

**THE PRIMROSE PATH.**

—

**VOL. III.**

" A violet in the youth of primy nature,  
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,  
The perfume and suppliance of a minute ;  
No more."

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— " the primrose path of dalliance "

HAMLET, *Act I, Scene III.*

# THE PRIMROSE PATH.

A CHAPTER

IN THE

ANNALS OF THE KINGDOM OF FIFE.

BY

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“The Chronicles of Carlingford,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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## CHAPTER I.

IT was on a bright day in the end of August that Margaret Leslie arrived at the Grange, which was her own house, her mother's birthplace, and her future home. They had been rather more than a month on the way, and had last come from Mrs. Bellingham's house, which was in the neighbourhood of Bellingham Court—not the great house of her district, but very near and closely related to that reigning mansion. Mrs. Bellingham had not been without grievances in her life. Indeed had one of two events happened which she had every reason to expect would happen, her present position would have been different and much more satis-

factory. Had her husband lived only a year longer, she would have been Lady Bellingham of the Court, the foremost lady in the county: and had she been the mother of a son, that son would have been Sir Somebody, and his mother would still have been, during his inevitably long minority at least, the mistress of the great house. But these two natural events did not happen. Jean was the mother of neither son nor daughter, and her husband, the eldest son, old Sir Anthony's heir, had cheated her effectually out of all share in the splendours of the house—which splendours indeed had been much more attractive than himself—by dying most spitefully a year before his father. If it had been a year after, she would not have minded so much. But as it was, there was nothing for it but to retire to the Dower House, and to see her next sister-in-law, with whom she had not been on very affectionate terms, become Lady Bellingham, and enter into possession of everything. It may be supposed that this was no slight trial; but Jean, everyone allowed, had behaved like

a heroine. In the moment of deep and real affliction which followed old Sir Anthony's death, she had taken the situation under review and considered it very deeply. The first suggestion naturally had been that she should return home, or at least settle in the neighbourhood of her father's house. But Jean reflected that her father was not only old but poor, that his house was very limited in accommodation, and that when her present gloom and crape were over, there was neither amusement nor occupation to be had at Earl's-hall, such as might oil the wheels of life and enable everything to go smoothly. Fife was not lively, nor was Earl's-hall attractive; whereas in the neighbourhood of the Court, though it would be hard to see another woman reigning there, there was always likely to be something going on, and the family was of the first consequence in the district, not shabby and worn out like the poor Leslies. Having come to this decision, Mrs. Bellingham had taken her measures accordingly. She had thrown off at once the natural air of grievance which

everybody had excused in her after such disappointments. Instead of troubling the new Lady Bellingham in her arrangements, she had thrown herself heartily into the work and aided her, in every way in her power. "I don't mean to say that it is not a disappointment," she said, "I hoped of course, I don't deny it, to be mistress here myself. I have worked for for it; through all Sir Anthony's illness, I am sure I never was less attentive to him because I knew I should be turned out, as soon as he was released from his sufferings."

"No, I am sure you never were," said the new Sir Anthony warmly.

"And I should have liked to be my lady, I don't deny it. If my poor Aubrey had lived, I should have enjoyed the position quite as much as you I hope will enjoy it, my dear."

"Oh, enjoy it! think of the responsibility," cried the new Lady Bellingham.

"I should not have minded the responsibility; but Providence has settled otherwise—you have it, and I have not. But don't think I am going to be disagreeable

on that account. I will move into the Dower House as soon as you please, and I will do everything I can to help you in settling down. I know how to struggle for my rights when it is necessary," Mrs. Bellingham had said, not without a warning glance at Sir Anthony, "but, thank heaven, I also know how to submit."

In this spirit she had begun her life, and with the same noble meaning had lived many years a kind of secondary star in the Bellingham firmament, shining independently, but never in opposition. A close connection with the Court made the Dower House important, and she kept up that connection. She was always serviceable, giving as well as receiving, maintaining her own position, even while she magnified it by that of the great house; and in short, nothing, all her friends allowed, could be more perfect than her behaviour, which was everything a sister's ought to be, and everything that could be desired in an aunt. The Dower House was a pretty house, and Mrs. Bellingham's jointure was sufficient to permit her a comfortable little carriage, a nice little

establishment, with the means of giving excellent dinners when she chose, and enjoying life in a dignified and most comfortable way. On the other hand, she dined very often at the Court, and had the use of their superfluous luxuries, and a share in everything that was going on, which increased at once her comfort and her consequence. This was the position in which she stood to her relations and neighbours. She felt now that she was about to repay them a hundredfold for all the little advantages they had thrown in her way by providing for Aubrey, who was her husband's godson, and the least successful member of the family. Aubrey was very accomplished, very charming, very idle. He could not be got to do anything, except make himself agreeable, and he had never even done that to any purpose. When Mrs. Bellingham heard that her father was dying, her first thought was of this. But she was a woman who could keep her own counsel. She sent Aubrey a cheque, and directions for his route: she threw facilities in his way, of which he did not, perhaps, quite make the

use she expected; but still things had mended in the latter part of their journey, and Margaret and he had been very good friends when they parted, and all was well in train in pursuit of this purpose. Mrs. Bellingham carried her young sister to the Dower House, and showed her the greatness of the Court. It was vacant for the moment, but its imposing size and splendour filled Margaret with admiration.

“All this would have been mine, Margaret, if my poor dear Aubrey had lived. You may think what a grief it was to me to lose him,” said Jean, with a sigh. “And that is why I take such deep interest in Aubrey, who was his godson, you know. This is Aubrey’s home.”

“Dearest Jean! how much more we ought to think of her, and try to please her, darling Margaret,” said Miss Leslie; “when we see how much she has lost.”

And when they had gone over all the empty stately rooms, and looked at all the portraits—docile Margaret receiving the tale of family grandeur with unquestioning assent—and had made acquaintance

with the lesser world of the Dower House, its paddock, its gardens, its conservatory, all the little comforts and elegancies which were so dear to the sisters, it was time to set out for the Grange, that Margaret might see her own house. It had been settled that Mrs. Bellingham and Miss Leslie should go there with her to take possession of it, and to see what changes would require to be made, to fit it for occupation—and that they were to remain with her there as long as the fine weather lasted, going back to the Dower House for winter and Christmas. The Grange lay in another county, and was some distance from the house of the Bellingham's, with which it communicated only by a very circuitous route. In old days, when the ladies would have been obliged to post, it would have taken days instead of hours to get to it, and yet it would have proved a nearer way. They had to go to the nearest town and then take a train going North, in order to find at the junction a train going South, in which they could proceed to the end of their journey. And what between the changes,

and the waiting here and there, this journey occupied most part of the day. It was dark when they drove from the little town where the railway ended, through a succession of dim roads and lanes and under overshadowing trees that made the twilight dimness greater, to the Grange: which presented no recognisable feature, but was merely a large shadow in the gloom surrounded by shadows less solid, ghosts of waving trees and high hedgerows. There was a woman visible at the little lodge, who came out and opened the gate and curtsied to the strangers, leaving her cottage door open and showing a cheerful glow of firelight, and a tiny little girl of three or four years old, standing against the light and gazing at the carriage; but this was the only gleam of cheerfulness that dwelt in Margaret's mind. The child's face was scarcely visible, but its little sturdy figure against the firelight, with two small feet well apart, and the most wondering curiosity in its entire pose, made the forlorn little mistress of the place smile as she went through those gates which led to

her home. After this there was a long avenue to drive through, with great trees overshadowing the carriage, and tossing their branches about in the night wind. It had been a very hot day, and the breeze which had sprung up was very grateful, but the moaning it made in the branches was very melancholy, and affected poor Margaret's imagination. "How the wind *soughs*," she said, with full use of the dreary guttural. She was sitting in the front seat of the cab as it jolted along amid all those waving shadows, and Margaret felt very sad, she did not know why. She had been curious about her sister's house and interested, and had liked the novelty and perpetual change; but she did not feel any curiosity, nothing but sadness in coming to this place, which was her own, though there was nobody here to welcome her. How the wind *soughed*! no other word could express so well the wild moan and wailing, which is an exaggeration by nature of the sound which the French call *tears in the voice*. It went to Margaret's heart; the tears came into her voice, too, and filled

her eyes in the darkness. All was melancholy in this home-coming to nothing but darkness and the unknown—the wind tossing about the branches, and complaining to the night, the sound of water somewhere, complaining too, with a feeble tinkle—the sky invisible, except in a speck here and there, just light enough to show how the branches were tossing overhead. The young traveller drooped her head in her corner, and felt her courage and her heart fail.

“Margaret,” said Jean’s voice out of the darkness, from the other side of the carriage, “you must learn to remember now that you are not a Scotch country girl in Fife, but an English young lady with a character to keep up, a landed proprietor. Don’t talk that vulgar Scotch. If you use such language here nobody will understand you ; and they will think you a girl without any education, which would be most painful for all your relatives, and a slur upon poor papa’s memory. Therefore remember, no Scotch.”

This altogether completed Margaret’s downfall. The gloom, the sobbing wind, the contrast between this home-

coming, and all that is ordinarily implied in the word, were enough in themselves to overwhelm so young a creature, still so short a way removed from the first grief of her life; but the reproof was of a kind which made the contrast still more poignant. Nothing in all his intercourse with his favourite child had been so tender or so characteristic as Sir Ludovic's soft, laughing animadversions upon that very point, "My little Peggy, you must not be so Scotch!" How often had he said it, his face lighted up with tenderest laughter, his reproof more sweet than other people's praise. But how different it sounded when Jean said it! Something came climbing into Margaret's throat and choked her. When the carriage stopped with a jar and a crash, as it did at that moment at the scarcely discernible door, she could not wait for its opening, or till the coachman should scramble from his perch, but flung the carriage door open, and jumped out, eager for movement of any kind; her forehead throbbing with pain over her eyebrows, the sob in her throat, and a sudden gush of salt

water hot and bitter, blinding her eyes. What could be more unlucky than to alight thus before the closed door and not to be able to see it for tears? It opened, however, while Margaret began to help Steward, who had groped her way from the box, to get out the innumerable small articles with which the cab was crowded. The country girl, who appeared at the door with a candle protected by a long glass shade in her hand, did not imagine for a moment that the slim creature not so big as herself, with the armful of cloaks and shawls, was her mistress. She addressed herself to the ladies in the carriage as was natural.

“If you please, ma’am,” she said, making a curtsey, “Miss Parker have gone to bed with a bad headache, but please there’s tea in the parlour, and all your rooms is ready.”

Margaret, however, scarcely saw the dark wainscotted room into which she followed her sisters, hearing their voices and exclamations as in a dream. It only seemed to Margaret to look very dark, very cold with its gleams of reflections.

Her little white-panelled room at home was far more cheerful than this dark place. She heard them say it was lovely! perfect! in such good keeping! without paying any attention. It was not in keeping with Margaret. In all her life she had never felt such a poor little melancholy stranger, such a desolate childish atom in an unknown world, as during this first hour in the house which belonged to her, the place where she was absolute mistress.

Finding that there was nothing to be made of her, that she would neither eat the plentiful fare on the table, nor admire the china in the great open cupboards, nor make herself amiable in any way. Mrs. Bellingham gave her a cup of warm tea and sent her to bed: where Steward, with a little pity, deferring her mistress' unpacking, benevolently followed to help her to undress. They had put her into a large, low, many-latticed room, with that mixture in it of venerable mansion and homely cottage which is the dream of such rural houses; but in the darkness made visible by two poor candles, even that was little more cheerful than the

dark parlour with its wainscot. At Earl's-hall, even in August, there might have been a little friendly fire to make a stranger at home; but in "the south!—" How many a pang of cold have we all supported in much warmer latitudes than England, for very shame because of "the South?"

Naturally, however, Margaret could not sleep though she was glad to be alone. She kept her candle lighted to bear her company with something of a child's dread of the darkness, and lay thinking with eyes preternaturally awake, now that the tears had been all wept out. She thought—of everything—of Earl's-Hall and the rhythm of the pines which were not like that rainy melancholy *sough*, and of those moments in the wood when she had gone out with her eyes just so hot with tears unshed, and just such a fiery throbbing of pain in her forehead, and choking in her throat. And oh, how kind *he* had been! he had not thought of himself, but only of comforting her. How he had drawn her to him, made her lean upon him, taken off the weight of her sorrow.

How hard-hearted she had been to poor Rob, never thinking of him all these days, glad to escape from the thought of him. And he had been so kind ! A great compunction came into her mind. How much he had been mingled in the twist of her life at that time which of all other times had been the most momentous in it ! and how was it possible that when that crisis was over her very fancy should have so fled from him, her thoughts thrust him away. Poor Rob ! and he had been so kind ! Margaret begged his pardon in her heart with great self-reproach, but it did not occur to her to make him any amends. She had no desire to call him back to her, to see him again, to write to him. Oh no ! she drew her breath hard with a sudden panic ; why should she write to him ? It was not necessary. She could not write at all a nice letter such as would be a pleasure to anyone. But the thought seemed to catch her very breath, her heart began to thump again, and her brow to burn and throb.

“ Are you asleep, dear Margaret ? ” said Grace, coming in. “ I just ran upstairs

for a moment to see. Dearest Jean is going over the rooms, to see what sort of rooms they are; not that we can see very much at night; and, of course, darling Margaret, I should like much better, and so would dear Jean, to wait till you were with us yourself; and if you would like me to stay with you, I would much rather stay. I shouldn't at all mind giving it up. So far as one can see, it is the dearest old place, so old-fashioned, and such china, and old armour in the hall—real armour, just as delightful as what you see in Wardour Street. Dear Jean is so pleased. Now do go to sleep, darling Margaret, go to sleep. The wainscot parlour is the dearest old room, just like a picture. I am to go out and join dear Jean on the stairs when I hear her coming up. She is talking to Steward about unpacking, for dear Jean is very particular about her unpacking. Are you asleep, darling?—not yet? but you must really go to sleep, and be quite fresh for to-morrow. That is right, shut your eyes, and I will shade the candle; or perhaps it would be better to have a night-light; I think I must try to get you a

night-light. There is dear Jean coming up the stairs. She enjoys anything like this. That is her voice coming up. You can always hear dear Jean's voice walking about a house. At the Dower House, when I am in my room, I always hear her at night, starting to see that all the doors and windows are safe. She begins with the scullery and goes everywhere. Dear Jean is energetic to a fault. She does not mind what trouble she takes. Now you are asleep, darling Margaret, quite fast: hush—hush!" said Miss Grace, patting her shoulder softly. It was not a very sensible proceeding, but it soothed Margaret. She turned round her cheek, still wet with tears, with a soft laugh, which was half derision and half pleasure.

"I am fast asleep; now run, Grace, run, or Jean will scold you."

"Oh, it is not that I am afraid! but really, really if you are going to sleep, and don't want me to stay—I will stay in a moment if you would like it, darling Margaret? but perhaps I should only keep you from sleeping, and dear Jean——"

"Where has she run to now?" they

could hear Jean's voice saying at a distance, and Miss Grace gave her young sister a hasty kiss and hurried away. Margaret lay still and listened for a long time while Jean's voice perambulated the house, going everywhere. It gave a new sort of brisk activity to the dark and cold place. Up and down and about the passages went the high-pitched tones commenting on everything. It was seldom that Margaret could make out what they said. But the sound made a cheer and comfort, a sense of society and protection. By and by she got drowsy with those cheerful echoes in her ears, and dropped at last into the deep sleep of youth, with a sense of this peaceful patrolling all about her, the darkness lighted by gleams of the candles they carried, and by Jean's voice.

And in the morning what a flood of sunshine filled the room! lavish extravagant sunshine pouring in, as if it had nothing else to do; which indeed was pretty nearly the case, as all the harvest was housed about the Grange, and there

was not much, except light matters of fruit for that magnificent sun to do, nothing but to ripen the peaches on the walls and the apples on the trees, and wake for a joke, with a blaze and illumination which might have done for a king, a little bit of a slim girl in the low-roofed chamber with its many windows. Margaret woke all in a moment, as you wake with a start when some one stands and looks at you fixedly, penetrating the strongest bond of drowsiness. She sprang up, her mind already full of excitement as she recollected where she was: in the Grange, in her own house! a curious thrill of pleasure, and wonder, and eager curiosity came over her. She got up and dressed hastily in her eagerness to see her surroundings. From her windows she looked out upon nothing but trees, a walled garden on one side, a little park on the other, a glimpse of a small stream with a little wooden bridge over it, and trees, and more trees as far as the eye could go. Her eye went as far as eye could go in that unconscious appeal for something to rest upon which is in-

instinctively made by all who are accustomed to hills; but there was no blue line upon the horizon, no undulation to relieve her. The only inequality was in the trees, which were some lower and some more lofty, in tufts of rich foliage everywhere, shading the landscape like a delicate drawing. Though it would not be September till next day, yet there were already traces here and there that Autumn had tinted the woods with that "fiery finger." It was nothing more than a touch; but it brightened the picture. How different from the parched elms and oaks all bare with the wind, and the dark unchanging firs in the Earl's-hall woods! The house was still asleep when she stole downstairs, half afraid of herself, down the oak staircase with its heavy balustrade. She was the only thing waking in the silent house, which still was so full of living waking sunshine. She seemed to herself to be the last survivor—the only inhabitant. Timorously she stole down, finding shutters at all the windows, bolts at all the doors. At Earl's-hall, who ever dreamed of a bolt or a bar? The door

was "snecked" when John thought of it, but often enough was left on the latch, so that anyone might have come in; but very different were the precautions here. She stole about on tiptoe, peeping here and there, feeling herself an intruder, totally unable to believe that all this was hers; and very much frightened by the noise she made, undid the heavy fastenings and opened the great door, which creaked and clanged as if calling for help against some invader. The dew was still sparkling on the flowers when she issued forth into the fresh air of the morning, doubly refreshed with last night's showers. The birds were singing, nations and tribes of them, in every tree. They made such a din round her as she stepped out that she could scarcely hear herself thinking. Instinctively Margaret ran down to the little brook, which she called (to herself) the burn. And there, looking back, she stood entranced with a novel delight. She had never before seen anything like it. A great old rambling simple-minded English house, of old brick with a bloom on it, and touches of lichen, golden and gray:

covered with verdure, nothing new or petty, the very honeysuckles grown into huge trees, forests of the simplest white clematis, the traveller's joy, with its wild wreaths and sweet clusters of flowers, roses in their second bloom mounting up to the old chimneys, which had retreated into great bushes of ivy—and everywhere through a hundred folds and wreaths of green, everywhere the mellow redness of the old house itself peeping through. Margaret clasped her hands in delight. The landscape was nothing but trees, and had little interest for her—but the house! It was itself like a great flower, all warm and strong. And this was hers! She could not believe it. She stood rapt and gazed at the perfect place—a mass of flowers and leafage, and bloomy old walls. It was a poem in homely red and brown, an autumnal sonnet. And this was hers! She could not believe it—it was too beautiful to be true.

## CHAPTER II.

**A**FTER this there ensued a moment of great quiet and pleasant domestic life. Miss Parker, who was the house-keeper, was a very legitimate member of the class which nobody had then thought of calling Lady-help, but which flourished in the shadow and protection of a family, as Poor Relation. She was a distant cousin of Margaret's mother, who having no money and no talents of any serviceable sort, had been kindly provided for in this very natural domestic office; and the good woman took a great deal of interest in Margaret, and would not have at all disliked to inspire her with rebellion, and persuade her to make a stand for "her own place" in her own house. That the other family, the other side of the house, should be regnant at the Grange, making Margaret appear like the daughter rather

than the mistress, offended her in every point; but as she was not a wicked woman, and Margaret not a rebellious girl, these little intentions of malice came to nothing, and Jean commenced an unquestioned and on the whole beneficent sway with little resistance. As for Margaret herself, the novelty of everything filled her life with fresh springs of enjoyment, and gave her a genuine new beginning, not counter to the natural, nor in any way antagonistic, but yet genuinely novel, fresh, and unconnected with any painful or disturbing recollection. The soft unlikeness of the leafy English landscape round, to all she had been used to, was not more marked than the other differences of her life. When she went along the rural road the little girls curtsayed to her, and so did the women at the cottage-doors; they stood obsequious in their own houses, when she went to see them, as if she had been the Queen, not like the cottagers about Earl's-hall, to whom she was only Miss Margret, who curtsayed to nobody, and who were more likely to offer the little girl "a piece" or a "drink of milk" than to take the surreptitious

shillings which Margaret at the Grange was so delighted to find herself able to give. "But they will be affronted!" she said in horror, when this liberality was first suggested to her; such a difference was there between Fife and "the South." Then, within reach, there lay a beautiful little church in which there were monuments and memorial marbles without number to the Sedleys, the family of her mother, the owners of the Grange, and where an anxious new incumbent had established daily service, to which he was very anxious the Leslies at the Grange should come by way of setting a good example. To this admirable man, who thought that within the four seas there was no salvation except in the Anglican Communion, Margaret unguardedly avowed, knowing no harm in it, that she had been brought up in the Church of Scotland and was not very familiar with the prayer-book. Oh what daggers Jean looked at her, poor Margaret not knowing why! Mrs. Bellingham made haste to explain.

"My father was old-fashioned, Mr. St. John, and never would give up the old

kirk. I think he thought it was right to go, to countenance the common people. I always say it is a disgrace, that it is they who have the parish churches in Scotland, just the set of people who are dissenters here; but I assure you all the gentry go to the English Church."

Mr. St. John, though he was a little appalled by that generalization, and did not like to learn that "the common people" were dissenters, or that any church but the Anglican could be called "old," yet nevertheless was not so shocked as he might have been, thinking, good man, that the common people in Fife probably spoke Gaelic, and that this was the reason why they had their service separate from the gentry. He began immediately to talk to Margaret about the beauty and pathos of Celtic music, which bewildered her extremely, for naturally Margaret Leslie, who had scarcely ever been out of the East Neuk till her father's death, had never heard a word of Gaelic in her life.

And now at last Bell's fondest desires were carried out. The little town which

was near, and which the lessening limits of this history forbid us to touch upon, was a cathedral town full of music and with many educational advantages ; for there were numerous schools in the neighbourhood, and masters came from town to supply the demand two or three times a week. Margaret began to play upon the piany, as Bell had always longed to have her do, and to speak French. We cannot undertake that she made very much progress in the former accomplishment with her untrained fingers and brief patience ; but she had a pretty voice and learnt to sing, which is perhaps a rarer gift, though it cannot be denied that she abused this privilege and went about the house and the garden, and even the park, singing at the top of her voice, till her sisters were provoked into expostulation. " What is the use of teaching you," Jean cried, " when you go singing singing, skirling they would call it in Fife, straining all your high notes ? When I was a girl like you, I was never allowed to open my mouth except for practising, and when there was an occasion for it. It is

all gone now, but I assure you when I was twenty I was considered to have a very pretty voice. I wish yours may ever be as good. It will not be so, long, if you go straining it in this way. Do you think the birds want to hear you singing?" cried Mrs. Bellingham with scorn.

"Oh, dearest Jean! but dear Margaret has much more of a voice than we ever had. We used to sing duets—"

"Yes, Grace had a little chirp of a second—just what you will come to, Margaret," said Mrs. Bellingham, "if you go on as you are doing, straining all your high tones."

As for the French, they found fault with her pronunciation, which was natural enough; but perhaps it was not so natural that Mrs. Bellingham should find fault with the irreproachable accent of Monsieur Dubois, a Parisian, *pur sang*, who had taught princesses in his day. "No, Margaret, my dear; you may go on with him, for any kind of French is better than none, when you are so far behind with your education. But I am sure he is taking all these good people in with his

fine certificates and testimonials. His French cannot be good, *for I don't understand a word he says!*" Thus the autumn went on; the trees about the Grange got aglow, and began to blaze with glorious colours, and Margaret with her crape getting shabby (crape gets shabby so soon, heaven be praised!) ran about the house, the park, the country roads, and the village, scolded, petted, taken care of, watched over, teased and worried, and made much of, as she had never been before. She had been the child at Earl's-hall, whose innocent faults everybody had smiled at, whose innocent virtues had met the same fate, who was indeed the spring of everybody's happiness, the most cherished, the most beloved—but yet, so to speak, of no importance at all. Here it was different; here everything hinged on Margaret. Jean, though she was a despot, insisted loudly on the fact that she was but a despot-regent, and Margaret's name was put to everything, and Margaret's supremacy upheld, though Margaret herself was scolded. What difference it might have made in this state of

affairs, had little Margaret, Sir Ludovic's orphan child, been dependant upon her sisters, as, but for that mother of hers of whom Margaret knew nothing, she well might have been—it would be impossible to say. They would have done her “every justice;” they would have taught her to sing and scolded her for singing, they would have called in Monsieur Dubois, and then declared his French could not be good; all these things would have happened all the same—and they would have meddled with and dictated to, and teased, and tried, their little sister. But whether the process would have been as bearable as it was under the present circumstances, who can tell? The dependant might have felt that insupportable which tempted the heiress into laughter, her and disclosed a fund of mirth within which she did not know she possessed. One thing, however, Jean would not have done had Margaret been penniless, which she did for Margaret as the young lady of the Grange. She certainly would not have invited Aubrey, after his return from Scotland, to come and see the new horse

that had been bought for Margaret, and to superintend her instructions in that kind. The girl had ridden at home, cantering about the country, all unattended, on a grey pony, in a grey garment, which bore but a faint resemblance to the pretty habit in which she was now clothed; but she had never mounted anything like the prancing steed which was now to be called hers. The sisters were a great deal too careful of her to allow this fiery steed to be mounted until after Margaret and the horse had received all kinds of preparation for the conjunction; but when the ladies came out to superintend the start, and watched while Aubrey, newly arrived, put the slim light creature upon her horse, Jean and Grace felt a movement of pride in her, which made the more emotional sister cry, and swelled Mrs. Bellingham's bosom with triumph. "Take care of her," she said to her nephew with a meaning glance, "for you will not find many like her."

"I will take care," said Aubrey, returning the look. This Mrs. Bellingham would not have done had Margaret been

only her little sister without any fortune, instead of the young lady of the Grange.

It was a very pleasant ride, and it was so different from all her former exercises of the kind that it became one of those points in Margaret's life which tell like milestones when one looks back. She did not talk very much after the first delighted outbreak of pleasure; but in her heart went back to the stage of the grey pony, and with a startled sense of the change in everything round her, contemplated herself. What change had passed upon her? was it only that she was a little taller, a little older, transplanted into new surroundings, separated altogether by death and distance from the group of old people who had been all her world? Not altogether that: there were other changes too important to be fully fathomed during a ride through the green lanes, and under the falling leaves. She rode along, hearing vaguely what Aubrey said to her, making only what response was necessary, wondering over this being who was, yet was not, herself. She had forgotten all about herself so far as that was

possible in the novelty of this new chapter of her career. She had lived only from day to day, from moment to moment, not asking herself what she was doing, how she was changing; and lo! she was changed. She found it out all in a moment. It bewildered and turned her head, and made her so giddy, that her companion thought she had taken a panic and was going to fall. He started and put out his hand to hold her.

“Oh, it is nothing,” Margaret said, “it is over now; it was all so strange.”

“What was strange? you are ill, you are giddy, you have got nervous.”

“Yes, I am giddy; but neither ill nor nervous. I am giddy to think—oh, how strange it is! do you remember, Mr. Aubrey, when we were in the Highlands in August?”

“Nearly three months ago; indeed, I remember very well. Do you think it is likely I should forget?”

“Oh, I don't suppose it was much to you,” said Margaret, with an abstraction of tone which prevented him, though very willing, from accepting this as provo-

cative of something like flirtation. "It was myself that I was thinking of, and it made me giddy. Since that time I am quite different. Since then I have grown up."

"I don't see very much difference," said Aubrey, contemplating her with those pleased looks of unspoken admiration, which he knew did not, in general, afford an ungrateful mode of homage.

"Oh! perhaps I have not grown much taller; but this is more than tallness. Do you remember Earl's-hall, Mr. Aubrey? It is not really, is it, so very far away?"

"I should not say so—about fifteen or sixteen hours' journey if the railway went straight, without that horrid interval of the Firth."

"Oh, that was not what I was meaning!" said Margaret, turning her head away a little coldly. And though he went on talking, she did not pay much attention. She came home with dreamy eyes, and suffered him to lift her off her horse, and went straight up to her room, leaving him. They had not ridden quite so far as they intended, and the ladies had not got home from their drive.

As Margaret went upstairs, carrying her train over her arm, she met Miss Parker, her poor relation, on the stairs, who gave a jump at the sight of her, and uttered a cry.

“Oh, my dear, I thought you were a ghost!” she said.

“Why should I be a ghost? I don’t feel like a ghost. Come in and tell me,” said Margaret, opening the door of her room. Miss Parker had palpitations, and this was quite enough to bring one of them on.

“I never thought you were like your poor mamma before,” cried the house-keeper in her agitation, “not a bit like. You are just like the Leslies, not her features at all; but in that habit, and in the very same hat and feathers!” Margaret took off her hat at these words, and Miss Parker breathed a little more freely. “Ah, that is better, that is not so startling. You were as like her, as like her—”

“Why should not I be like her? Poor mamma, it is hard upon her having nothing but me to leave in the world, that I should be so unkind as not to be like her,” said

Margaret, musing, half thinking through the midst of this conversation how strange it was that Earl's-hall should seem so very far away.

“I remember her as well as if it were yesterday,” said Miss Parker, “coming up that very stair after her last ride with—oh, I should not speak of him to you! It was before she had ever seen Sir Ludovic, your papa.”

“Her last ride with—whom?” Margaret's cheeks grew crimson. Somehow it seemed to be half herself about whom she was hearing—herself in her mother.

“Oh, my dear! I don't know if I ought to tell you all that story. They were a sort of cousins, as I was to them both. He had no money, poor fellow; but otherwise so suitable! just of an age, brought up much the same—and she was an heiress, if he had nothing. They tried to put it into her head that he was not good enough for her. And then they put it into his head (they succeeded there) that a man ought not to owe his living to his wife. So he would go away, let her say what she pleased. Oh, I remember that night.

when they took their last ride together. She came upstairs and met me in her riding-habit, in just such a hat and feathers, and her face pale with thinking, like yours, my dear. She changed colour, too, like you (ah, there it goes!) all in a moment changing from white to red."

"And what happened," cried Margaret, breathless.

"Well, my dear, nothing more than this happened— He went away. He went to India with his regiment; he thought he might get on there, perhaps, and get his promotion, and come back for her (she was not of age then). But he never came back, poor fellow—he died in less than a year."

"And she—she?" Margaret became breathless with anxiety and interest. She had not known her mother had any story; and how strange it was—half as if it might be herself!

"She felt it very much, my dear. She put on mourning for him—indeed she had to do that, for he was her cousin. Memorial windows were just coming into fashion, and she put up a window to his

memory in the church. Well, then! after a while, she went to Scotland, and met with Sir Ludovic. He was not young, but he was a most handsome striking-looking gentleman—and—well, I need not tell you any more. You know, as well as I can tell you, that *he* was your papa.”

“Poor papa!” said Margaret, her eyes filling, though she had said “poor mamma,” a moment before. “Did she care for him at all?”

“Oh, my dear! she was *in love* with him, a great deal more in love with him than she ever was with poor Edward. She *would* have him. Of course it was pointed out to her that he was poor, too, and living so far away, and a Scotchman, which is almost like a foreigner, and quantities of poor relations. She must have liked him more than she did poor Edward, for she would not listen, not for a moment; even when it was said that he was old, she cried, ‘What do I care?’ Oh, you must not think there was any doubt on that point. She was very fond of your papa. That is poor Edward’s picture in the corner,” said Miss Parker, crying a

little, "he never had eyes for anyone when she was there; but he was my cousin too."

Margaret got up tremulously, and went to look at the portrait. It was a feeble little watercolour, a young man, in a coat which had once been intended to be red, but which had become the palest of pink. When she looked at his insignificant good-looking features, she could not but remember her father's with a glow of pride. But Miss Parker was crying softly in the corner of the sofa. Why does it always happen that people are at cross purposes in loving? Miss Parker would have been very happy with Edward—why was it not she but the other, whom the young soldier loved? It made Margaret sad to think of it. And then all at once there came into her mind, like a pebble cast into tranquil water—Rob Glen. Something in the features of poor Edward who had died in the jungle, recalled Rob to her mind. Her heart began to beat. Perhaps, no doubt, there was some one who would be very happy to have Rob, who would think him the noblest man in existence. And

Margaret gave a little shiver. Suddenly it came to her mind with overpowering force, that notwithstanding all these changes, notwithstanding the difference in herself, notwithstanding the Grange and all its novel life, she, this new Margaret, who was so different from the old Margaret, was bound to Rob Glen. It seemed to her that she had never understood the position before. Miss Parker had gone away crying, poor, sentimental, middle-aged lady, and Margaret sat down on the sofa when she had left it, with dismay in her heart : and gazed at Edward's water-colour with blank discomfiture. There seemed to rise before her the little parlour in the farm, every detail of its homely aspect, the red and blue cloth on the table, the uncomfortable scratching of the pen with which she wrote her promise, the bit of paper smoothed out by Mrs. Glen's hand, the little common earthenware ink-bottle. She had not been aware before that she remembered all these things ; but now they started to the light, as if they were things of importance, all visible before her, re-made. How was it possi-

ble that she could have put them all away out of her memory so long? She had thought of him now and then, chiefly with compunctions, feeling herself ungrateful to him who had been so kind. But it was not with any compunction now that she remembered him, but with sudden alarm and sense of an incongruity beyond all words. Supposing Edward had not died, but had come back from the jungle after her mother had met Sir Ludovic, what would she have thought, how would she have felt—would she have welcomed him or fled from him? But then I—have never seen—anyone, Margaret said to herself. She blushed, though she was alone. There was nothing in that, her colour was always coming and going, and even this momentary change of sentiment relieved her a little. The horror was to have remembered, all of a sudden, in this calm and quiet—Rob Glen.

When such a sudden revelation as this occurs, it is astonishing how heaven and earth concur to keep the impression up. Next evening their dinner was more lively than usual. To keep Aubrey company

over his wine Mrs. Bellingham had invited Mr. St. John, the young rector (though they were in such deep mourning, your parish clergyman is never out of place, he is not company) to dine with them ; and there was a little more care than usual about the flowers on the table (since the garden-flowers were exhausted, Jean had restricted the article of flowers) and a more elaborate meal than was ever put upon the table for the three ladies. Mr. St. John was High Church, and had been supposed to incline towards celibacy for the clergy—but of late his principles had been wavering. The elder ladies at the Grange had given him no rest on the subject ; they had declared the idea to be Popish, infidelistic, heathen. Not marry ? Grace in particular had almost wept over this strange theory. What was to become of a parish without a lady to look after it ; and by this time Mr. St. John had been considerably moved by one of two things, either by the arguments of Mrs. Bellingham and Miss Leslie : or by the consideration that the Grange was very near the Rectory, that it was a very nice little property, the largest house in the parish, its

inhabitants, the most important family: and that its heiress was eighteen and very pretty, though brought up a Presbyterian, and probably, therefore, quite unregenerate and as good as unbaptized. He sat opposite Margaret at the table while Aubrey Bellingham sat by her, and the young priest felt an unchristian warmth of enmity arise in his bosom towards the stranger. But this put him on his mettle, and the talk was very lively and sometimes amusing; it made Margaret forget the fright of recollection that had seized her. The two young men remained but a very short time in the dining-room after the ladies had left, and Mr. St. John had just managed to get possession of a seat beside Margaret and to resume the question of the Celtic music which he had so skilfully hit upon at one of their earlier meetings, as a subject sure to interest her—when an incident occurred that threw back all her thoughts vividly into their former channel.

“Don't you think that the invariably pathetic character of their music reflects the leading tendency of the race?” Mr.

St. John had just said ; and she was actually making what she felt to be a very foolish answer.

“I have heard the pipes playing,” she was saying, “but not often ; and except reels, I don’t know any——Did you call me, Jean ?”

“Here is a parcel for you, a large parcel by the railway,” said Mrs. Bellingham. “Yes, really ; it is not for me as I thought, but for you, Margaret ; what can it be I wonder ? it has got Edinburgh on the ticket and a great many other marks. Bland, will you please undo it carefully and take away all the brown paper and wrappings. I daresay it is a present, Margaret ; it looks to me like a present. I should say it was a picture, perhaps something Ludovic may have sent you from Earl’s-hall ; was there any picture you were fond of, that can have been sent to you from Earl’s-hall ?”

“Dearest Margaret, it will be one of the portraits ; how kind of dear Ludovic to think of you. Surely you have a right to it,” said Miss Leslie ; and even the young men drew near with the lively curiosity

which such an arrival always creates. The very name of picture made Margaret tremble; she approached the large white square which Bland—Jean's most respectable servant—had carefully freed from the rough sheets of cardboard and brown paper in which it had been so carefully packed, with the thrill of a presentiment. Miss Leslie's fingers quivered with impatience to cut the last string, to unfold the last enclosure, but a heroic sense of duty to Margaret kept her back. It was Margaret's parcel; she it was who had the right to disclose the secret, to have the first exquisite flutter of discovery. Grace knew the value of these little sensations against the grey back-ground of monotonous life. But it seemed to Margaret that she knew what it was, even although she had no recollection for the moment what it could be. She unfolded the last cover with a trembling hand.

Ah! It was Earl's-hall, the old house, exactly as it had been that sunshiny morning before any trouble came—when little Margaret, thinking no evil, went skimming over the furrows of the potatoes,

running up and down as light as air, hovering about the artist whose work seemed to her so divine. What an ocean of time and change had swept over her since then! She gave a tremulous cry full of wonder and anguish, as she saw at a glance what it was. They all gathered round her, looking over her shoulder. There it stood with the sun shining full upon it, the old grey house: the big ivy leaves giving out gleams of reflection, the light blazing upon Bell's white apron, for Bell, too, was there: he had forgotten nothing. Margaret's heart gave a beat so wild that the little group round her must have heard it, she thought.

“Earl's-hall!” said both the ladies together. “And, dear me, Margaret, where has this come from?” said Mrs. Bellingham, “Ludovic had no picture like this. It is beautifully mounted, and quite fresh and new, it must be just finished; it is very pretty. There is the terrace in the tower, you can just make it out, and there are the windows of the long-room, and there I declare is my room, just a corner of it, and somebody sitting at the

door—why it is something like Bell. Who can have sent you such a beautiful present, Margaret? who can it be from?”

Margaret gained a little time while her sister spoke; but she was almost too much agitated to be able to say anything, and she did not know what to say.

“It was a—friend,” she said with trembling lips; “it was done—before—It was not finished.” And then taking courage from desperation she added, “may I take it up-stairs?”

What so natural as that she should be overwhelmed by the sudden sight of her old home? Grace rushed to her with open arms. “Let me carry it for you, let me go with you, darling Margaret,” she said, but the girl fled from her, almost pushing her away in the nervous impatience of agitation. Even Jean was moved. She called back her sister imperatively yet with a softened voice.

“Let her alone, let her carry it herself. Come here, Grace, and let the child alone,” said Mrs. Bellingham. “The sight of the old place has been too much for her, coming so suddenly—and not much won-

der. After all it is but four months. But I should like to know who did it, and who sent it," she added. That was the thought that was foremost with Aubrey too.

## CHAPTER III.

THIS incident completed the painful process which was going on in Margaret's mind. The little visionary link of kindness, tenderness, gratitude, which had existed between herself and Rob Glen had been really broken by the shock administered to her on the evening when she pledged herself to him for ever; but she had never attempted to realize her feelings, or inquire into them, rather had been glad to forget them, to push away from her and postpone all consideration of the subject which all at once had become so painful, so full of difficulty and confusion. She had avoided even the idea of any communication with him. When Ludovic spoke to her of correspondence, it had seemed impossible that the pledge he asked for could be necessary, or that there should be any question of corres-

pondence. She had never thought of it, never meant it. There was her promise against her which some time or other must be redeemed. There was the fact that Rob had parted from her like a lover, a thing which it now made her blush hotly to recollect, but which then had seemed part of the confused strangeness of everything, a proof of his "kindness," that kindness for which she had never been so grateful as she ought to have been. These were appalling certainties which overshadowed her life; but then, nothing could come of them for a long time, that was certain; three immense lifetimes of years stood between her and anything that could be done to her in consequence. And how familiar we all become with the Damocles' sword of an impending but uncertain event!—Margaret had been able to escape for a long time, and had put all thought of it aside. But her mother's story had recalled one aspect of her own, and here was another, bursting upon her distinct and vivid, which could not be pushed aside, which must be faced, and even explained, heaven help her! She

carried away the big drawing in her arms, her heart thumping against the cardboard wildly with suffocating force, her head throbbing, her mind in the most violent commotion. Had there been nothing else, no doubt the sudden recalling of all her thoughts to her old home, without any warning, in a moment, must have had a certain effect upon her. Even Jean had fully acknowledged this. It was natural that she should feel it. But something much more agitating, something more even than the bewildering thought of all that had happened in the last few weeks of her stay at Earl's-hall, came upon her with the first glimpse of the picture. Recollections rushed upon her like a torrent, recollections even more confusing more painful than these. The drawing itself was a memorial of the time when there was no trouble at all involved, when Rob, newly discovered, was a curiosity and delight to the young creature in quest of something new, to whom he was a god-send, and this it was which suddenly came before her now. There is no such anguish of retrospection as that with which the

very young look back upon moments in which they feel they have made themselves ridiculous, and given their fellow-creatures an inferior inadequate representation of them. This it was which overwhelmed Margaret now. She had acquired a little knowledge, if from nothing else, from the conversation of Mrs. Bellingham which had modified her innocence. She had heard of girls who "flung themselves at the heads" of men. She had heard of those who gave too much "encouragement," who "led on" reluctant wooers. This talk had passed lightly enough over her head always full of dreams; but yet it had left a deposit as so much light talk does. When first her eyes fell upon the picture, this was the thought that rushed upon her. Almost before the ready tear had formed which came at the sight of Earl's-hall, before the quick pang of grief for the loss of all which the old house represented to her, before the sense of fatal bondage and entanglement which was her special burden, had time to make itself felt—came, with a flood of agony and shame, a realization of

herself as she had been when Rob Glen had seated himself at the end of the potato field to make this drawing. Other things that had happened to her had not involved any fault of hers; she did not even feel that she was seriously to blame for the forging of the chain that bound her—but this, this had been her own doing. She it was who had wooed him to Earl's-hall; she had asked him to come, and to come again, she had persuaded him to a hundred things he never would have thought of by himself. But for her he would not have returned day by day, getting more and more familiar. When she rushed about everywhere for the things he wanted, when she admired everything he did with such passionate enthusiasm, when she would hang over his shoulder watching every line he drew—what had she been doing? “Flinging herself at his head,” “leading him on,” “encouraging him,” oh, and more than encouraging him! as Ludovic had said. This was worse even than the bondage in which it had resulted. Her face was covered with burning blushes; her soul overflowed with

shame. Oh, how well she recollected the ridiculous ardour with which she had taken up her old playfellow; the sense of some new delightful event which had come into her life when she met him, and discovered his sketches, and appropriated him as it were, to her own amusement and pleasure! What a change he had made in the childish monotony and quiet! She remembered how she had brought him to the house, how she had coaxed her father for him, how she had fluttered about him as he sat there beginning his drawing. If he said he wanted anything how she flew to get it! How she watched every line over his shoulder; how she praised him with all simple sincerity! (Margaret still thought the picture beautiful, more beautiful than anything she had ever seen.) She seemed to see herself, oh so over-eager, over-bold, unmaidenly! was it wonderful that he should think her ready to do everything he asked her? ready to make any sacrifice, to separate herself from all belonging to her for his sake?

There is always a certain consolation, a certain power which upholds and supports,

in the consciousness of suffering for something which is not one's own fault. To have been the victim of some wonderful combination of circumstances, to have been caught in some snare, which all your skill was not able to elude, that is far from being the worst that can befall anyone. But to see in your own conduct the germ of all your sufferings, to perceive how you have yourself led lightly up, dancing and singing, to the precipice over which you are about to be pitched—this is the most appalling ordeal of all. Margaret grew hot all over, with a blush that tingled to her finger points, and seemed to scorch her from head to foot. Whose fault was it, all the self-betrayal that followed, the horrible bond that bound her soul, and which she did not even venture to think of; whose fault was it but her own?

“Margaret, dear Margaret, dearest Jean has sent me to ask, are you not coming downstairs again? We all feel for you, darling—and oh, do you think it is nothing to us? Dear Jean puts great force upon herself, she has such a strong will, and commands it; but we all feel

the same. Oh, what a beautiful picture it is! what a dear, dear old house! How it brings back our youth, and dearest, dearest papa!"

Miss Leslie put her nose to the picture as if she would have kissed it. She felt in the depths of her artless soul that this was her duty to old Sir Ludovic, of whom poor Grace had known little enough for twenty years before. The tear came quite easily, which she dried with her white handkerchief, pressing it to her eyes. Not for anything in the world would she have failed of this duty to her dearest papa. Jean thought chiefly of crape, and was content with that way of expressing her sentiments; but within the first year, within, indeed, the first six months, to mention her father without the tear he had a right to, would have been to Grace a cruel dereliction from natural duty. After a twelvemonth, when the family put off crape, it would no doubt cease to be necessary—though always, she felt, a right thing—to pay that tribute of tears.

Margaret stood by, and looked on with a dreary helplessness. She had no tears

for her father, no room for him even in her overladen and guilty soul. And this she felt acutely, with a pang the more, feeling as if all love had died out of her heart, and nothing but darkness and confusion, and ingratitude and insensibility, was in her and about her. She took up the picture with a slight shudder, as she touched it, and put it away in the corner where hung the faded portrait of her mother's young lover. This touch of contact with the story of one who had gone before her, whom somehow, she scarcely knew how, she could not help identifying with herself, gave her a little fanciful consolation. Margaret did not long, as so many girls have done, to have a mother to flee to, and in whom to confide all her troubles; but it seemed to her, in some confused way, that it must have been but a previous chapter in her own life, which had passed under this same roof, in this same house, twenty years ago. She seemed almost, dimly, to recollect it, as she recollected (but far more vividly) that time of folly in which she had "encouraged" and "led on" Rob Glen. It

was better for her to obey Jean's call, to go downstairs and try to forget it all, for a moment, than to stay here and drive herself wild, wondering what he might do next, and what, oh what! it would be necessary for her to do. Grace, who was a little disappointed not to find her dissolved in tears, recommended that she should bathe her eyes—and brought her some water, and took a great deal of pains to obliterate the traces of weeping which did not exist. She tucked Margaret's hand under her arm, and patted it and held it fast.

“My poor darling!” she said, cooing over the unresponsive girl. Jean, too, who was not given to much exhibition of feeling, received her, when she came back, with something like tenderness.

“Put a chair for Margaret by the fire, Aubrey,” she said, “the child will be cold coming through all those passages; that is the worst of an old house, there are so many passages, and a draught in every one of them. I would not say a word against old houses, which are of course all the fashion, and very picturesque,

and all that; but I must say I think you suffer from draughts. And what good is the fireplace in the hall? the heat all goes up that big chimney. It does not come into the house at all. I would like hot-water pipes, but they are a great expense, and of course you would all tell me they were out of keeping. So is gas out of keeping. Oh, you need not cry out; I don't mean in the drawing-room, of course, which is a thing only done in Scotland, and quite out of the question; but to wander about those passages in the dark, and never to stir a step without a candle in your hand! I think it a great trouble, I must allow."

"Your ancestral home, Miss Leslie," said Mr. St. John, who had secured a place in front of the fire; "must be a true mediæval monument. I am very much interested in domestic architecture. And so I am sure you must be, familiar with two such houses—"

"People who possess old houses seldom care for them," said Aubrey, taking up a position on the other side, "you know what my aunt says about gas and hot

water pipes. Tell me," he said, half whispering, stooping over her, to the great indignation of the clergyman, "what I must call you? I must reserve the endearing title of aunt for the family circle, but I can't say Miss Leslie, you know, for you are not Miss Leslie; and Margaret, *tout court*, would be a presumption."

"Everybody calls me Margaret," she said.

"That man did, at Killin. I felt disposed to pitch him into the loch when I heard him; but probably," said Aubrey, laughing, "there might have been two words to that, don't you think? perhaps if it had come to a struggle it would have been I who was most likely to taste the waters of the loch."

"Oh, Randal is very good-natured," said Margaret, making an effort to recover herself, "and perhaps he would not have known what you meant if you had spoken about a lock. I never saw this house till—just a little while ago," she added to Mr. St. John, anxious to be civil. "I never was out of Fife."

“And the Northern architecture is different from ours; more—rude, is it not? I have heard that people often get confused, and attach an earlier date to a building than it really has any right to.”

“It is kind of you to say the man at Killin was good-natured,” said Aubrey, on the other side; “of course, you think *I* would not have given him much trouble. It seemed to me that everybody showed an extraordinary amount of confidence in that man at Killin. He pretended to be fishing, but he never fished. I suspect his fishing related to—who shall we say—your little cousin? nay, I am making a mistake again; I always forget that you belong to the previous generation—your niece.”

“Effie!” cried Margaret, completely roused, so great was her surprise. “Oh! but it was always—it was never—Effie—” Here she made a pause, bewildered, and caught Mr. St. John’s eye. “Oh, I beg your pardon,” she cried, with a sudden blush; “I—don’t know about architecture. I have not had—very much education,” she answered, looking piteously at her sisters for aid.

“Oh, dearest Jean! I think I must really go and tell Mr. St. John——”

“Hold your tongue,” said Mrs. Bellingham, holding her sister fast by her dress; “let the child make it out for herself. Do you think they mind about her education? Who cares for education? Men always like a girl to know nothing. Just keep out of the way and stop meddling.”

This aside was inaudible to the group round the fire; though Mr. St. John’s admirable enunciation made all he said quite distinct to them, and Mrs. Bellingham’s sharp ears were very conscious of Aubrey’s whispering—which was ill-bred, but of no effect—on the other side of Margaret’s chair.

Mr. St. John gave a little laugh of respectful derision and flattery.

“In the present age of learned ladies it is quite a relief to hear such a statement,” he said, “though I should not like to trust in your want of education. But this country is very rich architecturally, and I should be delighted to offer my humble services as cicerone. I should like to

convert you to the pure English Elizabethan—”

“It must have been Miss Effie,” said Aubrey; “who else? for Aunt Grace, though charming—And it stands to reason that a man who says he has gone to a certain place for fishing, yet never touches a rod, must have ulterior motives. And Aunt Jean is of opinion that these two would make a very pretty pair.”

Why Aubrey said this it would be hard to tell; whether from malice as meaning to prick her into annoyance, or whether out of simple mischief; anyhow it roused Margaret.

“Oh, I do not know if Jean would care—I am sure you are—very kind,” she said vacantly, to Mr. St. John; then more rapidly to the other hand. “I am almost sure you are mistaken. Neither Jean nor Effie knew Randal—that is to call knowing; he was—quite a stranger. I don’t think he knew Effie at all.”

“These are just the most favourable circumstances for a flirtation,” said Aubrey; “but look, they are all on the alert, and Aunt Jean is making signs to

me. It is evident they mean you to talk to *him*, not me. When he goes away let us return to Miss Effie and the man at Killin."

"Oh, I don't want to talk about them," cried Margaret; here at least there was nothing to make her shrink from Jean's inspection; she said this quite out loud so that all the company heard. Because she had one thing to conceal, was it not natural that she should take particular pains to show that there was nothing to conceal? She did not want any one to whisper to her. And there was besides, there could be no doubt, a certain tone of pique and provoked annoyance in Margaret's voice.

"I was saying," said Mr. St. John, mildly, "that in our own church there is a great deal that is interesting, and if you would allow me to take you over it some day, you and—Mrs. Bellingham or Miss Leslie, I should not despair of interesting you. Besides there are so many of your ancestors commemorated there. I hope we may succeed in making your mother-country very interesting to you," he said,

lowering his tone. It was a great relief to the young clergyman when "that fellow" went away from the heiress's side.

"Oh, I like it, very well," Margaret said.

"But I am very ambitious, Miss Leslie; very well is indifferent, I want you to like it more than that, I want you to love it, to prefer it to the other," he said with fervour in his voice; "and now I must say good-night." He held out his hand bending towards her, and Margaret looking up caught his eye; she gave a little start, and shrank backward at the very moment of giving him her hand. Why should he look like that, like *him* whom she was so anxious to forget? She dropped his hand almost before she touched it, in the nervous tremour which came over her. Why should he look like Rob Glen? Was he in the conspiracy against her to make her remember? She could scarcely keep in a little cry which rose to her lips in her sudden pain. Poor Mr. St. John! anything further from his mind than to make her think of any other suitor could not be. But Mrs. Bellingham, who was more clear-sighted, saw the look and put an interpre-

tation upon it of a different kind. When Mr. St. John had gone, attended to the door by Aubrey at his aunt's earnest request, Mrs. Bellingham came and placed herself where Mr. St. John had been, in front of the fire.

“That man,” she said solemnly, when he was gone, “is after Margaret too. Oh! you need not make such signs to me, Grace; I know perfectly well what I am saying. I never would speak about lovers to girls in an ordinary way; the monkeys find out all that for themselves quite fast enough—do you think there is anything that I could teach Effie on that point? But Margaret's is a peculiar case; she ought to know how to distinguish those who are sincere—she ought to know that it is not entirely for herself that men make those eyes at her. Oh I saw him very well, I perceived what he meant by it. You have a very nice fortune, my dear, and a very nice house, and you will have to pay the penalty like others. You will very soon know the signs as well as I do; and I can tell you, that *that* man is after you too.”

“Dearest Jean!” said Grace; “he may be a little High Church, more high than I approve, but he is a very nice young man? Whom could Margaret have better than a good, nice-looking, young clergyman? They are more domestic and more at home, and more with their wives——”

“Fiddle-faddling eternally in a drawing-room,” said Mrs. Bellingham, “always in a woman’s way wherever she turns. No, my dear, whoever you marry, Margaret, don’t marry a clergyman; a man like that always purring about the fireside, would drive me mad in a month.”

“Is it St. John who is in question?” said Aubrey, coming back. “Was he provided for my amusement, or is he daily bread at the Grange already? I don’t see how so pretty-behaved a person could drive anyone mad; he is a great deal safer than your last protégé, the man at Killin.”

“I don’t mean to discuss such questions with you, Aubrey,” said Mrs. Bellingham; “it is late, and I think if you will light our candles for us, we will say good-night; and I will go with you, Margaret, and look

at that picture again ; it was a very pretty picture—I must have it framed for you, there is a place in the wainscot parlour where it would hang very well. Who did you say sent it to you? or did you tell me? I did not know that there ever was anybody at Earl's-hall that could draw so well."

"Dear Jean," said Grace, thinking it a good opportunity to appear in Margaret's defence, "let her alone, let the poor child alone to-night; she is too tired for anything; are you not too tired, darling Margaret? I am sure you want to go to bed."

"I hope I know better than to overtire her," said Jean, with some offence; "there is no need for you to come, Grace. Where have you put the picture, Margaret? why you have put it with its face to the wall! is that to save it from the dust, or because you don't like to see it? My dear, I don't want to be unkind, but this is really carrying things too far. You don't mean to say you have taken a dislike to Earl's-hall?"

"No," Margaret said, under her breath; though it seemed to her that to look at the

picture again was more than she could bear.

“And it is a very pretty picture,” said Jean, turning it round and sitting down on the sofa to look at it; “a very pretty picture! By and by you will be very glad to have it. And who was it you said did it? I never thought Randal Burnside was an artist; perhaps he got one of the people to do it who are always at Sir Claude’s. But, my dear, if that is so, I can’t let you take a present from a young man like Randal Burnside.”

“It was not Randal,” Margaret was eager to clear him; “he never sent me anything in a present, he would not think of me at all. It was—Once when he came to make a picture of—papa, which is beautiful—He was a young man from the farm.”

“A young man from the farm!”

“Rob Glen,” said Margaret, almost choked, yet forcing herself to speak. “Papa said he might do it. I did not know anything about it, but I suppose he must have finished it; and here it is.” It seemed a simple statement enough, if she had not been so breathless, and changed colour so

continually, and looked so haggard about the eyes.

Mrs. Bellingham heard this account with a blank face.

“Rob Glen!” she said, “Rob Glen! where have I heard the name before? Was it the servants at Earl’s-hall, or was it Ludovic, or—who was it? Papa said he might do it? Dear me, papa might have known better, Margaret, though I am sure I don’t want to blame him. It will have to be paid for, I suppose; and how very strange it should have been sent like this without a word! He will send a bill most likely; how strange I should not have heard anything about this artist! Was there any price mentioned that you remember, Margaret? They ask such sums of money for one of those trifling sketches. It is nice enough, but I am sure it is not worth the half of what we shall have to give for it. When there is no bargain made before-hand it is astonishing the charges they will make; and papa really had no money for such nonsense—he ought not to have ordered it—but perhaps he thought it would be a gratification to

you. Can you remember at all, Margaret, if anything was said about the price."

"Oh no, no—there was to be no price. It was not like that—he asked to do it, and papa let him do it; nobody thought of any money."

"But, my dear!" said Jean, "my dear! you are a little simpleton; but you could not think, I hope, of taking the man's work and giving him *nothing* for it? That is out of the question—quite out of the question. I never heard of such a thing," said Mrs. Bellingham. The words seemed to penetrate through all Margaret's being. She trembled, notwithstanding all her efforts to control herself. What could she reply? Take a man's work and give him *nothing* for it; but it was not money that Rob would take.

"Of course it could not be expected that you should know anything of business," said Jean, "and poor papa was already feeling ill perhaps, and out of his ordinary way. I daresay a letter will come by the next post to explain it. And if not, you must give me the young man's address, and I will write and ask, or we

might send word to Ludovic. Aubrey is a very good judge of such things, we can ask Aubrey to-morrow what he thinks the value should be. Now, Margaret, you are trembling from head to foot, you are as white as a sheet; you have a nervous look about your eyes, that it always frightens me to see. My dear, what is to become of you," cried Jean, "if you let every little thing upset you? It was in the course of nature that we should lose papa—he was an old man, and, I believe, though he was never a man who talked much about religion, that he was well prepared. And as for Earl's-hall, you would not grudge that to Ludovic? It is his right as the only son. It shows great weakness, my dear, both of body and mind, that you should be upset like this only by a picture of Earl's-hall."

Margaret listened with all that struggle of conflicting feelings which produces hysteria in people unused to control themselves. The choking in the throat, the burning of those unshed tears about her eyes, the trouble in her heart was more than she could bear. She could not

make any reply. She could not even see her sister's face; the room reeled round with her—everything grew dark. To save her balance, she threw herself suddenly upon the firm figure before her, clutching at Jean's support, throwing her arms round her with a movement of desperation. Few people had ever clung wildly to Mrs. Bellingham in moments of insufferable emotion. She was quite overcome by this involuntary appeal to her. She took her young sister into her arms, all unconscious of the cause of her misery, and caressed and soothed her, and stayed by her till she had calmed down, and was able to escape from her trouble in bed. Jean believed in bed as a cure for most evils.

"You must not give way," she said, "indeed, my dear, you must not give way; but a good night's sleep will be the best thing for you; lie still and rest."

"What a tender-hearted thing it is;" she said, going downstairs again for a last word with Aubrey, after this agitating task was over. "I declare she has quite upset me, too; though it is scarcely possible, after being so long away from home,

that I could feel as she does. She is a great deal too feeling for her own comfort. But, Aubrey, you must not lose your time, my dear boy, you must push on. It would be the greatest 'divert' to her, as they say in Scotland, if you could only get her to fall in love with you. I have the greatest confidence in falling in love."

"And so have I—when they will do it," said Aubrey, puffing out a long plume of smoke from his cigar.

## CHAPTER IV.

CURIOUSLY enough Margaret's first thought, when she woke in the morning, was not of the picture nor of all the consequences which it seemed to threaten. Sometimes the most trifling matter will thrust itself in, before those giant cares, which generally wait by our bedsides, to surprise us when we first open our eyes. And the first thing she thought of, strangely enough, was Aubrey's suggestion of last night—Effie! What could he mean by it? Effie had been his own companion, not Randal's. Randal had not walked or talked with, or sought anyone, except— It was very strange indeed, how anyone could suppose that Effie— He did not *know* her. Of all the party, the one he knew best was certainly herself. She must certainly be best aware of what his feelings were—of what he had been think-

ing about ! It annoyed her to think that Aubrey should have so little perception, should know so little about it, though Jean had such confidence in him. There was a little irritation in her mind about this point, which quite pushed to the front and made itself appear more important than it was. She could not help making a little survey of the circumstances, of all that had happened—and it had just occurred to her to recollect the offer of service and help that Randal had made her. This had made her half smile at the moment, and since then she had smiled more than once at the idea that she could want his help. She had said, “ Jean will manage everything ;” and yet he had said it with fervid meaning, with a look of anxious concern.

Ah ! she sprang up in her bed, and clasped her hands together. The occasion had come ; but she could not consult Randal, nor anyone. She must struggle through it by herself, as best she could, holding her peace, saying nothing. That was the only safety for her. But Margaret was surprised to find that when she turned

the picture round again, and looked at it trembling, as though it had been capable of doing her bodily harm, she did not feel so much power in it as she had done the day before. It did not sting her the second time. She looked at it almost tranquilly, seeing in it no dreadful accuser, bringing before her all her own past levity and folly ; but only a memorial of a time and a place which indeed made her heart beat with keen emotion, and with pain, but not with the overwhelming sickening passion of misery which had been like death to her last night. She could not understand how this was, for the circumstances had not changed in any way, and there was still evidently before her the difficulty of making Jean understand how it was that this picture could be accepted without payment, and keeping her, energetic as she was, from interfering in her own person. There was still this difficulty ; and all that made the future so alarming, the dread of other surprises that might follow this, was undiminished ; but yet instead of turning the picture to the wall again, in sick horror of it, and fear of it, as of

a ghost, Margaret left it in the recess, uncovered, the corner of the broad rim of white touching the little faded water-colour portrait. That touch gave her a certain soothing and consolation. It was not the same kind of trouble as her own; probably the other girl who had been engaged to that poor fellow without loving him had not been at all to blame; but yet there his portrait stood, a memorial of other uneasy thoughts that had gone on in this same chamber. Probably *she* blamed herself too, though not as Margaret was doing. But certainly, anyhow, she must have sat thinking, and cried in the same corner of that sofa, and looked at the pale painted face. Margaret leant the cause of her trouble against the frame of that dead and gone one, which the other girl had lived through, and felt that there was consolation in the tomb. What so visionary, so painful, so foolish even, that will not console at eighteen when it happens to offer a parallel to our own distresses? And it was with renewed courage and a great deal more composure than she could have hoped for, that Margaret went

downstairs. They all came to meet her with kindly questions how she was. "But I, for one, think it quite unnecessary to put any such question," said Aubrey. He looked at her with a lingering look of pleasure. He did not object to Margaret. She was not "his style;" but still he did not object to her, and this morning he admired her as she came downstairs in her morning freshness, her black dress bringing out the delicate tints of her complexion. Jean had told him that he had better lose no time; and the fact of Mr. St. John's evident intentions had quickened Aubrey's. The good which another man was trying to secure became more valuable in his eyes. She was certainly very pretty, he said to himself, a delicate little creature, like a pale rose—not altogether a white rose, but that delicate blush which is not definable by any vulgar name of colour; and her silky hair was piquant among all the frizzy unkempt heads that were more fashionable. On the whole he had not the least objection to make what "running" he could, for Margaret. She was worth winning, with her beautiful old

house, and her pretty little income, though she was not quite his style.

“Here is a fat letter for you,” he said, “we have all been grumbling over our letters. Aunt Jean, I think, would like to read them all, to see if they were fit to be delivered to us; she takes all the charge of our moral as well as of our physical well-being. I saw her look at this very narrowly as if she had the greatest mind to break the seal. *That* is of course a figure of speech now-a-days—I mean to open the envelope; it is very fat and tempting to the curious spectator. I should like myself to know what was in it; it must be from some dear confidential young lady friend.”

Margaret looked at the letter with a little thrill of alarm; she did not get many letters and every one that came was a slight excitement; but when she had looked at it she laid it down very calmly. “It is from Bell,” she said. She knew very well what Bell would say to her. She would tell her about the brown cow and the chickens, and how John was with his rheumatism, and there was no great hurry to read it for

a few minutes, until they had ceased to take so much notice of her; Margaret knew that after a minute or two her sisters would be fully occupied with their own concerns.

“Aubrey is talking nonsense, Margaret, as he generally does,” said Mrs. Bellingham. “The idea that I would open anybody’s letter! not but what I think it a very right thing of young people to show their letters to their parents, or to those who stand in the place of parents; it shows a right sort of confidence, and I confess, for my part, I always like to see it; but I am not the sort of person that would ever force confidence. It is nothing, I always say, unless it comes spontaneously. I wonder if Bell will tell you anything about that picture that arrived last night, Margaret? I saw your letter was from Bell, and that is what made me look at it, as Aubrey says, though he always exaggerates. Of course I knew Bell and you had no secrets, Margaret. I really think if you had been out of the way I should have done violence to my own feelings and gone the length of opening it,

just to see if there was anything to explain what that young man could mean by sending it without a word."

"Oh!" said Aubrey, "it was a young man then, was it, who made the drawing? it is satisfactory to know that it was a young man."

"Why is it satisfactory to know that he is a young man? I can't say that I see that at all; it is neither satisfactory nor unsatisfactory; it is not a person in our condition of life, so that it does not matter in the least to Margaret. Why do you say it is satisfactory to know that he is a young man?"

"Well, because then, there is hope that he will do better when he is older," said Aubrey; "you all seemed to like it so much that I did not venture to say anything; but it is not great in point of art; I have no doubt it is a most faithful representation of the place, but it is nothing to speak of, you know, in the point of art."

"Oh, really, do you think so?" cried Mrs. Bellingham; "then you would not think it worth a very high price, Aubrey?"

I am very glad of that—for I thought we might be obliged to offer a large sum—”

“It is a beautiful picture,” said Margaret, hotly; she could not bear anything to be said against this rooted belief of hers; its presence alarmed and troubled her, but she would not have it undervalued. “If it were to be sold it would be worth a great deal of money; it is a beautiful picture: but there is nothing about selling it,” she cried, a flush rising into her cheeks. “It was done for—papa: money would not buy it—and him that painted it was not thinking about money.” Her pronouns, poor child, were wrong, but her heart was right. Rob Glen was her greatest terror on earth, but she would be just to him all the same.

“But that is just what I cannot be satisfied about,” said Jean; “if you pay a man for his work why there you are! but if you don’t pay him, or give him anything as an equivalent, why where are you? Every man must be paid one way or another. Open Bell’s letter, Margaret, and tell me if she says anything about it. I shall have to write to Ludovic, or to the

young man himself, if we do not know what he means."

Margaret opened Bell's letter with a hand that trembled a little. She did not expect to find anything there on the subject which so deeply occupied her, but still to open this thick enclosure before Jean, whose mind was so much set upon it that something was to be found there, and who would watch her while she read it, and ask to see Bell's humble epistle, was very alarming. She opened it with a tremulousness which she could scarcely disguise. Bell had folded her letter, which was written on a large sheet of paper, in the way in which letters had been folded before the days of envelopes, and consequently it was with some little delay and difficulty that a trembling hand opened the big folds. But Margaret was suddenly petrified, frozen to her very heart with terror, when she saw another letter lying enclosed, a tiny letter of very different aspect from Bell's. She dared not move, she dared not do anything to show the greatness of the shock she had received. The danger was not of a kind that she

dared disclose. The paper shook in her hands convulsively, and then they became preternaturally still and steady. She did not know Rob Glen's handwriting, but she knew that this was from him by instinct, by inspiration of her terror. What was she to do? her face she felt grew crimson, then fell into a chill of paleness; and when she lifted her eyes in a momentary glance of panic to see if Jean was looking at her, she met the eyes of Aubrey, and without knowing what she did, in a kind of delirium made a terrified instantaneous appeal to him; her thoughts were too hurried, her desperation too complete even to make her conscious that the appeal was unreasonable, or indeed aware that she had made it, till the thing was done; and next moment all became dim before her eyes, though she still kept her balance desperately upon her seat, and held the papers firmly in her hands.

Aubrey was not insensible or unkind; he was startled by the look, for whatever Margaret's emotion might mean it was evidently something very real and terrible for the young inexperienced creature who put this

involuntary trust in him. He said instantly,

“Have you finished breakfast, aunt Jean? for if so, I want you to look at some things of mine, a parcel I received this morning. Christmas is coming, and with all that crew of children at the Court a man is put to his wit’s end; come into my room and give me your advice about them. Oh yes, of course they are rubbish, what can I buy but rubbish on my little scrap of money? But come and give me your opinion.”

“Wait a minute, my dear boy, wait a minute; you shall have my opinion with the greatest of pleasure; but I want to hear what Bell says.”

Upon this he got up, and walking solemnly to her, offered his arm. “Who is Bell? I decline to yield the *pas* to Bell. Come now with me, and Bell will do afterwards; if it takes so long to read as it promises from the size of it, I should have to wait till to-morrow, and that does not suit me at all. Whisper! there is a scrap of Sèvres, Rose du Barri, and one or two small rags of lace.”

“Oh!” Mrs. Bellingham uttered a cry. She made a little dart towards Margaret

to inspect the letter over her shoulder, thus hoping to secure both the advantages offered; but before she could carry out her intention, her hand was caught fast in Aubrey's arm. "I want *you* to see them all *first*," he whispered in her ear.

"I do think dear Aubrey might have asked me too," said Miss Grace, querulously, "I don't know that there is so much difference, though it is Jean to be sure who is his real aunt. But then, perhaps, dearest Margaret, you know, he might not like to ask me, an unmarried lady, to go into his room. Yes, yes, dear Aubrey, I see exactly what he meant—he gave me a look as he went away, as much as to say, I will explain it all afterwards. Naturally, you know, he would not ask me, being an unmarried lady, to go into his room. Where are you going, my dear; where are you going? You have not eaten anything, darling Margaret, you have not even taken your tea."

But it was not difficult to escape from Grace, and Margaret, with a sense of desperation, snatched a cloak from the hall and stole out, wending her way among

the shrubbery to the most retired spot she could think of. She would not go to her room, where her sister would inevitably come after her. She had thrust Bell's big letter, innocent production penned out of the fulness of Bell's heart, which was as big as the letter, into her pocket. And she dared not look at the other till she had got safe into some corner where nobody would see her, some covert where she would be free from inspection. The cold wind revived her, and a little spiteful rain came damp upon her face, bringing back a little of its colour; but she was unconscious of both wind and rain. She went to a little breezy summer-house in a corner of the grounds; and then she bethought herself that the gravel paths were dry there, and Jean might easily follow, so she retraced her steps hurriedly, and pulled the hood of her cloak over her head, and ran across the little bridge, over the stream, to the park, where all the ground was still thickly sprinkled with the autumn carpet of yellow leaves. The grass was wet, the rain came spitefully in her face, but she did not mind; when she was in

the midst of the big clump of elms, where the leaves were almost gone, she stopped and paused a moment to rest, with her back against a tree. Jean would never follow her there; the wet grass and universal dampness spreading round her made her safe. She opened her fingers in which she had held it fast, the innocent-looking little missive. With what a beating heart she opened it! Oh, how foolish, foolish she had been to bind all her life, for ever and ever, and she not eighteen! And here it was that she read her first love letter—her heart beating, but not with pleasure; her bosom heaving with terror, and dismay, and pain.

“Margaret, my own darling, where have you gone from me, why do you not send me a word in charity? It is three months since you went away. Is it possible that in all that time you have never thought of me, nor thought how miserable I was, deprived of you and of all knowledge of you? You have put my love to a tremendous test, though it is strong enough to bear that, and a great deal more. But oh, my love, don't make me so unhappy!

Shake me off, you cannot—make me forget, you cannot. My love is too tender and too constant to fail; but you can make me very wretched, Margaret, and that is what you are doing. I have waited and waited, and looked every day for a letter—the merest little scrap would have made me happy. I knew you could not write often or much; but one word, surely I might have had one word. I am just finishing the drawing you liked, the view of Earl's-hall, hoping that, notwithstanding all changes, you may like it still, and that it may remind you of the happy time when we first knew each other, when nobody thought of parting us. Your dear old father would never have parted us; he would have preferred your happiness to everything. He would rather have chosen a loving husband to take care of his little Peggy than all the world could give her. Your brother thinks otherwise, my darling, and I don't blame him—but I know what old Sir Ludovic would have thought. And you will not let them turn you against me, my sweetest Margaret? you will not give me up because I am poor?

That is a thing I would scarcely believe, if you said it with your own dear lips. Margaret Leslie give up her betrothed husband because he had nothing! I never would believe it. But I know your delicate sense of honour, my own dear girl. You do not like to write to me in secret for the sake of the people you are living among; I understand how you feel, and you are right, I know you are right: but my sweet love, remember that to please them you are killing me, and I don't feel that I can bear it much longer. The silence is becoming too much, it is making an end of me. One word, one sweet loving word, my own Margaret, just to keep me alive! I feel that I am getting desperate. If I do not have one word from you I cannot answer for myself, even if it be for my own destruction: if I do not hear of you, I must come and see you. I must get sight of you, Three months without a word—without a message, is enough to kill anyone who loves as I do. I say to myself, she cannot have forgotten me, she cannot have forsaken me, she is too true, too faithful to her word; and then another day comes, and I get desperate.

Half-a-dozen times I have been ready to start off to go after you, to watch about your house, only to get a glimpse of you. Write to me, my Margaret, put me out of my misery—only one word!”—

Then in a postscript it was added, that he had asked Bell to send this for once, in order that her friends, her unkind friends, who wanted to separate her from him, might not find out he had written; and that he had sent the drawing—and that once more he begged for one word, only one word in reply. It was written under two dates, one some weeks before the other. Margaret stood with her back against the elm-tree, and read it with a flutter of terror. Oh, what would she do if he were to carry out his threat, if he were to come and watch about the house, and look for her! was that a thing that might happen any time, when she was walking through the lanes, even here in her own little park under her elm-trees? Might he come at any moment and—do as he used to do at Earl’s-hall? Oh! Margaret started from her shelter and clenched her hands, and stamped her foot

on the wet yielding grass. Oh! should it ever have to be gone through again, all that it made her blush so hotly to think of? The blush that was usually so evanescent got fixed in hot crimson of excitement on her cheek. If he came, it seemed to her that it was she who must fly—anywhere—to the end of the world; but yet he had a right to come, and some time he would come, and she would not be able to say a word against it. “Oh, what shall I do? what shall I do?” cried Margaret to herself. Would he not let her even have her three years to herself? He might wait, surely he might wait for three years! But it would be impossible to give any idea of the confused muddle of pain and helpless instinctive resistance in her thoughts. A hot flush of resentment against him for daring to use the name her father only had ever called her by, a kind of speechless fury and indignation burst out in the midst of all her other excitements. How dared he do it? Rob Glen, who was nobody, who was not even a gentleman! and then she covered her face with her hands, and cried out with horror and bewilderment

to think that this was her opinion of one to whom she had pledged herself, to whom she would belong almost more than to her father himself. And she had no one to go to, no one she could confide in, no one whose help she could ask. And what help would avail her? She must keep her word, she must fulfil her promise—at the end of three years. She never even contemplated the possibility of breaking her word. But at present why could he not let her alone? Had she not begged him to let her alone? She sank down by the foot of the elm, not even noting the wet, and cried. Crying could do no good, she knew that; but yet it relieved her mind. She was hemmed in and encompassed with danger. Perhaps he might come, might appear suddenly in her path, with arms ready to take hold of her, with those caresses which made her shrink even in imagination, with shame and pain. There had never been a time—except the first moment when she was too broken-hearted, too miserable to care what happened to her—that she had not shrunk from his tenderness. And how

could she bear it now? Terror came upon her breathless and speechless; here even, under these very trees, he might appear suddenly. A stifled shriek came out of her oppressed heart at the thought. It seemed to her that she could never move anywhere, with safety, without a sense of terror again.

And then there were lesser but very apparent dangers. Jean would ask her what Bell had said; she would ask, perhaps, to see Bell's letter, in which there was a sentence which was as bad as telling all. Bell wrote: "I am sending to you, my dear Miss Margret, a note that Rob Glen—him that you had to come so much to Earl's-hall before my dear old maister died—has asked me to send. Lothe, lothe, was I to do it? It may be something misbecoming the like of you to receive. But I will send it this one time. For a young lady like you to be writing of letters with a young gentleman of her own kind is a thing I would not encourage; but Rob Glen is more a match for your maid, Miss Margret, than he is for you. And it's real impudent of him to ask

me; but as he says it's something about one of his pictures, I do it for this one time." If Jean asked to see Bell's letter, would not this betray her? So that her path was surrounded by perils both great and small. After a while, weary, wet, and draggled, with her dress clinging to her, and her cloak dripping, she returned across the sodden grass. Jean, she knew, would be busy for the moment with household cares, and it seemed to Margaret that, if she lost no time, she might still make an attempt to avert the fate that threatened. She went to her own room, holding up as best she could, her poor black dress with its spoiled crape, and still crimson and hot with her excitement, wrote two letters in the time which she ordinarily took to arrange the preliminaries of one. She wrote to Rob as follows, with a terseness of expression partly dictated by the terror of him that had taken possession of her mind, partly by the headstrong haste in which she wrote.

" Dear Rob,

" I could not write, and I cannot now,

because I promised to Ludovic. You must not come; oh, don't come, if you have any pity for me! My life would be made miserable. How is it possible I could forget you? You don't forget anything in such a short time—and how could I *ever* forget? Oh, it has cost me too much! Please, please, do not come! I am quite well—and you must not, indeed you must not, mind my not writing, for I promised Ludovic. Good-bye, dear Rob; I do not want to hurt you. I always knew that you were very kind; but you must not, indeed, indeed, you must not think of coming to me here.”

Her wet dress, her spoiled crape, clung about her limbs, her wet shoes were like two pools, in which her cold little feet were soaked. As is usual at such moments of excitement, her head was burning but her feet cold. Nevertheless, she wrote another little note to Bell, telling her that she was quite right not to send any letters, and begging that if she saw Mr. Randal Burnside she would ask him to speak to Mr. Glen. Bell was to say that Margaret

had told her to make this extraordinary request—and Mr. Randal Burnside would understand. Nothing could be more incoherent than this last letter, for Margaret did not half know what she meant Randal to do or say; but he had promised to help her, he had told her to call him whenever she wanted him. Was her poor little head getting feverish and light? She went out again, stealing in her wet garments once more downstairs, leaving a dimness upon the polished wood, and walked all the way through the gradually increasing rain to the post-office in the village, where she put in her two letters. She was aching all over, her head hot and light, her feet cold and heavy, her crape all soaked and ruined, her hands too feeble to hold up her dress, which clung about her ankles, and made her stumble at every step, before she got home.

## CHAPTER V.

THE time that had passed so peacefully over Margaret, bringing so many new experiences, new scenes, and enlarged acquaintance with her own circumstances and advantages, had not gone with equal satisfaction over Rob Glen. Margaret's pledge to him, that pledge which she had given so easily, and which his mother prized so deeply, had been nothing but painful and shameful to him. Conscience has curious varieties in different persons, even in persons so nearly related as mother and son. Rob felt no sting in his moral consciousness from the fact that he had led Margaret to commit herself in her moment of trouble, and had taken advantage of the very abandonment of her grief to assume the position of a lover, the mere fact of which gave him a hold over her which nothing else could have given. To do him justice, he would

have taken the same position with any comely poor girl whom he had encountered in equal distress ; but the poor lass would probably have thought little of it, whereas to Margaret's more delicate nature there was all the reality of an unbreakable bond in the embrace and kiss with which he had taken possession of her, before she was aware. But Rob felt no trouble in his conscience in this respect. It did not occur to him that he had surprised her and taken advantage of her sorrow, and loneliness, and bewilderment ; but in respect to the pledge which his mother had with so little trouble got from her, his conscience did speak. Margaret, it was true, had thought nothing of it ; she had felt that all was done already, that her fate was fixed and irrevocable, that she could not go back—and what did her name on a piece of paper signify ? But here was where Rob's honour, such as it was, came in ; he hated that piece of paper. He was deeply mortified by Margaret's readiness to consent to everything so long as she could get free from his mother and himself. The written bond seemed to put him in a false

position, to lessen him in his own eyes. He would have nothing to say to it.

“Keep it yourself, if you like it, now that you have got it—it is none of my doing,” he had said, throwing it from him. Mrs. Glen secured it with a cry of dismay, as it was fluttering towards the fire.

“Ay, I’ll keep it,” she said, “and ye’ll be fain some day to come questing to me for your bit o’ paper, as ye call it, that you never would have had if your mother had been as thoughtless as yoursel’.”

“Mother!” he said, furious; “do you think I would hold a girl to her written promise, if she did not want to keep her word?”

“I canna say what you would do,” said Mrs. Glen, “you’re just a great gomerel, that’s what you are. Ye have mair confidence in her being in love with ye, a lang leggit ne’er-do-well, than in onything that’s reasonable: but, Robbie, my man, love comes and love goes. You’re no bad-looking, and you have the gift of the gab, which goes a lang way; and maybe she’ll stick to ye, as you think, against a’ her friends can say; but for me I’ve aye a great

confidence in what's put down in black and white; and I wouldna say but you would be fain to come to me for my bit o' paper, for a' so muckle as you despise it now."

"Never will I build my faith on such a foundation! never will I hold Margaret to her bond!" cried Rob; but his mother locked the precious bit of paper in the old secretary which stood in the parlour, with a cynical disregard to his protestations.

"It's there in the left hand drawer if anything should happen to me; if you should ever want it, you'll ken where to find it," she said.

And several weeks went on without any impatience on the part of either in respect to Margaret; even the conversation which Rob had with the new Sir Ludovic, who summoned him curtly to give up all idea of his sister, had rather encouraged than depressed him; for it was evident that Margaret had showed no signs of yielding, and her brother was not even her guardian and had no power whatever over her. When he thus ascertained from Sir Ludovic's inadvertent admission that Margaret had remained steadfast, Rob had metaphorically

snapped his fingers at the Baronet. He had been perfectly civil, but he had given Sir Ludovic to understand that he cared little enough for his disapprobation. "If I was in your position I should no doubt feel the same," he had said with fierce candour; "I should think that Margaret was about to throw herself away; but she does not think so, which is the great matter."

"She will think so when she comes to her senses—when she is fit to form an opinion!" Sir Ludovic cried; and Rob had smilingly assured him that he was contented to wait and put this to the proof. But after that interview, when Earl's-hall was dismantled and left vacant, and everything belonging to the Leslie's seemed about to disappear, and not a word came out of the distance in which Margaret was, both Rob and his mother began to be uneasy. Rob had not calculated upon any correspondence; but yet he had felt that somehow or other she would manage to communicate with him, and to find some means by which he could communicate with her. Girls of Margaret's condition do not submit to entire separation as those

of Jeanie's do; and when day after day passed, and week after week, it was natural that he should become uneasy. Nor was the anxiety which he felt as a lover unshared by the cooler spectator. Mrs. Glen began to ply him with questions, anxious, fretful, scornful, derisive.

"Ony word to-day, Rob?" she would say, "I saw you gang out to meet the lassie with the post." "Dear, dear, Rob, I hope our bonnie young lady may be well!" would be the burden of the next inquiry—and then came sharper utterances: "Lord! if I was a lad like you I wouldna stick there waiting and waiting, but I would ken the reason." "Do you think that's the way to court a lass, even if she be a lady? I would give her no peace if it were me; I would let her see that I wasna the one to play fast and loose with." These repeated assaults were followed by practical consequences quite as disagreeable; instead of the indulgence with which he had been for some time treated, the tacit consent given to his do-nothingness, the patience of his mother, though it went sorely against the grain, with an existence

which produced no profit and was of no use—he began to be once more the object of those bitter criticisms and flying insults which she knew so well how to make use of, to the exasperation of the compelled listener. “What it is to be a man and a good scholar!” she would say: “I couldna sit hand-idle looking at other folk working, no! if it were to save my life. Eh, ay, there’s a wonderful difference atween them that are born to earn their living, and them that are content to live on their friends—I hope the time will never come when that will be my lot; but no one of a’ my friends would help me, that’s one thing, certain; though there are some that have aye the luck to get somebody to toil and moil, while they live pleasantly and gang lightly. It is the way of the world.”

Another time she would burst out with all the fervour of roused temper. “Lord, man, how can ye sit there and see every creature in the house working but yoursel’? I would sooner weed the turnips or frichten the craws—but you’re of less use than a bairn of three years auld.”

Rob steeled himself as best he could

against these blighting words. He would stroll forth whistling by way of defiance and be absent the whole day, absent at meal-times when his mother exacted punctuality, and late of returning at night. It was a struggle of constant exasperation between them. He had no money and no means of getting any, or he would gladly have left the farm, where there was no longer even anything to amuse him, anything to give him the semblance of a pursuit. To be sure he worked languidly at his drawings still, and resumed the interrupted sketch of Earl's-hall which had occupied so important a place in his recent history. To have before you the hope of being rich in three years, of being able to enter another sphere and cast away from you all those vulgar necessities of work which fill the lives of most people : to have ease before you, happiness, social elevation—but only on the other side of that long chasm of time, which for the moment you can see no way of getting through : it is impossible to imagine a more tantalizing position. Say that it is utterly mean and miserable of any man to fix

his entire hopes upon an elevation procured in such a way ; but Rob was not conscious of this. A rich wife, who was also pretty and young, seemed to him a most satisfactory way of making a fortune ; had she been old and ugly the case would have been different, but he had no more hesitation about enriching himself by means of Margaret, than he had felt in securing Margaret to himself in the incaution and prostration of her grief. His conscience and his honour had in these particulars nothing to say. But as day after day went on and he received nothing from Margaret to prove his power over her, no stolen letter, no secret assurance of her love and faithfulness, Rob's mind became more and more uneasy, and his thoughts more and more anxious. She was the sheet-anchor of his safety, without which he must return into a chaos all the more dark that it had been irradiated by such a hope.

And this suspense, while it made his position at home more and more uncomfortable every day, did not improve his mental condition, as may be easily sup-

posed. He had entertained plans—before he had perceived how easily he might step upwards by aid of Margaret's hand—of seeking his fortune in London, and either by means of pen or pencil, or both together, making out some kind of future for himself. But why should he take this trouble, and expose himself to the rich man's contumely, &c., when by and by he might himself appear among the best, (as his ignorant fancy suggested,) a patron of art instead of a feeble professor of it—a fine amateur, with all the condescension towards artists which it is in the power of the wealthy to show? This was an ignoble thought and he was partially conscious that it was so; but there was a latent love of indolence in him which is always fostered by such prospects of undeserved and unearned aggrandisement, as now flaunted before his eyes. Why should he work laboriously to gain a little advancement for himself, when by mere patience and waiting he might reach to such advancement as the most Herculean work of his could not bring him to? And the suspense in which he was, worked

upon his mind and led him on in this evil path. He could do nothing till he had heard from her—and she would write, she must write any day.

These motives altogether, and the want of money to do anything for himself, and even the reproaches of his mother who denounced him for eating the bread of idleness without affording him any means to attempt a better existence—which latter acted by hardening his heart and making him feel a defiant satisfaction in thwarting her—all drove him deeper and deeper into the slipshod habits of an unoccupied life. He got up late, happy to escape a *tête-à-tête* breakfast with his mother, and her sneers and reproaches, at the cost of Jenny's integrity who smuggled him in a much better breakfast than his mother's, while the mistress was busy about her dairy or in her poultry yard; he dawdled over his sketches, doing a little dilettante work as pleased him; then he would stroll out and perhaps walk across the country to some other farmhouse where he was sure of a hospitable invitation to share the family dinner, and an excellent recep-

tion from the mother and daughters to whom it was no trouble to make himself agreeable; or he would go to the Manse and resume the often interrupted discussion about his "difficulties" with Dr. Burnside, who was anxious to be "of use" to Rob, and to be instrumental, as he said, in bringing him back to the right way. These discussions amused both parties greatly—the Minister, as affording him a means of bringing forth from their ancient armoury those polemical weapons in which every man who has ever attempted to wield them, takes a secret pride—and the young sceptic by reason of the delightful sense of superiority with which he felt able to see through his adversary's weakness, and sense of power in being able to crush him when he wished to do so. Often these controversies too, which were continually renewed and never ending, got Rob a dinner and saved him from the domestic horrors of the farm. And by and by there happened another accident which threw him still more into the way of mischief, as happens so often to those who dally

with temptation. He had made his peace with Jeanie on that melancholy night after Margaret's departure. She had been angry; but she had been persuaded to hear his story—to understand him, to see how it was that he had been “drawn into” the present circumstances of his life—and finally to be sorry for him who had gone astray because unaware that she was near, and because of poor little Margaret's need of comfort and solace. Did not Jeanie know how he could console a poor girl in trouble, with that tongue of his that would wile a bird from a tree? She had forgiven him and they had parted in melancholy kindness recognising that fate, not any fault of theirs, had separated them. When the household at Earl's-hall was broken up, Jeanie had returned to her father; and not long after she had, as was most natural, encountered Rob in a lonely lane, where she was taking a melancholy evening walk. What could be more natural? She could not sit and talk with the wives at their doors, when the soft autumn twilight, so full of wistful suggestion, dropped softly over the leigh toun. Jeanie was too much in the midst of her own life, too much ab-

sorbed by the dramatic uncertainties of fate to be capable of that tranquil amusement. There were not many people in the Kirkton who cared for the exercise of a walk. The men might stray out a hundred yards beyond the village, on one side or the other, with their evening pipe, but the women kept at "the doors;" they had enough of exercise in the care of their families and in "redding up the hoose." Thus Jeanie, even if she had wanted a companion, would have been unlikely to find one; and indeed it was much more to her mind to stray forth alone, very melancholy, with her head full of Rob, and all her old anger and indignation softened into indulgence and pity. He was made like that, could he help it? he could not see trouble anywhere without doing what he could to console the sufferer. Jeanie knew this well—and how tender a comforter he was. And poor Miss Margaret was so young and so bonnie, and in such sore trouble; and oh, it was easy to see, Jeanie thought to herself, how soft her heart was to *him*! No wonder; he would wile a bird from the tree. They met

while she was in this softened mood; and Rob was one who never neglected the good the gods provided, of this sort. He in his turn had recourse to Jeanie for consolation, throwing himself upon that feminine mercy and sympathy which never had yet failed him. And Jeanie cried, and was dismally flattered by his confidence in the midst of her suffering, and told him all she had heard from Bell about Margaret's movements, and forgot herself, poor girl, in the intensity of fellow-feeling and understanding. Next time they met it was not by accident, and Rob, while growing more and more anxious about the new love, which meant more than happiness to him, which meant likewise fortune and an altogether elevated and loftier life—took the comfort of the old love which was thus thrown in his way, and found life much more tolerable from the fact that he could talk over his distresses with Jeanie. He could confide to her his mother's taunts, and the hardness of his life at home—till Jeanie almost felt that to see him married to Margaret would be an advantage to herself, though she cried over it bitterly

enough when she was alone. But what did *she* matter, after all, a poor lass? Jeanie thought she could put up with anything to see him happy.

“A bonnie end your drawing and your painting and a’ your idleness is coming to,” said Mrs. Glen one November morning, while Rob obscured all the light in the little parlour window, putting the last touches to that drawing of Earl’s-hall. “A bonnie way of spending your life. Eh, man! I wouldna’ sooner sweep the house, or clean the rooms! What is the good o’ a’ this fyking and splairging? and what is to be the end of your bonnie Miss that a’ this idle work was to win? I’ll warrant she thinks she’s gotten clear off, and got a’ she wanted, and no need to do a hand’s turn for you, in recompense of a’ that you have thrown away upon her.”

“You have a very poor opinion of Margaret,” he said, “if you think so little of her. You can scarcely want her for a daughter-in-law.”

“Me!” said Mrs. Glen, “am I wanting her? I hope I have mair sense than to put my trust in daughters-in-law. ‘A gude

green turf's, a fine gude mither,' that's a' the most of them are thinking. Na! she might gang to—Jerusalem for me: if it was na that her siller is the only way I I can think of to get you bread, ye weirdless lad. When you have no mother to keep a roof over your head, what is to become of you? The Lord be thanked there's no a weirdless one in my family but yoursel. Do I want the lass or her siller—no me! But I'm real glad I've got *yon* bond over her, for you and no for me."

He frowned as he always did at the mention of this. "I am going to pack up this drawing and send it to Miss Leslie," he said.

"The picter! in a present!" Mrs. Glen stood for a moment taken by surprise, and a little bewildered by the suddenness of the suggestion. "I'm no that sure but what it's a good notion," she said slowly, "them that dinna ken might say it was throwing good money after bad—but I'm no that sure. In a present? What might you get for that now if you were to sell it? for there's plenty folk, I hear, that are fuilish enough to give good solid siller for a

when scarts upon paper." She had the most exalted idea of her son's skill, and secretly admired his work with enthusiasm, with all the naïve appreciation of a "picture" which is natural to the un-instructed but not dull understanding; though she would not have betrayed her admiration for the world.

"What might I get for it?" said Rob, looking critically yet complacently, with his head a little upon one side, at the finished drawing. "Well—if I were known, if I had got a connection among the picture-dealers, perhaps—let us say twenty pounds."

"Twenty pound!" she drew a long breath of awe and wonder, "and you'll go and give that light-headed lassie, in a present, a thing that might bring you in twenty pound!"

Rob did not explain that the bringing in of twenty pounds was an extremely problematical event. He got up with a little thrill of excitement and easy superficial feeling. "I would give her"—he said, "just to hear from her, just to have her back again, just to have her hand in mine

—I would give her everything I have in the world !”

“Ay, ay, my bonnie man,” said his mother, impressed for the moment by this little flourish of trumpets. But she added —“And it would not be that hard to do it; if she’ll only return you back your compliment, Rob, and do as muckle for you !”

This was how the sending of the picture “in a present” was decided upon, as a touching, if dumb appeal, to Margaret’s recollection—not to say as “laying her under an obligation,” which it would be necessary to take some notice of; for both mother and son fully appreciated this side of the question, which also forced itself at once upon Mrs. Bellingham’s practical and sensible eyes. Mrs. Glen, for her part, entertained a secret hope that Margaret would have sense enough to see the necessity of giving, not only thanks and renewed affection, but perhaps something else “in a present,” which would make an not inadequate balance to Rob’s gift. This was how things were managed by all reasonable people, that neither side might be “under

an obligation" of too serious a character. But she was wise enough to say nothing of this to her son, though it is just possible that the thought may have glanced across his mind too. And about the letter which he sent immediately afterwards, through Bell, and which produced such results for Margaret, Rob, on his side, said nothing at all.

## CHAPTER VI.

**B**ELL had left Earl's-hall when the house was dismantled, a melancholy operation which was proceeded with soon after the departure of the ladies. Old Sir Ludovic's library was sent over to Edinburgh where the greater part had been sold and dispersed ; it was, in its way, a valuable library, containing many rare editions and old works of price, a costly taste which the present Sir Ludovic did not share. Whatever was done with the old house, his wife and he agreed that to get rid of the books would be always an advantage. If they kept it, the long-room must be either divided into two, or at least arranged for the comfort of the family, in a manner impossible at present while it was blocked up with shelves in every corner, and a succession of heavy bookcases. In these innocent regions it was not necessary to keep

servants in charge of an empty house out of alarm for the safety of its contents. Is it not the simple custom, even of householders in Edinburgh, secure in the honesty of their population, to lock their doors for all precaution, and leave emptiness to take care of itself? There was not much fear for Earl's-hall. If Aubrey Bellingham had known, indeed, that the various bits of china that he admired, and the old dresses in the "aunie" in the high room, and the bits of forlorn old tapestry that wantoned in the wind—were thus left without any protection, it is very possible that he might have organized a gang of æsthetic cracksmen to seize upon those treasures; but they were not in danger from anyone in Fife. Bell and John, or rather, to speak correctly, John and Bell, taking with them their brown cow and all the chickens, removed into a cottage which they had acquired some years before, on the road to the Kirkton, with one or two fields attached to it, and a neat little barn, byre, and poultry-yard. This had been for a long time past the object of their hopes, their Land of Promise, to which they looked forward as

their recompense for years of long labour ; and it was pleasant, there could be no doubt, to establish the brown cow in the byre and see her “ like my leddy in her drawin’-room,” Bell said, making herself comfortable in her new habitation ; but it is a very different thing to have only “ a but and a ben ” when you have been virtual mistress of a fine old house like Earl’s-hall ; and though Bell had always prided herself upon her willingness “ to turn her hand to anything,” it did not quite please her to do all the little sweepings and dustings, and fulfil every duty of her little *ménage*, after having Jeanie under her, to whom she could refer all the rougher work which did not please herself. But above all, it was hard upon Bell that she had no longer “ the family ” to occupy her thoughts, to call forth her criticisms, and rouse her temper now and then, and give her a never-failing subject of interest and animadversion. Bell had a daughter of her own who had been married, as long as she could remember, it appeared to the old woman—and who had no children to give her mother a new hold upon life ; and

when she had finished her work, and sat down in the evening "outside the door," but with a totally different prospect from that she had been familiar with so long, Bell would talk to any neighbour that chanced to pass that way, and paused to cheer her up—about "my family" and even about "my ladies," though they were the same whom she had talked of a little while ago with nothing but the definite article to distinguish them, and of whom she had never been fond, though they had risen so much in her estimation now; and she generally concluded the audience by a sudden relapse into crying on the subject of "my Miss Margret" which filled the Kirkton half with pity for "the poor old body that had been so long in one place and couldna bide to be parted from them," and half with indignation that she should "think mair o' a young lady that wasna a draps blood to her, than of her ain." Mrs. Dreghorn, Bell's daughter, who kept the "grocery shop" in the laigh toun was strongly of this opinion. "My mother thinks nothing o' me in comparison with her Miss Margret—aye her Miss Mar-

gret!" said this good woman; but as Mrs. Dreghorn was forty, it may, perhaps, be allowed to be a different sentiment which Margaret called forth, from that steady-going affection on equal, or nearly equal terms, which subsisted between herself and her mother. Bell could not speak of her child without a moistening of the eyes. "My bonny bairn!" she was never tired of talking of her, and of the letters Margaret wrote to her; Bell was perhaps the only one of Margaret's correspondents whom she was not at all afraid.

Bell, however, was very much bewildered by the hasty incoherent little epistle which she received in reply to hers, which had contained the letter of Rob Glen. "If you see Mr. Randal Burnside will you ask him to speak to Mr. Glen. Say I told you to ask him, dear Bell, oh, be sure I said you were to ask him! and Mr. Randal will understand." What did this mean? Bell grew frightened, and for her part could not understand. The first step in the matter had been strange enough; that Rob Glen should have ventured to forward a letter to Miss Margaret, was of

itself a strange and inexplicable fact. But it might be, as he said, about his picture, it might be about some price which old Sir Ludovic had offered. In such circumstances writing might be necessary, and he might not like, perhaps, to write to "the ladies themselves." But Margaret's message made the mystery more mysterious still. It confounded Bell so much that she said nothing about it to John, but wrote with much trouble and pain another letter, begging her young lady "not to trouble her bonnie head about young men; but to leave them to themselves, as being another kind of God's creatures, innocent enough in their way, but not the best of company for bonnie young ladies like her darling." When, however, Bell had entered this protest, she immediately bent her mind to the due carrying out of Margaret's request. Randal had adopted the habit of coming over from Edinburgh in the end of the week and staying till Monday, a praiseworthy habit which his mother much encouraged, and of which she too spoke with tears in her eyes (so weak are

women!) as proving her son to be the very best son in the world, and the very prop and staff of old age to "the doctor and me." It was true enough that he was the delight and support of the old couple in the Manse, of whom one was as yet not particularly old. And if Randal was fond of golf, and arranged "a four-some" for all the Saturdays of his visits, upon the links which were within reach, in what respect did that affect the matter? A man may be a "keen golfer," let us hope, and a very good son as well.

"Is there any news at the Kirkton?" Bell said, when John came in, throwing off an old furred coat that had been old Sir Ludovic's; for John's bones were getting cranky with rheumatism, and his blood thin, as happens to every man. The fur glistened as he came into the warm room with his breath, which the cold without had fixed like beads upon every little hair. John put it away carefully on its peg, and came "into" the fire, and put himself into his big wooden arm-chair before he replied—

"Naething of consequence; there's a

change o' the ministry looked for afore lang, but that's been maistly aye the case as lang as I can mind. Either they're gaun out, or they're coming in; they're a' much alike as far as I can see."

"I wouldna say that," said Bell, who was more of a partizan than her husband. "There's our ain side—and there's the tither side, and our ain's muckle the best. It's them I would stand by through thick and thin—I'm nane o' your indifferent masses," said the old woman; "but it wasna politics I was thinking of. Did you see naebody—that you and me kens?"

"Naebody that you and me kens? I saw a' body that you and me kens," said John, taking a very large mouthful of the vowel, which he pronounced aw—"first Katie and her man—just in their ordinar; and syne John Robertson at his door, complaining that he never could find Jeanie; and syne John Armstrong at the smiddy very strang, shoeing ane of Sir Claude's horses that's to hunt the morn: and syne—"

"Touts, I dinna want a dictionary;" said Bell, probably meaning directory,

“naebody mair particular than John here, and John there? as if I was wanting a list o’ a’ the Johns! Well I wat there’s plenty o’ ye, young and auld, and great and sma’.”

“Is’t the wives you’re so keen about? I can tell ye naething o’ the women; there were few about the doors at this time o’ the night, and them just taupies, that would have been mair in their place, getting ready their man’s supper, or putting their bairns to their beds.”

“Eh, man John, but ye’ve awfu’ little invention,” said Bell, “if it had been me that had been to the Kirkton, I would have heard some story or other to divert you with, that were biding at hame. But ye canna get mair out of a man than Providence has put intill him,” she said with a sigh of resignation; then added as by a sudden thought, “You wouldna see any of the Manse family about?”

“Ay did I,” said John, provoked to hear any doubt thrown upon his capacity of seeing the Manse family. “I saw the gig trundling up the bit little avenue with Mr. Randal and his little portmanteau that I could have carried in ae hand.

But Robert's just a useless creature that will have out a horse for naething, sooner than up with a bit small affair upon his shoulder and carry't. It's bad for the horse and it's worse for the man, to let him go on in such weirdless ways."

"So Randal Burnside's back again," said Bell. She did not pay much attention to John's further animadversions upon Robert, who was the man-of-all-work at the Manse. Having at last got at the scrap of information she wanted, she got up and bestirred herself about the supper, and listened to just as much as interested her and no more. In this way at his own fireside without even Jeanie to disturb him, and no bell to break the thread of his discourse, John loved to talk.

The next day was Saturday, which Bell allowed to pass without any attempt to execute her commission; but when Sunday came, after the service was over, the sermon ended, and the kirk "skailing," in all decency and good order, she seized her opportunity. "Will you speak a word, Mr. Randal?" she said, lingering behind

the rest. "Na, no afore a' the folk; but if you'll come round to me at poor Sir Ludovic's tomb yonder, where I'm gaun to see if ony weeding's wanted."

Randal gave a hasty assent. His heart began to beat, in sympathy perhaps with Margaret's heart which had beat so wildly when she gave the commission now about to be communicated to him. He got free of the people, doubly tiresome at this moment, who insisted on shaking hands with the Minister's son as part of the performance. "Eh, what a sermon the Doctor's given us!" the kind women said. Perhaps Randal had not been so much impressed by his father's eloquence; but he was very eager to make an end of these weekly salutations and congratulations. He hurried back to Bell, with such an increase and quickening of all the currents of his blood, that the old woman looked with surprise upon his glorified countenance. "I never thought he was such a bonnie lad," Bell said to herself. As for Randal, he tried very hard but with no success, to persuade himself that what she wanted with him must be some trifling

business of her own. But his heart travelled on to Margaret and to some chance message from her, with a determination which he could not resist.

“Well, Bell, what is it?” he said

“I am real obliged to you, Mr. Randal. It’s no my business, and it’s a thing I canna approve of, that maun be said to begin with. Mr. Randal, I was writing to my young lady, to Miss Margret—”

“Yes?” said Randal, a little breathless, and impatient of the suspense.

“Ay, just that—and ye’ll no guess what happened. Rob Glen, that’s him that is Mrs. Glen’s son at Earl’s-lee farm, a lad that was to be a minister—you’ll ken him by name at least—Rob Glen.”

“Yes, I know him,” Randal felt as if she had thrown a deluge of cold water upon him; his very heart was chilled. “Oh, yes,” he said coldly, “I know Rob Glen.”

“Well, Sir, what does that lad do but come to me with a bit letter in his hand. ‘When ye’re writing to Miss Margret, will ye send her that for me?’ he said. You may think how I glowered at him.

‘For Miss Margret!’ I said. He gave me a kind of fierce look, and ‘Just for Miss Margret,’ he says. You might have laid me on the floor with a puff o’ your breath. Miss Margret! so young as she is, far ower young to get letters from ony man, far less a lad like Rob Glen.”

“But why are you telling me this?” said Randal half angry, half miserable. “I hope you will not tell it to anyone else.”

“I will tell it to no one else, Mr. Randal; I’m no one to talk. I have to tell you because I’m bidden to tell you. When I looked like that at the lad, he said it was about a picture that he had drawn of auld Earl’s-ha’. And weel I minded the drawing of that picture, and the work my bonnie lady made about it. Well, I sent the letter, and yesterday morning, nae further gane, I got twa-three lines from her, a’ blotted and blurred, poor lamb. I’m thinking the ladies maun have been at her—her that never had a hard word from man or woman! ‘Bell,’ she says, ‘if you see Mr. Randal Burnside, will you tell him to speak to Mr.

Glen? say it was me that bade ye, and then he'll ken fine what I mean.' I hope ye do ken what she means, Mr. Randal, for it's mair than I do—and I canna approve for a young lady, and such a young thing as Miss Margret, ony such troke with young men."

Randal's face had been almost as changeable as Margaret's while these words floated on. He reddened, and paled, and brightened, and was overshadowed, one change following another like the clouds on the sky. Finally the last result was a mixture of confusion and bewilderment, with eager interest, which it is difficult to describe. "I fear I don't understand at all, Bell," he cried. "Was that all? Was there no more than that?"

"No another word; but a' blurred and blotted, as if she had been in an awfu' hurry. And ye canna understand? She said you would ken fine."

"I think I understand a little," Randal said ruefully. He had asked her to call upon him whenever there was anything in which she wanted help, and here it was evident she wanted help; but of what

kind? Was he to help her lover or to discourage him? But of this Margaret gave no intimation. The office in itself was embarrassing enough, and what man ever received a more mysterious commission? She had appealed to him for aid, and who so willing to give it? but what kind of aid it was she wanted, he could not tell. "I know in a way," he said, "I know she wants me to do something but what? never mind, I will do my best to find out; and when you write to her, Bell, my good woman, will you tell her—"

"Na, na," said Bell briskly, "no a word. I've had enough to do with that kind of thing. I'll carry no message, nor I'll take charge o' no letters; na, na, lads are a destruction to everything. And no a lad even that might be evened to the like of her. Na, na, Mr. Randal, it might be the maist innocent message in the world, I'm no blaming you, but I canna undertake no more."

"And I think you are quite right," he said, confusedly; "but——what did she want him to do?" He went away in great

perplexity and excitement, which it was very difficult to shut up within his own bosom. To speak to Glen—that was his commission; but with what object? To help Margaret, poor little Margaret caught in the toils, and who had no one to help her; but what did she want him to do?

Randal went out after afternoon church was over, the “second diet of worship,” as his father called it. It was not a promising evening for a walk. The short November day was closing in; the foggy atmosphere was heavy and chill—the clouds so low that they seemed within the reach of his hand. Hedgerows and trees were all coated with a chill dew which soon would whiten with the night’s frost; everything was wet underfoot. Even in the laigh toun few of the people were “about the doors.” Gleams of ruddy firelight showed through the cottage windows, often over a moving mass of heads, of different sizes, the children sitting about “reading their books” as became a Sabbath evening, and the elders on either side of the fire carrying on solemn “cracks,” each individual furnishing a remark in slow succession. In-

doors there was something drowsy and Sabbathical in the air; but there was nothing drowsy or comfortable out of doors. Randal walked towards the farm in the grim grey winterly twilight, wondering whether he could make any plausible errand to the house, or how he was to make sure of seeing Rob. But Fortune favoured him in this respect, as indeed Fortune could scarcely help favouring anyone who, wanting Rob Glen, walked in the twilight towards Earl's-lee. When he was within a field or two of the farmhouse, Randal became aware of two figures in the shadow of a hedgerow, and of a murmur of voices. He divined that it was a "lad and lass." Lads and lasses are nowhere more common spectacles, "courting" nowhere a more clearly recognized fact than in Fife. Randal took care not to look at them or disturb them; and by and by he saw a little figure detach itself out of the shadows and run across the field. Who could it be? Their fervour of love-making must be warm indeed to enable them to bear the miseries of this "drear-nighted November." He went on with a certain sympathy and a little sigh.

Randal did not feel as if there could ever be any occasion for "courting" on his part. He was vaguely excited; but sadness more than any other feeling, filled his mind; if he saw Rob before him what was he to say to him? "Ah, Glen!" he exclaimed, "is that you?" while yet this question was fresh in his mind.

Rob came forward from the shadow with evident discomfiture. He recognised the newcomer sooner than Randal knew him. Was he, then, the man who had been whispering behind the hedge, from whose side that little female figure, not, he thought, unknown to Randal either, had flitted so hurriedly away? Hot indignation rose in Randal's veins.

"Can it be you?" he said, with a sudden mingling of displeasure and contempt with the surprise in his voice.

"Not a pleasant evening for a walk," said Rob. He was uneasy too, but he did not see what he could do better than talk, and forestal if possible any objection the other might seem disposed to make. "I—dropped something in the ditch," he said, accusing as he excused

himself, "but it is evidently too dark to hope to find it now.

"You are still staying here?" said Randal, still more contemptuous of the lie, and feeling a secret desire, which almost mastered him, to push his companion into the chill ooze under the hedgerow. "Though the country," he added, "has not the same attraction as—when we met last."

"No," said Rob, with a slight falter, "that is true; but necessity has no law. I am here because—I have nothing to do elsewhere. I am not so lucky as you, to be able to hold by and follow out the trade to which I have been bred."

"That is a misfortune, certainly."

"Yes, it is a misfortune—and such a misfortune in my case as you can scarcely realise. I have disappointed my friends and put them out of temper. There could be no harm in abandoning the law; but there is great harm in abandoning the church."

"There is always harm, I suppose," said Randal, "in throwing up the career in which our training can tell. Church or

law, it does not so much matter ; there is always disappointment in such a drawing back."

" Perhaps that is true ; but most in the first, and most of all in my class. Yes," said Rob suddenly, " you may say there is less attraction now. The last night we met, it was just before the Leslies left Earl's-hall."

" I remember the night," said Randal with some irrestrainable bitterness in his tone.

" I am sure you do. I felt it in your tone to-night. You—disapproved of me then : and now," said Rob with an air almost of derision, and he laughed a little nervous self-conscious laugh.

" I don't pretend to any right either of approval or disapproval," said Randal. Anger was rising hotter and hotter within him ; but what was it she wanted him to do ?

" No right ; but people don't wait for that," said Rob. He was not comfortable nor happy about his good fortune. He had got Margaret's note, and it had stung him deeply. And here was one who could

communicate with her though he could not—who belonged to her sphere, which he did not. “We all approve or disapprove by instinct, whatever right we may have. If you had felt more sympathy with me, I might have found a friend in you,” Rob went on after a pause. “When two people, so different in external circumstances as Margaret and myself, love each other, a mutual friend is of the greatest advantage to both.”

The blood rushed to Randal’s face in the darkness. He felt the veins fill and throb upon his forehead, and fury took possession of his heart. He could have seized the fellow by the throat who thus wantonly and without necessity had introduced Margaret’s name. But then—who could tell? this office of mutual friend might be the very thing she had intended him to take.

“I cannot see what use I could be—”

“You could be of the greatest use. You could find out for me, without suspicion, a hundred things I want to know; or, if you fell under the suspicion of being after Margaret yourself,” said Rob

with the unconscious vulgarity which he had never been able to get over, "there would be no harm done. They would not turn *you* to the door for it. You see our correspondence has to be of a very limited character—till she is of age."

"Do you think," said Randal hotly, "that to carry on such a correspondence at all is right or honourable, without the sanction of the friends?—no creature so young—" he kept to words as impersonal as possible, not feeling able to use a pronoun to indicate Margaret, whose sacred name ought never to have been breathed, "can understand what such a correspondence is. Glen, since you ask me, as a man of honour you ought not to do it. I am sure you ought not to do it."

"It is all very well talking," said Rob, "but what am I to do? Lose sight of her altogether? For three long years?"

"Is that the time fixed?" said Randal with dismay.

"When she comes of age. Then whatever happens, I have sufficient faith that all will go as merry as a marriage bell. But in the meantime—" Rob said half-

bragging, half-mournfully; he was in reality in the lowest depths of discouragement; but the last person to whom he would have confided this was Randal Burnside.

Randal was struck with a sudden thought. "Look here," he said somewhat hoarsely. "I have given you my opinion which I have no right to do; but you may make some use of me in return if you like. Look here, Glen—I'll get you something to do in my uncle's office in Edinburgh, which will be better than hanging on here—if you'll have patience and wait till the time you mention, and take my advice."

Was this what she wanted him to do? The effort was a great one; for Randal felt a loathing grow over him for the underbred fellow to whom such celestial good fortune and unexampled happiness had fallen. To annoy and harass himself with the constant sight of him in order to leave her free and unmolested—it was a sacrifice of which Margaret would never know the full difficulty. Was this what she wanted him to do?

## CHAPTER VII.

AUBREY BELLINGHAM was in the hall at the Grange when Margaret, all wet and weary, came in from that journey to the post-office. She was very anxious to get to the shelter of her own room, not only because she was feeling ill and wretched, but for the more immediately important reason that she was feverishly anxious to get rid of her wet dress before Jean should see her; for Margaret knew that Jean would more easily forgive a slight moral backsliding than her dishevelled appearance, blown about by the wind and soaked by the rain, and not without traces of the mud. She was ashamed of her own plight, though she had been too tired and had felt too miserable the later half of the road, to keep up the struggle with the elements. Her feet made a splashing noise upon the tiles as

she came in, and were cold as two pieces of lead; so were the hands, with one of which she had tried to keep up her umbrella, till it was blown inside out, when she gave up the struggle. A faint glimmer of anger rose in her, when she saw Aubrey, all trim and dry and point de vise as he always was, evidently waiting for her with the intention of speaking to her in the hall.

“How wet you are!” he said, “I could not believe my eyes when I saw you out in this rain. Could nobody have gone to the village instead of you? Why did you not send me?”

“Oh, *you*, Mr. Aubrey? It would have been worse for you than me,” said Margaret. “I never thought much of the weather; but I cannot wait now to talk. I must run and change my dress. Jean,” she added, ruefully looking at her spoiled trimmings, “will be angry about the crape.”

“I hope I managed rightly,” he said, following her to the stair. “I hope I did what you wanted?”

Margaret gazed at him with blank, wide-open eyes. What had he done? she had

forgotten the silent appeal she had made to him in her pain. Aubrey was a man of sense, and he perceived that to insist upon this good office which he had in reality done out of pure good-nature, without any thought of interest, was more likely to hurt than to help him now; so he added hurriedly, "I did not see how wet you are; I cannot detain you an instant longer. Why didn't you send me? you will be ill after this."

"Oh! I never take cold," said Margaret; but how glad she was to struggle up-stairs holding up the clinging skirts of her wet dress! Fortunately Mrs. Bellingham, who had a thorough instinct of comfort, kept fires in all the bedrooms, so that Margaret had the glimmer of a little brightness to console her in the bodily misery which for the moment prevailed over all the distresses of her mind. She took off her wet clothing with great haste, and with an impulse to hide it, to keep it from Jean's keen eyes; and when she "was fit to be seen," she sat down to think how she could explain that hurried errand to Jean.

The postbag went from the Grange twice a-day in a regular and orderly manner as it ought. What need had she to rush through the rain with her letters? but this problem proved too much for poor Margaret's brain; her head kept getting hotter and hotter; her feet, notwithstanding the fire, would not get warm; her bosom seemed bound as by an iron chain; she could not get her breath. What could be the matter with her? Jean had said she had a cold on the previous night; she supposed it must be that—a bad cold; how stupid and how wretched she felt! She sank back into the corner of the sofa which was opposite the fire; it was very lazy of her to do so, she knew, in broad daylight, when there was all the day's work to do. Margaret planned to herself that she would do it to-morrow—her practising and her French exercises, and all the little studies with which, under Mrs. Bellingham's energetic guidance, she was making up for her neglected education. She would do them to-morrow—yes, to-morrow—but was not to-morrow Sunday, when you cannot work? was not night coming in which

you could do no work? was not—Here Margaret seemed to break off with a start, and found that she had been dozing, dozing in the middle of the day, in broad daylight! it seemed impossible. She woke wretched, as young and healthy creatures do after such a feverish sleep. How could anybody sleep in the day? and how of all wonders was it that Margaret herself had slept in the day? It seemed something incredible; but before she knew what was coming, in those troubled wanderings, she had dropped again into another snatch of uncanny sleep. She did not hear the luncheon bell, nor if she had heard it would she have had energy enough to go downstairs, or, indeed, to get up from her seat; and when Miss Leslie, coming up, hurried into the room in wonder and alarm, to call her, Margaret was found propped up in the corner of the sofa, all flushed and confused, her pretty hair falling out of its fastenings, her hands hot and feverish. She woke with a start when her sister opened the door. "Oh! where am I, where am I?" she cried.

After this there was nothing but alarm in the house. The doctor was sent for, and

Miss Grace—who had cried herself almost into hysterics, and could do nothing but kiss her little sister, and ask in a melancholy voice, “Are you better, do you think you are a little better, darling Margaret?” was turned out and sent away, while Jean hastily took the place of nurse. If Jean had a fault as a nurse, it was that she required so many preparations. She assured Margaret it was nothing at all but a feverish cold, and that it would be better to-morrow; but she provisioned the room, as John had provisioned old Sir Ludovic’s, as for a siege of six weeks at least, and took her place in a dressing-gown and large cap by the bedside, like a woman who had made up her mind to hold out to the end. Margaret, however, was too ill to be alarmed by these precautions; she was too ill to mind anything except the pain which had her by the throat, and checked her breathing and filled her veins with fire. It was not a bad cold only, but that sublimation and intensification of cold, which carries death and destruction, under the name of congestion of the lungs. She was very ill for a week, during which time Mrs.

Bellingham kept heroically by her bedside, resolute to keep out Grace and to fight the malady in the correct and enlightened way. Aubrey had to search through all the adjoining town, from shop to shop, for a thermometer good enough to satisfy his aunt, which she received from his hands in all the mingled solemnity and familiarity of her nursing dress.

“I am sure the Red Cross has nothing half so imposing,” he said in his flippant way, “you would strike an army with awe.” He himself had but a dull time of it downstairs. He remained till Margaret was out of danger—very kindly solicitous—but when the crisis was over he withdrew. “You see I can make no progress now,” he said, on the occasion of an interview which Mrs. Bellingham awarded him, when the good news was proclaimed, “but perhaps a week or two hence I may come in with the chicken and champagne, and help to amuse the convalescent. One may make a great deal of running with a convalescent, Aunt Jean.”

“I wonder how you can talk so lightly, when we have just escaped such a danger,”

said Mrs. Bellingham ; “ not only Margaret, poor dear, but the property would have gone to quite a distant branch of the family, and even the savings of the minority. I can't bear to think what might have happened. But you can do nothing now, it is true ; you may as well go and return when you will be of use. But mind and go to the very best shop you can find in town, and get me a really good thermometer. I put no faith in anything that is bought in the country.” And that night, for the first time, Mrs. Bellingham permitted herself to go to bed.

It would be needless to follow Margaret through all the feverish thoughts that assailed her, or even those more coherent ones that came after the first stupor of illness. She recovered the power of thought now and then by intervals, as the fever abated, and then, no doubt, soft, dreamy musings, half dismal, half pleasant, of a pretty grave somewhere which would cut all the knots that bound her, and make all things clear, came into her mind. If she were to die, how little would it matter whether Jean was angry, whether Ludovic scolded ! They would all forgive her, even

if she had been silly. And though poor Rob, to whom her heart melted, as the one person whom she felt sure (besides Bell) to be very fond of her, would, no doubt, "break his heart" over that grave of hers, it would, she thought, be less hard for him, than to find out how little pleasure she took in the bond between them, and to bear the brunt of that struggle which she had so little heart to encounter—the struggle with Ludovic and Jean. And then another thing: what would it matter if Aubrey were right after all, and it was really Effie, *Effie* that Randal Burnside cared about? They would be happy, no doubt; and they would sometimes give a sigh to poor little Margaret, and tell each other that they never thought she would live long. This wrung Margaret's heart with an exquisite pity for her poor young tender self, cut down like a flower. And as the fever recurred, she would lose herself in wonderings where they would bury her, if they would take her down to the Kirkton, and lay her with her father in the breezy mound where she would be able to see her own hills, and hear on stormy nights the moaning of the

sea? and then it would seem to Margaret that she was being rolled and jolted through a vast darkness going towards that last home of the Leslies—dead at eighteen, but yet feeling and seeing everything, and half pleased with the universal pity. Over all these wanderings of sick and feverish fancy, Jean presided in her big cap, the shadow of which against the wall, sometimes rigidly steady, with a steadiness that only Jean could possess, sometimes nodding so that Margaret trembled, feeling that nothing could survive so great a downfall—ran through them all. Jean, in her big cap, was very tender to the girl. She was very quiet in her movements, and, notwithstanding the nodding of the cap, very vigilant, never forgetting an hour or dose. The strangest week it was!—the time sometimes looking not an hour, since she had begun to doze in the corner of the sofa, sometimes looking like a year, during which she had been wandering through dreariest wilds of confusion and pain. When she came to herself at last, without any choking, without any suffering, but utterly weak and passive, Margaret did not quite know

whether she was glad that she was better, or disappointed to feel that everything outside her was just of as much consequence as ever: that she would have to marry Rob Glen, and submit to Jean's scolding, and wonder if it was true about Randal and Effie—just the same.

But she did not recover in the speedy and satisfactory way which was desired. When she got what her anxious attendants called almost well, and got up and with an effort got herself dressed, it was astonishing to find how few wishes she had. She did not want anything. She did not care about going downstairs, did not want to get out, and was quite content to be let alone in her corner of the sofa, reading sometimes, still oftener doing nothing at all. At this point of her convalescence it was that Jean had retired, leaving the remainder of the nursing to Grace, who with a great grievance at her heart on the score of being shut out of the sick-room, took the place now offered her with enthusiasm, and did her best to administer the wines and jellies, the beef-tea, the concentrated nourishment of all

kinds which were wanted to make her charge strong again. One day, however, Jean, returning from some outside occupation, found the sick-room in a grievous state of agitation. Margaret had fainted for no particular cause that any one knew; and Grace and Miss Parker stood weeping over her, scarcely capable of doing anything but weep.

“Her mother, bless her, was just like that,” Miss Parker was saying. “I often thought afterwards if we had taken her abroad for the winter it might have been the saving of her. The doctor said so, but no one would believe it. Oh, if we had only taken her abroad!”

This was said in the intervals of fanning Margaret, who lay extended on the sofa as pale as marble, while Grace held salts to her nose. Margaret came to herself as her sister came into the room, with a shiver and long sigh, and Jean rushing in cleared away the two incapable persons and resumed the charge of affairs. But like a wise woman she took a hint even from her inferiors. When she had restored poor Margaret and made all quiet and

comfortable round her, and ordained that she was not to talk or be talked to, Jean's heart throbbed with terror. Not only did Margaret herself seem in renewed danger, but there was the estate to be considered, which would go away to a distant cousin and do no one (as Mrs. Bellingham said) any good. When the doctor came she consulted him with great anxiety on the subject. "Yes," the doctor said, "no doubt it would be very good for her to go to Mentone for the winter." He would not say she was in any particular danger now, but delicate, very delicate; all the Sedleys had been delicate, and it must not be forgotten that her mother died young. All this made Jean tremble. The girl herself, though she had been almost a stranger to her a little while ago, had got hold of her fussy but kind nature. She had nursed Margaret successfully through a serious illness; was she to submit to have her snatched out of her hands now for no reason at all, with no disease to justify the catastrophe? Jean said No stoutly. She would not submit.

"My dear I am going to take you to

Mentone," she said. "I hope you will like it. It is very pretty you know, and all that. There are a great many invalids, but poor things, they can't help being invalids. I am very sorry we shan't enjoy Christmas at the Court, that is a thing that would have done you good. But to be sure, as we are still wearing deep mourning, we could only have gone to the family parties, which are not very amusing. Grace, you may as well begin your packing, you always take such a time. I am going to take Margaret to Mentone."

"Oh!" cried Grace, ready to cry. "Dearest Jean! then the doctor thought that dear Margaret—"

"The doctor thought nothing about Margaret," cried Mrs. Bellingham. "The doctor thought what I told him. I said Mentone would do the child good after her illness, and all that has happened—and he agreed of course. That is all they can do. They tell you to go if they think you will like it; if they think you will not like it they recommend you to stay at home. I'll take Aubrey with me, he will always amuse Margaret."

“And, dearest Margaret! how good it is of dear Jean to settle it all. Do you think you will like—”

“Like! of course she will like it,” said Jean. “We shall start in a week, so you had better speak to Steward about your packing. A day will do for Margaret and me.”

“Mentone? that is Italy!” said pale Margaret, with a little glow rising upon her face; and then she put her pale little hands together, which were as small as a child’s, and said to herself inaudibly, “That is *away!*”

She got a little better from that hour. All the circumstances of her bondage, all the risk of discovery, the chance of agitating letters, such as those which had been the cause of the exposure that had ended in her illness, had come rushing back upon her memory. And it was a sudden intimation of some letters that had been put aside for her that had caused her faint, overpowering her in her weakness with sudden agitation. Letters! what might they be? She dared not ask for them. She dared not say anything about

them in case of questions which she could not answer. He might be coming for aught she knew, to haunt the neighbourhood of the house, to watch for her, to waylay her, to claim and take possession of her whether she liked or not. It is not to be described what a soft gush of ease and relief, and quiet came over her, when she realised that she was now to be taken *away*. Away! out of reach of all painful visitors, where it would be too far for him to come after her, where she would be safe. Margaret mended from that hour. And when, by means of Miss Parker, of whom she was not afraid, she managed that evening, while Jean and Grace were at dinner, to get possession of the letters, and found one from Bell, giving an account of the execution of her commission, and another from Randal, her heart threw off its burden, although Randal's letter filled her with strange yet pleasant excitement. She was not frightened by it as she had been by Rob's letter; but felt, on the contrary, a great thrill of eagerness and wonder. Would

he say anything about Effie? This, however, was all Randal said,

“ Dear Margaret,

“ If I may call my old playfellow so—I got your message, and thank you most cordially for it. I understood it, though I did not know what you wanted me to do. But I will tell you what I did. I saw him; he was anxious and complaining; I advised him to have patience, not to attempt to write which would probably put you in a false position, and offered him a place in my uncle’s office; he has accepted, and he will take my advice. If this is not what you meant let me know by one word. I thought it was for the best; but if silence is disagreeable to you, it is I that am to be blamed, not anyone else. Thank you with all my heart for understanding that I would serve you, if there was any need, with my life.

“ Your’s ever,

“ RANDAL BURNSIDE,”

How her heart bounded! She seemed to have found someone who would set

things right, who would manage those disturbed affairs for her. It did not occur to her that she had no right to put such a charge upon Randal, or make him her agent. That idea never entered her mind. How well he had divined what she wanted ! The way in which he told her of it was very curt and brief, it is true, and she felt disposed to wonder why he had put it in such few words ; but it relieved her of all her fears. It was in Randal's hands now. Randal would not let *him* come to worry her. Randal would save her from all this trouble. Jean heard her laugh, as she was coming upstairs—heard her laugh, the little monkey ! and Mrs. Bellingham was so glad that she could not be angry, though had this outburst happened twenty-four hours sooner, she probably would not have taken her away.

And she was quite equal to the journey when the day came, though she was still weak and white. One incident occurred, however, before they started which very much surprised Margaret. She was in the wainscot parlour alone, reclining among her cushions when Mr. St. John

came in. The elder ladies were out and Margaret had been left alone. Perhaps it was Miss Grace who had suggested this to the gentle Anglican. He came in and sat down beside her, with eyes enlarged by emotion and anxiety; and after he had told her how much sympathy her illness had brought out, and how many people had asked for her, and how fervently they had all thought of her when the prayer for sick persons came in the Litany, Mr. St. John startled Margaret beyond measure by suddenly telling her that he loved her, and asking if she would be his wife. "Me?" she cried with wondering questioning eyes, in profoundest bewilderment and surprise, and with her usual Scotch indifference to her pronouns. She grew paler than ever with horror. "Oh, it cannot be me!" she said, shaking her head. But this gave her a shock of surprise and pain. She did not want to hurt anybody's feelings. Could it be anything in her that made this painful thing happen over again?

## CHAPTER VIII.

AUBREY joined the travellers in London. It was very self-denying of him, very kind, to give up all the festivities at the Court and all his many Christmas invitations, in order to accompany and take care of a party of ladies on a journey to Mentone, his aunt said, "I will not say that it is not a sacrifice to myself to give up Christmas at the Court. I don't grudge the sacrifice, my dear, for your sake, and for the sake of your health; but I will not say it is nothing and does not matter as Grace does. Don't you believe either that it does not matter to Grace. She likes her amusement just as well as the rest of us, though to be sure our mourning would make a difference. But Aubrey is a young man, and has as many engagements as he can set his face to; and we are nothing but a couple of

old aunts, and you a bit of a little girl. Yet when he can be of use he never hesitates. You ought to be very grateful, Margaret, for all he is doing for you."

"And so I am," said Margaret: it was very kind; and though Aubrey, when he arrived, scouted the notion, and declared that he would go anywhere to get rid of the festivities of the Court, this did not make any impression upon the ladies who praised his self-denial to the echo. As for Margaret, there could be no doubt that his presence made the expedition very much more agreeable to her. Jean and Grace were very kind; but Jean was a little overpowering in her manifold arrangements, and Grace's tenderness did not always fall in with the girl's humour, who was apt to be impatient now and then. Margaret got better day by day, and there was so great a load lifted from her mind that she was able to enjoy everything as she had never done before. No chance now that she should be followed and pursued by any attendant of whom she would be afraid; every step they took made that more impossible; she seemed

to get out of the range of Rob Glen altogether when she crossed the Channel, not to say that Randal had already made her deliverance certain. She dwelt upon this action of Randal in many a musing, with mingled admiration and gratitude. How clever it was of him to divine what she wanted to be done! The confusion of the moment had been partly to blame for the incoherent message she had sent; but it was not altogether the confusion of the moment; there had been besides, a reluctance to mention the name of Rob Glen to Randal, a desire to imply rather than to state distinctly, what she wanted him to do. The vagueness was at least partly voluntary—and partly she did not know what she wanted to be done. She wanted something, some one to interpose who should know better than herself, who should be able to see what was most expedient. What claim had she on Randal that he should have done so much for her? And what inspiration could it be that made him divine so exactly what she wanted? Exactly what she wanted! not to hurt Rob's feelings. Oh, no, very far

from that. If she had not been unwilling to hurt Rob's feelings, it would never have been in his power to give her so much alarm as he had done.

Margaret sat and thought over all this as they crossed the bit of sea between Dover and Calais. Jean and Grace had betaken themselves to a deck cabin where they lay each on a sofa, scarcely venturing to congratulate each other that the sea was not quite so bad as usual, but prepared for every emergency; and Aubrey had gone to the other end to smoke a cigar. Margaret, in her excitement, had scorned the deck cabin, which both her sisters protested had been secured entirely for her. She was, though she did not as yet know it, one of those happy people who are excited, not prostrated, by the sea. She felt that she would like to walk about the decks with Aubrey; but all that had been permitted to her, was to sit in the most sheltered corner, done up in shawls and wraps, so as to lessen all chances of taking cold. And after a while, when the first thrill of excitement calmed down, and she

began to get accustomed to her own emotion, and the fact that she had left England, and the extraordinary certainty that these were the shores of France to which she was going, the extreme isolation of the moment drove Margaret back, as is so often the case, upon her most private thoughts. The exhilaration of her being, which was partly convalescence and partly change, she attributed entirely to the fact that, for the moment, she was free—delivered from the danger that had seemed about to overwhelm her. This consciousness seemed to triumph over everything—her grief which was still so recent, her illness, all the ills her flesh was heir to. And as Margaret's mind was growing amid all this agitation, it was now, at this moment, in the middle of the Channel, that the thought suddenly occurred to her: if she had been a sensible girl—if she had not been a very foolish girl, how much better it would have been to pay no heed to Rob Glen's feelings! to cut at once this bond which was all his making, which had been woven between them without any wish

of hers—which she had always rebelled against, except those first nights when she had scarcely been aware what he was saying, or what doing—when she had received his declarations of love almost without hearing them, and allowed his kisses on her cheek with no more perception of their meaning than that he wanted to be “kind” and comfort her. There had been no lover’s interview between them in which Margaret had not—a little—shrank from him. She had held herself away as far as she could from his embracing arm. She had averted her cheek as much as possible; but it had been impossible for her to fling away from him, to deliver herself altogether at the cost of Rob’s feelings. This she had not strength of mind to do. But now she perceived that it would have been better had she done it—had she said plain No, when he declared his love with all the hyperbole of passion. Margaret knew she did not love him, certainly not in that way; but how she had shrunk from saying it—from letting him feel that she did not care for him as he cared for her! How it

would have hurt his feelings ! rather put up with some little excess of affection for herself, she thought, than humiliate him in this way. And now was the first time when she really asked herself—Would it not have been better to say the truth ? The question flushed Margaret's cheek with crimson, then sent back all her blood in a sudden flood upon her heart. She did not venture to contemplate the possibility of having done this—of having actually said to him. “ It is a mistake ; you are very—very kind, but I am not in love with you.”

The mere idea of it appalled her. How cruel it would have been ! How he would have “ thought shame ! ” How his feelings would have been hurt ! But still—but still—perhaps it would have been better. She had just become pale and chill all over with the horrible possibility of having given such pain as this, when Aubrey's voice startled her. He was saying anxiously :

“ I am afraid you are ill. I am afraid you are feeling cold. Won't you go into the cabin and lie down—we shall be there in half an hour.”

“ Oh no !” said Margaret, her paleness disappearing in another sudden blush. The days of her blushing—her changes of countenance which were like the coming and going of the shadows—had come back. “ Oh no ! I am not cold ; and I am not ill. I like it. But I—was thinking—”

“ I wonder if I might offer you a penny for your thoughts ? I daresay they are worth a great deal more than that. Would you like to have mine ? They are not worth the half of a penny. I was thinking what poor creatures we all are, how unamiable we are on board of a steamboat (the most of us). Look what pictures of misery these people are. It is not rough, but they cannot believe that it may not be rough any moment : when there is a pitch—there ! like that !” said Aubrey, himself looking a little queer. “ They think, now it is coming ! All their strength of mind, all their philosophy, if they have any, cannot resist one heave of that green water. Ugh ! here’s another,” he cried, relapsing out of his fine moral tone into abject sensationalism. Margaret laughed as merrily, with her eyes dancing, as if

there was no Rob Glen in the world.

“But I don’t care,” she cried. “I—like it: when it seems to go from under your feet, and then bounds like a greyhound.”

“Don’t speak of it,” he said faintly. “And why is it you are so superior to the rest of us? Not because you are so much brighter, and purer, and better—”

“Oh no!” cried Margaret interrupting him, shaking her head and smiling. “Oh no! for I am not that—”

“You should not contradict people who are older than yourself—it is not good manners,” he said solemnly. “You are all that, I allow; but that is not the reason. It is simply because of some little physical peculiarity, some excellence of digestion, or so forth, if one may venture to use such a word: not because it is *you*—which I should think quite a natural and proper reason. No, for I have seen a creature as fair and as good almost as you are, Margaret, (our travellers’ names are Margaret and Aubrey, you know—that’s understood), I have seen a beautiful young girl everything that was sweet

and charming, lying dishevelled, speechless, a prey to nameless horrors. Ah! that was a bad one," said the young man, unable to conceal that he himself had become extremely pale.

"Oh! I am very sorry for her," said Margaret, forgetting the compliment in the interest of the story. "Who was she, Mr. Aubrey?" and she turned her sympathetic eyes full upon him, which was almost more than in his present state of sensation he could bear; but happily Calais was within a stone's throw, and that is a circumstance which steels the suffering to endurance. He got up, saying—"I think I must look after the aunts."

Margaret looked after him with a warm gush of sympathy. Who was this beautiful young girl who had been so ill? Was poor Aubrey too "in love?" She felt disposed to laugh a little, as is natural in the circumstances—for does not every one laugh when a love story is suddenly produced? but she was deeply interested, and at once felt a kindred sympathy and affectionate interest opening up in her bosom. Poor Aubrey! had anything happened, she

wondered, to the beautiful young girl who was everything that was sweet and charming? was not that enough to make everybody take an interest in her at once?

Margaret got no immediate satisfaction, however, about that beautiful young girl; but she often thought of her, and when she saw any shadow come over Aubrey's face, she immediately set it down to the credit of this anonymous young lady. For the moment, however, she was herself carried away by the excitement of being "abroad." But alas, is not the very first of all sensations "abroad" a bewildering sense that it is just the same world as at home, and that "foreigners" are nothing else than men and women, very much like the rest of us? For the first hour Margaret was in a kind of wonderland; the new unusual sound of the language, the different looks of the people delighted her, and she could understand what they were saying! though both Jean and Grace declared it to be such bad French that they never attempted to understand. "Is it very bad French?" she whispered to Aubrey, "perhaps that is why I know

what they mean;" and he gave her a comical look which made Margaret inarticulate with suppressed laughter. Thus the two young people became sworn allies—and understood each other. But after the first hour, the old familiar lines of the world, she had been previously acquainted with, came back to Margaret; the people though they were dressed differently and spoke French, were the same kind of men and women as she had always known; indeed the old women in their white caps looked as if they had just come from Fife.

"That is just what they were at home," she said again to Aubrey; "the old wives, those that never mind the fashions, even Bell!" there were some of the old women on the French roads, and at the stations, so like Bell that the sight of them brought tears to Margaret's eyes.

"Who is Bell? I have so often heard of Bell—Bell has been put forward again and again till I am afraid of her. I am sure you are afraid of her: and Aunt Jean, too, though she will not say so."

"Oh, not me!" cried Margaret, uncertain as ever about her pronouns, "Bell is

—she is just *Bell*. She was our—house-keeper; she was—everything to me; she brought me up. I never recollect any one else. Afraid of *Bell*—oh! no, no; but I would not like *Bell* to know,” said Margaret slowly, “if I did anything that was bad—anything that was *real* wrong—”

“You never will,” said Aubrey, “so it doesn’t matter; but I should call that being afraid of her. Now there are some people whom you only go to when you *have* done something that is *real* wrong.”

“Are there? I don’t know. It was *Bell* that brought me up, more than any one else, she is living now near——on the way to the Kirkton; but you will not take any interest in that.”

“I take the greatest interest,” said Aubrey; and it so chanced that this conversation, broken off in the railway, was renewed again when they were settled at Mentone, where again old women were to be found like *Bell*. They passed rapidly through Paris, and settled at once in the place that was supposed to be good for Margaret. But by the time they reached the sunny Riviera Margaret had thrown

off all trace of indisposition, and evidently wanted nothing but air and sunshine, and a little petting like other flowers. They had a little villa on the edge of that brightest sea: and there along a path bordered by a hedge of aloes, and with a great stone-pine at the end: its solemn dome of foliage, and its great column of trunk relieved against the Mediterranean blue: the two young people took a great many walks together. One of these evenings specially stamped itself on their memories; the sky was flushed rose-red with the sunset, and all the sounds in the air were soft, as summer only makes them in England: there was a tinkle going on close at hand from a convent bell, and there was a soft sound of voices from the beach, voices of which the inflections, the accents were all dramatic, though they could not tell a word that was said. It was the enchanted hour, the time of natural magic and poetry, and Aubrey, though he was not at all poetical, felt it a little more than he could have believed possible. He had found out how pretty Margaret was, how much prettier day by day; it was not

that there was any striking beauty in her that conquered with a glance: but every morning when she appeared downstairs with her colour coming and going, with her brown eyes full of such eagerness and lovely wonder, "she grew upon you," Aubrey said. He had thought her very tolerable even at first, no particular drawback to her income and her estate. But by this time he took a great deal of interest in her—she was never the same, always changing from serious to gay, from red to white, from quiet to eagerness. He was interested, never wearied; he had not really found it much of a sacrifice to accompany the ladies after all. The place was a bore; but then, fortunately, Margaret no longer required to be kept at this place; there was a reasonable hope of moving on to places in which there was more amusement; and Margaret was really amusing, very amusing, as girls go; there was a variety about her which kept your interest alive.

"Did you ever do anything that was real wrong?" said Margaret dreamily, looking out towards the horizon where the rose of the sky met the blue of the

sea. She was rather thinking aloud, than realising the scope of what she said; and it is doubtful whether the girl ever realised the difference between a girl and a man, the very different sense that *real wrong* might have to him or the equivocal meaning which such words might bear to a listener of so much more experience in the world.

He laughed, startling Margaret from her dreamy musing. "Alas!" he said, "a great many times I am afraid. Did you? but I don't suppose you know what wrong means."

"Yes," she said, drawing a deep breath, "I am not in fun; once: and it seems as if you never can get better of it. I don't know if it is any excuse that I did it, because I did not like to hurt a person's feelings."

"What was it?" he said lightly, "a little fib? a statement that was not quite justified by fact? These are the angelical errors that count for wrong among creatures like you."

"Then what do you call wrong, if that is not wrong? Aubrey, it was more wicked

than that; but I am not going to tell you what it was. I have been dreadfully sorry ever since I did it. But I feel a little easier, a little happier now."

"Perhaps you broke a bit of old Dresden?" he said, "or lost that Venice point Aunt Jean showed me. I should never forgive you for such sins, Margaret. No wonder you are reluctant to confess them. You are happier because nobody could be unhappy in this delicious evening, walking as we are. It is only in such a scene that I could look with complacency upon the heartless destroyer of China, the careless guardian of lace—"

"You are only laughing at me," she said, "I think you are always laughing. Don't you think there is anything in the world more serious than china and lace?"

"Very few things, Margaret. Few things so dear, which you will allow is very serious, and few things so easily injured."

"But, oh, Aubrey! I think that is almost wicked. To love a thing that cannot love you again, as much as—more than things that have life."

"I don't do that, Margaret;" he looked

at her so earnestly that she was almost abashed, yet fearing nothing, went on moved by the flowing of her own newly awakened thoughts. "You and Jean, you talk as if a little bit of a cup or a plate—what we call pigs in Fife—was of more importance—What are you laughing at, Aubrey? because I said pigs? But it is the common word."

"My dear little Margaret," he said, "don't make me laugh with your pigs; lecture me—let us go and sit under the pine and look out upon the sea, and do you preach me a little sermon about real right and real wrong. I am just in the mood to profit by it now."

"You are doing what papa used to do," said Margaret, half laughing, half crying, "he would always make a fool of me. And how should I lecture you? You must know much better than I do."

"I ought, I suppose," he said. The pine stood on a little point, one of those innumerable fairy headlands that line that lovely coast, the sea lapping softly, three parts round, the foot of the cliff on which it holds its place. The air was more fresh

there than anywhere else. The pine held high its clump of big branches and sharp evergreen needles high over their heads : behind them was a bosquet of shrubs which almost hid them as they sat together. The blue sea thus softly whispering below upon the beach, the delicate rose that tinted the sky, the great pine isolated and splendid, how could they recall to Margaret the dark wood all worn with the winds, the mossy knoll, the big elbows of the silver fir, the moan of the Northern sea with which she had been so familiar ? The one scene, though made up of almost the same details, bore no more resemblance to the other than Aubrey Bellingham did to Rob Glen : and where could a greater difference be ?

“ Yes,” he said, “ so far as wrong is concerned I should suppose so. I must be better up in that than you are ; but all the same I should like you to teach me. Let it be about the right, there you are strong. What must I do to cease to be a useless dilettante—as you say I am ?”

“ Me ! I never said so, Aubrey—not such a word ; I never said such a word.”

“But you meant it; tell me, Margaret, if I can cease to be a dilettante and a trifling person, what would you have me be?”

He bent towards her looking into her eyes, and half put out his hand to take hers; and Margaret, startled, saw once more what it had so much bewildered her to see in Mr. St. John, the same look which she knew in the eyes of Rob Glen. What an amount of experience she was acquiring, ever renewed and extended! This frightened her greatly. She drew away from him upon the garden seat, and kept her hands clasped firmly together and beyond the reach of any other hand.

“I do not want you to be anything,” she said, “you are very well as you are. You might think upon—perhaps you might think upon—the common folk a little more. When you came to Earl’s-hall we did not know what you meant, and sometimes even now Jean and you—I know most about the common folk, they are just as interesting as the others.”

“Ah,” he said laughing, but a little

discomfited, "you mean the poor. Must I take to visiting the poor!"

"I suppose you call them the poor in England," said Margaret doubtfully, "but you know a great deal better than I do, Aubrey; for one thing you are older. I think perhaps Jean will think I ought to go in now."

"Certainly I am a great deal older; but not so very much either. I am twenty-five, just about the right age to go with eighteen. Yes, tell me a little more. I shall recollect about—what do you call them? the common people—not the poor. Go on, my moralist; I am ready to be taught."

"I think I hear Grace calling," she said, rising to her feet. "I am sure Jean will think the wind is getting cold, and that I should have gone in before."

"The wind is as soft as summer," he said, with a little excitement, "and the evening as sweet as—yourself. Wait a little, only a few minutes, there is something I wish so much to say to you."

"Oh, Mr. Aubrey!" she said, frightened. "Do not say it! I would rather

you did not say it. Once I did very wrong not wishing to hurt a person's feelings; but that is what I must never do any more."

"Are you sure," he said, rising too, with a sudden flush of anger, "that you know what I was going to say?"

Margaret paused, with an alarmed look at him, the colour wavering in her cheeks, her eyes very anxious, her lips a little apart.

"What I was going to say," he continued pointedly; "was, that I fear I must soon leave the villa, and the fine weather, and your delightful society. This kind of holiday life cannot endure for ever."

"Oh!" she uttered her favourite exclamation with a look of distress, and, he thought, disappointment. This was balm to Aubrey's heart.

"Yes, I am sorry, too. But what can be done when duty calls? My office is getting clamorous, and there is nothing for a man to do here. Now, perhaps, we had better carry out your intention, and go back to Aunt Jean."

And they walked through the garden, back to the house, with scarcely a word spoken between them. One way or the other way, both were equally uncomfortable modes of managing such a crisis. She had hurt his feelings ! It was better than all that followed the episode of Rob Glen ; but still it was not a pleasant way.

## CHAPTER IX.

AND it was true that the very next morning Aubrey declared his intention of going away. "My chief finds that the office cannot get on without me," he said, pretending to have had letters by the morning mail; while Margaret sat, not daring to look up, feeling more guilty than she could say. Her consciousness that she was to blame even carried the day over her determined belief in the sincerity and absolute truthfulness of everyone about her. Twenty-four hours since she would have accepted Aubrey's statement as a matter-of-fact which left no room for doubt or comment. But now she could not but feel that she had something to do with it, that she had hurt his feelings, which made Margaret feel very guilty and wretched. He had been so kind to them, to her and her sisters, and

sacrificed a great many pleasant things to come with them: and this was all her gratitude! She did not like to lift her eyes. When Jean and Grace both rushed into wailing and lamentations, she said nothing. She tried to swallow her tea, though it nearly choked her, but she could not speak.

As for Mrs. Bellingham, she said not half so much to her nephew then, as she did after breakfast, when she had him to herself.

“You can’t be going to do anything so foolish; Aubrey, my dear Aubrey!” she said, “why you are making progress day by day. If ever a girl was delighted with a young man, and pleased to be with him, and happy in his society, Margaret is that girl. And you know how anxious I am, and how it would please everybody at the Court, to see you provided for.”

“You are very kind, Aunt Jean;” he said, with a flush of angry colour. “I know you mean nothing that is not amiable and kind; but I think all the same I might be provided for in some other way.”

Jean, though she was so strong-minded, felt very much disposed to cry at this failure of all her wishes.

“I don’t understand you at all,” she said; “I am sure there was nothing meant that was the least disagreeable to your feelings. Margaret, though I say it, that perhaps shouldn’t, is as nice a girl as you will find anywhere; and though her education has been neglected, nobody need be ashamed of her. And you seemed to be quite pleased; and I am sure she is really fond of you.”

“Yes, that is one of your Scoticisms,” he said; “you mean that as long as I am serviceable, and don’t ask too much, Margaret likes me well enough. I don’t say anything against that—”

This time Mrs. Bellingham really did put up her handkerchief to her eyes. “I never expected to hear of my Scoticisms from you, Aubrey,” she said. “Of course I am Scotch, there is no doubt about it, and I would never be one to deny my country. But I did think that after spending by far the greater part of my

life in England I might have been free of any such abuse as that."

"My dear Aunt Jean, do you think I meant abuse? I mean that Margaret likes me well enough as a friend—which you call being fond of me. I shouldn't wonder if she would herself say, with all the innocence in the world, that she was fond of me—knowing perfectly what she means; but then I should put a different meaning on such words. She will never be fond of me in my sense; and so, as I have still a little pride left (though you might not think so) it is clear that I cannot be provided for, as you say, in that way."

"What is the matter with you, Aubrey? Has anything happened between Margaret and you. Have you said anything, or has she said anything?"

Aubrey saw he had gone too far, and had almost committed himself, and he did not want anyone to think that a mere *ingénue*, a bread and butter girl like Margaret had repulsed or discouraged so accomplished a gentleman as himself. He said, with a little laugh, "My dear aunt, what are you think-

ing of? That has not been at all necessary; Margaret and I are the best friends in the world. I am 'very fond of her,' as you say. She is a charming little girl. But your scheme will not do; that is all. Was not I quite willing to be provided for? but it will never come to anything. Oh yes, I suppose the chief might be smoothed down; there is nothing so very important going on at the office: but what is the good of it? Margaret and I will stroll up and down the beach, and listen to the band, and all that, and be very fond of each other; but we will never get a step further than we are now."

"I know what it is," said Mrs. Bellingham, 'you are bored; that is the whole business; and I don't wonder. To see all the poor things about with their sick faces is enough to make anybody ill. And Margaret, the little monkey, after giving us such a fright, is just as well as I am. Someone was speaking to me the other day about the villa. I daresay we could get it off our hands quite easily; and in that case, if we go on to some place

which is more amusing, will you change your mind? or, let us say, reconsider your decision?"

He shook his head and shrugged his shoulders, and then he remembered his interests like a young man of sense. "Well, perhaps I will reconsider my decision," he said.

After this the party went on into Italy, and saw a great many things that filled Margaret with delight and wonder. She expanded like a flower as the spring came on, that Italian spring which is as youth to whosoever can receive it with an unburdened soul. And to Margaret, who already possessed youth, it was not only delight but mental growth and expansion of the whole being. Aubrey left them for a time, but returned again to escort them home in that month of May which is the climax of all the splendours of spring. The interval between his going and his coming back did a great deal more for Aubrey than any attentions of his could have done. They were in Florence when he left them, where Mrs. Bellingham and Miss Leslie had already

found a number of acquaintances, and where soon they were deep in afternoon teas and social evenings, as if they had been at home. Margaret had no education which fitted her for the delights of this life, and she could not run about alone in the solemn Italian city as she had done at home; and she missed her companion, who, though he was not clever nor particularly well-informed, understood how to set afloat those half thoughtful, half bantering conversations which youth loves, and in which young talkers can soar to heights of wise or foolish speculation, or drop into nonsense, at their pleasure: an art in which, it is needless to say, neither Mrs. Jean nor Miss Grace was skilled; and now and then he had an *accès* of enthusiasm equally beyond the range of the ladies, who walked about, guide-book in hand, and insisted that nothing should be omitted. "Margaret, Margaret, you are running away without seeing half of the pictures. I am only at number 310," Mrs Bellingham would say. But when Aubrey was there the girl was emancipated and allowed to gaze her soul away upon what she liked

and what he liked. How she missed him ! She was quite ready, as he said, to declare with fervour that she was "very fond" of Aubrey, and welcomed him when he came back with genuine pleasure. "Oh, how glad I am you are to be with us now till we get home !" she said.

Aubrey looked at her with a glance which was half angry and half affectionate. "You are a little deceiver," he said, "you like me to be with you only so long as I am useful ; I am a kind of courier, that is all the good of me."

"Oh no," cried Margaret, "I cannot tell you how much I missed you ; it is because you are so kind."

"It is because of me, not because of you," he said with a frown and a laugh, "and so it always will be, women are so ——" he was going to say selfish ; but when he caught Margaret's eyes puckered with emotion and wistfulness, looking anxiously at him, he stopped short and changed the word—"ridiculous," he added, not knowing what she meant, and feeling a little, just a very little prick in his heart that it was so, and that Margaret only found him

agreeable for his good qualities, and not from any inclination towards him within her own being. Her eager reception of him, however, woke a sentiment in him which was not unlike love; he was pleased by the brightness of her welcome; and to be unable to make a girl fall in love with you, a simple girl of eighteen who has never seen anybody, after months of companionship, a girl, too, whom to marry would be to provide for yourself for life—this, there can be no doubt, is humbling to a man of accomplishment and experience. So Aubrey made up his mind to another effort, with more determination if with less lively hope. He would not quarrel with her if in the long run she still refused to fall in love with him, but he began to hope that a different result might be attained. He liked Margaret, and Margaret liked him, without any disguise, and, after all, there was no telling; perhaps perseverance on his part, and the habit of referring to him perpetually, and getting a great deal of her pleasure through him, might bring about a satisfactory state of things at the last.

They reached London in the beginning

of June, when everything looked at its brightest. What a change Margaret felt in herself! she was no longer the little girl who had been allowed to grow up in all the simplicity of a country maiden, untaught and unsophisticated at Earl's-hall. She had seen a great many things and places, though that mere fact does not make very much difference. She had learned to think; and there had grown about her that little subtle atmosphere of personal experience, which can rarely be acquired in the little world of home. It was not possible for her to identify herself with her old sisters as she might have done with her mother. From the first they had been separate existences, detached from her, though in close incidental conjunction, and so kind to her; she was grateful to them, and loved them as she could; but she was very conscious of the isolations of her existence; and how could she help the little criticisms, the little laughs, the amusement which their "ways" could afford only to one whose life was not involved in theirs, and whose duty to them was less than the most sacred?—

Such detachedness has much to do with the energy of personal existence. Margaret had begun to feel herself, and to know what her life was, during the hours of solitude that were inevitable; and through the long period of partial companionship in which she went and came, docile and quiet in the train of Jean and Grace, without feeling herself ever identified with them, her own being was slowly developing within her. She had begun to see what the position was that she was born to occupy, and to foresee dimly duties which she had no natural guide to instruct her in, no natural representative to do for her, but which would have to be done otherwise than as Jean and Grace would bid.

These grave foreshadowings of the future came, however, but by glimpses upon Margaret. She had no desire to think of the future—over it there was a shadow which she did not know how to meet; she held it as much as she could at arm's length, still with a dumb faith in circumstances, in something which might still happen to deliver her. So entirely had she succeeded in this, that the alarming image of Rob Glen which—

every time she thought of him—had more and more terrors for her, had not even troubled her in any vision for weeks before the party re-crossed the Channel on their way home. But on that passage, as they came back, Margaret suddenly remembered the thought that had occurred to her there as she went away. It was a breezy day, and the sea was not smooth; Jean and Grace lay on sofas in the deck cabin, indifferent to Margaret, and everything else in earth and heaven. Aubrey, not much more strong in this particular, had taken himself and his miseries out of the way. Margaret, in happy exemption, sat alone. But this was not a happy exemption, as it happened; for suddenly there leapt into her mind a recollection of the question she had asked herself first, in this very steamboat, on this very ocean, five months ago—would it not have been better to disregard Rob Glen's feelings and tell him the truth? "Yes," she said now to herself, firmly, though with pale lips, and a shadow immediately fell over the brightness; the time was coming when her fortitude would be put to the test, when she must meet

him and decide what was to be the course of her life—and every tick of her watch, every throb of her pulse, every bound of the boat, was bringing her nearer—nearer to this terrible moment, and to Rob Glen.

They stopped in London for a few days to “do some shopping,” perennial necessity which haunts every mortal, and “to see the exhibitions.” This was a thing which Mrs. Bellingham considered absolutely necessary. She had not failed to go through the Royal Academy with her catalogue in her hand, marking the pictures she liked, once in the last twenty years. Nobody in society could avoid doing this. Whether you cared for them or not, it was indispensable that you should see them—they are always a topic of conversation afterwards, and Mrs. Bellingham had seen a dull party redeemed, quite redeemed, by a little knowledge of the exhibitions.

“Oh, yes, dearest Margaret, we must stay; dear Jean never misses the pictures, and you and dear Aubrey must see them. Dearest Jean says that all young people should see them; certainly they

are very beautiful and humanizing, and will do us all a great deal of good. We are to start as soon as we have had our luncheon. I should have liked to go in the morning, but dear Jean likes to see the people as well as the pictures—and, darling Margaret, you that have never seen anything, that will be so good for you too.”

“Not your hat, Margaret, your *bonnet!*” said Mrs. Bellingham, “we are in town; it is not like Florence or Paris, or any of those foreign places where we were visitors. Here you must understand that we are in *town*: next year we will come up for the season, when we are out of mourning (or almost out of mourning) and you must be presented and all that—but there is nothing to be done in crape—it would be altogether out of the question, and a disrespect to papa. But, such as it is, put on your bonnet, my dear Margaret. We shall see nobody—but we may see a good many people; and you must never forget that you are in *town* now.”

The bonnet was put on accordingly, and the ladies went to the Academy with Aubrey in attendance as usual. Perhaps

he did not like it so well as in foreign places, for they were a little travel-worn, and their crape not so fresh as it ought to be; but still the faithful Aubrey was faithful and went. He knew that if anybody saw him (and of course somebody would see him), it would be supposed that he had expectations from the old aunt in her imperfect crape; or the truth would creep out about Margaret, and he would be forgiven everything when it was known that it was an heiress upon whom he was in attendance. Such facts as these change the external aspect of affairs. It was a bright day, warm and cheerful, and, the Academy, of course, was crowded. Aubrey did not consider that it was his duty to follow Mrs. Bellingham while she made her conscientious round; but he kept close by Margaret, who was half frightened by the jostling and crowd, and could not see anything, and had a vague sense of dread she could not tell why. "I am afraid you have a headache," Aubrey said; but Margaret did not feel that it would be honest to take refuge in that common safe-guard of a head-ache. It was some-

thing more like a heart-ache that she had, though she could not tell why. She was standing looking round her vaguely enough, tired and waiting for a seat, in the great room, in a corner not so crowded as the rest, and Aubrey was coming up hurriedly to tell her of a sudden vacancy on one of the benches, when he was arrested by the sudden change in her countenance. Her eyes, which had been wandering vaguely over a prospect which afforded her but little interest, suddenly cleared and kindled—her face, which had been so pale, was suddenly lighted by one of those flushes of colour which changed Margaret's aspect so completely—her lips, which had been so serious, parted with the brightest of smiles. She made a step forward, all lighted up with pleasure and held out her hand. Aubrey stopped suddenly short in his advance, and looked suspiciously, keenly at the new-comer who produced this change on her. He was not a man who was addicted even to the most innocent of oaths; but this time his feelings were too much for him. "By Jove! the man of Killin," he said, and

he was so much startled that the words were uttered half aloud.

“Randal!” Margaret said, all smiling, holding out her hand. “Oh! I did not think I should see anyone I knew—much less you. How little one can tell! I had been wanting to go away!”

The simplicity of pleasure with which she said this, took Randal by surprise. He clasped her hand and held it in his own for a moment with a corresponding self-betrayal. “It seemed too good to be true,” he said; and they stood together for a moment so completely absorbed in this sudden delight of seeing each other, that Aubrey gave way to another vulgarity quite unlike his good breeding; he made as though he would have whistled, that long note of wonder and discovery which is one of the primeval signs invented before language. “When did this come about?” Aubrey said to himself; and his surprise was so genuine that he could do nothing but stand half petrified, and watch the course of this singular interview going on in all simplicity before his eyes.

“ Jean and Grace are both here,” said Margaret, “ and Aubrey—Aubrey whom you saw with us last summer. Oh, Randal, have you just come from home? Are they all quite well? Is it long since you saw Bell? Is Earl’s-hall very dreary, standing empty? Oh! I would like to hear about everything. Will you come and see us? But tell me now, are you staying in London, and what was it that brought you here, just this very afternoon when I was coming too?”

“ My good angel, I think,” said Randal fervently; and again the colour rushed over her face, and she smiled—as Aubrey thought he had never seen her smile before.

“ Let us say a kind fairy,” said Margaret, “ but will you come and see us where we are living? For here there is no quiet place to talk. Don’t go away though, Randal: Jean and Grace would like to see you—and I too.”

“ Is it likely that I should want to go away?” he said; and then his face paled a little, and he added: “ There is some one else you want to ask me about, Mar-

garet. You will not need to trust to me for information at second hand." Then he lowered his voice, and said, bending towards her, "Glen is here."

"Oh!" Aubrey could see the usual little exclamation prolonged almost into a cry. She grew quite pale with a dead pallor of fright. "Oh, Randal, take him away! or take me away; what shall I do?" she cried.

"Do you not wish to see him, Margaret?"

"Oh, no, no, Randal! turn round, pretend to be looking at the pictures. What shall I do? Oh, do not let him know I am here! It was that made me ill before. It was—all a mistake, Randal. Oh, I felt sure when I came out to-day something was going to happen; and then when I saw you I thought how silly I had been, that it was something good that had happened; now here is the right reading of it. Oh, Randal, you helped me before, can you not help me again now?"

"I will do anything, whatever you wish," he said, "but, Margaret, if this

is your feeling, it is scarcely fair to Glen; I think he ought to know."

"Yes, yes," she said, but in too great a panic to know what she was saying, "which will be the best? Should I stay here while you take him away, Randal? I could stand close to the pictures and put down my veil; or will you take me away? Oh, think, please, for I do not seem able to think! But he would be sure to know me if he saw me with you. Aubrey—oh, here is Aubrey," she said, seizing his arm as he approached, "he will take me; and, Randal, come, will you come to-night?"

"Where?" said Randal putting out his hand to detain her. Aubrey with a somewhat surly nod of recognition, which the other was scarcely aware of, gave him the address, and almost dragged through the crowd by Margaret's eagerness, went away with her, not ill-pleased notwithstanding this disagreeable evidence of some mystery he did not understand, to carry her off from the man she had smiled upon so brightly. She had dropped her veil, which was half crape, over her face, and holding her head down and clinging to his arm, drew him

through the crowd. "Are you ill?" he said, "what is the matter, Margaret?" but she made no reply; and it was only when he had found Mrs. Bellingham's hired carriage, which was waiting outside, and put her into it, that she seemed to be able to speak. Even then she would not let him go.

"Will you come home with me?" she said with a sweetness of appeal and a wistful look, which Aubrey with some indignation felt to be false, after the reception she had given to "that Scotch fellow—" yet could not resist.

"I am afraid you must be ill," he said half sullenly, "yes, if you wish it, I will go with you; but Aunt Jean, I am afraid, will think this very strange."

"There was some one that I did not want to see. Ah!" she cried, putting up her hands to her face and sinking back into a corner of the carriage. Aubrey looking out where her terrified glance had fallen, saw a man turn round and stare after them as they drove away; but he could not see who, or what kind of man, this was.

## CHAPTER X.

WHEN Rob Glen accepted the offer that Randal made him, and agreed to the conditions, it was done partly in despite, partly in impatience, partly because the novelty tempted him, in the state of discouragement and irritation which Margaret's troubled response had thrown him into. He had not ceased to be "in love" with her—nor was the impassioned letter he had addressed to her really false, notwithstanding his constant confidential interviews with Jeanie, which would have been the direst offence to Margaret had they been known, or had she really cared for him as he supposed and hoped her to do. Had she been within reach, Rob would have been [really as much in love with Margaret as ever; but he was angry and hurt by her indifference, and humiliated, he who had won so much love in

his day, that she did not receive his letter with pleasure. Even if she had seen the inexpediency or impossibility of continuing the correspondence, he could not forgive her that she had no word of thanks to send him for the letter, which might have made a girl happy, no breathing of soft response to its impassioned strain. He was pleased to punish her, to revenge himself by the hasty pledge not to write again. Yes, he would punish her. Next time she received one of these letters it should be after months of weary waiting, when she would thank him as she ought. It was absolutely impossible for Rob to realize that it would be a relief to Margaret not to hear from him at all—the idea was incredible. Never before in all his experience had he met with a girl who was quite insensible to his wooing, and Margaret who was so young, so artless! She might be afraid to snatch that painful joy—the perils of a clandestine correspondence might alarm instead of exciting her; but that she should not *like* it, was beyond all Rob's acquaintance with human nature, and altogether incredible to him. And

thus he would punish her. Edinburgh too would no doubt be more cheerful than the farm in the depth of winter, when his mother's ill-humour and the absence of all amusement would aggravate the short days and long cold nights, in which even a stroll with Jeanie was no longer practicable. Mrs. Glen too looked favourably on the idea. It would "pass the time." "And you'll be in the way of seeing a good kind of folk," his mother said, "plenty of gentry is aye about thae lawyers offices. They're in want o' siller, or they're wanting to get rid o' their siller, and I wouldna lose a chance of a good acquaintance. Then when the time comes, and when you set up in your ain house with your lady-wife you'll no be without friends."

"Friends made in an Edinburgh writer's office! Of what use will they be in the heart of England?" said Rob, with lofty superiority, but he was not displeased by the suggestion. He no more thought it possible that, with his talents, he could fail to "win forward," as his mother said, than he thought it possible that Margaret could

really be indifferent to such a glowing composition as the love-letter he had sent her. The only thing in the whole matter that he felt any reluctance about was, how he was to break it to Jeanie, whose sweetness as his confidential friend and adviser had been very soothing and consolatory to him. As the decision had to be made at once, there was not even much time in which to break it to Jeanie. He strolled past her father's cottage in the high toun, on one of the nights when Margaret lay at her worst in a haze of fever, with her life apparently hanging on a thread. But none of all the little knot of people at the Kirkton, whose lives were tangled with her's, were as yet aware of anything that had occurred to her. Rob went slowly past the little window, all glowing with firelight, where John Robertson sat tired with his work, while Jeanie put away the cups and saucers after their tea. By-and-by it would be necessary to light "the candle," for he had still a job to finish before bedtime: but what did they want with the candle when they were at their tea?

Firelight was quite enough for the scanty meal and the conversation which went on, not without a divided attention on Jeanie's part; for she could not but think that she heard a step outside which she knew.

"I think I will run out for two or three minutes and see Katie Dewar when you are settled to your work, father," Jeanie said; "she is always complaining, and it's a fine night," she added, with a little compunction, looking out through the uncurtained window. The sense of deceiving, however, was not at all strong or urgent in her, for such little deceits about a lover's meeting are leniently dealt with in Jeanie's sphere.

"You'll no be very long, Jeanie." Her father had a sufficiently good notion of what was going on, and, as he was quite unconscious of any complication in Rob Glen's affections, and quite confident in his daughter's purity and goodness it did not disturb him much. "Mind that it's a cold night, and dinna loiter about."

"I'll no be very long, father." Jeanie

threw a shawl round her, but left her pretty head, with its golden-brown curling hair, uncovered. If it was very cold it was always easy to throw a fold of the shawl over her head. She went out, with her heart beating—not altogether with pleasure. To be with *him* was still a kind of happiness, and it was better even to be the confidant of his engagement with another—which, Rob had so cunningly implied, would never have existed had Jeanie's presence hereabouts been known—than to have nothing at all to do with him. She stole along, half flying, in the shadow of the houses, and finally came out into the cold moonlight, at the corner beyond the little square, where she could see someone waiting. Poor Jeanie ; her pleasure and her sadness, and the mixture of the sweet with the bitter which was in these interviews, had become a kind of essential elixir to her life.

“Jeanie,” he said, after their first greetings were over, “I am going away.”

“Going away !” she had to grasp at his arm to support herself: “Ay,” she said drearily, after a pause, “nae doubt—I

aye kent that was how it would have to be.”

“I only knew it myself yesterday,” he said; “I have not lost a moment in telling you. How did you know that this was how it would be?”

“Oh, I kent it,” she said, holding her hands clasped to support herself; “it was easy to divine—it was no such a mystery. Weel, Maister Glen, ye’ll go to her ye’ve chosen, and ye’ll be—real happy with her. She’s bonnie, and she’s good—and she’ll give ye more, far more than the like of us could give you. I wish ye luck with—a’ my heart. Ay, a’ my heart! baith her and you.”

Jeanie withdrew a step from his side as she spoke, and her voice took something of the soft wail of the dove in the inflections and modulations which mark the native tongue of Fife. It was in a kind of soft cadence that she spoke, too soft to be tragic, but pitiful and wailing, the most pathetic of utterances. Jeanie did not rebel—it was natural, it was right; but the blow went to her heart.

“My foolish Jeanie,” he said; “what are you thinking of? Do you think it is

Margaret that has sent for me? Do you think she is going to acknowledge me all at once, and that all our troubles are over? No, my dear; you are too simple and too good, my bonnie Jeanie. It is not that. Margaret takes no notice of me. I am going to Edinburgh, to a situation—not for ease, not very far away—and not to her, Jeanie. You must not give me up so soon.”

He put his arm round her, and drew her close to him, and Jeanie, though full of better resolutions, was weak with the shock she had just received. She was thankful to lean against him for a moment.

“No that? not to her? when she could settle a’ if she pleased? Eh, Rob, ladies are no like—they’re no like—”

“You, Jeanie? no, who is like you? always kind, whatever happens, always ready to forgive. What is that in the Bible, ‘Suffereth long and is kind.’ I think that must have been made for you.”

“Oh!” said Jeanie—like Margaret, in the soft long breath of that ejaculation, “we sholdna quote Scripture, you and me! for what we are doing is a’ wrang.

Oh, Rob, it's a' wrang! You that are troth-plighted to another lass (though she is a lady) and me, that—"

"Yes, you that— what of you, Jeanie? not pledged, you must not say so, to another man."

"And if I was," she cried, "what would you have to do with it? it would be but justice. Na, na, that's no what I'm meaning, as weel ye ken. My heart has never had room but for ane. No—me that should ken better. Oh, dinna, dinna, I canna have it! Me that should have kent better was what I meant to say."

"Why should you know better? how can we tell what will happen in three years? and till three years are over nothing is settled," he said, with a secret thrill of anxiety and pain in his heart to remember that this, unlike much that he said, was altogether true.

"It's true," she said, shaking her head. "My heart's that's heavy I can think of nothing but harm; we may a' be dead in three years: and oh, I wish it might be over with me."

"I cannot have you speak like this," he

said. "I am going to Edinburgh; you don't seem to care to hear—to a situation, Randal Burnside has offered me. I don't know that I will stay in it long. Very likely it will only be a stepping-stone to something better. I will see you when I come back, which will be often, Jeanie; and indeed I think you might come over to see your friends in Edinburgh—you must have friends in Edinburgh—and see me."

"I'll not do that," said Jeanie, decidedly.

"You'll not do that? I don't think that is quite kind; but never mind, I will come home—often—on Saturday, like Randal Burnside."

"Will you be in the same line as Maister Randal, Rob?"

"I think not just the same line. He pleads you know, Jeanie, in the Parliament House, before the judges; and I will have to manage cases before they get there. It is a very important business. Failing what I was brought up to—the pulpit, and all that I was trained for—I think my people will be more pleased with the law than anything else. It is always

respectable, it is one of the learned professions. I will not deny that it is a very good opening, Jeanie."

"And when do you go away?"

"This week," he said; "I don't want to lose any more time—I have lost all my summer. It would have been better for me if I had never come home. I would have missed you, Jeanie; but then I might have avoided—other things that can never be got rid of now."

"Oh!" she said, her heart wrung with the suggestion, pleased with the regret, wounded with the comparison. "I wonder if you would say just the same of me to her, as of her to me?"

"How could I when you are so little like each other?" he said. "But, Jeanie, let us think of ourselves—let us not bring in *her*, or anyone. My bonnie Jeanie, when I come back I shall always find you here?"

"I canna tell—the cobbling's no just a grand trade, and what will feed ane does not aye serve two. I think I will maybe take a new place—at the New Year."

"But not to take you from the Kirkton,

Jeanie—not to take you away from me?”

“If it was to take me far, far away—to London, or to America, or New Zealand, where so many are going—and I wish my faither would think of it,” she said, softly. “Oh! I’ve great reason to pray ‘lead me not into temptation,’ for I would be far, far better away.”

“You are not like yourself to-night, Jeanie. Why should you lecture me to-night, just when you have to say good-bye to me—goodbye for a little while.”

“It would be far, far better if it was goodbye for ever,” she said; “but eh, Rob, I canna understand mysel. I would be glad if it was me that was to go—ay, would I. I would go to New Zealand, if my faither would but come, the morn; but when it’s you a’ my strength fails me, my heart goes sinking away frem me, my head begins to turn round. I know it’s right, but I canna bide it, Rob!”

“My poor little Jeanie,” he said, caressingly. “And I cannot bide it, if you speak of what a man likes; but it is better for me that I should not be wasting my time. I should be doing some work that will

be worth a man's while. What is money, Jeanie? I shall have plenty of money. But I ought to be known, I ought to think of my name."

"Oh, that's true;" she said. "I know well you're no a lad to spend your life in a quiet country place. And that just shows me more and more the difference between you and me, Rob. I shouldna call you Rob—I should say Maister Glen."

"Will you write to me, Jeanie? that was why we lost sight of each other; I did not know where you were—but now I will often send you a letter, and then on the Saturdays—I will probably come over with Randal Burnside."

"Rob, Mr. Randal is a gentleman, and so will you be a gentleman. No, oh no, you and me should say farewell. I'll aye think upon you. I'll pray for you night and morning; but dinna speak about you and me. We're like the twa roads at Earl's-ha' that creep thegether under the trees, and then part, ane west, the ither east. Oh, Rob!" said Jeanie, with streaming eyes, "no good will ever come of this. Let us summon up a good

courage and pairt. Here we should pairt. No, I'll no grudge you a kiss, for it will be the last. It's a' been meesery and confusion, but if we pairt the warst will be past. Say farewell, and God bless you, Jeanie!—and ah! with all my heart, I'll say the same to you."

"You are trembling so that you can scarcely stand," he said. "Do you think I will let you leave me like this. I cannot part from you, Jeanie, and why should I? It would break my heart."

"It has broken mine," said Jeanie, fervently; "but rather a broken heart as a false life. Rob, Rob, haud me nae longer, but let me gang to my faither. I'm safe when I'm with him."

But it was not for a long hour after this that Jeanie returned to her father, conducted as near as he could venture to go by her lover, who grew more and more earnest the more he was resisted. She went in very softly with a flushed and glowing cheek, stealing into the cottage not to disturb the solitary inmate who sat working on by the light of his dim candle.

"Is that you, Jeanie?" he said placidly;

“and how is Katie Dewar, poor body?” This question went to the bottom of her guilty heart.

“I’ll no tell you a lie, faither; I wasna near Katie Dewar. It’s a fine night and the moon shining; I gaed down the road, and then a little up the road, and then—”

“Oh, a’, my lass, I ken weel what that means,” he said; “but I can trust my Jeanie, the Lord be praised for it. I’m just done with my job, and it’s been a lang job. When the supper’s ready I’ll blow out the candle, and then if you’ve onything to tell me——”

“I have naething to tell you,” she cried; but as they sat together over their supper, which was of “stoved” potatoes, a savoury dish unknown to richer tables, Jeanie pressed upon her father once more with incomprehensible energy and earnestness the idea of New Zealand, which had already two or three times been talked of between them before.

Rob, however, left her with little alarm as to New Zealand. He was deeply gratified by that attachment to himself which made her ready to put up with everything,

even the bond which bound him to another, and the struggle in Jeanie's mind between what she wished and what she thought right, which ended in the triumph of himself, Rob, over all other powers and arguments was very sweet and consolatory to him. It healed the wounds of his *amour propre*. If Margaret did not give him the devotion he deserved, Jeanie gave him a devotion which he did not hesitate to confess he had not deserved, and this reconciled him to himself. The maid made up for the shortcomings of the mistress, and perhaps Jeanie's simple worship even gave a little license to Margaret as to the great lady, from whom, in her ladyhood and greatness, the same kind of love was not to be expected. She had things in her power to bestow more substantial than Jeanie's tenderness, and with these she had vowed in due time to crown this favourite of fortune. Rob was a sort of Sultan in his way, and liked the idea of getting from these two women the best they had. He went away from Stratheden a few days after, with his heart quite soft and tender to his Jeanie.

He would not forget her this time. He would write to her and say to her what he could not say to Margaret. He would keep a refuge for himself in her soft heart whatever happened. And, indeed, who could tell what might happen in three years?

While he thus made a settlement which quite pleased him in his affairs of the heart, the other part of his life was not quite so satisfactory. The position which he took in the office of Randal's uncle in Edinburgh was naturally that of a beginner, and he did not "win forward" as he had hoped. When clients came, they preferred to see the principal of the office, and instead of making acquaintance among the gentry, Rob found that all he had to do with them was opening the door to them when they came in, or showing them the way out when they left the office.

He did not say much about this, nor did he reveal his discontent to Randal, having sufficient good sense to learn by experience, and perceiving that this was indeed quite natural and the only thing to be expected, as soon as circum-

stances had impressed it upon him. But struggles with reason and circumstances of this kind, if they invariably end in an increase of hardly acquired knowledge, and are thus perhaps instructive in the highest degree, are not pleasant. And Rob having made no advance in "position," and having no important work confided to him, but only as was natural, the most elementary and routine business, soon became heartily sick of the office and of himself. He returned more hotly to his former hopes, as he felt the folly of this, and soon began to be conscious of the utter incongruity between his prospects and his present position. He tried to console himself like any child, by imagining to himself scenes of delightful revenge for all those "spurns which patient merit of the unworthy takes." When he was Margaret's husband and the possessor of her fortune, he planned to himself how he too would become a client of the employers who now treated him so coolly. What piece of business would he entrust to them? He would make them buy in Earl's-hall if it ever came to be sold. He

would consult them about the investment of the long accumulations of Margaret's minority. But in the meantime, while these grandeurs were not his, the office became more and more irksome to him. He had lost the habit of work during those idle months at home, where love-making had been his only serious occupation, and indeed he had never had the habits of work necessary here, the routine of certain hours and clearly defined duties, which the more free and less regular work of education is in general so little akin to. He had not been what is called idle in his studies ; but then these are always vague, and a young man may make up the defective work of the day at night or at odd moments, which a clerk in an office never can do. After a while, Rob had become so entirely disgusted with the humbleness of his position and the character of his work—so deeply impressed by the incongruity of his present with the future he looked forward to—and so indignantly conscious of powers within him which were capable of something better than this, that he threw up the situation

which it had taken Randal no small trouble to get for him, and without warning, suddenly set out for London, carrying with him his sketches and some slight and frothy literary essays which he had written, with the full intention of becoming a painter and an author, and taking the world by storm. The payment of three months salary had given him the means for this, and he felt that it was the only way, and that he had known all along it was the only way, to acquire for himself fame and fortune. He had by this time heard of Margaret's illness, and of her absence; but even had he thought of doing so, he had no means of following her into the expense and mystery of that unknown world which the ignorant know as "abroad." Indeed, to do him justice, he went to London with no intention of molesting Margaret, but only with a very fixed determination of making himself known—of coming to some personal glory or profit which should make up to him for the personal failure of the past. Rob had been in London for about a month on that eventful day when

Randal Burnside, who was in town upon business, had met him in the Exhibition. They had met not without a certain friendliness, and Randal, curious to know what he was doing, and still more curious to ascertain how much he knew about Margaret, and if he was keeping his promise in respect to her, had engaged Rob to dine with him, and had parted from him only a few minutes before he met Margaret herself. Meantime, Rob having finished his inspection of the pictures, and convinced himself that there were many there much inferior to his own, though he could find no purchasers for them, was issuing somewhat moodily forth—when a slight figure in black hurrying down the steps before him, and clinging closely to the arm of a man whom he thought he had seen before, yet did not recognise, caught his eye. He stood and looked after them while the carriage was called, his curiosity awakened he could scarcely tell why. He had followed them down to the pavement, and had just reached it when Aubrey put Margaret into the carriage—and all at once a vision of that well

known face, all tremulous and eager, avoiding as he thought his suddenly excited gaze, rose before him. In another moment the carriage was dashing along more quickly than is usual in the streets of London. Rob stood with a gasp gazing after it, and did not come to himself till it was too late to attempt the frantic expedient of jumping into a hansom and rushing after it. He did so when he realized what it was that had happened; but by this time it was too late, and he had not remarked the appearance of the carriage, but only the face in it. Margaret! The sight put sudden fire into his veins. He must see her, he must claim her. It was irrational and monstrous that a girl who was his promised wife should be entirely separated from him. Whether it was her own will or that of her friends, he would not submit to it any more.

## CHAPTER XI.

**I**T was Rob, perhaps, who had the most right to be excited by this unexpected vision—but Randal, who had no right, was also driven half wild by it, and altogether lost his head as he stood gazing blankly about him, and saw Margaret, rather dragging Aubrey after her than being conducted by him, thread through the crowd with such an eager impulse of flight. Few young men could have refused to be a little biassed and shaken from their equilibrium by the sweetness of such a reception as he had just received. The brightening of her countenance, the look of pleasure that overspread her face, the gleam of sweet friendliness and welcome would have been pleasant from any one; but from her who had already touched his fancy and interested his heart—from her to whom already he had given a devotion

which was of the nature of friendship rather than love—it was more than pleasant, it set every nerve tingling. His devotion had borne a kind of character of friendship he thought ; for was not love hopeless on her side, pledged as she was ? and yet he could not do less than serve her for the sake of her childhood, for the sake of all the associations of the past, but chiefly for the sake of herself so sweet as she was, so tender, and lovely, and young ; the kind of creature whom it would be sweet to shield from all trouble. It had wrung his heart before now to think how little he could do for Margaret, having no right to stand by her. What right had he to interfere ? he was not even a connection like Aubrey, whom he called “ that English fellow,” just as Aubrey called him “ that Scotch fellow ” and “ the man of Killin.” He had to stand by and see her go out into the world with nobody who understood her—her life already fettered by bonds so unsuitable, so foolishly formed—but beyond all power of his to interfere. And now to receive such a welcome from her, to see her face so lit up with pleasure

to greet him, went to Randal's very heart. It seemed to send a corresponding light over his whole being—he did not ask himself what it meant; but it was not possible that Margaret's sudden unaffected lighting up at sight of himself, and her unaccountable horror and terror and flight at the name of Glen, should not have stirred all manner of strange emotions in Randal. He made a virtue of patience for an hour or two until he thought it certain that her sisters would also have gone home, and then he hastened to the address Aubrey had unwillingly given him—missing by so doing an excited visit from Rob Glen, who, after driving wildly through the bewildering streets in hopeless confusion, bethought himself that Randal might know where Margaret was likely to be found. They missed each other on the crowded way—and Randal went on with his head full of dreams, in a kind of intoxication of beatitude and wonder. What a change since this morning had come over the young man's life!

When, however, he reached the place where the ladies were staying, it was into

the midst of confusion and excitement that Randal found himself suddenly thrown. Mrs. Bellingham was walking about the room in great commotion, Miss Grace crying softly on a sofa. They received him without surprise as people already too much excited to find any new event unexpected or strange.

“How do you do, Randal?” said Mrs. Bellingham; “I am sorry to say we have scarcely time to receive you as we should like. We had settled ourselves for a week in town, and got very nice rooms and everything; and I had quantities of things to do—the work of a year, I may say. We have no clothes, not an article to put on, and there were a hundred things I wanted. But all is thrown into disorder, all is unsettled, and I shan’t be able to do anything. We must go back to the Grange at once, without a moment’s delay.”

“Dearest Jean!” said Miss Grace with streaming eyes, “you know you said we must just give ourselves up to dear Margaret: and if it makes her ill to stay in London, how can it be helped? Let me

go with dearest Margaret, and do you stay and do your shopping—”

“As if I would trust her out of my hands! especially if she is going to be ill again. But here is the thing that puzzles me. Did you ever hear of Margaret being ill, Randal, at Earl’s-hall? But here is a girl that was as strong as—as strong as a little pony—in Fife, and she gets congestion of the lungs as soon as she comes to the South, and cannot stay two days in London! I never heard anything like it—of course I am very sorry for Margaret. What have I been doing but devoting myself to her for the last five months? And she was just blooming—would you not have called her blooming, Aubrey? but London does not agree with her. Fancy London not agreeing with a girl! I don’t know when I have been so much put out in all my life.”

“Is—Miss Leslie—ill?” said Randal, not knowing how to shape the question.

“Yes; she grew faint and ill just after we met you,” said Aubrey, looking at him with steady composure. “I thought the

best thing to do was to get her out of that beastly atmosphere at once."

"Oh, you did quite right, Aubrey, I am not in the least blaming you; much better in such a case to leave at once; for if she had fainted outright in the middle of the crowd that would have been a pretty business! I never was used to girls who fainted," said Mrs. Bellingham plaintively, "I have know them get bad headaches when there was nothing going on—but fainting, just when we were all amusing ourselves—and we have got a box at the opera to-night! it really is enough to send one out of one's wits—a box at the opera! and you know what a chance that is."

"But, dearest Jean! do you go—I will stay with dear Margaret. I shall not mind it; indeed, I shall not mind it *much*—; and you know she has been persuaded, she has given up the idea of going home to-night.

"Going to-night was simply impossible! we are not all born idiots," said Mrs. Bellingham, with a vigor of language which betrayed her nationality. Then calming down a little, she seated her-

self and began to pour out the tea which had been neglected. "I am sure I beg your pardon, Randal, for letting you see me in such a 'fuff.' But it is provoking, you will allow. And as for going to the opera by myself, or with only Grace, instead of having a pretty fresh young girl by our side that everybody would remark! I declare one would need to have the patience of a saint not to feel it. Oh, ill? no, I don't think she is very ill; just upset, you know. Indeed, I should have said it was more like a fright than anything else—but Aubrey says there was nothing; no accident, nor runaway horse, nor man killed. I've seen that happen in London streets, and very awful it was."

"No," said Aubrey, steadily, "there was nothing of that sort: but the atmosphere was bad enough for anything—and then the fatigue of the journey—"

"Do you take sugar in your tea, Randal? so many people take no sugar—it is always a trouble to recollect what you young people take and what you don't take. Well, I suppose we will just have to

make up our minds to it. Steward can stay with Margaret to-night, and we will go—it is no use throwing away a box at the height of the season.”

“But, dearest Jean, let me stay with dear Margaret. I don’t really mind. I am sure I don’t mind—”

“And to-morrow we must just go back,” said Mrs. Bellingham, sweeping on in the larger current of her discourse. “You must remember me very kindly to your excellent father and mother, Randal. I hope we shall see them in the autumn. We are pretty sure to be in Fife in the autumn. Margaret will be distressed not to see you; but after all that has happened I thought the best place for her was just her bed, so I made her lie down and I don’t like to disturb her. She will be quite distressed not to see you, when you have been so kind as to take up your time calling—which really is a thing, with people only up in town for a few days, that I never expect. You must have so many things to do.”

This Randal took as a hint that he had at present “taken up his time” and

hers long enough, and he went away horribly disappointed, tingling with pain as he had done with pleasure and excitement when he came, yet, but for the disappointment, not so entirely cast down as he might have been. Margaret's determined flight, her abandonment of the place where Rob Glen was, even though that place was London—large enough, it might be supposed, to permit two strangers to inhabit it at the same time without meeting—and her evident horror of the engagement between them, made Randal's spirits rise, more than his disappointment subdued them. This bondage once cleared away, and Rob Glen dropped back again into the regions to which he belonged—who could tell what might happen? There was but one thing that abode a prominent alarm in his mind, after the first sting of disappointment was over: and that was "the other fellow," who lied so calmly on Margaret's behalf. Was he in her confidence too? Randal felt that to possess her confidence, as he himself did, was as great a privilege as any man could have; but somehow,

curiously enough, it did not seem to him either so sacred or so seemly that Aubrey should possess it too. He felt that the suggestion of this wounded him for Margaret's sake. She ought not to take a young man into her confidence—it was not quite delicate, quite like the perfection of Margaret. This was the only thing that really and permanently troubled him as he went away.

And he had not been long back in his hotel when, a little before the dinner hour at which he expected Rob to appear, the chief hero of the whole entanglement suddenly made his appearance in a very evident state of excitement. Rob was pale, his eyes wild with anxiety, his hair hanging dishevelled over his forehead, as he wiped it with his handkerchief; and his coat covered with dust. He looked eagerly round, though he did not himself know what he expected to see. He waited till the door was closed, and then he said hurriedly, "Burnside, I have seen Margaret—I saw her coming out of the Academy when I met you this morning. I have been rushing about half

over London after her, and I cannot find her. Have you heard anything or seen anything, or can you guess where she is likely to be?"

"Sit down, Glen."

"Sit down!—that is no answer. I don't feel as if I could sit down until I have spoken to her. Tell me where you think she can be."

"Glen, I want to speak to you. I have something to say to you. They are gone, or going away, that much I heard. I saw Mrs. Bellingham this afternoon, and she told me that her sister was ill again, and that they were off at once. She found that London did not agree with her."

"Ill again?—gone away!" said Rob, hoarsely: then he threw down his hat upon the table with an exclamation of annoyance and pain. "It is not treating me fairly. I ought to see her," he cried, and threw himself weary and angry upon the nearest chair.

"I think so too," said Randal seriously. "I think you ought to see her. I don't want to hurt your feelings, Glen; but I think you should see her, and make her

tell you candidly the state of affairs.”

“What do you mean by the state of affairs? If it is that her family are opposed to the existence of any tie between her and me, that is no new discovery. I know that, and *she* knows that I know it.”

“That was not all I meant, Glen—that is bad enough. You know my opinion. As a man of honour, I think you have a duty even to the family; but this is different. She is not happy. I think you ought to have a full explanation, and—set things on a right footing.”

“What does setting things on a right footing mean?” Rob said with an attempt at a sneer, which was more like a snarl of despair. He had not found it such easy work “making his way” in London. His money was running short, and he had nothing to do, and no prospect of being able to support himself much longer. Margaret was his sheet-anchor, his sole hope in the future. He thought too that the rapid dash away of the carriage was not accidental, that she had seen him and driven him wild, and this bitter reflection

embittered him and made him ready to take offence at anything or nothing. He was miserable altogether, excited, distracted, anxious—and tired to death besides. He had taken nothing since the morning, having rushed off in wild pursuit of her instead of getting his usual midday meal. He bent down his head upon his folded arms after that angry question; and thus defeated all Randal's disposition to find fault, or blame him—if there had been any such disposition in Randal's mind. On the contrary, however, the young man's heart softened by the gleam of brightness that had seemed to come upon his own life out of Margaret's eyes, melted altogether over the unlucky presumptuous lover, the fool who had rushed in "where angels 'might' fear to tread," the unfortunate one who had lost all chance of that prize at which he had snatched too quickly and too roughly. Randal forgot to think of his presumption, of his doubtful conduct, and all his offences against good taste, and the highest standard of honour, in sheer pity for the downfall of him who had soared so

high. He laid his hand upon the other's shoulder.

"Glen," he said, "you are not the first who has made a mistake, or who has been the victim of a mistake. That is no disparagement to you: it is only continuing in the mistake that would be blameable. You and she—let her name be sacred—I do not like even to refer to her—"

"Who, Margaret?" said Rob defiant. He would have his way whatever the other might think. "I have no reason to be so shy about her name. Advice is very seldom palatable in the best of circumstances—but between me and Margaret—" Because Randal had deprecated the use of her name, he insisted on using it. He had a kind of insolent satisfaction in turning it over and over. "Between me and Margaret," he said with a laugh, "there is no need of advice that I know of—we understand each other. Mistake there is none between Margaret and me."

Randal bowed very gravely—he did not smile. The colour wavered over his

face—then departed. “In that case there is nothing to be said.”

“Not a word; Margaret and I understand each other. Margaret;—I suppose I can wash my hands somewhere before dinner. I am as dusty as a lamplighter with rushing about.”

And they dined together talking of everything in the world except Margaret, and thinking of nothing else. It was a relief to Randal that her name was no longer on the lips of his uncongenial companion; but yet the silence brought in a more eager and painful wonder as to what he was going to do. But Randal could not renew the subject, and Rob did not. He went away early, without having once again referred to the matter which occupied both their thoughts.

He lived in a humble room in one of the streets which run from the Strand to the river—not an unpleasant place, for his window commanded the Thames; but it was a very long walk from Randal's hotel. He went slowly through the streets, through all the loitering crowds of the summer evening, which were no

longer bustling and busy, but had an air of repose and enjoyment about them. Rob loitered too, but not from any sense of the pleasantness of the air, or the season. He had no one to care whether he came in or not, and it was easier to think, and think again, 'over this difficult question which must be decided one way or another, in the open air, than it was within doors, shut up with a question which he had debated so often. If Margaret was weary of the bargain, if she shrank from him and avoided him, what should he do? One moment he thought of casting her off proudly, of showing her what he thought of her fickleness, and taunting her with her Englishman, "that fellow" that was always with her. This would have been the most consolatory to his feelings. But, on the other hand, to point out to her the cowardice, the dishonour of breaking her word, the strength of the pledge which she could not escape from was better in another sense. Why should she be permitted to forsake him because she had changed her mind? What right had she to change her mind? Was it a less sin in a woman than

in a man to break a promise, to think nothing of a vow? A man would not be allowed to escape scathless from such a perjury, why should a girl? And as he walked along the street, mortified, humbled, breathing forth fumes of anger and pain, there even gleamed before Rob's eyes the scrap of paper, the promise on which his mother counted, which was locked in the secretary in the farm-parlour. He had hated the vulgar sharpness which had exacted that promise from Margaret, he had scouted it as a means of keeping any hold upon her. But now, when he felt so strong a desire to punish her, such an eager vindictive determination not to let her go free, even this came into his mind. Not to secure her by it, which was his mother's thought; but at least to punish her by it. He would send for it he thought, he would keep it by him as a scourge, not as a compulsion. He would let all her friends see at least how far she had gone, how she had pledged herself, and how she was fore-sworn.

While he was pursuing these thoughts,

loitering along through the soft summer night, jostled by the sauntering crowds who could not walk, even in the London streets, at that soft hour as they did during the day, his ear was suddenly caught by the intonations, so different from those around, the low-pitched lingering vowels, and half chanting measure of his natural tongue. Not only Scotch but Fife were the sounds that reached his ears: now the heavy rolling bass of a man, then a softer voice. Good heavens, who was it? A tall feeble-looking large boned man, a trim little figure by his side, moving lightly and yet languidly like her voice, which had caught Rob's ear by reason of something pathetic in it. The words she said were words of ordinary wonder and curiosity, such as became a country lass in the street of London; but the tone was sad and went to the heart, notwithstanding the little laugh with which it was sometimes interrupted. Was it possible? He turned round and followed them eagerly, growing more and more certain of their identity, scheming to get a glimpse of their faces, and make cer-

tainty sure. Jeanie! how came she here? He stepped forward as soon as he was certain of her, and laid his hand lightly on her shoulder. She started and turned round with a low cry. A gleam of delight came over her face. Her soft eyes lighted up with sudden warmth and gladness. It was the same change that had taken place on Margaret's face while Aubrey Bellingham, who was not the cause, watched it with disagreeable surprise; but this was warmer and more brilliant: more evanescent too; for Jeanie's countenance fell the next moment, and trouble, like a grey shadow, came over her face.

"Jeanie!" cried Rob, "how on earth have you come here? What has brought you here? Where are you staying? What are you going to do? I cannot believe my eyes."

She stood trembling before him, unable to raise her eyes, overcome by the happiness of seeing him, the wretchedness of parting—a wretchedness which she thought, poor girl, she had eluded, with all the conflict of feeling it must have brought. She tried to speak, but

she could only smile at him faintly, and begin to cry.

“Maister Glen,” said her father, “you maun speak to me: Jeanie has had enough of fash and sorrow. We are on our way—to please her—no for ony wish of mine, on a lang voyage. We’re strangers and pilgrims here in this muckle London, as I never realised the state before.”

“On a long voyage!” Rob, though he had got through so much emotion one time and another, felt his heart stand still and a cold sensation of dismay steal over him. Had he not been keeping himself a refuge in Jeanie’s heart whatever might happen? He said, “This is a terrible surprise. I never thought you would have taken such a step as this, Jeanie, without letting me know.”

“Maister Glen,” said Jeanie, adopting her father’s solemn mode of address, and hastily brushing the tears from her cheek, “wherever I gang what’s that to you?” Her voice was scarcely audible, he had half to guess at what she said.

“It is a great deal to me,” he cried, “I never thought you would treat me so.

Going away without a word of warning, without saying goodbye, without letting me know you had any thought of it!"

A thrill of pain penetrated Rob's heart. It was half ludicrous, but he did not see anything ludicrous in it. They were both flying from him, one on either side, the two girls with whom his fate was woven, one for want of love, the other for too much love. Rob saw no humour in the position, but he felt the poignancy and sting of it piercing through and through his heart. Should he be abandoned altogether then, left entirely alone, without any love at all? But his whole nature rose up fiercely against this. He would not submit to it. If not one, then the other. "It cannot be, it cannot be. I will not let you go," he said.

"Maister Glen," said her father, "I canna rightly tell what has been between Jeanie and you. You're better off than she is in this world, and your friends might have reason to complain if you bound yourself to a poor cobbler's daughter. But this I ken, you have brought my Jeanie more trouble than pleasure. Gang

your ways, my man, and let us gang ours. Jeanie, bid Mr. Glen farewell."

"I will say no farewell till I know more about it," he said, "where are you staying? I must see more of you, I must hear all about it. We are old friends at least, John Robertson; you cannot deny me that."

"Old enough friends; but what o' that? It's no years, but kindness that I look to. We're biding up west a bittie, with a decent woman from Cupar. I'm putting no force upon Jeanie to take her away. It's a' her ain doing; and if her and you have onything you want to say, I'll no forbid the saying of it; but I dinna advise thae last words and thae lang farewells," said John Robertson shaking his head. Jeanie looked up at him wistfully, with a sad smile in her wet eyes.

"Let him come this ae night, father, this ae night," she said in her plaintive voice, "maist likely it will be the last."

## CHAPTER XII.

RANDAL BURNSIDE was found at the station in the morning, though the train was an early one, to see the ladies away ; which, as the travellers were only Margaret and Grace, and as this was one of the things impossible to Aubrey, who could not get up in the morning, was a kindness very much appreciated. It had finally been decided, after much consultation, that as nothing ever happened at the Grange, and as even Mr. St. John was absent, Grace might be sufficient guardian for Margaret for the few days longer which Mrs. Bellingham was compelled by her shopping to remain in town. There was Miss Parker, who would keep her right on one hand, and there was Bland, the most respectable of butlers, on the other, to guide her steps. So with a flutter of mingled disappointment and

exhilaration Miss Leslie had assumed the charge of her young sister. It was a great relief to Grace's mind to see "a gentleman" at the station, ready to relieve her of all anxieties in respect to the luggage, and she thought it "a great attention" on his part. He was very useful, as she always said afterwards; not only did he secure them a carriage in the very centre of the train (which was such a safeguard in case of accidents) and look after the luggage—but he waited till the very last moment, though it was wasting his time sadly, and young men when they are in London only for a few days, really have no time, as Miss Grace knew. She smiled upon him most sweetly and entreated him not to wait, but he kept his post; it was a great attention.

"And if you should want anything," Randal said, with great meaning, "I shall be in town, at the Wrangham for ten days longer." This was repeated as he stood with his hand upon the carriage-door just before the train started.

"I am sure, Randal, we are very much obliged," said Miss Leslie; "but you see

dear Jean is in town behind us, and she will do all our commissions if there is anything wanted. Dearest Margaret and I will not want very much, and dear Jean knows about everything; but I am sure it is very kind of you, and a great attention—" and as the train was gliding away out of the station, she put out her head again, to beg that he would give her very kind regards, when he saw them, to his dear papa and mamma.

Margaret's mind had been pre-occupied with a dread of seeing someone else waiting to prevent her escape, and it was not till the train was in motion that she felt safe, and sufficiently relieved to wave her hand in answer to Randal's parting salutation. What a thing it is to be out of pain when you have been suffering, and out of anxiety when you have been racked with that torture! Margaret leant back in the corner, feeling the relief to the bottom of her heart. And it was a beautiful day, the country still all bright with the green of the early summer. When they had got a little way out of town, the faint little shade of disappoint-

ment in Miss Leslie's mind over lost shopping and relinquished operas, gave way to a sense of unusual exhilaration in being her own mistress, and even more than that, having an important trust in her hands.

“After all,” she said, “dearest Margaret, I think it will be very nice to get back to the country, though dear Jean always says a week or two in town is very reviving at this time of the year; but you must not think I am unhappy about coming away, for I really do not mind it *much*—nothing at all to speak of. I shall always say it was a great attention on the part of Randal Burnside, and I am sure, dear Jean will feel it. But how could he think we should want him, or anything he could do for us, when dear Jean is in town? Did you hear him give me his address, dearest Margaret? He said he would be at the Wrangham for ten days more. My word, but that must cost him a pretty penny! The Burnside must be very well off when Randal can afford to live at the Wrangham, for it cannot be expected that he can be getting much by his profession yet. We once went to the Wrangham

ourselves, but it was too expensive. I think you never go there without finding some Fife person or other. I wonder how they have got their Fife connection. But it amuses me to think that Randal Burnside should give us his address."

Margaret listened to this monologue with but slight attention; neither did she attach any importance to Randal's parting words. She was languid in the great relief of her mind, and quite content to rest in her corner, and listen to Grace's soft ripple of talk, which flowed only with a fullness most delightful to herself, the speaker, who had not for many a long day, had such an opportunity of expressing, uninterrupted, her gentle sentiments. She was pleased with her companion, who neither interrupted, nor contradicted, nor did anything but contribute a monosyllable now and then, such as was necessary to carry on, what Grace called the conversation. The Grange was as bright and sweet to the eyes when they got there, as it had been dark and melancholy on their first arrival. Everything was beginning to bloom, the early roses on the walls, the

starry blossoms of the little mountain clematis threading along the old dark red wall, the honeysuckle preparing its big blooms, and the garden borders gay with flowers. Miss Parker met them smiling upon the steps, and all the servants of the household, which Jean had organized liberally, curtsying behind her, while Bland, as affable as his name, with his own hands, opened the carriage-door. And to be consulted about everything, was very delightful to Miss Leslie. She seized the opportunity to make a few little changes in the garden, which she had long set her heart upon, and even corrected one or two things indoors, which she had not ventured to touch before. And she wrote to dearest Jean that Miss Parker was very kind, and studied their comfort in every way, and that Cook was behaving very well indeed, and Bland was *most* attentive. All her report was thoroughly satisfactory: and she could not help expressing a hope that dearest Jean would not hurry, but would enjoy herself. And Miss Leslie found Margaret a very pleasant companion, giving "no trouble," and ready to listen

for the whole day, if her sister pleased, and Grace was very well pleased to go on. She was very well pleased too to go on in her viceroyalty, and very liberal to the old women in the cottages, where Margaret and she paid a great many kindly visits. And, in short, Miss Leslie's feelings were of the most comfortable kind, and her rule, though probable it would have been much less successful in the long run, and consequently less popular, was for a time, to all the dependants who were permitted to have their own way, a very delightful sway in comparison with that of her sister; and it was very pleasant to herself to be looked up to, (more or less) instead of being looked down upon!

“I was always fond of you, dearest Margaret; but I never did you full justice till now,” she said, half crying, as it was so natural for her to do, when she was moved either happily or otherwise. Dear Jean, no doubt, was a great loss; but then dear Jean was enjoying herself *too*. Thus the beginning of this exile and retreat was very pleasant to both the ladies, and Margaret, with her expanded being

took real possession—with a sense of security and calm which sank into her heart like a benediction—of her own house.

On the third day after their arrival she had gone out into the park alone. It was the afternoon, and very bright and warm, too warm, Grace thought, for walking; but Margaret, in all the ardour of her young strength, found nothing too cold or too hot. She strayed across the park in the full sunshine; her broad straw hat was shade enough, and the long black gauze veil which Jean still insisted upon, hung floating behind her. Her dress, though black, was thin and light, she had recovered all the soft splendour of health, though in Margaret it could scarcely be called bloom or glow. A faint rose-tint like the flowers, as delicate and as sweet, was on her cheek going and coming; she had a book clasped under her arm, but she was not at all sure that she meant to read. She made her way through the blaze of the sunshine, defying it as foolish girls do, to the clump of trees where she had rushed in her despair to read Rob Glen's letter on the wet wintry day when she had caught her

illness. Without premeditation she had started for this shelter, but as she gained the shade and sat down at the foot of the great elm, the whole scene came back to her—her heart woke and seemed to echo the frantic beating which had been in it then. What a difference! Winter then, all weeping and dreary; yellow leaves scattered on the grass, naked branches waving in the dank air, against the mud-coloured clouds: now nothing but summer—the grass covered with flickering gleams of gold and soft masses of grateful shade, the sky so blue, and the leaves so green; and what was more wonderful still, her heart then so agitated and miserable, now so tranquil and calm. Yes, she said to herself, with a little tremor, but why should she be so tranquil and calm? nothing was changed; three days ago she had dashed through the London streets in the same frantic flight and horror. Nothing was changed; what did the distance matter, a hundred miles or a thousand when in fact and reality everything was the same; and distance could not settle it one way or another; running away could not settle it.

By word or by letter must she not make up her mind to do it, absolutely to meet the difficulty herself, to confront the danger, not to run away? Her book dropped down upon the warm delicious turf beside her—in any case this, in all likelihood, would have been its fate—but it fell from her hand now with a kind of violence. Yes! it must be settled—not by running away—it must be done somehow, beyond all chance of undoing. Margaret was a child no longer, she had learned at least the rudiments of that great lesson: she had found that those evils which we have brought on ourselves, cannot be undone by chance or good fortune. If she was to reclaim herself, it must be by a conscious struggle and effort—and how was it possible that she could encounter this boldly, forestall the next danger, go out to meet the trouble? If he would but leave her alone, it would not matter so much; she thought she could thrust it away from her and be happy—too grateful to let the days drift by, to enjoy her life till the inevitable moment when the long dreaded fate must come; and then?—

Margaret's heart began once more to swing wildly in her ears. Then! What was it she must do? She was not as she had been a year ago, when nothing but a frightened acquiescence, compulsion yet submission, to something against which there seemed no possibility of effectual resistance, a dreadful fate which she must make the best of when it came, seemed before her. Now she could no longer contemplate the future so; she would not be passive, but must act, must make some effort for her own emancipation: but not yet! not yet! her fluttering heart seemed to say: though something sterner in her, something stronger protested and held another strain. If 'twere done, when 'tis done, then it were well it were done quickly. If a struggle was inevitable, one desperate effort must be made to get herself free, why should she delay and suffer so many agonies in the meantime? A flutter of daring, a sinking of despair, combatted in her: and then arose the horrible question—if she did summon courage enough to parley with her fate and ask for her freedom, would he grant it? She had not come so

far as to think anything was possible without his consent. Would he let her go free? If she could but dare to tell him that she did not love him, that it was all a mistake, would he believe her, and be persuaded, and let her go? awful question to which it was impossible to give an answer. Margaret felt like a criminal dependent on the clemency of a monarch, before whom she could only kneel, and weep, and pray. Would he hear her? would he waive his claims—the claims which she could not deny—and let her go free?

When she was in the midst of these thoughts, too much engrossed to heed what might be going on round her, and secure that here nothing could be going on, the creaking of a branch, as under a footstep, caught Margaret's ear. She looked up, but saw nothing to alarm her, and with that curious deliverance from all fears or suspicions, and simplicity of trust which is apt to precede a catastrophe, returned to her fancies and questions and took no further notice. What harm could come near her there? She was in the middle of the park, in an island of shade

in the midst of the blaze of sunshine, out of sight of the house, out of reach of the gate, a place shut up and sacred, where no one interfered with the freedom of the young mistress of all. It might be a squirrel, it might be a rabbit, what could it be else? She did not even go so far as to ask herself what it was—there was not the break of a moment in her thoughts. Would he let her free? Her word was pledged to him—how could she release herself from that solemn promise? He was her master by reason of this pledge. Would he be merciful—would he have pity upon her—would he set her free?

What was that? a voice: "Margaret!" She seemed to hear it somehow before it really sounded, so that when the word was uttered it felt like a repetition. She looked up with a sudden cry. The voice was close over her head, and the very air seemed to tremble with it—repeating it, "Margaret!" She sprang to her feet with a wild impulse of flight, requiring no second glance, no second hearing to tell her that the moment of fate had come. She had

even made one hurrying flying step, with terror in her looks, her throat suddenly dry and gasping, her strength and courage gone. Was it he? what was it that caught at her dress? she darted away in terror indescribable: but just as she did so all the desperation of her case flashed upon Margaret. She stopped, and turning round, looked him in the face.

There he stood, looking at her, leaning against the tree, holding out his hands—"Margaret!" he cried. His face was all glowing and moving with emotion, unquestionably with genuine emotion. No cheat ever got by guile such an expression into his lying face. Rob was not lying. There was great emotion in his mind. He who could not look at a girl without trying to please her, felt his first glance at Margaret re-illumine all the first fire of loving in his heart. He had never seen her look half so beautiful. The health that was in her cheeks, the development that had come to her whole being, all tended to make her fairer: and even the improvement of her dress under her sister's careful supervision increased

her charm to Rob. He was keenly alive to all those signs of ladyhood which separated Margaret from his own sphere, and which proved not only her superiority, but his who loved her. She shone upon him like a new revelation of beauty and grace, tempting in herself—irresistible in that she was so much above him. But if she had not been at all above him, Rob still would not have let her go without the most strenuous effort to retain her. His face shone with the very enthusiasm of admiration and happiness. “Margaret! my beautiful darling!” he cried; and he held out his hands, inviting, wooing her to him. “Do not be afraid of me,” he said, with real pathos in his voice. “Margaret! I will not come a step nearer till you give me leave—to look at you seems happiness enough.”

Oh, what a reproach that look was to the poor girl, who, frightened and desperate, had yet intelligence enough left to see that there was no safety in flight! Happiness enough to look at her! while she—she, ungrateful—she, hard-hearted,

shrank from the sight of him ! She could not bear the delight and the petition in his eyes. Instead of being a suppliant to him for her freedom, it was he who, for his happiness, was a suppliant to her.

“ Oh, do not speak so,” she said, wringing her hands ; “ do not speak so well of me—I do not deserve it. Oh, why have you come here ?”

“ Why should I have come ? to see you, my only love. How do you suppose I could keep away from you ? Margaret, do you think I am made of stone—do you think I only pretend to love you ? You did not think so once, at Earl’s-hall,” he said, coming very softly a step nearer to her. His look was wistful, his voice so soft that Margaret’s heart was pierced with a thousand compunctions. She shrank, without venturing to step further back, bending her pliant, slight young figure away from him ; and thus he got her hand before she was aware. Margaret shrank still farther from his touch, her whole frame contracting, but the instinct of constancy and the sense of

guilt were too much for her. She could not withdraw her hand.

"Oh, Mr. Glen," she said: "oh, Rob," for he gave her a startled look of wonder and pain, "what can I say to you? I do not want to be unkind, and oh, I hope, I hope you don't care so much, not so very much? Oh," she cried, breaking out suddenly into the appeal she had premeditated, "don't you think we have made a mistake, a great mistake?"

"What mistake, Margaret? Is it because you are so much richer than we ever thought, and I so poor? Yes, it was a mistake. I had no right to lift my hopes so high; but do you think I remembered that? It was you I was thinking of, not what you had."

"What does it matter what I have?" she said sadly. "Do you think that was what *I* was thinking of? Rich or poor, has that anything to do with it? But oh, it is true—I cannot help it—we have made a mistake."

"I have made no mistake," he said, "I thought you the sweetest and the fairest creature that ever crossed my path,

and so you are. And I loved you, Margaret, and so I do now. A king could not do more. I have not made any mistake."

"Oh!" she cried with a shiver of desperation running through her, drawing her hand from his, "you may scorn me, you may despise me, but I must say it. It is I then: Oh, Rob, do not be angry! You have been kind, very kind, as good as an angel to me; but I—I am ungrateful, I have no heart. I cannot, cannot—" here Margaret entirely overcome, broke forth into sudden weeping and covered her face with her hands.

Then he took the step too far which was all that was wanted. How could he tell it was too far? He would have done it had she been no beautiful lady at all, but a country girl who had been once fond of him, whom he could not allow to escape. He put his arm tenderly round her, and tried to draw her towards him—

Margaret sprang from his side with a quick cry, putting him away with her hands. "Oh, no, no, no!" she cried, "that cannot be, that can never be! Do

not touch me, do not come near me, Mr. Glen !”

“Margaret !” his tone was full of astonishment and pain. “What does this mean ? it seems like a bad dream. It cannot be you that are speaking—to me.”

And then there was a pause. She could say nothing, her very breathing was choked by the struggling sobs. Oh, how cruel she was, how barbarous, how guilty ! And he so tender, so struck with wonder and dismay, gazing at her with eyes full of surprise and sudden misery ! would it not have been better to bear anything, to put up with anything, rather than inflict such cruel pain ?

It was Rob who was the first to speak. There was no make-believe in him ; it was indeed cruel pain, bitter to his heart and to his self love. He was mortified and wounded beyond measure. He could not understand how he could be repulsed so. “If this is true,” he said, “if it is not some nightmare—if I am not dreaming—what is to become of me ? My God ! the girl I love, without whom I don’t care for my life, my betrothed, my wife that was to

be: tells me—not to come near her, not to touch her! What does it mean, what does it mean, Margaret? You have been hearing something of me that is false, some slander, some ill stories—”

“No, no! oh no, no! not that, not a word.”

“Then what is it, Margaret? If you have any pity tell me what it is. I have done something to displease you. I have offended you, though heaven knows I would sooner offend the whole world.”

“It is not that: oh, can you not understand, will you not understand? I was so young. I did not know what it meant. Oh, forgive me, Mr. Glen. It is not that I want to be unkind. My heart is broken *too*. I was never—oh, how can I say it? I was never—never; but do not be angry! —never so—fond of you as you thought.”

She raised her eyes to him as the dreadful truth was said, with the awed and troubled gaze of a child, not knowing what horror of suffering she might see, or what denunciation might blast her where she stood. But Margaret was not prepared for something which was much

more difficult to encounter. He listened to her and a smile came over his face.

“My darling,” he said softly, “never mind, I have love enough for the two of us. We have been parted for a long time and you have forgotten what you thought once. I think I know better, dear, than you; I was content, and so shall I be again, and quite happy when all these cobwebs are blown away. I will take my chance that you will be fond of me,” he said.

This was a turn of the tables for which she was absolutely unprepared. She could do nothing but gaze at him blankly, not finding a single word to reply.

“And you shall be humoured, my darling,” he said, “I am not such a clown as you think. Do you suppose I don’t understand your delicacy, your shyness, my lady Margaret? Oh, I am not such a clown as you think. I will wait till you give me that dear little hand again. I will be patient till you come to my arms again. Oh no, I will not hurry you, darling. I will wait for you; but you must not ask me,” he cried, “you must not expect me, to give up my betrothed wife.”

“Dearest Margaret,” said another voice behind which made Margaret start, “I have been looking for you everywhere. Here is a letter from dearest Jean, saying that dear Ludovic is in town, and that she will bring him with her when she comes. Is this gentleman a friend of yours, darling Margaret? You must introduce him to me,” Miss Grace said.

## CHAPTER XIII.

**M**ISS LESLIE was hospitality itself. This national virtue belonged to all the Leslies, even when they had little means of exercising it; and it was intensified in Grace's case by the fact that she had so seldom any power of independant action. She was like a school-girl suddenly placed at the head of a household, and made absolute mistress in a place where hitherto even her personal freedom had been limited. And the pleasure of making a new acquaintance was doubled by the consciousness that there was no brisk ruler behind her to limit her kindness to the stranger. She insisted that he should come to dinner that evening, since she heard that he was staying in the village. "Of course, dear Margaret will like to be able to talk to you about home," she said. It was not often that she had

the opportunity of entertaining any one, and though Rob, to do him justice, hesitated for a moment, feeling that his acceptance of the unlooked for opportunity should depend upon Margaret—still it was scarcely to be expected that he could refuse an invitation so manifestly advantageous to him. Margaret said nothing. She would not reply to his look. She gave Grace a glance of mingled horror and entreaty: but Grace scarcely noticed this, and did not understand it. Margaret walked silently by their side to the house, as if in a dream. She heard them talk, the voices coming to her as through a mist of excitement and pain; but what could she do? When Grace suggested that she should show Mr. Glen the house, she shrank away and declared that she was tired, and was going to her room to rest; but the only result of her defection was, that Grace herself took the part of cicerone, and that Margaret, shutting herself up in her room, heard them going up and down stairs, Grace's voice leading the way, as Mrs. Bellingham's had done on the first night of their arrival.

“Dearest Margaret, do you know you are almost rude to Mr. Glen,” her sister said before dinner, “and such a pleasant young man, and so clever and so agreeable. I am sure dear Jean will think him quite an acquisition.”

“I hate him!” cried Margaret, with the fervour of despair. When she heard the words which she had uttered in her impatience, a chill of horror came over her. Was it true that she hated him, to whom she was bound by her promise, who loved her and expected her to love him? She went away to the other end of the room, pretending to look for something, and shed a few hot and bitter tears. It was horrible—but in the passion of the moment it seemed true. What was she to do to deliver herself?

“I don’t want to see him,” she said coming back, “and Jean would not like to have him here: I know she would not like to have him here.”

“You will forgive me, darling Margaret,” said Miss Leslie, “but I think I know what dear Jean would like—she would not neglect a stranger. She is

always very kind to strangers. How do you do again, Mr. Glen."

And the evening that followed was dreadful to Margaret. Grace who liked to study what her companions would like, made a great many little efforts to bring these two together. "They will like to have a little talk," she said, running up stairs to consult Miss Parker about something imaginary. "They are old friends, and they will like to have a little talk."

Margaret thus left alone with Rob grew desperate. She turned to him with a pale face and flashing eyes, taking the initiative for the first time.

"Oh, why did you come!" she cried, "do you think it is like a man to drive a poor girl wild—when I told you that I wanted you to go away? that it was all a mistake—all a mistake!"

"It was no mistake so far as I am concerned," he said, "Margaret! you have given me your hand and your promise—how can you be so cruel as to deny me your heart now?"

"I did not give you anything—I was distracted. I did not know what you

were saying," she said ; " I did not give you anything—whatever there was you took. It was not I—it was not I !"

" Margaret, my darling !" he said, coming close to her, " you cannot mean to be so unkind. Do not let us spend all these precious moments in quarrelling. Will you let me tell her when she comes back ?"

Margaret's voice seemed to fail in her throat, and a wild panic came into her eyes ; she was afraid of his vicinity—she could not bear any appearance of intimacy, any betrayal of their previous relations. And just then Miss Grace came back profuse in apologies.

" I had something to say to the house-keeper, Mr. Glen. I thought that dear Margaret, as an old friend, would be able to entertain you for a little while—for I heard you were old friends."

" From our cradles I think," said Rob, significantly, " Miss Margaret used to go fishing with me, when I was a boy, and she a tiny little fairy, whom I thought the most wonderful creature on earth.

There are traditions of childhood to which one holds all one's life."

"Ah!" said Grace, "childish friendships are very sweet. At dear Margaret's age they are sometimes not so much appreciated; but as one grows older, one understands the value of them. Are you going to stay for some time in our village, Mr. Glen? And are you making some pretty sketches? That was beautiful, that one of Earl's-hall, that you sent to dear Margaret. Dearest Jean was so much struck by it. I am sure it is a great gift to be able to give so much pleasure."

"I will make a companion sketch of the Grange for you, if you would like it," said Rob, "nothing would give me more pleasure. It is a beautiful old house."

"Oh, Mr. Glen! But you are a great deal too good—much too good! and how could I ever repay—how could I ever thank you!"

Margaret rushed from the room while these compliments were being exchanged. It seemed to her like a scene from some old play which she had seen played before, save that the interest was too sharp and

intense, too close to herself, for any play. She felt herself insulted and defied, provoked and wounded. What did he care for her or her feelings? Had he felt the least real consideration for her he could not have done it. She rushed up the half-lighted stairs to her room, with passion throbbing in her heart. Oh, that Jean were here to send him away! though there was in reality nobody whom Margaret was more alarmed for than Jean. Oh, that there was someone whom she could trust in—whom she might dare to speak to! But to whom could she speak? If she did betray this secret, would not she be thought badly of, as of a girl who was not a good girl? How well she remembered the sense of humiliation which had come over her, when Randal Burnside took no notice of her presence, and did not even take off his hat. Randal Burnside! The name seemed to go through and through her, tingling in every vein. Ah! was it because of this that he had looked at her so wistfully, when he put her into the railway-carriage, to warn her perhaps of what was coming? Could it be for this

that he had told Grace where he was to be found? The breath seemed to stop on Margaret's lips when this idea occurred to her. She had appealed to Randal before in her despair, and Randal had helped her; should she appeal to him again? There was a moment's confusion in her brain, everything going round with her, a sound of ringing in her ears. What right had she to call upon Randal? but yet she knew that Randal would reply to her appeal, he would do what he could for her, he would not betray, and above all, he would not blame her. That was a great deal to say, but it was true. Perhaps (she thought) he would be more sorry than anyone else in the world; but he would not blame her. The only other person who *knew*, was Ludovic; but to Ludovic she dared not appeal. He would think it was all her own fault; but Randal would not think it was her fault. He would *understand*. She stood for a moment undecided, feeling that she must do something at once, that there was no time to lose; and then she made a sudden dash at her writing-table, scattering the

papers on it in her confusion. She must not think any longer, she must do something, whatever it might be. And how could she write an ordinary letter in such a crisis, with an ordinary beginning and ending, as if there was nothing in it out of the common? She plunged at it, putting nothing but what she was obliged to say.

“ He has come here, and I don't know what to do. Oh, could you get him to leave me in peace, as you did before? I have no right to trouble you; but if you have any power over him, oh, will you help me, will you get him to go away? I know I ought not to write to you about this; but I am very unhappy, and who can I go to? Oh, Randal, if you have any power over him, get him to go away!”

At first she did not sign this at all; then she reflected that he might not know her handwriting, though she knew his. And then she signed it timidly with an M. L. But perhaps he might not know who M. L. was; other names began with the same

letters. At last she wrote, very tremulously, her whole name, the Leslie dying into illegibility. She did not, however, think it necessary to carry this herself to the post-office, as she had done the letter to Bell. Grace was not so alarming as Jean, and the post-bag was safe enough, she felt. When she had thus stretched out her hand for help, Margaret was guilty of the first act of positive rebellion she had ever ventured upon. She refused to go downstairs. The maid who took her message, said, apologetically, that she had a headache; but Margaret herself made so such pretence. She could not keep up any fiction of gentle disability when the crisis was coming so near. And though she so shrank from confiding her griefs to anyone, the girl, in her desperation, felt that the moment was coming, in which, if need were, she would have strength to defy all the world.

All was dark in Margaret's room, when Grace, having parted from her visitor, who had done his very best to be amusing, notwithstanding the unsatisfactory circum-

stances, came softly into her little sister's room, and bent over the bed.

"Poor darling!" Miss Leslie said, "how provoking, just when your old friend was here. But he is coming again, dearest Margaret, to-morrow, to begin his sketch. How nice of him, to offer to make a sketch—and for me! I never knew anything so kind; for he scarcely knows *me*."

Thus fate made another coil round her helpless feet.

As for Rob, he went back to the inn in the village scarcely less disturbed than Margaret. He had come to a new chapter in his history. Her coldness, her manifest terror of him, her flight from the room in which he was, provoked him to the utmost. He was less cast down than exasperated by her desire to avoid him. He was not a man, he said, to himself, from whom girls generally desired to escape, nor was he one with whom they could play fast and loose. He had not been used to failure. Jeanie, who had a hundred times more reason to be dissatisfied with him than Margaret could have, had been won over by his pleading even

at the last moment, and was waiting now in London for the last interview, which he had insisted upon. And did Margaret think herself so much better than everybody else that *she* was to continue to fly from him? He was determined to subdue her. She should not cast him off when she pleased, or escape from her word. In the fervour of his feelings he forgot even his own horror at the vulgar expedient his mother had contrived, to bind the girl more effectually. Even that he had made up his mind to use, if need were, to hold as a whip over her. It was no fault of his, but entirely her own fault, if he was thus driven to use every weapon in his armoury. He had written to his mother to send it to him before he came to the village, and now expected it every day. Perhaps to-morrow, before he set out for the Grange, it would arrive, and Margaret would see he was not to be trifled with. All this did not make him cease to be "in love with" her. He was prepared to be as fond, nay, more fond than ever, if she would but respond as she ought. No one had ever so used him

before, and he would not be beaten by a slip of a girl. If he could not win her back as he had won Jeanie, then he would force her back. She should not beat him. Thus the struggle between them which had been existing passive and unacknowledged for some time back, had to his consciousness, as well as Margaret's, come to a crisis now.

Next morning she kept out of the way, remaining in her own room, though without any pretence of illness. Margaret was too highly strung, too sensible of the greatness of the emergency to take refuge in that headache which is always so convenient an excuse ; she would not set up such a feeble plea. She kept upstairs in her room in so great a fever of mental excitement that she seemed to hear and see and feel everything that happened, notwithstanding her withdrawal. She heard him arrive, and she heard Grace's twitterings of welcome ; and then she heard the voices outside again, moving about, and divined that they were in search of the best point of view. They found it at last in sight of Margaret's window, where Rob established himself

and all his paraphernalia fully in her view. It was for this reason, indeed, that he had chosen the spot, meaning with one of his curious failures of perception to touch her heart by the familiar sight, and call her back to him by the recollection of those early days at Earl's-hall. The attempt exasperated her ; it was like the repetition of a familiar trick, the sort of thing he did everywhere. She looked out from behind the curtain with dislike and annoyance which increased every moment ; it seemed incredible to her, as she looked out upon him, how she could ever have regarded him as she knew she had once done. All that was commonplace in him, lightly veiled by his cleverness, his skill, his desire to please, appeared now to her disenchanted eyes. The thought that he should ever have addressed her in the tenderest words that one human creature can use to another ; that he should ever have held her close to him, and kissed her, made her cheek burn and her very veins fill and swell with shame. But, notwithstanding all her reluctance, she had to go down to luncheon, partly compelled by circum-

stances, partly by the strange attraction of hostility, and partly by the distress of Grace at the possibility of having to take her lunch "alone with a gentleman!" Margaret went down; but she kept herself aloof, sitting up stately and silent, all unlike her girlish self, at the table, where Miss Leslie did the honours with anxious hospitality, pressing her guest to eat, and happily leaving no room for any words but her own. Grace, however, was too anxious that the young people should enjoy themselves, not to perceive how very little intercourse there was between them, and after vain attempts to induce Margaret to show Mr. Glen the wainscot parlour, she adopted the old expedient of running out of the room and leaving them together, as soon as their meal was over.

"I must just speak to Bland," she said hurriedly, "I shall not be a moment—Margaret, you will take care of Mr. Glen till I come back."

Margaret who was herself in the very act of flight was obliged to stay; she rose from her chair and stood stiffly by it, while Grace ran along the passage. Her heart had begun

to beat so loudly that she could scarcely speak—but speak she must; and before sound of her sister's footsteps had died out of hearing, she turned upon the companion she had accepted so reluctantly, with breathless excitement.

“Mr. Glen,” she said trembling, “I must speak to you. We cannot go on like this. Oh! why will you not go away? If you will not go away, I must; I will not see you again, I cannot, I cannot do it. For God's sake go away!”

“Why should you be so urgent, Margaret,” he said. “What harm am I doing? It is hard enough to consent to see so little of you; but even a little is better than nothing all.”

“Oh!” she cried in her desperation, “do not stop to argue about it. Don't you see—but you must see—that you are making me miserable? If there is anything you want, tell me; but oh, do not stay here!”

“What I want is easily enough divined. I want *you*, Margaret,” he said, “and why should you turn me away? Let us not spend the little time we have together in

quarrelling. You are offended about something. Somebody has been speaking ill of me—”

“No one has been speaking ill of you,” she cried indignantly. “Oh, Mr. Glen, even if I liked you to be here it would be dishonourable: to come when my sister Jean was away—and to impose upon poor Grace who knows nothing, who does not understand—”

“Let me tell her,” he said eagerly, “she will be a friend to us—she is kind-hearted. Let me tell her; it is not I that wish for concealment, I should like the whole world to know. I will go and tell her—”

“No!” Margaret cried, almost with a scream of terror. She stopped him as he made a step towards the door. “What would you tell her, or any one? that I—care for you, Mr. Glen? Oh, listen to me! It is not that I have deceived you—for I never said anything—I only let you speak—But if I have done wrong, I am very sorry—if you told her that, it would not be true!”

“Margaret,” he said, with forced calm-

ness, "take care what you are saying. Do you forget that you are my promised wife? Is that nothing to tell her? Do you think that I will let you break your vow without a word. There is more than love concerned, more than caring for each other as you call it—there is our whole life!"

"Yes," she said. Her voice sank to a whisper in her extreme emotion, her face grew pallid as if she were going to faint. She clasped her hands together and looked at him piteously with wide-open eyes. "Yes," she said, "I know; I promised and I am false to it. Oh, will you forgive me, and let me go free? Oh, Mr. Glen, let me go free!"

"Is this all I have for my love?" he said, with not unnatural exasperation. "Let you go free! that is all you care for; what I feel is nothing to you, my hopes, and my prospects, and my happiness—"

Margaret could not speak. She made a supplicating gesture with her clasped hands, and kept her eyes fixed upon him. Rob did not know what to do; he paced up and down the room in unfeigned agita-

tion: outraged pride and disappointed feeling, and an impulse which was half generosity and half mortification tempting him on one side, while the rage of failure and the force of self-interest held him fast on the other. He could not give up so much without another struggle. He made a hasty step towards her and caught her hands in his.

“Margaret!” he cried, “how can I give you up? this hand is mine and I will not let it go. Is there nothing in your promise, nothing in the love that has been between us? Let you go free? Is that all the question that remains between you and me?”

They stood thus, making a mutual appeal to each other, he holding her hand, she endeavouring to draw it away, when the sound of a steady and solemn step startled them suddenly.

“If you please, Miss,” said Bland at the door, “there is a gentleman in the hall asking for Mr. Glen; and there is a—person as says she’s just come off a journey, and wants Mr. Glen too. Shall I

show them into the library, or shall I bring them here ?”

Rob had dropped her hand hastily at the first sound of Bland's appearance, and Margaret, scarcely knowing what she did, her head swimming, her heart throbbing, struggled back into a kind of artificial consciousness by means of this sudden return of the commonplace and ordinary, though she was scarcely aware what the man said.

“I am coming,” she answered faintly, the singing in her ears sounded like an echo of voices calling her. All the world seemed calling her, assembling to the crisis of her fate. She did not so much as look at Rob, from whom she was thus liberated all at once, but turned and followed Bland with all the speed and quiet of great excitement, feeling herself carried along almost without any will of hers.

The hall at the Grange was a sight to see that brilliant summer day. The door was wide open, framing a picture of blue sky and flowering shrubs at one end, and the sunshine which poured in through the south window caught the wainscot panels

and the bits of old armour, converting them into dull yet magical mirrors full of confused reflections. There were two strangers standing here, as far apart as the space would allow, both full of excitement to find themselves there, and each full of wonder to find the other. They both turned towards Margaret as she came in, pale as a ghost in her black dress. Her eye was caught first by him who had come at her call, her only confidant, the friend in whom she had most perfect trust. The sight of him woke her out of her abstraction of terror and helplessness.

“Randal!” she cried, with a gleam of hope and pleasure lighting up her face.

Then she stopped short and paled again with a horrible relapse into her former panic. Her voice changed into that pitiful “Oh!” of wonder and consternation, which the sight of a mortal passenger called forth, as Dante tells us, from the spirits in purgatory. The second stranger was a woman; no other than Mrs. Glen, from Earl’s-lee, in her best clothes, with a warm Paisley shawl enveloping her substantial person, who stood fanning herself

with a large white handkerchief in the only shady corner. These were the two seconds whom, half consciously, half willingly, yet in one case not consciously or willingly at all, the two chief belligerents in this strange duel had summoned to their aid.

## CHAPTER XIV.

THE strangers made their salutations very briefly; as for Randal, he did not approach Margaret at all. He made her a somewhat stiff bow, which once more in her simplicity wounded her, though the sight of him was such a relief; but even the comfort she had in his presence was sadly neutralized by this apparent evidence that he did not think so charitably of her as she had hoped. Amid all the pain and bewilderment of the moment, it was a pang the more to feel thus driven back upon herself by Randal's disapproval. She gave him an anxious questioning look, but he only bowed, looking beyond her at Rob Glen: and it was Mrs. Glen who hurried forward with demonstration to take and shake between both her own Margaret's reluctant hand.

“Eh, but I’m glad to see you, Miss Margret,” Mrs. Glen said. “What a heat! I thought I would be melted coming from the station, but a’s weel now I’m safe here.”

“Will you forgive me, Miss Leslie,” said Randal, “if I ask leave to speak to Glen on business? I took the liberty of coming, when I heard he was here. I should not have ventured to disturb you but for urgent business. Glen, I have heard of something that may be of great importance to you. Will you walk back with me to the station, and let me tell you what it is? I have not a moment to spare.”

“Na, na, ye’ll gang wi’ nobody to the station; how’s a’ with ye, Rob, my man,” cried Mrs. Glen, “you’re no going to leave me the first moment I’m here.”

Rob stood and gazed, first at one, then at the other; the conjunction did not seem to bode him any good, though he did not know how it could harm him. He looked at them as if they had dropped from the clouds, and a dull sense that his path was suddenly obstructed, and that

he was being hemmed in by friends as well as by foes came over him. "What do you want?" he said hoarsely. The question was addressed chiefly to his mother, to whom he could relieve himself by a savage tone not to be endured by any stranger.

"Me!" said Mrs. Glen, "I want nothing but a kindly welcome from you and your bonnie young lady, that's a' I'm wanting. But I couldna trust *yon* intil a letter," she added in a lower tone, "I thought it was a great deal safer just to bring it myself."

"But I," said Randal quickly, "have come upon business, Glen. Miss Leslie will excuse me for bringing it here, though I had not meant to do so. I have a very advantageous offer to tell you of. It was made to me, but it will suit you better. There is pleasant work and good pay, and a good opening—could you not put off this happy meeting for a little, and listen to what I have to say?"

"Good pay, and a good opening? Rob, my man," said Mrs. Glen, "leave you me with Miss Margret. We were

aye real good friends—and listen like a good lad to what Mr. Randal says. A good opening, and good pay—eh, but you're a kind lad when there's good going, no to keep it to yourself."

"If Glen will not give me his attention, I may be tempted to keep it to myself," said Randal, with a smile, "and there is not a moment to lose." He had meant what he said when he pledged himself to serve her, to do anything for her that his power could reach—nobody but himself knew what a sacrifice it was that he was prepared to make. And there was not a moment to lose. It was evident by the look of all parties, and by the unexplained appearance of Mrs. Glen, that the crisis was even more alarming, more urgent than he thought. The only thing he could do was to insist upon the prior urgency of *his* business. Could he but get Rob away! Randal knew that Margaret's natural protectors were on the way to take charge of her; he made another anxious appeal. "Pardon me, if I have no time for explanations or apologies," he said; "you may see how important it is when I have

come from London to tell you of it. Glen, you ought not to neglect such an opportunity. Miss Leslie will excuse you—it may make your fortune. Won't you come with me, and let me tell you? I can't explain everything here—”

“Eh, Rob,” said Mrs. Glen, who had pressed forward anxiously to listen. “What's half-an-hour, one way or another?—I would gang with him, and I would hear what he's got to say. We're none so pressed for time, you and me. What's half-an-hour? and me and your bonnie Miss Margret will have our cracks till ye come back. Gang away, my man, gang away.”

Rob stood undecided between them, looking from one to another, distrusting them all, even his mother. Why had she come here? They seemed all in a plot to get him away from this spot, where alone (he thought) he could insist upon his rights. “How did he know I was here?” he said between his teeth. As for Margaret, everything was in a confusion about her. She did not comprehend why Randal should stand there without a word

to her, scarcely looking at her—was this the way to serve her? and yet was it not for her sake that he was trying to take the other claimant—this too urgent suitor—away? As she stood there, passive, confused, and wondering, Margaret, standing with her face to the door, was the first to perceive, all at once detaching themselves from the background of the sky, two figures outside, whose appearance brought a climax to all the confusion within. In the pause within doors, while they all waited to see what Rob would do, a brisk voice outside suddenly took up and occupied the silence.

“I think most likely they don’t expect us at all. You never can be sure of Grace—her very letters go astray, as other people’s letters never do. The post itself goes wrong with her. If they had expected me they would have sent the carriage. But I declare there are people in the hall. I wonder,” said Mrs. Bellingham, in a tone of wonder, not unmingled with indignation, “if they have been having visitors—*visitors*, Grace and Margaret! while I have been away?”

No one said a word. Randal, who had been standing with his back to the door, turned round hastily, and the others stood startled, not knowing what was about to happen, but with a consciousness that the end of all things was drawing near. Mrs. Bellingham marched in with mingled curiosity and resolution in her face. She came in as the head of a house had a right to come, into a place where very high jinks had been enacted in his or her absence. She looked curiously at Rob Glen and his mother, who faced her first, and said, "Oh!" with a slight swing of her person—a half bow, a half curtesy, less of courtesy than suspicion;—but Jean was always aware what was due to herself, and could not be rude. When the third stranger caught her eye, she gave way to a little outcry of genuine surprise—"You here, Randal Burnside!"

"Yes, indeed," he said, "you must think it very strange; but I will explain everything to you afterwards."

"Oh, I am sure there is no need for explanations—your father's son can never be unwelcome," said Mrs. Bellingham, guardedly. "Well, Margaret, my dear,

so this is you! I think either you or Grace might have thought of sending the carriage; but you have been having company, I see—Where is Grace?”

“Oh, dearest Jean,” cried Miss Leslie, rushing forward, “to think that you should arrive like this without anyone expecting you! And oh, dear Ludovic, you too! I am sure——”

“You have been having company, I see,” said Mrs. Bellingham, “I trust we are not interrupting anything. I will take a seat here for a little, I think it is the coolest place in the house. You had better ask your friends to take chairs, Grace.”

“Oh, dearest Jean, it is Mr. Glen, the clever artist, you know, who—but I don’t know the—the——” what should Miss Leslie have said?—to call Mrs. Glen a lady was not practicable, and to call her a woman was evidently an offence against politeness. “I assure you,” she said in her sister’s ear, “I don’t know in the least who she is.”

Mrs. Bellingham sat down in the great chair which stood by the fireplace, a great

old carved throne in black wood, which looked like a chief-justice at least. It was close to the door, and served to bar all exit. Sir Ludovic had come in a minute after her, and he had been engaged in greeting his little sister, Margaret, and shaking hands with Randal Burnside, whom he was very glad to see, with a little surprise, but without *arrière-pensée*. But when the salutations were over he looked round him, and with a sudden, sharp exclamation discovered Rob Glen by his side.

“Margaret!” he said at once, “you had better retire, my dear, you had better retire. I don’t think this is a place for you.”

“I beg your pardon, Ludovic,” said Mrs. Bellingham, “where her brother and her sisters are is just the right place for Margaret. I have not the pleasure of knowing the Miss Leslie’s friends—neither do you, I suppose; but Margaret will just remain, and I daresay everything will be cleared up. It is a very fine day,” Jean said, with a gracious attempt to con-

ciliate everybody, "and very good for bringing on the hay."

After this there was a slight pause again; but Mrs. Glen felt that this was a tribute to her own professional knowledge, and as no one else took up the rôle of reply, she came forward a step, with a little cough and clearing of her throat.

"England's a great deal forwarder in that respect than we are in our part of the world," she said. "It's no muckle mair than the spring season wi' us, and here it's perfit simmer. We'll no be thinking o' the hay for this month to come—but I wouldna wonder if it was near cutting here."

Meanwhile Sir Ludovic had gone up to Rob Glen, in great agitation. "What are you doing here?" he said. "Why did you come here? I never thought you would have taken such a step as this. I gave you credit for more straightforwardness, more gentlemanly feeling—"

"There has been enough of this!" cried Rob. Exasperation is of kin to despair; amid all these bewildered faces looking at him not one was friendly—not one looked at him as the future master of the house, as

the man who was one day to be Margaret's husband, should have been looked at. And Margaret herself had no thought of standing by him. She had shrunk away from him into the background, as if she would have seized the opportunity to escape. "There has been enough of this," he said, "I do not see any reason why I should put up with it. If I am here it is because there is no other place in the world where I have so much right to be. I have come to claim my rights. Margaret can tell you what right I have to be here."

"Margaret!" repeated Mrs. Bellingham, wondering, in her high-pitched voice.

"Glen!" cried Randal, interrupting him, with nervous haste. "I told you I had an important proposal to make to you. When you know that I came down expressly to bring it, I think I might have your attention at least. Will you come with me, and hear what it is? I beg your pardon, Mrs. Bellingham; I do not want to interfere with any other explanation; but I came down on purpose, and Glen ought to give me an answer, while I have time to stay—"

"Eh, bide a moment, bide a moment,

Mr. Randal, gie him but a half-hour's grace;" cried Mrs. Glen, "speak up Rob, my bonnie man."

Randal, though he felt his intervention useless, made one last effort. "I must have my answer at once," he cried, impatient. "I tell you it is for your interest, Glen—"

"I don't think, gentlemen," said Sir Ludovic, "that this is a place to carry on an argument between yourselves, with which the ladies of this house, at least, have nothing to do."

"If you will not come, I at least must go!" Randal cried, with great excitement. He gave her an anxious glance, which she did not even see, and threw up his hands with a gesture of despair. "I can do no good here," he said.

Rob glared round upon them all—all looking at him—all hostile, he thought; he had it in his power, at least, to frighten these people who looked down upon him, who would think him not good enough to mate with them. He turned towards Margaret, who still stood behind him, trembling, and called out her name in a voice that made the hall ring.

“Margaret! It is you that have the first right to be consulted. Sir Ludovic, you know as well as I do, that Margaret is pledged to be my wife.”

“His wife!” Mrs. Bellingham sat bolt upright in her chair, and Miss Leslie, with a little shriek, ran to Margaret’s side, with the instinct of supporting, what seemed to her the side of sentiment against tyranny. “Darling Margaret! lean upon me, let me support you; I will never forsake you,” she breathed fervently in her young sister’s ear.

“Silence,” cried Sir Ludovic; “how dare you, Sir, make such a claim upon a young lady under age? If you had the feelings of a gentleman—”

At this moment, Mrs. Glen stepped forward to do battle for her son.

“You may think it fine manners, Sir Ludovic, to cast up to my Rob that’s he no a gentleman; but it doesna seem fine manners to me. Ay, that she is! troth-plighted till him, as I can bear witness, and by a document, my ladies and gentlemen, that ye’ll find to be good in law.”

“Mother, hold your tongue!” cried Rob; a suppressed fury was growing in him; he felt himself an alien among these people whom he was claiming to belong to, but of whom nobody belonged to him, except the mother, whose homeliness and inferiority were so very apparent to his eyes. He was growing hoarse with excitement and passion. “Sir Ludovic knows so well what my position is,” he said, with dry lips, “that he has asked me to give it up—he has tried before now to persuade me that I was required to prove myself a gentleman by giving it up. A gentleman! what does that mean?” cried Rob. “How many gentlemen would there be left if they were required to give up everything that is most dear to them, to prove the empty title? Do gentlemen sacrifice their interests and their hopes for nothing?—or do you count it honourable in a gentleman to abandon the woman he loves? If so, I am no gentleman, as you say. I will not give up Margaret. She chose me as much as I chose her. She is frightened, and you may force her into abandoning her betrothed, and breaking

her word. Women are fickle, and she is afraid of you all; but she is mine, and I will never give her up."

"Margaret," said Sir Ludovic, taking her hand and drawing her forward, "give this man his answer. Tell him you will have none of him. You may have been imprudent—"

"But she can be prudent now," said Rob Glen with a smile, "she can give up, now that she is rich, the man that loved her when she was poor. Margaret—yes—you can please them and leave me because I have nothing to offer you. They say such lessons are easily learnt; but I would not have looked for it from you."

Margaret stood in the centre, in face of them all, with her brain reeling and her heart wrung. She had a consciousness that Randal was there too, looking at her, which was a mistake, for he had left the hall hastily when his attempt was foiled; but all the others were round her, making a spectacle of her confusion, searching her with their eyes. What had she to do but to repeat the vehement denial which she had given to Rob himself, not half an

hour ago? She wrung her hands. The case was different; here he was alone, contending with them all for her; her heart ached for him, though she shrank from him. She gave a low cry and hid her face in her hands; how could she desert him, how could she cast him off when he stood thus alone?

“You see,” said Rob triumphantly, with a wonderful sense of relief, “she will not cast me off as you bid her. She is mine. You will never be able to separate us if we are true to each other; Margaret, my darling, lift your sweet face and look at me. All the brothers in the world cannot separate us. Give me your hand, darling, for it is mine.”

“Stand off, Sir!” cried Sir Ludovic, furious; and Mrs. Bellingham, coming down from her chair as from a throne, came and stood between them, putting out her hand to put the intruder away. Jean was all but speechless with wonder and rage. She put her other hand upon Margaret’s shoulder and pushed her from her, giving her a shake as she did so, of irrepressible wrath. “What is the mean-

ing of all this? Put those people out, Ludovic; put this strange woman, I tell you to the door."

"Put us out!" cried Mrs. Glen. "I'll daur ye to do that at your peril. Look at what I've got here. I have come straight from my ain house to bring this that has never left my hands since that frightened lassie there wrote it out. It's her promise and vow before God, that is as good as marriage in Scots law as everybody kens. Na, you'll no get it out of my hands. There it is! you may look till you're tired—you'll find no cheatry here."

"Did you write this, Margaret?" said her brother in tones of awful judicial severity, as it seemed to her despairing ears. They all gathered round, with a murmur of excitement.

"Marriage in Scots law! good Lord, anything is marriage in Scots law," Mrs. Bellingham said, under her breath, in a tone of horror. Grace burst out into a little scream of excitement, wringing her hands.

"Did you write this, Margaret?" still

more solemnly Sir Ludovic asked again. Margaret uncovered her face. She looked at them all with her heart sinking. Here was the final moment that must seal her fate. It seemed to her that after she had made her confession, there would be nothing for her to do but to go forth, away from all she cared for, with the two strangers who had her in their power. She clasped her hands together, and looked at the group which was all blurred and indistinct in her eyes. She could not defend herself, or explain herself at such a moment, but breathed out from her very soul a dismal, reluctant, almost inaudible "Yes!" which seemed the very utterance of despair.

"Ay, my bonnie lady," said Mrs. Glen triumphant, "you never were the one to go against your ain act and deed. Me and my Rob, we ken you better than all your grand friends. Well I kent that whatever they might say, you would never go against your ain hand of write."

Rob had been standing passive all this time, with such a keen sense of the terror in Margaret's eyes, and the contempt

that lay under the serious trouble of the others, as stung him to the very centre of his being. The unworthiness of his own position, the bewildered misery of the girl whom he was persecuting, the seriousness of the crisis as shown by the troubled looks of the brother and sister who were bending their heads over the paper which his mother held out so triumphantly—all this smote the young man with a sudden sharp perception. He was not of a mean nature altogether. The quick impulses which swayed him, turned as often to generosity as to self-interest; and, all this while, there had been films about this pursuit of the young heiress, which had partially deceived him as to its true nature. What is there in the world more hard than to see ourselves as we appear to those on the other side? A sudden momentary overwhelming revelation of this, came upon him now. He did not hear the whispers of “compromise it”—“offer him something—offer him anything,” which Jean, utterly frightened, was pouring into her brother’s ear. He saw only the utter abandonment of misery

in Margaret's face, the vulgar triumph in his mother's, the odious position in which he himself stood between them. In a moment his sudden resolution was taken: he pushed in roughly into the group, in passionate pre-occupation, scarcely seeing them, and snatched the scrap of paper she held, out of his mother's hands. "Margaret!" he cried loudly in his excitement, "Look here! and here! and here!" tearing it into a thousand fragments. He pushed his mother aside, who rushed with a shriek upon him to save them, and tossed the little white atoms into the air. "I asked for your love," he said, his eyes moistening, his face glowing, "not for papers or promises. Give me that, or nothing at all."

Sudden tears rushed to Margaret's eyes, she did not know what had happened, but she felt that she was saved.

"Oh, Rob!" she cried, turning to him, putting out her hands.

Sir Ludovic sprang forward and took both these hands into his.

"Margaret, do you want to marry him?" he cried.

“Oh, no, no, no ; but anything else !” the girl said. “It was never he that did *that*. He was always kind, kinder than anybody in the world—I am his friend. Let me go, Ludovic. Rob,” she said, going up to him, giving him her hand, the tears dropping from her eyes, “not *that* : but I am your friend, I will always be your friend, whatever may happen, wherever we may be. I will never forget you, Rob, good-bye ! You are kind again, you are like yourself, you are my old Rob that always was my friend.”

Rob took her hands into his, he stooped over her and kissed her on the forehead : he would not give in without a demonstration of his power ; then he flung her hands away from him almost with violence, and turned to the door.

“It seems my fate never to be able to do what is best for myself,” he said, looking back with a wave of his hand and an irrepressible burst of self-assertion, as he turned and disappeared among the flowering bushes, outside the open door.

## CHAPTER XV.

**R**OB issued forth out of the Grange discomfited and beaten, but without the sense of moral downfall which had been bowing him to the ground. His heart was melted, his spirit softened. He was defeated, but he was not humiliated. He had come off with all the honours of war, not an insulted coward, but a magnanimous hero. "All is lost but honour," he said to himself, with an expansion of his breast. His eyes were still wet with the dew of generous feeling; he had not been forced into renunciation—he had himself evacuated the untenable position. There was a little braggadocio in this self-consciousness—a little even of what in school-boy English is called swagger; but still he had a certain right to his swagger. He had taken the only possible way of coming out with honour from the dilemma in which he

had placed himself. He said to himself that it was a great sacrifice he had made. All the hopes upon which he had dwelt so long and fondly were gone; he was all at sea again for his future, and did not know what to do. What was he to do? He could not return to the aimless life he had pursued in his mother's house; and by this time he had found out that it was by no means so easy as he had supposed to get fortune and reputation in London. What should he do? He could hope nothing from his mother. He knew well with what reproaches she would overwhelm him, what taunts she would have in her power. He must do something to secure himself independence: though for so long he had hoped that independence was coming to him in the easiest way! a rich wife, not only rich but fair, the "position of a gentleman," most dearly cherished of all the gifts of fortune, a handsome house, leisure and happiness, and everything that heart of man could desire. The breaking up of this dream called forth a sigh when the first elation of his victory over himself was over; and then he began to droop as

he walked on. No elevation in the social scale was likely to come now. Rob Glen, the son of a small farmer, he was, and would remain, not the happy hero of a romance, not the great artist undeveloped, not the genius he had thought. Thus the brag and the swagger gradually melted away; the sense of moral satisfaction ceased to give him as much support as at first; even the generous sentiment sank into a sense of failure. What was to become of him? He walked on dull but dogged, going steadily forwards, but scarcely knowing where he was going; and thus came upon Randal Burnside walking along the same road before him, more anxious and excited, and not much less discouraged and melancholy than he.

Randal's face brightened slightly at the sight of him.

"You have come after all, Glen," he said, "I had almost given you up."

"I gave myself up before I came," said Rob.

"What do you mean? I suppose they were hard upon you—perhaps you could scarcely expect it to be otherwise; but

with your good fortune you may easily bear more than that," said Randal; then he checked himself, remembering that Margaret's horror of her lover's presence pointed to not much good fortune; "let me tell you now what my business was," he said with a sigh. He was too loyal to depart from his purpose, but though (he thought) he would have given up life itself to serve Margaret, yet he could not make this sacrifice without a sigh. He told his companion very briefly what it was. It was an offer from a newspaper to investigate a subject of great popular interest, requiring some knowledge of Scotch law, "but that I could easily coach you in," Randal said. He went into it in detail showing all its advantages, as they walked along the country road. The first necessity it involved was a speedy start to the depths of Scotland, close work for three months, good pay, and possible reputation. Rob listened to the whole with scarcely a remark. When Randal paused, he turned upon him hastily—

"This was offered not to me, but to yourself," he said.

“Yes; but you know a little of the law, and I could easily coach you in all you require.”

“And why do you offer it to me?”

“Come,” said Randal, with a laugh, “there is no question of motive; I don’t offer it to you from any wish to harm you. To tell the truth, it would suit me very well myself.”

“And you would give it to me, to relieve *her* of my presence?” cried Rob; “I see it now! Burnside, will you tell me honestly, what is your reward to be?”

“I have neither reward nor hope of reward,” cried Randal, “evidently not even a thank-you. I would not answer such a question, but that I see you are excited—”

“Yes, I am excited—I have good cause—I have given her up, and every hope connected with her; so there is no more need to bribe me,” said Rob, with a harsh laugh. “Keep your appointment to yourself!”

“Will you take it, or will you leave it, Glen? What may have happened otherwise is nothing to me—”

“There is the train,” said Rob. “No! I’ll take nothing, either from her dislike or your friendship—nothing! There are still some in the world that care more for me than charity. Good-bye.”

He made a dash up the bank, where a train was visible, puffing and pulling up at the little station—the legitimate road being a quarter of a mile round, and hopeless.

“Come back!” cried Randal, “you will break your neck. There is another train—”

Rob made no reply, but waved his hand, and dashed in wild haste over ditch and paling. Randal stood breathless, and saw him reach the height and spring into a carriage at the last moment, as the train puffed and fretted on its way. The spectator did not move, what was the use? he had no wish to take the same wild road; he stood and looked after the long white plume as it coursed across the country.

“He has got it, and I have lost it,” he said: but Randal smiled to himself. A sense of ease, of relief, and pleasure after so much pain, came over him. There was no longer any hurry—should he go forward, should he turn back?—it did not

much matter; he had two or three hours on his hands before he could get away.

The rush and noise of the train was a relief on the other hand to the traveller. As it pounded along, with roll and clang, and shrill whistle, the sudden hurry of his thoughts kept time. He had not a moment to lose. Now and then, when its speed slackened, he got up and paced about the narrow space of the carriage, as if the continued movement got him on the faster. When he reached London, he jumped into a hansom and dashed through the crowded Strand to one of the little streets leading down towards the river. Arrived there he thundered at a door, and rushed upstairs, three steps at a time, till he came to a little room at the top of the house, where the sole occupant, a young woman, had been sitting, looking wistfully out upon a glimpse of the river, which showed in dim twilight reflections at the foot of the street, for it was almost night. Her father was out, and Jeanie sat alone. She had "nae heart" to walk about the streets, to look in at the dazzling shop windows, to take any pleasure in the

sight of London. She was thinking—would she see him again? Would he come and bid her farewell as he said? “The day after the morn, the day after the morn,” she was saying to herself, sometimes putting up her hand to brush away a furtive tear from the corner of her eyes. That was the final day—after which in this world she should see Rob’s face no more.

“Jeanie,” he cried coming in breathless, “I have come back to you as I said,” Jeanie stumbled up to her feet, and fell a-crying with a tremulous smile about her lips.

“Oh, I’m glad, glad to see you,” she cried, “once mair, once mair! though it’s naething but to say farewell. We’re to sail the day after the morn.”

“The day after the morn.” He took Jeanie’s hands, which gave themselves up to his as Margaret’s shrinking fingers had never done, and looked into her pretty rustic face, all quivering with love and the anguish of parting. Jeanie had made her little pretences of pride, her stand of maidenly dignity against him; but at this moment all these defences were forgotten.

He had come so suddenly : and it was this once and never more, never more in all the world again. "The day after the morn," repeated Rob, "then there will just be time. I am coming with you ; and if you will have a man without a penny, Jeanie, it shall be as man and wife that you and I will go."

She gave a cry of sharp pain and drew her hands out of his. "How dare you speak like that to me that means no harm ? How dare you speak like that to me—and you another lass's lad, and never mine ?"

"I am nobody's but yours," he said "and, Jeanie, you need not try to deceive me. You never were but mine."

"But that's nae reason," she cried wildly, "to come and make a fool of me to my face, Rob Glen. Oh go, go to them you belong to ! I thought I might have said farewell to you without another word ; but even that canna be."

"There will never be farewell said between you and me, Jeanie," said Rob seriously, "never from this moment till death does us part."

When Rob Glen, stung at once by the kindness and severity of which he had been the object, took this sudden resolution, and with a wild dash of energy and without a pause, thus carried it out: Randal was left alone upon the country road, all strange and unfamiliar to him, but with which he seemed all at once to have formed so many associations—with two or three hours at his disposal. He stood and watched the train till it was out of sight, idly, with the most singular sense of leisure in opposition to that hurry and rush. From the moment when Rob had dashed up the bank, Randal had felt no longer in any hurry or anxiety about the train. It did not matter if he lost his train—nothing, indeed, seemed to matter very much for the moment. He saw the carriage that contained Rob rush out of sight while he was standing in the same place; if he chose to spend an hour in the same place, thinking over the causes which had carried Rob away, what would it matter? He had plenty of time for that or anything else—no hurry or care—the whole afternoon before him. Would it

not be better, more civil to go back, and pay his respects at the Grange as he ought? He had rushed into the house like a savage, and rushed out again without a word to say for himself; evidently this was not the way to treat ladies to whom he owed the utmost respect. He would go back. He turned accordingly, and went back; still at the most perfect leisure. Plenty of time! no hurry one way or another. He had not gone far, however, before he met a curiously-matched pair coming up along the road together, Mrs. Glen talking loudly and angrily, Sir Ludovic walking beside her, sometimes saying a word, but for the most part passive, listening and taking no notice. Randal heard her long before he saw the pair on the windings of the road. Mrs. Glen did not know whether to abuse or defend her son. She did both by turns. "A fine son to leave me that has aye thought far ower muckle of him, to find my way home as best I can, after making a fool of himself and a' belonging to him! But where was he to gang, poor lad; abused on a' hands—even by those that

led him into his trouble," she cried. There was no pause in her angry monologue. And, indeed, the poor woman, in her great Paisley shawl, with the hot sun playing upon her head, her temper exasperated, her body fatigued, her hopes baffled, might have something forgiven to her. "Gentry!" she cried, as she began to ascend the slope which led to the station, and which Randal was coming down; "a great deal the gentry have done for my family or me. Beguiled my Rob, the cleverest lad in a' Fife, till he's made a fool o' himself and ruined a' his prospects; and brought me trailing after him to a country where there's nae kindness, nor hospitality—among people that never offer you so much as a stool to rest your weary limbs upon, or a cup o' tea to refresh you. Eh! if that's gentry, I would rather have the colliers' wives or the fisher bodies in Fife—let alone a good farmhouse, and that's my ain."

"Mrs. Glen," said Sir Ludovic, "I am sure my sisters would have wished you to rest and refresh yourself."

"Ay, among their servant-women, no

doubt—if I would have bowed myself to that. I've paid rent to the Leslies for the last thirty years—nae doubt but they durstna have refused me a cup of tea; but I would have you to ken, Sir Ludovic, though you're a Sir, and I'm a plain farmer, that the like o' your servant-women are nae neebors for me."

"My good woman?"

"I'm nae good woman to be misca'ed by ane of your race. Good woman, quo' he! as I would say to some gangrel body. You're sair mistaken, Sir Ludovic, if that's what you think of the like of me, that has paid you rent, as I was saying, and held up my head with any in the parish, and given my bairns as good an education as you or yours could set your face to. If ye think, after a' that I've put up with, that I'm to take a 'good woman' from the laird, as if I wasna to the full as guid a tenant as he is a landlord or, may be mair to lippen to."

"Would you have me say 'ill woman?'" said Sir Ludovic, with momentary peevishness, yet with a gleam of humour. "You are quite right, Mrs. Glen, you are better

off, being a tenant, than I am as a landlord. The Leslies never were rich, that I heard tell of;—and if we were proud, it never was to our neighbours, the people on our own land.”

“ Well, I wouldna say but that’s true,” said Mrs. Glen, softened. “ Auld Sir Ludovic, your father, had aye a pleasant word for gentle and simple—and if it was not for that lang-tongued wife down bye yonder—”

Sir Ludovic, though he was a serious man, felt a momentary inclination to chuckle when he heard his sister Jean, the managing person of the family, described as a lang-tongued wife. But he said, gravely,

“ In such a question, Mrs. Glen, there is a great deal to be considered. You would not have liked it yourself, had one of your daughters been courted without your knowledge, by a penniless lover. When you see your son, if I can do anything for him, if I can advance his interests, let me know, and I will do it. He behaved like a man at the last.”

“ Oh, aye; when a lad plays into your

hands, it's easy to say that he's behaving like a man," she said; but she was mollified by the praise, and her wrath had begun to wear itself out. "I'll gie you a word o' warning, Sir Ludovic, though you've little title to it from my hands," she added. "Here's Randal Burnside coming back. If you've saved your little Miss from ae wooer, here's another; and my word, I would sooner have a bonnie lad like my Rob, with real janius in his head, than a Minister's son, neither ae thing nor another, like Randal Burnside."

They met a moment afterwards, and Randal recounted what had happened, how Rob had caught the train, but he himself, being too late, had intended to return to the Grange for the interval, and was now on his way there. Mrs. Glen, however, would not return; she was too glad to be deposited in a shady room where she could loose her shawl, and bonnet-strings, and fan herself with her large handkerchief. Sir Ludovic, who had "a warm heart for Fife," as he himself expressed it, and who had been touched by Rob's final self-vindication, did everything that could be done

for her comfort, before he turned back with Randal. But they had no sooner left her, than he fell to talking with an appearance of relief.

“Thank God, that’s done with!” he said. “It was very foolish of poor little Margaret; but after all it was nothing, nothing in law. My sister Jean got a terrible fright. There is a panic abroad in the world about Scotch marriages; but a promise that is only on one side can never be anything. You don’t seem to know what I am talking of.”

“No;” said Randal, who had gone out of the hall before the climax came. He looked, with bewildered curiosity, in his companion’s face.

“You should have told me, you should have told me—what did you know about it then? and what were you doing there, Randal? Excuse me, but I have a right to know.”

“You have a perfect right to know. I knew that Glen had—by some means—engaged—her—to himself,” said Randal, not knowing how to express what he meant, reddening and faltering, as if he himself had been

the culprit. "I saw them together twice at Earl's-hall; and once she was good enough to speak to me about it. I had taken no notice of her when I saw them, thinking, as one does brutally, that she understood what she was doing, as I did. And in her innocence she asked me why? What could I say but that I was a brute, and a fool—and that if I could ever serve her I would do it, should it cost me my life."

"That is the way you young idiots speak," said Sir Ludovic, with an impatient gesture; "your life, how could it affect your life? but you were neither a fool nor brutal, that I can see. Poor little silly thing, she thought you were rude to pass her, did she? and what then? Innocent, oh yes, she's innocent enough."

"And then," said Randal, "she sent to beg me to help her, to keep him away from her. I managed it that time; and this morning she sent to me again. She must have seen her mistake very soon, Sir Ludovic, and what it has cost her! but I hope it is all over now."

"And you came down here, ane's errand, as we say in Scotland? for nothing

but to relieve her mind? How did you mean to do it? what was the business you were so anxious to tell him about? I thought it was a strange business that you were so anxious to talk over with Rob Glen."

"It was very simple," said Randal, colouring high under this examination. "He is a clever fellow; he can write and draw, and has a great deal of talent. I wanted to send him off—on a piece of work that had been offered to me——"

"To relieve her?"

"Because I thought he could do it—and for other reasons."

"I understand." Sir Ludovic went on in silence for some time while Randal's heart beat quick in his breast. He had said nothing to betray himself, and yet he felt himself betrayed.

After a while, Sir Ludovic turned and laid his hand kindly but gravely on Randal's shoulder.

"Tell me the simple truth," he said, "has it ever been breathed between you that you should succeed to the vacant place?"

"Never!" cried Randal, indignantly;

“nor is there any vacant place,” he added. “Glen took advantage of a child’s ignorance. She thought him kind to her. She was grateful to him, no more ; and he took advantage of it. There is no vacant place.”

“I see,” said Sir Ludovic ; then after a pause. “Randal, you will act a man’s part and a friend’s if you will leave her to come to herself, with Jean to look after her. Jean may be ‘a lang-tongued wife,’” he said, not able to repress a smile, “but she’s a good woman in her way. She will take good care of our little sister ; what is she but a child still ? You will act an honourable part if you leave her to the women : leave her to be quiet and come to herself.”

“I will follow your advice faithfully, as you give it in good faith, Sir Ludovic,” said Randal, “if I can do so : but I warn you frankly that I will never be happy till I have told her what is in my heart.”

“Oh yes, it needs no warlock to see what’s coming,” said Sir Ludovic shaking his head ; “and there’s Jean’s nephew, that young haverel of an Englishman : and

probably two or three more for anything I can tell ; but let her alone, let her alone, Randal, I beseech you, till the poor little silly thing comes to herself."

It would be impossible to describe what hot resentment against such a disparaging title, mingled with the softened state of sentiment and amiable friendliness with which Randal felt disposed to regard all the world, and especially this paternal brother, who was so much more like a father. "I will remember what you say, and attend to it—as far as I can," he said.

"That means as far as it may happen to suit you, and not a step further," said Sir Ludovic, once more shaking his head.

Margaret was not visible when they got to the Grange. She was supposed to be in her own room and unable to see anyone ; and what was more extraordinary, Miss Grace was actually in her own room, and unable to see anyone—having wept herself blind, and made her nose scarlet with grief, over the separation of the two lovers, and all the domestic tragedy that had occurred, as Mrs. Belk

lingham declared, entirely by her fault. If ever there was a woman to whom the separation of true lovers was distressful and terrible, Grace Leslie was that woman : and Jean said it was all her fault ! “ When I would give my life to make darling Margaret happy ! ” cried the innocent offender. “ They should have my money, every penny, I would not care how I lived, or what I put on, so long as dearest Margaret was happy ! ” and she had retired speechless and sobbing, feeling the calamity too cruel. As for Mrs. Bellingham, she was in sole possession of the drawing-room where the gentlemen found her walking about and fanning herself, bursting with a thousand things to say. The sight of an audience within reach, calmed her more than anything else could have done.

“ What have you done with that woman, Ludovic ? ” she said, “ she was an impertinent woman ; but I ’ m sorry for her if you walked her all that way to the station as you walked me. Did ever anybody hear such a tongue ? and the temper of a demon ; but I hope I have some Christian

feeling, and after the young man was gone, if you had not been in such a hurry, as she is a Fife woman, and a tenant, I would have ordered her a cup of tea."

"I told her so," said Sir Ludovic, "but she is comfortable enough at the station, and I ordered the people at the inn to send her one."

"I would have done nothing of the kind," said Jean, "a randy, nothing but a randy; and just as likely as not to enter into the whole question, and make a talk about the family; and the way news spreads in an English village is just marvellous—Fife is bad enough, but Fife is nothing to it. So you have come back, Randal Burnside—oh yes, you young men are always missing your train. There's Aubrey would have been here with me and of some use, but that he could not get out of his bed soon enough in the morning. I am very glad Aubrey's coming, he will be a change from all this. And I never saw a young man with so much tact. Are you going up by the next train, Randal, or are you going to

stay? Oh well, if you will not think it uncivil, I am glad for one thing that you're going, for I came away in such a hurry, and forgot one of the things I wanted most. If you would go to Simpson's—not Simpson's you know in Sloane Street, nor the one in the Burlington Arcade, but Simpson's in Wigmore Street, the great shop for artificial flowers—"

"You need not be at so much trouble to conceal our family commotions," said Sir Ludovic, "Randal knows all about it better than either you or me."

"Then I would just like to hear what he knows," said Mrs. Bellingham, "I don't know anything about it myself; and I don't think I want to know. Randal, what time is your train? Will you be able to stay till dinner, or can I give you some tea? The tea will be here directly, but dinner may be a little late for Aubrey, who is coming by quite a late afternoon train. He said he had business; but you young men you have always got business. To hear you, one would think you never had a moment. And, Ludovic, just sit down and be quiet and not fuss about and

put me out of my senses. Now I will give you your tea."

Randal, however, did not stay, until it was time for his train. Signs of the past excitement were too strong in the house to make it pleasant to a stranger, and Margaret being absent, he had small interest in the Grange. He took his leave, saying he would take a stroll and look at the grounds, a notion much encouraged by Mrs. Bellingham. "Do that, Randal," she said, "I wish I were not so tired, I would go with you myself, and let you see everything. And I'll tell Grace and Margaret you were very sorry not to see them, but time and trains wait for no man. You'll give my kind regards to your excellent father and mother, and you'll not forget the wreaths at Simpson's—plain white for Margaret. No, I'll not keep you, for my mind is occupied, and I know I'm not an amusing companion. Good bye; I hope you will come another time, Randal, *when we expect you*, and when we will be able to show you a little attention. Good bye!"

Randal went away with a smile at the

meaning that lay beneath Mrs. Bellingham's significant words. Should he ever come here as one who was expected, and who had a claim upon the attention she promised him? He looked wistfully up the oak staircase and at the winding passages, by some of which Margaret must have gone. Perhaps she would never know that he had been here. And at the same time, perhaps, it was better that he should not see her. She was rich, while as yet he was not rich, and he had no right to say anything to her; while, perhaps, if they met at this moment of agitation, it might be difficult to refrain from saying something. Thus sadly disappointed, but trying to represent to himself that he was not disappointed, he went through the shubbery and out into the little park. How different it was from old Earl's-hall! Glimpses of the old red house, glowing at every corner in some wealth of blossom, early roses climbing everywhere, wreaths of starry clematis twisted about the walls, and clusters of honeysuckle up to the very eaves, came to him through the trees at every turn he took. So full of

colour and warmth, and set in the brilliant sunshine of this June day, warm as no midsummer ever attains to be in Fife—the contrast between Margaret's old home and her new one, struck him strangely. The old solemn gray walls, the keener, clearer tones of the landscape, the dark masses of ivy about the half ruinous tower of Earl's-hall came suddenly before his eyes. The scene was greyer and colder, but the central figure had been all life and colour there. Here it was the landscape that was warm in its wealthy background, and she that was pale in her dress of mourning.

He was thinking this, musing of her and nothing else, when he suddenly saw a shadow glide softly through the trees and stand for a moment upon a little rustic bridge over the small stream which flowed at a distance from the house. He started and hurried that way, striding along over the grass that made his steps noiseless. And sure enough it was Margaret. The fresh air was a more familiar restorative than "lying down," which was Jean's panacea for agitation as for toothache. She was

standing watching the clear running water, wondering at all that had happened—her sob scarcely sobbed out, and apt to come back; her eyes not yet dry, and her lips still parted with that quick breath which told the unstilled beating of her heart. Poor Rob! would he be unhappy? Her heart gave a special ache for him, then quivered with another question: Was Randal angry? Did he think badly of her that he would not speak?

She looked up hastily, when a step sounded close to her on the path, and that same fluttering heart gave a leap of terror. Then it stilled into sudden relief and repose. "Oh, Randal! you have not gone away!" she cried; and her face that had been so passive, lighted up.

"I came back," he said; and the two stood, looking at each other for a moment, he on one side of the tinkling water, she on the bridge. "But I am going away," he added, "Rob is gone."

"Oh, poor Rob!—he was very kind after all—it was a mistake, only a mistake. It was my fault; I did not like—to hurt his feelings. You should never let any one

think a thing is true that is not true, Randal; it is as bad as telling a lie. It is all over now;" she said, looking at him wistfully, with a faint smile.

"And you are glad?" he grudged her moistened eyes and the sob that broke in spite of her, into her voice, and the tone with which she said "poor Rob!"

Margaret did not make any reply to this question—she looked at him once more wistfully.

"Were you angry," she said, "that you would not speak? I should not have troubled you, Randal, but my heart was broken. I was nearly out of my wits with terror. I did not know how to stand out and keep my own part. Were you angry, Randal, that you would not speak?"

"Margaret," he said, "why should you ask me such questions? I am never angry with you; or if I am angry it is for love, because I would do anything you ask me, even against myself."

Margaret smiled. Her eyes filled with something that was half light and half tears. "And me too!" she said.

Thus without any grammar and with-

out any explanation a great deal was said; Randal went to his train, and Margaret, smiling to herself, went home across the bridge. Both Jean and Grace heard her singing softly as she went up the oak staircase, and could not believe their ears. Grace cried more bitterly still to think that her darling Margaret should show so little feeling, and Jean was dumbfounded; that she should not be ashamed of herself—a girl just escaped from such a danger, and so nearly mixed up in a horrible story! Sir Ludovic, who had girls of his own, only laughed and shook his head; “She will have seen the right one,” he said, with a gleam of amusement to himself. Perhaps he was all the more indulgent that Aubrey, who was clearly Jean’s candidate, and far too much a man of society for plain Sir Ludovic, arrived with the cream of current scandal, and a most piquant story about Lady Grandton, and a certain Duke, “the same man, you know—all come on again as everybody prophesied” that very night.

Rob Glen set off within forty-eight hours for the other side of the world with Jeanie as his wife. He had not much more money

than would buy the licence that made this possible, and pay his passage; and would have faced the voyage and the New World without either outfit or preparation but for a timely present of a hundred pounds that reached him the night before he sailed. But he never spoke of this even to his wife, though his mother was aware of it, who—though she would not see Jeanie—saw him and dismissed him with a stormy farewell.

“Sir Ludovic, honest man, might well say it was a heartbreak to see your bairn throw himsel’ away—little we kent, him and me, how sooth he was speaking,” Mrs. Glen said. When it was all over it gave her a little consolation to quote Sir Ludovic, what “he said to me, and I said to him,” when she met him “in the South.”

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that it was a great shock to Margaret to hear what had happened, and how soon and how completely the baffled suitor had consoled himself. “All the time it was Jeanie’s Rob,” she said to herself, with a scorching blush; and for the moment felt as deeply shamed and humbled as

Rob himself had been by her indifference. And when Jean heard of these two or three words with Randal, which, indeed, as Mrs. Bellingham said indignantly, “settled nothing—for after an affair of that kind what is to hinder her having a dozen?” she was very angry, and planted thorns in Margaret’s pillow. But Jean will not be supreme for ever over her little sister’s life.

THE END.



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