

LILLIESLEAF:

BEING A CONCLUDING SERIES

OF

PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF

MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND,

OF SUNNYSIDE.

WRITTEN BY HERSELF.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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LILLIESLEAF.



CHAPTER I.

BUT a time came, whether she would or no, that this poor young thing, having a burdened heart, behoved to get an outgate for it. One night, about ten days after Maggie's bit bout of illness, it chanced that I was later up than any person in the house, having to write a letter to Mary, my niece, at Lilliesleaf, and having other things besides to do. As I was going to my bed, I tarried in the long gallery where Miss Rhoda's door

opened into, to look at the bonnie harvest moon mounting in the sky, the which was so bright upon the fields and the garden below the window, that I could not pass it by without turning aside to glance upon the grand skies, and the warm earth, with all routh and plenty yet upon her breast, that were both the handiwork of the Lord. I had put my candle upon a table, at the door of my own room, and as I was standing here, I heard a sound of crying and wailing out of Miss Rhoda's room. It was not loud, but for all that it was very bitter, as if the poor bairn was breaking her heart. Now, truly when I heard that, I never took two thoughts about it, nor tarried to ponder whether I would be welcome to her or no, but hearing that it was her voice, and that she was in distress, I straightway turned and rapped at the door.

The voice stoppit in a moment, so quick

I scarce could think it was real, and then I heard a rustling and motion in the room. I thought she might be feared, seeing it was late, so I said, "It is me, my dear—will you let me speak to you?" It was all quiet for a moment more, and then the door was opened in an impatient way, and I entered in. Rhoda was there turning her back upon me—and there was no light but the moonlight, which made the big room, eerie though it was, so clear that you could have read a book. The curtains of the bed were drawn close as Cecy had drawn them when she sorted the room for the young lady, and Rhoda's things were lying about on the chairs, and through the open door of the small room that was within, there was another eerie glint of the white moonlight, and pale shadows of it, that, truly, I liked not to look upon, were in the big mirror that stood near. It was far from pleasant to me—and I was like to be less

moved by fancy than a young thing like Rhoda—the look this room had.

“My dear bairn,” said I, being more earnest than I ever was with her before.

“Will you let me hear what ails you? I ken what trouble is myself; and many a young thing has told her trouble to me. And you are lone, and solitary, and motherless, my poor bairn—and I am an aged woman, and would fain bring you comfort, if it was in my power. Sit down here, and keep no ill thought in your heart of me; for I ken what it is to be solitary and without friends mysel.”

She stood a while, and would not mind what I said, nor the hand I put upon her arm. And then she suddenly fell down upon her knees in a violent way, and laid her face upon the sofa, and cried. Truly, I kent not of such tears. I have shed heavy ones, and have seen them shed; but I kent not aught like the passion, and anger, and fierceness of this.

“I can’t tell you what grieves me,” she said, starting up, and speaking in her quick way, that was so strange to me—“a hundred thousand things—everything. I should like to go and kill myself—I should like to be tortured—oh! anything—anything, rather than this!”

“My dear, is it yourself you are battling with?” said I; “for that is a good warfare, and the Lord will help you, if you try it aright. But if it is not yourself, what is it, my bairn?”

She flung away out of my hand, and ran about the room like a wild thing. Then she came, quite steady and quiet, back again. “Yes,” she said, “I suppose it is myself I am fighting with. I am a wild beast, or something like it; and I am biting at my cage. I wish you would beat me, or hurt me—will you? I should like to be ill, or have a fever, or something to put me in great pain. For you are a good old lady, I know,

though I have been very rude to you. No, I am sure I cannot tell *you* what grieves me ; for I cannot fight with you. It is all papa's fault—that is what it is ! He persuaded me that people would pay attention to me here. But I am nobody here — nobody even takes the trouble to be angry with *me* ! And I cannot hate you all, either, though I wish I could. Oh ! old lady, go away !”

“Na, Miss Rhoda,” said I, “I am not going away.”

“That ridiculous Scotch, too !” cried out the poor bairn, with a sound that was meant for laughter. “But I can't laugh at it ; and sometimes, I want to be friends with you. How do you know that I never had a mother ? —for it is quite true, I never had one—never from the first day I was in the world. And I love papa with my whole heart, though he is not good to me ; and I hate every one that hates him ; and I will not consent to live as

you live here, however good you may pretend to be.”

“ But Miss Rhoda,” said I, “ what ails you at the way we live here ?”

“ It is not living at all,” said the poor bairn. “ I never can do anything very well when I try ; but I always want to be something great. I cannot exist and vegetate as you quiet people do. What is the good of your lives to you ? I am sure I cannot tell ; but it will kill me.”

“ You have never tried it, my dear,” said I ; “ so whether it will kill you or no, you can very ill ken. But tell me how you would like to be great.”

“ Why should I speak of such things ? You would not understand me,” said Rhoda. “ I would like to be a great writer, or a great painter, or a great musician—though I never would be a servant to the common people, and perform upon a stage. I know I could do something—indeed, indeed, I know it !

And you would have me to take prim walks, and do needlework, and talk about schools and stuff, and visit old women. Such things are not for me."

"Such things have been fit work for many a saint in heaven, my dear," said I; "but truly I ken no call that has been made upon you, either for one thing or another. Great folk, so far as I have heard, are mostly very well pleased with the common turns of this life to rest themselves withal; and truly it is my thought that the greater a person is, the less he will disdain a quiet life, and kindness, and charity. But it has never been forbidden you, Miss Rhoda, to take your pleasure; and I wot well it never will be."

"Pleasure!" said the poor bairn, with a bit wild laugh. "I may play with my sister's little girl, I suppose. What did she put me here for when I came? Was it to mock me? when, in reality, she was only going to treat

me like a poor dependant, and I ought to have been out of the way in a garret. I could have borne it better then."

"I would fain ken what you have had to bear, Miss Rhoda Maitland," said I, being quite wearied out with her. "You have put peace and pleasantness out of this house. You have disturbed the mind of every single person in Oakenshaw ; and you are a very proud, wilful, discontented, evil-conditioned bairn. You neither ken what you would be at, nor what is good for you ; and truly, if I thought it would do you any good, I would come in here, and flyte upon you every night. You are sinning your mercies very sore, like a thoughtless young thing. You that has youth, and health, and a good understanding, and might learn to do even that good work that the angels in heaven do, the service of the Lord that made you—and you tell me, that am an aged woman, kenning the sorrows of this world,

what *you* have to bear ! Go to your bed, Rhoda. You are an ill bairn, and I will even take you into my own hands. Go to your bed, and ask of the Lord to forgive your evil tempers, and rise in the morning in a better frame of mind. Do you hear what I say ?”

But instead of doing what I bade her, she sat down beside me, and began to tell over all her life. Truly, it was an unseemly life for a woman bairn ; and I did not marvel so much at her thoughtless way, though she sat there, leaning upon my knee, till all the hours of the night, and I was wearied for my natural rest, and kent that my candle was aye standing burning its lane outside of the door. But she could bear to hear the truth spoken till her, this strange bairn, and as soon as ever I began to flyte, she opened her heart to me. She had been left neglected for a while here and there among foreign folk ; and syne she had abode with her father, and seen the

gentlemen that came about his house, till even Mr. Maitland himself had taken thought that she was coming to years, and that the like of this was not fit for a motherless bairn ; and though she did not tell me plain in words, I could divine by her speech, that among her father's friends, was some one that she had lookit to hear from in Oakenshaw. The poor, proud, mortified bairn ! not one of them had given her a thought after she came away—and this was what had put her wild, and sickened her heart at every thing here. I was grieved for her, and had a better hope of Rhoda, every word she said ; but truly, it did not answer well for me to be put off my rest, and keep untimous hours like this ; and what would anybody think to see me, an aged gentlewoman, taking up my candle after the morning light was coming full in at all the windows, and going to my chamber, when it was liker rising up than lying down, so far on as it

was? I put Rhoda in her bed, and laid the white coverlet over her before I left her room, and she threw her arms about my neck in a wild way, and kissed me, and then thought shame—for, maybe, our douce manners look cauldribe to foreign folk, that make more work about one another—I would not say but it might whiles be so.

But so it befell, that having wared my good night's rest upon her—for, truly, I cannot say that I ever closed my e'en all that morning, except for half-an-hour, when it was full time to rise, the which made us late with the Books, and behind-hand all the day—I vanquished this bairn; and though she did not mend her ways in a day, nor come in to our fashions, nor ever cease to be a wild and froward bairn, we were ever friends after that, Rhoda and me. Also, having nobody in the house like herself, the perverse thing came to the one that was unlikest her-

self, and that was me; and would have kept me out of my bed many another night, if I would have let her; but now I kent in a measure how to deal with her, and she was no more illwilly in my presence, the which was a great comfort and satisfaction. Truly, they were two bairns far from easy to manage, both Grace and Rhoda, and I was near being raised in my own esteem, a vain auld wife that I am, when I won my dear bairn's young sister to open her heart to me.

CHAPTER II.

It would be ten days after that before Grace and Claud came home, and in that time many a converse passed between Rhoda and me. She brought me her big book down the stair, and let me look into it; and it was all full of bits of pictures, the which to my e'en looked very clever, though I kent not much of such-like things. Also, they were pictures out of stories that I never heard, and that made me slower at understanding them, and were mostly of fairies and spirits, and the like of that, the which were out of my way; but notwithstanding, I could not

but marvel at the skill the bairn had in her bits of fingers, seeing the pictures were far bonnier and cleverer than the pictures I have seen made by young things, and were not copied out of any book, but out of her own head. Also—and this was a great pleasure to Maggie, which made me put up with it, and take pleasure in it likewise, in a degree—she played music, no to call tunes, but grand things out of a book, like what, as I would think, the great music folk play. I like to hear a young voice, myself, when I ken what it says, and I like well to hear the maids at their work, or the country lads afield, cheering the labour of their hands after this fashion; but, truly, I will not say, that being an aged woman, and set in my own ways, I likit to sit still for hours at a time, and aye the great piano deaving me—though I put up with it both for Rhoda and Maggie's sake; and when the young lady learned little Maggie—that

was uncommon clever at taking up anything—to play a bit pleasant little tune herself, I will own to it that I was as proud and pleased as I could be, and never saw a sweeter sight in this world than my little bairnie's bonnie bits of fingers twinkling about upon the keys. For all that, I would not have folk suppose that I was altogether content with Miss Rhoda, though she was, without doubt, a better bairn than she had been; for, truly, the young thing's behaviour was far from what I was accustomed to, and in no manner like what it was my thought a douce and well-brought-up young gentlewoman should be. The pulpit at Dourhills was supplied the time Claud was away, by a very good lad, who came out from Edinburgh on the Saturdays, and stayed till Monday morning. He was a probationer, and a young man of good parts, but rather daunted at the sight of the congregation, and shy in a strange house as

well. And truly, I was angered at the disdainful way Miss Rhoda used this good lad, seeing, when he made his civilities, she put on a look like a princess, or else made a secret mock at him, the which put him about in an uncommon degree, for he was young and well-favoured to look upon, and doubtless would have likit to make friends with the young lady, as was but natural at his years.

At this time, many letters came for Grace, which I ever sent to her without delay, foreign letters in her father's hand of write and often heavy, double ones, as if other things were put up in them. It was not my business, truly—but, nevertheless, I was concerned in my mind about this, marvelling what they might be. Also, I wearied sore for my bairns coming home, for the house was not like itself when the master and mistress of it were away; and when a letter

came that they were on their road, it was a great comfort to me.

But when I read it, Miss Rhoda was sitting playing music, and Maggie on her little stool, very near-hand, listening to her. And when I said how soon Grace would be home, the young lady stoppit for a space, and syne gave a great rattle over the notes that made me deaf for the moment; and then rose up and shut to the piano with a thud. "So!" said Miss Rhoda; and she gathered up her big book with the pictures in it, and the other book with the music; and putting on her black countenance again, and looking at me with her old gloom, she went back to her room with them, and shut herself up there, it might be the space of an hour before she came back to Maggie and me.

"Will she no play any more after mamma comes home? Will she no draw any more pictures, aunt?" cried little Maggie; and this

the very first moment when we should have been rejoicing for my Grace coming home. Truly, I was ill-pleased.

“ My bairn,” said I, “ she will even take her ain will, whatever that may be ; for she is a perverse thing, and I will neither make nor meddle with her more.”

With that, I went forth to put my Grace’s room ready for her ; and then Maggie and me went into the garden, and got the bonniest flowers that were there, to make the house look cheery for the travellers ; and very blythe my little bairn was for her papa and mamma’s homecoming ; but still the innocent thing’s spirit was clouded concerning Miss Rhoda. “ Mamma would like her if she would be good, aunt,” said Maggie, in a troubled way ; for she was of a tender spirit, and could not bear that one in the house should be discontent ; and she could not get the young lady’s gloom out of her little head.

So when we went in again, Rhoda had come back out of her room ; and what was she doing, does anybody think, but working away at my seam, which had been lying upon my own table in no person's way? Well I kent, when I saw how her needle was flying through the cloth, and the unpurpose-like way she held it, and the manner she pulled and made faces at it, that all my work was gone for nought, and the seam, which was a little garment for Maggie, altogether spoiled under my very eyes. But, though I will not deny that it troubled me, I never said a word for fear of discouraging her, but took up something else, and came to my seat, and let her have her ain way. Truly it was not long till she was tired.

“ I can't conceive how you have patience for it,” she cried out, after a moment, throwing down the seam upon my little table, after a fashion that scattered my pirns of thread

down upon the carpet. "I have pricked my finger, and made it bleed. Why do people do needlework? It would kill *me*."

"Na," said I, "no fears of it, Miss Rhoda. Lawful work seldom kills folk, though it makes them jag their fingers whiles, when they are out of the use of it."

The bairn laughed, part at herself, and part at what I said. "Well, it has not killed you all this time, I suppose; but what is the use of it? I had rather not live at all than live to cut linen to pieces, and sew it together again. But one would think it was a great virtue, to look at you."

"Truly, it is far better than idleset," said I, "but I care not what folk do, so long as they do something, my dear; and we cannot be reading books all our days."

"Reading — no, indeed, I should think not!" said Miss Rhoda, rising up. "I can't read at all now; my thoughts come hurrying

and choking upon me when I try ; and Mrs. Maitland is coming back, and we shall all have to behave ourselves, and do what she tells us. I think she hates me already, and I do not love her, I am very sure."

"Think what you like in your own mind, Miss Rhoda," said I, "but say not such things to me. Your sister is my very dear bairn, and I will not hear it from you. And now I will give you an advice what to do. Take heed to your ain ways, and never take the trouble to judge for other folk ; play your music, or draw your pictures, or write in your book, but aye be doing, even if it should be just to spoil my seam, and jag your finger ; and if you are a good bairn, you will soon come to like your sister, and your sister to like you ; but you are far from a good bairn at this present time, Miss Rhoda—and I tell you true."

"Oh, I never hoped to be a good barn,"

she said, mocking at me with her foreign tongue; but for all that, she was not angered, and the rest of the afternoon, she was flying about here and there, in a restless way, giving me little peace, and able to settle to nothing herself; she was a very perverse bairn.

At last, when it was getting late in the day, Claud and Grace came home. The minister was brown and sunburnt with being much in the air, in their travel, and lookit well and blythe, but whenever I cast my eye upon Grace, I saw there was some trouble on her brow. So far as I kent—and I had seen them day by day, for most of their life together—there had neither cloud nor doubt come between the two. It was not that they made much work about one another, as I have seen married folk do—but they were one, and had nothing separate; and everything they did, was done hand in hand. But, at this moment it struck me, I ken not how,

that Grace had some trouble in her heart, that she was keeping all to herself. And when I minded upon her father's many letters, I was feared it was something concerning him. Truly, this thought came to my mind like a prophecy ; for I saw it was not any grave or sad thought, but a disturbing trouble, that was upon my Grace's face. However, she brightened, and peace came to her brow, as soon as she came within the pleasant door of her own home.

Rhoda behaved herself all the night as, truly, it was to be expected such a bairn would do. She went and came from her own chamber, keeping us ever disturbed with the opening and shutting of the doors ; and one while, she gloomed at us all, and syne she made an endeavour at some wild play with Maggie, the which, not being used to it, startled Grace ; and, another time, she opened the window wide, and went out to the garden,

with nothing on her head, though the night air was chill, and we might all have gotten the cold, with the draught that came over the lawn; but when the bairn came back again, she had but gone for a flower that Grace said she had not seen since she went away. Rhoda would not offer it to her sister with her own hand, but she gave it to Maggie, and whispered something, and went fleeing away to her own room again. "She brought it for you, mamma," said little Maggie; and truly, Grace's heart was moved as she took the flower, and she looked up marvelling at me. There was good in the bairn, wild and perverse as she was.

Claud said they had been very well pleased with their visit; so did Grace. "But much better pleased to come home, aunt," said my bairn, drawing little Maggie close into her arm. And Claud laughed, and said he: "Grace has carried all her cares with her,

Aunt Margaret ; she is cumbered about many things. Do you see that incipient wrinkle on her brow ?”

Truly I did, though she turned her head away ; and I was pleased that Claud could jest about it ; for it would be but some passing care, after all.

CHAPTER III.

IN the morning I got a letter from Mary, the which, as I have been so long of mentioning her, I will put in here. This was what it said :

“ My dear aunt,

“ I hope you will be able, some time during this winter, to come to us again. I cannot tell why I am so anxious to see you ; I suppose, because I am restless, and not in great spirits—which is only foolish, you know, for I have no occasion to be dull. The bairns are all very well, and Mrs. Elphinstone much

as usual. We have had a great accession of gay company here, in which I keep my place indefatigably—but it is fatiguing—and Mary and Susie, poor bairns, miss mamma in the nursery at night. My mother, too, is slightly scandalized at my dissipation, and, though she understands the motive, is not quite reconciled to it. I hope you will be able to come, Aunt Margaret. Tell Grace she can have no such need for your ministrations in her quiet household, as I have—that is, of course, with so much larger a family, I cannot help having greater cares. I almost smile, in spite of myself, at Grace's trouble with her young sister; had she two wild boys, like me, she would not think so much of Miss Rhoda, who, I trust, is tamed by this time. We have rather a strange guest in our own house—Mr. Bernard, Cosmo's tutor. He is a gentleman—very high-spirited, and extremely intolerant of the little prides of other people,

though he abounds in them himself ; and he brings another uneasy element into our house ; yet I like him very well, and he interests Allan very much. He has some near relative, father or brother, I believe, who is what Allan calls ‘ a sporting man,’ not very respectable, and who has compromised the honour which our Mr. Bernard is so very nervous about ; but you will see him when you come.

“ We are to leave Lilliesleaf in February ; and, some time before the new year, I hope you will manage to be with us. All is very well at the Manse. My father is much pleased with Cosmo’s progress ; my mother, disturbed about nobody but me ; and, you know, you are pledged, in all circumstances, to be my champion and defender—knowing as you do—but I need not recall the memory of that.

“ All the bairns send love and eager desires to see you, and a great many affectionate remembrances to their Uncle and Aunt

Grace, and little Maggie. Would Grace let Maggie come with you?—it would make such a jubilee at Lilliesleaf; and, to tell the truth, dear Aunt Margaret, I want one real jubilee of the bairns, to refresh me before I leave them. Good-bye.

“MARY ELPHINSTONE.”

“P.S. Mrs. Elphinstone rather enjoys all our gaieties, though she grumbles at me, and speaks of extravagance. I have not very much mirth in my own mind; but sometimes, I am amused at the comical terror of Allan, which he carefully conceals from me. He thinks I am growing very fond of society and pleasure, and he looks so rueful, now and then, and makes mental comparison, as I can see, between Lady Julia and her friends and me. Is it wicked of me to enjoy his fright? for I confess I do enjoy it.”

I could not but smile as I put down my

letter, though truly, as Mary herself said, there was little mirth in my mind. She had ever a spark of mischief in her, from a bairn ; but I was troubled lest maybe she should be going too far.

Grace also had got a big and bulky letter, which gave her no great satisfaction, so far as I could see. As for Claud, he was busy among a heap of papers, and Miss Rhoda, she sat by, and looked upon all our wealth with a jealous eye ; for there was never a word, either from one person or another, for the poor bairn.

Now Claud and Grace they had many schemes in their hand, for bettering their own land, and helping their own folk. They had done a great deal this while past ; but truly among the country folk that were aye increasing and whiles flitting, there was ever much to do. So Claud, he began to tell Grace of this one that he had paid a subscription to, and that one that was craving help, being a

struggling man in business, and of the grieve at one of the farms that behoved to have siller for the work that was carrying on there. Every word he said Grace's brow darkened the more—and at last she said, very quiet but in a quick and troubled tone :

“ All these things I want to discuss with you, Claud. I am embarrassed myself—we will have to spare something. I want to consult you, by and bye ; these things are all for other people, and this, alas ! is all for me.”

Claud looked at her with concern and wonder, in especial seeing her face to be flushed, and the wrinkle drawn close upon her brow.

“ What is all for you is more important than anything else, Grace,” he said, in a kindly, quiet way, “ do not consult me, if you would rather not. I cannot have you disturbed, and look on patiently ; but if you prefer that it should remain with yourself, do not think of telling me. I am in earnest, Grace.”

“ And I am rebuked,” said Grace, with her old smile ; “ however, we will discuss it afterwards ; and, aunt, what does Mary say ? ”

“ Mary would fain have me set another tryst to go to Lilliesleaf, and pleads to get Maggie with me,” said I—at which the bairn, being at the table, looked at her mamma, and clapped her hands, “ also, she tells us about what they are doing, and of the new gentleman that is come to Lilliesleaf, who is a well-learned lad, by all accounts, and Cosmo is coming on grand with him ; but Mary says he has strange ways, as, truly was to be expected till he got into the fashions of the house.”

“ That is the Mr. Bernard my father writes to me about, I suppose,” said Claud.

“ Bernard ? ” said Grace, with a little start, and I marvelled to see Rhoda start too, and get a brighter colour on her cheek. We were all quiet for a moment after that, and then Grace spoke again.

“Rhoda,” she said, in a kindly tone, but no without a tremble of unwillingness in it touching the name she had to say, “did you ever hear my father speak of a Mr. Bernard, or do you know such a person? you will do me a service if you can tell me who he is.”

And as for Rhoda, she grew red up to her dark hair, and trembled likewise, and then set herself firm upon her chair, and turned her eyes full upon Grace.

“Yes, I know him,” she said; and with that she sat still, looking at her sister, growing redder and redder, and as if she was feared for some story about herself that was to come.

“Who is he?” said Grace, “is he a man of character, or wealth, or what is he? I ask you, Rhoda, for your father’s sake.”

Once more the bairn trembled sore, and looked full at Grace with her bright dark e’en. That last word put spirit into her, for whatever was to come; and, truly, it was strange to me

to note what power her father, though he was but an ill man, and even no very good to herself, had upon this bairn's heart.

“He was my father's friend,” said Rhoda, with aye the colour burning deeper upon her cheek, and her eye glancing, and her lip quivering till, for the time, I thought her very bonnie, far bonnier than I had ever thought her to be—“and he came to us often. I do not know about his character, or if he was rich. He was brave and honourable I am sure, and he was papa's friend—that was enough for me.”

Grace said nothing more, but looked at her letter again, and shook her head, though I think not she was aware of it, or thought what she did ; but Rhoda was very keen watching her, and noted every motion she made.

“It is quite true,” cried Rhoda, in a kind of fierce, indignant way, “you do not need to doubt me. I should never have known him, nor thought of him if he had not been

papa's great friend ; for otherwise he was nothing to me !”

Grace lifted her e'en with surprise at that, and the two looked close at each other for a moment, and then Grace said :

“ My father has written to me about Mr. Bernard, Rhoda, but he has not told me that you had any friendship for this gentleman. I believe what you tell me entirely ; but your papa says that Mr. Bernard is no longer his great friend, but has quarrelled with him—that is why I asked you who he was.”

Rhoda made a kind of bow, but I saw that the bairn was trembling ; and, truly, it was hard to hear but this much of her father, and ken no more whether he was ill or well, or if he had come to trouble. She sat still upon her seat, never saying another word, but aye the colour burning on her brow, and the quiver on her frame till the breakfast was past, and Maggie was away with Cecy, her maid, and

Claud and Grace had both gone out together. Then the poor young thing came very eager and anxious to me.

“Do you know what it is,” she cried, “is papa in any trouble? Has anything happened with Mr. Bernard? I saw it was papa’s writing in a moment. Tell me what you think it is—I am very anxious—very anxious—oh! old lady, what can it be?”

“My dear, I cannot tell,” said I, “but you have a right to ken, and if you will go to your sister, simple and aefauld, like a good bairn, and ask her what it is, she will tell you—I know she will; just say your heart is sore, thinking upon your father, and you would like to ken, and she will not turn you away; for she is disturbed in her mind as well as you. Now, Rhoda, my dear, never wait to think upon it, but go to Grace and see.”

And before I could lift my hand from the table where I had put down my glasses, the

hasty bairn was gone. Truly they were not of a kind to let grass grow under their feet, either the one sister or the other, and I could not but marvel within myself what Rhoda had to do with this Mr. Bernard, or if he was the gentleman whom, by her speech, I had thought the bairn reckoned on hearing word from, or if he could be any way connected with the Mr. Bernard of Lilliesleaf. If it should happen so, it would be very strange.

A while after that, Rhoda came back into the room again, and came close up to me ; but when she was at my very side she faltered, and lookit as if she knew not well what to do. At last she began very quick and low to tell her tale to me.

“I have asked her,” said Rhoda, “and she told me something at last. Papa wants money—he is always wanting money—and he has trusted Mr. Bernard, and *he* has been false to him—that is all. I could not help

fearing it was something worse than that ; but as long as it is only money—papa never has as much money as he wants—I do not care.”

“ But, my dear,” said I, “ your father and your sister would not like you to tell the like of this to me.”

“ Why should I not tell it to you ? you are the only friend I have,” said Rhoda ; “ and I am not ashamed of papa wanting money—he always does ; I was afraid they were going to fight or something. Now I begin to hate Mr. Bernard since he has been false to papa. I never cared at all for him, I am sure I did not—but he was papa’s great friend, and—and he used to talk a great deal to me, and praised me. Nobody else ever praised me,” cried the poor bairn, with the tears bursting out through her bits of fingers, with the which she had covered her face, “ but I am sure I did not care at all for Mr. Bernard, except because he was papa’s great friend !”

CHAPTER IV.

THE bairn Rhoda was very subdued for a while after that, and minded no more the coming of the letters in the morning, which truly was just as wise of her, seeing there never was a thing for her, from either father or friend. But all this time, Grace never got free of the shadow on her brow, but was careful and disturbed in her mind, and ever got the other letter from foreign parts, and was the more put about with every one she got. If Claud kent what her trouble was, he did not tell it to me; and truly, Claud being a lad of a most generous spirit, and

kenning that there might be things of her father that were not pleasant to tell, it was my belief he would neither ask her concerning it, nor even hear what she was willing to say, for fear she might be grieved to let him ken.

Truly, but for their troubles before they were married—and for all so sore as they are at the time, the troubles of youth are light and hopeful, far different from the troubles of sober life, when you have evil folk to deal with, and the hard ways of the world—there had been no chastening in the lot of Claud and Grace, my two bairns. Mary, at Lilliesleaf, that began her life with as good a hope, had come through both care and sorrow when they were walking in quiet ways and knew no evil. And truly, at the most, if this were all, it was but a light weight among the bitter burdens of this life.

Now Grace had set up a house for orphan

bairns within the parish, and had greatly set her heart upon it, and was fully in the mind this year to cause build a bigger place, and take in more of the desolate things; for kenning what it was herself, she had ever a very tender heart for motherless bairns. At this present time, there might be as many as twenty of them at the Mains (Dourland Mains was the right name of it, but we called it that for shortness) common folk's bairns out of all places in the country, that were destitute, and had no friends to take care of them; and Grace had set her heart, as I have said, on building a good house—it being but an old farm-house, upon a very small farm, with great lack of convenience, that they were dwelling in now—and taking in ten more bairns, which truly would be a great family for a private person to feed, and cleed, and provide for. But being moderate in their own house, and the lands of Oakenshaw

growing aye richer and better lookit to every year, made Claud and Grace well able to help their poor neighbours, and blythe to be permitted in such a kindly fashion to serve the Lord. So it came to pass one morning when I was in my parlour with Grace our lane, and Miss Rhoda out, that I saw Grace sitting a long time with the picture of the new house that was to be built at the Mains lying before her on her desk, looking at it in a wistful way, and it so chanced that she glanced up at the moment, and saw that I perceived her what she was doing, and then a kind of doubtful smile came upon Grace's face.

“It is very hard, aunt, to give it up; I think it is very hard—and for such a purpose!” she said suddenly, and then some colour came upon her face, and she smiled like as if at herself, and came up to me with the picture in one hand, and another bit of paper in the other. “Aunt, what is a sacrifice worth that

is made unwillingly ?” said Grace, as she drew her chair close to me.

“Truly, I think it is very little worth, my bairn,” said I, for I wist not what she could mean.

So then she bade me look at the picture, which, truly, I had many times looked upon before, and kent full well; and then I saw the paper in her hand, wherein was sundry things written down, that it was Grace’s wont to help with her substance, being all for the good of poor folk, and for the spread of the Word; and she said to me, “Aunt, I must give up one of these—which shall it be?”

“My dear bairn,” said I, “wherefore must you give up one of them? Is it for siller, Grace?”

“Yes, aunt!” said Grace; “it is to pay debts that you would think sinful, and to maintain habits that I like as little as you;

and for that I must sacrifice my pretty house, and have no more orphans at the Mains, and give up something else besides ; and I do not know if even that will do ; but it is a very reluctant and distasteful sacrifice, aunt, and gives me no great opinion of myself—for I will make it in a very bad spirit, if I make it at all.”

“ But you must not do that, my bairn,” said I, “ or it will not be accepted at your hands ; for a gift is a poor thing, before the Lord, when there is a grudge at the heart.”

Just then, we heard a sound in the room, and truly, there was Claud had come in, without our kenning, and was standing behind us, looking over Grace’s shoulder. When we saw him, he put in his word :

“ What is this for, Grace ?” said Claud. “ These are all your own favourite plans ; why are they to be sacrificed ? or, what can that sacrifice be, from which you exclude me ?”

Grace's face grew red, and, for a moment, she would not look either at Claud or me. Then she said: "I ought to have told you sooner my whole story; but you, Claud, can guess it already. My father applies to me to pay his debts, especially now, when this Mr. Bernard has his name in his power, and could 'compromise'—which, I suppose, means, bring disgrace upon it. You know well enough how my father treated us all when he brought Rhoda here—and I will not consent that any one but me should give up a single pleasure for his comfort. It is a natural duty with me—but he deserves nothing at your hands, Claud—and that is why I exclude you from any share in this unwilling sacrifice of mine. There—I have said a great deal too much about it already. The debts are considerable—I will show you all the papers, Claud, immediately; and I wish to increase the income my father has had from

Oakenshaw since I came of age. But it *is* hard, aunt, though you shake your head at me—and the worst is, that I never can be sure how soon another crisis may come again.”

“Grace,” said Claud, taking the two papers out of her hand, “both of us felt injured by him in our young days, and we have never been properly respectful of your father. If he does not particularly care for your love, that is no excuse for us ; but it is some small comfort to help him, if we cannot have any great friendship with him. Come—we never have been separate before—and your natural duties are mine, as mine have always been yours. We will have no unwilling sacrifices, Aunt Margaret. Come, Grace, and have a private quarrel with me upon the subject, and my aunt will look after her young heathen—Rhoda is coming. Grace, I want you with me.”

And saying that, he drew her hand into

his arm, and they stood together before me there, in the early prime of their life, though youth was past—my own bairns! Claud looking down into Grace's e'en, seeking his full share of all her burdens, and the cloud of discontent upon Grace's face melting into a better and a closer blessedness, and *that*, that had been hard before, growing sweet and pleasant to her at what he said. Truly, I marvelled not there were tears in my bairn's e'en.

“Your philosophy is better than mine,” she said, looking up to him, and leaning close upon his arm; and so the two went away together, with their one heart.

I could not but look after them as they past from the door. Mary, Mary, my other bairn! the cares of this life would be small burden to you, if you could bear them like to this!

As I was sitting meditating in my own

thoughts, Rhoda came in. Truly, it was a trial, in its way, to see this bairn going idle about the house, and never doing a sensible turn, nor so much as taking thought whether it was for any use that her Maker had placed her here. She came in to me, and sat down by my table, and began to throw the things about, little wiser than a callant would have been ; and then she gave a gape, and said she was tired. It was no marvel she was tired—for she had not done a thing but nonsense all the day.

“It may be good, but it is very dull, living like this,” said Rhoda. “Always at home, constantly in one place, and never seeing anything, nor hearing anything—it makes me sick. I cannot help yawning. Sometimes I used to be neglected, when I was with papa—that is very true ; but then, I was dreadfully neglected—shockingly neglected, you know, and there was always some

excitement in that ; and then, papa took me out again, when better times came. But here, on the contrary, you know, you are all such very good people ; you would not be unkind to me, for your own sakes, and I am left only to quarrel with myself. There is very poor satisfaction to be got out of one's-self ; I had rather, a great deal, quarrel with papa."

"Do you no think it might be better entertainment, my dear," said I, "to learn to be a good bairn, and to agree with your friends?"

But Rhoda only shrugged her shoulders, and gave a sigh ; and then, after she had played with my pirns for a while again, she began to her stories once more.

"I never had any very good dresses when I was with papa ; he said I was too young, and did not want them," said Rhoda ; "and you would not fancy how Mrs. Lennox—that is my aunt, papa's sister—once insulted me.

She sent me a box, and I was quite proud to get it, thinking, of course, she would only send me proper things; and what do you think it was?" said the bairn, her eyes burning like fire, as she leaned over the table to me; "nothing but old dresses of hers and cousin Madeline's; and they had the presumption to think these were good enough for me!"

"Whisht, my bairn, and do not say ill words," said I. "I am not near so great a lady as Mrs. Lennox; but I have made down a gown of mine into a frock for Grace before now."

"That was a very different thing," said Rhoda, very quick; and truly, it showed the bairn had discrimination. "Grace—I mean, Mrs. Maitland—loved you. I would not mind very much, I think, wearing something of yours myself, for you are a kind old lady, and would never try to insult me. But, do

you know what I did with my aunt's box ? Whenever I saw what was in it, I gave it all to Jeanne, the poor little maid where we were living, and wrote a letter to my aunt, and told her so, and said I was sure she never could have meant them for me. Papa was very angry, at first, when he knew—very angry ; but afterwards, he laughed, and told people, and said it was a good joke. You don't know why I have told you all this ? It was because my sister gave me something to-day."

"And what was that?" said I, being anxious to ken.

With that, Rhoda opened a little velvet bag she had been holding all this time in her hand, and took out two notes, and let me see them. Truly, it was a great sum for such a young thing to have, and I mostly blamed Grace for giving her so much all at one time. It was whole twenty pounds.

“ I took it,” said Rhoda, “ for I am badly dressed, and it is not proper for my sister ; but if I can get everything right—for I would not be shabby, since Mrs. Maitland wishes me to be dressed properly—for one of these, I might send the other to papa, might I not ? and will you go with me ? My sister is very different from Mrs. Lennox ; but I suppose she would not object if I sent this to papa ? ”

“ Truly, he will get plenty without that,” said I, without thinking ; and I was feared Rhoda’s pride would be hurt ; but she was a strange bairn ; she never took thought of it, but went on in her careless speech again.

“ We will speak about it all afterwards ; and you will go with me, will you ? I should like you to go, for *I* might buy anything that was pretty, whether it would do or not. Well, I never had any money then ; but things used to be very different with papa.”

She rose up when she had said her say,

and went off with her wild, dancing step to the piano, where she had never been since Grace came home ; and truly, if I was not deaved within that next hour, it was no fault of Rhoda's—for she did all a bairn could do to drive a douce aged gentlewoman out of her wits, with the noise she made.

CHAPTER V.

AFTER Grace and Claud had taken counsel, it was still needful, as it came to pass, to give up some of their own pleasures to ease Mr. Maitland; and after all, the new house at the Mains was stoppit, and there were no more bairns taken in; and truly, so very ill is it to judge other folk, that there was many a one in the country-side that blamed Grace, and said she was devising great things, and had not the spirit to carry them out; and even the widow woman that had the chief charge at the Mains, was heard to grumble and make a moan over it, though my bairns had raised

her from great distress and trouble, and given her comfort and ease, and a bein homestead to end her days. Truly they have little ado who look for gratitude from human folk, and there would be small reward for kindness if that was what we lookit to.

Never a word of all this was minted to Rhoda. The bairn marvelled in her own spirit, wherefore so many letters should come from her father, but she never heard a word that would have mortified her heart to hear ; and Grace and her, to my content, though they were far from winning into each other's hearts, were far better friends than they used to be, and Rhoda got a right thought in her own mind of her sister, which was a pleasure to me. Also I could not but smile within myself, many a time, at the way this strange bairn did with the folk that came about our house ; forbye the gentry of the country-side, it was mostly folk connected with the Kirk

that came much to Oakenshaw—and Rhoda, at the beginning, had a great disdain of them, and would fain have lookit down upon them, as she did upon the young shy lad—the probationer that supplied Dourhills the time Claud was away. But, truly, there was great odds between a young well-favoured shame-faced lad, that was much concerned what the young lady would think of him, and men of middle age that had the great concerns of life in their hands, and minded not much, save for needful civility, the young women-folk that were about the house, but counted them all among the bairns—the which was a great wonder to Rhoda, and did the young thing good when she came to perceive it right. First, she saw them that they took no heed to her, the which was a mortification to the proud bairn; and then when she sat quiet listening to them, with the scornful curl upon her bit bonnie red upper lip, and the spark

dancing in her eye, it was just a divert to me to watch Rhoda's face. For the converse of these eldern folk was not like the converse this bairn had been used to, and when she came to see that it was no mock, but the concerns of their lives, respecting which they held converse together; and when her own good understanding—for the bairn was a clever bairn—was roused to take note of what they said, truly I think not but she came to care more for hearing them than for aught else in the house, and would in no manner have desired to go forth out of their company to seek such folk as she had seen in foreign parts with her papa; for I have ever seen the mind of youth, when it was well gifted of Providence, that it aye roused, like as at a trumpet, to thoughts of the grand and high things that belong to this life.

Also I went with the bairn to buy her new garments, and pleased I was to see the spirit

of youth in her likewise there, though in a far different way, and far wilder and flightier than what I had been used to in our ain bairns. Truly she was wise when she said she would not ken of her own hand what it would be right to get ; for one time it was a grand light-coloured silk gown, with coloured flowers, very bonnie to look upon in your hand, but fit for nobody but some grand fantastic lady that would put it on once in a lifetime ; and syne when I would not hear of that, the wild young thing darted off from me, and brought a bonnie douce dark satin that was just as far out of the question for her, though it would have done well enough for the like of me ; and if I had not keeped a check upon her, she would have set the whole sober house of Oakenshaw daft with her grand ribbons, seeing she scarce could be restrained from buying the brightest flowered ones in all the shops for the maids at home.

I had said positive to her, that she had no occasion to send siller to her father ; and the bairn—having never kent what it was to have money before—was out of her wits with her twenty pounds.

Truly, she was a great charge for me atmy years ; but I would not say but the trouble and fash she gave me, and all the wildness that was about her, and her tempers, when I had gotten the better of them, and the very little lear she had, were all just so many things to draw me more to this wilful bairn.

And at Oakenshaw it is not to be thought that she had come to behave herself as a young gentlewoman, brought up in our ways would have done. Far from that. She had changed her mind so far, that she was aye first ready for the Books, and joined in the singing of the psalm with a grand voice, that made us all silent to hear for the first time when she lifted it up among us ; and every morning, as con-

stant as the light came, there were flowers very bonnily put together in a glass upon the table at Grace's hand, which the bairn never would own to, but which we all kent well were put there by no hand but hers; and syne she would draw at her pictures for a while, and syne play her music, and ramble out her lane through the countryside; and if there was one seam of Rhoda's in my table, I am very well sure there was a score, begun and cast aside again—for she kent no better still than to jag her finger, and get impatient at the work, and throw it away; and truly what single thing she ever did that was of use to any mortal, I could not tell; the which made me often flyte upon her, and also caused me some perturbation in my mind, seeing I have ever been used to train up bairns eident and thoughtful, kenning that this life was no for their own pleasure, but for the help of man, and the service of the Lord. Many a time, when I thought

upon this, and pondered wiles in my heart to draw the bairn into better ways, have I been drawn to marvel and to smile at myself, trysted with such a strange handful in my old days. For Grace having many things to take up her time, the most of the charge of this strange bairn came upon me.

Now it came to pass, that all the folk that heard her, by chance, playing her music—for she never did it when strangers were near to listen—were of the opinion that she had a great turn for it, and might be very great at it, if she tried. And though, truly, I had little opinion of it, for more than a pastime it was doubtless right that the bairn should be learned to do whatsoever Providence had gifted her for. Also, a gentleman that was at Oakenshaw, and saw one of her bits of pictures that fell out of her big book, and was a great judge of such-like things, said to Grace that it was very clever too. So Grace said to

Rhoda that she should have folk out from Edinburgh to learn her both the one thing and the other, if she liked, seeing she had got no schooling to speak of all her days ; and Rhoda, though she made faces, was far from ill-pleased. Wherefore, there were two folk came three days in the week to give her lessons ; and touching one of them, there befell a serious outcast between this bairn and me.

He was but a young lad, and an Edinburgh lad forbye, but he was reckoned very good at learning music, and I was very glad to hear tell of him, for my part, thinking he was like to be better than the foreign folk with the hair about their faces, that make the like of me that am old-fashioned, very little heeding about grand music. This lad, being Mr. Sangster by name, was young, but far from comely, though he had a very good thought of himself, and he had not come many times before I perceived that he was very much taken up with

Rhoda, and as anxious as he could be to please her, and putting on looks, and making speeches in a hidelins way, which would have been a divert truly, if I had not been very ill pleased ; for they were like to make me laugh many a time in spite of myself. Now this angered me at the last, as it was like to do ; but when I saw Rhoda far from angry, but just as full of mischief as a bairn, aye laughing at him, and yet aye wiling him on, I was very sore displeased.

“ No, indeed, you do not know anything about music in Scotland ; you have no music here,” said Rhoda, in her saucy way, “ nothing but what you call tunes, and songs that all the maids sing ; no operas—nothing that is worth calling music—and no one understands anything about it either. The people think you mean their poor little ballads, when you speak of it, and get quite pathetic about national melodies. Papa used to tell me so, but I never

believed it. I never could think people were so ignorant as they are."

"Well, I will not say there ever were any great composers in Edinburgh," said Mr. Sangster, shaking his head, which was a very big one, and looking into Rhoda's face, "but the common songs have sometimes more heart in them than the higher music has, and for instance," said the lad, dropping his voice low, and making a noise upon the piano, no to let me hear, "if a lady should chance to have a lover that wanted to tell his passion, and durst not speak it in words, where could he find a better way than in a song that was just a plain outpouring of a fervent heart, and where the notes were less matter? For my part, I think music should be the language of the heart—and the more it tells of that, the better it is, in my opinion—and I think myself a very good judge, having studied it all my life."

"Oh! pray, Mr. Sangster, give us a speci-

men!" cried Rhoda, with all her face shining with mirth and smiles.

Whereupon the poor lad sang. Truly, being little concerned about such vanities, I mind not what it was he sang, but it was nonsense verses about love; no one of the old, simple songs, but some new thing that was the fashion, and seemed to me as if it was made in mockery of our sweet Scottish tongue; but the way he lookit, and the manner he had with it!—truly, it would have moved me to laugh, if I had not been very ill-pleased—and it ended with a verse saying, if she would but smile, he minded not if the whole world was battling with him for her sake.

Now Rhoda, as I could well see, could scarce contain herself for laughter; but when he ended, what did she do, but composed her face as well as she could, and smiled upon him, and praised his song till I thought shame. The poor lad was flushed with pleasure when he went away.

I doubt not he thought this young lady was as much taken up about him as she could be.

The next morning there came out a parcel to Rhoda, which she was in great surprise about, and opened beside me, and what was this, but a new song written by Mr. Sangster, and dedicated to Miss Rhoda Maitland, being no other than the song he had sung here the day before, and just a plain love-making to Rhoda, saying that he was not equal till her, and all the rest of it; but if she would but smile— The bairn laughed long at it at first, but syne she turned red, and syne she raised up her bit proud young head, and gave a troubled look at me. Truly, I was very far from pleased.

“ You have brought it upon yourself, Rhoda,” said I, “ you have not behaved yourself like a discreet young gentlewoman. Truly, though the lad has a great conceit of himself, the blame is no with him but you.”

“But he is a fool!” said Rhoda. “Of course, I was only laughing at him. Why, what could it be?—I never have anything to amuse me here; and I did not mean any harm. What a simpleton he must be!”

“If I were you, Rhoda,” said I, “I would think it was my own blame; no that I am excusing this lad, that should have kent better—but I am far from pleased at you.”

When I said that, the bairn went out of the room, offended; but first, she took the song, and tore it all into little bits, and threw it away; and truly, there was not much converse between us, all that day.

But I said nothing about it to send the lad away, but let him come again, lest he should say the bairn’s friends had interfered, and she her ownself, was in his favour. The next time he came, the poor callant durst not say a word about his song, so grand and so stately as she was; and if he had not been so far

wrong, I would have been vexed for him, with his downcast looks. No a glance would Rhoda give him, good or evil, and never said a word she could help ; but gravely took upon herself to tell him, she was some way engaged, and would not be in the house for the next week, which was the last of his term, as it befell. The poor lad grew very red in the face, and made us a bow, and went away ; and I kent not, truly, whether to be worse pleased at Rhoda, for making a divert of him when it suited her pleasure, or for casting him down so sore, when he went further than she meant him to go.

“ The lad is very sore mortified, and punished,” said I, when he was away ; “ and truly, you deserve just as much as he does, Rhoda ; but nobody says an ill word to you.”

“ I say them to myself. Don’t—I can’t be scolded,” said Rhoda, going away from me again ; and we were not to call friends for

days ; for the bairn was pricked in her conscience. I saw the foolish lad with my own e'en, for a week or two after that, wandering in the roads about Oakenshaw, trying to get a word of her. And truly, I was very ill-pleased at the thoughtless bairn.

CHAPTER VI.

IT was drawing to the winter, when all these things came to pass ; and I got many letters, all this time, from the Manse and Lilliesleaf, about the promise they had gotten from me, of going to see them again. And truly, if I put in a letter here, from Mary, my sister, it is my hope that none of our own folk will ever come to ken.

“ I will be very glad when you come,” my sister wrote to me, “ for I do not quite understand, Margaret, the circumstances in which Mary has placed herself. I believe I do not quite enter into all her difficulties, never having

known them myself; and I am reluctant to condemn, though I cannot strain my conscience to approve. It is strange enough that I should bid you, who have even less experience of actual life than I have, stand interpreter between the Manse and the house of Lilliesleaf; but Mary fears to lessen her husband in our opinion, and will say nothing fully; so that I half guess, and only half comprehend, the reason of her following him into all the extravagant pleasures of their present life. Sometimes, I am angry, and sometimes disquieted, and, though Mary does everything she can, to reconcile her different duties, I miss her many a time in what the bairns say; for Janet has now a greater share of the talk in the nursery, than mamma; and the little girls make no secret of their lamentation, that mamma is not with them, as she used to be, and does not hear them their lessons any more. Mary has a hard task of it, my dear sister;

and I do not think that Lilliesleaf himself approves, though it is all done to please him. But, whether it is right to please her husband, at the expense of her bairns, and to the wasting of the estate, is a question I do not like to consider, though it presses on my mind every day. I never had any such temptation—but I believe a woman who is as fortunate as I have been, or as my son Claud's wife is, is very apt to be a hard judge of others. To think of me judging Mary hardly!—but the truth is, that she perplexes me.

“At present, they have their house full, and Mary is looking better than I ever saw her, and I can very well perceive how much she is admired by Allan's friends, and how much surprised they are at her looks and manners; for I suppose Mary's quietness must have been taken for a confession of her inferiority to Lilliesleaf—and this too, perhaps, has somewhat roused her spirit. Old Mrs. Elphinstone

is very fretful, and a great trial of Mary's patience ; but we never knew what a spirit was in that bairn. She bears it all so steadily, and never says a word of complaint, even to me.

“ For a week or two past, since this last party arrived at Lilliesleaf, Mr. Bernard has been a great deal with us. He is a very proud, sensitive young man, and though Allan always pays him the greatest attention, he thinks the strangers are careless of his feelings, because he is only the tutor ; and being well-born, and bred to better things, and having a good deal of false pride besides, the poor lad is miserable. It appears he knew some of these folk before he came here, and he either fancies they have changed their manners to him, or it is the case ; so he comes and sits with the minister in his study, and Claud says he has had to rub up his old college lore, which a country minister has so little time to keep up, that he may not bring down the character of the

brethren before the Englishman. He has good manners, this young man, being a gentleman, and is very good-looking besides ; and as he never takes anything upon him with us, seeing we never have any desire to refuse him his due, I have got used to see him at the fireside, and at the table, and like him very well—the more especially as when he is here, Cosmo is here, and the callant is the very delight of the minister's heart. I often say, we were wiser in our regard to our own bairns, than we are to them of the second generation, who are spoiled on all hands—and a sweeter family than Mary's, no mortal could desire to see.

“ I am very glad to hear that Grace and you are better pleased with your young lady. The bairns here are all very anxious to know if you will bring little Maggie ; and you may tell Grace that not a bairn of them all is so anxious as the minister and me. And for

yourself, I wish very much you were here, my dear sister. Mary and I could both tell you our troubles ; and as I scarcely venture to say plain out my doubts and my fears, even to the minister himself, your coming would be a great comfort to me."

After I got this letter, I took counsel with Grace about it, and Grace gave consent that little Maggie should go with me. So I wrote back again, making a tryste to go to the Manse a day or two before the New Year, and from there to Lilliesleaf; and to tarry with Mary, maybe, three weeks or so, till it was near about time for her to go away. All the time we were settling this, Rhoda looked anything but well-pleased ; for the flighty bairn was wearied again, and her e'en lighted up when she heard of all the on-goings at Lilliesleaf. But I believe in her heart, she was vexed for me going away, and for little Maggie ; for

within the last little while, she had taken greatly to the bairn.

So, the autumn days shortened and chilled, and grew to winter before we were aware; and truly, it was a content and pleasant house when the fireside lamp was lighted in the long nights, and the cheery fire glimmered through the room. I think the look of it, more than any other thing, satisfied Rhoda. She learned to get something to do for herself, though what she did was mostly the daftest like things that any mortal in their senses could have devised. For the bairn made toys for Maggie, whatever kind of materials came to her hand, and whatever wild fancy struck her mind; and would whittle away at a bit of wood, with her apron (I made a black silk apron with pockets for her my own self, to get her wiled to wear it) spread on the table to gather the bits, as eager and well pleased as any wild callant, and very neat bits of things

she whiles made, and Maggie was very proud of them. Also, she had a great gift for making stucco images, working away at the clay with her bit delicate small fingers, till I marvelled that she was not tired ; or, whiles she would get a wild German book she had of her own, when Grace or Claud were busy, and sit down on a stool at my foot, and read in a low voice to me—aye, as was needful, seeing I kent not that foreign tongue, making it into English ; and, whiles stopping, as indeed many a time was likewise needful, seeing it was a wild book, and far out of my way, to explain the daftlike words, and strange things that were in it. Many a time I have seen both Claud and Grace wiled to listen to her ; but she shut up her book, whenever she thought they heard, though woe was to me if I did not attend, or was overmuch taken up about my seam when she was reading. She did what I bade her mostly, as good as a little

bairn could have done ; but she was of that kind of spirit, that she behoved to try in her innocent way, to be a tyrant to me.

And that was how the autumn went past, and the early winter fell ; and though I had much fash with Rhoda, truly, I was not lothe, and Grace was far better pleased with her than I could have thought she would be. Also, Maggie was greatly taken up with the young lady; and she was well enfeoffed in Oakenshaw, and whatever might happen, had gotten a home there, that I kent well would never fail her, as long as there was either life or kindness left at this warm and blythe hearth-stone.

CHAPTER VII.

It was drawing very near the time for me to go away, and was cold winter weather with snow upon the ground. Rhoda was sitting by the fire with the cloth jacket she used to wear, upon her, and a fine colour upon her cheeks, by reason of having been outbye, with the caller wind blowing upon her face. She was aye very particular in her dress now, and being but a very young thing—no eighteen years old yet—was growing bonnier and more woman-like every day. As 'for me, I was working, upon a pair of big pins, a kind of comforter for Maggie. Not that the like of

that was much in my way ; but it was very well for a divert now and then. And Grace was sitting by the table, looking out of a basket—the which Cecy had brought down out of the nursery—the things that were to be packed for Maggie the time she was away.

When Cecy, who had been sent out to the door upon a message, came back, and brought a letter in her hand. I kent not who it might be from, and a very strange letter it was ; but without doubt it was to me. And when I opened it up, who should it be from, but Jenny at Sunnyside ? I never mind of getting a letter from her before, and it was a surprise to me ; and seeing also that it was a great divert, I may as well put it down here ; she was no hand at writing letters, poor body ; and somebody had doubtless given her instructions. And this was how she began, though she soon came to plain-speak^{ing}, and telled in her common manner what she had to say :

“Honoured Madam,

“This comes to tell you, Miss Marget, that Lily Robb was married last Wednesday was a week, and all done as you would approve; and many thanks both from me and the young folk, and wishing you happiness and comfort, and a lang time in this life to ken how muckle everybody thinks upon your kindness—no to say that its just a speech in every house in Burrowstoun, how well off every ane is that ever did a good turn to name or kin belonging to Miss Marget and the minister, and how there’s a blessing belongs to the name.

“I have aye had my ain doubts—for it’s an awful jeopardy for a decent lass to be married upon a man; but I’m free to say that Robert Carr looks as decent-like a lad as need to be, and has gathered a very good plenishing, and gotten a bien house for her, and I have my hopes will make Lilly a good man. She was married in her silk gown, that Miss Grace

took the pains to send. I gave Lilly an advice myself to put it by in her drawers for an honesty, and let them see that came after her, what it was to be respectit, and have good friends. But Lilly threepit with me that Miss Grace would be better pleased if she had the gown made, and wore it to be married, which I cannot but think was a wastry; but grand it lookit, and might have done for the queen her ainsel. So they were married as I said—and *his* folk had a' the friends gathered on both sides; and a very creditable houseful it was, though I say it, that suld not say it. And there was a muckle bun a' frosted over with white sugar—a bride-cake, nae less for our Lilly—that Miss Mary sent down from Lilliesleaf. And the next morning after, when I said to them that I kent not what had fashed me dreaming about marryings and such-like vanities the whòle night, there got up a laughing among the young folk; and what had the

gilpies of lassies done, but put the dreaming bread below Jenny's pillow ! They were not blate !

“Lilly says you'll maybe think me a forward person, Miss Marget, writing down the like of this, as if it was like to please *you* ; but weel I kent, that have kent you a' your days, that it's a pleasure to our ain mistress to ken when puir folk's pleased, and very happy we a' were, and mony thanks to you, and to the young ladies for minding upon us. The young folk, Lilly and Robbie, are weel settled in their ain house, and desire their humble duty, and thanking you, Miss Marget, for a' the grand napery that would have been far aboon their fit, if it was not for your good thought upon them ; and Lilly's little sister, Helen, came in her place the day before yesterday, but is far from being a douce lass like Lilly, but a mischief of a bairn as ever was, and never out of trouble. Also I am very

feared, Mem, that you will think she is nae credit to the house of Sunnyside, the which has aye had a neat-handed lass to open the door, since my time ; for Nelly is very red-headed, and no so trig as I would have her to be, and what with flyting upon her morning and night, and flyting upon ither folk, that come with clashes about the poor bairn to me, I am clean wearied out at this present time, and have nae mair pith then a withered wand. I hear, by Mr. Cosmo, from Lilliesleaf—and he's turning the grandest callant that ever mortal saw, and rides upon his grey pony just like an angel—that past by this morning with the English gentleman riding in to Burrowstoun, that you are like to come to the countryside by the new year ; and it is my hope, Miss Marget, you'll no disdain your ain house, but take your pleasure at Sunnyside, and let me ken about this plaguit lassie, Nelly, if she will do or no ; for she is a great handful to me, and never out

of mischief, though I would not say she was an ill bairn either, but very red-headed, and never will be as douce a lass as Lilly, her sister, that now is a married wife in her ain house. All the folk about here are very weel in their health as far as I ken, though mony auld folk are sore fashed with rheumatics, and I am no to call free of them mysel. Also the minister's wife has gotten another son, (which makes five to her own hand) and there is word of Mrs. Rasp, the baker (and nobody in the town can reckon how auld she is, for a' so fat and fair as she looks, being a Greenock woman, and aye easy in her mind) taking another man—and that is a' the news I mind upon, Miss Marget—and hoping to see you soon in Sunnyside, and waiting your pleasure in respect of Nelly, who gives her word to be a better bairn if you'll consent for her to stay, and with my duty, and wishing all weel that are within your presence, especially Mr. Claud and Miss Grace, and

their little bairnie, that I would fain see with
my e'en before I pass away,

“ Remains your humble servant to command,

“ JENNY BALLANTYNE.”

Grace laughed when she had read the letter
over, and gave it back to me.

“ Jenny gives you a very kind invitation to
Sunnyside, aunt, I am glad to see,” said Grace.

So I thought it would be a divert to Rhoda,
and gave it to her to read ; and I truly believe
it fickled Rhoda as sore as her German book,
if she had put it into my hands, would have
fickled me ; though when the bairn did come
to a comprehension of it, she was wild with
her mirth and laughter, and would have it to
keep, whether I was willing or no. Truly, I
thought it was a very good letter myself, con-
sidering it was Jenny's own writing, and at her
years ; and the bits of news of the place were
aye welcome to me.

But great was my wonder when Rhoda came to me into my room that day, when I was putting my things up for the journey, and as serious as she could be, begged of me to take her with me, and let her stay at Sunnyside with Jenny the time I went to Lilliesleaf. The bairn was out of her wits ! but truly, she kent not what kind of a place Sunnyside was.

“ You see, when you are away, and Maggie is away, they will not want me,” cried Rhoda, in her quick way. “ I can’t make talk about nothing, and neither can my sister, and they cannot talk their own business when I am always there ; and I get tired of my own room, and get ill-tempered, and do so want to fight with Grace. I would give anything just for one good battle—indeed, I would ! but I had rather go with you, and live with that delightful Jenny, and get the little one into all sorts of scrapes. Will you

take me? I will be as good as possible, and I can sleep anywhere, and be no trouble. Do take me, will you? I want to be wild, and all by myself, and feel what it is to be free again."

"Truly, my dear, you ken little else, so far as I can see," said I; "but Sunnyside is a lone, small house, far different from Oaken-shaw, and everything will be strange, and you will ne'er see a face but Jenny. You would be far better, in especial at this bleak season, tarrying at home."

But Rhoda would not hear a thing I said. She pleaded with me to sit down, and she would sort everything, to let me see what a grand maid she would make; whereupon she began to fling my good things about, and heap them over each other in the great big chest that I had taken every one out of, no an hour ago—and to speak to her was vanity, for she never took breath to hear—and all

the time telling me what a grand traveller she was, and all she would do to take care of Maggie and me. She would not go out of my room, no a step, till I gave her my word to think upon it, and speak to Grace; and then, everything in my chamber being as far out of order as this wild bairn could put it, what could I do but cry upon Cecy, and abide there till the place was fit to be seen again. Cecy lifted up her hands, when she came in? Truly, the room was just a sight to be the bed-chamber of a douce gentlewoman like me.

“Yes, Mem, I ken whose handywork it was,” said Cecy, laughing in to herself. “I’m weel acquaint with a’ the ways o’t, sorting Miss Rhoda’s ain drawers and the muckle press in her room; and if I didna ken it was a’ in innocence, I would think she had done it for a divert, mony a time. She’s just an evendown laddie, and no better—with

her images and her whittling, kenning mair about a knife than needle and thread ; but she just has a way with her, Miss Marget. She gars folk do the daftest-like things, and think shame of themselves, and like her the better after a'."

Which was just the truth, and nothing more ; though truly, what I was to do with her in our travel, and carrying such a wild bairn to put Jenny out of her wits at Sunnyside, I could not tell ; but I did as I had promised, and spoke to Grace, and though Grace gave me little comfort, but laughed, and marvelled what Jenny would say, she made no objections, and I would not say but she was pleased. Rhoda came to me again that night to make her petition, and truly, I thought it was the wisest plan to give my consent, and send her away to get Cecy to look out her things ; for she would not hearken to me, nor even to Grace, when we

spoke to her concerning Sunnyside—what a bye-ordinary, quiet, not to say lonesome, place it was—lonesome, I am meaning, for the like of her, that heeded nought about our kindly neighbours—though it was home, and a warm and kindly place to my bairns and to me.

CHAPTER VIII.

“I HAVE just this thing in my mind, Miss Maitland, and I would crave to ken it at your ain hand before you gang away,” said Mrs. Porteous, the widow woman at Dourhills that I have before mentioned in this history. “They say in the town that you’re far from pleased at ane of our ways, and never keep Handsel Monday at Oakenshaw. I have aye been used to keep Handsel Monday mysel ; its aye the greatest day in this countryside. Will you tell me what reason you have against it, Miss Maitland ? for I think its a grand season for kindly meetings—and all

the bits of bairns with their scones and their handsels—they say there's nae mair heed taken of Handsel Monday than of a common day at Oakenshaw."

"Truly I ken no evil of it, Mrs. Porteous," said I; "but every place has its ain customs, and we take no heed of it in the place we come from."

"Eh, Mem! the like of that," cried Matty, who was standing by with a bairn in her arms, and another bit white-headed thing with a hold of her gown. "The English servants at Sir John's, they're aye making a wark about Christmas, but for my part I scarce ken when Christmas comes; but I would as soon think of missing the Sabbath day itself, as missing Handsel Monday. John's friends—they're aye in the town, foul or fair, and as mony of our ain as can win—come aye to see my mother and me; and the hail forenoon, what maun I do but

get the dumplings ready for the bairns ; and Willie has a new coat, and Grannie aye has a frock for little Annie, that all the bairns say is Grannie's pet lamb ; and no a friend belonging to us passes by the door that day. I'm no so heeding about the very New Year itsel ; and for the like of Christmas, its nathing but a feast of the English, and never was commanded till us ; but for onybody to pass by Handsel Monday fickle me."

" Ay, Miss Maitland, its the like of that that aye angers me at the gentles," said Mrs. Porteous. " What for do the great folk take up with the English fashions, as if the use of the countryside was not good enough ? There's just Sir John, no less ; and his grandfather was no better than an Edinburgh writer, and I mind of him making out a law-paper for my goodman afore we came to our losses. But now Sir John's gotten a grand fortune, he'll hae nae mair of either

meeting or kirk, but gangs to the English chapel to be in the fashion ; and for all he tarries at home many a Sabbath day, and breaks the lawful rest of the Lord, he's aye at the chapel upon the Christmas, like as if that was a better holy day than the one that God appointed. I canna thole the like of that."

"Truly," said I, "I would tell you if it was not a long story, the way I came to have a kindness for the Christmas time mysel ; though without doubt it is but a day of human settling, and has no place in the Word, and in our kirk we make no feasts but them that the Lord has made ; but it chanced to me that I was once in England mysel."

"Eh ! that was this time three year, when Charlie at my fit was born. I mind it as weel as yesterday," said Mattie.

"It was even so," said I, (and truly it was a time when I had travelled with my Grace—

the sorest peril I ever was in my life—a sea voyage to the very big town called Liverpool, to see her father, which is a thing I have never mentioned here,) and it was cold weather—like as it may be at this time—and I was heavy in my heart by reason of being far from home, and among strangers, and having an anxiety about my dear little bairnie at Oakenshaw—no to speak of other things. I was new risen up upon a chilly morning, and I was far from easy in my own thoughts; when, lo! there rose up at the window a song of the bairns; and I ken not what the rest of the words were, but this was what came to me—and truly it was a word in season to me, and I was rebuked, and murmured no more—for this was what one of the verses said, calling upon the folk of the house, as I suppose, and saying—

“ Let nothing you dismay,
Remember Christ our Saviour
Was born on Christmas Day.”

When I heard it, I was much startled, and came to mysel. "Truly," said I, "I will not be dismayed, minding upon Him, that He *was* born into the world, whether it befell upon this day, or no;" and from that hour, I took heart, believing well that little harm could come to me or mine, saving for a time, when it was true that He had come, and had died, and was alive for evermore—so that is the cause wherefore I keep a kind heart to the English fashion; though truly, as Matty says, it never was commanded, and the Kirk takes no heed of their Christmas-day."

"And they sing the like of that upon the streets—the bits of bairns!" said Matty, putting her apron to her e'en: "I'll take a kinder thought to them mysel, Miss Maitland—and I would not say but I would like to hear them—the bits of bairns!"

"Whisht, Matty! its naething but papistrie," said her mother, "and adding on tradition

and the word of man, to the word of God; and there's no a minister they have, can say better for it. But you see Handsel Monday, Miss Maitland, *its* nought but kindness, and a fashion in the countryside—and wherefore should anybody say a word against it? I see nae cause for a lawful objection, mysel."

"Truly," said I, "we are ever pleased with our ain fashion, whatever that may be; but it is want of kenning that makes us so sore against other folk's."

Now Matty, by this time, saw her mother was bent for controversy (which, truly, was not of my way; forbye that I had no call to stand up for the English kirk, or the ways of the same, which, if it were not in kindness and charity, are far from kindly to the like of me), so, having sense hersel, she took up the little bundle with the bairns' socks, that Mrs. Porteous had been working for me to take to Lilliesleaf; and truly beautiful they

were, and a great credit to her; and the bits of little feetie would look very bonnie in them, as I was careful to say—so I gave her her siller; for the aged woman had just a gift, for the like of this; and Matty was very proud of what her mother could do.

“I heard say it was very cauld in the south country. They tell me it’s mostly moorland, and a wild place in the winter time, Miss Maitland,” said Mrs. Porteous. “Its my hopes you’ll take plenty haps; for it’s far from being as warm and weel-sheltered as here in the Lowdens, the folk tell me.”

“Truly, it is my own place,” said I, being angered for the moment; “and I ken every wind that blows, which is more than I can say in Dourhills, for all so long as I have been here.”

“I once was in the South-country,” said Matty; “it was in the end of harvest, and there was a great kirn—and I was but a

young lass mysel. Weel, there's nae season like youth, that's my thought; though I'm very well content, and our John makes a good man, and better bairns a woman could not wish; but I aye mind upon the muckle barn, and the lads and the lasses, and the blythe night that was—though I'm fifteen years aulder by this time; and it happened before I was married, or the troubles of this life came."

"Whisht, Mattie!—do you think the lady heeds upon your kirn, and your vanities?—a woman of your years, that should ken better," said her mother, in an angry way.

But truly, I cared more for it than for arguments; and minded myself upon the days of my youth, and how far they differed from this present time; and with that, I put the bairns' socks into my little basket, and said good bye to them, and went my way. It was a clear, frosty day, kindly, but cold—and in at all the doors, I saw the fire shining, and

burning brisk, with mettle as it ever does in frosty weather; and some of the wives had their clothes hung out upon the hedges to dry, where the frost had whitened them and stiffened them, till they were all as hard as could be; and Mr. Kirkman's carriage was standing by his gate, and the horses pawing on the hard road, and the coachman marching about, to keep himself in heat; and one wife was cutting a frosted crisp stock of greens, in her bit garden, and another putting on the pot, upon the fire within—and there was neither want, nor the sore chill of it, wherever I could see; and life was very cheery to look upon, as I came down the main street of Dourhills.

It was strange to me, at this time, to meet an aged gentleman, that I had not seen for long—and truly, it brought a start to my heart, to mind upon the thoughts I had been thinking concerning my youth, and syne to

look at him, failed and frail, an old man, winning near to his end. We shook hands together, in the way of kindness, and syne he walked by my side, and told me wherefore he came to Dourhills. He was past the common days of man, and I had seen three-score years in my pilgrimage ; yet we minded both of us upon the time when other converse was between us, when we were in the flower of our days, before either blight or shadow came. Woe's me ! I kent not yet what was his thought respecting his own ill-doing ; but I kent well the end of youth it had brought both to him and me.

“ You are going to Pasturelands again,” he said to me ; and I answered “ Yes ;” but I was thinking upon different things.

“ I came here to see you, Miss Maitland,” he said, in the kind of sorrowful way he had — “ to say good bye, for old friendship's sake — though not a tragical farewell, like that

that once past between us. It is a long time since our acquaintance began.”

“Ay, Mr. Monteith,” said I; “and are you going upon a journey, as well?”

“Yes, the longest—or the shortest—of all journeys,” said Mr. Monteith. “I am not so young as you, nor have I so many ties to life. I may have set out before you come back again, Margaret; and, like an old fool, I could not rest till I had bidden my old love farewell.”

And truly, at the sound of his voice, the water came to my e'en; though the like of that, at our years, was not seemly to see; but we were old friends, and had been long acquaint, as he said.

I did not well ken what to say in answer to him, and we went upon the quiet road, him and me, old folk, without a word. Doubtless, if we said less, we thought the more; and when we went in at the door of

Oakenshaw, I said, being all I could get to say: "I pray the Lord to bless you, Harry, now and evermore, if we never look upon one another again." And so we parted; and it came to pass that, though we were both spared for years, I never saw Harry Monteith (that I should name him so, as I had not named him for forty years!) in this life again.

Now, this, as it was like, put me into a pondering, seeing I behoved to consider my own travel hence into a better place, when the friends of my youth were taking their leave of me. So it came to pass, that I spent most of the day my lane, looking over all my bits of private things, and setting my house in order; and, also, I wrote certain small letters that day, that will be found in the lockit drawer of the little room at Sunnyside, when I am gone to my rest, seeing there were some folk in this world, as I thought, that would like to ken I minded of

them, and bade them farewell before I passed away ; and meditating upon that, the night passed, and the next morning was the one appointed for our travel ; so I went not down the stair any more that night, but took my rest ; for a day's journey, at my years, was no light thing to me.

CHAPTER IX.

So, upon the next morning, we went away.

Now, seeing I had been pondering upon serious thoughts all the night, it came into my mind that it would be well for me to abide in my own house for a season, and be near my brother and sister, and all the kindly neighbours I had kent in old times ; which, when I mentioned it to Grace, she set her face greatly against, maintaining that I was far better at home, as she said, in Oakenshaw. But then, I minded her that Sunnyside was home, and had been for many a year to me and then she said, if I were doing such a

thing, she behoved to come too—and what did I think Claud would say to that? So we parted in dubiety, coming to no certain end upon the matter, only that I was well assured, in my own mind, that it would be best for me to stay.

Little Maggie was full of great pleasure and delight at the journey, as was natural to a bairn; and truly, between Cecy and my own self, if Grace had not been more discreet, we would have covered her so with haps, that the bairn could scarce have gotten breath; and Rhoda was in great spirits too. It was a great ease and matter of content to me, when we were on our journey, that these two bairns diverted one another, for I had other things upon my mind, and was but poor company; but being by the railway (which is a great ease in winning to a country place, whatever folk may think of it), we were not so very long upon the road;

and the minister, my brother, and Mary, my sister, were waiting upon us at Burrowstoun, very blythe to see me, and like to devour my little bairnie, concerning whom they were ever very much taken up, seeing she was all the family that had been bestowed upon Claud and Grace. Also I am blythe to say of Rhoda, that she behaved herself very seemly, and took no thought of offence at not being noticed, but waited till we had time, and took her pleasure in scattering the plaids and cloaks about, and was a very good bairn. It was so short a road to Sunnyside, that we walked there, and I kepted my eye upon Rhoda, to see what she thought of the bit little house at the top of the brae, where the door was opened already, and Jenny standing on the outside step in her best gown, and a cap with white ribbons, making grand curtseys as we went up, and waving her hand, till I doubt her arm was sore, poor body!

the which was all done out of the good-pleasure and kindness of her heart.

Now, Sunnyside in winter, when the leaves are all stripped off the trees, and the house itself appearing bare, with the red rowanberries in clusters at each side of it, and nothing behind but the bare branches, nor before but the damp, wintry grass in the garden, and the little green, is no like Sunnyside in summer weather, when, between the leaves, and the flowers, and the bees, no to speak of bits of birdies in every tree, a lightsomer or blyther house could not be, nor one more pleasant for a dwelling. But I think not Rhoda minded anything but Jenny. As soon as Jenny came forth, this wild bairn began to skip upon the road and clap her hands, no more daunted at being with strangers than if we had all been little bairns. "So, you are Jenny?" she said, when we were going in at the door. "I knew you

whenever I saw you. I came on purpose to see you ; and we are to be very great friends."

Jenny made another curtsey, and took a long look at the young lady. Poor body ! she kent not what to answer to the like of this.

My brother and sister tarried long enough to let us ken all the news of the family ; but seeing the Lilliesleaf carriage was to come for us the next day, when we were sure to be at the Manse, I would not let them be late, for fear of any accident on the road, it being both dark and slippery, with the hard frost and the late season of the year ; so they went away in the gloaming, before the tea was off the table, or the candles lighted. When I went out to the door with Mary, my sister, having put a shawl on my head, and saw Maggie's bit face looking out from the window, and the warm light of the fire glowing at her back, and Rhoda behind—truly, it looked to me as if a new spring had come

back to Sunnyside; and I think not but what Mary, my sister, thought the same, for she smiled, and said to me, "Would I never be done with new bairns?" and I will not deny that the room lookit very cheery to go back to it, with Rhoda sitting upon a stool by the fire, and the red light flushing her face, and rousing sparks in her dark e'en, and little Maggie set up, feet and all, into a big arm-chair, and the kettle by the fireside, and the tea still upon the table. When I came in, out of the cold, caller air, into my own house, it was a very bonnie sight to me.

But Jenny, she could not tell what to think of the young lady. Jenny was not used to have folk speak so free to her, and Rhoda's manner was far different from any of our ain bairns. So, when I had sent the young things to their beds, she came in to me in a great marvel.

"The young lady beats a''," said Jenny.

“ You’ll no tell me yon’s Miss Grace’s sister, Miss Marget ? I’m no to call proud mysel, but I would have naebody make a fool of Jenny—and if she was meaning that, for all she’s Miss Grace’s sister, she’s no the young lady for Sunnyside.”

“ My woman, you are forgetting,” said I, “ though you ken very well, Jenny, that the like of that is not a way to speak to me ; and Miss Rhoda must even be the very young lady, that’s for Sunnyside. She is not a bairn like our own bairns ; but she means no evil for all that, and, truly, she came all this way ance errand to see you. And you to make her such a poor return, is no what I thought of you, Jenny ; for it is little to be thought that young folk will seek after the like of you or me at our years.”

“ Whisht, Miss Marget, I’m no to believe that,” said Jenny, as if she was abashed, “ but I ken not what to answer till her, with her quick

ways. But she's very grand at her English to be out of foreign parts, and I reckon she'll learn Miss Maggie all manner of fremd tongues, and make her a grand scholar. And the darlin' bairn hersel! I wouldna even say Miss Mary, at Lilliesleaf, was to be evened to her—and her mamma's e'en!—and as like Mr. Claud as she can be—and I wouldna say, Miss Marget, but she had just a glint of yoursel, as muckle as tell them that kent, that she was your very ain bairn."

"Truly, I see not how she should be like me, Jenny," said I, though more folk than Jenny had said it, and, doubtless, I was like to be pleased at the thought, "seeing there are many folk nearer till her of blood than me; and to be close at the heart, is no to be like in the face, so far as ever I heard tell."

"But, 'deed I would not say," said Jenny. "Love makes likeness, to my ain kenning; as truly, I used to ken a very bonnie story of

a little ill-fa'ared unlearned bairn, that grew up into a beautiful lady, a' because one that was bonnie and good took a great notion till her, and likit her weel. And you're gaun away the morn again, the very first day! Weel, I'm no complaining—naebody can say there's ever an ill word in Jenny's head, or ony cankered ways; but for a' that, you might have tarried an eight days, Miss Marget, if it was but to put life in Sunnyside. It's but an eerie place, summer and winter, and the mistress aye away."

"Whisht Jenny," said I. "When I was last here, you said nought like that; and an aged person like you should not change her mind so soon."

"Ay, that was afore I lost Lilly, Miss Marget," said Jenny; "for Lilly was grand company. But as for the ither ane, she's like to break my heart with her mischief, and now she's greeting out her e'en, because I

have tauld her that the mistress is sure to send her away. I scarce ken how to tell you, —and the wyte comes a' on me, though I'm aye flyting at her. Miss Marget, this very day, at maybe about twelve of the clock, when I was sorting the inner chalmer, where the young lady's sleeping, what did the evil spirit of a bairn—that I should say so!—do? She took up the grand wee china jugs that stand upon the mantle-piece, baith in ae hand, and afore my very e'en—but just the moment that I turned my back upon her, to put on a cover on the table—first ane fell and syne another, and they're baith broken; and now I've telled it a'. It's been on my conscience since even you crossed the doorstane; and I could not but think what a hypocrite I was, making my reverence with a smiling face, and this on my mind a' the time!"

“Bless me, Jenny,” said I, “is the like of that a thing to give me a sore heart? Truly

I thought no less than that she had broken her arm, or let little Susie fall, or done harm to some of the bairns ; but if Nelly is a careless thing, you must give her a reproof, Jenny, and I'll say a word to her the morn mysel."

With that Jenny entered into more converse touching the news of the town, and was near out of her wits with good pleasure, when I said to her, I would maybe come back, after the New Year, and make my home for a while at Sunnyside. It was a real pleasure to Jenny ; and I was pleased myself to see that it made her heart grit, poor body, and gave her more comfort in her life.

So after long speaking to her—though truly I was wearied as she might well have thought—I got to my rest at the last ; and it moved my own heart to see Maggie in the bit small bed that Grace had once sleepit in, sleeping sweet in my old bedchamber ; and the other young thing, Rhoda—that, strange

bairn as she was, was winning in to my heart —laid down in the inner room, and both within my call, and close to me. Also when I took a step in within Rhoda's door, to see if she was sleeping, I saw her lying wakeful, looking at the moon, and she cried to me, and when I went close in to her, the bairn sprang up in her bed in her wild way, and grippit to my neck, and kissed my cheek or ever I was aware. "I feel as if I had once had a mother, and was at home," cried Rhoda, with a voice that was half greeting; "I do, indeed, since ever I lay down here. You want to go to sleep and rest, but I had rather lie awake and wonder. It feels very strange; I never cared to have anybody belonging to me before; but though I could cry, and though I can't help thinking about my mother, I feel almost as if I was happy to-night."

Poor bairn! I laid her down again, and happed her well, and, kissed her bit white brow,

and left her to sleep; and I doubt not she was sleeping sooner than me, for all she said.

Truly, I even had my own thoughts when came back to that chamber after a time of absence; and the thoughts of my youth were with me in a special manner on this occasion, so as I marvelled at them, and could not but take it for a sign in my own mind that the time of my sojourning was near-hand ended—the which gave me much meditation in my own spirit. But the Lord had willed it not so, for all my bodings, and I am abiding here even until this day, which, truly, is His mercy—though to be with Him, and clean apart from evil, and among the blessed company, where, I give thanks to His name, I have many friends, would be a grander mercy still—though I am well content with my abiding, seeing there are many folk within this world, being both bairns, and bairns' bairns, that are dear and near to me.

CHAPTER X.

WE were all early up upon the next morning, and a blythe wakening it was to me ; for it was my sweet little bairnie in her bit white night-gown coming to my bedside that first roused me. And when I got down the stair, which was before the young things were ready ; truly, it was lightsome to see the bright fire in the grate, and the breakfast upon the table, and the books laid out for the morning exercise ; but seeing there was a little while to wait, I went into the kitchen to say a word to Jenny, and at the door the red-headed lassie, Helen, met me, carrying a shovel of coals,

though I saw small need for them upon the fire—and, holding down her head, and getting discomposed at the sight of me, what did this silly thing do, but let the shovel fall out of her hands, and skail all the coals upon the carpet, where I kent full well, little bits of them would tarry in corners and be crushing under folk's feet at untimeous seasons for many a day. I bade her gather them up and sweep the carpet in a very careful manner, and syne I went ben to Jenny, who was very busy making scones—for she was aye uncommon good at that, and had a pride in them—but when I returned again into my cheery parlour, truly, I beheld with dismay the fire choked and black with the coals, and the lassie lying spread out in the middle of the room, sweeping the little bits clean across the carpet to the fire-side, casting down the bits of stools and dirtying the table-cloth like a misfortunate bairn as she was, and very red in the face, and thinking shame of

herself, but kenning no more than a wild laddie what to do. Now, it was not in mortal patience no to be angered, in especial to see the unpurpose-like ways of a young thing like this, that had her bread to make in service, and behoved to learn how it was seemly to do.

“My woman,” said I, “you should take thought. The room was very purpose-like, and needed nothing; and truly I was not a wild man that you should let fall the coals for me; and when a harm is done, Nelly, do you aye take my advice, and put it right the shortest road, and no the longest. Rise up, lassie, and take heart. What good do you think you can ever do, lying there, and looking at me.”

For truly there she was lying still upon the floor, glowering with her blue e'en at me, with her shovel in the one hand, and her brush in the other. And with that she started up, and, but that I was standing by, would have coupit the table, and all the things upon it.

Truly, this red-headed Nelly, though she had no will to do wrong, was a most misfortunate bairn.

After the breakfast was past, I went forth to see some folk, and took Rhoda with me; but seeing it was a cold day, and Maggie had gotten a new story-book in a present, I left my little bairn at home. The morning was brisk and clear, and the bonnie sunshine fell upon our road, and the sky as blue as frost and clear weather could make it, with nothing but a white cloud here and there. I ken not wherefore it was that I turned my steps towards Cruive End instead of Burrowstoun. Truly, it was Providence that moved me in my thoughts; but I kent it not.

There was a woman there, and her name was called Bisset, that I wanted to see; but sore grieved I was, going by the doors of the cot-houses to see what a sore odds there was between this place and Dourhills, where I had

been but the other day. They were bien bits of cottages, no very bonnie, but good, slated houses, well-built, and very decent-like at the beginning of them, when Mr. Allan was making his reformations here. Truly reformation was wanted more than it ever was. The places were dirty and ill-redd-up ; and they had just that mark upon them that tells every one that has eyes to see, of want, and pinching, and poverty, and that the folk within are oftentimes scant for daily bread. It was a great change, and it vexed me sore, no to say that Cruive End was twice as big as it used to be, and when trouble was in it, was sure to be heavier for that—having more mouths to feed, and hearts to faint than even in Burrowstoun itself.

Also my spirit was troubled to see that many idle folk were hanging about the doors in the forenoon, when they should have been working, and bairns wild and loud at every corner, that should have been at the school, making use of

their days. Rhoda, who kent nought of trouble, nor ever had been used to concern herself about her neighbours, was like to be wrathful to me; she put her hands to her bit face, and cried out at an ill smell, and pulled at my sleeve to make me come away.

“ You do not think this is a pleasant place to walk? Let us go to the town,” said Rhoda. “ Oh, please ! what do you want here ? The men look as if they could eat us—and those frightful dirty houses ; and the women in their great, thick caps ! Do come away.”

But I saw Nelly Bisset at her door, and straightway I went up to her, to ask what this might mean. Nelly was standing at the door-step with a sorrowful face, putting a meal-pock into a distressed woman’s hand ; and truly I thought not that this poor woman, whom I kent in former times, lookit with a pleasant face upon me, as she went away. But Nelly bade us come in ; and we went in, and sat

down upon two chairs ; and Nelly stood at the window, with the hem of her apron between her hands, and said she was blythe to see me, though very little blytheness was to be seen, in my judgment, in her face.

“Has aught happened at Cruive End, Nelly?” said I.

“Nothing by-ordinary, that I can tell of, Miss Marget,” said Nelly, aye busy with her apron, and never lifting her e’en to me.

“Nothing by-ordinary ! Dear me, Nelly,” said I, “the place looks like a place in a famine. I ken not what it means.”

“And what should it look like, but just the same thing it is,” said Nelly, very quick. “Famine’s a common neighbour here, Miss Marget ; there’s no a lad or lass, nor a little bairn about the place but kens the face of him, what like it is. There’s naething out of the common the noo, but winter weather makes it a pang the waur ; the mill’s stoppit—that’s a’.”

“ Mr. Allan’s mill !” said I, and it gave me a stound at my heart.

“ Ay ! the laird of Lilliesleaf’s grand mill, that was to be a wealth to the country-side,” said Nelly, in a bitter way, “ but the laird has mony a better thing to think upon, and canna consider a when poor folk. There’s been half time and quarter time, off and on this whole year, but the poor bodies aye stayed, still looking for better times—and now it’s stoppit work ; and wives and weans canna flit this dreadful weather, and where would they gang to ? So they stay and starve—what can they do ? It’s ill seeing folk’s neighbours perishing. Mony a time I am like to take my fit in my hand, and gang to Lilliesleaf mysel. I am begging your pardon, Miss Marget, and meaning no ill to you, nor to young Mrs. Elphinstone, that does a’ in her power ; but I wouldna wile folk with a promise of work, and leave them to starve in a strange place in the dead

of winter ; I would cut off my hand first if it was me !”

“ Bless me, Nelly,” said I, being greatly moved, “ Mr. Allan cannot ken.”

“ Kenning and taking thought are different things, Miss Marget,” said Nelly, “ and the laird kens his ain concerns, and gies his ain orders, though he ne'er may ken the misery they bring. There's a housefu' of folk three doors from this, would break onybody's heart to look at ; you might see them yoursel, and then you would ken better than me.”

“ And so I will, Nelly,” said I ; and with that, I rose up, and went forth, Nelly following after me—for I was sore disturbed at misery and want so near at hand, and vexed to hear an ill word of Mr. Allan, as if it was his blame.

Truly, it was a sore sight, when I saw it with my own eyes. There was no fire in the grate, but the man was sitting cowering over

the hearth, with the old use and wont ; and the wife, with a new-born baby at her breast, was in her bed, in the corner of the floor, and the other bairns creeping in, close up to the weak woman, to keep themselves warm, and greeting for pieces, like to break folk's heart to hear. They were strange folk to me, and had not been very long in the place ; and as for ^{pl}enishing, if it was not two chairs and a table, there was nothing in the house. It may well be thought what a grief the sight of this was to me ; though truly, I was very loath to say, in my own heart, that Mr. Allan was to blame. But when I asked the man, being the only person that could make an answer to me, what it was that brought such distress upon him, he said nothing but, "The mill's stoppit," and turned to the black fireside again.

But all this time, Rhoda was pulling at my sleeve. " I'll go back to Sunnyside ; I shall

not be five minutes—only wait till I come,” said Rhoda, when I could hear ; and before I had time to tell her what to bring, the wild bairn was away like an arrow. Truly, I was well pleased to get her away ; so I sent Nelly forth, to get one of the neighbour’s wives, and meal and milk from the shop, and coals for the fire ; and I went to speak to the fainting woman hersel, the man’s wife, with her little bairn at her breast. She was a very decent-like woman, and had seen better days ; and, between her feebleness, and being thankful for a friend at hand, her heart was grit, and she could scarce speak to me.

And when I went to the door, to look for Nelly, who should I see but Rhoda, fleeing with a big basket upon her arm, and aye stopping to look back and cry upon Jenny, who was toiling on the road, far behind. The bairn came in, near oversetting me, and set down her basket, and flew forth again—and

truly, I was wae for Jenny, with this wild young thing dragging at her, and her no so young as she had been, and far from able to come up the road at this rate. I never saw the like of the basket Rhoda had brought. Truly, I think not she had left a single thing in the press at Sunnyside—the whole of Jenny's grand scones, and the cold pie, and the bits of kipper that were over from the breakfast, and the loaf bread, and the very jelly off the table—no to say a boiling of potatoes, all wet out of the water, that Jenny had been washing for the dinner, and Rhoda had laid hands upon, and brought away.

By the time Rhoda came back, Nelly was in again, with some coals; and Jenny's basket was more sensible than Rhoda's; though truly, I think not but what the hungry man and the poor bairns thought better of the scones, and the pie, than of aught else there. Jenny, poor body, was able for nothing, but

to sit down upon a chair, and get her breath, after the way she had been hurried here. When once the fire was kindled, I let none of them stay, except the neighbour's wife, that Nelly Bisset had brought. I gave this woman siller, seeing she was a decent woman, and had no bairns wanting her at home, to get what was needful for this distressed family—and syne when they were as well as could be, I came away myself. Truly, it was a sore grief to me, to pass through among the houses, and see faces dark with famine and ill-will at many a door. But Mr. Allan could not make work, if work was not to be gotten—and I likit not to blame him; for, whatever his faults might be, it never could be said of him, that he had not a kind heart.

CHAPTER XI.

ON the road home, to my great content, I met with Mr. Bogle, the manager of the mill, leading his little boy by the hand. This decent man was one I had ever a great respect for, seeing he was aye in his own right place, and eident and thoughtful, concerning his great charge, and never sought after vanities. And the like of him walking forth in an idle manner, with his little bairn, in the working part of the day, with a dull countenance, and heaviness on his brow, was mostly as grievous to me as the distress of the poor folk, seeing it was but another sign of the misfortune that was on them all.

“Yes, it’s true,” said Mr. Bogle, “we’ve been on short work all the winter; and I would fain have had Lilliesleaf give thought to it in time, and part with the men by degrees, and get them cannily sent away, for there’s no another mill in this countryside, when our mill fails, and they would have a far better chance to get work in a manufacturing place, where there’s aye another master at hand to seek to, if one has little to do. But Lilliesleaf, he aye held on, in hopes of something turning up, and never could make up his mind to give the men fair warning to look out for themselves. So it was just the prudent lads that kept an eye to their own interest, that had wit to go away. Now we are stopped outright, and I know nothing about what the laird will do; but I’ll tell you what, Miss Maitland,” said Mr. Bogle to me, with a brightening upon his face, “the wisest thing Lilliesleaf could do, would be to sell

the whole concern. It's a very good speculation for a man that has capital, and time to look to the work himself; but Lilliesleaf is a country gentleman, and never was bred up to the like of this business; if there was but a sensible person at his hand to give him this advice."

"Truly, Mr. Bogle," said I, "a business like this, it is to be thought, was out of Mr. Allan's way."

"If the laird would make up his mind to that, there might be little harm done, Miss Maitland," said Mr. Bogle; "but it's ill for a man to allow he's failed, as long as he can help himself. Now, a new man, with capital, might make a grand place at Cruive End."

Well, I did not wonder, for my own part, that Mr. Allan was loth to that, for a new man at Cruive End, and another master, was what I did not like to think upon my very sel. But, bless me! what was our pride to

the starving folk? When I thought upon that dreary house, and other houses as dreary, that were doubtless there likewise, truly, I was stricken like a guilty person to think that there was any wyte of this upon any one belonging to me.

And when the Lilliesleaf carriage came to the door, all so grand and well-appointed, I had a tremble in my own spirit when I went into it, and could not but lift up my voice, crying to the Lord to make the evil pass away, and to bring down no judgment. Rhoda sat by my side very silent, pondering in her own mind, but making no word about what she had seen; and Jenny, that was not half recovered yet from her hurry, leaned in at the door, and craved to ken of me what she was to do concerning the poor folk. So I telled her I had left word with Nelly Bisset and the other woman, and, most like, would come down with Mary, my niece, to see to

the perishing family again myself; and so we drove away. It was a very bonnie winter afternoon, sunny, and frosty, and clear, with a good hard road under the horses' feet, and a pleasant country lying bright on every side, till you came to the hills, brown and gray as they were with their whins and heather, with flying shadows lighting upon them every moment, and sailing along the level fields till the sunshine drove them away. Rhoda had never seen the like of this moorland country; she was aye asking what this place was, and what was the name of that. For myself, I scarce could find pleasure even in the thought that every step brought me nearer my niece Mary, and all her bonnie bairns; for truly, I could not get that distressed family, and the wan looks of the poor folk out of my head, but whatever I looked upon, could see nothing but the cauld fire-sides and waesome faces about Cruive End.

When we came to Lilliesleaf, truly, there was such a tumult of welcome, that I could not but be moved by it. The bairns were just out of their wits with joy; and little Maggie, poor thing! being little used to other bairns, was mostly abashed among them, and came back, clinging close to me, till little Mary and Susie won upon her, with their sweet bits of faces, and she took their hands, and let them take her away. Mary, my niece, was looking bye-ordinary bonnie, but, someway, no just like herself, either, being thinner than her wont, and whiles, for a moment, when no person was looking at her, getting a wearied look upon her pleasant face. Mr. Allan we did not see, nor old Mrs. Elphinstone either, the which I was very blythe of; but after we had rested awhile in Mary's parlour, with all the bairns about us, were taken up the stair to our rooms, to make ourselves right before the dinner. Truly,

the sough of the rejoicing that we carried with us—for the whole of the bairns were following after, bringing Maggie among them to their own quarters—would have moved to good-pleasure a sorer heart than mine; and when she had settled Rhoda in her chamber, which was next to mine, my dear bairn Mary came to my door, and shut it after her, and we had close converse together for a space, her and me.

It was little will of mine to vex her, seeing she had plenty cares of her own, poor bairn! so truly, I said not a word that day about my morning's trouble, but sat still, and hearkened to her what she had to say to me.

“Are you tired, Aunt Margaret?” said Mary, “for we have a dinner-party to-day, and I hope they will not weary you; and then, after that, I expect a little time to rest.”

“And all is well, Mary?” said I—for truly, I kent not what to say.

“Surely, aunt, all is well,” said Mary. “I am fatigued and worried—sometimes only out of strength—sometimes out of patience, which is worse; but you will see that soon enough. Oh! and you have not seen Mr. Bernard. I expect to have trouble enough with him to-night—he is so easily offended. And Grace’s sister is pretty, and looks clever, aunt; I am very glad to see her have so good a face. Will you try your power upon Mr. Bernard, and tame him too? for this Miss Rhoda was wild enough at first, I suppose, if Grace told true?”

“She is a very uncommon bairn,” said I; “but truly, I will take no charge of the young lad, Mary, my dear. The like of him is out of my way; though I would not say but I have a dawning of vanity in my own mind concerning Rhoda, seeing she has come to be a very good bairn, though out of the ordinary way.”

Now, before I was done speaking, I saw well Mary's thoughts had wandered from me, and she said in a quick way: "Aunt, my father and mother will not be here to-night."

"Well, my bairn," said I, "they are old folk, even like myself, and were ever little minding about festivities. I marvel not at that."

"My mother thinks I am going too far—my mother is not pleased with me," said Mary; "and I am sadly wearied myself. Well, but I can tell you all about that another time. Now it is time to dress. I have scarcely half an hour to speak to you, Aunt Margaret, till all this host of strangers are in the house; but, aunt, listen," and the bairn's eyes sparkled, though they had been grave enough for the last little while, "I believe, in his heart, Allan is as tired of them as me."

I could not but smile likewise, when I saw the smile upon my Mary's face; truly, it

was like a bairn's innocent mischief, for all the weighty purpose that was hidden in it. "But, Mary," said I, "is it no a great expense?" And Mary looked graver than I had seen her look since I came.

"Aunt," said Mary, speaking low, and bending forward close to me, "they think little of their treasures or their jewels, that are fighting for their life."

And, saying that, she left me by myself. Wherefore was my bairn fighting for life? I had my doubts in my own mind, though I said not a word; for, truly, if she was wasting her bairns' providing, all for the sake of their father, it might be she was but doing evil, for a good that never would come.

I dressed myself in a very particular way that night; no that I desired to look aught different from what it became an aged gentlewoman in the end of her days to be, but for Mary's credit, that nobody might look down

upon her friends, or think our kindred misbecoming to be allied to Lilliesleaf. Also, I am free to say, I was fairly stricken silent at the sight of Rhoda, who came in to me, when she was dressed, looking like another bairn altogether ; so shining and so bonnie as she was, and in grand spirits, and very full about the great party, as it was natural for a young thing like her to be.

Many folk were gathered in the grand rooms at Lilliesleaf, when we went down the stairs, and kenning all the furnishing well, I saw that many new things had come here, and the place had a grander look than it used to have and everything was on a greater scale. Then, the dinner itself was beautiful to see, and the silver things and the flowers, and the lights, dazzled my e'en ; and, truly, I kent not what to think, as I looked round about, and saw how grand the whole room was. It was like a feast at a prince's house, and no the dwel-

ling place of a Scottish laird and country gentleman, and when I thought upon Cruive End, and yon miserable house, I was sick at my very heart.

But, truly, that night, if I was surprised at one thing more than another, it was Rhoda. The kind of converse that was strange to me, was natural to the folk here ; and the bairn did not refuse to bring out her grand music after a space, when she had been tempted to help some other young thing with her voice, and the stranger folk had heard it what a grand voice it was. Mr. Allan was very much taken up with her. He was very good at entertaining folk himself, and very happy and pleased he looked ; and I saw no reason to think he was tired of this manner of life, as Mary said he was. All this time I sat apart troubled in my spirit ; for I could not get my morning's work out of my head, and very glad I was that I had never mentioned it to Mary,

seeing it would have given her also a sore heart.

But when Rhoda was done with her singing, and many folk round about her, and me turning round to keep my eye upon her, being like my own bairn, and a constant charge to me—truly, I scarce could refrain from rising up from my chair, and stopping her speech when I heard what she was saying. She was speaking to Mr. Allan himself—the thoughtless bairn!

“We were at such a miserable place this morning. I wonder if there are such things everywhere, and we do not know them—do you think there are?” said Rhoda. “A hungry, dreadful looking man, sitting by the fire—but there was no fire—and a miserable poor woman with a baby, and such poor starved children. I don’t understand all their Scotch—but it was because the man had no work to do; and it was you who should have given

him work, he thought, Mr. Elphinstone. Of course, it would not be right, and you ought not to care for him; but I think if I had been the man, and starving, I should have tried to shoot you. I know I should!—I never would have sat quietly yonder, over the grate, when there was no fire. It was such misery!”

Mr. Allan stood like a man turned to stone, looking at her; but with a face burning red, and such a colour as I never saw. I could scarce move or say a word myself, and the folk beside me were but little better for the time—the thoughtless bairn!

CHAPTER XII.

“WELL, it is quite true,” said Rhoda. “I *would* have done it. When papa used to leave me by myself, and when I was neglected and nobody attended to me, I was quite fit to kill any of them—I am sure I was ; and I used to wish to do it, too. If I had been that man, and thought it was Mr. Elphinstone’s fault, I would not have cared, though they killed me the next moment. I know I would have killed *him*—and it is quite true.”

“But, dear me, my bairn,” said I, “was that right, think you ? If it was a savage,

there might be a kind of justice in it ; but it was an awful thing to say."

"I cannot help that—but I know it was true," said Rhoda, "and I never said *he* should have done it, only that I would. And I am a kind of savage, I suppose. When I was left by myself long ago, I used to wish with all my heart to do some harm to papa or somebody. Well, it was only fair ; for I am sure they never ought to have neglected a poor little thing like me."

And with that, this wilful bairn went away from me into her own chamber, leaving me so sore discomposed that I had not a word to say. For the like of that from a bairn in my charge was terrible to hear, in especial from one that had been in a Christian house, and heard the Word, and might have learned better. Truly, I never was in such a sore straight all my days.

And the next morning early, before I was ready to go down the stair, Mary came to me ;

and it was my thought that her eyes were red, as if, even at this hour in the morning, she had been weeping tears.

“Tell me about this dreadful story, aunt,” she said, in a troubled voice to me. “What did the girl see? Were you with her? Was it at Cruive End, Aunt Margaret? For I never knew that the mill had ceased to work till last night.”

So I told her my tale; and truly a heavy story it was to Mary, as well as to me.

“Allan is dreadfully disturbed, aunt,” she said, scarce able to keep the tears within her e’en; “and it is not very kind of him either. He blames me—everybody blames me. The increased expense has embarrassed him already, he says. And oh! Aunt Margaret, it is very hard to know what to do. If this is the issue of my experiment already, I dare hardly try to go on under such penalties. And what must everybody think of us?—how

heartless—how cruel ! It is very terrible—and then nobody but myself sees my true purpose, aunt.”

“My dear, no person in the countryside blames *you*,” said I, not knowing what to say.

“If Allan is blamed, I am blamed too—and worse than in my own person,” said Mary. “But if I stop now, I shall only have done harm. Aunt, I tell you plainly, I want to show Allan the pure, unmitigated ruin which he and I could accomplish if we tried, and which he *would* accomplish if I left him to himself, quite as surely, if not so soon. I want to bring him to the brink of it, while yet there is time to go back and be saved. It is a desperate game ; and I would conquer, aunt. But it is frightful to buy deliverance for ourself at the cost of misery to other people ; and I shudder when I think of what that strange girl said. I may be helping to lay up vengeance and enmity against Allan,

while I think I am only pursuing my own purpose to convince him. What can I do?"

"My dear," said I, "they tell me that many folk would be blythe to buy it, if he would but sell the mill."

But Mary shook her head, and said she was very feared he could not; and with that she thought she heard him crying upon her, and hastened away.

Now, truly, it was to me as if I had brought mischief into the house; for neither Mr. Allan nor even Mary herself, could forbear being distant to Rhoda, and every moment I was feared lest she should rise from the table in anger, and flee to her chamber after her old fashion; but this perverse bairn was never to be depended upon for anything she would do. She took not the smallest note of any slight to herself, but was far more concerned with the young stranger gentleman, Mr. Bernard, than with any other person at the table. This

was a very grand-looking lad, with black hair and blue e`en, and a kind of delicate face, being pale and thinner than was good for him, and no like the well-coloured country folk. But he had not pleasant ways : that is, no to me, that was little acquainted with him, though the minister and Mary, my sister, had come to like him well. He sat very silent, like taking notes of other folk, and but seldom spoke himself, and when he did speak, it was just to cause you to perceive that he had minded some innocent word you said, and was bringing it up again to make a smile at you, and that was far from pleasant to me. Mr. Allan was not very kindly even to me, all that time of the breakfast, but was disturbed and busy in his own mind, as I could well see ; and Mary could but ill keep up the converse, though she tried what she could, but was aye falling into a sudden quietness, her mind, as I saw very well, being full of thought upon her own concerns.

Now Rhoda had been keeping her e'en upon Mr. Bernard all the morning—whiles changing colour a little—and truly, I doubt not he also lookit at her, though there was nothing said. At last, she spoke to him in her quick way, so as that everybody at the table looked up at her for the moment.

“Were you ever abroad?” said she, and looked in his face.

To the which the young gentleman in a kind of ungracious way, and with a scorn of the question, answered just “Yes,” and not a word more.

“That is not what I mean; I mean were you ever at—” (but truly I mind not the name of the place), said Rhoda, “have you a brother there? He is like you, but different, and papa knows him very well. Is he your brother? I think he is.”

“I suppose it must be so,” said the gentleman, in a kind of unwilling way, “I have a

brother there ; but I respect the distinction he has acquired, and never claim him. He is quite a great man, is he not, this brother of mine ?”

“ I do not like him now myself,” said Rhoda, knowing very well what this meant, though it was a riddle to me, “ but I once used to like him very well, and thought him very handsome too.”

“ Happy fellow ! then he was once a greater person than I took him for,” said Mr. Bernard, in his scornful way.

“ But I dislike him very much now,” said Rhoda, with a flush upon her face. Truly, I could not say a word, for I was struck with wonder ; and such converse between two young things was more than I had ever heard all my days before.

Mr. Bernard gave a smile but said nothing. I was not pleased with this lad ; truly, whatever the other one might be, it behoves brother

to stand up for brother, which was far from being his way as it was easy to see.

“Can you sing like your brother?” said Rhoda again.

“I am happy to say I can do nothing like my brother,” said the young gentleman, with a gathering upon his brow, that far belied his smile, and making her a bow, “he is much too splendid an example for me.”

“Oh, yes! but you can, though,” said Rhoda, “you walk like him exactly, and that sneer is just like him; but his voice is not so good as yours. Will you sing with me?”

The lad was taken by surprise; when she said “that sneer,” he looked up in a marveling wrathful way; but anger or smile, it was the same thing to Rhoda, and so she went on to ask him her question. She was not to call forward either, this outre bairn; it had just been the way of her up-bringing, as I suppose.

Mr. Allan cheered up at this, seeing it

was a divert to hear their converse. "Yes, Bernard, will sing with you ; I answer for him," said Mr. Allan, "too great a temptation, by far, to be resisted. I should sing with you, myself, if I had the smallest amount of voice, Miss Rhoda ; but you would have nothing to say to me."

"No, not if you had a bad voice," said Rhoda, in her thoughtless way. "Is your brother coming home ? Do you know about him ?—Where is he now ?" She ran on, turning to the young gentleman again ; and he, for his part, drew away from the talk, and held his head high, and made a kind of scornful, proud answer, that he did not ken.

"Do you sing a great deal, yourself ?—Are you very fond of music ?" said Mary, turning to Rhoda, whom she had spoken but little to this morning ; "you will think us all heathens here in the country ; and Grace, I suppose, is not much better than I. It would be a

great change for you, when you went to Oakenshaw."

"It was frightful, at first," said Rhoda, in a very serious way. "I hated them all—I thought they were constantly injuring me, and plotting against me. I used to shut myself up in my own room, and be *so* unsociable. Sometimes, I enjoyed being miserable, when I was with papa—but it was very different in that great, great house. I was very near killing myself, one time; but I thought they would be quite glad to get rid of me—so I did not do it. Did you ever make up your mind to kill yourself?" said this wild bairn—and she turned quick to Mr. Bernard again.

The young lad's face grew first white, and then red—truly, such questions were hard to answer, especially being made in the face of a whole company, and everybody's e'en turned upon him.

"I am afraid your thoughts are very war-

like for a young lady," said Mr. Allan, with a smile that was not of pleasure. "Killing oneself, and shooting other people, are not the most agreeable pastimes in the world ; and I suppose Mr. Bernard agrees with me."

"It depends entirely upon the subject," said the young man, with a kind of haughty mirthfulness ; "there are some people, I confess, whom I should feel a strong theoretical satisfaction in shooting down."

"One never is quite miserable, if one is doing anything," said Rhoda, with her serious face ; "that was what made me think of killing myself—for it was always something to be busy about ; and then, to think what everybody would say—how shocked they would have been at Oakenshaw—there would be good fun in that ; for they would think the house was disgraced and haunted, and all sorts of things. I was very bad there at first—but it is a great deal better now ;—and

it is a very pretty place, and no very poor people, that I could see. Did you ever see anybody starving?—It looks frightful. I never saw it till yesterday.”

“ So, aunt, they were taking their satisfaction in cursing me,” said Mr. Allan, turning quick round. “ Could I invent work for them, did the fools think?—But, of course, all their improvidence and misfortune gets saddled upon me.”

“ Whisht, Mr. Allan !” said I ; “ they have their ain burden, these poor folk. I would not lightlie what they have to bear. And truly, it makes it not a bit the lighter, if you say it was all their own blame.”

“ No—that is true enough,” said Mr. Allan, slow, and in a meaning way—truly, his own misfortunes were all of his own bringing ; but when I said the words, I minded not that.

So, he said nothing more at that time, but rode out, when the breakfast was done. It

was my thought that he was away to Cruive End; but Mary whispered me no, and bade me be ready to go with her in the carriage. Mr. Allan was galloping, as fast as he could go, in another airt.

CHAPTER XIII.

It would be nothing but pain to me, and little pleasure to other folk, if I were telling what Mary and me saw that day, when we went to Cruive End; truly, there was sore distress and trouble in the place; we went from house to house, hearing pitiful stories, and doing all that could be done to help the same; and syne with heavy hearts, though we had taken comfort to many a fireside that day, we turned to go home.

When we were upon the road, Mr. Allan came up to us riding fast, and when ever he saw who it was, he threw his horse's

bridle to his man that was with him, and came in beside us. There was a gloom and a cloud upon his brow, and he was not like himself; and, truly, I was grieving at being here, no desiring in any measure to put myself between the two, or prevent their own cracks. So I sat far back in my corner, and said not a word, and was very anxious in my own mind to win hame.

“Well!” he said, after a space of silence, “not a word, ladies, not a word; is this how you return from your errand of charity? For I suppose, of course, that you have been at Cruive End?”

“Yes, Allan,” said Mary, in a kind of faltering way, “we have been at Cruive End.”

“Very well; is that all you have to say? Pray do not look so tragical,” said Mr. Allan, in an impatient way, “have you been hearing so very elaborate an anathema, Mary? Or has some stout fellow declared his adhesion to the

sentiments of Aunt Margaret's young lady? Come, do not tantalize me; am I to be shot without benefit of clergy? Or what is to happen to the unhappy proprietor of Cruive End?"

"Oh, Allan, don't be angry, and don't jest so bitterly," said Mary, "there is a great deal of distress, and many complaints and grumbling—but neither anathemas, nor anything else; and we have done what we could to relieve them to-day."

"So, I am the ogre, and my wife is the good angel," said Mr. Allan. "Well, Mary, never mind, I don't grudge their good opinion of you—you deserve a hundred times more than that, Heaven knows!—but I have been about some business, while you have been doing your charities, and Leslie thinks he will have little difficulty in finding a purchaser for the mill. I cannot for my life see why I should have any objection to sell it," said

Mr. Allan, "it has been nothing but trouble and expense from the beginning, and I was not made for a manufacturer. Eh, Mary? what do *you* say?"

"Will you sell it, Allan? I could thank you for doing that, as much as if it was a favour done to me," said Mary, in an eager manner, holding out her hand to him. So, first he blushed and frowned, and syne his old smile came glinting out again, out behind the cloud; and he took her bit hand, and grippit it fast, and kissed it, and then with a mirthful motion threw it away.

"That is all right, then," said Mr. Allan, "and our subjects will have a chance of work and wages under a new king; and do you know, we shall be quite rich," he said, with a kind of laugh again, "and have something in hand to pay for all your extravagances, you fashionable lady. What do you think, Aunt Margaret? Did you believe Mary had so

much spirit? The Castle has no chance against our humdrum old Lilliesleaf now."

"Truly, Mr. Allan," said I, "it was a very grand festivity last night."

"Yes," said Mr. Allan; and then he made a long stop, as if the thought of it was scarce so pleasant as it might have been; "we are to have no more of them, eh—Mary? till we go away. Now, what do you say? is not this Cruive End affair reason enough for relinquishing London? I think so, upon my word, and I am sure Aunt Margaret will second me. It would certainly be too much for you, Mary, not to speak of the expenses. What do you say?"

"I will give it up joyfully, Allan," Mary cried; but I reckon kenning its changes better than me, she saw some other meaning in his face, so her voice grew quieter, and the joy went out of her tone.

"If you still wish to go, I will still wish

to go with you, Allan," she said. "To tell the truth, it is not so pleasant a prospect to me to be left at Lilliesleaf alone."

"Alone, when you have the children," said Mr. Allan, who was angered in a degree, but carried it off with a laugh. "Of course, go *I* must, and if *you* will, I have nothing to say. Am I not a happy man, aunt," he said, turning to me, with his smile of displeasure upon his face—"though we have been married ten years, my wife cannot make up her mind, for as many weeks, to part with me, and prefers me out and out to all the bairns. What other husband could say as much as I can say?"

Mary's lip trembled, and her eyes filled full, and her face grew pale. I saw there was something on her very lip to say to him; but the bairn had learned to command herself, and never said a word, nor shed a tear. My poor bairn! Well blessed in the world

as she was—and Mr. Allan in truth very fond about her, and her bonnie family that it was a pleasure to me—there was aye still an hour, now and then, when Mary set her bare foot on the thorns, and felt the sore prick of this mortal lot.

But Mr. Allan had gotten back his good cheer before we came to Lilliesleaf, which was a comfort to me, and more than a comfort to Mary. Rhoda and Mr. Bernard were battling at one another when we went in—no arguing, or anything after that fashion, but even down rude to one another, like ill-brought up and unmannered bairns ; and all the little things being in the room with them, I was the more ill-pleased, seeing it was a very bad example to the like of Cosmo and Claud, and also to Maggie and Mary, who were old enough to take note. Cosmo keepit aye his place by Mr. Bernard's side, which truly, after a time, gave me a kindness for the lad ; for

if there had not been good in him, Cosmo would not have likit him so well.

Now I could not tell for the first minute what it was that Claud had gotten in his hand ; and what should it be, as I saw at last, but a lump of clay that he was howking at with his fingers, and looking at something that Susie held. The two were sitting upon the floor, all by themselves, and away from the rest ; and when I went near-hand, I saw it was one of Maggie's stucco images that Rhoda had made, and poor Susie was holding it high up in her hand, and Claud doing his endeavour to make another one, and Maggie aye coming, every little while, to tell him how to do ; truly it was a divert to note the ways of these bairns.

“ It was because Claud broke Maggie's one, Aunt Margaret,” said little Mary, whispering in to me. “ Its in two pieces, for all Susie holds it so steady, and they're trying

to make another ; but Claud shouldna get leave to break everything, aunt."

" He'll make this one bonnier," said little Susie ; " and Maggie says she'll like it better, and Miss Rhoda will never be angry. But, oh ! my arm's sair ! May I sit upon a chair, Claud ?"

" Wait a wee—wait a wee," said Claud ; and the callant was so taken up, that he never had time to say a word more. So I lifted Susie upon my own knee, and helped her, for she was a very good little bairn.

And in a while after that, Mrs. Elphinstone came in, and Mr. Allan drew in her chair to the fireside, and Mary sorted her pillows, and every one sought who should be kindest to her ; and Rhoda never took her e'en off the old lady the whole time. She was more failed than she had been, and I think, in my own mind, a thought more gentle, and no so fault-finding as she was in the spring of the year—which

I was very blythe to see. She called upon me to come and sit by her, the which I had to do, putting Susie off my knee. And pleased I was to see Mr. Allan take his bonnie little bairn upon his knee, straightway, and to hear him soon as busy about Claud's little image, as if he had been but a callant himself.

“And so the young lady is Mrs. Claud Maitland's sister?” said Mrs. Elphinstone, speaking loud out, so that Rhoda could easy hear, being very quick of the uptake forbye. “She sings very well. I heard her last night. So, that is Charles Maitland's daughter?—Yes, a great deal more like him, Miss Maitland, than your charge ever was. Grace had no style. And pray, what sort of a girl is this one?—a very good voice—yes, I heard it last night.”

“She is a good bairn, too,” said I, in a brief way, seeing I saw Rhoda's e'en shining upon my face.

“It’s a very good thing he has only daughters. Girls, if they are good-looking, have always a chance of marrying well,” said Mrs. Elphinstone; “but such a man’s sons have very little favour to look for, Miss Maitland. There is that poor boy, there—well, by the bye, now I think of it, they had better not be much together. At their age, people are always doing imprudent things. You had better send her to the piano, and ask him to do something. Mary!—where is Mary?—but she has no management. Miss Maitland, you had better do it yourself.”

“Whisht!” said I, close to her ear; “the bairns are close at our side, Mrs. Elphinstone, and they will hear.”

As truly, by her red cheeks, and her proud eye, I kent very well Rhoda did hear. But then, the best thing I could do, was to divert the old lady to another thing, which I tried my best for—and hard trying I had to keep

her off from speaking of Cruive End, the which her maid, a gossiping body, had been telling her about. She would not let me go from her the whole night, which, truly, was a bondage to me.

But I had pleasure to make amends ; for, when I saw Mr. Allan, in the gloaming time, paring apples and oranges, and parting sweeties among the bairns, and every one clustered around him, which to be nearest, and heard him say to Mary, with a smile, “ Well, now, is this not better than a crowd of strangers ? ” I began to believe, in my heart, that he was getting wearied of his vanities, and that my Mary was right—which was a thought of great comfort to me, and made me amends for being sore troubled in the morning, and much fatigued in my own spirit, with Mrs. Elphinstone’s converse this night.

CHAPTER XIV.

UPON the next day, we were trysted to go to the Manse, where we went, Rhoda, and the bairns, and me, going early, and Mary and Mr. Allan coming later in the day. But truly, it would be but a putting-off of time, to tell all that passed between Mary, my sister, and me, or how she was feared, in her own mind, about Mary, and perturbed with thinking upon the way she had gotten into, and the siller that bid to be spent, and the extravagant ways that were about Lilliesleaf. Also, she had heard all about Cruive End—for a report travels far and soon, in a country place

—and that grieved her the more. Also, my brother, the minister, took me in, my lane, into his study. Now, truly, he was a wise man, my brother Claud; and as he came on in years, he had learned that lore, that we are all so slow to learn. He judged no man without cause; and, being of a godly spirit, himself, as ever man was, he was ever ready to think the best that could be thought of the dealings of other folk. And glad was I to see that he considered Mary as being a married wife, and kenning her ain ways best, and had confidence in her, as one brought up in a godly house, that she would not go astray.

“I do not share her mother’s fears, Margaret,” said my brother to me; “though I would, if I had not great confidence in both of them. But they are very extravagant; and they will be obliged to come to a pause, sooner or later. A country gentleman cannot

live after this fashion. Does Mary understand her position, do you think?—Does she see what must be the end?”

“It’s my thought, she never takes her e’en off that, Claud,” said I; “and travels towards it, considering well what it must be.”

“Then I am quite satisfied,” said my brother to me; and we said not another word upon that matter, till the end came.

Now, Mr. Bernard came also to the Manse, that day, sooner than Mary and Mr. Allan; and truly, being, in a manner, like to one another, Rhoda and him, they aye drew together, which I marvelled not to see;—the thoughts and the ways of these young folks were different thoughts and ways from ours, that had kent a very diverse upbringing in the ways of this life; and, though they were ever seeking each other’s company, you would have mostly thought they had a pure ill-will at one another, from the way they spoke.

“ You always speak of my brother—is it because you know I don’t like it ?” said he, that afternoon, in a pettish way.

“ Why do you not like it ? You ought to be pleased, for he *is* your brother. If I had a brother, I should be glad to hear of him always,” said she.

“ Should you ?” said Mr. Bernard, with a scornful glance of his eye, “ and in the meantime you attribute your own amiability to me ; but I am not very amiable. You have made one mistake, you see.”

“ I never thought you were amiable,” said Rhoda, “ you do not look like it. You look as if you hated people that were better off than you. When any one is kind to you, you could almost kill them. You think it is a piece of presumption to be kind, and consider your feelings. You would rather everybody was rude, and then you could be rude back again, and be equal to them. I know how it feels

myself; it is the hardest thing in the world to submit when people are kind to you."

"How should *you* know all this? You are not a governess, are you?" said Mr. Bernard; and instead of being ill-pleased with her speech, truly, they looked to me better friends after it, though it made his brow burn all the time.

"No, I am not a governess; but I don't belong to anybody," said Rhoda, for the moment with a heavy tone. "I am like you—but better than you," she cried an instant after, with her wild saucy glance at him, though she had grace enough to get a red colour upon her cheek, "for I am a girl, and may marry well, as that old lady at Lilliesleaf says—but you don't know what is to become of you."

"What should become of me? Let me hear the most likely conclusion," said the young man, reddening up to his very brow. "When you have accomplished your desirable fate, and are well married—come, a contrast to

such supreme happiness—what will become of me?”

“What can a tutor be?” said Rhoda, in her wild way—“you will become a school-master, I suppose, and have boys to live with you, and teach them Latin, and take care of them ; that will be your fate.”

“Shall it?” said the lad, with a spark in his eye, and turning to her as if he defied her, “we shall see !”

“And I will recommend everybody to send their boys to you, and say how mild, and how patient, and how amiable you are ; and you will carve the roast mutton, and divide the pudding, and the boys will draw caricatures of you. What fun it will be !” said Rhoda, clapping her hands.

Now this lad was a very fine-looking lad, as I have said, and had a grand manner with him, and truly, was like such a one as an innocent bairn might have thought to be fit for the

highest place—as even thought myself in my own fancy, and marvelled much to see the like of him here. His brow grew redder and redder as Rhoda made her wild story, and I was vexed for him, kenning himself reduced and humbled, and having but small prospect maybe before him, and could not but think it was grievous for the poor lad to be made a mock of by this wild bairn. So I spoke to him myself, the bairns being all away out of the room with my sister, Mary, and only me sitting by the window with a book, while the two were holding this converse no far off from me.

“You are not to heed what she says, Mr. Bernard,” said I, “she means no harm; but also she takes no consideration, and ever is a wild bairn.”

“What?” he said, looking fierce round at me. Now if there is one word I like worse than another, it is that sharp “what?” when

folk do not hear what you say. We ever learned to say "Ma'am," or "Sir," in my young days ; but truly, if it be out of fashion to be as polite as that, folk might still find something better to say ; and the fierce look the callant gave—it set him very ill, or any like him, to give a jealous look at me—and when I answered him not in a moment, he even turned round from me again, and began with Rhoda once more ; for there is very little reverence now for auld folk, in the manners of bairns, the which is an unseemly thing to see.

"Now the other side of the picture," said the young man, "the extreme felicity of a good match ; do not deny me the companion sketch, and let it be as like nature as the first of the series—come, the other side !"

But Rhoda was learning wit, and kent better ; besides, for all so wild as she was, she was aye a woman-bairn, and had, doubtless, her ain thought of the future, and would not

bring it down into words ; so she rose up quick from her seat and came to me.

“ I can be rude to him, because I am like himself,” said Rhoda ; “ I am a dependant too, and people are kind to me, or are careless of me as they like—except such good people as you,” said the bairn, putting her arms round me in the quick way she had, which ever was a sore discomposure to me, being used to nothing of the kind, “ for you are a very good old lady, and I love you—and now, I will not speak to Mr. Elphinstone’s tutor any more.”

And with a wicked glance at him she went away ; truly, I kent not before what a torment this bairn would be to whoever got her. She was a good bairn, but would be a very sore handful for some decent man.

Yet the lad was not angered, though well I kent he would have been like a daft person, if any other had called him such a name. Truly, he was Mr. Elphinstone’s tutor—that,

and nothing more—but whiles the worst ill you can do, is just to call a thing by its right name ; though, for my own part, I see no good reason wherefore it should be so.

But I saw well I was no company for the lad when Rhoda went away, and it is no to be supposed he took any pains to give me another thought—and, by and bye, he also went forth, and where I was sitting at the window I could see him pacing up and down the Manse garden, knitting his brow, and busy in his own thoughts. Truly, I could not help but ware a thought upon him myself. Here he was, a young man, well-learned, well-born, and with pride enough for a crowned head ; his head was furnished full, I make no doubt, but he had little use of his hands, and was penniless, and behoved to be aye a gentleman, and would not bail his bonnet to any noble in the land. Also, he was not one of your grand men that will rise to their natural place, where-

soever they be when they begin, but was more weakly in his spirit, and had an eye to see a slight very keen, and was sore troubled with that malady that folk call "sensitiveness" in these days; and what was to become of the lad? At that time, Robert Loudon, of Fairliwell, a decent young lad of the parish, come of a good stock, and now settled in a small farm, came in at the Manse gate. We had been speaking of this lad and his family, the minister and me, so I kent his errand; for he was soon to be married upon a very discreet young woman, the next farm to his father, and had, doubtless, come to tell the minister the day. He had been a very big lad all his days, and was now as well-favoured a young man as you could desire to see—strong and tall, with fair hair, all browned with the sun, and merry blue e'en, and a healthful colour upon his cheek. In he came, manful but shame-faced, a lad that had nothing doubtful

in his lot, but kent that he behoved to eat his bread in the sweat of his brow, and all the days of his life to labour with his own hands ; and across the path, that sounded under Robert's heavy foot, passed the poor young gentleman, of the like years as himself, and one that Robert would make his courtesy to, and respect for a grand scholar, and a greater man than himself. Woes me ! and I would not say but Mr. Bernard thought the fine lad a clown and a rustic as he went past. Truly, I could not but marvel within myself at the difference ; for the odds was all in the favour of the young farmer, and it was scarce possible to judge aright how much more gifted by Providence was he ; and what could Mr. Bernard do ? Truly, to be a schoolmaster as Rhoda, in her mischief, said, though it was sore unlike the grand look of that young man, was maybe a better independence than he could look to—and I had no satisfaction

in my thoughts, but the poor notion that maybe some friend of his might leave him siller; for he was not one to win fortune at his ain hand, nor yet to be content without it—and to look upon the like of this lad was a new thing to me.

CHAPTER XV.

Now, truly, I need not to tell over in its right order everything that came to pass the time we were at Lilliesleaf. The family was mostly quiet after that, and had but few visitors, and Mr. Allan, being much at home, was aye very content and in good spirits. Mary was far flightier, and less at her ease, poor bairn, being troubled at the thought of leaving the bairns, and troubled to ken if she did quite right to go, and vexed with folk blaming, that should have encouraged her; also, having always in her ear the fret and reflections of her good-mother, who was never

done finding fault with her for the thought of going to London ; truly, for all that was come and gone, I did not just approve of it myself.

“ When I was a young wife, Miss Maitland,” said old Mrs. Elphinstone to me, one day, when I was walking by the side of the chair, and her man was wheeling her down the road—for when she went out in this manner to get the air, she ever would have me with her, whether I was pleased or not. “ When I was a young wife,” said she, “ and the late Mr. Elphinstone was not much given to economy, as I have reason to know, I denied myself everything for my boy’s sake. I never countenanced my husband’s extravagance ; when he would not listen to my remonstrances, I withdrew from the contest, and suffered him to ruin himself in his own way ; that was my system, Miss Maitland.”

Suffered him to ruin himself, said she ?

and so he had done, at his pleasure, and ruined more than himself; but, truly, that was just the thing that my bairn Mary had made up her mind Mr. Allan should not do.

“I considered the subject very fully in those days,” said Mrs. Elphinstone, “and made up my mind, that if Mr. Elphinstone would not listen to me, at least he should never have it in his power to justify his extravagance, by saying his wife shared it. Now, Mary will never be able to clear herself of blame—a very different position from mine.”

“But, truly, I think if blame was all, the bairn would rather bear it all herself than let an ill word fall on Mr. Allan,” said I, “and when I was here last, Mrs. Elphinstone, it was my thought that you counselled her no to be so retired, but to join more with Lilliesleaf in all his pleasures.”

“To be sure—to be sure, in a legitimate

way," said Mrs. Elphinstone, "ah ! it was Lady Julia I thought of then, as it happened—but that is all over, Miss Maitland—there never *had* been any attraction there, of course, and I did not suppose there was ;—but a season in London is a very different thing—London—"

"Was you crying upon me, my lady," said Mrs. Elphinstone's man, who was hard of hearing ; and he turned even round, and edged the chair among the whins, and stood still, with his hand on his ear, to hear what she had to say.

"No. Go on !" said Mrs. Elphinstone, in her quick way ; but he took the "Go on" for "John" again, and stirred not, more than to put his one hand to his hat, and keep the other over his ear.

"I'm turning deafer every day," said the poor man, "and there's an eerie sough among the trees—I can hear that, though I

canna hear a voice. Am I to turn back, Mem? there's rain in the skies, and we're clean again Malcolm's Moss, where there's little shelter—am I to turn hame?"

And though Mrs. Elphinstone cried "No" till she was tired, and I lifted my voice to speak to him myself, either he would not hear, or he could not; and, truly, there was a very sore moaning among the firs, and the sweep of the blast over the Moss was far from pleasant to hear; and I doubt not he kent best, though he should have obeyed what his mistress said.

But so it befell, that we ceased striving with him, and consented to be led away home—the which I was well pleased at for one person—and Mrs. Elphinstone began again.

"Rhoda Maitland is a strange girl, but I can understand her," said Mrs. Elphinstone. "Now, I never could understand her sister.

Pray, pardon me—I know you were much interested in your ward—but I never could make her out. There is such a world of sly, secret motives, and ideas one knows nothing about, under those quiet looks. I feel it a little with Mary; there is no understanding why she does a thing. I am always sure she has a dozen motives for it, though I do not know one of them; in fact, I immediately recognise the systematic way in which these quiet girls proceed. I never have any faith in them, though they get credit for so much simplicity and straightforwardness. No, I cannot tell what Mary means—I never could.”

“Truly no,” thought I, in my own spirit; though, being angered, I said not a word. “Wherefore should the like of you ken?” A worldly mind was like to be a very ill judge of my bairns; and I could not but think upon Mrs. Porteous and her daughter Matty,

at Dourhills, and how they said ill of the things they kent nothing about, and thought the custom of their ain countryside behoved to be kent and defended everywhere. But Mrs. Elphinstone, that ought to have kent better, was a more unkindly judge than them.

So we went upon our road in silence; and I could not but give aye the other look at the sky, that was darkening and closing round about us, like as it was descending upon the trees and the fields. Truly, the whole heavens, as far as I could see, had gotten a very eerie look; and the bare boughs of the trees shivered in the blast; and one bit robin went flying here and there, in an affrighted manner, as if it were seeking shelter where none was; and now and then, there was a great gust among the fallen leaves upon the road, and syne a moment of quiet, so still, that you could hear your breath; and truly, for that time, the trees lookit to me like human folk,

standing shivering, and cowering their heads upon the road, waiting for an enemy, who was, doubtless, coming fast upon them, out of the darkness and the cloud.

Now John, he hastened on, near-hand running, up the long avenue of Lilliesleaf; and Mrs. Elphinstone, she cried to me, and bade me hasten likewise, for the rain was coming on; and I made what speed I could myself; but before we got to the house, there was a flash out of the skies, and a long boom, like a big gun, and the rain came down like a flood. I helpit John, as well as I could, to put up the hood of the chair upon Mrs. Elphinstone; and I will not say but I was feared; for thunder is very fearsome in the winter time, seeing it comes so seldom; and it ever puts an awe upon me.

But in the very midst of it all, I heard a small voice near at hand; and what should I see but the whole band of the bairns, cowering

under a tree, poor bits of drookit things, feared to stay still, and feared to go on, and all clustered close to one another. Maggie and Mary, they had a plaid wrapped close about them both, over their heads, and had been running this way, with their arms about one another, and Claud running before, with a hold of an end of it, pulling them on—and, doubtless, they had been very mirthful, till the thunder came, and feared them. Susie was mounted up on Cosmo's back, being too young to run fast; and her bit head, with her cloak over it, was looking across the callant's shoulder at me; her blue e'en opened wide with fear, and her bit bonnie red lips parted, and her hair wet upon her cheeks. Cosmo was taking care of them all, though it was scarce like a wise laddie, to halt them under a tree; but the bairns were both tired and feared, and could go no further—poor bits of things!

Now, John was away, far on before, hurling Mrs. Elphinstone ; and to cry upon that deaf man, was but lost labour. And I was scarce young enough to go very fast myself ; so, the sole thing I could do, was to take the two bairns within the plaid, and put them before me, and guide them along the road home ; and to cover Susie's head better over with her cloak, and cheer Cosmo to carry her, and send Claud away, running as fast as he could, to get one of the men about the house to help us home—for we were still half a mile from Lilliesleaf. So, on we went, as fast as we could, me and the bairns—and, though there was little lightning, truly the thunder was fearsome, and aye the shivering of the trees, and the down-pouring of the rain, and the black sky coming closer and closer round, put a great awe upon me, and daunted the spirit of the little things, all but Cosmo, who was not to be feared. And of a truth, with

the rain, and the eerie sougning blast from the north side, I could see nought but the plaid before me, and the two little heads under it, that I tried to shield, as well as I could, from the storm. The two callants got far before us, as I was very blythe to hear, by their crying to me to come on faster—but I scarce kent who it was that grippit Maggie and Mary, at the first moment, and lifted the bundle of plaiding into his arms, with the two bairns safe within, and bade me no to be feared, for we are all safe at last—and who was this, but Mr. Bernard, that had seized upon Mrs. Elphinstone's chair, and came whirling it down the road, to bring us all home? We got safe into it, both the bairns and me; and Mr. Bernard rattled along the road with it, as it never went all its days before. Truly, it was a great ease and comfort; and we covered our heads under the hood and the bairns were not well in, when

they began to laugh and whisper to each other, and to think it grand fun. But I was very thankful to the lad, myself; for it was a great easement to me, and forbye, I was pleased to see he had that mettle, and took the first thing at his hand, when a good turn was to be done.

So, that was like the beginning of my acquaintance with this young lad; and, though he is far out of my way, and ever will be, and there is scarce two things in this world that him and me would 'gree upon, I have had a kind thought of him ever since then. Truly, it is but seldom, in an ordinary way, that a man can do his neighbour a very good turn, the like of what folk read of in books,—saving a life, or such as that—but I reckon just as good, in my judgment, the ready thought that came rattling down the brae at Lilliesleaf, to meet an aged woman, and two little bairns, out of the rain. And I would

not say but after he had done me this good turn, the lad himself had a kinder thought of me—for doing kindness, whiles far more than receiving it, softens folk's hearts.

You may well think there was much work made about us, when we got home; and Janet had the bairns up the stair in a moment, and changed them, as she had just changed Susie, who got home on Cosmo's back, sooner than we did; and we were all kept at the fireside, the rest of the day, and taken care of; and the little things had all double share of the sweeties, and the apples, and the oranges, after the dinner was past; and truly, I was well pleased to see both Mr. Bernard and Rhoda, having had their hearts opened with being feared about us, behaving themselves among the little things, that night, as if they had but been bigger bairns themselves, and making plays for them all, in a pleasant

spirit, and like as youth can best do among little bairns.

But Cosmo aye kepted between Mr. Bernard and me. Cosmo was much uplifted in his own spirit, in a proud, secret way, because his mamma was pleased with him—as, doubtless, she had cause to be, when the callant came to the door, and Susie safe upon his shoulder, and when Mary had been moved to weep tears, and call him her own boy, and her brave bairn. She had never praised him like that, all his days before; and Cosmo was grand in his notions of taking care of all the others, and counted himself a man from that day.

CHAPTER XVI.

IT seems just the appointed lot of some folk, in this world, to be trysted with the charge of bairns. Truly, if any one was like to be quit of them, it was me, being a single gentlewoman, with no great share in the cares of this life for my own hand; but, instead of that, I ken no mother of a family that has been more among young things, or had more to do with them, and all their bits of troubles; which, truly, is a strange providence. But, doubtless, a woman at the head of a house, has ever enough to do to look after her own

fireside; and I was free of cares, and had time to look to other folk.

But, truly, the charge of Rhoda was a great charge to me, seeing that this young thing scarce ever did a single thing that I had been used to set bairns of her years to do, nor kent aught of the manners and fashions that, in my eyes, were seemly unto youth. But the bairns at Lilliesleaf were soon very fond about Rhoda. She was a grand rider; and Cosmo thought much of her for that; and truly, when I went up into the nursery, and found her there, working away at an image for little Susie, I could not but be better pleased with the bairn, myself. The nursery was a big room, and there was a lamp upon the table, well-guarded, so that the little things might not burn themselves; and the light it gave was far from being a bright light, with the room being so big a room. And there they were, all the bonnie little

heads clustering about the table. Susie was sitting upon it, close at Rhoda's hand, with her bit facie level with the light, and the lamp shining in her blue e'en; and Maggie was standing at Rhoda's knee, and Mary next to her; and Claud upon the other side of the table, taking great heed how she was doing—for Claud had left his whittling, and turned all his thoughts to the images, since ever Rhoda came. When I stood at the door, looking upon them, I could not but think, in my own mind, upon the drawing-room down the stair, where Mr. Bernard was walking up and down, looking out into the dark night, from all the windows, and so restless that he would not draw nigh the table, nor the light, nor take a book, nor do a single sensible thing; though, truly, he lookit to have a very quick ear for any person coming in at the door. I think not he would just have likit as well as I did, to look upon the table

in the nursery ; but would have been greatly affronted, in his own spirit, to think of the bairn Rhoda quitting the like of his good company, to make an image for little Susie, up the stair.

So, I said we were missing her down in the drawing-room, and the image being nearly finished, Rhoda rose up quick, and went soon away. I abode myself among the little things, after her, seeing I had given them my word to tell them a story, before they went to their beds—and syne Mary my niece came up, to hear them say their bits of verses, and their prayers ; and so, we bade them good night, and left them, rosy and tired, and inostly falling asleep, as they laid their bit heads upon their pillows. Truly, the water was in my e'en, as I came away ; for little bairns are aye to me like a guard of angels, to keep the hearts of the careful folk that are gifted with them ; and how a father or a mother, with

the like of these little things about them, can go far astray into evil ways, is a sore marvel to me.

But, going into my own chamber, on the way down, what should I hear but the stirring of some person in Rhoda's room, which was close by mine. So, I put my hand upon the door, and said, "My bairn, is that you?" And truly it was her, and no other, stirring in a corner of the window, like a bird in the dark. I kent not what the bairn could mean.

"Have you no been down the stair?" said I. "Has aught troubled you, my dear?—or what brings a young thing like you up here in the dark your lane?"

"I like the dark very well," said Rhoda. "No, I am not sulky. I have not quarrelled with anybody. I only stay because I like it. I like the dark—one can think best in the dark. Oh, never mind me—I will come down by and bye."

“But, my bairn,” said I, “the thoughts that are best in the dark are seldom cheery thoughts; come down with me to the fire-side; when I came up, we were all marvelling what had become of you; and, truly, they will marvel more by this time. Come, Rhoda, like a good bairn.”

“Oh, nonsense!—nobody wants me downstairs,” said this perverse girl; truly, she would have hasted fast enough if she had thought nobody was caring; but I saw through her wile, though she saw it not herself; and it was mostly because she kent she was lookit for, and waited for, that she tarried here.

So I was constrained to leave her to her own pleasure; and, truly, I both smiled and sighed to myself when I stood in my own chamber, and listened to her, aye making the other start in her solitude, and whiles singing a bit word of a song to herself in the dark, and whiles wandering, as I could hear,

about the room, and whiles standing by the window, looking upon the night. Silly bairn ! as if I did not ken who was looking out in the same airt, down the stair, and growing wroth in his own spirit, waiting for her coming back. If it had not been for thinking upon what might come to pass, they would have been a divert to see them ; but I minded that trouble might follow, and it stayed the smile upon my face ; so, truly, I took counsel with myself, and made it up that we had far best depart and go to Sunnyside. For they were far different from a lad and a lass in the countryside, these two young things ; and what would become of them, if they were moved to put two broken fortunes into one ? when neither the one nor the other kent aught about the lawful labour of this life, nor how to do it, but behoved to be fended and cared for by other folk.

Now, it may well be believed that this

gave me a very serious thought in my mind ; for, truly, this lad, Mr. Bernard, was far worse off than any lad at the plough, and I could not divine, for my own part, what the like of such a young man could do, being bred to no profession, and having far grander notions than became a man that had to labour for his bread. Truly, even a sodger officer—though they get very little siller, poor lads, and are in a very ill condition for the cares of a family—was better off than Mr. Bernard ; and Rhoda Maitland was no more fit to be a poor man's wife. Mrs. Elphinstone, doubtless, was a far wiser woman, and better learned in this world than me ; and I should have taken note of what she said at the first about these two young things ; but, truly, the best I could do now was to get them parted, for it was little kindness to them to let them take their pleasure now, to the wounding of their ain hearts.

So, with this thought in my mind, I went down the stair, and the fierce face the young lad lifted at the door when he saw it was but me, was another sign of all the harm that had been done, and I smiled at it no more. Mr. Allan was learning Cosmo to play a game upon a little table, being the game of chess, which is a great divert, I doubt not, to them that can do it, but a very hard thing to learn, and a great off-put of time, in my judgment, seeing I never heeded about the like of such vanities myself. Cosmo was greatly bent upon it—being but a laddie, and very earnest to win from his papa—but Mr. Allan had an eye for Mr. Bernard, as I had, and smiled at me as I came in. Mary, also, sitting at her seam, was concerned about the young man, but Mary had clearer e'en, and kent it was nothing to smile at, as well as me.

Mr. Bernard was sitting down now, on a sofa by himself, reading at a book. Truly,

you would have thought — save at times, when the door opened—that the lad's very heart was in this book, but if he could have telled a single word of what it was about, I have little skill in men. So I sat down beside Mary myself, and looked at what she was doing ; and said I to her in a quiet way : “ Mary, the bairn Rhoda and me, must go back to Sunnyside.”

“ So I perceive, aunt,” said Mary ; and that was the whole that was said. We spoke so quiet, that Mr. Allan, being far nearer, heard us not, but I wot well, Mr. Bernard heard, and grew red in the face, and glanced at me, and curled his lip, half with anger, half with disdain. Truly, I never, all my days had been trysted with such a charge ; for it was not like these two strangers would do all that I bid them, like our own bairns.

And after a long space, Rhoda came down the stair. She came in, with her e'en dazzled

by the light, and looking very bonnie—but now it was the young man's turn to be perverse, and though I kent well he noted every turn she took, he was eager about his reading now, and never lifted his head. So Rhoda, she came to the little table, and drew her seat close to Cosmo, and began to counsel him what he was to play ; and the callant and her being great friends already, and him very anxious to win, and her well-learned in it, Mr. Allan laughed, and said he behoved to look to himself. So they began to play with great birr, Cosmo aye looking to Rhoda to counsel him, till, truly, I rose to look at the game myself, and so did Mary. But Mr. Bernard never stirred from his book—truly, it bid to be a very entertaining book, and worthy of great study ; and, doubtless, all the more because Rhoda was very mirthful in her way, and taken up with Cosmo, and never looked the airt Mr. Bernard was.

Now having two games like this to watch, and being more concerned about the one than the other, I cannot just tell in the right words how Cosmo came to win the play—but he did win, and very big the callant was about it, and making great triumph over Mr. Allan, and then the tea came ben, and we had all to take it, and Mr. Bernard put away his book. Rhoda was very full of spirit that night, and as happy as could be in her speech, and it did not take very long either to put the young man out of conceit with his reading. So Cosmo being wild about his game now, was earnest to play with everybody, and first, Mr. Bernard, and then Rhoda played with him, and seeing they were more taken up with one another than with the game, and the callant was solely bent upon it, he won over them both, and had a great triumph; and truly, we even that were older folk, were all very well pleased to look on. And so the night passed, being an anxious

season to me, though I would not say but it was a white night in the memory of these two young folk, and made Mr. Allan and Mary mind upon their own early days; though, truly, this was after a far diverse fashion from their way of growing acquaint.

But I took Rhoda into my room at night, and had a word with her, and said I :

“Rhoda, my bairn, it behoves us to go away.”

Her face was bright with the flush of colour that still was upon it, and her breath was coming fast upon her lip, and her e'en dancing with a flutter at her heart—and truly, I was vexed at myself when she looked up at me with a dismayed look, and said :

“ To go away ?”

“ Ay, my dear,” said I, “ it is thrë weeks since we came, and it is my desire to tarry a while at Sunnyside, and Grace will soon look for us home. Truly, I think we should make up our mind to go the day' after the morn.”

So she stood before me for a while playing with the candlestick in her hand, and then she gave first a laugh and then a sigh, and said, "Very well," and went away to her chamber in great haste; truly, I was troubled in my conscience that I had not taken better care for this bairn.

CHAPTER XVII.

ELDERN folk work by wiles—it is the common word, and I will not say but it may be true, though when I have tried my hand at that, I cannot take upon me to say that I ever had any great success—and, truly, they would need to be very good at it, that tried to baulk young folk, and put them off their own purposes. We were not long till we were settled at Sunnyside, Rhoda and me, leaving Maggie with the bairns at Lilliesleaf for a short season; but what good came of it? Nothing but to make errands for Mr. Bernard, and waste what little siller the poor lad had,

buying things in the shops at Burrowstoun for an excuse to come up the brae, and inquire after me. Truly, the young man took great pains about me at that season, and was much concerned about my health, though I was just uncommon well; and if ever there was a bairn that had a delight in torment, and took pleasure in tantalizing a decent lad, it was that ill-bairn Rhoda. If he had taken thought upon his ain peace and comfort, he would have sought no more to do with the like of her.

Now I well kent that the like of this quiet house of mine, with no better divert than Jenny, and the misfortunate thing, Nelly, Jenny's niece, would soon be a weariness to a bairn of Rhoda's spirit, which, truly, came to pass very soon—and this was the way we spent our days. In the morning, after our exercise, and breaking our fast, I took my own occupation, as was right, and sewed at my seam for a season, or lookit to my house, or

wrote a bit small letter to Grace at Oakenshaw, telling her all how it was with us here ; but for Rhoda, the bairn had no occupation, nor would settle to any ; whiles—and, truly, I will say, *that* was very hard upon me, being an aged woman, and little used to commotion—she would get the bits of things—being my work-box, and a big Bible that was seldom used, and some small ornaments—off from the old piano, that had been long in the house, and little made use of, and was not maybe just so grand in its sound as it had been, nor equal to them that Rhoda had played upon at Lilliesleaf and Oakenshaw—and then the bairn would begin to her music ; but she would not be ten minutes at it, when something would go wrong, and then there was a bum-bumming at my very ear, trying what it was, and if she could set it right, and crying out what a crazy affair it was, and miscalling the poor thing, that had stood quiet and been well thought

upon, by that wall so long, till I was mostly inclined to lift up my voice and flyte upon her, for the din she made. Then the piano would be shut down in a great hurry, and Rhoda would flee to the window, and sit there, drumming upon the glass with her fingers, till—it being hard frost, and the like of that far from canny—I made it out clear in my mind that she would break a pane; and then the baker's lad would come upon his pony, or a decent lad out of the town with something that was for the dinner, and it made small account what I was doing, for there would Rhoda sit and tell me everything that came within her view. Well, she likewise wearied of that—whereupon, she flew ben the house to Jenny, and I was at peace for a small space; but, truly, only for a very small space; for she would be back again then, and no kenning what to do with herself, would seek out one of her German books, and begin to read to

me, aye sitting down within view of the window, and keeping an eye upon the road ; and whiles going so far as to say in a mocking way, something about the messenger from Lilliesleaf to hear how I was, or naming the lad Mr. Elphinstone's tutor, or something like that—though if I had called him so, truly, I would not have liked Rhoda to hear me ; but the wild bairn went to all lengths herself.

And, doubtless, Mr. Bernard came ; but when the humour took her, though it might happen at that moment that I had begun to heed her book, and take thought to what she was reading, she would fling it from her in a moment, and start away up the stair, or in beside Jenny, the moment she saw the young lad upon the road ; and for all so sore as she had wearied for him, as I kent full well, would stay away the half of the time he was there, and syne come in, looking as grave, and putting on as grand a manner, as

if she was a princess, and him a common lad. I marvelled not the poor young man was kept ever in a perplexity ; for, truly, I kent no more than Jenny did what to think of her myself. And the whole day, after he was away, she would just go on as before, and in the gloaming fall into long meditations, and be very ill-pleased when the candles came, and the tea ; and other whiles, would do all her endeavour to draw me into a converse, of what chanced when I dwelt here constant at Sunnyside, and concerning Mr. Allan and Mary, and Grace and Claud, which, truly, made plain enough to me, if I had before been in doubt concerning them, the turn of the bairn's thoughts.

So I was in a great perplexity ; and one day, when she went out upon one of her rambles, I took a meditation upon it, and made up my mind that it behoved me to speak to her about this young man. It was

far from an easy thing to do, for I had no natural right over the bairn, and she cared not for the same things that would have had power with Grace and Mary ; and I feared much it was too far gone by this time to speak to either one or the other of them, of prudence and siller, and the ways of this world. But something I behoved to do—and I had even made up my mind to it, and was in a tremor, thinking upon what I would say when Rhoda came in. I might have kent something bye-ordinary had come to pass, if I had not been so much taken up with my own thoughts ; but I noted it not, till she had put by her bonnet, and come beside me again, down the stair. Truly, I tarried not for anything she might have to say, but took the first word, and began the converse myself.

“ Rhoda,” said I, “ I should have spoken to you about this before ; and, truly I am

very feared I have been to blame, and I ken not what Grace will think of me; but, my dear, you must hear what I have to say, now."

"Well, I *will* hear what you have to say," said Rhoda; the colour was changing, in a degree, upon her cheek; but she was not near so much perturbed as me.

"My dear," said I, "you will easy ken what I mean. Rhoda, Mr. Bernard is a very fine lad, and I have occasion to be pleased with him; but he comes oftener than is good for him, to Sunnyside."

Rhoda rose up from her seat, and laughed, and clapped her hands at that; and syne faltered, and got, in a manner, confused, and sat down again, no turning her face to me. "Do you think he has got any harm at Sunnyside?" she said, in a voice that was trembling between laughing and tears; "who can have injured him here?"

"Truly, if he is not all the stronger in his

own mind, he is sure to have gotten harm," said I, being displeased; "and, maybe, a heartbreak, poor lad! for all so little as you think of it, Rhoda. Now, my dear, you are no to look at me, as if you were innocent of what I mean—for you ken very well, Rhoda, and better than me, who Mr. Bernard comes here for—and that it is no other person but yourself."

"Well!" said Rhoda—and she had the grace to get a colour in her face, but was not feared to look at me, for all that—"and if he does, what then?"

"Truly," said I, "the bairns of this generation are different from what they were in my young days. I am saying serious words, Rhoda Maitland; and it becomes you not to smile at me. This poor lad might waste his best youth, and his heart, thinking upon you, you thoughtless bairn—and would that be a little thing?—truly not, in my eyes."

“But you might consider the other side of the question, too,” said Rhoda, the flush flaming up, for a moment, to her e’en, and lighting a spark there. “I might think of him, perhaps—since you use such gentle words—as much as he thinks of me. I will call you Aunt Margaret, too, for this once, as all the others do; for I have nobody else to care what happens to me. He is there upon the road now. I have been speaking to him—and I love him, and he loves me—and he knows it. And now, please do not look so cold, and so frightened, Aunt Margaret. Kiss me, and cry, and say you hope I will be happy—will you? I want to cry, myself—I can’t tell you what strange things I want to do. Don’t turn your head away—there—there!”

And with that, she sprang to me, and grippit me close, and cried, and laughed, like a daft bairn. Poor thing!—I was feared, and I was ill-pleased, and troubled for her;—a

stranger that she had never seen six months ago—but she had no person to tell her pleasure to, and the melting of her heart, but only me!

“Poor bairns!” said I; “poor bairns!—“and so you have taken it in your own hands, and waited no counsel. But, Rhoda, my dear, sit up upon your seat, and take thought, and hearken to me.”

“I have no time to take thought,” cried Rhoda, going back to her seat, quite blythe again. “And what is the good of thinking, when it’s all over? It will not be half such good fun now; and you ought to condole with me. But I suppose, now, you have no more to say about poor Austin taking harm at Sunnyside?”

Truly, I was at my wit’s end. “The lad is a very good lad—but what can he do?” said I, in my trouble—“and the two of you, you are far too young to fight with poverty,

and the cares of this life. Rhoda, my dear, it is not that I lightlie Mr. Bernard; but how does any mortal suppose the like of that young lad can keep a wife?"

Now Rhoda's face grew red again, at my first word; but she laughed, for all that. "He does not intend to do any such foolish thing; and you don't suppose I want to be married!" said Rhoda. "You make me laugh—I cannot help it. Fancy Austin and I, all by ourselves, in a little house, and me cooking his dinner for him! No—I am quite sure you are puzzled about us, you good Aunt Margaret—but we don't want to be married. Did you think we would set up the school immediately, and torment everybody to send their boys? Well, it will be very good fun, making all the plans for it; but we had no time to speak of that to-day."

Truly, she said right. I was very sore

perplexed. "Then, what is to come of it, Rhoda?" said I.

With that, she laughed at me again. "I cannot tell, I am sure," said Rhoda. "I don't care;—Austin is very fond of me, and I am very glad. And as for papa, and *his* brother, they may do what they like, they never will change us. And, perhaps, something will turn up—or, perhaps—I am sure I don't care what comes. So, indeed, Aunt Margaret, you need not have that dreadful wrinkle upon your nice smooth forehead, for Austin and me."

So she came and kissed me again; and syne went away singing to her own chamber. Truly, she was a great charge to me; and I kent not what to think of this new thing. I blamed myself, that did not take better care—but there was little comfort in that. So, the sole thing I could do, was to write letters both to Grace and Mary, telling them, and

asking their counsel. Truly, it was a very sore strait for an aged gentlewoman like me, kenning little of the world, to be brought into—and all the more, because it aye came to my mind, that I had been thoughtless, and in a measure to be blamed myself.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Now, truly, when all this had come to pass, and before I had got any word from either Grace or Mary, I was in a great swither and perplexity what to do ; but, having given much thought to it, I made up my mind, at last, to speak to the young lad himself, and see what he might have to say—as, to tell the truth, it was my thought that he ought to have made a duty of speaking to me, seeing that I was the only responsible person that had the present charge of the bairn Rhoda. Truly, it is a marvel to see the concern other folk take in a story like this, between two

bairns. Every one about Sunnyside was as taken up with this lad, and his comings and goings, as if he had belonged to themselves—and no Jenny and Nelly alone, but the men at the smiddy, and the folk at the public, came to their doors, to look after Mr. Bernard, when he took his road up the brae—for truly, it was not ill to guess what brought a young man like that so often to our house.

The next time he came, I was sitting in my parlour, my lane—sitting by the fire, the day being cold, with a shawl about me, and working a stocking; for I could not see to do a fine seam, and it aye was a divert to have something in my hands. Jenny let Mr. Bernard in at the door herself, having an interest in him. And when he came ben to me, I was perturbed, in a measure, and kent not, at first, how to meet him—as truly, the lad himself got a red face, and did not lift his e'en to me. So he took his seat, and sat

down ; and, for a moment's space, we said not a word, neither him nor me.

“ Where is Rhoda, Miss Maitland ? ” he said to me, at last, in a confused way.

“ Rhoda is no come in yet from her walk, Mr. Bernard,” said I, “ and I will not say but I am well-pleased ; for I would fain speak a word to you, myself. Are you well advised, Mr. Bernard, being but young, and noways settled in life, to bind this bairn and yourself to one another's fortune ? She has but me to take care for her, at this present time ; and truly, it is my thought that the two of you have not been well advised.”

“ Very probably,” said the young man, getting a flush upon his face, and looking wrathful at me. “ We sought no advice, that I am aware of, on the subject ; but had the presumption to suppose ourselves the best judges of what concerned us so closely. No, we had not much advice—I grant you that.”

“What I meant was, that you had not taken right counsel in your own minds,” said I; “for a troth-plight means more than itself. It means the keeping of a house, and the beginning of a life—and truly, I would be very glad to ken what plans you have for that; no because I am prying into your concerns, being a stranger to me, but because Rhoda Maitland is in my charge, and I have to be answerable for her; and she has no nearer friend at hand, to take thought for her welfare, poor bairn! You are of a far diverse breeding from me, Mr. Bernard, and from my folk; and so is Rhoda. But truly, it is the manner of all people, to take concern in the settling of young bairns—the which, doubtless, you are as well aware of as me.”

“Rhoda and I are very much like each other. We are both orphans, though she has a father—and we are both poor, and have not a prospect between us,” said the young

man, with a bitter tone, and a curl of his lip. "I think we may be permitted to dispense with the usual formalities. There are no high contracting parties here, Miss Maitland. You know, well enough, what we both are—and to call me to render a solemn account of myself, and my intentions, is ridiculous, in our case."

"And wherefore so, Mr. Bernard?" said I, being angered at him. "Poortith and wealth have been but words to me, all my days; and truly, I have seen poor folk blyther than rich folk—and many a house has the blessing of God upon it, where every one eats his bread by the work of his hands. I am no asking if you are rich, or have a prospect of siller, but only what it is you are meaning to do?"

With that the young man broke forth in an indignant way:

"Yes!" he cried, "you are quite ight. I

have betrayed Rhoda. I ought to have suffered everything myself, rather than induce her to pledge herself to me—to me!—somebody's poor tutor, with not even a garret to offer her. *She* asks nothing about my intentions, poor child! it is nothing but a frolic to her, the idea of beginning life. I had better escape from her this moment, while I can bear it, and never seek to see her more!"

With that he started up from his seat in a wild way; but kenning well that he would soon think better of it, I minded him not, but let him travel up and down the room to get his passion out. When that was done, he came back and sat down again, nearer to me.

"My prospects, Miss Maitland," said he, in a bitter way, "are simply nothing at all. I am an educated pauper—a poor gentleman! I teach boys their Latin and Greek, and endure to hear that my school-mastership is a very important office, and that when I train

a man's children well, I am entitled to his respect—Heavens! this is what I am, and what I am likely to be—and I call Rhoda Maitland my betrothed—my betrothed!—I deserve hanging for such a madness, do I not?”

“Truly, Mr. Bernard,” said I, “I am little learned either about hanging or who deserves it. I wot well, if we all got our deserts, it would be many stripes; but that is no the present question between you and me.”

So hearing me speak in a quiet manner like this, and no understanding, as he thought, his passionate way, the lad smiled at himself—though it was but a bitter smile—and syne he spoke again :

“Then what have I to say?” he asked of me. “I have nothing either present or in prospect to offer Rhoda; I have simply thrust myself in, a bar upon what the odious talk of the world calls her prospects—there! pray don't speak of that! I cannot listen to any-

thing about the good match Rhoda might have made—every man's patience has some limit—say what you will about me, but nothing of Rhoda; I will not hear that."

"Good matches are little in my way," said I, "I ken not what they mean—no more than I ken about evil fate, and such relics of heathendom, Mr. Bernard. Laddie, you are young and I am old, and you are a well-gifted callant in the strength of your days, and me an aged woman; but is that the fashion of your speech to me, in the first day of your troth-plight, and the melting of your heart? Truly, I would think shame of such a cauldribe wooer if I were this bairn. Get up to your ain feet, callant, and lean no more upon other folk—and will you tell me there is nothing better than learning bairns their lessons that a man in this world can do?"

Truly, I was angered at him—to speak in that manner to me, who kent the warstle and

the toil of life, and had seen many a time what a stout heart and a good will could do ! The lad stood up, marvelling at me, and looked in my face ; and I could not but be moved in my heart to think what pains the world had taken to let and hinder the good Providence of the Lord, when a young man like to this, in his youth and his strength could make such speeches to me.

“ If you were failed or aged, or of a weakly frame I would ken your meaning,” said I, “ but, callant, what did the Lord give you your strength for, but to labour at whatsoever hands or heart could do, and maintain your ain, and walk worthy of His grace, that made this world full of needs, for a man to strive among ? Was I asking about your siller or your lands or so much as minting at them, when I asked you about Rhoda ? No me !—truly, if that was my aim, I would have closed the door of Sunnyside, and sent the bairn away, and seen

your face no more—but I had a better thought of you. When I was in my youth, and very fond about the ballants and old stories in the countryside, I mind well the young knight got aye something grand to do, before he won the lady ; and, truly, you shall not get her for nought, take you my word. I ken nothing about good matches, Mr. Bernard, but I ken about a man's business in this life, and if you have not will and mettle to work for her, you shall see Rhoda no more. I will take it in my own hand—and that is just all I have to say.”

The lad's cheeks were glowing red, and there was an angry spark in his eye. I marvel not that a young man like him thought it hard to bear an auld wife's flyting ; but I thought the more of him that he put a curb upon himself, and considered of it, and suffered no passion to come upon him. I worked very busy at my stocking myself, while he was taking counsel with his ain

thoughts ; for it was not to be thought but that the like of this battling would put me in a tremor, and I never was good at flyting upon folk, all my days.

So in a very little time the lad came back, and held out his hand to me. "I bear my reproof all the better because your words ring," he said. "I will grant that you know the real wants and ways of life better than I do, and have a far nobler and broader view of them ; but I know the world—the hard, bitter, flinty-hearted step-mother, who has taught poor Rhoda and me a different philosophy from yours. But you ought to be right," said the lad, with a brightening face, for then there came a sound to the outer gate, which I doubt not, he was quicker to hear than me, "and it is very strange, after all, if I cannot do something better than what I am at present about. No man can have a stronger motive—there," he cried,

very quick, for Rhoda was already coming in at the outer door; "you will say no more of shutting the door of Sunnyside, or sending Rhoda away from me? Shake hands and be friends, Miss Maitland, and I will bemoan my fate no more."

I had no time to speak another word to him, when Rhoda came in; and, seeing they both thought shame, (in a measure,) having their first meeting before me, I had to look content and well-pleased, that the bairn might not be more perturbed than she was—though this, I must say, that after just the first moment, there was but small perturbation about Rhoda. She was more wild than common, if that was possible, and just as full of her mischief and her tormenting ways, though whiles she would be silent for a moment, when they chanced to look at one another, and get a colour upon her face, and hold down her head; but save for this, and,

truly, it was but for an instant at a time—I saw no odds upon the bairn. When I went forth to tell Jenny about the dinner, they behoved to be their lane for awhile; and I will not say they wearied very sore, either the one or the other of them, for me coming back again, for all so much pains as they had given me. Truly, bairns like these two are commonly very unthankful towards eldern folk, and find more pleasure in their own foolish company, than in the converse of a discreet person that could give them good counsel, and an advice that would be of use to them in the beginning of their life.

CHAPTER XIX.

“So you have been scolding Austin? you ought to scold me—for it is polite to suppose it is all my fault, and that he never would have been so foolish but for me,” said Rhoda, with a laugh and a bit blush, as we were sitting together that afternoon, her and me. “Papa will be furious, I believe; it is quite grand, sometimes, to see papa in a passion; and I should just like to see Harry Bernard when he is told of it. You know Austin’s brother is papa’s great friend; but Austin hates his brother, and I am very glad of it, I am sure.”

“Whisht, my bairn,” said I, “hate is an ill word.”

“Not for us,” said Rhoda, “but you never had any occasion to hate any one, I suppose. I once thought Harry Bernard was in love with me. I did not care anything for him—I did not, indeed—it is quite true—but I was pleased; for, of course, I always supposed I should have to marry somebody, and make a good match, as that old Mrs. Elphinstone says. Well, perhaps, you will say that is not right either; but it is very good fun to see how Austin looks when I tell him of that good match that everybody expected for me. He looks so red and so fierce, and scowls at me so furiously! I used to think I never could marry anybody but a very rich man,” cried out the bairn, with a kind of shudder, and shrug of her shoulders; “it is so dismal to be poor. Papa does not mind it so very much, I believe—but a poor little

child like me, to be left all neglected by myself, in some poor place, and nobody willing to take any trouble for me!—I used to get into such dreadful passions. I used to think I could kill papa when he went away and left me. Well, you need not shake your head; you never thought I was a good little child like Maggie. I had no right to be.”

“My dear,” said I, “you are winning upon better times; and I doubt not you will be a very good bairn, and make a good wife, when you come to have a house of your ain.”

Truly there was nothing daft-like in the thought, as far as I could see; but Rhoda laughed till the tears came to her eyes.

“When you say that, I always think I see myself in a big apron, making the dinner,” said Rhoda. “A good wife has to make puddings and shirts, and things, has she not? I’ll go and try on Jenny’s apron. I wonder how I should look in it; but what

would Austin say, I wonder, if he heard what you tell me? I don't think it is in Austin's way at all to have the thing you call a good wife."

"There are far worse things than making dinners, Rhoda," said I, "and I have many a time put on the broth myself, and no mortal ever thought the less of me. And, truly, being an aged woman, and kenning the old fashions best, I would not say that either making garments, or spreading a table with needful nourishment, was beneath a woman's hand; seeing it was doubtless her share of the world's work, before all the many cares of this manner of life began; and truly it is far from unkindly work, as I ken well, and a decent woman in her own house, making the parritch for her bairns, is ever a very bonnie sight to the like of me. But, my dear, you may learn to be a good wife, without needing Jenny's apron, or putting your hand to the

dinner ; and it's still my hope that this is what you will come to be."

"Then I shall go and experiment immediately," cried the bairn ; and away she went like a wild thing, to play her tricks upon Jenny. Jenny, poor body, was sorely trysted with her. All the bairns that ever were about the house were not near such a handful. And Jenny had not right discrimination to ken the difference of up-bringing, and was in a very sore strait about Rhoda, aye liking her, yet no kenning what to think of the strange bairn. But, truly, I took less thought than I might have done about Jenny, seeing that when the young thing went ben to the kitchen I ever had a little peace, and a space for thought myself.

Now many days went bye after this fashion ; and truly it was nothing but Austin, Austin (for that was the young lad's name) from morning to night. And the converse of two

bairns in their time of wooing, is scarce to call very entertaining for quiet, eldern folk ; and to make it worse, Jenny was wont to come ben to me when I was my lane, being very anxious about it, to ask me concerning the young things, and if aught was to come to pass in the matter. For Jenny was but a foolish body, and likit stir, and thought it would be grand to have another wedding out of the house, which, truly, seeing it was very unlikely, gave me small thought. But I soon could perceive that what I had said to Mr. Bernard himself was bearing fruit—seeing Rhoda was aye casting out with him every now and then, and coming to complain to me of the daft-like thoughts he had in his head ; for she was young and thoughtless herself, and never took time to consider upon it what was to come of this, but was just content to go on in her wild way, tormenting the poor lad out of his wits, and syne mocking of him,

and in her high and wild spirits, reckoning this life for nothing but a play, as truly a play it was to her, and nothing more, though it was a troubled time to me.

Now, Grace and Mary, when they heard of it, though they were not to call well-pleased, had nothing to say, seeing the bairn's heart was her ain, and her sister had little right to put bondage upon her; but Grace was of the thought like me, that Mr. Bernard behoved to have some feasible way of life, before any more was said. Mr. Allan, to my great marvelling, took more trouble in the matter, and had so spoken to Mr. Bernard, that there very near was a quarrel between them; and Rhoda would not speak a word to him, for many a day, though I never kent what the particular offence might be. Also, Mrs. Elphinstone, having no business with the matter, was wild, when she heard tell of it, and mis-called me, and was not feared to say that I

was a woman no fit to be trusted with the care of bairns ; which, truly, considering the little comfort I had of my charge, and the trouble it was, was very like to have angered me, and made me very slow to go back to Lilliesleaf myself. So we were little the better, in the matter of goodwill or cheerfulness, for the compact between the bairns ; and though Mr. Bernard aye came to Sunnyside, and I had not the heart to forbid him, the lad himself got a moody and a thoughtful brow, and had many a dreary meditation, I doubt not, over his ain concerns, and could see but little outgate. So, it was but the bairn Rhoda, who took thought for nothing, that kepted her heart, and had no cloud upon her, by reason of these troublous days ; but whiles it came to pass, that she, likewise, got to the ground of her temper, in the matter, and straightway fell upon me.

“It is you who have made Austin think

of all these disagreeable things," she said to me. "He is not like what he was; he bores one about going away, and working, and fighting, and stuff. It is a very pretty thing to say he must go away, because he is engaged to me—that is just why he ought to stay, *I* think. *He* may want to be married, if he likes; but I am sure I don't; and he has always something to propose—something he wants to do. I like very well to laugh and plan about that horrid school, and what odd things we should do in it; or about a cottage, and playing at housekeeping, and living upon nothing. That is just nonsense, you know, and amuses one; but I cannot see the least amusement in Austin going away."

"It would but be for a time, doubtless, and for both your good, my dear," said I; "for truly, you will not aye be bairns; and two folk cannot abide long as you two are now."

"Why not?" cried Rhoda, in an angry

way—and then she took a better thought. “Well, if he must do it, I do not mind him taking orders,” she said; “and that would please you—you have so many friends clergymen; and he thinks he might get a tolerably good living, if his friends were to try for him. I suppose that would be best—though it is very hard, and very dismal, that he is so poor, and has to do such a thing. I am sure it is very hard—and some people can’t tell what to do with their money; and it is no good to them. I once saw an old Nabob—and somebody married *him*, the shocking old wretch! and had all sorts of jewels, and things. But poor Austin has to take orders—and I am sure I do not know what is to become of me!”

“My dear,” said I, being grieved at this, “if I were you, I would put him off that thought; for it would be better to work with his two hands, than to take the ministry of the Word, for a living, and him no vocation

thereto. Truly, I will have no hand in such a work of darkness—for the offices of the Kirk should be taken up for the love of the Lord, and no for a sinful mortal bairn like you.”

“The kirk!” said Rhoda, in her mocking English way—“oh! do not fear that; it will not be in Scotland, for Austin is not Scotch, and never can be like you. Oh, no! it is quite a different thing what I mean.”

“The kirk is the kirk, wherever it may be,” said I, being very ill-pleased; “and truly, I meant not our branch of the Vine, in this kindly country, seeing there is small temptation to any carnal spirit here. But it makes little odds upon the Truth itself, which end of the land it is ministered in; and a servant that seeks not the honour of his Master, but his own conveniency, is as ill a servant in the kirk of England, as in this. Rhoda, you are but a very thoughtless bairn, and have little

right learning—but bid him rather work with his two hands, than do the like of this.”

“Shall I take the plough,” said Mr. Bernard, who had come in, though I heard him not; and very ill pleased the lad lookit, and Rhoda, being full of mischief, was as blythe as she could be, in a moment, to put him about. “Shall I take the plough, since you are so very kind as to discuss my business, Miss Maitland?” and the lad’s e’en fell upon his own white hands; and he smiled a proud, bitter, ill-tempered kind of smile.

“Truly, Sir, a man might do worse,” said I, “it is ever an honest skill that brings bread out of the soil; but the plough of the Word is no to be handled by unsanctified hands, nor for a carnal end—as the Lord himsel bears witness—and that is all I have to say.”

I left them, very greatly perturbed in my own spirit, being vexed, also, within myself

at showing anger to the lad ; but, truly, they thought not of that, but were diverted, as I well believe, at the sight of me taken up about such a matter ; for it was but in the plain way to them, and they thought no evil of that sore harm that befell Eli's race lang syne, when they sought to come in to a priest's office, to eat a piece of bread. They were thoughtless bairns, and ill-learned, and the preaching of the word was no better than a handicraft in their eyes.

CHAPTER XX.

THOUGH I had very little will to go, it behoved me to be one day at Lilliesleaf before Mr. Allan and Mary went away, which did not happen till Rhoda and me had been abiding near a month at Sunnyside ; so I desired of Mary, my sister, in a quiet way, that she would come down in the morning early, and take the bairn Rhoda up to the Manse with her, that I might not be troubled in my mind concerning any visitors at Sunnyside, the time I was away, which Mary was blythe to do. It was a February morning, gray and dowie, like what the mornings mostly are at that season,

and there was little pleasure in the damp road, and the dreary hedges dripping with wet, and the sky that was all clouds, and never showed a glint of cheerful blue ; and after I had seen Rhoda and Mary, my sister, into the Manse gig, I steppit into the Lilliesleaf carriage myself with anything but a light heart. Truly, it was not with me as it had been in past days, when both trouble and pleasure was simple and aefauld. Now, there was one thing that concerned one of the bairns, and one that concerned another ; and whiles what was for the pleasure of one was the other's harm, and stranger folk were among our hands, and the ways of strangers in our dwellings. Woes me ! for all its bits of troubles, it was a blythe time with us when the bairns were young—blyther than ever the years and the days could be, when they were bearing the burden, and we were aged folk looking on.

When I came to Lilliesleaf, it was near the

middle of the day—the time for the dinner of the little bairns ; and in Mary's parlour the cloth was laid for them, and all their chairs put to the table, but I saw no person when I went in, saving Mr. Bernard, who was treading back and forward with a heavy tread upon the road before the door, and knitting his brows and holding commune with himself. I passed him bye with a word, and went up the stair to my room ; and when I was passing the door of a small chamber which Mary kepted for herself, it so chanced that it was opened, and I saw both Mary and Cosmo within. Cosmo, poor callant, was struggling very sore to keep back the tears in his e'en, and behave himself like a man ; but I saw well by the red upon his brow, and the way he was oppressed with the greeting, which the proud laddie would not yield to, that Mary had been speaking to the callant of the way he was to do when she was away. Poor bairn !

he was very blythe to get away down the stair to some place where nobody would see him ; and Mary having also her heart in her e'en, took me in to the little room, and made me tarry there for a space, till she could compose herself, she said—which, truly, I saw well she had occasion to do.

“ He has so much sense ; he knows so much, aunt—too much for a bairn of his years,” said Mary to me, with the tears in her eyes : “ and I have been telling him—at least, not telling him—but letting him know it was not for pleasure I was going away—pleasure, aunt ! and leaving all those bairns by themselves at home.”

“ My dear,” said I, “ if you have made up your mind it is right, you should not grieve over what cannot be helped ; and, Mary, when do you go ?”

“ No, no,” said she, in a hurried way, “ no, grieving is out of the question ; but I can-

not help feeling as if something would happen before we return. Does every one fancy so on leaving home, aunt?" said Mary, with a bit sick smile up at me; "but it does not matter," she went on, raising herself up again—"I will put them in God's hands, and do what I see before me to do. Look aunt!" and she pointed to the window, where all the country was lying spread out under a faint blink of the sun, the bare tree-branches, and far away houses, and the quiet paths among the fields, and the brown hillsides farthest off of all, rising to the sky. It was a kindly prospect, pleasant to see; but I was vexed at Mary's look, and the glitter in her e'en, and her whisper to me that she had a strange thought, she never would look on it again.

"Mind not such freits, my dear bairn," said I, "truly the Lord warns us day by day, but no by idle thoughts in our mind. Put your heart steady before Him, Mary, my bairn,

and He will ne'er forsake you ;" which at that time was all we spoke together, Mary and me.

So with that we went down the stair beside the bairns. Now, I should have mentioned, in the right place, that Grace, being wearied by reason of my long stay, had written for little Maggie home again. And Claud, my brother, who was a member of the Commission that year, had a journey to make to Edinburgh about the concerns of the kirk, and so conveyed the bairn home ; so that it was but Mary's own family that were round the table, and a bonnie bairn-time they were, and a heritage of the Lord, which it was a blessing for the eye to see. And little Susie, she was telling a grand story when we came in, and seeing we were behind her, went on with it, thinking not it was her mamma and me. And this was all about the great things that were to be, "when mamma came home."

" We're to make a great big bag for mamma

to carry when she goes to the Manse, or to see the folk," said little Susie. "We're to make it all ourselves, Mary and me, and to mark her name upon it, like the big letters in Janet's sampler up the stair; and I'm to learn the "Better Land," and a great, big, long Psalm. Will you hear me, Cosmo? And Mary is to write a copy as beautiful as papa; and Claud—but he'll no say what he will do; and mamma is never to ken."

"Oh, Susie, mamma's here!" cried little Mary; and my poor wee bairn was like to greet for telling her secret, and was not to be comforted even when Mary gave her a kiss, and said she was a good bairn. So I put my chair beside Susie myself, and then she creepit close, and whispered to me. "We'll do something else—we'll no do the bag, Aunt Margaret," said Susie; "for mamma was never to ken."

And so it came to pass when their dinner

was past that the two little things came to me, and whispered at my knee to ken what they would do, and much counsel they took, and were very open to an advice, the innocent bairns ; truly, I thought to myself, if they were but as content to take counsel with wiser folk, when they came to years, it would be well with Mary and Susie. They were very unlike one another, Mary being a very positive woman for what was right, and Susie aye uncommon pitiful and tender-hearted—but they were flowers of grace, both the one and the other of them, and pleasant bairns.

But Claud would never say what he would do—no a word. “ Say you’ll no break anything, Claud,” said Mary ; but Claud put on a scornful look, and said, “ lassies didna ken.” Cosmo, he stood by my side the whole time, and when I lookit at him, he gave a glint of his bright e’en, and “ I’m to take care of them all—that was what mamma said,” said Cosmo.

The proud callant ! and so big as he was, and so manful as he looked ! I could not but think in my own mind upon the old verse the fuil father in the ballant said :

“ I could have ridden the border through
Had Christie Graham been at my back.”

Truly, if Cosmo Elphinstone came to be a man, I would not mell or meddle in the way of unkindness with ought belonging till him, no for all the lands of his inheritance ; and the spirit of the bairn was grand to see.

So when Cosmo and Claud went to their lessons, and the other two went up the stair, we had much converse—Mary and me. By reason of thinking long upon it, I had settled in my mind to tarry the rest of that winter season in Sunnyside, seeing Grace had no bye-ordinary occasion for me, and I was in a manner settled in my own house, and Mary, my sister, and the minister, would have more

need of a near friend than common, Mary being away from Lilliesleaf, and also I could give an eye when occasion was, to her bairns. So Mary told me her plans, which were all wise and right, so far as I could see.

There is one thing I have not mentioned, aunt," said Mary, "Miss Primrose, that had the school long ago—do you recollect?—at Sedgie Burn, has a niece, a good innocent girl, not accomplished enough to be a governess, though her aunt has done all she could for her—and she will come and take charge of Mary and Susie. I have been very doubtful about this on account of Mr. Bernard, but now that he is disposed of, I do not care so much. Violet is a very good girl, very humble and shy, and I have had a room prepared for her beside the nursery, and she will stay there. What I mean about Mr. Bernard, you know, aunt, is, that it might have been disagreeable for poor Violet, who is very shy, and

has no manners at all to speak of, and is as much unlike him as it is possible to fancy—only if he had been moderately civil to her, somebody would gossip about the tutor and the governess, and Mr. Bernard would be mortally offended; but my father will look after the boys when he goes away.”

“Is he going away, Mary?” said I, being greatly surprised.

“Did not Rhoda tell you, aunt?” said Mary. “I cannot tell what he means to do—but he is to leave Lilliesleaf when we leave it. He is not very comfortable, poor fellow! He tells Allan his plans, sometimes, and so I hear of them; and he is divided between two projects, at present, Allan says; one is going to Australia, and the other entering the Church in England. I do not know which he has decided upon, now.”

“But, Mary,” said I, “to hear you speak so quiet of the like of that! You would not

have the lad offer himself for a minister, and him has no vocation?—that is not like you.”

“Aunt,” said Mary, “I have been misjudged, myself, and I will judge no one. He may think more of serious things than we suppose he does. But, at least, his heart is stirred, aunt; and he is unhappy, and restless, and had much better be doing something; and what could he do in Australia?—that would be ridiculous, Allan says.”

“It may be so, my dear,” said I; “I ken nothing about Australia—but what would a lad like that do in a pulpit, or a parish? for that is more in my way. The lad is young, and I count him nothing to be pitied because he has to labour for his bread; but unlawful labour is never blessed.”

“He is a man of genius and education, and sensitive mind, aunt,” said Mary to me; “and poverty is misery to such a temper as his.”

“Bairn!” said I, “is that the way you speak to me? What is his genius, and his mind, and his education, but to make him more than even with his poverty? Will you tell me, when the Lord gives gifts like that, that he behoves to give the gift of wealth forbye? Hold your peace, Mary Maitland; that is no a word to come from you.”

“It comes from better judges—not from me,” said Mary, with a smile; “but, aunt, it is very hard to struggle with a fainting heart.”

“You are but a woman, yourself, my bairn,” said I, “and have had your own troubles; but truly, I see not that you sit down, and make your moan upon them, Mary—and if a weak woman like you goes forth upon your enterprise, without fainting, what should ail the like of him to do the same?”

But Mary’s eye lighted for the moment; and she ceased to take thought upon the stranger lad. “Yes, aunt, it is a serious en-

terprise," she said, thinking of herself; "and like Montrose, I put everything to the touch, 'to win or lose it all.' Mind me, aunt, always—always when you pray."

Did I ever cease to mind upon my poor bairn?—and she needed not for me to tell her how she was upon my heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

Now, when I returned back to my house once more, and got Rhoda home from the Manse, I saw well, to my grief, that this poor bairn kent nothing of Mr. Bernard's purpose to go away, and was no more prepared for it, than I had been—for truly, she was nothing subdued in her spirit; and I could not but think it was unwise of the lad to deal with her after this fashion, and doubtless drive her into a passion of surprise, and wrath, and grieving, when she had to part with him. So, I took my own time to say a word to her;

for she had been more quiet than common, about his plans and his purposes, for two or three days.

“Rhoda,” said I, “has Mr. Bernard come to ken his own mind?—is he to go away, or is he to stay, or what is to befall?—for I hear so many things, than I never ken what I am to believe.”

“There is nothing to believe,” said Rhoda, in a breathless way. “If he goes, of course I shall know what to think. He has got into an unfortunate entanglement, and he must escape while he can. Oh! papa did not bring me up for nothing. I know all how they speak—and if he does—if he does—I could kill him, though I love him better than all the world!”

“But, my bairn,” said I—

“Don’t! I can’t bear it,” said Rhoda. “Don’t talk to me like that, as if anybody cared for me—nobody does—it is all a make-

believe. But if he goes away, I will not bear it—I can't! I never was patient, and I will not try any more."

"Truly, Rhoda, I will tell you what you are; and that is, a very unreasonable bairn," said I, "and as for trying, I have seen small signs of it. What can the lad do here, but waste his time, casting out with you? and I never saw he was great at patience, any more than you are—and I can have no grand battles in my quiet house. Rhoda, my bairn, learn wisdom while you have the time; it is not aye very easy dealing with your ain spirit—and it is scarce like to be easier, when you have to deal with other folk. To keep this lad here, is far from right—and you would send him forth of your own hand, and bid him waste no more time in idleset, if you were like me."

"But I am not like you; and I don't understand Scotch," said Rhoda, with a bit

pout of her lip—which meant that she was in a perverse temper, and was minded to provoke me, if she could, as I kent very well—and truly, she was a most angersome bairn—but if I had been ever so ill pleased, I saw not what good it would have done; wherefore, I put restraint upon myself; for I like not to throw away wrath, any more than kindness; and doubtless, this poor thing was doing most harm to herself.

Now, I kent that Mary and Mr. Allan were appointed to go away the very next day after this converse between Rhoda and me; and also, I saw that there had been some speech with her and Mr. Bernard, on the matter. So, when the poor lad came in that day, looking very dark and cloudy in his face, and I saw that he came with a purpose, I even rose up from my seat, and made haste to go away. Both of them were eager for a battle, and yet would fain I had stayed

awhile before they began ; but truly, I thought I had better come in to make them friends, at the end of it, than stay to see the beginning of the fray. Now, what came to pass then, I cannot tell ; but when I thought they had been casting out long enough, I went down the stair ; and what should I see but Mr. Bernard, with a very dark countenance, hurrying past me, toward the outer door. I put my hand upon his arm, and caused him to stay ; but he made a fierce kind of motion, poor lad ! to get away from me, and then gave a wistful look at my parlour door ; and while we two stood in the passage, the door opened, and there was Rhoda, looking wild, but very bonnie, with one lock of hair fallen down upon her cheek, and the tears in her e'en. She did not say a word, for a moment, but looked at him and me ; and then she came forward, and held out her hand to him—whether it

was mock or earnest, I cannot tell—but she said, in as grave a manner as a little bairn might have said it, “Austin, you did not bid me good-bye to-day.”

Now, truly, the poor lad stood and lookit at her, like a man dumbfounded; he kent not the ill ways of her as I did—so I took it into my own hand, and put them both back into the room before me, and made them both sit down upon chairs.

“Now bairns,” said I, “you ken not your own mind, nor what you would be at, neither the one nor the other of you. Will you tell me your ownself, Mr. Bernard, if you are going away?”

“Yes; I am going to London to-morrow, to seek my fortune,” said the young man in a bitter, scornful way.

“And a very wise thing,” said I, “for you never would find it here. And what has come to you, Rhoda, that you sit there making

your bits of moues at me, and no saying a sensible word? Is that all the moan you have to make for the young gentleman going away?"

Now Rhoda sat still, trying to get up her courage and make me some wild answer for a while; but when that would not do, she fell into a great crying, and hid her face within her hands, and I could make out nothing she said, but "He ought to have told me before."

"I did tell you before," said the young man; and then he said a word to her in a strange language, the which I did not understand, at the sound of which she lifted up her head in a moment, and cried no more.

"He says I am not to show my passion to you," said Rhoda to me, with the fire in her eyes. "That is all he knows of me, though he is a man and thinks himself wise; but I have not any passion to show." And the bairn rose up from her seat, as composed as I ever saw her, and went up to him. "Go

away, Austin," she said ; " we have quarrelled enough for one day, and you need not try to make me angry at the last, for that is unkind of you. I won't kill you, though I said I would—nor myself either—and you can go and seek your fortune, and if you like you can come back and see what has become of me; and if you are not very old, and I am not married, we will see what we can do then—and that is all I have to say. I think you had better go away now, for you have been here quite long enough, and you are still Mr. Elphinstone's tutor; the little boys will want their last lesson, and, of course, you have something to do for Mrs. Elphinstone. Pray, Austin Bernard, do not let us detain you; go away."

He was still a while looking at her, and at the changes of her face, before he spoke, and then he turned to me. " May I remain for an hour or two, Miss Maitland?" said the lad.

“ I have left Lilliesleaf to-day. If I left you now, I would only go to Burrowstoun. May I remain ?”

So I said “ yes,” being well-pleased ; and, truly, it was not very long till they were friends again. It was a strange fashion of wooing, as ever I saw ; and instead of thinking of grand things that he might win to, as is the way with most bairns, the perverse young thing, Rhoda, took all the pains she could to find out what was the very poorest that a lad like him was like to do ; and, truly, he lookit as well pleased with that, as I have seen the like of our own Claud look, when it was prophesied to him in his young days of the great man he would be. Mr. Bernard stayed the most part of the night, till it was near time for our exercise ; and, after tea, when the candles came in, what did the bairn, Rhoda, do, but sought out an old seam of mine out of my table-drawer,

and sat down to work at it as grave as if that was her common occupation, and she had pleasure in it; but first she had given Mr. Bernard a book to read out loud to us—and when the poor lad began to read, I saw through her wile—the evil bairn! For the book was one that everybody kens, being a story, called the “Vicar of Wakefield;” and the bit Mr. Bernard had to read, was all about the lad, George Primrose, the vicar’s son, and of his wanderings, and his strivings, and all his poverty, Truly, I could not but smile within myself at the mischief of the bairn.

But it came to pass that this wile of hers made no harm, but brought pleasure; for, truly, when we were all sitting round about the table, and Rhoda with her seam (though she had little skill in it) and me at mine, and the young lad well-skilled in reading out loud—you will not hinder us, but we got concerned

with the story, though we all kent it before ; and my own very self, though I am an aged woman, and should have kent better, caused the lad to continue till he came to the end ; and I think not Rhoda was ever so well pleased with sewing at her seam all her days before. Also, when he was done, Mr. Bernard looked round and gave a glance at Rhoda, and drew his chair nearer the table ; and, said he, in a tone that had more in it than the meaning of the words, " This is being at home, at least, to-night," to which the bairn, Rhoda, made answer only in a trembling way, with a small laugh, that sounded but little like laughing—and my heart warmed to the young things, that, maybe, had scarce ever thought before what comfort there could be in a very small bit place, if it was their own.

" Well, but this philosophic vagabond—do you like him ?" said Rhoda, recovering her spirit after a season, " an usher, or an author

or a connoisseur ; but I had rather be a vagabond out and out, and play upon my flute. How you will enjoy it, Austin, in the summer nights !”

The young man laughed at this in a good spirit. “ Ushers and authors are different now,” he said. “ I do not need your saucy sympathy quite so much as you suppose. By-and-bye, you will have a better opinion of the present vagabond. I don’t disown the name ; it is appropriate enough, heaven knows !”

“ And truly the callant in the book came to but a poor end,” said I, “ nothing but his wife’s fortune for all his wayfaring. Truly, it is my hope, Mr. Bernard, you will do better than that.”

Now when I said that, Rhoda cried out, and clapped her hands, and Mr. Bernard laughed. “ We might not think it so great an evil, perhaps,” he said ; and the two

looked at one another, and forgot all their bits of quarrels. "But my wife will have no fortune, as it happens, and George Primrose's fate can never come to me."

So they parted in truer kindness, it is my belief, that night, than they ever had done before; and seeing he duly went away upon the next morning, I was relieved in my spirit, and it was a great ease to me. Truly, I had my own fash with those two ill-willy bairns.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR a time after that we were very quiet, Rhoda and me ; but it is little to be expected that a flighty and restless bairn like what this young thing was by nature, besides having her first trial (so to speak,) upon her, could be very content at Sunnyside ; and seeing Mary had put at our command one of the Lilliesleaf carriages, we made many journeys, her and me, about the countryside, whiles taking the bairns with us, and young Violet Primrose, that had come to learn Mary and Susie their lessons, the time their mamma was

away. This young thing was an uncommon quiet, shy bairn, very bonnie in her way, and as far unlike Rhoda as could be; but being of a humble and quiet temper, and very feared of herself, she had the more respect for Rhoda, who was much different, and feared nothing, neither herself nor other folk; and Rhoda also, was very well-pleased with her, in a manner, making Violet do many small things for her, which I found no fault with, seeing it was kindly enough done, and pleased them both. The days were drawing out, though it still was very early in the year, and it was our use to put our basket in the carriage, and put Claud beside the man to drive, and Cosmo on his pony, and so we travelled about the country many a day; which, truly, was whiles wearisome to me, but a great divert to the bairns—and I had very good accounts to write of them to Mary, and it was a pleasure to her to hear how well

they were doing, and how constant they were either with Mary my sister at the Manse, or with me.

It was the spring of the year, as I have said, and though it was but dowie weather still, there was a stir of life in the air, and a quickening in the countryside. The men were blythe and busy in the fields; the frost was away, and the seed was early sown; and truly, every bare hedge and thorn-bush, we went by upon the road was bursting with buds, and it was pleasant to look upon Sunnyside, where the bits of crocuses were bright in the garden, and the grass springing up beneath your very foot. The bairn Nelly, Jenny's niece, though ever a most misfortunate bairn, had come to have more use in her hands, and when I heard Jenny about the house, making her great cleaning for the spring, and singing her bits of songs—and looked out upon the old man, Peter Proud-

foot, that aye had done bits of jobs for us in his trade, working in his slow way at the garden, and was aware of Rhoda's light foot in the chamber above my head—truly, I will not say that my own heart did not rise, though I was old and stricken in years, at the touch of the kindly spring.

Also, this was a time full of many things to do, and much to hear tell of; and scarce a morning went by, but brought the lad that carried the post up from Burrowstoun, ance errand, to Rhoda or to me; and now it was a letter from Grace, and now from Mary, like what it had been in the old times, and much they had to tell me about, both the one and the other of them, which I was well-pleased to hear. Also, Rhoda, as was natural, had constant word from the young lad, Mr. Bernard, and read me bits of her letters, whiles, which were very strange writings to me, being as far out of my way as well could

be. Truly, I kent not what the lad would be at, for his mind was still in a great perplexity, as it was easy to see, and whiles he minted at one thing, and whiles at another, and was to “take orders” as they called it—being their thoughtless way of speaking of the solemn work of the kirk—one day, and to study the law another, and then to make his bread at writing books, which, truly, I could not but think was a poor heritage, seeing it was far from proven that the lad had the gift for such like work. And syne he would be in a despair for a day, and very near-hand making up his mind to sail for the far country of Australia, where folk were finding gold, as we heard tell; and the next letter would be in grand spirits about meeting in with some great friend, and looking for nothing less than a grand government place the very next day—which was the thing both Rhoda and him

were most keen about. But for me, I have ever small faith in stranger's promises, and count upon little security for a young lad beginning his warstle in this life, but from his own head, and his own two hands.

It was different with Rhoda, as may well be thought; for this bairn had little knowledge of work and labour, and the sore travail of the world. It was aye interest and great friends that were running in her mind, and what this one and the other one might do, which, doubtless, was—by reason of her upbringing—natural to her thoughts, seeing she never had been learned any better. Many a long letter Rhoda wrote herself in these days; but what she put in them, truly I had no way to ken.

And this was the manner of our life. The house of Sunnyside was like its ownself once more, having a look of habitation and kindness, in especial as the bairns were ever com-

ing and going, and Mary, my sister and the minister, seldom away as long as a week at a time, and the neighbours in the countryside very kind, and blythe to see me back again in my own house, as also were the common folk ; and, truly, for all so much love and comfort as I had ever kent at Oakenshaw, and the company of my dear bairn, Grace, who was a great want to me here, I could not but have a drither in my own mind that it scarce was right to abide away for years at a time when here was my own lawful dwelling-place, where I had lived all my days since my youth. Now I will not say but it was a great trial to be parted from Grace and Claud, and my own little bairn, Maggie, that had sleepit in my bosom, and was named by my name ; but when I found out—which, truly, was a pleasure in its way—that for all I was an aged woman, and had walked in quiet ways all my life, and meddled little with the affairs

of this world, there was still use for me in my own place, I settled within myself, though Grace thought different, that it behoved me to stay. Truly, being put to little expense for many years, I had put by siller, and was very well in condition to help poorer folk, and there was many a one about Burrowstoun that was not feared to tell their story to me, kenning me for an old friend, but would have perished sooner than make a moan to fremd folk. Also Mary, my sister, and the minister were blythe of my company, and I was much taken up myself with the bairns at Lilliesleaf, and every one had a reason wherefore I should stay—so I even set up my tabernacle, no deserting Oakenshaw, but making my chief dwelling-place in my own house at Sunnyside.

And Rhoda—though it might be thought she would be better pleased at Oakenshaw, being a far grander place—nothing would

please her but to make her dwelling with me, and go where I went, and though the bairn, being far out of my way, had ever been a trouble and perplexity to me, yet I will not say but I had a great kindness for her, and she made the house lightsome, and keepit us in a stir with her wild ways. So we were all very well content; and so it came to pass that the spring came with longer days and brighter days, and the cold creepit away among the hills, and there was a word from Grace and Mary, and from Mr. Bernard, and we were very well pleased, both Rhoda and me with a sojourning at Sunnyside.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BUT it is not to be thought that all this winter-time passed off from our heads like a cloud, and left no care and no burden in its road. Truly, such seasons are few in this mortal world, and seldom come even to old folk.

There was one thing that might well have been a pleasure, the which gave me a dinnle at my heart, whether I would or no, and brought back sore thoughts, and this was the mill at Cruive End. It was sold to a stranger gentleman out of the west country, as Mr. Allan

had let me ken, a decent man with plenty of siller, that was used to business, and kent all the ways of it. Now, if having plenty of work was aye the same as doing well, the folk at Cruive End had little reason to complain; and a very prosperous place it looked; and a great stir was ever at the mill night and day.

But when I saw what an eident hand, and a careful eye, and needful siller could do, and how much more Mr. Allan might have done, being native born to the place, and counting the folk for decent folk and neighbours, and no mere spinners, I could not but be grieved at my heart. The new gentleman oppressed no man, neither, being a stranger, was he much caring about any; but an he just could have minded the business as well, and had a kind thought and an open heart forbye, and been dwelling near by the place, and kenning its ways, as Mr. Allan did—truly

there would have been comfort, and peace, and well-doing at Cruive End. But any way, there was no more want, and little idleness, which was aye a comfort ; but to see the whole place in another master's hand was grievous to me.

And upon the lands of Lilliesleaf nothing was doing but just in the old way ; and aye here and there you came upon a neglected place ; and there was Malcolm's Moss, black beneath the sun, that was aye a grief to me to see, kenning all what Mr. Allan had meditated concerning it in his own thoughts. Truly, I could not but think within myself of all the siller that had been wared upon the house and the festivities, how it might have been to the fore, and a portion for the bairns, if it had but been laid out here. And I was wae in my own heart, to think upon what my own bairn Mary, even for a good purpose, might be doing, impoverishing both herself, and

them that would come after, and maybe but encouraging Mr. Allan in his wasteful ways after all. Many a time when I was travelling along the road with the bairns, and them all mirthful at my side, was my spirit heavy with such a meditation, which truly for the time, made the good ways of providence to be cloudy and dark to me.

Now it came to pass about this season, which was the worst of all, that the old lady Mrs. Elphinstone was taken with a sickness—no to call a serious trouble, but ill enough at her years, that keepit her in her bed, and made her needful of more care than ordinary. I went to see her as was fit, and to crave what I could do for her service; but truly it was little to my will when she bade me stay beside her, and said I had as good a right to nurse the sick, as to get the pleasure of the bairns. I abode two or three days, having to send for Rhoda; and what with the bairns, and the

trouble it was to keep them quiet, and the old lady with her frets, and her fault-finding, truly I had my own ado. The bed-chamber where she lay was kept very warm—warmer than was wholesome for me ; and her own woman, Nancy Simpson, was ever in the room ; and being a forward person by nature, and of much use to Mrs. Elphinstone, she aye took a great deal upon her. And I will not say but it was a very sore trial to my spirit to have the affairs of my bairns all turned over, and discoursed upon before a woman like this, that would go ben the house, among the men and the maids, and tell it all over, before it was well out of her mistress' mouth.

“It is very easy for you—you are active and strong ; and besides, you have no hereditary interest in this house, Miss Maitland,” said Mrs. Elphinstone to me, as I sat by her bed-side, working at my stocking, and she

lay among her pillows, a withered old woman, reached to her full seventy years. "You would condole with me as gently, if I were turned out of Lilliesleaf in my old age, and sent to wander in a strange place once more—as, indeed, I expect to be, ere long. It is very hard—I cannot help saying so—very hard to suffer all that I did for Allan's sake, and now to see him, and his wife—who ought to consider her son's interests, as I did mine—running as fast on his way to ruin, as ever his father did. But I am very wrong to expect sympathy. If I am expelled from my own house, and sent away to seek a grave, through the folly of these young people, it will be nothing to you."

"It would be a great deal to me, if it was not that I fear no such misfortune," said I, being partly divided between anger at the face of Nancy Simpson, close and within

hearing, and pity for this poor old solitary woman, that could do no better with her thoughts, than distrust providence, and put blame upon other folk. "But, truly, Mrs. Elphinstone, it is my thought we should keep this converse till we are our lane; for the affairs of this house are no for fremd folk."

"If it's me, Mem," said Nancy, setting up her face to me, as bold as could be, "you're no to think I'm minding about anybody's secrets. I have my ain concerns; and I ken as muckle as most folk already about the house of Lilliesleaf—and the mistress, hersel, she kens she can trust me."

"Oh! you need not question my discretion, Miss Maitland," said Mrs. Elphinstone. "I can trust Nancy. If it were not for Nancy, they would forget her mistress altogether, in this gay house. Times have sadly changed with me. When I came here with

Allan, after enduring poverty for his sake, I did not think of the thoughtless young wife, who would put his mother and all her counsels out of his mind. He never would have come to such a position as he is now in, had he attended to me."

Now, truly, it was on my lips to say that it was no will of ours, to marry Mary Maitland to the heir of this house; but, seeing that was long past, and little profit in going back upon bye-gones, I held my peace, though I was not very patient in my own mind, as I am obliged to say.

"And now they are in London," said Mrs. Elphinstone, "following up the extravagance of the country, with a season in town; and do you really think Lilliesleaf can afford all this, Miss Maitland? My expectation is to see them both arrive suddenly, and tell us we must all go away. I look for nothing else. I should not wonder if they tried to

break the entail, and sell Lilliesleaf; but I thank Heaven! Cosmo is too young for that. Mary had no such expectations as I had, Miss Maitland, being only your brother's daughter. She might well be content with such a part as I played. The late Mr. Elphinstone got no encouragement from me; I told him plainly, I would have no share in ruining my boy; and so my conscience was clear, when the end came—no one could blame me—but Mary, I assure you, will be in a very different position. Simpson tells me, the whole neighbourhood rings with her extravagance—a thing which never could have happened to me.”

“For you aye considered other folk before yoursel, Mem,” said Nancy; “born gentles are aye different from them that comes of the commonality. It's a' in the blood—it makes an awfu' odds.”

Now, truly, I scarce can tell how my spirit

rose to hear the like of this woman putting in her word about my bairns ; but I could not speak myself in her presence—being more angered than I can say.

“ There is something in that, of course,” said Mrs. Elphinstone, with a sigh ; “ and how do your nephew and your ward manage, Miss Maitland ? Oh, I suppose they are very careful people ! Little Maggie will be a great match. I advised Mary to throw Cosmo and the child a great deal together ; but Mary is most injudicious, and never thinks what early associations will do. Mrs. Claud Maitland does credit to your training, I have no doubt, and is quite a notable person. You were very successful with your system in her case, at least.”

“ Truly, madam, I ken not what system I had,” said I. “ Grace is a good wife, being of a God-fearing spirit, as, doubtless, I think no shame of any bairn of our house, kenning

well the true heart of every one of them, whatever an ill tongue or an unkindly thought may say."

Now, Nancy would fain have putten in her word here ; but Mrs. Elphinstone had thought upon a new thing, and was before her, and keepit back her malice. " I hear that Charles Maitland has a liberal income from his daughter—is it true?" said Mrs. Elphinstone. " That is very creditable—and this poor child, Rhoda, dependent on her besides. What could you possibly be thinking of, Miss Maitland, when you suffered these foolish young people to come so far as an engagement? They might have parted after their flirtation, and no harm done. Indeed, if I had the management of the affair, it would not be long in existence even now, I promise you ; as if it was not perfectly clear to everybody that a good match was the only proper provision for a girl in her circumstances ! Of course, her

father's annuity will die with him; and a child of her spirit will not find a very agreeable home in Oakenshaw. Her sister should have known better than to trust her here—and Rhoda herself will not thank you by and bye, Miss Maitland. You may rest assured of that."

Now, I was little used to battling for my own hand; and it put me about beyond measure, so I took up my clue and lifted my wires to go away, for I could not bear this converse any more.

"Truly, Mrs. Elphinstone," said I, "there is many a thing would better become you and me to occupy our time upon, seeing the day is far spent with us both, than idle talk concerning these bairns. I never was good at abusing my neighbours all my days, and, truly, I like not blame myself any more than other folk; so I will go my ways, or else I will read a book outloud, to be a real divert to you—but converse like to this is not for me."

The aged woman was first angered and then moved, to hear me speak so. "You take advantage of my weakness, Miss Maitland," said she, and syne she put her hand to her cheek, and gave a moan. "It is hard to be reminded of my age and my infirmity—that is poor comfort," said Mrs. Elphinstone, "especially when it comes from one who knows my real circumstances, and the harassing anxiety I have. Nobody has the power of expelling you from Sunnyside, in what will, perhaps, be your last illness, Miss Maitland. Your house is your own, and you can never be disturbed in it; but it is very different with me."

Now, though I might well have answered that she herself had been far better endowed with this world's goods in time past, than the like of me, and that I had but little that could be envied, saving the love and kindness of the bairns, I forbore, being moved at sight

of her weakness; whereupon, I drew my seat to her bedside again, and put away my stocking and my wires, and began to read a book to her, which was an entertaining book, and also was one that made no secret of the truth—with which, doubtless, seeing it was clever and well written, and her a very good understanding, Mrs. Elphinstone was well-pleased—and before I was done, the woman Nancy, being wearied of me and my reading, went away. Now, I was in a strait whether to speak about this woman or no, for she was one that had an ill tongue, and was very little thought upon either in the house or the parish, and the most of the stories that were going about concerning Mr. Allan, came from her hand—but seeing she was with Mrs. Elphinstone for a constancy, it was very ill to ken how the lady would take what I said. But I took heart, for all that, and bent down close by the pillow and spoke forth what

was in my mind, seeing if it did no good, it could do little harm.

“Mrs. Elphinstone,” said I, “say what you will to me, or folk that ken—but say not the things of the house to Nancy, for she is but a foolish person, and has little understanding, and makes idle stories; and, truly, what she hears in this chamber, she tells it to the whole countryside.”

With that the old lady gave an astonished look at me, and before I could say another word Nancy came in. I think not but her mistress, after making so much of her, and encouraging her in all her gossipping, had come to be feared for this woman; and it was not very long till Mrs. Elphinstone began her stories again, either forgetting what I had said till her, or to let me see she would not be guided by me. Truly, I had little will to try my hand; and it is a sore sight to me to see an old person—as I

have seen such, more than once, in my pilgrimage—that has lived past love and care for other folk, and mind not for either hearts breaking, or lives perishing, if they go on in their canny way, and are not put about themselves.

So I abode small space in that chamber after the woman Nancy came back. Truly, to be among the bairns, seeing their pretty ways, and them all seeking to my knee, to ask me this thing and the other—which, whiles I could not answer them—was more a pleasure to me than converse with Mrs. Elphinstone. And this was the sorest trouble I had in that early spring, when Mary was away—for I tried to keep friends with her good mother for my bairn's sake—but to listen to nought but reflections on Mary, and now and then a word about her kin, was more than I could bear, and very thankful was I, on my own account as well as hers, when Mrs. Elphinstone was well again. Truly,

Mary had been a good bairn to her—more that she should have looked for—and this made it the harder to me to hear this old lady speaking ill of my bairn now.

END OF VOL. II.

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