

HARRY MUIR.

A STORY OF SCOTTISH LIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND,"

"MERKLAND," "ADAM GRAEME," &c.

"God pardon thee! yet let me wonder, Harry,
At thy affections.
The hope and expectation of thy time
Is ruined; and the soul of every man,
Prophetically, does forethink thy fall."

KING HENRY IV.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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HARRY MUIR.

CHAPTER I.

Methinks, Sir,

A mother's heart's transparent—'tis so easy
To find the way into 't.

“WELL, Cuthbert, my man, are you back from your gowks errand? The month is far on now; it has taken you long,” said Mrs. Charteris.

“I have first to present my friend to you, mother,” said the advocate; “and as he will be Mr. Harry Muir only a day or two longer,

we must make the most of him while he bears his old name."

"So you were right after all?" said the old lady, lifting up her hands. "Dear me, Cuthbert, to think of that! You see, Mr. Muir, I could not believe his story, and prophesied that he was sure to fail—though I am very glad I was wrong. You are welcome to Edinburgh, and I wish you joy of your inheritance."

With a natural diffidence, which flushed his cheek, and slightly restrained his speech, Harry Muir made his acknowledgments. His dress had been most carefully overlooked before he left Glasgow that morning, and his eye was shining with animation and high hope.

Mrs. Charteris felt "her heart warm" to the stranger as he took the great easy-chair in the corner, and bent forward towards Cuthbert as to his guide and counsellor.

The attitude and expression charmed Cuthbert's mother. She felt that her son had done much for this young man—that he would do more—and Harry Muir became dear to her good heart, because he made her son dearer, and still more worthy of love.

"We must be off again instantly, mother," said Cuthbert, "to meet Davie Lindsay at my office. Ah, Davie is a slow man ; he has not an eye for a mystery like some other people ; but I suppose I must not boast. To-day we shall do a little business ; to-morrow we propose a trip up the Firth by the Stirling steamer, and a glance at Allenders. Muir, it will take lots of money to put that house in decent order, you may be sure."

Harry laughed ; twenty pounds would have been lots of money to Harry two days ago. It struck him as being slightly

ludicrous, and certainly quite amusing, all this grandeur of expectation. That *he* should have a house to repair, and lots of money to repair it — he, Harry Muir !

“It is a fine country, is it not?” he asked, in some haste, to cover his nervous joy. “I have never seen those Links of Forth, and their very name raises one’s expectation. Did you not say this house of enchantment was near the river?”

“He knows no more than we do, Mr. Muir,” said Mrs. Charteris. “You will take your bed here, of course? No doubt it is a bonnie country, but mind you must look for nothing like the Clyde.”

“Come along, Muir—I can’t pretend to cope with *two* west country people,” said Cuthbert. “Come, Lindsay will be waiting open-mouthed ; and to-morrow we must make our pilgrimage together, and no one shall say I

am ignorant of the enchanted palace any more. Come, Muir."

Next day the little party set out upon their brief voyage. This freedom of enjoyment, without stealth or remorse, was new to Harry. He breathed freely. It seemed to him, as from a listener, he became a partaker in the conversation of Lindsay and Charteris, that this was indeed a new life, a bracing atmosphere, such as he had not known before. He became quiet at first—somewhat serious even—and looking up upon an April sky, and down upon the great stream chafing and foaming in the little vessel's course, there came upon him the abstraction of a gentle reverie, picturing the times to come!

The times to come! Harry saw honour, wealth, independence, happiness, in a bright crowd before him. He did not see, would not see—poor, rash, incautious heart!—

that a grim shadow lowered upon them all, the shadow of his conquering sin—nor that this presence held the keys of the joyous home he dreamed of, and stood defiant on its threshold, blighting the flowers around the door. He never trembled for himself—poor Harry! there seemed before him nothing but security and peace.

Overhead the clouds flew to the east like a pilgrimage of birds, sweeping over the breadth of heaven with a speed which made you dizzy; and the mass of shadow threw a sable gleam on the water, as it dashed up its foaming mane, and shook it in the breeze. There are no clouds down the Firth where Inchkeith yonder burns and expands in the full sunshine; but here we have only wayward glances of light, darting down upon us as if in play, which vanish in a moment into the pursuing cloud.

The little vessel leaps over the buoyant

water with sometimes a mist of spray over her bows, and the passengers march in quick time along the decks, as if this swell and lengthened bound made music wild and martial, stirring the heart to quicker motion.

Now comes a sudden gleam, touching the russet outline of Inchcolm, as a painter would have it touched ; and as we pass, the light glides on before us, glittering upon the dewy slopes of Fife, and quivering along the waves, till it seems to sink there, like a golden arrow launched out of the heavens ; and the clouds again fly over us, away to the ungenial east.

St. Margaret's Hope—Ah, Saxon Margaret, Atheling, Exile, Queen and Saint ! was there hope in this quiet bay when the Scottish land stretched its brown arm of succour, and vowed its rude heart to thy service ? Not very far off now is grey Dunfermline,

forsaken of kings—and you may see a spire glitter on the further side of those withdrawing braes, pointing where the palace crumbles, and the wallflower and ivy flourish, over forlorn and solitary places, where queens had their bowers, and kings their council-chamber. Here too is the royal ferry, with its narrow gateway, bringing to a point the broad Firth on either side; and we rustle past the sentinel-rock, which has looked down often in the old times upon the passing boats of queens, and dash with a bound into the free course once more; past little busy ports, and slumbering villages, past the great houses in their nest of trees—till brave old Demeyet bows his stately head to us among the clouds, and the sun breaks out triumphant over the crowned rock of Stirling, and we glide into this silvery maze, radiant with flying lights and shadows—the links of Forth.

Here, by the side of the water, a great saugh tree droops its long locks, and trails them on the stream ; behind it are a heavy mass of alders—by its side a hawthorn slowly whitening with its fragrant blossom—and above the alders you can see a regular line of elm and beech, marshalled in fair succession, which seem to form a mall or avenue on the river's side. Beyond all appear the roof and gables of a hidden house. You cannot tell either size or form in the passing glimpse you gain of it from the river, but the heart of Harry Muir beats high as his eye falls on this home—a home it must be, for smoke curls from the chimneys, and a boat lies softly rocking on the water at the foot of the saugh tree.

“Neighbours,” said Harry to himself, under his breath ; “and I, too, must have a boat for Lettie and Rose.”

"Mr. Muir," said Lindsay, bending forward with a smile, "that is Allenders."

The heir started violently. With an eager look he tried to penetrate the network of boughs and opening leaves, and failing that, followed with his eyes the very smoke as it curled away into the clouds. His heart beat so loudly that, for a moment, it made him sick.

"Allenders!—my home, *their* home!" murmured Harry; and he felt his breast swell as if with a rising sob.

A drive of a few miles from Stirling brought them to the other side of Allenders. There was less wood there, and the view was towards the wide strath in which lies Bannockburn. But Harry had not time to look at the prospect without—there was something, at the moment, greatly more interesting to him in the gray gables and dilapidated rooms within.

The house was not large, but it was tall, with windows specked over it in all corners, without an attempt at regularity ; and on the eastern side was a curious little turret, obtruding itself abruptly from the wall, and throwing up a spear point, now black and tarnished, over the heads of the high trees.

The door was opened to them tardily by an old man, who did not seem at all desirous that they should penetrate beyond the threshold. This custodier of the house of Allenders was thin and shrivelled, and had a face dingy with age and smoke, the small features of which seemed to have shrunk and crept together, under the touch of time. A few thin, white hairs strayed over his head, diverging from the crown in all directions with genuine independence ; and his dress was of homespun blue, with great ribbed

stockings and buckled shoes. Those poor thin angular limbs seemed to bend any way with the stiff facility of wooden joints; and as he dangled his lean arms by his side, and gazed with light grey unmeaning eyes into their faces, it seemed as if the chill winter of years and poverty had frozen his very soul.

“You must let us in to see the house, my man,” said Lindsay briskly. “This is the young laird I have brought with me. Do you think he’s like the old Allenders, Dragon?—you should know them well.”

“Whilk ane is it, Mr. Lindsay—the muckle ane or the little ane?” asked the old man.

Now Harry was by no means little. He did not at all relish the adjective.

“This is Mr. Muir—Allenders of Allenders,” said Lindsay, hastily. “Come in; I’ll be your guide, and Dragon here will overlook us, and see we take nothing away.”

They entered a small square hall, dimly lighted, at the further end of which was a stone staircase of good proportions; but the walls were black with the dust of years, and the oak banisters of the stairs were broken and dilapidated. It had a dreary, deserted, uninhabitable look; and Harry, quickly impressed for good or evil, was half inclined to think Mrs. Rodger's little parlour a brighter home than this after all.

Lindsay opened quickly, and with the air of one thoroughly acquainted with the house, which, however, he had only once seen before, one of the dim oak doors which opened into the hall. Within was a wainscoted parlour of good dimensions, with one small window in the great blank of its side wall, and one squeezed into a corner beside the fire-place. The carpet was so worn that pattern and colours were alike indiscernible,

and dark curtains of faded purply-crimson hung over the dingy windows. A long dining-table, polished and glimmering, caught one ray of the sunshine without, and carried it down the narrow length of the apartment to the old-fashioned sideboard at the end; but save for this, the place looked as desolate as could be imagined. Lindsay turned round at the door with the air of an exhibitor, and something of the feeling; for though himself, at the first glance, had thought all this very chill and miserable, he looked unconsciously for satisfaction from Harry. Harry did not say a word. Alas! the house of enchantment—the fairy palace! The reality was a very different thing from the dream.

Cuthbert went quickly to the nearest window, and drew away with more energy than was needful the jealous curtain.

“Another window here to keep this one

company, and some pictures on these grim panels, and brighter furniture—you will make this room the pleasantest of winter parlours, Muir. One can have no idea of what it will be, from its appearance just now."

"Anither window!" exclaimed the old man, who had followed them. "Would ye break the guid wall, ye wasterful prodigal? Mr. Lindsay, is't this ane?" and he pointed his finger wrathfully at Cuthbert.

"No, no," said Harry Muir, with restored good-humour; "we must take your counsel since you like the walls so well. But what is your name? What did you call him, Mr. Lindsay?"

"They ca' me Dragon," said the warden of Allenders, vacantly. "That is, I'm meaning my name's Edom Comrie; but I never hear onybody have the civility to ca'

me aught but Dragon. Put in anither window! What would ye do that for, I would like to ken? Do ye mean to say that what was licht enough for the auld Allenders, is no licht enough for the like of you? You can wear spectacles if your vision is failing. I do it mysel'; but what for wad ye break the guid bonnie wa' that might withstand the French, for a nonsense window? And there's a bonnie bush a' fu' o' white roses, in their season, leaning on the house close by there. Would ye tramp down my bonnie lady rose for your mason work? Mr. Lindsay, is't no again the law?"

"But what if we brought a bonnie Lady Rose to sit at the new window, and look out upon the flowers!" said Cuthbert with a quick blush. "When Allenders brings his family home, he'll bring ladies here; and flowers, you know, never thrive without light. You

would not show yourself a dragon to the ladies. Adam—the first time they heard of you, too.”

The old man chuckled a strange laugh.

“He thinks *I*’m heeding about ladies—*me!* and you’ll nane of you be learned, I reckon ; for if ye were, there’s routh o’ grand books ben the house—I whiles read in them mysel, and they are a’ guid reading and profitable. When I come on an ill ane, I kindle my fire wi’t. I laid my hand on ane yes-treen, that’s nae better than it should be, in my judgment ; but it was uncommon diverting, and I just laid it by again, for my ain carnal pleasure—for I’m no abune the like o’ that, though I’m auld. Come away, Allenders—if you are Allenders ; I’ll let you see the book, and like a guid laddie, ye’ll take nae heed of yon birkie and his windows.”

The young men followed their conductor in high good-humour. He had quite neu-

tralized the melancholy appearance of the house.

Opposite the dining-parlour was a much smaller apartment, heavy and dark with books. Into the sombre twilight of this room no stray sunbeam wandered. High trees closed it round without, and great book-cases, dusty and crowded, oppressed the wall within. A single old print of some obscure Stirlingshire divine, long since forgotten, hung over the mantel-piece, and a much-worn leathern chair stood before a little writing-table in front of the fire-place. A window-seat, cushioned and covered with hard crimson moreen, occupied the recess of the window; but from this window you only looked out upon the damp outline of a neglected flower-bed, covered with rank vegetation, and upon the close screen of trees, which bent round it on every side.

“Man, I dinna envie ye the land!” ex-

claimed the harmless Dragon of Allenders, "but I div envie ye the books ; and being a callant, ye'll no ken how to make a right use of them. Now isna this a grand room ? I'll warrant ye never were in a muckle house like this afore ?"

"It is light we want—nothing but light. It is the gloom which makes these rooms look so dreary," said Charteris, sympathetically beholding the chill which again fell over Harry.

Harry went to the window, and looked out. Why *they* would be buried here—and the good fortune was a piece of penance after all.

"You should give me another five hundred a-year for consenting to live in this place, Mr. Lindsay," he said in almost an irritated tone.

Poor Harry had a weakness of thinking that disagreeable things were somebody's

fault. He was quite impatient with Lindsay and Charteris. He felt as if they had deluded him.

"Dr. Allenders in Stirling would not think so," said Lindsay, in his turn a little offended. "I dare say you might find a Jacob among them eager enough to bargain for the birthright."

"See, my man, here's the book," said the old servant, shuffling up to Harry. "Ye needna say onything to the minister about it, if ye should happen to fall in with him, for, maybe, he mightna think it very richt for a man of my years; and I'll put it ben the house on the hob to kindle the fire when I'm done reading it; but it's awfu' entertaining. See, look at it; but I canna ca' ye Allenders—Allenders was an auld man, and you're only a laddie. What do they ca' ye by your christened name?"

"My name is Harry Muir," was the in-

stant reply, for Harry had unconsciously a feeling of disgust now at the very sound of Allenders.

“Hairy! What garred them ca’ ye Hairy? it’s no a canny name for a laird of Allenders; and there’s never ane been called by it since the time the lady was lost; but I hope ye’ll come to nae skaith, for you’re no an ill lad, judging by your looks. And ye have leddies coming, have ye? what right has the like of you to leddies?”

“My sisters and my wife, Adam,” said Harry, with a smile.

“His wife! hear till him! Will ye tell me that the like of this bit callant’s married? Sirs, I never was married mysel.”

The poor old feeble Dragon looked round as he spoke with the air of a hero, and lifting up his shrivelled hands, exhibited himself complacently. But as he did this, his book fell, and stooping to pick it up, he presented it to Harry, with an unmeaning smile.

Poor Dragon ! it was a very rare and fine old edition of Shakespeare, which his rough handling had by no means improved. Harry was not sufficiently learned to know that it was curious and valuable, but he saw its great age and antique appearance, and thought it might be better employed than kindling Adam's fire.

"When you are done with it, keep it for me, Dragon," said Harry ; "I should like to look at it myself."

The old man began to shake his head, slowly at first, but with a gradually increasing rapidity of motion.

"I'm far from clear that it's right to give the like o' this to young folk ; it's only those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil, the Apostle says ; and you are but a babe to be fed on the sincere milk. How many sisters have ye, Mr. Hairy ?"

"Three, Dragon."

"Three sisters and æ wife! four women intill a house at ance! Come your ways up the muckle stair," said the old man, hastily, "and see the bonnie rooms we've gotten to lodge them a' in; and plenty of light and plenty of windows, for a' yon birkie says."

The young men followed in silence.

On the second story there was a multitude of small rooms. One of them, over the library, which they entered first, disclosed to Harry's half-reluctant eyes, the prettiest of little silvery burns, sparkling away into the river, under the shelter of those overgrown trees which made the under rooms so melancholy.

"Here we are," said Lindsay, triumphantly. "How you may feel on the matter, I can't tell, Mr. Muir, but this seems very fine to me; and the windows behind look out on the Forth."

Harry was half-ashamed of his ill-humour,

but for the moment he could not conquer it.

“We’ll give this room to the bonniest ane,” said the Dragon, with his feeble smile. “Whilk ane’s that, Mr. Hairy? and you’ll no be for ony mair windows for your Lady Rose,” added the old man, turning sharply round on Cuthbert.

Cuthbert had been investigating the apartment behind.

“The very brightest of drawing-rooms,” said the advocate, with a warmth which made Harry still more ashamed of himself. “You have nothing to do but take down this partition, and throw the two into one room.”

The poor old guardian of these dim walls clenched his hand, and shook it with feeble vehemence in Cuthbert’s face :

“Would ye put such radical notions into the innocent lad’s head? Would ye daur?”

CHAPTER II.

Lord what a nothing is this little span

We call a man !

How slight and short are his resolves at longest,

How weak at strongest !

QUARLES.

CUTHBERT CHARTERIS returned to Edinburgh that night, but not until he had first made a rude outline—he was no artist, but could use his pencil enough for this—of Allenders, with its eccentric turret and shady mall, and the boat—a very crazy, incompetent boat as it turned out—lying under

the saugh tree upon the quiet water. He showed it to Harry, as they eagerly consulted about the necessary improvements, and Harry thought it quite a remarkable production ; but Cuthbert greatly doubted as he enclosed it to Martha Muir. The deed almost lost its original intention of simple kindness, as he pondered over it, and feared that *they* might think his drawing a very poor affair ; but it was sent at last.

Harry remained with Lindsay in Stirling. It was necessary to see the family of Allenders residing there, who, failing Harry and his household, were next heirs ; and some legal forms had also to be gone through. Harry had recovered his usual spirits ; he was excited with his new position, with his proposed improvements, and even with his inn lodgings ; and while Lindsay laboured through some necessary processes for his enfeoffment, Harry strayed out to see the

town. He saw the town, it was very true. He climbed to the bastions of the lofty castle, and looked round him east and west. To the blue Highland hills in the distance—to Demeyet and his brother Ochils, glooming in brown shadows over the country at his feet—to the silvery maze of the Forth, wantoning in and out between those verdant banks as if he were fain of a pretext to linger at every corner, because he loved the way so well—and to the broad strath of Bannockburn, stealing away into those great lines of cloud, which seemed to carry its gently sloping plain into the distant sky. Harry looked upon them all, and mused and lingered, thinking pleasant thoughts. Then he saw the lights begin to gleam, one after another, in the town below, and he sauntered down to walk through the streets with their pleasant, quiet, leisurely stir, and then to return to his hotel.

But it was very late when Harry returned

to his hotel—and he was “indisposed,” and would not see the wondering Lindsay, who only left his papers for the supper he had ordered, when he heard that Mr. Muir had already gone to his room, and was “indisposed.” Lindsay was puzzled and offended. He could not make out what this sudden indisposition could mean.

Poor Harry ! next morning he rose late, with an aching head and a pained heart. He forgot at first when he woke how he had concluded the last evening ; but as the remembrance dawned upon him, he wrung his hands and groaned aloud. What could he do ? how could he defend himself against this overpowering weakness ? He threw himself upon his face, and prayed in an agony of self-reproach and shame, for strength, for deliverance. Alas ! this great inheritance, this fair new life—had he put the stain of his infirmity upon its promise already.

Lindsay had breakfasted some time before

Harry made his appearance in their sitting-room ; and now sat at a window, reading a newspaper, and looking very grave and stately. A ceremonious salutation passed between them ; and Harry, sick, despondent, and miserable, sat down at the table. As he loitered over his coffee, and pushed his plate away from him with loathing, there was perfect silence in the room, except for the rustling of Lindsay's paper, and his own restless motions.

Poor Harry was utterly cast down, but his humiliation struggled with a fierce irritability ; and Lindsay never moved his paper, but his companion felt the strongest impulse to snatch it from his hand, and trample on it, as if the indifference, which could content itself with a newspaper, while he was suffering thus, was a positive injury to him.

When he had finished breakfast, he re-

mained still leaning his head upon his hand, and idly brooding over the disordered table. He did not feel any inclination to go out, he had indeed nothing present before him, but a diseased image of himself overspread with blank despondency, and clouded with rising ill-humour. He had never felt this so much before ; for always before he had to justify himself, or to melt in sympathy with those tears of yearning love and pity which had been wept over him so often. He scarcely had known till now how bitterly and harshly the soul can condemn itself, alone.

“When you are at leisure, Mr. Muir,” said Lindsay, coldly, “I shall be glad if you will accompany me to call on Dr. Allenders. He was here last night, having received a note I wrote him from Edinburgh ; and as he did not see you then—”

“Of course, I am ready—of course,” said Harry, starting up hastily. “It was im-

possible I could know when Dr. Allenders intended to call. But I am quite at your command, Mr. Lindsay. Does this man mean to dispute my claim?"

"This man is a person of the highest character," said Lindsay, with his stiff gravity. "Having seen the documents, he does not intend to put any obstacle in your way, Mr. Muir. By the bye, I do not know whether you mean to assume the name of the family which you succeed. It is not a condition of the will certainly, but it was implied. Shall I present you to the Doctor as Mr. Allenders?"

"No, no, not yet," said the conscience-stricken Harry. "Not yet—not to-day. No, no—let it be a better time."

These words were spoken incoherently, but Lindsay understood them, and his heart was softened.

They went out, and the conversation

gradually became less constrained and more familiar ; but Harry painfully recognised the places which he had passed during the ramble of the previous night, and vowed in his heart, as the bright day without restored in some degree his failing spirit and courage, that never more, never again, should these inanimate things remind him of temptations yielded to, and resolutions broken. Poor Harry ! a very short time makes him as confident as ever ; and when they have reached the doctor's door, he has again begun to look forward fearlessly into the future, and to bring no self-distrust or trembling out of the past.

The doctor's house is on the outskirts of the town, a square, comfortable habitation, with a radiant glimpse from its windows of the mazes of the river and the far-off hills. Upon the door glitters a brass plate, bearing the name of John Allenders, M.D. ; and Dr.

John Allenders seems to be in comfortable circumstances, for a spruce boy in buttons opens the door, and they are shown into a handsome library, which a strong, peculiar fragrance, and a suspicious glass door with little red curtains, proclaims to be near the surgery ; but Dr. John has a good collection of books, and altogether appears to Harry an exceedingly creditable relation, and one with whom even the heir of Allenders may be sufficiently well pleased to count kin.

It is some time before Dr. John makes his appearance ; but Lindsay, who stands opposite the glass door, catches a glimpse of a dissipated-looking head, in great shirt collars, stealthily peeping through the red curtains at Harry, and making faces with an expression of unmitigated disgust. But he has scarcely time to notice this, when a shadow falls upon the door, and, with a

solemn step, Dr. Allenders enters the library.

He is a common-place looking man, with great dark eyes, which project almost their whole round from under the puckered eyelid. It is curious to notice how those eyes move, as if they were touched by strings or wires behind; but the rest of his face is very tolerable, and he looks what he is, a thoroughly respectable person, driving his gig, and having money in the bank; and understanding himself to be a responsible man, owing society, in right of his position in it, ever so many observances and proprieties.

Close behind Dr. Allenders, comes the dissipated head and the shirt collars, which just now made faces at Harry Muir. The owner of the head stumbles up the two steps which connect the lower level of the surgery with that of this more dignified

apartment, and enters the room with a swagger. He has eyes like the doctor's, and a long, sallow face, encircled by the luxuriant brushwood which repeats under his chin the shaggy forest of hair which is the crown and glory on his head. He wears a very short grey coat, a coloured shirt, and an immense neck-cloth; and there enters with him into the room an atmosphere of smoke, tinted with many harmonizing odours, which envelopes his whole person like a separate world.

Harry turned round with slightly nervous haste as the doctor made his appearance. The Doctor bowed, and held out his hand with a frankness half real, half assumed; but Harry's hand fell as it advanced to meet that of Dr. Allenders, while Dr. Allenders' son uttered a coarse exclamation of surprise and recognition. Poor Harry! his face became purple with very shame and anger—for

this coarse prodigal had been one of his boon companions on the previous night.

“Met before?” said the doctor, inquiringly, as Harry stimulated by the rude laugh of young Allenders, and the serious wonder of Lindsay, made a strong effort to recover himself. “Seen my son in some other place, Mr. Muir? I am glad of that, for blood is thicker than water; and though we have lost an estate through your means, my young friend, I hope we’ll have grace given us not to be envious, but to rejoice in your exaltation as if it were our own; besides that, it would have been very inconvenient to me—extremely inconvenient for my professional duties—to have lived five miles out of town; and then the house is such an old tumble-down affair. So I wish you joy, most heartily, Mr. Muir. The income of Allenders’ estate would have been small compensation to *me*, and Gilbert here has

not settled to the harness yet ; so we've no reason to complain—not a shadow. Pray sit down—or will you come up-stairs and see my wife and my daughters ? Oh, we'll not disturb them ; and being relations, they have heard of you, Mr. Muir—I told them myself yesterday—and would like to see the new heir."

"I say Muir, my boy, I'm delighted it's you," said Mr. Gilbert Allenders, thrusting forward a great bony, tanned hand, ornamented with a large ring. "Pleasant night, last night, wasn't it ? Glad to see we've got another good fellow among us. Come along up-stairs and see the girls."

Mr. Gilbert Allenders had a rough voice, with the coarsest of provincial accents ; and to mend the matter, Mr. Gilbert put himself to quite extraordinary pains to speak English, omitting his r's with painful distinctness, and now and then dropping a necessary h.

It had been a matter of considerable study to him, and he was very complacent about his success.

Harry submitted with a bad grace to shake hands, and unconsciously drew nearer to Lindsay.

But Lindsay, who only smiled at the vulgar Mr. Gilbert, instinctively drew himself up, and turned his face from Harry. Harry Muir for himself was nothing to the young lawyer; but Lindsay felt personal offence mingle in the contempt with which he perceived how his client chose his company—leaving himself solitary in their inn, to go and seek out a party which could admit this Gilbert Allenders. Henceforth, Mr. Lindsay might be man of business to the new heir—friend he could never be.

“I must be in Edinburgh this afternoon,” said Lindsay coldly. “Do you accompany me Mr. Muir? for if you do not, I have accom-

plished all that is necessary here, I fancy, and may take my leave."

Harry hesitated for a moment, his better feelings struggling with false shame and pride ; but lifting his eyes suddenly, he encountered the derisive smile of Gilbert Allenders, and took in with one rapid glance all the characteristics of his new-found kinsman. These had more effect on his susceptibility than either reason or repentance. He did not decide on returning in the lawyer's respectable society, because he feared for his own weakness, if he permitted himself to remain here alone. No, often though Harry's weakness had been demonstrated even to his own conviction, it was not this ; but what a knowledge of himself could not do, disgust with Gilbert Allenders did. He answered hastily that he too would return at once, and persuading Lindsay to remain and accompany him up-stairs to the drawing-

room where Mrs. Allenders and her daughters sat in state expecting their visit, they at length left the house together, declining the proffered escort of Mr. Gilbert.

But Harry did not escape without a galling punishment for the previous night's folly. Gilbert Allenders, seeing how he winced under it, plied him with allusion after allusion. "Last night, you recollect?" and with the most malicious perseverance recalled its speeches, its laughter, its jokes and its noise, assuming too an ostentation of familiarity and good-fellowship which Harry could scarcely restrain his fury at. The effect was good and bad; on the one hand, Harry vowed to himself fiercely that he never would put himself in the power of such a man again: on the other, he forgot how he himself had wasted the fair summer night begun with pleasant thoughts and blessings; how he had desecrated and

polluted what should have been its pure and healthful close. He forgot his repentance. He felt himself an ill-used man.

But he left Stirling that night with the half-mollified Lindsay. So much at least was gained.

CHAPTER III.

Fair gladsome waking thoughts, and joyous dreams
more fair !

CASTLE OF INDOLENCE.

IN the parlour at Port Dundas the window is open, the little muslin blind waves in the soft air, and sounds steal in drowsily through the sunshine from without. At the table sits Agnes, in her best gown, writing a letter to Harry. Violet, in a corner, stands erect with her hands behind her, defying Rose, who sits with great dignity in the arm-chair

to puzzle her with that spelling-book. Little Harry, now beginning to walk, creeps about the floor at his own sweet will ; and indeed they are all idling but Martha, who still works at the "opening," though you perceive she does it slowly, and has not the keen interest in "getting on " which she had a week ago.

Agnes writes rather laboriously—she is no penwoman ; and what she writes is just about nothing at all—a domestic letter, full of implied tenderness and exuberant hopes, through which you can scarcely see the sober and solemn solicitude which has made Harry's wife a woman deeper than her nature, and elder than her years. But the heart of the young wife is very light now, and she looks at the sleeve of her best gown with a smile, as she pauses to arrange the next sentence, and beats upon her hand with the feather of her pen. Little Harry seated at her feet,

which he makes a half-way house between two corners, tears away with appetite at a great orange, refreshing himself, before, on hands and knees, he starts upon another circumnavigation.

Looking down upon him lovingly, the young mother concocts her next sentence with triumphant success ; and you can guess, without looking over her shoulder, what a pretty outline grows upon her paper, under that inspired pen, which can write so quickly now. It is not a daguerreotype of little Harry which his mother will send to his father ; but indeed one cannot tell what height of excellence and warm expression this very daguerreotype can attain to, when the sunshine which makes the portraiture is not the light of common day, but of love.

Nor are you working either, little dark-haired Violet ! Alas, it is no sensible educational purpose which has carried you into the

corner, with one defiant foot planted firmly before the other, and those restless hands crossed demurely behind. Not a respectable lesson gravely administered and received, as lessons should be, but a challenge proudly given to Rose to "fickle" you, who are very confident in this particular of spelling, that you cannot be "fickled." A slight curve upon the brow of Rose, as she hunts up and down through all those pages for hard words, intimates that she is a little "fickled" herself; and Violet raises her head more proudly, and Rose laughs with greater mirth as each successive word is achieved, though now and then the elder trifier discovers that she is idle, and wonders why it is, and remembers the cause which has made their industry less urgent, with new smiles and joy.

But Martha still works at her "opening." This, the last which they are ever to do, Harry says, is a collar very elaborately em-

broidered, which Martha resolves shall be bestowed on Agnes, as one memorial of those toilsome days when they are past. The sterner lines in Martha's face have relaxed, and her eyelids droop softly with a grateful pleasant weariness over her subdued eyes. Sometimes the curves about her mouth move with a momentary quiver, as though a few tears were about to fall; but the tears never fall. And sometimes she lays down her work on her knee, and droops her head forward, and looks up under her eyelashes with a smile at the young mother, or at the two household flowers. These are long, loving, lingering glances, not bright but dim with the unusual gentleness of this unusual rest.

The sounds without do not strike upon your ear harshly, as sounds do in winter, for this April day is warm and genial, like a day in June, and has in it a natural hush and calm, which softens every distant voice.

Chief of all passing voices come gaily through the sunshine and the open window, the song of Maggie McGillivray. She is sitting again on her mother's step, with the full sunshine, which she does not at all heed, streaming upon her brown, wholesome, comely face. Her scissors flash in the sun, her yellow hair burns; but Maggie only throws over her head the finished end of her web, and clips and sings with unfailing cheerfulness. This time it is not the "Lea Rig," but "Kelvin Grove," to which the shears march and keep time; but it is impossible to tell what a zest it gives to idleness, when one can look out upon industry so sunshiny and alert as this.

"Perfunctory—p, e, r, f, u, n, c, t—Eh! Rose, yonder's Postie, with a letter," cried Violet, out of breath.

"It's sure to be from Harry, he's always so thoughtful," said the young wife; "run

and get it, Violet. I wonder if he has seen the house yet—I wonder if he has settled when we're all to go—I wonder—but to think of him writing again to-day! Poor Harry! he would think we would be anxious, Martha."

"Here's three; everybody but me gets a letter," cried Violet, entering with her hands full. "Martha, Postie says this should have come yesterday, but it had no number; and here's one from my uncle. May I open Uncle Sandy's letter, Martha?"

But Violet's question was not answered. Harry's letter was a large one, a family epistle addressed to Martha, enclosed within the love-letter which Harry's still fresh and delicate affection sent to his wife. But while Agnes ran over her's alone, a flush of delight and expectation making her smile radiant, Rose looking over Martha's shoulder, and Violet standing at her knee, possessed them-

selves of the contents of the larger letter ; so that Agnes, roused at the end of her own to kindred eagerness about this, started up to join them, as Rose exclaimed : “ A boat on the water,” and Violet cried “ Eh, Agnes, a wee burn,” in the same breath.

And then Martha smilingly commanded the little crowd which pressed around her to sit down quietly, and hear her read ; and Violet added with authority :

“ Agnes, Rose, you’re to go away. Martha will read it out loud ;” but, notwithstanding still obtruded her own small head between the letter of Harry and the eyes of her elder sister.

And Martha did read “ out loud,” all the others still continuing to bend over her shoulder, and to utter suppressed exclamations as their eyes ran, faster than Martha’s voice, over the full page. The mall, the boat, the burn, the partitions to be thrown down,

the windows to be opened, the painting and gilding and furnishing which filled Harry's mind with occupation, produced the pleasantest excitement in the family. Those two girls, Agnes and Rose—for the wife was little more mature than her young sister—paused at the end of every sentence to clap their hands, and exclaim with pleasure; but Violet's small head remained steady under shadow of Martha's shoulder, and she read on.

“I have the accumulated rents of two years — nine hundred pounds — to begin with,” wrote Harry; “you may fancy how much improvement we may get out of such a sum as that; and I am resolved that the house shall be a pleasant house to us all, and like what a *home* should be, if anything I can do, will make it so. We must have a new boat, instead of this old crazy one, and will be obliged to have a vehicle of some

kind. Violet must go to Stirling to school, so we'll need a pony for her (Violet laughed aloud), and Agnes and Rose and you, my dear Martha, must have some kind of carriage; however, you shall decide yourselves about that. But this thousand pounds, you see, will enable us to begin in proper style, and that is a great matter.

"I have just seen a family of Allenders in Stirling, respectable vulgar people, with a dissipated son, who took upon him to be more intimate with me than I was at all disposed for. I am afraid I shall be rude to this Gilbert Allenders, if he continues to press himself upon me; however, when you are all yonder, everything will go well."

Poor Harry! It was a consolation to him to condemn Gilbert Allenders: it seemed to take a weight from his own conscience; disgust for his dissipated kinsman stood Harry in stead as disgust for dissipation itself,

and he took the salve to his heart, and was comforted.

“Martha, will a pony carry two folk?” asked Violet, anxiously. “Yes, I mind—for ladies rode upon a pillion langsyne.”

“And what two folk would you have it carry, Lettie?” asked Rose.

“Me and Katie Calder. Martha, will you let Katie come?—for Auntie Jean’s ill to her; my uncle told Harry that, Martha.”

“Ask Agnes,” said Martha, with a smile; “I am only Harry’s sister and your sister, Lettie; but Agnes is lady of Allenders now; you must ask Agnes.”

The little wife grew red and white, and laughed hysterically; then she sank down on the floor at Martha’s feet, and clasped her arms round the elder sister’s waist, and wept quietly with her face hidden. It was too much for them all.

“And it’s an enchanted castle, and there’s

a Dragon in it," cried Violet joyously ; " but, Rosie, Rosie, there should be a knight. Oh ! I ken who it is—I ken who it is ; it's Mr. Charteris !"

" Lettie, what nonsense !" exclaimed Rose, who at that moment became extremely upright and proper.

" I ken ; you're the princess, Rosie, and Mr. Charteris is the knight ; and maybe there's fairies about the burn ! Oh ! I wish I was there !—me and little Katie Calder !"

Martha lifted the other letters from the table ; they had been forgotten in the interest of this. One of them was from Uncle Sandy ; the other was a note from Cuthbert, enclosing his sketch—an extremely brief note, saying little—yet Rose examined it over her sister's shoulder stealthily, while the others looked at the drawing. There was nothing peculiar about the hand ; and Rose did not understand the art of gleanings traits

of character out of hair-strokes—yet her eyes went over it slowly, tracing the form of every letter. Poor Cuthbert! he thought this same Rose would be very much interested about his drawing; it seemed for the moment that these plain characters occupied her more.

CHAPTER IV.

A pair of friends—though I was young
And Matthew seventy-three.

WORDSWORTH.

“EH, wee Hairy!” cried Miss Aggie Rodger, “your faither’s a muckle man noo ; do you ken that, my pet? and you’ll ride in a coach, and get a grand powney o’ your ain, and eat grossets and pu’ flowers a’ the simmer through ; do you hear that, my wee boy? But ye’ll have to gang away, Hairy, and what’ll we a’ do wanting ye?”

"It's me that's to get the pony," said Violet. "I'm to ride into Stirling to the school every day, and I want Martha to buy a pillion for Katie Calder, and then, Miss Aggie, I can sit before, and Katie behind, like the lady in Lochinvar; but it's me that's to get the pony."

"Preserve me, what a grand lady!" said Miss Aggie, throwing up little Harry in her arms; "but the wee boy's the heir for a' that—are ye no, Hairy?"

"But I want to ken how we're to get to Stirling," said Violet. "I ken about the Castle and the Ladies' Rock, and all the places where the Douglas played, and where Lufra chased the deer, and King James coming down the High Street, too; but Mr. John, will you tell me how we're to get to Stirling?"

"I never was there myself, Lettie," said the idle man; "but there's a map of

Scotland in that auld book—see, down yonder in the corner, behind ‘Hervey’s Meditations’—that’s it—and we’ll look and see.”

The book was a dingy and tattered one, and beside it lay a very old copy of Young’s “Night Thoughts,” which Violet brought with her in her hand.

“See now, this is the road,” said the poor, good-natured Johnnie, with whom Lettie was an especial favourite, as he spread out the worn map on his knee, and taking a pin from the lappel of his coat, traced with it the route. “But your brother, you know, Lettie, went to Edinburgh first, and then sailed up here—and this is Stirling.”

“Eh, how the water runs out and in!” exclaimed Violet; “and we have a boat all to ourselves. Mr. John, will you tell me what this book is—is it good for read-

ing?" and Violet contemplated, with a slightly puzzled expression, the dense pages of blank verse in which there appeared no story to catch her eye, or interest.

"Very good for reading," answered the oracular Mr. John; "but now, Lettie, put the books back, and run down to Mrs. McGarvie's like a good girl, and bring me a new pipe — run, Lettie!"

There was a strange alliance between the child and the man. Lettie, not always very tolerant of messages, put down the books without a murmur, and obeyed.

It was now May, and the day was hot and slumbrous. Miss Jeanie Rodger was at the warehouse, carrying back the work; Miss Aggie making boisterous fun with little Harry at the window; while proud,

pensive, faded Miss Rodger sat very unrepresentable in another room, repairing worn finery, which never could have been suitable for her, and was suitable for no one now.

The mother, worn out by two or three successive encounters with tax-gatherers, whose visits she bitterly resented at all times, and among whom she classed the collectors of those innocent water and gas accounts, which lay upon the "bunker" in the kitchen, was sleeping away her wrath and fatigue; everything was still in the house, except the crowing of little Harry. And little Harry's mother and aunts were making a new frock for him in the parlour—a work which, for very joy, made slow progress: they had so many other things to think and talk about.

Looking into this pleasant work-room to see that all was right, before she obeyed the

command of Mr. John, Violet went bounding down the stair, and out into the street.

Mrs. McGarvie's Tiger sat painfully on the very narrow step of the door, where he could be shaded from the sun; sat very upright and prim, poor fellow, compelled by this circumscribed space. Mrs. McGarvie's pretty Helen, with her beautiful hair and her bare feet, on short time at the mill, lovingly clipped with Maggie McGillivray across the way, but was very languid under the full sunshine, and grew quite ashamed of herself as she watched with awe and admiration the vigorous shears of her companion; while Mrs. McGarvie in the easy dishabille of a loose short gown, shook her clenched hand at her daughter from the threshold, and called her an idle cuttie at the top of her voice.

It was a drowsy day, and some one

looking very brown and dusty, came toiling down the sunny, unshaded road,

“Eh, it’s Harry !” cried Violet Muir—and affectionately grasping the pipe in one hand, she ran up the road to secure Harry with the other.

“Who’s to smoke the pipe ? Lettie, you must go no more messages like this, for you’re a young lady now,” said Harry, drawing himself up. “Is it for that idle fellow, John Rodger ? What a shame, Lettie !”

“He’s my friend ; I like him best,” said Violet, decidedly.

“He’s a mean fellow !” said Harry. “See that you don’t go anywhere for him again !”

For Harry had just now been a little irritated. Some one had met him, who did not know his new dignity, and who in the old days had been the superior of Mr. Bu-

chanan's clerk ; but having extinguished his wrath by this condemnation of poor John Rodger, and highly amused to notice the violent flush of anger which rose upon the little defiant face of Lettie, Harry entered the house in great spirits.

"He's turning steady, that lad," said Mrs. McGarvie, looking after him with a sigh. "I'm sure it's a great blessing ; and a' body mends o' their ill courses but our guid-man."

Harry had come by the coach ; the economic tardiness of the canal was not necessary to Harry now ; and except that he was sunburnt, and hot, and dusty, the quick inquisitive eye of Rose decided in a moment that there was nothing in his appearance to-day to rouse Martha's suspicions.

"Don't let Lettie run about so," said Harry, when their first greetings were over.

"It is great presumption of those Rodgers ; don't let her go errands for them. Lettie is clever, Martha ; we must make something of her. And now, when will you all go home?"

"Is that all that remains now, Harry?" exclaimed Agnes, clapping her hands. "May we go at once? Is it so near as that?"

"Well, I don't think you should," said Harry. "Let me get all the alterations made, and the place furnished, and then you can come. But Charteris said he was sure you would like better to be there at once, and have a hand in the improvements ; so I promised him to give you your choice."

"Oh, surely ! Let us go now," said Agnes.

"Eh, I would like !" echoed little Violet.

“But I should not like,” said Harry. “I want you to go when the place is complete and worthy of you. If you saw it now, you would think it a dingy, melancholy desert; but just wait for a month or so! There is a good deal of wood to be cut down, and they tell me the estate may be much improved; and to have a thousand pounds to begin with, you know, is great good fortune. There is a new church building close by—I think of giving them a hundred pounds, Martha.”

“A hundred pounds!” exclaimed Agnes and Rose.

The eyes of both were wet. It was so great a gladness to be able to give such a gift, and then to propose it was so good of Harry! They were both overpowered with his liberality.

“A Syrian ready to perish was my father,” said Martha, slowly. “Yes, it is very fit you

should bring the handful of first-fruits ; but bring it justly, Harry. Spare it. Do not give it to the church and spend it too."

"Martha is thinking of our old fifteen pounds a quarter," said Harry, gaily. "Martha forgets that you don't need to put off an account to pay your seat-rent now, Agnes. Why, only think of a thousand pounds—what a sum it is ! It seems to me as if we could never spend it. Look here, Lettie."

And Harry triumphantly exhibited a hundred-pound note. No one present had ever seen such a one before ; and simple Harry, with a touch of most innocent pride, had preferred this one piece of paper to the more useful smaller notes, simply to let them see it, and to dazzle their eyes with a whole hundred pounds of their own.

"Eh, Harry !" exclaimed Violet, with reve-

rential eyes fixed on Harry's new pocket-book, "is't a' there?"

Harry laughed, and closed the book ; but they all looked at it a little curiously, and even Agnes felt a momentary doubt as to whether a thousand—ay, or even a hundred—pounds were very safe in Harry's keeping.

"No, it's not all here," answered the heir ; "it's all in the bank but this. Now, Agnes, am I not to have any tea? And we must consult about it all. The improvements will cost some two hundred pounds ; then we'll say a hundred and fifty to furnish the drawing-room—that's very moderate. Then—there are already some things in the dining-room—say a hundred for that, and another hundred for the rest of the house. How much is that, Lettie?"

Lettie was counting it up on her fingers.

"Eh, Harry, what a heap of siller!"

"Five hundred and fifty; and this," said Harry, complacently laying his finger on his pocket-book, "six; and a hundred to the kirk, seven hundred and fifty; and say fifty pounds for a good horse and Lettie's pony, and somewhere near a hundred for a carriage, and then—whew! there's nothing left. I must begin to calculate again—a thousand pounds—"

"But, Harry, you said it was only nine hundred," said Rose.

"Well, so it is—it's all the same. What's a hundred here or there?" said Harry the Magnificent. "I must just make my calculations over again—that's all."

"But can people encumbered as you are afford to keep a carriage on four hundred and fifty pounds a-year?" asked Martha.

"Oh, not in the town, of course; but the country is quite different. Besides,

Allenders will improve to any extent ; and I suppose I may double my income very soon. Don't fear, Martha, we'll be very careful—oh, don't be afraid."

And Harry sincerely believing that no one need be afraid, went on in his joyous calculations—beginning always, not a whit discouraged, when he discovered again and again that he was calculating on a greater sum than he possessed ; but it soon became very apparent, even with Harry's sanguine arithmetic, that it was by no means a difficult thing to spend a thousand pounds, and a slight feeling of discontent that it was not another thousand suddenly crossed the minds of all.

"I see," said Harry, slowly, "it'll have to be fifty to the church, Martha. Fifty is as much as I can afford. It would not be just, to myself and to you all, to give more."

Poor Harry ! The magnificence of liberality was easier to give up than the other magnificences on which he had set his heart.

CHAPTER V.

But hark you, Kate,
Whither I go, thither shall you go too ;
To-day will I set forth, to-morrow you.

HENRY IV.

“WHAT could *you* do in Allenders ? one never knows how to deal with you capricious women. Stay at home, Agnes, and manage your own department—it is impossible you could assist me, and you would only be a hindrance to work. Stay at home, I say, till the place is ready for you.”

Agnes laid down the child softly upon the

sofa where she was sitting, and answered nothing ; but her face wore a look of resignation which Harry thought ostentatious, and which irritated him greatly, as indeed his little wife partly knew.

He started hastily from his seat with a contracted brow, and began to walk about the room, muttering something to himself about the impossibility of pleasing everybody. Poor little Agnes was desperately exerting herself to swallow a sob ; she did feel a little fretful and peevish, it was very true, but at the same time she honestly struggled to keep it down.

“ Martha, say something,” whispered Rose. “ Harry is angry—speak to him, Martha.”

But Martha sat still and said nothing—for Harry’s magnificent intentions troubled his sister with an uneasy sense of dependence. It is oftentimes a greater exercise of gene-

rosity to receive than to bestow. Labouring for Harry would have seemed to Martha a thing so natural as never to disturb her every-day life for a moment ; to be supported by Harry, called for a stronger exertion. But Harry's sister was of a stouter spirit than Harry's wife. She preferred, even at a risk of great pain, to make trial quietly of this new life, rather than to say how irksome to her was the prospect of burdening her brother, and to undergo a scene of indignation, and grief, and reconciliation. Nevertheless, Martha felt her influence abridged, and was silent—for this fortune did not change her own position or that of her sisters. Harry and his wife alone were rightful sharers of this unexpected elevation, and Martha stepped down from the elder sister's place, not without a struggle, and endeavoured to turn her eyes, which had so long expressed the distinct decisions of

a separate will, towards the young irresolute pair beside her as to the heads of the house.

“Why don’t you speak, Martha?” exclaimed Harry at last, noticing her silence with a renewed burst of impatience. “Why don’t you say what you think at once, instead of sitting glooming at us all?”

“I do not speak because I begin now to be your dependant, Harry,” said Martha, with harsh emphasis; “and especially in a matter where I and these bairns may restrict and hinder you, must now choose to listen to your decision, and not try to influence it. That is why I do not speak. But what I *think* is, that Agnes, since she wishes it, should go with you, and that we can remain to do all that is necessary here. Or I can take them home to Ayr—anywhere—and Agnes will like to be with you in your plannings and alterations, Harry. Why should she not go?”

“A dependant!” Harry looked very indignant and injured.

“Stay,” said Martha. “Nothing more of this. A woman needs to be so. I am willing; but I prefer that nothing should be said of it, Harry, especially now, when I am scarcely accustomed to the change.”

A long silence followed, and each individual heart there was busy with its own proper thoughts. Martha, ever proud and harsh, repeated to herself the many necessities which compelled her to remain an inmate of Harry's house, and to relinquish the work by which she had hitherto supported herself—she, who, small as her opportunities were, had always conferred, but never received, the benefits of ordinary life; and there came vividly upon her memory those old dreams of youth, in which she had imagined herself the support, the guardian, the protector of the orphan children who were her charge in the world. Now she was Harry's dependant

sister, curbing and burdening his hands, and restraining the harmless indulgences he longed for. Martha was not content, not willing, not ready, like a gentler woman, to take upon herself this gracious yoke of love, and receive with sweet and becoming humility the gifts which she could not refuse ; but she bent her stubborn neck to them, and reminded herself of her new position, with a strong resolve to do all its duties—chiefest of all to cover over in her own heart, so that no one could discern it, the bitterness she felt.

Harry, pleased to find himself not only the most important person in the household, but the maintainer and the acknowledged head of all, and only half angry that Martha should speak of herself as his dependant : Agnes, thinking solely that now she had gained her point, and should go with him to Allenders ; Rose, full of new fears and new

hopes, unwilling to realize all that was in her mind ; and little Lettie, last of all, chivalrously determined to win, by some unknown means, a fortune and fame for her sisters, far better than Harry's, surrounded this centre figure of the family group. In all minds there was a vague dissatisfaction. This great inheritance, after all, like everything else which deeply disturbs a life, brought new troubles, no less than new pleasures, in its train.

But Harry made no further resistance to Agnes's desire. An involuntary consciousness that it would be ungracious and unkind to decide contrary to Martha's opinion, after she had acknowledged his authority, had greater effect upon his impulsive mind than the reasonable wish of his wife ; for Harry came to do much of what was really right in his conduct by side motives and impulses, and oftener made a start in his direct course by

an impetus from some diverging way, than kept steadily on, because he knew that his path was the straight one. But Agnes did not pause to consider the motive. It was enough to her that her point was gained.

CHAPTER VI.

How does your garden grow ?
With silver bells and cockle shells,
And pretty maids all of a row.

NURSERY RHYME.

It is a bright May day, and the home-garden at Ayr is as bright as the season. Upon the fresh soft breeze the falling petals of the apple blossoms sweep down, fluttering like snowflakes to the ground ; and the great pear tree trained against the wall is flushed to the extremity of every bough, and has its leaves smothered in its wealth of bloom.

By the door here, in the sunshine, is the chair in which Alexander Muir presides over his little flock of workers, and a book held open by his spectacles still rests upon it ; but the old man himself is not here. Neither are the girls here, you would say at the first glance ; but look closer into the shady corners, and listen only five minutes—it is all you need to discover your mistake. There are pleasant sounds in the air ; softened young voices and light-hearted laughter ; and at the foot of Uncle Sandy's chair lies a heap of muslin, ballasted with stones, to keep it safe and preserve it from being blown away ; for Beatie and her sisterhood are idle, extremely idle, and idle even, it must be confessed, is Rose, the viceroy, to whom Uncle Sandy has delegated his charge. They are whispering together, little groups of bright heads, which here and there, the sunshine, stretching over the boughs of the

great plane tree, finds out and seizes on, tracing a single curl or braid of hair with delicate gold, and throwing wavy shadows over brow and face. They are dispersed in all the corners of the garden ; but here, leaning against the trunk of the plane tree, flushed with natural gratification, confidential and yet dignified, stands Rose Muir, the centre of the most important group.

Once these girls were little Rosie's play-mates ; now, though Rose is not proud, she feels no less than they do, that there is a difference, and quite acquiesces when they call her Miss Rose, and are respectful as well as friendly. She is standing, with a little of a patroness air, listening while Mary Burness tells of Maggie Crawford's "lad," and Maggie retaliates by a rumour that Mary is to be "cried" in the kirk the very next Sabbath day. Rose laughs a little, blushes a little, and looks so happy and

light-hearted, that you perceive at once she could not tell you why—but that there is some unconscious reason of still greater might than the family good fortune which brings back the natural joy so freshly to her heart.

By this open window you hear the sound of voices graver and less youthful. Within, with her hand wandering among the old man's books, sits Martha Muir. Her other hand holds a piece of her accustomed work, but it lies on her knee listlessly ; and with the unconsciousness of pre-occupation she turns over and over the books upon the window-shelf—old familiar books, friends which nurtured and strengthened her own youth—but her hand wanders over them as though they were strangers, and she could not tell you what she looks at with those fixed eyes.

“I hope it is all over, uncle,” said Martha,

slowly ; “ I trust it is—I trust it is. He has had hard lessons, many of them, and a great and sudden deliverance. The news of it came to me like an angel from heaven—for I felt that it might save Harry ; and so, I hope, I trust it will.”

“ You hope, you trust ? we all do that, Martha, my woman,” said the old man, anxiously. “ I never kent an evil-doing stranger yet that I would not have given all the strength of my good wishes to ; but, Martha, God has given you a clearer judgment than many. What *think* ye ? what does your ain mind decide as the most likely end ?”

“ God knows !” said Martha, solemnly. “ I *think* nothing, uncle ; I only trust and hope. I see no sin in him now—poor Harry ! poor Harry ! and God send the evil may pass away like the fearful dream, I sometimes believe it is. Do you mind him,

uncle—do you mind the pure, grand boy he was? Oh, my Harry! my poor Harry!—but I speak as if I was despairing, when, indeed, I am full of hope,” said Martha, looking up with a faint smile, through the unusual tears which only moistened her dried eyelids, but did not fall.

The old man looked at her doubtfully, with serious and earnest anxiety. She did not lift her eyes, neither did she seem inclined to say more; but her hand went wandering, wandering, over the books she knew so well, opening and closing them with such unconscious fingers, and mind so intently preoccupied, that he shook his head as he turned away, with a prayer, and a pang in his heart. For experience, alas! spoke to him as it spoke to her—sadly, hopelessly; and with Martha he turned from the subject, and would not *think*—would only trust and hope.

“And the other bairns,” said the old man, half questioning her, half consoling himself, “the other bairns; they at least bring us nothing but comfort.”

“Uncle,” said Martha, looking up with quick curiosity, “what brings this Mr. Charteris to Ayr? what is his business here? We meet him wherever we go; what does he want in your house or with us?”

“What is it ye say, Martha?”

Alexander Muir looked up with an awakened face, and glanced out through the framework of leaves and blossoms round the window to where his niece Rose stood under the great plane tree.

“Hush! look at them!” said Martha, grasping her uncle’s arm with her hand, and bending forward eagerly, as if the gesture made her hear as well as see.

There is a stranger in the garden, lingering beside the vacant chair on the threshold,

looking wistfully into the shaded corner, with its waving boughs and pursuing sunshine. Just now they are talking rather loud yonder, and laughing with unrestrained glee; and still it is stories of courtship and mirthful wooing which are told to Rose, and still she stands listening, well pleased, with smiles on her face, and in her heart. Rose could not tell you what it is that makes her step so light, her heart so free. It is something which touches duller pleasures into life, and kindles them all with a touch of its passing wing. But it has passed in the night this angel, when she only felt its plumes, and heard its sweet unrecognised voice; and as yet she has not seen the face of this new affection, nor blushes as she lifts her own, frankly to all kindly eyes; yet with the greater zest she listens to these girlish romances, and smiles, and asks questions—questions which the blushing subject of the

story does not always refuse to answer ; but just now the narrator has become rather loud, and there is a burst of laughter which good Uncle Sandy would reprove from his window, if he were not more seriously engaged.

Suddenly there falls a complete silence on the little group, broken only after the first moment by an indistinct tittering of confusion and bashfulness, as one by one they steal away, leaving Rose alone under the plane tree—and the stranger advances at a singular pace, which seems to be composed of two eager steps and one slow one, towards her, as she stands, half-reluctant, with her head drooped and the light stealing warmly over her cheek, waiting to receive him.

As he advances the colour rises on his forehead. It may be because he is aware of some close scrutiny, but however that is, Cuthbert Charteris, who can pass with the utmost cool-

ness through every corner of the Parliament House, and make his appearance before the Lords who rule her Majesty's Court of Session without a vestige of shyness, grows very red and lets his glove fall, as he advances to this audience. And the sympathetic Rose blushes too, and hangs down her head, and gives her hand reluctantly, and wishes she were anywhere but here, seeing any other person than Mr. Charteris. Why? For after all, there is nothing formidable about the Edinburgh advocate, and he has been her brother's friend.

Martha's hand again tightened on the old man's arm; then it was slowly withdrawn, and she sat still, looking at them earnestly—looking at them in their fair youth, and with their fresh hopes round them; like a saint's encircling glory—so great a contrast to herself.

“Well, Martha, well,” said the old man,

in a lighter tone, "well, my woman—no doubt neither you nor me have anything to do with the like of this ; but it is good, like every ordinance of God. If Rosie, poor thing, gets a good man, she'll do well ; and we need not be vexed for that, Martha."

"He is a gentleman, uncle, and not a rich one. They'll want him to have a rich wife," said Martha.

"Be content—be content ; one fear is over much to foster. We'll have no grief with Rosie," said Uncle Sandy, cheerfully. "If he turns out well, she'll do well, Martha ; but if he turns out ill, we must leave her now to God's good care and her ain judgment. And what could we have better for her ? But we need not leave them their lane, either. I will go and see after the other bairns myself."

So saying, the old man rose, and Martha lifted her work—but in a few minutes it again

dropped on her knee, and opening the window she bent out, and suffered the pleasant air to bathe her forehead, and smoothe out the wrinkles which care had engraven on it. "Take care of them, take care of them!" said Martha, under her breath. "God help me! I trust more in my own care than in His."

"Ye're aye idle—aye idle. Do they never come back to you in your dreams the lees ye tell me, and the broken promises?" said Uncle Sandy. "And Beatie, I had your faithful word that all that flower was to be done before the morn."

"Eh, but it was the gentleman," said Beatie, with conscious guilt, labouring at her muslin with great demonstration of industry.

"The gentleman! He came in himsel. He gave you no trouble," said the old man, shaking his head. "And you've been doing naething either, Jessie Laing."

“Eh ! *me !* I’ve weeded a’ the strawberry beds, though there’s naething on them yet but the blossom,” said the accused, in discontent ; “and Mary, and Maggie, and the rest of them, telling Miss Rose about their lads a’ the time—and naebody blamed but me !”

“Miss Rose has gotten a lad o’ her ain—eh ! look at the gentleman !” said another of the sisterhood, in an audible whisper.

For Rose had been playing with a sprig of fragrant lilac, which just now, as she started at sight of her uncle, fell upon the path at her foot ; and, with a deferential bend, which every girl who saw it took as a personal reverence to herself, and valued accordingly, Mr. Charteris stooped to pick up the fallen blossom, and by and bye quite unobtrusively placed it in his breast.

Uncle Sandy lifted his book, and seated himself, casting a glance of good pleasure towards the plane tree, from which Rose was

now approaching the door. Not a girl of all those workers who did not observe intently, and with an interest hardly less than her own "lad" received from her, every look and motion of "the gentleman." Not one of them who would not have intrigued in his behalf with native skill and perseverance, had any of the stock obstacles of romance stood in Cuthbert's way. It was pleasant to see the shy, smiling, blushing interest with which they regarded the stranger and his Lady Rose; something resembling the instinctive, half-pathetic tenderness with which women comfort a bride; but with more glee in it than that.

By and bye, when these young labourers were gone, and the shadows were falling over the garden, where little Lettie and Uncle Sandy's maid scattered pleasant sounds and laughter through the dim walks, as they watered Uncle Sandy's dearest flowers, Cuth-

bert Charteris unwillingly rose from the dim seat by the window, whence he could just see Violet at her self-chosen task, and said irresolutely that he must be gone. The window was open. They had been sitting for some time silent, and the wind, which blew in playfully, making a little riot now and then as it lighted unexpectedly upon the fluttering pages of an open book, was sweet with the breath of many glimmering hawthorns, and of that great old lilac bush—a garden and inheritance in itself—which filled the eastern corner, and hid the neighbouring house with its delicate leaves and blossoms. Opposite to him, Cuthbert still saw the white hair of the old man, and something of Martha's figure withdrawn by his side; but out of a pleasant darkness which his imagination filled very sweetly, had come once or twice the voice of Rose. He could not see her, it had grown so dark, nor could he

do more than feel a little soft hand glide into his, when he bade her good-night.

It had a singular charm, this darkness, and Cuthbert grasped the hand firmly and closely before it drew itself away. Then he went out into the soft summer night, with its sweet dew and sounds. A smile was on his face, his very heart was wrapped in this same soft fragrant gloom, and he went on unconsciously till he reached the river, and stood there, looking down upon the gentle water, flowing graciously, with a sweet ripple, under the pensive stars.

His hand upon his breast touched the lilac blossom. He drew it out to look at it, and held it idly in his fingers, for his first thought was to drop the fading flower into those pure cold waters, and let it float away towards that sea which is the great symbol of all depths. But Cuthbert's second thought, more usual, if not more true, was to restore

the drooping blossom, and keep it, though it faded ; and then, making an effort to shake off the pleasant mystic darkness which hid him from himself, Cuthbert Charteris roused his dreaming heart, and asked what he did there.

What brought him here ? The same question which Martha had put to her uncle. No one saw Cuthbert blush ; no one was witness to the conscious smile which rose in spite of himself upon his lip. What brought him here ? In fact, the slightest possible piece of business, which, at any other time, a letter might have managed ; but, in truth—what was it, Cuthbert ?

And straightway the thoughts of Cuthbert Charteris plunged into a long, discursive journey, calculating probabilities, prospects, necessities ; but through all wavered this conscious smile, and he felt the warm flush on his face, and looked, as Rose had never

looked upon her passing angel, into the very eyes of the fairy guide who had led him thither. The stars were dreaming in the sky, wrapped in soft radiant mist, when he left the river-side. Like them, the young man's-heart was charmed. Not fervent enough for passion yet, nor manstrong as it would be—charmed, fascinated, dreaming—a spell of magic over him, was this new power—the earliest spring of a life which should weave itself yet into the very strength of his.

CHAPTER VII.

A home to rest, a shelter to defend.

PLEASURES OF HOPE.

THE evening sun shines into the drawing-room of Allenders—the drawing-room newly completed and magnificent, through which Harry Muir's little wife goes merrily, laughing aloud as she pauses to admire again and again those luxurious easy-chairs and sofas, which it is almost impossible to believe are her own. It is a long room occupying the whole breadth of the house, for Harry has

taken Cuthbert's hint, and thrown down the partition which once made two dim bed-chambers, where now is this pretty drawing-room.

From the western window you can see the long light stealing over Bannockburn, tracing bright lines of softened green and yellow along the wide strath, and laying down upon the swelling fields as it passes away such a depth of dewy rest and shadow as never lay in any land of dreams. And the hill-tops are dusty and mazed with the rays which stream over them, a flood of golden streaks, falling out of the light like drooping hair; while nearer, at our very feet, as we stand by this window, the burn below flashes out through the heavy alder boughs, in such sweet triumph over its crowning sunbeam, that you unconsciously smile in answer to its smiling, as you would to any other childish joy.

From the other window you can look out upon Demeyet, somewhat sullenly receiving the radiance of the sunset. He, stout rebel, loves better the young morning, whose earliest glance is over his head, before her eyelids are fully opened. How she glances up playfully behind him, how she shrinks under his great shoulder, you will see, when you see the sun rise upon the links of Forth. But Demeyet, like many another, does not know when fortune is kindest to him, nor ever guesses that he himself, with those royal purple tints upon his robed shoulders, and the flitting shades which cover his brow, like the waving of a plume, shows his great form to better advantage now, than when the faint morning red, and the rising light behind, darken him with his own shadow. Wherefore Demeyet receives the sunlight sullenly, and glooms upon merry Agnes Muir at the window of Allenders' drawing-

room, till she can almost fancy that he lifts a shadowy arm, and clenches a visionary hand to shake it at her threateningly with defiance and disdain.

A silver tea-service, engraven with the Allenders' crest, and china the most delicate that Agnes ever saw, glitter on the table, which is covered besides with every rare species of "tea-bread," known to the ingenious bakers of Stirling. And now Agnes glides round and round the table, endeavouring to recollect some one thing omitted, but cannot find any excuse for ringing the bell and summoning one of her hand-maidens to get another survey of the *tout ensemble*, which dazzles the eyes of the little wife. Harry has gone to Stirling to meet and bring home his sisters; and Uncle Sandy, their escort and guardian, is with them for a visit; and so is poor little Katie Calder, the oppressed attendant of Miss Jean. It is

true that Agnes is very affectionate and very grateful—that, herself motherless, she clings to Martha, and would immediately succumb in any strait to the stronger mind, and character, and will of the eldest member of their little household; but withal, Agnes is mortal, and it is impossible to deny that there is quite a new and delightful pleasure to her in feeling herself, and in having others feel, that it is her house to which the sisters are coming home—that she is the head of the family, the house-mother, and that all the glories of this grandest of palaces are her own.

Now a faint rumbling of distant carriage-wheels strikes on the excited ear of Agnes, but no carriage is visible from the windows—so she runs impatiently up some flights of narrow winding stairs, and emerges, out of breath, upon the gallery, which conducts to the little turret of Allenders. This gallery is

very small—three people standing in it would make quite a little crowd ; but then it commands a far-off view of the Forth, beyond Alloa in one direction, and of Stirling's crowned rock, and the Highland hills, and what is still more important at this moment, of the Stirling road, on the other.

And yonder, along the white line of the Stirling road, seen at present only in a glimpse through the trees, comes that pretty open carriage, the price of which Harry is afraid to think of, his latest purchase, with its strong bay horse and its smart groom driver, beside whom Harry himself, still wise enough to acknowledge that he cannot drive, sits leaning back, to point out triumphantly to the crowded company behind him the first glimpse of their new house. Martha and Uncle Sandy, Rose and the two children, fill the coach almost to over-brimming ; and though they are all dusty and hot, there are

bright looks on every face of them. But Agnes does not pause to look at their faces, but flies down stairs, nearly tripping herself with the wide folds of her muslin gown, to throw the door hospitably open, and stand herself, dignified like a matron and head of a family, on the threshold, to receive the strangers.

At the gate, the innocent Dragon of Allenders twirls his rusty hat feebly on a stick, and laughs to himself with his slow chuckle as he leans upon the opened gate; and half in curiosity, half because the housemaid was once in Sir John Dunlop's, and has very proper notions of what is due to the "family," Agnes finds both her servants standing behind her in the hall. The little wife holds her head high, and overflows with dignity and innocent stateliness, all the while feeling an almost irresistible inclination to relieve herself with a burst of incredulous,

wondering laughter ; for how she ever came to be a great lady, Agnes cannot comprehend.

Now, Lettie, jump ! Be first out of the grand carriage—first upon the bright green lawn of Allenders. See, yonder are soft-voiced doves upon the turret ; and the spear-head, no longer tarnished, throws gleams about it in the sunshine upon those twinkling, tremulous aspen leaves ; and listen here to this child's tongue singing, calling to you, though the language is not yours—the burn, Lettie ! and this brown foliage is the fragrant walnut ; and past the grey walls and that dim library window is a broad gleam of silver, all fretted and broken by twining boughs and foliage, for that is the river—the grand Forth—and this is fairy land !

“ Oh, Martha, Martha !—Rose !—Uncle ! ”

cried Agnes, running forward to the carriage-door; but as Martha alighted, and took both her hands, the young house-mother forgot her dignity, and instead of the pretty speech she had been meditating, only exclaimed again: "Oh, Martha, Martha!" and burst into a fit of tears.

Laughing, sobbing, smiling, Agnes led them up-stairs, and hurried them through all the rooms. A pretty apartment, looking to the river, had been chosen for Martha and Rose, while a smaller one within it was for the children. They were all perfectly and carefully fitted up—alas! for Harry's nine hundred pounds.

"Bairns, I will ask a blessing," said Uncle Sandy, as they gathered round the tea-table.

There was an instant hush, and Rose shrouded little Harry's head with her hand,

and pressed him closer to her side, to still even the child into reverent silence. She was seated close by the old man, and he, too, raised one hand to shade his reverent forehead, and solemnly lifted the other.

“Lord, a blessing on these offered mercies, a blessing on this roof-tree, upon our meeting and our sundering, and upon these Thy bairns, fatherless and motherless, whom Thou hast led hitherto, and brought pitifully unto this day. Give them out of the ark of Thy covenant, comfort them with strength, and succour from all evil, for the Lord’s sake. Amen.”

There was a momentary solemn pause, after the voice ceased—and Rose bent down over the child to hide her face; and Agnes, with the tears still in her eyes, looked wistfully at the old man; and Harry cast down

his, and laid his hand softly on Martha's hand. No one said there were fears and hopes—intensest hopes and fears in this new beginning—nor that its brightness trembled with a solemn peradventure; but at this moment, all had a consciousness of putting themselves and their fate into the hand of God, and of waiting for what He should bring out of those unknown years. “*I cannot tell—God knows what is to come,*” said Martha's heart, as it yearned within her over them all; and there came to each a strange humility and trust. God knows! one can look calmly into a future which, step by step, is known to our pitiful, great Father. Day by day—hour by hour—they must each of them come to us out of the heavens, full and rounded with the daily tribulation, the daily gladness which is appointed to their lot. But God knows now the way which we

shall learn by single footsteps—knows
and appoints it for us out of His
great love — God knows — it is very
well.

CHAPTER VIII.

Now is the May of life.

ROGERS.

“EH, Violet! there’s twa men-servants, and twa maids!” said little Katie Calder.

Katie was short and stout, with a plump, good-humoured face, and wealth of long fair hair, and a bright-printed frock, bought for her by Uncle Sandy himself, to replace the faded liveries of Miss Jean. Katie had no turn for literature or poetry, like her little kinswoman; but to make up for that, she was

stout-hearted and adventurous, redoubtable in winter slides and summer rambles, and with as honest and "aefauld" a child's heart as ever looked through blue eyes. Miss Jean Calder and her penurious oppression had subdued Katie, but they had not crushed her; for Katie was not given to solitary thoughts or plaintive resignation. So instead of standing shyly by, as Violet might have done, and looking on with a longing wish to join the plays of happier children, Katie made bold dashes among them, content rather to pay for her play by a good fit of crying, when summoned in to the invariable scold, than to want altogether the wholesome "fun" which was the child's natural breath. So now, being prepared by a few days' freedom in Uncle Sandy's house at Ayr, for the liberty and kindliness, though scarcely for the grandeur of Allenders, Katie's happy spirit had entirely thrown off the fear

and bondage of Miss Jean. She was sitting on a low stool half-dressed, plaiting the long hair which streamed over her plump shoulders, and looking with great admiration at the new chintz frock carefully spread out upon a chair, which she had worn for the first time yesterday.

"Eh, Katie! if you only saw how the sun's rising behind yon muckle hill!" answered Violet from the window.

"And you never saw such a fine kitchen," pursued Katie, "a' the walls glittering with things, and as big as folk could dance in; and such a room with books down the stair. Did you think there was as mony in the world, Lettie?"

"But they're no for reading," said Violet disconsolately, "for I tried them last night; and I would rather have Mr. Sim's library in the Cowcaddens."

"Were there stories in it? Eh, Violet,

do you think there's ony fairy tales down the stair? for I like them," said Katie Calder; "but if I put on my new frock the day, it'll no be clean on Sabbath to gang to the kirk."

"There's Rose down in the garden—and there's the old man that Harry calls Dragon," cried Violet. "Come, Katie, and see the Forth and our boat."

"It's no so bonnie as our ain water at hame, and there's nae brigs," said Katie, as she donned her new frock, and anxiously examined it, to see whether yesterday's journey had left any trace upon its bright folds; for Katie was a thrifty little woman, and knew that she had no other dress worthy of Allenders.

It was still very early. Rose had newly left the house, and now stood alone under the great shadow of the walnut tree, looking up at the windows, beyond which the greater

part of the household were still asleep. She had left Martha in a deep, quiet, dreamless slumber which did not begin till the sky was reddening over Demeyet ; and Rose who had just been congratulating herself on having a free unoccupied hour to think, stood now endeavouring, with some confusion, to recollect what it was she wanted to think about. Her mind was in a tumult of sweet morning fancies, and the something on which she had resolved to meditate, eluded her, with many a trick and wile, like a playful child. A slight wavering blush came over her face, as now and then she seemed to catch a glimpse of it for a moment ; but immediately it was lost again among the thick-coming fancies of her stirred and wakening mind ; yet strangely enough, Rose did not pass the library window, nor seek the mall by the water-side. Not very long ago, nothing could have interested her more

than the river and the hills beyond ; now she only threw herself down on the lawn beneath the walnut tree, and leaning her head on her hand, played with the grass on which her eyes were bent, and mused and pondered with a downcast face. Sometimes indeed, her eyes were closed, and even when she opened them the dreamer saw nothing of Allenders. No ; for she was secretly making pictures which could not bear the eye of day, much less the inspection of brother or sister ; remembering, with such strange tenacity of recollection, what was done and what was said, on yonder May evening in the garden at Ayr, and in the gloom of the little parlour, and unconsciously creating other scenes like that, in which the same chief actor bore the hero's part.

Rose ! Rose ! you would blush and start like guilt, did any home voice at this moment call your name ; but the spell of this dream-

ing clings to you like slumber, and you can no more shake it off, than you could the sweet deep sleep which last night surprised you against your will, and changed those waking musings into the fantastic visions of the night; and your eyes grow heavy, Rose, while your heart wanders in this maze, and a soft uncertainty steals over your fair pictures, though with a sudden start, half of displeasure, you hear the steps of the children hastening to join you, and give up your maiden meditations with a sigh.

Behind the walnut tree, the poor old Dragon feebly bends over the flower-beds, plucking up here and there, with an effort, a solitary weed, but oftenest looking idly towards Rose, whom he would fain go and speak to, were not her preoccupation so evident. The great walnut waves its large fragrant leaves in the soft morning air

between them, and the sun burns in the gilded spear on the turret, and the broad light clothes the whole country like a garment. Strongly contrasted in this framework of summer life about them, are the two human creatures who complete the picture. The girl lingering on the threshold of a fair life unknown to her, and peopling all its fairy world with scenes which thrill her to a half-conscious joy; the old man in the torpor of great age, vacantly admiring her fresh youth, and with a strange, dim curiosity about her, who she is, and what she would say if he addressed her. To him a long life has passed like a dream, and appears in a mist to his memory, as in a mist it appears to her imagination; but the time is long past when anything could find out the old faint beating heart of Adam Comrie, to thrill it with emotion. His curiosities, his likings, his thoughts, have all become vague as a child's;

but they lie on the surface, and never move him, as a child's fancies do.

"See how the old man looks at Rose," whispered Katie Calder; "but she doesna see him yet; and, Violet, look at her. She's bonnie."

"But what way is she sitting there?" said Violet, wonderingly, "when she might be at the water-side. She's thinking about Harry; but what needs folk think about Harry now? Harry is in his bed and sleeping, Rose; but, oh! I see—you were not thinking about him after all."

Rose started with a vivid blush. No, indeed, she had not been thinking of Harry; it sounded like an accusation.

"And you'll be yon birkie's Lady Rose?" said the Dragon, coming forward. "Aweel I wadna say but he thought ye bonnier than my white bush; but they didna howk up the rose either; that's ae comfort—though nae

thanks to him, nor to this lad, Mr. Hairy, that took his counsel. What do they ca' this little bairn?"

"My name's Violet," said Lettie, with dignity.

"There was a Miss Violet in the last family; but she would have made six o' that bit creature," said the old servant. "What way are ye a' sae wee?"

"Eh! Lettie's a head higher than me!" exclaimed Katie Calder in amazement.

"Are you gaun to be married upon yon birkie now, if ane might speer?" asked the feeble Dragon. "I've lived about this house sixty year, but there hasna been a wedding a' that time; and now how I'm to do wi' young wives and weans I canna tell. The last Allenders had a wife ance, folk say, but I never mind of her. He was ninety year auld when he died, and lived a widow three score

years and five. I'm eighty mysel, and I never was married. It's aye best to get ower the like o' that when folk's young ; but you're just a lassie yet ; you should wait awhile, and be sicker ; and yon birkie has nae reverence for the constitution. I'm an awfu' guid hand for judging a man, and I ken as muckle by what he said about the windows."

"Eh, Rose, is't Mr. Charteris that's the birkie?" cried Violet, with extreme interest.

But Rose had risen from the grass, and now leaned upon the walnut tree, vainly trying to look serious and indifferent. This face which had been eluding her dreams so long, looked in gravely now upon her heart ; and Rose trembled and blushed, and could not speak, but had a strong inclination to run away somewhere under cover of the leaves, and weep a few tears out of her dazzled eyes, and

soothe her heart into calmer beating. The old man chuckled once more in childish exultation.

“ I’ll no tell—ye may trust me—and if ye’ll come in ower, I’ll let you see the white rose bush that garred yon birkie name ye to me. Whaur are ye for, you little anes? is’t the boat the bairns want? I’m saying!—I’ll no hae ony o’ you drowning yoursels in the water; and I gie you fair warning, if you should fa’ in twenty times in a day, I’m no gaun to risk life and limb getting ye out again—it doesna stand to reason that a wean’s life should be as valuable to this witless world as the life of an aged man. And I’ve had muckle experience in my day—muckle experience, Miss Rose; and aye glad to communicate, as the Apostle bids, and ready to give counsel, wi’ nae mair pride than if I had seen but ae score o’ years instead of four. It’s a great age.”

“And do they call you Dragon,” asked Violet, shyly.

“That’s what they ca’ me ; for I’ve lang keepit Allenders, and been a carefu’ man of a’ in it, from the master himsel to the berry bushes ; but my right name is Edom Comrie, if onybody likes to be so civil as ca’ me that. I’m saying, wee Missie, do ye think I could carry ye ? but I’m no so strong as I was forty year ago.”

“You could carry little Harry ; but I can rin, and so can Katie Calder,” said Violet.

“Wha’s Katie Calder ?”

“It’s me,” answered the little stranger ; “and I’m Lettie Muir’s third cousin ; and I’m to stay at Allenders, and no to go back to Miss Jean any more.”

“Weel, ye maun baith be guid bairns. I like guid bairns mysel,” said the old man ; “and ye can just come to me when ye want a piece scone or a wheen berries, and there’s

nae fears o' ye; and I'll aye gie them an advice, Miss Rose, and mind them of their duty. Ye needna be feared but I'll do grand with the bairns."

"Do you live in the house?" asked Rose, a little timidly, for she was somewhat alarmed at the second sight of the poor old Dragon.

"That minds me ye havena seen my room," said Dragon, briskly. "Come your ways round—aye, I just live in Allenders—and gie me a haud o' your hands, bairns, and Miss Rose will come after us, and ye'll get a sight of my house."

So the soft warm childish hands glided into the withered fingers of the old man, and Rose followed, passing by the luxuriant white rose bush, now blooming in the full flush of its snowy flowers under the new window of the dining-room, into a little court-yard behind where was the stable and byre, and where Mysie, the Dragon's grand-niece, was

just then milking the cow. This great temptation, Violet and Katie withstood womanfully, and passing the milk-pail and the active hands which filled it, with an effort, looked round somewhat impatiently for the Dragon's den.

"Ye maun come up here," said the old man, "ane at a time—ane at a time—and if ye're light-headed, take a grip o' the wa', for folk are whiles dizzy on an outside stair; and now here you see I have like a wee house all to mysel."

The "outside stair" was very narrow and much worn; it was evident it had undergone no repair in all Harry's labours, and Rose was fain to grasp herself at a withered branch of ivy which still clung to the wall, though life and sap had long departed from it, to secure her own safe passage upwards, and to stretch out her arm on the other side in terror for the children. Edom Comrie's

room was only the loft over the stable, a square low place, with bare rafters and a skylight in the roof; but Adam's bed was in one corner, and on a little table, immediately under the window, stood a bowl, ready for Adam's porridge, and the little round pot in which he made them, was beside his little fire.

“For ye see when it behooved me to live a'thegether at Allenders, the auld maister caused build me a bit grate into the wall. I was a young lad then, and might have taken my meat in the kitchen with Eppie, but I aye was of an independent kind, and I had mair faith in my ain parritch and kail than in onybody else's; so I came to be a constant resider here; and there's the Lady's Well no a dizzen yards from the stair fit, and the kitchen very near hand. Do ye like stories? Weel, I'll tell ye some day the story o' the Lady's Well.”

“Eh, Dragon, is’t a fairy tale?” asked Katie Calder, with wide-open eyes.

“Naebody can tell that; but I have plenty of fairy tales,” said the old man. “Ye see, it was in the auld times, maybe twa hundred year ago, or mair siller, that the Laird of Allenders had a young daughter, and her name was—aye, Miss Rose, that’s my meal ark—it doesna haud muckle aboon a peck at a time; and here’s where I keep my bannocks, and I have a wee kettle and a pickle tea and sugar there; and for the greens I have just to gang down to the garden and cut them, nae leave asked, and my drap milk brought regular to the very door. Ye see I’m weel off, and I’m ready to own it and be thankful, instead of graneing for ever like some folk—for I’m real comfortable here.”

“And have you no friends?” asked Rose.

“Weel, there’s Mysie down there, milking the cow, and there’s her father, my sister’s son. Eh, to see the ill the warld and a family do to a man! for there’s that lad Geordie Paxton, no fifty year auld, and he’s a mair aged man than me—‘for such shall have sorrow in the flesh,’ the Apostle says, and never being married mysel, ye see, and keeping up nae troke wi’ far-off kin, that’s a’ the friends, except a cousin, here and there, that I hae.”

“And does naebody ever come to see you?” asked Katie.

“No a creature—wha should mind me, a silly auld man?” answered the Dragon, with a momentary pathos in his tone. “And I couldna be fashed wi’ strangers either, and you see I hae a’thing within mysel, milk and meal, board and bed, sae that I’m nae ways dependent on either fremd-folk or friends; but ye may speak for me if you

like, Miss Rose, to Mr. Hairy for a book whiles. There's grand, solid books yonder of the auld maister's, and there's ane or twa that I found out no lang syne that wadna do for the like of you—I wouldna consent to lead away the young wi' them; but they do weel enough to divert an auld man that has experience of the world, and kens guid from evil; and I'll promise faithful to burn every word o' them when I've ta'en the divert mysel. Here's ane, ye see. I wadna let you read it, and you a young lassie; but ye may look at its name."

And looking, Rose discovered in the charred bundle of leaves which lay on the old man's hob, and lighted his fire, a torn "Vicar of Wakefield."

"Eh, I've read that!" said Violet, under her breath; and Violet looked on with horror as if at a human sacrifice.

“ Every morning, when I take a page for my light, I read it first,” said the Dragon, **chuckling** ; **“ there’s that muckle diversion in’t ; but it’s no for you—it’s no for the like of you.”**

CHAPTER IX.

Neither a borrower nor a lender be,
For borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry.

HAMLET.

"HARRY, my man, you must be canny with the siller," said Uncle Sandy. "It's a snare to the feet of many—and mind, this fortune brings such a change in your case, that there is a danger of you thinking it greater than it is."

"No fear, uncle," said Harry, pausing in his new land-proprietor mood to cut down

a thistle with a swinging blow of his cane. "No fear, I say. I'll live up to my income, but then that is perfectly legitimate, for the estate does not die with me. Just now, of course, there are a number of expenses which never will be renewed in my time—all this improvement and furnishing—and that may straighten me for a year, perhaps—but then I expected that; and I don't want to hoard and lay up money, uncle."

"Nor would I want that, Harry," said the old man; "far from it—but mind—

" ' No for to hide it in a hedge,
Nor for a train attendant,
But for the glorious privilege
Of being independent.' "

I am not a man to blaw about independence, Harry; and even Robert Burns himself, poor

man, speaks of his ain in a way that pleases me little—but it's a grand thing to feel that you're standing on your ain feet, and no leaning on a prop that may be drawn away itself, and ruin you. I am not the right person to give you counsel either, Harry, for I ken little about the affairs of the world, how they work, or what's the wisest way—only I'm an auld man, and have had my ain thoughts; be canny, Harry, with the siller."

"Yes, yes, no fear," repeated Harry, a little impatiently; "there is one thing I thought of speaking to you about, uncle. They tell me that if I took William Hunter's farm into my own hands, and cultivated it in the scientific way—I could employ a man to manage that, you know—I might double its value. Now in the estate of Allenders, there's this Mr. Hunter's farm, which he pays two hundred pounds for, and a Mr.

Sinclair has a much less one for a hundred and fifty, and there's a house I'll show you between this and Stirling, with twenty acres attached to it, that pays me fifty pounds—and the rest of the property is made up of some houses in Stirling, and the half of the village down here. So you see there is part of my income dependent on the chance of these houses letting well. They are all right just now, but one can never depend on that, and Mr. Hunter's lease is out. He does not wish to renew it himself, and though I have several offers for the farm, I have a great mind to keep it in my own hands. I think such an occupation as that is the very thing for me; but then, I've no capital."

"Ay Harry, ay Harry," said his uncle with eager interest, "are you thinking already about occupation for the leisure that God has given you? I like that—it gives me good heart; and, Harry, my man, just

look at that grand country. I ken no pleasure greater than working on it, and bringing out the wealth that is home-born and in the soil; better than your merchandizing, Harry," and the old man heartily shook his nephew's hand.

"Yes, uncle; but the capital," said Harry.

"I thought there was something to the fore—something in the bank to begin you with? ay, yes—I did not mind, you have spent that in the house; but, Harry, I have nothing myself, but two hundred pounds, and I wanted, if it were God's will, to leave some bit present to the bairns when I was gone; besides two hundred pounds could do little for you, Harry."

"Nothing at all," said Harry quickly; "but I have a plan you might help me in. How much money will Miss Jean have, uncle?"

“Jean Calder?—na, na, Harry,” said the old man, shaking his head. “I would not with my will, speak ill or judge unkindly of any mortal, but charity—I am meaning the free heart and the kind thought—is not in her. Did you no hear the fight we had to get your papers from her? No, Harry; I’m sorry to damp you. She may have a thousand pounds, maybe. As much as that I warrant; but you’ll make nothing of Miss Jean.”

“A thousand pounds! My plan, uncle is to offer her better interest than she could get elsewhere,” said Harry. “As for her kindness, I should never think of that; and I would not ask it, because I was her brother’s grandson, but because I could offer her so much per cent.; that’s the way. Now a thousand pounds from Miss Jean would make these lands bear other crops than this—look, uncle.”

They were standing at the corner of a field of thin and scanty corn. The long ears bent upon the breeze, like so many tall attenuated striplings; and their chill green contrasted unpleasantly with the rich brown tint which began to ripen over a full, rustling, wholesome field on the other side of the way.

"It's a poor crop," said Uncle Sandy, meditatingly; "it's like the well doings of a cauld heart—it wants the good-will to grow. But Jean Calder, Harry—Jean Calder help any man! Well, Providence may soften her heart; but it is not in her nature."

"She will give the money for her own profit," said Harry; "no fear. I will consult Mr. Lindsay, and we can offer her good interest. Then you see, uncle, the advantage of it is, that we are her rightful heirs, and she is a very old woman now."

"Whisht, Harry; let me never hear the

like of this again," said his uncle, gravely ; "you are a young man now, but God may keep you to be an old one. Never you reckon on the ending of a life, that it is in God's hand to spare or take away, and never grudge the air of this living world—such as it is, we aye desire to breathe it lang ourselves—to one that He keeps in it day by day, nourishing the auld worn-out heart with breath and motion, for good ends of His ain. And, Harry, this money is the woman's life—I could not think of the chance of its perishing without pain and trouble, for it would be a dreadful loss to her—like the loss of a bairn."

"Well, well, uncle, no chance of its being lost," said Harry, somewhat fretfully ; "but will you speak to her when you go back to Ayr? will you undertake to negociate this for me? I know she trusts you."

"She trusts me just as other folk do, who

have kent me tell few lies all my lifetime," said Uncle Sandy, "but as for more than this, Harry, Jean Calder trusts no man. Well, I'll tell her—I would not choose the office, but since you ask me, I'll tell her, Harry, and put it before her in the best way I can. That you should have occupation, is a good thought; and it's well too to increase your substance—well, my man, well; but you'll need to be eident, and keep an eye yourself on every thing—and even, Harry, you'll need to learn."

"Oh, yes, I'll learn," said Harry, "but the money, uncle, is the important thing—there will be little difficulty with the rest."

The old man shook his head.

"Have more regard to the difficulties, Harry—if you do so, you'll overcome them better; for mind ye, siller is sometimes maister, but he's easier to subdue and put your foot upon, than such things as heart

and mind and conscience. Harry, be canny ; God sometimes appoints us a hard school when we are slow of the uptake in an easy one. But you need not gloom—auld men get license of advising, and ye mind how the cottar ‘ mixes a’ with admonition due.’ ”

“ Yes,” said Harry laughing, “ I am fated to have counsellors—for yonder is our old Dragon who has no objection to give me the benefit of his experience too.”

Alexander Muir slightly erected his white head with a single throb of injured feeling ; for with all his natural and gracious humility, he did not choose to come down to the level of the poor old Dragon of Allenders ; but when a considerable silence followed, and Harry walking by his side with a sullen gloom contracting the lines of his face, made violent dashes now and then at groups of frightened poppies, or at the lordly resistant thistle, the old man was the first to speak—

for his anxious friends could not venture to offend this indulged and wayward Harry.

“The rough bur thistle spreading wide
Amang the bearded bear—”

said the old man quietly, “aye, Harry, my man, there were fine thoughts in that grand castaway; and a sore thing it is to see how little great gifts avail, and what shipwrecks folk may make with them—if this were anything but the avenue and porch of the great lifetime, which we forget so easy! I’ve been of little use myself, Harry, in my day and generation—little use but to comfort the hearts of bairns, and give them now and then an hour’s sunshine and pleasance—but you’re better gifted both in mind and estate than I ever was. I make ye my depute, Harry, to do better service to God and man than me.”

Oh, gentle, righteous heart! a sudden im-

pulse of humility and tenderness came upon Harry Muir's impressible spirit. Better service! yet this old man seemed to have lived for no other conscious end, than the service of God and man.

CHAPTER X.

You follow the young prince up and down like his evil angel.

KING HENRY IV.

“EH, Harry, here’s a gentleman coming,” said Violet, as she sat on the floor at the western window of the drawing-room with a book on her lap. Katie Calder kneeling beside her, was looking from the window, and making a superb cat’s cradle on her fingers. It was evening and lessons and work alike concluded, the children chose

each her own manner of amusement, until tea should be over, and leave them free for their out-door ramble. But it was Katie's observation which discovered the gentleman, though Violet was by no means incurious, when the discovery was communicated to her.

"Oh!" said Harry, turning from the window with a slight flush on his face, "it's Gibbie Allenders—I might as well see him alone—but that would hurt his feelings. Mind he's quite a foolish fellow."

This speech was addressed to no one in particular, but Harry looked annoyed and restless, and they all perceived it. Gilbert Allenders, indeed, was a kind of ghost to Harry; for already an intimacy which disgusted his finer mind, but which he seemed to have no power to struggle against, had sprung up between them, and Gilbert never

failed by jibe or malicious allusion, every time they met, to remind his new kinsman under what circumstances they first saw each other. Poor Harry ! his earliest error here haunted him perpetually—he could not shake its consequences off.

“ Has he got his smoking-room fitted up yet, Mrs. Muir Allenders,” asked Gilbert, after the ceremonies of his introduction—though he had seen Agnes before—were over. “ Has Harry not begun to retreat into a den of his own yet? Ah you don’t know how we young fellows do in these respects—and really Allenders has shown so much good taste in the other parts of the house, that I am quite anxious to see the den—I’ve seen a collection of pipes in a German student’s room, that would astonish all Scotland to match—Bursch as they call themselves—horrid language that Ger-

man—but I never could manage the coarse gutturals.”

“We have plenty in our own tongue,” said Uncle Sandy, quietly.

“Ah, Scotch—gone out of date, Sir, out of date—civilized people forget that there ever was such a jargon. I say, Harry, wasn’t that fine, that song Simson gave us the first night I saw you—magnificent—I didn’t know Allenders then, Miss Muir, quite a chance meeting, was it not extraordinary? and I think the first night he was in Stirling too—wasn’t it, Harry?”

Harry cast a guilty angry look round the room; Martha started in her chair; Agnes glanced up uneasily; and Uncle Sandy involuntarily shook his head; but Rose, happy Rose, heard nothing of it all, for with her eyelids drooping in a pleasant heaviness, she

was dreaming out her dream—and though it was herself whom Gilbert addressed as Miss Muir, Rose remained peacefully ignorant of all he said.

“And there’s your friend, that lawyer fellow—your business man, I suppose, Allenders—he wasn’t, with you ; a couple of slow chaps, that advocate and him,” continued the sapient Mr. Gilbert. “I wouldn’t give twopence for such society. If they’re not as flat as the canal and as slow as a heavy boat, I’m no judge.”

“It happens that we are all indebted to Mr. Charteris, and that he is a friend of ours,” said Martha, quickly, “I believe Harry is proud to call him so.”

“And I am sure I never met a pleasanter man,” stole in Agnes.

And the eyes of Rose gleamed positive

lightning upon the redoubtable Gilbert. But Rose, though she ventured upon a little short prefatory cough, said nothing.

"By-the-bye," said Harry, hurriedly, "you have not seen the grounds, Allenders; come and give me your opinion of them."

"Delighted, if the ladies will accompany us," said Mr. Gilbert; "otherwise, Harry, I am much obliged, but can't be detached from such fair company." And Gilbert returned, with a glance of very unequivocal admiration, the indignant flash of Rose's eye.

A pause of general disconcertment followed; irritated and defiant, Harry tossed about the books upon a little table near him, and moodily evaded the looks which sought his face. Mr. Gilbert Allenders, the only person present at ease, pulled up his high collar, and settled his long chin comfortably upon his stock, while Agnes, in a little flutter

of anxious deprecation and peace-making, began to move among her cups and saucers, and to prepare tea.

“We have never had the pleasure of seeing you in Stirling yet, Miss Muir,” said Gilbert, turning his back upon Martha, and addressing himself with great demonstration to Rose. “Haven’t you had my sisters out, calling? I thought so. They’re nice girls enough, considering they’ve been always in the country. Ah, there’s nothing like a season or two in London for polishing up a man.”

“Have you been in London, Mr. Allenders?” asked Agnes.

“Yes, three or four years; but I’m not quite a good specimen,” said Mr. Gilbert, modestly, “for I was at work all the time, studying very hard—oh! very hard;” and the painful student laughed loudly at his own

boast of industry. "I say, Harry, Leith races come on next month—you'll go with us, won't you? there's Simson and Allan and me; I said you would be sure to come."

"I don't care a straw for Leith races," said Harry, rudely; but notwithstanding he raised his head, and looked by no means so indifferent as he spoke.

"Care! who said anybody cared?" answered Gilbert; "one must go to lots of places one doesn't care a straw for—it becomes a duty to society. I'll undertake to say you'll come, Harry. We needn't be more than a couple of days away, and the ladies won't miss you. Permit me, Miss Muir."

And Gilbert, politely shutting out Martha and her uncle from sight of the tea-table with his long loose person and his easy chair, elaborately waited upon Rose, and

devoted himself to her in a laborious attempt at conversation ; but it is very hard to make a conversation where one of the interlocutors says only " Yes" and " No," and those with anything but good will ; so Gilbert took in Agnes as a partaker of his attentions, and talked so fine, and intimated so many festivities to come when the summer should be over, that the little wife grew interested in spite of herself, and wondered (for Agnes had been very " strictly" brought up) whether it would be proper and decorous for her, a matron and house-mother, twenty years old, to go to a ball. Martha, behind backs, sat quietly at her work, and said nothing ; while Uncle Sandy looked on with a slight expression of displeasure and offence. The old man had a sensitive perception of ill manners, and by no means liked them to be applied to himself.

But Martha was not offended by the neglect of Gilbert Allenders.

After tea, Harry — who had remained very moody and abstracted, except for a few minutes when he, too, kindled at those descriptions of local party-giving—proposed a walk in the grounds, where Agnes willingly, and Rose with great reluctance, were persuaded to accompany them. Rose was very innocent of flirtation—circumstances had guarded her, and kept from her both temptation and opportunity—so that, fully freighted with her present dreams, there could have been nothing less pleasant to Rose than to walk slowly along the mall, under the over-arching foliage, leaning upon the arm of Mr. Gilbert Allenders. And Mr. Gilbert Allenders was burdened with no delicacy. He kept steadily behind Harry and Agnes, he lingered in quiet places, he

spoke tender sentimentalities, he *quizzed* the young ladies of Stirling, he insinuated his perfect conviction of the extreme superiority of Miss Rose Muir; but no amount of proof could have persuaded Gilbert of a tenth part of the disgust and dislike with which Rose Muir listened. She was very near telling him so several times, and begging rather to hear the rude jokes than the mawkish sentiment. But Rose was shy, and her safest refuge was in silence.

“What has Harry to do with such a man as that?” said Uncle Sandy. “Martha, I doubt this fortune is to have its dangers, as great as the poverty.”

“Ay, uncle.” Martha had seen enough, after a week at Allenders, to convince her of that.

“And he’s taken with Rose,” said the old

man. "You were feared for Mr. Charteris, Martha ; but there's more reason here."

"No reason, uncle, no reason," was the quiet answer. "He may harm Harry, but Rose is very safe."

"So she is, it is true," said the uncle. "Ay, and the man that would do no harm to Harry might harm the free heart that clings by nature to things that are true and of good report. God preserve these bairns ! If such a thing were happening as that Rose was to marry, I think, Martha, my woman, you should come cannily hame to me."

A long time after, when both of them had relapsed into thoughtful silence, Martha answered :

"May be, uncle—it might be best ; but many things must come and go between this time and that."

"Harry has been speaking to me about a project he has," said the old man, "about farming and borrowing siller. Has he told you, Martha?"

"Ay, uncle."

"And you think well of it?"

"An occupation is always good," said Martha. "I am doubtful and anxious about his plans for getting money, but the work should do him service; and Harry has begun on a great scale here, uncle. It is impossible he can go on so on his present income, and he will rather increase than diminish—he is always so confident. So I should be glad to think he had a chance of improving the property. I thought it a great fortune a month ago. It does not look so inexhaustible now."

"Well, as the money would come to you at any rate in the ordinary course of nature,"

said the old man hesitating ; “ and as there is aye the land to fall back upon, no to speak of my two hundred pounds, I think I may venture to speak to Miss Jean whenever I get back to Ayr.”

“ Miss Jean ! Does Harry mean to ask her for the money ? ” asked Martha.

“ What think ye of it ? She is far from a likely person, but he means to offer her higher interest, he says, than anybody else. What think ye of it, Martha ? for I am only doubtful myself,” said the old man, anxiously.

But Martha only shook her head. “ Do it, if Harry asks you, uncle—do it. I have given up advising now. He must be left alone.”

And Harry, to his great wonder, and with a strange mixture of irritation and pleasure, found himself left alone—suffered, without

remonstrance or check, to follow entirely the counsel of his own will. Good little Agnes had great trust in what Harry *said* about economy and prudence, and triumphantly pointed out to Martha those resolutions of sublime virtue with which every piece of practical extravagance was prefaced; and Martha listened with a grave smile, and never suggested doubt to the simple heart, which, for itself, saw the most inexhaustible fortune in those much spoken of "rents," and never dreaded now the old familiar evils of poverty.

Martha descended from her mother's place among them. She stood aside, as she felt was meet, and suffered the young husband and the young wife to take their lawful place, free of all interference of hers. She herself now was only guardian of Rose and Violet, domestic helper of Mrs. Agnes—Harry

Muir's quiet elder sister, living in his house, a member of his family; and Martha's natural pride took a secret unconscious delight in bowing itself to this voluntary humility. She soon began to be neglected, too, for the strangers who visited the young household did not feel that the eldest and least attractive member of it had any such claim on their attention as the pretty, girlish wife, or the graceful sister Rose. So Martha dwelt more and more in her own room, always working, and watching the shadows on Demeyet for her hourly relaxation. These shadows going and coming, and the soft wind rustling in the leaves, and the water continually passing by, and gleaming out and in among the shadowing foliage, were delights to her in her solitude. So were the children, when they drew her out to walk between them by the waterside, or when they sat at her feet, and

retailed to her the stories of Dragon ; and so were Harry's good spirits, his constant occupation, his very infrequent lapses, and the sunny tone and atmosphere with which the hopeful house was filled. Yet Martha was anxious for Rose, whose dreams—sweet golden mists—were the first and only thoughts which her young sister had never ventured to whisper in her ear ; for the graver woman knew by true instinct, though they had never visited her own experience, what these youthful dreamings were, and always gave tenderly and quietly the sympathy which the young moved heart came to seek of her, when Rose leaned upon her shoulder in the summer nights, and looked at the star twinkling about Demeyet, and sighed. With her arm round the girl's waist, and both their faces veiled in the gloom, Martha would sigh, too, and tell stories of the old time that

was past—gentle remembrances of the father and mother, tales of Uncle Sandy, and of many a familiar name in Ayr. And Rose smiled, and shed gentle tears, and asked questions about those old humble romances, those dead sorrows, those softened and tranquil histories of common life, till the dreams in her heart no longer oppressed her with their shadowy enchantment, but floated away, leaving her only with a deeper apprehension and sympathy; and themselves came back, when it was their time, freshened as with the evening dews. Sometimes, while they were thus seated by the open window, Martha leaning on it, and Rose on her, with sweet sounds ascending—rustling of trees and water, far-off child-voices of Violet and Katie, Martha would feel for a moment—and as she felt it, her steady hand shook a little, and her voice trembled—that this ready memory

of hers, and the unconscious link which drew one story after another into her remembrance, and from her lips, was a mark of the age which began gradually to draw near. Age! the time of repose, of quietness, of peace; in the day-time, when such a thought struck her, the fiery heart within her chafed and rebelled; but at night she only felt her eyelid moisten, and her heart swell. Martha was wrong—age was not near; but in spite of forebodings and anxiety, this was a time of peace—a reposing time wherein strength for the great conflict was to be gathered.

CHAPTER XI.

Three thousand ducats for three months, and
Antonio bound.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

"THE land is aye guid security," said Alexander Muir doubtfully to himself, as he slowly brushed his Sabbath-day's hat, and glanced from the window to where one or two of his younger visitors, carrying their work idly in their hands, strayed with wistful looks past his strawberry beds. "There are hungry e'en among these bairns, and what

can we expect, poor things? I must promise them a lawful feast in the afternoon, if they'll no pick any berries the time I'm away; and then there's my two hundred pounds if it should come to the worst—but two hundred's a far way off a thousand; and the house and the garden are worth but little siller, and to sell them would break my heart. Well, I can aye see what Miss Jean says; and if all belonging to ye have done hard things for ye, in their day, Harry, my man, this is no the least."

"Bairns," continued the old man from the window, "do ye see yon strawberries yonder among the leaves? I'll be out an hour—you might have time to make an end of them if ye liked—but I ken there is far mair honour among ye than the like of that. Maggie, my dear, never you mind the rasps—they can stand steady of themsels, and need

no prop. Beatie, come away from the strawberries like a good bairn."

"It's just a branch that's lying ower the border—somebody's sure to tramp on't," explained Beatie.

"Never you mind, my woman, so it's no you that does it," answered the old man. "Enter not into temptation—turn your backs upon them like good bairns; and if I see there's good work done when I come back, ye shall have a table spread out, and I'll tell Mrs. Tamson to send in some cream, and ye shall gather the berries for yoursels."

One or two smiling faces looked up and nodded thanks, and there was a very general quickening of needles; but Mary Burness who had "cast out" with her "lad" the night before, drooped her head pathetically and sighed. Poor Mary, in her melancholy, had a soul above strawberries!

Having delivered this his last message, and given to Jessie, his little handmaiden, special directions to prepare for this simple entertainment, Alexander Muir took his staff in his hand, and set out solemnly to call upon Miss Jean.

He had left Allenders only the previous day, and had left it in good spirits, giving Harry particular charge about the "schooling" of Violet and Katie, which the old man perceived ran some risk of being neglected, at least by the heads of the house. But Uncle Sandy had great hopes of Harry, and was much interested about the occupation which Harry desired for his leisure. Nevertheless, the old man walked slowly towards the dwelling-place of Jean Calder. He needed to be a brave man who should venture to ask money from her.

"Ou, ay, she's aye steering," said, dis-

contentedly, the woman who occupied the lower story of Miss Jean's house, "weary tak her! I have had nae peace o' my life since ye took that little brat Katie away. She fees my wee lassie wi' ten shillings in the year to kindle her fire, and do a' her needs, and expects me forbye to wash her claes into the bargain, as if I hadna plenty to do wi' a man, and a muckle laddie, and a' thae weans! I wadna have let Aggie gang, but just I thought five shillings—though it didna come till the end o' the half year—couldna weel come amiss where there's aye sae muckle to do wi't, and Aggie was just to gang up in the morning. Instead of that it's Aggie here, Aggie there, the haill day through; and she never as muckle as says, have ye a mouth—except for that drap parritch in the morning, and sour milk."

"Poor woman! *she* gets more ill than

you," said the old man, compassionately ;
" but Aggie has mother and father to look
after her, and see she's no ill used ; whereas
little Katie had but a widow woman to look
to, who couldna have another mouth brought
hame to her ; and that makes a great
difference ; so now I'll go up the stair and
see Miss Jean."

But the old man's heart almost failed him,
as he paused at the half-opened door. He
had no opportunity of escape, however, for
the sharp, anxious, miser-ear had heard the
approaching footstep ; and the shrill, quivering
voice of Miss Jean Calder demanded impa-
tiently, " Wha's there ?"

" It's me," said Alexander Muir, meekly.
" If ye're well enough, and your lane, I'll
come in, Miss Jean."

" Ay, come in, and gie us the news,"
answered Miss Jean, appearing at the

kitchen-door in a thick muslin cap, with great flaunting borders, borrowed from Aggie's indignant mother. The poor lean cheeks looked thinner and more gaunt than usual within the wide full muslin wings which flaunted out from them on either side; and hot as this July day was, Miss Jean had been sitting, with an old faded woollen shawl over her shoulders, close by the fire. "Ye may come in, Sandy, since it's you, and gie us the news—just inbye here. It's nae guid standing on ceremony wi' auld friends like you. Come inbye to the fire, Sandy Muir," said Miss Jean, graciously.

The old man entered the little kitchen with some trepidation, though he hailed this singular courtesy as a good omen, and was emboldened for his difficult errand.

The kitchen was small, and hot, and stifling, for the July sun, very imperfectly

kept out by a torn curtain of checked linen and a broken shutter, accomplished what Miss Jean's penurious handful of fire scarcely could have done. A small round deal table stood before the fire-place; opposite to it was the door of Miss Jean's "concealed bed," which she closed in passing; while between the fire-place and the window a wooden "bunker," dirty and wounded, filled up all the wall. Miss Jean herself sat by the fire-side in a high wooden elbow-chair, furnished with one or two loose thin cushions, which scarcely interposed the least degree of softness between the sharp corners of the chair, and the sharper corners of her poor worn, angular frame. A little black teapot stood by the fire—for thrift Miss Jean never emptied this teapot; it always stood baking there, and always had its scanty spoonful of new tea added to the accumulation of half-boiled

leaves, till it would bear no further addition, and compelled a reluctant cleaning out.

But on the top of Miss Jean's bunker, a strange contrast to the penurious meanness of all her other arrangements, lay a great ham, enveloped in greasy paper, and roasting slowly in an atmosphere to which it was very little accustomed. A certain look of recognition given by Uncle Sandy to this very respectable edible, and an evident importance with which he stood endowed in the eyes of Miss Jean, explained how it came here—a peace-offering from Allenders to the wealthy miser.

“It was weel dune of ye, Sandy, to gar them mind the auld wife—very weel dune; and ane canna say what may come o't. I'm no meaning in siller,” added Miss Jean, hurriedly. “I wadna encourage a mercenary spirit—ye ken that—but in guid will, Sandy

—guid will ; and guid will's a grand thing amang relations ; and the ham's no ill eating. They would get it cheap yonder away noo—far cheaper than the like of you or me ?”

“ You see,” said Uncle Sandy—with elaborate skill, as he thought, good simple heart, “ they would have nane but the very finest, it being for you, Miss Jean, and so I cannot undertake to say it was cheap—when ye get the best of anything, it's seldom to call cheap.”

“ Ye're a grand man to learn me, Sandy Muir,” said Miss Jean, with a laugh of derision. “ Me, that have been a careful woman a' my days, never gieing a penny mair for onything than what it was worth to me. I've heard the like of you, that pretend to be philosophers, arguing against ane, when ane wanted to prig down a thing honestly, that what was asked was naething mair

than the thing's absolute worth. But what have I to do wi' absolute worth? What is't worth to *me*? That's my wisdom, Sandy Muir; and to hear you, that everybody kens has just had as little discernment as a bairn, and been imposed on by the hail town, telling *me* what's cheap and what's dear! I reckon if Solomon had been here, he would have found out at last the new thing that he took sic bother about, honest man."

"Weel, Miss Jean, I may have been imposed on—I'll no say," said the old man, looking slightly displeased. "Most folk have, one time or another; but you're no asking what kind of a place they've gotten, nor about the bairns themsels."

"Ye'll think yoursel up the brae, Sandy," said Miss Jean, "uncle, nae less, to a laird; but I'm less heeding, I'm thankful, of the

vanities of this warld. Is't a' guid brown earth the lad's siller comes from, or is't siller in the bank, or what is it? But you needna tell me about their grand claes and their braw house, for my mind's a different kind of mind from that."

"It's a' guid brown earth, as you say, Miss Jean," said the old man, eagerly seizing this opening to begin his attack; "that is, a' but some houses; and Harry like a thrifty man, is giving his attention to the land, and says, with good work, it could be made twice as profitable. You will be glad to hear of that, Miss Jean."

"I would be glad to hear it, if I didna ken that nae profit in this world would ever make yon wasteful callant thrifty," said the old woman, leaning back in her chair, and pressing the great borders of her cap close to her face with two dingy, shrivelled

hands. "Do ye think I dinna ken as weel as you that he's gaen and gotten a grand house, and deckit out yon bit doll o' his as fine in ribbons and satins, as if she were a countess? Na, Sandy, I'll no gie up my discrimination. Harry Muir will come to want yet, or you may ca' me a lee."

"No fears of Harry Muir," said the old man warmly. "I have myself, as I was just telling him, two hundred pounds of my ain, besides the garden and the house, and I'll come to want mysel', I am well assured of that, before want touches Harry Muir—but that's no the question; you see he could double his incoming siller in the year, if he could do justice to this farm; and the auld farmer, a Mr. Hunter, a very decent sponisible man, acknowledged the same thing to me, but said he was too old to learn himsel'."

"Twa hundred pounds! do you mean to

say that *you're* twa hundred pounds afore the world, Sandy?" said Miss Jean. "Man, I didna think you had sae muckle in ye!—but take you care, Sandy Muir, my man—take you care of the mammon of unrighteousness—it's a fickle thing to haud it sicker enough, and no to haud it ower fast."

And as she spoke, a slight twitch passed over the hard muscles of her face; yet she spoke unconsciously, and had not the remotest idea that she condemned herself.

"And what would be your counsel, Miss Jean?" said Uncle Sandy, not without a little tremor. "It would cost siller at first, you see, to work upon this farm; but no doubt it's sure to answer, being just like sowing seed, which is lost for a time, but in spring is found again in the green ear and blade. The lad is anxious to be well advised, and no begin without good consideration; so what would you say?"

"I'll tell ye what I would say, Sandy Muir," said the miser, spreading back her muslin wings, and leaning forward to him, with them projecting from her face on either side, and her dingy hands supporting her sharp chin; "I would say that a penny saved was as guid as tippence made; and that he should begin now, at the beginning of his time, and lay by and spare, and when he's an auld man like you, he'll hae a better fortin than he'll ever get out of the land. That's my counsel, and that's the way I've done mysel; and if he makes as gude an end o' his life as I've done o' mine, I'll let you ca' him a thrifty man."

"We'll nane of us be here to call him so," said Uncle Sandy, "we'll baith be in a place where gathered siller is an unthrifty provision. Whiles I think upon that, Miss Jean."

"Ou, ay, the like of you are aye thinking

upon that," said the old woman with fiery eyes; "but I tell ye I'm nane so sure of what may come to pass; for I've seen mony a hopefuller lad than Harry Muir—mony a ane that thought in their ain mind they would read the name on my grave-head twenty years after it was printed there, and I've pitten my fit upon their turf for a' that. I'm no wishing the lad ill—I'm wishing naebody ill that doesna meddle wi' me; but I've seen as unlikely things—and you'll see whether I'm no a sooth prophet, Sandy Muir."

And suddenly withdrawing her hands, and nodding her feeble head in ghastly complacency, the old weird woman leaned back again in her chair.

"God forbid ye should! God forbid it!—and spare, and bless, and multiply the lad, and make him an honour and a strength in the land, long after the moss is on my head—

stane," said Alexander Muir, with solemn earnestness. "And God bless the young bairns and the hopeful," added the old man, eagerly, after a pause, "and deliver them from evil eye that grudges at their pleasure, or evil foot of triumph on their innocent graves! And God forgive them that have ill thoughts of the sons of youth that are His heritage—blessings on their bright heads, ane and a'!"

And when he paused, trembling with earnest indignant fervour, the old man's eye fell upon Miss Jean. She had risen to take down from the high dusty mantel-piece a coarse blue woollen stocking which she had been knitting. Now she resumed her seat, and began with perfect composure to take up some loops which her unsteady fingers had drawn out as she took down the stocking. Either she had not listened to Uncle

Sandy's fervent blessing, or was not disposed to except at it—certainly she settled down in her chair with feeble deliberation, pulling about her thin cushions peevishly, and with no sign or token about her of emotion of any kind. Her very eye had dulled and lost its fire, and you saw only a very old miserable solitary woman, and not an evil spirit incarnate of covetousness and malice, as she had looked a few minutes before.

There was a considerable pause, for the old man did not find it so easy to overcome the tremor of indignation and horror into which her words had thrown him, and he now had almost resolved—but for a lingering unwillingness to disappoint Harry—to say nothing of his special mission. At last the silence was broken by Miss Jean herself.

“Ill times, Sandy Muir, awfu' ill times; for auld folk, such like as me that have just

their pickle siller and naething mair, nae land to bear fruit nor strong arm to work for them, Sandy ; the like of such times as thir, are as bad as the dear years."

Poor, forlorn, worn-out life ! unconsciously to herself, the old man's blessing on the young, whose strength she grudged and envied, had touched a gentle chord in her withered heart. Nothing knew she of what softened her, but for the moment she was softened.

"Are ye getting little interest for your siller, Miss Jean ?" said Uncle Sandy, immediately roused.

"Little ! ye might say naething ava, and no be far wrang," answered Miss Jean, briskly. "A puir dirty three pund, or twa pund ten, for a guid hunder. Ye'll be getting mair for your twa, Sandy Muir, or ye wadna look sae innocent ! Where is't, man ? and

ye're an auld sleekit sneckdrawer, after a', and ken how to tak care o' yoursel."

"I ken ane, Miss Jean, would gie ye five pounds for every hundred, and mony thanks into the bargain," said the old man, his breath coming short and his face flushing all over with anxious haste; "and a decent lad and landed security. I might have told you sooner, if I had kent; but, you see, I never thought it would answer you."

"Answer *me*! I find guid siller answer me better than maist things that folk put their trust in," said Miss Jean, laying down her stocking, and lifting up the frosty cold blue eyes, which again twinkled and glimmered with eagerness, to the old man's face. "Ye ken ane; and does he gie *you* this muckle for your twa hunder pounds?"

"Na, my twa hundred is out of my ain power, in the Ayr bank; besides, its mair

siller this lad wants—mine would do him nae service.”

“This lad ! whia does the auld tricky body mean ?” said Miss Jean, fixing her sharp eyes curiously on Uncle Sandy, “five pounds in the hunder—ye’re meaning he’ll gie me that by the year, and keep a’ my siller where I never can lay hand on’t again, Sandy Muir ?”

“At no hand,” said the old man, with dignity, “the best of landed security, and the siller aye at your call, and the interest punctual to a day.”

Miss Jean’s mouth watered and her fingers itched ; it was impossible to think of this treasure without yearning to clutch it. “Ane might put by thretty pounds in the year,” she said, musingly. “And how do you ca’ this lad when ye name him, Sandy Muir ?”

“I’ve seen his name in the papers,” said

the old man, with mingled exultation and anxiety, "and there it stands, 'Harry Muir Allenders, Esq., of Allenders,' but at hame - here we call him your nephew and mine, Harry Muir."

Miss Jean uttered a passionate cry, rose from her seat, and flung the stocking with all her feeble might in the face of her visitor. "Eh, Sandy Muir, ye auld, leein, artful, designing villain! was't no enough that ye came ance already wi' you lang-tongued writer and reived my house of guid papers that were worth siller, but ye would come again, ye smooth-spoken, white-headed hypocrite, to seize my very substance away from me, and take bread out of a lone woman's mouth to make a great man of a graceless prodigal. Ye auld sinner! ye hard-hearted theiving spoiler, that I should say so! how dare ye come to break a puir auld woman's

heart, and tantalize the frail life out of me, wi' your lees and deceits about siller? Oh, Sandy Muir!"

And Miss Jean threw herself down once more in her hard chair, and began to wipe the corners of her eyes; for the disappointment of her ruined expectations was really as hard upon her miserable soul as the failing of fortune or fame is at any time to its eager pursuer, who has just lifted his hand to grasp what Fate remorselessly snatches away.

"Ye'll come to yoursel, Miss Jean—ye'll come to yoursel," said Uncle Sandy quietly, as he laid the stocking on the table.

And after another burst of fierce invective, Miss Jean did come to herself.

"And he had to send *you*—he couldna get a decent writer to take up such an errand for him! but I'll see him come to want, as

a waster should, and he need ask nae charity from me !”

“ Nor never will,” said the much-enduring Uncle Sandy ; “ and Mr. Macer, whom ye ken weel, Miss Jean, for the first writer in this hail town, is instructed on the subject. Maybe, that may satisfy ye, if ye dinna believe me ; but it might be best when he comes to see ye, no to throw your wires at *him*.”

“ Weel, Sandy Muir, ye’re no such an ill body after a’,” said Miss Jean, with a shrill laugh ; “ and what better did ye deserve, ye auld sinner, after pitting me in such grand hopes ? But if there’s land to trust to, past yon prodigal himsel—and I wouldna gie a strae in the fire for *his* bond—and your ain undertaking, and your twa hundred pounds, Sandy Muir ; for ane could aye easy take

the law of you, being close at hand, and neighbour like—I'll no say but I might hearken, if I was secure of my siller."

And with this gracious deliverance, to himself quite unexpected, Alexander Muir gladly left Miss Jean to order the cream for his strawberries, and to write a note to Harry. The old man drew a long breath, and wiped his brow with the most grateful sense of relief when he once more stood at the door of his own garden, and saw the table spread upon the green, and the expectant girls only waiting the permission of his presence to plunge down among the green, cool strawberry-leaves, and bring forth the fragrant fruit. Good Uncle Sandy looked round upon the young bright heads with a swelling heart, and said "blessings on them" once more. The evil thoughts of Miss Jean's envious and unlovely age struck

the old man as if with a vague presentiment of danger. His heart stretched out strong protecting arms around them. "Yea, children are God's heritage," he said to himself in encouragement and hope; and Maggie, and Beenie, and Beatie and Mary, all felt a more delicate tenderness than usual, in the smiles and kind words of their entertainer.

CHAPTER XII.

I've seen the morning, with gold the hills adorning,
And loud tempests roaring before parting day.

SONG.

“SUCCESS to Uncle Sandy—he has done it!” cried Harry, with exultation, as he threw Uncle Sandy’s note, which he himself had just glanced at, across the table to Rose. “Read it aloud for the general edification, Rosie. My uncle has always some good counsel for us.”

And Rose, upon whom this duty generally

devolved, put little Harry into Martha's lap, and read the letter.

“My dear Harry,

“I have just come home from seeing Miss Jean ; and to put you out of pain, I may as well say at once that, to my great astonishment, she has consented like a lamb ; so that I called on Mr. Macer, on my road home, and told him he might go the very same afternoon and conclude the matter ; and I suppose you will get the siller very soon. But Harry, my man, mind what I said to you, and take good thought and competent counsel before you begin to lay it out, for I have heard folk say that ye may sow siller broadcast on land, and if it's no wisely done, you may be left ne'er a hair the better after all. I do not pretend to be learned about farming ; but mind, Harry, and

take good advice before you begin to spend this siller.

“Your propine of the ham was very well taken, and did me good in my errand; but I will never wish *you* an errand like it, Harry. Poor old desolate woman, it makes my heart sore to see her strong grip of the world, and worse than that, her grudge at you and the like of you, for the strength and youth which Jean Calder had in her day, but could not hoard like siller. I cannot get this out of my head, for it aye rejoices me myself to see the new life springing, and my heart blesses it; and Jean Calder, if years are anything, should be nearer the end than me.

“Ye may tell Violet and Katie that the bairns here are just laying the table in the garden, and that we are all to get our four hours’ of strawberries and cream. So being

a little wearied after my battle with Miss Jean, and the bairns being clamorous for me outbye, and besides the first part of this letter being what will most content *you*, Harry, the rest of the bairns will make allowance for me if I say no more at the present writing.

“ALEXANDER MUIR.”

“Well done, Uncle Sandy ! He is the prince of plenipotentiaries !” said the triumphant Harry, who, in the meantime, had opened another letter. “And here’s a note from Charteris. He’s coming to-day to pay us a visit, Agnes. You must give him the best room, and do him all honour—but for him, we might never have seen Allenders. Does anybody know, by the bye, what first set Charteris to search for the heir ? Do you, Rosie ?”

“Harry, *me* !”

Rose hastily drew little Harry upon her lap again, and looked very much amazed and innocent; but the colour rose over her face, and the small heir of Allenders felt her brow burn as he pulled her hair. His father laughed, and pulled Rose's dark love-locks too.

"Never mind then, we can ask himself; but Rose, we must take care that no hostile encounter takes place between Charteris and Gibbie Allenders—that would not do, you know."

A sudden frown contracted the forehead on which little Harry's hand grew hotter and hotter. The very name of Gilbert Allenders had grown a bugbear to Rose, for he had already paid them repeated visits, and was every time more and more demonstrative of his devotion to herself.

"Now, little ones, are you ready?" said

Harry. "Come, we shall drive you in to school to-day; and who else will go with me? you, Agnes, or Rose? We will stay in Stirling till Charteris comes, and bring him home."

"Not me," said Rose, under her breath, "not me." She said it as if she was resisting some urgent solicitations, and very resolute was the heroic Rose, who in ordinary circumstances thought a drive to Stirling a very pleasant thing.

"Nor me either, Harry, for I have something to do," said Agnes; "and besides, I don't want to be an hour or two in Stirling. Go yourself, and take the children; and Dragon thinks, Harry, that Violet's pony should be put to the little old gig to take them to school, for they cannot walk always, Dragon says; and it won't do to have a pillion, as Lettie proposed."

“But, Harry, I think it would, and Katie thinks it would,” said Violet, eagerly; “and I would ride behind the one day, and Katie the other. And what way could we no do as well as the lady in young Lochinvar?”

“The lady in young Lochinvar did not run away every day, or I dare say even she might have preferred a gig,” said Harry. “And besides, she had no pillion. I think we must have another pony for Katie—that will be the best plan.”

“Eh, Violet!” Little Katie Calder looked down at her printed chintz frock, and struggled to restrain the laugh of delight which was quite irrestrainable; for Katie had other frocks now much grander than the chintz one, and the little handmaiden of Miss Jean believed devoutly that she had come to live in fairy-land.

Their school was about two miles off, on the Stirling road—a famous *genteel* school for young lady boarders, where only these two little strangers were admitted as day scholars, because “Allenders” was landlord of the house. Violet and Katie dined with the young ladies at Blaelodge, besides having lessons with them; and they were being practically trained into the “manners” for which good, stiff, kindly Miss Inglis was renowned. On this particular morning the children ran to their room for their bonnets, and collected their books from the sunny window in the hall, just beside the door, which they had chosen for their study, with a considerable flutter of excitement; for to have “the carriage” stop at Blaelodge, and Harry himself, the most dignified of mortal men in the eyes of both, seen by all the young

ladies at all the windows taking care of them, was quite an overwhelming piece of grandeur.

"He'll take off his hat to Miss Inglis," said Katie, reverentially, "I saw him do that once, Violet, to the minister's wife."

"Eh, I've lost my grammar," said Violet in dismay. "Katie, do you mind where we had it last? And there's Harry ready at the the door."

"When we were sitting on the steps at Dragon's room last night," said the accurate Katie, "yes, I ken ; and I'll run, Lettie."

"I'll run myself," said Violet stoutly ; and there immediately followed a race across the lawn, which Lettie, being most impetuous, threatened at first to win, but which was eventually carried by the steadier speed of Katie Calder.

The Dragon himself, taking long, feeble,

tremulous strides over the dewy turf, met them half way, carrying the lost grammar.

“Ay, I kent it was near school time,” said old Adam; “and what should I pit my fit on, the first thing this morning when I steppit out o’ my ain door, but this braw new book? What gars ye be such careless monkeys? And it might just as easy have tumbled down off the step to the byre door, and had the brown cow Mailie, tramp on’t instead o’ me—and then ye never could have looked at it again, bairns. I wish you would just mind that a’ thing costs siller.”

“Eh, Dragon, Harry is to take us to Blaelodge in the carriage,” said Violet; “for Harry is going to Stirling to bring home Mr. Charteris to stay a whole week; and you mind Mr. Charteris, Dragon?”

“That’s yon birkie,” said the old man.

"Is he coming to be married upon Miss Rose?"

"As if Rose would marry anybody!" said Violet, with disdain; "but, eh, Katie! I dinna mind my grammar."

"Because you made him tell us fairy tales last night," said the sensible Katie; "but I had my grammar learned first. Come away, Lettie, and learn it on the road."

"And I'll maybe daunder as far as Maidlin Cross and meet ye, bairns, when ye're coming hame," said Dragon. "And I wadna care, if Mr. Hairy gave ye the auld gig to drive ye ower every morning mysel, and sae ye may tell him."

But Harry, just then, had discovered, by a second glance at Cuthbert's note, that he did not expect to arrive in Stirling till four or five o'clock. "It does not matter, however," said Harry, "I have something to do in

Stirling, and an hour or two is not of much importance. Have a good dinner for us, Agnes—perhaps I may bring out somebody else with me. Now, little ones, jump in—and you need not expect us till five.”

Agnes stood on the steps, very gay and blooming, in a morning dress which she would have thought magnificent Sabbath-day’s apparel six months ago ; while Rose, behind her, held up little Harry to kiss his hand to his young father. The window of the dining-room, where they had breakfasted, was open, and Martha stood beside it looking out. She was chiding herself, as she found that all those peaceful days had not yet quite obliterated the old suspicious anxiety which trembled to see Harry depart anywhere alone ; and unconsciously she pulled the white jasmine flowers which clustered about the window, and felt their fragrance sicken her,

and threw them to the ground. Many a time after, there returned to Martha's heart the odour of those jasmine flowers.

The high trees gleaming in the golden sunshine, the dewy bits of shade, and then the broad flush of tangible light into which their horse dashed at such an exhilarating pace, made the heart of Harry bound as lightly as did those of the children by his side. In his warm and kindly good-humour Harry even hesitated to set them down at the very shady gate of Blaelodge, which the sunshine never reached even in midsummer, till its latest hour, and gave five minutes to consider the practicability of carrying them with him to Stirling ; but it was not practicable—and Harry only paused to lift them out, and bid them hurry home at night to see the strangers, before proceeding himself on his farther way. The

influence of the bright summer day entered into his very heart ; he looked to his right hand, where lay the silver coils of the Forth, gleaming over fertile fields and through rich foliage ; he looked before him, where his young groom steadily driving on, cut in two the far-off mass of Benledi, and lifted his towering head over the mountain—an unconscious innocent Titan—and Harry's heart ran over like a child's, and he scarcely could keep himself still for a second, but whistled and sang, and talked to John, till John thought Allenders the merriest and wittiest gentleman in the country side ; and John was not much mistaken.

The day passed with the children, as days at school always pass. Violet very quick and very ambitious, resolute not to lose the silver medal inscribed with its glorious "Dux," which she had worn for

a whole week, managed to learn her grammar in some mysterious magical way which the steady Katie Calder could not comprehend ; and at last, just as Martha at home began to superintend the toilette which Rose anxiously desired to have plainer than usual to-day, although in spite of her, herself took involuntary pains with it, Katie and Violet gathered up their books, and left Blaelodge. Their road was the highway—a fine one, though not so delightful to Lettie as the narrower bye-lanes about Allenders—but the sun was sufficiently low to leave one side of the path, protected by high hedges and a fine line of elm trees, very shady and cool and pleasant. So they walked along the soft velvet grass, which lined their road, and lingered at the door of the one wayside cottage, and further on gave loving salutation to the cottar's cow, feeding among the sweet

.

deep herbage, all spangled with wildflowers, and cool with the elm tree's shadow, which made her milk so rich and fragrant, and herself a household treasure and estate. The little village of Maidlin lay half way between Blaelodge and Allenders, a hamlet of rude labourers' houses untouched by the hand of improvement, where shrewish hens and sunburnt children swarmed about the doors continually. There had been once a chapel here dedicated to the pensive Magdalen, and an old stone cross still stood in the centre of the village, which—though there now remained no vestige of the chapel—retained the Scoticised name of the Saint.

“There's Dragon at the cross,” said Katie Calder, who was skipping on in advance, leaving Violet absorbed in a childish reverie behind, “and he's telling a story to a' the bairns.”

So saying, Katie, who did not choose to lose the story, ran forward; while Lettie, only half awakened, and walking straight on in an unconscious, abstracted fashion peculiar to herself, had time to be gradually roused before she joined the little group which encircled the Dragon of Allenders.

He, poor old man, leaned against the cross, making a gesture now and then with those strange dangling arms of his which, called forth a burst of laughter, and scattered the little crowd around him for a moment, only to gather them closer the next. He was, indeed, telling a story — a story out of the Arabian Nights, which Violet herself had left in his room.

“ Ay, bairns, ye see I’m just ready,” said Dragon, finishing “ Sinbad the Sailor,” with a flourish of those long disjointed arms. “ Ony

divert does to pass the time when ane's waiting, for ye're aff-putting monkeys, and might hae been here half an hour since—no to say there's a grand dinner making at the house, and as many flowers pu'ed as would plenish a poor man's garden, and Miss Rose dressed like a fairy in a white gown, and ilka ane grander than anither. Whisht, wee laddies! do ye no see the twa missies carrying their ain books hame frae the school, and I maunna stop to tell ony mair stories to you."

"Come back the morn, Dragon." "Dinna eat them, Dragon, or chain them up in your den." "If ye do, I'll come out and fecht ye!" cried the "laddies" of Maidlin Cross; for those sturdy young sons of the soil, in two distinct factions, gave their fervent admiration to Katie and Violet, and

would have been but too happy to do battle for them on any feasible occasion.

“Have they come, Dragon?” asked Lettie. “Has Harry and Mr. Charteris come?”

“Nae word of them, nae word of them,” answered the Dragon. “They’re in at Stirling doing their ain pleasure, ye may tak my word for that. See, bairns, yonder’s Geordie Paxton, my sister’s son, coming in frae the field. He’s very sune dune the nicht. Just you look at him as he gangs by, and see what an auld failed man he is, aulder like than me.”

Geordie, laden with his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes, was returning home with those heavy, lengthened, slow strides which almost persuade you that some great clod drags back the heavy-weighted footstep of the rustic labourer. He was a man of fifty,

with bent shoulders and a furrowed face ; but though their old attendant advanced to him at a pace which Geordie's slow step could ill have emulated, the children, glancing up at the hale, brown, careworn face of the family father, and contrasting with it their poor old Dragon's ashy cheeks and wandering eyes, were by no means inclined to pronounce Geordie as old as his uncle.

“How's a' wi' ye the day, auld man?” said the slow-spoken labourer. “Aye daundering about in the auld way, I see. And how are ye liking the new family, uncle?”

“No that ill,” answered the old man. “I've kent waur, to be such young cratur's ; and to tell you the truth, Geordie, I feel just that I might be their faither, and that I'm appointed to take care o' the puir things.

Thae's twa o' the bairns, and our Mr. Hairy's wean is weer than them still."

"He has a muckle family on his hands, puir lad," said Geordie. "He'll hae mair o' his ain siller than the Allenders lands, it's like, or he ne'er would live in such grandeur. Your auld man never tried the like of yon, uncle."

"Ay, but Mr. Hairy has a grand spirit," said the Dragon; "and what for should he no have a' thing fine about him, sic a fine young lad as he is? See yonder, he's coming this very minute along the road."

The boys were still grouped in a ring round Maidlin Cross; and as Dragon spoke a shrill cheer hailed the advent of Harry's carriage as it dashed along in a cloud of dust towards Allenders. Harry himself was driving, his face covered with smiles,

but his hands holding tight by the reins, and himself in a state of not very comfortable excitement, at the unusual pace of the respectable horse, which he had chafed into excitement too. In the carriage was Charteris, looking grave and anxious, Gilbert Allenders, and another; but Harry could only nod, and Cuthbert bend over the side, to bow and wave his hand to little Violet as they flew past. There was not really any danger, for Harry's horse understood its business much better than its driver did; but Harry himself was considerably alarmed, though his pride would not permit him to deliver up the reins into the hands of John, who sat on the box by his side.

Violet did not think of danger; but, without saying a word to any one, and indeed with a perfect inability to give a

reason, she sat down upon the roadside grass, and cried. Dragon, who had added a feeble hurra to the cheer of the boys, bent down his white head anxiously, and Katie sat by her side and whispered, "Dinna greet!" and Geordie looked on in hard, observant silence. But when Lettie rose at last, and dried her eyes, and went on, neither her young companion nor her old one could glean from her what ailed her. "Nothing—she did not know." Poor little Lettie! she did not know indeed.

CHAPTER XIII.

Oh, how much more doth beauty beauteous seem
By that sweet ornament which truth doth give !
The rose looks fair, but fairer we it deem
For that sweet odour which doth in it live.

SHAKESPEARE.

SULLEN Demeyet lies mantled over with the sunshine which steals gradually further and further westward, pencilling out with a daring touch his rugged shoulders, and throwing into deepest shadow, here and there, an abrupt hollow on his side. The

trees of Allenders shadow the river just under the windows, but on either side the sun flashes off the dazzling water, as if it had a resistant power, and could repel the rays and throw them back with disdain and pride. Just now the little Stirling steamer, bound for Leith, has passed those overhanging trees, while up upon their drooping branches, with the momentary force of sea surf, comes a great roll of foaming water displaced by the passing vessel, and rushing along the green river banks after it, like an insulted water-god. There is always some one at the east window of the Allenders' drawing-room when the steamer passes up or down, for it is a pleasant sight, winding hither and thither through the bright links of Forth, with its gay passengers and rapid motion, and

gives to the broad landscape the animation which it needs.

By the east window at this present moment, Rose, and Rose alone, occupies the usual place. She wears a white gown, as Dragon said, and if scarcely self-possessed enough for a fairy, looks prettier and more delicate than usual, and has a slight tremor upon her, which she can neither subdue nor hide. Agnes, with little Harry in her arms, stands on the turret, eagerly looking out for the returning carriage, while Martha at a lower window watches the same road. Fain would Rose take her place, too, on the breezy turret; fain be the first to read in Harry's eye how he has spent these hours in Stirling; but no, Harry is not first just now in the thoughts of his sister. She is not thinking about any one, Rose would tell you indignantly; but, nevertheless, she sits

here with the most obstinate industry, at the east window where it is impossible to obtain the least glimpse of the road, and trembles a little, and drops her needle, and thinks she can hear every leaf fall, and can tell when a fly alights on the gravel walk, so keen is her ear for every sound.

And now there comes through the drawn curtains of the west window, which at present is full of sunshine, the sound of a great commotion ; and carriage-wheels dash over the gravel, and Agnes flies down stairs, and Harry calls loudly to John, who has sprung from his perch to catch the excited horse by the head, and calm him down, that the gentlemen may alight in safety. The colour comes and goes upon Rose's cheek, and her fingers shake so, that she scarcely can hold the needle, but she sits still ; and though Harry's laugh immediately after rings strangely

on her ear, and she listens with sudden anxiety for his voice, Rose never leaves her window—for another voice there has spoken too.

By and bye a sound of footsteps and voices come up the stair, and Rose suddenly commanding herself, raises her head and becomes elaborately calm and self-possessed. Alas, poor Rose! for the door of the drawing-room opens, and the voices pause without, but there only enters—Gilbert Allenders.

Gilbert Allenders and a stranger like himself—an intimate of his, whom he has persuaded Harry into acquaintance with. No one knows that Rose is here; no one thinks of her, indeed, but the guest of honour who is being conducted to his own room, and who does not at all admire the loud greeting in which Mr. Gilbert Allenders

expresses his delight at finding her ; but poor Rose, returning those greetings with intense pride, disappointment and reserve, could almost cry, as she finds herself compelled to be amiable to Harry's friend. And now she has time to grow painfully anxious about Harry himself, and to think of his excited voice and laughter, and to shiver with sudden fear.

While Rose sits thus, Martha, with so still a step that you cannot hear her enter, comes gliding into the room like a ghost. With the old feverish solicitude, the younger sister seeks the elder's eye ; but Rose learns nothing from the unusual gaiety of Martha's face. Indeed this smile, so forced and extreme, and the light tone in which her grave sister immediately begins to speak—speaking too so very much more than her wont—terrifies Rose. The strangers see

nothing more than a proper animation, and Gilbert Allenders relaxes and condescends to notice Martha ; but Rose steals out in wonder and terror, fearing she knows not what.

There is nothing to fear—nothing—say it again, Rose, that your loving anxious heart may be persuaded. Harry stands by the table in his dressing-room, unfolding a great bale of beautiful silk to the wondering eyes of Agnes ; and though Harry is a little more voluble than usual, and has an unsteady glimmer in his eye, and a continual smile, which reminds her of some sad home-comings of old, there is in reality nothing here to make any one unhappy. Nothing—nothing—but Rose's heart grows sick with its own confused quick throbs as she lingers, looking in at the door.

“ Come along here, Rosie ; look what I

have been getting a lecture for," cried Harry, looking up from the table. "It seems that Agnes needs no more gowns. Come here, and see if there is anything for you."

And Rose, who was by no means above the usual girlish vanities, but liked to see pretty things, and liked to wear them, went in very quickly—much more anxious than curious it is true, but nevertheless owning to a little curiosity as well.

"Oh, Rose, see what Harry has brought me," said Agnes, breathless with delight, deprecation and fear: "such a splendid silk, white and blue! but it's too grand, Rose—do you not think so? And this quiet coloured one—it is quite as rich though—is for Martha; and here is yours—pink, because your hair is dark, Harry says."

And as Agnes spoke, Harry caught up the radiant pink silk glistening with its

rich brocaded flowers, and threw it upon Rose, covering her simple muslin gown. To say that Rose's first impression was not pleasure would be untrue—or that she did not bestow a glance of affectionate admiration upon the three varieties of Harry's choice. But the eyes that sought them for a moment sought again with a lengthened wistful gaze his own flushed and happy face. And Harry was considerably excited—that was all—and it was so very easy to account for that.

“But just now, you know, we cannot afford it,” said Agnes, gathering her own silk into folds, which she arranged scientifically on her arm, and looking at it with her head on one side, as she held it in different lights. “I never saw anything so beautiful—it's just too grand; but then the price, Harry!”

“Don't you trouble yourself about the

price," said Harry, gaily. "You've nothing to do but to be pleased with them; no, nor Martha either; for do you think, after securing that old wife's siller, that I may not indulge myself with a silk gown or two? And if my wife and my sisters won't wear them, why I can only wear them myself. There, there's some cobweb muslin stuff in the parcel for the two of you, young ladies, and something for Lettie and her friend, and something for our heir; but away with you now, girls, and let me dress, and say nothing about the money."

Ah! hapless Miss Jean Calder! if but you could have heard and seen the doings of this zealous agricultural improver, whose resolute purpose of doubling the value of his newly-acquired lands, drew your beloved "siller" out of its safe concealment, what a wailing banshee shriek had wrung then

through these sunny rooms of Allenders! Not on strong cattle and skilful implements—not on the choice seed and the prepared soil—but on the vanities you have scorned through all your envious lifetime—to deck the fair young forms, whose gladsome breath you grudge to them—that *your* gold, the beloved of your heart, should be squandered thus! Alas, poor miser! But Miss Jean even now clutches her mortgage parchment, with the glitter of malicious power in her cold blue eyes. Let them squander who will—she has secured herself.

And Martha, even in her heart, does not say, “Poor Harry!” No, Martha, for the first time, tries to blind herself with false hope—tries to dismiss all her old anxious love from her heart, and be careless, and take no thought for the morrow. She has determined to think of Harry’s errors as other

people think—to call them exuberances, follies of youth, and to smile with gentle indulgence, instead of sorrowing in stern despair. For Harry is a man—head of a household; and Martha tries to endure placidly—tries to persuade herself that there is nothing to endure—knows that he must be left now to himself, to make his own fate. To-day she sees, as no other eye can see, the beginning of peril, and Harry's excitement, excusable though it may be, and constantly as she herself excuses it, has wrought in Martha a kindred agitation. She will not permit herself to grieve or to fear; but sad is this assumed light-heartedness which Rose trembles to see.

Meanwhile Rose and Agnes, who have carried off Harry's gifts between them, are laughing and crying together over the store.

It may be imprudent—it may be extravagant; but it is “so kind of Harry!” He is so anxious to give them pleasure.

And Mr. Charteris, in the drawing-room, talks to Martha with some abstraction, and coldly withdraws himself from the elegant conversation of Mr. Gilbert Allenders. Cuthbert cannot understand why Rose should avoid him; and he feels the blood warm at his heart with the pride to which neglect is grievous. But, at the same time, he is troubled and depressed, and looks with a yearning he never knew before at the closed door, and speaks little, lest he should lose the sound of the approaching footstep, which he remembers to be so light. The room is full of roses, though now in July their flush of beauty is nearly over. Roses red and white, the delicate blush and the

burning purple ; but Cuthbert would throw them all into the river joyfully for one glimpse of his Lady Rose.

This love-fit sits strangely on the grave advocate—he does not quite understand how, of all men in the world, it should have found out him—and its effect is singular. It moves him, perhaps by the power of those circumstances which hang over this family like a continual cloud, to a half-sorrowful tenderness for everything young and gentle. It does not occur to Cuthbert to inquire why his constant dream is to comfort, to console, to carry away the Rose of Allenders, and bear her tenderly in his arms out of sorrow and trial. This is the aspect under which he instinctively views the conclusion of his growing affection. Sometimes, indeed, there break upon him fair visions of a bride in the sunshine, a home gladdened by a

joyous, youthful voice, and smiles like the morning; but the usual current of Cuthbert's fancies present to him a far-off glimpse of happiness, chastened and calmed by suffering; and his hope is to deliver her out of some indefinite gloom and evil, to deliver and carry her home into a gentle rest.

And the shadow of this visionary trouble to come, throws a tender pathos over Rose in the eyes of her true knight. His stout heart melts when he sees her, with an indescribable softening—as if he extended his arms involuntarily, not so much to enclose her for his own content, as to ward off unseen impending dangers, and keep her safe by his care. Nevertheless, Cuthbert feels his cheek burn with quick, indignant anger, and starts and frowns in spite of himself, when he perceives that

Gilbert Allenders gives his arm—again with considerable demonstration—to the shy, reluctant Rose.

Harry is new to his duties as host, and perhaps his attention to his guests is slightly urgent and old-fashioned; but Harry is in triumphant spirits, and throws his radiant good-humour and satisfaction over them all like a great light. Not without a secret misgiving at the bottom of their hearts, Rose and Agnes make strong efforts to rise to Harry's pitch, if it were but to persuade themselves how innocent and blameless is Harry's exhilaration; and Martha continues to smile and speak as Rose never heard her speak before. It is quite a gay dinner-table.

The time glides on, the ladies leave the dining-room; but when they are alone, after some forced efforts to keep it up,

their gaiety flags, and one after another glides to her accustomed seat, and subsides into unbroken silence. It is true that the rejoicings of Violet and Katie over the new frocks which Harry has not failed to bring for them, make a little episode, and sustain the animation for a short time—but the sure reaction comes ; and now they sit still, one professing to read, and the others working, but all casting anxious looks towards the door.

By and bye comes laughter and voices and ringing footsteps up the stair, but only Charteris enters the drawing-room ; for Harry and his other friends are climbing further up to the turret, where he has fitted up a little “ den,” as Gilbert Allenders calls it, for himself. And their good friend, Mr. Charteris, looks very grave ; they think Harry has lowered himself in Cuthbert’s eyes—they

think this seriousness is the painful regret with which a strong man sees a weak one sink under temptation ; and their hearts flutter within them with restless anxiety, and they listen to Harry's laugh in the distance till its echo makes them sick. While, all the time, Cuthbert is too much interested not to notice how uneasily the young wife moves upon her chair, and the abstraction from which Martha starts with a dismal resolution to be gay again. Poor Harry ! But Cuthbert stands behind the chair of Rose, and feels that he is consoling *her*—feels that he is occupying with his presence something of the space which, without him, might have been wholly given to anxiety and fear.

The children are already out under the windows, playing on the lawn ; and, at Cuthbert's suggestion, Rose and Martha accompany him to the mall on the river-side. He

tells them how he admired this when he came first with Harry to see Allenders, and that he often fancies how they must enjoy this verdant cloister when he is shut up in his office at Edinburgh. The sun slants in through the great oak which rounds the end of the mall, and just touches here and there a heavy alder leaf, and lights up one little branch upon a stately elm, with tender golden rays, cool and dewy ; and there is wind enough to disturb the long willow branches and ruffle the fleecy lining of their leaves. A narrow strip of path, sandy and yellow, breaks the soft green turf which slopes down to the water on one side, and on the other, rich with flower-beds, stretches up in a slight incline to the walls of Allenders ; and Cuthbert, with Martha on his arm, walks slowly, silently, looking after the white figure which has strayed a step or two before. Slightly

turning towards them, with a shy, half-conscious look backwards, Rose says something to Martha about the wild flowers in the grass ; and Rose guesses, with a tremor, that Cuthbert has had visions of herself under the shadow of these trees, and feels that his eye just now is dwelling upon her, and that he is saying words to her in his heart. But the charmed silence lasts, and even Martha, looking on, has not the heart to break its spell.

But look up yonder at the turret. With the sun glancing in his hair, Harry stands in the little battlemented gallery, and holds up a glass of sparkling wine, and bows and smiles, and drinks to them. Immediately both the sisters look at Cuthbert ; and Cuthbert, with a gaiety he does not feel, takes off his hat, and returns the salutation with playful stateliness. His gesture cheers them, and they become again quite tremulously glad, when

he calls to Harry to come down, and Harry nods in assent, and disappears upon the turret stair. It is true that the momentary smile flits away from Cuthbert's face, and he becomes very serious. But they are looking for Harry—they do not see the deep regret and gravity which clouds the brow of his friend, who, within himself, says "Poor Harry!" with a heavy sigh.

And Harry is now more excited than ever, and they are constantly calming and soothing him to keep him within bounds—trying to be gay themselves that his unreal gaiety may be less marked—and carefully avoiding everything which could possibly irritate his feelings. Poor Harry! some wistful eye is always following him, some solicitous voice constantly interposing to bring down to the ordinary quietness and moderation his unconscious extravagance—

eyes which are afraid to meet—afraid to confide to each other, even by a glance, this new pain which Harry has brought upon them ; for hitherto they have seen principally the remorse which followed his fall, and never before have beheld others conscious, of what so greatly humiliated themselves. Now the sneer and patronizing forbearance of Gilbert Allenders, who has too cool a head to be moved as Harry is, chafes Martha beyond endurance, and excites the gentle little Agnes to such a pitch of anger, that her hand clenches involuntarily, and she could almost strike him in a burst of weeping petulance. But the long, long painful hours pass away, and at last it is night.

“ It is nothing—it is nothing. Nobody thinks anything of this but us. We are always so anxious !” sobs Agnes, as she wakes in the middle of the night, and weeps ;

but Martha, who does not need to wake—who has never slept—suffers her heart to say nothing, but only prays, and tries to forget—tries to think of anything rather than Harry; and cannot weep, if she should try for ever.

CHAPTER XIV.

And gentle hands the breakfast-rite begin,
Then the bright kettle sings its matin song,
Then fragrant clouds of Mocha and Souchong
Blend as they rise.

ROGERS.

“WHO is that out there, leading the horse?” asked Agnes, with some anxiety.

The snowy linen and bright silver and china of the breakfast-table sparkle in the sunshine. At a corner, Violet and Katie sit before a covered tray, hastily taking their porridge; for the breakfast is much later

than usual this morning, and the children are in great haste, lest they should be too late for school. Rose is working at the corner window—the new window, where the white rose bush nods up to her, and lays a snowy fragrant present of buds upon the window-ledge; but Martha stands silently, as she stood last morning, to watch Harry go away, and again pulls with unconscious fingers the jasmine flowers.

“Who is that?” repeated Agnes.

It is only a groom leading up and down, on the broad gravel walk at the other side of the lawn, a fine horse, stately and impatient, which scorns its limited space, and paws the gravel disdainfully, and arches its proud neck to the infinite admiration of the Dragon and John, who stand by the holly hedge as spectators. Katie and Violet, attracted by the repetition of Agnes’s question, rush from the

window to the door to ascertain ; and after a brief conversation with Dragon, Violet returns, breathless, with the information, that it is a new riding-horse, sent out this morning from Stirling, where Harry bought it yesterday ; but that Dragon says it is too wild a horse for any but a bold rider, and that it is sure to throw Mr. Hairy.

“Tell Dragon he’s an old fool, and that he had better think what he says,” said Harry himself, who suddenly made his appearance as Violet spoke ; “and you, Lettie, mind your own business, and don’t be so officious in reporting what everybody tells you. Why don’t you get these children off to school, Agnes ? Yes, it’s my horse. I hope no one has any objection.”

Poor Harry ! in this morning light, his own conscience has weighty objections, and upbraids him with folly and extravagance.

But Harry feels miserable, and is not well—angry with himself, and defiant of all around him—and he feels himself bound in honour to defend his horse.

But no one attacks it ; poor little Agnes is only anxious and deprecatory, eager to smile away his impatience, and cheer the depression which she very well knows is sure to follow ; while Martha still stands at the open window, without ever turning her head, and vacantly draws the long, pliant branch of jasmine through her fingers, and says not a word.

“ They are just going away,” said Agnes, hastily tying on the bonnet which Lettie had brought in her hand ; “ they have just breakfasted, you see, Harry. We are rather late this morning ; and Mr. Charteris is not down stairs yet.”

Harry left the room immediately, and went out. The arrival of this horse did

him good — dispersing the clouds of his depression, and its consequent ill-humour — and before he returned to the breakfast-room, Harry had consoled his conscience by a resolution to begin immediately his agricultural labours, and to spend no more of Miss Jean's money, except lawfully, on the object for which he borrowed it.

When he re-entered the room Cuthbert was there, and Harry had to smooth his brow and welcome his guest. Agnes still half trembling, and growing talkative in her anxiety to restore ease to the conversation, found herself, to her great delight and astonishment, seconded by Martha, as they took their places round the table. And the still composure of Martha's manner did more for this end, than the tremulous eagerness of the little wife. They regained the every-day tone, the every-day level of quietness and

repose ; and Agnes began to flatter herself that nothing unusual had happened last night after all, and Harry to think that his conscience blamed him unjustly ; only the sickness in Martha's heart lay still, uneased, and undisturbed. She was done with struggling—now she had only to wait for what it pleased God to reveal.

Charteris was to stay a week, and numerous excursions were discussed at the breakfast-table. It was a relief to them all, to have these things to speak about ; but Cuthbert exerted himself to-day to gain the confidence of Harry, and did in some degree gain it. They spoke together of the projected improvements ; and though Harry said with a little braggadocio that it was “an old rich aunt” who had given him the necessary capital, he was tolerably frank about his intentions, and very glad to receive introduc-

tions to some agricultural authorities whom Cuthbert knew. They walked together over the farm which the tenant was to leave at Martinmas, and together commented on the lean and scanty crops, which sparsely covered the half-cultured soil. It was a fresh, showery day, enlivened by a light breeze, which brought down the chiller breath of the hills over the green lowland country; and as this wind waved about his hair, and blew the sparkling rain against his cheeks, Harry struggled under the uneasy burden on his heart, and tried to throw it off, and let it vex him no more. "Forgetting the things that are behind," he muttered to himself, as they paused on a little eminence, and saw the sun touch into brilliant light a thousand rain-drops among the waving corn, and on the roadside trees—for still a heavy consciousness gnawed at his heart, and com-

pelled him to try some bargain with it for rest—and Harry gladly turned to look away from the past, into the broad life which lay before him, as bright as this sunny strath, though, like it, dewed with tears; and in the future his sanguine eyes again saw nothing but hope.

“Forgetting the things that are behind!”
Alas, poor Harry! for it was only too easy to forget.

But there followed a few days of cheerful activity, the very first of which dissipated into thin air the last remnant of Harry’s remorseful consciousness—for Cuthbert and he rode together to call on some of the agricultural authorities before mentioned, and take counsel with them—not always sweet—concerning all the processes of the warfare which should subjugate this stubborn soil; and Harry advertised in the local newspapers

for a manager to take charge of his farming operations, and heard of one before his advertisement was printed, so suitable, as it seemed, in every respect, that Harry, fearing he might not wait till Martinmas, engaged him out of hand in July, that no one else might seize on such a treasure.

Not only so—but Harry, whose pride had been greatly hurt by Dragon's implied opinion that he was a timid rider, subdued his horse, at no small cost to his own nerves, and rode a dozen miles to a cattle-show, partly in self-assertion, partly to acquire some knowledge of "the beasts," which his agricultural instructors discoursed of so learnedly; but Harry was not the man to study beasts, and his long ride exhausted him, though it was a triumph. He had settled matters, however, with his conscience which now,

rather applauded than condemned — and Harry was content.

Poor Harry ! but when Cuthbert's week was out, he said those words with eyes that glistened, and a yearning heart ; for Harry was born to be loved, and amid all his faults, and all the unconscious selfishness of his indulgences, he never lost this natural portion.

And Cuthbert, leaving behind him a bright, cheerful, hopeful household, as ready to be exhilarated as depressed, had said nothing to Rose—for he himself had little yet to share with any one, and he was afraid to risk his affectionate interest with the family as friend and counsellor, even for the chance of attaining the nearer and still more affectionate connexion for which he hoped. And Cuthbert, in his tenderness

of protection and succour, exaggerated the difference between his age and hers; he only thought himself likely to succeed at all, by the gentle and gradual process of wooing, which might accustom and attach her to him before she was aware. So he went away quietly, leaving, it is true, many tokens which spoke to Rose a strange, unusual language, showing her how much space she occupied in the heart and thoughts of this man, who, of all men she had ever seen, held the highest place. And Rose trembled and smiled with indefinite delight as words and looks came to her remembrance—looks and words which Cuthbert had feared would alarm and startle her, but which even his self-command could not restrain. There is a charm in this guessed and implied affection which perhaps no certainty has; and Rose, whose thoughts had

not yet taken shape or form, whose shy, womanly heart shrank even from believing itself beloved, and who would have denied the belief strenuously, had she asked herself the question in so many words—Rose suffered a bright mist of reverie to float about her, and was thrilled now and then with apprehensions and revelations, starting out half-distinct for a moment, and anon disappearing into the sunny maze. It was an idle mood, and sent her straying along the river-side, and seated her for hours together under the oak, with vague smiles and blushes flitting over her face, and many a dream in her heart; but yet her needle flew swiftly too under this mist, and she could be very well content with silence, for the long indefinite musings of her romance were sweet to Rose.

CHAPTER XV.

A good old man, Sir; he will be talking; as they say, when the age is in, the wit is out.—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

“AND, Dragon, you mind you promised the very first day—but you never told us yet the story of the Lady’s Well.”

“Have you ever been to see it, bairns?” asked the old man.

The children were seated on the outside stair, which led to Dragon’s room. Violet,

at least, sat on the upper step, with a book on her lap, and a total disappearance of feet, which suggested a suspicion that Lettie patronised the Turkish manner of seating herself rather than the English. Katie, who had a larger share of boldness than her friend, was jumping from the stair to the ground, mounting a step higher for every leap, while Dragon stood on the threshold of his own door, dangling his thin long arms, and talking to them with his usual animation. It was not yet the hour "when the kye come hame," and the two little girls, who constantly attended Mysie during the process of milking, were waiting for her appearance; besides that, they very generally chose to learn their lessons on Dragon's steps, having a facility of interruption here, which they could attain to in no other place.

“Eh, no—we’ve never been there!” cried Katie; “and Mysie’s no away yet to bring the cow. We’ve plenty time. Will you come, Dragon, and let us see it now?”

“I’m no heeding—if you’re sure you would like to gang,” said the old man. “But then, how am I to ken that you’ve got a’ your lessons bye, and that it’s lawful to take ye? for, you see, bairns that dinna attend tō their learning, have nae claim to diversion; and, Missie, you’re no dune wi’ your book yet.”

“But it’s just grammar, Dragon,” said Lettie, disconsolately; “and it’s no use trying to learn it till I’m to say it, for I aye forget till it’s just the time. Eh, Katie, you couldna jump off here.”

“Ye’re nane o’ ye gaun to jump and break banes at my door. I’ll no hae mysel

brocht in for a doctor's bill, like the way the auld maister brocht in Eppie for the muckle bowl she broke," said Dragon. "Gang quiet down the steps, bairns, or I'll no let you come here ony mair. And now, you see, we'll take this road, and we'll sune be at the Lady's Well."

The road was a solitary lane, looking deep and cool under the shadow of high thorn hedges, through which the delicate white convolvulus had darned its fairy leaves and tendrils. Here and there in the hedge-row, an old low oak, long shorn of all its branches, stood alone like some strong ruin, with a growth of pliant twigs, and young foliage waving over the bald trunk as they might have waved over a moss-grown wall. The ruddy clouds of the sunset were rapidly fading from the west, and already a meek young moon glanced shyly over the head of

Demeyet ; but it was still full daylight, and the children skipped along gaily by Dragon's side, keeping an eye on the field, whence Mailie, the brown cow, began to low her impatient summons to her maid ; but the maid did not make her appearance, and Violet and Katie went merrily on to the Lady's Well.

The Lady's Well lay under the shadow of an immense old saugh tree, whose whispering, sighing branches were continually bending down with a kind of graceful melancholy curiosity over the clear spring its feet. A very narrow strip of path proved that there still came occasional visitors to the little fountain ; but the underwood was thick and tangled round it, and the long bramble branches, on which already early berries began to ripen, formed a dangerous network of defence, closing up even the one entrance,

which gave admittance to the small circle of green turf surrounding the spring. But there were signs remaining which told of a time when greater honour was paid to the Lady's Well ; for the water bubbled up into a marble basin, and a small carved canopy protected it from the falling leaves. The little girls scrambled through the brambles with eager interest, and Katie bent curiously over the protecting cradle, while Violet sat down upon a great stone, which lay beside the basin—a hewn stone, slightly hollowed out in the centre, as if it had been used as a seat for ages. The stillness of the place, shut in on every side by the surrounding wood, and the silvery tinkle with which the water escaped from the hollowed edge of the basin, and passed away in a slender thread over the bleached pebbles of its narrow channel—away under the thick concealing

brushwood, disappearing as completely as though the earth had swallowed it again—affected Lettie with strange awe; and so it was not her, but her little companion, who broke the dreamy silence by demanding from Dragon the story he had promised.

“Ye see, bairns,” said Dragon, seating himself on the slender trunk of a young willow, cut down and left there for dead, but which was already throwing out its unquenchable life in long shoots of delicate green, “there was ance a Laird of Allenders, and he had ae only daughter, and her name was Violet. But they never ca’d her Lettie, as they do you, Missie—aye, the full name, like as if she had been a flower; and as bonnie as a flower she was, by a’ accounts, and made ballants and sangs out of her ain head. But, bairns, ye’ll be getting your

death of cauld in this dowie place, and then the blame's sure to come on me."

"But the lady, Dragon—the lady," exclaimed Violet, whose interest had been greatly quickened by the lady's name.

"Weel, as I was saying, there was not anither woman body about the house but hersel, and some servant women—neither mother, nor sister, nor friend; and the auld laird living solitary, and the young ane away in Flanders at the wars; so Leddy Violet ga'ed wandering about the water and the hills, her lane, and had an awfu' wark wi' this bit spring, and caused bring the very stane you're sitting on, Missie," (a thrill of strange interest passed over Lettie), "and came ilka day hersel, and drank the water in a silver cup, and sat upon the seat, with her ain thoughts for company, till the spirits that

were in the world then, began to take note of her, and tell ane anither of the Lady at the Well. Some say she began to get wit of them hersel, and saw them watching her out of the trees ; but ye maunna believe that, bairns, for it has nae foundation—no a hair of proof, to satisfy ony man that inquired into it.”

“ But there came a braw gentleman to the countryside that had a grand castle some way in the Lennox, and great friends among the Highland chiefs ; and ae day, when he was gaun wandering by the links of Forth, he heard music in the air, and ga’ed on and on, following after it, till it led him by the very road we came this nicht, and brought him to where Leddy Violet was sitting by the well. And what should this be but a sma’ fairy, that had a lad hersel, nae doubt, and likit Leddy Violet, and didna

ken what grand company guid thoughts were, but aye lamented ower the bonnie leddy, her lane and solitary in the wood. Ane canna tell now what kind of spirits thae fairies were, but nae doubt they had discrimination ; for it even turned out sae, that the leddy hersel likit the braw lad's company better than her ain thoughts."

"Eh, Dragon, are you sure there's nae fairies now?" asked Katie Calder.

"He'll tell us the morn. I want to hear about the Lady, Dragon?" said the eager Violet.

"I never saw ony," said the old man, mysteriously, "whiles I've heard folk say—but I'll no tell you that, or you'll be feared."

"What is it, Dragon?" exclaimed both the children in a breath.

"They say in moonlight nights, the

fairies have a feast here, and get their wine out of the well; and that there's aye some about in the gloaming spreading the tables; but they'll no meddle wi' ye, if you're guid bairns."

Violet shaded her eyes with her hand, and looked intently under the brushwood, to one spot of bright reflected light upon the water. She did not speak, but with a shiver of fascination and awe watched the slender current steal away under the leaves, and devoutly believed that she had seen the golden vessels of the fairy feast; but even this did not make her forget the story, and again she repeated, "The lady, Dragon, the lady."

"Weel, bairns, ye see it was the spring season then," resumed Dragon, "and there was a lang summer time to come—bonnie days—we never have the like of them now—

when Leddy Violet was constant at the Well. And the lad—they ca’ed him Sir Harry—came and went, and lay on the grass at her feet, and courted her, and sang to her, and made his reverence, till she learned to think, poor lassie, that there wasna a man like him in a’ the world. So he got acquaint at her father’s house, and courted the auld laird for her, and was about Allenders night and day; and at last it came to pass that they were to be married.

“Now, ye see, having mair to do now, when she was soon to be a married wife, she never got out to her auld wanderings, but sat with her maids, and saw them make gowns of silk and satin for the grand bridal; and this very same sma’ fairy that first brought the gentleman to see her, had cast out with her ain lad by this time, and

was in a sorrowful humour, and could not keep her hand from aye meddling with the ledly's concerns. So what did she do, for an imp of mischief as she maun hae been, but flee away to Sir Harry's ain land, and gather I kenna how mony stories of him; for he had been but a wild lad in his young days, and was nae better than he should be even then. And I canna tell ye, bairns, what art magic it was dune by, but this I ken, that it a' came to Leddy Violet's ain ears—every word o't. Now ye maun mind, that for her ain sel, she was like a saint; no a wee new-born bairn, nor ane of the like of you, mair innocent than her, though she was a woman grown. And nae suner had she heard this, than her maid that was wi' her, was aware of a sound like the snapping o' a string. Na, missie, ye couldna guess what that was—it was a sairer thing

than you ever heard tell o' a' your days—it was Leddy Violet's heart."

Violet had fixed her dilating melancholy eyes, in which the tears were fast swelling, upon the old man's face, and sat leaning her head upon her hands, bent forward with the deepest attention ; while Katie, arrested suddenly in the very act of balancing herself upon the little canopy, turned a look of eager interest upon him, till released by this conclusion she slipped down, and placed herself very quietly on the fallen tree by his side. In his monotonous, half-chaunting voice, the old man proceeded.

"The wedding was put off, and naebody kent what for, for Leddy Violet had a wise heart, and wouldna send him away till she was sure. But there came a gray-bearded man to the gate in the night, and asked to see her—what he said nae man kent ;

but when the morning broke, Leddy Violet was sitting at her ain window, gripping her hands fast, with a face as wan as the dead, and the bonnie gold hair upon her head a' covered wi' flakes of white, like snaw. But she rose up and cried upon her serving-woman, and put on her wedding gown. It was a' white and glistening—the auld brocade that you read about in books, wrought with flowers, and grander than you ever saw. And then she put her bride's veil on her head, and went away with a slow, step out of Allenders. The serving-woman in fear and trembling creepit away after her hiding under the hedges along the whole road, and she mindit often that the led dy didna meet a single living person a' the way—for she came straight here to the Lady's Well."

With a shiver of excitement and wonder

the children looked round them, and drew closer to Dragon; but the old man went steadily on.

“It was just half-licht, and the woman could see naething but the leddy, with her grand glistening gown and her veil about her head, gaun stately alang the quiet road. When she came to the Well, she sat down upon the stane, and crossed her hands upon her breast, and droopit her head; but there came a noise of folk upon the road at that moment, and Leddy Violet’s woman ran to see what it was. She looked east, and she looked west, but there wasna so much as a shadow on the haille way; and then she was scared and feared, and ran without a stop till she wan hame.

“But never mortal man saw Leddy Violet mair.”

“Eh, Dragon! where did she go?” cried

Katie Calder under her breath ; but Violet only cast timid looks round her, and almost thought she could perceive, in the half-light of this other gloaming, glimmerings of the white garments through the close foliage of the trees.

“ I tell ye, Missie, nae mortal on this earth kens that,” said the Dragon of Allenders ; “ but, bairns, ye’ll be getting cauld—and I’ll tell ye the rest at hame.”

“ Oh, Dragon, tell us the rest,” pleaded Violet ; but she looked behind her and before, and almost believed she felt the cold hand of the weird-lady laid upon her shoulder.

“ They sought her up and down through the whole country, but the wise and auld among them, kent full well that they would never get her ; and from that day to this, nae

man has ever seen her, nor kens if she is dead, and away to heaven, or if she's living aye a charmed life in the fairy-land. It's my hope she's in heaven this hundred years—but ane can never tell."

"And, Dragon, what about Sir Harry?" asked Katie Calder, timidly.

"Sir Hairy was like to gang distraught. He came here and sat upon that stane, day after day for a whole year; and it was him caused bring the stane bowl, and pit the carved wark ower the spring; and at the end of the year he died.

"That's a' the story, bairns; but, Missie, you that's fond of ballants, there's ane the leddy made, and that her woman heard her rhyming ower the day she ga'ed away. I have been trying to mind it a' this time. It used to have a tune in the country-side. I

could ance sing it grand mysel—and if you'll
be awfu' quiet, I'll try—

“The night wind rose amang the hills,
But the glen was lown and gray,
When she drew her veil about her head
And went upon her way.
And she has gathered the green willow
To lay on the threshold stane,
And the yew and the rue in the chalmer of state,
That the house might be kent for desolate
When she was lost and gane.

“Oh! father, kindly fare ye well,
Good may your last days be,
And God send your son were hame in peace,
Since ye'll nae joy in me.
And though ye have made a desert, Harry,
And griefs I mayna tell,
Where ance dwelt mony a pleasant thing,
Yet Harry, fare ye well!

“But wae unto the man, Harry,
 Within this house shall dwell,
And bears the name that breaks my heart,
 Though I say fare ye well !
The night wind cries among the trees,
 I ken what words they be,
And I maun hence to brik your pain,
But wae to him that bears the name
 Which is the dead of me.”

It was nearly dark now, and the cracked and quivering voice of age rung strangely through the night. Violet felt the leaves rustle about her, and shrank from the elfin touch of the long willow shoots which thrust themselves into her hand, and cast furtive, timid glances round, trembling lest she should see the stately white lady, with her drooped head and her bridal veil, sitting under the trees. Katie was bolder, and understood the ballad ; but Lettie's attention, constantly

drawn to some imaginary stir among the brushwood, or wandering reflection on the water, and arrested by the singular ghostly effect of the old man's shrill voice and ashy face, failed to make anything of the verse which ended his story. The water trickled away unseen under the leaves—the saugh tree turned out its fleecy lining to the night wind, which began to tremble among its branches—mystic flutterings shook the long grass and limber brambles—and Lettie sat on the stone seat where Lady Violet sat before her, and trembled to her very heart. Little Katie Calder, poking about into the dark mysterious underwood, felt only a little pleasant thrill of apprehension, and was not afraid—for Katie could very well trust an imagination which never had played pranks with her; but an awe of the dark road home possessed

Lettie. She was afraid to remain in this weird corner, and afraid to go away.

“Mailie’s milkit half an hour since,” said Dragon, getting up with his usual activity, and shaking the long arms which Violet half suspected were fastened on with wires, “and the haill house will be asteer wondering what’s come of us. Bairns, we’ll get our licks if we stay langer—and I’m wearying for my parritch mysel.”

But Lettie went along the dark lane, under the high hedge, which might have concealed armies of fairies, and looked behind her with furtive side-long looks, wistful and afraid. The road was very solitary and quiet, but now and then a slow footstep advancing out of the darkness made her heart leap; and even when they had reached home, Lettie ran, with unnecessary haste, up the dim staircase,

and was glad when bed-time came, and she could lay down her head and close her eyes. But after all, it was quite unsatisfactory to close her eyes; and as the room was very dark, Lettie constantly opened them to cast anxious glances into the corners, and listened with all her might for the rustling of the lady's silken gown; but Lady Violet made no appearance to her little relative, except in dreams.

CHAPTER XVI.

What strong hand can hold his swift foot back?

SHAKESPEARE.

THE window is up in Martha's room, and the sweet morning air comes in upon you, with a fresh and pleasant abruptness, frank and simple as the sudden laughter of a child. The stir of early day is upon all the country without—birds twittering among the wet leaves, which themselves glisten and tremble in the sun, shaking off the rain

which fell heavily through the night—and far-off footsteps and voices, echoing over the fields, of rural people at their wholesome toil. Beside the window, a work-basket stands upon a little table, and you will wonder when you see it full of the embroidered muslin—the delicate “opening” at which Martha and Rose were wont to labour. It is an elaborate collar which Martha holds in her hand, and she is working at it with silent speed, as she used to do. You would fancy, to look at her now, that the family change of fortune had brought little ease to her.

But upon a sofa, at a little distance, Rose, with a fresh morning face, and pretty muslin gown, is spreading out Harry’s present—the rich, grave-coloured silk, which has been made into a dress for Martha. And Martha suffers herself to smile, and says it’s only

fault is that it is too good, and that the bairns will not know her when she has it on. Katie Calder, at Rose's side, draws out the folds reverentially, and says, with awe, under her breath, that it is "awfu' bonnie;" but Violet sits on the carpet at Martha's feet, and thinks about the lady at the well.

For this is a holiday, and the children have no dread of school or lessons before their unembarrassed eyes. In the next room sits a Stirling dressmaker, who has condescended to come out to Allenders, to make up into gowns the glittering silks of Harry's present; and Katie has already spent an hour in the temporary work-room, appearing now and then, to report the shape of a sleeve, or to exhibit a specimen of some superlative "trimming." It is quite a jubilee to Katie.

But Violet, in an oriental attitude, like a

small sultana, sits on the carpet, and stoops both head and shoulders over the book on her knee; which book, for lack of a better, happens to be a quaint essay of Sir Thomas Browne's. All the light literature contained in the old Laird of Allenders' book-shelves, has been devoured long ago, and Violet concluded "Hydrotaphia" to be better than sermons—a conclusion which she is now slightly inclined to doubt. But Lettie is a little dreamy and meditative this morning, and is thinking of Dragon's story, and of Lady Violet's ballad; wondering, too, with secret excitement, whether she could make a ballad herself, and repeating over and over again a single ecstatic verse about the moon, of her own composition, which Violet thinks, with a thrill, sounds very like poetry. When Martha stops to thread her needle, she lays

her hand caressingly upon Lettie's head, and bids her sit erect, and not stoop so much; and Lettie is almost encouraged to repeat this verse to her, and hear whether Martha thinks it is like poetry—almost—but she never is quite sufficiently bold.

The door opens with a little commotion, and Agnes, with care on her brow, comes hurriedly in. The room has been so perfectly peaceful that you feel at once the disturbing element, when the young wife enters, for Agnes is excited, impatient, perturbed. She has just been having a controversy with Harry, and comes here, half crying, at its close.

“He says he's going to Edinburgh to-day with Gilbert Allenders; I hate Gilbert Allenders,” said the little wife, in a sudden burst. “He is always leading Harry away. He is

going to the races, and yet he says he doesn't care a straw for the races. Oh, will you speak to him, Martha !”

“It is better not, Agnes: he will take his own way,” said Martha. “It is best I should not interfere.”

“He says we all heard Gilbert Allenders ask him, and that I knew well enough he intended to go, and that you knew, Martha. I told Harry I was sure you did not; and what pleasure will he have at the races?”

“I wish Gilbert Allenders were in America, or in China—or in London, if he likes it better,” said Rose quickly.

“That's because he wants to fall in love with you,” said Agnes, with a light laugh, diverted for the moment by the fervour of Rose's good wishes for the fascinating Gilbert; “but I am sure I would not care where he was, if he was only away from Harry ;

and Harry does not like him either. Rose, we're to try to gather a big basket of strawberries for Mrs. Charteris, and I think, maybe, Martha, if Harry goes *there*, that he may get no skaith in Edinburgh."

Rose came shyly to the table. "If it had only been a week sooner! or if we had not pulled so many berries on Saturday!"

"We must take what we can get," said Agnes; "and the basket is standing below the walnut tree. Will you not say anything to Harry, Martha?"

"I will see him before he goes away," said Martha, laying down her work.

And Violet sprang up and threw "Hydrophobia" into the work-basket, and called upon Katie Calder, who just then ran out of the work-room with a little paper pattern in her hand, of a bonnet which she designed manufacturing for a great doll, joint property of

herself and Lettie. Lettie, with her books and her reveries, gave but a very inconstant regard to this doll ; it was often thrown for a week together upon the less capricious attention of Katie Calder.

Harry was standing by the dining-room window, with a sprig of jasmine in his breast, looking slightly ruffled and impatient, but still very bright and animated ; and as Agnes passed him, carrying the basket, he patted her shoulder playfully, and called her a good girl, after all. Poor little Agnes ! she was not sure whether it was best to laugh or cry.

“So you are going, Harry?” Martha paused beside him, and leaned against the jasmine-covered wall.

“Yes, I am going. Why, Martha, I am not a child ; why do you constantly look so wistful and anxious ? It’s enough to make

a man stay away altogether," said Harry, angrily.

"Is it? A man, I suppose, must have very little inducement to stay at home, when that is enough to send him away," said Martha, coldly; "but, Harry, your friend Gilbert Allenders annoys Rose—could you not restrain him, if you bring him here again?"

"Is that all?" said Harry, laughing. "Gibbie's not such a bad fellow, Martha; and the doctor will give him half of his practice, and he's sure to be steadier in a year or two. Well, I should *not* like Rose to have anything to do with him, that is true; but still he may have his chance as well as another. Have you anything to say to Charteris, Martha?"

"Nothing; but you will go there?" said Martha, eagerly.

“ Oh ! of course—the old lady would not be pleased ; but then I can’t take Allenders there—if it was only on account of Rose ;” and Harry laughed again. His impatience was wearing away. He was quite good-humoured and light-hearted now.

Meanwhile the light glimmers through the trees upon Rose’s head, bending over the great basket, and upon the wet leaves, from which she shakes the last remaining rain-drops, as she places them under the fragrant fruit ; and it is singular now, when the basket is full, to observe how careful she is in choosing those leaves, and how she scatters little bits of oak, tender brown and green, and spreads cool twigs of plane tree over the strawberries, and sends Violet away stealthily to gather white jasmine blossoms, and strew them on the fruit. Violet, nothing loth, twists a long bough of jasmine round Rose’s

dark hair, and Katie suggests cabbage-leaves to cover up the basket ; which suggestion prosaic as it is, has to be carried out, and so the basket is borne away.

The day after to-morrow Harry promises to return, and they watch him go away with doubt and pain ; but he himself is very cheerful, and speaks so confidently of what " I " will do, and evidently feels himself so dignified and independent a man, that they are comforted. " Everybody else in Harry's station does the same thing," says Agnes, a little proudly, and Martha assents with an averted face, and they separate in silence—the one to occupy herself pleasantly with little domestic cares, the other to take up her work again, and sit at her open window, and pray in her heart.

But Rose has wandered to the mall, and sits under the oak tree, which rounds its ter-

mination. They have made a little seat there under the thick foliage, where there is always shade ; and Rose, not without a compunction about the work which she should be doing, either to help Martha or the dress-maker, resigns herself to a dream. The water at her side glides on. She can see it floating past her, through the loving leaves which droop over it, and dip into its dazzling tide ; and at her other hand, the spear head glitters on the turret, and a glistening lime tree throws its wet boughs abroad, and shakes them in the face of the brave sun. Then there are rays of sober daylight stealing with sidelong quietness through the beeches farther down, and Violet and Katie send pleasant articulate voices into the universal rustle, which the soft air waving about everywhere, calls forth from the water and the trees.

Behind her is a corn-field, the greatest

rustler of all ; and Rose hears a heavy foot wading through the scanty grain, chance sown under the hedge. But just then, the children with their unfailing attendant, Dragon, have come close upon Rose on the other side of the oak, but do not see her, though she hears all they say.

There is a pause of perfect stillness for a moment, and Violet sighs.

“Eh, Dragon !” said Lettie, “I wouldna like to be here in the dark.”

“You dinna ken how bonnie it is in the dark, Missie,” said the old man, “’specially when there’s stars shining, that ye canna tell whether they’re in the water or the sky ; and there was ance a fairy ring somegate about the steps yonder, and I’ve heard mony a ane say they had listened lang syne to sair groans out of that oak. They say ane o’ the lairds that planted it came by a

violent death, and ye can aye hear't make a moan and complaint, at the season of the year when he was killed ; but I canna answer for that story—and I never heard the tree say a word mair than ony ither tree, a' my days."

"But listen, Dragon," said Lettie, covering her eyes: "if it was dark, I could think it was the rustling of Lady Violet's gown."

"And it's naething but the corn," said Dragon, with a feeble laugh ; "naething but the wind in the corn, and your ain fancy. Ay, but there is anither sound. What would ye say if it was Mailie in among Willie Hunter's corn?"

"I would get a wand, and drive her out again. I would like, Dragon—is it her that's in the corn?" cried Katie Calder.

But Dragon looking over the hedge

already bore testimony that it was not the brown cow, by greeting with great surprise his nephew Geordie.

"I was just coming in bye to say a word to Mysie," said the gruff voice of the labouring man. "Her mother's ill yonder, and ane o' the weans has a fever and the ither a hoast; be a decent body for ance, uncle, and cry her out to me—for I want to tell her she's no to come hame at no hand, on account of the bairns at the house."

"I'll rin," said the active little Katie Calder.

And Katie ran away through the trees, without waiting for permission.

"I passed Allenders in his carriage the noo," said Geordie. "He'll hae siller o' his ain, I reckon, mair than the lands? for it would take a grand fortune to keep up a' yon."

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“Ay, he’s a fine lad, Mr. Hairy,” said the old man, “and they’re a real biddable family, and dinna scorn guid advice wherever it comes frae; and then there’s the young lady, Miss Rose, ye ken, hasna made up her mind if she’s to be married on the doctor lad out of Stirling, or yon birkie in Edinburgh. I think she’s maist disposed to him—and I’ll warrant he’s a grand man, for he has it in his e’e—nae fear o’ Mr. Hairy, when he has a writer married on his ae sister, and sic a wise lady for his ither.”

Poor Rose started—but, to do her justice, quite as much because Geordie’s remark had opened her eyes to a new danger for Harry, as because Dragon’s unhesitating disposal of herself dissipated with a light much too distinct and severe, the indefinite happiness of her dreams.

“Is’t true he’s gaun to take Allender Mains into his ain hands?” said Geordie. “I hear the land’s to bear threple crops when the laird’s new manager comes. I’ll no say but it might if it was weel lookit after; and I would like to say a word to him mysel about that new harrow and better graith for the beasts. I’m saying, auld man—do ye think Allenders is sure to haud at it, if he begins wi’ the farm?”

“Man, he delved and dibbled in the garden ae night for a haill hour!” exclaimed the applauding Dragon.

Geordie shook his head. “I’m no sae sure that’s a good sign. And then, ye see, the farming takes siller. I would like to ken if it’s true what they say, uncle, that this lad was naething but a puir lad afore he wan to Allenders; but if he hasna siller o’ his ain, he ne’er can carry on at this rate. Ony

way, it's a comfort the land maun aye be tilled, and that ane gets anes bread whaever's maister. But here's Mysie. Guid day to ye, auld man."

"And I'll away in, Missie, to see about my kail," said Dragon. "It's eleven in the day by the sun. Ye should gang to Mysie, and get a piece yoursel."

The old man shuffled away, and Lettie, swinging round the thick trunk of the oak, suddenly came upon Rose. The child's eyes were glistening, dark and wistful, and there was a cloud of the old vague gloom and discouragement upon her face.

"What way do they ask if Harry has siller, Rose?" asked Lettie, anxiously; "what way do they say he hasna enough? Was Allenders no a grand fortune when Harry got it? and what way is it no a grand fortune now?"

"I cannot tell, Lettie," said Rose, sadly. "Come away, and we'll go in, and you'll read a book to Martha and me."

Lettie put her hand into her sister's quietly, and they went in together. Martha was still at her window—still working with her old silent assiduity—and Rose drew a chair to the opposite side of the little table, and, greatly subdued and sobered, took up out of Martha's basket, a piece of embroidery, and began to "open" it as busily as of yore. This work was still regularly supplied to Martha by Uncle Sandy in Ayr. It was a satisfaction to her to pursue those unknown labours day by day; and Rose, too, began with a kind of desperate energy—as if such a pittance as she could earn could have any effect upon the fortunes of Harry; but still it was a satisfaction to do what she could.

Katie Calder came in from the garden, flushed and merry, and could not comprehend the quietness which had fallen upon Rose and her little playfellow, though Lettie's changing moods ceased to surprise her constant companion ; so Katie resumed her pilgrimages between Martha's room, and the dressmaker's, and began her doll's bonnet with great success and *éclat* ; while Violet again seated on the carpet, solemnly commenced to read "Hydrotaphia" to her quite uninterested auditors ; but finding this would not do, suddenly threw it down, and began to tell them Dragon's story.

The sisters listened with quiet pleasure ; they did not always understand Lettie, in her reveries and dreamings, and she was naturally shy of speech ; but Martha had already been startled on more than one

occasion by the strange intuitive perceptions of her youngest "bairn," and she said with an affectionate smile when the story ended. "You will be like Lady Violet, Lettie—you will make ballads too."

A burning flush crossed the child's face, and she did not speak for some time. Then she looked up to say: "Dragon says Harry's no a canny name for the Lairds of Allenders, and there never has been one, Martha, from Lady Violet's time till now."

A cloud passed over Martha's face—a very slight fantastic thing was enough at this time to leave a permanent shadow.

And it was a week before Harry returned; and he came back sullen, gloomy, and exhausted, with nothing to tell them, as he said—nor had he seen Charteris except once, and that on the first day he spent in Edin-

burgh. Poor Harry! he had not yet expended a farthing on his farming operations, and he dared not think how little remained of Miss Jean's thousand pounds.

CHAPTER XVII.

The wind blows east, the wind blows west,
And then comes both sun and rain.

CARLYLE.

THE autumn passed with many ordinary vicissitudes, with times of peacefulness, and times of trouble ; and in the house of Allenders another baby son was born. It was just when Harry was beginning the business of his farm, and after a time of great abstraction and excitement, during which he had visited Edinburgh once or twice, and

was evidently occupied with some business which he could not confide to any one at home. But Harry's mind had been lightened before his baby came; the farm-manager had arrived; Geordie, the nephew of the feeble Dragon, had spoken his mind to Allenders about the new harrow and the plough-graith, and had been graciously heard—so graciously, that Geordie immediately decided on an affirmative answer to the question which agitated the whole population of Maidlin Cross, and ever after maintained that “the laird *had* siller o’ his ain, bye the lands, and that he was just living free and open-handed, as a gentleman should live.” It was one of Harry's sunshine times; and many a heart wished kindly wishes for him, as he stood in Maidlin Church, his young wife in her graceful weakness, and his sisters seated by his side, and held up his child to receive

the baptismal sprinkling, and to be named with the name of the Lord. "He has the kindest face I ever saw—ane's heart warms to the lad—blessings on him," said an old woman on the pulpit stairs; and Martha's heart swelled with the echoed blessing.

And there were blessings on him—blessings which many a desolate heart sighed and pined for in vain—blessings of rare love and tenderness, of children fair and hopeful, and in his own person of a competent mind, and of the bright health and youth to which everything was possible. So far as his starting point was concerned, a wonderful realization had come to Martha's ambitious hopes for him; and now it almost seemed to lie with Harry himself to decide what the end of them should be.

In the farm-house of Allender Mains, Harry's farm-manager has already established

himself, and from the midst of its bare trees you see appearing the half-built chimney of the new threshing-mill, the machinery of which has just arrived under charge of two young engineers from Glasgow; and the slope of the farm-garden, and all the barn-yard behind, is lined with great draining-pipes, glancing red through the hoar-frost at a mile or two's distance, upon their slight elevation. And just behind the little byre and stable of Allenders' house, a great range of new stables and byres are rising, to receive the cattle, which Harry has resolved shall be unequalled in the country-side. When the weather is "fresh," you cannot pass a field without seeing the heavy breath of the plough-horses, rising like a mist over the hedge, and hearing the meditative whistle, or uncouth call of the ploughman behind. An air of sudden activity spreads

over the little district—so decided and apparent, indeed, that a retired weaver in Stirling has already two new houses in progress, one of which is a little shop, in the very front of Maidlin Cross. The event excited the hamlet to a positive uproar, for never before had any man dreamed of dignifying Maidlin with such a two-storied slated house as slowly grew upon its astonished vision now.

And in the dusk of the winter mornings you see the lanes full of hardy brown children, girded with rough sackcloth aprons—bound for school, you would fancy. No, they are bound for Harry's fields, to "gather stanes," and have each a little "wage" to carry home on Saturday night to the immense delight of mother and child. The fathers are laying drains and ploughing, the elder sisters tend the fine cows in the

byre at Allender Mains, and prosperity to which they are altogether unaccustomed falls suddenly upon the startled inhabitants of Maidlin Cross.

And landlords and farmers, startled too, are looking more scrupulously to themselves, lest they be outdone by the new-comer; the blood stirs in the awakened veins of the country side, and something of emulation, keener than the keenest air of December, strikes into the warm fireside corner, where honest men can no longer take in peace their afternoon's glass of toddy, and its accompanying newspaper, for constant reports of what is doing at Allenders, and what Allenders himself is doing—for Harry's active footstep rings along the frost-bound paths, and Harry's frank salutations scatter good-will among his husbandmen every day; and steady-going

agricultural people waken up, and look after their own omissions and neglects, with a half-grudge at Allenders.

It seems that Harry has found at last the life suitable for him. Though the snow lies heavy on the sullen brow of Demeyet, and every blade of grass on the lawn is crisped into distinct identity, and the burn is frost-bound under the trees, and an icy hand restrains the tinkling springlet of the Lady's Well, Harry never fails to visit his fields.

“The best compost for the lands
Is the master's feet and hands,”

he says with a laugh, as he wraps his plaid about him, and sets out in the face of the keenest wind that sweeps out of the highlands; and Agnes, with the new baby on her arm, sits by the fireside with radiant

smiles, and Martha looks after him from the window, where now the jasmine clings in long brown fibres to the wall, without a single adorning leaf, and in her heart tries to forget all the dread and all the bitter thoughts which mingled in the summer-time with the sickly odour of those jasmine flowers.

Yet sometimes Harry is abstracted and full of care. They believe that he is thinking then of errors which they believe are now happily past for ever; for no one in the house but Martha, ever remembers, that all these improvements must cost more than Miss Jean's thousand pounds—and Martha finds all her attempts at inquiry evaded. She never can succeed in learning where Harry gets the means of accomplishing so much, and it is only now and then,

when an incautious murmur about interest or legal charges, reaches her, that she has ground for her conjecture that he has borrowed from others besides Miss Jean. But Martha believes with trembling that Harry's mind is changed—that his purposes are no longer fluctuating and unsteady—that he has reached at last the great strength and motive power of the Christian life; and she can trust all lesser things to the regulation of that which is above all.

And they never say poor Harry—never except when they are commenting with full hearts and eyes upon some new proof of Harry's kindness—and then it is said in applauding, grateful love, and not in pity. No longer poor Harry—for is he not a great landed proprietor, making such a stir in his district as no Allenders has done before him

for a hundred years? and has not Sir John Dunlop invited Allenders of Allenders to dine with him on Christmas-day?

They are very glad it is Christmas-day and not the new year—the Scottish family holy-tide—and Harry comes home greatly elated from Sir John Dunlop's where they have treated him with the greatest distinction, like a guest of special honour. Lady Dunlop, too, promises to call on Mrs. Allenders, and Agnes blushes deep for pleasure, and is fluttered and excited, and sings to the baby such a song of triumph, that instead of being lulled to sleep as she intends, he opens his blue eyes wide, and seizing on the lace about her pretty neck, tears it with exultation and delight. Happy baby! young enough to do mischief with impunity! Little Harry, now two full years old, who does not at all admire this supplant-

ing baby, and is still sore about his own dethronement, clenches his fist at him in anger and envy, and is the only person in the fireside circle who has sympathy with Agnes's tribulation about her perished lace.

Next week Cuthbert Charteris is coming for a single day to pay them a visit, for Cuthbert is very busy now, laying the foundation of a great business; and in honour of Cuthbert there is to be a party—the first which they have attempted—when the covers are to be taken off the drawing-room chairs, and Agnes and Rose are to appear in full costume. Youthful and inexperienced as they all are, this is a great event to them, and Agnes innocently reports to Harry various elegancies which she would like to have for her table and her pretty drawing-room, before the notable day; and Harry lays before them a plan of Miss Dunlop's for

a conservatory, which she herself has strongly recommended to him. Harry thinks he will set about it immediately, and it will not cost much, and Agnes and Rose are delighted and cannot sufficiently admire the artistic talent of Miss Dunlop.

But to-morrow Harry has to pay fifty labourers—to-morrow a quarter's salary falls due to the farm manager—to-morrow he has promised to pay for some fine Ayrshire cows, now luxuriating in the byre at Allender Mains—and to-morrow, alas ! there are two separate dividends of interest, which cannot be postponed—Miss Jean's, and a heavier creditor than Miss Jean.

So Harry retires to his library when they have left him, and chafes himself a little over the trouble of so many complicated concerns, and feels a momentary shiver pass over him, as he wonders how he will do when the great

sum he lately lodged in his bank at Stirling shall be exhausted—what then, Harry? with more than three hundred of interest to pay, and only four hundred and fifty pounds? And Harry's brow contracts for a moment, and a shadow steals over his face; but immediately it brightens. "Why by that time, to be sure, the farm will have doubled its value, and I shall be a rich man," he repeats half aloud, with a short laugh of satisfaction, and going to his writing-table, he puts down in permanent "black and white," a list of the pretty things in silver-work and upholstery, which he has promised to order before Agnes's party, and throwing himself into an easy-chair, reads a novel for an hour with the lightest heart in the world.

While Agnes visits little Harry in his crib to kiss him as he sleeps, and folds the

new-come brother into her own bosom, and lies down to her happy rest; and Rose, between sleeping and waking, dreams, with a heart full of sweet anticipations; and Martha in the darkness looks out upon the falling snow, and on the pallid moon lightening Demeyet, and bids the stern voice of her experience be still, and let her hope—Hope! she holds it to her heart with a desperate clutch, as a drowning mother holds her child, and is still, waiting for the will of God.

Not a sound breaks the profound slumber of Maidlin Cross, where Harry's labourers, free of all care for the morrow, lie silent in the deep sleep which compensates their toil. Not a sound disturbs the quietness of Allenders, except that small voice of Violet asking in the darkness if Katie is asleep. Yes, Katie is asleep: shut your

dark eyes, Lettie, and say your prayers, that Lady Violet may not come in her glistening garments to sit yonder in the darkest corner, and hold you with her glittering eye ; but except for this visionary dread, and the one ache of ancient fear in Martha's graver breast—fear which only dwells far down in the depths, like an echo in a well—this hour of rest sheds nothing but peace upon the home of Harry Muir.

END OF VOL. II.