

KIRSTEEN

MRS. OLIPHANT

KIRSTEEN

*THE STORY OF A SCOTCH FAMILY
SEVENTY YEARS AGO*

BY
MRS. OLIPHANT

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I

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PART I.

KIRSTEEN.

CHAPTER I.

“WHERE is Kirsteen?”

“Deed, mem, I canna tell you; and if you would be guided by me you wouldna wail and cry for Kirsteen, night and day. You’re getting into real ill habits with her to do everything for you. And the poor lassie has not a meenit to hersel’. She’s on the run from morning to night. Bring me this, and get me that. I ken you’re very weakly and life’s a great trouble, but I would fain have ye take a little thought for her too.”

Mrs. Douglas looked as if she might cry under Marg’re’s reproof. She was a pale

pink woman seated in a large high easy-chair, so-called, something like a porter's chair. It was not particularly easy, but it was filled with pillows, and was the best that the locality and the time could supply. Her voice had a sound of tears in it as she replied :

“ If you were as weak as I am, Marg’ret, and pains from head to foot, you would know better—and not grudge me the only comfort I have.”

“ Me grudge ye ainything ! no for the world ; except just that bairn’s time and a’ her life that might be at its brightest ; but poor thing, poor thing ! ” said Marg’ret, shaking her head.

The scene was the parlour at Drumcarro, in the wilds of Argyllshire, the speakers, the mistress of the house *de jure*, and she who was at the head of affairs *de facto*, Marg’ret the housekeeper, cook, lady’s maid, and general manager of everything. Mrs. Douglas had brought Marg’ret with her as her maid when she came to Drumcarro as a bride some thirty years before ; but as she went on having child

after child for nearly twenty years, without much stamina of either mind or body to support that continual strain, Marg'ret had gradually become more and more the deputy and representative, the real substitute of the feminine head of the house. Not much was demanded of that functionary so far as the management of its wider affairs went. Her husband was an arbitrary and high-tempered man, whose will was absolute in the family, who took counsel with no one, and who after the few complaisances of a grim honeymoon let his wife drop into the harmless position of a nonentity, which indeed was that which was best fitted for her. All her active duties one by one had fallen into the hands of Marg'ret, whose first tender impulse to save the mistress whom she loved from toils unfitted for her, had gradually developed into the self-confidence and universal assumption of an able and energetic housekeeper born to organize and administer. Marg'ret did not know what these fine words meant, but she knew "her work," as she would have said,

and by degrees had taken everything in the house and many things outside it into her hands. It was to her that the family went for everything, who was the giver of all indulgences, the only person who dared speak to "the maister," when clothes were wanted or any new thing. She was an excellent cook, a good manager, combining all the qualities that make a house comfortable, and she was the only one in the house who was not afraid of "the maister," of whom on the contrary he stood in a little awe. A wife cannot throw up her situation with the certainty of finding another at a moment's notice as a good housekeeper can do—even if she has spirit enough to entertain such an idea. And poor Mrs. Douglas had no spirit, no health, little brains to begin with and none left now, after thirty years of domestic tyranny and "a bairntime" of fourteen children. What could such a poor soul do but fall into invalidism with so many excellent reasons constantly recurring for adopting the habits of that state and its pathos and help-

lessness? especially with Marg'ret to fall back upon, who, though she would sometimes speak her mind to her mistress, nursed and tended, watched over and guarded her with the most unfailing care. Drumcarro himself (as he liked to be called) scarcely dared to be very uncivil to his wife in Marg'ret's presence. He knew better than to quarrel with the woman who kept so much comfort with so little expense in his spare yet crowded house.

"Who is your 'poor thing, poor thing'?" said a cheerful voice, with a mimicry of Marg'ret's manner and her accent (for Marg'ret said poor as if it were written with a French u, that sound so difficult to English lips) "would it be the colley dogue or the canary bird or maybe the mistress of the house?"

Marg'ret turned round upon the only antagonist in the house who could hold head against her, or whom she could not crush at a blow—Kirsteen, the second daughter, who came in at this moment, quite softly but

with a sudden burst open of the door, a sort of compromise between the noise it would have been natural to her to make, and the quietness essential to the invalid's comfort. She was a girl of nearly twenty, a daughter of the hills, strongly built, not slim but trim, with red hair and brown eyes and a wonderful complexion, the pure whiteness like milk which so often goes with those ruddy locks, and the colour of health and fine air on her cheeks. I would have darkened and smoothed my Kirsteen's abundant hair if I could, for in those days nobody admired it. The type of beauty to which the palm was given was the pale and elegant type, with hair like night and starry eyes either blue or dark ; and accordingly Kirsteen was not considered a pretty girl, though there were many who liked her looks in spite of her red hair, which was how people expressed their opinion then. It was so abundant and so vigorous and full of curl that it cost her all the trouble in the world to keep it moderately tidy, whereas "smooth as satin" was the

required perfection of ladies' locks. Her eyes were brown, not nearly dark enough for the requirements of the time, a kind of hazel indeed, sometimes so full of light that they dazzled the spectator and looked like gold—also quite out of accordance with the canons of the day. She was slightly freckled: she was, as I have said, strongly built; and in the dress of the time, a very short bodice and a very straight and scanty skirt, her proportions were scarcely elegant, but her waist was round if not very small, and her arms, in their short sleeves, shapely and well formed, and whiter than might have been expected from their constant exposure to air and sun, for Kirsteen only put on her gloves on serious occasions. The air of health and brightness and vigour about her altogether, made her appearance like that of a burst of sunshine into this very shady place.

“’Deed,” said Marg’ret, putting her hands on each side of her own substantial waist in a way which has always been supposed to

imply a certain defiance, "it was just you yoursel'."

"Me!" the girl cried with a sort of suppressed shout. She cast a laughing glance round with an apparent attempt to discover some cause for the pity. "What have I done wrong now?" Then her eyes came back to the troubled almost whimpering pathos of her mother's looks, and a cloud came over her bright countenance. "What has she been saying, mother, about me?"

"She says I'm crying on you for something day and night, and that you never have a minute to yourself; and oh, Kirsteen, my dear, I fear it's true."

Kirsteen put her arms akimbo too, and confronted Marg'ret with laughing defiance. They were not unlike each other, both of them types of powerful and capable womanhood, the elder purely and strongly practical, the other touched with fancy and poetry and perhaps some of the instincts of gentle blood, though neither in father nor mother were there many graces to inherit. "You are just

a leein' woman," said the girl with a flash of her bright eyes. "Why, it's my life! What would I do without my Minnie?—as the song says." And she began to sing in a fresh, sweet, but uncultivated voice :

"He turned him right and round about,
Said, Scorn not at my mither,
True loves I may get mony an ane
But Minnie ne'er anither."

Before Kirsteen's song came to an end, however, her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "What were you wanting, mother," she said hastily as she dropped the tune which was a very simple one, "to make her speak?"

"Oh, I was wanting nothing, nothing in particular. I was wanting my pillows shifted a little, and the big plaiden shawl for my knees, and one of my wires that fell out of my reach, and my other clew for I'm nearly at the end of this one. Ay! that's better; there is nobody that knows how to make me comfortable but you."

For Kirsteen in the meantime had begun to do, with swift and noiseless care, all that

was wanted, finding the clew, or ball of worsted for the stocking^s her mother was knitting, as she swept softly past to get the big shawl, on her way to the side of the chair where she arranged the pillows with deft accustomed skill. It did not take a minute to supply all these simple requirements. Marg'ret looked on, without moving while all was done, and caught the look half-soothed, half-peevish, which the invalid cast round to see if there was not something else that she wanted. "You may put down that book off the mantel-piece that Robbie left there," Mrs. Douglas said, finding nothing else to suggest; "it will curl up at the corners, and your father will be ill-pleased—"

"Weel," said Marg'ret, "now ye've got your slave, I'm thinking ye've nae mair need of me, and there's the grand supper to think of, that the maister's aye sae keen about. When will ye have markit a' thae things, Miss Kirsteen? For I maun see to the laddie's packing before it's ower late."

"There's the last half dozen of handker-

chiefs to do ; but I'll not take long, and they're small things that can go into any corner. I'll do them now," said Kirsteen with a little sigh.

"There's nae hurry ;" Marg'ret paused a little, then caught the girl by the sleeve, "just take another turn in the bonnie afternoon before the sun's down," she said in a low tone, "there's plenty of time. Run away, my bonnie lamb. I'll see the mistress wants naething."

"And you that have the supper and the packing and all on your hands ! No, no. I'll do them now. You may go to your work," said Kirsteen with a look half tender, half peremptory. She carried her work to the window and sat down there with the white handkerchiefs in her hand.

"And what colour will you mark them in, Kirsteen ? You have neither cotton nor silk to do it."

Kirsteen raised her head and pulled out a long thread of her red hair. "I am going to do it in this colour," she said with a slight

blush and smile. It was not an unusual little piece of sentiment in those days and the mother accepted it calmly.

"My colour of hair," she said, smoothing with a little complaisance her scanty dark locks under her cap, "was more fit for that than yours, Kirsteen, but Robbie will like to have it all the same."

Kirsteen laughed a little consciously while she proceeded with her work. She was quite willing to allow that a thread of her mother's dark hair would be better. "I will do one with yours for Robbie," she said, "and the rest with mine."

"But they're all for Robbie," said the mother.

"Yes, yes," Kirsteen replied with again that conscious look, the colour mantling to her cheeks, a soft moisture filling her eyes. The handkerchief was marked in fine delicate little cross stitches upon the white cambric, and though Mrs. Douglas's dark hair was like a spider's web, the red of Kirsteen's shone upon the fine fabric like a thread of gold.

The handkerchiefs were not yet finished when two young men came into the room, one so like Kirsteen that there was no difficulty in identifying him as her brother, the other a swarthy youth a little older, tall and strong and well knit. Robbie was on the eve of his start in life, leaving home, and Ronald Drummond, who was the son of a gentleman in the neighbourhood, was going with him. They were both bound with commissions in the Company's service for India, where half of the long-legged youths, sons of little Highland lairds and Lowland gentlemen, with good blood and plenty of pride and no money, the Quentin Durwards of the early nineteenth century, found an appropriate career. The period was that of the brief peace which lasted only so long as Napoleon was at Elba, long enough, however, to satisfy the young men that there was to be no chance of renewed fighting nearer home and to make them content with their destination. They had been bred for this destination from their cradles, and Robbie

Douglas at least was not sorry to escape from the dullness of Drumcarro to a larger life. Several of his brothers were already in India, and the younger ones looked to no other fate but that of following. As for the girls they did not count for much. He was sorry to say good-bye to Kirsteen, but that did not weigh down his heart. He was in high excitement, eager about his new outfit, his uniform, all the novel possessions which were doubly enchanting to a boy who had never before possessed anything of his own. He was eighteen, and to become all at once a man, an officer, an independent individuality, was enough to turn the head of any youth.

Ronald Drummond was different. He was going from a much more genial home : he had already tasted the sweets of independence, having served in the last campaign in the Peninsula and been wounded, which was a thing that raised him still higher in the scale of life than the three years' advantage in respect of age which he had over his young comrade. He was neither so cheerful nor so

much excited as Robbie. He came and stood over Kirsteen as she drew closer and closer to the window to end her work before the light had gone.

"You are working it with your hair!" he said, suddenly, perceiving the nature of the long curling thread with which she threaded her needle.

"Yes," she said, demurely, holding up her work to the light. "What did you think it was?"

"I thought it was gold thread," he said. And then he took up one of the handkerchiefs already completed from the table. "R. D.," he said. "That's my name too."

"So it is," said Kirsteen, as if she had now discovered the fact for the first time.

"Nobody will do anything like that for me," he added, pathetically.

"Oh, Ronald! if not the hairs of their heads but the heads themselves would do ye good ye should have them—and that ye know."

"It is very true," said Ronald, "and thank you, Kirsteen, for reminding me how good they are ; but," he added, after a moment, in a low voice, "they are not *you*."

She gave vent to a very feeble laugh which was full of emotion. "No, they could not be that," she said.

"And R. D. is my name too," said the young man. "Kirsteen!" She looked up at him for a moment in the light that was fading slowly out of the skies. He had taken one of the handkerchiefs from the pile, and touching her sleeve with one hand to call her attention, put the little glistening letters to his lips and then placed the handkerchief carefully in the breast pocket of his coat. Standing as he did, shutting out, as she complained, all the light from Mrs. Douglas, this little action was quite unseen, except by the one person who was intended to see it. Kirsteen could make no reply nor objection, for her heart was too full for speech. Her trembling hand, arrested in its work, dropped

into his for a moment. He whispered something else, she scarcely knew what—and then Marg'ret marched into the room with the two candles which were all the lights ever used in Drumcarro parlour, and all was over and done.

CHAPTER II.

THERE was “a grand supper,” as Marg’ret had announced, at Drumcarro this evening, for which, though it was almost entirely a family party, solemn preparations were being made. The house was full of an unusual odour of good cheer, unusual goings and comings through the house betrayed the excitement and sense of a great event approaching which was diffused through the family. On ordinary occasions the family dinner took place between two and three o’clock in the afternoon, followed by tea at seven with much wealth of scones and jam, new-laid eggs and other home produce—and the day ended for the elders by the production of “the tray” with its case of spirit-bottles and accompanying hot water. Now and then by

times, however, this great ceremonial of a supper took place, always on the eve of the departure of one of the boys to make their fortune in the world. These occasions were consequently not surrounded by the brightest recollections to the grown-up portion of the family, or to their mother. The supper indeed to her was a feast of tears, probably as great, though a more usual indulgence than the other characteristics of the festival. It was rarely that Mrs. Douglas ventured to weep in presence of her lord, but on that night he said nothing, made no comment upon her red eyes, and suffered the whimper in her voice without any harsh, "Hold your tongue, woman!" such as usually subdued her. And it was recognized in the house that it was the mother's *rôle* and privilege on these occasions to cry. The children were not disturbed by it as they might have been by tears which they were less accustomed to see shed.

The dining-room was the best room in Drumcarro, as in many Scotch houses of the kind, being recognized as the real centre of

life, the special room of "the maister" and the scene of all the greater events in the family. There were two windows in it which at a time when the existence of the window-tax curtailed the light, was of itself a fine feature, and it was well-sized and not badly furnished, with a multitude of substantial mahogany chairs, side-board, cellaret, and a long dining table of very dark mahogany, shining like a black mirror, which was capable of being drawn out to almost any length, and which had attained the very highest polish of which wood was capable. Covered with a dazzling white cloth, lighted with four candles, a most unusual splendour—set in the silver candlesticks, which were the pride of the family—and surrounded by all the Douglasses who still remained at home, it was an imposing sight. Flowers had not yet been thought of as decorations of a table; such frivolities were far in the depths of time. A large square dish set in a high stand of plated silver with straggling branches extending from it on every side, each of which contained a smaller dish full of confectionery,

pieces of coloured "rock " from Edinburgh, and sweeties procured from "the merchant's " for the occasion, occupied the centre of the table. It was called the *épergne* and was considered very splendid. The central dish was piled high with ruddy apples, which gave an agreeable piece of colour, if any one had thought of such fantastic folly. The four candlesticks, each with a pair of snuffers in its tray placed between them, completed the decorative portion of the table. The candles were not the delicate articles which advancing civilization has learned how to produce, but smoky "moulds" which tinged the atmosphere with a perceptible emanation, especially when they stood in need of snuffing. They threw a ruddy light upon the faces closely assembled round the board, bringing out most fully those of the more youthful members of the family, and fading dimly towards the ends of the long table at which the principal personages were placed. There were but two visitors of the party, one the minister, invited in right of having more or less super-

intended Robbie's studies, such as they were, and seated on Mrs. Douglas's right hand ; the other an old Miss Douglas known as Aunt Eelen, from whom there were certain expectations and who occupied a similar place of honour by the side of Drumcarro. The hero of the evening was at his father's left hand. The rest of the party were Mary the eldest daughter, Jeanie the youngest, Kirsteen, and two boys aged fourteen and twelve respectively, the remaining sons of the house. The fare was excellent, and in another region might have been thought luxurious ; but it was impossible to conceal that the large dish of delicious trout which stood smoking before Mrs. Douglas, and the corresponding hecatomb of grouse to which her husband helped the company after the trout had been disposed of, came from the loch and the moor on Drumcarro estate, and therefore were as much home produce as the eggs and the cream. This fact elicited a somewhat sharp criticism from Miss Eelen at the foot of the table.

“ The grouse is no doubt very good,” she

said, "and being to the manner born as ye may say, I never tire of it ; but for a genteel supper like what you have always given to the lads—"

"Faith," said the laird, "they'll find it most genteel where they're going. The Englishmen will think it the finest table in the world when they hear we have grouse every day ; and Robbie's no bound to condescend upon the number of other dishes. I know what I am doing."

"No doubt, no doubt : I was only making a remark. Now I think a bit of cod from the sea or a made dish of fine collops, or just a something tossed up with a bit of veal, they're more genteel—and I know that's what you're always thinking of, Neil—of course, for the boys' sakes—"

"There's a made dish coming, mem," said Merran, who was waiting.

"Oh, there's a made dish coming ! I thought Marg'ret would mind what was for the credit of the house. Robbie, my man, ye ought to feel yourself a great personage with

all the phrase that's made for you. When Sandy went away, who was the first, there was nothing but a haggis—but we've learned many things since then."

"A haggis is a very good thing, it's fit for a king's table."

"But not what you would call refined, nor genteel. Give me the leg and a piece of the back—there's more taste in it. I hope you will always be grateful to your father for giving ye such a grand set out."

"I think," said the minister at the other end, "that you and Drumcarro, mem, give yourselves more and more trouble every son that leaves ye. This is the fifth I have seen."

"Oh, don't say me, Mr. Pyper," said the mother. "I know just nothing about it—when your son's going away, and ye think ye may never set eyes on him again, who's to think of eating and drinking? He may do it, but not me."

"That's very true," said Mr. Pyper. "Still, to give the lad a something pleasurable to

look back upon, a last feast, so to speak, has many points in its favour. A lad's mind is full of materialism, as you may call it, and he will mind all the faces round the friendly board."

"It's not very friendly to me," said the mother, with a sob, "my four bonny boys all away, and now Robbie. It just breaks my heart."

"But what would you do with them mem, if they were here?" said the sensible minister; "four big men, for they're all men by this time, about the house? No, no, my dear leddy, you must not complain. Such fine openings for them all! and every one getting on."

"But what does that matter to me, Mr. Pyper, if I am never to see one of them again?"

"Oh, yes, mem, it matters—oh, ay, it matters much. The young of no species, much less the human, can bide at home. Fathers and mothers in the lower creation just throw them off, and there's an end. But you do

more than that. You put them in the best way of doing for themselves, and the King himself cannot do better. Alas!" said the minister, "no half so well, decent man—for look at all these young princes, one wilder than the other. And every one of yours doing so well."

"Oh, yes, they're doing well enough—but such a long way away. And me so delicate. And Robbie never quite strong since he had the measles. It's borne in upon me that I will never see him again."

"You need not say it, mother," said Kirsteen, "for that's what nobody can know; and it's just as likely he may be sent home with despatches, or some great grandee take a fancy to him and bring him back. And when we're sitting some day working our stockings he'll come linking in by the parlour door."

"Oh, you're just as light as air," said the mother; "there's nothing serious in ye. You think going to India is just like going to the fair."

Kirsteen darted a quick glance at her mother, but said no more. Her eyes kept filling much against her will. She was in great terror lest a big drop might brim over and run down her cheek, to be spied at once by Jeanie or the boys. For nothing would be hid from these little things: they could note at the same moment the last bit of a bird which they had all counted on, being transferred to Aunt Eelen's plate, and keep an eye upon the favourite apple each had chosen, and spy that suspicious brightness in Kirsteen's eyes. Nothing could be hid from their sharp, little, all-inspecting looks.

There was a breathless moment when the cloth was drawn, and the black gleam of the mahogany underneath changed in a moment the lights of the picture, and gave the children a delightful opportunity of surveying themselves in that shining surface. It was a moment full of solemnity. Everybody knew what was coming. The port and sherry, with their little labels, in the silver holders intended to prevent the bottles from scratching

the table, were placed before Mr. Douglas. Then there was also placed before him a trayful of tall glasses. He rose up : the eyes of all followed his movements : Jock and Jamie projecting their red heads forward in the smoky glow of the candles, then much in want of snuffing : Jeanie's paler locks turned the same way. Mary, who had her mother's brown smooth hair, rested her clasped hands upon the edge of the table with calm expectation. Kirsteen leant her elbows on the same shining edge, and put down her face in her hands. Miss Eelen shook her head, and kept on shaking it like a china mandarin. The laird of Drumcarro went to an old-fashioned wine-cooler, which stood under the sideboard. He took from it one bottle of champagne, which occupied it in solitary dignity. Marg'ret stood ready with a knife in her hand to cut the wire, and a napkin over her arm to wipe up anything that might be spilt. Not a word was said at table while these preliminaries were gone through. Aunt Eelen, as the catastrophe

lingered, went so far as to make a suppressed *Tchish! Tchish!* of her tongue against her palate. The rest were full of serious excitement too important for speech. The bottle was opened finally without spilling a drop: it was perhaps not so much "up" as it might have been. Drumcarro filled all the glasses, one for each person at table, and another for Marg'ret. There was perhaps more foam than wine in a number of the glasses. He held up his own in his hand. "It's Robbie's last night at Drumcarro," he said, "for the present. Have you all your glasses? Before the fizz is out of the wine drink to Robbie's good health, and good luck to him, and to all our lads that have gone before." He touched the foam in his glass, now fast dying away, with his lips. "May they all come back with stars on their breasts," he said, "and do credit to their name—and not a laggard, nor a coward, nor one unworthy to be a Douglas among them all!"

The other male members of the party were

standing up also, "Here's to you, Robbie! Here's to you, Robbie!" cried the two boys. The foam in their glasses merely moistened their throats; the minister, however, whose glass had been full, gravely swallowed its contents in little sips, with pauses between. "A very good health to them all, and the Lord bless them," he said with imposing authority. Mrs. Douglas, taking advantage of the privilege awarded to her, began to cry, and Marg'ret lifted up a strong voice, from the foot of the table where she stood with her hand upon the shoulder of the hero.

"Be a good lad, Robbie—and mind upon your Minnie and a' the family—and be a credit to us a': here's to you, and to the rest o' the young gentlemen, them that's gone, and them that are to go!"

"Ye'll have to get a new bottle for the little one," said Aunt Eelen, "Neil, my man, for your half-dozen will be out with Jock." She gave a harsh laugh at her own joke. "And then there's the lasses' mar-

riages to be thought upon," she added, setting down her glass.

Drumcarro resumed his seat, the ceremonial being over. "Let the lasses' marriages alone," he said impatiently. "I've enough to think upon with my lads. Now, Rob, are you sure you're all ready? Your things packed and all your odds and ends put up? The less of them you take the better. Long before you've got the length of Calcutta ye'll be wishing you had left the half of your portmanteaux at home."

"I've just two, father."

"Well, ye'll be wishing ye had but one. Bring ben the hot water, Marg'ret; for wine's but a feeble drink, and cold on the stomach. My wife never moves at the right time—will I give her a hint that you're waiting, Eelen?"

"Not on my account, Drumcarro. Your champagne's no doubt a grand drink; but a glass out of your tumbler, if you're going to make one, is more wholesome and will set all right."

“I thought ye would say that,” said the laird. She had said it already on every such occasion—so that perhaps his divination was not wonderful. He proceeded with care to the manufacture of “the tumbler,” at which the minister looked from the other end of the table with patient interest, abiding his time.

“Snuff the candles,” said the laird, “will nobody pay a little attention? You three little ones, you can run away with your apples, it’s near your bed-time; but don’t make more noise than you can help. Marg’ret, take the hot water to the minister. Champagne, as ye were saying, Eelen, is a grand drink; I think it right my sons should drink it at their father’s table before they plunge into the extravagance of a mess. It teaches a lad what he’s likely to meet with, and I would not have one of mine surprised with any dainty, as if he had come out of a poor house. But a wholesome glass like what I’m helping you to is worth twenty of it.” He was filling a wine-glass with his small silver toddy-ladle as he spoke, and the fumes of the

pungent liquid rose in curls of steam pleasant to the accustomed nostrils. Robbie kept an eye upon the hot water which Mr. Pyper detained, knowing that one of the privileges of his position to-night was "to make a tumbler" for himself, with the privilege of offering it then to his sisters, as each of his brothers had done.

"Can I assist you to a glass, mem? just a drop. It will do ye good," the minister said.

"Nothing will do me good," said Mrs. Douglas. "I'm far past that; but I'll take a little for civility, not to refuse a friend; whether it's toddy or whether it's wine it's all sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal to me. A woman when her bairns go from her is little comforted by the like of that."

"And yet the creature comforts have their place, a homely one but still a true one," said the minister. "There's a time to feast as well as a time to refrain from feasting. Miss Mary, may I have the pleasure of assisting you?"

“I’ll take a little from Robbie,” said the elder daughter, wisely instructed that it was well thus to diminish the unwonted tumbler allowed to the novice. Kirsteen rose quickly to her feet as these interchanges went round.

“Mother, I think if ye’ll let me, I’ll just give an eye to what the little ones are doing,” she said, “and see that Robbie’s things are all ready. One of the boxes is open still and there are these handkerchiefs.”

Kirsteen’s eyes were brimming over, and as she spoke a large drop fell upon her hand: she looked at it with alarm, saying, “I did not mean to be so silly,” and hastened away.

“Where is Kirsteen away to? Can she not take her share of what is going like the rest?” said her father. “You breed these lasses to your own whimsies, Mistress Douglas. The bairns are well out of the road; but them that are grown up should bide where they are, and not disturb the family. I have no patience with them.”

"I'm here, father," said Mary in her mild voice.

"Oh, ay, you're there," said the inconsistent head of the house, "for you're just nobody, and never had two ideas in your head," he continued in a lower tone. "Now, Robbie, my man, take your glass, there is no saying when you will get another. It's just second nature to a Scotsman, but it's as well for you to be out of the way of it; for though it's the most wholesome drink, it's very seductive and you're much better without it at your age. It's like the strange woman that you're warned against in Scripture."

"Drumcarro!" said Aunt Eelen. "Oh fie! before ladies."

"Ladies or no ladies I cannot let the occasion pass without a word of warning," said the father. "Ye will have every temptation put before ye, my lad; not drink perhaps, for the climate will not stand it, but other things, that are worse."

"I'm thinking, Christina," said the old

lady, "that now your goodman has begun his moralities it may be as well for us to go, for you know where that begins and you never can tell where it may end; a man has cognizance of many things that cannot enter into the experience of you and me. Mind you what your father says, Robbie, but it's not intended for your mother and me."

CHAPTER III.

KIRSTEEN hurried out of the room, out of the fumes of the toddy and the atmosphere of the half-festive, half-doleful occasion which made a not altogether unpleasant excitement in the monotony of the home life. She gazed in at the open door of the parlour, and saw the three younger children gathered in the firelight upon the hearthrug munching their apples, and the sweets with which they had been allowed to fill their pockets. The firelight made still more ruddy the red heads and freckled faces of the boys, and lit up Jeanie, who sat on a footstool a little higher than her brothers, in her more delicate tints. Kirsteen was much attached to her younger sister, who promised to be the beauty

of the family, and thought her like an angel, especially as seen through the dew of her wet eyes. "Dinna make a noise," she said ; "be awfu' quiet or you'll be sent to your beds ;" and then closed the door softly and stole through the dark passage towards the principal entrance. There was no light save a ruddy gleam from the kitchen in the depths of that dark passage which traversed the whole breadth of the house, and that which shone through the crevices of the dining-room door. She had to find her way groping, but she was very well used to this exercise, and knew exactly where the hall-table and the heavy wooden chairs on each side stood. The outer door stood half open according to the habit of the country where there were no burglars to fear, and little to tempt them, and a perfect capacity of self-defence inside. There was a full moon that night, but it had not yet risen, though the sky was full of a misty light which preceded that event. A faint shadow of the group of trees outside was thrown upon the doorway ; they were birches

slender and graceful, with their leaves half blown away by the October gales ; those that remained were yellow with the first touches of the frost, and in themselves gave forth a certain light. Kirsteen stole out to a bench that stood against the wall, and sat down in a corner. She was not afraid of cold with her uncovered head and bare arms. All the moods of the elements were familiar to the Highland girl. She thought it mild, almost warm : there was no wind, the yellow birches perceptible in their faint colour stood up like a group of long-limbed youths dangling their long locks in the dim light : the further landscape was but faintly visible, the shoulder of the hill against the sky, and a single gleam of the burn deep down among the trees.

She sat pressing herself into the corner of the seat, and the long pent-up tears poured forth. They had been getting too much for her, like a stream shut in by artificial barriers, and now came with a flood, like the same stream in spate and carrying every obstruction away. It was almost a pleasure to see (if

there had been any one to do so) the good heart with which Kirsteen wept: she made no noise, but the tears poured forth in a great shower, relieving her head and her heart. They were very heavy, but they were not bitter. They meant a great deal of emotion and stirring up of her whole being, but though her feelings were very poignant they were not without pleasure. She had never felt so elevated above herself, above every dull circumstance that surrounded her. She had been very sorry and had shed tears plentifully when the other boys went away. But this was not the same. She perhaps did not confess to herself, yet she knew very well that it was not altogether for Robbie. Robbie had his share, but there was another now. For years Kirsteen and Ronald Drummond had been good friends. When he went away before she had felt a secret pang, and had been very eager to hear the news of the battles and that he was safe: but something had changed this friendship during the last summer while he had been at home. Not a word had been

said : there was no love-making ; they were both too shy to enter upon any revelation of feeling, nor was there any opportunity for explanations, since they were always surrounded by companions, always in the midst of a wandering, easy-minded party which had no respect for any one's privacy. But Kirsteen when she marked her brother's handkerchiefs with her hair had fully intended that Ronald should see it, and be struck with the similarity of the initials and ask for or take one of them at least. Her heart beat high when this happened according to her prevision ; and when he stooped and whispered, "Will ye wait for me, Kirsteen, till I come back?" the answering whisper, "That I will!" had come from the bottom of her heart. She had scarcely been aware of what was said in the hurry of the moment. But it had come back to her, every syllable and every tone as soon as it was all over. Their spirits had floated together in that one moment, which was only a moment, yet enough to decide the course of two lives. They were too much bound by the laws of

their youthful existence to think of breaking any observance in order to expand these utterances, or make assurance sure. That Ronald should spend his last evening at home with his mother and sister, that Kirsteen should be present at Robbie's parting supper, was as the laws of the Medes and the Persians to these two. No emergency could be imagined of sufficient weight to interfere with such necessities of life. And there was something in their simple absolutism of youthful feeling which was better expressed in the momentary conjunction, in the sudden words so brief and pregnant, than in hours of lovers' talk, of which both boy and girl would have thought shame. "Will ye wait for me till I come back?" What more could have been said in volumes? and "That I will!" out of the fervour of a simple heart? Kirsteen thought it all over again and again. He seemed to stand by her side bending a little over her with a look half smile, half tears in his eyes; and she was aware again of the flash of the sweet discovery, the gold thread

of the little letters put to his lips, and then the question, "Will ye wait?" Wait! for a hundred years, for all the unfathomed depths of life, through long absence and silence, each invisible to the other. "That I will!" She said it over and over again to herself.

In those days there was no thought of the constant communications we have now, no weekly mails, no rapid courses overland, no telegraph for an emergency. When a young man went away he went for good—away; every trace of him obliterated as if he had not been. It was a four months' voyage to India round by the Cape. Within the course of the year his mother might hope to hear that he had arrived. And if an Indian letter had come even at that long interval for a girl in another family, what a host of questions would she not have had to go through! "A letter for Kirsteen! Who's writing to Kirsteen? What is he writing to her about? What is the meaning of it all? I must know what that means!" such would have been the inquiries that would have surged up in a

moment, making poor Kirsteen the object of everybody's curious gaze and of every kind of investigation. She never dreamed of any such possibility. Robbie, when he wrote home, which he would no doubt do in time, might mention the companion of his voyage; Agnes Drummond might say, "There's a letter from our Ronald." These were the only communications that Kirsteen could hope for. She was very well aware of the fact, and raised no thought of rebellion against it. When she gave that promise she meant waiting for interminable years—waiting without a glimpse or a word. Nor did this depress her spirits: rather it gave a more elevating ideal form to the visionary bond. All romance was in it, all the poetry of life. He would be as if he were dead to her for years and years. Silence would fall between them like the grave. And yet all the time she would be waiting for him and he would be coming to her.

And though Kirsteen cried, it was not altogether for trouble. It was for extreme

and highly-wrought feeling, sorrow and happiness combined. Through all her twenty years of life there had been nothing to equal that moment, the intensity of it, the expectation, the swift and sudden realisation of all vague anticipations and wishes. It was only a minute of time, a mere speck upon the great monotonous level of existence, and yet there would be food enough in it for the thoughts of all future years. When the thunder-shower of tears was exhausted, she sat quite still in a kind of exalted contentment, going over it and over it, never tired. The hot room and the smoky glare of the candles, and the fumes of the whisky and the sound of all the voices, had been intolerable to her; but in the fresh coldness of the night air, in that great quiet of Nature, with the rustle of the leaves going through it like breath, and the soft distant tinkle of the burns, what room and scope there was for remembering; which was what Kirsteen called thinking—remembering every tone and look, the way in which he approached the table

where her work was lying, her wonder if he would notice, the flush of perception on his face as he said, "It's my name too," and then that tender theft, the act that left Robbie for ever without one of his pocket-handkerchiefs,—she thought with a gleam of fun how he would count them and count them, and wonder how he had lost it—the little visionary letters put to his lips. Oh that her heart had been sewn in with the hair to give to him! But so it was, so it was! He had that pledge of hers, but she had nothing of his, nor did she want anything to remind her, to bind her faith to him, though it should be years before she saw him again. The tears started into her eyes again with that thought, which gave her a pang, yet one which was full of sweetness: for what did it matter how long he was away, or how dark and still the time and space that separated them now. "Will ye wait for me till I come back?" that would be the gold thread that should run through all the years.

The sound of a little movement in the

dining-room from which all this time she had heard the murmur of the voices, the tinkle of the glasses, made her pause and start. It was the ladies withdrawing to the parlour. She thought with a little gasp that they would find the children scorching their cheeks on the hearthrug, instead of being sent off to bed as should have been done, and held her breath expecting every moment the call of "Kirsteen!" which was her mother's appeal against fate. But either the general license of the great family event, or the sedative effect of her mouthful of champagne and glass of toddy, or the effect of Aunt Eelen's conversation which put her always on her defence whatever was the subject, had subdued Mrs. Douglas: there came no call, and Kirsteen, though with a slightly divided attention, and one ear anxiously intent upon what was going on indoors, pursued her thoughts. It gave them a more vivid sweetness that they were so entirely her own, a secret which she might carry safely without any one suspecting its existence under cover of everything that was

habitual and visible. It would be her life, whatever was going on outside. When she was dull—and life was often dull at Drumcarro—when her mother was more exacting than usual, her father more rough, Mary and the children more exasperating, she would retire into herself and hear the whisper in her heart, “Will ye wait till I come back?”—it would be like a spell she said to herself—just like a spell; the clouds would disperse and the sun break out, and her heart would float forth upon that golden stream.

The sound of a heavy yet soft step aroused Kirsteen at this moment from her dreams; but she was set at ease by the sight of a great whiteness which she at once identified as Marg’ret’s apron coming slowly round the corner of the house. “I just thought I would find you here,” said Marg’ret. “It’s natural in me after that warm kitchen and a’ the pots and pans, to want a breath of air—but what are you doing here with your bare neck, and nothing on your head? I’m just

warning you for ever, you'll get your death of cold."

"I could not bear it any longer," said Kirsteen, "the talking and all the faces and the smell of the toddy."

"Hoot," said Marg'ret, "what ails ye at the smell of the toddy? In moderation it's no an ill thing—and as for the faces, you wouldna have folk without faces, you daft bairn; that's just a silly speech from the like of you."

"There's no law against being silly," Kirsteen said.

"Oh, but that's true. If there was, the jails would be ower full: though no from you, my bonnie dear. But I ken weel what it is," said Marg'ret, putting her arm round the girl's shoulder. "Your bit heart's a' stirred up, and ye dinna ken how ye feel. Tak' comfort, my dear bairn, they'll come back."

Kirsteen shed a few more ready tears upon Marg'ret's shoulder, then she gave that vigorous arm a push, and burst from its hold

with a laugh, "There's one of Robbie's handkerchiefs lost or stolen," she said. "Where do ye think he'll ever find it? and R. D. worked upon it with a thread of my hair."

"Bless me!" said Marg'ret with alarm, "who would meddle with the laddie's linen? but you're meaning something mair than meets the eye," she added, with a pat upon the girl's shoulder; "I'll maybe faddom it by and by. Gang away ben, the ladies will be wondering where ye are, and it's eerie out here in the white moonlight."

"Not eerie at all: ye mean soft and sweet," said Kirsteen, "the kind of light for thinking in; and the moon is this minute up. She's come for you and not for me."

"I cannot faddom you the nicht any more than I can faddom what ye say," said Marg'ret. "There's mair in it than Robbie and his handkerchief. But I maun go in and fasten up the straps and put his keys in his pocket, or he'll forget them. Laddies are a great handful, they're aye forgetting."

But they're like the man's wife, they're ill to have, but worse to want. Gang in, gang in out of the night air," said Marg'ret with a faint sob, softly pushing Kirsteen before her. The smell of the peat fires, which was pleasant, and of the smoke of the candles, which was not, and of the penetrating fumes of the toddy again filled Kirsteen's nostrils as she came in. She had no right to be fastidious, for she had been brought up in the habit and knowledge of all these odours. When she entered, another scent, that of the tea with which the ladies were concluding the evening, added its more subtle perfume. In those days people were not afraid of strong tea, mixed with a great deal of green to modify the strong black Congou, and it had been "masking" for half an hour before the fire: they were not afraid of being "put off their sleep."

"And do ye mean to say, Christina, that there's nobody coming about the house that would do for your girls?"

"Oh, for mercy's sake, Eelen, say not a

word about that: we've had trouble enough on that subject," said Mrs. Douglas in her injured voice.

"Are you meaning Anne? Well, I mind Drumcarro's vow, but there is no doubt that was a miss-alliance. I'm meaning men in their own position of life."

"Where are they to see men in their own position, or any men?" said the mother shaking her head. "Bless me, Kirsteen, is that you? I don't like people to go gliding about the house like that, so that ye never can hear them. When your aunt and me were maybe talking—what was not meant for the like of you."

"Hoot, there was no hairm in it," said Aunt Eelen, "if all the lasses in the town had been here."

"But it's an ill custom," said Mrs. Douglas. "However, as you're here ye may just get me my stocking, Kirsteen, and take up a stitch or two that I let fall. Na, na, no strangers ever come here. And now that my Robbie's going, there will be fewer than

ever. I wish that your father would not keep that laddie out of his bed, and him starting so early. And, eh, me, to think that I'm his mother, and most likely will never see him in this world again!"

CHAPTER IV.

ROBBIE went away next morning very early, before the October day was fairly afloat in the skies. They had no carriage at Drumcarro except "the gig," and it was perched up in this high conveyance, looking very red with tears and blue with cold, that the household, all standing round the door, saw the last of the boy mounted beside his father, with a large portmanteau standing uncomfortably between them. His other baggage had been sent off in the cart in the middle of the night, Jock as a great favour accompanying the carter, to the great envy and wrath of Jamie, who thought it hard that he should miss such a "ploy," and could see no reason why his brother should be

preferred because he was two years older. Jamie stood at the horse's head looking as like a groom as he could make himself, while his father made believe to hold in the steady honest mare who knew the way as well as he did, and was as little troubled by any superfluous fun or friskiness. Mrs. Douglas had remained in bed dissolved in tears, and her boy had taken his leave of her in those congenial circumstances. "Be a good lad, Robbie, and sometimes think upon your poor mother, that will never live to see you again." "Oh, mother, but I'll be back long before that," he cried vaguely, doing his best to behave like a man, but breaking out in a great burst of a sob, as she fell back weeping upon her pillows. The girls at the door were in different developments of sorrow, Mary using her handkerchief with demonstration, Kirsteen with her eyes lucid and large with unshed tears, through which everything took an enlarged, uncertain outline, and little Jeanie by turns crying and laughing as her attention was distracted from

Robbie going away to Jamie standing with his little legs wide apart at the mare's respectable head. Robbie was not at all sorry to go away, his heart was throbbing with excitement and anticipation of all the novelties before him; but he was only eighteen, and it was also full for the moment of softer emotions. Marg'ret stood behind the girls, taller than any of them, with her apron to her eyes. She was the last person upon whom his look rested as his father called out, "Stand away from her head," as if honest Mally had been a hunter, and with a friendly touch of the whip stirred the mare into motion. Robbie looked back at the gray house, the yellow birches waving in the winds, the hillside beyond, and the group round the door, and waved his hand and could not speak. But he was not sorry to go away. It was the aim of all his breeding, the end looked forward to for many years. "It's me the next," said Jock, who was waiting at Inveralton, from which place by fishing-smack and coach Robbie was to

pursue his way to Glasgow and the world. Travellers had but few facilities in those days : the rough fishing boat across the often angry loch ; the coach that in October did not run "every lawful day," but only at intervals ; the absence of all comfortable accommodation would grievously affect the young men nowadays who set out in a sleeping carriage from the depths of the Highlands to take their berths in a P. and O. Robbie thought of none of these luxuries, which were not yet invented. His parting from his father and brother was not emotional : all that had been got over when the group about the doors had waved their last good-bye. He was more anxious about the portmanteaux, upon which he looked with honest pride, and which contained among many other things the defective half-dozen of handkerchiefs. Ronald Drummond met him at the side of the loch with his boxes, which contained a more ample outfit than Robbie's, and the sword-case which had been in the Peninsula, a distinction which drew

all eyes. "It's me the next," Jock shouted as a parting salutation, as the brown sail was hoisted, and the boat, redolent of herrings, carried the two adventurers away.

"Weel," said Marg'ret, "the laddie's gane, and good go with him. It's ane less to think of and fend for. And we must just all go back to our work. Whoever comes or whoever goes, I have aye my dinner to think of, and the clean clothes to be put into the drawers, and the stockings to darn a' the same."

"If you'll put an iron to the fire, Marg'ret, I'll come and do the collars," said Mary, "he was always so particular, poor Robbie. There will be no fyke now with trying to please him."

"I cannot settle to work," said Kirsteen, "and I will not. I'm not just a machine for darning stockings. I wish I was Robbie going out into the world."

"Oh, Kirsteen, come and see the rabbits he gave me," said Jeanie. "He would not trust one of them to the boys, but gave them to me. Come and take them some lettuce

leaves. It will keep us in mind of Robbie." There was perhaps some danger that the recollection of the brother departed would not last very long. So many had gone before him and there were still others to go.

But Kirsteen avoided Jeanie and the rabbits and suddenly remembered something she had to get at the "merchant's," which was a full mile off—worsted for her mother's knitting and needles for herself, who was always, to the reprobation of the elder members of the family, losing her needles. She was glad to represent to herself that this errand was a necessity, for a house without needles how can that be? and poor mother would be more dependent than ever on everything being right for her work, on this melancholy day. It was still quite early, about nine o'clock, and it was with a compunction that Kirsteen gave herself the indulgence of this walk. A morning away from work seemed to her almost an outrage upon life, only to be excused by the circumstances and the necessity of the errand. She

walked along the familiar road not noting where she went, her thoughts far away, following the travellers, her mind full of an agitation which was scarcely sorrowful, a sort of exaltation over all that was common and ordinary. The air and the motion were good for her, they were in harmony with that condition of suppressed excitement in which from the depths of her being everything seemed bubbling up. Kirsteen's soul was like one of the clear pools of the river by which she walked, into which some clear, silvery, living thing had leaped and lived. Henceforward it was no more silent, no longer without motion. The air displaced came up in shining globules to the surface, dimpling over the water, a stir was in it from time to time, a flash, a shimmering of all the ripples. Her mind, her heart were like the pool—no longer mirroring the sky above and the pathway ferns and grasses on the edge, but something that had an independent life. She roamed along without being able to tell, had any one asked her, where she was. The road was a

beautiful road by the side of a mountain stream, which was only called the burn, but which was big enough for trout or even now and then salmon—which ran now along the side of the hill, now diving deep down into a ravine, now half hid with big overreaching banks, now flinging forth upon a bit of open country, flowing deep among the rocks, chattering over the shallows, sometimes bass sometimes treble, an unaccountable, unreasonable, changeable stream. Red rowan-tree berries hung over it reflecting their colour in the water. The heather on the hill came in deep russet tones of glory defeated, and the withered bracken with tints of gold, all gaining a double brilliancy from the liquid medium that returned their image. To all these things Kirsteen was so well accustomed that perhaps she did not at any time stop to note them as a stranger might have done. But to-day she did not know what was about her; she was walking in more beautiful landscapes, in the land of imagination, by the river of love, in the country of the heart. The *pays du tendre*

which was ridiculous when all the fine ladies and gentlemen postured about in their high-heeled shoes is not absurd when a fresh and simple maiden crosses its boundary. She went down the glen to the merchant's and chose her wool, and bought her needles, and said a few words to the women at their doors, and shed a few more tears when they were sorry for her about her brother's going away, without ever leaving that visionary country, and came back from the village more deeply lost in it than ever, and hearing the whisper of last night in every motion of the branches and every song of the burns. "Will ye wait for me, Kirsteen?" though it was only this morning that he went away, and years and years must pass before he came back—"Ay, that I will! That I will."

She had nearly reached home again, coming back from the merchant's—for even her reverie and the charm of it could not keep Kirsteen's step slow, or subdue its airy, skimming tread—when she came up to the carter with his cart who had carried Robbie's

luggage to Inveralton. She stopped to speak to him, and walked along by his side timing her steps to those of his heavy, slow tread and the movement of the laborious, patient horse. "Did you see him, Duncan?" she said.

"Oh, ay, I saw him—and they got away fine in James Macgregor's boat; and a quick wind that would carry them over the loch in two or three minutes."

"And how was he looking, Duncan?"

"Deed, Miss Kirsteen, very weel: he's gaun to see the world—ye canna expect a young boy like that to maen and graen. I have something here for you."

"Something for me!" She thought perhaps it was something that had been put into the gig by mistake, and was not excited, for what should there be for her? She watched with a little amusement Duncan's conflict with the different coats which had preserved his person from the night cold. He went on talking while he struggled.

"The other laddie, Jock, I left to come home with the maister in the gig. He

thought it was fine—but I wouldna wonder if he was regretting Duncan and the cart—afore now. Here it is at last, and a fecht to get it. It is a book from Maister Ronald that you gave him a loan of—or something o' that kind—if I could but mind what gentles say—”

“Gave him—a loan of—?” cried Kirsteen, breathless. She had to turn away her head not to exhibit to Duncan the overwhelming blush which she felt to cover her from head to foot. “Oh, yes,” she added after a moment, taking the little parcel from his hand, “I—mind.”

Let us hope that to both of them the little fiction was forgiven. A loan of—she had nothing to lend, nor had he ever borrowed from her. It was a small paper parcel, as if it contained a little book. Kirsteen never could tell how she succeeded in walking beside the carter for a few steps further, and asking him sedately about his wife and the bairns. Her heart was beating in her ears as if it would burst through. It was like a bird straining at its bonds, eager to fly away.

Then she found herself at home where she had flown like the wind, having informed Duncan that she was "in a great hurry"—but in the passage, on the way to her own room, she met Mary, who was coming from the kitchen with a number of shining white collars in her arms which she had been ironing.

"Where have you been?" said Mary. "My mother has been yammering for you. Is this an hour of the day to go stravaighing for pleasure about the roads?"

Mary pronounced the last word "rods," though she prided herself on being very correct in her speech.

"Me—I have been to the merchant's for my mother's fingerin' for her stockings," Kirsteen said breathlessly.

"It was wheeling she wanted," said Mary with exasperating calm; "that's just like you, running for one thing when it's another that's wanted. Is that it in that small parcel like a book?"

"No, that's not it," said Kirsteen, clasping the little parcel closer and closer.

“It’s some poetry-book you’ve had out with you to read,” said her sister, as if the acme of wrong-doing had been reached. “I would not have thought it of you, Kirsteen, to be reading poetry about the rods, the very morning that Robbie’s gone away. And when my mother is so ill she cannot lift her head.”

“I’ve been reading no poetry,” cried Kirsteen, with the most poignant sense of injury. “Let me pass, Mary, I’m going up the stair.”

But it was Marg’ret now who interposed, coming out at the sound of the altercation. She said, “Miss Kirsteen, I’m making some beef-tea for the mistress. Come in like a dear and warm your hands, and ye can carry it up. It will save me another trail up and down these stairs.”

Kirsteen stood for a moment obstructed on both sides with a sense of contrariety which was almost intolerable. Tears of vexation rose to her eyes. “Can I not have a moment to myself?” she cried.

"To read your poetry!" Mary called after her in her mild little exasperating voice.

"Whist, whist, my lamb, say nothing," said Marg'ret. "Your mother canna bide to have a talking. Never you mind what she says, think upon the mistress that's lying up there, wanting to hear everything and canna—wanting to be in the middle of everything and no equal to it. It was no that I grudge going up the stairs, but just to keep a' things quiet. And what's that you've gotten in your hand?"

"It's just a small parcel," said Kirsteen, covering it with her fingers. "It's just a—something I was buying—"

"Not sweeties," said Marg'ret solemnly; "the bairns had more than plenty last night—"

"Never you mind what it is," said Kirsteen with a burst of impatience, thrusting it into her pocket. "Give me the beef-tea and I'll take it up stairs."

Mrs. Douglas lay concealed behind her

curtains, her face almost in a fluid state with constant weeping. "Oh, set it down upon the table," she said. "Do they think there's comfort in tea when a woman has parted with her bairn? And where have ye been, Kirsteen? just when I was in want of ye most; just when my head was sorest, and my heart like to break—Robbie gone, and Mary so taken up with herself, and you—out of the way—"

"I'm very sorry, mother," said poor Kirsteen. "I ran down to the merchant's to get you your yarn for your knitting. I thought you would like to have it ready."

Mrs. Douglas rocked her head back and forward on her pillow. "Do I look like a person that's thinking of yarn or of stockings, with my head aching and my heart breaking? And none of you can match a colour. Are you sure it's the same? Most likely I will just have to send Marg'ret to change it. What's that bulging out your pocket? You will tear every pocket you

have with parcels in it as if ye were a lad and not a lass."

"It's only a very small thing," said Kirsteen.

"If that's the yarn ye should never let them twist it up so tight. It takes the softness all out of it. Where are ye going the moment you've come back? Am I to have nobody near me, and me both ill in body, and sore, sore distress in mind? Oh, Kirsteen, I thought ye had a truer heart."

"Mother, my heart's true," cried the girl, "and there's nothing in the world I would not do to please you. But let me go and put away my things, let me go for a moment, just for a moment. I'll be back again before you've missed me."

"You're not always so tidy to put away your things," said the invalid; "sit down there by my bedside, and tell me how my bonnie lad looked at the last. Did he keep up his heart? And was your father kind to him? And did you see that he had his keys right, and the list of all his packages? Eh, me, to

think I have to lie here and could not see my laddie away."

"But, mother, you have never done it," said Kirsteen, "to any of the boys—and Robbie never expected—"

"You need not mind me," said Mrs. Douglas, "of the waik creature I've always been. Aye in my bed or laid up, never good for anything. If you'll lift me up a little, Kirsteen, I might maybe try to swallow the beef tea; for eh! I have much, much need of support on such a doleful day. Now another pillow behind my back, and put the tray here; I cannot bear the sight of food, but I must not let my strength run down. Where are you going now, you restless thing? Just stay still where you are; for I cannot do without you, Kirsteen. Kirsteen, do you hear me? The doctor says I'm never to be left by myself."

It was not till a long time after that Kirsteen was free. Her eager expectation had fallen into an aching sense of suspense, a dull pang that affected both mind and

body. Instead of the rapid flight to her room full of anticipation in which she had been arrested in entering the house, she went soberly, prepared for any disenchantment. The room was shared with her younger sister Jeanie, and it seemed quite probable that even a moment's solitude might be denied her. When she found it empty, however, and had closed the door upon herself and her secret, it was with trembling hands that she opened the little parcel. It might be the handkerchief sent back to her, it might be some other plain intimation that he had changed his mind. But when the covering was undone, Kirsteen's heart leaped up again to that sudden passion of joy and content which she had first known yesterday. The parcel contained the little Testament which Ronald had carried to church many a Sunday, a small book bound in blue morocco, a little bent and worn with use. On the flyleaf were his initials R. D., the letters of the handkerchief, and underneath C. D. freshly

written. He had made rather clumsily, poor fellow, with a pencil, a sort of Runic knot of twisted lines to link the two names together. That was all. Nowadays the young lover would at least have added a letter; seventy years ago he had not thought of it. Kirsteen's heart gave a bound in her breast, and out of weariness and contradiction and all the depressing influences of the morning, swam suddenly into another world: a delicious atmosphere of perfect visionary bliss. Never were public betrothals more certain, seldom so sweet. With a timid movement, blushing at herself, she touched with her lips the letters on the title-page.

PART II.

CHAPTER V.

MR. DOUGLAS of Drumcarro was the son of one of the Scotch lairds who had followed Prince Charlie, and had been attainted after the disastrous conclusion of the Forty-Five. Born in those distracted times, and learning as their very first lessons in life the expedients of a hunted man to escape his pursuers, and the anguish of the mother as to the success of these expedients, the two half-comprehending children, twin boys, had grown up in great poverty and seclusion in the corner of a half-ruined house which belonged to their mother's father, and within cognizance of their own real home, one of the great houses of the district which had passed into alien hands. When they set out

to make their fortune, at a very early age, their mother also having in the meantime died, two half-educated but high-spirited and strongly-feeling boys, they had parted with a kind of vow that all their exertions should be addressed to the task of regaining their old possessions and home, and that neither should set foot again upon that beloved alienated land until able in some measure to redeem this pledge. They went away in different directions, not unconfident of triumphantly fulfilling the mutual promise; for fame and fortune do not seem very difficult at sixteen, though so hard to acquire at a less hopeful age. Willie, the younger, went to England, where some relations helped him on and started him in a mildly successful career. He was the gentlest, the least determined of the two, and fortune overtook him in a manner very soothing after his troubled boyhood in the shape of a mild competency and comfort, wife and children, and a life altogether alien to the romance of the disinherited with which he had begun.

But Neil Douglas, the elder, went further afield. He went to the West Indies, where at that period there were fortunes for the making, attended however by many accessories of which people in the next generation spoke darkly, and which still, perhaps, among unsophisticated people survive in tradition, throwing a certain stain upon the planter's fortunes. Whether these supposed cruelties and horrors were all or almost all the exaggerations of a following agitation, belonging like many similar atrocities in America to the Abolitionist imagination, is a question unnecessary to discuss. Up to the time at which this story begins, whenever Mr. Douglas of Drumcarro quarrelled with a neighbour over a boundary line or a shot upon the hill-side, he was called "an auld slave-driver" by his opponent, with that sense of having power to exasperate and injure which gives double piquancy to a quarrel. And of him as of many another such it was told that he could not sleep of nights; that he would wake even out of an after-dinner doze

with cries of remorse, and that dreams of flogged women and runaways in the marshes pursued him whenever he closed his eyes. The one thing that discredited these popular rumours among all who knew Drumcarro was that he was neither tender-hearted nor imaginative, and highly unlikely to be troubled by the recollection of severities which he would have had no objection to repeat had he had the power. The truth was that he had by no means found fortune so easily as he had hoped, and had worked in every way with a dogged and fierce determination in spite of many failures, never giving up his aim, until at last he had found himself with a little money, not by any means what he had looked for and wanted, but enough to buy a corner of his old inheritance, the little Highland estate and bare little house of Drumcarro. Hither he came on his return from Jamaica, a fierce, high-tempered, arbitrary man, by no means unworthy of the title of "auld slave-driver," so unanimously bestowed upon him by his neighbours, who, however, could not

ignore the claims of his old Douglas blood however much they might dislike the man.

He had married a pretty little insipid girl, the daughter of one of his brother's friends in "the south country," who brought with her a piano and a few quickly-fading airs and graces to the Highland wilds, to sink as soon as possible into the feeble and fanciful invalid, entirely subject to her husband's firmer will and looking upon him with terror, whom the reader has already seen. Poor Mrs. Douglas had not vigour enough to make the least stand against her fate. But for Marg'ret she would have fallen at once into the domestic drudge which was all Drumcarro understood or wanted in a wife. With Marg'ret to preserve her from that lower depth, she sank only into invalidism—into a timid complaining, a good deal of real suffering, and a conviction that she was the most sorely tried of women. But she bore her despotic husband seven boys without a blemish, robust and long-limbed lads equal to every encounter with fate. And this made

him a proud man among his kind, strongly confident of vanquishing every adverse circumstance, in their persons at least, if not, as Providence seemed to have forbidden, in his own. He set his whole heart upon these boys—struggling and sparing to get a certain amount of needful education for them, not very much, it must be allowed ; and by every means in his power, by old relationships half-forgotten, by connections of his West Indian period, even by such share as he could take in politics, contrived to get appointments for them, one after another, either in the King's or the Company's service for India. The last was much the best of any ; it was a fine service, with perpetual opportunities of fighting and of distinction, not so showy as the distinctions to be gained in the Peninsula, but with far better opportunities of getting on. The four eldest were there already, and Robbie had started to follow them. For Jock, who took to his books more kindly than the others, there was a prospect of a writer-ship. It was more easy in those days to set

young men out in the world than it is now. Your friends thought of them, your political leaders were accessible; even a passing visitor would remark the boys in your nursery and lend a friendly hand. Nobody lends a friendly hand nowadays, and seven sons is not a quiverful in which a poor man has much reason to rejoice.

On the other hand the girls at Drumcarro were left without any care at all. They were unlucky accidents, tares among the wheat, handmaids who might be useful about the house, but who had no future, no capabilities of advancing the family, creatures altogether of no account. Men in a higher position than the laird of Drumcarro might have seen a means of strengthening their house by alliances, through the means of four comely daughters, but the poor little Highland lairdlings, who were their only possible suitors, were not worth his trouble, and even of them the supply was few. They too went out into the world, they did not remain to marry and vegetate at home. Mr. Douglas felt that

every farthing spent upon the useless female portion of his household was so much taken from the boys, and the consequence was that the girls grew up without even the meagre education then considered necessary for women, and shut out by poverty, by pride, by the impossibility of making the appearance required to do credit to the family, even from the homely gaieties of the countryside. They grew up in the wilds like the heather and the bracken, by the grace of nature, and acquired somehow the arts of reading and writing, and many housewifely accomplishments, but without books, without society, without any break in the monotony of life or prospect in their future. Their brothers had gone off one by one, depriving them in succession of the natural friends and companions of their youth. And in this way there had happened a domestic incident never now named in Drumcarro; the most awful of catastrophes in the experience of the younger members of the family. The eldest of the girls, named Anne, was the hand-

somest of the three elder sisters. She was of the same type of beauty which promised a still more perfect development in the little Jeanie, the youngest of the daughters ; with fair hair just touched with a golden light, blue eyes soft and tender, and a complexion somewhat pale but apt to blush at any touch of sentiment or feeling into the warmest variable radiance. She sang like a bird without any training, she knew all the songs and stories of the district, and read every poetry-book she could find (they were not many—*The Gentle Shepherd*, an old copy of Barbour's *Bruce*, some vagrant volumes of indifferent verse) ; she was full of sentiment and dreamy youthful romance without anything to feed upon. But just at the time when her favourite brother Nigel went away, and Anne was downcast and melancholy, a young doctor came temporarily to the district, and came in the usual course to see Mrs. Douglas, for whose case he recommended certain remedies impossible to be carried out, as doctors sometimes do. He advised change of air, cheerful

company, and that she should be kept from everything likely to agitate or disturb her. "That's sae easy—that's sae likely," said Marg'ret under her breath. But Anne listened anxiously while the young doctor insisted upon his remedies. He came again and again, with an interest in the patient which no one had ever shown before. "If you could take her away into the sunshine—to a brighter place, where she would see new faces and new scenes." "Oh, but how could I do that," cried Anne, "when I have no place to take her to, and my father would not let me if I had?" "Oh, Miss Anne, let me speak to your father," the young man pleaded. "You shall have a pleasant house to bring your mother to, and love and service at her command, if you will but listen to me." Anne listened, nothing loth, and the young doctor, with a confidence born of ignorance, afterwards asked for an interview with Drumcarro. What happened was never known; the doctor departed in great haste, pale with wrath, Mr. Douglas's voice sounding loud as

the burn when in spate after him as he strode from the door ; and Anne's cheeks were white and her eyes red for a week after. But at the end of that week Anne disappeared and was no more seen. Marg'ret, who had risen very early in the middle of the wintry dark, to see to some great washing or other household work, found, as was whispered through the house, a candle flickering down in the socket upon the hall-table, and the house-door open. To blow out the last flickering flame, lest it should die in the socket and so foreshadow the extinction of the race, was Marg'ret's first alarmed precaution ; and then she shut the open door, but whether she saw or heard anything more nobody ever knew. A faint picture of this scene, the rising and falling of the dying light, the cold wind blowing in from the door, the wild darkness of the winter morning, with its be-lated stars in a frosty sky looking in, remained in the imagination of the family surrounding the name of Anne, which from that day was never pronounced in the house. Where she

went or what became of her was supposed by the young ones to be absolutely unknown. But it is to be hoped that even Drumcarro, savage as he was, ascertained the fate of his daughter even while he cursed her. It came to be understood afterwards that she had married her doctor and was happy ; but that not for a long time, nor to the sisters thus taught by the tremendous force of example what a dreadful thing it was to look at any upstart doctor or minister or insignificant person without a pedigree or pretensions like their own.

This was the only shape in which love had come near the door of Drumcarro, and if there was a certain attraction even in the tragic mystery of the tale, there was not much encouragement for the others to follow Anne's example, thus banished summarily and for ever from all relations with her family. Also from that time no doctor except the old man who had brought the children into the world was ever allowed to enter those sacred doors, nor any minister

younger or more seductive than Mr. Pyper. As for other ineligible persons there were none in the country-side, so that Mary and Kirsteen were safe from temptation. And thus they went on from day to day and from year to year, in a complete isolation which poverty made imperative more even than circumstances, the only event that ever happened being the departure of a brother, or an unusually severe "attack" of their mother's continued ever-enduring illness. They were not sufficiently educated nor sufficiently endowed to put them on a par with the few high-born ladies of the district, with whom alone they would have been allowed to associate; and there was native pride enough in themselves to prevent them from forming friendships with the farmers' daughters, also very widely scattered and few in number, who, though the young ladies of Drumcarro were so little superior to themselves in any outward attribute, would have thought their acquaintance an honour. Nothing accordingly could exceed

the dulness, the monotony of their lives, with no future, no occupation except their work as almost servants in their father's house, no hope even of those vicissitudes of youth which sometimes in a moment change a young maiden's life. All was bald and gray about them, everything but the scenery, in which, if there is nothing else, young minds find but an imperfect compensation. Mary indeed had a compensation of another kind in the comfortable apathy of a perfectly dull and stolid character, which had little need of the higher acquirements of life. But Kirsteen with her quick temper and high spirit and lively imagination was little adapted for a part so blank. She was one of those who make a story for themselves.

CHAPTER VI.

MARG'RET was perhaps the only individual in the world who dared to remonstrate with Mr. Douglas as to the neglect in which his daughters were losing their youth and all its pleasures and hopes. Aunt Eelen it is true made comments from time to time. She said : " Puir things, what will become of them when Neil's deed ? They've neither siller nor learning ; and no chance of a man for one of them that I can see."

" And yet they're bonnie lasses," said the sympathetic neighbour to whom on her return home after Robbie's departure she made this confidence. " Oh, they're well enough, but with a silly mother and a father that's just a madman, what can any person

do for them?" Miss Eelen Douglas was not quite assured in her own mind that it was not her duty to do something for her young relations, and she took a great deal of pains to prove to herself that it was impossible.

"What if you had them over at the New Year? There's aye something going on, and the ball at the Castle."

"The ball at the Castle!" cried Miss Eelen with a scream. "And what would they put on to go to the ball at the Castle? Potato-bags and dishclouts? Na, na, I'm of his mind so far as that goes. If they cannot appear like Drumcarro's daughters they are best at home."

"Bless me," said the kind neighbour, "a bit white frock is no ruinous. If it was only for a summer Sabbath to go to the kirk in, they must have white frocks."

"Ruinous or no ruinous it's more than he'll give them," said Miss Eelen, shutting up her thin lips as if they had been a purse. She was very decided that the white frocks could not come from her. And indeed her

means were very small, not much more than was absolutely necessary to maintain her little house and the one maid who kept her old mahogany and her old silver up to the polish which was necessary. Naturally all her neighbours and her cousin Neil, who hoped to inherit from her, exaggerated Miss Eelen's income. But though she was poor, she had a compunction. She felt that the white frocks ought to be obtained somehow, if even by the further pinching of her own already pinched living, and that the great chance of the ball at the Castle ought to be afforded to Drumcarro's neglected girls. And she had to reason with herself periodically as to the impossibility of this, demonstrating how it was that she could not do it, that it was not her part to do it, that if the father and the mother saw no necessity, how was she, a cousin once removed, to take it upon her? For though they called her aunt she was in reality Neil Douglas of Drumcarro's cousin and no more. Notwithstanding all these arguments a compunction was always

present in Miss Eelen's worn out yet not extinguished heart.

"Besides," she began again more briskly, "what would be the use? Ye'll no suppose that Lord John or Lord Thomas would offer for Drumcarro's lasses. They're as good blood, maybe better; for it's cauld watery stuff that rins in those young lads' veins. But Neil Douglas is a poor man; if he had all or the half that rightly belongs to him, it would be anither matter. We'll say nothing about that. I'm a Douglas myself, and it just fires me up when I think of it. But right or wrong, as I'm saying, Drumcarro's a poor man and it's no in the Castle his lasses will find mates. And he's a proud man. I think upon Anne, puir thing, and I cannot say another word. Na, na, it's just a case where nobody can interfere."

"But Miss Anne's very happy, and plenty of everything, as I hear."

"Happy, and her father's doors closed upon her, and her name wiped out as if

she were dead, far more than if she were dead ! And bearing a name that no man ever heard of, her, a Douglas !” Miss Eelen’s gray cheek took on a flush of colour at the thought. She shook her head, agitating the little gray ringlets on her forehead. “Na, na,” she said, “I’m vexed to think upon the poor things—but I cannot interfere.”

“Maybe their father, if you were to speak to him—”

“Me speak to him ! I would as soon speak to Duncan Nicol’s bull. My dear, ye ken a great deal,” said Miss Eelen with irony, “but ye do not ken the Douglasses. And that’s all that can be said.”

This, however, was not all that a more devoted friend, the only one they had who feared neither Drumcarro nor anything else in the world, in their interests, found to say. Marg’reet was not afraid of Drumcarro. Even she avoided any unnecessary encounter with “the auld slave-driver,” but when it was needful to resist or even to assail him she did not hesitate. And this time

it was not resistance but attack. She marched into the laird's room with her head held high, trumpets playing and banners flying, her broad white capstrings finely starched and streaming behind her with the impulse of her going, an unusual colour in her cheeks, her apron folded over one hand, the other free to aid the eloquence of her speech. Several months had passed in great quiet, the little stir of Robbie's departure having died away along with the faint excitement of the preparations for his departure, the making of his linen, the packing of his portmanteaux. All had relapsed again into perfect dulness and the routine of every day. Jamie, the next boy, was only fourteen ; a long time must elapse before he was able to follow his brother into the world, and until his time should come there was no likelihood of any other event stirring the echoes at Drumcarro. As for Marg'ret, the routine was quite enough for her. To think what new variety of scone she could make for their tea, how she

could adapt the remains of the grouse to make a little change, or improve the flavour of the trout, or compound a beef-tea or a pudding which would tempt her mistress to a spoonful more, was diversion enough for Marg'ret among the heavier burdens of her work. But the bairns—and above all Kirsteen, who was her special darling. Kirsteen had carried her head very high after Robbie went away. She had been full of musings and of dreams, she had smiled to herself and sung to herself fragments of a hundred little ditties, even amid the harassments of her sick mother's incessant demands, and all the dulness of her life. But after a month or two that visionary delight had a little failed, the chill of abandonment, of loneliness, of a life shut out from every relaxation, had ceased to be neutralized by the secret inspiration which kept the smile on her lips and the song in her heart. Kirsteen had not forgotten the secret which was between her and Ronald, or ceased to be sustained by it; but she was young, and

the parting, the absence, the silence had begun to tell upon her. He was gone; they were all gone, she said to herself. With everything in the world to sustain the young sufferer, that chill of absence is always a sad one. And her cheerfulness, if not her courage, had flagged. Her heart and her head had drooped in spite of herself. She had been found moping in corners, "thinking," as she had said, and she had been seen with her eyes wet, hastily drying the irrepressible tears. "Kirsteen greetin'!" One of the boys had seen it, and mocked her with a jibe, of which afterwards he was much ashamed; and little Jeanie had seen it, and had hurried off awestricken to tell Marg'ret, "Kirsteen was in the parlour, just with nobody, and greetin' like to break her heart."

"Hoot awa' with ye, it'll be that auld pain in her head," said Marg'ret sending the little girl away. But this report brought affairs to a crisis. "The bairn shall not just be left to think and think," she said to herself, adding however prudently, "no if I can help it."

Marg'ret had managed one way or other to do most things she had set her heart upon, but upon this she could not calculate. Drumcarro was not a man to be turned easily from his evil ways. He was a "dour man." The qualities which had enabled him in the face of all discouragement to persevere through failure and disappointment until he had at last gained so much if no more and become Drumcarro, were all strong agents against the probability of getting him to yield now. He had his own theories of his duty, and it was not likely that the representations of his housekeeper would change them. Still Marg'ret felt that she must say her say.

He was seated by himself in the little room which was specially his own, in the heaviness of the afternoon. Dinner was over, and the air was still conscious of the whisky and water which had accompanied it. A peat fire burned with an intense red glow, and his chair and shabby writing-table were drawn close to it. No wonder then

that Drumcarro dozed when he retired to that warm and still seclusion. Marg'ret took care not to go too soon, to wait until the afternoon nap was over; but the laird's eyes were still heavy when she came in. He roused himself quickly with sharp impatience; though the doze was habitual he was full of resentment at any suspicion of it. He was reading in his room; this was the version of the matter which he expected to be recognized in the family: a man nowadays would say he had letters to write, but letters were not so universal an occupation then. A frank or an opportunity, a private hand, or sure messenger with whom to trust the missive were things of an occasional occurrence which justified correspondence; but it was not a necessity of every day. Mr. Douglas made no pretence of letters. He was reading; a much crumpled newspaper which had already passed through several hands was spread out on the table before him. It was a Glasgow paper, posted by the first reader the day after publication to a

gentleman on Loch Long, then forwarded by him to Iveralton, thence to Drumcarro. Mr. Pyper at the Manse got it at fourth hand. It would be difficult to trace its wanderings after that. The laird had it spread upon his table, and was bending over it, winking one eye to get it open when Marg'ret pushed open the door. She did not knock, but she made a great deal of noise with the handle as she opened it, which came to much the same thing.

"Well," he said, turning upon her snapshly, "what may ye be wanting now?"

"I was wanting—just to say something to ye, Drumcarro, if it's convenient to ye," Marg'ret said.

"What do ye want? That's your way of asking, as I know well. What ails ye now, and what long story have ye to tell? The sooner it's begun the sooner it will be ended," he said.

"There is truth in that," replied Marg'ret sedately; "and I canna say I am confident ye will be pleased with what I am going to say. For to meddle between a father and

his bairns is no a pleasant office, and to one that is but a servant in the house."

"And who may this be," said Mr. Douglas grimly, "that is coming to interfere between a father and his bairns,—meaning me and my family, as I'm at liberty to judge?"

Marg'ret looked her master in the face, and made him a slight but serious curtsy. "'Deed, sir, it's just me," she said.

"You!" said the laird with all the force of angry indignation which he could throw into his voice. He roused himself to the fray, pushing up his spectacles upon his forehead. "You're a bonny one," he said, "to burst into a gentleman's private room on whatever errand—let alone meddling in what's none of your concerns."

"If ye think sae, sir," said Marg'ret, "that's just anither point we dinna agree about; for if there's a mair proper person to speak to ye about your bairns than the person that has brought them up, and carried them in her arms, and made their parritch and mended their clo'es all their life, I'm no

acquaint with her. Eh me, what am I saying? There is anither that has a better right—and that's their mother. But she's your wife, puir lamb, and ye ken weel that ye've sae daunted her, and sae bowed her down, that if ye were to take a' their lives she would never get out a word."

"Did she send ye here to tell me so?" cried Drumcarro.

"But me," said Marg'ret, unheeding the question, "I'm no to be daunted neither by words nor looks. I'm nae man's wife, the Lord be thankit."

"Ye may well say that," said the laird, seizing an ever-ready weapon, "for it's well known ye never could get a man to look the way ye were on."

Marg'ret paused for a moment and contemplated him, half moved by the jibe, but with a slight wave of her hand put the temptation away. "I'm no to be put off by ony remarks ye can make, sir," she said; "maybe ye think ye ken my affairs better than I do, for well I wot I ken yours better than you. You're no

an ill father to your lads. I would never say sae, for it wouldna be true; ye do your best for them and grudge naething. But the lassies are just as precious a gift from their Maker as their brothers, and what's ever done for them? They're just as neglectit as the colley dogues: na, far mair, for the colleys have a fine training to make them fit for their work—whereas our young ladies, the Lord bless them—”

“Well,” said the father sharply, “and what have you to do with the young ladies? Go away with you to your kitchen, and heat your girdle and make your scones. That's your vocation. The young ladies I tell ye are no concern of yours.”

“Whose concern should they be when neither father nor mother take ony heed?” said Marg'ret. “Maister Douglas, how do you think your bonnie lads would have come through if they had been left like that and nobody caring? There's Miss Kirsteen is just as clever and just as good as any one o' them; but what is the poor thing's life worth

if she's never to see a thing, nor meet a person out of Drumcarro House? Ye ken yoursel' there's little company in Drumcarro House—you sitting here and the mistress maybe in her bed, and neither kin nor friend to say a pleasant word. Lord bless us a'! I'm twice her age and mair: but I would loup ower the linn the first dark day, if I was like that lassie without the sight of a face or the sound of a voice of my ain kind."

"You're just an auld fool," said Drumcarro, "the lassie is as well off as any lassie needs to be. Kirsteen—oh ay, I mind now, ye have always made a pet of Kirsteen. It's maybe that that has given her her bold tongue and set that spark in her eye."

"Na," said Marg'ret, "it was just her Maker did that, to make her ane of the first in the land if them she belongs to dinna shut her up in a lonesome glen in a dull hoose. But naebody shall say I'm speaking for Kirsteen alone; there's your bonny little Jeanie that will just be a beauty. Where she got it I canna tell, ony mair than I can tell where

Kirsteen got her grand spirit and yon light in her ee. No from her poor mother, that was a bonny bit thing in her day, but never like that. Jeanie will be just the flower o' the haill country-side, if ye can ca' it a country-side that's a' howkit out into glens and tangled with thae lochs and hills. If she were in a mair open country there's no a place from Ayr to Dumfries but would hear of her for her beauty in twa or three years' time. Ye may say beauty's but skin deep, and I'm saying nothing to the contrary; but it's awfu' pleasant to the sight of men; and I'll just tell you this, Drumcarro—though it's maybe no a thing that's fit for me to say—there's no a great man in a' the land that bairn mightna marry if she had justice done her. And maybe that will move ye, if naething else will."

A gleam had come into Drumcarro's eyes as she spoke, but he answered only by a loud and harsh laugh, leaning back in his chair and opening wide a great cavern of a mouth. "The deil's in the woman for marrying and

giving in marriage!" he said. "A bit lassie in a peenny? It's a pity the Duke marriet, Marg'ret, but it cannot be mended. If she's to get a prince he'll come this way when she's old enough. We'll just wait till that time comes."

"The time has come for the rest, if no for her," said Marg'ret, unexpectedly encouraged by this tone. "And eh? if ye would but think, they're young things, and youth comes but ance in a lifetime, and ye can never win it back when it's past. The laddies, bless them, are all away to get their share; the lassies will never get as much, but just a bit triflin' matter—a white gown to go to a pairty, or a sight of Glasgow, or—"

"The woman's daft!" said the laird. "Glasgow! what will they do there? a white gown! a fiddlestick—what do they want that they haven't got—plenty of good meat, and a good roof over their heads, and nothing to do for't but sew their seams and knit their stockings and keep a pleasant tongue in their heads. If ye stir up nonsense among them, I'll just turn ye bag and baggage out of my house."

“I would advise ye to do that, sir,” said Marg’ret calmly. “I’ll no need a second telling. And ye’ll be sorry but ance for what ye have done, and that’ll be a’ your life.”

“Ye saucy jade!” said the laird: but though he glared at her with fiery eyes, he added no more on this subject. “The lassies!” he said, a “pingling set aye wanting something! To spend your money on feeding them and clothing them, that’s not enough it would appear! Ye must think of their finery, their parties and their pleasures. Tell Kirsteen she must get a man to do that for her. She’ll have no nonsense from me.”

“And where is she to get a man? And when she has gotten a man—the only kind that will come her gait—”

Mr. Douglas rose up from his chair, and shook his clenched fist. Rage made him dumb. He stammered out an oath or two, incapable of giving vent to the torrent of wrath that came to his lips. But Marg’ret did not wait till his utterances became clear.

CHAPTER VII.

THIS was one of the days when Mrs. Douglas thought she felt a little better, and certainly knew it was very dull in her bedroom, where it was not possible to keep even Kirsteen stationary all day, so she had ventured to come down stairs after the heavy midday dinner which filled the house with odours. A little broth, served with what was considered great delicacy in Drumcarro in a china dish on a white napkin, had sufficed for her small appetite ; and when everything was still in the house, in partial somnolence after the meal, she had been brought to the parlour with all her shawls and cushions, and established by the fire. The news of the great ball at the Castle which had moved

Marg'ret to the desperate step she had just taken had its effect in the parlour too. Kirsteen who had said at first proudly, "What am I heeding?" had, notwithstanding everything, begun to wake up a little to the more usual sensations of a girl of twenty when any great event of this description is about to take place. It would be bonny to see—it would be fine just for once to be in grand company like the old Douglasses her forbears, and to see how the lords and ladies behaved themselves, if they were really so different from common folk. And then Kirsteen began to think of the music and the sound of the dancers' feet upon the floor, in spite of herself—and the imaginary strains went to her head. She was caught in the measure of her dreams, swaying a little involuntarily to keep time, and interjecting a real step, a dozen nimble twinklings of her feet in their strong country shoes as she went across the room to fetch a new clew for her mother's knitting.

"What's that you're doing Kirsteen, to shake the whole place?" said Mrs. Douglas.

“ Oh, it's just nothing, mother.”

“ She's practising her steps,” said Mary, “ for the grand ball.”

“ Dear me, dear me,” Mrs. Douglas said. “ How well I know by myself ! Many's the time I've danced about the house so that nothing would keep me still—but ye see what it all comes to. It's just vanity and maybe worse than vanity—and fades away like the morning dew.”

“ But, mother,” said Kirsteen, “ it was not your dancing nor the pleasure you've had that made you ill ; so we cannot say that's what it comes to.”

“ Pleasure !” said her mother. “ It's very little pleasure I have had in my life since I married your father and came to this quiet place. Na, na, it's no pleasure—I was very light-hearted in my nature though you would not think it. But that's a thing that cannot last.”

“ But you had it, mother,” said Mary, “ even if it was short. There was that ball you went to when you were sixteen, and the

spangled muslin you had on, and the officer that tore it with his spurs."

Mrs. Douglas's eyes lit up with a faint reflection of bygone fire. "Eh, that spangled muslin," she said, "I'll never forget it, and what they all said to me when I came home. It was not like the grand gowns that are the fashion now. It was one of the last of the old mode before those awfu' doings at the French Revolution that changed everything. My mother wore a hoop under her gown standing out round her like a cart-wheel. I was not old enough for that; but there was enough muslin in my petticoat to have made three of these bit skimpy things."

"I just wish," said Mary with a sigh, "that we had it now."

"It would be clean out of the fashion if ye had it; and what would ye do with a spangled muslin here? Ye must have parties to go to, before ye have any need for fine claes."

Mary breathed again that profound sigh. "There's the ball at the Castle," she said.

"Lord keep us!" cried her mother. "Your

faither would take our heads off our shoulders if ye breathed a word of that."

"But they say the whole country's going," said Kirsteen; "it's like as if we were just nobody to be always held back."

"Your father thinks of nothing but the boys," said Mrs. Douglas, with a feeble wail; "it's aye for them he's planning. Ye'll bring nothing in, he says, and he'll have you take little out."

There was a pause after this—indignation was strong in Kirsteen's heart, but there was also a natural piety which arrested her speech. The injustice, the humiliation and hard bondage of the iron rule under which she had been brought up, but which she had only now begun to look upon as anything more than the rule of nature, was what was uppermost in her thoughts. Mary's mind was not speculative. She did not consider humiliation or injustice. The practical affected her more, which no doubt was in every way a more potent argument. "I just wonder," she said, "that he has not more sense—for if we were

away altogether we would take nothing out—and that cannot be if nobody knows that we are here.”

“Your father’s a strange man,” said Mrs. Douglas. “You are old enough to see that for yourselves. When there are men coming about a house, there’s more expense. Many’s the dinner he got off my father’s table before he married me—and to have your lads about the house would never please him. Many is the thought I take about it when ye think I have nothing in my head but my own trouble. He would never put up with your lads about the house.”

“Mother!” cried Kirsteen, with indignation, “we are not servant lasses with men coming courting. Who would dare to speak like that of us?”

Mary laughed a little over her work. She was darning the stockings of the household, with a large basket before her, and her hand and arm buried in a large leg of grey-blue worsted. She did not blush as Kirsteen did, but with a little simper accepted her mother’s

suggestion. "If we are ever to get away from here, there will have to be lads about the house," she said, with practical wisdom ; "if we're not to do it Anne's way."

"Lord bless us, what are you saying? If your father heard you, he would turn us all to the door," said Mrs. Douglas, in dismay. "I've promised him on my bended knees I will never name the name of that—poor thing, poor thing," the mother cried suddenly, with a change of voice, falling into trembling and tears.

"I've heard she was real well off," said Mary, "and a good man, and two servant maids keep it for her. And it's just an old fashion thinking so much of your family. The old Douglasses might be fine folk, but what did they ever do for us?"

"Mary! hold your peace," cried Kirsteen, flaming with scorn and wrath. "Would ye deny your good blood, and a grand race that were as good as kings in their day? And what have we to stand upon if it's not them? We would be no more than common folk."

The conviction of Kirsteen's indignant tones, the disdainful certainty of being, on the natural elevation of that grand race, something very different from common folk, over-awed the less convinced and less visionary pair. Mrs. Douglas continued to weep, silently rocking herself to and fro, while Mary made what explanations she could to her fiery assailant.

"I was meaning nothing," she said, "but just that they're all dead and gone, and their grandeur with them. And the fashion's aye changing, and folk that have plenty are more thought upon than them that have nothing, whatever may be their name."

"Do you think," said Kirsteen, "if we had my mother's old gown to cut down for you and me, or even new gowns fresh from the shop—do you think we would be asked to the Castle or any other place if it were not for the old Douglasses that ye jeer at? It's not a spangled muslin but an old name that will carry us there."

"There's something in that," said Mary,

cowed a little. "But," she added with a sigh, "as we're not going it's no thanks to them nor any person. When the ladies and gentlemen are going to the ball we'll be sitting with our seams with one candle between us. And we may just spend our lives so, for anything I can see--and the old Douglasses will never fash their heads."

"Lord bless us! there's your father!" cried Mrs. Douglas with a start, hastily drying her eyes. Her ear was keener for that alarming sound than the girls', who were caught almost in the midst of their talk. The laird came in, pushing open the door with a violent swing which was like a gale of wind, and the suspicious silence that succeeded his entrance, his wife having recourse to her knitting in sudden desperation, and the daughters bending over their various tasks with devotion, betrayed in a moment what they desired to hide from his jealous eye.

"What were ye colleaguering and planning, laying your heads together—that you're all so still when I come in?"

"We were planning nothing, Neil, just nothing," said Mrs. Douglas eagerly. "I was telling the bairns a bit of an auld story—just to pass the time."

"They'll pass the time better doing their work," said their father. He came first to the fireside round which they were sitting, and stared into the glowing peat with eyes almost as red: then he strode towards the only window, and stood there shutting out the light with his back towards them. There was not too much light at any time from that narrow and primitive opening, and his solid person filled it up almost entirely. Kirsteen laid down her work upon her lap. It was of a finer kind than Mary's, being no less than the hemming of the frills of Drumcarro's shirts, about which he was very particular. He had certain aristocratic habits, if not much luxury, and the fineness of his linen was one of these. Kirsteen's hemming was almost invisible, so small were the stitches and the thread so delicate. She was accomplished with

her needle according to the formula of that day.

“Drumcarro,” said his wife timidly after a few minutes of this eclipse, “I am not wanting to disturb ye—but Kirsteen cannot see to do her work—it’s little matter for Mary and me.”

“What ails Kirsteen that she cannot do her work?” he said roughly, turning round but keeping his position. “Kirsteen here and Kirsteen there, I’m sick of the name of her. She’s making some cursed nonsense I’ll be bound for her ain back.”

“It’s for your breast, father,” said Kirsteen; “but I’ll stop if you like, and put it by.”

He eyed her for a moment with sullen opposition, then stepped away from the window without a word. He had an uneasy sensation that when Kirsteen was his opponent the case did not always go his way. “A great deal ye care, any of ye, for me and my wishes,” he said. “Who was it sent that deevil of a woman to my own business-room, where, if any place, a man may expect to be

left in peace ? No to disturb me ! Ye would disturb me if I was on my deathbed for any confounded nonsense of your ain."

"I am sure, Drumcarro," his wife replied, beginning to cry.

"Sure—you're sure of nothing but what she tells ye. If it were not for one thing more than another I would turn her out of my house."

"Dinna do that—oh, dinna do that, if it's Marg'ret you're meaning," cried Mrs. Douglas, clasping her hands. "She's just a stand-by for everything about the place, and the best cook that ever was—and thinks of your interest, Drumcarro, though maybe ye will not believe it, far above her own. And if you take away Marg'ret I'll just lie down and die—for there will be no comfort more."

"You're very keen to die—in words ; but I never see any signs in you of keeping to it," he said ; then drawing forward a chair to the fire, pushing against Kirsteen, who drew back hurriedly, he threw himself down in it,

in the midst of the women who moved their seats hastily on either side to give him room. "What's this," he said, "about some nonsense down at the Castle that is turning all your silly heads? and what does it mean?"

Mrs. Douglas was too frightened to speak, and as for Kirsteen she was very little disposed to take advantage of the milder frame of mind in which her father seemed to be to wheedle or persuade him into a consent.

It was Mary who profited by the unusual opportunity. "It's just the ball, father,—that the Duke gives when he comes home."

"The Duke," said he. "The Duke is as auld a man as I am, and balls or any other foolishness, honest man, I reckon they're but little in his way."

"He does not do it for himself, father—there's the young lords and ladies that like a little diversion. And all the folk besides from far and near—that are good enough," Mary said adroitly. "There are some that say he's too particular and keeps many out."

“ Nobody can be too particular, if he’s a duke or if he’s a commoner,” said Mr. Douglas. “ A good pedigree is just your only safeguard—and not always that,” he added after a moment, looking at her steadily. “ You’ll be one that likes a little diversion too ? ”

“ And that I am, father,” said Mary, suddenly grown into the boldest of the party, exhilarated and stimulated, she could scarcely tell how, by a sentiment of success that seemed to have got into the air. Mrs. Douglas here interposed, anxious apparently lest her daughter should go too far.

“ No beyond measure, Drumcarro—just in reason, as once I liked it well myself.”

“ You,” said Drumcarro hastily, “ ye were never an example. Let them speak for themselves. I’ve heard all the story from beginning to end. They’re weary of their life here, and they think if they went to this folly, they might maybe each get a man to deliver them.”

“ Father ! ” cried Kirsteen springing to her feet, with blazing eyes. To her who knew

better, who had not only the pride of her young womanhood to make that suggestion terrible, but the secret in her heart which made it blasphemy—there was something intolerable in the words and laugh and jibe, which roused her mother to a wondering and tremulous confidence, and made Mary's heart bound with anticipated delight. But no notice was taken of Kirsteen's outcry. The laird's harsh laugh drew forth a tremulous accompaniment, which was half nervous astonishment and half a desire to please him, from his more subservient womankind.

“Well, Drumcarro,” said his wife timidly, “it would just be the course of nature; and I'm sure if it was men that would make them happy, it's no me that would ever say them nay.”

“You!” said her husband again. “Ye would not say nay to a goose if ye saw him waddlin' ben. It's not to your judgment I'm meaning to trust. What's Kirsteen after there, with her red head and her e'en on fire? Sit down on your chair and keep silent if ye

have nothing pleasant to say. I'm not a man for weirdless nonsense and promiscuous dancing and good money thrown away on idle feasts and useless claes. But if there's a serious meaning at the bottom of it, that's just another matter. Eelen, I suppose, that's in all the folly of the place, and well known to the Duke and his family, as she has a good right to be from her name, will understand all about it, and how to put them forth and set them out to the best advantage. It must be well done, if it's done at all."

"There's a great many things that they will want, Drumcarro; none of mine are fit to wear, and the fashion's all changed since my time. They will want——"

"Oh, mother, not half what you think; I've my cairngorms that Aunt Mary left me. And Kirsteen, she has a very white skin that needs nothing. It's just a piece of muslin for our gowns——"

"Eh, me," said Mrs. Douglas, "when I mind all my bonny dyes, and my pearlins and ribbons, and high-heeled shoes, and my

fan as long as your arm ; and washes for my skin and cushions for my hair !” She sat up in her chair forgetting her weakness, a colour rising in her pale cheeks, her spirit rising to the unaccustomed delightful anticipation which was half regret and recollection, so that for once in her life she forgot her husband and escaped from his power. “ Ah ! ” she exclaimed again with a little outcry of pain, “ if I had but thought upon the time I might have lasses of my ain and keepit them for my bairns——”

“ Ye may make yourself easy on that point,” said Drumcarro, pushing back the chair he had taken, “ for ye never had a thing but was rubbish, nothing fit for a daughter of mine.”

“ It’s not the case, it’s not the case,” said the poor lady, touched in the tenderest point. “ I had my mother’s garnets, as bonny a set as ever was seen, and I had a brooch with a real diamant inside it, and a pearl pin—and—oh, I’m no meaning to say a word to blame your father, but what do men ken of

such things? And it's not the case! It's not the case! Ye're not to believe him," she said, with a feverish flush upon her cheeks.

"Bits of red glass and bits of white, and a small paste head on the end of a brass preen," said Drumcarro, with a mocking laugh.

"Father, let her be," cried Kirsteen. "I'll not have her crossed, my bonny minnie, not for all the balls that ever were."

"You'll not have her crossed! You're a bonny one to lift your face to your father. If you say another word ye shall not go."

"I care not if I should never go—I will not have my mother vexed, not for the Duke nor the Castle nor a' Scotland," cried Kirsteen, with fire gleaming in her hazel eyes.

"Oh, ye fool, ye fool! and him for once in a good key," cried Mary, in her sister's ear.

CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. DOUGLAS was the first to echo this prudent advice when after she had wept away the sting of that atrocious accusation and minutely described her "bonny dyes" (her pretty things) to her children who, indeed, had heard all about them often, and knew the pearl pin and the garnets by heart, and had been comforted with a cup of tea, she came to herself. And by that time Kirsteen's indignation too had cooled, and thoughts of the heaven of the Castle, with fine ladies and grand gentlemen pacing forth as in the ballads, and music playing and the sound of the dancers' feet, began to buzz in her young head and fill it with longings. If *he* had been at home he would have been

there. It would never now be what it might have been had it happened before. But even with that great blank of absence Kirsteen was but twenty, and her heart did not refuse to throb a little at this unthought of, un hoped for prospect. Just to see it, and how great persons behaved, and what like the world was, when you were in it, that world which represents itself in so many different ways to the youthful imagination. Kirsteen felt that at the Castle she would see it in all its glory, nothing better in the King's own court—for was it not under the shadow of the Duke, and what could fancy desire more? She would need no further enlightenment or experience of the aspect of society, and what it was and how it looked, than she could get there. This was the Highland girl's devout belief; *Vedi Napoli e poi morire*; earth could not have anything to show more fair.

Marg'ret would have been more than a woman had she not been all-glorious over this event. "I just daured him to do it,"

she said, "to let the occasion pass by and nane of his daughters seen, and a' their chances lost."

"Did ye speak of chances for me?" cried Kirsteen in youthful fury. "Me that would not look at one of them, if it was the prince out of the story book. Me that—" She turned away to dash a hot tear from her dazzling wet eyes—"me that am waiting for him!" Kirsteen said in her heart.

Her faithful champion looked at her with anxious eyes. "If she would but say that's what she's meaning," was Marg'ret's commentary. "Eh, I wonder if that's what she's meaning? but when neither the ane nor the ither says a word, how is a person to ken?" It slightly overclouded her triumph to think that perhaps for her favourite the chances were all forestalled, and even that trouble might come out of it if somebody should throw the handkerchief at Kirsteen whom her father approved. The cold chill of such an alarm not seldom comes across the designer of future events when all has

been carefully arranged to quicken the action of Providence. But Marg'ret put that discouraging alarm hastily out of her mind. Right or wrong it was always a good thing that her nurslings should see the world.

When the roll of white muslin arrived that was to make the famous gowns, and when Miss Macnab (who was not without claims in some far-away manner to be connected with a family in as near as the tenth remove from the Laird of Macnab's own sovereign race) came over with her little valise, and her *necessaire* full of pins and needles, and was put into the best room, and became for the time the centre of interest in the household—Marg'ret could scarcely contain herself for pleasure. “A' the hoose” with the exception of the boys, who at this stage of their development counted for little, snatched every available moment to look in upon Miss Macnab—who sat in state, with a large table covered with cuttings, and two handmaids at least always docile beside her, running up gores or laying hems. It might be thought,

indeed, that the fashion of that time required no great amount of labour in the construction of two white dresses for a pair of girls. But Miss Macnab was of a different opinion. She did not know, indeed, the amount of draping and arranging, the skill of the artist in the fine hanging of folded stuffs, or even the multitudinous flouncings of an intermediate age into which the art of dress was to progress.

The fashions of 1814 look like simplicity itself; the long, straight, narrow skirt, the short waist, the infantile sleeves, would seem to demand little material and less trouble for their simple arrangement. But no doubt this was more in appearance than in reality, and the mind of the artist is always the same whatever his materials may be.

Miss Macnab kept the young ladies under hand for hours fitting every line—not folds, for folds there were none—so that the skirt might cling sufficiently without affording too distinct a revelation of the limbs beneath, an art perhaps as difficult as any of the more modern contrivances.

Mary stood like a statue under the dress-maker's hands. She was never weary ; so long as there was a pleat or seam that needed correction, a pinch too little here, a fulness too much there, she was always ready. The white gown was moulded upon her with something like a sculptor's art. Miss Macnab, with her mouth full of pins, and her fingers seamed with work, pinned and pulled, and stretched out and drew in, with endless perseverance. She was an artist in her way. It was terrible to her, as a mistake on the field of battle to a general, to send forth into the world a gown that did not fit, a pucker or a twist in any garment she made. There are no Miss Macnabs nowadays, domestic professors of the most primitive yet everlasting of arts. The trouble she took over her composition would tire out a whole generation of needlewomen, and few girls even for a first ball would stand like Mary to be manipulated. And there is no such muslin now as the fine and fairy web, like the most delicate lawn, which was

the material of those wonderful gowns, and little workmanship so delicate as that which put together the long seams, and made invisible hems round the scanty but elaborate robe.

Kirsteen, who was not so patient as her sister, looked on with a mixture of contempt and admiration. It did not, to her young mind and thoughts occupied with a hundred varying interests, seem possible at first to give up all that time to the perfection even of a ball-dress. But presently the old seamstress with her devotion to her art began to impress the open-minded girl. It was not a very rich living which Miss Macnab derived from all this labour and care. To see her kneeling upon her rheumatic knees, directing the easy fall of the soft muslin line to the foot which ought to peep from underneath without deranging the exactness of the delicate hem, was a wonder to behold. A rivulet of pins ran down the seam, and Miss Macnab's face was grave and careful as if the destinies of a kingdom were upon that muslin line.

“What trouble you are taking!” cried Kirsteen. “And it’s not as if it were silk or velvet but just a muslin gown.”

Miss Macnab looked up from where she knelt by Mary’s knee. She had to take the pins out of her mouth before she could speak, which was inconvenient, for no pincushion is ever so handy. “Missie,” she said, “my dear, ye just show your ignorance : for there’s nothing so hard to take a good set as a fine muslin ; and the maist difficult is aye the maist particular, as ye would soon learn if ye gave yoursel’ to any airt.”

Kirsteen, who knew very little of any art, but thought it meant painting pictures, here gave vent, to her own shame afterwards, to a little laugh, and said hastily, “I would just set it straight and sew it up again if it was me.”

“I have no objection that ye should try,” said Miss Macnab, rising from her knees, “it’s aye the best lesson. When I was in a lairger way of business, with young ones working under me, I aye let them try their

ain way ; and maistly I found they were well content after to turn to mine—that is if they were worth the learning,” she added composedly ; “there are many that are just a waste of time and pains.”

“And these are the ones that take their own way? But if I were to take mine I would never yield, I would make it answer,” said Kirsteen. She added with a blush, “I just cannot think enough of all your trouble and the pains ye take.”

Miss Macnab gave the blushing girl a friendly look. She had again her mouth full, so that speech was impossible, but she nodded kindly and with dignity in return for this little burst of approval which she knew to be her due ; and it was with all the confidence of conscious merit and a benign condescension that she expounded her methods afterwards. “If ye dinna get the skirt to fall straight from the waist, ye will never mend it at the foot,” she said. “I can see you’re ane that can comprehend a principle, my bonnie missie. Take a’ the trouble ye

can at the beginning, and the end will come right of itself'. A careless start means a double vexation in the finish. And that ye'll find to apply," said this mild philosopher, "to life itself as well as to the dressmaking, which is just like a' the airts I ever heard tell of, a kind of epitome of life."

Kirsteen could not but break out into a laugh again, notwithstanding her compunction, at the dressmaker's high yet mild pretension; but she listened with great interest while Mary stood and gave all her thoughts to the serious subject of the skirt and how it would hang. "I just pay no attention to what she's saying, but I would like my gown to hang as well as any there, and you must take trouble for that," was Mary's report afterwards when the gown was found to be perfect. And what with these differing motives and experiences the workroom was the opening of new interests in Drumcarro, as important as even the ball at the Castle. The excitement and continued interest made the greatest improvement in Mrs. Douglas's

health, who came and sat in Miss Macnab's room and gave a hundred directions which the dressmaker received blandly but paid no attention to. Marg'ret herself was stirred by the presence of the artist. She not only excelled herself in the scones she made for Miss Macnab's tea, but she would come in the afternoon when she was not "throng" and stand with her hands upon each side of her ample waist and admire the work and add no insignificant part to the conversation, discoursing of her own sister, Miss Jean Brown, that was in a very large way of business in London, having gone there as a lady's maid twenty years before. The well-born Miss Macnab allowed with a condescending wave of her hand that many began in that way. "But my opinion is that it wants good blood in your veins and a leddy's breeding before you'll ever make a gown that will set off a leddy," she said to the little circle, but only, not to hurt her feelings, after Marg'ret was gone.

While these proceedings were occupying

all his family, Drumcarro himself proceeded with the practical energy which hitherto had only been exercised on behalf of his sons to arrange for his daughters' presentation to the world. More exciting to the county than a first drawing-room of the most splendid season was the ball at the Castle which was by far the finest thing that many of the Argyllshire ladies of those days ever saw. Even among those who like the family of Drumcarro owned no clan allegiance to the Duke, the only way of approaching the *beau monde*, the great world which included London and the court as well as the Highlands was by his means. The Duke in his own country was scarcely second to the far off and unknown King whose throne was shrouded in such clouds of dismay and trouble, and the Duchess was in all but name a far more splendid reality than the old and peevish majesty, without beauty or prestige, who sat in sullen misery at Windsor. To go to London, or even to Edinburgh, to the Lord High Commissioner's receptions at Holyrood,

was a daring enterprise that nobody dreamed of; but to go to the Castle was the seal of good blood and breeding. When he had got this notion into his head Drumcarro was as determined upon it as the fondest father could have been. The girls were of no consequence, but his daughters had their rights with the best, and he would not have the family let down even in their insignificant persons; not to speak of the powerful suggestion of relieving himself from further responsibility by putting them each in the way of finding "a man."

He made his appearance accordingly one afternoon in the little house inhabited by Miss Eelen, to the great surprise of that lady. It was a very small, gray house, standing at a corner of the village street, with a small garden round it, presenting a curious blank and one-eyed aspect, from the fact that every window that could be spared, and they were not abundant to start with, had been blocked up on account of the window-tax. Miss Eelen's parlour was dark in con-

sequence, though it had originally been very bright, with a corner window towards the loch and the quay with all its fishing-boats. This, however, was completely built up, and the prospect thus confined to the street and the merchant's opposite—a little huckster's shop in which everything was sold from needles to ploughshares. Miss Eelen was fond of this window, it was so cheerful ; and it was true that nobody could escape her who went to Robert Duncan's—the children who had more pennies to spend than was good for them, or the servant girls who went surreptitiously with bottles underneath their aprons. Miss Eelen kept a very sharp eye upon all the movements of the town, but even she acknowledged the drowsiness that comes after dinner, and sat in her big chair near the fire with her back turned to the window, “her stocking” in her lap, and her eyes, as she would have described it, “gathering straes,” when Mr. Douglas paid her that visit. Her cat sat on a footstool on the other side, majestically curling her tail

around her person, and winking at the fire like her mistress. The peats were burning with their fervent flameless glow, and comfort was diffused over the scene. When Drumcarro came in Miss Eelen started and instinctively put up her hands to her cap, which in these circumstances had a way of getting awry.

“ Bless me, Drumcarro ! is this you ? ”

“ It’s just me,” he said.

“ I hope they’re all well ? ”

“ Very well, I am obliged to you. I just came in to say a word about—the Castle—”

“ What about the Castle ? ” with astonished eyes.

“ I was meaning this nonsense that’s coming on—the ball,” said Mr. Douglas, with an effort. A certain shamefacedness appeared on his hard countenance—something like a blush, if that were a thing possible to conceive.

“ The ball ? Bless us all ! have ye taken leave of your senses, Neil ? ”

“ Why should I take leave of my senses ? ”

I'm informed that the hail country—everybody that's worth calling gentry will be going. You're hand and glove with all the clanjamfry. Is that true?"

"Who you may mean by 'clanjamfry' I cannot say. If you mean that his Grace and her Grace are just bye ordinary pleasant, and the young lords and ladies aye running out and in—no for what I have to give them, as is easy to be seen—"

"I'm not surprised," said Drumcarro; "one of the old Douglas family before the attainder was as good as any one of their new-fangled dukes."

"He's no' a new-fangled duke, as you know well; and as for the Douglas family, it is neither here nor there. Ye were saying ye had received information?" Miss Eelen divined her kinsman's errand, though it surprised her, but she would not help him out.

"Just that," said Drumcarro; "I hear there's none left out that are of a good stock. Now I'm not a man for entertainment, or any of your nonsense of music and dancing, nor

ever was. I have had too much to do in my life. But I'm told it will be a slight to the name if there's none goes from Drumcarro. Ye know what my wife is—a complaining creature with no spirit to say what's to be done, or what's not—”

“Spirit!” cried Miss Eelen. “Na, she never had the spirit to stand up to the like of you: but, my word, you would soon have broken it if she had.”

“I'm not here,” said Mr. Douglas, “to get any enlightenment on her character or mine. I've always thought ye a sensible woman, Eelen, even though we do not always agree. They tell me it'll be like a scorn put upon Drumcarro if the lasses are not at this ploy. Confound them a' and their meddling, and the fools that make feasts, and the idiots that yammer and talk!. I've come to you to see what you think. There shall come no scorn on Drumcarro while I'm to the fore.”

“Well, Neil, if you ask me,” said Miss Eelen, “I would have taken the first word,

and given ye my opinion if I had thought it would be of any use ; but it's just heaven's truth ; and farewell to the credit of Drumcarro when it's kent there are two young women, marriageable and at an age to come forward, and not there. It is just the truth. It will be said—for that matter it is said already—that ye're so poor or so mean that ye grudge the poor things a decent gown, and keep them out of every chance. I would not have said a word if you had not asked me, but that's just what folk say."

Drumcarro got up hastily from his chair and paced about the room, and he swore an oath or two below his breath that relieved his feelings. There was a great deal more in Miss Eelen's eyes. The "auld slave-driver" knew that his name did not stand high among his peers, and his imagination was keen enough to supply the details of the gossip of which his cousin gave so pleasant a summary. "Ye may tell them then," he said, "with many thanks to you for your candid opinion,

that Drumcarro's lassies, when he pleases, can just show with the best, and that I'll thole no slight to my name, any more than I would were I chief of this whole country as my forbears were. And that's what ye can tell your gossips, Eelen, the next time ye ask them to a dish of tea—no' to say you're a Douglas yourself and should have more regard for your own flesh and blood."

"Bless me!" cried Miss Eelen, "the man's just like a tempest, up in a moment. Na, Drumcarro, I always gave ye credit if but your pride was touched. And it's just what I would have wished, for I was keen for a sight of the ploy mysel' but too old to go for my own pleasure. You will just send them and their finery over to me in the gig, and I'll see to all the rest. Bless me, to think of the feeling that comes out when ye least expect it. I was aye convinced that if once your pride was touched. And who knows what may come of it? There's plenty of grand visitors at the Castle—

a sight of them's as good as a king's court."

"I hope a man will come of it, to one or the other of them," Drumcarro said.

CHAPTER IX.

MR. DOUGLAS himself went to the ball at the Castle. He was of opinion that when a thing is to be done, it is never so well done as when you do it in your own person, and like most other people of similar sentiments, he trusted nobody. Miss Eelen, as one of the race, was no doubt on the whole in the interests of the family, but Drumcarro felt that even she was not to be trusted with so delicate a matter as the securing of "a man" for Mary or Kirsteen. It was better that he should be on the spot himself to strike when the iron was hot, and let no opportunity slip. It is true that his costume was far from being in the latest fashion; but to this he was supremely indifferent, scarcely taking it into

the most cursory consideration. If he went in sackcloth he would no less be a Douglas, the representative of the old line upon whose pedigree there was neither shadow nor break. He was very confident that he could not appear anywhere without an instant recognition of his claims. Those of the Duke himself were in no way superior : that potentate was richer, he had the luck to have always been on the winning side, and had secured titles and honours when the Douglasses had attainder and confiscation—but Douglas was Douglas when the Duke's first forbear was but a paidling lairdie with not a dozen men to his name. Such at least was the conviction of Drumcarro ; and he marched to the Castle in his one pair of black silk stockings—with his narrow country notions strangely crossed by the traditions of the slave-driving period, with all his intense narrow personal ambitions and grudges, and not an idea beyond the aggrandisement of his family—in the full consciousness of equality (if not superiority) to the best there, the statesman Duke, the

great landowners and personages who had come from far and near. Such a conviction sometimes gives great nobleness and dignity to the simple mind, but Drumcarro's pride was not of this elevating kind. It made him shoulder his way to the front with rising rage against all the insignificant crowd that got before him, jostle as he might; it did not give him the consolatory assurance that where he was, there must be the most dignified place. It must be allowed, however, in defence of his attitude, that to feel yourself thrust aside into a crowd of nobodies when you know your place to be with the best, is trying. Some people succeed in bearing it with a smile, but the smile is seldom warm or of a genial character. And Drumcarro, at the bottom of the room, struggling to get forward, seeing the fine company at the other end, and invariably, persistently, he scarcely knew how, put back among the crowd, was not capable of that superlative amiability. The surprise of it partially subdued him for a time, and Miss Eelen's exertions, who got

him by the arm, and endeavoured to make him hear reason.

“Drumcarro! bless the man—can ye not be content where ye are? Yon’s just the visitors, chiefly from England and foreign parts—earls and dukes, and such like.”

“Confound the earls and the dukes! what’s their titles and their visitors to me? The Douglasses have held their own and more for as many hundred years——”

“Whisht, whisht, for mercy’s sake! Lord, ye’ll have all the folk staring as if we were some ferly. Everybody knows who the Douglasses were; but man, mind the way of the world that ye are just as much affected by as any person. Riches and titles take the crown of the causeway. We have to put up with it whether we like it or no. You’re fond of money and moneyed folk yourself——”

“Haud your fuilish tongue, ye know nothing about it,” said Drumcarro. But then he felt that he had gone too far. “I’m so used to my wife I forget who I’m speaking to. You’ll excuse me, Eelen?”

“The Lord be praised I’m not your wife,” said Miss Eelen devoutly. She added, perceiving a vacant chair a little higher up near the edge of the privileged line, “I see my harbour, Drumcarro, and there I’ll go, but no further ;” and with an able dive through the throng and long experience of the best methods, managed adroitly to settle herself there. She caught by the elbow as she made her dart a gentleman who stood by, a man with grey hair still dressed in a black silk bag in the old-fashioned way which was no longer the *mode*. “Glendochart,” she said, “one word. I’m wanting your help ; you were always on the Douglas’ side.”

“Miss Eelen ?” he cried with a little surprise, turning round. He was a man between fifty and sixty, with a fresh colour and gentle, friendly air, much better dressed and set up than Drumcarro, but yet with something of the look of a man more accustomed to the hill-side and the moor than to the world.

“For gudesake look to my cousin Neil, of Drumcarro ; he’s just like a mad bull raging

to be in the front of everything. Auld Earl Douglas, our great forbear, was naething to him for pride. He will just shame us all before the Duke and Duchess and their grand visitors, if some one will not interfere."

The gentleman thus appealed to turned round quickly with a glance at the two girls, who with difficulty, and a little breathless and blushing with excitement, had emerged out of the crowd behind Miss Eelen, less skilled in making their way than she. "These young ladies," he said, "are with you? they'll be—"

"Just Drumcarro's daughters, and the first time they've ever been seen out of their own house. But yonder's their father making everybody stand about. For ainy sake, Glendochart."

"I'll do your bidding, Miss Eelen."

The girls both thought, as his look dwelt upon them, that he was a most kind and pleasant old gentleman, and sighed with a thought that life would be far easier and everything more practicable if their father

was but such another. But alas, that was past praying for. They had a little more space now that they had gained this comparative haven at the side of Miss Eelen's chair to take breath and look about them, and shake themselves free of the crowd.

The muslin gowns had been very successful ; the skirts fell in a straight line from the waistband high under their arms to their feet, one with a little edge of fine white embroidery, the other with a frill scarcely to be called a flounce round the foot. The bodices were no longer than a baby's cut in a modest round with a little tucker of lace against the warm whiteness of the bosom : the sleeves were formed of little puffs of muslin also like a baby's. Mary wore her necklace of cairngorms with much pride. Kirsteen had nothing upon her milkwhite throat to ornament or conceal it. Nothing could have been whiter than her throat, with the soft warmth of life just tinging its purity ; her red hair, which goes so well with that warm whiteness, was done up in what was called a classic knot at

the back of her head, but there were some little curls which would not be gainsaid about her forehead and behind her ear. Her arms were covered with long silk gloves drawn up to meet the short sleeves. She was in a great tremor of excited imagination and expected pleasure. She was not thinking of partners indeed, nor of performing at all in her own person. She had come to see the world—to see the fine ladies and gentlemen, to hear some of their beautiful talk perhaps, and watch the exquisite way in which they would behave themselves. This was the chief pre-occupation of her mind. She looked round her as if it had been “the play.” Kirsteen knew nothing at all of the play, and had been brought up to believe that it was a most depraved and depraving entertainment, but still there had never been any doubt expressed of its enthralling character. The ball she had decided from the first day it had been mentioned, would be as good as going to the play.

Miss Eelen very soon found an old lady sitting near with whom she could talk, but

Mary and Kirsteen stood together looking out upon the faces and the moving figures and speaking to no one. They scarcely cared to talk to each other, which they could do, they both reflected, very well at home. They stood pressing close to each other, and watched all the coming and going. In the position which they had gained they could see all the sets, the great people at the head of the room, the humbler ones below. Kirsteen had an advantage over her sister. She had met Lady Chatty several times at Miss Eelen's and had admired her, half for herself, half for her position, which had a romantic side very delightful to her simple imagination. "That's Lady Chatty," she whispered to Mary, proud of her superior knowledge. "I don't think much of her," said Mary, whispering back again. This gave Kirsteen a shock in the perfect pleasure with which she watched the graceful movements and animated looks of the future beauty. She had felt a disinterested delight in following the other girl through her dance, admiring how happy she

looked and how bright ; but Mary's criticism had a chilling effect.

A long time passed thus, and Kirsteen began to feel tired in spite of herself ; the pleasure of watching a room full of animated dancers very soon palls at twenty. Her expectation of pleasure gradually died away. It was very bonny, but not the delight she had thought. Mary stood with a smile which had never varied since they entered the room, determined to look pleased whatever happened—but Kirsteen was not able to keep up to that level. If *he* had but been here ! then indeed all things would have been different. It gave her a singular consolation to think of this, to feel that it was in some sort a pledge of her belonging to him that she was only a spectator in the place where he was not ; but she was too sensible not to be aware that her consolation was a fantastic one, and that she would in fact have been pleased to dance and enjoy herself. She and her sister were pushed a little higher up by the pressure of the crowd which formed a fringe round the room, and

which consisted of a great many young men too timid to break into the central space where the fine people were performing, and of tired and impatient girls who could not dance till they were asked. Somehow it began to look all very foolish to Kirsteen, not beautiful as she had hoped.

And then by ill luck she overheard the chatter of a little party belonging to the house. It was the kind of chatter which no doubt existed and was freely used at the balls given by the Pharaohs (if they gave balls), or by Pericles, or at least by Charlemagne. "Where do all these funny people come from?" "Out of the ark, I should think," the young lords and ladies said. "Antediluvian certainly—look, here is a pair of very strange beasts." The pair in question seemed to Kirsteen a very pretty couple. The young man a little flushed and blushing at his own daring, the girl, yes! there could be no doubt, Agnes Drummond, Ronald's sister, of as good family as any in the room. But the young ladies and gentlemen from London

laughed "consumedly." "Her gown must have been made in the year one." "And no doubt that's the coat his grandfather was married in." But all their impertinences were brought to a climax by Lord John, one of the family, who ought to have known better. "Don't you know," he said, "it's my mother's menagerie? We have the natives once a year and make 'em dance. Wait a little till they warm to it, and then you shall see what you shall see." Kirsteen turned and flashed a passionate glance at the young speaker, which made him step backwards and blush all over his foolish young face; for to be sure he had only been beguiled into saying what the poor young man thought was clever, and did not mean it. Kirsteen's bosom swelled with pride and scorn and injured feeling. And she had thought everybody would be kind! and she had thought it would all be so bonny! And to think of a menagerie and the natives making a show for these strangers to see!

"Miss Kirsteen, there is a new set making

up, and your sister would be glad of you for a *vees-ā-vis* if ye will not refuse an old man for a partner." Kirsteen looked round and met the pleasant eyes, still bright enough, of Glendochart, whom Miss Eelen had bidden to look after the indignant Drumcarro. Kirsteen looked every inch Drumcarro's daughter as she turned round, an angry flush on her face, and her eyes shining with angry tears.

"I will not dance. I am obliged to you, sir," she said.

"Not dance," said Mary, in an indignant whisper, "when we're both asked! And what would ye have? We cannot all have young men."

"I will not dance—to make sport for the fine folk," said Kirsteen in the same tone.

"You are just like my father," said Mary, "spoiling other folks' pleasure. Will ye come or will ye not, and the gentleman waiting—and me that cannot if you will not."

"Come, my dear," said old Glendochart. He patted her hand as he drew it through his arm. "I have known your father and all

your friends this fifty years, and ye must not refuse an old man."

Neither of the girls were very much at their ease in the quadrille, but they watched the first dancers with anxious attention, and followed their example with the correctness of a lesson just received. Kirsteen, though she began very reluctantly, was soothed in spite of herself by the music and the measure, and the satisfaction of having a share in what was going on. She forgot for a moment the gibes she had listened to with such indignation. A quadrille is a very humdrum performance nowadays to those who know nothing so delightful as the wild monotony of the round dance. But in Kirsteen's time the quadrille was still comparatively new, and very "genteel." It was an almost solemn satisfaction to have got successfully through it, and her old partner was very kind and took her out to the tea-room afterwards with the greatest attention, pointing out to her the long vista of the corridor and some of the pictures on the walls, and everything that

was worth seeing. They were met as they came back by a very fine gentleman with a riband and a star, who stopped to speak to her companion, and at whom Kirsteen looked with awe. "And who may this bonny lass be?" the great man said. "A daughter of yours, Glendochart?"

"No daughter of mine," said the old gentleman in a testy tone. "I thought your Grace was aware I was the one of your clan that had not married. The young lady is Miss Kirsteen Douglas, a daughter of Drumcarro."

"I beg your—her pardon and yours; I ought to have known better," said the Duke. "But you must remember, Glendochart, when you are in such fair company, that it is never too late to mend."

"He should indeed have known better," said Glendochart, when they had passed on. "These great folk, Miss Kirsteen, they cannot even take the trouble to mind—which kings do, they say, who have more to think of. And yet one would think my story is

not a thing to forget. Did you ever hear how it was that John Campbell of Glendochart was a lone auld bachelor? It's not a tale for a ball-room, but there's something in your pretty eyes that makes me fain to tell."

"Oh, it is little I care for the ball-room," cried Kirsteen, remembering her grievance, which she told with something of the fire and indignation of her original feeling. He laughed softly, and shook his head.

"Never you fash your head about such folly. When my Lord John goes to St. James's the men of fashion and their ladies will say much the same of him, and you will be well avenged."

"It's very childish to think of it at all," said Kirsteen, with a blush. "And now will you tell me?" She looked up into his face with a sweet and serious attention which bewitched the old gentleman, who was not old at all.

"I was away with my regiment on the continent of Europe and in the Colonies and

other places for many years, when I was a young man," Glendochart said.

"Yes?" said Kirsteen, with profoundest interest—for was not that the only prospect before *him* too?

"But all the time I was confident there was one waiting for me at home."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Kirsteen, as if it had been her own tale.

"The news from the army was slow in those days, and there was many a mistake. Word was sent home that I was killed when I was but badly wounded. I had neither father nor mother to inquire closely, and everybody believed it, and she too. I believe her friends were glad on the whole, for I was a poor match for her. Her heart was nearly broke, but she was very young and she got over it, and, whether with her own will or without it I cannot tell, but when I came home at last it was her wedding-day."

"Oh!" Kirsteen cried almost with a shriek, "was that the end of her waiting? Me, I would have waited and waited on——"

“Wait now and ye will hear. The marriage was just over when I came to her father’s house thinking no evil. And we met ; and when she saw me, and that I was a living man, and remembered the ring that was on her finger and that she was another man’s wife—she went into her own maiden chamber that she had never left and shut to the door. And there she just died, and never spoke another word.”

“Oh, Glendochart !” cried Kirsteen with an anguish of sympathy, thinking of Ronald, and of the poor dead bride, and of the sorrow which seemed to her throbbing heart impossible, as if anything so cruel could not have been. She clasped his arm with both her hands, looking up at him with all her heart in her face.

“My bonny dear !” he said with surprised emotion, touching her clasped hands with his. And then he began to talk of other things : for they were in the ball-room, where, though every one was absorbed in his or her own pleasure, or else bitterly resenting the ab-

sence of the pleasure they expected, yet there were a hundred eyes on the watch for any incident. Kirsteen, in the warmth of her roused feelings, thought nothing of that. She was thinking of the other who was away with his regiment, for who could tell how many years—and for whom one was waiting at home—one that would never put another in his place, no, not for a moment, not whatever news might come !

CHAPTER X.

“IT was just a very bonny ball,” said Mary. “No, I was not disappointed at all. I danced with young Mr. Campbell of the Haigh, and once with old Glendochart, who is a very well-mannered man, though he is not so young as once he was.”

“He was by far, and by far, the nicest there,” cried Kirsteen with enthusiasm.

“For them that like an auld joe,” said Mary demurely. Kirsteen had no thought of “joes” old or young, but she thought with pleasure that she had gained a friend.

“The Duke took me for his daughter—and oh ! if there was such a person she would be a happy lass. Aunt Eelen, did you ever hear——”

Kirsteen cast a glance round and checked further question, for her father consuming a delicate Loch Fyne herring, with his attention concentrated on his plate, and Mary seated primly smiling over her scone, were not at all in sympathy with the tale she had been told last night. Miss Eelen, with the tray before her on which stood the teapot and teacups, peering into each to count the lumps of sugar she had placed there, did not appear much more congenial, though there were moments when the old lady showed a romantic side. No trace of the turban and feathers of last night was on her venerable head. She wore a muslin mutch, fine but not much different from those of the old wives in the cottages, with a broad black ribbon round it tied in a large bow on the top of her head; and her shoulders were enveloped in a warm tartan shawl pinned at the neck with a silver brooch. The fringes of the shawl had a way of getting entangled in the tray, and swept the teaspoons to the ground when she made an incautious move-

ment ; but nothing would induce Miss Eelen to resign the tea-making into younger hands.

“ Did I ever hear ? ” she said. “ I would like to know, Kirsteen Douglas, what it is I havena heard in my long pilgrimage of nigh upon seventy years. But there’s a time for everything. If ye ask me at another moment I’ll tell ye the whole story. Is it you, Drumcarro, that takes no sugar in your tea ? No doubt you’ve had plenty in your time in yon dreadful West Indies where you were so long.”

“ What’s dreadful about them ? ” said Drumcarro. “ It’s ignorance that makes ye say so. Ye would think ye were in paradise if ye were there.”

“ Oh, never with all those meeserable slaves ! ”

“ You’re just a set of idiots with your prejudices,” said the laird, who had finished his herrings and pushed away his plate. “ Slaves, quo’ she ! There’s few of them would change places, I can tell ye, with your crofters and such like that ye call free men.”

“Ye were looking for something, father,” said Mary.

“I’m looking for that mutton bone,” said her father. “Fish is a fine thing ; but there’s nothing like a bit of butcher’s meat to begin the day upon.”

“It’s my ain curing,” said Miss Eelen. “Ye can scarcely call it butcher’s meat, and it’s just a leg of one of your own sheep, Drumcarro. Cry upon the lassie, Kirsteen, and she’ll bring it ben in a moment. We’re so used to womenfolk in this house, we just forget a man’s appetite. I can recommend the eggs, for they’re all our own laying. Two-three hens just makes all the difference in a house ; ye never perceive their feeding, and there’s aye a fresh egg for an occasion. And so you were pleased with your ball ? I’m glad of it, for it’s often not the case when lassies are young and have no acquaintance with the world. They expect ower much. They think they’re to get all the attention like the heroines in thae foolish story-books. But that’s a delusion that soon passes away.

And then you're thankful for what you get, which is a far more wholesome frame of mind."

Kirsteen assented to this with a grave face, and a little sigh for the beautiful visions of ideal pleasure which she had lost.

But Mary bridled, and declared that all her expectations had been fulfilled. "I got a great deal of attention," she said, "and perhaps I had not such grand fancies as other folk."

"I have bidden Glendochart to come and see us at Drumcarro. Ye'll have to see to the spare cha'amer, and that he gets a good dinner," said Mr. Douglas. "Him and me we have many things in common. He's one of the best of his name, with a good record behind him—not to match with our auld Douglas line, but nothing to snuff at, and not far off the head of the house himsel'."

"You would be at the school together, Drumcarro," Miss Eelen said.

"No such a thing—he's twenty years younger than me," said Mr. Douglas angrily.

“And I was at no schule, here or there, as ye might well mind.”

“Twenty years! If there’s ten between ye that’s the most of it. There’s no ten between ye. When I was a young lass in my teens John Campbell was a bit toddling bairn, and ye were little mair, Drumcarro. Na, na, ye need not tell me. If there’s five, that’s the most. Ye might have been at the schule together and nothing out of the common. But he’s had none of the cares of a family, though maybe he has had as bad to bear; and a man that is not marriest has aye a younger look. I ken not why, for with women it’s just the contrair.”

“Mr. Campbell is a very personable man,” said Mary. “I’m no judge of ages, but I would say he was just in middle life.”

“It’s but little consequence what you say,” said her father roughly. “If Kirsteen was to express an opinion——”

Kirsteen’s mind had a little wandered during this discussion. Glendochart’s age appeared to this young woman a subject

quite unimportant. He was of the age of all the fathers and old friends. Had she been a modern girl she would have said he was a darling, but no such liberties were taken in her day.

“And that I will,” she said, “for we made friends though I’ve only seen him one night. He is just a man after my own heart,” said Kirsteen with warmth, with a sigh at the thought of his sad story, and a rising colour which was due to the fact that her imagination had linked the idea of young Ronald with that of this old and delightful gentleman who had been what her young lover was—but born to a less happy fate.

“Well,” said Drumcarro, “now ye’ve spoken, Kirsteen, ye’ve made no secret of your feelings; and, so far as I can judge, he has just as fine an opinion of you. And if you give your attention to making him comfortable and let him see the mettle you’re of, there is no saying what may happen. And it’s not me that will put obstacles in the way.”

“Drumcarro,” cried Miss Eelen, “ye get credit for sense among your own kind, but if ever there was a donnered auld fool in affairs of a certain description! Cannot ye hold your tongue, man, and let things take their course? They will do that without either you or me.”

Mr. Douglas had disposed of a great deal of the mutton ham. He had made a very good breakfast, and he felt himself free to retire from the table with a final volley. “If you think,” he said, “that I am going to give up my mind to manage, as you women-folks call it, and bring a thing about, and draw on the man and fleech the lassie, ye are just sair mistaken, Eelen. When I say a word in my house I’m accustomed to see it done, and no nonsense about it. If a man comes seeking that I approve of, it’s my pleasure that he shall find what he’s askin’ for. I’ll have no picking and choosing. Men are no so plenty, and lassies are just a drug in the market. You have never got a man yourself.”

“The Lord be praised!” said Miss Eelen. “I would have broken his heart, or he would have broken mine. But I’ve kent them that would have married me, Neil Douglas, if it was for me or for my tocher I leave you to judge. I’m thankful to think I was never deceived for a moment,” said the old lady with a nod which sent the black bow upon her head into a little convulsion of tremulous movement. “I name nae names,” she said.

Drumcarro walked to the window discomfited, and turned his back upon the party, looking out upon the village street. To tell the truth he had forgotten that trifling incident in his life. To taunt a woman who has refused you with never having got a man is a little embarrassing, and his daughters exchanged astonished looks which he divined, though it took place behind his back. Their opinion did not interest him much, it is true, but the thought that they had discovered a humiliation in his past life filled him with rage, insignificant as they were. He stood

there for a moment swallowing his fury ; then, " There's the gig," he said, thankful for the diversion. " Ye'll better get on your things and get back to your work, and mind your mother and the concerns of the house instead of senseless pleasure. But it's just what I said, when ye begin that kind of thing there's no end to it. When the head's once filled with nonsense it's a business to get it out."

" Well, father," said Mary, " the ball's done, and there is no other coming if we were ever so anxious. So you need not be feared. It's a little uncivil to Auntie Eelen to rise up the moment we've swallowed our breakfast."

" Oh, dinna take me into consideration," said Miss Eelen. " Ye must do your father's bidding, and I'll never lay it to your charge. But you'll take a piece of yon fine seed cake to your mother, poor thing, and some of the bonny little biscuits that were round the trifle at the supper. I just put them in my pocket for her. It lets an invalid person see the way that things are done—and a when

oranges in a basket. She has very little to divert her—though, poor thing, she has got a man.”

Drumcarro did not appear to take any notice of this Parthian arrow, though he fumed inwardly. And presently the girls' preparations were made. The muslin dresses did not take up so much room as ball-dresses do nowadays, and had been carefully packed early in the morning in a box which was to go home by the cart in the afternoon. And they tied on their brown bonnets and fastened their cloth pelisses with an activity becoming young persons who were of so little account. To mount beside their father in the gig, squeezed together in a seat only made for two persons, and in which he himself took an undiminished share, with a basket upon their knees, and several parcels at their feet, was not an unalloyed pleasure, especially as he gave vent to various threats of a vague description, and instantly stopped either daughter who ventured to say a word. But they had few pleasures in their life, and

the drive home, even in these circumstances, was not without its compensations. The girls knew that every cottar woman who came out to the door to see them pass was aware that they had been at the ball at the Castle, and looked after them with additional respect. And even the shouting children who ran after the gig and dared a cut of Drumcarro's whip in their effort to hang on behind amused them, and gave them a feeling of pleased superiority. Coming home from the ball—it was perhaps the best part of it, after all.

When they were drawing near the house their father made a speech to them which Kirsteen at least listened to without alarm but with much wonder. “Now,” he said, suddenly, as if adding a last word to something said before, “I will have no nonsense whatever you may think. If a man comes to my door that I approve, I’ll have no denial thrown into his teeth. You’re all ready enough when it’s to your own fancy, but by ——, this time I’ll make ye respect mine.”

“What is it, father?” said Kirsteen with astonished eyes.

Mary gave her sister a smart poke with her elbow. “We’ll wait till we’re asked before we give any denial,” she said.

“Ye shall give none whether or no,” said Drumcarro, unreasonably it must be allowed; “but it’s no you I’m thinking of,” he added with contempt.

Kirsteen felt herself deficient in Mary’s power of apprehension. It was not often that this was the case, but her sister had certainly the better of her now. There were however many things said by Drumcarro to which his family did not attach a great interest, and she took it for granted that this was one of the dark sayings and vague declarations in which, when he was out of humour, he was wont to indulge. Her heart was not overwhelmed with any apprehension when she jumped lightly down from the gig glad to escape from these objurgations and feeling the satisfaction of having news to tell, and a revelation to make to the eager house-

hold which turned out to the door to meet her: Marg'ret in the front with cap-ribbons streaming behind her and her white apron folded over her arm, and little Jeanie with her hair tumbled and in disorder, her mouth and her ears open for every detail, with one or two other heads in the background—they had never seen the Castle, these ignorant people, never been to a ball. The mortifications of the evening all melted away in the delight of having so much to tell. Certainly the coming home was the best; it brought back something of the roseate colour of the setting out. And what a world of new experiences and sensations had opened up before Kirsteen since yesterday.

“Was it bonny?” said little Jeanie. “Did you see all the grand folk? Was it as fine as ye thought?”

And then Mrs. Douglas's voice was heard from the parlour, “Come ben, come ben, this moment, bairns. I will not have ye say a word till ye're here.” She was sitting up with a delicate colour in her cheeks, her eyes

bright with anticipation. "Now just begin at the beginning and tell me everything," she said. Certainly the best of it was the coming home.

Mary gave her little narrative with great composure and precision, though it surprised her sister. "Everybody was just very attentive," she said. "It was clear to be seen that the word had been passed who we are. It was young Mr. Campbell of the Haigh that took me out at the first, but I just could not count them. They were most ceevil. And once I saw young Lord John looking very hard at me, as if he would like to ask me, but there was no person to introduce him. And so that passed by."

"Oh, Mary, I wish ye had danced with a lord and a duke's son," cried little Jeanie, clapping her hands.

"Well, he was no great dancer," said Mary. "I liked the young laird of the Haigh far better, and even old Glendochart—but he was Kirsteen's one."

"He was the nicest of all," cried Kirsteen.

“But, Jeanie, ye should have seen all the bonnie ladies with their diamonds like sparks of light. You would have thought the Duchess had stars on her head—all glinting as they do in a frosty sky—and a circle about her neck that looked just like the King’s Ellwand,¹ but far more of them. It’s not like stones or things out of the earth, as folks say. It’s like wearing little pieces of light.”

“Oh, I wish I had seen them,” said Jeanie.

“Whisht, whisht. I’ve seen diamonds many a time, but I never thought them like pieces of light. They’re more like bits of glass, which I have seen just as bonny. And who was it you danced with most, Kirsteen? You have not given us a list like Mary.”

“I danced with Glendochart,” said Kirsteen, looking down a little. “I stood a long time just looking about me. When you are dancing you cannot see the rest of the ball, and it was very bonny. Glendochart took

¹ The belt of Orion.

me into the tea-room and showed me all the pictures and things."

"But Lord John never looked in that fixed way at you?"

"No," said Kirsteen very shortly, perceiving that it was inexpedient to repeat the little episode of Lord John.

"Then ye were not so much taken notice of as Mary?" cried Jeanie with disappointment.

"But she spoke to the Duke—or at least he spoke to Glendochart when Kirsteen was on his arm—and there was Lady Chatty that made great friends with her," said Mary with benevolence, not to leave her sister quite in the background. But there was a momentary pause of disappointment, for they all felt that Lady Chatty was not so suggestive—had not in her name so many possibilities as Lord John.

"I hear of nothing but Glendochart," said Mrs. Douglas; "if he is the man I mind upon, he will be the same age as your father; and what was he doing dancing and hanging

about the like of you, a man at his time of life ? ”

Mary gave a little laugh, and repeated, “ He was Kirsteen’s one.”

“ What is the meaning of that, Kirsteen ? ”

“ The meaning of it is that Glendochart, tho’ he is old, is a real gentleman,” said Kirsteen ; “ and he saw that we were strangers and neglected, and nobody looking the way we were on—”

At this there was an outcry that drowned the rest of the sentence. Strangers, the daughters of Drumcarro!—neglected when Mary had just said how attentive everybody had been ! “ You are just in one of your ill keys, Kirsteen,” said her mother.

“ No,” said Mary, “ but she’s looking for him to-morrow : for my father has asked him, and she is feared you will not like him when ye see him. But my opinion is, though he is old, that he is still a very personable man.”

CHAPTER XI.

A FEW days afterwards Glendochart appeared at Drumcarro riding a fine horse, and dressed with great care, in a costume very different from the rough and ill-made country clothes to which the family were accustomed. Jock and Jeanie who had come home from school rushed emulously to take the horse to the stable, and the household was stirred to its depths with the unaccustomed sensation of a visitor, a personage of importance bringing something of the air of the great world with him. He was conducted to the laird's room by Marg'ret herself, much interested in the stranger—and there remained for a short time to the great curiosity of the family, all of whom were engaged in conjectures as to

what was being said within those walls, all but Kirsteen, who, being as it appeared most closely concerned, had as yet awakened to no alarm on the subject, and assured her mother quietly that there was nothing to be fluttered about. "For he is just very pleasant, and makes you feel at home, and like a friend," she said. Mrs. Douglas had come down to the parlour earlier than usual in expectation of this visit. She had put on her best cap; and there was a little fresh colour of excitement in her cheeks. "But what will he be saying to your father?" she said. "Sitting so long together, and them so little acquainted with each other."

"Oh, but they were at the school together, and at the ball they were great friends," replied Kirsteen. She was the only one about whom there was no excitement. She sat quite cheerfully over her work "paying no attention," as Mary said.

"Why should I pay attention? I will just be very glad to see him," replied Kirsteen. "He is just the kind of person I like best."

“Whisht, Kirsteen, whatever you may feel ye must not go just so far as that.”

“But it’s true, mother, and why should I not go so far? He’s a very nice man. If he had daughters they would be well off. He is so kind, and he sees through you, and sees what you are thinking of.”

“You must not let him see what you are thinking of, Kirsteen!”

“Why not?” she said, glancing up with candid looks. But after a moment a vivid colour came over Kirsteen’s milk-white forehead. Then a smile went over it like a sudden ray of sunshine. “I would not be feared,” she cried, “for he would understand.” She was thinking of his own story which he had told her, and of the one who was like him, away in a far distant country. How well he would understand it! and herself who was waiting, more faithful than the poor lady who had not waited long enough. Oh, but that should never be said of Kirsteen!

Presently the two gentlemen were seen to be walking round the place, Drumcarro

showing to his visitor all that there was to show in the way of garden and stables and farm offices, which was not much. But still this was the right thing for one country gentleman to do to another. The ladies watched them from the window not without an acute sense of the shortcomings of the place, and that there was no horse in the stable that could stand a moment's comparison with Mr. Campbell of Glendochart's beautiful beast. Drumcarro was a house in the wilds, standing on a grassy bank without so much as a flower plot near, or any "grounds" or "policy," or even garden to separate and enclose it, and a sense of its shabbiness and poverty came into the minds of all, instinctively, involuntarily. "If that's what he's thinking of he will never mind," Mrs. Douglas said under her breath. "Whisht, mother," said Mary. Kirsteen did not even ask Mary what her mother meant. Mrs. Douglas indeed said a great many things that meant little or nothing, but this did not quite explain the fatal unconsciousness of the

girl upon whose preoccupied ear all these warnings seemed to fall in vain.

The dinner had been prepared with more than usual care, and Marg'ret herself carried in several of the dishes in order to make a further inspection of the visitor. She had not been precisely taken into anybody's confidence, and yet she knew very well that he had come more or less in the capacity of a suitor, and that Drumcarro's extreme politeness and the anxiety he displayed to please and propitiate the stranger were not for nothing. Marg'ret said to herself that if it had been anybody but the laird, she would have thought it was a question of borrowing money, but she knew that Drumcarro would rather die than borrow, with a horror and hatred not only of debt but of the interest he must have had to pay. So it could not be that ; nor was the other gentleman who was so well preserved, so trim, "so weel put on," at all like a money-lender. It became clear to her, as she appeared in the dining-room at intervals, what the real meaning was. Glendochart

had been placed next to Kirsteen at table, and when he was not disturbed by the constant appeals of Drumcarro, he talked to her with an evident satisfaction which half flattered, half disgusted the anxious spectator. He was a real gentleman, and it was a compliment to Miss Kirsteen that a man who had no doubt seen the world and kings' courts and many fine places should distinguish her so—while on the other hand the thought was dreadful that, in all her bloom of youth, Kirsteen should be destined to a man old enough to be her father. As old as her father! and she so blooming and so young. But Marg'ret was perhaps the only one in the party who thought so. The others were all excited by various interests of their own, which might be affected by this union between January and May. Mrs. Douglas, with that fresh tint of excitement on her cheeks, was wholly occupied by the thought of having a married daughter near her, within her reach, with all the eventualities of a new household to occupy and give new interest to

life ; and Mary with a sense that her sister's house to visit, in which there would be plenty of company and plenty of money, and opportunity of setting herself forth to the best advantage, would be like a new existence. The young ones did not know what it was that was expected to happen, but they too were stirred by the novelty and the grand horse in the stable, and Glendochart's fine riding-coat and silver-mounted whip. Kirsteen herself was the only one unexcited and natural. There was little wonder that Glendochart liked her to talk to him. She was eager to run out with him after dinner, calling to little Jeanie to come too to show him the den, as it was called, where the burn tumbled over successive steps of rock into a deep ravine, throwing up clouds of spray. She took care of the old gentleman with a frank and simple sense that it was not he but she who was the best able to guide and guard the other, and used precautions to secure him a firm footing among the slippery rocks without a single embarrassing thought of that

change of the relationship between old and young which is made by the fictitious equality of a possible marriage. Far, very far were Kirsteen's thoughts from anything of the kind. She felt very tenderly towards him because of the tragedy he had told her of, and because he had gone away like Ronald, and had trusted in some one less sure to wait than herself. The very sight of Glendochart was an argument to Kirsteen, making her more sure that she never could waver, nor ever would forget.

When they came back from this expedition to the dish of tea which was served before the visitor set out again, Mrs. Douglas exerted herself to fill out the cups, a thing she had not been known to do for years. "Indeed," she said, "I have heard of nothing but Mr. Campbell since they came back from the ball : it has been Glendochart this and Glendochart that all the time, and it would ill become me not to show my gratitude. For I'm but a weak woman, not able myself to go out with my daughters ; and they are never so well

seen to, Mr. Campbell, when they are without a mother's eye."

Drumcarro uttered a loud "Humph!" of protest when this bold principle was enunciated; but he dared not contradict his wife, or laugh her to scorn in the presence of a visitor so particular and precise.

"You might trust these young ladies, madam," said Glendochart gallantly, "in any company without fear; for their modest looks would check any boldness, whatever their beauty might call forth."

This was still the day of compliments, and Glendochart was an old beau and had the habits of his race.

"Oh, you are very kind," said Mrs. Douglas, her faint colour rising, her whole being inspired. "If gentlemen were all like you, there would be little reason for any uneasiness; but that is more than we can expect, and to trust your bairns to another's guidance is always a very heavy thought."

"Madam, you will soon have to trust them

to the guidance of husbands, there can be little doubt."

"But that's very different: for then a parent is free of responsibility," said the mother, rising to the occasion; "that is just the course of nature. And if they are so happy as to chance upon good, serious, God-fearing men."

"Let us hope," said Glendochart, not without a glance at Kirsteen, "that your bonny young misses will be content with that sober denomination; but they will no doubt add for themselves, young and handsome and gay."

"No, no," Mrs. Douglas said, led away by enthusiasm, "you will hear no such wishes out of the mouths of lassies of mine."

"Let them answer for themselves," said Drumcarro, "they're old enough: or maybe they will wait till they're asked, which would be the wisest way. Glendochart, I am very sorry to name it, and if ye would take a bed with us, I would be most pleased. But if you're determined to go to-day, I must warn

ye the days are short and it's late enough to get daylight on the ford."

"If ye would take a bed—" Mrs. Douglas repeated.

The visitor protested that he was much obliged but that he must go. "But I will take your permission to come again," he said, "and my only fear is that you will see too much of me, for there are strong temptations here."

"Ye cannot come too often nor stay too long; and the more we see of you, the more we will be pleased," said the mistress of the house. And the girls went out to see him mount his horse, which the boys had gone to fetch from the stable. Never was a visitor more honoured. A third person no doubt might have thought the welcome excessive and the sudden interest in so recent an acquaintance remarkable. But no one, or at least very few are likely to consider themselves and the civilities shown to them in the same light as an impartial spectator would do. It seems always natural that friends new or

old should lavish civilities upon ourselves. Glendochart rode away with a glow of pleasure. He was not at all afraid of the ford, dark or light. He was as safe in his saddle as he ever had been, and had no fear of taking cold or getting damp. He feared neither rheumatism nor bronchitis. He said to himself, as he trotted steadily on, that fifty-five was the prime of life. He was a little over that golden age, but not much, nothing to count ; and if really that bonny Kirsteen with her Highland bloom, and her fine spirits, and her sense— It was a long time since that tragedy of which he had told her. Perhaps, as his Grace had said, it was never too late.

“Ye havoring woman,” said Drumcarro to his wife, “you are just like your silly kind. I would not wonder if going so fast ye had not just frightened the man away.”

“I said nothing but what ye said I was to say,” said Mrs. Douglas, still strong in her excitement ; “and it was never me that began it, and if him and you are so keen, it’s not for me to put obstacles in the way.”

Drumcarro stood for a moment astonished that his feeble wife should venture to indulge in a personal effort even when it was in his own aid : then he gave a shrug of his shoulders. "A man knows when to speak and when to refrain from speaking," he said ; "but you womenfolk, like gabbling geese ye can never keep still if once you have anything to cackle about."

CHAPTER XII.

ALL this time, strange to say, Kirsteen took no fright about old Glendochart whom she had calmly set down, as is not unusual at her age, upon the footing of a man of eighty or so, an old, old gentleman to whom she could be as kind as her friendly young soul dictated, giving him her hand to lead him down the rough road to the linn, and feeling with her foot if the stones were steady before she let him trust his weight to them. It had been quite natural to come out to the door to see him mount and ride away, to stroke and pat the shining well-groomed horse, who looked as great an aristocrat as his master beside the sober and respectable matron Mally, who drew the gig and some-

times the cart, and had carried barebacked all the children at once as carefully as if she had been their mother. Kirsteen was even pleased with the sense that she herself was Glendochart's favourite, that he had talked more to her than to any one, perhaps even had come to see her rather than the rest, with the pleasant partiality of an old friend. To be preferred is delightful to everybody, and especially to a girl who has had little petting in her life. It was an exhilarating consciousness, and she took the little jibes that flew about in the family and the laugh of Mary and the shout of the boys with perfect good humour. Yes, very likely Glendochart liked her best. He was a true gentleman, and he had seen her standing neglected and had come to her help. But for him the ball, if indeed always an experience and a fine sight, would have left only a sting in Kirsteen's mind instead of the impression bitter-sweet which it had produced. If she were glad now that she had gone, and pleased with the sight and the fact of having been

there, it was to Glendochart chiefly that the credit was due. She had taken him into her heart warmly in the position of an old friend, an old, kind, and true gentleman whom she would always run to meet and brighten to see. In this easy state of mind, pleased with him and even better pleased with herself because of his liking for her, she received calmly all the family jests, quite satisfied that they were true.

Glendochart became a frequent visitor. He would ride over, or sometimes drive over, in a high gig much better appointed than the old gig at Drumcarro, saying that he had come "to his dinner" or to eat one of Marg'ret's scones, or to see how they all were this cold weather. And he would permit Jock to drive the gig for a mile or two to the boy's delight, though it took all the strength of his young wrists to hold in the horse. Once even upon a great occasion Glendochart managed to persuade Drumcarro, who was ready to attend to all his suggestions, to bring the girls to a great hurling-

match, at which—for he was a master of the game—he himself appeared to great advantage and not at all like the old, old gentleman of Kirsteen's thoughts. And when the New Year came he brought them all "fairings," beautiful boxes of sweets such as had never been seen in the Highlands, and gloves wonderful to behold, which he begged Mrs. Douglas's permission to offer to her daughters. These visits and his pleasant ways, and the little excitement of his arrival from time to time, and the hurling-match which afforded a subject of conversation for a long time, and the little presents, all quickened existence at Drumcarro, and made life more pleasant for all concerned. Kirsteen had taken him by this time for many a walk to the edge of the linn, springing down before him, by the side of the waterfall, to point out which of the stepping-stones were safe to trust to.

"Put your foot here, and it is quite steady, but take care of that moss, Glendochart, for it's very soft, and I've nearly sunk into it," she would call to him stopping in mid-descent,

her young voice raised clear above the roar of the water, and her hand held out to help. If there was one thing that fretted the elderly suitor it was this, and sometimes he would make a spring to show his agility, not always with successful results. "You see you should do as I bid you," said Kirsteen gravely, helping him to get up on one such occasion, "and let me try first whether it will bear you or not."

"I will always do as you bid me," said the old gentleman, trying to look younger and younger and as if he did not mind the fall at all; "but it is my part to take care of you, and not you of me."

"Oh, no, not when the moss is so wet and the stones so shoogly," Kirsteen said.

All this was very pretty fooling; but Drumcarro was not the man to be kept hanging upon the chances of a propitious moment when it might please the wooer to make the leap. The additional cheerfulness of the household did not extend to him. He became very tired of Glendochart's "daid-

ling," and of the over-delicacy of his attentions. His eyes grew fiery and his grizzled eyebrows menacing. He would come into the parlour where the visitor was making himself very agreeable, keeping up the pleasantest conversation, paying compliments to Mrs. Douglas (whose health had greatly improved at this period), and with a devotion which was half fatherly, though he had no such intention, distinguishing Kirsteen who was always pleased to think that he liked her best. Drumcarro would come in with his hands thrust into the depths of his pockets, and his shoulders up to his ears. "Are ye not tired yet of the weemen, Glendochart? Weel, I would not sit there phrasin' and smilin', not for a king's ransom." "Perhaps, my friend, I'm getting more than any king's ransom, for what could buy such kind looks?" the old beau would reply. And then Drumcarro, with an oath muttered under his breath, would fling out again, not concealing his impatience, "I cannot put up with such daidling!" Whether Glendochart under-

stood, or whether his host took the matter into his own hands, never was known by the female portion of the household. But one morning shortly after the New Year, Glendochart having paid a long visit on the day before, Kirsteen received a most unexpected summons to attend her father in his own room.

"My father wants to speak to me! You are just sending me a gowk's errand," she said to Jock who brought the message.

"It's no a gowk's errand. It's just as true as death," said Jock. "He's sent me hissel'."

"And what can he want to say to me in his own room?" cried Kirsteen.

"He did not tell me what he wanted to say; but I can guess what it is," said Jock.

"And so can I," said Jeanie.

"What is it, ye little mischief?" cried Kirsteen. "I have done nothing. I have a conscience void of offence, which is more than you can say."

Upon this they both gave vent to a burst of laughter loud and long.

"It's about your auld joe, Kirsteen. It's about Glendochart," they cried in concert.

"About Glendochart?—he is just my great friend, but there is no harm in that," she cried.

"Oh, Kirsteen, just take him, and I'll come and live with ye," said Jeanie.

"And I'll come," added Jock encouragingly, "whenever we have the play."

"Take him!" said Kirsteen. She bade them with great dignity to hold their tongues and went to her father's room with consternation in her breast.

Mr. Douglas was sitting over his newspaper with the air of being very much absorbed in it. It was no less than a London paper, a copy of the *Times* which Glendochart had brought, which had been sent to him from London with the news of the escape of Boney, news that made Drumcarro wild to think that Jock was but fourteen and could not be sent off at once with such chances of promotion as a new war would bring. He had given the lad a kick

with a "Useless monkey! Can ye not grow a little faster;" as Jock had clattered up to bed in his country shoes the previous night. But he was not reading, though he pretended still to be buried in the paper when Kirsteen came in. He took no notice of her till she had been standing for a minute before him repeating, "Did you want me, father?" when he looked up, as if surprised.

"Oh, you're there. I calculated ye would take an hour to come."

"Jock said you wanted to speak to me, father."

"And so I did—but you might have had to put your gown on, or to brush your hair or something—for anything I knew."

"I never do that at this time of the day."

"Am I to mind your times of day? Kirsteen, I have something to say to you."

"So Jock told me, father."

"Never mind what Jock told ye. It is perhaps the most serious moment of all

your life ; or I might say it's the beginning of your life, for with the care that has been taken of ye, keepit from the cold and shadit from the heat, and your meat provided and everything you could require—the like of you doesn't know what life is as long as ye bide in your father's house."

Kirsteen's heart gave a throb of opposition, but she did not say or scarcely think that this position of blessedness had never been hers. She was not prepared to blaspheme her father's house.

"Well ! now that's all changed, and ye'll have to think of acting for yourself. And ye are a very lucky lass, chosen before your sister, who is the eldest, and according to the law of Laban—— But I think he was too particular. What the deevil maittered which of them was to go first so long as he got them both safe off his hands ?"

"I have no light," said Kirsteen with suppressed impatience, "as to what you're meaning, father !"

"Oh, ye have no light ! Then I'll give

ye one, and a fine one, and one that should make ye thankful to me all your days. I've settled it all with Glendochart. I thought he was but a daidlin' body, but that was in appearance, not in reality. He's just very willing to come to the point."

Kirsteen said nothing, but she clasped her hands before her with a gesture which was Marg'ret's, and which had long been known to the young people as a sign of immovable determination. She did not adopt it consciously, but with the true instinct of hereditary action, an impulse so much misrepresented in later days.

"Very willing," said Drumcarro, "to come to the point; and all the settlements just very satisfactory. Ye will be a lucky woman. Ye're to have Glendochart estates for your life, with remainder, as is natural, to any family there may be; and it's a very fine downsitting, a great deal better house than this, and a heap of arable land. And ye're to have——"

"For what am I to have all this, father?"

said Kirsteen in a low voice with a tremble in it, but not of weakness.

“For what are ye to have it?” He gave a rude laugh. “For yourself I suppose I must say, though I would think any woman dear at the price he’s willing to pay for ye.”

“And what does Glendochart want with me?” said Kirsteen with an effort to steady her voice.

“Ye fool! But you’re not the fool ye pretend to be. I cannot wonder that you’re surprised. He wants to mairry ye,” her father said.

Kirsteen stood with her hands clasped, her fine figure swayed in spite of her with a wave of agitation, her features moving. “Glendochart!” she said. “Father, if he has friends ye should warn them to keep him better and take care of him, and not let him be a trouble to young women about the country that never did any harm to him.”

“Young women,” said Drumcarro, “there is not one I ever heard of except yourself, ye thankless jaud!”

“One is plenty to try to make a fool of,” said Kirsteen.

“I would like to see him make a fool of one belonging to me. Na, it's the other way. But that's enough of this nonsense,” he added abruptly; “it's all settled. Ye can go and tell your mother. He's away for a week on business, and when he comes back ye'll settle the day. And let it be as soon as possible, that we may be done wi't. It's been as much as I could do to put up with it all this time. Now let any man say I've done much for my sons and little for my daughters!” said Drumcarro, stretching his arms above his head with a gesture of fatigue. “I've got them their commissions and outfit and all for less trouble than it has cost me to get one of you a man!” He yawned ostentatiously and rubbed his eyes, then opening them again to see Kirsteen still standing in the same attitude before him he gave vent to a roar of dismissal. “G'away with ye. Go and tell your mother. I've said all I have to say.”

“But I have something more to say,” said Kirsteen. “I’ll not marry Glendochart. It’s just been a mistake, and I’m sorry, but——”

“You’ll not mairry Glendochart! Ye shall marry whatever man I choose for ye.”

“No, father!” said Kirsteen clasping her hands more closely.

“No!” he said, pushing back his chair. He was honestly astonished, taken completely by surprise. “No! Lord, but ye shall though when I say it. And what ails ye at Glendochart? And him running after ye like a fool the whole winter, and nothing but pleasant looks for him till now.”

“I’m very sorry,” repeated Kirsteen. “I’m very sorry—I never, never thought of that. He’s an old man, and it seemed all kindness to one as much as another. Oh, I’m sorry, father. Tell him, I would not have vexed him for the world.”

“I’ll tell him no such thing. I’ll tell him ye’re very proud and pleased, as sets ye

better ; and I'll take you to Glasgow to buy your wedding-gown." He said this with an attempt at seduction, perhaps a little startled by the first idea that to subdue Kirsteen by violence would not be so easy as he thought.

"Father, you're meaning it for great kindness ; but oh, if ye would just understand ! I cannot marry Glendochart. I could not if there was no other man."

"It is just Glendochart ye shall marry and no other. It's all settled. You have nothing more to do with it but what I've promised and fixed for ye."

"No, father——"

"But I say yes," he said, bringing down his clenched fist on the table with a noise that made the windows ring.

"It cannot be settled without me," said Kirsteen, growing first red and then pale, but standing firm.

"You're not of the least importance," he said, foam flying from his lips. "What are ye ? A creature of no account. A lass that has to obey her father till she gets a man,

and then to obey him. Say what ye like, or do what ye like, it will never alter a thing I've fixed upon ; and of that ye may be as sure as that you stand there. G'away to your mother, and tell her it's to be soon, in a month or so, to get done with it—for I've made up my mind."

Kirsteen stood silent for a moment, not daunted but bewildered, feeling with a force which no girl in her situation would now recognize the helplessness of her position, not a creature to take her part, seeing no outlet. She burst forth suddenly when a new idea occurred to her. "I will speak to him myself! He is a good man, he will never hold me to it. I will tell him——"

"If ye say a word to him," cried Drumcarro rising from his chair and shaking his clenched hand in her face, "one word! I'll just kill ye where ye stand! I'll drive ye from my doors. Neither bit nor sup more shall ye have in this house. Ye may go and tramp from door to door with a meal-pack on your shoulder."

“I would rather do that,” cried Kirsteen, “far rather than make a false promise and deceive a good man. Oh, father, I’ll do anything ye bid me. I’ll be your servant, I’ll ask for nothing; but dinna, dinna do this! for I will not marry Glendochart, not if you were to kill me, not if you were to turn me from the door.”

“Hold your peace, ye lang-tongued—ye shall do what I bid you, that and nothing else.”

“No, father, no, father!” cried Kirsteen trembling; “I will not—for nothing in the world.”

“Go out of my sight,” he cried, “and hold your tongue. Away this moment! Ye shall do just what I say.”

“Father——”

“None of your fathers to me. Get out of my sight, and make yourself ready to do what I tell ye. It shall be in a fortnight. That’s all you shall make by your rebellion. Not another word, or I’ll turn you out of my house.”

Kirsteen retired as he made a step towards

her with his hands raised to her shoulders, to put her out. His fiery eyes, the foam that flew from his lips, the fury of his aspect frightened her. She turned and fled from the room without any further attempt to speak.

CHAPTER XIII.

KIRSTEEN rushed out of the house with the instinct of passion, to shake off all restraint, to get into the free air, where an oppressed bosom might get breath. She flew like a hunted deer, flashing past the window where Mary, sitting at her seam, saw her hurried escape and divined more or less what was the meaning of it.

“Who’s that?” said Mrs. Douglas, conscious of the flying shadow.

“It’s Kirsteen, and my father will have told her, and she’s just beside herself.”

“Beside herself!” said the mother tranquilly over her knitting. “She may well be that; for who would have thought of such a prospect for the like of her, at her age.”

Mary was not so sure that the agitation was that of joy, but she said nothing. And Kirsteen was out of sight in a moment, darting by.

She went towards the linn, without knowing why. The stream was strong with the winter floods, and the roar of it as it poured down the rocky cleft was enough to make all voices inaudible, and to deaden more or less even the sound of one's thoughts buzzing in one's head with the passion and the sweep of them, themselves like a hurrying stream. Kirsteen fled as to a covert to the "den," down which this passionate rivulet, swollen into a torrent, stormed and poured, flinging its spray over the wet and spongy turf into which her feet sank. She cared nothing for this in the absorption of her excitement, and flung herself down upon that damp slope, feeling the spray on her forehead and the roar of the water in her ears as a sort of relief from herself. Her feelings had been like to burst her heart and her brain together as she flew along, like some struggling things shut

up in a space too narrow for them. She could not get her breath nor contain the hurry and confusion of her own being. But in that damp retreat where nobody would be likely to pursue her, where she could scarcely even hear the thumping of her own heart nor any voice calling her, nor be subject to interruption of any kind, Kirsteen after a moment began to come to herself. The shock, the fright, the horror quieted a little; her mind became accustomed, as it does so rapidly, to the new alarm, to the frightful danger which had suddenly revealed itself. It was a danger which Kirsteen had not expected or foreseen. She had very well understood when she pledged herself to wait for Ronald what that meant. It was in all the traditions of romance with which she was acquainted—not waiting relieved by constant communication, and with a certain distinct boundary, but silent, unbroken, perhaps for life, certainly for years. In the beginning at least such a visionary burden may be taken up with enthusiasm, and Kirsteen had been proud of

it and of the deep secret of which there was nothing to tell, which was in spirit alone, with no bond to be displayed in the sight of men. But it had never occurred to her that she might be bidden to forswear herself as she said, that she might have to struggle against all about her for the right to keep her vow. This danger had never appeared before her as a possibility. She had not thought of any wooer, nor had any such presented himself to her consciousness. Without warning, without thought of precaution or self-defence, the danger had come.

To marry Glendochart: Glendochart—there burst through Kirsteen's distressful thoughts a sudden picture of the old gentleman descending the side of the linn guided by her hand, the safe places selected for him; and then his little plunge, his slip, her cry, "Oh, Glendochart, you have hurt yourself!" and there burst from her in the midst of her trouble an irrepressible laugh, which rang into the roar of the linn and went down with it into the depths echoing among all the

rocks. Kirsteen had been ashamed to laugh when that accident happened for fear of hurting his feelings, but all the ludicrousness of the incident burst upon her now. He had got so red, poor old gentleman ! he had seized upon a thorn bush to pull him up, rather than take her hand. He had said that it was nothing, nothing, though her keen young senses, compunctious of their own perceptions, had seen how he limped up the bank again. She had not dared to offer her support any more than to laugh, seeing it hurt his feelings. And it was because he wanted to marry her, her—Kirsteen, troth-plighted to her own lad—and him as old as her father. Oh, for shame, for shame !

That laugh did Kirsteen good. It liberated her soul ; she escaped as from the hand of fate and became able to think. And then a wild anger swept over her mind against her father, who wanted nothing but to get her, as he said, off his hands, and against Glendochart for daring to think that she would take him, an old, old man. All the sense of

his kindness disappeared in this illumination as to his motives : indeed the more Kirsteen esteemed him before, the more she despised and hated him now. She thought of auld Robin Gray, but that was too good for him. The old, ill man, to tell her a story of faithfulness and make her cry and mix him up in her mind with Ronald and her own love, and then to betray her, and want to marry her,—doubly faithless, to her that died for him, and to Kirsteen that had wept for him ! It was for constancy and pity and true love that the girl had been so sorry, so touched in her heart, so wishful to please him and make him smile. And now to turn upon her, to try to tear her from her own lad, to make her man-sworn ! There was nothing that was too bad for him, the old, ill man ! Kirsteen saw herself stand before him indignant, her eyes flashing with injured honour and a sense of wrong.

But then suddenly all this sustaining force of anger went from her as Glendochart's kind and gentle face so full of feeling came before

her imagination. Oh, he knew better than that! If she could but speak to him, and tell him! perhaps show him that little blue Testament, whisper to him that there was One—away with his regiment, fighting for the King, like Glendochart himself, like the story he had told her! Tears filled Kirsteen's eyes. Her father might be dour and hard, but Glendochart would understand. It was just his own story; he would never let her break her heart and die on her wedding-day like his own lass. Oh, no! oh, no! he would never do that. He would never let it happen twice, and all for him. With a quick gleam of her imagination, Kirsteen saw herself in her white wedding-gown, lying at his feet, the second bride that had burst her heart! Oh, no! oh, no! Glendochart would never do that: the tears streamed from Kirsteen's eyes at the thought, but her quivering mouth smiled with generous confidence. No, no! She had only to speak to Glendochart and all would be well. .

But then came her father's threat, his

blazing fiery eyes, his hand clenched and shaken in her face, the fury of his outcry : “ I’ll just kill ye where ye stand—I’ll put you to the door.” Kirsteen remembered Anne, and her soul sank. Anne had a husband to take care of her, she had a house, wherever it was ; but Kirsteen would have nothing. And what would become of her if she were put to the door ? Where would she go to find a shelter ? Another grotesque vision—but not so grotesque to her imagination—of the poor beggar-woman with a meal-pack on her shoulder which her father had evoked, flitted before her mind. No, she would not be like that. She would take care of bairns, or keep a house, or even make muslin gowns like Miss Macnab. There were plenty of things she could do !—it would be long, long before she need come to the meal-pack. But then there burst over Kirsteen’s mind another revelation : the shame of it ! She, a Douglas—one of the old Douglasses, that had been the lords of the whole land, not only of poor Drumcarro—a gentlewoman of as good blood as the Duchess

or any grand lady, and one that could not be hidden or made to appear as if she were a common person! And the scandal of it, to open up the house and all its concerns to ill talk—to make it open to all the world to say that Drumcarro was an ill father, and the house a cruel house, or that the Douglas lassies were not what ladies should be, but lightheaded and ill-conducted, rebels against their own kith and kin. This was the most terrible thought of all. The others seemed to open up a way of escape, but this closed the door; it is an ill bird that files its own nest. How could Kirsteen do that? shame her family so that even Sandy and Nigil and Charlie and Donald in India, even little Robbie, should hear of it and think shame—so that *he* should hear that Kirsteen had let herself be talked about? so that Drumcarro should be lightly spoken of and all its secrets laid bare? This new suggestion brought back all the passion and the confusion that the influence of the air and the freedom out of doors, and the quiet time to think had calmed down

To endure is always possible if you set your heart to do it, whatever happens ; but to shame and to expose your own house !

“Where have ye been, Kirsteen ?” said Mrs. Douglas. “I never saw a person like you for running out when you’re most wanted. You should not take your walks in the forenoon when we’re all at work.”

“Did you want me, mother ? I was not fit to sit down to my work. I had a—buzzing in my head.”

“’Deed I think ye have always a buzzing in your head. Sometimes I speak to ye three times before ye answer me.”

“She’s uplifted with her prospects,” said Mary, “and no wonder. I think ye should excuse her this day.”

Mary intended to be very kind to Kirsteen. She had made up her mind to be a very frequent visitor at her sister’s house.

“Well, well,” said Mrs. Douglas, “that may be true enough ; but I think she might have come and told me the news herself, instead of letting me find it out through your father—

not that I had not judgment enough to see what was coming this many a day."

Kirsteen was still trembling with the results of her self-argument at the linn—which indeed had come to no result at all save the tremor in her frame and the agitation in her heart. She had knelt down by her mother's side to wind the wool for which it appeared Mrs. Douglas had been waiting, and she was not prepared with any reply.

"She doesn't seem to have much to say to us now, mother," said Mary.

"Kirsteen, you should not be so proud. You will be a finer lady than ever your mother was, with a carriage and horses of your own, and no doubt everything that heart can desire ; for an auld man is far more silly than a young one."

Kirsteen gave the wool a jerk which tangled it wildly. "Mother, I just wonder what you are all hawering about," she said.

"Kirsteen, I'm well used to rude speaking," cried the mother, ready to cry at a moment's notice ; "but not from my own bairns."

“Oh, mother, I beg your pardon. It was not you that was hivering. Dinna speak to me, for I cannot bear it. My heart is just like to break.”

“With pleasure?” said Mary in her soft tones.

Kirsteen darted a glance of fire at her calm sister, but turned nervously to her occupation again and answered nothing. She had enough to do with her yarn which, in sympathy with her confused thoughts, had twisted itself in every possible way and refused to be disentangled. Her mother remarked the tremor of her hands.

“Ye have got the hank into a terrible tangle, and what are ye trembling at, Kirsteen—is it the cold?”

“I’m not trembling, mother,” said Kirsteen.

“Do ye think I am blind or doited and cannot see? Na, I’m a weak woman, sore held down with many infirmities; but I’m thankful to say my eyes are as good as ever they were. Ye’re all trembling, Kirsteen; is it the cold?”

“ She has gotten her gown all wet, mother. She has been down by the linn, it’s no wonder she’s trembling. She ought to go and change her things.”

“ Are your feet wet, Kirsteen ? ”

“ Oh,” said Kirsteen springing to her feet, “ if ye would just let me alone ; I’m neither wet nor cold, but my heart’s like to break. I don’t know what I am doing for misery and trouble. If ye would only have peety upon me and let me alone ! ”

“ Dear Kirsteen, how can ye speak like that ? Where will ye get any person you can open your heart to like your mother ? Just tell me what’s wrong and that will ease your mind. What can Mary and me mean but what is for your good ? Eh, I never thought but what you would be pleased, and a blithe woman this bonny day.”

“ She’ll maybe open her mind best between you two, if I were away,” said Mary rising. She was really full of good feeling towards her sister, with no doubt an anticipation of good to come to herself, but yet a certain

amount of solid sympathy genuine enough of its kind.

“Now, Kirsteen, my bonny woman, just tell me what’s the maitter,” said Mrs. Douglas when Mary was gone.

“It seems you know what has happened, mother, and how can you ask me? Am I likely to be a blithe woman as ye say when it’s just been told me?”

“That a good man and a good house are waiting for ye, Kirsteen? And one that’s very fond of ye, and asks no better than to give ye all ye can desire?”

“That I’m to be turned out of the house,” cried Kirsteen; “that I’m no more to see your face; that I’m to go from door to door with a meal-pack like a beggar woman!”

“Whisht, whisht, and don’t speak nonsense: that will be some of your father’s joking. Whiles he says things that are hard to bear. What should bring all this upon ye, Kirsteen? You will be the Leddy of Glendochart and an honoured woman, holding your head as high as ainy in the whole

county, and silk gowns as many as ye desire, and coaches and horses ; and what ye'll like best of all, my bonny bairn, the power to be of real service and just a good angel to them that ye like best."

"O mother, mother," cried Kirsteen, burying her face in her mother's lap, "that is the worst of it all ! Oh, if ye have any peety don't say that to me !"

"But I must, for it's all true. Oh, Kirsteen, I hope I'm not a complaining woman ; but just you think what it would be to me to have my daughter's house from time to time to take shelter in. Many and many a time have I been advised change of air, but never got it, for who dared name it to your father ? I have been thinking this whole morning it would make me just a new woman. To get away for a while from this hole—for it's just a hole in the winter though it may be bonny at other times, and to see my bairn sitting like a queen, happy and respectit."

"Not happy, mother !"

'That's just your fancy, my dear. You

think he's old, but he's not really old, and as kind a face as ever I saw, and full of consideration, and not one that ever would say ye had too many of your own folk about ye, or that ye ought to forget your father's house. Oh, Kirsteen, it's very little a lassie knows : ye think of a bonny lad, a bright eye or a taking look, or a fine figure at the dancing, or the like of that. But who will tell ye if he may not be just a deevil in the house ? Who will tell ye that he may not just ding ye into a corner and shame ye before your bairns, or drive ye doited with his temper, or make your bed and your board a hell on earth ? Oh," cried poor Mrs. Douglas in accents of deep conviction, "it's little, little a lassie kens ! She thinks she will please her fancy, or she listens to a flattering tongue, or looks to a bonny outside. And all the time it's just meesery she's wedding, and not a bonny lad. But, Kirsteen," she said, giving a furtive little kiss to the rings of hair on Kirsteen's milk-white forehead, "Kirsteen, my bonny woman, when ye take a man that

everybody knows, that is just kent for a good man and a kind man, and one that loves the very ground you tread on, oh, my dear! what does it maitter that he's not just that young? Is it anything against him that he knows the world and has had trouble of his own, and understands what it is to get a bonny lass and a good bairn like you? And oh, Kirsteen, think what ye can do for us all if you take him, for your sisters and for the callants, he's just made the house a different thing already; and though that's scarcely worth the thinking of, for I'm very near my grave and will want nothing long,—Kirsteen, for me, too!—”

“Oh, mother, mother!” cried the girl with her face still hidden in her mother's lap, “ye just break my heart.”

“Na, na,” said Mrs. Douglas in soft quick tones like one who consoles a child, “we'll have no breaking of hearts. Ye will not be a month marriet before ye'll think there's no such a man in the world. And there's nothing he will deny ye, and from being of little

account ye'll be one of the first ladies in the country side. Whisht, whisht, my darling! Ye'll make him a happy man, and is not he worthy of it? Kirsteen! Rise up and dry your eyes. I hear your father coming. And dinna anger him, oh! dinna anger him, for he never minds what ill words he says!"

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. DOUGLAS retired to her room after dinner in a very tearful mood. She had made a great effort and she had not been successful, and all her hopes which had been gradually built up into a palace of delight came tumbling down about her ears. The only comfort she could feel now was in the source of her chief troubles. "Ye may say what you like to me," she cried as Kirsteen helped her to take off her cap and arrange herself comfortably upon her bed, "but your father will never put up with it. It would have been more natural in ye, Kirsteen, if ye had yielded to your mother, for well I wot ye'll have to yield to him, whether ye like it or no."

“ Oh, mother, I think ye might understand,” Kirsteen said.

“ Understand ! it’s easy enough to understand. Ye’ve got a silly notion in your head that ye cannot mairry an old man. - Better than you have done it before ye, and it would be a blessing to all your family, and maybe help me to live to see some of my boys come back. But na, ye will never think of that, of nothing but your own pleasure. And you’ll see what your father will say to you,” said Mrs. Douglas, with a vindictive satisfaction, while Kirsteen drew the coverlet over her and arranged the pillow for her head.

“ Are ye comfortable, mother ? ”

“ Oh, ay, as much as I can be, so little considered as I am. Ye need not wait. Put my stick within my reach, I’ll chap upon the floor if I want ye, or ye can send Mary if it’s too much trouble,” the angry mother said. She had been very tender up to this point, very anxious to show how entirely it was for everybody’s advantage that this step should be taken. But to spend your strength thus

upon an unconvinced and unyielding child is hard to bear, and Mrs. Douglas's disappointment had turned to wrath.

"Oh, mother," Kirsteen said with anguish, but the remonstrance met with no reply except a fretful "Go away!" She went down stairs very slowly and reluctantly to the parlour where Mary sat at the household mending, in all the placid superiority of one who is at peace with the world. She had rejected no one's advice. She had not crossed her father or her mother, or disappointed her family. When Kirsteen sat down and took her work, Mary looked at her and gave utterance to a faint "tshish, tshish" of mild animadversion, but for some time nothing was said. When the silence was broken it was by a question from Mary, "Ye'll not be expecting Glendochart to-day?"

"Me expecting him? I never expected him! He just came of his own will," Kirsteen cried, moved in her anger and wretchedness to a few hasty tears.

“Well, well, I’m saying nothing ; but I suppose he’s not expected, if that’s the right way.”

“I know nothing about it,” said Kirsteen : which indeed was not quite true.

“It was just to tell Marg’ret she need take no extra trouble about the scones. It’s been a great expense a visitor like that, especially when it comes to nothing : often to his dinner, and still oftener to his tea. And always new scones to be made, and jam on the table, and the boys partaking freely : for how could I tell Jock and Jamie before a stranger, ‘It’s no for you.’ And all to come to nothing !” said Mary, holding up her hands.

“What could it have come to ?” cried Kirsteen. “I think I will be just driven out of my senses between my mother and you.”

“Poor mother,” said Mary. “She had just set her heart upon it. It would have been a grand change to her to go and visit ye. It would have done her health good, but there are some that never think on such

things. I just wish it had been me that had got the chance."

"And so do I, with all my heart," cried Kirsteen, with a hot and angry blush. She felt however that there was something like a dishonesty, an irritating attempt to despoil her of something belonging to her in Mary's wish.

"I would have put myself in the background," said Mary. "I would not have thought whether I liked it or not. I would just have taken the man however old he had been. I would have said, it will be fine for my mother and a good thing for Kirsteen and all the bairns; and I would just have taken him and never said a word."

"That would have been pleasant for him—that you should take him for the sake of the family."

"He would have been none the wiser," said Mary composedly. "There would have been no necessity to tell him. And he would never have found it out. They say men are

very vain ; they just think ye are in love with them whether ye are or not. And I would have managed Glendochart fine. But it was not me that had the chance."

Kirsteen cast of gleam of mingled indignation and contempt at her sister, who went on diligently with her mending while she gave vent to these sentiments. Mary was fitting on a patch upon one of the boys' undergarments, carefully laying it by the thread. Her mending was famed in the family ; nobody made repairs so neatly. She spoke very softly, never lifting her eyes from the work, which indeed required all her attention. And there is a special power, especially for irritation, in the words of wisdom that are thus addressed to one without any lifting of the eyes.

"But that's just the way of the world," Mary said with a sigh. "The one that would do it, that would not think of herself, but just do it, is never the one that has it in her power. I've seen the same thing many a

time. The wilful one that will please herself, it is her that folk seek—”

Kirsteen's heart swelled high with mortification and pain. If there was anything that she had desired in her visionary moods it had been to sacrifice herself, to do some great thing for her mother, to be the saving of little Jeanie. She had made many a plan how to do this, how to perform prodigies for them, to deliver them from dangers. In her dreams she had saved both from fire and flood, from the burning house which fancy sacrificed lightly to give her the chance of a piece of heroism, or from the roaring stream when it ran to its highest, cutting off Drumcarro, which was a thing that had happened once. And now the smooth and smiling Mary, who would have thought of nobody in such a strait but herself, could reproach Kirsteen! And it was a true reproach. Here was the way, with no need to set the house on fire, or flood the country: here was a deliverance to be accomplished, that was within her power, that she could do so easily

with no trouble to any one save to him who was far away, who perhaps would never hear of it, who might have changed his mind and forgotten Kirsteen long before he heard of it. All the best part of her seemed to rise against Kirsteen, demanding of her this sacrifice. Oh, it was so easy to do it in your head, to make a sacrifice of everything when nothing was wanted!—but when the time came—

And as if this was not enough, little Jeanie came running after Kirsteen when the poor girl escaped and wandered out again towards the linn in hope of a little soothing from Nature—Jeanie stole her hand into Kirsteen's and rubbed her golden locks against her sister's sleeve, "When ye go to Glendochart take me with you," said Jeanie. "Oh, I would like to live in a grand house. I would like a powney to ride, and to play upon the harpsichord as my mother did when she was young. They say ye'll be very rich, Kirsteen, when you go with Glendochart."

“ But I will never go with Glendochart ! ”
Kirsteen cried.

“ Oh, will ye no ? And why will ye no, Kirsteen ? Will ye send him away ? Oh, you could never be so cruel as to do that ! Will he come here no more ?—and everything be just as it used to be ? Oh, Kirsteen ! ” cried Jeanie, “ I wish you would marry Glendochart !—I would if it was me. He is the kindest man in the whole world. He speaks to me as if he was—No, fathers are not kind like that. I like him, Kirsteen, I am awfu’ fond of him ; and so is Jock and Jamie—Oh, I wish ye would change your mind ! ”

“ But, Jeanie, ye would not wish me to be meeserable,” cried poor Kirsteen.

“ No,” said Jeanie—but she added with youthful philosophy, “ you wouldna be meeserable when me and the rest were so happy. And it is us that will be meeserable if you send him away that has been so good to us all. And how would ye like that ? ”

Jeanie's small voice became almost stern as she asked the question, "How would ye like that?—to make all the rest meeserable—when the alternative was nothing more than being meeserable yourself?" Kirsteen had nothing to say against that logic. She told Jeanie to run to a certain drawer where she would find some oranges and share them with the boys. They were Glendochart's oranges like everything pleasant in the house. And he was the kindest man in the world. And he would be miserable too as well as her mother and Jeanie and the laddies. "Oh, poor Kirsteen, with all her best feelings turning traitors to her! would it not be far easier to consent and make them all happy, and just be miserable herself?"

But she was not to be left free even now. Before she had got to the side of the linn, to be deafened with the roar and drenched with the spray, which were the only things she could think of in which any solace was, Marg'ret coming round the back of the house

interrupted her on her way. "Where are ye going, down by the linn to get your death of cold and maybe an accident into the bargain? You have nothing upon your head, and no gloves on your arms, and the grass is drookit. No, my bonny lamb, ye must not go there."

"Let me be, Marg'ret. What do I care! If I get my death it will be all the better; but I'll no get my death."

"Lord, save us, to hear her speak! Ye'll no get your death,—it's just a figure of speech; but ye may get the cauld or a sair throat, or something that will settle on your chest, and that's as bad. What for would ye go and tempt Providence? Come into my bonny kitchen that is all redd up and like a new pin, and get a good warm."

"Neither warm nor cold is of any consequence to me," said Kirsteen, "if folk would just leave me alone."

"What's the maitter with my bonny doo? Many a time you've come to Marg'ret with your trouble and we've found a way out of it."

“ I see no way out of it,” said Kirsteen. She had reached that point of young despair when comfort or consolation is an additional aggravation of the evil. She preferred to be told that everything was over, and that there was no hope.

“ Ye may tell me a’ the same,” said Marg’ret, putting her arm round her nursling and drawing her close. “ It’s about auld Glendochart, that’s plain for all the world to see.”

“ You call him auld Glendochart,” cried Kirsteen.

“ Weel, and what would I call him ? He’s auld compared to the like of you. He’s no blate to come here with his grey pow and choose the best of the flock. But dinna break your heart for that, Kirsteen. Ye must say to him that ye canna have him. He will take a telling. A man of that age he kens moost things in this world. He will just mount his horse again, and ride away.”

“ It’s easy speaking,” cried Kirsteen, “ but

it's me that dare not say a word. For my father is just redweed, and will have it, Marg'ret. And my mother, she wants it too. And all of them they are upon me because I cannot consent : for oh, I cannot consent !—whatever folk may think or say, it's just this, that I cannot do it. I would sooner die."

"There is nobody that will force you," said Marg'ret. "Dinna lose heart, my bonny bairn. The laird himself is very fierce sometimes, but his bark is worse than his bite. Na, na, ye must just keep up your heart. Glendochart will soon see, he will let nobody force ye. Things like that never come to pass noo. They're just a relic of the auld times. Maybe the auld Douglasses that we hear so much about, that had the rights of fire and sword, and dark towers and dungeons to shut ye up in, might have done it. But where would he shut ye up here? There's no a lock to any room door in this house!" Marg'ret's laugh had a cheerful sound in the

air, it broke the spell. "Your father may want to frighten you, and bring ye to his will—but he will do nae mair; and as for the mistress, she will reproach ye for a day and then it'll be a' done."

Kirsteen was obliged to confess that there was something in this. Her mother had been in despair for twenty-four hours, and "just her ordinary" the day after on many previous occasions. It might all "blow over" as Marg'ret said, especially if Glendochart should see with his own eyes how little disposed was the bride whom the family were so anxious to put into his arms. No doubt his feelings would be hurt, which was a thing Kirsteen did not like to think of. But somebody must suffer it was clear, and if so, perhaps it was better that it should be Glendochart who was an old man, and no doubt used to it, and who was also a rich man, and could go away and divert himself as Marg'ret suggested.

Marg'ret was of opinion that though it

might hurt his feelings it was not likely at his age that it would break his heart. For hearts are more fragile at twenty than at sixty—at least in that way.

CHAPTER XV.

MARG'RET had said with truth that the troubles of her young favourite had often been smoothed away after a consultation with herself. The best of us have our weak points, and the excellent Marg'ret was perhaps a little vain of the faculty of "seeing a way out of it," which she believed herself to possess. She had seen a way out of it in many family tribulations which had a way of appearing less desperate when she took them in hand. And her last grand success in respect to the ball at the Castle had no doubt added to her confidence in herself. But after having turned it over in her mind for the best part of the night Marg'ret found that even her courage did not sustain her when she thought

of confronting Drumcarro and requiring of him that he should give up the marriage on which he had evidently set his heart. Marg'ret was conscious that she was herself partly to blame : had she not set before him in the famous argument about the ball the fact that in no other way was there any likelihood of finding "a man" for either of his daughters ? Alas, the man had been too easy to find, and how was she to confront him now and bid him let go his prize ? Marg'ret's heart sank, though it was not given to sinking. She lay awake half the night turning it over and over in her mind, first representing to herself under every light the possible argument with Drumcarro and what he would say, and what she would say. She heard herself remonstrating, "Sir, ye canna force your ain bairn, to make her meeserable," and the response, "What the deevil have you to do with it, if I make her meeserable or no ?" She had been *dans son droit* when she had interfered about the muslin gowns and the ball, and the necessity

of letting the young ladies be seen in the world—but who was she to meddle with a marriage when everybody was pleased but just the poor lassie herself? A poor lassie will change her mind as Marg'ret knew, and will sometimes be very thankful to those who opposed her foolish youth, and made her do what turned out to be so good for her. There was nothing so little to be calculated upon, as the sentiments of a girl whose position would be unspeakably improved by marriage, and whose silly bits of feeling might change at any moment. It is true that Kirsteen was not silly but full of sense far beyond her years. But even she might change her mind, and who could doubt that Drumcarro's daughter would be far better off as Glendochart's wife?

All this “dautoned” Marg'ret as she would herself have said. She began even to glide away from her conviction that the master must be wrong. This is a fine working sentiment, and helps to surmount many difficulties, but when a reasonable soul is smitten

by hesitation and feels that it is possible for even a habitual wrongdoer to be for once in the right, it takes the strength out of all effort. Finding herself less and less likely to be able with any comfort to object, Marg'ret began instinctively to turn to the other side of the question; and she found there was a great deal to be said on that other side. Glendochart was old—but after all he was not so dreadfully old, not in the stage of extreme age, as Kirsteen supposed. He was a “personable man.” He would give his young wife everything that heart of woman (in Argyllshire) could desire. She would have a carriage to drive about in and a saddle-horse to ride. She would get a spinet, or a harpsichord, or the new-fangled thing that was called a piany to play upon if she pleased; and as many books as she could set her face to; and maybe a sight of London and the King's court, “decent man! if he were but weel again,” said Marg'ret to herself, for the name of the Prince Regent was not in good odour. All this would be Kirsteen's if she

could but just get over that feeling about the old man. And after all Marg'ret went on, reasoning herself into a more and more perfect adoption of the only practicable side, he was not such an old man. Two or three years younger than Drumcarro—and Drumcarro had life enough in him, just a very born devil as fierce as ever he was. They would be bold that would call the laird an old man, and Glendochart was three at least, maybe five years younger. Not an old man at all—just a little over his prime ; and a well-made personable man, doing everything that the youngest did, riding every day and out stalking on the hills in the season, and hurling, as Kirsteen herself had allowed, with the best. When everything was done and said what should hinder her to take Glendochart ? He was a far finer gentleman than anybody that Kirsteen was likely to meet with. He was a good man, everybody said. He was what you might call a near kinsman of the Duke's, not more than four or five times removed. She would be in the best of company at Glendochart, invited out

to dinner, and to all the diversions that were going. What could a lassie want more? Marg'ret woke in the morning in a great hurry, having overslept herself after a wakeful night, with the same conviction in her mind which was so strongly impressed upon all the others. It was just for everybody's advantage that Kirsteen should marry Glendochart, and for her own most of all.

Kirsteen herself had been much calmed and invigorated by her consultation with Marg'ret. That authority had made so little of the obstacles and the dangers, as if it would be the easiest thing in the world to shake off Glendochart, and convince Drumcarro that nothing could be done. For the moment Kirsteen's heart rose. She was accustomed to put great trust in Mar'gret, to see her cheerful assurances more or less justified. Many a storm had blown over which had filled the girl with terror, but which Marg'ret had undertaken should come to nothing. And if that was what Marg'ret thought now, all might be well. That day Kirsteen bore her-

self with great courage, getting back her colour, and singing about the house as was her wont, though it was only by a great effort that she dismissed the foreboding from her heart. And this brave front she kept up heroically during the greater part of the week of Glendochart's absence, finding her best help in silence and a determined avoidance of the subject—but the courage oozed out at her finger tips as the days stole away. They seemed to go like conspirators one by one bringing her near the dreadful moment which she could not avoid. It had been on Thursday that her father had spoken to her, and now the week had gone all but a day. Kirsteen had just realized this with a sick fluttering at her heart, as she stood at the door watching the ruddy colours of the sunset die out of the heavens. Something of the feeling of the condemned who watches his last sun setting had come into her mind in spite of herself: what might have happened to her before to-morrow? Would her father's curse be on her, or the still heavier malison

of a creature mansworn, false to her dearest vow?

While she was thus musing, all her fictitious courage forsaking her, she felt herself suddenly and roughly caught by the arm from behind. "Well," said her father, "are ye thinking what ye'll say to your joe? He's to be here to-morrow to his dinner, and he'll expect to find all settled. Have ye fixed with your mother about the day?"

"Father," cried Kirsteen in a wild sudden panic, "you know what I said to ye. There's no day to be settled. I will tell him I cannot do it. I cannot do it. There's no question about a day."

He swung her round with that iron grasp upon her arm so that she faced him. His fierce eyes blazed upon her with a red light from under his heavy eyelids. "Dare to say a word but what I tell ye, and I'll dash ye—in pieces like a potter's vessel!" cried Drumcarro, taking the first similitude that occurred to him. He shook her as he spoke, her frame, though it was well-knit and vigorous,

quivering in his grasp. "Just say a word more of your damned nonsense and I'll lay ye at my feet!"

Kirsteen's heart fluttered to her throat with a sickening terror ; but she looked him in the face with what steadiness she could command, and a dumb resolution. The threat gave her back a sense of something unconquerable in her, although every limb shook.

"Ye'll see Glendochart when he comes—in my presence—ye'll have the day fixed and all put in order. Or if ye want to appear like a woman and not a petted bairn before your man that is to be, you'll settle it yourself. I give you full liberty if you'll behave yourself. But hearken," he said, giving her another shake, "I'll have no confounded nonsense. If ye go against me in a strange man's presence and expose the family, I will just strike ye down at my feet, let what will come of it. Do you hear what I say?"

"He will not let you strike me," she cried in terror, yet defiance.

“Ye’ll be at my feet before he has the chance,” cried Drumcarro. “And who’s will be the wyte if your father, the last of the Douglasses, should be dragged to a jail for you? If ye expose my family to scorn and shame, I’ll do it more. Do you hear me? Now go and settle it with your mother,” he said, suddenly letting her go. Kirsteen, thrown backward by the unexpected liberation, fell back with a dizzying shock against the lintel of the door. She lay against it for a moment sick and giddy, the light fading from her eyes; and for a minute or two Kirsteen thought she was going to die. It is a conviction that comes easily at such a crisis. It seemed to the girl so much the best way out of it, just to be done with it all.

“The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To bring repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom—”

Poor Kirsteen had no guilt, nor had she any clear apprehension what this meant, or

what guilt it was—it might have been only the guilt of disobedience, the shame of exposing the family for anything she knew ; but the words flashed through her mind in her half-faint, lying speechless against the door. It would bring repentance to them all and wring their bosoms—it would save the shame of a disturbance and the dreadful sight of a struggle between father and daughter. The only art—just to die.

He had said, “Go to your mother.” This came vaguely back to her mind as she came to herself. Her mother—no, her mother would say just the same, they would all say the same. She had no one to go to. Then Kirsteen’s gradually quickening senses heard something which sounded like an approaching footstep. She roused herself in a moment, and still sick and faint, with a singing in her ears, turned and fled—not to her mother, to Marg’ret in the kitchen, who was her only hope.

The kitchen was, as Marg’ret had said “like a new pin” at that hour, all clean and

bright, the fire made up, the hearth swept, the traces of dinner all cleared away. It was the moment when Marg'ret could sit down to needlework or spell out some old, old newspaper which even the minister had done with; her assistant Merran was out in the byre looking after the kye, and Marg'ret was alone. When Kirsteen rushed in unsteadily and threw herself down in the big wooden chair by the fireside, Marg'ret was threading a needle which was a work of patience. But this sudden invasion distracted her completely and made her lay down both thread and needle with a sigh.

“My bonny woman! What is the matter now?”

“Marg'ret, I nearly fainted standing against the door.”

“Fainted! bless the bairn! na, na, no so bad as that. Your head's cool and so is your hand. What was it, Kirsteen?”

“Or nearly died would be more like it, and that would maybe have been the best.’ And then with moist eyes fixed upon her

anxious companion and a tremulous smile about her mouth Kirsteen repeated her verse—

“The only art her guilt to cover,
To hide her shame from every eye,
To bring repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom—is to die.”

“Kirsteen! what is that you are saying?” cried Marg’ret, a sudden flush showing even upon her ruddy colour. “Guilt and shame! What have those dreadfu’ things to do with you?”

“I am disobeying both father and mother,” said the girl solemnly, “isna that guilt? And oh, it’s shaming all belonging to me to stand against them; but I canna help it, I canna help it. Oh, Marg’ret, hide me from him, find me a place to go to! What will I do! what will I do!”

“My dear, my dear!” said Marg’ret, “you make my heart sair. What can I say to you? I have ever taken your pairt as you ken weel—but oh, my bonny woman, I canna but think you’re a little unreasonable.

What ails you at Glendochart ? He's a good man and an honourable man, and it would please everybody. To think so much of his age when there's no other objection is not like you that had always such sense. And ye would be far happier, Kirsteen, in a house of your own. Because there's white on his head is that a cause to turn your heart from a good man ? ”

Kirsteen said nothing for a moment : she looked with wistful eyes and a faint smile in Marg'ret's face, shaking her head ; then suddenly rising up went away out of the kitchen, hurrying as much as her limbs, still feeble with the late shock and struggle, would let her. Marg'ret stood aghast while her hurried irregular step was audible going up stairs.

“ Now I have just angered her,” said Marg'ret to herself, “ and cast back her bit heart upon herself, and made her feel she has no true friend. Will I go after her,—or will I wait till she comes back ? ”

This question was settled for her as she

stood listening and uncertain, by the sound of Kirsteen's return. Marg'ret listened eagerly while she came down stairs again step by step. She came into the kitchen with the same vague deprecating smile upon her face. She had a little Testament in its blue boards in her hand. She said nothing, but opening it held out to her faithful adviser the fly-leaf upon which there stood the initials together of R. D. and C. D., connected with the feeble pencilling of the runic knot. Kirsteen said not a word, but held it out open, pointing to this simple symbol with her other hand. "R. D.," said Marg'ret, "wha' is that? C. D., that will just stand for yourself. It's not one of Robbie's books—it's—it's—Oh!" she cried with sudden enlightenment, "now I understand!"

Kirsteen put the little page solemnly to her trembling lips, a tear almost dropped upon it, but she shut the book quickly that no stain should come upon it, even of a tear. She did not say a word during this little tender revelation of her heart, but turned her

eyes and her faint propitiatory smile to Marg'ret as if there was no more to be said.

“And this has been in your heart all the time!” cried Marg'ret, drying her eyes with her apron. “I thought of that, twa-three times. There was something in his look yon day he gaed away, but I never said a word, for who can tell? And this was in your heart a' the time?”

“He said, ‘Will ye wait till I come back?’ and I said, ‘That I will!’” said Kirsteen, but very softly, the sweetness of the recollection coming back to soothe her in the midst of all the pain.

“And that's how they've tied their lives, thae young things!” said Marg'ret also with a kind of solemnity. “A word spoken that is done in a moment, and after that—a' thae long and weary years—and maybe for all they ken never to see ilk ither again.”

“And if it should be so,” said Kirsteen, “it would just be for death instead of life, and all the same.”

“ Oh, weel I ken that,” said Marg’ret shaking her head. She made a pause, and then she added hurriedly, “ What’s to be done with you, lassie? If Glendochart’s coming the morn to mairry ye there’s no time to be lost.”

“ Marg’ret, I will just go away.”

“ Where will ye go to? It’s easy speaking : a creature like you cannot travel the countryside like a servant lass going to a new place. And ye’ve nae friends that will take such a charge. Miss Eelen would be frightened out of her wits. I know nobody that will help you but Glendochart himself—and you couldna go to him.”

“ What is that letter on the table, Marg’ret, and who is it from?”

“ The letter? What’s in the letter? Can ye think of that at sic a moment? It’s a letter from my sister Jean.”

“ Marg’ret, that’s just where I am going! I see it all in a flash like lightning. I am going to London to your sister Jean.”

“The bairn is clean out of her senses!” cried Marg’ret almost with a scream.

And then they stood and looked at each other for a long rapid minute, interchanging volumes in the silent meeting of their eyes. Kirsteen had sprung in a moment from the agitated creature who had come to Marg’ret to be hidden, to be sheltered, not knowing what could be done with her, to the quick-witted, high-spirited girl she was by nature, alive with purpose and strong intuition, fearing nothing. And Marg’ret read all this new world of meaning in the girl’s eyes more surely than words could have told her. She saw the sudden flash of the resolution, the clearing away of all clouds, the rise of the natural courage, the Kirsteen of old whom nothing could “dauton” coming back. “Oh, my lamb!” she breathed under her breath.

“There’s not a moment to be lost,” said Kirsteen, “for I must go in the morning before anybody is up. And ye must not tell a living creature but keep my secret, Marg’ret. For go I must, there is no other thing to do.

And maybe I will never come back. My father will never forgive me. I will be like Anne cut off from the family. But go I must, for no more can I bide here. Give me the letter from your sister to let her see it's me when I get there. And give me your blessing, Marg'ret—it's all the blessing I will get. And let me go !”

“ Not to-night, Kirsteen !”

“ No, not to-night ; but early—early in the morning before daylight. Dinna say a word—not a word. It's all clear before me. I'll be at nobody's charges, I'll fend for myself ; and your sister Jean will show me the way.”

There was another silence during which Kirsteen, quite regardless of the rights of propriety which existed no more between Marg'ret and herself than between mother and daughter, took possession of Miss Jean Brown's letter, while Marg'ret stood reflecting, entirely alarmed by the revelation made to her, and by the sudden re-birth of the vehement young creature who had been for a time so subdued and broken down by her

first contest with the world. To keep Kirsteen back was, in the circumstances and with the strong convictions of the Scotch serving woman as to the force of a troth-plight and the binding character of a vow, impossible. But to let her go thus unfriended, unaided, alone into an unknown world, far more unknown to Marg'ret than the ends of the earth would be to her representative now, was something more than could be borne. She suddenly exclaimed in a sharp tone with a cruel hope: "And where are ye to get the siller? It's mad and mad enough any way, but madder still without a penny in your pocket. How are ye to get to London without money? It's just impossible."

"I can walk, others have done it before me. I'm well and strong and a grand walker," said Kirsteen, but not till after a pause of consternation, this consideration not having crossed her mind before.

"Walk! it's just hundreds of miles, and takes a week in the coach," cried Marg'ret. "Ye cannot walk, no to say ye would want

money even then, for I'm no supposing that you mean to beg your bread from door to door. Without money ye canna go a step. I'll not permit it. Have ye anything of your ain?"

"I have the gold guinea my grandmother left me in her will; but I have no more. How should I have any more?"

Marg'ret stood for a moment undecided, while Kirsteen waited a little eager, a little expectant like a child. It did not occur to her to deprecate help from Marg'ret as a more high-minded heroine might have done. Marg'ret was a little Providence at Drumcarro. She had store of everything that the children wanted, and had been their resource all their lives. And Kirsteen had not realized the difference between money and other indispensable things. She waited like a child, following Marg'ret with her eyes until some expedient should be thought of. She breathed a sigh of suspense yet expectation when Marg'ret hurried away to her bedroom at the back of the house, seating herself again in the

big chair to wait, not impatiently, for the solution of the problem. Marg'ret came back after a few minutes with a work-box in her hand. All kinds of things had come out of that box in the experience of the children at Drumcarro, things good and evil, little packets of powders for childish maladies, sweeties to be taken after the nauseous mouthful, needles and thimbles and scissors when these needful implements had all been lost, as happened periodically, even a ribbon or a pair of gloves in times of direst need. She began to turn over the well-remembered contents—old buttons, hooks and eyes from old gowns long departed, Marg'ret's two brooches that formed all her jewellery, wrapped up in separate pieces of paper. "My sister Jean," said Marg'ret with her head bent over the box, "has often bidden me to come and see her in London town. You ken why I couldna go. I couldna thole to leave you that are leavin' me without a tear. And she sent me what would do for my chairges. It was never touched by me. It

took me a great deal of trouble to get Scotch notes for it, and here it is at the bottom of my box with many an auld relic on the top of it—just a' I'll have of ye when ye've got your will," said Marg'ret, a tear dropping among the miscellaneous articles in the box. She took from the bottom a little parcel in an old letter, folded square and written closely to the very edge of the seal. "Hae! take it! and ye maun just do with it what pleasures yoursel'," Marg'ret cried.

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