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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK JANET'S LOVE AND SERVICE ***

Margaret M Robertson

"Janet's Love and Service"

Chapter One.

The longest day in all the year was slowly closing over the little village of Clayton. There were no loiterers now at the corners of the streets or on the village square—it was too late for that, though daylight still lingered. Now and then the silence was broken by the footsteps of some late home-comer, and over more than one narrow close, the sound of boyish voices went and came, from garret to garret, telling that the spirit of slumber had not yet taken possession of the place. But these soon ceased. The wind moved the tall laburnums in the lane without a sound, and the murmur of running water alone broke the stillness, as the gurgle of the burn, and the rush of the distant mill-dam met and mingled in the air of the summer night.

In the primitive village of Clayton, at this midsummer time, gentle and simple were wont to seek their rest by the light of the long gloaming. But to-night there was light in the manse—in the minister's study, and in other parts of the house as well. Lights were carried hurriedly past uncurtained windows, and flared at last through the open door, as a woman's anxious face looked out.

"What can be keeping him?" she murmured, as she shaded the flickering candle and peered out into the gathering darkness. "It's no' like him to linger at a time like this. God send he was at home."

Another moment of eager listening, and then the anxious face was withdrawn and the door closed. Soon a sound broke the stillness of the village street; a horseman drew up before the minister's house, and the door was again opened.

"Well, Janet?" said the rider, throwing the reins on the horse's neck and pausing as he went in. The woman curtsied with a very relieved face.

"They'll be glad to see you up the stairs, sir. The minister's no' long home."

She lighted the doctor up the stairs, and then turned briskly in another direction. In a minute she was kneeling before the kitchen hearth, and was stirring up the buried embers.

"Has my father come, Janet?" said a voice out of the darkness.

"Yes, he's come. He's gone up the stairs. I'll put on the kettle. I dare say he'll be none the worse of a cup of tea after his ride."

Sitting on the high kitchen dresser, her cheek close against the darkening window, sat a young girl, of perhaps twelve or fourteen years of age. She had been reading by the light that lingered long at that western window, but the entrance of Janet's candle darkened that, and the book, which at the first moment of surprise had dropped out of her hand, she now hastily put behind her out of Janet's sight. But she need not have feared a rebuke for "blindin' herself" this time, for Janet was intent on other matters, and pursued her work in silence. Soon the blaze sprung up, and the dishes and covers on the wall shone in the firelight. Then she went softly out and closed the door behind her.

The girl sat still on the high dresser, with her head leaning back on the window ledge, watching the shadows made by the firelight, and thinking her own pleasant thoughts the while. As the door closed, a murmur of wonder escaped her, that "Janet had'na sent her to her bed."

"It's quite time I dare say," she added, in a little, "and I'm tired, too, with my long walk to the glen. I'll go whenever papa comes down."

She listened for a minute. Then her thoughts went away to other things—to her father, who had been away all day; to her mother, who was not quite well to-night, and had gone up-stairs, contrary to her usual custom, before her father

came home. Then she thought of other things—of the book she had been reading, a story of one who had dared and done much in a righteous cause—and then she gradually lost sight of the tale and fell into fanciful musings about her own future, and to the building of pleasant castles, in which she and they whom she loved were to dwell. Sitting in the firelight, with eyes and lips that smiled, the pleasant fancies came and went. Not a shadow crossed her brow. Not a fear came to dim the light by which she gazed into the future that she planned. So she sat till her dream was dreamed out, and then, with a sigh, in which there was no echo of care or pain, she woke to the present, and turned to her book again.

“I might see by the fire,” she said, and in a minute she was seated on the floor, her head leaning on her hands, and her eye fastened on the open page.

“Miss Graeme,” said Janet, softly coming in with a child in her arms, “your mamma’s no’ weel, and here’s wee Rosie wakened, and wantin’ her. You’ll need to take her, for I maun awa’.”

The book fell from the girl’s hand, as she started up with a frightened face.

“What ails mamma, Janet? Is she very ill?”

“What should ail her but the one thing?” said Janet, impatiently. “She’ll be better the morn I hae nae doubt.”

Graeme made no attempt to take the child, who held out her hands toward her.

“I must go to her, Janet.”

“Indeed, Miss Graeme, you’ll do nothing o’ the kind. Mrs Burns is with her, and the doctor, and it’s little good you could do her just now. Bide still where you are, and take care o’ wee Rosie, and hearken if you hear any o’ the ither bairns, for none o’ you can see your mamma the night.”

Graeme took her little sister in her arms and seated herself on the floor again. Janet went out, and Graeme heard her father’s voice in the passage. She held her breath to listen, but he did not come in as she hoped he would. She heard them both go up-stairs again, and heedless of the prattle of her baby sister, she still listened eagerly. Now and then the sound of footsteps overhead reached her, and in a little Janet came into the kitchen again, but she did not stay to be questioned. Then the street door opened, and some one went out, and it seemed to Graeme a long time before she heard another sound. Then Janet came in again, and this time she seemed to have forgotten that there was any one to see her, for she was wringing her hands, and the tears were streaming down her cheeks. Graeme’s heart stood still, and her white lips could scarcely utter a sound.

“Janet!—tell me!—my mother.”

“Save us lassie! I had no mind of you. Bide still, Miss Graeme. You munna go there,” for Graeme with her little sister in her arms was hastening away. “Your mamma’s no waur than she’s been afore. It’s only me that doesna ken about the like o’ you. The minister keeps up a gude heart. Gude forgie him and a’ mankind.”

Graeme took a step toward the door, and the baby, frightened at Janet’s unwonted vehemence, sent up a shrill cry. But Janet put them both aside, and stood with her back against the door.

“No’ ae step, Miss Graeme. The auld fule that I am; ‘gin the lassie had been but in her bed. No, I’ll no’ take the bairn, sit down there, you’ll be sent for if you’re needed. I’ll be back again soon; and you’ll promise me that you’ll no leave this till I bid you. Miss Graeme, I wouldna deceive you if I was afraid for your mamma. Promise me that you’ll bide still.”

Graeme promised, awed by the earnestness of Janet, and by her own vague terror as to her mother’s mysterious sorrow, that could claim from one usually so calm, sympathy so intense and painful. Then she sat down again to listen and to wait. How long the time seemed! The lids fell down over the baby’s wakeful eyes at last, and Graeme, gathering her own frock over the little limbs, and murmuring loving words to her darling, listened still.

The flames ceased to leap and glow on the hearth, the shadows no longer danced upon the wall, and gazing at the strange faces and forms that smiled and beckoned to her from the dying embers, still she listened. The red embers faded into white, the dark forest with its sunny glades and long retreating vistas, the hills, and rocks, and clouds, and waterfalls, that had risen among them at the watcher’s will, changed to dull grey ashes, and the dim dawn of the summer morning, gleamed in at last upon the weary sleeper. The baby still nestled in her arms, the golden hair of the child gleaming among the dark curls of the elder sister as their cheeks lay close together. Graeme moaned and murmured in her sleep, and clasped the baby closer, but she did not wake till Janet’s voice aroused her. There were no tears on her face now, but it was very white, and her voice was low and changed.

“Miss Graeme, you are to go to your mamma; she’s wantin’ you. But mind you are to be quiet, and think o’ your father.”

Taking the child in her arms, she turned her back upon the startled girl. Chilled and stiff from her uneasy posture, Graeme strove to rise, and stumbling, caught at Janet’s arm.

“Mamma is better Janet,” she asked eagerly. Janet kept her working face out of sight, and, in a little, answered hoarsely,—

“Ay, she’ll soon be better, whatever becomes of the rest of us. But, mind, you are to be quiet, Miss Graeme.”

Chilled and trembling, Graeme crept up-stairs and through the dim passages to her mother’s room. The curtains had been drawn back, and the daylight streamed into the room. But the forgotten candles still glimmered on the table.

There were several people in the room, standing sad and silent around the bed. They moved away as she drew near. Then Graeme saw her mother's white face on the pillow, and her father bending over her. Even in the awe and dread that smote on her heart like death, she remembered that she must be quiet, and, coming close to the pillow, she said softly,—

“Mother.”

The dying eyes came back from their wandering, and fastened on her darling's face, and the white lips opened with a smile.

“Graeme—my own love—I am going away—and they will have no one but you. And I have so much to say to you.”

So much to say! With only strength to ask, “God guide my darling ever!” and the dying eyes closed, and the smile lingered upon the pale lips, and in the silence that came next, one thought fixed itself on the heart of the awe-stricken girl, never to be effaced. Her father and his motherless children had none but her to care for them now.

Chapter Two.

“It's a' ye ken! Gotten ower it, indeed!” and Janet turned her back on her visitor, and went muttering about her gloomy kitchen: “The minister no' being one to speak his sorrow to the newsmongering folk that frequent your house, they say he has gotten ower it, do they? It's a' they ken!”

“Janet, woman,” said her visitor, “I canna but think you are unreasonable in your anger. I said nothing derogatory to the minister; far be it from me! But we can a' see that the house needs a head, and the bairns need a mother. The minister's growing gey cheerful like, and the year is mair than out; and—”

“Whisht, woman. Dinna say it. Speak sense if ye maun speak,” said Janet, with a gesture of disgust and anger.

“Wherefore should I no' say it?” demanded her visitor. “And as to speaking sense—. But I'll no' trouble you. It seems you have friends in such plenty that you can afford to scorn and scoff at them at your pleasure. Good-day to you,” and she rose to go.

But Janet had already repented her hot words.

“Bide still, woman! Friends dinna fall out for a single ill word. And what with ae thing and anither I dinna weel ken what I'm saying or doing whiles. Sit down: it's you that's unreasonable now.”

This was Mistress Elspat Smith, the wife of a farmer—“no' that ill aff,” as he cautiously expressed it—a far more important person in the parish than Janet, the minister's maid-of-all-work. It was a condescension on her part to come into Janet's kitchen, under any circumstances, she thought; and to be taken up sharply for a friendly word was not to be borne. But they had been friends all their lives; and Janet “kenned hersel' as gude a woman as Elspat Smith, weel aff or no' weel aff;” so with gentle violence she pushed her back into her chair, saying:

“Hoot, woman! What would folk say to see you and me striving at this late day? And I want to consult you.”

“But you should speak sense yourself, Janet,” said her friend.

“Folk maun speak as it's given them to speak,” said Janet; “and we'll say nae mair about it. No' but that the bairns might be the better to have some one to be over them. She wouldna hae her sorrow to seek, I can tell you. No that they're ill bairns—”

“We'll say no more about it, since that is your will,” said Mrs Smith, with dignity; and then, relenting, she added,—

“You have a full handfu' with the eight of them, I'm sure.”

“Seven only,” said Janet, under her breath. “She got one of them safe home with her, thank God. No' that there's one ower many,” added she quickly; “and they're no' ill bairns.”

“You have your ain troubles among them, I dare say, and are muckle to be pitied—”

“Me to be pitied!” said Janet scornfully, “there's no fear o' me. But what can the like o' me do? For ye ken, woman, though the minister is a powerful preacher, and grand on points o' doctrine, he's a verra bairn about some things. *She* aye keepit the siller, and far did she make it gang—having something to lay by at the year's end as well. Now, if we make the twa ends meet, it's mair than I expect.”

“But Miss Graeme ought to have some sense about these things. Surely she takes heed to the bairns?”

“Miss Graeme's but a bairn herself, with little thought and less experience; and its no' to be supposed that the rest will take heed to her. The little anes are no' so ill to do with; but these twa laddies are just spirits o' mischief, for as quiet as Norman looks; and they come home from the school with torn clothes, till Miss Graeme is just dazed with mending at them. And Miss Marian is near as ill as the laddies; and poor, wee Rosie, growing langer and thinner every day, till you would think the wind would blow her awa. Master Arthur is awa at his eddication: the best thing for a' concerned. I wish they were a' safe unto man's estate,” and Janet sighed.

“And is Miss Graeme good at her seam?” asked Mistress Elspat.

“Oh ay; she's no' that ill. She's better at her sampler and at the flowering than at mending torn jackets, however. But

there's no fear but she would get skill at that, and at other things, if she would but hae patience with herself. Miss Graeme is none of the common kind."

"And has there been no word from *her* friends since? They say her brother has no bairns of his own. He might well do something for hers."

Janet shook her head.

"The minister doesna think that I ken; but when Mr Ross was here at the burial, he offered to take two of the bairns, Norman or Harry, and wee Marian. She's likest her mamma. But such a thing wasna to be thought of; and he went awa' no' weel pleased. Whether he'll do onything for them in ony ither way is more than I ken. He might keep Master Arthur at the college and no' miss it. How the minister is ever to school the rest o' them is no' easy to be seen, unless he should go to America after all."

Mistress Smith lifted her hands.

"He'll never surely think o' taking these motherless bairns to yon savage place! What could ail him at Mr Ross's offer? My patience! but folk whiles stand in their ain light."

"Mr Ross is not a God-fearing man," replied Janet, solemnly. "It's no' what their mother would have wished to have her bairns brought up by him. The minister kenned her wishes well on that point, you may be sure. And besides, he could never cross the sea and leave any of them behind."

"But what need to cross the sea?" cried Mrs Smith; "It's a pity but folk should ken when they're weel aff. What could the like o' him do in a country he kens nothing about, and with so many bairns?"

"It's for the bairns' sake he's thinking of it. They say there's fine land there for the working, and no such a thing as payin' rent, but every man farming his own land, with none to say him nay. And there's room for all, and meat and clothes, and to spare. I'm no' sure but it's just the best thing the minister can do. They had near made up their minds afore, ye ken."

"Hoot, woman, speak sense," entreated her friend. "Is the minister to sell rusty knives and glass beads to the Indians? That's what they do in yon country, as I've read in a book myself. Whatna like way is that to bring up a family?"

"Losh, woman, there's other folk there beside red Indians; folk that dinna scruple to even themselves with the best in Britain, no' less. You should read the newspapers, woman. There's one John Caldwell there, a friend o' the minister's, that's something in a college, and he's aye writing him to come. He says it's a wonderful country for progress; and they hae things there they ca' institutions, that he seems to think muckle o', though what *they* may be I couldna weel make out. The minister read a bit out o' a letter the ither night to Miss Graeme and me."

"Janet," said her friend, "say the truth at once. The minister is bent on this fule's errand, and you're encouraging in it."

"Na, na! He needs na encouragement from the like o' me. I would gie muckle, that hasna muckle to spare, gin he were content to bide where he is, though it's easy seen he'll hae ill enough bringing up a family here, and these laddies needing more ilka year that goes o'er their heads. And they say yon's a grand country, and fine eddication to be got in it for next to nothing. I'm no sure but the best thing he can do is to take them there. I ken the mistress was weel pleased with the thought," and Janet tried with all her might, to look hopeful; but her truth-telling countenance betrayed her. Her friend shook her head gravely.

"It might have done, with her to guide them; but it's very different now, as you ken yourself, far better than I can tell you. It would be little else than a temptin' o' Providence to expose these helpless bairns, first to the perils o' the sea, and then to those o' a strange country. He'll never do it. He's restless now; and unsettled; but when time, that cures most troubles, goes by, he'll think better of it, and bide where he is."

Janet made no reply, but in her heart she took no such comfort. She knew it was no feeling of restlessness, no longing to be away from the scene of his sorrow that had decided the minister to emigrate, and that he had decided she very well knew. These might have hastened his plans, she thought, but he went for the sake of his children. They might make their own way in the world, and he thought he could better do this in the New World than in the Old. The decision of one whom she had always revered for his goodness and wisdom must be right, she thought; yet she had misgivings, many and sad, as to the future of the children she had come to love so well. It was to have her faint hope confirmed, and her strong fears chased away, that she had spoken that afternoon to her friend; and it was with a feeling of utter disconsolateness that, she turned to her work again, when, at last, she was left alone.

For Janet had a deeper cause for care than she had told, a vague feeling that the worldly wisdom of her friend could not help her here, keeping her silent about it to her. That very morning, her heart had leaped to her lips, when her master in his grave, brief way, had asked,—

"Janet, will you go with us, and help me to take care of her bairns?"

And she had vowed to God, and to him, that she would never leave them while they needed the help that a faithful servant could give. But the after thought had come. She had other ties, and cares, and duties, apart from these that clustered so closely round the minister and his motherless children.

A mile or two down the glen stood the little cottage that had for a long time been the home of her widowed mother, and her son. More than half required for their maintenance Janet provided. Could she forsake them? Could any duty

she owed to her master and his children make it right for her to forsake those whose blood flowed in her veins? True, her mother was by no means an aged woman yet, and her son was a well-doing helpful lad, who would soon be able to take care of himself. Her mother had another daughter too, but Janet knew that her sister could never supply her place to her mother. Though kind and well-intentioned, she was easy minded, not to say thriftless, and the mother of many bairns besides, and there could neither be room nor comfort for her mother at her fireside, should its shelter come to be needed.

Day after day Janet wearied herself going over the matter in her mind. "If it were not so far," she thought, or "if her mother could go with her." But this she knew, for many reasons, could never be, even if her mother could be brought to consent to such a plan. And Janet asked herself, "What would my mother do if Sandy were to die? And what would Sandy do if my mother were to die? And what would both do if sickness were to overtake them, and me far-away?" till she quite hated herself for ever thinking of putting the wide sea, between them and her.

There had been few pleasures scattered over Janet's rough path to womanhood. Not more than two or three mornings since she could remember had she risen to other than a life of labour. Even during the bright brief years of her married-life, she had known little respite from toil, for her husband had been a poor man, and he had died suddenly, before her son was born. With few words spoken, and few tears shed, save what fell in secret, she had given her infant to her mother's care, and gone back again to a servant's place in the minister's household. There she had been for ten years the stay and right hand of her beloved friend and mistress, "working the work of two," as they told her, who would have made her discontented in her lot, with no thought from year's end to year's end, but how she might best do her duty in the situation in which God had placed her.

But far-away into the future—it might be years and years hence—she looked to the time when in a house of her own, she might devote herself entirely to the comfort of her mother and her son. In this hope she was content to strive and toil through the best years of her life, living poorly and saving every penny, to all appearance equally indifferent to the good word of those who honoured her for her faithfulness and patient labour, and to the bad word of those who did not scruple to call her most striking characteristics by less honourable names. She had never, during all these years, spoken, even to her mother, of her plans, but their fulfilment was none the less settled in her own mind, and none the less dear to her because of that. Could she give this up? Could she go away from her home, her friends, the land of her birth, and be content to see no respite from her labour till the end? Yes, she could. The love that had all these years been growing for the children she had tended with almost a mother's care, would make the sacrifice possible—even easy to her. But her mother? How could she find courage to tell her that she must leave her alone in her old age? The thought of parting from her son, her "bonny Sandy," loved with all the deeper fervour that the love was seldom spoken—even this gave her no such pang as did the thought of turning her back upon her mother. He was young, and had his life before him, and in the many changes time might bring, she could at least hope to see him again. But her mother, already verging on the three-score, she could never hope to see more, when once the broad Atlantic rolled between them.

And so, no wonder if in the misery of her indecision, Janet's words grew fewer and sharper as the days wore on. With strange inconsistency she blamed the minister for his determination to go away, but suffered no one else to blame him, or indeed to hint that he could do otherwise than what was wisest and best for all. It was a sore subject, this anticipated departure of the minister, to many a one in Clayton besides her, and much was it discussed by all. But it was a subject on which Janet would not be approached. She gave short answers to those who offered their services in the way of advice. She preserved a scornful silence in the presence of those who seemed to think she could forsake her master and his children in their time of need, nor was she better pleased with those who thought her mother might be left for their sakes. And so she thought, and wished, and planned, and doubted, till she dazed herself with her vain efforts to get light, and could think and plan no more.

"I'll leave it to my mother herself to decide," she said, at last; "though, poor body, what can she say, but that I maun do what I think is my duty, and please myself. The Lord above kens I hae little thought o' pleasin' myself in this matter." And in her perplexity Janet was ready to think her case an exception to the general rule, and that contrary to all experience and observation, duty pointed two ways at once.

Chapter Three.

The time came when the decision could no longer be delayed. The minister was away from home, and before his return it would be made known formally to his people that he was to leave them, and after that the sooner his departure took place it would be the better for all concerned, and so Janet must brace herself for the task.

So out of the dimness of her spotless kitchen she came one day into the pleasant light of May, knowing that before she entered it again, she would have made her mother's heart as sore as her own. All day, and for many days, she had been planning what she should say to her mother, for she felt that it must be farewell.

"If you know not of two ways which to choose, take that which is roughest and least pleasing to yourself, and the chances are it will be the right one," said she to herself. "I read that in a book once, but it's ill choosing when both are rough, and I know not what to do."

Out into the brightness of the Spring day she came, with many misgivings as to how she was to speed in her errand.

"It's a bonny day, bairns," said she, and her eye wandered wistfully down the village street, and over the green fields, to the hills that rose dimly in the distance. The mild air softly fanned her cheek, pleasant sights were round her everywhere, and at the garden gate she lingered, vaguely striving under their influence to cast her burden from her.

"I mun hae it ower," she muttered to herself as she went on. In each hand she held firmly the hand of a child. Marian and little Will were to go with her for safe keeping; the lads were at the school, and in her absence Graeme was to

keep the house, and take care of little Rose.

"Oh, Janet!" she exclaimed, as she went down the lane a bit with them; "I wish I were going with you, it's such a bonny day."

But Janet knew that what she had to say, would be better said without her presence, so she shook her head.

"You know Miss Graeme, my dear, you mun keep the house, and we would weary carrying wee Rosie, and she could never go half the distance on her feet; and mind, if ony leddies call, the short bread is in the ben press, and gin they begin with questions, let your answers be short and ceevil, like a gude bairn, and take gude care o' my bonny wee lily," added she, kissing the pale little girl as she set her down. "But I needna tell you that, and we'll soon be back again."

The children chattered merrily all the way, and busy with her own thoughts, Janet answered them without knowing what she said. Down the lane, and over the burn, through green fields, till the burn crossed their path again they went, "the near way," and soon the solitary cottage in the glen was in sight. It was a very humble home, but very pleasant in its loneliness, Janet thought, as her eye fell on it. The cat sat sunning herself on the step, and through the open door came the hum of the mother's busy wheel. Drawing a long breath, Janet entered.

"Weel, mother," said she.

"Weel, Janet, is this you, and the bairns? I doubt you hadna weel leavin' hame the day," said her mother.

"I had to come, and this day's as good as another. It's a bonny day, mother."

"Ay, its a bonny day, and a seasonable, thank God. Come in by, bairns, I sent Sandy over to Fernie a while syne. It's near time he were hame again. I'll give you a piece, and you'll go down the glen to meet him," and, well pleased, away they went.

"I dare say you'll be none the waur of your tea, Janet, woman," said her mother, and she put aside her wheel, and entered with great zeal into her preparations. Janet strove to have patience with her burden a little longer, and sat still listening to her mother's talk, asking and answering questions on indifferent subjects. There was no pause. Janet had seldom seen her mother so cheerful, and in a little she found herself wondering whether she had not been exaggerating to herself her mother's need of her.

"The thought ought to give me pleasure," she reasoned, but it did not, and she accused herself of perversity, in not being able to rejoice, that her mother could easily spare her to the duties she believed claimed her. In the earnestness of her thoughts, she grew silent at last, or answered her mother at random. Had she been less occupied, she might have perceived that her mother was not so cheerful as she seemed for many a look of wistful earnestness was fastened on her daughter's face, and now and then a sigh escaped her.

They were very much alike in appearances, the mother and daughter. The mother had been "bonnier in her youth, than ever Janet had," she used to say herself, and looking at her still ruddy cheeks, and clear grey eyes, it was not difficult to believe it. She was fresh-looking yet, at sixty, and though the hair drawn back under her cap was silvery white, her teeth for strength and beauty, might have been the envy of many a woman of half her years. She was smaller than Janet, and her whole appearance indicated the possession of more activity and less strength of body and mind than her daughter had, but the resemblance between them was still striking. She had seen many trials, as who that has lived for sixty years, has not? but she had borne them better than most, and was cheerful and hopeful still. When they were fairly seated, with the little table between them, she startled Janet, by coming to the point at once.

"And so they say the minister is for awa' to America after all. Is that true?"

"Oh, ay! it is true, as ill news oftenest is," said Janet, gravely. "He spoke to me about it before he went away. It's all settled, or will be before he comes hame the morn."

"Ay, as you say, it's ill news to them that he's leaving. But I hope it may be for the good o' his young family. There's many a one going that road now."

"Ay, there's more going than will better themselves by the change, I doubt. It's no like that all the fine tales, we hear o' yon country can be true."

"As you say. But, it's like the minister has some other dependence, than what's ca'ed about the country for news. What's this I hear about a friend o' his that's done weel there?"

Janet made a movement of impatience.

"Wha' should he be, but some silly, book-learned body that bides in a college there awa'. I dare say there would be weel pleased in any country, where he could get plenty o' books, and a house to hold them in. But what can the like o' him ken o' a young family and what's needed for them. If he had but held his peace, and let the minister bide where he is, it would hae been a blessing, I'm sure."

Janet suddenly paused in confusion, to find herself arguing on the wrong side of the question. Her mother said nothing, and in a minute she added,—

"There's one thing to be said for it, the mistress aye thought weel o' the plan. Oh! if she had been but spared to them," and she sighed heavily.

"You may weel say that," said her mother, echoing her sigh. "But I'm no sure but they would miss her care as much to bide here, as to go there. And Janet, woman, there's aye a kind Providence. He that said, 'Leave thy fatherless children to me,' winna forsake the motherless. There's no fear but they'll be brought through."

"I hae been saying that to myself ilka hour of the day, and I believe it surely. But oh, mother," Janet's voice failed her. She could say no more.

"I ken weel, Janet," continued her mother, gravely, "it will be a great charge and responsibility to you, and I dare say whiles you are ready to run away from it. But you'll do better for them than any living woman could do. The love you bear them, will give you wisdom to guide them, and when strength is needed, there's no fear but you'll get it. The back is aye fitted for the burden. Let them gang or let them bide, you canna leave them now."

She turned her face away from her mother, and for her life Janet could not have told whether the tears that were streaming down her cheeks, were falling for joy or for sorrow. There was to be no struggle between her and her mother. That was well; but with the feeling of relief the knowledge brought, there came a pang—a foretaste of the home-sickness, which comes once, at least, to every wanderer from his country. By a strong effort she controlled herself, and found voice to say,—

"I shall never leave them while they need me. I could be content to toil for them always. But, ah! mother, the going awa' over the sea—"

Her voice failed her for a minute, then she added,—

"I hae wakened every mornin' with this verse of Jeremiah on my mind: 'Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him, but weep sore for him that goeth away, for he shall return no more nor see his native country.'" Janet made no secret of her tears now.

"Hoot fie, Janet, woman," said her mother, affecting anger to hide far other feelings. "You are misapplyin' Scripture altogether. That was spoken o' them that were to be carried away captive for their sins, and no' o' honest folk, followin' the leadings o' Providence. If there's ony application it's to me, I'm thinkin'. It's them that bide at hame that are bidden weep sore;" and she seemed much inclined to follow the injunction. She recovered in a minute, however, and added,—

"But I'm no' going to add to your trouble. You dinna need me to tell you I'll have little left when you're awa'. But, if it's your duty to go with them, it canna be your duty to bide with me. You winna lose your reward striving in behalf o' these motherless bairns, and the Lord will hae me and Sandy in his keeping, I dinna doubt."

There was a long silence after this. Each knew what the other suffered. There was no need to speak of it, and so they sat without a word; Janet, with the quiet tears falling now and then over her cheeks; her mother, grave and firm, giving no outward sign of emotion. Each shrunk, for the other's sake, from putting their fears for the future into words; but their thoughts were busy. The mother's heart ached for the great wrench that must sever Janet from her child and her home, and Janet's heart grew sick with the dread of long weary days and nights her mother might have to pass, with perhaps no daughter's hand to close her eyes at last, till the thoughts of both changed to supplication, fervent though unuttered; and the burden of the prayer of each was, that the other might have strength and peace.

The mother spoke first. "When will it be?"

"It canna be long now. The sooner the better when once it's really settled. There are folk in the parish no weel pleased at the minister, for thinking to go."

"It's for none to say what's right, and what's wrang, in the matter," said the mother, gravely. "I hae nae doubt the Lord will go with him; but it will be a drear day for plenty besides me."

"He's bent on it. Go he will, and I trust it may be for the best," but Janet sighed drearily.

"And how are the bairns pleased with the prospect?" asked her mother.

"Ah! they're weel pleased, bairn-like, at any thought o' a change. Miss Graeme has her doubts, I whiles think, but that shouldna count; there are few things that look joyful to her at the present time. She's ower like her father with her ups and downs. She hasna her mother's cheerful spirit."

"Her mother's death was an awfu' loss to Miss Graeme, poor thing," said the mother.

"Aye, that it was—her that had never kent a trouble but by readin' o' them in printed books. It was an awfu' wakening to her. She has never been the same since, and I doubt it will be long till she has the same light heart again. She tries to fill her mother's place to them all, and when she finds she canna do it, she loses heart and patience with herself. But I hae great hope o' her. She has the 'single eye,' and God will guide her. I hae nae fear for Miss Graeme."

And then they spoke of many things—settling their little matters of business, and arranging their plans as quietly as though they looked forward to doing the same thing every month during the future years as they had done during the past. Nothing was forgotten or omitted; for Janet well knew that all her time and strength would be needed for the preparations that must soon commence, and that no time so good as the present might be found for her own personal arrangements. Her little savings were to be lodged in safe hands for her mother's use, and if anything were to happen to her they were to be taken to send Sandy over the sea. It was all done very quietly and calmly. I will not say that Janet's voice did not falter sometimes, or that no mist came between the mother's eyes and the grave face on the other side of the table. But there was no sign given. A strong sense of duty sustained them. A firm belief that

however painful the future might be, they were doing right in this matter, gave them power to look calmly at the sacrifice that must cost them so much.

At length the children's voices were heard, and at the sound, Janet's heart leaped up with a throb of pain, but in words she gave no utterance to the pang.

"Weel, Sandy, lad, is this you," said she, as with mingled shyness and pleasure the boy came forward at his grandmother's bidding. He was a well-grown and healthy lad, with a frank face, and a thick shock of light curls. There was a happy look in his large blue eyes, and the smile came very naturally to his rather large mouth. To his mother, at the moment, he seemed altogether beautiful, and her heart cried out against the great trial that was before her. Sandy stood with his hand in hers, while his grandmother questioned him about the errand on which he had been sent, and she had time to quiet herself. But there was a look on her face as she sat there, gently stroking his fair hair with her hand, that was sad to see. Marian saw it with momentary wonder, and then coming up to her, she laid her arm gently over her neck and whispered,—

"Sandy is going with us too, Janet. There will be plenty of room for us all."

"I've been telling Menie that I canna leave grannie," said Sandy, turning gravely to his mother. "You'll hae Norman and Harry, and them a', but grannie has none but me."

"And wouldna you like to go with us too, Sandy, man?" asked his mother, with a pang.

"To yon fine country John Ferguson tells us about?" said Sandy, with sparkling eyes. "That I would, but it wouldna be right to leave grannie, and she says she's ower old to go so far-away—and over the great sea too."

"Nae, my lad, it wouldna be right to leave grannie by herself, and you'll need to bide here. Think aye first of what is right, and there will be no fear of you."

"And are you goin' mother?" asked Sandy, gravely.

"I doubt I'll need to go, Sandy lad, with the bairns. But I think less of it, that I can leave you to be a comfort to grannie. I'm sure I needna bid you be a good and obedient laddie to her, when—"

It needed a strong effort on her part to restrain the bitter cry of her heart.

"And will you never come back again, mother?"

"I dinna ken, Sandy. Maybe no. But that's no' for us to consider. It is present duty we maun think o'. The rest is in the Lord's hands."

What else could be said? That was the sum. It was duty and the Lord would take care of the rest. And so they parted with outward calm; and her mother never knew that that night, Janet, sending the children home before her, sat down in the lane, and "grat as if she would never greet mair." And Janet never knew, till long years afterwards, how that night, and many a night, Sandy woke from the sound sleep of childhood to find his grandmother praying and weeping, to think of the parting that was drawing near. Each could be strong to help the other, but alone, in silence and darkness, the poor shrinking heart had no power to cheat itself into the belief that bitter suffering did not lie before it.

Chapter Four.

It was worship time, and the bairns had gathered round the table with their books, to wait for their father's coming. It was a fair sight to see, but it was a sad one too, for they were motherless. It was all the more sad, that the bright faces and gay voices told how little they realised the greatness of the loss they had sustained. They were more gay than usual, for the elder brother had come home for the summer, perhaps for always; for the question was being eagerly discussed whether he would go back to the college again, or whether he was to go with the rest to America.

Arthur, a quiet, handsome lad of sixteen, said little. He was sitting with the sleepy Will upon his knee, and only put in a word now and then, when the others grew too loud and eager. He could have set them at rest about it; for he knew that his father had decided to leave him in Scotland till his studies were finished at the college.

"But there's no use to vex the lads and Graeme to-night," he said to himself; and he was right, as he had not quite made up his mind whether he was vexed himself or not. The thought of the great countries on the other side of the globe, and of the possible adventures that might await them there, had charms for him, as for every one of his age and spirit. But he was a sensible lad, and realised in some measure the advantage of such an education as could only be secured by remaining behind, and he knew in his heart that there was reason in what his father had said to him of the danger there was that the voyage and the new scenes in a strange land might unsettle his mind from his books. It cost him something to seem content, even while his father was speaking to him, and he knew well it would grieve the rest to know he was to be left behind, so he would say nothing about it, on this first night of his home-coming.

There was one sad face among them; for even Arthur's home-coming could not quite chase the shadow that had fallen on Graeme since the night a year ago while she sat dreaming her dreams in the firelight. It was only a year or little more, but it might have been three, judging from the change in her. She was taller and paler, and older-looking since then. And yet it was not so much that as something else that so changed her, Arthur thought, as he sat watching her. The change had come to her through their great loss, he knew; but he could not have understood, even if it had been told him, how much this had changed life to Graeme. He had suffered too more than words could ever tell. Many a time his heart had been ready to burst with unspeakable longing for his dead mother's loving presence,

her voice, her smile, her gentle chiding, till he could only cast himself down and weep vain tears upon the ground.

Graeme had borne all this, and what was worse to her, the hourly missing of her mother's counsel and care. Not one day of all the year but she had been made to feel the bitterness of their loss; not one day but she had striven to fill her mother's place to her father and them all, and her nightly heartbreak had been to know that she had striven in vain. "As how could it be otherwise than vain," she said often to herself, "so weak, so foolish, so impatient." And yet through all her weakness and impatience, she knew that she must never cease to try to fill her mother's place still.

Some thought of all this came into Arthur's mind, as she sat there leaning her head on one hand, while the other touched from time to time the cradle at her side. Never before had he realised how sad it was for them all that they had lost their mother, and how dreary life at home must have been all the year.

"Poor Graeme! and poor wee Rosie!" he says to himself, stooping over the cradle.

"How old is Rosie?" asked he, suddenly.

"Near three years old," said Janet.

"She winna be three till August," said Graeme in the same breath, and she turned beseeching eyes on Janet. For this was becoming a vexed question between them—the guiding of poor wee Rosie. Janet was a disciplinarian, and ever declared that Rosie "should go to her bed like ither folk;" but Graeme could never find it in her heart to vex her darling, and so the cradle still stood in the down-stairs parlour for Rosie's benefit, and it was the elder sister's nightly task to soothe the fretful little lady to her unwilling slumbers.

But Graeme had no need to fear discussion to-night. Janet's mind was full of other thoughts. One cannot shed oceans of tears and leave no sign; and Janet, by no means sure of herself, sat with her face turned from the light, intently gazing on the very small print of the Bible in her hand. On common occasions the bairns would not have let Janet's silence pass unheeded, but to-night they were busy discussing matters of importance, and except to say now and then, "Whist, bairns! your father will be here!" she sat without a word.

There was a hush at last, as a step was heard descending the stairs, and in a minute their father entered. It was not fear that quieted them. There was no fear in the frank, eager eyes turned toward him, as he sat down among them. His was a face to win confidence and respect, even at the first glance, so grave and earnest was it, yet withal so gentle and mild. In his children's hearts the sight of it stirred deep love, which grew to reverence as they grew in years. The calm that sat on that high, broad brow, told of conflicts passed, and victory secure, of weary wandering through desert places, over now and scarce remembered in the quiet of the resting-place he had found. His words and deeds, and his chastened views of earthly things told of a deep experience in "that life which is the heritage of the few—that true life of God in the soul with its strange, rich secrets, both of joy and sadness," whose peace the world knoweth not of, which naught beneath the sun can ever more disturb.

"The minister is changed—greatly changed." Janet had said many times to herself and others during the last few months, and she said it now, as her eye with the others turned on him as he entered. But with the thought there came to-night the consciousness that the change was not such a one as was to be deplored. He had grown older and graver, and more silent than he used to be, but he had grown to something higher, purer, holier than of old, and like a sudden gleam of light breaking through the darkness, there flashed into Janet's mind the promise, "All things shall work together for good to them that love God." Her lips had often spoken the words before, but now her eyes saw the fulfilment, and her failing faith was strengthened. If that bitter trial, beyond which she had vainly striven to see aught but evil, had indeed wrought good, for her beloved friend and master; need she fear any change or any trial which the future might have in store for her?

"It will work for good, this pain and separation," murmured she. "I'm no' like the minister, but frail and foolish, and wilful too whiles, but I humbly hope that I am one of those who love the Lord."

"Well, bairns!" said the father. There was a gentle stir and movement among them, though there was no need, for Graeme had already set her father's chair and opened the Bible at the place. She pushed aside the cradle a little that he might pass, and he sat down among them.

"We'll take a Psalm, to-night," said he, after a minute's turning of the leaves from a "namey chapter" in Chronicles, the usual place. He chose the forty-sixth.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

"Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea."

And thus on through the next.

"He shall choose our inheritance for us, the excellency of Jacob, whom he loved."

And still on through the next till the last verse,—

"This God is our God for ever and ever. He will be our guide, even unto death," seemed like the triumphant ending of a song of praise.

Then there was a momentary hush and pause. Never since the mother's voice had grown silent in death had the voice of song risen at worship time. They had tried it more than once, and failed in bitter weeping. But Janet, fearful that their silence was a sin, had to-night brought the hymn-books which they always used, and laid them at Arthur's side. In the silence that followed the reading Graeme looked from him to them, but Arthur shook his head. He was not sure that his voice would make its way through the lump that had been gathering in his throat while his father read,

and he felt that to fail would be dreadful, so there was silence still—

There was a little lingering round the fire after worship was over, but when Arthur went quietly away the boys soon followed. Graeme would fain have stayed to speak a few words to her father, on this first night of his return. He was sitting gazing into the fire, with a face so grave that his daughter's heart ached for his loneliness. But a peevish voice from the cradle admonished her that she must to her task again, and so with a quiet "good-night, papa," she took her little sister in her arms. Up-stairs she went, murmuring tender words to her "wee birdie," her "bonny lammie," her "little gentle dove," more than repaid for all her weariness and care, by the fond nestling of the little head upon her bosom; for her love, which was more a mother's than a sister's, made the burden light.

The house was quiet at last. The boys had talked themselves to sleep, and the minister had gone to his study again. This had been one of Rosie's "weary nights." The voices of her brothers had wakened her in the parlour, and Graeme had a long walk with the fretful child, before she was soothed to sleep again. But she did sleep at last, and just as Janet had finished her nightly round, shutting the windows and barring the doors, Graeme crept down-stairs, and entered the kitchen. The red embers still glowed on the hearth, but Janet was in the very act of "resting the fire" for the night.

"Oh! Janet," said Graeme, "put on another peat. I'm cold, and I want to speak to you."

"Miss Graeme! You up at this time o' the night! What ails yon cankered fairy now?"

"Oh, Janet! She's asleep long ago, and I want to speak to you." And before Janet could remonstrate, one of the dry peats set ready for the morning fire was thrown on the embers, and soon blazed brightly up. Graeme crouched down before it, with her arm over Janet's knee.

"Janet, what did your mother say? And oh! Janet, Arthur says my father—" Turning with a sudden movement, Graeme let her head fall on Janet's lap, and burst into tears. Janet tried to lift her face.

"Whist! Miss Graeme! What ails the lassie? It's no' the thought of going awa', surely? You hae kenned this was to be a while syne. You hae little to greet about, if you but kenned it—you, who are going altogether."

"Janet, Arthur is to bide in Scotland."

"Well, it winna be for long. Just till he's done at the college. I dare say it is the best thing that can happen him to bide. But who told you?"

"Arthur told me after we went up-stairs to-night. And, oh! Janet! what will I ever do without him?"

"Miss Graeme, my dear! You hae done without him these two years already mostly, and even if we all were to bide in Scotland, you would hae to do without him still. He could na' be here and at the college too. And when he's done with that he would hae to go elsewhere. Families canna aye bide together. Bairns maun part."

"But, Janet, to go so far and leave him! It will seem almost like death."

"But, lassie it's no' death. There's a great difference. And as for seeing him again, that is as the Lord wills. Anyway, it doesna become you to cast a slight on your father's judgment, as though he had decided unwisely in this matter. Do you no' think it will cost him something to part from his first-born son?"

"But, Janet, why need he part from him? Think how much better it would be for him, and for us all, if Arthur should go with us. Arthur is almost a man."

"Na, lass. He'll no' hae a man's sense this while yet. And as for his goin' or bidin', it's no' for you or me to seek for the why and the wherefore o' the matter. It might be better—more cheery—for you and us all if your elder brother were with us, but it wouldna be best for him to go, or your father would never leave him, you may be sure o' that."

There was a long silence. Graeme sat gazing into the dying embers. Janet threw on another peat, and a bright blaze sprang up again.

"Miss Graeme, my dear, if it's a wise and right thing for your father to take you all over the sea, the going or the biding o' your elder brother can make no real difference. You must seek to see the rights o' this. If your father hasna him to help him with the bairns and—ither things, the more he'll need you, and you maun hae patience, and strive no' to disappoint him. You hae muckle to be thankful for—you that can write to ane anither like a printed book, to keep ane anither in mind. There's nae fear o' your growin' out o' acquaintance, and he'll soon follow, you may be sure. Oh, lassie, lassie! if you could only ken!"

Graeme raised herself up, and leaned both her arms on Janet's lap.

"Janet, what did your mother say?"

Janet gulped something down, and said, huskily,—

"Oh! she said many a thing, but she made nae wark about it. I told your father I would go, and I will. My mother doesna object."

"And Sandy?" said Graeme, softly, for there was something working in Janet's face, which she did not like to see.

"Sandy will aye hae my mother, and she'll hae Sandy. But, lassie, it winna bear speaking about to-night. Gang awa' to your bed."

Graeme rose; but did not go.

“But couldna Sandy go with us? It would only be one more. Surely, Janet—”

Janet made a movement of impatience, or entreaty, Graeme did not know which, but it stopped her.

“Na, na! Sandy couldna leave my mother, even if it would be wise for me to take him. There’s no more to be said about that.” And in spite of herself, Janet’s tears gushed forth, as mortal eyes had never seen them gush before, since she was a herd lassie on the hills. Graeme looked on, hushed and frightened, and in a little, Janet quieted herself and wiped her face with her apron.

“You see, dear, what with one thing and what with another, I’m weary, and vexed to-night, and no’ just myself. Matters will look more hopeful, both to you and to me, the morn. There’s one thing certain. Both you and me hae much to do that maun be done, before we see saut water, without losing time in grumblin’ at what canna be helped. What with the bairns’ clothes and ither things, we winna need to be idle; so let us awa’ to our beds that we may be up betimes the morn.”

Graeme still lingered.

“Oh, Janet! if my mother were only here! How easy it all would be.”

“Ay, lass! I hae said that to myself many a time this while. But He that took her canna do wrong. There was some need for it, or she would hae been here to-night. You maun aye strive to fill her place to them all.”

Graeme’s tears flowed forth afresh.

“Oh, Janet! I think you’re mocking me when you say that. How could I ever fill her place?”

“No’ by your ain strength and wisdom surely my lammie. But it would be limiting His grace to say He canna make you all you should be—all that she was, and that is saying muckle; for she was wise far by the common. But now gang awa’ to your bed, and dinna forget your good words. There’s no fear but you will be in God’s keeping wherever you go.”

Janet was right; they had need of all their strength and patience during the next two months. When Janet had confidence in herself, she did what was to be done with a will. But she had little skill in making purchases, and less experience, and Graeme was little better. Many things must be got, and money could not be spent lavishly, and there was no time to lose.

But, with the aid of Mrs Smith and other kind friends, their preparations were got through at last. Purchases were made, mending and making of garments were accomplished, and the labour of packing was got through, to their entire satisfaction.

The minister said good-bye to each of his people separately, either in the kirk, or in his own home or theirs; but he shrunk from last words, and from the sight of all the sorrowful faces that were sure to gather to see them go; so he went away at night, and stayed with a friend, a few miles on their way. But it was the fairest of summer mornings—the mist just lifting from the hills—and the sweet air filled with the laverock’s song, when Janet and the bairns looked their last upon their home.

Chapter Five.

They found themselves on board the “Steadfast” at last. The day of sailing was bright and beautiful, a perfect day for the sea, or the land either; but the wind rose in the night and the rain came on, and a very dreary morning broke on them as the last glimpse of land was fading in the distance.

“Oh! how dismal!” murmured Graeme, as in utter discomfort she seated herself on the damp deck, with her little sister in her arms. All the rest, excepting her father, and not excepting Janet, were down with sea-sickness, and even Norman and Harry had lost heart under its depressing influence. Another hour in the close cabin, and Graeme felt she must yield too—and then what would become of Rose? So into a mist that was almost rain she came, as the day was breaking, and sat down with her little sister upon the deck. For a minute she closed her eyes on the dreariness around, and leaned her head on a hencoop at her side. Rose had been fretful and uneasy all night, but now well pleased with the new sights around her, she sat still on her sister’s lap. Soon the cheerful voice of the Captain, startled Graeme.

“Touch and go with you I see, Miss Elliott. I am afraid you will have to give in like the rest.”

Graeme looked up with a smile that was sickly enough.

“Not if I can help it,” said she.

“Well, you are a brave lass to think of helping it with a face like that. Come and take a quick walk up and down the deck with me. It will do you good. Set down the bairn,” for Graeme was rising with Rose in her arms. “No harm will come to her, and you don’t look fit to carry yourself. Sit you there, my wee fairy, till we come back again. Here, Ruthven,” he called to a young man who was walking up and down on the other side of the deck, “come and try your hand at baby tending. That may be among the work required of you in the backwoods of Canada, who knows?”

The young man came forward laughing, and Graeme submitted to be led away. The little lady left on the deck

seemed very much inclined to resent the unceremonious disposal of so important a person, as she was always made to feel herself to be. But she took a look into the face of her new friend and thought better of it. His face was a good one, frank and kindly, and Rose suffered herself to be lifted up and placed upon his knee, and when Graeme came back again, after a brisk walk of fifteen minutes, she found the little one, usually so fretful and "ill to do with," laughing merrily in the stranger's arms. She would have taken her, but Rose was pleased to stay.

"You are the very first stranger that ever she was willing to go to," said she, gratefully. Looking up, she did not wonder at Rosie's fancy for the face that smiled down upon her.

"I ought to feel myself highly honoured," said he.

"I think we'll give him the benefit of little Missy's preference," said Captain Armstrong, who had been watching Graeme with a little amused anxiety since her walk was ended. The colour that the exercise had given her was fast fading from her face, till her very lips grew white with the deadly sickness that was coming over her.

"You had best go to the cabin a wee while. You must give up, I think," said he.

Graeme rose languidly.

"Yes, I'm afraid so. Come Rosie."

"Leave the little one with me," said Mr Ruthven. And that was the last Graeme saw of Rosie for the next twelve hours, for she was not to escape the misery that had fallen so heavily upon the rest, and very wearily the day passed. It passed, however, at last, and the next, which was calm and bright as heart could wish, saw them all on deck again. They came with dizzy heads and uncertain steps it is true, but the sea air soon brought colour to their cheeks, and strength to their limbs, and their sea life fairly began.

But alas! for Janet. The third day, and the tenth found her still in her berth, altogether unable to stand up against the power that held her. In vain she struggled against it. The "Steadfast's" slightest motion was sufficient to overpower her quite, till at last she made no effort to rise, but lay there, disgusted with herself and all the world. On the calmest and fairest days they would prevail on her to be helped up to the deck, and there amid shawls and pillows she would sit, enduring one degree less of misery than she did in the close cabin below.

"It was just a judgment upon her," she said, "to let her see what a poor conceited body she was. She, that had been making muckle o' herself, as though the Lord couldna take care o' the bairns without her help."

It was not sufficient to be told hourly that the children were well and happy, or to see it with her own eyes. This aggravated her trouble. "Useless body that I am." And Janet did not wait for a sight of a strange land, to begin to pine for the land she had left, and what with sea-sickness and home-sickness together, she had very little hope that she would ever see land of any kind again.

The lads and Marian enjoyed six weeks of perfect happiness. Graeme and their father at first were in constant fear of their getting into danger. It would only have provoked disobedience had all sorts of climbing been forbidden, for the temptation to try to outdo each other in their imitation of the sailors, was quite irresistible; and not a rope in the rigging, nor a corner in the ship, but they were familiar with before the first few days were over. "And, indeed, they were wonderfully preserved, the foolish lads," their father acknowledged, and grew content about them at last.

Before me lies the journal of the voyage, faithfully kept in a big book given by Arthur for the purpose. A full and complete history of the six weeks might be written from it, but I forbear. Norman or Harry, in language obscurely nautical, notes daily the longitude or the latitude, and the knots they make an hour. There are notices of whales, seen in the distance, and of shoals of porpoises seen near at hand. There are stories given which they have heard in the forecabin, and hints of practical jokes and tricks played on one another. The history of each sailor in the ship is given, from "handsome Frank, the first Yankee, and the best-singer" the boys ever saw, to Father Abraham, the Dutchman, "with short legs and shorter temper."

Graeme writes often, and daily bewails Janet's continued illness, and rejoices over "wee Rosie's" improved health and temper. With her account of the boys and their doings, she mingles emphatic wishes "that they had more sense," but on the whole they are satisfactory. She has much to say of the books she has been reading—"a good many of Sir Walter Scott's that papa does not object to," lent by Allan Ruthven. There are hints of discussions with him about the books, too; and Graeme declares she "has no patience" with Allan. For his favourites in Sir Walter's books are seldom those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; and there are allusions to battles fought with him in behalf of the good name of the Old Puritans—men whom Graeme delights to honour. But on the whole it is to be seen, that Allan is a favourite with her and with them all.

The beautiful Bay of Boston was reached at last, and with an interest that cannot be told, the little party—including the restored Janet—regarded the city to which they were drawing near. Their ideas of what they were to see first in the new world had been rather indefinite and vague. Far more familiar with the early history of New England—with such scenes as the landing of the pilgrims, and the departure of Roger Williams to a still more distant wilderness, than with the history of modern advance, it was certainly not such a city they had expected to see. But they gazed with ever increasing delight, as they drew nearer and nearer to it through the beautiful bay.

"And this is the wonderful new world, that promises so much to us all," said Allan.

"They have left unstained what there they found.
Freedom to worship God,"

murmured Graeme, softly. "I'm sure I shall like the American people."

But Allan was taking to heart the thought of parting from them all, more than was at all reasonable, he said to himself, and he could not answer her with a jest as he might at another time.

"You must write and tell me about your new home," said he.

"Yes—the boys will write; we will all write. I can hardly believe that six weeks ago we had never seen you. Oh! I wish you were going with us," said Graeme.

"Allan will see Arthur when he comes. Arthur will want to see all the country," said Norman.

"And maybe he will like the Queen's dominions best, and wish to settle there," said Allan.

"Oh! but we shall see you long before Arthur comes," said Graeme. "Is it very far to Canada?"

"I don't know—not very far, I suppose. I don't feel half so hopeful now that I am about to know what my fate is to be. I have a great dread on me. I have a mind not to go to my uncle at all, but seek my fortune here."

"But your mother wouldna be pleased," said Graeme, gravely.

"No. She has great hopes of what my uncle may do for me. But it would be more agreeable to me not to be confined to one course. I should like to look about me a little, before I get fairly into the treadmill of business."

In her heart Graeme thought it an excellent thing for Allan that he had his uncle to go to. She had her own ideas about young people's looking about them, with nothing particular to do, and quite agreed with Janet and Dr Watts as to the work likely to be found for them to do. But she thought it would be very nice for them all, if instead of setting off at once for Canada, Allan might have gone with them for a little while. Before she could say this, however, Janet spoke.

"Ay, that's bairn-like, though you hae a man's stature. I dare say you would think it a braw thing to be at naeboddy's bidding; but, my lad, it's ae' thing to hae a friend's house, and a welcome waiting you in a strange land like this, and it's anither thing to sit solitary in a bare lodging, even though you may hae liberty to come and go at your ain will. If you're like the lads that I ken' maist about, you'll be none the worse of a little wholesome restraint. Be thankful for your mercies."

Allan laughed good-humouredly.

"But really, Mrs Nasmyth, you are too hard on me. Just think what a country this is. Think of the mountains, and rivers and lakes, and of all these wonderful forests and prairies that Norman reads about, and is it strange that I should grudge myself to a dull counting-room, with all these things to enjoy? It is not the thought of the restraint that troubles me. I only fear I shall become too soon content with the routine, till I forget how to enjoy anything but the making and counting of money. I am sure anything would be better than to come to that."

"You'll hae many things between you and the like o' that, if you do your duty. You have them you are going to, and them you hae left—your mother and brother. And though you had none o' them, you could aye find some poor body to be kind to, to keep your heart soft. Are you to bide in your uncle's house?"

"I don't know. Mrs Peter Stone, that was home last year, told us that my uncle lives in the country, and his clerks live in the town anywhere they like. I shall do as the rest do I suppose. All the better—I shall be the more able to do what I like with my leisure."

"Ay, it's aye liberty that the like o' you delight in. Weel, see that you make a good use of it, that's the chief thing. Read your Bible and gang to the kirk, and there's no fear o' you. And dinna forget to write to your mother. She's had many a weary thought about you 'ere this time, I'll warrant."

"I daresay I shall be content enough. But it seems like parting from home again, to think of leaving you all. My bonnie wee Rosie, what shall I ever do without you?" said Allan, caressing the little one who had clambered on his knee.

"And what shall we do without you?" exclaimed a chorus of voices; and Norman added,—

"What is the use of your going all the way to Canada, when there's enough for you to do here. Come with us, Allan, man, and never mind your uncle."

"And what will you do for him, in case he should give his uncle up for you?" demanded Janet, sharply.

"Oh! he'll get just what we'll get ourselves, a chance to make his own way, and I doubt whether he'll get more where he's going. I've no faith in rich uncles." Allan laughed.

"Thank you, Norman, lad. I must go to Canada first, however, whether I stay there or not. Maybe you will see me again, sooner than I think now. Surely, in the great town before us, there might be found work, and a place for me."

Far-away before them, stretched the twinkling lights of the town, and silence fell upon them as they watched them. In another day they would be among the thousands who lived, and laboured, and suffered in it. What awaited them there? Not that they feared the future, or doubted a welcome. Indeed, they were too young to think much of possible evils. A new life was opening before them, no fear but it would be a happy one. Graeme had seen more trouble than the rest, being older, and she was naturally less hopeful, but then she had no fear for them all, only the thought that they were about to enter on a new, untried life, made her excited and anxious, and the thought of parting with their friend made her sad.

As for Janet, she was herself again. Her courage returned when the sea-sickness departed, and now she was ready "to put a stout heart to a stiff brae" as of old. "Disjaskit looking" she was, and not so strong as she used to be, but she was as active as ever, and more than thankful to be able to keep her feet again. "She had been busy all the morning," overhauling the belongings of the family, preparatory to landing, much to the discomfort of all concerned. All the morning Graeme had submitted with a passably good grace to her cross-questionings as to the "guiding" of this and that, while she had been unable to give personal supervision to family matters. Thankful to see her at her post again, Graeme tried to make apparent her own good management of matters in general, during the voyage, but she was only partially successful. There were far more rents and stains, and soiled garments, than Janet considered at all necessary, and besides many familiar articles of wearing apparel were missing, after due search made. In vain Graeme begged her never to mind just now. They were in the big blue chest, or the little brown one, she couldna just mind where she had put them, but of course they would be found, when all the boxes were opened.

"Maybe no," said Janet. "There are some long fingers, I doubt, in the steerage yonder. Miss Graeme, my dear, we would need to be carefu'. If I'm no' mistaken, I saw one o' Norman's spotted handkerchiefs about the neck o' yon lang Johnny Heeman, and yon little Irish lassie ga'ed past me the day, with a pinafore very like one o' Menie's. I maun ha' a look at it again."

"Oh, Janet! never mind. I gave wee Norah the pinafore, and the old brown frock besides. She had much need of them. And poor Johnny came on board on the pilot boat you ken, and he hadna a change, and Norman gave him the handkerchief and an old waistcoat of papa's,—and—"

Janet's hands were uplifted in consternation.

"Keep's and guide's lassie—that I should say such a word. Your papa hadna an old waistcoat in his possession. What for did you do the like o' that? The like o' Norman or Menie might be excused, but you that I thought had some sense and discretion. Your father's waistcoat! Heard anybody ever the like? You may be thankful that you hae somebody that kens the value of good clothes, to take care of you and them—"

"Oh! I'm thankful as you could wish," said Graeme, laughing. "I would rather see you sitting there, in the midst of those clothes, than to see the Queen on her throne. I confess to the waistcoat, and some other things, but mind, I'm responsible no longer. I resign my office of general caretaker to you. Success to you," and Graeme made for the cabin stairs. She turned again, however.

"Never heed, Janet, about the things. Think what it must be to have no change, and we had so many. Poor wee Norah, too. Her mother's dead you ken, and she looked so miserable."

Janet was pacified.

"Weel, Miss Graeme, I'll no' heed. But my dear, it's no' like we'll find good clothes growing upon trees in this land, more than in our own. And we had need to be careful. I wonder where a' the strippet pillow slips can be? I see far more of the fine ones dirty than were needed, if you had been careful, and guarded them."

But Graeme was out of hearing before she came to this.

They landed at last, and a very dreary landing it was. They had waited for hours, till the clouds should exhaust themselves, but the rain was still falling when they left the ship. Eager and excited, the whole party were, but not after the anticipated fashion. Graeme was surprised, and a little mortified, to find no particular emotions swelling at her heart, as her feet touched the soil which the Puritans had rendered sacred. Indeed, she was too painfully conscious, that the sacred soil was putting her shoes and frock in jeopardy, and had too much trouble to keep the umbrella over Marian and herself, to be able to give any thanks to the sufferings of the Pilgrim fathers, or mothers either. Mr Elliott had been on shore in the morning, and had engaged rooms for them in a quiet street, and thither Allan Ruthven, carrying little Rose, was to conduct them, while he attended to the proper bestowment of their baggage.

This duty Janet fain would have shared with him. Her reverence for the minister, and his many excellencies, did not imply entire confidence in his capacity, for that sort of business, and when he directed her to go with the bairns, it was with many misgivings that she obeyed. Indeed, as the loaded cart took its departure in another direction, she expressed herself morally certain, that they had seen the last of it, for she fully believed that, "yon sharp-looking lad could carry it off from beneath the minister's nose."

Dread of more distant evils was, however, driven from her thoughts by present necessities. The din and bustle of the crowded wharf, would have been sufficient to "daze" the sober-minded country-woman, without the charge of little Will, and unnumbered bundles, and the two "daft laddies forby." On their part, Norman and Harry scorned the idea of being taken care of, and loaded with baskets and other movables, made their way through the crowd, in a manner that astonished the bewildered Janet.

"Bide a wee, Norman, man. Harry, you daft laddie, where are you going? Now dinna throw awa' good pennies for such green trash." For Harry had made a descent on a fruit stall, and his pockets were turned inside out in a twinkling.

"Saw ever anybody such cheatry," exclaimed Janet, as the dark lady pocketed the coins with a grin, quite unmindful of her expostulations. "Harry lad, a fool and his money is soon parted. And look! see here, you hae set down the basket in the dubs, and your sister's bed gowns will be all wet. Man! hae you no sense?"

"Nae muckle, I doubt, Janet," said Harry, with an exaggerated gesture of humility and penitence, turning the basket upside down, to ascertain the extent of the mischief. "It's awfu' like Scotch dubs, now isn't it? Never mind, I'll give it a wash at the next pump, and it 'ill he none the worse. Give me Will's hand, and I'll take care of him."

"Take care o' yourself, and leave Will with me. But, dear me, where's Mr Allan?" For their escort had disappeared, and she stood alone, with the baskets and the boys in the rainy street. Before her consternation had reached a climax, however, Ruthven reappeared, having safely bestowed the others in their lodgings. Like a discreet lad, as Janet was inclined to consider him, he possessed himself of Will, and some of the bundles, and led the way. At the door stood the girls, anxiously looking out for them.

If their hostess had, at first, some doubt as to the sanity of her new lodgers, there was little wonder. Such a confusion of tongues her American ears had not heard before. Graeme condoled with Will, who was both wet and weary. Janet searched for missing bundles, and bewailed things in general. Marian was engaged in a friendly scuffle for an apple, and Allan was tossing Rosie up to the ceiling, while Norman, perched on the bannisters high above them all, waved his left hand, bidding farewell, with many words, to an imaginary Scotland, while with his right he beckoned to the "brave new world" which was to be the scene of his wonderful achievements and triumphs.

The next day rose bright and beautiful. Mr Elliott had gone to stay with his friend Mr Caldwell, and Janet was over head and ears in a general "sorting" of things, and made no objections when it was proposed that the boys and Graeme should go out with Allan Ruthven to see the town. It is doubtful whether there was ever so much of Boston seen in one day before, without the aid of a carriage and pair. It was a day never to be forgotten by the children. The enjoyment was not quite unmixed to Graeme, for she was in constant fear of losing some of them. Harry was lost sight of for a while, but turned up again with a chapter of adventures at his finger ends for their amusement.

The crowning enjoyment of the day was the treat given by Allan Ruthven on their way home. They were very warm and tired, and hungry too, and the low, cool room down some steps into which they were taken, was delightful. There was never such fruit—there were never such cakes as these that were set before them. As for the ice cream, it was—inexpressible. In describing the feast afterwards, Marian could never get beyond the ice cream. She was always at a loss for adjectives to describe it. It was like the manna that the Children of Israel had in the wilderness, she thought, and surely they ought to have been content with it.

Graeme was the only one who did not enjoy it thoroughly. She had an idea that there were not very many guineas left in Allan's purse, and she felt bound to remonstrate with him because of his extravagance.

"Never mind, Graeme, dear," said Norman; "Allan winna have a chance to treat us to manna this while again; and when I am Mayor of Boston, I'll give him manna and quails too."

They came home tired, but they had a merry evening. Even Graeme "unbent," as Harry said, and joined in the mirth; and Janet had enough to do to reason them into quietness when bed-time came.

"One would think when Mr Allan is going away in the morning, you might have the grace to seem sorry, and let us have a while's peace," said she.

If the night was merry, the morning farewells were sad indeed, and long, long did they wait in vain for tidings of Allan Ruthven.

Chapter Six.

"But where's the town?"

The bairns were standing on the highest step of the meeting-house, gazing with eyes full of wonder and delight on the scene before them. The meeting-house stood on a high hill, and beyond a wide sloping field at the foot of the hill, lay Merleville pond, like a mirror in a frame of silver and gold. Beyond, and on either side, were hills rising behind hills, the most distant covered with great forest trees, "the trees under which the red Indians used to wander," Graeme whispered. There were trees on the nearer hills too, sugaries, and thick pine groves, and a circle of them round the margin of the pond. Over all the great Magician of the season had waved his wand, and decked them in colours dazzling to the eyes accustomed to the grey rocks and purple heather, and to the russet garb of autumn in their native land.

There were farm-houses too, and the scattered houses along the village street looking white and fair beneath crimson maples and yellow beech-trees. Above hung a sky undimmed by a single cloud, and the air was keen, yet mild with the October sunshine. They could not have had a lovelier time for the first glimpse of their new home, yet there was an echo of disappointment in Harry's voice as he asked,—

"Where's the town?"

They had been greatly impressed by the description given them of Merleville by Mr Sampson Snow, in whose great wagon they had been conveyed over the twenty miles of country roads that lay between the railway and their new home.

"I was the first white child born in the town," said Sampson. "I know every foot of it as well as I do my own barn, and I don't want no better place to live in than Merleville. It don't lack but a fraction of being ten miles square. Right in the centre, perhaps a *leetle* south, there's about the prettiest pond you ever saw. There are some first-rate farms there, mine is one of them, but in general the town is better calculated for pasturage than tillage. I shouldn't wonder but it would be quite a manufacturing place too after a spell, when they've used up all the other water privileges in the State. There's quite a fall in the Merle river, just before it runs into the pond. We've got a fullin'-mill and a grist-mill on it now. They'd think everything of it in your country."

"There's just one meetin'-house in it. That's where your pa'll preach if our folks conclude to hire him a spell. The land's about all taken up, though it hain't reached the highest point of cultivation yet. The town is set off into nine

school-districts, and I consider that our privileges are first-rate. And if it's nutting and squirrel-hunting you're after, boys, all you have to do is to apply to Uncle Sampson, and he'll arrange your business for you."

"Ten miles square and nine school-districts!" Boston could be nothing to it, surely, the boys thought. The inconsistency of talking about pasturage and tillage, nutting and squirrel-hunting in the populous place which they imagined Merleville to be, did not strike them. This was literally their first glimpse of Merleville, for the rain had kept them within doors, and the mist had hidden all things the day before and now they looked a little anxiously for the city they had pictured to themselves.

"But Norman! Harry! I think this is far better than a town," said Marian, eagerly. "Eh, Graeme, isna yon a bonny water?"

"Ay, it's grand," said Graeme. "Norman, this is far better than a town."

The people were beginning to gather to service by this time; but the children were too eager and too busy to heed them for a while. With an interest that was half wonder, half delight, Graeme gazed to the hills and the water and the lovely sky. It might be the "bonny day"—the mild air and the sunshine, and the new fair scene before her, or it might be the knowledge that after much care, and many perils, they were all safe together in this quiet place where they were to find a home; she scarce knew what it was, but her heart felt strangely light, and lips and eyes smiled as she stood there holding one of Marian's hands in hers, while the other wandered through the curls of Will's golden hair. She did not speak for a long time; but the others were not so quiet, but whispered to each other, and pointed out the objects that pleased them most.

"Yon's Merle river, I suppose, where we see the water glancing through the trees."

"And yonder is the kirkyard," said Marian, gravely. "It's no' a bonny place."

"It's bare and lonely looking," said Harry.

"They should have yew trees and ivy and a high wall, like where mamma is," said Marian.

"But this is a new country; things are different here," said Norman.

"But surely they might have trees."

"And look, there are cows in it. The gate is broken. It's a pity."

"Look at yon road that goes round the water, and then up between the hills through the wood. That's bonny, I'm sure."

"And there's a white house, just where the road goes out of sight. I would like to live there."

"Yes, there are many trees about it, and another house on this side."

And so they talked on, till a familiar voice accosted them. Their friend Mr Snow was standing beside them, holding a pretty, but delicate little girl, by the hand. He had been watching them for some time.

"Well how do you like the looks of things?"

"It's bonny here," said Marian.

"Where's the town?" asked Harry, promptly.

Mr Snow made a motion with his head, intended to indicate the scene before them.

"Lacks a fraction of being ten miles square."

"It's all trees," said little Will.

"Wooden country, eh, my little man?"

"Country! yes, it's more like the country than like a town," said Harry.

"Well, yes. On this side of the water, we can afford to have our towns, as big as some folks' countries," said Mr Snow, gravely.

"But it's like no town I ever saw," said Norman. "There are no streets, no shops, no market, no anything that makes a town."

"There's freedom on them hills," said Mr Snow, waving his hand with an air.

During the journey the other day, Mr Snow and the lads had discussed many things together; among the rest, the institutions of their respective countries, and Mr Snow had, as he expressed it, "Set their British blood to bilin'," by hints about "aristocracy," "despotism," and so on. "He never had had such a good time," he said, afterwards. They were a little fiery, but first-rate smart boys, and as good natured as kittens, and he meant to see to them. He meant to amuse himself with them too, it seemed. The boys fired up at once, and a hot answer was only arrested on their lips, by the timely interference of Graeme.

"Whist, Norman. Harry, mind it is the Sabbath-day, and look yonder is papa coming up with Judge Merle," and turning

smilingly to Mr Snow, she added, "We like the place very much. It's beautiful everywhere. It's far bonnier than a town. I'm glad there's no town, and so are the boys, though they were disappointed at first."

"No town?" repeated Mr Snow.

But there was no time for explanations. Their father had reached the steps, and the children were replying to the greeting of the Judge. Judge Merle, was in the opinion of the majority, the greatest man in Merleville, if not in the country. The children had made his acquaintance on Saturday. He had brought them with his own hands, through the rain, a pail of sweet milk, and another of hominy, a circumstance which gave them a high idea of his kindness of heart, but which sadly overturned all their preconceived notions with regard to the dignity of his office. Janet, who looked on the whole thing as a proper tribute of respect to the minister, augured well from it, what he might expect in his new parish, and congratulated herself accordingly. The children were glad to see him, among the many strangers around them, and when Mr Snow gave him a familiar nod, and a "Morning Judge," Graeme felt a little inclined, to resent the familiarity. The Judge did not resent it, however. On the contrary, when Mr Snow, nodding sideways toward the minister, said, "He guessed the folks would get about fitted this time," he nodded as familiarly back, and said, "He shouldn't wonder if they did."

There are no such churches built in New England now, as that into which the minister and his children were led by the Judge. It was very large and high, and full of windows. It was the brilliant light that struck the children first, accustomed as they had been to associate with the Sabbath worship, the dimness of their father's little chapel in Clayton. Norman the mathematician was immediately seized with a perverse desire to count the panes, and scandalised Graeme by communicating to her the result of his calculation, just as her father rose up to begin.

How many people there were in the high square pews, and in the galleries, and even in the narrow aisles. So many, that Graeme not dreaming of the quiet nooks hidden among the hills she had thought so beautiful, wondered where they all could come from. Keen, intelligent faces, many of them were, that turned toward the minister as he rose; a little hard and fixed, perhaps, those of the men, and far too delicate, and care-worn, those of the women, but earnest, thoughtful faces, many of them were, and kindly withal.

Afterwards—years and years afterwards, when the bairns had to shut their eyes to recall their father's face, as it gleamed down upon them from that strange high pulpit, the old people used to talk to them of this first sermon in Merleville. There was a charm in the Scottish accent, and in the earnest manner of the minister, which won upon these people wonderfully. It was heart speaking to heart, an earnest, loving, human heart, that had sinned and had been forgiven, that had suffered and had been comforted; one who, through all, had by God's grace struggled upwards, speaking to men of like passions and necessities. He spoke as one whom God had given a right to warn, to counsel, to console. He spoke as one who must give account, and his hearers listened earnestly. So earnestly that Deacon Fish forgot to hear for Deacon Slowcome, and Deacon Slowcome forgot to hear for people generally. Deacon Sterne who seldom forgot anything which he believed to be his duty, failed for once to prove the orthodoxy of the doctrine by comparing it with his own, and received it as it fell from the minister's lips, as the very word of God.

"He means just as he says," said Mr Snow to young Mr Greenleaf, as he overtook him in going home that afternoon. "He wasn't talking just because it was his business to. When he was a telling us what mighty things the grace of God can do, he believed it himself, I guess."

"They all do, don't they?" said Mr Greenleaf.

"Well, I don't know. They all say they do. But there's Deacon Fish now," said Mr Snow, nodding to that worthy, as his wagon whirled past, "he don't begin to think that grace or anything else, could make *me* such a good man as he is."

Mr Greenleaf laughed.

"If the vote of the town was taken, I guess it would be decided that grace wouldn't have a great deal to do."

"Well, the town would make a mistake. Deacon Fish ain't to brag of for goodness, I don't think; but he's a sight better than I be. But see here, Squire, don't you think the new minister'll about fit?"

"He'll fit *me*," said the Squire. "It is easy to see that he is not a common man. But he won't fit the folks here, or they won't fit him. It would be too good luck if he were to stay here."

"Well, I don't know about that. There are folks enough in the town that know what's good when they hear it, and I guess they'll keep him if they can. And I guess he'll stay. He seems to like the look of things. He is a dreadful mild-spoken man, and I guess he won't want much in the way of pay. I guess you had better shell out some yourself, Squire. / mean to."

"You are a rich man, Mr Snow. You can afford it."

"Come now, Squire, that's good. I've worked harder for every dollar I've got, than you've done for any ten you ever earned."

The Squire shook his head.

"You don't understand my kind of work, or you wouldn't say so. But about the minister? If I were to pledge myself to any amount for his support, I should feel just as though I were in a measure responsible for the right arrangement of all things with regard to his salary, and the paying of it. Anything I have to do with, I want to have go right along without any trouble, and unless Merleville folks do differently than they have so far, it won't be so in this matter."

"Yes, I shouldn't wonder if there would be a hitch before long. But I guess you'd better think before you say no. I

guess it'll pay in the long run."

"Thank you, Mr Snow. I'll take your advice and think of it," said Mr Greenleaf, as Sampson stopped at his own gate. He watched him going up the hill.

"He's goin' along up to the widow Jones' now, I'll bet. I shouldn't wonder if he was a goin' to lose me my chance of getting her place. It kind o' seems as though I ought to have it; it fits on so nice to mine. And they say old Skinflint is going to foreclose right off. I'll have to make things fit pretty tight this winter, if I have to raise the cash. But it does seem as if I ought to have it. Maybe it's Celestia the Squire wants, and not the farm."

He came back to close the gate which, in his earnestness, he had forgotten, and leaned for a moment over it.

"Well, now, it does beat all. Here have I been forgetting all about what I have heard over yonder to the meeting-house. Deacon Sterne needn't waste no more words, to prove total depravity to me. I've got to know it pretty well by this time;" and, with a sigh, he turned toward the house.

Chapter Seven.

The next week was a busy one to all. Mr Elliott, during that time, took up his residence at Judge Merle's, only making daily visits to the little brown house behind the elms where Janet and the bairns were putting things to rights. There was a great deal to be done, but it was lovely weather, and all were in excellent spirits, and each did something to help. The lads broke sticks and carried water, and Janet's mammoth washing was accomplished in an incredibly short time; and before the week was over the little brown house began to look like a home.

A great deal besides was accomplished this week. It was not all devoted to helping, by the boys. Norman caught three squirrels in a trap of his own invention, and Harry shot as many with Mr Snow's wonderful rifle. They and Marian had made the circuit of the pond, over rocks, through bushes and brambles, over brooks, or through them, as the case might be. They came home tired enough, and in a state which naturally suggested thoughts of another mammoth washing, but in high spirits with their trip, only regretting that Graeme and Janet had not been with them. It was Saturday night, after a very busy week, and Janet had her own ideas about the enjoyment of such a ramble, and was not a little put out with them for "their thoughtless ruining of their clothes and shoon." But the minister had come home, and there was but a thin partition between the room that must serve him for study and parlour, and the general room for the family, and they got off with a slight reprimand, much to their surprise and delight. For to tell the truth, Janet's patience with the bairns, exhaustless in most circumstances, was wont to give way in the presence of "torn clothes and ruined shoon."

The next week was hardly so successful. It was cold and rainy. The gold and crimson glories of the forest disappeared in a night, and the earth looked gloomy and sad under a leaden sky. The inconveniences of the little brown house became more apparent now. It had been declared, at first sight, the very worst house in Merleville, and so it was, even under a clear sky and brilliant sunshine. A wretched place it looked. The windows clattered, the chimney smoked, latches and hinges were defective, and there were a score of other evils, which Janet and the lads strove to remedy without vexing their father and Graeme. A very poor place it was, and small and inconvenient besides. But this could not be cured, and therefore must be endured. The house occupied by Mr Elliott's predecessor had been burned down, and the little brown house was the only unoccupied house in the village. When winter should be over something might be done about getting another, and in the meantime they must make the best of it.

The people were wonderfully kind. One man came to mend windows and doors, another to mend the chimney. Orrin Green spent two days in banking up the house. Deacons Fish and Slowcome sent their men to bring up wood; and apples and chickens, and pieces of beef were sent in by some of the village people.

There were some drawbacks. The wood was green, and made more smoke than heat; and Janet mortally offended Mr Green by giving him his dinner alone in the kitchen. Every latch and hinge, and pane of glass, and the driving of every nail, was charged and deducted from the half year's salary, at prices which made Janet's indignation overflow. This latter circumstance was not known, however, till the half year was done; and in the meantime it helped them all through this dreary time to find their new friends so kind.

In the course of time, things were put to rights, and the little bare place began to look wonderfully comfortable. With warm carpets on the floors, and warm curtains on the windows, with stools and sofas, and tables made out of packing boxes, disguised in various ways, it began to have a look of home to them all.

The rain and the clouds passed away, too, and the last part of November was a long and lovely Indian-summer. Then the explorations of the boys were renewed with delight. Graeme and Rosie and Will went with the rest, and even Janet was beguiled into a nutting excursion one afternoon. She enjoyed it, too, and voluntarily confessed it. It was a fair view to look over the pond and the village lying so quietly in the valley, with the kirk looking down upon it from above. It was a fine country, nobody could deny; but Janet's eyes were sad enough as she gazed, and her voice shook as she said it, for the thought of home was strong at her heart.

In this month they made themselves thoroughly acquainted with the geography of the place, and with the kindly inmates of many a farm-house besides. And a happy month it was for them all. One night they watched the sun set between red and wavering clouds, and the next day woke to behold "the beauty and mystery of the snow." Far-away to the highest hill-top; down to the very verge of pond and brook; on every bush, and tree, and knoll, and over every silent valley, lay the white garment of winter. How strange! how wonderful! it seemed to their unaccustomed eyes.

"It 'minds me of white grave-clothes," said Marian, with a shudder.

"Whist, Menie," said her sister. "It makes me think, of how full the air will be of bonnie white angels at the

resurrection-day. Just watch the flakes floating so quietly in the air.”

“But, Graeme, the angels will be going up, and—”

“Well, one can hardly tell by looking at them, whether the snow-flakes are coming down or going up, they float about so silently. They mind me of beautiful and peaceful things.”

“But, Graeme, it looks cold and dreary, and all the bonnie flowers are covered in the dark.”

“Menie! There are no flowers to be covered now, and the earth is weary with her summer work, and will rest and sleep under the bonnie white snow. And, dear, you mustna think of dreary things when you look out upon the snow, for it will be a long time before we see the green grass and the bonnie flowers again,” and Graeme sighed.

But it was with a shout of delight that the boys plunged headlong into it, rolling and tumbling and tossing it at one another in a way that was “perfect ruination to their clothes;” and yet Janet had not the heart to forbid it. It was a holiday of a new kind to them; and their enjoyment was crowned and completed when, in the afternoon, Mr Snow came down with his box-sleigh and his two handsome greys to give them a sleigh-ride. There was room for them all, and for Mr Snow’s little Emily, and for half a dozen besides had they been there; so, well wrapped up with blankets and buffalo-ropes, away they went. Was there ever anything so delightful, so exhilarating? Even Graeme laughed and clapped her hands, and the greys flew over the ground, and passed every sleigh and sledge on the road.

“The bonnie creatures!” she exclaimed; and Mr Snow, who loved his greys, and was proud of them, took the oft repeated exclamation as a compliment to himself, and drove in a way to show his favourites to the best advantage. Away they went, up hill and down, through the village and over the bridge, past the mill to the woods, where the tall hemlocks and cedars stood dressed in white “like brides.” Marian had no thought of sorrowful things in her heart now. They came home again the other way, past Judge Merle’s and the school-house, singing and laughing in a way that made the sober-minded boys and girls of Merleville, to whom sleigh-riding was no novelty, turn round in astonishment as they passed. The people in the store, and the people in the blacksmith’s shop, and even the old ladies in their warm kitchens, opened the door and looked out to see the cause of the pleasant uproar. All were merry, and all gave voice to their mirth except Mr Snow’s little Emily, and she was too full of astonishment at the others to think of saying anything herself. But none of them enjoyed the ride more than she, though it was not her first by many. None of them all remembered it so well, or spoke of it so often. It was the beginning of sleigh-riding to them, but it was the beginning of a new life to little Emily.

“Isna she a queer little creature?” whispered Harry to Graeme, as her great black eyes turned from one to another, full of grave wonder.

“She’s a bonnie little creature,” said Graeme, caressing the little hand that had found its way to hers, “and good, too, I’m sure.”

“Grandma don’t think so,” said the child, gravely.

“No!” exclaimed Harry. “What bad things do you do?”

“I drop stitches and look out of the window, and I hate to pick over beans.”

Harry whistled.

“What an awful wee sinner! And does your grandma punish you ever? Does she whip you?”

The child’s black eyes flashed.

“She daren’t. Father wouldn’t let her. She gives me stints, and sends me to bed.”

“The Turk!” exclaimed Harry. “Run away from her, and come and bide with us.”

“Hush, Harry,” said Graeme, softly, “grandma is Mr Snow’s mother.”

There was a pause. In a little Emily spoke for the first time of her own accord.

“There are no children at our house,” said she.

“Poor wee lammie, and you are lonely sometimes,” said Graeme.

“Yes; when father’s gone and mother’s sick. Then there’s nobody but grandma.”

“Have you a doll?” asked Menie.

“No: I have a kitten, though.”

“Ah! you must come and play with my doll. She is a perfect beauty, and her name is Flora Macdonald.”

Menie’s doll had become much more valuable in her estimation since she had created such a sensation among the little Merleville girls.

“Will you come? Mr Snow,” she said, climbing upon the front seat which Norman shared with the driver, “won’t you let your little girl come and see my doll?”

“Well, yes; I guess so. If she’s half as pretty as you are, she is well worth seeing.”

Menie was down again in a minute.

"Yes, you may come, he says. And bring your kitten, and we'll play all day. Graeme lets us, and doesna send us to bed. Will you like to come?"

"Yes," said the child, quickly, but as gravely as ever.

They stopped at the little brown house at last, with a shout that brought their father and Janet out to see. All sprang lightly down. Little Emily stayed alone in the sleigh.

"Is this your little girl, Mr Snow?" said Mr Elliott, taking the child's hand in his. Emily looked in his face as gravely and quietly as she had been looking at the children all the afternoon.

"Yes; she's your Marian's age, and looks a little like her, too. Don't you think so Mrs Nasmyth?"

Janet, thus appealed to, looked kindly at the child.

"She might, if she had any flesh on her bones," said she.

"Well, she don't look ragged, that's a fact," said her father.

The cold, which had brought the roses to the cheeks of the little Elliots, had given Emily a blue, pinched look, which it made her father's heart ache to see.

"The bairn's cold. Let her come in and warm herself," said Janet, promptly. There was a chorus of entreaties from the children.

"Well, I don't know as I ought to wait. My horses don't like to stand much," said Mr Snow.

"Never mind waiting. If it's too far for us to take her home, you can come down for her in the evening."

Emily looked at her father wistfully.

"Would you like to stay, dear?" asked he.

"Yes, sir." And she was lifted out of the sleigh by Janet, and carried into the house, and kissed before she was set down.

"I'll be along down after dark, sometime," said Mr Snow, as he drove away.

Little Emily had never heard so much noise, at least so much pleasant noise, before. Mr Elliott sat down beside the bright wood fire in the kitchen, with Marian on one knee and the little stranger on the other, and listened to the exclamations of one and all about the sleigh-ride.

"And hae you nothing to say, my bonnie wee lassie?" said he pushing back the soft, brown hair from the little grave face. "What is your name, little one?"

"Emily Snow Arnold," answered she, promptly.

"Emily Arnold Snow," said Menie, laughing.

"No; Emily Snow Arnold. Grandma says I am not father's own little girl. My father is dead."

She looked grave, and so did the rest.

"But it is just the same. He loves you."

"Oh, yes!" There was a bright look in the eyes for once.

"And you love him all the same?"

"Oh, yes."

So it was. Sampson Snow, with love enough in his heart for half a dozen children, had none of his own, and it was all lavished on this child of his wife, and she loved him dearly. But they did not have "good times" up at their house the little girl confided to Graeme.

"Mother is sick most of the time, and grandma is cross always; and, if it wasn't for father, I don't know what we *should* do."

Indeed, they did not have good times. Old Mrs Snow had always been strong and healthy, altogether unconscious of "nerves," and she could have no sympathy and very little pity for his son's sickly wife. She had never liked her, even when she was a girl, and her girlhood was past, and she had been a sorrowful widow before her son brought her home as his wife. So old Mrs Snow kept her place at the head of the household, and was hard on everybody, but more especially on her son's wife and her little girl. If there had been children, she might have been different; but she almost resented her son's warm affection for his little step-daughter. At any rate she was determined that little Emily should be brought up as children used to be brought up when *she* was young, and not spoiled by over-indulgence as her mother had been; and the process was not a pleasant one to any of them, and "good times" were few and far between at their house.

Her acquaintance with the minister's children was the beginning of a new life to Emily. Her father opened his eyes with astonishment when he came into Janet's bright kitchen that night and heard his little girl laughing and clapping her hands as merrily as any of them. If anything had been needed to deepen his interest in them all, their kindness to the child would have done it; and from that day the minister, and his children, and Mrs Nasmyth, too, had a firm and true friend in Mr Snow.

Chapter Eight.

From the time of their arrival, the minister and his family excited great curiosity and interest among the good people of Merleville. The minister himself, as Mr Snow told Mrs Nasmyth, was "popular." Not, however, that any one among them all thought him faultless, unless Mr Snow himself did. Every old lady in the town saw something in him, which she not secretly deplored. Indeed, they were more unanimous, with regard to the minister's faults, than old ladies generally are on important subjects. The matter was dispassionately discussed at several successive sewing-circles, and when Mrs Page, summing up the evidence, solemnly declared, "that though the minister was a good man, and a good preacher, he lacked considerable in some things which go to make a man a good pastor," there was scarcely a dissenting voice.

Mrs Merle had ventured to hint that, "they could not expect everything in one man," but her voice went for nothing, as one of the minister's offences was, having been several times in at the Judge's, while he sinfully neglected others of his flock.

"It's handy by," ventured Mrs Merle, again. But the Judge's wife was no match for the blacksmith's lady, and it was agreed by all, that whatever else the minister might be, he was "no hand at visiting." True he had divided the town into districts, for the purpose of regularly meeting the people, and it was his custom to announce from the pulpit, the neighbourhood in which, on certain days, he might be expected. But that of course, was a formal matter, and not at all like the affectionate intercourse that ought to exist between a pastor and his people. "He might preach like Paul," said Mrs Page, "but unless on week days he watered the seed sown, with a word in season, the harvest would never be gathered in. The minister's face ought to be a familiar sight in every household, or the youth would never be brought into the fold," and the lady sighed, at the case of the youth, scattered over the ten miles square of Merleville. The minister was not sinning in ignorance either, for she herself, had told him his duty in this respect.

"And what did he say?" asked some one.

"Oh! he didn't say much, but I could see that his conscience wasn't easy. However, there has been no improvement yet," she added, with grave severity.

"He hain't got a horse, and I've heard say, that deacon Fish charges him six cents a mile for his horse and cutter, whenever he has it. He couldn't afford to ride round much at that rate, on five hundred dollars a year."

This bold speech was ventured by Miss Rebecca Pettimore, Mrs Captain Liscome's help, who took turns with that lady, in attending the sewing-circle. But it was well known, that she was always "on the off side," and Mrs Page deigned no reply. There was a moment's silence.

"Eli heard Mr Snow say so, in Page's shop yesterday," added Rebecca, who always gave her authority, when she repeated an item of news. Mrs Fish took her up sharply.

"Sampson Snow had better let the minister have his horse and cutter, if he can afford to do it for nothing. Mr Fish can't."

"My goodness, Mis' Fish, I wouldn't have said a word, if I'd thought you were here," said Rebecca, with an embarrassed laugh.

"Mr Snow often drives the minister, and thinks himself well paid, just to have a talk with him," said a pretty black-eyed girl, trying to cover Rebecca's retreat. But Rebecca wouldn't retreat.

"I didn't mean any offence, Mis' Fish, and if it ain't so about the deacon, you can say so now, before it goes farther."

But it was not to be contradicted, and that Mrs Fish well knew, though what business it was of anybody's, and why the minister, who seemed to be well off, shouldn't pay for the use of a horse and cutter, she couldn't understand. The subject was changed by Mrs Slowcome.

"He must have piles and piles of old sermons. It don't seem as though he needs to spend as much time in his study, as Mrs Nasmyth tells about."

Here there was a murmur of dissent. Would sermons made for the British, be such as to suit free-born American citizens? the children of the Puritans? The prevailing feeling was against such a supposition.

"Old or new, I like them," said Celestia Jones, the pretty black-eyed girl, who had spoken before. "And so do others, who are better judges than I."

"Squire Greenleaf, I suppose," said Ruby Fox, in a loud whisper. "He was up there last Sunday night; she has been aching to tell it all the afternoon."

Celestia's black eyes flashed fire at the speaker, and the sly Ruby said no more. Indeed, there was no more said about the sermons, for that they were something for the Merleville people to be proud of, all agreed. Mr Elliott's preaching had filled the old meeting-house. People who had never been regular churchgoers came now; some from

out of the town, even. Young Squire Greenleaf, who seemed to have the prospect of succeeding Judge Merle, as the great man of Merleville, had brought over the judges from Rixford, and they had dined at the minister's, and had come to church on Sunday. Young Squire Greenleaf was a triumph of himself. He had never been at meeting "much, if any," since he had completed his legal studies. If he ever did go, it was to the Episcopal church at Rixford, which, to the liberal Mrs Page, looked considerably like coquetting with the scarlet woman. Now, he hardly ever lost a Sunday, besides going sometimes to conference meetings, and making frequent visits to the minister's house. Having put all these things together, and considered the matter, Mrs Page came to the conclusion, that the squire was not in so hopeless a condition as she had been wont to suppose, a fact which, on this occasion, she took the opportunity of rejoicing over. The rest rejoiced too. There was a murmur of dissent from Miss Pettimore, but it passed unnoticed, as usual. There was a gleam which looked a little like scorn, in the black eyes of Miss Celestia, which said more plainly than Miss Pettimore's words could have done, that the squire was better now, than the most in Merleville, but like a wise young person as she was, she expended all her scornful glances on the shirt sleeve she was making, and said nothing.

The minister was then allowed to rest a little while, and the other members of the family were discussed, with equal interest. Upon the whole, the conclusion arrived at was pretty favourable. But Mrs Page and her friends were not quite satisfied with Graeme. As the minister's eldest daughter, and "serious," they were disposed to overlook her youthfulness, and give her a prominent place in their circle. But Graeme hung back, and would not be prevailed upon to take such honour to herself, and so some said she was proud, and some said she was only shy. But she was kindly dealt with, even by Mrs Page, for her loving care of the rest of the children had won for her the love of many a motherly heart among these kind people. And she was after all but a child, little more than fifteen.

There were numberless stories afloat about the boys,—their mirth, their mischief, their good scholarship, their respect and obedience to their father, which it was not beneath the dignity of the ladies assembled to repeat and discuss. The boys had visited faithfully through the parish, if their father had not, and almost everywhere they had won for themselves a welcome. It is true, there had been one or two rather serious scrapes, in which they had involved themselves, and other lads of the village; but kind-hearted people forgot the mischief sooner than the mirth, and Norman and Harry were very popular among old and young.

But the wonder of wonders, the riddle that none could read, the anomaly in Merleville society was Janet, or Mrs Nasmyth, as she was generally called. In refusing one of the many invitations which she had shared with the minister and Graeme, she had thought fit to give society in general a piece of her mind. She was, she said, the minister's servant, and kenned her place better than to offer to take her tea with him in any strange house; she was obliged for the invitation all the same.

"Servant!" echoed Mrs Sterne's help, who was staying to pass the evening, while her mistress went home, "to see about supper."

And, "servant!" echoed the young lady who assisted Mrs Merle in her household affairs.

"I'll let them see that I think myself just as good as Queen Victoria, if I do live out," said another dignified auxiliary.

"She must be a dreadful mean-spirited creature."

"Why, they do say she'll brush them great boys' shoes. I saw her myself, through the study-door, pull off Mr Elliott's boots as humble as could be."

"To see that little girl pouring tea when there's company, and Mrs Nasmyth not sitting down. It's ridiculous."

"I wouldn't do so for the President!"

"Well, they seem to think everything of her," said Miss Pettimore, speaking for the first time in this connection.

"Why, yes, she does just what she has a mind to about house. And the way them children hang about her, and fuss over her, I never see. They tell her everything, and these boys mind her, as they do their father."

"And if any one comes to pay his minister's tax, it's always, 'ask Mrs Nasmyth,' or, 'Mrs Nasmyth will tell you.'"

"They couldn't get along without her. If I was her I'd show them that I was as good as them, and no servant."

"She's used to it. She's been brought up so. But now that she's got here, I should think she'd be sick of it."

"I suppose 'servant' there, means pretty much what 'help' does here. There don't seem to be difference enough to talk about," said Rebecca.

"I see considerable difference," said Mrs Merle's young lady.

"It beats all," said another.

Yes, it did beat all. It was incomprehensible to these dignified people, how Janet could openly acknowledge herself a servant, and yet retain her self-respect. And that "Mrs Nasmyth thought considerable of herself," many of the curious ladies of Merleville had occasion to know. The relations existing between her and "the bairns," could not easily be understood. She acknowledged herself their servant, yet she reprov'd them when they deserved it, and that sharply. She enforced obedience to all rules, and governed in all household matters, none seeking to dispute her right. They went to her at all times with their troubles and their pleasures, and she sympathised with them, advised them, or consoled them, as the case might need. That they were as the very apple of her eye, was evident to all, and that they loved her dearly, and respected her entirely, none could fail to see.

There were stories going about in the village to prove that she had a sharp tongue in her head, and this her warmest friends did not seek to deny. Of course, it was the duty of all the female part of the congregation to visit at the minister's house, and to give such advice and assistance, with regard to the arrangements, as might seem to be required of them. It is possible they took more interest in the matter than if there had been a mistress in the house. "More liberties," Janet indignantly declared, and after the first visitation or two she resolutely set her face against what she called the answering of impertinent questions. According to her own confession, she gave to several of them, whose interest in their affairs was expressed without due discretion, a "downsetting," and Graeme and the boys, and even Mr Elliott, had an idea that a downsetting from Janet must be something serious. It is true her victims' ignorance of the Scottish tongue must have taken the edge a little off her sharp words, but there was no mistaking her indignant testimony, as regarding "upsettin' bodies," and "meddlesome bodies," that bestowed too much time on their neighbours' affairs, and there was some indignation felt and expressed on the subject.

But she had her friends, and that not a few, for sweet words and soft came very naturally to Janet's lips when her heart was touched, and this always happened to her in the presence of suffering and sorrow, and many were the sad and sick that her kind words comforted, and her willing hands relieved. For every sharp word brought up against her, there could be told a kindly deed, and Janet's friends were the most numerous at the sewing-circle that night.

Merleville was by no means on the outskirts of civilisation, though viewed from the high hill on which the old meeting-house stood, it seemed to the children to be surrounded with woods. But between the hills lay many a fertile valley. Except toward the west, where the hills became mountains, it was laid out into farms, nearly all of which were occupied, and very pleasant homes some of these farm-houses were. The village was not large enough to have a society within itself independent of the dwellers on these farms, and all the people, even to the borders of the "ten miles square," considered themselves neighbours. They were very socially inclined, for the most part, and Merleville was a very pleasant place to live in.

Winter was the time for visiting. There was very little formality in their entertainments. Nuts and apples, or doughnuts and cheese, was usually the extent of their efforts in the way of refreshments, except on special occasions, when formal invitations were given. Then, it must be confessed, the chief aim of each housekeeper seemed to be to surpass all others in the excellence and variety of the good things provided. But for the most part no invitations were given or needed, they dropped in on one another in a friendly way.

The minister's family were not overlooked. Scarcely an evening passed but some of their neighbours came in. Indeed, this happened too frequently for Janet's patience, for she sorely begrudged the time taken from the minister's books, to the entertainment of "ilka idle body that took leave to come in." It gave her great delight to see him really interested with visitors, but she set her face against his being troubled at all hours on every day in the week.

"If it's anything particular I'll tell the minister you're here," she used to say; "but he bade the bairns be quiet, and I doubt he wouldna like to be disturbed. Sit down a minute, and I'll speak to Miss Graeme, and I dare say the minister will be at leisure shortly."

Generally the visitor, by no means displeased, sat down in her bright kitchen for a chat with her and the children. It was partly these evening visits that won for Mrs Nasmyth her popularity. Even in her gloomy days—and she had some days gloomy enough about this time—she would exert herself on such an occasion, and with the help of the young people the visitor was generally well entertained. Such singing of songs, such telling of tales, such discussions as were carried on in the pleasant firelight! There was no such thing as time lagging there, and often the nine o'clock worship came before the visitor was aware.

Even Judge Merle and young Squire Greenleaf were sometimes detained in the kitchen, if they happened to come in on a night when the minister was more than usually engaged.

"For you see, sir," said she, on one occasion, "what with ae thing and what with anither, the minister has had so many interruptions this week already, that I dinna like to disturb him. But if you'll sit down here for a minute or two, I daresay he'll be ben and I'll speak to Miss Graeme."

"Mr Elliott seems a close student," said the Judge, as he took the offered seat by the fire.

"Ay, is he. Though if you are like the lave o' the folk, you'll think no more o' him for that. Folk o' my country judge o' a minister by the time he spends in his study; but here he seems hardly to be thought to be in the way of his duty, unless he's ca'ing about from house to house, hearkening to ilka auld wife's tale."

"But," said the Judge, much amused, "the minister has been studying all his life. It seems as though he might draw on old stores now."

"Ay, but out o' the old stores he must bring new matter. The minister's no one that puts his people off with 'cauld kail het again,' and he canna make sermons and rin here and there at the same time."

"And he can't attend to visitors and make sermons at the same time. That would be to the point at present," said the Judge, laughing, "I think I'll be going."

"Deed, no, sir," said Janet, earnestly, "I didna mean you. I'm aye glad to see you or any sensible person to converse with the minister. It cheers him. But this week it's been worse than ever. He has hardly had an unbroken hour. But still, sir. He would be ill-pleased if you went away without seeing him."

"I'll speak to papa, Judge Merle," said Graeme.

"Never mind, my dear. Come and speak to me yourself. I think Mrs Nasmyth is right. The minister ought not to be disturbed. I have nothing particular to say to him. I came because it's a pleasure to come, and I did not think about

its being so near the end of the week."

Graeme looked rather anxiously from him to Janet.

"My dear, you needna trouble yourself. It's no' folk like the Judge and young Mr Greenleaf that will be likely to take umbrage at being kept waiting a wee while here. It's folk like the 'smith yonder, or Orrin Green, the upsettin' body. But you can go in now and see if your papa's at leisure, and tell him the Judge is here."

"We had Mr Greenleaf here awhile the ither night," she continued, as Graeme disappeared. "A nice, pleasant spoken gentleman he is, an no' ae bit o' a Yankee."

The Judge opened his eyes. It was rather an equivocal compliment, considering the person to whom she spoke. But he was not one of the kind to take offence, as Janet justly said.

Chapter Nine.

Other favourites of Mrs Nasmyth's were Mr Snow and the schoolmaster, and the secret of her interest in them was their interest in the bairns, and their visits were made as often to the kitchen as to the study. Mr Snow had been their friend from the very first. He had made good his promise as to nutting and squirrel-hunting. He had taught them to skate, and given them their first sleigh-ride; he had helped them in the making of sleds, and never came down to the village but with his pockets full of rosy apples to the little ones. They made many a day pleasant for his little girl, both at his house and theirs; and he thought nothing too much to do for those who were kind to Emily.

Janet's kind heart had been touched, and her unfailing energies exercised in behalf of Mr Snow's melancholy, nervous wife. In upon the monotony of her life she had burst like a ray of wintry sunshine into her room, brightening it to at least a momentary cheerfulness. During a long and tedious illness, from which she had suffered, soon after the minister's arrival in Merleville, Janet had watched with her a good many nights, and the only visit which the partially-restored invalid made during the winter which stirred so much pleasant life among them, was at the minister's, where she was wonderfully cheered by the kindness of them all. But it was seldom that she could be prevailed upon to leave her warm room in wintry weather, and Sampson's visits were made alone, or in company with little Emily.

The schoolmaster, Mr Isaac Newton Foster, came often, partly because he liked the lads, and partly because of his fondness for mathematics. The night of his visit was always honoured by the light of an extra candle, for his appearance was the signal for the bringing forth of slates and books, and it was wonderful what pleasure they all got together from the mysterious figures and symbols, of which they never seemed to grow weary.

Graeme, from being interested in the progress of her brothers, soon became interested in their studies for their own sake, and Mr Foster had not a more docile or successful pupil than she became. Janet had her doubts about her "taking up with books that were fit only for *laddies*," but Mr Foster proved, with many words, that her ideas were altogether old-fashioned on the subject, and as the minister did not object, and Graeme herself had great delight in it, she made no objections. Her first opinion on the schoolmaster had been that he was a well-meaning, harmless lad, and it was given in a tone which said plainer than words, that little more could be put forth in his favour. But by and by, as she watched him, and saw the influence for good which he exerted over the lads, keeping them from mischief, and really interesting them in their studies, she came to have a great respect for Mr Foster.

But all the evenings when Mr Foster was with them were not given up to lessons. When, as sometimes happened, Mr Snow or Mr Greenleaf came in, something much more exciting took the place of Algebra. Mr Greenleaf was not usually the chief speaker on such occasions, but he had the faculty of making the rest speak, and having engaged the lads, and sometimes even Graeme and Janet, in the discussion of some exciting question, often the comparative merits of the institutions of their respective countries, he would leave the burden of the argument to the willing Mr Foster, while he assumed the position of audience, or put in a word now and then, as the occasion seemed to require. They seldom lost their tempers when he was there, as they sometimes did on less favoured occasions. For Janet and Janet's bairns were prompt to do battle where the honour of their country was concerned, and though Mr Foster was good nature itself, he sometimes offended. He could not conscientiously withhold the superior light which he owed to his birth and education in a land of liberty, if he might dispel the darkness of old-world prejudice in which his friends were enveloped. Mr Snow was ready too with his hints about "despotism" and "aristocracy," and on such occasions the lads never failed to throw themselves headlong into the thick of the battle, with a fierce desire to demolish things in general, and Yankee institutions in particular. It is to be feared the disputants were not always very consistent in the arguments they used; but their earnestness made up for their bad logic, and the hot words spoken on both sides were never remembered when the morrow came.

A chance word of the master's had set them all at it, one night when Mr Snow came in; and books and slates were forgotten in the eagerness of the dispute. The lads were in danger of forgetting the respect due to Mr Foster, as their teacher, at such times; but he was slow to resent it, and Mr Snow's silent laughter testified to his enjoyment of this particular occasion. The strife was getting warm when Mr Greenleaf's knock was heard. Norman was in the act of hurling some hundred thousands of black slaves at the schoolmaster's devoted head, while Mr Foster strove hard to shield himself by holding up "Britain's wretched operatives and starving poor."

"Come along, Squire," said Mr Snow. "We want you to settle this little difficulty. Mrs Nasmyth ain't going to let you into the study just now, at least she wouldn't let me. The minister's busy to-night."

Mr Greenleaf, nothing loth, sat down and drew Marian to his knee.

Neither Norman nor Mr Foster was so eager to go on as Mr Snow was to have them; but after a little judicious stirring up on his part, they were soon in "full blast," as he whispered to his friend. The discussion was about slavery this

time, and need not be given. It was not confined to Norman and Mr Foster. All the rest had something to say; even Janet joined when she thought a side thrust would be of use. But Norman was the chief speaker on his side. The subject had been discussed in the village School Lyceum, and Norman had distinguished himself there; not exactly by the clearness or the strength of his arguments—certainly not by their originality. But he thundered forth the lines beginning “I would not have a slave,” etcetera, to the intense delight of his side, and to at least the momentary discomfiture of the other.

To-night he was neither very logical nor very reasonable, and Mr Foster complained at last.

“But, Norman, you don’t keep to the point.”

“Talks all round the lot,” said Mr Snow.

“I’m afraid that is not confined to Norman,” said Mr Greenleaf.

“Norman is right, anyway,” pronounced Menie.

“He reasons in a circle,” said the master. “And because slavery is the only flaw in—”

“The only flaw!” said Norman, with awful irony.

“Well, yes,” interposed Mr Snow. “But we have had enough of the Constitution for to-night. Let’s look at our country. *It* can’t be beaten any way you take it. Physically or morally,” pursued he, with great gravity, “it can’t be beaten. There are no such mountains, rivers, nor lakes as ours are. Our laws and our institutions generally are just about what they ought to see. Even foreigners see that, and prove it, by coming to share our privileges. Where will you find such a general diffusion of knowledge among all classes? Classes? There is only one class. All are free and equal.”

“Folk thinking themselves equal doesna make them equal,” said Mrs Nasmyth, to whom the last remark had been addressed. “For my part, I never saw pride—really to call pride—till I saw it in this fine country o’ yours—ilka ane thinking himself as good as his neighbour.”

“Well—so they be. Liberty and equality is our ticket.”

“But ye’re no’ a’ equal. There’s as muckle difference among folks here as elsewhere, whatever be your ticket. There are folk coming and going here, that in my country I would hate sent round to the back door; but naething short of the company of the minister himself will serve them. Gentlemen like the Judge, or like Mr Greenleaf here, will sit and bide the minister’s time; but upsettin’ bodies such as I could name—”

“Well, I wouldn’t name them, I guess. General principles are best in such a case,” said Mr Snow. “And I am willing to confess there is among us an aristocracy of merit. Your friend the Judge belongs to that and your father, Miss Graeme; and I expect Squire Greenleaf will, too, when he goes to Congress. But no man is great here just because his father was before him. Everybody has a chance. Now, on your side of the water, ‘a man must be just what his father was.’ Folks must stay just there. That’s a fact.”

“You seem to be weel informed,” said Janet drily.

“Ah! yes; I know all about it. Anybody may know anything and everything in this country. We’re a great people. Ain’t that so, Mr Foster?”

“It must be granted by all unprejudiced minds, that Britain has produced some great men,” said Mr Foster, breaking out in a new spot as Mr Snow whispered to the Squire.

“Surely that would be granting too much,” said Norman.

“But,” pursued Mr Foster, “Britons themselves confess that it is on this Western Continent that the Anglo-Saxon race is destined to triumph. Descended from Britons, a new element has entered into their blood, which shall—which must—which—”

“Sounds considerable like the glorious Fourth, don’t it?” whispered Mr Snow.

“Which hasna put muckle flesh on their bones as yet,” said the literal Mrs Nasmyth.

“I was about to say that—that—”

“That the British can lick all creation, and we can lick the British,” said Mr Snow.

“Any crisis involving a trial of strength, would prove our superiority,” said Mr Foster, taking a new start.

“That’s been proved already,” said Mr Snow, watching the sparkle in Graeme’s eye. She laughed merrily.

“No, Mr Snow. They may fight it out without me to-night.”

“I am glad you are growing prudent. Mrs Nasmyth, you wouldn’t believe how angry she was with me one night.”

“Angry!” repeated Graeme. “Ask Celestia.”

“Well, I guess I shouldn’t have much chance between Celestia and you. But I said then, and I say now, you’ll make a first-rate Yankee girl yourself before seven years.”

"A Yankee!" repeated her brothers.

"A Yankee," echoed Menie.

"Hush, Menie. Mr Snow is laughing at us," said Graeme.

"I would rather be just a little Scotch lassie, than a Yankee Queen," said Menie, firmly.

There was a laugh, and Menie was indignant at her brothers for joining.

"You mean a president's wife. We don't allow queens here—in this free country," said Mr Snow.

"But it is dreadful that you should hate us so," said the Squire.

"I like you, and the Judge. And I like Mrs Merle."

"And is that all?" asked Mr Snow, solemnly.

"I like Emily. And I like you when you don't vex Graeme."

"And who else?" asked Mr Greenleaf.

"I like Celestia. She's nice, and doesna ask questions. And so does Graeme. And Janet says that Celestia is a lady. Don't you like her?" asked Menie, thinking her friend unresponsive.

"You seem to be good at asking questions yourself, Menie, my woman," interposed Mrs Nasmyth. "I doubt you should be in your bed by this time." But Mr Snow caused a diversion from anything so melancholy.

"And don't Cousin Celestia like me?" asked he.

"Yes; she said you were a good friend of hers; but is she your cousin?"

"Well, not exactly—we're not very near cousins. But I see to her some, and mean to. I like her."

The study-door opened, and there was no time for an answer from any one; but as Mr Snow went up the hill he said to himself: "Yes, I shall see to her. She is smart enough and good enough for him if he does expect to go to Congress."

Chapter Ten.

"I like the wood fires," said Graeme. "They are far clearer than the peat fires at home."

They were sitting, Graeme and Janet, according to their usual custom, a little after the others had all gone to bed. The study-door was closed, though the light still gleamed beneath it; but it was getting late, and the minister would not be out again.

Graeme might well admire such a wood fire as that before which they were sitting: The fore-stick had nearly burned through, and the brands had fallen over the andirons, but the great back-log glowed with light and heat, though only now and then a bright blaze leapt up. It was not very warm in the room, however, except for their faces, and Graeme shivered a little as she drew nearer to the fire, and hardly heeding that Janet did not answer her, fell to dreaming in the firelight.

Without, the rude March winds were roaring, and within, too, for that matter. For though carpets, and curtains, and listings nailed over seams might keep out the bitter frost when the air was still, the east winds of March swept in through every crack and crevice, chilling them to the bone. It roared wildly among the boughs of the great elms in the yard, and the tall well-sweep creaked, and the bucket swung to and fro with a noise that came through Graeme's dream and disturbed it at last. Looking up suddenly she became aware that the gloom that had been gathering over Janet for many a day hung darkly round her now. She drew near to her, and laying her arms down on her lap in the old fashion, said softly:

"The winter's near over now, Janet."

"Ay, thank the Lord for that, any way," said Janet. She knew that Graeme's words and movement were an invitation to tell her thoughts, so she bent forward to collect the scattered brands and settle the fore-stick, for she felt that her thoughts were not of the kind to bear telling to Graeme or to any one. As she gathered them together between the andirons, she sighed a sigh of mingled sorrow and impatience. And the light that leapt suddenly up made the cloud on her brow more visible. For the winter that had been so full of enjoyment to all the rest had been a time of trial to Janet.

To the young people, the winter had brought numberless pleasures. The lads had gone to the school, where they were busy and happy, and the little ones had been busy and happy at home. None had enjoyed the winter more than Graeme. The change had been altogether beneficial to Rose; and never since their mother's death had the elder sister been so much at ease about her. There was little to be done in the way of making or mending, and, with leisure at her disposal, she was falling into her old habits of reading and dreaming. She had been busy teaching the little ones, too, and at night worked with her brothers at their lessons, so that the winter had been profitable as well as pleasant to her. At all times in his study, amid the silent friends that had become so dear to him, Mr Elliott could be content; and in his efforts to become acquainted with his people, their wants and tastes, he had been roused to

something like the cheerfulness of former years.

But to Janet the winter had been a time of conflict, a long struggle with unseen enemies; and as she sat there in the dim firelight, she was telling herself sorrowfully that she would be worsted by them at last. Home-sickness, blind and unreasoning, had taken possession of her. Night by night she had lain down with the dull pain gnawing at her heart. Morning by morning she had risen sick with the inappeasable yearning for her home, a longing that would not be stilled, to walk again through familiar scenes, to look again on familiar faces.

The first letters from home, so longed for by all, so welcomed and rejoiced over by the rest, brought little comfort to her. Arthur's letters to his father and Graeme, so clear and full of all they wished to hear about, "so like a printed book," made it all the harder for her to bear her disappointment over Sandy's obscure, ill-spelt and indifferently-written letter. She had of old justly prided herself on Sandy's "hand o' write;" but she had yet to learn the difference between a school-boy's writing, with a copper-plate setting at the head of the page, and that which must be the result of a first encounter with the combined difficulties of writing, spelling and composition.

Poor Sandy! He had laboured hard, doubtless, and had done his best, but it was not satisfactory. In wishing to be minute, he had become mysterious, and, to the same end, the impartial distribution through all parts of the letter of capitals, commas and full stops, had also tended. There was a large sheet closely written, and out of the whole but two clear ideas could be gathered! Mr More of the parish school was dead, and they were to have a new master, and that Mrs Smith had changed her mind, and he was not to be at Saughless for the winter after all.

There were other troubles too, that Janet had to bear alone. The cold, that served to brace the others, chilled her to the bone. Unaccustomed to any greater variation of temperature than might be very well met by the putting on or taking off of her plaid, the bitter cold of the New England winter, as she went out and in about her work, was felt keenly by her. She could not resist it, nor guard herself against it. Stove-heat was unbearable to her. An hour spent in Mrs Snow's hot room often made her unfit for anything for hours after; and sleigh-riding, which never failed to excite the children to the highest spirits, was as fatal to her comfort as the pitching of the "Steadfast" had been. To say that she was disappointed with herself in view of all this, is, by no means, saying enough. She was angry at her folly, and called herself "silly body" and "useless body," striving with all her might to throw the burden from her.

Then, again, with only a few exceptions, she did not like the people. They were, in her opinion, at the same time, extravagant and penurious, proud and mean, ignorant, yet wise "above what is written," self-satisfied and curious. The fact was, her ideas of things in general were disarranged by the state of affairs in Merleville. She never could make out "who was somebody and who was naebody;" and what made the matter more mysterious, they did not seem to know themselves.

Mrs Judge Merle had made her first visit to the minister's in company with the wife of the village blacksmith, and if there was a lady between them Mrs Page evidently believed it to be herself. Mrs Merle was a nice motherly body, that sat on her seat and behaved herself, while Mrs Page went hither and thither, opening doors and spying fairlies, speiring about things she had no concern with, like an ill-bred woman as she is; and passing her remarks on the minister and the preaching, as if she were a judge. Both of them had invited her to visit them very kindly, no doubt; but Janet had no satisfaction in this or in anything that concerned them. She was out of her element. Things were quite different from anything she had been used with. She grew depressed and doubtful of herself, and no wonder that a gloom was gathering over her.

Some thought of all this came into Graeme's mind, as she sat watching her while she gathered together the brands with unsteady hands, and with the thought came a little remorse. She had been thinking little of Janet and her trials all these days she had been passing so pleasantly with her books, in the corner of her father's study. She blamed herself for her thoughtlessness, and resolved that it should not be so in future. In the mean time, it seemed as though she must say something to chase the shadow from the kind face. But she did not know what to say. Janet set down the tongs, and raised herself with a sigh. Graeme drew nearer.

"What is it, Janet?" asked she, laying her hand caressingly on hers. "Winna you tell me?"

Janet gave a startled look into her face.

"What is what, my dear?"

"Something is vexing you, and you winna tell me," said Graeme, reproachfully.

"Hoot, lassie! what should ail me. I'm weel enough."

"You are wearying for a letter, maybe. But it's hardly time yet, Janet."

"I'm no wearyin' the night more than usual. And if I got a letter, it mightna give me muckle comfort."

"Then something ails you, and you winna tell me," said Graeme again, in a grieved voice.

"My dear, I hae naething to tell."

"Is it me, Janet? Hae I done anything? You ken I wouldna willingly do wrong?" pleaded Graeme.

Janet put her fingers over the girl's lips.

"Whist, my lammie. It's naething—or naething that can be helpit," and she struggled fiercely to keep back the flood that was swelling in her full heart. Graeme said nothing, but stroked the toil-worn hand of her friend, and at last laid her cheek down upon it.

"Lassie, lassie! I canna help it," and the long pent up flood gushed forth, and the tears fell on Graeme's bent head like rain. Graeme neither moved nor spoke, but she prayed in her heart that God would comfort her friend in her unknown sorrow; and by the first words she spoke she knew that she was comforted.

"I am an auld fule, I believe, or a spoiled bairn, that doesna ken it's ain mind, and I think I'm growing waur ilka day," and she paused to wipe the tears from her face.

"But what is it, Janet?" asked Graeme, softly.

"It's naething, dear, naething that I can tell to mortal. I dinna ken what has come ower me. It's just as if a giant had a gripe o' me, and move I canna. But surely I'll be set free in time."

There was nothing Graeme could say to this; but she laid her cheek down on Janet's hand again, and there were tears upon it.

"Now dinna do that, Miss Graeme," cried Janet, struggling with another wave of the returning flood. "What will come o' us if you give way. There's naething ails me but that I'm an auld fule, and I canna help that, you ken."

"Janet, it was an awful sacrifice you made, to leave your mother and Sandy to come with us. I never thought till to-night how great it must have been."

"Ay, lassie. I'll no deny it, but dinna think that I grudge it now. It wasna made in a right sperit, and that the Lord is showing me. I thought you couldna do without me."

"We couldna, Janet."

"And I aye thought if I could be of any use to your father and your father's bairns, and could see them contented, and well in a strange land, that would be enough for me. And I hae gotten my wish. You're a' weel, and weel contented, and my heart is lying in my breast as heavy as lead, and no strength of mine can lift the burden. God help me."

"God will help you," said Graeme, softly. "It is the sore home-sickness, like the captives by Babel stream. But the Lord never brought you here in anger, and, Janet, it will pass away."

"Weel, it may be. That's what my mother said, or something like it. He means to let me see that you can do without me. But I'll bide still awhile, anyway."

Graeme's face was fall of dismay.

"Janet! what could we ever do without you?"

"Oh, you could learn. But I'm not going to leave you yet. The giant shallna master me with my will. But, oh! lassie, whiles I think the Lord has turned against me for my self-seeking and pride."

"But, Janet," said Graeme, gravely, "the Lord never turns against his own people. And if anybody in the world is free from self-seeking it is you. It is for us you are living, and not for yourself."

Janet shook her head.

"And, Janet, when the bonny spring days come, the giant will let you go. The weight will be lifted off, I'm sure it will. And, Janet, about Sandy—. You may be sure o' him. If you had been there to guide him, he might have been wilful, and have gone astray, like others. But now the Lord will have him in His keeping, for, Janet, if ever a fatherless child was left to the Lord, you left Sandy for our sakes, and He will never forsake him—never, *never!*"

Janet's tears were falling softly now, like the bright drops after the tempest is over, and the bow of promise is about to span the heavens.

"And, Janet, we all love you dearly." Graeme had risen, and put her arms round her neck by this time. "Sometimes the boys are rough, and don't seem to care, but they do care; and I'm thoughtless, too, and careless," she added, humbly, "but I was that with my mother, whiles, and you ken I loved her dearly." And the cry of pain that came with the words, told how dearly her mother was remembered still. Janet held her close.

"And, Janet, you must 'mind me of things, as my mother used to do. When I get a book, you ken I forget things, and you winna let me do wrong for my mother's sake. We have no mother, Janet, and what could we do without you? And all this pain will pass away, and you will grow light-hearted again."

And so it was. The worst was over after that night. Much more was said before they separated, and Graeme realised, for the first time, some of the discomforts of their present way of living, as far as Janet was concerned. Housekeeping affairs had been left altogether in her hands, and everything was so different from all that she had been accustomed to, and she was slow to learn new ways. The produce system was a great embarrassment to her. This getting "a pickle meal" from one, and "a corn tawties" from another, she could not endure. It was "living from hand to mouth" at best, to say nothing of the uncomfortable doubts now and then, as to whether the articles brought were intended as presents, or as the payment of the "minister's tax," as the least delicate among the people called it.

"And, my dear, I just wish your father would get a settlement with them, and we would begin again, and put aething down in a book. For I hae my doubts as to how we are to make the two ends meet. Things mount up you ken, and we maun try and guide things."

Graeme looked grave. "I wonder what my father thinks," said she. Janet shook her head.

"We mauna trouble your father if we can help it. The last minister they had had enough ado to live, they say, and he had fewer bairns. I'm no' feared but we'll be provided for. And, Miss Graeme, my dear, you'll need to begin and keep an account again."

Janet's voice had the old cheerful echo in it by this time, and Graeme promised, with good heart, to do all she could to keep her father's mind easy, and the household accounts straight.

Weeks passed on, and even before the bonny spring days had come, the giant had let Janet go, and she was her own cheerful self again. The letter that Harry brought in with a shout before March was over, was a very different letter from the one that had caused Janet to shed such tears of disappointment on that sad November, though Sandy was the writer still. The two only intelligible items of news which the last one had conveyed, were repeated here, and enlarged upon, with reason. A new master had come to the school, who was taking great pains with all the lads, and especially with Sandy, "as you will see by this letter, mother," he wrote, "I hope it will be better worth reading than the last."

If Mrs Smith had changed her mind, it was all for good. Janet was no more to think of her mother as living by herself, in the lonely cot in the glen, but farther up in another cottage, within sight of the door of Saughless. And Sandy was to go to the school a while yet and there was no fear but something would be found for him to do, either on the farm, or in the garden. And so his mother was to set her heart at rest about them.

And her heart was set at rest; and Janet sang at her work again, and cheered or chid the bairns according as they needed, but never more, though she had many cares, and troubles not a few, did the giant hold her in his grasp again.

Chapter Eleven.

"Miss Graeme," said Janet, softly opening the study-door, and looking in. Graeme was at her side in a moment.

"Never mind putting by your book, I only want to tell you, that I'm going up the brae to see Mrs Snow awhile. It's no' cold, and I'll take the bairns with me. So just give a look at the fire now and then, and have the kettle boiling gin tea time. I winna bide late."

Graeme put down her book, and hastened the preparations of the little ones.

"I wish I could up with you, Janet. How mild and bright it is to-day."

"But your papa mustna be left to the keeping of fires, and the entertainment of chance visitors. You winna think long with your book, you ken, and we'll be home again before it's dark."

"Think long!" echoed Graeme. "Not if I'm left at peace with my book—I only hope no one will come."

"My dear!" remonstrated Janet, "that's no' hospitable. I daresay if anybody comes, you'll enjoy their company for a change. You maun try and make friends with folk, like Menie here."

Graeme laughed. "It's easy for Menie, she's a child. But I have to behave myself like a grown woman, at least, with most folk. I would far rather have the afternoon to myself."

She watched them down the street, and then betook herself to her book, and her accustomed seat at the study window. Life was very pleasant to Graeme, these days. She did not manifest her light-heartedness by outward signs; she was almost always as quiet as sorrow and many cares had made her, since her mother's death. But it was a quiet always cheerful, always ready to change to grave talk with Janet, or merry play with the little ones. Janet's returning cheerfulness banished the last shade of anxiety from her mind, and she was too young to go searching into the future for a burden to bear.

She was fast growing into companionship with her father. She knew that he loved and trusted her entirely, and she strove to deserve his confidence. In all matters concerning her brothers and sisters, he consulted her, as he might have consulted her mother, and as well as an elder sister could, she fulfilled a mother's duty to them. In other matters, her father depended upon her judgment and discretion also. Often he was beguiled into forgetting what a child she still was, while he discussed with her subjects more suited for one of maturer years.

And it was pleasant to be looked upon with respect and consideration, by the new friends they had found here. She was a little more than a child in years, and shy and doubtful of herself withal, but it was very agreeable to be treated like a woman, by the kind people about her. Not that she would have confessed this. Not that she was even conscious of the pleasure it gave her. Indeed, she was wont to declare to Janet, in private, that it was all nonsense, and she wished that people would not speak to her always, as though she were a woman of wisdom and experience. But it was agreeable to her all the same.

She had her wish that afternoon. Nobody came to disturb them, till the failing light admonished her that it was time to think of Janet, and the tea-kettle. Then there came a knock at the door, and Graeme opened it to Mr Greenleaf. If she was not glad to see him, her looks belied her. He did not seem to doubt a welcome from her, or her father either, as he came in.

What the charm was, that beguiled Mr Greenleaf into spending so many hours in the minister's study, the good people of Merleville found it difficult to say. The squire's ill-concealed indifference to the opinions of people generally, had told against him always. For once, Mrs Page had been too charitable. He was not in a hopeful state, at least, in her sense of the term, and it might be doubted, whether frequent intercourse with the minister, would be likely to

encourage the young man to the attainment of Mrs Page's standard of excellence. But to the study he often came, and he was never an unwelcome guest.

"If I am come at a wrong time, tell me so," said he, as he shook hands with Mr Elliott, over a table covered with books and papers.

"You can hardly do that," said the minister, preparing to put the books and papers away. "I am nearly done for the night. Excuse me, for a minute only."

Graeme lingered talking to their visitor, till her father should be quite at liberty.

"I have something for you," said Mr Greenleaf, in a minute. Graeme smiled her thanks, and held out her hand for the expected book, or magazine. It was a note this time.

"From Celestia!" she exclaimed, colouring a little.

Graeme did not aspire to the honour of Celestia's confidence in all things, but she knew, or could guess enough, about the state of affairs between her friend and Mr Greenleaf, to be wonderfully interested in them, and she could not help feeling a little embarrassed, as she took the note, from his hands.

"Read it," said he.

Graeme stooped down to catch the firelight. The note was very brief. Celestia was going away, and wished Graeme to come and see her, to-morrow. Mr Greenleaf would fetch her.

"Celestia, going away!" she exclaimed, raising herself up.

"Yes," said he, "have you not heard it?"

"I heard the farm was to be sold, but I hoped they would still stay in Merleville."

"So did I," said Mr Greenleaf, gravely.

"When will they go?"

"Miss Jones is to be a teacher, in the new seminary at Rixford. They are going to live there, and it cannot be very long before they go."

"To her uncle?"

"No, Celestia thinks her mother would not be happy there. They will live by themselves, with the children."

"How sorry Celestia will be to go away," said Graeme, sadly.

"She will not be persuaded to stay," said Mr Greenleaf.

Graeme darted a quick, embarrassed look at him, as much as to say, "Have you asked her?" He answered her in words.

"Yes, I have tried, and failed. She does not care to stay."

There was only sadness in his voice; at least, she detected nothing else. There was none of the bitterness which, while it made Celestia's heart ache that afternoon, had made her all the more determined to do what she believed to be right.

"Oh! it's not that," said Graeme, earnestly, "I'm sure she cares. I mean if she goes, it will be because she thinks it right, not because she wishes it."

"Is it right to make herself and me unhappy?"

"But her mother and the rest. They are in trouble; it would seem like forsaking them."

"It need not. They might stay with her."

"I think, perhaps—I don't think—" Graeme hesitated, and then said hurriedly,—

"Are you rich, Mr Greenleaf?" He laughed.

"I believe you are one of those who do not compute riches by the number of dollars one possesses. So I think, to you I may safely answer, yes. I have contentment with little, and on such wealth one pays no taxes."

"Yes; but—I think,—oh, I can't say what I think; but I'm sure Celestia is right. I am quite sure of that."

Mr Greenleaf did not look displeased, though Graeme feared he might, at her bold speech.

"I don't believe I had better take you to see her to-morrow. You will encourage her to hold out against me."

"Not against you. She would never do that. And, besides, it would make no difference. Celestia is wise and strong, and will do what she believes to be right."

"Wise and strong," repeated Mr Greenleaf, smiling, but his face grew grave in a minute again. Mr Elliott made a movement to join them, and Graeme thought of her neglected tea-kettle, and hastened away.

"Never mind," she whispered, "it will all end well. Things always do when people do right."

Mr Greenleaf might have some doubt as to the truth of this comforting declaration in all cases, but he could have none as to the interest and good wishes of his little friend, so he only smiled in reply. Not that he had really many serious doubts as to its ending well. He had more than once that very afternoon grieved Celestia by saying that she did not care for him; but, if he had ever had any serious trouble on the subject, they vanished when the first touch of anger and disappointment had worn away, giving him time to acknowledge and rejoice over the "strength and wisdom" so unhesitatingly ascribed by Graeme to her friend. So that it was not at all in a desponding spirit that he turned to reply, when the minister addressed him.

They had scarcely settled down to one of their long, quiet talks, when they were summoned to tea by Graeme, and before tea was over, Janet and the bairns came home. The boys had found their way up the hill when school was over, and they all came home together in Mr Snow's sleigh. To escape from the noise and confusion which they brought with them, Mr Greenleaf and the minister went into the study again.

During the silence that succeeded their entrance, there came into Mr Greenleaf's mind a thought that had been often there before. It was a source of wonder to him that a man of Mr Elliott's intellectual power and culture should content himself in so quiet a place as Merleville, and to-night he ventured to give expression to his thoughts. Mr Elliott smiled.

"I don't see that my being content to settle down here for life, is any more wonderful than that you should have done so. Indeed, I should say, far less wonderful. You are young and have the world before you."

"But my case is quite different. I settle here to get a living, and I mean to get a good one too, and besides," added he, laughing, "Merleville is as good a place as any other to go to Congress from; there is no American but may have that before him you know."

"As for the living, I can get here such as will content me. For the rest, the souls in this quiet place are as precious as elsewhere. I am thankful for my field of labour."

Mr Greenleaf had heard such words before, and he had taken them "for what they were worth," as a correct thing for a minister to say. But the quiet earnestness and simplicity of Mr Elliott's manner struck him as being not just a matter of course.

"He is in earnest about it, and does not need to use many words to prove it. There must be something in it." He did not answer him, however.

"There is one thing which is worth consideration," continued Mr Elliott, "you may be disappointed, but I cannot be so, in the nature of things."

"About getting a living?" said Mr Greenleaf, and a vague remembrance of Deacons Fish and Slowcome made him move uneasily in his chair.

"That is not what I was thinking of, but I suppose I may be sure of that, too. 'Your bread shall be given you, and your water sure.' And there is no such thing as disappointment in that for which I really am labouring, the glory of God, and the good of souls."

"Well," said Mr Greenleaf, gravely, "there must be something in it that I don't see, or you will most assuredly be disappointed. It is by no means impossible that I may have my wish, men of humbler powers than mine—I may say it without vanity—have risen higher than to the Congress of our country. I don't look upon mine as by any means a hopeless ambition. But the idea of your ever seeing all the crooked natures in Merleville made straight! Well, to say the least, I don't see how you can be very sanguine about it."

"Well, I don't say that even that is beyond my ambition, or beyond the power of Him whom I serve to accomplish. But though I may never see this, or the half of this accomplished, it does not follow that I am to be disappointed, more than it follows that your happiness will be secured when you sit in the Congress of this great nation, or rule in the White House even, which is not beyond your ambition either, I suppose. You know how a promise may be 'kept to the ear and broken to the heart,' as somebody says."

"I know it is the fashion to speak in that way. We learn, in our school books, all about the folly of ambition, and the unsatisfying nature of political greatness. But even if the attainment must disappoint, there is interest and excitement in the pursuit. And, if you will allow me to say so, it is not so in your case, and to me the disappointment seems even more certain."

Mr Elliott smiled.

"I suppose the converse of the poet's sad declaration may be true. The promise may be broken to the eye and ear, and yet fulfilled divinely to the heart. I am not afraid."

"And, certainly," thought the young man, "he looks calm and hopeful enough."

"And," added Mr Elliott, "as to the interest of the pursuit, if that is to be judged by the importance of the end to be attained, I think mine may well bear comparison to yours."

"Yes, in one sense, I suppose—though I don't understand it. I can imagine an interest most intense, an engagement—a happiness altogether absorbing in such a labour of love, but—I was not looking at the matter from your point of

view.”

“But from no other point of view can the subject be fairly seen,” said Mr Elliott, quietly.

“Well, I have known few, even among clergymen, who have not had their eyes turned pretty frequently to another side of the matter. One ought to be altogether above the necessity of thinking of earthly things, to be able to enjoy throwing himself wholly into such a work, and I fancy that can be said of few.”

“I don’t understand you,” said Mr Elliott. “Do you mean that you doubt the sincerity of those to whom you refer.”

“By no means. My thoughts were altogether in another direction. In fact, I was thinking of the great ‘bread and butter’ struggle in which ninety-nine out of every hundred are for dear life engaged; and none more earnestly, and few with less success, than men of your profession.”

Mr Elliott looked as though he did not yet quite understand. Mr Greenleaf hesitated, slightly at a loss, but soon went on.

“Constituted as we are, I don’t see how a man can wholly devote himself to a work he thinks so great, and yet have patience to struggle with the thousand petty cares of life. The shifts and turnings to which insufficient means must reduce one, cannot but vex and hurt such a nature, if it does not change it at last. But I see I fail to make myself understood by you; let me try again. I don’t know how it may be in your country, but here, at least as far as my personal observation has extended, the remuneration received by ministers is insufficient, not to say paltry. I don’t mean that in many cases they and their families actually suffer, but there are few of them so situated as regards income, that economy need not be the very first consideration in all their arrangements. Comparing them with other professional men they may be called poor. Such a thing as the gratification of taste is not to be thought of in their case. There is nothing left after the bare necessities are secured. It is a struggle to bring up their children, a struggle to educate them, a struggle to live. And what is worse than all, the pittance, which is rightly theirs, comes to them often in a way which, to say the least, is suggestive of charity given and received. No, really, I cannot look on the life of a minister as a very attractive one.”

“I should think not, certainly, if such are your views of it,” said Mr Elliott.

“I wish I could have the comfort of doubting their justness, but I cannot, unless the majority of cases that have fallen under my observation are extreme ones. Why, there are college friends of mine who, in any other profession, might have distinguished themselves—might have become wealthy at least, who are now in some out of the way parish, with wives and little children, burdened with the cares of life. How they are to struggle on in the future it is sad to think of. They will either give up the profession or die, or degenerate into very commonplace men before many years.”

“Unless they have some charm against it—which may very well be,” said Mr Elliott, quietly.

“I see you do not agree with me. Take yourself for instance, or rather, let us take your predecessor. He was a good man, all say who knew him well, and with time and study he might have proved himself a great man. But if ever a man’s life was a struggle for the bare necessities of life, his was, and the culpable neglect of the people in the regular payment of his very small salary was the cause of his leaving them at last. He has since gone West, I hear, to a happier lot, let us hope. The circumstances of his predecessor were no better. He died here, and his wife broke down in a vain effort to maintain and educate his children. She was brought back to Merleville and laid beside her husband less than a year ago. There is something wrong in the matter somewhere.”

There was a pause, and then Mr Greenleaf continued.

“It may seem an unkindly effort in me to try to change your views of your future in Merleville. Still, it is better that you should be in some measure prepared, for what I fear awaits you. Otherwise, you might be disgusted with us all.”

“I shall take refuge in the thought that you are showing me the dark side of the picture,” said Mr Elliott.

“Pray do. And, indeed, I am. I may have said more than enough in my earnestness. I am sure when you really come to know our people, you will like them notwithstanding things that we might wish otherwise.”

“I like you already,” said Mr Elliott, smiling. “I assure you I had a great respect for you as the children of the Puritans, before ever I saw you.”

“Yes, but I am afraid you will like us less; before you like us better. We are the children of the Puritans, but very little, I daresay, like the grave gentlemen up on your shelves yonder. Your countrymen are, at first, generally disappointed in us as a people. Mind, I don’t allow that we are in reality less worthy of respect than you kindly suppose us to be for our fathers’ sakes. But we are different. It is not so much that we do not reach so high a standard, as that we have a different standard of excellence—one that your education, habits, and prepossessions as a people, do not prepare you to appreciate us.”

“Well,” said Mr Elliott, as his friend paused.

“Oh! I have little more to say, except, that what is generally the experience of your countrymen will probably be yours in Merleville. You have some disappointing discoveries to make among us, you who are an earnest man and a thinker.”

“I think a want of earnestness can hardly be called a sin of your countrymen,” said the minister.

“Earnestness!” said Mr Greenleaf. “No, we are earnest enough here in Merleville. But the most of even the good men

among us seem earnest, only in the pursuit of that, in comparison to which my political aspirations seem lofty and praiseworthy. It is wealth they seek. Not that wealth which will result in magnificent expenditure, and which, in a certain sense, may have a charm for even high-minded men, but money-making in its meanest form—the scraping together of copper coins for their own sakes. At least one might think so, for any good they ever seem to get of it.”

“You are severe,” said the minister, quietly.

“Not too severe. This seems to be the aim of all of us, whether we are willing to acknowledge it or not. And such a grovelling end will naturally make a man unscrupulous as to the means to attain it. There are not many men among us here—I don’t know more than two or three—who would not be surprised if you told them, being out of the pulpit, that they had not a perfect right to make the very most out of their friends—even by shaving closely in matters of business.”

“And yet you say their standard is a high one?”

“High or not, the religious people among us don’t seem to doubt their own Christianity on account of these things. And what is more, they don’t seem to lose faith in each other. But how it will all seem to you is another matter.”

“How does it seem to you?”

“Oh, I am but a spectator. Being not one of the initiated, I am not supposed to understand the change they profess to have undergone; and so, instead of being in doubt about particular cases, I am disposed to think little of the whole matter. With you it is different.”

“Yes, with me it is indeed different,” said the minister, gravely—so gravely, that Mr Greenleaf almost regretted having spoken so freely, and when he spoke again it was to change the subject.

“It must have required a great wrench to break away from your people and country and old associations,” said he, in a little. Mr Elliott started,—

“No, the wrench came before. It would have cost me more to stay and grow old in my own land than it did to leave it, than it ever can do to live and die among strangers.”

Fearful that he had awakened painful thoughts, Mr Greenleaf said no more. In a little Mr Elliott went on,—

“It was an old thought, this wishing to find a home for our children in this grand new world. We had always looked forward to it sometime. And when I was left alone, the thought of my children’s future, and the longing to get away—anywhere—brought me here.”

He paused, and when he spoke again it was more calmly.

“Perhaps it was cowardly in me to flee. There was help for me there, if my faith had not failed. I thought it would be better for my children when I left them to leave them here. But God knows it was no desire to enrich myself that brought me to America.”

“We can live on little. I trust you will be mistaken in your fears. But if these troubles do come, we must try, with God’s grace, and Mrs Nasmyth’s help, to get through them as best we can. We might not better ourselves by a change, as you seem to think the evil a national one.”

“The love and pursuit of the ‘almighty dollar,’ is most certainly a national characteristic. As to the bearing it may have in church matters in other places, of course I have not the means of judging. Here I know it has been bad enough in the past.”

“Well, I can only say I have found the people most kind and liberal hitherto,” said Mr Elliott.

“Have you had a settlement with them since you came?” asked the squire; the remembrance of various remarks he had heard of late coming unpleasantly to his mind.

“No, I have not yet. But as the half-year is nearly over, I suppose it will come soon. Still I have no fears—I think I need have none. It is not *theirs* but *them* I seek.”

“Do you remember the Sabbath I first came among you? I saw you there among the rest. If my heart rose up in thankfulness to God that day, it was with no thought of gold or gear. God is my witness that I saw not these people as possessors of houses and lands, but of precious souls—living souls to be encouraged—slumbering souls to be aroused—dead souls to be made alive in Christ, through His own Word, spoken by me and blessed by Him.

“No, I do not think I can possibly be disappointed in this matter. I may have to bear trial, and it may come to me as it oftenest comes to God’s people, in the very way that seems hardest to bear, but God *will bless his Word*. And even if I do not live to see it, I can rest in the assurance that afterward, ‘both he that soweth and he that reapeth shall rejoice together.’”

He paused. A momentary gleam of triumph passed over his face and left it peaceful.

“The peace that passeth understanding,” thought the young man, with a sigh. For he could not quite satisfy himself by saying, that Mr Elliott was no man of business, an unworldly man. It came into his mind that even if the minister were chasing a shadow, it was a shadow more satisfying than his possible reality of political greatness. So he could not but sigh as he sat watching that peaceful face. The minister looked up and met his eye.

"And so, my friend, I think we must end where we begun. You may be disappointed even in the fulfilment of your hopes. But for me, all must end well—let the end be what it may."

Chapter Twelve.

The time of settlement came at last. The members of the church and congregation were requested to bring to Deacon Sterne and his coadjutors an account of money and produce already paid by each, and also a statement of the sum they intended to subscribe for the minister's support during the ensuing half year. After a delay which, considering all things, was not more than reasonable, this was done, and the different accounts being put into regular form by the proper persons, they were laid before the minister for his inspection and approval.

This was done by Deacons Fish and Slowcome alone. Deacon Sterne, as his brethren in office intimated to Mrs Nasmyth, when she received them, having just then his hands full of his own affairs. Deacon Fish "expected" that brother Sterne had got into trouble. It had been coming on for some time. His son, the only boy he had left, had been over to Rixford, and had done something dreadful, folks said, he did not exactly know what, and the deacon had gone over to see about it. Deacon Sterne was Janet's favourite among the men in office, and apart from her regret that he should not be present on an occasion so important, she was greatly concerned for him on his own account.

"Dear me!" said she, "I saw him at the kirk on the Sabbath-day, looking just as usual."

"Well, yes, I expect so," said Mr Fish. "Brother Sterne looks always pretty much so. He ain't apt to show his feelin's, if he's got any. He'll have something to suffer with his son William, I guess, whether he shows it or not."

Janet liked both father and son, though it was well known in the town that there was trouble between them; so instead of making any answer, she hastened to usher them into the study. The minister awaited them, and business began. First was displayed the list of subscriptions for the coming half-year. This was quite encouraging. Three hundred and fifty and odd dollars. This looked well. There had never been so much subscribed in Merleville before. The deacons were elated, and evidently expected that the minister should be so, too. He would be well off now, said they. But the minister was always a quiet man, and said little, and the last half-year's settlement was turned to.

There were several sheets of it. The minister in danger of getting bewildered among the items, turned to the sum total. "Two hundred and seventy-two dollars, sixty-two and a-half cents." He was a little mystified still, and looked so.

"If there is anything wrong, anything that you object to, it must be put right," said Deacon Slowcome.

Deacon Fish presumed, "that when Mr Elliott should have compared it with the account which he had no doubt kept, it would be found to be all right."

Mr Elliott had to confess that no such account had been kept. He supposed it was all it should be. He really could say nothing with regard to it. He left the management of household affairs entirely to his daughter and Mrs Nasmyth. It was suggested that Mrs Nasmyth should be called in, and the deacon cleared his voice to read it to her.

"If there's anything you don't seem to understand or remember," prefaced the accommodating Deacon Slowcome, "don't feel troubled about saying so. I expect we'll make things pretty straight after a while."

Mrs Nasmyth looked at the minister, but the minister did not look at her, and the reading began. After the name of each person, came the days' work, horse hire, loads of firewood, bushels of corn, pounds of butter and cheese, sugar and dried apples, which he or she had contributed. Deacon Fish's subscription was chiefly paid by his horse and his cow. The former had carried the minister on two or three of his most distant visits, and the latter had supplied a quart or two of milk daily during a great part of the winter. It was overpaid indeed by just seventeen and a-half cents, which, however, the deacon seemed inclined to make light of.

"There ain't no matter about it. It can go right on to the next half year. It ain't no matter about it anyhow," said he, in liberal mood.

He had an attentive listener. Mrs Nasmyth listened with vain efforts not to let her face betray her utter bewilderment at the whole proceeding, only assenting briefly when Mr Slowcome interrupted the reading, now and then, to say interrogatively,—

"You remember?"

It dawned upon her at last that these were the items that made up the subscription for the half year that was over; but except that her face changed a little, she gave no sign. It is possible the deacon had had some slight misgiving as to how Mrs Nasmyth might receive the statement; certainly his voice took a relieved tone as he drew near the end, and at last read the sum total: "Two hundred and seventy-two dollars sixty-two and a-half cents."

Again Janet's eye sought the minister's, and this time he did not avoid her look. The rather pained surprise had all gone out of his face. Intense amusement at Janet's changing face, on which bewilderment, incredulity and indignation were successively written, banished, for a moment, every other feeling. But that passed, and by the look that followed Janet knew that she must keep back the words that were rising to her lips. It required an effort, however, and a rather awkward silence followed. Deacon Slowcome spoke first:

"Well, I suppose, we may consider that it stands all right. And I, for one, feel encouraged to expect great things."

"I doubt, sirs," said Janet in a voice ominously mild and civil, "there are some things that haena been put down on yon paper. There was a cum apples, and a bit o' unco spare rib, and—"

"Well, it's possible there are some folks ain't sent in their accounts yet. That can be seen to another time."

Janet paid no attention to the interruption.

"There were some eggs from Mrs Sterne—a dozen and three, I think—and a goose at the New Year from somebody else; and your wife sent a pumpkin-pie; and there was the porridge and milk that Judge Merle brought over when first we came here—"

"Ah! the pie was a present from my wife," said Deacon Fish, on whom Mrs Nasmyth's awful irony was quite lost.

"And I presume Judge Merle didn't mean to charge for the porridge, or hominy, or whatever it was," said Deacon Slowcome.

"And what for no'?" demanded Janet, turning on him sharply. "I'm sure we got far more good and pleasure from it than ever we got o' your bloody fore-quarter of beef, that near scunnered the bairns ere we were done with it. Things should stand on your papers at their true value."

Deacon Slowcome was not, in reality, more surprised at this outbreak than he had been when his "fore-quarter of bloody beef" had been accepted unchallenged, but he professed to be so; and in his elaborate astonishment allowed Janet's remarks about a slight mistake she had made, and about the impropriety of "looking a gift horse in the mouth" to pass unanswered.

"You were at liberty to return the beef if you didn't want it," said he, with an injured air.

"Weel, I'll mind that next time," said she in a milder tone, by no means sure how the minister might approve of her plain speaking. Deacon Fish made a diversion in favour of peace, by holding up the new subscription-list, and asking her triumphantly if that "didn't look well."

"Ay, on paper," said Janet, dryly. "Figures are no' dollars. And if your folk have been thinking that the minister and his family hae been living only on the bits o' things written down on your paper you are mistaken. The gude money that has helped it has been worth far more than the like o' that, as I ken weel, who hae had the spending o' it; but I daresay you're no' needing me longer, sir," she added, addressing the minister, and she left the room.

This matter was not alluded to again for several days, but it did Janet a deal of good to think about it. She had no time to indulge in homesick musings, with so definite a subject of indignant speculation as the meanness of the deacons. She "was nettled at herself beyond all patience" that she should have allowed herself, to fancy that so many of the things on the paper had been tokens of the people's good-will.

"Two hundred and seventy dollars and more," she repeated. "Things mount up, I ken weel; but I maun take another look at it. And I'll hae more sense anither time, I'm thinking."

She did not speak to Graeme. There would be no use to vex her; but she would fain have had a few words with the minister, but his manner did not encourage her to introduce the subject. A circumstance soon occurred which gave her an opening, and the subject, from first to last, was thoroughly discussed.

March was nearly over. The nights were cold still, but the sun was powerful during the day, and there were many tokens that the earth was about to wake from her long sleep and prepare for the refreshment of her children. "And time for her," sighed Janet, taking a retrospective view of all that had happened since she saw her face.

The boys had been thrown into a state of great excitement by a proposal made to them by their friend Mr Snow. He had offered to give them sixty of the best trees in his sugar place, with all the articles necessary to the making of sugar, on terms that, to them, seemed easy enough. They were to make their own preparations, gather the sap, cut their own wood, in short, carry on the business entirely themselves; and, nothing daunted, they went the very first fine day to see the ground and make a beginning. Graeme and the other girls went with them as far as Mr Snow's house, and Janet was left alone. The minister was in his study as usual, and when they were all gone, uncomfortable with the unaccustomed quietness of the house, she arose and went to the door and looked rather sadly down the street. She had not long to indulge her feelings of loneliness, however. A sleigh came slowly grating along the half-bare street, and its occupant, Mr Silas Spears, not one of her favourites, stopped before the door, and lost no time in "hitching" his horse to the post. Janet set him a chair, and waited for the accustomed question whether the minister was at home, and whether he could see him.

"The body has some sense and discretion," said Janet to herself, as he announced instead that he "wa'ant a going to stay but a minute, and it wouldn't be worth while troubling the minister." He did stay, however, telling news and giving his opinion on matters and things in general in a way which was tolerable to Janet in her solitude. He rose to go at last.

"I've got a bucket of sugar out here," said he. "Our folks didn't seem to want it, and I thought I'd fetch it along down. I took it to Cook's store, but they didn't want it, and they didn't care enough about it at Sheldon's to want to pay for it, so I thought I might as well turn it in to pay my minister's tax."

So in he came within a minute.

"There's just exactly twenty-nine pounds with the bucket. Sugar's been sellin' for twelve and a-half this winter, and I guess I ought to have that for it, then we'll be about even, according to my calculation."

"Sugar!" ejaculated Janet, touching the solid black mass with her finger. "Call you *that* sugar?"

"Why, yes, I call it sugar. Not the best, maybe, but it's better than it looks. It'll be considerable whiter by the time you

drain it off, I expect."

"And weigh considerable lighter, I expect," said Mrs Nasmyth, unconsciously imitating Mr Spears' tone and manner in her rising wrath. "I'm very much obliged to you, but we're in no especial need o' sugar at this time, and we'll do without a while before we spend good siller on staff like that."

"Well I'll say eleven cents, or maybe ten, as sugarin' time is 'most here. It *ain't* first-rate," he added, candidly. "It mightn't just do for tea, but it's as good as any to sweeten pies and cakes."

"Many thanks to you. But we're no' given to the makin' o' pies and cakes in this house. Plain bread, or a sup porridge and milk does for us, and it's mair than we're like to get, if things dinna mend with us. So you'll just take it with you again."

"Well," said Mr Spears, slightly at a loss, "I guess I'll leave it. I ain't particular about the price. Mr Elliott can allow me what he thinks it worth, come to use it. I'll leave it anyhow."

"But you'll no' leave it with my consent. Deacon Slowcome said the minister wasna needing to take anything he didna want, and the like o' that we could make no use of."

"The deacon might have said that in a general kind of way, but I rather guess he didn't mean you to take him up so. I've been calculating to pay my minister's tax with that sugar, and I don't know as I've got anything else handy. I'll leave it, and if you don't conclude to keep it, you better speak to the deacon about it, and maybe he'll give you the money for it. I'll leave it anyhow."

"But you'll no leave it here," exclaimed Mrs Nasmyth, whose patience was not proof against his persistence, and seizing the bucket, she rushed out at the door, and depositing it in the sleigh, was in again before the astonished Mr Spears quite realised her intention.

"You'll no' find me failing in my duty to the minister, as I hae done before," exclaimed she, a little breathless with the exertion. "If the minister canna hae his stipend paid in good siller as he has been used wi', he shall at least hae nae trash like yon. So dinna bring here again what ither folk winna hae from you, for I'll hae none o' it."

"I should like to see the minister a minute," said Mr Spears, seating himself with dignity. "I don't consider that you are the one to settle this business."

"There's many a thing that you dinna consider that there's sense in, notwithstanding. It's just me that is to decide this business, and a' business where the minister's welfare, as regards meat and drink, is concerned. So dinna fash yourself and me mair about it."

"I'd like to see him, anyhow," said he, taking a step towards the study-door.

"But you'll no' see him about any such matter," and Janet placed herself before him. "I'm no' to hae the minister vexed with the like o' that nonsense to-night, or any night. I wonder you dinna think shame, to hold up your face to me, forby the minister. What kens the minister about the like o' that? He has other things to think about. It's weel that there's aye me to stand between him and the like o' your 'glegs and corbies'."—And Janet, as her manner was when excited, degenerated into Scotch to such a degree, that her opponent forgot his indignation in astonishment, and listened in silence. Janet was successful. Mr Spears was utterly nonplussed, and took his way homeward, by no means sure that he hadn't been abused! "Considerable beat, anyhow."

Scarcely had he taken his departure, when Mr Elliott made his appearance, having had some idea that something unusual had been going on. Though loth to do so, Janet thought best to give a faithful account of what had taken place. He laughed heartily at her success and Mr Spears' discomfiture, but it was easy to see he was not quite at his ease about the matter.

"I am at a loss to know how all this will end," he said, gravely, after a minute.

"Indeed, sir, you need be at no loss about that. It will end in a 'toom pantry' for us, and that before very long."

This was the beginning of a conversation with regard to their affairs, that lasted till the children came home. Much earnest thought did the minister bestow on the subject for the next three days, and on the evening of the fourth, at the close of a full conference meeting, when most of the members of the church were present, the result of his meditations was given to the public. He did not use many words, but they were to the point.

He told them of the settlement for the past, and the prospect for the future. He told them that the value to his family of the articles brought in, was not equal to their value, as named in the subscription-lists, their real value he supposed. They could not live in comfort on these terms, and they should never try it. He had a proposal to make to them. The deacon had estimated that an annual amount equal to seven hundred dollars could be raised. Let each subscriber deduct a seventh part of what he had promised to pay, and let the remainder be paid in money to the treasurer, so that he might receive his salary in quarterly payments. This would be the means of avoiding much that was annoying to all parties, and was the only terms on which he would think it wise to remain in Merleville.

He alluded to a report that had lately reached him, as to his having money invested in Scotland. In the hand of a friend he had deposited sufficient to defray the expenses of his eldest son, until his education should be completed. He had no more. The comfort of his family must depend upon his salary; and what that was to be, and how it was to be paid, must be decided without loss of time.

He said just two or three words about his wish to stay, about the love he felt for many of them, and of his earnest desire to benefit them all. He had no other desire than to cast in his lot with theirs, and to live and die among them.

But no real union or confidence could be maintained between them, while the matter of support was liable at any moment to become a source of discomfort and misunderstanding to all concerned. He added, that as so many were present, perhaps no better time than to-night could be found for arranging the matter, and so he left them.

There was quite a gathering that night. Judge Merle was there, and the deacons, and the Pages, and Mr Spears, and a great many besides. Behind the door, in a corner seat, sat Mr Snow, and near him, Mr Greenleaf. He evidently felt he was not expected to remain, and made a movement to go, but Sampson laid his hand on his arm.

"Hold on, Squire," he whispered; "as like as not they'd spare us, but I'm bound to see this through."

There was a long pause. Then Deacon Fish got up and cleared his throat, and "felt as though he felt," and went over much ground, without accomplishing much. Deacon Slowcome did pretty much the same. Judge Merle came a little nearer the mark, and when he sat down, there was a movement behind the door, and Sampson Snow rose, and stepped out. He laid his hand on the door latch, and then turned round and opened his lips.

"I expect you'll all think it ain't my place to speak in meetin', and I ain't goin' to say a great deal. It's no more than two hours or so since I got home from Rixford, and Squire Stone, he told me that their minister had given notice that he was goin' to quit. Goin' to Boston, I guess. And the Squire, says he to me, 'We've a notion of talking a little to your Mr Elliott,' and says he, 'We wouldn't begrudge him a thousand dollars cash down, and no mistake.' So now don't worry any about the minister. *He's* all right, and worth his pay any day. That's all I've got to say," and Mr Snow opened the door and walked out.

Sampson's speech was short, but it was the speech of the evening, and told. That night, or within a few days, arrangements were made for the carrying out of the plan suggested by Mr Elliott, with this difference, that the seventh part was not to be deducted because of money payment. And the good people of Merleville did not regret their promptitude, when the very next week there came a deputation from Rixford, to ascertain whether Mr Elliott was to remain in Merleville, and if not, whether he would accept an invitation to settle in the larger town.

Mr Elliott's answer was brief and decided. He had no wish to leave Merleville while the people wished him to remain. He hoped never to leave them while he lived. And he never did.

Chapter Thirteen.

Spring came and went. The lads distinguished themselves both for the quantity and quality of their sugar, and highly enjoyed the work besides. The free out-of-door life, the camping in the woods beside a blazing fire, and the company of the village lads who daily and nightly crowded around them, charmed them from all other pursuits. Mr Foster and his mathematics were sadly neglected in these days. In future they were to devote themselves to agriculture.

In vain Janet hinted that "new things aye pleased light heads," and warned them that they were deciding too soon. In vain Mr Snow said that it was not sugaring time all the year; and that they should summer and winter among the hills before they committed themselves to a farmer's life. Harry quoted Cincinnatus, and Norman proved to his own satisfaction, if not to Mr Snow's, that on scientific principles every farm in Merleville could be cultivated with half the expense, and double the profits. Even their father was carried away by their enthusiasm; and it is to be feared, that if he had had a fortune to invest, it would have been buried for ever among these beautiful hills of Merleville.

An opportunity to test the strength of the lads' determination, came in a manner which involved less risk than a purchase would have done. Early in May a letter was received from Mr Ross, in which he offered to take the charge of Arthur's education on himself, and, as he was well able to do so, Mr Elliott saw no reason for refusing the offer. The money, therefore, that he had set apart for his son's use, returned to his hands, and he did a wiser thing than to invest it either in mountain or valley.

It came, about this time, to the worst, with Mrs Jones and her daughter Celestia. The mortgage on the farm could not be paid, even the interest had fallen far behind, and Squire Skinflint had foreclosed. Nothing remained for the widow, but to save what she could from the wreck of a property that had once been large, and go away to seek a new home for herself and her children. On the homestead she was about to leave, the heart and eyes of Mr Snow had long been fixed. As a relation of the widow, he had done what could be done, both by advice and assistance, to avert the evil day; but the widow was no farmer, and her boys were children, and the longer she kept the place, the more she must involve herself; and now that the land must pass from her hands, Sampson would fain have it pass into his. But the only condition of sale was for ready money, and this without great sacrifice he could not obtain. Meanwhile, others were considering the matter of the purchase, and the time was short; for there had been some failure in Squire Skinflint's Western land speculation, and money must be had. If the widow could have held it still, Mr Snow would never have desired to have the land; but what with the many thoughts he had given to it, and the fear of getting bad neighbours, he had about come to the conclusion that it was not worth while to farm at all, unless he could have the two farms put into one.

Just at this juncture, the minister surprised him greatly by asking his advice about the investment of the money which his brother-in-law's generosity had placed at his disposal. A very few words settled the matter. The minister lent the money to Mr Snow, and for the annual interest of the same, he was to have the use of the farm-house and the ten acres of meadow and pasture land, that lay between it and the pond. The arrangement was in all respects advantageous to both parties, and before May was out, the little brown house behind the elms was left in silence, to await the coming of the next chance tenants; and the pleasurable excitement of settling down in their new home, filled the minds of Janet and the bairns.

And a very pleasant home it promised to be. Even in that beautiful land of mountain and valley they would have sought in vain for a lovelier spot. Sheltered by high hills from the bleak winds of the north and east, it was still

sufficiently elevated to permit a wide view of the farms and forests around it. Close below, with only a short, steep bank, and a wide strip of meadow land between, lay Merle pond, the very loveliest of the many lovely lakelets, hidden away among these mountains. Over on the rising ground beyond the pond stood the meeting-house, and scattered to the right and left of it were the white houses of the village, half-hidden by the tall elms and maples that fringed the village street. Close by the farm-house, between it and the thick pine grove on the hill, ran Carson's brook, a stream which did not disappear in summer-time, as a good many of these hill streams are apt to do, and which, for several months in the year was almost as worthy of the name of river as the Merle itself. Before the house was a large grassy yard, having many rose-bushes and lilac trees scattered along the fences and the path that led to the door. There were shade trees, too. Once they had stood in regular lines along the road, and round the large garden. Some of these had been injured because of the insufficient fences of late years; but those that remained were trees worthy of the name of trees. There were elms whose branches nearly touched each other, from opposite sides of the wide yard; and great maples that grew as symmetrically in the open space, as though each spring they had been clipped and cared for by experienced hands. There had been locusts once, but the old trees had mostly died, and there were only a few young ones springing up here and there, but they were trees before the children went away from the place which they were now beginning to look upon as home.

Formerly, there had been a large and handsome garden laid out at the end of the house, but since trouble had come on the family, its cultivation had been considered too much expense, and the grass was growing green on its squares and borders now. There were a few perennials easy to cultivate; and annuals such as sow themselves, marigolds and pansies. There was balm in abundance, and two or three gigantic peonies, in their season the admiration of all passers by; and beds of useful herbs, wormwood and sage, and summer savory. But, though it looked like a wilderness of weeds the first day they came to see it, Janet's quick eye foresaw a great deal of pleasure and profit which might be got for the bairns out of the garden, and, as usual, Janet saw clearly.

There was a chance to find fault with the house, if anyone had at this time been inclined to find fault with anything. It was large and pleasant, but it was sadly out of repair. Much of it had been little used of late, and looked dreary enough in its dismantled state. But all this was changed after a while, and they settled down very happily in it, without thinking about any defect it might have, and these disappeared in time.

For, by and by, all necessary repairs were made by their provident landlord's own hands. He had no mind to pay out money for what he could do himself; and many a wet afternoon did he and his hired man devote to the replacing of shingles, the nailing on of clapboards, to puttying, painting, and other matters of the same kind. A good landlord he was, and a kind neighbour too; and when the many advantages of their new home were being told over by the children, the living so near to Mr Snow and little Emily was never left till the last.

A very pleasant summer thus began to them all. It would be difficult to say which of them all enjoyed their new life the most. But Janet's prophecy came true. The *newness* of farming proved to be its chief charm to the lads; and if it had been left entirely to them to plant and sow, and care for, and gather in the harvest, it is to be feared there would not have been much to show for the summer's work. But their father, who was by no means inexperienced in agricultural matters, had the success of their farming experiment much at heart, and with his advice and the frequent expostulations and assistance of Mr Snow, affairs were conducted on their little farm on the whole prosperously.

Not that the lads grew tired of exerting themselves. There was not a lazy bone in their bodies, Mr Snow declared, and no one had a better opportunity of knowing than he. But their strength and energy were not exerted always in a direction that would *pay*, according to Mr Snow's idea of remuneration. Much time and labour were expended on the building of a bridge over Carson's brook, between the house and Pine Grove Hill, and much more to the making of a waterfall above it. Even Mr Snow, who was a long time in coming to comprehend why they should take so much trouble with what was no good but to look at, was carried away by the spirit of the affair at last, and lent his oxen, and used his crowbar in their cause, conveying great stones to the spot. When the bridge and the waterfall were completed, a path was to be made round the hill, to the pine grove at the top. Then, among the pines, there was a wonderful structure of rocks and stones, covered with mosses and creeping plants. The Grotto, the children called it, Mr Snow called it the Cave. A wonderful place it was, and much did they enjoy it. To be sure, it would not hold them all at once, but the grove would, and the grotto looked best on the outside, and much pleasure did they get out of their labours.

The lads did not deserve all the credit of these great works. The girls helped, not only with approving eyes and lips, but with expert hands as well. Even Graeme grew rosy and sunburnt by being out of doors so much on bright mornings and evenings, and if it had been always summer-time, there might have been some danger that even Graeme would not very soon have come back to the quiet indoor enjoyment of work and study again.

As for Janet, her home-sickness must have been left in the little brown house behind the elms, for it never troubled her after she came up the brae. With the undisputed possession of poultry, pigs and cows, came back her energy and peace of mind. The first basket of eggs collected by the children, the first churning of golden butter which she was able to display to their admiring gaze, were worth their weight in gold as helps to her returning cheerfulness. Not that she valued her dumb friends for their usefulness alone, or even for the comforts they brought to the household. She had a natural love for all dependent creatures, and petted and provided for her favourites, till they learned to know and love her in return. All helpless creatures seemed to come to her naturally. A dog, which had been cruelly beaten by his master, took refuge with her; and being fed and caressed by her hand, could never be induced to leave her guardianship again. The very bees, at swarming time, did not sting Janet, though they lighted in clouds on her snowy cap and neckerchief; and the little brown sparrows came to share with the chickens the crumbs she scattered at the door. And so, hens and chickens, and little brown sparrows did much to win her from a regretful remembrance of the past, and to reconcile her to what was strange—"unco like" in her new home.

Her cows were, perhaps, her prime favourites. Not that she would acknowledge them at all equal to "Fleckie" or "Blackie," now, probably, the favourites of another mistress on the other side of the sea. But "Brindle and Spottie

were wise-like beasts, with mair sense and discretion than some folk that she could name," and many a child in Merleville got less care than she bestowed on them. Morning and night, and, to the surprise of all the farmers' wives in Merleville, at noon too, when the days were long she milked them with her own hands, and made more and better butter from the two, than even old Mrs Snow, who prided herself on her abilities in these matters, made from any three on her pasture. And when in the fall Mr Snow went to Boston with the produce of his mother's dairy, and his own farm, a large tub of Janet's butter went too, for which was to be brought back "tea worth the drinking, and at a reasonable price," and other things besides, which at Merleville and at Merleville prices, could not be easily obtained.

The Indian-summer had come again. Its mysterious haze and hush were on all things under the open sky, and within the house all was quiet, too. The minister was in the study, and the bairns were in the pine grove, or by the water side, or even farther away; for no sound of song or laughter came from these familiar places. Janet sat at the open door, feeling a little dreary, as she was rather apt to do, when left for hours together alone by the bairns. Besides, there was something in the mild air and in the quiet of the afternoon, that "'minded" her of the time a year ago, when the bairns, having all gone to the kirk on that first Sabbath-day, she had "near grat herself blind" from utter despairing home-sickness. She could now, in her restored peace and firmness, afford to feel a little contemptuous of her former self, yet a sense of sadness crept over her, at the memory of the time, a slight pang of the old malady stirred at her heart. Even now, she was not quite sure that it would be prudent to indulge herself in thoughts of the old times, lest the wintry days, so fast hastening, might bring back the old gloom. So she was not sorry when the sound of footsteps broke the stillness, and she was pleased, for quite other reasons, when Mr Snow appeared at the open door. He did not accept her invitation to enter, but seated himself on the doorstep.

"Your folks are all gone, are they?" asked he.

"The minister is in his study, and Miss Graeme and the bairns are out by, some way or other. Your Emily's with them."

"Yes, I reckoned so. I've just got home from Rixford. It wouldn't amount to much, all I could do to-night, so I thought I'd come along up a spell."

Janet repeated her kindly welcome.

"The minister's busy, I presume," said he.

"Yes,—as it's Saturday,—but he winna be busy very long now. If you'll bide a moment, he'll be out, I daresay."

"There's no hurry. It's nothing particular."

But Mr Snow was not in his usual spirits evidently, and watching him stealthily, Janet saw a care-worn anxious expression fastening on his usually, cheerful face.

"Are you no' weel the night?" she asked.

"Sartain. I never was sick in my life."

"And how are they all down-by?" meaning at Mr Snow's house, by "down-by."

"Well, pretty much so. Only just middling. Nothing to brag of, in the way of smartness."

There was a long silence after that. Mr Snow sat with folded arms, looking out on the scene before them.

"It's kind o' pleasant here, ain't it?" said he, at last.

"Ay," said Janet, softly, not caring to disturb his musings. He sat still, looking over his own broad fields, not thinking of them as his, however, not calculating the expense of the new saw-mill, with which he had been threatening to disfigure Carson's brook, just at the point where its waters fell into the pond. He was looking far-away to the distant hills, where the dim haze was deepening into purple, hiding the mountain tops beyond. But it could not be hills, nor haze, nor hidden mountain tops, that had brought that wistful longing look into his eyes, Janet thought, and between doubt as to what she ought to say, and doubt as to whether she should say anything at all, she was for a long time silent. At last, a thought struck her.

"What for wasna you at the Lord's table, on the Sabbath-day?" asked she.

Sampson gave her a queer look, and a short amused laugh.

"Well, I guess our folks would ha' opened their eyes, if I had undertook to go there."

Janet looked at him in some surprise.

"And what for no? I ken there are others of the folk, that let strifes and divisions hinder them from doing their duty, and sitting down together. Though wherefore the like of these things should hinder them from remembering their Lord, is more than I can understand. What hae you been doing, or what has somebody been doing to you?"

There was a pause, and then Sampson looked up and said, gravely.

"Mis' Nasmyth, I ain't a professor. I'm one of the world's people Deacon Fish tells about."

Janet looked grave.

"Come now, Mis' Nasmyth, you don't mean to say you thought I was one of the good ones?"

"You ought to be," said she, gravely.

"Well,—yes, I suppose I ought to. But after all, I guess there ain't a great sight of difference between folks,—leastways, between Merleville folks. I know all about *them*. I was the first white child born in the town, I was raised here, and in some way or other, I'm related to most folks in town, and I ought to know them all pretty well by this time. Except on Sundays, I expect they're all pretty much so. It wouldn't do to tell round, but there are some of the world's people, that I'd full as lief do business with, as with most of the professors. Now that's a fact."

"You're no' far wrong *there*, I daresay," said Janet, with emphasis. "But that's neither here nor there, as far as your duty is concerned, as you weel ken."

"No,—I don't know as it is. But it kind o' makes me feel as though there wasn't much in religion, anyway."

Janet looked mystified. Mr Snow continued.

"Well now, see here, I'll tell you just how it is. There ain't one of them that don't think I'm a sinner of the worst kind—gospel hardened. They've about given me up, I know they have. Well now, let alone the talk, I don't believe there's a mite of difference, between me, and the most of them, and the Lord knows I'm bad enough. And so you see, I've about come to the conclusion, that if there is such a thing as religion, I haven't never come across the real article."

"That's like enough," said Janet, with a groan. "I canna say that I have seen muckle o' it myself in this town, out of our own house. But I canna see that that need be any excuse to you. You have aye the word."

"Well, yes. I've always had the Bible, and I've read it considerable, but I never seem to get the hang of it, somehow. And it ain't because I ain't tried, either. There was one spell that I was dreadful down, and says I to myself, if there's comfort to be got out of that old book, I'm bound to have it. So I began at the beginning about the creation, and Adam and Eve, but I didn't seem to get much comfort there. There was some good reading, but along over a piece, there was a deal that I could see nothing to. Some of the Psalms seemed to kind o' touch the spot, and the Proverbs *are* first-rate. I tell *you* he knew something of human nature, that wrote *them*."

"There's one thing you might have learned, before you got far over in Genesis," said Mrs Nasmyth, gravely, "that you are a condemned sinner. You should have settled that matter with yourself, before you began to look for comfort."

"Yes. I knew that before, but I couldn't seem to make it go. Then I thought, maybe I didn't understand it right, so I talked with folks and went to meeting, and did the best I could, thinking surely what other folks had got, and I hadn't, would come sometime. But it didn't. The talking, and the going to meeting, didn't help me.

"Now there's Deacon Sterne; he'd put it right to me. He'd say, says he, 'Sampson, you're a sinner, you know you be. You've got to give up, and bow that stiff neck o' your'n to the yoke.' Well, 'I'd say, I'd be glad to, if I only knew how to.' Then he'd say, 'But you can't do it yourself, no how. You're clay in the hands of the potter, and you'll have to perish, if the Lord don't take right hold to save you.' Then says I, 'I wish to mercy He would.' Then he'd talk and talk, but it all came to about that, 'I must, and I couldn't,' and it didn't help me a mite.

"That was a spell ago, after Captain Jennings' folks went West. I wanted to go awfully, but father he was getting old, and mother she wouldn't hear a word of it. I was awful discontented, and then, after a spell, worse came, and I tell *you*, I'd ha' given most anything, to have got religion, just to have had something to hold on to."

Mr Snow paused. There was no doubting his earnestness now. Janet did not speak, and in a little while he went on again.

"I'd give considerable, just to be sure there's anything in getting religion. Sometimes I seem to see that there is, and then again I think, why don't it help folks more. Now, there's Deacon Sterne, he's one of the best of them. He wouldn't swerve a hair, from what he believed to be right, not to save a limb. He is one of the real old Puritan sort, not a mite like Fish and Slowcome. But he ain't one of the meek and lowly, I can tell you. And he's made some awful mistakes in his lifetime. He's been awful hard and strict in his family. His first children got along pretty well. Most of them were girls, and their mother was a smart woman, and stood between them and their father's hardness. And besides, in those days when the country was new, folks had to work hard, old and young, and that did considerable towards keeping things straight. But his boys never thought of their father, but to fear him. They both went, as soon as ever they were of age. Silas came home afterwards, and died. Joshua went West, and I don't believe his father has heard a word from him, these fifteen years. The girls scattered after their mother died, and then the deacon married again, Abby Sheldon, a pretty girl, and a good one; but she never ought to have married him. She was not made of tough enough stuff, to wear along side of him. She has changed into a grave and silent woman, in his house. Her children all died when they were babies, except William, the eldest,—wilful Will, they call him, and I don't know but he'd have better died too, for as sure as the deacon don't change his course with him, he'll drive him right straight to ruin, and break his mother's heart to boot. Now, what I want to know is—if religion is the powerful thing it is called, why don't it keep folks that have it, from making such mistakes in life?"

Janet did not have her answer at her tongue's end, and Sampson did not give her time to consider.

"Now there's Becky Pettimore, she's got religion. But it don't keep her from being as sour as vinegar, and as bitter as gall—"

"Whist, man!" interrupted Janet. "It ill becomes the like o' you to speak that way of a poor lone woman like yon—one who never knew what it was to have a home, but who has been kept down with hard work and little sympathy, and many another trial. She's a worthy woman, and her deeds prove it, for all her sourness. There's few women in the town that I respect as I do her."

"Well, that's so. I know it. I know she gets a dollar a week the year round at Captain Liscome's, and earns it, too; and I know she gives half of it to her aunt, who never did much for her but spoil her temper. But it's an awful pity her religion don't make her pleasant."

"One mustna judge another," said Mrs Nasmyth, gently.

"No, and I don't want to. Only I wish—but there's no good talking. Still I must say it's a pity that folks who have got religion don't take more comfort out of it. Now there's mother; she's a pillar in the church, and a good woman, I believe, but she's dreadful crank sometimes, and worries about things as she hadn't ought to. Now it seems to me, if I had all they say a Christian has, and expects to have, I'd let the rest go. They don't half of them live as if they took more comfort than I do, and there are spells when I don't take much."

Janet's eyes glistened with sympathy. There was some surprise in them, too. Mr Snow continued—

"Yes, I do get pretty sick of it all by spells. After father died—and other things—I got over caring about going out West, and I thought it as good to settle down on the old place as any where. So I fixed up, and built, and got the land into prime order, and made an orchard, a first-rate one, and made believe happy. And I don't know but I should have stayed so, only I heard that Joe Arnold had died out West—he had married Rachel Jennings, you know; so I got kind of unsettled again, and went off at last. Rachel had changed considerable. She had seen trouble, and had poor health, and was kind o' run down, but I brought her right home—her and little Emily. Well—it didn't suit mother. I hadn't said anything to her when I went off. I hadn't anything to say, not knowing how things might be with Rachel. Come to get home, things didn't go smooth. Mother worried, and Rachel worried, and life wasn't what I expected it was going to be, and I worried for a spell. And Mis' Nasmyth, if there had been any such thing as getting religion, I should have got it then, for I tried hard, and I wanted something to help me bad enough. There didn't seem to be anything else worth caring about any way.

"Well, that was a spell ago. Emily wasn't but three years old when I brought them home. We've lived along, taking some comfort, as much as folks in general, I reckon. I had got kind of used to it, and had given up expecting much, and took right hold to make property; and have a good time, and here is your minister has come and stirred me up, and made me as discontented with myself and everything else as well."

"You should thank the Lord for that," interrupted Janet, devoutly.

"Well, I don't know about that. Sometimes when he has been speaking, I seem to see that there is something better than just to live along and make property. But then again, I don't see but it's just what folks do who have got religion. Most of the professors that I know—"

"Man!" exclaimed Janet, hotly, "I hae no patience with you and your professors. What need you aye to cast them up? Canna you read your Bible? It's that, and the blessing that was never yet withheld from any one that asked it with humility, that will put you in the way to find abiding peace, and an abiding portion at the last."

"Just so, Mis' Nasmyth," said Mr Snow, deprecatingly, and there was a little of the old twinkle in his eye. "But it does seem as though one might naturally expect a little help from them that are spoken of as the lights of the world; now don't it?"

"There's no denying that, but if you must look about you, you needna surely fix your eyes on such crooked sticks as your Fishes and your Slowcomes. It's no breach o' charity to say that *they* dinna adorn the doctrine. But there are other folk that I could name, that are both light and salt on the earth."

"Well, yes," admitted Sampson; "since I've seen your folks, I've about got cured of one thing. I see now there is something in religion with some folks. Your minister believes as he says, and has a good time, too. He's a good man."

"You may say that, and you would say it with more emphasis if you had seen him as I have seen him for the last two twelve-months wading through deep waters."

"Yes, I expect he's just about what he ought to be. But then, if religion only changes folks in one case, and fails in ten."

"Man! it never fails!" exclaimed Janet, with kindling eye. "It never failed yet, and never will fail while the heavens endure. And lad! take heed to yourself. That's Satan's net spread out to catch your unwary soul. It may serve your turn now to jeer at professors, as you call them, and at their misdeeds that are unhappily no' few; but there's a time coming when it will fail you. It will do to tell the like of me, but it winna do to tell the Lord in 'that day.' You have a stumbling block in your own proud heart that hinders you more than all the Fishes and Slowcomes o' them, and you may be angry or no' as you like at me for telling you."

Sampson opened his eyes.

"But you don't seem to see the thing just as it is exactly. I ain't jeering at professors or their misdeeds, I'm grieving for myself. If religion ain't changed them, how can I expect that it will change me; and I need changing bad enough, as you say."

"If it hasna changed them, they have none of it," said Mrs Nasmyth, earnestly. "A Christian, and no' a changed man! Is he no' a sleeping man awakened, a dead man made alive—born again to a new life? Has he not the Spirit of God abiding in him? And no' changed!—No' that I wish to judge any man," added she, more gently. "We dinna ken other folk's temptations, or how small a spark of grace in the heart will save a man. We have all reason to be thankful that it's the Lord and no' man that is to be our judge. Maybe I have been over hard on those men."

Here was a wonder! Mrs Nasmyth confessing herself to have been hard upon the deacons. Sampson did not speak his thoughts, however. He was more moved by his friend's earnestness than he cared to show.

"Well, I expect there's something in it, whether I ever see it with my own eyes or not," said he, as he rose to go.

"Ay, is there," said Mrs Nasmyth, heartily; "and there's no fear but you'll see it, when you ask in a right spirit that your eyes may be opened."

"Mis' Nasmyth," said Sampson, quietly and solemnly, "I may be deceiving myself in this matter. I seem to get kind o' bewildered at times over these things. But I do think I am in earnest. Surely I'll get help some time?"

"Ay—that you will, as God is true. But oh man! go straight to *Him*. It's between you and Him, this matter. But winna you bide still? I daresay the minister will soon be at leisure now."

"I guess not. I hadn't much particular to say to him. I can just as well come again." And without turning his face toward her, he went away.

Janet looked after him till the turn of the road hid him, saying to herself,—

"If the Lord would but take him in hand, just to show what He could make of him. Something to His praise, I hae no doubt—Yankee though he be. God forgive me for saying it. I daresay I hae nae all the charity I might hae for them, the upsettin' bodies."

Chapter Fourteen.

Even in quiet country places, there are changes many and varied wrought by the coming and going of seven years, and Merleville has had its share of these since the time the minister's children looked upon the pleasant place with the wondering eyes of strangers. Standing on the church-steps, one looks down on the same still hamlet, and over the same hills and valleys and nestling farm-houses. But the woods have receded in some places, and up from the right comes the sound of clashing machinery, telling that the Merle river is performing its mission at last, setting in motion saws and hammers and spindles, but in so unpretending a manner that no miniature city has sprung up on its banks as yet; and long may that day be distant.

The trees in the grave-yard cast a deeper shadow, and the white grave-stones seem to stand a little closer than of old. The tall, rank grass has many times been trodden by the lingering feet of the funeral-train, and fresh sods laid down above many a heart at rest forever. Voices beloved, and voices little heeded, have grown silent during these seven years. Some have died and have been forgotten; some have left a blank behind them which twice seven years shall have no power to fill.

The people have changed somewhat, some for the better, some for the worse. Judge Merle has grown older. His hair could not be whiter than it was seven years ago, but he is bent now, and never forgets his staff as he takes his daily walk down the village street; but on his kindly face rests a look of peace, deeper and more abiding than there used to be. His kind and gentle wife is kind and gentle still. She, too, grows old, with a brightening face, as though each passing day were bringing her nearer to her hope's fulfilment.

Deacon Sterne is growing older; his outward man gives no token thereof. His hair has been iron-grey, at least since anybody in Merleville can remember, and it is iron-grey still. He looks as if seven times seven years could have no power to make his tall form less erect, or to soften the lines on his dark, grave face. And yet I am not sure. They say his face is changing, and that sometimes in the old meeting-house on Sabbath afternoons, there has come a look over it as though a bright light fell on it from above. It comes at other times, too. His patient wife, pretending to look another way as he bends over the cradle of his wilful William's little son, yet turns stealthily to watch for the coming of the tender smile she has so seldom seen on her husband's face since the row of little graves was made in the church-yard long ago. By the deacon's fireside sits a pale, gentle woman, Will's bride that was, Will's sorrowing widow now. But though the grave has closed over him, whom his stern father loved better than all the world beside, there was hope in his death, and the mourner is not uncomforted; and for the deacon there are happier days in store than time has brought him yet.

Deacon Slowcome has gone West, but, "yearning for the privileges he left behind,"—or not successful in his gains-getting, is about to return. Deacon Fish has gone West and has prospered. Content in his heart to put the wonderful wheat crops in place of school and meeting, he yet deploras aloud, and in doleful terms enough, the want of these, and never ends a letter to a Merleville crony without an earnest adjuration to "come over and help us." But on the whole, it is believed that, in his heart, Deacon Fish will not repine while the grain grows and the markets prosper.

Mr Page is growing rich, they say, which is a change indeed. His nephew, Timothy, having invented a wonderful mowing or reaping-machine, Mr Page has taken out a patent for the same, and is growing rich. Mrs Page enjoys it well, and goes often to Rixford, where she has her gowns and bonnets made now; and patronises young Mrs Merle, and young Mrs Greenleaf, and does her duty generally very much to her own satisfaction, never hearing the whispered doubts of her old friends—which are audible enough, too—whether she is as consistent as she ought to be, and whether, on the whole, her new prosperity is promoting her growth in grace.

Becky Pettimore has got a home of her own, and feels as if she knows how to enjoy it. And so she does, if to enjoy it means to pick her own geese, and spin her own wool, and set her face like a flint against the admission of a speck of dirt within her own four walls. But it is whispered among some people, wise in these matters, that there is something going to happen in Becky's home, which may, sometime or other, mar its perfect neatness, without, however, marring Becky's enjoyment of it. It may be so, for hidden away in the corner of one of her many presses, is a little pillow of down, upon which no mortal head has ever rested, and which no eyes but Becky's own have ever seen; and

they fill with wonder and tenderness whenever they fall upon it; and so there is a chance that she may yet have more of home's enjoyments than geese or wool or dustless rooms can give.

Behind the elms, where the old brown house stood, stands now a snow-white cottage, with a vine-covered porch before it. It is neat without and neat within, though often there are children's toys and little shoes upon the floor. At this moment there is on the floor a row of chairs overturned, to make, not horses and carriages as they used to do in my young days, but a train of cars, and on one of them sits Arthur Elliott Greenleaf, representing at once engine, whistle, conductor and freight. And no bad representative either, as far as noise is concerned, and a wonderful baby that must be who sleeps in the cradle through it all. Beside the window, unruffled amid the uproar, sits Celestia with her needle in her hand—a little paler, a little thinner than she used to be, and a little care-worn withal. For Celestia is "ambitious," in good housewife phrase, and thereto many in Merleville and beyond it who like to visit at her well-ordered home.

The squire's newspaper nestles as peacefully amid the din as it used to do in the solitude of his little office seven years ago. He is thinner, too, and older, and more care-worn, and there is a look in his face suggestive of "appeals" and knotty points of law; and by the wrinkles on his brow and at the corners of his eyes, one might fancy he is looking out for the Capitol and the White House in the distance still. "He is growing old while he is young," as Mrs Nasmyth says, "Yankees have a knack of doing—standing still at middle age and never changing more." But despite the wrinkles, the squire's face is a pleasant one to see, and he has a way of turning back a paragraph or two to read the choice bits to Celestia, which proves that he is not altogether absorbed in law or politics, but that he enjoys all he has, and all he hopes to be, the more that he has Celestia to enjoy it with him.

As for her, seven years have failed to convince her that Mr Greenleaf is not the gentlest, wisest, best in all the world. And as her opinion has survived an attack of dyspepsia, which for months held the squire in a giant's gripe, and the horrors of a contested election, in which the squire was beaten, it is to be supposed it will last through life. At this very moment her heart fills to the brim with love and wonder as he draws his chair a little nearer and says:

"See, here, Celestia. Listen to what Daniel Webster says," and then goes on to read.

"Now, what do you think of that?" he asks, with sparkling eyes. Hers are sparkling too, and she thinks just as he does, you may be sure, whatever that may be. Not that she has a very clear idea of what has been read, as how could she amid rushing engines and railroad whistles, and the energetic announcement of the conductor that "the cars have got to Boston."

"See here, Elliott, my son. Ain't you tired riding?" asks papa, gently.

"Ain't you afraid you'll wake sister?" says mamma. "I wouldn't make quite so much noise, dear."

"Why, mother, I'm the cars," says Elliott.

"But hadn't you better go out into the yard? Carlo! Where's Carlo? I haven't seen Carlo for a long time. Where's Carlo?"

It is evident Solomon is not in the confidence of these good people. Moral suasion is the order of the day. They often talk very wisely to each other, about the training of their children, and gravely discuss the prescriptions given long ago, for the curing of evils which come into the world with us all. They would fain persuade themselves that there is not so much need for them in the present enlightened age. They do not quite succeed, however, and fully intend to commence the training process soon. Celestia, especially, has some misgivings, as she looks into the face of her bold, beautiful boy, but she shrinks from the thought of severe measures, and hopes that it will all come out right with him, without the wise king's medicine; and if mother's love and unfailing patience will bring things out right, there need be no fear for little Elliott.

It is a happy home, the Greenleaf's. There are ease and comfort without luxury; there is necessity for exertion, without fear of want. There are many good and pretty things in the house, for use and ornament. There are pictures, books and magazines in plenty, and everything within and without goes to prove the truth of Mr Snow's declaration, that "the Greenleafs take their comfort as they go along."

But no change has come to anyone in Merleville, so great as the change that has come to Mr Snow himself. Death has been in his dwelling once—twice. His wife and his mother have both found rest, the one from her weary waiting, the other from her cares. The house to which Sampson returns with lagging footsteps, is more silent than ever now.

But a change greater than death can make, had come to Sampson first, preparing him for all changes. It came to him as the sight of rushing water comes to the traveller who has been long mocked with the sound of it. It came, cleansing from his heart and from his life the dust and dimness of the world's petty cares, and vain pursuits. It found him weary of gains-getting, weary of toiling and moiling amid the dross of earth for that which could not satisfy, and it gave him for his own, the pearl which is above all price. Weary of tossing to and fro, it gave him a sure resting-place, "a refuge whereunto he may continually resort," a peace that is abiding. With its coming the darkness passed away, and light to cheer and guide was his for evermore. Behind the closed blinds of his deserted house, he was not alone. The promise, made good to so many in all ages, was made good to him.

"He that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and We will come and make our abode with him."

That wonderful change has come to him, which the world would fain deny—the change which so many profess to have experienced, but which so few manifest in their lives. He has learned of the "meek and lowly." He is a Christian at last. He has "experienced religion," the neighbours say, looking on with varied feelings to see what the end may be.

Sampson Snow never did anything like anybody else, it was said. He "stood it" through "a season of interest," when Deacons Fish and Slowcome had thought it best to call in the aid of the neighbouring ministers, to hold "a series of meetings." Good, prudent men these ministers were, and not much harm was done, and some good. Some were gathered into the Church from the world; some falling back were restored; some weak ones were strengthened; some sorrowing ones comforted. And through all, the interested attention of Mr Snow never flagged. He attended all the meetings, listened patiently to the warnings of Deacon Fish, and the entreaties of Deacon Slowcome. He heard himself told by Mr Page that he was on dangerous ground, "within a few rods of the line of demarcation." He was formally given up as a hopeless case, and "left to himself", by all the tender-hearted old ladies in Merleville, and never left the stand of a spectator through it all. Then when Deacons Fish and Slowcome, and all Merleville with them, settled down into the old gloom again, his visits to the minister became more frequent, and more satisfactory, it seemed, for in a little time, to the surprise of all, it was announced in due form, that Sampson Snow desired to be admitted into fellowship with the Church of Merleville.

After that time his foes watched for his halting in vain. Different from other folks before, he was different from them still. He did not seem to think his duty for the week was done, when he had gone twice to meeting on the day time, and had spoken at conference on the Sunday evening. Indeed, it must be confessed, that he was rather remiss with regard to the latter duty. He did not seem to have the gift of speech on those occasions. He did not seem to have the power of advising or warning, or even of comforting, his neighbours. His gift lay in helping them.

"Inasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these, My brethren, ye have done it unto Me," were words that Sampson seemed to believe.

"He does folks a good turn, as though he would a little rather do it than not," said the widow Lovejoy, and no one had a better right to know.

As for the poor, weak, nervous Rachel, who could only show her love for her husband, by casting all the burden of her troubles, real and imaginary, upon him, she could hardly love and trust him more than she had always done, but he had a greater power of comforting her now, and soon the peace that reigned in his heart influenced hers a little, and as the years went on, she grew content, at last, to bear the burdens God had laid upon her, and being made content to live and suffer on, God took her burden from her and laid her to rest, where never burden presses more.

If his mother had ever really believed that no part of her son's happiness was made by his peevish, sickly wife, she must have acknowledged her mistake when poor Rachel was borne away forever. She must have known it by the long hours spent in her silent room, by the lingering step with which he left it, by the tenderness lavished on every trifle she had ever cared for.

"Sampson seemed kind o' lost," she said; and her motherly heart, with all its worldliness, had a spot in it which ached for her son in his desolation. She did not even begrudge his turning to Emily with a tender love. She found it in her heart to rejoice that the girl had power to comfort him as she could not. And little Emily, growing every day more like the pretty Rachel who had taken captive poor Sampson's youthful fancy, did what earnest love could do to comfort him.

But no selfishness mingled with her stepfather's love for Emily. It cost him much to decide to send her from him for a while, but he did decide to do so. For he could not but see that Emily's happiness was little cared for by his mother, even yet. She could not now, as in the old time, take refuge in her mother's room. She was helpful about the house too, and could not often be spared to her friends up the hill, or in the village; for old Mrs Snow, much as she hated to own it, could no longer do all things with her own hands, as she used to do. To be sure, she could have had help any day, or every day in the year; but it was one of the old lady's "notions" not to be able "to endure folks around her." And, besides, "what was the use of Emily Arnold?" And so, what with one thing and another, little Emily's cheek began to grow pale; and the wilful gaze with which she used to watch her father's home-coming, came back to her eyes again.

"There is no kind o' use for Emily's being kept at work," said her father. "She ain't strong; and there's Hannah Lovejoy would be glad to come and help, and I'd be glad to pay her for it. Emily may have a good time as well as not."

But his mother was not to be moved.

"Girls used to have a good time and work too, when I was young. Emily Arnold is strong enough, if folks would let her alone, and not put notions in her head. And as for Hannah, I'll have none of her."

So Mr Snow saw that if Emily was to have a good time it must be elsewhere; and he made up his mind to the very best thing he could have done for her. He fitted her out, and sent her to Mount Holyoke seminary; that school of schools for earnest, ambitious New England girls. And a good time she had there, enjoying all that was pleasant, and never heeding the rest. There were the first inevitable pangs of home-sickness, making her father doubt whether he had done best for his darling after all. But, in a little, her letters were merry and healthful enough. One would never have found out from them anything of the hardships of long stairs and the fourth storey, or of extra work on recreation day. Pleasantly and profitably her days passed, and before she returned home at the close of the year, Mrs Snow had gone, where the household work is done without weariness. Her father would fain have kept her at home then, but he made no objections to her return to school as she wished, and he was left to the silent ministrations of Hannah Lovejoy in the deserted home again.

By the unanimous voice of his brethren in the church, he was, on the departure of Deacons Fish and Slowcome, elected to fill the place of one of them, and in his own way he magnified the office. He was "lonesome, awful lonesome," at home; but cheerfulness came back to him again, and there is no one more gladly welcomed at the minister's house, and at many another house, than he.

There have been changes in the minister's household, too. When his course in college was over, Arthur came out to the rest. He lingered one delightful summer in Merleville, and then betook himself to Canada, to study his profession of the law. For Arthur, wise as the Merleville people came to think him, was guilty of one great folly in their eye. He could never, he said, be content to lose his nationality and become a Yankee; so, for the sake of living in the Queen's dominions, he went to Canada; a place, in their estimation, only one degree more desirable as a place of residence than Greenland or Kamtschatka.

That was five years ago. Arthur has had something of a struggle since then. By sometimes teaching dull boys Latin, sometimes acting as sub-editor for a daily paper, and at all times living with great economy, he has got through his studies without running much in debt; and has entered his profession with a fair prospect of success. He has visited Merleville once since he went away, and his weekly letter is one of the greatest pleasures that his father and sisters have to enjoy.

Norman and Harry have both left home, too. Mr Snow did his best to make a farmer first of the one and then of the other, but he failed. To college they went in spite of poverty, and having passed through honourably, they went out into the world to shift for themselves. Norman writes hopefully from the far West. He is an engineer, and will be a rich man one day he confidently asserts, and his friends believe him with a difference.

"He will make money enough," Janet says, "but as to his keeping it, that's another matter."

Harry went to Canada with the intention of following Arthur's example and devoting himself to the law, but changed his mind, and is now in the merchant's counting-room; and sends home presents of wonderful shawls and gowns to Janet and his sisters, intending to impress them with the idea that he is very rich indeed.

Those left at home, are content now to be without the absent ones; knowing that they are doing well their share in the world's work, and certain that whatever comes to them in their wanderings, whether prosperity to elate, or adversity to depress them, their first and fondest thought is, and ever will be, of the loving and beloved ones at home.

Chapter Fifteen.

The Indian-summer-time was come again. The gorgeous glory of the autumn was gone, but so, for one day, at least, was its dreariness. There was no "wailing wind" complaining among the bare boughs of the elms. The very pines were silent. The yellow leaves, still lingering on the beech-trees in the hollow, rustled, now and then, as the brown nuts fell, one by one, on the brown leaves beneath. The frosts, sharp and frequent, had changed the torrent of a month ago into a gentle rivulet, whose murmur could scarce be heard as far as the gate over which Graeme Elliott leaned, gazing dreamily upon the scene before her.

She was thinking how very lovely it was, and how very dear it had become to her. Seen through "the smoky light," the purple hills beyond the water seemed not so far-away as usual. The glistening spire of the church on the hill, and the gleaming grave-stones, seemed strangely near. It looked but a step over to the village, whose white houses were quite visible among the leafless trees, and many farm-houses, which one could never see in summer for the green leaves, were peeping out everywhere from between the hills.

"There is no place like Merleville," Graeme thinks in her heart. It is home to them all now. There were few but pleasant associations connected with the hills, and groves, and homesteads over which she was gazing. It came very vividly to her mind, as she stood there looking down, how she had stood with the bairns that first Sabbath morning on the steps of the old meeting-house; and she strove to recall her feeling of shyness and wonder at all that she saw, and smiled to think how the faces turned to them so curiously that day were become familiar now, and some of them very dear. Yes; Merleville was home to Graeme. Not that she had forgotten the old home beyond the sea. But the thought of it came with no painful longing. Even the memory of her mother brought now regret, indeed, and sorrow, but none of the loneliness and misery of the first days of loss, for the last few years had been very happy years to them all.

And yet, as Graeme stood gazing over to the hills and the village, a troubled, vexed look came over her face, and, with a gesture of impatience, she turned away from it all and walked up and down among the withered leaves outside the gate with an impatient tread. Something troubled her with an angry trouble that she could not forget; and though she laughed a little, too, as she muttered to herself, it was not a pleasant laugh, and the vexed look soon came back again, indeed, it never went away.

"It is quite absurd," she murmured, as she came within the gate, and then turned and leaned over it. "I won't believe it; and yet—oh, dear! what shall we ever do if it happens?"

"It's kind o' pleasant here, ain't it?" said a voice behind her. Graeme started more violently than there was any occasion for. It was only Mr Snow who had been in the study with her father for the last hour, and who was now on his way home. Graeme scarcely answered him, but stood watching him, with the troubled look deepening on her face, as he went slowly down the road.

Mr Snow had changed a good deal within these few years. He had grown a great deal greyer and graver, and Graeme thought, with a little pang of remorse, as she saw him disappear round the turn of the road, that she had, by her coldness, made him all the graver. And yet she only half regretted it; and the vexed look came back to her face again, as she gathered up her work that had fallen to the ground and turned toward the house.

There was no one in the usual sitting-room, no one in the bright kitchen beyond, and, going to the foot of the stairs, Graeme raises her voice, which has an echo of impatience in it still, and calls:

"Mrs Nasmyth."

For Janet is oftener called Mrs Nasmyth than the old name, even by the bairns now, except at such times as some wonderful piece of coaxing is to be done, and then she is Janet, the bairn's own Janet still. There was no coaxing echo in Graeme's voice, however, but she tried to chase the vexed shadow from her face as her friend came slowly down the stairs.

"Are you not going to sit down?" asked Graeme, as she seated herself on a low stool by the window. "I wonder where the bairns are?"

"The bairns are gone down the brae," said Mrs Nasmyth; "and I'm just going to sit down to my seam a wee while."

But she seemed in no hurry to sit down, and Graeme sat silent for a little, as she moved quietly about the room.

"Janet," said she, at last, "what brings Deacon Snow so often up here of late?"

Janet's back was toward Graeme, and, without turning round, she answered:

"I dinna ken that he's oftener here than he used to be. He never stayed long away. He was ben the house with the minister. I didna see him." There was another pause.

"Janet," said Graeme again, "what do you think Mrs Greenleaf told me all Merleville is saying?"

Janet expressed no curiosity.

"They say Deacon Snow wants to take you down the brae."

Still Mrs Nasmyth made no answer.

"He hasna ventured to hint such a thing?" exclaimed Graeme interrogatively.

"No' to me," said Janet, quietly, "but the minister."

"The minister! He's no' blate! To think of him holding up his face to my father and proposing the like of that! And what did my father say?"

"I dinna ken what he said to him; but to me he said he was well pleased that it should be so, and—"

"Janet!" Graeme's voice expressed consternation as well as indignation, Mrs Nasmyth took no notice, but seated herself to her stocking-darning.

"Janet! If you think of such a thing for a moment, I declare I'll take second thoughts and go away myself."

"Weel, I aye thought you might have done as weel to consider a wee afore you gave Mr Foster his answer," said Janet, not heeding Graeme's impatient answer.

"Janet! A sticket minister!"

"My dear, he's no' a sticket minister. He passed his examinations with great credit to himself. You hae your father's word for that, who was there to hear him. And he's a grand scholar—that's weel kent; and though he mayna hae the gift o' tongues like some folk, he may do a great deal of good in the world notwithstanding. And they say he has gotten the charge of a fine school now, and is weel off. I aye thought you might do worse than go with him. He's a good lad, and you would have had a comfortable home with him."

"Thank you. But when I marry it won't be to get a comfortable home. I'm content with the home I have."

"Ay, if you could be sure of keeping it," said Janet, with a sigh; "but a good man and a good home does not come as an offer ilka day."

"The deacon needna be feared to leave his case in your hands, it seems," said Graeme, laughing, but not pleasantly.

"Miss Graeme, my dear," said Mrs Nasmyth, gravely, "there's many a thing to be said of that matter; but it must be said in a different spirit from what you are manifesting just now. If I'm worth the keeping here, I'm worth the seeking elsewhere, and Deacon Snow has as good a right as another."

"Right, indeed! Nobody has any right to you but ourselves. You are ours, and we'll never, never let you go."

"It's no' far down the brae," said Janet, gently.

"Janet! You'll never think of going! Surely, surely, you'll never leave us now. And for a stranger, too! When you gave up your own mother and Sandy, and the land you loved so well, to come here with us—!" Graeme could not go on for the tears that would not be kept back.

"Miss Graeme, my dear bairn, you were needing me then. Nae, hae patience, and let me speak. You are not needing me now in the same way. I sometimes think it would be far better for you if I wasna here."

Graeme dissented earnestly by look and gesture, but she had no words.

"It's true though, my dear. You can hardly say that you are at the head of your father's house, while I manage all

things, as I do.”

But Graeme had no desire to have it otherwise.

“You can manage far best,” said she.

“That’s no to be denied,” said Mrs Nasmyth, gravely; “but it ought not to be so. Miss Graeme, you are no’ to think that I am taking upon myself to reprove you. But do you think that your present life is the best to fit you for the duties and responsibilities that, sooner or later, come to the most of folk in the world? It’s a pleasant life, I ken, with your books and your music, and your fine seam, and the teaching o’ the bairns; but it canna last; and, my dear, is it making you ready for what may follow? It wouldna be so easy for you if I were away, but it might be far better for you in the end!”

There was nothing Graeme could answer to this, so she leaned her head upon her hand, and looked out on the brown leaves lying beneath the elms.

“And if I should go,” continued Janet, “and there’s many an if between me and going—but if I should go, I’ll be near at hand in time of need—”

“I know I am very useless,” broke in Graeme. “I don’t care for these things as I ought—I have left you with too many cares, and I don’t wonder that you want to go away.”

“Whist, lassie. I never yet had too much to do for your mother’s bairns; and if you have done little it’s because you havena needed. And if I could aye stand between you and the burdens of life, you needna fear trouble. But I canna. Miss Graeme, my dear, you were a living child in your mother’s arms before she was far past your age, and your brother was before you. Think of the cares she had, and how she met them.”

Graeme’s head fell lower, as she repeated her tearful confession of uselessness, and for a time there was silence.

“And, dear,” said Janet, in a little, “your father tells me that Mr Snow has offered to send for my mother and Sandy. And oh! my bairn, my heart leaps in my bosom at the thought of seeing their faces again.” She had no power to add more.

“But, Janet, your mother thought herself too old to cross the sea when we came, and that is seven years ago.”

“My dear, she kenned she couldna come, and it was as well to put that face on it. But she would gladly come now, if I had a home to give her.”

There was silence for a while, and then Graeme said,—

“It’s selfish in me, I know, but, oh! Janet, we have been so happy lately, and I canna bear to think of changes coming.”

Mrs Nasmyth made no answer, for the sound of the bairns’ voices came in at the open door, and in a minute Marian entered.

“Where have you been, dear? I fear you have wearied yourself,” said Janet, tenderly.

“We have only been down at Mr Snow’s barn watching the threshing. But, indeed, I have wearied myself.” And sitting down on the floor at Janet’s feet, she laid her head upon her lap. A kind, hard hand was laid on the bright hair of the bonniest of a’ the bairns.

“You mustna sit down here, my dear. Lie down on the sofa and rest yourself till the tea be ready. Have you taken your bottle to-day?”

Marian made her face the very picture of disgust.

“Oh! Janet, I’m better now. I dinna need it. Give it to Graeme. She looks as if she needed something to do her good. What ails you, Graeme?”

“My dear,” remonstrated Janet, “rise up when I bid you; and go to the sofa, and I’ll go up the stair for the bottle.”

Marian laid herself wearily down. In a moment Mrs Nasmyth reappeared with a bottle and spoon in one hand, and a pillow in the other, and when the bitter draught was fairly swallowed, Marian was laid down and covered and caressed with a tenderness that struck Graeme as strange; for though Janet loved them all well, she was not in the habit of showing her tenderness by caresses. In a little, Marian slept. Janet did not resume her work immediately, but sat gazing at her with eyes as full of wistful tenderness as ever a mother’s could have been. At length, with a sigh, she turned to her basket again.

“Miss Graeme,” said she, in a little, “I dinna like to hear you speak that way about changes, as though they did not come from God, and as though He hadna a right to send them to His people when He pleases.”

“I canna help it, Janet. No change that can come to us can be for the better.”

“That’s true, but we must even expect changes that are for the worse; for just as sure as we settle down in this world content, changes will come. You mind what the Word says, ‘As an eagle stirreth up her nest.’ And you may be sure, if we are among the Lord’s children, He’ll no leave us to make a portion of the rest and peace that the world gives. He is kinder to us than we would be to ourselves.”

A restless movement of the sleeper by her side, arrested Janet's words, and the old look of wistful tenderness came back into her eyes as she turned toward her. Graeme rose, and leaning over the arm of the sofa, kissed her softly.

"How lovely she is!" whispered she.

A crimson flush was rising on Marian's cheeks as she slept.

"Ay, she was aye bonny," said Janet, in the same low voice, "and she looks like an angel now."

Graeme stood gazing at her sister, and in a little Janet spoke again.

"Miss Graeme, you canna mind your aunt Marian?"

No, Graeme could not.

"Menie is growing very like her, I think. She was bonnier than your mother even, and she kept her beauty to the very last. You ken the family werena well pleased when your mother married, and the sisters didna meet often till Miss Marian grew ill. They would fain have had her away to Italy, or some far awa' place, but nothing would content her but just her sister, her sister, and so she came home to the manse. That was just after I came back again, after Sandy was weaned; and kind she was to me, the bonny, gentle creature that she was.

"For a time she seemed better, and looked so blooming—except whiles, and aye so bonny, that not one of them all could believe that she was going to die. But one day she came in from the garden, with a bonny moss-rose in her hand—the first of the season—and she said to your mother she was wearied, and lay down; and in a wee while, when your mother spoke to her again, she had just strength to say that she was going, and that she wasna feared, and that was all. She never spoke again."

Janet paused to wipe the tears from her face.

"She was good and bonny, and our Menie, the dear lammie, has been growing very like her this while. She 'minds me on her now, with the long lashes lying over her cheeks. Miss Marian's cheeks aye reddened that way when she slept. Her hair wasna so dark as our Menie's, but it curled of itself, like hers."

Mrs Nasmyth turned grave pitying eyes toward Graeme, as she ceased speaking. Graeme's heart gave a sudden painful throb, and she went very pale.

"Janet," said she, with difficulty, "there is not much the matter with my sister, is there? It wasna that you meant about changes! Menie's not going to die like our bonny Aunt Marian!" Her tones grew shrill and incredulous as she went on.

"I cannot tell. I dinna ken—sometimes I'm feared to think how it may end. But oh! Miss Graeme—my darling—"

"But it is quite impossible—it can't be, Janet," broke in Graeme.

"God knows, dear." Janet said no more. The look on Graeme's face showed that words would not help her to comprehend the trouble that seemed to be drawing near. She must be left to herself a while, and Janet watched her as she went out over the fallen leaves, and over the bridge to the pine grove beyond, with a longing pity that fain would have borne her trouble for her. But she could not bear it for her—she could not even help her to bear it. She could only pray that whatever the end of their doubt for Marian might be, the elder sister might be made the better and the wiser for the fear that had come to her to-day.

There are some sorrows which the heart refuses to realise or acknowledge, even in knowing them to be drawing near. Possible danger or death to one beloved is one of these; and as Graeme sat in the shadow of the pines shuddering with the pain and terror which Janet's words had stirred, she was saying it was impossible—it could not be true—it could never, *never* be true, that her sister was going to die. She tried to realise the possibility, but she could not. When she tried to pray that the terrible dread might be averted, and that they might all be taught to be submissive in God's hands, whatever His will might be, the words would not come to her. It was, "No, no! no, no! it cannot be," that went up through the stillness of the pines; the cry of a heart not so much rebellious as incredulous of the possibility of pain so terrible. The darkness fell before she rose to go home again, and when she came into the firelight to the sound of happy voices, Menie's the most mirthful of them all, her terrors seemed utterly unreasonable, she felt like one waking from a painful dream.

"What could have made Janet frighten herself and me so?" she said, as she spread out her cold hands to the blaze, all the time watching her sister's bright face.

"Graeme, tea's over. Where have you been all this time?" asked Rose.

"My father was asking where you were. He wants to see you," said Will.

"I'll go ben now," said Graeme, rising.

The study lamp was on the table unlighted. The minister was sitting in the firelight alone. He did not move when the door opened, until Graeme spoke.

"I'm here, papa. Did you want me?"

"Graeme, come in and sit down. I have something to say to you."

She sat down, but the minister did not seem in haste to speak. He was looking troubled and anxious, Graeme thought; and it suddenly came into her mind as she sat watching him, that her father was growing an old man. Indeed, the last seven years had not passed so lightly over him as over the others. The hair which had been grey on his temples before he reached his prime, was silvery white now, and he looked bowed and weary as he sat there gazing into the fire. It came into Graeme's mind as she sat there in the quiet room, that there might be other and sadder changes before them, than even the change that Janet's words had implied.

"My dear," said the minister, at last, "has Mrs Nasmyth been speaking to you?"

"About—" Menie, she would have asked, but her tongue refused to utter the word.

"About Mr Snow," said her father, with a smile, and some hesitation. Graeme started. She had quite forgotten.

"Mrs Greenleaf told me something—and—"

"I believe it is a case of true love with him, if such a thing can come to a man after he is fifty—as indeed why should it not?" said the minister. "He seems bent on taking Janet from us, Graeme."

"Papa! it is too absurd," said Graeme, all her old vexation coming back. Mr Elliott smiled.

"I must confess it was in that light I saw it first, and I had well nigh been so unreasonable as to be vexed with our good friend. But we must take care, lest we allow our own wishes to interfere with what may be for Mrs Nasmyth's advantage."

"But, papa, she has been content with us all these years. Why should there be a change now?"

"If the change is to be for her good, we must try to persuade her to it, however. But, judging from what she said to me this afternoon, I fear it will be a difficult matter."

"But, papa, why should we seek to persuade her against her own judgment?"

"My dear, we don't need to persuade her against her judgment, but against her affection for us. She only fears that we will miss her sadly, and she is not quite sure whether she ought to go and leave us."

"But she has been quite happy with us."

"Yes, love—happy in doing what she believed to be her duty—as happy as she could be so far separated from those whom she must love better than she loves us even. I have been thinking of her to-night, Graeme. What a self-denying life Janet's has been! She must be considered first in this matter."

"Yes, if it would make her happier—but it seems strange that—"

"Graeme, Mr Snow is to send for her mother and her son. I could see how her heart leapt up at the thought of seeing them, and having them with her again. It will be a great happiness for her to provide a home for her mother in her old age. And she ought to have that happiness after such a life as hers."

Graeme sighed, and was silent.

"If we had golden guineas to bestow on her, where we have copper coins only, we could never repay her love and care for us all; and it will be a matter of thankfulness to me to know that she is secure in a home of her own for the rest of her life."

"But, papa, while we have a home, she will never be without one."

"I know, dear, while we have a home. You need not tell me that; but Graeme, there is only my frail life between you and homelessness. Not that I fear for you. You are all young and strong, and the God whom I have sought to serve, will never leave my children. But Janet is growing old, Graeme, and I do think this way has been providentially opened to her."

"If it were quite right to marry for a home, papa—" Graeme hesitated and coloured. Her father smiled.

"Mrs Nasmyth is not so young as you, my dear. She will see things differently. And besides, she always liked and respected Mr Snow. I have no doubt she will be very happy with him."

"We all liked him," said Graeme, sighing. "But oh! I dread changes. I can't bear to break up our old ways."

"Graeme," said her father, gravely, "changes must come, and few changes can be for the better, as far as we are concerned. We have been very happy of late—so happy that I fear we were in danger of sitting down contented with the things of this life, and we need reminding. We may think ourselves happy if no sadder change than this comes to us."

The thought of Menie came back to Graeme, with a pang, but she did not speak.

"I know, dear," said her father, kindly, "this will come hardest upon you. It will add greatly to your cares to have Mrs Nasmyth leave us, but you are not a child now, and—"

"Oh, papa! it is not that—I mean it is not that altogether, but—" Graeme paused. She was not sure of her voice, and she could not bear to grieve her father. In a little, she asked.

"When is it to be?"

"I don't know, indeed, but soon, I suppose; and my dear child, I trust to you to make smooth much that might otherwise be not agreeable in this matter to us all. The change you dread so much, will not be very great. Our kind friend is not going very far-away, and there will be pleasant things connected with the change. I have no doubt, it will be for the best."

"Shall I light your lamp, papa?" said Graeme, in a little while.

"No, love, not yet. I have no mind for my book to-night."

Graeme stirred the fire, and moved about the room a little. When she opened the door, the sound of the children's voices came in merrily, and she shrunk from going out into the light. So she sat down in her accustomed place by the window, and thought, and listened to the sighs, that told her that her father was busy with anxious thoughts, too.

"Only my frail life between my children and homelessness," he had said. It seemed to Graeme, as she sat there in the darkness, that since the morning, everything in the world had changed. They had been so at rest, and so happy, and now it seemed to her, that they could never settle down to the old quiet life again.

"As an eagle stirreth up her nest," she murmured to herself. "Well, I ought no' to fear the changes He brings— But, oh! I am afraid."

Chapter Sixteen.

The rest of the bairns received the tidings of the change that was going to take place among them, in a very different way from Graeme. Their astonishment at the idea of Janet's marriage was great, but it did not equal their delight. Graeme was in the minority decidedly, and had to keep quiet. But then Janet was in the minority, too, and Mr Snow's suit was anything but prosperous for some time. Indeed, he scarcely ventured to show his face at the minister's house, Mrs Nasmyth was so evidently out of sorts, anxious and unhappy. Her unhappiness was manifested by silence chiefly, but the silent way she had of ignoring Sampson and his claims, discouraging all approach to the subject, that lay so near the good deacon's heart, was worse to bear than open rebuff would have been; and while Mrs Nasmyth's silence grieved Mr Snow, the elaborate patience of his manner, his evident taking for granted that "she would get over it," that "it would all come right in the end," were more than she could sometimes patiently endure.

"He's like the lave o' them," said she to Graeme one day, after having closed the door, on his departure, with more haste than was at all necessary. "Give a man an inch, and he'll take an ell. Because I didna just set my face against the whole matter, when the minister first spoke about it, he's neither to hold nor bind, but 'when will it be?' and 'when will it be?' till I have no peace of my life with him."

Graeme could not help laughing at her excitement.

"But, when will it be?" asked she.

"My dear, I'm no sure that it will ever be."

"Janet!" exclaimed Graeme. "What has happened?"

"Nothing has happened; but I'm no' sure but I ought to have put a stop to the matter at the very first. I dinna weel ken what to do."

"Janet," said Graeme, speaking with some embarrassment, "my father thinks it right, and it does not seem so—so strange as it did at first—and you should speak to Mr Snow about it, at any rate."

"To put him out o' pain," said Janet, smiling grimly. "There's no fear o' him. But I'll speak to him this very night."

And so she did, and that so kindly, that the deacon, taking heart, pleaded his own cause, with strong hopes of success. But Janet would not suffer herself to be entreated. With tearful eyes, she told him of her fears for Marian, and said, "It would seem like forsaking the bairns in their trouble, to leave them now." Mr Snow's kind heart was much shocked at the thought of Marian's danger. She had been his favourite among the bairns, and Emily's chief friend from the very first, and he could not urge her going away, now that there was so sorrowful a reason for her stay.

"So you'll just tell the minister there is to be no more said about it. He winna ask any questions, I dare say."

But in this Janet was mistaken. He did ask a great many questions, and failing to obtain satisfactory answers, took the matter into his own hands, and named an early day for the marriage. In vain Janet protested and held back. He said she had been thinking of others all her life, till she had forgotten how to think of herself, and needed some one to think and decide for her. As to Marian's illness being an excuse, it was quite the reverse. If she was afraid Marian would not be well cared for at home, she might take her down the brae; indeed, he feared there was some danger that he would be forsaken of all his children when she went away. And then he tried to thank her for her care of his motherless bairns, and broke down into a silence more eloquent than words.

"And, my dear friend," said he, after a little, "I shall feel, when I am to be taken away, I shall not leave my children desolate, while they have you to care for them."

So for Mrs Nasmyth there was no help. But on one thing she was determined. The day might be fixed, but it must be

sufficiently distant to permit the coming home of the lads, if they could come. They might come or not, as it pleased them, but invited they must be. She would fain see them all at home again, and that for a better reason than she gave the minister. To Mr Snow, who doubted whether "them boys" would care to come so far at such expense, she gave it with a sadder face than he had ever seen her wear.

"If they are not all together soon, they may never be together on earth again; and it is far better that they should come home, and have a few blithe days to mind on afterward, than that their first home-coming should be to a home with the shadow of death upon it. They must be asked, any way."

And so they were written to, and in due time there came a letter, saying that both Harry and Arthur would be home for a week at the time appointed. From Norman there came no letter, but one night, while they were wondering why, Norman came himself. His first greeting to Janet was in words of grave expostulation, that she should think of forsaking her "bairns" after all these years; but when he saw how grave her face became, he took it all back, and declared that he had been expecting it all along, and only wondered that matters had not been brought to a crisis much sooner. He rejoiced Mr Snow's heart, first by his hearty congratulations, and then by his awful threats of vengeance if Mrs Snow was not henceforth the happiest woman in Merleville.

Norman was greatly changed by his two years' absence, more than either of his brothers, the sisters thought. Arthur was just the same as ever, though he was an advocate and a man of business; and Harry was a boy with a smooth chin and red cheeks, still. But, with Norman's brown, bearded face the girls had to make new acquaintance.

But, though changed in appearance, it was in appearance only. Norman was the same mirth-loving lad as ever. He was frank and truthful, too, if he was still thoughtless; and Graeme told herself many a time, with pride and thankfulness, that as yet, the world had not changed for the worse, the brother for whom she had dreaded its temptations most of all.

Norman's letters had always been longest and most frequent; and yet, it was he who had the most to tell. If his active and exposed life as an engineer at the West had anything unpleasant in it, this was kept out of sight at home, and his adventures never wearied the children. His "once upon a time" was the signal for silence and attention among the little ones; and even the older ones listened with interest to Norman's rambling stories. Nor did their interest cease when the sparkle in Norman's eye told that his part in the tale was ended; and the adventures of an imaginary hero begun.

There was one story which they were never tired of hearing. It needed none of Norman's imaginary horrors to chase the blood from the cheeks of his sisters, when it was told. It was the story of the burning steamboat, and how little Hilda Bremer had been saved from it; the only one out of a family of eight. Father, mother, brothers, all perished together; and she was left alone in a strange land, with nothing to keep her from despair but the kind words of strangers, uttered in a tongue that she could not understand. It would, perhaps, have been wiser in Norman to have given her up to the kind people who had known her parents in their own land; but he had saved the child's life, and when she clung to him in her sorrow, calling him dear names in her own tongue, he could not bear to send her away.

"These people were poor, and had many children of their own," said Norman. "I would have thought it a hard lot for Menie or Rosie to go with them; and when she begged to stay with me, I could not send her with them. If it had not been so far, I would have sent her to you, Graeme. But as I could not do that, I kept her with me while I stayed in C, and there I sent her to school. They say she bids fair to be a learned lady some day."

This was an item of news that Norman's letters had not conveyed. They only knew that he had saved Hilda from the burning boat, and that he had been kind to her afterwards.

"But Norman, man, the expense!" said the prudent Mrs Nasmyth, "you havena surely run yourself in debt?" Norman laughed.

"No; but it has been close shaving sometimes. However, it would have been that anyway. I am afraid I have not the faculty for keeping money, and I might have spent it to worse purpose."

"And is the little thing grateful?" asked Graeme.

"Oh! yes; I suppose so. She is a good little thing, and is always glad to see me in her quiet way."

"It's a pity she's no' bonny," said Marian.

"Oh! she is bonny in German fashion; fair and fat."

"How old is she?" asked Mrs Nasmyth.

Norman considered.

"Well, I really can't say. Judging by her inches, I should say about Rosie's age. But she is wise enough and old-fashioned enough to be Rosie's grandmother. She's a queer little thing."

"Tell us more," said Rose; "do you go to see her often?"

"As often as I can. She is very quiet; she was the only girl among the eight, and a womanly little thing even then. You should hear her talk about her little business matters. My dear Mrs Nasmyth, you need not be afraid of my being extravagant, with such a careful little woman to call me to account.

"I have a great mind to send her home to you in the spring, Graeme. It seems very sad for a child like her to be growing up with no other home but a school. She seems happy enough, however."

"And would she like to come?"

"She says she wouldn't; but, of course, she would like it, if she were once here. I must see about it in the spring."

The wedding-day came, and in spite of many efforts to prevent it, it was rather a sad day to them all. It found Janet still "in a swither." She could not divest herself of the idea that she was forsaking "the bairns."

"And, Oh! Miss Graeme, my dear, if it werena for the thought of seeing my mother and Sandy, my heart would fail me quite. And are you quite sure that you are pleased now, dear?"

"Janet, it was because I was selfish that I wasna pleased from the very first; and you are not really going away from us, only just down the brae."

Graeme did not look very glad, however. But if the wedding-day was rather sad, Thanksgiving-day, that soon followed, was far otherwise. It was spent at the Deacon's. Miss Lovejoy distinguished herself forever by her chicken-pies and fixings. Mr and Mrs Snow surpassed themselves as host and hostess; and even the minister was merry with the rest. Emily was at home for the occasion; and though at first she had been at a loss how to take the change, Menie's delight decided her, and she was delighted, too.

They grew quiet in the evening but not sad. Seated around the fire in the parlour, the young people spoke much of the time of their coming to Merleville. And then, they went further back, and spoke about their old home, and their mother, and their long voyage on the "Steadfast."

"I wonder what has become of Allan Ruthven," said Marian. "It's strange that you have never seen him, Arthur."

"I may have seen him twenty times without knowing him. You mind, I was not on the 'Steadfast' with you."

"But Harry saw him; and, surely, he could not have changed so much but that he would know him now if he saw him."

"And do you know no one of the name?" asked Graeme.

"I have heard of several Ruthvens in Canada West. And the house of Elphinstone and Gilchrist have a Western agent of that name. Do you know anything about him, Harry? Who knows but he may be Allan Ruthven of the 'Steadfast.'"

"No, I thought he might be, and made inquiries," said Harry. "But that Ruthven seems quite an old fogey. He has been in the employment of that firm ever since the flood,—at least, a long time. Do you mind Allan Ruthven, Menie?"

"Mind him!" That she did. Menie was very quiet to-night, saying little, but listening happily as she lay on the sofa, with her head on Graeme's knee.

"Allan was the first one I heard say our Menie was a beauty," said Norman. "Menie, do you mind?"

Menie laughed. "Yes, I mind."

"But I think Rosie was his pet. Graeme, don't you mind how he used to walk up and down the deck, with Rosie in his arms?"

"But that was to rest Graeme," said Harry. "Miss Rosie was a small tyrant in those days."

Rosie shook her head at him.

"Eh! wasna she a cankered fairy?" said Norman, taking Rosie's fair face between his hands. "Graeme had enough ado with you, I can tell you."

"And with you, too. Never heed him, Rosie," said Graeme, smiling at her darling.

"I used to admire Graeme's patience on the 'Steadfast'," said Harry.

"I did that before the days of the 'Steadfast,'" said Arthur.

Rosie pouted her pretty lips.

"I must have been an awful creature."

"Oh! awful," said Norman.

"A spoilt bairn, if ever there was one," said Harry. "I think I see you hiding your face, and refusing to look at any of us."

"I never thought Graeme could make anything of you," said Norman.

"Graeme has though," said the elder sister, laughing. "I wouldna give my bonny Scottish Rose, for all your western lilies, Norman."

And so they went on, jestingly.

"Menie," said Arthur, suddenly, "what do you see in the fire?"

Menie was gazing with darkening eyes, in among the red embers. She started when her brother spoke.

"I see— Oh! many things. I see our old garden at home,—in Clayton, I mean—and—"

"It must be an imaginary garden, then. I am sure you canna mind that."

"Mind it! indeed I do. I see it as plainly as possible, just as it used to be. Only somehow, the spring and summer flowers all seem to be in bloom together. I see the lilies and the daisies, and the tall white rose-bushes blossoming to the very top."

"And the broad green walk," said Harry.

"And the summer-house."

"And the hawthorn hedge."

"And the fir trees, dark and high."

"And the two apple trees."

"Yes,—the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, I used to think them," said Norman.

"And I, too," said Menie. "Whenever I think of the garden of Eden, I fancy it like our garden at home."

"Your imagination is not very brilliant, if you can't get beyond *that* for Paradise," said Arthur, laughing.

"Well, maybe not, but I always do think of it so. Oh! it was a bonny place. I wish I could see it again."

"Well, you must be ready to go home with me, in a year or two," said Norman. "You needna laugh, Graeme, I am going home as soon as I get rich."

"In a year or two! you're nae blate!"

"Oh! we winna need a great fortune, to go home for a visit. We'll come back again. It will be time enough to make our fortune then. So be ready, Menie, when I come for you."

"Many a thing may happen, before a year or two," said Marian, gravely.

"Many a thing, indeed," said Graeme and Norman, in a breath. But while Graeme gazed with sudden gravity into her sister's flushed face, Norman added, laughingly.

"I shouldn't wonder but you would prefer another escort, before that time comes. I say, Menie, did anybody ever tell you how bonny you are growing?"

Menie laughed, softly.

"Oh! yes. Emily told me when she came home; and so did Harry. And you have told me so yourself to-day, already."

"You vain fairy! and do you really think you're bonny?"

"Janet says, I'm like Aunt Marian, and she was bonnier even than mamma."

"Like Aunt Marian!" Graeme remembered Janet's words with a pang. But she strove to put the thought from her; and with so many bright faces round her, it was not difficult to do to-night. Surely if Marian were ill, and in danger, the rest would see it too. And even Janet's anxiety had been at rest for a while. Menie was better now. How merry she had been with her brothers for the last few days. And though she seemed very weary to-night, no wonder. So were they all. Even Rosie, the tireless, was half asleep on Arthur's knee, and when all the pleasant bustle was over, and they were settled down in their old quiet way, her sister would be herself again. Nothing so terrible could be drawing near, as the dread which Janet had startled herewith that day.

"Emily," said Harry, "why do you persist in going back to that horrid school? Why don't you stay at home, and enjoy yourself?"

"I'm not going to any horrid school," said Emily.

"You can't make me believe that you would rather be at school than at home, doing as you please, and having a good time with Rose and Menie here."

Emily laughed. "I would like that; but I like going back to school too."

"But you'll be getting so awfully wise that there will be no talking to you, if you stay much longer."

"In that case, it might do you good to listen," said Emily, laughing.

"But you are altogether too wise already," Harry persisted. "I really am quite afraid to open my lips in your presence."

"We have all been wondering at your strange silence, and lamenting it," said Arthur.

"But, indeed, I must have a word with the deacon about it," said Harry. "I can't understand how he has allowed it so

long already. I must bring my influence to bear on him.”

“You needn’t,” said Emily. “I have almost prevailed upon Graeme, to let Menie go back with me. There will be two learned ladies then.”

Graeme smiled, and shook her head.

“Not till summer. We’ll see what summer brings. Many things may happen before summer,” she added, gravely.

They all assented gravely too, but not one of them with any anxious thought of trouble drawing near. They grew quiet after that, and each sat thinking, but it was of pleasant things mostly; and if on anyone there fell a shadow for a moment, it was but with the thought of the morrow’s parting, and never with the dread that they might not all meet on earth again.

Chapter Seventeen.

They all went away—the lads and Emily, and quietness fell on those that remained. The reaction from the excitement in which they had been living for the last few weeks was very evident in all. Even Will and Rosie needed coaxing to go back to the learning of lessons, and the enjoyment of their old pleasures; and so Graeme did not wonder that Marian was dull, and did not care to exert herself. The weather had changed, too, and they quite agreed in thinking it was much nicer to stay within doors than to take their usual walks and drives. So Marian occupied the arm-chair or the sofa, with work in her hand, or without it, as the case might be, and her sister’s fears with regard to her were, for a time, at rest. For she did not look ill; she was as cheerful as ever, entering into all the new arrangements which Janet’s departure rendered necessary with interest, and sharing with Graeme the light household tasks that fell to her lot when the “help” was busy with heavier matters.

There was not much that was unpleasant, for the kind and watchful eyes of Mrs Snow were quite capable of keeping in view the interests of two households, and though no longer one of the family, she was still the ruling spirit in their domestic affairs. With her usual care for the welfare of the bairns, she had sent the experienced Hannah Lovejoy up the brae, while she contented herself with “breaking in” Sephronia, Hannah’s less helpful younger sister. There was a great difference between the service of love that had all their life long shielded them from trouble and annoyance, and Miss Lovejoy’s abrupt and rather familiar ministrations. But Hannah was faithful and capable, indeed, “a treasure,” in these days of destitution in the way of help; and if her service was such as money could well pay, she did not grudge it, while her wages were secure; and housekeeping and its responsibilities were not so disagreeable to Graeme as she had feared. Indeed, by the time the first letter from Norman came, full of mock sympathy for her under her new trials, she was quite as ready to laugh at herself as any of the rest. Her faith in Hannah was becoming fixed, and it needed some expostulations from Mrs Snow to prevent her from letting the supreme power, as to household matters, pass into the hands of her energetic auxiliary.

“My dear,” said she, “there’s many a thing that Hannah could do well enough, maybe better than you could, for that matter; but you should do them yourself, notwithstanding. It’s better for her, and it’s better for you, too. Every woman should take pleasure in these household cares. If they are irksome at first they winna be when you are used to them; and, my dear, it may help you through many an hour of trouble and weariness to be able to turn your hand to these things. There is great comfort in it sometimes.”

Graeme laughed, and suggested other resources that might do as well to fall back upon in a time of trouble, but Mrs Snow was not to be moved.

“My dear, that may be all true. I ken books are fine things to keep folk from thinking, for a time; but the trouble that is put away that way comes back on one again; and it’s only when folk are doing their duty that the Lord gives them abiding comfort. I ken by myself. There have been days in my life when my heart must have been broken, or my brain grown crazed, if I hadna needed to do this and to do that, to go here and to go there. My dear, woman’s work, that’s never done, is a great help to many a one, as well as me. And trouble or no trouble, it is what you ought to know and do in your father’s house.”

So Graeme submitted to her friend’s judgment, and conscientiously tried to become wise in all household matters, keeping track of pieces of beef and bags of flour, of breakfasts, dinners and suppers, in a way that excited admiration, and sometimes other feelings, in the mind of the capable Hannah.

So a very pleasant winter wore on, and the days were beginning to grow long again, before the old dread was awakened in Graeme. For only in one way was Marian different from her old self. She did not come to exert herself. She was, perhaps, a little quieter, too, but she was quite cheerful, taking as much interest as ever in home affairs and in the affairs of the village. Almost every day, after the sleighing became good, she enjoyed a drive with Graeme or her father, or with Mr Snow in his big sleigh after the “bonny greys.” They paid visits, too, stopping a few minutes at Judge Merle’s or Mr Greenleaf’s, or at some other friendly home in the village; and if their friends’ eyes grew grave and very tender at the sight of them, it did not for a long time come into Graeme’s mind that it was because they saw something that was invisible as yet to hers. So the time wore on, and not one in the minister’s happy household knew that each day that passed so peacefully over them was leaving one less between them and a great sorrow.

The first fear was awakened in Graeme by a very little thing. After several stormy Sabbaths had kept her sister at home from church, a mild, bright day came, but it did not tempt her out.

“I am very sorry not to go, Graeme,” said she; “but I was so weary last time. Let me stay at home to-day.”

So she stayed; and all the way down the hill and over the valley the thought of her darkened the sunlight to her sister’s eyes. Nor was the shadow chased away by the many kindly greetings that awaited her at the church door; for

no one asked why her sister was not with her, but only how she seemed to-day. It was well that the sunshine, coming in on the corner where she sat, gave her an excuse for letting fall her veil over her face, for many a bitter tear fell behind it. When the services were over, and it was time to go home, she shrunk from answering more inquiries about Marian, and hastened away, though she knew that Mrs Merle was waiting for her at the other end of the broad aisle, and that Mrs Greenleaf had much ado to keep fast hold of her impatient boy till she should speak a word with her. But she could not trust herself to meet them and to answer them quietly, and hurried away. So she went home again, over the valley and up the hill with the darkness still round her, till Menie's bright smile and cheerful welcome chased both pain and darkness away.

But when the rest were gone, and the sisters were left to the Sabbath quiet of the deserted home, the fear came back again, for in a little Marian laid herself down with a sigh of weariness, and slept with her cheek laid on the Bible that she held in her hand. As Graeme listened to her quick breathing, and watched the hectic rising on her cheek, she felt, for the moment, as though all hope were vain. But she put the thought from her. It was too dreadful to be true; and she chid herself for always seeing the possible dark side of future events, and told herself that she must change in this respect. With all her might she strove to reason away the sickening fear at her heart, saying how utterly beyond belief it was that Menie could be going to die—Menie, who had always been so well and so merry. She was growing too fast, that was all; and when the spring came again, they would all go to some quiet place by the sea-shore, and run about among the rocks, and over the sands, till she should be well and strong as ever again.

"If spring were only come!" she sighed to herself. But first there were weeks of frost and snow, and then weeks of bleak weather, before the mild sea-breezes could blow on her drooping flower, and Graeme could not reason her fears away; nor when the painful hour of thought was over, and Menie opened her eyes with a smile, did her cheerful sweetness chase it away.

After this, for a few days, Graeme grow impatient of her sister's quietness, and strove to win her to her old employments again. She would have her struggle against her wish to be still, and took her to ride and to visit, and even to walk, when the day was fine. But this was not for long. Menie yielded always, and tried with all her might to seem well and not weary; but it was not always with success; and Graeme saw that it was in vain to urge her beyond her strength; so, in a little, she was allowed to fall back into her old ways again.

"I will speak to Doctor Chittenden, and know the worst," said Graeme, to herself, but her heart grew sick at the thought of what the worst might be.

By and by there came a mild bright day, more like April than January. Mr Elliott had gone to a distant part of the parish for the day, and had taken Will and Rosie with him, and the sisters were left alone. Graeme would have gladly availed herself of Deacon Snow's offer to lend them grey Major, or to drive them himself for a few miles. The day was so fine, she said to Menie; but she was loth to go. It would be so pleasant to be a whole day quite alone together. Or, if Graeme liked, they might send down for Janet in the afternoon. Graeme sighed, and urged no more.

"We can finish our book, you know," went on Menie. "And there are the last letters to read to Mrs Snow. I hope nobody will come in. We shall have such a quiet day."

But this was not to be. There was the sound of sleigh-bells beneath the window, and Graeme looked out.

"It is Doctor Chittenden," said she.

Marian rose from the sofa, trying, as she always did, when the Doctor came, to look strong and well. She did not take his visits to herself. Doctor Chittenden had always come now and then to see her father, and if his visits had been more frequent of late they had not been more formal or professional than before. Graeme watched him as he fastened his horse, and then went to the door to meet him.

"My child," said he, as he took her hand, and turned her face to the light, "are you quite well to-day?"

"Quite well," said Graeme; but she was very pale, and her cold hand trembled in his.

"You are quite well, I see," said he, as Marian came forward to greet him.

"I ought to be," said Marian, laughing and pointing to an empty bottle on the mantelpiece.

"I see. We must have it replenished."

"Don't you think something less bitter would do as well?" said Marian, making a pitiful face. "Graeme don't think it does me much good."

"Miss Graeme had best take care how she speaks disrespectfully of my precious bitters. But, I'll see. I have some doubts about them myself. You ought to be getting rosy and strong upon them, and I'm afraid you are not," said he, looking gravely into the fair pale face that he took between his hands. He looked up, and met Graeme's look fixed anxiously upon him. He did not avert his quickly as he had sometimes done on such occasions. The gravity of his look deepened as he met hers.

"Where has your father gone?" asked he.

"To the Bell neighbourhood, for the day. The children have gone with him, and Graeme and I are going to have a nice quiet day," said Marian.

"*You* are going with me," said the doctor.

"With you!"

"Yes. Have you any objections?"

"No. Only I don't care to ride just for the sake of riding, without having anywhere to go."

"But, I am going to take you somewhere. I came for that purpose. Mrs Greenleaf sent me. She wants you to-day."

"But, I can go there any time. I was there, not long ago; I would rather stay at home to-day with Graeme, thank you."

"And what am I to say to Mrs Greenleaf? No, I'm not going without you. So, get ready and come with me."

Menie pouted. "And Graeme had just consented to my staying at home quietly for the day."

"Which does not prove Miss Graeme's wisdom," said the doctor. "Why, child, how many April days do you think we are going to have in January? Be thankful for the chance to go out; for, if I am not much mistaken, we are to have a storm that will keep us all at home. Miss Graeme, get your sister's things. It is health for her to be out in such a day."

Graeme went without a word, and when she came back the doctor said,—

"There is no haste. I am going farther, and will call as I come back. Lie down, dear child, and rest just now."

Graeme left the room, and as the doctor turned to go out, she beckoned him into the study.

"You don't mean to tell me that Menie is in danger?" said she, with a gasp.

"I am by no means sure what I shall say to you. It will depend on how you are likely to listen," said the doctor, gravely.

Graeme strove to command herself and speak calmly.

"Anything is better than suspense." Then, laying her hand on his arm, she added, "She is not worse! Surely you would have told us!—"

"My dear young lady, calm yourself. She is not worse than she has been. The chances of recovery are altogether in her favour. The indications of disease are comparatively slight—that is, she has youth on her side, and a good constitution. If the month of March were over, we would have little to fear with another summer before us. Your mother did not die of consumption?"

"No, but—" The remembrance of what Janet had told her about their "bonny Aunt Marian" took away Graeme's power to speak.

"Well, we have everything to hope if we can see her safely through the spring without taking cold, and you must keep her cheerful."

"She is always cheerful."

"Well—that's well. You must not let her do anything to weary herself. I don't like the stove-heat for her. You should let her sleep in the other room where the fireplace is. When the days are fine, she must be well wrapped up and go out, and I will send her something. My dear, you have no occasion for despondency. The chances are all in her favour."

He went toward the door, but came back again, and after walking up and down the room for a little, he came close to Graeme.

"And if it were not so, my child, you are a Christian. If the possibility you have been contemplating should become a reality, ought it to be deplored?"

A strong shudder passed over Graeme. The doctor paused, not able to withstand the pain in her face.

"Nay, my child—if you could keep her here and assure to her all that the world can give, what would that be in comparison with the 'rest that remaineth?' For her it would be far better to go, and for you—when your time comes to lie down and die—would it sooth you then to know that she must be left behind, to travel, perhaps, with garments not unspotted, all the toilsome way alone?"

Graeme's face drooped till it was quite hidden, and her tears fell fast. Her friend did not seek to check them.

"I know the first thought is terrible. But, child! the grave is a safe place in which to keep our treasures. Mine are nearly all there. I would not have it otherwise—and they are safe from the chances of a changeful world. You will be glad for yourself by and by. You should be glad for your sister now."

"If I were sure—if I were quite sure," murmured Graeme through her weeping.

"Sure that she is going home?" said the doctor, stooping low to whisper the words. "I think you may be sure—as sure as one can be in such a case! It is a great mystery. Your father will know best. God is good. Pray for her."

"My father! He does not even think of danger." Graeme clasped her hands with a quick despairing motion.

"Miss Graeme," said the doctor, hastily, "you must not speak to your father yet. Marian's case is by no means hopeless, and your father must be spared all anxiety at present. A sudden shock might—" He paused.

"Is not my father well? Has he not quite recovered?" asked Graeme.

"Quite well, my dear, don't be fanciful. But it will do no good to disturb him now. I will speak to him, or give you leave to speak to him, if it should become necessary. In the meantime you must be cheerful. You have no cause to be otherwise."

It was easy to say "be cheerful." But Graeme hardly hoped for her sister, after that day. Often and often she repeated to herself the doctor's words, that there was no immediate danger, but she could take no comfort from them. The great dread was always upon her. She never spoke of her fears again, and shrank from any allusion to her sister's state, till her friends—and even the faithful Janet, who knew her so well—doubted whether she realised the danger, which was becoming every day more apparent to them all. But she knew it well, and strove with all her power, to look calmly forward to the time when the worst must come; and almost always, in her sister's presence, she strove successfully. But these quiet, cheerful hours in Marian's room, were purchased by hours of prayerful agony, known only to Him who is full of compassion, even when His chastisements are most severe.

Chapter Eighteen.

No. None knew so well as Graeme that her sister was passing away from among them; but even she did not dream how near the time was come. Even when the nightly journey up-stairs was more than Marian could accomplish, and the pretty parlour, despoiled of its ornaments, became her sick-room, Graeme prayed daily for strength to carry her through the long months of watching, that she believed were before her. As far as possible, everything went on as usual in the house. The children's lessons were learned, and recited as usual, generally by Marian's side for a time, but afterwards they went elsewhere, for a very little thing tired her now. Still, she hardly called herself ill. She suffered no pain, and it was only after some unusual exertion that she, or others, realised how very weak she was becoming day by day. Her work-basket stood by her side still, for though she seldom touched it now, Graeme could not bear to put it away. Their daily readings were becoming brief and infrequent. One by one their favourite books found their accustomed places on the shelves, and remained undisturbed. Within reach of her hand lay always Menie's little Bible, and now and then she read a verse or two, but more frequently it was Graeme's trembling lips, that murmured the sweet familiar words. Almost to the very last she came out to family worship with the rest, and when she could not, they went in to her. And the voice, that had been the sweetest of them all, joined softly and sweetly still in their song of praise.

Very quietly passed these last days and nights. Many kind inquiries were made, and many kind offices performed for them, but for the most part the sisters were left to each other. Even the children were beguiled into frequent visits to Mrs Snow and others, and many a tranquil hour did the sisters pass together. Tranquil only in outward seeming many of these hours were to Graeme, for never a moment was the thought of the parting, that every day brought nearer, absent from her, and often when there were smiles and cheerful words upon her lips, her heart was like to break for the desolation that was before them.

"Graeme," said Marian, one night, as the elder sister moved restlessly about the room, "you are tired to-night. Come and lie down beside me and rest, before Will and Rosie come home."

Weary Graeme was, and utterly despondent, with now and then such bitter throbs of pain, at her heart, that she felt she must get away to weep out her tears alone. But she must have patience a little longer, and so, lying down on the bed, she suffered the wasted arms to clasp themselves about her neck, and for a time the sisters lay cheek to cheek in silence.

"Graeme," said Marian, at last, "do you think papa kens?"

"What love?"

"That I am going soon. You know it, Graeme?"

Graeme's heart stirred with a sudden throb of pain. There was a rushing in her ears, and a dimness before her eyes, as though the dreaded enemy had already come, but she found voice to say, softly,—

"You're no' feared, Menie?"

"No," said she, quickly, then raising herself up, and leaning close over, so as to see her sister's face, she added, "Do you think I need to fear, Graeme?"

If she had had a thousand worlds to give, she would have given all to know that her little sister, standing on the brink of the river of death, need not fear to enter it.

"None need fear who trust in Jesus," said she, softly.

"No. And I do trust Him. Who else could I trust, now that I am going to die? I know He is able to save."

"All who come to him," whispered Graeme. "My darling, have you come?"

"I think he has drawn me to Himself. I think I am His very own. Graeme, I know I am not wise like you—and I have not all my life been good, but thoughtless and wilful often—but I know that I love Jesus, and I think He loves me, too."

She lay quietly down again.

"Graeme, are you afraid for me?"

"I canna be afraid for one who trusts in Jesus."

It was all she could do to say it, for the cry that was rising to her lips from her heart, in which sorrow was struggling with joy.

"There is only one thing that sometimes makes me doubt," said Marian, again. "My life has been such a happy life. I have had no tribulation that the Bible speaks of—no buffetting—no tossing to and fro. I have been happy all my life, and happy to the end. It seems hardly fair, Graeme, when there are so many that have so much suffering."

"God has been very good to you, dear."

"And you'll let me go willingly, Graeme?"

"Oh! Menie, must you go. Could you no' bide with us a little while?" said Graeme, her tears coming fast. A look of pain came to her sister's face.

"Graeme," said she, softly; "at first I thought I couldna bear to go and leave you all. But it seems easy now. And you wouldna bring back the pain, dear?"

"No, no! my darling."

"At first you'll all be sorry, but God will comfort you. And my father winna have long to wait, and you'll have Rosie and Will—and, Graeme, you will tell papa?"

"Yes, I will tell him."

"He'll grieve at first, and I could not bear to see him grieve. After he has time to think about it, he will be glad."

"And Arthur, and all the rest—" murmured Graeme.

A momentary shadow passed over Marian's face.

"Oh! Graeme, at first I thought it would break my heart to leave you all—but I am willing now. God, I trust, has made me willing. And after a while they will be happy again. But they will never forget me, will they, Graeme?"

"My darling! never!"

"Sometimes I wish I had known—I wish I had been quite sure, when they were all at home. I would like to have said something. But it doesna really matter. They will never forget me."

"We will send for them," said Graeme, through her tears.

"I don't know. I think not. It would grieve them, and I can bear so little now. And we were so happy the last time. I think they had best not come, Graeme."

But the words were slow to come, and her eyes turned, oh! so wistfully, to her sister's face, who had no words with which to answer.

"Sometimes I dream of them, and when I waken, I do so long to see them," and the tears gathered slowly in her eyes. "But it is as well as it is, perhaps. I would rather they would think of me as I used to be, than to see me now. No, Graeme, I think I will wait."

In the pause that followed, she kissed her sister softly many times.

"It won't be long. And, Graeme—I shall see our mother first—and you must have patience, and wait. We shall all get safe home at last—I am quite, *quite* sure of that."

A step was heard at the door, and Mrs Snow entered.

"Weel, bairns!" was all she said, as she sat down beside them. She saw that they were both much moved, and she laid her kind hand caressingly on the hair of the eldest sister, as though she knew she was the one who needed comforting.

"Have the bairns come?" asked Menie.

"No, dear, I bade them bide till I went down the brae again. Do you want them home?"

"Oh no! I only wondered why I didna hear them."

The wind howled drearily about the house, and they listened to it for a time in silence.

"It's no' like spring to-night, Janet," said Menie.

"No, dear, it's as wintry a night as we have had this while. But the wind is changing to the south now, and we'll soon see the bare hills again."

"Yes; I hope so," said Menie, softly.

"Are you wearying for the spring, dear?"

"Whiles I weary." But the longing in those "bonny e'en" was for no earthly spring, Janet well knew.

"I aye mind the time when I gathered the snowdrops and daisies, and the one rose, on my mother's birthday. It was long before this time of the year—and it seems long to wait for spring."

"Ay, I mind; but that was in the sheltered garden at the Ebba. There were no flowers blooming on the bare hills in Scotland then more than here. You mustna begin to weary for the spring yet. You'll get down the brae soon, maybe, and then you winna weary."

Menie made no answer, but a spasm passed over the face of Graeme. The same thought was on the mind of all the three. When Menie went down the brae again, it must be with eyelids closed, and with hands folded on a heart at rest forever.

"Janet, when will Sandy come? Have you got a letter yet?"

"Yes; I got a letter to-day. It winna be long now."

"Oh! I hope not. I want to see him and your mother. I want them to see me, too. Sandy would hardly mind me, if he didna come till afterwards."

"Miss Graeme, my dear," said Mrs Snow, hoarsely, "go ben and sit with your father a while. It will rest you, and I'll bide with Menie here."

Graeme rose, and kissing her sister, softly went away. Not into the study, however, but out into the darkness, where the March wind moaned so drearily among the leafless elms, that she might weep out the tears which she had been struggling with so long. Up and down the snow-encumbered path she walked, scarce knowing that she shivered in the blast. Conscious only of one thought, that Menie must die, and that the time was hastening.

Yes. It was coming very near now. God help them all. Weary with the unavailing struggle, weary to faintness with the burden of care and sorrow, she had borne through all these months of watching, to-night she let it fall. She bowed herself utterly down.

"So let it be! God's will be done!"

And leaning with bowed head and clasped hands over the little gate, where she had stood in many a changing mood, she prayed as twice or thrice in a lifetime. God gives power to his children to pray—face to face—in His very presence. Giving her will and wish up quite, she lay at his feet like a little child, chastened, yet consoled, saying not with her lips, but with the soul's deepest breathing, "I am Thine. Save me." Between her and all earthly things, except the knowledge that her sister was dying, a kindly veil was interposed. No foreshadowing of a future more utterly bereaved than Menie's death would bring, darkened the light which this momentary glimpse of her Lord revealed. In that hour she ate angel's food, and from it received strength to walk through desert places.

She started as a hand was laid upon her shoulder, but her head drooped again as she met Mr Snow's look, so grave in its kindness.

"Miss Graeme, is it best you should be out here in the cold?"

"No," said Graeme, humbly. "I am going in." But she did not move even to withdraw herself from the gentle pressure of his hand.

"Miss Graeme," said he, as they stood thus with the gate between them, "hadn't you better give up now, and let the Lord do as He's a mind to about it?"

"Yes," said Graeme, "I give up. His will be done."

"Amen!" said her friend, and the hand that rested on her shoulder was placed upon her head, and Graeme knew that in "the golden vials full of odours" before the throne, Deacon Snow's prayer for her found a place.

She opened the gate and held it till he passed through, and then followed him up the path into Hannah's bright kitchen.

"Will you go in and see papa, or in there?" asked she, glancing towards the parlour door, and shading her eyes as she spoke.

"Well, I guess I'll sit down here. It won't be long before Mis' Snow'll be going along down. But don't you wait. Go right in to your father."

Graeme opened the study-door and went in.

"I will tell him to-night," said she. "God help us."

Her father was sitting in the firelight, holding an open letter in his hand.

"Graeme," said he, as she sat down, "have you seen Janet?"

"Yes, papa. I left her with Marian, a little ago."

"Poor Janet!" said her father, sighing heavily. No one was so particular as the minister in giving Janet her new title. It was always "Mistress Snow" or "the deacon's wife" with him, and Graeme wondered to-night.

"Has anything happened?" asked she.

"Have you not heard? She has had a letter from home. Here it is. Her mother is dead."

The letter dropped from Graeme's outstretched hand.

"Yes," continued her father. "It was rather sudden, it seems—soon after she had decided to come out here. It will be doubly hard for her daughter to bear on that account. I must speak to her, poor Janet!"

Graeme was left alone to muse on the uncertainty of all things, and to tell herself over and over again, how vain it was to set the heart on any earthly good. "Poor Janet!" well might her father say; and amid her own sorrow Graeme grieved sincerely for the sorrow of her friend. It was very hard to bear, now that she had been looking forward to a happy meeting, and a few quiet years together after their long separation. It did seem very hard, and it was with a full heart that in an hour afterward, when her father returned, she sought her friend.

Mr Snow had gone home and his wife was to stay all night, Graeme found when she entered her sister's room. Marian was asleep, and coming close to Mrs Snow, who sat gazing into the fire, Graeme knelt down beside her and put her arm's about her neck without a word. At first Graeme thought she was weeping. She was not; but in a little she said, in a voice that showed how much her apparent calmness cost her, "You see, my dear, the upshot of all our fine plans."

"Oh, Janet! There's nothing in all the world that we can trust in."

"Ay, you may weel say that. But it is a lesson that we are slow to learn; and the Lord winna let us forget."

There was a pause.

"When was it?" asked Graeme, softly.

"Six weeks ago this very night, I have been thinking, since I sat here. Her trouble was short and sharp, and she was glad to go."

"And would she have come?"

"Ay, lass, but it wasna to be, as I might have kenned from the beginning. I thought I asked God's guiding, and I was persuaded into thinking I had gotten it. But you see my heart was set on it from the very first—guiding or no guiding—and now the Lord has seen fit to punish me for my self-seeking."

"Oh, Janet!" said Graeme, remonstratingly.

"My dear, it's true, though it sets me ill to vex you with saying it now. I have more need to take the lesson to heart. May the Lord give me grace to do it."

Graeme could say nothing, and Janet continued—

"It's ill done in me to grieve for her. She is far better off than ever I could have made her with the best of wills, and as for me—I must submit."

"You have Sandy still."

"Aye, thank God. May He have him in His keeping."

"And he will come yet."

"Yes, I have little doubt. But I'll no' set myself to the hewing out of broken cisterns this while again. The Lord kens best."

After that night Mrs Snow never left the house for many hours at a time till Menie went away. Graeme never told her father of the sorrow that was drawing near. As the days went on, she saw by many a token, that he knew of the coming parting, but it did not seem to look sorrowful to him. He was much with her now, but all could see that the hours by her bedside were not sorrowful ones to him or to her. But to Graeme he did not speak of her sister's state till near the very last.

They were sitting together in the firelight of the study, as they seldom sat now. They had been sitting thus a long time—so long that Graeme, forgetting to wear a cheerful look in her father's presence, had let her weary eyes close, and her hands drop listlessly on her lap. She looked utterly weary and despondent, as she sat there, quite unconscious that her father's eyes were upon her.

"You are tired to-night, Graeme," said he, at last. Graeme started, but it was not easy to bring her usual look back, so she busied herself with something at the table and did not speak. Her father sighed.

"It will not be long now."

Graeme sat motionless, but she had no voice with which to speak.

"We little thought it was our bonny Menie who was to see her mother first. Think of the joy of that meeting, Graeme!"

Graeme's head drooped down on the table. If she had spoken a word, it must have been with a great burst of weeping. She trembled from head to foot in her effort to keep herself quiet. Her father watched her for a moment.

"Graeme, you are not grudging your sister to such blessedness?"

"Not now, papa," whispered she, heavily. "I am almost willing now."

"What is the happiest life here—and Menie's has been happy—to the blessedness of the rest which I confidently believe awaits her, dear child?"

"It is not that I grudge to let her go, but that I fear to be left behind."

"Ay, love! But we must bide God's time. And you will have your brothers and Rose, and you are young, and time heals sore wounds in young hearts."

Graeme's head drooped lower. She was weeping unrestrainedly but quietly now. Her father went on—

"And afterwards you will have many things to comfort you. I used to think in the time of my sorrow, that its suddenness added to its bitterness. If it had ever come into my mind that your mother might leave me, I might have borne it better, I thought. But God knows. There are some things for which we cannot prepare."

There was a long silence.

"Graeme, I have something which I must say to you," said her father, and his voice showed that he was speaking with an effort. "If the time comes—when the time comes—my child, I grieve to give you pain, but what I have to say had best be said now; it will bring the time no nearer. My child, I have something to say to you of the time when we shall no longer be together—" Graeme did not move.

"My child, the backward look over one's life, is so different from the doubtful glances one sends into the future. I stand now, and see all the way by which God has led me, with a grieved wonder, that I should ever have doubted his love and care, and how it was all to end. The dark places, and the rough places that once made my heart faint with fear, are, to look back upon, radiant with light and beauty—Mounts of God, with the bright cloud overshadowing them. And yet, I mind groping about before them, like a bond man, with a fear and dread unspeakable.

"My child, are you hearing me? Oh! if my experience could teach you! I know it cannot be. The blessed lesson that suffering teaches, each must bear for himself; and I need not tell you that there never yet was sorrow sent to a child of God, for which there is no balm. You are young; and weary and spent as you are to-night, no wonder that you think at the sight, of the deep wastes you may have to pass, and the dreary waters you may have to cross. But there is no fear that you will be alone, dear, or that He will give you anything to do, or bear, and yet withhold the needed strength. Are you hearing me, my child?"

Graeme gave a mute sign of assent.

"Menie, dear child, has had a life bright and brief. Yours may be long and toilsome, but if the end be the same, what matter! you may desire to change with her to-night, but we cannot change our lot. God make us patient in it,—patient and helpful. Short as your sister's life has been, it has not been in vain. She has been like light among us, and her memory will always be a blessedness—and to you Graeme, most of all."

Graeme's lips opened with a cry. Turning, she laid her face down on her father's knee, and her tears fell fast. Her father raised her, and clasping her closely, let her weep for a little.

"Hush, love, calm yourself," said he, at last. "Nay," he added, as she would have risen, "rest here, my poor tired Graeme, my child, my best comforter always."

Graeme's frame shook with sobs.

"Don't papa—I cannot bear it—"

She struggled with herself, and grew calm again.

"Forgive me, papa. I know I ought not. And indeed, it is not because I am altogether unhappy, or because I am not willing to let her go—"

"Hush, love, I know. You are your mother's own patient child. I trust you quite, Graeme, and that is why I have courage to give you pain. For I must say more to-night. If anything should happen to me—hush, love. My saying it does not hasten it. But when I am gone, you will care for the others. I do not fear for you. You will always have kind friends in Janet and her husband, and will never want a home while they can give you one, I am sure. But Graeme, I would like you all to keep together. Be one family, as long as possible. So if Arthur wishes you to go to him, go all together. He may have to work hard for a time, but you will take a blessing with you. And it will be best for all, that you should keep together."

The shock which her father's words gave, calmed Graeme in a moment.

"But, papa, you are not ill, not more than you have been?"

"No, love, I am better, much better. Still, I wished to say this to you, because it is always well to be prepared. That is all I had to say, love."

But he clasped her to him for a moment still, and before he let her go, he whispered, softly,—

"I trust you quite, love, and you'll bring them all home safe to your mother and me."

It was not very long after this, a few tranquil days and nights only, and the end came. They were all together in Marian's room, sitting quietly after worship was over. It was the usual time for separating for the night, but they still lingered. Not that any of them thought it would be to-night. Mrs Snow might have thought so, for never during the long evening, had she stirred from the side of the bed, but watched with earnest eyes, the ever changing face of the dying girl. She had been slumbering quietly for a little while, but suddenly, as Mrs Snow bent over her more closely, she opened her eyes, and seeing something in her face, she said, with an echo of surprise in her voice,—

"Janet, is it to be to-night? Are they all here? Papa, Graeme. Where is Graeme?"

They were with her in a moment, and Graeme's cheek was laid on her sister's wasted hand.

"Well, my lammie!" said her father, softly.

"Papa! it is not too good to be true, is it?"

Her father bent down till his lips touched her cheek.

"You are not afraid, my child?"

Afraid! no, it was not fear he saw in those sweet triumphant eyes. Her look never wandered from his face, but it changed soon, and he knew that the King's messenger was come. Murmuring an inarticulate prayer, he bowed his head in the awful presence, and when he looked again, he saw no more those bonny eyes, but Janet's toil-worn hand laid over them.

Graeme's cheek still lay on her sister's stiffening hand, and when they all rose up, and her father, passing round the couch put his arm about her, she did not move.

"There is no need. Let her rest! it is all over now, the long watching and waiting! let the tired eyelids close, and thank God for the momentary forgetfulness which He has given her."

Chapter Nineteen.

That night, Graeme slept the dreamless sleep of utter exhaustion, and the next day, whenever her father or Mrs Snow stole in to look at her, she slept or seemed to sleep still.

"She is weary," they said, in whispers. "Let her rest." Kind neighbours came and went, with offers of help and sympathy, but nothing was suffered to disturb the silence of the now darkened chamber. "Let her rest," said all.

But when the next night passed, and the second day was drawing to a close, Mrs Snow became anxious, and her visits were more frequent. Graeme roused herself to drink the tea that she brought her, and to Mrs Snow's question whether she felt rested, she said, "Oh! yes," but she closed her eyes, and turned her face away again. Janet went out and seated herself in the kitchen, with a picture of utter despondency. Just then, her husband came in.

"Is anything the matter?" asked he, anxiously.

"No," said his wife, rousing herself. "Only, I dinna ken weel what to do."

"Is Miss Graeme sick? or is she asleep?"

"I hope she's no' sick. I ken she's no sleeping. But she ought to be roused, and when I think what she's to be roused to—. But, if she wants to see her sister, it must be before—before she's laid in—"

A strong shudder passed over her.

"Oh! man! it's awful, the first sight of a dear face in the coffin—"

"Need she see her again?" asked Mr Snow.

"Oh! yes, I doubt she must. And the bairns too, and it will soon be here, now."

"Her father," suggested Mr Snow.

"He has seen her. He was there for hours, both yesterday and to-day. But he is asleep now, and he has need of rest. I canna disturb him."

"Couldn't you kind of make her think she was needed—to her father or the little ones? She would rouse herself if they needed her."

"That's weel said," said Mrs Snow, gratefully. "Go you down the brae for the bairns, and I'll go and speak to her again."

"Miss Graeme, my dear," said she, softly; "could you speak to me a minute?"

Her manner was quite calm. It was so like the manner in which Graeme had been hundreds of times summoned to discuss domestic matters, that without seeming to realise that there was anything peculiar in the time or circumstances, she opened her eyes and said, quietly,—

"Well, what is it, Janet?"

"My dear, it is the bairns. There is nothing the matter with them," added she hastily, as Graeme started. "They have been down the brae with Emily all the day, but they are coming home now; and, my dear, they havena been ben yonder, and I think they should see her before—before she's moved, and I dinna like to disturb your father. My bairn, are you able to rise and take Will and wee Rosie ben yonder."

Graeme raised herself slowly up.

"Janet, I have been forgetting the bairns."

Mrs Snow had much ado to keep back her tears; but she only said cheerfully:

"My dear, you were weary, and they have had Emily."

She would not be tender with her, or even help her much in her preparations; though her hands trembled, and she touched things in a vague, uncertain way, as though she did not know what she was doing. Janet could not trust herself to do what she would like to have done; she could only watch her without appearing to do so, by no means sure that she had done right in rousing her. She was ready at last.

"Are they come?" asked Graeme, faintly.

"No, dear. There's no haste. Rest yourself a wee while. My dear, are you sure you are quite able for it?" added she, as Graeme rose.

"Yes, I think so. But I would like to go alone, first."

"My poor lamb! If I were but sure that I have been right," thought Janet, as she sat down to wait.

An hour passed, and when the door opened, and Graeme came out again, the fears of her faithful friend were set at rest.

"She hasna' been alone all this time, as I might have known," said Janet to herself, with a great rush of hidden tears. "I'm faithless, and sore beset myself whiles, but I needna fear for them. The worst is over now."

And was the worst over? After that was the covering of the beloved forever from their sight, and the return to the silent and empty home. There was the gathering up of the broken threads of their changed life; the falling back on their old cares and pleasures, all so much the same, and yet so different. There was the vague unbelief in the reality of their sorrow, the momentary forgetfulness, and then the pang of sudden remembrance,—the nightly dreams of her, the daily waking to find her gone.

By and by, came letters from the lads; those of Norman and Harry full of bitter regrets, which to Graeme seemed almost like reproaches, that they had not been sent for before the end; and the grief of those at home came back strong and fresh again.

The coming of the "bonny spring days" for which Norman had so wished, wakened "vain longings for the dead." The brooks rose high, and the young leaves rustled on the elms; and all pleasant sounds spoke to them with Menie's voice. The flowers which she had planted,—the May-flower and the violets by the garden path, looked at them with Menie's eyes. The odour of the lilacs, by the gate, and of the pine trees on the hill came with that mysterious power to awaken old associations, bringing back to Graeme the memory of the time when they first came to the house on the hill, when they were all at home together, and Menie was a happy child. All these things renewed their sorrow, but not sharply or bitterly. It was the sorrow of chastened and resigned hearts, coming back with hopeful patience to tread the old paths of their daily life, missing the lost one, and always with a sense of waiting for the time when they shall meet again, but quite content.

And Mrs Snow, watching both the minister and Graeme, "couldna be thankful enough" for what she saw. But as the weeks passed on there mingled with her thankfulness an anxiety which she herself was inclined to resent. "As though the Lord wasna bringing them through their troubles in a way that was just wonderful," she said to herself, many a time. At last, when the days passed into weeks, bringing no colour to the cheeks, and no elasticity to the step of Graeme, she could not help letting her uneasiness be seen.

"It's her black dress that makes her look so pale, ain't it?" said Mr Snow, but his face was grave, too.

"I dare say that makes a difference, and she is tired to-day, too. She wearied herself taking the flowers and things over yonder," said Mrs Snow, glancing towards the spot where the white grave-stones gleamed out from the pale, green foliage of spring-time. "And no wonder. Even Emily was over tired, and hasna looked like herself since. I dare say I'm troubling myself when there is no need."

"The children, Will, and Rosie, don't worry her with their lessons, do they?"

"I dinna ken. Sometimes I think they do. But she would weary far more without them. We must have patience. It would never do to vex the minister with fears for her."

"No, it won't do to alarm him," said Mr Snow, with emphasis; and he looked very grave. In a little he opened his lips as if to say more, but seemed to change his mind.

"It ain't worth while to worry her with it. I don't more than half believe it myself. Doctors don't know everything. It seems as though it couldn't be so—and if it is so, it's best to keep still about it—for a spell, anyhow."

And Mr Snow vaguely wished that Doctor Chittenden had not overtaken him that afternoon, or that they had not

talked so long and so gravely beneath the great elms.

"And the doctor ain't given to talking when he had ought to keep still. Can't nothing be done for him? I'll have a talk with the squire, anyhow."

That night Mr and Mrs Snow were startled by a message from Graeme. Her father had been once or twice before sharply and suddenly seized with illness. The doctor looked very grave this time, but seeing Graeme's pale, anxious face, he could not find it in his heart to tell her that this was something more than the indigestion which it had been called—severe but not dangerous. The worst was over for this time, and Graeme would be better able to bear a shock by and by.

The minister was better, but his recovery was very slow—so slow, that for the first time during a ministry of thirty years he was two Sabbaths in succession unable to appear in his accustomed place in the pulpit. It was this which depressed him and made him grow so grave and silent, Graeme thought, as they sat together in the study as it began to grow dark. She roused herself to speak cheerfully, so as to win him from the indulgence of his sad thoughts.

"Shall I read to you, papa? You have hardly looked at the book that Mr Snow brought. I am sure you will like it. Shall I read awhile?"

"Yes, if you like; by and by, when the lamp is lighted. There is no haste. I have been thinking as I sat here, Graeme—and I shall find no better time than this to speak of it to you—that—"

But what he had been thinking Graeme was not to hear that night, for a hand was laid on the study-door, and in answer to Graeme's invitation, Mr and Mrs Snow came in, "just to see how the folks were getting along," said Mr Snow, as Graeme stirred the fire into a blaze. But there was another and a better reason for the visit, as he announced rather abruptly after a little.

"They've been talking things over, down there to the village, and they've come to the conclusion that they'd better send you off—for a spell—most anywhere—so that you come back rugged again. Some say to the seaside, and some say to the mountains, but / say to Canada. It's all fixed. There's no trouble about ways and means. It's in gold, to save the discount," added he, rising, and laying on the table something that jingled. "For they do say they are pretty considerable careful in looking at our bills, up there in Canada, and it is all the same to our folks, gold or paper," and he sat down again, as though there was enough said, and then he rose as if to go. Graeme was startled, and so was her father.

"Sit down, deacon, and tell me more. No, I'm not going to thank you—you need not run away. Tell me how it happened."

"They don't think papa so very ill?" said Graeme, alarmed.

"Well—he ain't so rugged as he might be—now is he?" said Mr Snow, seating himself. "But he ain't so sick but that he can go away a spell, with you to take care of him—I don't suppose he'd care about going by himself. And Mis' Snow, and me—we'll take care of the children—"

"And what about this, deacon?" asked Mr Elliott, laying his hand on the purse that Sampson had placed on the table.

But Mr Snow had little to say about it. If he knew where the idea of the minister's holidays originated, he certainly did not succeed in making it clear to the minister and Graeme.

"But that matters little, as long as it is to be," said Mrs Snow, coming to the deacon's relief. "And it has all been done in a good spirit, and in a proper and kindly manner, and from the best of motives," added she, looking anxiously from Graeme to her father.

"You need not be afraid, my kind friends," said Mr Elliott, answering her look, while his voice trembled. "The gift shall be accepted in the spirit in which it is offered. It gives me great pleasure."

"And, Miss Graeme, my dear," continued Mrs Snow, earnestly, "you needna look so grave about it. It is only what is right and just to your father—and no favour—though it has been a great pleasure to all concerned. And surely, if I'm satisfied, you may be."

Sampson gave a short laugh.

"She's changed her mind about us Merleville folks lately—"

"Whist, man! I did that long ago. And, Miss Graeme, my dear, think of seeing your brothers, and their friends, and yon fine country, and the grand river that Harry tells us of! It will be almost like seeing Scotland again, to be in the Queen's dominions. My dear, you'll be quite glad when you get time to think about it."

"Yes—but do they really think papa is so ill?"

She had risen to get a light, and Mrs Snow had followed her from the room.

"Ill? my dear, if the doctor thought him ill would he send him from home? But he needs a rest, and a change—and, my dear, you do that yourself, and I think it's just providential. Not but that you could have gone without their help, but this was done in love, and I would fain have you take pleasure in it, as I do."

And Graeme did take pleasure in it, and said so, heartily, and "though it wasna just the thing for the Sabbath night," as Janet said, they lingered a little, speaking of the things that were to be done, or to be left undone, in view of the

preparations for the journey. They returned to the study with the light just as Mr Elliott was saying,—

“And so, I thought, having the prospect of but few Sabbaths, I would like to spend them all at home.”

Janet's first impulse was to turn and see whether Graeme had heard her father's words. She evidently had not, for she came in smiling, and set the lamp on the table. There was nothing reassuring in the gravity of her husband's face, Mrs Snow thought, but his words were cheerful.

“Well, yes, I vote for Canada. We ain't going to believe all the boys say about it, but it will be a cool kind of place to go to in summer, and it will be a change, to say nothing of the boys.”

Graeme laughed softly. The boys would not have been the last on her list of good reasons, for preferring Canada as the scene of their summer wanderings. She did not join in the cheerful conversation that followed, however, but sat thinking a little sadly, that the meeting with the boys, in their distant home, would be sorrowful as well as joyful.

If Mrs Snow had heard anything from her husband, with regard to the true state of the minister's health, she said nothing of it to Graeme, and she went about the preparations for their journey cheerfully though very quietly. Indeed, if her preparations had been on a scale of much greater magnificence, she needed not have troubled herself about them. Ten pairs of hands were immediately placed at her disposal, where half the number would have served. Her affairs were made a personal matter by all her friends. Each vied with the others in efforts to help her and save her trouble; and if the reputation of Merleville, for all future time, had depended on the perfect fit of Graeme's one black silk, or on the fashion of her grey travelling-dress, there could not, as Mrs Snow rather sharply remarked, “have been more fuss made about it.” And she had a chance to know, for the deacon's house was the scene of their labours of love. For Mrs Snow declared “she wouldna have the minister and Miss Graeme fashed with nonsense, more than all their proposed jaunt would do them good, and so what couldna be redone there needna be done at all.”

But Mrs Snow's interest and delight in all the preparations were too real and manifest, to permit any of the willing helpers to be offended at her sharpness. In her heart Mrs Snow was greatly pleased, and owned as much in private, but in public, “saw no good in making a work about it,” and, on behalf of the minister and his daughter, accepted the kindness of the people as their proper right and due. When Mrs Page identified herself with their affairs, and made a journey to Rixford for the purpose of procuring the latest Boston fashion for sleeves, before Graeme's dress should be made, she preserved the distant civility of manner, with which that lady's advances were always met; and listened rather coldly to Graeme's embarrassed thanks, when the same lady presented her with some pretty lawn handkerchiefs; but she was warm enough in her thanks to Becky Pettimore—I beg her pardon, Mrs Eli Stone—for the soft lamb's wool socks, spun and knitted for the minister by her own hands, and her regrets that her baby's teeth would not permit her to join the sewing parties, were far more graciously received than were Mrs Page's profuse offers of assistance.

On the whole, it was manifest that Mrs Snow appreciated the kindness of the people, though she was not quite impartial in her bestowment of thanks; and, on the whole, the people were satisfied with the “deacon's wife,” and her appreciation of them and their favours. Nothing could be more easily seen, than that the deacon's wife had greatly changed her mind about many things, since the minister's Janet used “to speak her mind to the Merleville folk,” before they were so well known to her.

As for Graeme, her share in the business of preparation was by no means arduous. She was mostly at home with the bairns, or sharing the visits of her father to the people whom he wished to see before he went away. It was some time before Will and Rosie could be persuaded that it was right for Graeme to leave them, and that it would be altogether delightful to live all the time at Mr Snow's, and go to school in the village—to the fine new high-school, which was one of the evidences of the increasing prosperity of Merleville. But they were entirely persuaded of it at last, and promised to become so learned, that Graeme should afterward have nothing to teach them. About the little ones, the elder sister's heart was quite at rest. It was not the leaving them alone, for they were to be in the keeping of the kind friend, who had cared for them all their lives.

Graeme never ceased to remember those happy drives with her father, on his gentle ministrations to the sick and sorrowful of his flock, in those days. She never thought of the cottage at the foot of the hill, but she seemed to see the suffering face of the widow Lovejoy, and her father's voice repeating,—

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Long afterwards, when the laughter of little children rose where the widow's groans had risen, Graeme could shut her eyes and see again the suffering face—the dooryard flowers, the gleaming of the sunlight on the pond—the very shadows of the maples on the grass. Then it was her sorrowful delight to recall those happy hours of quiet converse, the half sad, half joyful memories which her father loved to dwell upon—the firm and entire trust for the future, of which his words assured her.

Afterwards it came to her, that through all this pleasant time, her father was looking at a possibility to which her eyes were shut. He had spoke of her mother as he had seldom spoken even to Graeme, of the early days of their married-life—of all she had been to him, of all she had helped him to be and to do. And more than once he said,—

“You are like your mother, Graeme, in some things, but you have not her hopeful nature. You must be more hopeful and courageous, my child.”

He spoke of Marian, Graeme remembered afterward. Not as one speaks of the dead, of those who are hidden from the sight, but as of one near at hand, whom he was sure to meet again. Of the lads far-away, he always spoke as “your brothers, Graeme.” He spoke hopefully, but a little anxiously, too.

“For many a gallant bark goes down when its voyage is well nigh over; and there is but one safe place of anchorage, and I know not whether they have all found it yet. Not that I am afraid of them. I believe it will be well with them at last. But in all the changes that may be before you, you will have need of patience. You must be patient with your

brothers, Graeme; and be faithful to them, love, and never let them wander unchecked from what is right, for your mother's sake and mine."

He spoke of their leaving home, and very thankfully of the blessings that had followed them since then; of the kindness of the people, and his love to them; and of the health and happiness of all the bairns, "of whom one has got home before me, safely and soon."

"We might have come here, love, had your mother lived. And yet, I do not know. The ties of home and country are strong, and there was much to keep us there. Her departure made all the rest easy for me, and I am quite convinced our coming was for the best. There is only one thing that I have wished, and I know it is a vain thing." He paused a moment.

"Of late I have sometimes thought—I mean the thought has sometimes come to me unbidden—that I would like to rest beside her at last. But it is only a fancy. I know it will make no difference in the end."

If Graeme grew pale and trembled as she listened, it was with no dread that she could name. If it was forced upon her that the time must come when her father must leave them, it lay in her thoughts, far-away. She saw his grave dimly as a place of rest, when the labours of a long life should be ended; she had no thought of change, or separation, or of the blank that such a blessed departure must leave. The peace, which had taken possession of his mind had its influence on hers, and she "feared no evil."

Afterwards, when the thought of this time and of these words came back she chid herself with impatience, and a strange wonder, that she should not have seen and understood all that was in his thought—forgetting in her first agony how much better was the blessed repose of these moments, than the knowledge of her coming sorrow could have made them.

They all passed the rides and visits and the happy talks together. The preparations for the journey were all made. The good-byes were said to all except to Mrs Snow and Emily. The last night was come, and Graeme went round just as she always did, to close the doors and windows before she went to bed. She was tired, but not too tired to linger a little while at the window, looking out upon the scene, now so familiar and so dear. The shadows of the elms lay dark on the town, but the moonlight gleamed bright on the pond, and on the white houses of the village, and on the white stones in the grave-yard, grown precious to them all as Menie's resting-place. How peaceful it looked! Graeme thought of her sister's last days, and joyful hope, and wondered which of them all should first be called to lie down by Menie's side. She thought of the grave far-away on the other side of the sea, where they had laid her mother with her baby on her breast; but her thoughts were not all sorrowful. She thought of the many happy days that had come to them since the time that earth had been left dark and desolate by their mother's death, and realised for the moment how true it was, as her father had said to her, that God suffers no sorrow to fall on those who wait on Him, for which He does not also provide a balm.

"I will trust and not be afraid," she murmured.

She thought of her brothers and of the happy meeting that lay before them, but beyond their pleasant holiday she did not try to look; but mused on till her musings lost themselves in slumber, and changed to dreams.

At least, she always thought she must have fallen asleep, and that it was the sudden calling of her name, that awakened her with a start. She did not hear it when she listened for it again. She did not think of Rosie or Will, but went straight to her father's room. Through the half-open door, she saw that the bed was undisturbed, and that her father sat in the arm-chair by the window. The lamp burned dimly on the table beside him, and on the floor lay an open book, as it had fallen from his hand. The moonlight shone on his silver hair, and on his tranquil face. There was a smile on his lips, and his eyes were closed, as if in sleep; but even before she touched his cold hand, Graeme knew that from that sleep her father would never waken more.

Chapter Twenty.

It was a very changed life that opened before the bairns when Arthur took them home with him to Montreal. A very dismal change it seemed to them all, on the first morning when their brothers left them alone. Home! Could it ever seem like home to them? Think of the dwellers among the breezy hills of Merleville shut up in a narrow brick house in a close city street. Graeme had said that if they could all keep together, it did not so much matter how or where; but her courage almost failed as she turned to look out of the window that first morning.

Before her lay a confined, untidy yard, which they were to share with these neighbours; and beyond that, as far as could be seen, lay only roofs and chimneys. From the room above the view was the same, only the roofs and chimneys stretched farther away, and here and there between them showed the dusty bough of a maple or elm, or the ragged top of a Lombardy poplar, and, in the distance, when the sun shone, lay a bright streak, which they came at last to know as Harry's grand river. On the other side, toward the street, the window looked but on a brick wall, over which hung great willow-boughs shading half the street. The brick wall and the willows were better than the roofs and chimney-tops, Rosie thought; but it was a dreary sort of betterness. From Graeme's room above were seen still the wall and the willows, but over the wall and between the willows was got a glimpse of a garden—a very pretty garden. It was only a glimpse—a small part of a circular bit of green grass before the door of a handsome house, and around this, and under the windows, flowers and shrubs of various kinds. There was a conservatory at one end, but of that they saw nothing but a blinding glare when the sun shone on it—many panes of glass when the sun was gone. The garden seemed to extend behind the house; but they could only see a smooth gravel walk with an edge of green. Clumps of evergreens and horse-chestnuts hid all the rest. But even these were very beautiful; and this glimpse of a rich man's garden, from an upper window, was the redeeming feature in their new home.

For it was summer—the very prime of summer-time—and except for that little glimpse of garden, and the dusty maple boughs, and the ragged tops of the poplars, it might just as well have been winter. There was nothing to remind them of summer, but the air hanging over them hot and close, or sweeping in sudden dust-laden gusts down the narrow street. Yes; there was the long streak of blue, which Harry called the river, seen from the upper window; but it was only visible in sunny days, at least it only gleamed and sparkled then; it was but a dim, grey line at other times.

How changed their life was; how they drooped and pined for the sights and sounds and friends of Merleville.

“If there were but a green field in sight, or a single hill,” said Rosie; but she always added, “how nice it is to have the willow trees and the sight of the garden.”

For Rose was by no means sure that their longing for green fields and hills and woods was not wrong. It seemed like ingratitude to Arthur, this pining for the country and their old home; and these young girls from the very first made a firm stand against the home-sickness that came upon them. Not that home-sickness is a sickness that can be cured by struggling against it; but they tried hard to keep the knowledge of it from their brothers. Whatever happened during the long days, they had a pleasant breakfast-hour and a pleasant evening together. They seldom saw their brothers at other times during the first few months. Harry’s hours were long, and Arthur’s business was increasing so as to require close attention. This was a matter of much rejoicing to Graeme, who did not know that all Arthur’s business was not strictly professional—that it was business wearisome enough, and sometimes bringing in but little, but absolutely necessary for that little’s sake.

Graeme and Rosie were at home alone, and they found the days long and tedious often, though they conscientiously strove to look at all things from their best and brightest side. For a while they were too busy—too anxious for the success of their domestic plans, to have time for home-sickness. But when the first arrangements were made—when the taste and skill of Graeme, and the inexhaustible strength of their new maid, Nelly Anderson, had changed the dingy house into as bright and pleasant a place as might well be in a city street, then came the long days and the weariness. Then came upon Graeme that which Janet had predicted, when she so earnestly set her face against their going away from Merleville till the summer was over. Her fictitious strength failed her. The reaction from all the exertion and excitement of the winter and spring came upon her now, and she was utterly prostrate. She did not give up willingly. Indeed, she had no patience with herself in the miserable state into which she had fallen. She was ashamed and alarmed at her disinclination to exert herself—at her indifference to everything; but the exertion she made to overcome the evil only aggravated it, and soon was quite beyond her power. Her days were passed in utter helplessness on the sofa. She either denied herself to their few visitors, or left them to be entertained by Rose. All her strength and spirits were needed for the evening when her brothers were at home.

Some attention to household affairs was absolutely necessary, even when the time came, that for want of something else to do Nelly nodded for hours in the long afternoons over the knitting of a stocking. For though Nelly could do whatever could be accomplished by main strength, the skill necessary for the arrangement of the nicer matters of their little household was not in her, and Graeme was never left quite at rest as to the progress of events in her dominions. It was a very fortunate chance that had cast her lot with theirs soon after their arrival, Graeme knew and acknowledged; but after the handiness and immaculate neatness of Hannah Lovejoy, it was tiresome to have nothing to fall back upon but the help of the untaught Nelly. Her willingness and kind-heartedness made her, in many respects, invaluable to them; but her field of action had hitherto been a turnip-field, or a field in which cows were kept; and though she was, by her own account, “just wonderfu’ at the making of butter,” she had not much skill at anything else. If it would have brought colour to the cheek, or elasticity to the step of her young mistress, Nelly would gladly have carried her every morning in her arms to the top of the mountain; but nothing would have induced her, daring these first days, to undertake the responsibility of breakfast or dinner without Graeme’s special overlooking. She would walk miles to do her a kindness; but she could not step lightly or speak softly, or shut the door without a bang, and often caused her torture when doing her very best to help or cheer her.

But whatever happened through the day, for the evening Graeme exerted herself to seem well and cheerful. It was easy enough to do when Harry was at home, or when Arthur was not too busy to read to them. Then she could still have the arm-chair or the sofa, and hear, or not hear, as the case might be. But when any effort was necessary—when she must interest herself, or seem to interest herself in her work, or when Arthur brought any one home with him, making it necessary for Graeme to be hospitable and conversational, then it was very bad indeed. She might get through very well at the time with it all, but a miserable night was sure to follow, and she could only toss about through the slow hours exhausted yet sleepless.

Oh, how miserable some of these sultry August nights were, when she lay helpless, her sick fancy changing into dear familiar sounds the hum that rose from the city beneath. Now it was the swift spring-time rush of Carson’s brook, now the gentle ripple of the waters of the pond breaking on the white pebbles of the beach. The wind among the willow-boughs whispered to her of the pine grove and the garden at home, till her heart grew sick with longing to see them again. It was always the same. If the bitter sorrow that bereavement had brought made any part of what she suffered now; if the void which death had made deepened the loneliness of this dreary time, she did not know it. All this weariness of body and sinking of heart might have come though she had never left Merleville, but it did not seem so to her. It was always of *home* she thought. She rose up and lay down with longing for it fresh and sore. She started from troubled slumber to break into passionate weeping when there was no one to see her. She struggled against the misery that lay so heavily upon her, but not successfully. Health and courage failed.

Of course, this state of things could not continue long. They must get either better or worse, Graeme thought, and worse it was. Arthur and Harry coming home earlier than usual found her as she had never allowed them to find her before, lying listlessly, almost helplessly on the sofa. Her utmost effort to appear well and cheerful at the sight of them failed this once. She rose slowly and leaned back again almost immediately, closing her eyes with a sigh.

“Graeme!” exclaimed Harry, “what ails you! Such a face! Look here, I have something for you. Guess what.”

"A letter," said Rose. "Oh! Graeme look!"

But Graeme was past looking by this time. Her brothers were startled and tried to raise her.

"Don't, Arthur," said Rose; "let her lie down. She will be better in a little. Harry get some water."

Poor, wee Rosie! Her hands trembled among the fastenings of Graeme's dress, but she knew well what to do.

"You don't mean that she has been like this before?" said Arthur, in alarm.

"Yes, once or twice. She is tired, she says. She will soon be better, now."

In a minute Graeme opened her eyes, and sat up. It was nothing, she said, and Arthur was not to be frightened; but thoroughly frightened Arthur was, and in a little while Graeme found herself placed in the doctor's hands. It was a very kind, pleasant face that bent over her, but it was a grave face too, at the moment. When Graeme repeated her assurance that she was not ill, but only overcome with the heat and weariness, he said these had something to do with it, doubtless, and spoke cheerfully about her soon being well again; and Arthur's face quite brightened, as he left the room with him. Rose followed them, and when her brother's hand was on the door, whispered,—

"Please, Arthur, may I say something to the doctor? I think it is partly because Graeme is homesick."

"Homesick!" repeated the doctor and Arthur in a breath.

"Perhaps not homesick exactly," said Rose, eagerly addressing her brother. "She would not go back again you know; but everything is so different—no garden, no hills, no pond. And oh! Arthur, don't be vexed, but we have no Janet nor anything here."

Rosie made a brave stand against the tears and sobs that were rising in spite of her, but she was fain to hide her face on her brother's arm as he drew her toward him, and sat down on the sofa. The doctor sat down, too.

"Why, Rosie! My poor, wee Rosie! what has happened to my merry little sister?"

"I thought the doctor ought to know, and you must not tell Graeme. She does not think that I know."

"Know what?" asked Arthur.

"That she is so sad, and that the time seems long. But I have watched her, and I know."

"Well, I fear it is not a case for you, doctor," said Arthur, anxiously.

But the doctor thought differently. There was more the matter with Graeme than her sister knew, though the homesickness may have something to do with it; and then he added,—

"Her strength must have been severely tried to bring her to this state of weakness."

Arthur hesitated a moment.

"There was long illness in the family—and then death—my sister's first, and then my father's. And then I brought the rest here."

It was not easy for Arthur to say all this. In a little he added with an effort,—

"I fear I have not done well in bringing them. But they wished to come, and I could not leave them."

"You did right, I have no doubt," said the doctor. "Your sister might have been ill anywhere. She might have been worse without a change. The thing is to make her well again—which, I trust, we can soon do—with the help of Miss Rosie, who will make a patient and cheerful nurse, I am sure."

"Yes," said Rose, gravely. "I will try."

Arthur said something about taking them to the country, out of the dust and heat of the town.

"Yes," said the doctor. "The heat is bad. But it will not last long now, and on the whole, I think she is better where she is, at present. There is no danger. She will soon be as well as usual, I think."

But it was not very soon. Indeed, it was a long time before Graeme was as well as usual; not until the leaves on the willows had grown withered and grey, and the summer had quite gone. Not until kind Doctor McCulloch had come almost daily for many weeks—long enough for him to become much interested in both patient and nurse.

A wonderful nurse Rose proved herself to be. At first something was said about introducing a more experienced person into Graeme's chamber, but both Rose and Nelly Anderson objected so decidedly to this, and aided and abetted one another so successfully in their opposition to it, that the design was given up on condition that Rosie kept well and cheerful to prove her claim to the title of nurse. She kept cheerful, but she grew tall and thin, and a great deal too quiet to be like herself, her brothers thought; so whatever was forgotten or neglected during the day, Rosie must go out with one of them for a long walk while the other stayed with Graeme, and by this means the health and spirits of the anxious little lady were kept from failing altogether. For indeed the long days and nights might well be trying to the child, who had never needed to think twice about her own comfort all her life, and who was now quite too acutely sensible, how much the comfort of all the rest depended upon her. But she bore the trial well, and indeed came to the conclusion, that it was quite as pleasant to be made useful, to be trusted and consulted, and depended

upon, as to be petted and played with by her brothers. She quite liked the sense of responsibility, especially when Graeme began to get well again, and though she got tired very often, and grew pale now and then, they all agreed afterward that this time did Rose no harm, but a great deal of good.

As for Nelly Anderson, circumstances certainly developed her powers in a most extraordinary manner—not as a nurse, however. Her efforts in that line were confined to rambling excursions about the sick-room in her stockinged-feet, and to earnest entreaties to Graeme not to lose heart. But in the way of dinners and breakfasts, she excited the astonishment of the household, and her own most of all. When Arthur had peremptorily forbidden that any reference should be made to Graeme in household matters, Nelly had helplessly betaken herself to Rose, and Rose had as helplessly betaken herself to “Catherine Beecher.” Nothing short of the state of absolute despair in which she found herself, would have induced Nelly to put faith in a “printed book,” in any matter where the labour of her hands was concerned. But her accomplishments as a cook did not extend the making of “porridge” or the “choppin’ of potatoes,” and more was required. So with fear and trembling, Rose and she “laid their heads together,” over that invaluable guide to inexperienced housekeepers, and the result was success—indeed a series of successes. For emboldened by the favourable reception of their efforts, Nelly went on and prospered; and Rose, content that she should have all the honour of success, permitted her to have all the responsibility also.

Almost every morning Rose had a walk, either with Harry to his office, or with Will, to the school, while Arthur stayed with Graeme. The walk was generally quick enough to bring a bright colour to her cheeks, and it was always a merry time if Harry was with her, and then she was ready for her long day at home. She sometimes lingered on the way back. On the broad shady pavements of the streets she used to choose, when she was alone, she made many a pause to watch the little children at their play. She used to linger, too, wherever the ugly brick walls had been replaced by the pretty iron railings, with which every good rich man will surround his gardens, in order that they who have no gardens of their own may have a chance to see something beautiful too. And whenever she came to an open gate, the pause was long. She was in danger then of forgetting her womanliness and her gravity, and of exclaiming like a little girl, and sometimes she forgot herself so far as to let her feet advance farther up the gravel walk than in her sober moments she would have considered advisable.

One bright morning, as she returned home, she found herself standing before the large house on the other side of the street. For the first time she found the large gate wide open. There was no one in sight, and taking two steps forward, Rose saw more of the pretty garden within than she had ever seen before. She had often been tempted to walk round the smooth broad walks of other gardens, but second thoughts had always prevented her. This time she did not wait for second thoughts, but deliberately determined to walk round the carriage way without leave asked or given.

The garden belonged to Mr Elphinstone, a great man—at least a great merchant in the eyes of the world. One of Rose’s amusements during the time she was confined in her sister’s sick-room was to watch the comings and goings of his only child, a girl only a little older than Rose herself. Sometimes she was in a little pony-carriage, which she drove herself; sometimes she was in a large carriage driven by a grave-looking coachman with a very glossy hat, and very white gloves. Rosie used to envy her a little when she saw her walking about in the garden gathering the flowers at her own will.

“How happy she must be!” she thought now, as she stood gazing about her. “If she is a nice young lady, as I am almost sure she is, she would rather that I enjoyed her flowers than not. At any rate I am going to walk round just once—and then go.”

But it was not an easy matter to get round the circle. It was not a very large one, but there were flowers all round it, and Rosie passed slowly on lost in wonder and delights as some strange blossom presented itself. It took a long time to pass quite round, and before this was accomplished, her footsteps were arrested by a splendid cardinal flower, that grew within the shadow of the wall. It was not quite a stranger. She had gathered a species of it often in the low banks of the pond; and as she bent over it with delight, a voice startled her—

“You should have seen it a while ago. It is past its best now.”

Rose turning saw the gardener, and hastily stammering an excuse, prepared to go. But he did not seem to understand that she was an intruder.

“If you’ll come, round this way I’ll show you flowers that are worth looking at,” said he.

“He thinks I am a visitor,” said Rose to herself. “I’m sure I admire his flowers as much as any of them can do. It won’t trouble him much to show them to me, and I’ll just go with him.”

So picking up her bonnet that had fallen on the walk, she followed him, a little frightened at her own boldness, but very much elated. She did not think the garden grew prettier as they went on, and her conductor hurried her past a great many pretty squares and circles without giving her time to admire them. He stopped at last before a long, narrow bed, where the flowers were growing without regard to regularity as to arrangement; but oh! Such colouring! Such depth and richness! What verbenas and heliotropes!—what purples—crimson—scarlets! Rose could only gaze and wonder and exclaim, while her friend listened, and was evidently well pleased with her delight.

At last it was time to go, and Rose sighed as she said it. But she thanked him with sparkling eyes for his kindness, and added deprecatingly—

“I am not a visitor here. I saw the gate open and came in. I couldn’t help it.”

It was a small matter to her new friend whether she were a visitor at the great house or not.

“You ken a flower when you see it,” said he, “and that’s more than can be said of some of the visitors here.”

He led the way round the garden till they came to a summer-house covered with a flowering vine, which was like nothing ever Rose had seen before.

"It was just like what a bower ought to be," she told Graeme, afterwards. "It was just like a lady's bower in a book."

There was a little mound before it, upon which and in the borders close by grew a great many flowers. Not rare flowers, such as she had just been admiring, but flowers sweet and common, pansies and thyme, sweet peas and mignonette. It was Miss Elphinstone's own bower, the gardener said, and these were her favourite flowers. Rose bent over a pale little blossom near the path—

"What is this?" asked she; and then she was sorry, fearing to have it spoiled by some long unpronounceable name.

"Surely you have seen that—and you from Scotland? That's a gowan."

"A gowan!" She was on her knees beside it in a moment. "Is it the real gowan, 'that glints on bank and brae'? No, I never saw one; at least I don't remember. I was only a child when I came away. Oh! how Graeme would like to see them. And I must tell Janet. A real gowan! 'Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower'—you mind? And here is a white one, 'With silver crest and golden eye.' Oh! if Graeme could only see them! Give me just one for my sister who is ill. She has gathered them on the braes at home."

"Ahem! I don't know," said her friend, in a changed voice. "These are Miss Elphinstone's own flowers. I wouldna just like to meddle with them. But you can ask her yourself."

Rose turned. The pretty young lady of the pony-carriage, was standing beside her. Rose's confusion was too deep for words. She felt for a minute as though she must run away, but thought better of it, and murmured something about the flowers being so beautiful, and about not wishing to intrude. The young lady's answer was to stoop down and gather a handful of flowers, gowans, sweet peas, violets and mignonette. When she gave them into Rose's hand she asked,—

"Is your sister very ill? I have seen the doctor going often to your house."

"She is getting better now. She has been very ill. The doctor says she will soon be well."

"And have you taken care of her all the time? Is there no one else?"

"I have taken care of her, Nelly Anderson and I, all the day, and our brothers are home at night."

"I am glad she is getting better. Is she fond of flowers. Mr Stirling is thinking I haven't arranged mine nicely, but you can do that when you put them in water, you know."

"Oh! thank you. They are beautiful. Yes, Graeme is very fond of flowers. This will be like a bit of summer to her, real summer in the country, I mean. And besides, she has gathered gowans on the braes at home."

"I am a Canadian," said the young lady. "I never saw the 'gowany braes,' but I shall see them soon."

They had reached the gate by this time.

"Come again, soon. Come into the garden, whenever you like. I am sure Mr Stirling will like to show you his flowers, you are so fond of them. I think a few of his would improve your bouquet."

Mr Stirling touched his hat to his young lady.

"I shall be proud to show the flowers to Miss Rose, and I shall have the honour of making her a bouquet soon." The young lady laughed.

"You are to be a favourite. Is your name Rose," added she, lingering by the gate.

"Yes, Rose Elliott. I am the youngest. We all live over there, my brothers, and Graeme and I. It would be a dreary place, if it were not for the glimpse we get of your garden. Look, there is Nelly looking for me. I am afraid I have hindered Arthur. Thank you very much, and good-bye."

Rose shyly put forth her hand. The young lady took it in both hers, and drawing her within the gate again, kissed her softly, and let her go.

"Stirling," said she, as she turned toward the house, "how did you know the young lady's name is Rose? is she a friend of yours? Do you know her?"

"I know her face, that is all I have seen her for hours together, looking in on the garden from that upper window. And whiles she looks through the gate. I heard her brothers calling her Rose. She's a bonny lassie, and kens a flower when she sees it."

That night, Nelly was startled into a momentary forgetfulness of her thick shoes, and her good manners, and came rushing into Graeme's room, where they were all sitting after tea, bearing a bouquet, which a man, "maybe a gentleman," Nelly seemed in doubt, had sent in with his compliments to Miss Rose Elliott. A bouquet! it would have won the prize at any floral exhibition in the land, and never after that, while the autumn frosts spared them, were they without flowers. Even when the autumn beauties hung shrivelled and black on their stems, and afterwards, when the snows of winter lay many feet above the pretty garden beds, many a rare hot-house blossom brightened the little parlour, where by that time Graeme was able to appear.

"For," said Mr Stirling, to the admiring Nelly, "such were Miss Elphinstone's directions before she went away, and besides, directions or no directions, the flowers are well bestowed on folk that take real pleasure in their beauty."

The autumn and winter passed pleasantly away. As Graeme grew strong, she grew content. The children were well and happy, and Arthur's business was prospering in a wonderful way, and all anxiety about ways and means, might be put aside for the present. They often heard from Norman, and from their friends in Merleville, and Graeme felt that with so much to make her thankful and happy, it would be ungrateful indeed to be otherwise.

In the spring, they removed to another house. It was in town, but compared with the only one they had left, it seemed to be quite in the country. For the street was not closely built up, and it stood in the middle of a little garden, which soon became beautiful under the transforming hands of Rose and her brothers. There was a green field behind the house too, and the beautiful mountain was plainly visible from it; and half an hour's walk could take them to more than one place, where there was not a house to be seen. The house itself, seemed like a palace, after the narrow brick one they had just left. It was larger than they needed, Graeme thought, and the rent was higher than they could well afford, but the garden was enough to content them with everything else. It was a source of health, if not of wealth, to them all, and a never failing source of delight besides. Their new home was quite away from Mr Stirling's end of town, but he found time to come and look at their garden every week or two; and his gifts of roots, and seeds, and good advice were invaluable.

This was a short and pleasant summer to them all. It is wonderful how much pleasure can be made out of the quiet every-day duties of life, by young and happy people on the watch for pleasant things. To Will and Rosie everything was delightful. The early marketing with Nelly, to which Graeme and Arthur, and sometimes even Harry was beguiled, never lost its charm for them. Harry had lived in town, long enough, to permit himself to be a little scornful of the pleasure which the rest took, in wandering up and down among the vegetables and fruits, and other wares in the great market, and made himself merry over Rosie's penchant for making acquaintance with the old French woman and little children whom they met. He mystified Rose and her friends by his free interpretation of both French and English, and made the rest merry too; so it was generally considered a great thing when he could be induced to rise early enough to go with them.

Sometimes they went in the early boats to the other side of the river, a pleasure to be scorned by none on lovely summer mornings; and they would return home with appetites ready to do honour to the efforts of Nelly and Miss Beecher. Sometimes when a holiday came, it was spent by the whole family, Nelly and all, at Lachine or the Back River, or on the top of the mountain. All this may seem stupid enough to them who are in the habit of searching long, and going far for pleasure, but with the help of books and pencils, and lively conversation, the Elliots were able to find a great deal of enjoyment at such holiday times.

They had pleasures of another kind, too. Arthur's temporary connection with one of the city newspapers, placed at their disposal magazines, and a new book now and then, as well as tickets for lectures and concerts, and there was seldom a treat of the kind but was highly enjoyed by one or other of them.

They had not many acquaintances at this time. In Janet's estimation, the averseness of Graeme to bring herself in contact with strangers, had been a serious defect in her character. It was easier to avoid this in the town than it used to be in the country, Graeme found. Besides, she had no longer the sense of parish responsibilities as a minister's daughter, and was inclined for quietness. Once or twice she made a great effort, and went with an acquaintance to the "sewing meetings" of the ladies of the church which they attended; but it cost her a great deal of self-denial to very little purpose, it seemed to her, and so she compromised the matter with her conscience, by working for, and being very kind indeed, to a family of little motherless girls, who lived in a lane near their house, and stayed at home. She was by no means sure that she did right. For everybody knows, or ought to know, how praiseworthy is the self-denial which is willing to give up an afternoon every week, or every second week, to the making of pincushions, and the netting of tidies, which are afterwards to appear in the form of curtains or pulpit covers, or organs, or perhaps in the form of garments for those who have none. But then, though the "sewing-circle" is the generally approved and orthodox outlet for the benevolent feelings and efforts of those dear ladies who *love to do good*, but who are apt to be bored by motherless little girls, and other poor people, who live in garrets, and out of the way places, difficult of access, it is just possible that direct efforts in their behalf may be accepted too. One thing is certain, though Graeme did not find it easy for a while to satisfy herself, as to the "moral quality" of the motive which kept her at home, the little Finlays were all the happier and better for the time she conscientiously bestowed on them and their affairs.

They made some acquaintances that summer, and very pleasant ones, too. Arthur used sometimes to bring home to their six o'clock dinner, a friend or two of his clients from the country, or a young lawyer, or lawyer's clerk, to whom the remembrance of his own first lonely days in the city made him wish to show kindness. There were two or three gay French lads of the latter class who, strange to say, had taken a great liking to the grave and steady Arthur, and who often came to pass an evening at his pleasant fireside. Graeme was shy of them for a while, not being clear as to the principles and practice of the French as a people, and as for Rose, the very sight of these polite moustached gentlemen suggested historical names and events, which it was not at all comfortable to think about. But those light-hearted Canadian lads soon proved themselves to be as worthy of esteem as though English had been their mother tongue. Very agreeable visitors they were, with their nice gentlemanly manners, their good humour, and their music; and far better subjects for the exercise of Rosie's French than the old market women were, and in a little while they never came but they were kindly welcomed.

This was a busy time, too. Graeme taught Rosie English, and they studied together French and German, and music; and were in a fair way, Harry declared, of becoming a pair of very learned ladies indeed. Very busy and happy ladies they were, which was a matter of greater importance. And if sometimes it came into Graeme's mind that the life they were living was too pleasant to last, the thought did not make her unhappy, but humble and watchful, lest that which was pleasant in their lot should make them forgetful of life's true end.

Chapter Twenty One.

"It is just three years to-night since we came to M. Did you remember it, Arthur?" said Graeme, looking up from her work.

"Is it possible that it can be three years?" said Arthur, in surprise.

"It has been a very happy time," said Graeme.

Rose left her book, and came and seated herself on the arm of her brother's chair. Arthur took the cigar from his lips, and gently puffed the smoke into his sister's face. Rose did not heed it.

"Three years!" repeated she. "I was quite a child then."

The others laughed, but Rose went on without heeding.

"It rained that night, and then we had a great many hot, dusty days. How well I remember the time! Graeme was ill and homesick, and we wished so much for Janet."

"That was only at first, till you proved yourself such a wonderful nurse and housekeeper," said Graeme; "and you were not at all homesick yourself, I suppose?"

"Perhaps just a little at first, in those hot, dreary days," said Rose, gravely; "but I was not homesick very long."

"I am afraid there were a good many dreary days about that time—more than you let me know about," said Arthur.

Graeme smiled and shook her head.

"I am afraid you had a good many anxious days about that time. If I had known how hard you would have to work, I think I would have stayed in Merleville after all."

"Pooh! Nonsense! Hard work is wholesome. And at the very worst time, what with one thing and another, we had a larger income than my father had in Merleville."

"But that was quite different—"

"Did I tell you that I have got a new client? I have done business for Mr Stone before, but to-day it was intimated to me, that henceforth I am to be the legal adviser of the prosperous firm of 'Grove & Stone.' It will add something to our income, little woman."

Rose clapped her hands, and stooping down, whispered something in her brother's ear.

"Don't be planning any extravagance, you two, on the strength of 'Grove & Stone.' You know any superfluous wealth we may have, is already appropriated," said Graeme.

"To the Merleville visit. But this is not at all an extravagance, is it, Arthur?" said Rose.

"That depends—. I am afraid Graeme is the best judge. But we won't tell her to-night. We must break the matter to her gently," said Arthur.

"Graeme is so dreadfully prudent," sighed Rose.

Graeme laughed.

"It is well there is one prudent one among us."

"I don't believe she would at all approve of your smoking another cigar, for instance. They are nicer than usual, are they not?" said Rose, inhaling the fragrance from her brother's case.

"Yes. I treated myself to a few of the very best, on the strength of Grove & Stone. They are very nice. Have one?"

Rose took it with great gravity.

"Suppose we take a little walk first, and smoke afterwards," said she, coaxingly.

Arthur made a grimace.

"And where will you beguile me to, when you get me fairly out?"

"There is no telling, indeed," said Rose. "Graeme, I am going to put on my new hat. When Mr Elliott honours us with his company, we must look our very best, you know."

"But, Arthur, you have an engagement to-night. Don't you remember?" asked Graeme.

"To Mrs Barnes'," said Rose. "Miss Cressly brought home my dress to-day, and she told me all about it. Her sister is nurse there. The party is to be quite a splendid affair. It is given in honour of Miss Grove, who has just come home. I wish I were going with you."

"You may go without me! I will give you my invitation. It is a great bore, and I don't believe I shall go. I don't see the

good of it.”

“But you promised,” said Graeme.

“Well, I suppose I must go for a while. But it is very stupid.”

“Just as if you could make us believe that. It must be delightful. I think it’s very stupid of you and Graeme, not to like parties.”

“You forget. I was not asked,” said Graeme.

“But you might have been, if you had returned Mrs Barnes’ call soon enough. How nice it would have been! I wish I were Miss Grove, to have a party given for me. She is a beauty, they say. You must notice her dress, Arthur, and tell me all about it.”

“Oh! certainly,” said Arthur, gravely. “I’ll take particular notice. But come, get your hats. There is time enough for a walk before I go. Haste, Rosie, before the finest of the evening is past. Are you coming, Will? Man! you shouldna read by that light. You will blind yourself. Put away your book, you’ll be all the better for a walk.”

They lingered a moment at the gate.

“Here is Harry!” exclaimed Rose. “And some one with him. Charlie Millar, I think.”

“We will wait for them,” said Arthur.

The look that came to Graeme’s face, as she stood watching her brother’s coming, told that the shadow of a new care was brooding over her, and the light talk of her brother and sister told that it was one they did not see. She stood back a little, while they exchanged greetings, and looked at Harry with anxious eyes.

“Are you going out, Graeme?” asked he, coming within the gate.

“Only to walk. Will you go with us? Or shall I stay?”

“Miss Elliott,” interposed Charlie Millar, “I beg you will not. He doesn’t deserve it at your hands. He is as cross as possible. Besides, we are going to D street, by invitation, to meet the new partner. He came yesterday. Did Harry tell you?”

“Harry did not come home last night. What kept you, Harry?” asked Rose.

“We were kept till a most unreasonable hour, and Harry stayed with me last night,” said Charlie.

“And of course Graeme stayed up till all hours of the night, waiting for me,” said Harry, with an echo of impatience in his voice.

“Of course she did no such foolish thing. I saw to that,” said Arthur. “But which is it to be? A walk, or a quiet visit at home?”

“Oh! a walk, by all means,” said Charlie Millar.

“I have a great mind not to go,” said Harry.

“Nonsense, man! One would think you were about to receive the reward of your evil deeds. I refer to you, Miss Elliott. Would it be respectful to the new firm, if he were to refuse to go?”

“Bother the new firm,” said Harry, impatiently.

“The new partner, you mean. He has taken a most unreasonable dislike to my brother at first sight—calls him proud, and a snob, because he happens to be shy and awkward with strangers.”

“Shy! A six-footer, with a beard enough for three. After that I’ll vanish,” said Harry.

“I don’t think Harry is very polite,” said Rose.

“Never mind. There are better things in the world than politeness. He will be more reasonable by and by,” said Harry’s friend.

“So your brother has come,” said Graeme. “How long is it since you have seen him?”

“Oh! not for ten years. He was home once after he came out here, but I was away at school, and did not see him. I remembered him quite well, however. He is not spoiled by his wanderings, as my mother used to fear he might be;” then he added, as Harry reappeared, “the fact is, Miss Elliott, he expected to be asked to dinner. We must overlook his ill-temper.”

“By all means,” said Graeme, laughing.

“Thank you,” said Harry. “And I’ll try to be patient.”

“Well, shall we go now?” said Arthur, who had been waiting patiently through it all. The others followed him and Will.

"Is your brother going to remain here?" asked Graeme. "That will be nice for you."

"Yes, on some accounts it would be nice. But if they send Harry off to fill his place at the West, I shall not like that, unless, indeed, they send us both. And I am not sure I should like that long."

"Send Harry!" exclaimed Graeme.

"Nonsense, Graeme!" said Harry. "That is some of Charlie's stuff."

"I hope so; but we'll see," said Charlie. "Miss Elliott, I had a letter from my mother to-day." The lad's eyes softened, as he turned them on Graeme.

"Have you?" said Graeme, turning away from her own thoughts to interest herself in his pleasure. "Is she quite well?"

"Yes, she is much better than she was, and, Miss Elliott, she sends her love to you, and her best thanks."

"For what?" said Graeme, smiling.

"Oh! you know quite well for what. What should I have done, if it had not been for you and Harry? I mean if you had not let me come to your house sometimes."

"Stuff!" said Harry.

"Truth!" said Charlie. "I never shall forget the misery of my first months, till Harry came into our office. It has been quite different since the night he brought me to your house, and you were so kind as to ask me to come again."

"That was no great self-denial on our part," said Graeme, smiling.

"You minded Graeme on some one she used to know long ago," said Rose. "And, besides, you are from Scotland."

Both lads laughed.

"And Graeme feels a motherly interest in all Scottish laddies, however unworthy they may be," said Harry.

And so they rambled on about many things, till they came to the gate of Mr Elphinstone's garden, beyond which Arthur and Will were loitering.

"How pretty the garden is!" said Rose. "Look, Graeme, at that little girl in the window. I wonder whether the flowers give her as much pleasure, as they used to give me."

"I am afraid she does not get so many of them as you used to get," said Graeme.

"Come in and let me gather you some," said Charlie.

"No, indeed. I should not venture. Though I went in the first time without an invitation. And you dare not pick Mr Stirling's flowers."

"Dare I not?" said Charlie, reaching up to gather a large spray from a climbing rose, that reached high above the wall.

"Oh! don't. Oh! thank you," said Rose.

As far down as they could see for the evergreens and horse-chestnuts a white dress gleamed, and close beside the little feet that peeped out beneath it, a pair of shining boots crushed the gravel.

"Look," said Rose, drawing back.

"The new partner," said Harry, with a whistle. "A double partnership—eh, Charlie?"

"I shouldn't wonder," said Charlie, looking wise.

"He knows what he's about, that brother of yours. He's cute. He knows a thing or two, I guess."

"Harry," said Rose, gravely, "don't talk slang. And I don't think it very polite to speak that way to Mr Millar about his brother."

"My dear Rosie, I am not talking slang, but the pure American language; and I think you are more considerate about other people's brothers than you are of your own. Twice this night I have heard your brother called cross and disagreeable, without rebuke."

"You deserved it," said Rose, laughing.

"Miss Rose," said Charlie, "let your smile beam on him for one moment, and he can't look cross for the rest of the evening."

Rose turned her laughing face to her brother.

"Be a good boy, Harry. Good bye."

As they returned, Will and Rose went on before, while Graeme lingered with Arthur.

"Did you hear what Mr Millar said about the possibility of Harry's being sent West? It must be to take the new partner's place, I suppose," said Graeme, after a little.

"No; did he say so? It would be a capital good thing for Harry."

"Do you think so? He would have to leave home."

"Yes; that would be a pity, of course; but the opening for him would be a very good one. I doubt whether there is much in it, however. Harry has been for so short a time in the employment of the firm, and he is very young for a place so responsible. Still, it may be. I know they have great confidence in him."

There was a pause, and they walked slowly on.

"Arthur," said Graeme, in a low voice. "Do you think Harry is—quite steady?"

"Steady," repeated Arthur in a surprised and shocked tone. "Why should you doubt it?"

Graeme strove to speak quietly, but her hand trembled on her brother's arm, and he knew it cost her an effort.

"I dare say there is no cause for doubt. Still, I thought I ought to speak to you. You will know better than I; and you must not think that I am unkind in speaking thus about Harry."

"You unkind! No; I should think two or three things before I thought that. But tell me why you have any fears?"

"You know, Arthur, Harry has been very late in coming home, a good many times lately; and sometimes he has not come at all. And once or twice—more indeed—he has been excited, more than excited—and—"

Graeme could not go on.

"Still, Graeme, I do not think there is any real cause for apprehension. He is young and full of spirit, and his society is sought after—too much for his good, I dare say. But he has too much sense to give us any real cause for uneasiness on that ground. Why, Graeme, in P street Harry is thought much of for his sense and talent."

Graeme sighed. There came into her mind something that her father had once said, about gallant ships being wrecked at last. But she did not speak.

"Shall I speak to him, Graeme? What would you like me to do? I don't think there is much to fear for him."

"Well, I will think so, too. No; don't speak to him yet. It was hearing that he might be sent away, that made me speak to-night. I dare say I am foolish."

They walked on in silence for a little, and then Graeme said,—

"I hope it is only that I am foolish. But we have been so happy lately; and I mind papa and Janet both said to me—it was just when we were beginning to fear for Menie—that just as soon as people were beginning to settle down content, some change would come. It proved so then."

"Yes; I suppose so," said Arthur, with a sigh. "We must expect changes; and scarcely any change would be for the better as far as we are concerned. But, Graeme, we must not allow ourselves to become fanciful. And I am quite sure that after all your care for Harry, and for us all, you will not have to suffer on his account. That would be too sad."

They said no more till they overtook the children,—as Rose and Will were still called in this happy household.

"I have a good mind not to go, after all. I would much rather stay quietly at home," said Arthur, sitting down on the steps.

"But you promised," said Graeme. "You must go. I will get a light, and you need not stay long."

"You must go, of course," said Rose. "And Graeme and I will have a nice quiet evening. I am going to practise the new music you brought home."

"A quiet evening," said Will.

"Yes; I have rather neglected my music of late, and other things, too. I'm sure, I don't know where the time goes to. I wish I were going with you, Arthur."

"You are far better at home."

"Yes, indeed," said Graeme; and Will added,—

"A child like Rosie!"

"Well, be sure and look well at all the dresses, especially Miss Grove's, and tell me all about them."

"Yes; especially Miss Grove, if I get a glimpse of her in the crowd, which is doubtful."

"Well, good-night," said Rose. "I don't believe there will be a gentleman there to compare to you."

Arthur bowed low.

"I suppose I ought to say there will be no one there to compare with you. And I would, if I could conscientiously. But 'fine feathers make fine birds,' and Miss Grove aspires to be a belle it seems,—and, many who don't aspire to such distinction, will, with the help of the dressmaker, eclipse the little Scottish Rose of our garden. Good-night to you all—and Graeme, mind you are not to sit up for me past your usual time."

He went away, leaving Rose to her practising, Will to his books, and Graeme to pace up and down the gallery in the moonlight, and think her own thoughts. They were not very sad thoughts, though Arthur feared they might be. Her brother's astonishment at her fears for Harry, had done much to re-assure her with regard to him; for surely, if there were danger for Harry, Arthur would see it; and she began to be indignant with herself for having spoken at all.

"Arthur will think I am foolish. He will think that I have lost confidence in Harry, which is not true. I wish I were more hopeful. I wish I did not take fright at the very first shadow. Janet aye said that the first gloom of the cloud, troubled me more than the falling of the shower should do. Such folly to suppose that anything could happen to our Harry! I won't think about it. And even if Harry has to go away, I will believe with Arthur, that will be for the best. He will be near Norman, at any rate, and that will be a great deal. Norman will be glad. And I will not fear changes. Why should I? They cannot come to us unsent. I will trust in God."

But quite apart from the thought of Harry's temptation or prospects, there was in Graeme's heart a sense of pain. She was not quite satisfied in looking back over these pleasant years. She feared she had been beginning to settle down content with their pleasant life, forgetting higher things. Except the thought about Harry, which had come and gone, and come again a good many times within the last few months, there had scarcely been a trouble in their life daring these two years and more. She had almost forgotten how it would seem, to waken each morning to the knowledge that painful, self-denying duties lay before her. Even household care, Nelly's skill and will had put far from her.

And now as she thought about all of this, it came into her mind how her father and Janet had always spoken of life as a warfare—a struggle, and the Bible so spoke of it, too. She thought of Janet's long years of self-denial, her toils, her disappointments; and how she had always accepted her lot as no uncommon one, but as appointed to her by God. She thought of her father—how, even in the most tranquil times of his life—the time she could remember best, the peaceful years in Merleville, he had given himself no rest, but watched for souls as one who must give account. Yes, life was a warfare. Not always with outward foes. The struggle need not be one that a looker-on could measure or see, but the warfare must be maintained—the struggle must only cease with life. It had been so with her father, she knew; and through his experience, Graeme caught a glimpse of that wonderful paradox of the life that is hid with Christ in God,—constant warfare—and peace that is abiding; and could the true peace be without the warfare? she asked herself. And what was awaiting them after all these tranquil days?

It was not the fear that this might be the lull before the storm that pained her, so much as the doubt whether this quiet time had been turned to the best account. Had she been to her brothers all that father had believed she would be? Had her influence always been decidedly on the side where her father's and her mother's would have been? They had been very happy together, but were her brothers really better and stronger Christian men, because of her? And if, as she had sometimes feared, Harry were to go astray, could she be altogether free from blame?

The friends that had gathered around them during these years, were not just the kind of friends they would have made, had her father instead of her brother been at the head of the household; and the remembrance of the pleasure they had taken in the society of some who did not think as their father had done on the most important of all matters, came back to her now like a sin. And yet if this had worked for evil among them, it was indirectly; for it was the influence of no one whom they called their friend that she feared for Harry. She always came back to Harry in her thoughts.

"But I will not fear for him," she repeated often. "I will trust God's care for Harry and us all. Surely I need not fear, I think I have been beginning at the wrong end of my tangled thoughts to-night. Outward circumstances cannot make much difference, surely. If we are humble and trustful God will guide us."

And busy still with thoughts from which renewed trust had taken the sting, Graeme sat still in the moonlight, till the sound of approaching footsteps recalled her to the present.

Chapter Twenty Two.

The shining boots crashed the gravel, and the white dress gleamed through the darkness, some time after the young men were seated in Mr Elphinstone's handsome drawing-room. The master of the mansion sat alone when they entered, gazing into a small, bright coal fire, which, though it was not much past midsummer, burned in the grate. For Mr Elphinstone was an invalid, with little hope of being other than an invalid all his life, though he was by no means an old man yet.

If he had been expecting visitors, he had forgotten it, for they had come quite close to him before he looked up, and he quite started at the sound of Mr Millar's voice. He rose and received them courteously and kindly, however. Mr Elphinstone in his own drawing-room was a different person, or rather, he showed a different manner from Mr Elphinstone in his counting-room in intercourse with his clerks; and Harry, who had had none but business intercourse with him, was struck with the difference. It required an effort for him to realise that the bland, gentle voice was the same that he had so often heard in brief and prompt command.

Business was to be ignored to-night, however. Their talk was of quite other matters. There was an allusion to the new partnership, and to Mr Millar's half-brother, the new partner, who at the moment, as they all knew, was passing along the garden walk with a little white hand on his coat-sleeve. This was not alluded to, however, though each thought his own thoughts about it, in the midst of their talk. That those of Mr Elphinstone were rather agreeable to himself,

the lads could plainly see. He had no son, and that his partner and nephew should fall into a son's place was an idea that pleased him well. Indeed, it had cost him some self-denial to-night not to intimate as much to him after the pretty Lilius had withdrawn, and the smile that Harry was stealthily watching on his face, was called up by the remembrance of the admiration which his daughter had evidently called forth. Harry watched the smile, and in his heart called the new partner "lucky," and "cute," and looked at Charlie's discontented face with a comic astonishment that would have excited some grave astonishment to their host, if by any chance he had looked up to see. Though why Charlie should look discontented about it, Harry could not well see.

They talked about indifferent matters with a little effort till the white dress gleamed in the firelight, and a soft voice said—

"What, still in the dark, papa!"

The lights came in, and Harry was introduced to Miss Elphinstone. He had shared Rosie's interest in the lady of the pony-carriage, long ago, and had sometimes seen and spoken with her in the garden in those days, but he had not seen her since her return from Scotland, where her last three years had been spent. A very sweet-looking and graceful little lady she was, though a little silent and shy at first, perhaps in sympathy, Harry thought, with the tall, bearded gentleman who had come in with her.

It was evidently Harry's interest to be on good terms with the new partner, and common politeness might have suggested the propriety of some appearance of interest in him and his conversation. But he turned his back upon the group by the fire, and devoted himself to the entertainment of their young hostess who was by this time busy with her tea-cups in another part of the room. There was some talk about the weather and the voyage and sea-sickness, and in the first little pause that came, the young lady looked up and said,—

"You don't live in the house opposite now, I think."

It was the first voluntary remark she had made, and thankful for a new opening, Harry said,—

"No; my sisters were never quite contented there. We left it as soon as possible; and we are quite at the other end of the town now."

"And is your little sister as fond of flowers as ever?"

"Rose? Oh, yes! She has a garden of her own now, and aspires to rival the pansies and verbenas of Mr Stirling, even."

Miss Elphinstone smiled brightly.

"I remember the first time she came into the garden."

"Yes, that was a bright day in Rosie's life. She has the gowans you gave her still. The garden was a great resource to her in those days."

"Yes; so she said. I was very glad. I never gathered gowans among the hills at home, but I seemed to see that pretty shy face looking up at me."

"Yes," said Harry, meditatively, "Rose was a very pretty child."

Mr Millar had drawn near by this time. Indeed, the other gentlemen were listening too, and when Miss Elphinstone looked up it was to meet a very wondering look from the new partner.

"By the by, Mr Elliott," said her father, breaking rather suddenly into the conversation, "whom did your elder brother marry?"

"Marry!" repeated Charles.

"He is not married," said Harry.

"No? Well he is to be, I suppose. I saw him walking the other day with a young lady. Indeed, I have often seen them together, and I thought—"

"It was my sister, I presume," said Harry.

"Perhaps so. She was rather tall, with a pale, grave face—but pretty—quite beautiful indeed."

"It was Graeme, I daresay. I don't know whether other people think her beautiful or not."

Harry did not say it, but he was thinking that his sister seemed beautiful to them all at home, and his dark eyes took the tender look of Graeme's own as he thought. It vanished quickly as a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and he turned to meet the look of the new partner.

"You don't mean that you are the Harry Elliott that sailed with me in the 'Steadfast,' ten years ago."

"Yes, I am Harry Elliott, and I crossed the sea in the 'Steadfast' ten years ago. I knew *you* at the first glance, Mr Ruthven."

"I never should have known you in the least," said Mr Ruthven. "Why, you were quite a little fellow, and now you can nearly look down on me."

"I never thought of that," said Harry, looking foolish.

"And you thought the new partner fancied himself too big a man to know you," said Charlie. "And that's the reason you took umbrage at him, and told your sister he was—ahem, Harry?"

Miss Elphinstone's laugh recalled Charlie to a sense of propriety, and Harry looked more foolish than ever. But Mr Ruthven did not seem to notice what they were saying.

"I never should have known you. I see your father's look in you now—and you have your elder sister's eyes. Why did you not write to me as you promised?"

"We did write—Norman and I both, and afterwards Graeme. We never heard a word from you."

"You forget, it was not decided where you were to settle when I left you. You promised to write and tell me. I wrote several times to your father's friend in C—, but I never heard from him."

"He died soon after we arrived," said Harry.

"And afterward I heard of a Reverend Mr Elliott in the western part of New York, and went a day's journey thinking I had found you all at last. But I found this Mr Elliott was a very young man, an Englishman—a fine fellow, too. But I was greatly disappointed."

Harry's eyes grew to look more like Graeme's than ever, as they met Allan's downward gaze.

"I can't tell you how many Mr Elliotts I have written to, and then I heard of your father's death, Harry, and that your sisters had gone home again to Scotland. I gave up all hope then, till last winter, when I heard of a young Elliott, an engineer—Norman, too—and when I went in search of him, he was away from home; then I went another fifty miles to be disappointed again. They told me he had a sister in a school at C—, but Rose never could have grown into the fair, blue-eyed little lady I found there, and I knew it could not be either of the others, so I only said I was sorry not to see her brother, and went away."

Harry listened eagerly.

"I daresay it was our Norman, and the little girl you saw was his adopted sister, Hilda. If Norman had only known—" said Harry. And then he went on to tell of how Norman had saved the little girl from the burning boat, and how he had cared for her since. By and by they spoke of other things and had some music, but the new partner said little, and when it was time for the young men to go, he said he would walk down the street with them.

"So, Charlie, you have found the friends who were so kind to me long ago," said his brother, as they shut the gate.

"Yes," said Charlie, eagerly, "I don't know how I should have lived in this strange land without them. It has been a different place to me since Harry came to our office, and took me home with him."

"And I suppose I am quite forgotten."

"Oh, no, indeed!" said Harry, and Charlie added—

"Don't you mind, Harry, your sister Rose said to-night that I reminded Miss Elliott of some one she knew long ago. It was Allan, I daresay, she meant. My mother used to say I looked as Allan did when he went away."

They did not speak again till they came near the house. Then Charlie said,—

"It is not very late, Harry. I wonder whether they are up yet. There is a light."

"Allan," said Harry, lingering behind, "Marian died before my father. Don't speak of her to Graeme."

Graeme was still sitting on the steps.

"Miss Elliott," whispered Charlie, eagerly, "who is the new partner, do you think? Did I ever tell you my half-brother's name? It is Allan Ruthven."

Graeme gave neither start nor cry, but she came forward holding out her hands to the tall figure who came forward with an arm thrown over Harry's shoulder. They were clasped in his.

"I knew you would come. I was quite sure that some time we should see you again," said Graeme, after a little.

"And I—I had quite lost hope of ever finding you," said Allan. "I wonder if you have missed me as I have missed you?"

"We have been very happy together since we parted from you," said Graeme, "and very sorrowful, too. But we never forgot you, either in joy or sorrow; and I was always sure that we should see you again."

They went into the house together. Rose, roused from the sleep into which she had fallen, stood very much amazed beneath the chandelier.

"You'll never tell me that my wee white Rose has grown into a flower like this!" said Allan.

It was a bold thing for him to do, seeing that Rose was nearly as tall as her sister; but he clasped her in his arms and kissed her "cheek and chin" as he had done that misty morning on the deck of the "Steadfast" so many years ago.

"Rose," said Graeme, "it is Allan—Allan Ruthven. Don't you remember. I was always sure we should see him again."

They were very, very glad, but they did not say so to one another in many words. The names of the dead were on their lips, making their voices trembling and uncertain.

"Arthur," said Rose, as they were all sitting together a day or two after, "you have forgotten to tell us about the party."

"You have forgotten to ask me, you mean. You have been so taken up with your new hero that I have had few of your thoughts."

Mr Ruthven smiled at Rose from the other side of the table.

"Well, tell us about it now," said she. "You must have enjoyed it better than you expected, for more than one of the 'small-hours' had struck before you came home."

"Oh, yes, I enjoyed it very well. I met young Storey, who has just returned from Europe. I enjoyed his talk very much. And then Mrs Gridley took me under her protection. She is a clever woman, and handsome, too."

"Handsome!" echoed Rose. "Why she is an old woman, with grown-up daughters. And if you were to see her by daylight!"

They all laughed.

"Well, that might make a difference. But she says very clever, or maybe very sharp things about her neighbours, and the time passed quickly till supper. It was rather late but I could not leave before supper—the event of the evening."

"I should think not," said Harry.

"Well, we won't ask about the supper, lest it might make Harry discontented with his own. And what happened after supper?"

"Oh! after supper Mr Grove and his friend Barnes began to discuss the harbour question, and I very foolishly allowed myself to be drawn into the discussion. Mr Green was there, the great western merchant. He is a long-headed fellow, that. You must know him, Mr Ruthven."

"I know him well. He is a remarkably clever business-man, and a good fellow; though, I suppose, few know it so well as I do. I had a long illness in C once, and he nursed me as if I had been a brother. I might have known him for years in the way of business, without discovering his many excellent qualities. He has the name of being rather hard in the way of business, I believe?"

"He has a clear head of his own," said Arthur; "I enjoyed a talk with him very much. He intends visiting Europe, he tells me."

"Well, what next?" said Rose, to whom Mr Green and his good qualities were matters of indifference.

"Then I came home. Mr Green walked down the street with me."

"And didn't you see Miss Grove, the belle of the evening!" exclaimed Rose.

"Oh, yes! I had the honour of an introduction to her. She is a pretty little thing."

"Pretty! Is that all you can say for the belle? How does she look? Is she fair or dark? What colour are her eyes?"

"I can hardly say. She would be called fair, I think. I can't say about her eyes. She has a very pretty hand and arm, and—is aware of it."

"Don't be censorious, Arthur! Does she wear curls? And what did she say to you?"

"Curls! I cannot say. I have the impression of a quantity of hair, not in the best order toward the end of the evening. She seemed to be dancing most of the time, and she dances beautifully."

"But she surely said something to you. What did you talk about?" demanded Rose, impatiently.

"She told that if she were to dance all the dances for which she was engaged, she wouldn't get home till morning."

"You don't mean to say you asked her to dance?"

"Oh, no! She volunteered the information. I could have waited so long as to have the honour."

"And, of course, you can't tell a word about her dress?"

"I beg your pardon," said Arthur, searching his pocket. "It must be in my other vest. I asked Mrs Gridley what the young lady's dress was made of, and put it down for your satisfaction. Rosie, I hope I haven't lost it."

"Arthur! what nonsense!" said Graeme, laughing. "I am sure Mrs Gridley was laughing in her sleeve at you all the time."

"She hadn't any sleeve to laugh in. But when I told her that I was doing it for the benefit of my little sister Rosie, she

smiled in her superior way."

"I think I see her," said Rosie, indignantly. "But what was her dress, after all? Was it silk or satin?"

"No, nothing so commonplace as that. I could have remembered silk or satin. It was—"

"Was it lace, or gauze, or crape?" suggested Rose.

"Or tartan or muslin?" said Graeme, much amused.

"Or damask, or velvet, or cloth of gold, or linsey-woolsey?" said Harry.

Arthur assumed an air of bewilderment.

"It was gauze or crape, I think. No; it had a name of three syllables at least. It was white or blue, or both. But I'll write a note to Mrs Gridley, shall I, Rosie?"

"It would be a good plan. I wonder what is the use of your going to parties?"

"So do I, indeed," said her brother. "I am quite in the dark on the subject. But I was told in confidence that there are cards to be issued for a great entertainment in Grove House, and I should not wonder if my 'accomplished sisters'—as Mrs Gridley in her friendly way calls them—were to be visited in due form by the lady of the Grove preparatory to an invitation to the same. So be in readiness. I think I should write the note to Mrs Gridley, Rosie; you'll need a hint."

Graeme laughed, while Rose clapped her hands.

"I am not afraid of the call or the invitation," said Graeme.

But they came—first the call, which was duly returned, and then the invitation. That was quite informal. Mrs Grove would be happy if Miss Elliott and her sister would spend the evening at her house to meet a few friends. To their surprise, Harry, as well as Arthur, came home with a little pink note to the same effect.

"I didn't know that you knew the Groves, Harry," said Arthur.

"Oh, yes, I know Mr Grove in a general way; but I am invited through a mistake. However, I shall go all the same. I am not responsible for other people's mistakes. Nothing can be plainer than that."

"A mistake!" repeated several voices.

"Yes; Mrs Grove thinks I am a rising man, like the squire here; and why undeceive her? I shall add to the brilliancy of her party, and enjoy it mightily myself. Why undeceive her, I ask?"

"Don't be nonsensical, Harry," said Rose.

"How came Mrs Grove to make such an absurd mistake?" said Arthur, laughing.

"She's *cute*, I know; still it was not surprising in the circumstances. I met her on the street yesterday, and I saw the invitation in her eyes as plainly as I see this little pink concern now;" and he tossed the note to Rose. "I think I should send the acceptance to Miss Elphinstone. It was she who obtained the invitation for me."

"Miss Elphinstone!"

"Yes, or Jack, or both, I should perhaps say. For if Jack had been at his post, I should not have been politely requested to call a carriage for Miss Elphinstone, and Mrs Grove would not have seen me escorting her down the street as she sat in her carriage at Alexander's door. I know she was thinking I was very bold to be walking on N Street with my master's daughter. Of course she didn't know that I was doing the work of that rascal Jack. And so I am going to the Grove party, unless, indeed, there is any objection to our going *en masse*. Eh, Graeme?"

"It is not a party, only a few friends," said Rose, eagerly.

"Certainly, we'll all go," said Arthur. "If they had not wanted us all, they would not have asked us. Of course, we'll all go for once."

"But, Graeme," said Harry, coming back after he had left to go away, "don't let the idea of 'a few friends' delude you. Make yourselves as fine as possible. There will be a great crowd, you may be sure. Miss Elphinstone and Mr Ruthven are invited, and they are not among the intimate friends of such people as the Groves. Shall I send you home a fashion book, Rosie?"

"Or write a note to Mrs Gridley," said Arthur.

Rose laughed. She was pleasantly excited at the prospect of her first large party, there was no denying it. Indeed, she did not seek to deny it, but talked merrily on, not seeing, or not seeming to see, the doubtful look on Graeme's face. She alone, had not spoken during the discussion. She had not quite decided whether this invitation was so delightful as Rosie thought, and in a little when her sister had left the room, she said—

"Shall I accept the invitation then for Rose and me?"

"Have you not accepted yet? you need not of course, unless you wish. But I think you will enjoy it, and Rosie, too."

"Yes, but I am by no means sure, that I like Mrs Grove," said she, hesitating.

"Are you not?" said her brother, laughing. "Well, I have got much farther than you. I am sure that I don't like her at all. But, what of that?"

"Only that I don't fancy accepting kindness, from a person I don't like, and to whom I don't think it would be pleasant to repay in kind."

"Oh! nonsense. The obligation is mutual. Her kindness will be quite repaid, by having a new face in her splendid rooms. And as for repaying her in kind, as you call it, that is quite out of the question. There are not a dozen people in town who do the thing on the scale the Groves attempt. And besides, Rosie would be disappointed."

Graeme did not believe that it was the best thing that could happen to Rosie, to be gratified in this matter, but she did not say so.

"After all," thought she, "I daresay there is no harm in it. I shall not spoil the pleasure of the rest, by not seeming to enjoy it. But I don't like Mrs Grove."

The last words were emphatically repeated. She did not like her. She did not wish to see her frequently, or to know her intimately. She wished she had neither called, nor invited them. She wished she had followed her first impulse, which had been to refuse at once without referring to her brothers. Now, however, she must go with a good grace.

So they all went, and enjoyed it very much, one and all, as they found on comparing notes around the bright little fire which Nelly had kept burning, against their return.

"Only," said Rosie, with a little shamefacedness, "I am not sure that Graeme liked me to dance quite so much."

Graeme was not sure either, but she did not think this the best time to speak about it. So she did not.

"But how you ever learned to dance is a mystery to me," said Arthur, "and Harry too, I saw him carrying off Miss Elphinstone, with all the coolness imaginable. Really, the young people of the present day amaze me."

"Oh! one can dance without learning," said Rose, laughing. "The music inspires it."

"And I have danced many a time before," said Harry. "You are not sorry you went, are you Graeme?"

"Sorry! no indeed! I have had a very pleasant evening."

And so had they all. Mrs Grove had made a great effort to get a great many nice and clever people together, and she had succeeded. It had required an effort, for it was only lately, since his second marriage, that Mr Grove had affected the society of clever people, or indeed, any society at all. There were people who fancied that he did not affect it yet, and who pitied him, as he wandered about, or lingered in corners among the guests, that his more aspiring wife managed to bring together. He did not enjoy society much, but that was a small matter in the opinion of his wife. He was as little of a drawback to the general enjoyment, as could be expected in the circumstances. If he was not quite at his ease, at least he was seldom in anybody's way, and Mrs Grove was quite able to do the honours for both. Mr Grove was a man whom it was not difficult to ignore, even in his own dining-room. Indeed, the greatest kindness that could be shown to the poor little man in the circumstances, was to ignore him, and a great deal of this sort of kind feeling was manifested towards him by his guests.

On the first entrance of Arthur and Graeme, their host fastened on the former, renewing with great earnestness a conversation commenced in the morning in the young man's office. This did not last long, however. The hostess had too high an opinion of Mr Elliott's powers of pleasing, to permit them to be wasted on her husband, so she smilingly carried him off, leaving Mr Grove, for the present, to the tender mercies of Graeme. He might have had a worse fate; for Graeme listened and responded with a politeness and interest to which he was little accustomed from his wife's guests. Before he became unbearably tedious, she was rescued by Mr Ruthven, and Mr Grove went to receive Mr Elias Green, the great western merchant, a guest far more worthy of his attention than any of the fine ladies and gentlemen, who only knew him in the character of feast-maker, or as the stupid husband of his aspiring wife.

Graeme had seen Allan Ruthven often since that first night. They had spoken of the pleasant and painful things that had befallen them, since they parted so long ago, or they might not have been able to walk so quietly up and down the crowded rooms, as they did for a while. Then they found a quiet, or rather a noisy, corner in the music room where they pursued their conversation unmolested, till Harry brought Miss Elphinstone to be introduced to Graeme.

This was a mutual pleasure, for Graeme wished to know the young lady who had long been Rosie's ideal of all that was sweet and beautiful, and Miss Elphinstone was as pleased to become the friend of one whom her cousins Allan and Charlie admired so much. And when she begged permission to call upon her and Rose, what could Graeme do, but be charmed more and more. Then Miss Elphinstone was claimed for another dance, and who should present himself again but their host, and with him the guest of the evening, the great western merchant! Then there were a few minutes not so pleasant, and then Mr Green proposed that they "should make the tour of the rooms." But Graeme had not the courage for such an ordeal, and smilingly begged to be excused; and so he sat down beside her, and by and by, Graeme was surprised to find herself interested in his conversation. Before he had been a great merchant. Mr Green had been a farmer's boy among the hills of Vermont, and when he knew that Miss Elliott had passed seven happy years in a New England village, he found enough to say to her; and Graeme listened and responded, well pleased.

She had one uncomfortable moment. It was when the supper movement began to be made, and the thought flashed upon her, that she must be led to the supper room, by this western giant. Mr Ruthven saved her from this, however,

to the discontent of the giant, who had been so engaged in talking and listening, as not to have perceived that something interesting was about to take place. The sight of the freely flowing champagne gave Graeme a shock, but a glance at Harry reassured her. There was no danger for him to-night. Yes, they had all enjoyed it, they acknowledged, as they lingered over the fire after their return.

"But, Arthur," said Graeme, "I was disappointed in Miss Grove. She is pretty, certainly, but there is something wanting—in expression I mean. She looks good tempered, but not intellectual."

"Intellectual!" repeated Arthur. "No. One would hardly make use of that word in describing her. But she is almost the prettiest little thing I ever saw, I think."

"And she certainly is the silliest little thing I ever saw," said Harry. "Rosie, if I thought you capable of talking such stuff, as I heard from her pretty lips to-night, I would—"

Arthur laughed; less, it seemed, at what Harry had said, than at what it recalled.

"She is not likely to astonish the world by her wisdom, I should think," said he, as he rose to go up-stairs. "Nor Rosie either, for that matter," he added, laughing, and looking back.

"None of us are giving great proof of wisdom just now, I think," said Graeme. "Come, Rosie, Nelly will lose patience if breakfast is kept waiting. Good-night, Harry. Don't sit long."

Chapter Twenty Three.

Whether Nelly lost her patience next morning or not, history does not record; but it is a fact that breakfast was late, and late as it was, Rosie did not make her appearance at it. Graeme had still a very pleasant remembrance of the evening; but it was not altogether unmixed. The late breakfast, the disarrangement of household matters, Rosie's lassitude, and her own disinclination to engage in any serious occupation, was some drawback to the remembrance of her enjoyment. All were more or less out of sorts, some from one cause, some from another.

This did not last long, however. The drawback was forgotten, the pleasure was remembered, so that when a day or two afterward, a note came from Mrs Gridley, begging the presence of the brothers and sisters at a small party at her house, nothing was said about refusing. Mrs Gridley had promised some friends from Toronto, a treat of Scottish music, and she would be inconsolable should they disappoint her. But the consolation of Mrs Gridley was not the chief reason of the acceptance. Arthur was to be out of town, but Will was to go in his place. They went, and enjoyed it well; indeed, it was very enjoyable.

Mrs Gridley was a serious person, said her friends, and some, who had no claim to the title said the same—the tone and manner making all the difference in the sense of the declaration. She would not for much, have been guilty of giving dancing or card parties in her own house, though by some mysterious process of reasoning, she had convinced herself that she could quite innocently make one of such parties in the houses of other people. So there was only music and conversation, and a simple game or two for the very young people. Graeme and Rosie, and Will too, enjoyed it well. Harry professed to have been bored.

Out of these parties sprang others. Graeme hardly knew how it happened, but the number of their acquaintances greatly increased about this time. Perhaps it was partly owing to the new partnership entered into by Arthur, with the long-established firm of Black & Company. They certainly owed to this, the sight of several fine carriages at their door, and of several pretty cards in their receiver. Invitations came thick and fast, until an entire change came over their manner of life. Regular reading was interfered with or neglected. Household matters must have fallen into confusion, if Nelly had not proved herself equal to all emergencies. The long quiet evening at home became the exception. They went out, or some one came in, or there was a lecture or concert, or when the sleighing became good a drive by moonlight. There were skating parties, and snow-shoeing parties, enough to tire the strongest; and there was no leisure, no quiet time.

Graeme was not long in becoming dissatisfied with this changed, unsettled life. The novelty soon wore off for her, and she became painfully conscious of the attendant evils. Sadly disinclined herself to engage in any serious occupation, she could not but see that with her sister it was even worse. Rose enjoyed all these gay doings much more, and in a way quite different from her; and the succeeding lassitude and depression were proportionably greater. Indeed, lassitude and depression were quite too gentle terms to apply to the child's sensations, and her disinclination to occupation sometimes manifested itself in an unmistakable approach to peevishness, unless, indeed, the party of the evening was to be followed by the excursion of the day. Then the evil effects were delayed, not averted. For a time, Graeme made excuses for her to herself and to her brothers; then she did what was much wiser. She determined to put a stop to the cause of so much discomfort. Several circumstances helped her to this decision, or rather to see the necessity for it. She only hesitated as to the manner in which she was to make her determination known; and while she hesitated, an opportunity to discuss their changed life occurred, and she did not permit it to pass unimproved.

Christmas and New Year's Day had been past for some weeks, and there was a pause in the festivities of their circle, when a billet of the usual form and purport was left at the door by a servant in livery. Rose, who had seen him pass the window, had much to do to keep herself quiet, till Nelly had taken it from his hand. She just noticed that it was addressed to Graeme, in time to prevent her from opening it.

"What is it, Graeme?" asked she, eagerly, as she entered the room where her sister was writing. "I am almost sure it was left by Mrs Roxbury's servant. See, there is their crest. What is it? An invitation?"

"Yes," said Graeme, quietly, laying down the note. "For the twenty-seventh."

"Such a long time! It will be a grand affair. We must have new dresses, Graeme."

She took up the note and read:

"Mrs Roxbury's compliments to Miss Elliott."

"Miss Elliott!" she repeated. "Why, Graeme! I am not invited."

"So it seems; but never mind, Rosie. I am not going to accept it."

Rose was indeed crestfallen.

"Oh, you must go, of course. You must not stay at home on my account."

"No; certainly. That is not the reason. Your being invited would have made no difference."

"I could hardly have gone without you," said Rose, doubtfully.

"Certainly not. Neither of us would have gone. If I don't accept this invitation our acquaintance with the Roxburys will perhaps go no further. That would be a sufficient reason for my refusal, if there were no others."

"A sufficient reason for not refusing, I should rather say," said Rose.

"No. There is no good reason for keeping up an acquaintance with so many people. There is no pleasure in it; and it is a great waste of time and strength, and money too, for that matter."

"But Arthur wishes it. He thinks it right."

"Yes, to a certain extent, perhaps, but not at too great a cost. I don't mean of money, though in our circumstances that is something, too. But so much going out has been at a great sacrifice of time and comfort to us all. I am tired of it. We won't speak of it now, however; I must finish my letter." For to tell the truth, Rosie's face did not look promising.

"Don't send a refusal till you have spoken to Arthur, Graeme. If he wishes you to go, you ought, you know."

"I am by no means sure of that. Arthur does not very often go to these large parties himself. He does not enjoy them, and I see no reason why I should deny myself, in so bad a cause."

"But Graeme, you have enjoyed some of them, at least. I am sure I have always enjoyed them."

"Yes, I have enjoyed some of them, but I am not sure that it is a right kind of enjoyment. I mean, it may be too dearly bought. And besides, it is not the party, as a party, that I ever enjoy. I have had more real pleasure in some of our quiet evenings at home, with only—only one or two friends, than I ever had at a party, and—, but we won't talk about it now," and she bent over her letter again. She raised her head almost immediately, however.

"And yet, Rosie, I don't know why this is not the best time to say what, for a long time, I have meant to say. We have not been living a good or wise life of late. Do you mind, love, what Janet said to us, the night before we came away? Do you mind the charge she gave us, to keep our garments unspotted till we meet our father and mother again? Do you think, dear, the life of pleasure we have been living, will make us more like what our mother was, more like what our father wished us to be—more fit to meet them where they are?"

Graeme spoke very earnestly. There were tears in her eyes.

"Graeme," said Rose, "do you think it wrong to go to parties—to dance? Many good people do not."

"I don't know, love. I cannot tell. It might be right for some people, and yet quite wrong for us. Certainly, if it withdraws our minds from things of importance, or is the cause of our neglecting duty, it cannot be right for us. I am afraid it has been doing this for us all lately."

Rosie looked grave, but did not reply. In a little, Graeme added,—

"I am afraid our last letters have not given much satisfaction to Mrs Snow, Rosie. She seems afraid for us; afraid, lest we may become too much engrossed with the pleasant things about us, and reminds us of the care and watchfulness needed to keep ourselves unspotted from the world."

"But, Graeme, everything is so different in Merleville, Janet cannot know. And, besides—"

"I know, dear; and I would not like to say that we have been doing anything very wrong all this time, or that those who do the same are doing wrong. If we were wiser and stronger, and not so easily influenced for evil, I daresay it would do us no harm. But, Rosie, I am afraid for myself, that I may come to like this idle gay life too much, or, at least, that it may unfit me for a quiet useful life, as our father would have chosen for us, and I am afraid for you, too, dear Rose."

"I enjoy parties very much, and I can't see that there is any harm in it," said Rosie, a little crossly.

"No, not in enjoying them, in a certain way, and to a certain extent. But, Rose, think how dreadful, to become 'a lover of pleasure.' Is there no danger do you think, love?"

Rose hung her head, and was silent. Graeme went on,—

"My darling, there is danger for you—for me—for us all. How can we ever hope to win Harry from the society of those who do him harm, when we are living only to please ourselves?"

"But, Graeme, it is better that we should all go together—I mean Harry is more with us than he used to be. It must be better."

"I don't know, dear. I fear it is only a change of evils. Harry's temptation meets him even with us. And, oh! Rosie, if our example should make it easier for Harry to go astray! But we won't speak about Harry. I trust God will keep him safe. I believe He will."

Though Graeme tried to speak calmly, Rose saw that she trembled and grew very white.

"At any rate, Rose, we could not hope that God would hear our prayers for Harry, or for each other, if we were living in a way displeasing to Him. For it is not well with us, dear. We need not try to hide it from ourselves. We must forget the last few troubled months, and begin again. Yes, we must go farther back than that, Rosie," said Graeme, suddenly rising, and putting her arms about her sister. "Do you mind that last night, beside the two graves? How little worth all seemed to us then, except to get safe home together. Rosie! I could not answer for it to our father and mother if we were to live this troubled life long. My darling! we must begin again."

There were tears on Rose's cheeks, as well as Graeme's, by this time. But in a little Graeme sat down again.

"It is I who have been most to blame. These gay doings never should have commenced. I don't think Arthur will object to our living much more quietly than we have done of late. And if he does, we must try and reconcile him to the change."

It was not difficult to reconcile Arthur to the change. "Graeme must do as she thought right," he said. "It must be rather a troublesome thing to keep up such a general acquaintance—a loss of time to little purpose," and so it would have ended, as far as he was concerned, if Harry had not discovered Mrs Roxbury's note.

"I declare Mrs Gridley is right," said he. "We are a rising family. I hope you gave that lady a chance to peep into this note, when she was here to-day. But how is this? Miss Elliott. Have you one, Rosie?"

Rose shook her head.

"No. Have you, Harry?"

"Have I? What are you thinking of, Rose? Do you suppose those lofty portals would give admission to one who is only a humble clerk? It is only for such commercial successes as Mr Green, or Allan Ruthven, that that honour is reserved. But never mind, Rosie. We shall find something to amuse us that night, I have no doubt."

"Graeme is not going," said Rose.

"Not going! Oh! she'll think better of it."

"No, she has sent her refusal."

"And why, pray?"

"Oh! one can't go everywhere, as Mrs Gridley says," replied Graeme, thus appealed to.

"Yes; but Mrs Gridley said that with regard to a gathering of our good friend, Willie Birnie, the tailor. I can understand how she should not find time to go there. But how you should find time to shine on that occasion, and have none to spare for Mrs Roxbury's select affair, is more than I can comprehend."

"Don't be snobbish, Harry," said Will.

"I think the reasons are obvious," said Arthur.

"Yes," said Graeme, "we knew Willie Birnie when we were children. He was at the school with you all. And I like his new wife very much, and our going gave them pleasure, and, besides, I enjoyed it well."

"Oh! if you are going to take a sentimental view of the matter, I have nothing to say. And Willie is a fine fellow; I don't object to Willie, or the new wife either—quite the contrary. But of the two, people generally would prefer to cultivate the acquaintance of Mrs Roxbury and her set."

"Graeme is not like people generally," said Rose.

"I hope not," said Will. "And, Harry, what do you suppose Mrs Roxbury cares about any of us, after all?"

"She cares about Graeme going to her party, or she would not have asked her."

"I am not sure of that," said Graeme, smiling at the eagerness of the brothers. "I suppose she asked me for the same reason that she called here, because of the partnership. They are connected with the Blacks, in some way. Now, that it is off her conscience, having invited me, I daresay she will be just as well pleased that I should stay at home."

"That is not the least bit uncharitable, is it Graeme?"

"No. I don't think so. It certainly cannot make much difference to her, to have one more or less at her house on the occasion. I really think she asks me from a sense of duty—or rather, I ought to say, from a wish to be polite to her

friends the Blacks. It is very well that she should do so, and if I cared to go, it would, of course, be agreeable to her, but it will not trouble her in the least though I stay away."

"Well, I can't but say you have chosen an unfortunate occasion to begin to be fastidious. I should think the Roxbury's would be the very house you would like to go to."

"Oh! one has to make a beginning. And I am tired of so much gaiety. It makes no difference about its being Mrs Roxbury."

"Very well. Please yourself and you'll please me," said Harry, rising.

"Are you going out to-night, Harry?" said Graeme, trying not to look anxious.

"Yes; but pray don't wait for me if I should not be in early," said Harry, rather hastily.

There was nothing said for some time after Harry went out. Will went to his books, and Rose went to the piano. Graeme sewed busily, but she looked grave and anxious.

"What can make Harry so desirous that you should go to Mrs Roxbury's?" said Arthur, at last. "Have you any particular reason for not wishing to go?"

"Do you think Harry really cared? No; I have no reason for not wishing to go there. But, Arthur, we have been going out too much lately. It is not good for Rosie, nor for me, either; and I refused this invitation chiefly because she was not invited, I might not have had the courage to refuse to go with her—as she would have been eager to go. But it is not good for her, all this party-going."

"I dare say you are right. She is too young, and not by any means beyond being spoiled. She is a very pretty girl."

"Pretty! Who can compare with her?" said Graeme. "But she must not be spoiled. She is best at home."

"Proudfute tells me this is to be a reception in honour of your friend Ruthven, and Miss Elphinstone," said Arthur. "It seems the wedding is to come off soon. Proudfute is a relation of theirs, you know."

"No; I did not know it," said Graeme; and in a little she added, "ought that to make any difference about my going? My note is written but not sent."

"I should think not. You are not supposed to know anything about it. It is very likely not true. And it is nothing to us."

"No; that is true," said Graeme. "Rosie, my dear, you are playing too quickly. That should be quite otherwise at the close," and rising, she went to the piano and sat down beside her sister. They played a long time together, and it was Rose who was tired first 'for a wonder.'

"Graeme, why did you not tell Harry the true reason that you did not wish to go to Mrs Roxbury's?" said Rose, when they went up-stairs together.

"The true reason?" repeated Graeme.

"I mean, why did you not speak to him as you spoke to me?"

"I don't know, dear. Perhaps I ought to have done so. But it is not so easy to speak to others as it is to you. I am afraid Harry would have cared as little for the true reason as for the one I gave."

"I don't know, Graeme. He was not satisfied; and don't you think it would have been better just to say you didn't think it right to go out so much—to large parties, I mean."

"Perhaps it would have been better," said Graeme, but she said no more; and sat down in the shadow with her Bible in her hand for the nightly reading. Rose had finished her preparations for bed before she stirred, and coming up behind her she whispered softly,—

"Graeme, you are not afraid for Harry now? I mean not more afraid?"

Graeme started. Her thoughts were painful, as her face showed; but they were not of Harry.

"I don't know, love. I hope not. I pray God, no harm may come to Harry. Oh! Rosie, Rosie, we have been all wrong this long, long time. We have been dreaming, I think. We must waken up, and begin again."

Chapter Twenty Four.

Graeme's first judgment of Allan Ruthven, had been, "how these ten years have changed him;" but she quite forgot the first judgment when she came to see him more, and meeting his kind eyes and listening to his kind voice, in the days that followed she said to herself, "he is the same, the very same."

But her first judgment was the true one. He was changed. It would have been strange if the wear and tear of commercial life for ten years had not changed him, and that not for the better.

In the renewal of intercourse with his old friends, and in the new acquaintance he made with his brother Charlie, he came to know himself that he had changed greatly. He remembered sadly enough, the aspirations that had died out

of his heart since his youth, the temptations that he had struggled against always, but which, alas! he had not always withstood. He knew now that his faith had grown weak, that thoughts of the unseen and heavenly had been put far-away from him.

Yes; he was greatly changed since the night he had stood with the rest on the deck of the "Steadfast," watching the gleaming lights of a strange city. Standing now face to face with the awakened remembrance of his own ideal, he knew that he had fallen far short of its attainment; and reading in Graeme's truthful eye "the same, the very same," his own often fell with a sense of shame as though he were deceiving her.

He was changed, and yet the wonder was, that the influences of these ten years had not changed him more. The lonely life he had pictured to his friends, that last night on the "Steadfast," fell far short of the reality that awaited him. Removed from the kindly associations of home, and the tranquil pursuits and pleasures of a country village, to the turmoil of a Western city, and the annoyance of a subordinate in a merchant's office, he shrank, at first, in disgust from the life that seemed opening before him. His native place, humble as it was, had lived in song and story for many centuries; and in this city which had sprung up in a day, nothing seemed stable or secure. A few months ago the turf of the prairie had been undisturbed, where to-day its broad streets are trodden by the feet of thousands. Between gigantic blocks of buildings rising everywhere, strips of the prairie turf lay undisturbed still. The air of newness, of incompleteness, of insecurity that seemed to surround all things impressed him painfully; the sudden prosperity seemed unreal and unnatural, as well it might, to one brought up in a country where the first thought awakened by change or innovation is one of mistrust and doubt.

All his preconceived ideas of business and a business-life, availed him nothing in the new circumstances in which he found himself. If business men were guided in their mutual relations by any principle of faith or honour, he failed in the first bitterness of his disgust to see it. Business-life seemed but a scramble, in which the most alert seized the greatest portion. The feverish activity and energy which were fast changing the prairie into a populous place seemed directed to one end—the getting of wealth. Wealth must be gotten by fair means or foul, and it must be gotten suddenly. There was no respite, no repose. One must go onward or be pushed aside, or be trodden under foot. Fortune was daily tempted, and the daily result was success, or utter failure, till a new chance could be grasped at.

"Honest labour! Patient toil!" Allan wondered within himself if the words had ever reached the inward sense of these eager, anxious men, jostling each other in their never-ceasing struggle.

Allan watched, and wondered, and mused, trying to understand, and to make himself charitable over the evil, by calling it a national one, and telling himself that these men of the new world were not to be judged by old laws, or measured by old standards. But there were among the swiftest runners of the race for gold men from all lands, men whose boyish feet had wandered over English meadows, or trod the heather on Scottish hills. Men whose fathers had spent their lives content in mountain sheilings, with no wish beyond their flocks and their native glens; humble artisans, smiths, and masons, who had passed in their own country for honest, patient, God-fearing men, grew as eager, as unscrupulous, as swift as the fleetest in the race. The very diggers of ditches, and breakers of stone on the highway, the hewers of wood and drawers of water; took with discontent that it was no more their daily wages, doubled or tripled to them, since they set foot on the soil of the new world.

That there might be another sort of life in the midst of this turmoil, he did not consider. He never could associate the idea of home or comfort with those dingy brick structures, springing up in a day at every corner. He could not fancy those hard voices growing soft in the utterance of loving words, or those thin, compressed lips gladly meeting the smiling mouth of a little child. Home! Why, all the world seemed at home in those vast hotels; the men and women greeting each other coldly, in these great parlours, seemed to have no wants that a black man, coming at the sound of a bell, might not easily supply. Even the children seemed at ease and self-possessed in the midst of the crowd. They troubled no one with noisy play or merry prattle, but sat on chairs with their elders, listening to, or joining in the conversation, with a coolness and appropriateness painfully suggestive of what their future might be. Looking at these embryo merchants and fine ladies, from whose pale little lips "dollar" and "change" fall more naturally than sweeter words, Ruthven ceased to wonder at the struggle around him. He fancied he could understand how these little people, strangers, as it seemed to him, to a home or even to a childhood, should become in time the eager, absorbed, unscrupulous runners and wrestlers, jostling each other in the daily strife.

Ruthven was very bitter and unjust in many of his judgments during the first part of his residence in C. He changed his opinions of many things afterwards, partly because he became wiser, partly because he became a little blind, and, especially, because he himself became changed at last. By and by his life was too busy to permit him to watch those about him, or to pronounce judgment on their aims or character. Uncongenial as he had at first found the employment which his uncle had provided for him, he pursued it with a patient steadiness, which made it first endurable, then pleasant to him. At first his duties were merely mechanical; so much writing, so much computing each day, and then his time was his own. But this did not continue long. Trusted always by the firm, he was soon placed in a position where he was able to do good service to his employers. His skill and will guided their affairs through more than one painful crisis. His integrity kept their good name unsullied at a time when too many yielding to what seemed necessity, were betaking themselves to doubtful means to preserve their credit. He thoroughly identified himself with the interests of the firm, even when his uncle was a comparative stranger to him. He did his duty in his service as he would have done it in the service of another, constantly and conscientiously, because it was right to do so. So passed the first years of his commercial life.

In default of other interests, he gave himself wholly up to business pursuits, till no onlooker on the busy scene in which he was taking part would have thought of singling him out as in any respect different from those who were about him. Those who came into close contact with him called him honourable and upright, indeed, over scrupulous in many points; and he, standing apart from them, and in a certain sense above them, was willing so to be called. But as one cannot touch pitch without being defiled, so a man must yield in time to the influences in the midst of which he has voluntarily placed himself. So it came to pass that, as the years went on, Allan Ruthven was greatly changed.

It need not have been so. It doubtless was far otherwise with some who, in his pride and ignorance, he had called earth-worms and worshippers of gold; for though, in the first bitterness of his isolation, he was slow to discover it, there were in the midst of the turmoil and strife of that new city warm hearts and happy homes, and the blessed influence of the Christian faith and the Christian life. There were those over whom the gains-getting demon of the place had no power, because of a talisman they held, the "constraining love of Christ," in them. Those walked through the fire unscathed, and, in the midst of much that is defiling, kept their garments clean. But Ruthven was not one of them. He had the name of the talisman on his lips, but he had not its living power in his heart. He was a Christian only in name; and so, when the influence of early associations began to grow weak, and he began to forget, as men will for a time, his mother's teachings "in the house, and by the way," at the "lying down and the rising up," no wonder that the questionable maxims heard daily from the lips of the worldly-wise should come to have weight with him at last.

Not that in those days he was, in any sense, a lover of gold for its own sake. He never sank so low as that. But in the eagerness with which he devoted himself to business, he left himself no time for the performance of other and higher duties, or for the cultivation of those principles and affections which can alone prevent the earnest business-man from degenerating into a character so despicable. If he was not swept away by the strong current of temptation, it was because of no wisdom or strength or foresight of his. Another ten years of such a life would have made him, as it has made many another, a man outwardly worthy of esteem, but inwardly selfish, sordid, worldly—all that in his youth he had most despised.

This may seem a hard judgment, but it is the judgement he passed on himself, when there came a pause in his busy life, and he looked back over those years and felt that he did not hold the world loosely—that he could not open his hand and let it go. He had been pleasing himself all along with the thought that he was not like the men about him—content with the winning of wealth and position in the world; but there came a time when it was brought sharply home to him that without these he could not be content. It was a great shock and surprise to him to be forced to realise how far he had drifted on with the current, and how impossible it had become to get back to the old starting-place again, and in the knowledge he did not spare himself, but used harder and sterner words of self-contempt than any that are written here.

Ruthven's intercourse with his uncle's family, though occurring at long intervals, had been of a very pleasant kind, for he was a great favourite with his aunt and his cousin Liliias, who was then a child. Indeed, she was only a child when her mother died; and when there fell into his hands a letter written by his aunt to his mother, during one of his first visits to M, in which half seriously, half playfully, was expressed a wish that the cousins might one day stand in a nearer and dearer relation to one another, he was greatly surprised and amused. I am afraid it was only the thought that the hand that had penned the wish was cold in death that kept him from shocking his mother by laughing outright at the idea. For what a child Liliias must have been when that was written, thought he! what a child she was still!

But the years went on, and the child grew into a beautiful woman, and the remembrance of his aunt's wish was pleasant to Allan Ruthven, because of his love and admiration for his cousin, and because of other things. He could not be blind to the advantages that such a connection would ensure to him. The new partnership was anticipated and entered upon, on very different terms from those which might have been, but for the silent understanding with regard to Liliias that existed between the uncle and nephew. It was no small matter that the young merchant should find himself in a position to which the greater number attain only after half a lifetime of labour. He was at the head of a lucrative business, conscious of possessing skill and energy to conduct it well—conscious of youth and health and strength to enjoy the future opening before him. Nor was there anything wrong in this appreciation of the advantages of his position. He knew that this wealth had not bought him. He loved his cousin Liliias, or he thought he loved her; and though up to this time, and after this time their intercourse was only after a cousinly sort, he believed she loved him. The thought *did* come into his mind sometimes whether his cousin was all to him that a woman might be, but never painfully. He did not doubt that, as years went on, they would be very happy together after a quiet, rational fashion, and he smiled, now and then, at the fading remembrance of many a boyish dream as to how his wife was to be wooed and won.

He was happy—they were all happy; and the tide of events flowed quietly on the the night when Allan clasped the trembling hand of Graeme Elliott. Indeed, it flowed quietly on long after that, for in the charm that, night after night, drew him into the happy circle of the Elliotts, he recognised only the pleasure that the renewal of old friendships and the awakening of old associations gave him. The pleasure which his cousin took in the society of these young people was scarcely less than his own. Around the heiress and only child of Mr Elphinstone there soon gathered a brilliant circle of admirers, the greater part of whom would hardly have recognised the Elliotts as worthy of sharing the honour with them. But there was to the young girl, who had neither brother nor sister, something better than brilliancy or fashion in Graeme's quiet parlour. The mutual love and confidence that made their home so happy, filled her with wonder and delight, and there were few days, for several pleasant months, in which they did not meet.

The pleasant intercourse was good for Liliias. She brightened under it wonderfully, and grew into a very different creature from the pale, quiet, little girl, who used to sit so gravely at her father's side. Her father saw the change and rejoiced over it, and though at first he was not inclined to be pleased with the intimacy that had sprung up so suddenly, he could not but confess that the companionship of one like Rose Elliott must be good for her. Graeme he seldom saw. The long morning calls, and spending of days with her friend, which were Rosie's delight, Graeme seldom shared. But she was quite as much the friend of Liliias as was her livelier sister, and never did his cousin seem so beautiful to Allan, never was she so dear, as when, with pretty willfulness; she hung about Graeme, claiming a right to share with Rose the caresses or gentle reproofs of the elder sister. He did not think of danger to himself in the intercourse which Liliias shared so happily. He was content with the present, and did not seek to look into the future.

But he was not quite free from troubled thoughts at this time. In the atmosphere in which he lived things wore a new aspect to him. Almost unconsciously to himself at first, he began to judge of men, and motives, and actions, by a new

rule—or rather, he came back to the old rule, by which he had measured all things in his youthful days. These days did not seem so far removed from him now as they used to do, and sometimes he found himself looking back over the last ten years, with the clear truthful eyes of eighteen. It was not always a pleasant retrospect. There were some things covered up by that time, of which the review could not give unmingled pleasure. These were moments when he could not meet Graeme's truthful eyes, as with "Don't you remember?" she recalled his own words, spoken long ago. He knew, though she did not, how his thoughts of all things had changed since then; and though the intervening years had made him a man of wealth and note, there came to him, at such moments, a sense of failure and regret, as though his manhood had belied the promise of his youth—a strong desire to begin anew—a longing after a better life than these ten years had witnessed.

But these pleasant days came to an end. Business called Allan, for a time, to his old home in C, and to his uncongenial life there. It was not pleasant business. There was a cry, louder than usual, of "hard times" through the country, and the failure of several houses, in which he had placed implicit confidence, threatened, not, indeed, to endanger the safety, but greatly to embarrass the operations of the new firm. Great losses were sustained, and complicated as their affairs at the West had become, Allan began to fear that his own presence there would for some time be necessary. He was surprised and startled at the pain which the prospect gave him, and before he had time to question himself as to why it should be so, the reason was made plain to him.

A letter written by his uncle immediately after a partial recovery from an illness, a return of which, his physicians assured him, must prove fatal, set the matter before him in its true light. The letter was brief. Knowing little of the disorder into which recent events had thrown their affairs, he entreated Allan's immediate return, for his sake, and for the sake of Liliás, whom it distressed him to think of leaving till he should see her safe with one who should have a husband's right to protect and console her. It was simply and frankly said, as one might speak of a matter fully understood and approved of by all concerned. But the words smote on Allan's heart with sharp and sudden pain, and he knew that something had come into his life, since the time when he had listened in complacent silence to Mr Elphinstone's half-expressed ideas, concerning Liliás and her future. There was pleasure in the pain, sharp and sweet while it lasted, for with the knowledge that came to him, that he loved Graeme Elliott, there came also the hope, that there was something more than gentle friendliness in the feelings with which she regarded him. But the pleasure passed, and the pain remained, growing sharper and deeper as he looked the future in the face.

It was not a hopeful future. As for his cousin, there had passed between them no words or tokens of affection, that cousins might not very well exchange; at least, he was willing to believe so now; and judging her feelings, partly by his own, and partly by the remembrance of many a chance word and action of the last few months, he said to himself, the happiness of her life would not be marred though they might never be more than cousins to each other. But this did not end his doubts as to the course that lay before him, and every day that he lingered in miserable indecision, made more evident to him the difficulties of his position. He knew it was a son's place that he had got in the firm. He could only claim it as a son. If his relations to Liliás and her father were changed, it seemed to him that he could not honourably claim a position which had been urged upon him, and which he had gladly accepted with a view to these relations. The past ten years must be as nothing to him, except for the experience they had given him, the good name they had won for him. He must begin life again a poor man.

But let me not be unjust to him. It was not this that made all the misery of his indecision. Had all this come in a time of prosperity, or when Mr Elphinstone had strength and courage to meet disaster unmoved, it would have been different. But now, when all things looked threatening, when certain loss—possible ruin—lay before them, when the misfortunes of some, and the treachery of others were making the very ground beneath their feet insecure, could he leave the feeble old man to struggle through these difficult and dangerous times alone? He knew his uncle too well to believe that he would willingly accept help from him, their relations being changed, and he knew that no skill and knowledge but his own could conduct to a successful issue, enterprises undertaken under more favourable circumstances.

He was very wretched. He could not put away the discomfort of his indecision by permitting time and circumstances to decide in the course which he must take. Whatever was done must be done by him, and at once. There was no respite of time or chance to fall back upon, in the strait in which he found himself. He did not hasten home. He had cause enough to excuse the delay to himself, and he threw himself into the increasingly painful details of business, with an energy that, for the time, left no room for painful thoughts. But it was only for the time. He knew that his lingering was useless, in view of what the end must be, and he despised himself for his indecision.

If his choice had been altogether between poverty and wealth, it would have been easy to him, he thought, though it forced itself upon him with intense bitterness during these days, how the last ten years had changed the meaning of the word to him. But his honour was involved—his honour as a man, and as a merchant. He could not leave his uncle to struggle with misfortune in his old age. He could not let the name, so long honoured and trusted in the commercial world, be joined with the many which during the last few months had been coupled with ruin, and even with shame. He was responsible for the stability or the failure of the house, which for thirty years had never given cause for doubt or fear. More than this. His own reputation as a wise and successful man of business, if not even his personal honour was at stake, to make it impossible for him to separate himself from the affairs of the firm at a juncture so perilous.

And then, Liliás. Nothing but her own spoken word could free him from the tacit engagement that existed between them. In honour he could never ask her to speak that word.

Through his long journey of days and nights he pondered it all, making no decision as to what was to be done or said, but growing gradually conscious as he drew near home, that the life of the last few months, was coming to seem more and more like a pleasant dream that must be forgotten in the future. He met his uncle's eager greeting with no word of change. His face was pale and very grave when he met his cousin, but not more so than hers. But that might very well be said each of the other. Liliás knew more of the losses which the firm had sustained than her father knew; and Allan might well look grave, she thought, and the watching and anxiety for her father's sake might well account to him for her sad looks. After the first clasp of their hands he knew that the vows hitherto unspoken, must now be

fulfilled.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Graeme did go to Mrs Roxbury's party, and it happened in this way. The invitations had been sent out before Mr Elphinstone's short, sharp illness, and Liliias had been made very useful by her aunt on the occasion. She had not been consulted about the sending of Graeme's invitation, or probably Rose would have had one too, but by good fortune, as she declared, Graeme's refusal came first to her hand, and the little lady did a most unprecedented thing. She put it quietly into her pocket, and going home that night by the Elliott's, ventured to expostulate.

"First, you must promise not to be vexed," and then she showed the note. Graeme looked grave.

"Now you must not be angry with me. Rosie, tell her not to be vexed, because, you know you can write another refusal, if you are determined. But I am sure you will not be so cruel. I can't tell you any reason, except that I have set my heart on your being there, and you'll come to please me, will you not?"

"To please you, ought to be sufficient reasons, I know," said Graeme, smiling. And Liliias knew she had prevailed with her friend. She saw the acceptance written, and carried it off to place it with dozens of others, in the hands of Mrs Roxbury. She did not say much to Graeme about it, but to Rosie, she triumphed.

"I want Aunt Roxbury to see Graeme looking her very best. Graeme will look like a queen among us. Aunt will see that Allan and I have good reasons for our admiration. Fancy any of these trumpery people patronising Graeme! But you are not to tell her what I say. You don't think she was really vexed with me, do you? And she must wear her new peach-blossom silk. I am so glad."

But poor little Liliias went through deep waters, before the peach-blossom silk was worn by Graeme. Mr Elphinstone was brought very near the gates of death, and anxious days and nights were passed by his daughter at his bedside. Mrs Roxbury would have recalled her invitations, and Liliias' soul sickened at the thought of the entertainment; but when the immediate danger was over, events fell into their usual channel, and though she gave no more assistance, either by word or deed, her aunt counted on her presence on the occasion, and even her father insisted that it was right for her to go.

"And so, my love," said Mrs Roxbury, "as your father and I see no impropriety in your coming, there can be none, and you will enjoy it, indeed you will. You are tired now."

"Impropriety! it is not that I don't wish to go. I cannot bear the thought of going."

"Nonsense! you are overtired, that is all. And Mr Ruthven will be here by that time, and I depend on you to bring him."

But if Allan's presence had depended on Liliias, Mrs Roxbury would not have seen him in her splendid rooms that night. It was Mr Elphinstone that reminded her of the note that awaited the return of her cousin, and it was he who insisted that they should appear, for at least an hour or two, at the party. And they went together, a little constrained and uncomfortable, while they were alone, but to all appearance at their ease, and content with one another when they entered the room. Graeme saw them the moment they came in, and she saw, too, many a significant glance exchanged, as they made their way together to Mrs Roxbury.

Liliias saw Graeme almost as soon. She was standing near the folding-doors, seemingly much interested in what Mr Proudfoote, her brother's friend, was saying to her.

"There, aunt," said Liliias, eagerly, when the greetings were over, "did I not tell you that my friend Miss Elliott would eclipse all here to-night? Look at her now."

"My dear," said her aunt, "she does better than that. She is very lovely and lady-like, and tries to eclipse no one, and so wins all hearts."

Liliias' eyes sparkled as she looked at her cousin, but he did not catch her look.

"My dear," continued Mrs Roxbury, "I have news for you, but perhaps it is no news to you. Ah! he has found her."

Mr Elias Green was at the moment, making his bow to Graeme.

"There was no truth in the rumour, about him and little Miss Grove. Mr Green has more sense. Your friend is fortunate, Liliias."

Liliias looked at her aunt in astonishment, but nothing more could be said, for there were more arrivals, and her attention was claimed.

"Aunt Roxbury does not know what she is talking about," said she, to her cousin, as he led her away. "The idea of Mr Green's daring to lift his eyes to Graeme Elliott. She would not look at him."

"Mr Green is a great man in his own circle, I can assure you," said Mr Ruthven. "Miss Elliott will be thought fortunate by people generally."

"Do you think so? You know very little about her, if you think that," said Liliias, impatiently.

"I know Mr Green better than most people do, and I respect him—and he is very rich—"

"Oh! don't talk folly," cried Liliás. "I have no patience with people who think, because a man is rich—. But you don't know Graeme, cousin Allan—I thought—"

They were very near Graeme by this time. She turned at the moment, and greeted them frankly enough, as far as any one could see. She noticed the cloud on Liliás' face, and asked her if she was quite well; she expressed pleasure at the return of Mr Ruthven too, but she did not meet his eye, though he told her he had seen her brother Norman at a station by the way, and detained her to give her a message that he had sent. He had schooled himself well, if he was really as unmoved by the words of Mrs Roxbury and Liliás, as to his cousin he appeared to be. But he was not a man who let his thoughts write themselves on his face, and she might easily be deceived. It was not a pleasant moment, it was a very bitter moment indeed, to him, when with a smile to them, Graeme placed her hand on the willing arm of Mr Green, and walked away "like a queen," he said to himself, but to his cousin he said—

"My friend will be a very happy man, and *your* friend may be happy too, let us hope."

But Liliás never answered a word. She followed them, with her eyes, till they disappeared through the door that led to the room beyond; and then she said only,—

"I have made a great mistake."

Had she made a mistake or had he? A mistake never to be undone, never outlived—a mistake for Graeme, for himself, perhaps for Liliás too. It was not a thought to be borne, and he put it from him sternly, saying it could not have been otherwise—nothing could be changed now; and he was very gentle and tender with his little cousin that night and afterwards, saying to himself that she, at least, should have no cause to grieve in the future, if his loving care for her could avail.

About this time Will was threatened with a serious illness. It did not prove so serious as they at first feared, but it was long and tedious, and gave his eldest sister an excuse for denying herself to many who called, and accounted for her pale looks to those whom she was obliged to see. In the silence of her brother's sick-room, Graeme looked a great sorrow in the face. In other circumstances, with the necessity laid upon her to deceive others, she might for a time have deceived herself; for the knowledge that one's love has been given unsought, is too bitter to be accepted willingly. But the misery of those long silent nights made plain to her what the first sharp pang had failed to teach her.

In the first agony of her self-scorn, she saw herself without excuse. She was hard and bitter to herself. She might have known, she thought, how it was with Allan and his cousin. During all those years in which she had been a stranger to them both, they had loved each other; and now, with no thought of her, they loved each other still. It was natural that it should be so, and right. What was she, to think to come between them with her love?

She was very bitter to herself and unjust in her first misery, but her feeling changed. Her heart rebelled against her own verdict. She had not acted an unmaidenly part in the matter. She had never thought of harm coming to her, or to anyone, out of the pleasant intercourse of these months—the renewal of their old friendship. If she had sinned against Liliás, it had been unconsciously. She had never thought of these things in those days.

If she had only known him sooner, she thought, or not so soon, or not at all! How should she ever be able to see them again in the old unrestrained way? How should she be able to live a life changed and empty of all pleasure?

Then she grew bitter again, and called herself hard names for her folly, in thinking that a change in one thing must change all her life. Would not the passing away of this vain dream leave her as rich in the love of brothers and sister, as ever? Hitherto their love had sufficed for her happiness, and it should still suffice. The world need not be changed to her, because she had wished for one thing that she could not have. She could be freed from no duty, absolved from no obligation because of this pain; it was a part of her life, which she must accept and make the best of, as she did of all other things that came upon her.

As she sat one night thinking over the past and the future, wearily enough, but without the power to withdraw her mind from what was sad in them, there suddenly came back to her one of Janet's short, sharp speeches, spoken in answer to a declaration half vexed, half mirthful, made by her in the days when the mild Mr Foster had aspired to be more to her than a friend.

"My dear," she had said, "bide till your time comes. You are but a woman like the lave, and you maun thole the brunt of what life may bring. Love! Ay will you, and that without leave asked or given. And if you get love for love, you'll thank God humbly for one of his best gifts; and if you do not well, He can bring you through without it, as He has done many a one before. But never think you can escape your fate, and make the best of it when it comes."

"And so my fate has found me," murmured Graeme to herself. "This is part of my life, and I must make the best of it. Well, he can bring me through, as Janet said."

"Graeme," said Will suddenly, "what are you thinking about?"

Graeme started painfully. She had quite forgotten Will. Those bright, wakeful eyes of his had been on her many a time when she thought he was asleep.

"What were you thinking about? You smiled first, then you sighed."

"Did I? Well, I was not aware that I was either smiling or sighing. I was thinking about Janet, and about something that she said to me once."

She rose and arranged the pillows, stooping down to kiss her brother as she did so, and then she said sadly,—

"I am afraid you are not much better to-night, Will."

"Yes; I think I am better. My head is clearer. I have been watching your face, Graeme, and thinking how weary and ill you look."

"I am tired, Will, but not ill." Graeme did not like the idea of her face having been watched, but she spoke cheerfully.

"I have been a great trouble to you," said Will.

"Yes, indeed! a dreadful trouble. I hope you are not going to try my patience much longer."

"I don't know. I hope not, for your sake." And then in a little Will added, "Do you know, Graeme, I am beginning to be glad of this illness after all."

Graeme laughed.

"Well, if you are glad of it, I will try and bear it patiently a little longer. I daresay we are taking the very best means to prolong it chattering at this unreasonable hour."

"I am not sleepy," said Will, "and I am not restless either. I think I am really better, and it will do me good to have a little talk; but you are tired."

"I am tired, but I am not sleepy. Besides, if you are really better, I can sleep for a week, if I like. So, if it be a pleasure to you, speak on."

"What was it that Janet said that made you sigh so drearily just now?" asked Will.

Graeme would have liked the conversation to take any other turn rather than that, but she said, gently,—

"I think my smile must have been for what Janet said. I am sure I laughed heartily enough when she said it to me so long ago. I suppose I sighed to think that what she said has come true."

"What was it, Graeme?"

"Oh! I can hardly tell you—something about the changes that come to us as we grow older, and how vain it is to think we can avoid our fate."

"Our fate?" repeated Will.

"Oh, yes! I mean there are troubles—and pleasures, too, that we can't foresee—that take us at unawares, and we have just to make the best of them when they come."

"I don't think I quite understand you, Graeme."

"No, I daresay not; and it is not absolutely necessary that you should,—in the connection. But I am sure a great many pleasant things that we did not expect, have happened to us since we came here."

"And was it thinking of these pleasant things that made you sigh?" asked Will.

"No. I am afraid I was thinking of the other kind of surprises; and I daresay I had quite as much reason to smile as to sigh. We can't tell our trials at first sight, Will, nor our blessings either. Time changes their faces wonderfully to us as the years go on. At any rate, Janet's advice is always appropriate; we must make the best of them when they come."

"Yes;" said Will, doubtfully; he did not quite understand yet.

"For instance, Will, you were disconsolate enough when the doctor told you you must give up your books for an indefinite time, and now you are professing yourself quite content with headache and water-gruel—glad even at the illness that at first was so hard to bear."

Will made a face at the gruel she presented.

"I dare say it is good for me, though I can't say I like it, or the headache. But, Graeme, I did not get this check before I needed it. It is pleasant to be first, and I was beginning to like it. Now this precious month taken from me, at the time I needed it most, will put me back. To be sure," added he, with a deprecating glance, "it is not much to be first among so few. But as Janet used to say, Pride is an ill weed and grows easily—flourishes even on a barren soil; and in the pleasure and excitement of study, it is not difficult to forget that it is only a means to an end."

"Yes," said Graeme, "it is easy to forget what we ought to remember."

But it came into Will's mind that her sympathy did not come so readily as usual, that her thoughts were elsewhere, and he had a feeling that they were such as he was not to be permitted to share. In a little he said,—

"Graeme; I should like very much to go home to Scotland."

Graeme roused herself and answered cheerfully,—

"Yes, I have never quite given up the hope of going home again; but we should find sad changes, I doubt."

"But I mean I should like to go home soon. Not for the sake of Clayton and our friends there. I would like to go to fit

myself better for the work I have to do in the world.”

“You mean, you would like to go home to study.”

“Yes. One must have a far better opportunity there, and it is a grand thing to be ‘thoroughly furnished’.” There was a pause, and then he added, “If I go, I ought to go soon—within a year or two, I mean.”

“Oh, Will, how could I ever let you go away?”

“Why, Graeme! that is not at all like you; you could let me go if it were right. But I have not quite decided that it is not selfish in me to wish to go.”

“But why?” asked Graeme.

“Partly because it would be so pleasant. Don’t you remember how Janet used to say, we are not so likely to see all sides of what we desire very much. Perhaps I desire it more for the pleasure it would give me, than for the benefit it might be to me. And then the expense. It would be too much to expect from Arthur.”

“But there is the Merleville money. It was meant for Arthur’s education, and as he did not need it, it is yours.”

“No, that belongs to you and Rose. It would not be right to take that.”

“Nonsense, Will. What is ours is yours; if the expense were all! But I cannot bear to think of you going away, and Harry, too, perhaps.”

“Rose tells me that Harry is more bent on going West than ever.”

“Yes, within a few days he has become quite eager about it. I cannot understand why he should be so. Oh, I cannot feel hopeful about it.”

“Arthur thinks it may be a good thing for Harry,” said Will.

“Yes, for some things I suppose so. But, oh! Will, I could not let Harry go as I could let you, sure that he would be kept safe till—”

Graeme laid her head down on her brother’s pillow, and the tears she had been struggling with for so long a time burst forth. She had never spoken to Will of her fears for Harry, but he knew that they all had had cause for anxiety on his account, so instead of speaking he laid his arm over his sister’s neck. She struggled with herself a moment, unable to speak.

“Graeme,” said Will, softly, “we cannot keep Harry safe from evil, and He who can is able to keep him safe there as well as here.”

“I know it; I say it to myself twenty times a day. That is, I say it in words; but I do not seem to get the comfort I might from them.”

“But, Graeme, Harry has been very little away this winter, and I had thought—”

“I know, dear, and I have been quite hopeful about him till lately. But, oh, Will! it won’t bear talking about. We can only wait patiently.”

“Yes, Graeme, we can pray and trust, and you are exaggerating to yourself Harry’s danger, I think. What has happened to make you so faint-hearted, dear?”

“What should have happened, Will? I am tired—for one thing—and something is wrong I know.”

She paused to struggle with her tears.

“Somehow, I don’t feel so anxious about Harry as you do, Graeme. He will come back again. I am sure this great sorrow is not waiting you.”

He paused a moment, and then added, hesitatingly,—

“I have had many thoughts since I sat down here, Graeme. I think one needs—it does one good, to make a pause to have time to look back and to look forward. Things change to us; we get clearer and truer views of life, alone in the dark, with nothing to withdraw our thoughts from the right and the wrong of things, and we seem to see more clearly how true it is, that though we change God never changes. We get courage to look our troubles fairly in the face, when we are alone with God and them.”

Still Graeme said nothing, and Will added,—

“Graeme, you must take hope for Harry. And there is nothing else, is there?—nothing that you are afraid to look at—nothing that you cannot bring to the one place for light and help?”

She did not answer for a minute.

“No, Will, I hope not. I think not. I daresay—I am quite sure that all will be for the best, and I shall see at some time.”

Not another word was said till Graeme rose and drawing aside the curtains, let in on them the dim dawn of a bleak

March morning.

In a few more days Will was down-stairs again. Not in his accustomed corner among his books, but in the arm-chair in the warmest place by the fire, made much of by Rose and them all. It seemed a long time since he had been among them. A good many things had happened during the month that Graeme and he had passed together up-stairs. March, that had come in "like a lion" was hastening out "like a lamb;" the sky was clear and the air was mild; spring was not far-away. The snow lay still in sullied ridges in the narrow streets where the sun had little power, and the mud lay deep in the streets where the snow had nearly disappeared. But the pavements were dry and clean, and in spite of dirty crossings and mud bespattering carriages, they were thronged with gay promenaders, eager to welcome the spring. Those who were weatherwise shook their heads, declaring that having April in March would ensure March weather when April came, or it might be even in May. So it might prove, but there was all the more need, because of this, that the most should be made of the sunshine and the mild air, and even their quiet sweet was quite gay with the merry goers to and fro, and it seemed to Will and Graeme that more than a month had passed since his illness began.

Harry had quite decided to go West now, and was as eager and impatient to be gone as if he had all his life been dreaming of no other future than that which awaited him there. That he should be so glad to go, pained his sister as much as the thought of his going. That was at first, for it did not take Graeme long to discover that Harry was not so gay as he strove to appear. But her misgivings as to his departure were none the less sad on that account, and it was with a heavy heart that she listened to his plans.

Perhaps it was in contrast to Harry's rather ostentatious mirth that his friend Charlie Millar seemed so very grave on the first night that Will ventured to prolong his stay among them after the gas had been lighted. Rose was grave, too, and not at ease, though she strove to hide it by joining in Harry's mirth. Charlie did not strive to hide his gravity, but sat silent and thoughtful after his first greetings were over. Even Harry's mirth failed at last, and he leaned back on the sofa, shading his face with his hands.

"I am afraid your brother would think us very ungrateful if he could see how badly we are thanking him for his great kindness to Harry."

Graeme forced herself to say it. Allan's name had not been mentioned among them for days, and the silence, at first grateful, had come to seem strange and unnatural, and it made Graeme's cheeks tingle to think what might be the cause. So, looking into Charlie's face with a smile, she spoke to him about his brother. But Charlie did not answer, or Graeme did not hear, and in a little while she said again,—

"Is Mr Ruthven still in town?"

"Oh! yes. It is not likely he will leave again soon."

"And your uncle is really recovering from his last attack? What an anxious time Miss Elphinstone must have had!"

"Yes, he seems better, and, contrary to all expectation, seems likely to live for some time yet. But his mind is much affected. At least it seems so to me."

"Poor Lillas!" said Graeme, "Is she still alone?"

"Oh, no. There is a houseful of them. Her aunt Mrs Roxbury is there, and I don't know how many besides. I declare, I think those women enjoy it."

Graeme looked shocked.

"Charlie means the preparations for the wedding," said Rose. "It is to take place soon, is it not?"

"Within the month, I believe," said Charlie, gravely.

"So soon!" said Graeme; and in a little she added, "Is it not sudden?"

"No—yes, I suppose so. They have been engaged, or something like it for some time; but the haste is because of Mr Elphinstone. He thinks he cannot die happy till he sees his daughter safe under the care of her husband. Just as if Allan would not be her friend all the same. It seems to me like madness."

"And Lillas," said Rose, almost in a whisper, "is she content?"

"On the whole, I suppose so. But this haste and her father being so ill, and all these horrid preparations are too much for her. She looks ill, and anything but cheerful."

"We have not seen your brother for a long time," said Will.

"I have scarcely seen him, either. He did not find matters much to his mind in C, I fear. Harry will have to keep his eyes open among those people."

"How soon will Harry have to go?" asked Rose.

"The sooner the better, I suppose," said Charlie, rising and walking about. "Oh! dear me. This is a miserable overturning that has come upon us—and everything seemed to be going on so smoothly."

"Harry will not have to go before Arthur comes back, I hope," said Rose.

"I don't know, indeed. When does he come?"

"Charlie, man," said Harry, rising suddenly, "did I not hear you promising Crofts to meet him to-night? It is eight o'clock."

"No. I don't care if I never see Crofts, or any of his set again. You had much better stay where you are Harry."

"Charlie, don't be misanthropical. I promised if you didn't. Come along. No? Well, good-night to you all. Will, it is time you were in bed, your eyes are like saucers. Don't sit up for me, Graeme."

Graeme had no heart to remonstrate. She felt it would do no good, and he went away leaving a very silent party behind him. Charlie lingered. When Graeme came down-stairs after seeing Will in his room she found him still sitting opposite Rose, silent and grave. He roused himself as she entered. Graeme would gladly have excused him, but she took a seat and her work, and prepared to be entertained. It was not an easy matter, though Charlie had the best will in the world to be entertaining, and Graeme tried to respond. She did not think of it at the time, but afterwards, when Charlie was gone, she remembered the sad wistful look with which the lad had regarded her. Rose too, hung about her, saying nothing, but with eyes full of something to which Graeme would not respond. One angry throb, stirred her heart, but her next thoughts were not in anger.

"These foolish young people have been dreaming dreams about Allan and me,—and I must undeceive them—or deceive them—"

"Graeme," said Rose, softly, "if either of us wait for Harry it must be me, for you are very tired."

"Yes, I am very tired."

"Charlie said, perhaps he would take Harry home with him. Should we wait?" said Rose.

"No. He may not come. We will not wait. I shall sleep near Will. He cannot spare me yet. Now go, love."

She kissed the troubled face upturned to her, but would suffer no lingering over the good-night. She was in no haste to go herself, however. She did not mean to wait for Harry, but when two hours had passed, she was still sitting where Rose had left her, and then Harry came.

But oh! the misery of that home-coming. Graeme must have fallen asleep, she thought, for she heard nothing till the door opened, and then she heard Harry's voice, thick and interrupted, thanking someone, and then stupidly insisting on refusing all further help.

"Never mind, gentlemen—I can manage—thank you."

There were two persons with him, Charlie Millar was one of them.

"Hush, Harry. Be quiet, man. Are you mad? You will waken your sister."

The light which someone held behind them, flushed for a moment on Graeme's pale face.

"Oh! Miss Elliott," said Charles, "I tried to keep him with me. He is mad, I think. Be quiet, Harry."

Harry quite incapable of walking straight, struggled to free himself and staggered toward his sister.

"I knew you would sit up, Graeme—though I told you not—and so I came home."

"Of course, you did right to come home. But hush, Harry! you will waken Will."

"Oh! yes! Poor Will!" he mumbled. "But Graeme, what ails you, that you look at me with a face like that?"

"Miss Elliott," entreated Charlie, "leave him to us, you can do nothing with him to-night."

She went up-stairs before them carrying the light, and held firmly the handle of Will's door till they passed. She stood there in the darkness till they came out again and went down-stairs. Poor Harry lay muttering and mumbling, entreating Graeme to come and see him before she went to bed. When she heard the door close she went down again, not into the parlour where a light still burned, but into the darkness of the room beyond.

"Oh Harry! Harry! Harry!" she cried, as she sank on her knees and covered her face.

It was a dark hour. Her hope, her faith, her trust in God—all that had been her strength and song, from day to day was forgotten. The bitter waters of fear and grief passed over her, and she was well nigh overwhelmed.

"Oh papa! mamma! Oh Harry! Oh! my little brothers."

"Miss Elliott," said a voice that made her heart stand still, "Graeme, you must let me help you now."

She rose and turned toward him.

"Mr Ruthven! I was not aware—" said she, moving toward the door through which light came from the parlour.

"Miss Elliott, forgive me. I did not mean to intrude. I met your brother and mine by chance, and I came with them. You must not think that I—"

"Thank you, you are very kind."

Graeme was trembling greatly and sat down, but rose again immediately.

"You are very kind," repeated she, scarcely knowing what she said.

"Graeme," said Mr Ruthven, "you must let me help you in this matter. Tell me what you wish. Must Harry stay or go?"

Graeme sank down with a cry, wringing her hands.

"Oh! Harry! Harry!"

Mr Ruthven made one step toward her.

"Miss Elliott, I dare not say to you that you think too severely of Harry's fault. But he is young, and I do not really fear for him. And you have more cause to be hopeful than I. Think of your father, and your father's God. Graeme, be sure Harry will come back to you again."

Graeme sat still with her head bowed down.

"Graeme—Miss Elliott. Tell me what you would have me do?"

Graeme rose.

"You are very kind," she repeated. "I cannot think to-night. We must wait—till Arthur comes home."

He went up and down the room several times, and then came and stood by her side again.

"Graeme," said he, in a low voice, "let me hear you once say, that you believe me to be your true and faithful friend."

"Why should I not say it, Allan. You are my true and faithful friend, as I am yours."

Her voice did not tremble, and for a moment she calmly met his eye. He turned and walked away, and when he came back again he held out his hand and said,—

"Good-night."

"Good-night," said Graeme.

"And you will see about Harry—what you wish for him?"

"Yes. Good-bye."

He raised the hand he held to his lips, and then said, "Good-bye."

Chapter Twenty Six.

The next few days were weary ones to all. Will had reached that stage of convalescence in which it was not easy to resign himself to utter idleness, and yet he had not strength to be able to occupy himself long without fatigue; and in the effort to amuse and interest him, Graeme's spirits flagged sadly. She looked so exhausted and ill one day when the doctor came in, that he declared that Will must be left to the tender mercies of Rose, while her sister went first for a walk in the keen morning air, and then to her room for the rest of the day. It is possible that solitude and her own thoughts did Graeme less good than attendance on Will would have done, but doctors cannot be supposed to know everything; and even had he known all there was to account for her hot hands and pale cheeks, it is doubtful whether his skill could have suggested anything more to the purpose than his random prescription was. At any rate, Graeme was thankful for a few days' quiet, whether it was good for her or not; and in the mean time Rose and Will got on very well without her.

And Harry—poor, unhappy, repentant Harry, trying under a mask of sullen indifference to hide the shame and misery he felt at the remembrance of that night—these were dreary days to him. Graeme never spoke to him about that night. She had not the courage, even if she had felt hot that it would be better not to do so. The preparations for his departure went on slowly, though it was becoming doubtful, whether he should go West after all. He said little about it himself, but that little it was not pleasant for Graeme to hear.

Much to the surprise of everyone, and to the extreme indignation of Harry, Mr Ruthven had again left town, saying nothing of his destination or the length of his stay, only in very brief fashion, telling him to make no further arrangements for his departure until his return.

"He does not trust me. He does not think me fit to take charge of his affairs," said Harry to himself, with his vague remembrance of Allan's share in the events of that miserable night, he could hardly wonder that it should be so, and in his shame and impatience he was twenty times on the point of breaking his connection with his employers, and going his own way. However, he forced himself to wait a little.

"If I am sent West after all, well and good. If not I shall remain no longer. The change of arrangements will be sufficient excuse, at least I will make it so. I can't stay, and I won't. If he would but come back and put an end to it all."

And Harry was not the only one who was impatient under the unreasonable absence of Mr Ruthven. Poor Mr Elphinstone, ill and irritable, suffered not an hour to pass without vexing himself and others, wondering at, and lamenting, his delay. Liliias had much ado to keep him from saying angry and bitter things about his nephew, and exaggerated the few details she had gathered with regard to their recent losses, in order to account to him for Allan's untimely devotion to business. Poor girl, she looked sad and ill in these days, and grew irritable and unreasonable amid the preparations of Mrs Roxbury, in a way that shocked and alarmed that excellent and energetic lady. She considered it a very equivocal proof of Liliias' love to her father, that she should be so averse to the carrying out of his express wishes. There had been nothing that is proper on such an occasion, and Mrs Roxbury seemed bent on fulfilling his wishes to the very letter. So, at last, Liliias was fain for the sake of peace to grow patient and grateful, and stayed more and more closely in her father's room, and her aunt had her will in all things that concerned the wedding, that under such melancholy circumstances was drawing near.

"Graeme," said Harry, one night, when they were sitting together after the rest had all gone up-stairs, "don't you think we have been uncomfortable long enough? Don't you think you have given us enough of that miserable, hopeless face for one occasion? I think a change would be agreeable to all concerned. It would to me, at any rate."

Graeme was so startled at this speech, that for a little she could not say a word. Then she said something about being tired and not very well—and about its being impossible always to help one's looks.

"Why don't you say at once that it is I who have made you so miserable that you have lost all faith in me—that I am going straight to ruin. That is what you mean to say—you know very well."

"Harry," said she, gently, "I did not mean to say anything unkind."

Harry left his seat, and threw himself on the sofa with a groan.

"If you would only rate a fellow soundly, Graeme! If you would only tell me at once, what a weak, pitiful wretch you think me! I could bear that; but your silence and that miserable face, I cannot bear."

"I cannot say I think you weak or pitiful, Harry. It would not be true. And I am afraid you would not like my rating better than my silence. I can only say, I have had less courage in thinking of your going away to fill an important and responsible situation, since that night."

Harry groaned.

"Oh! well; don't bother yourself about my going away, and my responsibilities. The chances are some one else will have to fill the important situation."

"Have you seen—has Mr Ruthven returned?"

"Mr Ruthven has returned, and I have seen him, but I have not spoken with him. It was not his will and pleasure to say anything to-night about that which has been keeping me in such miserable suspense. He was engaged, forsooth, when a moment would have settled it. Well, it does not matter. I shall take the decision into my own hands."

"What do you mean, Harry?"

"I mean, I shall give up my situation if he does not send me West—if he hesitates a moment about sending me, I shall leave his employment."

"But why, Harry?"

"Because—because I am determined. Ruthven does not think me fit to be entrusted with the management of his affairs, I suppose."

"Harry," said his sister, gravely, "is it surprising if he does not?"

"Well, if I am not to be trusted there, neither am I to be trusted here, and I leave. Graeme, you don't know what you are talking about. It is quite absurd to suppose that what happened that night would make any difference to Allan Ruthven. You think him a saint, but trust me, he knows by experience how to make allowance for that sort of thing. If he has nothing worse than that against any one in his employment, he may think himself fortunate."

"Then, why do you say he does not trust you?"

"I shall call it sufficient evidence that he does not, if he draws back in this. Not that I care much. I would rather be in the employment of some one else. I shall not stay here."

"Harry," said Graeme, coming quite close to the sofa on which he had thrown himself, "what has happened between you and Allan Ruthven?"

"Happened! What should have happened? What an absurd question to ask, Graeme."

"Harry, why are you so determined to leave him? It was not so a little while ago."

"Was it not? Oh, well! I daresay not. But one wants a change. One gets tired of the same dull routine, always. Now, Graeme," added he, as she made an incredulous gesture, "don't begin to fancy any mystery. That would be too absurd, you know."

Graeme came and knelt close beside him. His face was turned away so that she could not see it. Her own was very

pale.

“Harry, speak to me. Do you believe that Allan Ruthven is otherwise than an honourable and upright gentleman in business and—in other matters? Tell me, Harry.”

“Oh, yes! as gentlemen go. No, Graeme, that is not right. I believe him in all things to be upright and honourable. I think more highly of him than I did at first. It is not that.”

The colour came slowly back to Graeme’s face. It was evident that Harry had no foolish thoughts of her and Allan. In a little she said,—

“And you, Harry—you have not—you are—”

“I hope I am an honourable man, Graeme,” said Harry, gravely. “There is nothing between Mr Ruthven and me. I mean, he does not wish me to leave him. But I must go, Graeme. I cannot stay here.”

“Harry, why? Tell me.” Graeme laid her hand caressingly on his hair.

“It is nothing that I can tell,” said Harry, huskily.

“Harry—even if I cannot help it, or remove it—it is better that I should know what is making you so unhappy. Harry, is it—it is not Lillias?”

He did not answer her.

“Harry, Harry! Do not say that this great sorrow has fallen upon us, upon you, too.”

She drew back that he might not feel how she was trembling. In a little she said,—

“Brother, speak to me. What shall I say to you, my poor Harry?”

But Harry was not in a mood to be comforted. He rose and confronted her.

“I think the most appropriate remark for the occasion would be that I am a fool, and deserve to suffer for my folly. You had better say that to me, Graeme.”

But something in his sister’s face stopped him. His lips trembled, and he said,—

“At any rate, it isn’t worth your looking so miserable about.”

“Hush, Harry,” whispered she, and he felt her tears dropping on his hands. “And Lillias?”

“Graeme, I do not know. I never spoke to her, but I hoped—I believed till lately—.”

He laid his head down on his sister’s shoulder. In a little he roused himself and said,—

“But it is all past now—all past; and it won’t bear talking about, even with you, Graeme, who are the dearest and best sister that ever unworthy brother had. It was only a dream, and it is past. But I cannot stay here—at least it would be very much better—”

Graeme sighed.

“Yes, I can understand how it should seem impossible to you, and yet—but you are right. It won’t bear talking about. I have nothing to say to comfort you, dear, except to wait, and the pain may grow less.”

No, there was nothing that Graeme could say, even if Harry would have listened to her. Her own heart was too heavy to allow her to think of comfort for him; and so they sat in silence. It seemed to Graeme that she had never been quite miserable until now. Yesterday she had thought herself wretched, and now her burden of care for Harry was pressing with tenfold weight. Why had this new misery come upon her? She had been unhappy about him before, and now it was worse with him than all her fears.

In her misery she forgot many things that might have comforted her with regard to her brother. She judged him by herself, forgetting the difference between the woman and the man—between the mature woman, who having loved vainly, could never hope to dream the sweet dream again, and the youth, hardly yet a man, sitting in the gloom of a first sorrow, with, it might well be, a long bright future stretching before him.

Sharp as the pain at her own heart was, she knew she should not die of it. She took no such consolation to herself as that. She knew she must live the old common life, hiding first the fresh wound and then the scar, only hoping that as the years went on the pain might grow less. She accepted the lot. She thought if the darkness of her life never cast a shadow on the lives of those she loved, she would strive, with God’s help, to be contented.

But Harry—poor Harry! hitherto so careless and light-hearted, how was he to bear the sorrow that had fallen upon him? Perhaps it was as well that in her love and pity for her brother, Graeme failed to see how different it might be with him. Harry would hardly have borne to be told even by her that his sorrow would pass away. The commonplaces supposed to be appropriate about time and change and patience, would have been unwelcome and irritating, even from his sister’s lips, and it was all the better that Graeme should sit there, thinking her own dreary thoughts in silence. After the momentary pain and shame which the betrayal of his secret had caused him, there was a certain consolation in the knowledge that he had his sister’s sympathy, and I am afraid, if the truth must be told, that Graeme that night suffered more for Harry than Harry suffered for himself. If she looked back with bitter regret on the

vanished dream of the last six months, it was that night at least less for her own sake than for his. If from the future that lay before them she shrank appalled, it was not because the dreariness that must henceforth be on her life, but because of something worse than dreariness that might be on the life of her brother, unsettled, almost reckless, as he seemed to be to-night. She could not but see the danger that awaited him, should he persist in leaving home, to cast himself among strangers. How gladly would she have borne his trouble for him. She felt that going away now, he would have no shield against the temptation that had of late proved too strong for him; and yet would it be really better for him, could she prevail upon him to stay at home? Remembering her own impulse to be away—anywhere—to escape from the past and its associations, she could not wonder at his wish to go. That the bitterness of the pain would pass away, she hoped and believed, but would he wait with patience the coming of content. Alas! her fears were stronger than her hopes. Best give him into God's keeping and let him go, she thought.

"But he must not leave Mr Ruthven. That will make him no better, but worse. He must not go from us, not knowing whither. Oh, I wish I knew what to do!"

The next day the decision was made. It would not be true to say that Harry was quite calm and at his ease that morning, when he obeyed a summons into Mr Ruthven's private room. There was more need for Charlie's "keep cool, old fellow," than Charlie knew, for Harry had that morning told Graeme that before he saw her face again he would know whether he was to go or stay. In spite of himself he felt a little soft-hearted, as he thought of what might be the result of his interview, and he was glad that it was not his friend Allan, but Mr Ruthven the merchant, brief and business-like in all he said, whom he found awaiting him. He was busy with some one else when Harry entered, talking coolly and rapidly on business matters, and neither voice nor manner changed as he turned to him.

There was a good deal said about matters that Harry thought might very well have been kept till another time; there were notes compared and letters read and books examined. There were some allusions to past transactions, inquiries and directions, all in the fewest possible words, and in the quietest manner. Harry, replied, assented and suggested, making all the time the strongest effort to appear as there was nothing, and could be nothing, beyond these dull details to interest him.

There came a pause at last. Mr Ruthven did not say in words that he need not wait any longer, but his manner, as he looked up, and turned over a number of letters that had just been brought in, said it plainly. Indeed, he turned quite away from him, and seemed absorbed in his occupation. Harry waited till the lad that brought in the letters had mended the fire, and fidgeted about the room, and gone out again; then he said, in a voice that ought to have been quiet and firm, for he took a great deal of pains to make it so,—

"Mr Ruthven, may I trespass a moment on your valuable time *now*?"

Mr Ruthven immediately laid his letters on the table, and turned round. Harry thought, like a man who found it necessary to address himself, once for all, to the performance of an unpleasant duty. Certainly, he had time to attend to anything of importance that Mr Elliott might have to say.

"It is a matter of great importance to *me*, and I have been led to suppose that it is of some consequence to you. The Western agency—"

"You are right. It is of great consequence to the firm. There is, perhaps, no immediate necessity for deciding—"

"I beg your pardon, sir, there is absolute necessity for my knowing at once, whether it is your pleasure that I should be employed in it."

"Will a single day make much difference to you?" said Mr Ruthven, looking gravely at the young man, who was certainly not so calm as he meant to be.

"Excuse me, sir, many days have passed since. But, Mr Ruthven, it is better I should spare you the pain of saying that you no longer consider me fit for the situation. Allow me, then, to inform you that I wish—that I no longer wish to remain in your employment."

"Harry," said Mr Ruthven, gravely, "does your brother—does your sister know of your desire to leave me? Would they approve, if you were sent West?"

"Pardon me, Mr Ruthven, that question need not be discussed. I must be the best judge of the matter. As for them, they were at least reconciled to my going when you—drew back."

Mr Ruthven was evidently uncomfortable. He took up his bundle of letters again, murmuring something about their not wishing it now.

"I understand you, sir," said Harry, with a very pale face. "Allow me to say that as soon as you can supply my place—or at once, if you like—I must go."

But Mr Ruthven was not listening to him. He had turned over his letters till a little note among them attracted his attention. He broke the seal, and read it while Harry was speaking. It was very brief, only three words and one initial letter.

"Let Harry go. G."

He read it, and folded it, and laid it down with a sigh. Then he turned to Harry, just as he was laying his hand on the door.

"What is it, Harry? I did not hear what you were saying."

"I merely said, sir," said Harry, turning round and facing him, "that as soon as you can supply my place in the office, I shall consider myself at liberty to go."

"But why should you wish to go?"

"There are several reasons. One is, I shall never stay anywhere on sufferance. If I am not to be trusted at a distance, I shall certainly not stay to give my employers the trouble of keeping an eye upon me."

His own eye flashed as he spoke.

"But, Harry, man, that is nonsense, you know."

It was not his master, but his friend, that spoke, and Harry was a little thrown off his guard by the change in his tone.

"I do not think it is nonsense," said he.

"Harry, I have not been thinking of myself in all this, nor of the interests of the firm. Let me say, once for all, that I should consider them perfectly safe in your hands, in all respects. Harry, the world would look darker to me the day I could not trust your father's son."

Harry made no answer.

"It is of you I have been thinking, in the hesitation that has seemed so unreasonable to you. Harry, when I think of the home you have here, and of the wretched changed life that awaits you there, it seems selfish—wrong to wish to send you away."

Harry made a gesture of dissent, and muttered something about the impossibility of staying always at home.

"I know it, my lad, but the longer you can stay at home—such a home as yours—the better. When I think of my own life there, the first miserable years, and all the evil I have seen since—. Well, there is no use in going over all that. But, Harry, it would break your sister's heart, were you to change into a hard, selfish, worldly man, like the rest of us."

There was nothing Harry could say to this.

"So many fail in the struggle—so many are changed or ruined. And, dear lad, you have one temptation that never was a temptation to me. Don't be angry, Harry," for Harry started and grew red. "Even if that is not to be feared for you, there is enough besides to make you hesitate. I have known and proved the world. What we call success in life, is not worth one approving smile from your sister's lips. And if you should fall, and be trodden down, how should I ever answer to her?"

He walked up and down the room two or three times.

"Don't go, Harry." For Harry had risen as though he thought the interview was at an end. "You said, just now, that you must decide for yourself, and you shall do so. But, consider well, and consult your brother and sister. As for the interests of the firm, I have no fear."

"I may consider it settled then," said Harry, huskily. "Arthur was always of opinion that I should go, and Graeme is willing now. And the sooner the better, I suppose?"

"The sooner the better for us. But there is time enough. Do not be hasty in deciding."

"I have decided already, I thank you, sir—" He hesitated, hardly knowing what to say more.

"I hope it will prove that you will have good reason to thank me. Remember, Harry, whatever comes out of this, you left us with my full and entire confidence. I do not believe I shall have cause to regret it, or that you will fail me or disappoint me."

Harry grasped the hand held out to him without a word, but inwardly he vowed, that come what might, the confidence so generously expressed should never, for good cause, be withdrawn.

And so the decision was made. After this the preparations did not occupy a long time. The second day found Harry ready for departure.

"Graeme," said Harry, "I cannot be content to take away with me such a melancholy remembrance of your face. I shall begin to think you are not willing that I should go after all."

"You need not think so, Harry. I am sure it is best since you are determined. But I cannot but look melancholy at the necessity. You would not have me look joyful, when I am going to lose my brother?"

"No—if that were all. But you have often said how impossible it was that we should always keep together. It is only what we have been expecting, and we might have parted in much more trying circumstances. I shall be home often—once a year at the least; perhaps oftener."

"Yes, dear, I know."

"Well, then, I think there is no cause for grief in my going, even if I were worthy of it, which I very much doubt."

Graeme's face did not brighten. In a little while her tears were falling fast.

"Graeme, what is it? There is some other reason for your tears, besides my going away. You do not trust me, Graeme, you are afraid."

Graeme made an effort to quiet herself.

"Yes, Harry, I am a little afraid, since you give me the opportunity to say so. You have hardly been our own Harry for a while, as you know, dear. And what will you be when you are far from us all? I am afraid to let you go from me, Harry, far more afraid than I should be for Will."

Harry rose and walked about a while, with an air that seemed to be indignant; but if he was angry, he thought better of it, and in a little he came and sat down beside his sister again.

"I wish I could make you quite satisfied about me, Graeme."

"I wish you could, dear. I will try to be so. I daresay you think me unreasonable, Harry. I know I am tired, and foolish, and all wrong," said she, trying in vain to keep back her tears.

"You look at this moment as though you had very little hope in anything," said Harry, with a touch of bitterness.

"Do I? Well, I am all wrong, I know. There ought to be hope and comfort too, if I sought them right. I will try to leave you in God's keeping, Harry, the keeping of our father's and our mother's God."

Harry threw himself on his knees beside her.

"Graeme, you are making yourself unhappy without cause. If you only knew! Such things are thought nothing of. If I disgraced myself the other night, there are few young men of our acquaintance who are not disgraced."

Graeme put her hand upon his lips.

"But, Graeme, it is true. I must speak, I can't bear to have you fretting, when there is no cause. Even Allan Ruthven thought nothing of it, at least, he—"

"Hush, Harry, you do not need Mr Ruthven to be a conscience to you. And it is not of the past I am thinking, but the future! How can I bear to think of you going the way so many have gone, knowing the danger all the greater because you feel yourself so safe. I am afraid for you, Harry."

It was useless to speak, she knew that quite well. The words of another can never make danger real, to those who are assailed with poor Harry's temptation. So she shut her lips close, as he rose from her side, and sat in silence; while he walked up and down the room. By and by he came back to her side, again.

"Graeme," said he, gravely. "Indeed, you may trust me. The shame of that night shall never be renewed. You shall never have the same cause to be sorry for me, or ashamed of me again."

She put her arms round his neck, and laid her head down on his shoulder, but she did not speak. It was not that she was altogether hopeless about her brother, but Harry understood it so.

"Graeme, what shall I say to you? How shall I give you courage—faith to trust me? Graeme, I promise, that till I see you again I shall not taste nor touch that which so degraded me in your eyes. I solemnly promise before God, Graeme."

"Harry," said his sister, "it is a vow—an oath, that you have taken."

"Yes, and it shall be kept as such. Do you trust me, Graeme? Give me that comfort before I go away."

"I trust you, Harry," was all she had voice to say. She clasped him and kissed him, and by and by she prayed God to bless him, in words such as his mother might have used. And Harry vowed, with God's help, to be true to himself and her. He did not speak the words again, but none the less was the vow registered in Heaven.

That was the real farewell between the brother and sister. Next morning there was little said by any one, and not a word by Graeme, but the last glimpse Harry had of home, showed his eldest sister's face smiling and hopeful, saying as plainly as her words had said before,—

"Harry, I trust you quite."

Chapter Twenty Seven.

The brilliant sunlight of a September morning was shining full into the little breakfast-room, where Graeme sat at the head of the table, awaiting the coming of the rest. The morning paper was near her, but she was not reading; her hands were clasped and rested on the table, and she was looking straight before her, seeing, probably, further than the pale green wall, on which the sunshine fell so pleasantly. She was grave and quiet, but not in the least sad. Indeed, more than once, as the voices of Rose and Arthur came sounding down-stairs, a smile of unmistakable cheerfulness overspread her face. Presently, Arthur entered, and Graeme made a movement among her cups and saucers.

"Your trip has done you good, Graeme," said Arthur, as he sat down opposite to her.

"Yes, indeed. There is nothing like the sea-breezes, to freshen one. I hardly know myself for the tired, exhausted

creature you sent away in June."

Graeme, Rose, and Will, had passed the summer at Cacouna. Nelly had gone with them as housekeeper, and Arthur had shut the house, and taken lodgings a little out of town for the summer.

"I am only afraid," added Graeme, "that all our pleasure has been at the expense of some discomfort to you."

"By no means, a change is agreeable. I have enjoyed the summer very much. I am glad to get home again, however."

"Yes, a change does one good. If I was only quite at ease about one thing, we might have gone to Merleville, instead of Cacouna, and that would have given Janet and a good many others pleasure."

"Oh! I don't know," said Arthur. "The good people there must have forgotten us by this time, I fancy. There are no sea-breezes there, and they were what you needed."

"Arthur! Janet forgotten us! Never, I am quite sure of that. But at the time it seemed impossible to go, to make the effort, I mean. I quite shrunk from the thought of Merleville. Indeed, if you had not been firm, I fear I should not have had the sea-breezes."

"Yes. You owe me thanks. You needed the change. What with Will's illness, and Harry's going away, and one thing and another; you were quite in need of a change."

"I was not well, certainly," said Graeme. "Will has gone to the post, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Rose, who entered at the moment. "I see him coming up the street."

"As for Rosie," said Arthur, looking at her gravely, as she sat down. "She has utterly ruined her complexion. Such freckles! such sunburning! and how stout she has grown!"

Rose laughed.

"Yes, I know I'm a fright. You must bring me something, Arthur. Toilette vinegar, or something."

"Oh! it would not signify. You are quite beyond all that."

"Here comes Will, with a letter for each of us, I declare."

Arthur's letter was soon despatched, a mere business missive. Graeme's was laid down beside her, while she poured Will's coffee. Rose read hers at once, and before she was well down the first page, she uttered a cry of delight.

"Listen all. No, I won't read it just yet. Arthur, don't you remember a conversation that you and I had together, soon after Sandy was here?"

"Conversation," repeated Arthur. "We have talked, that is, you have talked, and I have listened, but as to conversation:—"

"But Arthur, don't you remember saying something about Emily, and I did not agree with you?"

"I have said a great many times, that I thought Emily a very pretty little creature. If you don't agree, it shows bad taste."

"I quite agree. I think her beautiful. She is not very little, however. She is nearly as tall as I am."

"What is it, Rose?" asked Graeme, stretching out her hand for the letter.

"You'll spoil your news, with your long preface," said Will.

"No, but I want Arthur to confess that I am wisest."

"Oh! I can do that, of course, as regards matters in general; but I should like to hear of this particular case."

"Well, don't you remember saying that you did not think Sandy and Emily would ever fall in love?"

"I remember no such assertion, on my part. On the contrary, I remember feeling pretty certain that the mischief was done already, as far as Sandy was concerned, poor fellow; and I remember saying, much to your indignation, more's the pity."

"Yes; and I remember you said it would be just like a sentimental little blue, like Emily, to slight the handsome, hearty young farmer, and marry some pale-faced Yankee professor."

"You put the case a little strongly, perhaps," said Arthur, laughing. "But, on the whole, that is the way the matter stood. That was my opinion, I confess."

"And they are going to be married!" exclaimed Graeme and Will in a breath. "How glad Janet will be!"

"Emily does not say so, in so many words. It won't be for a long time yet, they are so young. But I am to be bridesmaid when the time comes."

"Well, if that is not saying it!" said Will laughing. "What would you have, Rosie?"

Graeme opened and read her letter, and laid it down beside her, looking a little pale and anxious.

"What is it, Graeme? Nothing wrong, I hope."

"No; I hope not. I don't know, I am sure. Norman says he is going to be married."

"Married!" cried Rose and Will.

"To Hilda?" said Arthur.

"Yes; but how could you have guessed?" said Graeme, bewildered.

"I did not guess. I saw it. Why it was quite easy to be seen that events have been tending toward it all these years. It is all very fine, this brother and sister intercourse; but I have been quite sure about them since Harry wrote about them."

"Well, Norman seems surprised, if you are not. He says, 'You will be very much astonished at all this; but you cannot be more astonished than I was myself. I did not think of such a thing; at least, I did not know that I was thinking of such a thing till young Conway, my friend, asked permission to address my sister. I was very indignant, though, at first, I did not, in the least, know why. However, Hilda helped me to find out all about it. At first I meant she should spend the winter with you all I want very much that you should know each other. But, on the whole, I think I can't spare her quite so long. Expect to see us therefore in November—one flesh!'" There was much more.

"Well done, Norman!" cried Arthur. "But, Graeme, I don't see what there is to look grave about. She seems to be a nice little thing, and Norman ought to know his own mind by this time."

"She's a great deal more than a nice little thing," said Graeme earnestly. "If one can judge by her letters and by Harry's description of her—to say nothing of Norman's opinion—she must be a very superior person, and good and amiable besides. But it seems so strange, so sudden. Why, it seems only the other day since Norman was such a mere boy. I wish she could have passed the winter with us. I think, perhaps, I should write and say so."

"Yes, if you like. But Norman must judge. I think it is the wisest thing for him. He will have a settled home."

"I do believe it is," said Graeme, earnestly. "I am very glad—or I shall be in a little. But, just at first, it seems a little as though Norman would not be quite so much one of us—you know—and besides there really is something odd in the idea of Norman's being married; now, is there not?"

"I confess I fail to see it," said Arthur, a little sharply. Graeme had hardly time to notice his tone. An exclamation from Will startled her.

"What is it, Will?" said Rose: "Another wedding?"

"You'll never guess, Rosie. Never. You need not try."

"Is it Harry this time?" said Arthur, looking in from the hall with his hat on.

"No. Listen, Arthur! Harry says, 'What is this that Mr Green has been telling me about Arthur and little Miss Grove? I was greatly amused at the idea *their* mutual admiration. Mr Green assures me that he has the best authority for saying that Arthur is to carry off the heiress. Charlie, too, has hinted something of the same kind. Tell Graeme, when that happens, I shall expect her to come and keep my house.'"

"They said Mr Green was going to carry off the heiress himself!" exclaimed Rose.

"Listen!" continued Will. "'Unless, indeed, Graeme should make up her mind to smile on Mr Green and take possession of the "palatial residence," of which he has just laid the foundation near C—.'"

"Here is a bit for you, Graeme. Nobody is to be left out, it seems. It will be your turn next, Rosie," said Arthur, as he went away laughing.

"But that is all nonsense about Arthur and little Miss Grove?" said Rose, half questioningly.

"I should think so, indeed! Fancy Arthur coming to that fate," said Graeme. "That would be too absurd."

And yet the thought came uncalled several times that day, and her repetitions of "too absurd," became very energetic in her attempts to drive it quite away. The thought was unpleasantly recalled to her when, a day or two after, she saw her brother, standing beside the Grove carriage, apparently so interested in his conversation with the pretty Fanny that she and Rose passed quite close to them unobserved. It was recalled more unpleasantly still, by the obliging care of Mrs Gridley, who was one of their first visitors after their return. The Grove carriage passed as she sat with them, and, nodding significantly toward it, she said:

"I don't know whether I ought to congratulate you or sympathise with you."

Graeme laughed, but she was very much afraid she changed colour, too, as she answered:

"There is no haste. When you make up your mind as to which will be most appropriate, you will be in time."

"Ah! you are not to commit yourself, I see. Well, you are quite right. She is a harmless little person, I believe, and

may turn out very well if withdrawn from the influence of her stepmother.”

Something in Graeme’s manner stopped the voluble lady more effectually than words could have done, and a rather abrupt turn was given to the conversation. But Graeme could not forget it. Not that she believed in the truth of what Mrs Gridley had hinted at, yet she could not help being annoyed at it. It was rather foolish, she thought, for Arthur to give occasion for such gossip. It was so unlike him, too. And yet so little was enough to raise a rumour like that, especially with so kind a friend as Mrs Gridley to keep the ball rolling. Very likely Arthur knew nothing at all about this rumour, and, as the thought passed through her mind, Graeme determined to tell him about it.

But she did not; she could not do so—though why she could not was a mystery to herself. Sometimes she fancied there was that in Arthur’s manner which prevented her from pursuing the subject, when an opportunity seemed to offer. When he was not there, she was quite sure it was only her own fancy, but no sooner was the name of Grove mentioned; than the fancy returned, till the very sight of the Grove carriage made her uncomfortable at last, especially if the lady of the mansion was in it. She never failed to lean forward and bow to them with the greatest interest and politeness; and more than once Graeme was left standing looking in at a shop-window, while Arthur obeyed the beckoning hand of the lady, and went to speak to her. Sometimes the pretty Fanny was there; sometimes she was not. But her absence did not set Graeme’s uncomfortable feelings at rest with regard to her brother.

And yet, why should she be uncomfortable? she asked herself, a thousand times. What right had she to interfere, even in thought, with her brother’s friendship? If he admired Miss Grove, if even he were attached to her, or engaged to her, it was nothing with which she could interfere—nothing to which she could even allude—until he should speak first. But then, of course, that was quite absurd! Miss Grove, though very pretty, and the daughter of a man who was reported to be rich, was no more worthy to be Arthur’s wife—than—

Oh! of course it was all nonsense. No one had ever heard three words of common sense from those pretty lips. She had heard Arthur say as much as that himself. Miss Grove could dance and flirt and sing a little; that was all that could be said for her, and to suppose that Arthur would ever—

And yet Graeme grew a little indignant standing there looking at, but scarcely seeing the beautiful things in Savage’s window, and she inwardly resolved that never again should she wait for the convenience of the free-and-easy occupant of the carriage standing a few doors down the street. She had time to go over the same thoughts a good many times, and the conclusion always was that it was exceedingly impertinent of Mrs Grove, and exceedingly foolish of Arthur, and exceedingly disagreeable to herself, before she was recalled by her brother’s voice from her enforced contemplation of the beautiful things before her.

“Mrs Grove wanted to speak to you, Graeme,” said he, with a little embarrassment.

“I could hardly be expected to know that by intuition,” said Graeme, coldly.

“She beckoned. Did you not see?”

“She beckoned to you; she would hardly venture on such a liberty with me. There is not the slightest approach to intimacy between us, and never will be, unless I have greatly mistaken her character.”

“Oh, well, you may very easily have done that, you know very little about her. She thinks very highly of you, I can assure you.”

“Stuff!” pronounced Graeme, with such emphasis that she startled herself, and provoked a hearty laugh from her brother.

“I declare, Graeme, I thought for the moment it was Harry that spoke for Mrs Gridley in one of her least tolerant moods. It did not sound the least like you.”

Graeme laughed, too.

“Well, I was thinking of Harry at the minute, and as for Mrs Gridley—I didn’t mean to be cross, Arthur, but something disagreeable that she once said to me did come into my mind at the moment, I must confess.”

“Well, I wish you a more pleasant subject for meditation on your way home,” said Arthur. “Wait till I see if there are any letters. None, I believe. Good-bye.”

Mrs Gridley did not occupy Graeme’s thoughts on her way home, yet they were not very pleasant. All the way along the sunny streets she was repeating to herself, “so absurd,” “so foolish,” “so impertinent of Mrs Grove,” “so disagreeable to be made the subject of gossip,” and so on, over and over again, till the sight of the obnoxious carriage gave her a fresh start again. The lady did not beckon this time, she only bowed and smiled most sweetly. But her smiles did not soothe Graeme’s ruffled temper, and she reached home at last quite ashamed of her folly. For, after all, it was far less disagreeable to call herself silly than to call Arthur foolish, and Mrs Grove impertinent, and she would not think about it any more. So she said, and so she repeated, still thinking about it more than was either pleasant or needful.

One night, Charlie Millar paid them a visit. He made no secret of his delight at their return home, declaring that he had not known what to do with himself in their absence, and that he had not been quite content or at his ease since he sat in Graeme’s arm-chair three months ago.

“One would not think so from the visits you have made us since we came home,” said Graeme, smiling. “You have only looked in upon us. We were thinking you had forsaken us, or that you had found a more comfortable arm-chair, at a pleasanter fireside.”

"Business, business," repeated Charlie, gravely. "I assure you that Harry out there, and I here, have had all that we have been able to attend to during the last three months. It is only to the unexpected delay of the steamer that I owe the leisure of this evening."

"You expect us to believe all that, I suppose," said Graeme, laughing.

"Indeed, you may believe me, Miss Elliott. It is quite true. I can't understand how it is that my wise brother can stay away so long just now. If he does not know how much he is needed it is not for want of telling, I assure you."

"You hear often from him, I suppose?"

"Yes. I had a note from Lilius the other day, in a letter I got from my mother. She sent 'kind regards' to the Misses Elliott, which I take the present opportunity of delivering."

"Business having hitherto prevented," said Rose.

"You don't seem to have faith in my business engagements, Miss Rose; but I assure you that Harry and I deserve great credit for having carried on the business so successfully for the last three months."

"Where is Mr Gilchrist?" asked Arthur.

"Oh, he's here, there, and everywhere. But Mr Gilchrist is an 'old fogey,' and he has not helped but hindered matters, now and then. It is not easy getting on with those slow-going, obstinate old gentlemen; I can't understand how Allan used to manage him so well. However, he had unbounded confidence in Allan's powers, and let him do as he pleased."

"And the obstinate old gentleman has not unbounded confidence in the powers of you and Harry?" said Arthur, laughing. "Upon the whole I think, in the absence of your brother, it is as well, that you two lads should have some check upon you, now and then."

"Not at all, I assure you," said Charlie. "As for Harry—Miss Elliott, I wish I could tell you half the kind things I hear about Harry from our correspondents out there."

Graeme smiled brightly. She was permitting herself to rely entirely upon Harry now.

"But, Charlie," said Will from his corner, "what is this nonsense you have been telling Harry about Arthur and the beautiful Miss Grove?"

Charlie started and coloured, and so did Graeme, and both glanced hastily at Arthur, who neither started nor coloured, as Graeme was very glad to perceive.

"Nonsense!" said Charlie, with a great show of astonishment and indignation. "I don't understand you, Will."

"Will," said Rose, laughing, "you are mistaken. It was Mr Green who had been hinting to Harry something you remember; you read it to us the other morning."

"Yes, but Harry said that Charlie had been saying something of the same kind," persisted simple Will, who never dreamed of making any one feel uncomfortable.

"Hinting!" repeated Charlie. "I never hint. I leave that to Mrs Gridley and her set. I think I must have told Harry that I had seen Arthur in the Grove carriage one morning, and another day standing beside it talking to Miss Fanny, while her mamma was in ordering nice things at Alexander's."

Graeme laughed, she could not help it.

"Oh, that terrible carriage!" said Rose.

"A very comfortable and convenient carriage I found it, many a time, when I was staying at Mrs Smith's," said Arthur, coolly. "Mrs Grove was so polite as to invite me to take a seat in it more than once, and much obliged I was to her, some of those warm August mornings."

"So you see, Will," said Charlie, triumphantly, "I was telling Harry the simple truth, and he was mean to accuse me of hinting 'nonsense,' as you call it."

"I suppose that is what Mrs Gridley meant the other day when she nodded so significantly toward the Grove carriage, and asked whether she was to congratulate us."

Rose spoke with a little hesitation. She was not sure that her brother would be quite pleased by Mrs Gridley's congratulations, and he was not.

"Oh! if we are to have Mrs Gridley's kind concern and interest in our affairs, we shall advance rapidly," said he, a little crossly. "It would of course be very desirable to discuss our affairs with that prudent and charitable lady."

"But as I did not suppose there was on that occasion any matters to discuss there was no discussion," said Graeme, by no means unwilling that her brother should see that she was not pleased by his manner and tone to Rose.

"Oh! never mind, Graeme," said Rose, laughing, "we shall have another chance of being congratulated, and I only hope Arthur may be here himself. Mrs Gridley was passing when the Grove carriage stood at our door this morning. I saw her while I was coming up the street. She will be here in a day or two to offer again her congratulations or her

sympathy.”

“Was Mrs Grove here this morning?” enquired Arthur. “She must have given you her own message then, I suppose.”

“She was at the door, but she did not get in. I was out, and Graeme was busy, and sent her word that she was engaged.”

“Yes,” said Graeme, “I was helping Nelly, and I was in my old blue wrapper.”

“Now, Graeme,” said Will, “that is not the least like you. What about a wrapper?”

“Nothing, of course. But a call at that hour is not at all times convenient, unless from once intimate friends, and we are not intimate.”

“But perhaps she designs to honour you with her intimate friendship,” said Charlie.

Graeme laughed.

“I am very much obliged to her. But I think we could each make a happier choice of friends.”

“She is a very clever woman, though, let me tell you,” said Arthur; “and she can make herself very agreeable, too, when she chooses.”

“Well, I cannot imagine ever being charmed by her,” said Graeme, hastily. “There is something—a feeling that she is not sincere—that would spoil all her attempts at being agreeable, as far as I am concerned.”

“Smooth and false,” said Charlie.

“No, Charlie. You are much too severe,” said Arthur. “Graeme’s idea of insincerity is better, though very severe for her. And, after all, I don’t think that she is consciously insincere. I can scarcely tell what it is that makes the dear lady other than admirable. I think it must be her taste for management, as Miss Fanny calls it. She does not seem to be able to go straight to any point, but plans and arranges, and thinks herself very clever when she succeeds in making people do as she wishes, when in nine cases out of ten, she would have succeeded quite as well by simply expressing her desires. After all, her manoeuvring is very transparent, and therefore very harmless.”

“Transparent! Harmless!” repeated Charlie. “You must excuse me if I say I think you do the lady’s talents great injustice. Not that I have any personal knowledge of the matter, however: and if I were to repeat the current reports, Miss Elliott would call them gossip and repudiate them, and me too, perhaps. She has the reputation of having the ‘wisdom of the serpent;’ the slyness of the cat, I think.”

They all laughed, for Charlie had warmed as he went on.

“I am sure it must be very uncomfortable to have anything to do with such a person,” said Rose. “I should feel as though I must be always on the watch for something unexpected.”

“To be always on the watch for something unexpected, would be rather uncomfortable—‘for a continuance,’ as Janet would say. But I don’t see the necessity of that with Mrs Grove. I think it must be rather agreeable to have everything arranged for one, with no trouble. You should hear Miss Fanny, when in some difficult conjunction of circumstances—she resigns herself to superior guidance. ‘Mamma will manage it.’ Certainly she does manage some difficult matters.”

There was the faintest echo of mimicry in Arthur’s tone, as he repeated Miss Fanny’s words, which Graeme was quite ashamed of being glad to hear.

“It was very stupid of me, to be sure! Such folly to suppose that Arthur would fall into that shallow woman’s snares. No; Arthur’s wife must be a very different woman from pretty little Fanny Grove. I wish I knew anyone good enough and lovely enough for him. But there is no haste about it. Ah, me! Changes will come soon enough, we need not seek to hasten them. And yet, we need not fear them whatever they may be. I am very sure of that. But I am very glad that there is no harm done.”

And yet, the harm that Graeme so much dreaded, was done before three months were over. Before that time she had it from Arthur’s own lips, that he had engaged himself to Fanny Grove; one who, to his sisters, seemed altogether unworthy of him. She never quite knew how to receive his announcement, but she was conscious at the time of feeling thankful; and she was ever afterwards thankful, that she had not heard it a day sooner, to mar the pleasure of the last few hours of Norman’s stay.

For Norman came with his bride even sooner than they had expected. Graeme was not disappointed in her new sister, and that is saying much, for her expectations had been highly raised. She had expected to find her an intellectual and self-reliant woman, but she had not expected to see so charming and lovable a little lady. They all loved her dearly from the very first; and Graeme satisfied Norman by her unfeigned delight in her new sister, who was frank, and natural and childlike, and yet so amiable and wise as well.

And Graeme rejoiced over Norman even more than over Hilda. He was just what she had always hoped he might become. Contact with the world had not spoiled him. He was the same Norman; perhaps a little graver than he used to be in the old times, but in all things true, and frank, and earnest, as the Merleville school-boy had been.

How they lived over those old times! There was sadness in the pleasure, for Norman had never seen the two graves in that quiet church-yard; and the names of the dead were spoken softly. But the bitterness of their grief had long been past, and they could speak cheerfully and hopefully now.

There was a great deal of enjoyment crowded into the few weeks of their stay. "If Harry were only here!" was said many times. But Harry was well, and well content to be where he was, and his coming home was a pleasure which lay not very far before them. Their visit came to an end too soon for them all; but Norman was a busy man, and they were to go home by Merleville, for Norman declared he should not feel quite assured of the excellence of his wife till Janet had pronounced upon her. Graeme was strongly tempted to yield to their persuasions, and go to Merleville with them; but her long absence during the summer, and the hope that they might go to Emily's wedding soon, decided her to remain at home.

Yes; they had enjoyed a few weeks of great happiness; and the very day of their departure brought upon Graeme the pain which she had almost ceased to fear. Arthur told her of his engagement to Miss Grove. His story was very short, and it was told with more shamefacedness than was at all natural for a triumphant lover. It did not matter much, however, as there was no one to take note of the circumstances. From the first shock of astonishment and pain which his announcement gave her, Graeme roused herself to hear her brother say eagerly, even a little impatiently—

"Of course, this will make no difference with us at home? You will never *think* of going away because of this, Rose and you?"

By a great effort Graeme forced herself to speak—

"Of course not, Arthur. What difference could it make? Where could we go?"

When Arthur spoke again, which he did not do for a moment, his tone showed how much he was relieved by his sister's words. It was very gentle and tender too, Graeme noticed.

"Of course not. I was quite sure this would make no change. Rather than my sisters should be made unhappy by my—by this affair—I would go no further in it. My engagement should be at an end."

"Hush, Arthur! It is too late to say that now."

"But I was quite sure you would see it in the right way. You always do, Graeme. It was not my thought that you would do otherwise. And it will only be a new sister, another Rosie to care for, and to love, Graeme. I know you will be such a sister to my wife, as you have ever been to Rose and to us all."

Graeme pressed the hand that Arthur laid on hers, but she could not speak. "If it had been any one else but that pretty, vain child," thought she. She almost fancied she had spoken her thought aloud, when Arthur said,—

"You must not be hard on her, Graeme. You do not know her yet. She is not so wise as you are, perhaps, but she is a gentle, yielding little thing; and removed from her stepmother's influence and placed under yours, she will become in time all that you could desire."

She would have given much to be able to respond heartily and cheerfully to his appeal, but she could not. Her heart refused to dictate hopeful words, and her tongue could not have uttered them. She sat silent and grave while her brother was speaking, and when he ceased she hardly knew whether she were glad or not, to perceive that, absorbed in his own thoughts, he did not seem to notice her silence or miss her sympathy.

That night Graeme's head pressed a sleepless pillow, and among her many, many thoughts there were few that were not sad. Her brother was her ideal of manly excellence and wisdom, and no exercise of charity on her part could make the bride that he had chosen seem other than weak, frivolous, vain. She shrank heartsick from the contemplation of the future, repeating rather in sorrow and wonder, than in anger, "How could he be so blind, so mad?" To her it was incomprehensible, that with his eyes open he could have placed his happiness in the keeping of one who had been brought up with no fear of God before her eyes—one whose highest wisdom did not go beyond a knowledge of the paltry fashions and fancies of the world. He might dream, of happiness now, but how sad would be the waking.

If there rose in her heart a feeling of anger or jealousy against her brother's choice, if ever there came a fear, that the love of years might come to seem of little worth beside the love of a day, it was not till afterwards. None of these mingled with the bitter sadness and compassion of that night. Her brother's doubtful future, the mistake he had made, and the disappointment that must follow, the change that might be wrought in his character as they went on; all these came and went, chasing each other through her mind, till the power of thought was well nigh lost. It was a miserable night to her, but out of the chaos of doubts and fears and anxieties, she brought one clear intent, one firm determination. She repeated it to herself as she rose from her sister's side in the dawn of the dreary autumn morning, she repeated it as part of her tearful prayer, entreating for wisdom and strength to keep the vow she vowed, that whatever changes or disappointments or sorrows might darken her brother's future, he should find her love and trust unchanged for ever.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Arthur Elliott was a young man of good intellect and superior acquirements, and he had ever been supposed to possess an average amount of penetration, and of that invaluable quality not always found in connection with superior intellect—common sense. He remembered his mother, and worshipped her memory. She had been a wise and earnest-minded woman, and one of God's saints besides. Living for years in daily intercourse with his sister Graeme, he had learnt to admire in her the qualities that made her a daughter worthy of such a mother. Yet in the choice of one who was to be "till death did them part" more than sister and mother in one, the qualities which in them were his pride and delight, were made of no account. Flesh of his flesh, the keeper of his honour and his peace henceforth, the maker or marrer of his life's happiness, be it long or short, was this pretty unformed, wayward child.

One who has made good use of long opportunity for observation, tells me that Arthur Elliott's is by no means a singular case. Quite as often as otherwise, men of high intellectual and moral qualities link their lot with women who are far inferior to them in these respects; and not always unhappily. If, as sometimes happens, a woman lets her heart slip from her into the keeping of a man who is intellectually or morally her inferior, happiness is far more rarely the result. A woman, may, with such help as comes to her by chance, keep her *solitary* way through life content. But if love and marriage, or the ties of blood, have given her an arm on which she has a right to lean, a soul on whose guidance she has a right to trust, it is sad indeed if these fail her. For then she has no right to walk alone, no power to do so happily. Her intellectual and social life must grow together, or one must grow awry. What God has joined cannot be put asunder without suffering or loss.

But it *is* possible for a man to separate his intellectual life from the quiet routine of social duties and pleasures. It is not always necessary that he should have the sympathy of his housekeeper, or even of the mother of his children, in those higher pursuits and enjoyments, which is the true life. The rising doubt, whether the beloved one have eyes to see what is beautiful to him in nature and art, may come with a chill and a pang; the certain knowledge of her blindness must come with a shock of pain. But when the shudder of the chill and the shock of the pain are over, he finds himself in the place he used to occupy before a fair face smiled down on him from all high places, or a soft voice mingled with all harmonies to his entranced ear. He grows content in time with his old solitary place in the study, or with striving upward amid manly minds. When he returns to the quiet and comfort of his well-arranged home, the face that smiles opposite to him is none the less beautiful because it beams only for home pleasures and humble household successes. The voice that coos and murmurs to his baby in the cradle, that recounts as great events the little varieties of kitchen and parlour life, that tells of visits made and received, with items of harmless gossip gathered up and kept for his hearing, is none the less dear to him now that it can discourse of nothing beyond. The tender care that surrounds him with quiet and comfort in his hours of leisure, in a little while contents him quite, and he ceases to remember that he has cares and pains, aspirations and enjoyments, into which she can have no part.

But this is a digression, and I daresay there are many who will not agree with all this. Indeed, I am not sure that I quite agree with all my friend said on this subject, myself. There are many ways of looking at the same thing, and if all were said that might be said about it, it would appear that an incapacity on the part of the wife to share, or at least to sympathise with all the hopes, pursuits, and pleasures of her husband, causes bitter pain to both; certainly, he who cannot assure himself of the sympathy of the woman he loves, when he would pass beyond the daily routine of domestic duties and pleasures, fails of obtaining the highest kind of domestic happiness.

Charlie Millar's private announcement to his friend Harry of his brother Arthur's engagement, was in these words:

"The efforts of the maternal Grove have been crowned with success. Your brother is a captive soon to be chained—"

Charlie was right. His clear eye saw, that of which Arthur himself remained in happy unconsciousness. And what Charlie saw other people saw also, though why the wise lady should let slip through her expert fingers the wealthy Mr Green, the great Western merchant, and close them so firmly on the comparatively poor and obscure young lawyer, was a circumstance that could not so easily be understood. Had the interesting fact transpired, that the great Elias had not so much slipped through her fingers, as, to use his own forcible and elegant language, "wriggled himself clear," it might have been satisfactory to the world in general. But Mr Green was far-away intent on more important matters, on the valuation and disposal of fabulous quantities of pork and wheat, and it is not to be supposed that so prudent a general as Mrs Grove would be in haste to proclaim her own defeat. She acted a wiser part; she took the best measures for covering it.

When the pretty Fanny showed an inclination to console herself for the defection of her wealthy admirer by making the most of the small attentions of the handsome young lawyer, her mamma graciously smiled approval. Fanny might do better she thought, but then she might do worse. Mr Elliott was by no means Mr Green's equal in the great essentials of wealth won, and wealth in prospect, still he was a rising man as all might see; quite presentable, with no considerable connections,—except perhaps his sisters, who could easily be disposed of. And then Fanny, though very pretty, was "a silly little thing," she said to herself with great candour. Her beauty was not of a kind to increase with years, or even to continue long. The chances were, if she did not go off at once, she would stay too long. Then there were her sisters growing up so fast, mamma's own darlings; Charlotte twelve and Victoria seven, were really quite tall and mature for their years, and at any rate, it would be a relief to have Fanny well away.

And so the unsuspecting youth enjoyed many a drive in the Grove carriage, and ate many a dinner in the Grove mansion, and roamed with the fair Fanny by daylight and by moonlight among the flowers and fruits of the Grove gardens, during the three months that his brother and sisters passed at the seaside. He made one of many a pleasant driving or riding party. There were picnics at which his presence was claimed in various places. Not the cumbrous affairs which called into requisition all the baskets, and boxes, and available conveyances of the invited guests—parties of which the aim seems to be, to collect in one favoured spot in the country, all the luxuries, and airs, and graces of the town—but little impromptu efforts in the same direction in which Mrs Grove had all the trouble, and her guests all the pleasure. Very charming little fêtes her guests generally pronounced them to be. Arthur enjoyed them vastly, and all the more that it never entered into his head, that he was in a measure the occasion of them all. He enjoyed the companionship of pleasant people, brought together in those pleasant circumstances. He enjoyed the sight of the green earth, and the blue water, the sound of the summer winds among the hills, the songs of birds amid rustling leaves and waving boughs, until he came to enjoy, at last the guardianship of the fair Fanny, generally his on those occasions; and to associate her pretty face and light laughter with his enjoyment of all those pleasant things.

Everything went on naturally and quietly. There was no open throwing them together to excite speculation in the minds of beholders, or uncomfortable misgivings in the minds of those chiefly concerned. Quite the contrary. If any watchful fairy had suggested to Arthur the possibility of such a web, as the skillful mamma was weaving around him, he would have laughed at the idea as the suggestion of a very ill-natured, evil-minded sprite indeed. Did not mamma keep watchful eyes on Fanny always? Had she not many and many a time, interrupted little confidences on the part of the young lady, at the recollection of which he was sometimes inclined to smile? Had she not at all times, and in all

places, acted the part of a prudent mamma to her pretty step-daughter, and of a considerate hostess to him, her unworthy guest?

And if the fairy, in self-justification, had ventured further to insinuate, that there is more than one kind of prudence, and that the prudence of Mrs Grove was of another and higher kind, than a simple youth could be supposed to comprehend, his enlightenment might not yet have been accomplished. If it had been averred that mamma's faith, in her daughter's tact and conversational powers was not sufficient to permit her to allow them to be too severely tried, he might have paused to recall her little airs and gestures, and to weigh the airy nothings from those pretty lips, and he could not but have acknowledged that mamma's faithlessness was not surprising. As to the ultimate success of the sprite in opening his eyes, or in breaking the invisible meshes which were meant to hold the victim fast, that is quite another matter.

But there was no fairy, good or bad, to mingle in their affairs, and they flowed smoothly on, to the content of all concerned, till Graeme came home from Cacouna, to play, in Mrs Grove's opinion, the part of a very bad fairy indeed. She was mistaken, however. Graeme took no part in the matter, either to make or to mar. Even had she been made aware of all the possibilities that might arise out of her brother's short intimacy with the Groves, she never could have regarded the matter as one in which she had a right to interfere. So, if there came a pause in the lady's operations, if Arthur was more seldom one of their party, even when special pains had been taken to secure him, it was owing to no efforts of Graeme. If he began to settle down into the old quiet home life, it was because the life suited him; and Graeme's influence was exerted and felt, only as it had ever been in a silent, sweet, sisterly fashion, with no reference to Mrs Grove, or her schemes.

But that there came a pause in the effective operations of that clever lady, soon became evident to herself. She could not conceal from herself or Miss Fanny, that the beckonings from the carriage window were not so quickly seen, or so promptly responded to as of old. Not that this defection on Arthur's part was ever discussed between them. Mrs Grove had not sufficient confidence in her daughter to admit of this. Fanny was not reliable, mamma felt. Indeed, she was very soon taking consolation in the admiration excited by a pair of shining epaulets, which began about this time to gleam with considerable frequency in their neighbourhood. But mamma did not believe in officers, at least matrimonially speaking, and as to the consolation to be derived from a new flirtation, it was but doubtful and transitory at the best. Besides she fancied that Mr Elliott's attentions had been observed, and she was quite sure that his defection would be so, too. Two failures succeeding each other so rapidly, would lay her skill open to question, and "mar dear Fanny's prospects."

And so Mrs Grove concentrated all her forces to meet the emergency. Another invitation was given, and it was accepted. In the single minute that preceded the entrance into the dining-room, the first of a series of decisive measures was carried into effect. With a voice that trembled, and eyes that glistened with grateful tears, the lady thanked her "dear friend" for the kind consideration, the manly delicacy that had induced him to withdraw himself from their society, as soon as he had become aware of the danger to her sweet, but too susceptible Fanny.

"Fanny does not dream that her secret is suspected. But oh! Mr Elliott, when was a mother at fault when the happiness of her too sensitive child was concerned?"

In vain Arthur looked the astonishment he felt. In vain he attempted to assure her in the strongest terms, that he had had no intention of withdrawing from their society—that he did not understand—that she must be mistaken. The tender mother's volubility was too much for him. He could only listen in a very embarrassed silence as she went on.

Mr Elliott was not to suppose that she blamed him for the unhappiness he had caused. She quite freed him from all intention of wrong. And after all, it might not be so bad. A mother's anxiety might exaggerate the danger; she would try and hope for the best. Change of scene must be tried; in the meantime, her fear was, that pique, or wounded pride, or disappointed affection might induce the unhappy child to—in short Mr Elliott must understand—. And Mrs Grove glanced expressively toward the wearer of the shining epaulets, with whom Arthur being unenlightened, might have fancied that the unhappy child was carrying on a pretty energetic and prosperous flirtation.

But "pique and wounded pride!" He had never in all his life experienced a moment of such intense uncomfortableness as that in which he had the honour to hand the lady of the house to her own well-appointed table. Indignation, vexation, disbelief of the whole matter spoiled his dinner effectually. Mrs Grove's exquisite soup might have been ditch-water for all he knew to the contrary. The motherly concern so freely expressed, looked to him dreadfully like something not so praiseworthy. How she could look her dear Fanny in the face, and talk, so softly on indifferent subjects, after having so—so unnecessarily, to say the least, betrayed her secret, was more than he could understand. If, indeed, Miss Fanny had a secret. He wished very much not to believe it. Secret or not, this was a very uncomfortable ending to a pleasant three months' acquaintance, and he felt very much annoyed, indeed.

Not till course after course had been removed, and the dessert had been placed on the table, did he summon resolution to withdraw his attention from the not very interesting conversation of his host, and turn his eyes to Miss Grove and the epaulets. The result of his momentary observation was the discovery that the young lady was looking very lovely, and not at all miserable. Greatly relieved, he ventured an appropriate remark or two, on the subject under discussion. He was listened to with politeness, but not with Miss Fanny's usual amiability and interest, that was evident.

By and by the gentlemen followed the ladies into the drawing-room, and here Miss Fanny was distant and dignified still. She gave brief answers to his remarks, and glanced now and then toward the epaulets, of whom Mrs Grove had taken possession, and to whom she was holding forth with great energy about something she had found in a book. Arthur approached the centre-table, but Mrs Grove was too much occupied with Captain Starr to include him in the conversation. Mr Grove was asleep in the dining-room still, and Arthur felt there was no help for him. Miss Fanny was left on his hands; and after another vain attempt at conversation, he murmured something about music, and begged to be permitted to hand her to the piano. Miss Grove consented, still with more than her usual dignity and distance,

and proposed to sing a new song that Captain Starr had sent her. She did sing it, very prettily, too. She had practised it a great deal more than was necessary, her mamma thought, within the last few days. Then she played a brilliant piece or two; then Mrs Grove, from the centre-table, proposed a sweet Scottish air, a great favourite of hers, and, as it appeared, a great favourite of Mr Elliott's, also. Then there were more Scottish airs, and French airs, and then there was a duet with Captain Starr, and mamma withdrew Mr Elliott to the centre-table, and the book, and did not in the least resent the wandering of his eyes and his attention to the piano, where the Captain's handsome head was at times in close proximity with that of the fair musician. Then, when there had been enough of music, Miss Grove returned to her embroidery, and Captain Starr held her cotton and her scissors, and talked such nonsense to her, that Arthur hearing him now and then in the pauses of the conversation, thought him a great simpleton; and firmly believed that Miss Fanny listened from "pique or wounded pride," or something else, not certainly because she liked it. Not but that she seemed to like it. She smiled and responded as if she did, and was very kind and gracious to the handsome soldier, and scarcely vouchsafed to Mr Elliott a single glance.

By and by Mr Grove came in and withdrew Mr Elliott to the discussion of the harbour question, and as Arthur knew everything that could possibly be said on that subject, he had a better opportunity still of watching the pair on the other side of the table. It was very absurd of him, he said to himself, and he repeated it with emphasis, as the young lady suddenly looking up, coloured vividly as she met his eye. It was very absurd, but, somehow, it was very interesting, too. Never, during the whole course of their acquaintance, had his mind been so much occupied with the pretty, silly little creature.

It is very likely, the plan of piers and embankments, of canals and bridges, which Miss Fanny's working implements were made to represent, extending from an imaginary Point Saint Charles, past an imaginary Griffintown, might have been worthy of being laid before the town council, or the commissioner for public works. It is quite possible that Mr Grove's explanations and illustrations of his idea of the new harbour, by means of the same, might have set at rest the doubts and fears of the over-cautious, and proved beyond all controversy, that there was but one way of deciding the matter, and of securing the prosperity of Mount Royal City, and of Canada. And if Mr Grove had that night settled the vexed question of the harbour to the satisfaction of all concerned, he would have deserved all the credit, at least his learned and talented legal adviser would have deserved none of it.

It was very absurd of him, he said again, and yet the interest grew more absorbing every moment, till at last he received a soft relenting glance as he bowed over Miss Fanny's white hand when he said good-night. He had one uncomfortable moment. It was when Mrs Grove hoped aloud that they should see him often, and then added, for his hearing alone,—

"It would look so odd, you know, to forsake us quite."

He was uncomfortable and indignant, too, when the captain, as they walked down the street together, commented in a free and easy manner on Miss Grove's "good points," and wondered "whether the old chap had tin enough to make it worth a fellow's pains to follow up the impression he seemed certain he had made." He was uncomfortable when he thought about it afterward. What if "pique, or wounded pride, or disappointed affection" should tempt the poor little girl to throw herself away on such an ass! It would be sad, indeed.

And then he wondered if Miss Grove really cared for him in that way. Surely her stepmother would not have spoken as she had done to him on a mere suspicion. As he kept on thinking about it, it began to seem more possible to him, and then more pleasant, and what with one thing, and what with another, Miss Fanny began to have a great many of his thoughts indeed. He visited Grove House a good many times—not to seem odd—and saw a good deal of Miss Fanny. Mamma was prudent still, and wise, and far-seeing, and how it came about I cannot tell, but the result of his visits, and the young lady's smiles, and the old lady's management was the engagement of these two; and the first intimation that Graeme had of it was given by Arthur on the night that Norman went away.

Time passed on. The wedding day was set, but there were many things to be brought to pass before it should arrive. Graeme had to finish the task she had set for herself on the night, when Arthur had bespoken her love and care for a new sister. She had to reconcile herself fully to the thought of the marriage, and truly the task did not seem to her easier as time went on. There were moments when she thought herself content with the state of affairs, when, at least, the coming in among them of this stranger did not seem altogether like the end of their happy life, when Miss Grove seemed a sweet and lovable little thing, and Graeme took hope for Arthur. This was generally on those occasions when they were permitted to have Fanny all to themselves, when she would come in of her own accord, in the early part of the day, dressed in her pretty morning attire, without her company manners or finery. At such times she was really very charming, and flitted about their little parlour, or sat on a footstool chattering with Rose in a way that quite won her heart, and almost reconciled the elder sister to her brother's choice.

But there were a great many chances against the pleasure lasting beyond the visit, or even to the end of it. On more than one occasion Graeme had dispatched Nelly as a messenger to Arthur, to tell him that Fanny was to lunch with them, though her magnanimity involved the necessity of her preparing the greater part of that pleasant meal with her own hands; but she was almost always sorry for it afterward. For Fanny never appeared agreeable to her in Arthur's presence; and what was worse to bear still, Arthur never appeared to advantage, in his sister's eyes, in the presence of Miss Grove. The coquettish airs, and pretty tyrannical ways assumed by the young lady toward her lover, might have excited only a little uncomfortable amusement in the minds of the sisters, to see Arthur yielding to all her whims and caprices, not as one yields in appearance, and for a time, to a pretty spoiled child, over whom one's authority is only delegated and subject to appeal, but *really* as though her whims were wisdom, and her caprices the result of mature deliberation, was more than Graeme could patiently endure. It was irritating to a degree that she could not always control or conceal. The lovers were usually too much occupied with each other to notice the discomfort of the sisters, but this indifference did not make the folly of it all less distasteful to them: and at such times Graeme used to fear that it was vain to think of ever growing content with the future before them.

And almost as disagreeable were the visits which Fanny made with her stepmother. These became a great deal more

frequent, during the last few months, than Graeme thought at all necessary. They used to call on their way to pay visits, or on their return from shopping expeditions, and the very sight of their carriage of state, and their fine array, made Graeme and Rose uncomfortable. The little airs of superiority, with which Miss Fanny sometimes favoured them, were only assumed in the presence of mamma, and were generally called forth by some allusion made by her to the future, and they were none the less disagreeable on that account. How would it be when Fanny's marriage should give her stepmother a sort of right to advise and direct in their household? At present, her delicate attempts at patronage, her hints, suggestive or corrective, were received in silence, though resented in private with sufficient energy by Rose, and sometimes even by Graeme. But it could not be so always, and she should never be able to tolerate the interference of that vain, meddling, superficial woman, she said to herself many a time.

It must be confessed that Graeme was a little unreasonable in her dread and dislike of Fanny's clever stepmother. Sometimes she was obliged to confess as much to herself. More than once, about this time, it was brought home to her conscience that she was unjust in her judgment of her, and her motives, and she was startled to discover the strength of her feelings of dislike. Many times she found herself on the point of dissenting from opinions, or opposing plans proposed by Mrs Grove, with which she might have agreed had they come from any one else. It is true her opinions and plans were not generally of a nature to commend themselves to Graeme's judgment, and there was rather apt to be more intended by them than at first met the eye and ear. As Miss Fanny said on one occasion, "One could never tell what mamma meant by what she said," and the consequence often was an uncomfortable state of expectation or doubt on the part of those who were included in any arrangement dependent on mamma. Yet, her schemes were generally quite harmless. They were not so deep as to be dangerous. The little insincerities incident to their almost daily intercourse, the small deceits made use of in shopping, marketing, making visits, or sending invitations, were no such mighty matters as to jeopardise the happiness, or even the comfort of any one with eyes keen enough to detect, and with skill and will to circumvent them. So Graeme said to herself many a time, and yet, saying it she could not help suffering herself to be made uncomfortable still.

The respect and admiration which Mrs Grove professed for Miss Elliott might have failed to propitiate her, even had she given her credit for sincerity. They were too freely expressed to be agreeable under any circumstances. Her joy that the Elliotts were still to form one household, that her dear thoughtless Fanny was to have the benefit of the elder sister's longer experience and superior wisdom, was great, and her surprise was great also, and so was her admiration. It was so dear in Miss Elliott to consent to it. Another person might have resented the necessity of having to take the second place, where she had so long occupied the first in her brother's house. And then to be superseded by one so much younger than herself, one so much less wise, as all must acknowledge her dear Fanny to be, was not, could not, be pleasant. Miss Elliott must be a person possessing extraordinary qualities, indeed. How could she ever be grateful enough that her wayward child was to have the advantage of a guardianship so gentle and so judicious as hers was sure to be! She only hoped that Fanny might appreciate the privilege, and manifest a proper and amiable submission in the new circumstances in which she was to be placed.

Graeme might well be uncomfortable under all this, knowing as she did, that mamma's private admonitions to her "wayward daughter" tended rather to the encouragement of a "judicious resistance" than of "a proper and amiable submission" to the anticipated rule. But as a necessary abdication of all household power made no part of Graeme's trouble, except as she might sometimes doubt the chances of a prosperous administration for her successor, she was able to restrain all outward evidence of discomfort and indignation. She was the better able to do this, as she saw that the clever lady's declaration of her sentiments on this subject, made Arthur a little uncomfortable too. He had a vague idea that the plan as to their all continuing to live together, had not at first been so delightful to Mrs Grove. He had a remembrance that the doubts as to how his sisters might like the idea of his intended marriage, had been suggested by her, and that these doubts had been coupled with hints as to the proper means to be taken in order that the happiness of her dear daughter might be secured, he remembered very well; and that she had expected and desired no assistance from his sisters to this end, he was very well assured.

"However, it is all right now," said Arthur, congratulating himself. "Graeme has too much sense to be put about by mamma's twaddle, and there is no fear as far as Fanny and she are concerned."

The extent to which "mamma's twaddle" and other matters "put Graeme about" at this time she concealed quite, as far as Arthur was concerned. The best was to be made of things now; and though she could not help wishing that his eyes might be more useful to him on some occasions, she knew that it would not have mended matters could he have been induced to make use of her clearer vision, and so her doubts and fears were kept to herself, and they did not grow fewer or less painful as time went on.

But her feelings changed somewhat. She did not cease to grieve in secret over what she could not but call Arthur's mistake in the choice he had made. But now, sometimes anger, and sometimes a little bitter amusement mingled with her sorrow. There seemed at times something ludicrous in bestowing her pity on one so content with the lot he had chosen. She was quite sure that Arthur would have smiled at the little follies and inconsistencies of Miss Grove, had he seen them in any one else. She remembered that at their first acquaintance he had smiled at them in her. *Now* how blind he was! All her little defects of character, so painfully apparent to his sisters were quite invisible to him. She was very amiable and charming in his eyes. There were times when one might have supposed that he looked upon her as the wisest and most sensible of women; and he began to listen to her small views and assent to her small opinions, in a way, and to an extent that would have been amusing if it had not been painful and irritating to those looking on.

Graeme tried to believe that she was glad of all this—that it was better so. If it was so that these two were to pass their lives together, it was well that they should be blind to each other's faults. Somehow married people seemed to get on together, even when their tastes, and talents, and tempers differed. If they loved one another that was enough, she supposed; there must be something about it that she did not understand. At any rate, there was no use vexing herself about Arthur now. If he was content, why should not she be so? Her brother's happiness might be safer than she feared, but whether or not, nothing could be changed now.

But as her fears for her brother were put from her, the thought of what the future might bring to Rose and her, came oftener, and with a sadder doubt. She called herself foolish and faithless—selfish even, and scolded herself vigorously many a time; but she could not drive away her fears, or make herself cheerful or hopeful in looking forward. When Arthur should come quite to see with Fanny's eyes, and hear with her ears, and rely upon her judgment, would they all live as happily together as they had hitherto done? Fanny, kept to themselves, she thought she would not fear, but influenced by her stepmother, whose principles and practice were so different from all they had been taught to consider right, how might their lives be changed!

And so the wedding-day was drawing nigh. As a part of her marriage-portion, Mr Grove was to present to his daughter one of the handsome new houses in the neighbourhood of Columbus Square, and there the young lady's married-life was to commence. The house was quite a little fortune in itself, Mrs Grove said, and she could neither understand nor approve of the manner in which her triumphant announcement of its destination was received by the Elliots. It is just possible that Arthur's intimate knowledge of the state of his future father-in-law's affairs, might have had something to do with his gravity on the occasion. The troubles in the mercantile world, that had not left untouched the long-established house of Elphinstone & Company, had been felt more seriously still by Mr Grove, and a doubt as to whether he could, with justice to all concerned, withdraw so large an amount from his business, in order to invest it for his daughter's benefit, could not but suggest itself to Arthur. He was not mercenary; it would not be true to say he had not felt a certain degree of satisfaction in knowing that his bride would not be altogether undowered. But the state of Mr Grove's affairs, was, to say the least, not such as to warrant a present withdrawal of capital from his business, and Arthur might well look grave.

Not that he troubled himself about it, however. He had never felt so greatly elated at the prospect of marrying an heiress, as to feel much disappointed when the prospect became doubtful. He knew that Miss Grove had a right to something which she had inherited from her mother, but he said to himself that her right should be set aside, rather than that there should be any defilement of hands in the transfer. So, if to Mrs Grove's surprise and disgust, he remained silent when she made known the munificent intentions of Fanny's father, it was not for a reason that he chose to discuss with her. His remarks were reserved for Mr Grove's private ear, and to him they were made with sufficient plainness.

As for Graeme, she could not but see that their anticipated change of residence might help to make certainties of all her doubts and fears for their future. If she had dreaded changes in their manner of life before, how much more were they to be dreaded now? They might have fallen back, after a time, into their old, quiet routine, when Fanny had quite become one of them, had they been to remain still in the home where they had all been so happy together. But there seemed little hope of anything so pleasant as that now, for Fanny's handsome house was in quite a fashionable neighbourhood, away from their old friends, and that would make a sad difference in many ways, she thought; and all this added much to her misgivings for the future.

"Fanny's house!" could it ever seem like home to them? Her thoughts flew back to Janet and Merleville, and for a little, notwithstanding all the pain she knew the thought would give her brother, it seemed possible—nay best and wisest, for her and Rose to go away.

"However, we must wait a while; we must have patience. Things may adjust themselves in a way that I cannot see just now."

In the lesson, which with tears and prayers and a good-will Graeme had set herself to learn, she had got no farther than this, "We must wait—we must have patience." And she had more cause to be content with the progress she had made than she thought; for, amid all the cures for the ills of life, which wisdom remembers, and which folly forgets, what better, what more effectual than "patient waiting?"

Chapter Twenty Nine.

"Are you quite sure that you are glad, Graeme."

"I am very glad, Will. Why should you doubt it? You know I have not so heartsome a way of showing my delight as Rosie has."

"No. I don't know any such thing. I can't be quite glad myself, till I am sure that you are glad, too."

"Well, you may be quite sure, Will. It is only my old perverse way of looking first at the dark side of things, and this matter has a dark side. It will seem less like home than ever when you are gone, Will."

"Less like home than ever!" repeated Will. "Why, Graeme, that sounds as if you were not quite contented with the state of affairs."

"Does it?" said Graeme, laughing, but not pleasantly.

"But, Graeme, everything has turned out better than we expected. Fanny is very nice, and—"

"Yes, indeed," said Graeme, heartily. "Everything has turned out much better than we used to fear. I remember the time when I was quite afraid of Fanny and her fine house—my old perversity, you see."

"I remember," said Will, gravely.

"I was quite morbid on the subject, at one time. Mamma Grove was a perfect night-mare to me. And really, she is well! she is not a very formidable person, after all."

"Well, on the whole, I think we could dispense with mamma Grove," said Will, with a shrug.

"Oh! that is because she is down upon you in the matter of Master Tom. You will have to take him, Will."

"Of course. But then, I would do a great deal more than that for Fanny's brother, without all this talk."

"But then, without 'all this talk,' as you call it, you might not have discovered that the favour is done you, nor that the letter to her English friend will more than compensate you, for going fifty miles out of your way for the boy."

"Oh! well, it is her way, and a very stupid way. Let her rest."

"Yes, let her rest. And, Will, you are not to think I am not glad that you are going home. I would choose no other lot for you, than the one that is before you, an opportunity to prepare yourself for usefulness, and a wide field to labour in. Only I am afraid I would stipulate that the field should be a Canadian one."

"Of course. Canada is my home."

"Or Merleville. Deacon Snow seems to think you are to be called to that field, when you are ready to be called."

"But that is a long day hence. Perhaps, the deacon may change his mind, when he hears that I am going home to learn from the 'British.'"

"There is no fear. Sandy has completed the work which my father and Janet began. Mr Snow is tolerant of the North British, at any rate. What a pleasant life our Merleville life was. It seems strange that none of us, but Norman, has been back there. It won't belong now, however."

"I am afraid I cannot wait for Emily's wedding. But I shall certainly go and see them all, before I go to Scotland."

"If you do, I shall go with you, and spend the summer there."

"And leave Rose here?" said Will, in some surprise.

"No. I wish to go for Rose's sake, as much as for my own. It seems as though going to Merleville and Janet, would put us all right again."

"I hope you may both be put right, without going so far," said Will.

"Do you know, Will, I sometimes wonder whether I can be the same person who came here with Rose and you? Circumstances do change people, whether they will or not. I think I should come back to my old self again, with Janet to take me to task, in her old sharp, loving way."

"I don't think I understand you, Graeme."

"Don't you? Well, that is evidence that I have changed; and that I have not improved. But I am not sure that I understand myself."

"What is wrong with you, Graeme?"

"I cannot tell you, Will. I don't know whether the wrong is with me, or with matters and things in general. But there is no good in vexing you, unless you could tell me how to help it."

"If I knew what is wrong I might try," said Will, gravely.

"Then, tell me, what possible good I shall be able to do in the world, when I shall no longer have you to care for?"

"If you do no good, you will fall far short of your duty."

"I know it, Will. But useless as my way of life is, I cannot change it. Next year must be like this one, and except nursing you in your illness, and Fanny in hers, I have done nothing worth naming as work."

"That same nursing was not a little. And do you call the housekeeping nothing? It is all very well, Fanny's jingling her keys, and playing lady of the house, but we all know who has the care and trouble. If last year has nothing to show for work, I think you may make the same complaint of all the years that went before. It is not that you are getting weary of the 'woman's work, that is never done,' is it, dear?"

"No, Will. I hope not. I think not. But this last year has been very different from all former years. I used to have something definite to do, something that no one else could do as well. I cannot explain it. You would laugh at the trifles that make the difference."

"I see one difference," said Will. "You have the trouble, and Fanny has the credit."

"No, Will. Don't say that I don't think that troubles me. It ought not; but it is not good for Fanny, to allow her to suppose she has the responsibility and care, when she has not really. And it is not fair to her. When the time comes that she must have them, she will feel the trouble all the more for her present delusion. And she is learning nothing. She is utterly careless about details, and complicates matters when she thinks she is doing most, though, I must say, Nelly is very tolerant of the 'whims' of her young mistress, and makes the best of everything. But Will, all this must sound to you like finding fault with Fanny, and indeed, I don't wish to do anything so disagreeable."

"I am sure you do not, Graeme. I think I can understand your troubles, but I am afraid I cannot tell you how to help

them.”

“No, Will. The kind of life we are living is not good for any of us. What I want for myself is some kind of real work to do. And I want it for Rose.”

“But, Graeme, you would never surely think of going away,—I mean, to stay always?”

“Why not? We are not needed here, Rose and I. No, Will, I don’t think it is that I am growing tired of ‘woman’s work.’ It was very simple, humble work I used to do, trifles, odds and ends of the work of life; stitching and mending, sweeping and dusting, singing and playing, reading and talking, each a trifling matter, taken by itself. But of such trifles is made up the life’s work of thousands of women, far wiser and better than I am; and I was content with it. It helped to make a happy home, and that was much.”

“You have forgotten something in your list of trifles, Graeme,—your love and care for us all.”

“No, Will. These are implied. It is the love and care that made all these trifles really ‘woman’s work.’ A poor dreary work it would be without these.”

“And, Graeme, is there nothing still, to sanctify your daily labour, and make it work indeed?” said Will.

“There is, indeed, Will. If I were only sure that it is my work. But, I am not sure. And it seems as though—somewhere in the world, there must be something better worth the name of work, for me to do.” And letting her hands fall in her lap, she looked away over the numberless roofs of the city, to the grey line of the river beyond.

“Oh! Will,” she went on in a little, “you do not know. You who have your life’s work laid out before you, can never understand how it is with me. You know the work before you is your work—given you by God himself. You need have no misgivings, you can make no mistake. And look at the difference. Think of all the years I may have to spend, doing the forgotten ends of another’s duty, filling up the time with trifles, visits, frivolous talk, or fancy work, or other things which do good to no one. And all the time not knowing whether I ought to stay in the old round, or break away from it all—never sure but that elsewhere, I might find wholesome work for God and man.”

Very seldom did Graeme allow herself to put her troubled thoughts into words, and she rose now and went about the room, as if she wished to put an end to their talk. But Will said,—

“Even if it were true and real, all you say, it may not be for long. Some day, you don’t know how soon, you may have legitimate ‘woman’s work’ to do,—love, and sympathy, and care, and all the rest, without encroaching on Fanny’s domain.”

He began gravely, but blushed and stammered; and glanced with laughing deprecation at his sister, as he ended. She did not laugh.

“I have thought of that, too. It seems so natural and proper, and in the common course of things, that a woman should marry. And there have been times, during this last year, when, just to get away from it all, I have thought that any change would be for the better. But it would not be right, unless—” she hesitated.

“No, unless it was the right person, and all that, but may we not reasonably hope that the right person may come?”

“We won’t talk about it, Will. There must be some other way than that. Many women find an appropriate work to do without marrying. I wish I could do as the Merleville girls used to do, spin and weave, or keep a school.”

“But they don’t spin and weave now, since the factories have been built. And as for school-keeping—”

“It would be work, good wholesome work, in which, with God’s help, I might try to do as our father and mother did, and leave the world better for my labour.”

“But you could not part from Rose, and Arthur could never be made to see it right that you should go away,” said Will.

“Rose should go with me. And Arthur would not like it at first, nor Fanny, but they would reconcile themselves to it in time. And as to the school, that is only one kind of work, though there are few kinds left for a woman to do, the more’s the pity.”

“There is work enough of the best kind. It is the remuneration that is scant. And the remuneration could not be made a secondary consideration; if you left home.”

“In one sense, it ought to be secondary. But I think it must be delightful to feel that one is ‘making one’s living,’ as Mr Snow would say. I *should* like to know how it feels to be quite independent, Will, I must confess.”

“But Graeme, there is no need; and it would make Arthur quite unhappy, if he were to hear you speak in that way. Even to me, it sounds a little like pride, or discontent.”

“Does it, Will. That is dreadful. It is quite possible that these evil elements enter into my vexed thoughts. We won’t speak any more about it, Will.”

“But, why should we not speak about it? You may be quite right. At any rate, you are not likely to set yourself right, by keeping your vexed thoughts to yourself.”

But, if Graeme had been ever so willing, there was no more time just now. There was a knock at the door, and Sarah,

the housemaid, presented herself.

"If you please, Miss Graeme, do you think I might go out as usual. It is Wednesday, you know."

Wednesday was the night of the weekly lecture, in Sarah's kirk. She was a good little girl, and a worshipper in a small way of a popular young preacher of the day.

"If Nelly thinks she can manage without you," said Graeme.

"It was Nelly proposed it. She can do very well, unless Mrs Elliott brings home some one with her, which is unlikely so late."

"Well, go then, and don't be late. And be sure you come home with the Shaws' Sarah," said Miss Elliott.

"They are late," said Will. "I am afraid I cannot wait for dinner. I promised to be with Doctor D at seven."

They went down-stairs together. Nelly remonstrated, with great earnestness against Will's "putting himself off with bread and cheese, instead of dinner."

"Though you need care the less about it, that the dinner's spoiled already. The fowls werena much to begin with. It needs sense and discretion to market, as well as to do most things, and folk that winna come home at the right hour, must content themselves with things overdone, or else in the dead thraw."

"I am very sorry Will should lose his dinner," said Graeme; "but they cannot be long in coming now."

"There's no saying. They may meet in with folk that may keep them to suit their ain convenience. It has happened before."

More than once, when Fanny had been out with her mother, they had gone for Arthur and dined at Grove house, without giving due notice at home, and the rest, after long waiting, had eaten their dinner out of season. To have a success in her department rendered vain by careless or culpable delay, was a trial to Nelly at any time. And if Mrs Grove had anything to do with causing it, the trial was all the greater.

For Nelly—to use her own words—had no patience with that "meddlesome person." Any interference on her part in household matters, was considered by her a reflection on the housekeeping of her young ladies before Mrs Arthur came among them, and was resented accordingly. All hints, suggestions, recipes, or even direct instructions from her, were utterly ignored by Nelly, when it could be done without positive disobedience to Miss Graeme or Mrs Elliott. If direct orders made it necessary for her to do violence to her feelings to the extent of availing herself of Mrs Grove's experience, it was done under protest, or with an open incredulousness as to results, at the same time irritating and amusing.

She had no reason to suppose that Mrs Grove had anything to do with her vexation to-night, but she chose to assume it to be so, and following Graeme into the dining-room, where Will sat contentedly eating his bread and cheese, she said,—

"As there is no counting on the time of their home-coming, with other folks' convenience to consult, you had best let me bring up the dinner, Miss Graeme."

"We will wait a few minutes longer. There is no haste," said Graeme, quietly.

Graeme sat a long time looking out of the window before they came—so long that Nelly came up-stairs again intending to expostulate still, but she did not; she went down again, quietly, muttering to herself as she went,—

"I'll no vex her. She has her ain troubles, I daresay, with her young brother going away, and many another thing that I ken nothing about. It would ill set me to add to her vexations. She is not at peace with herself, that's easy to be seen."

Chapter Thirty.

Graeme was not at peace with herself and had not been so for a long time, and to-night she was angry with herself for having spoiled Will's pleasure, by letting him see that she was ill at ease.

"For there is no good vexing him. He cannot even advise me; and, indeed, I am afraid I have not the courage really to go away."

But she continued to vex herself more than was wise, as she sat there waiting for the rest in the gathering darkness.

They came at last, but not at all as they ought to have come, with the air of culprits, but chatting and laughing merrily, and quite at their leisure, accompanied—to Nelly's indignant satisfaction—by Mrs Grove. Graeme could hardly restrain an exclamation of amusement as she hastened toward the door. Rose came first, and her sister's question as to their delay was stopped by a look at her radiant face.

"Graeme, I have something to tell you. What is the most delightful, and almost the most unlikely thing that could happen to us?"

Graeme shook her head.

"I should have to consider a while first—I am not good at guessing. But won't it keep? Nelly is out of all patience."

But Rose was too excited to heed her.

"No; it won't keep. Guess who is coming—Janet!"

Graeme uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"Arthur got a letter from Mr Snow to-day. Read it."

Graeme read, Rose looking over her shoulder.

"I am very glad. But, Rosie, you must make haste. Fanny will be down in a minute, and Nelly is impatient."

"No wonder! But I must tell her about Mrs Snow."

And with her bonnet in her hand, she went dancing down the kitchen stairs. Nelly would have been in an implacable humour, indeed, if the sight of her bright face had not softened her. Regardless of the risk to muslins and ribbons, she sprang at once into the midst of the delayed preparations.

"Nelly! Who do you think is coming? You will never guess. I may as well tell you. Mrs Snow!"

"Eh, me! That's news, indeed. Take care of the gravy, Miss Rose, dear. And when is she coming?"

There was not the faintest echo of rebuke in Nelly's tone. There was no possibility of refusing to be thus included in the family joy, even in the presence of overdone fowls and ruined vegetables. Besides, she had the greatest respect for the oldest friend of the family, and a great desire to see her. She looked upon her as a wonderful person, and aspired in a humble way to imitate her virtues, so she set the gravy-dish on the table to hear more.

"And when will she be coming?" she asked.

"Some time in June. And, Nelly, such preparations as we shall have! But it is a shame, we kept dinner waiting. We could not help it, indeed."

"You dinna need to tell me that. I heard who came with you. Carry you up the plates, and the dinner will be up directly."

"And so your old nurse is coming?" said Mrs Grove, after they had been some time at the table. "How delightful! You look quite excited, Rose. She is a very nice person, I believe, Miss Elliott." Graeme smiled. Mrs Grove's generally descriptive term hardly indicated the manifold virtues of their friend; but, before she could say so, Mrs Grove continued.

"We must think of some way of doing her honour. We must get up a little *fête*—a pic-nic or something. Will she stay here or at Mr Birnie's. She is a friend of his, I suppose, as Rose stopped him in the street to tell him she is coming. It is rather awkward having such people staying in the house. They are apt to fancy, you know; and really, one cannot devote all one's time—"

Rose sent her a glance of indignation; Graeme only smiled. Arthur had not heard her last remark, so he answered the first.

"I doubt such things would hardly be in Mrs Snow's way. Mrs Grove could hardly make a lion of our Janet, I fancy, Graeme."

"I fancy not," said Graeme, quietly.

"Oh! I assure you, I shall be willing to take any trouble. I truly appreciate humble worth. We so seldom find among the lower classes anything like the faithfulness, and the gratitude manifested by this person to your family. You must tell me all about her some day, Rose."

Rose was regarding her with eyes out of which all indignation had passed, to make room for astonishment. Mrs Grove went on.

"Didn't she leave her husband, or something, to come with you? Certainly a lifetime of such devotion should be rewarded—"

"By a pic-nic," said Rose, as Mrs Grove hesitated.

"Rose, don't be satirical," said Arthur, trying not to laugh.

"I am sure you must be delighted, Fanny—Arthur's old nurse you know. It need not prevent you going to the seaside, however. It is not you she comes to see."

"I am not so sure of that," said Arthur, smiling across the table to his pretty wife. "I fancy Fanny has as much to do with the visit as any of us. She will have to be on her good behaviour, and to look her prettiest, I can assure her."

"And Janet was not Arthur's nurse," said Rose. "Graeme was baby when she came first."

"And I fancy nursing was but a small part of Janet's work in those days," said Arthur. "She was nurse, and cook, and housemaid, all in one. Eh, Graeme?"

"Ay, and more than that—more than could be told in words," said Graeme, with glistening eyes.

"And I am sure you will like her," said Rose, looking straight into Mrs Grove's face. "Her husband is very rich. I think he must be almost the richest man in Merleville."

Arthur did not reprove Rose this time, though she well deserved it. She read her reproof in Graeme's look, and blushed and hung her head. She did not look very much abashed, however. She knew Arthur was enjoying the home thrust; but the subject was pursued no farther.

"Do you know, Fanny," said Mrs Grove, in a little, "I saw Mrs Tilman this morning, and a very superior person she turns out to be. She has seen better days. It is sad to see a lady—for she seems to have been quite a lady—so reduced."

"And who is Mrs Tilman?" asked Arthur.

Fanny looked annoyed, but her mamma went on.

"She is a person Mrs Gridley was speaking to Fanny about—a very worthy person indeed."

"She was speaking to you, you mean, mamma," said Fanny.

"Was it to me? Well, it is all the same. She is a widow. She lived in Q— a while and then came here, and was a housekeeper in Haughton Place. I don't know why she left. Some one married, I think. Since then she has been a sick nurse, but it didn't agree with her, and lately she has been a cook in a small hotel."

"She seems to have experienced vicissitudes," said Arthur, for the sake of saying something.

"Has she not? And a very worthy person she is, I understand, and an admirable cook. She markets, too—or she did at Haughton House—and that is such a relief. She must be an invaluable servant."

"I should think so, indeed," said Arthur, as nobody else seemed inclined to say anything.

Graeme and Rose were speaking about Janet and her expected visit, and Fanny sat silent and embarrassed. But Nelly, busy in taking away the things, lost nothing of what was said; and Mrs Grove, strange to say, was not altogether inattentive to the changing face of the energetic table maid. An uncomplimentary remark had escaped the lady, as to the state of the overdone fowls, and Nelly "could put this and that together as well as another." The operation of removing the things could not be indefinitely prolonged, however, and as Nelly shut the door Mrs Grove said,—

"She is out of place now, Fanny, and would just suit you. But you must be prompt if you wish to engage her."

"Oh! there is no hurry about it, I suppose," said Fanny, glancing uneasily at Graeme. But Graeme took no notice. Mrs Grove was rather in the habit of discussing domestic affairs at the table, and of leaving Graeme out of the conversation. She was very willing to be left out. Besides, she never thought of influencing Fanny in the presence of her stepmother.

"Oh! but I assure you there is," said Mrs Grove. "There are several ladies wishing to have her. Mrs Ruthven, among the rest."

"Oh! it is such a trouble changing," said Fanny, wearily, as if she had had a trying experience and spoke advisedly.

"Not at all. It is only changing for the worse that is so troublesome," said Mrs Grove, and she had a right to know. "I advise you not to let this opportunity pass."

"But, after all, Nelly does very well. She is stupid sometimes and cross, but they are all that, more or less, I suppose," said Fanny.

"You are quite right, Fanny," said Arthur, who saw that his wife was annoyed without very well knowing why. "I daresay Nelly is a better servant—notwithstanding the unfortunate chickens of to-day, which was our own fault, you know—than the decayed gentlewoman. She will be a second Janet, yet—an institution, an established fact in the history of the family. We couldn't do without Nelly. Eh, Graeme?"

Graeme smiled, and said nothing. Rose answered for her.

"No, indeed I am so glad Nelly will see Mrs Snow."

"Very well," said Mrs Grove. "Since Miss Elliott seems to be satisfied with Nelly, I suppose she must stay. It is a pity you had not known sooner, Fanny, so as to save me the trouble of making an appointment for her. But she may as well come, and you can see her at any rate."

Her carriage being at the door, she went away, and a rather awkward silence followed her departure.

"What is it all about! Who is Mrs Tilman?" asked Arthur.

"Some one Mrs Grove has seen," said Graeme, evasively.

"But what about Nelly? Surely you are not thinking of changing servants, Graeme?"

"Oh! I hope not; but Nelly has been out of sorts lately—grumbled a little—"

“Out of sorts, grumbled!” exclaimed Fanny, vexed that Mrs Grove had introduced the subject, and more vexed still that Arthur should have addressed his question to Graeme. “She has been very disagreeable, indeed, not to say impertinent, and I shall not bear it any longer.”

Poor little Fanny could hardly keep back her tears.

“Impertinent to you, Fanny,” cried Graeme and Arthur in a breath.

“Well, to mamma—and she is not very respectful to me, sometimes, and mamma says Nelly has been long enough here. Servants always take liberties after a time; and, besides, she looks upon Graeme as mistress rather than me. She quite treats me like a child,” continued Fanny, her indignation increasing as she proceeded.

“And, besides,” she added, after there had been a moment’s uncomfortable silence, “Nelly wishes to go.”

“Is Barkis willing at last?” said Arthur, trying to laugh off the discomfort of the moment.

Rose laughed too. It had afforded them all much amusement to watch the slow courtship of the dignified Mr Stirling. Nelly always denied that there was anything more in the gardener’s attentions, than just the good-will and friendliness of a countryman, and he certainly was a long time in coming to the point they all acknowledged.

“Nonsense, Arthur! That has nothing to do with it,” said Fanny.

“Then, she must be going to her sister—the lady with a fabulous number of cows and children. She has spoken about that every summer, more or less. Her conscience pricks her, every new baby she hears of. But she will get over it. It is all nonsense about her leaving.”

“But it is not nonsense,” said Fanny, sharply. “Of course Graeme will not like her to go, but Nelly is very obstinate and disagreeable, and mamma says I shall never be mistress in my own house while she stays. And I think we ought to take a good servant when we have the chance.”

“But how good a servant is she?” asked Arthur.

“Didn’t you hear what mamma said about her? And, of course, she has references and written characters, and all that sort of thing.”

“Well, I think we may as well ‘sleep upon it,’ as Janet used to say. There will be time enough to decide after to-night,” said Arthur, taking up his newspaper, more annoyed than he was willing to confess.

The rest sat silent. Rose was indignant, and it needed a warning glance, from Graeme to keep her indignation from overflowing. Graeme was indignant, but not surprised. Indeed, Nelly had given warning that she was to leave; but she hoped and believed that she would think better of it, and said nothing.

She was not indignant with Fanny, but with her mother. She felt that there was some truth in Fanny’s declaration, that Nelly looked upon her as a child. She had Nelly’s own word for that. She considered her young mistress a child to be humoured and “no’ heeded” when any serious business was going on. But Fanny would not have found this out if left to herself, at least she would not have resented it.

The easiest and most natural thing for Graeme, in the turn affairs had taken, would be to withdraw from all interference, and let things take their course; but just because this would be easiest and most agreeable, she hesitated. She felt that it would not be right to stand aside and let Fanny punish herself and all the rest because of the meddlesome folly of Mrs Grove. Besides, it would be so ungrateful to Nelly, who had served them so faithfully all those years. And yet, as she looked at Fanny’s pouting lips and frowning brow, her doubts as to the propriety of interference grew stronger, and she could only say to herself, with a sigh,—

“We must have patience and wait.”

And the matter was settled without her interference, though not to her satisfaction. Before a week, Nelly was on her way to the country to make acquaintance of her sister’s cows and children, and the estimable Mrs Tilman was installed in her place. It was an uncomfortable time for all. Rose was indignant, and took no pains to hide it. Graeme was annoyed and sorry, and, all the more, as Nelly did not see fit to confine the stiffness and coldness of her leave-takings to Mrs Elliott as she ought to have done. If half as earnestly and frankly as she expressed her sorrow for her departure, Graeme had expressed her vexation at its cause, Nelly would have been content. But Graeme would not compromise Fanny, and she would not condescend to recognise the meddlesomeness of Mrs Grove in their affairs. And yet she could not bear that Nelly should go away, after five years of loving service, with such angry gloom in her kind eyes.

“Will you stay with your sister, Nelly, do you think? or will you come back to town and take another place? There are many of our friends who would be very glad to get you.”

“I’m no’ sure, Miss Elliott. I have grown so fractious and contrary lately that maybe my sister winna care to have me. And as to another place—”

Nelly stopped suddenly. If she had said her say, it would have been that she could bear the thought of no other place. But she said nothing, and went away—ran away, indeed. For when she saw the sorrowful tears in Graeme’s eyes, and felt the warm pressure of her hand, she felt she must run or break out into tears; and so she ran, never stopping to answer when Graeme said:

“You’ll let us hear from you, Nelly. You’ll surely let us hear from you soon?”

There was very little said about the new order of affairs. The remonstrance which Fanny expected from Graeme never came. Mrs Grove continued to discuss domestic affairs, and to leave Graeme out, and she was quite willing to be left out, and, after a little, things moved on smoothly. Mrs Tilman was a very respectable-looking person. A little stout, a little red in the face, perhaps. Indeed, very stout and very red in the face; so stout that Arthur suggested the propriety of having the kitchen staircase widened for her benefit; and so red in the face as to induce Graeme to keep her eyes on the keys of the sideboard when Fanny, as she was rather apt to do, left them lying about. She was a very good servant, if one might judge after a week's trial; and Fanny might have triumphed openly if it had not been that she felt a little uncomfortable in finding herself, without a struggle, sole ruler in their domestic world. Mrs Tilman marketed, and purchased the groceries, and that in so dignified a manner that Fanny almost wondered whether the looking over the grocer's book and the butcher's book might not be considered an impertinent interference on her part. Her remarks and allusions were of so dignified a character as to impress her young mistress wonderfully. She was almost ashamed of their limited establishment, in view of Mrs Tilman's magnificent experiences. But the dignified cook, or housekeeper, as she preferred being called, had profited by the afflictive dispensations that seemed to have fallen upon her, and resigned herself to the occupancy of her present humble sphere in a most exemplary manner.

To be sure, her marketing and her shopping, interfered a little with her less conspicuous duties, and a good deal more than her legitimate share of work was left to Sarah. But fortunately for her and the household generally, Graeme was as ready as ever to do the odds-and-ends of other people's duties, and to remember things forgotten, so that the domestic machinery moved on with wonderful smoothness. Not that Nelly's departure was no longer regretted; but in her heart Graeme believed that they would soon have her in her place again, and she was determined that, in the meantime, all should be pleasant and peaceful in their family life.

For Graeme had set her heart on two things. First, that there should be no drawback to the pleasure of Mrs Snow's visit; and second, that Mrs Snow should admire and love Arthur's wife. She had had serious doubts enough herself as to the wisdom of her brother's choice, but she tried to think herself quite contented with it now. At any rate, she could not bear to think that Janet should not be quite content. Not that she was very much afraid. For Graeme's feelings toward Fanny had changed very much since she had been one of them. She was not very wise or sensible, but she was very sweet-tempered and affectionate, and Graeme had come to love her dearly, especially since the very severe illness from which Fanny was not long recovered. Her faults, at least many of them, were those of education, which she would outlive, Graeme hoped, and any little disagreeable display which it had been their misfortune to witness during the year could, directly or indirectly, be traced to the influence or meddlesomeness of her stepmother, and so it could easily be overlooked. This influence would grow weaker in time, and Fanny would improve in consequence. The vanity, and the carelessness of the feelings of others, which were, to Graeme, her worst faults, were faults that would pass away with time and experience, she hoped. Indeed, they were not half so apparent as they used to be, and whether the change was in Fanny or herself she did not stop to inquire.

But she was determined that her new sister should appear to the best advantage in the eyes of their dear old friend, and to this end the domestic sky must be kept clear of clouds. So Mrs Tilman's administration commenced under the most favourable circumstances, and the surprise which all felt at the quietness with which this great domestic revolution had been brought about was beginning to give place, on Fanny's part, to a little triumphant self-congratulation which Rose was inclined to resent. Graeme did not resent it, and Rose was ready to forgive Fanny's triumph, since Fanny was so ready to share her delight at the thought of Mrs Snow's visit. As for Will, he saw nothing in the whole circle of events to disturb anybody's equanimity or to regret, except, perhaps, that the attraction of the McIntyre children and cows had proved irresistible to Nelly at last. And Arthur congratulated himself on the good sense and good management of his little wife, firmly believing in the wisdom of the deluded little creature, never doubting that her skill and will were equal to the triumphant encounter with any possible domestic emergency.

Chapter Thirty One.

They came at last. Arthur and Will met them on the other side of the river, and Graeme and Rose would fain have done the same, but because of falling rain, and because of other reasons, it was thought not best for them to go.

It was a very quiet meeting—a little restrained and tearful just at first; but that wore away, and Janet's eyes rested on the bairns from whom she had been so long separated with love and wonder and earnest scrutiny. They had all changed, she said. Arthur was like his father; Will was like both father and mother. As for Rosie—

"Miss Graeme, my dear," said Mrs Snow, "I think Rosie is nearly as bonny as her sister Marian," and her eye rested on the girl's blushing face with a tender admiration that was quite as much for the dead as for the living. Graeme had changed least of all, she said; and yet in a little she found herself wondering whether, after all, Graeme had not changed more than any of them.

As for Fanny she found herself in danger of being overlooked in the general joy and excitement, and went about jingling her keys, and rather ostentatiously hastening the preparations for the refreshment of the travellers. She need not have been afraid. Her time was coming. Even now she encountered an odd glance or two from Mr Snow, who was walking off his excitement in the hall. That there was admiration mingled with the curiosity they expressed was evident, and Fanny relented. What might soon have become a pout on her pretty lip changed to a smile. They were soon on very friendly terms with each other, and before Janet had got through with her first tremulous recognition of her bairns, Mr Snow fancied he had made a just estimate of the qualities—good—and not so good—of the pretty little housekeeper.

After dinner all were more at their ease. Mr Snow walked up and down the gallery, past the open window, and Arthur sat there beside him. They were not so far withdrawn from the rest but that they could join in the conversation that went on within. Fanny, tired of the dignity of housekeeping, brought a footstool and sat down beside Graeme; and Janet, seeing how naturally and lovingly the hand of the elder sister rested on the pretty bowed head, gave the little

lady more of her attention than she had hitherto done, and grew rather silent in the scrutiny. Graeme grew silent too. Indeed she had been rather silent all the afternoon; partly because it pleased her best to listen, and partly because she was not always sure of her voice when she tried to speak.

She was not allowed to be silent long, however, or to fall into recollections too tender to be shared by them all. Rose's extraordinary restlessness prevented that. She seemed to have lost the power of sitting still, and flitted about from one to another; now exchanging a word with Fanny or Will, now joining in the conversation that was going on between Mr Snow and Arthur outside. At one moment she was hanging over Graeme's chair, at the next, kneeling at Mrs Snow's side; and all the time with a face so radiant that even Will noticed it, and begged to be told the secret of her delight.

The truth was, Rose was having a little private jubilation of her own. She would not have confessed it to Graeme, she was shy of confessing it to herself, but as the time of Mrs Snow's visit approached, she had not been quite free from misgivings. She had a very distinct recollection of their friend, and loved her dearly. But she found it quite impossible to recall the short active figure, the rather scant dress, the never-tiring hands, without a fear that the visit might be a little disappointing—not to themselves. Janet would always be Janet to them—the dear friend of their childhood, with more real worth in her little finger than there was in ten such fine ladies as Mrs Grove. But Rose, grew indignant beforehand, as she imagined the supercilious smiles and forced politeness of that lady, and perhaps of Fanny too, when all this worth should appear in the form of a little, plain old woman, with no claim to consideration on account of externals.

But that was all past now. And seeing her sitting there in her full brown travelling-dress, her snowy neckerchief and pretty quaint cap, looking as if her life might have been passed with folded hands in a velvet arm-chair, Rose's misgivings gave place to triumphant self-congratulation, which was rather uncomfortable, because it could not well be shared. She had assisted at the arrangement of the contents of the travelling trunk in wardrobe and bureau, and this might have helped her a little.

"A soft black silk, and a grey poplin, and such lovely neckerchiefs and handkerchiefs of lawn—is not little Emily a darling to make her mother look so nice? And such a beauty of a shawl!—that's the one Sandy brought."

And so Rose came down-stairs triumphant, without a single drawback to mar the pleasure with which she regarded Janet as she sat in the arm-chair, letting her grave admiring glances fall alternately on Graeme and the pretty creature at her feet. All Rosie's admiration was for Mrs Snow.

"Is she not just like a picture sitting there?" she whispered to Will, as she passed him.

And indeed Rosie's admiration was not surprising; she was the very Janet of old times; but she sat there in Fanny's handsome drawing-room, with as much appropriateness as she had ever sat in the manse kitchen long ago, and looked over the vases and elegant trifles on the centre-table to Graeme with as much ease and self-possession as if she had been "used with" fine things all her life, and had never held anxious counsels with her over jackets and trowsers, and little half-worn stockings and shoes.

And yet there was no real cause for surprise. For Janet was one of those whose modest, yet firm self-respect, joined with a just appreciation of all worldly things, leaves to changing circumstances no power over their unchanging worth.

That Mr Snow should spend the time devoted to their visit within four walls, was not to be thought of. The deacon, who, in the opinion of those who knew him best, "had the faculty of doing 'most anything," had certainly not the faculty of sitting still in a chair like other people. The hall or the gallery was his usual place of promenade, but when the interest of the conversation kept him with the rest, Fanny suffered constant anxiety as to the fate of ottomans, vases and little tables. A judicious, re-arrangement of these soon gave him a clearer space for his perambulations; but a man accustomed to walk miles daily on his own land, could not be expected to content himself long within such narrow limits. So one bright morning he renewed the proposal, made long before, that Will should show him Canada.

Up to a comparatively recent period, all Mr Snow's ideas of the country had been got from the careful reading of an old "History of the French and Indian War." Of course, by this time he had got a little beyond the belief that the government was a military despotism, that the city of Montreal was a cluster of wigwams, huddled together within a circular enclosure of palisades, or that the commerce of the country consisted in an exchange of beads, muskets, and bad whiskey for the furs of the Aborigines. Still his ideas were vague and indistinct, not to say disparaging, and he had already quite unconsciously excited the amusement of Will and the indignation of Rose, by indulging in remarks indicative of a low opinion of things in general in the Queen's dominions. So when he proposed that Will should show him Canada, Rose looked gravely up and asked,—

"Where will you go first, Will? To the Red river or Hudson's Bay or to Nova Scotia? You must be back to lunch."

They all laughed, and Arthur said,—

"Oh, fie, Rosie! not to know these places are all beyond the limits of Canada!—such ignorance!"

"They are in the Queen's dominions, though, and Mr Snow wants to see all that is worth seeing on British soil."

"Well, I guess we can make out a full day's work in Canada, can't we? It is best to take it moderate," said Mr Snow, smiling benignly on Rose. He was tolerant of the young lady's petulance, and not so ready to excite it as he used to be in the old times, and generally listened to her little sallies with a deprecating smile, amusing to see.

He was changed in other respects as well. Indeed, it must be confessed that just at first Arthur was a little disappointed in him. He had only a slight personal acquaintance with him, but he had heard so much of him from the

others that he had looked forward with interest to making the acquaintance of the "sharp Yankee deacon." For Harry had a good story about "Uncle Sampson" ready for all occasions, and there was no end to the shrewd remarks and scraps of worldly wisdom that he used to quote from his lips. But Harry's acquaintance had been confined to the first years of their Merleville life, and Mr Snow had changed much since then. He saw all things in a new light. Wisdom and folly had changed their aspect to him. The charity which "believeth and hopeth all things," and which "thinketh no evil," lived within him now, and made him slow to see, and slower still to comment upon the faults and foibles of others with the sharpness that used to excite the mirth of the lads long ago. Not that he had forgotten how to criticise, and that severely too, whatever he thought deserved it, or would be the better for it, as Will had good reason to know before he had done much in the way of "showing him Canada," but he far more frequently surprised them all by his gentle tolerance towards what might be displeasing to him, and by his quick appreciation of whatever was admirable in all he saw.

The first few days of sightseeing were passed in the city and its environs. With the town itself he was greatly pleased. The great grey stone structures suited him well, suggesting, as they often do to the people accustomed to houses of brick or wood, ideas of strength and permanence. But as he was usually content with an outside view of the buildings, with such a view as could be obtained by a slow drive through the streets, the town itself did not occupy him long. Then came the wharves and ships; then they visited the manufactories and workshops, lately become so numerous in the neighbourhood of the canal. All these pleased and interested him greatly, but he never failed, when opportunity offered, to point out various particulars, in which he considered the Montrealers "a *leetle* behind the times." On the whole, however, his appreciation of British energy and enterprise was admiring and sincere, and as warmly expressed as could be expected under the circumstances.

"You've got a river, at any rate, that about comes up to one's ideas of what a river ought to be—broad and deep and full," he said to Arthur one day. "It kind of satisfies one to stand and look at it, so grand and powerful, and still always rolling on to the sea."

"Yes, it is like your Father of Waters," said Arthur, a little surprised at his tone and manner.

"One wouldn't be apt to think of mills and engines and such things at the first glimpse of that. I didn't see it the day when I crossed it, for the mist and rain. To-day, as we stood looking down upon it, I couldn't but think how it had been rolling on and on there, ever since creation, I suppose, or ever since the time of Adam and Eve—if the date ain't the same, as some folks seem to think."

"I always think how wonderful it must have seemed to Jacques Cartier and his men, as they sailed on and on, with the never-ending forest on either shore," said Rose. "No wonder they thought it would never end, till it bore them to the China seas."

"A wonderful highway of nations it is, though it disappointed them in that," said Arthur. "The sad pity is, that it is not available for commerce for more than two-thirds of the year."

"If ever the bridge they talk about should be built, it will do something towards making this a place of importance in this part of the world, though the long winter is against, too."

"Oh! the bridge will be built, I suppose, and the benefit will not be confined to us. The Western trade will be benefited as well. What do you think of your Massachusetts men, getting their cotton round this way? This communication with the more northern cotton growing States is more direct by this than any other way."

"Well, I ain't prepared to say much about it. Some folks wouldn't think much of that. But I suppose you are bound to go ahead, anyhow."

But to the experienced eye of the farmer, nothing gave so much pleasure as the cultivated country lying around the city, and beyond the mountain, as far as the eye could reach. Of the mountain itself, he was a little contemptuous in its character of mountain.

"A mountain with smooth fields, and even orchards, reaching almost to the top of it! Why, our sheep pasture at Merleville is a deal more like a mountain than that. It is only a hill, and moderate at that. You must have been dreadful hard up for mountains, to call *that* one. You've forgotten all about Merleville, Rosie, to be content with that for a mountain."

While, he admired the farms, he did not hesitate to comment severely on the want of enterprise shown by the farmers, who seemed to be content "to putter along" as their fathers had done, with little desire to avail themselves of the many inventions and discoveries which modern science and art had placed at the disposal of the farmer. In Merleville, every man who owned ten, or even five acres of level land, had an interest in sowing and mowing machines, to say nothing of other improvements, that could be made available on hill or meadow. If the strength and patience so freely expended among the stony New England hills, could but be applied to the fertile valley of the Saint Lawrence, what a garden it might become! And the Yankee farmer grew a little contemptuous of the contented acquiescence of Canadians to the order of affairs established by their fathers.

One afternoon he and Will went together to the top of the mountain toward the western end. They had a fair day for a fair sight, and when Mr Snow looked down on the scene, bounded by the blue hills beyond both rivers, all other thoughts gave place to feelings of wondering admiration. Above was a sky, whose tender blue was made more lovely by the snowy clouds that sailed now and then majestically across it, to break into flakes of silver near the far horizon.

Beneath lay the valley, clothed in the numberless shades of verdure with which June loves to deck the earth in this northern climate. There were no waste places, no wilderness, no arid stretches of sand or stone. Far as the eye could reach, extended fields, and groves, and gardens, scattered through with clusters of cottages, or solitary farm-houses.

Up through the stillness of the summer air, came stealing the faint sound of a distant bell, seeming to deepen the silence round them.

"I suppose the land that Moses saw from Pisgah, must have been like this," said Mr Snow, as he gazed.

"Yes, the Promised Land was a land of hills, and valleys, and brooks of water," said Will softly, never moving his eyes from the wonderful picture. Could they ever gaze enough? Could they ever weary themselves of the sight? The shadows grew long; the clouds, that had made the beauty of the summer sky, followed each other toward the west, and rose in pinnacles of gold, and amber, and amethyst; and then they rose to go.

"I wouldn't have missed *that* now, for considerable," said Mr Snow, coming back with an effort to the realisation of the fact that this was part of the sightseeing that he had set himself. "No, I wouldn't have missed it for considerable more than that miserable team'll cost," added he, as he came in sight of the carriage, on whose uncomfortable seat the drowsy driver had been slumbering all the afternoon. Will smiled, and made no answer. He was not a vain lad, but it is just possible that there passed through his mind a doubt whether the enjoyment of his friend had been as real, as high, or as intense, as his had been all the afternoon. To Will's imagination, the valley lay in the gloom of its primeval forests, peopled by heroes of a race now passed away. He was one of them. He fought in their battles, triumphed in their victories, panted in the eagerness of the chase. In imagination, he saw the forest fall under the peaceful weapons of the pale face; then wondered westward to die the dreary death of the last of a stricken race. Then his thoughts come down to the present, and on into the future, in a vague dream, which was half a prayer, for the hastening of the time when the lovely valley should smile in moral and spiritual beauty too. And coming back to actual life, with an effort—a sense of pain, he said to himself, that the enjoyment of his friend had been not so high and pure as his.

But Will was mistaken. In the thoughts of his friend, that summer afternoon, patent machines, remunerative labour, plans of supply and demand, of profit and loss, found no place. He passed the pleasant hour on that green hill-side, seeing in that lovely valley, stretched out before them, a very land of Beulah. Looking over the blue line of the Ottawa, as over the river of Death, into a land visible and clear to the eye of faith, he saw sights, and heard sounds, and enjoyed communion, which, as yet, lay far in the future, as to the experience of the lad by his side; and coming back to actual life, gave no sign of the Divine Companionship, save that which afterward, was to be seen in a life, growing liker every day to the Divine Exemplar.

Will thought, as they went home together, that a new light beamed, now and then, over the keen but kindly face, and that the grave eyes of his friend had the look of one who saw something beyond the beauty of the pleasant fields, growing dim now in the gathering darkness; and the lad's heart grew full and tender as it dawned upon him, how this was a token of the shining of God's face upon his servant, and he longed for a glimpse of that which his friend's eyes saw. A word might have won for him a glimpse of the happiness; but Will was shy, and the word was not spoken; and, all unconscious of his longing, his friend sat with the smile on his lips, and the light in his eye, no thought further from him than that any experience of his should be of value to another. And so they fell quite into silence, till they neared the streets where the lighted lamps were burning dim in the fading daylight.

That night, in the course of his wanderings up and down, Mr Snow, paused, as he often did, before a portrait of the minister. It was a portrait taken when the minister had been a much younger man than Mr Snow had ever known him. It had belonged to a friend in Scotland, and had been sent to Arthur, at his death, about a year ago. The likeness had been striking, and to Janet, the sight of it had been a great pleasure and surprise. She was never weary of looking at it, and even Mr Snow, who had never known the minister but as a grey-haired man, was strangely fascinated by the beauty of the grave smile that he remembered so well on his face. That night he stood leaning on the back of a chair, and gazing at it, while the conversation flowed on as usual around him. In a little, Rose came and stood beside him.

"Do you think it is very like him?" asked she.

"Well," said Mr Snow, meditatively, "it's like him and it ain't like him. I love to look at it, anyhow."

"At first it puzzled me," said Rose. "It seemed like the picture of some one I had seen in a dream; and when I shut my eyes, and tried to bring back my father's face as it used to be in Merleville, it would not come—the face of the dream came between."

"Well, there is something in that," said Mr Snow, and he paused a moment, and shut his eyes, as if to call back the face of his friend. "No, it won't do that for me. It would take something I hain't thought of yet, to make me forget his face."

"It does not trouble me now," said Rose. "I can shut my eyes, and see him, Oh! so plainly, in the church, and at home in the study, and out under the trees, and as he lay in his coffin—" She was smiling still, but the tears were ready to gush over her eyes. Mr Snow turned, and laying his hand on her bright head, said softly,—

"Yes, dear, and so can I, If we didn't know that it must be right, we might wonder why he was taken from us. But I shall never forget him—never. He did too much for me, for that. He was the best friend I ever had, by all odds—the very best."

Rose smiled through her tears.

"He brought you Mrs Snow," said she, softly.

"Yes, dear. That was much, but he did more than that. It was through him that I made the acquaintance of a better and dearer friend than even *she* is—and that is saying considerable," added he, turning his eyes toward the tranquil figure knitting in the arm-chair.

"Were you speaking?" said Mrs Snow, looking up at the sound of his voice.

"Yes, I was speaking to Rosie, here. How do you suppose we can ever persuade her to go back to Merleville with us?"

"She is going with us, or she will soon follow us. What would Emily say, if she didna come?"

"Yes, I know. But I meant to stay for good and all. Graeme, won't you give us this little girl?"

Graeme smiled.

"Yes. On one condition—if you will take me too."

Mr Snow shook his head.

"I am afraid that would bring us no nearer the end. We should have other conditions to add to that one."

"Yes," said Arthur, laughing. "You would have to take Fanny and me, as well, in that case. I don't object to your having one of them at a time, now and then, but both of them—that would never do."

"But it must be both or neither," said Graeme, eagerly, "I couldna' trust Rosie away from me. I havena these sixteen years—her whole life, have I, Janet? If you want Rosie, you must have me, too."

She spoke lightly, but earnestly; she meant what she said. Indeed, so earnest was she, that she quite flushed up, and the tears were not far away. The others saw it, and were silent, but Fanny who was not quick at seeing things, said,—

"But what could we do without you both? That would not be fair—"

"Oh! you would have Arthur, and Arthur would have you. At any rate, Rosie is mine, and I am not going to give her to any one who won't have me, too. She is all I shall have left when Will goes away."

"Graeme would not trust Rosie with Arthur and me," said Fanny, a little pettishly. "There are so many things that Graeme don't approve of. She thinks we would spoil Rose."

Janet's hand touched hers, whether by accident or design Graeme did not know, but it had the effect of checking the response that rose to her lips, and she only said, laughingly,—

"Mrs Snow thinks that you and Arthur are spoiling us both, Fanny."

Janet smiled fondly and gravely at the sisters, as she said, stroking Graeme's bowed head,—

"I dare say you are no' past spoiling, either of you, but I have seen worse bairns."

After this, Mr Snow and Will began the survey of Canada in earnest. First they went to Quebec, where they lingered several days. Then they went farther down the river, and up the Saguenay, into the very heart of the wilderness. This part of the trip Will enjoyed more than his friend, but Mr Snow showed no sign of impatience, and prolonged their stay for his sake. Then they went up the country, visiting the chief towns and places of interest. They did not confine themselves, however, to the usual route of travellers, but went here and there in wagons and stages, through a farming country, in which, though Mr Snow saw much to criticise, he saw more to admire. They shared the hospitality of many a quiet farm-house, as freely as it was offered, and enjoyed many a pleasant conversation with the farmers and their families, seated on door-steps, or by the kitchen-fire.

Though the hospitality of the country people was, as a general thing, fully and freely offered, it was sometimes, it must be confessed, not without a certain reserve. That a "live Yankee," cute, and able-bodied, should be going about in these out-of-the-way parts, for the sole purpose of satisfying himself as to the features, resources, and inhabitants of the country, was a circumstance so rare, so unheard of, indeed, in these parts, that the shrewd country people did not like to commit themselves at the first glance. Will's frank, handsome face, and simple, kindly manners, won him speedily enough the confidence of all, and Mr Snow's kindly advances were seldom long withstood. But there sometimes lingered an uneasy feeling, not to say suspicion, that when he had succeeded in winning their confidence, he would turn round and make some startling demand on their faith or their purses in behalf of some patent medicine or new invention—perhaps one of those wonderful labour-saving machines, of which he had so much to say. As for himself, if he ever observed their reserve or its cause, he never resented it, or commented upon it, but entered at once into the discussion of all possible subjects with the zest of a man determined to make the most of the pleasant circumstances in which he found himself. If he did not always agree with the opinions expressed, or approve of the modes of farming pursued, he at least found that the sturdy farmers of Glengarry and the country beyond had more to say for their opinions and practice than "so had their fathers said and done before them," and their discussions ended, quite as frequently as otherwise, in the American frankly confessing himself convinced that all the agricultural wisdom on the continent did not lie on the south side of the line forty-five.

Will was greatly amused and interested by all this. He was, to a certain extent, able to look at the ideas, opinions, and prejudices of each from the other's point of view, and so to enjoy with double zest the discussion of subjects which could not fail to present such dissimilar aspects to minds so differently constituted, and developed under circumstances and influences so different. This power helped him to make the opinions of each more clear to the other, presenting to both juster notions of each other's theory and practice than their own explanations could have done. By this means, too, he won for himself a reputation for wisdom, about matters and things in general, which surprised no one so much as himself. They would have liked to linger far longer, over this part of their trip, than they had time to do, for the days were hastening.

Before returning home, they visited Niagara, that wonderful work of God, too great and grand, as Mr Snow told Rosie,

to be the pride of one nation exclusively, and so it had been placed on the borders of the two greatest nations in the world. This part of the trip was for Will's sake. Mr Snow had visited them on his way West many years ago. Indeed, there were other parts of the trip made for Will's benefit, but those were not the parts which Mr Snow enjoyed least, as he said to his wife afterwards.

"It paid well. I had my own share of the pleasure, and Will's, too. If ever a lad enjoyed a holiday he enjoyed his. It was worth going, just to see his pleasure."

When the time allotted to their visit was drawing to a close, it was proposed that a few days should be passed in that most beautiful part of Canada, known as the Eastern Townships. Arthur went with them there. It was but a glimpse they could give it. Passing in through Missisquoi County to the head of the lovely lake Memphremagog, they spent a few days on it, and along its shores. Their return was by a circuitous course across the country through the County of Stanstead, in the midst of beautiful scenery, and what Mr Snow declared to be "as fine a farming country as anybody need wish to see."

This "seeing Canada" was a more serious matter than he had at first supposed, Mr Snow acknowledged to the delighted Rose. It could not be done justice to in a few days, he said; but he would try and reconcile himself to the hastiness of his trip, by taking it for granted that the parts he had not seen were pretty much like those he had gone through, and a very fine country it was.

"Canada will be heard from yet, I expect," said he, one night when they had returned home. "By the time that you get some things done that you mean to now, you'll be ready to go ahead. I don't see but you have as good a chance as ever we had—better, even. You have got the same elements of prosperity and success. You have got the Bible and a free press, and a fair proportion of good soil, and any amount of water-power. Then for inhabitants, you've got the Scotchman, cautious and far-seeing; the Irishman, a little hot and heady, perhaps, but earnest; you've got the Englishman, who'll never fail of his aim for want of self-confidence, anyhow; you've got Frenchmen, Germans, and a sprinkling of the dark element out west; and you've got what we didn't have to begin with, you've got the Yankee element, and that is considerable more than you seem to think it is, Rosie."

Rose laughed and shook her head. She was not going to allow herself to be drawn into a discussion of nationalities that night.

"Yes," continued he, "the real live Yankee is about as complete a man as you'll generally meet anywhere. He has the caution of the Scot, to temper the fire of the Irishman, and he has about as good an opinion of himself as the Englishman has. He'll keep things going among you. He'll bring you up to the times, and then he won't be likely to let you fall back again. Yes; if ever Canada is heard from, the Yankee will have something to do with it, and no mistake."

Chapter Thirty Two.

In the mean time very quiet and pleasant days were passing over those who were at home. Fanny jingled her keys, and triumphed a little at the continued success of affairs in Mrs Tilman's department. Graeme took no notice of her triumph, but worked away at odds and ends, remembering things forgotten, smoothing difficulties, removing obstacles, and making, more than she or any one knew, the happiness of them all. Rose sung and danced about the house as usual, and devoted some of her superfluous energy to the embellishment of a cobweb fabric, which was, under her skillful fingers, destined to assume, by and by, the form of a wedding pocket handkerchief for Emily. And through all, Mrs Snow was calmly and silently pursuing the object of her visit to Canada. Through the pleasant hours of work and leisure, in all their talk of old times, and of the present time, in all moods, grave and gay, she had but one thought, one desire, to assure herself by some unfailling token that her bairns were as good and happy as they ought to be.

The years that had passed since the bairns had been parted from her had made Janet older than they ought to have done, Graeme thought. It was because she was not so strong as she used to be, she said herself; but it was more than sickness, and more than the passing years that had changed her. The dreadful shock and disappointment of her mother's death, followed so soon by the loss of Marian and the minister, had been too much for Janet. It might not have been, her strong patient nature might have withstood it, if the breaking up of the beloved family circle, the utter vanishing of her bairns from her sight, had not followed so close upon it. For weeks she had been utterly prostrate. The letters, which told the bairns, in their Canadian home, that their dear friend was ill, and "wearying" for them, told them little of the terrible suffering of that time. The misery that had darkened her first winter in Merleville came upon her again with two-fold power. Worse than the home-sickness of that sad time, was the never-ceasing pain, made up of sorrow for the dead, and inappeasable longing for the presence of the living. That she should have forsaken her darlings, to cast in her lot with others—that between her and them should lie miles and miles of mountain and forest, and barriers, harder to be passed than these, it sickened her heart to know. She knew it never could be otherwise now; from the sentence she had passed upon herself she knew there could be no appeal. She knew that unless some great sorrow should fall upon them, they could never have one home again; and that peace and happiness could ever come to her, being separated from them, she neither believed nor desired. Oh! the misery of that time! The fields and hills, and pleasant places she had learnt to love, shrouded themselves in gloom. The very light grew hateful to her. Her prayer, as she lay still, while the bitter waters rolled over her, was less the prayer of faith, than of despair.

And, through all the misery of that time, her husband waited and watched her with a tender patience, beautiful to see; never, by word or deed, giving token of aught but sympathy, and loving pity for the poor, sick, struggling heart. Often and often, during that dreary time, did she wake to hear, in the stillness of the night, or of the early morning, his whispered prayer of strong entreaty rising to Heaven, that the void might be filled, that in God's good time and way, peace, and healing, and content, might come back to the sick and sorrowful heart.

And this came after long waiting. Slowly the bitter waters rolled away, never to return. Faith, that had seemed dead,

looked up once more. The sick heart thrilled beneath the touch of the Healer. Again the light grew pleasant to her eyes, and Janet came back to her old household ways, seeing in the life before her God-given work, that might not be left undone. But she was never quite the same. There was never quite the old sharp ring in her kindly voice. She was not less cheerful, perhaps, in time, but her cheerfulness was of a far quieter kind, and her chidings were rare, and of the mildest, now. Indeed, she had none to chide but the motherless Emily, who needed little chiding, and much love. And much love did Janet give her, who had been dear to all the bairns, and the especial friend of Marian, now in Heaven. And so God's peace fell on the deacon's quiet household, and the gloom passed away from the fields and hills of Merleville, and its pleasant nooks and corners smiled once more with a look of home to Janet, as she grew content in the knowledge that her darlings were well and happy, though she might never make them her daily care again. But she never forgot them. Her remembrance of them never grew less loving, and tender, and true. And so, as the years passed, the old longing came back, and, day by day, grew stronger in her heart the wish to know assuredly that the children of her love were as good and happy as they ought to be.

Had her love been less deep and yearning she might have been more easily content with the tokens of an innocent and happy life visible in their home. If happiness had been, in her estimation, but the enjoyment of genial days and restful nights, with no cares to harass, and only pleasant duties to perform; if the interchange of kindly offices, the little acts of self-denial, the giving up of trifles, the taking cheerfully of the little disappointments, which even their pleasant life was subject to—if these had been to her sufficient tests of goodness, she might have been satisfied with all she saw.

But she was not satisfied, for she knew that there are few hearts so shallow as to be filled full with all that such a life of ease could give. She knew that the goodness, that might seem to suffice through these tranquil and pleasant days, could be no defence against the strong temptations that might beset them amid the cares of life. "For," said she to herself, "the burn runs smoothly on over the pebbles in its bed without a break or eddy, till the pebbles change to rocks and stones, and then it brawls, and murmurs, and dashes itself to foam among them—and no help." She was content with no such evidence of happiness or goodness as lay on the surface of their pleasant life, so she waited, and watched, seeing without seeming to see, many things that less loving eyes might have overlooked. She saw the unquiet light that gleamed at times in Graeme's eyes, and the shadow of the cloud that now and then rested on her brow, even in their most mirthful moments. She smiled, as they all did, at the lively sallies, and pretty wilfulness of Rose, but she knew full well, that that which made mirth in the loving home circle, might make sorrow for the household darling, when the charm of love was no longer round her. And so she watched them all, seeing in trifles, in chance words and unconscious deeds, signs and tokens for good or for evil, that would never have revealed themselves to one who loved them less.

For Will she had no fear. He was his father's own son, with his father's work awaiting him. All would be well with Will. And for Arthur, too, the kind and thoughtful elder brother—the father and brother of the little household, both in one, her hopes were stronger than her doubts or fears. It would have given her a sore heart, indeed, to believe him far from the way in which his father walked.

"He has a leaven of worldliness in him, I'll no deny," said she to her husband one night, when they were alone in the privacy of their own apartment. "And there is more desire for wealth in his heart, and for the honour that comes from man, than he himself kens. He'll maybe get them, and maybe no'. But if he gets them, they'll no' satisfy him, and if he gets them not, he'll get something better. I have small fear for the lad. He minds his father's ways and walk too well to be long content with his own halting pace. It's a fine life just now, with folk looking up to him, and patting trust in him, but he'll weary of it. There is nothing in it to fill, for long, the heart of his father's son."

And in her quiet waiting and watching, Janet grew assured for them all at last. Not that they were very wise or good, but her faith that they were kept of God grew stronger every day; and to be ever in God's keeping, meant to this humble, trustful, Christian woman, to have all that even her yearning love could crave for her darlings. It left her nothing to fear for them, nothing to wish in their behalf; so she came to be at peace about them all; and gently checked the wilful words and ways of Rose, and waited patiently till Graeme, of her own accord, should show her the cloud in the shadow of which she sometimes sat.

As to Fanny, the new claimant for her love and interest, she was far from being overlooked all this time, and the pretty little creature proved a far greater mystery to the shrewd, right-judging friend of the family than seemed at all reasonable. There were times when, had she seen her elsewhere, she would not have hesitated to pronounce her frivolous, vain, overbearing. Even now, seeing her loved and cared for, in the midst of the bairns, there were moments when she found herself saying it in her heart. A duller sense, and weaker penetration could not have failed to say the same. But Fanny was Arthur's wife, and Arthur was neither frivolous, nor vain, nor overbearing, but on the contrary, wise, and strong, and gentle, possessing all the virtues that ever had made his father a model in Janet's admiring eyes, and it seemed a bold thing, indeed, to think lightly of his wife. So she mused, and pondered, and watched, and put Fanny's beautiful face and winning manners, and pretty, affectionate ways, against her very evident defects, and said to herself, though Arthur's wife was not like Arthur's mother, nor even like his sisters, yet there were varieties of excellence, and surely the young man was better able to be trusted in the choice of a life-long friend than on old woman like her could be; and still she waited and pondered, and, as usual, the results of her musings were given to her attentive husband, and this time with a little impatient sigh.

"I needna wonder at it. Love is blind, they say, and goes where it is sent, and it is sent far more rarely to wisdom and worth, and humble goodness, than to qualities that are far less deserving of the happiness it brings; and Mr Arthur is no' above making a mistake. Though how he should—minding his mother as he does—amazes me. But he's well pleased, there can be no doubt of that, as yet, and Miss Graeme is no' ill-pleased, and love wouldna blind her. Still I canna but wonder after all is said."

And she still wondered. There were in her vocabulary no gentler names for the pretty Fanny's defects, than just frivolity and vanity, and even after a glimpse or two of her stepmother, Janet's candid, straightforward nature could hardly make for those defects all the allowance that was to be made. She could not realise how impossible it was,

that a fashionable education, under such a teacher as Mrs Grove should have made her daughter other than she was, and so not realising that her worst faults were those of education, which time, and experience, and the circumstances of her life must correct, she had, at times, little hope of Fanny's future worth or wisdom.

That is, she would have had little hope but for one thing—Graeme had faith in Fanny, that was clear. Love might blind Arthur's eyes to her faults, or enlighten them to see virtues invisible to other eyes, but it would not do that for Graeme; and Graeme was tolerant of Fanny, even at times when her little airs and exactions made her not quite agreeable to her husband. She was patient and forbearing towards her faults, and smiled at the little housekeeping airs and assumptions, which Rose openly, and even in Arthur's presence, never failed to resent. Indeed, Graeme refused to see Fanny's faults, or she refused to acknowledge that she saw them, and treated her always with the respect due to her brother's wife, and the mistress of the house, as, well as with the love and forbearance due to a younger sister.

And that Fanny, with all her faults and follies, loved and trusted Graeme was very evident. There was confidence between them, to a certain extent at any rate, and seeing these things, Janet took courage to hope that there was more in the "bonny vain creature" than it was given her to see, and to hope also that Arthur might not one day find himself disappointed in his wife. Her doubts and hopes on the matter were all silent, or shared only with the worthy deacon, in the solitude of their chamber. She was slow to commit herself to Graeme, and Graeme was in no haste to ask her friend's opinion of her brother's wife.

They had plenty of other subjects to discuss. All their Merleville life was gone over and over during these quiet summer days.

The talk was not always gay; sometimes it was grave enough, even sad, but it was happy, too, in a way; at any rate they never grew weary of it. And Mrs Snow had much to tell them about the present state of their old home; how the old people were passing away, and the young people were growing up; how well the minister was remembered there still, and how glad all would be to see the minister's bairns among them again; and then Sandy and Emily, and the approaching wedding made an endless subject of talk. Rose and Fanny never wearied of that, and Mrs Snow was as pleased to tell, as they were to hear.

And when Rose and Fanny were away, as they often were, and Graeme was left alone with her friend, there were graver things discussed between them. Graeme told her more of their family life, and of their first experiences than she had ever heard before. She told her of her illness, and home-sickness, and of the many misgivings she had had as to whether it had been wise for them all to come to burden Arthur. She told her of Harry, and her old terrors on his account, and how all these had given place to hope, that was almost certainty now, that she need never fear for him for the same cause more. They rejoiced together over Hilda, and Norman, and recalled to one another their old pride in the lad when he had saved the little German girl from the terrible fate that had overtaken her family, and smiled at the misgivings they had had when he refused to let her go with the friends who would have taken her. This was all to be rejoiced over now. No doubt the care and pains which Norman had needed to bestow on his little adopted sister, had done much to correct the native thoughtlessness of his character, and no doubt her love and care would henceforth make the happiness of his life. So they said to one another with smiles, and not without grateful tears, in view of the overruling love and care visible in all they had to remember of one and all.

And Will, who seemed to be Graeme's own more than either of the other brothers, because she had cared for him, and taught him, and watched over him from the very first, she permitted herself to triumph a little over him, in private with her friend, and Janet was nothing loth to hear and triumph too, for in the lad his father lived again to her, and she was not slow to believe in his sister's loving prophecy as to his future. Graeme could not conceal, indeed she did not try to conceal, from her friend, how much she feared the parting from him, and though Janet chid her for the tears that fell so fast, it was with a gentle tenderness that only quickened their flow.

And now and then, in these long talks and frequent silence, Janet fancied that she caught a glimpse of the cloud that had cast a shadow over Graeme's life, but she was never sure. It was not to be spoken about, however, nothing could be clearer than that.

"For a cloud that can be blown away by a friend's word, will lift of itself without help in a while. And if it is no' a cloud of that kind, the fewer words the better. And time heals many a wound that the touch of the kindest hand would hurt sorely. And God is good." But all this was said in Janet's secret prayer. Not even her husband shared her thoughts about Graeme.

"What a dismal day it is!" said Fanny, as she stood at the window, listening to the wind and watching the fall of the never-ceasing rain.

It was dismal. It must have been a dismal day even in the country, where the rain was falling on beautiful green things to their refreshment; and in the city street, out upon which Fanny looked, it was worse. Now and then a milk cart, or a carriage with the curtains closely drawn, went past; and now and then a foot passenger, doing battle with the wind for the possession of his umbrella; but these did not brighten the scene any.

It was dismal within doors, too, Fanny thought. It was during the time of Mr Snow and Will's first trip, and Arthur had gone away on business, and was not expected home for a day or two, at least. A household of women is not necessarily a dismal affair, even on a rainy day, but a household suddenly deprived of the male element, is apt to become so in those circumstances, unless some domestic business supposed to be most successfully accomplished at such a time is being carried on; and no wonder that Fanny wandered from room to room, in an uncomfortable state of mind.

Graeme and Rose were not uncomfortable. Rose had a way of putting aside difficult music to be practised on rainy days, and she was apt to become so engrossed in her pleasant occupation, as to take little heed of what was going

on about her, and all Fanny's exclamations of discontent were lost on her. Graeme was writing letters in the back parlour, and Mrs Snow was supposed to be taking her after-dinner's rest, up-stairs, but she came into the room in time to hear Fanny exclaim petulantly,—

"And we were very foolish to have an early dinner. That would have been something to look forward to. And no one can possibly call. Even Mr Green would be better than nobody—or even Charlie Millar."

"These gentlemen would be highly flattered if they heard you," said Rose, laughing, as she rose to draw forward the arm-chair, to Mrs Snow.

"Are you not tired playing Rose," said Fanny, fretfully.

"By no means. I hope my playing does not disturb you. I think this march is charming. Come and try it."

"No, I thank you. If the music does not disturb Mrs Snow, I don't mind it."

"I like it," said Mrs Snow. "The music is cheerful this dull day. Though I would like a song better."

"By and by you shall have a song. I would just like to go over this two or three times more."

"Two or three times! Two or three hundred times, you mean," said Fanny. "There's no end to Rose's playing when she begins."

Then she wandered into the back parlour again.

"Are you going to write all day, Graeme?"

"Not all day. Has Mrs Snow come down?" asked she, coming forward. "I have been neglecting Harry lately, and I have so much to tell him, but I'll soon be done now."

"My dear," said Mrs Snow, "dinna heed me; I have my knitting, and I enjoy the music."

"Oh! dear! I wish it didn't rain," said Fanny.

"My dear, the earth was needing it," said Mrs Snow, by way of saying something, "and it will be beautiful when the rain is over."

"I believe Graeme likes a rainy day," said Fanny. "It is very stupid, I think."

"Yes, I sometimes like a rainy day. It brings a little leisure, which is agreeable."

Fanny shrugged her shoulders.

"It is rather dismal to-day, however," said Graeme. "You look cold with that light dress on, Fanny, why don't you go and change it?"

"What is the use? I wish Arthur were coming home. He might have come, I'm sure."

"You may be sure he will not stay longer than he can help," said Graeme; turning to her letter again.

"And my dear, might you no' take a seam? It would pass the time, if it did nothing else," said Mrs Snow.

But the suggestion was not noticed, and partly because she did not wish to interfere, and partly because she had some curiosity to see how the little lady would get out of her discomfort, Mrs Snow knitted on in silence.

"Make something nice for tea," suggested Rose, glancing over her shoulder.

"That is not necessary *now*," said Fanny, shortly.

"Oh! I only suggested it for your sake—to pass the time," said Rose.

It lasted a good while longer. It lasted till Graeme, catching Mrs Snow's look, became suddenly aware that their old friend was thinking her own thoughts about "Mrs Arthur." She rose at once, and shutting her desk, and going to the window where Fanny was standing, said with a shiver:—

"It *is* dismal, indeed. Fanny, look at that melancholy cat. She wants to come in, but she is afraid to leave her present shelter. Poor wee pussy."

"Graeme, don't you wish Arthur were coming home," said Fanny, hanging about her as she had a fashion of doing now and then.

"Yes, indeed. But we must not tell him so. It would make him vain if he knew how much we missed him. Go and change your dress, dear, and we'll have a fire, and an early tea, and a nice little gossip in the firelight, and then we won't miss him so much."

"Fire!" repeated Rose, looking disconsolately at the pretty ornaments of the grate with which she had taken so much pains. "Who ever heard of a fire in a grate at this time of the year?"

But Rose was overruled. They had a fire and an early tea, and then, sitting in the firelight, they had a gossip, too;

about many different things. Janet told them more than she had ever told them before, of how she had “wearied for them” when they first left Merleville, and by and by Rose said,—

“But that was all over when Sandy came.”

“It was over before that, for his coming was long delayed, as you’ll mind yourselves. I was quite content before that time, but of course it was a great thing to me, the coming of my Sandy.”

“Oh! how glad you must have been!” said Rose. “I wish I had been there to see. Tell us what you said to him, and what he said to you.”

“I dinna mind what I said to him, or if I said anything at all. And he just said, ‘Well, mother!’ with his heartsome smile, and the shine of tears in his bonny blue e’en,” said Janet, with a laugh that might very easily have changed to a sob; “and oh! bairns, if ever I carried a thankful heart to a throne of grace, I did that night.”

“And would you have known him?” asked Rose, gently.

“Oh! ay, would I. No’ but what he was much changed. I wouldna have *minded* him, but I would have kened him anywhere.”

Janet sat silent with a moved face for a little, and then she went on.

“I had had many a thought about his coming, and I grew afraid as the time drew near. Either, I thought, he winna like my husband, or they winna agree, or he will have forgotten me altogether, and winna find it easy to call me his mother, or he’ll disappoint me in some way, I thought. You see I had so set my heart on seeing him, that I was afraid of myself, and it seemed to be more than I could hope that he should be to me all that I desired. But when he came, my fears were set at rest. He is an honest, God fearing lad, my Sandy, and I need say nae mair about him.”

“And so clever, and handsome! And what did Mr Snow say?”

“Oh! his heart was carried captive, from the very first, with Sandy’s heartsome, kindly ways. It made me laugh to myself, many a time, to see them together, and it made me greet whiles, as well. All my fears were rebuked, and it is the burden of my prayers from day to day, that I may have a thankful heart.”

“And how did Sandy like Merleville, and all the people?”

“Oh, he liked them well, you may be sure. It would have been very ungrateful if he had not, they made so much of him—Mr and Mrs Greenleaf, especially, and the Merles, and plenty besides. He made himself very useful to Mr Greenleaf, in many ways, for he is a clever lad, my Sandy. It’s on his business that he’s West now. But he’ll soon be home again.”

“And Emily! Tell us just what they said to each other at first, and what they thought of each other.”

“I canna do that, for I wasna there to hear. Emily saw my Sandy before I saw him myself, as you’ll mind I told you before.”

“And was it love at first sight?” asked Fanny.

“And did the course of true love for once run smooth,” said Rose. Mrs Snow smiled at their eagerness.

“As for the love at first sight—it came very soon to my Sandy. I am no’ sure about Emily. As for its running smooth, there was a wee while it was hindered. They had their doubts and fears, as was natural, and their misunderstandings. But, oh! bairns, it was just wonderful to sit by and look at them. I saw their happy troubles coming on before they saw it themselves, I think. It was like a story out of a book, to watch them; or like one of the songs folk used to sing when I was young—the sweet old Scottish songs, that are passing out of mind now, I fear. I never saw the two together in our garden, but I thought of the song that begins,—”

“Ae simmer nicht when blobs o’ dew,
Garred ilka thing look bonny—”

“Ah! Well, God has been good to them, and to us all.”

“And Mr Snow was well pleased, of course,” said Fanny.

“Pleased is hardly the word for it. He had just set his heart on it from the very first, and I had, whiles, much ado to keep him from seeming to see things and to keep him from putting his hand to help them a wee, which never does, you ken. Folk must find out such things for themselves, and the canniest hand may hinder, rather than help, with the very best will. Oh ay, he was well pleased.”

“And it is so nice that they are to be so close beside you. I daresay we shall hardly know our old home, it will be so much improved.”

“It is improved, but no’ beyond your knowledge of it. It was ay a bonny place, you’ll mind. And it *is* improved, doubtless, for her father thinks there is nothing too good for Emily.”

“And Oh! bairns, we have a reason to be thankful. If we trust our affairs in God’s hand, He’ll ‘bring it to pass,’ as he has said. And if we are his, there is no’ fear but the very best thing for us will happen in the end.”

Chapter Thirty Three.

"Who is is Mr Green, anyhow?"

The question was addressed by Mr Snow to the company generally, as he paused in his leisurely walk up and down the gallery, and stood leaning his elbow on the window, looking in upon them. His manner might have suggested the idea of some mystery in connection with the name he had mentioned, so slowly and gravely did his eyes travel from one face to another turned toward him. As his question had been addressed to no one in particular, no one answered for a minute.

"Who is Mr Green, that I hear tell so much about?" he repeated impressively, fixing Will with his eye.

"Mr Green? Oh! he is an American merchant from the West," said the literal Will, not without a vague idea that the answer, though true and comprehensive, would fail to convey to the inquiring mind of the deacon all the information desired.

"He is a Green Mountain boy. He is the most perfect specimen of a real live Yankee ever encountered in these parts, —cool, sharp, far-seeing,—"

Charlie Millar was the speaker, and he was brought up rather suddenly in the midst of his descriptive eloquence by a sudden merry twinkle in the eye of his principal listener; and his confusion was increased by a touch from Rose's little hand, intended to remind him that real live Yankees were not to be indiscreetly meddled with in the present company.

"Is that all you can say for your real live Yankee, Charlie, man?" said Arthur, whose seat on the gallery permitted him to hear, but not to see, all that was going on in the room. "Why don't you add, he speculates, he whittles, he chews tobacco, he is six feet two in his stockings, he knows the market value of every article and object, animate and inanimate, on the face of the earth, and is a living illustration of the truth of the proverb, that the cents being cared for, no apprehension need be entertained as to the safety of the dollars."

"And a living contradiction of all the stale old sayings about the vanity of riches, and their inability to give even a transitory content," said Charlie, with laughing defiance at Rose.

"Quite true, Charlie," said Arthur; "if Mr Green has ever had any doubts about the almighty dollar being the 'ultimate end,' he has nursed or combated his doubts in secret. Nothing has transpired to indicate any such wavering of faith."

"Yes; it is his only standard of worth in all things material and moral," said Charlie. "When he enters a room, you can see by his look that he is putting a price on all things in it—the carpet and curtains—the books and pretty things—even the ladies—"

"Yes," continued Arthur; "if he were to come in here just now, it would be—Mrs Snow worth so much—naming the sum; Miss Elliott so much more, because she has on a silk gown; Mrs Elliott more still, because she is somehow or other very spicy, indeed, to-night; he would appreciate details that go beyond me! As for Rosie, she would be the most valuable of all, according to his estimate, because of the extraordinary shining things on her head."

"The possibility of their being only imitations, might suggest itself," interposed Charlie.

"Yes, to be sure. And imitation or not, they would indicate all the same the young lady's love of finery, and suggest to his acute mind the idea of danger to the purse of her future possessor. No, Rosie wouldn't have a chance with him. You needn't frown, Rosie, you haven't. Whether it is the shining things on your head, or the new watch and chain, or the general weakness in the matter of bonnets that has been developing in your character lately, I can't say, but nothing can be plainer, than the fact that hitherto you have failed to make the smallest impression on him."

"A circumstance which cannot fail to give strength to the general impression that he is made of cast iron," said Charlie.

"Arthur, I am shocked and astonished at you," said Rose, as soon as she was permitted to speak. "You have forgotten, Charlie, how kindly he cared for your brother when he was sick, long ago. And Harry says that his hardness and selfishness is more in appearance, than real. He has a very kind heart."

"Oh! if you come to his heart, Miss Rose, I can't speak for that. I have never had an opportunity of satisfying myself as to that particular. I didn't know he had one, indeed, and should doubt it now, if we had not Harry's authority and yours."

"You see, Rosie, when it comes to the discussion of hearts, Charlie gets beyond his depth. He has nothing to say."

"Especially tender hearts," said Charlie; "I have had a little experience of a flinty article or two of that sort."

"Charlie, I won't have you two quarrelling," said Graeme, laughing. "Rose is right. There is just a grain or two of truth in what they have been saying," she added, turning to Mr Snow. "Mr Green is a real live Yankee, with many valuable and excellent qualities. A little hard perhaps, a little worldly. But you should hear him speak of his mother. You would sympathise with him then, Charlie. He told me all about his mother, one evening that I met him at Grove House, I think. He told me about the old homestead, and his father's saw-mill, and the log school-house; and his manner of speaking quite raised him, in my opinion. Arthur is wrong in saying he cares for nothing but money."

"But, who is he?" asked Mr Snow, with the air of one much interested; His question was this time addressed to Fanny, who had seated herself on the window seat close by her husband, and she replied eagerly,—

"Oh, he is a rich merchant—ever so rich. He is going to give up business, and travel in Europe."

"For the improvement of his mind," said Arthur.

"I don't know what he goes for, but he is very rich, and may do what he likes. He has built the handsomest house in the State, Miss Smith tells me. Oh! he is ever so rich, and he is a bachelor."

"I want to know?" said Mr Snow, accepting Fanny's triumphant climax, as she gave it, with great gravity.

"He is a great friend of mine, and a great admirer of Miss Elliott," said Mrs Grove, with her lips intending that her face should say much more.

"Do tell?" said Mr Snow.

"A singular and eccentric person you see he must be," said Will.

"A paradoxical specimen of a live Yankee. Don't frown, Miss Rose. Mrs Grove's statement proves my assertion," said Charlie.

"If you would like to meet him, Mr Snow, dine with us on Friday," said Mrs Grove. "I am quite sure you will like and admire each other. I see many points of resemblance between you. Well, then, I shall expect you *all*. Miss Elliott, you will not disappoint me, I hope."

"But so large a party! Mrs Grove, consider how many there are of us," said Graeme, who knew as well as though she were speaking aloud, that the lady was saying that same thing to herself, and that she was speculating as to the necessity of enlarging the table.

"Pray, don't mention it. We are to have no one else. Quite a family party. I shall be quite disappointed if I don't see you all. The garden is looking beautifully now."

"And one more wouldn't make a bit of difference. Miss Rose, can't you speak a good word for me," whispered Charlie.

"Thank you," said Graeme, in answer to Mrs Grove. "I have been longing to show Mrs Snow your garden. I hope the roses are not quite over."

"Oh, no!" said Arthur. "There are any number left; and Charlie, man, be sure and bring your flute to waken the echoes of the grove. It will be delightful by moonlight, won't it, Rosie?"

Mrs Grove gave a little start of surprise at the liberty taken by Arthur. "So unlike him," she thought. Mr Millar's coming would make the enlargement of the table absolutely necessary. However, she might ask one or two other people whom she ought to have asked before, "and have it over," as she said. So she smiled sweetly, and said,—

"Pray do, Mr Millar. We shall expect you with the rest."

Charlie would be delighted, and said so.

"But the flute," added he to Rose. "Well, for that agreeable fiction your brother is responsible. And a family party will be indeed charming."

Dining at Grove House was not to any of them the pleasantest of affairs, on those occasions when it was Mrs Grove's intention to distinguish herself, and astonish other people, by what she called a state dinner. Graeme, who was not apt to shirk unpleasant duties, made no secret of her dislike to them, and caught at any excuse to absent herself with an eagerness which Fanny declared to be anything but polite. But, sitting at table in full dress, among dull people, for an indefinite length of time, for no good purpose that she had been able to discover, was a sacrifice which neither Graeme nor any of the others felt inclined to make often.

A dinner *en famille*, however, with the dining-room windows open, and the prospect of a pleasant evening in the garden, was a very different matter. It was not merely endurable, it was delightful. So Rose arrayed herself in her pretty pink muslin, and then went to superintend the toilette of Mrs Snow—that is, she went to arrange the folds of her best black silk, and to insist on her wearing her prettiest cap—in a state of pleasurable excitement that was infectious, and the whole party set off in fine spirits. Graeme and Rose exchanged doubtful glances as they passed the dining-room windows. There was an ominous display of silver on the sideboard, and the enlargement of the table had been on an extensive scale.

"If she has spoiled Janet's evening in the garden, by inviting a lot of stupid, it will be too bad," whispered Rose.

It was not so bad as that, however. Of the guests whose visits were to be "put over," on this occasion, only Mr Proudfoot, a very pleasant, harmless gentleman, and Fanny's old admirer, Captain Starr, came. As to making it a state affair, and sitting two or three hours at table, such a thing was not to be thought of. Mr Snow could eat his dinner even in the most unfavourable circumstances, in a tenth part of that time, and so could Mr Green, for that matter; so within a reasonable period, the ladies found themselves, not in the drawing-room, but on the lawn, and the gentlemen soon followed.

It was the perfection of a summer evening, with neither dust nor insects to be a drawback, with just wind enough to make tremulous the shadows on the lawn, and to waft, from the garden above the house, the odours of a thousand flowers. The garden itself did not surpass, or even equal, in beauty of arrangement, many of the gardens of the neighbourhood; but it was very beautiful in the unaccustomed eyes of Mr and Mrs Snow, and it was with their eyes that Graeme looked at it to-night. They left the others on the lawn, the gentlemen—some of them at least—smoking

in the shade of the great cedar, and Rose and Fanny making wreaths of the roses the children were gathering for them. The garden proper was behind the house, and thither they bent their steps, Graeme inwardly congratulating herself that she and Will were to have the pointing out of its beauties to the friends all to themselves. They did not need to be pointed out to the keen, admiring eyes of Mr Snow. Nothing escaped him, as he walked slowly before them, looking over his shoulder now and then, to remark on something that particularly interested him. Mrs Snow's gentle exclamations alone broke the silence for some time. She lingered with an interest, which to Graeme was quite pathetic, over flowers familiar in her childhood, but strangers to her for many a year.

"It minds me of the Ebba Gardens," said she, after a little. "Not that it is like them, except for the flowers. The Ebba Gardens were on a level, not in terraces like this. You winna mind the Ebba Gardens, Miss Graeme."

They had reached by this time a summer-house, which commanded a view of the whole garden, and of a beautiful stretch of country beyond, and here they sat down to wait the coming of the others, whose voices they heard below.

"No," said Graeme, "I was not at the Ebba often. But I remember the avenue, and the glimpse of the lake that comes so unexpectedly after the first turning from the gate. I am not sure whether I remember it, or whether it is only fancy; but it must have been very beautiful."

"It is only fancy to you, I doubt, for we turned many a time after going in at the gate, before the lake came in sight."

"Perhaps so. But I don't think it can all be fancy. I am sure I mind the lake, with the swans sailing, on it, and the wee green islets, and the branches of the birch trees drooping down into the water. Don't you mind?"

"Yes, I mind well. It was a bonny place," said Janet, with a sigh.

"But, what a tiny lake it must have been! I remember we could quite well see the flowers on the other side. It could not have been half so large as Merleville Pond."

"It wasn't hardly worth while calling it a lake, was it?" said Mr Snow.

"It did for want of a bigger, you know," said Graeme, laughing. "It made up in beauty what it wanted in size."

"It was a bonny spot," said Mrs Snow.

"And the birds! Whenever I want to imagine bird music in perfection, I shut my eyes, and think of the birches drooping over the water. I wonder what birds they were that sang there? I have never heard such singing of birds since then."

"No, there are no such singing birds here," said Mrs Snow. "I used to miss the lark's song in the morning, and the evening voices of the cushat and the blackbird. There are no birds like them here."

"Ain't it just possible that the music may be fancy, too, Miss Graeme," said Mr Snow, who did not like to hear the regretful echo in his wife's voice when she spoke of "home." Graeme laughed, and Mrs Snow smiled, for they both understood his feeling very well, and Mrs Snow said,—

"No, the music of the birds is no fancy, as you might know from Sandy. There are no birds like them here; but I have learnt to distinguish many a pleasant note among the American birds—not like our own linties at home, but very sweet and cheerful notwithstanding."

"The birds were real birds, and the music was real music. Oh! I wonder if I ever shall hear it again!" said Graeme, with a sigh. "You will hear it, Will, and see the dear old place. Oh! how I wish you could take me too." Will smiled.

"I shall be glad to hear the birds and see the places again. But I don't remember the Ebba, or, indeed, any of the old places, except our own house and garden, and your mother's cottage, Mrs Snow. I mind the last time we were there well."

"I mind it, too," said Mrs Snow, gravely.

"And yet, I should be almost sorry to go back again, lest I should have my ideas disturbed by finding places and people different from what I have been fancying them all this time. All those old scenes are so many lovely pictures to me, and it would be sad to go and find them less lovely than they seem to me now. I have read of such things," said Graeme.

"I wouldna fear anything of that kind," said Mrs Snow; "I mind them all so well."

"Do you ever think you would like to go back again?" said Will. "Would not you like to see the old faces and the old places once more?"

"No, lad," said Mrs Snow, emphatically. "I have no wish ever to go back."

"You are afraid of the sea? But the steamers are very different from the old 'Steadfast'."

"I was not thinking of the sea, though I would dread that too. But why should I wish to go back? There are two or three places I would like to see the glen where my mother's cottage stood, and two or three graves. And when I shut my eyes I can see them here. No, I have no wish to go back."

There was a moment's silence, and then Mrs Snow, turning her clear, kind eyes on her husband, over whose face a wistful, expostulating look was stealing, said,—

"I like to think about the dear faces, and the old places, sometimes, and to speak about them with the bairns; it is both sad and pleasant now and then. But I am quite content with all things as they are. I wouldna go back, and I wouldna change my lot if I might. I am quite content."

Mr Snow smiled and nodded in his own peculiar fashion for reply. There could be no doubt of *his* content, or Mrs Snow's either, Graeme acknowledged, and then her thoughts went back to the time when Janet's lot had been so different. She thought of the husband of her youth, and how long the grave had closed over him; she remembered her long years of patient labour in the manse; the bitter home-sickness of the first months in Merleville, and all the changes that had come since then. And yet, Janet was not changed. She was the very same. The qualities that had made her invaluable to them all those years, made the happiness of her husband and her home still, and after all the changes that life had brought she was content. No one could doubt that. And Graeme asked herself, would it ever be so with her? Would she ever cease to regret the irrevocable past and learn to grow happy in a new way? She prayed that it might be so. She longed for the tranquil content of those old days before her heart was startled from its girlhood's quiet. How long it seemed since she had been quite at peace with herself! Would she ever be so again? It did not seem possible. She tried in vain to fancy herself among other scenes, with other hopes, and friends, and interests. And yet, here was Janet, not of a light or changeful nature; how she had loved, and lost, and suffered! And yet she had grown content?

"What are you thinking about, Graeme?" said Will, who, as well as Mr Snow, had been watching her troubled face, Graeme started.

"Oh! of a great many things. I don't know why it should have come to my mind just now, but I was thinking of a day in Merleville, long ago—an Indian-summer day. I remember walking about among the fallen leaves, and looking over the pond to the hills beyond, wondering foolishly, I suppose, about what the future might bring to us all. How lovely it was that day!"

"And then you came and stood within the gate, and hardly gave me a look as I passed out. I mind it, very well," said Mr Snow.

"I was not friends with you that day. But how should you remember it? How should you know it was that day, of which I was thinking?"

"I saw, by your face, you were thinking of old times, and of all the changes that had come to you and yours; and it was on that day you first heard of one of them. That is how I came to think of it."

"And then you came into the house, and called me from the foot of the stairs. You werena well pleased with me, either, that day," said Mrs Snow.

"Oh! I was afraid; and you spoke to me of aunt Marian, and of our own Menie, and how there might be sadder changes than even your going away. Ah, me! I don't think I have been quite at peace with myself since that night."

"Miss Graeme! my dear," expostulated Mrs Snow.

"No, I have ay been afraid to find myself at peace. But I am glad of one thing, though I did not think that day it would ever make me glad. Uncle Sampson, did I ever tell you—I am afraid I never did—how glad I am now, that you were stronger than I was, and prevailed—in taking Janet from us, I mean?"

She was standing behind him, so that he did not see her face. He did not turn round, or try to see it. He looked towards his wife, with a grave smile.

"I don't think you ever told me in words."

"No, because it is only a little while that I have been really glad; it is only since your coming has made me sure she is happier—far happier with you and Emily and Sandy, than ever we could make her now; almost as happy as she deserves to be."

"I reckon, the happiness ain't all on one side of the house, by a great deal," said Mr Snow, gravely.

"No, I know that—I am sure of that. And I am glad—so glad, that it reconciles me to the knowledge that we can never be quite the same to her as we used to be, and that is saying much."

"Ain't you most afraid that it might hurt her to hear you say so?" said Mr Snow, his eyes never leaving his wife's face. They were quite alone by this time. Will had obeyed the call of the children, and was gone away.

"No, I am not afraid. She knows I would not hurt her willingly, by word or deed, so you must let me say how very glad I am we lost her, for her sake. And when I remember all that she has lived through—all the sorrow she has seen; knowing her steadfast, loving, heart, and how little she is given to change, yet seeing her happy, and with power to make others happy, it gives me courage to look into the future; it makes me less afraid."

His eyes left his wife's face now, and turned, with a look of wonder, to Graeme.

"What is it, dear?" he asked. "Is there anything I may not know?"

"No. Only I am glad for Janet's sake, and for yours, and for mine, too, because—"

It would not have been easy to say more, and, besides, the others were coming up the walk, and, partly because there were tears in her eyes, and partly because she shrunk nervously from the excessive friendliness with which it seemed to be Mrs Grove's intention on the occasion to distinguish her, she turned, hoping to escape. She did not

succeed, however, and stood still at the door, knowing very well what would be Mrs Grove's first remark.

"Ah! I see you have an eye for the beautiful."

She had heard her say it just as many times as she had stood with her on that very beautiful spot; and she never expected to stand there without hearing it, certainly not if, as on the present occasion, there were strangers there too. It was varied a little, this time.

"You see, Mr Green, Miss Elliott has an eye for the beautiful. I knew we should find her here, with her friends."

The rest was as usual.

"Observe how entirely different this is, from all the other views about the place. There is not a glimpse of the river, or of the mountains, except that blue line of hills, very distant indeed. The scene is quite a pastoral one, you see. Can you imagine anything more tranquil? It seems the very domain of silence and repose."

The last remark was not so effective as usual, because of the noise made by Charlie Millar and Will, and the young Groves, as they ran along the broad walk full in sight.

"It is a bonny, quiet place," said Mrs Snow.

"The garden is not seen at its best now," continued Mrs Grove. "The beauty of the spring flowers is over, and except the roses, we have not many summer flowers; we make a better show later in the season."

"It looks first-rate," said Mr Snow.

"It costs a great deal of trouble and expense to keep it up as it ought to be kept," continued Mrs Grove. "I sometimes think it is not right to spend so much time and money for what is a mere gratification to the eye."

Mrs Grove was bent on being agreeable, to all present, and she thought "the economical dodge" was as good as any, considering her audience.

"There is something in that," said Mr Snow, meditatively; "but a place like this ought to be a great deal more than that, I think."

"Oh! I expect it pays," said Mr Green. "To people who are fond of such things, I expect there is more pleasure to be got for the same money from a garden than from 'most any other thing."

"To say nothing of the pleasure given to other folk—to one's friends," suggested Mrs Snow.

"I was calculating that, too," said Mr Green. "The pleasure one's friends get tells on one's own comfort; you feel better yourself, if the folks about you feel well, especially if you have the doing of it. *That* pays."

"If we are travelling in the right road, the more we see of the beautiful things God has made, the better and the happier we will be," said Mr Snow. "It will pay in that way, I guess."

He turned an inquiring look on Mr Green, as he spoke, but that gentleman, probably not being prepared to speak advisedly on the subject, neither agreed nor dissented, and his eyes travelled on till they rested on the face of his wife.

"Yes," said, she, softly, "the more we see of God's love and wisdom in the beautiful things He has made, the more we shall love Him, and in loving Him we shall grow like Him."

Mr Snow nodded. Mr Green looked curiously from one to the other as they spoke.

"I suppose we may expect something wonderful in the way of gardens and pleasure-grounds, when you have completed your place, Mr Green," said Mrs Grove, who did not care that the conversation should take a serious turn on this occasion. She flattered herself that she had already won the confidence and admiration of Mr and Mrs Snow, by her warmly-expressed sympathy with their "rather peculiar" views and opinions. Whether Mr Green would be so fortunate was questionable, so she went on quickly,—

"Miss Elliott, Mr Green has been telling me about his place as we come up the garden. It must be very lovely, standing, as it does, on the borders of one of those vast prairies that we all admire."

Thus appealed to, it was unpardonable in Graeme that she should respond to the lady's admiring enthusiasm with only the doubtful assent implied in a hesitating "Indeed;" but her enthusiasm was not to be damped.

"There must be something grand and elevating in the constant view of a prairie. It must tend to enlarge one's ideas, and satisfy one; don't you think so, Miss Elliott?"

"I don't know," said Graeme, hesitatingly. "For a place of residence, I should suppose it might be a little dull, and unvaried."

"Of course, if there was nothing besides the prairie; but, with such a residence as Mr Green's—I forget what style of architecture it is."

But Mr Green was not learned on the subject of architecture, and said nothing about it. He only knew that people called his house a very handsome one, and that it had cost him a deal of money, and he said so, emphatically, adding his serious doubts whether the investment would "pay."

"Oh! you cannot tell yet," said Mrs Grove. "That will depend altogether on circumstances. It is quite time that you were settling down into a quiet family man. You have been roaming about the world quite long enough. I don't at all approve of the European trip, unless, indeed—"

She paused, and looked so exceedingly arch and wise, that Mr Green looked a little puzzled and foolish by contrast, perhaps.

"Miss Elliott," continued Mrs Grove, bent on carrying out her laudable intention of drawing Graeme into the conversation, "have you quite decided on not accompanying your brother?"

"Accompanying Will? Oh! I have never for a moment thought of such a thing. The expense would put it quite out of the question, even if there were no other reasons against it."

"Indeed, then I must have misunderstood you when I fancied I heard you say how much you would like to go. I thought you longed for a chance to see Scotland again."

"I daresay you heard me say something of the kind. I should like to visit Scotland very much, and other countries, too. And I intend to do so when I have made my fortune," added she, laughing.

"Or, when some one has made it for you; that would do as well, would it not?" asked Mrs Grove.

"Oh, yes! a great deal better. When some one makes my fortune for me, I shall visit Europe. I think I may promise that."

"Have you ever been West, yet, Miss Elliott? You spoke of going at one time, I remember," said Mr Green.

"Never yet. All my travelling has been done at the fireside. I have very much wished to visit my brother Norman. I daresay Rose and I will find ourselves there some day," added she, turning to Mr Snow.

"Unless we keep you in Merleville," said he, smiling.

"Oh! well, I am very willing to be kept there on certain conditions you know."

"How do you suppose Fanny could ever do without you?" asked Mrs Grove, reproachfully.

"Oh! she would miss us, I daresay. But I don't think we are absolutely necessary to her happiness."

"Of course, she will have to lose you one of these days. We cannot expect that you will devote yourself to your brothers always, I know."

"Especially as they don't stand in particular need of my devotion," said Graeme stiffly, as she offered her arm to Mrs Snow. "Let us walk, again. What can Will and the children be doing? Something extraordinary, if one may judge by the noise."

Mrs Grove rose to go with them, but lingered a moment behind to remark to Mr Snow on the exceeding loveliness of Miss Elliott's disposition and character, her great superiority to young ladies in general, and especially on the devotion so apparent in all her intercourse with her old friend.

"And with you, too," she added; "I scarcely can say which she honours most, or on which she most relies for counsel."

"There," said she to herself, as she followed the others down the walk, "I have given him an opening, if he only has the sense to use it. One can see what *he* wants easily enough, and if he knows what is for his advantage he will get the good word of his countryman, and he ought to thank me for the chance."

Chapter Thirty Four.

Why Mrs Grove thought Mr Green might need an opening for anything he had to say to Mr Snow did not appear, as he did not avail himself of it. It was Mr Snow who spoke first, after a short silence.

"Going to give up business and settle down. Eh?"

"I have thought of it. I don't believe I should enjoy life half as well if I did, however."

"How much do you enjoy it now?" inquired Mr Snow.

"Well, not a great deal, that is a fact; but as well as folks generally do, I reckon. But, after all, I do believe to keep hard to work is about as good a way as any to take comfort in the world."

Mr Green took a many-bladed knife from his pocket, and plucking a twig from the root of a young cedar, began fashioning it into an instrument slender and smooth.

"That is about the conclusion I have come to," repeated he; "and I expect I will have to keep to work if I mean to get the good of life."

"There are a good many kinds of work to be done in the world," suggested Mr Snow.

Mr Green gave him a glance curious and inquiring.

"Well, I suppose there are a good many ways of working in the world, but it all comes to the same thing pretty much, I guess. Folks work to get a living, and then to accumulate property. Some do it in a large way, and some in a small way, but the end is the same."

"Suppose you should go to work to spend your money now?" suggested Mr Snow, again.

"Well, I've done a little in that way, too, and I have about come to the conclusion that that don't pay as well as the making of it, as far as the comfort it gives. I ain't a very rich man, not near so rich as folks think; but I had got a kind of sick of doing the same thing all the time, and so I thought I would try something else a spell. So I rather drew up, though I ain't out of business yet, by a great deal. I thought I would try and see if I could make a home, so I built. But a house ain't a home—not by a great sight. I have got as handsome a place as anybody need wish to have, but I would rather live in a hotel any day than have the bother of it. I don't more than half believe I shall ever live there long at a time."

He paused, and whittled with great earnestness.

"It seems a kind of aggravating, now, don't it, when a man has worked hard half his life and more to make property, that he shouldn't be able to enjoy it when he has got it."

"What do you suppose is the reason?" asked Mr Snow, gravely, but with rather a preoccupied air. He was wondering how it was that Mr Green should have been betrayed into giving his dreary confidences to a comparative stranger.

"Well, I don't know," replied Mr Green, meditatively. "I suppose, for one thing, I have been so long in the mill that I can't get out of the old jog easily. I should have begun sooner, or have taken work and pleasure by turns as I went along. I don't take much comfort in what seems to please most folks."

There was a pause; Mr Snow had nothing to say in reply, however, and in a little Mr Green went on:

"I haven't any very near relations; cousins and cousin's children are the nearest. I have helped them some, and would rather do it than not, and they are willing enough to be helped, but they don't seem very near to me. I enjoy well enough going to see them once in a while, but it don't amount to much all they care about me; and, to tell the truth, it ain't much I care about them. If I had a family of my own, it would be different. Women folks and young folk enjoy spending money, and I suppose I would have enjoyed seeing them do it. But I have about come to the conclusion that I should have seen to that long ago."

Without moving or turning his head, he gave his new friend a look out of the corner of his eyes that it might have surprised him a little to see; but Mr Snow saw nothing at the moment. To wonder as to why this new acquaintance should bestow his confidence on him, was succeeding a feeling of pity for him—a desire to help him—and he was considering the propriety of improving the opportunity given to drop a "word in season" for his benefit. Not that he had much confidence in his own skill at this sort of thing. It is to be feared the deacon looked on this way of witnessing for the truth as a cross to be borne rather than as a privilege to be enjoyed. He was readier with good deeds than with good words, and while he hesitated, Mr Green went on:

"How folks can hang round with nothing particular to do is what I can't understand. I never should get used to it, I know. I've made considerable property, and I expect I have enjoyed the making more than I ever shall enjoy the spending of it."

"I shouldn't wonder if you had," said Mr Snow, gravely.

"I *have* thought of going right slap into political life. I might have got into the Legislature, time and again; and I don't doubt but I might find my way to Congress by spending something handsome. That might be as good a way to let off the steam as any. When a man gets into politics, he don't seem to mind much else. He has got to drive right through. I don't know how well it pays."

"In the way of comfort, I'm afraid it *don't* pay," said Mr Snow.

"I expect not. I don't more than half think it would pay *me*. Politics have got to be considerably mixed up in our country. I don't believe I should ever get to see my way clear to go all lengths; and I don't believe it would amount to anything if I could. Besides, if a man expects to get very far along in *that* road, he has got to take a fair start in good season. I learnt to read and cypher in the old log school-house at home, and my mother taught me the catechism on Sunday afternoons, and that is about all the book-learning I ever got. I shouldn't hardly have an even chance with some of those college-bred chaps, though there are *some* things I know as well as the best of them, I reckon. Have you ever been out West?"

"I was there once a good many years ago. I had a great notion of going to settle there when I was a young man. I am glad I didn't, though."

"Money ain't to be made there anything like as fast as it used to be," said Mr Green. "But there is chance enough, if a man has a head for it. I have seen some cool business done there at one time and another."

The chances in favour of Mr Snow's "word in season" were becoming fewer, he saw plainly, as Mr Green wandered off from his dissatisfaction to the varied remembrances of his business-life; so, with a great effort, he said:

"Ain't it just possible that your property and the spending of it don't satisfy you because it is not in the nature of such things to give satisfaction?"

Mr Green turned and looked earnestly at him.

"Well, I have heard so, but I never believed it any more for hearing it said. The folks that say it oftenest don't act as if they believed it themselves. They try as hard for it as any one else, if they are to be judged by their actions. It is all right to say they believe it, I suppose, because it is in the Bible, or something like it is."

"And you believe it, not because it is in the Bible, but because you are learning, by your own experience, every day you live."

Mr Green whistled.

"Come, now; ain't that going it a little too strong? I never said I didn't expect to enjoy my property. I enjoy it now, after a fashion. If a man ain't going to enjoy his property, what is he to enjoy?"

"All that some people enjoy is the making of it. You have done that, you say. There is less pleasure to be got from wealth, even in the most favourable circumstances, than those who haven't got it believe. They who have it find that out, as you are doing.

"But I can fancy myself getting all the pleasure I want out of my property, if only some things were different—if I had something else to go with it. Other folks seem to take the comfort out of theirs as they go along."

"They seem to; but how can you be sure as to the enjoyment they really have? How many of your friends, do you suppose, suspect that you don't get all the satisfaction out of yours that you seem to? Do you suppose the lady who was saying so much in praise of your fine place just now, has any idea that it is only a weariness to you?"

"I was telling her so as we came along. She says the reason I don't enjoy it is because there is something else that I haven't got, that ought to go along with it and I agreed with her there."

Again a furtive glance was sent towards Mr Snow's thoughtful face. He smiled and shook his head.

"Yes, it is something else you want. It is always something else, and ever will be till the end comes. That something else, if it is ever yours, will bring disappointment with it. It will come as you don't expect it or want it, or it will come too late. There is no good talking. There is nothing in the world that it will do to make a portion of."

Mr Green looked up at him with some curiosity and surprise. This sounded very much like what he used to hear in conference meeting long ago, but he had an idea that such remarks were inappropriate out of meeting, and he wondered a little what could be Mr Snow's motive for speaking in that way just then.

"As to making a portion of it, I don't know about that; but I do know that there is considerable to be got out of money. What can't it get? Or rather, I should say, what can be got without it? I don't say that they who have the most of it are always best off, because other things come in to worry them, maybe; but the chances are in favour of the man that has all he wants to spend. You'll never deny that."

"That ain't just the way I would put it," said Mr Snow. "I would say that the man who expects his property to make him happy, will be disappointed. The amount he has got don't matter. It ain't in it to give happiness. I know, partly because I have tried, and it has failed me, and partly because I am told that 'a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things that he possesseth.'

"Well, now, if that is so, will you tell me why there ain't one man in ten thousand who believes it, or at least who acts as if he believed it? Why is all the world chasing after wealth, as if it were the one thing for body and soul? If money ain't worth having, why hasn't somebody found it out, and set the world right about it before now?"

"As to money not being worth the having, I never said that. What I say is, that God never meant that mere wealth should make a man happy. That has been found out times without number; but as to setting the world right about it, I expect that is one of the things that each man must learn by experience. Most folks do learn it after a while, in one way or other."

"Well," said Mr Green, gravely, "you look as if you believed what you say, and you look as if you enjoyed life pretty well too. If it ain't your property that makes you happy, what is it?"

"It ain't my property, *sartain*," said Mr Snow, with emphasis. "I know I shouldn't be any happier if I had twice as much. And I am sure I shouldn't be less happy if I hadn't half as much; my happiness rests on a surer foundation than anything I have got."

He paused, casting about in his thoughts for just the right word to say—something that might be as "a fire and a hammer" to the softening and breaking of that world-hardened heart.

"He *does* look as if he believed what he was saying," Mr Green was thinking to himself. "It is just possible he might give me a hint. He don't look like a man who don't practise as he preaches." Aloud, he said,—

"Come, now, go ahead. What has cured one, may help another, you know. Give us your idea as to what is a sure foundation for a man's happiness."

Mr Snow looked gravely into his face and said,

"Blessed is the man who feareth the Lord."

"Blessed is the man whose trust the Lord is."

"Blessed is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered."

"Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, in whose spirit there is no guile."

Mr Green's eye fell before his earnest gaze. It came into his mind that if there was happiness to be found in the world, this man had found it. But it seemed a happiness very far-away from him—quite beyond his reach—something that it would be impossible for him ever to find now. The sound of his mother's voice, softly breaking the stillness of a Sabbath afternoon, with some such words as these, came back to him, and just for a moment he realised their unchangeable truth, and for that moment he knew that his life had been a failure. A pang of regret, a longing for another chance, and a sense of the vanity of such a wish, smote on his heart for an instant and then passed away. He rose from his seat, and moved a few paces down the walk, and when he came back he did not sit down again. His cedar twig was smoothed down at both ends to the finest possible point, and after balancing it for a minute on his forefingers, he tossed it over his shoulder, and shutting his knife with a click, put it in his pocket before he spoke.

"Well, I don't know as I am much better off for that," said he, discontentedly. "I suppose you mean that I ought to get religion. That is no new idea. I have heard *that* every time I have gone to meeting for the last thirty years, which hasn't been as often as it might have been, but it has been often enough for all the good it has done me." He looked at Mr Snow as if he expected him to make some sort of a reply, but he was silent. He was thinking how vain any words of his would be to convince him, or to show him a more excellent way. He was thinking of the old time, and of the talk wasted on him by the good people who would fain have helped him. At last he said, gravely:

"It wouldn't amount to much, all I could say to you, even if I was good at talking, which I ain't. I can only tell you that I never knew what it was to be satisfied till I got religion, and I have never been discontented since, and I don't believe I ever shall again, let what will happen to me."

He paused a moment, and added,—

"I don't suppose anything I could say would help you to see things as I wish you did, if I were to talk all night. Talk always falls short of the mark, unless the heart is prepared for it, and then the simplest word is enough. There are none better than the words I gave you a minute ago; and when everything in the world seems to be failing you, just you try what trust in the Lord will do."

Nothing more was said. The sound of approaching footsteps warned them that they were no longer alone, and in a little Mrs Elliott and Rose were seen coming up the walk, followed by Arthur and Captain Starr. They were discussing something that interested them greatly, and their merry voices fell pleasantly on the ear. Very pretty both young ladies looked, crowned with the roses they had been weaving into wreaths. The grave look which had settled on Mr Green's face, passed away as he watched their approach.

"Pretty creatures, both of them," remarked he. "Mrs Elliott appears well, don't she? I never saw any one improve so much as she has done in the last two years. I used to think her—well not very superior."

"She is a pretty little thing, and good tempered, I think," said Mr Snow, smiling. "I shouldn't wonder if our folks made something of her, after all. She is in better keeping than she used to be, I guess."

"She used to be—well, a little of a flirt, and I don't believe she has forgot all about it yet," said Mr Green, nodding in the direction of Captain Starr, with a knowing look. The possibility of a married woman's amusing herself in that way was not among the subjects to which Mr Snow had given his attention, so he had nothing to say in reply.

"And the other one—she understands a little of it, too, I guess."

"What, Rosie? She is a child. Graeme will teach her better than that. She despises such things," said Mr Snow, warmly.

"She don't flirt any herself, does she?" asked Mr Green, coolly. "Miss Elliott, I mean."

Mr Snow turned on him astonished eyes. "I don't know as I understand what you mean by flirting. I always supposed it was something wrong, or, at least, something unbecoming in any woman, married or single. Graeme ain't one of that sort."

Mr Green shrugged his shoulders incredulously. "Oh! as to its being wrong, and so forth, I don't know. They all do it, I guess, in one way or other. I don't suppose Miss Graeme would go it so strong as that little woman, but I guess she knows how."

The voice of Rose prevented Mr Snow's indignant reply.

"But, Arthur, you are not a disinterested judge. Of course you would admire Fanny's most, and as for Captain Starr, he is—"

"He is like the ass between two bundles of hay."

"Nonsense, Arthur. Fanny, let us ask Mr Snow," said Rose, springing forward, and slightly bending her head. "Now, Uncle Sampson, which is prettiest? I'll leave the decision to you."

"Uncle Sampson" was a very pleasant sound in Mr Snow's ears, and never more so, than when it came from the lips of Rose, and it was with a loving as well as an admiring look that he answered—

"Well I can't say which is the prettiest. You are both as pretty as you need to be. If you were as good as you are pretty!"

Rose pouted, impatient of the laughter which this speech excited.

"I mean our wreaths. Look, mine is made of these dear little Scotch roses, with here and there a moss-rose bud. Fanny's, you see, are all open roses, white and damask. Now, which is the prettiest?"

She took her wreath from her head in her eagerness, and held it up, admiringly.

"Yours ain't half so pretty as it was a minute ago. I think, now, I should admire Mrs Elliott's most," said Mr Green, gravely.

They both curtsied to him.

"You see, Rosie, Mr Green has decided in my favour," said Fanny, triumphantly.

"Yes, but not in favour of your wreath. The others thought the same, but I don't mind about that. It is our wreaths I want to know about. Let us ask Graeme."

But Graeme did not come alone. The little Groves came with her, and Will and Charlie followed, a rather noisy party. The little girls were delighted, and danced about, exclaiming at the beauty of the flowery crowns; and in a little, Miss Victoria was wearing that of Rose, and imitating the airs and graces of her elder sister in a way that must have encouraged her mother's hopes as to her ultimate success in life. The other begged piteously for Fanny's, but she was too well aware of its charming effect on her own head to yield at once to her entreaties, and, in the midst of the laughing confusion that accompanied the carrying of the child's point, Graeme and Mrs Snow, who confessed herself a little tired after her walk, entered the summer-house again. Mrs Grove and Mr Proudful entered with them, and the others disposed, themselves in groups about the door. Mr Green stood leaning on the door-post looking in upon them.

"Miss Elliott," said Mr Proudful, presently, "what has become of you for a long time? I have hardly seen you for years—for a year at least—and we used to meet so often." Graeme laughed.

"I have seen you a great many times within a year. I am afraid my society doesn't make the impression on you it ought. Have you forgotten your New Year's visit, and a visit or two besides, to say nothing of chance meetings in the street and in the market?"

"Oh, but excuse me. I mean we have not met in society. You have been making a hermit of yourself, which is not very kind or very complimentary to your friends, I assure you."

"I am very glad to hear you say so," exclaimed Mrs Grove. "That is a subject on which Miss Elliott and I never agree—I mean the claims society has upon her. If she makes a hermit of herself, I assure you she is not permitted to do so without remonstrance."

"Your ideas of a hermit's life differ from those generally held," said Graeme, vexed at the personal turn of the conversation, and more vexed still with Mrs Grove's interference. "What does the ballad say?"

"A scrip with fruits and herbs well stored,
And water from the spring.'

"I am afraid a hermit's life would not suit me."

"Oh! of course, we are speaking of comparative seclusion," said Mrs Grove. "Still, as ladies are supposed to have a fancy for going to extremes, Miss Elliott's taste for quietness is the most desirable extreme of the two."

The remark was addressed to Mr Green, who was an interested listener, but Mr Proudful answered it.

"I am by no means sure of that, my dear madam. I can understand how those who have an opportunity of daily or frequent intercourse with Miss Elliott should be content to think so; but that she should withdraw herself altogether from society, should not be permitted. What charming parties, I remember, we used to enjoy."

"Mr Proudful," said Graeme, gravely, "look at Mrs Snow's face. You are conveying to her the idea that, at one time, I was quite given up to the pursuit of pleasure, and she is shocked, and no wonder. Now, my own impression is, that I was never very fond of going into society, as you call it. I certainly never met you more than two or three times—at large parties, I mean."

Mr Proudful bowed low.

"Well, that shows how profound was the impression which your society made on me, for on looking back I uniformly associate you with all the pleasant assemblies of the season. You went with us to Beloeil, did you not?"

Graeme shook her head.

"Well, no wonder I forget, it is so long ago, now. You were at Mrs Roxbury's great affair, were you not? It happened not long before Mr Elphinstone's death. Yes, I remember you were there."

"Yes, I remember you were kind enough to point out to me the beauties of that wonderful picture, in the little room up-stairs," said Graeme, smiling.

"Yes, you were ill, or slightly unwell, I should say, for you recovered immediately. You were there, Mr Green, I remember. It was a great affair, given in honour of Miss Elphinstone and your friend Ruthven. By-the-by, Miss Elliott, they lay themselves open to censure, as well as you. They rarely go out now, I hear."

"I am to be censured in good company, it seems," said Graeme, laughing.

"I suppose you see them often," continued he. "You used to be quite intimate with my pretty cousin—I call her cousin, though we are only distantly connected. She is a very nice little woman."

"Yes. I believe you used to be very intimate with them both," said Mrs Grove, "and there has hardly been any intercourse since Fanny's marriage. I have often wondered at and regretted it."

"Have you?" said Graeme, coldly. "We have had little intercourse with many old friends since then."

"Oh! yes, I daresay, but the Ruthvens are very different from most of your old friends, and worth the keeping. I must speak to Fanny about it."

"We saw Miss Elphinstone often during the first winter after her return. That was the winter that Mr Proudful remembers as so gay," said Graeme. "Did I ever tell you about the beginning of Rosie's acquaintance with her, long before that, when she wandered into the garden and saw the gowans?"

"Yes, dear, you told me about it in a letter," said Mrs Snow.

"I never shall forget the first glimpse I got of that bunch of flowers," said Graeme, rather hurriedly. "Rose has it yet among her treasures. She must show it you."

But Mrs Grove did not care to hear about Rosie's flowers just then, and rather perversely, as Graeme thought, reverted to the falling away of their old intimacy with the Ruthvens, and to wonder at its cause; and there was something in her tone that made Mrs Snow turn grave, astonished eyes upon her, and helped Graeme to answer very quietly and coldly to her remark:

"I can easily see how marriage would do something towards estranging such warm friends, when only one of the parties are interested; but you were very intimate with Mr Ruthven, as well, were you not?"

"Oh! yes; more so than with Miss Elphinstone. Mr Ruthven is a very old friend of ours. We came over in the same ship together."

"I mind him well," interposed Mrs Snow; "a kindly, well-intentioned lad he seemed to be. Miss Rose, my dear, I doubt you shouldna be sitting there, on the grass, with the dew falling, nor Mrs Arthur, either."

A movement was made to return to the house.

"Oh! Janet," whispered Graeme, "I am afraid you are tired, mind as well as body, after all this foolish talk."

"By no means, my dear. It wouldna be very edifying for a continuance, but once in a way it is enjoyable enough. He seems a decent, harmless body, that Mr Proudful. I wonder if he is any friend of Dr Proudful, of Knockie?"

"I don't know, indeed," said Graeme, laughing; "but if he is a great man, or connected with great folk, I will ask him. It will be an easy way of giving him pleasure."

They did not make a long evening of it. Mr Green was presented by Mrs Grove with a book of plates, and Graeme was beguiled to a side-table to admire them with him. Mr Proudful divided his attention between them and the piano, to which Rose and Fanny had betaken themselves, till at the suggestion of Mrs Grove, Arthur challenged him to a game of chess, which lasted all the evening. Mrs Grove devoted herself to Mrs Snow, and surprised her by the significant glances she sent now and then in the direction of Graeme and Mr Green; while Mr Grove got Mr Snow into a corner, and enjoyed the satisfaction of pouring out his heart on the harbour question to a new and interested auditor.

"Rose," said Fanny, as they sat together the next day after dinner, "what do you think mamma said to me this morning? Shall I tell you?"

"If it is anything particularly interesting you may," said Rose, in a tone that implied a doubt.

"It was about you," said Fanny, nodding significantly.

"Well, the subject is interesting," said Rose, "whatever the remark might be."

"What is it, Fanny?" said Arthur. "Rose is really very anxious to know, though she pretends to be so indifferent. I daresay it was some appropriate remark's on her flirtation with the gallant captain, last night."

"Mamma didn't mention Captain Starr, but she said she had never noticed before that Rose was so fond of admiration, and a little inclined to flirt."

Rose reddened and bit her lips.

"I am much obliged to Mrs Grove, for her good opinion. Were there any other appropriate remarks?"

"Oh! yes; plenty more," said Fanny, laughing. "I told mamma it was all nonsense. She used to say the same of me, and I reminded her of it. I told her we all looked upon Rose as a child, and that she had no idea of flirting—and such things."

"I hope you did not do violence to your conscience when you said it," said Arthur, gravely.

"Of course not. But still when I began to think about it, I could not be quite sure."

"Set a thief to catch a thief," said her husband.

Fanny shook her finger at him.

"But it wasn't Captain Starr nor Charlie Millar mamma meant. It was Mr Green."

The cloud vanished from Rosie's face. She laughed and clapped her hands. Her brothers laughed, too.

"Well done, Rosie," said Arthur. "But from some manoeuvring I observed last night, I was led to believe that Mrs Grove had other views for the gentleman."

"So she had," said Fanny, eagerly. "And she says Rose may spoil all if she divides his attention. It is just what a man of his years is likely to do, mamma says, to fall in love with a young girl like Rosie, and Graeme is so much more suitable. But I told mamma Graeme would never have him."

"Allow me to say, Fanny, that I think you might find some more suitable subject for discussion with Mrs Grove," said Rose, indignantly. Arthur laughed.

"You ought to be very thankful for the kind interest taken in your welfare, and for Graeme's, too. I am sure Mr Green would be highly flattered if he could be aware of the sensation he is creating among us."

"Mr Green admires Graeme very much, he told mamma; and mamma says he would have proposed to her, when he was here before, if it had not been for Mr Ruthven. You know he was very intimate here then, and everybody said he and Graeme were engaged. Mamma says it was a great pity he did not. It would have prevented the remarks of ill-natured people when Mr Ruthven was married—about Graeme, I mean."

"It is to be hoped no one will be ill-natured enough to repeat anything of that sort in Graeme's hearing," said Arthur, very much annoyed.

"Oh! don't be alarmed. Graeme is too well accustomed by this time, to Mrs Grove's impertinences, to allow anything she says to trouble her," said Rose, with flashing eyes.

Mrs Snow's hand was laid softly on that of the young girl, who had risen in her indignation.

"Sit down, my dear," she whispered.

"Nonsense, Rosie," said her brother; "there is nothing to be vexed about. How can you be so foolish?"

"Indeed," said Fanny, a little frightened at the excitement she had raised, "mamma didn't mean anything that you wouldn't like. She only thought—"

"We had better say nothing more about it," said Arthur, interrupting her. "I dare say Graeme can manage her own affairs without help from other people. But there is nothing to be vexed about, Rosie. Don't put on a face like that about it, you foolish lassie."

"What is the matter here, good people?" said Graeme, entering at the moment. "What are you quarrelling about? What ails Rosie?"

"Oh! Mrs Grove has been giving her some good advice, which she don't receive so meekly as she might," said Arthur.

"That is very ungrateful of you, Rosie," said her sister. Mrs Grove's interference didn't seem a sufficient matter to frown about.

"How is she now, my dear?" inquired Mrs Snow, by way of changing the subject.

She was Mrs Tilman, who had of late become subject to sudden attacks of illness, "not dangerous, but severe," as she herself declared. They had become rather frequent, but as they generally came on at night, and were over before morning, so that they did not specially interfere with her work, they were not alarming to the rest of the household. Indeed, they seldom heard of them till they were over; for the considerate Mrs Tilman was wont to insist to Sarah, that the ladies should not be disturbed on her account. But Sarah had become a little uncomfortable, and had confessed as much to Graeme, and Graeme desired to be told the next time she was ill, and so it happened that she was not present when a subject so interesting to herself was discussed.

"Is Mrs Tilman ill again?" asked Fanny. "How annoying! She is not very ill, I hope."

"No," said Graeme, quietly; "she will be better to-morrow."

That night, in the retirement of their chamber, Mr and Mrs Snow were in no haste to begin, as was their custom, the comparing of notes over the events of the day. This was usually the way when anything not very pleasant had occurred, or when anything had had been said that it was not agreeable to recall. It was Mr Snow who began the conversation.

"Well, what do you think of all that talk?" asked he, when his wife sat down, after a rather protracted putting away of various articles in boxes and drawers.

"Oh! I think little of it—just what I have ay thought—that yon is a meddling, short-sighted woman. It is a pity her daughter hasna the sense to see it."

"Oh! I don't think the little thing meant any harm. But Rosie flared right up, didn't she?"

"I shouldna wonder but her conscience told her there was some truth in the accusation—about her love of admiration, I mean. But Mrs Arthur is not the one that should throw stones at her for that, I'm thinking."

"But about Graeme! She will never marry that man, will she?"

"He'll never ask her," said Mrs Snow, shortly. "At least I think he never will."

"Well, I don't know. It looked a little like it, last night and come to think of it, he talked a little like it, too."

"He is no' the man to ask any woman, till he is sure he will not ask in vain. He may, but I dinna think it."

"Well, perhaps not. Of course, I could see last night, that it was all fixed, their being together. But I thought she stood it pretty well, better than she would if she hadn't liked it."

"Hoot, man! She thought nothing about it. Her thoughts were far enough from him, and his likes, and dislikes," said Mrs Snow, with a sigh.

"As a general thing, girls are quick enough to find out when a man cares for them, and he showed it plainly to me. I guess she mistrusts."

"No, a woman kens when a man has lost his heart to her. He lets her see it in many ways, when he has no thought of doing so. But a woman is not likely to know it, when a man without love wishes to marry her, till he tells her in words. And what heart has twenty years cheat'ry of his fellow men left to yon man, that my bairn should waste a thought on a worldling like him?"

Mr Snow was silent. His wife's tone betrayed to him that something was troubling her, or he would have ventured a word in his new friend's defence. Not that he was inclined to plead Mr Green's cause with Graeme, but he could not help feeling a little compassion for him, and he said:

"Well, I suppose I feel inclined to take his part, because he makes me think of what I was myself once, and that not so long ago."

The look that Mrs Snow turned upon her husband was one of indignant astonishment.

"Like you! You dry stick!"

"Well, ain't he? You used to think me a pretty hard case. Now, didn't you?"

"I'm no' going to tell you to-night what I used to think of you," said his wife, more mildly. "I never saw you on the day when you didna think more of other folks' comfort than you thought of your own, and that couldna be said of him, this many a year and day. He is not a fit mate for my bairn."

"Well—no, he ain't. He ain't a Christian, and that is the first thing she would consider. But he ain't satisfied with himself, and if anybody in the world could bring him to be what he ought to be, she is the one." And he repeated the conversation that had taken place when they were left alone in the summer-house.

"But being dissatisfied with himself, is very far from being a changed man, and that work must be done by a greater than Graeme. And besides, if he were a changed man to-night, he is no' the man to win Miss Graeme's heart, and he'll no ask her. He is far more like to ask Rosie; for I doubt she is not beyond leading him on for her own amusement."

"Oh! Come now, ain't you a little too hard on Rosie," said Mr Snow, expostulatingly. He could not bear that his pet should be found fault with. "I call *that* as cruel a thing as a woman can do, and Rosie would never do it, I hope."

"Not with a conscious desire to give pain. But she is a bonny creature, and she is learning her own power, as they all do sooner or later; and few make so good a use of such power as they might do;" and Mrs Snow sighed.

"You don't think there is anything in what Mrs Grove said about Graeme and her friend I have heard so much about?" asked Mr Snow, after a pause.

"I dinna ken. I would believe it none the readier that yon foolish woman said it."

"She seems kind of down, though, these days, don't she? She's graver and quieter than she used to be," said Mr Snow, with some hesitation. He was not sure how his remark would be taken.

"Oh! well, maybe. She's older for one thing," said his wife, gravely. "And she has her cares; some of them I see plainly enough, and some of them, I daresay, she keeps out of sight. But as for Allan Ruthven, it's not for one woman to say of another that, she has given her heart unsought. And I am sure of her, that whatever befalls her, she is one of those that need fear no evil."

Chapter Thirty Five.

"It is a wonder to me, Miss Graeme," said Mrs Snow, after one of their long talks about old times—"it is a wonder to me, that minding Merleville and all your friends there as well as you do, you should never have thought it worth your while to come back and see us."

"Worth our while!" repeated Graeme. "It was not indifference that hindered us, you may be sure of that. I wonder,

myself, how it is we have never gone back again. When we first came here, how Will, and Rosie, and I, used to plan and dream about it! I may confess, now, how very homesick we all were—how we longed for you. But, at first, the expense would have been something to consider, you know; and afterwards, other things happened to prevent us. We were very near going once or twice.”

“And when was that?” asked Mrs Snow, seemingly intent on her knitting, but all the time aware that the old shadow was hovering over Graeme. She did not answer immediately.

“Once was with Norman and Hilda. Oh! I did so long to go with them! I had almost made up my mind to go, and leave Rosie at home. I was glad I didn’t, afterward.”

“And why did you not?” demanded her friend.

“For one thing, we had been away a long time in the summer, and I did not like to leave home again; Arthur did not encourage me to go. It was on the very night that Norman went away that Arthur told me of his engagement.”

“I daresay you did right to bide at home, then.”

“Yes, I knew it was best, but that did not prevent me wishing very much to go. I had the greatest desire to go to you. I had no one to speak to. I daresay it would not have seemed half so bad, if I could have told you all about it.”

“My dear, you had your sister.”

“Yes, but Rosie was as bad as I was. It seemed like the breaking up of all things. I know now, how wrong and foolish I was, but I could not help being wretched then.”

“It was a great change, certainly, and I dinna wonder that the prospect startled you.”

Mrs Snow spoke very quietly; she was anxious to hear more; and forgetting her prudence in the pleasure it gave her to unburden her heart to her friend, Graeme went on rapidly,—

“If it only had been any one else, I thought. We didn’t know Fanny very well, then—hardly at all, indeed, and she seemed such a vain, frivolous little thing, so different from what I thought Arthur’s wife should be; and I disliked her stepmother so much more than I ever disliked any one, I think, except perhaps Mrs Page, when we first came to Merleville. Do you mind her first visit with Mrs Merle, Janet?”

“I mind it well,” said Mrs Snow, smiling. “She was no favourite of mine. I daresay I was too hard on her sometimes.”

Graeme laughed at the remembrance of the “downsettings” which “the smith’s wife” had experienced at Janet’s hands in those early days. The pause gave her time to think, and she hastened to turn the conversation from Arthur and his marriage to Merleville and the old times. Janet did not try to hinder it, and answered her questions, and volunteered some new items on the theme, but when there came a pause, she asked quietly,—

“And when was the other time you thought of coming to see us all?”

“Oh! that was before, in the spring. Arthur proposed that we should go to Merleville, but we went to the seaside, you know. It was on my account; I was ill, and the doctor said the sea-breeze was what I needed.”

“The breezes among our hills would have been as good for you, I daresay. I wonder you didn’t come then.”

“Oh! I could not bear the thought of going then. I was ill, and good for nothing. It would have been no pleasure for any one to see me then. I think I should hardly have cared to go away anywhere, if Arthur had not insisted, and the doctor too.”

Unconsciously Graeme yielded to the impulse to say to her friend just what was in her heart.

“But what ailed you?” asked Mrs Snow, looking up with astonished eyes, that reminded Graeme there were some things that could not be told even to her friend.

“What ailed you?” repeated Mrs Snow.

“I can’t tell you. An attack of the nerves, Nelly called it, and she was partly right. I was tired. It was just after Will’s long illness, and Harry’s going away, and other things.”

“I daresay you were weary and sorrowful, too, and no wonder,” said Mrs Snow, tenderly.

“Yes, about Harry. I was very anxious. There were some doubts about his going, for a while. Mr Ruthven hesitated, and Harry chafed and vexed himself and me, too, poor laddie; but we got through that time at last,” added Graeme, with a great sigh.

“Did Mr Ruthven ken of Harry’s temptation? Was it for that he hesitated?” asked Mrs Snow.

“I cannot say. Oh! yes, he knew, or he suspected. But I don’t think he hesitated altogether because of that. As soon as he knew that we were quite willing—Arthur and I—he decided at once. Mr Ruthven was very kind and considerate through it all.”

“Miss Graeme, my dear,” said Mrs Snow, with some hesitation, “did you ever think there was anything between your brother Harry and his master’s daughter—the young lady that Allan Ruthven married—or was it only Sandy’s fancy?”

Graeme's face grew white as she turned her startled eyes on her friend.

"Sandy! Did he see it? I did not think about it at the time; but afterward I knew it, and, oh! Janet, you cannot think how it added to my wretchedness about Harry."

"My bairn! There have been some rough bits on the road you have been travelling. No wonder your feet get weary, whiles."

Graeme rose, and, without speaking, came and laid her head upon her friend's lap. In a little she said,—

"How I longed for this place! I had no one to speak to. I used to think you might have helped and comforted me a little."

She did not try to hide her tears; but they did not flow long. Janet's kind hand had not lost its old soothing power, and by and by Graeme raised herself up, and, wiping away her tears, said, with a faint smile,—

"And so Sandy saw poor Harry's secret? I did not, at first. I suppose little Emily had sharpened his eyes to see such things, even then."

"Yes, Sandy saw it, and it was a great surprise to us all when there came word of her marriage. Sandy never thought of Allan Ruthven and his cousin coming together."

Graeme rose and took her work again. It was growing dark, and she carried it to the window and bent over it.

"Was it for her money—or why was it?"

"Oh! no. I never could think so. She was a very sweet and lovely creature; we loved her dearly, Rose and I. They had been engaged a long time, I believe, though the marriage was sudden at last. That was because of her father's illness. He died soon after, you remember."

"Yes, I remember. Well, I didna think that Allan Ruthven was one to let the world get a firm grip of him. But folk change. I didna ken."

"Oh! no, it was not that," said Graeme, eagerly. "Indeed, at that time Mr Elphinstone's affairs were rather involved. He had met with great losses, Harry says, and Arthur thought that nothing but Mr Ruthven's high character and great business talents could have saved the firm from ruin. Oh! no; it was not for money."

"Well, my dear, I am glad to hear you say it. I am glad that Allan Ruthven hasna changed. I think you said he hasna changed?"

"At first I thought him changed, but afterwards I thought him just the same."

"Maybe it was her that wanted the money? If her father was in trouble—"

"No, oh! no! You could never have such a thought if you had ever seen her face. I don't know how it happened. As all marriages happen, I suppose. It was very natural; but we won't speak about it."

"They seem to have forgotten their friends. I think you said you seldom see them now."

"We don't see them often. They have been out of town a good deal, and we have fallen a little out of acquaintance. But we have done that with many others; we have made so many new acquaintances since Arthur's marriage—friends of Fanny's, you know; and, somehow, nothing seems quite the same as it used to do. If Mr Ruthven knew you were in town, I am sure he would have been to see you before now."

"I am no' wearying to see him," said Mrs Snow, coldly. "But, my dear, is your work of more value than your eyes, that you are keeping at it in the dark?"

Graeme laughed and laid it down, but did not leave the window, and soon it grew so dark that she had no excuse for looking out. So she began to move about the room, busying herself with putting away her work, and the books and papers that were scattered about. Janet watched her silently. The shadow was dark on her face, and her movements, as she displaced and arranged and re-arranged the trifles on the table were quick and restless. When there seemed nothing more for her to do, she stood still with an uneasy look on her face, as though she thought her friend were watching her, and then moved to the other end of the room.

"My dear," said Mrs Snow, in a little, "how old are you now?"

Graeme laughed, and came and took her old seat.

"Oh! Janet, you must not ask. I have come to the point when ladies don't like to answer that question, as you might very well know, if you would stop to consider a minute."

"And what point may that be, if I may ask?"

"Oh! it is not to be told. Do you know Fanny begins to shake her head over me, and to call me an old maid."

"Ay! that is ay the way with these young wives," said Janet, scornfully. "There must be near ten years between you and Rose."

"Yes, quite ten years, and she is almost a woman—past sixteen. I *am* growing old."

"What a wee white Rose she was, when she first fell to your care, dear. Who would have thought then that she would ever have grown to be the bonny creature she is to-day?"

"Is she not lovely? And not vain or spoiled, though it would be no wonder if she were, she is so much admired. Do you mind what a cankered wee fairy she used to be?"

"I mind well the patience that never wearied of her, even at the worst of times," said Mrs Snow, laying her hand tenderly on Graeme's bowed head.

"I was weary and impatient often. What a long time it is since those days, and yet it seems like yesterday." And Graeme sighed.

"Were you sighing because so many of your years lie behind you, my bairn?" said Mrs Snow, softly.

"No, rather because so many of them lie before me," said Graeme, slowly. "Unless, indeed, they may have more to show than the years that are past."

"We may all say that, dear," said Mrs Snow, gravely. "None of us have done all that we might have done. But, my bairn, such dreary words are not natural from young lips, and the years before you may be few. You may not have time to grow weary of them."

"That is true," said Graeme. "And I ought not to grow weary, be they many or few."

There was a long pause, broken at last by Graeme.

"Janet," said she, "do you think I could keep a school?"

"A school," repeated Mrs Snow. "Oh, ay, I daresay you could, if you put your mind to it. What would binder you? It would depend some on what kind of a school it was, too, I daresay."

"You know, teaching is almost the only thing a woman can do to earn a livelihood. It is the only thing I could do. I don't mean that I could take charge of a school; I am afraid I am hardly fit for that. But I could teach classes. I know French well, and music, and German a little."

"My dear," said Mrs Snow, gravely, "what has put such a thought in your head? Have you spoken to your brother about it? What does he say?"

"To Arthur? No, I haven't spoken to him. He wouldn't like the idea at first, I suppose; but if it were best, he would reconcile himself to it in time."

"You speak about getting your livelihood. Is there any need for it? I mean, is there more need than there has been? Is not your brother able, and willing—"

"Oh! yes, it is not that I don't know. Our expenses are greater than they used to be—double, indeed. But there is enough, I suppose. It is not that—at least it is not that only, or chiefly."

"What is it then, dear child?" asked her friend.

But Graeme could not answer at the moment. There were many reasons why she should not continue to live her present unsatisfying life, and yet she did not know how to tell her friend. They were all plain enough to her, but some of them she could not put in words for the hearing of Janet, even. She had been saying to herself, all along, that it was natural, and not wrong for her to grow tired of her useless, aimless life, and to long for earnest, bracing work, such as many a woman she could name was toiling bravely at. But with Janet's kind hand on her head, and her calm, clear eyes looking down upon her face, she was constrained to acknowledge that, but for one thing, this restless discontent might never have found her. To herself she was willing to confess it. Long ago she had looked her sorrow in the face, and said, "With God's help I can bear it." She declared to herself that it was well to be roused from sloth, even by a great sorrow, so that she could find work to do. But, that Janet should look upon her with pitying or reproving eyes, she could not bear to think; so she sat at her feet, having no power to open her lips, never thinking that by her silence, and by the unquiet light in her downcast eyes, more was revealed to her faithful old friend than spoken words could have told.

"What is it my dear?" said Mrs Snow. "Is it pride or discontent, or is it something worse?" Graeme laughed a little bitterly. "Can anything be worse than these?"

"Is it that your brother is wearying of you?"

"No, no! I could not do him the wrong to think that. It would grieve him to lose us, I know. Even when he thought it was for my happiness to go away, the thought of parting gave him pain."

"And you have more sense than to let the airs and nonsense of his bairn-wife vex you?"

Graeme was silent a moment. She did not care to enter upon the subject of Arthur's wife just at this time.

"I don't think you quite understand Fanny, Janet," said she, hesitating.

"Weel, dear, maybe no. The bairns that I have had to deal with have not been of her kind. I have had no experience of the like of her."

"But what I mean is that her faults are such as every one can see at a glance, and she has many sweet and lovable

qualities. I love her dearly. And, Janet, I don't think it is quite kind in you to think that I grudge Fanny her proper place in her own house. I only wish that—"

"You only wish that she were as able to fill it with credit, as you are willing to let her. I wish that, too. And I am very far from thinking that you grudge her anything that she ought to have."

"Oh! Janet," said Graeme, with a sigh, "I shall never be able to make you understand."

"You might try, however. You havena tried yet," said Janet, gently. "It is not that you are growing too proud to eat bread of your brother's winning, is it?"

"I don't think it is pride. I know that Arthur considers that what belongs to him belongs to us all. But, even when that is true, it may be better, for many reasons, that I should eat bread of my own winning than of his. Everybody has something to do in the world. Even rich ladies have their houses to keep, and their families to care for, and the claims of society to satisfy, and all that. An idle life like mine is not natural nor right. No wonder that I weary of it. I ought not to be idle."

"Idle! I should lay that imputation at the door of anybody in the house rather than at yours. You used to be over fond of idle dreaming, but I see none of it now. You are ay busy at something."

"Yes, busy about something," repeated Graeme, a little scornfully. "But about things that might as well be left undone, or that another might do as well."

"And I daresay some one could be found to do the work of the best and the busiest of us, if we werena able to do it. But that is no' to say but we may be working to some purpose in the world for all that. But it is no' agreeable to do other folks' work, and let them get the wages, I'll allow."

"Will said something like that to me once, and it is possible that I may have some despicable feeling of that sort, since you and he seem to think it," said Graeme, and her voice took a grieved and desponding tone.

"My dear, I am bringing no such accusation against you. I am only saying that the like of that is not agreeable, and it is not profitable to anybody concerned. I daresay Mrs Arthur fancies that it is her, and no' you that keeps the house in a state of perfection that it is a pleasure to see. She persuades her husband of it, at any rate."

"Fanny does not mean—she does not know much about it. But that is one more reason why I ought to go. She ought to have the responsibility, as well as to fancy that she has it; and they would get used to being without us in time."

"Miss Graeme, my dear, I think I must have told you what your father said to me after his first attack of illness, when he thought, maybe, the end wasna far-away."

"About our all staying together while we could. Yes, you told me."

"Yes, love, and how he trusted in you, that you would always be, to your brothers and Rose, all that your mother would have been if she had been spared; and how sure he was that you would ever think less of yourself than of them. My dear, it should not be a light thing that would make you give up the trust your father left to you."

"But, Janet, it is so different now. When we first came here, the thought that my father wished us to keep together made me willing and glad to stay, even when Arthur had to struggle hard to make the ends meet. I knew it was better for him and for Harry, as well as for us. But it is different now. Arthur has no need of us, and would soon content himself without us, though he may think he would not; and it may be years before this can be Will's home again. It may never be his home, nor Harry's either."

"My dear, it will be Harry's home, and Will's, too, while it is yours. Their hearts will ay turn to it as home, and they wouldna do so if you were only coming and going. And as for Mr Arthur, Miss Graeme, I put it to yourself, if he were left alone with that bonny, wee wife of his, would his home be to him what it is now? Would the companionship of yon bairn suffice for his happiness?"

"It ought to do so. A man's wife ought to be to him more than all the rest of the world, when it is written, 'A man shall leave all, and cleave to his wife.' Married people ought to suffice for one another."

"Well, it may be. And if you were leaving your brother's house for a house of your own, or if you were coming with us, as my husband seems to have set his heart on, I would think it different. Not that I am sure of it myself, much as it would delight me to have you. For your brother needs you, and your bonny new sister needs you. Have patience with her, and with yourself, and you will make something of her in time. She loves you dearly, though she is not at all times very considerate of you."

Graeme was silent. What could she say after this, to prove that she could not stay, that she must go away. Where could she turn now? She rose with a sigh.

"It is growing dark. I will get a light. But, Janet, you must let me say one thing. You are not to think it is because of Fanny that I want to go away. At first, I was unhappy—I may say so, now that it is all over. It was less for myself and Rose than for Arthur. I didn't think Fanny good enough for him. And then, everything was so different, for a while it seemed impossible for me to stay. Fanny was not so considerate as she might have been, about our old friends, and about household affairs, and about Nelly, and all that. Arthur saw nothing, and Rosie got vexed sometimes. Will preached patience to us both; you know, gentlemen cannot understand many things that may be vexatious to us; and we were very uncomfortable for a while. I don't think Fanny was so much to blame; but her mother seemed to fancy that the new mistress of the house was not to be allowed to have her place without a struggle. Arthur saw nothing wrong. It was laughable, and irritating, too, sometimes, to see how blind he was. But it was far better he did

not. I can see that now.”

“Well, we went on in this way a while. I daresay a good deal of it was my fault. I think I was patient and forbearing, and I am quite sure I gave Fanny her own place from the very first. But I was not cheerful, partly because of the changes, and all these little things, and partly for other reasons. And I am not demonstrative in my friendliness, like Rosie, you know. Fanny soon came to be quite frank and nice with Rosie, and, by and by, with me too. And now, everything goes on just as it ought with us. There is no coldness between us, and you must not think there is, or that it is because of Fanny I must go away.”

She paused, and began to arrange the lamp.

“Never mind the light, dear, unless your work canna be left,” said Mrs Snow; and in a little Graeme came and sat down again.

“And about Fanny’s not being good enough for Arthur,” she went on. “If people really love one another, other things don’t seem to make so much difference. Arthur is contented. And Janet, I don’t think I am altogether selfish in my wish to go away. It is not entirely for my own sake. I think it would be better, for them both to be left to each other for a little while. If Fanny has faults, it is better that Arthur should know them for the sake of both—that he may learn to have patience with them, and that she may learn to correct them. It is partly for them, as well as for Rose and me. For myself, I must have a change.”

“You didna use to weary for changes. What is the reason now? You may tell me, dear, surely. There can be no reason that I may not know?”

Janet spoke softly, and laid her hand lovingly on that of Graeme.

“Oh! I don’t know: I cannot tell you,” she cried, with a sudden movement away from her friend. “The very spirit of unrest seems to have gotten possession of me. I am tired doing nothing, I suppose. I want real earnest work to do, and have it I will.” She rose hastily, but sat down again.

“And so you think you would like to keep a school?” said Mrs Snow, quietly.

“Oh! I don’t know. I only said that, because I did not know what else I could do. It would be work.”

“Ay. School-keeping is said to be hard work, and thankless, often. And I daresay it is no better than it is called. But, my dear, if it is the work you want, and not the wages, surely among the thousands of this great town, you might find something to do, some work for the Lord, and for his people. Have you never thought about working in that way, dear?”

Graeme had thought of it many a time. Often had she grieved over the neglected little ones, looking out upon her from narrow lanes and alleys, with pale faces, and great hungry eyes. Often had the fainting hearts of toilers in the wretched places of the city been sustained and comforted by her kind words and her alms-deeds. There were many humble dwellings within sight of her home, where her face came like sunlight, and her voice like music. But these were the pleasures of her life, enjoyed in secret. This was not the work that was to make her life worthy, the work for God and man that was to fill the void in her life, and still the pain in her heart. So she only said, quietly,—

“It is not much that one can do. And, indeed, I have little time that is not occupied with something that cannot be neglected, though it can hardly be called work. I cannot tell you, but what with the little things to be cared for at home, the visits to be made, and engagements of one kind or other, little time is left. I don’t know how I could make it otherwise. My time is not at my own disposal.”

Mrs Snow assented, and Graeme went on.

“I suppose I might do more of that sort of work—caring for poor people, I mean, by joining societies, and getting myself put on committees, and all that sort of thing, but I don’t think I am suited for it, and there are plenty who like it. However, I daresay, that is a mere excuse. Don’t you mind, Janet, how Mrs Page used to labour with me about the sewing meetings.”

“Yes, I mind,” said Mrs Snow, with the air of one who was thinking of something else. In a little she said, hesitatingly:

“Miss Graeme, my dear, you speak as though there were nothing between living in your brother’s house, and keeping a school. Have you never glanced at the possibility that sometime you may have a house of your own to keep.”

Graeme laughed.

“Will said that to me once. Yes, I have thought about it. But the possibility is such a slight one, that it is hardly worth while to take it into account in making plans for the future.”

“And wherefore not?” demanded Mrs Snow.

“Wherefore not?” echoed Graeme. “I can only say, that here I am at six and twenty; and the probabilities as to marriage don’t usually increase with the years, after that. Fanny’s fears on my account have some foundation. Janet, do you mind the song foolish Jean used to sing?

“‘The lads that cast a glance at me
I dinna care to see,
And the lads that I would look at
Winna look at me.’”

"Well, dear, you mustna be angry though I say it, but you may be ower ill to please. I told you that before, you'll mind."

"Oh! yes, I mind. But I convinced you of your error. Indeed, I look upon myself as an object for commiseration rather than blame; so you mustna look cross, and you mustna look too pitiful either, for I am going to prove to you and Fanny and all the rest that an old maid is, by no means, an object of pity. Quite the contrary."

"But, my dear, it seems strange-like, and not quite right for you to be setting your face against what is plainly ordained as woman's lot. It is no' ay an easy or a pleasant one, as many a poor woman kens to her sorrow; but—"

"But, Janet, you are mistaken. I am not setting my face against anything; but why should you blame me for what I canna help? And, besides, it is not ordained that every woman should marry. They say married-life is happier, and all that; but a woman may be happy and useful, too, in a single life, even if the higher happiness be denied her."

"But, my dear, what ailed you at him you sent away the other week—him that Rosie was telling me of?"

"Rosie had little to do telling you anything of the kind. Nothing particular ailed me at him. I liked him very well till—. But we won't speak of it."

"Was he not good enough? He was a Christian man, and well off, and well-looking. What said your brother to your refusal?" persisted Janet.

"Oh! he said nothing. What could he say? He would have known nothing about it if I had had my will. A woman must decide these things for herself. I did what I thought right. I could not have done otherwise."

"But, my love, you should consider—"

"Janet, I did consider. I considered so long that I came very near doing a wrong thing. Because he was Arthur's friend, and because it seems to be woman's lot, and in the common course of things, and because I was restless and discontented, and not at peace with myself, and nothing seemed to matter to me, I was very near saying 'Yes,' and going with him, though I cared no more for him than for half a dozen others whom you have seen here. What do you think of that for consideration?"

"That would have been a great wrong both to him and to yourself. I canna think you would ever be so sinful as to give the hand where the heart is withheld. But, my dear, you might mistake. There are more kinds of love than one; at least there are many manifestations of true love; and, at your age, you are no' to expect to have your heart and fancy taken utterly captive by any man. You have too much sense for the like of that."

"Have I?" said Graeme. "I ought to have at my age."

It was growing quite dark—too dark for Mrs Snow to see Graeme's troubled face; but she knew that it was troubled by the sound of her voice, by the weary posture into which she drooped, and by many another token.

"My dear," said her friend, earnestly, "the wild carrying away of the fancy, that it is growing the fashion to call love, is not to be desired at any age. I am not denying that it comes in youth with great power and sweetness, as it came to your father and mother, as I mind well, and as you have heard yourself. But it doesna always bring happiness. The Lord is kind, and cares for those who rush blindly to their fate; but to many a one such wild captivity of heart is but the forerunner of bitter pain, for which there is no help but just to 'thole it,' as they say."

She paused a moment, but Graeme did not, by the movement of a finger, indicate that she had anything to say in reply.

"Mutual respect, and the quiet esteem that one friend gives to another who is worthy, is a far surer foundation for a lifetime of happiness to those who have the fear of God before their eyes, and it is just possible, my dear, that you may have been mistaken."

"It is just possible, and it is too late now, you see, Janet. But I'll keep all you have been saying in mind, and it may stand me in stead for another time, you ken."

She spoke lightly, but there was in her voice an echo of bitterness and pain that her friend could not bear to hear; and when she raised herself up to go away, as though there were nothing more to be said, Janet laid her hand lightly but firmly on her shoulder, and said,—

"My dear, you are not to be vexed with what I have said. Do you think I can have any wish but to see you useful and happy? You surely dinna doubt me, dear?"

"I am not vexed, Janet," said she. "And who could I trust if I doubted you?"

"And you are not to think that I am meaning any disrespect to your new sister, if I say it is no wonder that I dinna find you quite content here. And when I think of the home that your mother made so happy, I canna but wish to see you in a home of your own."

"But happiness is not the only thing to be desired in this world," Graeme forced herself to say.

"No, love, nor the chief thing—that is true," said Mrs Snow.

"And even if it were," continued Graeme, "there is more than one way to look for happiness. It seems to me the chances of happiness are not so unequal in single and married-life as is generally supposed."

"You mayna be the best judge of that," said Mrs Snow, gravely.

"No, I suppose not," said Graeme, with a laugh. "But I have no patience with the nonsense that is talked about old maids. Why! it seems to be thought if a woman reaches thirty, still single, she has failed in life, she has missed the end of her creation, as it were; and by and by people begin to look upon her as an object of pity, not to say of contempt. In this very room I have heard shallow men and women speak in that way of some who are doing a worthy work for God and man in the world."

"My dear, it is the way with shallow men and women to put things in the wrong places. Why should you be surprised at that?"

"But, Janet, more do it than these people. Don't you mind, the other day, when Mrs Grove was repeating that absurd story about Miss Lester, and I said to her that I did not believe Miss Lester would marry the best man on the face of the earth, you said in a way that turned the laugh against me, that you doubted the best man on the face of the earth wasna in her offer."

"But, Miss Graeme, I meant no reflection on your friend, though I said that. I saw by the shining of your eyes, and the colour on your cheek, that you were in earnest, and I thought it a pity to waste good earnest words on yon shallow woman."

"Well," said Graeme, with a long breath, "you left the impression on her mind that you thought her right and me wrong."

"That is but a small matter. And, my dear, I am no' sure, and you canna be sure either, that Mrs Grove was altogether wrong. If, in her youth, some good man—not to say the best man on the face of the earth—had offered love to your friend, are you sure she would have refused him?"

"There!—that is just what I dislike so much. That is just what Mrs Grove was hinting with regard to Miss Lester. If a woman lives single, it is from necessity—according to the judgment of a discriminating and charitable world. I *know* that is not the case with regard to Miss Lester. But even if it were, if no man had ever graciously signified his approbation of her—if she were an old maid from dire necessity—does it follow that she has lost her chance in life?—that life has been to her a failure?"

"If she has failed in life; so do God's angels. Janet, if I could only tell you half that she has done! I am not intimate with her, but I have many ways of knowing about her. If you could know all that she has done for her family! She was the eldest daughter, and her mother was a very delicate, nervous woman, and the charge of the younger children fell to her when she was quite a girl. Then when her father failed, she opened a school and the whole family depended on her. She helped her sisters till they married, and liberally educated her younger brothers, and now she is bringing up the four children of one of them who died young. Her father was bedridden for several years before he died, and he lived in her home, and she watched over him, and cared for him, though she had her school. And she has prepared many a young girl for a life of usefulness, who but for her might have been neglected or lost. Half of the good she has done in this way will never be known on earth. And to hear women who are not worthy to tie her shoe, passing their patronising or their disparaging remarks upon her! It incenses me!"

"My dear, I thought you were past being incensed at anything yon shallow woman can say."

"But she is not the only one. Even Arthur sometimes provokes me. Because she has by her laborious profession made herself independent, he jestingly talks about her bank stock, and about her being a good speculation for some needy old gentleman. And because that beautiful, soft grey hair of hers will curl about her pale face, it is hinted that she makes the most of her remaining attractions, and would be nothing loth. It is despicable."

"But, my dear, it would be no discredit to her if it were proved that she would marry. She has a young face yet, though her hair is grey, and she may have many years before her. Why should she not marry?"

"Don't speak of it," said Graeme, with great impatience; "and yet, as you say, why should she not? But that is not the question. What I declare is, that her single life has been an honourable and an honoured one—and a happy one too. Who can doubt it? There is no married woman of my acquaintance whose life will compare with here. And the high place she will get in heaven, will be for no work she will do as Mrs Dale, though she were to marry the Reverend Doctor to-night, but for the blessed success that God has given her in her work as a single woman."

"I believe you, dear," said Mrs Snow, warmly.

"And she is not the only one I could name," continued Graeme. "She is my favourite example, because her position and talents, her earnest nature and her piety, make her work a wonderful one. But I know many, and have heard of more, who in a quiet, unobtrusive way are doing a work, not so great as to results, but as true and holy. Some of them are doing it as aunts or maiden sisters; some as teachers; some are only humble needlewomen; some are servants in other people's kitchens or nurseries—women who would be spoken of by the pitying or slighting name of 'old maid,' who are yet more worthy of respect for the work they are doing, and for the influence they are exerting, than many a married woman in her sphere. Why should such a woman be pitied or despised, I wonder?"

"Miss Graeme, you look as though you thought I was among the pitiers and despisers of such women, and you are wrong. Every word you say in their praise and honour is truth, and canna be gainsaid. But that doesna prove what you began with, that the chances of happiness in married and single life are equal."

"It goes far to prove it—the chances of usefulness, at any rate."

"No, my dear, because I dare say, on the other hand, many could be told of who fail to do their work in single life, and

who fail to get happiness in it as well. Put the one class over against the other, and then consider the many, many women who marry for no other reason than from the fear of living single, it will go far to account for the many unhappy marriages that we see, and far to prove that marriage is the natural and proper expectation of woman, and that in a sense she *does* fail in life, who falls short of that. In a certain sense, I say."

"But it does not follow from that that she is thenceforth to be an object of pity or derision, a spectacle to men and angels!"

"Whist, my dear; no, that doesna follow of necessity. That depends on herself somewhat, though not altogether, and there are too many single women who make spectacles of themselves in one way or other. But, my dear, what I say is this: As the world is, it is no easy thing for a woman to warstle through it alone, and the help she needs she can get better from her husband than from any other friend. And though it is a single woman's duty to take her lot and make the best of it, with God's help, it is no' to be denied, that it is not the lot a woman would choose. My saying it doesna make it true, but ask you the women to whom you justly give so high a place, how it was with them. Was it their own free choice that put them where they are? If they speak the truth, they will say 'No.' Either no man asked them—though that is rare—or else in youth they have had their work laid ready to their hands. They had a father and mother, or brothers and sisters, that they could not forsake for a stranger. Or they gave their love unsought, and had none to give when it was asked. Or they fell out with their lovers, or another wiled them away, or death divided them. Sometimes a woman's life passes quietly and busily away, with no thoughts of the future, till one day she wakes up with a great start of surprise and pain, to the knowledge that her youth is past—that she is an 'old maid.' And if a chance offer comes then, ten to one but she shuts her eyes, and lays hold on the hand that is held out to her—so feared is she of the solitary life before her."

"And," said Graeme, in a low voice, "God is good to her if she has not a sadder wakening soon."

"It is possible, my dear, but it proves the truth of what I was saying, all the same; that it is seldom by a woman's free choice that she finds herself alone in life. Sometimes, but not often, a woman sits down and counts the cost, and chooses a solitary path. It is not every wise man that can discern a strong and beautiful spirit, if it has its home in an unlovely form, and many such are passed by with a slighting look, or are never seen at all. It is possible that such a woman may have the sense to see, that a solitary life is happiness compared with the pain and shame a true woman must feel in having to look down upon her husband; and so when the wise and the worthy pass by, she turns her eyes from all others, and says to herself and to the world, with what heart she may, that she has no need of help. But does that end the pain? Does it make her strong to say it? May not the slight implied in being overlooked rankle in her heart till it is changed and hardened? I am afraid the many single women we see and hear of, who live to themselves, giving no sympathy and seeking none, proves it past all denying. My dear, folk may say what they like about woman's sphere and woman's mission—and great nonsense they have spoken of late—but every true woman kens well that her right sphere is a home of her own, and that her mission is to find her happiness in the happiness of her husband and children. There are exceptional cases, no doubt, but that is the law of nature. Though why I should be saying all this to you, Miss Graeme, my dear, is mair than I ken."

There was a long silence after this. Mrs Snow knew well that Graeme sat without reply because she would not have the conversation come back to her, or to home affairs, again. But her friend had something more to say, and though her heart ached for the pain she might give, she could not leave it unsaid.

"We were speaking about your friend and the work she has been honoured to do. It is a great work, and she is a noble woman. God bless her! And, dear, though I dinna like the thought of your leaving your brother's house, it is not because I dinna think that you might put your hand to the same work with the same success. I am sure you could do, in that way, a good work for God and man. It is partly that I am shy of new schemes, and partly because I am sure the restlessness that is urging you to it will pass away; but it is chiefly because I think you have good and holy work laid to your hand already. Whatever you may think now, dear, they are far better and happier here at home, and will be all their lives, because of you.

"I'm no' saying but you might go away for a wee while. The change would do you good. You will come with us, or you will follow after, if you like it better; and then you might take your sister, and go and see your brother Norman, and your wee nephew, as we spoke of the other day. But this is your home, love, and here lies your work, believe me. And, my bairn, the restless fever of your heart will pass away; not so soon, maybe, as if it had come upon you earlier in life, or as if you were of a lighter nature. But it will pass. Whist! my darling," for Graeme had risen with a gesture of entreaty or denial. "Whist, love; I am not asking about its coming or its causes. I am only bidding you have patience till it pass away."

Graeme sat down again without a word. They sat a long time quite silent, and when Graeme spoke, it was to wonder that Arthur and the others were not come home.

"They must have gone to the lecture, after all, but that must be over by this time. They will be as hungry as hawks. I must go and speak to Sarah."

And she went away, saying sadly and a little bitterly to herself, that the friend on whose kindness and counsel she had relied, had failed her in her time of need.

"But I must go all the same. I cannot stay to die by slow degrees, of sloth, or weariness, or discontent, whichever it may be. Oh me! And I thought the worst was past, and Janet says it will never be quite past, till I am grown old."

And Janet sat with reverent, half-averted eyes, seeing the sorrow, that in trying to hide, the child of her love had so plainly revealed. She knew that words are powerless to help the soreness of such wounds, and yet she chid herself that she had so failed to comfort her. She knew that Graeme had come to her in the vague hope for help and counsel, and that she was saying now to herself that her friend had failed her.

"For, what could I say? I couldna bid her go. What good would that do, when she carries her care with her? And it is not for the like of her to vex her heart out with bairns, keeping at a school. I ken her better than she kens herself. Oh! but it is sad to think that the best comfort I can give her, is to look the other way, and not seem to see. Well, there is One she winna seek to hide her trouble from, and He can comfort her."

Chapter Thirty Six.

The only event of importance that occurred before Mrs Snow went away, was the return of Nelly. She came in upon them one morning, as they sat together in the breakfast-room, with more shamefacedness than could be easily accounted for at the first moment. And then she told them she was married. Her sudden departure had been the means of bringing Mr Stirling to a knowledge of his own mind on the matter of wedlock, and he had followed her to her sister's, and "married her out of hand." Of course, she was properly congratulated by them all, but Rose was inclined to be indignant.

"You promised that I was to be bridesmaid, and I think it is quite too bad that you should disappoint me," said she.

"Yes, I know I promised, but it was with a long prospect of waiting. I thought your own turn might come first, Miss Rose, He didna seem in a hurry about it. But his leisure was over when I was fairly away out of reach. So he came after me to my sister's, and nothing would do, but back I must go with him. He couldna see what difference a month or two could make in a thing that was to be for a lifetime; and my sister and the rest up there—they sided with him. And there was reason in it, I couldna deny; so we just went down to the manse one morning, and had it over, and me with this very gown on, not my best by two or three. He made small count of any preparations; so you see, Miss Rose, I couldna well help myself; and I hope it will all be for the best."

They all hoped that, and, indeed, it was not to be doubted. But, though congratulating Mrs Stirling heartily, Graeme was greatly disappointed for themselves. She had been looking forward to the time when, Mrs Tilman's temporary service over, they should have Nelly back in her old place again; but the best must be made of it now, and Nelly's pleasure must not be marred by a suspicion of her discontent. So she entered, with almost as much eagerness as Rose, into a discussion of the plans of the newly married pair.

"And is the market garden secured?" asked she. "Or is that to come later?"

"It will not be for a while yet. He is to stay where he is for the present. You will have heard that Mr Ruthven and his family are going home for a while, and we are to stay in the house. I am to have the charge. It will be something coming in through my own hands, which will be agreeable to me," added the prudent and independent Nelly.

The meeting of Mrs Snow and Mrs Stirling was a great pleasure to them both. They had much to say to one another before the time of Mrs Snow's departure came, and she heard many things about the young people, their way of life, their love to each other, and their forbearance with Fanny and her friends, which she would never have heard from them. She came to have a great respect for Mrs Stirling's sense and judgment, as well as for her devotion to the interests of the young people. One of the few expeditions undertaken by her was to choose a wedding present for the bride, and Rose had the satisfaction of helping her to decide upon a set of spoons, useful and beautiful at the same time; and "good property to have," as Mr Snow justly remarked, whether they used them or not.

The day of departure came at last. Will, Graeme, and Rose went with them over the river, and Fanny would have liked to go, too, but she had an engagement with Mrs Grove, and was obliged to stay at home. Arthur was to be at the boat to see them on, if it could be managed, but that was doubtful, so he bade them good-bye in the morning before he went away. There was a crowd, as usual, on the boat, and Graeme made haste to get a seat with Mrs Snow, in a quiet corner out of the way.

"Look, Graeme," said Rose. "There is Mr Proudfoote, and there are the Roxburys, and ever so many more people. And there is Mr Ruthven. I wonder if they are going away to-day."

"I don't know. Don't let us get into the crowd," said Graeme, rather hurriedly. "We shall lose the good of the last minutes. Stay here a moment, Will, and see whether Arthur comes. I will find a seat for Mrs Snow. Let us get out of the crowd."

It was not easy to do, however, and they were obliged to pass quite close by the party towards which Rose had been looking, and which Graeme had intended to avoid.

"Who is that pretty creature with the child on her lap?" asked Mrs Snow, with much interest. "You bowed to her, I think."

"Yes. That is Mrs Ruthven. I suppose they are going away to-day. I should like to say good-bye to her, but there are so many people with her, and I am not sure that she knew me, though she bowed. Ah! she has seen Rosie. They are coming over here."

She rose and went to meet them as they came near.

"You have never seen my baby," said Mrs Ruthven, eagerly. "And I want to see Mrs Snow."

Graeme took the little creature in her arms.

"No, we were unfortunate in finding you out when we called, more than once—and now you are going away."

"Yes, we are going away for a little while. I am so glad we have met to-day. I only heard the other day that Mrs Snow

had come, and I have not been quite strong, and they would not let me move about, I am so very glad to see you," added she, as she took Janet's hand. "I have heard your name so often, that I seem to know you well."

Mrs Snow looked with great interest on the lovely, delicate face, that smiled so sweetly up into hers.

"I have heard about you, too," said she, gravely. "And I am very glad that we chanced to meet to-day. And you are going home to Scotland?"

"Yes, for a little while. I have not been quite well, and the doctor advises the voyage, but we shall be home again before winter, I hope, or at the latest, in the spring."

There was not time for many words. Arthur came at the last minute, and with him Charlie Millar. He held out his arms for the baby, but she would not look at him, and clung to Graeme, who clasped her softly.

"She has discrimination, you see," said Charlie. "She knows who is best and wisest."

"She is very like what Rosie was at her age," said Mrs Snow. "Don't you mind, Miss Graeme?"

"Do you hear that, baby!" said Charlie. "Take heart. The wee white Lily may be a blooming rose, yet—who knows?"

"You have changed," said Mrs Snow, as Mr Ruthven came up to her with Will.

"Yes, I have changed; and not for the better, I fear," said he, gravely.

"I do not say that—though the world and its ways do not often change a man for the better. Keep it out of your heart."

There was only time for a word or two, and Graeme would not lose the last minutes with their friend. So she drew her away, and turned her face from them all.

"Oh, Janet! Must you go? Oh! if we only could go with you! But that is not what I meant to say. I am so glad you have been here. If you only knew how much good you have done me!"

"Have I? Well, I am glad if I have. And my dear, you are soon to follow us, you ken; and it will do you good to get back for a little while to the old place, and the old ways. God has been very good to you all."

"Yes, and Janet, you are not to think me altogether unthankful. Forget all the discontented foolish things I have said. God *has* been very good to us all."

"Yes, love, and you must take heart, and trust Him. And you must watch over your sister, your sisters, I should say. And Rose, dear, you are never to go against your sister's judgment in anything. And my bairns, dinna let the pleasant life you are living make you forget another life. God be with you."

Mr Snow and Will made a screen between them and the crowd, and Janet kissed and blessed them with a full heart. There were only a few confused moments after that, and then the girls stood on the platform, smiling and waving their hands to their friends, as the train moved off. And then Graeme caught a glimpse of the lovely pale face of Lillias Ruthven, as she smiled, and bowed, and held up her baby in her arms; and she felt as if that farewell was more for her, than any of the many friends who were watching them as they went away. And then they turned to go home. There was a crowd in the boat still, in the midst of which the rest sat and amused themselves, during the few minutes sail to the other side. But Graeme stood looking away from them all, and from the city and crowded wharf to which they were drawing near. Her eyes were turned to the far horizon toward which the great river flowed, and she was saying to herself,—

"I *will* take heart and trust Him, as Janet said. He *has* been good to us all I will not be afraid even of the days that look so dull and profitless to me. God will accept the little I can do, and I *will* be content."

Will and Charlie Millar left them, after they had passed through a street or two.

"We might just as well have gone to Merleville with them, for all the difference in the time," said Rose.

"But then our preparations would have interfered with our enjoyment of Janet's visit, and with her enjoyment, too. It was a much better way for us to wait."

"Yes. And for some things it will be better to be there after the wedding, rather than before. But I don't at all like going back to an empty house. I don't like people going away."

"But people must go away, dear, if they come; and a quiet time will be good for us both, before we go away," said Graeme.

But the quiet was not for that day. On that day, two unexpected events occurred. That is, one of them was unexpected to Graeme, and the other was unexpected to all the rest. Mr Green proposed that Miss Elliott should accompany him on his contemplated European tour; and Mrs Tilman's time of service came to a sudden end.

As Graeme and Rose turned the corner of the street on their way home, they saw the Grove carriage standing at their door.

"*That* does not look much like quiet," said Rose. "However, it is not quite such a bugbear as it used to be; don't you remember, Graeme?"

Rose's fears were justified. They found Fanny in a state of utter consternation, and even Mrs Grove not quite able to conceal how much she was put about. Mrs Tilman had been taken suddenly ill again, and even the undiscerning Fanny could not fail to understand the nature of her illness, when she found her unable to speak, with a black bottle lying on the bed beside her. Mrs Grove was inclined to make light of the matter, saying that the best of people might be overtaken in a fault, on occasion; but Graeme put her very charitable suggestions to silence, by telling the secret of the housekeeper's former illnesses. This was not the first fault of the kind, by many.

There were a good many words spoken on this occasion, more than it would be wise to record. Mrs Grove professed indignation that the "mistress of the house" should have been kept in ignorance of the state of affairs, and resented the idea of Fanny's being treated as a child. But Fanny said nothing; and then her mother assured her, that in future she would leave her to the management of her own household affairs; and Graeme surprised them all, by saying, very decidedly, that in doing this, she would be quite safe and right.

Of course, after all this, Fanny could not think of going out to pass the afternoon, and Graeme had little quiet that day. There were strangers at dinner, and Arthur was busy with them for some time after; and when, being at liberty at last, he called to Graeme that he wanted to see her for a minute, it must be confessed that she answered with impatience.

"Oh! Arthur, I am very tired. Won't it keep till morning? Do let Mrs Tilman and domestic affairs wait."

"Mrs Tilman! What can you mean, Graeme? I suppose Mrs Grove has been favouring the household with some advice, has she?"

"Has not Fanny told you about it?" asked Graeme.

"No. I saw Fanny was in tribulation of some kind. I shall hear it all in good time. It is something that concerns only you that I wish to speak about. How would you like to visit Europe, Graeme?"

"In certain circumstances I might like it."

"Mr Green wished me to ask the question—or another—"

"Arthur, don't say it," said Graeme, sitting down and turning pale. "Tell me that you did not expect this."

"I cannot say that I was altogether taken by surprise. He meant to speak to you himself, but his courage failed him. He is very much in earnest, Graeme, and very much afraid."

"Arthur," said his sister, earnestly, "you do not think this is my fault? If I had known it should never have come to this."

"He must have an answer now."

"Yes, you will know what to say to him. I am sorry."

"But, Graeme, you should take time to think. In the eyes of the world this would be a good match for you."

Graeme rose impatiently.

"What has the world to do with it? Tell me, Arthur, that you do not think me to blame for this."

"I do not think you intended to give Mr Green encouragement. But I cannot understand why you should be so surprised. I am not."

"You have not been seeing with your own eyes, and the encouragement has not been from *me*. It cannot be helped now. You will know what to say. And, Arthur, pray let this be quite between you and me."

"Then, there is nothing more to be said?"

"Nothing. Good-night."

Arthur was not surprised. He knew quite well that Mr Green was not good enough for Graeme. But, then, who was? Mr Green was very rich, and it would have been a splendid settlement for her, and she was not very young now. If she was ever to marry, it was surely time. And why should she not?

He had intended to say something like this to her, but somehow he had not found it easy to do. Well, she was old enough and wise enough to know her own mind, and to decide for herself; and, taken without the help of his position and his great wealth, Mr Green was certainly not a very interesting person; and probably Graeme had done well to refuse him. He pondered a long time on this question, and on others; but when he went up-stairs, Fanny was waiting for him, wide awake and eager.

"Well, what did Graeme say? Has she gone to bed?"

Arthur was rather taken aback. He was by no means sure that it would be a wise thing to discuss his sister's affairs with his wife. Fanny would never be able to keep his news to herself.

"You ought to be in bed," said he.

"Yes, I know I ought. But is she not a wretch?"

"Graeme, a wretch!"

"Nonsense, Arthur! I mean Mrs Tilman. You know very well."

"Mrs Tilman! What has she to do with it?"

"What! did not Graeme tell you?"

And then the whole story burst forth—all, and a good deal more than has been told, for Fanny and Rose had been discussing the matter in private with Sarah, and she had relieved her mind of all that had been kept quiet so long.

"The wretch!" said Arthur. "She might have burned us in our beds."

"Just what I said," exclaimed Fanny, triumphantly. "But then, Sarah was there to watch her, and Graeme knew about it and watched too. It was very good of her, I think."

"But why, in the name of common sense, did they think it necessary to wait and watch, as you call it? Why was she not sent about her business? Why was not I told?"

"Sarah told us, it was because Miss Elliott would not have Mrs Snow's visit spoiled; and *Rose* says she wanted everything to go smoothly, so that she should think I was wise and discreet, and a good housekeeper. I am very much afraid I am not."

Arthur laughed, and kissed her.

"Live and learn," said he.

"Yes, and I shall too, I am determined. But, Arthur, was it not very nice of Graeme to say nothing, but make the best of it? Especially when mamma had got Nelly away and all."

"It was very nice of her," said Arthur.

"And mamma was very angry to-day, and Graeme said— no, it was mamma who said she would let me manage my own affairs after this, and Graeme said that would be much the best way."

"I quite agree," said her husband, laughing.

"But, Arthur, I am afraid if it had not been for Graeme, things would have gone terribly wrong all this time. I am afraid, dear, I *am* rather foolish."

"I am sure Graeme does not say so," said Arthur.

"No. She does not say so. But I am afraid it is true all the same. But, Arthur, I do mean to try and learn. I think Rose is right when she says there is no one like Graeme."

Her husband agreed with her here, too, and he thought about these things much more than he said to his wife. It would be a different home to them all. Without his sister, he acknowledged, and he said to himself, that he ought to be the last to regret Graeme's decision with regard to Mr Green and his European tour.

In the meantime, Graeme, not caring to share her thoughts with her sister just then, had stolen down-stairs again, and sat looking, with troubled eyes, out into the night. That was at first, while her conversation with her brother remained in her mind. She was annoyed that Mr Green had been permitted to speak, but she could not blame herself for it. Now, as she was looking back, she said she might have seen it coming; and so she might, if she had been thinking at all of Mr Green and his hopes. She saw now, that from various causes, with which she had had nothing at all to do, they had met more frequently, and fallen into more familiar acquaintanceship than she had been aware of while the time was passing, and she could see where he might have taken encouragement where none was meant, and she was grieved that it had been so. But she could not blame herself, and she could not bring herself to pity him very much.

"He will not break his heart, if he has one; and there are others far better fitted to please him, and to enjoy what he has to bestow, than I could ever have done; and, so that Arthur says nothing about it, there is no harm done."

So she put the subject from her as something quite past and done with. And there was something else quite past and done with.

"I am afraid I have been very foolish and wrong," she said, letting her thoughts go farther back into the day. She said it over and over again, and it was true. She had been foolish, and perhaps a little wrong. Never once, since that miserable night, now more than two years ago, when he had brought Harry home, had Graeme touched the hand or met the eye of Allan Ruthven. She had frequently seen Lillas, and she had not consciously avoided him, but it had so happened that they had never met. In those old times she had come to the knowledge that, unasked, she had given him more than friendship, and she had shrunk, with such pain and shame, from the thought that she might still do so, that she had grown morbid over the fear. To-day she had seen him. She had clasped his hand, and met his look, and listened to his friendly words, and she knew it was well with her. They were friends whom time, and absence, and perhaps suffering, had tried, and they would be friends always.

She did not acknowledge, in words, either her fear or her relief; but she was glad with a sense of the old pleasure in the friendship of Allan and Lillas; and she was saying to herself that she had been foolish and wrong to let it slip out of her life so utterly as she had done. She told herself that true friendship, like theirs, was too sweet and rare a

bleeding to be suffered to die out, and that when they came home again the old glad time would come back.

"I am glad that I have seen them again, very glad. And I am glad in their happiness. I know that I am glad now."

It was very late, and she was tired after the long day, but she lingered still, thinking of many things, and of all that the past had brought, of all that the future might bring. Her thoughts were hopeful ones, and as she went slowly up the stairs to her room, she was repeating Janet's words, and making them her own.

"I will take heart and trust. If the work I have here is God-given, He will accept it, and make me content in it, be it great or little, and I will take heart and trust."

Chapter Thirty Seven.

If, on the night of the day when Janet went away, Graeme could have had a glimpse of her outward life for the next two years, she might have shrunk, dismayed, from the way that lay before her. And yet when two years and more had passed, over the cares, and fears, and disappointments, over the change and separation which the time had brought, she could look with calm content, nay, with grateful gladness. They had not been eventful years—that is, they had been unmarked by any of the especial tokens of change, of which the eye of the world is wont to take note, the sudden and evident coming into their lives of good or evil fortune. But Graeme had only to recall the troubled days that had been before the time when she had sought help and comfort from her old friend, to realise that these years had brought to her, and to some of those she loved, a change real, deep, and blessed, and she daily thanked God, for contentment and a quiet heart.

That which outwardly characterised the time to Graeme, that to which she could not have looked forward hopefully or patiently, but upon which she could look back without regret, was her separation from her sister. At first all things had happened as had been planned. They made their preparations for their long talked of visit to Merleville; they enjoyed the journey, the welcome, the wedding. Will went away, and then they had a few quiet, restful days with Janet; and then there came from home sad tidings of Fanny's illness—an illness that brought her in a single night very near to the gates of death, and Graeme did not need her brother's agonised entreaties to make her hasten to her side. The summons came during a brief absence of Rose from Merleville, and was too imperative to admit of Graeme's waiting for her return, so she was left behind. Afterwards, when Fanny's danger was over, she was permitted to remain longer, and when sudden business brought her brother Norman east, his determination to take her home with him, and her inclination to go, prevailed over Graeme's unwillingness to consent, and the sisters, for the first time in their lives, had separate homes. The hope of being able to follow her in the spring, had at first reconciled Graeme to the thought, but when spring came, Fanny was not well enough to be left, nor would Norman consent to the return of Rose; and so for one reason or other, more than two years passed before the sisters met again. They were not unhappy years to Graeme. Many anxious hours came in the course of them, to her and to them all; but out of the cares and troubles of the time came peace, and more than peace at last.

The winter that followed her return from Merleville, was rather a dreary one. The restraints and self-denials, which the delicate state of her health necessarily imposed upon her, were very irksome to Fanny; and Graeme's courage and cheerfulness, sometimes during these first months, were hardly sufficient to answer the demands made upon her. But all this changed as the hour of Fanny's trial approached—the hour that was to make her a proud and happy mother; or to quench her hope, perhaps, her life, in darkness. All this was changed. Out of the entire trust which Fanny had come to place in her sister Graeme, grew the knowledge of a higher and better trust. The love and care which, during those days of sickness and suffering, and before those days, were made precious and assured, were made the means of revealing to her a love which can never fail to do otherwise than the very best for its object—a care more than sufficient for all the emergencies of life, and beyond life. And so, as the days went on, the possibilities of the future ceased to terrify her. Loving life, and bound to it by ties that grew stronger and closer every day, she was yet not afraid to know, that death might be before her; and she grew gentle and quiet with a peace so sweet and deep, that it sometimes startled Graeme with a sudden dread, that the end might, indeed, be drawing near.

Graeme was set at rest about one thing. If there had lingered in her heart any fear lest her brother's happiness was not secure in Fanny's keeping, or that his love for her would not stand the wear and tear of common life, when the first charms of her youth and beauty, and her graceful, winning ways were gone, that fear did not outlast this time. Through the weariness and fretfulness of the first months of her illness, he tended her, and hung about her, and listened to her complaints with a patience that never tired; and when her fretful time was over, and the days came when she lay hushed and peaceful, yet a little awed and anxious, looking forward to she knew not what, he soothed and encouraged her with a gentle cheerfulness, which was, to Graeme, pathetic, in contrast with the restless misery that seemed to take possession of him when he was not by her side. One does not need to be very good, or very wise, or even beautiful to win true love; and Fanny was safe in the love of her husband, and to her sister's mind, growing worthier of it every day.

Graeme would have hardly acknowledged, even to herself, how much Arthur needed the discipline of this time, but afterwards she saw it plainly. Life had been going very smoothly with him, and he had been becoming content with its routine of business and pleasure. The small successes of his profession, and the consideration they won for him, were in danger of being prized at more than their value, and of making him forget things better worth remembering, and this pause in his life was needed. These hours in his wife's sick-room, apparently so full of rest and peace, but really so anxious and troubled, helped him to a truer estimate of the value of that which the world can bestow, and forced him to compare them with those things over which the world has no power! Fanny's eager, sometimes anxious questionings, helped to the same end. The confidence with which she brought her doubts and difficulties to him for solution, her evident belief in his superior wisdom and goodness, her perfect trust in his power and skill to put her right about matters of which until now she had never thought, were a reproach to him often. Listening to her, and pondering on the questions which her words suggested, he saw how far he had wandered from the paths which his father had trod, how far he had fallen short of the standard at which he had aimed, and the true object of life grew

clearer to him during those days.

They helped each other to the finding of the better way; she helped him most, and Graeme helped them both. These were anxious days to her, but happy days, as well. In caring for these two, so dear to her in seeking for them the highest happiness, in striving, earnestly, that this time might not be suffered to pass, without leaving a blessing behind, she forgot herself and her own fears and cares and in seeking their happiness found her own.

This quiet time came to an end. The little life so longed for, so precious, lingered with them but a day, and passed away. Fanny hovered for a time on the brink of the grave, but was restored again, to a new life, better loved and more worthy of love than ever she had been before.

That summer they went south, to the seaside, and afterwards before they returned home, to Merleville, where Arthur joined them. It was a time of much pleasure and profit to them all. It did Arthur good to stand with his sister beside the two graves. They spoke there more fully and freely than they had ever spoken to each other before, of the old times, of their father and mother, and of the work they had been honoured to do in the world; and out of the memories thus awakened, came earnest thoughts and high resolves to both. Viewed in the light which shone from his father's life and work, his own could not but seem to Arthur mean and worthless. Truths seen dimly, and accepted with reserve, amid the bustle of business, and the influence of the world, presented themselves clearly and fully here, and bowed both his heart and his reason, and though he said little to his sister, she knew that life, with its responsibilities and duties, would henceforth have a deeper and holier meaning to him.

Janet never spoke to Graeme of her old troubled thoughts. "It is all coming right with my bairn," she said, softly, to herself, the very first glimpse she got of her face, and seeing her and watching her during these few happy days, she knew that she had grown content with her life, and its work, and that the fever of her heart was healed. And as the days went on, and she saw Arthur more and more like his father, in the new earnestness of his thoughts and hopes, and watched Fanny gentle, and loving, mindful of others, clinging to Graeme, and trusting and honouring her entirely, —a Fanny as different as could well be imagined from the vain, exacting little housekeeper, who had so often excited her indignation, a year ago, she repeated again and again. "It is coming right with them all."

Another year passed, bringing new cares, and new pleasures, and, to Arthur and Fanny, the fulfilment of new hopes in the birth of a son. To Graeme, it brought many longings for the sight of her sister's face, many half formed plans for going to her, or for bringing her home, but Arthur's boy was three months old before she saw her sister. Will was still in Scotland, to stay for another year, at least Harry had been at home several times since his first sorrowful departure, and now there was a prospect that he would be at home always. A great change had taken place in his affairs. The firm of Elphinstone and Company no longer existed. It was succeeded by one, which bade fair to be as prosperous, and in time, as highly honoured as it had been, the firm of Elliott, Millar and Company. Mr Ruthven was still in the business, that is, he had left in it the capital necessary to its establishment on a firm basis, but he took no part in the management of its affairs. He lived in Scotland now, and had done so ever since the death of his wife, which, had taken place soon after they had reached that country. He had since succeeded, on the death of his uncle, his father's brother, to the inheritance of a small estate near his native place, and there, with his mother and his little daughter, he resided. Either, it was said, his uncle had made his residence on the place a condition of possession, or he had grown tired of a life of business, but he, evidently, did not intend to return to Canada at present; even his half-brother, who deeply regretted his early withdrawal from active life, and earnestly remonstrated with him concerning it, knew little about his motives, except that his health was not so firm as it used to be, and that he had determined not to engage in business again.

Harry had changed much, during the years of his absence. Up to the time of his leaving home, he had retained his boyish frankness and love of fun, more than is usual in one really devoted to business, and successful in it. When he came back, he seemed older than those years ought to have made him. He was no longer the merry, impulsive lad, ready on the shortest notice, to take part in anything that promised amusement for the moment, whatever the next might bring. He was quiet and observant now; hardly doing his part in general conversation, holding his own views and opinions with sufficient tenacity when they were assailed, but rather indifferent as to what might be the views and opinions of others; as unlike as possible to the Harry who had been so ready on all occasions, either in earnest or in sport, to throw himself into the discussion of all manner of questions, with all kind of people. Even in their own circle, he liked better to listen than to speak, but he fell quite naturally and happily into his place at home, though it was not just the old place.

Graeme thought him wonderfully improved, and made no secret of her pride and delight in him. Arthur thought him improved too, but he shocked his sister dreadfully, by professing to see in him indications of character, that suggested a future resemblance to their respected friend, Mr Elias Green, in more than in success.

"He is rather too devoted to business, too indifferent to the claims of society, and to the pursuits of the young swells of the day, to be natural, I am afraid. But it will pay. In the course of fifteen or twenty years, we shall have him building a 'palatial residence', and boring himself and other people, like our respected friend. You seem to be a little discontented with the prospect, Graeme."

"Discontented!" echoed Graeme. "It is with you, that I am discontented. How can you speak of anything so horrible? You don't know Harry."

"I know what the result of such entire devotion to business must be, joined to such talents as Harry's. Success, of course, and a measure of satisfaction with it, more or less, as the case maybe. No, you need not look at Harry's friend and partner. He is 'tarred with the same stick,' as Mrs Snow would say."

Harry's friend and partner, laughed.

"Mrs Snow would never say that about Mr Millar," said Graeme indignantly, "nor about Harry either; and neither of

them will come to a fate like that.”

“They may fail, or they may marry. I was only speaking of the natural consequences of the present state of affairs, should nothing intervene to prevent such a conclusion.”

“Harry will never grow to be like Mr Green,” said Fanny, gravely. “Graeme will not let him.”

“There is something in that,” said Arthur.

“There is a great deal in that,” said Mr Millar.

“There are a great many to keep Harry from a fate like that, besides me,” said Graeme, “even if there was any danger to one of his loving and generous nature.”

She was more in earnest than the occasion seemed to call for.

“Graeme,” said Fanny, eagerly, “you don’t suppose Arthur is in earnest. He thinks there is no one like Harry.”

Arthur laughed.

“I don’t think there are many like him, certainly, but he is not beyond spoiling, and Graeme, and you, too, make a great deal too much of him, I am afraid.”

“If that would spoil one, you would have been spoiled long ago,” said Graeme, laughing.

“Oh! that is quite another matter; but as to Harry, it is a good thing that Rose is coming home, to divert the attention of you two from him a while,” added he, as his brother came into the room. “And you will do your best to spoil her, too, if some of the rest of us don’t counteract your influence.”

“What is it all about?” said Harry. “Are you spoiling your son, Fanny? Is that the matter under discussion?”

“No. It is you that we are spoiling, Graeme and I. We admire you quite too much, Arthur says, and he is afraid we shall do the same for Rose.”

“As for Rose, I am afraid the spoiling process must have commenced already, if admiration will do it,” said Harry. “If one is to believe what Norman says, she has been turning a good many heads out there.”

“So that her own head is safe, the rest cannot be helped,” said Graeme, with a little vexation. It was not Harry’s words, so much as his tone, that she disliked. He shrugged his shoulders.

“Oh! as to that, I am not sure. I don’t think she tried to help it. Why should she? It is her natural and proper sphere of labour—her vocation. I think she enjoyed it, rather.”

“Harry, don’t! I can’t bear to hear you speak of Rose in that way.”

“Oh! my speaking of it can’t make any difference, you know; and if you don’t believe me, you can ask Charlie. He is my authority for the last bit of news of Rosie.”

Charlie looked up astonished and indignant, and reddened as he met Graeme’s eye.

“I don’t understand you, Harry—the least in the world,” said he.

“Do you mean to say you have forgotten the postscript I saw in Rowland’s letter about Mr Green and his hopes and intentions? Come, now, Charlie, that is a little too much.”

“Mr Green!” repeated Arthur and Fanny, in a breath.

“Are we never to have done with that unhappy man?” said Graeme, indignantly.

“The idea of Rose ever looking at him!” said Fanny.

“Oh! she might look at him without doing herself any harm,” said Harry. “She might even indulge in a little innocent flirtation—”

“Harry,” said Fanny, solemnly, “if there is a word in the English language that Graeme hates it is that. Don’t say it again, I beg.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders. Graeme looked vexed and anxious.

“Miss Elliott,” said Charlie, rising, in some embarrassment, “I hope you don’t think me capable of discussing—or permitting—. I mean, in the letter to which Harry refers, your sister’s name was not mentioned. You have received a wrong impression. I am the last person in the world that would be likely to offend in that way.”

“Charlie, man! you are making much ado about nothing; and, Graeme, you are as bad. Of course, Rosie’s name was not mentioned; but I know quite well, and so do you, who ‘La belle Canadienne’ was. But no harm was meant, and none was done.”

“It would be rather a good joke if Rosie were to rule in the ‘Palatial Residence’ after all, wouldn’t it?” said Arthur, laughing.

"Arthur, don't! It is not nice to have the child's name coupled with—with any one," said Graeme.

"It may not be nice, but it cannot be helped," said Harry. "It is the penalty that very pretty girls, like Rose, have to pay for their beauty—especially when they are aware of it—as Rose has good right to be by this time. Small blame to her."

"And I don't see that there is really anything to be annoyed about, Graeme," said Arthur. "A great deal more than the coupling of names might happen without Rosie being to blame, as no one should know better than you."

"Of course. We are not speaking of blame, and we will say no more about it," said Graeme, rising; and nothing more was said. By and by Harry and his friend and partner rose to go. They lived together, now, in the house behind the willow trees, which Rose had taken such pleasure in watching. It was a very agreeable place of residence still, though a less fashionable locality than it used to be; and they were fortunate enough to have the efficient and kindly Nelly as housekeeper, and general caretaker still, and she magnified her office.

Harry had some last words to exchange with Arthur, and then Mr Millar approached Graeme and said, with a smile that was rather forced and uncertain,—

"I ought to apologise for coming back to the subject again. I don't think you believe me likely to speak of your sister in a way that would displease you. Won't you just say so to me?"

"Charlie! I know you could not. You are one of ourselves."

Charlie's face brightened. Of late it had been "Mr Millar," mostly—not that Graeme liked him less than she used to do; but she saw him less frequently, and he was no longer a boy, even to her. But this time it was, "Charlie," and he was very much pleased.

"You have been quite a stronger, lately," she went on; "but now that Mrs Elliott is better and Rose coming home, we shall be livelier and better worth visiting. We cannot bring the old times quite back, even with Harry and Rose, but we shall always be glad to see you."

She spoke cordially, as she felt, and he tried to answer in the same way; but he was grave, and did not use many words.

"I hope there is nothing wrong," said Graeme, observing his changing look.

"Nothing for which there is any help," said he. "No there is nothing wrong."

"I am ready, Charlie," said Harry, coming forward. "And Graeme, you are not to trouble yourself about Rose's conquests. When she goes to her own house—'palatial' or otherwise—and the sooner the better for all concerned—you are coming to take care of Charlie and me."

"There may be two or three words to be said on that subject," said Arthur, laughing.

"I am sure neither you nor Fanny will venture to object; you have had Graeme all your life—at least for the last seven years. I should like to hear you, just. I am not joking, Graeme."

Graeme laughed.

"There is no hurry about it, is there? I have heard of people changing their minds; and I won't set my heart on it, in case I should be disappointed."

Chapter Thirty Eight.

So Rose came home at last. Not just the Rose who had left them, now more than two years ago, even in the eyes of her sister. Her brothers thought her greatly changed and improved. She was more womanly, and dignified, and self-reliant, they said, and Graeme assented, wondering and pleased; though it had been the desire of her heart that her sister should come back to her just what she was when she went away.

She would probably have changed quite as much during those two years, had they been passed at home, though they might not have seen it so plainly. But Arthur declared that she had become Americanised to an astonishing degree, not making it quite clear whether he thought that an improvement, indeed not being very clear about it himself. Harry agreed with him, without the reservation; for Harry admired the American ladies, and took in good part Rose's hints and congratulations with regard to a certain Miss Cora Snider, an heiress and a beauty of C—. "A trifle older than Harry," explained she, laughing, aside to Graeme; "but that, of course, is a small matter, comparatively, other things 'being agreeable.'"

"Of course," said Harry, with a shrug that set Graeme's fancy at rest about Miss Cora Snider.

In less time than Graeme at first supposed possible, they fell back into their old ways again. Rose's dignity and self-reliance were for her brothers and her friends generally. With Graeme she was, in a day or two, just what she had been before she went away—a dear child and sister, to be checked and chided, now and then; to be caressed and cared for always; growing, day by day, dearer and fairer to her sister's loving eyes. She was glad to be at home again. She was very fond of Norman and Hilda and their boys, and she had been very happy with them; but there was no one like Graeme, and there was no place like home. So she fell into her old place and ways, and was so exactly the Rosie of old times, that Graeme smiled in secret over the idea of her child having been in danger of being

spoiled by admiration or by a love of it. It was quite impossible to believe that a love of pleasure would let her be so content with their quiet life, their household occupations, their unvaried round of social duties and pleasures. Admired she might have been, but it had not harmed her; she had come back to them quite unspoiled, heart-free and fancy-free, Graeme said to herself, with a sense of relief and thankfulness, that grew more assured as the time went on.

"It amuses me very much to hear Arthur say I am changed," said Rose, one day, when the sisters were sitting together. "Why, if I had come home a strong-minded woman and the president of a convention, it would have been nothing to the change that has taken place in Fanny, which I daresay he does not see at all, as a change; he always was rather blind where she was concerned. But what have you being doing to Fanny, Graeme?"

"Rose, my dear," said Graeme, gravely, "Fanny has had a great deal of sickness and suffering, and her change is for the better, I am sure; and, besides, are you not speaking a little foolishly?"

"Well, perhaps so, but not unkindly, as far as Fanny is concerned. For the better! I should think so. But then I fancied that Fanny was just the one to grow peevish in sickness, and ill to do with, as Janet would say; and I confess, when I heard of the arrival of young Arthur, I was afraid, remembering old times, and her little airs, that she might not be easier to live with."

"Now, Rosie, that is not quite kind."

"But it is quite true. That is just what I thought first, and what I said to Norman. I know you said how nice she was, and how sweet, and all that, but I thought that was just your way of seeing things; you never would see Fanny's faults, you know, even at the very first."

Graeme shook her head.

"I think you must have forgotten about the very first. We were both foolish and faithless, then. It has all come right; Arthur is very happy in his wife, though I never thought it could be in those days."

There was a long pause after that, and then Rose said,—

"You must have had a very anxious time, and a great deal to do, when she was so long ill that first winter. I ought to have been here to help you, and I should have been, if I had known."

"I wished for you often, but I did not have too much to do, or to endure. I am none the worse for it all."

"No," said Rose, and she came over and kissed her sister, and then sat down again. Graeme looked very much pleased, and a little surprised. Rose took up her work, and said, with a laugh that veiled something,—

"I think you have changed—improved—almost as much as Fanny, though there was not so much need."

Graeme laughed, too.

"There was more need for improvement than you know or can imagine. I am glad you see any."

"I am anxious about one thing, however, and so is Fanny, I am sure," said Rose, as Fanny came into the room, with her baby in her arms. "I think I see an intention on your part to become stout. I don't object to a certain roundness, but it may be too decided."

"Graeme too stout! How can you say such things, Rosie?" said Fanny, indignantly.

"She is not so slender as when I went away."

"No, but she was too slender then. Arthur thinks she is growing handsomer, and so do I."

"Well, perhaps," said Rose, moving believe to examine Graeme critically; "still I must warn her against future possibilities as to stoutness—and other things."

"It is not the stoutness that displeases her, Fanny," said Graeme, laughing; "it is the middle-aged look that is settling down upon me, that she is discontented with."

"Fanny," said Rose, "don't contradict her. She says that on purpose to be contradicted. A middle-aged look, is it? I dare say it is!"

"A look of contentment with things as they are," said Graeme. "There is a look of expectation on most *young* faces, you know, a hopeful look, which too often changes to an anxious look, or look of disappointment, as youth passes away. I mean, of course, with single women. I suppose it is that with me; or, do I look as if I were settling down content with things as they are?"

"Graeme," said her sister, "if some people were to speak like that in my hearing, I should say it sounded a little like affectation."

"I hope it is not politeness, alone, which prevents you from saying it to me?"

"But it is all nonsense, Graeme dear," said Fanny.

"How old are you, Graeme?" said Rose. "Middle-aged, indeed!"

"Rosie, does not ten years seem a long time, to look forward to? Shall you not begin to think yourself middle-aged ten years hence?"

"Certainly not; by no means; I have no such intention, unless, indeed—. But we won't speak about such unpleasant things. Fanny, shan't I take the baby while you do that?"

"If you would like to take him," said Fanny, with some hesitation.

Baby was a subject on which Rose and Fanny had not quite come to a mutual understanding. Rose was not so impressed with the wonderful attractions of her son as Fanny thought she ought to be. Even Graeme had been surprised at her indifference to the charms of her nephew, and expostulated with her on the subject. But Rose had had a surfeit of baby sweetness, and, after Hilda's strong, beautiful boys, Fanny's little, delicate three months' baby was a disappointment to her, and she made no secret of her amusement at the devotion of Graeme, and the raptures of his mother over him. But now, as she took him in her arms, she astonished them with such eloquence of baby-talk as baby had never heard before. Fanny was delighted. Happily Graeme prevented the question that trembled on her lips as to the comparative merits of her nephews, by saying,—

"Well done, Rosie! If only Harry could hear you!"

"I have often wished that Hilda could see and hear you both over this little mortal. You should see Hilda. Does not she preserve her equanimity? Fancy her walking the room for hours with any of her boys, as you did the other night with this one. Not she, indeed, nor any one else, with her permission."

"I thought—I am sure you have always spoken about Hilda as a model mother," said Fanny, doubtfully.

"And a fond mother," said Graeme.

"She *is* a model mother; she is fond, but she is wise," said Rose, nodding her head. "I say no more."

"Fanny dear, we shall have to learn of Rose. We are very inexperienced people, I fear," said Graeme, smiling.

"Well, I daresay even I might teach you something. But you should see Hilda and her babies. Her eldest son is three years old, and her second will soon be two, and her daughter is four months. Suppose she had begun by walking all night with each of them, and by humouring every whim?"

And then Rose began her talk with the baby again, saying all sorts of things about the fond foolishness of his little mamma and his Aunt Graeme, that it would not have been at all pretty, she acknowledged, to say to themselves. Graeme listened, smiling, but Fanny looked anxious.

"Rose," said she, "tell me about Hilda's way. I want to have the very best way with baby. I know I am not very wise, but I do wish to learn and to do right!"

Her words and her manner reminded Rose so forcibly, by contrast, of the Fanny whose vanity and self-assertion had been such a vexation so often, that, in thinking of those old times, she forgot to answer her, and sat playing with the child's clasping fingers.

"She thinks I will never be like Hilda," said Fanny, dolefully, to Graeme.

Rose shook her head.

"There are not many like Hilda; but I don't see any reason why you should not be as good a mother as she is, and have as obedient children. You have as good a teacher. No, don't look at Graeme. I know what you mean. She has taught you all the good that is in you. There are more of us who could say the same—except for making her vain. It is this young gentleman, I mean, who is to teach you."

And she began her extraordinary confidences to the child, till Graeme and Fanny were both laughing heartily at her nonsense.

"I'll tell you what, Fanny," said she, looking up in a little. "It is the mother-love that makes one wise, and Solomon has something to do with it. You must take him into your confidence. But, dear me! Think of my venturing to give you good advice, I might be Janet herself."

"But, Rosie, dear," said Graeme, still laughing, "Solomon has nothing to say about such infants as this one."

"Has he not? Well, that is Hilda's mistake, then. She is responsible for my opinions. I know nothing. The wisdom I am dispensing so freely is entirely hers. You must go and see Hilda and her babies, and you will understand all about it."

"I mean to go and see her, not entirely for the sake of her wisdom, however, though it must be wonderful to have impressed you so deeply."

"Yes, it *is* wonderful. But you will be in no hurry about going, will you? Two or three years hence will be time enough, I should think. I mean to content myself here for that time, and you are not going there, or anywhere, without me. That is quite decided, whatever arrangements Norman may have made."

"I don't think he will object to your going with me, if Arthur doesn't, and Fanny," said Graeme, smiling.

"Possibly not. But I am not going yet. And no plan that is meant to separate you and me shall prosper," said Rose, with more heat than the occasion seemed to call for, as though the subject had been previously discussed in a

manner not to her liking. Graeme looked grave and was silent a moment, then she said,—

“I remember saying almost these very words before we went to Merleville, to Emily’s wedding. But you know how differently it turned out for you and me. We will keep together while we can, dear, but we must not set our hearts upon it, or upon any other earthly good, as though we knew best what is for our own happiness.”

“Well, I suppose that is the right way to look at it. But I am to be your first consideration this winter, you must remember, and you are to be mine.”

“Graeme,” said Fanny, earnestly, “I don’t think Rose is spoiled in the least.”

Fanny made malapropos speeches sometimes still, but they were never unkindly meant now, and she looked with very loving eyes from one sister to the other.

“I hope you did not think Hilda was going to spoil me. Did you?” said Rose, laughing.

“No, not Hilda; and it was not I who thought so, nor Graeme. But Harry said you were admired more than was good for you, perhaps, and—”

Rose shrugged her shoulders.

“Oh! Harry is too wise for anything. I had a word or two with him on that subject myself, the last time he was out at Norman’s. You must not mind what Harry says about me, Fanny, dear.”

“But, Rose, you are not to think that Harry said anything that was not nice. It was one night when Mr Millar was here, and there was something said about Mr Green. And he thought—one of them thought that you—that he—I have forgotten what was said. What was it, Graeme? You were here as well as I.”

“I am very sure there was nothing said that was not nice,” said Graeme. “I don’t quite remember about it. There was nothing worth remembering or repeating.”

“I daresay Harry told you I was a flirt. He told me so, myself, once,” said Rose, tossing her head in a way Graeme did not like to see.

“Hush, dear. He said nothing unkind, you may be sure.”

“And, now I remember, it was not Harry but Mr Millar who spoke about Mr Green,” said Fanny, “and about the ‘palatial residence,’ and how Rose, if she liked, might—”

Rose moved about impatiently.

“I must say I cannot admire the taste that would permit the discussion of anything of that sort with a stranger,” said she, angrily.

“My dear, you are speaking foolishly. There was no such discussion. And if you say anything more on the subject, I shall think that Harry was right when he said you were fond of admiration, and that your conscience is troubling you about something. Here comes nurse for baby. I suppose it is time for his bath, is it mamma?”

Fanny left the room with the child, and, after a few minutes’ silence, Rose said, with an effort,—

“Now, Graeme, please tell me what all this is about.”

“Dear, there is nothing to tell. I fancy Harry used to think that I was too anxious and eager about your coming home, and wanted to remind me that you were no longer a child, but a woman, who was admired, and who might, by and by, learn to care for some one else, more than for your sister and brothers. But he did not seriously say anything that you need care about. It would have been as well, perhaps, not to have said anything in Mr Millar’s presence, since we seem to have fallen a little out of acquaintance with him lately. But Harry has not, and he did not consider, and, indeed, there was nothing said that he might not very well hear.”

“It seems it was he who had most to say.”

“No. You are mistaken. Fanny did not remember correctly. It was either Arthur or Harry who had something to say about Mr Green. I don’t think Charlie had anything to say about it. I am sure he would be the last one willingly to displease me or you. And, really, I don’t see why you should be angry about it, dear Rosie.”

“I am not angry. Why should I be angry?” But she reddened as she met Graeme’s eye. Graeme looked at her in some surprise.

“Harry is—is unbearable sometimes,” said Rose. “Fancy his taking me to task about—about his friend— Oh! there is no use talking about it. Graeme, are you going out?”

“Yes, if you like. But, Rose, I think you are hard upon Harry. There must be some misunderstanding. Why! he is as fond and as proud of you as possible. You must not be vain when I say so.”

“That does not prevent his being very unreasonable, all the same. However, he seems to have got over it, or forgotten it. Don’t let us speak any more about it, Graeme, or think about it either.”

But Graeme did think about it, and at first had thoughts of questioning Harry with regard to Rose’s cause of quarrel with him, but she thought better of it and did not. Nor did she ever speak about it again to Rose; but it came into her

mind often when she saw the two together, and once, when she heard Harry say something to Rose about her distance and dignity, and how uncalled for all that sort of thing was, she would have liked to know to what he was referring to, but she did not ask, for, notwithstanding little disagreements of this kind, they were evidently excellent friends.

How exactly like the old time before Arthur's marriage, and before Will or Harry went away, some of the days were, that followed the coming home of Rose. They seemed like the days even longer ago, Graeme felt, with a sense of rest and peace at her heart unspeakable. For the old content, nay, something better and more abiding had come back to her. The peace that comes after a time of trouble, the content that grows out of sorrow sanctified, are best. Remembering what has gone before, we know how to estimate the depth, and strength, and sweetness—the sharpness of past pain being a measure for the present joy. And, besides, the content that comes to us from God, out of disappointment and sorrow, is ours beyond loss, because it is God-given, and we need fear no evil.

So these were truly peaceful days to Graeme, untroubled by regret for the past, or by anxious fears for the future. They were busy days, too, filled with the occupations that naturally sprung out of happy home life, and agreeable social relations. Rose had been honoured, beyond her deserts, she said, by visits since she came home. These had to be returned, and Graeme, who had fallen off from the performance of such duties, during Rose's absence, and Fanny's illness, took pleasure in going with her. She took real pleasure in many of these visits, sometimes because of the renewal of friendly interest, sometimes for other reasons. The new way in which the character and manner of Rose came out never failed to amuse her. At home, and especially in her intercourse with her, Rose was just what she had been as a child, except the difference that a few added years must make. But it was by no means so in her intercourse with the rest of the world. She had ideas and opinions of her own, and she had her own way of making them known, or of defending them when attacked. There was not much opportunity for seeing this during brief formal visits, but now and then Graeme got a glimpse that greatly amused her. The quiet self-possession with which she met condescending advances, and accepted or declined compliments, the serene air with which she ignored or rebuked the little polite impertinences, not yet out of fashion in fine drawing-rooms, it was something to see. And her perfect unconsciousness of her sister's amusement or its cause was best of all to Graeme. Arthur amused himself with this change in her, also, and had a better opportunity to do so. For Graeme seldom went to large parties, and it was under the chaperonage of Mrs Arthur that Rose, as a general thing, made her appearance in their large and agreeable circle, on occasions of more than usual ceremony. Not that there were very many of these. Fanny was perfectly well now, and enjoyed these gay gatherings in moderation, but they were not so necessary to her happiness as they used to be, and Rose, though she made no secret of the pleasure she took in them, was not unreasonable in her devotion to society. So the winter was rather quiet than otherwise, and Graeme and Rose found themselves with a good deal of leisure time at their disposal.

For true to her first idea of what was for the happiness of her brother's household, Graeme, as Fanny grew stronger, gradually withdrew from the bearing of responsibility where household matters were concerned, and suffered it to fall, as she felt it to be right, on Arthur's wife. Not that she refused to be helpful; either in word or in deed, but it was as much as possible at the bidding of the mistress of the house. It was not always very easy to do, often not by any means so easy as it would have been to go on in the old way, but she was very much in earnest about this thing. It was right that it should be so, for many reasons. The responsibilities, as well as the honour, due to the mistress of the house, were Fanny's. These could not, she being in health and able to bear them, be assumed by her sister without mutual injury. The honour and responsibility could not be separated without danger and loss. All this Graeme tried to make Fanny see without using many words, and she had a more docile pupil than she would have had during the first year of her married-life. For Fanny had now entire confidence in the wisdom and love of her sister, and did her best to profit by her teaching:

It was the same where the child was concerned. While she watched over both with loving care, she hesitated to interfere or to give advice, even in small matters, lest she should lessen in the least degree the young mother's sense of responsibility, knowing this to be the best and surest guide to the wise and faithful performance of a mother's duties. And every day she was growing happier in the assurance that all was coming right with her sister, that she was learning the best of all wisdom, the wisdom of gentleness and self-forgetfulness, and of devotion to the welfare of others, and that all this was bearing fruit in the greater happiness of the household. And besides this, or rather as a result of this, she bade fair to be a notable little house-mother also; a little over-anxious, perhaps, and not very patient with her own failures, or with the failures of others, but still in earnest to attain success, and to be in all things what in the old times, she had only cared to seem.

Though Harry did not now form one of the household, he was with them very often. Mr Millar did not quite fall into the place which Harry's friend Charlie had occupied, but though he said less about his enjoyment of the friendship of their circle, it was evident that it was not because he enjoyed it less than in the old times. He had only changed since then by growing quieter and graver, as they all had done. His brother's determination not to return to Canada had been a great disappointment to him at the time, and he still regretted it very much, but he said little about it, less than was quite natural, perhaps, considering that they had once been such friends. Circumstances had made the brothers strangers during the boyhood of the younger, and it was hard that circumstances should separate them again, just as they had been beginning to know and to value each other. Charlie had hoped for a long time that Allan might come back after a year or two; for his estate was by no means a large one, and he believed that he would soon weary of a life of inactivity, and return to business again. He was still young, and might, with his knowledge and experience, do anything he liked in the way of making money, Charlie thought, and he could not be satisfied with his decision. But Will, who had visited Allan lately, assured Charlie that his brother was settling down to the enjoyment of a quiet country life, and that though he might visit Canada, there was little chance of his ever making that country his home again.

"I should think not, indeed," said Arthur, one night, as they were discussing the matter in connection with Will's last letter. "You don't display your usual good judgment, Charlie, man, where your brother is concerned. Why should he return? He is enjoying now, a comparatively young man, all that you and Harry expect to enjoy after some twenty or thirty years of hard labour—a competency in society congenial to him. Why should he wait for this longer than he

need?"

"Twenty or thirty years!" said Harry. "Not if I know it. You are thinking of old times. But I must say I agree with Charlie. It is strange that Mr Ruthven should be content to sit down in comparative idleness, for, of course, the idea of farming his own land is absurd. And to tell you the truth, I never thought him one to be satisfied with a mere competency. I thought him at one time ambitious to become a rich, man—a great merchant."

"It would not be safe or wise to disparage the life and aims of a great merchant in your presence, Harry," said Rose, "but one would think the life of a country gentleman preferable in some respects."

"I don't think Allan aspires to the position of a country gentleman—in the dignified sense in which the term is used where he is. His place is very beautiful, but it is not large enough to entitle him to the position of one of the great landed proprietors."

"Oh! as to that, the extent makes little difference. It is the land that his fathers have held for generations, and that is a thing to be proud of, and to give position, Rose thinks," said Arthur.

"His father never owned it, and his grandfather did not hold it long. It was lost to the name many years ago, and bought back again by Allan's uncle within ten years."

"Yes, with the good money of a good merchant," said Harry.

"And did he make it a condition that he should live on it?" said Arthur.

"No, I think not. Allan never has said any such thing as that to me, or to my mother."

"Still he may think it his duty to live there."

"I don't know. It is not as though it were a large estate, with many tenants, to whom he owed duty and care and all that. I think the life suits him. My mother always thought it was a great disappointment to him to be obliged to leave home when he did to enter upon a life of business. He did not object decidedly. There seemed at the time nothing else for him to do. So he came to Canada."

"I daresay his present life is just the very life he could enjoy most. I wonder that you are so vexed about his staying at home, Charlie."

"I daresay it is selfishness in me. And yet I don't think it is so altogether. I know, at least I am almost sure, that it would be better for him to come here, at least for a time. He might always have the going home to look forward to."

"I cannot imagine how he can content himself there, after the active life he lived on this side of the water; he will degenerate into an old fogey, vegetating there," said Harry.

"But I think you are hard on yourself, Mr Millar, calling it selfishness in you to wish your brother to be near you," said Graeme, smiling. "I could find a much nicer name for it than that."

"I would like him to come for his own sake," said Charlie. "As for me, I was just beginning to know him—to know how superior he is to most men, and then I lost him." He paused a moment—

"I mean, of course, we can see little of each other now, and we shall find it much easier to forget one another than if we had lived together and loved and quarrelled with each other as boys. I shall see him if I go home next summer, and I don't despair of seeing him here for a visit, at least."

"Will says he means to come some time. Perhaps he will come back with you, or with Will himself, when he comes," said Rose.

"Oh! the voyage is nothing; a matter of ten days or less," said Arthur. "It is like living next door neighbours, in comparison to what it was when we came over. Of course he may come any month. I don't understand your desolation, Charlie."

Charlie laughed. "When is Will coming?"

"It does not seem to be decided yet," said Graeme. "He may come in the spring, but if he decides to travel first, as he seems to have an opportunity to do, he will not be here till next autumn, at the soonest. It seems a long time to put it off; but we ought not to grudge the delay, especially as he may never get another chance to go so easily and pleasantly."

"What if Will should think like Mr Ruthven, that a life at home is to be desired? How would you like that, girls?" said Harry.

"Oh! but he never could have the same reason for thinking so. There is no family estate in his case," said Rose, laughing.

"Who knows?" said Arthur. "There may be a little dim kirk and a low-roofed manse waiting him somewhere. That would seem to be the most appropriate inheritance for his father's youngest son. What would you say to that Graeme?"

"I would rather say nothing—think nothing about it," said Graeme, hastily. "It is not likely that could ever happen. It will all be arranged for us, doubtless."

"It was very stupid of you, Harry, to say anything of that sort to Graeme," said Rose. "Now, she will vex herself about her boy, as though it were possible that he could stay there. He never will, I know."

"I shall not vex myself, indeed, Rosie—at least I shall not until I have some better reason for doing so, than Harry's foolish speeches. Mr Millar, you said you might go home next summer. Is that something new? Or is it only new to us?"

"It is possible that I may go. Indeed, it is very likely. I shall know soon."

"It depends on circumstances over which he has no control," said Harry, impressively. "He has my best wishes, and he would have yours, Graeme, I think, if you knew about it."

"He has them, though I don't know about it," said Graeme. "I have confidence in him that he deserves success."

"Yes, it is safe to wish him success—if not in one thing, in another. I am not sure that he quite knows what he wants yet, but I think I know what is good for him."

"Rosie," said Fanny, suddenly, "Mr Millar can set us right now. I am glad I thought of it. Mr Millar, is Mrs Roxbury your aunt, or only your brother's?"

"I am afraid it is only Allan who can claim so close a relationship as that. I don't think I can claim any relationship at all. I should have to consider, before I could make it clear even to myself, how we are connected."

"It is much better not to consider the subject, then," said Arthur, "as they are rather desirable people to have for relations; call them cousins, and let it go."

"But at any rate she is not your aunt, and Amy Roxbury is not your cousin, as some one was insisting over Rose and me the other day. I told you so, Rosie."

"Did you?" said Rose, languidly. "I don't remember."

"It was Mrs Gridley, I think, and she said—no, it must have been some one else—she said you were not cousins, but that it was a very convenient relationship, and very pleasant in certain circumstances."

"Very true, too, eh, Charlie," said Arthur, laughing.

"I should scarcely venture to call Miss Roxbury cousin," said Charlie.

"She is very nice, indeed," pursued Fanny. "Rose fell in love with her at first sight, and the admiration was mutual, I think."

Rose shrugged her shoulders.

"That is, perhaps, a little strong, Fanny, dear. She is very charming, I have no doubt, but I am not so apt to fall into sudden admirations as I used to be."

"But you admired her very much. And you said she was very like Lily Elphinstone, when you first saw her. I am sure you thought her very lovely, and so did Graeme."

"Did I?" said Rose.

"She is very like her," said Mr Millar. "I did not notice it till her mother mentioned it. She is like her in other respects, too; but livelier and more energetic. She is stronger than Lily used to be, and perhaps a little more like the modern young lady."

"Fast, a little, perhaps," said Arthur.

"Oh! no; not like one in the unpleasant sense that the word has. She is self-reliant. She has her own ideas of men and things, and they are not always the same as her mamma's. But she is a dutiful daughter, and she is charming with her little brothers and sisters. Such a number there are of them, too."

Charlie spoke eagerly, looking at Graeme. "You seem deeply interested in her," said Arthur, laughing.

Harry rose impatiently.

"We should have Mrs Gridley here. I never think a free discussion of our neighbours and their affairs can be conducted on proper principles without her valuable assistance. Your *cousin* would be charmed to know that you made her the subject of conversation among your acquaintance, I have no doubt, Charlie."

"But she is not his cousin," said Fanny. "And Harry, dear, you are unkind to speak of us as mere acquaintances of Mr Millar. Of course, he would not speak of her everywhere; and you must permit me to say you are a little unreasonable, not to say cross." And Rose smiled very sweetly on him as she spoke.

Harry did look cross, and Charlie looked astonished. Graeme did not understand it.

"Was that young Roxbury I saw you driving with the other day?" asked Arthur. "He is going into business, I hear."

"It was he," said Charlie. "As to his going into business, I cannot say. He is quite young yet. He is not of age. Are you going, Harry? It is not very late yet."

They did not go immediately, but they did not have much pleasure after that. He was very lively and amusing, and tried to propitiate Harry, Graeme thought, but she was not quite sure; there were a good many allusions to events and places and persons that she did not understand, and nothing could be plainer than that she did not succeed. Then they had some music. Rose sat at the piano till they went away, playing pieces long, loud, and intricate; and, after they went away, she sat down again, and played on still.

“What put Harry out of sorts to-night?” asked Arthur.

“Was he out of sorts?” asked Graeme, a little anxiously.

Rose laughed.

“I shall have to give Harry some good advice,” said she; and that was the last word she said, till she said “good-night.”

“There is something wrong,” said Graeme to herself, “though I am sure I cannot tell what it is. In old times, Rosie would have burst forth with it all, as soon as we came up-stairs. But it is nothing that can trouble her, I am sure. I hope it is nothing that will trouble her. I will not fret about it beforehand. We do not know our troubles from our blessings at first sight. It ought not to be less easy to trust for my darling than for myself. But, oh! Rosie, I am afraid I have been at my old folly, dreaming idle dreams again.”

Chapter Thirty Nine.

Graeme had rejoiced over her sister's return, “heart-free and fancy-free,” rather more than was reasonable, seeing that the danger to her freedom of heart and fancy was as great at home as elsewhere, and, indeed, inevitable anywhere, and, under certain circumstances, desirable, as well. A very little thing had disturbed her sense of security before many weeks were over, and then, amid the mingling of anxiety and hope which followed, she could not but feel how vain and foolish her feeling of security had been. It was the look that had come into Charlie Millar's face one day, as his eye fell suddenly on the face of Rose. Graeme's heart gave a sudden throb of pain and doubt, as she saw it, for it told her that a change was coming over their quiet life, and her own experience made it seem to her a change to be dreaded.

There had been a great snow-shoe race going on that day, in which they were all supposed to be much interested, because Master Albert Grove was one of the runners, and had good hope of winning a silver medal which was to be the prize of the foremost in the race. Graeme and Rose had come with his little sisters to look on, and Rose had grown as eager and delighted as the children, and stood there quite unconscious of the admiration in Charlie's eyes, and of the shock of pain that thrilled at her sister's heart. It was more than admiration that Graeme saw in his eyes, but the look passed, and he made no movement through the crowd toward them, and everything was just as it had been before, except that the thought had come into Graeme's mind, and could not quite be forgotten again.

After that the time still went quietly on, and Charlie came and went, and was welcomed as before; but Graeme looking on him now with enlightened eyes, saw, or thought she saw, more and more clearly every day, the secret that he did not seem in haste to utter. And every day she saw it with less pain, and waited, at last, glad and wondering, for the time when the lover's word should change her sister's shy and somewhat stately courtesy into a frank acceptance of what could not but be precious, Graeme thought, though still unknown or unacknowledged. And then the mention of Amy Roxbury's name, and the talk that followed, startled her into the knowledge that she had been dreaming.

“Rose,” said she, after they had been up-stairs for some time, and were about to separate for the night, “what was the matter with Harry this evening?”

“What, indeed?” said Rose, laughing. “He was quite out of sorts about something.”

“I did not think he knew the Roxburys. He certainly has not known them long,” said Graeme.

“No, not very long—at least, not Miss Amy, who has only just returned home, you know. But I think she was not at the root of his trouble; at least, not directly. I think he has found out a slight mistake of his, with regard to ‘his friend and partner.’ That is what vexed him,” said Rose.

“I don't know what you mean?” said Graeme, gravely. “I should think Harry could hardly be seriously mistaken in his friend by this time, and certainly I should not feel inclined to laugh at him.”

“Oh! no. Not *seriously* mistaken; and I don't think he was so much vexed at the mistake, as that I should know it.”

“I don't understand you,” said Graeme.

“It does not matter, Graeme. It will all come out right, I daresay. Harry was vexed because he saw that I was laughing at him, and it is just as well that he should be teased a little.”

“Rose, don't go yet. What is there between you and Harry that I don't know about? You would not willingly make me unhappy, Rose, I am sure. Tell me how you have vexed each other, dear. I noticed it to-night, and I have several times noticed it before. Tell me all about it, Rose.”

“There is nothing to tell, Graeme, indeed. I was very much vexed with Harry once, but I daresay there was no need for it. Graeme, it is silly to repeat it,” added Rose, reddening.

"There is no one to hear but me, dear."

"It was all nonsense. Harry took it into his head that I had not treated his friend well, when he was out West, at Norman's, I mean. Of course, we could not fall into home ways during his short visit there; everything was so different. But I was not 'high and mighty' with him, as Harry declared afterwards. He took me to task, sharply, and accused me of flirting, and I don't know what all, as though that would help his friend's cause, even if his friend had cared about it, which he did not. It was very absurd. I cannot talk about it, Graeme. It was all Harry's fancy. And to-night, when Mr Millar spoke so admiringly of Amy Roxbury, Harry wasn't pleased, because he knew I remembered what he had said, and he knew I was laughing at him. And I fancy he admires the pretty little thing, himself. It would be great fun to see the dear friends turn out rivals, would it not?" said Rose, laughing.

"But that is all nonsense, Rose."

"Of course, it is all nonsense, from beginning to end. That is just what I think, and what I have been saying to you. So don't let us say or think anything more about it. Good-night."

"Good-night. It will all come right, I daresay;" and Graeme put it out of her thoughts, as Rose had bidden her do.

After this, Harry was away for a while, and they saw less of Mr Millar, because of his absence, Graeme thought. He must have more to do, as the busy time of the coming and going of the ships was at hand. So their days passed very quietly, with only common pleasures to mark them, but they were happy days for all that; and Graeme, seeing her sister's half-veiled pleasure when Charlie came, and only half-conscious impatience when he stayed away, smiled to herself as she repeated, "It will all come right."

It was a fair April day; a little colder than April days are generally supposed to be, but bright and still—just the day for a long walk, all agreed; and Rose went up-stairs to prepare to go out, singing out of a light heart as she went. Graeme hastened to finish something that she had in her hand, that she might follow, and then a visitor came, and before Rose came down with her hat on, another came; and the one that came last, and stayed longest, was their old friend, and Harry's aversion, Mrs Gridley. Rose had reconciled herself to the loss of her walk, by this time, and listened amused to the various subjects discussed, laying up an item now and then, for Harry's special benefit. There was variety, for this was her first visit for a long time.

After a good many interesting excursions among the affairs of their friends and neighbours, she brought them back in her pleasant way to their own.

"By the by, is it true that young Roxbury is going into business with Mr Millar and your brother?"

"We have not been informed of any such design," said Rose.

"Your brother is away just now, is he not? Will he return? Young men who have done business elsewhere, are rather in the habit of calling our city slow. I hope your brother Harry does not. Is young Roxbury to take his place in the firm, or are all three to be together?"

"Harry does not make his business arrangements the subject of conversation very often," said Graeme, gravely.

"He is quite right," said Mrs Gridley. "And I daresay, young Roxbury would not be a great acquisition to the firm, though his father's money might. However, some of *that* may be got in a more agreeable way. Mr Millar is doing his best, they say. But, Amy Roxbury is little more than a child. Still some very foolish marriages seem to turn out very well. Am I not to see Mrs Elliott, to-day? She is a very devoted mother, it seems."

"She would have been happy to see you, if she had been at home."

"And she is quite well again? What a relief it must be to you," said Mrs Gridley, amiably. "And you are all quite happy together! I thought you were going to stay at the West, Rose?"

"I could not be spared any longer; they could not do without me."

"And are you going to keep house for Harry, at Elphinstone house, or is Mr Millar to have that?"

And so on, till she was tired, at last, and went away.

"What nonsense that woman talks, to be sure!" said Rose.

"Worse than nonsense, I am afraid, sometimes," said Graeme. "Really, Harry's terror of her is not surprising. Nobody seems safe from her tongue."

"But don't let us lose our walk, altogether. We have time to go round the square, at any rate. It is not late," said Rose.

They went out, leaving, or seeming to leave, all thought of Mrs Gridley and her news behind them. They met Fanny returning home, before they had gone far down the street.

"Come with us, Fanny. Baby is all right. Are you tired?" said Rose.

"No, I am not tired. But is it not almost dinner time? Suppose we go and meet Arthur."

"Well—only there is a chance of missing him; and it is much nicer up toward S street. However, we can go home that way. There will be time enough. How delightful the fresh air is, after a whole day in the house!"

"And after Mrs Gridley," said Graeme, laughing.

"Have you had Mrs Gridley?" said Fanny.

"Yes, and columns of news, but it will keep. Is it not nice to be out? I would like to borrow that child's skipping rope, and go up the street as she does."

Fanny laughed. "Wouldn't all the people be amazed? Tell me what news Mrs Gridley gave you."

Rose went over a great many items, very fast, and very merrily.

"All that, and more besides, which Graeme will give you, if you are not satisfied. There is your husband. I hope he may be glad to see us all."

"If he is not, he can go home by himself."

Arthur professed himself delighted, but suggested the propriety of their coming one at a time, after that, so that the pleasure might last longer.

"Very well, one at a time be it," said Rose. "Come, Fanny, he thinks it possible to have too much of a good thing. Let him have Graeme, to-night, and we will take care of ourselves."

They went away together, and Arthur and Graeme followed, and so it happened that Graeme had lost sight of her sister; when she saw something that brought some of Mrs Gridley's words unpleasantly to her mind. They had turned into S street, which was gay with carriages, and with people riding and walking, and the others were at a distance before them under the trees, when Arthur spoke to some one, and looking up, she saw Miss Roxbury, on horseback, and at her side rode Mr Millar. She was startled, so startled that she quite forgot to return Miss Roxbury's bow and smile, and had gone a good way down the street before she noticed that her brother was speaking to her. He was saying something about the possible admission of young Roxbury into the new firm, apropos of the encounter of Mr Millar and Amy.

"Harry is very close about his affairs," said Graeme, with a little vexation. "Mrs Gridley gave us that among other pieces of news, to-day. I am not sure that I did not deny it, decidedly. It is rather awkward when all the town knows of our affairs, before we know them ourselves."

"Awkward, indeed!" said Arthur, laughing. "But then this partnership is hardly our affair, and Mrs Gridley is not all the town, though she is not to be lightlified, where the spreading of news is concerned; and she tells things before they happen, it seems, for this is not settled, yet, and may never be. It would do well for some things."

But Graeme could not listen to this, or to anything else, just then. She was wondering whether Rose had seen Charles Millar and Miss Roxbury, and hoping she had not. And then she considered a moment whether she might not ask Arthur to say nothing about meeting them; but she could not do it without making it seem to herself that she was betraying her sister. And yet, how foolish such a thought was; for Rose had nothing to betray, she said, a little anxiously, to herself. She repeated it more firmly, however, when they came to the corner of the street where Fanny and Rose were waiting for them, and laughing and talking merrily together. If Rose felt any vexation, she hid it well.

"I will ask Fanny whom they met. No, I will not," said Graeme, to herself, again. "Why should Rose care. It is only I who have been foolish. They have known each other so long, it would have happened long ago, if it had been to happen. It would have been very nice for some things. And it might have been, if Rose had cared for him. He cared for her, I am quite sure. Who would not? But she does not care for him. I hope she does not care for him. Oh! I could not go through all that again! Oh, my darling, my darling!"

It was growing dark, happily, or her face might have betrayed what Graeme was thinking. She started a little when her sister said,—

"Graeme, do you think it would be extravagant in me to wish for a new velvet jacket?"

"Not very extravagant just to wish for one," said Graeme, dubiously. Rose laughed.

"I might as well wish for a gown, too, while I am wishing, I suppose, you think. No, but I do admire those little jackets so much. I might cut over my winter one, but it would be a waste of material, and something lighter and less expensive would do. It wouldn't take much, they are worn so small. What do you think about it, Graeme?"

"If you can afford it. They are very pretty, certainly."

"Yes, are they not? But, after all, I daresay I am foolish to wish for one."

"Why, as to that, if you have set your heart on one, I daresay we can manage it between us."

"Oh! as to setting my heart on it, I can't quite say that. It is not wise to set one's heart on what one is not sure of getting—or on things that perish with the using—which is emphatically true of jackets. This one has faded a great deal more than it ought to have done, considering the cost," added she, looking gravely down at her sleeve.

There was no time for more.

"Here we are," said Fanny, as they all came up to the door. "How pleasant it has been, and how much longer the days are getting. We will all come to meet you again, dear. I only hope baby has been good."

"She did not see them," said Graeme, to herself, "or she does not care. If she had seen them she would have said so, of course, unless—. I will watch her. I shall see if there is any difference. But she cannot hide it from me, if she is vexed or troubled. I am quite sure of that."

If there was one among them that night more silent than usual, or less cheerful, it certainly was not Rose. She was just what she always was. She was not lively and talkative, as though she had anything to hide; nor did she go to the piano, and play on constantly and noisily, as she sometimes did when she was vexed or impatient. She was just as usual. She came into Graeme's room and sat down for a few minutes of quiet, just as she usually did. She did not stay very long, but she did not hurry away as though she wished to be alone, and her mind was full of the velvet jacket still, it seemed, though she did not speak quite so eagerly about it as she had done at first. Still it was an important matter, beyond all other matters for the time, and when she went away she laughingly confessed that she ought to be ashamed to care so much about so small a matter, and begged her sister not to think her altogether vain and foolish. And then Graeme said to herself, again, that Rose did not care, she was quite sure, and very glad and thankful.

Glad and thankful! Yet, Graeme watched her sister next day, and for many days, with eyes which even Fanny could see were wistful and anxious. Rose did not see it, or she did not say so. She was not sad in the least degree, yet not too cheerful. She was just as usual, Graeme assured herself many times, when anxious thoughts would come; and so she was, as far as any one could see.

When Mr Millar called the first time after the night when Graeme had met him with Miss Roxbury, Rose was not at home. He had seen her going into the house next door, as he was coming up the street, he told Mrs Elliott, when she wondered what had become of her. She did not come in till late. She had been beguiled into playing and singing any number of duets and trios with the young Gilberts, she said, and she had got a new song that would just suit Fanny's voice, and Fanny must come and try it. And then, she appealed to Arthur, whether it was a proper thing for his wife to give up all her music except nursery rhymes, and carried her in triumph to the piano, where they amused themselves till baby wanted mamma. She was just as friendly as usual with Mr Millar during the short time he stayed after that—rather more so, perhaps, for she reminded him of a book which he had promised to bring and had forgotten. He brought it the very next night, but Rose, unhappily, had toothache, and could not come down. She was not "making believe," Graeme assured herself when she went up-stairs, for her face was flushed, and her hands were hot, and she paid a visit to the dentist next morning. In a day or two Harry came home, and Mr Millar came and went with him as usual, and was very quiet and grave, as had come to be his way of late, and to all appearance everything went on as before.

"Graeme," said Fanny, confidentially, one night when all but Rose were sitting together, "I saw the *prettiest* velvet jacket to-day! It was trimmed in quite a new style, quite simply, too. I asked the price."

"And were astonished at its cheapness," said Harry.

"For baby, I suppose?" said Arthur.

"For baby! A velvet jacket! What are you thinking of, Arthur?" said Fanny, answering her husband first. "No, Harry, I was not astonished at the cheapness. But it was a beauty, and not very dear, considering."

"And it is for baby's mamma, then," said Arthur, making believe to take out his pocket book. Fanny shook her head.

"I have any number of jackets," said she.

"But, then, you have worn them any number of times," said Harry.

"They are as good as new, but old-fashioned? Eh, Fanny?" said her husband.

"Three weeks behind the latest style," said Harry.

"Nonsense, Arthur! What do you know about jackets, Harry? But, Graeme, Rosie ought to have it. You know, she wants one so much."

"She spoke about it, I know; but I don't think she really cares for one. At any rate, she has made up her mind to do without one."

"Of course, it would be foolish to care about what she could not get," said Fanny, wisely. "But she would like it, all the same, I am sure."

The velvet jacket had been discussed between these two with much interest; but Rose had given up all thought of it with great apparent reluctance, and nothing had been said about it for some days. Judging from what her own feelings would have been in similar circumstances, Fanny doubted the sincerity of Rose's resignation.

"I believe it is that which has been vexing her lately, though she says nothing," continued she.

"Vexing her," repeated Graeme. "What do you mean, Fanny? What have you seen?"

"Oh! I have seen nothing that you have not seen as well. But I know I should be vexed if I wanted a velvet jacket, and could not get it; at least I should have been when I was a young girl like Rose," added Fanny, with the gentle tolerance of a young matron, who has seen the folly of girlish wishes, but does not care to be hard on them. The others laughed.

"And even later than that—till baby came to bring you wisdom," said her husband.

"And it would be nice if Rosie could have it before the Convocation," continued Fanny, not heeding him. "It would just be the thing with her new hat and grey poplin."

"Yes," said Graeme, "but I don't think Rosie would enjoy it unless she felt that she could quite well afford it. I don't really think she cares about it much."

"I know what you mean, Graeme. She would not like me to interfere about it, you think. But if Arthur or Harry would have the sense to make her a present of it, just because it is pretty and fashionable, and not because she is supposed to want it, and without any hint from you or me, that would be nice."

"Upon my word, Fanny, you are growing as wise as your mamma," said Harry. "A regular manager."

Fanny pouted a little for she knew that her mamma's wisdom and management were not admired. Graeme hastened to interfere.

"It is very nice of you to care so much about it, Fanny. You know Rose is very determined to make her means cover her expenses; but still if, as you say, Harry should suddenly be smitten with admiration for the jacket, and present it to her, perhaps it might do. I am not sure, however. I have my misgivings."

And not without reason. Rose had an allowance, liberal enough, but not too liberal; not so liberal but that taste, and skill, and care were needed, to enable her to look as nice as she liked to look. But more than once she had failed to express, or to feel gratitude to Fanny, in her attempts to make it easier for her, either by an appeal to her brothers, or by drawing on her own means. Even from Graeme, she would only accept temporary assistance, and rather prided herself on the little shifts and contrivances by which she made her own means go to the utmost limit.

But there was no difficulty this time. It all happened naturally enough, and Rose thanked Harry with more warmth than was necessary, in his opinion, or, indeed, in the opinion of Graeme.

"I saw one on Miss Roxbury," said Harry, "or, I ought to say, I saw Miss Roxbury wearing one; and I thought it looked very well, and so did Charlie."

"Oh!" said Rose, with a long breath. "But then you know, Harry dear, that I cannot pretend to such style as Miss Roxbury. I am afraid you will be disappointed in my jacket."

"You want me to compliment you, Rosie. You know you are a great deal prettier than little Amy Roxbury. But she is very sweet and good, if you would only take pains to know her. You would win her heart directly, if you were to try."

"But then I should not know what to do with it, if I were to win it, unless I were to give it away. And hearts are of no value when given by a third person, as nobody should know better than you, Harry, dear. But I shall do honour to your taste all the same; and twenty more good brothers shall present jackets to grateful sisters, seeing how well I look in mine. It is very nice, and I thank you very much."

But she did not look as though she enjoyed it very much, Graeme could not help thinking.

"Of course, she did not really care much to have it. She does not need to make herself fine. I daresay she will enjoy wearing it, however. It is well she can enjoy something else besides finery."

They all went to the Convocation, and Rose wore her new jacket, and her grey poplin, and looked beautiful, the rest thought. The ladies went early with Arthur, but he was called away, and it was a little tedious waiting, or it would have been, only it was very amusing to see so many people coming in, all dressed in their new spring attire. Fanny enjoyed this part of the affair very much, and Rose said she enjoyed it, too, quite as much as any part of the affair; and, by and by, Fanny whispered that there was Harry, with Miss Roxbury.

"I thought Harry was not coming," said she.

"I suppose, he was able to get away after all," said Graeme, and she looked round for Mr Millar. He was not to be seen, but by and by Harry came round to them, to say that there were several seats much better than theirs, that had been reserved for the Roxbury party, because Mr Roxbury had something to do with the College, and Mrs Roxbury wanted them to come round and take them, before they were filled.

"Oh! how charming!" said Rose. "If we only could. We should be quite among the great people, then, which is what I delight in."

"I thought you were not coming, Harry," said Graeme.

"I was afraid I could not get away, but I made out to do so. No, not at Charlie's expense. There he is now, speaking to Mrs Roxbury, and looking about for us, I daresay."

"Well, Fanny, you go on with Harry, and Graeme and I will follow," said Rose. "It would not do to separate, I suppose? Are you sure there is room for all, Harry?"

"Quite sure. No fear; we will make room."

So Harry gave his arm to Fanny, and Graeme rose to follow them, though she would much rather have stayed where she was. When she reached the other end of the long hall, she turned to look for her sister, but Rose had not moved. She could not catch her eye, for her attention was occupied by some one who had taken the seat beside her, and Graeme could not linger without losing sight of Harry and Fanny, for the people were crowding up, now, and only the seats set apart for the students were left vacant. So she was obliged to hasten on.

"I will send Harry back for her," said Graeme, to herself. "Or, perhaps, when Arthur returns, she will cross the hall with him. We have made a very foolish move for all concerned, I think. But Rosie seemed to like the idea, and I did not care. I only hope we are not separated for the whole affair."

But separated for the whole affair they were. Arthur returned, but it was not easy for him to get through the crowd to the place where he had left his wife and sisters, and when he reached it, he saw that it would not be easy to get away again. So as he could see and hear very well where he was, and as Rose seemed quite satisfied with her place, and with the companionship of her little friend, Miss Etta Goldsmith, he contented himself where he was.

Miss Goldsmith had come to town to see her brother take his diploma as doctor of medicine, and she was in a fever of anxiety till "dear Dick," had got his precious bit of parchment in his hands. And after that, till he had performed his duty as orator of his class, and had bidden farewell to each and all, in English so flowing and flowery, that she was amazed, as well as delighted, and very grateful to his classmates for the applause, which they did not spare. Rose sat beside the eager little girl, so grave and pale, by contrast, perhaps, that Arthur leaned over, and asked her if she were ill, or only very tired of it all. Then she brightened.

"There is great deal more of it, is there not? I must not be tired yet. Why don't you find your way over to Fanny and Graeme?"

"Where are they? Ah! yes, I see them over there among the great folks—and Harry, too, no less, and his friend and partner. And that bonny little Amy is not far-away, I'll venture to say. No. I shall stay where I am for the present."

Miss Goldsmith did not feel bound to be specially interested in anybody or anything, except her big brother and his bit of parchment. And so, when he had given her a nod and a smile, as he came down from the dais, crumpling his papers in his big hands, she was ready to look about and enjoy herself. And to the unaccustomed eyes of the country girl, there was a great deal worth seeing.

"How beautifully the ladies are dressed! How pretty the spring fashions are! I feel like an old dowdy! Who is that lady in blue? What a love of a hat! And your jacket! It is a beauty!"

It was through such a running fire of questions and exclamations that Rose listened to all that was going on. There was a good deal more to be said, for the law students were addressed by a gentleman, whose boast it seemed to be, that he had once been a law student himself. Then they had some Latin muttered over them, and their heads tapped by the Principal, and some one else gave them their bits of parchment, and then their orator spoke their farewell in flowing and flowery English. And "will it ever be done?" thought Rose, with a sigh.

It was not "just the thing," all this discussion of hats and fashions; but little Miss Goldsmith spoke very softly, and disturbed no one, breathed her questions almost, and Rose answered as silently, with a nod, or a smile, or a turn of the eye; and, at any rate, they were not the only people who were thus taking refuge from the dullness of the Dean, and the prosing of the Chancellor, Rose thought to herself; as she glanced about. Arthur whispered that the Chancellor surpassed himself on the occasion, and that even the Dean was not very prosy, and Rose did not dissent, but she looked as if it was all a weariness to her? She brightened a little when it was all over, and they rose to go.

"Go and find Fanny and Graeme," said she to her brother. "Dr Goldsmith will take care of his sister and me."

Dr Goldsmith was nothing loth, and Rose was so engaged in offering her congratulations, and in listening to his replies, and in responding to the greetings of her many friends as she came down into the hall, that she did not notice that Graeme and Mr Millar were waiting for her at the head of the stairs. There was a little delay at the outer door, where there were many carriages waiting. The Roxbury carriage was among the rest, and Miss Roxbury was sitting in it, though Rose could not help thinking she looked as though she would much rather have walked on with the rest, as Harry was so bold as to propose. They were waiting for Mr Roxbury, it seemed, and our party lingered over their last words.

"I will walk on with the Goldsmiths. I have something to say to Etta," said Rose, and before Graeme could expostulate, or, indeed, answer at all, she was gone. The carriage passed them, and Miss Roxbury leaned forward and bowed and smiled, and charmed Miss Goldsmith with her pretty manner and perfect hat. In a little, Harry overtook them. Rose presented him to Miss Goldsmith, and walked on with the Doctor. At the gate of the college grounds, their ways separated.

"Mr Elliott," said Miss Goldsmith, "your sister has almost promised to come and visit us when I go home. I do so want papa and mamma to see her. Brother Dick goes home to-morrow, but I am going to stay a day or two, and then I want Rose to go with me. Do try and persuade Miss Elliott to let her go."

Harry promised, with more politeness than sincerity, saying he had no doubt Graeme would be happy to give Rose the pleasure, and then they got away.

"Papa, and mamma, and brother Dick. I declare it looks serious. What are you meditating, now, Rosie, if I may ask?"

"My dear Harry, if you think by chaff to escape the scolding you know you deserve, you will find yourself mistaken. The idea of your taking Graeme and Fanny away, and leaving me there by myself! I don't know what I should have done if Arthur had not come back. To be sure I had Etta Goldsmith, who is a dear little thing. I don't think her big brother is so very ugly if he hadn't red hair. And he must be clever, or he would not have been permitted to make that speech. His papa and mamma must be delighted. But it was very shabby of you, Harry, to go and leave me alone; was it not, Arthur?"

"But, you might have come, too," said Fanny. "I thought you were following us."

"And so did I," said Graeme.

"Well, dear little Etta Goldsmith pounced upon me the moment you left, and then it was too late. I did not feel sufficiently strong-minded to elbow my way through the crowd alone, or I might have followed you."

"I did not miss you at first," said Harry, "and then I wanted Charlie to go for you, but—"

"He very properly refused. Don't excuse yourself, Harry. And I had set my heart on comparing jackets with Miss Roxbury, too."

"Why did you not stay and speak to her at the door, then?" said Harry, who had rather lost his presence of mind under his sister's reproaches. He had hurried after her, fully intending to take her to task for being so stiff and distant, and he was not prepared to defend himself,—

"Why didn't you wait and speak to her at the door?"

"Oh! you know, I could not have seen it well then, as she was in the carriage. It is very awkward looking up to carriage people, don't you think? And, besides, it would not have been quite polite to the Goldsmiths," added she, severely. "You know they befriended me when I was left alone."

"Befriended you, indeed. I expected every minute to see your feather take fire as he bent his red head down over it. I felt like giving him a beating," said Harry, savagely. Rose laughed merrily.

"My dear Harry! You couldn't do it. He is so much bigger than you. At least, he has greater weight, as the fighting people say."

"But it is all nonsense, Rose. I don't like it. It looked to me, and to other people, too, very much like a flirtation on your part, to leave the rest, and go away with that big—big—"

"Doctor," suggested Rose.

"And we shall have all the town, and Mrs Gridley, telling us next, that you—"

"Harry, dear, I always know when I hear you mention Mrs Gridley's name, that you are becoming incoherent. / leave *you*. Quite the contrary. And please don't use that naughty word in connection with my name again, or I may be driven to defend myself in a way that might not be agreeable to you. Dear me, I thought you were growing to be reasonable by this time. Don't let Graeme see us quarrelling."

"You look tired, dear," said Graeme, as they went up-stairs together.

"Well, it was a little tedious, was it not? Of course, it wouldn't do to say so, you know. However, I got through it pretty well, with little Etta's help. Did you enjoy the Roxbury party much?"

"I kept wishing we had not separated," said Graeme. "Oh! yes, I enjoyed it. They asked us there to-night to meet some nice people, they said. It is not to be a party. Harry is to dine here, and go with us, and so is Mr Millar."

"It will be very nice, I daresay, only I am so very tired. However, we need not decide till after dinner," said Rose.

After dinner she declared herself too sleepy for anything but bed, and she had a headache, besides.

"I noticed you looked quite pale this afternoon," said Arthur. "Don't go if you are tired. Graeme, what is the use of her going if she does not want to?"

"Certainly, she ought not to go if she is not well. But I think you would enjoy this much, better than a regular party? and we might come home early."

"Oh! I enjoy regular parties only too well. I will go if you wish it, Graeme, only I am afraid I shall not shine with my usual brilliancy—that is all!"

"I hope you are really ill," said Harry. "I mean, I hope you are not just making believe to get rid of it."

"My dear Harry! Why, in all the world, should I make believe not well 'to get rid of it,' as you so elegantly express it? Such great folks, too!"

"Harry, don't be cross," said Fanny. "I am sure I heard you say, a day or two since, that Rose was looking thin."

"Harry, dear!" said Rose, with effusion, "give me your hand. I forgive you all the rest, for that special compliment. I have had horrible fears lately that I was getting stout—middle-aged looking, as Graeme says. Are you quite sincere in saying that, or are you only making believe?"

"I didn't intend it as a compliment, I assure you. I didn't think you were looking very well."

"Did you not? What would you advise? Should I go to the country; or should I put myself under the doctor's care? Not our big friend, whom you were going to beat," said Rose, laughing.

"I think you are a very silly girl," said Harry, with dignity.

"You told me that once before, don't you remember? And I don't think you are at all polite,—do you, Fanny? Come up-stairs, Graeme, and I will do your hair. It would not be proper to let Harry go alone. He is in a dreadful temper, is

he not?" And Rose made a pretence of being afraid to go past him. "Mr Millar, cannot you do or say something to soothe your friend and partner?"

Harry might understand all this, but Graeme could not, and she did not like this mood of Rose at all. However, she was very quiet; as she dressed her sister's hair, and spoke of the people they had seen in the afternoon, and of the exercises at the college, in her usual merry way. But she did not wish to go out; she was tired, and had a headache, listening to two or three things at one time, she said, and if Graeme could only go this once without her, she would be so glad. Graeme did not try to persuade her, but said she must go to bed, and to sleep at once, if she were left at home, and then she went away.

She did not go very cheerfully. She had had two or three glimpses of her sister's face, after she had gone to the other side of the hall with Harry, before Miss Goldsmith had commenced her whispered confidences to Rose, and she had seen there a look which brought back her old misgivings that there was something troubling her darling. She was not able to put it away again. The foolish, light talk between Rose and Harry did not tend to re-assure her, and when she bade her sister good-night, it was all that she could do not to show her anxiety by her words. But she only said, "good-night, and go to sleep," and then went down-stairs with a heavy heart. She wanted to speak with Harry about the sharp words that had more than once passed between him and Rose of late; but Mr Millar walked with them, and she could not do so, and it was with an anxious and preoccupied mind that she entered Mr Roxbury's house.

The drawing-room was very handsome, of course, with very little to distinguish it from the many fine rooms of her friends. Yet when Graeme stood for a moment near the folding-doors, exchanging greetings with the lady of the house, the remembrance of one time, when she had stood there before, came sharply back to her, and, for a moment, her heart grew hot with the angry pain and shame that had throbbled in it then. It was only for a moment, and it was not for herself. The pain was crossed by a thrill of gladness, for the more certain knowledge that came to her that for herself she was content, that she wished nothing changed in her own life, that she had outlived all that was to be regretted of that troubled time. She had known this before, and the knowledge came home to her joyfully as she stood there, but it did not lighten her burden of dread of what might lie in the future for her sister.

It did not leave her all the evening. She watched the pretty, gentle Amy, flitting about among her father's guests, with a feeling which, but for the guileless sweetness of the girl's face, the innocent unconsciousness of every look and movement, might have grown to bitterness at last. She watched her ways and words with Mr Millar, wishing, in her look or manner, to see some demand for his admiration and attention, that might excuse the wandering of his fancy from Rose. But she watched in vain. Amy was sweet and modest with him as with others, more friendly and unreserved than with most, perhaps, but sweet and modest, and unconscious, still.

"She is very like Lily Elphinstone, is she not?" said her brother Harry in her ear.

She started at his voice; but she did not turn toward him, or remove her eyes from the young girl's face.

"She is very like Lily—in all things," said Graeme; and to herself she added, "and she will steal the treasure from my darling's life, as Lily stole it from mine—innocently and unconsciously, but inevitably still—and from Harry's, too, it may be."

And, with a new pang, she turned to look at her brother's face; but Harry was no longer at her side. Mr Millar was there, and his eyes had been following hers, as Harry's had been.

"She is very sweet and lovely—very like Lily, is she not?" he whispered.

"Very like her," repeated Graeme, her eyes closing with a momentary feeling of sickness.

"You are very tired of all this, I am afraid," said he.

"Very tired! If Harry only would take me home!"

"Shall I take you home? At least, let me take you out of the crowd. Have you seen the new picture they are all talking about? Shall I take you up-stairs for a little while."

Graeme rose and laid her hand on his arm, and went up-stairs in a dream. It was all so like what had been before—the lights, and the music, and the hum of voices, and the sick pain at her heart; only the pain was now for Rose, and so much worse to bear. Still in a dream, she went from picture to picture, listening and replying to she knew not what; and she sat down, with her eyes fixed on one beautiful, sad face, and prayed with all her heart, for it was Rosie's face that looked down at her from the canvas; it was Rosie's sorrow that she saw in those sweet, appealing eyes.

"Anything but this great sorrow," she was saying in her heart, forgetting all else in the agony of her entreaty; and her companion, seeing her so moved, went softly away. Not very far, however. At the first sound of approaching footsteps he was at her side again.

"That is a very sad picture, I think," she said, coming back with an effort to the present. "I have seen it once before."

Charlie did not look at the picture, but at her changing face. An impulse of sympathy, of admiration, of respect moved him. Scarce knowing what he did, he took her hand, and, before he placed it within his arm, he raised it to his lips.

"Miss Elliott," murmured he, "*you* will never take your friendship from me, whatever may happen?"

She was too startled to answer for a moment, and then they were in the crowd again. What was he thinking of! Of Allan and the past, or of Rose and Amy and the future? A momentary indignation moved her, but she did not speak,

and then little Amy was looking up in her face, rather anxiously and wistfully, Graeme thought.

"You are not going away, Miss Elliott, are you?" said she.

"I am very tired," said Graeme. "Oh! here is my brother. I am very sorry to take you away, Harry, but if you don't mind much, I should like to go home. Will you make my adieux to your mother, Miss Roxbury?—No, please do not come up-stairs. I would much rather you did not. Good-night."

"You might at least have been civil to the little thing," growled Harry, as she took his arm when they reached the street. Graeme laughed.

"Civil!" she repeated and laughed again, a little bitterly. "Oh! Harry, dear! there are so many things that you cannot be supposed to know. But, indeed, I did not mean to be uncivil to the child."

"Then you were uncivil without meaning it," said Harry, sharply.

Graeme was silent a moment.

"I do not choose to answer a charge like that," said she. "I beg your pardon, Graeme, but—"

"Harry, hush! I will not listen to you."

They did not speak again till they reached home. Then Graeme said,—

"I must say something to you, Harry. Let us walk on a little. It is not late. Harry, what is the trouble between you and Rose?"

"Trouble!" repeated Harry, in amazement. "Do you mean because she fancied herself left alone this afternoon?"

"Of course I do not mean that. But more than once lately you have spoken to each other as though you were alluding to something of which I am ignorant—something that must have happened when you were away from home—at the West, I mean—something which I have not been told."

"Graeme, I don't understand what you mean. What could possibly have happened which has been concealed from you? Why don't you ask Rose?"

"Because I have not hitherto thought it necessary to ask any one, and now I prefer to ask you. Harry, dear, I don't think it is anything very serious. Don't be impatient with me."

"Has Rose been saying anything to you?"

"Nothing that I have not heard you say yourself. You accused her once in my hearing of being too fond of admiration, of—of flirting, in short—"

"My dear Graeme! I don't think I ever made any such assertion—at least in a way that you or Rose need to resent—or complain of."

"Rose does not complain of it, she laughs at it. Harry, dear, what is it? Don't you remember one night when something was said about Mrs Gridley—no, don't be impatient. You were annoyed with Rose, then, and it was not about anything that was said at the time, at least I thought not. I don't wish to seem prying or inquisitive, but what concerns Rose is a great matter to me. She is more to me than any one."

"Graeme," said Harry, gravely, "you don't suppose that I love Rose less than you do. I think I know what you mean, however. I annoyed her once by something I said about Charlie, but it was only for the moment. I am sure she does not care about that now."

"About Charlie!" repeated Graeme.

"Yes; you did not know it, I suppose, but it was a serious matter to Charlie when you and Rose went away that time. He was like a man lost. And I do believe she cared for him, too—and I told him so—only she was such a child."

"You told him so!" repeated Graeme, in astonishment.

"I could not help it, Graeme. The poor fellow was in such a way, so—so miserable; and when he went West last winter, it was more to see Rose than for anything else. But he came back quite downhearted. She was so much run after, he said, and she was very distant with him. Not that he said very much about it. But when I went out there afterwards, I took her to task sharply about it."

"Harry! How could you?"

"Very easily. It is a serious thing when a girl plays fast and loose with a man's heart, and such a man as Charlie. And I told her so roundly."

"And how did she take it?" asked Graeme, in a maze between astonishment and vexation.

"Oh! she was as high and mighty as possible, called my interference rudeness and impertinence, and walked out of the room like an offended princess—and I rather think I had the worst of it," added Harry, laughing at the remembrance. "But I don't bear malice, and I don't think Rose does."

"Of course, she does not. But Harry, dear, though I should not call your interference impertinent in any bad sense, I must say it was not a very wise thing to take her to task, as you call it. I don't believe Mr Millar ever said a word to her about—about his feelings, and you don't suppose she was going to confess, or allow you to scold her about—any one."

"Now; Graeme, don't be missish! 'Never said a word!'—Why, a blind man might have seen it all along. I know we all looked upon her as a child, but a woman soon knows when a man cares for her."

"No wise woman will acknowledge it to another till she has been told so in words; at least she ought not," said Graeme, gravely.

"Oh, well!—there is no use talking. Perhaps I was foolish; but I love Charlie, dearly. I daresay Rose thinks herself too good for him, because he does not pretend to be so wonderfully intellectual as some of her admirers do, and you may agree with her. But I tell you, Graeme, Charlie is pure gold. I don't know another that will compare with him, for everything pure and good and high-minded—unless it is our own Will; and it is so long since we have seen him, we don't know how he may be changed by this time. But I can swear for Charlie."

"You don't need to swear to me, Harry. You know well I have always liked Charlie."

"Well, it can't be helped now. Charlie has got over it. Men *do* get over these things, though it doesn't seem possible to them at the time," added Harry, meditatively. "I was rather afraid of Rosie's coming home, and I wanted Charlie to go to Scotland, then, but he is all right now. Of course you are not to suppose that I blame Rose. Such things will happen, and it is well it is no worse. It is the way with those girls not to know or value true worth because they see it every day."

"Poor Charlie!" said Graeme, softly.

"Oh, don't fret about Charlie. He is all right now. He is not the man to lose the good of his life because a silly girl doesn't know her own mind. 'There's as good fish in the sea,' you know. If you are going to be sorry for any one, let it be for Rosie. She has lost a rare chance for happiness in the love of a good man."

"But it may not be lost," murmured Graeme.

"I am afraid it is," said Harry, gravely. "It is not in Rose to do justice to Charlie. Even you don't do it, Graeme. Because he lives just a commonplace life, and buys and sells, and comes and goes, like other men, you women have not the discrimination to see that he is one of a thousand. As for Rose, with her romance, and her nonsense, she is looking for a hero and a paladin, and does not know a true heart when it is laid at her feet. I only hope she won't wait for the 'hats till the blue-bonnets go by,' as Janet used to say."

"As I have done, you would like to add," said Graeme, laughing, for her heart was growing light. "And Harry, dear, Rosie never had anybody's heart laid at her feet. It is you who are growing foolish and romantic, in your love for your friend."

"Oh! well. It doesn't matter. She will never have it now. Charlie is all right by this time. Her high and mighty airs have cured him, and her flippancy and her love of admiration. Fancy her walking off to-day with that red-headed fool and quite ignoring Mrs Roxbury and her daughter, when they—Miss Roxbury, at least—wanted to see her to engage her for this evening."

"He is not a fool, and he cannot help his red hair," said Graeme, laughing, though there was both sadness and vexation in her heart. "The Goldsmiths might have called her 'high and mighty' if she had left them and gone quite out of her way, as she must have done, to speak to those 'fine carriage people.' She could only choose between the two parties, and I think politeness and kindness suggested the propriety of going on with her friends, not a love of admiration, as you seem determined to suppose."

"She need not have been rude to the Roxburys, however. Charlie noticed it as well as I."

"I think you are speaking very foolishly, Harry," said Graeme. "What do the Roxburys care for any of us? Do you suppose Mrs Roxbury would notice a slight from a young girl like Rose. And she was not rude."

"No, perhaps not; but she was polite in a way so distant and dignified, so condescending, even, that I was amazed, and so was Charlie, I know, though he did not say so."

"Nonsense, Harry! Rose knows them, but very slightly. And what has Mr Millar to do with it?"

"Mr Millar!" exclaimed Harry. "Do be reasonable, Graeme. Is it not of Mr Millar that we have been speaking all this time? He has everything to do with it. And as for not knowing them. I am sure Rose was at first delighted with Miss Roxbury. And Amy was as delighted with her, and wanted to be intimate, I know. But Rose is such a flighty, flippant little thing, that—"

"That will do, Harry. Such remarks may be reserved for Mr Millar's hearing. I do not choose to listen to them. You are very unjust to Rose."

"It is you who are unjust, Graeme, and unreasonable, and a little out of temper, which does not often happen with you. I am sure I don't understand it."

Graeme laughed.

"Well, perhaps I am a little out of temper, Harry. I know I am dreadfully tired. We won't say anything more about it to—"

night, except that I don't like to have Rose misunderstood."

"I was, perhaps, a little hard on Rosie, once, but I don't think I misunderstand her," said Harry, wisely. "She is just like other girls, I suppose; only, Graeme, you have got me into the way of thinking that my sisters should not be just like other girls, but a great deal better in every way. And I shan't be hard on her any more, now that it is all right with Charlie."

But was it all right with Charlie? Graeme's talk with Harry had not enlightened her much. Had pretty, gentle Amy Roxbury helped Charlie "to get over it;" as Harry's manner of speaking seemed to imply? Or did Charlie still care for Rose? And had Rose ever cared for him "in that way?" Was Rose foolish, and flippant, and fond of admiration, as Harry declared; and was she growing dissatisfied with their quiet, uneventful life? Was it this that had brought over her the change which could not be talked about or noticed, which, at most times, could not be believed in, but which, now and then, made itself evident as very real and very sad? Or was it something else that was bringing a cloud and a shadow over the life of her young sister? Even in her thoughts, Graeme shrunk from admitting that Rose might be coming to the knowledge of her own heart too late for her happiness.

"I will not believe that she has all that to pass through. It cannot be so bad as that. I will have patience and trust. I cannot speak to her. It would do no good. I will wait and trust."

Graeme sat long that night listening to the quiet breathing of her sleeping sister; but all the anxious thoughts that passed through her mind, could only end in this: "I will wait and trust."

Chapter Forty.

Graeme awoke in the morning to wonder at all the doubts and anxieties that had filled her mind in the darkness; for she was aroused by baby kisses on her lips, and opened her eyes to see her sister Rose, with her nephew in her arms, and her face as bright as the May morning, smiling down upon her. Rose disappointed and sad! Rose hiding in her heart hopes that were never to be realised! She listened to her voice, ringing through the house, like the voice of the morning lark, and wondered at her own folly. She laughed, as Rose babbled to the child in the wonderful baby language in which she so excelled; but tears of thankfulness rose to her eyes as she remembered the fears of the night, and set them face to face with the joy of the morning.

"I could not have borne it," she said to herself. "I am afraid I never could have borne to see my darling drooping, as she must have done. I am content with my own lot. I think I would not care to change anything the years have brought to me. But Rosie— Ah! well, I might have known! I know I ought to trust for Rosie, too, even if trouble were to come. But oh! I am very glad and thankful for her sake."

She was late in the breakfast-room, and she found Harry there.

"'The early bird,' you know, Graeme," said he. "I have been telling Rosie what a scolding you were giving me last night on our way home."

"But he won't tell me what it was all about," said Rose.

"I cannot. I don't know myself. I have an idea that you had something to do with it, Rosie. But I can give no detailed account of the circumstances, as the newspapers say."

"It is not absolutely necessary that you should," said Graeme, smiling.

"I hope you are in a much better humour this morning, Graeme."

"I think I am in a pretty good humour. Not that I confess to being very cross last night, however."

"It was he who was cross, I daresay," said Rose. "You brought him away before supper! No wonder he was cross. Are you going to stay very long, Harry?"

"Why? Have you any commands for me to execute?"

"No; but I am going to introduce a subject that will try your temper, judging from our conduct yesterday. I am afraid you will be threatening to beat some one."

Harry shrugged his shoulders.

"Now, Graeme, don't you call that flippant? Is it anything about the big doctor, Rosie?"

"You won't beat him, will you Harry? No. It is only about his sister. Graeme, Fanny has given me leave to invite her here for a few days, if you have no objection. She cannot be enjoying herself very much where she is staying, and it will be a real holiday to the little thing to come here for a while. She is very easily amused. She makes pleasure out of everything. Mayn't she come?"

"Certainly, if you would like her to come; I should like to know her very much."

"And is the big brother to come, too?" asked Arthur.

"No. He leaves town to-day. Will you go with me, Harry, to fetch her here?"

"But what about 'papa and mamma,' to whom you were to be shown? The cunning, little thing has some design upon

you, Rosie, or, perhaps, on some of the rest of us.”

Rose laughed.

“Don’t be frightened, Harry. You are safe, as you are not domesticated with us. And I intend to show myself to ‘papa and mamma’ later, if you don’t object.”

“There! look at Graeme. She thinks you and I are quarrelling, Rosie. She is as grave as a judge.”

“Tell us about the party, Harry,” said Fanny.

“It was very pleasant. I don’t think Graeme enjoyed it much, however. I wonder, too, that she did not, for there were more nice people there than we usually see at parties. It was more than usually agreeable, I thought.”

“You are degenerating, Harry,” said his brother. “I thought you were beyond all that sort of thing. I should have thought you would have found it slow, to say the least.”

“And then to make him lose the supper! It was too bad of you, Graeme,” said Rose.

“Oh! she didn’t. I went back again.”

They all exclaimed. Only Harry laughed.

“Can I do anything for you and your friend, Rosie?” asked he.

“Yes, indeed you can. I intend to make a real holiday for the little thing. We are open to any proposal in the way of pleasure, riding, driving, boating, picnicking, one and all.”

“It is very kind of you, Harry, to offer,” said Graeme.

“Hem! not at all. I shall be most happy,” said Harry.

“Oh! we shall not be exacting. We are easily amused, little Etta and I.”

Miss Goldsmith’s visit was a success. She was a very nice little girl, whose life had been passed in the country—not in a village even, but quite away from neighbours, on a farm, in which her father had rather unfortunately invested the greater part of his means. It might not prove to be unfortunate in the end, Etta explained to them, because the land was valuable, only in the meantime it seemed to take all the income just to keep things going. But by and by she hoped farming would pay, and the place was beautiful, and they lived very happily there, if they only had a little more money, Etta added gravely.

Dick was the hero who was to retrieve the fallen fortunes of the family, Etta thought. He was her only own brother. All the rest of the children were only her half-brothers and sisters. But notwithstanding the hard times to which Etta confessed, they were a very happy family, it seemed.

Everything was made pleasure by this little girl. It was pleasure just to drive through the streets, to see the well-dressed people, to look in at the shop-windows. Shopping was pleasure, though she had little to spend. An hour in a bookseller’s, or in a fancy shop, was pleasure. The churches, old and new, were wonderful to her, some for one reason, some for another. Rose and she became independent and strong-minded, and went everywhere without an escort. They spent a day in wandering about the shady walks of the new cemetery, and an afternoon gazing down on the city from the cathedral towers. They paid visits and received them; and, on rainy days, worked and read together with great delight, if not with much profit. Rose, with both heart and hands, helped her friend to make the most of her small allowance for dress; and contrived, out of odds and ends, to make pretty, inexpensive ornaments for her, and presents for her little brothers and sisters at home. She taught her new patterns in crochet, and new stitches in Berlin wool. She even gave her a music lesson, now and then, and insisted on her practising, daily, that she might get back what she had lost since she left school, and so be able the better to teach her little sisters when she went home. In short, she contrived to fill up the time with amusement, or with work of some sort. Not a moment but was occupied in some way.

Of course, Graeme was sometimes included in their plans for the day, and so were Fanny and baby, but for the most part the young girls were occupied with each other; and the visit, which was to have been for a few days, lengthened out beyond the month, and might have been longer than that, even, only Rose had a slight, feverish attack which confined her to her room for a day or two, and then Etta could no longer hide from herself that she ought to go home.

“I hope I shall not find that this pleasant time has spoiled me. I think papa and mamma are somewhat afraid. I mean to be good, and contented, and helpful; but I know I am only a silly little thing. Oh! Rosie! if you were only going home with me for a little while!”

“I should like it very much, indeed,” said Rose.

“Of course, everything is very different at our house, but you wouldn’t mind that. Miss Elliott, don’t you think you could spare Rose to me for a few days?”

Graeme shook her head.

“I think I have spared her to you a good many days. I have seen very little of her for a long time, I think.”

Miss Goldsmith looked grieved and penitent. “Nonsense, Etta,” said Rose; “she is only laughing at you. She has had

you and me, too. And I should like very much to go with you. This is the nicest time of the year to be in the country, I think. What do you say, Graeme?"

Little Etta clasped her hands, and looked at Graeme so entreatingly, that Rose laughed heartily. But Graeme said nothing encouraging. However, the very hottest days of the summer came that season among the first June days, and, because of the heat, Graeme thought Rose did not recover from her illness so quickly as she ought to have done. She is languid and pale, though pretty busy still, and cheerful, and Graeme proposed that she should go with her friend for a few days, at least. Etta was enchanted.

"I am afraid my resolutions about being good, and helping mamma, and teaching the little ones, would have fallen through, for I know I am a foolish girl. But with Rose to help me, just at first, I shall succeed I know."

"Don't be silly, Etta," said Rose. "You are a great deal wiser and better, and of a great deal more use in the world, than ever I was, or am like to be. All my wisdom is lip-wisdom, and my goodness lip-goodness. If they will help you, you shall have the benefit of them; but pray don't make me blush before Graeme and Fanny, who know me so well."

No time had to be lost in preparations. The decision was made one day, and they were to leave the next. Harry, with his friend and partner, came up one night to bid Miss Goldsmith good-bye, and heard for the first time of Rose's intention to go with her. Harry did not hear it with pleasure, indeed; he made no secret of his vexation. There was a little bantering talk between them, in the style that Graeme disliked so much, and then Rose went away for a few minutes.

"Graeme," said Harry, "what is all this about? It seems to me Rose ought to have had enough of her little friend by this time. What freak is this she has taken about the country, and a change of air, and nonsense?"

"If it is a freak, it is mine," said Graeme, quietly. "Rose needs a change. She is not ill, but still she is not quite well, and I am very glad she is to go with Miss Goldsmith."

"A change," repeated Harry. "Why could she not go with Fanny to the seaside, if she needs a change?"

"But Fanny is not going for several weeks yet. Rose will be home before that time. She will not be away more than a fortnight, I hope."

"A fortnight, indeed! What has the time to do with it? It is the going at all that is so foolish: You astonish me, Graeme."

"You astonish me, Harry! Really I cannot understand why you should care so much about it."

"Well, well! If you are pleased, and she is pleased, I need not trouble myself about it," said Harry, sulkily.

"What has happened to you, Harry?" said Fanny. "You are not like yourself, to-night."

"He is a great deal more like the Harry of old times," said Graeme. "Like the Harry you used to know long ago, Mr Millar, than like the reasonable, dignified person we have had among us lately."

"I was just thinking so," said Mr Millar.

"Why should not Rosie go?" persisted Fanny. "I think it must be a very stupid place, from all that Etta says; still, if Rose wishes it, why should she not go?"

"I believe it is the big brother Harry is afraid of," said Arthur, laughing. Graeme and Fanny laughed, too.

"I don't think it is a laughing matter," growled Harry. "How would you like it if she were to throw herself away on that red-headed giant?"

Arthur and Fanny laughed, still, but Graeme looked grave. "It would be just like a silly girl like Rose," continued Harry, gloomily.

"Harry," said Graeme, "I think you are forgetting what is due to your sister. You should be the last person to couple Rose's name with that of any gentleman."

"Of course, it is only among ourselves; and, I tell you, Graeme, you are spoiling Rosie—"

"Harry! be quiet. I don't choose to listen to you on that subject."

"I declare, Harry, you are getting morbid on the subject of Rosie's conquests. It is the greatest folly imaginable," said Arthur.

"Well, it may be so. At any rate, I shall say no more. Are you coming, Charlie? I must go."

He went to the foot of the stairs, and called: "Rose, are you coming down again? I must go."

Rose came flying down.

"Must you go, Harry? I am just done with what I needed to do. Don't be cross with me, Harry." And greatly to his surprise, as she put her arms around his neck, he felt her tears upon his cheek.

"Why, Rosie, what ails you? I didn't mean to be cross, Rosie, my darling."

But, in a minute, Rose was smiling through her tears.

“Rosie, dear,” whispered her brother, “you are a very silly little girl. I think you are the very silliest girl I know. I wish —” Rose wiped her eyes.

“Don’t go yet, Harry. I will come in immediately; and please don’t tell Graeme that I am so silly. She wouldn’t like it at all.”

“Graeme is as silly as you are,” growled Harry.

Rose laughed, and ran up-stairs, but came down in a minute with Miss Goldsmith. Harry had brought a great paper of sweets for the little sisters at home, for which Etta thanked him very prettily, and then she said:

“I hope you are not afraid to trust Rose with us? We will take great care of her, I assure you.”

“Since I am too silly to take care of myself,” said Rose.

They had a pleasant evening enough, all things considered, and it was some time before Harry and his friend went away.

“I must say good-bye for a long time, Miss Rose,” said Mr Millar. “I shall have sailed before you are home again, I suppose.”

“You go in the first steamer, then?”

“I don’t know, I am not quite sure yet. I have not quite decided.”

“Of course, he goes by the first steamer,” said Harry. “He should have gone long ago. There is no use dwelling longer over so simple a matter.”

Rose opened her eyes very wide.

“Is that the way you speak to your friend and partner?” said Fanny.

“Really, Harry, I am afraid your fine temper is being spoiled,” said Rose. “I think Mr Millar is very good not to mind you.”

“I understand Harry,” said his friend.

“You don’t understand yourself, nor what is good for you. Good-bye, dear, silly, little Rose.”

“Good-bye, Harry. Don’t be cross.”

“Rose,” said Graeme, when they were up-stairs alone for the night, “I think it is the big brother that put Harry out of temper to-night.” Rose laughed.

“He seems quite afraid of him,” continued Graeme.

“And you are a little bit afraid of him, too, Graeme, or you never would have told me about Harry.”

“No. But I am just a little afraid for him.”

“You need not be. Harry thinks my desire for admiration insatiable, I know, but it is too bad of you, Graeme, to intimate as much. I have a great mind to tell you a secret, Graeme. But you must promise not to tell it again; at least, not yet.”

“Well,” said Graeme.

“If I should stay away longer than I mean to do at present, and Harry should get very unhappy about me, perhaps you might tell him. Harry thinks I cannot manage my own affairs,” added Rose, a vivid colour rising on her cheeks. “And he has a mind to help me. He has not helped me much, yet. Ah! well, there is no use going over all that.”

“What is the secret you are going to tell me?” asked Graeme.

“I don’t know whether I ought to tell. But it will be safe with you. Graeme, the big doctor is engaged.”

“Well,” said Graeme.

“It is not all smooth sailing, yet. I am afraid it may interfere somewhat with his success in retrieving the fortunes of the family, as Etta has always been hoping he might do. But she is quite pleased for all that, poor dear little thing. See that you don’t tell Harry.”

“Well, is that all you have to say on the subject?” asked her sister.

“Graeme! I do believe you are as bad as Harry. Do you fancy that it is I to whom Dr Goldsmith is engaged? By no means. I am afraid it is a foolish affair; but it may fall through yet. She is a young widow, and has two children, and a little money. No. It is very foolish of Harry to fancy things. He is very stupid, I think. But you are not to tell him, because, really, the secret is not mine, and besides, I have another reason. Good-night, dear.”

And so they went away in the morning. Rose's visit to the country was quite as agreeable as had been Miss Goldsmith's to the town, judging from the time she stayed there, and from the letters she sent home. The country was lovely, and she wondered any one would live in the city who could leave it. She kept a journal for Graeme, and it was filled with accounts of rides, and drives, and sails; with, now and then, hints of work done, books read, of children's lessons, and torn frocks, of hay-making, and butter-making; and if Graeme had any misgiving as to the perfect enjoyment of her sister, it could not have been her letters that had anything to do with it.

At last there came word of an expedition to be undertaken to a lake far-away in the woods, where there were pond-lilies and lake trout in abundance. They were to carry a tent, and be out one night, perhaps two, and Mr and Mrs Goldsmith were going with them, and all the children as well. This was the last letter. Rose herself came soon after, to find a very quiet house, indeed. Fanny and her son had gone to the seaside, whither Graeme and Rose, perhaps, might go, later. Mr Millar had gone, too, not by the first steamer, nor by the second, however. If Rose had been home two days sooner, she might have seen him before he went, Harry told her; and Rose said, "What a pity! If I had only known, I could so easily have come!" That was all.

How quiet the house was during those long summer days! It was like the coming again of the old time, when they and Nelly used to have the house in the garden to themselves, with only Will coming and going, till night brought the brothers home.

"What happy, happy days they were!" said Rose, with a sigh.

"They *were* happy days," said Graeme. "Very happy days."

She did not seem to hear the regretful echo in her sister's voice, nor did she take her to task for the idle hands that lay folded on her lap, nor disturb by word or look the times of silent musing, that grew longer and more frequent as those uneventful days passed on. What was to be said? The doubts and fears that had made her unhappy in the spring, and even before the spring, were coming back again. Rose was not at peace with herself, nothing was easier to be seen than that; but whether the struggle was with pride, or anger, or disappointment, or whether all these and something more had to do with it, she could only wait till time, or chance, or Rose of her own free will, should tell.

For Graeme could not bring herself to speak of the trouble which her sister, sad and preoccupied, in so many nameless ways betrayed. She would not even seem to see it, and so strove to make it appear that it was her own industry, her occupation with book, or pen, or needle, that made the silence between them, on those days when Rose sat listless or brooding, heedless of books, or work, or of whatever the day might bring. And when the fit of gloom wore over, or when, startled by some sudden fear of being observed, she roused herself, and came back with an effort to the things about her, Graeme was always ready, yet not too eager, to make the most of excuses. Either the heat made her languid, or the rain made her dull, or the yesterday's walk had been exhausting; and Graeme would assent, and warn or reprove, as the case seemed to require, never intimating, by word or look, how clearly she saw through it all, and how she grieved and suffered with her.

And, when seized upon by restlessness or impatience, she grew irritable and exacting, and "ill to do with," as Janet would have said, Graeme stood between her and the wonder and indignation, of her brothers, and, which was harder to do, shielded her from her own anger and self-contempt, when she came to herself again. She went out with her for long walks, and did what was kinder still, she let her go by herself, to rest her mind by tiring out her body, at times when the fever fit was on her, making her fret and chafe at trifles that would have made her laugh if all had been well with her.

It was an anxious time to Graeme. When their brothers were with them, Rose was little different from the Rose of old, as far as they could see; and, at such times, even Graeme would be beguiled into a momentary belief that she had been letting her fears speak, when there was little cause. But another day would come, bringing the old listlessness or restlessness, and Graeme could only watch and wait for the moment when a cheerful word, or a chiding one, might be spoken for her sister's good, or a movement of some kind made to beguile her into occupation or pleasure for a little while. But, through all her watching, and waiting, and anxiety, Graeme spoke no word that might betray to her sister her knowledge that something was amiss with her.

For, indeed, what could she say? Even in her secret thoughts she had shrunk from looking too closely on the cloud of trouble that had fallen on the life of her young sister. Was it misunderstanding, or wounded pride, or disappointment? Or was it something which time and change might not so easily or so surely dispel? There were no words to be spoken, however it might be. That was plain enough, Graeme said to herself, remembering some years of her own experience, and the silent life she had lived unsuspected among them all.

Not that any such trouble as had befallen her, had come upon Rose. That was never for a moment to be believed. Nothing that had happened to Rose, or was like to happen, could so change life to her as hers had been changed. Rose was wiser and stronger than she had been, and she was younger, too, and, perhaps, as Janet had said, "of a lighter nature." Graeme comforted herself thus, saying to herself that the cloud would pass away; and she waited and watched, and cared for her, and soothed or chided, or shielded her still. She did all this sorrowfully enough at times, yet hopefully, too, for she knew that whatever the trouble might be that, for the present, made the summer days a weariness to the desponding girl, it would pass away; and so she waited, and had patience, and prayed that, out of it all, she might come wiser and stronger, and more fitted for the work that was awaiting her somewhere in the world.

"Graeme," said her sister, one day when they had been sitting for a long time silent together, "suppose we were to go and see Norman and Hilda this fall, instead of in the spring, as they propose."

"Would you like it?" asked Graeme, a little surprised.

"Yes. For some things I would like it;" and Graeme fancied there was suppressed eagerness in her manner. "It is a

better season to go, for one thing—a better season for health, I mean. One bears the change of climate better, they say.”

“But you have been here so short a time. What would Arthur say, and Fanny? It would look as if you only thought yourself a visitor here—as if your home was with Norman.”

Rose shrugged her shoulders.

“Well! neither Arthur nor Fanny would be inconsolable. The chances are it may be my home. It is worth taking into consideration. Indeed, I have been considering the matter for some time past.”

“Nonsense! Don’t talk foolishly, Rose. It is not long since you wished me to promise that we should always remain together, and I have no thought of going West to stay very long.”

“And why not? I am sure Norman has a right to grumble at our being here so long.”

“Not at you, Rosie.”

“No. Not at me. And, besides, I was not thinking of Norman, altogether. I was thinking of making a home for myself out there. Why not?”

Graeme looked up, a little startled.

“I don’t understand you, Rose.”

Rose laughed.

“No, you don’t. But you think you do. Of course, there is only one way in which a woman can have a home according to the generally received opinion. It must be made for her. But one might fancy you should be beyond that by this time, Graeme,” added Rose, a little scornfully.

Graeme said nothing, and Rose went on.

“It would not be easy here, I know; but out there you and I could make a home to ourselves, and be independent, and have a life of our own. It is so different there. You ought to go there just to understand how very different it is.”

“If we needed a home,” said Graeme. “But, Rose, I am content with the home we have.”

“Content!” repeated Rose, impatiently. “There is surely something better than content to be looked for in the world;” and she rose and walked about the room.

“Content is a very good thing to have,” said Graeme, quietly.

“Yes, if one could have it. But now, Graeme, do tell me what is the good of such a life as we are living now?—as I am living, I ought to say. Your life and work are worth a great deal to the rest of us; though you must let me say I often wonder it contents you. Think of it, Graeme! What does it all amount to, as far as I am concerned, I mean? A little working, and reading, and music; a little visiting and housekeeping, if Fanny be propitious—coming, and going, and smiling, and making believe enjoy it, when one feels ready to fly. I am sick of the thought of it all.”

Graeme did not answer her. She was thinking of the time when she had been as impatient of her daily life as this, and of how powerless words, better than she could hope to speak, had been to help her; and though she smiled and shook her head at the young girl’s impetuous protest against the uselessness of her life, her eyes, quite unconsciously, met her sister’s with a look of wistful pity, that Rose, in her youthful impatience and jealousy, was quick to resent.

“Of course, the rest would make an outcry and raise obstacles—that is, if they were to be consulted at all,” she went on. “But *you* ought to know better, Graeme,” added she, in a voice that she made sharp, so that her sister need not know that it was very near being tearful.

“But, Rose, you have not told me yet what it is you would do, if you could have your own way. And what do you mean by having a life of your own, and being independent? Have you any plan?”

Rose sat down, with a little sigh of impatience.

“There is surely something that we could do, you and I together. I can have no plan, you know quite well; but you might help me, instead of—” Instead of laughing at me, she was going to say, but she stopped, for though Graeme’s lips were smiling, her eyes had a shadow in them that looked like coming tears; and the gaze, that seemed resting on the picture on the wall, went farther, Rose knew; but whether into the past or the future, or whether it was searching into the reason of this new eagerness of hers to be away and at work, she could not tell. However it might be, it vexed and fretted her, and she showed it by sudden impatient movements, which recalled her sister’s thoughts.

“What is it, Rose? I am afraid I was thinking about something else. I don’t think I quite understand what you were saying last,” said Graeme, taking up her work as a safe thing on which to fix her eyes.

“For I must not let her see that I know there must be a cause for this sudden wish for a new life,” said she to herself. If she had done what she longed to do, she would have taken the impatient, troubled child in her arms, and whispered, as Janet had whispered to her that night, so long ago, that the restless fever of her heart would pass away; she would have soothed and comforted her, with tender words, as Janet had not dared to do. She would have

bidden her wait, and have patience with herself and her life, till this cloud passed by—this light cloud of her summer morning, that was only mist to make the rising day more beautiful, and not the sign of storm and loss, as it looked to her young, affrighted eyes.

But this she could not do. Even with certain knowledge of the troubles which she only guessed, she knew it would be vain to come to her with tender, pitying words, and worse than vain to try to prove that nothing had happened to her, or was like to happen, that could make the breaking up of her old life, and the beginning of a new one, a thing to be thought of by herself or those who loved her. So, after a few stitches carefully taken, for all her sister could see, she said,—

“And, then, there are so few things that a woman can do.”

The words brought back so vividly that night in the dark, when she had said them out of a sore heart to her friend, that her work fell on her lap again, and she met her sister’s eye with a look that Rose could not understand.

“You are not thinking of what I have been saying. Why do you look at me in that strange way?” said she, pettishly.

“I am thinking of it, indeed. And I did not know that I was looking any other than my usual way. I was saying to myself, ‘Has the poor child got to go through all that for herself, as I have done?’ Oh! Rosie, dear! if I could only give you the benefit of all my vexed thoughts on that very subject!”

“Well, why not? That is just what I want. Only, don’t begin in that discouraging way, about there being so few things a woman can do. I know all that, already.”

“We might go to Norman for a while together, at any rate,” said Graeme, feeling how impossible it would be to satisfy one another by what might be said, since all could not be spoken between them.

“Yes. That is just what I said, at first. And we could see about it there. We could much more easily make our plans, and carry them out there, than here. And, in the meantime, we could find plenty to do in Hilda’s house with the children and all the rest. I wish we could go soon.”

And then she went over what she had often gone over before, the way of life in their brother Norman’s house—Hilda’s housekeeping, and her way with her children, and in society, and so on, Graeme asking questions, and making remarks, in the hope that the conversation might not, for this time, come back to the vexed question, of what women may do in the world. It grew dark in the meantime, but they were waiting for Harry and letters, and made no movement; and, by and by, Rose said, suddenly:

“I am sure you used to think about all this, Graeme—about woman’s work, and how stupid it is to live on in this way, ‘waiting at the pool,’ as Hannah Lovejoy used to say. I declare it is undignified, and puts thoughts into people’s heads, as though—. It would be different, if we were living in our father’s house, or, even, if we had money of our own. You used to think so, yourself, Graeme. Why should Arthur and Harry do everything for us?”

“Yes, I remember. When Fanny first came, I think I had as many thoughts about all this as you have now. I was very restless, and discontented, and determined to go away. I talked to Janet about it one night.”

“And she convinced you that you were all wrong, I suppose,” said Rose. “And you were content ever after.”

“No. I don’t think she helped me much, at the time. But her great doctrine of patience and quiet waiting, and circumstances together, convinced me, afterward, that I did not need to go in search of my work, as seemed to me then the thing to do. I found it ready at my hand, though I could not see it then. Her wisdom was higher than mine. She said that out of it all would come content, and so it has.”

“That was not saying much!” said Rose.

“No. It did not seem to me, much, when she said it. But she was right, all the same, and I was wrong. And it has all happened much better than if I had got my own way.”

“But, Graeme, all that would not apply in the case of women, generally. That is begging the question, as Harry would say.”

“But I am not speaking of women in general; I am speaking about myself, and my own work; and I say Janet was wise, though I was far from thinking it that night, as I mind well.”

There was a pause, and then Rose said, in a low voice.

“It may have been right for you to stay at home then, and care for the rest of us, but it would be quite different now, with me, and I think with you, too. And how many women have to go and make a way of life for themselves. And it is right that it should be so; and Graeme, we might try.”

Instead of answering her directly, Graeme said, after a little while,—

“Did I ever tell you Rose, dear, about that night, and all that Janet said to me? I told her how I wished to get out of my useless, unsatisfactory life, just as you have been telling me. Did I ever tell you all she said to me? I don’t think I ever did. I felt then, just as you do now. I think I can understand your feeling, better than you suppose; and I opened my heart to Janet—I mean, I told her how sick I was of it all, and how good-for-nothing I felt myself to be, and how it all might be changed, if only I could find real work to do—”

And Graeme went on to tell much that had been said between them that night, about woman’s work, and about old

maids, and a little about the propriety of not setting one's face against the manifest lot of woman; and when she came to this part of it, she spoke with an attempt at playfulness, meant to cover, a little, the earnestness of all that went before. But neither in this nor in the rest, did she speak as though she meant Rose to take the lesson to herself, or as though it meant very much to either of them now; but rather implied by her words and manner, and by many a pathetic touch here and there, that she was dwelling on it as a pleasant reminiscence of the dear old friend, whose quaint sayings were household words among them, because of their wisdom, and because of the honour and the love they gave her. Her earnestness increased, as, by and by, she saw the impatience pass out of her sister's face and manner; and it never came into her mind that she was turning back a page in her own experience, over which Rose had long ago pondered with wonder and sadness.

"I could not make Janet see the necessity that seemed so clear to me," she went on. "I could not make her understand, or, at least, I thought she could not understand, for she spoke as though she thought that Fanny's coming, and those old vexations, made me wish to get away, and it was not easy to answer her when she said that my impatience and restlessness would all pass away, and that I must fulfil papa's last wish, and stay with the rest. I thought the time had come when the necessity for that was over, and that another way would be better for *me*, certainly; and I thought for Arthur and Fanny, too, and for you, Rosie. But, Oh! how much wiser Janet was than I, that night. But I did not think so at the time. I was wild to be set free from the present, and to have my own will and go away. It was well that circumstances were too strong for me. It has come true, as Janet said. I think it is better for us all that I have been at home all those years. Fanny and I have done each other good. It has been better for us all."

She paused a moment, and then added,—

"Of course, if it had been necessary that I should go out into the world, and make my own way, I might have done as others have done, and won, at least, a measure of success. And so we might still, you and I together, Rose, if it were necessary, but that makes all the difference. There is no question of necessity for us, dear, at present, and as for God's work, and work for our fellow creatures, we can find that at home. Without separating from the others, I mean."

But Rose's face clouded again.

"There need be no question of separating from the others, Graeme. Norman is out there, and there are hundreds of women who have their own place and work in the world, who have not been driven by necessity to look for them—the necessity of making a living, I mean. There are other necessities that a woman must feel—some more than others, I suppose. It is an idle, foolish, vain life that I am living. I know that I have not enough to fill my life, Graeme. I know it, though I don't suppose I can make you understand it. I am past the age now to care for being petted, and amused, and made much of by the rest of you. I mean, I am too old now to feel that enough for my satisfaction. It is different with you, who really are good for something, and who have done so much, for Arthur and Fanny, and us all. And, besides, as you say, you are content; but as for me—oh! I know there is no use talking. I could never make you understand—There, I don't want to be naughty, and vex you—and we will say no more to-night. Shall I get a light?"

She stooped over her sister, and kissed her, and Graeme, putting her arms round her, said softly,—

"Only one word more, Rosie. I think I can understand you better than you believe, as Janet understood me that night, though I did not see it then, and you must just let me say one thing. My darling, I believe all that is troubling you, now, will pass away; but, if I am wrong, and if it be best that you have your own way about this work of yours—I mean, if it is right—circumstances will arrange themselves to that end, and it will all come easy for you, and me, too. We shall keep together, at any rate, and I am not afraid. And, love, a year or two does make a difference in people's feelings about things, though there is no good in my saying it to you, now, I know. But we will wait till Will comes home. We must be here to welcome him, even if his coming should be delayed longer than we hope now. I don't like to think of any plan for you and me, out of which Will must be left. And so many things may happen before a year is over. I remember how restless and troubled I was at that time. I don't like to think of it even now—and it is all past—quite past. And we will stay together, whatever happens, if we can, and, darling, you must have patience."

All this was said with many a caressing pause between, and then Rose said,—

"Well—yes—I suppose we must wait for Will."

But she did not say it cheerfully, and Graeme went on, after a little:

"And, dear, I have noticed more than once in my life that when a quiet time like this has come, it has come as a time of preparation for work of some sort; for the doing, or the bearing of God's will in some peculiar way; and we must not lose the good of these quiet days by being anxious about the future, or regretful over the past. It will all come right, love, you may be sure of that."

The last words were spoken hastily, for Harry's voice was heard, and Rose went softly out at one door, as he came in at the other; and when, in a little, he called from the foot of the stairs, as he always did, when he did not find her in her parlour, she came down, affecting surprise.

"So you are here at last, Harry? Are there any letters to-night?"

Yes, there were letters. Harry had read his, and gave them the news with a little grumbling, while the gas was being lighted. His friend and partner seemed intent on making the most of his long delayed holiday, and was going to lengthen it a little, by taking a run to Paris, perhaps even to Rome.

"With whom do you think, Graeme?" added he, his face clearing up suddenly. "With his brother Allan, and our Will. Won't they help one another to have a good time? Charlie takes it quite coolly, however, I must say. It was an even chance, at one time, whether he would go at all, and now, there is no telling when he will be back again. That is

always the way. I wonder when I shall have my holiday? 'The willing horse,' you know, Rosie."

"It is very hard on you, Harry, dear. But I fancied you had a little trip yourself, lately, and enjoyed it, too. Was that in the interest of your friend?"

"Hem! Yes—indirectly. I did enjoy it. Fanny says she has had a very pleasant summer; and, if you are going down at all, Rosie, it is time you were going. They seem to have a very nice set of people there. I think if you were to go at once, I would take a run down with you—next week, perhaps. I think you would enjoy it."

"I thank you, Harry, dear. But, you know, Fanny's taste and mine are different. I don't always fancy *her* pleasant people. And I should not think of taking you away on my account."

"Not at all. I shall go, at any rate. But I want you to go, Rosie, for a reason I have. And I promise you won't regret it. I wish Graeme would go, too."

"It would be charming if we could all go together," said Rose. "But it would be hardly worth while, we could make so short a stay, now."

"I enjoyed it very much," said Harry. "One gets to know people so much better in such a place, and I am sure you would like the Roxburys, Rosie, if you would only take pains to know them."

"My dear Harry! think what you are saying! Would they take pains to know me? They are Fanny's nice people, are they? Yes, I suppose so. However, I don't believe Graeme will care to go."

Graeme uttered an exclamation over her letter.

"It is from. Mr Snow," said she, with a pale face.

"Bad news?" asked Harry.

It was bad news, indeed. It told, in Mr Snow's brief way, that, within a few days, the illness, from which his wife had been suffering for some time, had taken a dangerous turn, rendering an operation necessary; and the letter was sent to prepare them for a possible fatal result.

"It gives her a chance, and that is all the doctors will say. *She* says it will be all right whichever way it turns. God bless you all. Emily will tell you more."

"Harry," said Graeme, as he laid down the letter. "I must go to Janet."

"It would be a comfort to her if you could," said Harry, gravely.

"And to me," said Graeme. "I shall go early to-morrow."

There was not much more said about it. There was a little discussion about the trains, and the best way to take, and then Harry went away. Rose had not spoken a word while he was there, but the moment the door closed after him, she said, softly,—

"Harry does not think that I am going; but, dear, you promised that, whatever happened, we should keep together. And, Graeme, the quiet time has been to prepare you for this; and we are sure it will all be right, as Janet says. You will let me go with you, Graeme?" she pleaded; "you will never go and leave me here?"

So whatever Harry thought, Graeme could do nothing but yield; and the next morning the sisters were speeding southward, with fear in their hearts, but with peace and hope in them, also; for they knew, and they said to one another many times that day, that the words of their dear old friend would come true, and that in whatever way the trouble that had fallen on her might end, it would be for her all well.

Chapter Forty One.

September was nearly over; there were tokens of the coming Autumn on the hills and valleys of Merleville, but the day was like a day in the prime of summer, and the air that came in through the open windows of the south room fell on Mrs Snow's pale cheeks as mild and balmy as a breeze of June. The wood-covered hills were unfaded still, and beautiful, though here and there a crimson banner waved, or a pillar of gold rose up amid the greenness. Over among the valleys, were sudden, shifting sparkles from half-hidden brooks, and the pond gleamed in the sunshine without a cloud to dim its brightness. In the broken fields that sloped towards it, and in the narrow meadows that skirted that part of the Merle river which could be seen, there were tokens of life and busy labour—dark stretches of newly-turned mould alternating with the green of the pastures, or the bleached stubble of the recent harvest. There were glimpses of the white houses of the village through the trees, and, now and then, a traveller passed slowly along the winding road, but there was nothing far or near to disturb the sweet quiet of the scene now so familiar and so dear, and Mrs Snow gazed out upon it with a sense of peace and rest at her heart which showed in her quiet face and in her folded hands.

It showed in Mr Snow's face, too, as he glanced now and then over the edge of the newspaper he was holding in his hand. He was reading, and she was supposed to be listening, to one of the excellent articles which weekly enriched the columns of *The Puritan*, but the look that was coming and going on his wife's face was not just the look with which she was wont to listen to the doings of the County Association of ministers, Mr Snow thought, and, in a little, he let the paper drop from his hand.

"Well, and how did they come on with their discussions?" said Mrs Snow, her attention recalled by the silence.

Mr Snow smiled.

"Oh! pretty much so. Their discussions will keep a spell, I guess," said he, taking off his spectacles, and changing his seat so as to look out of the window.

"It is a bonny day," said Mrs Snow, softly.

"Yes, it is kind of pleasant."

There was nothing more said for a long time. Many words were not needed between these two by this time. They had been passing through weeks of sore trial; the shadow of death had seemed to be darkening over them, and, worse to bear even than the prospect of death, had been the suffering which had brought it near. Worse for her, for she had drawn very near to the unseen world—so near that the glory had been visible, and it had cost her a struggle to be willing to come back again; and worse for him, too, whose heart had grown sick at the sight of the slow, wearing pain, growing sharper every day.

But that was past now. Very slowly, but still surely, health was coming back to the invalid, and the rest from long pain, and the consciousness of returning strength, were making the bright day and the fair scene more beautiful to her. As for him, he could only look at her with thankful joy.

"I never saw this bonny place bonnier than it is to-day, and so sweet, and quiet, and homelike. We live in a fair world, and, on a day like this, one is ready to forget that there is sin or trouble in it."

"It is good to see you sitting there," said Mr Snow, for answer.

"Well, I am content to be sitting here. I doubt I shall do little else for the rest of my life. I must be a useless body, I'm afraid," added she, with a sigh.

Mr Snow smiled.

"You know better than that," said he. "I don't suppose it seems much to you to get back again; but it is a great deal for the rest of us to have you, if it is only to look at."

"I am content to bide my time, useless or useful, as God wills," said his wife, gravely:

"I was willing you should go—yes, I do think I was willing you should go. It was the seeing you suffer that seemed to take the strength out of me," said he, with a shudder. "It makes me kind of sick to think about it," added he, rising and moving about. "I believe I was willing, but I am dreadful glad to see you sitting there."

"I am glad to be here, since it is God's will. It is a wonderful thing to stand on the very brink of the river of death, and then to turn back again. I think the world can never look quite the same to eyes that have looked beyond it to the other side. But I am content to be here, and to serve Him, whether it be by working or by waiting."

"On the very brink," repeated Mr Snow, musingly. "Well, it *did* look like that, one while. I wonder if I was really willing to have you go. It don't seem now as if I could have been—being so glad as I am that you did not go, and so thankful."

"I don't think the gladness contradicts the willingness; and knowing you as I do, and myself as well, I wonder less at the willingness than at the gladness."

This needed further consideration, it seemed, for Mr Snow did not answer, but sat musing, with his eyes fixed on the distant hills, till Mrs Snow spoke again.

"I thought at first, when the worst was over, it was only a respite from pain before the end; but, to-day, I feel as if my life was really coming back to me, and I am more glad to live than I have been any day yet."

Mr Snow cleared his throat, and nodded his head a great many times. It was not easy for him to speak at the moment.

"If it were only May, now, instead of September! You always did find our winters hard; and it is pretty tough being hived up so many months of the year. I do dread the winter for you."

"Maybe it winna be so hard on me. We must make the best of it anyway. I am thankful for ease from pain. That is much."

"Yes," said Mr Snow, with the shudder that always came with the remembrance of his wife's sufferings, "thank God for that. I ain't a going to fret nor worry about the winter, if I can help it. I am going to live, if I can, from hour to hour, and from day to day, by the grace that is given me; but if I *could* fix it so that Graeme would see it best to stop here a spell longer, I should find it considerable easier, I expect."

"But she has said nothing about going away yet," said Mrs Snow, smiling at his way of putting it. "You must take the grace of her presence, day by day, as you do the rest, at least till she shows signs of departure."

"We never can tell how things are going to turn," said Mr Snow, musingly. "There is that good come out of your sickness. They are both here, and, as far as I see, they are content to be here. If we could prevail on Will to see it his duty to look toward this field of labour, now, I don't doubt but we could fix it so that they should make their home,

here always—right here in this house, I mean—only it would be 'most too good a thing to have in this world, I'm afraid."

"We must wait for the leadings of Providence," said his wife. "This field, as you call it, is no' at Will's taking yet. What would your friend, Mr Perry, think if he heard you? And as for the others, we must not be over-anxious to keep them beyond what their brothers would like. But, as you say, they seem content; and it is a pleasure to have them here, greater than I can put in words; and I know you are as pleased as I am, and that doubles the pleasure to me," added Mrs Snow, looking gratefully toward her husband. "It might have been so different."

"Oh! come, now. It ain't worth while, to put it in that way at this time of day. I don't know as you'd allow it exactly; but I do think they are about as nigh to me as they are to you. I really do."

"That's saying much, but I'll no' gainsay it," said Mrs Snow, smiling. "They are good bairns, and a blessing wherever they may go. But I doubt we canna hope to keep them very long with us."

"It is amazing to me. I can't seem to understand it, or reconcile it to—"

Mr Snow paused and looked at his wife in the deprecating manner he was wont to assume when he was not quite sure whether or not she would like what he was going to say, and then added:

"However, she don't worry about it. She is just as contented as can be, and no mistake; and I rather seem to remember that you used to worry a little about her when they were here last."

"About Miss Graeme, was it?" said Mrs Snow, with a smile; "maybe I did. I was as good at that as at most things. Yes, she is content with life, now. God's peace is in her heart, and in her life, too. I need not have been afraid."

"Rosie's sobered down some, don't you think?" said Mr Snow, with some hesitation. "She used to be as lively as a cricket. Maybe it is only my notion, but she seems different."

"She's older and wiser, and she'll be none the worse to take a soberer view of life than she used to do," said Mrs Snow. "I have seen nothing beyond what was to be looked for in the circumstances. But I have been so full of myself, and my own troubles of late, I may not have taken notice. Her sister is not anxious about her; I would have seen that. The bairn is gathering sense—that is all, I think."

"Well! yes. It will be all right. I don't suppose it will be more than a passing cloud, and I might have known better than to vex you with it."

"Indeed, you have not vexed me, and I am not going to vex myself with any such thought. It will all come right, as you say. I have seen her sister in deeper water than any that can be about her, and she is on dry land now. 'And hath set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings,'" added Mrs Snow, softly. "That is the way with my bairn, I believe. Thank God. And they'll both be the better for this quiet time, and we'll take the good of it without wishing for more than is wise, or setting our hearts on what may fail. See, they are coming down the brae together. It is good to see them."

The first weeks of their stay in Merleville had been weeks of great anxiety. Long after a very difficult and painful operation had been successfully performed, Mrs Snow remained in great danger, and the two girls gave themselves up to the duty of nursing and caring for her, to the exclusion of all other thoughts and interests. To Mr Snow it seemed that his wife had been won back to life by their devotion, and Janet herself, when her long swoon of exhaustion and weakness was over, remembered that, even at the worst time of all, a dim consciousness of the presence of her darlings had been with her, and a wish to stay, for their sakes, had held her here, when her soul seemed floating away to unseen worlds.

By a change, so gradual as scarcely to be perceptible, from day to day, she came back to a knowledge of their loving care, and took up the burden of her life again. Not joyfully, perhaps, having been so near to the attaining of heavenly joy, but still with patience and content, willing to abide God's time.

After that the days followed one another quietly and happily, with little to break the pleasant monotony beyond the occasional visits of the neighbours from the village, or the coming of letters from home. To Graeme it was a very peaceful time. Watching her from day to day, her old friend could not but see that she was content with her life and its work, now; that whatever the shadow had been which had fallen on her earlier days, it had passed away, leaving around her, not the brightness of her youth, but a milder and more enduring radiance. Graeme was, in Janet's eyes, just what the daughter of her father and mother ought to be. If she could have wished anything changed, it would have been in her circumstances, not in herself. She was not satisfied that to her should be denied the higher happiness of being in a home of her own—the first and dearest to some one worthy of her love.

"And yet who knows?" said she to herself. "One can never tell in which road true happiness lies; and it is not for me, who can see only a little way, to wish for anything that God has not given her. 'A contented mind is a continual feast,' says the Book. She has that. And 'Blessed are the meek, and the merciful, and the pure in heart.' What would I have? I'll make no plans, and I'll make no wishes. It is all in good hands, and there is nothing to fear for her, I am sure of that. As for her sister—. Well, I suppose there will ay be something in the lot of those we love to make us mindful that they need better help than ours. And it is too far on in the day for me to doubt that good guidance will come to her as to the rest."

Still, after her husband's words, Mrs Snow regarded Rose's movements with an earnestness that she was not quite willing to acknowledge even to herself. It was rather unreasonable of him, she thought at first, to be otherwise than content with the young girl in her new sedateness. She was not quite so merry and idle as during her last visit; but that was not surprising, seeing she was older and wiser, and more sensible of the responsibilities that life brings to

all. It was natural that it should be so, and well that it should be so. It was matter for thankfulness that the years were bringing her wisdom, and that, looking on life with serious eyes, she would not expect too much from it, nor be so bitterly disappointed at its inevitable failures. She was quieter and graver, but surely no fault was to be found with that, seeing there had been sickness and anxiety in the house.

She was cheerful and busy too, Mrs Snow saw, accomplishing wonderful things in the way of learning to do housework, and dairy work, under the direction of Hannah, and comporting herself generally in a way that was winning the good opinion of that experienced and rather exacting housekeeper. She took great interest in out-of-door affairs, going daily with the deacon to the high sheep pasture, or to the clearing beyond the swamp, or wherever else his oversight of farming matters led him, which ought to have contented Mr Snow, his wife thought, and which might have done so if he had been quite sure that her heart was in it all.

By and by Mrs Snow wearied a little for the mirthfulness and laughter that had sometimes needed to be gently checked during her former visit. More than once, too, she fancied she saw a wistful look in Graeme's eyes as they followed her sister's movements, and she had much ado to keep from troubling herself about them both.

They were sitting one day together in the south room which looked out over the garden and the orchard and the pond beyond. Rose was in the garden, walking listlessly up and down the long paths between the flower-beds, and Mrs Snow, as she watched her, wondered within herself whether this would be a good time to speak to Graeme about her sister. Before she had time to decide, however, they were startled by Hannah's voice coming round the corner—

"Rose," it said, "hadn't you just as leives do your walking right straight ahead? 'Cause, if you had, you might take a pitcher and go over to Emily's and borrow some yeast. I don't calculate, as a general thing, to get out of yeast, or any thing else, but the cat's been and keeled the jug right down, and spilled the last drop, and I want a little to set some more to rising."

"Hannah," said Rose, with a penitent face, "I am afraid it was my fault. I left the jug on the corner of the shelf, instead of putting it away as I ought. I am very sorry."

"Well, I thought pretty likely it might be you, seeing it wasn't me," said Hannah, grimly. "That jug has held the yeast in this house since Grandma Snow's time, and now it's broke to forty pieces."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" said Rose.

"Well, I guess it don't matter a great sight. Nobody will worry about it, if I don't, and it's no use crying over spilt milk. But I guess you'd better tell Emily how it happened. I'd a little rather what borrowing there is between the two houses should be on t'other side. I wouldn't have asked you, only I thought you'd rather go than not. That walking up and down is about as shiftless a business as ever you undertook. But don't you go if you don't want to."

Rose shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh! I'll go, and I'll tell Mrs Nasmyth how it happened, and that it was my fault and the cat's. Mrs Snow," said she, presenting herself at the window, "did you hear what Hannah has been saying? I have broken Grandma Snow's yeast jug into forty pieces, and I am to go and confess to Emily, and get some yeast."

"I thought it was the cat that did it; though, doubtless, it was your fault not putting it in its place. However, there is no great harm done, so that you get more yeast to Hannah."

"And let Emily know that it is my fault and not Hannah's that more yeast is needed. Graeme, will you come and have a walk this bonny day?"

"You can go and do Hannah's errand, now, and I will stay with Mrs Snow, and we will walk together later," said Graeme.

"And you might bring wee Rosie home with you, if her mother will spare her, and if she wants to come. But there is no doubt of her wishing to come with you."

"Is anything the matter with your sister, that you follow her with such troubled e'en?" asked Mrs Snow, after a moment's silence.

"Troubled e'en!" repeated Graeme. "No, I don't think there is anything the matter with her. Do you? Why should you think there is anything the matter with her, Janet?"

"My dear, I was only asking you; and it was because of the look that you sent after her—a look that contradicts your words—a thing that doesna often happen with you, be it said."

"Did I look troubled? I don't think there is any reason for it on Rosie's account—any that can be told. I mean I can only guess at any cause of trouble she may have. Just for a minute, now and then, I have felt a little anxious, perhaps; but it is not at all because I think there is anything seriously wrong with Rosie, or indeed anything that will not do her good rather than harm. But oh, Janet! it is sad that we cannot keep all trouble away from those we love."

"I canna agree with you, my dear. It would be ill done to keep anything from her that will do her good and not evil, as you say yourself. But well or ill, you canna do it, and it is foolish and wrong of you to vex yourself more than is needful."

"But I do not, indeed. Just now it was her restless, aimless walking up and down that vexed me. I am foolish, I suppose, but it always does."

"I daresay it may tell of an uneasy mind, whiles," said Mrs Snow, gravely. "I mind you used to be given to it yourself in the old times, when you werena at ease with yourself. But if you don't like it in your sister, you should encourage her to employ herself in a purpose-like manner."

"Hannah has done it for me this time—I am not sure, however." For Rosie was standing still at the gate looking away down the hill towards the village, "thinking her own thoughts, doubtless," Graeme said to herself.

"She's waiting for some one, maybe. I daresay Sandy has sent some one down to the village for the papers, as this is the day they mostly come."

"Miss Graeme, my dear," continued Mrs Snow, in a little, "it is time you were thinking of overtaking all the visiting you'll be expected to do, now that I am better. It will be a while, before you'll get over all the places where they will expect to see you, for nobody will like to be overlooked."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Graeme. "It is not just like last time, when we were strangers and new to the people. And we have seen almost everybody already. And I like this quiet time much best."

"But, my dear, it is too late to begin to think first of your own likes and dislikes now. And it will be good for Rosie, and you mustna tell me that you are losing interest in your Merleville friends, dear! That would be ungrateful, when they all have so warm an interest in you."

"No, indeed! I have not lost interest in my Merleville friends. There will never be any place just like Merleville to me. Our old life here always comes back to me like a happy, happy dream. I can hardly remember any troubles that came to us all those seven years, Janet—till the very end."

"My dear, you had your troubles, plenty of them, or you thought you had; but the golden gleam of youth lies on your thoughts of that time, now. There was the going away of the lads, for one thing. I mind well you thought those partings hard to bear."

"Yes, I remember," said Graeme, gravely, "but even then we hoped to meet again, and life lay before us all; and nothing had happened to make us afraid."

"My dear, nothing has happened yet that need make you afraid. If you mean for Rosie, she must have her share of the small tribulations that fall to the lot of most women, at one time or other of their lives; but she is of a cheerful nature, and not easily daunted; and dear, *you* have come safely over rougher bits of road than any that are like to lie before her, and she ay will have you to guide her. And looking at you, love, and knowing that the 'great peace,' the Book speaks about, is in your heart and in your life, I have no fear for your sister, after all that has come and gone to you."

Graeme leaned back in her chair, silent for a moment, then she said, gently,—

"I am not afraid. I cannot think what I have said, Janet, to make you think I am afraid for Rosie."

"My dear, you have said nothing. It was the wistful look in your e'en that made me speak to you about her. And besides, I have noticed Rosie myself. She is not so light of heart as she used to be. It may be the anxious time you have had with me, or it may be the added years, or it may be something that it may be wiser for you and me not to seem to see. But whatever it is, I am not afraid for Rose. I am only afraid that you may vex yourself about her, when there is no need. There can be no good in that, you know well."

"But I am not vexing myself, Janet, indeed. I will tell you what I know about it. Do you mind that restless fit that was on me long ago, when you came to see us, and how it seemed to me that I must go away? Well, Rose has come to the same place in her life, and she would like to have work, real work, to do in the world, and she has got impatient of her useless life, as she calls it. It has come on her sooner than it came on me, but that is because the circumstances are different, I suppose, and I hope it may pass away. For, oh! Janet, I shrink from the struggle, and the going away from them all; and I have got to that time when one grows content with just the little things that come to one's hand to do, seeing they are sent by God, as well as nobler work. But it is not so with Rose, and even if this wears over, as it did with me, there are weary days before her; and no wonder, Janet, that I follow her with anxious eyes."

There was no more said for a moment. They were both watching Rose, who still stood at the gate, shading her eyes, and looking down the hill.

"She doesna look like one that has much the matter with her," said Mrs Snow. "Miss Graeme, my dear, do you ken what ails your sister? Why has this feverish wish to be away and at work come upon her so suddenly, if it is a question that I ought to ask?"

"Janet, I cannot tell you. I do not know. I can but guess at it myself, and I may be all wrong. And I think, perhaps, the best help we can give her, is not to seem to see, as you said a little ago. Sometimes I have thought it might all be set right, if Rose would only speak; but one can never be sure, and I think, Janet, we can only wait and see. I don't believe there is much cause for fear, if only Rose will have patience."

"Then, wherefore should you look so troubled? Nothing but wrong-doing on your sister's part should make you look like that." For there were tears in Graeme's eyes as she watched her sister, and she looked both anxious and afraid.

"Wrong-doing," repeated she, with a start. Then she rose impatiently, but sat down again in a moment. Was it "wrong-doing" in a woman to let her heart slip unawares and unasked from her own keeping? If this was indeed the thing that had happened to Rose? Or was it "wrong-doing" to come to the knowledge of one's heart too late, as Harry had once hinted might be the end of Rosie's foolish love of admiration?

"Wrong-doing," she repeated again, with a sudden stir of indignation at her heart. "No, that must never be said of Rose. It must be one of the small tribulations that sooner or later fall to the lot of most women, as you said yourself Janet, a little ago. And it won't do to discuss it, anyway. See, Rose has opened the gate for some one. Who is coming in?"

"My dear," said Mrs Snow, gravely, "it was far from my thought to wish to know about anything that I should not. It is Sandy she is opening the gate for, and wee Rosie. He has been down for the papers, it seems, and he may have gotten letters as well."

"But, Janet," said Graeme, eagerly, "you know I could not mean that I could not tell you if I were ever so willing. I do not know. I can only guess; but as for 'wrong-doing'—"

"My dear, you needna tell me that. Sandy, man, it must seem a strange-like thing to the folk in the village to see you carrying the child that way on your horse before you—you that have wagons of one kind or another, and plenty of them, at your disposal. Is it safe for the bairn, think you? Do you like that way of riding, my wee Rosie?"

"Yes, gamma, I 'ike it," lisped the two years old Rosie, smiling brightly.

"It is safe enough, mother, you may be sure of that. And as for what the village folk may think, that's a new thing for you to ask. It is the best and pleasantest way in the world for both Rosie and me." And looking at the proud, young father and the happy child sitting before him, it was not to be for a moment doubted.

"It must be delightful," said Rose, laughing. "I should like a ride myself, wee Rosie."

"And why not?" said Mrs Snow. "Sandy, man, it is a wonder to me that you havena thought about it before. Have you your habit here, my dear? Why should you no' bring young Major or Dandy over, saddled for Miss Rose? It would do her all the good in the world to get a gallop in a day like this."

"There is no reason in the world why I should not, if Miss Rose, would like it."

"I would like it very much. Not that I need the good of it especially, but I shall enjoy the pleasure of it. And will you let wee Rosie come with me."

"If grandma has no objections," said Sandy, laughing. "But it must be *old* Major, if you take her."

"Did ever anybody hear such nonsense?" said Mrs Snow, impatiently. "But you'll need to haste, Sandy, man, or we shall be having visitors, and then she winna get away."

"Yes, I should not wonder. I saw Mr Perry coming up the way with a book in his hand. But I could bring young Major and Dandy too, and Miss Rose needn't be kept at home then."

Rose laughed merrily.

"Who? The minister? Oh! fie, Sandy man, you shouldna speak such nonsense. Wee Rosie, are you no' going to stay the day with Miss Graeme and me?" said Mrs Snow.

Graeme held up her arms for the little girl, but she did not offer to move.

"Will you bide with grannie, wee Rosie?" asked her father, pulling back her sun-bonnet, and letting a mass of tangled, yellow curls fall over her rosy face.

"Tum adain Grannie," said the little girl, gravely. She was too well pleased with her place to wish to leave it. Her father laughed.

"She shall come when I bring over Dandy for Miss Rose. In the meantime, I have something for some one here."

"Letters," said Graeme and Rose, in a breath.

"One a piece. Good news, I hope. I shall soon be back again, Miss Rose, with Dandy."

Graeme's letter was from Will, written after having heard of his sisters being in Merleville, before he had heard of Mrs Snow's recovery. He had thought once of coming home with Mr Millar, he said, but had changed his plans, partly because he wished to accept an invitation he had received from his uncle in the north, and partly for other reasons. He was staying at present with Mrs Millar, who was "one of a thousand," wrote Will, with enthusiasm, "and, indeed, so is, her son, Mr Ruthven, but you know Allan, of old." And then he went on to other things.

Graeme read the letter first herself, and then to Mrs Snow and Rose. In the midst of it Mr Snow came in. Rose had read hers, but held it in her hand still, even after they had ceased to discuss Will's.

"It is from Fanny," said she, at last. "You can read it to Mrs Snow, if you like, Graeme. It is all about baby and his perfections; or nearly all. I will go and put on my habit for my ride. Uncle Sampson come with me, won't you? Have you anything particular to do to-day?"

"To ride?" said Mr Snow. "I'd as lieve go as not, and a little rather—if you'll promise to take it moderate. I should like the chaise full better than the saddle, I guess, though."

Rose laughed.

"I will promise to let *you* take it moderate. I am not afraid to go alone, if you don't want to ride. But I shouldn't fancy

the chaise to-day. A good gallop is just what I want, I think."

She went to prepare for her ride, and Graeme read Fanny's letter. It was, as Rose had said, a record of her darling's pretty sayings and doings, and gentle regrets that his aunts could not have the happiness of being at home to watch his daily growth in wisdom and beauty. Then there were a few words at the end.

"Harry is properly indignant, as we all are, at your hint that you may see Norman and Hilda, before you see home again. Harry says it is quite absurd to speak of such a thing, but we have seen very little of him of late. I hope we may see more of him now that his friend and partner has returned. He has been quite too much taken up with his little Amy, to think of us. However, I promised Mr Millar I would say nothing of that bit of news. He must tell you about it himself. He has a great deal of Scottish news, but I should only spoil it by trying to tell it; and I think it is quite possible that Harry may fulfil his threat, and come for you himself. But I suppose he will give you fair warning," and so on.

Graeme closed the letter, saying nothing.

"It is not just very clear, I think," said Mrs Snow.

"Is it not?" said Graeme. "I did not notice. Of course, it is all nonsense about Harry coming to take us home."

"And who is little Miss Amy, that she speaks of? Is she a friend of your brother Harry? Or is she Mr Millar's friend? Mrs Arthur doesna seem to make it clear?"

"Miss Amy Roxbury," said Graeme, opening her letter again. "Does she not make it plain? Oh, well! we shall hear more about it, she says. I suppose Harry has got back to his old fancy, that we are to go and live with him if Mr Millar goes elsewhere. Indeed, I don't understand it myself; but we shall hear more soon I daresay. Ah! here is Rosie."

"And here is Dandy," said Rose, coming in with her habit on. "And here is wee Rosie come to keep you company while I am away. And here is Mr Snow, on old Major. Don't expect us home till night. We shall have a day of it, shall we not?"

They had a very quiet day at home. Wee Rosie came and went, and told her little tales to the content of her grandmother and Graeme, who made much of the little girl, as may well be supposed. She was a bonny little creature, with her father's blue eyes and fair curls, and showing already some of the quaint, grave ways that Graeme remembered in her mother as a child.

In the afternoon, Emily came with her baby, and they were all happy and busy, and had no time for anxious or troubled thoughts. At least, they never spoke a word that had reference to anything sad. But, when Graeme read the letters again to Emily, Mrs Snow noticed that she did not read the part about their going West, or about little Amy, or about Harry's coming to take them home. But her eye lingered on the words, and her thoughts went back to some old trouble, she saw by her grave look, and by the silence that fell upon her, even in the midst of her pretty child's play with the little ones. But never a word was spoken about anything sad. And, by and by, visitors came, and Mrs Snow, being tired, went to lie down to rest for a while. But when Rose and Mr Snow came home, they found her standing at the gate, ready to receive them.

Chapter Forty Two.

"I want to know! Now do tell; if there ain't mother standing at the gate, and opening it for us, too," exclaimed Mr Snow, in astonishment and delight. "That is the farthest she's been yet, and it begins to look a little like getting well, now, don't it?"

"I hope nothing has happened," said Rose, a little anxiously.

"I guess not—nothing to fret over. Her face don't look like it. Well, mother, you feel pretty smart to-night, don't you? You look first-rate."

"I am just as usual," said Mrs Snow, quietly. "But what has kept you so long? We were beginning to wonder about you."

"Has anything happened?" said Rose, looking over Mrs Snow's head, at a little crowd of people coming out at the door.

"We have visitors, that is all. The minister is here, and a friend of yours—your brother Harry's partner. He has brought news—not bad news, at least he doesna seem to think so, nor Miss Graeme. I have hardly heard it myself, yet, or seen the young man, for I was tired and had to lie down. But you'll hear it yourself in due time."

Rose reined her horse aside.

"Take care, dear," said Mrs Snow, as she sprung to the ground without assistance. "There is no need for such haste. You might have waited for Sandy or some one to help you, I think."

"What is it, Graeme?" said Rose, for her sister looked flashed and excited, and there were traces of tears on her cheeks she was sure. But she did not look anxious—certainly not unhappy.

"Rosie, dear, Charlie has come."

"Oh! Charlie has come, has he? That is it, is it?" said Rose, with a long breath.

Yes, there was Mr Millar, offering his hand and smiling—"exactly like himself," Rose thought, but she could not tell very well, for her eyes were dazzled with the red light of the setting sun. But she was very glad to see him, she told him; and she told the minister she was very glad to see *him*, too, in the very same tone, the next minute. There was not much time to say anything, however, for Hannah—whose patience had been tried by the delay—announced that tea was on the table, in a tone quite too peremptory to be trifled with.

"Rose, you are tired, I am sure. Never mind taking off your habit till after tea."

Rose confessed herself tired after her long and rapid ride.

"For I left Mr Snow at Major Spring's, and went on a long way by myself, and it is just possible, that, after all, you are right, and I have gone too far for the first ride; for see, I am a little shaky," added she, as the teacup she passed to Mr Snow trembled in her hand.

Then she asked Mr Millar about the news he had brought them, and whether all were well, and a question or two besides; and then she gave herself up to the pleasure of listening to the conversation of the minister, and it came into Graeme's mind that if Harry had been there he would have said she was amusing herself with a little serious flirtation. Graeme did not think so, or, if she did, it did not make her angry as it would have made Harry; for though she said little, except to the grave wee Rosie Nasmyth, whom she had taken under her care, she looked very bright and glad. Rose looked at her once or twice, a little startled, and after a while, in watching her, evidently lost the thread of the minister's entertaining discourse, and answered him at random.

"I have a note from Harry," said Graeme, as they left the tea-table. "Here it is. Go and take off your habit. You look hot and tired."

In a little while the visitors were gone and Mr Millar was being put through a course of questions by Mr Snow. Graeme sat and listened to them, and thought of Rose, who, all the time, was sitting up-stairs with Harry's letter in her hand.

It was not a long letter. Rose had time to read it a dozen times over, Graeme knew, but still she lingered, for a reason she could not have told to any one, which she did not even care to make very plain to herself. Mr Snow was asking, and Mr Millar was answering, questions about Scotland, and Will, and Mr Ruthven, and every word that was said was intensely interesting to her; and yet, while she listened eagerly, and put in a word now and then that showed how much she cared, she was conscious all the time, that she was listening for the sound of a movement overhead, or for her sister's footstep on the stair. By and by, as Charlie went on, in answer to Mr Snow's questions, to tell about the state of agriculture in his native shire, her attention wandered altogether, and she listened only for the footsteps.

"She may perhaps think it strange that I do not go up at once. I daresay it is foolish in me. Very likely this news will be no more to her than to me."

"Where is your sister?" said Mrs Snow, who, as well as Graeme, had been attending to two things at once. "I doubt the foolish lassie has tired herself with riding too far."

"I will go and see," said Graeme.

Before she entered her sister's room Rose called to her.

"Is it you, Graeme? What do you think of Harry's news? He has not lost much time, has he?"

"I was surprised," said Graeme.

Rose was busy brushing her hair.

"Surprised! I should think so. Did you ever think such a thing might happen, Graeme?"

This was Harry's letter.

"My Dear Sisters,—I have won my Amy! You cannot be more astonished than I am. I know I am not good enough for her, but I love her dearly, and it will go hard with me if I don't make her happy. I only want to be assured that you are both delighted, to make my happiness complete."

Throwing her hair back a little, Rose read it again. This was not quite all. There was a postscript over the page, which Rose had at first overlooked, and she was not sure that Graeme had seen it. Besides, it had nothing to do with the subject matter of the note.

"Did the thought of such a thing ever come into your mind?" asked she again, as she laid the letter down.

"Yes," said Graeme, slowly. "It did come into my mind more than once. And, on looking back, I rather wonder that I did not see it all. I can remember now a good many things that looked like it, but I never was good at seeing such affairs approaching, you know."

"Are you glad, Graeme?"

"Yes, I am glad. I believe I shall be very glad when I have had time to think about it."

"Because Harry's happiness won't be complete unless you are, you know," said Rose, laughing.

"I am sure Harry is quite sincere in what he says about it," said Graeme.

"It is not to be doubted. I daresay she is a nice little thing; and, after all, it won't make the same difference to us that

Fanny's coming did."

"No, if we are to consider it with reference to ourselves. But I think I am very glad for Harry's sake."

"And that is more than we could have said for Arthur. However, there is no good going back to that now. It has all turned out very well."

"Things mostly do, if people will have patience," said Graeme, "and I am sure this will, for Harry, I mean. I was always inclined to like little Amy, only—only, we saw very little of her you know—and—yes, I am sure I shall love her dearly."

"Well, you must make haste to tell Harry so, to complete his happiness. And he is very much astonished at his good fortune," said Rose, taking up the letter again. "'Not good enough for her,' he says. That is the humility of true love, I suppose; and, really, if he is pleased, we may be. I daresay she is a nice little thing."

"She is more than just a nice little thing. You should hear what Mr Millar says of her."

"He ought to know! 'Poor Charlie,' as Harry calls him in the pride of his success. Go down-stairs, Graeme, and I will follow in a minute; I am nearly ready!"

The postscript which Rose was not sure whether Graeme had seen, said, "poor Charlie," and intimated that Harry's sisters owed him much kindness for the trouble he was taking in going so far to carry them the news in person. Not Harry's own particular news, Rose supposed, but tidings of Will, and of all that was likely to interest them from both sides of the sea.

"I would like to know why he calls him 'poor Charlie,'" said Rose, with a shrug. "I suppose, however, we must all seem like objects of compassion to Harry, at the moment of his triumph, as none of us have what has fallen to him."

Graeme went down without a word, smiling to herself as she went. She had seen the postscript, and she thought she knew why Harry had written "poor Charlie," but she said nothing to Rose. The subject of conversation had changed during her absence, it seemed.

"I want to know! Do tell!" Mr Snow was saying. "I call that first-rate news, if it is as you say, Mr Millar. Do the girls know it? Graeme, do you know that Harry is going to be married?"

"Yes, so Harry tells me."

"And who is the lady? Is it anyone we know about? Roxbury," repeated Mr Snow, with a puzzled look. "But it seems to me I thought I heard different. I don't seem to understand."

He looked anxiously into the face of his wife as though she could help him.

"That's not to be wondered at," said she, smiling. "It seems Miss Graeme herself has been taken by surprise. But she is well pleased for all that. Harry has been in no great hurry, I think."

"But that ain't just as I understood it," persisted Mr Snow. "What does Rose say? She told me this afternoon, when we were riding, something or other, but it sartain wa'n't that."

"It could hardly be that, since the letter came when you were away, and even Miss Graeme knew nothing of it till she got the letter," said Mrs Snow, with some impatience.

"Rosie told me," went on Mr Snow. "Here she is. What was it you were telling me this afternoon about—about our friend here?"

"Oh! I told you a great many things that it would not do to repeat," and though Rose laughed, she reddened, too, and looked appealingly at Graeme.

"Wasn't Roxbury the name of the lady, that you told me was—"

"Oh! Uncle Sampson! Never mind."

"Dear me," said Mrs Snow, "what need you make a mystery out of such plain reading. Miss Graeme has gotten a letter telling her that her brother Harry is going to be married; and what is there so wonderful about that?"

"Just so," said Mr Snow. He did not understand it the least in the world, but he understood that, for some reason or other, Mrs Snow wanted nothing more said about it, so he meant to say no more; and, after a minute, he made Rose start and laugh nervously by the energy with which he repeated, "Just so;" and still he looked from Graeme to Mr Millar, as though he expected them to tell him something.

"Harry's letter gives the news, and that is all," said Graeme.

"But I cannot understand your surprise," said Mr Millar, not to Mr Snow, but to Graeme. "I thought you must have seen it all along."

"Did you see it all along?" asked Mr Snow, looking queer.

"I was in Harry's confidence; but even if I had not been, I am sure I must have seen it. I almost think I knew what was coming before he knew it himself, at the very first."

"The very first?" repeated Graeme. "When was that? In the spring? Before the time we went to Mrs Roxbury's, on the

evening of the Convocation?"

"Oh! yes! long before that—before Miss Rose came home from the West. Indeed, I think it was love at first sight, as far as Harry was concerned," added Mr Millar, with an embarrassed laugh, coming suddenly to the knowledge of the fact that Mr Snow was regarding him with curious eyes. But Mr Snow turned his attention to Rose.

"What do *you* say to that?" asked he.

"I have nothing to say," said Rose, pettishly. "I was not in Harry's confidence."

"So it seems," said Mr Snow, meditatively.

"I am sure you will like her when you know her better," said Mr Millar.

"Oh! if Harry likes her that is the chief thing," said Rose, with a shrug. "It won't matter much to the rest of us—I mean to Graeme and me."

"It will matter very much to us," said Graeme, "and I know I shall love her dearly, and so will you, Rosie, when she is our sister, and I mean to write to Harry to-morrow—and to her, too, perhaps."

"She wants very much to know you, and I am sure you will like each other," said Mr Millar looking deprecatingly at Rose, who was not easy or comfortable in her mind any one could see.

"Just tell me one thing, Rose," said Mr Snow. "How came you to suppose that—"

But the question was not destined to be answered by Rose, at least not then. A matter of greater importance was to be laid before her, for the door opened suddenly, and Hannah put in her head.

"Where on earth did you put the yeast-jug, Rose? I have taken as many steps as I want to after it; if you had put it back in its place it would have paid, I guess. It would have suited *me* better, and I guess it would have suited better all round."

Her voice betrayed a struggle between offended dignity and decided crossness. Rose was a little hysterical, Graeme thought, or she never would have laughed about such an important matter in Hannah's face. For Hannah knew her own value, which was not small in the household, and she was not easily propitiated when a slight was given or imagined, as no one knew better than Rose. And before company, too!—company with whom Hannah had not been "made acquainted," as Hannah, and the sisterhood generally in Merleville, as a rule, claimed to be. It was dreadful temerity on Rose's part.

"Oh! Hannah, I forgot all about it."

But the door was suddenly closed. Rose hastened after her in haste and confusion.

Mr Snow had been deeply meditating, and he was evidently not aware that anything particular had been happening, for he turned suddenly to Mr Millar, and said,—

"I understood that it was you who was—eh—who was—keeping company with Miss Roxbury?"

"Did you think so, Miss Elliott," said Charlie, in some astonishment.

"Mr Snow," said his wife, in a voice that brought him to her side in an instant. "You may have read in the Book, how there is a time to keep silence, as well as a time to speak, and the bairn had no thought of having her words repeated again, though she might have said that to you."

She spoke very softly, so that the others did not hear, and Mr Snow would have looked penitent, if he had not looked so bewildered. Raising her voice a little, she added,—

"You might just go out, and tell Hannah to send Jabez over to Emily's about the yeast, if she has taken too many steps to go herself; for Miss Rose is tired, and it is growing dark;—and besides, there is no call for her to go Hannah's messages—though you may as well no' say that to her, either."

But the door opened, and Rose came in again.

"I can't even find the jug," she said, pretending great consternation. "And this is the second one I have been the death of. Oh! here it is. I must have left it here in the morning, and wee Rosie's flowers are in it! Oh! yes, dear, I must go. Hannah is going, and I must go with her. She is just a little bit cross, you know. And, besides, I want to tell her the news," and she went away.

Mr Snow, feeling that he had, in some way, been compromising himself, went and sat down beside his wife, to be out of the temptation to do it again, and Mr Millar said again, to Graeme, very softly this time,—

"Did you think so, Miss Elliott?"

Graeme hesitated.

"Yes, Charlie. I must confess, there did, more than once, come into my mind the possibility that Harry and his friend and partner might find themselves rivals for the favour of the sweet little Amy. But you must remember, that—"

But Charlie interrupted her, eagerly.

"And did—did your sister think so, too? No, don't answer me—" added he, suddenly rising, and going first to the window to look out, and then, out at the door. In a little Graeme rose, and went out too, and followed him down the path, to the gate, over which he was leaning. There was no time to speak, however, before they heard the voices of Rose and Hannah, coming toward them. Hannah was propitiated, Graeme knew by the sound of her voice. Mr Millar opened the gate for them to pass, and Graeme said, "You have not been long, Rosie."

"Are you here, Graeme," said Rose, for it was quite dark, by this time. "Hannah, this is Mr Millar, my brother Harry's friend and partner." And then she added, with great gravity, according to the most approved Merleville formula of introduction, "Mr Millar, I make you acquainted with Miss Lovejoy."

"I am pleased to make your acquaintance, Mr Millar. I hope I see you wed," said Miss Lovejoy, with benignity. If Mr Millar was not quite equal to the occasion, Miss Lovejoy was, and she said exactly what was proper to be said in the circumstances, and neither Graeme nor Rose needed to say anything till they got into the house again.

"There! that is over," said Rose, with a sigh of relief.

"The getting of the yeast?" said Graeme, laughing.

"Yes, and the pacification of Miss Lovejoy."

It was not quite over, however, Graeme thought in the morning. For Rose seemed to think it necessary to give a good deal of her time to household matters, whether it was still with a view to the good humour of Hannah or not, was not easy to say. But she could only give a divided attention to their visitor, and to the account of all that he and Will had done and enjoyed together. Graeme and he walked up and down the garden for a while, and when Mrs Snow had risen, and was in the sitting-room, they came and sat down beside her, and, after a time, Rose came too. But it was Graeme who asked questions, and who drew Mr Millar out, to tell about their adventures, and misadventures, and how Will had improved in all respects, and how like his father all the old people thought him. Even Mrs Snow had more to say than Rose, especially when he went on to tell about Clayton, and the changes that had taken place there.

"Will fancied, before he went, that he remembered all the places distinctly; and was very loth to confess that he had been mistaken. I suppose, that his imagination had had as much to do with his idea of his native place, as his memory, and when, at last, we went down the glen where your mother used to live, and where he distinctly remembered going to see her with you, not long before you all came away, he acknowledged as much. He stepped across the burn at the widest part, and then he told me, laughing, that he had always thought of the burn at that place, as being about as wide as the Merle river, just below the mill bridge, however wide that may be. It was quite a shock to him, I assure you. And then the kirk, and the manse, and all the village, looked old, and small, and queer, when he came to compare them with the pictures of them he had kept in his mind, all these years. The garden he remembered, and the lane beyond it, but I think the only things he found quite as he expected to find them, were the laburnum trees, in that lane," and on Charlie went, from one thing to another, drawn on by a question, put now and then by Graeme, or Mrs Snow, whenever he made a pause.

But all that was said need not be told here. By and by, he rose and went out, and when he came back, he held an open book on his hand, and on one of its open pages lay a spray of withered ivy, gathered, he said, from the kirkyard wall, from a great branch that hung down over the spot where their mother lay. And when he had laid it down on Graeme's lap, he turned and went out again.

"I mind the spot well," said Mrs Snow, softly.

"I mind it, too," said Graeme.

Rose did not "mind" it, nor any other spot of her native land, nor the young mother who had lain so many years beneath the drooping ivy. But she stooped to touch with her lips, the faded leaves that spoke of her, and then she laid her cheek down on Graeme's knee, and did not speak a word, except to say that she had quite forgotten all.

By and by, Mr Snow came in, and something was said about showing Merleville to their visitor, and so arranging matters that time should be made to pass pleasantly to him.

"Oh! as to that, he seems no' ill to please," said Mrs Snow. "Miss Graeme might take him down to the village to Mr Greenleaf's and young Mr Merle's, if she likes; but, as to letting him see Merleville, I think the thing that is of most importance is, that all Merleville should see him."

"There is something in that. I don't suppose Merleville is any more to him than any other place, except that Harry and the rest had their home here, for a spell. But all the Merleville folks will want to see *him*, I expect."

Rose laughingly suggested that a town meeting should be called for the purpose.

"Well, I calculate that won't be necessary. If he stays over Sunday, it will do as well. The folks will have a chance to see him at meeting, though, I suppose it won't be best to tell him so, before he goes. Do you suppose he means to stay over Sunday, Rosie?"

"I haven't asked him," said Rose.

"It will likely depend on how he is entertained, how long he stays," said Mrs Snow. "I daresay he will be in no hurry to get home, for a day or two. And Rosie, my dear, you must help your sister to make it pleasant for your brother's friend."

"Oh! he's no' ill to please, as you said yourself," answered Rose.

It was well that he was not, or her failure to do her part in the way of amusing him, might have sooner fallen under general notice. They walked down to the village in the afternoon, first to Mr Merle's, and then to Mr Greenleaf's. Here, Master Elliott at once took possession of Rose, and they went away together, and nothing more was seen of them, till tea had been waiting for some time. Then they came in, and Mr Perry came with them. He stayed to tea, of course, and made himself agreeable, as he always did, and when they went home, he said he would walk with them part of the way. He had most of the talk to himself, till they came to the foot of the hill, when he bade them, reluctantly, good-night. They were very quiet the rest of the way, and when they reached home, the sisters went up-stairs at once together, and though it was quite dark, neither of them seemed in a great hurry to go down again.

"Rose," said Graeme, in a little, "where ever did you meet Mr Perry this afternoon? And why did you bring him to Mr Greenleaf's with you?"

"I did not bring him to Mr Greenleaf's. He came of his own free will. And I did not meet him anywhere. He followed us down past the mill. We were going for oak leaves. Elliott had seen some very pretty ones there, and I suppose Mr Perry had seen them, too. Are you coming down, Graeme?"

"In a little. Don't wait for me, if you wish to go."

"Oh! I am in no haste," said Rose, sitting down by the window. "What are you going to say to me, Graeme?"

But if Graeme had anything to say, she decided not to say it then.

"I suppose we ought to go down."

Rose followed her in silence. They found Mr and Mrs Snow alone.

"Mr Millar has just stepped out," said Mr Snow. "So you had the minister to-night, again, eh, Rosie? It seems to me, he is getting pretty fond of visiting, ain't he?"

Rose laughed.

"I am sure that is a good thing. The people will like that, won't they?"

"The people he goes to see will, I don't doubt."

"Well, we have no reason to complain. He has given us our share of his visits, always," said Mrs Snow, in a tone that her husband knew was meant to put an end to the discussion of the subject. Graeme was not so observant, however.

"It was hardly a visit he made at Mr Greenleaf's to-night. He came in just, before tea, and left when we left, immediately after. He walked with us to the foot of the hill."

"He was explaining to Elliott and me the chemical change that takes place in the leaves, that makes the beautiful autumn colours we were admiring so much," said Rose. "He is great in botany and chemistry, Elliott says."

And then it came out how he had crossed the bridge, and found them under the oak trees behind the mill, and what talk there had been about the sunset and the leaves, and a good deal more. Mr Snow turned an amused yet doubtful look from her to his wife; but Mrs Snow's closely shut lips said so plainly, "least said soonest mended," that he shut his lips, too.

It would have been as well if Graeme had done so, also she thought afterwards; but she had made up her mind to say something to her sister that night, whether she liked it or not, and so standing behind her, as she was brushing out her hair, she said,—

"I think it was rather foolish in Mr Perry to come to Mr Greenleaf's to-night, and to come away with us afterwards."

"Do you think so?" said Rose.

"Yes. And I fancied Mr and Mrs Greenleaf thought so, too. I saw them exchanging glances more than once."

"Did you? It is to be hoped the minister did not see them."

"Merleville people are all on the watch—and they are so fond of talking. It is not at all nice, I think."

"Oh, well, I don't know. It depends a little on what they say," said Rose, knotting up her hair. "And I don't suppose Mr Perry will hear it."

"I have commenced wrong," said Graeme to herself. "But I must just say a word to her, now I have began. It was of ourselves I was thinking, Rose—of you, rather. And it is not nice to be talked, about. Rosie, tell me just how much you care about Mr Perry."

"Tell me just how much *you* care about him, dear," said Rose.

"I care quite enough for him, to hope that he will not be annoyed or made unhappy. Do you really care for him, Rosie?"

"Do you, Graeme?"

"Rose, I am quite in earnest. I see—I am afraid the good foolish man wants you to care for him, and if you don't—"

"Well, dear—if I don't?"

"If you don't, you must not act so that he may fancy you do, Rose. I think there is some danger in his caring for you."

"He cares quite as much for you as he cares for me, Graeme, and with better reason."

"Dear, I have not thought about his caring for either of us till lately. Indeed, I never let the thought trouble me till last night, after Mr Millar came, and again, to-night. Rosie, you must not be angry with what I say."

"Of course not. But I think you must dispose of Mr Perry, before you bring another name into your accusation; Graeme, dear, I don't care a pin for Mr Perry, nor he for me, if that will please you. But you are not half so clever at this sort of thing as Harry. You should have began at once by accusing me of claiming admiration, and flirting, and all that. It is best to come to the point at once."

"You said you would not be angry, Rose."

"Did I? Well, I am not so sore about it as I was a minute ago. And what is the use of vexing one another. Don't say any more to-night."

Indeed, what could be said to Rose in that mood. So Graeme shut her lips, too.

In the mean time Mr Snow had opened his, in the privacy of their chamber.

"It begins to look a little like it, don't it?" said he.

He got no answer.

"I'd a little rather it had been Graeme, but Rosie would be a sight better than neither of them."

"I'm by no means sure of that," said Mrs Snow, sharply. "Rosie's no' a good bairn just now, and I'm no' weel pleased with her."

"Don't be hard on Rosie," said Mr Snow, gently.

"Hard on her! You ought to have more sense by this time. Rosie's no' thinking about the minister, and he hasna been thinking o' her till lately—only men are such fools. Forgive me for saying it about the minister."

"Well, I thought, myself, it was Graeme for a spell, and I'd a little rather it would be. She's older, and she's just right in every way. It would be a blessing to more than the minister. It seems as though it was just the right thing. Now, don't it?"

"I canna say. It is none the more likely to come to pass because of that, as you might ken yourself by this time," said his wife, gravely.

"Oh, well, I don't know about that. There's Aleck and Emily."

"Hoot, fie, man! They cared for one another, and neither Miss Graeme, nor her sister, care a penny piece for yon man—for the minister, I mean."

"You don't think him good enough," said Mr Snow, discontentedly.

"Nonsense! I think him good enough for anybody that will take him. He is a very good man—what there is o' him," added she, under her breath. "But it will be time enough to speak about it, when there is a chance of its happening. I'm no weel pleased with Rosie. If it werena that, as a rule, I dinna like to meddle with such matters, I would have a word with her myself. The bairn doesna ken her ain mind, I'm thinking."

The next day was rainy, but not so rainy as to prevent Mr Snow from fulfilling his promise to take Mr Millar to see some wonderful cattle, which bade fair to make Mr Nasmyth's a celebrated name in the county, and before they came home again, Mrs Snow took the opportunity to say a word, not to Rose, but to Graeme, with regard to her.

"What ails Rosie at your brother's partner, young Mr Millar?" asked she. "I thought they would have been friends, having known one another so long."

"Friends!" repeated Graeme. "Are they not friends? What makes you speak in that way, Janet?"

"Friends they are not," repeated Mrs Snow, emphatically. "But whether they are less than friends, or more, I canna weel make out. Maybe you can help me, dear."

"I cannot, indeed," said Graeme, laughing a little uneasily. "I am afraid Charlie's visit is not to give any of us unmingled pleasure."

"It is easy seen what she is to him, poor lad, and I canna but think—my dear, you should speak to your sister."

"But, Janet, Rosie is not an easy person to speak to about some things. And, besides, it is not easy to know whether one may not do harm, rather than good, by speaking. I *did* speak to her last night about—about Mr Perry."

"About the minister! And what did she answer? She cares little about him, I'm thinking. It's no' pretty in her to amuse herself so openly at his expense, poor man, though there's some excuse, too—when he shows so little discretion."

“But, amusing herself, Janet! That is rather hard on Rosie. It is not that, I think.”

“Is it not? What is it, then? The bairn is not in earnest. I hope it may all come to a good ending.”

“Oh! Janet! I hope it may. But I don’t like to think of endings. Rosie must belong to some one else some day, I suppose. The best thing I can wish for her is that I may lose her—for her sake, but it is not a happy thing to think of for mine.”

“Miss Graeme, my dear, that is not like you.”

“Indeed, Janet, it is just like me. I can’t bear to think about it. As for the minister—” Graeme shrugged her shoulders.

“You needna trouble yourself about the minister, my dear. It will no’ be him. If your friend yonder would but take heart of grace—I have my own thoughts.”

“Oh! I don’t know. We need not be in a hurry.”

“But, dear, think what you were telling me the other day, about your sister going out by herself to seek her fortune. Surely, that would be far worse.”

“But she would not have to go by herself. I should go with her, and Janet, I have sometimes the old dread of change upon me, as I used to have long ago.”

“But, my dear, why should you? All the changes in our lot are in good hands. I dinna need to tell you that after all these years. And as for the minister, you needna be afraid for him.”

Graeme laughed; and though the entrance of Rose prevented any more being said, she laughed again to herself, in a way to excite her sister’s astonishment.

“I do believe Janet is pitying me a little, because of the minister’s inconstancy,” she said to herself. “Why am I laughing at it, Rosie? You must ask Mrs Snow.”

“My dear, how can I tell your sister’s thoughts? It is at them, she is laughing, and I think the minister has something to do with it, though it is not like her, either, to laugh at folk in an unkindly way.”

“It is more like me, you think,” said Rose, pouting. “And as for the minister, she is very welcome to him, I am sure.”

“Nonsense, Rose! Let him rest. I am sure Deacon Snow would think us very irreverent to speak about the minister in that way. Tell me what you are going to do to-day?”

Rosie had plenty to do, and by and by she became absorbed in the elaborate pattern which she was working on a frock for wee Rosie, and was rather more remiss than before, as to doing her part for the entertainment of their guest. She had not done that from the beginning, but her quietness and preoccupation were more apparent, because the rain kept them within doors. Graeme saw it, and tried to break through it or cover it as best she might. Mrs Snow saw it, and sometimes looked grave, and sometimes amused, but she made no remarks about it. As for Mr Millar, if he noticed her silence and preoccupation, he certainly did not resent them, but gave to the few words she now and then put in, an eager attention that went far beyond their worth; and had she been a princess, and he but a humble vassal, he could not have addressed her with more respectful deference.

And so the days passed on, till one morning something was said by Mr Millar, about its being time to draw his visit to a close. It was only a word, and might have fallen to the ground without remark, as he very possibly intended it should do; but Mr Snow set himself to combat the idea of his going away so soon, with an energy and determination that brought them all into the discussion in a little while.

“Unless there is something particular taking you home, you may as well stay for a while longer. At any rate, it ain’t worth while to go before Sunday. You ought to stay and hear our minister preach, now you’ve got acquainted with him. Oughtn’t he, Graeme?”

Graeme smiled.

“Oh! yes, he ought to stay for so good a reason as that is.”

“There are worse preachers than Mr Perry,” said Mrs Snow, gravely.

“Oh! come now, mother. That ain’t saying much. There ain’t a great many better preachers in our part of the world, whatever they may be where you live. To be sure, if you leave to-night after tea, you can catch the night cars for Boston, and stay there over Sunday, and have your pick of some pretty smart men. But you’d better stay.—Not but what I could have you over to Rixford in time, as well as not, if it is an object to you. But you better stay, hadn’t he, girls? What do you say, Rose?”

“And hear Mr Perry preach? Oh! certainly,” said Rose, gravely.

“Oh! he will stay,” said Graeme, laughing, with a little vexation. “It is my belief he never meant to go, only he likes to be entreated. Now confess, Charlie.”

"Eh, bairns! is it no' a bonny day!" said Mrs Snow, breaking into Scotch, as she was rather apt to do when she was speaking to the sisters, or when a little moved. "I ay mind the first look I got o' the hills ower yonder, and the kirk, and the gleam of the grave-stones, through the trees. We all came round the water on a Saturday afternoon like this; and Norman and Harry took turns in carrying wee Rosie, and we sat down here and rested ourselves, and looked ower yon bonny water. Eh, bairns! if I could have but had a glimpse of all the years that have been since then, of all the 'goodness and mercy' that has passed before us, now my thankless murmurs, and my unbelieving fears would have been rebuked!"

They were on their way up the hill to spend the afternoon at Mr Nasmyth's, and Mr Millar was with them. Nothing more had been said about his going away, and if he was not quite content to stay, "his looks belied him," as Miss Lovejoy remarked to herself, as she watched them, all going up the hill together. They were going very slowly, because of Mrs Snow's lingering weakness. One of the few of the "Scotch prejudices!" that remained with her after all these years, was the prejudice in favour of her own two feet, as a means of locomotion, when the distance was not too great; and rather to the discontent of Mr Snow, she had insisted on walking up to the other house, this afternoon.

"It is but a step, and it will do me no harm, but good, to go with the bairns," said she, and she got her own way.

It was a "bonny day," mild, bright, and still. The autumnal beauty of the forests had passed, but the trees were not bare, yet, though October was nearly over; and, now and then, a brown leaf fell noiselessly through the air, and the faint rustle it made as it touched the many which had gone before it, seemed to deepen the quiet of the time. They had stopped to rest a little at the turn of the road, and were gazing over the pond to the hills beyond, as Mrs Snow spoke.

"Yes, I mind," said Graeme.

"And I mind, too," said Rose, softly.

"It's a bonny place," said Mrs Snow, in a little, "and it has changed but little in all those years. The woods have gone back a little on some of the hills; and the trees about the village and the kirkyard have grown larger and closer, and that is mostly all the changes."

"The old meeting-house has a dreary look, now that it is never used," said Rose, regretfully.

"Ay, it has that. I mind thinking it a grand and stately object, when I first saw it from the side of the water. That was before I had been in it, or very near it. But I learnt to love it for better things than stateliness, before very long. I was ill-pleased when they first spoke of pulling it down, but, as you say, it is a dreary object, now that it is no longer used, and the sooner it goes the better."

"Yes, a ruin to be an object of interest, should be of grey stone, with wallflowers and ivy growing over it," said Graeme.

"Yes, but this is not a country for ruins, and such like sorrowful things. The old kirk was good enough to worship in, to my thinking, for many a year to come; and the new one will ay lack something that the old one had, to you and me, and many a one besides; but the sooner the forsaken old place is taken quite away, the better, now."

"Yes, there is nothing venerable in broken sashes, and fluttering shingles. But I wish they had repaired it for a while, or at any rate, built the new one on the same site. We shall never have any pleasant associations with the new red brick affair that the Merleville people are so proud of."

And so they lingered and talked about many a thing besides the unsightly old meeting-house—things that had happened in the old time, when the bairns were young, and the world was to them a world in which each had a kingdom to conquer, a crown to win. Those happy, happy days!

"Oh! well," said Mrs Snow, as they rose to go up the hill again, "it's a bonny place, and I have learnt to love it well. But if any one had told me in those days, that the time would come, when this and no other place in the world would seem like home to me, it would have been a foolishness in my ears."

"Ah! what a sad dreary winter that first one was to you, Janet, though it was so merry to the boys and me," said Graeme. "It would have comforted you then, if you could have known how it would be with you now, and with Sandy."

"I am not so sure of that, my dear. We are untoward creatures, at the best, and the brightness of to-day, would not have looked like brightness then. No love, the changes that seem so good and right to look back upon, would have dismayed me, could I have seen them before me. It is well that we must just live on from one day to another, content with what each one brings."

"Ah! if we could always do that!" said Graeme, sighing.

"My bairn, we can. Though I mind, even in those old happy days, you had a sorrowful fashion of adding the morrow's burden to the burden of to-day. But that is past with you now, surely, after all that you have seen of the Lord's goodness, to you and yours. What would you wish changed of all that has come and gone, since that first time when we looked on the bonny hills and valleys of Merleville?"

"Janet," said Graeme, speaking low, "death has come to us since that day."

"Ay, my bairns! the death of the righteous, and, surely, that is to be grieved for least of all. Think of them all these years, among the hills of Heaven, with your mother and the baby she got home with her. And think of the wonderful things your father has seen, and of his having speech with David, and Paul, and with our Lord himself—"

Janet's voice faltered, and Graeme clasped softly the withered hand that lay upon her arm, and neither of them spoke again, till they answered Sandy and Emily's joyful greeting at the door.

Rose lingered behind, and walked up and down over the fallen leaves beneath the elms. Graeme came down again, there, and Mr Nasmyth came to speak to them, and so did Emily, but they did not stay long; and by and by Rose was left alone with Mr Millar, for the very first time during his visit. Not that she was really alone with him, for all the rest were still in the porch enjoying the mild air, and the bright October sunshine. She could join them in a moment, she thought, not that there was the least reason in the world for her wishing to do so, however. All this passed through her mind, as she came over the fallen leaves toward the gate on which Mr Millar was leaning; and then she saw that she could not so easily join the rest, at least, without asking him to let her pass. But, of course, there could be no occasion for that.

"How clearly we can see the shadows in the water," said she, for the sake of saying something. "Look over yonder, at the point where the cedar trees grow low. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," said he, but he was not looking the way of the cedars. "Rose, do you know why I came here?"

Rose gave a startled glance towards the porch where they were all sitting so quietly.

"It was to bring us news of Will, wasn't it? And to see Merleville?" said she.

Did she say it? Or had she only thought of it? She was not sure, a minute after, for Mr Millar went on as if he had heard nothing.

"I came to ask you to be my wife."

Did this take her by surprise? or had she been expecting it all the time? She did not know. She was not sure; but she stood before him with downcast eyes, without a word.

"You know I have loved you always—since the night that Harry took me home with him. My fancy has never wandered from you, all these years. Rose, you must know I love you, dearly. I have only that to plead. I know I am not worthy of you, except for the love I bear you."

He had begun quietly, as one begins a work which needs preparation, and strength, and courage, but his last words came between pauses, broken and hurriedly, and he repeated,—

"I know I am not worthy."

"Oh! Charlie, don't say such foolish words to me." And Rose gave him a single glimpse of her face. It was only a glimpse, but his heart gave a great leap in his breast, and the hand that lay on the gate which separated them trembled, though Rose did not look up to see it.

"Rosie," he whispered, "come down to the brook and show me Harry's waterfall."

Rose laughed, a little, uncertain laugh, that had the sound of tears in it; and when Charlie took her hand and put it within his arm, she did not withdraw it, and they went over the field together.

Graeme had been watching them from the porch, and as they passed out of sight, she turned her eyes toward Mrs Snow, with a long breath.

"It has come at last, Janet," said she.

"I shouldna wonder, dear. But it is no' a thing to grieve over, if it has come."

"No. And I am not going to grieve. I am glad, even though I have to seek my fortune, all alone. But I have Will, yet," added she, in a little. "There is no word of a stranger guest in his heart as yet. I am sure of Will, at least."

Mrs Snow smiled and shook her head.

"Will's time will come, doubtless. You are not to build a castle for yourself and Will, unless you make room for more than just you two in it, dear."

Emily listened, smiling.

"It would be as well to leave the building of Will's castle to himself," said she.

"Ah! yes, I suppose so," said Graeme, with a sigh. "One must build for one's self. But, Emily, dear, I built Rosie's castle. I have wished for just what is happening over yonder among the pine trees, for a long long time. I have been afraid, now and then, of late, that my castle was to tumble down about my ears, but Charlie has put his hand to the work, now, in right good earnest, and I think my castle will stand."

"See here, Emily," said Mr Snow, coming in an hour or two later, "if Mr Millar thinks of catching the cars for Boston, this evening, you'll have to hurry up your tea."

"But he has no thought of doing any such foolish thing," said Mrs Snow. "Dear me, a body would think you were in haste to get quit of the young man, with your hurry for the tea, and the cars for Boston."

"Why no, mother, I ain't. He spoke about it this morning, himself, or I'm pretty sure I shouldn't. I'll be glad to have him stay, and more than glad."

"He is going to stay and hear the minister preach," said Graeme. "You know you asked him, and I'm sure he will enjoy it."

"He is a good preacher," said Mr Snow, gravely.

"And he's a good practiser, which is far better," said his wife. "But I doubt, deacon, you'll need to put him out of your head now. Look down yonder, and tell me if you think Rosie is likely to bide in Merleville."

And the deacon, looking, saw Mr Millar and Rose coming slowly up the path together, and a duller man than Mr Snow could hardly have failed to see how matters stood between them. Mr Millar was looking down on the blushing face of his companion with an air alike happy and triumphant, and, as for Rose, Mr Snow had never seen her look at all as she was looking at that moment.

"Well," said his wife, softly.

"Well it is as pretty a sight as one need wish to see," said Mr Snow. He nodded his head a great many times, and then, without a word, turned his eyes on Graeme.

His wife smiled.

"No, I am afraid not. Every one must build his own castle, as I heard her saying—or was it Emily? this very afternoon. But we needna trouble ourselves about what may come to pass, or about what mayna. It is all in good hands."

"And, Rosie dear, all this might have happened at Norman's last year, if only Charlie had been bolder, and Harry not so wise."

The sisters were in their own room together. A good deal had been said before this time that need not be repeated. Graeme had made her sister understand how glad she was for her sake, and had spoken kind, sisterly words about Charlie, and how she would have chosen him for a brother out of all the world, and more of the same kind; and, of course, Rose was as happy, as happy could be. But when Graeme said this, she turned round with a very grave face.

"I don't know, Graeme. Perhaps it might; but I am not sure. I did not know my own mind then, and, on the whole, it is better as it is."

"Harry will be glad," said Graeme. Indeed, she had said that before.

Rose laughed.

"Dear, wise Harry! He always said Charlie was pure gold."

"And so he is," said Graeme.

"I know it, Graeme; and he says he is not good enough for me." And Rose laid down her cheek upon her sister's lap, with a little sob. "Ah! if he only knew, I am afraid—"

"Dear, it is the humility of true love, as you said about Harry. You love one another, and you need not be afraid."

They were silent for a long time after that, and then Rose said, flushing a little,—

"And, Graeme, dear, Charlie says—but I promised not to tell—"

"Well, you must not, then," said Graeme, smiling, with just a little throb of pain at her heart, as it came home to her that now, Rose, and her hopes and fears, and little secrets belonged more to another than to her.

"Not that it is a secret, Graeme," said her sister, eagerly.

"It is something that Charlie has very much at heart, but I am not so sure myself. But it is nothing that can be spoken about yet. Graeme, Charlie thinks there is nobody in the world quite so good as you."

Graeme laughed.

"Except you, Rosie."

"I am not good, Graeme, but very foolish and naughty, often, as you know. But I will try and be good, now, indeed I will."

"My darling," murmured Graeme, "I am so glad for you—so glad and thankful. We ought to be good. God has been very good to us all."

Of course all this was not permitted to shorten the visit of the sisters to their old friend. Mr Millar went away rather reluctantly, alone, but the Winter had quite set in before they went home. Mrs Snow was well by that time, as well as she ever expected to be in this world, and she bade them farewell with a good hope that she might see them again.

"But, whether or not," said she, cheerfully, "I shall ay be glad and thankful for the quiet time we have had together. There are few who can say of those they love, that they wish nothing changed in their life or their lot; but I do say that of all your father's bairns. No' but that there may be some crook in the lot of one or other of you, that I canna see, and maybe some that I can see; but when the face is set in the right airt (direction) all winds waft onward, and that, I trust, is true of you all. And, Rosie, my dear, it takes a steady hand to carry a full cup, as I have told you, many a time; and mind, my bairn, 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it,' and, 'the foundation of

God standeth sure.' Miss Graeme, my dear, 'They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength,' as you have learnt yourself long syne. God bless you both, and farewell."

They had a very quiet and happy winter. They had to make the acquaintance of their new sister, and a very pleasant duty it proved, Harry had at one time indulged some insane hopes of having his little Amy safe in his own keeping before the snow came, but it was soon made plain to him by Mrs Roxbury, that this was not for a single moment to be thought of. Her daughter was very young, and she must be permitted at least one season to see something of society before her marriage. She was satisfied with the prospect of having the young merchant for a son-in-law; he had established a reputation of the most desirable kind among the reliable men of the city, and he was, besides, a *gentleman*, and she had other daughters growing up. Still it was right that Amy should have time and opportunity to be quite sure of herself, before the irrevocable step was taken. If Mrs Roxbury could have had her way about it, she should have had this opportunity before her engagement had been made, or, at least, before it had been openly acknowledged, but, as that could not be, there must be no haste about the wedding.

And so the pretty Amy was hurried from one gay scene to another, and was an acknowledged beauty and belle, in both civic and military circles, and seemed to enjoy it all very well. As for Harry, he sometimes went with her, and sometimes stayed at home, and fretted and chafed at the state of affairs in a way that even his sisters considered unreasonable, though they by no means approved of the trial to which Amy's constancy was exposed. But they were not afraid for her. Every visit she made them—and many quiet mornings she passed with them—they became more assured of her sweetness and goodness, and of her affection for their brother, and so they thought Harry unreasonable in his impatience, and told him so, sometimes.

"A little vexation and suspense will do Harry no harm," said Arthur. "Events were following one another quite too smoothly in his experience. In he walks among us one day, and announces his engagement to Miss Roxbury, as triumphantly as you please, without a word of warning, and now he frets and fumes because he cannot have his own way in every particular. A little suspense will do him good."

Which was very hard-hearted on Arthur's part, as his wife told him.

"And, besides, it is not suspense that is troubling Harry," said Rose. "He knows quite well how it is to end. It is only a momentary vexation. And I don't say, myself, it will do Harry any harm to have his masculine self-complacency disturbed a little, by just the bare possibility of disappointment. One values what it costs one some trouble to have and to hold."

"Rose, you are as bad as Arthur," said Fanny.

"Am I? Oh! I do not mean that Harry doesn't value little Amy enough; but he is unreasonable and foolish, and it looks as if he were afraid to trust her among all those fine people who admire her so much."

"It is you who are foolish, now, Rose," said her sister. "Harry may be unreasonable, but it is not on that account; and Amy is a jewel too precious not to be guarded. No wonder that he grudges so much of her time, and so many of her thoughts to indifferent people. But it will soon be over now."

"Who knows? 'There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip,' you know," said Arthur. "Who knows but Harry may be the victim among us? Our matrimonial adventures have been monotonously prosperous, hitherto. Witness Rosie's success. It would make a little variety to have an interruption."

But Harry was not destined to be a victim. As the winter wore over, Mrs Roxbury relented, and "listened to reason on the subject," Harry said; and by and by there began to be signs of more than usual occupation in the Roxbury mansion, and preparations that were likely to throw Rosie's modest efforts in the direction of housekeeping altogether in the shade. But Rosie was not of an envious disposition, and enjoyed her pretty things none the less, because of the magnificence of Harry's bride. As for little Amy, she took the matter of the trousseau very coolly. Mamma was quite equal to all that, and took trouble enough, and enjoyment enough out of it all for both, and she was sure that all would be done in a right and proper manner, without anxiety or over-exertion on her part, and there was never a happier or more light-hearted little bride than she.

At first it was proposed that the two weddings should take place on the same day, but, afterwards, it was decided otherwise. It would be inconvenient for business reasons, should both the partners be away at the same time, and in those circumstances the wedding trip would be shortened. And besides, the magnificence of the Roxbury plans, would involve more trouble as to preparations, than would be agreeable or convenient; and Rose proposed to go quietly from her own home to the home Charlie was making ready for her; and it was decided that Harry's marriage should take place in the latter part of April, and the other early in the summer.

But before April, bad news came from Will. They heard from himself first, that he had not been sometimes as well as usual, and then a letter came from Mr Ruthven to Graeme, telling her that her brother was ill with fever, quite unable to write himself; and though he did not say in so many words, that there was danger for him, this was only too easily inferred from his manner of writing.

The next letter and the next, brought no better news. It was a time of great anxiety. To Graeme it was worst of all. As the days went on, and nothing more hopeful came from him, she blamed herself that she had not at once gone to him when the tidings of his illness first reached them. It was terrible to think of him, dying alone so far from them all; and she said to herself "she might, at least, have been with him at the last."

He would have been at home by this time, if he had been well, and this made their grief and anxiety all the harder to bear. If she could have done anything for him, or if she could have known from day to day how it was with him, even though she could not see him, or care for him, it would not have been so dreadful Graeme thought. Her heart failed her, and though she tried to interest herself still in the preparations and arrangements that had before given her so

much pleasure, it was all that she could do, to go quietly and calmly about her duties, during some of these very anxious days.

She did not know how utterly despondent she was becoming, or how greatly in danger she was of forgetting for the time the lessons of hope and trust which her experience in life had taught her, till there came from Mrs Snow one of her rare, brief letters, written by her own hand, which only times of great trial had ever called forth from her.

“My bairn,” she said, “are you not among those whom nothing can harm? *Absolutely nothing!* Whether it be life or death that is before your brother, you hae surely nothing to fear for *him*, and nothing for yourself. I think he will be spared to do God’s work for a while yet. But dear, after all that has come and gone, neither you nor I would like to take it upon ourselves to say what would be wise and kind on our Father’s part; and what is wise and kind will surely come to pass.”

Their suspense did not last very long after this. Mr Ruthven’s weekly letters became more hopeful after the third one, and soon Will wrote himself, a few feeble, irregular lines, telling how his friend had watched over him, and cared for him like a brother, during all those weeks in his dreary, city lodging; and how, at the first possible moment, he had taken him home to his own house, where Mrs Millar, his mother, was caring for him now; and where he was slowly, but surely, coming back to life and health again. There was no hope of his being able to be home to Harry’s marriage, but unless something should happen to pull him sadly back again, he hoped to see the last of Rosie Elliott, and the first of his new brother Charlie.

There were a few words meant for Graeme alone, over which she shed happy, thankful tears, and wrote them down for the reading of their old friend, “Brought face to face with death, one learns the true meaning and value of life. I am glad to come back again, for your sake Graeme, and for the sake of the work that I trust I may be permitted to do.”

After this they looked forward to the wedding with lightened hearts. It was a very grand and successful affair, altogether. Amy and her bridesmaids were worthy of all the admiration which they excited, and that is saying a great deal. There were many invited guests, and somehow, it had got about that this was to be a more than usually pretty wedding, and Saint Andrew’s was crowded with lookers-on, who had only the right of kind and admiring sympathy to plead for being there. The breakfast was all that it ought to be, of course, and the bride’s travelling-dress was pronounced by all to be as great a marvel of taste and skill, as the bridal robe itself.

Harry behaved very well through it all, as Arthur amused them not a little by gravely asserting. But Harry was, as an object of interest, a very secondary person on the occasion, as it is the usual fate of bridegrooms to be. As for the bride, she was as sweet and gentle, and unaffected, amid the guests, and grandeur, and glittering wedding gifts, as she had always been in the eyes of her new sisters, and when Graeme kissed her for good bye, she said to herself, that this dear little sister had come to them without a single drawback, and she thanked God in her heart, for the happiness of her brother Harry. Yes, and for the happiness of her brother Arthur, too, she added in her heart, and she greatly surprised Fanny by putting her arms round her and kissing her softly many times. They were in one of the bay windows of the great drawing-room, a little withdrawn from the company generally, so that they were unobserved by all but Arthur.

“Graeme’s heart is overflowing with peace and good will to all on this auspicious occasion,” said he, laughing, but he was greatly pleased.

After this they had a few happy weeks. Rosie’s preparations were by this time, too far advanced to give any cause for anxiety or care, and they all enjoyed the quiet. Letters came weekly from Will, or his friend, sometimes from both, which set them quite at rest about the invalid. They were no longer mere reports of his health, but long, merry, rambling letters, filled with accounts of their daily life, bits of gossip, conversation, even jokes at one another’s expense, generally given by Will, but sometimes, also, by the grave and dignified Mr Ruthven, whom, till lately, all but Charlie had come to consider almost a stranger. Still the end of May was come, and nothing was said as to the day when they expected to set sail. But before that time, great news had come from another quarter. Norman and his family were coming East. A succession of childish illnesses had visited his little ones, and had left both mother and children in need of more bracing air than their home could boast of in the summer-time, and they were all coming to take up their abode for a month or two, on the Gulf, up which health-bearing breezes from the ocean never cease to blow. Graeme was to go with them. As many more as could be persuaded were to go, too, but Graeme certainly; and then she was to go home with them, to the West, when their summer holiday should be over.

This was Norman’s view of the matter. Graeme’s plans were not sufficiently arranged as yet for her to say either yes or no, with regard to it. In the meantime, there were many preparations to be made for their coming, and Graeme wrote to hasten these arrangements, so that they might be in time for the wedding.

“And if only Will comes, we shall all be together again once more,” said she, with a long breath.

“To say nothing of Norman’s boys, and his wonderful daughter, and Fanny’s young gentleman, who will compare with any of them now, I think,” said Rose.

“We will have a house full and a merry wedding,” said Arthur. “Though it won’t be as grand as the other one, Rosie, I’m afraid. If we only could have Mrs Snow here, Graeme?”

Graeme shook her head.

“I am afraid that can hardly be in the present state of her health. Not that she is ill, but Mr Snow thinks the journey would be too much for her. I am afraid it is not to be thought of?”

“Never mind—Charlie and Rosie can go round that way and get her blessing. That will be the next best thing to

having her here. And by the time you are ready for the altar, Graeme, Janet will come, you may be sure of that."

June had come, warm and beautiful. Harry and his bride had returned, and the important but exhausting ceremony of receiving bridal visits was nearly over. Graeme, at least, had found them rather exhausting, when she had taken her turn of sitting with the bride; and so, on one occasion, leaving Rose and some other gay young people to pass the evening at Harry's house, she set out on her way home, with the feeling of relief that all was over in which she was expected to assist, uppermost in her mind. It would all have to be gone over again in Rosie's case, she knew, but she put that out of her mind for the present, and turned her thoughts to the pleasant things that were sure to happen before that time—Norman's coming, and Will's. They might come any day now. She had indulged in a little impatient murmuring that Will's last letter had not named the day and the steamer by which he was to sail, but it could not be long now at the longest, and her heart gave a sudden throb as she thought that possibly he might not write as to the day, but might mean to take them by surprise. She quickened her footsteps unconsciously as the thought came into her mind; he might have arrived already. But in a minute she laughed at her foolishness and impatience, and then she sighed.

"There will be no more letters after Will comes home, at least there will be none for me," she said to herself, but added, impatiently, "What would I have? Surely that will be a small matter when I have him safe and well at home again."

But she was a little startled at the pain which the thought had given her; and then she denied to herself that the pain had been there. She laughed at the idea, and was a little scornful over it, and then she took herself to task for the scorn as she had done for the pain. And then, frightened at herself and her discomfort; she turned her thoughts, with an efforts to a pleasanter theme—the coming of Norman and Hilda and their boys.

"I hope they will be in time. It would be quite too bad if they were to lose the wedding by only a day or two. And yet we could hardly blame Charlie were he to refuse to wait after Will comes. Oh, if he were only safe here! I should like a few quiet days with Will before the house is full. My boy!—who is really more mine than any of the others—all that I have, for my very own, now that Rosie is going from me. How happy we shall be when all the bustle and confusion are over! And as to my going home with Norman and Hilda—that must be decided later, as Will shall make his plans. My boy!—how can I ever wait for his coming?"

It was growing dark as she drew near the house. Although the lights were not yet in the drawing-room, she knew by the sound of voices coming through the open window that Arthur and Fanny were not alone.

"I hope I am not cross to-night, but I really don't feel as though I could make myself agreeable to visitors for another hour or two. I wish Sarah may let me quietly in; and I will go up-stairs at once. I wonder who they are!"

Sarah's face was illuminated.

"You have come at last, Miss Elliott," said she.

"Yes; was I expected sooner? Who is here? Is it you, Charlie? *You* are expected elsewhere."

It was not Charlie, however. A voice not unlike his spoke in answer, and said,—

"Graeme, I have brought your brother home to you;" and her hand was clasped in that of Allan Ruthven.

Chapter Forty Four.

The pleasant autumn days had come round again, and Mr and Mrs Snow were sitting, as they often sat now, alone in the south room together. Mr Snow was hale and strong still, but he was growing old, and needed to rest, and partly because the affairs of the farm were safe in the hands of his "son," as he never failed to designate Sandy, and partly because those affairs were less to him than they used to be, he was able to enjoy the rest he took.

For that was happening to him which does not always happen, even to good people, as they grow old; his hold was loosening from the things which for more than half a lifetime he had sought so eagerly and held so firmly. With his eyes fixed on "the things which are before," other things were falling behind and out of sight, and from the leisure thus falling to him in these days, came the quiet hours in the south room so pleasant to them both.

But the deacon's face did not wear its usual placid look on this particular morning; and the doubt and anxiety showed all the more plainly, contrasting as they did with the brightness on the face of his wife. She was moved, too, but with no painful feeling, her husband could see, as he watched her, though there were tears in the eyes that rested on the scene without. But she was seeing other things, he knew, and not sorrowful things either, he said to himself, with a little surprise, as he fingered uneasily an open letter that lay on the table beside him.

"It ain't hard to see how all *that* will end," said he, in a little.

"But," said his wife, turning toward him with a smile, "you say it as if it were an ending not to be desired."

"Ah, well!—in a general way, I suppose it *is*, or most folks, would say so. What do you think?"

"If *they* are pleased, we needna be otherwise."

"Well!—no—but ain't it a little sudden? It don't seem but the other day since Mr Ruthven crossed the ocean."

"But that wasna the first time he crossed the ocean. The first time they crossed it together. Allan Ruthven is an old

friend, and Miss Graeme is no' the one to give her faith lightly to any man."

"Well! no, she ain't. But, somehow, I had come to think that she never would change her state; and—"

"It's no' very long, then," said his wife, laughing. "You'll mind that it's no' long since you thought the minister likely to persuade her to it."

"And does it please you that Mr Ruthven has had better luck?"

"The minister never could have persuaded her. He never tried very much, I think. And if Allan Ruthven has persuaded her, it is because she cares for him as she never cared for any other man. And from all that Will says, we may believe that he is a good man, and true, and I am glad for her sake, glad and thankful. God bless her."

"Why, yes, if she must marry," said Mr Snow, discontentedly; "but somehow it don't seem as though she could fit in anywhere better than just the spot she is in now. I know it don't sound well to talk about old maids, because of the foolish notions folks have got to have; but Graeme did seem one that would 'adorn the doctrine' as an old maid, and redeem the name."

"That has been done by many a one already, in your sight and mine; and Miss Graeme will 'adorn the doctrine' anywhere. She has ay had a useful life, and this while she has had a happy one. But oh, man!" added Mrs Snow, growing earnest and Scotch, as old memories came over her with a sudden rush, "when I mind the life her father and her mother lived together—a life of very nearly perfect blessedness—I canna but be glad that Miss Graeme is to have a chance of the higher happiness that comes with a home of one's own, where true love bides and rules. I ay mind her father and her mother. They had their troubles. They were whiles poor enough, and whiles had thraward folk to deal with; but trouble never seemed to trouble them when they bore it together. And God's blessing was upon them through all. But I have told you all this many a time before, only it seems to come fresh and new to me to-day, thinking, as I am, of Miss Graeme."

Yes, Mr Snow had heard it all many a time, and doubtless would hear it many a time again, but he only smiled, and said,—

"And Graeme is like her mother?"

"Yes, she's like her, and she's not like her. She is quieter and no' so cheery, and she is no' near so bonny as her mother was. Rose is more like her mother in looks, but she doesna 'mind me of her mother in her ways as her sister does, because, I suppose, of the difference that the age and the country make on all that are brought up in them. There is something wanting in all the young people of the present day, that well brought up bairns used to have in mine. Miss Graeme has it, and her sister hasna. You'll ken what I mean by the difference between them."

Mr Snow could not. The difference that he saw between the sisters was sufficiently accounted for to him by the ten year's difference in their ages. He never could be persuaded, that, in any undesirable sense, Rose was more like the modern young lady than her sister. Graeme was perfect, in his wife's eyes, and Rose was not quite perfect. That was all. However, he did not wish to discuss the question just now.

"Well! Graeme is about as good as we can hope to see in *this* world, and if he's good enough for her that is a great deal to say, even if he is not what her father was."

"There are few like him. But Allan is a good man, Will says, and he is not one to be content with a false standard of goodness, or a low one. He was a manly, pleasant lad, in the days when I kened him. I daresay his long warstle with the world didna leave him altogether scatheless; but he's out of the world's grip now, I believe. God bless my bairn, and the man of her choice."

There was a moment's silence. Mrs Snow turned to the window, and her husband sat watching her, his brow a little clearer, but not quite clear yet.

"She *is* pleased. She ain't making believe a mite. She's like most women folks in *that*," said Mr Snow, emphasising to himself the word, as though, in a good many things, she differed from "women folk" in general. "They really do think in their hearts, though they don't always say so, that it is the right thing for girls to get married, and she's glad Graeme's going to do so well. But, when she comes to think of it, and how few chances there are of her ever seeing much of her again, I am afraid she'll worry about it—though she sertain don't look like it now."

Certainly she did not. The grave face looked more than peaceful, it looked bright. The news which both Rose and Will had intimated, rather than announced, had stirred only pleasant thoughts as yet, that was clear. Mr Snow put on his spectacles and looked at the letters again, then putting them down, said, gravely,—

"She'll have her home a great way off from here. And maybe it's foolish, but it does seem to me as though it was a kind of a come down to go back to the old country to live after all these years."

Mrs Snow laughed heartily.

"But then, it is no' to be supposed that she will think so, or he either, you ken."

"No, it ain't. If they did, they'd stay here, I suppose."

"Well, it's no' beyond the bounds of possibility, but they may bide here or come back again. But, whether they bide here or bide there, God bless them both," said Mrs Snow, with moistening eyes.

"God bless them both!" echoed her husband. "And, which ever way it is, you ain't going to worry the least mite about

it. Be you?"

The question was asked after a pause of several seconds, and Mr Snow looked so wistfully and entreatingly into his wife's face, that she could not help laughing, though there were tears in her eyes.

"No, I am no thinking of worrying, as you call it. It is borne in upon me that this change is to be for the real happiness of my bairn, and it would be pitiful in me to grudge her a day of it. And, to tell you the truth, I have seen it coming, and have been preparing myself for it this while back, and so I have taken it more reasonably than you have done yourself, which is a thing that wasna to be expected, I must confess."

"Seen it coming! Preparing for it!" repeated Mr Snow; but he inquired no farther, only looked meditatively out of the window, and nodded his head a great many times. By and by he said, heartily,—

"Well, if you are pleased, I am. God bless them."

"God bless all the bairns," said his wife, softly. "Oh, man! when I think of all that has come and gone, I am ready to say that 'the Lord has given me the desire of my heart.' I sought His guidance about coming with them. I had a sore swither ere I could think of leaving my mother and Sandy for their sakes, but He guided me and strengthened me, though whiles I used to doubt afterwards, with my sore heart wearying for my own land, and my own kin."

Mr Snow nodded gravely, but did not speak, and in a little she went on again:

"I sought guidance, too, when I left them, and now, looking back, I think I see that I got it; but, for a while, when death came, and they went from me, it seemed as though the Lord had removed the desire of my eyes with a stroke, because of my self-seeking and unfaithfulness. Oh, man! yon was a rough bit of road for my stumbling, weary feet. But He didna let me fall altogether—praise be to His name!"

Her voice shook, and there was a moment's silence, and then she added,—

"But, as for grieving, because Miss Graeme is going farther away, than is perhaps pleasant to think about, when she is going of her own free will, and with a good hope of a measure of happiness, that would be unreasonable indeed."

"Now, if she were to hold up her hands, and say, 'Now, lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,' it would seem about the right thing to do," said Mr Snow, to himself, with a sigh. "When it comes to giving the bairns up, willing never to see them again, it looks a little as if she was done with most things, and ready to go—and I ain't no ways ready to have her, I'm afraid."

The next words gave him a little start of surprise and relief.

"And we'll need to bethink ourselves, what bonny thing we can give her, to keep her in mind of us when she will be far-away."

"Sartain!" said Mr Snow, eagerly.

"Not that I think she'll be likely to forget us," added his wife, with a catch in her breath. "She's no of that nature. I shouldna wonder if she might have some homesick thoughts, then, even in the midst of her happiness, for she has a tender heart! But, if they love one another, there is little doubt but it will be well with them, seeing they have the fear of God before their eyes. And, she may come back and end her days on this side of the sea, yet, who knows?"

"I shouldn't wonder a mite," said Mr Snow.

"But, whether or not, if she be well, and happy, and good, that is the main thing. And whiles I think it suits my weakness and my old age better to sit here and hear about the bairns, and think about them, and speak to you about them and all that concerns them, than it would to be among them with their youth and strength, and their new interests in life. And then, they dinna need me, and you do," added Mrs Snow, with a smile.

"That's so," said he, with an emphasis that made her laugh.

"Well then, let us hear no more about my worrying about Miss Graeme and the bairns. That is the last thing I am thinking of. Sitting here, and looking over all the road we have travelled, sometimes together, sometimes apart, I can see plainly that we were never left to choose, or to lose our way, but that, at every crook and turn, stood the Angel of the Covenant, unseen then, and, God forgive us, maybe unthought of, but ever there, watching over us, and having patience with us, and holding us up when we stumbled with weary feet. And knowing that their faces are turned in the right way, as I hope yours is, and mine, it is no' for me to doubt but that He is guiding them still, and us as well, and that we shall all come safe to the same place at last." She paused a moment, because of a little break and quiver in her voice, and then she added,—

"Yes. 'The Lord hath given me the desire of my heart' for the bairns. Praise be to His name."

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