EFFIE OGILVIE:

THE STORY OF A YOUNG LIFE.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT,

AUTHOR OF "CHRONICLES OF CARLINGFORD," ETC.

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CHAPTER XIII.

Effie came towards him smiling, without apprehension. The atmosphere out of doors had not the same consciousness, the same suggestion in it which was inside. A young man's looks, which may be alarming within the concentration of four walls, convey no fear and not so much impression in the fresh wind blowing from the moors and the openness of the country road. To be sure it was afternoon and twilight coming on, which is always a witching hour.

He stood at the corner of the byeway

waiting for her as she came along, light-footed, in her close-fitting tweed dress, which made a dim setting to the brightness of her countenance. She had a little basket in her hand. She had been carrying a dainty of some kind to somebody who was ill. The wind in her face had brightened everything, her colour, her eyes, and even had, by a little tossing, found out some gleams of gold in the brownness of her hair. She was altogether sweet and fair in Fred's eyes — a creature embodying everything good and wholesome, everything that was simple and pure. She had a single rose in her hand, which she held up as she advanced.

"We are not like you, we don't get roses all the year round; but here is one, the last," she said, "from Uncle John's south wall."

It was not a highly-cultivated, scentless rose, such as the gardens at Allonby produced by the hundred, but one that was full of

fragrance, sweet as all roses once were. The outer leaves had been a little caught by the frost, but the heart was warm with life and sweetness. She held it up to him, but did not give it to him, as at first he thought she was going to do.

"I would rather have that one," he cried, "than all the roses which we get all the year round."

"Because it is so sweet?" said Effie. "Yes, that is a thing that revenges the poor folk. You can make the roses as big as a child's head, but for sweetness the little old ones in the cottage gardens are always the best."

"Everything is sweet, I think, that is native here."

"Oh!" said Effie, with a deep breath of pleasure, taking the compliment as it sounded, not thinking of herself in it. "I am glad to hear you say that! for I think so too—the clover, and the heather, and the haw-

thorn, and the meadow-sweet. There is a sweet-brier hedge at the manse that Uncle John is very proud of. When it is in blossom he always brings a little rose of it to me."

"Then I wish I might have that rose," the young lover said.

"From the sweet-brier? They are all dead long ago; and I cannot give you this one, because it is the last. Does winter come round sooner here, Mr. Dirom, than in—the South?"

What Effie meant by the South was no more than England—a country, according to her imagination, in which the sun blazed, and where the climate in summer was almost more than honest Scots veins could bear. That was not Fred's conception of the South.

He smiled in a somewhat imbecile way, and replied, "Everything is best here. Dark, and true, and tender is the North: no, not dark, that is a mistake of the poet. Fair,

and sweet, and true—is what he ought to have said."

"There are many dark people as well as fair in Scotland," said Effie; "people think we have all yellow hair. There is Uncle John, he is dark, and true, and tender—and our Eric. You don't know our Eric, Mr. Dirom?"

"I hope I shall some day. I am looking forward to it. Is he like you, Miss Effie?"

"Oh, he is dark. I was telling you: and Ronald—I think we are just divided like other people, some fair—some——"

"And who is Ronald?—another brother?"

"Oh, no—only a friend, in the same regiment."

Effie's colour rose a little, not that she meant anything, for what was Ronald to her? But yet there had been that reference of the Miss Dempsters which she had not understood, and which somehow threw Ronald into competition with Fred Dirom, so that Effie,

without knowing it, blushed. Then she said, with a vague idea of making up to him for some imperceptible injury, "Have you ever gone through our little wood?"

"I am hoping," said Fred, "that you will take me there now."

"But the gloaming is coming on," said Effie, "and the wind will be wild among the trees—the leaves are half off already, and the winds seem to shriek and tear them, till every branch shivers. In the autumn it is a little eerie in the wood."

"What does eerie mean? but I think I know; and nothing could be eerie," said Fred half to himself, "while you are there."

Effie only half heard the words: she was opening the little postern gate, and could at least pretend to herself that she had not heard them. She had no apprehensions, and the young man's society was pleasant enough. To be worshipped is pleasant. It makes one

so much more disposed to think well of one's self.

"Then come away," she said, holding the gate open, turning to him with a smile of invitation. Her bright face looked brighter against the background of the trees, which were being dashed about against an ominous colourless sky. All was threatening in the heavens, dark and sinister, as if a catastrophe were coming, which made the girl's bright tranquil face all the more delightful. How was it that she did not see his agitation? At the crisis of a long alarm there comes a moment when fear goes altogether out of the mind.

If Effie had been a philosopher she might have divined that danger was near merely from the curious serenity and quiet of her heart. The wooden gate swung behind them. They walked into the dimness of the wood side by side. The wind made a great sighing high up in the branches of the fir-

trees, like a sort of instrument—an Eolian harp of deeper compass than any shrieking strings could be. The branches of the lower trees blew about. There was neither the calm nor the sentiment that were conformable to a love tale. On the contrary, hurry and storm were in the air, a passion more akin to anger than to love. Effie liked those great vibrations and the rushing flood of sound. But Fred did not hear them. He was carried along by an impulse which was stronger than the wind.

"Miss Ogilvie," he said, "I have been talking to your father—I have been asking his permission—— Perhaps I should not have gone to him first. Perhaps—It was not by my own impulse altogether. I should have wished first to—— But it appears that here, as in foreign countries, it is considered—the best way."

Effie looked up at him with great surprise, her pretty eyebrows arched, but no sense of

special meaning as yet dawning in her eyes.

"My father?" she said, wondering.

Fred was not skilled in love-making. It had always been a thing he had wished, to feel himself under the influence of a grand passion: but he had never arrived at it till now; and all the little speeches which no doubt he had prepared failed him in the genuine force of feeling.

He stammered a little, looked at her glowing with tremulous emotion, then burst forth suddenly, "O Effie, forgive me; I cannot go on in that way. This is just all, that I've loved you ever since that first moment at Allonby when the room was so dark. I could scarcely see you in your white dress. Effie! it is not that I mean to be bold, to presume—I can't help it. It has been from the first moment. I shall never be happy unless—unless——"

He put his hand quickly, furtively, with

a momentary touch upon hers which held the rose, and then stood trembling to receive his sentence. Effie understood at last. She stood still for a moment panic-stricken, raising bewildered eyes to his. When he touched her hand she started and drew a step away from him, but found nothing better to say than a low frightened exclamation, "O Mr. Fred!"

"I have startled you. I know I ought to have begun differently, not to have brought it out all at once. But how could I help it? Effie! won't you give me a little hope? Don't you know what I mean? Don't you know what I want? O Effie! I am much older than you are, and I have been about the world a long time, but I have never loved any one but you."

Effie did not look at him now. She took her rose in both her hands and fixed her eyes upon that.

"You are very kind, you are too, too——

I have done nothing that you should think so much of me," she said.

"Done nothing? I don't want you to do anything; you are yourself, that is all. I want you to let me do everything for you. Effie, you understand, don't you, what I mean?"

"Yes, she said, "I think I understand: but I have not thought of it like that. I have only thought of you as a——"

Here she stopped, and her voice sank, getting lower and lower as she breathed out the last monosyllable. As a friend, was that what she was going to say? And was it true? Effie was too sincere to finish the sentence. It had not been quite as a friend: there had been something in the air—But she was in no position to reply to this demand he made upon her. It was true that she had not thought of it. It had been about her in the atmosphere, that was all.

"I know," he said, breaking in eagerly. "I did not expect you to feel as I do. There was nothing in me to seize your attention. Oh, I am not disappointed—I expected no more. You thought of me as a friend. Well! and I want to be the closest of friends. Isn't that reasonable? Only let me go on trying to please you. Only, only try to love me a little, Effie. Don't you think you could like a poor fellow who wants nothing so much as to please you?"

Fred was very much in earnest: there was a glimmer in his eyes, his face worked a little: there was a smile of deprecating, pleading tenderness about his mouth which made his lip quiver. He was eloquent in being so sincere. Effie gave a furtive glance up at him and was moved. But it was love and not Fred that moved her. She was profoundly affected, almost awe-stricken at the sight of that, but not at the sight of him.

"Oh," she said, "I like you already very much: but that is not—that is not—it is not—the same——"

"No," he said, "it is not the same—it is very different; but I shall be thankful for that, hoping for more. If you will only let me go on, and let me hope?"

Effie knew no reply to make; her heart was beating, her head swimming: they went on softly under the waving boughs a few steps, as in a dream. Then he suddenly took her hand with the rose in it, and kissed it, and took the flower from her fingers, which trembled under the novelty of that touch.

"You will give it to me now—for a token," he said, with a catching of his breath.

Effie drew away her hand, but she left him the rose. She was in a tremor of sympathetic excitement and emotion. How could she refuse to feel when he felt so

much? but she had nothing to say to him. So long as he asked no more than this, there seemed no reason to thwart him, to refuse—what? he had not asked for anything, only that she should like him, which indeed she did; and that he might try to please her. To please her! She was not so hard to please. She scarcely heard what he went on to say, in a flood of hasty words, with many breaks, and looks which she was conscious of, but did not resent. He seemed to be telling her about herself, how sweet she was, how true and good, what a happiness to know her, to be near her, to be permitted to walk by her side as he was doing. Effie heard it and did not hear, walking on in her dream, feeling that it was not possible any one could form such extravagant ideas of her, inclined to laugh, half-inclined to cry, in a strange enchantment which she could not break.

She heard her own voice say after a while, "Oh no, no—oh no, no—that is all wrong. I am not like that, it cannot be me you are meaning." But this protest floated away upon the air, and was unreal like all the rest. As for Fred, he was in an enchantment more potent still. Her half-distressed, half-subdued listening, her little protestation, her surprise, yet half-consent, and above all the privilege of pouring forth upon her the full tide of passionate words which surprised himself by their fluency and force, entirely satisfied him. Her youth, her gentle ignorance and innocence, which were so sweet, fully accounted for the absence of response.

He felt instinctively that it was sweeter that she should allow herself to be worshipped, that she should not be ready to meet him, but have to be wooed and entreated before she found a reply. These were all additional charms. He felt no want, nor was conscious of any drawback. The noise in

the tops of the fir-trees, the waving of the branches overhead, the rushing of the wind, were to Fred more sweet than any sound of hidden brooks, or all the tender rustling of the foliage of June.

Presently, however, there came a shock of awakening to this rapture, when the young pair reached the little gate which admitted into the garden of Gilston. Fred saw the house suddenly rising before him above the shrubberies, gray and solid and real, and the sight of it brought him back out of that magic circle. They both stopped short outside the door with a consciousness of reality which silenced the one and roused the other. In any other circumstances Effie would have asked him to come in. She stopped now with her hand on the gate, with a sense of the impossibility of inviting him now to cross that threshold. And Fred too stopped short. To go farther would be to risk the entire fabric of this sudden happiness.

He took her hand again, "Dear Effie, dearest Effie; good-night, darling, good-night."

"O Mr. Fred! but you must not call me these names, you must not think—— It is all such a surprise, and I have let you say too much. You must not think——"

"That I am to you what you are to me? Oh no, I do not think it; but you will let me love you? that is all I ask: and you will try to think of me a little. Effie, you will think of me—just a little—and of this sweet moment, and of the flower you have given me."

"Oh, I will not be able to help thinking," cried Effie. "But, Mr. Fred, I am just bewildered; I do not know what you have been saying. And I did not give it you. Don't suppose—oh don't suppose—— You must not go away thinking——"

"I think only that you will let me love you and try to please you. Good-night, darling, good-night."

Effie went through the garden falling back into her dream. She scarcely knew what she was treading on, the garden paths all dim in the fading light, or the flower-beds with their dahlias. She heard his footstep hurrying along towards the road, and the sound of his voice seemed to linger in the air—Darling! had any one ever called her by that name before? There was nobody to call her so. She was Uncle John's darling, but he did not use such words: and there was no one else to do it.

Darling! now that she was alone she felt the hot blush come up enveloping her from head to foot—was it Fred Dirom who had called her that, a man, a stranger! A sudden fright and panic seized her. His darling! what did that mean? To what had she bound herself? She could not be his darling without something in return. Effie paused half-way across the garden with a sudden impulse to run after him, to tell him

it was a mistake, that he must not think—But then she remembered that she had already told him that he must not think—and that he had said no, oh no, but that she was his darling. A confused sense that a great deal had happened to her, though she scarcely knew how, and that she had done something which she did not understand, without meaning it, without desiring it, came over her like a gust of the wind which suddenly seemed to have become chill, and blew straight upon her out of the colourless sky which was all white and black with its flying clouds. She stood still to think, but she could not think: her thoughts began to hurry like the wind, flying across the surface of her mind, leaving no trace.

There were lights in the windows of the drawing-room, and Effie could hear through the stillness the voice of her stepmother running on in her usual strain, and little Rory shouting and driving his coach in the

big easy-chair. She could not bear to go into the lighted room, to expose her agitated countenance to the comments which she knew would attend her, the questions, where she had been, and why she was so late? Effie had not a suspicion that her coming was eagerly looked for, and that Mrs. Ogilvie was waiting with congratulations; but she could not meet any eye with her story written so clearly in her face. She hurried up to her own room, and there sat in the dark pondering and wondering. "Think of me a little." Oh! should she ever be able to think of anything else all her life?

CHAPTER XIV.

EFFIE came down to dinner late—with eyes that betrayed themselves by unusual shining, and a colour that wavered from red to pale. She had put on her white frock hurriedly, forgetting her usual little ornaments in the confusion of her mind. To her astonishment Mrs. Ogilvie, who was waiting at the drawing-room door looking out for her, instead of the word of reproof which her lateness generally called forth, met her with a beaming countenance.

"Well, Miss Effie!" she said, "so you're too grand to mind that it's dinner-time. I suppose you've just had your little head turned with flattery and nonsense." And

to the consternation of her stepdaughter, Mrs. Ogilvie took her by the shoulders and gave her a hearty kiss upon her cheek. "I am just as glad as if I had come into a fortune," she said.

Mr. Ogilvie added a "humph!" as he moved on to the dining-room. And he shot a glance which was not an angry glance (as it generally was when he was kept waiting for his dinner) at his child.

"You need not keep the dinner waiting now that she has come," he said. Effie did not know what to make of this extraordinary kindness of everybody. Even old George did not look daggers at her as he took off the cover of the tureen. It was inconceivable; never in her life had her sin of being late received this kind of notice before.

When they sat down at table Mrs. Ogilvie gave a little shriek of surprise, "Why, where are your beads, Effie? Ye have

neither a bow, nor a bracelet, nor one single thing, but your white frock. I might well say your head was turned, but I never expected it in this way. And why did you not keep him to his dinner? You would have minded your ribbons that are so becoming to you, if he had been here."

"Let her alone," said Mr. Ogilvie, "she is well enough as she is."

"Oh yes, she's well enough, and more than well enough, considering how she has managed her little affairs. Take some of this trout, Effie. It's a very fine fish. It's just too good a dinner to eat all by ourselves. I was thinking we were sure to have had company. Why didn't you bring him in to his dinner, you shy little thing? You would think shame: as if there was any reason to think shame! Poor young man! I will take him into my own hands another time, and I will see he is not snubbed. Give Miss Effie a little of that

claret, George. She is just a little done out—what with her walk, and what with ——"

"I am not tired at all," said Effie with indignation. "I don't want any wine."

"You are just very cross and thrawn," said Mrs. Ogilvie, making pretence to threaten the girl with her finger. "You will have your own way. But to be sure there is only one time in the world when a woman is sure of having her own way, and I don't grudge it to you, my dear. Robert, just you let Rory be in his little chair till nurse comes for him. No, no, I will not have him given things to eat. I'ts very bad manners, and it keeps his little stomach out of order. Let him be. You are just making a fool of the bairn."

"Guide your side of the house as well as I do mine," said Mr. Ogilvie, aggrieved. He was feeding his little son furtively, with an expression of beatitude impossible to

describe. Effie was a young woman in whom it was true he took a certain interest; but her marrying or any other nonsense that she might take into her head, what were they to him? He had never taken much to do with the woman's side of the house. But his little Rory, that was a different thing. A splendid little fellow, just a little king. And what harm could a little bit of fish, or just a snap of grouse, do him? It was all women's nonsense thinking that slops and puddings and that kind of thing were best for a boy.

"My side of the house!" said Mrs. Ogilvie, with a little shriek; "and what might that be? If Rory is not my side of the house, whose side does he belong to? And don't you think that I would ever let you have the guiding of him. Oh, nurse, here you are! I am just thankful to see you; for Mr. Ogilvie will have his own way, and as sure as we're all living, that boy

will have an attack before to-morrow morning. Take him away and give him a little ——. Yes, yes, just something simple of that kind. Good-night, my bonnie little man. I would like to know what is my side if it isn't Rory? You are meaning the female side. Well, and if I had not more consideration for your daughter than you have for my son——"

"Listen to her!" said Mr. Ogilvie, "her son! I like that."

"And whose son may he be? But you'll not make me quarrel whatever you do—and on this night of all others. Effie, here is your health, my dear, and I wish you every good. We will have to write to Eric, and perhaps he might get home in time. What was that Eric said, Robert, about getting short leave? It is a very wasteful thing coming all the way from India, and only six weeks or so to spend at home. Still, if there was a good reason for it——"

"Is Eric coming home? have you got a letter? But you could not have got a letter since the morning," cried Effie.

"No; but other things may have happened since the morning," said Mrs. Ogilvie with a nod and a smile. Effie could not understand the allusions which rained upon her. She retreated more and more into herself, merely listening to the talk that went on across her. She sat at her usual side of the table, eating little, taking no notice. It did not occur to her that what had happened in the wood concerned any one but herself. After all, what was it? Nothing to disturb anybody, not a thing to be talked about. To try to please her—that was all he had asked, and who could have refused him a boon so simple? It was silly of her even, she said to herself, to be so confused by it, so absorbed thinking about it, growing white and red, as if something had happened; when nothing had

happened except that he was to try to please her—as if she were so hard to please!

But Effie was more and more disturbed when her stepmother turned upon her as soon as the dining-room door was closed, and took her by the shoulders again.

"You little bit thing, you little quiet thing!" said Mrs. Ogilvie. "To think *you* should have got the prize that never took any thought of it, whereas many another nice girl!—I am just as proud as if it was myself: and he is good as well as rich, and by no means ill-looking, and a very pleasant young man. I have always felt like a mother to you, Effie, and always done my duty, I hope. Just you trust in me as if I were your real mother. Where did ye meet him? And were you very much surprised? and what did he say?"

Effie grew red from the soles of her feet, she thought, to the crown of her head, shame or rather shamefacedness, its innocent

counterpart, enveloping her like a mantle. Her eyes fell before her stepmother's, but she shook herself free of Mrs. Ogilvie's hold.

"I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Oh fie, Effie, fie! You may not intend to show me any confidence, which will be very ill done on your part: but you cannot pretend not to know what I mean. It was me that had pity upon the lad, and showed him the way you were coming. I have always been your well-wisher, doing whatever I could. And to tell me that you don't know what I mean!"

Effie had her little obstinacies as well as another. She was not so perfect as Fred Dirom thought. She went and got her knitting,—a little stocking for Rory,—work which she was by no means devoted to on ordinary occasions. But she got it out now, and sat down in a corner at a distance from the table and the light, and began to knit as if her life depended upon it.

"I must get this little stocking finished. It has been so long in hand," she said.

"Well, that is true," said Mrs. Ogilvie, who had watched all Effie's proceedings with a sort of vexed amusement; "very true, and I will not deny it. You have had other things in your mind; still, to take a month to a bit little thing like that, that I could do in two evenings! But you're very industrious all at once. Will you not come nearer to the light?"

"I can see very well where I am," said Effie shortly.

"I have no doubt you can see very well where you are, for there is little light wanted for knitting a stocking. Still you would be more sociable if you would come nearer. Effie Ogilvie!" she cried suddenly, "you will never tell me that you have sent him away?"

Effie looked at her with defiance in her eyes, but she made no reply.

"Lord bless us!" said her stepmother;

"you will not tell me you have done such a thing? Effie, are you in your senses, girl? Mr. Fred Dirom, the best match in the county, that might just have who he liked,—that has all London to pick and choose from,—and yet comes out of his way to offer himself to a—to a—just a child like you. Robert," she said, addressing her husband, who was coming in tranquilly for his usual cup of tea, "Robert! grant us patience! I'm beginning to think she has sent Fred Dirom away!"

"Where has she sent him to?" said Mr. Ogilvie with a glance half angry, half contemptuous from under his shaggy eyebrows. Then he added, "But that will never do, for I have given the young man my word."

Effie had done her best to go on with her knitting, but the needles had gone all wrong in her hands: she had slipped her stitches, her wool had got tangled. She could not see what she was doing. She got

up, letting the little stocking drop at her feet, and stood between the two, who were both eyeing her so anxiously.

"I wish," she said, "that you would let me alone. I am doing nothing to anybody. I wish you wouldn't look at me like that. What have I done? I have done nothing that is wrong. Oh, I wish—I wish Uncle John was here!" she exclaimed suddenly, and in spite of herself and all her pride and defensive instincts, suddenly began to cry, like the child she still was.

"It would be a very good thing if he were here; he would perhaps bring you to your senses. A young man that you have kept dancing about you all the summer, and let him think you liked his society, and was pleased to see him when he came, and never a thought in your head of turning him from the door. And now when he has spoken to your father, and offered himself and all, in the most honourable way.

Dear bless me, Effie, what has the young man done to you that you have led him on like this, and made a fool of him, and then to send him away?"

"I have never led him on," cried Effie through her tears. "I have not made a fool of him. If he liked to come, that was nothing to anybody, and I never—never——"

"It is very easy to speak. Perhaps you think a young man has no pride? when they are just made up of it! Yes—you have led him on: and now he will be made a fool of before all the county. For everybody has seen it; it will run through the whole countryside; and the poor young man will just be scorned everywhere, that has done no harm but to think more of you than you deserve."

"There's far too much of this," said Mr. Ogilvie, who prided himself a little on his power to stop all female disturbances and to

assert his authority. "Janet, you'll let the girl alone. And, Effie, you'll see that you don't set up your face and answer back, for it is a thing I will not allow. Dear me, is that tea not coming? I will have to go away without it if it is not ready. I should have thought, with all the women there are in this house, it might be possible to get a cup of tea."

"And that is true indeed," said his wife, "but they will not keep the kettle boiling. The kettle should be always aboil in a well-cared-for house. I tell them so ten times in a day. But here it is at last. You see you are late, George; you have kept your master waiting. And Effie——"

But Effie had disappeared. She had slid out of the room under cover of old George and his tray, and had flown upstairs through the dim passages to her own room, where all was dark. There are moments where the darkness is more congenial than the

light, when a young head swims with a hundred thoughts, and life is giddy with its over-fulness, and a dark room is a hermitage and place of refuge soothing in its contrast with all that which is going through the head of the thinker, and all the pictures that float before her (as in the present case —or his) eyes. She had escaped like a bird into its nest: but not without carrying a little further disturbance with her.

The idea of Fred had hitherto conveyed nothing to her mind that was not flattering and soothing and sweet. But now there was a harsher side added to this amiable and tender one. She had led him on. She had given him false hopes and made him believe that she cared for him. Had she made him believe that she—cared for him? Poor Fred! He had himself put it in so much prettier a way. He was to try to please her, as if she had been the Queen. To try to please her! and she on her side was to try—to like him.

That was very different from those harsh accusations. There was nothing that was not delightful, easy, soothing in all that. They had parted such friends. And he had called her darling, which no one had ever called her before.

Her heart took refuge with Fred, who was so kind and asked for so little, escaping from her stepmother with her flood of questions and demands, and her father with his dogmatism. His word; he had given his word. Did he think that was to pledge her? that she was to be handed over to any one he pleased, because he had given his word? But Fred made no such claim—he was too kind for that. He was to try to please her; that was different altogether.

And then Effie gradually forgot the episode downstairs, and began to think of the dark trees tossed against the sky, and the road through the wood, and the look of her young lover's eyes which she had not ven-

tured to meet, and all the things he said which she did not remember. She did not remember the words, and she had not met the look, but yet they were both present with her in her room in the dark, and filled her again with that confused, sweet sense of elevation, that self-pleasure which it would be harsh to call vanity, that bewildered consciousness of worship. It made her head swim and her heart beat. To be loved was so strange and beautiful. Perhaps Fred himself was not so imposing. She had noticed in spite of herself how the wind had blown the tails of his coat and almost forced him on against his will. He was not the hero of whom Effie, like other young maidens, had dreamed. But yet her young being was thrilled and responsive to the magic in the air, and touched beyond measure by that consciousness of being loved.

Fred came next morning eager and wistful and full of suppressed ardour, but with

a certain courage of permission and sense that he had a right to her society, which was half irksome and half sweet. He hung about all the morning, ready to follow, to serve her, to get whatever she might want, to read poetry to her, to hold her basket while she cut the flowers—the late flowers of October—to watch while she arranged them, saying a hundred half-articulate things that made her laugh and made her blush, and increased every moment the certainty that she was no longer little Effie whom everybody had ordered about, but a little person of wonderful importance—a lady like the ladies in Shakespeare, one for whom no comparison was too lofty, and no name too sweet.

It amused Effie in the bottom of her heart, and yet it touched her: she could not escape the fascination. And so it came about that without any further question, without going any farther into herself, or

perceiving how she was drawn into it, she found herself bound and pledged for life.

Engaged to Fred Dirom! She only realized the force of it when congratulations began to arrive from all the countryside—letters full of admiration and good wishes; and when Doris and Phyllis rushed upon her and took possession of her, saying a hundred confusing things. Effie was frightened, pleased, flattered, all in one. And everybody petted and praised her as if she had done some great thing.

CHAPTER XV.

"AND when is it going to be?" Miss Dempster said.

The ladies had come to call in their best gowns. Miss Beenie's was puce, an excellent silk of the kind Mrs. Primrose chose for wear—and Miss Dempster's was black satin, a little shiny by reason of its years, but good, no material better. These dresses were not brought out for every occasion; but to-day was exceptional. They did not approve of Effie's engagement, yet there was no doubt but it was a great event. They had been absent from home for about three weeks, so that their congratulations came late.

"I don't know what you mean by *it;* there is nothing going to be," said Effie, very red and angry. She had consented, it was true, in a way; but she had not yet learnt to contemplate any practical consequences, and the question made her indignant. Her temper had been tried by a great many questions, and by a desire to enter into her confidence, and to hear a great deal about Fred, and how it all came about, which her chief friend Mary Johnston and some others had manifested. She had nothing to say to them about Fred, and she could not herself tell how it all came about; but it seemed the last drop in Effie's cup when she was asked when it was to be.

"I should say your father and Mrs. Ogilvie would see to that; they are not the kind of persons to let a young man shilly-shally," said Miss Dempster. "It is a grand match, and I wish ye joy, my dear. Still, I would like to hear a little more about it: for

money embarked in business is no inheritance; it's just here to-day and gone to-morrow. I hope your worthy father will be particular about the settlements. He should have things very tight tied down. I will speak to him myself."

"My sister has such a head for business," Miss Beenie said. "Anybody might make a fool of me: but the man that would take in Sarah, I do not think he is yet born."

"No, I am not an easy one to take in," said Miss Dempster. "Those that have seen as much of the ways of the world as I have, seldom are. I am not meaning that there would be any evil intention: but a man is led into speculation, or something happens to his ships, or he has his money all shut up in ventures. I would have a certain portion realized and settled, whatever might happen, if it was me."

"And have you begun to think of your things, Effie?" Miss Beenie said.

At this Miss Effie jumped up from her chair, ready to cry, her countenance all ablaze with indignation and annoyance.

"I think you want to torment me," she cried. "What things should I have to think of? I wish you would just let me be. What do I know about all that? I want only to be let alone. There is nothing going to happen to me."

"Dear me, what is this?" said Mrs. Ogilvie coming in, "Effie in one of her tantrums and speaking loud to Miss Dempster! I hope you will never mind; she is just a little off her head with all the excitement and the flattery, and finding herself so important. Effie, will you go and see that Rory is not troubling papa? Take him up to the nursery or out to the garden. It's a fine afternoon, and a turn in the garden would do him no harm, nor you either, for you're looking a little flushed. She is just the most impracticable thing I

ever had in my hands," she added, when Effie, very glad to be released, escaped out of the room. "She will not hear a word. You would think it was just philandering, and no serious thought of what's to follow in her head at all."

"It would be a pity," said Miss Dempster, "if it was the same on the other side. Young men are very content to amuse themselves if they're let do it; they like nothing better than to love and to ride away.

"You'll be pleased to hear," said Mrs. Ogilvie, responding instantly to this challenge "that it's very, very different on the other side. Poor Fred, I am just very sorry for him. He cannot bring her to the point. She slips out of it, or she runs away. He tells me she will never say anything to him, but just 'It is very nice now—or—we are very well as we are.' He is anxious to be settled, poor young man, and nothing can be

more liberal than what he proposes. But Effie is just very trying. She thinks life is to be all fun, and no changes. To be sure there are allowances to be made for a girl that is so happy at home as Effie is, and has so many good friends."

"Maybe her heart is not in it," said Miss Dempster; "I have always thought that our connection, young Ronald Sutherland——"

"It's a dreadful thing," cried Miss Beenie, "to force a young creature's affections. If she were to have, poor bit thing, another Eemage in her mind——"

"Oh!" cried Mrs. Ogilvie, provoked. She would have liked to shake them, the old cats! as she afterwards said. But she was wise in her generation, and knew that to quarrel was always bad policy. "What Eemage could there be?" she said with a laugh. Effie is just full of fancies, and slips through your fingers whenever you would bring her to look at anything in earnest;

but that is all. No, no, there is no Eemage, unless it was just whim and fancy. As for Ronald, she never gave him a thought, nor anybody else. She is like a little wild thing, and to catch her and put the noose round her is not easy; but as for Eemage! cried Mrs. Ogilvie, exaggerating the pronunciation of poor Miss Beenie, which was certainly old fashioned. The old ladies naturally did not share her laughter. They looked at each other, and rose and shook out their rustling silken skirts.

"There is no human person," said Miss Dempster, "that is beyond the possibility of a mistake; and my sister and me, we may be mistaken. But you will never make me believe that girlie's heart is in it. Eemage or no eemage, I'm saying nothing. Beenie is just a trifle romantic. She may be wrong. But I give you my opinion; that girlie's heart's not in it: and nothing will persuade me to the contrary. Effie is a

delicate bit creature. There are many things that the strong might never mind, but that she could not bear. It's an awful responsibility, Mrs. Ogilvie."

"I will take the responsibility," said that lady, growing angry, as was natural. "I am not aware that it's a thing any person has to do with except her father and me."

"If you take it upon that tone—Beenie, we will say good-day."

"Good-day to ye, Mrs. Ogilvie. I am sure I hope no harm will come of it; but it's an awfu' responsibility," Miss Beenie said, following her sister to the door. And we dare not guess what high words might have followed had not the ladies, in going out, crossed Mr. Moubray coming in. They would fain have stopped him to convey their doubts, but Mrs. Ogilvie had followed them to the hall in the extreme politeness of a quarrel, and they could not do this under her very eyes. Uncle John perceived, with

the skilled perceptions of a clergyman, that there was a storm in the air.

"What is the matter?" he said, as he followed her back to the drawing-room. "Is it about Effie? But, of course, that is the only topic now."

"Oh, you may be sure it's about Effie. And all her own doing, and I wish you would speak to her. It is my opinion that she cares for nobody but you. Sometimes she *will* mind what her Uncle John says to her."

"Poor little Effie! often I hope; and you too, who have always been kind to her."

"I have tried," said Mrs. Ogilvie, sitting down and taking out her handkerchief. She appeared to be about to indulge herself in the luxury of tears: she looked hard at that piece of cambric, as though determining the spot which was to be applied to her eyes—and then she changed her mind.

"But I know it is a difficult position,"

she said briskly. "I think it very likely, in Effie's place, that I should not have liked a stepmother myself. But then you would think she would be pleased with her new prospects, and glad to get into her own house out of my way. If that was the case I would think it very natural. But no. I am just in that state about her that I don't know what I am doing. Here is a grand marriage for her, as you cannot deny, and she has accepted the man. But if either he or any one of us says a word about marriage, or her trousseau, or anything, she is just off in a moment. I am terrified every day for a quarrel: for who can say how long a young man's patience may last?"

"He has not had so very long to wait, nor much trial of his patience," said Uncle John, who was sensitive on Effie's account, and ready to take offence.

"No; he has perhaps not had long to wait. But there is nothing to wait for. His

father is willing to make all the settlements we can desire: and Fred is a partner, and gets his share. He's as independent as a man can be. And there's no occasion for delay. But she will not hear a word of it. I just don't know what to make of her. She likes him well enough for all I can see; but marriage she will not hear of. And if it is to be at the New Year, which is what he desires, and us in November now — I just ask you how are we ever to be ready when she will not give the least attention, or so much as hear a word about her clothes?"

"Oh, her clothes!" said Mr. Moubray, with a man's disdain.

"You may think little of them, but I think a great deal. It is all very well for gentlemen that have not got it to do. But what would her father say to me, or the world in general, or even yourself, if I let her go to her husband's house with a poor providing, or fewer things than other brides?

Whose fault would everybody say that was? And besides it's like a silly thing, not like a reasonable young woman. I wish you would speak to her. If there is one thing that weighs with Effie, it is the thought of what her Uncle John will say."

"But what do you want me to say?" asked the minister. His mind was more in sympathy with Effie's reluctance than with the haste of the others. There was nothing to be said against Fred Dirom. He was irreproachable, he was rich, he was willing to live within reach. Every circumstance was favourable to him.

But Mr. Moubray thought the young man might very well be content with what he had got, and spare his Effie a little longer to those whose love for her was far older at least, if not profounder, than his. The minister had something of the soreness of a man who is being robbed in the name of love.

Love! forty thousand lovers, he thought, reversing Hamlet's sentiment, could not have made up the sum of the love he bore his little girl. Marriage is the happiest state, no doubt: but yet, perhaps a man has a more sensitive shrinking from transplanting the innocent creature he loves into that world of life matured than even a mother has. He did not like the idea that his Effie should pass into that further chapter of existence, and become, not as the gods, knowing good and evil, but as himself, or any other. He loved her ignorance, her absence of all consciousness, her freedom of childhood. It is true she was no longer a child; and she loved—did she love? Perhaps secretly in his heart he was better pleased to think that she had been drawn by sympathy, by her reluctance that any one should suffer, and by the impulse and influence of everybody about her, rather than by any passion on her own side, into these toils.

"What do you want me to say?" He was a little softened towards the stepmother, who acknowledged honestly (she was on the whole a true sort of woman, meaning no harm) the close tie, almost closer than any other, which bound Effie to him. And he would not fail to Mrs. Ogilvie's trust if he could help it; but what was he to say?

Effie was in the garden when Uncle John went out. She had interpreted her stepmother's commission about Rory to mean that she was not wanted, and she had been glad to escape from the old ladies and all their questions and remarks. She was coming back from the wood with a handful of withered leaves and lichens when her uncle joined her. Effie had been seized with a fit of impatience of the baskets of flowers which Fred was always bringing. She preferred her bouquet of red and yellow leaves, which every day it was getting more difficult to

find. This gave Mr. Moubray the opening he wanted.

"You are surely perverse," he said, "my little Effie, to gather all these things, which your father would call rubbitch, when you have so many beautiful flowers inside."

"I cannot bear those grand flowers," said Effie, "they are all made out of wax, I think, and they have all the same scent. Oh, I know they are beautiful! They are too beautiful, they are made up things, they are not like nature. In winter I like the leaves best."

"You will soon have no leaves, and what will you do then? and, my dear, your life is to be spent among these bonnie things. You are not to have the thorns and the thistles, but the roses and the lilies, Effie; and you must get used to them. It is generally a lesson very easily learnt."

To this Effie made no reply. After a while she began to show that the late autumn

leaves, if not a matter of opposition, were not particularly dear to her—for she pulled them to pieces, unconsciously dropping a twig now and then, as she went on. And when she spoke, it was apparently with the intention of changing the subject.

"Is it really true," she said, "that Eric is coming home for Christmas? He said nothing about it in his last letter. How do they know?"

"There is such a thing as the telegraph, Effie. You know why he is coming. He is coming for your marriage."

Effie gave a start and quick recoil.

"But that is not going to be—oh, not yet, not for a long time."

"I thought that everybody wished it to take place at the New Year."

"Not me," said the girl. She took no care at all now of the leaves she had gathered with so much trouble, but strewed the ground with them as if for a procession to pass.

"Uncle John," she went on quickly and tremulously, "why should it be soon? I am quite young. Sometimes I feel just like a little child, though I may not be so very young in years."

"Nineteen!"

"Yes, I know it is not very young. I shall be twenty next year. At twenty you understand things better; you are a great deal more responsible. Why should there be any hurry? *He* is young too. You might help me to make them all see it. Everything is nice enough as it is now. Why should we go and alter, and make it all different? Oh, I wish you would speak to them, Uncle John."

"My dear, your stepmother has just given me a commission to bring you over to their way of thinking. I am so loth to lose you that my heart takes your side: but, Effie——"

"To lose me!" she cried, flinging away

the "rubbitch" altogether, and seizing his arm with both her hands. "Oh no, no, that can never be!"

"No, it will never be: and yet it will be as soon as you're married: and there is a puzzle for you, my bonnie dear. The worst of it is that you will be quite content, and see that it is natural it should be so: but I will not be content. That is what people call the course of nature. But for all that, I am not going to plead for myself. Effie, the change has begun already. A little while ago, and there was no man in the world that had any right to interfere with your own wishes: but now you know the thing is done. It is as much done as if you had been married for years. You must now not think only of what pleases yourself, but of what pleases him."

Effie was silent for some time, and went slowly along clinging to her uncle's arm.

At last she said in a low tone, "But he is pleased. He said he would try to please me; that was all that was said."

Uncle John shook his head.

"That may be all that is said, and it is all a young man thinks when he is in love. But, my dear, that means that you must please him. Everything is reciprocal in this world. And the moment you give your consent that he is to please you, you pledge yourself to consider and please him."

"But he is pleased. Oh! he says he will do whatever I wish."

"That is if you will do what he wishes, Effie. For what he wishes is what it all means, my dear. And the moment you put your hand in his, it is right that he should strive to have you, and fight and struggle to have you, and never be content till he has got you. I would myself think him a poor creature if he thought anything else."

There was another pause, and then Effie

said, clasping more closely her uncle's arm, "But it would be soon enough in a year or two—after there was time to think. Why should there be a hurry? After I am twenty I would have more sense; it would not be so hard. I could understand better. Surely that's very reasonable, Uncle John."

"Too reasonable," he said, shaking his head. "Effie, lift up your eyes and look me in the face. Are you sure that you are happy, my little woman? Look me in the face."

CHAPTER XVI.

"No, Beenie," said Miss Dempster solemnly, "her heart is not in it. Do you think it is possible at her age that a young creature could resist all the excitement and the importance, and the wedding presents and the wedding clothes? It was bad enough in our own time, but it's just twice as bad now when every mortal thinks it needful to give their present, and boxes are coming in every day for months. That's a terrible bad custom: it's no better than the penny weddings the poor people used to have. But to think a young thing would be quite indifferent to all that, if everything was natural, is more than I can understand."

"That's very true," said Miss Beenie, "and all her new things. If it was nothing but the collars and fichus that are so pretty nowadays, and all the new pocket-handkerchiefs."

"It's not natural," the elder sister said.

"And if you will remember, there was a wonderful look about the little thing's eyes when Ronald went away. To be sure there was Eric with him. She was really a little thing then, though now she's grown up. You may depend upon it that though maybe she may not be conscious of it herself, there is another Eemage in her poor bit little heart."

"Ye are too sentimental, Beenie. That's not necessary. There may be a shrinking without that. I know no harm of young Dirom. He's not one that would ever take my fancy, but still there's no harm in him. The stepmother is just ridiculous. She thinks it's her that's getting the elevation.

There will never be a word out of her mouth but Allonby if this comes to pass. But the heart of the little thing is not in it. She was angry; that was what her colour came from. It was no blush, yon; it was out of an angry and an unwilling mind. I have not lived to my present considerable age without knowing what a girl's looks mean."

"You are not so old as you make yourself out. A person would think you were just a Methusaleh; when it is well known there is only five years between us," said Miss Beenie in an aggrieved tone.

"I always say there's a lifetime—so you may be easy in your mind so far as that goes. I am just as near a Methusaleh as I've any desire to be. I wonder now if Mrs. Ogilvie knows what has happened about Ronald, and that he's coming home. To be a well-born woman herself, she has very little understanding about inter-mar-

riages and that kind of thing. It's more than likely that she doesn't know. And to think that young man should come back, with a nice property though it's small, and in a condition to marry, just when this is settled! Bless me! if he had come three months ago! Providence is a real mystery!" said Miss Dempster, with the air of one who is reluctant to blame, but cannot sincerely excuse. "Three months more or less, what were they to auld Dauvid Hay? He was just doited; he neither knew morning nor evening: and most likely that would have changed the lives of three other folk. It is a great mystery to me."

"He will maybe not be too late yet," said Miss Beenie significantly.

"Woman, you are just without conscience," cried her sister. "Would that be either right or fair? No, no, they must just abide by their lot as it is shaped out. It would be a cruel thing to drop that poor lad now

for no fault of his—just because she did not know her own mind. No, no, I have Ronald's interest much at heart, and I'm fond in a way of that bit little Effie, though she's often been impertinent—but I would never interfere. Bless me! If I had known there was to be so little satisfaction got out of it, that's a veesit I never would have paid. I am turning terrible giddy. I can scarcely see where I'm going. I wish I had stayed at home."

"If we had not just come away as it were in a fuff," said Miss Beenie, "you would have had your cup of tea, and that would have kept up your strength."

"Ay, *if*," said Miss Dempster. "That's no doubt an argument for keeping one's temper, but it's a little too late. Yes, I wish I had got my cup of tea. I am feeling very strange; everything's going round and round before my eyes. Eh, I wish I was at my own door!"

"It's from want of taking your food. You've eaten nothing this two or three days. Dear me, Sarah, you're not going to faint at your age! Take a hold of my arm and we'll get as far as Janet Murray's. She's a very decent woman. She will soon make you a cup of tea."

"No, no—I'll have none of your arm. I can just manage," said Miss Dempster. But her face had grown ashy pale. "We're poor creatures," she murmured, "poor creatures: it's all the want of—the want of—that cup o' tea."

"You'll have to see the doctor," said Miss Beenie. "I'm no more disposed to pin my faith in him than you are; but there are many persons that think him a very clever man——"

"No, no, no doctor. Old Jardine's son that kept a shop in—— No, no; I'll have no doctor. I'll get home—I'll——".

"Oh," cried Miss Beenie. "I will just

run on to Janet Murray's and bid her see that her kettle is aboil. You'll be right again when you've had your tea."

"Yes, I'll be—all right," murmured the old lady. The road was soft and muddy with rain, the air very gray, the clouds hanging heavy and full of moisture over the earth. Miss Beenie hastened on for a few steps, and then she paused, she knew not why, and looked round and uttered a loud cry; there seemed to be no one but herself on the solitary country road. But after a moment she perceived a little heap of black satin on the path. Her first thought, unconscious of the catastrophe, was for this cherished black satin, the pride of Miss Dempster's heart.

"Oh, your best gown!" she cried, and hurried back to help her sister out of the mire. But Miss Beenie soon forgot the best gown. Miss Dempster lay huddled up among the scanty hawthorn bushes of the broken

hedge which skirted the way. Her hand had caught against a thorny bramble which supported it. She lay motionless, without speaking, without making a sign, with nothing that had life about her save her eyes. Those eyes looked up from the drawn face with an anxious stare of helplessness, as if speech and movement and every faculty had got concentrated in them.

Miss Beenie gave shriek after shriek as she tried to raise up the prostrate figure. "Oh, Sarah, what's the matter? Oh, try to stand up; oh, let me get you up upon your feet! Oh, my dear, my dear, try if ye cannot get up and come home! Oh, try! if it's only as far as Janet Murray's. Oh, Sarah!" she cried in despair, "there never was anything but you could do it, if you were only to try."

Sarah answered not a word, she who was never without a word to say; she did not move; she lay like a log while poor Beenie

put her arms under her head and laboured to raise her. Beenie made the bush tremble with spasmodic movement, but did no more than touch the human form that lay stricken underneath. And some time passed before the frightened sister could realize what had happened. She went on with painful efforts trying to raise the inanimate form, to drag her to the cottage, which was within sight, to rouse and encourage her to the effort which Miss Beenie could not believe her sister incapable of making.

"Oh, Sarah, my bonnie woman!—oh, Sarah, Sarah, do you no hear me, do you not know me? Oh, try if ye cannot get up and stand upon your feet. I'm no able to carry you, but I'll support you. Oh, Sarah, Sarah, will you no try!"

Then there burst upon the poor lady all at once a revelation of what had happened. She threw herself down by her sister with a shriek that seemed to rend the skies. "Oh,

good Lord," she cried, "oh, good Lord! I canna move her, I canna move her; my sister has gotten a stroke——"

"What are you talking about?" said a big voice behind her; and before Miss Beenie knew, the doctor, in all the enormity of his big beard, his splashed boots, his smell of tobacco, was kneeling beside her, examining Miss Dempster, whose wide open eyes seemed to repulse him, though she herself lay passive under his hand. He kept talking all the time while he examined her pulse, her looks, her eyes.

"We must get her carried home," he said. "You must be brave, Miss Beenie, and keep all your wits about you. I am hoping we will bring her round. Has there been anything the matter with her, or has it just come on suddenly to-day?"

"Oh, doctor, she has eaten nothing. She has been very feeble and pale. She never would let me say it. She is very masterful;

she will never give in. Oh that I should say a word that might have an ill meaning, and her lying immovable there!"

"There is no ill meaning. It's your duty to tell me everything. She *is* a very masterful woman; by means of that she may pull through. And were there any preliminaries to-day? Yes, that's the right thing to do—if it will not tire you to sit in that position——"

"Tire me!" cried Miss Beenie—"if it eases her."

"I cannot say it eases her. She is past suffering for the moment. Lord bless me, I never saw such a case. Those eyes of hers are surely full of meaning. She is perhaps more conscious than we think. But anyway, it's the best thing to do. Stay you here till I get something to carry her on——"

"What is the matter?" said another voice, and Fred Dirom came hastily up. "Why,

doctor, what has happened—Miss Dempster?" —he said this with an involuntary cry of surprise and alarm. "I am afraid this is very serious," he cried.

"Not so serious as it soon will be if we stand havering," cried the doctor. "Get something, a mattress, to put her on. Man, look alive. There's a cottage close by. Ye'll get something if ye stir them up. Fly there, and I'll stay with them to give them a heart."

"Oh, doctor, you're very kind—we've perhaps not been such good friends to ye as we might——"

"Friends, toots!" said the doctor, "we're all friends at heart."

Meantime the stir of an accident had got into the air. Miss Beenie's cries had no doubt reached some rustic ears; but it takes a long time to rouse attention in those regions.

"What will yon be? It would be somebody crying. It sounded awfu' like some-

body crying. It will be some tramp about the roads; it will be somebody frighted at the muckle bull——" Then at last there came into all minds the leisurely impulse—"Goodsake, gang to the door and see——"

Janet Murray was the first to run out to her door. When her intelligence was at length awakened to the fact that something had happened, nobody could be more kind. She rushed out and ran against Fred Dirom, who was hurrying towards the cottage with a startled face.

"Can you get me a mattress or something to carry her upon?" he cried, breathless.

"Is it an accident?" said Janet.

"It is a fit. I think she is dying," cried the young man much excited.

Janet flew back and pulled the mattress off her own bed. "It's no a very soft one," she said apologetically. Her man had come out of the byre, where he was ministering to a sick cow, an invalid of vast importance

whom he left reluctantly; another man developed somehow out of the fields from nowhere in particular, and they all hurried towards the spot where Miss Beenie sat on the ground, without a thought of her best gown, holding her sister's head on her breast, and letting tears fall over the crushed bonnet which the doctor had loosened, and which was dropping off the old gray head.

"Oh, Sarah, can ye hear me? Oh, Sarah, do you know me? I'm your poor sister Beenie. Oh if ye could try to rouse yourself up to say a word. There was never anything you couldna do if ye would only try."

"She'll not try this time," said the doctor. "You must not blame her. There's one who has her in his grips that will not hear reason; but we'll hope she'll mend; and in the meantime you must not think she can help it, or that she's to blame."

"To blame!" cried Beenie, with that acute cry. "I am silly many a time; but she is

never to blame." In sight of the motionless figure which lay in her arms, Miss Beenie's thoughts already began to take that tinge of enthusiastic loyalty with which we contemplate the dead.

"Here they come, God be thanked!" said the doctor. And by and by a little procession made its way between the fields. Miss Dempster, as if lying in state on the mattress, Beenie beside her crying and mourning. She had followed at first, but then it came into her simple mind with a shiver that this was like following the funeral, and she had roused herself and taken her place a little in advance. It was a sad little procession, and when it reached the village street, all the women came out to their doors to ask what was the matter, and to shake their heads, and wonder at the sight.

The village jumped to the fatal conclusion with that desire to heighten every event which is common to all communities: and

the news ran over the parish like lightning.

"Miss Dempster, Rosebank, has had a stroke. She has never spoken since. She is just dead to this world, and little likelihood she will ever come back at her age." That was the first report; but before evening it had risen to the distinct information—Miss Dempster, Rosebank, is dead!"

Fred Dirom had been on his way to Gilston, when he was stopped and ordered into the service of the sick woman. He answered to the call with the readiness of a kind heart, and was not only the most active and careful executor of the doctor's orders, but remained after the patient was conveyed home, to be ready, he said, to run for anything that was wanted, to do anything that might be necessary—nay, after all was done that could be done, to comfort Miss Beenie, who almost shed her tears upon the young man's shoulder.

"Eh," she said, "there's the doctor we have aye thought so rough, and not a gentleman—and there's you, young Mr. Dirom, that Sarah was not satisfied with for Effie; and you've just been like two ministering angels sent out to minister to them that are in sore trouble. Oh, but I wonder if she will ever be able to thank you herself."

"Not that any thanks are wanted," cried Fred cheerfully; "but of course she will, much more than we deserve."

"You've just been as kind as—I cannot find any word to say for it, both the doctor and you."

"He is a capital fellow, Miss Dempster."

"Oh, do not call me Miss Dempster—not such a thing, not such a thing! I'm Miss Beenie. The Lord preserve me from ever being called Miss Dempster," she cried, with a movement of terror. But Fred neither laughed at her nor her words. He was very respectful of her, full of pity and almost ten-

derness, not thinking of how much advantage to himself this adventure was to prove. It ran over the whole countryside next day, and gained "that young Dirom" many a friend.

And Effie, to whom the fall of Miss Dempster was like the fall of one of the familiar hills, and who only discovered how much she loved those oldest of friends after she began to feel as if she must lose them —Effie showed her sense of his good behaviour in the most entrancing way, putting off the shy and frightened aspect with which she had staved off all discussion of matters more important, and beginning to treat him with a timid kindness and respect which bewildered the young man. Perhaps he would rather even now have had something warmer and less (so to speak) accidental: but he was a wise young man, and contented himself with what he could get.

Effie now became capable of "hearing

reason," as Mrs. Ogilvie said. She no longer ran away from any suggestion of the natural end of all such engagements. She suffered it to be concluded that her marriage should take place at Christmas, and gave at last a passive consent to all the arrangements made for her. She even submitted to her step-mother's suggestions about the trousseau, and suffered various dresses to be chosen, and boundless orders for linen to be given. That she should have a fit providing and go out of her father's house as it became a bride to do, with dozens of every possible under-garments, and an inexhaustible supply of handkerchiefs and collars, was the ambition of Mrs. Ogilvie's heart.

She said herself that Miss Dempster's "stroke," from which the old lady recovered slowly, was "just a providence." It brought Effie to her senses, it made her see the real qualities of the young man whom she had not prized at his true value, and whose super-

iority as the best match in the countryside, she could not even now be made to see. Effie yielded, not because he was the best match, but because he had shown so kind a heart, and all the preparations went merrily forward, and the list of the marriage guests was made out and everything got ready.

But yet for all that, there was full time for that slip between the cup and the lip which so often comes in, contrary to the dearest expectations, in human affairs.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE slip between the cup and the lip came in two ways. The first was the arrival from India—in advance of Eric who was to get the short leave which his stepmother thought such a piece of extravagance, in order to be present at the marriage of his only sister—of Ronald Sutherland, in order to take possession of the inheritance which had fallen to him on the death of his uncle.

It was not a very great inheritance—an old house with an old tower, the old "peel" of the Border, attached to it; a few farms, a little money, the succession of a family sufficiently well known in the country-side, but which had never been one of the great

families. It was not much certainly. It was no more to be compared with the possessions in fact and expectation of Fred Dirom than twilight is with day; but still it made a great difference.

Ronald Sutherland of the 111th, serving in India with nothing at all but his pay, and Ronald Sutherland of Haythorn with a commission in her Majesty's service, were two very different persons. Mrs. Ogilvie allowed that had old David Hay been so sensible as to die three years previously, she would not have been so absolutely determined that Ronald's suit should be kept secret from Effie; but all that was over, and there was no use thinking of it. It had been done "for the best"—and what it had produced was unquestionably the best.

If it had so happened that Effie had never got another "offer," then indeed there might have been something to regret; but as, on the contrary, she had secured the best match

in the county, her stepmother still saw no reason for anything but satisfaction in her own diplomacy. It had been done for the best; and it had succeeded, which is by no means invariably the case.

But Mrs. Ogilvie allowed that she was a little anxious about Ronald's first appearance at Gilston. It was inevitable that he should come; for all the early years of his life Gilston had been a second home to him. He had been in and out like one of the children of the house. Mrs. Ogilvie declared she had always said that where there were girls this was a most imprudent thing: but she allowed at the same time that it is difficult to anticipate the moment when a girl will become marriageable, and had better be kept out of knowing and sight of the ineligible, so long as that girl is a child. Consequently, she did not blame her predecessor, Effie's mother, for permitting an intimacy which at six was innocent

enough, though it became dangerous at sixteen.

"Even me," she said candidly, "I cannot throw my mind so far forward as to see any risks that little Annabella Johnston can run in seeing Rory every day—though sixteen years hence it will be different; for Rory, to be sure, will never be an eligible young man as long as his step-brother Eric is to the fore—and God forbid that anything should happen to Eric," she added piously.

On this ground, and also because Ronald had the latest news to give of Eric, it was impossible to shut him out of Gilston, though Mrs. Ogilvie could not but feel that it was very bad taste of him to appear with these troubled and melancholy airs, and to look at Effie as he did. It was not that he made any attempt to interfere with the settlement of affairs. He made the proper congratulations though in a very stiff and formal way, and said he hoped that they would be happy.

But there was an air about him which was very likely to make an impression on a silly, romantic girl.

He was handsomer than Fred Dirom—he was bronzed with Indian suns, which gave him a manly look. He had seen a little service, he was taller than Fred, stronger, with all those qualities which women specially esteem. And he looked at Effie when she was not observing—oh, but Mrs. Ogilvie said: "It is not an easy thing to tell when a girl is not observing!—for all that kind of thing they are always quick enough."

And as a matter of fact, Effie observed keenly, and most keenly, perhaps, when she had the air of taking no notice. The first time this long, loosely clothed, somewhat languid, although well-built and manly figure had come in, Effie had felt by the sudden jump of her heart that it was no ordinary visitor. He had been something like a second brother when he went away, Eric's invariable

companion, another Eric with hardly any individual claim of his own: but everything now was very different. She said to herself that this jump of her heart which had surprised her so much, had come when she heard his step drawing near the door, so that it must be surely his connection with Eric and not anything in himself that had done it; but this was a poor and unsatisfactory explanation.

After that first visit in which he had hoped that Miss Effie would be very happy, and said everything that was proper, Effie knew almost as well as if she had been informed from the first, all that had passed: his eyes conveyed to her an amount of information which he was little aware of. She recognized with many tremors and a strange force of divination, not only that there had been things said and steps taken before his departure of which she had never been told, but also, as well as if it had been

put into words, that he had come home, happy in the thought of the fortune which now would make him more acceptable in the eyes of the father and stepmother, building all manner of castles in the air; and that all these fairy fabrics had fallen with a crash, and he had awakened painfully from his dream to hear of her engagement, and that a few weeks more would see her Fred Dirom's wife.

The looks he cast at her, the looks which he averted, the thrill imperceptible to the others which went over him when he took her hand at coming and going, were all eloquent to Effie. All that she had felt for Fred Dirom at the moment when the genuine emotion in him had touched her to the warmest sympathy, was nothing like that which penetrated her heart at Ronald's hasty, self-restrained, and, as far as he was aware, self-concealing glance.

In a moment the girl perceived, with a

mingled thrill of painful pleasure and anguish, what might have been. It was one of those sudden perceptions which light up the whole moral landscape in a moment, as a sudden flash of lightning reveals the hidden expanse of storm and sea.

Such intimations are most often given when they are ineffectual—not when they might guide the mind to a choice which would secure its happiness, but after all such possibilities are over and that happy choice can never be made. When he had gone away Effie slid out of sight too, and sought the shelter of her room, that little sanctuary which had hid so many agitations within the last few weeks, but none so tremendous as this. The discovery seemed to stun her. She could only sit still and look at it, her bosom heaving, her heart beating loudly, painfully like a funeral toll against her breast.

So, she said to herself, *that* might have

been; and *this* was. No, she did not say it to herself: such discoveries are not made by any rational and independent action of mind. It was put before her by that visionary second which is always with us in all our mental operations, the spectator, "qui me resemblait comme mon frère," whom the poet saw in every crisis of his career. That spiritual spectator who is so seldom a counsellor, whose office is to show the might-have-beens of life and to confound the helpless, unwarned sufferer with the sight of his mistakes when they are past, set this swiftly and silently before her with the force of a conviction. This might have been the real hero, this was the true companion, the mate congenial, the one in the world for Effie. But in the moment of beholding she knew that it was never to be.

And this was not her fault—which made it the more confusing, the more mis-

erable. When it is ourselves who have made the mistake that spoils our lives, we have, at least, had something for it, the gratification of having had our own way, the pleasure of going wrong. But Effie had not even secured this pleasure. She would be the sufferer for other people's miscalculations and mistakes. All this that concerned her so deeply she had never known. She faced the future with all the more dismay that it thus appeared to her to be spoiled for no end, destroyed at once for herself and Ronald and Fred. For what advantage could it be to Fred to have a wife who felt that he was not her chief good, that her happiness was with another? Something doubly poignant was in the feeling with which the poor girl perceived this.

Fred even, poor Fred, whom she approved and liked and sympathized with and did all but love—Fred would be none

the better. He would be wronged even in having his heart's desire conceded to him, whereas—it all came before Effie with another flash of realization—Fred would never have thought of her in that way had she been pledged to Ronald. They would have been friends—oh! such good friends. She would have been able to appreciate all his good qualities, the excellence that was in him, and no close and inappropriate relationship could have been formed between the two who were not made for each other.

But now all was wrong! It was Fred and she, who might have been such excellent friends, who were destined to work through life together, badly matched, not right, not right, whatever might happen. If trouble came she would not know how to comfort him, as she would have known how to comfort Ronald. She would not know how to help him. How was it she

had not thought of that before? They belonged to different worlds, not to the same world as she and Ronald did, and when the first superficial charm was over, and different habits, different associations, life, which was altogether pitched upon a different key, began to tell!

Alarm seized upon Effie, and dismay. She had been frightened before at the setting up of a new life which she felt no wish for, no impulse to embrace; but she had not thought how different was the life of Allonby from that of Gilston, and her modest notions of rustic gentility from the luxury and show to which the rich man's son had been accustomed. Doris and Phyllis and their ways of thought, and their habits of existence, came before her in a moment as part of the strange shifting panorama which encompassed her about. How was she to get to think as they did, to accustom herself to their ways of living?

She had wondered and smiled, and in her heart unconsciously criticised these ways: but that was Fred's way as well as theirs. And how was she with her country prejudices, her Scotch education, her limitations, her different standard, how was she to fit into it? But with Ronald she would have dwelt among her own people—oh, the different life! Oh, the things that might have been!

Poor Ronald went his way sadly from the same meeting with a consciousness that was sharp and confusing and terrible. After the first miserable shock of disappointment which he had felt on hearing of Effie's engagement, he had conversed much with himself. He had said to himself that she was little more than a child when he had set his boyish heart upon her, that since then a long time had passed, momentous years: that he had changed in many ways, and that she too

must have changed—that the mere fact of her engagement must have made a great difference—that she had bound herself to another kind of existence, not anything he knew, and that it was not possible that the betrothed of another man could be any longer the little Effie of his dreams.

But he had looked at her, and he had felt that he was mistaken. She was his Effie, not that other man's: there was nothing changed in her, only perfected and made more sweet. Very few were the words that passed between them—few looks even, for they were afraid to look at each other—but even that unnatural reluctance said more than words. He it was who was her mate, not the stranger, the Englishman, the millionaire, whose ways and the ways of his people were not as her ways.

And yet it was too late! He could neither say anything nor do anything to

show to Effie that she had made a mistake, that it was he, Ronald, whom Heaven had intended for her. The young man, we may be sure, saw nothing ludicrous in this conviction that was in his mind; but he could not plead it. He went home to the old-fashioned homely house, which he said to himself no wife of his should ever make bright, in which he would settle down, no doubt, like his old uncle, and grow into an old misanthrope, a crotchety original, as his predecessor had done. Poor old uncle David! what was it that had made him so? perhaps a fatal mistake, occurring somehow by no fault of his—perhaps a little Effie, thrown away upon a stranger, too—

"What made you ask him to his dinner, though I made you signs to the contrary?" said Mrs. Ogilvie to her husband, as soon as, each in a different direction, the two young people had disappeared. "You might

have seen I was not wanting him to his dinner; but when was there ever a man that could tell the meaning of a look? I might have spared my pains."

"And why should he not be asked to his dinner?" said Mr. Ogilvie. "You go beyond my understanding. Ronald Sutherland, a lad that I have known since he was *that* high, and his father and his grandfather before him. I think the woman is going out of her wits. Because you're marrying Effie to one of those rich upstarts, am I never to ask a decent lad here?"

"You and you're decent lads!" said his wife; she was at the end of her Latin, as the French say, and of her patience too. "Just listen to me, Robert," she added, with that calm of exasperation which is sometimes so impressive. "I'm marrying Effie, since you like to put it that way (and it's a great deal more than any of her

relations would have had the sense to do), to the best match on all this side of Scotland. I'm not saying this county; there's nobody in the county that is in any way on the same footing as Fred. There is rank, to be sure, but as for money he could buy them all up, and settlements just such as were never heard of. Well, that's what I'm doing, if you give me the credit of it. But there's just one little hindrance, and that's Ronald Sutherland. If he's to come here on the ground of your knowing him since he was *that* high, and being Eric's friend—that's to say, like a son of the house—I have just this to say, Robert, that I will not answer for Effie, and this great match may not take place after all."

"What do you mean, you daft woman? Do you mean to tell me there has been any carrying on, any correspondence——"

"Have some respect to your own child,

Robert, if not to your wife. Am I a woman to allow any carrying on? And Effie, to do her justice, though she has very little sense in some respects, is not a creature of that kind; and mind, she never heard a word of yon old story. No, no, it's not that. But it's a great deal worse—it's just this, that there's an old kindness, and they know each other far better than either Effie or you or me knows Fred Dirom. They are the same kind of person, and they have things to talk about if once they begin. And, in short, I cannot tell you all my drithers—but I'm very clear on this. If you want that marriage to come off, which is the best match that's been made in Dumfriess-shire for generations, just you keep Ronald Sutherland at arm's length, and take care you don't ask him here to his dinner every second day."

"I am not so fond of having strangers

to their dinner," said Mr. Ogilvie, with great truth. "It's very rarely that the invitation comes from me. And as for your prudence and your wisdom and your grand managing, it might perhaps be just as well, on the whole, for Effie if she had two strings to her bow."

Mrs. Ogilvie uttered a suppressed shriek in her astonishment. "For any sake! what, in the name of all that's wonderful, are you meaning now?"

"You give me no credit for ever meaning anything, or taking the least interest, so far as I can see, in what's happening in my own family," said the head of the house, standing on his dignity.

"Oh, Robert, man! didn't I send the young man to you, and would not listen to him myself! I said her father is the right person: and so you were, and very well you managed it, as you always do when you will take the trouble. But what

is this about a second string to her bow?"

Mr. Ogilvie *se faisait prier*. He would not at first relinquish the pride of superior knowledge. At last, when his wife had been tantalized sufficiently, he opened his budget.

"The truth is, that things, very queer things, are said in London about Dirom's house. There is a kind of a hint in the money article of the *Times*. You would not look at that, even if we got the *Times*. I saw it yesterday in Dumfries. They say 'a great firm that has gone largely into mines of late'—and something about Basinghall Street, and a hope that their information may not be correct, and that sort of thing—which means more even than it says."

"Lord preserve us!" said Mrs. Ogilvie. She sat down, in her consternation, upon Rory's favourite toy lamb, which uttered

the squeak peculiar to such pieces of mechanism. Probably this helped to increase her annoyance. She seized it with impatient warmth and flung it on the floor.

"The horrible little beast!—But, Robert, this may be just a rumour. There are plenty of firms that do business in mines, and as for Basinghall Street, it's just a street of offices. My own uncle had a place of business there."

"You'll see I'm right for all that," said her husband, piqued to have his information doubted.

"Well, I'll see it when I do see it; but I have just the most perfect confidence—What is this, George? Is there no answer? Well, you need not wait."

"I was to wait, mem," said George, "to let the cook ken if there was nobody expected to their dinner; for in that case, mem, there was yon birds that was quite good, that could keep to another day."

"Cook's just very impatient to send me such a message. Oh, well, you may tell her that there will be nobody to dinner. Mr. Dirom has to go to London in a hurry," she said, half for the servant and half for her husband. She turned a glance full of alarm, yet defiance, upon the latter as old George trotted away.

"Well, what do you say to that?" cried Mr. Ogilvie, with a mixture of satisfaction and vexation.

"I just say what I said before—that I've perfect confidence." But nevertheless a cloud hung all the rest of the day upon Mrs. Ogilvie's brow.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Two or three days had passed after Fred's departure, when Mrs. Ogilvie stated her intention of going to Allonby to call upon his mother.

"You have not been there for a long time, Effie. You have just contented yourself with Fred—which is natural enough, I say nothing against that—and left the sisters alone who have always been so kind to you. It was perhaps not to be wondered at, but still I would not have done it. If they were not just very good-natured and ready to make the best of everything, they might think you were neglecting them, now that you have got Fred."

As was natural, Effie was much injured and offended by this suggestion.

"I have never neglected them," she said. "I never went but when they asked me, and they have not asked me for a long time. It is their fault."

"Well," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "it is winter weather, and there is nothing going on. Your tennis and all that is stopped, and yet there's no frost for skating. But whether they have asked you or not, just put on your new frock and come over with me. They are perhaps in some trouble, for anything we can tell."

"In trouble? How could they be in trouble?"

"Do you think, you silly thing, that they are free of trouble because they're so well off? No, no; there are plenty of things to vex you in this world, however rich you may be: though you are dressed in silks and satins and eat off silver plate,

and have all the delicacies of the season upon your table, like daily bread, you will find that you have troubles with it, all the same, just like ordinary folk."

Effie thought truly that she had no need of being taught that lesson. She knew far better than her stepmother what trouble was. She was going to marry Fred Dirom, and yet if her heart had its way! And she could not blame anybody, not even herself, for the position in which she was. It had come about—she could not tell how or why.

But she could not associate Phyllis and Doris with anything that could be called trouble. Neither was her mind at all awake or impressionable on this subject. To lose money was to her the least of all inconveniences, a thing not to be counted as trouble at all. She had never known anything about money, neither the pleasure of possession nor the vexation of losing it.

Her indifference was that of entire ignorance; it seemed to her a poor thing to distress one's self about.

She put on her new frock, however, as she was commanded, to pay the visit, and drove to Allonby with her stepmother, much as she had driven on that momentous day when for the first time she had seen them all, and when Mrs. Ogilvie had carried on a monologue, just as she was doing now, though not precisely to the same effect and under circumstances so changed. Effie then had been excited about the sisters and a little curious about the brother, amused and pleased with the new acquaintances to be made, and the novelty of the proceeding altogether. Now there was no longer any novelty. She was on the eve of becoming a member of the family, and it was with a very different degree of seriousness and interest that she contemplated them and their ways. But still Mrs. Ogilvie was full of speculation.

"I wonder," she said, "if they will say anything about what is going on? You have had no right explanation, so far as I am aware, of Fred's hurrying away like yon; I think he should have given you more explanation. And I wonder if they will say anything about that report— And, Effie, I wonder——" It appeared to Effie as they drove along that all that had passed in the meantime was a dream, and that Mrs. Ogilvie was wondering again as when they had first approached the unknown household upon that fateful day.

Doris and Phyllis were seated in a room with which neither Effie nor her stepmother were familiar, and which was not dark, and bore but few marks of the amendments and re-arrangements which occupied the family so largely on their first arrival at Allonby. Perhaps their interest had flagged in the embellishment of the old house, which was no longer a stranger to them; or perhaps

the claims of comfort were paramount in November. There was still a little afternoon sunshine coming in to help the comfortable fire which blazed so cheerfully, and Lady Allonby's old sofas and easy chairs were very snug in the warm atmosphere.

The young ladies were, as was usual to them, doing nothing in particular, and they were very glad to welcome visitors, any visitor, to break the monotony of the afternoon. There was not the slightest diminution visible of their friendship for Effie, which is a thing that sometimes happens when the sister's friend becomes the *fiancée* of the brother. They fell upon her with open arms.

"Why, it is Effie! How nice of you to come just when we wanted you," they cried, making very little count of Mrs. Ogilvie. Mothers and stepmothers were of the opposite faction, and Doris and Phyllis did not pretend to take any in-

terest in them. "Mother will be here presently," they said to her, and no more. But Effie they led to a sofa and surrounded with attentions.

"We have not seen you for an age. You are going to say it is our fault, but it is not our fault. You have Fred constantly at Gilston, and you did not want us there too. No, three of one family would be insufferable; you couldn't have wanted us; and what was the use of asking you to come here, when Fred was always with you at your own house? Now that he is away we were wondering would you come—I said yes, I felt sure you would; but Doris——"

"Doris is never so confident as her sister," said that young lady, "and when a friendship that has begun between girls runs into a love affair, one never can know."

"It was not any doing of mine that it

ran into—anything," said Effie, indignant. "I liked you the——" She was going to say the best, which was not civil certainly to the absent Fred, and would not have been true. But partly prudence restrained her, and partly Phyllis, who gave her at that moment a sudden kiss, and declared that she had always said that Effie was a dear.

"And no doubt you have heard from your brother," said Mrs. Ogilvie, who was not to be silenced, "and has he got his business done? I hope everything is satisfactory, and nothing to make your good father and mother anxious. These kind of cares do not tell upon the young, but when people are getting up in years it's then that business really troubles them. We have been thinking a great deal of your worthy father—Mr. Ogilvie and me. I hope he is seeing his way——"

The young ladies stared at her for a

moment, in the intervals of various remarks to Effie; and then Doris said, with a little evident effort, as of one who wanted to be civil, yet not to conceal that she was bored: "Oh, you mean about the firm? Of course we are interested; it would make such a change, you know. I have taken all my measures, however, and I feel sure I shall be the greatest success."

"I was speaking of real serious business, Miss Doris. Perhaps I was just a fool for my pains, for they would not put the like of that before you. No, no, I am aware it was just very silly of me; but since it has been settled between Effie and Mr. Fred, I take a great interest. I am one that takes a great deal of thought, more than I get any thanks for, of all my friends."

"I should not like to trouble about all my friends, for then one would never be out of it," said Doris, calmly. "Of course,

however, you must be anxious about Fred. There is less harm, though, with him than with most young men; for you know if the worst comes to the worst he has got a profession. I cannot say that I have a profession, but still it comes almost to the same thing; for I have quite made up my mind what to do. It is a pity, Effie," she said, turning to the audience she preferred, "if the Great Smash is going to come that it should not come before you are married; for then I could dress you, which would be good for both of us—an advantage to your appearance, and a capital advertisement for me."

"That is all very well for her," said Miss Phyllis, plaintively. "She talks at her ease about the Great Smash; but I should have nothing to do except to marry somebody, which would be no joke at all for me."

"The Great Smash," repeated Mrs. Ogil-

vie, aghast. All the colour had gone out of her face. She turned from one to the other with dismay. "Then am I to understand that it has come to that?" she cried, with despair in her looks. "Oh! Effie, Effie, do you hear them? The Great Smash!"

"Who said that?" said another voice—a soft voice grown harsh, sweet bells jangled out of tune. There had been a little nervous movement of the handle of the door some moments before, and now Mrs. Dirom came in quickly, as if she had been listening to what was said, and was too much excited and distracted to remember that it was evident that she had been listening. She came in in much haste and with a heated air.

"If you credit these silly girls you will believe anything. What do they know? A Great Smash—!" Her voice trembled as she said the words. "It's ridiculous,

and it's vulgar too. I wonder where they learned such words. I would not repeat them if I could help it—if it was not necessary to make you understand. There will be no Smash, Mrs. Ogilvie, neither great nor small. Do you know what you are talking of? The great house of the Diroms, which is as sure as the Bank of England? It is their joke, it is the way they talk; nothing is sacred for them. They don't know what the credit of a great firm means. There is no more danger of our firm—no more danger—than there is of the Bank of England."

The poor lady was so much disturbed that her voice, and, indeed, her whole person, which was substantial, trembled. She dropped suddenly on a chair, and taking up one of the Japanese fans which were everywhere about, fanned herself violently, though it was late November, and the day was cold.

"Dear me," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "I am sorry if I have put you about; I had no thought that it was serious at all. I just asked the question for conversation's sake. I never could have supposed for a moment that the great house, as you say, of Dirom and Co. could ever take it in a serious light."

Upon this poor Mrs. Dirom put down her fan, and laughed somewhat loudly—a laugh that was harsh and strained, and in which no confidence was.

"That is quite true," she said, "Mrs. Ogilvie. You are full of sense, as I have always said. It is only a thing to laugh at. Their papa would be very much amused if he were to hear. But it makes me angry when I have no occasion to be angry, for it is so silly. If it was said by other people I should take it with a smile; but to hear my own children talking such nonsense, it is this that makes me angry. If it was anyone else I shouldn't mind."

"Oh, yes," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "I understand that; for if other people make fools of themselves it is of no particular consequence; but when it's your own it's a different matter. But Miss Doris, I suppose, has just taken a notion into her head, and she does not care what it costs to carry it out. Effie, now, really we must go. It is getting quite dark, the days are so short. No, I thank you, we'll not take any tea; for Mr. Ogilvie has taken a habit of coming in for his cup of tea, and he just cannot bear us to be away. When a man takes a notion of that kind, the ladies of his family just have to give in to it. Good-bye, young ladies, good-bye. But I hope you'll not be disappointed to find that there's no Great Smash coming; for I don't think that I should relish it at all if it was me."

They had a silent drive home. Effie had so many thoughts at that moment that she was always glad, when she could, to return

into them. She thought no more of the Great Smash than of any other of the nonsensical utterances which it might have pleased Doris to make. Indeed, the Great Smash, even if it had been certain, would not have affected her mind much, so entirely unconscious was she what its meaning might be. She retired into her own thoughts, which were many, without having received any impression from this new subject.

But it vaguely surprised her that her stepmother should be so silent. She was so accustomed to that lively monologue which served as a background to all manner of thoughts, that Effie was more or less disturbed by its failure, without knowing why. Mrs. Ogilvie scarcely said a word all the way home. It was incredible, but it was true. Her friends would scarcely have believed it—they would have perceived that matters must have been very serious indeed, before she could be reduced to such silence.

But Effie was heedless, and did not ask herself what the reason was.

This was the evening that Ronald had been invited "to his dinner," an invitation which had called forth a protest from Mrs. Ogilvie; but, notwithstanding, she was very kind to Ronald. It was Effie, not she, who kept him at a distance, who avoided any conversation except the vaguest, and, indeed, sat almost silent all the evening, as if her lover being absent she had no attention to bestow upon another. That was not the real state of Effie's mind; but a delicate instinct drew her away, and gave her a refuge in the silence which looked like indifference.

Mrs. Ogilvie, however, showed no indifference to Ronald. She questioned him about his house, and with all the freedom which old family connection permitted, about the fortune which he had "come into," about what he meant to do, and many other sub-

jects. Ronald gave her, with much gravity, the information she asked. He told her no—that he did not mean to remain—that he was going back to his regiment. Why should he stay, there was nothing for him to do at Haythorne?

"Hoot," Mrs. Ogilvie said, "there is always this to do, that you must marry and settle; that is the right thing for a young man. To be sure, when there is no place to take a wife home to, but just to follow the regiment, that's very different; for parents that are in their senses would never let a girl do that. But when you have the house first, then the wife must follow. It is just the right order of things."

"For some men," said Ronald, "but not for me; it is either too early, or, perhaps, too late."

"Oh, too late! a lad like you to speak such nonsense!—and there's never any saying what may happen," the lady said.

This strange speech made two hearts beat: Ronald's with great surprise, and devouring curiosity. Had he perhaps been premature in thinking that all was settled—was it a mistake? But oh, no, he remembered that he had made his congratulations, and they had been received; that Eric was coming back to the marriage; that already the wedding guests were being invited, and all was in train. Effie's heart beat too, where she sat silent at a distance, close to the lamp, on pretence of needing light for her work; but it was with a muffled, melancholy movement, no sign of hope or possibility in it, only the stir of regret and trouble over what might have been.

"Are you going to write letters, at this time of night?" said Mr. Ogilvie, as he came back from the door, after seeing Ronald away.

"Just one, Robert; I cannot bear this suspense if the rest of you can. I am going

to write to my cousin John, who is a business man, and has his office, as his father had before him, in Basinghall Street in London city. I am going to ask him a question or two."

"If I were you," said Mr. Ogilvie, with some energy, "I would neither make nor meddle in other folk's affairs."

"What do you call other folk's affairs? It is my own folk's affairs. If there ever was a thing that was our business and not another's, it's this. Do you think I would ever permit—and there is very little time to be lost. I wonder I never thought of John before—he is just the person to let me know."

Mr. Ogilvie put his hands behind his back, and walked up and down the room in great perturbation.

"I cannot see my way to making that kind of inquiry. It might do harm, and I don't see what good it can do. It might

set people thinking. It might bring on just what we're wanting to avoid."

"I am wanting to know, that is all," said Mrs. Ogilvie. "As for setting people thinking, that's done as you're aware. And if it's done down here, what must it be in the city? But I must be at the bottom of it, whether it's false, or whether it's true."

Mr. Ogilvie was not accustomed to such energy. He said, "Tchk, tchk, tchk," as people do so often in perplexity: and then he caught sight of his daughter, holding Rory's little stocking in the lamplight, and knitting with nervous fingers. It was a good opportunity for getting rid of the irritation which any new thing raised in him.

"Surely," he said, with an air of virtuous indignation, "it is high time that Effie, at least, should be in her bed!"

CHAPTER XIX.

"YES, Ronald, my man. It was a great peety," Miss Dempster said.

She was lying on a sofa in the little drawing-room, between the fireplace and the window, where she could both feel and see the fire, and yet command a glimpse of the village and Dr. Jardine's house. She could still see the window to which the doctor came defiantly when he took his mid-morning refreshment, to let the ladies at Rosebank see that he was not afraid of them.

The relations between the doctor and the ladies had modified a little, but still that little conflict went on. He did not

any longer nod at them with the "Here's to you!" of his old fury at what he thought their constant *espionage*, but he still flaunted his dram before their eyes, and still they made mental notes on the subject, and Miss Beenie shook her head. She did not say, "There's that abominable man with his dram again. I am sure I cannot think how respectable people can put up with that smell of whisky. Did you say sherry? Well, sherry is very near as bad taken at all hours."

What Miss Beenie said now was: "I wish the doctor would take a cup of tea or even a little broth instead of that wine. No doubt he wants support with all he has to do; but the other would be far better for him."

This will show how the relations had improved. He had brought Miss Dempster "through." Instead of her bedroom at the back of the house, which allowed of little

diversion, she had got so far as to be removed to the drawing-room, and lie on the sofa for the greater part of the day. It was a great improvement, and people who knew no better believed that the old lady was getting better. Miss Beenie was warmly of this opinion; she held it with such heat indeed that she might have been supposed to be not so certain as she said.

But Miss Dempster and the doctor knew better. The old lady was more than ever distressed that Providence had not taken better care of the affairs of Effie Ogilvie. It was this she was saying to Ronald, as he sat beside her. He had come over with some birds and a great bunch of hothouse grapes. He was, as the reader may remember, a connection—even, Miss Beenie said, a *near* connection: and the ladies had been good to him in his early youth.

"Yes, it was a great peety," Miss Dempster said. "I am not grudging your uncle Dauvid a day of his life, honest man—but the three last months is never much of a boon, as I know by myself. It would have done him no harm, and you a great deal of good. But there's just a kind of a blundering in these things that is very hard to understand."

"The chances are it would have made no difference," said the young man, "so there is nothing to be said."

"It would have made a great difference; but we'll say nothing, all the same. And so you're asked to the wedding? Well, that woman is not blate. She's interfered with the course of nature and thinks no shame: but perhaps she will get her punishment sooner than she's looking for. They tell me," said the old lady, "that the Diroms have had losses, and that probably they will have to leave

Allonby, and come down in their grand way of living. I will say that of Janet Ogilvie that she has a great spirit; she'll set her face like a rock. The wedding will be just as grand and as much fuss made, and nobody will hear a word from her; she is a woman that can keep her own counsel. But she'll be gnashing her teeth all the same. She will just be in despair that she cannot get out of it. Oh, I know her well! If it had been three months off instead of three weeks, she would have shaken him off. I have always said Effie's heart was not in it; but however her heart had been in it, her stepmother would have had her way."

"We must be charitable, we must think ill of nobody," said Miss Beenie. "I'm too thankful, for my part, to say an ill word, now you're getting well again."

"She might have done all that and done nothing wrong," said Miss Dempster

sharply. And then Ronald rose to go away; he had no desire to hear such possibilities discussed. If it had not been for Eric's expected arrival he would have gone away before now. It was nothing but misery, he said to himself, to see Effie, and to think that had he been three months sooner, as his old friends said!

But no, he would not believe that; it was injurious to Effie to think that the first who appeared was her choice. He grew red and hot with generous shame and contempt of himself when he thought that this was what he was attributing to one so spotless and so true. The fact that she had consented to marry Fred Dirom, was not that enough to prove his merit, to prove that she would never have regarded any other? What did it not say for a man, the fact that he had been chosen by Effie? It was the finest proof that he was everything a man could be.

Ronald had never seen this happy hero. No doubt there had been surgings of heart against him, and fits of sorrowful fury when he first knew; but the idea that he was Effie's choice silenced the young man. He himself could have nothing to do with that, he had not even the right to complain. He had to stand aside and see it accomplished. All that the old lady said about the chances of the three months too late was folly. It was one of the strange ways of women that they should think so. It was a wrong to Effie, who not by any guidance of chance, not because (oh horror!) this Dirom fellow was the first to ask her, for nothing but pure love and preference (of which no man was worthy) had chosen him from the world.

Ronald, thinking these thoughts, which were not cheerful, walked down the slope between the laurel hedges with steps much slower and less decided than his ordinary

manly tread. He was a very different type of humanity from Fred Dirom—not nearly so clever, be it said, knowing not half so much, handsomer, taller, and stronger, without any subtlety about him or power of divination, seeing very clearly what was before him with a pair of keen and clear blue eyes, straightforward as an arrow; but with no genius for complication nor much knowledge of the modifying effect of circumstances. He liked or he did not like, he approved or he did not approve: and all of these things strenuously, with the force of a nature which was entirely honest, and knew no guile.

Such a man regards a decision as irrevocable, he understands no playing with possibilities. It did not occur to him to make any effort to shake Effie's allegiance to her betrothed, or to trouble her with any disclosure of his own sentiments. He accepted what was, with that belief in the

certainty of events which belongs to what is called the practical or positive nature in the new jargon, to the simple and primitive mind, that is to say. Ronald, who was himself as honest as the day, considered it the first principle in existence that his fellow-creatures were honest too, that they meant what they said, and when they had decided upon a course of action did not intend to be turned from it, whatever it might cost to carry it out.

Therefore it was not in this straightforward young man to understand all the commotion which was in poor little Effie's mind when she avoided him, cast down her eyes not to meet his, and made the shortest answers to the few remarks he ventured to address to her. It hurt him that she should be so distant, making him wonder whether she thought so little of him as to suppose that he would give her any annoy-

ance, say anything or even look anything to disturb her mind.

How little she knew him! but not so little as he knew her. They met this day, as fate would have it, at the gate of Rosebank, and were obliged to stop and talk for a minute, and even to walk along with each other for the few steps during which their road lay in the same direction. They did not know what to say to each other; he because he knew his mind so well, she because she knew hers so imperfectly, and felt her position so much.

Effie was in so strange a condition that it seemed to her she would like to tell Ronald everything: how she was going to marry Fred she could not tell why—because she had not liked to give him pain by refusing him, because she seemed not to be able to do anything else. She did not know why she wanted to tell this to Ronald, which she would not have done to anyone

else. There seemed to be some reason why he should know the real state of affairs, a sort of apology to make, an explanation—she could not tell what.

But when they stood face to face, neither Ronald nor she could find anything to say. He gave the report of Miss Dempster that she was a little better; that was the bulletin which by tacit agreement was always given —she was a little better, but still a great invalid. When that subject was exhausted, they took refuge in Eric. When was he expected? though the consciousness in both their minds that it was for the wedding he was coming, was a sad obstacle to speech.

"He is expected in three weeks. He is starting, I suppose, now," Effie said.

"Yes, he must be starting now——" And then they both paused, with the strongest realization of the scene that would ensue. Effie saw herself a bride far more clearly at that moment through the eyes, so to

speak, of Ronald, than she ever had through those of the man who was to be her husband.

"I think I shall go back with him when he goes," said Ronald, "if I don't start before."

"Are you going back?"

He smiled as if it had been very ridiculous to ask him such a question.

"What else," he said—there seemed a sort of sad scorn in the inquiry—"What else is left for me to do?" Perhaps he would have liked to put it more strongly—What else have you left me to do?

"I am very sorry," said Effie, "I thought ——" and then she abandoned this subject altogether. "Do you think Eric will see much change?" she said.

"Eric! Oh, yes; he will see a great deal of change. The country and all look the same to be sure; it is the people who alter. He will see a great deal of change in you, Miss Ogilvie."

Effie looked up with tears starting in her eyes as if he had given her a sudden blow.

"Oh, Ronald! why do you call me that —am I not Effie—always——" And there came a little sob in her throat, stopping further utterance.

He looked as if he could have cried too, but smiled instead strangely, and said, "When you have—another name, how am I to call you by that? I must try and begin now."

"But I shall always be Effie, always," she said.

Ronald did not make any reply. He raised his hands in a momentary protestation, and gave her a look which said more than he had ever said in words. And then they walked on a few steps together in silence, and then stopped and shook hands silently with a mutual impulse, and said to each other "good-bye."

When Effie got near home, still full of

agitation from this strange little opening and closing of she knew not what—some secret page in her own history, inscribed with a record she had known nothing of—she met her stepmother, who was returning very alert and business-like from a walk.

"What have you been saying to Ronald?" said Mrs. Ogilvie, "to make him look so grave? I saw him turn the corner, and I thought he had seen a ghost, poor lad; but afterwards it proved to be only you. You should not be so severe: for he has liked you long, though you knew nothing about it; and it must have been very hard upon him, poor fellow, to find that he had come home just too late, and that you had been snapped up, as a person may say, under his very nose."

This was so strange an address that it took away Effie's breath. She gave her stepmother a look half stupified, half horrified. "I don't know what you mean," she said.

"Well, Effie, my dear, you must just learn; and I don't think you will find it very difficult, if you will give your attention to it. I have been wanting to speak to you for two or three days, and your father too. You must not trouble about Fred Dirom any more. I have never been quite satisfied in my own mind that your heart was in it, if he had not been so pressing and pushing, and, as we all thought, such a good match. But you see it turns out that's not the case, Effie. I got a letter yesterday from my cousin John; and it's all true about Dirom's firm. They are just going down hill as fast as can be, and probably by this time they've failed. Though you don't know about business, you know what that means. It is just the end of all things; and to hold the young man to his promise in such circumstances would be out of the question. We are quite agreed upon that, both your father and me. So, my

dear Effie, you are free. It mightn't have become you to take steps; so your father and me—we have acted for you; and now you are free."

Effie stopped short in the road, and stared at the speaker aghast. If her heart gave a little leap to hear that word, it was merely an instinctive movement, and meant nothing. Her mind was full of consternation. She was confounded by the suddenness, by the strangeness of the communication.

Free! What did it mean, and why was it? Free! She repeated the word to herself after a while, still looking at her stepmother. It was but a single little word. It meant—what? The world seemed to go round and round with Effie, the dim November skies, the gray of the wintry afternoon, the red shaft of the setting sun beyond—all whirled about her. "Free!" She repeated it as an infant repeats a foreign word without knowing what it means.

"Now, Effie," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "don't let us have any pretences: that is all I ask of you. Just face the thing honestly, and don't let us have any make-believe. If you tell me that you are deep in love with Fred Dirom and can't give him up, I will just not believe you. All I will think is that you are a little cutty, and have no heart at all. I was very glad you should make such a good match; but I could see all along your heart was not in it. And whatever he might say, I made no doubt but you would be thankful. So let us have none of your little deceptions here."

"I don't think I understand," said Effie, striving to speak. "I think I must have lost my senses or my hearing, or something. What was it you were saying? They say people call things by wrong names sometimes, and can't help it. Perhaps they hear wrong, too. What is it that you mean?"

"You know perfectly well what I mean,"

said Mrs. Ogilvie, with some exasperation; "I have just written breaking off your marriage—is that plain enough? I've done it under your father's orders. It was he that accepted and I'm thinking it's he that has a right to refuse—It's all broken off—I cannot speak any plainer. Now, do you understand what I say?"

Effie had grown very pale—she shivered as if with cold—her lips quivered when she began to speak.

"And that is," she said, "because he has failed—because he is not a good match now, but a poor man—is that what it is?"

"If you like to put it in that broad way. Of course he is not in a condition to marry any longer. It is the kindest thing we can do——"

"Give me your letter," said Effie, holding out her hand. There was something threatening, something dangerous, about the girl, which made Mrs. Ogilvie scream out.

"My letter! I am not in the habit of showing my letters to anybody but your father. And even if I was disposed to show it I cannot, for I've just been to the post and put it in with my own hand. And by this time it is stamped and in the bag to go away. So you must take my description of it. I will be very happy to tell you all I have said."

"You have just been to the post to put it in!" Effie repeated the words, her eyes growing larger every moment, her face more ghastly. Then she gave a strange cry like a wounded creature, and turned and flew back towards the village neither pausing nor looking behind her, without a word more. Mrs. Ogilvie stood for a time, her own heart beating a little faster than usual, and a choking sensation in her throat.

"Effie, Effie!" she cried after her—but Effie took no notice. She went along

through the dim air like a flying shadow, and soon was out of sight, taking no time either for breath or thought. Where had she gone? wherever she went, what could she do? It was for her good; all through it had been for her good. If she mistook at first, yet after she must come round.

Effie had fled in the opposite direction to Allonby. Where was she going? what could she do? Mrs. Ogilvie made a rapid glance at the possibilities and decided that there was really nothing which the girl could do. She drew a long breath to relieve the oppression which in spite of herself had seized upon her, the sudden panic and alarm.

What could Effie do?—just nothing! She would run and tell her Uncle John, but though the minister was a man full of crotchets he was still more or less a man of sense, and he had never been very keen on the match. He would speak to her

sensibly and she would see it when he said it, though not when Mrs. Ogilvie said it: and she would come home.

And then Ronald would get another invitation to his dinner. It was all as simple as A B C.

CHAPTER XX.

Mr. Moubray was in his study, in the gray of the winter's afternoon. It is never a very cheerful moment. The fire was burning brightly, the room was warm and pleasant, with plenty of books, and many associations; but it was a pensive moment, too dark for reading, when there is nothing to do but to think. And though a man who has begun to grow old, and who is solitary, may be very happy thinking, yet it is a pensive pleasure. He was sitting very quietly, looking out at the shaft of red gold in the west where the sun had disappeared, and watching the light as it stole away, each moment a little less, a

little less brilliant, till it sank altogether in the gray.

To eyes "that have kept watch o'er man's mortality" there is always an interest in that sight: one going out is so like another: the slow lessening, the final disappearance have an interest that never fails. And the minister can scarcely be said to have been thinking. He was watching, as he had watched at many a death-bed, the slow extinction, the going away. Whether it is a sun or a life that is setting, that last ineffable moment of disappearance cannot but convey a thrill to the heart.

This was how he was seated, meditating in the profoundest tranquillity when, all at once, the door flew open, and a young figure full of agitation, in all the force of life and passion, a creature all alive to the very finger points, to the hem of her skirts, to the crown of her wind-blown

hair, burst in breathless, an emblem of disturbance, of conflict, in short, of existence in contrast with the calm of contemplation.

She stood for a moment before him, but only as if under protest, pausing perforce for breath, "Uncle John," she cried, panting, "come, come with me! I want to tell you, I want to ask you—you must help me—to stop something. But, oh, I can't wait to explain; come with me, come with me! and I'll tell you on the way——"

"What is it, Effie?" He got up hastily; but though her influence was strong, it was not strong enough to prevent him from asking an explanation before he obeyed it.

She caught at his arm in her impatience, "Oh, Uncle John, come—come away! I'll tell you on the road—oh, come away—there is not a moment, not a moment! to lose——"

"Is anybody ill?" he said. She con-

tinued to hold his arm, not as a means of support, but by way of pushing him on, which she did, scarcely leaving him a moment to get his hat. Her impetuosity reminded him so much of many a childish raid made into his house that, notwithstanding his alarm, he smiled.

"Oh, no, there is nobody ill, it is much, much worse than that, Uncle John. Oh, don't smile as if you thought I was joking! It's just desperation. There is a letter that Mrs. Ogilvie has written, and I must, I must—get it back from the post, or I will die. Oh, come! come! before it is too late."

"Get a letter back from the post!——"

He turned in spite of Effie's urgency at the manse door. It stood high, and the cheerful lights were beginning to shine in the village windows below, among which the shop and post-office was conspicuous with its two bright paraffin lamps.

"But that is impossible," he said.

"Oh, no," said the girl. "Oh, Uncle John, come quick, come quick! and you will see that we must have it. Mrs. Moffatt will give it when she sees you. Not for me, perhaps, but for you. You will say that something has been forgotten, that another word has to be put in, that—oh, Uncle John when we are there it will come into our heads what to say——"

"Take no thought beforehand what you shall speak, Effie," said the minister, half smiling, half admonishing; "is it so serious as that?"

He suffered her to lead him down the slope of the manse garden, out upon the road, her light figure foremost, clinging to his arm, yet moving him along; he, heavier, with so much of passive resistance as his large frame, and only half responsive will, gave.

"Oh yes," she cried, "it is as serious as

that. Uncle John, was not that what our Lord said when His men that He sent out were to stand for Him and not to forsake Him? And to desert your friends when they are in trouble, to turn your back upon them when they need you, to give them up because they are poor, because they are unfortunate, because they have lost everything but you——"

She was holding his arm so closely, urging him on, that he felt the heaving of her heart against his side, the tremor of earnestness in her whole frame as she spoke.

"Effie, my little girl! what strait are you in, that you are driven to use words like these?"

Her voice sounded like a sob in her throat, which was parched with excitement.

"I am in this strait, Uncle John, that he has lost everything, and they have written to say I take back my word. No,

no, no," cried Effie, forcing on with feverish haste the larger shadow by her side. "I will never do it—it shall not be. They made me take him when he was rich, and now that he is poor I will stand by him till I die."

"My little Effie!" was all the minister said. She still hurried him along, but yet he half carried her with an arm round her slender figure. What with agitation and the unaccustomed conflict in her mind, Effie's slight physical frame was failing her. It was her heart and soul that were pushing on. Her brain swam, the village lights fluttered in her eyes, her voice had gone altogether, lost in the climbing sob which was at once breath and utterance. She was unconscious of everything save her one object, to be in time, to recover the letter, to avert that cowardly blow.

But when Effie came to herself in the little shop with its close atmosphere, the

smell of the paraffin, the dazzling glare of the light, under the astonished gaze of Mrs. Moffatt the postmistress, who stood at her counter stamping the letters spread out before her, and who stopped short, bewildered by the sudden entrance of so much passion, of something entirely out of the ordinary, which she felt, but could not understand—the girl could bring forth nothing from that slender, convulsed throat but a gasp. It was Mr. Moubray who spoke.

"My niece wishes you to give her back a letter—a letter in which something must be altered, something added: a letter with the Gilston stamp."

"Eh, Mr. Moubray! but I canna do that," the postmistress cried.

"Why can't you do it? I am here to keep you free of blame. There is no harm in it. Give her back her letter, and she will add what she wishes to add."

"Is it Miss Effie's own letter? I'm no

sure it's just right even in that point of view. Folk should ken their own minds." said Mrs. Moffatt, shuffling the letters about with her hands, "before they put pen to paper. If I did it for ane, I would have to do it for a' that ask. And where would I be then? I would just never be done——"

"Let us hope there are but few that are so important: and my niece is not just any one," said the minister, with a little natural self-assertion. "I will clear you of the blame if there is any blame."

"I am not saying but what Miss Effie —— Still the post-office is just like the grave, Mr. Moubray, what's put in canna be taken out. Na, I do not think I can do it, if it was for the Queen hersel'."

Effie had not stood still while this conversation was going on; she had taken the matter into her own hands, and was turning over the letters with her trembling

fingers without waiting for any permission.

"Na, Miss Effie; na, Miss Effie," said the postmistress, trying to withdraw them from her. But Effie paid no attention. Her extreme and passionate agitation was such that even official zeal, though strengthened by ignorance, could not stand before it. Notwithstanding all Mrs. Moffatt's efforts, the girl examined everything with a swift desperation and keenness which contrasted strangely with her incapacity to see or know anything besides. It was not till she had turned over every one that she flung up her hands with a cry of dismay, and fell back upon the shoulder of the minister, who had held her all the time with his arm.

"Oh, Uncle John! oh, Uncle John!" she cried with a voice of despair.

"Perhaps it has not been sent, Effie. It was only a threat perhaps. It might

be said to see how you felt. Rest a little, and then we will think what to do——"

"I will have to go," she said, struggling from him, getting out to the door of the shop. "Oh, I cannot breathe! Uncle John, when does the train go?"

"My dear child!"

"Uncle John, what time does the train go? No, I will not listen," said the girl. The fresh air revived her, and she hurried along a little way: but soon her limbs failed her, and she dropped down trembling upon the stone seat in front of one of the cottages. There she sat for a few minutes, taking off her hat, putting back her hair from her forehead instinctively, as if that would relieve the pressure on her heart.

She was still for a moment, and then burst forth again: "I must go. Oh, you are not to say a word. Do you know what it is to love some one, Uncle John? Yes, *you* know. It is only a few who can

tell what that is. Well," she said, the sob in her throat interrupting her, making her voice sound like the voice of a child; "that is how he thinks of me; you will think it strange. He is not like a serious man, you will say, to feel so; but he does. Not me! oh, not me!" said Effie, contending with the sob; "I am not like that. But he does. I am not so stupid, nor so insensible, but I know it when I see it, Uncle John."

"Yes, Effie, I never doubted it; he loves you dearly, poor fellow. My dear little girl, there is time enough to set all right——"

"To set it right! If he hears just at the moment of his trouble that I—that I—— What is the word when a woman is a traitor? Is there such a thing as that a girl should be a traitor to one that puts his trust in her? I never pretended to be like *that*, Uncle John. He knew that it

was different with me. But true—Oh, I can be true. More, more! *I can't be false.* Do you hear me? *You* brought me up, how could I? I can't be false; it will kill me. I would rather die——"

"Effie! Effie! No one would have you to be false. Compose yourself, my dear. Come home with me and I will speak to them, and everything will come right. There cannot be any harm done yet. Effie, my poor little girl, come home."

Effie did not move, except to put back as before her hair from her forehead.

"I know," she said, "that there is no hurry, that the train does not go till night. I will tell you everything as if you were my mother, Uncle John. You are the nearest to her. I was silly—I never thought:—but I was proud too. Girls are made like that: and just to be praised and made much of pleases us; and to have somebody that thinks there is no one in

the world like you—for that," she said, with a little pause, and a voice full of awe, "is what he thinks of me. It is very strange, but it is true. And if I were to let him think for a moment—oh, for one moment! — that the girl he thought so much of would cast him off, because he was poor!——"

Effie sprang up from her seat in the excitement of this thought. She turned upon her uncle, with her face shining, her head held high.

"Do you think I could let him think that for an hour? for a day? Oh, no! no! Yes, I will go home to get my cloak and a bonnet, for you cannot go to London just in a little hat like mine; but don't say to me, Uncle John, that I must not do it, for I WILL."

She took his arm again in the force of this resolution. Then she added, in the tone of one who is conceding a great

favour: "But you may come with me if you like."

Between the real feeling which her words had roused in him and the humour of this permission, Mr. Moubray scarcely knew how to reply. He said: "I would not advise you to go, Effie. It will be better for me to go in your place if anyone must go; but is that necessary? Let us go quietly home in the meantime. You owe something to your father, my dear; you must not take a step like this without his knowledge at least."

"If you are going to betray me to Mrs. Ogilvie, Uncle John——"

"My little Effie, there is no question of betrayal. There is no need for running away, for acting as if you were oppressed at home. You have never been oppressed at home, my dear. If Mrs. Ogilvie has written to Mr. Dirom, at least she was honest and told you. And you must be

honest. It must all be spoken of on the true ground, which is that you can do only what is right, Effie."

"Uncle John," cried Effie, "if to give up Fred is right, then I will not do it—whatever you say, I will not do it. He may never want me in my life again, but he wants me now. Abandon him because he is in need of me! Oh, could you believe it of Effie? And if you say it is wrong, I do not care, I will do it. I will not desert him when he is poor, not for all the—not for anybody in the world——"

"Is that Effie that is speaking so loud? is that you, John?"

This was the voice of Mr. Ogilvie himself, which suddenly rose out of the dim evening air close by. They had gone along in their excitement scarce knowing where they went, or how near they were to the house, and now, close to the dark shrubberies, encountered suddenly Effie's father,

who, somewhat against his own will, had come out to look for her.

His wife had been anxious, which he thought absurd, and he had been driven out rather by impatience of her continual inquiries: "I wonder where that girl has gone. I wonder what she is doing. Dear me, Robert, if you will not go out and look after her, I will just have to do it myself," — than from any other motive. Effie's declaration had been made accordingly to other ears than those she intended; and her father's slow but hot temper was roused.

"I would like to know," he said, "for what reason it is that you are out so late as this, and going hectoring about the roads like a play-acting woman? John, you might have more sense than to encourage her in such behaviour. Go home to your mother this moment, Effie, and let me hear no such language out of your head. I will not

ask what it's about. I have nothing to say to women's quarrels. Go home, I tell you, to your mother."

Effie had caught with both her hands her uncle's arm.

"Oh, I wish that I could—Oh, if I only could," she cried, "that would make all clear."

"Ogilvie, she is in a state of great excitement—I hope you will set her mind at rest. I tell her she shall be forced to nothing. You are not the man, though you may be a little careless, to permit any tyranny over your child."

"Me, careless! You are civil," said the father. "Just you recollect, John Moubray, that I will have no interference—if you were the minister ten times over, and her uncle to the boot. I am well able to look after my own family and concerns. Effie, go home."

Effie said nothing; but she stood still

clinging to her uncle's arm. She would not advance though he tried to draw her towards the gate, nor would she make any reply: she wound her arms about his, and held him fast. She had carried him along with the force of her young passion; but he could not move her. Her brain was whirling, her whole being in the wildest commotion. Her intelligence had partially given way, but her power of resistance was strong.

"Effie," he said softly, "come home. My dear, you must let your father see what is in your mind. How is he to learn if you will not tell him? Effie! for my part, I will do whatever you please," he said in a low tone in her ear. "I promise to go to him if you wish it—only obey your father and come home."

"Go home this moment to your mother," Mr. Ogilvie repeated. "Is this a time to be wandering about the world? She may

just keep her mind to herself, John Moubray. I'll have nothing to say to women's quarrels, and if you are a wise man you will do the same. Effie, go home."

Effie paused a moment between the two, one of whom repulsed her, while the other did no more than soothe and still her excitement as best he could. She was not capable of being soothed. The fire and passion in her veins required an outlet. She was so young, unaccustomed to emotion. She would not yield to do nothing, that hard part which women in so many circumstances have to play.

Suddenly she loosed her arms from that of the minister, and without a word, in an instant, before anything could be said, darted away from them into the gathering night.

CHAPTER XXI.

"WE were just bringing her back. No doubt she has darted in at the side door—she was always a hasty creature—and got into her own room. That's where ye will find her. I cannot tell you what has come over the monkey. She is just out of what little wits she ever had."

"I can tell very well what has come over her," said Mrs. Ogilvie. "She is just wild that I have interfered, which it was my clear duty to do. If she had been heart and soul in the matter it would have been different—but she was never that. These old cats at Rosebank, they thought

there was nobody saw it but themselves; but I saw it well enough."

"In that case," said Mr. Moubray, "perhaps it would have been better to interfere sooner. I wish you would send some one to see if Effie is really there."

"Why should I have interfered sooner? If everything had gone well, it was such a match as Effie had no chance of making; but when it turned out that it was a mistake, and the other there breaking his heart, that had always been more suitable, and her with no heart in it——" Mrs. Ogilvie paused for a moment in the satisfaction of triumphant self-vindication. "But if you're just sentimental and childish and come in my way, you bind her to a bankrupt that she does not care for, because of what you call honour—honour is all very well," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "for men; but whoever supposes that a bit little creature of a girl——"

"Will ye go and see if Effie is in her room?" said her husband impatiently.

"Ye may just ring the bell, Robert, and send one of the maids to see; what would I do with her? If I said anything it would only make her worse. I am not one of the people that shilly shally. I just act, and am done with it. I'm very glad I put in my letter myself that it might go in the first bag. But if you will take my advice you will just let her be: at this moment she could not bear the sight of me, and I'm not blaming her. I've taken it in my own hands, at my own risk, and if she's angry I'm not surprised. Let her be. She will come to herself by-and-bye, and at the bottom of her heart she will be very well pleased, and then I will ask Ronald Sutherland to his dinner, and then——"

"I wish," said Mr. Moubray, "you would ease my mind at least by making sure that Effie has really come in. I have a mis-

giving, which is perhaps foolish: I will go myself if you will let me."

"No need for that," said Mrs. Ogilvie, ringing the bell. "George, you will send Margaret to tell Miss Effie—but what am I to tell her? that is just the question. She will not want anything to say to me, and she will perhaps think—— You will say just that her uncle wants her, that will be the best thing to say."

There was a pause while George departed on his errand: not that Mrs. Ogilvie had nothing to say or was affected by the anxiety of others. It had indeed been a relief to her when her husband informed her that Effie, no doubt, had come in and was in her own room. The stepmother, who had been a little uneasy before, took this for granted with a sigh of relief, and felt that a certain little danger which she had not defined to herself was over.

And now that the alarm was past, and

that she had put forth her defence, it seemed better not to dwell upon this subject. Better to let it drop, she said to herself, better to let Effie think that it was over and nothing more to be made of it. Mrs. Ogilvie was a woman without temper and never ill-natured. She was very willing to let it drop. That she should receive her step-daughter as if nothing had happened was clearly the right way. Therefore, though she had a thousand things now to say, and could have justified her proceedings in volumes, she decided not to do so; for she could also be self-denying when it was expedient so to be.

There was therefore a pause. Mr. Moubray sat with his eyes fixed on the door and a great disquietude in his mind. He was asking himself what, if she appeared, he could do. Must he promise her her lover, as he would promise a child a plaything? must he ignore altogether the not

unreasonable reasons which Mrs. Ogilvie had produced in justification of her conduct? They were abhorrent to his mind, as well as to that of Effie, yet from her point of view they were not unreasonable. But if Effie was not there? Mr. Ogilvie said nothing at all, but he walked from one end of the room to another working his shaggy eyebrows. It was evident he was not so tranquil in his mind as he had pretended to be.

Presently Margaret the housemaid appeared, after a modest tap at the door. "Miss Effie is not in her room, mem," she said.

"Not in her room? are you quite sure? Perhaps she is in the library waiting for her papa; perhaps she is in the nursery with Rory. She may even have gone into the kitchen, to speak a word to old Mary, or to Pirie's cottage to see if there are any flowers. You will find her somewhere

if you look. Quick, quick, and tell her the minister wants her. You are sure, both of you gentlemen, that you saw her come in at the gate?"

"No doubt she came in," said Mr. Ogilvie with irritation; "where else would she go at this time of night?"

"I am not sure at all," said Mr. Moubray, rising up, "I never thought so: and here I have been sitting losing time. I will go myself to Pirie's cottage—and after that——"

"There is nothing to be frightened about," said Mrs. Ogilvie, rising too; "if she's not at Pirie's she will be at Rosebank, or else she will be in one of the cottages, or else—bless me, there are twenty places she may be, and nothing to make a panic about."

The minister went out in the middle of this speech waving his hand to her as he went away, and she followed him to the

door, calling out her consolations across the passage. She met her husband, who was about to follow, as she turned back, and caught his arm with her hands.

"Robert, you're not in this daft excitement too? Where in the world would she go to, as you say? She'll just have run somewhere in her pet, not to see me. There can be nothing to be terrified about."

"You have a way," cried the husband, "of talking, talking, that a person would fly to the uttermost parts of the airth to get free o' ye. Let me go! Effie's young and silly. She may run we know not where, or she may catch a cold to kill her, which is the least of it. Let me go."

"Sit down in your own chair by your own fireside, and listen to me," said the wife. "Why should you go on a fool's errand? one's enough for that. Did Effie ever give you any real vexation all her

life? No, truly, and why should she begin now? She will be taking a walk, or she will be complaining of me to the Miss Dempsters, or something of that innocent kind. Just you let her be. What did she ever do to give you a bad opinion of her? No, no, she's come out of a good stock, and she'll come to no harm."

"There is something in that," Mr. Ogilvie said. He was not ill disposed to sit down in his own chair by his own fireside and take his ease, and accept the assurance that Effie would come to no harm.

But when she had thus quieted her husband and disposed of him, Mrs. Ogilvie herself stole out in the dark, first to the house door, then through the ghostly shrubberies to the gate, to see if there was any trace visible of the fugitive. She was not so tranquil as she pretended to be. Effie's look of consternation and horror was still in her eyes, and she had a sense of guilt

which she could not shake off. But yet there were so many good reasons for doing what she had done, so many excuses, nay, laudable motives, things that called for immediate action.

"To marry a man you don't care about, when there is no advantage in it, what a dreadful thing to do. How could I look on and let that little thing make such a sacrifice? and when any person with the least perception could see her heart was not in it. And Ronald, him that she just had a natural bias to, that was just the most suitable match, not a great *parti* like what we all thought young Dirom, but well enough, and her own kind of person!"

It was thus she justified herself, and from her own point of view the justification was complete. But yet she was not a happy woman as she stood within the shadow of the big laurels, and looked out upon the road, hoping every moment to

see a slight shadow flit across the road, and Effie steal in at the open gate. What could the little thing do? As for running away, that was out of the question; and she was so young, knowing nothing. What could she do? It was not possible she should come to any harm.

Mr. Moubray was more anxious still, for it seemed to him that he knew very well what she would do. He walked about all the neighbouring roads, and peeped into the cottages, and frightened the Miss Dempsters by going up to their door, with heavy feet crushing the gravel at that unaccustomed hour, for no reason but just to ask how the old lady was!

"I must be worse than I think or the minister would never have come all this way once-errand to inquire about me," Miss Dempster said.

"He would just see the light, and he would mind that he had made no inquiries

for three days," said Miss Beenie; but she too was uncomfortable, and felt that there was more in this nocturnal visitation than met the eye.

It did not surprise Mr. Moubray that in all his searches he could find no trace of his little girl. He thought he knew where he would find her—on the platform of the little railway station, ready to get into the train for London. And in the meantime his mind was full of thoughts how to serve her best. He was not like the majority of people who are ready enough to serve others according to what they themselves think best. Uncle John, on the contrary, studied tenderly how he could help Effie in the way she wished.

He paused at the post-office, and sent off a telegram to Fred Dirom, expressed as follows:—"You will receive to-morrow morning a letter from Gilston. E. wishes you to know that it does not express her

feeling, that she stands fast whatever may happen."

When he had sent this he felt a certain tranquillising influence, as if he had propitiated fate, and said to himself that when she heard what he had done, she might perhaps be persuaded to come back. Then the minister went home, put a few things into his old travelling bag, and told his housekeeper that he was going to meet a friend at the train, and that perhaps he might not return that night, or for two or three nights. When he had done this, he made his evening prayer, in which you may be sure his little Effie occupied the first place, and then set off the long half-hour's walk to the station.

By this time it was late, and the train was due: but neither on the platform, nor in the office, nor among those who stood on the alert to jump into the train, could he find her. He was at last constrained

to believe that she was not there. Had she gone further to escape pursuit, to the next station, where there would be nobody to stop her? He upbraided himself deeply for letting the train go without him, after he had watched it plunging away in the darkness, into the echoes of the night. It seemed to thunder along through the great silence of the country, waking a hundred reverberations as he stood there with his bag in his hand, aghast, not knowing what to do. There had been time enough for that poor little pilgrim to push her way to the next stopping place, where she could get in unobserved.

Was this what she had done? He felt as if he had abandoned his little girl, deserted her, left her to take her first step in life unprotected, as he went back. And then, as he neared the village, a flicker of hope returned that she might, when left to herself, have come to a more reasonable

conclusion and gone home. He went back to Gilston, walking very softly that his step might not disturb them, if the family were all composed to rest. And for a moment his heart gave a bound of relief when he saw something moving among the laurels within the gate.

But it was only Mrs. Ogilvie, who stole out into the open, with a suppressed cry: "Have you not found her?" "Has she come home?" he asked in the same breath: then in the mutual pang of disappointment they stood for a moment and looked at each other, asking no more.

"I have got Robert to go to his bed," said Mrs. Ogilvie. "God forgive me, I just deceived him, saying she was at the manse with you—which was what I hoped—for what would have been the use of him wandering about, exposing himself and getting more rheumatism, when there was you and me to do all we could? And, oh!

what shall we do, or where can I send now? I am just at my wit's end. She would not do any harm to herself, oh! never! I cannot think it; and, besides, what would be the use? for she always had it in her power to write to him, and say it was only me."

Then the minister explained what he had anticipated, and how he had proved mistaken. "The only thing is, she might have gone on to Lamphray thinking it would be quieter, and taken the train there."

"Lord bless us!" said Mrs. Ogilvie. "If she has done that we can hear nothing till—there is no saying when we may hear."

And though they were on different sides, and, so to speak, hostile forces, these two people stood together for a moment with but one thought, listening to every little echo, and every rustle, and the cracking

of the twigs, and the sound of the burn, all the soft unreckoned noises of a silent night, but Effie's step or breath was not among them all.

CHAPTER XXII.

Effie had darted away from the side of her father and uncle in one of those *accès* of impatience, which are common to the young and inexperienced. She had no training in that science of endurance which is one of the chief bulwarks of life. Everything had become intolerable to her. She "could not bear it," words which are so often said, but which in most cases mean little more than the unavailing human cry against the hardships to which we have all to submit, and which most of us learn must be borne after all, whatever may be the struggle. By times the young, the unprepared, the undisciplined, fly out and will not

submit, to the confusion of their own existence first, and that of all others involved.

Effie meant little more than this uncontrollable expression of impatience, and sense of the intolerableness of the circumstances, when she loosed her arm from that of Uncle John, and fled—she knew not where. She was not far off, standing trembling and excited among the shadows, while they called her and searched for her along the different paths; and when they went hastily into the house on the supposition that she had found her way there, her heart for a moment failed her, and an inclination to realize their thoughts, to escape no farther than to the seclusion and safety of her own room, crossed her mind like one of the flying clouds that were traversing the sky. But not only her excitement and rebellion against the treason which she was being compelled to, but even her pride was now in arms, preventing any return.

She stood among the trees, among the evening damps, for some time after the gentlemen had disappeared, thought after thought coursing through her brain. Her determination was unchanged to go South by the night train, though she had no clear idea what was next to be done when she should reach London, that great fabulous place where she had never been, and of which she had not the faintest understanding. She would seek out Fred, tell him that she would stand by him whatever his trouble might be—that nothing should detach her from his side—that if he was poor, that was all the more reason.

So far as this went, Effie knew what to say, her heart was full of eloquence and fervour. The intermediate steps were difficult; but that was easy. She had been shy with him and reticent, receiving what he gave, listening to what he said, of herself giving little. But now a new impulse

possessed her. She would throw herself heart and soul into his fortunes. She would help him, now that he needed her. She would be true, ah! more than that, as she had said—she could not be false—it was an impossibility. Now that he was in need she was all his, to work or watch, to console or to cheer as might be most needful—his by the securest, most urgent of bonds, by right of his necessities.

The enthusiasm which she had never felt for Fred came now at the thought of his poverty and loss. She could smile in the force of her resolution, at the folly of the woman who thought this would break the tie between them; break it! when it made it like steel.

This fire in her heart kept Effie warm, and glowed about her with a semblance of passion; but first there was a difficult moment which she did not know how to pass. Had the train gone at once all would

have been easy; but it would not go yet for hours, and she could not pass the time standing on the damp grass, her feet getting wet, her damp skirts clinging about her, the wintry dews dropping upon her, under those trees. She began to think and ask herself where she would go to wait and get a little warm before it should be time for the train.

To Rosebank? but they were on the other side she reflected, with a vague pang and misty passing realization of all that the other side meant. She had been on the other side herself, against her will, till to-day; but not now, oh, not now! She felt the pang, like a cutting asunder, a tearing away; but would not dwell upon it, felt it only in passing. No, she would not go into the atmosphere of the other side.

And how could she go to the manse where Uncle John would beg and pray to go in-

stead of her, which was so very different; for Effie required not only to demonstrate her strong faithfulness, but to keep it up, to keep it in the state of passion.

Then there suddenly came upon her a gleam of illumination. Yes! that was the only place to go. To whom but to those who would suffer with him, who would have need also of strengthening and encouragement, who had such a change before them, and so much occasion for the support of their friends—could Effie betake herself? It did not occur to her that Doris and Phyllis, under the influence of depression and loss, were almost inconceivable, and that to cheer them by the sympathy and backing up of a little girl like herself, was something which the imagination failed to grasp. Not that thought, but the difficulties of the way chilled her a little. The dark, dark road over the brae which reached the waterside close to the churchyard, the

little path by the river, the wide, silent, solitary park—all this made her shiver a little.

But she said to herself with a forlorn rallying of her forces that such trifles mattered nothing, that she was beyond thinking of anything so unimportant, that there was the place for her, that she must go to his sisters to give them confidence, to comfort them on Fred's account, to say, "I am going to him, to stand by him." They who knew him so well, would know that when she said that, all was said, and Fred's strength and endurance secured.

This decision was made very rapidly, the mental processes being so much quicker than anything that is physical, so that the sound of the door closing upon Mr. Ogilvie and Mr. Moubray had scarcely died out of the echoes before she set forth. She walked very quickly and firmly so long as it was the highroad, where there were cot-

tage lights shining here and there and an occasional passer-by, though she shrank from sight or speech of any; but when she came to the darker by-way over the hill, it was all Effie's courage could do to keep her going.

There was light in the sky, the soft glimmer of stars, but it did not seem to get so far as the head of the brae, and still less down the other side, where it descended towards the water. Down below at the bottom of the ravine the water itself, indeed, was doubly clear; the sky reflected in it with a wildness and pale light which was of itself enough to frighten any one; but the descending path seemed to change and waver in the great darkness of the world around, so that sometimes it appeared to sink under Effie's feet, receding and falling into an abyss immeasurable, which re-acted upon the gloom, and made the descent seem as steep as a precipice.

Her little figure, not distinguishable in the darkness, stumbling downwards, not seeing the stones and bushes that came in her way, seemed a hundred times as if about to fall down, down, into the depths, into that dark clearness, the cold gulf of the stream. Sometimes she slid downward a little, and then thought for a dizzy moment that all was over—sometimes stumbled and felt that she was going down headlong, always feeling herself alone, entirely alone, between the clear stars overhead, and the line of keen light below.

Then there came the passage of the churchyard, which was full of solemnity. Effie saw the little huddled mass of the old chapel against the dim opening out of the valley in which the house of Allonby lay—and it looked to her like a crouching figure watching among the dead, like, perhaps, some shadow of Adam Fleming or his murdered Helen in the place where she fell.

As soon as she got on level ground the girl flew along, all throbbing and trembling with terror. Beyond lay the vague stretches of the park, and the house rising in the midst of the spectral river mists, soft and white, that filled it—the lights in the windows veiled and indistinct, the whole silent, like a house of shadows. Her heart failed although she went on, half flying, towards it, as to a refuge. Effie by this time had almost forgotten Fred. She had forgotten everything except the terrors of this unusual expedition, and the silence and solitude and all the weird influences that seemed to be about her. She felt as if she was outside of the world altogether, a little ghost wandering over the surface of the earth. There seemed to be no voice in her to call out for help against the darkness and the savage silence, through which she could not even hear the trickle of the stream: nothing but her

own steps flying, and her own poor little bosom panting, throbbing, against the unresponsive background of the night.

Her footsteps too became inaudible as she got upon the turf and approached close to Allonby. All was silent there also; there seemed no sound at all as if any one was stirring, but only a dead house with faint spectral lights in the windows.

She stopped and took breath and came to herself, a little calmed by the neighbourhood of a human habitation in which there must be some inhabitants though she could not hear them. She came to herself more or less, and the pulsations of terror in her ears beat less overwhelmingly, so that she began to be able to think again, and ask herself what she should do. To go to the great door, to wake all the echoes by knocking, to be met by an unconcerned servant and ushered in as if she were an ordinary visitor, all agitated and

worn by emotion as she was, was impossible.

It seemed more natural, everything being out of rule, to steal round the house till she found the window of the room in which the girls were sitting, and make her little summons to them without those impossible formalities, and be admitted so to their sole company. The lawn came close up under the windows, and Effie crept round one side of the house, finding all dark, with a feeling of discouragement as if she had been repulsed. One large and broad window a little in advance showed, however, against the darkness, and though she knew this could not be a sitting-room, she stole on unconscious of any curiosity or possibility of indiscretion, it being a matter of mere existence to find some one.

The curtains were drawn half over the window, yet not so much but that she

could see in. And the sight that met the girl's astonished eyes was one so strange and incomprehensible that it affected her like a vision.

Mrs. Dirom was sitting in the middle of the room in a deep easy chair, with her head in her hands, to all appearance weeping bitterly, while a man muffled in a rough loose coat stood with his back to her, opening what seemed the door of a little cupboard in the wall close to the bed. Effie gazed terror-stricken, wondering was it a robber, who was it? Mrs. Dirom was making no resistance; she was only crying, her face buried in her hands.

The little door yielded at last, and showed to Effie dimly the shelves of a safe crowded with dark indistinct objects. Then Mrs. Dirom rose up, and taking some of these indistinct objects in her hands suddenly made visible a blaze of

diamonds which she seemed to press upon the man.

He turned round to the light, as Effie, stooping, half kneeling on the wet grass, gazed in, in a kind of trance, scarcely knowing what she did. The coat in which he was muffled was large and rough, and a big muffler hung loosely round his neck, but to the great astonishment of the young spectator the face was that of Mr. Dirom himself. He seemed to laugh and put away the case in which the diamonds were blazing.

Then out of the further depths of the safe he brought a bundle of papers over which he nodded his head a great many times as if with satisfaction. At this moment something seemed to disturb them, some sound apparently in the house, for they both looked towards the door, and then the lamp was suddenly extinguished and Effie saw no more. It was a curious

scene—the diamonds lighting up the dim room, the woman in tears offering them to the man, he refusing, holding his little bundle of papers, the unusual dress, the air of excitement and emotion: and then sudden darkness, nothing visible any more; yet the certainty that these two people were there, without light, concealing themselves and their proceedings, whatever these might be.

Effie had looked on scarcely knowing why, unaware that she was prying into other people's concerns, suddenly attracted by the gleam of light, by the comfort of feeling some one near. The putting out of the lamp threw her back into her panic, yet changed it. She shrank away from the window with a sudden fear of the house in which something strange, she knew not what, was going on. Her mind was too much confused to ask what it was, to make any representation to herself of

what she had seen; but the thought of these two people *in the dark* seemed to give a climax to all the nameless terrors of the night.

She went on by the side of the house, not knowing what to do, afraid now to ask admission, doubly afraid to turn back again, lost in confusion of mind and fatigue of body, which dimmed and drove out her original distress.

Now, however, she had come to the back regions in which the servants were stirring, and before she was aware a loud "Who's that?" and the flash of a lantern upon her, brought her back to herself. It was the grooms coming back from the stable who thus interrupted her forlorn round.

"Who's that?—it's a woman—it's a lassie! Lord bless us, it's Miss Ogilvie!" they cried.

Effie had sufficient consciousness to meet their curious inspection with affected composure.

"I want to see Miss Dirom," she said. "I lost my way in the dark; I couldn't find the door. Can I see Miss Dirom?"

. Her skirts were damp and clinging about her, her hair limp with the dews of the night, her whole appearance wild and strange: but the eyes of the grooms were not enlightened. They made no comments; one of them led her to the proper entrance, another sent the proper official to open to her, and presently she stood dazzled and tremulous in the room full of softened firelight and taperlight, warm and soft and luxurious, as if there was no trouble or mystery in the world, where Doris and Phyllis sat in their usual animated idleness talking to each other. One of them was lying at full length on a sofa, her arms about her head, her white cashmere dress falling in the much esteemed folds which that pretty material takes by nature; the other was seated on a stool before the

fire, her elbows on her knees. The sound of their voices discoursing largely, softly, just as usual, was what Effie heard as the servant opened the door.

"Miss Ogilvie, did you say?—Effie!" They both gazed at her with different manifestations of dramatic surprise—without, for the moment, any other movement. Her appearance was astonishing at this hour, but nothing else seemed to disturb the placidity of these young women. Finally, Miss Phyllis rose from her stool in front of the fire.

"She has eyes like stars, and her hair is all twinkling with dew—quite a romantic figure. What a pity there is nobody to see it but Doris and me! You don't mean to say you have come walking all this way?"

"Oh! what does it matter how I came?" cried Effie. "I came—because I could not stay away. There was nobody else that

was so near me. I came to tell you—I am going to Fred."

"To Fred!" they both cried, Phyllis with a little scream of surprise, Doris in a sort of inquiring tone, raising herself half from her sofa. They both stared at her strangely. They had no more notion why she should be going to Fred than the servant who had opened the door for her—most likely much less—for there were many things unknown to the young ladies which the servants knew.

"Fred will be very much flattered," said Doris. "But why are you going? does he know? what is it for? is it for shopping? Have you made up your mind, all at once, that you want another dress?—I should say two or three, but that is neither here nor there. And what has put it so suddenly into your head? And where are you going to stay? Are you sure your friends are in London at this time of the year——?'

"Oh!" cried Effie, restored out of her exhaustion and confusion in a moment by this extraordinary speech, "is that all you think? a dress, and shopping to do! when Fred is alone, when he is in trouble, when even your father has deserted him—and his money gone, and his heart sore! Oh, is that all you know? I am going to tell him that I will never forsake him whatever others may do—that I am come to stand by him—that I am come——"

She stopped, not because she had no more to say, but because she lost the control of her voice and could do nothing but sob—drawing her breath convulsively, like a child that has wept its passion out, yet has not recovered the spasmodic grip upon its throat.

Phyllis and Doris looked at her with eyes more and more astonished and critical. They spoke to each other, not to her. "She means it, do you know, Dor!"

"It is like a melodrama, Phyll—Good-

ness, look at her! If we should ever go on the stage—— !"

Effie heard the murmur of their voices, and turned her eyes from one to another: but her head was light with the fumes of her own passion, which had suddenly flared so high; and though she looked from one to another, instinctively, she did not understand what they said.

"And did you come to tell us this, so late, and all alone, you poor little Effie? And how did you manage to get away? and how are you to get back?"

"Of course," said Doris, "we must send her back. Don't ask so many silly questions, Phyll."

"I am not going back," said Effie. "They would stop me if they knew. Oh, will you send me to the train? for it is very dark and very wet, and I'm frightened, it's all so lonely. I never meant to trouble anybody. But your father will be going

too, and I would just sit in a corner and never say a word. Oh, will you ask him to let me go with him to the train?"

"What does she mean about papa? The train! there is no one going to the train. Do you mean to say that you—to-night—oh, you know you must be dreaming; nothing like this is possible, Effie! You must go home, child, and go to bed——"

"To bed! and let him think that I've forsaken him—to let him get up to-morrow morning and hear that Effie, because he is poor, has gone back from her word? Oh! no, no, I cannot do it. If you will not send me, I will just walk as I meant to do! I was frightened," said Effie, with her piteous little sob. "And then if your father is going—But it does not matter after all, I will just walk as I meant to do: and if you don't care, that was my mistake in coming—I will just say good-night."

She turned away with a childlike dignity, yet with a tremor she could not subdue. She was not afraid to go out into the world, to carry the sacrifice of her young existence to the man who loved her, whom she would not forsake in his trouble: but she was frightened for the dark road, the loneliness of the night—she was frightened, but yet she was ready to do it. She turned away with a wave of her hand.

Both of the girls, however, were roused by this time. Doris rose from her sofa, and Phyllis seized Effie, half coaxingly, half violently, by the arm.

"Effie! goodness," she cried, "just think for a moment. You musn't do this—what could Fred do with you? He would be frightened out of his senses. You would put him in such a predicament. What *would* he do?"

"And where would you go?" said Doris. "To his lodgings? Only fancy, a young

man's lodgings in Half Moon Street, just the sort of place where they think the worst of everything. He would be at his wit's end. He would think it very sweet of you, but just awfully silly. For what would he do with you? He could not keep you there. It would put him in the most awkward position. For Fred's sake, if you really care for him, don't, for heaven's sake, do anything so extraordinary. Here is mother, she will tell you."

"Mamma," they both cried, as Mrs. Dirom came into the room, "Effie has got the strangest idea. I think she must be a little wrong in her head. She says she is going to Fred ——"

"To Fred!" the mother exclaimed with a voice full of agitation. "Has anything happened to Fred——"

"Don't make yourself anxious, it is only her nonsense. She has heard about the firm, I suppose. She thinks he is ruined,

and all that, and she wants to go to him to stand by him—to show him that she will not forsake him. It's pretty, but it's preposterous," said Doris, giving Effie a sudden kiss. "Tell her she will only make Fred uncomfortable. She will not listen to us."

Mrs. Dirom had a look of heat and excitement which her children never remembered to have seen in her before, but which Effie understood who knew. Her eyes were red, her colour high, a flush across her cheek-bones: her lips trembled with a sort of nervous impatience.

"Oh," she cried, "haven't I enough to think of? Do I want to be bothered with such childish nonsense now? Going to Fred! What does she want with Fred? He has other things in his mind. Let her go home, that is the only thing to do——"

"So we have told her: but she says she wants to go to the train; and some-

thing about my father who is here, and will be going too."

"Nothing of the sort," cried Mrs. Dirom, sharply. She gave Effie a look of alarm, almost threatening, yet imploring—a look which asked her how much she knew, yet defied her to know anything.

"The poor little thing has got a fright," she said, subduing her voice. "I am not angry with you, Effie; you mean it kindly, but it would never, never do. You must go home."

Effie's strength had ebbed out of her as she stood turning her bewildered head from one to another, hearing with a shock unspeakable that Fred—Fred whom she had been so anxious to succour!—would not want her, which made the strangest revolution in her troubled mind. But still mechanically she held to her point.

"I will not be any trouble. I will just sit in the corner and never say a word.

Let me go to the train with Mr. Dirom. Let me go—with him. He is very kind, he will not mind."

"Mamma, do you hear what she says? She has said it again and again. Can papa be here and none of us know?"

"Nothing of the sort," cried Mrs. Dirom once more. Her tone was angry, but it was full of alarm. She turned her back on the others and looked at Effie with eyes that were full of anguish, of secrecy and confidence, warning her, entreating her, yet defying.

"How should he be here when he has so much to do elsewhere?" she cried. "The child has got that, with the other nonsense, into her head." Then with a sudden change of tone, "I will take her to my room to be quiet, and you can order the brougham to take her home."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"SHE was sent home in the brougham, that disturbed all our sleep just dashing along the road at the dead of night. They were in a terrible state before that. The minister, too, was here, looking like a ghost to hear if we knew anything; and how could we say we knew anything, seeing she had parted from here in the afternoon not over well pleased with Beenie and me. And Mrs. Ogilvie—she is not a woman I am fond of, and how far I think she's to blame, I would just rather not say—but I will say this, that I was sorry for her that night. She came, too, with a shawl over her head, just out of herself.

She had got the old man off to his bed, never letting on that Effie was out of the house; and she was in a terror for him waking, and the girl not there."

"No fear of him waking; he is just an old doited person," said Miss Beenie, with indignation.

"Not so old as either you or me. But let alone till I've told my story. And then, Ronald, my man, you've heard what's followed. Not only a failure, but worse and worse; and the father fled the country. They say he had the assurance to come down here to get some papers that were laid up in his wife's jewel press, and that Effie saw him. But he got clean away; and it's a fraudulent bankruptcy—or if there's anything worse than a fraudulent bankruptcy, it's that. Oh, yes, there has been a great deal of agitation, and it is perhaps just as well that you were out of the way. I cannot tell whether I feel for

the family or not. There is no look about them as if they thought shame. They're just about the same as ever, at kirk and at market, with their horses and carriages. They tell me it takes a long time to wind up an establishment like that—and why should they not take the good of their carriages and their horses as long as they have them? But I'm perhaps a very old-fashioned woman. I would not have kept them, not a day. I would never have ridden the one nor driven about in the other, with my father a hunted swindler, and my family's honour all gone to ruin—never, never! I would rather have died."

"Sarah, that is just what you will do, if you work yourself up like this. Will ye not remember what the doctor says?"

"Oh, go away with your doctors. I'm an old-fashioned woman, but I'm a woman of strong feelings; I just cannot endure it! and to think that Effie, my poor little

Effie, will still throw in her lot with them, and will not be persuaded against it!"

"Why should she be persuaded against it?" said Ronald Sutherland, with a very grave face. "Nobody can believe that the money would make any difference to her: and I suppose the man was not to blame."

"The man—was nothing one way or another. He got the advantage of the money, and he was too poor a creature ever to ask how it was made. But it's not that; the thing is that her heart was never in it—never! She was driven—no, not driven—if she had been driven she would have resisted. She was just pushed into it, just persuaded to listen, and then made to see there was no escape. Didn't I tell you that, Beenie, before there was word of all this, before Ronald came home? The little thing had no heart for it. She just got white like a ghost when

there was any talk about marriage. She would hear of nothing, neither the trou-so, as they call it now, nor any of the nonsense that girls take a natural pleasure in. But now her little soul is just on fire. She will stick to him—she will not forsake him. And here am I in my bed, not able to take her by her shoulders and to tell her the man's not worthy of it, and that she'll rue it just once, and that will be her life long!"

"Oh!" cried Miss Beenie, wringing her hands, "what is the use of a woman being in her bed if she is to go on like that? You will just bring on another attack, and where will we all be then? The doctor, he says——"

"You are greatly taken up with what the doctor says: that's one thing of being in my bed," said Miss Dempster, with a laugh, "that I cannot see the doctor and his ways—his dram—that he would come

to the window and take off, with a nod up at you and me."

"Oh, Sarah, nothing of the kind. It was no dram, in the first place, but just a small drop of sherry with his quinine——"

"That's very like, that's very like," said Miss Dempster, with a satirical laugh, "the good, honest, innocent man! I wonder it was not tea, just put in a wine glass for the sake of appearances. Are you sure, Beenie, it was not tea?"

"Oh, Sarah! the doctor, he has just been your diversion. But if you would be persuaded what a regard he has for you—ay, and respect too—and says that was always his feeling, even when he knew you were gibing and laughing at him."

"A person that has the sense to have a real illness will always command a doctor's respect. If I recover, things will just fall into their old way; but make your mind easy, Beenie, I will not recover, and the

doctor will have a respect for me all his days."

"Oh, Sarah!" cried Miss Beenie, weeping. "Ronald, I wish you would speak to her. You have a great influence with my sister, and you might tell her—— You are just risking your life, and what good can that do?"

"I am not risking my life; my life's all measured, and reeling out. But I would like to see that bit little Effie come to a better understanding before I die. Ye will be a better doctor for her than me, Ronald. Tell her from me she is a silly thing. Tell her yon is not the right man for her, and that I bid her with my dying breath not to be led away with a vain conceit, and do what will spoil her life and break her heart. He's not worthy of it—no man is worthy of it. You may say that to her, Ronald, as if it was the last thing I had to say."

"No," said Ronald. His face had not at all relaxed. It was fixed with the set seriousness of a man to whom the subject is far too important for mirth or change of feature. "No," he said, "I will tell Effie nothing of the kind. I would rather she should do what was right than gain an advantage for myself."

"Right, there is no question about right!" cried the old lady. "He's not worthy of it. You'll see even that he'll not desire it. He'll not understand it. That's just my conviction. How should his father's son understand a point of honour like that? a man that is just nobody, a parvenoo, a creature that money has made, and that the want of it will unmake. That's not a man at all for a point of honour. You need say nothing from yourself; though you are an old friend, and have a right to show her all the risks, and what she is doing; but if you don't tell her what

I'm saying I will just—I will just—haunt you, you creature without spirit, you lad without a backbone intil ye, you——"

But here Miss Beenie succeeded in drawing Ronald from the room.

"Why will ye listen to her?" cried the young sister; "ye will just help her to her own destruction. When I'm telling you the doctor says—oh, no, I'm pinning my faith to no doctor; but it's just as clear as daylight, and it stands to reason—she will have another attack if she goes on like yon——"

The fearful rush she made at him, the clutch upon his arm, his yielding to the impulse which he could not resist, none of these things moved Ronald. His countenance was as set and serious as ever, the humour of the situation did not touch him. He neither smiled nor made any response. Downstairs with Miss Beenie, out of sight of the invalid who was so

violent in the expression of her feelings, he retained the same self-absorbed look.

"If she thinks it right," he said, "I am not the one to put any difficulty before her. The thing for me to do is just to go away—"

"Don't go away and leave us, Ronald, when no mortal can tell what an hour or a day may bring forth; and Sarah always so fond of you, and you such a near connection, the nearest we have in this countryside——"

"What should happen in a day or an hour, and of what service can I be?" he asked. "Of course, if I can be of any use——" but he shook his head. Ronald, like most people, had his mind fixed upon his own affairs.

"Oh, have ye no eyes?" cried Miss Beenie, "have none of ye any eyes? You are thinking of a young creature that has all her life before her, and time to set things right if they should go wrong;

but nobody has a thought for my sister, that has been the friend of every one of you, that has never missed giving you a good advice, or putting you in the way you should go. And now here is she just slipping away on her last journey, and none of you paying attention! not one, not one!" she cried, wringing her hands, "nor giving a thought of pity to me that will just be left alone in the world."

Miss Beenie, who had come out to the door with the departing visitor, threw herself down on the bench outside, her habitual seat in happier days, and burst into subdued weeping.

"I darena even cry when she can see me. It's a relief to get leave to cry," she said, "for, oh, cannot ye see, not one of ye, that she's fading away like the morning mist and like the summer flowers?"

The morning mist and the summer flowers were not images very like Miss

Dempster, who lay like an old tree, rather than any delicate and fragile thing; but Dr. Jardine, coming briskly up on his daily visit, was not susceptible to appropriateness of metaphor. He came up to Miss Beenie and patted her on the shoulder with a homely familiarity which a few months ago would have seemed presumption to the ladies of Rosebank.

"Maybe no," he said, "maybe no, who can tell? And even if it was so, why should you be alone? I see no occasion—— Come up, and we'll see how she is to-day."

Ronald Sutherland, left alone, walked down the slope very solemnly, with his face as rigid as ever. Miss Dempster was his old and good friend, but, alas, he thought nothing of Miss Dempster.

"If she thinks it right, it must be so," he was saying to himself. "If she thinks it's right, am I the one to put any difficulty in the way?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

To postpone the self-sacrifice of an enthusiast for weeks, or even for days, is the hardest of all tests, and a trial almost beyond the power of flesh and blood. Upheld by religious fervour, the human soul may be equal to this or any other test; but in lesser matters, and specially in those self-sacrifices prompted by generosity, which to the youthful hero or heroine seem at the first glance so inevitable, so indispensable, things which no noble mind would shrink from, the process of waiting is a terrible ordeal.

He, or still more, she, who would have given life itself, happiness, anything, everything that is most prized in existence,

with a light heart, and the most perfect conviction at the moment, becomes, as the days go by, the victim of a hundred chilling doubts and questions. Her courage, like that of Bob Acres, oozes out at her finger-ends. She is brought to the bar of a thousand suppressed, yet never extinguished, reasonings.

Is it right to feign love even for her lover's sake?—is it right to do another so great an injury as to delude him into the thought that he is making you happy, while, in reality, you are sacrificing all happiness for him? Is it right——? but these questions are so manifold and endless that it is vain to enumerate them.

Effie had been the victim of this painful process for three long lingering weeks. She had little, very little, to support her in her determination. The papers had been full of the great bankruptcy, of details of Dirom's escape, and of the valuable papers

and securities which had disappeared with him: and with a shiver Effie had understood that the scene she had seen unawares through the window had meant far more than even her sense of mystery and secrecy in it could have helped her to divine.

The incidents of that wonderful night—the arguments of the mother and sisters, who had declared that the proposed expedition would be nothing but an embarrassment to Fred—her return ashamed and miserable in the carriage into which they had thrust her—had been fatal to the fervour of the enthusiasm which had made her at first capable of anything. Looking back upon it now, it was with an overwhelming shame that she recognized the folly of that first idea. Effie had grown half-a-dozen years older in a single night. She imagined what might have happened had she carried out that wild intention, with one of those scathing and burning blushes which seem

to scorch the very soul. She imagined Fred's look of wonder, his uneasiness, perhaps his anger at her folly which placed him in so embarrassing a position.

Effie felt that, had she seen those feelings in his eyes even for a moment, she would have died of shame. He had written to her, warmly thanking her for her "sympathy," for her "generous feeling," for the telegram (of which she knew nothing) which had been so consolatory to him, for the "unselfishness," the "beautiful, brave thought" she had for a moment entertained of coming to him, of standing by him.

"Thank you, dearest, for this lovely quixotism," he had said; "it was like my Effie," as if it had been a mere impulse of girlish tenderness, and not the terrible sacrifice of a life which she had intended it to be. This letter had been overwhelming to Effie, notwithstanding, or perhaps

by reason of, its thanks and praises. He had, it was clear, no insight into her mind, no real knowledge of her at all. He had never divined anything, never seen below the surface.

If she had done what she intended, if she had indeed gone to him, he living as he was! Effie felt as if she must sink into the ground when she realized this possibility. And as she did so, her heart failed her, her courage, her strength oozed away: and there was no one to whom she could speak. Doris and Phyllis came to see her now and then, but there was no encouragement in them. They were going abroad; they had ceased to make any reference to that independent action on their own part which was to have followed disaster to the firm. There was indeed in their conversation no account made of any downfall; their calculations about their travels were all made on the

ground of wealth. And Fred had taken refuge in his studio they said — he was going to be an artist, as he had always wished: he was going to devote himself to art: they said this with a significance which Effie in her simplicity did not catch, for she was not aware that devotion to Art interfered with the other arrangements of life. And this was all. She had no encouragement on that side, and her resolution, her courage, her strength of purpose, her self-devotion oozed away.

Strangely enough, the only moral support she had was from Ronald, who met her with that preternaturally grave face, and asked for Fred, whom he had never asked for before, and said something inarticulate which Effie understood, to the effect that he for one would never put difficulties in her way. What did he mean? No one could have explained it—not even himself: and yet Effie knew. Ronald had the

insight which Fred, with those foolish praises of her generosity and her quixotism, did not possess.

And so the days went on, with a confusion in the girl's mind which it would be hopeless to describe. Her whole life seemed to hang in a balance, wavering wildly between earth and heaven. What was to be done with it? What was she to do with it? Eric was on his way home, and would arrive shortly, for his sister's marriage, and all the embarrassment of that meeting lay before her, taking away the natural delight of it, which at another moment would have been so sweet to Effie. Even Uncle John was of little advantage to her in this pause. He accompanied her in her walks, saying little. Neither of them knew what to say. All the wedding preparations had come to a standstill, tacitly, without any explanation made; and in the face of Fred's silence

on the subject Effie could say nothing, neither could her champion say anything about the fulfilment of her engagement.

Mrs. Ogilvie, on the other hand, was full of certainty and self-satisfaction.

"He has just acted as I expected, like a gentleman," she said, "making no unpleasantness. He is unfortunate in his connections, poor young man; but I always said that there was the makings of a real gentleman in young Dirom. You see I have just been very right in my calculations. He has taken my letter in the right spirit. How could he do otherwise? He had the sense to see at once that Robert could never give his daughter to a ruined man."

"There could not be two opinions on that subject," said her husband, still more satisfied with himself.

"There might, I think, be many opinions," the minister said, mildly. "If two young people love each other, and

stick to it, there is no father but will be vanquished by them at the end."

"That's all your sentimentality," said Mr. Ogilvie. "Let them come and tell me about their love as you call it, they would soon get their answer. Any decent young woman, let alone a girl brought up like Effie, would think shame."

"Effie will not think shame," said Mr. Moubray: "if the young man is equal to Mrs. Ogilvie's opinion of him. You will have to make up your mind to encounter your own child, Robert—which is far harder work than to meet a stranger—in mortal conflict. For Effie will never take your view of the matter. She will not see that misfortune has anything to do with it. She will say that what was done for good fortune was done for bad. She will stand by him."

"Hoots," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "I am not ashamed to name the name of love for my

part. There was no love on Effie's side. No, no, her heart was never in it. It is just a blaze of generosity and that kind of thing. You need have no trouble so far as that is concerned. When she sees that it's not understood, her feeling will just die out, like that lowing of thorns under the pot which is mentioned in Scripture: or most likely she will take offence—and that will be still better. For he will not press it, partly because he will think it's not honourable, and partly because he has to struggle for himself and has the sense to see it will be far better not to burden himself with a wife."

"If you were so sure there was no love on Effie's side, why did you let it go on?" said Mr. Moubray with a little severity.

"Why did I let it go on? just for the best reason in the world—because at that time he was an excellent match. Was I to let her ruin the best sitting down in all

the countryside, for a childish folly? No, no; I have always set my heart on doing my duty to Robert's daughter, and that was just the very best that could be done for her. It's different now; and here is another very fine lad, under our very hand. One that is an old joe, that she has known all her life, and might have been engaged to him but for—different reasons. Nothing's lost, and he's just turned up in the very nick of time, if you do not encourage her in her daft ideas, Uncle John."

"I do not consider them daft ideas: and that Effie should go from one to another like a puppet when you pull the strings——"

"Oh, I am not a clever person; I cannot meet you with your images and your metaphors; but this I can say," cried Mrs. Ogilvie, solemnly, "that it is just your niece's happiness that is at stake, and if you come between her and what is just

and right, the blame will be yours and not mine."

Mr. Moubray went away very much troubled, with this in his mind. Effie had not loved Fred, and it was possible that she might love Ronald, that she might have had an inclination towards him all along; but was it possible that she should thus change—put down one and take up another—resign even the man she loved not, as no longer a good match, and accept the man she might love, because he was?

Marriage without love is a horror to every pure mind; it was to the minister the most abhorrent of all thoughts: and yet it was not so degrading, so deplorable as this. He went home to his lonely house with a great oppression on his soul. What could he say, what advise to the young and tender creature who had been brought to such a pass, and who had to

find her way out of it, he could not tell how? He had nothing to say to her. He could not give her a counsel; he did not even know how to approach the subject. He had to leave her alone at this crisis of her fate.

The actual crisis came quite unexpectedly when no one thought it near. It had come to be December, and Christmas, which should have witnessed the marriage, was not far off. The Diroms were said to be preparing to leave Allonby; but except when they were met riding or driving, they were little seen by the neighbours, few of whom, to tell the truth, had shown much interest in them since the downfall. Suddenly, in the afternoon of one of those dull winter days when the skies had begun to darken and the sun had set, the familiar dog-cart, which had been there so often, dashed in at the open gates of Gilston and Fred Dirom jumped out. He startled old

George first of all by asking, not for Miss, but Mrs. Ogilvie.

"Miss Effie is in, sir. I will tell her in a moment," George said, half from opposition, half because he could not believe his ears.

"I want to see Mrs. Ogilvie," replied the young man, and he was ushered in accordingly, not without a murmured protest on the part of the old servant, who did not understand this novel method of procedure.

The knowledge of Fred's arrival thrilled through the house. It flitted upstairs to the nursery, it went down to the kitchen. The very walls pulsated to this arrival. Effie became aware of it, she did not herself know how, and sat trembling expecting every moment to be summoned. But no summons came. She waited for some time, and then with a strong quiver of excitement, braced herself up for the final trial

and stole downstairs. George was lingering about the hall. He shook his gray head as he saw her on the stairs, then pointed to the door of the drawing-room.

"He's in there," said the old man, "and I would bide for no ca'. I would suffer nae joukery-pawkery, I would just gang ben!"

Effie stood on the stairs for a moment like one who prepares for a fatal plunge, then with her pulses loud in her ears, and every nerve quivering, ran down the remaining steps and opened the door.

Fred was standing in the middle of the room holding Mrs. Ogilvie's hand. He did not at first hear the opening of the door, done noiselessly by Effie in her whirl of passionate feeling.

"If you think it will be best," he was saying, "I desire to do only what is best for her. I don't want to agitate or distress her—Effie!"

In a moment he had dropped her step-mother's hand and made a hurried step towards the apparition, pale, breathless, almost speechless with emotion, at the door. He was pale too, subdued, serious, very different from the easy and assured youth who had so often met her there.

"Effie! my dearest, generous girl!"

"Oh, Fred! what has become of you all this time? did you think that I was like the rest?"

"Now, Effie," said Mrs. Ogilvie, "you are just spoiling everything both for him and for yourself. What brought you here? you are not wanted here. He has plenty on his mind without you. Just you go back again where you came from. He has told me all he wants to say. You here just makes everything worse."

Fred had taken her hands into his. He looked into her eyes with a gaze which Effie did not understand.

"To think you should be willing to encounter even poverty and misery for me!" he said; "but I cannot take you at your word. I cannot expose you to that struggle. It must be put off indefinitely, my sweetest girl: alas, that I should have to say it! when another fortnight, only two weeks more, should have made us happy."

He stooped down and kissed her hands. There was a tone, protecting, compassionate, respectful in his voice. He was consoling her quite as much as himself.

"Postponed?" she said faltering, gazing at him with an astonishment which was mingled with dismay.

"Alas, yes, my generous darling: though you are willing, I am not able to carry out our engagement: that is what I have been explaining. Don't think it is not as bad for me as for you."

"As bad for me, as for you," the blood rushed to Effie's countenance in a wild

flood of indignation and horror. As bad for him as for her! She stood aghast, her eyes fixed upon his, in which there was, could it be? a complaisance, a self-satisfaction mingled with regret.

Fred had not the least conception of the feeling which had moved her. He knew nothing about the revolution made in all her thoughts by the discovery of his ruin, or of her impassioned determination to stand by him, and sacrifice everything to his happiness. No idea of the truth had entered his mind. He was sorry for her disappointment, which indeed was not less to him than to her, though, to be sure, a girl, he knew, always felt it more than a man. But when Effie, in her hurt pride and wounded feeling, uttered a cry of astonishment and dismay, he took it for the appeal of disappointment and replied to it hastily:

"It cannot be helped," he said. "Do

you think it is an easy thing for me to say so? but what can I do? I have given up everything. A man is not like the ladies. I am going back to the studio —to work in earnest, where I used only to play at working. How could I ask you to go there with me, to share such a life? And besides, if I am to do anything, I must devote myself altogether to art. If things were to brighten, then, indeed, you may be sure—— without an hour's delay!"

She had drawn her hands away, but he recovered possession of one, which he held in his, smoothing and patting it, as if he were comforting a child. A hundred thoughts rushed through her mind as he stood there, smiling at her pathetically, yet not without a touch of vanity, comprehending nothing, without the faintest gleam of perception as to what she had meant, sorry for her, consoling her for her loss, feeling

to his heart the value of what she had lost, which was himself.

Her dismay, her consternation, the revulsion of feeling which sent the blood boiling through her veins, were to him only the natural vexation, distress, and disappointment of a girl whose marriage had been close at hand, and was now put off indefinitely. For this—which was so natural—he was anxious to console her. He wanted her to feel it as little as possible—to see that it was nobody's fault, that it could not be helped. Of all the passionate impulses that had coursed through her veins he knew nothing, nothing! He could not divine them, or understand, even if he had divined.

"At best," he said, still soothing her, patting her hand, "the postponement must be for an indefinite time. And how can I ask you to waste your youth, dearest Effie? I have done you harm enough already. I

came to let you know the real state of affairs—to set you free from your engagements to me, if," he said, pressing her hand again, looking into her face, "you will accept——"

His face appeared to her like something floating in the air, his voice vibrated and rang about her in circles of sound. She drew her hand almost violently away, and withdrew a little, gazing at him half stupified, yet with a keen impatience and intolerance in her disturbed mind.

"I accept," she said hoarsely, with a sense of mortification and intense indignant shame, which was stronger than any sensation Effie had ever felt in her life before.

That was what he thought of her; this man for whom she had meant to sacrifice herself! She began hastily to draw off the ring which he had given her from her finger, which, slight as it was, seemed to grow larger with her excitement and

tremulousness, and made the operation difficult.

"Take it," she said, holding out the ring to him. "It is yours, not mine."

"No, no," he said, putting back her extended hand softly, "not that. If we part, don't let it be in anger, Effie. Keep that at least, for a recollection—for a token——"

She scarcely heard what words he used. It was he who had the better of it, she felt. She was angry, disappointed, rejected. Was not that what everybody would think? She held the ring in her hand for a moment, then let it drop from her fingers. It fell with a dull sound on the carpet at his feet. Then she turned round, somehow controlling her impulse to cry out, to rush away, and walked to the door.

"I never expected she would have shown that sense and judgment," said Mrs. Ogilvie, after she had shown the visitor, whose

exit was even more hasty than his arrival, and his feelings far from comfortable, to the door. She sat down at her writing table at once with that practical sense and readiness which never forsook her.

"Now I will just write and ask Ronald to his dinner," she said.

CHAPTER XXV.

But things did not go so easily as Mrs. Ogilvie supposed.

Effie had received a blow which was not easily forgotten. The previous mistakes of her young career might have been forgotten, and it is possible that she might have come to be tolerably happy in the settling down and evaporation of all young thoughts and dreams, had she in the fervour of her first impulse become Fred Dirom's wife. It would not have been the happiness of her ideal, but it often happens that an evanescent splendour like that which illumines the early world dies away with comparative harmlessness, and leaves

a very good substitute of solid satisfaction on a secondary level, with which all but the visionary learn to be content.

But the sharp and keen awakening with which she opened her eyes on a disenchanted world, when she found her attempted sacrifice so misunderstood, and felt herself put back into the common-place position of a girl disappointed, she who had risen to the point of heroism, and made up her mind to give up her very life, cannot be described. Effie did not turn in the rebound to another love, as her stepmother fully calculated. Though that other love was the first, the most true, the only faithful, though she was herself vaguely aware that in him she would find the comprehension for which she longed, as well as the love—though her heart, in spite of herself, turned to this old playmate and companion with an aching desire to tell him everything, to get the support of his

sympathy, yet, at the same time, Effie shrank from Ronald as she shrank from every one.

The delicate fibres of her being had been torn and severed; they would not heal or knit together again. It might be that her heart was permanently injured and never would recover its tone, it might be that the recoil from life and heart-sickness might be only temporary. No one could tell. Mrs. Ogilvie, who would not believe at first that the appearance of Ronald would be ineffectual, or that the malady was more than superficial, grew impatient afterwards.

"It is all just selfishness," she said; "it is just childish. Because she cannot have what she wanted, she will not take what she can get; and the worst of all is that she never wanted it when she could have it."

"That's just the way with women," said her husband; "ye are all alike. Let her

come to herself, and don't bore me about her as you're doing, night and day. What is a girl and her sweetheart to me?"

"Don't you think," said Mr. Moubray, "if you had been honest with Effie from the first, if you had allowed her own heart to speak, if there had been no pressure on one side, and no suppression on the other——"

"In short," cried Mrs. Ogilvie, with a flush of anger, "if we had just left everything to a bit silly thing that has not had the wit to guide herself in the most simple, straightforward way! where ye would have thought a fool could not go wrong——!"

Mr. Ogilvie at this lifted his head.

"Are ye quarrelling with John Moubray, Janet?" he said; "things must have come to a pretty pass when you fling yourself upon the minister, not content with putting me to silence. If ye're ill-pleased with Effie," said the head of the family,

"let Effie bear the wyte; but what have we done, him and me?"

The minister, however, was Effie's resource and help. He opened his own heart to her, showing her how it had bled and how it had been healed, and by and by the girl came to see, with slowly growing perception and a painful, yet elevating, knowledge, how many things lay hidden in the lives and souls which presented often a common-place exterior to the world. This was a moment in which it seemed doubtful whether the rending of all those delicate chords in her own being might not turn to bitterness and a permanent loss and injury. She was disposed to turn her face from the light, to avoid all tenderness and sympathy, to find that man delighted her not, nor woman either.

It was in this interval that Eric's brief but very unsatisfactory visit took place, which the young fellow felt was as good as

the loss of his six weeks' leave altogether. To be sure, there was a hard frost which made him some amends, and in the delights of skating and curling compensated him for his long journey home; and Ronald, his old comrade, whom he had expected to lose, went back with him, which was something to the credit side. But he could not understand Effie, and was of opinion that she had been jilted, and could scarcely be kept from making some public demonstration against Fred Dirom, who had used his sister ill, he thought. This mistake, too, added to Effie's injuries of spirit a keener pang: and the tension was cruel.

But when Eric and Ronald were gone again, and all had relapsed into silence, the balance turned, and the girl began to be herself once more, or rather to be a better and loftier self, never forgetful of the sudden cross and conflict of the forces of

life which had made so strong an impression upon her youth.

Miss Dempster, after some further suffering, died quite peacefully in the ruddy dawn of a winter's morning, after doing much to instruct the world and her immediate surroundings from her sick bed, and much enjoying the opportunity. She did not sleep very well the last few nights, and the prospect of "just getting a good sleep in my coffin before you bury me, and it all begins again," was agreeable to her.

She seemed to entertain the curious impression that the funeral of her body would be the moment of re-awakening for her soul, and that till that final incident occurred she would not be severed from this worldly life, which thus literally was rounded by a sleep. It was always an annoyance to her that her room was to the back, and she could not see Dr. Jardine as formerly

come to his window and take off his dram, but perhaps it was rather with the sisterly desire to tease Beenie than from any other reason that this lamentation (with a twinkle in her eyes) was daily made.

When she died, the whole village and every neighbour far and near joined in the universal lamentation. Those who had called her an old cat in her life-time wept over her when she was laid in the grave, and remembered all her good deeds, from the old wives in the village, who had never wanted their pickle tea or their pinch of snuff so long as Miss Dempster was to the fore, to the laird's wife herself, who thought regretfully of the silver candlesticks, and did not hesitate to say that nobody need be afraid of giving a party, whether it was a dinner or a ball supper that had to be provided, so long as Miss Dempster was mistress of the many superfluous knives and forks at Rosebank.

"She was just a public benefactor," said Mrs. Ogilvie, who had not always expressed that opinion.

As for Miss Beenie, her eyes were rivers of tears, and her sister's admirable qualities her only theme. She lived but to mourn and to praise the better half of her existence, her soul being as much widowed by this severance as if she had been a bereaved wife instead of a sister.

"Nobody can tell what she was to me, just more than can be put into words. She was mother and sister and mistress and guide all put into one. I'm not a whole human creature. I am but part of one, left like a wreck upon the shore—and the worst part," Miss Beenie said.

The doctor, who had been suspected of a tear himself at the old lady's funeral, and had certainly blown his nose violently on the way back, was just out of all patience with Miss Beenie's yammering, he said, and

he missed the inspection of himself and all his concerns that had gone on from Rosebank. He was used to it, and he did not know how to do without it.

One spring morning, after the turn of the year, he went up with a very resolute air the tidy gravel path between the laurel hedges.

"Eh, doctor, I cannot bide to hear your step—and yet I am fain, fain to hear it: for it's like as if she was still in life, and ye were coming to see her."

"Miss Beenie," said the doctor, "this cannot go on for ever. She was a good woman, and she has gone to a better place. But one thing is certain, that ye cannot bide here for ever, and that I cannot bide to leave you here. You must just come your ways across the road, and set up your tabernacle with me."

At this, Miss Beenie uttered a cry of consternation: "Doctor! you must be taking leave of your senses. Me!——"

"And why not you?" said Dr. Jardine. "You would be far better over the way. It's more cheerful, and we would be company for one another. I am not ill company when I am on my mettle. I desire that you will just think it over, and fix a day——"

And after a while, Miss Beenie found that there was sense in the suggestion, and dried her eyes, and did as she was desired, having been accustomed to do so, as she said, all her life.

The Diroms disappeared from Allonby as if they had never been there, and were heard of no more: though not without leaving disastrous traces at least in one heart and life.

But it may be that Effie's wounds are not mortal after all. And one day Captain Sutherland must come home——

And who knows?

THE END.