

# LILLIESLEAF:

BEING A CONCLUDING SERIES

OF

PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF

MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND,

OF SUNNYSIDE.

WRITTEN BY HERSELF.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# LILLIESLEAF.



## CHAPTER I.

“AY, Aunt Margaret,” said my niece Mary to me, as she rose from where she was sitting by me, and went to get some work out of her little table, with a heavy sigh, “ay, Aunt Margaret, these were but the troubles of our youth, and it is life we have come to now.”

And I did not say a word to her, though my heart was sore for my dear bairn. When the troubles of youth were upon my niece Mary, I would have had no peace till she had trusted them to me; but now I durst but

look at her, and sigh a weary sigh, that was scarce as bitter as her own. She was a married wife, and the mother of four bairns. There were troubles in her lot, that I might not put my hand into. We kept silence, her and me, with our hearts heavy within us, and syne began to speak of other folk, and things that moved us not.

Now it is not in my heart to think that stranger folk can mind what plain stories I once telled about my niece Mary, and my own bairn Grace, and the bits of struggles the young things had before they were married, when their fortune (so to speak, as the world speaks, but never forgetting the Lord's kind hand in Providence, that has been ever bountiful to me and mine) was in their own hands, and all their lives before them; and it will not take me long to tell who Mary Maitland was. She was my brother Claud's one daughter, come of a godly house and

name, and she was married upon Allan Elphinstone, of Lilliesleaf, a young gentleman of the country, well esteemed in this world, of an honourable family, and a good estate. Divers doubts and troubles had come before the two were married, but at last their hands were joined together in the fullness of hope. It was now ten years since that time, and four bairns had come into the house, every one bonnier than the other. Cosmo, that was called after his father's father—Claud, my brother's name-son; and little Mary and Susan; also there were other two, sweetest of all to my Mary's heart, and they were in heaven.

For me I kent but little for my own hand, of what my dear bairn meant when she said Life. The troubles of youth were known to me, and I had lost my father and my mother, but that was nigh upon thirty years ago, and I had been long at rest. If I fathomed what

Mary meant, it was only because she herself was in my very heart—for Sunnyside had ever been a most quiet habitation, and Oakenshaw, where my bairn Grace was dwelling, was scarce less peaceful, though it might be more blythe than my own house; which, maybe, was one reason that I kept silence, and did not say even to old Mrs. Elphinstone that Mary was white and worn, and looked not like herself. But Lilliesleaf was a great house, and there were many servants in it, and to rule it well cost care—and my niece Mary, though ever a gentlewoman, had been, as it was right, used to quiet ways in the Manse, her father's house, and was, doubtless, the more encumbered with her daily burdens here; and the mother of bairns has ever cares upon her head; and, truly, I marvel at myself that I should make a wonder about it, as if my dear bairn needed to have some secret grief upon her spirit, when, doubtless, it was only

the sober mind that became a woman, guiding her house and her servants well.

We were sitting in a pleasant parlour, where Mary aye sat in the mornings, where all the furnishing was plain, and did not need to be taken care of, and where the bairns might come at their will. The windows were towards the east, and the outlook was very bright and lightsome from one of them, where the trees were thinned, and you could see a far way, past the very outer gate of Lilliesleaf, to where the roofs of the cottages at the Knowe were shining in the sun; they were mostly red tiled, and they made a glow in the light, glinting through the green trees; and the view was aye warm and kindly to me for their sakes. Summer and winter, Mary had her seat in this window; Mr. Allan, I minded well, had caused build these bits of houses before he was married upon my dear bairn, and the place had been called

Mary's Knowe. It might be that *that* was the cause why Mary favoured it—though I have also seen her turn her chair about, so that she might not see them, with her old spark of anger in her eye—for Mary was not to call a subdued woman, but had some of her old temper about her still.

A very big and soft easy chair with pillows in it stood aye by the fireside in this room, and here old Mrs. Elphinstone sat when she was able to come down the stair, early in the day. She was not here this morning, and it was a bonnie spring morning, sunny and blythe, and we had let out the fire. I was stitching white linen collars for the bairns, and Mary was busy at something, for I do not very well mind what it was. I had only come to Lilliesleaf the day before, and her and me had got but little time for our own cracks till now.

“And, my dear,” said I, “Grace would



very fain have you and the bairns to see her yonder. She whiles complains to me how you two are parted, and wonders if she would be as much taken up as you, if she had as many bairns."

"The bairns make a great difference, aunt," said Mary with a little faint smile that came and was gone in a moment. "I have always something to do for them."

"But many a poor man's wife has everything to do for them, Mary," said I, half meaning to reprove her; for surely the Laird of Lilliesleaf's wife had little occasion to complain of what she had to do.

"Ay, aunt," said Mary, and she looked up into my face with a strange smile, that was not what I liked to see. "Do you know I think I would have made a very good poor man's wife, aunt," she said, trying to be blythe, "that was what I was intended for—to take care of all my

curly heads in one of the cottages on the Knowe."

"My dear, Providence kent best what you were intended for," said I. "Is Mrs. Elphinstone very frail, Mary? she's very sore failed since I saw her last."

"She is just like the rest of us, aunt," said Mary, "she has begun to trouble her mind, and she is not young enough, nor strong enough to bear much thinking, and care frets her spirit and disturbs it. I see you will not ask me what care she can have," said Mary, glancing up at me with the colour rising on her brow, "and I thank you for it, aunt; but she is disturbed because she thinks that Allan—because she supposes *we* are exceeding our means. Well, it is serious enough if it should be so. That is what troubles Mrs. Elphinstone, aunt."

"And yet she tells me you are such a grand manager, Mary," said I; for the

moment I did not understand the bairn.

Mary laughed and turned away ; she made me no answer, and I was not long before I came to see the truth, and asked no more questions about that.

“ But, my dear, its a comfort to me to see your mother,” said I, “ she never was bonnier to me in all her days.”

“ Oh, Aunt Margaret, is she not too bonnie ?” cried Mary, coming back to me so quick that I was taken by surprise. “ I dare not think of that. I nurse Mrs. Elphinstone, and I leave my own mother to strangers, and it makes me crazy to think of it. Oh, aunt, aunt, do not go away !”

“ My dear bairn,” said I, “ wherefore are you troubled ? You are doing what God has put in your hands. Mary, Mary, is this like you ?”

“ Yes, aunt,” said Mary, drying her wet

cheeks, and lifting up her face from the table, where she had leant it upon my hands ; “ indeed it is very like me ; everything that is impatient and unreasonable is like me ;—but nobody ever sees it. I have only betrayed myself to you, and I will promise to be good, like little Susie, and never do it again. But tell me about my mother, aunt ? Do you think she is as strong as she was ? Do you think she is well ? Don’t deceive me, Aunt Margaret ; but if you can, say there is nothing to fear.”

“ My dear, if anything ails my sister Mary, it is seeing you look white and dwining ; there is nothing else,” said I.

“ Then, I will look well, aunt,” said Mary, in an eager voice, “ you may be quite sure I will look well. My mother, surely, is not anxious about me—why should she ? You see, aunt, how very well and comfortable I am.”

My poor bairn! my poor Mary! and with the quiver in her lip, and the tear in her eye, and the flutter and trouble in her face, she insisted with me how well she was. I said not a word, except to quiet her; but, truly, my heart was very sore.

From her earliest days, my niece Mary was of a quick and wayward spirit, and out of her griefs and her troubles, the bairn had come unchanged. But we were both blythe when the door opened, and all the bairns came in, dancing and jumping over one another, and a very decent woman with them, that was their maid. And every one had its own story to tell; and truly it was a pleasant sight to me, to see the wee things crowding about my bairn, and to think that they would arise and call her blessed, when they were of years to ken what a good mother was.

“But Claud broke Susie’s doll, mamma,”

said little Mary, who was an uncommon serious bairn; "and I said I would tell you, because it was wrong. Mamma, I said Claud might break his ain drum, but he should not break Susie's doll."

"But he said he was very sorry," said little Susie, shaking her head.

And these were the common ways of the two little woman bairns—the one with her bit serious face, because it was wrong; the other sweet thing with a tear in her eye, and aye an excuse in her mouth. Susie was but an infant when I was last at Lilliesleaf, and my heart yearned to the bairn, now.

"Mamma, may we go to the Manse?" said Claud. "Robie was to make me a wheel for my mill. I didna want to break Susie's doll, I wanted to see how it was made."

"Mamma, I want my pony," cried Cosmo, and because the laddie was older and

stronger than the rest, and had a bigger voice, I could not help but start and turn around to look at him, "and they will not do what I bid them, because papa is going to the Castle, and they're all waiting on him. Will you order Findlay to get me my pony, mamma?"

Such a bold boy he was! but he was over bold for a bairn; though, when I looked upon his shining e'en, and his flushed face, and the manly look he had, I scarce could wonder that Mary was slow to see him wrong. When Cosmo spoke, she stopped from answering the other bairns, and when he said the Castle, there came a red glow over her brow, and syne, it faded to the saddest whiteness I ever saw. She had to stop to take breath before she spoke.

"You shall have your pony, Cosmo," she said, in a quiet tone, but one in the which I was sore afraid the very bairns, as well as me,

could read the quietness of indignation, and pain, and offence that were scarce to be controlled, "and you shall all drive over to the Manse, little ones, with Aunt Margaret and me; but you must not trouble me any more just now. Stay here, all of you, till I come back."

And she went away, and left me and the servant-woman, the bairn's maid, looking at each other. I began in a great hurry, whenever Mary was gone, to ask questions about one and another of the family, that the maid might not think I had any doubts in my mind about what her mistress meant. But I saw in her face that she kent all was not well. I read it in the wistful looks of the little things, and the bold face of Cosmo, that was more witting than face of bairn should be. My Mary, my simple-hearted bairn! what was this that had come upon her.

When she came back, I was mostly what



you might call disappointed—such selfish folk are we!—to see that there was no vexation on her face, but only her ordinary look. And she said, Mr. Allan was away with Lord Burrowstoun and some strangers that were at the Castle, and would, maybe, not be at home again this day. “So we will go away to the Manse and see my father and my mother, Aunt Margaret,” said Mary, with a quiver of her lips, and a sigh that she did not want me to hear. “And Cosmo will ride all the way beside us, and be our cavalier; and everybody will smile to see us in the Manse—every one: we always carry pleasure *there*.”

I wished, and yet I feared to know what Mary might mean; but I asked not a single question. She told me Mrs. Elphinstone was keeping her ain room, but would be down at night. And I was blythe to give my consent to go to the Manse; and we had the carriage brought, and all the bairns put in it, and

Cosmo on his pony waiting, as proud and glad as a boy could be. But wherefore did both his mother and me turn back to look at Lilliesleaf? For my own part, indeed, I cannot tell.

## CHAPTER II.

IT was as sweet a spring day as ever I saw ; and sure am I, I never went upon the road in sweeter company. The trees were beginning to loose out their young leaves from the bud, and the horse-chesnut boughs were rich above us, with their big leaves half folded, and no a sign of blossom, except here and there on the sunniest branch of all. It was early May, and the very air was sweet, and when I looked upon the three bonnie bairns in the carriage beside me,

and minded where I was going, and lookit out upon this road I kent so well, I could not keep my heart from rising. Truly, I am a woman in years, and have kent tribulation ; but I seldom can refuse to be blythe when spring is about me, and bairns by my side.

But, when I looked to Mary, I could not but catch a shadow of the cloud that was upon her face. Though Susie's bonnie hand was holding her, and all their blythe voices round, Mary's brow was knitted, and her eyes were travelling along a turn of the road. What she saw there in her spirit, I cannot tell. There was nought to be seen by me but the sunshine lying upon the path, and the shadows of the trees ; but it was the road to the Castle, where, may be, Mr. Allan was not long past, and woes me but she had little pleasure in it, if that was what she thought.

But I was blythe to see what a pleasure

it was to all the bairns to go to the Manse, from Cosmo, prancing on his brisk little pony, to Susie that aye nestled like a birdie between her mamma and me. The new Manse was well placed for seeing the country, and they saw us coming for long before we got there; so that Mary, my sister, and the minister, and Robie, the minister's man, and one of the maids, forbye, were all waiting at the door; and truly it was a jubilee. It seemed to me, as if the house was lying sleeping all its life, but just when Mary and the bairns came; but at sight of them it wakened up, and was like itself again. They were dwelling their lane, as in the first days of their youth, my brother and my sister. Their hopes had come to pass, and were departed from them. Their bairns had entered into their own life; and truly, it is but a sad thing for the father and the mother of a bonnie family to look forward

to, that in the natural course of time, the young things will all depart from them, and the nursing birds be left their lane.

The very maids were moved as if it was a ploy; and there was a tray set already in the parlour, with fine scones and butter of Bessie's own making, and more than one kind of jam for pieces to the bairns; and it is many a long day since I have seen Mary, my sister, look so like herself. "Now," said she, "if we had but Claud, and Grace, and little Maggie here;" and, for myself, I was very nigh being jealous, that the little bairn at Oakenshaw, my Grace's one child, would be forgotten among the family of Lilliesleaf. Mary, my niece, threw off her shawl and her bonnet, and sat down with a dreary look, that every one of us old folk took note of; and when her mother came to ask how she was, she first said she was very well, and then that she was no very well,

and then she laughed, and looked at me.

“ I like to complain, when I come home, aunt,” said Mary, “ even though it makes my mother anxious. I like to be ill, and to be petted and taken care of, and to mind that I was once young. Mother, indeed, I am quite well—it is only for the pleasure of having your hand about me, that I pretend to complain.”

I did not hear what Mary, my sister, answered to that; for the tears came in my eyes, and I turned away to the little things who were gathering about the table. Little Mary had climbed up upon her grandpapa's knee, and was lifting up her little serious face to him, and telling him some story; though I kent not what it was about; and Cosmo was mounting Susie high up upon a bairn's chair—a new chair, that was right enough for a nursery, but strange here; but,

to tell the truth, my brother and sister cared more for the pleasure of these bairns, than for anything else in the world. They told me Mary was Claud's pet—I doubt not because of her name.

“We will stay and dine, if you like, mother,” said my niece Mary; “for Allan has gone out—I mean, he will be at the Castle. There are a great many people there now; but I suppose Lord Burrowstoun will soon go away again, and he is always seeking Allan—so, we are alone to-day.”

“When were you there yourself, Mary?” said her mother. “Not since the first time? But it would be little pleasure to you.”

“It was no pleasure to me,” said Mary, very quietly. “I do not wish to go again.”

“Mary, come and do your duty,” said the minister. “Cosmo is not bold enough to meddle with the jams. My boy, is there



anything else in the world you would be afraid to do?"

"Yes;" said Cosmo, readily. "I'm sometimes very feared, grandpapa. When I fell into Sedgie Burn, and when I broke my arm, and when they left me at night in the old tower at Lochlee—I was quite as feared as Susie. Now it's true."

"And what might you be feared for, Cosmo?" said I.

"I was feared mamma would be angry," the callant said; and he took time to say no more, for he was busy with one of Bessie's beautiful scones, and it was just wonderful to see the way it disappeared. They were all very good at that, and, by the time they were done, the jam and the bread were done too, and no very much milk left in the big china jug. So they all went away out to the garden, to their own plays, and we were left in quietness.

"When are you to have a tutor for

Cosmo, Mary?" said the minister. "He is old enough to be a good scholar. I spoke to Lilliesleaf about young Richard Blythe. Have you heard him speak of it again?"

"I—I can scarcely tell you, father," said Mary, looking down. "Allan was to see about it; but somebody mentioned to him some one from Oxford—and—and, I suppose there is nothing settled. He has so much to do."

"Well, my dear, Lilliesleaf is the best judge," said my brother, rising up, not without anger, as I thought; "and they do attend more to the classics in England—but—well, well, Mary, never mind. I thought I might have been able to do something for young Blythe."

"Father—father! I cannot help it! Do not be displeased," cried Mary, "I will speak to Allan again; he will have more time when these people are away."

“And I wish with all my heart they were away,” cried the minister, and he went away to his study, still with a gloom upon his brow.

“My father does not quite understand, mother,” said Mary, turning to us with a pleading voice. “Allan is so kind, and so good-hearted himself, he would like to help everybody—and somebody had spoken to him at the Castle—and he has so many friends there—and it is difficult for him to refuse to help any one, or do a service. You understand, mother?”

“Yes, Mary, yes,” said my sister.

The bairn turned to me with her eyes full of tears. “Oh, aunt! will you help me with my father and my mother,” she cried. “My mother only says ‘yes,’ to please me. She is not satisfied—she is never satisfied. Aunt Margaret, *you* see what I mean.”

The Lord help and bless my poor bairn! She was not satisfied herself, but far, far from that—and what did she mean insisting with her mother and me? Were we to be pleased, when she was not pleased herself? Woes me! but it is hard to ken the secrets of the heart.

To make a divert, I began to ask about old neighbours, and the news of the countryside—the new bairns, and who was married, and who had departed into the better country. Truly, there were but few of our age abiding in these borders, that had been young when we were young; and my sister Mary and me grew quiet as we spoke, no to call sad, but taking thought of what lay near to us both in the natural course of time. But this was far from pleasing my niece Mary; she would not let us be still and quiet, and commune in a serious way. She was restless her own self,

and it seemed to fret her spirit more to see us grave. She would have in the bairns again, and when they were dancing about the room, she drew a chair to the window, and took up her mother's seam, and was more like what it was my desire to see her; but, poor bairn, she was never at rest.

It may seem strange to folk that know us not, to hear me calling her a bairn that had a house and a family of her own; but Mary, my niece, was aye young to me. I could see care upon her bonnie brow, and have a sore heart to see it there; but I could not see the mark of years upon her; though whiles she would smile and look in my face, and tell me she was older than me. Ay, I would not say; maybe her hands were full of troubles, that were unkent in the quiet life the Lord had granted to me; but I smiled back again and said nought, but kent full well the

difference—the strong spring that was welling up in her heart, and the still waters that lay subdued in mine.

We took our dinner at the Manse in the middle of the day, the bairns being with us; and I was well pleased when Mary went out to see a school near at hand, and left my sister and me our lane. But still we did not speak of her, though our hearts were full of nothing else; and when we did come to mention her name, it was all what a good mother she was, and how she cared for her bairns, and how she was aye our own bairn to us, notwithstanding all.

“They were always different,” said Mary, my sister, in a thoughtful way; “but what think you now, Margaret? Mary and Grace—is there a great difference between them now? They are both young mothers—both in their own house. Are they any way like each other?”

“It is not so long since you saw Grace yourself, Mary,” said I.

“Yes; but I have not lived with her, I have not—I want your opinion, Margaret,” said my sister, in a very hasty manner. It was the same way with all of us; we were aye wanting each to persuade the other that all was well with our dear bairn.

“They were aye different,” said I; “but Grace is married upon Claud, and you ken what your son is.”

My sister’s eyes grew bright, and then she sighed. Claud was an honoured man, happy and beloved in his own house, and in the countryside. But Mary, Mary!—the one that was in trouble, was nearest to our hearts.

“Grace has a lighter heart; but then she has less care. And Mary, with her family, has so many things to think of,” said I.

“That is it, Margaret!” cried my sister. “I always say that is it; and Lilliesleaf is of a gayer temper, you see, and the responsibility is left upon the mistress of the house. We have every reason to believe he is a very kind husband. Do you not think so? Only, you know, he was brought up in a worldly way, and he’s a young man yet; and it is all perfectly innocent, though it is not what we have been used to. I blame myself for being so anxious about Mary; but I am sure, Margaret, you don’t think there is any cause.”

“I see her in the garden herself—she is coming back,” said I, “and she looks full blythe among all these bonnie bairns. The little things ken already what she is. What should we be anxious for? Look at them all, and be thankful, Mary. God will take care of her, as he has taken care of us; and truly he has blessed her now.”



And my sister came to the window beside me, and looked forth upon them, and was comforted. It was as pleasant a sight as eye could look upon—the littlest one of all holding her dress, and little serious Mary, the third of the name, clinging to her hand, and little Claud sitting on the grass at her feet, minding nothing but the wood he was whittling with his knife; and that bonnie bold Cosmo standing by his mother as if he was as proud of her as we were, to whom she was a bairn. And so bright, and young, and womanlike she was herself—our Mary! I could not see that sight, and be heavy at my heart.

By and bye we went back again, when the afternoon shadows were lengthening, and Susie was wearied, being but delicate, and fell asleep on my knee. This quiet day had been good for Mary—she was not restless now, and spoke cheerily and blythe about

Grace, and began to plan with me how we could wile the family from Oakenshaw to the Manse, to meet all together. But she did not say she wanted them to come to Lilliesleaf; and that was very strange to me. Whatever secret care she had, she was feared even for her dearest and nearest to find it out; and I saw, though I marvelled, that there was not one that she would let so far into her heart as me. It is, maybe, a wrong to Mary's mother to say that; but I was a solitary gentlewoman myself, and what I saw would not pass from me; and they had aye come to me in all their troubles. That was the reason that Mary could trust to me; but even to me she did not say a word of anything that grieved her, only she kent well that I could not choose but see.

## CHAPTER III.

THE next day after that, was one of Mrs. Elphinstone's well days, and she came down to her breakfast, which was an uncommon thing for her. She was now a woman of seventy, failed and frail, and even in her mind far different from what she used to be. She had fallen into the restless state that is common for some old folk, and was aye finding fault, and taking note of everything from her chair where she sat; and being scarce so quick of hearing or of seeing, and even of understanding, as was her wont, was

aye taking it into her head, that something was doing that she kent not of. Her voice was sharp by reason of her age, and truly peace was not in her heart.

“So, Allan has not come back,” she said, when she was settled into her easy chair, and propped up with her pillows, my Mary serving her with a tender hand, like a dutiful bairn. “And what might be the reason of that, Mary?—if, indeed, he let you know.”

“He did not expect to return last night,” said Mary, in an anxious way. “Indeed, I begged him not to think of returning; for the road is very lonely, and it must have been late before he could get away.”

“Just so—just so,” said the old lady; “and you really thought the company at the Castle was as safe as any chance passenger he might meet with on the road?”

Mary’s face flushed for the moment. “Grandmamma has no great opinion of Lord

Burrowstoun, you perceive, aunt," said she, turning to me with a doubtful and trembling smile. "But I am always nervous about that ford on the Sedgie Burn—especially, late at night."

"Yes; one understands what an anxious wife means by 'late at night,' when her husband is coming home from a dinner-party," said Mrs. Elphinstone, with something like a sneer. "Mary does not call things by their proper names, as she used to do, Miss Maitland."

Mary rose at that moment quick, and with a start, and brought Mrs. Elphinstone's cup of tea to her. I was sitting close by, and, so when the bairn bent down her head close to her good-mother, I could not help but hear.

"Dear Mrs. Elphinstone," said Mary very earnestly, and with pain and trouble in her face, "you forget the children are at table, and they hear all you say."

“ My dear, there is no chance of my forgetting that the children are at table,” said Mrs. Elphinstone, loud out, “ when Cosmo sits there and stares at me, as if he had never seen me before. That boy’s manners are shocking, Mary ; but to be sure, poor thing, you cannot attend to everything. Cosmo, is it the stable-boy who learns you to gape and stare as you do ? That’s not like a gentleman.”

Cosmo muttered something under his breath. I heard not what it was, but it was something he ought not to have said—I could see that by the gloom on his brow ; but Mrs. Elphinstone minded it not.

“ They had much better have breakfast in the nursery,” said the old lady. “ You have very little consideration, Mary ; of course, your aunt and I, being old friends, have many things to talk of, and if you don’t want the children to hear, you ought to send them away.”

“They are going instantly,” said Mary, and she went away to whisper among them, and tell them what they were to do ; but Cosmo never took his eyes off his grandmamma. That bold rascal bairn ! there was not one of them but the callant would have foughten with for his mother’s sake.

However, at last, the little things went their way, and whether, after all, she was not minded to cross Mary, or if it was but a turn of her own will, I cannot tell, but Mrs. Elphinstone kept silence till they were all away. Then she turned again to me.

“Mary is foolish, Miss Maitland,” she said, “she thinks she can deceive the children, and prevent them knowing that their father neglects them ; but I think it is my duty to tell the truth. If he had been an unencumbered man, of course, it would be quite indifferent ; but I should like to know what he will have left to provide for his

family, if Mary sits quietly and looks on, and suffers him to be drawn in more closely every day by young Burrowstoun and his set. Thank heaven! *I* see better what it all would lead to—and if Mary continues to hold her peace, I, at least, will do my duty, and remonstrate with Allan. He means no harm, poor boy, but he must be warned. My dear, you need not contradict me.”

“But these are private matters—entirely private, and belonging to our own house,” cried Mary, starting up, and then curbing herself, and sitting down again, as if she thought shame of having so little patience. “A mother often has something to disapprove of in her son; and there are few wives so blind as never to see a moment’s imprudence in their husbands; but that is all between ourselves; and you see, Mrs. Elphinstone, that even my dear aunt Margaret, who has sympathy for everybody, is troubled and



uneasy when you speak of this, that only concerns us.”

“You are a very simple girl, Mary,” said Mrs. Elphinstone, “a good wife, my dear, and a good mother; and I do you the justice to say, a very attentive child to me. But you do not know the world. If you did, I should think you quite inexcusable, suffering Allan to go day after day to the Castle, without a word of remonstrance, when you know who is there.”

At these words, my Mary's face became of a burning red. There was shame, and trouble, and anger in the flush; but I think I never saw such a one on a woman's face before. She rose off her chair now, steady and determined, so as I had never seen her look. “Anything but that!” she said. “I will bear anything but that. I will not listen to it—it is not fit to be said to me. Mrs. Elphinstone, let us not discuss what Allan does; he is able to account for himself.”

The old lady was subdued by my bairn's look. Truly, I doubted sorely Mary had been learning in a hard school; but Mrs. Elphinstone, to my content, straightway left speaking about Allan, and began to find fault with the bairns and the servants, and her ain maid, who doubtless had a hard life, poor thing, waiting on all her fancies. Woe's me! how this aged woman was changed! For a while after Mary was married, I thought Mrs. Elphinstone was learning what it was to have love about her, and looking once more like her I had kent in my youth; but I had been three whole years without being at Lilliesleaf, for Grace had been but delicate, and likit my hand aye about her, and I had my abode at Oakenshaw; and Mrs. Elphinstone had failed greatly, and had worn into a fretting, carping, restless old woman, neither lovely to see nor to hear, by that time. Care had ever been upon her

brow ; and it had always been a doubt with me, if she had learned right to cast *all* her burden upon the Lord, which made me the more troubled now, when I saw she was trying still to carry it herself.

When her maid had come for her, and taken her back to her room, where she aye rested awhile before she was wheeled out in her chair, Mary came quick and anxious up to me. “Aunt,” she said in such haste, that she was out of breath, “I will make no more pretences with you. Do you see now why I cannot ask Grace here—why I am afraid to have anybody staying in the house? Mrs. Elphinstone is always commenting on Allan. Her mind is not what it was, though she speaks so clearly, and she does not keep her anxieties in her heart, like me.”

“Then, Mary, my dear, you have cause to be anxious, too?” said I.

“Aunt,” said Mary, holding by my arm

for a moment, to keep herself up, "aunt, I am not very happy—but it is not Allan's fault. We have never had any quarrels—he is always very good to me, and I have not a word to say against him; but I wish—women will aye be wishing, aunt Margaret—never mind that. Sometimes, Mrs. Elphinstone's fears and suspicions make me half crazy; and sometimes—I beseech you never listen to her, aunt!—sometimes," said Mary, her face lighting up again with that red glow, like a flame, "she says things which Allan Elphinstone's wife should never hear. And if even my mother heard her speak, she would think Allan—my Allan, Aunt Margaret!—to be an evil-hearted man; which he is not, and never will be, I know—I know!"

"My dear bairn, I am sure of that," said I.

She kissed my hand, and let fall a tear

upon it, in her thankfulness; and then she said, "What troubles me most, is when their grandmamma speaks before the children, and they sit and hear; and Cosmo gets fancies in his head; and it grieves me. Cosmo thinks a great deal, though you would not fancy it, aunt; and his grandmamma never seems to fear letting the boy hear. Aunt, think what a dreadful thing to have a boy grow up, sitting in judgment on his father! And Mrs. Elphinstone is very fond of them all, too, though she blames me about them. She has altered strangely in the last year."

"And you have plenty to learn you patience, Mary, my dear," said I.

"Whisht, aunt," said Mary, "we will not speak of that."

But her mind seemed easy when she had told me this, though this was but a part of her burden, as I kent full well. For, if

Mary had been as well-pleased with Mr. Allan, in her own heart, as she wanted me to think she was, what other folk said would have made little matter to her. And I kent she was trying to keep secret from her very self, her own distrust and fear, that were the sorest pang of all. But it may be thought I was but ill-content after that, when Mrs. Elphinstone called upon me, to go out with her, and walk by the side of her chair, as she was wheeled down the long avenue. Truly, I wanted none of her expounding. The mysteries of the house were sore enough to me without that.

I said it was a fine day, and the country was beautiful to look upon ; and syne though I was very anxious to find converse to keep us from one subject, the which I was feared for, I stoppit in my speech, and found no more to say. For it is ill feigning, when folks are little used to it ; and I had a full heart.

“At our age, Miss Maitland,” said Mrs. Elphinstone, “the country loses much of its attractions. Spring is not what it used to be. But I need not say so to you, who are so active always. It is otherwise with me.”

I could not help but marvel within myself, whether the lady minded that she was nigh ten years older than I was; but I said nothing, except that Providence was aye kind, though age made a great odds in this world.

“Yes, you have little care,” said Mrs. Elphinstone; “and as you are now so closely connected with our family, I need not hesitate to say to you how anxious I am about my son, Miss Maitland. Mary is an excellent creature; but she is not calculated to amuse an active-minded young man like Allan; and she has all her old-fashioned, precise ways still—so, you see, he is driven to seek entertainment away from home.”

It was an ill thing in me, but I was sore angered against this unwise woman—so much, that I felt my cheeks glow—me, that should have kent better!—with wrath against her; but I commanded myself, and only said: “Mrs. Elphinstone, the man will hear as well as me.”

“Who? Robert?” said she, pointing at the man who was drawing her chair. “He is deaf, and he is busy. You need not fear for *my* discretion, Miss Maitland. But this is how matters are; and, actually, though I am sure you would scarcely believe it, Mary never even remonstrates, so far as I know; and Allan goes day after day to the Castle, and dangles about Lady Julia. There was an attachment between Lady Julia and my Allan, as you may recollect, Miss Maitland, before he thought of making proposals for your niece.”

Oh, my Mary! my innocent bairn! This



was what, she said was not fit for Allan's wife to hear ; and truly it was not—nor even for me, a single gentlewoman, that never had troke with scandal makers, nor spread evil about my neighbours all my days. I made no answer to his mother—woes me ! was it fit for her to say ?

“ It is perfectly natural. I really do not wonder at it at all,” said Mrs. Elphinstone ; “ and I do not mean to say there is any harm in it. Mary is a good wife—an excellent wife—but sometimes she is only a dull companion, Miss Maitland ; and, indeed, out of the highest circles, you seldom find that vivacity and delicate wit, which attract men. So, of course, Allan goes to amuse himself where he can be amused ; and Lady Julia is not very happily married either, I believe ; and I really wish you would advise Mary to try and acquire a little more knowledge of the world.”

“It would ill set one of her race to ken this world better, Madam,” said I; and I scarce could speak to her, I was so moved in my spirit—in a special manner, because she should dare to say to me that Mr. Allan was unhappily married upon my bairn. “I ken no such world myself,” said I again, when I had better mastery of my speech; “and little insight into its evil ways could I give to my dear Mary. The Lord preserve her and her bairns!”

“Amen!” said the old withered woman, looking up, with a laugh, into my face. “But there is not the least occasion for being tragical; nor for being offended, either, Miss Maitland—for my meaning is a very simple one. Mary ought to bestir herself to make his own home more attractive to her husband. That he should have conformed to her manners so long is the real wonder, and not that he should return to his natural

sphere now. I do not approve of Lord Burrowstoun; he is a gambler, and a sporting man, and his character is damaged. I believe if Allan is not delivered from his influence, he will be ruined; for I know, by experience, what follows such a course. I take you into my confidence because I think you may do them service, Miss Maitland, and you ought to advise Mary to consult her husband's tastes more than she does—you have influence with your niece."

"I will use it all I can, madam," said I, with a trembling in my speech; and we walked in silence till we came back to Lilliesleaf; and syne I went to my chamber, and shut to my door, and groaned and was abashed at the sight of my own spirit. For I was in no Christian frame of mind, woes me!—passion and anger might have been chastened out of me in all these years that the hand of the Lord had been dealing with our house; but the carnal man was in me still.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE next day after that, partly because I behoved to go, and partly to ease them of my company till Mr. Allan came home, and got his flyting over—if flyting there was in store for him—I said to my niece Mary, that I would go to my own house of Sunnyside, and tarry with my maid Jenny, for a night. Mary, poor bairn, made a pretence that she would not have me go; but I saw, in her heart, she was well content I should be away from Lilliesleaf at this time. So she had out the little carriage with the two ponies,

that she aye used herself ; and, with a decent lad from our own parish, whose father and mother I had kent well in my young days, driving me, I went away upon my travel to Sunnyside.

Now, sitting by John Glendinning's side in the bit small carriage, for an hour and a half or so, it is no to be supposed that I did not speak to him, seeing he came of kent folk ; and when I had asked about his father and mother, and his young sister that was married upon a lad out of Lothian, and settled in the parish of Dourhills, near Oakenshaw, we came, in course of nature, to have converse concerning the neighbours, and what was doing in the countryside. The road went by the bit little village on the Knowe ; and well-doing, comfortable houses they looked, the which I was blythe to see ; but it was but small parcels of land that were won out of the black moss, where Mr.

Allan thought to make grand corn land, and great harvests. For this had been one of his grand plans at the time he was married. It was good land, the most of our parish—bonnie, broad, arable fields, with the hill sides for the sheep; but Malcolm's Moss (which was the name of it) was a black spot upon the country side—no to say that it was unseemly to look upon: for heather and whins, in their blossoming time, are very bonnie things to the outward eye, though small pasture to ought but the bees, that aye were very keen to gather here. A bit small burn ran out and in, through the very midmost of the moss; and bits of low birches and rowans gathered about the banks of it. But in this present season, when the whins were black, and the heather out of bloom, there was little to gladden the eye in a sight of the Moss; and, for my part, it was not pleasant to see how little land had been won

out of it, for the seed and the bread, that are the life of man.

“I see the land is little different from what it used to be, John Glendinning,” said I; “and well I wot it is hard to change nature; and the moss will aye be the moss, let Mr. Allan try all he can. Young folk are aye hopeful. They telled me it was in the power of art to bring corn out the black rigs yonder, though I ever had my own doubts, all the time.”

“It takes lang working, Mem, to make a great change,” said the young man.

“Ay,” said I, “but John, there are changes that neither working nor the hand of man can make.”

I know not wherefore it was, but the lad lookit as if he fain would have said me nay, for he was an opinionated lad.

“The hand o’ man has a long grip, now,” said John, “mony a thing’s done, that folk

durstna dream of in the auld times ; but it takes pains, and it takes time.”

Now he was but a country lad, and I see not why I should have given thought to him, and truly, he was far more like to be wrong than his master was ; but I could not help but ponder on his words, minding all Mr. Allan was wont to say.

So truly, finding little pleasure in this converse, I held my peace, and there was little more between us. He said no evil, yet I was angered in my heart, because the lad's words helped on my own thoughts, and I could not but have vexation in my own spirit to hear every person, some in plain words, and some that you could just guess at, reflecting on Mr. Allan ; and, truly, it was no business of theirs ; but folk are aye better pleased to mend their neighbour's manners than their own.

When I came to Sunnyside, the place looked strange to me. There it was upon its



quiet brae, looking down upon Burrowstoun, with the thorn hedge grown up high about it, and the ash trees midway down the road arching over to meet one another, and the very apple trees and currant bushes grown high and big like the bairns that once played about the gate. It made my heart sad to look upon this house, I knew not wherefore. It minded me of the days when I was in my middling age, and when Grace and Mary, my dear bairns, with their young pleasures and their young troubles were the joy of my heart. Woes me! I was an aged woman now, and had little help to give me to them, that aye were used to come to me for counsel, and life was upon their bonnie heads with all its weights and its burdens; and I thought in my heart upon this lone house of Sunnyside, and the past that dwelt in it, and kent it was even like my old age and me.

My maid Jenny, was aged like myself; but

Jenny was ever a cheery body, and aye was able for her canny work, and her crack with her old neighbours, and it was a comfort to see her kindly face again. She made a great outcry at the sight of me; and Lilly, her sister's bairn, who always abode with her, being grown into a discreet young woman now, ran in before to light a fire in my own parlour, and to put the room right for me. For my own part, I tarried at the door, looking down upon the town; truly change comes upon us, but the heavens and the earth change not. It might still have been that day twenty years ago when I came here with my mother, for all the difference that was in the place, or in what I lookit forth upon. It was a pleasant day; the young ash leaves were loosing out from the branches, and there was a chirp in the air of all the birds of spring—and, truly, I was both cheered and cast down in my own spirit, and I knew not which most.

When I went in, it was still the same—the old things that aye put me in mind of old days, all standing as they used to stand, and my own very chair drawn to the new-kindled fire, as if Grace herself had put it there. I laid down my bonnet upon the table, and sat at the lone fire-side, from the which both life and pleasantness had passed away: and I could not send back the tear from my eye that came at the thought of what was gone; for truly the fire-side of Claud, my brother, was as deserted as mine.

“Jenny,” said I, “it is an eerie thing to think upon. Do you mind what a pleasure it was to do everything for the bairns? and now the bairns are sober men and women, and have their ain fire-sides, and their ain troubles; truly nature and the course of life are hard upon old folk.”

“But, Miss Marget, they’re a’ so weel,” said Jenny, who was at the fire, rousing up

the new-lighted coals with the poker to make a blaze. "If ony ane of them was in distress, I would mak my maen; but just to look at that bonnie bairn-time at Lilliesleaf—it's enough to make ony heart rejoice."

"Ay, Jenny, but the mother of a family like that has many cares," said I, for I was, without doubt, in a thankless and repining frame.

"And what would ye have, Miss Marget?" said Jenny, "as lang as they're a' thriving, what's care but joy? Bless their bonnie faces every ane! I would like to ken wha daur be wae for Miss Mary, with yon four darlins at her fit. If it was the Minister himsel, he suld never say sae to Jenny."

"And who is wae for Miss Mary?" said I, "truly, I ken little reason any man has. I was thinking of my sister and my brother, and even of this eerie house of Sunnyside;

but I thought not of any mortal having cause to pity my dear bairn at Lilliesleaf."

Thus I spoke, as folk speak that have a secret at their heart; if I was grieved for her myself, I could not thole that another should think her in trouble; and I wanted to hear what Jenny would say.

"And that's just my ain very thought, Miss Marget," said Jenny, "and what I aye say when John Rasp, the baker, or Miss Janet Selvage, or ony idle folk about the town come with their clavers to me. What if Lilliesleaf is fond of his pleasure? He's young, and he's the biggest gentleman in the countryside; and, wherefore, when the like of that puir cheeping Lord Burrowstoun keeps the crown of the causeway, should Mr. Allan bide, like an auld wife, at hame? But them that says he's mair heeding about his pleasures than about his bonnie leddy and a' thae precious bairns, says lees, Miss

Marget. It's no such things; it's for the credit of hame-born folk, and no to let a fremd family get it a' their ain way. Na! I ken better; he may gang through with his siller—mony a gentleman does that—but there's nae harm in his heart."

And Jenny was moved when she was speaking. I could not have thought she had that spirit in her at her age; but she never would put up with a word against Mr. Allan, and she was aye a brisk body, and would have her ain way. She held aye the poker in her hands, and turned about as if she would have foughten even with me; and truly I was comforted, and smiled to myself—though it was but very little she could have kent about it, right or wrong.

"Does Mary come whiles to see you, Jenny?" said I.

"Whiles? Every single time she's in Burrowstoun, Miss Marget," said Jenny,

crying out with very pleasure ; “ and if you could but see them at the scones ! When the French maid came—weel now, that was an antic ! I marvelled at Lilliesleaf for that—and a’ to please the fuil folk at the Castle—no a’ her airs, nor her wiles could win wee Miss Susie frae Jenny. The bairn kent, as discreet as an eldern woman, wha it was that likit her best. I wouldna have brought the like of yon gipsy into a decent house, Miss Marget, if I had been Lilliesleaf.”

“ I never heard of that, Jenny,” said I.

Jenny put down the poker, and sweepit in the fireside, and then, maybe, seeing that I would like to ken—though truly I was not sure in my own mind if it was right to hearken—she turned about to me, and took up her apron, and folded the hem of it between her fingers, all the time she spoke.

“ It’s nine or ten months byepast,” said Jenny ; “ for it was in the height of summer,

before the weans got the play at the schule—and the first I heard o't was from Maister Cosmo, and he said he would do what his mamma bade, but he wouldna have Lady Julia's maid to learn him. What for suld bairns learn outlandish tongues, Miss Marget? Where's the marrow of the kindly Scots that's born with them? And then I came to hear that Lady Julia was to send a woman a' the gate from London, to be a bairns'-maid at Lilliesleaf, and speak French to the bairns. Janet Scot tauld me the mistress had given her consent, but wasna very well pleased; and you may think, Mem, it was nae pleasure to Janet, being a decent eldern woman, that has charge of everything in the Lilliesleaf nursery. Weel, the woman came—a black-haired gipsey, far grander than ony lady about Burrowstoun—and she was three months in the house. I canna tell for a certainty what happened then; but Miss



Mary—the mistress, as I ought to say—put her away. For all so young as she is, she has a grand spirit, our Miss Mary; and, without a word to any person, she sent the woman away. There was an awfu' clash about it, Miss Marget, and everybody said Miss Mary had her reasons; but you're no to think I give ony faith to that—only Miss Mary keepit her ain counsel, and at an hour's notice sent the ill-doer out of Lilliesleaf."

This story took away my breath; I could make nought of it; for more was meant than was said in words.

"And what did Mr. Allan say, Jenny?" said I. When I had spoken, I was wroth at myself. What kind of question was that?

"You're no to think ony ill of Mr. Allan, Miss Marget," said Jenny in a kind of commanding way. "Mr. Allan said the mistress kent best, and whatever she did was right. It's all clavers what folk say about Mr. Allan;

he's a good lad, and a kind lad, and I'll no hear ill of him; if it was my last breath, it's a' lees, Miss Marget."

I did not ask what it was that was "a' lees;" but I marvelled at myself that did not check Jenny, and bid her be silent, and never to mint such things to me. To speak the truth, it dumbfounded me. I could not tell what to say; but when she went to get me my dinner, and I was left by myself, and had time to think, I was much vexed and angered at myself. For the like of this story did not bear thinking of; and I kent very well whatever the French gipsey had done, Mr. Allan could have no hand in it; and I was sore displeased to hear my bairn's name in idle clavers like that. Also, it troubled me to think that, maybe, Mary was not dealing wisely; and that she ought to have told plain out the why and wherefore; but truly it is easy to be wise behindhand.

## CHAPTER V.

I ABODE at Sunnyside for three or four days after that. Many folk in Burrowstoun were blythe of a word with me, to outward appearance, being an old neighbour, and well kent in the place; and I cannot say but what it was a comfort to have certain days to my own self, to meditate upon all that had befallen our house and kindred, and about the shadow of trouble that was upon us. Also, there were many changes in the place itself; the old folk, many of them had passed to their rest, and the son sat in the

father's seat ; but truly, I minded them all when they were bairns ; and young folk have ever been pleasant to me, all my days. I both marvelled, and was blythe to hear how every one spoke of my Mary. She was no bit young thing now, dwelling under the shadow of her father's house ; but was kent as a righteous woman, ruling her own, and no without a measure of self-will, and her own way, either, as I came to learn—but very well liked, and well thought of, both by gentle and simple. As for Mr. Allan, few folk mentioned him to me ; no that he was in ill repute, for every one had a kind thought of him ; but, either they had a fancy that I was not pleased, or that I had reason so to be ; for it was only now and then that one would speak of Lilliesleaf. There was some horse-racing nigh at hand, I heard here, and that was the reason why Lord Burrowstoun and his friends had come

hither at this season—and, truly, no person thought well of them.

As for Mr. Allan's works about Cruive End they were stoppit a year ago ; and the improvements had made little speed since I left the place. Mr. Allan had been a great man for improvements, at the season of his marriage ; but his good thoughts had been but unstable—poor man ! truly I was grieved in my heart concerning him many a day, as I lookit forth from my parlour window, or took my walk into the town ; for he was not a strong tower in the country side, as it had been my hope to see him ; and when folk spoke of any good work, it was his wife that they named, and no him—the which was a grief to me, and small pleasure to Mary, as I kent well.

Also, by the means of Jenny, I heard many idle stories that were throng in the countryside, the which I put no faith in, as

neither did Jenny ; but they still showed to me how fremd folk made a speech of it, and gossip was about the house—my dear bairn's house that should have been sacred ! For me, it was hard to refrain and no blame Mrs. Elphinstone ; for we are evil folk in our hearts, and aye blythe to lay blame on somebody, and truly I could not be content, but that whiles she put ill in folk's heads.

The Sabbath I spent in peace and quietness at Sunnyside, there being two diets of worship in our own kirk, and faithful serving of the Word in both ; and, also, I had much converse with Lilly Robb, Jenny's niece, and found her to be a very well-disposed young woman, that had thought upon the things that concerned her peace, and was likewise going to be married ; and though she had but little to say, I could see that the root of the matter was well grafted in her, which was a great comfort to me, seeing I

had been out of my house so long, and had lost opportunities of guiding this young thing aright; but, truly, the Lord is never distant, and there had been no lack for the like of me. I gave her an advice, being at such a season of her life; and also promised to speak to Jenny about her providing, and a gown to be married in,—the which things—forbye being a custom in our house—both Jenny herself and the young woman were well worthy of, being faithful and leal servants to mine and me.

On the Tuesday morning, hearing a skriegh of pleasure out of the kitchen, where Jenny had been humming bits of tunes in to herself, as she did her work—for she would take no rest, let me say as I might—I lookit forth from my window to see what it might be; and, truly, it was Mary and the bairns in the little carriage, and Cosmo upon his pony, all come to take me back to

Lilliesleaf. I was blythe to see them, without doubt ; but it likewise gave me a stound and tremble at my heart, for I had made up my mind, when I went back, to speak plain to Mary, and warn the bairn what wisdom she needed to guide her way, and how it behoved her to consider what she could do, to set Mr. Allan right, even if it should be by conforming to his ways in everything that was not sin. So, when I saw her bonnie fresh face at the window, to speak the truth, my heart failed me ; for I kent she would not bear to hear either friend or foe blame Mr. Allan ; and, truly, it is ever a thankless thing to interfere between married folk.

I did not go to the door, but stood at the window watching them. And in they came—all the bairns, skipping through the shadows of the trees, and running into the blythe morning light that was like themselves, so bonnie, and



fresh, and innocent. They all gathered close about Jenny on the door-steps; and every one had a word to tell her; and Jenny was so fain and so pleased that she was nigh to greeting; and I saw what a delight these little things were to every old person that had a right to them. Truly, there is nothing in the world so sweet or so blessed as the heritage of bairns. Susie, for all so genty and quiet a bairn as she was, was mounted up upon Jenny's shoulder; and that was how she came in to me, to the parlour where I was waiting. Jenny had on a short gown made of a thrifty print, and a checked apron tied about her as was right in the morning; and truly the strings had need to have been well sewed on, for the strain Claud gave them, tearing at the apron; though what the laddie wanted with it, except just mischief, I know not.

Cosmo was behind them all with his mamma. He was a big callant of his years,

strong and well-grown ; and it was his pride to be aye beside her, like a grown-up man, taking care of her. Doubtless, Mary was proud of him, such a fine, bold, bonnie boy as he was ; but I could not help thinking that there was aye a glance in Cosmo's eye, which meant that his father should have been here, and defied every body to think less of his mother than of the queen upon her throne. It was not good for the bairns to hear old Mrs. Elphinstone, how she spoke.

“ We've a' come to take thoo home,” said Susie, riding upon Jenny's shoulder. “ Grand-mamma at the Manse wants thoo, Aunty, and mamma and Susie ; and thoo're never to go away any more.”

“ And aunt, Janet says Claud would be good if you would come and tell us stories,” said little Mary ; “ but he's broken Susie's carriage, and my skipping rope ; and the mill that played music that you brought us

from Oakenshaw—he's broken them a' since you were away."

"But I made another one, aunt," said Claud. "She's telling lees on me. I made a grand mill that could grind things; and Robbie at the Manse helpit me; but papa took it away to let somebody see it, and never brought it back again. It wasna my blame."

"Papa has come home, aunt," said Cosmo. The bairn spoke so suddenly, that his voice startled me, coming so close after the bits of pleasant voices of the other little things; and I aye felt it behoved me to answer Cosmo, for he was far different from the rest.

"And you'll all be very glad of that, my dears," said I.

Cosmo looked into my face—straight into it, as if he wanted to see what I meant; and then he said, "Yes;" aye keeping his eye upon me. Truly, he was a strange callant. I could not fathom him.

“I’m glad!” said little Mary, “papa lets me and Claud ride upon ponies as big as Cosmo’s; and grandmamma aye scolds papa when he’s at home, and never minds us; and you’ll be pleased, aunt, for papa likes to see you at Lilliesleaf.”

“And mamma’s glad,” said Susie, whispering in close at my cheek, for she was on my knee by this time, “for papa’s aye so good when he’s at home.”

I was blythe it was only me that heard what little Susie said. I could have broken my heart if I had thought it was Mary’s blame that a little bairn should speak like this; but it was not their mother’s doing, poor thing; it was old Mrs. Elphinstone—and this was what made Mary so feared for them hearing what her converse was.

When Mary herself came in, she was looking so fresh and fair, and the cloud was so lightened off her bonnie brow, that I took

heart again. She said they had come to take me home—that Mr. Allan would have come himself but for being busy ; and that she was going on to Burrowstoun to the shops, and I was to put my bonnet on and come with her.

“ For, of course, the bairns have told you, aunt,” said Mary, with a mother’s smile at them all. “ You will hear of nothing else till it is all over, and we have to give our orders now.”

Not kenning what it was, I lookit from one to another, and Claud cried out :

“ We didna tell you, auntie ;—a’ the folk in the country are coming to Lilliesleaf. There’s to be a grand party, and we’re a’ to get leave to be there.”

“ It’s on my birthday, aunt,” said Mary, half with a smile, and half with a sigh, “ that is in a fortnight—do you mind ?—and Allan thinks it will please me. It is very kind of him—he thinks it will be a pleasure to me.”

My dear bairn ! she was wistful and anxious for all she said of pleasure ; and yet she was pleased too, and was blythe to think that he meant it for a compliment to her. Little things please women-folk, if they look like love at the heart.

So I went to put my bonnet on straight-way, and when I came back, Jenny had the table spread, and the bairns were all busy with her scones and her jam and milk, and Mary had a glass of our own elder wine. I would not take upon me to say that Mary likit, in any bye ordinary way, the elder wine that Jenny made at Sunnyside, though it used to be a great treat to Claud and Grace and her when they were bairns ; but she kepted it before her on the table, and put it to her lips as she spoke to Jenny—for Jenny, truly, abode in the room the whole time, being so fond and so proud about the bairns that she forgot her manners, even when I

myself came down the stair. So, at last, we got away; and though our bit garden at Sunnyside was nothing to Lilliesleaf, nor even to the Manse garden, Jenny laboured to gather all the primroses for little Susie, and I believe the body would have been fain to cut down the trees or the berry bushes, if the bairns had but wished for them; and truly I do not know if I was much wiser myself.

We went away down the road first of all to Burrowstoun, to Ralph Plane, the joiner's, and to Mrs. Rasp, and to the mantua-maker, for the bairns were to have new frocks, and there was to be some grand tent made with canvass, that all the little things were wild about. When we had done our errands, we turned the ponies' heads to go home. It was a very cheery bonnie day, and both the mother and the bairns were blythe about me. I could not let any shadow be in my heart, and truly it was hard to think of grief and trouble

in Mary's lot, and her surrounded by such bonnie faces. My dear bairn ! if she had the cares of this world, she likewise had the best joys of it, and I gave thanks in my heart for her, for there were not four such bairns—that I could see—in the whole country side.



## CHAPTER VI.

TEN years had made but little difference, so far as the outward eye could see, upon Mr. Allan. He had the same kindly happy look, almost the same youthfulness as he was wont to have, and being scarce in his prime yet, the odds was less upon him than even upon Mary, who, doubtless, having the troubles and toils of the mother of a family, was less like what she was, though she was not less bonnie than she used to be. When I saw Mr. Allan first, the day I came to Lilliesleaf, his face was clouded; but now he was at peace with himself, having come back to his own house again, and truly I marvelled

how any mortal could think ill of him, seeing how fond he was both about Mary and the bairns.

“Were they very tiresome company, aunt, when I was away?” he said to me. “I take it as a personal compliment that you left Lilliesleaf in my absence. Aunt Margaret does not prefer your company to mine, Mary, as she used to do—and I shall prize the distinction.”

“But Aunt Margaret went to see Jenny, papa,” cried little Mary, “and she likes mamma and us best—it was not because you were away.”

“Hush, little ones,” said Mr. Allan. “Come and show Aunt Margaret where our tent is to be. Where are you going, Cosmo? Come and explain all our business to Aunt Margaret. Do you hear me, sir? where are you going?”

“I am going with mamma,” said Cosmo.

The laddie's voice was low, and not to call pleasant in its tone, and he lifted up his head, and stood in a defying way before his father, as truly I was grieved to see him, for the callant was aye brooding upon what Mrs. Elphinstone said, and had not the sense to know how much of it was but the 'complaining of a fretful spirit. Mr. Allan's face grew red up to the hair, and there was both anger and shame in his eye ; and the look that passed between the two was not such a look as ought to be between a father and a son.

“This boy tries my patience, Mary,” said Mr. Allan in a haughty and reproachful way, turning away from him, and making me take his arm. Woe's me! one ill aye leads to another. She was distressed at Cosmo's look, and yet half angered with his father for blaming him ; and the callant clung closer and closer to Mary, and looked as if he was set for her defence against the whole

world. The whole of this was grievous and sore to me.

And we went forth upon the bonnie green sod, with the trees over us swelling and quickening with the coming summer, and went on our way to the bonniest spot in all the grounds of Lilliesleaf—little Claud and Mary, that were nearest each other in age, running on before us, and Susie holding fast by her mother's hand behind, and Cosmo walking proud by her side. Mr. Allan's face was discomposed as he went with me, but the cloud abode not long, and when we came to the place, he was quite himself again, only that I noticed he would not speak to Cosmo. It was a hollow in the ground, with bonnie natural banks sloping up, and trees here and there, where nobody would have planted them, but where the winds had sown the seed, and where it was far bonnier than the skilfullest art to see them grow

at their own will. At one end, raised a little upon a brae, was a bonnie level of green sod, a bit of table land among all the slopes, with trees behind and round about it, but quite clear of wood itself; and there the great tent was to be. A pleasanter place could not have been for any innocent rejoicing, and truly I was blythe to think of the bonnie sunshine, and the long summer day that would make this festivity more innocent and seemly—to my way of thinking, being an aged woman—than those weary nights at the Castle that vexed the spirit of my Mary, and wiled Mr. Allan away.

“And all the folk are to dance here, aunt,” cried little Mary, who was in the heart of the hollow, skipping about upon the grass, “and the music’s to be in yonder among the trees, where nobody can see it; and mamma and you are to sit up in the tent, and look at a’ the folk—and the ladies will have a’ such

bonnie dresses on. Oh, Susie!—and papa says we're a' to get leave to come, and have some wine to drink mamma's health. I wish I had a birthday like mamma's."

"Be as good as mamma, little Mary," said Mr. Allan, going back to the side of my Mary with a smile that rejoiced my heart, "and somebody will think as much of your birthday as I do of mamma's."

I saw the tears come to Mary's eye, half in sorrow, half in pleasure; and truly they were standing warm in my own—but through it all, I could not but perceive the dark glance of the callant Cosmo; the laddie understood nothing of his father—how should he, being but a boy? And though he was far before his years in most things, he was too young to know what inconsistent folk we are, and how Mr. Allan might cherish his wife in his heart, above every other earthly thing, yet give many a light hour and careless day

to other folk, and grieve her he liked best. Truly it was strange to myself to think upon it ; and my true thought is that auld age and youth, the one of which has not begun the sore work of life, and the other is resting from it, are the hardest judges, and seek perfectness ever, even when they ken it is not to be found.

Truly, it is easy for us to speak, that have come safe out of the world, and its snares and temptations, and have come to our aged days, and have our hearts quieted within us ; but so far as I can see, we are mostly hard judges of them that are fighting for their own hand in the sore wrestle of life. For, in my way, I was even as thoughtless as other folk, and said ofttimes to myself, with his bonnie wife and bairns, and his good estate, what could the longing heart of man crave more, than the Lord had given to Mr. Allan ? I minded not what was in man's heart, and how it ever

desires what it hath not, more than what it has.

When we returned back, little Susie was mounted up on Mr. Allan's shoulder, and Mary went by his side. Little Mary and Claud aye ran on before, and Cosmo, (his papa had never spoken to him) was with me. Such a bonnie, bold boy he was, like a man, for all he was a bairn in years. I did not wonder Mary was proud of him. I was even proud to look upon him myself.

“But Cosmo,” said I, “my dear bairn, what makes you gloom. The face of a young callant like you should never be clouded like that.”

“I am not a baby, aunt,” said the bold laddie. “I cannot aye be smiling like Susie. I look like what I feel.”

“Ay, Cosmo,” said I, “but a boy like you should never feel as if he would like to gloom. A young spirit should aye be a blythe spirit ;



and you're only a bairn. And truly you're a favoured bairn, with many a good thing in your lot that other folk cannot get. And to see the like of you discontented is not a seemly thing to look upon; and I like not to see it, Cosmo, my dear."

"I'm no discontented," said Cosmo, in a sullen way; and then he looked up at me quick. "Are you pleased with papa, Aunt Margaret? For grandmamma says—"

"Cosmo," said I, in a troubled way—for I did not want to say an ill word of Mrs. Elphinstone—"do you know what your papa is, and what you are? You are a little callant that kens not truth from lees; and your papa is a man, and knows what life and the world are; and do you think there ever was in the Bible, a bairn that asked other folk, if they were pleased with his father? I would be blythe to see your mother's son a bairn of

grace, Cosmo ; and no one that goes against the Word can be that."

The callant hung his head for a space ; but he was not content. " You did not tell me, aunt," he said, in a kind of breathless way, half-angered at me, and half-thinking shame of himself.

" My dear," said I, " when your papa was a young lad, and no the man he is now, I likit him well ; and I'll like him well all his days, Cosmo ; and I pray for the blessing of the Lord upon him and his, and I am no feared for what any mortal says."

" Aunt Margaret," said Cosmo, in a very earnest manner, with the water in his eyes, poor bairn ! " I like papa ! there's no a gentleman like him in the county ; and Lord Burrowstoun is not fit to speak to *my* father. But then grandmamma says —"

" She never said it for you, Cosmo," said I, " nor meant you should hear. Whiles your

mamma tells me stories of her ill bairns, that she would not like me to say o'er again ; and your papa was once grandmamma's bairn, and maybe as ill-willy as you are, Cosmo. But she never means you to think less of him for all that. How long is it since you learned the fifth command ?”

“I don't forget it, aunt,” said Cosmo, holding down his head, and turning very red. The laddie was not so ill a bairn, but he kent when to think shame.

“ Well, my man, let me see,” said I, “ and mind, I like not a winter sky in spring. Put you away that gloom of yours, and your mamma will be better pleased, as well as me.”

“ I will, Aunt Margaret—indeed, I will,” cried Cosmo. I have seen few callants like him. He was more thoughtful than became his years ; but there was much good in the bairn, and a hopeful spirit, though as proud and dour as ever was, when he was roused to

keep his own part, or thought another meant not true.

We went back to the house, in better content with one another; and Susie's bonnie bit face looking over Mr. Allan's shoulder brought lightness in my heart. When we went into the house, he made me sit down in the big chair, and came close beside me, and name over to me all the names of the folk that were to be invited; and truly there were grand folk among them; and I could not but be pleased at the thought that they were all to come together to do honour to my niece Mary, who was doubtless come of as creditable a stock as any of them, but no so great according to the counting of this world.

"I wonder if we could induce Claud to come, and Grace," said Mr. Allan; "then, Mary, your party would be complete; and we could crown all her friends and well-wishers, as the country-folk say, with a closer

circle of people who love her, Aunt Margaret. What do you think? Would Oakenshaw be persuaded, and come?"

"But, Allan, you do not call *these* my friends and well-wishers?" said Mary, looking over his shoulder. "I am not so ambitious. There are some of these ladies who will never forget that I was born in the Manse of Pasturelands. They are very civil and polite acquaintances, and like to make me feel uncomfortable, aunt. We wish each other well after a very restricted fashion. They are the great people of the country-side, and not my friends."

"That is their bad taste, or your *hauteur*," said Mr. Allan, but not with a pleasant tone. "Notwithstanding, Mrs. Elphinstone of Lilliesleaf has a great many admirers, aunt. The great people are not so indifferent to her attractions as she says they are."

"Truly, Mr. Allan," said I, "if she has

one to admire her, now she is a married wife, it will be all she is minding about; though she ever had many to wish her well, all the days of her youth."

"Never so many as now, Aunt Margaret," said Mr. Allan. "There, we won't discuss the subject; but would Claud and his family come, do you think? Mary, have we ever had them in Lilliesleaf?"

"No," said Mary, with a momentary falter in her voice, "except once, for a day or two. They are always at the Manse or at Sunnyside. My mother has the best claim; and Grace is so fond of her old home. I like to go there myself, aunt; there is only one Sunnyside in the world to Grace and me."

"Order!" said Mr. Allan, striking upon the table with a bonnie little ivory ruler that came out of Mary's desk. "We are not speaking of Sunnyside, but of Lilliesleaf. I have my associations, too, with your house,

Aunt Margaret ; but we will not enter on so wide a subject. Will Claud come here to Mary's *fête*? What does Aunt Margaret say?"

I looked in Mary's face, and it was troubled ; and I saw that in her secret heart, though she yearned for them, the bairn was feared for their coming. So I said, " Mary and me will consult about it, Mr. Allan ; but Claud has aye his duty ; and Grace is far from strong. We will lay our two heads together, and see what is most fitting. They would be blythe to come, if they could but win, right."

" I suppose Claud's position makes no difference in these duties of his," said Mr. Allan, with something like a sigh ; " and I suppose you would think it wrong, aunt, if it did. Yet, I wonder he endures the bondage — it must be a great restraint upon him."

" He thinks it is the best work between this and heaven, Mr. Allan," said I ; " and

truly a man must do something, and cannot spend his strength on nought. Wherefore should it be a bondage? It is far easier to Claud, than idleset would be."

"Still breaking your lance against 'idleset,' Aunt Margaret," said Mr. Allan, rising up with a smile upon his kindly face; "but I am a confirmed idler, I fear. I will leave you now to your consultations; and I hope you will decide that Claud and Grace must come. You will find me in the library when you want me, Mary."

And so he went away; and the bairns having been sent away before, Mary and me were left our lane—and truly it put me in a tremble; for I was very doubtful whether I ought to speak to her, or what I should say.





## CHAPTER VII.

WE sat, for a while, looking at each other, not knowing what to say; and, at last, when I saw she could not bear it any longer, Mary pushed away her chair, and went to the other end of the room to get her seam, that she might hide her face from me; and when she was there at a distance, and only looking at me sideways, she spoke in a hesitating, breathless way, that it grieved me to hear,

“I think, aunt,” said Mary, “that, perhaps, considering all the circumstances, and the difference between their ways and ours, and all the time they have been away—I think, aunt—do not be displeased at me—that,

may be, it would be as well if Claud and Grace did not come to Lilliesleaf."

"Very well, Mary, my dear," said I; for, in my weakness, though I kent the bairn's motive so well, I was angered for the moment, "very well, Mary; they were looking for no invitation; and truly I see no reason that they should ever ken what Mr. Allan said."

"Aunt, you ought not to misunderstand me," said Mary, coming back again, with a flush upon her face, and some water in her eyes; "you know what I mean—you know why it is that I am straitened in my own house—you, at least, ought not to be displeased."

"And that is true, Mary," said I. "I ought to know better; but we're all frail—and I like not a slight to any one of my bairns—and that was just my first thought."

"And what do you think is *my* first thought, aunt?" said Mary, with a little

bitterness. "What do you think my opinion of myself is, when I say such a thing?—only, aunt,"—and the bairn stood before me with her bonnie face shining, and the clear red colour rising in it, like what I had seen her many a time in the days of her youth—"only Mrs. Elphinstone's fault-finding is for no ear but mine; and I will not have any one deluded to believe things that are not true. Claud is a minister, aunt," she went on, sitting down upon her chair; "and there are many things innocent enough for other men, that would not suit him—and—they have had no clouds upon their life; they have never learnt to make allowance for the habits or the infirmities of others. Aunt, *will* you understand me? or must I speak plainer, and show you all my heart?"

"My dear," said I, "it might be no harm if you showed all your heart to the like of me, that like you well—but I ask not for it,

Mary. I will understand you, my poor bairn. I ken what you mean."

But she was not content with that, either—she would have me understand her, and yet not understand her. I ever said either too little, or too much.

"You are not to pity me, aunt," she said, with a strange smile upon her face. "I am not poor Mrs. Elphinstone, whatever any one may say. I have nothing to regret—nothing to find fault with. Allan may be imprudent, but he never forgets either himself or me."

"I never thought he did, Mary, my dear," said I; "I ken his nature, and what a pleasant nature it is; and I ken it is not in him to do the like of such evil, or to think of it. You need not be feared for me."

"What have you heard, aunt?" said Mary, looking in my face, as if I had stricken her a blow.

"Truly, my dear," said I, "I have heard

what Mrs. Elphinstone, kenning the evils of this world, took upon her to say—and I put no faith in it, Mary; but, my bairn, if you will bear with me, I was thinking of a word of counsel—will I tell you, Mary?”

“Yes, aunt, yes,” she said, leaning over to me, in an eager way, with light burning in her bonnie blue eyes, that was not natural there. Poor bairn! it was not the advice she wanted, but to hear what I had heard.

“My dear,” said I, “you ken you were aye brought up in a very quiet way; and there is many a thing in the world that never comes into a minister’s family, that’s innocent and right enough, when folk do it in a right spirit; and, if you will take an advice from me, Mary, you’ll take share of Mr. Allan’s pleasures; and that will take the handle from ill-willy folk, and they will have nothing to speak about more. I am no feared for your own spirit, my dear bairn; you’ll neither

forget your right duty, nor where your blessings come from ; and for all I warned both Grace and you against the snares of pleasure, when you were young things, it's different now. Mary, my dear bairn, do not be feared — where he goes, you should go ; and you'll deliver him out of snares, and help him to keep the true way, and put ill-speaking out of folk's heads. It behoves you to be wise, and take heed, Mary ; and you must not let an ill report grow on Mr. Allan, whatever you should do to keep it off."

"Oh, aunt, an ill report !" said Mary, in a wild way—and then she stopped quick and drew nearer to me—and lookit in my face as if she would command me to her will. "Whatever reports there may be, you will not believe them, and you will never mention them again. Say you will not, aunt ! Oh ! they were not true !"

I believed well in my heart that they were

not true ; but I saw also that Mary, for all her anxious words, was not near so sure as me.

“ My dear,” said I, “ you are no to speak as if I thought Mr. Allan needed to be excused ; he maun be excused to nobody, Mary, and you must not look as if he was to blame. But if he’ll no take your ways, try his, my dear, and please him his ain way, and make it right and innocent ; for his sake and Cosmo’s, Mary, my bairn.”

Her face lighted up with a gleam, like as of surprise and joy—as one might look that had found in a moment what they had long been looking for and then the shade came over it again. “ Mrs. Elphinstone ?” she said.

“ Mrs. Elphinstone is Mr. Allan’s mother, and thinks, like all the rest of us, that she may say what she will of her ain bairn,” said I, “ and her mind’s failed, Mary. She’s a sore failed woman from what she was when I saw her last. She’s fallen into age, and her

mind's decayed: she maun e'en say her say, and never be disturbed by you."

Mary made me no answer, but pondered long in her own mind; and then she spoke suddenly at last, as if I had not been waiting silent all this time for what she was to say.

"Aunt," said Mary, "I see it quite well; it is all true. It is I who have been to blame. I have never forgotten that I was a minister's daughter, and I have treated things gravely that should have been passed over with a light hand. I have been wrong—help me, aunt!"

She held out her hand to me, and I took it within my two hands. It was bonnie, and white, and small, but thinner than it ought to be; and there was the one ring upon the finger that telled of all the troublous lot, and cares of this life. She was past the time for many tears, my Mary; for she was now a woman of a sober age, and it is only given to youth to ease its heart and weep. But she



turned her face away from me, and put the other hand over her eyes, and it is my hope, at that moment, that she was putting up a word of supplication, and craving a blessing in her heart.

“And what will my mother think of me?” said Mary, then. “You must stand by me, aunt—and if you do, perhaps I might give myself one pleasure, and ask Claud and Grace here. If I once begin,” and she made a little stop and looked up to me with a glint of mirth and mischief in her face, like the look that once made little Mary’s the blythest face about the Manse of Pasturelands. “If I begin, aunt, there is no saying where I may end; and even you yourself may misunderstand me, and think me led away. But, Aunt Margaret, promise—you will always remember the advice you have given me, and keep my part. Promise, aunt! I see—I see! I may save it all yet!”

I promised her, scarce knowing what she meant—and truly it was hard to ken it was the same Mary, so full of spirit as she was now. She went to write a letter to Claud, —as blythe a letter as I ever saw—and then she sat apart in the window working fast at her seam, with a smile coming and going upon her face, pondering her own thoughts. Truly, if I had not been pleased, I would have been troubled, marvelling what had come over the bairn.

It was a bonnie May-day, and the weather was warm, so we gathered to the low windows of the big grand drawing-room, about six in the night, after the dinner was past, and before the bairns went to their beds. Mr. Allan, he was out upon the bonnie slope of grass before the window, lying all his length upon it, with Susie at his shoulder, and little Mary at his knee, whiles telling them a story, whiles singing, whiles rising up to jump them

high in his arms ; and, truly, I saw not a sign about him, that his mind was straying to other pleasure, or that he had a thought that was apart from his own home. Further down, upon the gravel path, was little Claud with his knife and a bit of wood ; for he was an awful callant for mechanics, and doubtless was making something that was very clever in its way, for he had not time to say a word, and was very ill-pleased when Mary came, pulling at him, to play with papa. Then, within the open window, was my Mary, the mother of the bairns, in a bonnie light shining silk gown, finer than what she had for common wear, and rich fine lace about her white neck, and her bonnie wrists and hands. She was as fair to look upon as a woman that was no more in her first bloom could be, and far bonnier than she herself was in her ain youth ; and when the sun came glinting in upon her, and lighted a gleam in her shining hair,

and syne sank down to her gown, and painted it all into a brighter colour, my heart was fain to look upon my bairn. Cosmo was sitting on the ledge of the window, with his head in and his feet out, learning his lessons, like a wise callant, and very steady and thoughtful like, and I was in the big chair behind. Mrs. Elphinstone keepit her room being feared for draughts and cold air; and, truly, we were like unto a pleasant family—greeing well, and good to one another—to every mortal that saw us then.

The bairns did what they would with Mr. Allan; he played with them like a happy callant, as blythe as any one there, and sure am I, all the Lady Julias in the world were nought to that young man, compared to his little bairn Susie, and his bonnie wife that sat so cheery and so bright behind. I could not help but marvel at the ill stories about him. Who could credit evil of Allan Elphinstone,

that saw him as I saw him? But, woes me! that was the very thing that harmed the pleasant young man. He was of that spirit that he aye enjoyed whatever pleasure came in his way; and though it is hard to me to believe that he could be as blythe at the Castle, as he was here at his own house, yet truly I must e'en credit, because it was even so. He was like a bairn in his spirit, and meant no evil wherever he went.

And when the little things went away to their beds, and only Cosmo was left, we had pleasant converse, them and me. The Lord had blessed the poor word I said to my Mary—it was as if new spirit had come into the bairn; and truly I was blythe to hear Mr. Allan and her taking close counsel together, and drawing nearer and nearer to one another. All this time Cosmo stood looking at them, his bright brown e'en glowing out under his bonnie brow. He kent

not, nor could understand, the spirit of his father and his mother; but there was a wistful young mind in the callant, and he pondered what he saw.

When I went in from the window, where the moon was gleaming out above the trees, and the sough of the leaves, and the sighing of the burn sounded nearer and clearer in the quiet of the night, my heart was moved within me for that house and the dwellers there. Truly my prayer was for prosperity, and the blessing of the Highest—but more than all, that their feet might be guided out of slippery ways, and the paths of pleasantness bring them to wisdom and to the grace of God.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“AY, Janet,” said I, “I mind very well the time you came here. It was when Claud came first to this world, and that’s eight long years ago. You have made a long sojourn at Lilliesleaf, and it’s my hope you’ll make a longer sojourn yet, specially since your son is gone from your hands and doing so weel.”

“Yes, Mem, he’s a weel-doing lad; he was aye a weel-doing lad,” said Janet Scott, who had charge of the nursery, putting up the end of her apron to her e’en; “but its a far way for a mother to part with her one bairn, and maybe never to see him more. I’m a real unthankfu’ person in my true heart, though

folk may think better o' me than I deserve. I canna get ower my complaining, Miss Margaret, and I aye think I would be sae blythe to see Alick, if it was but aince, for he's a' I have in this world."

"Na, Janet," said I, "you cannot say the like of that, and you has your strength unfailed, and many a way of serving the Lord. I could not hear that, Janet; and truly there are times when I would be blythe to be you, among all those bonnie bairns."

"Weel, they *are* a pleasure," said Janet looking round upon them. "Weel-conditioned bairns, and in grand order, though I say it, that shouldna say it; for the mistress hersel, she mony a time brings them to me, when they're a thocht wild, and no ane of them will do a thing contrair when aince I say no. They're very good bairns—but eh, Miss Marget! what think ye of Maister Cosmo? He'll be a grand man, if he's spared,



and I never saw his marrow for discretion now."

"Truly, Janet, I see not the discretion," said I, shaking my head. I was in the Lilliesleaf nursery, which was a big room in one end of the house, with two windows in the length of it, and one in the corner, where there was a grand view over the country, and reaching as far as the Manse, where Claud, my brother, dwelt. Summer and winter it was a bonnie view to me; and I was sitting in Janet's chair by this small window, and before the table where Janet's wire, and the stocking she was working, were laid. The three youngest bairns were all in the room, busy with their ain plays; but Cosmo, he was down the stair, for he was a big laddie now, and likit not the name of the nursery. There was but little furnishing in the room, that the little things might have room to play, and truly it was in bye-ordinary order, con-

sidering how many bairns were in it. Also, a decent young woman that was a helper to Janet, sat in the far corner at her seam, and everything was so right, and so quiet, that it was easy to be seen that this was a well-ordered house.

“Eh, Miss Marget, the like o’ that!” said Janet. “When I’m in ony trouble I aye ask counsel at Maister Cosmo. Naebody kens the wisdom that’s in that bairn, and aye so concerned as he is when he sees a look of trouble on ony kent face, and as taken up about my Alick as if he belanged to himsel. And there’s Maister Claud—did ever ye see as clever a laddie? Him and Robbie at the Manse took down the clock their twa sels and cleaned it; but I’m feared Robbie has nae talent, for the puir thing has never ga’en an hour since. And Miss Mary’s sampler’s beautiful; and as for wee Miss Susie, she’s the life of the house. They’re

grand-mannered bairns, they're no like common folk; though I wouldna say but they took an example from Loueese, and it's nae credit to me."

"And who was Loueese, Janet," said I. "Was that the French bairn's-maid, that there was some story about?"

"She wasna an ill cratur, Miss Marget," said Janet, "far from that. I likit her weel enough mysel, though she had strange ways, but she didna tell she was married, and when her man came about the house, folk thought he came for nae good; and then the maister took her part, and that made things worse—and that was how she gaed away. I wouldna say the mistress was vexed for doing it; but whiles I think, if she had ta'en langer time to ponder it, she never would have putten Loueese away."

To hear this troubled me, and I durst not ask more, because it was but an ill thing

to speak to the servant concerning the doings of the house ; but, bless me, what for did my bairn make a mystery of a simple thing like that, and give folk grounds to speak ? And truly to think of Mary like a jealous woman, ever fearing ill, made my brow burn. Her, that kent nothing but truth and innocence in her young days—it went to my heart to think that Mary was changed like this.

“ Poor Loueese !” said Janet ; “ she was aye uncommonly handy, Miss Marget ; and I’ll let you see a cap she made me—the bonniest thing that ever was, only far ower bonnie to put on ; and her man was a very ill man, and spent the puir thing’s siller, and hurt her guid name ; and that was wherefore she didna tell about him, thinking he ne’er could find her out in a far away pairt like this. But Satan learns his servants wit—and here he came. The mistress wasna very fond of her at the first, seeing she came

from that glaikit Lady Julia ; but we were winning on grand, if it hadna been for that muckle vagabond, with his hairy face. Poor Loueese !”

“ And where is she now, Janet ?” said I.

“ We never could hear that,” said Janet ; “ the blackguard vanished, like an evil spirit ; and the mistress was angered, and wouldna let Loueese stay—so the puir thing put up her bits of bundles, and took her fit in her hand, and followed after him. The mistress wasna hersel that whole day—she had nae comfort after the stranger left the house ; and vexed she was in her ain spirit, for punishing the innocent—she said as muckle hersel to me ; and that, if ever she could, she would find the puir thing out, and make her amends—for Mrs. Elphinstone has a real kind heart, Mem—but you ken that better than me.”

“ But you see, Janet, it’s no aye easy to judge what’s false and what’s true,” said I ;

“and young folk canna have old folk’s experience. It’s no to be expected of them.”

“Oh, deed, Miss Marget! I have nae brood of auld folk’s experience,” said Janet, with a nod of her head, and a sniff of disdain; “gie me an innocent thought, and a kind heart, and I’m no wanting experience—auld folk, truly! It would be telling the like of them to look to their ain ways, and no to put ill in everybody’s head, as I ken some that do!”

“Janet,” said I, being angered, in a measure, “that is no a way to speak to me.”

“I ken it’s no, Miss Marget,” said Janet, “but, whiles I canna refrain—and I humbly beg your pardon, Mem—and if the young mistress took but counsel of her ain guid heart, or of the minister, she would never gang wrang. But that’s no to say that it’s weel enough kent in the house, wha it was first raised an ill story against puir Loueese.”

“Janet, my woman, you’re forgetting who I am,” said I, rising up from my chair; “I have nothing ado with the stories of the house, and they are not to be telled to me. I hope you’ll soon have good news of Alick; and that he’ll come home, and settle, and comfort you for a’ your trouble—and I’m very blythe to hear he’s turned out so well-doing a lad.”

“Yes, Miss Marget,” said Janet, coming after me to the door; but I would not come back, though she was troubled at vexing me—and so I went to my own chamber, and considered of it, and all the trials Mary had found, and how much it behoved her to have wisdom from on high. Also, I could not but marvel at the quiet lot that had come to Grace, and how different it was from the nature of the two bairns—the one being more fit for trouble to our poor vision than the other; and the spirit that was least strong to

bear, and least patient to thole, having come to the hardest lot. But truly their lives were in the hand of Him that kent far better what was good for them, than the like of me.

It happened, then, that Cosmo came running up the stair, with a letter to me, from Oakenshaw—the which was a long letter, with much in it about little Maggie, who was the bairn of my old age, and the sole blossom of her life to my Grace. She was an uncommon bairn, as everybody thought—but this is no the place to tell about her, seeing I am at Lilliesleaf, among Mary's bairns, and no beside her black e'en. And forbye that, Grace made mention to me o' divers things Claud was doing in the parish, and o' divers folk that were about Oakenshaw; and at the end of all, she wrote, in a hurried way, that she had been having many letters from her father. Now, he was one that we had not heard tell of for years,



being but an ill man, and having taken a great anger in his spirit against Grace, seeing she never would be guided by him, nor fall into his evil ways; and was also greatly vexed, when she was married upon my nephew Claud, and called our family by many ill names, the which put a great controversy between him and Grace.

Now, I ought to say, at this place, to stranger folk that never kent me before, that Grace, my dear bairn, was no kindred by blood to me, but was sent to me, when I was a very lone woman, abiding my lane at Sunnyside, and her a little bairn, with no mortal caring for her, to dwell and be brought up by me. The bairn grew into my heart, and, being a bairn of a most generous nature, she likit me, as I likit her, and was like one of our race; and after many troubles, she came into her own inheritance, and was married upon Claud, my nephew, that had been very

fond of her all his days—the which was a sore disappointment to her father, who would fain have kept her out of her rights, if that could have been. So, truly, I marvelled when Grace wrote me word that her father was seeking her now; and inquired, within my own mind, what it could be for—the which Grace said nothing about.

When I went down the stair again, Mary was blythe to get a reading of my letter, though, truly, I doubt not she smiled within herself at all the little things Grace told about her one bairn; for, having many bairns herself, Mary noted not their little ways as we did that had but one, and her a delicate thing, and aye keeping us anxious about her. Mr. Allan was in the room this morning, and so was old Mrs. Elphinstone; and truly, I marvelled at his patience, and such a good son as he was, for she was of a very fretful and restless spirit, and it was far

from a seemly old age that I was looking upon now.

“I suppose you have heard all about this, Miss Maitland,” said Mrs. Elphinstone. “I have just been telling Allan that it is a great piece of nonsense, and will put all the house in disorder, and I am quite sure Mary does not care for it. No, no; be honest, Allan. It is to please yourself: I am quite sure it is not to please Mary.”

“But, indeed, it will please me very much,” said Mary, in an eager way; “and Allan’s position requires something of the kind, now and then, and if we only have a good day, it will please you, I am sure to look on. I think it will be a very pretty sight.”

“A pretty sight! Do you know what you are speaking of, child?” said Mrs. Elphinstone. “Do you mean to ruin your husband and your children with such displays? You cannot afford them—you know how much pains it

cost me to preserve your estate for you, Allan; and now, in my old days, you will leave me without a shelter, and make your heir penniless. Mary, I am surprised at you!"

For a moment, Mary glanced between her good mother and me, as if she was not quite sure what she should do, but then her eye brightened up again. "We will not be extravagant," she said; but she said nothing more—and, truly, I marvelled at Mrs. Elphinstone, who, but a week before, had been complaining to me that Mary was stricter than became her, and did not humour Mr. Allan in his ways.

By and bye the old lady went back to her own room, being in no sweet state of temper, as it appeared to me, and we were by ourselves again. All that forenoon was a very pleasant time; but I could not help marvelling how the word I spoke to Mary had changed the bairn. Mr. Allan behoved to be ever planning something; it was in his nature, and he

had a grand plan now, as we soon came to hear.

“Next year, Mary,” he said, in a half hesitating way, as if he knew not how she would take it. “Next spring, I was thinking, I ought to spend some time in London. I have almost pledged myself, indeed; and you will not miss me, with the children.”

There was a trembling over Mary's face, like a wind passing upon it, and I saw from the way Mr. Allan spoke, that he expected either a remonstrance, or that she would just say “very well,” in an offended way, and it would make a breach between them; and, truly, I waited, scarcely drawing my breath, and very anxious to hear what Mary would say. In another moment, she lookit up in his face.

“I will miss you very much, Allan. Had we not better go together? For even the children do not make amends for you.”

And the young man was greatly taken by

surprise. He lookit at her for a moment with an astonished look. "Would *you* go Mary—you?" he said, in a kind of laughing, unbelieving way. "I never thought of that. I never supposed you would like it. I do not mean a flying visit; that would be quite a different thing. I mean to stay three or four months in London."

"Well, Allan, I should like it," said Mary in a quiet steady way, that showed me she was not to be discouraged, but had made up her mind.

The colour rose high upon Mr. Allan's face; his brow grew red to his very hair. He glanced at her in a quick way; and then he cast down his eyes, and played with a pencil in his hand. At last, he lookit up again.

"My dear Mary, of course it would increase my pleasure," he said, in an impatient tone; "but have you considered the inconvenience—the trouble—yes, not to mince the

matter, the expense. A family in London is very different from a single individual."

"I have not had much time to consider anything," said Mary; "but I like the plan very much, Allan. We will leave the bairns at Lilliesleaf. I can trust Janet; and grandmamma here, and grandmamma at the Manse will look after them. And you and I will go forth on our adventures, and be young people again. I should like it, Allan."

She put her little white hand upon his, and bent across the table to him with tears in her eyes, and a loving look on her bonnie face. Mr. Allan took her hand into his for a moment, and lookit at her, steadfast and amazed. Then he said: "Well, Mary, since you wish it to be so—" and then he rose, and made some excuse, and went away.

Mary could not keep her tears within her e'en when he was gone, and I turned from her, and went to the window that she might not

think I saw them ; but, in a very little while she came up to me, and lookit in my face. “ Aunt,” said Mary, “ I have made a beginning—and not without a sacrifice, either. How shall I do for three months without the bairns ?”

“ God will take care of them, my dear ; and you will be doing what you should do, and striving against the enemy,” said I ; and truly, to hear me speak, any mortal would have thought I was sending forth my dear bairn among the heathen, instead of advising her, as many good folk would think was a sin, to enter for her own hand into the pleasures and vanities of this world.



## CHAPTER IX.

“ BUT, Mary, my dear,” said I, “ what will Mr. Allan do in London ? ”

This was two or three days after the time I told about on the last page, and just within a week of the great party. Mary was very full, in her own mind, about going to London ; and every time it was mentioned, I saw by the secret smile that came into her face, that she had more thoughts about it than were telled to any one of us ; though, truly, what pleasure it could be to her, leaving all the bairns, I could not divine, and it troubled me in my own mind.

“ What will he do, aunt ? indeed, I can-

not tell, till we get there," said Mary, "it will all be perfectly new to me, you know; and I suppose we shall do what other people do, who go to London with no object but pleasure. Pleasure! we will be very gay, you may be certain; what else can people be, that have nothing to do?"

I lookit at her with a moment's dubeity, and it was not easy to ken whether it was excitement for a pleasure, or strong resolution that was in Mary's face.

"My dear," said I, "it's my steadfast hope you'll not be led away by the like of such vanities, nor find enticement in them; for it's a world of temptation, Mary, and, truly we have all deceitful hearts."

"Are you beginning to suspect me already, aunt?" said Mary, in a quiet, sorrowful way. "Well, I know I cannot escape suspicion, and neither can I explain myself to any one; but, aunt, you at least are pledged

to keep my part. Do not fear—the things that keep me away from my bairns, and my mother, and home, will not tempt me very greatly. My mother, Aunt Margaret—she is sure to disapprove, though I will tell her all I can; you will try to satisfy my mother? She will trust you that I am doing right.”

“My dear bairn,” said I, “I bid you not betray the counsels of your own heart; but you may weel trust them that like you best; and if you tell her all you can tell her, and speak to her even as you have spoken to me, my sister will want no warrant of mine for her own bairn.”

There was a silence between us after that, for a space of time. Truly, I perceived well Mary had more thoughts concerning this matter than she told to me, or any mortal; and though I was anxious and troubled for her, I yet had a measure of confidence, trusting she would still be preserved in the right way.

“Aunt,” said Mary, suddenly to me after this, “we all ought to have some business, especially men. Allan said, the other day, that he wondered at Claud retaining his charge, and fettering himself with all his parish duties. Claud is very wise, Aunt Margaret. I wish every man had a profession. Cosmo shall have one, and a love for it, too, if I can have my will. I dare say you will think me ambitious; but it is not ambition either. Do you know, aunt, I would like very much if Allan were in parliament.”

“Mary!” said I, in amazement, scarce knowing what she meant.

“Yes, indeed, I intend to aim at that,” said Mary, with a smile to herself; “and if you see me very gracious to every body next week, you will know what I mean. Aunt, I think it is a very dismal thing to have no great object in life.”

• “My dear,” said I, “there are some that

God himself puts forth out of the tide, that have no special thing to live for, as folk might think ; but truly it is my thought that we all have a great object, seeing the angels themselves ken nothing grander than the glory of the Lord and to do his will, the which is the chief end of man, as Susie said to me, out of the question-book, this very day."

Mary shook her head, and looked up into my face. "When we learn that lesson, Aunt Margaret, everything else is easy to us," said Mary ; and the bairn said nothing more, and the converse ended. Truly, that is the first lesson for every man to learn : that God has not made him for nought, but would have use of him in this world ; also, it is the sole way to win through the troubles of this life ; for the grief, and the sorrow, and the pain, what are they but servants of the Lord, even as we should be, and working to the self-same end ?

Once more again that day, I had a letter from my Grace ; and truly I will just copy down the letter, and let it tell its ain tale. This was what she said :

“ My dear Aunt,

“ I have just written to Mary, telling her how sorry we are—for we cannot come to her party, though we should have wished very much—not for *it*, perhaps—but for a look at Pasturelands, and Lilliesleaf, and Sunnyside, not to speak of our father and mother, Mary and you. Claud is very much occupied at present, and could not leave home to go anywhere—and I—but, as my business is not so agreeable as his, nor so satisfactory, I must tell you of it in detail. You speak a great deal of the troubles of life, since you went to Lilliesleaf, aunt—are there troubles in that halcyon country ? for I think I am once more coming in to my early share of

them—and after all these quiet years, I fear for my own patience a little, and am doubtful whether I will bear them well.

“ I have mentioned to you, once or twice, my father’s letters. He has become my greatest correspondent for a few weeks. It seems that he has fallen somehow out of his customary good fortune, and has been living at Boulogne, to keep out of harm’s way, as he says. He has nobody with him but one person, who seems to have won into his heart, though that is not very soft, nor very easily moved. This is a girl whom he calls my sister. My dear aunt, I reprove myself constantly, yet am no better for it—I cannot hear, without repugnance, this name applied to a stranger ; it makes me impatient with him, and angry at myself. I suppose he has been married again, though we never heard of it ; and his daughter, who is young, only eighteen or nineteen years old, is de-

pendent on him. He praises her very much, and very warmly. He sometimes even—and that pleases me—makes comparisons, very disadvantageous to myself, between her devotion and my indifference to him ; and, altogether, she seems the one person in the world for whom this man of the world has both esteem and affection. I ought to have been touched by his constant references to her—by the evident hold she has upon his regard, and by the greater respect with which he speaks of a well-ordered life, and a quiet home, and his wish that Rhoda should have the advantage of them. But all this, that ought to sway me in her favour, has only the reverse effect ; and I am dismayed to find how I dislike, instead of pitying and devising help for this poor girl.

“ I have sent him remittances, of course—and have written to him, also, as kindly and dutifully as I could—which it is not so



very hard to do, now that I have a bairn of my own—and he has been most constant and persevering in his letters to me. I was astonished at first extremely, but now I understand his motive, and though it is an interested motive, it is not one to blame him for. He has asked me, at last, plainly, to receive his daughter at Oakenshaw.

“This idea is very distasteful to me, my dear aunt. I cannot make up my mind to consent, yet I cannot help pitying him for having to ask. What am I to do? Claud is perplexed as much as I am, and not more willing than I to receive my father’s daughter. I have delayed writing, and will delay, unless something occurs to decide us suddenly, till I hear from you. I do wish you could come home, but that would be a great disappointment to Mary, and I cannot ask it. A girl brought up abroad, under my father’s shadow, the daughter of a Frenchwoman, entirely

ignorant of our fashion of life—how can I bring such an exotic to Oakenshaw ?

“ It is not for a visit either, which might be endurable, but my father asks me, appeals to me, to take charge of Rhoda. He says he has no friend worthy of such a trust, and that I, who am so much older, might be a mother to the poor girl, and begs me very seriously to save her from the evils of his wandering life. How can I refuse ? How can I consent ? For, after all, our own home-peace and comfort are the first things to be considered, and whether my father’s daughter would be a safe companion for mine, is a question I am slow to answer.

“ You see what perplexity I am in, and how much I want your counsel. I am half afraid of myself sometimes, lest prosperity and happiness have hardened my heart ; for, after all, we are not doing much for anybody, only helping a little our kindly neighbours, who

are quite as ready to help us. Come back again, Aunt Margaret, if you can, as soon as Mary's festivities are over, and, in the meantime, write me, and give this difficult question your full consideration.

"Maggie asks anxiously every morning about your return. There is great lack of you in Oakenshaw—and if we have this stranger thrust upon us, and a visit from my father to boot—but, however, we will not anticipate that.

"G. M."

This letter put me in a measure of perturbation, not seeing any right reason that Grace could have to deny her father what he asked from her, or to send back the poor thing, his daughter, who was her own nearest blood in this world. Also, it grieved me that Grace should be so opposed in her mind to the mention of this stranger, who, maybe, was

a very good bairn, and discreet young woman for all we could tell, and truly my own mind was moved towards her, thinking what a hard lot it was for a young thing to have no creature in the world to look to, but the like of that reckless and ill-doing man. I went down the stair, and there I saw Mary, who also was reading a letter, and Grace had told her likewise. Mary thought more with Grace than I did, but she also thought with me, that Grace could not say her father nay. Whereupon I wrote a letter to Oakenshaw, saying what I thought, and that Mary thought the same, and that I hoped Grace would think nothing but good of the poor desolate young thing, that according to nature was, next to her own bairn, her nearest friend. Also, I bade Grace to mind what great mercies the Lord had bestowed upon her, giving her a most quiet habitation, and keeping deadly sickness, trouble, and peril far from her gates—and

how it behoved her to render thanks, as it is the Lord's pleasure to be thanked and praised, by love and kindness to them that were less blessed, specially to one that was her own near kin, and no better than an orphan, being a woman-bairn with only a man to take care of her. When I had sent away my letter, I was eased in my mind—and syne I made a paction with Mary, that whenever the party was bye, I was to go my ways home; the which Mary was slow to give consent to, but yielded when I promised to come back, and see how she was coming on, before she went to London with Mr. Allan in the spring of the year.

And, truly, that time before the great party was just a divert to me. I ken not which was busiest, Mr. Allan or the bairns; and all as taken up about the ploy, as if such a festivity had never befallen before. It was all to do Mary honour, Mr. Allan said, and so it was; but Mrs. Elphinstone said no lee

either, when she said, it was pleasure to himself. For all that he was of discreet years, and the father of a family, he was still but a guileless callant at his heart; and, truly I began to see what Mary meant, when she spoke of folk having an object, and something sure and certain to do in the busy road of this life.

## CHAPTER X.

IT was a bonnie sight as ever I saw. The day was one of the kind of days, in early June, that ever make my heart warm within me—the air was so bright with the light of the sun, and the trees put up their branches into the midst of it, with the full broad green that only belongs to the prime of the year. And there was scarce any breeze to move them—you would think they were crooning to themselves, like living creatures basking in the light; and upon the blue sky was nothing but a bit floating boatie of a cloud, here and there, that might be the shadow of an angel passing by—and the sound of the voices had

a soft sough, as if the sweet summer air would let nothing harsh come through. And truly, to see many folk taking pleasure, after an innocent fashion, in the bonnie woods and braes about Lilliesleaf, and them, for the most part, folk comely to look upon, and well attired, glancing in and out through the trees, or resting on the soft green grass, or running,—the youthful of them—from one brae to another was a fair sight to me, and pleasant to my spirit. Our own bairns had been astir from the earliest light that morning, and there they were, little Mary and Susie, in very bonnie new white frocks, very grand with sewed work, and Cosmo and Claud in their best dresses running every place, and as busy as could be, though the little things, as was to be expected, only hindered other folk in their business, and helped none. Then there was my Mary herself, in a new gown, that was not white, but very near it—a bonnie



glancing silk, and made far finer than Miss Janet Selvage could have made it, with a bit bonnet of lace and flowers upon her head, and so many bonnie things about her, that I scarce kenned my own bairn ; and then there was Mrs. Elphinstone, dressed as rich and fine as she well could be, and her man wheeling her about in her chair, and Mr. Allan, with his happy face, and the smile that aye said welcome, and the kindly way he had that no mortal could resist. I had on my silver gray satin gown myself, and was attired like as an aged gentlewoman should be, to my own thinking, no to bring discredit on them belonging to me, but soberly, as became my years. I kent but few folk myself, in that company ; here and there one came to mind me, that I had kent their father or mother, and there were two or three that I minded in my youth ; but all greater folk that put state upon them, with the like of me, which, truly,

I was never very well pleased to put up with, and that made us that we did not always agree. However, I perceived that many a one kent me, that I did not ken, and I went upon my way with good pleasure, speaking a word where it was meet, and ever coming by Mary, or Mr. Allan, or some of the bairns, who were aye clinging to me.

Then, when we went down to the dinner, the grand tent, when it was laid, was beautiful to see—and truly I did not think there were so many flowers for a dozen miles, as were gathered on the table, and round about it, and put through the tent, wherever a flower could be. The dinner was all cold, it being the height of summer, and that being the fashion, as folk tell me, for dinners that are made out-bye;—and very blythe the folk were, and very bonnie it was to see the ribbons, and the flowers, and the bright colours—and many a bonnie face among them, every

one brighter than its neighbour—and they drank Mary's health, and praised her in a speech, till I thought the bairn's head would be turned ; and was ill-pleased at the man that did it, seeing such phrasing could never be aught but a pain to Mary ; though, when I looked at herself, at last, and saw her with a bit scornful smile upon her lip, looking down, and patting with her foot upon the grass, after an impatient fashion, I would mostly rather she had been pleased, than distrusting it all, as if folk meant not what they say. Mrs. Elphinstone had some more around her—aged ladies like unto herself, some of them with fair faces, pleasant to look upon, and some crabbed and fretful, as hers was—and she was well taken up with them ; but I had time to look about, and see all the folk.

And then, after the dinner, there was music among the trees hid away in one of the little glens—and very bonnie it was, and hushed

the clatter of the folk, and drew them forth again, to sit upon the grass, and wander about the Knowe. And then the bonnie green hollow below the tent was cleared, and they began to dance—and, though it aye seems a fuil pastime to me, for any but very young folk, yet I am free to confess, it was a bonnie sight, that dancing under the trees. The bairns were just wild with joy and pleasure; and, truly, I was very well pleased to sit and look at them myself.

But when the afternoon was near over, and I was sitting at the foot of the long table, that still had wine, and ice, and baskets of flowers, and such like things upon it, looking at the company, and marking the dancers, and hearing the music, I marvelled to see Mr. Allan near-hand me in the tent. At that time, there were few folk in the tent—only Mrs. Elphinstone and some of her friends, with a carpet spread under their feet, sitting

far forward before the door of it, looking at the dancers, and one or two folk in the place itself getting bits of little saucers with the pink ice in them from the serving-man, or resting in the shade. The minister and Mary, my sister, had been here for a space, but were gone away again ; and I was sitting my lane, looking at all the folk, and thinking my own thoughts in my heart.

When, truly, as I have said, I marvelled to see Mr. Allan very near me, also his lane, and not so well content in his looks as he had been in the fore part of the day. He was taking a glass of wine in a slow moody way, looking down into it, as if he saw something there, and giving aye the other glance out at the company, with a keen look, as if he was not pleased. When he saw I noted him, he came to me, and sat down by my side ; and it was not long before I saw the discontent of his spirit, from his converse about the folk.

“Every body looks very amiable, aunt,” said Mr. Allan; “you would not suppose how many long-standing piques and bitter little feuds lie under all those smilings. What a set of hypocrites we are !”

“Whisht, Mr. Allan,” said I, “we whiles say more than we think, and we whiles say lees; but I like not, in the very time of this festivity to find fault with stranger folk.”

“Would you rather find fault with your friends, Aunt Margaret?” said Mr. Allan, with a smile.

“Yes, truly,” said I; “I ken the infirmities of my ain folk, and, in a Christian way, may reprove the same; but I durst not think ill of folk I do not ken, Mr. Allan. I think not it is lawful or right.”

“Well, aunt,” said Mr. Allan, and this time it was with a sigh, “I have never reached to the heights of your philosophy; but I acknowledge its purity and its wisdom. See

how gay everybody is down there—even Mary—do you see Mary, Aunt Margaret ?”

Now, truly, I had been doing little else but note Mary ; and much I marvelled to see her—for, wherever blythe folk were, there was she, the blythest among them, gliding about from one to the other, her bonnie face full of light and smiles, the very spirit of all the pleasure there—and the way she entered into it, and the content she had in all, gave me some wonder in my own spirit.

“ Do you see Mary, Aunt Margaret ?” said Mr. Allan, again, in a strange way—half laughing, yet far from pleased ; “ Mary’s character has quite reached a new development to-day. *She* enjoys herself, at least, whoever does not. She has quite taken me by surprise. What do you think, aunt ?”

“ I think she looks very bonnie, happy, and content, as a woman should be, with so many blessings in her lot, Mr. Allan,” said I.

“Happy and content are beautiful words ; they do not suit a scene like this—they are not adapted for parties of pleasure,” said Mr. Allan, with a dour look ; “they are words for home, Aunt Margaret. Mary is gay—elated—and I am such a selfish fellow, that I confess I don’t like to see my wife enjoy herself so much among strangers—strangers whom she does not like, either. I had rather see her most happy in her own house, and when we are alone.”

“Are you most happy there, yourself, Mr. Allan ?” said I, being, for the moment, angered at him.

“Yes,” he cried out, in an eager way. “I am fool enough, sometimes, but never so great a fool as not to acknowledge my happiness. I am amused elsewhere, too often, perhaps—but trust me, Aunt Margaret, my true delight is always at home.”

“And have you seen tokens of ought else



in Mary?" said I, still being displeased, "truly I have seen her many days at hame her lane, wearying for your company, but making herself as content as she could with the bairns—and the poor thing's blink of pleasure, that is chief to see you pleased, it is ill to grudge her, Mr. Allan. Her pleasure has ever been at hame, as I can testify, and it is my thought that few folk ken my niece, Mary, better than me."

"Aunt, you are displeased," said Mr. Allan, "and I deserve it, I do not deny; but I like to think of Mary as a bright particular star, above all this nonsense and foppery; tush—I am a fool to say so—the truth is, simply, Aunt Margaret, I am completely amazed by her desire to go to London. Why does she wish to go to London? To leave the children here and expose her own health, and mind, and temper to the worry of a London season. I do not understand it, I confess to you."

“And wherefore were you going yourself, Mr. Allan?” said I.

“That is a different thing,” said Mr. Allan, “In the first place I have some engagements—then—but it is entirely a different thing; the question is, why does Mary wish to go?”

“Truly, Mr. Allan,” said I, “she has not opened her mind to me, and I never thought to ask her such a question; but wherefore should she not wish to go where you are going, seeing her best pleasure, doubtless, is in your company, and what is good for you, cannot be ill for her. I see no marvel in it, for my own self.”

“Well, perhaps not,” said Mr. Allan, slowly, “but to tell you the very truth, Aunt Margaret, I would rather cut off my hand, than see Mary in any risk of being drawn into the whirl of pleasure, as people call it—of party-giving and party-going, and all the poor frivolities of second-rate fashion. I like to see

her pretty and bright, and the inspiration of everything about her, as she is now—of course I do—but when I think of her getting into the habit of the thing—not being able to do without it—I get at once alarmed and impatient. I have seen some specimens of late ; and I really wish you would use your influence, Aunt Margaret. I would much rather she did not go to London.”

“Truly, you must ken best, Sir,” said I, “but for my part, I fear nothing for my niece, Mary Maitland ; she kens her duty and the right way well, and I believe not any power in this world will lead her away, so I am not troubled concerning my bairn.”

Mr. Allan’s face brightened up, and he laughed and lookit into my eyes, and held out his hand to me. “Mary Elphinstone, if you please, Aunt Margaret,” he said, with his kindly look, “I think of the old times when I was fighting everybody for her when you

“speak so. Yes, Mary has not got a very good bargain of me, aunt,” he said with a sigh and a grave look. “I have not fulfilled all your kind expectations; but Mary is everything she was—all her sweet promise has come to fruit—and I would not have the world breathe upon my flower of grace. Do you understand me, aunt?”

“Partly, and partly no,” said I. “Mary is no bairn now, but a woman of an assured spirit; and truly, if I were you, and so feared the world would harm her, Mr. Allan, I would take good care to keep out of it myself.”

With that he laughed, and started up from me. “That is a very far hit, aunt; but Mary wants me I see,” he said, and so straightway left me, and went forth among the company again, with all his blythe looks back to him, and as proud about his bonnie wife as could be. Truly he wanted steadfastness in his spirit, and I was wae at my heart to

see that ; but, notwithstanding, he wiled me with his kindly looks, and his mind that aye revealed itself, both good and evil. He was even like a laddie though he had more experience of the world (after his fashion) than even the like of me ; but in his heart and his spirit, he would ever be young.

## CHAPTER XI.

THE next day, I went away early in the morning with the bairns to the Manse, Mr. Allan and Mary being trysted to come for us later in the day. I was also to go the next day to Sunnyside to see Jenny, and then to go back to Oakenshaw to Grace. So, as this was my last day with my brother and my sister, I behoved to go soon that we might have our private converse among ourselves touching all the bairns.

When we got there, Mary, my sister, gave me a letter to read from Grace, the which she had got that morning—wherein Grace wrote, that she had sent word to her father that she would take his motherless bairn, and

be good to her, and provide for her; but I am grieved to say that Grace's mind was not changed concerning this poor young thing, but she still confessed she was far from glad of her coming, and liked not to call her sister. Her name was Rhoda, an out of the way name, but truly she could scarce be said to be of any nation, poor thing, having a French lady to her mother, and living a wandering vagabond life all her days.

We had much converse touching Grace, and divers little things that Mary, my sister, had made, and was sending to little Maggie, our one bairn, and the minister also told me many particular matters about the parish to tell to Claud. Likewise we made a paction touching their visit to Oakenshaw, the which was long promised, and Grace was very anxious about it; so I trysted them to come in the month of September, after the harvest, which they were content to do.

“And now, Margaret,” said, Mary my sister, to me, when the minister had gone out to the garden to speak to the bairns, and we two were our lane, “now I want to speak to you about Mary; she says to me she has changed her plan, and that henceforward she will go where Lilliesleaf goes, and take part in all his extravagant ways. He is very extravagant, Margaret. I am afraid to think of what may happen, if they both get into the same habits. Do you think Mary is right?”

“Truly,” said I, “she thinks she is right, taking counsel in her own spirit, and I marvel to see her discreetness and her wisdom; and she kens how things are, better than we do; and I think I can trust her, *that* she is right, Mary.”

“Well! that is very true,” said Mary, my sister, the cloud clearing off her face. “Mary has a great deal of sense, and even of wisdom, Margaret, and I believe you are right. Still,



I cannot help fearing for her. Did she tell you she was going to London? and all the snares of that gay world, and the difference from everything she has been used to, and the change she will feel when she comes home—do you think she can bear it? It dismays me!”

“Whiles things are but a weariness to some folk, which are great temptations to others,” said I, “and I am not feared for her, Mary. She will come home as she went away; and, truly, we have the kind hand of Providence to trust in, that will preserve the bairn from all evil. I am not feared.”

“If it were not that it might be tempting Providence,” said Mary, my sister, in a low voice, “doing evil that good might come; but *she* thinks it right, as you say, and I will trust her, Margaret; and I pray the Lord send her unharmed home.”

Now, it may be thought we were making a

great speech of this, and it no greater a thing than many godly folk do every year ; but, truly, we kent it would be gay company that Mr. Allan would seek unto, and for my own self, I like not that folk should lose their own fireside night after night, even for godly ends, or meet in public places overmuch, though it was to hear about the spread of the Truth, and the good that was doing in the world—far less for men dancing or singing, or hearing of plays and music, or converse concerning other folk, and about the vanities of the world. I say not that there are few godly folk among them that live so ; but I think it is ill for the spirit of us that are set to dwell in families, to be aye living in a crowd instead, and, truly, quietness and thought, and the common ways of life, are what God has appointed us to, for the most part. Yet was I bold, being strengthened of providence ; though I will not conceal that I whiles had a drither at the

thought, that it was me, and no other, who was the one to send forth my bairn into the snares and pitfalls of the stranger world.

When Mr. Allan and Mary came, we were all blythe. I kent not how it was; for their manner towards one another differed nothing from what it ever was—but there was a look of kindness between the two that comforted my heart; and there was no gloom now upon Cosmo's face. The laddie had taken my counsel—and truly there had been no cause for either bairn or grown-up person to find fault with Mr. Allan, or think he was not caring enough about his own home. I was blythe to see much converse also between him and the minister; and we had real comfort that day of all our troke together. The bairns kept close by me, and would not leave me, seeing it was the last but one that I would be among them; and Cosmo stood by my side as he had been wont to stand by his

mother, casting his bold looks round him, as if he was wishful to hear somebody say a word that might be displeasing to me. He was a manful callant, though rather of a warlike spirit; and the first thought of the brave laddie was to defend, and take care of them he likit best. Truly, I will not advise any ill-willy person to come nigh to me, or speak an ill word of me, when Cosmo comes to be a man.

The next morning early, I went forth again upon my travels, and journeyed to Sunnyside. Truly, it was out of my way to be travelling about after this fashion; but it would have vexed Jenny if she had not seen me again. When I won to my own house, I took Jenny apart into my bedchamber, and spoke a word to her there. "Jenny," said I, "it is nothing but falset and slander what ill folk say of Lilliesleaf, and about your French maid that there was the grand story about. She was a

married wife, poor thing; and Janet Scott has a warm heart to her; and it was for no evil, but because of her ill man that she went away. And truly the other stories are just such like, Jenny; and you'll mind my word, and let every body hear that I thought nought of the ill stories in the countryside but clavers and falset. Jenny, my woman, that was what I wanted to say."

"You speak to me as if *I* put faith in them—and you ga'en away!" said Jenny, in a sorrowful way, putting her apron to her eyes, "when I aye said they were a' lees, mysel, ilka time I heard them minted at. You're ga'en away, Miss Marget—and I'm auld and feeble. I've served ye for five-and-thirty years constant, and waited upon your mother that's laid till her rest, and yoursel in the days of your youth; and now I wouldna say—I'll maybe never look upon your face again."

"Truly, Jenny," said I, "we are both old folk."

“ Ay, Miss Marget, maybe, I’ll never see you again,” said Jenny, wiping her eyes ; “ and I wanted to tell ye aince, what a bien end ye’ve given to me, and comfort in my auld days. I might be a grand lady mysel, for a’ the trouble I have to be at,” said Jenny, with a little bit laugh to herself ; “ nought to fash me from Saturday to Saturday, but the divert of a stocking to work, or some bit thing to do for the bairns ; but, Miss Marget, when I’m called, and gang forth upon my journey, ye’ll cause write down if I was a bad serving woman to you, and that I was five and thirty year in the ae place. I’m no proud, but I like an honest name—and truly, if the young lasses thought it was a credit to the family, it might put mair heart in them, to put up with their ain sma’ vexations, for the sake of the hinder end. And there’s Lilly, puir thing, she’s given her consent, and they were cried in the kirk last Sabbath day ; and

over kind ye've been to her also, Miss Marget. I canna give ye right thanks. I never great at phrasing a' my days; but it's a comfort just to say, aince, how muckle I think upon it, and that I'm thankful in my heart—if I should ne'er see you again."

"Jenny," said I, "you and me will meet one another again, though it be not in this world; and truly it behoves us, being aged folk, to turn our heart to the other country. But, if I have served you, you have served me likewise; and we are but even; and truly it is my hope, Jenny, to see you yet again, in this very place. Whatsoever the Lord's will may be, it will come well. But I would be blythe to be spared for a while in this tabernacle, to see His pleasure among the bairns."

To the which Jenny said "Amen," having her ain anxieties as well as me—though, doubtless, the Lord needed not our oversight, to mark that He ordered all things well—yet it pleased Him to bear with us, and even

to give us our will, and suffer us of the elder generation to abide even till this day. I was some further time in my ain chamber, my lane, having some things to look out from my napery press, that I was minded to give to Lilly, to help in her plenishing—and also, I abode a space, holding communion with my ain spirit, and with Him that gave the same, pondering both on what was past, and on what was to come, and craving a blessing upon the young and the old that were nearest to me. Surely, I was an aged woman, past my threescore years, and winning near to the farthest bound of mortal life—and it behoved me to set my house in order, and to think, as Jenny said, that I never might see it again.

And it may be that my face was graver than its wont, when I bade farewell to Jenny, and lookit back upon the full green of the summer trees round about Sunnyside, and the quiet town lying down below in the



hollow, and the Heaven above, and the countryside around. If I was not grieved to think of my own departure thither, seeing it would be to a better place, I was wae in my heart to think how we would all go home one by one, and how many a dirl would be at the heartstrings of the younger folk, before their call came; but, truly, that was in the Lord's hands, and He is ever kind.

"You are sad, aunt," said Mary to me, when we were driving away upon the quiet country road, when there was not a sound but the ponies' feet, and the carriage-wheels, and the soft sough among the trees; and Mary looked into my face with concern upon her own.

"No sad—only thoughtful, my dear," said I, "truly, it would set me ill to be sad when I was thinking of the Lord's ain holy presence yonder, and the blessed folk we will have our dwelling with, when we win into the kingdom to see His face."

Mary quickened the speed of the ponies, and turned her eyes away from me with a look of trouble. "Aunt, if it is joyful for those who go, it is bitter for those who stay," she said so low that I scarce could hear.

"No bitter, Mary, my dear; nought is bitter but sin," said I, "but sore and heavy, and forlorn, I'll no deny—and that was wherefore I grieved in my spirit—for you will all have that to bear."

She did not say another word, but closed her lips firm, and drove the rest of the road home as fast as we could go; and all that night, Mary clung to me so, as I could not but marvel to see. She thought I boded evil in my heart; truly, I ken the Lord and His mercies better, than to bode of ill, when He has all the doing of it. I was but thoughtful and grave, as beseemed me, parting, it might be, for the last time, and at my years, with the place where I had my abode the most of my life.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE next morning, having taken leave of all the bairns, I went into her private chamber to say farewell to Mrs. Elphinstone. She was still in her bed, lying upon many pillows, and a book nigh-hand her upon a little table, for she was very wakeful. Her face was small and withered, and drawn in by reason of old age; but her e'en then and ever, were wakeful and sharp as e'en could be. She put out her hand to me when I came towards her, and said she was sorry I was going away; and I thanked her, and said, I behoved to go for Grace's sake.

“ You are in great request, Miss Maitland,” said Mrs. Elphinstone, with a bit sneer at me, which, truly, I heeded not. “ And that is just why I regret so much that you leave us so soon. Your ward and niece, at Oakenshaw, cannot want you so much, surely. There is nothing the matter with her, I suppose; and really, Mary has the greatest need of a judicious friend, especially now, with the ridiculous notions she has got into her head. What should she do in London? You really ought to advise her against it !”

“ Truly, madam, I doubt not she kens best hersel,” said I.

“ She does nothing of the sort,” said Mrs. Elphinstone. “ She is jealous—that is the whole truth of it; and so I have told Allan. Foolish creature! as if a young man’s fancy was to be chained and arrested by such a watch as that. You may be sure this will do harm, Miss Maitland.”

“Truly, I ken nothing of it,” said I, being perplexed and troubled ; for wherefore should we, though we were near to them, question together what two other folk, being a man and his wife, were thinking in their hearts.

“So—I see, you think it the best policy to be neutral,” said Mrs. Elphinstone, with a smile that angered me, in spite of myself. “Well ! farewell, Miss Maitland ! We are growing old ; perhaps we may never meet again.”

She shook my hand lightly and let it fall, and though I had a word upon my lips to say, touching the better place, where it was my hope we would meet, I was discouraged like a foolish person, and said it not ; but turned and went forth in silence from the room. Her manner and her speech daunted me—that I should say so ! but, truly, she was ever a woman hard to deal with, even in her best days.

The minister, my brother, was waiting for me at the door ; and when I bade farewell to

my dear bairn Mary, Mr. Allan came forth also to see me away. Mary whispered I was to come back soon again, and bade me trust her, and mind all the converse that had been between us, and then I went into the little carriage, and Claud, my brother, and Mr. Allan with me, and we drove away. We had a long way to go to the railroad, which had come into our quiet countryside since the bairns were married, and I went to abide at Oakenshaw ; and truly, it was not a long journey now from the south country to the east country, where I was going ; so that early in the afternoon, I came to the end of my travel, and saw Grace waiting for me to take me home.

My bairn Grace was little changed from what she was in her youth. She had ever been thoughtful and discreet beyond her years, though truly there was mirth and pleasantness in her, forbye, that strangers kent not. She was not to call bonnie, though I never

saw another face that had just the same wile in it as hers had ; for if you saw it one time, you wearied to look upon it again. She had eyes that were wonderful to see, like as if stars were shining in them ; not that they were aye bright, or aye glancing, but would wake up out of the depths, if you roused them, and glow like the lights of heaven. Besides this, she was not big in stature, nor ever took command upon her ; yet her bit hand had the might to rule, and I ken very few in this pairt that had the power to say her nay. At this present time, as indeed it was ever, her dress was very quiet and plain, and mony a woman servant was grander to look upon in her apparel. But my Grace was ever like a gentlewoman ; and you saw at a glance that she might be a princess, but never could be a common person, howsoever her array might be.

It was but a short road to Oakenshaw,

and being a bonnie afternoon I was blythe to walk thither, there being no greater pleasure to my bairn and me than a quiet walk our lane, after we had been a space parted, when we had many things to say. So we went on with glad hearts upon our road, Grace telling me that all was well at home, the which it was comfort to hear, and then I questioned her concerning things that had come to pass while I was away, and she questioned me.

“And Grace, my dear,” said I, “first of all, have you written the letter to your father, for I am specially concerned for that?”

“Yes, aunt,” said Grace, “I have written to my father, and not only so, but received a letter in return. There is no disposition on his part to leave me time to reconsider the matter; he is perfectly willing to accept my proposal, and settle it at once.”

“But my dear,” said I, “what was your



proposal? It is my hope, Grace, that it was kind and like yourself."

"It was like myself, aunt," said Grace, looking a little doubtfully at me, "though how far that implies that it was *kind*, I will not venture to say. It was not like *you*—and I confess I have a letter to show you which makes me suspicious that my invitation was not the most gracious one in the world."

"Is it from your father, Grace?" said I.

"No; he is a man of the world. He is only proud when it is convenient for him," said Grace; "*he* seems to have seen no ungraciousness in my letter, aunt. This is from the girl herself, and smites me with something like remorse. I am very glad you are here, and will be here from her first arrival, for, if I am not what I should be—and poor Rhoda, I perceive, will have no great expectations from me—she is sure to find out that

your heart is open, Aunt Margaret. Poor bairn! I will say so much in your own very tone."

"But wherefore should you not welcome her aright?—and what should make you ungracious, Grace, my dear?" said I.

Grace shook her head. "I suppose only perverse rebellious human nature, aunt," she said. "I am not *good*, as the bairns say. I deserve to be put in the corner, and have nobody to speak to me, for the worse of it is, that I am perfectly conscious of being wrong—and, to tell you the truth, I doubt if Claud is much more amiable than I am. I cannot tell you, aunt," said Grace, turning to me with the spark lighting up in her eyes, "how bitterly and deeply the sense of wrong used to assail me when I was with my father. I never could quite forget my resentment and indignation;—and then to have a stranger thrust upon us thus—our private home in-

vaded by a girl who will scarcely be able to bear the natural restraints of it, and all because it is right and my duty—I confess, aunt—it is very wrong—but I cannot submit myself quietly to such a coercion as this.”

“ My dear bairn,” said I, being troubled in my spirit, “ the ways of God must be no coercion, or a blessing will not come upon them.”

Grace was silent, and did not lift her head ; truly the bairn kent well that I bid to rebuke her for her speech.

“ A poor motherless bairn, and your own nearest kin,” said I ; “ and because it was disturbing yourself, you would not put forth your hand to succour her, and deliver her out of unseemly company, and bring her into the right road. I marvel at you, Grace, truly such a speech as this is not like my bairn.”

Grace looked up to me with a smile upon her face. “ I am afraid it is extremely like

Grace Maitland, aunt," she said; "however, it is wrong, and I am sorry, and we will trust to time to make all right. You shall see Rhoda's letter when we get home, and will be still more moved in her favour, I am sure—for to tell the truth, it is a very pretty simple genuine letter, aunt, and gives me many compunctions for my involuntary dislike to my father's child."

"You ought to say your sister, Grace," said I.

But Grace looked up at me again, with the smile in her eyes. "How Maggie will be amused, aunt," she said, in her happy way. "Maggie will admire to see mamma come in for her share of admonition. Come, there she is, looking out for you. And now for a great race to welcome Aunt Margaret home."

And truly my sweet little bairnie had been watching at the door of the lodge, and came flying forth, holding out her arms to welcome

me. She was my own special bairn, the child of my old age, called by my own name ; and though all the little things of our blood were precious in my sight, I am free to own I saw none like this one, that was like the blossom of my own heart.

So with little Maggie holding fast by my hand (she had but little to say, her bit heart being moved) we went through among the trees and the flowers, and over the bonnie green lawn — the garden at that season being beautiful to look upon—towards the open window of the parlour, where we mostly sat in the mornings, and where there was a very grand picture of my Grace's mother, which every stranger person took to be Grace herself. And then, the mother and the daughter loosed off my bonnet, and took my shawl from me, that I might not be troubled to go up the stair ; and little Maggie ran to get me a cup of tea, kenning that was what

I likit best ; and Grace went to her little desk—the very same little desk she had when she was a young thing at Sunnyside—and took from it the letter she had told me about. Truly I was moved when I read it, and likewise marvelled, it being out of the common way of letters. This was what it said :

“ Papa has told me, this morning, that my sister will receive me in her great house, and that I am to write and thank her, and say I am very glad. But, madame, I am not very glad. I love papa, and he is very kind to me—and, though he says it is for his good, and for my good, yet I would rather stay with him, and do what I could for him, however poor we were, than come to be unwelcome, and a stranger among strangers. You are a great lady, papa tells me—and I am old enough, now, to know what a very poor, poor girl Rhoda is, without a friend in the

world, except poor papa. But, madame, I would not come to burden you, if it were not his wish. I am very thankful to you, because it is his wish—but I blush, that you will think it is my fault, or that I wish to come. I have often thought of you, madame, all my life—when I was but a little child, and saw every other child with its own friends, and poor Rhoda alone, I wept, then, for my sister, who would love me for papa's sake. But now, I am old, and understand—you will not love me. Madame, I will trouble you very little. You shall never know I am in your great house—and if you will believe that I come only because it is papa's will—though I would rather be his servant, or work for charitable people, than be a burden upon any one—I will be very thankful and content. I say farewell, madame, and pray you may be happy. And I thank you very much, papa bids me say.

“RHODA.”

It was written in an unsteady hand, as though she had been in great trouble when she wrote it. And truly, I was much moved myself; and Grace read it over my shoulder, with a guilty countenance, kenning very well, though she said nought, that she herself had been unkindly, and to blame. I took the letter away with me, when I went to my chamber, that night, and read it over once again; and resolved, in my own heart, without doubt, that whensoever this desolate bairn might come to us, she should find one friend waiting on her, in Oakenshaw.



## CHAPTER XIII.

IN the morning, when I came down the stair, with little Maggie leading me—for the bairn was in my bed-chamber before I was up, and would not go from me, till I was ready—she was a tender-hearted bit thing, and likit me well, though I say it—it was a fair sight that met my eyes when I came to the parlour, where the household were gathered. There was Claud, my nephew, sitting at the table, with the Book before him, ready to begin; and the early morning light, that ever is so fresh and gladsome, was glinting upon the spread table, and the bread and merciful provision for which we were to

give thanks to our Maker, who is ever mindful of us; and also upon divers fresh and comely faces of the maid-servants, who were all sitting by in their clean morning wrappers, and the one lad that abode in the house. My chair was set for me in the place I aye sat, and my book that I aye read out of, lying upon it; and between me and Grace was Maggie's little chair. My heart rose within me as the bairn and me came in, and took our place in the family; and, truly, I could not but give thanks to God for the blessing that had come upon me according to His promise, and that I was spared to see children's children, and peace upon Israel, as at this day; though, likewise, I could not but have thought of Mary in the house at Lilliesleaf, which was not sanctified by the word of God and prayer, in a daily ordinance, which truly was a great and sore loss to her, and to her bairns.

“ Well, Aunt Margaret,” said my nephew Claud to me when worship was past, and we were sitting at our breakfast, “ you have not told us half your news—what about Lilliesleaf?”

“ They were very blythe there, Claud, my man, just before I came away,” said I, “ holding Mary’s birthday as it never was held before, all her days, to my thought—and many great folk about the house, and a very bonnie sight it was. Mary would have likit well, if you had been there.”

“ Yes!—and Mary is happy, I suppose,” said Claud with a questioning look at me. Truly ill stories travel fast; and they had heard a sough of the countryside gossip and falset, as far as Oakenshaw.

“ She has good occasion, Claud,” said I; “ and the bairn would be sinning her mercies if she were aught but happy, with her good estate in this world, and her bonnie bairns,

and Mr. Allan that thinks there is not the like of her. She has her bits of cares, like other folk ; but her cares are no to be named with her blessings ; and its my hope she thinks that hersel."

" I am very glad you say so, aunt," said Claud. But he said nought more ; and Grace spoke not a word. I kent, at a glance, they had heard the evil ; and truly I liked not to suffer a reproach on Mr. Allan, and held my peace with ill-will.

" And the Elders, and the Blythes, and all our old friends," said Grace, " Aunt Margaret has very little to say of them, Claud. And we were quite jealous, Maggie and I, of the Lilliesleaf bairns, and feared we would have no chance against them. When is the Manse coming to Oakenshaw, aunt? Maggie is losing her lawful rights as the representative of the Maitlands. She is only a little girl, my poor wee Maggie ! and I am afraid even

grandmamma prefers Cosmo Elphinstone for the champion and heir."

"Cosmo was very good to me when he was here, mamma," said little Maggie, with her shamefaced look. "He would not let Claud meddle with me. And oh! aunt, does Mary mind me, I wonder? and bonnie little Susie that was just a wee baby then? I would like to go to Lilliesleaf, if mamma would take me; and I would like them to come here. But, oh aunt! will you tell me what I am to do when the young lady comes?"

"What young lady, my bairn?" said I.

Maggie looked at her mamma, and then at me, with the colour up in her bonnie bit face. "The young lady, Miss Maitland, that mamma has the grand room ready for, aunt," said the bairn. "Will she aye speak French? Will she be like the French lady at Dourhills, I wonder, and aye wear grand gowns? I would rather she was like you and mamma."

“It is Rhoda, aunt,” said Grace, with a little flush upon her cheek. “Maggie is alarmed at the idea of the foreign princess; but I daresay she will be a very good simple girl after all, though she will not understand your Scotch, Maggie. You must learn to speak very pretty, and be on your good behaviour, in case the young lady should think you a barbarian, an you must not speak of grand rooms or grand gowns any more. After breakfast, we will take Aunt Margaret to see Miss Rhoda’s room.”

“I think she has a very bonnie name, and I would like to like her; but I think mamma is not pleased,” said little Maggie, reaching up to whisper to me. Maggie had aye a little secret, every now and then for my private ear. We were great friends, my dear little bairn and me.

“Truly, I think you will like her, my dear,” said I, out loud, “and so will I, and

so will mamma; for it's my thought she'll be bonnie and good, and troubled at her heart, poor bairn! and we'll all be very thoughtful, Maggie, and cheer her up again."

And then I began to tell Claud, as the minister bade me, about the parish at home, and what was doing there; and about many humble folk that we all kent, and were concerned about, dwelling in the cot-houses and the small farm-steadings through the parish of Pasturelands, and nigh-hand the little village of Sedgie Burn; but to go over the like of the Glendinnings, or the Kerrs, or Adam Murray's family, or the widow Bessie Downie, and all her bairns would be little interest to stranger folk, though Claud and Grace were blythe to hear about them. Also, I had to tell about Lilly Robb, and that she was to be married, and the lad's name that was to be her man, and

who he belonged to; and Grace said she bid to fill a box with things for Lilly, and Claud promised he would send the young folk a big bible, for Jenny's sake, whereat I was pleased, knowing it would be a great pleasure to Jenny, and also for the sake of Lilly Robb, who was a most discreet and God-fearing young woman herself. So, in this converse, the hour of the breakfast went by, and a pleasant meal time it ever was, both to them and me; and then seeing it was late in the week, Claud, my nephew, went to his ain study, and to his meditations—for he had two diets of worship on the Sabbath day, forbye, a small meeting among the colliers, at Blackstone Brae, that he aye went to on the Sabbath night, hoping in good time to get out a probationer to labour there, and syne to have it erected into a charge, there being great need of it, with many families growing up like heathens,



and no mortal striving for them, that they might win unto the light.

And then Maggie would give her mamma no peace till they took me to the rooms that were for the young stranger, and let me see them. Maggie was very much taken up about the young lady, as she called her, and was aye whispering to me about her, wondering if I would like her, and if she would not understand our speech, and who she would look like, and many more things. To my great wonder I found that Grace had been sorting a very grand room for her poor young sister, one of the biggest bed-chambers in the house, with a dressing-room off from it, and furnished in a very pretty way, like as if it was a guest of honour that was coming, instead of a poor desolate bairn, and a stranger, and no very welcome here. I was troubled in my mind concerning this, and scarce pleased with Grace, for I saw well

that it was all to cover the want of kindness in her heart, that she made this show of honour to Rhoda; and truly I would have been better pleased that she had gotten the empty room up nigh to the nursery, and made to be one of the household, and taken in among us, than to put the poor motherless thing with her sore heart in a grand guest-chamber, that would be but a mockery of her puirtith and her solitude, and her orphan state.

“ Well, aunt,” said Grace, taking me into the pretty bit dressing-room, and making me sit down upon a bit neat little sofa, that was new covered like all the rest of the things, “ I see you are displeased, and yet I am sure it is not because I have neglected Rhoda’s comfort. Now, come and give me my lecture. What is wrong ?”

Maggie stood at my knee, looking up into my face; and truly, I likit not to reprove the mother before her bairn.

“My dear,” said I, “if it was a woman of sober years, that was coming to the house, and of station in the world like yours, even though she was a distressed gentlewoman, and had not riches like unto you, I would say you had done very well—but this is but a bairn, with a sore heart. Truly, I think it would have been a kinder thought to give her something that was not just a guest’s chamber, but one that was liker an abiding place.”

“But, aunt,” said Grace, with a smile at me, “why should these rooms, because they are pretty, be unlike an abiding place? I am very much pleased with them, myself.”

Now, it so chanced that, from where we were sitting, there was to be seen a very grand big wardrobe, standing at the other end of the room, with its doors open, and nothing in it. I think it was near the biggest thing of the kind in the house.

“Grace,” said I, “when you went out of

Sunnyside, a friendless young thing, not kenning what would befall you, do you mind the bits of trunks you took, and the plain things you had to put on? If they were a' hung up yonder, that *you* took with you, Grace, do you think you would have been pleased to see them in this grand big room? Truly, my dear, it is my thought, that, when you lookit upon them, and the place you were to put them, you would have thought shame."

The colour mounted up high to my Grace's brow. "You are very right, aunt," she said, in a humble way; "it is a homely argument, but a strong one—it would have been a mockery—and this poor child will be far poorer than I was. Yes, Aunt Margaret, it is very true."

"But, Grace, my dear," said I, "I bid you not change the room. Truly, I mind not where the room is, for my part;

it is the welcome I am minding about—and I am assured, in my mind, that this young thing would rather like a humble place, and a kind look, than the grandest room in the Queen's ain palace, no to speak of Oakenshaw."

"Well, aunt, wait till she comes," said Grace. "I am beginning to be convinced, you see. But we cannot give up all our pretty preparations. Look at the books, aunt—look at the writing-table—look at all the pretty things. Maggie thinks that no young lady in the world could refuse to be happy here."

"But, mamma, I like a wee room, mysel. I would be feared to be here at night, my lane," whispered Maggie; "and, maybe, the young lady will be feared, too. But, aunt, look how bonnie!—and there's to be flowers here, in this glass—and I'm to bring a pin-cushion I made mysel—and, do you think she will not like it, Aunt Margaret?"

The innocent bairn made me that I could find no more fault with the place—truly, it was a place where a princess might have been content—but cold to the heart of a poor young thing, that was coming like in charity, kenning herself a dependent, and no so welcome as she might have been. My heart was sore for her, as I looked round upon the damask curtains on the bed, and the bonnie white broidered muslin fluttering at the windows, and the grand plenishing on every side, like as if for a guest of state. Poor bairn! I would have put her into Grace's little room, at Sunnyside, if I had her there—which was but a small room, opening out of my own chamber, and no better in it than white dimity, and a bit plain carpet, and two chairs. And truly, if she was such a bairn as I thought in my mind of her, it is my belief she would have been far happier there.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE next morning, when the post came in at breakfast-time, we all got some letters. I saw Grace take up hers in an impatient way, from the which, besides a foreign look the paper had, I divined it was from her father. Claud's were circulars, and such like, about the affairs of the kirk; for our Claud was well reputed among the brethren, and had great say in his own Synod, and was convenor of one scheme, and had to do with most things that were stirring in our parts, for the good of the kirk, and the spread of the Truth. And, truly, I think not there

were many weighty things done, even in the Edinburgh Presbytery itself, but one or another would ask his counsel. For the callant, who had ever been wise, and minded well his father's counsels and good exemplar, was now a man of authority and judgment, well kent for a judicious person, and a manful standard-bearer in the hosts of the Lord. For my own hand, I got two letters; one from Mary, my sister, and one in a big hand of write, which I kent not, till I opened it, and saw the name at the foot of the page. Now, this being from Cosmo, and him no much used to the writing of letters, I will put it all down here.

“My dear Aunt,

“Mamma says I am to write to tell you that we are all very well at Lilliesleaf, and that my tutor is coming, and I'm to begin my lessons. And the gentleman is



from Oxford; and grandpapa is pleased. Mamma says he would rather have had another tutor for me; but he is pleased, for all that. And papa took me with him all the way to Dumfries, by the railway, and bought a great lot of books, and a first rate bow and arrows, and the grandest knife for Claud that you ever saw. It has a dozen blades, and mamma is feared for it, and Robbie at the Manse says he would rather have it than a pound note. I am to have an awful lot of things, papa says; and the books are all in a box; and there's a new desk come into the east room—and that is to be the school-room. And Claud, when he is bigger, is to learn all the same things as me. The gentleman is to come next Monday; his name is Mr. Bernard, and he is an Englishman, and will not go to the kirk, to hear grandpapa, but down to the English chapel at Burrowstoun. Claud thinks he will not

like learning with a tutor ; but I am growing up, and mamma says I ought ; and I am determined to learn whatever other men learn, and be as good a scholar as uncle Claud, though I am never to be a minister—and you need not be feared because Mr. Bernard is English ; for we are to say our catechism to grandpapa, and there is no fear. Papa set up a target, yesterday, on the Aspen brae ; and mamma says I made the best shot, though papa was trying all his might, and wanted to win. And I have been at the Castle, with papa ; and there was a wee chap there, that was Lady Julia's son, with a white face, like a lassie, and not half so big as me—but he beat me in a race, and he can play some games far better than I can ; and I think I like him, though he is a little smatchet, and speaks to mamma as if he was a grown-up man. Claud sends you word, he is making a box, with his new knife, to hold pirns in ;

and it is all to be carved on the top; and he will give it to you;—and Mary and Susie—but mamma says I am not to tell about that. Papa and mamma send their kind love. Papa is to give me a new pony, and Claud is to get Spunkie. And I am

“Your affectionate nephew,

“COSMO ELPINSTONE.”

I think not I would have gotten so much news in any old person's letter—and truly it pleased me, for Cosmo was a manful callant, though he had his bits of faults like other folk. When I was done, I let Maggie see it, who was very proud to get a letter to read, and syne it passed from one to another, and Claud was pleased with it also, and said it was like seeing Lilliesleaf, and very glad he was to get a vision of such comfort and content in Mary's house.

All this time, Grace was taken up about

her letter, reading it over and over with a discontented face, and then she gave it to Claud, and then to me. While Claud was reading it, and Maggie and me were speaking about Cosmo, Grace was silent, and did not say a word, and by the time it came to my hands, truly I was wearied marvelling at what she could mean. The letter was from her father, as I thought, and here it is :—

“ Dear Grace,

“ That you may not be disappointed waiting for us, I have concluded our arrangements at once, and will reach Oakenshaw shortly after you receive this note, with your sister, who is considerably fluttered at the thought of meeting you, knowing how much of the comfort of her future life will depend upon your good opinion of her. Rhoda is a child in many things—in some an experienced and precocious woman—and I, heaven

help me! am not the best person in the world to be the sole guardian of a sensitive girl. So it may happen that some of your feminine fashions, and still more likely, some of your primitive ideas of decorum and propriety, living out of the world as you unfortunately do, may be shocked by my poor girl. I warn you of this danger beforehand, that you may guard against it. Rhoda has a high spirit, though she curbs it, and has been accustomed to a life very different from what yours must be. But though in our former unfortunate differences of opinion I may have expressed myself strongly, and even have confessed to you how extremely unlike my own, and distasteful to me in many points your opinions were, I have always had the highest opinion, as you are aware, of your good sense and judgment—and as the children of one parent, I trust you and your sister will find many things in

common, and will be able to settle into a comfortable family relationship. My compliments to your husband ; I trust he *perfectly approves* of your kind proposal to adopt Rhoda, and will receive her as his wife's sister—especially considering the great advantages you have brought to him—ought to be received. On the whole, I shall leave Rhoda in your hands without much anxiety, and I have no doubt she will make herself both agreeable and useful to you. You will soon discover that she is sometimes very self-willed—the letter that she wrote to you, for instance, she absolutely declined showing me, so that I can only hope it was sufficiently grateful and well expressed ; but as you naturally have a firm will yourself, I do not fear that you will soon sway your sister to your pleasure. I find that I am lengthening unreasonably what I intended as a mere *avant courier* of our approach, for I am indeed

heartily and sincerely anxious that my poor child should find a happy home in the house, of which, but for peculiar circumstances, she might have been joint heiress with yourself. Farewell for a few hours, when I shall hope to receive your hospitable welcome, and to present to you your sister.

“ H. MAITLAND.”

Grace watched me when I was reading this, with a kind of smile upon her face, and I deny not that I was startled, in especial by the end. “ Truly,” said I, with a little start, putting off my spectacles, and laying down the paper on the table, “ I would be blythe to ken what the gentleman might mean.”

“ Is that about the joint heiress-ship, aunt ?” said Grace, still with her pale and angered smile. “ We are favoured people, are we not ? Rhoda has a high spirit, and is self-willed. Claud must make his best bow, and I my state curtsey, in acknowledgment of

the honour paid us. Our poor house does not deserve such a guest."

"My dear bairn, speak not so. The young thing is innocent of this," said I, "though truly, I will not say but the most patient person might own to a provocation. But we are no to answer a man according to his folly. I meant not to say folly in respect of this gentleman: but, truly, the letter is ill-advised."

"So, this is the last day of our private comfort—is it, Grace?" said Claud, "and to-morrow we will have this high-spirited young lady supervising us. Well! we will be able to bear it, I fancy. Let us not be angry in the first place—and Miss Rhoda may differ in sentiment, as much as his other daughter does, from her papa."

Grace shrugged up her shoulders and said nothing, and little Maggie looked from one to another with her bright e'en, marvelling, but kenning not, what our converse was about. Then I put in my word myself.



“Grace, my dear, it behoves us to be ready for the strangers,” said I, “for they will be tired off their long travel; and oh, my bairns! think of kindness, and no of displeasure! Think but of all the mercy the Lord has wared upon yours and you, and crowned your heads and filled your house with the blessing of His covenant; and should you refuse to open your heart to a desolate poor bairn, that, doubtless, has had but scant learning in the only truth? I will not believe it either of Claud or Grace; and now come and see to their up-putting, and wait not, thinking bitter thoughts, till they have reached to the very door.”

With that, Grace rose up and put her arm into mine. “Yes, aunt, yours is the nobler fashion of requital,” she said, turning to the door with me. “Come, Maggie, we will prepare for our young lady—and to-morrow will show us which is right.”

## CHAPTER XV.

BUT the forenoon passed, and there was no word of the strangers. We went to the rooms that were for Miss Rhoda, and saw them all right sorted; and truly Grace was as careful of them as though they had been for some grand visitor; and then little Maggie got her own basket, and drew me away into the gardens, where we got some flowers, early roses some of them, and many bonnie blossoms, the which it was my dear little bairn's great delight to sort and put into the rooms. When all was done, we took our seams, Grace and me, went into the drawing-room to wait for

them ; for Grace would not have her father come into the parlour, which it was her pleasure to call mine, and where her mother's picture was. It is not to be expected that we could settle to work or converse, as long as we were waiting ; and truly Grace went wandering about, from Claud's study to my seat, saying a word to him and a word to me, and moved in her spirit with thought of her days of trouble long ago, when she was under her father's frown. And little Maggie was aye skipping in and out at the open windows, and running a race towards the little house at the gate, and running back again to tell me she heard the carriage wheels ; and whiles I saw Claud's own high head looking through among the trees towards the road. And I will not say, when I minded all the past, and the way I saw this gentleman last, that I had not a little tremble upon me myself.

“I cannot help it, though it is so very foolish, aunt,” said Grace to me when I told her there was a flush upon her cheek, and she looked not like herself; “the thought of seeing my father, rouses me painfully. I cannot avoid remembering all that he made me suffer. Yes, it is quite true; I am excited, Aunt Margaret, and it does not become me to be excited. I cannot quite restrain myself.”

“Truly, my dear, a time of onwaiting is aye a trouble,” said I, “but it is my hope, Grace, you will show none of that when the strangers come.”

“No, no!” she said in a quick way, and turned away from me; and then I sat my lane, pondering on the changes of this life. Once upon a time, my bairn Grace was in her father’s hands; and, doubtless, if he had tried right might have been swayed to his pleasure like other young things. But he

tried to put a yoke upon the bairn's high and generous spirit, and dealt unlovingly and unwisely in the time of his power ; and, truly, though she bore a Christian mind, and would not pay back evil for evil, she looked for his coming as if he was her sworn enemy, and no her nearest friend by nature. And when I thought upon it, I perceived in my own spirit, that he could have very little comfort, any more than she had, in coming here.

When the time of our dinner came, which was at four of the clock in the afternoon—for we were not minding about the fashion—I was for having it put off ; but Grace would not listen to me—" They will dine when they come ; but we cannot wait for them," she said, in her proud way. So, we took our dinner ; though, truly, I was often disturbed in it, thinking I heard them ; and Claud himself many times turned his head towards the window. Grace never took any notice,

nor said a word concerning them ; there had been enough about them for one day.

And in the cool of the bonnie evening time, Claud being done with his sermon, we all upon the lawn before the windows, Maggie running about, bareheaded, with the slanting sun upon her bonnie curls, and her little sweet face, aye drawing her papa away, to see a new flower, here, and there a blink of light among the grand clouds in the west. It was not sunset yet, but drawing near unto it, the sweetest hour of all the day ; and the kye were passing home along the road, lowing for the milking ; and the birds making haste towards their nests, and the clouds gathering about the sun, to see him on his way. Truly, peace was on the countryside, and pleasantness about our dwelling-place. And when I looked about, upon the woods of Oakenshaw, and saw the house standing fast on its ain soil, my heart smote me to think of them that

were coming here, that had no such home to comfort them, but were wanderers and vagrants in the unfriendly world. What were we, that the Lord should have given the like of this comfort to us? Truly, we aye grudge to share our good with other folk, though He grudges not in its bestowal—and, as I considered it, I thought shame in my heart.

Just at that moment, as I was communing with myself, Grace called little Maggie, and took hold of my arm, and drew me into the house; also Claud followed us fast, and stood by the window, looking out.

“Now for our trial, aunt,” said Grace; “they are here at last.”

And then I perceived a post-chaise entering by the gate, and coming toward the house. I will not deny that it put me into a tremor; here was the gentleman, Grace’s father, that had said many an ill-word, and thought many an unkindly thought, touching mine and

me ; and there was she, that was his ain bairn, yet had not a bairn's thought toward him, standing white and firm by the table, striving with her ain heart. "My dear bairn !" said I, making a step toward my Grace, and the sound of my speaking roused her. She returned into her own look once more.

"Now, I am ready for them, aunt," she said, with a smile upon her face ; and, truly, Grace had ever a wonderful power within herself to recall her ain spirit. I saw, being well acquaint with every look in her e'en, the light shining subdued in them, that a small matter would suffice to kindle ; but to outward appearance, and especially to stranger folk, her bearing was as content and quiet, and full of grace as heart could desire.

"Now Claud," she said, turning to him, who was watching from the window how the dusty carriage came up towards the door. "Come with me and receive our guests." When



Claud heard that, he came to her, and Grace took hold of his arm. Truly, it was not in my heart to be other than proud of them, as they stood there before me in the prime of their strength, being both my own bairns. Claud, most manful and strong, looking well like what he was—one of the Lord's appointed servants to keep the Truth, and succour the distressed—and Grace, the queen of her own house, taking nought unseemly upon her, as simple as a little bairn, and nothing in her that was not womanly, for all the natural rule she had. I marvelled in my own mind what the gentleman would think of the two, who, if they were not according to his carnal fashions, were gentlefolk of the Lord's own making, and never could be lookit down upon by the braveries of this world.

Thus they were when they went away. Grace as proud of her husband, and he of his wife, as I was thankful and proud of them

both, in my ain secret heart ; and little Maggie tarried at my knee, looking up in my face and marvelling, and questioning me. Truly, I was not to call composed myself, and I doubted not that if he durst, this strange gentleman would do all he could to be uncivil to me, and maybe, would put his young daughter against me, the which I would be grieved to see ; and I could not help but think, even as Grace did, of the time when he came to Sunnyside, and spoke not as a gentleman should, both to her and to me.

“ Am I to call the gentleman grandpapa, aunt ? ” said little Maggie. It gave me a start to think upon it—Grandpapa ! the same name as Claud, my brother, bore.

“ Yes, my bairn, ” said I. “ He has been long parted from this place, and may be, has different ways ; but you’ll be sure to pay him great respect, Maggie, for he is a very grand gentleman to look upon, and aye has been

used to much service ; and though you never saw him before, he is your own grandpapa, as much as grandpapa at the Manse.”

“ And am I to say ‘ aunt ’ to the young lady, Aunt Margaret ? ” said little Maggie.

“ Yes, my darling,” said I ; “ but just then we both heard voices, or to speak true, one voice, being the voice of Mr. Maitland, Grace’s father, coming along from the door ; and truly Maggie and I were very quiet in a moment, and waited for their coming, and were not very easy, or in comfort, being our lane in the room, either her or me.

“ Yes, I quite approve of your taste—very quiet, but very suitable to your station and requirements,” said the gentleman, as he came in ; “ very creditable indeed, Grace — *very* much improved since my time. I am glad that your short residence with your aunt and myself, though unfortunate in some respects, was not quite lost upon you.”

And there they were in the room, Grace coming a step behind her father, who entered first, and with a higher colour than was her wont, upon her face, and a smile with the which I was not to call pleased; for there was a measure of scorn in it, and that was a grief to me. The gentleman himself, though he was older than he was when I last saw him, kept it his age well, and looked little different. He was a grand-looking man, big, and tall, and with a great presence; but his face, though folk would say it was a fine face in respect of features and such like, was one that you loved not to look upon, being full of this world, and the things of this world, as I thought; though truly it becomes not human folk to make hard judgments upon one another, and it might be that I was in the wrong. Any way, he had a manner that angered quiet folk, being aye as if he was a greater person, and kent far more than them

he spoke to ; and truly this was what my Grace, save in the way of scorning it, was little like to bear.

But I lookit behind to see his young daughter, who was coming close after him, with a brown veil like a cloud hanging half over her face. She was about eighteen, as far as I could judge, and was glancing about her in quick glances, noting all things. Poor thing, she was but strangely dressed for her first appearing among strangers, with a brown cotton gown, and a brown jacket of an outlandish fashion, the like of which I never saw in our parts, though it was not misbecoming either. She was dark in her complexion, with restless eyes that aye seemed on their travels, and dark hair, falling out below her bonnet, and little colour in her face ; and though she had a very bonnie little mouth, it was set in an obstinate sullen way that was not pleasant to see, and her forehead was

drawn in with a thought of a frown, and I saw she was bent upon noting the way Grace lookit at her father and spoke to him, as if she would fain make a quarrel with my bairn. Truly after the first glance, I had some ado to keeping from closing my heart against Miss Rhoda, for she was far from looking like the distressed and solitary bairn that I expected to see.

When they were fairly into the room, her father drew her forward—truly, to my thinking, the way a play-actor might have done, and kissed her before us all. “Now, Rhoda my love,” he said, “I have brought you to your sister’s house, and I trust you will be very happy here, and never regret the sacrifices you have made in leaving me. You lose some advantages, of course, but I trust you will gain others more important to a woman. Welcome, my child, to what was once my home. Your sister will do all she can to

make Oakenshaw a home to you, I am sure."

I saw a tremble, like as of a breath of wind, going over Grace's face, and then the two sisters stood before one another for a moment. The young thing looked at Grace with defiance in her eye; and as for Grace, the way she kept possession of herself was wonderful to me. "I will do what I can to make Oakenshaw a home to you," she said, with a little bow, and a tone of mockery in her voice, repeating her father's words; and for an instant my heart relented, for I thought I saw a quivering on the lip of the stranger bairn; but, if there was, it passed in a moment, and she made Grace a curtsy and sat down. Truly it was a strange meeting among folk so near in blood.

## CHAPTER .XVI.

ALL that night, neither Mr. Maitland nor his daughter took note of me, nor, for that matter, of Claud either, more than they could help. The gentleman kept up a converse with Grace ; the young lady having changed her dress, and taken her dinner, sat in a corner, and lookit at all the books she could get, and took many glances at Grace, and at her father. My dear, little, bonnie Maggie was soon sent away, it being the little thing's bed-time, but before she went out of the room, she stood by my knee, looking at them in her shame-faced way, no venturing to speak,



being a shy bairn, but giving wistful looks that they never took notice of. When Mr. Maitland saw us first, he said, "This is your little girl, Grace?" and patted her upon her head, and said, "How do you do, dear?" but that was not what Maggie was used with, and the little thing was sorely disappointed at it. I cannot say it was a comfortable night in any manner, for I sat at my work, saying nothing and Claud went and came between this room and the study, and the young lady sat in her corner, never speaking to one of us, but looking at the books. All this time, Grace sat in the same chair near her father, speaking to him; and every word she said was in the same scornful way, as if it was not worth her while to say him nay—and everything had the same kind of mock respect as a great lady might show to a mean person that was presuming upon her, but that she would not take the trouble to rebuke in words. I never

saw my Grace look better to the outward eye, for there was a kind of unwitting state about her, where she sat, and a colour in her cheek, and a light in her eye, no to speak of the bit curl of her upper lip, which I kent full well ; but, truly, in my own spirit, I have seldom been less satisfied with my bairn ; for though he took a great deal upon him, and though I kent very well what false pretension it was, he was her father, and it behoved her to demean herself in another fashion, no to say that he was likewise a stranger and a guest under our roof ; and if she had been less polite, and more sincere and kind, truly it might have saved her, and the whole household of us, from sundry troubles.

When it came to be time for the Books, and when George, the lad we had for service in the house, came and put them upon the table, I saw a moment's self-rebuke come into the eye of Grace. Her father took his spying

glass to look at the great Bible that was put before Claud's seat at the head of the table; and when the maid-servants began to come in, he looked at Grace, to ask of her what it was. I heard not what she said; but she spoke something. And syne he lifted up a Bible, in a condescending kind of way, and answered loud out, so that every one could hear,

“To be sure—your husband is a clergyman. I had forgotten—nay, no apologies!—perfectly right—perfectly right, in *his* profession, my dear.”

Now, I cannot say but my heart rose at this—as if the worship of the Lord, in a godly family, belonged to any man's profession! But truly, there was little use in being angry. As for the young lady, when a book was given to her, she lookit at it, and then closed it, and put it down upon another chair. I marvelled not that Claud's face should be

less composed than was his wont, when he opened the big Bible, and lifted his hand to crave a blessing upon the reading of the word ; for, truly, my own mind was in a very perturbed state, and I scarce could attend to what he said.

We were but a strange family, looking upon us at that moment, to be assembled in a minister's house. The maids could not well conceal how anxious they were for a good look at the strangers—in especial, at Miss Rhoda ; and were glancing up from their books, in a hidelins and secret way, when they thought nobody was looking—as, also, truly, to my shame be it said, I was likewise doing myself. Grace bent down over her Bible, till you could scarce see her face, which was flushed and discomposed. Her father, beside her, was holding his book wide open upon his hand, and looking round upon the room, as if he wanted everybody to take

note what honour he was doing his Maker. And, as for the strange young lady, she had no book, but sat with her eyes steadfast on Claud's face, and never moved all the time. As I lookit at her, I could not but perceive a look of Grace in her face—though, how that should be, seeing Grace was like her mother, and not like Mr. Maitland, I could not divine—but, as I glanced at her dark e'en, full open, and the look that was nigh-hand scornful, but steadfast upon Claud, they put me in mind of the manner in which Grace had been bearing herself, all this night, towards her father; and I confessed, in my heart, that the two had a likeness to one another. For myself, I once, also, encountered Miss Rhoda's black e'en, as they went questioning about, for the space of a moment, when she had left looking upon my nephew—and I saw that the poor thing was questioning—poor, forlorn bairn! she kent no better—if

we had a sincere meaning ; and was rather moved to think, in her own mind, that we were all false and hypocrites, because it was our custom thus to draw near unto God.

I would have thought the reading of the chapter and the prayer Claud made, which was the prayer of a righteous man, for them that were near and dear to us all, and for the kirk, and for all in distress and trouble, would have moved the hearts of these fremd folk ; but truly I saw little sign of it—and after the books were laid by, Grace took the young lady to her room again, and she made a curtesy to us all, and said good-night, which was mostly the first plain word I had heard her say. And then the gentleman, Grace's father, yawned and gaped like an uncivil person, and Grace when she came back, stood in converse with him, pretending to be so respectful and so reverent, that I think he saw the mock she was putting upon him at last. 'Then he also

went away, and Claud, and Grace, and me were left our lane.

Grace threw herself down into a chair before me.

“This evening is over at last,” she said, putting her hands upon her hot cheeks, “and now for our opinion of our guests. Aunt, you ought to begin. What do you think of them?”

“Truly, Grace, my dear,” said I, “it is not in my way to discuss the father’s fashions with the bairn, nor yet to listen to the same. They are very different from the like of us; but we’re no such very good folk that we should be the standard, and that is all I have to say.”

“It is not remarkably satisfactory, aunt,” said Grace. “Now, Claud, for your opinion; what do you think of them?”

“I think—that your father is your father, Grace,” said Claud.

I saw the red colour mount up again to Grace’s brow, and a look of vexation and dis-

pleasure came upon her face ; but she waited a moment before she spoke, and in that moment the shadow cleared away.

“ Yes ! you are quite right—quite right !—and yet you trouble me,” said Grace. “ I would rather you spoke out, Claud—both my aunt and you. I will say nothing of my father, not a word ; but what does anybody think of this girl ?”

Claud shrugged his shoulders and shook his head till Grace was moved to smile at him. Neither of the two had much opinion of the stranger, and I was not greatly moved within myself to put in my ain word for her ; but it was right that somebody should take the poor thing’s part.

“ My bairns,” said I, “ she kens us not, and she kens not our ways. I think not she has been used to worship in a family, Grace, my dear—and, truly, if she thinks you are cold and distant to her, she will not think it is very



honest, our drawing nigh to God ; for I have aye seen that those folk who mind least about godliness for their own hand, are aye most exacting with them that profess the same. So, my bairns, I warn you to be wary, and no bring a reproach upon the truth."

"Aunt," said Grace, firing again in her old way, "she is a stranger in our house, and it is her part to conform to us, not ours to suit ourselves to her."

"Truly, no," said I, "but, oh Grace! be kind—be kind! You were once motherless, and among strangers yourself."

"I have never been motherless since I have known you, Aunt Margaret," said Grace; "but Rhoda will have nobody's sympathy to fall back upon, and I had always yours. Yes! I will be very kind to her, aunt, and so will you; but the question is, what do you think of her? and it is not so easy to answer that."

"She knows nothing about us," said

Claud, "and to tell the truth, I do not think we are in a much better position. Such innocent specimens of young ladyhood as Grace and Mary did not help me much in my study of the natural history of the species, aunt. This is altogether a different creature—we are not in a position to pronounce any verdict, Grace. You must proceed in proper order, madam. Let us hear the articles of your libel; what have you to say against her?"

"I have nothing to say against her, and nothing to say for her—no opinion at all, indeed, except the old one, 'I dinna like you,' which my aunt will object to," said Grace, with a little laugh. "Well, after all, we don't know her; but I am afraid of this girl in our quiet house; she has spirit enough, and will show it too, or there is no faith to be put in mortal eyes."

"Truly she has a look that minds me of

her kindred," said I, "and that should warm Claud's heart to her as well as mine. I love not to see a scornful look on your face, Grace, my dear, and truly if you would not have it said that your young sister is like you, you will never look in that manner again."

"Like *me*, aunt?" cried Grace; and truly Claud was near angered at me, and would not have it said; but I did not quit my opinion for that, and though I thought not much of this poor thing, I was grieved for her, and doubtless all the more grieved if she was not such a bairn as would win love for her own hand.

Also I said a word of reproof to my Grace concerning her way of speaking to her father. "My dear," said I, "if you would but mind that the like of this gentleman, if he sees evil in you, will blame it on the word and faith that you profess to hold—for I ken well what worldly folk say; and truly I mind not

that the fourth command takes time to tell that we maun honour a godly father only, or one that pleases our own spirit. And if you were dealing in honour and truth with this gentleman in your courtesy to-night, truly, Grace, you ken yoursel."

Whereupon Grace gave me her hand and promise that she would not do it again, and we went up the stair to our beds, first looking in, both her and me, to the little room, which was between Grace's room and mine, where our little bairn was sleeping sweet after her prayers. Maggie's bonnie curls were all smoothed back below her bit little white cap, and her sweet rosy cheekie (it was not to call rosy either for a bairn, but just a faint bloom, yet what you whiles see in a flower) pressed close upon the white pillow, and one bonnie hand on her little breast, and one thrown up above her head. A very small bookie full of texts (she ever learned

one every night that she might have a good thought in her mind at her lying down, and said it to me in the morning) was upon the little table, and the moon was coming in at the window, and there was one white rose, that she had taken out among the flowers, in a glass by itself upon the mantel-piece. It was easy to see there were kindly hands about that little chamber, and many a prayer has been said in it, as I ken full well.

“ Grace,” said I, “ yon poor bairn in her grand room that you decked for her to-day is no so blessed as little Maggie, with her mother at her bedside, kissing her for good-night.”

And Grace turned round to me and wept, just in a moment, or ever I was aware—and bent down again, as I did also, and kissed our sleeping bairnie on her bonnie brow. She said no more to me but “ good night,” but I kent I had the better of her, and she would mind what I said.

And truly in my own heart I thought upon the stranger, and was grieved for her, and named over her name in my exercise before I went to my rest. Poor desolate thing! if she was of a dour spirit by nature, there was but the greater reason to be wae for her in her troublous lot.

## CHAPTER XVII.

THE gentleman, Mr. Maitland, Grace's father, abode a whole week at Oakenshaw; and I doubt not it was a dull week to him, as truly as it was not bye-ordinary in its cheerfulness for any one of us. But it was easy to see he had no mind to bring his young daughter into the ways of our quiet house. He spoke to Grace about a riding-horse for the young lady, and Grace being, to my grief, in that scornful humour that would not say him nay, caused saddle for her a very bonnie beastie which she sometimes rode upon herself, and which whiles drew a carriage, wherein Grace

was wont to drive with Maggie and me. Miss Rhoda was a grand rider. I likit to look upon her, for my own part; and the firm seat and hand that she had, aye minded me more of my own Grace. So her father and her rode about the country, hither and thither, being away hours at a time, which truly was not wise either in the one or the other, seeing that friendship and favour in the eyes of her sister, were like to be of more import to the young thing than any pleasure of this kind.

Our house was disturbed, and our ways interrupted by these strange folk. The dinner was put off to please Mr. Maitland; and I have seen him come into the room in the middle of the prayer, when we had the Books in the morning, and syne go out again, without even the reverence of walking quiet. Claud was very patient with them, though his brow grew dark, and his e'en lighted up, now and then, when something vexed him; and Grace



in spite of all I could say, aye keepit her scornful courtesy, though whiles she was sorry for her own manner as I could see, and even thought shame. As for myself, I kent not well how to do, being troubled in my mind, though truly it was against my will, by the gentleman's demeanour towards myself, as if I was an intruding person, and had no call to be there. Truly it was little pleasure to be there, at that time.

At last, the morning came when he was to go away. He had been calling upon folk that he kent in the countryside, and concerning them he was very busy, telling his young daughter, how he had bidden this one and the other one come to see her, and how she would soon get cheery company, and was to be sure no to fall into low spirits, but to keep up her heart when he went away. The young lady was sitting in a low chair, which had used to be Grace's favourite chair, till the

young thing took constant possession of it—bending down her head, listening to her papa, with her cheeks redder than their wont, and, as I could see, the water in her eyes ; for she was nigh to her parting with him, and would soon be among strangers, and left her lane. So the bairn was moved, and I marvelled not at that ; though, truly, if he had been giving her good counsel to guide her aright, it would have been wiser-like than all this converse about folk that were little known to Grace, and would be very little heeding about his daughter, when they kent she was but left upon her sister's hospitality. But some folk never ken either themselves or their place ; though, truly, it was not to be thought that the ways and customs of our house, and the manner of our life, were all to be turned to nought for this stranger bairn ; and far kinder it would have been to her, to learn her to turn her heart, being young, to the fashion of the folk

among whom her lot had fallen, than to build her up in a vain thought, that her way was the way *we* all bid to follow, and to use.

My Grace sat apart, listening to the gentleman's speech. He was speaking loud that we all could hear, and she was taking heed to it, and for human folk that aye have a spirit of their ain, it was hard, I could not deny, to keep patience, while this strange man settled everything with his young daughter, as if she was the lady of the place. Grace sat very still, looking over a picture book, listening to what her father said; and, truly, though I was sewing at my seam, I will not say I was without a tremor at my heart, partly with anger against this proud person, and partly for marvelling what my bairn would say.

At length, Mr. Maitland rose, and he came towards Grace. "Now," said he, with a manner like a man telling a bairn—as truly, in a measure, he had a right to do, being her

father. "Now, I leave my daughter in your hands, Grace. Your life is different from the life she has been accustomed to, and she will give up many advantages ; but I trust to you to give her a happy home. I do not object to your primitive mode of existence : no doubt it suits you best ; but I trust you will not forget that Rhoda is young, and needs a little excitement and variety—nor that she is a lady, and your father's daughter, Grace."

"It is time I should say a word, Sir, before you leave us," said Grace, standing up suddenly, just before him. "Miss Rhoda Maitland is now in Oakenshaw, and perceives what our manners are ;. but I cannot hold out any hope to her, that her own arrival in the household will change it much. We are older, graver people, and have serious pursuits to occupy us. I pledge myself that I will neither forget that she is my father's daughter, nor a gentlewoman, and that she shall have perfect

freedom, as far as is possible, in the choice of her friends ; but I cannot undertake that we will alter our associates, or our mode of living. I speak in kindness," said Grace, giving one glance at me, and one at Miss Rhoda, "because it is much better that we should understand each other before you go away ; and I should be grieved if we disappointed Rhoda's expectations, after suffering her to form them. Better to know, truly, how matters are, now."

"Rhoda's expectations, Grace, must be very sturdy plants, if they have outlived this week," said Mr. Maitland, shrugging his shoulders, but no to call offended. "I presume she has a tolerable perception, by this time, how things will be, and has made up her mind to it. Nay, she is here ! I refer you to herself."

Grace turned to her young sister, and so did I unawares ; and the young thing turned upon Grace, with her eye flashing, and her

lip quivering, and passion, and anger, and grief in her face. "It is to please papa. I told you so!" she cried, scarce able to steady her voice. "We will not have much pleasure in each other; but it is papa's wish, and that is enough for me."

"Rhoda, my darling, your sister has not been in the habit of giving so much importance to her father's wish," said Mr. Maitland. "Grace is strong-minded, and has always shown herself above that first rule of nature. But we will not prolong this scene. I can trust my elder daughter's honour—and, as for my child—Rhoda, love, if I have not been a good father to you, still you will not forget me, even here?"

The young thing rose, keeping quiet, with all her power—though I saw it was in her nature to be wild, and show her passion, whatever kind of passion it was—and came close up to her father, and put herself into his

arms, and clung to him as if they never could part. He was not moved as she was ; but still it touched him ; and he put his hands upon her head, as she stood leaning close unto him, and bade " God bless her." Then he said, " Stand up, Rhoda, it is time—control yourself, my love ; control yourself. I must go away "

With that, she drew herself away, and went and sat down upon her chair—and syne he made a bow to me, and went to the door where the carriage waited upon him, Grace following him there, to see him away. Truly, I could not but look, with my heart in my e'en, at his desolate bairn. She never minted to go to the window, to look after him, but followed the track of his disappearing toward the door, and keepit her eyes fixed there, as if she saw him in the empty air, and sat quite still, never moving, and looking as if she kent of neither thing nor person, but the

one that had gone forth this moment from her sight. When the wheels began to move and grind upon the gravel path, then she put her hand quick to her breast, and started as if she had gotten a stroke ; and when the carriage past the window, she gave a bit cry, and started half up, as if to stop him from going away — but then, she just fell back into her chair, and was motionless again, with her e'en wide open, listening and listening — for truly, I kent the look well — till the echo of the sound, as it went away, made her heart sick. I sat bye, looking upon her — folk may think it was but coldrife and hard of me to watch the hour of her trouble ; but, truly, I was greatly moved, in my own spirit, to say a word of comfort to her myself.

“ My dear,” said I, at length — though I marvelled that Grace should be so long away — “ parting is ever sore ; but, in the Lord’s good time, you will see your papa again.”



She looked up in my face, with a wild look, and impatient at me. I mostly think, if she had not put rule upon herself, the bairn could have stricken me with her hand. "What do you say?" said Rhoda; and it angered her the more, that she was forced to speak.

"My dear," said I; for I minded that grief is ever hasty, and cannot thole the words of unconcerned folk—and I was not displeased—"my dear, you will meet with your papa again; and you are young; and it's my hope there's a fair life before you. Take comfort in your heart."

"I do not understand you," she said, in a hasty way. "I did not complain, did I? When I am so weak as to complain, then a stranger may have some right to condole with me; but I do not understand what you say, and you know nothing of me."

I saw the tears so near running over in her

eyes, that still I was not angered as I might have been.

“No,” said I, “truly, it is my hope I ken nothing of you yet; for it is my thought, though I ken not how I came to it, that this is not you, but only your sorrow and your trouble, my poor bairn.”

And she stared at me with her dark e'en, that gloomed and frowned, though nature had made them bright; she stared into my face as one that indeed understood me not. At that moment Grace came into the room, and the e'en fell, and the posture changed, and straightway, though her lip trembled, she looked even as strong and stately as Grace was wont to look herself. My bairn looked not at me when she came in, but went straight to Rhoda, and the manner and the look of Grace was likewise changed, so as it was a comfort to my eyes to see. She put her hand upon Rhoda's hand and spoke to her; and my heart was

gladdened by the tender voice of my own Grace.

“ Rhoda,” she said, “ you are left to me now, and you do not know me, nor like me much. You do not expect to be happy in Oakenshaw. I do not say you will be happy at first, but sometime I am sure you will, if we all try. Will you try, my young sister ? and do not judge harshly of us because we are a great deal older, and something different from you.”

The young thing lookit up for an instant in a startled, scared way into Grace’s face, and then she drew her hand away and rose up, and ran from the room :

“ I cannot bear it—I cannot bear any more,” she cried, with her voice broken ; and so left Grace and me looking at one another in the room our lane.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

IT may be thought we had not very much satisfaction after what we said to Rhoda, at the converse being ended so suddenly, but I bade Grace to have patience, and Grace said the poor thing was moved, and maybe the word we had spoken would bear fruit. Also, I was feared within myself, lest she might think we were both upon her, and might flee from us, no being able to bear our speeches. We had much converse between our two selves that day, and little Maggie came creeping in, looking round about the room for Rhoda, but very glad at her bit little heart, as I could see, that her

grand grandpapa was away. Maggie sat down at her mamma's feet, upon her little stool, and we changed our converse, not thinking it right to speak of other folk before the bairn ; but ever she gave another glint round the room, and ever lookit back at the chair Rhoda had been sitting on, as if her thoughts were as busy as ours. At last the bairn took courage and spoke.

“Mamma,” she said, “will you go and see the young lady? She is in her own room, and nurse heard her greetin’—and she is very sad, and nobody to be good to her—oh, mamma !”

And Maggie lifted her bit bonnie e'en to Grace's face and mine ; the bairn was full of kindness at her heart.

We lookit at each other, when that was said, Grace and me, and Grace put her hand on the head of the bairn. “My dear little Maggie,” she said, “we are very sorry

for the young lady, both Aunt Margaret and I—but it is kinder to leave her alone.”

Maggie lookit up again, and shook her bit little head in a positive way; she was too little a bairn to ken of the private sorrows of the heart. “Mamma, she’s greetin’,” said Maggie, and truly it was hard ado for even myself, that should have kent better, to think of the poor young thing in yon grand solitary room alone breaking her heart, and no a Christian person to speak a word of comfort, or a kind hand to raise her head. It was very dreary to think upon it—for whether she was of a dour and forward spirit, or no, it was certain she was in a strange house, and a strange land.

Wherefore we all abode in an expectation, watching if she would return to us again; and an hour and more passed by, and there was no word of Rhoda, and then we made up our minds that it behoved Grace

to go to her room, and make an essay to bring her back again. But when Grace went, the room was empty, and one of the maids told her that the young lady had gone forth to walk half an hour ago, the which threw us into consternation, for fear the bairn, being left to herself, and misguided, might stray away in the bitterness of her heart. So it may well be thought we had little comfort that day and could not settle to anything, but were ever on the watch for every sound and every foot upon the road without, no to say that Grace put her bonnet on, and went out for a whole hour looking for the bairn, and Maggie kept a constant travel between the gate and the house, and I myself sat constant at the window, looking for the coming back of the young thing. When it was far on in the day, and we had sat down with troubled hearts at the table to dine, Miss Rhoda at last came back—but it was

only to shut herself up in her own room once more, as Maggie's nurse came to tell us. We were all in perplexity, not knowing how to deal with her, and then Grace rose from the head of the table, and went to seek her young sister herself. In two or three minutes Grace came back with a red flush on her face, and took her own seat again. "Aunt, I will learn patience by degrees," said Grace, smiling to me; but I could see she was greatly angered and disturbed as well—for truly kindness, when it is refused, is ever ready to turn to displeasure, and Grace was not used with being resisted. The young thing had met her at the door of the room, and scarce would let her in.

"She has been brooding over some fancied slight or injury," said Grace, "and now she has come in to continue the process. Of course, it makes her miserable; and I can see in her dark, pale, gloomy face, how much she



is tormenting herself. But I suppose, aunt, we must just leave her to come to herself. She does not want anything, she says—nothing at all ; she is splendidly lodged ; and she gave a bitter glance round the room, aunt, as she said it ; but she did not want any dinner, she thanked me, nor anything more to-night.”

“Dear me, Grace, must we leave the bairn so ? She will be ill before the morn,” said I, not knowing what to think.

“It seems to me you are disturbing yourself a great deal too much about the freaks of this sullen girl,” said Claud. “If she chooses to be high fantastical, you never can satisfy her, of course ; and it is not our fault that her pride is humbled by coming here. You were not so very anxious to bring her, that you should blame yourself for her unhappiness, Grace.”

But Grace was not more content than me ; and truly the thought of that perverse bairn,

chafing her heart, poor, uninstructed thing, in her solitude, and thinking we were all aliens and enemies, and seeing no comfort in heaven or earth, was a sore cloud upon the comfort of our assembling, and made us that we did not ken how to speak to each other, but were all communing in our minds touching how we should deal with her, seeing she was left sole in our keeping, and whether she were froward or gentle was truly a trust before God.

“She has a heart, too, if we could only reach to it,” said Grace, after a while’s silence; and dinner being ended, Claud rose up, and, said he, “I will go to my books, Grace, if we are to talk of nothing but Rhoda. But you should get her out of the room, if possible. Should not my aunt try?”

The which showed to us, as made us smile at him, that Claud also was disturbed concerning her, and would fain see the poor mis-

guided thing content in the house that Providence had brought her to.

“Now, aunt,” said Grace, when we had gone into the other room, “now, aunt, it is your turn. Will you encounter her?”

“I would go with goodwill, my dear,” said I, “if I could but get an effectual word to say to the poor bairn; but, truly, when I spoke to her this morning, she told me plain she understood me not, and maybe the tongue being strange—as doubtless her tongue also is strange to me—may make it harder to get in to her; but if you think it is best for me to go, I will try.”

“Yes, aunt, do go,” said Grace—and so I went away, no without a tremor; for truly, I was not used to dealing with ill-willy bairns, our own young things having ever been of a dutiful and pleasant spirit; besides that, I kent them well, and what was like to move them; but I kent nothing of this

stranger, nor where her heart was most like to yield.

I knockit softly when I came to the closed door. Truly, it was like the citadel and stronghold of an enemy in our friendly and kindly house; and two of the maids, being Bell Whitelaw and Cecy, Maggie's nurse, were lingering nigh-hand the door, which, doubtless, was not right, though I scarce could marvel at it, seeing the like of them are aye taken up about a mystery. I could get no answer to my first quiet rap upon her, and then I knockit again, having first sent the two maids away, and said :

“Will you no let me speak to you, my dear,” and put my hand upon the handle of the door. It may be that it made a noise as if I was going to open it, for straightway the moment I touched it, the door was opened quick, and there stood the stranger bairn before me, her face black with the cloud upon

her spirit, but her cheeks glowing like with sudden anger. Truly, I was feared for the moment she would lift her hand to me.

“ I do not know what hospitality means in this country,” she said, in a quick way, her breath coming fast upon her lip in her passion, “ but I have been used to suppose my own chamber a place in which I was secure from intrusion ; perhaps you will kindly explain to me. Am I to have domiciliary visits always, or are they only a special kindness shown to me now, because I particularly wish to be alone ?”

The bairn spoke to me in such a manner as truly I would not have spoken to any forward servant lass about the house ; her eyes firing out from under her gloom, and her bit small hand holding firm to the door.

“ Truly, Miss Rhoda,” said I, “ it is my fear you are forgetting both the dwellers in this house and yourself ; you are but a young thing, scarce come to woman’s estate, and I

am aged and have white hairs. I will not think you have been so evil instructed as not to ken that this is not a seemly fashion to speak to the like of me."

The bairn put on a scornful look, as like my Grace—though, truly, I was not pleased to confess to it,—as could be, and made me a mock curtsy, and said :

"I beg your pardon, madam ; pray forgive me. I do not understand Scotch perfectly ; and I was not aware what your pretensions were."

Truly, it was hard to keep from being angered ; but I kent she was speaking in a kind of daring, and against her right and proper heart, and also I was very sorry, in my own mind, for the misguided bairn.

"My dear," said I, "it is little odds to you what are my pretensions, seeing you can neither hinder them nor further them, whatever they may be ; and it behoves you rather to mind upon your own, that they be just and right.

I have come from your sister, whose place you ken, and whom Providence has made mistress of this house, to bid you to the room where the family are, to take your place like other folk—or else to give us the comfort of kenning that you are right attended to in your own room, if it is really your honest and true desire to be your lane this night. You are very young, and have but small experience in this world ; but the like of you, poor bairn, what can you do, striving and setting yourself up among the folk with whom you dwell ? There is not an evil thought towards you in this whole house of Oakenshaw, nor yet an unkind purpose ; and, truly, if you take other thoughts into your head, they are vain, and will only harm your own spirit, besides being unworthy and foolish thoughts, and misbecoming any mind that has come to years. Now, truly, I am not one to make quarrels ; but you will even let me ken if it is your pleasure to abide

## LILLIESLEAF.

here, or to come among the family—or, without either making or meaning anger, what it will be for your ain comfort to do.”

The bairn was daunted seeing me speak so quiet, and kent not well what to make answer, perceiving—for she was clever enough—that I was not one to make an outcast with. She stood looking at me for a moment with an obstinate look, but discomposed and shaken. But then she turned, took her hand from the door, and stood aside, as if for me to enter. “I will stay here, please,” she said; “or—I do not care—anywhere you choose.”

And with that, she made a step into the room, and gathered up some papers from the table. Her things were lying about, one on this chair, and one on that, and her bonnet on the floor. There was little order now in the grand room.

“Do you want me to come in, Miss Rhoda?” said I.



“ Oh, just as you please—exactly as you please !” cried the young thing, tearing a bit of paper to pieces, in a passionate way. “ *I* have no authority here.”

“ My poor bairn,” said I, “ some day you will ken me better. I desire of you to let one of the women come in, to bring you something, for your sister’s satisfaction. And now I bid you good night.”

With these words, I went away; Rhoda making me no answer. Without doubt, she was a very perverse bairn. I called Cecy to me, when I left the door, and told her, being a discreet, eldern person that could be trusted, to carry divers things into the room for Miss Rhoda ; and truly I saw the tray carried down the next morning, and perceived that Rhoda had not withstood nature, but had eaten her supper like a sensible bairn.

## CHAPTER XIX.

The next morning, and many mornings after that, it was just wonderful to see how anxious we all were to ken whether or no Miss Rhoda would appear among us. Whiles she came, and whiles she did not—whiles she would be in my parlour where we aye took our breakfast, and had the books, before another one of the family was down the stair—and maybe, the next morning, would not come out of her room, till eleven or twelve in the day. Truly, even I myself could say nothing better for her, than that everything she did was perverse. And Grace, being but

ill-pleased to begin with, had come to be very greatly angered at this foolish bairn. When Rhoda whiles sat, in the same room with us, for an hour or so at a time, I saw well she was far from content with herself—she had no notion of a woman's work, poor thing!—and when I was sitting by, with my seam, and little Maggie, maybe, at my feet, making her bit pleasant pretence of sewing, too, and Grace aye busy with one needful thing or another, Rhoda would sit idle in a corner, with her hands on her knee, and her face as black as a winter night; or else keep a book before her, the which, poor bairn! she was overmuch burdened with her ain thoughts to read, or give heed to; but took weary looks at us, behind the shelter of it, scoffing at us in her heart. There was she, in her low chair, that she had put Grace out of possession of, never saying a word that she could help, with trouble and a constant gloom upon

her young face, that should have been brighter to look upon, and her e'en gleaming about with that watching, jealous look that folk learn, when they are dwelling among enemies; and there was Grace, further back in the room, at her own table, whiles busy with papers and books (for Claud and her were both active young folk, and never done with one good deed or another, for the service of the folk on the estate, and the improvement of the land), or else doing something with her hands, either for use or divert, as the case might be; and there was me—now, truly, you may say it was little wisdom in me to be sewing at my seam, when other folk could have done it just as well, and I might have spent my time better—but I had ever pleasure in doing something, and likit not to be idle; and the needle and thread were well-kent tools to me. All this time, the window would be open, and the hum of the sweet

air without, and whiles a wandered butterfly or a bee, and aye my bonnie dancing Maggie, coming out and in, from the garden to the room—and there was not a cloud nor a gloom any place to be seen, but the sunny light, and the blythe content of a summer day. Many a wistful look I took at the two that were sisters in blood, and had a glint of likeness to one another, in the look upon their faces—for Grace was sore angered, as scarce was marvellous—for truly, what occasion was there here for that young thing's constant gloom.

Then Miss Rhoda would start up off her seat, and throw down her book, in a kind of desperate way, as if she said, "I can bear it no longer," and flee away to her ain room; and we then would see her, straightway, in her bit outlandish jacket, and a hat upon her head, such as was not kent in our pairts going forth by a bye-path out of the garden, to

wander about the lone country roads, till the gloaming fell. Oakenshaw, and all that belonged to it, was well kent, and well respected in the countryside; and we were not feared for harm happening to the misguided bairn; but, for all that, it was not right, and put Grace much about, and likewise myself, seeing Rhoda was come to years, that made it unseemly, and, proud though she was, she might see folk, in her wanderings, that were not meet for her to see. But, whiles at another time, instead of going out, she would shut herself up close in her own room, and never mint at crossing the door, day after day. So, truly, we were at our wits end concerning Rhoda, ever taking counsel about her between ourselves, and not kenning what to do.

Now I cannot say of my Grace that she was perfect, any more than other folk; she was one that made a good endeavour to

follow the ways of the Lord, but she had her ain failings like the rest, and the bairn Rhoda was a great hinder and off-put to her, and disturbed her spirit many a day. So truly, it might happen that Grace whiles took that for scorn and defiance, which was but bitterness of heart, and disappointment, and a sore mistake in the young thing's mind concerning the whole of us. But so it came to pass that nothing mended, and now, when it was a whole month since Mr. Maitland went away, we were no better, and the stranger was no more settled nor comforted than on the first day. Her father wrote but once all that time—I am meaning she got but one letter out of the bag—and nobody came to see her, of all the folk that the gentleman had promised to come; and poor forlorn thing, in her loneliness and her wrath against us, she could have foughten with us all.

Now it came to pass that Claud and

Grace were trusted to go upon a visit early in September to some grand folk in the North country, that thought much of them both—as truly they well deserved; few folk kent that so well as me—and I was to be left my lane with Maggie and Miss Rhoda, though, to speak true, I was not so thankful for the young lady's company as I might have been. A fortnight before they went away Grace told her. “I am sorry to think, Rhoda,” she said, “that our absence will make very little difference to you;—but I hope you may have considered better of it, before our return, and that we may then be able to adapt ourselves a little to each other. I think we could manage that, do you know, if you took the trouble to desire it yourself.”

“Oh! pray do not think of me,” said Rhoda in a very quick way, “nothing is any matter to me—it is all the same now, quite the same.”



Now, maybe Grace should not have smiled ; but truly, hearing the tone of this, I my own self, could scarce refrain. And then the poor thing burst out with such a passion as she had never let herself show to us before.

“ You laugh at me ! ” she cried out, in a fierce way, “ you who know very well I would rather work with these reapers in the fields than stay here, eating your bitter bread. You laugh at *me* ! oh, if I could only go and beg, or starve, or kill myself ! but you know I must stay here ! ”

“ Rhoda,” said Grace—and truly, neither the one nor the other would have thanked me had I put in my word, so I turned my seat apart, and said nothing. “ Rhoda, do you know that these are what the world calls ‘ heroics ? ’—and, besides, they are very foolish, unreasonable, useless words, as you must perceive quite as well as me. Let us acknowledge that it is a very hard fate to stay in

Oakenshaw ; nevertheless, it is your father's will, and you cannot help it. Do you really think it is the wisest plan to make the worst of it ? or do you not think that you might try now, for novelty's sake, to make the best ?”

Grace said it all with a smile, and maybe her tone was like the tone that grave folk use when they are reasoning with a foolish bairn. When I looked at Miss Rhoda, I am free to say that I was feared in my own spirit. Her very face was bursting and throbbing with passion, and there was a deep angry flush upon it, and her little bit hands were clasped firm. She looked at Grace for a long time without saying a word, and then she started up in her common fashion, and said something I could not hear, and went away. When she had closed the door, I kent by the bounds that she was running as fast as her wild passion could carry her to her own room, and that the most

likely thing was that we should not see her again that day.

A moment after Claud came in. "Is the girl mad, Grace?" he said, and it turned out that she had come against him on the stair, being nigh blind with her anger, and had stamped her foot at him, and bade him not come in her way. Claud likewise had a smile upon his face, though he was angry; truly wrath and passion need a great person to make them terrible, though to me it is ever a sore spectacle to look upon such a tumult in any spirit, seeing the seed of all evil is in it, and the dreary sight it is in the eye of God.

"Shall we be fairly driven out—expelled from our own house, Grace?" said Claud, in a smiling way. "But, seriously, we ought not to permit any thing of this kind. Is it ruling our own house well, think you, Aunt Margaret? I am doubtful of it. Did you conduct

yourself like this young lady, when you lived with Mrs. Lennox, Grace?"

Grace's countenance cleared for a moment when he said that. "I am not very sure that I was a great deal better," she said, after a time. "I did what I was bidden, and made no disturbance in the household—thanks to Aunt Margaret, who taught me what lawful authority was; but, in spirit, I am afraid, Claud, I was not so much superior to Rhoda, as I have been supposing all this time."

"Well! if it is a common infirmity of young ladies, we must bear with it," said Claud, shrugging his shoulders and laughing. "But how shall we leave Aunt Margaret, with such a little tiger? Perhaps, before we get back, aunt, she may have expelled *you*."

"Whisht, wisht, bairns," said I. "None of you ken—she is more troubled at what she does hersel, than even we can be."

And with that we stayed our converse. Truly, though I made excuses for her, I was displeased in my own mind to think that our thoughts were turned from better things, and our spirits disturbed and troubled, ever watching what she would do, and taking counsel about this perverse bairn.

That very same night, Maggie came to me, with the tears in her eyes, drawing down her sleeve as far as she could, poor bit thing, to hide a mark upon her arm. When I asked her what it was, Maggie cried, and bade me no to tell her mamma.

“It was the young lady, aunt,” said Maggie. “She was hurrying past, and she didna see me, and I wasna looking, and I fell. I tried no to greet as much as ever I could, Aunt Margaret, but it’s sore for all that; and when Miss Rhoda saw there was nobody but me in the garden, she came back, and lifted me up and kissed me, and cried hersel; for

she did not mean it, aunt—and if you only had seen how she cried !”

But I could see nothing but the broken skin on my bairn’s bonnie little arm. The careless, perverse, passionate girl!—that I should say so. I was more provokit with this, than I had been with all her other ill-doings; and even Maggie’s sweet bit voice, pleading for her, was no enough to soften me. Truly, I was just as far from being of a sanctified temper myself, as Rhoda was; and if I had been a right person, it would have been a lesson to me.

But I put Maggie to her bed myself, and heard her say her Psalm, and her prayers, and sat by her till she fell asleep; and I thought it was even as well, having come to a better temper by that time, to say nothing about it to Grace. For when I considered in my mind it was easy to come to right thoughts in that room, where the bairn’s prayers were said

even now, and the bairn's breath making music in the quiet place; and when the like of me, an aged woman, that might have learned patience many a year ago, went so easy astray, was I the one to make a hard judgment upon a misguided and unlearned bairn like Rhoda, that never had her footsteps guided in the right way, nor kent what was the loving-kindness of the Lord? Truly, it became me not; and I was humbled to see what strife and evil temper was still abiding in mysel.

## CHAPTER XX.

THERE was little more came to pass that I can mind of, out of our ordinary way, till Claud and Grace went upon their journey. They were going to very great folk, as I have said, no the gentlefolk of a countryside, as my two bairns were themselves, but noble persons, as well kent in the nation as the house of Oakenshaw was in the parish and county we were dwelling in; and but that Grace had small pleasure in being out of the sight of her little bairn, even for a time, they were well pleased to go. Miss Rhoda had made no change since the last



time I have mentioned her, but she had the grace to come down the stair to her breakfast the morning they were going away, and to bid them good-bye, though not after a seemly fashion. By the time they departed, she was out for one of her long walks, and I was left by myself; truly, I behoved to look to my ways, being left, an aged gentlewoman, with this ill-willy bairn; and though there was little laughing in my head, I could not but smile at the thought that we were all feared for her more or less, though she was the youngest in all the house, except little Maggie, my good bairn.

In the afterpart of the day, when Maggie was out with her maid Cecy, and all the house was quiet, I went forth myself, meaning to walk to Dourhills, to see one or two auld folk, of my own time of life, that were sorer failed than me. I went but slow, being easier wearied than I once was; besides, that kend-

ing, all the folk, I could not pass by an open door without a word with the mistress of it, if she saw me, or something to say to the little bairns; so it was not far off the sunsetting when I came to Dourhills.

Dourhills is but a very small place, but pleasant in its way, being near-hand the water, upon a brae, with many very fine big trees upon the crown of it, and the gates of Mr. Kirkman's house, (who is the laird of Dourhills,) and all the planting there, turning off from the low end of the main street—if you can call the rows of cot-houses, and the two or three bits of shops by the name of a street at all. The place, where I was going specially, was half up the brae, a well-sized house that was two stories in the back, by reason of the unequal ground, though it was but one to the front part of it; and the aged person in the upper room there, was a very decent woman, and come of creditable folk, though, by reason

of being married upon a poor man, and having a very big family, she had aye been struggling all her days with the world. Her bairns were scattered hither and thither, in every airt; and truly, having so many of them, she kent it must be so, and mourned not. Her goodman — though I have small reason to call him so, seeing there was but little good in him—was dead; and this was a daughter married upon a saddler, that kepted this house. The aged woman herself—her name was Porteous, a name of this countryside—was sitting by the window when I went in, looking upon the blythe and lightsome water of Dour, which truly was as bonnie a sight as you could see, careering down its path, with the long slant of the sun upon it, and the great bits of rock breaking up in its mid course, with an edge of foam round about them, and the opposite bank, with its bonnie birch trees, and the clusters of red rowans shining

among the leaves. Mrs. Porteous was working a little stocking. I never saw one like her for this work. She made bits of socks for Maggie that were like fine lace; and Grace and the other ladies near-hand keepit her well in work, which was just a divert and pleasure to her, forbye. She was well pleased to see me. The folk in Dourhills had all a warm heart to every one that came out of the minister's house.

“And how lang will he be away, Miss Marget?” said Mrs. Porteous, “four weeks, said ye? three haille Sabbath days? Weel, I wouldna be ane to grudge the minister the play, ony mair than another man; but a’body kens what awfu’ discontented folk the folk are hereaway; and I’m just as sure to hear the Meeting cast it up to us that our minister is away to see a lord, as I am sure the sun will rise again. But nae fears of him, says I; if it was the queen hersel, and a’ the vanities of this world. I hear of that earl, Miss

Marget, that he's a great man for the kirk himself."

"There is little doubt of that," said I; "and a good man, likewise, like all his forbears."

"I never mind whether it's him, or his father; his father was aye of your real wild lords, and nae better than he should be, Miss Marget," said Mrs. Porteous; "it's an unco' strange thing to me, when Matty tells me: 'Mother, it's the auld man you're thinking upon—and he's been dead this mony a year.' 'Hout, lassie!' I say, in my joking way, 'I mind of him before you were born, in the time of the last war, that you ken naething about—and will you say you're better acquaint than me?' But, it's aye Matty that turns out right, Miss Marget; auld age and wit dwell not in the same dwelling; for I was reckoned very well learned, in my young days."

"Truly," said I, "I am not feared that either you or me will forget what it behoves

us most to mind ; and I heed not much, for myself, upon the rest.”

“Na,” said Mrs. Porteous, who was a bye-ordinary Christian woman ; “He puts our memory in nae peril—for the Lord abides ever the same ; but I like to keep my lear of this world, a vain auld wife that I am—and, speaking of that, Miss Marget, that puir afflicted young lady ! it’s an awfu’ charge for you—and some folk in the town are far from content at Mrs. Maitland and the minister, for leaving you with such a handful. Is she ever like to be restored ?”

“Truly, I ken of little that ails her, but sometimes a pain in her temper, poor bairn !” said I, being greatly startled in my own mind, but wishful to pass it lightly by. “Afflicted she is not, in any manner ; but as well as a young thing can be, that is strange to our ways. Is it some evil person that has been raising a story ? I thought not there was

such unkindly gossiped in a neighbour place like Dourhills."

"Na, Miss Marget, you maunna be angry," said Mrs. Porteous; "it was one of the maids that telled it in the town, that the minister said the young lady wasna hersel—and wha could disbelieve the minister? It's nae gossip, I'll assure you, from either Matty or me."

"The minister said no such thing, Mrs. Porteous," said I; "and truly, I would not like to hear either maid or man about our house, saying such a falset. The young lady is as well in her mind, as in her health; and nothing ails her but a young thing's strangeness in an unkent place. Afflicted! No, Matty, my woman, I'm no angry; but it troubles me that such a thing should be said, being so far from true."

"Never you heed about it, Miss Marget. I ken how to do," said Matty, who had come

in beside us, and was a very stirring, thrifty woman, and well esteemed in the town; “there’s no a lass in the parish can threep to a story with me. You’ll never hear tell of it again; and I’ll give Cecy, that might ken better, a guid flyte, the next time she comes here;—but to see the young lady fleeing about by the planting, and a’ the quiet roads, and never speaking even to a bairn—and kenning a’body was so different at Oakenshaw—and that the minister said it—how were we to ken?”

I tarried awhile, that they might not think I was bearing anger, and then I went away, kenning well this was but a passing story, yet troubled at it in my mind. When I was on my road home, I saw, off the bye-path I was travelling upon, a carriage on the road; and I soon kent it for the carriage of one of the county families, folk that were kent to Grace’s father (as, also, they were



to my bairn herself, in a degree) and that he said had promised to come and see Miss Rhoda, when he went away. As I was coming up to the stile, to pass out of the bit small path I was on, into the common road, the carriage stoppit close before me; and, as I cared not for converse with this lady, I steppit back behind the hedge, till it would pass again. But then, I marvelled to see that it was Rhoda that was standing by the side of the carriage, and that Mrs. Mowbray was speaking to her. What she said was no secret to be feared for hearing it. It was just that she hoped Rhoda liked Oakenshaw, and found Mrs. Maitland agreeable. "She can be very agreeable when Rhoda likes," the lady said, in a quick rattling way she had; "and her old aunt is quite a character, and will amuse you, I am sure. When did you hear from papa? Ah! he is not a very regular correspondent, I dare say. I should have

called, but I heard Mrs. Maitland was from home. Good bye, dear—I am glad to hear you are comfortable at Oakenshaw.”

The carriage drove away, and Rhoda stood among the dust it raised, never moving off the place she stood. I know not what the poor bairn had expected, or if she really had believed her father that grand folk like this were to come out of their way to be kind to a desolate thing like her that was worse than an orphan; but she stood still for a while, and then she put her hands into the air as if she threw something from them. “I will do without everybody—I will be enough for myself—I will never hope in any one again,” she said, muttering with a kind of choked voice, and then she started upon the road, not running, but walking so fast that I could not have kept up with her—walking straight on in a passionate blind way, as if she cared not where she was going, and would

be just as well pleased to dash her head against a wall as to enter at a door. I saw very well now how it could happen, that my bonnie little Maggie, being in Miss Rhoda's way, should get a fall.

When I came home, I was filled with wonder to see her in the drawing-room, for I had made up my mind that she would shut herself into her own chamber after this trial; but there she was, with the lamp lighted, and a big book before her, which I had never seen before, and over this book she bent her head so low that whiles her hair swept upon it, and I could not see her face. When I had seen my little bairnie safe in her bed, I came back and took my seam, and sat down nigh to Miss Rhoda, and my heart was moved towards the motherless bairn.

“I have not had a charge like this,” said I, trying to win her into converse, “since

I abode in my own house, and had Grace, your sister, under my hand. I am an old woman now by what I was then, and Sunnyside was a small place, and Grace was as well acquaint with it as me. Did you ken, Miss Rhoda, that your sister was my bairn ?”

“ You took care of her, I suppose,” the young lady said, in a short way, giving one glance up at me, in the which time I saw she had a pencil in her hand, and was either writing or drawing pictures in her book. “ And now, I fancy, she intends that you should take care of me.”

“ Truly my vocation is past,” said I. “ I will take care of no more save maybe little Maggie ; but an aged person is aye a protection to a youthful one, and my hope is that nobody in Oakenshaw will cast out with me.”

“ I do not quite understand Scotch—I beg

your pardon?" said Miss Rhoda, meaning to anger me, as I kent full well.

And I was angered for a moment's space. "My dear," said I, "the more is your loss not to ken your forefathers' kindly tongue;—but I make no doubt that you understand well enough what I mean."

She made me no answer for a while, but went on with her writing on the book; then she closed it up with a noise that made me start, and threw her pencil on to the table. "I can't do anything—I never can when I try," she cried out. "Oh, old lady, old lady, how is it possible that people can endure to live as long as you?"

I was started to hear at last a voice out of her heart. "Truly it is sore travail whiles, my poor bairn," said I, "and I know not how either man or woman could get to the end of it, if it were not for the kind hand of the

Lord ; but He is a friend that never fails, and we are all near unto His presence ; that is how folk can endure to live."

I know not if it was what I said—I think not it could be—but she was quiet for a long time. Then she went to the piano that was in the room, and without saying a word to me, began to play upon it. I thought it was very grand what she played, but she was aye stopping in the same way as she stoppit at her book, as if she was never pleased with herself, and at last she closed it up again with an impatient noise, and gave me a start once more. Then, just as I was going to bid the servants come to the Books, she gathered up her pencils and things, and went past me to the door. "Will you no stay till the exercise, Miss Rhoda?" said I. Truly I ought to have had better thought, for she would not ken I meant the Books by that word—but instead of answering, she only

made me a curtesy, and said "good-night."  
And that was the first night that this  
stranger bairn and me spent our lane in  
Oakenshaw.

## CHAPTER XXI.

THE next morning, to my wonder once more, Miss Rhoda was in my parlour sooner than I was. It was a bonnie September morning, pleasant and sunny, but with an autumn mist upon the sky. The shearers were in all the fields near hand, and there was a sough of their voices in the air, sounding to me, as it aye does, like the sough of a rejoicing, for the good harvest and the fruits of the earth; and even in our house we were stirred with the time of the shearing, it being the use in our countryside to have as many as a hundred or more of shearers in one field, and every



person at it that could win. I ever have pleasure in the harvest time, being a cheery time when every hand is full ; and, truly, I liked well to see the stir among the maids and all the common folk, though I cannot deny but it is whiles rough jesting and unseemly mirth, that is among the shearers in a harvest field.

When I opened the big Book upon the table to begin the exercise, it troubled me to see the scornful watching look that this young stranger gave at me. Wherefore should I refrain from craving the blessing of the Lord upon this house, because its head was away ? Truly, I kent no cause ; but it was a grief to think when I was reading the chapter, that all the time this young thing was hardening her heart against both the Word and me. She never took the book that was before her into her own hand ; but put it down upon a chair in a scornful way, and sat and watched us. Doubtless one of the maids would give a

glance up now and then, and even Maggie, being but a bairn, might forget for a moment the Presence she was in ; but Miss Rhoda, that never tried to be reverent, or think upon who we were serving, was one of them that could put up with nothing but perfection in us.

She sat down to her breakfast in a quiet way after that, with Maggie and me ; and I began to take note of her that Grace and Claud had put some awe upon her ; but that she minded less to show her nature with little Maggie and me. When I spoke, she made some small answer to me whiles, and was not aye on the watch for being slighted or injured as she seemed to be in former times, and when Maggie got out her books, for her lessons, after the breakfast was past, Miss Rhoda abode still in the room, watching her and me. Maggie was but a little bairn yet for right schooling, and though Grace had made up her mind to get a governess to learn her her lessons, yet

we were aye lothe to bring a strange person into our house, and she had aye read her chapter, and said her bits of verses to her mamma and me. Rhoda sat in her idle way looking at my little bairn. I had gotten my seam again myself, and Maggie was reading in a very pleasant book, that was full of stories, and pleased the bairn, and yet was very good reading, forbye. And, truly, we were more at peace, and easier, than we had been for many a day ; for Miss Rhoda would not take the pains to fight with Maggie and me.

“If I had been Queen Elizabeth, aunt,” said Maggie, “I would aye have asked papa and mamma, and you, and then I would have been a grand queen ; but the queen now never kills anybody, Aunt Margaret. Were they awfu’ ill folk, in Queen Elizabeth’s time ?”

“Truly, my bairn,” said I, “they were even such like as we are ourselves in their heart, and that is no saying very much good of them,

Maggie ; but they were wilder folk, and more ready to take up the sword. Wherefore, it came about that the sword made an end of them, even as the Lord himself says."

"Would you like to be a queen, Aunt Margaret?" said my little bairn to me.

Now I could not but smile at that. "My dear," said I, "them that have tried it, have never recommended it to other folk, though they likit not to lose the honour for themselves ; and, truly, it is far out of my way ; and I never questioned until this time whether I would like to be a queen or no."

"But I would, aunt," said Maggie. "I would build a grand palace in Dourhills, and make a' the poor folk as happy they could be. And I would send for Willie Kirkman back out of the wars, and I would never let anybody greet as Mrs Kirkman did when he went away. I would like to be a queen ! There should never be any trouble, aunt, if I was as great

as Queen Elizabeth was ; and I would build a kirk for the colliers, as good as that kirk in mamma's book. I know a place where it could stand. If you'll come with me, Aunt Margaret, I'll let you see the place to-day."

I put my hand upon her head, and said she was a good bairn. "But, my dear," said I, "young things like you never ken how little great folk, and even queens, can do. But I mind upon your mamma, when she was a little bairn, how it was her thought to travel all the world through, to help them that were in want and oppressed ; and, whiles, some folk can do the like of that, Maggie ; but the most of us, God bids to be content, and abide at hame, and do just what we can, and what He sends. Truly, neither our ain ways, nor other folk's, are in our hand—but Him that orders them all is the Lord."

The bairn did not speak just for a little while, and then she said. "Aunt, Cosmo is

good, is he not? but he aye wants wars and battles. Is it right for folk to fight, Aunt Margaret? for Mary and me said to Cosmo that we would never speak to a soldier that had killed a man."

"My dear," said I, "the like of these stories are no for you and me; and whiles it is needful to fight, and to thole sin and wrong is worse than to daur grief and death. But, truly, we all have our wars and our battles. Do you ken who that little bairn was, that fought and strove with Cecy for the flowers in her mamma's garden, that were not to be touched till mamma came hame? Because it is my thought, Maggie, that there were both wars and battles in that little bairn's heart."

Maggie held down her head, and had not a word to say. She was a good bairn, but failed whiles like other folk, and she thought shame to hear that I kent this story, and for Miss Rhoda to hear it, forbye. But the young lady,

by this time, had a smile upon her face, which I well believe was the first smile I had seen upon it in Oakenshaw; and when Maggie went and brought her bag, and took out of it the small bit seam she was doing, Rhoda came up and spoke to her. "Little one, you don't care for working, do you? Come out and walk with me."

Maggie let her bag fall, and lookit in my face: for my part, I was very well pleased.

"Take up your bag, Maggie," said I; "and if Miss Rhoda will take a quiet walk, and no stay very long—for Maggie is but a delicate bairn, my dear—truly, I think you will both like it this bonnie morning, if you will promise me to be in in an hour."

So the two went out, hand in hand, and I was blythe and rejoiced in my heart that this was a good sign. So, when they were away, I went to cry upon Cecy, and find fault with her, for the story she had raised in Dour-

hills about Miss Rhoda, the which angered me much, when I thought upon it once more.

“Eh, Miss Margaret, to say it was me!” Cecy cried with a skreigh when I spoke to her first. “You see, the way it was, was this. Bell and me, we had an errand to the town; and Bell she’s aye clavering, and maun hae something to make a story about. And we met Lizzie Paul, as it might be here, forenent Mr. Kirkman’s gate; and Lizzie, she says, ‘What’s your news?’ and Bell she makes answer, ‘News! nae such guid chance ever comes our gate.’ And Lizzie (that’s just as glaikit as Bell’s sel) says she, ‘You’ll have mair company now, when there’s a young lady in Oakenshaw.’ ‘Eh, woman, she’s daft!’ said Bell; and it wasna till then, if you believe me, Miss Marget, that I put in my word. I said, ‘You’re an ill bird, Bell Whitelaw—and if there *was* a misfortune in the family, it ill sets you to spread it about, and the mistress



been so kind to you. She's a very bonnie young lady, and comes out of foreign parts; and though the minister did say ae day—for I heard him—that she was clean gyte and out of hersel, I canna think he meant ony mair than just distracted; and if there's ony story made, baith the minister and the mistress will be very angry; and I warn ye, I'll ken wha to lay the wyte upon, if I hear one of you mint at it again.' So, you see, Miss Marget, whaever made such a tale, it wasna me."

"It was very ill done of you, Cecy," said I, "seeing you have aye waited upon Miss Rhoda—and if the minister did say, in an impatient way, that the lassie was daft, you ken very well what he behoved to mean."

With that, Cecy was troubled, and began to put her apron to her e'en. "I tell you every word I said, Miss Marget," said Cecy. "It was Bell that maun aye have something to make a speech about—it wasna me."

“ I lookit for more discretion at your hands, Cecy,” said I ; “ and it’s my hope you’ll take better care of your ain words, and let Bell explain herself after this : for you ken very well, Cecy, that, however strange Miss Rhoda may be in her ways, she is no more daft than either you or me.”

With that, I left Cecy to come to herself. She was far from an ill person, and very fond of Maggie, and a very careful bairn’s-maid ; but no so discreet with her tongue, as this proved, as I lookit for her to be.

I was not well done with Cecy, when Miss Rhoda came back again, and put Maggie within the parlour, beside me, and went her ways to her own chamber ; the poor bit bairn was very tired.

“ Miss Rhoda walks very fast, aunt,” said Maggie to me ; “ and I had to run ; and she wearied of me ; and the sun was so hot, and it was hard running on the stubble field—

and oh, Aunt Margaret! put your hand upon my brow—I am very glad to get in again, and beside you.”

Poor bit thing! the long road, and the hot day, was more than she could bear; and, doubtless, I was more anxious than ordinary, seeing her mamma was away. But Maggie was not to call well, for two or three days after that; and I had to make her lie down upon her bed, and send for the doctor. Miss Rhoda was as grieved as could be, when she heard tell of it first; but after, I think she took an unkindly thought of me, that I was making more work than was needful, as she had brought harm to the bairn—so, a week more, we made no advance, but fell back into our old way—though Miss Rhoda did not fash herself to go out so much, nor to keep up such a warfare, but followed her pleasure in the house, and made small account of me. She was ill at her ease, poor bairn!

no to call melancholy or downcast, but aye keeping up a fight with herself, and fretting and chafing at whatever happened to her—for truly, her father had never tried to make her content, but put notions in her head, that could only be crossed and disappointed; and I was grieved for her yet, many an hour, while she but scoffed, and made a divert of me.

END OF VOL. I.

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