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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK DAVID FLEMING'S FORGIVENESS ***

Margaret Murray Robertson

"David Fleming's Forgiveness"

Chapter One.

A Canadian Settlement.

The first tree felled in the wilderness that lay to the south and west of the range of hills of which Hawk's Head is the highest, was felled by the two brothers Holt. These men left the thickly-settled New England valley where they were born, passed many a thriving town and village, and crossed over miles and miles of mountain and forest to seek a home in a strange country. Not that they thought of it as a strange country, for it was a long time ago, and little was known by them of limits or boundary lines, when they took possession of the fertile Canadian valley which had till then been the resort only of trappers and Indians. They were only squatters, that is, they cut down the great trees, and built log-houses, and set about making farms in the wilderness, with no better right to the soil than that which their labour gave. They needed no better right, they thought; at least, there was no one to interfere with them, and soon a thriving settlement was made in the valley. It turned out well for the Holts and for those who followed them, for after a good many years their titles to their farms were secured to them on easy terms by the Canadian Government, but they had held them as their own from the first.

Within ten years of the coming of the brothers, the cluster of dwellings rising around the saw-mill which Gershom Holt had built on the Beaver River—the store, the school-house, the blacksmith's shop—began to be spoken of by the farmers as "the village." Every year of the ten that followed was marked by tokens of the slow but sure prosperity which, when the settlers have been men of moral lives and industrious habits, has uniformly attended the planting of the later Canadian settlements.

Gradually the clearings widened around the first log-houses, and the unsightly "stumps" grew smaller and blacker under the frequent touch of fire. The rough "slash fences" made of brushwood and fallen trees, gave place to the no less ugly, but more substantial "zigzag" of cedar rails. The low, log farm-houses began to be dwarfed by the great framed barns which the increasing harvest rendered necessary, until a succession of such harvests rendered possible and prudent the building of framed dwellings as well.

As the clearings widened and the farms became more productive, the prosperity of the village advanced. A "grist-mill" was added to the saw-mill, and as every year brought more people to the place, new arts and industries were established. The great square house of Gershom Holt, handsome and substantial, was built. Other houses were made neat and pretty with paint, and green window-blinds, and door-yard fences, as time went on.

Primitive fashions and modes of life which had done for the early days of the settlement, gave place by degrees to the more artificial requirements of village society. The usual homespun suit, which even the richest had considered sufficient for the year's wear, was supplemented now by stuffs from other looms than those in the farm-house garrets. Housewives began to think of beauty as well as use in their interior arrangements. "Boughten" carpets took the place of the yellow paint and the braided mats once thought the proper thing for the "spare room" set apart for company, and articles of luxury, in the shape of high chests of drawers and hard hair-cloth sofas, found their way into the houses of the ambitious and "well-to-do" among them. The changes which increasing means bring to a community were visible in the village and beyond it before the first twenty years were over. They were not all changes for the better, the old people declared; but they still went on with the years, till Gershom, as the village came to be called, began to be looked upon by the neighbouring settlements as the centre of business and fashion to all that part of the country.

The Holts were both rather indifferent as regarded religious matters, but they had the hereditary respect of their countrymen for "school and meeting privileges," and they were strong in the belief that the ultimate prosperity of their community, even in material things, depended mainly on the growing intelligence and morality of the people; so it happened that much earlier than is usual in new settlements, measures were taken to secure the means of secular and religious instruction for the people. But it was not merely in material wealth and prosperity that was evident the progress of which the inhabitants of Gershom were becoming so justly proud.

As the Holts were the first comers to Gershom, so for a long time they kept the first place in the town, both in social and in business matters. "The Holts had made Gershom," the Holts said, and other people said it too, only sometimes it was added, that "they had also made themselves, and that all the pains they had taken had been to that end." But this was saying too much, for all the Holts had great pride in the place and its prosperity, and almost all the industries that

contributed to its growth, as time went on, had been commenced by one or other of them.

Gershom Holt was the more successful of the two brothers, partly because of his greater energy and capacity for business, and partly because he had "located" at that point on the Beaver River where the water-power could be made easily available for manufacturing purposes. No time was lost by him in doing what skill and will could do with only limited capital to make a beginning in that direction, and every new artisan who came to the town, and did well for himself in it, did something to increase the wealth of Gershom Holt also. So in course of time he became the rich man of the place. He dealt closely in business matters, he liked the best of a bargain, and, as a rule, got it; but he was of a kindly nature, and was never hard to the poor, and many a man in Gershom was helped to a first start in business through his means, so that he was better liked and more entirely trusted than the one rich man in a rising country place is apt to be.

His brother Reuben was not so fortunate, either in making money or in winning favours. His farm bordered on the river, but the meadows were narrow, and the land rose abruptly into round rocky hills, fit only for pasture. Beyond the hills, on the higher level, the land was fairly good, but the cultivation of it was difficult, and he had never done much with it. He was neither strong nor courageous. Some of his children died, and others "went wrong," and he fell into misanthropic ways, and for several years before his death he was seldom seen in the village.

For more than twenty years the Beaver River settlement, as it was at first called, was occupied by people of American origin who had come in with the Holts, or had followed after them. But about the time when the land of which they had taken possession was secured to them by the Government, a number of Scotch families came to settle in that part of the town called North Gore, lying just under the morning shadows of Hawk's Range. To these people, for whose land and ancestry they had a traditional admiration and respect, the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers extended a warm welcome, and it was called a good day for the town when they settled down in it.

With the best intentions on the part of all concerned, affairs will go wrong in the history of towns as well as of individuals. Unhappily the new settlers were not at first brought into contact with the best and kindest of the people. Some of them suffered in purse, not from "bad men," but from men whose easy consciences did not refuse to take advantage of their necessities, and of their ignorance of the country and its ways; and some of them suffered in their feelings from what they believed to be curiosity and "meddlesomeness" on the part of neighbours, who in reality meant to be helpful and friendly.

So the North Gore folk "kept themselves to themselves" as they expressed it, and struggled on through some hard years, which more friendliness with their neighbour; might have made easier. The old settlers watched with an interest, on the whole kindly, the patient labour, the untiring energy which did not always take the shortest way to success, but which made its ultimate attainment sure. But to them the firm adherence of the Scotchmen to their own opinions and plans and modes of life, looked like obstinacy and ignorance, and they spoke of them as narrow and bigoted, and altogether behind the times, and the last charge was the most serious in their estimation.

The new-comers refused to see anything admirable in the ease and readiness with which most of the old settlers, disciplined by necessity, could turn from one occupation to another, as circumstances required. The farmer who made himself a carpenter to-day and a shoemaker to-morrow was, in their estimation, a "Jack-of-all-trades," certainly not a farmer in the dignified sense which they had been accustomed to attach to the name.

The strong and thrifty Scotchwomen, who thought little of walking and carrying great baskets of butter and eggs the three or four miles that lay between North Gore and the village, found matter for contemptuous animadversion in the glimpses they got of their neighbours' way of life, and spoke scornfully to each other of the useless "Yankee" wives, who were content to bide within doors while their husbands did not only the legitimate field-work, but the work of the garden, and even the milking of the cows as well. The "Yankee" wives in their turn shrugged their shoulders at the thought of what the housekeeping must be that was left to children, or left altogether, while the women were in the hay or harvest-field as regularly and almost as constantly as their husbands and brothers. Of course they did not speak their minds to one another about all this, but they knew enough about one another's opinions to make them suspicious and shy when they met.

And they did not meet often. The mistress of a new farm found little time for visiting. Winter had its own work, and the snow and the bitter cold kept them within doors. When winter was over they could only think how best to turn to account the long days of the short Canadian summer for the subduing of the soil, out of which must come food for their hungry little ones. Every foot reclaimed from the swamp or the forest, every unsightly thing burned out of the rough, new land, meant store of golden grain and wholesome bread for the future. So, with brave hearts and willing hands, the North Gore women laboured out of doors as well as within, content to wait for the days when only the legitimate woman's work should fall to their share. There were some exceptions, of course, and friendly relations were established between individuals, and between families, in the North Gore and the village; but a friendly feeling was for a good many years by no means general, and two distinct communities lived side by side in the town of Gershom.

Even the good people among them—God's own people—who have so much in common that all lesser matters may well be made nothing of between them—even they did not come together across the wall which ignorance and prejudice and circumstances had raised. At least they did not for a time. The Grants and the Scotts and the Sangsters travelled Sabbath by Sabbath the four miles between the North Gore and the village, and, passing the house where a good man preached the Gospel in the name of the Lord Jesus, travelled four miles further still for the sake of hearing one of their own kirk and country preach the same Gospel in the name of the same Lord. And so the Reverend Mr Hollister, and Deacon Moses Turner, and other good men among them, thought themselves justified in setting them down as narrow-minded and bigoted, and incapable of appreciating the privileges which had fallen to their lot.

There was really no good reason why they should not all have worshipped together as one community, for in the doctrines which they held, the descendants of the Pilgrim Fathers differed little from those who had been taught in Scottish kirks the truth for which their fathers had fought and died. The little band who kept together, and held to the form of church government which they had learned to revere in their native land, were by reason of their isolation, practically as independent in regard to the matters of their kirk as were their Puritan neighbours who claimed this independence as their right.

In point of numbers, and in point of means, the older settlers were the stronger of the two parties; in point of character and piety, even they themselves were not sure that the superiority was on their side. However that might be, all felt that the coming in among them of the North Gore men and their families was much to be desired, and after a time measures were taken to bring the subject of union before them in the most favourable manner.

So, accompanied and encouraged by Deacon Turner, Mr Hollister, the minister, visited the North Gore folk family by family, and was respectfully and kindly received by them all, but he did not make much progress in the good work he had

undertaken. His remarks about brotherly love and the healing of breaches were for the most part listened to in silence, and so were Deacon Turner's cautious allusions to the subscription-list for the dealing with current expenses. Nowhere did they meet with much encouragement to hope that their efforts to bring the two communities together would be successful. For several years after this the North Gore folk continued to make their "Sabbath-day's journey" past the village church. Then for a while they had the monthly ministrations of a preacher of their own order in their own neighbourhood, and on other days kept up meetings among themselves, and did what they could in various ways to keep themselves to themselves as of old.

But time wrought changes. The children who had come to the North Gore grew up, and they did not grow up to be just such men and women as their fathers and mothers had been. It is not necessary to say whether they were worse men or better. They were different. There was not much change in the manner of life in many of the homes. The Sabbath was as strictly kept, and the young people were as strictly taught and catechised and looked after in Scottish fashion as of old, and they bade fair to grow up as cautious and as "douce," and as much attached to old ways and customs as if they had been brought up on the other side of the sea, quite beyond the reach of Yankee innovations and free-and-easy colonial ways. But even the most "douce" and cautious amongst them were without the stiffness and strength of the old-time prejudice, and the young people of the different sections of the township, brought together in the many pleasant ways that are open to young people in country places, no longer kept apart as their fathers had done.

There were troubles in Gershom still of various kinds, misunderstandings and quarrels, and violations of the golden rule between individuals and between families, and some of them took colour, and some of them took strength, from national feeling and national prejudice; but there were no longer two distinct communities living side by side in the town, as there once had been. And by and by, when old Mr Grant and Deacon Turner, and some others of the good men who had held with one or other of them on earth, were gone to sit down to eat bread together in the kingdom of heaven, the good men they had left behind them drew closer together by slow degrees. And when Mr Hollister grew old and feeble, and unable to do duty as pastor of the village church, all agreed that the chief consideration, in the appointment of a successor, must be the getting of such a man as might be able to unite the people of all sections into one congregation at last.

This was the state of things in Gershom when it began to be whispered that there was serious trouble arising between Jacob Holt and old Mr Fleming.

Chapter Two.

The Flemings.

There were already a good many openings in the North Gore woods when the Flemings took possession of the partially cleared farm lying half-way between it and the village, at a little distance from the road. They built on it a house of grey, unhewn stone, long and low like the home they had "left on the other side of the sea." They called the place Ythan Brae, and the clear shallow brook that ran down from their rocky pastures, through the swamp to Beaver River, they called the Ythan Burn because the familiar names were pleasant on their lips and in their ears in a strange land; but it was a long time before it seemed like home to them.

For a while the neighbours knew about them only what could be learned from the fields visible from the North Gore road. That Mr Fleming had experience, tireless industry, and some money, three things to insure success in his calling, the canny Scotch farmers were not slow to perceive in the change that gradually came over the once-neglected land. Mr Fleming seemed a grave, silent man, with the traces of some severe trouble showing in his face. And this trouble his wife had shared, for, though she was still a young woman when she came to Gershom, there were streaks of white in her brown hair, and on her fair, serene face there was the look which "tells of sorrow meekly borne." The gloom and sternness which sometimes made people shrink from coming in contact with her husband was never seen in her.

The eldest of their two sons was almost a man when they came to live at Ythan Brae. He was a quiet, well-doing lad, reserved like his father, but pleasant-spoken and friendly like his mother. His brother Hugh had inherited his mother's good looks and sunny temper, and he had, besides, the power which does not always accompany the possession of personal beauty or cleverness—the power of winning love.

Long afterward, when the mention of Hugh's name was a sorrowful matter, the people of the North Gore who knew him best used to speak of him with a kind of wonder. He was such "a bonny laddie," with eyes like stars, and even at sixteen a head above his elder brother. He was so blithe and kindly, and clever too. According to these people there was nothing he could not do, and nothing that he would not trouble himself to do to give pleasure to his friends. He was "the apple of his father's eye," the delight of his life; and that his mother's heart did not break when she lost him, was only because, even at the worst of times, God's grace is sufficient for help and healing to those who stay themselves on Him.

For Hugh "went wrong." Oh, sorrowful words! seeming so little and meaning so much: care and fear, watching and waiting, sleepless nights and days of dread to those who looked on with no power to bring him back again. How he went wrong may be easily guessed. He had been led astray by evil companions his mother always said. Not that to her knowledge, or to the knowledge of any one, he had gone so very far astray till the end came. There had been doubts and fears for him, and earnest expostulations from those who loved him, but it was a great shock and surprise to all the countryside when it came to be known that he had gone away never to return.

What he had done was certainly known only to two or three. There were whispers of forgery, and even robbery, and some said it was only debt, which his father refused to pay. There were others involved in the matter, and it was kept quiet. Some of the young Holts were among the number. Jacob, Gershom's eldest son, went away for a while. It was not known whether they had gone together, but Jacob soon came home again, and as far as he was concerned, everything was as before.

But after a time there came heavy tidings to Ythan Brae. Hugh Fleming was dead—in the very flower of his youth—"with all his sins on his head;" his father cried out in the agony of the knowledge. There was only a word or two in a strange handwriting to say that, after sharp and sudden illness, he had died among strangers.

The father and mother lived through the time that followed. How they lived none knew, for they were alone at the Brae. They never passed the bounds of their own farm through all that terrible winter, and the neighbours, who sometimes went to see them, as a general thing only saw Mrs Fleming. She stood between her husband and the sorrowful curiosity, the real but painful sympathy which he could not have borne—which even she found it so hard to

bear. Neither then, nor in all the years that followed, did any one but his boy's mother hear him utter his boy's name. They lived through it, but that winter was like the "valley of the shadow of death" to them both.

When spring came, the worst was over, the neighbours said, and in one way so it was. Their son James brought his wife home to live with them, and they settled down to their changed life, making the best of it. Mrs Fleming's cheerfulness came back in the midst of many cares, for her son's wife was a delicate woman, and the little children came fast to their home. Mrs Fleming governed the household still, and in a sense began life anew in their midst.

But after his son came to live with them, Mr Fleming gave up to him all that part of their affairs that would have taken him away from home. He was a born farmer; his forefathers had been farmers for as many generations as he could trace, and he had a hereditary reverence for mother earth as the giver of bread to man. He took pleasure in the work of the farm, labouring patiently and cheerfully to bring it to the highest productiveness which the soil and the variable Canadian climate would permit. Hollows were filled and heights were levelled, and the wide stretch of lowland on either side of the Burn near its mouth, was year by year made to yield. A road or two to be cleared and drained and tilled, and one might have travelled a summer day through the fine farming country without seeing a finer farm than he made it at last.

And all this time the farm, with his interest in it and his labour on it, was doing a good work for him, and he grew to love the place as his home, and the home of the little children who were growing up about him.

But just as a tranquil gloaming seemed to be closing over their changeful day of life, a new and heavy sorrow fell upon them. Their son James died, and the two old people found themselves left alone to care for his delicate widow and her fatherless children. Other troubles followed closely on this. James Fleming had never been a worldly-wise man, and he died in debt. Some of the claims were just, some of them were doubtful, none of them could have held against his father. But the old man gave not a moment's hearing to those who made this suggestion. The honour of his son's name and memory was at stake, and in his haste and eagerness to settle all, and because he had so fallen out of business ways, the best and wisest plans were not taken in the arrangement of his affairs.

When the time of settlement came, it was found that most of the claims against James Fleming had passed into the hands of the Holts. It was Jacob alone who was to be dealt with, for his father was an old man, and his connection with the business had long been merely nominal. Jacob Holt had changed since the days when he had been, as Hugh Fleming's father firmly believed, the ruin of his son. He had changed from an ill-doing, idle lad, into a man, noted even in that busy community for his attention to business, a man who took pains to seek a fair reputation for honesty and generosity among his fellow-townsmen. But Mr Fleming liked the man as little as he had liked the lad, and it added much to the misery of his indebtedness that his obligation was to him. He was growing an old man, conscious of his increasing weakness and inability to cope with difficulties, and he believed his "enemy," as he called him, to be capable of taking advantage of these. His faith failed him sometimes, and in his anxiety and unhappiness, he uttered harder words than he knew.

Everybody in Gershom knew of his debt, but no one knew what made the bitterness of his indebtedness to the old man. The part which Jacob Holt had had in the trouble, that had come on him through his son, had never been clearly understood, and was now well-nigh forgotten in the place. But the father had not forgotten it. He would gladly have mortgaged his farm, or even have given up half of it altogether, to any friend who could have advanced him the money to pay his debt, but no such friend was at hand, and it ended, as all knew it must end, in a seven years' mortgage being taken by Jacob Holt, and the only thing the old man could do now was to keep silence and hope for better days.

The little Flemings were growing up healthy and happy, a great comfort and a great care to their grandparents. They were bright and pretty children, and good children on the whole, the neighbours said, and they said also, that there seemed to be no reason why the last days of the old people should not be contented and comfortable, notwithstanding their burden of debt. For the Holts would never be hard on such old neighbours, and as the boys grew up, to take the weight of the farm-work on them, the debt might be paid, and all would go well. This was the hopeful view of the matter taken by Mrs Fleming also, but the old man always listened in silence to such words.

When five years had past, no part of the debt had yet been paid. Even the interest had been in part paid with borrowed money, and there were other signs and tokens that the Flemings were going back in the world. It was not to be wondered at; for Mr Fleming was an old man, and the greater part of the farm-work had to be done by hired help, at a cost which the farm could ill bear. And the chances were, that for a while at least the state of affairs would be worse rather than better.

Then there came to Mr Fleming this proposal from Jacob Holt. If twenty-five acres of the swampy land that bordered the Beaver River just where the brook fell into it were given up to him the mortgage should be cancelled, and the debt should be considered paid. He declared that the proposal was made solely in the interest of the Fleming family, and there were a good many people in Gershom who believed him.

To this proposal, however, Mr Fleming returned a prompt and brief refusal. He said little about it, but it was known that he believed evil of Jacob Holt with regard to the matter, and though he kept silence, others spoke. The North Gore people took the matter up, and so did the people of the village. Mr Fleming had friends in both sections of the town, and some of them did not spare hard words in the discussion.

Jacob Holt was now the rich man of Gershom, one of the chief supporters of the church and of every good cause encouraged in the town, and all this did not promise well for the union in church matters so earnestly desired by many good people in Gershom.

Chapter Three.

The Holts.

Gershom Holt was to all appearance a hale old man, but for a long time before this he had had little to do with the management of the business of Holt and Son. He still lived in the great square house which had succeeded the log-house built by him in the early days of the settlement. Two of his children lived with him—Elizabeth, the youngest child of his first wife, and Clifton, the only child of his second wife, who had died in giving him birth.

Elizabeth was good, pretty, and clever, and still single at twenty-four. The persons she loved best in the world were her father and her younger brother. Her father loved and trusted her entirely, and every passing day made him more

dependent on her for comfort and for counsel; for he was a very old man, and in many ways needed the care which it was his daughter's first duty and pleasure to give. Her brother loved and trusted her too in his way, but he was only a lad, and too well contented with himself and his life to know the value of her love as yet, and she was not without anxious thoughts about him. He was supposed to be distinguishing himself in a New England College as he had before distinguished himself in the High-School of the village, and only spent his vacations at home.

There was a difference of nearly twenty years in the ages of Gershom Holt's two sons, and they had little in common except their father's name. Elizabeth loved them both, and respected the youngest most. Jacob was a little afraid of his sister, and took pains to be on the best of terms with her, and he could not forget sometimes in her presence that he had done some things in his life which he was glad she did not know.

He had married, early in life, a pretty, commonplace woman, who had grown thin and querulous in the years that had passed since then, and who was not at all fitted to be the great lady of Gershom, as the rich man's wife might have been. That place was filled by Elizabeth, who filled it well and enjoyed it.

With its large garden and orchard, and its sloping lawn, shaded by trees beginning to look old and venerable beside those of more recent growth in the village street, the old square house looked far more like the great house of the village than the finer mansion lately built by Jacob further up the hill. Under Elizabeth's direction it had been modernised and beautified by the throwing out of a bow-window and the addition of a wide veranda on two sides. Everything about it, without and within, indicated wealth moderately used, for comfort and not for display. It was the pleasantest house in the village to visit at, everybody said; for the squire—so old Mr Holt was generally called—was very hospitable, and all sorts of people were made welcome there.

There were by this time people in Gershom who had outlived the remembrance of the days when all the settlers, rich and poor alike, were socially on a level, and who spoke smoothly and loftily about "station" and "position" and "the working classes," but the young Holts were not among them. Elizabeth and Clifton deserved less credit than was given them on account of their unassuming and agreeable manners with the village people, for they did not need to assert themselves as some others did. Miss Elizabeth, for all her unpretending ways, was the great lady of the village, and liked it, and very likely would have resented it had a rival appeared to call her right in question.

The Holts of the Hill were, in most respects, very different from the Holts of the village. They lived and worked and dressed and conducted themselves generally very much as they had been used to do in the early days of the settlement. The old man had been long dead, and his widow and her two daughters lived on the farm. One of the daughters was a childless widow, Betsey, the other had never married. "A good woman with an uncertain temper," was the character which many of her friends would have given her, and some of them might have added that she had had a hard life and many cares, and no wonder that she was a little hard and sour after all she had passed through. But this was by no means all that could be said of Miss Betsey.

There was little intercourse between the Holts of the Hill and the village Holts, and it was not the fault of Elizabeth. It was Betsey who decidedly withdrew from any intimacy with her cousins. She was too old-fashioned, too "set" in her way to fall in with all their new notions, she said, and from the time that Elizabeth came home from school to be the mistress of her father's house, and the most popular person in Gershom, she had had but little to do with her. It hurt Elizabeth that it should be so, for she respected her cousin and would have loved her, and would doubtless have profited—by their intercourse if it had been permitted. But she never got beyond a certain point in the intimacy with her, at least she did not for a time.

The Hill Holts were much respected in the neighbourhood, and Miss Betsey exerted an influence in its way almost as great as did Miss Elizabeth. One or two persons who knew them both well, said they were very much alike, though to people generally they seemed in temper, in tastes, and in manner of life as different as well could be. They were alike and they were different, and the chief difference lay in this, that Miss Betsey was growing old and had passed through troubles in her time, and Miss Elizabeth was young and had most of her troubles before her.

The village of Gershom Centre, as it was called, at this time lay chiefly on the north bank of the Beaver River. Its principal street ran north and south at right angles to the river, and the village houses clustered closest at the end of the bridge that crossed it. At the south end of the bridge another street turned west down the river, and at a little distance became a pleasant country road which led to the hill-farm of the Holts, and past it to the neighbouring township of Fosbrooke. Another street went east, on the north side of the river a few hundred yards, and then turned north to the Scotch settlement at the Gore.

On this street, before it turned north, the new church stood. There was a wide green common before it, shaded by young trees, and only the inclosing fence and the road lay between this and the river, which was broad and shallow, and flowed softly in this part of its course. The church was a very pretty one of its kind—white as snow, with large-paned windows, and green Venetian blinds. It had a tall slender spire, in which hung the first bell that had ever wakened the echoes in that part of the country for miles around, and of the church and the bell, and the pretty tree-shaded common before it, the Gershom people were not a little proud.

Behind the church lay the graveyard, already a populous place, as the few tall monuments and the many less pretentious slabs of grey or white stone showed. It was inclosed by a white fence tipped with black, and shaded by many young trees, and it was a quiet and pleasant place. Between the church and the graveyard was a long row of wooden sheds. They were not ornamental, quite the contrary; but they were very useful as a shelter for the horses of the church-goers who came from a distance, and they had been added by way of conciliating the North Gore people when one and another of them began to come to the village church.

Toward the church one fair Sabbath morning in June, many Gershom people were hastening. Already there were vehicles of great variety in the sheds, and horses were tied here and there along the fences under the trees. There were groups of people lingering in Gershom fashion on the church steps and on the grass, and the numbers, and the air of expectation over all, indicated that the occasion was one of more than usual interest. All Gershom had turned out hoping to see and hear the new minister, whose coming was to be an assurance of peace to the church and to the congregation. They were to be disappointed for that day, however, for the minister had not come. Squire Holt and his son and daughter came with the rest. The old man lingered at the gate exchanging greetings with his neighbours, and the young people went on toward the door.

"Gershom is the place after all, Lizzie," said her brother. "It is pleasant to see all the folks again. But I don't believe I'm going to stay to see Jacob through this business. Well! never mind, Lizzie," he added, as his sister looked grave. "I'll see you through, if you say so. And here come Ben and Cousin Betsey; let us wait and speak to them."

"Clifton," said his sister, earnestly, "Ben is Cousin Betsey's best hand this summer. It won't do to beguile him from his work, dear. You must not try it."

"Nonsense, Elizabeth. It is rather soon to come down on a fellow like that, before I have even spoken to him. I never made Ben idle, quite the contrary."

Coming slowly up the green slope between the gate and the church were the two persons recognised by Clifton as Ben and Cousin Betsey. They moved along in a leisurely way, nodding to one and speaking to another, so that there was time to discuss them as they approached.

"Lizzie," said her brother, "do you suppose you'll ever come to look like Cousin Betsey?"

"I am quite sure I shall never wear such a bonnet," said Elizabeth, pettishly. "Why will she make a fright of herself?"

"It is as an offset to you—so fine as you are," said Clifton, laughing. "She had that gown before Ben was born; I remember it perfectly."

Miss Betsey Holt was a striking-looking person, notwithstanding the oddness and shabbiness of her dress. Scantiness is a better word for it than shabbiness, for her dress was of good material, neat and well preserved, but it was without a superfluous fold or gather, and in those days, when, even in country places, crinoline was beginning to assert itself, she did look ludicrously straight and stiff. Miss Elizabeth's dress was neither in material nor make of the fashion that had its origin in the current year, and city people, wise in such matters, might have set them both down as old-fashioned. But in appearance, as they drew near one another, there was a great contrast between them, though in feature there was a strong resemblance.

There was more than fifteen years' difference in their ages, and Betsey looked older than her forty years. She was above the middle height, thin and dark and wrinkled, and there were white streaks in the brown hair brought down low and flat upon the cheek, but in every feature the bright youthful beauty of the girl had once been hers. Some of the neighbours, who were regarding them as they met, would have said that once Miss Betsey had been much handsomer than ever Miss Elizabeth would be. For Miss Betsey had been young at a time when there was little danger that indolence or self-indulgence could injure the full development of healthful beauty, and as yet Miss Elizabeth had fallen on easy days, and was languid at times, and delicate, and if the truth must be told, a little discontented with what life had as yet brought her, and a little afraid of what might lie before her, and there was a shadow of this on her fair face to-day.

They had not much to say to each other, and they stood in silence watching the two lads. Clifton was considered in Gershom to have learned very fine manners, since he went to college, but he had forgotten them for the moment, and was as boyish and natural as his less sophisticated cousin. They were only second cousins, Ben being the only child of Reuben Holt's eldest son, who had died early. His Aunt Betsey had brought the boy up, and "had not had the best of luck in doing it," she sometimes told him; but he was the dearest person in the world to her, for all her pretended discontent with her success. She watched the two lads as they went into the eager discussion of something that pleased them, and so did Elizabeth, for it was a pleasant sight to see.

"Cousin," said Elizabeth, gently, "I do not think you need fear that my boy will harm yours."

"I am not afraid—not much. Ben is the stronger of the two, morally, if he isn't so bright. My boy is to be trusted," and she looked as though she would have added, "that is more than you can say for yours."

Elizabeth looked grave.

"Cousin Betsey, you were always hard on my brother Clifton."

Betsey shrugged her shoulders.

"You are harder on him this minute than I am. I don't suppose he has done anything very bad this time—worse than usual, I mean."

"Have you heard anything? Did you know he was sent home?" asked Elizabeth in dismay.

"He sent a letter to Ben a spell ago, and I saw it lying round. You needn't tell him so. If it is as he says, there aint much wrong this time. Here is Hepsey Bean."

Miss Bean had come to inquire if anything had been heard of the minister, but the cousins were too much occupied in watching the two lads to answer her, and Hepsey's eyes followed theirs.

"Are not they alike as two peas?" said she. "Not their fixings exactly, I don't mean—"

Miss Elizabeth laughed, even Miss Betsey smiled, touched with a grim sense of humour as she regarded the lads. Their "fixings" were certainly different. Everything, from the tips of Clifton's shining boots to the crown of his shining hat, declared him to be a dandy. His collar, necktie, coat, and all the rest, were in the latest fashion—a fashion a sight of which, but for his coming home, the Gershom people might not have been favoured with for a year to come. His compulsory departure from the seat of learning had been delayed while the tailor completed his summer outfit, so that there could be no mistake about his "fixings."

As for Ben, he was fine also, in a new suit of homespun, which, since it came from the loom, and, indeed, before it went to the loom, had passed through no hands but those of his Aunt Betsey. It was not handsome. The home-made thick grey cloth of the country, which the farmers' wives of those days took pride in preparing for the winter-wear of their "men folks," was an article of superior wearing qualities, and handsome in its way. But it was the half-cotton fabric, dingy and napless, considered good enough for summer wear, in which Ben was arrayed. Made as a loose frock and overall to be worn in the hay-field, or following the plough, it was well enough; but made into a tight-fitting Sunday-suit, it was not handsome, certainly. As far as "fixings" were concerned, the cousins were a contrast. Betsey looked and laughed again, but Elizabeth did not laugh. She knew that Cousin Betsey was sensitive where Ben was concerned.

"Clothes don't amount to much anyway," said Betsey. "Hepsey's right. They are alike as two peas, but Ben is the strongest morally, because he hasn't been spoiled by property, as Clifton has. Not that he is altogether spoiled yet."

"But about the minister?" interrupted Miss Bean.

"He has not come, it seems," said Elizabeth. "There is to be a sermon read to-day," but she did not say that her brother Jacob was to read it.

The bell which had been delayed beyond the usual time pealed out, and all faces were turned to the church door. Clifton and Ben lingered till the last.

"There is old Mr Fleming going off home," said Ben as he caught sight of a figure on horseback turning the corner toward North Gore. "I expect he don't care about your brother Jacob's preaching," he added, gravely.

"Isn't it his practice he don't care about?" said Clifton, laughing.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Ben.

"Well, I can't say I care much about his preaching either. Come, Ben, let us go down to the big elm and talk things over."

Ben shook his head, but followed.

"It is not just the same as if the minister was there," said he, doubtfully.

"But then what will Aunt Betsey say?"

"Oh, she won't care since it's only Jacob. And she needn't know it."

"Oh, she's got to know it. But it is not any worse for us than for old Mr Fleming. It's pleasant down here."

It was pleasant. The largest elm tree in Gershom grew on the river bank, and its great branches stretched far over to the other side, making cool shadows on the rippling water. The place was green and still, "a great deal more like Sunday than the inside of the meeting-house," Clifton declared. But Ben shook his head.

"That's one of the loose notions you've learned at college. Your sister believes in going to meetings, and so does Aunt Betsey."

So did Clifton it seemed, for there was a good deal more said after that, and they quite agreed that whether it was altogether agreeable or not, it was quite right that people generally should go to church, rather than to the river, as they had done. How it happened, Ben hardly knew, but in a little while they found themselves in Seth Fairweather's boat, and were paddling up the river, out and in among the shadows, past the open fields and the cedar swamp to the point where the Ythan Burn fell into the Beaver. They paddled about a while upon the Pool, as a sudden widening of the channel of the river was called, till the heat of the sun sent them in among the shadows again. Then Clifton leaned back at his ease, while Ben waved about a branch of odorous cedar to keep the little black flies away.

"Now tell me all about it, Cliff," said he.

Clifton winced, but put a bold face on the matter, and told in as few words as possible the story of his having been sent home. It was not a pleasant story to tell, though he had been less to blame than some others who had escaped punishment altogether. But sitting there in the shadow of the cedars, with Ben's great eyes upon him, he felt more sorry and ashamed, and more angry at himself, and those who had been concerned with him in his folly, than ever he had felt before.

"The fun didn't pay that time, did it, Cliff?" said Ben. "I don't believe it ever does—that kind of fun."

"That's what Aunt Betsey says, eh?" said Clifton. "Well, she's about right."

"And you'll never do so, any more; will you, Cliff?"

Clifton laughed.

"But, Cliff, you are almost a man now, you are a man, and it don't pay in the long run to drink and have a good time. It didn't pay in my father's case, and Aunt Betsey says—"

"There, that will do. I would rather hear Aunt Betsey's sermons from her own lips, and I am going up to the Hill some time soon."

There was silence between them for a little while, then Ben said:

"There's a meeting up in the Scott school-house 'most every Sunday afternoon, Cliff; suppose we go up there, and then I can tell Aunt Betsey all about it."

Clifton had no objections to this plan; so pushing the boat in among the bushes that hung low over the water, they left it there and took their way by the side of Ythan Burn. But he would not be hurried. As a boy he had liked more than anything else in the world, loitering through the fields and woods with Ben, and it gave him great satisfaction to discover that he had not outgrown this liking. He forgot his fine manners and fine clothes, his college friends and pleasures and troubles; and Ben forgot Aunt Betsey, and that he was doing wrong, and they wandered on as they had done hundreds of times before.

For though no one, not even his Aunt Betsey, thought Ben very bright, Clifton would have taken his word about beast and bird and creeping thing, and about all the growing life in the woods, rather than the word of any other ten in Gershom. They made no haste, there fore, in the direction of the Scott school-house, but wound in and out among the wood paths, using eyes and ears in the midst of the rejoicing life of which the forest was so full at that June season.

They kept along the side of the brook, and by and by came out of the woods on the edge of the fine strip of land which old Mr Fleming had made foot by foot from the swamp. There was no finer land in the township, none that had been more faithfully dealt with than this. Ben uttered an exclamation of admiration as he looked over it to the hill beyond. Even Clifton, who knew less and cared less about land than he did, sympathised with his admiration.

"He might mow it now, and have a second crop before fall," said Ben, with enthusiasm. "It would be a shame to spoil so fine a meadow by building a factory on it, wouldn't it?"

"It would spoil it for hay, but factories are not bad in a place, I tell you. It might be a good thing to put one here."

"Not for Mr Fleming. He don't care for factories. He made the meadow out of the swamp, and nobody else has any business with it, whatever they may say about mortgages and things."

"But who is talking about mortgages and things?" asked Clifton, laughing.

"Oh, most everybody in Gershom is talking. I don't know much about it myself. And Jacob's one of your folks, and you'd be mad if I told you all that folks say."

Clifton laughed.

"Jacob isn't any more one of my folks than you are—nor so much. Do you suppose I would stay away from meeting to come out here with Jacob? Not if I know it."

"He wouldn't want you to, I don't suppose."

"Not he. He doesn't care half so much about me as you do."

"No, he don't. I think everything of you. And that's why Aunt Betsey says you ought to be careful to set me a good example."

"That's so," said Clifton, laughing. "Now tell me about old Fleming."

Ben never had the power of refusing to do what his cousin asked him, but he had little to tell that Clifton had not heard before. There was talk of forming a great manufacturing company in Gershom; but there had been talk of that since ever Clifton could remember. The only difference now was that a new dam was to be built further up the river at a place better suited for it, and with more room for the raising of large buildings than was the point where Mr Holt had built his first saw-mill in earlier times. It was supposed to be for this purpose that Jacob Holt was desirous to obtain possession of that part of the Fleming farm that lay on the Beaver River; for, though a company was to be formed, everybody knew that he would have the most to say and do about it. But Mr Fleming had refused to sell, "and folks had talked round considerable," Ben said, and he went on to repeat a good deal that was anything but complimentary to Jacob.

"But I told our folks that you and Uncle Gershom would see Mr Fleming through, and Aunt Betsey, she said if you were worth your salt you'd stay at home and see to things for your father, and not let Jacob disgrace the name. But I said you'd put it all straight, and Aunt Betsey she said—"

"Well, what did Aunt Betsey say?" for Ben stopped suddenly.

"She told me to shut up," said Ben, hanging his head.

Clifton laughed heartily.

"And she doesn't think me worth my salt. Well, never mind. It is an even chance that she is right. But I think she is hard on Jacob."

There was time for no more talk. They had skirted the little brook till they came to a grove of birch and wild cherry-trees that had been left to grow on a rocky knoll where the water fell over a low ledge on its way from the pasture above. The sound of voices made them pause before they set foot on the path that led upwards.

"It's the Fleming children, I suppose," said Ben. "They'll be telling us, mayhap, that we're breaking the Sabbath, and I expect so we be."



"A pretty picture they made together."—Page 39.

Chapter Four.

The Fleming Children.

Instead of following the path, Clifton went round the knoll to the brook, and paused again at the sight of a pair or two of little bare feet in the water, and thus began his acquaintance with the Fleming children. There were several of them, but Clifton saw first a beautiful brown boyish face, and a pair of laughing eyes half hidden by a mass of tangled curls, and recognised Davie. Close beside the face was another so like it, and yet so different, that Clifton looked in wonder. The features were alike, and the eyes were the same bonny blue, and the wind was making free with the same dark curls about it. But it was a more delicate face, not so rosy and brown, though the sun had touched it too. There was an expression of sweet gravity about the mouth, and the eyes that were looking up through the leaves into the sky had no laughter in them. It was a fair and gentle face, but there was something in it that made Clifton think of stern old Mr Fleming sitting on the Sabbath-day among his neighbours in the church.

"That must be sister Lizzie's wee Katie," said Clifton to himself.

The slender girlish figure leaned against the rock on which the boy was lying so that the two faces were nearly on a level, and a pretty picture they made together. Clifton had been making facetious remarks to his sister about the old-fashioned finery of the dressed-up village girls on their way to church, but he saw nothing to criticise in the straight, scant dress, of one dim colour, unrelieved by frill or collar, which Katie Fleming wore. He did not think of her dress at all, but of the slim, graceful figure and the bonny girlish face turned so gravely up to the sky. He was not sure whether it was best to go forward and speak or not. Ben stood still, looking also.

"I say, Katie," said the boy, lifting his head, "what is the seven-and-twentieth?"

"Oh fie, Davie! to be thinking of propositions and such-like worldly things, and this the Sabbath-day," said Katie, reprovingly.

"Just as if you werena thinking of them yourself, Katie."

"No, I'm no' thinking of them. They come into my head whiles. But I'm no' fighting with them, or taking pleasure in them, as I do other days. I'm just resting myself in this bonny quiet place, looking at the sky and the bonny green grass. Eh, Davie, it's a grand thing to have the rest and the quietness of the Sabbath-day."

The girl shook her head at the answer which Clifton did not hear, and went on.

"It gives us time to come to ourselves, and to mind that there is something else in the world besides just cheese and butter-making, and these weary propositions. Of course it's right to go to the kirk, and I promised grannie I would go this afternoon to the Scott school-house with the bairns. But I like to bide quiet here a while, too."

"I would far rather bide here," said Davie.

"Yes, but, Davie, we mustna think light of the Sabbath-day. Think what it is to grandfather. He would like it better if we were better bairns. I'm just glad of the rest."

"You're tired of your books," said Davie, with a little brotherly contempt in his voice. "You're but a lassie, however, and it canna be helped."

"I canna do two things at once. I'm tired of making cheese and keeping up with girls at the school too. And I'm glad it's the Sabbath-day for the rest. And, Davie," she added, after a pause, "I'm not going to the school after you stop."

Grannie needs me at home, and I'm no' going."

"Catch me staying at home if I could go," said Davie.

"But, Davie, it is my duty to help grannie to make all the money we can to pay the debt, and get grandfather out of the hands of those avaricious Holts. What noise was yon, Davie?"

Listeners seldom hear good of themselves, and the mention of the "avaricious Holts" startled Clifton into the consciousness that he was listening to that which was not intended for his ears, and he drew to Ben's side.

"It's the little Flemings," said Ben; "aint they Scotchy? That is the way they always speak to one another at home."

They went round the knoll through the trees among the broken pieces of rock scattered over the little eminence. Before they reached the brook the other way a voice hailed them.

"Hallo, Ben! Does your Aunt Betsey know that you're going about in such company on Sunday?"

"If meeting's out she knows, or she mistrusts," said Ben, taking the matter seriously. "We're going over to the Scott school-house to meeting. Aunt Betsey'll like that, anyhow."

They all laughed, for Ben and the Fleming children had long been friends.

"Here's Clif got home sooner than he expected to, and Jacob, he's reading a sermon by himself because the minister didn't come, and so—we came away. This is Clif."

The smile which had greeted Ben went out of Katie's eyes, and surprise and a little offence took its place, as she met Clifton's look. But she laughed merrily when the lad, stepping back, took off his hat and bowed low, as he might have done to any of the fine ladies of B—, where he had been living of late.

But in a little while she grew shy and uncomfortable, and conscious of her bare feet, and moved away. Clifton noticed the change, and said to himself that she was thinking of the mortgage, and of "those avaricious Holts."

"Your grandfather did not go to meeting, either," said Ben, anxious to set himself right in Katie's eyes. "We saw him turning the corner as we went down to the river."

"Grandfather!" repeated Katie. "I wonder why?"

"I suppose it was because Jacob was going to read the sermon," said Ben, reddening, and looking at his cousin.

Katie reddened too and turned to go.

"Grandfather must be home, then, Davie; it's time to go in," and Kate looked grave and troubled.

"Davie," repeated she, "it's time to come home."

Davie followed her a step or two, and they heard him saying:

"There's no hurry, Katie; if my grandfather didna go to the kirk, he'll be holding a meeting all by himself in Pine-tree Hollow, and he'll not be at the house this while, and I want to speak to Ben."

"Davie," said his sister, "mind it's the Sabbath-day."

The chances were against his minding it very long. It was a good while before he followed his sister to the house, and he brought the Holts with him to share their dinners of bread and milk.

"We're all going to the meeting together, grannie," said he, "and Kate," he added in a whisper, "Clif Holt has promised to lend me the book that the master gave you a sight of the other day, and I am to keep it as long as I like; and he's not so proud as you would think from his fine clothes and his fine manners; but he couldna tell me the seven-and-twentieth, more shame to him, and him at the college."

"He thinks much of himself," said Katie, "for all that."

The little Flemings and their mother and the two Holts went to the Scott school-house, as had been proposed, and the house was left to Mrs Fleming as a general thing. This "remarkable old lady," as the Gershom people had got into the way of calling her to strangers, greatly enjoyed the rare hours of rest and quiet that came at long intervals in her busy life, but she did not enjoy them to-day. Her Bible lay open upon the table, and "Fourfold State" and her "Solitude Sweetened" were within reach of her hand, but she could not settle to read either of them. She wandered from the door to the gate and back again in a restless, anxious way, that made her indignant with herself at last.

"As gin he wasna to be trusted out of my sight an hour past the set time," said she, going into the house and sitting resolutely down with her book in her hand. "And it is not only to him, but to his master, that my anxious thoughts are doing dishonour, as though I had really anything to fear. But he was unco' downhearted when he went away."

She looked a very remarkable old lady as she sat there, still and firm. She was straight as an arrow, small and slender, wrinkled indeed, but with nothing of the weazened, sunken look which is apt to fall on small women when they grow old. She was a beautiful old woman, with clear bright eyes, and a broad forehead, over which the bands of hair lay white as snow.

She had known a deal of trouble in her life, and, for the sake of those she loved, had striven hard to keep her strength and courage through it all, and the straight lines of her firmly-closed lips told of courage and patience still. But a quiver of weakness passed over her face, and over all her frame, as at last a slow, heavy footstep came up to the door. She listened a moment, and then rising up, she said cheerfully:

"Is this you, gudeman? You're late, arena you? Well, you're dinner is waiting you."

She did not wait for an answer, nor did she look at him closely till she had put food before him. Then she sat down beside him. He, too, was remarkable-looking. He had no remains of the pleasant comeliness of youth as she had, but there were the same lines of patience and courage in his face. He was closely shaven, with large, marked features and dark, piercing eyes. It was a strong face, good and true, but still it was a hard face, and it was a true index of his character. He was firm and just always, and almost always he was kind, slow to take offence, and slow to give it; but being offended, he could not forgive. He looked tired and troubled to-night—a bowed old man.

"Where are the bairns?" were the first words he uttered, and his face changed and softened as he spoke. She told him where they had gone, and that their mother had gone with them. Then she made some talk about the bonny day and the people he had seen at church, speaking quietly and cheerfully till he had finished his meal, and then, having set aside the dishes, she came close to him, and, laying her hand on his arm, said gently: "David, we are o'er lane in the house. Tell me what it is that's troubling you."

He did not answer her immediately.

"Is it anything new?" she asked.

"No, no. Nothing new," said he, turning toward her. At the sight of her fond wet eyes he broke down.

"Oh, Katie! my woman," he groaned, "it's ill with me this day. I hae come to a strait bit o' the way and I canna win through. 'Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven,' the Book says, and this day I feel that I havena forgiven."

Instead of answering, she bent over him till his grey head lay on her shoulder and rested there. He was silent for a little.

"When I saw him younder to-day, smooth and smiling, standing so well with his fellow-men, my heart rose up against him; I daredna bide, lest I should cry out in the kirk before them all and call God's justice in question—God that lets Jacob Holt go about in His sunshine, with all men's good word on him, when our lad's light went out in darkness so long ago. Is it just, Katie? Call ye it right and just?"

She did not answer a word, but soothed him with hand and voice as she might have soothed a child. She had done it many times before during the forty years that she had been his wife, but she had never, even in the time of their sorest troubles, seen him so moved. She sat down quietly beside him and patiently waited.

"Has anything happened, or is anything threatening that I dinna ken of?" asked she after a little.

"No, nothing new has happened. But I am growing an old failed man, Katie, and no' able to stand up against my ain fears."

"Ay, we are growing old and failed; our day is near over, and so are our fears. Why should we fear? Jacob Holt canna move the foundations of the earth. And even though he could, we needna fear, for 'God is our refuge and strength.'"

He was leaning back with closed eyes, tired and fainthearted, and he did not answer.

"There's no fear for the bairns," she went on, cheerfully. "They are good bairns. There are few that hae the sense and discretion of our Katie, and her mother's no' without judgment, though she is but a feckless body as to health, and has been a heavy handful to us. They'll be taken care of. The Lord is ay kind."

And so she went on, gentle soothing alternating with more gentle chiding, all the time keeping away from the sore place in his heart, not daring for his sake and for her own to touch it till this rare moment of weakness should be past.

"You are wearied, and no wonder, with the heat and your long fast; lie down on your bed and rest till it be time to catechise the bairns—though I'm no' for Sabbath sleeping as an ordinary thing. Will you no' lie down? Well, you might step over as far as the pasture-bars and see if all is right with old Kelso and her foal, for here come the bairns and their mother, and there will be no peace with them till they get their supper, and your head will be none the better for their noise."

And so she got him away, going with him a few steps up the field. She turned in time to meet the troop of children who, in a state of subdued mirthfulness suitable to the day and their proximity to their grandfather, were drawing near. She had a gentle word of caution or chiding to each, and then she said softly to Katie:

"You'll go up the brae with your grandfather and help him if there is anything wrong with old Kelso. And cheer him up, my lassie. Tell him about the meeting, and the Sunday-school; say anything you think of to hearten him. You ken well how to do it."

"But, grannie," said Katie, startled, "there is nothing wrong, is there?"

"Wrong," repeated her grandmother. "Ken you anything wrong, lassie, that you go white like that?"

The brave old woman grew white herself as she asked, but she stood between Katie and the rest, that none might see.

"I ken nothing, grannie, only grandfather didna bide to the meeting to-day, Ben told me."

"Didna bide to the meeting? Where went he, then? He has only just come home."

"It was because of Jacob Holt," Ben said.

"But Katie, my woman, you had no call surely to speak about the like of that to Ben Holt?"

"I didna, grannie. I just heard him and came away. And, grannie, I think maybe grandfather was at Pine-tree Hollow. It

would be for a while's peace, you ken, as the bairns were at home."

"Pine-tree Hollow! Well, and why not?" said grannie, too loyal to the old man to let Katie see that she was startled by her words. "It has been for a while's peace, as you say. And now you'll run up the brae after him, and take no heed, but wile him from his vexing thoughts, like a good bairn as you are."

"And there's nothing wrong, grannie?" said Katie, wistfully.

"Nothing more than usual; nothing the Lord doesna ken o', my bairn. Run away and speak to him, and be blithe and douce, and he'll forget his trouble with your hand in his."

Katie's voice was like a bird's as she called: "Grandfather, grandfather, bide for me."

The old man turned and waited for her.

"Doesna your grandmother need you, nor your mother, and can you come up the brae with that braw gown on?"

Katie smiled and took his hand.

"My gown will wash, and I'll take care, and grannie gave me leave to come."

And so the two went slowly up the hill, saying little, but content with the silence. When they came back again Mrs Fleming, who was waiting for them at the door, felt her burden lightened, for her first glance at her husband's face told her he was comforted.

"My bonny Katie, gentle and wise, a bairn with the sense of a woman," said she to herself, but she did not let her tenderness overflow. "We have gotten the milking over without you, Katie, my woman. And now haste you and take your supper, for it is time for the bairns' catechism and we mustna keep your grandfather waiting."

That night when Ben Holt went home he found the house dark and apparently forsaken. Miss Betsey sat rocking in her chair in solitude and darkness, and she rocked on, taking no notice when Ben came in.

"Have you got a sick headache, Aunt Betsey?" said Ben after a little; he did not ask for information, but for the sake of saying something to break the ominous silence. He knew well Aunt Betsey always had a sick headache and was troubled when he had been doing wrong.

"I shall get over it, I expect, as I have before; talking won't help it."

Ben considered the matter a little. "I don't know that," said he, "it depends some on what there is to say, and you don't need to have sick headache this time, for I haven't been doing anything that you would think bad."

Miss Betsey laughed unpleasantly.

"What has that to do with it?"

"Well, I haven't been doing anything bad, anyhow."

"Only just breaking Sunday in the face and eyes of all Gershom. You are not a child to be punished now. Go to bed."

"I don't know about breaking Sunday; I didn't any more than old Mr Fleming. He didn't care about going to Jacob's meeting, and no more did Clif and me. We went along a piece, and then we went to the Scott school-house to meeting. It was a first-rate meeting."

"What about Mr Fleming; has he and Jacob been having trouble?" asked Miss Betsey, forgetting in her curiosity her controversy with Ben.

"Nothing new, I don't suppose. And Clif, he says that he don't believe but what Jacob'll do the right thing, and he says he'll see to it himself."

"There, that'll do," interrupted Miss Betsey. "If Clifton Holt was to tell you that white was black you'd believe him."

"I'd consider it," said Ben, gravely.

"If you want any supper it's in the cupboard," said Miss Betsey, rising, "I've had supper and dinner too, up to Mr Fleming's, and we went to meeting at the Scott school-house. It wasn't Clif's fault this time, Aunt Betsey, and we haven't done anything very bad either. And Clif, he's going to be awful steady, I expect, and stick to his books more than a little, and he sent his respects to you, Aunt Betsey, and he says—"

"There, that'll do. Go to bed if you don't want to drive me crazy."

"I'll go to bed right off if you'll come and take away my candle, Aunt Betsey. No, I don't want a candle; but if you'll come in and tuck me up as you used to, for I haven't been doing anything this time, nor Clif either. Will you, Aunt Betsey?"

"Well, hurry up, then," said Aunt Betsey, with a break in her voice, "for this day has been long enough for two, and I'm thankful it's done," and then she added to herself:

"I sha'n't worry about him if I can help it. But it is so much more natural for boys to go wrong than to go right, that I can't help it by spells. After all I've seen, it isn't strange either."

"Ben," said she, when she took his candle in a little while, "you mustn't think you haven't done wrong because the day turned out better than it might have done. It only happened so. It was Sabbath-breaking all the same to leave

meeting and go up the river. There, I aint going to begin again. But wrong is wrong, and sin is sin whichever way it ends."

"That's so," said Ben, penitently.

"And there is only one way for sin to end, however it may look at the beginning, and it won't help you to have Clif fall into the same condemnation. There, good-night."

"I don't know about that last," said Ben to himself. "It would seem kind o' good to have Clif round 'most anywhere. But he's going to work straight this time, I expect, and I guess he'll have all the better chance to walk straight too."

Chapter Five.

The Minister.

The event of the summer to the people of Gershom was the coming of the new minister. It is not to be supposed that with a population of a good many hundreds there was uniformity of opinion in religious matters in the town. To say nothing of the North Gore people, the people of Gershom generally believed in the right of private judgment, and exercised it to such purpose that, within the limits of the township, at least a half dozen denominations were represented. The greater number of these, however, had not had much success in establishing their own peculiar form of worship, except for a little while at a time, and the greater part of the people were at this time more or less closely identified with the village corporation. So that it is scarcely an exaggeration to say, that all Gershom was moved to welcome the Reverend William Maxwell among them.

Never, except perhaps in their most confidential whispers among themselves, did the wise men of Gershom confess that they were disappointed in their minister. They had not expected perfection, or they said they had not, but each and every one of them had expected some one very different from the silent, sallow, heavy-eyed young man whom Jacob Holt, at whose home he was for the present to live, introduced to them.

Something had been said of the getting up of a monster tea-meeting to welcome him, but uncertainty in the time of his coming, because of illness, had prevented this, and as soon as he was seen there was a silent, but general decision among those in authority that this would not have been a successful measure. So he was conducted from house to house by Jacob Holt, or some other of the responsible people, and he was praised to his flock, and his flock were praised to him, but there was not much progress made toward acquaintance for a while, and even the least observing of them could see that there were times when contact with strangers, to say nothing of the necessity of making himself agreeable to them, was almost more than the poor young man could bear.

Still, nobody confessed to disappointment. On the contrary, Jacob Holt and the rest of the leaders of public opinion declared constantly that he was "the right man in the right place." Of Scottish parentage, brought up from his boyhood in Canada, and having received his theological education in the United States, if he were not the man to unite the various contending national elements in Gershom society, where was such a man to be found?

No man could have every gift, it was said, and whatever Mr Maxwell might seem to lack as to social qualities, he was a preacher. All agreed that his sermons were wonderful. It was the elaborately prepared discourses of his seminary days, that the young man moved by a vague, but awful dread of breaking down, gave to his people first. It was well that the learned professor's opinion of them and of their author had come to Gershom before him. There could be no doubt as to the sermons after that testimony, so it was no uncertain sound that went forth about his first pulpit efforts.

They were clear, they were logical, they were profound. Above all, they were pronounced by the orthodox North Gore people to be "sound." It is true he read them, but even that did not spoil them; and it was a decided proof that these people were sincere in their admiration, and in earnest in their desire for union and "the healing of breaches" that this was the case. In old times, that is, in the time of old Mr Grant, and old Mr Sangster, to be a "proper minister" was in their opinion to be a "dumb dog that could not bark," and such a one had ever been an object of compassion, not to say of contempt among them. But Mr Maxwell's sermons were worth reading, they said, and they waited. And so the first months were got safely over.

Safely, but, alas! not happily, for the young minister; scarcely recovered from severe illness, weak in body and desponding in mind, he had no power to accommodate himself to the circumstances toward which all the preparation and discipline of his life had been tending. Over a time of sickness and suffering he looked back to days of congenial occupation and companionship, with a regret so painful that the future seemed to grow aimless and hopeless in its presence. As men struggle in dreams with unseen enemies, so he struggled with the sense of unfitness for the work he had so joyfully chosen, and for which he had so earnestly prepared, with the fear that he had mistaken his calling, and that he might dishonour, by the imperfect fulfillment of his duty, the Master that he loved.

He despised himself for the weakness which made it a positive pain for him to come in contact with strangers with whom he had no power to make friends. He began to regard the hopes that had sustained him during the time of preparation, the pleasure he had taken in such remnants of other people's work in the way of preaching as had fallen to him as a student; and the encouragement which had been given to him as to his gifts and talents, as so many temptations of Satan. It was this sense of unfitness for his work that made him fall back at first on the sermons of his student days, and which made the pulpit services, praised by his hearers, seem to him like a mockery. It was a miserable time to him. He distrusted himself utterly, and at all points; which would not have been so bad a thing if he had not also distrusted his Master.

But such a state of things could not continue long. It must become either worse or better, and better it was to be. As Mr Maxwell's health improved, he became less despondent, and more capable of enjoying society. Clifton Holt was at home again, but no one, not even Miss Elizabeth, could have anticipated that he would be almost the first one in Gershom to put the minister for the moment at his ease.

Clifton had gone back to his college examinations at the appointed time; and had so far retrieved his character for steadiness and scholarship, that he was permitted to start fair another year, the last in his college course. He was now at home for the regular vacation, and was proving the sincerity and strength of his good resolutions to his sister's satisfaction, by remaining in Gershom, and contenting himself with the moderate enjoyments of such pleasures as village society, and the neighbouring woods and streams afforded.

Miss Elizabeth had seconded Jacob's rather awkward attempts to bring her brother and the young minister together, taking a vague comfort in the idea that the intercourse must do Clifton good. But as a general thing Clifton kept aloof a little more decidedly than she thought either kind or polite, so that it was a surprise to her, as well as a pleasure, when one night they came in together; and they had not been long in the house, before she saw that whether the minister was to do her brother good or not, her brother had already done good to the minister. They were dripping wet from a summer shower, that had overtaken them; but Mr Maxwell looked a good deal more like other people, Miss Elizabeth thought, than ever she had seen him look before.

"Mr Maxwell was in despair at the thought of venturing with muddy boots into Mrs Jacob's 'spick and span' house, so I brought him here," said Clifton. "We have been down at the Black Pool, and I have been taking a lesson in fly-fishing. We have earned our tea, and we are ready for it."

"And you shall have it. But I thought we were to—well, never mind. Go up-stairs and make yourselves comfortable, and tea will be ready when you come down."

"No one knows how to do things quite so well as Lizzie," said Clifton to himself, when they came down to find the tea-table laid, not in the great chilly dining-room, but in the smaller sitting-room, on the hearth of which a bright wood-fire was burning. The old squire had been examining their fish, and listened with almost boyish interest to his son's description of their sport. In the effort he made to entertain the old gentleman Mr Maxwell looked still more like other people, and Clifton's coat, which he wore, helped to the same effect.

"I stumbled over him lying on his face in Finlay's grove," said Clifton to his sister. "He would have run away, if I had not been too much for him. We borrowed Joe Finlay's rod, and he went fishing with me. It is a great deal better for him than being stunned by women's talk at Mrs Jacob's."

"Yes, the sewing-circle!" said Elizabeth, "What will Mrs Jacob say? Did he forget it? Of course he was expected home."

"He said nothing about it, nor did I. Jacob asked me to go over in the evening. Why are you not there?"

"I have been there all the afternoon. I came home to make father's tea. I told Mrs Jacob I would go back. I am afraid Mr Maxwell's coming here to-night will offend her."

"Of course, but what if it does?"

"And do you like him? Does he improve on acquaintance?"

"He turns out to be flesh and blood, not a skin stuffed with logic, and the odds and ends of other people's theological opinions. He is a dyspeptic being, homesick and desponding, but he is a man. And look here, Lizzie; if you really want to do a good work, you must take him in hand, and not let Mrs Jacob, and the deacons, and all the rest of them sit on him."

"How am I to help it, if such be their pleasure?"

"I have helped it to-night. Don't say a word about the sewing-circle, lest his conscience should take alarm. I hope I shall see Mrs Jacob's face when she hears that he has spent the evening here."

"I don't care for Mrs Jacob, but I am afraid the people may be disappointed." For in Gershom the ladies met week by week in each other's houses to sew for the benefit of some good cause, and their husbands and brothers came to tea in the evening, and there was to be a more than usually large gathering on this occasion, Elizabeth knew. "However, I am not responsible," thought she.

So she said nothing, and her father in a little while said rather querulously, that he hoped she was not going out again.

"Not if you want me, father. It will not matter much, I suppose."

"You will not be missed," said her brother.

Mr Maxwell did not seem to think it was a matter with which he had anything to do. He made no movement to go away when tea was over, and Elizabeth put away all thought of the disappointment of the people assembled, and of her sister-in-law's displeasure, and enjoyed the evening. Mr Maxwell seemed to enjoy it too, though he did not say much. Clifton kept himself within bounds, and was amusing without being severe or disagreeable in his descriptions of some of the village customs and characters, and though he said some things to the minister that made his sister a little anxious and uncomfortable for the moment, she could see that their interest in each other increased as the evening wore on.

It came out in the course of the conversation that Mr Maxwell had made the acquaintance of Ben Holt in his rambles, but he had never been at the Hill-farm, and had very vague ideas as to the Hill Holts or their circumstances, or as to their relationship to the Holts of the village. Clifton professed to be very much surprised.

"Has not Mrs Jacob introduced you to Cousin Betsey? Has she not told you how many excellent qualities Cousin Betsey has? Only just a little set in her ways," said Clifton, imitating so exactly Mrs Jacob's voice and manner, that no one could help laughing.

"Cousin Betsey is rather set in her ways, and not always agreeable in her manners to Mrs Jacob," said Elizabeth. "But you are not to make Mr Maxwell suppose that there is any disagreement between them."

"By no means. They are the best of friends when they keep apart, and they don't meet often. Mrs Jacob has company when the sewing-circle is to meet at the Hill, and when it meets at Mrs Jacob's, Betsey has a great soap-making to keep her at home, or a sick headache, or something. To tell the truth, Cousin Betsey does not care a great deal about any of her village relations, except the squire. But she is a good soul, and a pillar in the church, though she says less about it than some people. I'll drive you over to the farm some day. Cousin Betsey will put you through your catechism, I can tell you, if she happens to be in a good humour."

Mr Maxwell laughed. "I have had some experience of that sort of thing already," said he. "But I fear it has not been a satisfactory affair to any one concerned."

"Cousin Betsey will manage better," said Clifton.

They went to the Hill at the time appointed, and the visit, and some others that they made, were so far successful that the minister took real pleasure in them, and that was more than could be said of any visit he had made before. Miss Betsey did not put him through his catechism in Clifton's presence; that ceremony was reserved for a future occasion. She was rather stiff and formal in her reception of them, but she thawed out and consented to be pleased and interested before the afternoon was over. She smiled and assented with sufficient graciousness when Clifton not only bespoke Ben's company, on an expedition with gun and rod, which he and Mr Maxwell were going to make further down the river, but he invited himself and the minister to tea on their way home.

"For you know, Cousin Betsey, that Ben and I won't be very likely to get into mischief in the minister's company, and you can't object to our going this time."

"If anybody doesn't object to the minister's going in your company. That is the thing to be considered, I should say," said Cousin Betsey, smiling grimly.

"Oh, cousin! do you mean that going fishing with me will compromise the minister? No wonder that you are afraid to trust me with Ben. But I say that a day in the woods with Ben and me will do Mr Maxwell more good than two or three tea-meetings or sewing-circles. Only you have a good supper ready for us, and I will bring him home hungry as a hunter."

"Which hasn't happened very often to him of late, if one may judge from his looks," said Miss Betsey.

"No, he ought to be living here at the Hill. It would suit him better than Jacob's. And when are you coming to see us? Lizzie wanted to come with us to-day, but she was afraid you wouldn't be glad to see her. You never come to our house, and she mustn't do all the visiting. And, besides, you don't ask her."

"It aint likely that she'll be so hard up for something to amuse her, that she'll want to fall back on a visit to the Hill. But if she should be, she can come along over, and try how it would seem to visit with mother and Cynthia and me. She'll always find some of us here."

"All right. I'll tell her you asked her, and she'll be sure to come."

The success of this visit encouraged Clifton to try more in the minister's company. For a reason that it was not difficult to understand, Jacob in his rounds had not taken him to visit at Mr Fleming's, nor had any one else, and Clifton, remembering his own visit there, took the introduction of Mr Maxwell at Ythan Brae into his own hands, and Elizabeth went with him. They sailed up the river, and went through the woods as he and Ben had done. It was a lovely autumn day, but there were few tokens of decay in the woods and fields through which they took their way, and they lingered in the sweet air with a pleasure that made them unconscious of the flight of time, and the afternoon was far spent before they sat down to rest on the rocky knoll where Clifton in Ben's company had renewed his acquaintance with the Fleming children. The remembrance of the time and the scene came back so vividly, that he could not help telling his companions about it. Elizabeth's face clouded as he repeated Katie's words about "those avaricious Holts" which had brought him to a sense of the indiscretion he was committing in listening.

"The Flemings are hard upon Jacob. Mr Maxwell might have been more fortunate in his escort," said she.

"Nonsense, Lizzie! Mrs Fleming is far too sensible to confound us with Jacob; and, Lizzie, you used to be a pet of hers."

"Yes," said Elizabeth, "long ago."

And as they lingered, she went on to tell them about the Flemings, and their opinions and manner of life, and about the troubles which had fallen on them. She grew earnest as she went on, telling about poor Hugh whom everybody had loved so well, whom she herself remembered as the handsomest, gentlest, and best of all those who had frequented their house, when her brother Jacob was young and she was a child; and in her earnestness she said some things that surprised her brother as he listened.

"My father and Mr Fleming were always friendly, and sometimes I went with my father to their house. I did not often see Mr Fleming, but I remember his coming into the room one day, when I was sitting on a low stool, holding the first baby of his son's family in my lap. She was a lovely little creature, little Katie, just beginning to coo, and murmur, and smile at me with her bonny blue eyes, and I suppose the child, and my pride and delight in her, must have been a pretty sight to see, for the grandfather sat down beside us, and smiled as he looked and listened, and made some happy, foolish talk with us both. My father was very much surprised, he told me afterward; and in a little while, when I went into another room, I found Mrs Fleming crying, with her apron over her face. But they were happy tears, for she smiled when she saw us, and clasped and kissed baby and me, with many sweet Scottish words of endearment to us both. It was the first time she had seen her husband smile since their troubles, she said. The dark cloud was lifting, and wee Katie's smile would bring sunshine again. I was a favourite with her a long time after that, but we have fallen out of acquaintance of late."

"Which is a great mistake on your part," said her brother.

"Yes; I hope she will be glad to see us. She will be glad to see you, Mr Maxwell."

"She will be glad to see us all," said Clifton.

Chapter Six.

A Visit to Ythan Brae.

It was a great deal later in the afternoon than it ought to have been for the first visit of the minister, and the chances

were he would have been told so in any other house in the parish. But Mrs Fleming welcomed him warmly, and all the more warmly, she intimated, that he came in such good company. The lateness of the hour made this difference in the order of events: they had their tea first, and their visit afterward; a very good arrangement, for their tramp through the fields and woods had made them hungry, and Mrs Fleming's oat-cakes and honey were delicious. There were plenty of other good things on the table, but the honey and oat-cakes were the characteristic part of the meal, never omitted in Mrs Fleming's preparations for visitors. She had not forgotten the old Scottish fashion of pressing the good things upon her guests, but there was not much of this needed now, and she looked on with much enjoyment.

"Will you go ben the house, or bide still where you are?" asked she, when tea was over and they still lingered. "Ben the house"—in the parlour there were tall candles burning, and other arrangements made, but no one seemed inclined to move. The large kitchen in which they were sitting was, at this time of the year, the pleasantest place in the house. Later the cooking-stove, which in summer stood in the outer kitchen would be brought in, and the great fire-place would be shut up, but to-night there was a fire of logs on the wide hearth. It flickered and sparkled, and lighted up the dark face of old Mr Fleming, and the fair face of Miss Elizabeth, as they sat on opposite sides of the hearth, and made shadows in the corners where the shy little Flemings had gathered. It lighted, too, the beautiful old face of the grandmother as she sat in her white cap and kerchief, with folded hands, making, to the minister's pleased eye, a fair picture of the homely scene.

And so they sat still. Katie and her mother moved about quietly for a while, removing the tea-things and doing what was to be done about the house. When all this was over, and they sat down with the rest, Clifton, and even Elizabeth, awaited with a certain curiosity and interest the discussion of some important matter of opinion or doctrine between the old people and the minister, as was the way during the minister's visits to most of the old Scotch houses of the place. But Mrs Fleming had changed, and the times had changed, since the days when old Mr Hollister and his friend went about to discuss the question of a union with the good folks of North Gore, and the household had changed also. The children sitting there so quiet, yet so observant, came in for a share of the minister's notice, and when their grandmother proposed that they should arrange themselves before him in the order of their ages to be catechised by him, he entered into the spirit of the occasion as nobody in Gershom had seen him enter into anything yet. He knew all about it. He had been catechised in his youth in the orthodox manner of his country, and he acquitted himself well. From "What is the chief end of man?" until one after another of the children stopped, and even Katie hesitated, he went with shut book. It was very creditable to him in Mrs Fleming's opinion, quite as satisfactory as a formal discussion would have been in assuring her of the nature and extent of his doctrinal knowledge, and the soundness of his views generally.

"He'll win through," said she to herself; "he has been dazed with books till he has fallen out of acquaintance with his fellow-creatures, and he'll need to ken mair about them before he can do much good in his work. But he'll learn, there is no fear."

The minister had other questions to ask at "the bairns" that had never been written in any catechism, and he had new things to tell them, and old things to tell them in a new way, and, as she looked and listened, Mrs Fleming nodded to her husband and said to herself again, "He'll win through."

"Bairns," said she impressively, "you see the good of learning your Bible and your catechism when you are young; take an example from the minister."

And with this the bairns were dismissed from their position; for the rest of the evening till bedtime it was expected that they were "to be seen and not heard," as was the way with bairns when their grandmother was young. The two eldest, Katie and Davie, were put forward a little, in a quiet way, and encouraged to display their book-learning to their visitors. But Katie was shy and uncomfortable, and did not do herself as much credit as usual. Her grandfather put her forward as a little girl, and the visitors treated her as a grown woman, and she did not like it, and at last took refuge with her knitting at her grandfather's side, and left the field to Davie.

As for Davie, he was shy too, but in some things he was bold to a degree that filled Katie with astonishment. He held his own opinion about various things against the minister, who, to be sure, "was only just trying him." And he and young Mr Holt wrangled together over their opinions and questions good-humouredly enough, but still very much in earnest. Young Mr Holt was the better of the two as to the subjects under discussion, but he was not so well up as he thought he was, or as he ought to have been, considering his advantages, and Davie knew enough to detect his errors, though not enough to correct them. The minister, appealed to by both, would not interfere, but listened smiling. Mr Fleming sat silent, as his manner was, sometimes smiling, but oftener looking grave.

"Softly, Davie. Take heed to your words, my laddie," said his grandmother now and then, and Elizabeth listened well pleased to see her brother, about whom she was sometimes anxious and afraid, taking evident pleasure in it all.

By and by the Book was brought, and Mr Fleming, as head and priest of the household, solemnly asked God's blessing on the Word they were to read, before he gave it to the minister to conduct the evening worship. It chanced that the chapter read was the one from which Mr Maxwell's Sunday text had been taken; and in the pause that followed the unwilling, but unresisting departure of the little ones to bed, Clifton said so. Then he added that he wished Mrs Fleming had been there to hear the sermon, as he would have liked to hear her opinion as to some of the sentiments given in it by the minister. It was said with the hope of drawing the old lady into one of the discussions of which they had heard, Elizabeth knew, but it did not succeed.

"I heard the sermon, and had no fault to find with it; had you?" said Mrs Fleming.

"Fault! No. One would hardly like to find fault with it before the minister," said Clifton, laughing. "I am not very well up in theology myself, but it struck me that the sermon was not just in the style of old Mr Hollister's."

"I doubt you werena in the way of taking much heed of Mr Hollister's sermons, and you can ask Mr Maxwell the meaning of his words if you are not satisfied. What was lacking in the sermon the years will supply to those that are to follow it. It was written at the bidding of the doctors o' divinity at the college, was it not?"

"Yes," said Mr Maxwell with some hesitation, "it was written for them."

"Oh! they would surely be pleased with it. It was sound and sensible and conclusive; that is, you said in it what you set out to say, and that doesna ay happen in sermons. You'll put more heart in your ministrations when you have been a while among us, I hope."

There was a few minutes' silence.

"There is a grave charge implied in your words, Mrs Fleming, and I fear a true one," said the minister.

"I meant none," said Mrs Fleming earnestly. "As for your sermon, what could you expect? It was all the work of your head, your heart had little part in it. It was the doctors of divinity, and the lads, your fellow-students—ilka ane o' them waiting to get a hit at you—that you had in your mind when you were writing it, and no' the like of us poor folk, who are needing to be guided and warned and fed. But it is a grand thing to have a clear head, and to be able to put things in the right way, and, according to the established rules: yon was a fine discourse; though you seemed to take little pleasure in it yourself, sir, I thought, as you went on."

Mr Maxwell smiled rather ruefully. "I took little pleasure in it indeed."

"I saw that. But you have no call to be discouraged. We have the treasure in earthen vessels, as Paul says himself. But a clear head and a ready tongue are wonderful gifts for the Master's use, when they go with a heart that He has made His dwelling. Have patience with yourself. If you are the willing servant of your Master, His word is given for your success in His work. It is Him you are to look to, and not to yourself."

"Ay! there is comfort in that."

"It must be a great change for you coming to a place like this from the companionship of wise men, living and dead, and you are but young and likely to feel it. But you'll come to yourself when the strangeness wears off. Your work lies at your hand, and plenty of it. You'll have thraward folk to counter you, and folk kind and foolish to praise you and your words and works, whatever they may be. A few will give you wholesome counsel, and a smaller few wholesome silence, and you must take them as they come, and carry them one and all to His feet, and there's no fear of you."

The minister said nothing. Clifton looked curiously at his grave face over his sister's shoulder.

"Wholesome silence! It's not much of that he is likely to get in Gershom," said he.

"But," said Mrs Fleming earnestly, "you are not to put on a grave face like that, or I shall think your visit hasna done you good, and that would grieve me. You have no call to look doubtfully before you. You have the very grandest of work laid ready to your hand, and you have the will to do it, and I daresay you are no just that ill prepared for it. At least you are prepared to learn in God's school that He has put you in. And you have His promise that you cannot fail. It is wonderful to think of."

"Who is sufficient for these things?" said the minister gravely.

"Him that God sends He makes sufficient," said Mrs Fleming, cheerfully. "Put your trust in Him, and take good care of yourself, and above all, I would have you to beware of Mrs Jacob Holt's Yankee pies and cakes and hot bread, for they would be just the ruination of you, health and temper, and all. But you needna say I told you."

Elizabeth and Clifton laughed heartily at the anticlimax. Mr Maxwell laughed too, and hung his head, remembering Mrs Jacob's dainties, which he had not yet been able to do justice to. Mrs Fleming might have enlarged on the subject if time allowed, but they had a long walk before them.

"I hope you'll no be such a stranger now that you have found your way back again," said Mrs Fleming, as Elizabeth was putting on her shawl. "I mind the old days, and you have ay been kind to my Katie, who is growing a woman now, and more in need of kindness and counsel than ever," added she, looking wistfully from the one to the other. For answer, Elizabeth turned and kissed Katie, and then touched with her lips the brown wrinkled hand of the grandmother.

"God bless you and keep you, and give you the desire of your heart," said Mrs Fleming, "if it be the best thing for you," she added, moved by a prudent after-thought, which came to her to-night more quickly than such thoughts were apt to come to her. "I'm no feared for you or Katie. Why should I be? You are both in good keeping. And if you are no dealt with to your pleasure, you will be to your profit, and that is the chief thing."

They had a pleasant walk through the dewy fields in the moonlight, and much to say to one another, but they had fallen into silence before they paused at the gate to say "good-night."

"I suppose on the whole our visit may be considered a success," said Clifton as they lingered.

"Altogether a success," said Elizabeth.

"I am glad I went in your company," said the minister.

"Thank you," said Elizabeth.

"Your are welcome," said her brother, and then he added, laughing, "I hope all the rest of the world will be as well pleased."

This was to be doubted. Mrs Jacob was by no means pleased for one. She had said nothing to Elizabeth on the occasion when Mr Maxwell had stayed away from the sewing-circle, but Elizabeth knew that her silence did not imply either forgetfulness or forgiveness. She could wait long for an opportunity to speak, and could then put much into a few words for the hearing of the offender. It was a renewal of the offence that the minister should have been taken to the hill-farm by Clifton, and then to Ythan Brae by him and his sister, though why she could not have easily explained. Whatever Clifton did was apt to take the form of an indiscretion in her eyes, but neither her sharp words nor her soft words were heeded by him, and she rarely wasted them upon him. But it was different where his sister was concerned. She had turns now and then of taking upon herself the responsibility of Elizabeth, as of a young girl to whom she stood as the nearest female relation, and she knew how to hurt her when she tried. Elizabeth rarely resented openly her little thrusts, but all the same, she unconsciously armed herself for defence in Mrs Jacob's presence, and an attitude of defence is always uncomfortable where relations who meet often are concerned.

They had met a good many times, however, before any allusion was made to the visits which had displeased her. She came one day into Elizabeth's sitting-room to find Mr Maxwell there in animated discussion with Clifton. She hardly recognised him in the new brightness of his face, and the animation of his voice and manner. He was as unlike as possible to the silent, constrained young man who daily sat at her table, and who responded so inadequately to her

efforts for his entertainment. She liked the minister, and wished to make him happy in her house, and there was real pain mingled with the unreasonable anger she felt as she watched him. Her first few minutes were occupied in answering the old squire's questions about Jacob and the children. She had startled him from his afternoon's sleep, and he was a little querulous and exacting, as was usual at such times. But in a little she said:

"Mr Maxwell had good visits at the Hill, and at Mr Fleming's, he told us. It is a good thing you thought of going with him, Elizabeth. You and Cousin Betsey have become reconciled."

"Reconciled!" repeated Elizabeth; "we have never quarrelled."

"Oh, of course not. That would not do at all. But you have never been very fond of one another, you know."

"I respect Cousin Betsey entirely, though we do not often see one another," said Elizabeth. "I did not go to the Hill the other day, however. Clifton went with Mr Maxwell, and they enjoyed it, as you say."

The squire was a little deaf, and not catching what was said, needed to have the whole matter explained to him.

"Betsey is a good woman," said he; "I respect Betsey. Her mother isn't much of a business woman, and it is well Betsey is spared to her. It'll be all right about the place; I'll make it all right, and Jacob won't be hard on them."

And so the old man rambled on, till the talk turned to other matters, and Mrs Jacob kept the rest of her remarks for Elizabeth's private ear.

"I am so glad you like Mr Maxwell, Elizabeth. I was afraid you would not; you are so fastidious, you know, and he seems to have so little to say for himself."

"I like him very much, and so does Clifton," said Elizabeth, waiting for more.

"I am very glad. He seems to be having a good influence on Clifton. He hasn't been in any trouble this time, at all, has he? How thankful you must be. Jacob is pleased. I only hope it may last."

The discussion of her younger brother's delinquencies, real or supposed, was almost the only thing that irritated Elizabeth beyond her power of concealment; and if she had been in her sister-in-law's house, this would have been the moment when she would have drawn her visit to a close. Now she could only keep silence.

"I hope Clifton may do well next year," went on Mrs Jacob; "you will miss him, and so shall we."

"We must do as well as we can without him. In summer he will be home for good, I hope."

"Yes, if he should conclude to settle down steadily to business. Time will show, and this winter we have Mr Maxwell. It depends some on Miss Martha Langden, I suppose, how long we shall have him in our house. You have heard all about that, I suppose?" said she, smiling significantly.

Elizabeth smiled too, but shook her head.

"I have heard the name," said she.

"Well, you must not ask me about her. I only know that she gets a good many letters from Gershom about this time. It is not to be spoken of yet."

She rose to go, and Elizabeth went with her to the door, and she laughed to herself as she followed her with her eye down the street. She had heard Miss Martha Langden's name once. It was on the night when Mr Maxwell called on his way from the Hill-farm. He had said that he liked Miss Betsey, and that she reminded him of one of his best friends, Miss Martha Langden, one who had been his mother's friend when he was a child.

Miss Elizabeth laughed again as she turned to go into the house, and she might have laughed all the same, if she had known that the frequent letters to Miss Martha Langden never went without a little note to some one very different from Miss Martha. But she did not know this till long after.

Clifton Holt went back to college again, and Elizabeth prepared for a quiet winter. She knew that, as in other winters, she would be held responsible for a certain amount of entertainment to the young people of the village in the way of gigantic sewing-circles, and no less gigantic evening parties. But these could not fall often to her turn, and they were not exciting affairs, even when the whole responsibility of them fell on herself, as was the case when her brother was away. So it was a very quiet winter to which she looked forward.

And because she did not dread the utter quiet, as she had done in former winters, and because she was able to dismiss from her thoughts, with very little consideration of the matter, a tempting invitation to pass a month or two in the city of Montreal, she fancied she was drawing near to that period in a woman's life, when she is supposed to be becoming content with the existing order of things, when the dreams and hopes, and expectations vague and sweet, which make so large a part in girlish happiness, give place to graver and more earnest thoughts of life and duty, to a juster estimate of what life has to give, and an acquiescent acceptance of the lot which she has not chosen, but which has come to her in it. It is not very often that so desirable a state of mind and heart comes to girls of four-and-twenty. It certainly had not come to Elizabeth. However, it gave her pleasure—and a little pain as well—to think so, and it was a good while before she found out that she had made a mistake.

As for Mr Maxwell, he was "coming to himself," as Mrs Fleming had predicted. His health improved, and as he grew familiar with his new circumstances, the despondency that had weighed him down was dispelled. Before the snow came, he was making visits among the people, without any one to keep him in countenance. Not regular pastoral visits, but quite informal ones, to the farmer in his pasture or wood-lot, or as he followed his oxen over the autumn fields. He dropped now and then into the workshop of Samuel Green, the carpenter, and exchanged a word with John McNider as he passed his forge, where he afterward often stopped to have a talk. The first theological discussion he had in Gershom was held in Peter Longley's shoe-shop, one morning when he found that amiable sceptic alone and disposed—as he generally was—for a declaration of his rather peculiar views of doctrine and practice; and his first temperance lecture

was given to an audience of one, as he drove in Mark Varney's ox-cart over that poor man's dreary and neglected fields.

Chapter Seven.

Minister and People.

In Gershom in these primitive days, a deep interest in the affairs of their neighbours, private, personal and relative, and a full and free discussion of the same, implied to the minds of people in general no violation of any law of morals or expediency. It was a part of the established order of things, which had its advantages and disadvantages. Almost everybody had a measure of enjoyment in it, and everybody had to submit to it.

Even those among the people who would have found little to interest them in the comings and goings of their neighbours generally, took part in the admiring discussion of the comings and goings of the minister. There was a comfortable sense of duty about the matter, a feeling that they were manifesting an interest in "the cause," and "holding up the minister's hands" on such occasions that was agreeable. There was a sense of satisfaction in the frequent allusions made to the Sunday's sermon, in the repetition of the text and "heads," and in the admiring remarks and comparisons which usually accompanied this, as if it were religious conversation that was being carried on and enjoyed. The pleasing delusion extended to the old people's endless talks about subscription-lists, and ways and means of support and to the young people's plans and preparations for a great fair to be held for the purpose of obtaining funds for the future furnishing and adorning of the parsonage. So it was a happy era in the history of the congregation and the village. Everybody was interested, almost everybody was pleased.

If Mr Maxwell had heard half the kind and admiring things that were said of him, or if he had known a tenth part of what he was expected to accomplish by his sermons, his example, his influence, he would have been filled with confusion and dismay. But happily "a wholesome silence" with regard to these things was at first for the most part preserved toward him, and he took his way among his people unembarrassed by any over-anxious effort to meet expectations too highly raised.

To tell the truth, he was getting a good deal more credit than he deserved just at this time. His devotion to his work, his labours "in season and out of season," his zeal and energy, and kindness in the way of visiting and becoming acquainted with the people, were due less to a conscious desire to do them good, or to serve his Master, than to a growing pleasure in friendly contact with his fellow-creatures. He was entering on a new and wonderful branch of study, the study of living men, and he entered upon it with earnestness and delight.

Hitherto his most intimate acquaintance had been with men, the greater number of whom had been dead for hundreds of years. His living friends had, for the most part, been men of one type, men of more or less intelligence, educated on the same plan, holding the same opinions—men of whose views on most subjects he might have been sure without a word from them. His intercourse with the greater number of them had been formal and conventional; upon very few had he ever had any special claim for sympathy or interest.

All this was different now. The interest of the Gershom people was real and evident, and he had a right to it; and he owed to them, for his Master's sake, both love and service. They were real men he had to deal with, not mere embodiments of certain views and opinions. They were men with feelings and prejudices; they were men who, like himself, sinned and suffered, and were afraid. They had opinions also, on most subjects, firmly held and decidedly expressed. Indeed, some of them had a way of putting things which was a positive refreshment and stimulus to him. It had, for the moment, the effect of genius and originality, and in the first pleasure of contact, he was inclined to give to some of his new friends a higher place intellectually than he gave them afterward. Happily, he kept his opinions of men and things very much to himself in these first days, and scandalised no one by declaring Peter Longley to be a genius, or John McNider to be a hero, or by taking the part of poor Mark Varney, as one more sinned against than sinning.

He owed his reputation for wisdom in these first months quite as much to his silence as to his speech. His own superficial knowledge of men and things got easily from books, seemed to him—as indeed it was—a poor thing in comparison with the wisdom which some of these quiet, unpretending men had almost unconsciously been gathering through the experience of years. But it did not seem so to them. When he did speak, he could, through the discipline of education and training, put into clear right words the thoughts which they found it not easy to utter, and they gave him credit for the thought as his, when often he was only giving back to them what he had received. And he listened well, and he chose his subjects judiciously when he did talk. It was iron with the blacksmith, and wood with the carpenter, and seeds and soils and the rotation of crops with the farmer, and without at all meaning to exalt himself thereby, he would put the reading of some leisure hour into a few well-chosen words, which seemed like treasures of wisdom to men who had gathered their knowledge by the slow process of hearsay and observation; and what with one thing, and what with another, the minister grew in favour with them all.

That there had ever been a latent sense of disappointment in the minds of any great number of the people on his first appearance among them would have been indignantly denied. Possibly, in the varied course of events, some in the parish might have their eyes opened to see failings and faults in him, but in the meantime there existed in the congregation a wonderful unanimity of feeling with regard to him.

"The cause was prospering in their midst," that was the usual formula by which was expressed the satisfaction of the staid and elderly people among them. It meant different things to different people: that the church was well filled; that the weekly meetings were well attended; that the subscription-list looked well; that the North Gore folks were drawing in generally, and identifying themselves with the congregation.

This last sign of prosperity was the one most generally seen and rejoiced over. There had all along been a difference of opinion among the wise men of the church as to the manner in which the desired union was to be brought about. The bolder spirits, and the new-comers, who did not remember the well-meant, but futile attempts of Mr Hollister and Deacon Turner in that direction, were of opinion that formal prospects for union should be made to the North Gore men; that matters of doctrine and discipline should be discussed either publicly or privately as might be decided, and that in some way the outsiders should be made to commit themselves to a general movement in the direction of union. But the more prudent and easy-going of the flock saw difficulties in the way. It was not impossible, the prudent people said, that in the course of discussion new elements of disagreement might manifest themselves, and that the committing might be to the wrong side. The easy-going souls among them were of opinion that it was best "just to let things kind o' happen along easy"—saying that after a while the sensible people of the North Gore would "realise their privileges" and avail themselves of the advantages which church fellowship offered to true Christians, and all agreed, before a year were over, that Mr Maxwell's influence and teaching would help to bring about all that was so much desired.

And as time went on, one thing worked with another toward the desired end. In the course of the winter, several of those who were looked upon as leaders among the North Gore people, both for intelligence and piety, cast in their lot with the village people by uniting formally with the church. A good many more became constant hearers without doing so; some hesitating for one reason, and some for another. Among these were the Flemings, whose reason for keeping aloof was supposed to be Jacob Holt, though no one had a right to speak by their authority, of the matter.

Of course Mr Maxwell had been made acquainted with the peculiar circumstances of the place, and he rejoiced with the rest at such evidences of success in his work as the gathering in of the North Gore implied, but no one had ever told him of any serious difficulty existing between old Mr Fleming and Jacob Holt. It was Squire Holt who first spoke to him about it, and the winter was nearly over before that time.

The squire in one of his retrospective moods went over "the whole story," speaking very kindly of the young lad who had gone astray, and of his brother who had died. He spoke kindly, too, of the old man, with whom he had always been on the most friendly terms, but he did not hesitate to say that he thought him foolish and unreasonable in the position he took toward Jacob.

"It was because of something that happened when his son Hugh went away, but Jacob was no more to blame than others; and it might have been all right if the foolish young man had only stayed at home and taken the risk. I tried at the time to talk things over with the old man, but he never would hear a word. There are folks in Gershom who think hard of Jacob, because of old Mr Fleming's opinion, though they did not know a word about the matter. And I'm afraid it's going to do mischief in the church."

"It is strange that I should never have heard of all this before," said Mr Maxwell, at a loss to decide how much of the regret and anxiety evidently felt by Mr Holt was due to the weakness of age. "During all my visits to Mr Fleming, and you know I saw him frequently during his illness, not a word was ever spoken that could have reference to any trouble between the two, nor has your son—"

Mr Maxwell paused. He was not so sure of the exact correctness of what he had been about to say. A good many hints and remarks of Jacob, and of his wife also, which had seemed vague at the time, and which he had allowed to pass without remark, occurred to him now as possibly having reference to this trouble.

"Probably there has been misunderstanding between them," said he after a little.

"Just so," said the old man eagerly. "Jacob aint the man to be hard on anybody—to say hard; he likes to have what is his own, and being a good man of business he hates shiftless doings, and so shiftless folks think and say hard things of him. But as to taking the advantage of an old man like Mr Fleming—why, it would be about as mean a thing as a man could do, and Jacob aint the man to do it, whatever may be said of him."

"Why, look here, Mr Maxwell. Just let me tell you all about it." And the old man, with perfect fairness and sufficient clearness, went into all particulars as to the state of Mr Fleming's affairs at the time of his son's death, and of Jacob's claims upon him. His real respect and friendship for the old man was evident in all he said, and when he lamented that his old friend's unreasonableness should make a settlement of his affairs so difficult, and should make unpleasant talk and hard feelings in the community, Mr Maxwell could not but spare his regret.

"Why, look here, Mr Maxwell. There hasn't been a cent paid on the principal yet, and not all the interest, though it is years ago now, and some of that has been borrowed money. And there is little prospect of its being any different for years to come. If it had been almost any one else but Jacob, he'd have foreclosed long ago, and I don't know but he had better when the right time comes."

It was on Mr Maxwell's lips to express assent to this, when a glance at the face of Miss Elizabeth arrested his words. It wore a look which he had sometimes seen on it when she wished to turn her father's thoughts away from a subject which was becoming painful to him. There was anxiety, even pain in her face as well, on this occasion, and these deepened as her father went on.

"Only the other day Jacob was talking to me about it. 'Father,' says he, 'why can't you just say a word to the old man about letting me have a piece of his land on the river, and settle matters all up. He'll hear you,' says he. 'I don't want to make hard feelings in the church, or anywhere else,' says he. 'It's as much for the old man's interest to have his affairs all straightened out, as it is for me, and more. There need be no trouble about it, if he'd only listen to reason.' I expect I shall have to have a talk with Mr Fleming about it some time," added the old man gravely. "Or you might speak, Mr Maxwell. He would listen to you."

"Only, father, it would be as well to wait till the old gentleman is quite well and strong again," said Elizabeth, rising and folding up her work, and moving about as if to prevent the chance of more talk.

"Well, I guess so, and then I don't suppose it would amount to much anything I could say to him. I wouldn't like to say anything to vex or worry him. He has had a deal of trouble one way and another, since he came to the place, and it has kind of soured him, but he is always as sweet as milk to me. You aren't going away, are you, Mr Maxwell? There, I have tired you all out with my talk, and I've tired myself too. But don't you hurry away. I'll go and step round a little to get the fresh air, and then I'll lie down a spell, and rest. And, Lizzie, you find 'The Puritan' for Mr Maxwell, and he can take a look at that in the meantime."

Elizabeth did as she was bidden, and managed to make the minister understand, without saying so, that she would like him not to go away. So he sat down to the doubtful enjoyment of the paper while Elizabeth followed her father from the room.

Chapter Eight.

Taking Counsel.

It was one of those soft, bright days of early March that might beguile a new-comer to the country into a temporary belief that spring had come at last, and Elizabeth, tying her "cloud" over her head, followed her father out into the yard. To take a walk just for the sake of the walk was not likely to suit old Mr Holt, or to do him much good. But he and Elizabeth went about here and there, in the yard and up and down the well-swept walk from the gate to the door, where

the snow lay still on either side as high as the squire's shoulder, and Elizabeth talked to him about the great wood-pile, and praised the industry and energy of Nathan Pell, the hired man, and of his team, Dick and Doll, that were making it longer every day. She spoke of the great drifts that must be cleared away before the thaw came, of the bough which last night's wind had brought down from the elm in the corner, of the broken bit of fence beyond the gate, of anything to lead his thoughts away from the theme which for the last hour had occupied and excited him.

She succeeded so well, that he went away by himself, to get a hammer and nails to mend the broken paling, and Elizabeth, leaning over the little white gate while she waited for him to return, had an unexpected pleasure—a little chat with Mrs Jacob. It was not the chat which gave her the pleasure, it was her own thought that amused her, and the knowledge of her sister-in-law's thoughts as well.

She knew that though Mrs Jacob declined to come in now at her invitation, she had come up the street with the full design of doing so, and she knew that she was saying to herself that Mr Maxwell could not be in the house, though Jacob had seen him going that way, or Lizzie would never be standing so long at the gate, looking down the street.

"I am waiting for father," said Elizabeth; "he has gone in for the hammer to drive some nails in the fence. I suppose Nathan must have driven against it last night in the dark." She was hoping that Mr Maxwell was enjoying "The Puritan" so well that he would not be tempted to look out of the window so as to be seen.

"Here is father; he will be glad to see you; it is a long time since you were here. Won't you change your mind and come in?"

"Well, no, not to-day. I am going in to see Miss Ball a minute about my bonnet, and I ought to hurry home."

Mrs Jacob knew that she would have to answer many questions about Jacob and the children. Probably the squire had seen them all to-day already, and would see them all again before the day was over.

"I think I'll go, and not hinder him about the fence, since he doesn't know I am here. Why don't you come up sometimes? Well, good-bye; I guess I'll go."

"Good-bye," said Elizabeth. "And now when she finds out that Mr Maxwell was here all the time, though I was standing at the gate, she will make herself and Jacob, too, believe that I am a deceitful girl; though why I should tell her, since she did not ask, I do not quite see."

She took the nail-box from her father's hand and followed him out of the gate, giving him each nail as he wanted it, making suggestions and praising his work as one might do with a child. It was soon finished to the old man's satisfaction, and by that time his excitement and his troubled thoughts were gone, and he was ready for his afternoon's rest.

"You have something to say to me, Miss Holt," said the minister, when she came again into the sitting-room.

"No—I am not sure that I have, though a little ago I thought I had."

"But, Miss Holt, I am almost sure you must have something to say," said Mr Maxwell, after a pause. "I have sometimes found that I have got a clearer view of vexed questions in village politics, and even in church matters, where there are no vexations as yet, after a little talk with you, than after many and long talks with other people."

Elizabeth laughed.

"Thank you. The reason is, that all the rest are on one side or the other of all vexed questions, and not being specially concerned in them, at least not personally concerned in them, I can see all sides: and usually there is little to see that might not as well be ignored."

"Well, does not that hold good in this case also?"

"But in this case I may be supposed to take a side."

The minister smiled.

"But not so as to prevent you from seeing clearly all sides. You are not going to tire of the task of keeping me right in village matters?"

Even when the sunshine is bright above the March air is keen and cold, and so Elizabeth, chilled with lingering so long at the gate, leaned toward the open fire, shading her face with her hand. She was silent for some time, thinking of several things.

"At least tell me that in this case, also, there is little to see, or I shall begin to fear that your father may be right when he says there may be danger of trouble arising out of this matter to us all."

"No. There need be no trouble, if people would only not talk," said Elizabeth, raising her head and turning so as to look at the minister. "I will tell you what I was thinking about before I went out; I was sorry that my father had spoken to you about Mr Fleming's affairs, or that he should have suggested the idea of your speaking to the old man about them; I wanted you not to promise to speak—I mean I do not think it would do any good were you to do so."

"Well, I did not promise."

"No; and I think my father may forget that he has spoken to you about it; he forgets many things now. And if you would forget all about it too, it would be all the better."

"I will be silent, and that will answer every purpose of forgetfulness, or ignorance, will it not?"

Elizabeth shook her head. "Not quite; and since I have said so much, I ought to say a little more. I can see all sides of this matter with sufficient clearness to be aware that trouble to a good many people, or at least discomfort and annoyance, might easily spring out of it. As to the church, I am not sure. But if everybody would keep silence, there need

be no trouble. And to tell the truth, Mr Maxwell, I was not thinking of Mr Fleming or of Jacob, or of what my father was telling you, except in its relation to you. It is a pity that you should have been told any of those old grievances."

Elizabeth rose and took the brush from its hook, and swept up the ashes and embers that had fallen upon the hearth. Then she seated herself in her own low chair by the window, and took up her work, but laid it down again, and folded her hands on her lap.

Mr Maxwell smiled. "I see I am not expected to stay much longer. But really, Miss Holt, I don't quite see 'the pity' of it. Why am I not to know all that is going on as well as the rest? Besides, if your father had not told me, some one else would have done so."

"True."

"And I might in such a case have committed myself to the doing or saying of something foolish at a first hearing, as I should have done to-day but that your face made me pause."

"Did it?" said Elizabeth, demurely.

"And if silence is the thing to be desired, I shall be all the more likely to keep silence to others, if you give me the right and true version of troubles past, and of troubles possible in the future, with regard to this matter. Will you take up your work again, and tell me all? Or shall I come another time, Miss Elizabeth?"

But Miss Elizabeth had little to add to the story which her father had told. Jacob was hard, she supposed, just as business men were obliged to be hard sometimes. But then Mr Fleming was not to be regarded just as another man in the same position might be regarded—especially he was not to be so regarded by her brother Jacob. In the sore troubles that had come into the old man's life. Jacob had had a part. What part Elizabeth did not know she did not even know the nature of the trouble, but she knew, though she had only learned it lately, that the very sight of her brother was like wormwood to Mr Fleming; that even Mrs Fleming, friendly and sweet to all the world, was cold and distant to Jacob. And all this seemed to Elizabeth a sufficient reason why he should be more gentle and forbearing with them than with others, that he should be willing to forego his just claims rather than to lay himself open to the charge of wishing or even seeming to be "hard on them."

"For what is a little land, more or less, to Jacob, who has so much? And why should he wish to take even a small part of what old Mr Fleming has worked so hard to improve—has put his life into, as one may say?"

"But does he want to take it? Have you ever spoken to your brother about this?"

"He is supposed to want it for the site of the new buildings to be put up for the manufacturing company—if it ever comes into existence. But he does not want it without a sufficient allowance to the old man for it. Only, I suppose, the debt would cover it all. But I have never spoken about it to Jacob. It is not easy to speak to him about business unless he wishes," said Elizabeth, hesitating. "But Clifton, who is quite inclined to be hard on Jacob, laughs at the idea of his doing unjustly or even severely by Mr Fleming."

"At least he has done nothing yet, it seems."

"No, Clifton says that Mr Fleming's dislike of Jacob has become a sort of mania with him, and that he would not yield to him even if it were for his own advantage—he has brooded over his trouble so long and so sadly, poor old man!"

"That is quite possible," said Mr Maxwell, gravely. "And you think I should not speak to him about his trouble?"

"Not about his trouble with Jacob. Indeed, it is said that he will not speak of it, nor hear of it. It would do no good. And then he likes you so much, Mr Maxwell, and comes to church as he did not always do, and seems to take such pleasure in hearing you. It would be a pity to risk disturbing these pleasant relations between you with so small a chance of any good being done by it. And besides," Elizabeth made a long pause before she added: "besides, if trouble is before us because of this, and if it should come to taking sides, as almost always happens in the vexing questions of Gershom life, it would be far better that you should know nothing about the matter—that at least you should not have seemed to commit yourself to any decided opinion with regard to it. I cannot bear to think that your comfort and usefulness may be endangered through the affairs of those who should be your chief supports. Not that I think this likely to happen," added Elizabeth, colouring with the fear of having spoken too earnestly; "I daresay, after all, I am 'making mountains of mole-hills.'"

Mr Maxwell rose and took his hat.

"Well, to sum up," said he.

"Oh, to sum up! I believe the whole of what I wanted to say was this, that I don't want you to be vexed or troubled about it," said Elizabeth, rising also.

"It is kind in you to say so."

"Yes, kind to ourselves. And I daresay I may have given you a wrong impression about the matter after all, and that it looks more serious to you than it needs do. I had much better have kept silent, as I would have other people do."

"Don't say that, Miss Elizabeth. What should I do without you to set me right, and to keep me right about so many matters? Be anything but silent, my friend."

There was a good deal more said about Mr Fleming's affairs, and about other affairs, though Mr Maxwell stood all the time with his hat in his hand. But enough has been told to give an idea of the way in which these young people talked to each other. Mr Maxwell never went from the house without congratulating himself on the friendship of Miss Holt. How much good she always did him! What a blessing it was for him that there was one person in his congregation to whom he might speak unreservedly, and who had sense and judgment to see and say just what was best for him to do or to refrain from doing.

This was putting it rather strongly. Elizabeth was far from assuming such a position in relation to the minister. But she had sense and judgment, and frankness and simplicity of manner, and no doubt she found it pleasant to be listened to, and deferred to, as Mr Maxwell was in the habit of doing. And she knew she could help him, and that she had helped him, many a time. He was inexperienced, to say nothing more, and she gave him many a hint with regard to some of the doubtful measures and crooked natures in Gershom society, which prevented some stumbles, and guided him safely past some difficult places on his first entrance into it. But she had done more and better than that for him though she herself hardly knew it.

Squire Holt's house was a pleasant house to visit, and during the first homesick and miserable days of his stay in Gershom, when he would gladly have turned his back on his vocation and his duties, the bright and cheerful welcome there that Elizabeth gave him on that first night when Clifton took him home with him, and ever after that night, was like a strengthening cordial to one who needed it surely. Miss Elizabeth was several years younger than he, but she felt a great deal older and wiser in some respects than the student whose experience of life had been so limited and so different, and so it came to pass that, at the very first, she had fallen into the way of advising him, and even of expostulating with him on small occasions, and he had not resented it, but had been grateful for it, and at last rather liked it. He had brightened under her influence, and now the thought of her was associated with all the agreeable and hopeful circumstances of his new life and work.

He said to himself often, and he wrote to his friend Miss Martha Langden, that the friendship of Miss Elizabeth Holt was one of his best helps in the faithful performance of his pastoral duties, and that excellent and venerable lady at once assigned to Mr Maxwell's friend the same place in his regard, and in his parish generally, that she herself had occupied in the regard of several successive pastors, and in her native parish for forty years at least. It never occurred to Miss Langden, and it certainly never occurred to Mr Maxwell, that this friendship could be in any danger of interfering with the wishes and plans of former years. That it might affect in any way his future relations with the pretty and amiable young person whom Miss Langden was educating to be his wife, and the model for all the ministers' wives of the generation, never came into the mind of either. Miss Elizabeth was a true and useful friend, and the satisfaction that this afforded him was not to his consciousness incompatible with a happy and just appreciation of his good fortune in having a claim on the affection of Miss Langden's niece.

Elizabeth did not know at this time of the existence of Miss Langden's niece. If she had known it, it is not at all likely that she would have allowed such knowledge to interfere with the friendly relations into which she had fallen with the minister. She would have liked him none the less had she known of his tacit engagement to that young lady, and would have manifested her friendliness none the less, but rather the more because of it. And, on the whole, it was a pity that she did not know it.

Chapter Nine.

Master and Pupils.

At Ythan Brae the winter opened sadly. The grandfather had an illness which kept both Davie and Katie at home from the school for a while; and what was worse, when he grew better he would fain have kept them at home still. This would have been a serious matter to Davie, and he vexed Katie and his grandmother by suggesting possible and painful consequences all round should his grandfather persist. For the lad had been seized with a great hunger for knowledge. He desired it partly for its own sake, but partly also because he had heard many a time and implicitly believed that "knowledge is power," which is true in a certain sense, but not in the sense or to the extent that it seemed true to Davie. His grandfather was afraid of the boy's eager craving, and of what might come of it, and would far rather have seen him content, as his father had been, to plod through the winter, busy with the occupations which the season brought, than so eager to get away to Mr Burnet and his books. The grandfather had his sorrowful reasons for wishing to keep the lad in the quiet and safe paths which his father had trod. The grandmother knew how it was with him, and Katie and Davie guessed something of what his reasons might be. "And, bairns," said their grandmother, "ye are no to doubt that your grandfather is right, though he doesna see as ye do in this matter. For knowledge is whiles a snare and a curse; and a true heart, and an honest life, and a will to do your duty in the place in which your Maker has putten you are better than a' the uncanny wisdom that men gather from books, whether you believe it or not, Davie, my man. I canna say that I have any special fear for you myself, but one can never ken. And your grandfather, he canna forget; it's no' his nature. There was once one like you, Davie lad, that lost himself through ill-doing folk, and—I canna speak about it—and what must it be to him?"

"But, grannie," said Davie after a little, "it's different. Nobody will follow after me because I am so handsome and clever and kindly. And folk say it needna have been so bad with him, if my grandfather hadna been hard on him."

"Whisht, laddie," said his grandmother, with a gasp. Katie looked at him with beseeching eyes, and Davie hung his head.

"Davie, my laddie, have patience," said his grandmother in a little; "what is a year or two out of a young life like yours compared with giving a sore heart to an old man like your grandfather? He has had sore trouble to thole in his lifetime, some that you can guess, and some that you will never ken, and his heart is just set on Katie and you."

"But, grannie, there's no fear of me. I'll have no time for ill company. I'm no to be an idle gowk like Clifton Holt, to throw away my chances. And here's Katie ay to take care of me and keep me out of mischief."

"My lad, speak no ill of your neighbours. You'll need all the sense you have before you get far through the world. And you'll need grace and wisdom from above, as well, whether your work lie in high places with the great men of the earth, or just sowing and reaping in Ythan Brae. And as for Katie and her care of you, there's many a true word spoken in jest, and you maun be a good laddie, Davie."

It was all settled with fewer words than the grandmother feared would be needed, and a happy winter began to the brother and sister. They were young and strong and hopeful. No serious trouble was pressing on them or theirs. Just to be alive in such circumstances is happiness, only it is a kind of happiness that is seldom realised while the time is going on. When it is looked back upon over years of pain or care, it is seen clearly and valued truly, and sometimes—oh, how bitterly regretted.

They had their troubles. There was the mortgage about which they fancied they were anxious and afraid. They were just enough anxious about it to find in it an endless theme for planning and castle-building—a motive for the wonderful

things they were to accomplish in the way of making money for their grandfather, and as a means of triumphing over Jacob Holt, whom they were inclined to regard as the villain of their life-story.

From all the drawbacks common to the old-time schools in this part of Canada, Gershom High-School had, to some extent, suffered. The restraints of limited means, the value of the labour even of children on a new farm, the frequent change of teachers, the endless variety of text-books, the vexing elements of national prejudice and religious differences, had told on its efficiency and success. Yet it had been a power for good in Gershom and in all the country round. From the earliest settlement of the place the leading men had taken pains to encourage and support it. Its teachers had generally been college students from the neighbouring States, who taught one year to get money to carry them through the next, or graduates who were willing to pass a year or two in teaching between their college course and their choice or pursuit of a profession. Among them had come, now and then, a youth of rare gifts, one, not only strong to govern and skilled to teach, but who kindled in the minds of the pupils an eager desire for self-improvement, an enthusiasm of mental activity which outlasted his term of office, and which influenced for good a far greater number than those whom he taught, or with whom he came personally in contact.

Mr Burnet, Davie's teacher, was not one of these. His college days had long been over, before he crossed the sea. He had been unfortunate in many ways, but most of all in this, that he had been brought up to consider wise and right that which became sin and misery to him, because of the strength of his appetite and the weakness of his will. And so woeful days came to him and his, and he was sent over the sea, as so many another has been sent, to be out of sight. But on this side of the sea, too, woeful days awaited him, and after many a to and fro, he was stranded, an utter wreck as it seemed, on the village of Gershom. His wife was dead by this time, and his two forlorn little daughters had been sent home in rags to their mother's sister, and there was no visible reason why the wretched man should not die also, except, as he said to them who tried to help him, that, after all, his soul might have a chance to be saved.

He did not die; he lived a free man, and when the time came for Davie and Katie to go back to the school, he had been its teacher for more than a year. Not so good a teacher in some respects as two or three of the orderly, methodical college lads, who were still remembered with affection in Gershom; but in other respects he surpassed any of them—all of them together. It was said of him that he had forgotten more than all the rest of Gershom ever knew; and that he had a tongue that would wile the very birds from the trees. He was an eloquent man, and he had not only "words," but he had something to say. From the treasures of a highly-cultivated mind he brought, for the instruction of his pupils, and sometimes for the instruction and delight of larger audiences, things new and old. As an orator he was greatly admired, as a man he was much esteemed, as a teacher he was regarded with the respect due to his great powers, and with the tolerance which the defects accompanying them needed.

He had decided defects as a school-master. His government of his school was imperfect; he took it up by fits and starts, having his stern days, when the falling of a pin might be heard in his domain, and days when the boys and girls were mostly left to their own devices; but there were no idle days among them. No teacher who had ever ruled in the High-School could compare with him in the power he had to make the young people care for their books and their school-work, or to present to the clever idle ones among them the most enticing motives to exertion. "He got them on," the fathers and mothers said, and though he made no pretension to being a very good man, and sometimes used sharper words than were pleasant to hear, he loved the truth and hated a lie, and lived an honourable life among them, and all men regarded him with respect, and most men with affection.

So, putting all things together, Davie and Katie and the other young people of Gershom had a fair chance of a happy winter, and so it proved to the brother and sister. There were plenty of amusements going on in the village, but with these they had little to do. Their grandfather fretted if they were not at home in the evening, and it was no self-denial for them to stay away from all gay village doings—at least it was none to Davie. Except the master's lectures, and those debates and spelling-schools in which the reputation and honour of the High-School were concerned, he scorned them all. Katie did not scorn them. She would have enjoyed more of them than fell to her share, but yet was willing to agree with her grandmother that more might not be good for her, and was on the whole content without them.

Very rarely does there come in a lifetime a triumph so unmixed as the boy enjoys who is not only declared first, but shows himself before his whole world to be first in the village school. It does not matter whether he distinguishes himself by the spelling of many-syllabled words, and the repeating of rules and the multiplication table, or by his proficiency in higher branches, which are mysteries to the greater part of the admiring audience. It is all the same a triumph, pure, unmixed, satisfying. At least it possesses all these qualities in a higher degree than any future triumph can possibly possess them.

Such a triumph was Davie's. It was Katie's too in a way, but it was Davie's chiefly on this occasion, because it was his for the first time. But that did not spoil Katie's pleasure at all. Quite the contrary. Davie's triumph was hers, and she almost forgot to answer when her own name was called to receive her merited share of the honours, so full was she of the thought of what her grandfather would say when she should tell him about Davie.

And Katie had a little triumph all her own. It troubled her for a while, and did not come to anything after all, but still it was a triumph, and acknowledged to be such by all Gershom. She was chosen out of all the girls who had been Mr Burnet's pupils during the winter, to teach the village school. The village school stood next to the High-School, and for Katie Fleming, not yet sixteen, to be chosen a teacher, was a feather in her cap indeed. Her grandfather was greatly pleased and so was Miss Elizabeth. Mrs Fleming, coveting for her good and clever Katie advantages which in their circumstances she could only hope to enjoy through her own exertions, would have been willing to spare her from home, and Miss Elizabeth, who had come to love the girl dearly, knew that she could often have her with her, should she be in the village during the summer. But Katie never kept the village school, nor any school. Her grandfather did not like the idea of it, nor did Davie. Miss Betsey Holt set her face against it from the very first, though why she should interest herself especially in the matter did not clearly appear. The chances were that it would be but a poor school that a child like Katie Fleming would keep, clever scholar though she was, Miss Betsey said, which was very possibly quite true. But it was on Katie's own account that she did not approve of the place.

"Not that it would hurt her as it might some girls to 'board round' in the village houses, a week at a time, as she would have to do, and leave her evenings free to spend with the idle young folks of the place. It, maybe, wouldn't spoil that pretty pot of violets to have the street dust blow on them for an hour or two, but you wouldn't care about having them set out to catch it. And Katie Fleming is better at home making butter for her grandmother than she would be anywhere else, and happier too, if she only knew it."

Miss Betsey said this to Miss Elizabeth one day when she called, having some business with the squire, and she said something like it to the grandmother, which helped to a decision that Katie was to stay at home. Katie was a little disappointed for the moment, but she acknowledged that she might have failed with the school, and that she was much needed at home; and Davie's satisfaction at the decision did much to reconcile her to it. And all the rest were satisfied as

well as Davie, for Katie's being at home made a great deal of difference in the house.

Even Mrs Fleming, with her hopeful nature and her firm trust in God, had times of great anxiety with regard to Davie. He was so like the son who had gone so early astray, who had darkened all his father's life, and nearly broken his heart, that she could not but anxiously watch his words and his ways, attaching to them sometimes an importance that was neither wise nor reasonable. His grandfather's discipline was strict, not to say severe, and Davie's resistance, or rather his unwilling submission and obedience, for he seldom resisted his grandfather's will, made her afraid. Though she would not have acknowledged it to Davie, she knew that his grandfather was hard on him sometimes, far harder than, for such faults as Davie's, she herself would have been, and she feared that unwilling or resentful obedience might in time change to rebellion, and beyond such a possibility as that the anxious grandmother did not dare to look.

But it was only once in a great while that she suffered herself to contemplate the possibility of "anything happening" to Davie. The sore troubles she had passed through had shaken her somewhat, and she was growing old, but her bright and sunny nature generally asserted itself, in spite of the weakness which troubles and old age bring. So when she had occasion to speak to the old man about Davie, trying to make him more hopeful concerning him, and more patient with his faults, she could do so with a faith in the boy's future which could not fail sometimes to inspire him with the same hopefulness.

And indeed Davie was not more wilful and wayward than is often the case with lads of his age, nor was he idle, or inclined to do less than his just share of what was to be done. On the contrary, he had great good sense and perseverance in carrying out any plans of work which suited his ideas of how work ought to be done. But unfortunately his plans were not always exactly those of his grandfather. Of course he did not hesitate to acknowledge his grandfather's right to do as he pleased in his own place, when his grandmother put it to him in that way, and he was quite as ready to acknowledge that his wisdom as to matters in general, and as to farm-work in particular, was "not to be mentioned in the same day" with that of his grandfather. But when the work was to be done, he did not yield readily to suggestions, or even to commands, and had a way of coming back to the disputed point, and even of carrying it, to a certain extent, which looked to his grandfather like sheer perversity.

And even when Davie's plans proved themselves to have been worthy of consideration, because of the success that attended them now and then, even success seemed a small matter to the stern old man, because of the disobedience to his commands, or the ignoring of his known wishes which the success implied.

So dear, bright, patient grannie had "her own adoes" between these two whom she loved so well, and her best hope and comfort in all matters which concerned them was Katie.

For Katie's first thought always was, her grandfather. That he should have nothing to vex him, that his days should be brightened and his cares lightened, seemed to Katie the chief thing there was to think about. She had learned this from her grandmother, whose first thought he had been for many a year and day, and Katie's many pretty ways of "doing good to grandfather" did quite as much good to grannie.

As to Davie's "fancies," as she called his many plans and projects, she had great interest in some of them, and gave him good help in carrying them out, but she had no sympathy or patience with any sign of willfulness, or carelessness where their grandfather was concerned. But she loved her brother dearly, and helped him through some difficulties with others besides her grandfather, and Davie, having confidence in her affections, submitted to her guidance, and was more influenced by her opinions and wishes than he knew. And though she scolded him heartily sometimes, and set her face



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against any disobedience or seeming disrespect to their grandfather, she gave him good help often, and so eagerly entered into all his plans, when she saw her way clearly to the end of them, that he heeded her all the more readily when she differed from him and refused her help.

So Mrs Fleming's dependence on Katie was not misplaced, and she wondered at herself, when she had time to think about it, that she should ever have supposed it possible that she could be spared from home.

"But, oh, my dear!" said she one day to Katie's mother, "it's a woeful thing to set up idols, and you must put me in mind, as I must put you, that we're both in danger here. For who among them all is like our Katie? Not but that she has

her faults," added she, coming back to the business of the moment, as she watched Katie letting her full pail run over, while she enticed the kitten into a race after its tail: "Katie, my woman, you should leave the like of that to wee Nannie; I think you'll need all your time till supper-time.—But faults, did I say? It is scarcely a fault to be lighthearted, and easily pleased. But oh, Anne, my dear, we have need to take care."

Chapter Ten.

Katie's Friendships.

The life which healthy, good-tempered, unsophisticated children may live on a farm has in it more of the elements of true enjoyment than can be found in almost any other kind of life. If poverty or the necessity of constant work press too severely upon them, of course the enjoyment is interfered with, but not even poverty or hard work can spoil it altogether. There are always the sunshine and the sweet air; there are the freshness and the beauty of the early morning, which not one in ten of the dwellers in town know anything of by experience; the dawn, the sunrise, the glitter of dewdrops, the numberless sweet sounds and scents that belong to no other time. Young people with open eyes and quick sympathies find countless sources of interest and enjoyment in the beautiful growing things of the woods and fields, and in the ceaseless changes going on among them. Almost unconsciously they gain through all these a wisdom which is better than book lore, a discipline of heart and mind and temper which tends to soften and elevate the whole nature, leaving them less open to the temptations incident to youth and evil companionships.

They were very happy together, these two fast and true friends, as they never might have become had they had at this time more frequent intercourse with other young people; and true friendship between brother and sister is the perfect ideal of friendship. It does not always exist even between brothers and sisters who love each other dearly. It is something more than the natural affection which strengthens (as children grow older) into brotherly and sisterly love. It implies something that is not always found where the ties of blood and kindred are most warmly cherished, not a blindness to each other's faults or defects of character, but a full and loving appreciation of all admirable qualities both of mind and heart, a harmony of feeling, sentiments, and tastes which does not exist between brothers and sisters generally.

Day by day Mrs Fleming grew more and more at ease about Davie, seeing the love between the brother and sister.

"A year or two and the laddie's restless time will be over, and all that makes us anxious about him now, his plans and fancies, his craze for books, and his longing to put his hand to the guiding of his ain life will be modified by the knowledge that comes with experience. But, eh me! What is the use of speaking o' experience? If only the good Father above would take him in hand! And who shall say that He is not doing it even now, and making our bonny Katie the instrument of His will for her brother's good? And, Dawvid, we mustna be hard on the laddie, but just let him have his fancies about things, and let him carry them out when they are harmless, and when they dinna cost ower muckle money," added grannie, with prudent afterthought, for some of Davie's fancies would have cost money if he had been allowed "to go the full length of his tether."

"And after all is said, there is sense in his fancies. It would be a grand thing to have a hundredweight or two of honey, as he says we might, and never kill the bees. Think of that now! And nothing spent on them, but all the blossom on the trees, and all the flowers of the field theirs for the taking. And as for the new milk-house, with ice in it, and running water, it would be a grand thing. And, as Katie says, it's almost as easy to take care of the milk of ten cows as six, and there is pasture enough. As to the churning, if it could be done by the running water, wouldna that be a fine help? And we must just have patience with him, as the Lord has had with us this many a year and day."

Mrs Fleming got no answer to all this. She did not expect one. This was the way she took to familiarise the grandfather's mind with plans that might come to something. The old man's habitual caution was changing with the passing years into timidity and dread of change; and his long dwelling on his state of indebtedness, and the subjection to his "enemy" that it implied, made him afraid of anything that would render it necessary to dispense the smallest sum for any other purpose than the payment of this debt. His son James had let his money go from him with a free hand, and though he might have got it back again had he lived, his father could not but remember that it was through his plans, through his desire to improve the fortunes of his family, which had carried him beyond his means, that this debt, or a part of it, had been left upon them.

As for Davie, what could a lad like him know about such things? Fancies that would lead to nothing but waste and want! And yet his wife's words told upon him as all her words did sooner or later.

"Would you like it then, Katie, my woman?" said he, as one night, when all the work was over, he came on Katie sitting with Nannie and Sandy on the bank of the burn. Davie was on the other side pacing up and down, measuring out, as they had done together many times before, the site of the new milk-house. Many thoughts and words had Davie expended upon it, and so had Katie for that matter. So she rose and walked with her grandfather along the burnside, out of Davie's hearing, and then she answered brightly:

"Ay, that I would, grandfather; not just now, ye ken, but after a while, when it can be done without going into debt. It would be grand. And I could sell twice as much butter as we make now, if we had it. I like butter-making." And so on, touching on more of Davie's fancies than her grandfather had heard of yet, till they came back to the lad, still intent on his measurements, with his eyes fixed on a paper on which he was industriously figuring.

"The foundation must be of stone, Katie, because of the swelling of the burn in spring and fall, but the stones are at hand, and cost no money. And we might gather them on rainy days, grandfather, not to take time from other work; I can make the frame myself, but the foundation must be of stone."

Katie stood still, surprised and a little frightened. She was not sure how all this might be taken, for though they had made much enjoyment for themselves out of the new dairy that was to be, and had spoken to "grannie" and their mother about it, this was the first direct intimation they had given to their grandfather. He smiled grimly, however; indeed he laughed, which did not often happen with him.

"A foundation! and stone, too! I didna think you needed foundations to your fancies, Davie, lad."

"Well, maybe no' just as long as they are fancies, grandfather," said Davie, looking outwardly a little sheepish, but with inward triumph, as Katie knew quite well. For to get his grandfather to listen to him was a great step. "And now,

Katie, I'll just ask grandfather which is right, you or me. Come over here, grandfather, and tell us which you think the best place for it. Katie thinks this is over far from the house, but I think not."

The grandfather actually crossed the burn, and went with him, Katie following with a smiling face and joyful heart. They did not decide much that night, but ever after the new milk-house was considered a settled thing, and much good they got out of it before either stone or stick was laid down beside the burn. For Davie got on better with his grandfather after that, and fifteen-year lad as he was, did a grown man's work from day to day, growing thin upon it for a while, but growing tall also, and losing his pretty boyish looks, of which Katie and his mother had been so proud.

So the summer work was done, and the summer pleasure, which was greater than they knew, as the pleasure which comes with busy uneventful days generally is. But it was a happy summer, and must have been so even if the drawbacks had been more numerous and harder to bear.

Katie had one pleasure which her brother could not share, but which pleased her grandmother well: this was the friendship of Miss Elizabeth. Ever since the night of her first visit with her brother and the minister, Elizabeth had taken pains to renew her intimacy with Mrs Fleming and Katie, to their mutual satisfaction. On stormy nights during the winter, Elizabeth had sometimes sent for Katie to the school, that she might be saved the long cold walk home, and Katie liked to go. During the summer she could not be spared often, but she went now and then, and their friendship grew apace.

On Katie's part it was more than friendship. It was like "falling in love." She did not say much about it, it was not her way. But she thought of her friend's words and ways, and opinions, and seeing her superiority to people in general, Miss Elizabeth became to her the ideal of all womanly sweetness and excellence. Miss Elizabeth could not but be touched and charmed by the affection which was thus rather betrayed than expressed, and though she was sometimes amused by her devotion, it greatly pleased her as well.

"Yours must be such a happy life, Miss Elizabeth," said Katie one night when she was visiting her friend, and they were sitting together after Mrs Holt had gone to bed.

Elizabeth smiled and shook her head. "Tell me what my life is like?"

There was a pause, during which Katie considered.

"You have a quiet life, and you are a comfort to your father, and everybody loves you."

"I am afraid there are some people who do not love me much. As to my father, yes. I shall never be quite a useless person while he needs me. But as to my life being a happy life—"

"You have leisure," said Katie after a little, "and you take pleasure in so many things—things going on far away, and that happened long ago. And you care for books, and you understand people. And you believe in great principles of action, and you are not afraid. I cannot say just what I mean."

"But, Katie, all that is as true of you as it is of me, except perhaps the leisure."

"I am only a child almost," said Katie, with a little rising colour. "But when I am a woman I should like my life to be just like yours."

There was silence for a minute or two, then Katie went on:

"I once heard Mr Burnet tell my grandfather that you did more by the real interest you take in everything that is good and right, and by your bright, unselfish ways, to keep up a healthy, happy state of things among the young people of the place, than even the minister's preaching. That was in old Mr Hollister's time, however," added the truth-loving Katie reflectively.

Miss Elizabeth smiled. "Mr Burnet is partial in his judgment."

"But you are happy, Miss Elizabeth," said Katie wistfully.

"Am I? I ought to be, I suppose; yes, I think so. I am content, and that is better than happiness, they say."

This was something that required consideration.

"'Godliness with contentment is great gain;' that is what Paul said. Perhaps he thought it better than happiness too."

"And Solomon says, 'A contented mind is a continual feast,'" said Miss Elizabeth, smiling at her face of grave consideration.

"I wonder what is the difference?" said Katie. "Folk are contented without knowing it, I suppose. I have been contented all my life, and if I had my wish about some things I would be happy."

"What things?"

"If we had no debt," said Katie, decidedly. "And if we had a little more money, so that we would not need to consider about things so much, and so that Davie could go to school all the year, and perhaps to the college, and the rest too, Nannie and Sandy and all. And we should have the dairy built over the burn, with a store of ice in it, and marble shelves, like one grandmother saw at Braemar. Well, not marble perhaps. That might be foolish, but we should have everything to make the work light, and there would be time for other things. My grandfather should plant trees, and graft them and prime them and work away at his leisure, not troubling himself as to how it was all to come out at the end of the year. And my mother should have a low carriage, just like yours, Miss Elizabeth, and old Kelso should have nothing to do but draw it for her pleasure. And grannie—oh, grannie should wear a soft grey gown every day of the year, and neckerchiefs of the finest lawn, as she used to do—and such sheets and table-cloths as she should have, and she should never need to wet her fingers—only I am not sure that she would be any happier for that," said Katie, pulling herself up suddenly.

“And what would you have for yourself?” said Miss Elizabeth, wishing to hear more.

“I should have leisure,” said Katie decidedly, as though she had thought it over and made up her mind. “I should have time for fine sewing, and to learn things—not just making lessons of them, and hurrying over them as they do at the school. I should have time to think about them, and I should have books and music, and a room like yours. Oh, dear me! What is the use of thinking about it,” said Katie, with a sigh.

“And after all, contentment with things as they are, would answer every purpose,” said Miss Elizabeth.

“Yes, but there are some things with which it is impossible to be contented—without wishing to change them, I mean—debt, and sickness, and having too much to do. And there are some things in people’s lives that cannot be changed.”

“And with such things we must just try and content ourselves,” said Elizabeth.

“Yes. And contentment depends more on ourselves, and less on other folk, than happiness does. And so we are safer with just contentment,” said Katie, and in a little she added, “Submission to God’s will, that would be contentment.”

“That would be happiness,” said Elizabeth, and there was nothing more said for a long time.

They were sitting in Miss Elizabeth’s sitting-room, a perfect room to Katie Fleming’s mind, and the only light came from the red embers of the wood-fire, now falling low. Miss Elizabeth was leaning back among the cushions of her father’s great arm-chair, and Katie sat on a low chair opposite, with a book on her lap. Miss Elizabeth was “seeing things in the fire,” Katie knew, by the look on her face, wondering what she saw. She looked “like a picture,” sitting there in her pretty dress, with her cheek upon her hand. What a soft white hand it was, with its one bright ring sparkling in the firelight! Katie looked at it, and then at her own. Hers was not very large, but it was red and roughened, bearing traces of her daily work. She held it up and looked at it in the firelight, not at all knowing why she did it, but with the strangest feeling of discomfort. It was not the difference of the hands that troubled her. Somehow she seemed to be looking, not at the two hands, but at the two lives, hers and Miss Elizabeth’s.

For Miss Elizabeth’s was a pleasant life, though she had looked grave when she said so. She had so many things to enjoy—her music, her reading, her flowers, with only pleasant household duties, and above all she had leisure. Katie thought of her as she had seen her often, sitting in the church, or in the garden among her flowers, or under the trees in the village street, looking so fair and sweet, so different from any one else, so very different from Katie herself, and a momentary overpowering discontent seized her—discontent with herself, her home, her manner of life, with the constant daily work which seemed to come to nothing but just a bare living. It was the same thing over and over again, housework and dairy-work, and waking and sleeping, with nothing to show for it all at the year’s end. What was the good of it all?

Katie let her book fall on the floor as she put her hands together with a sudden impatient movement, and the sound startled her out of her vexing thoughts.

“What would grannie say, I wonder, if she knew?” muttered she, as she stooped to pick up the book. She felt her face grow hot, and then she laughed at her foolishness, and looked up to meet Miss Elizabeth’s eye.

“What is it, Katie? What are you thinking about?”

“I was thinking about—grannie,” said Katie in confusion.

“Well, what about her?”

“Oh! I don’t know. I cannot tell you. Only I shall never be so good a woman as grannie, I’m afraid.”

“But then you have a long time before you. I don’t think you need to be discouraged yet,” said Miss Elizabeth, laughing.

But Katie was very much ashamed of herself, and did not forgive herself till she had talked the matter over, first with her grandmother, and then with Davie. Davie only laughed at her with a little good-natured contempt. He did not share his sister’s enthusiasm about Miss Elizabeth, and did not quite approve of the great friendship between them. But as to making a sin of a moment’s envy of her friend, and a moment’s discontent with her own life—Davie laughed at the idea.

But her grandmother did not laugh.

“My dear lassie, it is the way with us all. We are ready to turn our best helps into snares to catch our feet. Miss Elizabeth’s kindness may do you much good in many ways, but if it should make you envious, and should fill you with discontent, that would be sad indeed. And I doubt you’ll need to watch yourself, and maybe punish yourself, by hiding away from her for a while.”

Chapter Eleven.

Gershom Manufacturing Company.

The possibility and desirableness of advancing the interests of the town of Gershom by the still further “utilising” of the waters of the Beaver River for manufacturing purposes, had long been a matter earnestly discussed among the people. At various towns within the last five years measures had been proposed, tending toward the accomplishment of this object, but hitherto it had been with little result.

As a rule, the various industries which now gave prosperity and importance to the place had grown out of small beginnings. On the spot where now stood Cartwright’s Carriage Factory, well known through all the countryside, old Joshua Cartwright had faithfully and laboriously spent his days in making tubs and stools, sugar-troughs, and axe-helves for the early settlers. The shed where, in those days, Simon Horton had shod their horses and oxen, had grown in the course of years into the Gershom axe-factory, which bade fair to make a rich man of his daughter’s son.

But the slow and sure process which had served their fathers in their advances toward wealth were not likely to content the men of Gershom now, and there had been much talk among them about the forming of a company to be called "The Gershom Manufacturing Company," the object of which was to be the establishment of new industries in the town.

Meetings were held, and speeches were made. The "enterprise and public spirit of certain of our fellow-townsmen" were highly lauded, and a wonderful future of prosperity for the town of Gershom and the surrounding country was foretold as the result of the step about to be taken. The Beaver River was made the subject of long and laudatory discussion. Its motive power was calculated and valued, and the long running to waste of its waters deplored. A committee was appointed for the arranging of preliminaries, and that was as far as the matter progressed at that time.

Other attempts were made later in the same direction. Some of them passed beyond preliminary arrangements, and more than once the more sanguine among the promoters of these schemes made sure of a successful issue, but all had failed when the practical part of the business had been touched.

The cause of this did not always clearly appear. Once at least it was attributed by some of the disappointed townsmen to the obstinacy and avarice of Jacob Holt. The old woollen-mill built by Gershom Holt in the early days of the settlement had served a good purpose in the country for a good many years. But it was time now, it was thought, for the work to be carried on in Gershom on a larger scale. The old building itself was of little value, and the old-fashioned machinery it contained was of less, but the site was considered to be the best in Gershom for a manufactory of the kind. Jacob Holt professed to be quite ready to dispose of it to the company on reasonable terms; but when it came to the point, no agreement could be made as to what were reasonable terms, and so the old mill plodded on in the old way for a while, and within a year a new mill was built in the neighbouring township of Fosbrooke. There was much indignation expressed with regard to this matter in Gershom, but Jacob troubled himself little about it. The old mill had gone the way of most old mills since then; it had caught fire one wintry night and burned to the ground, and the Gershom paper-mill had been built on the site.

Jacob had not come down in his ideas as to the value he set upon it, but he had been content to take shares in the building instead of the "cash down" which he had demanded before. In this way, and in other ways, he came by and by to be the largest shareholder in the concern, and when later, partly through the inefficiency of the person who had charge of the business, and partly for other reasons, paper-making began to look like a losing concern, the value of the shares went down, and in course of time most of them fell into his hands. So it was "Holt's Paper-mill" now, and there was no other manufacturing company as yet in existence in Gershom. The chances were, it was said, that had the first company succeeded with the woollen-mill it might have fallen into the same hands, and as far as the general property of the town was concerned, it might as well have been Jacob Holt's hands as others'. But those who had lost, or who fancied they had lost, by his part in these two transactions, were watchful and suspicious of his movements when once more the wise men of Gershom began to see visions of what might be done by the combined powers of the Beaver River, the enterprise of the people, and the use of a moderate amount of capital to advance the prosperity of their town.

Their ideas had still advanced with the times. Their plans were not limited to a woollen-mill now. Machine shops of all sorts, a match factory, furniture-shops, even a cotton factory was spoken of. Indeed, there were no limits to the manufacturing possibilities of the place, as far as talk went. Money was needed, and a good deal of it, and the people of Gershom wisely contemplated the propriety of making use of other people's money in building up the town, and for this purpose it was desirable that the company should embrace the rich men of other towns as well. Some of those rich men came in an informal way and looked about, and admired the Beaver River, and talked and thought a good deal about the scheme. The banks of the river above and below the town were examined with a view to deciding on the building of a new dam, and Mr Fleming's refusal to sell any part of his land had been in answer to Jacob Holt's offer on behalf of the prospective company.

All this had taken place about the time when Mr Maxwell came to Gershom, and when he had been there a year no advance had been made in the way of actual work.

The greater part of the land on the north side of the river, as far up as Ythan Brae, had always belonged to the Holts. During the past year the land of Mark Varney, on the south side, had also fallen into their hands. For poor Mark's wife died, and any hope that his friends were beginning to have that he might redeem his character was quite lost for the time. He sold his place, already heavily burdened with debt, to Jacob Holt; his mother became Mr Maxwell's housekeeper in the new parsonage, taking her little grandchild with her, and poor Mark went away—none for a while knew whither.

But the chief thing that concerned the people of Gershom was that Jacob Holt had got his land, and the conclusion at once arrived at was that at the point on the river where his pasture and wood-lot met, the new dam was to be made, and that on his land, and on the land opposite, the new factories, and the new town that must grow out of them, were to be built.

"What Jacob ought to do now would be to go right on and make a good beginning on his own account. If there is ever going to be anything done in Gershom, that is the spot for it, and the company would have to come to his terms at last."

So said Gershom folks, wondering that the rich man of the place should "kind o' hang back" when such a chance of money-making seemed to lie before him. But Jacob knew several things as yet only surmised by Gershom folks in general. It was by no means certain after all that the Gershom Manufacturing Company would come into existence immediately. And even if it should, the chances were that among its members would be more than one man who would be little likely to yield himself to the dictation or even to the direction of Jacob Holt, as his townsmen had fallen into the way of doing where the outlay of capital was concerned. It would be easy to make a beginning, but Jacob looked further than a beginning.

Gershom was not the only place whose inhabitants cherished the ambition to become a manufacturing community and there were other rivers besides the Beaver running to waste, which might be made available as a manufacturing power. A company, with sufficient amount of stock subscribed and paid for, might agree to put Fosbrooke, or Fairfax, or Crowsville down as the name, and carry their money, and their influence, and the chance of acquiring wealth to either of their thriving towns; and a beginning in Gershom would amount to very little in such a case.

And then the river bank on the Varney place was not, in Mr Holt's opinion, the best place for the new mills and the new village. It was not to be compared to the point just below which Bear's Creek, or, as the Flemings called it, Ythan Brae, flowed into the Beaver, and this also belonged to Mr Fleming. Jacob would have liked to make his beginning there. He knew, for he had taken advice on the matter, that at the Varney place no dam of sufficient capacity to answer all the purposes which were contemplated by the company could be made, without at certain seasons of the year so flooding the land above it as to render it useless for any purpose. He might have taken the risk of probable lawsuits, and gone on

with the work, if it had depended on him alone to decide the matter. But it did not. Or he would have bought it, but that it belonged to David Fleming, who would listen to no proposal from his "enemy."

It was not that Mr Fleming was not satisfied with the terms offered. He would listen to no terms. Indeed he refused to discuss the matter with his neighbours, not only with those who might be suspected of wishing for one reason or another to convince him of the folly of not taking advantage of a good offer for his land, but with those who sympathised with him in his dislike to Jacob Holt, who went further than he did even, and called the rich man not only avaricious, but worse. He would listen to nothing about it, but rose and turned his back on the bold man who ventured to approach the subject in his presence.

In all this Jacob Holt felt himself to be hardly used. He declared to himself that he wished to do the right thing by Mr Fleming. He was willing to give him the full value of every foot of his land, and above its value. That the advancement of the interests of the town and the welfare of the whole community should be interfered with, because of an obstinate old man's whim, seemed to him intolerable; he did not want the land. Let Mr Fleming treat with the company—there was no company as yet, however—and let him pay him his just debt, that was all he asked of him.

He did not speak often about this to any one—not a man in Gershom but had more to say about it than he. But he thought about it continually. If it had been any other man in Gershom who had so withstood him, he would long ago have taken such measures as would have brought him to his senses. He could do so lawfully, by and by. The law had sustained him in dealing with much harder cases than Mr Fleming's, though it was not altogether pleasant to remember some of them. But there could be no question but that it would be for the interest of the Flemings, old and young, were his terms agreed to. No one would have a right to say a word, though he were to carry his point against the old man, and claim what was his due.

All this he said to himself many times, but still he could not do it, at least he could not bring himself to do it at once. His father, though he acknowledged the unreasonableness of his friend, would yet be grieved at the taking of extreme measures against him; his sister would be indignant, and he was a little afraid of Elizabeth. The church union, which he with all the rest of Gershom had earnestly desired, would be endangered; for he knew by many tokens that some of the North Gore men were hanging back because of him. Public opinion would not sustain him in any steps taken against so old a man, and one who had seen so much trouble since he came among them, and he did not wish to take severe measures, he told himself many times. It is just possible that the remembrance of the lad who had been his companion and friend, who had been cut off in the flower of his youth, to the never-dying sorrow of the old man who opposed him, had something to do with his hesitation in this matter. But even to himself this was never acknowledged; all he could do was to wait and see whether some sudden turn of events might not serve to bring about his purpose better than severity could do.

In the meantime, after many thoughts about it, when the few scanty fields on the Varney place were harvested, he did make a beginning. He brought old Joe Middlemas to the place, who walked about with all the appliances for surveying it, and for laying it out in building lots. He had some trees cut down, and some hillocks levelled, and kept several men for a time employed in bringing loads of stone to the river's bank, in a way that looked very much like making a beginning. But the heavy autumn rains put an end to all this for a while, and as yet there existed no manufacturing company in Gershom, nor was there any immediate prospect that the hopes of the people with regard to it were likely to be realised.

"They're fine at speaking, grannie," said young Davie, who had been keeping his eyes and his ears open to all that was going on in Gershom. "But grandfather and you may be at peace about the dam and the mischief it might do for a while anyway. It may come in my day, but it winna come in yours, unless that should happen which is not very likely to happen, and all the rich men in the country should put their names and their money at the disposal of King Jacob. He may measure his land, and gather his sticks and his stones together, but that is all it will come to, this while at any rate. Though why grandfather should be so unwilling to part with a few acres of poor land to Jacob Holt is more than I can understand."

"It is a wonder to me, Davie lad, where you got such a conceit of yourself. One would think you were in folks' secrets, and spoke with authority. It will do here at home with Katie and your mother and me, but I am thinking other folk would laugh to hear you."

But Mrs Fleming was relieved for all that, for Davie was, in her opinion, a lad of sense and discretion for his years, though she did not think it necessary to tell him so, and she took comfort in the thought that her husband would have a while's peace, as little more could be done till the spring opened again.

Chapter Twelve.

The Two Cousins.

A great disappointment was preparing for Elizabeth. Her brother completed his studies, and brought home his diploma, whether he deserved it or not, and spent a pleasant six weeks at home, "resting from his labours," as he said, and then he announced his intention of going to reside in the city of Montreal, to pursue there the study of the law. It had always been taken for granted that when his studies came to an end, he was to go into the business of the Holts, and settle down in Gershom.

"And what good should I do in the business?" said he to his sister; "should I stand behind the counter in the store and sell yards of calico and pounds of tea? Or should I take the tannery in hand, or the paper-mill? Or should I go into the new company that Jacob seems so bent on getting up? Now, Lizzie, do be reasonable and tell me what good I should do in the business."

"I know that few young men in the country could hope for such a start in life. It is not necessary that you should sell tea or calico either, except by the hands of those you may employ—though if you were to do it, it would be no discredit to you—and no more than your father did before you many a day."

"Discredit! No, that is not the thing. But I can do something better for myself than that; I am going to try at least."

"If self is your first consideration—But, Clifton, whether you think it or not, you could do much in the business, and you are needed in it. Jacob has more on his hands than he can do well, and even if he had not, it is your affair that the business should prosper as well as his. All we have is in it, and what do any of us know as to how our affairs stand? We

are altogether in Jacob's hands."

"Come, now, Lizzie! Let Cousin Betsey and the rest of them run down Jacob. It is rather hard on him that his own sister should join them. I believe he is an honest man—as honesty among business men goes."

"I am not speaking of honesty or dishonesty. But Jacob is not such a man of business as our father was."

"No, but with his chances, he cannot but be carrying on a prosperous business. Oh, I'll risk Jacob."

"But, Clifton, all that we have is in the business, and we ought to know."

"Why, Lizzie! who ever thought before that you were mercenary and suspicious, and I don't know what else besides? What has Jacob been doing to 'aggravate' you lately, that you should be down on him?"

"Clifton, you must not dismiss the matter so lightly. I am thinking far more of you than of myself. You can never do better for yourself anywhere, and why should you change your plans now, after all these years?"

"Have I ever said that I was to stay in Gershom? I don't say that I won't come back for good, some time. Gershom does seem to be the place for a halt but as to going into the business right away, no, I thank you."

"I think you are wrong."

"Nonsense! What do you suppose, now, Jacob would do if I were to bring him to book, and claim a right to know all about his business transactions, and his plans and prospects? It would be a mere farce my making believe to go into the business."

"Possibly you might make it so, but it need not be so. But I cannot think it wise or right for you to go to Montreal. It is like setting aside the plans of your whole life to leave Gershom."

"No; you are mistaken. Though I have said nothing about it, I have not this many a day meant to settle down here. I may ultimately 'hang out my shingle' here, or I may be appointed judge of the district by and by, and then I'll come back and be a bigger man than Jacob, even."

But Elizabeth could not laugh at his nonsense. She was afraid for her brother. She had longed for his return home, saying to herself that home influence and a busy life would be better for him than the careless life he had been living as a student; that with responsibility laid upon him, he would forget his follies, and be all that she longed to see him.

"Think of our father's disappointment. How can you ever tell him that you are going away?"

"While he has you he will be all right, and he will always be looking forward to the time when I shall come home for good, for I fully intend to settle here by and by. I confess it is hard for you to be kept stationary here, Lizzie. It looks mean in me to go away and leave you, doesn't it?"

"If it were going to be for your good—But, Clifton I don't believe it."

"I ought to give myself the best chance, ought I not? I must go to Montreal. But, Lizzie, why don't you say at once that I am not to be trusted in the city with its temptations? That is what you are thinking of."

Elizabeth did not deny it. She was thinking of it sadly enough.

"That is one reason against it," said she.

"Well, get rid of that fear. I am all right. I should be worse off loafing round here with little to do, and I shall be home often. Now, Lizzie, don't spoil the last days by fretting about what is not to be helped. I'm bound to go."

And go he did. Elizabeth could only submit in silence. His father missed him less than she had feared he might. He was home several times during the autumn and winter, and always spoke of the time when he was coming for good, and his father was content with that.

Whether her brother Jacob was really disappointed or not at Clifton's decision, Elizabeth could not tell. "Jacob had never counted much on any help he would be likely to get from his brother," Mrs Jacob said. She was quite inclined to make a grievance of his going away, as she would probably have made a grievance of his staying, if he had stayed. But Jacob said little about it, and everything went on as before.

Elizabeth had the prospect of a quieter winter than even the last had been. Her father was less able to enjoy the company of his old friends than he had been. He grew weary very soon now, and liked better the quiet of the house when only Elizabeth was with him. His active habits and his interest in the business had long survived any real responsibility as to the affairs of the farm, but even these were failing him now. When the weather was bright and fine he usually once a day moved slowly down the village street, where every eye and voice greeted him respectfully, and every hand was ready to guide his feeble steps. He paid a daily visit to the store, or the tannery, or the paper-mill, as he had done for so many years, but it was from habit merely. He often came wearily home to slumber through the rest of the day.

He was querulous sometimes and exacting as to his daughter's care, and she rarely left him for a long time. She looked forward to no social duties in the way of merry-making for the young folks of the place this year. Even Clifton's coming home now and then did not enliven the house in this respect as it had done in former winters. Many a quiet day and long, silent evening did she pass before the new year came in, and she would have had more of them had it not been for her Cousin Betsey.

Once or twice, when her father had suffered from some slight turn of illness, Elizabeth had sent for her cousin, whose reputation as a nurse had been long established, and Betsey had come at first, at some inconvenience to herself, from a sense of duty. Afterward she came because she knew she was welcome, and because she liked to come, and all the work at home, most of which fell to her willing hands, was so planned and arranged that she might at a moment's notice leave her mother and her sister Cynthia to their own resources and the willing and effective help of Ben. After a time, few

weeks passed that she did not look in upon them.

"He may drop away most any time, mother," said she, "and she hasn't seen trouble enough yet to be good for much to help him or herself either, at a time like that."

"And you are so good in sickness. And your uncle Gershom's been a good friend to us always," said her mother. "I'm glad you should be with him when you can, and with her too. And trouble may do Lizzie good."

"Well, it may be. Some folks don't seem to need so much trouble as others, at least they don't get so much, but Cousin Lizzie isn't going to be let alone in that respect, I don't think. Well, I guess I'll go along over, and I'll get back before night if nothing happens, and if I am not, as it's considerable drifted between here and the corner, Ben might come down after supper and see what is going on."

"Trouble!" repeated Miss Betsey, as she gathered up the reins and laid the whip lightly on the back of "old Samson."

"Trouble is just as folks take it. I have had my own share in my day, or I thought so," she added, with a sharp little laugh. "I just wonder what I should have done now if the Lord had let me have my own way about some things."

Old Samson moved steadily along, past Joel Bean's, and the bridge, and up the hill that brought Gershom in sight, and then she said aloud: "But then things might have been different," and then old Samson felt the whip laid on with a little more decision this time, and this, probably with the anticipation of the measure of oats awaiting him in the squire's stable, quickened his movements; and in a few minutes Miss Betsey was shaking the snow from her cloak in Sally Griffith's back kitchen. It had been snowing heavily for a while, and the movement of the sleigh had been unheard by Elizabeth, or she would have taken the shaking of the snowy garments into her own hands.

"Folks as usual?" said Miss Betsey, as she came into the front kitchen, where Sally reigned supreme, conscious of her value as "help," and careful of her dignity as a citizen of Gershom, "as good as anybody."

"Well, pretty much so, I guess. Kind of down these days, in general."

They had been youthful companions, these two, and had plenty to say to each other. So Betsey warmed her feet at the oven door, and they discussed several questions before she went into the sitting-room. She went in softly, so as not to disturb the old man, should he have fallen asleep in his chair, as he sometimes did after dinner; so she had a chance to see Elizabeth's face before she knew that she was not alone. It was grave and paler than Betsey had ever seen it, and there was a weary, far-away look in her eyes that were following the grey clouds just beginning to drift over the clearing sky. They brightened, however, as they turned at the sound of the opening door.

"Cousin Betsey! I'm so glad to see you. You have come to stay?"

Friendly as they had become of late, Elizabeth did not often venture to kiss her cousin. She did this time, however, repeating:

"You have come to stay?"

"Well, yes. I came fixed so as to stay a spell if I was wanted. Joel Bean's folks heard somewhere that Uncle Gershom hadn't been seen out in the street these two days, and I thought I'd just come over and see how he was keeping along."

"That was good of you. He was not out yesterday, and to-day has been so snowy. But he is no worse; a little better and brighter, if anything. But all the same, I want you to stay."

"Well, I don't care if I do a spell. You must be hard up for company to be so glad to see me."

Miss Betsey sat down by the fire, and took her knitting from her pocket. There were tears in Elizabeth's eyes which Betsey pretended not to see, and which Elizabeth did her best to keep back. She went into her father's room for a minute, and looked cheerful enough as she took her seat on the other side of the hearth opposite her cousin, with her work in her hand. But when she began to answer Betsey's questions about her father—his appetite, his strength, his nights, his days—the tears came again, and this time they fell over her cheeks. For she found herself sorrowfully telling that though he had comfortable days, and days when he seemed just as he used to do, it was evident that his strength was failing more rapidly than it had ever done during any winter before. She let her work fall on her lap, and leaning her elbow on the table, covered her face with her hands.

"He is an old man," said Betsey, gravely.

"Yes. But he is all I have got," said Elizabeth, speaking with difficulty.

"He is your father, but he is not all you've got. Don't say that."

"There is no one else that cares very much about me. If I were sick or in trouble, I think I would have a better right to come to you, Cousin Betsey, than to any one else in the world."

"Well, and why not? You ought to have had a sister," said Betsey.

Elizabeth laughed a little hysterically.

"I have—Jacob's wife," said she.

"Humph," said Betsey. "I'll tell you what's the matter with you; you're nervous, and no wonder."

"Oh, Cousin Betsey! don't be hard on me. I'll be all right in a minute. I know I'm foolish, and it is a shame now that you are here not to be better company."

"You are nervous," repeated Betsey. "And what you want is to feel the fresh air blowing about you. See here, old Samson is right here in the shed. You go and put on your things and have a drive. It will do you all the good in the world."

“And will you come with me?”

“No, I guess not. Then you’d want to hurry right home again, because of your father. I’ll stay with him, and then you won’t worry. If he’s pretty well, I want to have a talk with him anyway, and now will be as good a time as any. So don’t you hurry back.”

“Well, I won’t. But it doesn’t seem worth while to go alone.”

“Yes, it does. And see here! You go over as far as Mrs Fleming’s. She’ll do you good, and maybe she’ll let Katie come home with you to stay a day or two. What you want is to have somebody to look at besides Sally Griffith, and I don’t know anybody any better for that than little Katie Fleming. Her grandmother will let her come, seeing you are alone.”

It was not a blight day even yet, though the snow had ceased to fall, and the clouds were clearing away. Elizabeth looked out of the window, hesitating.

“If any one should come in,” said she.

“Well, I guess I could say all that need be said—unless it was anybody very particular, and then I could keep them till you came home again.”

“Well, I’ll go; and thank you, cousin,” said Elizabeth, laughing.

She did not drive old Samson. He was safely stabled by this time. She drove her own horse and sleigh with its pretty robes, and acknowledged herself better the very first breath of wind that fanned her cheek. The snow had fallen so heavily as to make it not easy to drive rapidly, and so she enjoyed all the more the winter sights and sounds that were about her. The whole earth was dazzlingly white. The evergreen trees in the graveyard looked like pyramids of snow. The trunks of the great maples under which she passed as she drew near Mr Fleming’s house, showed black and rugged, and so did the leafless boughs that met each other overhead.

But even the great boughs were bending under their load of new-fallen snow, and every now and then, as the wind stirred them, it fell in great, soft masses silently to the ground. How still and restful it was. The sleigh-bells tinkled softly, and there was a faint rushing of the wind through the trees, and the sharp stroke of an axe was heard now and then in the distance. That was all. Elizabeth put away all troubled thoughts to enjoy it, and there were no traces of tears, no signs of nerves visible, when she drove up to Mrs Fleming’s door. She had been there a good many times since the night she had made the visit with Clifton and the minister, and she never came but that she was heartily welcomed by them all.

“Especially welcome to-day, when we never expected to see any one after such a fall of snow. Come awa’ ben, Miss Elizabeth, and when Davie comes down with his load of wood, he’ll put in the horse, and you’ll bide to your tea, and go home by light of the new moon.”

But Elizabeth could not stay long. Betsey, who was with her father, would be anxious to be home early, and she must not leave her father alone, though she would like to stay.

“Well, you know best, and we winna spoil the time you’re here by teasing you about staying longer. So sit you down here by the fire and warm your hands, though you look anything but chilled and cold. Your cheeks are like twin roses.”

Elizabeth thought of Betsey’s dismissal of her and laughed.

“My drive has done me good.”

She stayed a good while and enjoyed every minute of it. It was a great rest and pleasure to listen to Mrs Fleming’s cheerful talk, with Katie’s quiet mother putting in a word, and now and then Katie herself. Neither Katie nor Davie were at the school this winter. The studies that Davie liked best he would have had to go on with alone, even if he had gone, and he liked as well to get a little help from the master now and then and stay at home. But he had not much time for study. For he had taken “just a wonderful turn for work,” his grandmother said, and much was told of the land he was clearing and the cord-wood he was piling for the market. Katie brought in a wonderful bee-hive he had made, to show Miss Elizabeth, and told her how much honey they had had, and how much more they were to have next year, because of Davie’s skill. Davie had made an ice-house too, for the summer butter—a rather primitive one it seemed to be as Katie described it—on a plan of Davie’s own, and it had to be proved yet, but it gave great satisfaction in the meantime. And the frame of the new dairy was lying ready beside the burn to be put up as soon as the snow melted, and the water was to be made to run round the milk-pans in the warm nights, and Katie, under the direction of her grandmother, was to make the best butter in the country. All this might not seem of much interest to any one but themselves, but listening to them, and watching their happy, eager faces, Elizabeth, who had more than the common power of enjoying other people’s happiness, felt herself to be refreshed and encouraged as she listened, especially to what was said about Davie. The troubles of the Flemings would soon be over should Davie prove to be a prop on which, in their old age, they might lean.

“He is wonderfully taken up about the work, and the best way of doing it just now, and I only hope it may last,” said Mrs Fleming, and then Katie said, “Oh, grannie!” so deprecatingly that they all laughed at her.

When Mr Fleming came in, and had heard all about the squire, and how Cousin Betsey was staying with him while Elizabeth made her visit and got a breath of fresh air, she took courage to present her petition that Katie might be allowed to go home with her and stay a day or two. It needed some courage to urge it, for she knew that her grandfather was never quite at peace when Katie was not at home. “It was Cousin Betsey, Mrs Fleming, that bade me ask you for Katie for a little while. She said her coming would do me good, and Katie no harm; and she said you would be sure to let her come since I was so lonesome at home.”

Katie looked with wistful eyes at her grandmother, and she looked at the old man.

“We might spare her a while to Miss Elizabeth, who is kept so close at home with her father. And you must take your seam with you, Katie, my lassie,” added the old lady, as no dissenting frown from the grandfather followed her first words. “And maybe Miss Elizabeth has a new stitch, or some other new thing to teach you. These things are easy carried about with a person, and they ay have a chance to come in use sometime. Oh, ay, you can take a while with a book, too,

now and then when Miss Elizabeth is occupied with her father. Only be reasonable, and don't forget all else, as is awiles the way with you. And you can put on your bonny blue frock, but be sure and take good care o' it," and many more last words the happy Katie heard, and then they went away.

Chapter Thirteen.

Two Friends.

A day with Miss Elizabeth was one of Katie's chief pleasures, and it was scarcely less a pleasure to Miss Elizabeth to have her with her; so the faces of both were bright and smiling as they drove away from the door.

"It's no' often that you see two like these two," said Mrs Fleming, as they all stood looking after them for a minute. "And it's only good that they are like to do one another. May the Lord have them both in His keeping. There is nothing else that can keep them safe and happy; but that is enough, and I'm not afraid."

They drove slowly down the slope, and waited at the gate for a word with Davie, who was coming from the wood with his great brown oxen, with the last load for the night. He did not look more than half pleased to see his sister at Miss Elizabeth's side.

"You are not to grudge her to me, Davie, for a little while," said Miss Holt.

"Oh, she can please herself," said Davie, with a shrug. "When will you be home again, Katie?"

"Oh, in a day or two. I cannot just tell; but soon."

They had not time to linger, and the horse did not care to stand, so with a hurried good-bye they were away and moved on rapidly for a while.

"I don't think Davie likes me very well," said Miss Elizabeth.

"Oh, it's not you he doesn't like," said Katie eagerly.

"It is Jacob, I suppose?"

It was not Jacob that Katie meant, but she said nothing.

"Well, never mind; we are going to think and speak only of pleasant things for the next three days, and that was a bad beginning."

Though the snow was deep it was light, and the horse, with the prospect of home before him, was willing to go, and strong as well, so they flew along, down the hill beneath the maples, past the graveyard and the church, into the long street of the town; and then, though it was growing late, Miss Elizabeth turned to the left over the bridge instead of going up the hill toward home. They came into the road on the other side of the bridge that brought most people to the town, and the snow was already well beaten down, and they went on in perfect enjoyment of the easiest of all movements.

It was neither sunlight nor moonlight, or rather it was both, for the clouds had all cleared away, and a red glow lingered in the west, and high above hung the moon, a silver crescent, and in the sky beyond a bright star here and there; all the rest was white, with streaks of black where the fences were and the wayside trees, and far in the distance a long stretch of forest hid the line where the white of the earth touched the blue of the sky.

In the light so faint, and yet so clear, that shone around them, all things had an unfamiliar look—a look of mystery, and it seemed, even to the sensible Katie, as though almost any strange adventure might happen to them to-night.

"I could almost fancy that we were going away together into some strange country, into the country of the 'wraiths' maybe, that grannie whiles tells the bairns about. Don't all things seem to have a strange look to-night, Miss Elizabeth?"

Miss Elizabeth started. She had fallen into thought, and Katie could see when she turned her face that her thoughts had not been happy.

"What were you saying, Katie? Going away together? Oh, how I wish we were, away beyond the hills yonder, to leave all our troubles behind us."

That was to be considered. Katie was not so ready to assent to her friend's words as usual.

"But we should be leaving our comforts behind us too, all the people who love us, and all those whom we love."

"Ah, yes, I know; and all our work as well. And it would be no good, for we should carry our troubles with us. It was a foolish thing to say, Katie, dear. It must be time to turn back when such foolish words come to one's lips."

Besides they had come to a place where turning was easy, and it might be some time before they could get another chance, so deep was the snow on either side. So they turned round toward home, and Katie thought it more wonderful still, for the red glow in the sky was before them now, and the new moon, and more stars shone as the glow faded.

"But it would be fine to go away with you, Miss Elizabeth, to some far country, to see strange sights—if we could be spared, I mean, and with the thought of coming back again."

"Wouldn't it be fine!" said Miss Elizabeth, rousing herself. "Some day we'll go—you and I together, Katie. We'll cross the sea, and wander through the countries that we read about in books, and among the great cities that have stood for hundreds and hundreds of years. Wouldn't you like to see Scotland, Katie, and the heather hills that grannie tells us about; and the great castles that they used to hold against all comers in the old times, and the parks, and the deer, and the gardens full of wonderful flowers, and the lakes and the mountains—only we can see lakes and mountains at home."

"And the moors and glens where they worshipped in the dark days."

And so they went on in turn, telling what they would like to see—they were going slowly now—till they came to the bridge again.

"I like to think about it, but it could never be," said Katie gravely.

"And why not? It might very easily be, I think."

"But it could never be for me, until—the saddest things had happened. I could never leave my grandfather and my grandmother, and all the rest; only the rest might live till I came back again; but grannie—and him—"

"Yes, Katie, and it is as true for me as for you. Our work is here, and our happiness too; and, after all, we have fallen into sad thoughts again. But we are nearly home now."

"There was no light in the minister's study to-night," said Katie, as they went slowly up the hill. "Nor in the dining-room either. He must be away from home."

Elizabeth had noticed the darkened window, but she did not say so. Indeed she said nothing. She was thinking: "Perhaps he went in to see my father, knowing I was away."

And so he had, for when they went into the hall they heard his voice, indeed several voices in the sitting-room. But they went first up-stairs to take off their wraps in Miss Elizabeth's room, and came down just in time to find the tea-table ready, and the company waiting for them. There was coffee on the table too, for Mr Burnet was there, and Sally knew his tastes.

"There! You feel better, don't you?" said Miss Betsey, who was the first to notice their entrance. "You look better, anyway."

"Like two roses," said Mr Burnet.

Elizabeth laughed and thanked him, and then shook hands with Mr Maxwell.

"I hope you have had a good time, daughter. I have," said the squire.

"Yes. I see you have had company."

"Yes, Betsey is always good company. Mr Maxwell came when he saw you pass down the street. He didn't know Betsey was here, and he thought I might be lonesome."

"It was very kind," said Elizabeth.

All the rest sat down, but Mr Maxwell continued standing. The squire would not listen to him, when he said that doubtless his tea would be waiting for him at home, but urged him almost petulantly to remain.

"Lizzie, why don't you ask the minister to stay?"

For Elizabeth was listening to something that Mr Burnet was saying to Katie, but she turned round when her father spoke to her.

"We haven't Mr Burnet and Cousin Betsey here very often, Mr Maxwell. You might stay to-night for their sakes."

So he stayed, and the squire had a good time still, and so had all the rest, it seemed, for they were in no haste to leave the table till Sally came to take the things away. When she came in again it was to say that "Ben had been waiting for his Aunt Betsey for the biggest part of an hour, and it was getting on for nine o'clock." Even then Miss Betsey seemed in no hurry to go, but when she went, Mr Burnet went also, and Elizabeth went out of the room with her cousin, and did not come back for what seemed to Katie a long time. Her father was tired and she went out with him afterward. Mr Maxwell talked with Katie a while, about her mother and her grandparents, about Davie and his bees, and the work that had occupied him all the winter, and then he sat for a long time looking into the fire in silence. When Miss Elizabeth came in again he rose to go away.

"It is not very late," said she.

"No—and it is very pleasant here," said the minister, and he sat down again.

Miss Elizabeth took her work, and they were all silent for a while, and in the silence a sudden sense of embarrassment and discomfort seized Katie Fleming. She had a book in her hand, but she was not sure whether she ought to read or not. She would have liked to go with it to the side-table, where Miss Elizabeth had carried the lamp before she sat down, or even out into the kitchen to see Sally for a while.

"Are you deep in your story already? Well, take your book to the lamp, if you like, for a little while," said Miss Elizabeth, just as if she had known her thoughts.

But Katie would not have liked her to know her thoughts. She was glad to go to the lamp, but she did not care for her story. She was thinking of something else, of a single word she had heard one day, which put together significantly the names of the minister and her friend. She had been indignant at first. "They were just friends," she had said to herself. Afterward she could not help giving them a good many of her thoughts, and she was not sure about it. As she sat with the book on the table before her, shading her eyes with her hands, she felt a little guilty and greatly interested, for the story before her was better than any story in a book.

Perhaps she ought to go away, she thought again. It was not right to listen, and she could not help listening. But indeed there was nothing said which all the world might not hear. Mrs Varney had burned her hand. Old Mrs Lawrence was sick, and Miss Elizabeth promised to go and see her. Then Mr Maxwell told her about a meeting he had attended in

Fairfax, and about another that he meant to attend, and so on.

"It might be grannie and he," said Katie, with a little impatient wonder. "Only grannie would say it all a great deal better, and not just 'yes' and 'no,' and 'I hope so indeed,' like Miss Elizabeth. What has come to her, I wonder? Mrs Stacy's rheumatism, and the mothers' meeting at North Gore. That is not how people talk, surely—when—when—"

Suddenly looking up she met Miss Elizabeth's eye, and reddened, and hung her head. Then she rose as Miss Elizabeth beckoned to her, and came to the fireside again, still holding her book in her hand.

After that Miss Elizabeth took a letter which she had that day received from her brother Clifton, and read bits of it aloud. It was a very amusing letter, she seemed to think, and so did the minister, but Katie did not understand all the allusions in it, and missed the point. And besides, Clifton Holt was not a favourite with her. She was a little scornful of a lad who seemed to care so little for the opportunities he had, and who did so little good work with them. He was idle, she thought, and conceited, and she could not but wonder at Miss Elizabeth's delight in him, and listened with some impatience to the discussion of him and his affairs that followed the reading of the letter.

"To be sure he is her brother, and she must make the best of him," said Katie.

By and by Mr Maxwell rose to go away, and Miss Elizabeth bade him good-night in the sitting-room, and did not go with him to the hall, as was her way usually with visitors who were going away. Then she said she had to see Sally about something, and was so long away that Katie had time to get fairly into her story, and so she read on after she came in again, and it was a good while before she noticed that her friend was gazing with a strange, fixed look into the embers, and that her roses had paled sadly since Mr Burnet had praised them when they first came in. But she smiled brightly enough when she turned and met Katie's wistful look.

"Well! How do you like it, Katie? But we must do something besides reading to-morrow, dear, or grannie will not be pleased."

And then she went on to tell of some pretty fancy-work that they were to learn together, and was so full of it, and of all they were to do the next three days, that Katie forgot her grave looks for that night. As the days went on, and she saw how feeble Mr Holt had become, she did not wonder at her sadness, and it did not come into Katie's mind that there could be any other cause for her sadness and her grave looks than her father's illness gave.

"Except, perhaps, her brother may not be doing so well as he ought. And that is enough of itself to make her sad," said Katie. "For what should I do if it were our Davie?"

Katie had a pleasant visit in many ways. The leisure was delightful to her. They had a drive every day. Sometimes Mr Holt went with them, and then they had the large sleigh and a pair of horses, and sometimes Katie laughed, and made Miss Elizabeth laugh too, pretending that she was a rich lady riding in her own sleigh, and taking her friends for a drive. But she liked it best when Miss Elizabeth drove her own horse Lion, and they went alone together. It seemed to Katie that the talks they had at such times, in the keen, clear winter air, were different from the talks they sometimes fell into sitting by the fireside, when all the rest had gone to bed and they had the home to themselves. Under the bright sunshine they seemed to get away from Gershom and its news and its troubles and vexations, into a wider and brighter world, and some of the things that Miss Elizabeth said to her then, Katie told herself she would never forget while she lived.

There were visitors now and then, and at such times, if they were strangers to her, Katie took her book into a corner, or into Sally's bright kitchen, and read it there; but if the visitors were her friends as well, she stayed and enjoyed their visits also. Just one thing happened that it was not pleasant to think about afterward. Indeed it had been very unpleasant at the time, and Katie had some trouble in deciding whether or not she should say anything about it to grannie and her mother when she went home.

This was a visit made one day to Elizabeth by Mrs Jacob Holt. Katie did not go away this time, because she was afraid it might not please her friend, but she did not join in the conversation. She sat beyond the flower-stand in the bay-window, reading and knitting; but she was not so interested in her book as not to hear something of what was said. Mrs Jacob told some village news, and then spoke about Clifton, and about a new dress that was to be finished for her to-day, and much more of the same kind.

It was not Mrs Jacob's fault that the conversation took the turn it did. It was the squire, who questioned her about Jacob, and about various matters connected with their business; and then he said something about Silas Bean, who had got hurt in his employment, and the difficulty was to make him understand what Silas Bean should be doing at the Varney place with two yoke of oxen, and what Jacob had to do with it. Elizabeth reminded him that Jacob had bought the Varney place, and that Mark Varney had gone away, and tried to end the discussion of the matter. But Mrs Jacob went still on to remind him of the Gershom Manufacturing Company, that would no doubt be formed by and by, and how Jacob hated to have time lost, and was taking advantage of the snow to have stones and timber drawn that would be needed in the building of the new dam; and that was the way that Silas Bean came to be there with his oxen.

"And the company will take the timber off his hands, I suppose," said she. "Only it's likely Jacob will be pretty much the company himself—at least he will have most to say in it. He most generally does."

"But it seems to me that Jacob should not have undertaken so much without consulting me," said the squire, with some excitement. "It seems to me he's going ahead pretty fast, isn't he?"

"Oh! he's told you all about it, I expect. You've forgotten. Your memory isn't what it once was, you know."

But the squire was inclined to resent the idea that he could have forgotten a matter of such importance, and though Mrs Jacob assured him that his son had gone away for the day to Fosbrooke, it was all that his daughter could do to prevent him from going in search of him. She almost regretted not permitting him to go, however, for he would not leave the subject, and insisted on Mrs Jacob telling him all about the matter. She, with less sense and more malice than Elizabeth could have supposed possible, went on to tell of what was to be done, and went over the old grievance as to Mr Fleming's obstinacy in refusing to come to terms for a piece of land which was the best for the mill-site, and good for very little else, "just to spite Jacob."

"We won't talk about that," said the squire, seeming to forget the first cause of grievance. "Jacob knows my mind about that matter. And it is doubtful whether the company they talk about will ever amount to much—at least for a time."

"Well, it isn't for me to say. But I must go. They'll think at home that I am lost," and as she rose and pushed away her chair, she added in a voice that the squire could not hear, "It is not for me to say much about it. But Jacob generally does get things fixed pretty much to his mind, and I guess he sees his way clear to get this as well. Of course it will be just as much for Mr Fleming's benefit as for the rest of the town, and his land will be paid for, he needn't fear that."

At the first mention of her grandfather's name, Katie had risen, and she was standing with burning cheeks and shining eyes when Mrs Jacob turned toward her to say good-bye.

"I hope you'll come and make me a visit before you go home. If Lizzie can spare you I shall be pleased to have you come any day—say to-morrow. Will you come?"

"No," said Katie, and then she sat down and put her book to her face lest Mrs Jacob should see the angry tears which she feared would not be kept back. For once in her life Mrs Jacob looked uncomfortable and disconcerted in Elizabeth's presence. Elizabeth uttered not one of the many angry words that had almost risen to her lips, but opened the door and closed it again with only the usual words of good-bye.

Chapter Fourteen.

The Minister's Friendship.

When Mr Maxwell left Squire Holt's house that first night of Katie's visit to Miss Elizabeth, he did not return directly to the parsonage. He stood a moment at the gate considering which direction it would be wisest for him to take for the long walk which he felt he must have before he slept. For the minister to be seen walking at that hour of the night to no particular place, and for no particular purpose, would give matter for discussion among some of those who specially interested themselves in his comings and goings, and though the interest might be flattering, the discussion was to be avoided.

So he hastened up the street in the direction of Jacob Holt's, and turning into the field to the right, he took the path made as a short cut by such of the North Gore boys as were this winter attending the High-School. He would not be likely to meet any one there, nor on the North Gore road, to which it led, certainly not in the field-path. The snow had fallen heavily during the first part of the day, and now the wind had risen, and when he came higher up the hill, it was with difficulty that he got through the drifts that were growing deeper with every blast. He soon lost the path, indeed every trace of it had long disappeared, and if it had not been, that the broken line of the woods which skirted the field on the other side of the hill was visible even in the darkness, he might have lost himself altogether in his wanderings.

As it was he made a long journey of the fields that lay between the two highways, and when he reached the North Gore road he found he had had enough of it; and a little breathless, but glowing with the pleasant warmth which the exercise had excited, and a good deal more cheerful in spirits than when he left Squire Holt's gate, he turned toward home. His buffet with the wind and the great drifts had done him good. He would doubtless have a sounder sleep and a brighter waking because of it.

But something had to be done before he slept, and for this, too, it is possible that the buffet with the snow and the wind was a preparation.

That something had happened to disturb the friendly relations in which he had from the first stood with regard to Miss Elizabeth he had long felt, and he had never felt it more painfully than to-night. He could scarcely make clear to himself the nature of the change that had come to their intercourse, and he did not know the reason of it—or he had hitherto told himself that he did not. There was nothing in his life, nor in his plans and prospects, that had not been there before the friendliness of Miss Holt had been given him. There was nothing to which he looked forward in the future which could interfere to make her friendship less precious to him—nothing which could be a sufficient reason for its withdrawal on her part—nothing which could compensate him for its loss.

And yet it was slipping from him, or rather that which had made it pleasant to him as no other friendship had ever been, and useful as no other friendship in Gershom could ever be, was missed by him, to his great loss and discomfort. Miss Holt was kind and frank and friendly still. He would have used those very words—indeed he had used them—in describing their relations to each other soon after their first acquaintance, but there was a difference which, though it did not touch the kindness and the friendliness, made itself felt still.

Was the change in Miss Holt or in himself? or was it caused by circumstances which neither of them could help? This was the point which Mr Maxwell proposed to settle that night before he slept. He must see this clearly, he said to himself, and then he might also see a way to prevent the pain and loss which estrangement from his friend must cause.

It would be useless to follow him through all the troubled thoughts and anxious questionings of the night. Out of them all came first a doubt, and then a certainty, painful and not unmixed with shame, that the friendship he feared to lose was more to him than was the love that put it in jeopardy. Nay, that he had for many a month been mistaking love for friendship, and friendship for love.

There were more troubled thoughts and anxious questionings, and they ended in the conviction that he had made a great mistake for which there seemed no remedy. He must suffer, but he knew that with God's help he would overcome. For a time he must submit to the loss of that society which had been so much to him since he came to Gershom. By and by, when he should be wiser and stronger, and when other changes should have come into his life, as they must come, his friendship with Miss Holt might be renewed and strengthened, and through all his thoughts and questionings it never came into his mind that the suffering might not be his alone.

About three months before this time, when Mr Maxwell had been a resident of Gershom for a year and a half, circumstances occurred which made it advisable for him to pay a visit to the place which had been his home during the last years of his mother's life, and during the years which followed her death while his course of study continued. It was a visit which he anticipated with lively pleasure, and much enjoyed. His home while there was, of course, in the house of his friend and his mother's friend, Miss Martha Langden; and visiting her aunt at the same time, as had frequently happened in former years when he had been this lady's guest, was her niece, Miss Essie. She was a very pretty girl, and a good girl as well, eight or ten years younger than Mr Maxwell, but not too young to be his wife, his mother and her aunt had decided long ago when Miss Essie was a child. These loving and rather romantic friends had set their hearts on a union in every way to their view so suitable, and they had been at less pains than was quite prudent to keep their hopes

and their plans to themselves. Indeed, as presented by a fond mother to a studious and utterly inexperienced lad, such as young Maxwell was at twenty, the prospect of a wife so pretty and winning and well dowered could not but be agreeable enough, and though no formal engagement was entered into between them, they had corresponded frequently, and to an engagement it was taken for granted by all parties this correspondence was to lead when the right time came.

The idea that the time of this visit might be the right time had not presented itself so clearly to Mr Maxwell as it had to his friend Miss Martha. Still it was natural enough and pleasant enough for him to fall into the old relations with the pretty and good Miss Essie. Not quite the old relations, however, for Miss Essie was a child no longer, but eighteen years of age, and a graduate of one of the most popular ladies' seminaries of the State, and quite inclined to stand on her dignity and claim due consideration for her years and acquirements. She had been one of the model young ladies of the seminary, it seemed, and in various pretty ways, and with words sufficiently modest, she sought to make her admiring friends aware of the fact, and dwelt with untiring interest on the trials and triumphs of the time. But she by no means considered her education completed, she gravely assured Mr Maxwell. She had a plan of study drawn out by the distinguished principal of the seminary, which, after she should be quite rested from the work of the last years, she intended steadily to pursue, to the further development of her powers, and the acquisition of knowledge which should fit her for usefulness in any sphere which she might be called to occupy. She had much to say on these themes, her present self-improvement and her future work and influence in the world, and Mr Maxwell sometimes smiled in secret as he listened, but he liked to listen all the same. Her views were not very clear to herself, nor very practical, but she was very earnest in expressing them; and being perfectly sincere in her beliefs and honest in her intentions, she had also perfect confidence in the success of what she was pleased to call her "life's work," and never doubted that she should accomplish through her labours find see with her eyes, all the good which she planned.

It was her earnestness and evident sincerity that charmed Mr Maxwell, and though all this looked to him sometimes like a child's mimic assumption of responsibilities and duties, with a child's power of imagining what is desired, and ignoring all else, yet he was more impatient of his own doubts than of her illusions.

But dare he speak or think of them as illusions? He recalled his own early youth—the plans he had formed, the hopes he had cherished of all he was to dare and do for his Master's sake, the battles he was to win, the souls he was to conquer, and he grew grave and self-reproachful at the remembrance. He was young yet as to his work and his office, and young in years, but in the presence of all his earnestness, this desire to do good and true work in the world, he could not but acknowledge that his own early zeal had cooled somewhat, that something had gone from him in life, and in his discontent with himself his admiration for the little enthusiast grew apace. And though he could not but smile now and then, still as she made her modest little allusions to her private diary and to certain "resolutions" written therein, and though he could not always respond with sufficient heartiness to satisfy himself when she showed him little letters on very thin paper that had come to her from "distant lands," and confessed to anxious thoughts as to the claims which the "foreign field" and the "dark places of the earth" might have upon her, yet listening to her, and meeting Aunt Martha's admiring glances, and hearing her more extended accounts of her self-devotion and self-denial, he could not but consider himself fortunate in his relations to them both, and desire almost as earnestly as Aunt Martha did that the young girl should consent to share his life's work and make it hers. To this end all their intercourse tended, and the course of love, in their case, promised to be as smooth as could be desired for a time.

But an interruption occurred as the end of Mr Maxwell's visit drew near, which, however, seemed hardly to be an interruption as they took it, or rather, it should be said, as the young lady whom it was specially designed to influence seemed to take it.

Up to this time Miss Martha had been permitted to do very much as she chose with her pretty niece. Miss Essie's mother, a dear friend of Miss Martha's, had died when her daughter was an infant, and the child's home, even after the second marriage of her father, had been almost as often with her aunt as with him. Her aunt had chosen her teachers and her schools, and had introduced her to a social circle far more refined and intellectual than she could have found in the large manufacturing town where her father lived. She had formed the girl's mind, and possessed her affections, and had come to look upon her as her own child rather than as the child of her hitherto somewhat indifferent father, who had another family growing up around him. It certainly never came into Miss Martha's mind that the future she had been planning for her darling might be regarded by the father with unfavourable eyes. So that his decided refusal to permit his daughter to enter into an engagement of marriage with the young man was a surprise as well as a pain to her.

The father was not unreasonable in his objections. Mr Maxwell might be all that his partial old friend declared him to be, worthy in all respects of his daughter. But that a child—he called her a child—should ignorantly make a blind promise that must affect her whole future life, he would not allow. A girl just out of school, who had seen nothing of the world, who could not possibly know her own mind on any matter of importance, must not be suffered to do herself this wrong. He smiled a little when Aunt Martha, hoping to move him, dwelt earnestly on her dear Essie's views of life, her plans of usefulness, and her desire above all things to do some good in the world. It was all right, he said, just what he should expect from a girl brought up by a good woman like Aunt Martha. But all the same she was only a child, and she could not know whether she cared enough for Mr Maxwell to be happy in doing her life's work in his company.

Even when Miss Martha in her eagerness betrayed how long the thought of her niece's engagement had been familiar to her, he only laughed, though he saw that he had a good right to be angry, and he stood firm to his first determination that for two years at least there should be no engagement. Essie must have more experience of life; she must visit her mother's relations, and see more of the world. He intended she should spend the next winter with her aunt in New York, and he would not have her hampered by any engagement, out of which, if she should find that she had mistaken her own heart, trouble might spring. He was firm, and poor Miss Martha was heart-broken at the turn which affairs had taken.

Not so her niece. She had no words with her father with regard to the matter, but she gave her aunt to understand that she considered a mere formal engagement a matter of little consequence where true and loving hearts were concerned. She must not disobey her father, but time would show that he had been mistaken and not she.

"And after all, auntie, a year, or even two, does not make so much difference, and I rather like the idea of spending the winter with Aunt Esther in New York."

Aunt Martha sighed. She did not like the idea at all. She would miss her darling, and she had no great confidence in her Aunt Esther, and she dreaded some of the influences to which the child must be exposed, for she was little more than a child, Aunt Martha acknowledged, a wise and good child indeed, but one never could know what might come in the course of two years to change her views of life. And altogether, the dear old lady was not so hopeful as she felt she ought to be, knowing as she so well did, that our days and our ways are all ordered by a higher wisdom than our own.

Miss Essie was not downhearted; on the contrary, her sweetness and resignation in the presence of her aunt's sorrow and anxiety were beautiful to see. She acknowledged with a readiness that pleased her father greatly, that he was quite right in thinking her too young and inexperienced to take the decision of so serious a matter into her own hands; and when she added that the years which might be supposed to bring wisdom as well as experience would find her unchanged as to the purpose of her life, he only smiled and nodded his head a good many times, and let it pass.

Mr Maxwell may be said to have been resigned and hopeful also. Indeed he had not expected to take the young lady to Gershom for a good while to come. He acknowledged that Mr Langden's view of the case was just and reasonable, and looking at it from a Gershom point of view, he acknowledged to himself, though he did not think it necessary to say anything of it to any one else, that a few more years and a wider experience would be of advantage to a minister's wife in relation to even the comparatively primitive community where his lot was cast. So he went away cheerfully enough, content to wait.

It must be confessed that Miss Martha was the greatest sufferer of the three at this time. She too was obliged to allow that her niece was very young, and she did not doubt that the years would add to her many gifts and graces. Nor did she doubt her constancy, or she believed she did not, but she knew that a change had come to the means and circumstances of her brother of late. He had always been a prosperous man in a safe and quiet way, but of late he had become a rich man, and though no decided change had as yet been made in the manner of life of his family, she knew by various signs and tokens that Miss Essie at least was to have the benefit of those advantages which wealth can give. And though she told herself that she did not doubt that she would be brought safely through the temptations to which wealth might expose her, she sometimes thought of her picture with a troubled heart.

A short absence was just what Mr Maxwell had needed to prove to himself how content he was to look upon Gershom as his home, and upon his church and congregation and upon the people of the place generally, as his friends. His visit had been so arranged as to include the New England Thanksgiving Day, which falls in the end of November, and the winter, which set in early this year, was beginning when he returned. Winter is the time of leisure in Canada among farmers, and in country places generally, for the long winter evenings give opportunity for doing many things never undertaken at other seasons. So Gershom folks were busy with special arrangements of one sort and another for pleasure and profit, and Mr Maxwell made himself busy with the rest. Winter was the time for special courses of lectures and sermons, for social gatherings among the people of the congregation, and for a good deal more of regular pastoral visiting than was ever undertaken by him at other seasons, and it was with satisfaction, even with thankfulness, that he found himself looking forward without dread to his work.

A quiet and busy winter lay before him. Of course there must be the usual anxieties and vexations, he thought; and he also thought that he would have the kindly counsel and sympathy of Miss Elizabeth. But after his first visit to the squire's house a difference made itself apparent in their intercourse. It was not that Miss Holt was less friendly or less ready with counsel or encouragement when it was needed. But there was something wanting, and what this might be he set himself to consider on that night after his walk in the snowy fields.

He did not discover it, but he discovered something else which startled him—something which could neither be helped nor hindered—something which could only be borne silently and patiently. Through time and a loyal devotion to the work which his Master had given him to do, the pain should wear away.

In one of the long letters which Mr Maxwell received about this time from Miss Langden, there came, to his surprise and momentary discomfiture, a little note to Miss Holt. He knew that Miss Essie was very fond of writing little notes to her friends and also to the friends of her friends, and when he came to think about it, the only wonder was that she had not written to Miss Holt before.

For, of course, he had spoken to her of Miss Elizabeth, as he had spoken of others who were his special friends among his parishioners. Miss Martha had been set right as to her age and her place in the world of Gershom, and he had answered many questions with regard to her. He had answered questions about other people too—about John McNider, and the Flemings and Miss Betsey, and there might come a little letter to one of them some day. He laughed when he thought of this, but he did not laugh when he thought of giving the note to Miss Elizabeth.

He need not have been troubled. It was a very innocent little letter, which Miss Elizabeth received without any expression of surprise and read in his presence.

"It is not the first letter I have received from Miss Essie Langden. I heard from her while you were still away."

Miss Elizabeth's colour changed a little as she said this.

"She did not tell me," said Mr Maxwell.

"I was glad she wrote to me," said Miss Elizabeth.

There had not been much in the first letter, either. Miss Essie had thanked Miss Holt for her goodness to her friend "Will Maxwell," as she called him. Then there was something about knowing and loving each other at some future time, and something more about a common work and a common purpose in life, and something about "the tie that binds," and that was all.

It might mean much or little according as it was read, and to Elizabeth it had meant much. It did not find her altogether untroubled. She had missed Mr Maxwell more than she had supposed possible, and had been obliged to confess to herself that the winter in Gershom would be a very different matter if he were not to be there. But then it would be a different matter to all the rest of the people, as well as to her, and so she had quieted herself till Miss Essie's letter came. It startled her, but the pain it gave her made her glad of its coming. She was frank with herself, or she meant to be so. She had been receiving and enjoying more from Mr Maxwell's friendship than could possibly be hers as time went on and circumstances changed, and then she might miss it more than would be reasonable or pleasant. So she was very glad that the letter had been written and awaited Mr Maxwell's return, expecting to hear more, and preparing herself to be sympathetic and congratulatory.

But she had heard no more, and she could not but be surprised. For though he might not for various reasons be ready to make known his engagement to all Gershom, she thought he owed it to their friendship to acknowledge it to her.

"I have been longing to congratulate you, Mr Maxwell—though you have told me nothing," said she as she folded the note and laid it down.

"I have nothing to tell that would call for congratulation—in the way you mean," said the minister. "But I would like to talk a little to you, Miss Elizabeth, if you will be so kind as to listen to me."

It was growing dark, and there was only the firelight in the room, and taking her knitting in her hands, Miss Elizabeth sat down to listen. He made rather a long story of it, telling of the friendship between his mother and Miss Essie's aunt—of their hopes and plans for them, of their correspondence, and lastly of Mr Langden's interference as to a positive engagement because of his daughter's youth. Of course there was no chance for congratulation, he said.

But Miss Elizabeth had hopes to express and good wishes, and one good thing came out of their talk: the coldness or distance, or whatever it might be called, that had come between the friends for a while, seemed to pass away, and they fell into their old ways again.

Miss Elizabeth counselled and encouraged, and discussed church affairs and Gershom affairs very much as she had always done, and no doubt the minister was as much the better through it as he had been from the first. Miss Essie sent letters to Mr Maxwell, many and long, and now and then a note to Miss Elizabeth, but that young lady's name was not very often mentioned between them.

Chapter Fifteen.

Jacob's Troubles.

This was by no means so happy a winter in Gershom church and society as last winter had been. The various circumstances that had been thought causes for congratulation last year were to be rejoiced over still. Mr Maxwell was holding his own among them. His sermons were admired as much as ever. The various meetings were well attended; there was no perceptible falling off in the subscription-list, and many of the North Gore people were as regular in their attendance, and to all appearance as loyal to church interests as could be desired. Still it was not so pleasant or so prosperous a winter as the last had been.

There was not much said about it, even by the privileged grumblers among them, for a while, and the people who made the best of things generally saw only what was to be expected. In the best laid plans there will be some points of doubtful excellence. In all new arrangements there will be grating and friction which cannot even with the best intentions be at first overcome. The only way was to have patience and be ready with "the oil of gentleness and the feather of forbearance," so as to give a touch here or there as it was needed, and everything would be sure to move smoothly after a while.

No special cause was assigned for this state of things. No one thought of connecting Jacob Holt's name with it, but as the winter wore over a good many eyes were turned toward him, and a good many tongues were busy discussing his affairs, and chiefly his affairs as they had reference to Mr Fleming. No one whose opinion or judgment he cared about blamed him openly. It would have required some courage to do so. For Jacob was the rich man of the church, as he was of the town, and had much in his power in a community where voluntary offerings were depended upon as a means of covering all expenses. But the work commenced on the Varney place made matter for discussion among people who had not the motive for silence that existed among Jacob's personal friends and brethren.

That he meant to bring Mr Fleming to his own terms could not be doubted. The mortgage on the farm had only another year to run. The land above the Blackpool would be taken possession of, or if this should be hindered in any way, the land would be ruined by the building of the new dam at the Varney place. What would Jacob Holt care for the bringing of a lawsuit against him by a poor man like Mr Fleming after the dam should be built and operations commenced?

True, it was the Gershom Manufacturing Company which was to decide as to the site of the mills, and which would be called upon to pay all damages. But how was that to help Mr Fleming? Within the memory of the oldest inhabitant no enterprise commenced or carried on in Gershom but had, at one point or other in its course, felt the guiding or restraining touch of a Holt, and so it was not easy for lookers-on in general to put Jacob out of the question when the mind and will of the future manufacturing company was under discussion.

It is not to be supposed that all this time Mr Maxwell had heard no other version of this trouble than that which the squire and Miss Elizabeth had given him. He had heard at least ten corresponding generally to theirs as to facts, but differing in spirit and colouring according to the view of the narrator. He had not as yet found it necessary to commit himself to any expression of opinion with regard to it. He listened gravely, and often with a troubled heart, doubting that evil to the people he had learned to love might grow out of it. But he listened always as though he were listening for the first time.

The matter could not be brought before him as pastor of the church, as between Jacob Holt and Mr Fleming, for Mr Fleming was not a church member. He still kept aloof, as did others of the elderly people of his neighbourhood; and though Mr Maxwell had spoken with several of them as to their duty in the circumstances, he had never spoken to Mr Fleming. He was on the most friendly terms with the family, and had always been kindly received and respectfully treated by the old man, but as to personal matters Mr Fleming was as reserved with him as with the rest of the world. It would have seemed to Mr Maxwell an impertinence on his part to seek either directly or indirectly to force the confidence of a man like him. And indeed he felt that he might have little to say to the purpose should his confidence be spontaneously given. He thought it possible that it might do Mr Fleming good to freely and fully tell his troubles, real and imaginary, to a sympathising and judicious listener, but he was far from thinking himself the right man to hear him.

He had a strong desire to help and comfort him. In church, when he saw, as he now and then did, the stern old face softening and brightening under some strong sweet word of his Lord, like the face of a little child, he had an unspeakable longing to do him good. In his study the remembrance of the look came often back to him, and almost unconsciously the thought of him, and his wants, and possible experiences, influenced his preparations for the Sabbath. His thoughts of him were always gentle and compassionate. That there is likely to be wrong on both sides, where anger, or coldness, or contempt comes between those who acknowledge the Lord of love and peace as their Master, Mr Maxwell well knew, but in thinking of the trouble between these two men, neither the sympathy nor the blame was equally awarded. When he prayed that both might be brought to a better mind through God's grace given and His word spoken, he almost unconsciously assumed that this grace was to make the word a light, a guide, a consoler to one, and to the other a fire and a hammer to break the rock in pieces.

It would not have been difficult at this time to bring back the old state of things when two distinct communities lived

side by side in Gershom; and in the main the two communities would have stood in relation to each other very much as the North Gore folk and the villagers had stood in the old times. Not altogether, however. The North Gore folk, as a general thing, sided with Mr Fleming, or they would have done so if he had not been dumb and deaf to them and to all others on the subject of his troubles, but all the towns-people would not have been on the other side.

For Jacob lacked some of the qualities that during the past years had made his father so popular in the town. He was not the man his father had been in any respect. "Jacob bored with a small auger," Mr Green, the carpenter, used to say, and the miscellaneous company who were wont to assemble in his shop for the discussion of things in general did not differ from him in opinion. Jacob was small about small matters, they said, and lost friends and failed to make money, where his father would have made both friends and money safe. As a business man he had not of late proved himself worthy of the respect of his fellow-townsmen as his father had always done.

Things had gone well with the Holts for a long time. They had had a share in most of the well-established business of the town. In helping others, as they had certainly done, to a living, they had helped themselves to wealth, and on many farms in the vicinity, and on some of the village homes, they had held claims. In many cases these claims had been paid in time; in others the property had passed from the hands of the original owners into the hands of the Holts, father and son. Very rarely in old Mr Holt's active days had this happened in a way to excite the feeling of the community against the rich man; but of late it had been said that Jacob had done some hard things, and some of those who discussed his affairs were indignant because of the people who suffered, and some who did not like Jacob for reasons of their own joined in the cry; but it was to David Fleming and his affairs that attention was chiefly turned when any one wanted to say hard things of Jacob Holt.

Jacob was having a hard time altogether. Not because men were saying hard things of him. Few of these hard sayings would be likely to reach his ears. Some of the men who growled and frowned behind his back, before his face were mild and deprecatory, and listened to his words and smiled at his jokes, and carried themselves in his company very much as they had done in years past.

As for Mr Fleming's affairs, it was coming to that with Jacob, that he would have done to him all the evil that he was accused of planning, if he could have had his way; but, nevertheless, not with a desire to harass and annoy the man who had always shunned him, and who now defied him, as people sometimes declared.

It cannot be said that he had not felt and secretly resented what he called the folly of the unreasonable old man. But Mordecai might have sat stiff and stern at the gate all day long for him and every day of the year, if the refusal to rise with the rest and do him reverence had been all the trouble between them. He knew that Mr Fleming had bitter thoughts against him because of all that had befallen his son long ago, and though he believed himself to have been no more guilty toward him than others had been, he knew that they had all been guilty together, and he had therefore submitted quietly, if not patiently, to the constant rebuke which he felt, and which all Gershom felt, the old man's stern silence to be. He could understand how the sight of him and his prosperity should be an aggravation to the sorrow of this man, who did not seem to be able to forget, and he had a sort of compassion for him in his loss—not merely of the handsome, kindly lad who had gone away so long ago, but of the man to which the much-loved Hugh might by this time have grown. His desire to resent the father's manner to himself had never been more than a momentary feeling and if he could have conferred upon him some great benefit, and placed him under such obligation to him as should be seen and acknowledged by all Gershom, he would gladly have done so. Indeed he believed that in the terms agreed on by his father, with regard to Mr Fleming's mortgage, such a benefit had been conferred, and as he thought about it his anger grew.

For now Mr Fleming's unreasonable obstinacy in refusing to dispose of his land seemed the only hindrance in the way of the new enterprise which promised so well. If he had had the power to make him yield, he would have exerted it to the uttermost, even if it would have ruined the old man, instead of placing him and the children dependent on him above the fear of want forever. But as yet he had no power, and before the year should be out, when the law would allow him to take possession of the land, the ruin which men were saying might fall on Mr Fleming, might, nay must, fall on himself.

Ruin? Well, that was putting it strongly perhaps. But the delay would cause loss and trouble terrible to anticipate—not to him only, but to the whole town of Gershom—loss which years of common prosperity would hardly make up for. Jacob rarely spoke of David Fleming or his relations to him, but when he did so, this was the way he put it. The prosperity of Gershom and of the country round was hindered by his refusal to sell his land. But in his heart he knew that the prosperity of Gershom was a very secondary consideration with him at the moment.

For Jacob was in trouble, had been in trouble a long time, though he was only just beginning to confess it to himself. To no one else would he confess it, till nothing else could be done. He ought never to have come to any such determination. He was not strong enough to bear the weight of such trouble alone, and he was not wise enough to see the right means of getting through it.

There were times when he owned this to himself. He had not nerve for great ventures. It made him sick to think of one or two transactions, out of which he might have come triumphant as others had done, only that his courage had failed to carry him through to the end. He needed more courage, and less conscientiousness, he liked to add in his thoughts, and perhaps he was not altogether without warrant in doing so. At any rate, something had come between him and success where other men had succeeded.

Mr Green and his friends were right in their opinion that he was not such a man as his father. Even in conducting his Gershom business, which had almost come to be mere routine with him, they could see that he sometimes made mistakes. His persistent way of standing out against, or apart from, any movement that was to benefit the whole community, unless it was made in his way or to his evident advantage, was very unlike his father. It is true, that in his father's day there had been fewer men in Gershom to share either responsibility or power. But the squire had known when to yield, and by judicious yielding it frequently happened that he was allowed to hold all the faster to his own plans.

Jacob had to yield his own will also now and then, but at such times he could not help seeing that his fellow-townsmen looked upon him as having been beaten, and that they rather enjoyed it. Even when he succeeded in getting his own way in some matters, it often happened that his success was more in appearance than in reality. Still, if he had kept to his legitimate business, he might have done well in it, and kept the confidence of the community as being a man "who knew what he was about," and certainly he would have had an easier mind.

It was a little before this time that the discovery of the existence of mineral wealth, and the speculation in mining property which has since made a curious chapter in the history of this part of Canada, were beginning to occupy the attention of moneyed men, and Jacob had made his venture with the rest. But he had not come out of the affairs so well as some others had done. A history of their operations as to buying and selling would not interest. The result, as far as

Jacob Holt was concerned, was disastrous enough, for in one way and another he had involved himself to an extent that to people generally would have appeared incredible. But people generally knew little about it. Those who did know were those who had been engaged with him, who had either made much money or lost much in the course of their transactions, and a prudent silence seemed to be considered best. Of course it could not but be known in the country to some extent who were the gainers and who the losers, but no one guessed that the Holts would be "In" for any considerable amount. But in the giving up of much valuable property at a great loss, in order to preserve his credit, Jacob was made to feel his position bitterly.

Squire Holt had bought and held for many years large tracts of wild lands in various parts of the country, content to sink the purchase-money and to pay the taxes for the present, in the certain knowledge that as new settlers came in, and the country was opened up by the making of roads and the building of bridges, the value of the lands would be greatly increased. Many of these tracts Jacob was at this time obliged to sacrifice. He rather ruefully congratulated himself on the fact that the transfer of such property to other names might be done quietly, so that his difficulties need not be fully known or discussed in the community, but it was a terrible blow to him, and the necessity of keeping the knowledge of it from his father made it all the harder.

For the squire had given his voice against all operations in mining matters. He was conscious that he was no longer equal to a contest with younger men in a new field of action, and his advice to his son, whose powers he had measured, had been "to let well alone," and leave to those who had less to lose, the chance of being winners in the new game. It would have been well if his words had been heeded, Jacob owned to himself; and partly for his own sake and partly for the sake of his father, he said little about his losses. He was willing to have him and others believe that railroad matters were not prospering as he would have liked, which indeed was true. "The Hawkshead and Dunn Valley" railroad, which he had been chiefly instrumental in starting, and the stock of which he held largely, had promised well for a time, and would doubtless pay well in the end; but in the meantime, the big men of Fosbrooke, who had been allowed to say less than they wished to say as to the location of the road, were agitating the subject of another road to connect more directly with the Grand Trunk, and with other lines on the south side of the border, and "Hawkshead and Dunn Valley" stock had gone down.

So Jacob candidly acknowledged that "the banks were crowding a little," whenever he found it necessary to ask for the use of a fellow-townsmen's name to his paper. He found it necessary a good many times these days, and he was not very often refused. For there were few of the old settlers whom he or his father had not obliged in the same way at one time or the other, as he took occasion to tell the sons of some of them now and then. And besides this, giving one's name was a mere form, very convenient in the way of business, which in those days was supposed to be done more rapidly than had been the way in old times.

That any of the signers, "joint and several," ever imagined that they might, in the course of untoward events, be called upon to make good the promise to pay that stood over their names, is not likely. Nor did Jacob himself ever contemplate so painful a possibility. Serious as he saw his difficulties to be, he saw a way out of them—or he would have done so, he said to himself bitterly, if the will of an unreasonable old man had not stood in his way.

In the establishment and success of the new Company, so long the subject of discussion in the town, lay his best chance of freeing himself from his present embarrassment. If he might have had his way as to the site, so that the building might have been commenced, there would have been no trouble about the Company. A few good names with his own, and a moderate amount of capital, with the dam and the buildings commenced, there would have been no trouble about the rest. He felt that he would then have been master of the situation. Every cottage needed for the Mill hands and their families must be built on his land; and the chances were that by judicious management as to building, every one of them might become his tenant; and he had already in view certain arrangements by which most of the materials for building, and many of the supplies for the work-people, should be made to pass through his hands. By these means, and by the combination of other favourable circumstances, which he foresaw, he did not doubt that he could not only escape from present embarrassments, but recover much of what he had been obliged to sacrifice.

It is possible that he was quite mistaken in all this, but he believed it all, and no wonder that his indignation grew and strengthened as he thought of Mr Fleming.

Chapter Sixteen.

Jacob's Experience.

Jacob spoke wonderfully little of all this, considering how much it was in his mind. He sometimes spoke to his wife, but even to her he said nothing of the losses that had fallen upon him, or of the fears that were weighing him down; but he did allow the bitterness which was gathering in his heart toward old Mr Fleming to overflow, once in a while, in her hearing. He knew it was not a wise thing to do, for she could only listen and add a word or two, which did no good, but harm. She dropped bitter words to other people too, nay, poured them forth to Elizabeth, and to Clifton when he came home, and to Miss Betsey, even, when a rare opportunity occurred.

It did not matter much as far as they were concerned, for they knew the value of her words, and did not repeat them; but she uttered them to other people as well, and they were repeated, as all village talk is repeated, and commented upon, and exaggerated, and no one did more toward the stirring up of strife, and the making of two parties in Gershom, than did Mrs Jacob. She did her husband no good, but she did him less harm than she might have done had she been a woman of a higher and stronger nature. He did not have perfect confidence in her sense and judgment, and was apt to hesitate rather than yield to her suggestions even when he would have liked to do so. But her intense interest and sympathy were very grateful to him, and all the more that he neither asked nor expected sympathy from any one else.

He often longed to ask it; there were several men in Gershom with whom he would have liked to discuss his grievances, but he hardly dared to enter upon the subject, lest in confessing how great a matter a six months' delay was to him, he should betray how serious his losses had been. He did not intend to make his wife aware of his embarrassments, but she could not fail to see that all his anxiety could not spring from doubts as to the company or indignation toward Mr Fleming. She could not bring herself to speak of his losses while he remained silent, but she was all the more bitter in speaking of the old man's obstinacy.

"And there are people who call him a sincere and exemplary Christian! The hard, selfish, sour old man!"

"Well," said Jacob, after a pause of consideration, "I guess he is a Christian—as Christians go. There are few

Christians who live up to their light in all respects, I'm afraid."

"That's so; but then there is a difference between failings and shortcomings, or even open yieldings to sudden temptations, and this keeping up of anger and uncharitableness, as he has been doing, year in and year out, since ever I can remember, almost."

"We cannot judge him; he has had great troubles, and he is an old man," said Jacob, rising. Any allusion to Mr Fleming's disapproval of him fretted him more than it used to do, and once or twice lately he had allowed himself to say more than he would have liked to reach the ears of his neighbours, and so he rose to go.

"He has never done me any hurt that I know of, and I don't suppose he'll do enough to speak of now. It will come all round right I guess, and then if I can do him a good turn I will."

If he had stayed a minute longer, his wife would have told him that he at least was showing a Christian spirit in thus saying, but being left alone, it came into her mind that no better revenge could be taken upon the hard old man than that his enemy should heap kindness upon him.

"Not that such a thought was in Jacob's heart," she said to herself, "but I guess he's got some new notion in his head. I never can tell just what he means by what he says; it will be queer if he doesn't get his own way first or last."

It was no great stretch of charity on Jacob's part to allow that the people who believed in the Christianity of Mr Fleming might be right, notwithstanding the old man's unreasonable antipathy to himself. He had never doubted it, and his wife's words had startled him.

"If he is not a Christian, I am afraid some of the rest of us had better be looking to our little deeds. I guess he has as fair a chance as the most of us."

He did not get rid of his thoughts when he sat down in his office and began the work of the afternoon. The remembrance of some things that he would gladly never have remembered came back to him even while he was busy with his writing, and he said to himself that if the controversy between him and Mr Fleming were to be decided according to his character, it would go hard with him, and for a moment it seemed as if the sins of his youth were to be remembered against him, and that his punishment was coming upon him after all those years. But he pulled himself up when he got thus far, saying he was growing foolish and as nervous as a woman, and then he rose and took his hat and went down to the mill.

He met his father on the way, and the old man turned back with him down the street again. There was always something the squire wanted to say to his son about business, and Jacob owed more than he acknowledged—and he acknowledged that he owed much—to the keen insight of his father. He seemed to be able to see all sides of a matter at once, and though Jacob liked to manage his affairs himself, and believed that he did so, yet there had been occasions when a few words from his father had modified his plans, and changed the character of important transactions to his profit. At the first glimpse he got of him to-day, a great longing came over him to tell him all his trouble and get the help of his judgment and advice.

It was possibly only a passing feeling which he might have acted on in any circumstances. But his father's first querulous words made it evident that he could not act upon it to-day. It is doubtful whether any of Jacob's friends or acquaintances, whether even his wife or his sister, would have believed in the sudden, sharp pain that smote through Jacob's heart at the moment. He himself half believed that it was disappointment because he could not get the benefit of his father's experience and counsel at this juncture of affairs, but it was more than that. He really loved his father and honoured him. He had been proud of his abilities and his success, and of the respect in which he was held by the community, both as a man of business and as a man. He had tried since his manhood to atone to him for the sins of his youth, and had striven as far as he knew how to be a dutiful son, and on the whole he had satisfied his father, though doubtless a son with a larger heart and higher capabilities would have satisfied him better. But they loved one another, and the squire respected his son in a way, and they had been much more to each other than people generally, knowing the two men, would have supposed possible.

When Jacob saw his father so feeble and broken that afternoon, and heard his querulous lament over this thing and that which had gone wrong in the mill, the thought came home to him that he was failing fast, and that the end could not be very far away, and the pain that smote him was real and sharp. A sense of loss such as had never touched him, though he had long known that his days were numbered, made him sick for the moment, and left a weight of despondency on him that he could not shake off. He spoke soothingly to him, and walked with him over the mill, telling him of changes that might be made, and asking him questions till he grew cheerful again, and more like his usual self; then taking possession of Silas Bean's sleigh that was "hitched" at the mill-door, he proposed to drive him home, because the March sun had melted the new-fallen snow, leaving the street both slippery and wet, as he took care to explain, so that he need not suspect that he was more careful than usual about him.

When Elizabeth, a little startled, came to meet them at the door, he repeated all this to her in cheerful tones, but when his father went in, the look of care came back to his face as he said that he had been afraid to let him try the long walk up the hill.

"I was just thinking of going down to meet him," said Elizabeth. "It was very kind of you to bring him home."

"Kind!" repeated Jacob, and then he pulled his hat over his eyes and went away.

Elizabeth looked after him a moment in surprise. Even Elizabeth, who thought more kindly of him than any one, except perhaps his father, did not imagine how much the sight of the old man's increasing weakness had moved him.

Jacob went to a prayer-meeting that night, and, as his custom was, sat on a back seat near the door. The rich man of the village was not a power in the church when one looked beyond material things—the regular subscription-list, the giving of money, the exercise of hospitality—and except in regularity of attendance, he was certainly not a power in the prayer-meeting. But regularity of attendance is something, and on nights when winter storms, or bitter cold, or domestic contingencies of any sort, kept the "regular stand-bys" at home, he could and did fill the place of one or other of them by "taking a part." But he had no "gift" in that way, and knew it, and kept himself in the background. His neighbours knew it too, and some of them said sharp things, and some of them said slighting things of him because of this. But "the diversity of gifts" was pretty generally acknowledged, and people generally were not hard on him because of silence.

To-night there was no call on him. The school-room was well filled, as there was a prospect of the winter roads breaking up early, so that people from a distance could not come for a while. Besides, it was not the usual prayer-meeting, but the preparatory lecture before the communion, and Mr Maxwell had the meeting altogether in his own hands; and perhaps there were others there as well as Jacob, who took the good of the thought that there was no special responsibility resting upon them for the night.

If it had been the regular meeting, it is possible that Jacob might have sat in his corner as usual, supposing himself to be attending to the words of Deacon Scott and old Mr Wainwright, and all the rest of them, and through habit and the associations of time and place, he might have fallen into old trains of thought which did not always exclude a glance over the business of the day, or a glance toward the business of to-morrow; and so the unwonted stir of fears and feeling which had moved him in the afternoon might have been set at rest, and the cloud of care and pain dissolved for the time. But Mr Maxwell had the word, and still moved and troubled, Jacob could not but listen with the rest.

It was not the minister's usual way to give one of his elaborate written discourses on such an occasion as the present. There might be a difference of opinion among the people now and then, as to whether he gave them something better, or something not so good. But to-night the greater part of them did not remember to make any comparisons of that kind, but found themselves wondering whether anything had happened to the minister, so earnest and solemn was he both in word and manner to-night.

The words he spoke from were these, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." I could not give the discourse, even if it would be wise to do so. It was such an one as his hearers could not but listen to.

As he went on to tell them some of the wondrous things implied in being "risen with Christ," the Head, crowned and glorious of the Church, "His body," of which they were "the members," and to insist on the seeking the "things above" as the result and sole evidence of this life from the dead, none listened more intently than did Jacob. And perhaps because of the unusual experience of the afternoon, he did not listen, as he was rather apt to do on common occasions, for the rest of the congregation, this for Deacon Scott, that for Mr Wainwright, the other for some one else, for whom it seemed a suitable portion; he listened for himself, with his father all the while in his mind. And when it came to the "result and evidence," he had not, for the moment, a word to say for himself.

As for his father—well, his father had never made a public profession of faith in Christ. He had "kept aloof," as the village people said, whatever had been his reasons. But it came into Jacob's mind—moved and stirred out of its usual dull acceptance of things as they seemed—that to eyes looking deeper than the surface, his father's life might count for more as "evidence" than his own profession could do. And as the minister put it, would even his father's life count for much as "evidence" of his being "risen with Christ?" Whose life would?

"Mine would amount to just nothing!" was Jacob's decision as he left the house, when the meeting was over, and having got thus far it might naturally be supposed that he would not rest until he got farther. He had got thus far many a time before, but the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches had done their part in the past to put the thought away, and they did the same again.

But not so readily this time. For Jacob was unsettled and anxious, longing for the help and counsel which his father could never give more—longing also, but not always, for the help which he knew his younger brother was capable of giving him if he would; and he asked himself often, whether it paid even for this world, to wear one's self out for the making of money which one might lose, as he had done, and which all must leave, as his father was about to do.

But the day's work had to be done, and the day's cares met, and Jacob found himself after a little moving on in the old paths, not altogether satisfied with himself or his life, but pretty well convinced that though it might be well to take higher ground as to some things, both in his business and his religion, now was not the time for the change. And besides, he also believed in "the diversity of gifts," as they were pleased to term it in Gershom. If he could not lead a meeting, or speak a word in season in private, as some of the brethren could do, he tried to use his influence on the right side in all moral and religious questions; and though he knew that there were several among the brethren who, if they could have seen their way clear, would perhaps have called in question the character of certain business transactions with which his name had got mixed up, he set over against the unpleasant fact the other fact, that no three of these men gave so much to sustain the cause of religion in the place as he did.

It might be considered doubtful whether the church itself would have been built, if he had not taken hold of it as he did. That had helped the coming in of the North Gore people, and that with other things had brought Mr Maxwell to them as their minister. Gershom would have been a different place, as to the state of morality and religion, if it had not been for the Holts—and when Jacob said the Holts in this connection, he meant himself, as far as the last ten years were concerned.

Of course he did not say, even to himself, that any amount of giving or doing could make a man safe, either for this world or the next; but he did say that doing and giving to the good cause must count for something as evidence of one's state. And though he was not satisfied that he was all that he ought to be, he thought that, taking all things into account, he was as good as most of his neighbours, and with this for the present he contented himself.

A visit from his brother Clifton gave him about this time something to think about, and something to do as well. Clifton had heard, though their father had not, of Jacob's mining speculations, and he had heard of several transactions of so serious a nature that he could not but be curious, not to say anxious, as to results. It cannot be said that he got either information or satisfaction from his inquiries. Jacob, never communicative, was altogether silent to his brother as to the extent of his loans, and as to the property he had been obliged to sacrifice to satisfy pressing claims.

To tell the truth, Clifton was disposed to take matters easily. The Holts must expect their turn of reverses, as well as other people, and they were better able to meet them, he imagined, than most people. If Elizabeth at this time had pressed upon him the propriety of his making himself aware of the exact state of their affairs, he might have inquired to better purpose. As it was, he returned to his more congenial pursuits in Montreal, not quite satisfied, but with no very grave misgivings as to the state of their affairs.

His visit was not without result, however. Though Jacob had only given him the vaguest kind of talk as to mining matters, and had blamed his unfortunate railroad ventures for such pressure as to money as could not be concealed, he had much to say about the new mills, which at some future time must be a source of wealth to the Holts, and to the town. He did not succeed in making his brother believe all that he promised from them should they be built and in running order within the year, but he did succeed in getting more of his sympathy than ever he had got before, as to his loss through the obstinacy of old Mr Fleming. As Jacob put it, it did seem a pity that so much should be lost to the Holts,

and the town through him, when so much might be gained to Mr Fleming and his family, by yielding the point at once. Of course it must come to Jacob's having the land in the end, he acknowledged, and he had never acknowledged so much before.

"As it seems to be personal spite that keeps him to his resolution—for of course a shrewd man like him must see the advantage that the building of the mills so near his land must be—you should get some one else to treat with him."

But that had been tried. The Gershom Manufacturing Company had as little prospect of success as a company as Jacob had had as an individual, and Clifton could only suggest that everybody concerned should wait patiently for another year for the chance of getting rich by the mills, which was easy for him to say, but hard for Jacob to hear. The hint which renewed his hope, and gave him another chance, was thrown to him over his brother's shoulder when he rose to go away.

"What about this Mr Langden, whose name I hear mentioned by Mr Maxwell and others as a rich man? Why don't you suggest to him that he might do a good thing for himself by putting some of his money into the new mills? It would be a better investment than this mining business which our neighbours on the other side of the line seem so eager about. If he were to offer the money down to Mr Fleming, ten to one he would not refuse to sell. You need not appear in the business."

Jacob shook his head.

"You might try it, anyway. It would not be a bad speculation for him. It is up to-day and down to-morrow with some of these men over there, and he might so manage it, that anything he put into mills in Canada might be made secure to him in case of a smash on the other side. It might be done, I suspect. If I were you I would make a move in that direction."

And then with a smile and a nod for good-bye, he went away, never suspecting that he left his brother in a very different state of mind from that in which he had found him. Jacob was not, as a general thing, quick at taking up new ideas or in acting upon them, but this ought not to have been a new idea to him, he said almost angrily to himself after his brother was gone. Why had he not thought of Mr Langden and his money before?

Some correspondence had passed between them with regard to certain mining operations in which Mr Langden had, or hoped to have, an interest. At the time Jacob had been much occupied with similar transactions, and had hoped, through Mr Langden's means, to advance their mutual interests. But things had gone wrong with him beyond hope of help, and later he had with a clear conscience advised him to have nothing to do with any venture in mining stock within the area of which he had any personal knowledge, and then the correspondence had ceased. Now he greatly regretted that he had not thought of proposing the other investment to him.

After much consideration of the subject, and some rather indirect discussion with Mr Maxwell as to Mr Langden's means, opinions, and prejudices, he came to the conclusion that he could make the whole matter clearer to him and more satisfactory to both if they were to meet face to face, and so his plans were made for a visit to him. But spring had come before this was brought about. He went south in May, and was away from Gershom several weeks. When he returned nothing transpired as to his success. Even to Clifton, who had come to Gershom to accompany his father and sister to C. Springs, where the squire was to spend a month or two, he only spoke of his intercourse with the rich man as one of the pleasant circumstances attending his trip, and Clifton took it for granted that there was not much to tell.

Nor was there; but the rich man had spoken of a possible visit to Canada during the summer, and he had promised that if this took place he should come to Gershom and discuss the matter of the mills on the spot, and though Jacob said little about it, he permitted himself to hope much from the visit.

Chapter Seventeen.

Sugaring-Time.

The season opened cheerfully at Ythan Brae. It had been a peaceful winter with them; there had been less frequent communication with the village than usual. Davie had been both master and man for the most part, and had had little time for anything else. Katie had been now and then for a visit to Miss Elizabeth, and to other people too, for Katie confessed to being fond of visiting, and above most things disliked the idea of being called odd or proud, or whatever else one was liable to be called in Gershom who "set out to be different from her neighbours." The younger children were not yet considered to be beyond such teaching as they had at the Scott school-house, so that there had been little coming and going to the village, and all the talk that had been indulged in there as to their affairs had hurt no one at Ythan.

They had their own talks, that is, Davie and Katie had. Their grandfather was as silent at home as elsewhere as to the ill that his enemy meditated toward him, so silent that even hopeful grannie grew first doubtful and then anxious, fearing more than she would have feared any outburst of bitterness, this silent brooding over evils that might be drawing near. She dropped a cheerful word now and then as to the certainty that they would never be left in their old age to anxiety and trouble; but though he usually assented to her words, it was almost always silently.

"It is all in God's hands," he said once, and he never got beyond that.

But as for the young ones, there was no end to the talk they had as to Jacob Holt and his plans, not that they knew much about them, or were in the least afraid of them. Katie was troubled sometimes, but Davie made light of her fears, and the rest followed Davie's lead. Davie was of Mr Green's opinion:

"It will never amount to anything, all that he'll do to my grandfather. He'll stop before he gets to the end. Mind, I don't say that he won't be as great a rogue as he knows how to be, but he is a small man, is Jacob, and he'll make a muddle of it. He couldn't do his worst with the eyes of all Gershom on him. He hasn't pluck to take even what is his own against the general opinion."

But Katie thought him hard on Jacob.

"He is not a fool, Davie; and surely he's not a rogue altogether. But I'm not caring for him; I'm only thinking of

grandfather.”

And though Katie did not say it, she was thinking that her grandfather’s silence and gloom might do him more harm than even the loss of half of Ythan. But Davie did not know her thoughts, and he answered the words a little scornfully:

“Of course it is grandfather that we all think of. Who thinks of Jacob, or what may happen to him? And where is your faith, Katie lass? What do you suppose the Lord would be thinking of to take sides with Jacob Holt against such a man as our grandfather? ‘He will not suffer his feet to be moved.’ That’s what the Psalm says, and after that we’ll just wait and see.”

“But, Davie,” said Katie, her eyes wide with surprise and something that felt like dismay, “I doubt that it is not what it means. The Lord doesna take sides that way. And do you think that grandfather would let go his hold—of the Lord even if—even if—and what would become of him then?” added Katie, appalled.

“But that is just what I am saying can never happen. We’ll wait and see.”

Katie was not satisfied.

“But, Davie, even if trouble should come—the worst that could come, it would not be the Lord taking sides against us. The Lord has let trouble, great trouble, fall on grandfather already. And you mind the other Psalm:—

“‘Therefore, although the earth remove,
We will not be afraid.’”

“We’ll just wait and see,” repeated Davie.

“But, Davie, do you think it would be a sign that the Lord was against grandfather if He should let Jacob Holt do his worst? I cannot bear to hear you say such things, as though we were just trying him.”

“Well, and is not that just what we are bidden do? It’s no’ me that is saying grandfather is to be forsaken in his old age.”

“And I’m sure its no’ me. Grandfather forsaken! Never. And, Davie, the loss of Ythan even wouldna mean that to grandfather. Do you no’ mind: ‘Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him.’ What is Ythan, and what are any of us to grandfather, in comparison to having the Lord Himself?” said Katie, with rising colour and shining eyes.

“Well, it is no’ me that say it. There are plenty of folk in Gershom just waiting to see how it will turn—to see which is going to beat—the Lord or—or the other side. I wouldna say that grandfather himself is not among the number.”

“Davie,” said Katie solemnly, “my grandfather kens how it must end. Do you think he puts his trust in God on a venture like that? You little ken.”

Davie made no reply at this time. But they were never weary of the theme, and sometimes went so far as to plan what it would be best to do should they have to leave Ythan. Grannie sometimes watched with sad eyes the shadow on the old man’s face, but no one was more ready than grannie to laugh to scorn the idea that any real harm could happen to them.

So the season opened cheerfully to them all. Davie was indeed the chief dependence now, and went about his work in a way that must have gladdened his grandfather’s heart, though he said little about it. There was no other man about the place. They got a day’s work now and then from a neighbour, and later they must have a man to help, or perhaps two, when the heaviest of the work should come on. But in the meantime, Davie and his brothers did all that was to be done in the sugar-place, and sometimes Katie helped them.

Indeed, as far as sugaring-time was concerned, they might have had help every day and all day. There was not so much sugar made in the vicinity of Gershom as there used to be, and the idle lads of the place enjoyed being in the Ythan woods, in the sweet spring air and sunshine, even on days when working hard at carrying in the sap was all that could be done. But there was always this drawback to Davie’s pleasure in their help or their company, that his grandfather did not like either the one or the other. It was partly his own reserved nature that made the presence of strangers distasteful to him, and it was partly, too, because of painful remembrances of the time when one like Davie had been led astray by the influence of such lads. So Davie did not encourage his friends of the village to come, as he might have done in other circumstances.

On “sugaring-off” days there were usually plenty of visitors. Sugaring-off is the final process of sugar-making, when the syrup into which the sap has been made by long boiling down, is clarified and skimmed and boiled still until it is clear as amber, ready, when cooled, to become a solid mass of glittering sweetness. It is astonishing what a quantity of the warm brown liquid can be consumed with pleasure, and without satiety, and on sugaring-off days not even the half-acknowledged dread of Mr Fleming and his stern looks and ways prevented a gathering of young people larger than would have been welcome to less open-handed folk. But the consumption of a few pounds of warm sugar, more or less, was a small matter in the opinion of the old people, provided all behaved themselves as they ought; and whatever might have been likely to happen in Mr Fleming’s absence, his presence was a sufficient check on the most foolish among them. And even the wild young lads of the village found the old man less grim and stern in the spring woods, with the sunshine about them, than they had learned to think him as they watched him sitting in the meeting-house on Sundays.

Sugaring-time is a time of hard and unpleasant work, and this was a more favourable year than usual. Davie had been too busy with other things all the winter to be able to do much in the way of improving the tools and utensils necessary in the making of sugar. By another year there would be a change, he told Katie in confidence. But in the meantime, the three great iron kettles that had been in use during his father’s lifetime made the only boiling apparatus; they hung over a fire of great logs, on a strong pole the ends of which rested on the “crotch” of two great logs or ports set up fifteen or twenty feet apart, and there was no roof above them.

The “camp” or “shanty” used for shelter if it rained, was close by the fire, made of boards, one end of which rested in the ground, while the other end was raised to rest on a pole extended between the boughs of two overhanging trees; but the young people rarely cared to enter it. It held the syrup tubs and such stores of food as were needed from day to day, but it was small and low, and “out of doors” suited them better, even at night when their work detained them.

Into the great maple trees, scattered over an area of many acres, small scooped spouts of cedar were fastened, and out of a tiny cutting, made by a common axe above it, the sap flowed over these into a primitive bucket of cedar, or a still more primitive trough placed beneath. This sap was carried from all parts of the place in pails sustained by a rough wooden yoke placed on the shoulders of the carrier, and emptied into great wooden sap-holders beside the kettles. This part of the work, to be done well, and with the smallest amount of labour, had to be done in the early morning, before the sun had melted the crust which the night's frost had made on the snow. For even when the open fields were bare, the snow still lingered in the hollows of the wood, and to carry full pails safely, when one's feet were sinking into the mass made soft by the sunshine, was a feat not to be accomplished easily.

This carrying of the sap and the cutting of the wood for fires, was the hard part of the work; the boiling of the sap and all the rest of it was considered by Davie and his brothers as only fun. When there was a great run of sap, as usually happens several times in the season, the boiling had to be carried on through the night, as well as during the day, and when the weather was fine, this only made the fun the greater. At such times Davie usually secured the companionship of a friend, and the chances were the friend brought another friend or two with him; and there were few things happening in Gershom or elsewhere that were not freely discussed at such times.

Katie had less to do with sugar-making this year than ever she had before, and was inclined to murmur a little because of it. But she was less needed in the wood now, her grandmother said, when the other bairns were growing able to help their brother, and Katie was needed in the house. Early as it was, there were calves to be fed and milk to be cared for, and this year it was understood that Katie was to be responsible for all that was done in the dairy. There was plenty to do; Katie's mother was not strong, and grannie confessed that she was feeling herself not so young as she used to be, and Katie was the main stay now.

And, besides, Katie was too nearly a grown woman now to play herself with the bairns in the wood, grannie went on to say, and it was far better for Davie to get Ben Holt or some other lad to help, when help was needed, than to take his sister from her work at home to do work for which she was not fit. Of course Katie assented, and yielded her own pleasure, as she always did at any word of grannie's; but grannie herself felt a little uncomfortable about it. For it was not her thought that Katie should be kept, as a general thing, out of the wood, but Davie's. Between indignation and amusement, she had had some difficulty in keeping her countenance when the lad had spoken.

"I dinna need her, grannie, and she's better at home. Help! There's no fear but I'll get help enough. Jim Miller will be over, and Moses Green, and more besides, very likely, and I'm no' wanting Katie."

"You're well off for helpers, it seems, Davie, my lad. But as for Katie's going—"

"Grannie, she's no' going. As for helpers, they may come and go, and help or not help, as suits themselves. But the less they have to say about our Katie in the town, the better. Helpers! Do you suppose, grannie dear, that they all come to help me?"

His grandmother looked at him in amazement.

"I doubt, laddie, you hardly ken what you are saying."

"I ken fine, grannie. If they want to see Katie, they must come to the house here, to my mother and you. I'm no' to have the responsibility."

"Davie, lad," said grannie solemnly, "if you kened what you are saying, you would deserve the tawse. Responsibility, indeed! A laddie like you; and my bonnie simple-hearted Katie."

"I'm saying nothing about Katie, grannie. I'm speaking about other folk. Jim to-day and Moses to-morrow, and maybe young Squire Holt—no less, the next—with their compliments and their nonsense. And as for Katie, she likes it well enough, or she might come to like it; she's but a lassie after all."

"Oh, laddie, laddie!" was all his astonished grandmother could say.

"I'm no' needing her to-day," repeated Davie.

"Davy, you are to say nothing of all this to your sister. I wouldna for much that she would hear the like of that from you."

"I thought it better to speak to you, grannie," said Davie with gravity.

Grannie would have liked to box his ears.

"Grannie, you needna be angry at me. I'm no saying that Katie is heeding; but other folk call her bonnie Katie as well as you, and she's almost a woman now, and it canna be helped."

"Whisht, Davie. Well, never mind; I'm no' angry. But say nothing to Katie to put things in her head. A laddie like you." And grannie laughed in spite of her indignation. But she kept her "bonnie Katie" at home for the most part, unless there was some special reason for her going with the rest.

There were many other visitors at the sugar-place—visitors whom even Davie could not suspect of coming altogether for Katie's sake. Most people who had a chance to do so, liked to go at least once into the woods when the sugar-making was going on, and the Flemings' place was not very far from the village, and lay high and dry and was easy of access, so that few days passed without a visit from some one.

Sometimes they were visitors to mind and sometimes they were not, but the laws of hospitality held good in the woods as in the house, and they were welcomed civilly at least. Once or twice, when particular friends of his came on sap-boiling days, Davie ventured on an impromptu sugaring-off on his own responsibility. He made use of a small kettle for the purpose, so that the important matter of boiling down the sap need not be interfered with. He told himself that he was not disobeying his grandfather, but he knew that probably it had never come into his mind that such a thing would be attempted, and he did not enjoy it much, though his visitors did. He acknowledged afterward to Katie, that never in the course of his life had he "felt so mean" as he did on the last occasion of the kind. The sugar was just coming to perfection, when the eager barking of the dog proclaimed the approach of some one, and Davie never doubted that it

was his grandfather. It was all that he could do to prevent himself from snatching the sugar from the fire and putting it out of sight. He did not do it, however, and it was not his grandfather. But Davie's feeling of discomfort stayed with him, though he had no reason to suppose that any one of the party had noticed his trouble.

But in this he was mistaken. The very last person to whom he would have liked to betray himself had observed him. Mr Maxwell had only been a few minutes at the camp, and was not one of those for whose entertainment Davie had prepared. Of course he knew that whoever came to the place on regular sugaring-off days, was made welcome to all that could be enjoyed on the occasion, but even with his knowledge that the Flemings were open-handed on all occasions, he did feel somewhat surprised that such special pains should be taken for the entertainment of chance comers. But it was the anxious look that came over Davie's face that struck him painfully.

That Davie, whose character for straightforwardness and courage no one doubted—his grandfather's right hand, the staff and stay of the whole household—that Davie should be found turning aside, ever so little, from what was open and right, hurt the minister greatly. He loved the lad too well to forbear from reproof, or at least a caution, so he stayed till the others had left the wood to say a word to him. This was not his first visit to the camp, for Davie and he were friends, and Mr Maxwell had proved his friendship in a way that the boy liked—by lending him books, and by helping him to a right appreciation of their contents. He had a book in his hand now, as he waited while Davie filled the kettles and stirred the fire, and it troubled him to think that he was going to prove his friendship this time in a way the boy would not like so well. He did not know what to say, and had not decided, when Davie, perhaps surprised at his unwonted silence, looked up and met his eye.

"Davie, lad, was it your grandfather that you expected to see when Collie barked a little while ago?"

Davie reddened and hung his head, and then looking up, said with a touch of anger in his voice:

"You are thinking worse of me than I deserve, Mr Maxwell."

"Well, I shall be glad to be set right, Davie."

"You don't suppose my grandfather would grudge a few pounds of sugar in such a year as this? Why, there has been no such season since I can remember, at least we have never made so much."

"No, I did not suppose that. It would not be like him."

"And there was no time lost; I was helped rather than hindered. And anybody would do the same in any sugar-place in the country, only—" Davie hesitated.

"It was not the sugar I thought of, it was the look that came over your face when you thought your grandfather was coming, that accused you. You accused yourself, Davie."

After a moment's silence, Davie said:

"My grandfather is not just like other folks in all things, and there were two or three here that he does not like—and he might have spoken hastily—being taken by surprise, and—I didn't like the thought of it."

The hesitation was longer this time.

"The chances are, he would—have given me—a blowing up, and that is not so pleasant before folks."

"Well," said the minister again.

"Well, he might have been uneasy at the sight of Hooker and Piatt, and he might have thought I was not to be trusted. And then it would have vexed grannie and them all. My grandfather is queer about some things—I mean he is an old man, and has had trouble in his life, with more ahead, if some folks get their way and so I would have been sorry to see him just then."

"And, Davie, should all this make you less careful to do his will, or more, both as to the spirit and the letter?"

"But, Mr Maxwell, it was not that I thought I was doing wrong, only I hoped grandfather might not come; and even grannie has whiles to—to—No, I won't say it. Grannie is as true as steel. And I was wrong to do anything to encourage Hooker and Piatt to stay, and I am sorry."

"Davie," said the minister kindly and solemnly, "be always loyal in word and deed, as I know you are in heart, to your grandparents. You are everything to them. I know of no nobler work than you have been doing all winter. I beg your pardon if I have been hard on you; but it hurt me dreadfully to see that doubtful look on your face. I did not mean to be hard."

Davie told all this to Katie a few nights afterward, as they were going home through the fields together. But he did not tell her that he made an errand round behind the camp lest Mr Maxwell should see the tears that came rushing to his eyes; nor did he tell her anything that was said after that.

Indeed, there was but a word or two about the Lord and Master, whose claims to a loving loyalty are supreme, words which Davie never forgot, and only alluded to long afterward, when he and Katie found it easier to talk together about such things. And that the minister had not put their friendship in jeopardy, Katie plainly saw.

Chapter Eighteen.

Mr Fleming's Troubles.

A few days after the minister's talk with Davie, the squire and Miss Elizabeth came to pay a visit at Ythan Brae. The squire's visits were rare now, and his coming gave them all pleasure; and as the day was fine, and the old man

expressed a wish to go to the sugar-place, they lost no time after dinner in setting out.

The squire and Mr Fleming went in Mr Holt's buggy, as far as it could be taken, but Mrs Fleming went, with Miss Elizabeth and Katie, the near way through the fields. It was an afternoon long to be remembered. Katie could not tell which she liked best, the walk up the hill with these two, or the walk home again with Davie when he told her of Mr Maxwell's talk with him in the wood. It was pleasant sitting in the sunshine too, and listening to the old squire, and grannie, and them all, and if there had been nothing else to delight her, it would have been enough to see Davie behave so well. For Davie did not think so much of Miss Elizabeth's friendship as Katie did, and did not as a general thing take so much pains as she thought he ought to do to be polite to her friend. But to-day Davie, in his sister's opinion, was kind and "nice" to them all. They heard the sharp ring of his axe as they went up through the pasture, and when they came in among the trees they heard him singing merrily to himself. He made much of grannie, whose first visit it was for the season, and when he heard that his grandfather and Mr Holt were coming by the road, he went off with great strides, like a young giant, to meet them before they should reach a certain hole in the wood road which was deeper than it looked, and where possibly they might have to alight and leave the buggy. By and by he came back with them, carrying the squire's great coat, which he had found heavy in coming up the hill. Then with some boards and an old buffalo-skin and quilt from the camp, he hastened to make comfortable seats for them all.

"I think, grandfather," said he, "since the squire and Miss Elizabeth have come so far—to say nothing of grannie—we should make it worth their while. If Katie will wash out the little kettle, while I make a place for it on the fire, we will have a sugaring-off in an hour or two. If you had come to-morrow, Miss Elizabeth, you would have seen us turning off a hundredweight and more."

"If there will be time for it," said Mr Fleming doubtfully.

"Plenty of time, grandfather. I will set it a-going, and Katie can attend to it, for there are some buckets east yonder that I have not seen to-day, and I must gather the sap and make an end of it to-night, if I can."

"I think I might be trusted to set it a-going myself, Davie," said Katie, laughing and turning up her sleeves.

Davie had made his morning porridge in the kettle, having been busy very early in the woods, and there were traces of former sugar-making on it also, but of this Katie said nothing. It was pretty to see her quick, light movements, as she busied herself with the work. Even the washing of a porridge pot may be done in a way to interest on-lookers, and well-pleased eyes followed her movements.

A tub of syrup which was to form part of to-morrow's "batch" stood in the camp, and from this a portion was carefully taken that the grounds need not be disturbed, a beaten egg and a cup of sweet milk were added for clarifying purposes, and it was placed on the fire. As it grew hot a dark scum rose to the top, which Katie with her skimmer removed, and by and by there was nothing to be done but to see that the clear, amber-coloured liquid did not boil over. All the help that her brother gave her was by way of advice, and of this she made as much use as suited her, and Miss Elizabeth listened to them much amused.

But neither Miss Elizabeth nor Katie lost a word of the quiet talk that was going on between the old people. The squire and Mrs Fleming had most of it to themselves, Mr Fleming putting in a word now and then. Their talk was mostly of old times. If the squire had heard anything new of his friend's trouble as to his debt to Jacob he had forgotten it, as he forgot most things happening from day to day now. It was of the old times in Gershom, even before Mr Fleming's coming, that he was speaking; most of what he said he had said to them often before. He called Davie Hughie, and did not notice that Elizabeth looked anxious and tried to change the talk.

Davie did his part in setting things right by bringing up the question which Ben and he had been discussing lately, as to the salmon fishing on the Beaver River, before the building of the saw-mills had kept the fish away. Then Davie went to his sap-gathering, and after that the talk fell upon graver matters; and though all took part, it was grannie who had most to say, and Elizabeth liked to think afterward of the eager, childlike way in which her father had listened and responded to it all.

He was very fond of telling of his early days, and of his success in life, poor old man, but to-day he acknowledged that this life, if it were all, would be but a poor thing.

"I might have done differently in some things, and I wish I had, though I don't know that it would have amounted to much, anything that I could do."

"And it is well that it is not our ain doings we have to trust to when life is wearing over," said Mrs Fleming, gravely. "I doubt the best of us would find but poor comfort in looking back over our life, when the end is drawing on; it is to Him who is able and willing to save to the uttermost that we have, one and all, to look."

"Yes, I know, there is no one else. And my life is most done, but I haven't never confessed Him, not before men."

"But it's no' too late for that even yet," said Mrs Fleming, gently; "and you *have* confessed Him in a way, for you have fed the hungry and clothed the naked, and all men trust your word, which, God forgive them, is more than can be said of some who have His name oftenest on their lips."

"Folks ought to get religion young, as Lizzie did here, and Jacob. I hope it's all right with Jacob. I've seen the time when I would have been glad to come forward and confess Him and do my part in the church, before Lizzie's mother died. But when a man gets on in years it isn't easy for him to come out before the world and do as he ought. I hope it will be all right, and as I told Jacob the other day, when the time does come for me to be judged I'd full as lief be standing on the same platform with old David Fleming as with most any of the professors in Gershom."

"Eh, man! It would be but a poor place to stand in," said Mr Fleming, with a startled movement. Mrs Fleming looked from one to the other a little startled also.

"It is just this," said she, quickly and softly. "Do we love Him best, and honour Him most? No professing or doing will stand to us instead of that, either now or afterwards. And it is our life rather than our lips that should have the telling of our love. Though they should both speak," added she, gravely.

"Ay! that should they," said her husband.

"And if we love Him best and honour Him, that is so far an evidence that we are His, and we need fear no evil."

"I love Him; I know I love Him," said the squire gravely. "As to having honoured Him before the world all these years—I have little to say about that. And now my life is most gone—most gone—"

Davie came back for the last time with his full pails, and Miss Elizabeth was glad that the talk should come to an end, for her father was showing signs of weariness and weakness. There was a little discussion about the propriety of boiling all the sap down to-night, so that the morning's "batch" of sugar should be the larger. That was Davie's plan, but his grandfather objected, and to Katie's intense delight Davie yielded to his decision cheerfully enough. So he set to work to build up the fires, that the process of boiling to syrup what was now in the kettle might be hastened, for it must be taken from the fire and strained and put safely into the camp before they went home.

Katie's sugar was by this time pronounced ready to be tested, and Davie hastened to bring from some distant hollow a bucketful of the snow which still lingered in shady places. Over this a spoonful or two of the clear brown liquid from the kettle was spread, and as it stiffened, and after a little became solid, it was pronounced to be sugar—though to unaccustomed eyes it would have seemed only a brown syrup still. But by the time it cooled it would be mostly solid sugar, and when the remaining moist part should be drawn off, it would be maple sugar of the very best, Squire Holt declared, and no one knew better than he.

It is not to be supposed that the old people had cared much to have the sugar made for them, or that they tasted it very freely now that it was done. But they had enjoyed seeing it made, and had had a pleasant afternoon. They did not fall into much talk after this. It was nearly sunset, and time for the squire to be at home. So he and Elizabeth did not return to the house, but took the buggy at the point where it had been left, and went straight to the village. Mr and Mrs Fleming went home together over the fields, and Katie was left to help Davie with the straining of the syrup, which was nearly ready now.

"We have had a pleasant afternoon," said Katie; "I only wish the minister had been here, and Miss Betsey, and Mr Burnet. If we had known we might have sent for them."

"It is better as it was. Grandfather liked it better," said Davie. "The minister was here the other day."

"And you didna tell us!"

"Well—I'm telling you now." And in a little he had told the whole story, shamefacedly, but quite honestly. Katie did not say that she thought the minister had been hard on him—thought it for a while. However, Davie did not think he had been hard, she could see, and no harm was done.

In Katie's opinion Davie had been wonderfully good and thoughtful all winter. He had very rarely laid himself open to his grandfather's doubts or displeasure. But after this time there was a difference that made itself apparent to eyes that were less watchful than Katie's. "Loving loyalty," that was just the name for it. In great things and small, after this, the lad laid himself out to please his grandfather.

He was captious with his sisters "whiles," she acknowledged in secret; he was arbitrary with his little brothers when they neglected tasks of his giving; and tried his mother and his grandmother, now and then, as young lads always have, and always will try their mothers and grandmothers, until old heads can be put on young shoulders.

But with his grandfather he was gentle, patient, and considerate, to a degree that surprised even Katie, who had been gentle, patient, and considerate with him all her life. She used to wonder whether her grandfather noticed it. He never spoke of it, but he found fault less frequently, and was less exacting as to times and seasons for work, and as to the lad's comings and goings generally.

Mr Fleming had for a long time said little either of past troubles or future fears, and it was on the past rather than the future that his thoughts dwelt. The future looked dark enough in some of its aspects, but it was by no means hopeless. Davie was more nearly right than Katie was willing to believe, when he said that his grandfather, as well as a good many others in Gershom, were waiting to see "what the Lord was going to do about it," whether it was to be a case of "the righteous never forsaken," or whether this time "the race was to be to the swift, and the battle to the strong."

It may be said of the old man, that on the whole he waited hopefully, or, rather, he looked forward without any special anxiety as to what might be the result of his long controversy with his enemy. Nothing so terrible could happen as had come to him in the past, when his boy had gone down to a dishonoured grave, beyond the reach of hope. Nothing so terrible could happen to the bairns. Every summer and winter passing over their heads, made them more able to meet hardship, if hardship lay before them. Of Katie he had long been sure, and of Davie he was growing surer every day. The rest were healthy, wholesome bairns, with no special gift of beauty or cleverness to lay them open to special temptation. They would do well by their mother, and by one another, and God would guide them, the old man said.

As for himself and his Katie, his dear old wife, their time was nearly over, and they would soon be at peace. At peace! That was the way he put it to himself always. He did not dwell at this time on all that has been promised of the glory to be revealed. He never said that he shrank from the thought of entering through the gates into the heavenly city, out of which his boy must be shut. That would have been rebellion against God, and he would not rebel.

But he was walking in darkness. His eyes were turned away from His face who is the light of the world, and even when he strove to lift them up, there were clouds and shadows between, that grew darker for a while.

All this had come upon him gradually. After the utter darkness of the winter that followed his son's death, he might have ceased to think so constantly of his loss and his son's ruin if it had not been for the sight of Jacob Holt. If Jacob had never returned, or if he had gone on in his old ways till the end came to him also, he might have forgiven him, at least he might have outlived the bitterness of his anger, and in time might have been comforted for his son, and as other fathers are comforted.

But Jacob came home, and had another chance, and became a changed man, or so it was said of him. As years passed he did well for himself, and had power and influence in the town, as his father had had before him. And when James Fleming died, and the old man fell into his enemy's hand, as he thought, his whole life was made bitter to him.

It was not that he grudged to Jacob anything either of wealth or consideration that he had won for himself. But with

every thought of him was joined the thought of the son who, in his father's eyes, had been as much above him as one human being could well be above another, in goodness, in cleverness, in beauty, in all that makes a man worthy of love and honour from his fellows, and he grew sick sometimes with the thought of it all.

But he never spoke much of all this even to his wife. It was years before the old squire knew that it was not all right between Mr Fleming and Jacob, and he never knew all the bitterness of the old man's feelings. Gershom people generally knew that there was no love lost between them, but even Mrs Fleming hardly knew how utterly her husband had become possessed of the feelings which embittered his life.

All this hurt Jacob far less than it hurt himself. Indeed, it cannot be said that it affected Jacob at all, in the way of making him ashamed or remorseful. It affected in some measure the opinion of a few of his fellow-townsmen, and gave to those who had a grudge against him for other reasons, an opportunity of saying hard things against him. But Jacob cared little for all this, and until he had been thwarted by him in the matter of the land on the bank of the river, had given few of his thoughts to Mr Fleming.

But who can say what the stern old man had endured all these years while his silent anger, which was almost hatred, was living and rankling in his heart? Even while he believed that it was the sin that he hated, and not the sinner, it had been like a canker within him. His conscience permitted the stern avoidance of this man, but it was not always silent as to the neglect or the positive avoidance of duties, which the presence of this man made distasteful, and at times even impossible to him.

When Jacob, according to the hopeful verdict of his friends, became a changed man, and cast in his lot with the people of God, it had needed the utmost exercise of the strong restraint which he imposed on himself, as far as outward acts were concerned, to keep him from crying out against what seemed to him to be a profanation of God's ordinances. After old Mr Hollister's death, when others fell in with the new order of things, and one after another of his old friends found his place in the church, he kept back and remained a spectator, even when he would gladly have gone with them.

It was only his strong sense of the duty he owed to his family, that took him to the new church at all, and it was to be feared that had it not been for his personal interest in Mr Maxwell, and his real love for the word of truth as presented by him to the people, he would, during the winter which saw the work at Varney's farm commenced and carried on at Jacob Holt's bidding, have absented himself from the house of God altogether.

He went, but he did not derive the good from it he might have done in other circumstances, as he longed to do. He was like one bound or blinded; like one striving vainly to reach a hand held out to him, to see clearly a face of love turned toward him, indeed, but with a veil between.

"Thou art a God that hidest Thyself," was his cry. And when this word followed to his conscience, "Your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear," he laid his hand on his mouth, acknowledging that it might well be so; but it was not the sin of his anger against Jacob Holt that came home to him. He told himself that it was the man's daily hypocrisy that he hated. And if he could not always separate the sinner from the sin in his thoughts, he yet could quiet himself, taking refuge in the knowledge that never by word or deed had he pleaded his own cause against him. He left it to God to deal with him.

But having waited long, and seeing many troubles drawing near, he asked in moments of darkness whether God had indeed forgotten him.

And so the days went on through the spring, and Mrs Fleming watched and waited, saying little, but growing sad at heart to see how rapidly the signs of old age were growing visible upon him.

Chapter Nineteen.

Katie's Word.

Grannie's brave heart did not fail her. She had much to comfort her at this time of trouble.

Seldom had there been a more favourable spring for the getting in of the crops, and never even at Ythan Brae had the spring work been done better, or in better time.

Davie was far enough from being perfect yet in many respects, and his grandmother did not consider it her duty, or for his good, to let him forget his faults. But she made amends to herself, if not to him, by rejoicing over him and his steadiness and goodness to his mother and Katie. None of her rebukes or cautions were needed where his grandfather was concerned, and she could not but wonder sometimes at the lad's forbearance, for the old man's burden of care made him weary and irritable often.

Katie's dairy, so long talked of and planned for, was in use now, though it was not quite finished to her mind yet. Davie made use of his spare minutes on rainy days to add to its conveniences. In the meantime it was clean and cool. The Ythan burn rippled softly through it, and with a free use of its limpid waters, and a judicious use of the limited treasure of ice which they had secured during the last winter months, Katie made such butter as bade fair to win her a reputation which might in course of time rival that of her grandmother. They had two more cows in the pasture than ever they had had before; but ambitious to do much, and to make much money for their possible time of need, and being perfectly healthy and strong, Katie laughed at the idea of having too much to do, and could have disposed, in the village, of twice as much of her delicious butter as her dairy could produce.

Everything seemed to promise a profitable summer, and a pleasant summer too, notwithstanding the knowledge that whatever evil was to come on them through Jacob Holt could not be long averted now.

"Katie," said Davie, "do you ken what they are saying about grandfather now? They say that—"

"But who are saying it? If you tell me who they are, I'll soon tell you what they are saying. Though it matters little anyway."

"Well, you needna fly out at me. I'm no' saying it," said Davie, laughing. "And as for *they*, I might as well say *he*, or

maybe *she*. It was Ben Holt who told me. He heard his Aunt Betsey telling his grandmother. But it came from Mrs Jacob in the first place. She says that poor old Mr Fleming is not right in his mind, and that something will have to be done about it."

"Davie!" gasped Katie, "how dare you?"

Davie looked up startled. Katie's face crimsoned first, and then went very white.

"Oh, Davie, Davie! How could you say it?" and her tears gushed forth.

"But, Katie—such nonsense! I didna say it. Do be reasonable. I shouldna have told you. But why should we heed what they say?"

It took Katie a good while to get over the shock she had received, and Davie sat watching her a little shamefaced and sorry, saying to himself what queer creatures girls were, and what an especially queer creature Katie was, and he wished heartily that he had said nothing about it.

But Katie was not shocked in the way that Davie supposed. It was not that she was indignant at Mrs Jacob for saying such a thing of her grandfather. That there should be anything in her grandfather's words or ways to make the saying of such things possible made the pain. For a terrible fear had come upon Katie. Or rather, by the constant watching of her grandmother's looks and words, she had come to the knowledge that she feared for the old man something which she had never put into words.

It was Sunday afternoon, a lovely June day, and they were sitting at the foot of the little knoll under the birch-tree, where the two Holts had found them on that Sunday morning long ago. The rest of the bairns had gone with their mother to the Sunday-school at the Scott school-house as usual, and their grandfather and grandmother were sitting together in the house. Davie had been sitting there too, with his book in his hand, but he had not enjoyed it much; he had nodded over it at last and dropped asleep, and then grannie had bidden him go out to the air for a while and stretch himself, adding to his grandfather as he went:

"He's wearied with his week's work, poor laddie, and canna keep his eyes open, and it will do him good to stroll quietly down the brae to the burn. And Katie, lassie, you can go with him for a little till the bairns and your mother come home."

So, her grandfather saying nothing, Katie went well pleased, and the two soon found themselves at their favourite place of rest, at the point where the Ythan begins to gurgle and murmur over the stones at the foot of the birch knoll.

They had both changed a good deal since the day the Holts found them sitting there. There seemed a greater difference in their ages than there had seemed then, for Katie, as bonnie and fresh as ever, was almost a woman now. Davie was a boy still, long and lank, and not nearly so handsome as he used to be, but there was promise of strength and good looks too, when a few years should be over. He had worked constantly and hard for the last year, and he stooped a little sometimes when he was tired, and Katie was beginning to fear lest he should become round-shouldered and "slouching," and was in the way of giving him frequent hints about carrying himself uprightly, as he went about the farm. But he was as fine a young fellow as one could wish to see, and his looks promised well for the manhood that did not lie very far before him.

They were silent for a good while after Katie's outburst. She sat on the grass, her hands clasped round her knees, and her eyes fixed on the rippling water of the burn. Davie lay back on the grass with his head on his clasped hands regarding her. She turned round at last with a grave face.

"I cannot understand it, Davie. I suppose Jacob Holt is not a good man, and grandfather thinks he did him a great wrong long ago, and that he is only waiting for an opportunity to do him still another. But yet it seems strange to me that grandfather should care so much, and be so hard on him. It should not matter so much to him, for Jacob Holt is but a poor creature after all."

Davie looked at her in astonishment.

"Is that the way you look at it? Do you know what happened long ago?"

"I don't know, nor do you; but we can guess. And even grannie thinks him hard on Jacob. Oh, Davie; it is a terrible thing not to be able to forget."

Davie said nothing, and Katie went on:

"I hate myself for thinking that grandfather may not be right in everything, so good as he is, so upright and so true. He never did a mean or unjust deed in all his life. If he is not one of God's people, who is? And yet, Davie, the Bible says, 'If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses.' And to think that one like Jacob Holt should have the power to harden a good man's heart like that!"

"What do you suppose grannie would think if she were to hear you?" said Davie in amazement.

"Of course I wouldna speak to grannie, or to any one else but you. And whiles I think that grannie herself is feared at his silence, and—and at his unchangeableness," said Katie, with an awed look. "And grandfather is growing an old man now, and what will it matter to him in a little while about Jacob Holt or any other man?"

Davie got up and walked about restlessly for a while, and when he came and stood before her on the other side of the burn, Katie went on again:

"Grandfather must ken that the Lord knows about it all, and that it is sure 'to work for good' to him, as the Bible says it must. 'All things,' it says. And the Lord knew grandfather's trouble long ago, and grandfather knows that He knew it, and it is a wonder that he should never be comforted."

"It is something that we canna understand," said Davie gravely. "But, Katie, grandfather is not ay dwelling on it as

you suppose. Did he ever do an ill deed to Jacob Holt, or say an ill word of him? He canna be friendly with him, because he canna trust him or respect him. But as to not forgiving him—that is not likely.”

“But, Davie, he hasna spoken a word to Jacob Holt for years. He has not heard his name spoken—unless by the old squire, who forgets things whiles. None of us name him in his hearing, nor the neighbours. And all this about the land and the site for the mills is not natural, is it, if he has forgiven and forgotten? And it is not Christian, if he has not,” added Katie with a sob.

“And what you mean by all this is, that—that something is the matter with him—as Mr Jacob said,” and Davie turned angry eyes on his sister.

“Davie, I whiles think grannie is feared. She is ay longing for his home-coming when he is away. And I hear her speaking softly to him when they are alone. And I hear him often praying in the night; last night it was for hours, I think. Oh, Davie! and then grannie went to him, and he went back to his bed again, and grannie looked, oh, so white and spent in the morning.”

“And he was at Pine-tree Hollow the other night,” said Davie.

“Yes! And grannie went to meet him, and my mother was waiting for them at the gate, and she burst out crying when she saw them coming home together through the gloaming.”

They sat for a long time silent after that. Indeed, there was not another word spoken till they heard the children’s voices, and knew that it was time to go to the house again. Then Katie stooped and laved the water on her tear-stained face before she turned to go.

“It will all work for good, Katie, you may be sure of that,” said her brother huskily, as they went up the brae together.

“Yes, to those who love Him. So the promise is good for grannie and him—and, oh, Davie! if we were only sure for us all.”

There were smiles on Katie’s face when she said this, and tears too, and it was doubtful which of them would have way, till her grandfather’s voice settled it. She had only smiles for him, as he came out at the door with his staff in his hand, and looking as if he needed it to lean upon, but looking, at the same time, brighter and more like himself than Katie had seen him for a while. She turned and went with him toward the pasture-bars, his favourite walk. They went slowly on together, speaking few words, content to be silent in each other’s company.

It was a bonny day, the old man said, and the grass was fine and green; and Katie bade him look at the barley turning yellow already, and at the purple shadows on the great hay-field as the wind passed over it.

“I like to watch them,” said Katie, “and, grandfather, doesna it mind you of the waves of the sea?”

Her grandfather shook his head.

“It’s a bonny sight, but it is no like the waves of the sea.”

And thus a word dropped here and there till they came to the pasture-bars. The sheep and the young lambs crowded together close to the bars over which they leaned, expecting the usual taste of salt from their hands, and old Kelso and her colt neighed their welcome. It was a peaceful, pleasant scene, and would do her grandfather good, Katie said to herself joyfully. But in a minute her heart gave a sudden throb, as with a look at her face, from which neither the water of the burn, nor the mild sweet air had quite effaced the traces of tears, he said gravely:

“And what was it that Davie was saying to you as you came up the brae?”

Katie gave a quick look into his face, and her eyes fell, and she could not utter a word.

“Was he vexing you with his nonsense? Was he scolding you, my lassie?”

“Davie! Oh, grandfather! I would never heed Davie. And besides, it is I who scolded Davie,” added she with a laugh, much relieved.

“I dare say he’s no’ out of the need of it whiles, though he maybe needs it less than he once did.”

“Yes, indeed! grandfather. Is he not steady now? As good as gold?”

“As gold? Well, gold is good in its place, if it could be kept there. And what were you two discoursing about, down yonder by the burn?”

It never came into Katie’s mind that she could answer him otherwise than indirectly.

“We were speaking—about you, grandfather, and about—Jacob Holt.”

“Well?”

“And Davie was saying how impossible it was that anything that that man can do could hurt you, grandfather.”

“He thinks he kens, does he?”

“But he says everybody kens that, though Jacob is a greedy man, he is but a poor creature, and wouldna dare to harm you, because all Gershom would cry out against him if he were to do his will.”

“I’m no’ sure of that. But, indeed, I think he has done his worst on me already.” And the look, the dark look, that always brought the shadow to grannie’s eyes came over his face as he said it. Katie’s heart beat hard, but her courage

rose to the occasion, and she said softly and reverently:

"It was God's will, grandfather, and surely Jacob must be sorry now."

The old man uttered a sound between a groan and a cry.

"Was it God's will? It was a great sin, and God has never punished him for it. Lassie, you little ken."

"No, grandfather, but God kens. And it was His will," repeated Katie, not knowing what to say.

"God's will! Ay, since He permitted it; we can say nothing else. But that it should be God's will that yon man should have a name and a place here—and it may be, hereafter—passes me."

Except to his wife, Mr Fleming had never spoken such words before, and the pain and anger on his face it was sorrowful to see.

"Grandfather, don't you mind how, at the very last, our Lord said, 'Father, forgive them'?"

He had been sitting, with his face averted from her, but he turned now with a strange, dazed look in his eyes:

"Ay. And He said, 'Love your enemies,' and 'Forgive and ye shall be forgiven.' And Katie, my bonny woman, I canna do it."

Katie slid down to the ground beside him, and laid her wet face on his knee without a word. What was there to be said, only "God comfort him, God comfort him?" and she said it many times in the silence that came next.

By and by the clouds drifted toward the west and hid the sun, and it seemed to grow dreary and chill around them.

"We'll go to the house to your grandmother," said he at last in a voice that to Katie seemed hard and strange.

Was he angry with her? Ought she not to have spoken? She dared not ask him, but she touched his hand with her lips, and wet it with her tears before she rose. He took no notice, but said again: "We'll go home to your grandmother;" and no word was spoken till they reached the house, and then Katie slipped away out of sight, lest her grandmother should see her tears.

But as the days went on she knew that he was not angry. He was very grave and silent, and grannie was never quite at rest when he was long out of sight. But summer wore on, and nothing happened to make one day different from another till haying-time came.

Chapter Twenty.

A Demonstration.

Mr Fleming's failing strength, and the high rate of wages paid for farm labour, had for several years made it necessary for him to depart from what seemed to him the best mode of farming, in order to save both strength and wages. So there was a larger part of the place in hay and pasture-land than there had been at first, a larger proportion than there ought to be for really good farming on such land as his, he was willing to acknowledge. Haymaking was, therefore, the most important part of summer work at Ythan.

There was much to be done, both in the house and in the fields. Several men were required to help for a month or more, and if they were not of the right stamp, both as to character and capabilities, the oversight of them became a trouble to the grandfather, and that, of course, troubled them all. No choice could be exercised in the matter. They were usually men who came along from the French country, either before or after their own narrow fields were cut, in order to make a little money by helping their English-speaking neighbours, and those who hired them must take their chance.

As a general thing the men were good workers, and did well when their employers worked with them. But they were for the most part eye-servants, who took things easy when it might be done, and with eye-service Mr Fleming had less patience than with most things.

But the "good luck" that had followed Davie and his doings on the farm all the summer, followed him still. One night there came to Ythan a stranger, who introduced himself as Ira Hemmenway, an American, sole agent in Canada for the celebrated Eureka mowing-machine, and he "claimed the privilege" of introducing this wonderful invention to the notice of the discriminating and intelligent farmers of Gershom. He asked nothing better for his own share of profit than a chance to show what he could do with it on some of the smooth fields of Ythan.

If he had been aware of Mr Fleming's distaste for all things untried, or "new-fangled," it is likely he would have carried his request elsewhere. But, greatly to Davie's surprise, his grandfather listened to the proposition of Mr Hemmenway with no special signs of disfavour, and he could only hope that the wonderful eloquence of their Yankee friend might not hinder rather than help his cause.

"With a fair start in the morning we calculate, with a middlin' span of horses, to get over by noon as much ground as six men would get over, if they worked from sunrise to sundown, if they didn't have to stop to eat or drink or take a resting-spell. We cut clean and even. There'll be a little clipping, maybe, round the stumps and stone piles, but you don't seem to have many of them. You just see me go once round your big field there with my team, and you'll never want to touch a scythe again. Only give me the chance. The first day sha'n't cost you nothing but my victuals and good feed of oats for my team. Now come, what do you say?"

Mr Fleming listened with patience and with some amusement, Davie thought.

"That is cheap enough surely," said he.

"And nothing risked," continued Mr Hemmenway. "It'll be good for you and good for me, and it doesn't often happen that both sides get the best of the bargain. Say yes, and I'll be along by sunrise, and if I don't make this young man here open his eyes first time round, I shall be some surprised."

The only difficulty seemed lest there might be too much grass cut to be properly cared for, since they had not as yet engaged help.

"Don't you fret about that. You'll have the whole neighbourhood here looking on, and I don't suppose they'll stand still and do it. I'll risk the making of the hay that'll be cut to-morrow."

The idea of the whole neighbourhood looking on, or even helping to make hay, was not so agreeable to Mr Fleming as Mr Hemmenway might have supposed, and Davie hastened to suggest that Ben Holt and two or three others who had not yet commenced in their own fields might give help for one day, and so the matter was arranged. Mr Hemmenway lost no time. The machine was brought to Ythan that night, and when Mr Fleming came out in the morning operations had long been commenced in Mr Hemmenway's best style, and Davie was occupying his place on the high seat of the machine, and driving "the team" steadily round the great square, which was growing beautifully less at every turn.

Not quite the whole neighbourhood came to look on, but a good many did. Among the rest was Deacon Scott, who was almost as much averse to "new-fangled" notions as was Mr Fleming. But he engaged the machine for the next day, and paid a good price for it—which was all clear gain, Mr Hemmenway admitted to Davie in confidence. Going about from field to field for a few days in a neighbourhood was the company's way of advertising. If it did not pay this year it would next, for half the farmers in the country would have a machine by another year.

"And I don't say it is any way among the impossibles that we should conclude to give your little town a lift, by establishing a branch factory in it. You've got a spry little stream here, and some good land, and there'll be some handsome fields for the Eureka to operate upon when the stumps get cleared out. But you are considerably behind the times in the way of implements. You want to be put up to a dodge or two, and we are the folks to do it, in the way of machinery," and so on.

Two more days of the Eureka at Ythan laid low the grass in every field, and within eight days of the time when Mr Hemmenway made his appearance there, all the hay was well made and safely housed, without a drop of rain having fallen upon it.

Davie was tired, but triumphant. "Providence is ay kind," said grannie softly, and grandfather's assent, though silent as usual, was pleased and earnest, and he was "in better heart" than he had been for a while.

Davie had some good hard work in other hay-fields in return for the help they had had at Ythan, and it was done gratefully and heartily.

And when most of the hay-fields in Gershom were bare and brown, waiting for the showers that were to make them green and beautiful for the fall pasture, in the short "resting-spell" that usually comes in this part of Canada between the hay and grain harvest, thoughts of pleasure seemed to take possession of young and old in Gershom.

It would be impossible to say to whom was due the honour of originating the idea of assembling for a grand pleasure party of some sort, all the people of Gershom "and vicinity." A good many people claimed it, and it is probable they all had a right to do so. For so natural and agreeable a plan might well suggest itself to several minds at the same time. It took different forms in different minds, however. All were for pleasure, but there were various opinions as to how it could best be secured.

The young people generally were in favour of an expedition to Hawk's Head, or to the more distant, but more accessible wonders of Clough's Chasm, where in a sudden deep division of the hills lay a clear, still lake, whose depths it was said had never yet been sounded. Others approved rather of some plan that would allow a far larger number to participate in it, than such an expedition would allow. And while this was being discussed in a manner that threatened the falling through of the whole affair, it was taken up by that part of the community who considered themselves chiefly responsible for the well-being of the body politic, and who considered themselves also, on the whole, eminently qualified to perform the duties which the responsibilities implied. And by them it was declared that a great temperance demonstration was at this time desirable.

Such a demonstration would do good in many ways. It would revive the drooping spirits of those who were inclined to despond as to the prosperity of the cause. It would rouse from slumber the consciences of some who had once been its active friends, and it would strengthen the hands of all faithful workers; it would bring on the field all the best speakers of the country, and give an impulse to the cause generally.

All this was said with much energy and reiteration, and a good deal of it was believed; at any rate, all other plans for pleasure were made to give way before it. It did not so much matter what might be made the occasion of the gathering, so that folks got together to have a good time, said the young and foolish, who thought much of whatever would give enjoyment for the time, and little of anything else. As to listening to speech-making—there need be no more of that than each might choose; so in the end almost all fell in with the idea of the great temperance demonstration, and notice was given to the country at large accordingly.

But it is only as far as two or three people concerned themselves with it that we have anything to do with the matter, either as an occasion for amusement or as a demonstration of principle. Davie brought home to Katie the news of all that was intended, and added a good deal as to his opinion of it, which he acknowledged he would have liked to give at a meeting called to make arrangements, which he and Ben had just attended.

"You should have heard them, grannie, and then you would shake your head at them and not at me."

And Davie gave them a specimen of the remarks that had been made and the manner of them, that made even his grandfather smile. There had been a great deal of inconsequent talking, as is usual on such occasions, and the chances were that the meeting would have come to an end without having definitely settled a single point which they had met for the purpose of settling, if it had not happened that Clifton Holt—at home for his vacation, he said—strayed into the school-house toward the end.

"And it must be acknowledged that Clif has a head," said Davie discontentedly. "He is a conceited fellow but he is smart. In ten minutes they had decided on the place, the grove above Varney's place, and had appointed committees for

all manner of things. And he made them all believe that the meeting had settled the whole and not himself. You should have heard John McNider 'moving,' and Sam Green 'seconding,' and Jim Scott 'suggesting,' and every one of them believing that he was doing it out of his own head. It is a good thing that Clif thinks Gershom too small a place for him. He'd play the old squire in a new way. He's got more gumption in his little finger than Jacob has in his whole body;" and remembering that his grandfather was present, he paused, and then added: "He'll make a spoon or spoil a horn, will Clif. And, grannie, I'm hungry."

"Well, there is milk and bread in the pantry. Bring it to your brother, Katie, as he's tired. And we'll hope, Davie lad, that the spoon will be made and the horn no' spoiled. You're over ready with your judgments, I doubt."

When Katie brought the bread and milk she ventured to ask some further particulars as to arrangements.

"Oh, you'll hear all about it. You are on two or three committees at least. No, I don't remember what they are. Setting tables, I think. You'll hear all about it, and if you don't, then all the better," said Davie shortly.

"And what have they given you to do? Surely they didna neglect the general interest so far as to overlook you."

For when Davie took that line with Katie, grannie considered that he needed to be put down a bit. Davie laughed. He understood it quite well.

"No, grannie dear, I'm on two or three of their committees as well as Katie—and so is half the town for that matter. And they think they are doing it for 'the cause,'" added Davie, laughing. "Grannie, I would give something if I could write down every word just as it was spoken. I never read anything half so ridiculous in a book."

"My lad, things are just as folk look at them. I daresay your friends Ben, and Sam and Jim Scott saw nothing ridiculous about it till you made them see it. And the master was there, and John McNider—"

"But the master didna bide long; and as for John—if you give him a chance to make a speech, that is all he needs—"

"Whisht, Davie lad, and take the good of things. It is a good cause anyway."

"Oh, grannie, grannie! as though the cause had anything to do with it, at least with the most of them!"

"Well, never mind. You can take the good of the play without making folk think it's for the cause. And you'll need to help the preparations. As for Katie, I doubt I canna so well spare her—except for the day itself."

The last few words had been between these two when the others had gone out of the room. Grannie had a little of the spirit of which Katie had a good deal. She was sociably inclined, and, though it troubled her little that she or those belonging to her should be called odd, she know it troubled Katie, and she wanted her to have the harmless enjoyment that other young girls had, and to take the good of them. And she desired for Davie, also, that he should be able to do and to enjoy something else besides the work of the farm, which was certainly his first duty. But she knew that his grandfather's desire to keep him from evil companionship might keep him also from such companionship as might correct some faults into which he was in danger of falling, being left too much to himself, and might do him good in other ways. So, whenever a fair opportunity occurred to give the young people a taste of amusement which seemed harmless and enjoyable, she quietly gave her voice in favour of it. And in her opinion this was one of the occasions.

"If we are to refuse to put a hand to any good work till all who wish to help are models of discretion, we'll do little in this world, Davie lad. And you'll do what you can to make the occasion what it ought to be for the honour of the town, since it is to be in Gershom."

"Oh, grannie, grannie! What would folk say to hear you? As though the whole town werena agog for the fun of it, and as though I could make a straw's difference."

"You can make a difference to your mother and Katie and the bairns. And I dinna like to hear you laughing at folk, as though you didna believe in them and their doing. We canna all be among the wise of the earth, and I would like Katie to get the good of this—she who gets so little in the way of pleasure."

"Oh, Katie! She's better at home than holding sham committee meetings with a parcel of idle folk. There's plenty to do it all without her."

"Oh, as to committee meetings, I doubt she could be ill spared to many of them, but for the day itself, to hear the speaking and see the show like the rest. And you are not to spoil it to her beforehand, Davie."

"Well, I winna, grannie. It will be great fun I dare say."

"And as it's a leisure time, you must do what you can to help with the rest, and all the more as I canna spare Katie. And she will have preparations to make at home. But we'll hear more about it, it is likely."

"Plenty more, grannie. Oh, yes; I'll help. It is to be a grand occasion."

"But the preparing beforehand is the best of all, they say," said Katie.

But even her grandmother was as well pleased that Katie should have nothing to do with general preparations. All sorts of young people were to help, and it could hardly be but that some foolish things should be said and done where there was so much to excite and nothing to restrain, and her Katie's name was as well to be kept out of it all. But she put no limit as to the preparations that were to be made at home in the way of cakes and tartlets and little pats of butter, for it was to be a great occasion for Gershom.

There had been demonstrations of this kind before in Gershom and the vicinity. Indeed, this was a favourite way of promoting the cause of temperance, as it has more recently become the favourite way of promoting other causes in Canada. In some spot chosen for general convenience a great many people assembled. The greater the number the greater the good accomplished, it was supposed. The usual plan was for parties of friends to keep together, and either before or after the speech-making—which was supposed to be the chief interest of the day—to seek some suitable spot

in field or grove for the enjoyment in common of the many nice things stored in the baskets with which all were supplied.

But Gershom folk aimed at something beyond the usual way. In Finlay Grove, which had been chosen as the place of meeting, tables were to be set up and covered for—

“Well—we’ll say five hundred people,” Clifton Holt suggested at one of the meetings for the settling of preliminaries. “And let us show them what Gershom can do.”

Of course he did not know in the least what he was undertaking for Gershom in this off-hand way, nor did any one else till it was too late to change the plan. Not that there was any serious thought of changing it. The honour of Gershom was at stake, and “to spend and be spent” for this—to say nothing of “the cause”—seemed to be the general desire.

Davie Fleming did his part well. He drew loads of boards from the saw-mill, and loads of crockery from the various village stores. He helped to fix the tables and many seats, and to build the platform for “the speakers from a distance,” vaguely promised as a part of the day’s feast. Indeed, he distinguished himself by his zeal and efficiency, and was in such request that he was obliged to promise that he would be on the ground early in the morning of the day to help about whatever might still have to be done.

He had got quite into the spirit of it by this time. It was great fun, he said, and he was a little ashamed of the part he had taken in keeping Katie out of it all. So he proposed that she should go with him that morning and stay for an hour or two. She could go quite easily, he said, for he could put her over the river on a raft which he had made for his own convenience, to save the walk round by the bridge. But Katie could not be spared. The children were all expected to go with the Scott’s Corner Sunday-school to the High-School, from thence to walk with several other Sunday-schools in procession to the Grove, and Katie must help to get them ready and see them off. When Davie came back at noon he had some news to give her.

“The squire and Miss Elizabeth have come home, and they have company at Jacob’s—friends of Mr Maxwell’s, they say; but it is likely they would be staying at the parsonage if they were. They have come at a good time. They’ll see folks enough in their meeting-clothes for once.”

Davie had come home to put on his own “meeting-clothes,” and declined his dinner in his hurry to get away again. Katie took it more quietly. In her joy at the prospect of seeing Miss Elizabeth again, the prospect of seeing so many people “in their meeting-clothes” seemed a secondary matter, and this was too openly acknowledged to please her brother.

“Katie,” said he discontentedly, “I think the less we have to do with the Holts to-day the better.”

“Jacob and his wife, you mean,” said Katie, laughing. “Oh, I shall have nothing in the world to do with them.”

“I mean Jacob and his wife and all the rest of them. However, there will be so many there to-day for Clif to show his fine clothes and his fine manners to, that he’ll have no time for the like of you.”

“But I’ll see his fine clothes and his fine manners too, as well as the rest. And there are some things that look best a little way off, you know.”

“That’s so. And if it’s Holts you want, you’d better stick to Betsey.”

“Yes, and Ben,” said Katie, laughing.

“Bairns,” said grannie gravely, “you’re no quarrelling, I hope. Are you ready, Katie? And, Davie lad, are you sure it’s quite safe for your sister to go over the river on your raft? And will she no’ be in danger of wetting her clean frock? It would save her a long walk, and the day is warm, if you are sure it’s safe.”

“It has carried me safe enough, grannie dear, and Ben Holt and more of us. I ken Katie’s precious gear beside me, to say nothing of her frock. But it’s safe enough.”

“Well, go away, like good bairns, and dinna be late in coming home.”

Chapter Twenty One.

A Temperance Speech.

Both Katie and her frock got safely over the river on Davie’s raft, which was a very primitive affair. They had a field or two to cross from the landing-place, and at the opening made in the fence for the people from the village to pass through on their way to the Grove, she found the squire and Miss Elizabeth. They were sitting in Miss Elizabeth’s low carriage, at a loss what to do, because they had been told that the committee had decided that no carriage was to be admitted within the grounds, and Miss Elizabeth did not like to set rules and regulations at defiance, but neither did she like that her father should have to walk up the hill to the Grove. In this dilemma she appealed to Davie.

“Oh, never mind the committee, Miss Elizabeth. Go ahead up the hill; and, besides, I’m on that committee, and I’ll give you a pass,” said Davie, appreciating the situation.

Miss Elizabeth laughed, and so did Katie; but when Miss Elizabeth proposed that he should take her place in the carriage and drive her father up to the stand where he was to sit, Katie laughed more than the occasion required, Davie thought. Of course he could not refuse, and yielded with a good grace.

The field was none of the smallest, and the carriage moved slowly, so that Elizabeth and Katie reached the neighbourhood of the speakers’ stand almost as soon as the squire. They were in time to see Clifton help his father up the steps to his place on the stand, where a good many other gentlemen were seated. Then they saw him hand into the carriage a very pretty young lady, a stranger, and drive away with her. Davie looked after them with a grimace.

"That is cool! Holts indeed."

"I hope my brother is not committing an indiscretion," said Miss Elizabeth gravely.

"Oh, I guess she likes it. And he is one of the managers; he may do as he likes."

"I am not so sure of that," said Miss Elizabeth.

"But who is she?" asked Katie; "I think she is the prettiest girl I ever saw—and such a pretty dress!"

"Yes, she is very pretty. She is Miss Langden. She and her father came last night. They are staying at my brother's. They are friends of Mr Maxwell's, I hope Clifton has not done a foolish thing in taking her away."

The little carriage was making slow progress round the grounds, with many eyes fixed upon it, and certainly the handsome young couple sitting in it were a pleasant sight to see. Many a remark was passed upon them by friends and strangers alike; admiring remarks generally they were, and though they did not reach the ears of the young people, Clifton could very easily imagine them. He enjoyed the situation, and if his companion did not, as one observing lady remarked, "her looks belied her." By and by they came round to the stand again and stopped to speak with Elizabeth.

"I am glad you brought the carriage, Lizzie," said her brother. "It is a sight well worth seeing, and one gets the best view in going all the way round."

It was a sight worth seeing. There were already many hundreds of people on the ground. It was a large grassy field, sloping down gradually nearly to the river. The Grove, where the speakers' stand had been placed, and where many long tables were spread, was toward the upper part of it, but there were trees scattered through all the field, and groups of people were sitting and walking about here and there through the whole of it, and more were arriving every moment.

There was a good deal of bright colour about the "meeting-clothes" of some of them, and the effect at a distance was pleasing. In the lower part of the field toward the right, where there were trees enough for shade, but an open space also, many children were running about, and their voices, possibly too noisy for the pleasure of those close beside them, came up the hill with only a cheerful murmur that heightened the effect of the scene.

"I consider myself fortunate in being permitted to witness such a gathering," said the young lady in the carriage. "You must feel it to be very encouraging to see so many people showing themselves to be on the right side."

"Yes, there is a very respectable gathering. There are a great many from neighbouring towns," said Elizabeth; "I am very glad we have so fine a day."

"We can make room for you, Miss Holt," said Miss Langden.

"Yes, Lizzie, come; we will drive round again. You can have a far better idea of the numbers when you see the whole field."

But Elizabeth declined. Indeed, she ventured to express a doubt whether it were the right thing to do. But Clifton only laughed, and asked her who she supposed would be likely to object.

"All the same; I would rather not do what others are not permitted to do," said Elizabeth gravely.

"All right, Lizzie," said her brother.

The young lady at his side made no movement.

"Shall we take another turn round the field?" said Clifton. "Oh, yes, Lizzie, we shall be back before the speech-making begins. We would not lose a word of that for a great deal," said Clifton, laughing.

Elizabeth stood looking after them, with a feeling of some discomfort. It was very foolish for Clifton to make himself so conspicuous, she thought, and then she turned at somebody's suggestion to go and look at the tables before they were disturbed. Here she fell in with Katie again, and with her cousin Betsey, and they all went together round the tables.

They were twelve in number, and were capable of seating not quite five hundred, but a great many people, and they were loaded with good things of all sorts. The speakers' table was splendid with flowers and glass and silver. The good and beautiful from all baskets, or a part of whatever was best and most beautiful, had been reserved for it, and Katie hoped that the stranger young lady had got a good view of it. The other tables were loaded also. There did not seem to be a full supply of plates and knives and things on some of them, but that would doubtless be considered a secondary matter as long as the good things lasted; and there seemed little chance of their failing.

The supply reserved for the second tables, and even for the third and fourth tables, seemed to Miss Elizabeth to be inexhaustible. Baskets of cookies and doughnuts, and little cakes of all kinds; great trays of tartlets and crullers, boxes of biscuits, and buns and rolls of all shapes and sizes, fruit-pies, and crackers, and loaves of bread: there seemed to be no end of them.

"End of them! If they hold out, we may be glad," said Miss Betsey. "Every child on the field is good for one of each thing, at least, biscuits and cookies and all the rest, and there are hundreds of children, to say nothing of the grown-up folks. They've been all calculating to have the children come in at the last, but two or three of us have concluded to fix it different."

The speaking was to come before the eating, and as the crowd who would wish to hear would leave no room for the children, Miss Betsey's plan was that they should have their good things while the speaking was going on, at a sufficient distance to prevent their voices from being troublesome, and that the tables should be left undisturbed. Some dozens of young people were detailed to carry out this arrangement, and Davie and Katie were among them. Miss Elizabeth would have liked to go with them; but she was a little anxious about her father, who had been made the chairman of the occasion, and did not wish to be far away from him.

The children's tea was the best part of the entertainment, David said afterward. There was some danger that the third, or even the second tables would have little to show, for it had been agreed by those who served the children that while any of them could eat a morsel, it should be supplied. And it was a good deal more than Miss Betsey's "one apiece all round" of everything. The quantity that disappeared was amazing.

Miss Betsey came out wonderfully in her efforts in behalf of the young people. Miss Elizabeth had been rather surprised to find her in the Grove at all, and had quite unintentionally allowed her surprise to appear. It was not like her cousin Betsey to take part in this sort of thing, on pretence of its being a duty, and her thought was answered as if she had spoken it.

"I told mother I wasn't going to set up to be any wiser than the rest of the folks this time. It's a good cause, and if we don't help it much, we can't do much harm. I mean the children shall have a good time as far as victuals are concerned." And so they did.

Betsey sacrificed her chance of hearing some good speaking, which was a greater disappointment to her than it would have been to some others, and Katie stayed with her. But when the children were at last satisfied, they turned their faces toward the stand, still hoping to hear something. They passed along slowly, for there was a great crowd of people, not half of whom were listening to what was said. At one side of the stand, a little removed from it, but yet near enough to hear if they cared to listen, they saw Miss Elizabeth and her brother, and Miss Langden. Katie pointed her out to Miss Betsey.

"How pretty she is, and such a pretty dress, and everything to match! Look, Miss Betsey. Did you ever see anything prettier?"

"Why, yes. I don't know but I have. The dress is well enough," said Betsey.

Which was faint praise. The dress was a marvel of elegant simplicity in some light material of soft dim grey, with just enough of colour in flowers and ribbons to make the effect perfect. It was worth while coming a long way just to see it, more than one young person acknowledged. The dress and the wearer made a very pretty picture to many eyes. She was very modest and gentle in manner, and listened, or seemed to listen, like the rest, but Clifton Holt claimed much of her attention, smiling and whispering now and then in a way that made his sister uncomfortable, she scarcely knew why, for the young lady herself did not seem to resent it.

Betsey had not lost much, it was several times intimated to her during her progress up the hill. "The speakers from a distance" had all failed to appear except two. The forte of one of these seemed to be statistics. He astonished his audience if he did not edify them, putting into round numbers every fact connected with the temperance cause that could possibly be expressed by figures—the quantity of spirits consumed in Canada, the money paid for it, the quantity of grain employed in its manufacture, the loss in flour and meal to the country, the money received for licences, the number of crimes caused by its use, and the cost of these to the country. The other "went in" for "wit and humour," and there was much clapping of hands and laughter from such of the audience as had not heard his funny stories before, and his was generally pronounced a first-rate speech.

Squire Holt was in "the chair," but the duty of introducing the speakers was performed by Mr Maxwell, for the squire was feeble, and not equal to all that devolved upon him. Indeed, he dropped asleep, poor old gentleman, while the statistics were being given, and lost the point of the stories and got very tired, as Elizabeth could see. But Mr Maxwell did his part well, and just as Betsey settled herself to hear, he introduced Mr Langden, a friend of the cause from the States.

Mr Langden gave them some statistics also, and expressed himself delighted with the gathering, and the evidence of interest in the good cause. He was delighted, too, with their little town and the water-power, and with their country generally, which was a finer country than he had imagined it to be, and not so far behind his own section. He said a great many agreeable things, and though it did not, in the opinion of the critical part of the audience, amount to much as a temperance address, it was such a speech as it was pleasant to hear.

Then Mr Burnet came forward and charmed the audience with his grand flowing periods. But though his words were splendid, they were few; for Mr Burnet did not care to waste his words on a weary and hungry people. And then came the speech of the day.

Just as Mr Maxwell was considering whether he should give the people a ten minutes' address, as was of course expected, or dismiss them at once to the tables, toward which some of them were already directing their steps, Clifton Holt came on to the stand and whispered a few words to him, and then came forward, asking leave, not to make a speech, but to introduce a new speaker. He did make a speech, however, short, but telling, and was cheered heartily; but the cheering rose to its loudest and longest when Mark Varney came forward on the stand.

Was it Mark Varney? It was a very different man from the down-looking, heartless poor fellow who had disappeared from Gershom two years ago. Erect and broad and brown he stood, with a look of strength and firmness on his face, though his lips trembled, that no one remembered to have seen there since his early youth, before his foe had mastered him.

In the silence that fell after the first shout of welcome, the people pressed forward, eager to see and hear. A movement toward the point of interest took place through all the field. Those who had grown tired of listening, and those who had not cared to listen, drew near, and several of those on the platform pressed forward the better to see and hear.

Mr Maxwell did not; he drew back rather, after a glance toward the spot where Miss Holt and Miss Langden were sitting, and, resting his elbow on the back of Squire Holt's chair, leaned his head on his hand. Miss Langden did not see the glance, for she was listening to Clifton, who had returned and was saying something to her. But Elizabeth saw that there was a strange look, grave and glad, on his face, and that he was very pale.

Gradually the rustle and movements which had given Mark time to quiet the trembling of his lips came to an end, and then he and all the throng were startled by a sudden cry—loud and strong, though it was but one man's voice:

"Mark Varney, before all!"

It might have terribly spoiled the effect, but it did not. It gave poor Mark, who was no orator, and who, with his heart full, did not find the right words ready, a beginning.

"Yes, Tim Cuzner, it is Mark Varney, who hasn't been seen in these parts for two years, nor for a good while before that, in his right mind—and you are the very man I want to talk to, Tim, you and a few others. I've got something to tell you. A few others? Yes, I've got something to say to every man in this Grove. I am not going in for a temperance lecture, though it wouldn't be the first time. I was a living temperance lecture in the streets of Gershom for a long while, as Squire Holt and Jacob and all the folks here know.

"But I want to say a word to every young man here because there isn't a young man in this Grove, I don't care who he is, whose feelings as to liquor I don't know all about. I know, and I remember this minute, just how it feels never to have tasted a drop. I remember how the first temptation to drink came to me, and I know how it feels after the first glass, and the second, and the third. I know just how strong and scornful a young man feels when folks begin to warn him, and how impossible it looks to him that danger should be near. I know every step of the dark way that leads down to the gates of death—to the very gates—for I have been there.

"I don't know just how far down that road any of you young men may have got by this time, but I know that some of you are on it somewhere. I know where you used to be, Tim Cuzner, and you haven't been standing still since then. No. Come now, don't get mad and go away. If my life would help you to set your feet on solid ground in any other road, you should have it and welcome. But it wouldn't; no, nor ten such lives.

"But I'll tell you what will help you, and what every young man here who feels the curse of strong drink needs as much as you do, and what we all need to keep us safe from the temptations that are everywhere. There is only one thing in the earth beneath or the heaven above that will touch the spot, and that's the grace of God!

"That doesn't seem much, does it? The grace of God! You've heard old Mr Hollister tell about it time and again, and you've heard Mr Maxwell, and the folks in conference meeting talk of it, and it has got to seem to you just like a word, a name, and that's all. But I tell you, Tim and boys, it is a power. I know it, for it has dealt with me and broken me to pieces, and made me over new."

Mark was no orator, though he had the clear, firm, penetrating voice of one; but his words, because of the surprise of his presence, and the change which had been wrought in him, and because of his earnestness and simplicity, had on his audience all the effect of the loftiest eloquence. He had a great deal more to tell them of the darkness and misery and sin through which he was passing, when the minister found him and laid hands on him, and followed him day in and day out, and never got tired of him, nor discouraged about him, but laboured with him, and encouraged him, and gave him the hope that though he could not save himself, God could save him.

He tried to say a word about the night which they two passed together beside his wife's coffin, but he broke down there, and went on to tell how he went away to give himself a chance, because it had seemed to him then, that if he should stay among his old companions and the daily temptations of his life nothing could save him.

He did not tell his mother, and he did not write to her, because at first he never knew what day his enemy might overcome him, and then she would have had to put away hope and take up her old burden again.

But he had fallen into good hands over yonder in the States, and he had much to tell of the kindness shown him there, and the Lord had stood by him and helped him, as He would help all who came to Him in their need.

The people who heard all this were moved by it in a wonderful way. It was like a miracle, they said to one another, that Mark Varney's lips should be opened to speak as he was speaking. It was like life from the dead to see him standing there, they said, as indeed it was.

"And you must excuse me for saying so much about myself, because that is just what I came here to do. I was coming home soon, at any rate; but when I saw in a newspaper a notice of this gathering in Finlay's Grove, I thought it would be as good a time as any to come and show which side I am on now. And if I can, I mean to get back my farm again. And if I can't, why, I shall have to get another, and if God will let me help Him to save two or three such as I was when our minister found me, I'll be content with my work. I can't talk. I don't suppose I shall ever speak from a platform again as long as I live, but I mean to help some poor souls I know of up out of the pit.

"And I tell you, I'm glad to get home. I have only just seen mother a minute and my little Mary. And I haven't seen Squire Holt yet to speak to, nor the minister."

Then he turned his back on his audience, and a good many people thought that was a lame ending to a good speech, but all did not think so. At least it was good to see the old squire holding his hand, and to hear him telling him that he had got to his right place at last. And it was good to see how he and Mr Maxwell were shaking hands, and all the rest of the people on the stand crowding round to have their turn. Indeed, it seemed to be a general business, for Mr Burnet was shaking hands with Mr Maxwell, and so was the old squire, and John McNider clambered up on the stand on purpose to do the same thing, and so did several other people.

By and by the minister came forward, and they all thought he was going to make a speech. But he did not. He told them tea was ready, and that all the elderly people were to go to the tables first, and that the young people were to serve them. But nobody seemed in a hurry to move, and then Squire Holt came forward, and instead of making a speech, he asked them to sing the Doxology.

And didn't they sing it? Mark Varney, who had led the choir once on a time—and a good many in the crowd vowed that he should lead it again—began in his wonderful, clear tenor, and then the sound rose up like a mighty wind, till all the hills echoed again. And then they all went to tea.

Elizabeth meant that her father should go home at this time, but when Mr Maxwell brought him down to her, he declined to acknowledge himself tired, and went to the table with the rest, and Elizabeth took her place to serve. Miss Langden had a seat at the "speakers' table," and was well served, as was right. Clifton had the grace to deny himself the pleasure of sitting down beside her, as there were more than guests enough for all the seats, but he devoted himself to her service, as every lady said, and enjoyed it as well as he would have enjoyed his tea.

Davie was on the "tea and coffee committee," and his business at this time was to be one of several to carry great pitchers of one or other of those beverages from mighty cauldrons, where they were being made in a corner of the field, to a point where cups could be conveniently filled and distributed at the tables.

But from the midst of the pleasant confusion that reigned supreme in this department, Davie suddenly disappeared,

leaving the zealous, but less expert Ben to take his place.

"He's got something else to do, I expect, Aunt Betsey, and you'll have to get along with me somehow, for I saw him tearing down toward the river like sixty, and there would be no catching him even if I was going to try."

"There was nothing the matter, was there, Ben?" asked Katie; but so little did she think it possible, that she did not even wait for the answer which Ben was very ready to give.

Chapter Twenty Two.

Poor Davie.

It was not that Davie thought anything serious was the matter that, as Ben said, "he went tearing" down the hill toward the river, but that he feared there might be before all was done, unless there was some way of preventing it.

"Where are them boys?" he heard one mother say to another, as he passed with his empty pitcher in his hand, and the answer was—

"They've gone down to the river, I expect. But I don't suppose there's any danger—not to Gershom boys, who swim there every summer day of their lives."

But there were many boys and girls also on the grounds who did not belong to Gershom, and to some of them a river big enough for a boat to sail on, would have a charm which must certainly draw them to its banks, and it would have been a good plan to appoint a committee to see to such, Davie thought.

"I'll just have a look down there," he said to himself, and as soon as he was over the fence and out of sight, he ran rapidly toward the river. There were all sorts of children there, some of whom had wandered down to the mill-pond. There were two boats on the river, but there were grown people as well as children in them, and there were grown people walking on the bank who might justly be considered responsible for the safety of those who could not take care of themselves, and Davie was about to turn up the hill again, when a little fellow hailed him.

"I say, Davie, what do you suppose Dannie Green and Frankie Holt and two more boys are doing? They have taken your raft and are going to have a sail on the Black Pool—so they said."

"They could never do it," said Davie, with a sudden fear rising.

There was no turning up the hill after that. He ran across the two fields to the point where the raft had been left. It was gone sure enough, and he hastened on, stumbling over the stones and timber which Jacob Holt had last winter accumulated on the Varney place. Then he went through the strip of woods, and round the rocky point beyond, thinking all the time that such little fellows never could have pushed the raft so far up the stream, and that it was foolish for him to run.

But he was not a minute too soon. He could never tell afterward, whether he saw the raft, or heard the frightened cry first, but he knew that a boy had overbalanced and fallen into the water while trying to reach bottom with his pole in the deeper waters of the pool; and the next moment he had thrown off boots and coat, and was striking out toward the spot where he had disappeared. The boy would rise in a minute, he thought, and he could get hold of him.

But he did not rise for what seemed to Davie a very long time, and might never rise of himself. There was not a particle of risk, Davie knew, in diving to search for him, and if there had been, he would hardly have considered it in the excitement of the moment. It would have been the last of little Frank Holt if he had



Frank Holt rescued by Davie.—Page 254.

considered it long. The little fellow had fallen head foremost, and possibly had

struck his head on one of the roots or sticks that had accumulated in the bottom of the pool, for when Davie brought him to the surface, he seemed quite insensible, and he struck out for the Ythan side of the pool. He did what he could for the boy, letting the water flow from his mouth and ears, and rubbing him rapidly for a time.

He caught sight of the other lads as they reached the opposite shore with the raft, and saw them running at full speed in the direction of the Grove. But he felt that he must not wait for the help they would be sure to send, and gently lifting the boy in his arms, he went with him with all speed through the wood and up the hill to the house.

A single sentence told the story, and in a minute little Frank was in a warm bath and then in a warm bed. He soon showed such signs of life as encouraged them to hope that there was not much the matter with him; and then Davie thought of the consternation which the other lads would cause when they carried the tale to the Grove.

"I doubt you'll need to go as quick as you can, Davie. Think of the poor father and mother if they should hear."

"Ay, lad, make what haste you can," said his grandfather, and neither of them were the less urgent that the child was the son of their "enemy."

So Davie went down the field again in his wet clothes, but that mattered the less as he had the river to swim, the raft being on the other side. He put on his dry coat over his wet garments, and no one seemed to notice as he entered the Grove. No rumour of the accident had as yet spread through the crowd, and Davie spoke only to Miss Elizabeth, as he met her on the way home with her father. Happily the father and mother knew nothing of the matter, till by and by the boy, wrapped in one of Mrs Fleming's best blankets, was carried and set with his bundle of wet clothes in the hall. It was his uncle Clifton who took him home, and all that he could tell about the matter was that he had fallen into the Black Pool, and somebody had taken him out.

Dan Green kept his own counsel, running straight home and putting himself to bed. After his first sleep, however, he woke in such a fright that he could keep the tale no longer, but told it to his mother with many sobs and tears. His mother soothed and comforted him, believing that he had been startled out of a troubled dream. But the next day the story was told in Gershom at least a thousand times; and when Davie went into the post-office for his grandfather's weekly paper, he heard, with mingled amazement and disgust, extravagant praises of his courage in saving the boy's life.

"Courage? Nonsense! Risk? Stuff!" He never bathed in Black Pool that he did not dive in at one side and come out at the other. Why, his little brother could do that. There was no more danger for them than for a musk-rat, and Davie hurried away to escape more words about it, and to avoid meeting Mr Maxwell and his friends, who were coming down the street. In his haste he nearly stumbled over Jacob Holt, who held him fast, and that was worse than all the rest. For Jacob could not utter a word, but choked and mumbled and shook his hand a great many times, and when David fairly got away, he vowed that he should not be seen at the post-office again for a while, and he was not, but it was for a better reason than he gave to himself then.

For Davie went about all next day with a heavy weight upon him, and a dull aching at his bones, as new as it was painful. He refused his dinner, and grew sick at the sight of his supper; and tossed, and turned, and muttered all night upon his bed, longing for the day. But the slow-coming light made him wish for the darkness again, for it dazzled his heavy eyes, and put strange shapes on the most familiar objects, and set them all in motion in the oddest way. A queer sort of light it seemed to be, for though he closed his eyes he did not shut it out, and the changes on things and the odd movements seemed to be going on still within the lids.

So in a little he rose and dressed, and roused his brothers to bring the cows into the yard, meaning to help as usual with the milking. But the milking was done and the breakfast over, and worship, and no one had seen Davie. He was lying tossing and muttering on the hay in the big barn, and there at last, in the course of his morning's work, his grandfather found him. He turned a dull, dazed look upon him as he raised himself up, but he did not speak.

"Are you no' well, Davie? Why did you no' come to your breakfast?"

"I'm coming," said Davie, but he did not move.

His grandfather touched his burning hand and his heart sank.

"Come awa' to your grandmother."

"Yes, we'll go to grannie," said Davie.

Blinded by the sunlight, he staggered on, and his grandfather put his arm about him. Mrs Fleming met them at the door as they drew near.

"What can ail the laddie?" asked his grandfather, with terror in his eyes.

They made him sit down, and Katie brought some cold water. He drank some and put some on his head, and declared himself better.

"It is some trash that he has eaten at that weary picnic," said grannie.

"No, grannie, I hadna a chance to eat."

"And you have eaten little since. Well, never mind. You'll go to your bed, and I'll get your mother to make you some of her herb tea."

"And I'll be better the morn, grannie," said Davie, with an uncertain smile.

He drank his mother's bitter infusion, and tossed and turned and moaned and muttered, all day and all night, and for many days and nights, till weeks had passed away, and a time of sore trial it was to them all.

He was never very ill, they said. He was never many hours together that he did not know those who were about his bed, and young Dr Wainwright, who came every day to see him, never allowed that he was in great danger. But as day

after day went on, and he was no better, their hearts grew sick with hope deferred. Grannie alone never gave way to fear. She grew weak and weary, and could only sit beside him, little able to help him; but he never opened his eyes but her cheerful smile greeted him, and her cheerful words encouraged him. His mother waited on him for a while, but she was not strong, and had no spring of hope within her. Katie worked all day and watched all night, and scorned the idea of weariness, but the Ythan water that trickled around her milk-pans in the dairy, carried daily some tears of hers down to the Black Pool.

"It is grandfather I'm thinking about," said she one day when she burst out crying in Miss Betsey's sight. "I am afraid I shall never be able to keep from thinking that God has been hard on grandfather, if anything should happen to Davie."

"But God is not hard on your grandfather and there is nothing going to happen to Davie," said Betsey, too honest to reprove the girl for the expression of thoughts which she had not been able to keep out of her own mind. It was the plunge into the Black Pool and the going about afterward in his wet clothes that had brought on this illness, and that it should be God's will that David Fleming's grandson, his hope and stay, should lose his health, perhaps his life, in saving the son of Jacob Holt, looked to Miss Betsey a terrible mystery. She did not say that God was hard on him, as poor Katie was afraid of doing; but when, now and then, there came a half hour when it seemed doubtful whether Davie would get through, the thought that God would not afflict His servant to the uttermost helped her to still hope for the lad. As far as words and deeds went, she showed herself always hopeful for him, and did more than even the doctor himself in helping him to pull through.

In country places like Gershom, where professional nurses were not often to be found, when severe sickness comes into a family necessitating constant attention by night as well as by day, the neighbours, far and near, might be relied upon for help, as far as it could be given by persons coming and going for a night or a day. The Flemings had had severe sickness among them more than once, but they had never called on their neighbours for help, and they could not bring themselves to do so now, even for night-watching. That she should trust Davie to any of the kind young fellows who night after night offered, their services, was to grannie impossible. She did not doubt their good-will, but she doubted their wisdom and their power to keep awake after their long day's work. "And it is no' our way," said Mrs Fleming, and that ended the discussions, as it had ended them on former occasions.

"But they never can get through it alone this time," said Miss Betsey, "and I don't know but it is my duty to see about it, as much as anybody."

It was just in the hot days in the beginning of August when Betsey was wont to give up butter-making and set to the making of cheese, the very worst time of the year for her to get away from home. But she saw no help for it.

"You must do the best you can, mother, you and Cynthy, and Ben will give what help you need with the lifting. If I should never make another cheese as long as I live, I can't let Mrs Fleming wear herself out, and maybe lose her boy after all."

So Miss Betsey went over one morning "to inquire," she said, and some trifling help being needed for a minute, she took off her bonnet, and "concluded to stay a spell," and that night Ben brought her bag over which she had packed in the morning, and she stayed as long as she was needed, to the help and comfort of them all.

As for the grandfather, it went hard with him these days. He was outwardly silent and grave as usual, giving no voice to the anxiety that devoured him. But at night when his wife slumbered, worn out with the day's watching, or when she seemed to slumber, and in Pine-tree Hollow, which in the time of his former troubles had become to him a refuge and a sanctuary, his cry ascended to God in an agony of confession and entreaty. He, too, wondered that it should be God's will that the child of his enemy should be saved, and his child's life made the sacrifice; but he did not consciously rebel against that will. It was God's doing; Davie had not even known whose child it was whom he tried to save. This was God's doing from beginning to end.

Far be it from him to rebel against God, he said to his wife when, fearing for him and all that he might be thinking, she spoke to him about it. It was a terrible trouble, but it did not embitter him as former trouble had done, and his enemy had fewer of his thoughts at this time than might have been supposed.

But he had not forgiven him. He knew in his heart that he had not forgiven him. When Jacob came with his wife, grateful and sorry, and eager to do something to express it, he kept quiet in a corner of Davie's room, into which they were not permitted to enter. Mrs Fleming said all that was needful on the occasion, and when Jacob broke down and could not speak of his boy who had been given back to them almost from the dead, she laid her hand gently upon his arm and said, "Let God's goodness make a better man of you," and even Mrs Jacob did not feel like resenting the words. But there was no one who could help them in their present trouble, she repeated, as they went sorrowfully away.

No one except Miss Betsey, grannie felt gratefully, as she turned into the house again—Miss Betsey, who seemed made of iron, and never owned to being tired. She slept one night in three, when Katie and her mother kept the watching, and at other times she took "catnaps" in the rocking-chair, or on Mrs Fleming's bed, when grannie was at her brightest and could care for Davie in the early part of the day.

And poor Davie tossed and muttered through many days and nights, never so delirious as to have forgotten the summer's work, but never quite clear in his mind, and always struggling with some unknown power that, against his will, kept him back from doing his part in it. Till one day he looked into his grandfather's face with comprehending eyes, and said weakly, but clearly:

"It must be time for the cutting of the wheat, grandfather; I have been sick a good while, surely?"

"Ay, have you; a good while. But you are better now, the doctor says. But never heed about the cutting of the wheat. Mark Varney has done all that, and more. We have had a good harvest, Davie."

"Have we, grandfather?" said Davie, looking with surprise and dismay at the tears on his grandfather's face.

"God has been good to us, laddie," said Mr Fleming, trying to speak calmly, and then he rose and went out.

"So we've had a good harvest, have we? And Mark Varney! I wonder where he turned up. Oh, well! it's all right I daresay—and—I'm tired already." And he turned his head on the pillow and fell asleep.

Yes, Mark Varney had taken Davie's work into his own hand. He came over with Mr Maxwell as soon as he heard the lad was ill. He made no formal offer of help, but just set himself to do what was to be done. He had all his own way about it, for Mr Fleming was too anxious to take much heed of the work, since some one else had taken it in hand; and no one knew better how work should be done than Mark. He had all the help he needed, for the neighbours were glad to offer help, and give it, too, in this time of need. The harvest was got through and the grain housed as successfully as the hay had been before Davie, lank and stooping, crept out over the fields of Ythan.

It was Sunday afternoon again when Katie and he went slowly down the brae toward the cherry-trees. Their grandfather and grandmother looked after them with loving eyes.

"The Lord is ay kind," said Mrs Fleming, and then she read the 103rd Psalm in the old Scottish version, which she "whiles" liked to do. She paused now and then because her voice trembled, and on some of the verses she lingered, reading them twice over, seeking from her husband audible assent to the comfort they gave:

"The Lord our God is merciful,
And He is gracious,
Long-suffering, and slow to wrath,
In mercy plenteous.'

"Ay is He! as we ken well this day. And again:—

"Such pity as a father hath
Unto his children dear,
Like pity shows the Lord to such
As worship Him in fear.'

"Such pity as a father hath.' We ken well what that means, Dawvid; a father's pity; such pity and love as we felt for our Davie, when he lay tossing in his bed, poor laddie. And—as we felt for—him that's gone—"

She could say no more at the moment, even if it would have been wise to do so. But by and by she rose and came toward him, and standing half behind him, laying her soft, wrinkled old hand on his grey head, she said softly:

"If I could but hear you say that you forgive—Jacob Holt!"

Then there was a long silence in which she did not move.

"Because—I have been thinking that the Lord let our laddie do that—good turn for His—to put us in mind—" Again she paused. "And I would fain hear you say it, for His sake who has loved us, and forgiven so much to us."

"I wish him no ill. I wouldna hurt a hair of his head. I leave him in God's hands."

He spoke huskily, with long pauses between the sentences. Whether he would have said more or not she could not tell. There was no time for more, for the bairns came in with their mother from the Sunday-school, and quiet was at an end for the moment.

It was a long time before the subject was touched upon between them again, and it was he who spoke first.

Chapter Twenty Three.

Poor Grannie.

The Langdens had stayed ten days in Gershom. Half the time Miss Langden had passed with Miss Holt, and they had both enjoyed the visit, though not quite in the same way. Her father needed much of Elizabeth's care and attention at this time, and it would not have been possible for her to devote herself constantly to her visitor. But Miss Essie was not a difficult person to entertain—quite the contrary.

She took interest in many things. She had her journal to keep up, and many letters to write. And then Mr Clifton Holt was at home, and at her service. Mr Maxwell was a frequent visitor also; and when he came, Miss Holt felt at liberty to attend to her own affairs, knowing that they did not need her presence. Clifton was not so mindful of their old friendship, or not so well aware of their present relation, for he did not seem to think it was the thing to do to leave their visitors to entertain each other; and certainly he was never made to feel himself to be an intruder, though his sister often feared that he might be so.

Then Miss Langden had a great desire to see as much as possible of "this interesting country" as she politely called Canada; and as much of it as could be seen while driving about with Clifton in his sister's low carriage, or in the larger carriage with Clifton and Mr Maxwell, or her father, she saw, and professed herself delighted with it. She admired the farm-houses and the farmers, and the farmers' wives and daughters, and laid herself out to captivate them in a way that Clifton declared to be wonderful. To Elizabeth it seemed natural enough.

They saw a good deal of company in a quiet way. The Holts took pains to invite, at one time or another, the greater part of Mr Maxwell's friends, in order that Mr Langden and his daughter might make their acquaintance, and both in different ways won golden opinions among them.

The good people of Gershom were naturally well-disposed toward the friends of their minister, and Mr Langden was a quiet, shrewd business man, without a particle of pretence, whose company they would have enjoyed under even less favourable circumstances. He took much interest in listening to the very things they liked best to tell about—the early settlement of that part of the country, its features and resources, agricultural, mineral, commercial; the history of railroads, manufactures, and business ventures generally. If there were anything worth knowing about any of these matters that Mr Langden did not know before his visit came to an end, it was not for want of questions asked, Clifton Holt said, laughing, to his daughter. Which was quite true—and he had asked some questions and received some answers which neither Clifton nor Jacob had heard, and knew more about some things in Gershom than Clifton himself knew at that time. Some hints that there had been thoughts of business as well as pleasure in his mind in visiting Gershom had

transpired, and it would have been agreeable to hear more about it, but Mr Langden was better at asking questions than at answering them, and no one knew any more about his plans when he went than when he came. But people liked him, and liked to talk about him and his visit afterward.

And his daughter was very much admired also. That is to say, she was admired in her character of visitor to Miss Elizabeth—as a pretty and amiable and beautifully-dressed young lady from “the States.” But when the discussion went farther, and her possible future as a resident of Gershom was hinted at, all were not so sure about her. A minister’s wife! That was another affair. Would she fit into that spot? She did not look much like the ministers’ wives that the Gershom people knew most about.

“I suppose it comes as natural to her to have gloves, and boots, and bonnets to match every gown she puts on, as it does for the most of folk to wear one pair as long as they’ll last,” said Miss Smith from Fosbrooke—a much more primitive place than Gershom—“and she looks as if she set a value on such things, as even good folks will do till they’ve learned better.”

“And the minister’s salary isn’t equal to all that, and wouldn’t be, not if it was raised to eight hundred dollars, which isn’t likely yet a spell,” said Mrs Coleman, the new deacon’s wife.

“Not unless she has money of her own. And if she has—well, ministers’ folks are pretty much so, wherever they be, or whatever they’ve got; and such articles of luxury are not the thing for ministers’ wives—not in *this* wooden country.”

“I know one thing,” said Miss Hall, the dressmaker. “Her trunk was never packed to come here short of five hundred dollars, to say nothing of jewellery. I’ve handled considerable dry-goods in my time, and I know that much.”

“Ah, well. I guess any one that’s lived in ‘the States,’ and that talks as cool as a cucumber about going to travel in Europe, isn’t very likely to settle down in Gershom—not and be contented,” said Myrilla Green, who had lived in “the States” herself, and was supposed to know the difference.

“Ah! I guess there’s as good folks as her in Gershom;” and so the talk went on.

But it was the opinion of several of the ladies interested in the discussion, that clothes, and even money, did not amount to much in some cases. The young lady had the missionary spirit, as any one who had heard her talk must see, and she was not likely to be influenced by secondary motives.

Of course the discussion of the possibility implied by all this was inevitable in the circumstances, though no one in Gershom *knew* anything about the matter; and the parties most concerned could have given them little satisfactory information with regard to it. The first of the two years of probation, which Mr Langden had insisted upon, had not yet passed, and Mr Maxwell could not have renewed the question of an engagement, if he had wished to do so, or if Miss Essie had given him an opportunity, which she did not. Not a word was spoken between them that all Gershom might not have heard, though nothing could be more friendly and pleasant than their intercourse during these ten days.

But then Miss Essie was on friendly terms with every one. Nothing could be more charming than her manners, it was said. She was “not a bit stuck up,” the Gershom girls acknowledged. If she had any “citized airs” they were not of the kind that are especially displeasing to country people. She was friendly with every one, and before her visit came to an end, it came into Elizabeth’s mind that she was particularly pleasant in words and ways with her brother Clifton.

It had come into Clifton’s mind also, and Elizabeth longed to tell him just how matters stood between Miss Langden and Mr Maxwell. But she did not feel at liberty to do so, and she could only hope that Clifton’s devotion would be in this case, as it had been in others, only transitory, and that he would not suffer more than was reasonable for his folly. Of what passed between Mr Langden and Jacob Holt very little was known. They went together over the ground which Jacob had so long coveted, and Mr Langden saw the advantages which the locality offered for the purpose proposed. He would have considered the purchase of the land to be a good investment, but Jacob could not bring himself to urge the unpleasant subject of sale on Mr Fleming, now that Davie was so ill, and he knew that urging would avail nothing, but it was a great disappointment to him.

He said little about it to Mr Langden; but that gentleman knew more of the relations existing between him and Mr Fleming, and of other things besides, than Jacob fancied. They saw a good many people who were interested in the proposed enterprise, and got information which would help him to decide about future investments, he said, but he took no definite step with regard to the matter before he went away.

It had been understood that Mr Maxwell was to take his “vacation” at this time, and that he was to go with his friends through a part of their travels. But Davie Fleming was at the worst, and his mother and his grandparents were in great trouble, and the minister could not bring himself to leave them. Of course his friends were disappointed, but not unreasonably so, for they could understand his feeling, and it was agreed that if it were possible he should join them at some point in their route, and so they said good-bye lightly.

Clifton Holt went with them to the city of Montreal, where they stayed a few days, as all American tourists do. Then they sailed down the Saint Lawrence to Quebec and farther, and up the Saguenay, and he sailed with them, and doubtless added to their pleasure by the information he was able to give as to events and places in which all travellers are supposed to interest themselves.

Clifton enjoyed it, and would have enjoyed going farther with them. But on their return to Montreal, they met with a party of friends whom they found it expedient to join, and so Clifton returned to Gershom, with the intention of remaining at home for a time. His father was still feeble, and Clifton seemed inclined to take the advice which his sister had long ago given him, to seek to obtain some knowledge of the business which Jacob had hitherto been carrying on in his own name and his father’s.

Elizabeth received a little note or two from Miss Langden before she left Canada, in which much admiration was expressed for her friend’s “interesting country,” and much pleasure in her remembrance of the days spent in Gershom; and she had another after her return to her aunt’s house, where she was to pass some time. And then she did not hear from her again for a long time.

Davie got better, but not very rapidly. He remained gaunt and stooping, and had little strength, and Miss Betsey, who still considered herself responsible for his health, carried him away to the Hill; and then giving Ben a holiday after his busy summer, sent them both away to visit her cousin Abiah, who had a clearing and a saw-mill ten miles away. There

were partridges there, and rumours of a bear having been seen, and there was fishing at any rate, and Davie was assured that ten days of such sport as could be got there in the woods ought to make a new man of him.

But Betsey had another reason for sending him away. On the day of her visit, Mrs Fleming, who had acknowledged herself to be weak and weary from anxiety and watching, knew herself to be ill; not very ill, however. She had often, in her younger days, kept about the house, and done all her work when she felt far worse than she did now, she said. But she could not "keep about" now, and that was the difference. Davie would be well away, for he would fret about his grandmother, and that would do neither of them any good.

Davie's visit to the woods did not make a new man of him; but it did him good, and he needed all his strength and courage when he came home again, for grannie, who had been "not just very well" when he went away, was no better when he returned.

"And they never told me, grannie," said he, indignantly.

"There was nothing to tell, my laddie, and you are better for going. And now you must help Katie to cheer your grandfather, and keep your brothers at their work."

And Davie saw that his grandfather needed to be cheered. He seemed to have grown a very old man during the last few months, he thought. He had gone about the farm, and kept the boys at their work, and had helped sometimes, Katie said, while Davie was away. But now he gave all that up to him. Mark Varney came now and then when there was anything extra to be done; and though Davie was not so strong as before his illness, they were as well on with their fall work as the neighbours generally.

But except with a word of advice, or an answer to questions, which Davie was pertinacious in asking, as to what was to be done, and what left undone, the old man took little part in what had filled his life before. He went about the house and barns, with his head bowed, and his hands clasped behind him, making Katie wild with the wistful, helpless longing of his face.

"It is no good for grannie to see you so downcast, grandfather. Courage is what is needed more than anything in a time of sickness, Betsey says. And, grandfather, grannie is no' so very ill."

"Is she no', think you, Katie? She says it, but oh, my heart fails me."

"She says it, and I think she is right. And, grandfather, she often says, you ken that the Lord is ay kind."

"Ay, lass! but His kindest touch cuts sore whiles. And if He were to deal with me after my sins—"

"But, grandfather; He never does, and He hurts to heal—as I have heard you say yourself."

"Ay. I have said it with my lips, but I doubt I was carrying a sore and angry heart whiles, when I was putting the folk in mind. And, oh, Katie, lassie, He is far awa'. He has hidden His face from me."

"But only for a moment, grandfather; don't you mind, 'For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I visit thee'? And grannie is no' so very ill."

She drew him gently from the room where grannie was slumbering, so that she need not be disturbed. It seemed to her the strangest thing that her grandfather should speak to her in this way, and that she should have courage to answer him. He sat down on a seat by the door, and leaned his chin on the hand that rested on his staff, and looked away over Ythan fields to the hills beyond. But whether he saw them or not was doubtful, for his eyes were dazed and heavy with trouble, and Katie could not bear to see him so.

"She is not so very ill," she repeated. "She is sometimes better and sometimes worse, but she has no thought that she is going to die. She will be better soon."

"She is a good ten years younger than I am. I should go first by rights. But she has had much to weary her, and she would doubtless be glad to rest."

"No, grandfather, she would not. She is glad at the thought that she will be spared a little while for—all our sakes."

"Who is that coming down the road? It is the minister, I think, and Betsey Holt."

The old man rose hastily.

"I'll awa' up the brae," said he. "No, it is no disrespect to the minister, but I canna hear his words to-day."

And up the hill he went to the pasture-bars, and through the pasture "to Pine-tree Hollow," Katie thought, as her eyes followed him anxiously.

"But He may show him His face, up yonder," said Katie, with tears; "and I am sure, and so is Miss Betsey, that she is no' so very ill."

Grannie had never thought herself very ill. Even when all her days were spent in bed, she only called herself weary at first. There had been a very warm week about that time, and she had suffered from the heat, and had kept herself quiet. But she did not think herself ill, and certainly Katie did not think it. For though she was not strong, she did not suffer much, except that she was feverish and restless now and then, and she was always sweet and bright and easily pleased, and not at all like the sick people that Katie had seen. It was a pleasure to be with her, to wait on her, and to listen to her. For there were times when she had much to say, soothing her own restlessness with happy talk of many things which Katie liked to hear.

She told her about her father—so grave and kind and trustworthy—and about Hughie, who was so good and clever, but who had "gone wrong," and been lost to them, leaving their life so dreary. And once or twice she spoke of one over whom she had kept the silence of many a year. It was Katie's own name she heard—but it was of another "bonnie Katie"

that her grandmother murmured so fondly, one who had been beguiled—who had sinned and suffered, and died long ago. But she always spoke brokenly of her when she was restless and feverish, and Katie, though she would have liked to hear more, strove always to turn her thoughts away.

But almost always her talk was happy and bright. In those days Katie heard more of her grandmother's youthful days than she had ever heard before. She spoke about her home, and her brothers and sisters, and about "the gowany braes" and "the silver Ythan," and the songs they used to sing, before it had ever come into her mind that there was trouble and care before her. She even tried to sing again, in her faint sweet voice, some of the dear old songs, laughing softly at her own foolishness.

But she never once spoke as though she thought she might not recover; even when she gave Katie words of counsel or caution, it was just in the way she used to do when they were going about their work together, and the girl was sure that she would soon be well again, and that that was Miss Betsey's thought too.

But seeing her as she stood looking down on her grandmother's sleeping face that morning, Katie was not so sure of what Miss Betsey's thoughts might be. Still, her grandmother's eyes opened and she smiled her old cheerful smile, as she said she was glad to see them.

"You must tell grandfather that the minister is come, Katie," said she.

Mr Maxwell had seen Mr Fleming stepping up the brae, and he knew well that no words of his could comfort him. He could only hope as Katie did, that his Lord and Master might show him His face in the solitude he sought.

He had few words to say to Mrs Fleming, for she seemed inclined to slumber through the afternoon.

"I wish you could stay with us to-night, Miss Betsey," said Katie's mother. "I am afraid grandmother is not so well."

"There is not much difference either way, I think. I would be glad to stay, but Uncle Gershom has had another bad turn, and I promised cousin Lizzie I would stay with her to-night. But I will come over to-morrow morning before I go home if I can get away."

"Do you think her very ill?" asked Mr Maxwell as they walked down the hill together.

"I have not thought her very ill. I don't know that she is worse to-day, but she is certainly no better. I suppose it depends on whether her strength holds out. She is an old woman now."

These were anxious days to Katie; but her grandfather had more of her thoughts than her grandmother.

"And it is a wonder to me that he should be so broken down, a good man like him, even by such sore trouble. Even the loss of grannie would be but for a few days, and he has the Lord Himself in the midst of it all."

But this was a mistake on Katie's part. For all this time, strangely and sadly enough, he was ringing the changes on his old complaint: "Thou art a God that hidest Thyself." He had not the Lord Himself in those days. Even when he pleaded, as he did day and night, for Davie's life, it was the cry of despair that came out of his sore trouble, rather than the "prayer of faith" to which the promise of healing to the sick is given.

And as he bowed himself down beneath the pines, it was the same. He was in a maze of perplexity and fear. Had he been sinning against God all this time? Had he been hating not the sin, but the sinner? Had it been beneath God's hand that he had been refusing to bow? And now was God leaving him to hardness of heart?

For he was utterly broken and spent, and in the weakness of mind which exhaustion of body caused, he had almost lost the power to discriminate or reason. He could not command his thoughts. The wind moaned in the pines above him, and the sunshine came and went, flickering and fading, and brightening again, and with the monotonous sound and the ever-changing light, there came voices and visions, and he seemed to listen as in a dream:

"It was God's will, grandfather. God kens, and it was His will. I would fain hear you say once that you have forgiven your enemy."

His enemy! Was Jacob Holt his enemy? And if he were, could even an enemy bring evil on him or his without permission? What had it all come to—the long pain, the persistent shrinking from this man, whom God alone might judge? Had he been hating him all this time—bringing leanness to his own soul, and darkness, and all the evil that hatred must ever bring? And where was it all to end? And what must he do, now that his sin had found him out?

For his time was short, and the end near. And then his thoughts wandered away to the old squire lying on his death-bed—the man who had declared himself willing to stand on the same platform with old David Fleming, when his time should come to be judged. And that time was close at hand now, and his own time could not be far away, and then he must stand face to face with Him whose last words were, "Father, forgive them!"—face to face with Him who had said, "Love your enemies," "Forgive, and it shall be forgiven unto you."

Over and over the same round his thoughts went, till, worn out with anxiety and watching, and lulled unconsciously by the soft "sough" of the wind in the pines, he fell asleep. Pine-tree Hollow was all in shadow when he awoke, but when he had gone a few steps, he saw the sunlight lying on the high hills to the east. His first thoughts were of what might have been happening at home while he slept, and he quickened his steps.

And as he walked he was conscious that his sleep had done him good. He was stronger and calmer, and could command his thoughts again, and he hurried eagerly on. The sight of Katie passing quietly out and in to the dairy quieted him still more. It must be well with grannie or Katie would not be there.

"Well, my lassie?"

"Yes. Grannie has been sleeping, but she is awake now, and has been asking for you. Mother is with her now."

He went into the house slowly and quietly. Katie's mother was sitting by the bed, with her sad eyes fastened on the

face of the grandmother, who seemed to have fallen into slumber again.

"She has been wandering a little, I think," said Mrs James.

"Wandering?" repeated Mr Fleming drearily.

Grannie opened her eyes, and looked first at one and then at the other.

"No, my dear, it wasna that I was wandering. I was dreaming, I think—a strange grand dream—of a far country. And—Dawvid—I saw our Katie there, and her little bairn—and I saw our Hughie, and James, and many another. But I saw them first and best; and we have no cause to fear."

Even as she spoke her eyes closed again. The old man sat down with a sinking heart. Did not these sound like "last words?" Had she not got a first glimpse of the "far country" to which she was hastening? How vain to struggle against God, he thought. He never uttered a word. His daughter-in-law looked at him with compassionate eyes that he could hardly bear. Katie came in with a glass of milk in her hand.

"She is not asleep again, is she? Well, I must waken her, because she must take something. The sleeping is good for her, but she must take something to keep up her strength. Grannie dear, take this," and she raised her gently.

She opened her eyes and smiled.

"Oh, ay! I'll take it. And I could take a bit of bread, I think."

"Well, mother will bring a bit." But Katie was greatly surprised.

"I think I'm better, if I were only stronger a bit," said grannie.

Over Katie's bright face Mr Fleming saw the grave face of her mother, and though he knew that it was her way rather to fear than to hope, his heart sank.

"I'll soon be better, I think. Are you there, Dawvid? You ken I couldna go and stand before the Lord and tell Him that you hadna forgiven your enemy."

"She is wandering," whispered Katie's mother.

"No; I'm no wandering, but whiles I feel—as if I were slipping awa'—and you'll give me your hand, Dawvid, and that will keep me back. Ay. That will do," and her eyes closed again.

Katie followed her mother from the room.

"It is not far away now."

"Mother, don't say it. She is not going to die. Oh, mother! mother! Surely God is not going to take her from us yet. No. I'm not going to cry; I havena time," said Katie. "And, mother, she says it herself, and I don't think she is going to die. Oh, if Miss Betsey could have been here to-night!"

Katie resolutely put away her tears and her fears, and prepared for a night of watching. First, she made her mother lie down with a warm wrapper on her, so that she might be ready to come at any moment. Then she sent the bairns to their beds, and wished that Davie would come home. Then she remembered, with a pang of remorse, that her grandfather had not had his supper, and she got his accustomed bowl of bread and milk, and carried it into the room. Neither of them had moved, and stooping and listening, it seemed to Katie that her grandmother was sleeping naturally and sweetly. Her grandfather shook his head at the sight of the food.

"You must take it, grandfather," said Katie in a whisper.

She put the bowl on a chair, and knelt down beside him.

"You need not move," she said softly, and she fed him as he had often fed her when she was a little child.

"My good Katie!" said he, but it would not have been well for him to try to say more.

Davie came in before the supper was over. Katie nodded cheerfully, but did not speak till they were both in the kitchen.

"Well?" said Davie.

"She is no worse. I think she seems better. She has eaten a wee bit of bread, but mother says you cannot always tell by that. We must just wait."

It was a long and anxious night to these two. It was well that grannie should sleep, but in her utter weakness it was also necessary that she should have nourishment often. She had grown sick of the sight of everything in the way of food, and she had had her choice of whatever the best housewives of Gershom could supply. For days she had only taken a little milk, and to-night she seemed to take it with relish. In a little she woke and spoke:

"Are you no' coming to your bed, Dawvid? It is time surely."

Her clasp of his hand loosened as Katie offered the milk to her lips. The old man rose, but he had been sitting in an uneasy posture, and tottered as he moved to the door.

"Grandfather," said Davie, "lie down on the other side. It will be better for you and grannie too. Come grandfather. Katie, lay the pillow straight."

"But I might disturb her—and I might fall asleep."

But he yielded.

"She would like it, grandfather, and we can waken you if you fall asleep."

So the two old people slumbered together, and Katie had to steal away to weep a few tears in the dark while her brother watched beside them, and they did not dare to ask themselves whether they hoped or feared in the stillness that fell on them.

"They say this is the old squire's last night," whispered Davie at last. "I saw Ben coming out as I passed."

"Maybe no," said Katie, who was determined to be hopeful to-night. "They have said that before. Maybe he'll win through this time too."

"Ay. But he is an old man, and it must come soon."

Now and then they exchanged a word or two, and Katie put the cup to her grandmother's lips, and the night wore on. Whether their grandfather slept or not they could not tell, but he made no movement that could disturb her, and he still held her hand, to keep her from "slipping away," as she had said.

Once the mother came in and looked, but she only said she was sleeping quietly, and they made her lie down again. Toward morning Katie brought a quilt and a pillow, and Davie lay down on the floor beside the bed, and Katie prayed and waited for the dawn.

Chapter Twenty Four.

Poor Old Squire.

Betsey Holt had not found the old squire so low as she expected to find him when she went to his house after leaving Mr Fleming's, and seeing him comfortable, and apparently no weaker than she had seen him before, she hesitated as to what she ought to do.

"There will be nights when you will need me more cousin," said she, "and I think—"

But Elizabeth's face made her pause.

"Dear cousin, stay with me to-night. No, I do not think he is going to die to-night, though Dr Wainwright thought it could not be long. But do stay with me, cousin. I seem to be alone and good for nothing."

"You are tired, and no wonder. You look sick. Yes, I'll stay. I think, on the whole, I'd better."

Betsey did not say that it was Mrs Fleming she had been thinking of when she hesitated. She took off her bonnet and prepared to stay.

"I made up my mind to be here to-night as soon as I heard that your father wasn't well. I thought once I'd go home and come back after sundown, but it doesn't matter about going. They'll know why I stay, and I guess likely Ben will come along over after milking is done."

"Is there no one we could get to help your mother and Cynthia for a few days? I would send anywhere for help to them if you could only stay with me till—"

"Oh, I guess they'll get along, and Hepsy Bean is near by. If they get into a fix they can send for her. I'll stay anyway. Isn't your brother Clifton round?"

"No, he went to the city yesterday; he left before we thought my father worse. I hope he will be home to-morrow."

"Well, I hope he will, and I guess he'd better stay a spell next time he comes."

Elizabeth had been up for the night, and after a visit to her father, who was still sleeping quietly, Betsey persuaded her to go and lie down, promising to call her at the turn of the night, or sooner if there should be any change. Elizabeth was glad to go, for she was very tired.

"I feel so safe in leaving him with you, cousin," said Elizabeth, the tears starting in her eyes. "You must not think that I am always so—downhearted, but I feel as if I might give way—as if I might lay a little of my burden on you, and—"

"And so you may, with no *if* about it, only there is a better place to lay it, as you don't need me to tell you by this time. She thinks she knows what trouble is, and perhaps she does," continued Betsey as she followed Elizabeth with her thoughts. "For trouble is just as folks take it, and she has been pretty tenderly dealt with hitherto. But I guess she is not one that trouble can do any real harm to. The Lord sees it all, and she is in His hand, and I needn't worry about her. She'll be kept safe through it all."

But she gave a good many thoughts to Elizabeth's possible troubles as she sat there alone. Before the "turn of the night" Elizabeth came down rested and refreshed, she said. Jacob came in and sat a while, but scarcely a word was spoken. He offered to stay, but it was not necessary, his sister said.

"No! When is Clifton coming back?" asked he.

"To-morrow, I hope," said Elizabeth.

"He must not go away again."

"No. Not for a time."

Elizabeth's rest and refreshment "did not seem to amount to much," Betsey thought as she watched her sitting in the firelight after Jacob went away. Not many people had ever seen on Elizabeth's face the look it wore now. She seemed to have forgotten that there was any one to see. Except that she raised her head now and then to listen for sounds in her father's room, she sat perfectly motionless, "limp and hopeless," Betsey said to herself, and after a little she said aloud:

"Cousin Lizzie, you are not going to be 'swallowed up of overmuch sorrow,' are you? That would be rebellion, and there is no deeper deep of misery to a Christian than that."

Elizabeth looked up startled.

"I don't think I rebel, but—"

"You have been expecting this for a good while. Your father is a very old man now, Lizzie."

"He is all I have got."

"You said that to me before, but that is not so. He isn't all you've got by many."

"He is the only one who has needed me ever. When he is gone, there will not be one left in the world who might not do without me as well as not, though perhaps there are one or two who might not think so for a little while."

"Well, that may be said of most folks, I guess, but of you with less truth than of most."

Elizabeth made a movement of dissent.

"You are young enough to make friends, and it is easy for you to make them. I don't believe anybody ever saw your face who didn't want to see it again. You want to do good in the world, and you have the means and the natural gifts for doing it, and that is happiness."

Elizabeth raised herself up and looked at her in amazement.

"How you talk, Cousin Betsey!" said she.

"Well, that's the way I feel about it. No matter what trouble you may be going through now, there is the other side, and when you get there you'll find good work to do, because you have the heart to do it. And you'll get your wages—rest, and a quiet mind."

Elizabeth's eyes were on the red embers again, but the expression of her face had changed a little. Betsey moved so that her own face would be in the shadow, and then she went on:

"You may think it an unnatural thing for me to say, cousin, but I feel as if there would be more gone from my life than from yours, when Uncle Gershom goes. More in comparison with what will be left."

Elizabeth said nothing to this.

"Do you remember the two or three elms there are left on the side of the hill, just beyond the Scott school-house? There were a great many more there once, and we used to call it Elm Grove in old times. There are only three or four left that are not dying. I hear the children calling it the grove still. The young trees are growing up fast round them, not elms, many of them but wild cherry-trees, and poplars, and a few spruces but the poor old elms seem to be all the more alone because of the second growth. When your father and my mother are gone, there won't be a great many left to me. I suppose I shall find something to do, however, till my time comes."

There was a long silence after that. Betsey went once or twice into the sick-room, but the old man slept peacefully.

"It will not be to-night," said she softly. Then she sat down again.

"Cousin," said she gravely in a little, "you are not worrying about your father, as though it may—not be well with him now?"

Elizabeth looked at her startled.

Betsey went on:

"I have been exercised about him considerably myself, one time and another. I have felt as if I must have him to come out and acknowledge himself on the Lord's side, confess Him before men, by openly uniting himself with the Church. But he has been hindered. I do not know where has been the stumbling-block altogether. But the Lord knows, and actions speak louder than words. He has lived a Christian life since ever I can remember. And it is by their fruits ye shall know them."

Elizabeth's face had fallen on her hands again, and her tears were falling fast, but she had no words with which to answer her.

"A good many years ago, at communion seasons, I used to grieve over him more than a little. I couldn't bear to have him miss the privilege—deprive himself of the privilege of remembering the Lord in the way He appointed. He didn't consider himself worthy, he told me once, when I said a word to him about it—at the time my father died that was.

"I tell you, Lizzie, it made me feel poor and mean enough—a hypocrite, almost, when I heard him say it. Not that any one can be worthy, in one sense. But out Lord said, 'Except ye be converted and become as little children,' and he had

the heart of a little child about some things, more than any one I ever knew.

"Cousin, if I were to tell you—but I couldn't begin to tell you, all he has done for us—for father and the boys when they were in trouble, and for me. And the way he did it, as though it was his business, that he needn't be thanked for. The patience he showed, and the gentleness—yes, and the strength and firmness, when these were needed. I should have fallen down under my burden in those days, if it hadn't been for Uncle Gershom. I have often wondered, Lizzie, if you knew just what a man your father was."

Elizabeth turned her tearful face, smiling now, toward her cousin, but she said nothing.

"I never could tell you—never! My father, for a good while, wasn't easy to get along with. Well, he wasn't himself all the time, and if it hadn't been for Uncle Gershom—

"But there—I mustn't talk about it, not to-night," she said, rising and walking about the room. "It kind of puts me off the balance to go back to those days, and I'd better let it alone to-night."

"Some time you will tell me," said Elizabeth.

"Well, I don't promise. But if I could tell you just how like the face of an angel your father's face has been to me many and many a time."

"I think I know," said Elizabeth.

"And I wish we were all as fit for heavenly places as he is. I don't deny that I should have been glad for the sake of the cause, if he could have seen his way clear to unite with the Church before he went—to sit down at the Lord's table here on earth, before he goes to sit down at it above, and I wish he might even yet."

"I'll tell you what I would like. If he should revive a little, as he may, and if the minister had no objections, a few might come in, mother and Cynthia, and old Davie Fleming, and two or three others, and take the cup and the bread with him, not that it would make any real difference—"

"Betsey," said the squire's voice from the other room.

They were both with pale faces at his bedside in a moment.

"Did I hear Betsey's voice? Or did you only say she was coming, Lizzie? Oh, she is here, is she? Well, I've got something to say to Betsey. It isn't best to put off these things too long."

Poor old squire! He had said almost the same words every time he had seen Betsey for the last year or two, and it never occurred to either of them that he would not forget the words as soon as they were uttered. After taking some nourishment he was much revived and strengthened.

"Yes, I want to speak to Betsey about some business. Jacob isn't here, is he? Because this is between Betsey and me. It was all over and done with before Jacob knew anything about my business, and he needn't know now. Go up-stairs, Lizzie, to the store-room where the old bureau is, and your mother's little wheel, and you'll find what I want—the old saddle-bag—in the left-hand, deep drawer. There are papers in it; but you'd better bring the bag down."

Elizabeth waited a moment, thinking he might drop asleep again, but he did not.

"I feel rested. It won't hurt me, Lizzie. Better go now, and have it over with—"

Elizabeth looked at her cousin.

"You'd better go, I guess. It will satisfy him, even if he cannot do anything about it."

Elizabeth returned almost immediately, and spent a little time brushing the dirt from the old bag, which she remembered as always taken by her father on his journeys on horseback long ago, though she had not seen it for years.

"I brought it from Massachusetts with me well-nigh on fifty year ago," said the old man, laying his hand on it. "Where are my glasses? But I guess you'll find what I want, Lizzie."

There was no lock to be opened. There were a number of folded papers, laid loosely in the compartments. They were arranged with some order, however, and Elizabeth read the few words written on the outside of each as she lifted them out. They were a strange medley, notes of hand, receipted accounts, the certificate of the squire's first marriage, his wife's letter of dismissal from the Massachusetts church, dated, as the squire said, "well-nigh on fifty year ago." Then there was a bundle of papers marked "Brother Reuben."

"That is it. I ought to look them all over myself. But you'll have to do it, Lizzie."

There were several acknowledgments of money received, and notes of hand to a large amount that had passed between the brothers. On one was written, "Paid for my Joe," and a date; on another, "Lent to my son. Parley, at the time he went west," and several more of the same kind. The dates ran over many years, and the father had made himself responsible for all to the squire.

"He was very independent, was my brother Reuben, always," said the squire. "He wanted to mortgage his place to me, but I wouldn't have it. I thought his notes good enough; more easily dealt with anyway than a mortgage. He would have paid every cent if he could, and if he had it would have all gone into the bank for the benefit of his womenfolk, who have had a hard time mostly."

He seemed to have forgotten Betsey's presence, for he went on:

"I want you to give them to Betsey. Jacob needn't hear of them. He might think he had some claim on them, but he hasn't a mite. Betsey shall have the satisfaction of knowing that at no time to come they can be claimed—the value of

them, I mean. Betsey knew about them, I guess, though her father didn't mean she should. She is a good woman, Betsey, if ever there was one, and she has had her share of trouble."

"Father, I will burn them now; that will be best," said Elizabeth, eagerly.

"And not say anything to Betsey? But she knows there is something due, and it might worry her, thinking that some time or other it might be claimed. If you burn them I think you should let her see you do it."

"Yes, father; Betsey is here, and we shall burn them together."



Burning the Promissory Notes.—Page 291.

"Well, that is pretty much all, I guess; and I'm tired now. Look out the rest of them when you have time, and you'll know what to burn. There is nothing there that Jacob or Clifton has anything to do with. I often have been sorry that I didn't just take old Mr Fleming's note, instead of the mortgage. It might have saved some hard feelings. There, that's all. I feel better, I'll try and sleep again."

They sat beside him till he fell asleep, and then they moved into the other room, Elizabeth carrying the bag with her.

"Cousin Lizzie," said Betsey, "wait a minute. I don't more than half believe it's lawful to burn these notes and things."

"It is quite lawful. My father told me to burn them."

"But wait. Do you know that folks are beginning to say that your brother Jacob is hard up, that he is pressed for money?"

"Yes, he told me so himself. He said the difficulty was only temporary, and that—that I should hear more about it soon."

"They say it's pretty bad, and you know everything has been mixed up in the business, and your share might have to go with the rest. There is a good deal represented by the papers you have in your hands, cousin."

"I see what you mean. All the more this must be made safe."

She rose, and going toward the hearth, dropped the papers one by one into the fire.

"Now, Cousin Betsey, that is done with. Forget all about it. We will never speak of this again."

Elizabeth took the old bag to carry it away. Several papers fell from the other side as she moved it. She looked at each one as she put it in the bag again, reading aloud what was written on each. One was a sealed letter, thick and folded as letters used to be before envelopes were in use. It was addressed to her father in very beautiful handwriting which she had seen somewhere before. She held it before her cousin that she might see it.

"It is Hughie Fleming's writing! I know it well," said Betsey.

"It looks as if it had never been opened," Elizabeth said, turning it over and over in her hand. "How strange! My father must surely have read it?"

"Who knows? It is possible he never did."

"I wonder if I should keep it and speak to him about it?"

Betsey shook her head.

"It isn't likely he'd remember it, and it might trouble him. It is about that old trouble likely."

"Perhaps I should drop it into the embers?"

"It is hard to say. I should hate to know from it anything that would make me think less of poor Hugh."

"But it may be quite different. Ought I to open it? My father gave all the papers to me to examine. I wonder if I should open it, cousin?"

Miss Betsey took the letter in her hand and looked at it for a minute or two.

"It looks like a message from the dead," said she.

"Open it, cousin. You remember him and his trouble better than I can. Open it, and if there is nothing in it that his friends would be glad to know, you shall burn it without a word."

Betsey still hesitated.

"It comes from the dead," said she, but she opened it at last, cutting round the large seal with a pair of scissors. But their hesitation as to what they ought to do was not over. There was an inclosure addressed to David Fleming, at which Betsey looked as doubtfully as ever, and then she gave it to Elizabeth. There were only a few words in the first letter:

"Honoured Sir:—I write to confess the sin I sinned against you, though you must know it already. I ask your forgiveness, and I send this money as the first payment of what I owe you, and if I live, full restitution shall be made. If my father will read a letter of mine, will you take the trouble to give him the lines I send with this?"

And then was signed the name of Hugh Fleming. It was only a hint of the sad story they knew something of before. There was an American bank bill for a small sum, and the inclosure to his father, and that was all.

"Poor Hughie! poor dear, bonnie laddie!" said Betsey softly. "Can it be possible that your father never opened or read this? It was written within a week of the poor boy's death," added she, looking at the date on the letter.

"My father never could have opened it or Mr Fleming would have had this," said Elizabeth, holding up the inclosed note, "I wonder how it could have happened that it was overlooked."

She never knew, nor did any one. She tried next day to say something to her father about it, but she could not make him understand. He said nothing in reply that had any reference to the letter, or to poor Hugh, or to his father. It must have been, by some unhappy chance, overlooked and placed with other papers in the old saddle-bag, where it had lain all these years.

"And now what shall we do about this?" asked Elizabeth, still holding the other letter in her hand.

It was a single small leaf folded like a letter and one edge slipped in as though it was to have been sealed or fastened with a wafer. But it was open.

"I don't know, the least in the world," said Betsey, much moved. "It might hold a medicine for the old man over there, but it might also be poison."

"But since he wrote to my father of confession and restitution, we may hope that there is a confession in this also."

"Yes, there is something in that. But it was a great while ago now, and all the old misery would come back again. Not that he has ever forgotten it. And now I fear there is more trouble before him."

They were greatly at a loss what to do.

"If we could consult some one."

"It would not help much. As it is not sealed you might just look at it. If there is comfort in it the poor old father ought to have it. There is no better time to give it."

Elizabeth opened it with trembling fingers.

"I hope it is not wrong."

"It would be too great a risk either to give it or to withhold it without having known its nature. It was written so long ago, and it would be terrible to have sorrow added to sorrow now."

A single glance was enough.

"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight."

Elizabeth read no more. That was enough. She burst into sudden weeping.

"And he never saw his father again."

"No. And the father never saw the words his son had written," said Betsey, scarcely less moved.

Daylight was coming in by this time and there was the sound of footsteps at the door. Then Jacob's voice was heard, and remembering that the squire had said that the papers were for Elizabeth's eyes alone, Betsey lifted the bag from the table and carried it into the sick-room. Mr Maxwell was with Jacob, and other people were waiting to hear how the night had been passed.

“He has had a good night, and is still sleeping quietly,” said Elizabeth.

“And he seemed quite revived when he was awake last,” Betsey added, as she came out of his room.

“Mr Maxwell, Jacob,” said Elizabeth, “the strangest thing has happened. Jacob, look at this,” and she put into his hand the letter with the red seal on it, on which his eyes had been fixed since ever he came in.

He grew pale when he saw his father’s name in the once familiar handwriting, and when he saw the money, and read the words to his father, written on the other side, he sat down suddenly without a word. If Elizabeth had thought a moment, she might have hesitated about giving it to him while others were looking on. Betsey was glad that she had done it. Elizabeth took the letter which Jacob had laid down and gave it to Mr Maxwell:

“You have heard of Hugh Fleming, the lad who went wrong. Betsey can tell you more than I can. I found the letter among some old papers of my father’s. I think he cannot have read it, for the seal was not broken. There must have been some mistake.”

Mr Maxwell read it in silence.

“But it is this that has troubled us. A letter from Hugh to his father. Think of it, Jacob. After all these years!”

Yes. After all these years! “Be sure your sin will find you out.” That is what Jacob was saying to himself. Even Betsey could have found it in her heart to pity the misery seen in his face.

“He can’t be so cold-blooded as people suppose,” thought she.

“Should it be given to his father at once? I think the worst part of the trouble to him has been the thought that his son was cut off so suddenly—that he died unrepenting.”

Mr Maxwell looked at the folded paper and then at Jacob.

“It may trouble the old man, but I do not think we have a right to withhold it.”

Elizabeth was about to say that she had looked at the note, but Betsey interrupted her:

“He was sorry for his sin—whatever it was. His written words to Uncle Gershom prove that. And if there is in it any kind of sorrow, or any proof that others were more guilty than he, it might comfort the old man.”

“Will you take it to him by and by, Mr Maxwell?” said Elizabeth.

“If I am the best person to take it. But he has never spoken to me of his son.”

“He has never spoken a word to any one but the mother. And I feel that there is comfort to him in this little letter, and you will be glad to carry him comfort, I know.”

“Thank you. Well, I will take it at once. Some one will be up at this early hour with the grandmother. I will go now.”

Elizabeth put the folded paper in her father’s letter with the money and gave it to him.

“I will go too,” said Jacob, rising.

“Had you better?”

Both Elizabeth and Betsey spoke these words with a little excitement. He turned a strange look from one to the other. Whether it was of pain or anger, neither knew, and he went out with the minister. Elizabeth watching, saw them turn into the path that led a near way to the North Gore road.

“Oh, Betsey! I hope we have done right. God comfort the poor father by these words,” cried Elizabeth, with a sudden rush of tears.

“Amen!” said Betsey, solemnly.

Chapter Twenty Five.

Forgiveness.

The longed-for dawn came to Katie with a sudden chill and sinking of the heart that felt for a minute like the utter failure of bodily strength. When she put the lamp out, and put aside the curtain so that the daylight fell on the two grey old faces lying on the same pillow, her heart beat hard with sudden fear.

How wan and sunken and spent they looked! What if they were both to die? The little gleam of red that had now and then, through all her illness, showed itself on grannie’s cheeks was quite gone now, and she would never be whiter, Katie thought, as she bent down to catch the sound of her breath coming and going so faintly. The two wrinkled, toil-worn hands still clasped each other in sleep.

“They should go together,” said Katie, with a sob, “but oh! not yet.”

She was not experienced enough to know whether this motionless sleep, so different from the fitful, broken slumbers of the last few weeks, was a hopeful sign or not; if her strength could be kept up, the doctor had said, and so had Miss Betsey—and perhaps she ought to wake her and give her something. As she stood looking at her, her grandfather opened his eyes.

"Grannie's better, I think," said she, with a quick impulse to give him comfort. "She has been sleeping quietly, and her hand is cool and moist. If you'll bide still beside her, I'll go and get a drop of warm milk from Brownie, to be ready when she wakes."

If she had stayed a minute longer she must have cried at the sight of the old man's face as he raised himself up and bent over that other face so white and still. She did cry a little when she went out, and shivered in the chill of the September morning, but she did not linger over her task. When she came in she found her grandfather risen, and standing by the bed. Her grandmother was awake now.

"Are you there, Katie? Is your tea masket? Give a cup of tea to your grandfather now; it will refresh him; and I think I could take a cup myself."

"All right, grannie dear," said Katie, cheerfully; "and in the meantime take a little milk," and she held the cup to her lips. "And now, if you should fall asleep, it will be all the better till the tea be ready."

Katie smoothed the pillows and put the bedclothes straight, and touched her lips to the white cheek; then it was turned to rest on the thin hand and grannie fell asleep. Davie rose up at Katie's bidding, and went to get wood to kindle the fire. Katie let the curtain fall again over the open window, and softly closed the door, as she followed her grandfather out of the room.

"We'll let her sleep," said the old man, and he went out with slow, languid steps into the sunshine.

It was hardly sunshine yet, for though the light lay clear on the hill-tops, all the valley was in shadow, and the mist lay low along the course of Beaver River in great irregular masses, white, but with great "splatshes" of colour here and there where the sun touched it. The dew lay heavy on the grass, and the garden bushes and the orchard trees, and on Katie's flowers, and the sweet breath of green things came pleasantly to his sense as he sat down on his accustomed seat by the door.

Birds were chirping in the orchard trees, and there was the scarcely less pleasant sound of barn-door fowls near at hand. The sheep behind the pasture-bars sent their greeting over the dewy fields, and the cows in the yard "mowed" placidly as they stirred one another with soft, slow movements. How fair and peaceful the place looked! How full of calm and quiet, yet strong life!

The old man closed his eyes on it all. He was not thinking, he was hardly feeling. The night had brought broken slumbers, but not rest, and he was very weary. A wondering question, whether she could be going to die on such a day as this, passed through his mind. It did not seem possible.

"And besides, she and he said she could not die till I had forgiven my enemy."

But he was too weary to go over it all again—the long heart-breaking story. He could only sit still with closed eyes, waiting.

And it was thus that the minister and Jacob Holt found him. They had said little to one another as they passed through the dewy fields, and under the long shadows of the wayside trees together. Mr Maxwell at first had said a word as to the mission they had undertaken, and asked a question or two as to how they had better make it known, but Jacob had answered in monosyllables, or not at all.

The last part of their walk had been over the fields again, and they came suddenly upon Mr Fleming sitting at the door. Katie had seen them coming, and was standing at her grandfather's side, her hand laid on his shoulder, and she looked at them as they drew near with questioning, almost angry eyes. Mr Maxwell held out his hand to her.

"Is he sleeping, Katie?"

But as he spoke Mr Fleming looked up. He did not see Jacob for the moment. He held out his hand and tried to rise.

"No; sit still," and Mr Maxwell sat down beside him.

"It is kind of you to come so early. Katie thinks her—no worse this morning. But you must think her dying to come so soon again, and at this hour."

"No. I am glad she is no worse. It was not that I thought her dying. I came for another reason."

"Well, you are kindly welcome anyway."

"I went to see Squire Holt this morning. No—he is not dying, though it cannot be long now."

"Ay! ay! Well, he is an old man, and he is ending a useful life."

He spoke dreamily in his utter weariness, looking away over the fields to the sunshiny hills beyond.

"I have something to give you, Mr Fleming," said the minister gently, "something which Miss Holt found among her father's papers."

"Well, well," said the old man, waiting quietly, almost indifferently, for what might be said.

"It is a letter, written long ago by one dead and gone, who was very dear to you."

A change came over her grandfather's face, but whether it was because of what Mr Maxwell had said, or because he saw Jacob Holt standing before him, and quite near him, Katie could not tell. Jacob moistened his dry lips, and tried twice to speak before a sound came.

"It is a letter—and before you read it—I beg you to forgive me for any harm I may ever have done—to you or yours."

The little Flemings had gathered about the door, but their mother drew them away into the house. Katie kept her place by her grandfather, and so did Davie, but he was out of sight in the porch. Mr Fleming rose, and stood face to face with his enemy; but when he spoke it was to Mr Maxwell that he turned.

"She said, she could never go—up yonder—till I have forgiven him—and I am an old man, now."

He tottered a little as he turned to Jacob, but he held out his hand:

"God forgive you. And God help me to forgive you. And God forgive me too, for I doubt it has been rebellion with me all this time."

"Amen," said Jacob, and then he moved away, and Mr Fleming sank down on the seat again. He seemed to have forgotten that there was anything more to be said, and after a moment's hesitation, Mr Maxwell put the letter into Katie's hand.

"The letter, grandfather," said she softly.

"Ay, the letter."

He took it, holding it out at arm's length that he might see, but when his eye rested on the familiar characters he uttered a sharp, inarticulate cry and let it fall. The blood rushed to his face till it was crimson, and then receding, left him pale as death.

"Grandfather, come into grannie," said Katie, putting her arms about him. "Davie, come and help our grandfather."

"Grannie's better, grandfather," said Davie; "come."

"But the letter," said the old man, faintly. "Oh, ay! Grandmother will like to see the letter!"

But he did not rise.

"The letter. Where's the letter?"

Jacob Holt stooped and lifted it from the grass where it had fallen, and Davie looked at him with amazed and angry eyes, as he opened it and taking out the folded slip of paper, offered it to him, while he kept the squire's letter and the money in his hand.

"Read that first," said Jacob hoarsely, and then he went away round the corner of the house out of sight, and Mr Maxwell followed him.

"Read it, Katie, lassie."

With trembling fingers Davie opened the letter and gave it to his sister. Kneeling beside him, Katie read:

"Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son."

There was more written, but she got no further, for a cry burst from his lips—whether of joy or pain they could not tell—and his head fell on Katie's shoulder.

"Whisht, Davie. Lay him down gently, and get a little water. Be quiet, man. Grannie will hear you."

For Davie had cried out in his terror at the sight of his grandfather's deathlike face. The cry brought out his mother, and Mr Maxwell and Jacob hurried back again. He was better in a minute, and they led him into the house, and made him lie down. In a little while Katie brought him some tea.

"Grannie bade me, grandfather, and you must take it you ken."

She knelt beside him, holding the cup for him, and by coaxing and entreating made him take a little food.

"And now you must just rest a while."

They had brought him into the front room "for quiet," Katie said, as he looked round in surprise; "rest and think about it," she whispered, hardly venturing to say more. Gradually it came back to him that something had happened. By this time breakfast was over, and worship, and Katie brought Mr Maxwell in and left him there.

Jacob Holt would not stay to breakfast, though Davie and his mother had asked him to stay. Before he went he gave the squire's letter to Davie.

"Give it to your grandfather, but do not read it," said he.

He had something to say to Mr Maxwell also.

"I don't know just how much Mr Fleming knows of what happened long ago. Hugh Fleming, after much entreaty from several of us, signed my father's name where he ought not. He alone had the skill to do it. It was to save—some of us from much trouble. He was not in the scrape. He was not to be benefited personally by it, except that he was persuaded that some foolish deed of his could be more easily kept from his father's knowledge if he helped to screen the rest by yielding. If he had stayed at home and met it, it would have been well; my father made no trouble about it. But he went away—and died. And you must tell his father—"

Jacob turned his back upon the minister for a full minute, and then without another word went away.

It was Mr Maxwell who read the letter to Mr Fleming after all. There were only a few lines more than Katie read: "I

trust God has forgiven me, and that He will keep me safe from sin. Forgive me, dear father and mother and James."

And then his name and another line: "I will make up to you, dear father, for all you suffer now for me."

"And He has kept him safe," said the minister, "all these years."

Katie came now and then, and looked in, but she did not speak, except once to say that grannie was sleeping still. Even Katie never knew how the minister and her grandfather passed the long morning. It was noon when she went in and told them that dinner was nearly ready, and that grannie was awake and asking for them. Afterward Mr Maxwell told Miss Elizabeth something about it.

How as it gradually became clear to the father that his dear son's light had not gone out in darkness, but that he had repented of his sin, and confessed it, and had been as he trusted forgiven, his grief and shame and penitence were even deeper than his joy.

"To think that I should have been misdoubting the Lord all this time, as though He had broken His promise to me! And how patient He has been—long-suffering and full of compassion. I have been hard on Jacob Holt. If God had dealt with me as I have in my heart dealt with him!"

The minister did not always know whether he was speaking to him, or to himself. By and by, when he got calmer, and "better acquainted" with the thought of the new joy, he told the minister, in broken words, the story of his love for his son, and the bitterness of his loss, and his wonder and sympathy grew as he listened.

What depths of woe the old man had sounded! With what agonies of bitterness and anger which had grown to be hated almost, as the years went on, had he struggled. And he had sometimes yielded to the misery of doubt of God's care. He had thought the struggle vain.

He had never been quite at peace with himself through it all. God had never left him to an easy conscience, where Jacob Holt was concerned, even at his quietest time, and when things were at their best with him. He had never left him to himself, and now the evil spirit was cast out.

"The patience He has had with me. It is wonderful!" he said again and again. "And now I ask nothing but that He may do His will with me and mine," he added, as Katie came in.

"I think grannie is no worse, though she is very weak and cannot bear much," was Katie's gentle caution, lest she should be excited overmuch.

He did not answer her, but turned to Mr Maxwell and repeated his words:

"I ask nothing but that God may do His will with me and mine."

"That is always best," said the minister.

Katie looked from one to the other.

"Come, grandfather," said she.

He went slowly out, touching the door and the walls to steady himself by, and when he went in to grannie, Katie softly shut the door. There was no one to tell what was said there between the two. If Mr Fleming had needed anything utterly to break his heart with loving shame, and thankfulness, and sorrow, the glad serenity and trust of his dear old wife would have done it. He put restraint upon himself lest he should excite her beyond her strength, but she smiled at him.

"Joy seldom does harm, and I am better, though I am but weak and feckless. I'll soon mend now."

"And are you really better? I could almost find it in my heart to let you go to Him, nay, I canna say gladly, but God's will be done, whether you be to stay or go."

"Surely. And in His good time He'll take me, but no' just yet. You canna spare me yet."

The old man laughed a glad, tremulous laugh, but the tears were not very far from his eyes, and he patted gently the wrinkled hand, grown thin and limp.

"And you'll just go to your dinner with the minister and the bairns, and I'll rest myself a wee while, for, oh! I have little strength. But I'll soon have more."

After dinner Mr Maxwell came in to say a few words to Mrs Fleming, and "to give thanks," as she said, and then the old people were left alone together again. Whether they slept or not, grannie could not tell.

"But we didna think long, my dear," said she to Katie, with her faint, glad smile.

Mr Maxwell would have liked to lie all the afternoon on the orchard grass, with Davie and his mother sitting near, and Katie and the rest coming and going, as the work permitted, for it was sweet and restful there. But the old squire might wish to see him. He had visited him almost daily for a while, and so after a little he rose and said he must go.

"And grannie is better, but Miss Elizabeth will have no glad morning. Oh, if we could comfort her," said Katie, gravely.

"And don't you think that all that has comforted you all to-day, will comfort her also?" said Mr Maxwell.

"Miss Elizabeth has always rejoiced with the joyful, and sympathised with those who were in sorrow," said Katie's mother.

"And that is why she is loved so dearly," said Katie.

"And she was ay fond of grannie," said Davie.

"She will be comforted," said the minister.

And Miss Betsey had her wish. One day her mother and Cynthia came down, and Ben went over for Mr Fleming, and old Mrs Wainwright, and Deacon Stone, and two or three others, and the minister, and they all remembered their Lord together. The "cup of blessing" was passed from the trembling hands of Mr Fleming to the hands of Jacob Holt, which trembled also, and so the very last drop of bitterness passed out of the old man's heart forever.

The end was drawing near now, and the old squire, looking glad and solemn too, held his daughter's hand, and welcomed them all by name as they came, and bade them farewell as they went away, "hoping to see them again," he said, but knowing, as did they all, that it must be on "the other side." Mr Fleming stayed when the others went away, and Elizabeth gave him her seat by her father for a little while. They had not much to say to one another. In all their intercourse the squire had been the talker, but he was past all that now. But he was not past noticing the peaceful look that had already come to the face of his friend.

"You feel better, don't you? It has done you good?" meaning doubtless the communion they had enjoyed together with their Lord and Master.

Mr Fleming hardly knew what he meant, but he said gently, "Ay, it has done me good."

For a moment it came into his thoughts to speak to the squire about the letter, and the joy it had brought to him at last. But he was tired and his thoughts were beginning to wander, and he doubted whether he could make him understand.

"He'll ken where he is going," said he to himself, but to the dying man he said nothing but "Fare ye well; and the Lord be with you in the valley." And then he went away.

But not without a word from Elizabeth.

"Dear Mr Fleming," said she, holding his hand when they were at the door, "you must let me say how glad I am for you and for his mother."

"Ay, that you are, I am very sure."

"If only it had come—long ago," said Elizabeth.

A momentary shadow passed over his face.

"Ay. It seems strange to us. There is only one thing sure—His time is best."

Then Elizabeth sent her love to Mrs Fleming and to Katie, and her mother, and then she touched with her lips the old man's furrowed cheek, and some who saw him leave his old friend's house could not but wonder at the peaceful brightness of his face that day.

There was another day of watching and waiting, and then a few days of silence in the darkened house, and then the old squire was laid in his grave with such marks of honour as his fellow-townsmen could give. People from other towns, and from all the country round, came to Gershom that day, and many a kindly word was spoken of the dead, and many a tale told of good deeds done in secret, of friendly help and counsel given in time of need, and all agreed that a good man and true had gone to his rest from among them, and that not many like him were left behind.

And though all that great multitude could not see the open grave and Elizabeth and Clifton and Jacob at the head, and Betsey and her mother and Ben and all the rest standing near, no man left Gershom that day who had not heard how, when the first clods fell on the coffin-lid, and Jacob shuddered and grew white as death, old David Fleming, one of the bearers, went forward and gave him his arm to lean upon till the grave was filled and the last word spoken. Of course these strangers did not know all that this implied to both these men, but every one in Gershom knew and was glad for them both.

And then when all was over, and Mr Maxwell, in a voice that was not quite firm, had, in the name of the mourners, thanked the assembled friends for their presence and sympathy on the solemn occasion, Elizabeth and Clifton and Jacob went home with the feeling strong upon them that the old life was at an end forever, and it was truer for them all than either of them knew.

Chapter Twenty Six.

Business.

It would have been no longer possible for Clifton Holt to refuse all active interest in the business that had hitherto been carried on by Jacob in the name of himself and father. The brothers had long known the arrangements made by their father with regard to the division of his property among his children after his death, and this division made it necessary that Clifton should give both time and pains to a right understanding of how affairs stood.

Elizabeth was to have the house in the village and the home farm, together with a certain sum of money, part of which was invested in the business. She was not to be a partner in the business. It would be wrong, her father said, at least it would be uncomfortable for her to be made in that way responsible for risks of which she knew nothing. If all should agree that her money should be retained in the business, then of course her brothers would give her the same security that they would give to any one else who intrusted property to them. The sum was a large one, but, had all things been going well with them during the last few years, not larger than was right as her share of her father's wealth.

For the rest, the business was to be equally in the hands of the two brothers, and the real estate equally divided between them. All this had been arranged at the time when Jacob was formally received as his father's partner. It was a

just arrangement, giving the younger brother no undue advantage, though it might seem to do so, for Jacob had before that time spent a large part of the share of the property to which, according to Canadian law, he had a claim at his father's second marriage. He had acknowledged the arrangement to be just at the time it was made, and still acknowledged it, although the fact that his brother had not, as was expected, come to take his share of the work and risks of the business when he came of age might have given him some cause to complain.

He might have complained if all this time he had been prospering in his management of their affairs; but as it was, he said little, and allowed Clifton to come gradually to a knowledge of how it was with them.

Up to a late date Clifton's plan had been, either to remain as a sort of sleeping partner in the business, thus securing a certain income to himself without trouble; or to claim a division of the property, and take his share, leaving Jacob to carry on the business in his own name. This was the course which his sister foresaw and feared, knowing that such a course must bring trouble and loss to them all.

But within the last few months Clifton's idea and plans had undergone a change. By the way in which he set himself to work, intent on mastering the details of the business in all its branches, it became evident that before many years were over he would stand fair to take his father's place as the first man in that part of the country.

The more Clifton looked into the state of their affairs, the less satisfaction he felt with regard to them. When, in the course of his investigation, he discovered the extent of the sacrifice of real estate which had attended the settling up of the mining operations, it is scarcely too much to say that he was for the moment utterly appalled. He was, upon the whole, moderate in his expression of surprise and vexation at the state of things, and whatever he said which went beyond moderation, his brother did not often resent, at least he rarely answered otherwise than mildly. But Jacob's cool way of answering questions and suggesting expedients that might serve for a time, as though he had been freed by his brother's presence from any special responsibility with regard to their present straits, amazed and provoked Clifton. Of course he could not now abandon the concern without dishonour to the name, and without the sacrifice of plans and projects to which he had of late been giving many of his thoughts.

No, there was nothing to be done but to make the best of matters as they stood.

"If you had come into the firm two years ago, as you should have done," said Jacob one day, returning, as his manner was, to matters discussed and dismissed too often already, in his brother's opinion; "if you had thrown yourself right into it, you might have made the Gershom Manufacturing Company go. I hadn't the time to give to it. And I haven't the power of talking folks over to see a thing, as you have. It was all square with us then, as far as folks generally knew, and if the company had been formed, and the mills put right up and set a-going, it would have made all the difference in the world to us."

"It's too late to talk now," said Clifton, shortly, and he rose and left the room.

But he recognised the fact. If he had been in the business for the last two years, he knew that he would now have been in a far better position for carrying out the plans, which more than anything else had brought him back to Gershom; and it was toward the forming of such a company—or, rather, it was toward the commencing and carrying on of the work which such a company might be expected to do, that all his plans now pointed.

Business had not been a secondary consideration with Mr Langden when he paid his visit to Gershom. The success which had been almost the uniform result of his undertakings during the last ten years had been very pleasant to him, and had made it difficult for him to resist the temptation to engage in still other enterprises which offered fairly for the making of money. It was not that he loved money for its own sake, or for the sake of what it might bring. He parted with it readily enough, and held himself responsible for more liberal giving in proportion as his means increased.

There was nothing added to the enjoyment of his life by the luxurious appliances which wealth can command. He took a certain pride in being regarded as a man who had built up his own fortune, and who had benefited his native place and the community generally, by his increasing wealth. But the highest enjoyment he had was in the actual doing of work—in the beginning and carrying on to a successful end any enterprise which it required skill and will and a strong hand to guide.

It was not the passion for speculation—the passion of the gambler—which may take possession of the man of business as of the man of pleasure. He made no daring ventures and took no special risks. He investigated patiently and saw clearly, and then he acted. His weakness, if it could be called weakness, lay in this, that he found it difficult to refrain from entering into new schemes when opportunity occurred.

A less clear-sighted man than he might during a ten days' visit to Gershom have seen enough of the state of affairs there, and enough of Jacob Holt himself, to prevent him from entering into any serious business relations with him. He had disappointed Jacob by his apparent indifference to the evident advantages offered for the establishment of new industries, and the opening of new sources of wealth to himself, and of prosperity to Gershom. But he was not indifferent in the matter. He saw the opportunity clearly enough, but he did not see in Jacob Holt, or in any other man he met in Gershom, the right sort of agent by whom to make the opportunity available.

He changed his opinion as to this, however, when he came to know more of Clifton. Their long sail together, down the Saint Lawrence, and up the Saguenay, gave time for much talk between them. Jacob was right when he said that Clifton had his father's head for business, and the shrewd and observing Mr Langden was not long in discovering his powers. Squire Holt had been engrossed with business during the boyhood of his younger son, and Clifton had been on too familiar terms with him, not to have acquired much knowledge with regard to the details of business matters without any effort on his part. His views and opinions, modified and enlarged by contact with others during the two years' residence in the city of Montreal, commended themselves to the judgment of his new friend, and Mr Langden expressed surprise that he should not have preferred entering on such a business as that left by his father, rather than to take a new and untried path.

From one thing they went to another, till the capabilities of the Beaver River as a water-power, and the chances of Gershom as a manufacturing town, were fully discussed between them. The result was that Clifton almost decided to give up for the present his legal studies, and take up his abode in Gershom as Mr Langden's partner in such a business as it had been Jacob's hope that the Gershom Manufacturing Company might establish. Such an enterprise need not prevent him from going on as Jacob's partner. On the contrary, his position in such a case would be an advantage to him, and from his share of his father's wealth he expected to obtain the means necessary as his part in the investment of which Mr Langden was to supply the larger part. And so, to the surprise and joy of Elizabeth, and of Jacob as well, Clifton came

home for good. Mr Langden did not see, or did not seem to see, one of the chief motives that had influenced the young man in considering this step. Clifton at first did not acknowledge to himself that his interest in Mr Langden's daughter had much to do with the decision. There were good reasons enough for it to fall back upon without this, and these were so clearly and earnestly dwelt on in his talks with his sister, that he went far toward convincing himself that to settle in Gershom and do as his father had done before him was the most reasonable course to take.

He had greatly admired Miss Langden everybody saw, and a good many people had seemed to see that the admiration was mutual. But if their intercourse had ended when they left Gershom, it would hardly have gone further than admiration between them. Up to that time Clifton had shared the general opinion that Miss Essie would at some future day probably become a resident of the parsonage, and he had his doubts, as some others in Gershom had, whether that might prove the most suitable place for the dainty little lady.

But the sail together down the Saint Lawrence changed his opinion, and set his doubts at rest. Mr Maxwell was almost her dearest friend, as his mother had been the dearest friend of her Aunt Martha. He was like a cousin or an elder brother, she said, admiring and praising him quite openly, as no young lady would be likely to speak of her lover. And as for the parsonage, well, the intimations, quite frankly given, as to what she meant to see and to do in the future, did not point that way. And Clifton told himself, as he listened to her, that having seen them so much together, he might have known from the nature of their intercourse that there was nothing but friendship between them.

In the comparative isolation of the sail on the two great rivers, these young people became more intimate than they could have become in so short a time in almost any other circumstances, and Miss Essie was a pretty and winning little creature. She was very frank and friendly with him, and an occasional touch of shyness and reserve made her frankness and friendliness all the more charming. What with the one way and the other, she bewitched the happy young fellow, and she had bewitched several others since the Thanksgiving visit of Mr Maxwell.

Clifton scarcely knew what had happened to him till he stood in the desolate station in Montreal, watching the train that carried her and her friends to meet the upward-bound boat at Lachine. After that there came with the thought of the pretty, bright little girl, the thought of her father, who was a rich man, and who would not, he feared, be easily approached in any matter that had reference to his daughter. Clifton forth with came to what was probably the wisest resolution that he could have taken in the circumstances, to keep silence at present, and to do what might be done, at least to put himself in the way of becoming a rich man also.

A good deal had passed between the gentlemen as to possible future business relations, but nothing had been definitely settled while Mr Langden was in Canada. That is, Clifton had not fully decided whether he should change his plans and settle in Gershom. But there had been a full discussion of all that was to follow should he do so.

The unsatisfactory state into which their own affairs had fallen under his brother's management was doubly vexing to him, because of the difficulties which were thus thrown in the way of the new enterprise. Not only must there be delay, there must be a new plan of operations.

There was far more than enough of property of one kind or another in their possession still to cover all the liabilities of the firm, but money was needed and the banks were pressing. An honourable settlement might be made, and their good name preserved, and even their fortunes retrieved to some extent—provided that time should be given them, and provided also the settlement of their affairs should be left in their own hands. An extensive and varied country business like theirs might be carried on through years of ill-success without an utter breakdown, and years of care and labour would be required, if the sacrifice of much valuable property was to be avoided, and this care and labour he saw must fall on him. He could no longer hope for a partnership with Mr Langden in the new enterprise. It seemed even doubtful whether, occupied as he must be with their own affairs for the next year or two, Mr Langden would consider the question of making him his agent in carrying out his plans.

"You can but lay the matter before him," said his sister Elizabeth.

To her alone had Clifton permitted himself to speak of Mr Langden's plans, and of the disappointment that threatened his own hopes because of the losses that had come upon them.

"That is easily said," said he, impatiently. "A statement of our affairs; such as it would be necessary to put before him, would be almost impossible at the present moment, at least in writing."

"Why don't you go and see him, then?"

Clifton looked at her a moment in silence.

"The matter ought to be settled in one way or another, at once," said his sister. "You would feel quite differently about Jacob's troubles and your own if you were not in suspense."

And so it came about that Clifton found his opportunity, and went.

Chapter Twenty Seven.

Changes.

A surprise awaited the people of Gershom—indeed a series of surprises. But the greatest of all was this, David Fleming not only sold that part of his farm which bordered on the Black Pool and lay beyond it, higher up the river, but he sold it to the Holts. He sold it on such terms that the longstanding debt to them was more than cancelled, and in so doing did well for himself and for the Holts also.

When the winter had fairly set in, and there was snow enough for good winter roads, the stones and timber which Jacob Holt had accumulated on the Varney place last year were all removed higher up the river, and preparations on a larger scale than ever Jacob had attempted, commenced for the making of the new dam, at the point long ago decided upon as the best on the river for such a purpose. And the building of the dam was to be but the beginning of what was to be done.

Clifton Holt did not say much to any one, except his sister Elizabeth, of all that was to be undertaken soon in Gershom. But the good people took too much interest in him and his undertakings not to give much time and talk to them. Clifton Holt's undertakings, they were always called, though he was but the agent of Mr Langden, the complications in the old business with which he had still to do making it wiser for him to occupy that position for the present. But that he was to be at the head of all that was to be done, as far as buildings were concerned, was easily seen.

And Mark Varney was to be one of his right hands. It was Mark who had the immediate oversight of the numerous workmen who were employed during the winter collecting the materials required. It was he who, when the spring opened, superintended the digging and levelling, the cutting and carting that were being carried on, on a scale and with a rapidity that surprised even Jacob Holt, who in imagination had seen something like it done a hundred times over. It was in Mark's pastures, once again his own, that the horses and oxen used in the work found rest when it was needed, and it was he who had all to say that was to be said of them, and of much besides. And the surprise, as far as he was concerned, was that he should be capable of taking all this in hand, and that being trusted with it he should so quickly and clearly show that he was capable of doing it all well.

No one was surprised at Clifton. He had the old squire's head for business, they said, as Jacob had said before, and he had such an education as the squire had never had, which must tell in the long run. Then he had so good an opinion of his own powers, that he would never think any work too great to undertake, and being "backed" by Mr Langden, and by several other rich men, both at home and at a distance, to whom Mr Langden's movement in the matter of the new mills had given confidence, the chances were, everybody said, that he would do what he had set out to do.

And so he did, as far as the new dam on the Beaver River, and the mills and workshops, and many other works besides, which he put his hand to for the benefit of Gershom and his own benefit, were concerned. And so he did in the course of years in his own business—that is, he and Jacob together did much to recover that which had been lost, and to make once more the name of the firm a power in Gershom, and in all the countryside. But a good many years passed before all that was brought about.

Mr Fleming parted with a portion of his farm, not without regret, indeed; but with none of the bitterness of feeling which in former days had always risen within him at the thought of possibly having to do so; and Davie was triumphant. Katie grieved over the prospect of having the "bonny quiet place" spoiled with mills and shops and other folks' houses, and the clatter of looms and factory-bells. Grannie thought as Katie did, and would have grieved over this also if anything except a fear of the wrong-doing of any of the bairns could have moved her from the sweet content which, since the joyful ending of her long illness, had rested in her heart, and made itself evident in every word and deed.

But still grannie found much that was to be rejoiced over in that which made Katie grieve. It was a fine thing to be free of debt, and it was well that since they must part with the land it was to be put to a good use.

As for grandfather there was no sign of grumbling in him. Indeed, when the spring opened, and the work at the Pool made progress, he began to take much interest in all that was going on there, and his evening walk often took him in that direction. It was a silent, and not always an approving interest. But there was neither bitterness nor anger in his thoughts now. He was content, like his dear old wife, to let the world move on and take its way, since he had so nearly done with it all.

There was for Davie a constant fascination in the skill and power displayed by those employed in directing the work that was going on. He haunted the place at every spare moment, and even did a day's work there, at leisure times, for the sake of getting an insight into the principles of things of which he had read, but which he had never had an opportunity of seeing applied. The engineer employed about the dam, a scientific man, capable of doing far higher work than fell to him in Gershom, well pleased with the lad's eager interest, gave him many a hint that went beyond the work in hand, and lent him books, and encouraged him in various other ways to educate himself in the direction toward which his tastes and inclinations seemed to lead. He claimed his help on occasions when intelligence and skill rather than strength were needed, and Davie, well pleased, did his best. The end of it all was, that the lad's vulgar wishes for other work and another kind of life than that which had fallen to him on the farm, took a definite form, and as usual his confidence was given to his sister, and as usual, also, Katie's first thought was:

"But, Davie, think of grandfather."

"Oh, there is no special hurry about it, and we'll break it to him easily. And you must mind that there is less land now, and Sandy and Jamie are coming on. There is not room for so many of us here, Katie. And I'll be first to slip out of the nest, that is all."

"But that you should be so glad to think about it, Davie," said Katie mournfully.

"Oh, as to that, I'm no' awa' yet. You needna fear that I'll do anything that grandfather will take to heart. And besides, Katie, grandfather is different now."

Davie said these last words with a little hesitation, because he had been taken up rather sharply on a former occasion when he had said something of the same kind. Katie seemed to have forgotten her old unhappy thoughts about her grandfather and Jacob Holt, and how hard it had been for her grandfather to forgive his enemy, and it almost seemed like reflection on his past life when it was said how greatly he was changed.

"It is not so much that he is changed," said Katie; "it is just the 'shining more and more unto the perfect day.' It is that he is becoming more like the 'little child' our Lord speaks about, and so more fit for the kingdom of heaven as the time draws nearer. For grandfather is growing an old man now, Davie," said Katie, not without tears.

"Yes, that's so. Well, I'll never grieve him, Katie, you needna fear. There is no hurry, and I am not losing time while Mr Davenport is here. And I don't despair of being a civil engineer, as good as the best of them yet."

"Shining more and more unto the perfect day." Yes, that was so. Mr Fleming was almost as silent in these days as had been his way all his life, but it was a different silence—a silence serene and peaceful, that told better than words could have done, of the joy and confidence with which he was waiting for all that life had to bring him, and for all that lay beyond.

One Sabbath-day in the beginning of the winter, when Mrs Fleming had gathered a little strength after her illness, grandfather and she, with Davie and Katie and their mother, went to the village church and sat down together at the

table of our Lord. Jacob Holt was there too, and a good many more who had sympathised with one or the other of them when trouble was between them, and every one who saw the old man's bowed head, and the childlike look on his face as he sat there among them all, knew that all hard feelings had passed out of his heart forever.

Jacob Holt's head was bowed also, but his face did not tell of peace as yet. That might come later, but Jacob was now in the midst of his troubles, and was having a hard time. But there was peace between him and Mr Fleming. In former days the old man's eyes had never lighted on his enemy, either in church or market, as all the world knew. But to-day it was Jacob who tied old Kelso in the shed, Davie not being at hand. He helped Mrs Fleming up the steps too, Cousin Betsey and a good many other people being there to see, and then the two men walked up the church aisle together.

"It was as good to Jacob as Mr Fleming's name to a note for a thousand dollars," Mr Green said afterward. And that was quite true. For a thousand dollars, more or less, would have made little difference to him in the present state of affairs, and the open friendliness of the man who had so long shunned and slighted him, was good and pleasant to him to-day.

"And it was done on purpose," Betsey told her mother afterward, for Mr Fleming was not accustomed to say much to any one by salutation on Sunday, and had passed several of his friends, Betsey herself among the number, without a word or even a nod of recognition. But he seemed glad of the chance to say a word to Jacob before them all.

"And it was a good day for Gershom," people said. There was no longer any question as to union now in church matters, and in other matters as well. No one had said less about union and brotherly love and a Christian spirit among brethren than Mr Fleming; but his silent influence had always been stronger than most men's loudly-spoken reasons, either for or against the union so much desired, and now his open adherence to the church in the village did much to decide those who had long hung back, and it was acknowledged to be a good day by them all.

Chapter Twenty Eight.

Clifton's Success.

Jacob Holt was having a hard time, and it did not for the moment make his troubles any lighter that his younger brother seemed likely, by and by, to show him a way out of them all. Indeed, it was rather an aggravation to his troubles to see Clifton's success. He was carrying out with apparent ease an enterprise on which he had spent time and strength in vain, and with fewer drawbacks than would have been likely to come to him had the Gershom Manufacturing Company been formed when he moved in the matter years ago.

Of course success was for Jacob's benefit, and by and by he would be able to appreciate and take advantage of it. But in the meantime it was not a pleasant thing to find himself superseded—left on one side—as he said to himself often. It was not pleasant to be second where he had so long been first.

On the whole, Clifton carried himself with as much moderation as could have been expected toward his elder brother, and he made him useful in various ways that told for the good of both.

Elizabeth rejoiced greatly, as each month passed over, that her brother not only showed himself equal to the duties of the position in which he was placed, but that he seemed to enjoy them, and would, therefore, not be likely to be tempted to seek other work elsewhere.

Of his work and his plans, and all he meant to do and be in the future, Clifton said more to his sister than to all the rest of Gershom put together. He was as frank and free in his talk, and as eagerly claimed her sympathy and approval as ever he had done in his boyish days about less important matters, and the chief interest of her life now, as then, was in throwing herself heartily into all his plans and prospects.

But on one subject he was for the most part silent, and his sister could only guess at the motives that had chiefly decided him in returning to Gershom, and at the hopes he might be cherishing with regard to Miss Langden, and of both motives and hopes she was afraid. She was afraid that disappointment awaited him, and that the end of it would be to unsettle him again, and to disgust him with the life he had chosen.

Elizabeth's knowledge of the tacit engagement existing between Miss Essie and Mr Maxwell made her anxious and unhappy about her brother, and at the same time it made it difficult for her to say anything that might incline him to speak more freely to her. For Clifton's first successful visit to Mr Langden had by no means been his last. Business took him southward several times during the year, and more than one visit united business with pleasure. Once he had seen Miss Langden in her aunt's house in New York, and once he had turned aside to one of the fashionable summer resorts in the mountains where she was staying with her aunt's family. He enjoyed both visits, as may be supposed. Miss Essie was as bright and sweet as ever, and doubtless enjoyed them also.

Even Mrs Weston, who had seen a good deal more of society, and of the world in general, than her niece, acknowledged that the young Canadian carried himself well, and held his place among the idle gentlemen who were helping them and their friends to spend their summer days agreeably. Mrs Weston would have been as well pleased if he had not carried himself so well, or made himself so agreeable, as far as her niece was concerned, though she did not allow him to suspect any such feelings, and had self-respect enough to say nothing to her niece till after their visitors had departed.

She did not say much to her even then. She laughed a little at her and the conquest she had made, declaring that if she were determined to spend her life in the far North, it would be wise to give up all thoughts of the parsonage, and make good her claim to be the great lady of Gershom. Mrs Weston had always laughed at the idea of the parsonage, and had no thought of allowing her pretty niece to betake herself to the far North in any circumstances. But she did not express herself very openly with regard to this. For, with all Miss Essie's gentleness and sweetness, and her willingness to submit to guidance when nothing of particular importance to herself was depending upon it, she had a mind and will of her own, and did not hesitate to assert herself on occasion, and her aunt had seen enough of this to make her cautious in dealing with her when their opinions differed. Upon the whole, however, she thought she had reason to congratulate herself on the success that had hitherto attended her efforts on her niece's behalf.

Miss Langden, who could "hold her own" among the scores of fine people—the fashionable and elegant ladies and gentlemen who formed the circle in which they moved at present—was a very different creature from the quaint and

prudish little school-girl whom her father had brought to New York a year and a half ago.

"Improved! Yes, indeed," she said to herself, and Mr Langden agreed with his sister in the main, but on all points was not so sure. However, he doubted nothing less than that in all essential respects his good and pretty daughter would come out right in the end. Whether that might mean the parsonage and the far North, either or both, he did not say to himself or any one else. He had exchanged no words with his daughter on the subject, though they had been at Gershom together.

Mrs Weston was not afraid of Mr Maxwell and the parsonage, but, after his summer visit, she was a little afraid of Clifton Holt. She knew how high he stood both as to character and capabilities in the opinion of Essie's father, and though he had not liked the idea of his daughter's marriage with the minister, she thought it possible that he might not object seriously a second time, should Essie indeed prefer the new aspirant to her favour.

But all the same her aunt did not intend that either of them should have her pretty niece if she could manage matters so as to prevent it.

Chapter Twenty Nine.

Conclusion.

Clifton went southward again not long after his summer visit to the mountains, and on his return he had more to say about what he had seen and done and enjoyed than was usual with him. Whether he was led into doing so by the fact that Mr Maxwell had come in for the evening, and took pleasure in hearing about old friends and familiar scenes, or whether he spoke with intention, Elizabeth could not afterward decide.

He had not seen Miss Langden at this time. She was paying a visit to friends at a distance. If she had been visiting her Aunt Maltha, he would have gone there to see her, he said, as though it were quite his right to do so, and a matter of course. Elizabeth listened to all this with much discomfort, and glanced at Mr Maxwell now and then to see how it was taken. The minister met her glance frankly and smilingly, and certainly did not seem to have any thought of resenting the young man's tone and manner.

"He is sure of his ground," thought Elizabeth; "and he can wait; but, my poor Clifton, I fear he has disappointment before him."

She knew that such a disappointment might be got over, and he be none the worse, but rather the better, for what he might have to pass through. But it hurt her beforehand to think of his suffering, and to think that it must come to him through his friend. Even as the talk went on between them, she was trying to bring her courage to the point of asking Mr Maxwell to tell her brother how matters stood between him and Miss Langden. It was only that they were waiting for the end of the two years of probation, she supposed, and they were nearly over now. She came out of her own thoughts in time to hear Mr Maxwell say:

"Yes, I mean to get away for a week or two by and by, and I mean to pass Thanksgiving either there or with Miss Martha at New B—. If I cannot get away at that time I shall certainly go later, but I should like to be there on Thanksgiving Day for various reasons."

Elizabeth looked from one to the other with some surprise. Mr Maxwell spoke, and Clifton listened, with faces that were grave enough, but the eyes of both were smiling as they met hers.

"Mr Maxwell ought to tell him," thought she, with a touch of anger at her heart.

But he did not need to be told. When Mr Maxwell was gone, and Clifton had returned from seeing him to the gate, he said to his sister:

"Did you know, Lizzie, that Mr Maxwell had once asked Miss Langden to marry him?"

Elizabeth was moving about the room, putting things in order, as was her way before going up-stairs for the night. She removed the lamp to the side-table, and sat down before she answered him.

"Yes, I have long known it. I have often, often wished to tell you, but I did not feel at liberty to do so."

"And why not, pray? One may surely repeat a rumour of that kind without a breach of confidence."

"But I did not hear it as a rumour, and I had no permission to repeat it. And besides, it was Mr Maxwell who told me."

"Rather queer—his telling you, wasn't it?"

"No. In the circumstances it was natural enough. I knew it, or I had guessed it before he told me."

And then she went on to tell of the first note that Miss Essie had sent her, because she was one of the Gershom friends of her friend "Will Maxwell," as she called him. "But it is a long time now since one of her pretty notes has come to me. But they correspond, and have always done so, since he came to Gershom."

Clifton said nothing, and his sister was silent for a time. Then she asked:

"Who told you of their engagement?"

"Engagement! There is no engagement," said Clifton shortly.

"No formal engagement, but that was only because her father thought Miss Essie too young; but the time of waiting is nearly over now."

"Lizzie, if I had been asked who had been most in Mr Maxwell's thoughts for the last year I should not certainly have said it was Miss Langden."

"Well, your penetration would have been at fault, that is all."

"And I should not have said that Miss Langden had been giving many of her thoughts to him, for the last year at least."

"Of that I can say nothing. But who told you of the proposal? Not Mr Maxwell?"

"No. Mr Langden told me."

"Mr Langden!" exclaimed Elizabeth, and by and by she added: "Is that all I am to hear, brother?"

"It is all I have to tell at present. Perhaps I may have more by and by."

"Or perhaps it may be Mr Maxwell who may have something to tell," said Elizabeth gravely, "when he comes home from Thanksgiving."

Clifton laughed.

"Possibly he may—but—"

"Clifton, I cannot bear to think that Mr Maxwell and you may not always be friends."

"Well, you needn't fret about it beforehand, need you?" and then he rose and went away.

They both had something to tell before Thanksgiving Day, but it was not just what Elizabeth had expected to hear. Clifton did not tell his part before Thanksgiving, however. Indeed, he never told it. He was away a good deal about that time; and was so much occupied when he was at home, that Elizabeth saw less of him, and heard less from him than had ever been the case before during the same length of time, and she could only wait till it should be his pleasure to speak. But Mr Maxwell lost no time in saying to his friend what he had to say.

One fair September morning, about a year after her father's death, Elizabeth saw the minister coming in at the gate with an open letter in his hand, and though she could give no reason for the thought, she told herself at once to prepare for tidings. Her first impulse was to go away, so as to gain time, for a sharp and sudden pain, which she could not but fear was not all for her brother, smote her heart as she caught sight of Mr Maxwell's moved and smiling face. But she felt that it was better not to go, so she rose and met him at the door.

"Well," she said, smiling and preparing to be glad for him, at least.

Her face was moved out of its usual quiet too, as Mr Maxwell could not but see, and he said:

"Have you heard anything? Has your brother anything to tell?"

"Clifton is not at home; I have heard nothing."

"Ah, well! All in good time, I suppose."

Mr Maxwell did not sit down, though Elizabeth did, but walked about the room, looking out first at one window and then at the other in a way that startled her.

"Well," she said after a little, "I am waiting for your news."

"News? I have no news—yes, I have something to say. I have been waiting these two years to say it—may I speak, Elizabeth?"

And then he sat down on the sofa beside her. To that which he had to say Elizabeth listened with a surprise which would have been painful to her friend if something more than surprise had not soon appeared.

In a few words he told her of the discovery he had made soon after his return home two years ago, and how he had thought nothing else right or possible but to wait patiently till the two years of probation were over to see what might befall. He had not always waited patiently, he acknowledged. He had had little hope that Miss Holt had more than friendship to give him, and believed himself to be content with that for the present, till he had known how, after her father's death, some one else was asking for the hand for which he had no right to ask, and then it had gone hard with him.

He had not been blind to Clifton's hopes and pretensions, and he had been for some time quite aware that whatever Miss Langden might have to give to Clifton, she had only friendship to give to him. But he had remained silent because he believed himself bound not to speak to Elizabeth till the two years were over. And now they were over.

Mr Langden, knowing that his plan was to visit them soon, considered that he ought to know how he was to be received, and had insisted that his daughter should tell him her mind distinctly as to her future. It is not to be supposed that she did that altogether, but she acknowledged that her views of life and duty had somewhat changed, and she feared it would not be for their mutual happiness to renew her engagement with Mr Maxwell. A little note to that effect was inclosed in her father's letter which had reached him this morning, and certainly the minister had lost no time.

If Elizabeth hesitated to answer the question which came next, it was not for a reason that seemed to trouble the questioner much. She was not sure that she would make a good minister's wife—and especially she was not sure that she would make a good minister's wife for Gershom. But all that was put aside for the present. She was not afraid to trust her happiness in the hands of her friend. She was willing to share his life and his labours, and to do what she could to aid him in his work. And with that her friend was well content.

When he said something of the inequality of their relations to each other, because of that which she possessed, she declared herself willing to let all that pass into the hands of her brothers, and to share the parsonage and comparative poverty with him. Whether she was showing her usual wisdom and prudence in making such a declaration, there was no one there to decide, and when the right time came for the decision it was not left in her hands.

Clifton did not return home triumphant, as Elizabeth had never doubted that he would. He was well pleased to hear all she had to tell him of the new happiness that had come into her life; but he had nothing to tell her in return. By and by she heard, through Mr Maxwell, that Miss Langden had gone with her aunt to pass at least a year in Europe, and then Clifton told her that he had known her plans all along. He said little about his disappointment, indeed he did not acknowledge himself disappointed. But he did not succeed in concealing it from Elizabeth. He went on as usual with all that he had to do, with no less interest and energy, and with no less success than before.

Mr Langden paid a visit to Gershom in the following spring, and there was perfect confidence and satisfaction between him and Clifton as far as business relations were concerned. And hearing his daughter's name frequently mentioned by him, and taking some other things into consideration, Elizabeth could not but hope that in good time all things would end as her brother desired, and since he was silent, she did not think it would be right for her to speak.

But it did not all end as Clifton wished it to end. Miss Langden returned with her aunt at the close of the year, as had been expected, but she returned engaged to marry a New York gentleman whom they had met abroad. She and Clifton had never been engaged. Her father had forbidden the young man to speak to her till the two years of Mr Maxwell's waiting were over, and before that time the European trip was decided on and close at hand.

This meeting and parting at that time had been all that Clifton could desire, except that she had refused to bind herself by a promise to him, and her aunt had sustained her in this, as was perhaps right, knowing all that she knew. Without her promise Clifton had trusted her entirely, and doubtless she meant to be true to him.

But temptation came in the form of wealth and family and fashion, and her aunt was at hand to show her the advantages of these things. Indeed, it must be said the young lady saw them for herself only too clearly, and was glad that she had no promise to break to secure them.

If there was any comfort in the knowledge that her father was disappointed and indignant at what she had done without his knowledge or consent, Clifton had that comfort, but it possibly did not go far to help him. He said little about it, but it went hard with him for a while.

However, he did not make his misery an excuse for neglecting his duty. He was past the age for such folly now and besides, he was too really interested in his work not to find it a resource in the time of his trouble, and the changes which his sister had feared might follow such disappointment, did not come.

"And after all," she said, comforting herself, "he will get over it in time." Which was perfectly true.

The new dam and the new establishments of various sorts, which followed its completion, did much for Gershom. That is to say, they increased the population and the wealth of the place, and made it more than ever the centre of the surrounding country as to all business transactions. But it is a question whether it made it a pleasanter place of residence for any of our friends there. A state of transition from a country village to a country town of some importance is never pleasant for the old residents for a time. But progress is to be desired for all that, and Gershom is now an incorporated town with a mayor and council-men of its own, and on the whole it may be considered that its prosperity is established on a good foundation.

Changes came to the people also, some of them to be rejoiced over, and some of them not. The High-School lost Mr Burnet as a teacher, which, considering his utter inability to fall in with certain new-fangled notions as to schools and schoolmasters, which the influx of new-comers brought with it, was not a bad thing for him, whatever it might be for the school. He went home to Scotland to take possession of some money left to him by an elder brother, who had been a rich man. He came back, however, to make his home in Canada, as people who have lived in it for any length of time are almost sure to do.

He brought back with him his two daughters, bonnie lassies of fifteen and sixteen, and took up his abode with them in the house that had been the parsonage. The big house on the hill answered the purpose of a parsonage now. His daughters were nice, merry girls, but they were quite ignorant of housekeeping matters, and they did not get on very well with the new ways of the place for a while. They had, perhaps, been too much restrained by the friends who had brought them up, for some of the staid people of Gershom thought that they did not know how to use their liberty wisely.

Perhaps their father thought so too, and that he needed help to guide them; at any rate, to the surprise of most people, he asked Miss Betsey Holt to come and take care of them, and of himself also, and after some hesitation, caused by doubt as to how "mother and Cynthy and Ben would get along without her," she consented.

All eyes were on the household for a time, for dutiful submission on the part of the young step-daughters was considered doubtful by a good many of their friends. It is likely that Betsey had her own troubles with them till they knew her better, but no one in Gershom was the wiser for anything that she told them, and things righted themselves in time, as they always do where good and sensible people are concerned.

Mark Varney redeemed his farm and moor, and carried his mother and his little daughter home again when Mr Maxwell was married. His farm was not so large after a time, for a part of it was laid out in building lots for the new village, and Mark, as the neighbours declared, was soon "well-to-do," and doing well.

And though he never made so good a speech again as he made that day at the picnic, he has done for many a suffering and miserable man what in the first days of his coming to Gershom, Mr Maxwell did for him. He has followed, and comforted, and brought back to life and hope more than one or two poor besotted wretches, whom the rising prosperity of Gershom drew thither in the hope of getting bread. And he has never grown weary of the work, though sometimes he has had to grieve over ill-success.

It would be going beyond the truth to say that all Gershom was satisfied when the engagement of Miss Holt and the minister was announced, because there are some people who are never satisfied. But they whose opinion they valued most were satisfied. Mrs Fleming and Cousin Betsey had been hoping for it—almost expecting it all along, and one or two of Elizabeth's special old-lady friends acknowledged that they had been praying for such a marriage all the while. As for Katie, it was in her eyes the only fitting end to the romance which she had guessed at long ago, and which she had been

secretly and silently watching all these years.

As to whether or not she made a good minister's wife, Elizabeth was never quite sure. But the minister was content, and so were most of the people. And even those who were never quite contented with anything, acknowledged that "she did as well as she knew how," and that would be high praise for the most of us.

Clifton lived in the old home with them, for his good and their pleasure, till the time came when he made a home of his own, which, considering all things, was not so very long a time after all.

Although Jacob's change from the first place to the second both in the business and in the town was not pleasant to him, it was wholesome. He had never been equal to the *rôle* of the great man of the place, and after the first feelings of humiliation wore away, and their affairs began to look prosperous again, the fact that "two heads are better than one" made itself apparent to him even more clearly than had been the case in the days when he found his father unable, and his brother unwilling, to give him help and counsel.

He came to be much better liked by his neighbours than he used to be, and was really a better man. He had fewer worries and fewer temptations, and though he was not what might be called "a shining light" either in the church or in the world, it was the opinion of his brethren and townsmen that his troubles had been blessed to him, and that he was getting along—not very fast, but in the right direction.

But that which did most for Jacob in his time of trouble was the knowledge of Mr Fleming's forgiveness and friendship. It is not likely that he had ever acknowledged, even to himself, that he had sinned against him through his son more than others had done, but a sense of the old man's silent anger had always been in him, and had been painful and humiliating to him—how painful he knew by the sense of relief he experienced whenever they came in contact afterward. He no longer stepped aside when he saw him approaching, so that the neighbours should not remark about the old man's steadily averted face. They had never much to say to each other, but they met and exchanged kindly greetings as other men did, and all Gershom saw the change that had come over them both. Even his cousin Betsey grew friendly and frank in her intercourse with him and his wife, and that was a change certainly.

Few people ever knew just what had brought about this changed state of feeling. There was nothing to tell which Jacob cared to repeat. It would have done no good to bring up the old, sad story again, he well knew, and he said little about it even to his wife.

As for Mr Fleming—and indeed all the Flemings—the joyful tidings that the letter brought on that fair September morning were too sacred and sweet to be discussed much even among themselves. Katie always held that her grandfather would have forgiven Jacob Holt all the same if the letter had never come, because there was the Lord's command clear and plain, "Forgive and ye shall be forgiven," and it must have come to that at last.

"And, indeed, Davie, it was near at hand before the letter came. The Lord had touched him. First there was the fear of losing you, and then the fear of losing grannie, and then the letter came from the son he had lost so long, and that was the last touch for which the rest had made him ready. Oh! how good He has been to us! Surely, surely, Davie, we can never through all our lives forget."

Mrs Fleming thought as Katie did, though they had never spoken together of the subject. In her innermost heart she had believed—though even to herself she had hardly put the thought into words—that on the subject of Jacob Holt's past misdeeds her husband was hardly responsible for his thoughts. The misery of his son's loss, not for this brief life only, but forever and ever, as he could not but believe, had taken such full possession of him as to leave him no power to struggle against the bitterness which became almost hatred as time went on. If he had died unforgiving, the Lord would have still received him, she had believed, and she had striven to content herself with this belief in silence, feeling how vain were spoken words to him.

"Only a miracle would make him see God's will in this; and I have no right to ask for that."

No miracle was wrought. The letter came, and was the last touch of the loving Hand which even at the worst times had wounded but to heal; and lying with his lips in the dust, but with eyes looking upward, the cloud parted, and he saw the face of God, and was at peace.

After this there came nothing to trouble these two old people as they moved softly down the hill together. Grannie was never very strong again after her long illness, and no longer took the lead in all that was done in the house—that was Katie's part in life for several years to come; but she was quite content to rest and to look at other folk busy with the work which had once been hers, and that does not always happen in the last days of a life so active and so full as hers had been.

And what was true of the grandmother was true of the grandfather as well. He seemed to have no more anxious thoughts about anything. He did not need to have while Davie stayed at home; but even after Davie went away, and the management of the farm fell for the most part into the less skillful hands of the younger brothers, their grandfather "took things easy," the lads said, and rarely found fault.

And so they had still a peaceful gloaming, these two old people, when their changeful day of life was drawing to a close. Only it was like the dawn rather than the gloaming, Katie said, because of the soft brightness that shone on them both. It was "light at evening time," and their last days were their best to themselves and to all by whom they were beloved.

For the last days were days of waiting for the change of which they spoke often to the bairns so dear, and to one another. Once, as Katie sat with her grandfather at the pasture-bars on Sabbath afternoon, she said to him—after many other words had been spoken between them—that she would like to put that verse on his grave-stone after he was gone:

"At evening time it shall be light."

But her grandfather said:

"Na, na, my lassie! If I have a grave-stone—which matters little—and if any verse at all be put upon it, let it be this:—

"'Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.'" Then Katie stooped and touched his hand with her lips, as she had done once

long ago, and said softly: “Yes, grandfather, so it shall be.” And so it was.

The End.

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