

THE LAIRD OF NORLAW.

A SCOTTISH STORY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“MARGARET MAITLAND,” “LILLIESLEAF,” “ORPHANS,”

“THE DAYS OF MY LIFE.”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE LAIRD OF NORLAW.

CHAPTER I.

WHILE all these new events and changes were disturbing the quiet life of the home district at Melmar, and Norlaw, and Kirkbride, Cosmo Livingstone wandered over classic ground with Cameron and his young pupil, and sent now and then, with modest pride, his contribution to the *Auld Reekie Magazine*, which had now been afloat for four months, and on account of which Mr. Todhunter, in his turn, sent remittances—not remarkably liberal, yet meant to be so, in

letters full of a rude, yet honest, vanity, which impressed the lad with great ideas of what the new periodical was to do for the literary world. So far, all was satisfactory with Cosmo. He was very well off also in his companions. Cameron, who had been shy of undertaking a manner of life which was so new to him, and whom all the innkeepers had fleeced unmercifully on the first commencement of their travels—for the very pride which made him starve in his garret at home, out of everybody's ken, made him, unused and inexperienced as he was, a lavish man abroad, where everybody was looking on, and where the thought of "meanness" troubled his spirit. But by this time, even Cameron had become used to the life of inns and journeys, and was no longer awed by the idea that landlords and waiters would suspect his former poverty, or that his pupil himself might complain of undue restraint. The said pupil, whose name was Macgregor, was good-

natured and companionable, without being anything more. They had been in Italy, in Switzerland, and in Germany. They had all acquired a traveller's smattering of all the three tongues familiar on their road—they had looked at churches, and pictures, and palaces, till those eyes which were unguided by *Murray*, and knew just as much, or rather as little, of art, as the bulk of their countrymen at the time, became fairly bewildered, and no longer recollected which was which. They were now in France, in chilly February weather, on their way home. Why they pitched upon this town of St. Ouen for their halt, it would have been hard to explain. It was in Normandy, for one reason, and Cosmo felt rather romantically interested in that old cradle of the conquering race. It was within reach of various places of historic interest. Finally, young Macgregor had picked up somewhere a little archaic lore, which was not a common accomplishment in those days,

and St. Ouen was rich in old architecture. Thus they lingered, slow to leave the shores of the France, which was not sunny France in that February, but had been the beginning and was about to be the end of their pleasant wandering, and where accordingly they were glad to rest for a little before returning home.

Though, to tell truth, Cosmo would a great deal rather have tarried on the very edge of the country, at the little seaport which Bowed Jaacob called "Deep," and where that sentimental giant had seen, or fancied he had seen, the lady of his imagination. Cosmo had enjoyed his holiday heartily, as became his temperament and years, yet he was returning disappointed, and even a little chagrined and ashamed of himself. He had started with the full and strong idea that what his father could not succeed in doing, and what advertisements and legal search had failed in, he himself, by himself, could do—and he was now going home somewhat enlightened as to this first fallacy

of youth. He had not succeeded, he had not had the merest gleam or prospect of success ; Mary of Melmar was as far off, as totally lost, as though Cosmo Livingstone, who was to be her knight and champion, had never known the story of her wrongs, and Time was gliding away with silent, inevitable rapidity. A year and a-half of the precious remaining interval was over. Huntley had been at his solitary work in Australia for nearly a whole year, and Huntley's heart was bent on returning to claim Melmar, if he could but make money enough to assert his right to it. This Cosmo knew from his brother's letters, those to himself, and those which his mother forwarded to him (in copy). He loved Huntley, but Cosmo thought he loved honour more—certainly he had more regard for the favourite dream of his own imagination, which was to restore the lost lady to her inheritance. But he had not found her, and now he was going home !

However, they were still in St. Ouen. Since Cameron recovered himself out of his first flutter of shy extravagance and fear lest he should be thought "mean," they had adopted an economical method of living when they stayed long in any one place. Instead of living at the inn, they had taken rooms for themselves, a proceeding which Cameron flattered himself made them acquainted with the natives. On this principle they acted at St. Ouen. Their rooms were, two on the *premier étage* for Cameron and his pupil, and one *au troisième* for Cosmo. Cosmo's was a little room in a corner, opening by a slim, ill-hung door upon the common staircase—where rapid French voices and French feet, not very light, went up the echoing flight above to the *mansarde*, and made jokes, which Cosmo did not understand, upon the young Englishman's boots, standing in forlorn trustfulness outside his door, to be cleaned. Though Cosmo had lived in a close in the High Street, he was quite

unused to the public traffic of this staircase, and sometimes suddenly extinguished his candle with a boy's painful modesty, at the sudden fancy of some one looking through his key-hole, or got up in terror with the idea that a band of late revellers might pour in and find him in bed, in spite of the slender defence of lock and key. The room itself was very small, and had scarcely a feature in it, save the little clock on the mantelpiece, which always struck in direct and independent opposition to the great bell of St. Ouen. The window was in a corner, overshadowed by the deep projection of the next house, which struck off from Cosmo's wall in a right angle, and kept him obstinately out of the sunshine. Up in the corner, *au troisième*, with the next door neighbour's blank gable edging all his light away from him, you would not have thought there was anything very attractive in Cosmo's window—yet it so happened that there was.

Not in the window itself, though that was

near enough the clouds—but Cosmo, looking down, looked, as his good fortune was, into another window over the way, a pretty second floor, with white curtains and flowers to garnish it, and sunshine that loved to steal in for half the day. It was a pretty point of itself, with its little stand of early-blooming plants, and its white curtains looped up with ribbon. The plants were but early spring flowers, and did not at all screen the bright little window which Cosmo looked at, as though it had been a picture—and even when the evening lamp was lighted, no jealous blinds were drawn across the cheerful light. The lad was not impertinent nor curious, yet he sat in the dusk sometimes, looking down as into the heart of a little sacred picture. There were only two people ever in the room, and these were ladies, evidently a mother and daughter—one of them an invalid. That there was a sofa near the fire, on which some one nearly always lay—that once or twice in the day this recumbent

figure was raised from the couch, and the two together paced slowly through the room—and that, perhaps once a week, a little carriage came to the door to take the sick lady out for a drive, was all that Cosmo knew of the second person in this interesting apartment; and the lad may have been supposed to be sufficiently disinterested in his curiosity, when we say that the only face which he ever fully saw at that bright window was the face of an *old* lady—a face as old as his mother's. It was she who watered the flowers and looped the curtains—it was she who worked within their slight shadow, always visible—and it was she who, sometimes looking up and catching his eye, smiled either at or to Cosmo, causing him to retreat precipitately for the moment, yet leaving no glance of reproach on his memory to forbid his return.

Beauty is not a common gift; it is especially rare to the fanciful, young imagination, which is very hard to please, save where it loves.

This old lady, however, old though she was, caught Cosmo's poetic eye with all the glamour, somehow tenderer than if she had been young, of real loveliness. She must have been beautiful in her youth. She had soft, liquid, dark-blue eyes, full of a motherly and tender light now-a-days, and beautiful light-brown hair, in which, at this distance, it was not possible to see the silvery threads. She was tall, with a natural bend in her still pliant form, which Cosmo could not help comparing to the bend of a lily. He said to himself, as he sat at his window, that he had seen many pretty girls, but never anyone so beautiful as this old lady. Her sweet eyes of age captivated Cosmo; he was never weary of watching her. He could have looked down upon her for an hour at a time, as she sat working with her white hands, while the sun shone upon her white lace cap, and on the sweet old cheek, with its lovely complexion, which was turned to the window; or when she half disappeared within to minister

to the other half visible figure upon the sofa. Cosmo did not like to tell Cameron of his old lady, but he sat many an hour by himself in this little room, to the extreme wonderment of his friend, who supposed it was all for the benefit of the *Auld Reekie Magazine*, and smiled a little within himself at the lad's literary enthusiasm. For his part, Cosmo dreamed about his opposite neighbours, and made stories for them in his own secret imagination, wondering if he ever could come to know them, or if he left St. Ouen, whether they were ever likely to meet again. It certainly did not seem probable, and there was no photography in those days to enable Cosmo to take pictures of his beautiful old lady as she sat in the sunshine. He took them on his own mind instead, and he made them into copies of verses, which the beautiful old lady never would see, nor if she saw could read—verses for the *Auld Reekie Magazine* and the *North British Courant*.

CHAPTER II.

THE house of Cosmo's residence was not a great enough house to boast a regular *portière* or *concierge*. A little cobbler, who lived in an odd little ever-open room, on the ground floor, was the real renter and landlord of the much-divided dwelling place. He and his old wife lived and laboured without change or extension in this one apartment, which answered for all purposes, and in which Baptiste's scraps of leather contended for pre-eminence of odour over Margot's *pot au feu*; and it was here that the lodgers hung up the keys of their respective chambers, and where the letters

and messages of the little community were left. Cameron and Cosmo were both very friendly with Baptiste. They understood him but imperfectly, and he, for his part, kept up a continual chuckle behind his sleeve over the blunders of *les Anglais*. But as they laughed at each other mutually, both were contented, and kept their complacence. Cosmo had found out by guess or inference, he could not quite tell how, that Madame in the second floor opposite, with the invalid daughter, was the owner of Baptiste's house—a fact which made the cobbler's little room very attractive to the lad, as it was so easy to invent questions, direct or indirect, about the beautiful old lady. One morning, Baptiste looked up with a smirk from his board, as he bid good-day to his young lodger. He had news to tell.

“You shall now have your wish,” said Baptiste; “Madame has been asking Margot about the young Englishman. Madame takes

interest in *les Anglais*. You shall go to present yourself, and make your homage when her poor daughter is better. She loves your country. Madame is *Anglais* herself."

"Is she?" cried Cosmo, eagerly; "but I am not English, unfortunately," added the lad, with a jealous nationality. "I am a Scotsman, Baptiste; madame will no longer wish to see me."

"Eh, bien!" said Baptiste, "I know not much of your differences, you islanders—but madame is *Ecossais*. Yes, I know it. It was so said when Monsieur Jean brought home his bride. Ah, was she not beautiful? too pretty for the peace of the young man and the ladies; they made poor Monsieur Jean jealous, and he took her away."

"Is that long ago?" asked Cosmo.

"It was the year that Margot's cousin, Camille, was drawn in the conscription," said Baptiste, smiling to himself at his own private recollections. "It is twenty years since.

But madame was lovely! so poor Monsieur Jean became jealous and carried her away. They went, I know not where, to the end of the world. In the meantime the old gentleman died. He was of the old *régime*—he was of good blood—but he was poor—he had but this house here and that other to leave to his son—fragments, Monsieur, fragments, crumbs out of the hands of the Revolution; and Monsieur Jean was gay and of a great spirit. He was not a *bourgeois* to go to become rich. The money dropped through his fine fingers. He came back, let me see, but three years ago. He was a gentleman, he was a noble, with but a thousand francs of rent. He did not do anything. Madame sat at the window and worked with her pretty white hands. Eh, bien! what shall you say then? she loved him—nothing was hard to her. He was made to be loved this poor Monsieur Jean.”

“It is easy to say so—but he could not

have deserved such a wife," cried Cosmo, with a boy's indignation, "he ought to have toiled for her rather, night and day."

"Ah, Monsieur is young," said Baptiste, with a half satirical smile and shrug of his stooping French shoulders. "We know better when we have been married twenty years. Monsieur Jean was not made to toil, neither night nor day; but he loved Madame still, and was jealous of her—he was a *beau garçon* himself to his last days."

"Jealous!" Cosmo was horrified; "you speak very lightly, Baptiste," said the boy, angrily, "but that is worst of all—a lady so beautiful, so good—it is enough to see her to know how good she is—the man deserved to be shot!"

"Nay, nay," cried Baptiste, laughing, "Monsieur does not understand the ways of women—it pleased Madame—they love to know their power, and to hear other people know it; all the women are so. Madame

loved him all the better for being a little—just a little afraid of her beauty. But he did not live long—poor Monsieur Jean !”

“I hope she was very glad to be rid of such a fellow,” cried Cosmo, who was highly indignant at the deficient husband of his beautiful old lady. Baptiste rubbed the corner of his own eye rather hard with his knuckle. The cobbler had a little sentiment lingering in his ancient bosom for the admired of his youth.

“But he had an air noble—a great spirit ;” cried Baptiste. “But madame loved him ! She wept—all St. Ouen wept, monsieur—and he was the last of an old race. Now there are only the women, and madame herself is a foreigner and a stranger, and knows not our traditions. Ah, it is a great change for the house of Roche de St. Martin ! If you will believe it, monsieur, madame herself is called by the common people nothing but Madame Roche !”

“And that is very sad, Baptiste,” said

Cosmo, with a smile. Baptiste smiled too ; the cobbler was not particularly sincere in his aristocratical regrets, but, with the mingled wit and sentiment of his country, was sufficiently ready to perceive either the ludicrous or the pathetic aspect of the decayed family.

Cosmo, however, changed his tone with the most capricious haste. Whether she was a plain Madame Roche, or a noble lady, it did not matter much to the stranger. She was at the present moment, in her lovely age and motherhood, the lady of Cosmo's dreams, and ridicule could not come near her. She was sacred to every idea that was most reverential and full of honour.

“ And she is a widow, now, and has a sick daughter to take care of,” said Cosmo, meditatively ; “ strange how some people in the world have always some burden upon them. Has she no one to take care of *her* ? ”

“ If monsieur means *that*,” said Baptiste,

with a comical smile, "I do not doubt madame might have married again."

"Married—she! how dare you say so," Baptiste," cried the lad, colouring high in indignation; "it is profane!—it is sacrilege!—but she has only this invalid daughter to watch and labour for—nothing more?"

"Yes—it is but a sad life," said Baptiste, "many a labouring woman, as I tell Margot, has less to do with her hard fingers than has madame with those pretty white hands—one and another all her life to lean upon her, and now, alas! poor Mademoiselle Marie!"

The cobbler looked as if something more than mere compassion for her illness moved this last exclamation, but Cosmo was not very much interested about Mademoiselle Marie, who lay always on the sofa, and hidden in the dimness of the chamber, looked older than her mother, as the lad fancied. He went away from Baptiste, however, with his mind very full of Madame Roche. For a home-born

youth like himself, so long accustomed to the family roof and his mother's rule and company, he had been a long time now totally out of domestic usages and female society—longer than he had ever been in his life before—he was flattered to think that his beautiful old lady had noticed him, and an affectionate chivalrous sentiment touched Cosmo's mind with unusual pleasure. He loved to imagine to himself the delicate womanly fireside, lighted up by a smile which might remind him of his mother's, yet would be more refined and captivating than the familiar looks of the Mistress. He thought of himself as something between a son and a champion, tenderly reverent and full of affectionate admiration. No idea of Mademoiselle Marie, nor of any other younger person with whom it might be possible to fall in love, brought Cosmo's imagination down to the vulgar level. He felt as a lad feels who has been brought up under the shadow of a mother heartily loved and honoured. It was

still a mother whom he was dreaming about ; but the delicate old beauty of his old lady added an indefinable charm to the impulse of affectionate respect which animated Cosmo. It made him a great deal more pleased and proud to think she had noticed him, and to anticipate perhaps an invitation to her very presence. It made him think as much about her to-day as though she had been a girl, and he her lover. The sentiment warmed the lad's heart.

He was wandering round the noble old cathedral later in the day, when the February sun slanted upon all the fretted work of its pinnacles and niches, and playing in, with an ineffectual effort, was lost in the glorious gloom of the sculptured porch. Cosmo pleased himself straying about this place, not that he knew anything about it, or was at all enlightened as to its peculiar beauties—but simply because it moved him with a sense of perfectness and glory, such as, perhaps, few other human works ever impress so deeply.

As he went along, he came suddenly upon the object of his thoughts. Madame Roche—as Baptiste lamented to think the common people called her—was in an animated little discussion with a market-woman, then returning home, about a certain little bundle of sweet herbs which remained in her almost empty basket. Cosmo hurried past, shyly afraid to be supposed listening; but he could hear that there was something said about an omelette for Mademoiselle Marie, which decided the inclinations of his old lady. He could not help standing at the corner of the lane to watch her when she had passed. She put the herbs into her own little light basket, and was moving away towards her house, when something called her attention behind, and she looked back. She could not but perceive Cosmo, lingering shy and conscious at the corner, nor could she but guess that it was herself whom the lad had been looking at. She smiled to him, and made him a little courtesy, and waved her hand with

a kindly, half-amused gesture of recognition, which completed the confusion of Cosmo, who had scarcely self-possession enough left to take off his hat. Then the old lady went on, and he remained watching her. What a step she had!—so simple, so straightforward, so unconscious, full of a natural grace which no training could have given. It occurred to Cosmo for a moment, that he had seen but one person walk like Madame Roche. Was it a gift universal to Frenchwomen?—but then she was not a Frenchwoman—she was English—nay—hurrah! better still—she was his own countrywoman. Cosmo had not taken time to think of this last particular before—his eye brightened with a still more affectionate sentiment, his imagination quickened with new ground to go upon. He could not help plunging into the unknown story with quite a zest and fascination. Perhaps the little romance which the lad wove incontinently, was not far from the truth. The young heir of

the house of Roche de St. Martin, whom the Revolution left barely "lord of his presence and no land beside"—the stately old French father, perhaps an *emigré*—the young man wandering about the free British soil, captivated by the lovely Scottish face, bringing his bride here, only to carry her away again a gay, volatile, mercurial, unreliable Frenchman. Then those wanderings over half the world, those distresses, and labours, and cares which had not been able to take the sweet bloom from her cheek, nor that elastic grace from her step—and now here she was, a poor widow with a sick daughter, bargaining under the shadow of St. Ouen for the sweet herbs for Marie's omelette. Cosmo's young heart rose against the incongruities of fortune. She who should have been a fairy princess, with all the world at her feet, how had she carried that beautiful face unwithered and unfaded, that smile undimmed, that step unburthened, through all the years and the sorrows of her heavy life?

It seemed very hard to tell—a wonderful special provision of Providence to keep fresh the bloom which it had made; and Cosmo went home, thinking with enthusiasm that perhaps it was wrong to grudge all the poverty and trials which doubtless she had made beautiful and lighted up by her presence among them. Cosmo was very near writing some verses on the subject. It was a very captivating subject to a poet of his years—but blushed and restrained himself with a truer feeling, and only went to rest that night wondering how poor Mademoiselle Marie liked her omelette, and whether Madame Roche, the next time they met, would recognise him again.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day Cameron came up-stairs to Cosmo's room, where the lad was writing by the window, with an open letter in his hand and rather a comical expression on his face.

"Here is for you, Cosmo," said Cameron. "The like of me does not captivate ladies. Macgregor and I must make you our reverence. We never would have got this invitation but for your sake."

"What is it?" cried Cosmo, rising eagerly, with a sudden blush, and already more than guessing, as he leaned forward to see it, what the communication was. It was a note from

Madame Roche, oddly, yet prettily, worded, with a fragrance of French idiom in its English, which made it quite captivating to Cosmo, who was highly fantastical, and would not have been quite contented to find his beautiful old lady writing a matter-of-fact epistle like other people. It was an invitation to "her countrymen" to take a cup of tea with her on the following evening. She had heard from Baptiste and his wife that they were English travellers, and loved to hear the speech of her own country, though she had grown unfamiliar with it, and therewith she signed her name, "Mary Roche de St. Martin," in a hand which was somewhat stiff and old-fashioned, yet refined. Cosmo was greatly pleased. His face glowed with surprised gratification; he was glad to have his old heroine come up so entirely to his fancy, and delighted to think of seeing and knowing her, close at hand in her own home.

“You will go?” he said, eagerly.

Cameron laughed—even, if truth must be told, the grave Highlander blushed a little. He was totally unused to the society of women; he was a little excited by the idea of making friends in this little foreign town, and already looked forward with no small amount of expectation to Madame Roche’s modest tea-drinking. But he did not like to betray his pleasure; he turned half away, as he answered:—

“For your sake, you know, laddie—Macgregor and I would have had little chance by ourselves—yes, we’ll go,” and went off to write a very stiff and elaborate reply, in the concoction of which Cameron found it more difficult to satisfy himself than he had ever been before all his life. It was finished, however, and despatched at last. That day ended, the fated evening came. The Highland student never made nor attempted so careful a toilette—he, too, had found time to

catch a glimpse of Cosmo's beautiful old lady, and of the pale, fragile daughter, who went out once a week to drive in the little carriage. Mademoiselle Marie, whom Cosmo had scarcely noticed, looked to Cameron like one of the tender virgin martyrs of those old pictures which had impressed his uncommunicative imagination without much increasing his knowledge. He had watched her, half lifted, half helped into the little carriage, with pity and interest greater than any one knew of. He was a strong man, unconscious in his own person of what illness was—a reserved, solitary, self-contained hermit, totally ignorant of womankind, save such as his old mother in her Highland cottage, or the kind, homely landlady in the High Street whose anxiety for his comfort sometimes offended him as curiosity. A lady, young, tender, and gentle—a woman of romance, appealing unconsciously to all the protecting and supporting impulses of his manhood, had

never once been placed before in Cameron's way.

So Cosmo and his friend, with an interest and excitement almost equal, crossed the little street of St. Ouen, towards Madame Roche's second floor, in the early darkness of the February night, feeling more reverence, respect, and enthusiasm than young courtiers going to be presented to a Queen. As for their companion, Cameron's pupil, he was the only unconcerned individual of the little party. *He* was not unaccustomed to the society of ladies—Madame Roche and her daughter had no influence on his imagination ; he went over the way with the most entire complacency, and not a romantical sentiment within a hundred miles of him ; he was pleased enough to see new faces, and share his own agreeable society with some one else for the evening, and he meant to talk of Italy and pictures and astonish these humble people, by way of practice when he should reach home—Mac-

gregor was not going to any enchanted palace—he only picked his steps over the causeway of the little street of St. Ouen, directing his way towards Madame Roche's second floor.

This chamber of audience was a small room, partly French and partly English in its aspect; the gilded clock and mirror over the mantel-piece—the marble table at the side of the room—the cold polished edge of floor on which Cameron's unwary footsteps almost slid—the pretty lamp on the table, and the white maze of curtains artistically disposed at the window, and looped with pink ribbons, were all indigenous to the soil; but the square of thick Turkey carpet—the little open fire-place, where a wood fire burned and crackled merrily, the warm-coloured cover on the table, where stood Madame Roche's pretty tea equipage, were home-like and "comfortable" as insular heart could wish to see. On a sofa, drawn close to the fire-place, half sat, half reclined, the invalid daughter. She was very pale, with

eyes so blue, and mild, and tender, that it was impossible to meet their gentle glance without a rising sympathy, even though it might be impossible to tell what that sympathy was for. She was dressed—the young men, of course, could not tell how—in some invalid dress, so soft, so flowing, so seemly, that Cameron, who was as ignorant as a savage of all the graces of the toilette, could not sufficiently admire the perfect gracefulness of those most delicate womanly robes, which seemed somehow to belong to, and form part of, this fair, pale, fragile creature, whose whole existence seemed to be one of patience and suffering. Madame Roche herself sat on the other side of the table. She was not in widow's dress, though she had not been many years a widow. She wore a white lace cap, with spotless, filmy white ribbons, under which her fair hair, largely mixed with silver, was braided in soft bands, which had lost nothing of their gloss or luxuriance. Her dress was black satin, soft

and glistening—there was no colour at all about her habiliments, nothing but soft white and black. She did not look younger than she was, nor like anything but herself. She was not a well-preserved, carefully got-up beauty. There were wrinkles in her sweet old face, as well as silver in her hair. Notwithstanding, she sat there triumphant, in the real loveliness which she could not help and for which she made no effort, with her beautiful blue eyes, her soft lips, her rose cheek, which through its wrinkles was as sweet and velvety as an infant's, her pretty white hands and rosy finger tips. She was not unconscious either of her rare gift—but bore it with a familiar grace as she had borne it for fifty years. Madame Roche had been beautiful all her life—she did not wonder nor feel confused to know that she was beautiful now.

And she received them, singular to say, in a manner which did not in the slightest degree

detract from Cosmo's poetic admiration, asking familiar questions about their names, and where, and how, and why they travelled, with the kindly interest of an old lady, and with that same delightful junction of English speech with an occasional French idiom, which had charmed the lad in her note. Cameron dropped shyly into a chair by the side of the couch, and inclined his ear, with a conscious colour on his face, to the low voice of the invalid, who, though a little surprised, took polite pains to talk to him, while Cosmo as shyly, but not with quite so much awkwardness, took up his position by the side of Madame Roche. She made no remark, except a kindly smile and bow, when she heard the names of Cameron and Macgregor, but when Cosmo's was named to her she turned round to him with a special and particular kindness of regard.

“Ah! Livingstone!” she said; “I had a friend once called by that name,” and Madame

Roche made a little pause of remembrance, with a smile and a half sigh, and that look of mingled amusement, complacence, gratitude, and regret, with which an old lady like herself remembers the name of an old lover. Then she returned quietly to her tea-making. She did not notice Macgregor much, save as needful politeness demanded, and she looked with a little smiling surprise into the shadow where Cameron had placed himself by the side of her daughter, but her own attention was principally given to Cosmo, who brightened under it, and grew shyly confidential, as was to be looked for at his age.

“I have seen you at your window,” said Madame Roche. “I said to Marie, this young man, so modest, so ingenuous, who steals back when we come to the window, I think he must be my countryman. I knew it by your looks—all of you, and this gentleman your tutor—ah, he is not at all like a Frenchman. He has a little forest on his cheeks and none

on his chin, my child—that is not like what we see at St. Ouen.”

The old lady's laugh was so merry that Cosmo could not help joining in it—“He is my dear friend,” said Cosmo, blushing to find himself use the adjective, yet using it with shy enthusiasm; “but he is only Macgregor's tutor, not mine.”

“Indeed! and who then takes care of you?” said the old lady. “Ah, you are old enough—you can guard yourself—is it so? Yet I know you have a good mother at home.”

“I have indeed; but, Madame, how do you know?” cried Cosmo, in amazement.

“Because her son's face tells me so,” cried Madame Roche, with her beautiful smile. “I know a mother's son, my child. I know you would not have looked down upon an old woman and her poor daughter so kindly but for your mother at home; and your good friend, who goes to talk to my poor Marie—

has he then a sick sister, whom he thinks upon when he sees my poor wounded dove?"

Cosmo was a little puzzled; he did not know what answer to make—he could not quite understand himself this entirely new aspect of his friend's character. "Cameron is a very good fellow," he said, with perplexity; but Cosmo did not himself perceive how to prove himself a good fellow, it was needful for Cameron to pay such close reverential regard to the invalid on her sofa, whom he seemed now endeavouring to amuse by an account of their travels. The reserved and grave Highlander warmed as he spoke. He was talking of Venice on her seas, and Rome on her hills, while Marie leaned back on her pillows, with a faint flush upon her delicate cheek, following his narrative with little assenting gestures of her thin white hand, and motions of her head. She was not beautiful, like her mother, but she was so fragile, so tender, so delicate, with a shadowy white veil on her head like a cap,

fastened with a soft pink ribbon, which somehow made her invalid delicacy of complexion all the more noticeable, that Cosmo could not help smiling and wondering at the contrast between her and the black, dark, strong-featured face which bent towards her. No—Cameron had no sick sister—perhaps the grave undemonstrative student might even have smiled at Madame Roche's pretty French sentiment about her wounded dove; yet Cameron, who knew nothing about women, and had confessed to Cosmo long ago how little of the universal benevolence of love he found himself capable of, was exerting himself entirely out of his usual fashion, with an awkward earnestness of sympathy which touched Cosmo's heart, for the amusement of the poor sick Marie.

“We, too, have wandered far, but not where you have been,” said Madame Roche. “We do not know your beautiful Rome and Venice—we know only the wilderness, I and

my Marie. Ah, you would not suppose it, to find us safe in St. Ouen ; but we have been at—what do you call it?—the other side of the world—down, down below here, where summer comes at Christmas—ah! in the Antipodes.”

“And I would we were there now, mamma,” said Marie, with a sigh.

“Ah, my poor child!—yes, we were there, gentlemen,” said Madame Roche. “We have been great travellers—we have been in America—we were savages for a long time—we were lost to all the world ; no one knew of us—they forgot me in my country altogether ; and even my poor Jean—they scarce remembered *him* in St. Ouen. When we came back, we were like people who drop from the skies. Ah, it was strange ! His father and his friends were dead, and me—it was never but a place of strangers to me—this town. I have not been in my country—not for twenty years ; yet I sometimes think I

should wish to look at it ere I die, but for Marie."

"But the change might be of use to her health," said Cameron, eagerly. "It often is so. Motion, and air, and novelty, of themselves do a great deal. Should you not try?"

"Ah, I should travel with joy," said Marie, clasping her white, thin hands, "but not to Scotland, monsieur. Your fogs and your rains would steal my little life that I have. I should go to the woods—to the great plains—to the country that you call savage and a wilderness; and there, mamma, if you would but go, you should no longer have to say—'Poor Marie!'"

"And that is—where?" said Cameron, bending forward to the bright sick eyes, with an extraordinary emotion and earnestness. His look startled Cosmo. It was as if he had said, 'Tell me but where, and I will carry you away whosoever opposes!' The Highlandman almost turned his back upon

Madame Roche. This sick and weak Marie was oppressed and thwarted in her fancy. Cameron looked at her in his strong, independent manhood, with an unspeakable compassion and tenderness. It was in his heart to have lifted her up with his strong arms and carried her to the place she longed for, wherever it was—that was the immediate impulse upon him, and it was so new and so strange that it seemed to refresh and expand his whole heart. But Marie sank back upon her pillows with a little movement of fatigue, perhaps of momentary pettishness, and only her mother spoke in quite another strain.

“You do not know my country, my child,” said Madame Roche. “I have another little daughter who loves it. Ah, I think some day we shall go to see the old hills and the old trees; but every one forgets me there, and to say truth, I also forget,” said the old lady, smiling. “I think I shall scarcely know my

own tongue presently. Will you come and teach me English over again?"

"You should say Scotch, madam—it is all he knows," said Cameron, smiling at Cosmo, to whom she had turned. It was an affectionate look on both sides, and the boy blushed as he met first the beautiful eyes of his lovely old lady, and then the kind glance of his friend. He stammered something about the pleasure of seeing them in Scotland, and then blushed for the commonplace. He was too young to remain unmoved between two pair of eyes, both turned so kindly upon him.

"He is his mother's son, is he not?" said Madame Roche, patting Cosmo's arm lightly with her pretty fingers. "I knew his name when I was young. I had a friend called by it. You shall come and talk to me of all you love—and you and I together, we will persuade Marie."

Cameron glanced as she spoke, with a keen

momentary jealous pang, from the handsome lad opposite to him, to the invalid on the sofa. But Marie was older than Cosmo—a whole world apart, out of his way, uninteresting to the boy as she lay back on her cushions, with her half-shut eyes and her delicate face. It was strange to think how strong and personal was this compassion, the growth of a day, in the Highlander's stern nature and uncommunicating heart.

CHAPTER IV.

THE days glided on imperceptibly over the travellers as they rested in St. Ouen—rested longer than there seemed any occasion for resting, and with so little inducement that Macgregor began to grow restive, and even Cosmo wondered; Cameron was no longer the same. The fiery heart of the Highlander was moved within him beyond all power of self-restraint. He was calm enough externally by the necessity of his nature, which forbade demonstration—but within, the fountains were breaking, the ice melting, a fiery and fervid activity taking the place of the long quies-

cence of his mind. He neither understood it himself nor reasoned upon it. He yielded because he could not help yielding. An arbitrary, imperious impulse, had taken possession of him, strengthening itself in his own strength and force, and taking into consideration no possibility of obstacles. His big, strong heart yearned over the tender weakness which could not help itself—he could think of nothing but of taking it up in his powerful arms and carrying it into safety. It was the first awakening of his native passionate fervor—he could acknowledge nothing, perceive nothing to stand in the way. He was as unreasonable and arbitrary as the merest boy—more so, indeed, for boys do not know emotions so stormy and violent. It had an extraordinary effect altogether upon this grave, reserved, toilworn man; sometimes he was capricious, impatient, and fitful in his temper—at other times more tender than a woman—often half ashamed of himself—and only clear about one thing

as it seemed, which was, that he would not go away.

Another point he was angrily jealous upon; he neither lingered in Baptiste's room himself, nor, if he could possibly prevent it, permitted Cosmo to do so. He would have no questions asked, no gossiping entered into about Madame Roche. "These ladies should be sacred to us—what they wish us to know they will tell us," said Cameron, almost haughtily, on one occasion, when he interrupted a conversation between the cobbler and his young companion. Cosmo was half disposed to resent at once the interference, and the supposition that he himself would gossip about any one, or acquire information by such undignified means—but the serious feeling in his friend's face, almost stern in its earnestness, impressed the lad. It was evidently of tenfold importance to Cameron more than to himself, much as he was interested in his beautiful old lady. Cosmo yielded with but a little demonstration of

impatience and wonder, half-guessing, yet wholly unable to comprehend what this could mean.

Another day, when Cosmo sat by his little window in the corner, to which he had been shy of going since he knew Madame Roche, but which had still a great attraction for him, Cameron entered his room hurriedly and found him at his post. The Highlandman laid his powerful hand roughly on the lad's shoulder, and drew him away, almost with violence. "How dare ye pry upon them?" he cried, with excitement; "should not their *home* be sacred, at least?" Almost a quarrel ensued, for Cosmo struggled in this strong grasp, and asserted his independence indignantly. He pry upon any one! The lad was furious at the accusation, and ready to abjure for ever and in a moment the friend who judged him so unjustly; and had it not been that Cameron himself melted into an incomprehensible caprice of softness, there must have been an open breach and separa-

tion. Even then, Cosmo could scarcely get over it; he kept away from his window proudly, was haughty to his companions, passed Baptiste without the civility of a recognition, and even, in the strength of his ill-used and injured condition, would not go to see Madame Roche. Out of this sullen fit the lad was awakened by seeing Cameron secretly selecting with his uncouth hands such early flowers as were to be found in the market of St. Ouen, and giving shy, private orders about others, more rare and delicate, which were to be sent to Madame Roche, in her second floor. Cosmo was very much perplexed, and did not comprehend it, any more than he comprehended why it was that the Highlandman, without motive or object, and in face of the protestations of his pupil, persisted in lingering here in St. Ouen.

Thus a week passed—a fortnight, and no period was yet assigned for their stay. They became familiar with that pretty, little, half

French, half English apartment, where poor Marie lay on the sofa, and her mother sat working by the window. Madame Roche was always kind, and had a smile for them all. Marie was sometimes vivacious, sometimes fatigued, sometimes broke forth in little outbursts of opposition to mamma, who was always tender and forbearing to her; sometimes Cosmo thought the gentle invalid was even peevish, lying back among her cushions, with her half-closed eyes, taking no notice of any one. This poor Marie was not only weak in frame—she was unsatisfied, discontented, and had “something on her mind.” She started into sudden effusions of longing and weariness, with eager wishes to go away somewhere, and anticipations of being well, if mamma would but consent, which Madame Roche quietly evaded, and, during which, Cameron sat gazing at her with all his heart inquiring in his eyes, where? But Marie showed no inclination to make a confidant of

her mother's countryman. She listened to him with a languid interest, gave him a partial attention, smiled faintly when her mother thanked him for the flowers he sent, but treated all these marks of Cameron's "interest" in herself with a fatal and total indifference, which the Highlandman alone either did not, or would not perceive. It did not even appear that Marie contemplated the possibility of any special reference to herself in the stranger's courtesies. She treated them all alike, paying no great regard to any of the three. She was amiable, gentle, mild in her manners, and pleasant in her speech; but throughout all, it was herself and her own burdens, whatever these might be, that Marie was thinking of. Perhaps they were enough to occupy the poor tender spirit so closely confined within those four walls. Cosmo did not know—but *his* sympathies were with the bright old mother, whose beautiful eyes always smiled, who seemed to have no time to spend

in impatience or discontent, and whose perpetual care was lavished on her daughter, whether Marie was pleased or no.

Madame Roche, it would appear, was not too sensitive—her husband, who loved and was jealous of her, and who died and left her a widow, had not broken her heart; neither could her child, though she was ill and peevish, and not very grateful. Perhaps Cosmo would rather, in his secret spirit, have preferred to see his beautiful old lady, after all her hard life and troubles, and with still so many cares surrounding her, show greater symptoms of heart-break, but Madame Roche only went on working and smiling, and saying kind words, with an invincible patience, which was the patience of natural temper, and not of exalted principle. She could not help her sweetness and affectionate disposition any more than she could help the beauty which was as faithful to her in age as in youth. She was kind even to Macgregor, who was totally indifferent to

her kindness; perhaps she might be as kind to the next wandering party of travellers who were thrown in her way. Cosmo would not allow himself to believe so, yet, perhaps, it was true.

And in the meantime, Macgregor grumbled, and wrote discontented letters home; and even Cosmo could give no reason to himself for their stay in St. Ouen, save Madame Roche and her daughter—a reason which he certainly would not state to the Mistress, who began to be impatient for her boy's return. Cameron had no letters to write—no thoughts to distract him from the one overpowering thought which had taken possession of his mind—the arbitrary fancy, absolute and not to be questioned, that his own errand in the little Norman town was to restore liberty, health, content, and comfort to Marie Roche de St. Martin. He felt he could do it, as his big heart expanded over Madame Roche's "wounded dove"—and Cameron, on the verge

of middle age, experienced by privations and hardships, fell into the very absoluteness of a boy's delusion. He did not even take into account that, upon another capricious, wilful, human heart depended all his power over the future he dreamed of—he only knew that he could do it, and therefore would, though all the world stood in his way. Alas, poor dreamer! the world gave itself no trouble whatever on the subject, and had no malice against him, nor doom of evil for Marie. So he went on with his imperious determination, little witting of any obstacle before him which could be still more imperious and absolute than he.

CHAPTER V.

ON one of these days Cameron came again to Cosmo with a letter in his hand. His look was very different now—it was grave, resolute, determined, as of a man on the verge of a new life. He showed the letter to his young companion. It was from Macgregor's father, intimating his wish that they should return immediately, and expressing a little surprise to hear that they should have remained so long in St. Ouen. Cameron crushed it up in his hand when it was returned to him; a gesture not so much of anger as of high excitement powerfully restrained.

“We must go, then, I suppose?” said Cosmo; but the lad looked up rather doubtfully and anxiously in his friend’s face—for Cameron did not look like a man obedient, who was ready to submit to a recall.

“I will tell you to-morrow,” said the Highlander; “yes—it is time—I don’t resent what this man says—he is perfectly right. I will go, or I will not go to-morrow.”

What did this mean? for the “will not go” was a great deal more than a passive negative. It meant—not a continued dallying in St. Ouen—it meant all that Cameron imagined in that great new torrent of hopes, and loves, and purposes, which he now called life. Then he went to Cosmo’s window and glanced out for a moment; then he returned with a deep, almost angry flush on his face, muttering something about “never alone,”—then he thrust his arm into Cosmo’s, and bade him come along.

“I am going to see Madame Roche,” cried

Cameron, with a certain recklessness of tone. "Come—you're always welcome there—and four is better company than three."

It was no little risk to put Cosmo's temper to—but he yielded, though he was somewhat piqued by the address, feeling an interest and anxiety for something about to happen, which he could not perfectly define. They found Madame Roche alone, seated by the window working, as usual—but Marie was not there. The old lady received them graciously and kindly, as was her wont. She answered to Cameron's inquiries that Marie's headache was more violent than usual, and that she was lying down. Poor Marie! she was very delicate—she suffered a great deal, the dear child!

"Invalids have sometimes a kind of inspiration as to what will cure them," said Cameron, steadily fixing his eyes upon Madame Roche, "why will you not let her go where she wishes to go? Where is it? I should think the trial worth more than fatigue, more

than labour, ay—if a man had more to give—more even than life !”

Madame Roche looked up at him suddenly, with a strange surprise in her eyes—a painful, anxious, terrified wonder, which was quite inexplicable to Cosmo.

“Alas, poor child !” she said hurriedly, and in a low voice. “I would grudge neither fatigue nor labour for my Marie—but it is vain. So you are going away from St. Ouen ? ah, yes, I know—I hear everything—I saw your young Monsieur Macgregor half an hour ago ; he said letters had come, and you were going. We shall grieve when you are gone, and we shall not forget you, neither I nor my Marie.”

Cameron’s face changed ; a sweetness, an elevation, a tender emotion, quite unusual to those strong features, came over them.

“It is by no means certain that I shall go,” he said, in a low and strangely softened voice. “Does Mademoiselle Marie know ?”

And once more he glanced round the room, and at her vacant sofa, with a tender reverence and respect which touched Cosmo to the heart, and filled the lad with understanding at once and pity. Could he suppose that it was hearing of this that aggravated Marie's headache? could he delude himself with the thought that she was moved by the prospect of his departure? Poor Cameron! Madame Roche was looking at him too with a strange anxiety, trying to read his softened and eloquent face. The old lady paused with an embarrassed and hesitating perplexity, looking from Cosmo to Cameron, from Cameron back again to Cosmo. The lad thought she asked an explanation from him with her eyes—but Cosmo had no explanation to give.

“My friend,” said Madame Roche, at last, trying to recover her smile, but speaking with an evident distress, which she endeavoured in vain to conceal—“you must not say *Mademoiselle* Marie. The people do so, for they have

known her as a girl—but they all know her story, poor child! I fancied you must have heard it from Baptiste or Margot, who love to talk. Ah! have they been so prudent?—it is strange.”

Madame Roche paused again, as if to take breath. Cosmo instinctively and silently moved his chair further away, and only looked on, a deeply-moved spectator, not an actor in the scene. Cameron did not say a word, but he grasped the little marble table with a hand as cold as itself, and looked at Madame Roche with the face of a man whose tongue clove to his mouth, and who could not have spoken for his life. She, trembling a little, afraid to shew her emotion, half frightened at the look of the person she addressed, proceeded, after her pause, with a rapid, interrupted voice.

“My poor tender Marie—poor child!” said the mother. “Alas! she is no more mademoiselle — she is married — she was married years ago, when she was too young.

Ah, it has wrung my heart!" cried the old lady, speaking more freely when her great announcement was made—"for her husband loves her no longer; yet my poor child would seek him over the world if she might. Strange—strange—is it not?—that there should be one most dear to her who does not love Marie?"

But Cameron took no notice of this appeal. He still sat gazing at her, with his blank, dark face, and lips that were parched and motionless. She was full of pity, of distress, of anxiety for him—she went on speaking words which only echoed idly on his ear, and which even Cosmo could not attend to, expatiating in a breathless, agitated way, to cover his emotion and to gain a little time, upon the troubles of Marie's lot, upon the desertion of her husband, her broken health and broken heart. In the midst of it, Cameron rose and held out his hand to her. The trembling mother of Marie took it, rising up to receive

his farewell. She would have made a hundred anxious apologies for the involuntary and unconscious deceit from which he had suffered, but dared not. He shook hands with her hastily, with an air which could not endure speaking to.

“I shall leave St. Ouen so soon that I may not be able to see you again,” said Cameron, with a forcible and forced steadiness which put all her trembling compassion to flight; and he looked full in her eyes, as if to dare her suspicions. “If I cannot, farewell, and thank you for your kindness. I can but leave my best wishes for—Mademoiselle Marie.”

Before Cosmo could follow him—before another word could be said, Cameron was gone. They could hear him descending the stair, with an echoing footstep, as they stood together, the old lady and the lad, in mutual distress and embarrassment. Then Madame Roche turned to Cosmo, took his hand, and burst into tears.

“Could I tell?” cried Marie’s mother—
“alas, my child! could I think that your
tutor, so grave, so wise, would be thus moved?
I am beside myself! I am grieved beyond
measure! Alas, what shall I do?—a good
man is in distress and I am the cause!”

“Nay, it is not your fault, madam,” said
Cosmo—“it is no one’s fault—a mistake, a
blunder, an accident—poor Cameron!” and
the lad had hard enough ado to preserve his
manhood and keep in his own tears.

Then Madame Roche made him sit down
by her and tell her all about his friend.
Cosmo would rather have gone away to
follow Cameron, and know his wishes imme-
diately about leaving St. Ouen, but was
persuaded without much difficulty that it was
kinder to leave the Highlander alone in the
first shock of the discovery he had made.
And Madame Roche was much interested in
the story of the student, whose holiday had
ended so sadly. She wished, with tears in

her eyes, that she could do anything to comfort, anything to help him on. And in turn, she told the story of her own family to Cosmo—how Marie's husband had turned out a vagabond and worthless, how he had deserted his girlish wife in the beginning of her illness, leaving her alone and unattended at a distance even from her mother—how they had heard nothing of him for three years, yet how, notwithstanding all, the poor Marie wept for him constantly and tried to persuade her mother to set out on the hopeless enterprise of finding him again.

“My poor child!” said Madame Roche. “She forgets everything, my friend, but that she loves him. Ah, it is natural to us women—we remember that, and we remember nothing more.”

Cosmo could not help a momentary spark of indignation. He thought Marie very selfish and cold-hearted, and could not forgive her his friend's heart-break :—

“Mademoiselle Marie should not forget *you*,” he said.

Though he dealt with such phenomena occasionally in his verses, and made good sport with them like other young poets, Cosmo was, notwithstanding, too natural and sensible not to pause with a momentary wonder over this strange paradox and contradiction of events. To think of such a man as Cameron losing his wits and his heart for love of this weak and perverse woman, who vexed her mother’s heart with perpetual pining for the husband who had ill-used and deserted her! How strange it was!

“Marie does not forget me, my child; she is not to blame,” said Madame Roche; “it is nature—do not I also know it? Ah, I was undutiful myself. I loved my poor Jean better than my father; but I have a little one who is very fond of me—she is too young for lovers—she thinks of nothing but to make a home in my own country for Marie and me.

My poor Marie! she cannot bear to go away from St. Ouen, lest he should come back to seek her—she will either go to seek *him*, or stay; and so I cannot go to Desirée nor to my own country. Yet, perhaps, if Marie would but be persuaded! My little Desirée is in Scotland. They think much of her where she is. It is all very strange; she is in a house which once was home to me when I was young. I think it strange my child should be there.”

“Desirée?” repeated Cosmo, gazing at his beautiful old lady with awakened curiosity. He remembered so well the pretty little figure whose bearing, different as they were otherwise, was like that of Madame Roche. He looked in her face, anxious, but unable, to trace any resemblance. Desirée! Could it be Joanna’s Desirée—the heroine of the broken windows—she who was at Melmar? The lad grew excited as he repeated the name—he felt as though he held in his hand

the clue to some secret—what could it be?”

“Do you know the name? Ah, my little one was a true *Desirée*,” said Madame Roche; “she came when the others were taken away—she was my comforter. Nay, my friend—she wrote to me of one of your name! One—ah, look at me!—one who was son of my old friend. My child, let me see your face—can it be you who are son of Patrick, my good cousin? What!—is it then possible? Are you the young Livingstone of Norlaw?”

Cosmo rose up in great excitement, withdrawing from the half embrace into which Madame Roche seemed disposed to take him; the lad’s heart bounded with an audible throb, rising to his throat:—

“Do you know me? Did you know my father? Was he your cousin?” he cried, with an increasing emotion. “He was Patrick Livingstone, of Norlaw, a kinsman of the old

Huntleys;—and you—you—tell me! You are Mary of Melmar! I know it! I have found you! Oh, father! I have done my work at last.”

The lad's voice broke into a hoarse cry—he had no words to express himself further, as he stood before her with burning cheeks and a beating heart, holding out his hands in appeal and in triumph. He had found her! he could not doubt, he could not hesitate—gazing into that beautiful old face, the whole countryside seemed to throng about him with a clamorous testimony. All those unanimous witnesses who had told him of her beauty, the little giant at the smithy to whom her foot rung “like siller bells,” the old woman who remembered her face “like a May morning,” rushed into Cosmo's memory as though they had been present by his side. He cried out again with a vehement self-assurance and certainty, “You are Mary of Melmar!” He kissed her hand as if it had been the hand of

a queen—he forgot all his previous trouble and sympathy—he had found her! *his* search had not been made in vain.

“I am Mary Huntley, the daughter of Melmar,” said the old lady, with her beautiful smile. “Yes, my child, it is true—I left my father and my home for the sake of my poor Jean. Ah, he was very fond of me! I am not sorry; but you sought me?—did you seek me?—that is strange, that is kind; I know not why you should seek me. My child, do not bring me into any more trouble—tell me why you sought for *me*?”

“I sought you as my father sought you!” cried Cosmo; “as he charged us all to seek you when he died. I sought you, because you have been wronged. Come home with me, madam. I thank God for Huntley that he never had it!—I knew I should find you! It is not for any trouble. It is because Melmar—Melmar itself—your father’s house—is yours!”

“Melmar—my father’s house—where my Desirée is now?—nay, my friend, you dream,” said the old lady, trying to smile, yet growing pale; she did not comprehend it—she returned upon what he said about his father; she was touched to tears to think that Norlaw had sought for her—that she had not been forgotten—that he himself, a young champion, had come even here with the thought of finding her;—but Melmar, Melmar, her father’s house! The old Mary of Melmar, who had fled from that house and been disinherited, could not receive this strange idea—Melmar! the word died on her lip as the voice of Marie called her from an inner chamber. She rose with the promptness of habit, resuming her tender mother-smile, and answering without a pause. She only waved her hand to Cosmo as the boy left her to her immediate duties. It was not wonderful that she found it difficult to take up the thread of connec-

tion between that life in which she herself had been an only child, and this in which she was Marie's nursing mother. They were strangely unlike indeed.

CHAPTER VI.

COSMO ran down the stairs, and out of the gate of Madame Roche's house, much too greatly excited to think of returning to his little room. The discovery was so sudden and so extraordinary that the lad was quite unable to compose his excitement or collect his thoughts. Strange enough, though Mary of Melmar had been so much in his mind, he had never once, until this day, associated her in the smallest degree with the beautiful old lady of St. Ouen. When he began to think of all the circumstances, he could not account to himself for his extraordinary slowness of

perception. At least a score of other people, totally unlikely and dissimilar, had roused Cosmo's hopes upon his journey. Scarcely a place they had been in which did not afford the imaginative youth a glimpse somewhere of some one who might be the heroine; yet here he had been living almost by her side without a suspicion, until a sudden confidence, given in the simplest and most natural manner, disclosed her in a moment—Mary of Melmar! He had known she must be old—he had supposed she must have children—but it was strange, overpowering, a wild and sudden bewilderment, to find in her the mother of Desirée and Marie.

Cosmo did not go home to his little room—he hurried along the narrow streets of St. Ouen, carried on by the stress and urgency of his own thoughts. Then he emerged upon the riverside, where even the picturesque and various scene before him failed to beguile his own crowding fancies. He saw without seeing

the river boats, moored by the quay, the Norman fishermen and market-women, the high-gabled houses, which corresponded so pleasantly with those high caps and characteristic dresses, the whole bright animation and foreign colouring of the scene. In the midst of it all he saw but one figure, a figure which somehow belonged to it, and took individuality and tone from this surrounding;—Mary of Melmar! but not the pensive, tender Mary of that sweet Scottish countryside, with all its streams and woodlands—not a Mary to be dreamt of any longer on the leafy banks of Tyne, or amid those roofless savage walls of the old Strength of Norlaw. With an unexpressed cry of triumph, yet an untellable thrill of disappointment, the lad hurried along those sun-bright banks of Seine. It was this scene she belonged to; the quaint, gray Norman town, with its irregular roofs and gables, its cathedral piling upward to a fairy apex those marvellous pinnacles and towers, its bright provincial cos-

tume and foreign tints of colour, its river, bright with heavy picturesque boats, and floating baths, and all the lively life of a French urban stream. It was not that meditative breadth of country, glorious with the purple Eildons and brown waters, sweet with unseen birds and burns, where the summer silences and sounds were alike sacred, and where the old strongholds lay at rest like old warriors, watching the peace of the land. No—she was not Mary of Melmar—she was Madame Roche de St. Martin, the beautiful old lady of St. Ouen.

When Cosmo's thoughts had reached this point, they were suddenly arrested by the sight of Cameron, standing close to the edge of the quay, looking steadily down. His remarkable figure, black among the other figures on that picturesque river-side—his fixed, dark face, looking stern and authoritative as a face in profile is apt to look—his intense, yet idle gaze down the weather-stained, timber-bound

face of the river-pier, startled his young companion at first into sudden terror. Cosmo had, till this moment, forgotten Cameron. His friendship and sympathy woke again, with a touch of alarm and dread, which made him sick. Cameron!—religious, enthusiastic, a servant of God as he was, what was the disappointed man, in the shock of his personal suffering, about to do? Cosmo stood behind, unseen, watching him. The lad did not know what he feared, and knew that his terror was irrational and foolish, but still could not perceive without a pang that immovable figure, gazing down into the running river, and could not imagine but with trembling what might be in Cameron's thoughts. He was of a race to which great despairs and calamities are congenial. His blood was fiery Celtic blood, the tumultuous pulses of the mountaineer. Cosmo felt his heart beat loud in his ears as he stood watching. Just then one of the women he had been in the habit of buying flowers

from, perceived Cameron and went up to him with her basket. He spoke to her, listened to her, with a reckless air, which aggravated Cosmo's unreasonable alarm; the lad even heard him laugh as he received a pretty bouquet of spring flowers, which he had doubtless ordered for Marie. The woman went away after receiving payment, with a somewhat doubtful and surprised face. Then Cameron began to pull the pretty, delicate blossoms asunder, and let them fall one by one into the river—one by one—then as the number lessened, leaf by leaf, scattering them out of his fingers with an apparent determination of destroying the whole, quite unconscious of the wistful eyes of two little children standing by. When the last petal had fallen into the river, and was swept down under the dark keel of one of the boats, the Highlander turned suddenly away—so suddenly, indeed, that Cosmo did not discover his disappearance till he had passed into the little

crowd which hung about a newly-arrived vessel lower down the quay ;—his step was quick, resolute, and straightforward—he was going home.

And then Cosmo, brought by this means to real ground, once more began to think, as it was impossible to forbear thinking, over all the strange possibilities of the new events which had startled him so greatly. If Marie had not been married—if Cameron had wooed her and won her—if, strangest chance of all, it had thus happened that the poor Highland student, all unwitting of his fortune, had come to be master of Melmar ! As he speculated, Cosmo held his breath, with a sudden and natural misgiving. He thought of Huntley in Australia—his own generous, tender-hearted brother. Huntley, who meant to come home and win Melmar, and who already looked upon himself as its real master—Huntley, whose hopes must be put to an absolute and instant conclusion, and were

already vain as the fancies of a child. He thought of his mother at home in Norlaw, thinking of the future which waited her son, and refusing to think of the woman who had inflicted upon her the greatest sufferings of her life—he thought of Patie, who, though much less concerned, had still built something upon the heirship of Melmar. He thought of the sudden change to the whole family, who, more or less unconsciously, had reckoned upon this background of possible enrichment, and had borne their real poverty all the more magnanimously, in consideration of the wealth which was about to come—and a sudden chill came to the lad's heart. Strange perversity! Cosmo had scorned the most distant idea of Huntley's heirship, so long as it was possible; but now that it was no longer possible, a compunction struck him. This prospect, which cheered Huntley in his exile, and put spirit into his labour—this, which encouraged the Mistress, for her son's sake,

to spare and to toil—this, which even furthered the aims of Patie in his Glasgow foundry—this it was *his* ungracious task to turn into vanity and foolishness. His step slackened unconsciously, his spirit fell, a natural revulsion seized him. Madame Roche de St. Martin—the poor sick Marie, who loved only herself and her worthless French husband, who doubtless now would find his way back to her, and make himself the real Lord of Melmar! Alas, what a change from Cosmo's picturesque and generous dreams among the old walls of Norlaw! When he thought of the vagabond Frenchman, whose unknown existence had made Cameron miserable, Cosmo made an involuntary exclamation of opposition and disgust. He forgot *that* Mary of Melmar who was now an imaginary and unsubstantial phantom; he even forgot the beautiful old lady who had charmed him unawares—he thought only of the French Marie and her French husband, the selfish invalid

and the worthless wanderer who had deserted her. Beautiful Melmar, among its woods and waters, to think it should be bestowed thus!

Then Cosmo went on, in the natural current of his changed thoughts, to think of the present family, the frank and friendly Joanna, the unknown brother whom Bowed Jaacob respected as a virtuoso, and who, doubtless, firmly believed himself the heir—the father who, though an enemy, was still a homeborn and familiar countryman. Well, *that* household must fall suddenly out of prosperity and wealth into ruin—his own must forego at once a well-warranted and honourable hope—all to enrich a family of St. Ouen, who knew neither Melmar nor Scotland, and perhaps scorned them both! And it was all Cosmo's doing!—a matter deliberately undertaken—a heroic pursuit for which he had quite stepped out of his way! The lad was quite as high-minded, generous, even romantic, in the streets of St. Ouen as he had been in his

favourite seat of meditation among the ruins of Norlaw; but somehow, at this moment, when he had just succeeded in his enterprise, he could not manage to raise within his own heart all the elevated sentiments which had inspired it. On the contrary, he went slowly along to his lodging, where he should have to communicate the news to Cameron, feeling rather crest-fallen and discomfited—not the St. George restoring a disinherited Una, but rather the intermeddler in other men's matters, who gets no thanks on any hand. To tell Cameron, who had spent the whole fiery torrent of that love which it was his nature to bestow, with a passionate individual fervour, on one person and no more—upon the capricious little French Marie, who could not even listen to its tale! Cosmo grew bitter in his thoughts as he took down the key of his chamber from the wall in Baptiste's room and received a little note which the cobbler handed him, and went very softly up stairs. The

note was from Madame Roche, but Cosmo was misanthropical, and did not care about it. He thought no longer of Madame Roche—he thought only of Marie, who was to be the real Mary of Melmar, and of poor Cameron heart-broken, and Huntley disappointed, and the French vagabond of a husband, who was sure to come home.

CHAPTER VII.

CAMERON was not visible until the evening, when he sent for Cosmo to his own room. The lad obeyed the summons instantly; the room was rather a large one, very barely furnished, without any carpet on the floor, and with no fire in the stove. It was dimly lighted by one candle, which threw the apartment into a general twilight, and made a speck of particular illumination on the table where it stood, and by which sat Cameron, with his pocket-book and Baptiste's bill before him. He was very pale, and somehow it seemed impossible to see his face otherwise than in pro-

file, where it looked stern, rigid, and immovable as an old Roman's; but his manner, if perhaps a little graver, was otherwise exactly as usual. Cosmo was at a loss how to speak to him; he did not even like to look at his friend, who, however, showed no such embarrassment in his own person.

“We go to-morrow, Cosmo,” said Cameron, rather rapidly; “here is Baptiste's bill to be settled, and some other things. We'll go over to Dieppe the first thing in the morning—everything had better be done to-night.”

“The first thing in the morning! but I am afraid I—I cannot go,” said Cosmo, hesitating a little.

“Why?” Cameron looked up at him imperiously—he was not in a humour to be thwarted.

“Because—not that I don't wish to go, for I had rather be with you,” said Cosmo—“but because I made a discovery, and a very important one, to-day.”

“Ay?” said Cameron, with a smile and a tone of dreary satire; “this must have been a day for discoveries—what was yours?”

“It was about Madame Roche,” said Cosmo, with hesitation—he was afraid to broach the subject, in his anxiety for his friend, and yet it must be told.

“Just so,” said Cameron, with the same smile; “I knew it must be about Madame Roche—what then? I suppose it is no secret? nothing more than everybody knew?”

“Don’t speak so coldly,” entreated Cosmo, with irrestrainable feeling; “indeed it is something which no one could have dreamed of; Cameron, she is Mary. I never guessed or supposed it until to-day.”

Something like a groan burst from Cameron in spite of himself. “Ay, she’s Mary!” cried the Highlander, with a cry of fierce despair and anguish not to be described,” but laddie, what is that to you?”

They were a world apart as they sat to-

gether on either side of that little table, with the pale little light between them—the boy in the awe of his concern and sympathy—the man in the fiery struggle and humiliation of his manhood, wrung to the heart. Cosmo did not venture to look up, lest the very glance—the water in his eyes might irritate the excited mind of his friend. He answered softly, almost humbly, with the deep imaginative respect of youth.

“She is Mary of Melmar, Cameron—the old lady; my father’s kinswoman whom he was—fond of—who ran away to marry a Frenchman—who is the heir of Melmar—Melmar which was to be Huntley’s, if I had not found her. It cannot be Huntley’s now; and I must stay behind to complete the discovery I have made.”

Perhaps Cosmo’s tone was not remarkably cheerful; the Highlander looked up at him with an impatient and indignant glance.

“Why should it be Huntley’s when it is

hers?" he said, almost angrily. "Would you grudge her rights to a helpless woman? you, boy! are even *you* beguiled when yourself is concerned?"

"You are unjust," said Cosmo. "I do not hesitate a moment—I have done nothing to make any one doubt me—nor ever will."

The lad was indignant in proportion to his uneasiness and discomfort in his discovery, but Cameron was not sufficiently at rest himself to see through the natural contradictions of his young companion. He turned away from him with the half-conscious gesture of a sick heart.

"I am unjust—I believe it," he said, with a strange humility; "lands and siller are but names to me. I am like other folk—I can be liberal with what I have not—ay, more! I can even throw away my own," continued Cameron, his strong voice trembling between real emotion and a bitter self-sarcasm, "so that nobody should be the better for the waste; that's

my fortune. Your estate will be of use to somebody—take comfort, callant; if you are disappointed, there's still some benefit in the gift. But ye might give all and no mortal be a gainer—waste, lavish, pour forth everything ye have, and them the gift was for, if ever they knew, be the worse and not the better! Ay! that's some men's portion in this life."

Cosmo did not venture to say a word—that bitter sense of waste and prodigality, the whole treasure of a man's heart poured forth in vain, and worse than in vain, startled the lad with a momentary vision of depths into which he could not penetrate. For Cameron was not a boy, struggling with a a boy's passion of disappointment and mortification. He was a strong, tenacious, self-concentrated man. He had made a useless, vain, unprofitable holocaust, which could not give even a moment's pleasure to the beloved of his imagination, for whom he had designed to do every-

thing, and the unacceptable gift returned in a bitterness unspeakable upon the giver's heart. Other emotions, even more heavy and grievous, struggled also within him. His old scruples against leaving his garret and studies, his old feelings of guilt in deferring voluntarily, for his own pleasure and comfort, the beginning of his chosen "work," came back upon his silent Celtic soul in a torrent of remorse and compunction, which he could not and would not confide to any one. If he had not forsaken the labours to which God had called him, could he have been left to cast his own heart away after this desperate and useless fashion? With these thoughts his fiery spirit consumed itself. Bitter at all times must be the revulsion of love which is in vain, but this was bitterer than bitterness—a useless, unlovely, unprofitable sacrifice, producing nothing save humiliation and shame.

"I see, Cosmo," he said, after a little pause; "I see that you cannot leave St. Ouen

to-morrow. Do your duty. You were fain to find her, and you have found her. It might be but a boy's impulse of generosity, and it may bring some disappointment with it; but it's right, my lad! and it's something to succeed in what you attempt, even though you do get a dinnle thereby in some corner of your own heart. Never fear for Huntley—if he's such as you say, the inheritance of the widow would be sacred to your brother. Now, laddie, fare you well. I'm going back to *my* duty that I have forsaken. Henceforth you're too tender a companion for the like of me. I've lost—time, and such matters that you have and to spare; you and I are on different levels, Cosmo; and now, my boy, fare ye well."

"Farewell? you don't blame *me*, Cameron?" cried Cosmo, scarcely knowing what he said.

"*Blame* you—for what?" said the other, harshly, and with a momentary haughtiness; then he rose and laid his hand with an ex.

treme and touching kindness, which was almost tender, upon Cosmo's shoulder. "You've been like my youth to me, laddie," said the Highlandman; "like a morning's dew in the midst of drouth; when I say fare ye well I mean not to say that we're parted; but I must not mint any more at the pathways of your life—mine is among the rocks, and in the teeth of the wind. I have no footing by nature among your primroses. That is why I say—not to-morrow in the daylight, and the eyes of strangers, but now when you and me and this night are by ourselves—fare ye well, laddie! We're ever friends, but we're no more comrades—that is what I mean."

"And that is hard, Cameron, to me," said Cosmo, whose eyes were full.

Cameron made no answer at all to the boy; he went to the door of the dim room with him, wrung his hand, and said, "Good night!" Then, while the lad went sadly up the noisy

staircase, the man turned back to his twilight apartment, bare and solitary, where there was nothing familiar and belonging to himself, save his pocket-book and passport upon the table, and Baptiste's bill. He smiled as he took that up, and began to count out the money for its payment; vulgar, needful business, the very elements of daily necessity—these are the best immediate styptics for thrusts in the heart.

Cosmo, to whom nothing had happened, went to his apartment perhaps more restlessly miserable than Cameron, thinking over all his friend's words, and aggravating in imagination the sadness of their meaning. The lad did not care to read, much less to obey the call of Madame Roche's pretty note, which bade him come and tell her further what his morning's communication meant. For this night, at least, he was sick of Madame Roche, and everything connected with her name.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE morning brought feelings a little more endurable, yet still, very far from pleasant. Very early, while it was still dark, Cosmo saw his companions set off on their journey home, and was left to the cold dismal consciousness of a solitary day just beginning, as he watched the lights put out, and the chill gray dawn stealing over the high houses. The first ray of sunshine glimmered upon the attic windows and burned red in the vane over the dwelling-place of Madame Roche. This gleam recalled the lad's imagination from a musing fit of vague depression and uneasiness. He must

now think no more of Cameron—no more of those strange breakings off and partings which are in life. On the contrary, his old caprice of boyish generosity laid upon him now the claim of an urgent—almost an irksome—duty, and he, who went upon his travels to seek Mary of Melmar with all the fervour of a knight-errant, turned upon his heel this cold spring dawn with an inexpressible reluctance and impatience, to go to her, in obedience to her own summons. He would rather have been with Cameron in his silent and rapid journey—but his duty was here.

When Cosmo went to Madame Roche, which he did at as early an hour as he thought decorous, he found her alone, waiting for him. She came forward to receive him with rather an anxious welcome. “I almost feared you were gone,” said the old lady, with a smile which was less tranquil than usual. “When I saw your friends go, I said to myself, this boy is but a fairy messenger, who

tells of a strange hope, and then is gone and one hears no more of it. I am glad you have not gone away; but your poor friend, he has left us? I thought it best, my child, to say nothing to Marie."

Cosmo's heart swelled a little in spite of himself; he could not bear the idea of the two women gossiping together over his friend's heart-break, which was the first thought that occurred to him as Madame Roche spoke, and which, though it was certainly unjust, was still partly justified by the mysterious and compassionate tone in which the old lady mentioned Cameron's name.

"I am not aware that there is any occasion for saying anything, madame," said Cosmo, with a little abruptness. Madame Roche was not remarkably quick-sighted, yet she saw through the lad's irritation—the least smile in the world came to the corner of her lip. She did not think of the great pang in the Highlander's heart—she knew very little indeed of

Cameron—she only smiled with a momentary amusement at Cosmo's displeasure, and a momentary sense of womanish triumph over the subjugated creature, man, represented in the person of this departed traveller, who had just gone sadly away.

“Do not quarrel with me, my child,” she said, her smile subsiding into its usual sweetness; “the fault was not with me; but tell me once more this strange news you told me last night. Melmar, which was my father's, I was born heiress of it—did you say it was mine—*mine*? for I think I must have mistaken what the words mean.”

“It is quite true,” said Cosmo, who had not yet quite recovered his temper, “your father left it to you if you were ever found, and if you were not found, to *my* father, and to Huntley Livingstone, his heir and eldest son. My father sought you in vain all his life; he never would put in his own claim lest it should injure you. When he died, Huntley was not

rich enough to go to law for his rights, but he and everybody believed that you never would be found, and that he was the heir. He thinks so now; he is in Australia working hard for the money to maintain his plea, and believing that Melmar will be his; but I have found you, and you are the lady of Melmar; it is true."

"You tell me a romance—a drama," cried Madame Roche, with tears in her eyes. "Your father sought me all his life—*me?* though I was cruel to him. Ah, how touching! how beautiful!—and you, my young hero!—and this Huntley, this one who thinks himself the heir—he too is generous, noble, without selfishness—I know it! Oh, my child, what shall I do for him? Alas, Marie! She is my eldest child, and she is married already—I never grieved for it enough till now."

"There is no need, Madame," said Cosmo, to whom these little sentences came like so many little shooting arrows, pricking him into

a disappointed and vexed resentment. "Huntley needs nothing to make him amends for what is simply justice. Melmar is not his, but yours."

This speech, however, which was somewhat heroical in tone, expressed a most uncomfortable state of mind in Cosmo. He was angry at the idea of rewarding Huntley with the hand of Marie, if that had not been given away already. It was a highly romantic suggestion, the very embodiment of poetic justice, had it been practicable; but somehow it did not please Cosmo. Then another suggestion, made by his own fancy, came dancing unsolicited into the lad's mind. Desirée, perhaps, who was not married, might not *she* be compensation sufficient for Huntley? But Cosmo grew very red and felt exceedingly indignant as he thought of it; this second reward was rather more distasteful than the first. He paid very little attention, indeed, to Madame Roche, who, much excited, smiled and shed tears, and ex-

claimed upon her good fortune, upon the kindness of her friends, upon the goodness of God. Cosmo put his hands in his pockets and did not listen to her. He was no longer a young poet, full of youthful fervour and generosity. The temper of the British lion began to develop itself in Cosmo. He turned away from Madame Roche's pretty effusion of sentiment and joy, in a *huff* of disenchantment, discontented with her, and himself, and all the world.

Perhaps some delicate spirit whispered as much in the old lady's ear. She came to him when her first excitement was over, with tender tears in her beautiful old eyes.

“My child, you have found a fortune and a home for me,” said Madame Roche, “but it is to take them away from your brother. What will your mother say at home?”

“She will say it is right and just, madame, and I have done my duty,” said Cosmo, briefly enough.

Then Madame Roche bent forward and kissed his young cheek, like a mother, as she was.

“We are widow and orphans,” she said, softly. “God will bless you—He is the guardian of such ; and He will not let Huntley suffer when he sees how all of you do justice out of a free heart.”

Cosmo was melted ; he turned away his head to conceal the moisture in his own eyes—was it out of a free heart? He felt rebuked and humbled as he asked himself the question ; but Madame Roche gave him no time to think of his own feelings. She wanted to know everything about all that had occurred. She was full of curiosity and interest, natural and womanly, about not only the leading points of the story, but all its details, and as Marie did not appear, Cosmo by himself, with his beautiful old lady, was soon reconciled to the new circumstances, and restored to his first triumph. He had

done what his father failed to do—what his father's agents had never been able to accomplish—what newspaper advertisements had attempted in vain. He had justified his own hope, and realised his own expectation. He had restored home and fortune to the lost Mary of Melmar. A night and a morning were long enough for the sway of uncomfortable and discontented feelings. He gave himself up, once more, to his old enthusiasm, forgetting Huntley's loss and Cameron's heartbreak, and his mother's disappointment, in the inspiration of his old dreams, all of which now were coming true. The end of this conversation was, that Cosmo—charged with Madame Roche's entire confidence, and acting as her representative—was to follow his former companions and return to Edinburgh as speedily as possible, and there to instruct his old acquaintance, Cassilis, to take steps immediately for the recovery of Melmar. He parted with the old

lady, who was, and yet was not, the Mary of his fancy, that same evening—did not see Marie, who was fortunately kept in her room by an access of illness or peevishness, took leave of Baptiste and the old streets of St. Ouen with great content and exhilaration, and on the very next morning, at an hour as early, as chilly, and as dark as that of Cameron's departure, began his journey home.

CHAPTER IX.

THE streets of Edinburgh looked strange and unfamiliar to Cosmo Livingstone when he stood in them once more—a very *boy* still in heart and experience, yet feeling himself a travelled and instructed man. He no longer dreamed of turning his steps towards Mrs. Purdy's in the High Street; he took his carpet bag to a hotel instead, half wondering at himself for his changed ideas. Cameron's ideas too, probably, were equally changed. Where was he, or how had he managed to reconcile the present with the past? But Cosmo had no time to inquire.

He could not pause in Edinburgh for anything but his needful business, which was to see Mr. Cassilis, and to place in his hands the interests of Madame Roche.

The young lawyer received him with a careless kindness not very flattering to Cosmo's dignity, but was greatly startled by the news he brought. Once only he paused in taking down all the facts of the case which Cosmo could give him, to say:—

“This discovery will be a serious loss to your brother;” but Cosmo made no reply, and with that the comment ceased. Huntley and his heirship melted away out of sight in the strangest manner while this conversation went on. Cosmo had never realised before how entirely it separated him and his from all real connection with Melmar. The sensation was not quite satisfactory, for Melmar, one way or another, had borne a most strong and personal connection with all the thoughts and projects of the family of Norlaw for a year

or two past ; but that was all over. Cosmo alone now had any interest in the matter, and that solely as the representative of Madame Roche.

When he had fully informed the young lawyer of all the needful points in the matter, and formally left the cause in his hands, Cosmo left him to secure a place in the first coach, and to hasten home with all the speed he could make. He could scarcely have felt more strange, or perceived a greater change upon everything, if he had dropped from the skies into Kirkbride ; yet everything was precisely the same, so clearly and broadly recognisable that Cosmo could not understand what difference had passed upon them, and still less could understand that the difference was in himself. His mother stood waiting for him at the door of the Norlaw Arms. It was cold March weather, and the Mistress had been sitting by the fire, waiting the arrival of the coach. She was flushed a little with the frosty air and

the fire, and looked disturbed and uneasy, Cosmo thought—he could fancy she turned a jealous eye upon himself as he sprang from the coach to meet her—which fancy was perfectly true, for the Mistress was half afraid that her son who had been abroad might be “led away” by his experiences of travel, and might have become indifferent or contemptuous about his home. She was a little displeased, too, that he had lingered behind Cameron. She was not like Madame Roche—all-enduring sweetness was not in this old-fashioned Scottish mother. She could not help making a strong personal claim of that arbitrary Love which stinted nothing in bestowing, upon those who were her own—and opened her heart only slowly and secondarily to the rest of the world.

“So you’re hame at last!” was the Mistress’s salutation; though her eye was jealous there was moisture in it, as she looked at her boy. Cosmo had grown in stature

for one thing—he was brown with exposure, and looked manly and strong—and not least, his smooth cheeks began to shew evidence of those symptoms of manhood which boys adore. There was even a something not to be described or defined upon Cosmo's upper lip, which caught his mother's eye in a moment, and gave a tangible ground for her little outburst of half angry fondness.

“You're no' to bring any of your outlandish fashions here!” said the Mistress, “though you have been in foreign parts. I'll have no person in my house bearded like a Frenchman. Can you no carry your bag in your ain hand, laddie? Come away then—you can shake hands with other folk another time.”

As the Mistress spoke, a figure strange to Kirkbride stalked through the circle of lookers on. Nothing like that bearded face and wide cloak had been known to Cosmo's memory in the village or the district. He turned unconsciously to look after the stranger.

Further down on the road before were two girls whom Cosmo recognised with a start. One was Joanna Huntley—the other there was no possibility of mistaking. Cosmo gazed after her wistfully—a blush of recollection, of embarrassment, almost of guilt, suddenly rising to his face. Bowed Jaacob stood at his smithy door, with the fiery glow of the big fire behind him, a swart little demon gazing after her too. Desirée! Was she the desired of this unknown figure in the cloak, who went languidly along to join her? Cosmo stood silent for a moment, altogether absorbed by the junction of old and new thus strangely presented to him. Familiar Kirkbride, with Jaacob at the smithy door, and that graceful little figure of romance whose story no one but Cosmo knew, followed by the other stranger figure which he was entirely unacquainted with. He started when his mother repeated her imperative summons—the colour on his cheeks looked guilty and troubled; he had

his secret on his heart, and knew beforehand that it would not be agreeable to the Mistress. So he did the very worst thing he could have done—postponed the telling of it to a more convenient season, and so went uncomfortably and with a visible restraint, which vexed his mother's soul within her, home to Norlaw.

Patie, as it happened, had come home a few days before on a brief visit, and when they met round the fire that first evening, every one's thought instinctively was of Huntley. When Marget came in, disturbing the gloamin quietness with lights, her long-drawn sigh and involuntary exclamation:—

“Eh sirs! if Master Huntley were but here!” startled the little family group into open discussion of the subject which was in all their hearts.

“Huntley's been further than you, Cosmo,” said the Mistress, “and maybe seen mair; but I wouldna wonder if Huntley thinks yet,

as he thought when he left Norlaw, that there's no place equal to hame."

"Huntley's in the bush; there's not very much to make him change his opinion there, mother," said Patrick.

"Ay, but Huntley's heart is ever at hame," said the Mistress, finding the one who was absent always the dearest.

"Mother," said Cosmo, his courage failing him a little, "I have something to tell you—and it concerns Huntley, too; mother, I've found the lady, the heir—she whom we have all heard so much about—Patie, *you* know?"

"What lady? what heir? and how does Patie know?" asked the Mistress; then she paused, and her countenance changed. A guess at the truth occurred to her, and its first effect was an angry flush, which gradually stole over her face. "Patie is no' a romancer to have to do with heirs and ladies," she added, quickly; "nor to have strange folk in his thoughts the first hour he's at home. I can-

na tell wherefore any one of you should have such wandering fancies—it's no' like a bairn of mine."

"Mother, I've learnt something by it," said Cosmo; "before I went away I thought it worth hunting over all the world to find her—for no reason that I can tell, except that she was wronged, and that we might be the better if she never came back; but now I have found her—I know where Mary of Melmar is, and she knows she's the heir—but ever since my thought has been of Huntley. Huntley could have had no pleasure in Melmar, mother, if it were not justly his own."

The Mistress raised her head high as Cosmo spoke. Anger, great disappointment, of which she was half ashamed, and a pride which was resolute to show no sign of disappointment, contended in her face with that bitter dislike and repugnance to the lost Mary which she had never been able—perhaps had seldom tried to conquer—"I have heard

plenty of Mary of Melmar," said the Mistress, hastily, "ae time and another she's been the plague of my life. What, laddie! do you mean to say you left me, and your hame, and your ain business, to seek this woman! What was she to you? and you come back and tell me you've found her as if I was to rejoice at the news. You ken where she is and she kens she's the heir! and I crave ye to tell me, what is that to me? Be silent, Patie! am I her mother, or her sister, or her near friend, that this lad shall come to bring the news to me?"

"It's poor news," said Patie, who did not hesitate to look gravely annoyed and disappointed, as he was; "very poor news for all of us, mother—but at least it is better that Cosmo found her than a stranger—if found she was to be."

The Mistress paused a moment, subdued by this suggestion. "Poor news! I kenna what you both mean," she said, with pride; "what

concern is it of ours? Would my Huntley ever put hand, or touch upon another person's gear? Let her come back the morn, and what the waur are we? Do you think I envied her Melmar, or her land? Do you think I would have made my son rich at *her* cost, that never was a friend to me? You may ken many things, laddies, but you dinna ken your mother.—Me! I would not take blade o' grass or drop of water belonging to her, if you asked me—and I am thankful to tell ye baith my Huntley is Huntley Livingstone of Norlaw, and needs to be indebted to no person in this whole countryside.”

The Mistress rose up in the fervour of her indignant disappointment; vexation and mortified feeling brought the water to her eyes. She felt aggrieved and wronged, not only in this setting aside of Huntley, but in the very fact that Mary of Melmar was about to return. This Mary, for whose unthankful sake her husband had neglected *her* honest love and

faithful heart, had at last lured even her son, her youngest and best beloved, away from her, and was coming back triumphant to the inheritance which might have been Huntley's. The Mistress's heart rose in a tumult of pride, love, indignation, and bitterness. She said "*my* son," and "*my* Huntley," with a proud and tender emphasis, an involuntary, anxious impulse to make amends to him for the hope he had lost—yet with an equally natural feeling rejected indignantly all sympathy for him, and would not permit even his brothers to speak of disappointment or loss to Huntley in this new event. She went away across the room, breaking up the fireside circle by the hasty movement, to seek out in her basket the stocking which she was knitting—for the Mistress's eyes began to fail her in candlelight with all her more delicate industries—and coming back to the table, began to knit with absorbed attention, counting the loops in the heel as if she had no care for the further par-

ticulars which Cosmo, encouraged by Patie, proceeded to tell. Yet she did hear them notwithstanding. But for the presence of Patie's practical good-sense, Cosmo and his mother might have had painful recollections of that night; but his brother's steady look and sober attention kept Cosmo from indulging the irritation and wounded feeling which he might have felt otherwise. He went on with his story, gradually growing interested in it, and watching—as a dramatist might watch his first audience—the figure of the Mistress, who sat almost with her back to him, knitting assiduously, the light of the candle throwing a great shadow of her cap upon the wall, and her elbow moving slightly with the movement of her wires. Cosmo watched how the elbow moved irregularly at certain points of his tale, how it was still for an instant now and then, as the interest grew, and the boy-poet was pleased and forgave his mother. At last the stocking fell from the Mistress's hand—she

pushed back her chair, and turned round upon him with a half scream.

“Desirée!” cried the Mistress, as she might have exclaimed at the crisis of a highly interesting novel, “it’s her that’s at Melmar—whisht!—dinna speak to me—I’m just as sure as that we’re a’ here—it’s her ain very bairn!”

After this, Cosmo’s tale ended with a great success; he had excited his mother—and the truth began to glide into her unwilling heart, that Mary of Melmar was, like herself, the mother of fatherless children, a widow, and poor. She heard all the rest without a word of displeasure; she became grave, and said nothing, when her sons discussed the matter; she nodded her head approvingly when Patie repeated rather more strongly than before his satisfaction that Cosmo had found the lost Mary, since she was to be found. The Mistress was thinking of something—but it was only after she had said good night to them that the youths discovered what it was.

“Bairns,” said the Mistress then, abruptly pausing upon the stair, with her candle in her hand, “that bit lassie at Melmar is in the dwelling of the enemy—and if it were not so, the mother canna make war on the house where her bairn has shelter. You’re her nearest kinsmen that I ken of, to be friends as well—she’ll have to come here.”

“Mother!” cried Cosmo, in delight and surprise, and compunction, “can you ask her here?”

“Ay, laddie—I can do mony things, mair than the like of you ken of,” said the Mistress; and, saying so, she went slowly up-stairs, with the light in her hand, and her shadow climbing the wall after her, leaving no unkindness in the echo of her motherly good night.

CHAPTER X.

DURING all these months Desirée had led a strange life at Melmar. She had never told any one of the revelation, painful and undesired, the miserable enlightenment which Aunt Jean's story had brought. What Cosmo told Madame Roche months after, Madame Roche's little daughter knew on that winter night by the Kelpie, when the tale of Aunt Jean, and all its confirming circumstances, stung her poor little heart with its first consciousness of falsehood and social treachery. After that she was ill, and they were kind to her at Melmar, and when she recovered Desirée still did not tell

her mother. People did not write so many letters then as they do now, in these corresponding days—Madame Roche certainly did not hear oftener than once a fortnight, sometimes not more than once a month from her daughter—for Melmar was nearly as far from St. Ouen in *those* days as India is now. Many a painful thought it cost poor Desirée as she stole out by herself, avoiding every one, to the side of Tyne. Oswald Huntley, after her recovery, had resumed his manner of devotion towards her—but Desirée's eyes were no longer touched with the fairy glamour of her first dream. She had not been “in love,” though the poor child imagined she had—she had only been amused by that dream of romantic fancy to which seventeen is subject, and touched into gratitude and pleasure by the supposed love she had won—yet, even while she scorned his false pretence of tenderness, that very disdain made Desirée shrink from the thought of injuring Oswald. She

was sadly troubled between the two sentiments, this poor little girl, who was French, and Madame Roche's child, and who consequently was much tempted by the dangerous intoxications of feeling. What was barely, simply, straightforwardly *right* might have satisfied Joanna; but Desirée could not help thinking of self-sacrifice and suffering for others, and all the girlish heroics common to her age. She could not live in their house and betray the family who had sheltered and were kind to her. She seemed to be tempted to avenge herself on Oswald by righting her mother at his expense; so for feeling's sake Desirée kept herself very unhappy, saying nothing to her mother of the discovery she had made, unable to resume her old cordiality with the Huntleys, ill at ease in her own mind, and sadly solitary and alone. If it had been any mere piece of information—or had the injury to be done been her own, Desirée would have seen what was right, plainly enough—

but as it was, she only thought of the cruel difference to the family of Melmar, which a word of hers might make, and of the selfish advantage to herself; and feeling conscious of the sacrifice she made for them—a sacrifice which nobody knew or appreciated, and which her conscience told her was even wrong—Desirée's mind grew embittered against them and all the world; and her poor little heart, uneasy, cross, and restless, consumed itself. As the struggle continued it made her ill and pale, as well as disturbed in mind; nobody could tell what ailed her—and even Aunt Jean, with her keen black eyes, could not read Desirée. She had “something on her mind.”

When one day she was startled by the arrival of a visitor, who asked to see *her*, and was put into a little waiting-room—a cold little room; without a fire, into which the March sunshine came chill, with no power of warmth in it—to wait for the little governess. De-

sirée was much amazed when she entered here to see the ruddy and comely face of the Mistress looking down upon her out of that black bonnet and widow's cap. It was a face full of faults, like its owner, but it was warm, bright, kind, full of an unsubduable spirit and intelligence, which had long ago attracted the eye of the vivacious little Frenchwoman, who, however, did not know Mrs. Livingstone, except by sight. They looked at each other in silence for the first moment—one amazed, and the other thoughtful—at last the Mistress spoke.

“Maybe I may not name you right,” she said; “I have nae knowledge of your tongue, and no' much of strangers, whatever place they come from; but my son Cosmo has seen your mother, in foreign parts, and that is the reason that brings me here.”

Desirée started violently; for the moment it seemed to her that this was her true and fit punishment. Her mother, whom she might have been with—who might have been here

had Desirée but spoken—was sick, was dying, and a stranger brought her the news! She grew very pale and clasped her little French hands in a passion of grief and self-upbraiding.

“She is ill!” cried Desirée, “ill, and I am here!”

“Na—no’ that I ken of,” said the Mistress; “stranger news than that; do you know of any bond between your mother and this house of Melmar? for that is what I am come to tell you of now, as maybe she has done herself before this time by hand of write.”

From pale, Desirée’s cheeks became burning red—her eyes sank beneath the look of the Mistress, her heart beat loud and wildly. Who had found her out? but she only turned her head aside with an uneasy movement and did not speak.

“I may guess you’ve heard tell of it by your face,” said the Mistress; “Melmar was left by will to my family—to my Huntley, the eldest and the heir—failing your mother, that

was thought to be lost. When he heard tell of that, my Cosmo would not rest till he was away on his travels seeking her. He's been through France and Italy, and I ken not what unlikely places a' to look for your mother, and at last he's found her; and she's coming home with little mair delay to be enfeoffed in her ain lands and prove herself the heir."

Bitter tears, which still had a certain relief in them, fell heavy from Desirée's eyes—*she* had known it all, but had not been the means of bringing this fortune to her mother. Her first impulse was not the delighted surprise which the Mistress expected, but she threw herself forward, after a moment's pause, at her visitor's feet, and seized her hand and cried—"Is it true?" with a vehemence which almost scandalised the Mistress. Cosmo's mother took her hand away involuntarily, but moved by the girl's tears laid it on her head, with a hasty but kindly motion.

"It's true," said the Mistress; "but being

true do you no' see you canna stay here? It is your mother's house—but though I hold this Me'mar for little better than a knave, yet I would not deceive him. You canna remain here when your mother's plea against him is begun. You should not stay another day without letting him ken who you are—and that is why I'm here to bid you come back with me to Norlaw."

"To Norlaw!" cried Desirée, faintly; she had no words to express her amazement at the invitation—her shame for the deceit which she had practised, and which was worse than anything the Mistress supposed possible—her strange humiliation in comparing herself, Oswald Huntley, everyone here, with Cosmo; somehow when this sudden burst of honest daylight fell upon her, Desirée felt herself as great a culprit as Melmar. Her place seemed with him and with his son, who knew the truth and concealed it—not with the generous and true hearts who relinquished their own expectations

to do justice to the wronged. In an agony of shame and self-disgust, Desirée hid her face in her hands—she was like Oswald Huntley whom she despised—she was not like Cosmo Livingstone nor Cosmo's mother.

“Ay—to Norlaw,” said the Mistress, ignorant of all this complication of feeling and with a softening in her voice; “Norlaw himself, that's gane, was near of kin to your mother; your grandfather, auld Melmar, was good to us and ours; my sons are your nearest kinsmen in these parts, and I'm their mother. It's mair for your honour and credit, and for your mother's, now when you ken, to be there than here. Come hame with me—you'll be kindly welcome at Norlaw.”

“And yet,” said Desirée, lifting her tearful eyes, and her face flushed with painful emotion; “and yet but for us, all this fortune would have gone to your son. Why are you kind to me? you ought to hate me.”

“Na!” said the Mistress, with proud love and triumph; “my Huntley is nane the waur—bairn, do you think the like of you could harm my son, that I should hate you? Na! he would work his fingers to the bone, and eat dry bread a’ his days before he would touch the inheritance of the widow—loss of land or loss of gear is no such loss to my Huntley that I should think ill of any person for its sake; and you’re my son’s kinswoman, and I’m his mother. Come hame with me till your ain mother is here.”

Without a word Desirée rose, dried her eyes, and held out her little hand to the Mistress, who took it doubtfully.

“I will be your daughter, your servant!” cried the little Frenchwoman, with enthusiasm; “I will come to learn what truth means. Wait but till I tell them. I will stay here no longer—I will do all that you say!”

In another moment she darted out of the room to prepare, afraid to linger. The Mistress looked after her, shaking her head.

“My daughter!” said the Mistress to herself, with a “humph!” after the words—and therewith she thought of Katie Logan; where was Katie now?

CHAPTER XI.

THE Melmar family had just concluded their luncheon, and were still assembled in the dining-room—all but Mrs. Huntley, who had not yet come down-stairs—when Desirée, flushed and excited from her interview with the Mistress, who waited for her in the little room, came hastily in upon the party; without noticing any of the others Desirée went up at once to the head of the house, who glared at her from behind his newspaper with his stealthy look of suspicion and watchfulness, as she advanced. Something in her look roused the suspicions of Mr. Huntley; he gave a quick,

angry glance aside at Oswald, as if inquiring the cause of the girl's excitement, which his son replied to with a side-look of sullen resentment and mortification—an unspoken angry dialogue which often passed between the father and son, for Melmar had imposed upon the young man the task of keeping Desirée in ignorance and happiness, a charge which Oswald, who had lost even the first novelty of amusing himself with her, found unspeakably galling, a constant humiliation. The little Frenchwoman came up rapidly to her host and employer—her cheek glowing, her eye shining, her small foot in its stout little winter-shoe sounding lightly yet distinctly on the carpet. They all looked at her with involuntary expectation. Something newly-discovered and strange shone in Desirée's face.

“Sir,” she said, quickly, “I come to thank you for being kind to me. I come because it is honest to tell you—I am going away.”

“Going away? What's wrong?” said

Melmar, with a little alarm ; “ come into my study, Mademoiselle, and we will put all right, never fear ; that little deevil Patricia has been at her again ! ”

Desirée did not wait for the burst of shrewish tears and exclamations which even Patricia’s extreme curiosity could not restrain. She answered quickly and with eagerness.

“ No, no, it is not Patricia—it is no one—it is news from home ; *you* know it already—you know it ! ” cried the girl. “ My mother ! She is poor ; I have had to come away from her to be a governess ; and you, alas, knew who she was, but said nothing of it to me ! ”

And involuntarily Desirée’s eyes sought, with a momentary indignant glance, the face of Oswald. He sat perfectly upright in his chair staring at her, growing red and white by turns ; red with a fierce, selfish anger, white with a baffled ungenerous shame, the ignominy, not of doing wrong, but of being found out. But even in that moment, in the mortifying

consciousness that this little girl had discovered and despised him—the revenge, or rather, for it was smaller—the spite of a mean mind, relieved itself at last in the false wooer's face. He turned to her with the bitterest sneer poor Desirée had ever seen. It seemed to say, “what cause but this could have induced me to notice *you*?” She did not care for him, but she thought she once had cared, and the sneer galled the poor little Frenchwoman to the heart.

“You are ungenerous—you!” she exclaimed, with a fiery vehemence and passion, “you delude me, and then you sneer. Shall I sneer at you, you sordid, you who wrong the widow! But no! If you had not known me I should have thanked you, and my mother would never, never have injured one who was good to Desirée; but now it is war, and I go. Farewell, Monsieur! you did not mean to be kind, but only to blind me—ah, I was wrong to speak of thanks—farewell!”

“What do you mean? who has deceived you?” cried Joanna, stepping forward and shaking Desirée somewhat roughly by the arm; “tell us all plain out what it is. I’m as sure as I can be that it’s him that’s wrong—and I think shame of Oswald to see him sit there, holding his tongue when he should speak; but you shanna look so at papa!”

And Joanna stood between Melmar and her excited little friend, thrusting the latter away, and yet holding her fast at arm’s length. Melmar put his arm on his daughter’s shoulder and set her quietly aside.

“Let us hear what this discovery is,” said Mr. Huntley; “who is your mother, Mademoiselle?”

At which cool question Desirée blazed for an instant into a flush of fury, but immediately shrunk with a cold dread of having been wrong and foolish. Perhaps, after all, they did not know—perhaps it was she who was about to heighten the misfortune of their loss and ruin

by ungenerous insinuations. Desirée paused and looked doubtfully in Melmar's face. He was watching her with his usual stealthy vigilance, looking, as usual, heated and fiery, curving his bushy, grizzled eyebrows over those keen catlike eyes. She gazed at him with a doubtful, almost imploring, look—was she injuring him?—had he not known?

“Come, Mademoiselle,” said Melmar, gaining confidence as he saw that the girl was a little daunted, “I have but a small acquaintance in your country. Who was your mother? It does not concern us much, so far as I can see, but still, let's hear. Oswald, my lad, can't you use your influence?—we are all waiting to hear.”

Oswald, however, had given up the whole business. He was pleased to be able to annoy his father and affront Desirée at last. Perhaps the rage and disappointment in his heart were in some sort a relief to him. He was at least free now to express his real

sentiments. He got up hastily from his chair, thrust it aside so roughly that it fell, and with a suppressed but audible oath, left the room. Then Desirée stood alone, with Melmar watching her, with Patricia crying spitefully close at hand, and even Joanna, her own friend, menacing and unfriendly. The poor girl did not know where to turn or what to do.

“Perhaps I am wrong,” she said, with a momentary falter. “There was no reason, it is true, why you should know mamma. And perhaps it is unkind and ungenerous of me. But—ah, Joanna, you guessed it when I did not know!—you said she must have been here—you who are honest and knew no harm! My mother was born at Melmar; it is hers, though she is poor—and she is coming home.”

“Coming home! this is but a poor story, Mademoiselle,” said Melmar. “*That* person died abroad long ago, and was mother to

nobody; but it's clever, by George! uncommonly clever. Her mother's coming home, and my land belongs to her! cool, that, I must say. Will you take Patricia for your lady's maid, Mademoiselle?"

"Ah, you sneer, you all sneer!" cried Desirée. "I could sneer too, if I were as guilty; but it is true, and you know it is true; you, who are our kinsman and should have cared for us—you, who have planned to deceive a poor stranger girl—you know it is true!"

"If he does," cried Joanna, "*you're* no' to stand there and tell him. He has been as kind to you as if you belonged to us—you don't belong to us—go—go away this moment. I will not let you stay here!"

And Joanna stamped her foot in the excess of her indignation and sympathy with her father, who looked on, through all this side-play of feelings, entirely unmoved. Poor little Desirée, on the contrary, was stung and

wounded beyond measure by Joanna's violence. She gave her one terrified, passionate look, half reproachful, half defiant, had hard ado to restrain a burst of girlish, half-weeping recrimination, and then turned round with one sob out of her poor little heart, which felt as though it would burst, and went away with a forlorn, heroic dignity out of the room. Poor Desirée would not have looked back for a kingdom, but she hoped to have been called back, for all that, and could almost have fallen down on the threshold with mortification and disappointment, when she found that no one interfered to prevent her withdrawal. The poor child was full of sentiment, but had indeed a tender heart withal. She could not bear to leave a house where she had lived so long after this fashion, and but for her pride, Desirée would have rushed back to fall into Joanna's arms, and beg everybody's pardon; but her pride sustained her in the struggle,

and at length vanquished her "feelings." Instead of rushing into Joanna's arms, she went to the Mistress, who still waited for her in the little room, and who had already been edified by hearing the fall of Oswald's chair, and seeing that gentleman, as he went furiously forth, kicking Patricia's lap-dog out of his way in the hall. The Mistress was human. She listened to those sounds and witnessed that sight with a natural, but not very amiable sentiment. She was rather pleased than otherwise to be so informed that she had brought a thunderbolt to Melmar.

"Let them bear it as they dow," said the Mistress, with an angry triumph; "neither comfort nor help to any mortal has come out of Me'mar for mony a day;" and she received the unfortunate little cause of all this commotion with more favour than before. Poor little Desirée came in with a quivering lip and a full eye, scarcely able to speak, but determined not to cry, which was

no small trial of resolution. The family of Melmar were her mother's enemies—some of them had tried to delude, and some had been unkind to herself—yet she knew them ; and the Mistress, who came to take her away, was a stranger. It was like going out once more into the unknown world.

So Desirée left Melmar, with a heart which fluttered with pain, anger, indignation, and a strange fear of the future, and the Mistress guided to Norlaw almost with tenderness the child of that Mary who had been a lifelong vexation to herself. They left behind them no small amount of dismay and anxiety, all the house vaguely finding out that something was wrong, while Joanna alone stood by her father's side, angry, rude, and careless of every one, bestowing her whole impatient regards upon him.

CHAPTER XII.

“HAPPENED!” said Bowed Jaacob, with a little scorn; “what should have happened?—you dinna ca’ this place in the world—naething, so far as I can tell, ever happens here except births and deaths and marriages; no muckle food for the intelleck in the like of them, though I wouldna say but they are necessary evils—na, laddie, there’s little to tell you here.”

“Not even about the Bill?” said Cosmo; “don’t forget I’ve been abroad and know nothing of what you’ve all been doing at home.”

“The Bill—humph! it’s a’ very weel for

the present," said Jaacob, with a twinkle of excitement in his one eye, "but as for thae politicians that ca' it a final measure, I wouldna gie that for them," and Jaacob snapped his fingers energetically. "It hasna made just a' that difference in the world ane would have expected either," he added, after a moment, a certain grim humour stealing into his grotesque face; "we're a' as nigh as possible just where we were. I'm no' what you would ca' a sanguine philosopher mysel'. I ken human nature gey weel; and I canna say I ever limited my ain faith to men that pay rent and taxes at so muckle a year; but it doesna make that difference ane might have looked for. A man's just the same man, callant—especially if he's a poor creature with nae nobility in him—though you do gie him a vote."

"Yet it's all the difference," cried Cosmo, with a little burst of boyish enthusiasm, "between the freeman and the slave!"

Jaacob eyed him grimly with his one eye. "It's a' the like of you ken," said the cynic, with a little contempt, and a great deal of superiority; "but you'll learn better if ye have the gift. There's a certain slave-class in ilka community—that's my conviction—and I wouldna say but we've just had the good fortune to licht upon them in thae ten-pound householders; oh, ay, laddie! let the aristocrats alane—they're as cunning as auld Nick where their ain interest's concerned, though nae better than as mony schoolboys in a' greater concerns. Catch them extending the suffrage to the real *men*, the backbane of the country! Would you say a coof in the town here, that marries some fool of a wife and gets a house of his ain, was a mair responsible person than *me*? Take it in ony class you please—yourself when you're aulder—na, Me'mar's son even, that's nearer my age than yours—ony Willie A' thing of a shopkeeper gets his vote—set him up! and his voice in the country

—but there's nae voice for you, my lad, if ye were ane-and-twenty the morn—nor for the young laird.”

The mention of this name instantly arrested Cosmo's indignation at his own political disabilities. “You say nothing has happened, Jaacob,” said Cosmo, “and yet here is this same young laird—what of him?—is he nothing?—he ought to rank high in Kirkbride.”

“Kirkbride and me are seldom of the same opinion,” said the little Cyclops, pushing his red cowl off his brow, and proceeding carelessly to his work, which had been suspended during the more exciting conversation. “I canna be fashed with weakly folk, women or men, though it's more natural in a woman. There's that bit thing of a sister of his with the pink e'en—he's ower like her to please me—but he's a virtuoso. I've been ca'ed one mysel. I've mair sympathy with a travelled man than thae savages here. You see I wouldna say but I might think better of baith

him and his father if I'm right in a guess o' mine; and I maun admit I'm seldom wrang when I take a thing into my mind."

"What is it?" asked Cosmo, eagerly.

"There's a young lass there, a governess," said Jaacob; "I couldna tell, if I was on my aith, what's out of the way about her. She's no' to ca' *very* bonnie, and as for wut, that's no' to be looked for in woman—and she's French, though I'm above prejudice on that score; but there's just something about her reminds me whiles of another person—though no mair to be compared in ae way than a gowan to a rose. I'm no' very easy attractit, which is plain to view, seeing, for a' I've met with, I'm no' a married man, and like enough never will be—but I maun admit I was taken with her mysel'."

Cosmo's face was crimson with suppressed anger and laughter both combined.

"How dare you!" he cried at last, with a violent and sudden burst of the latter impulse.

Bowed Jaacob turned round upon him, swelling to his fullest stature, and settling his red cowl on his head with an air of defiance, yet with a remote and grim consciousness of fun in the corner of his eye.

“Daur!” exclaimed the gallant hunchback. “Mind what you say, my lad! Women hae ae gift—they aye ken merit when they see it. I’ve kent a hantle in my day; but the bonniest of them a’ never said ‘How daur ye’ to me.”

“Very well, Jaacob,” said Cosmo, laughing; “I had forgotten your successes. But what of this young lady at Melmar, and your guess about Oswald Huntley? I know her, and I am curious to hear.”

“Just the lad yonder, if you will ken, is taken with her like me—that’s a’. I advise you to say ‘you daur’ to him,” said Jaacob, shortly, ending his words with a prolonged chorus of hammering.

An involuntary and unconscious exclamation.

tion burst from Cosmo's lips. He felt a burning colour rise over his face. Why, he could not tell; but his sudden shock of consternation and indignant resentment quite overpowered his composure for the moment—a thrill of passionate displeasure tingled through his heart. He was violently impatient of the thought, yet could not tell why.

“Whatfor no?” said Jaacob. “I’m nane of your romantic men mysel’—but I’ve just this ae thing to say, I despise a lad that thinks on the penny siller when a woman’s in the question. I wouldna tak a wife into the bargain with a wheen lands or a pickle gear, no’ if she was a king’s daughter—though she might be that, and yet be nae great things. Na, laddie, a man that has the heart to be real down-right in love has aye something in him, take my word for’t; and even auld Me’mar himsel’—

“The old villain!” cried Cosmo, violently; “the mean old rascal! That is what he meant by bringing her here. It was not

enough to wrong the mother, but he must delude the child! Be quiet, Jaacob; you don't know the old gray-haired villain! They ought to be tried for conspiracy, every one of them. Love!—it is profanation to name the name!”

“Eh, what's a' this?” cried Jaacob. “What does the callant mean by conspiracy?—what's about this lassie? She's gey bonnie—no' to say very, but gey—and she's just a governess. I respect the auld rascal, as you ca' him—and I wouldna say you're far wrang—for respecting his son's fancy. The maist o' thae moneyed men, I can tell ye, are as mean as an auld miser; therefore ye may say what ye like, my lad. I'm friends with Me'mar and his son the noo.”

Jaacob went on accordingly with his hammering, professing no notice of Cosmo, who, busy with his own indignant thoughts, did not even observe the vigilant, sidelong regards of the blacksmith's one eye. He scarcely even

heard what Jaacob said, as the village philosopher resumed his monologue, keeping always that solitary orb of vision intent upon his visitor. Jaacob, with all his enlightenment, was not above curiosity, and took a lively interest in the human character and the concerns of his fellow-men.

“And the minister’s dead,” said Jaacob. “For a man that had nae experience of life, he wasna such a fuil as he might have been. I’ve seen waur priests. The vulgar gave him honour, and it’s aye desirable to have a man in that capacity that can impose upon the vulgar;—and the bairns are away. I miss Katie Logan’s face about the town mysel’. She wasna in my style; but I canna deny her merits. Mair folks’ taste than mine has to be consulted. As for me, I have rather a notion of that French governess at Melmar. If there’s onything wrang there, gie a man a hint, Cosmo, lad. I’ve nae objection to cut Oswald Huntley out mysel’.”

“Find some other subject for your jests,” cried Cosmo, haughtily; “Mademoiselle Desirée’s name is not to be used in village gossip. I will not permit it while I am here.”

Jaacob turned round upon him with his eye on fire.

“Wha the deevil made you a judge?” said Jaacob; “what’s your madame-oiselle, or you either, that you’re ower guid for an honest man’s mouth? Confound your impidence! a slip of a callant that makes verses, do ye set up your face to me?”

At this point of the conversation Cosmo began to have a glimmering perception that Desirée’s name was quite as unsuitable in a quarrel with Jaacob as in any supposed village gossip; and that the dispute between himself and the blacksmith was on the whole somewhat ridiculous. He evaded Jaacob’s angry interrogatory with a half laugh of annoyance and embarrassment.

“You know, as well as I do, Jaacob, that one should not speak so of young ladies,” said Cosmo, who did not know what to say.

“Do I?” said Jaacob; “what would ye hae a man to talk about? they’re no muckle to crack o’ in the way o’ wisdom, but they’re bonnie objects in creation, as a’body maun allow. I would just like to ken though, my lad, what’s a’ your particular interest in this madame-oiselle?”

“Hush,” said Cosmo, whose cheeks began to burn; “she is my kinswoman; by this time perhaps she is with my mother in Norlaw; she is the child of—”

Cosmo paused, thinking to stop at that half-confidence. Jaacob stood staring at him, with his red cowl on one side, and his eye gleaming through the haze. As he gazed, a certain strange consciousness came to the hunchback’s face. His dwarf figure, which you could plainly see had the strength of a giant’s, his face swart and grotesque, his one gleaming

eye and puckered forehead, became suddenly softened by a kind of homely pathos which stole over them like a breath of summer wind. When he had gazed his full gaze of inquiry into Cosmo's face, Jaacob turned his head aside hurriedly.

“So you've found her!” said the blacksmith, with a low intensity of voice which made Cosmo respectful by its force and emotion; and when he had spoken he fell to upon his anvil with a rough and loud succession of blows which left no time for an answer. Cosmo stood beside him during this assault with a grave face, looking on at the exploits of the hammer as if they were something serious and important. The introduction of this new subject changed their tone in a moment.

When Jaacob paused to take breath he resumed the conversation, still in a somewhat subdued tone, though briskly enough.

“So she's aye living,” said Jaacob; “and

this is her daughter? A very little mair insight and I would have found it out mysel'. I aye thought she was like. And what have you done with her now you've found her? Is she to come hame?"

"Immediately," said Cosmo.

"She's auld by this time, nae doubt," said Jaacob, carelessly; "women are such tender gear, a'thing tells upon them. It's *their* beauty that's like a moth—the like of me wears langer; and so she's aye to the fore?—ay! I doubt she'll mind little about Me'mar, or the folk here about. I'm above prejudices mysel', and maybe the French are mair enlightened in twa three points than we are—I'll no' say—but I wouldna bring up youngsters to be natives of a strange country. So you found her out with your ain hand, callant, did you? You're a clever chield! and what's to be done when she comes hame?"

"She is the Lady of Melmar, as she always was," said Cosmo, with a little pride.

“And what’s to become of the auld family—father and son—no’ to say of the twa sisters and the auld auntie,” said Jaacob, with a grim smile. “So that’s the story! Confound them a’! I’m no’ a man to be cheated out of my sympathies. And I’m seldom wrang—so if you’ve ony thoughts that way, callant, I advise ye to relinquish them. Ye may be half-a-hunder’ poets if ye like, and as mony mair to the back o’ that, but if the Huntley lad liket her she’ll stick to him.”

“That is neither your concern nor mine!” cried Cosmo, loftily. But, as Jaacob laughed and went on, the lad began to feel unaccountably aggravated, to lose his temper, and make angry answers, which made his discomfiture capital fun to the little giant. At length, Cosmo hurried away. It was the same day on which the Mistress paid her visit to Desirée, and Cosmo could not help feeling excited and curious about the issue of his mother’s invitation. Thoughts which made

the lad blush came into his mind as he went slowly over Tyne, looking up at that high bank, from which the evening sunshine, chill, yet bright, was slowly disappearing—where the trees began to bud round the cottages, and where the white gable of the manse still crowned the peaceful summit—that manse where Katie Logan, with her elder-sister smile, was no longer mistress. Somehow, there occurred to him a wandering thought about Katie, who was away—he did not know where—and Huntley, who was at the ends of the earth. Huntley had not actually lost anything, Cosmo said to himself, yet Huntley seemed disinherited and impoverished to the obstinate eyes of fancy. Cosmo could not have told either why he associated his brother with Katie Logan, now an orphan and absent, yet he did so involuntarily. He thought of Huntley and Katie, both poor, far separated, and perhaps never to meet again; he thought of Cameron in his sudden trouble; and then

his thoughts glided off, with a little bitterness, to that perverse woman's love, which always seemed to cling to the wrong object. Madame Roche herself, perhaps, first of all, though the very fancy seemed somehow a wrong to his mother, Marie fretting peevishly for her French husband, Desirée giving her heart to Oswald Huntley. The lad turned upon his heel with a bitter impatience, and set off for a long walk in the opposite direction as these things glided into his mind. To be sure, he had nothing to do with it; but still it was all wrong—a distortion of nature—and it galled him in his thoughts.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE presence of Desirée made no small sensation in the house of Norlaw, which did not quite know what to make of her. The Mistress herself, after that first strange impulse of kin and kindness which prompted her to bring the young stranger home, relapsed into her usual ways, and did not conceal from either son or servant that she expected to be "fashed" by the little Frenchwoman; while Marget, rather displeased that so important a step should be taken without her sanction, and mightily curious to know the reason, was highly impatient at first of Desirée's name and

nation, and discontented with her presence here.

“I canna faddom the Mistress,” said Marget, angrily; “what she’s thinking upon, to bring a young flirt of a Frenchwoman into this decent house, and ane of our lads at home, is just beyond me. Do I think her bonnie? No’ me! She’s French, and I daur to say, a papisher to the boot; but the lads will, take my word for it—callants are aye keen about a thing that’s outray. I’m just as thankfu’ as I can be that Huntley’s at the other end of the world—there’s nae fears of our Patie—and Cosmo, you see, he’s ower young.”

This latter proposition Marget repeated to herself as she went about her dairy. It did not seem an entirely satisfactory statement of the case, for if Cosmo was too young to be injured, Desirée was also a couple of years his junior, and could scarcely be supposed old enough to do any great harm.

“Ay, but it’s in them frae their cradle,” said the uncharitable Marget, as she rinsed her great wooden bowls and set them ready for the milk. The honest retainer of the family was quite disturbed by this new arrival. She could not “get her mouth about the like of thae outlandish names,” so she never called Desirée anything but Miss, which title in Marget’s lips, unassociated with a Christian name, was by no means a title of high respect, and she grumbled, as she was quite unwont to grumble, over the additional trouble of another inmate. Altogether Marget was totally dissatisfied.

While Desirée, suddenly dropped into this strange house, every custom of which was strange to her, and where girlhood and its occupations were unknown, felt somewhat forlorn and desolate, it must be confessed, and sometimes even longed to be back again in Melmar, where there were many women, and where her pretty needleworks and graceful

accomplishments were not reckoned frivolous, the Mistress was busy all day long, and when she had ended her household employments, sat down with her work-basket to mend shirts or stockings with a steadiness which did not care to accept any assistance.

“Thank you, they’re for my son, Huntley ; I like to do them a’ mysel’,” she would answer to Desirée’s offer of aid. “Much obliged to you, but Cosmo’s stockings, poor callant, are no work for the like of you.” In like manner, Desirée was debarred from the most trifling assistance in the house. Marget was furious when she ventured to wash the Mistress’s best tea-service, or to sweep the hearth on occasion.

“Na, miss, we’re no’ come to that pass in Norlaw that a stranger visitor needs to file her fingers,” said Marget, taking the brush from Desirée’s hand ; so that, condemned to an uncomfortable idleness in the midst of busy people, and aware that the Mistress’s

“Humph!” on one occasion, at least, referred to her pretty embroideries, poor little Desirée found little better for it than to wander round and round the old castle of Norlaw, and up the banks of Tyne, where, to say truth, Cosmo liked nothing better than to wander along with her, talking about her mother, about St. Ouen, about his travels, about everything in earth and heaven.

And whether Cosmo was “ower young” remains to be seen.

But Desirée had not been long in Norlaw when letters came from Madame Roche, one to the Mistress, brief yet effusive, thanking that reserved Scottish woman for her kindness to “my little one;” another to Cosmo, in which he was called my child and my friend so often, that though he was pleased, he was yet half ashamed to shew the epistle to his mother; and a third to Desirée herself. This was the most important of the three, and contained Madame Roche’s scheme of poetic

justice. This is what the Scotch-French mother said to little Desirée :—

“ My child, we, who have been so poor, are coming to a great fortune. It is as strange as a romance, and we can never forget how it has come to us. Ah, my Desirée, what noble hearts ! what princely young men ! Despite of our good fortune, my heart bleeds for the generous Huntley, for it is he who is disinherited. Must this be, my child ? he is far away, he knows not we are found— he will return to find his inheritance gone. But I have trained my Desirée to love honor and virtue, and to be generous as the Livingstones. Shall I say to you, my child, what would glad my heart most to see ? Our poor Marie has thrown away her happiness and her liberty ; she cannot reward any man, however noble ; she cannot make any compensation to those whom we must supplant, and her heart wanders after that vagabond, that abandoned one ! But my Desirée is

young—only a child, and has not begun to think of lovers. My love, keep your little heart safe till Huntley Livingstone returns—your mother bids you, Desirée! Look not at any one, think not of any one, till you have seen this noble Huntley. It is the only return you can give—nay, my little one! it is all *I* can do to prove that I am not ungrateful. This Melmar, which I had lost and won without knowing it, will be between Marie and you when I die. You cannot give it all back to your kinsman, but he will think that half which your sister has, doubly made up, my child, when I put into his hand the hand of my Desirée; and we shall all love each other, and be good and happy, like a fairy tale.

“This is your mamma’s fondest wish, my pretty one; you must keep your heart safe, you must love Huntley, you must give him back half of the inheritance. My poor Marie and I shall live together, and you shall be near us,

and then no one will be injured, but all shall have justice. I would I had another little daughter for the good Cosmo who found me out in St. Ouen. I love the boy, and he shall be with us when he pleases, and we will do for him all we can. But keep your heart safe, my Desirée, for Huntley, and thus let us reward him when he comes home ! ”

Poor Madame Roche ! she little knew what a fever of displeasure and indignation this pretty sentimental letter of her's would rouse in her little daughter's heart. Desirée tore the envelope in pieces in her first burst of vexation, which was meant to express by similitude that she would have torn the letter, and blotted out its injunction if she dared. She threw the epistle itself out of her hands as if it had stung her. Not that Desirée's mind was above those sublime arrangements of poetic justice, which in this inconsequent world are always so futile ; but, somehow, a plan which might have looked pretty enough

had it concerned another, filled Madame Roche's independent little daughter with the utmost shame and mortification when she herself was the heroine.

“Let him take it all,” she cried out, half aloud to herself, in her little chamber. “Do I care for it? I will work—I will be a governess—but I will not sell myself to this Huntley—no, not if I should die!”

And having so recorded her determination, poor little Desirée sat down on the floor and had a hearty cry, and after that thought with a girlish effusion of sympathy of poor Cosmo, who, after all, had done it all, yet whom no one thought of compensating. When straightway there came into Desirée's heart some such bitter thoughts of justice and injustice as once had filled the mind of Cosmo Livingstone. Huntley!—what had Huntley done that Madame Roche should dedicate her—*her*, an unwilling Andromeda, to compensate this unknown monster; and Desirée sprang up and

stamped her little foot, and clapped her hands, and vowed that no force in the world, not even her mother's commands, should compel her to shew her mother's gratitude by becoming Huntley's wife.

A most unnecessary passion ;—for there was Katie Logan all the time, unpledged and unbetrothed it is true, but thinking her own thoughts of some one far away, who might possibly break in some day upon those cares of elder-sisterhood, which made her as important as a many-childed mother, even in those grave days of her orphan youth; and there was Huntley in his hut in the bush, not thriving over well, poor fellow, thinking very little of Melmar, but thinking a great deal of that manse parlour where the sun shone and Katie darned her children's stockings, a scene which always would shine, and never could dim out of the young man's recollection. Poor Madame Roche, with her pretty plan of compensation, and poor Desirée, rebelliously re-

sistant to it, how much trouble they might both have saved themselves, could some kind fairy have shown to them a single peep of Huntley Livingstone's solitary thoughts.

CHAPTER XIV.

FIVE years had made countless revolutions in human affairs, and changed the order of things in more houses than Melmar, but had not altered the fair face of the country, when, late upon a lovely June evening, two travellers alighted from the coach at the door of the Norlaw Arms. They were not anglers, nor tourists, though they were both bronzed and bearded. The younger of the two looked round him with eager looks of recognition, directing his glances to particular points—a look very different from the stranger's vague gaze at everything, which latter was in the

eyes of his companion. At the manse, where the white gable was scarcely visible through the thick foliage of the great pear-tree—at the glimmering twilight path through the fields to Norlaw—even deep into the corner of the village street, where Bowed Jaacob, with his red cowl pushed up from his bullet-head behind, stood, strongly relieved against the glow within, at the smithy-door. To all these familiar features of the scene, the new-comer turned repeated and eager glances. There was an individual recognition in every look he gave as he sprang down from the top of the coach, and stood by with a certain friendly, happy impatience and restlessness, not easy to describe, while the luggage was being unpacked from the heavy-laden public conveyance. That was a work of time. Even now, in railway days, it is not so easy a matter to get one's portmanteau embarked or disembarked at Kirkbride station as one might suppose; and the helpers at the Norlaw Arms were innocent

of the stimulus and external pressure of an express train. They made a quantity of bustle, but did their business at their leisure, while this new arrival, whom none of them knew, kept looking at them all with their names upon his lips, and laughter and kindness in his eyes. He had "seen the world" since he last saw these leisurely proceedings at the Norlaw Arms—he had been on the other side of this big globe since he last stood in the street of Kirkbride; and the young man could not help feeling himself a more important person now than when he set out by this same conveyance some seven years ago to make his fortune and his way in the world.

Huntley Livingstone, however, had not made his fortune; but he had made what he thought as much of—a thousand pounds; and having long ago, with a tingle of disappointment and a flush of pride, renounced all hopes of the Melmar which belonged to Madame

Roche, had decided, when this modest amount of prosperity came to him, that he could not do better than return to his homely little patrimony, and lay out his Australian gains upon the land at home. It is true we might have told all this much more dramatically by bringing home the adventurer unexpectedly to his mother, and leaving him to announce his riches by word of mouth. But Huntley was too good a son to make dramatic surprises. When he made his thousand pounds, he wrote the Mistress word of it instantly—and he was not unexpected. The best room in Norlaw was prepared a week ago. It was only the day and hour of his return which the Mistress did not know.

So Huntley stood before the Norlaw Arms, while the grey twilight, which threw no shadows, fell over that leaf-covered gable of the manse; and gradually the young man's thoughts fell into reverie even in the moment and excitement of arrival. Katie Logan! she

was not bound to him by the faintest far-away implication of a promise. It was seven years now since Huntley bade her farewell. Where was the orphan elder-sister, with her little group of orphan children now?

Huntley's companion was as much unlike himself as one human creature could be unlike another. He was a Frenchman, with shaved cheeks and a black moustache, lank, long locks of black hair falling into one of his eyes, and a thin, long, oval face. He was in short—except that he had no *habit de bal*, no white waistcoat, no bouquet in his button-hole—a perfect type of the ordinary Frenchman whom one sees in every British concert-room as the conductor of an orchestra, or the player of a fiddle. This kind of man does not look a very fine specimen of humanity in traveller's dress, and with the dust of a journey upon him. Huntley was covered with dust, but Huntley did not look dirty; Huntley was roughly attired, had a beard, and was

somewhat savage in his appearance, but, notwithstanding, was a well-complexioned pure-skinned Briton, who bore the soil of travel upon his surface only, which was not at all the case with his neighbour. This stranger, however, was sufficiently familiar with his travelling-companion to strike him on the shoulder and dispel his thoughts about Katie.

“Where am I to go? to this meeserable little place?” asked the Frenchman, speaking perfectly good English, but dwelling upon the adjective by way of giving it emphasis, and pointing at the moment with his dirty forefinger, on which he wore a ring, to the Nor'law Arms.

Huntley was a Scotsman, strong in the instinct of hospitality, but he was at the same time the son of a reserved mother, and hated the intrusion of strangers at the moment of his return.

“It's a very good inn of its kind,” said Huntley, uneasily, turning round to look at it. The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders,

and eyed the respectable little house with contempt.

“Ah! bah! of its kind—I believe it,” said the stranger, kicking away a poor little dog which stood looking on with serious interest, and waiting for the fresh start of the coach; “I perceive your house is a chateau, an estate, my friend,” he continued; “is there no little room you can spare a comrade? I come on a good errand, the most virtuous, the most honest! Madame, your mother, will give me her blessing—I go to seek my wife.”

Huntley turned away to look after his trunks, but the stranger followed with a pertinacity which prevailed over Huntley. He gave a reluctant invitation at last, was restored to better humour by a sudden recognition from the landlord of the Norlaw Arms, and after pausing to receive the greetings and congratulations of everybody within hearing, set off, hastily accompanied by the Frenchman. Huntley endured his companion with great

impatience, especially as they came within sight of home, and all the emotions connected with that familiar place rushed to the young man's heart and to his eyes. The Frenchman's voice ran on, an impertinent babble, while the gray old castle, the quiet house, with its pale vane pointing to the north, and the low hill-side, rustling to its summit with green corn, lay once more before the eyes which loved them better than any other landscape in the world. Then a figure became visible going in and out at the kitchen-door, a tall, angular form, with the "kilted" gown, the cap with its string pinned back, the little shawl over the shoulders, all of which homely details Huntley remembered so well. The young man quickened his pace, and held out his hands unconsciously. And then Marget saw him; she threw down her milk-pail, arched her hand over her eyes for a moment to gaze at him and assure herself, and then with a loud, wild exclamation, rushed into the house. Huntley remembered

no more, either guest or hospitality ; he rushed down the little bank which intervened, splashed through the shallow Tyne, too much excited to take the bridge, and reached the door of Norlaw, as the Mistress, with her trembling hands, flung it unsteadily open to look for herself, and see that Marget was wrong. Too much joy almost fainted the heart of the Mistress within her ; she could not speak to him—she could only sob out big, slow sobs, which fell echoing through the still air with the strangest pathos of thanksgiving. Huntley had come home.

“ So you werna wrang, as it happened,” said the Mistress, with dignity, when she had at last become familiar with the idea of Huntley’s return, and had contented her eye with gazing on him ; “ you werna wrang after a’ ; but I certainly thought that myself, and me only, would be the person to get the first sight of my bairn. He minded you too, very well, Marget, which was less wonder

than you minding him, and him such a grown man with such a black beard. I didna believe ye, it's true, but it was a' because I thought no person could mind upon him to ken him at a distance, but only me."

"Mind!" cried Marget, moved beyond ordinary patience; "did I no' carry the bairn in my arms when he was just in coats and put his first breeks upon him! Mind!—me that have been about Norlaw House seven-and-twenty years come Martinmas—wha should mind if it wasna me?"

But though this speech was almost concluded before the Mistress left the kitchen, it was not resented. The mother's mind was too full of Huntley to think of anything else. She returned to the dining-parlour, where, in the first effusion of her joy, she had placed her first-born in his father's chair, and began to spread the table with her own hands for his refreshment. As yet she had scarcely taken any notice of the Frenchman. Now his voice

startled her ; she looked at him angrily, and then at her son. He was not quite such a person as fathers and mothers love to see in the company of their children.

“No doubt, Huntley,” said the Mistress, at last, with a little impatient movement of her head—“no doubt this gentleman is some great friend of yours, to come hame with you the very first day, and you been seven years from home.”

“Ah ! my good friend Huntley is troubled, madame,” interposed the subject of her speech ; “I have come to seek my wife. I have heard she is in Scotland—she is near ; and I did ask for one little room in his castle rather than go to the inn in the village. For I must ask you for my wife.”

“Your wife ? what should I know about strange men’s wives ?” said the Mistress ; “Huntley’s friends have a good right to be welcome at Norlaw ; but to tell the truth he’s new come home and I’m little accustomed to

strangers. You used to ken that, Huntley, laddie, though you've maybe forgotten now ; seven years is a long time."

"My wife," resumed the Frenchman, "came to possess a great fortune in this country. I have been a traveller, madame. I have come with your son from the other side of the world. I have been *bon camarade*. But see ! I have lost my wife. Since I am gone she has found a fortune, she has left her country, she is here, if I knew where to find her. Madame Pierrot, my wife."

"I'm little acquaint with French ladies," said the Mistress, briefly ; but as she spoke she turned from her occupation to look full at her strange visitor with eyes a little curious and even disquieted. The end of her investigation was a "humph," which was sufficiently significant. After that she turned her back upon him and went on with her preparations, looking somewhat stormy at Huntley. Then her impatience displayed itself under other

disguises. In the first place she set another chair for him at the table.

“Take you this seat, Huntley, my man,” said the Mistress; “and the foot of the table, like the master of the house; for doubtless Norlaw is yours for any person it’s your pleasure to bring into it. Sit in to the table, and eat your supper like a man; and I’ll put *this* back out of the way.”

Accordingly, when Huntley rose, his mother wheeled back the sacred chair which she had given him in her joy. Knowing how innocent he was of all friendship with his companion, Huntley almost smiled at this sign of her displeasure, but, when she left the room, followed her to explain how it was.

“I asked him most ungraciously and unwillingly,” said poor Huntley; “don’t be displeased on account of that fellow; he came home with me from Australia, and I lost sight of him in London, only to find him again coming here by the same coach. I

actually know nothing about him except his name."

"But I do," said the Mistress.

"You, mother?"

"Ay, just me, mother; and a vagabond he is, as ony person may well see," said the Mistress; "I ken mair than folk think; and now go back for a foolish bairn as you are, in spite of your black beard. Though I never saw the blackguard before, a' my days, I'll tell you his haill story this very night."

CHAPTER XV.

It was Saturday night, and in little more than an hour after Huntley's return, Cosmo had joined the little family circle. Cosmo was five years older by this time, three-and-twenty years old, a man and not a boy; such at least was his own opinion—but his mother and he were not quite so cordial and united as they had been. Perhaps, indeed, it was only while her sons were young, that a spirit so hasty and arbitrary as that of the Mistress could keep in harmony with so many independent minds; but her youngest son had disappointed and grieved her. Cosmo had

relinquished those studies which for a year or two flattered his mother with the hope of seeing her son a minister and pillar of the Church. The Mistress thought, with some bitterness, that his travels had permanently unsettled her boy ; even his verses began to flag by this time, and it was only once in three or four months that Mrs. Livingstone received, with anything like satisfaction, her copy of the *Auld Reekie Magazine*. She did not know what he was to be, or how he was to live ; at present he held “ a situation ”—of which his mother was bitterly contemptuous—in the office of Mr. Todhunter, and exercised the caprices of his more fastidious taste in a partial editorship of the little magazine, which had already lost its first breath of popularity. And though he came out from Edinburgh dutifully every Saturday to spend the day of rest with his mother, that exacting and impatient household ruler was very far from being satisfied. She

received him with a certain angry, displeased affectionateness, and even in the presence of her newly-arrived son, kept a jealous watch upon the looks and words of Cosmo. Huntley could not help watching the scene with some wonder and curiosity. Sitting in that well-remembered room, which the two candles on the table lighted imperfectly, with the soft night air blowing in through the open window in the corner, from which the Mistress had been used to watch the kitchen door, and at which now her son sat looking out upon the old castle and the calm sky above it, where the stars blossomed out one by one—Huntley watched his mother, placing, from mere use and wont, her work-basket on the table, and seating herself to the work which she was much too impatient to make any progress with—launching now and then a satirical and utterly incomprehensible remark at the Frenchman, who yawned openly, and repented his contempt for the Norlaw Arms—

sometimes asking hasty questions of Cosmo, which he answered not without a little kindred impatience—often rising to seek something or lay something by, and pausing as she passed by Huntley's chair to linger over him with a half expressed, yet inexpressible tenderness. There was change, yet there was no change in the Mistress. She had a tangible reason for some of the old impatience which was natural to her character, but that was all.

At length the evening came to an end. Huntley's uncomfortable companion sauntered out to smoke his cigar, and coming back again was conducted up-stairs to his room, with a rather imperative politeness. Then the Mistress, coming back, stood at the door of the dining-parlour, looking in upon her sons. The shadows melted from her face, and her heart swelled, as she looked at them. Pride, joy, tenderness contended with her, and got the better for a moment.

“God send you be as well in your hearts as you are to look upon, laddies!” she said, hurriedly; and then came in to sit down at the table and call them nearer for their first precious family hour of mutual confidence and reunion.

“Seven years, Huntley? I canna think it’s seven years—though they’ve been long enough and slow enough, every one; but we’ve thriven at Norlaw,” said the Mistress, proudly. “There’s guid honest siller at the bank, and better than siller in the byre, and no’ a mortal man to call this house his debtor, Huntley Livingstone! which is a change from the time you gaed away.”

“Thanks to your cares and labours, mother,” said Huntley.

“Thanks to no such thing. Am I a hired servant that ye say such words to me? but thanks to Him that gives the increase,” said the Mistress; “though we’re no’ like to show our gratitude as I once thought,” and

she threw a quick side-glance at Cosmo ;
“but Huntley, my man, have ye naething to
tell of yourself?”

“Much more to ask than to tell,” said
Huntley, growing red and anxious, but
making an effort to control himself, “for you
know all of the little that has happened to
me already, mother. Thankless years enough
they have been. To think of working hard so
long and gaining nothing, and to make all
that I have at last by what looks like a mere
chance!”

“So long! What does the laddie call
long?—many a man works a lifetime,” said
the Mistress, “and even *then* never gets the
chance; and it’s only the like of you at your
time of life that’s aye looking for something
to happen. For them that’s out of their
youth, life’s far canniest when naething
happens—though it is hard to tell how that
can be either where there’s bairns. There’s
been little out of the way here since this

callant, Cosmo, gaed out on his travels, and brought his French lady and a' her family hame. Me'mar's in new hands now, Huntley; and you'll have to gang to see them, no doubt, and they'll make plenty wark about you. It's their fashion. I'm no much heeding about their ways mysel', but Cosmo has little else in his head, night or day."

Cosmo blushed in answer to this sudden assault; but the blush was angry and painful, and his brother eagerly interposed to cover it.

"The ladies that took Melmar from us!—let us hear about them, mother," said Huntley.

The Mistress turned round suddenly to the door to make sure it was closed.

"Take my word for it," she said, solemnly, and with emphasis, "yon's the man that's married upon Marie."

"Who?" cried Cosmo, starting to his feet, with eager interest.

The Mistress eyed him severely for a moment.

“When you’re done making antics, Cosmo Livingstone, I’ll say my say,” said his offended mother—“you may be fond enough of French folk, without copying their very fashion. I would have mair pride if it was me.”

With an exclamation of impatience, which was not merely impatience, but covered deeply wounded feelings, Cosmo once more resumed the seat which he thrust hastily from the table. His mother glanced at him once more. If she had a favourite among her children, it was this her youngest son, yet she had a perverse momentary satisfaction in perceiving how much annoyed he was.

“Yon’s the man!” said the Mistress, with a certain triumphant contempt in her voice; “just the very same dirty Frenchman that Huntley brought to the house this day. I’m no mista’en. He’s wanting his wife, and he’ll

find her, and I wish her muckle joy of her bonnie bargain. That's just the ill-doing vagabond of a husband that's run away from Marie!"

"Mother," said Cosmo, eagerly, "you know quite well how little friendship I have for Marie—"

When he had got so far he stopped suddenly. His suggestion to the contrary, was almost enough to make his mother inform the stranger at once of the near neighbourhood of his wife, and Cosmo paused only in time.

"The mair shame to you," said the Mistress, indignantly, "she's a suffering woman, ill and neglected; and I warn you baith I'm no' gaun to send this blackguard to Melmar to fright the little life there is out of a pair dying creature. He shall find out his wife for his ain hand; he shanna be indebted to me."

"It is like yourself, mother, to determine

so," said Cosmo, gratefully. "Though, if she had the choice, I daresay she would decide otherwise, and perhaps Madame Roche too. You say I am always thinking of them, but certainly I would not trust to their wisdom—neither Madame Roche nor Marie."

"But really—have some pity upon my curiosity—who is Marie, mother?" cried Huntley, "and who is her husband, and what is it about altogether? I know nothing of Pierrot, and I don't believe much good of him; but how do *you* know?"

"Marie is the French lady's eldest daughter—Madame would have married her upon you, Huntley, my man, if she had been free," said the Mistress, "and I woudna say but she's keeping the little one in her hand for you to make up for your loss, as she says. But Maree she settled for hersel' lang before our Cosmo took news of their land to them; and it just shows what kind of folk they were when she took up with the like of this lad.

I've little skill in Frenchmen, that's true; if he's not a common person, and a blackguard to the boot, I'm very sair deceived in my e'en; but whatever else he is, he's her man, and that I'm just as sure of as mortal person can be. But she's a poor suffering thing that will never be well in this world, and I'll no' send a wandering vagabond to startle her out of her life."

"What do you say, madame," screamed a voice at the door; "you know my wife—you know her—Madame Pierrot?—and you will keep her husband from her? What! you would take my Marie?—you would marry her to your son because she is rich? but I heard you—oh, I heard you! I go to fly to my dear wife."

The Mistress rose, holding back Huntley, who was advancing indignantly:—

"Fly away, Mounseer," said Mrs. Livingstone, "you'll find little but closed doors this night; and dinna stand there swearing and

screaming at me ; you may gang just when you please, and welcome ; but we'll have none of your passions here ; be quiet, Huntley—he's no' a person to touch with clean fingers—are you hearing me, man ? Gang up to your bed, if you please, this moment. I give you a night's shelter because you came with my son ; or if you'll no' go up the stairs go forth out of my doors, and dinna say another word to me—do you hear ? ”

Pierrot stood at the door, muttering French curses as fast as he could utter them ; but he did hear notwithstanding. After a little parley with Huntley, he went up-stairs, three steps at a time, and locked himself into his chamber.

“ He's just as wise,” said the Mistress, “ but it's no' very safe sleeping with such a villain in the house ; ” which was so far true that, excited and restless, she herself did not sleep, but lay broad awake all night thinking of Huntley and Cosmo—thinking of all the

old grief and all the new vexations which Mary of Melmar had brought to her own life.

CHAPTER XVI.

FOR these five years had not been so peaceful as their predecessors—the face of this home country was much changed to some of the 'old dwellers here. Dr. Logan, old and well-beloved, was in his quiet grave, and Katie and her orphans, far out of the knowledge of the parish which once had taken so entire an interest in them, were succeeded by a new minister's new wife, who had no children yet to gladden the manse so long accustomed to young voices ; and the great excitement of the revolution at Melmar had scarcely yet subsided in this quiet place ;—least of all, had it

subsided with the Mistress, who, spite of a lurking fondness for little Desirée, could not help finding in the presence of Mary of Melmar a perpetual vexation. Their French habits, their language, their sentiments and effusiveness—the peevish, invalid condition of Marie, and even the sweet temper of Madame Roche, aggravated, with a perennial agitation, the hasty spirit of Mrs. Livingstone. She could not help hearing everything that everybody said of them, could not help watching with a rather unamiable interest the failings and shortcomings of the family of women who had dispossessed her son. And then her other son—her Cosmo, of whom she had been so proud—could see nothing that did not fascinate and attract him in this little French household. So, at least, his mother thought. She could have borne an honest falling in love, and “put up with” the object of it, but she could not tolerate the idea of her son paying tender court to another mother, or of sharing

with any one the divided honours of her maternal place. This fancy was gall and bitterness to the Mistress, and had an unconscious influence upon almost everything she did or said, especially on those two days in every week which Cosmo spent at Norlaw.

“It’s but little share his mother has in his coming,” she said to herself, bitterly; and even Marget found the temper of the Mistress rather trying upon the Sundays and Mondays; while between Cosmo and herself there rose a cloud of mutual offence and exasperation, which had no cause in reality, but seemed almost beyond the reach of either explanation or peace-making now.

The Sabbath morning rose bright and calm over Norlaw. When Huntley woke, the birds were singing in that special, sacred, sweetest festival of theirs which is held when most of us are sleeping, and seems somehow all the tenderer for being to themselves and God; and when Huntley rose to look out, his heart

sang like the birds. There stood the Strength of Norlaw, all aglist with early morning dews and sunshine, wall-flowers tufting its old walls, sweet wild-roses looking out, like adventurous children, from the vacant windows, and the green turf mantling up upon its feet. There ran Tyne, a glimmer of silver among the grass and the trees. Yonder stretched forth the lovely country-side, with all its wealthy undulations, concealing the hidden house of Melmar among its woods. And to the south, the mystic Eildons, pale with the ecstasy of the night, stood silent under the morning light, which hung no purple shadows on their shoulders. Huntley gazed out of his window till his eyes filled. He was too young to know, like his mother, that it was best when nothing happened ; and this event of his return recalled to him all the events of his life. He thought of his father, and that solemn midnight burial of his among the ruins ; he thought of his own wanderings, his hope and loss of wealth,

his present modest expectations ; and then a brighter light and a more wistful gaze came to Huntley's face. He, too, was no longer to be content with home and mother ; but a sober tenderness subdued the young man's ardour when he thought of Katie Logan among her children. Seven years ! It was a long trial for an unpledged love. Had no other thoughts come into her good heart in the meantime ? or, indeed, did she ever think of Huntley save in her elder-sisterly kindness as she thought of everybody ? When this oft-discussed question returned to him, Huntley could no longer remain quiet at his window. He hastily finished his toilette, and went down-stairs, smiling to himself as he unbolted and unlocked the familiar door—those very same bolts and locks which had so often yielded to his restless fingers in those days when Huntley was never still. Now, by this time, he had learned to keep himself quiet occasionally ; but the old times flashed back upon him strangely, full of

smiles and tears, in the unfastening of that door.

Thinking certainly that at so early an hour he himself was the first person astir in Norlaw, Huntley was greatly amazed to find Cosmo—no longer choosing his boyish seat of meditation in the window of the old castle—wandering restlessly about the ruins. And Cosmo did not seem quite pleased to see *him*; that was still more remarkable. The elder brother could not help seeing again, as in a picture, the delicate fair boy, with his long arms thrust out of the jacket which was too small for him, with his bursts of boyish vehemence and enthusiasm, his old chivalrous championship of the unknown Mary, his tenacious love for the hereditary Norlaw. Huntley had not seen the boy grow up into the man—he had not learned to moderate his protecting love for the youngest child into the steady brotherly affection which should now acknowledge the man as an equal. Cosmo was still “my father’s

son," the youngest, the dearest, the one to be shielded from trouble, in the fancy of the elder brother. Yet, there he stood, as tall as Huntley, his childish delicacy of complexion gone, his fair hair crisp and curled, his dark eyes stormy and full of personal emotions, his foot impatient and restless, the step of a man already burdened with cares of his own. And, reluctant to meet his brother, his closest friend, and once his natural guardian! Huntley thrust his arm into Cosmo's, and drew him round the other side of the ruins.

"Do you really wish to avoid me?" said the elder brother, with a pang. "What is wrong, Cosmo? — can you not tell me?"

"Nothing is wrong, so far as I am aware," said Cosmo, with some haughtiness. His first impulse seemed to be to draw away his arm from his brother's, but, if it was so, he restrained himself, and, instead, walked on with a cold, averted face, which was almost more

painful than any act to the frank spirit of Huntley.

“I will ask no more questions then,” said Huntley, with some impatience; “I ought to remember how long I have been gone, and how little you know of me. What is to be done about this Pierrot? So far as I can glean from what my mother says, he will be an unwelcome guest at Melmar. What ground has my mother for supposing him connected with Madame Roche? What sort of a person is Madame Roche? What have you all been doing with yourselves? I have a hundred questions to ask about everybody. Even Patie no one speaks of; if nothing is wrong you are all strangely changed since I went away.”

“I suppose the *all* means myself; I am changed since you went away,” said Cosmo, moodily.

“Yes, you are changed, Cosmo; I don’t understand it; however, never mind, you can

tell the reason why when you know me better," said Huntley, "but, in the meantime, how is Patie, and where? And what about this Madame Roche?"

"Madame Roche is very well," said Cosmo, with assumed indifference, "her eldest daughter is married, and has long been deserted by her husband; but I don't know his name—they never mention it. Madame Roche is ashamed of him; they were people of very good family, in spite of what my mother says—Roche de St. Martin—but I sent you word of all this long ago. It is little use repeating it now."

"Why should Pierrot be *her* husband, of all men in the world?" said Huntley; "but if he's not wanted at Melmar, you had better send the ladies word of your suspicions, and put them on their guard."

"I have been there this morning," said Cosmo, slightly confused by his own admission.

“This morning? you certainly have not lost any time,” said Huntley, laughing. “Never mind, Cosmo, I said I should ask nothing you did not want to tell me; though why you should be so anxious to keep her husband away from the poor woman—How have they got on at Melmar? Have they many friends? Are they people to make friends? They seem at least to be people of astonishing importance in Norlaw.”

“My mother,” said Cosmo, angrily, “dislikes Madame Roche, and consequently everything said and done at Melmar takes an evil aspect in her eyes.”

“My boy, that is not a tone in which to speak of my mother,” said Huntley, with gravity.

“I know it!” cried the younger brother, “but how can I help it? it is true they are my friends. I confess to that; why should they not be my friends? why should I reject kindness when I find it? As for Marie, she is a

selfish, peevish invalid, I have no patience with her—but—Madame Roche—”

Cosmo made a full stop before he said Madame Roche, and pronounced that name at last so evidently as a substitute for some other name, that Huntley's curiosity was roused; which curiosity, however, he thought it best to satisfy diplomatically, and by a roundabout course.

“I must see her to-morrow,” he said; “but what of our old friend, Melmar, who loved us all so well? I should not like to rejoice in any man's downfall, but *he* deserved it, surely. What has become of them all?”

“He is a poor writer again,” said Cosmo, shortly, “and Joanna—it was Joanna who brought Desirée here.”

“Who is Desirée?” asked Huntley.

“I ought to say Miss Roche,” said Cosmo, blushing to his hair. “Joanna Huntley and she were great friends at school, and after the change she was very anxious that Joanna

should stay. *She* is the youngest, an awkward, strange girl—but, why I cannot tell, she clings to her father, and is a governess or a school-mistress now, I believe. Yes, things change strangely. They were together when I saw them first.”

“They—them! you are rather mysterious, Cosmo. What is the story?” asked his brother.

“Oh, nothing very remarkable; only Des—Miss Roche, you know, came to Melmar first of all as governess to Joanna, and it was while she was there that I found Madame Roche at St. Ouen. When I returned, my mother,” said Cosmo, with a softening in his voice, “brought Desirée to Norlaw, as you must have heard; and it was from our house that she went home.”

“And, except this unfortunate sick one, she is the only child?” said Huntley. “I understand it now.”

Cosmo gave him a hurried, jealous glance,

as if to ask what it was he understood, but after that relapsed into uncomfortable silence. They went on for some time so, Cosmo with anger and impatience supposing his elder brother's mind to be occupied with what he had just told him; and it was with amazement, relief, but almost contempt for Huntley's extraordinary want of interest in matters so deeply interesting to himself, that Cosmo heard and answered the next question addressed to him.

“And Dr. Logan is dead,” said Huntley, with a quiet sorrow in his voice, which trembled too with another emotion. “I wonder where Katie and her bairns are now?”

“Not very far off; somewhere near Edinburgh. I think Lasswade. Mr. Cassilis' mother lives there,” said Cosmo.

“Mr. Cassilis! I had forgotten him,” said Huntley, “but he does not live at Lasswade?”

“They say he would be glad enough to

have Katie Logan in Edinburgh," said Cosmo, indifferently; "they are cousins—I suppose they are likely to be married;—how do I know? Well, only by some one telling me, Huntley! I did not know you cared."

"Who said I cared?" cried Huntley, with sudden passion. "How should anyone know anything about the matter—eh? I only asked, of course, from curiosity, because we know her so well—used to know her so well. Not you, who were a child, but we two elder ones. My brother Patie—I hear nothing of Patie. Where is *he* then? You must surely know."

"He is to come to meet you to-morrow," said Cosmo, who was really grieved for his own carelessness. "Don't let me vex you, Huntley. I am vexed myself, and troubled; but I never thought of that, and may be quite wrong, as I am often," he added, with momentary humility, for Cosmo was deeply mortified by the sudden idea that he had been selfishly mindful of his own concerns, and indifferent

to those of his brother. For the time, it filled him with self-reproach and penitence.

“Never mind ; everything comes right in time,” said Huntley ; but this piece of philosophy was said mechanically—the first commonplace which occurred to Huntley to veil the perturbation of his thoughts.

Just then some sounds from the house called their attention there. The Mistress herself stood at the open door of Norlaw, contemplating the exit of the Frenchman, who stood before her, hat in hand, making satirical bows and thanking her for his night’s lodging. In the morning sunshine this personage looked dirtier and more disreputable than on the previous night. He had not been at all particular about his toilette, and curled up his moustache over his white teeth, the only thing white about him, with a most sinister sneer, while he addressed his hostess ; while she, in the meantime, in her morning cap and heavy black gown, and clear, ruddy face, stood

watching him, as perfect a contrast as could be conceived.

“I have the satisfaction of making my adieux, madame,” cried Pierrot; “receive the assurances of my distinguished regard. I shall bring my wife to thank you. I shall tell my wife what compliments you paid her, to free her from her unworthy spouse and bestow your son. She will thank you—I will thank you. Madame, from my heart I make you my adieux!”

“It’s Sabbath morning,” said the Mistress, quietly; “and if you find your wife—I dinna envy her, poor woman! you can tell her just whatever you please, and I’ll no’ cross you; though it’s weel to see you dinna ken, you puir, misguided heathen, that you’re in another kind of country frae your ain. You puir Pagan creature! do you think I would ware my Huntley on a woman that had been another man’s wife? or do you think that marriage can be broken *here*? but it’s no’

worth my while parleying with the like of you. Gang your ways and find your wife, and be good to her, if it's in you. She's may be a silly woman that likes ye still, vagabone though ye be—she's may be near the end of her days, for onything you ken. Go away and get some kindness in your heart if ye can—and every single word I've said to you you can tell ower again to your wife."

Which would have been rather hard, however, though the Mistress did not know it. The wanderer knew English better than a Frenchman often does, but his education had been neglected—he did not know Scotch—a fact which did not enter into the calculations of Mrs. Livingstone.

"Adieu comrade!" cried Pierrot, waving his hand to Huntley; "when I see you again you shall behold a milor, a nobleman; be happy with your amiable parent. I go to my wife, who adores me. Adieu."

"And it's true," said the Mistress, drawing

a long breath as the strange guest disappeared on the road to Kirkbride. "Eh, sirs, but this world's a mystery! it's just true, so far as I hear; she does adore him, and him baith a mountebank and a vagabone! it passes the like of me!"

And Cosmo, looking after him too, thought of Cameron. Could that be the husband for whom Marie had pined away her life?

CHAPTER XVII.

It was Sabbath morning, but it was not a morning of rest ; though it was Huntley's first day at home, and though it did his heart good to see his mother, the young man's heart was already astray and pre-occupied with his own thoughts ; and Cosmo, full of a subdued but unrecoverable excitement, which his mother's jealous eye only too plainly perceived, covered the face of the Mistress with clouds. Yet a spectator might have supposed that breakfast-table a very centre of family love and harmony. The snow-white cloth, the basket of brown oatcakes and white flour

scones, of Marget's most delicate manufacture, the great jug full of rich red June roses, which made a glory in the midst, and the mother at the head of her table, with those two sons in the bloom of their young manhood, on either side of her, and the dress of her widowhood throwing a certain, tender, pathetic suggestion into her joy and their love. It was a picture had it been a picture, which no one could have seen without a touching consciousness of one of the most touching sides of human life. A family which at its happiest must always recall and commemorate a perpetual lack and vacancy, and where all the affections were the deeper and tenderer for that sorrow which overshadowed them; the sons of their mother, and she was a widow! But, alas, for human pictures and ideals! The mother was restless and dissatisfied, feeling strange interests crowding in to the very hour which should be peculiarly her own; the young men were stirred with the personal and undisclosed

troubles of their early life. They sat together at their early meal, speaking of common matters, eating daily bread, united yet separate, the peace of the morning only veiling over a surface of commotion, and Sabbath in everything around save in their hearts.

“It’s a strange minister—you’ll miss the old man, Huntley,” said the Mistress; “but you’ll write down your thanksgiving like a good bairn, and put an offering in the plate; put your name, say, ‘Huntley Livingstone returns thanks to God for his safe home-coming.’ There would have been nae need for that if Dr. Logan had been to the fore; he aye minded baith thanks and supplications; and I’ll never forget what petitions he made in his prayer the last Sabbath you were at hame. You’re early stirring, Cosmo—it’s no’ time yet for the kirk.”

“I am going to Melmar, mother,” said Cosmo, in a low voice.

The Mistress made no answer; a flush

came over her face, and her brow contracted, but she only said, as if to herself:—

“It’s the Sabbath day.”

“I went there this morning, to warn them of this man’s arrival,” said Cosmo, with excitement, “saying what *you* thought. I did not see any of them; but Marie has one of her illnesses. They have no one to support them in any emergency. I must see that he does not break in upon them to-day.”

The Mistress still made no answer. After a little struggle with herself, she nodded hastily.

“If ye’re a’ done, I’ll rise from the table. I have things to do before kirk-time,” she said at length, pushing back her chair and turning away. She had nothing to say against Cosmo’s resolution, but she was deeply offended by it—deeply, unreasonably, and she knew it—but could not restrain the bitter emotion. To be absent from the kirk at all, save by some overpowering necessity, was an offence

to all her strong Scottish prejudices—but it was an especial breach of family decorum, and all the acknowledged sentiment and punctilio of love, to be absent to-day.

“Keep us a’ patient!” cried Marget, in an indignant undertone, when Mrs. Livingstone was out of hearing; for Marget, on one pretence or other, kept going and coming into the dining-parlour the whole morning, to rejoice her eyes with the sight of Huntley. “Some women come into this world for nae good reason but to make trouble. To speak to the Mistress about an emergency! Whatever supported *her* in her troubles but the Almighty himsel’ and her ain stout heart? I dinna wonder it’s hard to bear! Some gang through the fire for their ain hand, and no’ a mortal nigh them—some maun have a hail houseful to bear them up. Weel, weel, I’m no’ saying anything against it—it’s kind o’ you, Mr. Cosmo—but you should think, laddie, before you speak.”

“*She* is not like my mother,” said Cosmo, somewhat sullenly.

“Like your mother!” cried Marget, with the utmost contempt. “She would smile a hantle mair, and ca’ ye mair dears in a day than *my* Mistress in a twelvemonth; but would *she* have fought and struggled through her life for a thankless man and thankless bairns—I trow no! Like your mother! She was bonnie when she was young, and she’s maybe, bonnie now, for onything I ken; but she never was wordy to tie the shoe upon the foot of the Mistress of Norlaw!”

“Be silent!” cried Cosmo, angrily; and before Marget’s indignation at this reproof could find itself words, the young man had hurried out from the room and from the house, boiling with resentment and a sense of injury. He saw exactly the other side of the question. His mother’s jealous temper, and hard-heartedness and dislike to the gentle and tender Madame Roche—but he could not see how

hard it was after all, for the honest, faithful heart, which grudged no pain nor hardship for its own, to find their love beguiled away again and again—or even to suppose it was beguiled—by one who had never done anything to deserve such affection.

And Cosmo hurried on through the narrow paths to Melmar, his heart a-flame with a young man's resentment, and impatience, and love. He scarcely could tell what it was which excited him so entirely. Not, certainly, the vagabond Pierrot, or any fears for Marie; not even the displeasure of his mother. He would not acknowledge to himself the eager, jealous fear which hurried him through those flowery byeways where the blossoms of the hawthorn had fallen in showers like summer snow, and the wild roses were rich in the hedgerows. Huntley!—why did he fear Huntley? What was the impulse of unfraternal impatience which made him turn with indignant offence from every thought of his

brother? Had he put it into words, he would have despised himself; but he only rushed on in silence through the silent Sabbath fields and byeways to the house of Madame Roche.

It is early, early yet, and there is still no church bell ringing through the silence of the skies to rouse the farms and cottages. The whole bright summer world was as silent as a dream—the corn growing, the flowers opening, the sun shining, without a whisper to tell that dutiful Nature carried on her pious work through all the day of rest. The Tyne ran softly beneath his banks, the Kelpie rushed foaming white down its little ravine, and all the cool burns from among the trees dropped down into Tyne with a sound like silver bells. Something white shone upon the path on the very spot where Desirée once lay, proud and desolate, in the chill of the winter night, brooding over false friendship and pretended love. Desirée now is sitting on the same stone, musing once more in her maiden medi-

tation. The universal human trouble broods even on these thoughts—not heavily—only like the shadow that flits along the trees of Tyne—a something ruffling the white woman's forehead, which is more serious than the girl's was, and disquieting the depths of those eyes which Cosmo Livingstone has called stars. Stars do not mist themselves with tender dew about the perversities of human kind as these eyes do; yet let nobody suppose that these sweet drops, lingering bright within the young eyelids, should be called tears.

Tears! words have so many meanings in this world! it is all the same syllable that describes the child's passion, the honey-dew of youth, and that heavy rain of grief which is able sometimes to blot out both the earth and the skies.

So, after a fashion, there are tears in Desirée's eyes, and a great many intermingled thoughts floating in her mind—thoughts troubled by a little indignation, some fear, and

a good deal of that fanciful exaggeration which is in all youthful trials. She thinks she is very sad just now as she sits half in the shade and half in the sunshine, leaning her head upon her hand, while the playful wind occasionally sprinkles over her those snowy drops of spray from the Kelpie which shine on her hair; but the truth is that nothing just now could make Desirée sad, save sudden trouble, change, or danger falling upon one person—that one person is he who devours the way with eager, flying steps, and who, still more disturbed than she is, still knows no trouble in the presence of Desirée; and that is Cosmo Livingstone.

No; there is no love-tale to tell but that which has been told already; all these preliminaries are over; the Kelpie saw them pledge their faith to each other, while there still were but a sprinkling of spring leaves on those trees of June. Desirée! the name that caught the boy's fancy when he *was* a boy,

and she unknown to him—the heroine of his dreams ever since then, the distressed princess to whom his chivalry had brought fortune—how could the young romance end otherwise? but why, while all was so natural and suitable, did the young betrothed meet here?

“I must tell your mother! I must speak to her to-day! I owe it both to myself and Huntley,” cried Cosmo. “I cannot go away again with this jealous terror of my brother in my heart; I dare not, Desirée! I must speak to her to-day.”

“Terror? and jealous? Ah, then, you do not trust me,” said Desirée, with a smile. Her heart beat quicker, but she was not anxious; she held up her hand to the wind till it was all gemmed with the spray of the waterfall, and then shook it over the head of Cosmo, as he half sat, half knelt by her side. He, however, was too much excited to be amused; he seized upon the wet hand and held it fast in his own.

“I did not think it possible,” said Cosmo. “Huntley, whom I supposed I could have died for, my kind brother! but it makes me frantic when I think what your mother has said—what she *intends*. Heaven! if he himself should think of *you!*”

“Go, you are rude,” said Desirée; “if I am so good as you say, he must think of me; but am *I* nothing, then,” she cried, suddenly springing up, and stamping her little firm foot, half in sport, half in anger; “how do you dare speak of me so? Do you think mamma can give me away like a ring, or a jewel? Do you think it will be different to me whether he thinks or does not think of Desirée? You make me angry, Monsieur Cosmo; if that is all you come to tell me, go away!”

“What can I tell you else?” cried Cosmo. “I must and will be satisfied. I cannot go on with this hanging over me. Do you remember what you told me, Desirée,

that Madame Roche meant to offer you—you! to my brother? and you expect me to have patience! No, I am going to her now.”

“Then it is all over,” cried Desirée, “all these sunny days—all these dreams! She will say no, no. She will say it must not be—she will forbid me meeting you; but if you do not care, why should I?” exclaimed the little Frenchwoman, rapidly. “Nay, you must do what you will—you must be satisfied. Why should you care for what *I* say; and as for me, I shall be alone.”

So Desirée dropped again upon her stone seat, and put her face down into her hands, and shed a few tears; and Cosmo, half beside himself, drew away the hands from her face, and remonstrated, pleaded, urged his claim.

“Why should not you acknowledge me?” said the young lover. “Desirée, long before I ventured to speak it you knew where my heart was—and now I have your own word and promise. Your mother will not deny

you. Come with me, and say to Madame Roche—”

“What?” said Madame Roche’s daughter, glancing up at him as he paused.

But Cosmo was in earnest now:—

“What is in your heart!” he said, breathlessly. “You turn away from me, and I cannot look into it. What is in your heart! whether it is joy, or destruction, I care not,” cried the young man, suddenly, “I must know my fate.”

Desirée raised her head and looked at him with some surprise and a quick flush of anger:—

“What have I done that you dare doubt me?” she cried, clapping her hands together with natural petulance. “You are impatient—you are angry—you are jealous—but does all that change me?”

“Then come with me to Madame Roche,” said the pertinacious lover.

Desirée had the greatest mind in the world

to make a quarrel and leave him. She was not much averse now and then to a quarrel with Cosmo, for she was a most faulty and imperfect little heroine, as has been already confessed in these pages ; but in good time another caprice seized her, and she changed her mind.

“ Marie is ill,” she said softly, in a tone which melted Cosmo ; “ let us not go now to trouble poor mamma.”

“ Marie ! I came this morning to warn her, or rather to warn Madame Roche,” said Cosmo, recalled to the ostensible cause of his visit. “ A Frenchman, called Pierrot, came home with Huntley—”

But before he could finish his sentence, Desirée started up with a scream at the name, and seizing his arm, in her French impatience overwhelmed him with terrified questions :—

“ Pierrot ? quick ! speak ! where is he ? does he seek Marie ? is he here ? quick, quick,

quick, tell me where he is! he must never come to poor Marie! he must not find us—tell me, Cosmo! do you hear?”

“He spent last night at Norlaw—he seeks his wife,” said Cosmo, when she was out of breath; at which word Desirée sprang up the path with excited haste:—

“I go to tell mamma,” she said, beckoning Cosmo to follow, and in a few minutes more disappeared breathless within the open door of Melmar, leaving him still behind.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MADAME ROCHE sat by herself in the drawing-room of Melmar—the same beautiful old lady who used to sit working behind the flowers and white curtains of the little second floor window in St. Ouen. The room itself was changed from the fine disorderly room in which Mrs. Huntley had indulged her invalid tastes, and Patricia read her poetry-books. There was no longer a loose crumb-cloth to trip unwary feet, nor rumped chintz covers to conceal the glory of the damask; and there was a wilderness of gilding, mirrors, cornices, chairs, and picture-frames, which

changed the sober aspect of Melmar, and threw a somewhat fanciful and foreign character upon the grave Scotch apartment, looking out through its three windows upon the solemn evergreens and homely grassplot which had undergone no change. One of the windows was open, and *that* was garlanded round, like a cottage window, with a luxuriance of honeysuckle and roses, which "the former family" would have supposed totally unsuited to "the best room in the house." It was before this open window, with the sweet morning breeze waving the white curtains over her, and the roses leaning in in little crowds, that Madame Roche sat. She was reading—at least she had a book in her hand, among the leaves of which the sweet air rustled playfully. It was a pious, pretty book of meditations which suited both the time and the reader, and she sat sometimes looking into it, sometimes suffering her eyes and mind to stray, with a sweet pensive

gravity on her fair old face, and tender, subdued thoughts in her heart. Madame Roche was not profound in anything; perhaps there was not very much depth in those pious thoughts, or even in the sadness which just overshadowed them. Perhaps she had even a far-off consciousness that Cosmo Livingstone saw a very touching little picture, when he saw the mother by the window reading the Sabbath book in that Sabbath calm, and saying prayers in her heart for poor Marie. But do not blame Madame Roche—she still did say the prayers, and out of an honest heart.

When Desirée flew into the room, flushed and out of breath, and threw herself upon her mother so suddenly, that Madame Roche's composure was quite overthrown:—

“Mamma, mamma!” cried Desirée in what was almost a scream, though it was under her breath, “listen—Pierrot is here—he has found us out.”

“What, child? Pierrot? It is impossible,” cried Madame Roche.

“Things that are impossible are always true!” exclaimed the breathless Desirée; “he is here—Cosmo has seen him—he has come to seek Marie.”

“Cosmo? is *he* here?” said Madame Roche, rising. The old lady had become quite agitated, and her voice trembled. The book had fallen out of the hands which she clasped tightly together, in her fright and astonishment. “But he is mistaken, Desirée; he does not know Pierrot.”

When Cosmo, however, came forward to tell his own story, Madame Roche grew still more disturbed and troubled:—

“To come now!” she exclaimed to herself with another expressive French pressure of her hands,—“to come now! Had he come in St. Ouen, when we were poor, I could have borne *ti*; but now, perceive you what will happen, Desirée? He will place himself here,

and squander our goods and make us despised. He will call my poor Marie by his mean name—she, a Roche de St. Martin! and she will be glad to have it so. Alas, my poor deluded child!”

“Still though he is so near, he has not found you yet; and if he does find you, the house is yours, you can refuse him admission; let me remain, in case you should want me,” said Cosmo, eagerly; “I have been your representative ere now.”

Madame Roche was walking softly about the room, preserving through all her trouble, even now when she had been five years in this great house, the old habit of restraining her voice and step, which had been necessary when Marie lay in the little back chamber at St. Ouen, within constant hearing of her mother. She stopped for an instant to smile upon her young advocate and supporter, as a queen might smile upon a partizan whose zeal was more than his wisdom;

and then went on hurriedly addressing her daughter.

“For Marie, poor soul, would be crazed with joy. Ah, my Desirée! who can tell me what to do? For my own pleasure, my own comfort, a selfish mother, must I sacrifice my child?”

“Mamma,” cried Desirée, with breathless vehemence, “I love Marie—I would give my life for her; but if Pierrot comes to Melmar, I will go. It is true—I remember him—I will not live with Pierrot in one house.”

Madame Roche clasped her hands once more, and cast up her eyes with a gesture of despair. “What can I do—what am I to do? I am a woman alone—I have no one to advise me,” she cried, pacing softly about the room, with her clasped hands and eyes full of trouble. Cosmo’s heart was quite moved with her distress.

“Let me remain with you to-day,” said Cosmo, “and if he comes, permit me to see

him. You can trust *me*. If you authorise me to deny him admission, he certainly shall not enter here."

"Ah, my friend!" cried Madame Roche. "Ah, my child! what can I say to you? Marie loves him."

"And he has made her miserable," cried Desirée, with passion. "But, because she loves him, you will let him come here to make us all wretched. I knew it would be so. She loves him—it is enough! He will make her frantic—he will break her heart—he will insult you, me, everyone! But Marie loves him! and so, though he is misery, he must come. I knew it would be so; but I will not stay to see it all—I cannot! I will never stand by and watch while he kills Marie. Mamma! mamma! will you be so cruel? But I cannot speak—I am angry—wretched! I will go to Marie and nurse her, and be calm; but if Pierrot comes, Desirée will stay no longer. For, you know it is true!"

And so speaking, Desirée went, lingering and turning back to deliver herself always of a new exclamation, to the door, out of which she disappeared at last, still protesting her determination with violence and passion. Madame Roche stood still, looking after her. There was great distress in the mother's face, but it did not take that lofty form of pain which her child's half-defiance might have produced. She was not wounded by what Desirée said. She turned round sighing to where Cosmo stood, not perfectly satisfied, it must be confessed, with the bearing of his betrothed.

“Poor child! she feels it!” said Madame Roche,” and, indeed, it is true, and she is right; but what must I do, my friend? Marie loves him. To see him once more might restore Marie.”

“Mademoiselle Desirée says he will break her heart,” said Cosmo, feeling himself bound to defend the lady of his love, even though he did not quite approve of her.

“Do not say Mademoiselle. She is of this country; she is not a stranger,” said Madame Roche, with her bright, usual smile; “and he *will* break her heart if he is not changed; do I not know it? But then—ah, my friend, you are young and impatient, and so is Desirée. Would you not rather have your wish and your love, though it killed you to have it, than live year after year in a blank peacefulness? It is thus with Marie; she lives, but her life does not make her glad. She loves him—she longs for him; and shall I know how her heart pines, and be able to give her joy, yet keep silence, as though I knew nothing? It might be most wise; but I am not wise—I am but her mother—what must I do?”

“You will not give her a momentary pleasure, at the risk of more serious suffering,” said Cosmo, with great gravity.

But the tears came to Madame Roche’s eyes. She sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hand. “It would be joy!—can I

deny her joy? for she loves him," faltered Marie's mother. As he looked at her with impatient, yet tender eyes, the young man forgave Desirée for her impatience. How was it possible to deal calmly with the impracticable sentiment and "feelings" of Madame Roche?

"I came to speak to you of myself," said Cosmo. "I cannot speak of myself in the midst of this trouble; but I beg you to think better of it. If he is all that you say, do not admit him here."

"Of yourself?" said Madame Roche, removing her hand from her face, and stretching out to him that tender white hand which was still as soft and fair as if it had been young instead of old. "My child, I am not so selfish as to forget you who have been so good to us. Tell me what it is about yourself?"

And as she smiled and bent towards him, Cosmo's heart beat high, half with hope, half with shame, for he felt guilty when he remembered that neither himself nor Desirée had

confessed their secret betrothal to Desirée's mother. In spite of himself, he could not help feeling a shadow of blame thrown upon Desirée, and the thought wounded him. He was full of the unreasonable, romantic love of youth. He could not bear, by the merest instinctive secret action of his mind, to acknowledge a defect in her.

“You say, ‘Marie loves him’—that is reason enough for a great sacrifice from you,” cried Cosmo, growing out of breath with anxiety and agitation; “and Desirée—and I,—what will you say to us? Oh, Madame, you are kind, you are very kind. Be more than my friend, and give Desirée to me!”

“Desirée!”—Madame Roche rose up, supporting herself by her chair—“Desirée! but she knows she is destined otherwise—you know—Desirée!” cried Madame Roche, clasping her pretty hands in despair. “She is dedicated—she is under a vow—she has to do justice! My friend Cosmo—my son—my

young deliverer!—do not—do not ask this! It breaks my heart to say no to you; but I can never, never give you Desirée!”

“Why?” said Cosmo, almost sternly. “You talk of love—will you deny its claim? Desirée does not say no. I ask you again, give her to me! My love will never wound her nor break her heart. I do not want the half of your estate, and neither does my brother! Give me Desirée—I can work for her, and she would be content to share my fortune. She *is* content—I have her own word for it. I demand it of you for true love’s sake, madame—you, who speak of love! Give her to me!”

“Alas!” cried Madame Roche, wringing her hands—“alas! my child! I speak of love because Marie is his wife; but a young girl is different! She must obey her destiny! You are young—you will forget it. A year hence, you will smile when you think of your passion. No—my friend Cosmo, hear me!

No, no, you must not have Desirée—I will give you anything else in this world that you wish, if I can procure it, but Desirée is destined otherwise. No, no, I cannot change—you cannot have Desirée!”

And on this point the tender and soft Madame Roche was inexorable—no entreaty, no remonstrance, no argument could move her! She stood her ground with a gentle iteration, which drove Cosmo wild. No, no, no; anything but Desirée. She was grieved for him—ready to take him into her arms and weep over him—but perfectly impenetrable in her tender and tearful obstinacy. And when, at last, Cosmo rushed from the house, half-mad with love, disappointment, and mortification, forgetting all about Pierrot and everybody else save the Desirée who was never to be his, Madame Roche sat down, wiping her eyes and full of grief, but without the faintest idea of relinquishing the plans by which her daughter was to compensate Huntley Livingstone for the loss of Melmar.

CHAPTER XIX.

WHEN Cosmo rushed forth from Melmar with his heart a-flame, and made his way out through the trees to the unsheltered and dusty highway, the sound of the Sabbath bells was just beginning to fall through the soft summer air, so bright with the sunshine of the morning. Somehow, the sound seemed to recall him, in a moment, to the sober homelife out of which he had rushed into this feverish episode and crisis of his own existence. His heart was angry, and sore, and wounded. To think of the usual familiar routine of life disgusted him—his impulse was to fly out of

everybody's reach, and separate himself from a world where everybody was ready to sacrifice the happiness of others to the merest freak or crotchet of his own. But the far-off tinkle of the Kirkbride bell, though *it* was no wonder of harmony, dropped into Cosmo's ear and heart like the voice of an angel. Just then, his mother, proudly leaning upon Huntley's arm, was going up the bank of Tyne to thank God for her son's return. Just then, Desirée, who had left Melmar before him, was walking softly, in her white summer robes, to the Sabbath service, little doubting to see Cosmo there; and out of all the country round, the rural families, in little groups, were coming up every path, all tending towards the same place. Cosmo sprang impatiently over a stile, and made his way through a corn-field, where the rustling green corn on either side of the path, just bursting from the blade, was almost as tall as himself. He did not care to meet the churchgoers, who would not have been

slow to remark upon his heated and uneasy looks, or even upon the novel circumstance of his being here instead of at "the Kirk." This same fact of itself communicated an additional discomfort to Cosmo. He felt in his conscience, which was young and tender, the unsabbatical and agitating manner in which he had spent the Sabbath morning, and the bell seemed ringing reproaches into his ear as he hastened through the rustling corn. Perhaps not half-a-dozen times before in his life, save during the time of his travels, had Cosmo voluntarily occupied the Sabbath morning with uses of his own. He had dreamed through its sacred hours many a time, for he was "in love" and a poet; but his dreams had gone on to the cadence of the new minister's sermon, and taken a sweeter echo out of the rural psalms and thanksgivings; and he felt as a Scottish youth of religious training was like to feel under such circumstances—his want of success and present unhappiness increased

by the consciousness that he was using the weekly rest for his own purposes, thinking his own thoughts, doing his own business, and filling, with all the human agitation of fears and hopes, selfish and individual, the holy quiet of the Sabbath-day.

And when Cosmo reached Norlaw, which was solitary and quiet like a house deserted, and when the little girl who helped Marget in the dairy rose from her seat at the clean table in the kitchen, where, with her Bible open before her, she was seeking out "proofs" for her "questions," to let him in, not without a wondering air of disapproval, the feeling grew even stronger. He threw himself into his mother's easy-chair, in the dining-parlour, feeling the silence grow upon him like a fascination. Even the Mistress's work-basket was put out of the way, and there was no open book here to be ruffled by the soft air from the open window. Upon the table was the big Bible, the great jug full of red roses, and

that volume of *Harvey's Meditations*, which the Mistress had certainly not been reading—and the deep, unbroken Sabbath stillness brooded over him as if it were something positive and actual, and not a mere absence of sound. And as he thought of it, the French household at Melmar, with its fancies, its agitations, its romantic plans and troubles of feeling, looked more and more to Cosmo discordant and inharmonious with the time; and he himself jarred like a chord out of tune upon this calm of the house and the Sabbath; jarred strangely, possessed as he was by an irritated and injured self-consciousness—that bitter sensation of wrong and disappointment, which somehow seemed to separate Cosmo from everything innocent and peaceful in the world.

For why was it always so—always a perennial conspiracy, some hard, arbitrary will laying its bar upon the course of nature? Cosmo's heart was sore within him with some-

thing more than a vexed contemplation of the anomaly, with an immediate, pursuing, hard mortification of his own. He was bitterly impatient of Madame Roche in this new and strange phase of her character, and strangely perplexed how to meet it. For Cosmo had a poetic jealousy of the honour and spirit of his best-beloved. He felt that he could not bear it, if Desirée for his sake defied her mother—he could not tolerate the idea that she was like to do so, yet longed, and feared, and doubted, full of the most contradictory and unreasonable feelings, and sure only of being grieved and displeased whatever might happen. So he felt as he sat by himself, with his eyes vacantly fixed upon the red roses and the big Bible, wondering, impatient, anxious beyond measure, to know what Desirée would do.

But that whole silent day passed over him unenlightened; he got through the inevitable meals he could scarcely tell how—replied or did not reply to his mother's remarks, which

he scarcely noticed were spoken *at*, and not to him, wandered out in the afternoon to Tyneside and the Kelpie, without finding any one there—and finally with a pang of almost unbearable rebellion, submitted to the night and sleep which he could not avoid. To-morrow he had to return to Edinburgh, to go away, leaving his brother in possession of the field—his brother, to whom Madame Roche meant to *give* Desirée, in compensation for his lost fortune. Cosmo had forgotten all about Katie Logan by this time; it was not difficult, for he knew scarcely anything; and with a young lover's natural pride and vanity, could not doubt that any man in the world would be but too eager to contend with him for such a prize as Desirée Roche.

And to-morrow he had to go away!—to return to Mr. Todhunter's office, to read all the trashy stories, all the lamentable criticisms, all the correspondence, making small things great, which belonged to the *Auld Reekie Ma-*

gazine. Cosmo had not hitherto during his life been under much compulsion of the *must*, and accordingly found it all the harder to consent to it now. And he was growing very weary of his occupation besides. He had got a stage beyond his youthful facility of rhyme, and was, to say the truth, a little ashamed now of his verses, and of those flowery prose papers, which the Mistress still read with delight. He began to suspect that literature, after all, was not his vocation, and at this moment would rather have carried a labourer's hod, or followed the plough, than gone to that merchandize of words, which awaited him in Edinburgh. So he rose, sullen and discontented, ready to quarrel with any or everyone who thwarted him, and feeling towards Huntley rather more like an enemy than like a brother.

And Cosmo had but just risen from the early breakfast table when a note was put into his hand. Marget brought it to him, with rather

an ostentation of shewing what she brought, and Cosmo had to read it under the eyes of his mother and Huntley, neither of whom could help casting many glances at the young man's disturbed face. It was the first letter he had ever received from Desirée—no wonder that he hurried out when he had glanced at it, and did not hear that the Mistress called him back; for it was a very tantalizing, unsatisfactory communication. This is what Desirée said:—

“I knew it would be so. Why are you so restless, so impatient—why do you not be calm and wait like me? Mamma has set her heart upon what she says. She will not yield if you pray to her for ever. She loves me, she loves you; it would make her happy; but, alas, poor mamma! She has set her thoughts upon the other, and will not change. Why do you vex her, you, me, every one? Be silent, and all will be well.

“For I am not in haste, Monsieur Cosmo, if you are. I am able to wait—me! I know you went away in great anger, and did not come to church, and were cross all day, and your mother will think I am to blame. But if you *will* be impatient, am I to blame? I tell you to wait, as I shall, to be good and silent, and see what will happen; but you do not regard me.

“Farewell, then, for a week. I write to you because I cannot help it this time, but I will not write again. Be content, then, restless boy; *au revoir!*”

“DESIRÉE.”

Cosmo turned it round and round, and over and over, but nothing more was to be made of it. Desirée had not contemplated the serious discontent of her lover. She thought he would understand and be satisfied with her playful letter, and required nothing more serious. Perhaps, had she thought he

required something more serious, the capricious little Frenchwoman would have closed her heart and refused it. But, however that may be, it is certain that Cosmo was by no means so much pleased as he expected to be when he saw the note first, and prepared himself to leave home with feelings scarcely at all ameliorated, shaking hands abruptly with Huntley, and having a very cold parting with his mother. He carried a discontented heart away with him, and left discontent and vexation behind, and so trudged into Kirkbride, and drove away to Edinburgh on the top of the coach, troubled with the people behind and the things before him, and in the most unamiable humour in the world.

CHAPTER XX.

“WELL, Huntley, and what’s your opinion of our grand new neighbours?” said the Mistress. They were returning together on that same Monday from a formal call at Melmar; perhaps the first time on which the Mistress’s visit to Madame Roche had been made with any pleasure. Mrs. Livingstone came proudly through the Melmar grounds, leaning upon Huntley’s arm. She had gone to exhibit her son; half consciously to exult over her richer neighbour, who had no sons, and to see with her own eyes how Huntley was pleased with his new friends.

“I think,” said Huntley, warmly, “that it is no wonder people raved about Mary of Melmar. She is beautiful now.”

“So she is,” said the Mistress, rather shortly. “I canna say I am ony great judge mysel’. She’s taen good care of her looks—oh ay, I dinna doubt she is.”

“But her daughters don’t seem to inherit it,” added Huntley.

“Ay, lad—would ye say no?—no’ the little one?” said the Mistress, looking up jealously in his face. She was the very reverse of a matchmaker, but perhaps it is true that women instinctively occupy themselves with this interesting subject. The Mistress had not forgotten Katie Logan, but in the depths of her heart she thought it just possible that Huntley might cast a favourable eye upon Desirée.

“No, not the little one,” said Huntley, laughing; “though I like her best of the two; and was it that invalid whom you

supposed the wife of Pierrot? Impossible!—anything so fragile and delicate would never have married such a fellow.”

“She’s delicate, no doubt,” said the Mistress, “but to be weakly in body is no’ to be tender in the mind. Eh, what’s that among the trees?—black and ill favoured, and a muckle cloak about him—it’s just the villain’s sel’!”

“Hush, he sees us,” said Huntley; “let us meet him and hear if he is going to Melmar. It seems unbelievable that so gentle an invalid should be his wife.”

The Mistress only said “Humph!” She was sorry for Marie, but not very favourable to her—though at sight of the Frenchman all her sympathies were immediately enlisted on behalf of his devoted wife. Pierrot would have avoided them if he could, but as that was impossible, he came forward with a swaggering air, throwing his cloak loose, and exhibiting a morning toilette worthy of an

ambitious tailor or a gentleman's gentleman. He took off his hat with elaborate politeness, and made the Mistress a very fine bow, finer than anything which had been seen in these parts for many a day.

“Let me trust you found Madame Pierrot, my charming wife, well and visible,” said the adventurer, with a second ironical obeisance, “and my gracious lady, her mamma, and pretty Desirée? I go to make myself known to them, and receive their embraces. I am excited, overjoyed,—can you wonder? I have not seen my wife for ten years.”

“And might have suffered that trial still, if it had not been for the siller,” said the Mistress; “eh, man, to think of a woman in her senses taking up with the like of you!”

Fortunately the Mistress's idiomatic expressions, which might not have been over agreeable had they been understood, were not quite comprehensible to Monsieur Pierrot. He only knew that they meant offence, and

smiled and showed his white teeth in admiration of the malice which he only guessed at.

“I go to my castle, my chateau, my fortune,” he said; “where I shall have pleasure in repaying your hospitality. I shall be a good host. I shall make myself popular. Pierrot of Mel-mar will be known everywhere—it is not often that your dull coteries are refreshed by the coming of a gentleman from my country. But I am too impatient to linger longer than politeness demands. I have the honour to bid you very good morning. I go to my Marie.”

Saying which, he swaggered past with his cloak hanging over his shoulders—a romantic piece of drapery which was more picturesque than comfortable on this summer day. The Mistress paused to look after him, clasping with rather an urgent pressure her son’s arm, and with an impulse of impatient pity moving her heart.

“I could never bear a stranger nigh in *my* troubles,” she cried, at last, “but yon woman’s no’ like me. She’s used to lean upon other folk. What can she do, with that poor failing creature at one side of her and this villain on the other? Huntley, my man! she’s nae friend of mine, but she’s a lone woman, and you’re her kinsman. Go back and give her your countenance to send the vagabone away!”

“Mother, I am a stranger,” cried Huntley, with surprise and embarrassment; “what could I do for her? how could I venture indeed to intrude myself into their private affairs? Cosmo might have done it who knows them well, but I—I cannot see a chance of serving them, perhaps quite the reverse. If you are right, this man belongs to the family, and blood is thicker than water. No, no; of course I will do what you wish, if you wish it; but I do not think it is an office for me.”

And the Mistress, whose heart had been moved with compassion for the other widow who had no son, and who had suggested voluntarily that Huntley should help her, could not help feeling pleased nor being ashamed of her pleasure, when he declined the office. He, at least, was not "carried away" by the fascinations of Mary of Melmar. She took a secret pleasure in his disobedience. It soothed the feelings which Cosmo's divided love had aggrieved.

"Weel, maybe it's wisest; they ken best themselves how their ain hearts are moved—and a strange person's a great hindrance in trouble. *I* couldna thole it mysel'," said the Mistress; "I canna help them, it's plain enough—so we'll do little good thinking upon it. But, Huntley, my man, what's your first beginning to be, now that you are hame?"

At this question, Huntley looked his mother full in the face, with a startled, anxious glance, and grew crimson, but said not a word; to

which the Mistress replied by a look, also somewhat startled, and almost for the moment resentful. She did not save him from his embarrassment by introducing then the subject nearest to his heart. She knew, and could not doubt what it was, but she kept silent, watching him keenly, and waiting for his first words. Madame Roche would have thrown herself into his arms and wept with an effusion of tenderness and sympathy, but this was the Mistress, who was long out of practice of love-matters, and who felt her sons more deeply dear to her own heart than ever lover was in the world. So it was with a little faltering that Huntley spoke.

“It is even years since I went away, and she was only a girl then—only a girl, though like a mother. I wonder what change they have made upon Katie Logan these seven years?”

“She’s a good lassie,” said the Mistress; “eh, Huntley, I’m ower proud!—I think nae-

body like my sons; but she's a very good lassie. I havena a word to say against her, no' me! I canna take strangers easy into my heart, but Katie Logan's above blame. You ken best yoursel' what you've said to one another, her and you—but I canna blame ye thinking upon her—na," said the Mistress, clearing her throat, "I am thankful to the Almighty for putting such a good bairn into your thoughts. I'm a hard woman in my ain heart, Huntley. I'll just say it out ance for a'. You've a' been so precious to me, that at the first dinnle I canna bide to think that nane of you soon will belong to your mother. That's a'—for you see I never had a daughter of my ain."

The Mistress ended this speech, which was a long speech for her, with great abruptness, and put up her hand hurriedly to wipe something from her eye. She could be angry with Cosmo, who confided nothing to her, but her loving, impatient heart could not stand against the frankness of his brother. She made her

confession hurriedly, and with a certain obstinate determination—hastily wiped the unwilling tear out of the corner of her eye, and the next moment lifted her head with all her inalienable spirit, ready, if the smallest advantage was taken of her confession, to gird on her armour on the moment, and resist all concessions to the death.

But Huntley was wise. “We have said nothing to each other,” he answered, quickly, “but I would fain see Katie first of all.”

This was about the sum of the whole matter—neither mother nor son cared to add much to this simple understanding. Katie had been absent from Kirkbride between four and five years, and during all that time the Mistress had only seen her once, and not a syllable of correspondence had passed between her and Huntley. It might be that she had long ago forgotten Huntley. It might be that Katie never cared for him, save with that calm regard of friendship which Huntley did not

desire from her. It was true that the Mistress remembered Katie's eyes and Katie's face on that night, long ago, when a certain subtle consciousness of the one love which was in the hearts of both, gave the minister's daughter a sudden entrance into the regard of Huntley's mother. But the Mistress did not tell Huntley of that night. "It's no for me to do," said the Mistress to herself, when she had reached home, with a momentary quiver of her proud lip. "Na, if she minds upon my Huntley still—and wha could forget him?—I've nae right to take the words out of Katie's mouth; and he'll be a' the happier, my puir laddie, to hear it from hersel'."

It was a magnanimous thought; and somehow this self-denial and abnegation—this reluctant willingness to relinquish now at last that first place in her son's heart, which had been so precious to the Mistress, shed an insensible brightness that day, over Norlaw. One could not have told whence it came; yet

it brightened over the house, a secret sunshine, and Huntley and his mother were closer friends than, perhaps, they had ever been before. If Cosmo could but have found this secret out!

CHAPTER XXI.

IN the meantime, Cosmo, angry with himself and everybody else, went into Edinburgh to his weekly labour. It was such lovely summer weather, that even Edinburgh, being a town, was less agreeable than it is easy to suppose that fairest of cities ; for though the green hill heights were always there to refresh everybody's eyes, clouds of dust blew up and down the hilly streets of the new town, which had even still less acquaintance then than now with the benevolent sprinkling of the water-carts. If one could choose the easiest season for one's troubles, one

would not choose June, when all the world is gay, and when Nature looks most pitiless to sad hearts. Sad hearts! Let every one who reads forgive a natural selfishness—it is the writer of this story who has nothing to do with its events, who yet cannot choose but make her sorrowful outcry against the sunshine—sweet sunshine, smiling out of the heart of heaven! which makes the soul of the sorrowful sick within them. It is not the young hero in the agitation of his young troubles—warm discontents and contests of life—the struggles of the morning. Yet Cosmo was vexed and aggravated by the light, and heat, and brightness of the fair listless day, which did not seem made for working in. He could not take his seat at Mr. Todhunter's writing-table, laden with scraps of cut-up newspapers, with bundles of "copy," black from the fingers of the printers, and heaps of proof sheets. He could not sit down to read through silly romances, or

prune the injudicious exuberance of young contributors. Unfortunately, the contributors to the *Auld Reekie Magazine* were almost all young; it had not turned out such an astounding "start" as the *Edinburgh Review*; it had fallen into the hands of young men at College, who, indisputably, in that period of their development, however great they may become eventually, are not apt to distinguish themselves in literature; and Cosmo, who had just outgrown the happy complacency of that period, was proportionately intolerant of its mistakes and arrogances, and complained (within himself) of his uncongenial vocation and unfortunate fate. He was not fit to be editor of the *Auld Reekie*. He was not able for the labour dire and weary woe of revising the papers which were printed, and glancing over those which were not — in short, he was totally dissatisfied with himself, his position, and his prospects. Very probably, but for his love-

dream, Cosmo would have launched himself upon the bigger sea in London, another forlorn journeyman of literature, half conscious that literature was not the profession to which he was born; but the thought of Desirée held him back like a chain of gold. He could still see her every week while he remained here, and beyond that office of Mr. Todhunter's in which perseverance and assiduity, and those other sober virtues which are not too interesting generally to young men, might some time make him a partner, Cosmo could not for his life have told any one what he would do.

After he had endured his work as long as he could in this quiet little den, which Mr. Todhunter shared with him, and where that gentleman was busy, as usual, with paste and scissors, Cosmo at last tossed an unreadable story into the waste-paper basket, and starting up, got his hat. His companion only glanced up at him with an indignant reproof.

“What! tired? Are they so *awful* bad?” said Mr. Todhunter; but this model of a bookseller said no more when his young deputy sallied out with a nod and a shrug of his shoulders. The proprietor of the *Auld Reekie Magazine* was one of those rare and delightful persons—heaven bless their simple souls!—who have an inalienable reverence for “genius,” and believe in its moods and vagaries with the devoutness of a saint.

“Of course I would exact common hours from a common young man,” said Mr. Todhunter, “but a lad of genius is another matter. When he’s in the vein, he’ll get through with his work like a giant. I’ve seen him write four papers with his own hand after the twenty-third of the month, and the magazine as sharp to its time; notwithstanding, as if he had been a year preparing. He’s not a common lad, my sub-editor;”—and Cosmo quite took credit with his employer on

the score of his fits of varying energy and his irregular hours.

Cosmo, however, sauntered away through the bright and busy streets without giving himself so much credit. The young man was thoroughly uncomfortable, self-displeased, and aggravated. He knew well enough that it was not the impatience of genius, but only a restless and disturbed mind, which made his work intolerable on that long summer afternoon. He was thinking of Desirée, who would not bear thinking of, and whom he supposed himself to have bitterly and proudly relinquished—of Madame Roche, with her ridiculous fancy in respect to Huntley—and of Huntley himself, who it was just possible might accept it, and take Desirée's reluctant hand. It seemed to Cosmo the strangest, miserable perversion of everybody's happiness; and he could not help concluding upon all this wrong and foolishness coming to pass, with all the misanthropical certainty of disappointed youth.

Cosmo even remembered to think of Katie Logan, by way of exaggerating his own discontent—Katie, who quite possibly had been faithful to Huntley's memory all these seven long years.

He was thus pondering on, with a quick impatient step, when he caught a glimpse of some one at a distance, whose appearance roused him. The figure disappeared down the Canongate, which Cosmo was crossing, and the young man hastened to follow, though this famous old street is by no means a savoury promenade on a hot summer afternoon. He pushed down, notwithstanding, along the dusty burning pavement, amid evil smells and evil sounds, and passengers not the most agreeable. Women on the outside stairs, with dirty babies in their arms, loud in gossip, and unlovely in apparel—ragged groups at the high windows, where noble ladies once looked out upon the noble highway, but where now some poor housemother's washing, thrust out upon

a stick, dallied with the smoky air, and was dried and soiled at the same moment—hopeless, ill-favoured lads and girls, the saddest feature of all, throwing coarse jokes at each other, and, indeed, all the usual symptoms of the most degraded class of town population, which is much alike everywhere. Cosmo threaded his way among them with disgust, remembering how he had once done so before with Cameron, whom he was now pursuing, and at a time when his own anticipations, as well as his friend's, pointed to the sacred profession in which the Highlandman now toiled. That day, and that conversation, rose vividly before Cosmo. It sickened his sensitive heart to realize the work in which Cameron was employed; but when his mind returned to himself, who had no profession, and to whose eyes no steady aim or purpose presented itself anywhere, Cosmo felt no pleasure in the contrast. This was not the sphere in which a romantic imagination could follow the footsteps of the

evangelist. Yet, what an overpowering difference between those steps and the wanderings of this disturbed trifler with his own fortune and youth.

But Cameron still did not re-appear. Somewhat reluctantly Cosmo entered after him at the narrow door, with some forgotten noble's sculptured shield upon its keystone, and went up the stair where his friend had gone. It was a winding stair, dark, close, and dirty, but lighted in the middle of each flight by a rounded window, through which—an extraordinary contrast—the blue sky, the June sunshine, and a far-off glimpse of hills and sea, glanced in upon the passenger with a splendor only heightened by the dark and narrow frame through which the picture shone. Cosmo paused by one of these windows with an involuntary fascination. Just above him, on the dusky landing, were two doors of rooms, tenanted each by poverty and labour and many children, miserable versions of home, in

which the imagination could take no pleasure. In his fastidious distaste for these painful and unlovely realities, the young man paused by the window ;—all the wealth of nature glowing in that golden sunshine—how strange that *it* should make its willing entrance here !

He was arrested by a voice he knew—subdued, but not soft by nature, and sounding audibly enough down the stair.

“ *I* don’t know if he can do them harm—very likely no’—I only tell you I heard somebody speak of him, and that he was going to Melmar. Perhaps you don’t care about the family at Melmar? I am sure, neither do I ; but, if you like, you can tell Cosmo Livingstone. It’s nothing to me !”

“ I’ll tell him,” said Cameron. “ Who was the man? Do you know ?”

“ He was French ; and I’m sure a vagabond—I am sure a vagabond !” cried the other. “ I don’t know if *you* can mind me, but Cosmo will—I’m Joanna Huntley. I care

for none of them but Desirée. Her mother and her sister may take care of themselves. But we were great friends, and I like her; though I need not like her unless I please," added Joanna, angrily; "it's not for her sake, but because I canna help it. There—just tell Cosmo Livingstone! Perhaps it's nothing, but he might as well know."

"I'll tell him," said Cameron, once more.

Then there came a sound of a step upon the stair—not a light step, but a prompt and active one—and Joanna herself, grown very tall, tolerably trim, rather shabby, and with hair of undiminished redness, came rapidly down the narrow side of the spiral stair, with her hand upon its rib of stone. She started and stopped when she had reached almost as far as Cosmo's window—made as though she would pass him for the first moment, but finally drew up with considerable hauteur, a step or two above him. Joanna could not help a little offence at her father's con-

queror, though she applauded him in her heart.

“I’ve been in London,” said Joanna, abruptly, entering upon her statement without any preface. “I saw a man there who was inquiring about Melmar—at least, about the eldest daughter, for he did not know the house—and Oswald directed him every step of the way. I’ll no’ say he was right, and I’ll no’ say he was wrong, but I tell *you*; the man was a rascal, that’s all I know about him—and you can do what you like now.”

“But stop, Miss Huntley; did you seek Cameron out to tell him?” said Cosmo, with gratitude and kindness.

“I *am* Miss Huntley now,” said Joanna, with an odd smile. “Patricia’s married to an officer, and away, and Oswald’s in London. My brother has great friends there. Did I seek Mr. Cameron out? No. I was here on my own business, and met him. I might have sought you out, but not him, that scarcely

knows them. But it was not worth while seeking you out either," added Joanna, with a slight toss of her head. "Very likely the man is a friend of theirs—they were but small people, I suppose, before they came to Melmar. Very likely they'll be glad to see him. But Oswald was so particular telling him where they were, and the man had such an ill look," added Joanna, slowly, after a pause, "that I cannot think but that he wanted to do them an ill turn."

"Thank you for warning them. He had come yesterday, and I fear he will do Marie a very ill turn," said Cosmo; "but nobody has any right to interfere—he is a—a relation. But may I tell Desirée—I mean Miss Roche—anything of yourself? I know she often speaks, and still oftener thinks, of you."

"She has nothing to do with us that I know of," said Joanna, sharply; "good day to you; that was all I had to say," and she rushed past him, passing perilously down the

narrow edge of the stair. But when she had descended a few steps, Joanna's honest heart smote her. She turned back, looking up to him with eyes which looked so straightforward and sincere, in spite of their irascible sparkle, that Joanna's plain face became almost pretty under their light. "I am sure I need not quarrel with you," she said, with a little burst of her natural frankness, "nor with Desirée either. It was not her fault—but I was very fond of Desirée. Tell her I teach in a school now, and am very happy—they even say I'm clever," continued the girl, with a laugh, "which I never was at Melmar; and mamma is stronger, and we're all as well as we can be. You need not laugh, Cosmo Livingstone, it's true!" cried Joanna, with sudden vehemence, growing offended once more; "papa may have done wrong whiles, but he's very good to us; and no one shall dare throw a stone at him while I'm living. You can tell Desirée."

"I will tell Desirée you were very fond

of her — she will like that best,” said Cosmo.

Whereupon the veil, which had been hanging about her bonnet, suddenly dropped over Joanna’s face; it is to be supposed from the suppressed and momentary sound that followed, that, partly in anger, partly in sorrow, partly in old friendship and tenderness, she broke down for the instant, and cried—but all that could clearly be known was, that she put out her hand most unexpectedly, shook Cosmo’s hand, and immediately started down the stair with great haste and agitation. Cosmo could not try to detain or follow her; he knew very well that no such proceeding would have found favour in the eyes of Joanna; and Cameron at that moment came in sight from the upper floor.

Cosmo never could tell by what sudden impulse it was that he begged his old friend to return with him to his lodgings and dine; he had no previous intention of doing so—but

the idea seized him so strongly, that he urged, and almost forced the half reluctant Highlander into compliance. Perhaps the listless loveliness of the day affected Cameron, in a less degree, somewhat as it affected his more imaginative companion—for, at length, after consulting his note-book, he put his strong arm within Cosmo's, and went with him. Cameron, like everybody else, had changed in these five years. He was now what is called a licentiate in the Church of Scotland—authorized to preach, but not to administer the Sacraments, an office corresponding somewhat with the deacon's orders of the English Church. And like other people, too, Cameron had not got his ideal fortune. The poor student had no patronage, and the Gaelic-speaking parish among his own hills, to which his fancy had once aspired, was still as distant as ever from the humble Evangelist. Perhaps Cameron did not even wish it now—perhaps he had never forgotten that hard lesson which he learned

in St. Ouen,—perhaps had never so entirely recovered that throwing away of his heart, as to be able to content himself among the solitudes of the hills. But, at least, he had not reached to this desired end—and was now working hard among the wynds and closes of old Edinburgh, preaching in a public room in that sad quarter, and doing all that Christian man could do to awaken its inhabitants to a better life.

“It is good, right, best! I confess it!” cried Cosmo, in a sudden *accès* of natural feeling, “but how can you do it, Cameron?—how is it possible to visit, to interest, to woo, such miserable groups as these? Look at them!” exclaimed the young man. “Mean, coarse, brutal, degraded, luxuriating in their own wretchedness, knowing nothing better—unable to comprehend a single refined idea, a single great thought. Love your neighbour—love *them*?—is it in the power of man?”

Cameron looked round upon them, too, though with a different glance.

“Cosmo,” said the Highlandman, with that deep voice of his, to which additional years and personal experience had given a sweeter tone than of old, “do you forget that you once before asked me that same question? Love is ill to bind, and hard to draw. I love few in this world, and will to the end; but first among them is One whose love kens no caprice like to ours. I tell you again, laddie, what I tell them for ever. Can *I* comprehend it?—it’s just the mystery of mysteries—*He* loves them all. I have room in my goodwill, if not in my heart, for them that *you* love, Cosmo; and what should I have for them that He loved, and loved to the death? That is the secret. My boy, I would rather than gear and lands that you found it out for yourself.”

“I can understand it, at least,” said Cosmo, grasping his friend’s hand; “but I blush for

myself when I look at your work and at mine. They are different, Cameron."

"A lad may leave the plough in mid-furrow for a flower on the brae or a fish in the water," said Cameron, with a smile; "but a man returns to the work he's put his hand to. Come back, my boy, to your first beginning—there's time."

And Cosmo was almost persuaded, as they went on discussing and remonstrating to the young man's lodging, where other thoughts and other purposes were waiting for them both.

CHAPTER XXII.

FOR on Cosmo's table lay a letter, newly-arrived, and marked *immediate*. Cosmo felt himself forewarned by the sudden tremor which moved him, as he sprang forward to take it up, that it was from Madame Roche. Perhaps some strange instinct suggested the same to Cameron, for he withdrew immediately from his friend's side, and went away to Cosmo's book-shelf in the corner without a word. Then, perhaps, for the first time, any unconcerned spectator looking on might have perceived that Cameron looked weary, and that, besides the dust upon his boots and

black coat, the lines in his face were deeper drawn than his years and strength warranted, and told of a forlorn fatigue somewhere which no one tried to comfort. But he did not say anything—he only stood quietly before the book-shelf, looking over Cosmo's books.

Cosmo, on the contrary, his face flushed with excitement and expectation, and his heart beating high, opened the letter. As he ran over it, in his haste and anxiety, the flush faded from his face. Then he read it seriously a second time—then he looked at his friend.

“Cameron!” said Cosmo.

But it seemed that Cameron did not hear him till he was called a second time, when he looked round slowly; and, seeing Cosmo holding towards him the letter which he had just read so eagerly, looked at it with a strange confusion, anxiety, and embarrassment, half-lifting his hand to take it, and saying “Eh?” with a surprised and reluctant inquiry.

“It concerns you as well as me. Look at it, Cameron,” said the young man.

It was from Madame Roche; and this is what Cameron read:—

“Cosmo—my son, my friend! come back and help us! Pierrot—he of whom you warned us—has come; and I, in my folly—in my madness, could not deny to Marie to see him. You will ask me why? Alas! he is her husband, and she loves him! I thought, in my blindness, it might make her well; but we have known her illness so long, we have forgotten how great it is; and the shock has killed her—ah, me! unhappy mother!—has stricken my child! She was very joyful, the poor soul!—she was too happy!—and he who is so little deserving of it! But it has been more than she could bear, and she is dying! Come!—sustain us, comfort us, Cosmo, my friend! We are but women alone, and we have no one who will be so tender to us as

you! It was but Monday when he came, and already she is dying!

“I have another thing to say. My poor Marie spoke to me this morning. I could not tell my child how ill, how very ill she was—I, her mother! but she has learned from our sad looks, or, perhaps, alas, from the wretch, Pierrot, that she is in danger. She spoke to me this morning. She said, ‘Mamma, will no one speak to me of heaven? Alas, I know not heaven. How shall I know the way? Send for the Englishman—the Scottishman—the traveller who came with Cosmo to our old house. I remember how he spoke—he spoke of God as one might who loved Him. None but he ever spoke so to me. Send mother—if he loves God he will come.’ Alas, my friend! could I say to her on her sick-bed, ‘My child, this good Monsieur Cameron loved *you*. I cannot break his heart over again, and ask him to come.’ No! I could not say it. I can but write to you, Cosmo. Speak

to this good Cameron—this man who loves God. Ah, my friend, can you not think how I feel now that I am ignorant, that I am a sinner—that I, who am her mother, have never taught my Marie? Tell it to your friend—tell him what she has said—she knows not, my poor child, what thoughts might once have been in his heart. Let him come, for the love of God.”

Cosmo scarcely ventured to look at his friend while he read this letter; and as for Cameron himself, he raised it in his hands so as to shade his face, and held it so with strong yet trembling fingers, that nobody might see the storm of passionate emotions there. Never before in his life, save once, had the vehement and fiery nature of the Highlander been subject to so violent a trial, and even that once was not like this. A great sob rose in his throat—his whole passionate heart, which had been strained then in desperate

self-preservation, melted now in a flood of sudden grief and tenderness, ineffable and beyond description. Marie, upon whom he had wasted his heart and love—Marie, whose weakness had filled him with a man's impulse of protection, sustenance, and comfort—Marie! Now at last should it be his, in solemnwise, to carry out that love-dream—to bring her in his arms to the feet of the Lord whom he loved—to show the fainting spirit where to find those wings of a dove, by which she might fly away and be at rest. Great overbrimming tears, big as an ocean of lighter drops, made his eyes blind, but did not fall. He sat gazing at the conclusion of the letter long after he had read it, not reading it over again like Cosmo—once had been enough to fix the words beyond possibility of forgetting upon Cameron's heart—but only looking at it with his full eyes, seeing the name, "Mary Roche de St. Martin," glimmering and trembling on the page, now partially visible, now altogether

lost. When Cosmo ventured at last to glance at his friend, he was still sitting in the same position, leaning both his elbows upon the table, and holding up the letter in his hands to screen his face. Cosmo was aware of something strangely touching in the forced, strained, spasmodic attitude, but he could not see the big silent sob that heaved in his friend's strong heart, nor the tears that almost brimmed over but did not fall out of Cameron's eyes.

Presently the Highlandman folded up the letter with care and elaboration, seemed to hesitate a moment whether he would keep it, and finally gave it over with some abruptness to Cosmo. "Relics are not for me," he said, hastily. "Now, when you are ready, let us go."

"Go?—to Melmar!" said Cosmo, faltering a little.

"Where else?" asked Cameron, sternly—"is that a summons to say no to? *I* am going without delay. We can get there to-night."

“The coach will not leave for an hour—take some refreshment first,” said Cosmo; “you have been at work all day—you will be faint before we get there.”

Cameron turned towards him with a strange smile.—

“I will not faint before we get there,” he said slowly, and then rose up and lifted his hat. “You can meet me at the coach, Cosmo, in an hour—I shall be quite ready; but in the first place I must go home; make haste, my boy; *I* will go, whether you are there or not.”

Cosmo gazed after him with something like awe; it was rather beyond romance, this strange errand—and Cameron, in spite of the fervid Highland heart within him did not look a very fit subject for romance; but somehow Cosmo could not think what personal hopes of his own might be involved in this relenting of Madame Roche—could not think even of Desirée, whose name was not once mentioned

in the letter, could think of nothing but Cameron, called of all men in the world to *that* bedside to tell the dying Marie where to find her Lord.

They left Edinburgh accordingly within the hour. Cameron had entirely recovered his usual composure, but scarcely spoke during the whole journey, in which time Cosmo had leisure to return to his own fortune, with all its perplexities. Even Marie's illness was not likely to form reason enough in the eyes of the Mistress for his abrupt and unexpected return, and he could hardly himself see what good his presence could do Madame Roche, with dangerous illness, perhaps death, and a disagreeable son-in-law in her house. Take him at his worst, Pierrot, who was Marie's husband, had a more natural place there than Cosmo, who was only Desirée's lover—a lover rejected by Madame Roche; and Desirée herself had not intimated by word or sign any desire for his presence.

The whole aspect of things did not conduce to make Cosmo comfortable. It seemed almost a necessity to go to Melmar, instantly, instead of going to Norlaw ; but what would the Mistress think of so strange a proceeding ? And Huntley and Patie now, it was to be presumed, were both at home. What a strange, disturbing influence had come among the brothers ! Cosmo began to contemplate his own position with a certain despair ; he knew well enough by this time the unreasoning sentiment of Madame Roche ; he knew very well that though she relieved herself in her trouble by writing to him, and made a solemn appeal for his services, that it by no means followed when this emergency was past, that she would confirm his sonship by giving him her daughter, or relinquish her past idea for the sake of the hopes she might have excited ; and in the second place Cosmo could not tell for his life what use he was likely to be to Madame Roche, or how he could

sustain her in her trouble—while the idea of being so near home without going there, and without the knowledge of his mother, aggravated all his other difficulties. He went on, however, with resignation, got down with the calmness of despair and bewilderment at Kirkbride, walked silently towards Melmar, guiding Cameron along the silent leafy ways, and yielding himself, whatever that might be, to his fate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

AND there stood the house of Melmar, resting among its trees, in the soft, sweet darkness of the June night.

Perhaps Cameron's heart failed him as he came so near—at least Cosmo reached the house first. The foliage was so thick around that the darkness seemed double in this circle round the house. You could only see the colorless, dark woods, stretching back into the night, and the gleam of blue sky over head, and the lighted windows in the house itself—lights which suggested no happy household meeting, but were astray among different

windows in the upper story, telling their own silent tale of illness and anxiety. Cosmo, standing before the door which he knew so well, could only tell that Tyne was near by the low, sweet tinkle of the water among the sighing leaves, and was aware of all the summer flush of roses covering that side of the house by nothing save the fragrance. He stood there gazing up for a moment at one light which moved about from window to window with a strange restlessness, and at another which burned steadily in Marie's bed-chamber. He knew it to be Marie's chamber by instinct. A watch-light, a death-light, a low, motionless flame, so sadly different from the wavering and brightening of that other, which some anxious watcher carried about. Cosmo's heart grew sad within him as he thought of this great solemn death which was coming on Marie. Poor Marie, with her invalid irritability, her little feverish weakness, her ill-bestowed love! To think that

one so tender and wayward, from whom even reason and sober thought were not to be expected, should, notwithstanding, go forth alone like every other soul to stand by herself before her God, and that love and pity could no longer help her, let them strain and struggle as they would! The thought made Cosmo's heart ache, he could not tell why.

Madame Roche met them at the door. She was not violently affected as Cosmo feared—she only kept wiping from her eyes the tears which perpetually returned to fill them, as he had seen his own mother do in her trouble—and perhaps it is the common weeping of age which has no longer hasty floods of youthful tears to spend upon anything. She gave a cry of joy when she saw Cameron.

“Ah, my friend, it is kind—God will reward you!” said Madame Roche, “and you must come to her—there is little time—my child is dying.”

Cameron did not answer a word—he only threw down his hat and followed her, restraining his step with a painful start when he heard it ring against the pavement. Cosmo followed, not knowing what else to do, to the door of the sick room. He did not enter, but as the door opened, he saw who and what was there. And strange to her son sounded the voice which came out of that sad apartment—the voice of the Mistress reading with her strong Scottish accent and old-fashioned intonation, so different from the silvery lady's voice of Madamé Roche, and the sweet tones of Desirée. Spread out before her was the big Bible, the family book of old Huntley of Melmar, and she was seated close by the bedside of the sufferer, who lay pallid and wasted, with her thin hands crossed upon the coverlet, and her whole soul in an agony of *listening* not to be described. Close by the Mistress, Desirée was kneeling, watching her sister. This scene, which he saw

only in a momentary glance before the door was closed, overpowered Cosmo. He threw himself down upon a window-seat in the long corridor which led to this room, and covered his face with his hands. The sudden and unexpected appearance of his mother brought the young man's excitement to a climax. How unjust, unkind, ungenerous now seemed his own fears!

Madame Roche was one of those women who fear to meet any great emergency alone. In the first shock of dismay with which she heard that Marie's life was fast hastening to its end, she wrote to Cosmo; and before it was time for Cosmo to arrive,—while indeed it was impossible that he could even have received her letter—the poor mother, with an instinct of her dependent nature, which she was not aware of and could not subdue, hastened to send for the Mistress to help her to bear that intolerable agony in which flesh and heart faint and fail—the anguish of beholding

the dying of her child. The Mistress, who, under similar circumstances would have closed her doors against all the world, came, gravely and soberly to the call of this undeniable sorrow. In face of that all the bitterness died out of her honest heart. Madame Roche had already lost many children, "And I have all mine—God forgive me—I ken nothing of *that* grief," cried Mrs. Livingstone, with a sob of mingled thankfulness and terror. It was not her vocation to minister at sick-beds, or support the weak; yet she went without hesitation, though leaving Huntley, to do both. And even before Madame Roche sent for her, Desirée, who understood her character, had run over by herself early in the morning, when, after watching all night, she was supposed asleep, to tell the Mistress that her mother had written to Cosmo. So there was neither cause nor intention of offence between the sad family at Melmar and that of Norlaw. When she came to Marie's sick-bed, the Mis-

tress found that poor sufferer pathetically imploring some one to tell her of the unknown world to which she was fast approaching—while Madame Roche, passionately reproaching herself for leaving her daughter uninstructed, mingled with her self-accusations, vague words about heaven and descriptions of its blessedness which fell dull upon the longing ears of the anxious invalid. The harps and the white robes, the gates of pearl and the streets of gold were nothing to Marie—what are they to any one who does not see there the only presence which makes heaven a reality? The Mistress had no words to add to the poor mother's anxious eager repetition of all the disjointed words, describing heaven, which abode in her memory—but instead, went softly down-stairs and returned with the Big Bible, the old, well-remembered book, which never failed to produce a certain awe in Madame Roche—and this was how it happened that Cosmo found his mother reading to Marie.

When Cameron entered the room, the Mistress, who had not paused, continued steadily with the reading of her Gospel. He, for his part, did not interrupt her—he went to the other side of the bed and sat down there, looking at the white face which he had never seen since he saw it in St. Ouen, scarcely less pale, yet bright enough to appear to his deluded fancy a star which might light his life. That was not an hour or place to think of those vain human dreams. Sure as the evening was sinking into midnight, this troubled shadow of existence was gliding on towards the unspeakable perfection of the other life. A little while, and words would no more veil the face of things to this uninstructed soul—A little while—but as he sat by Marie's death-bed the whole scene swam and glimmered before Cameron's eyes—"A little while and ye shall not see me—and again a little while and ye shall see me." Oh these ineffable, pathetic, heart-breaking words! They wandered out

and in through Cameron's mind in an agony of consolation and of tears. He heard the impatient anxious mother stop the reading—he felt her finger tap upon his arm urging him to speak—he saw Marie turn her tender, dying eyes towards him—he tried to say something but his voice failed him—and when at last he found utterance, with a tearless sob, which it was impossible to restrain, the words which burst from his lips with a vehement outcry, which sounded loud though it was nearer a whisper, were only these:—"Jesus! Jesus! our Lord!"

Only these!—only that everlasting open secret of God's grace by which he brings heaven and earth together! The gentle, blue eyes, which were no longer peevish, brightened with a wistful hope. There was comfort in the very name; and then this man—who laboured for the wretched—whom himself could not force his human heart to love, because his Master loved them—this man, whom

poor Marie never suspected to have loved *her* in her selfish weakness with the lavish love of a prodigal, who throws away all—this man stood up by the bed-side with his Gospel. He himself did not know what he said—perhaps neither did she, who was too far upon her way to think of words—but the others stood round with awe to hear. Heaven? No, it was not heaven he was speaking of—there was no time for those celestial glories, which are but a secondary blessing; and Cameron had not a thought in his heart save for this dying creature and his Lord.

Was it darker out of doors under the skies? No; there was a soft young moon silvering over the dark outline of the trees, and throwing down a pale glory over this house of Melmar, on the roof, which glimmered like a silver shield; and, in the hush, the tinkling voice of Tyne and the breath of the roses, and a sweet white arrow of moonlight, came in, all mingled and together, into the chamber of

death. Yet, somehow, it is darker—darker. This pale figure, which is still Marie, feels it so, but does not wonder—does not ask—is, indeed, sinking into so deep a quiet, that it does not trouble her with any fears.

“I go to sleep,” she says faintly, with the sweetest smile that ever shone upon Marie’s lips, “I am so well. Do not cry, mamma; when I wake, I shall be better. I go to sleep.”

And so she would, and thus have reached heaven unawares, but for the careless foot which pushed the door open, and the excited figure which came recklessly in. At sight of him, Cameron instantly left the bed-side—instantly, without a word, quitted the room—and began to walk up and down the corridor, where Cosmo stood waiting. Pierrot began immediately to address his wife:—His wife!—his life!—his angel! was it by her orders that strangers came to the house, that his commands were disobeyed, that he himself was kept from

her side? He begged his adored one to shake off her illness, to have a brave spirit, to get up and rouse herself for his sake.

“What, my Marie! it is but courage!” cried her husband. “A man does not die who will not die! Up, my child! Courage! I will forsake you no more—you have your adored husband—you will live for him. We shall be happy as the day. Your hand, my angel! Have courage, and rise up, and live for your Emile’s sake!”

And all the peace that had been upon it fled from Marie’s face. The troubled eagerness of her life came back to her. “Yes, Emile!” she whispered, with breathless lips, and made the last dying effort to rise up at his bidding and follow him. Madame Roche threw herself between, with cries of real and terrified agony, and the Mistress, almost glad to exchange her choking sympathy for the violent, sudden passion which now came upon her, went round the bed with the silence and

speed of a ghost, seized his arm with a grip of imperative fury not to be resisted, and, before he was aware, had thrust him before her to the door. When she had drawn it close behind her, she shook him like a child with both her hands. "You devil!" cried the Mistress, transported out of all decorum of speech by a passion of indignation which the scene almost warranted. "You dirty, miserable hound! how daur you come there? If you do not begone to your own place this instant—Cosmo, here! She's gone, the poor bairn. He has nae mair right in this house, if he ever had ony—take him away."

But while this violent scene disturbed the death calm of the house, it did not disturb Marie. She had seen for herself by that time, better than any one could have told her, what robes they wore, and what harps they played in the other world.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THAT same night, while they watched their dead at Melmar, the young moon shone kindly into the open parlour window of a pretty cottage where some anxiety, but no sorrow, was. This little house stood upon a high bank of the river Esk, just after that pretty stream had passed through the pretty village of Lasswade. The front of the house was on the summit of the height, and only one story high, while the rapid slope behind procured for it the advantage of two stories at the back. It was a perfectly simple little cottage, rich in flowers, but nothing else, furnished with old,

well-preserved furniture, as dainty, as bright, and as comfortable as you could imagine, and looking all the better for having already answered the wants of two or three generations. The window was open, and here, too, came in the tinkle of running water, and the odour of roses, along with the moonlight. Candles stood on the table, but they had not been lighted, and two ladies sat by the window, enjoying the cool breeze, the sweet light, the "holy time" of evening—or, perhaps, not aware of enjoying anything, busy with their own troubles and their own thoughts.

"I doubt if I should advise," said the elder of the two, "but though I'm an old maid myself, I am not prejudiced either one way or another, my dear. I've lived too long, Katie, to say this or that manner of life is the happiest—it does not matter much whether you are married or not married—happiness lies aye in yourself; it's common to think a single woman very lone and dreary when she comes

to be old, but I'm not afraid for you. Somebody else will have bairns for you, Katie, if you do not have them for yourself. Solitude is not in your cup, my dear—I'm prophet enough to read that."

Her companion made no answer—and in the little pause which ensued, the Esk, and the roses, and the moonlight came in as a sweet unconscious chorus—but a chorus full of whispers which struck deeper than those quiet words of quiet age.

"But on the other side," continued the old lady, "Charlie is as good a fellow as ever lived—the best son, the kindest heart! I would not trust myself praising him any more than praising you, my dear. You are both a comfort and a credit to us all, and, maybe, that is why we should like to make the two of you one. We're no' so very romantic, Katie, in our family—that is to say," continued the speaker, with sudden animation, "the women of us—for if Charlie, or any lad

belonging to the house, was to offer himself without his whole heart and love, he had better never show his face to me !”

“ But, auntie,” said the younger lady, with a smile, “ would it be right to take a whole heart and love, and only have kindness to give in exchange ? ”

“ Women are different, my dear,” said Katie Logan’s maiden aunt ; “ I will confess I do not like myself to hear young girls speaking about love—I would never advise a *man* to marry without it—nay, the very thought makes me angry ; but—perhaps, you’ll think it no compliment to us, Katie—women are different ; I have no fears of a good woman liking her husband, no’ even if she was married against her will, as sometimes happens. I would advise you not to be timid, so far as that is concerned. Charlie’s very fond of you, and he’s a good lad. To be married is natural at your age, to have a house of your own, and your own place in this world—and then there

are the bairns. Colin will soon be off your hands, but the other three are young. Do you think it would not be best for them if you married a *friend*?"

Katie did not reply—but perhaps it was this last argument which moved her to a long low sigh of unwelcome conviction. The old lady's emphatic *friend* was Scotch for a relative. Would it indeed be better for them that Katie's husband should be her cousin?

"Unless," said her aunt, rising up to light the candles, yet pausing to give effect to this last precaution. "Unless, my dear, there should be a single thought of any other man resting in your mind. If there is, Katie, think no more of Charlie Cassilis. I'm willing you should marry him first and grow fond of him after; but, my dear, stop and think—do you like any other person better than him?"

"Maybe I do, auntie," said the low voice, softly; and Katie shook her head thoughtfully

in the darkness, with a half melancholy, half pleased motion ; “ maybe I do.”

“ Then, for pity’s sake, not another word,” cried the old lady ; and that kindest of aunts rustled out of the pretty parlour, taking one of the candlesticks in her hand, with a commotion and haste which showed that Katie’s quiet half confession had by no means pleased her, in spite of her avowed impartiality. Lucifer, son of the morning, had not fallen at that time into such degrading familiarity with housekeepers and housemaids as has chanced now to that unhappy spirit. Matches were none in all the village of Lasswade, nor throughout the kingdom, save slender slips of wood anointed with brimstone and bearing the emphatic name of *spunk* in all the regions north of the Tweed ; so Katie’s respectable aunt, who was kind to her servants, rustled along the passage to the kitchen to light the candle, and on the way there and the way back, recovered her temper—which was all

the better for Katie — and by-and-bye the quiet maiden household shut itself up and went to sleep.

And perhaps when Katie knelt by her bedside that night to say her prayers—by the white bed where little Isabel slept the deep sleep which all the children sleep, thank heaven, when we are awake with our troubles—a little weariness of heart made a sigh among her prayers. She was not romantic—the women of her family were otherwise disposed, as good Auntie Isabel said, who had not a single selfish impulse in her composition; and Katie was grieved to disappoint Cousin Charlie, and perhaps feared, as women always do, with an unconscious vanity, for the consequences of his disappointment;—was she right to damage his happiness, to refuse a supporter for herself, a protector for her children, all for the sake of Huntley, who might perhaps have forgotten her years ago? Katie could not answer her own question, but she did what was

the wisest course under the circumstances—laid her head resolutely down on her pillow and fell asleep, leaving time and the hour to solve the question for her, and only sure of one thing—that her impulse was right.

But the question returned to her when she opened her eyes, in the morning, in those first waking moments, when, as Béranger says, all our cares awake before us, assault afresh, and, as if the first time, the soul which has escaped them in the night. Was she right? All through her early morning duties this oft-repeated question beset the mind of Katie; and it needs only to see what these duties were, to acknowledge how pertinacious it was. The cottage belonged to Aunt Isabel, who had received gladly her orphan nieces and nephews after the death of Dr. Logan. Aunt Isabel's spare income was just enough for herself and her maid, who, heretofore, had been sole occupants of the pretty little house, and Katie and her orphans managed to live upon theirs, which

was also a very small income, but marvellously taken care of—and pleasantly backed by the gooseberry-bushes and vegetable beds of the cottage garden, which riches their mistress made common property. On Katie's advent, Aunt Isabel retired from the severe duties of housekeeping in her own person. It was Katie who made the tea and cut the bread and butter, and washed with her own hands the delicate cups and saucers which Aunt Isabel would not trust to a servant. Then the elder sister had to see that the boys were ready, with all their books strapped on their shoulder, and their midday "piece" in their pocket, for school. Then Isabel's daintier toilet had to be superintended; and if Katie had a weakness, it was to see her sister prettily dressed, and "in the fashion"—and that little maiden sent forth fair and neat to the ladies' seminary which illustrated the healthful village of Lasswade; and then Katie went to the kitchen, to determine what

should be had for dinner, and sometimes to lend her own delicate skill to the making of a pudding or the crimping of a frill. When all was done, there was an unfailing supply of needlework to keep her hands employed. On this particular morning, Aunt Isabel meditated a call upon Miss Hogg, in Lasswade, and Katie had been so much persecuted by that question which some malicious imp kept always addressing to her, that she felt heated and out of breath in the pretty parlour. So she took up her work, put her thread and scissors in her pocket, and went out to the garden to sit on a low garden-seat, with the grass under her feet, and the trees over her, and sweet Esk singing close at hand, thinking it might be easier to pursue her occupation there.

Perhaps that was a mistake. It is not easy to sew, nor to read, nor even to think, out of doors on a June morning, with a sweet river drowsing by, and the leaves, and the roses, and the

birds, and the breeze making among them that delightful babble of sound and motion which people call the quiet of the country. Still Katie *did* work; she was making shirts for Colin, who had just gone into Edinburgh to Cousin Charlie's office;—stitching wristbands! and in spite of the sunshine and her perplexed thoughts, Katie's buttonholes were worth going ten miles to see.

But was she right? Search through all the three kingdoms and you could not have found a better fellow than Cousin Charlie, who was very fond of Katie Logan, and had been for years. The elder sister liked him heartily, knew that he would be kind to her orphans, believed him everything that was good in man; but while she reasoned with herself, the colour wavered upon her cheek, and somewhere in her heart a voice, which might have been the Esk river, so closely its whisper ran with her thoughts, kept saying, “Dinna forget me, Katie!” till, by dint of

persistence, all the other meditations yielded, and this, with a triumphant shout, kept the field. Oh, Huntley Livingstone! who had, just as like as no', forgotten Katie—was she right?

He could not have come at a better time—he came quite unannounced, unintroduced, so suddenly that Katie made an outcry almost of terror—one moment, nobody with her but the Esk, and the roses, and her own thoughts—not a shadow on the grass, not a step on the road. The next moment, Huntley, standing there between her and the sky, between her and home, shutting out everything but himself, who had to be first attended to. If she had only seen him a moment sooner, she might have received him quite calmly, with the old smile of the elder-sister; but because of the start, Katie getting up, dropping her work, and holding out her hands, looked about as agitated, as glad, as tearful, as out of herself, as even Huntley was.

“I have come home—to Norlaw—to remain,” said Huntley, when he began to know what he was saying, which was not just the first moment; “and you are not an old Katie in a cap, as you threatened to be; but first I’ve come to say out what I dared not say in the manse parlour—and you know what that is. Katie, if you have forgotten me—Heaven knows I never will blame you!—it’s seven weary years since then—if you have forgotten me, Katie, tell me I am not to speak!”

Katie had two or three impulses for the moment—to tell the truth, she was quite happy, rejoiced to be justified in the unsolicited affection she had given, and entirely contented in standing by this sudden Œdipus, who was to resolve all her doubts. Being so, she could almost have run away from the embarrassment and gravity of the moment, and made a little natural sport of the solemnity of the lover, who stood before her as if his life depended on it. Perhaps it was the

only coquettish thought which Katie Logan ever was guilty of. But she conquered it—she looked up at him with her old smile.

“Speak, Huntley!” she said; and having said so much, there was not, to tell the truth, a great deal more necessary. Huntley spoke, you may be sure, and Katie listened; and the very roses on the cottage wall were not less troubled about Cousin Charlie for the next hour than she was. And when Aunt Isabel returned, and Katie went in with a blush, holding Huntley’s arm, to introduce him simply as “Huntley Livingstone,” with a tone and a look which needed no interpretation, there was no longer a doubt in Katie’s mind as to whether she was right.

But she did not think it needful to tell Huntley what question she was considering when his sudden appearance startled her out of all her perplexities; and it is very likely that in that, at least, Katie was perfectly right.

CHAPTER XXV.

A VERY sadly different scene; no young hopes blossoming towards perfection — no young lives beginning—no joy—has called together this company, or makes this room bright; a dark house, shrouded still in its closed curtains and shutters, a wan light in the apartment, a breathless air of death throughout the place. Outside, the tawdry Frenchman, with a long crape hatband, knotted up in funereal bows, as is the custom in Scotland, walking up and down smoking his cigar, angry at finding himself excluded, yet tired of the brief decorum into which even he has

been awed, and much disposed to amuse himself with any kitchen-maid whom he may chance to see as he peers about their quarters, keeping at the back of the house. But the maids are horrified and defiant, and the affair is rather dull, after all, for Monsieur Pierrot.

The company are all assembled in the drawing-room, as they have returned from the funeral. The minister, the doctor, a lawyer from Melrose, Cameron, and the three brothers Livingstone. Madame Roche, her black gown covered with crape, and everything about her of the deepest sable, save her cap, the white ribbons of which are crape ribbons too, sits, with her handkerchief in her hand, in an easy-chair. The Mistress is there, too, rather wondering and disapproving, giving her chief attention to Desirée, who sits behind her mother quietly crying, and supposing this solemn assembly is some necessary formality which must be gone through.

“Is it to read the will?” asks the minister,

who suggests that her husband had better be present; but no, there is no will—for poor Marie had nothing, and could leave nothing. When they have been all seated for a few minutes, Madame Roche herself rises from her chair. Though the tears are in her eyes, and grief in her face, she is still the beautiful old lady whom Cosmo Livingstone loved to watch from his window in St. Ouen. Time himself, the universal conqueror, can never take from Mary of Melmar that gift which surrounded her with love in her youth, and which has lighted all her troubled life like a fairy lamp. The sweet soft cheek where even wrinkles are lovely, the beautiful old eyes which even in their tears cannot choose but smile, the footstep so light, yet so firm, which still might ring “like siller bells,” though its way is heavy. Everyone was looking at her, and as they looked, everyone acknowledged the unchanging fascination of this beautiful face.

“Gentlemen,” said Madame Roche with a

little tremour in her voice, “ I would speak to you all—I would do my justice before the world ; you have heard what I was in my youth. Mary Huntley of Melmar, my father’s heiress. I was disobedient—I went away from him—I knew he disowned me, and knew no more than an infant that he relented in his heart when he died. I was poor all my life—my Marie, my dear child ! ” and here Madame Roche paused to sob aloud, and Desirée laid her head upon the knee of the Mistress and clutched at her dress in silent self-control ; “ it was then she married this man—married him to break her heart—yet still loved him to the last. Ah, my friends, I was thus a widow with my sick child in my husband’s town. My Jean was dead, and she was forsaken—and my Desirée was gone from me to serve strangers—it was then that one came to my house like an angel from heaven. Cosmo, my friend, do you blush that I should name your name ? ”

“And what a tale he told me!” cried poor Madame Roche, whose tears now filled her eyes, and whose lips quivered so that she had to pause from moment to moment; “I, who thought me a lonely woman, whom no one cared for;—my father had thought upon me—my kinsman, Patrick Livingstone, had sought me to give me back my lands—my young hero was seeking me then; and his brother, yes, Huntley, his noble brother, was ready to renounce his right—and all for the widow and her children. I weep, ah, my friends, you weep!—was it not noble? was it not above praise? When I heard it I made a vow—I said in my heart I should repay this excellent Huntley. I had planned it in my mind—I said in my thoughts, my Marie, my blessed child, must have half of this great fortune. She is married, she cannot make compensation—but the rest is for Desirée, and Desirée shall give it back to Huntley Livingstone.”

Everyone of her auditors by this time gazed

upon Madame Roche. Desirée, sitting behind her, lifted her face from the lap of the Mistress ; she was perfectly pale, and her eyes were heavy with crying. She sat leaning forward, holding the Mistress's gown with one hand, with sudden dismay and terror in her white face. Just opposite her Cameron sat, clenching his hand. What *he* was thinking no one could say—but as Madame Roche spoke of Marie he still clenched his hand. Then came the strangers, surprised and sympathetic, Patrick Livingstone among them. Then Huntley, much startled and wondering, and Cosmo, with a face which reflected Desirée's, dismayed and full of anxiety, and the attitude of a man about to spring up to defy, or denounce, or contradict the speaker. The Mistress behind sat upright in her chair, with a face like a Psalm of battle and triumph, her nostril dilating, her eyes shining. For the first time in her life, the Mistress's heart warmed to Mary of Melmar. She alone

wanted no explanation of this speech—she alone showed no surprise or alarm—it was but a just and fit acknowledgment—a glory due to the sons of Norlaw.

“But, alas,” cried Madame Roche; “God has looked upon it, and it has not been enough. He has broken my heart and made my way clear; pity me, my friends, my Marie is in Heaven and her mother here! And now there is but one heir. My Desirée is my only child—there is none to share her inheritance. Huntley Livingstone, come to me! I have thought and I have dreamed of the time when I should give you my child—but, alas! did I think it should be only when Marie was in her grave? Huntley Livingstone! you gave up your right to me, and I restore it to you. I give you my child, and Melmar is for Desirée. There is no one to share with you, my daughter and my son!”

Huntley had risen and approached to Madame Roche, though with reluctance, when

she called him. Now she held his hand in one of hers, and stretched out the other for that of Desirée—while Huntley, confounded, confused, and amazed beyond expression, had not yet recovered himself sufficiently to speak. Before he could speak Cosmo had sprung to the side of Desirée, who stood holding back and meeting her mother's appeal with a look of dumb defiance and exasperation, which might be very wrong, but was certainly very natural. Every one rose. But for the grief of the principal actors, and the painful embarrassment of all, the scene might almost have been ludicrous. Cosmo, who had grasped at Desirée's hand, did not obtain it any more than her mother. The girl stood up, but kept her hold of the Mistress's gown, as if for protection.

“No, no, no, no!” said Desirée, in a low, hurried, ashamed voice; “mother, no—no—no! I will not do it! Mamma, will you shame me? Oh, pity us! Is it thus we are to weep for Marie?”

“My child, it is justice,” cried Madame Roche, through her tears; “give him your hand—it is that Huntley may have his own.”

“But there is some strange mistake here,” said Huntley, whose brow burned with a painful flush; “Melmar was never mine, nor had I any real right to it. Years ago I have even forgotten that it once was possible. Be silent for a moment, Cosmo, I beg of you, and you, Mademoiselle Desirée, do not fear. Madame Roche, I thank you for your generous meaning, but it is an entire mistake in every way—let me explain it privately. Let us be alone first;—nay, nay, let me speak, then! I am my father’s heir, and our house is older than Melmar; and nothing in the world, were it the hand of a queen, could tempt me to call myself anything but Livingstone of Norlaw!”

The Mistress had been standing up, like everybody else, an excited spectator. When Huntley said these words she sat down

suddenly, with a glow and flush of triumph not to be described—the name of her husband and her son ringing in her ears like a burst of music; and then, for the first time, Desirée relinquished her hold, and held out her hand to Huntley, while Cosmo grasped his other hand and wrung it in both his with a violent pressure. The three did not think for that moment of Madame Roche, who had been looking in Huntley's face all the time he spoke to her, and who, when he ended, dropped his hand silently and sank into her chair. She was leaning back now, with her white handkerchief over her face—and the hand that held it trembled. Poor Madame Roche! this was all her long-thought-of scheme had come to—she could only cover her face and forget the pang of failure in the bigger pang of grief—she did not say another word; she comprehended—for she was not slow of understanding—that Huntley's little effusion of family pride was but a rapid and generous expedient

to save him from a direct rejection of Desirée. And poor Madame Roche's heart grew sick with the quick discouragement of grief. She closed her eyes, and heavier tears came from them than even those she had shed for Marie. She had tried her best to make them happy, she had failed; and now they for whose sake alone she had made all this exertion neglected and forgot her. It was too much for Madame Roche.

“Mamma, listen,” whispered Desirée, soothingly. “Ah, mamma, you might force mine—I should always obey you—but you cannot force Huntley's heart—he does not care for *me*; bah, that is nothing!—but there *is* one whom he cares for—one whom he has come home for—Katie, whom they all love! Mamma, you were right! he is noble, he is generous; but what is Melmar to Huntley? He has come back for Katie and his own home.”

“Katie?—some one else? My darling, does he love her?” said Madame Roche.

“Then it is God who has undone all, Desirée, and I am content. Let him come to me, and I will bless him. I will bless you all, my children,” she said, raising herself up, and stretching her hands towards them. “Ah, friends, do you see them—so young and so like each other! and it was *he* who sought us, and not Huntley; and it is I who am wrong—and God is right!”

Saying which, Madame Roche kissed Huntley’s cheek, dismissing him so, and took Cosmo into her arms instead. Her sweet temper and facile mind forgot even her own failure. She put back Cosmo’s hair tenderly from his forehead, and called him her hero. He was her son at least; and Desirée and Melmar, the two dreams of his fancy, between which, when he saw the girl first, he suspected no possible connection, came at once, a double gift, the one eagerly sought, the other totally unthought of, into the Benjamin’s portion of Cosmo Livingstone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“THERE’S aye plenty fools in this world,” said Bowed Jaacob; “a’thing else that’s human fails, but that commodity’s aye ready. I had my hopes of that laddie Livingstone. He has nae discrimination, and hasna seen the world, like some other folk, but for a’ that I thought I could perceive a ring of the right metal in him, and I’m no’ often wrang. And so Cosmo’s to be marriet! I dinna disapprove of his taste—that’s a different matter. I even had a great notion of *her* mysel’; but when the lad’s married there’s an end of him. Wha ever heard tell of a man coming to dis-

inction with a wife at his tail?—na! I wash my hands of Cosmo—he shall never mair be officer of mine.”

Jaacob did not address himself to any one in particular. The news with which Kirkbride was ringing was great news in its way, and a little crowd had collected in the corner, close by the smithy, to discuss it, a crowd composed chiefly of women, chief among whom, in a flush of triumph and importance, stood Marget of Norlaw. Jaacob did not often concern his lofty intelligence with the babble of women, but the little giant was interested in spite of himself, and had a warm corner in his heart for both the heroes who were under present discussion. A lusty blacksmith-apprentice puffed at the great bellows within that ruddy cavern, and Jaacob stood at the door, with one or two male gossips lingering near him, which was a salve to his dignity; but Jaacob's words were not addressed even to his own cronies; they were a spontaneous

effusion of observant wisdom, mingled with benevolent regret.

“The man’s in a creel!” cried the indignant Marget—“an officer of yours, Jaacob Bell?—*yours*, ye object! and I would just like to ken wha gave the like of you ony right to ca’ *our* son by his christened name? Na, sirs, ye’re a’ wrang—it just shows how little folk ken about onything out of their ain road; and canna haud their peace either, or let them speak that have the knowledge. The auld lady—her that was Mary of Melmar—would have given our Huntley baith the land and the bonnie lass, if it had been *her* will, for she’s a real sensible woman, as it’s turned out, and kens the value of lads like ours. But Huntley Livingstone, he said no. He’s no’ the lad, our Huntley, to be ony wife’s man—and he has his awn yestate, and an aulder name and fame than Melmar. There’s no an auld relick in the whole countryside like our auld castle. I’ve heard it from them that ken; and

our Huntley would no mair part with the name than wi' his right hand. Eh! if auld Norlaw, puir man, had but lived to see this day! Our Cosmó is very like his father. He's just as like to be kent far and near for his poems and his stories as Walter Scott ower yonder at Abbotsford. It's just like a story in a book itsel'. When he was but a laddie—no muckle bigger than Bowed Jaacob—he fell in with a bonnie bit wee French lady, in Edinburgh. I mind him telling me—there's never ony pride about our sons—just as well as if it was yesterday. The callant's head ran upon naething else—and wha was this but just Miss Deseera! and he's courted her this mony a year, whaever might oppose; and now he's won and conquered, and there's twa weddings to be in Kirkbride, baith in the very same day!”

“In Kirkbride? but, dear woman, Miss Logan's no' here,” suggested one of the bystanders.

“Wha’s heeding!” cried Marget, in her triumph, “if ane’s in Kirkbride, and ane in anither kirk, is that onything against the truth I am telling? Sirs, haud a’ your tongues—I’ve carried them a’ in my arms, and told them stories. I’ve stood by them and their mother, just me and no other person, when they were in their sorest trouble; and I would like to hear wha daur say a word, if Norlaw Marget is just wild and out of her wits, for aince in her life, to see their joy!”

“I never look for discretion at a woman’s hand mysel’,” said Bowed Jaacob, though even Jaacob paused a little before he brought the shadow of his cynicism over Marget’s enthusiasm; “they’re easy pleased, puir things, and easy cast down—a man of sense has aye a compassion for the sex—it’s waste o’ time arguing with them. Maybe that’s a reason for lamenting this lad Livingstone. A man, if he’s no’ a’ the stronger, is awfu’ apt to fall to the level of his company—and to think of

a promising lad, no' five-and-twenty, lost amang a haill tribe—wife, mother, mother-in-law, sister-in-law, and gude kens how mony friends forbye—it's grievous—that's just what it is; a man goes down, a man comes to the calibre of the women. For which cause," said Bowed Jaacob, thrusting his cowl on one side of his head, twisting still higher his high shoulder, and fixing a defiant gaze upon the admiring crowd with his one eye; "in spite of mony temptations—for I'll say that for the women, that they ken a man of sense when they see him—I'm no', and never will be, a marrying man mysel'!"

"Eh, but Jaacob," cried a saucy voice, "if you could have gotten her, you might have put up with Miss Roche."

"Humph—I had a great notion of the lassie," said Jaacob, loftily; "men at my years get above the delusion of looking for a woman as a companion. It makes nae muckle matter whether she's ca'ed a foolish

woman or a sensible ane; it's naething but a question of degree; and when a man finds that out, he has a right to please his e'e. When you hear of me married, it's a wife of sixteen, that's what I'll have gotten; but you see, as for Miss Deeseera, puir thing, she may be breaking her heart, for onything I ken. I'm a man of honour, and Cosmo's a great friend of mine—I wouldna, for twenty Melmars, come between my friend and his love."

And amid the laughter which echoed this magnanimous speech, Bowed Jaacob retired into the ruddy gloom of the smithy and resumed his hammer, which he played with such manful might and intention upon the glowing iron, that the red light illuminated his whole swarthy face and person, and the red sparks flashed round him like the rays round a saint in an old picture. He was not in the least a saintly individual, but Rembrandt himself could not have found a better study for light and shade.

A little time sufficed to accomplish these momentous changes. The Mistress gave up her trust of Norlaw, the cows and dairies which were the pride of her heart, the bank-book, with its respectable balance, and all the rural wealth of the farmsteading, to her son. And Huntley warned the tenants to whom his mother had let the land that he should resume the farming of it himself at the end of the year, when their terms were out. Everything about Norlaw began to wear signs of preparation. The Mistress spoke vaguely of going with Patie, the only one of her sons who still "belonged to his mother"—and making a home for him in Glasgow. But Patie was an engineer, involved over head and ears in the Herculean work of the new railways; he was scarcely three months in the year, take them all together, at the lodging which he called his head quarters—and perhaps, on the whole, he rather discouraged the idea.

“At least, mother, you must wait to

welcome Katie," said this astute and long-headed adviser of the family—and the Mistress, with her strong sense of country breeding and decorum, would not have done less, had it broken her heart. But she rather longed for the interval to be over, and the matter concluded. The Mistress, somehow, could not understand or recognise herself adrift from Norlaw.

“But I dinna doubt it would be best—it’s natural,” said the Mistress—“they should have their good beginning to themselves,” and with that she sighed, and grew red with shame to think it was a sigh, and spoke sharply to Marget, and put the old easy chair which had been “their father’s!” away into a corner, with a little momentary ebullition of half resentful tears. But she never lost her temper to Huntley—it was only Nature, and not her son, who was to blame.

It was early in August when Katie came home. The Mistress stood at the door

waiting to receive her, on a night which was worthy such a homecoming. Just sunset, the field-labourers going home, the purple flush folded over the Eildons like a regal mantle, the last tender ray catching the roofless wall of the Strength of Norlaw, and the soft hill rising behind, with yellow corn waving rich to its summit, soon to be ripe for the harvest. Tears were in the Mistress's heart, but smiles in her face; she led her new daughter in before even Huntley, brought her to the dining-parlour, and set her in her own chair.

“This is where I sat first myself the day I came home,” said the Mistress, with a sob, “and sit you there; and God bless my bairns, and build up Norlaw—amen!”

But Katie said the amen too, and rose again, holding the Mistress fast and looking up in her face.

“I have not said mother for ten years,” said Katie. “Mother! do you think dispeace

can ever rise between you and me, that you should think once of going away?"

The Mistress paused.

"No dispeace, Katie—no, God forbid!" said Huntley's mother, "but I'm a hasty woman in my speech, and ever was."

"But not to me," said the Katie who was no more Katie Logan—"never to me! and Huntley will be a lonely man if his mother goes from Norlaw, for where thou goest I will go, and where thou dwellest I will dwell. Mother, tell me! is it Patie or poor Huntley who is to have you and me?"

The Mistress did not say a word. She suffered herself to be placed in the chair where she had placed Katie, and then put her apron over her face and wept, thinking strangely, all at once, not of a new daughter-in-law and a changed place, but of him who lay sleeping among the solemn ruins at Dryburgh, and all the sacred chain of years that made dear this house of Norlaw.

The other marriage took place after that, with much greater glory and distinction, to the pride of the Mistress's heart. It was a great festival when it came—which was not till the season of mourning was over—to all whom Madame Roche could reach. Even Joanna Huntley and Aunt Jean were persuaded to come to gladden the wedding of Desirée and Cosmo; and it is even said that Joanna, who is of a very scientific turn of mind, and has a little private laboratory of her own, where she burns her pupils fingers, was the finder of that strange little heap of dust and cinders which revealed to Huntley the mineral wealth in the corner of the Norlaw lands, which now has made him rich enough to buy three Norlaws. At any rate, Joanna was put into perfect good humour by her visit, and thenceforward with the chivalry of a knight-errant, worshipped above all loveliness the beautiful old face of Madame Roche.

This is about all there is to tell of the

Livingstone family. They had their troubles, and are having them, like all of us; but, like all of us, have great joy-cordials now and then to make them strong; and always Providence to work a clear web out of the tangled exertions which we make without witting, and which God sorts into his appointed lot.

THE END.

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