

THE MINISTER'S WIFE.

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PREFACE.

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CHAPTER I.

THE Glebe Cottage at the head of Loch Diarmid was something between a primitive cottage and the little house of gentility, commonly called by that name. The hill-side of which it was the sole inhabitant had once been ecclesiastical soil belonging to the church of Lochhead, which was about a mile distant across the braes—and still, so far as this one dwelling was concerned, retained the name. It had originally been a building of one story thatched and mossy; but lately a few additional rooms had been built over one part of it, and covered with respectable slates. It was composite and characteristic, a human thing, growing out of human rules, and consequently more picturesque than if it had been the result of the most picturesque intention. The thatched end of the cottage was surrounded by no enclosure; the soft rich mossy grass of the hills broken by great bushes of heather pressed up to its very walls; while the other half, or western end, was cultivated

and formed into a pretty homely garden. Hardy roses and honeysuckles, and a waving wealth of fuchsias, hanging rich with crimson bells, clothed the southern front and west end,—the refined part of the cottage. On the mountain side, there was nothing but the rough, low whitewashed wall, the overhanging thatch, the heather within a yard of the house. The same characteristic difference existed even in respect to the landscape. The east windows looked out upon a noble range of hills, between the folds of which a gleam of distant water, branching off into two lochs, was visible over a purple glow of heather. The west had a softer prospect. Low at the foot of the hill lay a third loch, one of the smallest and least renowned, but one of the loveliest in the Highlands, green with foliage, and specked by scattered white houses on either shore among the trees. The wooded banks would have looked too soft for Scotland, but for the summit of heather which rose, sometimes brown, sometimes purple, against the often cloudy, often rainy sky. Looked at from the height on a day in June, with a blue sky blazing over head, the golden whins lighting the hillside, the heather greening over and preparing its bells; the grass like smooth-shorn velvet, half grass, half moss; the little birches waving their long locks in the soft breeze—Loch Diarmid lying glorified in the sun-

shine on one side, and 'dark Loch Goil' gleaming round that gloomy giant's shoulders on the other — I do not think the whole world holds a lovelier scene. It was upon this mount of vision that the Glebe Cottage had planted itself, very inconveniently apart from other people, yet in a position which a queen might have envied. And here, some thirty years ago, lived a family of Diarmids, as curiously varied in internal constitution as was the aspect of their home.

-- The father of the household had been a soldier 'in the war,' and, though little more than a peasant by birth, had risen from the ranks and won his commission by sheer daring and bravery. It is very doubtful whether he was much the happier for it. When he had won his epaulettes another piece of luck befell him: he caught the eye and fancy of a pretty, romantic girl, who married him for his valour and his inches and his red coat. To him she was an heiress, though the actual amount of her wealth was small. Probably he meant, in his gratitude and pride, to be a good husband and live happy ever after, and for this end bought the cottage he had been born in, and added some modern additions to it for the comfort of his lady-wife. But Duncan was Duncan still, notwithstanding his good fortune and his epaulettes; and his poor young wife, finding out her mistake, died

at the end of a year or two, after bringing a pair of twin girls into the world. After this Captain Diarmid saw a great deal of service in all quarters of the world, and when he came back married again, a homely 'neighbour lass,' and died after she too had become the mother of two children. They all lived together in the Glebe Cottage—two sets of people as different as could well be conceived. During the Captain's lifetime a certain arbitrary link united them; but after his death it was not expected by the country-side that there could be any further family union between the twin sisters to whom everything belonged, and the homely widow with her girl and boy. It was a wonder to many of the genteel people of the neighbourhood when it was discovered that Margaret and Isabel meant to permit their father's widow, Jean Campbell, to share their house. Even old Miss Catherine at the Lochhead gave it as her opinion that 'Jean and her bairns had no claim on them.' But the sisters, it was evident, thought differently, though it was not without a certain conflict within and between themselves that the decision was made. They were then between nineteen and twenty, two girls who had grown up as Nature would, with little training of any description, but with that curious refinement of race or tradition which is so often

to be found in those who, springing from a higher origin, have yet lived chiefly among the poor. They were 'ladies born,' as was acknowledged by 'all the Loch'—and universal respect was paid them; although they were not, except on formal occasions, dignified by the title of 'the Miss Diarmids,' but were generally distinguished only as 'the Captain's Margaret,' and 'the Captain's Isabel.' Margaret had fallen into bad health some years before her father's death, and sickness and a more elevated type of character had made her as much the elder of the two as if her seniority had been a matter of years instead of minutes. It was she whose will had prevailed in respect of her step-mother. The sisters had discussed the subject with a certain heat shortly after their father's death. It was settled on a bright October day, when the sun shone brightly on the first sprinkling of snow on the hills. But there were no hills visible from the window of the parlour at which Isabel stood in her black dress, when this discussion commenced. Margaret was lying back in her easy chair by the fire; the chair was full of cushions, and there was a little table at her elbow, with her book, and her work, and her little vase of cut flowers—a proof already of the habits of an invalid which were slowly creeping over her. Isabel, with her red-brown hair, her brilliant hazel eyes, and her bright

complexion, a creature full of life, energy, and force, stood sometimes turning her back in momentary petulance, sometimes glancing round upon her pale sister as her argument required. Margaret had been all lilies and roses, too, not so long ago; but now the roses when they came were too dazzling, and the white too much like snow. There were no roses at that moment upon her soft fading cheek. She was not pretty like her sister; but beautiful with that beauty which it makes one's heart ache to see.

‘She was his wife after all,’ said Margaret, ‘and they are our brother and sister. We have no right to forget that ——’

‘She had no right to be his wife!’ said hasty Isabel, with sudden tears. ‘If she were a poor body in a cothouse do you think I would grudge her anything? but I cannot bear it, because she’s thought to belong to us—her and those weary bairns.’

‘They are my father’s bairns,’ said the invalid; and then she added after a pause, ‘And I hope they are God’s bairns, Bell—and you too.’

‘Me!’ said Isabel, looking round, as with a hasty determination even to deny this bond of union; but when the meaning of the words reached her, a shade of compunction, a gleam of sorrow, shot one after another over her face which expressed all she

thought, 'Oh, Margaret, no like you,' cried the impulsive girl, 'no like you!'

'Dinna break my heart,' said the other, falling in her emotion into the soft vernacular which both in their composed moments avoided; 'are we not all God's bairns? But we shut our hearts and shut our door the one on the other; the like of us can be grand and proud and high—but the like of Him was neighbour and mair to all the poor folk. We aye forget that.'

'*You* never forget,' said Isabel; 'I'll do what you like, my dear, my dear! I'll serve them on my knees night and day if you'll but stay and be content.'

'I'm very content to stay,' said Margaret, with a smile,—'too content. It's not for me to judge; but, Bell, we'll never be parted if I stay or if I go.'

To this the other girl made no answer, but fell down on her knees beside the invalid's chair, and hid her face in her sister's dress, weeping there in silence. Margaret laid her thin hand upon the bright hair and smoothed it tenderly. She was no older than the creature at her feet, and yet it seemed to be her child, warm with all the passion of life, whom she was caressing in her calm and patience. And she smiled, though Isabel saw it not.

'I'll go no further than to Him,' she said, 'and you've aye access to Him at all times. I'll take a

grip of his robe that's made of light, and I'll hear your voice when He's listening to you. I'll tell Him it's my sister:—as if He needed us to tell Him,' she added, with a soft laugh of contempt at herself; and her eyes lighted up in her pale face, and went away far beyond Isabel kneeling at her side, far beyond the homely walls and little humble house. They said in the country-side that she saw such sights as nobody else saw when her eyes woke up, and went away beyond mortal ken in that gaze. She would speak to them of God's love, when she came back, in such a strain that even the old devout people who had lived with God all their lives came from hill and dale to hear her, and held up their hands in thankfulness for the young saint's words. The position of the two young sisters was one so strange and exceptional as to have attracted observation independent of themselves: but Margaret Diarmid was the glory of the country-side; even the rude farm-servants about, who feared not God nor regarded man, gave her a kind of worship. Everybody far and near knew of her, and had for her the veneration which is due to a saint. But Bell took no pleasure in her sister's pre-eminence; every word that was said in Margaret's honour seemed to the eager, hasty, loving creature to sound like a prelude to what would be said over Margaret's grave.

By-and-by Isabel's weeping ceased, and she became aware, by her sister's silence, and by the chill touch of the hand which rested on her head, that Margaret's mind had stolen away from all their trials and troubles. She rose up softly, not disturbing her, and threw one piteous look at the pale, soft countenance. Such abstraction is always more or less an injury and pain to love, which cannot follow. What was she thinking of? what holy, silent refuge had her heart taken shelter in? Isabel gave her one troubled, appealing look and withdrew to a corner. She grudged her companion even to God. And in her heart unawares said little petulant girlish prayers, which were not much like praying:—‘Thou hast all the angels, and all the blessed—and my mother,’ said Isabel in her heart, ‘and must she go too?’ and the bitterness of the man who had but his ewe-lamb came upon her. One or two hot, hasty tears fell on the work she had taken up mechanically. It was little Mary's black frock, her other sister—Jean Campbell's little girl. That was how Isabel succinctly described the children; Jean Campbell's bairns; and was that to be all she would have for a sister when God had His way?

This was how it came to be settled that Jean Campbell and her bairns should remain in the Glebe Cottage. Jean had few qualifications for

the office of guardian to these girls, but she was in some sort a protector to them, and took care of their goods and managed their humble affairs. She was not a woman of such elevation of character as might have fitted her to take the command of the situation; but she was one of those kind and faithful souls who so often hide the sweeter qualities of their nature under an almost harsh, quite uncaressing and undemonstrative appearance. She, too, had mother-wit enough to see through the Captain, though no doubt his rank had dazzled her at first; but now that Captain Duncan was gone, she would have defended his memory to her last breath, and she was very good and tender in her own way to his daughters. She accepted her position loyally, without any attempt to better or change it.

‘I’ve no a word to say,’ she said to her gossips when they attempted to bewail her grievances or stir her up to rebellion. ‘When I married the Captain I did it with my e’en open. They’re ladies born, and no on a footing with the like of me; but they’re awful good to the bairns, and Margaret is aye considerate, and I haven’t a word to say.’

The arrangement worked well enough, strange though it was. The sisters kept to their own end

of the cottage, and Jean and her children abode in theirs. They all took their meals together in the large low-roofed kitchen; but otherwise Jean would have scorned to intrude upon her step-daughters. If they were proud in their innocent fashion of their uncertain grade of rank, the peasant woman was a thousand times prouder in her determination to keep hers, of which there could be no dispute; but she did not hesitate to share what they had, the Captain having left her peniless; nor was she above a little natural anxiety about the chances of the future. The state of Margaret's health was too apparent to leave bystanders in any doubt; and Jean was often uneasy—it is impossible to disguise the fact—as to what might become of herself and her children in such a case.

‘Margret will die,’ she said, with the plain speech of her class, ‘and Isabel—she’ll be married; and then where will I be?’

‘Dinna speak of Margret as if she were but like other folk,’ said one of her friends. ‘If ever there was a servant of the Lord on this earth, she’s one; and now that the age of miracles is come back among us——’

‘I’ve no a word to say against Margret,’ said Jean; ‘she’s mair worth than a’ the rest of us

counted up and added together ; but that 'll no keep her from dying. Every mortal that looks in her face can see she's in a decline.'

'According to the flesh,' said the other ; 'but eh, woman, think of Ailie Macfarlane, whose days were numbered ! No a doctor within twenty mile but had given her up ; and now you'll see her about the loch night and morning, as gleg and as steady as you or me. Ailie's real spiritual-minded, but so is Margret ; and I'm sure if the ane is worth a miracle——'

'Oh, woman, if you would but think what you're saying,' said another speaker ; 'as if any child of Adam was worthy ! I'm no saying grace mightna do it ; but what's Margret but a poor sinful creature after all, like yersel ?'

'And when you've said a' that can be said,' said Jean, holding steadily to her argument, 'it just comes to this,—that there's me and my bairns, and naething to lippen to in this world. No that I'm dounhearted. I was born to work for my bread, and I can work for theirs. But I would have liked well to give Jamie a guid education, and him the Captain's son.'

'Your ain kith and kin were as good as the Captain's,' said the first speaker Jenny Spence, who was 'a connexion'—'your grandmother's cousin was minister of the Lewes, and a real godly

man; and whether Jamie gets the siller or no, Margaret's prayers are a great heritage. I would bid her think upon him when she goes up by yonder to the brae.'

'I'm no saying to the contrary,' said Jean; 'but a scratch of her pen would do a' I want. She canna carry her siller with her; no that I'm wishing her gone—far frae that. If I could keep her, she would live to be as auld as Miss Catherine; but I canna keep her. She's failing every day; and if Providence would but put it in her head to leave a little of her siller for the callant's schooling——'

This was the stepmother's very natural desire. But in the meantime she was very kind to her husband's daughters, and cared for their goods as if they had been her own, and was a faithful servant to them. She and her children were as comfortable in their end of the cottage as were Margaret and Isabel in their half, to which by times the gentlefolks of the district would come as visitors, out of consideration for the good blood which ran in their veins by their mother's side. It was Isabel who was the representative sister out-of-doors, and whom Miss Catherine carried with her to return calls, and make such return as was possible to the civilities of her neighbours and connexions. But it was Margaret who was the queen within and received all the homage. Day by day,

however, carried the elder sister more out of the range of worldly affairs. It was, as Jean said, 'a decline' that had seized her. Not a violent disease, but a soft fading. The current of her life kept shrinking into always a narrower and a narrower channel. She still went every day to a certain spot on the hill-side above the house, where a little burn went trickling from stone to stone, and a mountain-ash drooped its leafy branches over a little green knoll. For many years it had been her daily custom to sit and ponder, or to pray in this silent grassy place. It was long before she knew that any one watched her daily pilgrimage: but nothing escapes the keen inspection of a rural community. When it had just begun to be a toil to her to seek her little oratory, a poor mother from the village, who had been hanging wistfully about, accosted her with a humble petition that she would 'think upon' a suffering child 'when she gaed up bye to the brae.' It was too late then for her to change or to hide her custom, and by degrees she became used to the petition. She went up with tremulous, feeble step day after day, bearing upon her tender soul the burden of other people's troubles, penitences, and fears. Not a soul in the parish would willingly have gone that way to disturb the saintly creature, as she knelt under her rowan-tree, with the soft burn singing in her

ear, and the soft breeze blowing her hair; and offered her offering and made her intercession. They were stern Puritans in the village below, and rampant Protestants; but they sent their white spotless virgin to intercede for them, with a faith which no doctrine could shake. The spot is marked out now from the brae, and enclosed by the reverent hands of Margaret's friends. But it was more like her when it was but the knoll of smooth mossy sward, the burn tripping from stone to stone, the tree with its long flexible branches, its summer fragrance of blossom, its autumn wealth of berries, hanging over her head. There she would sit and muse, looking with wistful eyes on the lovely landscape, which probably she neither noticed nor saw, looking into the heaven which drew near to her, with strange sweet thoughts coming and going like the angels. These thoughts went a great deal wider than the creed she had been bred in, but Margaret was not aware of that. She was a creature taught of God and not of man. Neither temptation nor turmoil of any kind ever seemed to have crossed her quiet path. Her inspiration even was not of the usual kind. Her mind and her heart were open to every one that called. No doubt her sickness had something to do with the formation of her character, but there was nothing sickly in the constitution of her mind or her thoughts.

She was stealing down softly in the slowly falling twilight, when the country was brightening into spring, six months after her father's death. She had a warm shawl wrapped closely round her shoulders, and her step was not quite steady as she left the soft grass of the hill-side for the path. It was but a few yards to the cottage, but her strength was no more than equal to the exertion. There were two people standing waiting for her near the door; one of them a tall, vigorous, old lady, wrapped like herself in a large, soft, black and white shawl, who stood talking, with some eagerness, to the clergyman of the parish, a fresh, rural, middle-aged man, with clear eyes, clear complexion, and a general distinctness about him. It was Miss Catherine of the Lochhead who was speaking to the minister. Family names were unusual in the parish, for the population, with some trifling exceptions, were all Diarmids. Miss Catherine was in some respects the squire of the district. Her brother, it is true, was the real laird, but he was seldom at home, and Miss Catherine reigned in his stead. She was discussing the great topic of the moment with Mr. Lothian; and the two were not quite agreed.

‘Don’t speak to me about miracles,’ said Miss Catherine. ‘I’m not one of your believing

kind. I don't deny that some of the things are very surprising, but they're all to be accounted for. We are surrounded by surprising things. I never lift my hand to my head, but when I think of it, it is a wonder to me—but as for direct miracles ——'

'Here is Margaret,' said the minister; 'we'll ask her; you all believe her better than you'll ever believe me.'

Margaret came up with her slightly faltering, uncertain step as he spoke; and the two gazed at her with that mingled awe and pity which a creature standing on the boundary between life and death naturally calls forth in every sympathetic soul. Mr. Lothian drew her hand through his arm as her father might have done.

'You should not walk so far till you get stronger,' he said. Margaret looked at him with a smile, and shook her head.

'You know I will never get stronger,' she said. 'It is not like you to say what you don't mean. But you'll come in. My feet are failing already, and it's not often we see Miss Catherine here.'

'My dear,' said the old lady, speaking quickly as if to shake the tears out of her voice, 'the horses are all busy at the plough, and I'm a poor walker. I always hear how you are all the same.'

‘You’re vexed to look at me,’ said Margaret. ‘I know what you mean. You’re like to break your heart when you see my face; but I’m not grieved for my part. I cannot see what great difference there can be between this world and the other. God is aye the same. I would like to see Isabel and know that the poor bairns are doing as they ought ——’

‘Oh, Margaret, do not break my heart with your bairns,’ cried Miss Catherine, with tears in her eyes. ‘It’s you I’m thinking of—I care nothing for other folk.’

‘You would hate me if I thought that,’ said Margaret, with her soft smile; ‘and I would be very glad to have your advice. I’m troubled about Jamie’s education. Isabel is young; she’ll maybe not think as I do. I am very anxious for your advice.’

‘We were talking of different things,’ said Mr. Lothian, leading the invalid into the house. ‘We were discussing what has happened in the countryside. If anybody can convince Miss Catherine it is you, Margaret. She will not believe the story everybody is full of—though I saw Ailie with my own eyes, one day helpless on her bed, the next walking down the hill-side far more strongly, my poor child, than you.’

‘It was hysterical; nothing will make me be-

lieve different,' said Miss Catherine; 'fanciful illness, fanciful cure. I'm not gainsaying the facts, but you'll never get me to believe it was miraculous. What is Ailie Macfarlane that God should do miracles for her? If it had been Margaret here ——'

'But He knows I want no miracles,' said Margaret; 'I'm very content with what I get. I'm fond of both the bairns myself; but I give most to little Mary; not that she deserves it most, or that I like her best, but because her nature's aye craving. It's the same thing. Ailie craves, too, and God knows the nature He gave her; but for me—He sees I'm content.'

'And you would be content if you were cut in little pieces for Isabel and Jean Campbell's weans,' cried Miss Catherine, with an indignation that was assumed to hide something else. 'It takes little to content you.'

'Everybody is so good to me,' said Margaret. 'You are not so good to Ailie Macfarlane. You take up her little words, and you're angry at God for doing more for her than for me; but I take it as a compliment, for my part,' said the girl, with a smile. She was so near her Father in Heaven, that she spoke of Him almost as she would have done of a father on earth.

'Well—well,' said Miss Catherine, impatiently,

‘we must all believe just what you like to tell us. Where is Isabel? I think she might be here to look after you and keep you comfortable instead of wandering all the day among the hills.’

‘She is never away from me,’ said Margaret, warmly; ‘she would carry me in her arms if I would let her. I sent her out for change, poor Bell! It would be a hard thing if I was to let her put all her happiness on me.’

‘Better on you than on that English lad,’ said Miss Catherine, with heat, ‘that nobody knows. In my day, we were never allowed to speak to a young man till his kith and kin were known. You think you’re wiser now—but I wish it may come to no harm,’ said the old lady. She was an old woman given to opposition, but the strength of her indignation now lay in the absolute necessity she felt to do or say something which should not drop into weak lamentation and tears.

Margaret made no answer. She bent back in her invalid chair, and threw off the shawl which wrapped her, and untied the bonnet which surrounded her delicate face like a great projecting frame. As for the minister, his face flushed, and his hands grew restless with agitation; though on the surface of things it would have seemed that he had very little to do with the matter.

‘There is no meaning in it,’ said Mr. Lothian;

‘they’re children both;—she is not the one, especially now—No, you need not think of that.’

And with this speech he rose up and went to the window, and gazed out, not knowing what to say. Miss Catherine held up her hands commenting on his excitement as women do,—half contemptuous, half amused,—

‘What is it to him that might be her father?’ she said, leaning over Margaret, in a whisper. And Margaret smiled with the indulgent quiet of old age.

‘Let them be,’ she said, softly; ‘God will guide it His own way. I’m not afraid for my Isabel. When I’m away, you’ll see what is in her. My shadow is aye coming in, though you don’t think it, between her and you.’

At this moment the minister turned round, as with a little impatience, and interrupted the side-talk.

‘And as we speak of her, here comes Isabel,’ he said, with a hasty sigh. Both the women knew at once more distinctly than if he had said it, that the ‘English lad,’ young Stapylton, the one idler of the country-side, was with Isabel. As the young pair approached, the elder visitors prepared to go away. Miss Catherine was absorbed in her anxiety and grief for Margaret, but other feelings stirred

in the mind of her companion. He was eager to leave the cottage before Isabel and her escort should appear, and hurried the old lady in her leave-taking.

‘We must not tire her out,’ he said, pressing Margaret’s hand with a certain petulant haste, which she forgave him. It was true he was old enough to be Isabel’s father; but even that reflection, though he had often insisted upon it in his own thoughts, had not moved him as it ought to have done. He could not wait to meet her, but nodded his head with a poor assumption of carelessness, and hurried Miss Catherine down the opposite path. Even Mr. Lothian’s secret sentiments had been discovered, like other things, by the country-side; and the old lady perceived what he meant, and dried the tear in her eye, and looked at him with a certain grim, half-pitying smile about the corner of her mouth.

‘Isabel will think we are angry,’ she said, watching him with a certain interest — almost amusement in his suffering; ‘though, poor thing, I don’t know that she is to blame.’

‘Why should we be angry?’ said the poor minister, winding himself up to what he supposed to be an air of perfect composure. ‘I never thought she was to blame.’

‘ We cannot expect much wisdom from a young thing of her age,’ said Miss Catherine. She was full of the natural amazement of women at the ever curious phenomena of a passion so out of date; and there was a tone of kindly contempt, as well as amusement, in her voice.

‘ Margaret is no older,’ he said with a sigh.

Upon which his companion burst into a short, agitated laugh.

‘ Minister, you’ll excuse me,’ she said; ‘ but the sight of a man like you taking note of the nonsense of a lassie like her—That I should laugh when I have but just left that bonnie creature with Death in her face. Talk of bonnie Isabel and her silly ways, when we have but left *her*.’

Mr. Lothian made no answer. No man could have been more kind to Margaret; but bonnie Isabel and her silly ways disturbed the good man more than anything else in earth or heaven.

‘ Why should she die?’ said Miss Catherine, with sudden agitation. ‘ Tell me that, you that are a minister of God. She is worth ten of us common folk. It is good to see her—good to be near her—and yet it is her that has to die.’

‘ It is because she is the most fit for heaven,’ said the clergyman, solemnised by this appeal.

‘ That’s what you all say,’ said Miss Catherine, with a touch of contempt; ‘ but I cannot even

take that for gospel. There is old Nancy Sinclair at the clachan as ready as any; but not for her do your chariots come. I cannot understand God for my part,' the hot-tempered old woman said with hasty tears. God seemed to have come strangely near to the Loch, and was spoken of with a certain realism as a present and vividly realized personage, which to stranger ears might seem profane.

'Her mother was just the same,' Miss Catherine continued, pouring out her grievances against the supreme Governor of all things, with a petulance nearly related to tears, 'taken away when there was the most for her to do, and leaving these two poor things to guide each other. If she had been spared, Margaret might have been a blooming lass at this day, and Isabel not left to wander at her will, and pick up friends, and prepare, maybe, her own destruction.'

'Miss Catherine, you forget that an innocent girl should not be spoken of so,' said the minister, with again a heavy sigh.

'I forget nothing, Edward Lothian—nor that you, like an old fool, are breaking your heart about her; a girl that might be your daughter—a mere silly bairn!'

'Hush!' he said. A faint colour had crept upon his face. He made no attempt to deny the

accusation. 'I hope I am not a man to break my heart, as you say, for anything in the world,' he added, after a pause, 'as long as there is the parish, and my work;' and the poor man unconsciously once more rounded his sentence with a sigh.

CHAPTER II.

THE code of manners in a rural district like that of Loch Diarmid, and in the doubtful rank, half gentry half 'common folk,' held by the two sisters, is less severe than on higher altitudes and more formal scenes. Though Isabel might blush a little to be seen by Miss Catherine walking down the hill with Horace Stapylton, it was not because any idea of impropriety occurred to her. She had met him 'by accident,' and he had joined her in her walk and returned with her, to ask for her sister in the most natural and entirely fortuitous way. And the country girl was unaware even that the presence of a chaperone was unnecessary to justify such companionship. It was almost twilight when they entered the little parlour where Margaret lay back wearily in her chair, longing for rest and the silence of the night; but she smiled softly at her sister, and half rose from her seat, weak, but courteous to acknowledge the presence of the

stranger. Stapylton was the son of an English squire, who had been sent to Scotland to study agriculture, and from the high farming of Lothian had found his way to Ayrshire on the score of cheesemaking, and thence to the other side of the Loch to Mr. Smeaton's great stock farm. It had been autumn when he came, and the grouse was a still more potent attraction. And after a while he had found his way over the braes to see Mr. Lothian, who had once been tutor to the young earl (before he came to be marquis), and had many English friends. A Scotch Manse is the home of hospitality, and young Stapylton found himself comfortable and saw Isabel, and discovered many attractions in the place; and, after a succession of flying visits, had settled down as Mr. Lothian's permanent guest. In the primitive world of Loch Diarmid he was distinguished by his nationality, which placed him on a little pedestal apart from all competitors. He was 'yon English lad' to the prejudiced multitude; and more kindly bystanders entitled him 'the young Englishman at the Manse.' He was a ruddy, well-looking, not highly refined type of man; but he was a stranger and 'English,' and surrounded with a certain agreeable half-mystery in consequence. His accent had a sound of refinement and elevation

in it to ears used to the broader vowels and ' West-country drawl ' of the vernacular. And to Isabel Diarmid he had a charm more subtle even than the attraction of singularity and unlikeness to the multitude. He was the first man who had openly and evidently owned her power as a woman, which of itself is a great matter. He had been the first to awaken in her mind that delicious sense of sovereignty which surprises the child into womanhood and awakens all the budding faculties. There might be truer and deeper love to come, but that first thrill of wondering delight had come to the girl out of young Stapylton's homage. Since he had come to live at the Manse the idle young fellow had thrown himself continually in Isabel's way. She could not go ' down the road ' on the simplest errand without meeting him. If she wandered over the heathery braes in a spare moment to ' take the air,' he was there with his eager looks. It did not matter where she went, he knew of it as by magic, and was always at hand, a kind of persecution which is not always disagreeable to an inexperienced girl. It gave to Isabel that vague, sweet sense of being one of the princesses of romance which tells for so much in a young life. She went in now, to her sister, with life breathing about her, with the wild perfume of the summer blossoms,

the heather she had been brushing against, the bog-myrtle she had been treading under foot, like an atmosphere round her; and love untold and hope without bounds, all tender, vague, and splendid, encircling her like the air she breathed. This was the difference between the two sisters, and it was a strange difference. If Margaret had been an ordinary invalid it would have been a touching and melancholy contrast. But as it was the advantage was not all on her sister's side.

'We've been hearing of Ailie Macfarlane,' said Isabel, eagerly; 'I have seen her. If it is faith that has cured Ailie, why should you lie there so weak? Oh, my bonnie Maggie! If it was the like of me it would be different; but why should Ailie be well and strong and you lie there?'

'I think because it's God's will,' said Margaret: 'but Miss Catherine has been here, and I have done nothing this hour but talk of myself; it is not the best subject. Mr. Stapylton, I thought you were leaving the Loch? There is not much to take up a young man like you here.'

'There is more here than anywhere else in the world,' said young Stapylton; 'I should like to stay all my life—I hate the very thought of going away.'

'But your friends are all in England,' said Margaret, 'and your life—it is not easy for me now

to feel what life is. I am like one lying by a river-side, seeing it glide and glide away. I can do little but speak, and that's poor work. But you that are young and strong are different—you and Isabel. You should not put off each other's time.'

'We met by chance,' said Isabel, with a sudden blush; 'and I have done all I had to do. There are times when one cannot work; it's gloaming now and the day is past. There is a meeting down at the Lochhead with Mr. Lothian and all the ministers. But I would rather stay with you.'

'Maybe it's best,' said Margaret, with a little sigh; 'but if I were strong enough to be among them, and pray with our brethren, it would strengthen my heart. Oh, Bell! if the Spirit is coming like a flood, and bonnie Loch Diarmid to be the first place where His blessed feet will touch when He comes again—what kind of folk should we be to be ready for such a grace!'

Isabel and the young man beside her looked at each other with a startled glance, as of guilt. It was not this they had been thinking of. The girl drew a stool to her sister's side, and sat down with tremulous humility, drawing Margaret's hand into her own.

'I am not so good as you,' she said, faltering. 'I was thinking of other things. It was so bonnie on the hills, and everything so sweet; but if it

were to be so, He would be good to us for your sake,' said Isabel, with a few sudden tears. It wrung her heart to turn to that solemn prospect from her own natural, simple joyfulness; and yet it was good to escape from the sad spectacle of her sister's waning days by means of that vague possibility, half-comforting, half-appalling. If it should be so—if the world which was so sweet should melt away, and all be lost in that splendour of 'His' coming, which to Isabel herself, for the moment, looked more awful than consolatory—then, at least, Margaret would be exalted as she deserved. There was some compensation in that.

'As if He did not know you better than I do!' said Margaret, with a smile; 'as if He had not an eye to see that the bit silly thing was right in her heart, though her feet went whiles astray like a bairn's! I am fond of my Isabel, but no so kind as He is; He's not blaming you for liking the bonnie hills and the sweet air—though maybe I was blaming you a little in my heart. That makes all the difference. And the fools are feared for Him seeing!' cried Margaret with a smile, half of indignation, half of pride. The daylight had almost gone by this time, and her breath was short; she said a little sentence, and then paused, making clear stops in her weakness, and giving a simple emphasis unawares. As for

Stapylton, he had hidden himself among the shadows, somewhat appalled by this kind of conversation, while Isabel sat low by her sister's knees, and gazed up with her bright lamps of eyes. Outside a little glimmer of pale light showed where the loch reflected the pale heavens, and down by the waterside the people were praying in an unanimous strange fervour—praying not for daily bread and common gifts, but for miracles, wonders, the coming of Christ, the end of all things. It was not wonderful if the heart of the young saint swelled within her, or that the sweet, half-developed nature of Isabel should have thrilled with a strange mingling of fears and hopes. The young fellow who sat by gazed at them with dull wonder. He did not make it out. He was not of the parish, and thought the prevailing excitement must be madness or feigning, as an unsympathetic stranger, in the presence of a strong sentiment which he does not understand, is so apt to do. A certain rustling which he made in his uneasiness caught Isabel's ear, and made her aware of the foreign element which was out of harmony. Her own feeling on the subject was no more than sympathy, and she was the more quickly affected by this silent protestation. She rose hastily, feeling by intuition what was passing in her lover's mind. Never

could there have been a more comprehensive embodiment and contrast of feeling. Isabel rushed into common life with a bound; half in yearning to recover her interrupted relations with him, half with a proud reluctance to lay open to his cold eye the inner life which he misconceived or laughed at.

‘*She’s* coming in from the Loch-head,’ cried Isabel, ‘and the bairns are ready for their supper—and, Margaret, we’ve wearied you.’

She was Jean Campbell, the stepmother to whom Isabel was less kind and tolerant than her sister, and whom presently they heard come in with a little commotion into the large low kitchen where the family took its meals. Little Mary had been with her mother, and by-and-by a little knock at the parlour-door announced her approach. The lady-visitors were very great people to the child, and only she of ‘the other family’ ever ventured uninvited into that splendid apartment. She was like Isabel, though Isabel was indignant to be told so—with two large excitable, brilliant brown eyes, which at this moment blazed out of the little flushed and agitated face. She had been at the meeting, and had heard all, and felt all, with precocious sensibility. While Isabel went out under pretence of helping her stepmother, but in reality to accompany her

visitor to the door, the child knelt down on the stool she had been sitting on by Margaret's side, and began her little passionate tale.

'It was like in the Bible,' said little Mary; 'in the middle of the reading the Holy Spirit came. O Margaret, I couldn't bear it! Ailie gave a great cry, and then she spoke; but it wasna *her* that spoke: her countenance was shining white, like the light—just like the Bible; and she spoke out like a minister, but far better than the minister. It was awfu' to hear her; and, O Margaret, I couldn't bear it; I thought shame.'

'Why did you think shame?' said Margaret. 'You should have been glad to hear, thankful to hear—even if it was too high for a bairn like you to understand.'

'It wasna that,' cried the child. 'I thought shame that it wasna you. Why can Ailie do it, and no you? And they say you are as good as Ailie, and as holy; but they say you havena faith. O Margaret, would you let *her* aye be the first, and a' the folk going after her? I canna bear it! I have faith mysel. You could get up this minute, and go and speak like Ailie, if you would but have faith.'

Margaret put her arm softly round the excited child, and the little thing's agitation found vent in tears. She put down her head on her sister's

shoulder, and sobbed with childish mortification and wounded pride. Whether any echo of that cry woke in the patient soul thus strangely reproached, the angels only know. Margaret said nothing for some minutes; she held the child close with her feeble arm, and calmed and soothed her; and it was only when the sobs were over and the excitement subdued that she spoke.

‘So you think God’s no so kind to me?’ she said softly in the darkness. ‘My little Mary, you are too little to understand. I am not one that craves for gifts; I am content with love. I am best pleased as it is. Ailie and me are two different spirits; not than one is better and the other worse. If we had both been angels, we would still have been different. You are too little to understand. I am not the one to speak and to work; I am the one to be content.’

‘But you shouldna be content,’ said little Mary; ‘you should have faith. O Margaret, I’m little, but I’ve faith. Rise up, and be well and live! They a’ say that to be ill and die is a sin against the Holy Ghost.’

The child had risen up in her excitement, and stood stretching out her little arms over her sister. The room was dark and still, with but the ‘glimmering square’ of the window fully visible, and night gathering in all the corners. Margaret’s

form was invisible in the soft gloom; the outline of her reclining figure, the little phantom standing over her, the suggestion of a contrast, intense as anything in life, was all that could have been divined by any spectator. Presently soft hands stretched upwards, and took hold of the little rigid arms of the would-be marvel-worker; and a voice still softer,—low like the coo of a dove, came out of the darkness.

Margaret attempted no reply; she made no remonstrance; she only repeated that psalm which is as the voice of its mother to every Scottish child—the first thing learnt, the last forgotten :—

‘ The Lord’s my Shepherd, I’ll not want,
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green; he leadeth me
The quiet waters by.

Yea, though I walk in death’s dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill;
For thou art with me, and thy rod
And staff me comfort still.’

As the soft familiar voice went on, poor little Mary’s excited nerves broke down. She burst once more into tears, and ere the psalm was ended added her small faltering voice to the low and steady tones of her sister. She was overcome by influences much too exciting to be understood by a

child. The little creature yielded, because her physical endurance was not equal to the task she had set herself, but her mind was unchanged. She was impatient, angry, and mortified. Her sister's rival had triumphed, and little Mary could not bear it. As for Margaret, she rose when her psalm was ended, and took her little sister's hand and led her into the kitchen, where the family table was prepared. The change was quaint and strange, as were all the contrasts in this family. The kitchen was large and low, with a door opening directly upon the road, and two broad square lattice windows, one of which looked out upon the moor. There was a great wooden table in the centre, with three chairs, and a couple of three-legged stools set round it. Jean Campbell—buxom and comely in her widow's cap—was filling the children's bowls with porridge, while Isabel made tea. The fireplace was large, but not old enough to be picturesque, and the room was lighted by a little oil-lamp fastened to the high wooden mantel-shelf, on which were ranged all the shining things possessed by the household, in the shape of brass candlesticks, and other domestic ornaments. This dim light was supplemented by what lingering remains there were of twilight from the open door. Twilight, indeed, was all that was within. The floor was tiled and

red, the walls dark with smoke and age. A kind of cupboard in one corner disclosed the press-bed which belonged to the cottage originally, but which the little winding ladder-like staircase at the other side made unnecessary. The two unlighted candles, standing white and tall on the dresser ready to be taken into the parlour; the pretty china cups and teapot at one end of the large table, and still more the appearance of the two sisters, gave the most curious climax to the confusion of ideas which seemed to belong to the place. Margaret sat down in the cushioned chair which awaited her, still holding little Mary by the hand. She had to pause to take breath before she spoke, and the child stood by her like an eager little prisoner, with her big eyes shining. Mary's mind was precocious, and stimulated into premature action by the strange circumstances that surrounded her. She felt as profoundly as if she had been twenty, that while Margaret and Isabel were the Miss Diarmids, she was only 'Jean Campbell's bairn;' and now a sure way of obtaining individual distinction, the highest of all grades of rank, had burst upon the child; therefore she was in no mood for the half-reproof which she foresaw was to come.

'I think little Mary is too young for the meet-

ings,' said Margaret; 'not that I mean she should not learn; but she is very quick and easy moved, and she is but a bairn.'

The stepmother looked up with a little flash of not unnatural suspicion.

'She is no a lady born like you,' said Jean, hastily; 'but in my way of thinking that's a reason the more why she should learn.'

'But no when she is so young,' said Margaret. 'Her little face is all moving, and the bairn herself trembling. It's her nerves I'm thinking of,' said the sick girl, with a deprecating smile; at which, however, Jean only shook her head, as she looked at the child's glowing, startled face.

'Nerves! I never heard of nerves in her kith or kin,' said the woman; and then added, 'You may speak to Isabel about nerves, Margaret; she's been greeting but the house like an infant, and tells me "naothing," when I asks what ails her. It's to her you should speak.'

Margaret looked at her sister across the table, and shook her head. 'You all take your own way,' she said, with a touch of sadness, 'though you say it is to please me. I am thankful beyond measure that you care for the kirk and for prayer, but little Mary might be as well if she was left with me. We are great friends. And, Isabel, you'll

make your bonnie eyes red, but you'll no give up a hard thought or a hasty word; and yet that would be worth more than miracles. Jamie, come and tell me what has happened to-day on the hill.'

'Me!' said Jamie, looking up with his mouth full of porridge, and his eyes large with wonder. 'There's never naething happens till me.'

'Is that a way to answer when Margaret speaks to you?' cried his mother. 'But he'll never learn manners—never, whatever you do. I think whiles he's no better than a natural born.'

'But he knows every creature on the hill, and every bird on the trees,' said Margaret, 'and is never cruel to one of them. That's grand manners. He's good to everything God has made. Jamie, did you see the minister to-day?'

'Hunting flowers on the hill,' said Jamie promptly, thrusting away his thick matted white hair from his round, staring, wondering eyes. He was like his mother—that was all that could be said of him. He had nothing of little Mary's resemblance to her step-sisters, nor had he the good looks of his soldier father; and, notwithstanding his mother's anxiety to give him an education, that greatest of prizes in the estimation of a Scotch peasant, he was slow of comprehension, and slow of speech, an unpromising subject. Jean

broke in at his words with a little snort of indignation.

‘So mony great things going on at his very side, and him gathering a wheen useless flowers! And it was well seen on him,’ she cried; ‘there was Mr. Fraser of the Langholm and Mr. Wood on the other side of the hill, that took it a’ upon themselves; though Ailie’s in our parish, and a’ the stir. And our ain minister without a word to say! I’ve aye said he was ower much taken up with his flowers, and his fancies; no, but what I think it would be a far better thing for Isabel——’

‘Nothing about me, if you please,’ said Isabel, flashing into sudden wrath; and then she gave Margaret a guilty look. As for Margaret she but shook her head softly once more.

‘He is not so sure in his own mind,’ she said, ‘that is what makes him silent. Mr. Wood and Mr. Fraser are different kind of men. Some can just believe without more ado, and some have to think first. Isabel, if you’re ready, it is the bairns’ bedtime, and we can go.’

‘You’re awfu’ anxious to-night about the bairns,’ said Jean, still irritable and displeased.

‘She is so little,’ said Margaret, stooping over little Mary to kiss her. ‘If you would but believe me, and no take her down yonder. How can

she understand at her age? and she has nerves as well as Isabel. Will you promise me not to think to-night? but just to fall asleep, little Mary, as soon as you've said your prayers?'

'I'll pray for you, Margaret,' cried the child, with the tremulous tones of excitement, 'and you'll, maybe, be well and strong like Ailie the morn's morn.'

'Then wait till morning comes,' said Margaret, 'for to-night I am wearied, and I want to rest.'

Thus they separated, the sisters with their candles retiring to their little parlour,—the lights in the window of which were watched by more than one watcher from far, with tender thoughts of the young inmates. But Margaret was weary,—too weary,—for the counsel she had to give. She went to bed leaving Isabel, the latest of all the house, sitting alone, in a fever of thought which she could now indulge for the first time. The lonely little window sent a feeble ray upon the hill-side road, and was visible on the loch to such a late hour as seldom witnessed any window alight in Loch Diarmid. There were many causes for the tumult of fancies which absorbed the girl and made her forget the progress of time. The very air around her was full of excitement; her sister for

anything she knew might the next day rise healed from her bed. She herself might be free as the winds to choose her own life; and it was at the very climax and crisis of this life that Isabel stood.

CHAPTER III.

It will have been guessed by what has been already said that one of the periodical fits of religious excitement to which every primitive country is liable, had lately taken place in the parish of Loch Diarmid. There had been a general quickening of popular interest in religious matters. The doctrinal side, which is generally uppermost in Scotland, had given way to the emotional; and a great many subjects, long laid aside as antiquities, and belonging to a different dispensation, reappeared, and were discussed in eager peasant assemblies as possible occurrences of every day. The questions which were hotly debated in every cottage were, whether the age of miracles had passed away—whether they were not, on the contrary, a necessary adjunct of Christ's Church in all ages—whether sickness and suffering of every kind were not so many contradictions of God's will and evidences of want of faith. Religion had taken a new meaning to the fervid primitive mind. A mira-

culous world, all glowing with undeveloped forces, rose up around them. The end might be that the Lord would come, bringing confusion to His enemies and triumph to His people, or, at least, that such supernatural endowments would come as should make poor men and peasant maidens the reformers of the world. At the first outset there was something splendid, something exalting, in this hope. And the strange story which a short time before had run round the Loch as by magic gave it instant confirmation. Ailie Macfarlane, a young woman known to be hopelessly ill, who had been visited, and sympathized with, and ministered to by all the kindly gossips of the parish,—whose parents had been condoled with on her approaching loss,—and whose symptoms were as well known to the community as their several and individual sufferings, had risen up all at once from her sick bed and gone out on a journey at the call of faith. The astonished parish had suddenly encountered her afoot upon its public roads, yet knew with a certainty beyond all power of deception, that the day before she had been a helpless sufferer.

Such a wonder had an immense effect upon the popular mind, as indeed a thoroughly ascertained fact of the kind would have had anywhere. Whether there was any strictly physical explanation of so wonderful a recovery, I cannot tell; but the fact was

indisputable, vouched for not by two or three witnesses, but by the entire community. Whether or not she might turn out a prophetess, as she claimed to be, this wonderful preliminary was certain. She had risen up and walked like the paralytic in the Gospel, in defiance of all physicians and human means of cure, and was visible among them in restored health and activity a creature who had been on the verge of the grave. Throughout the whole country, great and small, without exception, were occupied by Ailie Macfarlane's wonderful recovery. Nobody could deny, and nobody could explain it. There was not a house in the district where sickness was which did not thrill with a strange hope. For once in this limited local world most men succeeded in realizing, as by a gleam of sudden enlightenment, that the spiritual life was at least as important as the temporal, and that their relations with God were of more instant moment and present value to them than their relations with men. To bring this conviction into the minds of an ordinary population, however temporally, however superficially, with the force of reality, was of itself no small wonder; and it was very much the work of the two young women who filled so strange a place in the sober Scotch parish,—Ailie Macfarlane, on whom the miracle had been wrought, and Margaret Diar-

mid, the subject of no miracle, whose power was that of pure holiness and Christianity alone.

The thrill of strange expectation which thus ran through the parish was, as may be supposed, more strongly felt by Margaret's friends than by any other of the rustic neighbours. The strength of their love for her tempted them almost to accuse, and certainly to reproach, the wilful sufferer who would not avail herself of her known favour with Heaven and be healed like the other. It was this certainty that set her sister free (or at least, so she thought,) to entertain visions of happiness to herself independent of Margaret. On the very next evening, when the sun had set upon the loch, but still lingered red upon the further hills, Isabel resumed the subject which had occupied her thoughts. The day had come between, with all its commonplace occupations, and the night with its sleep, and it was under very different circumstances that the subject so important to the girl's happiness was approached. Notwithstanding her numberless little employments it had never been out of her mind all day. She had held long and serious conversation, with Margaret. She had taught little Mary her lessons; she had taken a share in everything, even in the talk, when poor Mr. Lothian, the minister, had paid his almost daily visit. But throughout all, like an accompaniment, her

controversy with herself had gone on all day, taking up every spare moment, and holding a tenacious life through all obstacles. Could she do it? Sunder her future life from her past at a leap—set herself free from all the present claims upon her—could it be possible to do it? or, on the other hand, would she, could she give up her love?

Isabel's brain had grown giddy by dint of thinking,—whensuddenly she heard a little gravel thrown on the corner of the parlour window—the signal that she was waited for without. She threw her shawl round her hastily, drawing it over her head, and stole out. Margaret was not there to be disturbed. She had gone to her place of prayer some time before, and was still in that silent nook, with the sweet rowan-tree blossoms scenting the air round her. Isabel stole out with a certain guilty sense that her errand was not one to be approved by any beholder. Some way up, beyond the cottage, among the great bushes of whins and heather, lingered a single figure. Few passengers cared to wade among that thick undergrowth; here and there it was treacherous moss in which the foot sank; here and there a young birch waved its brown locks pathetically in the evening breeze; and the heather-bushes, with their gnarled stalks like miniature oaks, were not very

pleasant to walk among. But the two who had appointed their meeting there did not care for the heather stalks, or the trembling moss. Neither did they care for the landscape—the hills still glorified with red gleams of sunshine, with Loch Goil leaden-blue at their feet on one side, and Loch Diarmid silvery grey on the other. They were thinking but of themselves—or, rather, as they would have said, of each other. Earth had not anything to show more fair to the young man than the pretty figure all wrapt in that shawl, with bright, brown, dewy eyes looking out from its shade, and a quiver of emotion about those soft lips, who wound her way through the heather to meet him. He did not feel as she did, that the meeting was wrong,—but at least it was forbidden, if not by any one in words, still by every one of those principles of duty and prudence against which a young man delights to set himself. It was treachery to those who loved the two best on either side; it was madness in every prudential point of view. But, at the same time, it was love; and what more could be said?

‘Have you thought it all over?’ said the young man, eagerly. ‘Isabel, you cannot mean to cast me off. Don’t tell me so; don’t look as if you could be so cruel. I could bear anything for your sake, but that I could not bear.’

This was said in haste and excitement, after a long pause; for Isabel had nothing to say to her lover, but went on with him in silence, turning her face away from his anxious looks.

‘I never thought of casting you off,’ said Isabel; ‘how could that be? If we were to be parted for ever and ever, I could never cast you off; but I canna do it, Horace,—I canna do it. You must ask me no more.’

‘Why cannot you do it?’ he said. ‘What is to prevent you? I have told you everything, Isabel. They will say I am too young to marry if I ask them at home—and they don’t know you. If my mother knew my Isabel, it would be different. And if we were but married, it would be different. Once married, everything would come right. And what matter is it if we were married in private or in public? It is always in a house here in Scotland. I only ask that one little sacrifice. Is it much to ask when I am ready to do anything—everything ——’

‘But there is nothing for you to do,’ said Isabel; ‘it would all be me. You are making me deceive them now. I never said what was not true all my life before; and now I’m false to everybody—everybody but you.’

‘It would put an end to that if you would do what I say,’ cried the young man. ‘We should go

away; and then when we came back, everybody would know. I am asking so little—only to have it done privately. We would come back, and all would be right. My people would make up their minds to it when they could not help it; and yours ——’

‘Ah!’ cried Isabel, ‘to speak to me of running away and being married, and my Margaret—my only sister, lying dying! How can you name such a thing to me?’

‘Now, Isabel,’ said young Stapylton, ‘this is nonsense, you know. If you break my heart, what good will that do to her? It will not cure her. Besides,’ he added, with suppressed scorn, ‘you know yourself—you have told me—that Margaret might be well if she liked. She is very good, isn’t she? better than that girl whom you are all talking of—and she ought to be cured. If she keeps herself ill on purpose, it is cruel and selfish of her. Why should she spoil your life and her own too?’

‘How dare you speak like that of my sister?’ said Isabel, with blazing eyes, ‘and her so near the angels? Oh, Horace, you would never think so of Margaret, if you were really, really caring for me.’

‘If you can doubt me, I have no more to say,’ said the young man; and then they started apart, and the briefest lovers’ quarrel ensued—a quarrel soon made up in the inevitable, universal way,

strengthening the position of the one who attacked, and weakening that of the defender. Stapylton drew Isabel's hand through his arm when she gave it him in reconciliation and led her through the heather farther and farther from home. 'You are never to utter such cruel words any more,' he said, 'nor so much as to think them. Am not I ready to give up everything for you? The old Hall, and my father's favour, and all I might have if I pleased. It is different from Loch Diarmid, Isabel; but I care for nothing but you; and you will not make the least little sacrifice for me.'

'I would make any sacrifice—any sacrifice; there is nothing so hard but I would try to do it—for you, Horace,' said the girl with tears.

'And yet you will not come away with me for two or three days, and be made my wife! What are you afraid of, Isabel? Can you not trust me? Do you think I would harm you? Tell me what it is you fear?'

'Fear!' said Isabel surprised, lifting her eyes to his face. 'When you are with me what can I fear?'

'Then why don't you trust me?' said the young fellow, with a sudden flush on his face.

'I trust you as I trust myself,' said Isabel. 'Could I care for any one as I care for you, and not trust him? It is my own folk I am thinking of. I cannot deceive my own folk. Oh, dinna ask me, Horace, and I will do anything else in the world.'

‘Your own folk!’ said Horace, with a little contempt; ‘Jean Campbell, perhaps, that is not good enough to be your housekeeper. I am deceiving father and mother for you, Isabel, and I never grumble. To think of your father’s widow in comparison with me!’

‘I think of Margaret,’ said Isabel, ‘my twin sister. Oh, never ask me more! It would kill my Margaret. Me to deceive her that has been part of herself. Oh, Horace, dinna ask me! I would die to please you; but not even to please you, would I hurt her. I canna do it. I would sooner die!’

Young Stapylton’s face grew red all over with a passionate, furious colour; then he drew his breath hard and restrained himself. For one moment he grasped Isabel’s hand, which rested on his arm, with a firm pressure, which would have made her scream had she been less startled. Then he loosed it with a strange little laugh which was not pleasant to hear.

‘Isabel,’ he said, ‘if you don’t make me hate Margaret before all’s over, it will be a wonder. Do you forget what you have told me? or do you think I forget? Would I ever ask you to leave your sister, if things were here just as they are in other places? Have you not told me that the age of miracles has come back; and don’t I know that

there is nobody in the place so good as Margaret? Why should she die when the rest recover? It stands to reason; and you are not going to spend all your lives together, you two. Of course you will marry some time; and so will she—when she is better,' the young man added after a pause.

'Margaret marry? Never, never!' cried Isabel. 'You cannot understand; and you dinna say that as if you believed it either—but like a scoffer,' she added, 'that thinks nothing is true.'

'I think my Isabel is true,' said the young man, 'and I believe anything she says.'

'Oh, no me, no me,' cried Isabel, with tears, 'dinna call *me* true. I am false to everybody belonging to me. I am cheating and deceiving all my own folk. I am true to nobody but you.'

'After all, that is the most important,' said Stapylton, with an attempt at playfulness. 'Isabel, am not I the first now? the first to be loved—the first to be considered? I know you are to me.'

Isabel made a long pause. She wandered on with him, for they were walking all the time, with her eyes bent on the sweet grass she trod under foot, and the heather-bushes among which they picked their way. After a long interval a 'No' dropped from her lips. 'No,' she went on, shaking her head slowly, 'I must not think of you first,—not now. I must think of Margaret first.

Dinna be angry, Horace. It is but a year since I saw you first, and she has been my best friend and my dearest for twenty years. And you are well and strong, and she is dying; and you have plenty of friends, and she has no one but me. I must think of her before you.'

'Then you don't love me!' cried the young man. 'I see how it is: you have a liking for me,—that is all. You are pleased to keep a man dangling about at your orders, waiting for you, as they say here, at kirk and market; but as for *loving*—giving up all and following your husband,—you're not the girl for that, Isabel. I see: you're Scotch, and you're cautious; and you won't take one step till you see what is to be the next; and as for speaking of love——'

Isabel looked up at him hastily with indignant, tender eyes, wounded to the heart. She drew her hand out from his arm. Not love him, and yet deceive her friends for him and leave Margaret alone the long, slow evening through! The colour rose violent and hot to her face. But she was very proud as well as very warm in her affections. She would not explain. Turning away from him as she disengaged her hand, her eye suddenly caught the dreary blank of the moor around them, from which the light had faded. Never before in all their rambles had they wandered so far. The

cottage was invisible, as well as every other habitation. The night was falling. It was time already for the family supper, and Margaret, all alone, would be waiting for her sister, while Isabel was far from home, in the dark on the moor, with only her lover beside her. A little cry of consternation burst from the girl's lips. Had she had wings, she could scarcely have gone back quick enough to save Margaret from anxiety and wonder, and perhaps fear. Her companion saw her start, her painful surprise, and forgot his upbraiding. He seized her hand again suddenly, and drew it almost with a degree of force within his arm.

‘Isabel,’ he cried energetically, ‘it’s night, and nobody will see us; and we are as near to Loch Goil as we are to the Glebe—I think nearer, Isabel. It’s but to go on, now you are so far on your way. There shall be nothing to worry, nothing to frighten you. Let us go down on the other side, and get it over. It is not a great matter, if you love me. Margaret will be anxious, but we’ll send her word to-morrow. I know a good woman to take you to. I know a quiet way down, where nobody will see us. Isabel, Isabel! you don’t mean to say you’re angry. You are not afraid of me?’

‘I’m feared for no man,’ cried Isabel, drawing herself away from him, and turning back with startled, gleaming eyes. She made no further an-

swer, but folded her shawl close round her, and turned her back upon her eager, pleading lover. He had to follow her as she made her way with nervous haste back to the highroad which crossed the hill. Even then he did not think his cause lost. The night was growing dark, and he had brought her far from home, and the road led both ways. He went after her, entreating, praying, using every art he knew.

‘They will be as anxious now as they can be,’ he said; ‘they will think we have gone; they will be better pleased to see you come back to-morrow my wife than to have all the parish telling that you and I were here so long on the hill. Isabel, it will be all to do over again, anxiety and everything. The worse is over. Come; an hour’s walk will bring us to Loch Goil.’

He put his hand on her arm as he spoke. They were on the verge of the highroad, which by this time was scarcely distinguishable from the moor. He had followed closely across the heather, as she sped along, keeping by her side, urging his anxious arguments. Now, for the first time, he put out his hand, drawing her closer to him, drawing her the other way, on the downward path which led to another life. Isabel snatched herself away and stood facing him for a moment. It was a moment of breathless suspense to both. He knew her so

little that he believed she might still decide for him; and held his breath in expectation: while the indignant, proud, tender creature stood looking at him, uncertain whether she should part with him for ever, or throw herself into his arms in a momentary storm of love and upbraiding, making him understand at once and for ever the possibilities and impossibilities in her nature. She stood lingering for that moment of doubt—and then she turned suddenly from him without a word, and drew her shawl over her head and fled homewards like a deer or a child of the hills. He had thought she might turn with him, might give up her fate into his hands, at the very moment when she turned thus and flew forward into the darkness, leaving him without a word of explanation. While he stood still in consternation he heard her rapid feet scattering the pebbles on the road, going as fast as a mountain-stream. The young man made a plunge after her; but she was already far in advance, and had known the path all her life, and there was neither credit nor advantage in pursuing a runaway maiden. He came to a dead pause and ground his teeth in vexation and disappointment. He was passionately ‘in love’ with the girl, and yet he called her names in the bitterness of his mortified feelings. ‘I’ll have her yet, all the same, whether she will or no,’ he said with fury, as he

found himself thus left in the lurch. As for Isabel, she took no time to think. She knew every step of the road along which she rushed in the darkness. Her heart was hot and burned within her; if it was anger, if it was excitement, if it was misery, she had no time to decide. The only thing before her was to get home. If she could but reach home, and find Margaret tranquil, as was her wont, then the whole matter should be ended for ever. This was what Isabel was thinking, so far as she could be said to think at all.

When she came at last within sight of the dim light in the kitchen window, a low lattice, out of which the lamp was faintly shining like a glowworm on the ground, Isabel's flying pace was quickened. She could distinguish already some vague outlines of more than one figure round the door. Had the occasion or her feelings been less urgent, she would have paused to recover her breath, to put back her shawl, and end her precipitate course with an attempt at decorum; but she was too much agitated now to think of any such precautions. They heard her rapid feet as she began to hear the soft sound of their voices in the summer gloom; and Jean Campbell had but time to call out, 'Who goes there? is it oor Isabel?'—when the girl rushed into the midst of them, breathless, her hair ruffled by the shawl, her face glowing with the unusual exercise,

her eyes shining. She rushed into the midst of the little group, catching hold of her stepmother in her agitation to stop herself in her headlong course. And the watchers started and gave place to her with a mixture of joy and terror.

‘Lassie, you’ll have me down!’ cried Jean Campbell, staggering under the sudden clutch, ‘but it’s you, God be praised. Here’s your sister half out of her mind. And where have you been?’

‘Is Margaret there?’ cried the panting Isabel. ‘And it so late, and the dew falling—and all my fault! But I did not mean it—I never thought it was so late; and then we got astray on the hill; and I’ve run every step of the way,’ cried Isabel hastily. She was safe; and unawares, against her will, her lips began to seek excuses. After all, it was nothing very wicked. And, perhaps, it was not necessary to tell of young Stapylton and his foolish proposal. Perhaps he was toiling down after her in the dark, not knowing his way, with a mortified, wounded heart. All this flashed into her mind in an instant. ‘The heather and the moss are so confusing,’ said Isabel, still breathless with her flight; ‘but as soon as my feet found the road, I’ve run every step of the way.’

‘And what were you doing among the moss and the heather?’ began the stepmother. Margaret interrupted the expostulation. She put her

hand out in the darkness to her sister. 'I am not able to stand longer—now Isabel's come,' she said; 'I am wearied and faint with waiting—say nothing to-night—the morn will be a new day.'

'Ay,' said Jean Campbell to herself, when the sisters had gone in; 'the morn's aye a new day; but them that's lightheaded and thoughtless the night will be thoughtless the morn. I wish a night could change a'—or a year—or anything but God's grace—no but what God's grace is ready for them that ask it,' she added, with compunction. Jean was but half influenced by the prevailing passion, and the fact that Ailie Macfarlane had been 'taken' and Margaret 'left' was very confusing to her faith, such as it was; but still her language, and to a certain extent her thoughts, were modified by the sudden influx of piety in the parish. 'It goes where it listeth,' she said to herself, as she went indoors, 'as the Bible says. It's no to be counted on. Naething is to be counted on with a young lass. She'll hae her fling though she's a lady born. And Margaret there, puir thing, that never kent what it was to have the life dancing in her bits of veins! I'm, maybe, hard on her mysel,' Jean murmured, pausing a moment at the closed door of the parlour. There was a sound of weeping from within, which touched her heart. She listened, hesitating

whether to interfere. 'If she had twa-three words to say to her lad on the hill, there was nae harm in that,' said Jean to herself; and moved by recollections, she knocked at the door. 'Lasses, ten's chappit,' she said. 'The bairns are in their beds, and Margaret should aye be bedded as soon as the bairns. As for *her* there, likely she meant nae harm. Let her gang to her bed and say her prayers, and we'll think on't nae mair.'

'I hope my own sister may say what she likes,' said Isabel, starting up and turning on the good-natured mediator with her bright eyes full of tears. 'There is nobody has a right to meddle between Margaret and me.'

'Oh, hush, hush,' said Margaret, 'you two. I am not finding fault with her — and she is not ungrateful to you. It is a thing will never happen again.'

'No — till the next time,' said Jean Campbell, closing the parlour door after her with rising irritation. 'Am I a fool to mind what the silly thing says?' she said to herself, as she fastened the cottage door. Just then the sound of another foot scattering the gravel on the road came to her ear. With natural curiosity she reopened the door, leaving a little chink by which she could see through. 'I kent it was him,' she said triumphantly within herself. Though it was so

dark, there was something about young Stapylton's appearance, as a stranger and foreigner, which was instantly distinguishable to rural eyes. Jean looked on with keen curiosity as he passed. He could not see her, nor could he perceive the loop-hole through which her eyes watched him. To him the house was all dark and silent, shut up in its usual tranquillity. He paused before it, and inspected it all round, evidently with the idea that Isabel might be lingering outside. When he saw the light in the parlour window, he turned away with an exclamation of disgust, and shook his fist at the house which contained his love. The astonished watcher could not hear what he muttered to himself, nor divine what was the cause of his wrath; but she threw the door open, and shook her fist at him in return, with prompt resentment. 'It's a dark night for a long walk, Maister Stapylton,' Jean called out to him, with fierce satisfaction; 'and there's an awfu' ill bit down there where the burn's broke the bank. Can I len' you a lantern till you're past the burn?'

The young man quickened his steps, and went rambling on detaching the stones down the rugged road with some inarticulate angry answer of which Jean could make nothing. The disappointed wooer was in no very good humour either with himself or the household, which he pictured to himself must

be laughing over his failure. Jean, for her part, put up the bolt with demonstration when she had thus gratified her feelings. The 'lad' whom his lass had left disconsolate on the hill, was fair game in the eyes of the peasant woman, and the little matter was concluded when he was thus sent angry and humbled away.

But it was not so in the parlour where Isabel was telling her story with many tears. Margaret, whose mind had long been abstracted from all such thoughts, listened with a curious mingling of interest and pain. That it could ever have entered into the mind of her sister to leave her thus suddenly, without warning, was an idea that filled her with consternation. She was silent while the confession was being made, confused as if a new world had suddenly opened up before her. Not a word of reproof did Margaret say; but she listened like a creature in a dream. Love!—was it love that could work so, that could be so pitiless? The virgin soul awoke appalled, and looked out as upon a new earth. Even Isabel did not know the effect her words produced. Her penitence fell altogether short of the occasion. She was sorry for having listened, sorry for having given patient ear for a moment to such a project, but she was not utterly bewildered, like Margaret, to think that such a project could be.

‘And he thought, and I thought,’ cried Isabel, alarmed by her sister’s silence, ‘that you could never be long left when Ailie’s cured and well. He would never have dreamed of it, but that he believed, like me——. Oh, Margaret! it’s slow to come, but it’s coming, you’re sure it’s coming? God would never forsake *you*.’

‘He will never forsake me,’ cried Margaret; ‘but, Bell, I cannot be cured. That is not the Lord’s meaning for me. And if I had been well, you would have run away and left me!’ she added, with a little natural pang. Isabel could not encounter the wistful reproach in her eyes; she threw herself down by her sister’s side, and hid her face in Margaret’s dress.

‘If you had been well, you would not have minded,’ she sobbed: ‘if you had been well, somebody would have been coming for *you* as well as for me.’

. ‘For me!’ said the sick girl—her voice was too soft for indignation, too soft for reproach; and yet an ineffable touch of both was in the tone. ‘Yes,’ she said, after a pause, ‘the Bridegroom is soon coming for me; I hear his step nearer and nearer every day. And, Bell, I will not say a word. It is nature, they all tell me; I am not blaming you.’

- ‘If you would blame me, if you would but be

wild at me!' cried Isabel, weeping, 'it wouldna be so hard to bear.'

Margaret bent down over the prostrate creature; she put her arms round the pretty head, with all its brown locks disordered, and pressed her own soft, faintly-coloured cheek upon it, 'It is but God that knows us all, to the bottom of our hearts,' she said, 'and He is always the kindest. We are all hard upon our neighbours, every one—even me that should know better and am aye talking. But, Bell, it cannot be well for him to tempt you; you should listen to him no more.'

'I will never, never speak to him again!' cried Isabel.

'Not that—not so much as that,' said Margaret; 'but he should not tempt my Bell to what is not true.'

And then the penitent girl felt her sister's kiss on her forehead, and knew herself forgiven, and her fault passed over. She rose grateful and relieved, and the weight floated off her mind. The only one with whom the incident of the evening left any sting was the one who had most need of love's consolation—the sick girl who loved everybody, and whom even God cast into the background, leaving her in the shade. Poor Margaret went to her rest confused and stunned, not knowing what had befallen her. All were preferred to her, both by man and by God.

CHAPTER IV.

NEXT morning the household in the Glebe Cottage found itself solaced and comforted from the excitement of the night. To Jean Campbell the incident was commonplace; 'No a thing to make a work about,' she acknowledged frankly; while even Isabel, except for a certain sense of excitement and giddiness as she settled down to ordinary things, comforted herself, like a child, that the matter was over, and that she should hear no more of it. Margaret's too early maturity, her deeper seriousness, the solemnity with which her illness and the shadow of death surrounded her, had kept Isabel a child, and made her look up to her twin-sister almost as to her mother. Margaret not being 'angry,' everything would naturally come right. Young Stapylton, finding his overtures of no avail, would come humbly and penitent to be forgiven, and would give up his wild project, and all would go well again. Thus Isabel felt, leaning unawares with the sense of

security which is conveyed by dependence, on her sister as her guide. The only sting which came out of that darkling interview on the hill had gone into Margaret's heart.

When Mr. Lothian paid her his usual afternoon visit, he found the sick girl, as usual, in her invalid chair, with her knitting in her hands. Isabel had left the room only as he became visible on the road, and her work lay in a little heap on the table. He cast a hasty look at it, even at the moment when he greeted the other sister. That evidence of an abrupt departure was of more consequence than it ought to have been to the minister. He shook his head as he sat down by the abandoned work.

‘She need not have run away when she saw me coming,’ he said, with a little sigh. ‘I could have said nothing to anger her, here.’

‘She did not mean it,’ said Margaret. ‘She is hasty, like a bairn. I am afraid sometimes I have made too much a bairn of her. I have grown so old myself, and she is so bonnie and young.’

‘Too bonnie and young,’ said the poor minister; and then he roused himself to a sense of justice; ‘but not younger—nor bonnier either for that matter—than you, my poor Margaret. It is your illness that makes you feel a difference. I remember two years ago——’

‘I would rather forget that,’ said Margaret, with a faint blush. ‘It is not illness, but death, that makes the difference, and sometimes I wonder what will become of her when I’m gone. I’m not meaning that I am of so much importance. I know well the world goes on just the same, whoever is taken away; but I feel as if I should always want to take care of Bell, even in heaven.’

‘It may be so permitted for aught we know,’ said Mr. Lothian; and then he paused and looked at her wistfully, as if there was something more that he would like to say.

‘And I know, if all’s well, there are friends that will do their best to take care of her on this earth,’ said Margaret, declining to make any response to this anxious look. ‘And there are times when I feel a great longing to win away.’

‘You have been in pain?’ said the minister, who, confused with his own hopes and feelings, did not know what to say.

‘Not in pain,’ said Margaret; ‘maybe disturbed a little, and troubled in my mind. I think nobody understands another’s heart. We are so selfish, aye striving to be first. There is but the Lord that can control our very thinking, and keep down vain expectations; but it is a struggle to flesh and blood,’ she added, with a faint smile.

‘You are thinking of what is going on in the parish,’ said Mr. Lothian, ‘and of Ailie ——’

‘I’m wearied hearing of Ailie,’ said Margaret, with a thrill of impatience. ‘Is God to have but one way of working? and is it so great a thing to be kept in this chilly world, instead of being taken home? I am not thinking of Ailie; I’m thinking of very different things. Mr. Lothian, is he a lad you can trust—that English lad?’

‘What English lad?’ said Mr. Lothian, with a certain sullen dulness which he put on in a moment like a mask. ‘Is it young Stapylton, you mean?’

‘What kind of folk does he come of?’ said Margaret, pursuing her examination steadily. ‘Is he true and sure? You brought him here, and you’ve known him long, and you must be able to tell.’

‘If I brought him here, I am very sorry,’ said the minister; ‘but I don’t think I did. He saw—your sister at Lochhead; and God forgive me if I do the boy injustice—perhaps I am not a just judge—but I put little confidence in him, Heaven knows, for my part.’

Margaret clasped her hands tightly together with a look of pain, but she said nothing; and after a little pause her companion resumed,—

‘It is hard for me to speak when you know so

well what I am thinking. I would guard her like the apple of my eye. The wind should not blow on her. I am not a young fellow like Stapylton, but she would be safer with me.'

'Ay,' said Margaret; and a touch of pathos unusual to it had crept into her voice; 'but she is safest of all in the house she was born in, where love's free and for nought. I don't mean to be unkind, Mr. Lothian. It's a deceitful heart that speaks; but if I were well the morn, Bell would go away from me; and till I die there will aye be somebody setting their heart against me to get me out of the way—maybe even you.'

'Never me,' said the minister. 'I think myself your brother, Margaret—whether or no ——'

He put out his hand, and took her wasted hand into his. The first fret that had crossed it for years was on poor Margaret's brow. To think of her sister as happy eventually, when her own grave was green, was sweet to the dying girl. But the conflict in Isabel's mind now, of happiness and self-sacrifice, was the hardest burden that had ever fallen on her delicate spirit. It seemed to introduce an alien note into the soft concords of the ending life.

'Yes, whether or no,' said Margaret, with a faint smile; 'and I wish you would preach to me now. I never get to the kirk with other folk.'

I am growing a law to myself, I fear, instead of minding the true law. Speak to me, for I'm wearied and cannot speak to myself.'

'It is you that have taught me many a day,' said the minister; and then he paused, and that pang of pity with which the strong sometimes look on the weak thrilled through him. She was as young as Isabel. If sickness had not broken the soft outlines of her face and hollowed out her eyes, she would have been as fair as Isabel; and yet death was the only prospect before the one sister, while everything that was bright in life lay at the feet of the other. This sudden strong compunction silenced the man. What could he say?—that the touch of nature stirring in her was wrong? that it was wicked to feel that prick of wounded love? that this last stab was a crowning manifestation of the love of God? There were many in his position who would have said this boldly; but he, who knew her so well, had not the heart.

'Margaret,' he said, 'you know I cannot speak to you as many can; your sickness comes from the hand of God, and you have never repined against Him. What comes from the clash and contradiction of human feelings is a different burden to bear. It seems a feature in our life that we must go against each other daily, whether we will or no. There is no happiness but has trouble in its train.

What is joy to her is grief to you. What would be comfort to you, would sicken me and—aye, I will be just to him—one other, with disappointment and pain. The lassie that was married in the village yesterday made her mother's heart bleed; but her own would have suffered as sorely, and so would the lad's, if she had not married. What can we say? It is not trouble of God's sending, but the complications of human nature. He looks down from heaven and beholds and tries the children of men, as says the Scripture. It is the one that bears the heat and the cold, the long calm and the fierce tempest, that is Christ's soldier; but the cold and the heat, and the calm and the storm, are all natural—not punishments of God, but necessities of the world. We have to brace our minds up to them. It's a cross world, and its conditions must be borne,—I do not say because God sends them of first purpose and will—but always for Christ's sake.'

'Ay,' said Margaret, 'I think I had a glimmering of that. It is no that God delights to cross us at every point, as some folks say;—it's nature—and one spirit, differing from another. But He put us all in this cross world. He set us all our hard conditions. He wove in thread with thread, the warp aye crossing the woof. Is it sin that has set all wrong? You say love is the best

thing on earth, but look what bitterness, and tribulation, and disappointment it works. I am not meaning that lad's love, or his kind; I am meaning the love that is likest God's, where all is given and nought returned. We would give them the hearts out of our bosoms, and they look on us as cumberers of the ground standing in the way of their happiness!' cried the girl, with a brilliant colour flashing over her face and light gleaming up in her eyes. Then she made a pause, and the light faded, and she bent down her face into her hands. Perhaps it was the only time in her life that she had broken out in passionate remonstrance against the hard bonds and limits of humanity. Her companion was much older than she was. He had gone through that and many a later stage of human development. He looked on pitying and tender upon that first outbreak against the intolerable. He took softly into his own brotherly grasp her thin white hand, but he did not say anything. There was indeed nothing to say.

When Margaret recovered herself she drew her hand away, and once more blushed the nervous, sudden blush of weakness. 'You'll think I am a miserable creature,' she said, 'to grudge at others' happiness; but it is not that.'

'I understand,' said the minister. 'It is not that. It is harmony we want in this poor world;

and there's no harmony : there are nothing but jars and discords, however well we all mean to each other. Here in this parish even, where there is more fervour, more true piety, I know it, than there was a little while ago—and yet——'

'You are not satisfied,' said Margaret, suddenly waking up out of her personal concerns.

'I am far from satisfied,' he said. 'I tell you there is more piety, more fervour—and yet what a price it is bought at! Ailie Macfarlane has the gift of tongues, she says, and so has Big Robert at the clachan and his sister, and Mr. John at Ardnamore. They rant and they speak, sometimes in English, sometimes in that wild way. It's very impressive to hear her, Margaret. It's not her business, and she tells you nothing you do not know. But to see the young creature, with all the poetry in her, standing up among the people in the gloaming, when it's nearly dark, and pouring forth her soul, is very impressive. A man would be made of wood if it did not go to his heart.'

'And she gives new light?' said Margaret, eagerly ; 'she makes the Scriptures clear, or she sets the ways of God before you? Then never mind the rest.'

'So people say,' said Mr. Lothian, 'but I cannot see it. She gives no new light to me. I ask myself sometimes is it the jealousy of my office that

cannot bear to be superseded? But I don't think it is that. My heart is sore, Margaret; I think my Master's work will lose credit by such wild service; and then I think of the uninstructed, and that a wonder or a parable may strike them more than anything we can say. And that is true. The people come to the meetings as they would not come to me. And nobody can deny that Ailie has risen from her sick bed to become a preacher among us. What am I to say?

'I would say nothing,' said Margaret, 'I would wait and leave it all to God. Let it be, and if it is of God, it will stand. It is old advice, and not mine alone. You tell me it is human nature, when I make my grumble; and it is human nature there too. She's one that will have signs and wonders,—her spirit is craving,—always craving. But you'll mind I said it when I'm gone—there's no cheater in Ailie. She may deceive herself, she may take her dreams for true,—but she means it all every word. You are not to disbelieve her, Mr. Lothian. In her heart she is true.'

'Which just makes her all the more dangerous,' said the minister, shaking his head. 'She believes in herself. She believes all she says. My dear, they are praying and praying for you, and it's Ailie's hope that you are to rise with her, and go forth—what shall I call it,—as prophets, evangelists?—

to the end of the earth. If they were to do that, Margaret, I would believe too.'

Margaret's pale face flushed once more; it was not in human nature to subdue the thrill of the dying frame when life and strength seemed thus held out to it. Her soft eyes fixed on the vacant air before her. 'What would you believe?' she said. 'Do you think I doubt He could raise me up if He pleased, just as He could make me a queen if He pleased, instead of a poor country girl? But why? You were saying we were under hard conditions in this world—but they are the conditions we're born to; and which is best, to suffer them loyally, or break out of them by force?' I do not think myself,' she went on dreamily, 'that He wanted to raise up Lazarus. It's against reason. It would make a revolution in the world if all the dead were to come back. He did it because the sisters wearied Him with their continual craving. I've thought that all over, and I see it could not be. The foundations of the world would be overturned if every yearning woman got back her dead. It couldna be. Worse and worse would come of it. Do you not see it could not be? God would have to change the whole frame of things before His time. Now and then there is one that cries and cries so sore, and will not be denied. Why did He weep when He raised

Lazarus? it would not be for Lazarus' sake. Was it because they wearied Him with their crying till He had to do it, but knew well He could not do it, and must not do it, for all the rest? Now that is like her and me,' said Margaret, after a pause, her face melting into a smile. 'She's cried and cried till she's been granted; but I can see it's against reason. I'm not the one to make a work. He is not to be troubled to change life and all its laws for the like of me.'

'Margaret, you speak as if He were a man to be wearied and troubled,' said the minister, with a half reproof.

'He said it Himself,' said the girl. 'He is my nearest friend. He is more to me than all the world. And am I to vex Him and make Him ask for what's against God's Providence? He died Himself; and they were all too confused to say a word—nobody cried to the Father to overturn the foundations of the earth and save Him; and why should it be done for me?'

She crossed her hands upon her breast as she spoke, and lay back, with her simple countenance rapt into a half-celestial calm, her eyes dilated, her fine nostrils expanded, her soft lips closed; she wanted but the cross in her clasped hands to embody the picture of a martyr; she wanted but a lily to realise the triumphant saint. But Margaret

knew no symbols. Her religion, perhaps, was too bare of form and letter; it was of the spirit—a spirit full of the lofty submission of reason as well as faith.

In the silence that followed, and which Mr. Lothian made no attempt to disturb, sounds from without made themselves heard by degrees. There came an echo of steps on the road, and voices at the door. Margaret gave no heed, being absorbed in her own thoughts. But the minister, more used to the popular commotion, roused himself, and listened anxiously. Then there was a little parley outside. Mr. Lothian hurried out, to stay, if possible, the visit which he had foreseen. The group at the door was as great a contrast as could be imagined to the calm of the scene he had just left. Isabel stood, with flushed cheeks and clasped hands, before the parlour-door, half barring the entrance, half showing the way. Jean Campbell stood at the door of the kitchen, holding up her hands in excitement and partial terror. ‘Eh, if it could be—if it could but be!’ she cried. ‘Our Margaret, that was aye a child of God! Oh, Ailie woman, think weel before you disturb her. I’ll no have her disturbed!—but if it was the will of God——’

‘It’s the will of God that brings me here,’ said the young prophetess of Loch Diarmid. She was

scarcely older than the patient to whom she came. She stood on the threshold of the house, in simple, ordinary dress, a fair Lowland beauty, with abundant light locks, a delicate, half- hectic colour, and blue eyes *à fleur de tête*, which, in her excitement, seemed absolutely to project from her face. They were the visionary, translucent eyes, not giving out, but absorbing, the light, which so often reveal the character of a mystic and enthusiast. She was no deceiver, it was evident, but believed in her own mission with a fervour which, to some degree, overcame the incredulity of every sympathetic spectator. Her belief in herself had given to Ailie some of the half-theatrical features of a prophetess and inspired maid. It was not that she meant or understood them to be theatrical; but she had let loose from her own mind and conduct those limits of ordinary restraint and decorum, which confine the impulses of ordinary mortals. It was her duty henceforward to say the words that came to her lips, whatever those words might be, for were they not from God? The visionary gaze of her eyes was no longer restrained by the modesty of nature or conventional respect for others. If she was the chosen of God, as she believed, it was her duty to fix those wild orbs wherever the Spirit directed her, to gaze into the very hearts of others, and read their minds in

their faces. It was her duty to go to the house where God sent her, whosoever might oppose. What was it to her that her visit might be considered intrusive, or her words uncalled for? A higher rule regulated the actions of the servant of God. Therefore Ailie gave all her peculiarities, both of mind and appearance, full freedom, and, taking her impulses for God's will, obeyed them without hesitation. But this is no story of a sensual mind letting itself go into the uncleanness of fanaticism. The girl was a pure and innocent girl. Pride, self-opinion, self-importance, wild self-will, might be in her, but nothing base or vile. She moved forward, with that strange directness which only primitive nature or passion ever shows, to the door of the room in which Margaret was. She took no notice of Isabel who stood in the way. 'It's in the name of the Lord,' said the inspired creature. Even the minister, who stood there ready to defend the repose of his friend against all comers, gave way before her with a strange thrill of something like faith. It might be—it was possible—God had employed such messengers before now. A creature spotless, and perfect, and young, in the first glow of love, and energy, and enthusiasm, could any human thing be nearer the angels? And the angels were God's messengers. Mr. Lothian stood back subdued—

his own convictions and strong sense standing him in no stead against the excitement of the moment. Had he opposed her he would have felt guilty. He stood back against the wall and let her pass. 'If it is of God,' he said to himself. And she went in as Miriam might have gone with her timbrels,—like a figure in a triumphant procession, going on to miracle and wonder in the name of the Lord.

Behind her, however, came one who roused no such sentiments in the mind of the minister. This was a man evidently not of Ailie's rank, nor in any way resembling her, except in the flush of excitement which in him might have gone to any length of fanaticism. His mouth was closely shut; the lines of his face were rigid and strained; his eyes burned with a cloudy fire. Passion, which might almost be insanity, was in his look. The pair were as unlike as if one had been an errant angel astray from heaven, and the other one of the rebels who fell from them with Lucifer. The minister started and grew red, and put up his hand to oppose the further progress of this unexpected visitor; although it was already very well known that 'Saul was among the prophets,' and 'Mr. John,' heretofore of a very different character, had entered their ranks.

'Mr. John, this is no place for you,' said Mr.

Lothian. 'You have no need that I should tell you that. This is no place for you.'

'Wherever God's work is to be done is the place for me,' was the answer; and the speaker pressed on. He was a powerful man, and a scuffle there might have been fatal to the dying girl; but yet the minister confronted him, and put his hand on his breast.

'It is not the work of God to disturb his dying saint,' said Mr. Lothian. 'She'll soon be free and in your way no longer. Let her go in peace.'

'Go?' cried Mr. John, 'dying?—never while God is faithful that promised. Stand back and let us in; it is to save her life.'

But it was not this or any more likely reason; it was simply to prevent the noise of contradiction and controversy from reaching Margaret, that Mr. Lothian yielded. He himself followed the stranger into the room, and Isabel crept after him. By this time the sun had set, and the daylight began to wane. Perhaps Margaret had guessed what the interruption meant. She was sitting as she had been when Mr. Lothian left her, with her hands crossed upon her breast, motionless, her eyes fixed upon the soft obscurity that gleamed in through the window. She turned her head half round as they all entered. 'Ailie, is it you?' she said. There was scarcely any surprise in her

voice. 'I heard what had happened, and I knew you would be sure to come to me.'

Her perfect quiet, the composure of her attitude, the calm face gleaming like something cut in marble against the grey wall, had a certain effect even upon the young enthusiast. She made a pause ere she began, and her companion, who had been standing behind her, came round to her right hand, and gazed eagerly upon Margaret's face. The moment she saw him, Margaret, too, was disturbed in her composure; she started and gave a little cry and raised herself up in her chair; while, as for the intruder, he pressed forward upon her with eyes that burned in their deep sockets and an air of restrained passion, before which for the moment the fever of Ailie's inspiration sank into the shade.

'Has it come to this?' he said. 'And I was never told, never called to her! But, thanks be to God, we are still in time, and the prayer of faith will save ——'

'Mr. John,' said Margaret, raising herself erect, 'this is no place for you. Why should you be told or called to me? If Ailie has anything to say I am content to hear her; but you and me are best apart.'

'Why should we be best apart,' cried Mr. John, 'when you know what my heart is? No, I

will not go. Be silent all of you ; how dare you interfere between her and me? I have come with one of God's handmaidens to save her life.'

'Let him be,' said Ailie. 'We've come here together that we may hold the Lord to His promise. Margret Diarmid, I've come to bid you rise up and be strong as I am. O woman! can you lie there and see the world lying in wickedness, and no find it in your heart to throw off the bonds of Satan? Why should ye lie and suffer there? It's no doctors you want, it's faith you want. We a' ken you're a child of God. Margret, hearken to me. I was like you, I was in my bed, worse than you, and pondered and pondered and kept silence till my heart burned. I said to mysel why was it? and the Lord taught me it was Satan and no His will. Do you think I lay there one day mair? I listened to the voice that was in my ears. I thought no more of flesh and blood ; I rose up and here I am. Margret Diarmid, I command you to rise up in the name of the Lord !'

They all gathered close, with an uncontrollable thrill of excitement, to listen to this appeal and to see the result of it. Isabel fell on her knees beside her sister, and gazed at her to see the change, if any came. Ailie, with her hands raised over Margret's head, and her face lifted to heaven, waited for her answer. John Diarmid by her side, with a

look of wilder passion still, hung over the group in speechless excitement. Even Jean Campbell behind stood wringing her hands, feeling her heart beat and her temples throb. Was it the Spirit of God that was about to come, shaking the homely room as by a whirlwind? There was a pause of awful stillness during which nobody spoke. When Margaret answered, the bystanders started and looked at each other. The calm tone of her voice fell upon their excited nerves like something from a different world.

‘I hear *your* voice, Ailie,’ said Margaret, with the softness of a whisper, though her words fell quite distinct and clear upon their ears, ‘but I hear no voice within. Can you not believe that God may deal one way with you and another with me?’

‘God has no stepbairns,’ cried Ailie. ‘Does He love me better than you? O neebors! on your knees,—on your knecs! Will He no remember His ain word that’s passed to us and canna be recalled. What two or three agree to ask is granted afore we speak. It’s no His consent, but her’s we have to seek!’

Then she threw herself on her knees, with upturned face and hands stretched out. They all sank down around her, filling the darkening room with kneeling figures. Even the minister, whose

office was thus taken out of his hands, knelt down behind the girl who took such wild authority upon her, and bent his face into his clasped hands, moved, as only the prevailing excitement of the time could have moved him, by that faint tinge of possibility which was in the air. Isabel, kneeling too, took her sister's hand, and watched her with an intense gaze which seemed to penetrate to her very heart.

And Ailie prayed: 'O Thou that dwellest in the heavens!' she cried, turning her visionary face to the pale twilight sky that looked wistfully in through the window, 'Father, that lovest us weel! look down and see what man cannot do, what Thou canst do at a word, at the lifting of Thy finger. If she hasna the faith to rise up, give her the faith. O Lord, Lord, Thou hast promised—Thou hast promised! Is God a man that He should repent? Look on us here before Thee, two or three all agreed. O Lord God!' cried Ailie, pausing and bursting forth with sobs that broke her voice, 'do you no mind what you said? If it had been man that said it, we would never have lippened to man. O Lord, Thy promise! We are waiting,—waiting,—waiting!—Bid her to rise like Lazarus! Loose her bonds like the woman's in Galilee! Oh! raise her up, Lord God, as Thou hast raised me!'

It would be impossible to describe the impassioned cry that thus rose up in the silence. There was no one in the room except Margaret, who escaped the contagion of that strange emotion. She had fallen back into her chair in weakness, and gazed at them with calm and pitiful looks, like those of an angel. Hers was the only heart that beat no faster. She lay and looked at them all as a creature past all the storms of life might be supposed to look at those still tossing on its stormy tide. She was not roused by the appeal made to her faith, nor overwhelmed by the fervour of the prayers, the tears, the exclamations, the bewildered, breathless expectations by which she was surrounded. She put one arm softly round Isabel, who knelt by her side, and with her other hand took hold of Ailie's, which was stretched up over her in entreaty. There seemed to be something mesmeric in the touch of those cool, soft fingers. Ailie's outstretched arms fell; her eyes turned to Margaret's face; a strange wonder came over her countenance; her voice died away as if surprise had extinguished it; and then there was again another pause, full of fate.

'Ailie, God hears,' said the sick girl; 'and He will give me life; but not here, and not now. You're not to think your prayers refused. I'm near to the gate, and I can hear the message sent. It

says, "Ay, she shall be saved; ay, she shall rise up; not in earth, but in heaven."'

'No,' said Ailie, passionately; 'it's no a true spirit of prophecy; it's an evil spirit come to tempt you. No. O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt? Is the Lord to be vexed for ever with this generation that will not believe? Listen to His voice. Arise, arise! shake off the bonds of Satan. Rise up, and stand upon your feet. Margaret, let not God's servants plead in vain. Oh, hearken to me while I plead with you, harder, far harder, than I have to plead with God. Why will ye die, O house of Israel? Rise up and live: I command you in the name of the Lord!'

'Oh, if you would but try! O my Maggie, will you try?' sobbed Isabel, clasping her sister closer, and gazing with supplication beyond words in her face.

And the minister lifted his face from his hands, and looked at her; and little Mary, who had stolen in, came forward like a little wandering spirit, and threw herself, with a cry, on Margaret's shoulder, in a wild attempt to raise her up. This last effort of childish passion was more than the sick girl could bear. She turned round upon them all with a wondering burst of patience and impatience.

'Is there no one to understand?' she said, with

a plaintive cry, and drew her hands away and covered her face with them in a kind of despair. Even her own had turned, as it were, against her. Her bodily strength gave way; her heart failed her; no response woke in her mind to those wild addresses. That they should leave her alone, alone, was all she longed for—only to be left in quiet, to be at peace.

Then the minister stood up, and took Ailie by the arm. She was shivering and trembling with the revulsion, worn out with her excitement. Her moment of 'power' was over.

'You can do no more here,' he said, with a thrill in his voice which betrayed how much he himself had been moved. 'She is worn out, and you are worn out, and here there is no more to say. Ailie, for God's sake come with me, and disturb her no more.'

'O friends, it's the wiles of Satan,' said Ailie. 'Oh, to think he should be there! Margret—Margret, how can I leave you to perish! Let me stay by her day and night, and wrestle with Satan for his prey!'

'You will come with me,' said Mr. Lothian, firmly, and then the passionate creature burst into choking sobs and tears. Poor Margaret, whose thread of life was worn so thin, whose weakness could so ill bear the struggle, sat in the gathering twilight,

and looked on while the prophetess, who had come to heal her, was led, like an exhausted child, from her presence. She gave a long sigh of relief when the scene was over. Once more she crossed her thin hands upon her breast, where her heart was fluttering faintly, yet wildly, with weariness and pain. 'Oh, to be away! oh, to be away!' she said to herself. Life had grown weary to her, a burden to be cast off, not a glorious hope to be secured. She stood at the opposite pole of existence, and had ceased to remember how sweet that living was to which they would fain have dragged her back. 'Oh, to be away!' she said, crossing her hands upon her fluttering heart. She thought she was alone, but a sound close to her startled her back again into a little flush of agitation. 'I am worn and weaker,' she said, driven to the limit of her powers. 'Oh, will ye let me be? Whoever you are, leave me and my life to God!'

'Margaret, it is I,' said a deep voice close to her ear. 'Why will you die? Do you know my heart will die with you, and my last hope? Am I to live to curse God? or will you live —will you live, and save a sinful soul? Margaret, because I have been ill to you have pity on me!'

Weak as she was, Margaret started from her seat. 'John Diarmid,' she cried, 'how dare ye

‘speak to me? Am I the one to bear the blame of your blessing or your misery? If you had the heart of a man, you would go miles and miles rather than enter here.’

‘I would lie at your door like a dog,’ said the man in his passion, ‘rather than be banished like this: but I’ll go away to the ends of the earth, Margaret, Margaret, if you’ll live, and not die!’

‘I’ll do as the Lord pleases,’ said the poor girl, stretching out her feeble hands in the darkness for some support. She was worn out. Before her persecutor could reach her she had sunk upon the floor with a faintness which soon reached the length of unconsciousness. The women, rushing in at his cry, carried her to her bed. She had not fainted to be out of suffering; her heart throbbed against her breast, as though struggling to be free. Poor Margaret! the human passion was more hard to meet than all that went before.

CHAPTER V.

MR. JOHN, whose appearance at the Glebe had thus moved all the spectators, had been for a long time the embodiment of pleasure-seeking and dissipation to the country-side. His had been the *jeunesse orageuse*, which, as a pleasant discipline and beginning of life, has ceased to be realised on this side of the Channel. A quaint old house on the eastern side of the loch, and a few hillsides which had been in the family for centuries, were all his patrimony; but his mother had transmitted a moderate fortune to her only child, which he had got rid of in his younger days in gayer scenes than could be found on the Loch. When he had returned perforce, all his money being spent, to his long-neglected home, Mr. John for some years had taken rank as the Don Giovanni of the district. He had been so far prudent or fortunate as never to be the object of any unusually grave scandal. Miss Catherine, rigid as she was in morality, had not been compelled to shut her doors against her own con-

nexion, but had been able to doubt, to extenuate, to find excuses for him. 'Left to his own will when he was but a callant,' she would say, 'flattered and served hand and foot by them that led him away. If I am to shut my doors on the poor lad, where would he get a word of advice, or be shown the error of his ways?'

It was thus that Mr. John, pursuing his pleasures with such daring as was possible, preserved still a shred of superficial character. And then the time had come when vulgar dissipation palled on the man. For a year or two he had partially recovered himself, and turned to a better life; and during this interval it was that he became acquainted with Margaret. Mr. John, whose family was unimpeachable, was a great man to Captain Duncan, whose slender connexion with the aristocracy of the district was built more upon the gentility of his first wife than even on his commission. And no doubt a rude attempt at match-making had been planned by the old soldier. As for the two principally concerned, Margaret, who knew little of his previous character, had been naturally attracted by the best-bred and best-mannered man she had ever been brought into contact with; and he, a passionate soul in his way, seeking emotion and excitement through all his pleasures, had been suddenly seized upon by the pure and visionary

creature, whose life was to him as a new revelation. Yet, notwithstanding his sense of her utter purity, notwithstanding his love for her, and the new germ of moral improvement within him, the habits of his former life, and the contempt in which he held her upstart father, had led him, strange as it may seem, to entertain dishonourable designs towards the spotless girl, who looked up to him as a higher type of manhood than any she had yet met with. Captain Duncan, hot enough in all that concerned his honour, had somehow discovered the suitor's base meaning, and expelled him from his house with all the violence that belonged to his character. When Margaret became aware of the storm that raged round—when she found her lover shut out from the place, and herself forbidden to think of him, a brief tumult rose in her maidenly bosom. She might have resisted even, for her sense of justice was strong, and she had begun to love, had fiery Duncan been left to manage matters in his own way. But Mr. Lothian had stepped in with his good sense, and Jean Campbell, homely as she was, with his support, had brought her woman's wit to work on the question. The two between them brought one of Mr. John's victims quietly by night to tell her miserable story. Other miserable stories poured upon Margaret's ear when the ice was broken.

She gave but one cry, and went away from them and shut herself up in her own room. Nothing was said to her of any intended disrespect to herself. If she ever guessed the existence of such a horror, she never betrayed it to mortal ear; but the parish knew well enough why it was that Mr. John had the door of the House shut upon him, and was curtsied to by Miss Catherine with awful grandeur when they met at the church-door.

This sealed his fate so far as the Loch was concerned. His own race and class abandoned him to the devil and all his angels, to whom accordingly he devoted himself for some months with renewed spirit. But disgust had entered his heart; he had seen better things, and his soul had begun to move uneasily within him. Then commenced the religious movement which stirred the parish of Loch Diarmid. Mr. John, dreary, mournful, and alone, was one of the first to be moved by it. Here was, indeed, a religion worth having, one that held out to him the hope of immediate reward, the highest advantage that flesh and blood could hope for, deliverance from sickness, miraculous strength, favour, and power. He went into it with all the fervour of his nature. He was converted with much rejoicing on the one hand, and blackest painting of all his former errors on the other, as is natural in such cases. From penitence he went on

rapidly to the highest grace, to own the inspiration of Ailie, and to believe in her and in himself. It was a curious process altogether, and yet it was not so inconsistent with nature as might have been supposed.

The man had lived a wicked, sensual, evil life ; but had not been, so to speak, a sensual man. He had sought excitement in all his wanderings astray ; his desire had been rather for some wild satisfaction to a hungering, tumultuous, undisciplined spirit, than for the positive delights of wickedness ; and now it seemed to him, in all sincerity, as if he had found the fiery satisfaction, the tumult of emotion, sensation, and feeling, for which his soul longed. He loathed himself for his sins, and rushed into religion as he had rushed into dissipation, from the same passionate thirst for excitement. He had been eating husks with the prodigal ; to the depths of his heart he felt how miserable were those husks, how vile his life had been ; and rushed out in an agitation which was changed, yet the same, to his Father's house, to find there the strange delight of welcome, the exciting feast, the flood of conflicting emotions. Whether he caught contagion from Ailie's visionary nature ; whether there was anything more than contagion in it ; whether the rush of thoughts, and words, and breathless fervour, was produced by an influence from heaven, or by

simple specialities of nature, we do not know and cannot decide. But he had all those signs of supernatural grace. He who had gone so far astray burst forth with all the appearance of religious ecstasy into wild expositions, wild exhortations, full of fire and eloquence. It was, some said, the greatest thing that had happened—even greater than Ailie's miraculous recovery. 'Is Saul also among the prophets?' those Bible-quoting people said to each other. And a certain awe gathered round the figure of Mr. John.

It had been by his special solicitation that this visit to the Glebe was made. Margaret had been ill he knew, but he did not know how ill; and with a man's natural touch of vanity, he had imagined the illness to be caused partly at least by separation from himself. He had the fullest confidence in Ailie's powers, and the most entire belief that what he and she together prayed for, in the passionate faith which they shared, would be done for them by God; but he had also in his secret heart some hope that the mere sight of him, a changed and converted man, would do much for Margaret. When he saw her, not tenderly touched by sentimental illness, but worn to the edge of the grave by consuming disease, it would be difficult to describe the shock he sustained. His passion

for her revived to its fullest extent; and she was dying—dying, before his eyes. And God had promised in any case, however desperate, to hear the prayer of faith. Yet there she lay, calm, steadfast, content, not eager to be saved, crushing down the excitement at its height with the touch of her soft, cool hand. The agitation which possessed him almost rose to frenzy. He was angry with Ailie, the young leader of his faith, for requiring food and rest, and desiring to go home, instead of ‘wrestling in prayer’ along with him on the grassy bank beneath the Glebe. His vehemence was so extreme, that Ailie herself was moved to reprove it. ‘Brother,’ she said, ‘you’re not thinking of God’s glory, you’re thinking of Margaret’s life. Your mind’s gone wild for love of her. Set up no idols in your heart.’

‘Love!’ cried Mr. John, ‘and between her and me!—that will never be. But she must not die. She is a child of God. She is so beloved, I think half the country would follow after her. Shall we lose that great advantage to the Lord’s cause? You have been my teacher in the way of life, must I be yours now?’

‘Ay,’ said Ailie, ‘if the Lord has given you something to say.’

It was Mr. Lothian, who had followed them

down the hill, who heard this strange conversation. Mr. John's face changed, as was usual with all the gifted. A kind of spasm passed over him. 'Hear the word of the Lord,' he cried; 'hear and obey! Will you go back to your selfish rest, and eat your selfish bread, and let His saint die? Is it not written, He that asketh receiveth. Shall we submit to be foiled by Satan? He is not an unjust judge, nor you a vengeful woman, and will you do less than He did to save a life? What is a night on the heather, a night on the hill, to the loss of that blessed creature? Never will she be bride of man,' he cried, with a groan,—'never bride of mine nor friend of mine that you say I'm mad with love. Our fathers lived in caves of the earth, and were hunted like beasts for the sake of the truth—and will we refuse to watch a night for the salvation of a soul? Could not ye watch with me one night? We are two together that put our trust in Him, and the Lord will remember His promise when we pray.'

'I will pray in my own poor chamber,' cried Ailie. 'O, John Diarmid, I ken you're a man of God! but your face frightens me, and your voice frightens me. I cannot bide with you on the hill. Lord, Lord, is it Thy will? I'll watch for her,—I'll pray for her,—I'll give half my life for Margret; but I darena bide here.'

‘My sins find me out,’ said Mr. John; ‘you are afraid of me, Ailie. You think it is the old man that speaks, and not the new.’

‘No,’ said Ailie, controlling herself, ‘I canna fear my brother. I know you are a man of God—but oh, will not the Lord’s purpose be served if we pray at home? He’s as near in a chamber as on the hill. Let us not speak nor waste our strength. Let us bend our minds to it, and pray for our sister going along this weary way. It will be a holy way,’ cried the girl, solemnly marching along, with her young elastic figure drawn up, her hands clasped, and her eyes raised to the sky, ‘if we make every step in prayer. Oh, hear us; oh, open Thy hand to us; oh, save her, dear Lord!’

Mr. Lothian, when he told this tale, would melt almost into tears. ‘She was an innocent creature,’ the minister would say. He followed them softly, unseen, with a man’s secret dread of the reformed sinner, ready to protect Ailie if she should want protection, and saw her move swift and silent along the path, never stumbling, never faltering, with her clasped hands and her eyes raised to heaven. Broken words of prayer fell from her lips as she went on. As for the dark shadow by her side, the minister took less note of that. But he never forgot their joint prayer, sometimes rising to a mutual outburst of supplication as

they went before him over the silent road. Mr. John's spirit was rending itself with wild throes of pain, and at the same time satisfying itself with the violent strain of strongest emotion. Thus they went on until Ailie reached her mother's cottage at Lochhead. And the silent follower behind them had been praying too. When he went into the Manse, which was too quiet, too lonely for that name, the minister asked himself, would it all be without avail; would God turn a deaf ear, though the very lion and lamb together pleaded with him for a blessing—though the sinner became pure, and the suffering walked by faith? And for his part he rounded with a sigh the excitement of the evening, and opened the Bible on his table—that Bible within whose pages there are still so many prayers unanswered, waiting till God's time shall come.

Next morning Mr. Lothian had the events of the night brought before him from another point of view. It was hard upon the minister that his house, of all the houses in the parish, should be the one to shelter his young rival—a man in himself totally uncongenial to him. But so it was; he had incautiously received a guest whom he found it impossible to send away; and Mr. Lothian had been compelled to look on and see the young fellow all but win the prize on which his own heart had been set for so long. How the trifling

youth could have caught Isabel's fancy was a mystery to the good man; but naturally such a fact gave to every foolish word he uttered a double importance in his host's jealous and wondering eyes.

'I hear there was a prayer-meeting—or something—last night up at the Glebe,' said Stapylton. 'Was it effectual, do you know?'

'What do you mean by effectual?' said the minister, gravely.

'Oh, I thought it might have had one of two effects,' said the young man with careless contempt. 'It might have cured the patient, you know; or at least, so they say. And they might have prayed her to death, which I should think the most likely, for my part.'

'I did not know you were so well informed,' said Mr. Lothian, who was in no conciliatory mood.

'Oh, yes, I am posted up,' said Stapylton, with a vain laugh, for which his companion could have knocked him down. 'I think they will find it difficult to cure consumption; but the greater the difficulty the greater the miracle. It shows, at least, that they are not afraid.'

'It shows they are not impostors, as you seem to think them,' said the minister with some heat.

'Oh, dear, no, not impostors,' said Stapylton;

‘not any more than other people. We are all impostors, I suppose, more or less.’

‘Your views are too advanced for our rural minds,’ said Mr. Lothian, growing more and more angry in spite of himself. ‘We don’t understand them. Impostors are rare in this country-side.’

‘Oh, yes, I believe you,’ said Stapylton insolently. ‘Do you mean to say you put any faith in that praying crew? Did you think their shouting and bawling could do any good to that poor, consumptive creature ——’

‘Is it Margaret Diarmid you are speaking of?’ said the minister; and the men paused and looked in each other’s faces. Stapylton had gone further than he meant to go. Isabel’s sister was nothing to him, though he loved Isabel in his selfish way. He had no respect for Margaret as a woman, or as a sick woman; he had no appreciation of her character. She was to him simply a poor, consumptive creature, whom he would be glad to have killed or cured out of his way. If Isabel were ever his, she should not long retain any foolish devotion to her sister. Therefore he could not understand the scorn and indignation of Mr. Lothian’s eyes.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I would not hurt her sister’s feelings by calling her so, you know. We’re all

impostors, as I said. But still you know that is what the girl is, all the same.'

The minister rose from the table impatiently, and made no answer. And this was the man to whom Isabel had given her heart!

CHAPTER VI.

‘I AM saying nothing against Ailie,’ said Jean Campbell, ‘no a word. Our Margret upholds her as a God-fearing lass; but maybe she was going beyond her tether when she came praying ower our Margret. No, it was of nae avail. I never expected it for my part.’

‘It maun have been want of faith,’ said one of the eager spiritual gossips who had flocked around Jean to hear the news. ‘Human nature is so full o’ shortcomings. We’ve a’ looked up to her for her godly life; but the Lord will not put up with our idols. You’ve made an idol o’ Margret Diarmid, asking her prayers; but now she’s weighed and found wanting. It’s been lack of faith.’

‘I dinna see how that can be,’ said another. ‘She’s won us a’ blessings morning and night. I’ve seen heaven written plain in her face if ever it was written in a face in this world. Na; it must have been that they were lukewarm in their prayers.’

‘Hoots! they canna aye win,’ said a third neighbour; ‘if a’ the world was to be full of miracles where would us living folk be?’

‘But it’ll be a sair discouragement to the spread of the truth,’ said Mary White of the Mill, who had spoken first. ‘The enemy will cry out sore, like as if it was a triumph. And it’s ill for them of feeble minds to hear that Margret Diarmid hasn’t faith to be saved, or Ailie Macfarlane lost her power.’

‘I would like to see the one that has more faith than our Margret,’ said Jean Campbell, wounded in her tenderest point. ‘As for Ailie she’s a wonderful lass, but she’s upsetting with her prophet’s ways. If it had been the Lord’s will, would He have bided for Ailie to ask Him? Would he no have done it for our Margret that has kent Him longer and followed Him better? I’m no pretending to ken mysel—but if ever there was a saint of God it’s our Margret; and naebody need say anything else to me.’

‘There’s naebody in our parish would try,’ cried Jenny Spence, who was a connexion. ‘As for Ailie Macfarlane she canna be said rightly to belong to the parish. It’s weel kent she was brought up in the Rue, and a’ her friends bide down by the Loch-end. I canna see ony reason for following after her, and thinking licht of our ain.’

‘Did you never hear, ye silly women,’ said a voice over their heads, ‘that a prophet has nae honour in his ain country? Bring in the new light, and cast out the wisdom that dwells among us: that’s aye been the world’s opinion since lang before it was divided into parishes. As for this poor lassie you make such a work about, she’s hysterical, and that’s the explanation of her cure and her prophesying; no that the creature means ill. She’s an innocent creature, so far as I can see *the noo*; but how lang her innocence will last if this goes on——’

‘Nae doubt you’re a fine authority, Maister Galbraith,’ said Mary, with a toss of her head; ‘you that believe in naething, neither spirit nor deevil, like the auld Sadducees. It’s grand to come and get lessons from you.’

‘I believe in more than you believe in, Mary, my woman,’ said the schoolmaster, who had interrupted the talk; ‘but I’ll no go into controversy. Jean Campbell, I’m wanting a word with you, if you’ll come inbye as you’re passing, after a’ this important business is done; you were aye good at settling the affairs of the parish—but if I were you I would leave the other world in peace till you win there.’

‘It’s much he kens about thè ither world,’ said Mary White as the schoolmaster passed on. ‘Poor

auld haverel, with his Latin and his poetry, that never could get a kirk, even in the auld Moderate times. The minister himself is but lukewarm; he's awfu' Laodicean in his principles; but as for the maister, I'm no sure in my mind if we're justified in sending the bairns to an unconverted character. Eh, to think o' the mercy that's come to this place lying in wickedness! A half-hearted minister that hangs on one side and doubts; a ledgy like Miss Catherine, that canna bide an earnest word; and the like of this auld, sneering, unbelieving Dominie. But it's on them that deserve the least that the maist is poured out.'

'If we were a' to gang by our deservings,' said Jenny Spence; 'but eh, woman, you dinna see what you're leading to. Is it because Margaret Diarmid is the best o' us a' that the Lord lets her be? Is it because she's holy that He's leaving her in her sickness? She's done nothing a' her mortal days but serve Him, the dear lamb! Eh, Mary, ye're an ill preacher; ye're bidding us think ill o' the Lord!'

'I'm saying nae mair than Scripture says,' said Mary. 'No the righteous but sinners to repentance. There's Mr. John o' Ardnamore; is it no a greater triumph to win him to grace and the fear o' God than if he had been blameless frae his birth, like the lad in the Bible that had

kept a' the commandments? There's no a house in this parish that doesn't ken Mr. John, and the kind o' man he was. And noo he's a burning and a shining light. I ca' that a victory, if you please.'

'It's just this kind of victory,' cried Jean Campbell, hotly, 'that if the Captain, poor man, had been to the fore it would have cost Mr. John dear. If he had ever come with his gloomy countenance to oor door, and our Margret lying like yon——.'

'Whisht, woman!' said Jenny Spence, 'as if Margret could ever have gotten harm from such a blackguard! He was na worthy to come in to her presence—no at the best of times; and sae I aye said to the Captain. That's what it is to be worldly-minded. You a' thought it would be a grand match, till the villain showed what was in him. But to speak as if twenty scoundrels, and twenty to that, could harm Margret ——'

Jean Campbell shook her head. 'I wouldna say it to another mortal but you twa,' she said. 'We're auld friends; but the innocent thing liket him well. I canna tell if she ever found out the ill he meant. Me mysel did I ever think he would dare to have onything but a true meaning to the Captain's daughter, and her a lady born? But he's a bonnie man to come and pray over our Margret! He's a pleasant kind o' converted

character to show about the country-side! Lord! I would murder him if he came, in daylight that I could see him, praying over me!

‘Jean, Jean,’ said Mary solemnly, ‘your aye the auld woman. You take a’ thing in the view of nature; but the greatest sinner is aye the greatest saint when he wins to grace.’

‘As long as he bides far from me,’ cried Jean; ‘but I’ll have no commerce with the like of Mr. John. Good day to ye both if that’s a’ ye have to say. I wouldna gie a wee word of our Margret for a’ the saints and a’ the miracles that ever were kent in this world. And I’m gaun to speak to the maister as he bid me. It’s something about my Jamie, nae doubt. I’ll bid ye baith good day.’

The women had been standing at the corner of the only street in the hamlet of Lochhead. The village consisted of two irregular lines of houses, advancing to and receding from the curved line of the road. The highest of them had but two stories, and the generality had only a ‘but and a ben,’ a room on each side of the door; two or three possessed a homely little strip of garden, where cabbages and cabbage-roses grew peacefully together; here and there through a break in the line appeared the gleaming surface of the loch, and the heathery braes rose up behind, clothing in with a

warm background the homely landscape. The church stood at one end with its inclosure of trees and graves upon a slope of the rising ground, with the school and schoolmaster's house on the opposite side of the road. This wood ran parallel with that which led to the Glebe Cottage, and a little path connecting the two crossed the hillside, dwindling to a white thread among the heather. The gossips had been standing at one end of the village, by Jenny Spence's door, and Jean Campbell had to traverse the whole length of the street before she came to the slated house where the 'maister' expected her visit. The other two stood looking after her with the criticism inevitable under such circumstances. Jenny for her part stooped to clutch by the petticoats and elevate suddenly into her arms a two-year-old creature in nondescript garments that had been creeping about her as she talked. 'Eh the wee mondiewort, it's as black as a sweep,' she cried, giving the child a shake. 'Poor Jean, she's no as lightfooted as I mind her. The Captain he was awfu' wearing to a poor woman's temper. It was an honour for the like of her, but it's made her auld before her time.'

'I canna see the honour' said Mary, 'he was an auld swearing trooper, and no a man I could ever have put up wi'. The way thae men get wives! and the fuils women are to lippen to them!

And thae stepdaughters and their pride, and a house that's no her ain ! It's nae wonder to me if she looks auld and worn.'

Jenny being a 'connexion' felt her family consequence assailed : 'I never said she was auld or worn. She's climbed the hill like the rest of us ; and now we'll have to totter down again, as the sang says.'

'It's no like you or any serious person to take thought of a song, when it's your latter end your speaking o',' said Mary, seriously. 'Jenny, I'm surprised ; you're just taking the good things of this world and laying nothing seriously to heart.'

'I dinna ken,' said Jenny, indignantly, 'what right or reason you have to find fault wi' me.'

'Eh, woman, it's no a time to seek reasons,' said her companion. 'The Lord's working mightily by signs and wonders in the midst of us. Do you think I dinna find fault with myself more than with you ? It's no a time to take your ease and seek your ain comfort. Come out to the prayer-meeting and bring your man and seek a blessing. Dinna forget, nor let him forget, that you have souls to be saved.'

'Eh, I ken that,' said Jenny ; 'but you see he likes his supper, oor man. It's the nature of men. They're mair mindful of what they eat and what they drink than women-folk. He's the bread-

winner, and he works hard a' day, and I think it's but right he should be humoured at night.'

'Aye,' said Mary, 'humour his pair dying body and destroy his immortal soul. That's the way you silly women do.'

'Na, if you get to your silly women I'll no say another word,' said Jenny. 'I aye ken what that means. When you havena a reasonable word to answer, you're like the men and the lads—it's aye something about silly women. I've been married this sixteen year, and I'm used to that. I ken it's because you canna answer me. There's nothing about prayer-meetings in the Bible, though nae doubt they're grand things; but there's an awful deal about your man's supper and a' his little wants. Who's to look after their bits of fancies, poor fellow, but the wife?'

'And you think it's in the Bible about your man's supper,' said Mary, scornfully. 'Poor thing, poor thing! And that's the way you read the word of God!'

'It's his dinner the noo,' said Jenny, once more clutching by its brief petticoats the child she had set down on the ground beside her, 'and the bairns will be hame from the hill, and I've nae time to stand havering here.'

When the last of the party was thus left alone, she shook her head and groaned within herself with

a fervour not unnatural in the circumstances. 'She would have stood long enough clish-clashing,' said Mary to herself, 'but the moment I came upon the things that concern her peace. Eh me! but it's a weary world!'

While the gossip thus came to an abrupt termination, Jean Campbell went on her way without any further pauses to the schoolhouse door. It was a summer day of the moderate warmth which summer has in Scotland under the shadow of the hills. Every quality of summer except the heat, which burns up more southern regions, was in the magical air. Sounds came softly through it charmed out of all their native rudeness. The smell of the young birch-trees, and resinous odour of the fir, came now and then in soft gusts from the hill; and the more distinct and warm sweetness of the hawthorn from the hedges breathed about the loch, surrounding it on all sides. The birds were still, for it was high noon; and so was the street in which there were few wayfarers; the 'men' being all at work, and the women busy with dinners and other domestic cares at home. But the burn went trickling down the hillside into the clear still basin of the loch unsubdued by the quiet of the hour; and the hum of invisible life from the hill was almost as murmurous as if the street of Lochhead had been heather instead of rough pavement and

‘plainstones.’ Jean went her way not without a little fret at her heart about various matters which had touched her feelings. Chief of all, ‘oor Margaret,’ who had undoubtedly sunk from her former position as the Holy Maid of the Loch. Now there was another holy maid, and Margaret was accused by profane tongues of lacking faith, which was a pain and a humiliation to her stepmother. Next in importance was the sensation of mingled excitement and indignation which filled her mind touching the untoward visit of ‘Mr. John;’ and, thirdly, Jean’s bosom throbbed with a sense that ‘the maister’ could not have asked to speak to her for nothing, and that probably the boy had been getting into mischief. Poor Jamie was not clever, though he was ‘the Captain’s laddie;’ and there seemed reason to doubt whether he would ever be capable of education, or the sublime destiny of being a minister, to which his mother in her heart had devoted him. She went on with a homely alertness which gave the lie to her critics; but Care went behind her as he does with all the world.

Jean was in her white *mutch*, like a French peasant woman, and wore no bonnet, and had her trim apron tied round her, over her black gown. On Sundays, when she took her way to Church in all the dignity of her widow’s bonnet and her ‘deep crape,’ it was altogether a different

matter; but on ordinary occasions no affectation of superiority as the Captain's widow was in her mind. When she reached the school-house, the maister, who had been on the watch, came himself to the door to let her in. It was a holiday, and the maister's heart was glad; but he, too, was not without his cares. He opened his door to his visitor, and brought her into a room which struck awe upon the whole village. It was rudely shelved in the recesses by the fireplace, and on two of the sides of the room, and filled from the floor to the ceiling with books. The books were not better clad than their owner; but the Scotch village, with characteristic appreciation, valued them more highly on that account. 'No books that you could buy and be done with,' the parish said, 'none of your ephemeral things wi' braw outsides.' The finest russias or the most choice editions could not have been so imposing to the rural imagination as the Dominie's shabby, battered, old books. He had a great telescope, too, mounted on a stand, and a pair of old globes, and a small collection of fossils, rudely arranged in wooden boxes of his own construction. Other curious things there were, traces of pursuits eagerly entered into and soon abandoned, records of wanderings unusual in his time,—the whole story of a long, unsettled, uneasy life, driven upon itself for occupation and interest, and carrying with it me-

mories of a thousand disappointments. The maister himself was spare and stooping, as such a man could scarcely fail to be. His voice was harsh and unmelodious, broken by much shouting to unruly urchins. He took snuff, and on the top of his head he wore a rusty wig. He was, indeed, something very like the conventional schoolmaster, poor, and worn, and tragi-comic; but that he possessed—the rarest and strangest of all his gifts,—a broad, full smile, which came over his face with curious unexpectedness, and which transfigured that worn countenance, and everything belonging to it, as by magic. You might have smiled at the Dominie and his surroundings when his face was grave and in repose—but when it lighted up you discovered with a blush that the Dominie saw the fun better than you did, and appreciated it as no one else could; and if you were a soul of grace were abashed before him. It was a smile that encouraged others now and then, but just as often discomfited them. He threw it about upon his poor house, his pitiful belongings, his unlovely figure, like light from a lantern, noting all the grotesqueness, all the poverty. The gleam of this curious illumination which met Jean as she came in, and played on her, half cordial, half derisive, filled the woman with awe and perplexity, and made the audience to which she was thus admitted more bewildering

to her, than if, as she said, 'it had been the laird himsel.'

'Weel, Jean, my woman,' said the maister, 'how's a' with ye? It's a bonnie day.'

'After a' the saft weather we've had,' said Jean, making the conventional answer which was expected of her. 'And we're a' very weel but Margret, who's no long for this world, Maister Galbraith, though it's sair news to tell.'

'No a word about that,' said the maister, hastily, 'and a' the fools in the country-side living and thriving! I will not speak of what I cannot understand. It's no about her I'm wanting you, but about bonnie Isabel.'

'About Isabel?' said Jean, wondering: and to herself she added, 'Eh, if the auld fuil's head should be turned like the lave with that bit lassie!' a mental exclamation which was unexpectedly brought to light, as it were, by one of the Dominie's broad sudden smiles.

'I might be her grandfather,' he said; 'and whiles I feel as if I was grandfather to a' these heedless things. You've had your ain ado, Jean, my woman, with the Captain's family. Before ever you married Duncan, you mind what I said.'

'I'm no complaining,' said Jean, with intense and lofty pride.

'No,' said the maister, 'you're no the one to

complain. You're too spirity for that, and too proud. And Margaret for one knows what you've done; but as for me, that have aye taken an interest in them, I'm wanting you to do more than ever, and I know you 'll no be asked in vain.'

'You had aye a skilfu' tongue, maister,' said Jean: 'you were aye one to wile the bird off the tree, when you liket to try. What is't that's coming noo?'

Upon which the maister laughed softly, for it was a point upon which he was susceptible to flattery.

'It's no laughing matter,' he said; 'you'll give me your best attention, Jean. You and me are not the folk to meddle with love and lovers in their wooings and nonsense; but there are times when the like of us must interfere. Bonnie Isabel is but a bairn. I know she is Margaret's twin, but there's a wonderful difference between them for all that; and yon English lad at the Manse will beguile the lass if we do not take the better heed, you and me.'

'Beguile our Isabel!' said Jean, scornfully. 'You ken heaps of things, maister, but no the heart of the like of her. If it was a lass out of the village, I wouldna say: but our Isabel's a lady born.'

'I stand corrected,' said the maister; 'you're

a woman of sense, Jean Campbell, and know better than me. I cannot express myself like you, but this was what I meant—that if we did not take heed, you and me, bonnie Isabel would be led further than she means to go; and the world, that is always an ill-thinking world, would make out a case of appearances against her. I've seen her with yon lad upon the hill——'

'And what's about that?' said Jean; 'is a lass never to speak to a lad but afore witnesses? And what's the use of being young if you come to that? The lads have maist of the good things in this world; if a bonnie lass is no to have the upper hand o' them and gie their heartstrings a bit wring when she has the power to do it. Na, na, maister, if you want her to let the lad be——'

'She's ta'ena good grip of some other heartstrings I know,' said the maister, 'more's the pity. You've no bowels, you women. If it was but his heart that was in question, I do not say I would make much moan; but it is her credit, which is more to the purpose. Do not fire up at me; he was near running off with her the other night. You ask me how I know? Is not every secret word of your mouth or thought, of your heart proclaimed on the housetops? If she were to go a step with him, it would be a sore heart for Margaret, and long would Isabel rue the day.'

‘I’ll not believe it,’ said Jean. ‘She’s prouder than the Marchioness, if you come to that. Her give way to a lad! I wouldna believe it if it was sworn to by a’ the Loch. She has mair spirit than that.’

‘Love’s blind,’ said the maister, with a melting tone in his harsh old voice; ‘it thinks no evil. He swears to her he means her well, and I would not say he did not mean well; but the day she’s that lad’s wife will be an ill day for Isabel, and all the more if she runs off with him. Whisht! and hear me out. They have quarrelled to-day, but to-morrow they will be ’greed again;—and she has no mother. I trust her, Jean Campbell, to you.’

‘I dinna believe it, no a word,’ said Jean, rising from her chair; ‘but I aye do my best. No but Isabel is a sair handful, with her pride and her hasty ways. It’s the flower of a’ that the Lord winna spare. Eh, maister, it’s mair than I can understand.’

‘No a word of that,’ said the Dominie, ‘or you and me will criticise our Maker, and that mustna be. He must have some reason. Thae birds’ eggs are your Jamie’s, Jean. He’s a strange callant, awfu’ slow at his lessons, and awfu’ gleg on the hill.’

‘The hill will do him little good, maister,’ said Jean, discontented, ‘if you would but make him

mind his book ! It would be a terrible cross to me if he didna get on with his education, and him the Captain's son.'

'He'll never mind his book,' said the Dominic, promptly, 'no more than his father before him. Make him a sodger if you please, like Duncan. If ye insist on schools and college, he'll never be wiser than a stickit minister, like me.'

'Eh, but it's ower muckle learning with you !' cried Jean, bewildered by the smile with which the maister described his condition. She had so described him herself, not without a touch of contempt. But at the present moment her mortification about her boy was swallowed up in reverential terror for the man who thus appreciated his own misfortunes. 'It's because my Jamie's ower useful with the birds' eggs, and the trash o' flowers they are aye gathering,' Jean said to herself, as she went home ; 'but I'll send him where he'll be well kept to his book, if the maister speaks like that to his mother again.'

CHAPTER VII.

EXCITEMENT had once more sunk into calm at the Glebe Cottage; but Margaret, though she had recovered her composure, had suffered so much from the shock as to be unable to leave her bed next day. It was a pain to her to lose her habitual hermitage, her hours of silence on the hillside, with the meditative burn beside her, and the fair landscape below; but she was willing to husband the remnants of her strength; and it was in the little chamber which opened out of the parlour, a room which she knew must witness her last cares and last prayers on earth, that she lay by herself as the summer afternoon fell into evening. She had sent her attendants away, the door was ajar so that she might call some one if necessary, and Margaret was left alone with her habitual preoccupations with new matter for thought and new occasion for prayer.

On the other side of the wall sat Isabel trying in

vain to occupy herself with her usual work. Her sister's state had filled all her thoughts the previous night. Hopes and fears about her recovery, awe and excitement about the means to be used, a terrible strain of suspense, and blank of disappointment when all was over, had withdrawn Isabel's mind entirely from her own affairs. But now that it had all passed like a dream,—now that Margaret was better, left at peace for her prayers, looking the same as before, and quenching all excitement with the quiet of her smile, Isabel's imagination had returned in spite of her to her own love and sorrow. She had nothing to expect for all that long evening. She could not go out and sit on the heather braes, and perhaps play condescendingly with her little brother and sister, perhaps maintain a half-quarrelling, half-amiable conversation with their mother by her kitchen-door. Such a tranquil amusement had palled on Isabel since she knew what excitement was. She could not escape into a poem or story in which she could see her own youthful troubles reflected, for stories and poems were very scant on Loch Diarmid. She sat with her needle suspended in her fingers, gazing vacantly from the other side of the room at the window which she was too languid to approach. What would have been the good of looking out? He was not coming to-night, he was never coming any

more, Isabel said to herself. All that she had to do was to go back to her life as it was before she knew him, and to try to content herself with that, and to look forward to a long dead blank in which nothing would ever happen, into which no step would ever come, no voice which could kindle her heart. Never more would her heart beat to hear and feel that there was some one roaming about the little house waiting till she came out—to listen to the step coming and going—the soft whistle unmarked by any ears but her own—the pebble that would strike accidentally against the window. No doubt it was all wrong and undignified, but it was the practice of the humbler girls in the district, and Isabel had never realized that there could be any harm in it. And it was sweet, very sweet, to think that one was so much beloved; and now what a blank it would all be when no such pilgrim came!

Isabel sat, very dismal, alone with these thoughts, her red under lip drooping a little, the corners of her mouth drawn down, her eyes fixed vacantly on the window. It was getting dark, the very hour she used to meet him. The evening star was shining high up, miles up, above the misty braes on the other side of the loch. How often had she seen it rise and grow, and tremble out of the blue depths above, while he stood by

her among the great rustling bushes of the heather. And this was to be never, never more. She must watch the stars alone, out of a chill room, where there was nothing to vary the monotony of life, where the silence and vacancy would rustle in her ears and never be broken by a voice—when Margaret perhaps should be in heaven—Margaret, the only creature left her to love—and nothing but Jean Campbell, and Jean Campbell's bairns, be left belonging to her. Big tears filled Isabel's eyes as she gazed out, seeing nothing, the corners of her mouth drooping more and more, her lip quivering just a little—lost in the most pathetic sensation of youth, a deep and wondering pity for herself.

All at once she started, and sprang to her feet, changed as by a spell. She stood for a moment, irresolute, between her seat and the window. Then, by degrees, her whole expression altered. Her lip melted into the ghost of a smile, light came back to her pretty eyes; after a pause of consideration, she sat down once more by the wall. 'I couldna leave Margaret,' she said to herself. And she took up her work again, and worked briskly for about thirty seconds. Then she paused—listened—smiled. Ah! there could be no doubt about it. That was the accidental pebble that had struck the window. That was the soft, faint whistle, the merest whisper of a call which

breathed on the air. He had come back, after all. It changed the entire current of Isabel's thoughts in a moment. She had no further desire to go out, no impatience of her loneliness. These sounds had reconciled her to life and to herself. He was there, that was enough. She had even a pleasure in thinking he would have his walk and his waiting for nothing. She reminded herself of her anger and of her duty. Nothing in the world could induce her to leave Margaret. Her closed lips took a demure expression, as she sat and listened with a certain mischievous content. The blank which had seemed so intolerable and so permanent a few minutes before, flushed now with a thousand rosy colours. It was easy to deny herself, it was rather a pleasure than a pain to remain alone, so long as she knew that he watched for her and that she had not been forsaken.

Half-an-hour passed, and twice Isabel had heard, with a widening of the smile or half smile round her mouth, the familiar pebble on the window, when Jean Campbell came suddenly into the room where she was sitting. It had once occurred to Isabel, with some anxiety, that Margaret alone, in her retirement, lying still in the unbroken silence, might hear these sounds and interpret them aright; but she thought of no one else, and cared for no one else, in her youthful pride. Her

stepmother's entrance disturbed her and moved her to impatience. It was seldom Jean came so far without special invitation, and never to join Isabel, who was less gentle, less patient, and had a much warmer, hastier temper than Margaret. She came in, however, on this occasion without so much, the girl angrily remarked, 'as a knock at the door.' Isabel stopped working and raised her astonished eyes to Jean with a demonstrative surprise. 'Did you want anything?' she asked, in her pretty, clear, but, so far as poor Jean was concerned, unsympathetic voice.

'I wanted to see if you were here,' said Jean, with a mixture of softness and resentment.

'Where could I be but here,' said Isabel, 'and Margaret lying in her bed? Maybe you thought I was out enjoying myself,' she added, with a certain pique; and just at that moment, borne upon a stronger gust than usual, came a bewildering echo of the distant whistle. In spite of herself she changed colour a little, and clutched at her work, as if to shut out the sound.

'Eh, listen!' said Jean; 'what's that? I've heard it near an hour about the house. I hope it's nae ill-doer waiting about to watch for an open door.'

To this unsuitable accusation Isabel listened very demurely, returning to her work. The idea

amused her, and converted the half-suppressed irritation with which she was too often in the habit of addressing Jean Campbell, to a certain equally repressed sense of fun. As for Jean, she looked suspiciously at her companion, and continued,—

‘There’s mair ways of stealing than one. It might be some lad that would never meddle with siller or gold; but there’s things mair precious than siller or gold—eh, Isabel, my woman!’ cried honest Jean, with a thrill of true feeling in her voice.

‘What are you speaking of?’ said Isabel, coldly. ‘To hear you, folk would think you had some meaning. There’s little to steal at the Glebe, if that’s what you are thinking. Most likely it’s your son Jamie, wasting his time on the moor instead of learning his lessons. You need not be feared for him.’

‘I’m no feared for my Jamie,’ cried Jean, indignant. ‘He’s your father’s son as well as mine, Isabel, though you’re so proud. He’s your brother, and maybe the time will come when you’ll be glad to mind that. If I could think,’ she added, suddenly changing her tactics and making a direct attack, ‘that you had the heart to keep your lad waiting on the hill, and our Margret in her bed! Eh, and there’s the proof,’ she added, as an indiscreet pebble at that moment glanced upon the win-

dow. 'I said it, but I could not think it—the like of this from you!'

Isabel's cheeks flushed scarlet. She had been full of a great burst of indignation when this sudden evidence against her struck her ear and checked her utterance. To be sure she was in no way to blame, but yet appearances were against her, and her indignant self-defence was shorn of its fulness.

'I have nothing to do with it,' she cried; 'I've sat by Margaret's bedside the whole day. How am I to tell what folk may do outside? It's no concern of mine. And you've no business to meddle with me,' cried the girl, with hot unwilling tears.

'Isabel,' cried Jean, with solemnity, 'you think very little of me. I'm no a lady like you, though I was your father's wife; but I'm the oldest woman in the house, and I ken mair than you do, aye, or Margaret either. There was ane that warned me that I should do my duty to you and speak out. It would be easier for me to hold my tongue. It's aye the easiest to hold your tongue; but ane that is your friend——'

'I know who that is,' cried Isabel, with flashing eyes, 'and I think he might have known I could guide myself, and would have no meddling from you!'

‘Na, you didna ken who it was,’ said her stepmother; ‘it was ane that has kent you all your days; and it’s no that he has any cause to be jealous like him you’re thinking o’. Eh, that other ane! Poor man! it makes my heart sair to look in his face. A man that might ken better—and no a thought in his head but how to please a lassie’s heedless eye.’

‘There is many a thought in his head,’ cried Isabel, ‘I’ll not have you speak of my friends. Let me alone. I’m sitting listening if Margaret cries on me, and thinking of nobody. If the best man in the world was there, I would not go to the window to look at him; but don’t torment me, or I cannot tell what I may do.’

‘I’ll no be threatened,’ said Jean, with equal spirit, ‘and I’ll say what’s in my heart to say. If you go on with that English lad it’ll be to your destruction, Isabel. I was warned to say it, and I’ll say it—like it or not, as you please. When I have a burden on my mind, it’s no you that will stop me. If you take up with the lad at the Manse, the English lad——’

‘Mr. Lothian will disapprove,’ said Isabel, with a toss of her head.

‘I’ve nothing ado with Mr. Lothian,’ she said. ‘I’m no speaking from him. You’ll rue the day, Isabel. I’m no for putting a lass in a prison and

forbidding her to speak to a man. Would I mind if it was a' in play? I was ance a young lass mysel. But yon lad, he's in earnest. And if he beguiles you to listen to him, you'll rue the day!'

Isabel had risen to her feet in indignation, and was about to reply, when a faint call from Margaret interrupted the combatants. Probably Jean had raised her voice unduly, though neither of them were aware of it. It was Isabel Margaret called, and 'Let *her* come too,' added the invalid. This was how they generally described to each other their father's wife. The two paused abashed, and went in to the little room behind. Margaret had raised herself up on her pillows, and sat erect, with a flush on her cheeks. The excitement of the previous night had not yet died away. Its effect was to give her the feverish beauty which belongs to her complaint. She had her small Bible clasped between her two white, worn hands, as she had been reading it. 'Come in,' she said, 'come in,' holding out her hand to Jean, who lingered at the door. Though she was so beautiful in her weakness, it was death that was in Margaret's face.

'I want to speak to you both,' she said; 'why will ye quarrel, you two, the moment I'm away?'

'We were not quarrelling,' said Isabel, turning her back upon her stepmother.

‘Na,’ added Jean, in explanation ; ‘it was nae quarrel. It was me that was speaking. I’m no a ladyborn like you ; but I’m the Captain’s widow, and a woman of experience, and I will not hold my tongue and see a young lass fall into trouble. Margaret, it’s no meaning to vex you ; but she’s aye keeping on a troke and a kindness with that English lad.’

Isabel turned round with hasty wrath and flushed cheeks ; but her resentment was useless. She caught her sister’s eye, to whom she could never make any false pretences ; and suddenly bent down her head, and hid her face. To Margaret she had no defence to make, even though at this moment she was without blame.

‘Then it is him I hear on the hill,’ said Margaret. ‘Isabel, go and bring him in to speak to me?’

‘Bring him in—here?’ asked both the bystanders in a breath, aghast at the command. The amazement of their tone, and the glance they cast round the little room, brought a slight additional colour to Margaret’s cheek.

‘Bring him here,’ she repeated ; ‘I’ve gone so far on my way that I’m free to do what I please. I cannot seek him out or stop him on the road. Isabel, go and bring him into me.’

Isabel, who had grown suddenly pale and begun

to tremble, hesitated to obey. 'O my Maggie!' she said, clasping her hands; and in her desperation she turned to her stepmother with an appealing glance. Jean was at her wits' end, divided between lively dislike and repugnance to 'the English lad,' and that absolute reverence for Margaret which made it difficult to resist any of her wishes.

'He's no worthy,' she said, with trembling eagerness; 'he's no fit to come into this chamber and speak face to face with the like of you. Let me gang and speak to him. We mustna be ower anxious; he's but coortin' like the other lads. It's no as if him and Isabel had given each other their troth. It's but a diversion, like a' the rest. I'll speak to him canny, and send him away.'

'It's no diversion,' said Isabel, hotly, under her breath. Margaret sat in the abstraction of her weakness between the two who were so warm with life and all its emotions, clasping her little Bible in her hands.

'No,' she said, softly; 'you mistake Bell. She is not like one of the lasses at Lochhead, to meet him and speak to him for diversion, as you say. It's different. And there's none to guard her but me. You're very good—you've always been good to us both. Don't be angry if she's impatient. She's but young,' Margaret went on, with a pathetic smile

and her eyes fixed on Jean, who by this time was crying without restraint; 'when she knows more of the world, she'll see that you're a good woman and have ever been a help and comfort to her and me. But I am mother and sister and all to Isabel as long as I live; and I'll no live long, and I would like to speak a word to him. Bell, you must dry your eyes and bring the young man to me.'

'I'll do what you bid me, if it was to break my heart,' said the weeping Isabel.

Margaret made no reply. She knew that Isabel was perfectly sincere, and yet she knew that the flutter in the girl's bosom was not for her sister but her lover. While Isabel stole slowly, reluctantly away, Margaret sat propped among her pillows, watching with soft eyes. She was herself so much beyond the world—so ready to go; so far on her way, as she herself expressed it, that the tumult of feeling in her sister's bosom appeared to her almost like the baby flutterings of childhood. But Jean, whose experience was of a different kind, stood looking after the girl with mingled indignation and sympathy.

'It's hard on her,' said the stepmother. 'You ken an awfu' deal mair than me, Margret; but you dinna see it's hard upon her as I do: though I could never forgive her thinking of anything

serious, and you so ill. We maun a' hae our little diversion,' Jean added, after a pause. 'It's but that. It couldna be marrying and giving in marriage the lass was thinking of, and you so far from well.'

'Would it not be more unkind if it was mere diversion?' said Margaret.

'Na,' said Jean quickly, 'a lass like a bairn must whiles have the play. We're a' the better o't. And Isabel meant nae mair. She's thoughtless whiles, but she has a tender heart. You canna believe she was planning out her life and you lying suffering here?'

'She's so young,' said Margaret, though a momentary contraction passed over her face. It was meet that Isabel's life should be planned out before she was left alone in the world. Margaret by this time in the liberality of ending life was ready to consider the merits even of the English lad—much more ready than to believe it was mere amusement, which had led Isabel like the village lasses to meet her lover on the hill-side. But the suggestion was a natural one to Jean Campbell. The window of the room was a low lattice looking out upon the heather, and chiefly glazed with the thick old-fashioned glass, with a kind of round eye in every pane, which prevents any sight of things outside. Jean went to it and gazed out, vainly attempting to see what was going on outside, but

she could make out nothing but the dim waving of the bushes and rustle of the heather—nothing human was to be seen on the hill.

Isabel for her part went very slowly to the door, and looked up and down the road, to cheat her own conscience into the belief that she was obeying her sister. She took a few steps round the house in the wrong direction to look for the watcher, and went back to the door with a relieved heart, not having seen him. Her heart was not detached from her first love, but she had been much shaken in her belief in him at their last meeting; and though she denied indignantly that it was ‘diversion,’ she trembled to bring Stapylton to the length of an interview with Margaret, thereby binding him and herself for ever. So Isabel thought in her simplicity. ‘It would be as bad as being married,’ she said to herself; and she had no desire to be married. All that her heart asked could be given by those chance meetings, by the sweet sense of being loved, the charm of the tender secret which was between the two. To go any further at such a moment would have shocked and startled the girl; and what was to be done if she brought him to Margaret, but that the most serious consequences might follow. She was incapable of ‘diverting herself,’ as Jean thought, but yet had no inclination to quicken the

pace of life, or rush upon facts. Serious existence looked still distant and far off, and Isabel approached it with tender delay, with soft wistfulness and reluctance. It would come to that eventually, no doubt. But why should Horace, why should Margaret, be so impatient now?

Isabel stood at the door, and her flushed face cooled in the evening air, and the beating of her heart grew less loud; but she could not see her lover on the road. 'He must have gone away back, if he was ever there,' she said, when she returned to Margaret's room, or 'maybe it was but the pee-weep on the hill.'

'It was nae peeweep,' said Jean Campbell, turning round; but she was charitable enough to say no more, when she saw the look of anxiety on Isabel's face.

'If he's gone there is no more to be said,' said Margaret; and then she sighed. 'It is not because I'm going,' she added, with a smile, as it were correcting herself, 'but because I would fain put myself in God's place for my bonnie Bell; as if He did not love her more than I can—as if she were not safest with Him!'

And then poor Isabel, full of remorse, bent down her head upon her sister's outstretched hands. Could she trust Margaret, perfect as she was, to see all her thoughts, all the fancies that rose in her mind

as God did? Jean Campbell, whose homely mind was free of these complications, withdrew at this point, drying her eyes and shaking her head.

‘And she’s nae aulder than Isabel!’ said the humble stepmother. It was the most pathetic commentary that could have been made.

CHAPTER VIII.

‘I WOULD not have thought,’ said Miss Catherine, looking steadily at young Stapylton, who had gone to pay her a visit, ‘that the farming over the hill was worth so long study. They must be wearying for you at home.’

‘There are more things than the farming,’ said Horace; ‘there is the grouse, for instance, and it will soon be September. The folks at home have to make up their mind to it. A man is not like a girl.’

‘The Lord forbid!’ said Miss Catherine, ‘or fathers and mothers would have little comfort of their lives. I hope there’s a pleasant young sister to keep them company at home.’

‘Oh, there are three girls, thank you,’ said young Stapylton, carelessly, ‘they are jolly enough. It’s against my principles to be always turning up at the Hall. What is the good of being young if one is not to have a little freedom? I suppose I shall settle down some time like my father. It’s very

respectable and all that, but it's not amusing. Women never can understand a man. You think we should be tied down to all the old cut-and-dry habits like yourselves.'

'No,' said Miss Catherine, 'it is not to be expected we should understand you. We are creatures of a lower class, as is well known. But still you know the very dogs come to a kind of comprehension of their masters. I would think the Hall and the neighbours you have known all your days, and the hunting and such like, would have as many charms as Mr. Lothian and the grouse. It's but a poor sphere for you here.'

'Well, I suppose so long as I am content, that is enough,' said Horace, with a feeling that he was being laughed at; and then he added, with an attempt at sarcasm, 'Besides there are a great many superior people here; and this movement is very interesting to a student of human nature, you know.'

'And what does a student of human nature make of the movement?' said Miss Catherine, grimly, looking at the young fellow with her penetrating grey eyes. He was not the *blasé* young man of the present day, experienced in everything and weary of all. He was not sufficiently polished for the soft sneer and universal derision now current among us, but he was the first rough sketch of that

accomplished personage ; the fashion had come in, or at least had reached to his level. But it was a rough species of the art, and only good as an essay.

‘ Well,’ said Horace, with a certain grandeur, an air which had often imposed upon Isabel, who knew no better, ‘ I suppose it is just one of the ordinary religious swindles. But the simplicity of the people makes it look better than usual, to begin with. And it is only beginning. One can’t tell at first what follies such a business may fall into. The woman is mad, I suppose ; or else she has taken this way of thrusting herself into notice. She is rather pretty, too. Somebody might be fool enough to marry her, if she was taken up by the better class. As for the men, I suppose they have some motive ; ambition to be first among their neighbours, or love of excitement, or something. It is like whisky ; and then it don’t lead to trouble as whisky does.’

Miss Catherine was much opposed to ‘ the movement ’ herself ; but her soul was moved within her by this speech.

‘ Do you tell them your opinions as frankly at the Glebe ? ’ she said, quietly ; and her companion changed colour somewhat at the question.

‘ Well, you know, the eldest girl is of the same way of thinking,’ he said. ‘ It is quite natural she should be. She is very ill, and she must come to

that, sooner or later ; and then they all think it's a chance for her to get better. I don't wonder, in the least, at Margaret. The other—don't know what to think,' he added, with a little reluctance; ' but, of course, one would not shock the feelings of two girls.'

' That's good of you,' said Miss Catherine; ' and I see the force of what you say. Religion is what we must all come to, sooner or later. It's a very fine way of putting it, and shows a perception of character—But, my young friend, is it right of you to turn your steps night after night towards the Glebe? I am never at my west window in the evening, but I see you with your face that way. They are gentlewomen by the mother's side, and no farther off than fifth cousins from the family at Ardallan; but their father was only a trooper, and they have little siller. Would your father be pleased with such a bride as Isabel for his heir? Not but what she is fit for a duke,' said Miss Catherine, warmly, once more fixing her companion with her eye.

' Bride?' said the young man, blushing violently, and gazing at her, surprised ; and then, for the first time, his tone changed. ' She is sweet enough, and pretty enough, for a queen,' he said ; and then added—' if that were all!' with a sigh.

‘Yes, but it is not all,’ said Miss Catherine, somewhat melted. ‘There are many things to be taken into consideration. Old folk and young folk have different notions; and unless your people know what you’re doing, Mr. Horace, my advice would be that you should go no more to the Glebe.’

‘Oh, that’s all nonsense!’ said Horace, recovering himself. ‘Things have not gone so far as that. Poor little thing! she wants some amusement; her sister is always ill, and nobody with her but that woman. She is a pretty little thing, and I like to talk to her; and so, it appears, does she to me.’

‘And that is all?’ said Miss Catherine, with a return of the grimness to her face.

‘That is all,’ said Horace, lightly, ‘we may chatter to each other I hope now and then without going to the last extremity. I know what you are going to say, that there is somebody else ready to step in, and that I am standing in the way of her prospects.—Such prospects!—a man old enough to be her father, with a humdrum Manse to offer her. She ought to do better than that. In short, I am a defence to keep Mr. Lothian off,’ he added, with a laugh, which his high colour and the contraction of his forehead belied. ‘Confound the old inquisitor!’ he was saying to himself, ‘what has she to do with it—am I bound to tell her everything?’

Miss Catherine's looks grew blacker and blacker as she listened.

'You give a bonnie account of yourself,' she said, 'if you want nothing but to chatter with her, how dare ye stand between her and an honest man that loves her? When Margaret dies,—and we all know that calamity cannot be long averted,—is it your will, for the sake of your amusement, that a bonnie, tender creature should be left without friend or guide in the world? Yes, I know what you think,' said Miss Catherine, growing hot; 'you think she's so soft and sweet, that you can play as you please. But mind what I say, you may go too far with Isabel; she is young, and younger than she might be, but she is not of a light nature to be guided by you. If you play her false, be it in one way, be it in another, you'll get your punishment. Now you have heard what I have to say, and you can go on your own way, and take your own course, like all your kind; but you've got warning of what will follow. And now, Mr. Horace Stapylton,' said Miss Catherine, rising and making him a stately curtsy, 'I am obliged to bid you good day.'

Horace started to his feet amazed beyond description by this dismissal. 'I am shocked to have intruded upon you,' he said, angrily; 'I shall take care never to repeat the infliction.'

‘That shall be as you please,’ said Miss Catherine, with another curtsy, and the young man found himself out of the room and out of the house almost before he recovered his consciousness. ‘Old hag!’ he said to himself, ‘old Scotch cat!—venomous old maid!’ as he walked down the avenue. But he was worsted notwithstanding, and felt his defeat.

‘She turned me out of the house,’ he said, afterwards, with artful incaution to Isabel, when despite all that had occurred, he succeeded in meeting her ‘by accident’ on the hill: ‘and all for your sake. You are getting me into disgrace with everybody. They upbraid me for following you, for taking up your time, for keeping others away; and the folk at home write to ask if I am never coming back. People look glum at me wherever I go for your sake, and you will do nothing for me: I must say it is rather too bad.’

‘I would do anything for you,’ said Isabel. ‘I would not mind what all the world might say. They might gloom at me, and welcome; what would I care? anything but one thing, Horace—and that you know—you see—I could not do.’

‘Which, of course, is the only thing I want,’ said the young man, sullenly. ‘That is always the way with girls.’

‘And why should you want it so?’ said Isabel,

eagerly. 'We're young, and we can wait. If all your folk were ready and willing, could I leave my Margaret? Horace, you know as well as I do: she has been my comfort a' my days; there is not one like her far or near. If you think, as other folk think, that Ailie is nearer God than our Margaret, oh, it shows how little you know,' cried Isabel, with the hot colour rushing over her face; 'and could I forsake her that has been like a mother to me? What is love, if it's like that?'

'I don't think you know what love means,' said Horace: 'it is to give up all for one; it is to forsake father and mother—and your past life—and your prospects, as people call them—and good sense and caution and prudence, and all your Scotch qualities;—that is what love is, Isabel; to think of nobody, and care for nobody, but one; to give all your heart, and not a bit of it. I don't ask you for a bit of it; I want you all—every thought, every feeling. I want you to give up everybody and come to me—to me!' and here the young man opened his arms and turned to her with a look of passion which startled the girl. She made a sudden sidelong step beyond one of the great heather clumps before she answered. The colour changed from red to pale on her face; but she kept her eyes fixed on him, with a look of eagerness and

wistfulness, trying to penetrate beneath the surface and see his heart.

‘Horace,’ she said, softly, ‘you and me are different—a man and a girl are different, I suppose. That is not what it is to me. It is something that makes life better, and stronger, and sweeter. I’m fonder of Margaret, I’m better to the bairns. Don’t turn away like that. It is like wine,’ cried the girl, with light rising in her eyes; ‘it gives you strength for all you have to do. You’re at your work, you’re minding your house, you’re vexed and wearied and troubled—and lo, you give a glance out at the window, and you see *him* pass, and all your trouble rolls away! That’s love to me. When you turn round and give me a smile, it’s like wine,’ cried Isabel once more; ‘I feel it all about my heart—I go back to my work, and something sings within me. I am neither tired nor troubled more. That’s love to me! And the world’s bonnier and the sky’s brighter,’ she went on faltering, ‘Oh, Horace, surely you know what I mean?’

‘No, I don’t know what you mean,’ cried the young man, with a kind of brutality. ‘I never understand your Scotch. If this is the sort of figure I am to cut, making you devote yourself more to Margaret and the bairns, as you call them,

I had better take myself off, it would seem. A fellow is not to lose the best days of his life for such a reward as that.'

Isabel looked at him with but partial comprehension; her point of view was more elevated than his, but yet it was limited, like his, to her own side of the question. She looked at his clouded brow and averted face with a woman's first violent effort to enter into a state of feeling which was the antipodes of her own. Slowly it dawned upon her that it might be as just as her own though so different. She clasped her arms round the slender white stem of a young birch-tree, and leant against it, gazing at her lover with dreamy eyes.

'Maybe it's all true,' she said, slowly, 'both what I think and what you think, Horace. It will break my heart, but I can bear it if that is best. Go away into the world, and please your own folk—and I'll wait for you; I'll wait all my life; I'll wait years and years. Why should you lose your best days for me? Oh, I see well it is neither just nor right; and me that has so little to give! It's a sin to keep you here,' she continued, tears, unthought of, dropping from her eyes. 'Loch Diarmid comes natural to me, and folk forget—But go, Horace, and think on me sometimes; and my heart will go with you;

and if you should ever come back you'll find me waiting here.'

'Isabel, this is all folly and nonsense,' cried young Stapylton. 'What are you crying about? am I talking of going away? It is all very easy to send a fellow off and make a fuss, or to keep him hanging on, and kicking his heels among this confounded heather. Can't you do what I want you instead? it's simple enough. What's the good of living in Scotland if you can't get married how you please? If I were to go away I might never come back. They'd keep fast hold of me at home, or they'd pack me off somewhere out of reach; and you would change, and I might change. Who can undertake what would happen? I don't believe in comings back. I should find you Mrs. Somebody or other with half-a-dozen——Hallo, where are you going now?'

'I'm going home,' said Isabel, drying her tears indignantly. 'It's late, and I cannot enter into such questions. I am not one to change; but, Mr. Stapylton, if that's your way of thinking it's far best it should all come to an end. I don't want to be married. I will never leave my sister. If you will have an answer yes or no, there's your answer. Never, never, if she should live a dozen years!—and God send she may live a dozen years,

and a dozen more to that!’ cried Isabel with a sob. ‘My Margaret, that never has a thought but for me! And to bid me run away and shame the house, and break her heart—and to call it love!’ said the girl, with an outburst of tears.

She had come back to the birch and leant her pretty head upon the graceful young tree, which waved its tender branches over her with a curious sympathetic resemblance to her own drooping form, while her lover drew near her slowly, his heart melting, though his temper was still ruffled. He was going to her to take her in his arms, to whisper his final arguments, to woo her with his breath on her cheek. At such a moment it did not occur to the young man to look around him, to guard against interruption; and, perhaps, in the soft twilight he could scarcely have perceived the lonely personage who was winding with a noiseless step among the heather, full of her own thoughts.

The dew was falling among the slender birches, and on the heather and gorse—the wild gale underfoot filled the air with sweetness, and with this soft perfume came the soft stir of silence, the breath of the great quiet, which gave a musical tone to the atmosphere. The shadows were falling over the loch and the hills; points of view that had been visible one moment were invisible the next; and all at once, up in the blue heavens, stars were

revealing themselves, here and there one, like lamps among the clouds. A night to tempt any one to linger in the open air, in the quiet, sweet, soft, darkling, humid twilight, full of the silences and splendours of nature, and unawares moved by some brooding of God. The other figure which, veiled by night, and by abstracting thought, was wandering devious on those hills, thinking little of where she went or whom she met, was in her way a better embodiment of the sentiment of the night than were the agitated lovers. It was Ailie Macfarlane come out to roam at eventide like Isaac. She had a shawl over her head after the primitive fashion common to all nations, her head veiled because of the angels. Sometimes she stumbled among the heather, not remarking whither her foot strayed. The darkling world in which those solemn hills stood up each folded in his twilight mantle, with stars about his head and a forehead wet with dew, was full of God to the inspired maiden. Her eyes were moist, like all the earth, with dew. Her mind was full, not of thought but of a quiet consciousness. The poetry that was love to Isabel was to Ailie God. She was in His presence, His great eyes were upon her, at any moment she might hear His voice calling to her, as Adam heard it in the cool of the garden. As she strayed upon the hills alone with that great trem-

bling, thrilling Nature which was conscious, too, of His presence, the Lord had strayed communing with His Father. He had passed the whole night there, as His servant was not able to do. He had gone down the darkling slopes and set his foot, unaware of the restrictions of nature, upon the gleaming silvery waters below as she could have done on the loch had her faith been but strong enough. 'More faith! more faith!' she murmured to herself as she went, 'O Lord, increase my faith.' Her young soul was burning within her with the cravings which Margaret Diarmid had divined; not soft submission to Him that rules heaven and earth, but eager anticipations, restless energy, a heart full of passion. Joan of Arc might so have strayed on her southern moors; though it was from the yoke of Satan that Ailie longed to deliver her people—from wickedness, and disease, and misery. Why should not she? Had not the Lord promised *whatsoever ye ask?* Had not He granted to all eyes authentic wonders? Was his arm shortened that it could not save? or was there anything wanted but faith, more faith?

The sound of voices roused her from her abstraction, first to a sudden flush of annoyance, and then, as she perceived the two figures before her, to a warm thrill of zeal for their conversion. 'The Lord has delivered them into my hand,' the en-

thusiast said to herself. Their backs were turned to her, and their minds so much occupied that even the crackle of the heather under her foot did not betray her approach. She was close by their side, laying a sudden hand upon the shoulder of each before they were even aware of her presence.

‘What do ye here?’ said Ailie, rising as it seemed to them like a ghost out of the darkness. The two sprang apart and gazed at the intruder, but Ailie was too much absorbed by her office to heed their looks. ‘Isabel Diarmid,’ she repeated with solemnity, ‘what do you here?’

‘I was doing nothing,’ said Isabel, startled back into self-possession: ‘I might say what were you doing coming upon folk like a ghost?’

‘If ye mean a spirit,’ said Ailie, ‘it’s like that I wish to come. What is this poor body that we should let it thrall us? If I had faith I might fly upon angel’s wings: but oh! I’m feared it was not to serve the Lord that you two came here. Na, stand apart, and let me speak. Can ye see a’ this world round about ye, and no feel that you’re immortal? Isabel, the Lord would fain have ye to be His servant—and you too, young man.’

‘Oh, Ailie, I’m no like you,’ murmured Isabel, awed out of her first self-assertion. As for Stapyhton, he turned away with contemptuous impatience.

‘What does she know about it?’ he said. ‘Isabel, don’t you give in to this rubbish. Nobody has any right to intrude upon another. Tell her to mind her own business.’ This was said in a low tone. ‘Come, I’ll see you home. It is getting late,’ he said, aloud.

‘Ah!’ said Ailie, ‘it’s getting late, awfu’ late. The blackness of the night is coming on afore the awfu’ dawn. Think what it will be when you canna go home, nor find a place to hide yourself in from the brightness of His coming. Worldly wisdom would bid you join yourselves to Him now. But I’m no thinking of worldly wisdom. To stand up for Him in a dark world; to go forth like the angels, and make the way clear; to love and to bless, and to give life for death. O Isabel! O young man! I would rather that than heaven.’

Ailie, with her young face gleaming white in the twilight, her nervous arm raised, her abstracted, humid eyes gazing into the vacant darkness, was a creature whose influence it was hard to be altogether indifferent to. Stapylton, though he was capable of laughter at this exhibition ten minutes after, was, at least, silenced for the moment. He looked at her with that curious stupidity, in which the ordinary mind loses its faculties at the sight of such incomprehensible poetic exaltation. But Isabel, already excited, gazed upon the young pro-

phetess with the big tears still standing in her eyes, drawn by one emotion more closely within the reach of another than she had yet been.

‘I am not standing against Him! Oh, Ailie, dinna think it! Not for the world!’ she cried, dropping those two great tears; and nature gave a little gasp and sob within her. To go forth with God’s servants on this austere road, or to wander with her love in the primrose paths. — If there was a choice to be made, could any one doubt for a moment which would be the right choice? But Isabel felt herself so different from this inspired creature, so different even from Margaret, so much slighter, younger, more trifling, fond of praise and admiration, and amusement; not able to give her mind to it. And yet she was the same age as Margaret, and very little younger than Ailie. ‘I am not like you,’ she added, with an exquisite sense of her own imperfection, which brought other tears from those same sources. And then the feminine impulse of excuse came upon her: ‘We were meaning nothing,’ she said, hurriedly and humbly. ‘I met Mr. Stapylton here on the hill. And it’s a bonnie night. You were walking yourself, Ailie. And I’m going home. It was no harm.’

‘Oh, Isabel, ye never mind how you weary the Lord with your contradictions,’ said the pro-

phetess. 'I canna see your heart like Him; but do you think I canna see what's moved ye? No the bonnie night, nor the bonnie hill, nor His presence that's brooding ower a' the world; but a lad that says he loves you, Isabel. There's nae true love that's no in Christ. If he's true, let him come to the Lord with ye this moment, afore this blessed hour is gane. Eh, my heart's troubled,' she cried, suddenly raising her arms; 'my heart's sore for you. If he comes not now, when the Lord is holding wide the door, it's that he'll never come; and then there is nothing for you but tribulation and sorrow, and lamentation and woe!'

Her voice sank as suddenly as it had risen. She pressed her hands upon her eyes, with what seemed, to the terrified Isabel, the gesture of one who shuts out something terrible from her vision.

'It is the spirit that's upon her,' Isabel murmured to herself, shivering. 'Oh, Ailie, dinna lay any curse on us, that never did you harm!'

'Curse!' she said, so low that they could scarcely hear her. 'It's no for me to curse. He had no curses in His mind, and wherefore should I? It was a cloud that passed. Isabel, bring yon lad to God, bring him to God! or he'll bring you to misery, and trouble, and pain. I am saying the truth. It's borne in on me that he'll bring you

to awfu' trouble. But if he comes to the Lord, ye'll break Satan's spell.'

Stapylton had turned aside in impatience, and heard nothing of this; but now he came forward and laid his hand on Isabel's arm.

'Your sister will want you,' he said, almost roughly; 'it is getting late, and this is not the place for a prayer-meeting; let me take you home.'

'Oh, Ailie, I must go home to my Margaret,' said Isabel, clasping her hands. Nature was contending, with natural awe and reverence, in the girl's mind. She did not reject the authority of the holy maid for one moment—she was ready to yield to its power; but as soon as the possibility of escape became visible to her, she seized it anxiously. 'She'll be waiting and watching for me; and you know how ill she is, and I must not keep her anxious,' pleaded Isabel; 'but I'll think upon all you say.'

'Ay, gang your ways, gang your ways,' said Ailie, turning her back upon them and dismissing them with a wave of her hand. 'Put it off to a convenient season; wait till you're hardened in your worldly thoughts, and the Lord has shut-to the door; but dinna come then and say, Give us of your oil, for there will be nane to give in that day—nane to give! The market's open the noo,

and plenty to fill your vessels; but in that day there will be nane. Gang your ways to Margret, and tell her she's but a faint heart, that will lie down and die, when the Lord has that need of her for His work. I'm no saying she's not a child of God, but she has a faint heart. Gang your ways.'

'If you knew my Margaret better, ye would never dare to speak like this,' said Isabel, flushing into opposition. Stapylton drew her hand into his arm, and led her away.

'Come now,' he said, 'come while she has turned her head. I want no more sermons for my part. Your sister is waiting, Isabel—come! this is too much for me.'

Isabel suffered herself to be led across the heather, scarcely aware, in her excitement, of the close pressure with which her lover held her hand. She was angry for Margaret's sake. 'Nobody understands,' she murmured to herself. 'Nobody knows what they're saying. Her to be blamed that is the flower of all!' and turned her head, notwithstanding Stapylton's opposition, to maintain her sister's cause against her rival. But Ailie had turned away. She was going back, moving slowly among the heather, with her head bent and her eyes cast down, dreaming after her fashion, though not dreams like those of Isabel. Ailie was think-

ing—with much confusion of images and vagueness of apprehension, but with the exalted glow of ascetic passion—of the love of God. Poor Isabel was trembling with all the complications, the duties, and desires going contradictory to each other which adhere to the love of man.

‘I suppose she must be mad,’ said Stapylton; ‘nothing but madness could account for it. That is what comes of prayer-meetings and such stuff. Or if she’s not mad, she’s cunning and likes the power.’

‘And how do you think you can judge?’ cried Isabel, turning upon him with the ready irritation of excitement,—‘you that know nothing of Ailie, nor of her way of living. If you were healed all in a moment and raised out of your bed, who would you believe did it but God? and could you stop to think and consider the question if you were mad or not, before you spoke? Let them judge that know!’

‘Never-mind,’ said the young man, caressing the hand he held, ‘you little fury! I don’t know and I don’t care; but you never thanked me for reminding you of your sister, and freeing you from that mad creature. Now she is gone there is no hurry, Isabel. It is not late, after all.’

‘But Margaret will want me,’ said the girl. ‘No; I’ll not wait, I must go home.’

‘Only half an hour,’ he pleaded; ‘she is gone, and we have all the hill-side to ourselves.’

Isabel made no answer, but she drew her hand from his arm, and continued on her way, quickening rather than delaying her progress. He walked by her for some time, sullen and lowering. He had no comprehension of the high spirit of the girl, though he loved her. After a while he drew closer to her side, and laid his hand on her arm.

‘You must do as I said, my darling, now,’ he said, with real fervour. ‘She is going back to her meeting, and it will be all over the parish to-morrow, that you and I were courting on the hill.’

This was the drop too much that made Isabel’s cup run over. She turned upon him with eyes that flashed through her tears. ‘Do you reproach me with it?’ she cried—‘you I did it for? Oh, if I had known! But, Mr. Stapylton, it shall be the last time.’

‘Don’t turn my words against me,’ he said, ‘don’t be so peevish, so foolish, Isabel! as if it was that I meant.’

‘No, I’ll not be foolish,’ she answered, in her heat, ‘nor think shame of myself for any lad. After this ye may be sure, Mr. Stapylton, I’ll never do it again.’

And then she hastened down, increasing her speed at every step, and taking no time to think.

And he went sullenly by her side, not quite sure whether he loved or hated her most in her perversity. And they parted with a curt, resentful goodnight at the very door of the Glebe Cottage, he being too angry and she too proud to linger over the parting. It was a parting which all the world might have witnessed. And Isabel returned to her quiet home, and Horace proceeded on to the village, each with the blaze of a lover's quarrel quivering about them. Such flames are too hot and sudden to last; but nothing had yet done so much to separate them as had this unexpected meeting with Ailie on the hill.

CHAPTER IX.

THE village was still astir and awake when young Stapylton reached it, rounding the darkling margin of the loch. The early summer was over by this time, and with it had departed those lingering silvery evening-lights which are so sweet in Scotland. The days had already begun to shorten, and real darkness to take the place of twilight. The water rippled upon the beach with a little rush and gurgle among the gravel, and gave a certain sense of companionship to the solitary passenger; and lights glimmered in the cottage windows, sometimes gleams of red firelight, sometimes the white flicker of a lamp, half revealing the children about the hearth, or the mother making the porridge. People still stood at their doors, talking to each other across the street, in their unreserved tones, from which the soft evening air took all harshness. In the distance, raised on its height, the lamp was shining from the open window of the Manse parlour. Now and then one of the voices

would cease, and a cottage door be shut, and silence fall upon one spot in the homely darkling scene. Sometimes the air would be started with a loud call for Johnnie or Jenny, from the group of children who still played before the doors. The children, too, contributed their share to the effect of the picture. They were playing at one of the musical games so common in Scotland, advancing and retiring, and going round in a ring with soft, monotonous chant. The drama was the mystic one which narrates the illness and death and alarming resurrection of 'Janet-joe;' and the little ones answered each other in fresh clear voices, through which the talk of the mothers at the doors went on undisturbed. In the darkness it was scarcely possible to distinguish the speakers; but this was how the public conversation went on.

'Your man's no hame yet, Jenny Spence?'
'Na, he's no hame, and I've nae peace o' my mind since that weary public has been opened on the road to Kilcranion. It's awfu' hard on the men. Weariet and fasting, puir fellows, and Luckie Bisset at the door aye tempting them with a dram.' 'I wonder how any Christian woman can set up sic a trade,' cried another half-visible interlocutor, 'and her ain man that drank himsel' to death, as a' the loch kens.' 'But there maun be refreshment for travellers, neebors,' said another,

‘or what would become of thae English that are aye tramping about among the hills?’ ‘They might stay at hame, and a’ the better, instead o’ coming and glowering at honest folk, like as if we were savages.’ ‘Rather half-a-score Englishmen starve than a decent man be led away to his ruin,’ cried another indignant commentator. ‘But if the minister was what he should be, it would never have been allow’t.’ ‘I’m thinking it’s the factor that’s most to blame; it’s onything for siller with thae worldly men.’ ‘But eh, if the minister was the man he should be, there would be less worldliness in the parish. He’s an awfu’ Laodicean in his ways, for a’ the grace that’s come to this place.’ ‘I ken nothing about your Laodiceans,’ said Jenny Spence. ‘The minister kens better than you or me—but he’s no that clever to keep the factor frae a good tenant, nor Luckie Bisset frae a customer, nor my John frae a dram. It’s my opinion we’ll a’ have to hing by our own heads, as the saying is, and the minister can answer for himself.’ ‘My Jean is gaun to her new place the morn,’ said another neighbour, opening a new subject, ‘I maun away and see after her claes. It’s an awfu’ thocht to send a young lass away into the world.’ ‘But she’s a good lass, and has aye had a good example set before her, and it’s no that far but you can see her whiles,’ said the optimist. ‘You may well say

it's an awfu' thocht,' said, with a sigh, the assailant of the minister, 'when ye think of Sawtan going about like a roaring lion; no to speak of a' the lads about a farm-toun that are worse than Sawtan himself.' 'I say it aye depends on the lass,' Jenny interposed, who spoke with authority, being well connected, and a person of weight and discretion. 'If it's a light-headed thing that runs after the lads, or if it's a dowie thing that yields to them—but a spirity lass like Jean, that kens her ain value, is as safe one place as anither. And eh bless me! if there's no our John and the cart coming down the brae—and me misdoubting him a' this time!'

The conversation here paused, and the chant of the children at their game, and the gurgle and plash of the rising water, and the rumble of the home-coming cart, took up the vacancy. The little figures moved indistinctly in the gloom; the man and the cart loomed like great shadows at the turn of the road; and here and there a door was shut, and the woman who had been but half visible while she stood there talking, passed across the lighted window inside, sitting down to her evening task of mending, or darning, or porridge-making. To all this homely village life the stranger who was passing through it gave no attention. The human fellowship of the women at their thresholds,

the shutting of those humble doors upon the individuality within, a separation not severe enough to secure even a blind at the lighted window, made no impression on young Stapylton. He heard the chatter as he passed, and felt the mothers and the children to be as vulgar and uninteresting as the palings of their little gardens, or the stones in the irregular street. John, rumbling slowly on, seated on the edge of his cart, gave him the proverbial rural salutation, 'It's a fine nicht,' without eliciting any further reply than a surly nod. The young fellow had neither life nor heart for the little community around him.

There was, however, a point on the road at which he paused and turned aside. To return to Mr. Lothian while the night was still so young was anything but desirable. The minister was not a congenial companion; and though the young man, half in despite to plague his rival with his presence, and half in selfish consideration of his own comfort, obstinately remained at the Manse, an evening spent in his host's society was more than he was equal to. The turn he took led to a village centre, where, to tell the truth, Stapylton was no favourite; but he had too much self-estimation to be aware of that. The Marquis, the tutelary genius of the district, had forbidden the establishment of any place of entertainment in his

dominions, a step not unusual with highland potentates; and but for Luckie Bisset's little public-house over the hill, which existed under the pretext of travellers, and was too far off to tempt the villagers, there was no place of social meeting for its worthies. One of the resources upon which the fathers of the hamlet fell back to supply the want was the smithy where John Macwhirter, laborious and money-making, worked after everybody else was in bed. Perhaps even John prolonged his day's work out of regard to the little assembly which was wont to gather round the glow of his fire. Even in August a fire is not unpleasant to behold on Loch Diarmid. When the hill was sodden, and the paths running with rain—as happened so often—there was a sensible comfort in its red glimmer; and even on such a night as this, when everything breathed balm and peacefulness, a clear night after a bright day, the ruddy glare which lighted out from the open door into the gloom of the night was pleasant to behold. The company within was of the usual kind. John the smith himself, with his sleeves rolled up on his strong arms, was cleaning and fitting together some part of the new threshing-machine which was to be put up at Miss Catherine's farm in a day or two; but behind him his journeyman was labouring at the anvil as became a smith, with the

furnace roaring, and the hammer sounding, and red sparks flying about. One of the visitors, a tall man, with a tall hat over his eyes, sat astride and absorbed, with his hands in his pockets, on a disused anvil. This was Andrew White, the miller, an elder, and man of weight in the parish. Peter Chalmers, the general 'merchant,' or shop-keeper of the village, stood by the smith, with curious eyes bent upon his work. It was old Sandy of the Langholm that stood close into the ruddy corner, holding out his hands, though at a respectful distance, to the blaze, and a little afraid of the sparks. William of Wallacebrae, who was also an elder, and often called Mr. William, in acknowledgment of the respect due to his character, made up the party. These last who had but Christian names to distinguish them, were all Diarmids like the rest of the parish. A step or two aside, in the heat of conversation, would now and then make one of the interlocutors disappear into the gloom; and, on the other hand, a sudden puff of the bellows and blazing up of the fire would flash over walls and roof and into all the corners, showing everything animate and inanimate as by a flash of lightning; and there would sometimes occur a momentary silence, when the company was thinking; but these interruptions were few, and the talk flowed on in a very steady stream.

‘Ay, it’s a newfangled machine in thir parts,’ said John, ‘but no in Fife, or the Carse, where there’s fine farming. And it’s a beautiful principle. If you pay attention you’ll soon see how the wheels act, one within anither like maist things——’

‘I’m no for those new inventions,’ said Sandy of Langholm; ‘they cost a heap of siller, and a poor man cannot get them. In the auld way ye were a kind o’ equal wi’ your neebor till the corn was selt, or till it was eaten. The same seed, and the same sun, and a dibble and a plough, and a good hook and an Irish shearer to take it in hand. But whenever ye come in wi’ your steam and machinery, I kenna when you’ll stop. Ye’ll shear the corn by steam, or a’s done.’ This Sandy said, with a short laugh, as a monstrous assertion, the wildest flight of fancy—all unconscious of the reaping-machine which has lately begun its unnatural rounds on his own fields.

‘I’m no satisfied in my mind that it’s according to Scripture,’ said Andrew White. ‘Mony’s the grand passage that will be dark to us if these inventions carry the day: “Whose flail is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor.” Take up your machinery for everything, and who would ken the meaning o’ that?’

‘I dunna mind when I’ve seen a flail,’ said Mr. William, ‘except whiles in the far Hielands, when

I was buying cattle. It's little corn they grow puir bodies, and time's nae object to them. They grind their corn in the quern thereabout, which is awfu' scriptural; but I warrant, Andrew, you wouldna go the length o' that.'

'And wherefore no if it put the truth afore a' your minds?' said Andrew, hoisting himself on his anvil, as if it had been a horse; 'but it's easier for a camel to gang through the eye of a needle than for some folk to see the truth.'

'I wish we had less o' the truth and minded it mair,' said John the smith; 'I'm weariet o' all this speaking. There's naebody about this place in his right senses but me—and maybe the minister; and the wife herself is corruptit like the rest and has nae faith in her natural guide. Ye laugh, but it's no laughing matter. Here's the parish in the hands of a wheen women and silly lads—wi' a prayer-meeting for a parliament to make laws for us a' that might be their grandfathers. I canna thole 't for ever.'

'But ye maun even thole't and bow your proud neck, like a young heifer,' said the miller, 'if it's the Lord's will.'

'No me,' said John, 'a wheen weans! I'd give them a big barn and a fiddle, and auld Johnny Carter from the Rue to learn them the new-fashioned quadrilles. It would suit them better

than their prayer-meetings. I was aye one for nature, say what you like.'

'Whisht! we maunna speak,' said Peter Chalmers, 'if it was to last, a man might make a stir; but hooly and fairly gangs a lang way. It'll no last; as long as that dour auld Whig's there, spying everything, if I was you John, my man, I wouldn't waste my breath.'

'Ye were aye a temporizer,' said John aloud, for the merchant's advice had been given in an undertone. 'And I wouldna say but what it's natural wi' little Tam set up down the lochside in your ain trade to wile away your customers; but it's grand to have a monopoly, and a man daur speak his mind. When ye hae the consciousness in your breast that there's no another smiddy nearer nor the Rue, and horses maun be shod and ploughs kept in fettle, it gies you an awfu' sense of independence; and I'm saying I'm no for these new-fangled ways. Let the lasses bide at hame and mind their mithers that have mair sense, or what's the good o' years? I'm fond o' young folk in their ain place—but that's no to be guides to me that kent what was what afore they were born. I'm no for asking questions in a kind of a public place like this, but we a' ken you've been up to the session-meeting, Andrew, and if there was any decision I wouldna say but I would be glad to hear.'

‘There’s been nae decision,’ said Andrew concisely.

‘We werena a quorum,’ explained Mr. William, with more urbanity, ‘or rather, we were just a quorum, and the minister and me being mostly ae way o’ thinking it wouldna have been fair to the rest. So the meeting’s adjourned till the morn’s nicht; but I canna hope anything will come of it. They’re awful sure they’re right, and we’re far from sure they’re wrang; and it’s easy to see in sic a case wha’s like to prevail.’

‘There’s an awfu’ deal to be said on both sides,’ said Peter Chalmers; ‘the auld ways are, maybe, safest, but the new ways are real steering. And it canna be denied that there’s mair interest in a’thing connected wi’ the kirk; though them that’s given to scoffing while gets a handle.’

‘I would like to ken,’ said old Sandy, interrupting, ‘what’s the use o’ thae unknown tongues. There’s just as much sense to be made of a cow’s bellow or the auld stot in the field—mair, I would say; for she’s wanting hame to the byre. I’m no ain that sits in the seat of the scorner; but I would like to ken, what does’t mean.’

‘It means what it meant in the auld days,’ said Andrew White; ‘it’s the voice o’ the Lord in power. Ye mayna understand wi’ your understanding; but what’s o’ that? Is the mind o’ man

sae high and grand that it perceives a' things? Do ye ken the meaning o' the wind when it's gaun howling and roaring over the hills? Say there's nae meaning till't, and what then? It is the voice of the Lord. If it gars ye shake with fear o' His awfu' coming, or fills ye full of wonder and trembling like the thunder, is that no enough? And maybe, if we but kent,' he added, with a change of his voice, 'there's some poor creatures somewhere away in the ends o' the earth, that would understand every word, and hear and live.'

'Then there's just the question why it was sent to us and no to them,' said the smith. 'You've a queer notion of the Lord, you awfu' guid folk, as if He had a' His tools in a confusion, and never knew which ane to grip to for its right work. As if I was to take the muckle hammer to thae bits of wheels. For my part I canna but think He maun be mair wark-like and ken what he's doing. But as long as the Session's come to nae decision, we'll suspend our judgment. It's gey and dreary though for them that's no o' your way o' thinking—take mysel for example. I gang hame wearied after my day's work; and the wife, she's away at a prayer-meeting. When she comes in I'm gaun to my bed, and maybe no in the best o' tempers; and then there's nought for me but a' the prayers and a' the discourses at second hand; and "Eh but Ailie

was grand in this;" and "Eh but Mr. John was like ane of the apostles." "Saul among the prophets," is what I say. Set him up for a preacher! The fac is, either the women-folk are awfu' gomerils, or they're mair innocent than a man can divine.'

'I dinna believe in their innocence for ane,' said Peter Chalmers.

'Nor I,' said young Stapylton, who had come in to the group unseen.

'Nor you, laddie?' said Mr. William; 'it's no an argument for you to put in your hand to. You're a stranger and a callant, and no used to our ways. And if ye were the lad ye should be, ye would mind your mother and think shame ——'

'I'm not so young that I don't know other women besides my mother,' Horace retorted, hotly; 'and if you ask me to believe ——'

'I ask ye to believe nothing, lad,' said the elder, severely. 'And, Andrew, you and me have naething to do wi' this wild talk. John Macwhirter's a decent man, but he hasna that regard for the elders of the pairish that's becoming, or he wouldna let loose his tongue upon you and me.'

'I claim naething as an elder o' the pairish,' said Andrew, rising. 'We're a' miserable sinners. I'm willing to learn frae the humblest for

my part, but it behoves us a' to consider what we say when ye think that for every idle word there's an awfu' account coming. Gang to the prayer-meeting with your wife, John, if ye'll take my advice; and hardened as ye are, grace may come your way. There's naething so free as grace; it comes to them that's least deserving, without money or price; and wherefore should it no come even to you?'

'My faith, but yon's impudence!' cried the astonished smith, when the two spiritual rulers of the parish left the smithy. 'I'm no bragging o' mysel. I'm sinner enough, God knows; but if I'm the least deserving, and Black John o' Ardnamore's a chosen vessel it's awfu' queer to me.'

'That's hame, lad,' said Peter, with malicious laughter. 'I'm fond o' a guid shot; and you're a roaring, ranting unbeliever, that's what ye are.'

'Better that than a roarin', rantin' believer, that makes the like o' you scoff at a' things guid,' retorted John. 'I have my ain views—but afore I'd sneevel in my sleeve like you, and gang with first ane and then anither, and mak a scoff at a', I'd sooner low at a stake wi' Ailie Macfarlane setting light to the faggots; and I wouldna say but that 's what we'll see yet afore a's ower.'

'Na, na,' said old Sandy; 'dinna be sae fierce: she'll never light faggot, yon lass. If it's

no the grace o' God I canna tell what it is. She's mair like to gang to the stake, John Macwhirter, than the like o' you.'

'I'll gie ye the explanation o' it in a jiffy,' said John. 'She's been brought up in an awfu' strict family. Nae laughing allowed yonder, Peter, nor naething natural. I'll give ye my word the poor lass never danced a reel in her days. But she's Eve's dochter like a' the rest; and commotion o' some kind the creature must have. I'm no blaming her. If I was shut up in ane o' yon doleful houses, I'd jump out the window and break my leg or my neck, but I'd be doing; and sae it's seen by her. Keep a lass frae a' that's in nature, and she'll take to what's out of nature, poor thing. A young creature must have stir and excitement; that's my explanation. Ony man can tell how it's begun; but nae man, that I ken of, can prophesy what will be the end.'

'Weel, aweel,' said Peter, 'if it was auld Johnny Carter and his fiddle that was put in competition the lasses mightn't be that ill-pleased.'

'I'd join for one, with all my heart,' cried Stapylton. 'It would be fun to set all the little Presbyterians jigging;' and he ventured to laugh, which drew upon him the smith's glowing eye.

'You're a braw lad to talk o' the little Presbyterians,' he said, 'but I wouldna advise you, my

man, though you set up for a gentleman, to make or meddle with them. We're awfu' clannish on this loch; and if a bonnie lass happens to have nae father to take her part, we're a' her fathers for the occasion. It would be the worst day's work ye ever did in your life to put a slight on any here.'

'You are very impudent, my fine fellow,' said Stapylton. 'Do you think I am going to take advice from you?'

'You'll take what you canna avoid,' said John; 'and ye needna think to daunton me. The Manse is a protection, but it'll no serve you in sic a case. I'm naming no names; and if I were you, I'd gang hame to my anxious friends, and no push in where you arena wanted. Peter, the wife will be waitin' for you at hame; and a doited body ye are, aye stravaghin'. I'm thinking of shutting up the smiddy at better hours.'

'I hope no afore the work's done,' said old Sandy, who, sheltering his eyes with his hands, looked anxiously on at the progress of the journeyman, who had been working at a cart-wheel which was Sandy's property, and which he awaited in order to get home.

'It'll no be done this half-hour yet, and a dark ride ye'll have o't ower the hills,' said John. 'Come your ways in wi' me, and we'll see if there's a dram left in the greybeard. That's ae advantage

of thae prayer-meetings. She canna tak' count o' every tumbler when she's out on her ain jollifications. Come your ways ben, and Tam will cry on us when the work's done. I would like to hae't out with that English lad,' he went on as they left the smithy. 'I wouldna trust him, no with a dog, let alane a lass; and he's after nae good, aye biding on here. Ye may say what you like, Peter, wi' your scoffing tongue; but either the women are awfu' innocent, mair than a man can believe, or else they're downright fuils.'

'That last was aye my opinion,' said sceptic Peter.

'Or maybe a wee o' baith,' said old Sandy. 'I've lasses o' my ain, and I ought to ken; they're awfu' innocent, as you say, till ance it's put into their heads; and then there's heaps o' them that are fuils,' Sandy added with a sigh; 'but no a'.'

The two others went into the house with him without a word. The old man was not without occasion for that sigh. Shame and humiliation such as was, alas! not quite rare in the countryside, had visited his house; but it was an old story, and the other speakers had forgotten it. It did not even weigh so heavy on Sandy's own mind as to prevent him from being very comfortable over his toddy, and setting off afterwards through

the darkness with his wheel mended, rumbling in his cart along the lonely road with a sufficiently cheerful heart.

As for Stapylton, he left the smithy with very vengeful thoughts, half disgusted even with his love, whose mean position thus entitled every clown in the country-side to claim an interest in her. He had quarrelled with Isabel, which, of course, gave force to his sentiments; and he speculated, half consciously to himself, upon the girls 'at home' whom the Squire's son might marry. Some of them were as pretty as Isabel; some were rich, and Isabel had but a pittance; all had connexions, friends, and some sort of pedigree. Fancy the village blacksmith at home venturing to interfere! Clannish indeed! They might be as clannish as they pleased for a parcel of Scotch curs. What were they to him? He was so unsympathetic with all around him, that he felt like a foreigner in a strange country as he went up the hill, though he had ascended by that same path every day for six months. By this time most of the doors were shut. From one cottage as he passed, the sound of a monotonous psalm, the even-song of family prayer, came somewhat mournfully. No doubt it was a doleful sound; and a little further up the Dominie stood on the threshold of his house smoking his evening

pipe. 'It's a fine night,' he said, as Horace passed. And then the young man came within hearing of the school-house just opposite the Manse, where the prayer-meeting was being held. There was the sound of one voice in passionate tones; then a silence and rustle of movement; then the same or another monologue recommenced. A certain hum, as of numbers, came through the open window. 'Oh, ay, they're all at it again,' the Dominic said slowly. As for Horace, he laughed to himself with a certain contempt as he went on. If they thought they were to control *him*, to make him a slave to their caprice, to interfere with his amusements or plans, whatever they might be, they were mightily mistaken. Stapylton went home with that curious sense of universal dislike and misappreciation which brings out all the obstinate self-conceit of an inferior mind. 'I will show them their mistake,' was what Horace was saying to himself as he went past. About himself he saw nothing to be mended. It was the outer world that was in the wrong; and it was an inferior, Scotch world—a narrow, prejudiced, psalm-singing, vulgar, little community, unaware of the superior dignity of the Squire's son. Thoughts of going off instantly and marrying one of the girls he had bethought himself of, and coming back in a postchaise to dazzle the scorners, arose in his

mind—to dazzle Isabel Diarmid most of all, who was not so proud of his regard as it became her to be. Thus he went angrily to the Manse, feeling that he had nothing in common with anyone near him, untouched by the peacefulness of the night or the soft hum of tranquil life which he had left behind.

CHAPTER X.

THE Manse of Lochhead was not a venerable, nor a beautiful house. It had none of the associations which sometimes cluster about an English parsonage. It had not been built above twenty years, and neither its dimensions nor its appearance were in the least manorial. But it was a comfortable square house, quite large enough for the owner's wants and income, and important enough to represent the dignity of the minister, amid the humble roofs of the village. It was built on a slope of the braes which rose heathery and wild behind, and the prospect from its windows was as soft as if there had been no mountains within a hundred miles. The unequal combination of the great Highland range on one side, with the pastoral loch on the other, which gave a charm to the Glebe Cottage, was lost on this lower elevation. Here there was nothing but Loch Diarmid with its soft banks, scattered with white houses, divided

into a thousand tints, with its patches of wood, and yellowing corn, and green pastures, and purple heather. When the day was bright, all these varieties of colour would be reproduced in the faithful water, with magic precision, and the landscape smiled with the softest, rural, pastoral, inland beauty. But it missed the subliming touch of the great outlines behind, the mountain ridge with all its grandeur of colour and shadow. The church, a homely place like an oblong barn lighted by long windows, with a square tower attached to it to make it hideous; and the school, which was a barn without a tower, stood exactly opposite the gate of the Manse garden, on the other side of the road. The Dominie's house was a few steps lower down. Thus religion and learning stood together, very homely, very unpretending, and yet not without a dignity which everybody acknowledged. There was a natural connexion between them, which no one dreamed of gainsaying; and if perhaps by times a certain gleam of contempt might cross the mind of the practical community for the follies of flower-gathering and butterfly-hunting, by which the two members of the Guild of Education were said to be distinguished, this kindly sense of superiority did not lessen the respect awarded to them 'in their ain line.' When the minister and the Dominie were discovered with

their great telescope erected on the road between their houses, or in the Manse garden, no such contempt attended their proceedings; the countryside, including Miss Catherine, looked on well pleased, feeling that star-gazing was a pursuit worthy of their leaders—and proud of the science which threw a reflected lustre upon themselves. Mr. Galbraith was six or seven years older than the minister, who, himself was about fifty. Mr. Lothian was the successful man of the two, having attained all he had aimed at in his professional existence. The Dominie had broken down in that highest aim. But still they had gone through the same training, and belonged to the same class. Such cases are very rare in Scotland now; they were rare indeed, even then. But the combination was of great importance to the two most closely concerned; and gave a certain rank to the parish of which it was very conscious, though it could not refuse itself by times the privilege of a smile.

The minister and the Dominie had dined together on the afternoon preceeding the adjourned meeting of the Kirk Session, partly because it was habitual on the Saturday half-holiday, and partly to strengthen each other for the work before them. The hour of their dinner was four o'clock, which was as if you had said eight o'clock to that primitive

community. When the meal was over they adjourned to the study to smoke the quiet pipe which was one of their bonds of union. The study was a small room with one window looking into a vast rose-bush, though peeps of the trim kitchen-garden were to be had on one side. The rose-bush hung heavy with great blobs of rain that glittered in the late reluctant glimmer of the setting sun, for it had been raining all day. One great blazing full-blown rose of the second blowing caught the light like a jewel; and all that could be seen besides was the glistening of the green leaves, and great diamond rain-drops. The study itself was full of books, in rude shelves not much more elegant than those of the Dominie. It had a number of little prints in black frames hung anyhow upon so much wall as was free from books — symmetry in such matters evidently not having occurred to the minister as desirable. Under the wall on which the prints were hanging stood an old writing-table, covered with papers. The window was open, and a faint little breeze rustled the papers inside, and now and then playfully discharged a raindrop from the rose-leaves upon the two friends. You would have supposed that it would be natural for two such men to prefer the other side of the house, where the loch was visible, changing to a hundred opal tints as the shadows pursued the fleeting uncertain sunshine off its bosom.

But they were very familiar with the view, and the little study at the back was the legitimate place for the pipe and the consultation.

‘I am always afraid of these violent men,’ said the minister, ‘and then they are so much in earnest. Earnestness is a fine quality, no doubt, but it’s very hard to keep it in bounds; and I cannot let things go on as they are doing. They’ll soon take the very work out of my hands. Already it is not me but Ailie that’s at the head of the parish. And you tell me you’ll give me no help?’

‘It’s against my principles,’ said the Dominie. ‘Let alone, that’s aye my rule. I’m no for meddling with the development of the mind whatever form it takes. You may say it’s a childish way to take up religion; but so far as it’s gone there’s no harm.’

‘No harm! after what I told you of that scene at the Glebe, and the reprobate turned prophet,’ said Mr. Lothian, angrily.

‘You’re very sensitive about the Glebe. If it had been any other house in the parish it would not have gone so much to your heart.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Lothian, ‘if I am, is it not natural? Two young creatures, so strangely situated, neither ladies, so to speak, nor simple lasses, though ladies in their hearts. And then that saint there is more like heaven than earth.

You need not smile. I do not disguise my feeling for her sister. It's a mad notion for a man of my years, but I don't disguise it. And yet it was of Margaret I thought.'

'By all I hear,' said the Dominie, 'she'll soon be out of all risk of disturbance.'

'You speak at your ease,' said the minister, rising in agitation to pace about the little room. 'When Margaret Diarmid dies it will be like the quenching of a light to me, and more than me. And how can I protect her deathbed but by putting a stop to this? Her deathbed, aye, or her very grave. Have you forgot that they go further and further every day?'

'I heard they were raising the dead,' said the Dominie, calmly. 'It's the sense o' power that leads them away.'

'And they *have* power,' said the minister, 'that is the strangest of all. Wherever it comes from, from God or the devil, they have power in their hands. I cannot deny it—I cannot understand it. Are we to believe what we see in contradiction of every instinct, or are we to hold by reason and common sense, and the truth we understand, and give facts the lie? The thought is too much for me.'

'And so you would put a stop to it?' the Dominie said, with a long puff of smoke. 'But

ye'll have discussion enough before that's done. I'm more concerned for the two poor things at the Glebe. If Margaret dies, as she must die, what is to become of bonnie Isabel?'

The minister, though he was a man of vigorous frame, gave a momentary shiver, as if the cold had seized him, and then sat down again, and began to turn over his papers, averting his face. 'You know what would become of her,' he said, 'if I had my will.'

'You would bring the lassie down here to be mistress and mair,' said Galbraith. 'I'm no blaming you, though I cannot understand it myself. You and me are more wiselike companions than her and you could ever be. If you had married in your youth, like most men, ye might have had a daughter of your own as old as she is now.'

'I've said all that to myself,' said the minister, 'a hundred times over. But it makes no difference. And I can bear whatever may happen—but my heart craves this thing from the Lord, and no other, before I die.'

'You're taking up their very phraseology, for all your objections to them,' said the Dominie, with a little disdain.

'It's the phraseology of all that yearn,' cried the minister. 'Why should I not ask it of the Lord? It's a lawful thing I crave. God do so to

me and more also if I would not cherish her like Christ His Church. I am old enough to be her father, as you say; but I never loved woman till now, and that is the youth of the heart. The boy there is fond of her in his way—but what sort of a way? a fancy of the moment for her sweet face. And you'll say it's more natural. But I tell you, Galbraith, there is no nature in it,' he said, once more rising in his excitement, 'to link that creature's pure soul to a hardened, heathen, self-seeking man of the world. I know the lad; he is near her in age, but in nothing else. She makes a God of him in her imagination; and when her eyes were opened, and she saw the loathly creature by her side, what would become of my Isabel? She would break her heart, and she would die.'

'Her eyes might never be opened,' said the Dominie, reflectively. 'There's no bounds to a woman's power of deceiving herself. She might make a hero of him all her days, though he was but a demon to the rest of the world. And the lad is maybe not so ill as ye say.'

'That would be worst of all—for then he would drag her down to his level, and blind her eyes to good and evil. No more,' said the minister, with a trembling voice; 'you mean well, Galbraith, but you don't know how hard all this is to bear.'

'Maybe no,—maybe no,' was the answer; 'but

she might stay still at the Glebe for all I can see, as long as Jean Campbell is there to take care of her. Jean Campbell is a very decent woman. Margaret knows the worth of her, but no yon hasty lassie of an Isabel. As long as she is there there's no such desperate necessity for a change.'

'And Margaret is living, and may live,' said Mr. Lothian, sinking back into his easy chair.

The Dominie shook his head. 'If one life could stand for another, I would be sore tempted to give her mine,' he said; 'it's so little good to a man like me. I've had all that life can give. Ye may say it was a niggardly portion—daily bread and little more—no comfort to speak of, nothing like what you call success,—no love beyond my mother's when I was a lad. And yet, though there's so little, I'll have all the trouble of old age and death at the hinder end. Poor thing, she would be very welcome to my life if there was any possibility of a transfer. But ye must put away your profane thoughts, and get out your books, for yonder is Andrew White coming down the brae.'

Half-an-hour after the Kirk Session had met. The Kirk Session is the vestry, the guardians, the churchwardens of a Scotch parish, all in one. Its members are also, when they are efficient, the curates, so to speak, of the minister. It is a local Convocation, with some power in its hands which

that body does not possess. And at the period of which we write, before any great rent had been made in the Church of Scotland, its authority was real and considerable. The men who came in one by one, and took their place about the large table in the Manse dining-room, were men of natural weight on the Loch. There was Andrew White, and Mr. William of Wallacebrae, seated on different sides; and there was Mr. Smeaton, of the great stock farm on the eastern side of the Loch, and Samuel Diarmid, of Ardintore. The minister took his place at the head of the table, and Mr. Galbraith, with his book of minutes opened before him, prepared to fulfil his office of Session clerk. 'I give no opinion,' he had said to the other members of the court, 'but I'm Session clerk, and I'll not neglect my duty.' There was a prayer to begin with, said by the minister, while they all stood up round the table, some with wide open eyes and restless looks, some with bowed heads and reverence. And then the Dominie read the minutes of the last meeting, and the present one was constituted.

'To appoint the Rev. the Moderator, Mr. Andrew White, and Mr. William Diarmid to inquire into the effect of the recent movement in the parish, with power to act against all presuming and schismatical persons that may be taking authority into their own hands.'

‘I have to ask the Moderator,’ said the Dominie, ‘if he is ready to present his report.’

‘I have to make an explanation instead,’ said the minister. ‘We were not agreed. What William Diarmid and myself found to be unreasonable and bordering upon enthusiasm, Andrew approved of with all his heart. I will give you the result of my own inquiries without prejudice to other members of the court. In the first place, there are two or three women who, contrary to all the rules of the church, and to the Apostle’s order, take upon them to speak and lead the prayers of the congregation ——’

‘Wi’ a’ respect to the minister,’ said Andrew White, ‘I’ve ae small remark to make. If it had been contrary to the order of the Apostles, wherefore does St. Paul speak of the prophetesses that were to have a veil upon their heads? There’s plenty of passages I could quote to that——’

‘There’s ane that’s decisive to my way o’ thinking,’ said William Diarmid. ‘That women are no to speak in the church.’

‘A law’s one thing,’ said Samuel of Ardintore. ‘But an institution that’s actually existing is mair to be remembered than ae mention of a rule against it, that might be nae law.’

‘We can leave that point,’ said the minister. ‘I say it is not for edification, that Ailie Mac-

farlane, though I have not a word to say against her, should be led away by her zeal to take up such a position in the parish. By custom and use, if by nothing else, such things are forbidden. I have not finished. I have to object further that persons holding no office in the church, neither ministers, nor licentiates, nor elders, have likewise taken a leading part, and prayed, and exhorted, and held meetings, that so far as I can see they had no authority for. If it is sanctioned by the Kirk Session, that is a different matter. But the fact is that there are meetings taking place in every quarter of the parish without the authority of the Kirk Session, or so much as a sanction either from the elders or from me.'

'I must protest, Moderator,' said Samuel Diarmid. 'I cannot allow that the freedom of the subject is to be sae confined, that a man canna praise God with his neighbours without authority from the minister; that I canna allow.'

'Ye may enter your protest,' said the Dominie, 'but the Moderator must say out his say.'

'And now I come to what is most serious of all,' said Mr. Lothian. 'It is my opinion that these continual meetings, held by unauthorized persons, are doing harm and not good to the devout in this parish. I say nothing about the wonders that have attended the movement. These may have been

delusion ; but far be it from me to say that there 's been deception ——'

' There can be nae deception,' said Andrew White, ' in the work of the Lord.'

' Whisht, man!' said Samuel; ' the question the minister puts, if no in as many words, is, If it is the work of the Lord?'

' With a' respect to the minister, it's a question like one of the questions of the Pharisees,' said Andrew. ' What did He answer when John's disciples came to ask Him, " Art thou He?" " Look round ye," says He. " The blind see, the deaf hear, the lame walk, to the poor the gospel is preached. There's your answer." Can any man say there's no the same answer to the same question here? The minister tells ye of persons without authority; but I say every man living has an authority to serve his Maker. Which of ye would see his ox or his ass fa' into a pit, even on the Sabbath-day, and no pull him out? And are we to stand by and see our brethren perish? " Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams," says the prophet, " and upon myservants and upon my *handmaids*—" There are the words, Joel, ii. 28, 29, and quoted in the Acts, second chapter, which gives it double authority. Though she wasna to be born for hundreds of years, do ye think the mind of the Spirit

is so confined, that He hadna a thought of His young handmaid on Loch Diarmid when He put thae words in the mouth o' the ancient prophet? Ay had He! and foresaw the very objections ye're making, and prepared a word to end them, if it was by nae better mouth than mine.'

Then there was a momentary pause, for Andrew's excitement was great. His heavy, grizzled eyebrows were working, his lips quivering; and such emotion has its advantages and disadvantages, which alike eclipse the ordinary arguments of men. It was Samuel, his supporter, who was the first to speak.

'A' that is very true,' he said, 'and the minister canna object to real proof. I wouldna say a word that was disagreeable; but I doubt, sir, if ye've had as many seals to your ministry in a' the years ye've been here, as the Lord's servants have had since this outpouring began. It stands to reason, if the Spirit comes Himself in power, that the work will be great; but if we were to insist against Him that a' was to be done our ain way——'

The minister had been struggling with himself against what he would have called the carnal man. A Scotch clergyman is not unused to hear his conduct discussed, and bear it with more patience than would be possible to flesh and blood

across the Tweed. But there was in all this a covert disapproval of him of which he was quite conscious, and which fired his blood in spite of himself.

‘You forget,’ he said, ‘that the office of a minister has its duties. I am responsible to the superior courts, and I am responsible to the country if wild and unruly doings exist in my parish. As members of Session I admit your authority; but it is I that am responsible to the world.’

‘For that matter I’m little heeding,’ said Samuel. ‘The world has naething ado, that I can see, with the kirk; and it’s weel kent that in Scotland—thanks to our godly forefathers—the kirk has aye gone the first, and the rest followed after, as is well seen in history. No, nor I’m saying nothing against a minister’s office; a godly minister is the greatest character on earth; but, Mr. Lothian, I maun aye maintain that the ministers o’ the present day are no infallible; and though I’m the last to be failing in respect, you’re but a member of this Kirk Session, and no the Pope yoursel.’

‘Softly,’ said the Dominie; ‘you’re going over-fast, Mr. Samuel. I’ve got the books of discipline here, and I’ll read you the law of the kirk on that question, which is different from what you think.’

‘I care nothing about the books of discipline,’

said Samuel, with growing excitement; 'but I ken weel that if the minister had given us moving gospel sermons instead of thae cauld, moderate discourses about duty, the work would ne'er have been taken out o' his hands. Does the Lord spend his strength for nought? He's waited lang for fruit, and found nane; and instead o' cursing the tree, as He might weel have done,—what do we deserve but the curse?—He's sent His prophets to dig about it and dung it, if peradventure it might yet bear fruit. And I'm saying we'll deserve the fate o' Babylon, and worse, if we send the prophets away.'

'I object to the introduction of irrelevant matter into the discussion,' said Mr. Lothian, with rising colour. 'My sermons are not the question. If there are any objections against them, it is in another place, and before another court, that they must be discussed.'

'Na, na, that's no what Samuel means,' said Mr. Smeaton, who had not yet spoken. 'Hoot, minister, to be that sensitive! For my part there's naething I think mair applicable to a general congregation than a guid practical sermon. Let us ken our duty, at least; and if we dinna do it, it's our ain fault.'

'Ye might as well say it's a blind man's fault that he canna see the well ere he fa's into it,' said

Samuel, with scorn. 'If we were like the angels in heaven our duty might be a' we wanted to ken. But we're children o' wrath and no children o' God; and how daurs any man speak to me o' duty afore he has moved me out o' death into life, and shown me how to save my soul? But I'm meaning nae offence to the minister,' he added, with a softened voice. 'We're none of us denying that Mr. Lothian's awfu' kind, and aye ready to succour them that's in need. Na, na; none of us will gang to the Presbytery wi' complaints. But I wouldna say behind his back anything that I daurna say to his face; and if his sermons were mair rousing, and his applications more pointed——'

'No to disturb the elder that's speaking,' said Mr. Galbraith, 'but we've wandered far from the object of this meeting—which was to conclude what ought to be done, or if anything ought to be done, about the movement going on in this parish—the prophesyings and the new light.'

'For my part,' said Mr. William, 'I've no objection to meetings now and then. It's a good way of keeping the folk alive, and keeping up their interest; and I wouldna say that Ailie Macfarlane should be put to silence. I canna think but the Spirit in her comes from above; and we a' know that she was raised up by a miracle. I wouldna

put a stop to nothing. I would only give them rules to guide them, and appoint the meetings oursels; and let none take place without the minister and an elder, or one of the neighbour ministers; or if that canna be, then twa elders, to see that things are done decently in order. That would be my proposition. No to let the parish go into ranting and violence; and at the same time, so far as it's His doing, no to strive against the Lord.'

'And are ye to dictate to the Lord what day He shall come and what day He shall bide?' said Andrew. 'If He gives a word of instruction to His servants, is the voice to be silenced by the Kirk Session? I'll never give in to that. If it's the work of man, let it come to an end; but dinna put your straw bands on the flame o' the Spirit o' God.'

'That's a' very true,' said Mr. Smeaton; 'but if the word o' the Lord was to come in the middle of the night, when the parish was sleeping, ye wouldna have the prophet rise up and ca' the honest folk out of their beds? And if they can wait till the morning—or rather till the night after, for they're a' at night these prayer-meetings—what's to hinder them to wait till anither day?'

'It's awfu' carnal reasoning,' said Samuel Diarmid; 'but it's no without meaning for them that ken no better. I wouldna object to William's proposition mysel; but I canna answer for them

that feel the word burning within them that they can bide for your set days.'

'Your sawbaths and your new moons,' said Andrew. 'Na, ye might as well leemit the sun in his shining and the dew in its falling — they'll speak in season and out of season. It was for that they were sent.'

But Mr. William's conciliatory motion was at last carried after much more discussion. And the struggle did not break the bonds of amity which united the little assembly: Samuel Diarmid volunteered not only his advice, but a cart of guano to a certain field on the glebe, which, in his opinion, was not producing such a crop as it ought. 'You're no a married man yoursel, and it's of less importance to ye,' Samuel said, 'but I canna bide to see land lying idle no more than men.' And Andrew White announced the intention of the mistress to send the minister a skep of honey from the hills. 'Ye keep nae bees yoursel, which is a pity,' said the elder, always with that gentle touch of admonition with which the rural Scotch personage naturally addresses his clergyman. They parted in the soft gloaming, while still there was light enough to guide them on their respective ways. Mr. Smeaton, the stock farmer, had his horse waiting at John Macwhirter's; and the others dropped in there on their homeward way to fight the battle

over once more; all but Samuel and Andrew, who climbed the hill together to the mill, where the former was to take a bed for the night, his house being at the furthest limits of the parish, on the other side of 'the braes.'

'Yon was grand about the minister's sermons, to his face,' said Mr. Smeaton, as they went over the whole discussion in the smithy.

'Ay, man; did they gang into that subject? I'm real glad o't,' said John Macwhirter; 'he's a learned man and a clever man, but he's as fu' of doctrines as an egg's fu' of meat. He's no half practical enough for me.'

Thus it will be seen opinions differed widely even on the primitive shores of the Loch.

CHAPTER XI.

THE next day, which was Sunday, carried the news of this decision through all the parish. It was a bright morning after the rain, one of those radiant pathetic days which are so usual in the Highlands. The women came across the hill with their dresses 'kilted' and pinned up to preserve them from the moisture which glistened on the heather. The birch-trees hung their glistening branches out to the sun. The paths ran with the recent rain; and at the same time the sun shone brilliantly upon everything reflected from the dazzling mirror of the Loch, where not a boat or sign of life disturbed the Sabbatical repose. The gathering of the kirk-going crowd is always a pretty sight. Dissent scarcely existed in those days in such rural places. Groups came gathering along all the paths; the village emptied itself of all but an occasional housewife, or the old grannie too deaf or feeble to join the congregation.

While the cracked and miserable bell tingled forth its ten minutes from the tower, the women and children poured into the church, while the men lingered in a crowd in the churchyard waiting till the tingle should be over. This was the habit of the Loch; but to-day these groups were animated by a livelier interest than usual. There was no question of crops outside among the men, nor of measles and hooping-cough among the women rustling and whispering in their pews. 'Have ye heard the news that the meetings are stopped?' 'I have heard it, but I canna believe it.' 'I'm very thankful, for there was nae saying what they might have turned to;' or, 'I'm awfu' sorry, and such good as they were doing in the parish.' 'But the thing is, will Ailie submit, or Mr. John?' These were the words that were whispered from one to another as the bell jingled forth its summons to church. The two thus conjoined had come to be regarded universally as the leaders of the movement; they were patronised and supported by many parochial personages of weight, but in the end it was evidently they who must decide. And nobody could tell as yet what their decision would be. The matter would be 'laid before the Lord,' and the end was consequently lost in the profoundest darkness, and left room for the fullest discussion. When Ailie came in, with her little

Bible folded in her hands, and her eyes cast down in maidenly humility, a thrill ran through the congregation. And when Mr. John passed through the dark ranks of the men outside and went up the narrow stair to the Ardnamore pew in the front of the gallery, passing 'the plate' with a half-contemptuous wave of his hand, and with a dark lowering look at the two elders,—by chance Mr. William and Mr. Smeaton—who kept watch over it, the people outside gazed after him and pulled at each other's sleeves that no man might miss the sight. 'He's in one of his tantrums,' somebody whispered. But what was only a tantrum in the unbeliever, was a fit of prophetic indignation in the religious leader.

'I wouldna wonder if there was some disturbance. Would it no be better if you or me was to speak to him,' said Smeaton, always a conciliatory soul.

'He would pay nae heed to you or me; things maun take their course,' said Mr. William.

But a secret expectation of something about to happen was in everybody's mind. Had the roof been rent asunder, and a sudden vision burst upon them—had fire come down from heaven upon one of the prophetic heads, or any Scriptural miracle been repeated on their behalf, the assembled people would not have wondered.

They would have approved of the marvel as a fit testimony to the importance of their judgment, but they would not have received it with surprise.

Mr. Lothian's sermon, as was expected, bore some reference to the momentous crisis of affairs. With that natural perversity to which even the best of men yield like their inferiors, the minister's sermon, instead of being as Samuel Diarmid had suggested, 'rousing,' was calmer than usual in its tone; and he was so bold, almost rash, all things taken into consideration, as to take his text from the strange description in the Old Testament of those prophets whom Saul joined in their wild rapture of inspiration. By a rare self-denial he refrained from absolutely quoting the words which were on the lips of all his parishioners. 'Is Saul also among the prophets?'—but dwelt upon the wild outburst which had so little effect upon the condition of the people, and upon the sorrowful calm of Samuel to whom no such ardour of religious excitement seemed to have been given, 'From all we can see,' said the minister, 'he stood and looked on, not disapproving, but well aware in his heart how little was to be expected from such bursts of enthusiasm.' The attention in the church was absorbing. Sometimes there would be a stolen glance at Ailie, who listened like the

rest with profound attention, a gleam of colour now and then flitting over her visionary face; and he was happy who could obtain from his seat a glimpse of the Ardnamore pew, with Mr. John's dark head relieved against the high back. He sat alone, and was very conspicuous in the front of the gallery, and at any time he would have been notable among the shrewd, expressive, peasant countenances round him. Something of the finer and more subtle varieties of expression given by education and intercourse with the world, and—though he was at best but a country squire—something of the flavour of race was in the passionate, dark face, fixed upon the preacher with a defiant attention which seemed likely at any moment to burst into utterance. People said he had actually risen to speak when Mr. Lothian hastily gave the benediction and concluded the service. There had not been so exciting a 'diet of worship' on the Loch in the memory of man. The congregation, as it dispersed, broke into little groups, discussing the one subject from every point of view.

'I wonder how he daur speak, with her yonder before him like one of the saints, and sae humble for a' her gifts.' 'And, eh, I wonder how a young lass could sit and listen to a' yon from the minister and still bide steadfast in her ain way,' said the gossips. 'But I canna haud with that way o' finding

fault with Scripture,' said one of the fathers of the village. 'A' Scripture's written for our instruction; and wha gave ony man authority to judge the auld prophets as if they were not examples every ane?'

'It's a fashion nowadays,' said another. 'I've heard some o' them as hard on Jacob, honest man, as if he had been a neebor lad; and as for King Dawvid and his backslidings——'

'Had he been a neebor lad, as ye say, he had never come within my door,' cried Jenny Spence, 'and seeing the Lord puts them to shame Himsel, wherefore should we set up for making them perfect? And, bless me, if ye think of a wheen naked men, tearing their claes, and ranting afore decent folk——'

'Haud your tongue, Jenny!' said John, 'or speak o' things ye understand.'

'If I didna understand better nor you lads that never take thought of naething, it would be queer to me,' retorted Jenny. 'What wi' your work, and your clavers, and Luckie Bisset ower the hill——'

'Whisht! whisht! woman, it's the Sawbath-day,' said an older neighbour; and then the original subject was resumed.

Among the many church-going parties there was the habitual one from the Glebe. Jean Campbell, in her best attire, the heavy, well-preserved, but

somewhat rusty weeds which became the Captain's widow was an imposing figure. Her crape was rather brown, but it was a more perfect evidence of rank to her than silk or satin. Her fresh, comely face looked out pleasantly from the white crimped borders, and overshadowing penthouse of black, which marked her condition. She was no lady herself, she admitted freely without any attempt at evasion; but the Captain, now he was gone, was one of the great ones of the earth. It had been difficult to keep up that delusion while he lived; but Duncan dead might have been the Duke of Wellington, or he might have been the Chevalier Bayard, had Jean ever heard of such a personage. He was the Captain, and everything splendid was involved in the word. With a profound consciousness of her own vicarious dignity as his representative, she preserved through the progressing years her rusty crape. Not a new-made widow on all the Loch had deeper weeds than she; though Isabel by her side in her gray gown and with her rose ribbons looked fresh as the day. The two children walked hand in hand before them in preternatural good behaviour, little Mary saying over to herself the psalm she was to repeat to Margaret in the afternoon; but Jamie sorely distracted by the sight of a pretty orchis here and there among the heather, or the glimmer of a blue

butterfly on the glistening edge of the hedgerows by the lochside.

Jean had many salutations to make as they issued out of church; and pretty Isabel, who was very conscious of the little step of superiority in her position which made her notice of her rustic neighbours, 'a compliment,' distributed her little greetings like a princess, shyly looking out for Miss Catherine, with whom she was wont to walk home as far as the gate of Lochhead, thus separating herself from the common level on which her stepmother stood. Isabel was not distinguished except on special occasions by that flattering prefix which marked Miss Catherine's full blood and unimpaired aristocracy. She was but the Captain's Isabel to most of her humble friends; and she could not but feel that she took out, as it were, a new patent of nobility by means of the Sunday walk with Miss Catherine, which had become almost invariable. She stood in her stepmother's shadow and protection, looking out for her exalted friend, a pretty impersonation of modest pride and timidity, with a certain soft refinement about her unknown to the Loch, while Jean talked to all her friends. Many was the glance of admiration cast at Isabel. The curious claim she had upon them as being no more than their equal, and yet their superior, attracted to her the observation of all

the women of the Loch. They looked at her dress, though that was plain enough, with interest, and sometimes admiration. 'Look well at Isabel of the Glebe as you pass her; you maun make your new frock like yon,' an anxious mother would say to her daughter. 'They say she's aye meeting that young Stapylton on the braes, but he daurna come near her on the Sabbath-day.' 'Eh, no, I'm thinking he wouldna have the face, and her waiting for Miss Catherine.' Isabel was softly conscious of the comments made upon her. When Margaret and she were children, standing together waiting for their father on the same spot ten years before, the same looks had been turned upon them; the same curious observations made on their dress and their 'manners;' and 'Ye dinna see the wee ladies behaving like that,' had been a common admonition to the unruly children around.

'I hope you are all well,' she said to Jenny Spence with the pretty 'English,' which the Loch admired, and which, to tell the truth, Isabel herself often forgot, except on those Sabbatical occasions. And Jenny felt the compliment of the salutation and the pride of the connexion so profoundly that she rushed into eager tender inquiries about Margaret, overwhelming the girl with her reverential affection. Between the two square, middle-aged, well-developed figures of her

stepmother and her 'connexion,' Isabel stood, slim and fair, more visible by the contrast. Stapylton, not venturing to approach, as the gossips concluded, stood gazing at her from the outskirts. More than one observant eye had seen the minister himself look tenderly at Isabel before he left the pulpit; and while she stood, with smiling dignity, listening to Jenny Spence, another little incident occurred that increased still further her importance with the crowd. Ailie Macfarlane was not in the habit of speaking to any one as she left the church. She would pass through them all with her little Bible folded in her hands, her eyes either cast down or gazing rapt into the air, while everybody made way for her. But when she approached Isabel on this memorable day, Ailie paused. She took one of her hands from her Bible, and suddenly laid it upon Isabel's. It was cold; and the girl, who had not expected it, made a little start backward from the touch.

'It's like ice to your warm blood,' said Ailie; 'and so am I to you. But I'm no acting on my ain notion. Isabel Diarmid, promise me you'll come to the prayer-meeting the morn.'

'O Ailie, how can I promise?' said Isabel in dismay, 'and Margaret so ill.'

'Dinna set that up for an excuse. I'm bidden to ask you by them that will have no excuse,' said

Ailie. 'To her ain Master she standeth or falleth — I'm no judging Margret. But, Isabel, I'm bidden to summon you.'

'I cannot leave my sister,' faltered Isabel, raising her eyes to the crowd with a mute appeal for defence.

'You can leave her for the hill,' said Ailie, very low; and then she added hurriedly, 'It's no me that speaks. There's awfu' trouble and sorrow in your way, and you're but a soft, feckless thing to bear it. Come to the prayer-meeting the morn.'

It was just at this moment that Miss Catherine appeared. Isabel's eyes had been diverted for the moment away from the church, and she had not seen the approach of her friend; who laid her hand upon the girl's shoulder as Ailie repeated her invitation.

'Ailie Macfarlane,' Miss Catherine said, while Isabel started nervously at the unexpected touch. 'You are not to bid her to your meetings; she is too young, and she is my kinswoman, and I cannot let her go.'

'If she was the queen's kinswoman I would bid her,' said Ailie. 'What are your ranks and degrees to the Spirit of the Lord? I'm offering her far more than you can offer her, though you're a lady and me but a simple lass. Now that persecution has come upon us, as was to be looked

for, it canna be but the Spirit will be poured out double. It's out of love to Isabel I ask her, that she may taste the first-fruits and be kent for ane of the chosen. Who are you that would stand between the Lord and His handmaid? I'm freed from earthly bonds this day. Isabel, I'll say nae mair to ye; but tell Margaret I bid her arise and meet me—for the corn is whitening to the harvest; and come yoursel.'

When she had said these words she passed on with the same rapt look as before, speaking to no one, seeing no one. The people round had gathered close to hear what she said, and dispersed slowly out of her path as she turned, making way for her reluctantly, and full of curiosity. Some of the women even plucked at her dress as she passed. 'Eh, Ailie! speak one word. Will't bring judgment on the parish?' said one anxious voice. But Ailie made no reply. She glided away from them, with that directness and silent speed of motion which gives a certain spiritual and ghostly air to the very movements of the abstracted and impassioned.

Isabel had forgotten her simple vanity. She stood trembling, with tears in her eyes, by Miss Catherine's side, not even capable of pride in being thus adopted as the special charge of the great lady of the parish.

‘She says I’m coming to grief and trouble,’ sobbed poor Isabel. ‘Oh, is it my Margaret she means?’

‘Hush!’ said Miss Catherine, drawing Isabel’s hand through her own; ‘you must not cry before all these folk. Come and tell me all that ails you. Is Margaret worse that you tremble so? and what can that poor thing know about it more than you or me? Can she know as well as Margaret herself?’

‘But if it was true that she had the Spirit?’ faltered Isabel through her tears. ‘And oh, Miss Catherine, it goes to my heart what she aye says—if Margaret had but faith!’

‘Margaret has all the faith a Christian woman wants—be you sure of that,’ said Miss Catherine, with impatience; ‘and I wish the minister had taken order sooner to put a stop to all this. But, Isabel, there might be worse things in your way than the grief we all share. My dear, I have been wanting long to speak to you. Put Ailie and her raving out of your mind, and come cannily up to Lochhead with me.’

‘Margaret will want me,’ said Isabel, awakening suddenly to a sense that admonitions of another kind were hanging over her.

‘I’ll not keep you long,’ said Miss Catherine, ‘and Jean shall say where you are. Good day, Mrs. Diarmid. I am taking Isabel with me to have

a talk. Give Margaret my love, and I'll walk up to see her this afternoon and bring her sister back. There's no change?"

'I canna say there's ony change, Miss Catherine,' said Jean, divided between the melancholy meaning of what she said and the glory of this address; for even Miss Catherine, punctilious as she was in giving honour where honour was due, seldom addressed her by the dignified title of Mrs. Diarmid; 'but she's aye wearing away, and weaker every day.'

'The Lord help us, there's nothing else to be looked for,' said Miss Catherine, sadly. And Isabel, who had regained her composure to some extent, fell weeping once more, silently leaning on her friend's arm. There was nothing more said till they descended the brae, and made their way through the village. The Loch had never been trained to the custom of curtseying to the lady of the manor. The groups stood aside with kindly looks to let her pass, and here and there a man better bred than usual took off his hat; but the salutations in general were rather nods of friendly greeting and smiles that broadened the honest rural faces than more reverential servilities. 'How are all at home, John?' Miss Catherine said, in her peremptory way as she passed. 'How is all with ye, Janet?' And then there was a needful

pause, and the story of the children's recovery from some childish epidemic would be told, or of the letter from 'the lads' in Canada, or of family distress and anxiety. When they were quite free of these interruptions, which had once more the effect of bringing composure to Isabel, whose April tears dried quickly, and whose heart could not be coerced out of hope, Miss Catherine turned to the special charge she had taken upon her.

'My dear,' she said, 'I am going to be a cruel friend. I have made up in my mind all manner of hard things to say to you, Isabel. You are not to take them ill from me. We're kindred far removed, but yet there's one drop's blood between you and me, and I know nobody on the Loch that wishes you well more warmly. Will you let me speak as if I were your mother? Had she been living it would have been her place.'

'Miss Catherine,' said Isabel, with a thrill of nervous impatience, a sudden heat flushing to her face, 'how can you ask it? Ye have always said whatever you liked to me.'

'And you think I've sometimes been hard upon you?' said Miss Catherine. 'Well, we'll not argue. Your mother was younger than me, Isabel, and she had no near friends any more than you. If she had had a father or a brother to take care of her, she never would have married Duncan

Diarmid. I am meaning no offence to the Captain. He did very well for himself, and a man that makes his way is always to be respected; but he was a different man from what your mother thought when she married him, and her life was short, and far from happy. She was a sweet, wilful, tender, hot-tempered thing, just like you.'

'Eh, I'm no wilful!' said Isabel, thrilling in every vein with the determination to resist all advice that could be given to her. They were almost alone on the green glistening road which wound round the head of the Loch, and the water rippled up upon the pebbles, and flashed like a great mirror in the sunshine.. The girl's heart rose with the exhilaration of the brightness. It is easy to forget that it ever was, or ever can be, anything but bright, when youth and sunshine both unite to convince the heart to the contrary. After all, Margaret had made many rallies before, and would—might—must rally again; and Stappylton would be tender and true, and everything would go well. Why should any monitor take the other side of the question, and press the life out of the young heart with visionary fear?

'Your mother would take no advice,' said Miss Catherine, 'and she died at five-and-twenty, and left you, two poor babies, without a mother to guide you in the world.'

‘But, oh, it was not her fault she died,’ cried Isabel. ‘Folk die that are happy too.’

‘I’ll tell you what it was,’ said Miss Catherine; ‘not to put you against your father. He never pretended to more than he was. Duncan was aye honest, whatever else. But your mother saw qualities in him that no mortal could see. And when the hasty thing saw her idol broken, her heart broke too; and you’re like her—too like, Isabel.’

‘For one thing at least, I’m wronging nobody; and why should you say all this to me?’ cried the girl all flushed and resentful, and yet struggling with her tears.

‘How can I tell what you might be tempted to do? Margaret Diarmid—that’s your mother—gave me her word she would take time and think, and the very next Sabbath she was cried in the kirk! Isabel, I said I would be cruel. Do you know, do you ever think, what’s coming upon you, bairn?’

Isabel made no answer—her resentment could not stand against this solemnity of tone. She raised her eyes to Miss Catherine as one who awaits the sentence of fate.

‘While you are running about, out and in, like a butterfly or a bird, and singing your songs, and working at your seam, and meeting strange folk upon the braes’—said Miss Catherine with emphasis.

‘I am not blaming you, even for the last. But all this time there’s coming a day when you will be left alone in the world, Isabel. Your bit cottage will still be yours—so to speak a home; but a home that’s empty and desolate, what is that? And none to lean on, none to advise you, none to be your guide—silence in the chambers, and cold on the hearth; and you no better than a bairn, used from your cradle to lean on her and turn to her: what will you do when you are alone in the world?’

‘Oh, my Margaret!’ cried Isabel, drawing her hand from Catherine’s arm and bursting into a passion of tears. They were within the gate at Lochhead, and there was no one by to see the girl’s weeping, which was beyond control. She had been told of it again and again, and realized it to some degree, but never until now had brought her imagination to bear on the life that remained for herself after her sister was gone. Miss Catherine was softened by the violence of her emotion. She took Isabel into her arms and let fall a tear or two out of her old eyes, to mingle with those scorching drops that came wrung out of the other’s very heart.

‘Oh, you are cruel, cruel,’ cried Isabel, struggling out of her embrace; ‘I will die too! I canna bear it; I canna bear it! It is more than I can bear.’

Then Miss Catherine led her, blind with her

tears, to a grassy seat hid among the trees, and sat down by her and did her best to administer comfort. 'Isabel, you know well it must be so,' she said at length, with some severity. 'It cannot be that you have found it out for the first time to-day.'

'Oh, do not speak to me,' cried Isabel; 'how can ye dare to say it is to be, when God could raise her up in a moment like Ailie? And there was Mary Diarmid down the Loch that was—dying—that's what they said—and even she got the turn. Oh, do not speak to me, God is not cruel as you say.'

All these reproaches Miss Catherine bore, sitting compassionately by her victim until the force of her passion was spent; and when Isabel, faint and exhausted, like a creature in a dream, could resist no longer, she resumed where she had left off.

'My dear, I am thinking what is to become of you when this comes to pass—and so does Margaret. Bless her, she thinks of you night and day; and many a talk we have about you, Isabel, when you're little thinking of us. There is one good man in the parish that loves you well——'

'I want no love,' answered the girl, almost sullenly. 'Oh, Miss Catherine, don't speak like this to me.'

‘But I am speaking for Margaret’s sake. There is one that would be a comfort and strength and blessing to any woman. And there is the other lad. Isabel! your father was rough and wild, and not a match for my kinswoman Margaret Diarmid; but he had always a heart. This lad has little heart. If you but heard how he can speak of them you hold most dear ——’

‘Miss Catherine,’ said Isabel, with a voice of despair, starting to her feet, ‘I will run home to Margaret; I can bear no more.’

CHAPTER XII.

THE prayer-meeting on Monday evening was the most exciting 'occasion' that had been known on the Loch for years. At this the decision of the prophets would be made known, as the decision of the Kirk Session had already been. It was moonlight, that great necessity of all rural evening gatherings; and from all the corners of the parish came curious hearers eager to know what was the next step to be taken. Mr. William's wife from Wallacebrae was even one of the audience undeterred by her husband's objections. 'How can I say I'm against them, and my ain wife led away to hear?' he said. 'Hoot away! No to hear them; but to see what they will do,' said Mrs. Diarmid, 'am I one to be led away?'

And Isabel, who had begun to place a certain vague hope in Ailie, after the struggle she had gone through the day before, had made up her mind to obey the injunction so strongly laid upon her, and to go also. 'I would like to hear what they say, and what they are going to do,' she said to her

sister, in almost the same words which the mistress at Wallacebrae had given as her excuse, owning no sympathy with the enthusiasts, but simple curiosity.

‘But you must not go to hear the word of God as if it were a play,’ said Margaret, ‘it is always the word of God whoever speaks it. If you are but going out of curiosity, Isabel, it would be better to bide with me.’

‘I would rather stay with you than do anything else in the world; if you would but stay with me,’ said Isabel, with wistful looks, ‘and try, maybe, what Ailie said?’

‘Ye vex me,’ said the dying girl. But the tone was so soft that it could scarcely be called a reproach. And yet Margaret felt that to remain with her in the unbroken quiet of the long evening was more than Isabel could now bear. There were the braes with all their wistful delights to tempt her forth, and her own unquiet, restless heart, tortured by doubt and grief, and distracting gleams of the future; and there was perhaps the lover whom in her heart she yearned for and yet had begun to flee. Her thoughts went quick and grew breathless, and choked her, as she sat in the quiet of the little parlour with the two candles lighted, and the summer night shut out, and the clock ticking loud through the silent house. Margaret divined all this, though not a word was said. Better the

prayer-meeting now with its excitement than to stay with the sufferer seeing her cheek grow pale, her thin hands thinner every moment. She did no injustice to her sister, even in the pang of the discovery that Isabel could not remain with her contented as of old. She understood that the sight of her gradual calm decay was intolerable to the young tender creature, whose life had been wrapt up in hers.

‘She cannot bear to look at me now she sees so plain what’s coming,’ Margaret would say to herself, and felt no resentment though a tear would come to the corner of her eye. But there was more in Isabel’s thoughts than Margaret’s virgin soul could divine. Notwithstanding the anguish which overwhelmed her, when she was called upon to contemplate the event which would make an end of one stage of existence for her, all the agitation and tumult of another life was in Isabel’s heart. She felt, and hated herself for the feeling, that she would not die when her sister did, and that she had no wish to die. She felt the thrill of contingencies behind which would come into being after Margaret was gone. She felt life stretching broad before her, dark, like a starless night, but yet full like the night, of rustling among the trees and stirrings in the heather, such as moved her soul with premonitions that were not pain. It was

involuntarily, by some power beyond her own will, that such vague flutterings of the future came upon Isabel, and she hated herself for them. Oh, how heartless she was, how stony-hearted, as all the ministers said to be able to feel as if life was possible without Margaret! She struggled against the tumults of her young blood, weeping wildly, resisting the movements of nature, and quite unaware that it was nature that moved her; and she felt guilty and miserable in her sister's presence. Oh, for that miracle that would save Margaret and set Isabel right with herself! Oh, to be set free from the awful thought that death was coming, while life thus struggled in her own heart! But all this time death came nearer and nearer, and showed more conspicuously every hour in Margaret's worn face and faltering steps. It was all she could do now to rise from her bed, and totter to her chair in the parlour. And Isabel could not bear to see this lingering tragedy enacted before her. To go anywhere! to be absent and able to dream that 'some change,' some wonder, might have happened while she was absent, was the sick, unnatural longing of her heart.

'*She is going,*' Isabel said again, after a pause, 'and you are always so kind, you say ye want for nothing, Margaret. It is not for curiosity. They told me I was warned by name. No, I am not

going away after them; I was thinking of different things.'

'Ever of that miracle?' said Margaret, with a faint smile, 'which will never come. If it was not for you, Isabel, it would be a miracle to me to be away. But we will no speak of that; leave little Mary with me if you will go,—not that I want anybody. I am real well to-night, and no breathless to speak of; but it's ill for the bairn.'

'Oh, Margaret! I feel whiles as if you thought more of that bairn than of your own sister!' said Isabel, with all the hot jealousy of a heart which felt itself divided and guilty.

'She *is* my sister,' said Margaret, softly; 'but nobody could ever be like my Bell; it would be strange if you needed to be told that now.'

And then the impatient, impetuous girl wept and upbraided herself. 'Oh, I am not myself, I am not myself!' she said; 'I'm all wrong; it's as if I could not submit to God.'

'My bonnie Bell!' said Margaret, wistfully, gazing at the perplexing creature, whom she could not understand, and laying her hand upon the bowed-down head. A little sigh of weariness mingled with her perplexity. She had come to that point when peace is demanded by worn-out nature; and those tumults were too much for her. 'Put on something warm,' she said, 'and tell *her*

she is not to go too far in; but be home soon and let me hear what's passed. If Ailie speaks to you, tell her I'm real well and content.'

'Will I tell her you are better? Oh, will I say you're mending, Margaret?'

'Ye cannot think how you vex me,' said poor Margaret, sighing, 'you more than all. Why should I mend? I am far on my journey now, and why should I come back just to tread all the weary way over again another time? Tell Ailie I'm winning home. The road is uphill, and maybe the last bit is the steepest; but I am real content. If you will not say that, say nothing, Isabel. And if you are going, it is time for you to go.'

'But I'll go and leave you angry, Margaret,' cried Isabel; 'angry and vexed at me?'

'No, no; no angry,' said Margaret, wearily. The hectic spot had come into her cheek. She laid her head back on the cushions with again a weary sigh. What wonder if she longed for the end,—she to whom life had no longer anything to give? She closed her eyes for a moment, and Isabel, feeling more guilty than ever, stole away to warn her stepmother, and to tie on her cottage bonnet and great grey cloak. 'You'll watch Margaret that she wants nothing; but you'll not speak to her to wear her out,' she said to little Mary, ever jealous of her sister's love. And then said to

herself, Oh, how heartless she was to feel a pleasure in the soft wind that blew in her face, and in the chance of seeing Stapylton, if it were but on the road, and in the excitement of going to this meeting! What could she do? The one was dying, the other living; strong impulses drew Isabel to the living world—and a stronger impulse still, the very tie that knits heaven to earth, drew Margaret towards that solemn starry darkness in which she was so soon to be swallowed up. The twin sisters had been one till now, but now could be one no more.

The moon was shining veiled in clouds upon the Loch, now bursting forth into the fullest radiance, now leaving nothing but a luminous track across the sky. The road was almost as full of passengers as if it had been Sunday. People were coming from far and near, even from the other end of the Loch; one or two boats-full were crossing the water, their oars sounding far in the stillness. When the moon disappeared behind the clouds, the sound of the oars, and of the voices, all about in the darkness, were like the impressions of a dream; and lights twinkled in the village windows, and from the town of Lochhead. Isabel Diarmid, by her stepmother's side, in unusual contiguity and fellowship, went silent like a dreaming creature. Agitation, compunction, a sense of guilt, and yet of

stolen pleasure, a thrill of the universal excitement which made her heart beat, and at the same time a consciousness that she should have been elsewhere, and was virtually forsaking her sister and her duty, so filled her with conflicting emotions that she had no voice left to speak. To Jean's remarks about their fellow-passengers on the road she made no reply, and indeed shrank, with the pride which was natural to her, from confounding herself with the stream of 'common folk.' There was no Miss Catherine to-night to restore her confidence in her superior position. 'Eh, is this Isabel?' the gossips said when they had greeted her stepmother. She was humiliated in her own esteem in addition to all other feelings; yet she persevered and went on, eager, though she did not know why, for anything to distract her thoughts. A girl in such a position, half despairing, beset on every side, full of the anguish, and yet full of the irrepressible hopes, of youth—driven by the tumult in her heart from her habitual counsellors, feeling guilty, wretched, unpardonable, confused by her very innocence—is the being of all others most ready to plunge into any possible dissipation. It was but a prayer-meeting, but it answered, and more than answered, all the purposes of a ball. Now and then a glimpse of the scene she had left behind, of Margaret sitting in the silence with little Mary's eager eyes watching

her, and her 'own' sister gone, would gleam across Isabel's eyes, giving her a pang she could scarcely bear; but how could she have borne it to sit and gaze at Margaret, and hear the clock ticking and the life ebbing away? So she went on, feeling as if she were in a dream, a pilgrim among other half-seen figures on the darkling road, hearing voices, and the plash of the oars, and thinking that every moment she might wake and find herself—where? alone in this echoing, vacant world.

The schoolhouse was all dark when the crowd reached it. Instead of the usual preparation for them the door was locked, and the Dominie stood on the step, looking down upon the dark groups as they began to arrive and gather round, with the patience of the rural mind. 'The door's no open yet.' 'The lights are no lightet.' 'I tell't ye, for a' your grumbling, we would be here soon enough.' 'It's no often Ailie's late.' 'And what's the Dominie waiting there like a muckle ghost,' murmured the crowd.

Mr. Galbraith, to tell the truth, was in no desirable position. He had the key in his hand, but that could not be seen; and he was charged with the dangerous mission of temporising, and commissioned to coax the multitude out of their excitement, and persuade them to go quietly home. If he did not succeed, there was always the key to

fall back upon. 'In the last place, if better is not to be made of it, I'll let them have their will,' he had said. Of all offices in the world the least satisfactory. Already he had begun to see that it was a mistake, but it was now too late to withdraw. 'They should have found a' dark and been treated to no explanations,' he said to himself, as he stood with his back against the door and gazed on them. A mob is not an easy thing to deal with in any circumstances; and a religious mob, spurred up to the highest point of spiritual excitement, is the most dangerous of all. Had it not been for the large leaven of mere curiosity which kept down the pitch of agitation, things might have gone badly for the Dominie. He cleared his throat a great many times before he screwed himself to the point of addressing them. The prophets themselves had not yet appeared, and if it might be possible to dismiss the people before the arrival of their leaders, a great point would be gained. Spurred by this thought he at last broke the silence.

'My friends,' said the Dominie; and there was an immediate hush of the scraping feet, and the coughs and whispers of impatience. The moon had gone in and all was dark, so that he could distinguish none of the faces turned to him, and felt, as few orators can do, the sense of that vague abstraction, a crowd unbroken by the glance of any

exceptional sympathetic face. ‘My friends, I’m here to say a word to you from the Kirk Session. Those that are put over ye in the Lord have taken much thought and counsel together to see what’s best to be done. I am reflecting upon nobody. It’s not my place to tell you who you are to hear, or when you are to forbear. But I appeal to those that are heads of families if there have not been too many of these meetings? The human mind is not equal to such a strain. I’ve studied it all my life, and ye may believe me when I speak. There must be a Sabbath for the body, and the mind’s mair delicate than the body. But any night, every night, have ye no assembled here, to listen to the most agitating addresses, given, I do not gainsay, with what is more touching than oratory, with the whole conviction of the soul. My friends, ye have but a delicate machine to manage. Your minds are no like your ploughs that are simple things to guide. They’re like the new-fangled steam-engines, full of delicate bits of wheels, and cranks, and corners——’

At this moment a figure glided up to him out of the crowd. The Dominie divined at once whose were those swift and noiseless steps, and felt that his oratory and his object were defeated. She came and placed herself beside him holding up her hand, and at that moment the

moon burst forth and shone full upon Ailie's face, which in that light was white as marble, with the full large lambent eyes, almost projected from it, looking out upon the eager spectators.

'Comena here with your carnal wisdom,' said Ailie, putting up her hand as if to stop him. 'Oh comena here! What's learning, and knowledge, and a' your science afore the fear of the Lord? And how dare ye stop His servants from constant prayer to Him, and saving souls? Will ye quench the Spirit, O man, with your vain words? Think ye we're sae little in earnest that we want biggit walls to shelter us, or your fine candles to give us light? The Lord is our light,' cried the prophetess, stretching out her hand towards the moon that shone full upon her. And there was a rustle and stir in the crowd which told the instant response of the audience.

The Dominie's own feelings were not beyond the reach of such an apostrophe. He moved uneasily from one foot to another, and began to fumble in his coat-pocket for the key, the last concession which he was prepared to make.

'I am saying nothing against that, my good lass,' he said; 'not a word am I saying, but that for you and the like of you there's too much of this; and that's the Kirk Session's opinion. You shall have plenty of opportunity,—plenty of occasion,

but, my dear, for the sake of your own life, and for all the rest of them, not every night——'

'Friends,' said another voice suddenly from another quarter, 'it is nothing wonderful if persecution has come upon us. I have expected it from the first. The hand of this world is against the servants of God, and ever will be. We are driven forth like our forefathers to the hill-side. The Church has shut to her doors against us. I told you it would be so. I told you a lukewarm, unawakened Church would never bear that within her bosom that was a reproach to her. And what of that?' the speaker went on with growing excitement, 'there is God's word that they cannot drive us out of, and God's lights that He has set for us in the heavens, and His ear that is ever open, and His hand that is ready to save. On your knees, my brethren! What hinders that we should pray to Him here?'

Then there arose a murmur among the crowd: 'It's Mr. John!' 'Eh, it's the days of the persecution come back.' 'We'll no thole't.' 'Who's the minister or the Kirk Session either to stand up against the Christian people?' 'And quench the Spirit?' cried a voice above the rest; 'do they mind that 's the unpardonable sin?'

Mr. Galbraith made vain efforts to speak; the murmurs rose higher and higher, and began at last

to direct themselves to him. 'Is the like of that weirdless Dominie to stand against ye a', feeble loons?' cried a woman. 'Wha's he that he should daur to stand against us?' 'Let me at him!' 'Eh, lads, canny, canny, he's an auld man.' Such were the cries of indignation and alarm that rose in the stillness. The remnant of people who had been left in the village came rushing forth to see what was the matter. Mr. Lothian was at the other end of the parish, but young Stapylton, who had just returned from a fruitless ramble on the braes, came lounging to the Manse gate. The moon went suddenly behind a cloud, leaving all that darkling mass confused and struggling. Then it was that the Dominie made himself heard. 'Lads,' he shouted, his voice reaching the entire crowd though he was himself unseen, 'I've trained ye, and I'm reaping the credit. If it was for your sakes ye might tear the auld man in pieces before you should have your will. Dinna think ye can frighten me. If I give the key to Ailie, it is for the women's sake; and the bairns.'—Women, are ye mad that ye bring bairns here?

'It's because their souls are mair precious to us than a' the world,' cried some mother in the crowd. 'It's little enough you teach them,' cried another. 'Where would they hear the Gospel if no in the meetings?' 'No in the kirk, wi' a

moderate minister and his moral essays.' 'And now when we've found the Word of God ye would drive us to the hillside to seek it.' 'They would drive us into the Loch if they had their will,' cried the crowd.

Isabel Diarmid, with all her sensibilities in arms, humiliated to the dust, indignant, terrified, stood trembling in the midst of this seething, agitated mass, thrust about by its sudden movements, ready to cry or to faint, feeling her self-respect for ever lost, no better than 'a common lass' among the crowd. She strained her eyes, but could not make out whether the Dominie had escaped from the insults offered to him. She felt herself drawn along by the movement of the people round her rushing in one body for the door, which, with much noise of the key in the keyhole, had at length been opened. And as she turned round in a vain, helpless endeavour to free herself she caught sight of the figure at the Manse gate, and felt hot shame flush to her face. Was it the minister looking on, or Stapylton?—the two men who loved her—was it possible he could see her, in her humiliation? What would either think of the girl they placed on such a pedestal, could they recognise her drawn along, elbowed, and struggling, among these common folk? Clinging to her step-

mother, vainly resisting, overwhelmed with shame, she felt herself swept out of the fresh air into the dark schoolroom no longer an individual with a will of her own, but a helpless portion of the crowd. What would Miss Catherine say, what would Margaret think? Margaret, sinking softly away at home with nobody to watch her but little Mary. These moments of shame and compunction were as an age to the girl. And she was half stifled by the flood which thus carried her reluctantly with it, and terrified by the rush, and the crowding, and the darkness. 'Eh, Margret would ne'er forgive me if she heard of this,' gasped Jean, holding her fast by her hand. When the first pioneers succeeded in lighting one miserable candle to throw a glimmer over the scene, its feeble rays, gave no one any assistance, but only cast a wretched twinkle of revelation, showing the struggle,—the benches pushed aside by the blind, uncertain crowd; the throng pouring in darkling through the black doorway. By degrees a few other feeble twinkles began to glitter about the room, and the people subsided into seats, with much commotion and struggling.

'Eh, woman, sit up a bit!' 'Take care where ye 're gaun,—that 's my wean.' 'Take off your hat, honest man; I canna see nothing for ye.'

Such were the compliments passing among the audience. It was some time before they were all settled in their places. Everything was new to Isabel; when she found herself established at last out of the tumult, in a corner against the wall, where she flattered herself nobody could see her, she drew breath again. The strange gloom, the flicker of the candles, the eager look of all those faces turned towards the Dominie's table, at which stood Mr. John; the thrill of excitement and expectation among them, overcame Isabel's susceptible nature. The very breath failed on her lips in her eagerness. What might she be about to hear—the heaven opened and voices issuing out of it, or a revelation from heaven, as wonderful in its way? All her shame disappeared before the extraordinary fire of popular emotion which she had suddenly caught. If she could be said to have hated any man in the world, Mr. John would have been the man. And yet she sat and gazed at him as if he had been an angel of fate.

‘It's come at last,’ he said; ‘my brothers, I've been looking for it long. None can live godly in Christ Jesus but suffer persecutions. And Satan has found his instruments. Two nights had not gone from your first meeting in this place when the Lord showed me how it would be. But are we to give up our sacred standard because the

heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing—ay, a vain thing! As well might they bind the Loch that the flood should not come up. Has not the Spirit of the Lord come like a flood upon this parish; and they try to stop Him with a key turned in the lock and a shut door! But the Lord has opened us a door, great and effectual. Praise Him, my friends, that He has given us the victory. The horse and his rider has He overthrown in the sea——’

‘But this is awfu’ irregular,’ cried another personage, who rose suddenly out of the darkness, and was discovered after a time to be Samuel Diarmid the elder. He came out of the front row, which was merely a range of dark heads to the people behind, and stepped before the prophet with a small Bible in his hand. ‘My friends,’ he said, ‘though Mr. Galbraith took upon him to shut ye out o’ this public place belonging to the parish, I’m here in my capacity as an elder o’ this parish to preside among ye. I hope there’s none here will dispute my right. We’ll open the meeting in the usual way by singing to the praise of God in the Psalms; and after the meeting’s lawfully constituted, ye shall hear whatever word the Lord’s servant may have to say.’

At this announcement, there arose a sudden rustle and resolute thumbing of the Psalms, which

were attached to everybody's Bible. The audience found the place conscientiously, though only a few could by any possibility see the page. Samuel himself led the singing, standing with his book in his hand, and his figure swaying to and forward with the cadence of the 'tune;' and seated in darkling rows, with their books held in every possible slope to reach the light, the audience lifted up their voices and sang one of those strange measures at which musicians stand aghast.

‘ Perhaps Dundee's wild warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive Martyrs worthy of the name.’

The Psalm was sung in unison, and yet, heaven knows, in but small harmony, by all the voices, from the man's deep bass to the child's shrill treble. 'And yet it was not without solemnity. Everybody was in deadly earnest. The strain might be eccentric, and the singing altogether beyond all rules of art; but the strange song, half repeated from memory, half elucidated in the darkness by anxious eyes, and poured forth with all its meaning in it, fresh out of the minds, if not the hearts, of so many half-visible people, had a power over the primitive and uncultivated mass which the loveliest strains of music often fail in. Isabel sang it with all her heart. No criticism occurred to her. Her ear was not shocked by the false notes, the

curious growls and creaks of utterance around her.

‘ I wait for God, my soul doth wait ;
My hope is in His Word.
More than they that for morning watch,
My soul hopes in the Lord.’

And then she closed her little Testament, and stood up, covering her face with her hands for the prayer. It was the prayer of a man having authority which Samuel Diarmid poured forth ; and in that darkness through which no man could make out his neighbour's face, the crowd stood and listened. It was a curious way in which to exhibit High Churchmanship and ecclesiastical authority ; but yet no ritualist, struggling for bell, book, and candle, could have been more thoroughly persuaded that he was preserving the discipline of the Church, and doing all things decently and in order, than was Elder Samuel. He was conscious that he was so far rebelling against the authority of the Session in leading this unauthorized assembly, but felt in himself the spirit of a martyr, ready to sacrifice everything to his duty. ‘ They may reprimand me,’ he said to himself ; ‘ but I'll no let it be said that in Lochhead parish there was no elder with that regard for his fellow-creatures to run the risk o' a reprimand for them.’ His prayer was a kind of liturgy in itself.

He prayed for her Sacred Majesty, as is the custom in Scotland, and for the Government and magistrates, and every class of men who could be put together in a general supplication. There was something half-comic, half-solemn in his formality; but it did not strike his audience as anything peculiar. They drew a long breath when it was ended, with conscious but unexpressed relief.

‘He’s aye awfu’ dry and fusionless in his prayers,’ Jean whispered to Isabel, ‘but wait till it’s Ailie’s turn.’ She was concerned that her step-daughter should appreciate ‘the meeting,’ and not be discouraged by its dreary beginning. When they had all resumed their seats, the speaker opened his Bible and began to read ‘a chapter.’ For some part of this, all went on with perfect quiet and decorum. You might have been in the kirk, Isabel said to herself, had it not been so dark, and the people so thronged together. The thought was passing through her mind when all at once a crash of sound startled her. She rose to her feet in wonder, gazing where it might come from; but to her amazement no one else moved. Heads were raised a little, the attention of the mass was quickened, but nobody except herself thought, as Isabel did, that something terrible had happened. What the sound was she could not tell, ‘some said it thundered, or that a spirit spoke.’ The

utterance was like a sudden blast or gust of wind ; or a heavy, sudden stroke upon organ-keys, so loud and wild that the silence which ensued next moment, was as grateful as relief after pain. Then there was a pause. Isabel, in the extremity of her amazement, stood peering into the darkness, but she was the only one who did so. Her heart was beating loudly in her breast—a pang of impatience, horror, anger, ran through her. Who could it be that dared to interrupt the worship? But while she gazed and listened, there suddenly arose another sound ; this time it was a voice distinct and musical. And Isabel, relieved, sat down again, and lent an attentive ear. The next moment she was once more on her feet in a confusion too great to be restrained. ‘What is she saying? what is she saying?’ she whispered in her stepmother’s ear. Jean, habituated to the wonder, was scandalized by this excitement. She twitched at Isabel’s cloak to drag her back to her seat. ‘Whisht! sit down. It’s nothing but the tongue,’ she said. The girl strained her eyes upon the listening crowd, but no one was moved as she was. She dropped back appalled into her seat. It was Ailie who spoke; and in the intense silence and darkness poured forth an address full of that eloquence of intonation and expression which is perceptible in every language. ‘Is it Latin? is it Hebrew?’ Isabel asked herself,

moved by wonder, and awe, and admiration, into an indescribable excitement. Some sacred language employed by the oracles of God it seemed to her it must be ; and to be thus poured forth over the heads of the common folk who sat listening, wondering, not so much impressed as Isabel ! Though not a single word was intelligible to her, she followed every word with a rapt attention. What was it ? why was it ? The rest of the audience sat half stupid, half curious, sometimes with a nod at each other or whispered exclamation, ‘ She’s lang at the tongue to-nicht,’ waiting for the preliminary to be over. When the voice suddenly paused, and changed and turned into ordinary utterance, there was a little rustle of roused attention among the crowd ; but Isabel leant back upon the wall and burst into silent tears. The excitement had been more than she could bear. When she came to herself the same fresh youthful voice was making the room ring, and compelled her attention. It was like bringing down to ordinary life the vague grace of youthful fancies. All Isabel’s mysterious soul, all those complications of thought and feeling which she herself did not understand, seemed to have somehow got utterance in the wild, meaningless, tuneless syllables. It was to her what a fine strain of music might have been—an outcry of that which was unexplainable and unspeakable. When she

awoke from the surprise of her excitement, and found that Ailie was speaking so as everybody understood her, the wonder and the mystery were gone.

‘O ye of little faith,’ cried Ailie, ‘wherefore do ye doubt? are ye feared to go forth from the fine kirk and the comfortable meeting to the hills and the fields? Where was it He went to commune with His Father, that is our example? was it to biggit land, or lightsome town? No; but to the cauld hill-side in the dark, where nothing was but God and the stars looking down out of the lonesome sky. O the puir creatures we are,—the puir creatures! Think ye it’s for the good of this bit corner of the earth that He has given me strength to rise up from my bed, and poured forth the gifts o’ tongues, and teaching and prophesying upon this parish? I was like you. He knows how laith,—laith I was to come out of the kirk I was christened in, and open my heart to the weary, wanting world. But I take ye a’ to witness it’s no us that have begun. They have lifted up their hands against the ark of the Lord. They’ve tried their best to stop us in our ministry and in the salvation of souls. They’ve scoffed and they’ve said where are the signs o’ His appearing. Look round ye, friends, and see. Me that never learned more than my Bible,—I speak wi’ tongues—I see the things that are to come. Think ye that is for

nought? It fell on your sons and your daughters in your very presence and is that for nought? Bear ye witness, friends, that I take up my commission this night. Go forth into the world and preach the Gospel to every creature, that is the command that's given to me. Throw off your bonds, ye that sleep—arise and let us go forth! It's no a question o' a parish, or o' a village, or o' a kirk or a meeting, but of His coming to be prepared and the world to be saved.'

Whether this wild but sweet voice had come to a natural pause, or whether it was suddenly interrupted and broken by the same extraordinary burst of sounds which had been heard before, Isabel, terrified out of all her self-control, could not tell. She gave a suppressed scream, as Mr. John stood up with his rigid arms stretched out and his features convulsed with the passion of utterance whatever it was. The sound which had alarmed her came from him, bursting from his lips as if by some force which had no relation to his own will or meaning. The cry came from him like the groanings and mutterings of a volcano, moved by some unseen power. Isabel clung to her step-mother in her terror and hid her face in her hands.

'It's awsome the first time,' whispered Jean, consoling her. 'It's awfu' awsome to see the spirit like that, rending and riving; but he'll soon

‘speak. Whisht, my pet! It’s aye a’ the grander when he speaks.’

Such sounds echoing through the darkened room, over all those hushed and eager listeners, were impressive enough to overawe any lively imagination; and it was with her head bent down on Jean Campbell’s shoulder, and her eyes closely shut, that Isabel heard the inarticulate horror change into words.

‘Hear the voice of the handmaid of the Lord,’ cried Mr. John. ‘The Lord sent His servant to her with a word from Him, saying, Go forth and convert the world; but she would not listen. She said, Who am I that I should go forth and preach? Thy handmaid is a child, she said. But lo! the Lord himself hath taught her. Not to you only, O people of Loch Diarmid; you have had the first-fruits, but the ingathering is not yet! Like those that have not long to be with you, we turn and cry—Repent! Repent, and be converted. You have waited long. And God has sent you prophets, miracles, and wonders, in your midst. And lo! your moment of privilege is nearly over, and He sends His servants forth. Repent! Oh, that my voice were a trumpet, that it might ring into your hearts! Oh, that it were as a rushing, mighty wind to sweep you to the Lord! We are going forth in His name. We are going out upon

the world. Give us first-fruits—first-fruits for the Lord! Let us pray! Let us pray! Let us pray!’

Then the darkling mass rose to their feet, and the enthusiast poured forth his prayer. Sobs sounded out of the gloom as he went on, cries, less awful, but of the same character as his own—the faint, uncertain, flickering light adding ever another element of mystery and confusion to the extraordinary scene. Isabel, always clinging to the stout form of her stepmother, who listened and looked on with a curious, interested composure and placidity, could scarcely restrain herself from joining in the subdued outcries round her. By degrees, time and place, and all mortal restrictions, vanished from her excited mind. It seemed to her as if she always had been, always must be in this wild, darkened, agitated place, torn by terrors and ecstasies of which she could give no explanation. She felt herself replaced in her seat, then raised again, as prayer and address alternated; but lost all reckoning of what was taking place, except as one great blank of excitement raised to the pitch of fever. What roused her was Ailie’s voice, once more soft, pleading, sympathetic. A voice that calmed her wild emotions, and brought her back in some degree to herself.

‘I have wondered and wondered, and asked of

the Lord,' said Ailie, 'what for His gift of speaking wi' tongues should have come to me,—me that kent nothing, that had so little way of speaking forth His praise. But it has pleased Him to show me what He aye says, that out o' the mouth o' babes and sucklings His praise is perfected. Ye canna understand me when I speak what He puts into my mouth; and oh I canna understand mysel! But out yonder,' said the inspired creature, a flush coming over her visionary face, a smile gleaming on her lips, 'who can tell what poor perishing creatures would ken what it means?—and after being a sign and a wonder to you, He'll make me to them a preacher in their ain tongue like Peter and the Apostles. Eh, that He should give His grace to me so little worthy! But it's for your sakes! And oh!' said Ailie, turning upon them with outstretched hands, 'are we to go out alone for such a work? Is there none will come with us to prepare the way o' the Lord, to make His paths straight? Is there none willing to leave houses and lands, and father and mother, and comfort and home, for His sake? Eh, neebors! I ken one that's like the angels of the Lord! She wants faith, but she wants nothing else. She's wearying, wearying to be at hame with the Lord, and hasna the heart to rise up off her bed, and come forth wi' me to the salvation of men. You a' know her as well as me! Maybe it's Margaret's

prayers that have brought the Spirit on this parish. Ye know how she has prayed for us up bye at the burn, wrestling wi' the Lord like Jacob. Eh, freends, if I had Margaret I would go forth light as the air! Lord, give her faith! Lord, raise her up! Lord, send thy blessed creature forth with us! Lord, Lord, listen, and give her faith! Oh, my freends, will ye no pray?'

At this moment Isabel's emotion became altogether uncontrollable. It seemed to herself as if the inspiration she had witnessed had suddenly come upon her. She held up her hands wildly out of her dark corner where no one could see. Then a scream burst from her lips.

'No,' she cried out, in a voice so strained with passion that no one would have recognised it for hers. 'No, no,—not for Margaret; she shall not live, she shall have her will. Leave her in peace, and let her die.'

Isabel fell like a dead creature into her step-mother's arms, not unconscious, with all her senses still wildly vivid, but trembling like a leaf, and helpless as an infant. Then there was a moment of terrified silence, and heads soon turned timidly round in the darkness to search for the new prophet. Ailie, standing with her arms uplifted in sight of them all, gazed intently into the gloom with her great lambent eyes, waiting and listening

for some moments after the voice had ceased. Then the prophetess suddenly sank into the girl by a transition so extraordinary that it caught once more the wavering attention of the audience attracted from her by the new miracle. Her arms fell by her side, a flood of tears came pouring from her eyes.

‘Oh, Lord, Lord, Lord! ye have never refused me before!’ said Ailie, with a wild cry of reproach, and sank upon the floor in a burst of weeping so helplessly natural and girl-like that the excited group around her gazed at each other in dismay.

‘We’ve all heard it,’ said Mr. John, suddenly starting up, with quivering lips and a countenance pale as death. ‘O Spirit! if ye be of the Lord, speak again; if ye be of the devil, away, away! Begone to the father of lies that sent ye here! If ye be of the Lord, speak again!’

Isabel heard all, but her bodily powers had forsaken her; she lay passive upon Jean Campbell’s shoulder, who, for her part, scandalised by the ‘exposure,’ held her fast soothing her. ‘Oh, no a word, no a word!’ cried Jean; ‘let it no be said that one of the Miss Diarmids has gone after them, too!’

Even this whisper was almost audible in the intense silence that followed. Mr. John stood with one hand raised, himself like a ghost in the

darkness with the light of the candle flickering on his face.

‘It’s a lying spirit,’ he cried, ‘sent to tempt us. Let us pray! let us pray!’

‘It is the Lord!’ said Ailie, in a voice choked with weeping.

Her sobs were audible through all the wild supplication that followed. But Isabel, worn out, was conscious of little more until she felt herself drawn into the fresh air, and saw the moonlight lying white upon the braes.

CHAPTER XIII.

THERE was little said upon the walk home. Isabel was too much exhausted to make any reply to the questions, and half reproaches, and soothing speeches, made in regular succession by her stepmother.

‘What put it into your head to speak out like yon? And, eh, I’m glad naebody saw it was you. It would break my heart to hear them say the Captain’s Isabel was gane after them. Lean heavier, my lamb. It was naething but the love and the contradiction in your bit warm heart. Ye’ve never been drawn to me, Isabel, but I was aye ane that kent ye had a warm heart.’

And then Jean would recommence her questions. Isabel paid but little attention to anything that was said. They had taken the quieter path across the hill, to get out of the way of the people, who would no doubt have discussed the meeting, and who it was that spoke. The moon shone so brightly that Jean felt her courage equal to the

unfrequented path ; or, rather, her alarm at any chance of discovery was so great that she preferred to incur its perils. The hill-road wound round behind the Manse, and was but a path among the heather, wide enough for a country cart, but seldom trod except by foot-passengers. They were quite alone on it, and it was eerie ; and the moon-light cast a weird brightness upon the Loch, which lay underneath them like a sheet of silver, visible all the way down, until it glided into the Clyde through the narrow gateway formed by two green points. It looked smaller than by daylight, and shone, silent and ghost-like, in its black and white, like a picture on silver. The heather and the distant hills were black too, except where those intense white lights fell on them ; nothing had any colour in it, except the vast, serene, blue sky.

‘The wonder was, not that I spoke, but that you kept silent. Oh, how could you hear all yon,’ said Isabel, ‘and keep still?’

‘Me!’ cried Jean. ‘What had I to do with them? I wasna there to mix myself up in their ways. As if I was minding what nonsense they might say!’

‘Then why did ye go and listen?’ said Isabel.

It seemed to her stepmother a question so supremely irrelevant that she made no attempt to answer.

‘I’m awfu’ sorry I took you,’ she said. ‘If I had thought you would have paid so much attention—But, eh, if a body was to mind them like that, what do you think would become of this world? Whisht! there’s naebody coming. It’s as light as day, and we’re no far from hame. What would become of the world,’ repeated Jean, who was a little nervous herself upon the lonely, unfrequented road, and trembled at the rustling of the heather and breathings of the night upon the braes, ‘if a’body’s was praying and preaching and gaun on like *yon*? Ye see, it couldna be. The weans would a’ run wild, and the men’s meat be wasted; and a man without his meat is like a boat without a sail. A miracle now and then might be a grand thing; but if there was to be naething but miracles it would be an awfu’ strange world.’

‘Oh, but it would be like heaven!’

‘I dinna pretend to ken that muckle about heaven,’ said Jean, ‘but I’m thinking our bodies, and the meat and the claes, would be an awfu’ burden to us there. You’ll think it queer, but this world’s mair familiar; and seeing the Lord has

kept it a' up this thousands and thousands o' years, ane would think He would ken what suited us best.'

Thus they went on clinging to each other along the white line of road between the dark rustling whin-bushes and tough stalks of heather which caught at their dresses as they passed. When the light in her own low window at last appeared, a very fervent 'God be thanked' burst from Jean Campbell's lips. 'I canna face thae awfu' lonely roads. Ye never ken wha ye mayna meet, face to face,' she said as the cottage became fully visible, her soul encouraged by the sight of it. But Jean herself was nowise aware how she had summed up the mysterious sensations of the night. At such a moment you might have met any one living or dead, distant or present, in the solitude of that pathway across the hill.

To go out of the magic, significant night, silent with such excess of meaning, into the absolute stillness of the little parlour, all grey and brown, with its one window shuttered and curtained, and the two candles twinkling solemnly on the table, and Margaret dozing in her chair, was the strangest contrast. The clock was still ticking steadfastly as if it never would stop, through and through the house; little Mary, with very large wide open eyes, sat on a footstool opposite Mar-

garet, from whom she never removed her anxious gaze. 'She's been dozing and waking, dozing and waking,' said Mary; 'and eh, but ye've been lang, lang!'

'It was a lang meeting the night,' said Jean. 'But what way have ye closed up the window, and Margaret sae fond of the view? I would have gotten an awfu' fright to see a' dark if we had come round by the Loch.'

'It was like as if something terrible might come and look in,' said little Mary, with a shudder. And then Margaret, roused by the stir, opened her feverish bright eyes and asked what news.

'You've been long,' she said. 'And were ye as pleased as you thought you would be, Isabel?'

Isabel had taken off her bonnet and pushed back the hair from her aching forehead. She looked up at her sister with the intention of replying, and then suddenly overpowered, hid her face in her hands and burst into tears.

'Ah, she may well cry,' said Jean. 'If I was ever mair shamed in my life! Isabel, the Captain's daughter, and a lady born!—She was that led away, Margaret, that she spoke like the rest.'

Isabel gave her stepmother an indignant warning look, and then rose, throwing aside her cloak, and placed herself behind Margaret's chair out of reach of those eyes which she could not bear.

‘Isabel—spoke—like the rest! I cannot understand,’ said Margaret faintly. ‘Are you meaning that it came upon her—in power?’ And the invalid turned round wistful and wondering. Could it be that God had passed over her in her suffering and given this gift to Isabel? Perhaps, for the first time, there came to Margaret a touch of that strange, wondering envy which all her friends had already felt in her behalf. She had been content that Ailie should have the privilege denied to herself. But Isabel! She turned and sought her sister with her eyes, wandering. ‘It is because I am not worthy,’ she said to herself, but not without a pang.

‘It was them that were speaking of you,’ said Isabel; ‘that you wanted faith; and that we were to pray, and that you were to be made to arise and go forth with Ailie to convert the world. It made me mad. I couldna sit still and keep silence. I cried out—“She shall have her will. It’s not for you to say”—and then Mr. John said, it was a lying spirit, and not from the Lord; and then I mind no more!’

‘My poor Isabel,’ said Margaret, with a smile of relief and tenderness; ‘it was true love that spoke and nothing else. But she’s not to go there again—neither Isabel nor little Mary. It can do them nothing but harm.’

‘It does me no harm that I ken,’ said Jean. ‘It’s awfu’ exciting whiles; but I never find myself the worse.’

‘You’re different from these young things,’ said Margaret; ‘but, oh! you’ll always mind—both of you—that it’s my wish you should not go there. I’m not uneasy about it for the present. After—when I’ll, maybe, not be here to speak—you’ll both mind.’

‘Go to your bed this moment, bairn,’ cried Jean, with the petulance of grief, ‘sitting glowering at Margaret with thae big e’en! but mind ye dinna waken my poor Jamie going up the stair. It’s getting late, and time we’re a’ in our beds after such a night.’

‘I am very comfortable,’ said Margaret. ‘I am not disposed to move. I’m better here than in my bed, with that glimmer of the fire. I was always fond of a fire. It’s like a kindly spirit with its bits of flames, crackling and chattering. I have it in my mind to speak to you both, if you’ll have patience and listen. Don’t contradict me, Isabel. I know I am going fast, and why should you say no? But it would be a real comfort to speak and tell you what I wish before I die.’

‘Oh, Margaret! anything but that,’ cried Isabel.

The invalid shook her head with an expression of pain. ‘Nothing but this,’ she said; ‘if you want

to cross me, and vex me, and drive me to be silent, it's in your power: but my sister will never do that. I must speak, if you would leave my heart at rest. Dry your eyes, Isabel. I'm selfish, but ye must yield to it. If it was you that were going, would not your heart burn to speak before you left to them you hold dear? and to-night you must think not of yourself, but of me.'

Jean had drawn the stool upon which her child had been seated towards the waning fire. She had taken out her handkerchief and dried her eyes with it, and turned her face towards her step-daughter. It was not in the good woman's nature to strive against an evident fact as poor Isabel did. She had long ago acknowledged to herself that Margaret was dying; and it was natural she should wish to give them such clear evidence of her happy frame of mind as should be edifying to the whole parish—and the 'good advice' that coming from dying lips is so doubly precious. Jean looked upon it as reasonable people in her class are wont to look, as a natural and seemly accompaniment of the situation. 'Come and see how a Christian can die; and oh, guard against sin and vanity, and think how poor all your pleasures will look when you come to a dying bed!' This was the kind of address which she expected from Margaret.

She dried her eyes, but kept her handkerchief

in readiness for further weeping, and composed herself to go through this solemn but necessary scene, with that curious rigid sense of the fit and becoming which is at once so conventional and so real in her class. And then there were 'worldly affairs' also to settle, though Jean was ashamed to confess even to herself, that she was capable of thinking of these. Except her own children, she loved no one so well as these two, whom she had watched over the greater part of their lives; but yet it would cost Margaret but a 'scrape of the pen' to secure Jamie's education, which was his mother's highest desire in this world; and Isabel would never miss it. With all these motives of interest in her mind, Jean affected no reluctance to listen to what she was content to receive as her stepdaughter's dying words,—and yet there was nothing that could have been proposed to her that she would not have done to save Margaret, or even to spare her an hour's suffering.

Isabel's feelings were of a very different kind. It seemed to her as if this night in her passion she had given up Margaret, and her eager longing to contradict herself, and to refuse once more to believe in the hopelessness of her sister's position, was met as by a stone wall, by the awful thought, that her impetuous words had not been her own, but dictated to her by God. The struggle within

her was indescribable. Had she stood out against that impulse, had she 'wrestled' with God according to the phraseology she was so habituated to hear, for Margaret's life, might not she have saved her sister? And she had given her up instead. In her impatience, and opposition, and pride, she had sacrificed Margaret. Oh! what if God had been tempting her as He was said to tempt the wavering and prove them? And she had chosen her own impetuous way to contradict the others, instead of beating down her pride and importuning Him on her knees, with their help, to undo all He had been doing, and heal by a miracle. What use was there in praying or struggling now when she had let the one opportunity, the moment of grace, thus pass from her—when she had accepted the wild suggestion, and given her consent that Margaret must die? Had she been her sister's murderer, Isabel's heart could scarce have beat more wildly. God was to her as a juggler, who had given her a chance and hidden it from her until it was rejected. 'I canna listen, I canna understand, my heart's broken!' she said, throwing herself into her father's old arm-chair in the corner. It was out of the way, almost out of sight; and at that distance, wrapping herself up in silence and reserve, allowing herself no look, nor word, nor touch of tenderness, she might

live it out, and satisfy Margaret. No other way was it possible. It was a strange group: the room so poorly lighted, with the two candles on the table, the fire smouldering in the grate, dying into dull embers; Margaret laid out on her invalid chair supported by pillows, her pale face absorbing all the light there was; Jean sitting crouched together on the stool with her honest, comely countenance, serious now and full of anxiety, turned to her step-daughter; and Isabel in her chair apart against the wall, as if she were not one of them—her face visible only in profile—her hands hanging listless in her lap—her eyes cast down. The dying girl, who did not understand it, was wounded by her sister's withdrawal; and yet what did it matter?—perhaps it left her more free to speak than if Isabel's tender eyes had been searching out the meaning in her face before she could utter it? Even the irritation and half-estrangement of a grief too poignant to be submissive, Margaret could understand.

‘I am thinking most of Bell,’ she said. ‘I’ve always thought most of Bell. It was natural. There were but the two of us in the world. And I’ve always been a woman, you’ll mind. When she was but a bairn playing on the hill-side, I was like her mother. That was my nature; and

now the sorest thought I have is to leave her without a guide in this hard world.'

Isabel could not speak—but she made a hasty, deprecating gesture with her hand.

'You would say, no,' said Margaret; 'but, Isabel, I know best. I am not vaunting myself, but I know best. For a while past you've been that you did not understand yourself. Your heart has been breaking to part with me, and yet you could not bear the sight of me. It is wearying to everybody when a poor creature takes so long to die. Oh, Bell, dinna say a word! Do you think I doubt you? I'm speaking of nature. And when I'm gone—so young as you are, and so hasty, and so feeling;—you've been a trouble to yourself and a mystery already, and what will you be then, with none near you to turn it all over in their minds?'

'If there's only me,' said Isabel, gazing into the vacant air before her, 'who will care?'

'I'll care wherever I am,' said Margaret. 'Oh, you canna think I could be happy in heaven, and my bonnie Bell in pain or sorrow. If you could but harden your heart against the movements that come and go—if ye would but take patience and think before you put your hand to aught. You were aye so hasty and so innocent. Do you mind when Robbie Spence fell into the

Loch, and her after him in a boat before a man could move?’

‘Ay, do I,’ said Jean, ‘and our ain Jamie when he broke his arm——’

‘It was Isabel that carried him home, that big laddie!’ said Margaret with pathetic smiles and tears; ‘aye hasty, though she was so young and so slight; but there’s worse danger than that. Ye might take burdens upon you that would be harder to carry. Oh, my bonnie Bell! if I could but have seen you in a good man’s hands!’

‘I’ll not hear you speak,’ cried Isabel, almost wildly; ‘am I wanting any man?’

‘If you would promise to take thought before you made up your mind,’ said Margaret; ‘I’m no myself when I think of my Isabel in trouble. If you would go to your room, and take a while to think. I canna tell what’s beyond the veil, nor what’s permitted *yonder*; but, Bell, I would aye promise you this—not to *appear* to be a terror to you. But if you would take time to think, and shut to your door, and say to yourself, “Margaret loved me well. She’s been dead and gone for years and years, but she couldna forget her sister wherever she is. What would Margaret say if she were here?” And, Bell, I promise you this—not to frighten you, or appear

like one coming from the dead, but to draw near and let you know what I'm thinking. Always if it is permitted—I canna tell.'

'Oh, Margaret! Margaret! I will die too,' cried Isabel, suddenly throwing herself at her sister's feet; 'I can bear no more.'

'No, there's plenty more to bear,' said her sister, caressing the head which was buried in her coverings. 'You cannot get out of the world like that. It is me that has the easy task. I have but to bide quiet and let Him do a'—me that took pride in being the wisest of the two, and able to guide you. And it is you that will have all to bear. But, Bell, it's a promise—you'll mind when the time comes? I will not say, Take this one or take that, for the heart is free. But take thought, Isabel!—Oh, my darling, take thought; and I'll always give you my opinion, not in your ear like the living that are bound in the flesh—but into your heart. And now,' she added, raising herself a little, with a cheerful tone in her voice, 'I have but two or three more words to say.'

Isabel did not move nor speak. She had her face hid in the coverlid as if she were weeping. But she did not weep. Her eyes were blazing, covered by her hands, like stars, parched

with drought, almost fiery in their light; her heart beat with the violence of a creature at the fullest height of life. But no one saw those wild heavings; she knelt there with her face hidden, and only her soft hair, which had fallen into disorder within reach of Margaret's hectic hand.

'You'll aye take care of her as long as may be,' Margaret went on addressing Jean. 'When she's older she'll understand. It is just that all should be hers,—everything we have; but she'll not depart from my desire about Jamie, you may be sure of that. And, Isabel, you'll no rebel, but let her be good to you, all her days. And be a good sister to the bairns. I'm real foolish,' she went on, with a smile; 'as if me being away would make such a change—I'm real vain. But you'll no blame me, you two.'

'Blame you!' said Jean, with her handkerchief to her eyes; 'O Margaret, you're ower thoughtfu'; but it was that the callant should be bred for a minister? that was what you meant?'

'If he turns his mind to it,' said Margaret. 'And I think that is all. You'll be good to *her*, Bell, and she'll be good to you. And keep little Mary out of the meetings. She's very keen and bright, brighter than Jamie. You'll not let

her go astray. And be kind to everybody for my sake,' Margaret said with a smile, which touched the very extremity of self-control, and had a certain flicker almost of delirium in it—'I am fit for no more.'

CHAPTER XIV.

DURING the week that ensued various events happened in the parish which kept up the local excitement. The prophets, who up to this time had been in external subjection to the authorities, at the first mention of restriction had thrown off all bonds. Mild as was the attempted control it was more than they would bear, and no sooner had they thus emancipated themselves from all habitual restraint than their higher pretensions began to develope.

The intimation that Ailie was about to set out on a mission to the general world could not but be exciting information to the parish; and at the same time there was an arrival of pilgrims from that outer world to inquire into the marvel. Commissions of investigation had already come from the Presbytery of the district, and even from Edinburgh and Glasgow, the news having spread quickly at a moment of general religious excitement; but

the inquirers from England, one of whom was soon discovered to be 'an English minister,' produced a more marked impression, and thrilled the Loch with indescribable pride. Though all united in this sense of modest complacency, there were many discussions and much controversy in the parish. The strange thing in the midst of them, was a thing which nobody could be indifferent to; and while all the adherents of the new light stood in one compact united body, their opponents were in two camps and had little in common. One half of them were the so well-named Moderates, people who thought religion a very respectable adjunct to life, to be produced on Sundays and at times of bereavement, and on other notable occasions, but who considered it an impertinence to have any feeling on the subject beyond that of dignified respect. The other half were reasonable people, who sympathized in the piety, the earnestness, the zeal of the prophets, but did not believe in their miraculous powers.

Common sense, being thus divided into bands, had, as was to be supposed, little chance against the intense emotion and wild sense of absolute right which distinguished the extreme party. There were meetings held in every corner of the parish in this exciting week at which Ailie made known her intention, and called upon her

disciples to pray for enlightenment to her, and especially for clearer direction what part of the world she was to turn to. That her 'tongue' was the language of some distant country she was convinced—and that were she but directed on this point, her path would be clear before her. In all other respects her mind was made up. She was going forth as the Apostles did without scrip or shoes. Her enthusiasm saw nothing appalling—nothing extraordinary in the thought.

'The Lord can make a simple lass stronger than an armed man,' she would say, with her visionary eyes gleaming; and it may be supposed how little weight against this inspired creature had suggestions of prudence. She wrought her audience to an amount of belief in her, and expectation in respect to her work, which might have produced wilder results still, but for another event going on by the side of this which exercised almost as strong a spiritual restraint on the district as Ailie's enthusiasm excited it. This was the dying of Margaret Diarmid, an operation so slow, so gradual, and so universally known, that the entire Loch seemed to assist at the great spectacle. Nothing of the kind could have happened in a more conventional community; but in this primitive patriarchal country such an event affected all.

Margaret was sinking day by day. She had made

her last step on the grass, taken her last draught of the fresh mountain air out of doors. From day to day it seemed impossible that she should ever again totter from one room to the other; and yet she managed to do it, retaining her hold upon her domestic place with a tenacity quite unlike the feebleness of her hold upon life. Sometimes, indeed, she had to be carried to the sofa in the parlour, from which she could still gain a glimpse of the Loch, and feel herself one of the family; but she would not relinquish this last stronghold of existence. 'It will be time enough to shut me up when I'm gone,' she would say, smiling upon them: and the doctor's orders had been that she should be humoured in everything. 'Nothing can harm her now,' he had said, with that mournful abandonment of precaution, which shows the death of hope. And the parish,—nay, 'the whole Loch,' held its breath and looked on.

It was such a tragedy as thrills human nature in all positions and circumstances—a kind of typical creature fair, and spotless, and sweet, a little raised in rank above the common level and immeasurably elevated in character, a holy maid, whose story of angelic musing and intercession and counsel, was in all hearts. 'Whisht, bairns,' the Presbyterian mother who was a born iconoclast and to whom a Saint Margaret in the Church would have been

the direst offence, would say to her children; 'whisht, bairns, or go further off. Here's where Margret comes to pray.' And now, Margret, maiden Margret, was about to accomplish her death, that last scene so full of universal interest, and so fascinating to human curiosity, in the sight of all. Her death-bed was as visible to them, so to speak, as was the cottage on the hill, in which it was taking place. 'Did ye hear what Margret said last night?' one passenger would say to another on the road. Even in the smithy a certain subdued tone would fall on the men, when one of them asked, 'Do ye ken if there is any news of Margret at the Glebe?'

Unconscious words of hers like feathered seed were floating all about the Loch. Her little parlour was a resort to which the whole neighbourhood went to pay its homage with that open, undisguised curiosity as to the words and looks of the dying, which belongs to a peasant population everywhere.

'It's but natural we should a' want to see her. She's on her death-bed, ye ken,' said the women in the village; 'And ye couldna see a greater sight,' Jenny Spence added with mournful pride. 'I would bring a' the world to see her if I had my will.' Ministers from other parishes would visit Mr. Lothian for the express purpose of being introduced to Margret's presence-chamber. Even 'the English minister,'

who had come to inquire into the tongues, sought that privilege, and came out of the Glebe Cottage after it with oily conventional thanksgivings, but a real tear in the corner of his eye. The importance of the event thus taking place before them kept the parish from abandoning its wits altogether in the other excitement. The dying saint kept the living prophets in check.

And Margaret for the first time accepted the homage that was done her. She lay on her sofa in something of that soft stupor and fascination which is said to lessen the pains of death in some cases of a violent exit from the world. Hers was the reverse of violent; but yet Death so charmed her as he approached that pain seemed to depart along with hope. She lay in a strange calm, ready to see whosoever approached her, meeting her visitors with her faint smile, answering their questions as far as her strength permitted, sometimes letting fall a tender word of spontaneous utterance.

‘But ye’re real happy in your mind; ye’re sure o’ your Saviour. O, Margaret, there’s nae clouds or darkness about you!’ the visitors would say, gazing with insatiable human curiosity into that twilight which precedes the everlasting night. Sometimes she only smiled for her reply; sometimes she would answer to satisfy them, —answers like those strange words in Scripture

which say all for the well-being of the individual, but throw no light upon the darkling way which every man must tread for himself. Sometimes, when she was weary, she would 'wander' in her mind, and murmur her broken thoughts half aloud; and it was said in the parish that if Margaret was wonderful when she was *herself*, she spoke like an angel out of heaven when her mind was thus confused and overcast.

'As if God was that good to her, that she was like His petted bairn,' the women said with tears. And such a sight affected the entire country-side.

As for Isabel it seemed to her that she lived in a dreadful dream. The vague terror that had been hanging over her so long had settled down, and could no longer be escaped; it seemed years to her since the time when she had believed it might not be,—or at least hoped that it might have been delayed. As for her individual story, that might have happened ages since, to judge by her feelings. In the early days, when still she heard the pebble strike against the window, and her lover's whistle on the hill, a strange sense of something out of date came over her. And when that stopped,—and for days together there was no mention of him,—Isabel would go back into her heart by moments and gather her relics together, and think of Stupylton as of some one long lost, whom she should

never see again. Sometimes her heart quickened into one great pulsation like a sob, when she heard his voice at the door asking, as everybody asked, for Margaret. 'It's kind of him to mind—so long,' she said to herself. With Margaret she had gone into the valley of the shadow of death, and its first effect had been, or seemed to have been, to quench out all her personal identity. Her impetuous soul was hushed, her eager heart stilled. And constant watching, and the want of regular sleep, had rapt her into that curious exalted condition of body which nature's hunger for rest, and the impossibility of taking it, produce in all watchers. She was half asleep and half insensible many an hour when she sat by Margaret in her dozes of weariness. The fascination of death worked upon her almost as it did upon her sister. She went about a silenced creature, feeling upon her the mesmeric influence of the lion which was about to make its spring. They were going through that dark valley, the two sisters together, hand in hand as they had gone from their birth; and one would never emerge from its shadow. What was to become of the other—if her life was to terminate in its shade, or continue as in a dream, or blot itself out like something too faint to continue, Isabel could not tell. The power of thought seemed to be taken from her; all that perplexing

agitation of a life beyond which had driven her wild with self-disgust, and yet thrilled her with involuntary emotion, went out of her like an extinguished light. To remember when Margaret should have her cordial—when she should be made to swallow the wine which kept her alive a little longer—which was the hour for the draught that soothed her cough—and which for the reluctant mouthful of food which sustained her strength, was all that Isabel was capable of. She was rapt up in this feverish routine of little occupations as in the rhythm of some spell which stupified her. People came and went, but she scarce saw or heard them. She could not remember afterwards, though she racked her brain to recall them, the words which her sister said to herself. The wine, and the medicine, and the cordial, and the spoonful of something which it was her highest object on earth to make Margaret swallow; her feverish doze and feverish waking, which went on without distinction of night from day, or day from night—to this had come Isabel's impetuous life. Her stepmother was continually by her side to help, and entreated her with tears in her eyes to take rest and food.

‘You'll kill yourself too, and then what will become of us?’ said Jean.

But even that thought did not rouse the girl. ‘You are not her only sister like me,’ she would

answer drearily, resuming always the same strange stupifying round.

Perhaps it was because Jean Campbell, too, was in something of the same stupor of exhausted nature, produced by constant watching and want of sleep, that one visitor, whom they had guarded against for days, found his way to Margaret's bedside. The children had been set to watch on the road, to warn the cottage if the very shadow of Mr. John fell upon the hill, and had repeatedly brought back news of him, which set the watchers on their guard. But, as it happens so often when such a watch goes on for days, there came a moment when the little scouts thought of something else, and when all other visitors were absent, and the road left open for the enemy. Jean had withdrawn to her kitchen while Margaret slept, or seemed to sleep—and had thrown herself, worn out, into the great arm-chair covered with checked linen, where she nodded by the fire. Isabel sat at the foot of the sofa, with her eyes on her sister. And those eyes, too, were veiled by the drooping eyelids, in the fatigue and awful tedium of the protracted watch. The afternoon was darkening, the gloaming had almost come; but it was better to keep silent, even in the dark, than to move and wake Margaret from anything that looked like sleep. Thus the anxious household slumbered at its post,

overtaken by weariness and security. How long the doze lasted none of them could tell, but when some faint movement of her sister's made Isabel start from her insensibility, it froze the blood in her heart, and almost woke her to positive exertion, to see the man they all feared seated by the sofa on which Margaret lay. He had lifted the latch, and come in noiselessly, while they all slept in their exhaustion. There was still light enough to show his dark face, gazing intently upon the white vision on the sofa. All the hectic had gone from Margaret's cheek. She was as pale as if the end had already come, and lay with her blue-veined eyelids ajar, as it were, the long lashes a little raised from the white cheeks, the pale lips parted with her painful breath. Mr. John sat by the side of the sofa, shadowing over her like a destroying angel. Had it been Death himself in person, the sight could scarcely have been more startling. His countenance was working in every line with suppressed but violent emotion, his lips were moving, his eyes fixed intently upon the face of the sleeper. He had stretched out one hand over Margaret's couch, not touching her, like one who gave a benediction or enforced a command. Isabel sat and watched, paralyzed by the sight. There seemed no power in her to stir or speak. And Margaret still slept, moving some-

times uneasily under that gaze, which seemed capable of penetrating the insensibility of death, but never unclosing her liquid, half-seen eyes, or giving any sign of consciousness. By degrees, half-audible words began to drop from the prophet's lips.

‘Life, life!’ Isabel could hear him say. ‘My life for hers! My salvation for her life!’

The passion in him gradually became less controllable. It was with God he was struggling, with a vehemence of desire which left no room for reason or for reverence. After a while, he slid downwards upon his knees, always noiseless in the supreme urgency of his passion. He held his hand up over the couch, maintaining the painful attitude with a rigidity beyond all ordinary power.

‘I will not let Thee go, till Thou bless her,—till Thou save her!’ Isabel heard him say.

All this appeared suddenly before her, awaking out of her dream. There was not a sound in the house, except the clock ticking through all with its monotonous, merciless beat, and Margaret's irregular breathing, now louder, now lower, a fitful human accompaniment. At last, the power of self-control could go no further.

‘Rise, rise, woman beloved!’ he cried, hoarsely, springing to his feet. ‘I’ve won you out of the hands of Death!’

The harsh agony of the cry woke Margaret. He was standing between her and the faint light from the window, bending down over her from his great height with outstretched arms; his face invisible in the darkness which was made doubly dark by his shadow. Thus suddenly called back from her temporary oblivion, she woke with a little start. 'Isabel!' she said, instinctively. And then in a moment it became apparent to Margaret that another ordeal had come to her worse than the paroxysms of failing breath or palpitating heart in which Isabel could help her. With an instinctive thought for her sister, she raised herself slightly upon her pillows. 'My dear, my dear, you're not to blame,' said Margaret, with a little moan. She had hoped to get out of the world without this trial, but now that it had come it must be borne.

'She is not to blame,' said Mr. John. 'Nobody is to blame. I came stealing in like a thief in the night: they shut me out from you as if I would harm you—I that am ready to give my life for you. Margaret, arise! I've won you out of the hands of Death!'

'Oh, if you would not waste this madness on me!' said Margaret. 'Isabel, let him stay. Death thinks no shame and feels no fear. I'm glad that I can speak to him before I go. John Diarmid, dinna drive me wild. This life is no so grand a

gift that I should seek it out of your hands. God's will is more to me than your will. Sit down by my death-bed; and oh, man, be silent, if ye have any heart! It's for me to speak now.'

'I will do what you will,—whatever you will,' he said: 'Margaret! if you will but listen to the Lord's voice and rise up and live! Can I stand by and see you die?'

A little impatient sigh burst from Margaret's breast. 'You stood by,' she said, 'once before, and took all the light and all the sweetness out of life. For once I will speak. I have been proud, but it's not the time for pride now. O, John Diarmid, it is fit it should be your hand to call me back to life as you call it! I would never have upbraided you—no, not by a word. It was a thing settled you were never to come here. But now I will speak before I die.'

'Speak!' he cried, going down upon his knees with a crouch of submission in his great frame. 'Say what you will. I am vile to all and vilest to you. You are as God to me, Margaret, Margaret! But take the life I have won for you and never see me more.'

'The life you have won!' said Margaret, with a tone which in any other voice would have been disdain. But her voice was like that of a dove, and had no notes of scorn in it. Yet soft as the approach to contempt was, the dying girl was re-

morseful of it. 'I must not speak like this,' she said; 'and you must not speak to rouse the ill spirit in me, and me so near the pleasant heavens. Whisht! I canna think shame now, though Isabel is there to hear. John Diarmid, once I was as nigh loving you as now——'

'You're nigh hating me!' he said, with a great sob breaking his voice.

'No; as I'm nigh being free of all the bonds of this world,' said Margaret. 'I was little more than a bairn; I was like Bell. They said you meant me harm; but I never thought you meant me harm—'

As the pathetic voice went on John Diarmid bowed his head lower and lower till at last he sank prostrate on the floor by the side of the sofa. It was her last words that brought him to this abject self-humiliation. He knew better than she did. A groan burst out of the man's labouring breast. Even Isabel—sitting in a trance at her sister's feet, roused up out of her stupor, her cheeks burning with a wild flush of jealousy and shame, half wild that Margaret had descended from her saintly pedestal to avow the emotions of earth, and furious to think that any man had shared her heart—yet felt an unwilling movement of pity for the prostrate sinner. Margaret only, continued without any change.

'I never thought you meant me harm,' she

said, once more smiting with the awful rod of her innocence the man at her feet. 'But when I heard what you had been, and what you had done, the light died out of the world. I am not blaming you. It was God that gave me my death, and not man; but from that hour I had no heart to live. Why should a woman strive to live, and fight against all the unseen powers, when this world's so sore-defiled, and not a spot that she can set her foot on,—no one that she can trust? For me I had no heart to struggle more.'

A certain note of plaintive self-consciousness had come into the steady voice, broken only by weakness, with which Margaret told her tale, as if it were a history so long past that all emotion had died out of it. And so it was. Her almost love had faded in her heart; but there still remained a sense of pity for the young forlorn creature whose eyes had been thus opened, and of whom Margaret had half forgotten that it was herself

For the moment in her abstraction, in her deadly calm, she was well-nigh cruel. She took no notice of the man who lay abject at her feet, with his face to the ground. Her great spiritual eyes in those pale circles which approaching death had hollowed out, gazed wistfully into the darkness. Perhaps it was the convulsive movement of the prostrate figure by her which roused her

at last. Suddenly she stirred, and, putting out a white thin hand, laid it softly on his bowed head. 'John Diarmid,' she said, softly, 'are you walking with God now?'

He seized her hand, raising his head from where he lay, and knelt upright by her, pressing it to his breast, which heaved violently as with sobs. What compunction was in his heart, what sudden knowledge of himself, what remorse, no one could say. It was dark, and they were to each other as ghosts in the gloom. Margaret could see his gestures, but nothing more; if, indeed, anything more could have been learnt from the bent head and hidden countenance. Her voice grew softer and softer when she broke the silence again.

'I know you 're moved to the heart,' she said. 'I am not doubting you *now*. You are changed, and I see you 're changed. And if you would but tell me there were no more such thoughts in your heart, and that you were walking with God,—then I would feel there were some prayers answered before I die.'

'You have prayed for me, Margaret!' he cried. The passionate man was subdued to a child. His great frame was shaken by sobs; his eyes were wet with tears. He had not another word to say; his passion, his inspiration, all the prophetic pretensions which clothed him, had vanished like so many

cobwebs. He knelt by the purest love of his life with a heart broken and speechless. She dying, and he without power to save.

‘Ay!’ she said, laying her hand once more upon his head; and then there was silence broken only by the groan or sob that came from John Diarmid’s heart. Darkness covered the group in which the supremest of human emotions were working so strongly. They looked like spectres hidden in the silence and the gloom; yet there was life at its last struggle, always most powerful, most sublime at the moment before its ending; and love in its great anguish, heart parting from heart. All that was fictitious, all that was out of nature, had floated away at the touch of Margaret’s dying hand. Isabel sank on her knees too, and wept—she knew not why; and thus one awful silent moment passed over the three; or rather life and time stood still to leave room for one last encounter and farewell.

The next minute familiar sounds and sights broke in. Jean Campbell, with a candle in her hand, came pushing open the closed door. ‘Eh, you’re in the dark, like craws in the mist,’ she said, as she approached.

At the sound of her voice John Diarmid sprang to his feet, rising like a giant out of the darkness. He bent down his head suddenly over Margaret,

pressed his motionless lips to her forehead, with a movement of despair, which was no kiss, and passing the astonished woman who held up her candle to look at him, rushed forth like the wind, letting the night and the chill air enter as he plunged forth.

How long Jean might have stood spell-bound by consternation, but for this sudden puff of cold air which blew about the flame of her candle, it is impossible to say; but she was roused instantly by fear of the cold for Margaret, and ran in haste to close the doors.

‘Weirdless loon!’ she cried, as she came back, ‘without so much sense as to think the cauld would harm her. Eh, Isabel, how could you let him in to vex her? It was a’ my fault dovering and sleeping in my chair. My lamb, ye’re weariet to death?’

‘Ay, very near to death,’ said Margaret, with a smile; ‘but there’s nobody to blame; and I’m glad I saw him at the last.’

‘So lang as he didna drive you distracted wi’ his prophecies and his miracles,’ said Jean, looking anxiously with wistful eyes from one to another. Isabel had risen at her stepmother’s entrance, and drying the tears from her cheeks, hastily began to arrange the coverings over her sister; she shrank from Jean’s look, feeling herself somehow to blame,

and angry at the thought that had the other watcher been awake this trial would not have come to Margaret. But, as for Margaret herself, she made no effort to avoid Jean's eye; she lay back on her pillows panting sometimes for breath, with a humid softness about her great shining eyes and a quivering smile on her lips. Very nearly tired to death; and yet ever patient, waiting till a little more should achieve the end.

'I was glad to see him at the last,' she repeated; 'if it had been said to me that I must do it, I would have rebelled and resisted. But now that it has come without our doing, I am glad. He is not so ill as folk think.'

'Folk think him a prophet frae heaven!' said Jean, whose curiosity to know what had passed grew greater and greater, 'and it's no doubt as a prophet he found his way in here.'

'Then he's not so good as folk think,' said Margaret, 'not so good and not so ill; but craving for he knows not what, and torn by good and evil that are struggling for him. I'm glad to have seen him at the last.'

And all the evening through she lay musing with her eyes open and awake, taking no notice of her anxious attendants. If ever Isabel through all the weary time of watching was angry with her sister it was this night. To think that Margaret,

so pure and holy, and knowing this man what he was, could yet think of him, let her mind rest upon him!—it seemed a desecration to Isabel. But Jean, who was older, understood better.

‘Whatever may be said against him—and there’s plenty to say—he was awfu’ fond o’ our Margret,’ she said, wiping her eyes with her apron, ‘and wha was to forbid the innocent thing to be fond o’ him? Na, Isabel lass! though a lad may be unworthy, ye canna break heart’s love like a cotton thread. And if she’s praying for him in her mind, bless her! are we to complain?’

But whether she prayed—or whether she did but muse in the quiet of that immense stillness which preceded death, of all the wonderful might-have-been that lay behind her, Margaret said not a word. And the name of John Diarmid was never heard from her lips again.

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Mr. John rushed from the door of the Glebe Cottage mad with grief and sorrow and a sense of impotence, it was not to return to his home or to enter upon any of his usual duties, even such as might have seemed akin to the passion and excitement in his mind. He went up the hill-side without knowing where he went, rushing into the clouds and rain which were sweeping across the invisible braes. There had been a pause in the deluge when he had stolen into Margaret's parlour—the shrine of her sanctity; but now the storm had recommenced. The rain beat in his face as he emerged into the outer world; the wind buffeted him as if it would have thrown him down; the trees on the opposite side of the way shook all their rustling heavy boughs at him in the darkness. To himself he seemed pursued, driven forth, defied and isolated by all nature. Was it that he had killed her? He had taken from her, she said, all heart to struggle against

her fate. He had murdered Margaret; and notwithstanding all the supernatural signs in which he trusted, his power had failed him at her bedside. Her soft words had paralyzed him—the wild prayers he had been uttering had been taken out of his very mouth; all his trust in himself, in his own emotions, in the change that had passed upon him, had been overthrown. Was he truly a better man than he had once been? He demanded an answer hotly from himself as he rushed on he knew not whither in the face of the wind and rain, struggling forward, and feeling a certain satisfaction in the struggle, up the hill.

And he did not answer, as he might have done, that through all his wickedness and his righteousness, the time when he was a reprobate, and the time when he was a prophet, he had been pursuing neither vice nor virtue, but excitement, emotion, the keen sensations which were life to him. He was not sufficiently enlightened to see so much as that. He considered the question not as a matter of temperament, but as a matter of guilt. As he inquired into his own motives, fierce answers rose up against him. No, he had not served God for God's sake, but for his own; to get the things he craved; to have power to do miracles and wonders; to sway and move the people round him; to feel that the high heaven was touched by his prayers; and,

above all, to save Margaret, the creature whom he loved. He had loved her with hopes of winning her love; and then he had loved her with the bitter love of one who feels that he himself has revolted from him the rising affection; and now he had to stand by impotent and feel that he could not save her, that he was as nothing in her life!

Even at this moment the thought galled him beyond all expression. Had she been dying for him, he could have borne it; had she accused him, there would have been a certain consolation in the sense that he was thus important to her. But he was nothing to her. She spoke to him out of her calm with the voice of one who had long escaped from any influence of his. Nothing to her! less than nothing! Not able for a second to impose upon her that estimate of his own power which he held himself; not able to excite or move her—a solemn, saintly, dying creature, whom nothing he said could rouse either into hope or despair. His heart had melted into utter self-abandonment under the humiliation of her tender words and soft admonitions; but now that he had time to think, a different impression came over him. If he had been able to disturb her as he had done before,—if her heart had failed her while he spoke,—if he had felt that it was he who had the mastery, the wild agitation which now raged in his heart

would have been less violent. The dark waters of Loch Goil were glimmering just before him ere he arrested his steps; he had climbed and descended the hill without knowing how; he was drenched to the skin, beaten by the wind, wild, half crazed with the multitude of his thoughts; all his new-born sense of power, all his confidence in his changed condition, were gone. He was a man abandoned by hope, and at the same time a prophet forsaken of the Lord.

Where he had stopped short, John Diarmid stood, he did not know how long, gazing into the night. What he saw was the pale glimmer of the Loch before him, its waves running high and breaking against the rocks, sending a salt spray into his face along with the rain; and the shadow of the great hills opposite glooming down upon him with crushing awful shadows. Between him and them, he knew well how dark was the gloomy water, how deep, and wild, and subject to storms. If a man were to go half-a-dozen steps further, scarcely so much, down the steep rocky beach, the chances were that the Clyde pouring its tide up into the hollows of the hills, would suck him down and out to sea, and that no one would ever be the wiser for that conclusion of all troubles. The thought passed through his mind with all the distinctness of a thing about to happen. Ten minutes buffeting perhaps in the

wild water, then silence and quiet, and only a white passive speck tossed about at the pleasure of the waves. The tide was going out, the strong current setting seaward. A drowned creature might be driven by Arran before the morning,—out into the Atlantic, where never human eye should light on it till the sea gave up its dead. How the black waves would suck it away, and play with the passive thing, as with a log upon the water! and no one would be the wiser. He never knew how long he stood with the rain beating on him, and the spray dashing salt into his face; but when he came to himself he had turned his back on that scene, and was rushing wildly along, not even by the road, but through the heather, to Loch Diarmid once more.

It had been not quite six o'clock when he left the Glebe. It was nearly midnight now when he forced his way through the tough stalks of the heather, crushing them down with his feet, stumbling into the forests of whins, going wildly through the yellowing brachens. Wild creatures rushed out of their coverts as he crossed the braes; it was too dark to see any path, even had he cared to confine himself to it. All was silent and black when he drew near the first inhabited place, the little cluster of cottages above the Manse to which he directed his steps. It was there

that Ailie Macfarlane, his co-adjutatrix and predecessor, lived with her father and mother. Not a light was visible in any window. The little congregation of souls, wrapt in the kind protecting darkness, slept and took no note of all the surrounding mysteries of the night. Mr. John went up to Ailie's door and knocked, waking echoes which seemed to go over all the parish, and rousing the dogs at Lochhead out of the light sleep of their vigilance. It was some time before he had any reply. Then the lattice window, which was on a level with the door, was softly opened. It was Ailie herself who looked out, her fair locks braided about her head like a saint in a picture.

‘Who are ye? what do ye want?’ she said, with a certain anxiety in her voice. ‘Is it a summons to me too?’

Mr. John was too much pre-occupied to observe what she said, but he discerned the signs of some emotion, and took it for fear.

‘Fear me not,’ he said, ‘I’ve come, from wrestling with the Lord upon the hill—and, Ailie, I have a message from Him to you. Fear me not.’

‘I’m fearing nothing,’ said the girl, with momentary surprise—for even had she not been protected by her exceptional character, to speak with ‘a friend’ from a chamber window, even in the middle of the night, was counted no sin on Loch

Diarmid. 'I'm fearing nothing,' she repeated, steadily, 'but my heart's sore and my een are heavy. Say quick what you have to say.'

But she was still perfectly calm when he crossed the paling of the little garden and came close to the sill of the window at which she stood. He was without and she within; but they were near enough to speak low, and even to touch each other. Ailie drew the shawl in which she was wrapped closer round her and shivered in the night air; but did not tremble at the vicinity of the man whose haggard aspect she could dimly perceive. His eyes gleamed wildly at her in the darkness; the rain was falling on him soaking into his wet coat; a sense of something wild and awful came over Ailie as she gazed at him from behind the shelter of her little casement. 'You've been out all night on the hill,' she said, with compassion in her voice, 'you're wet and miserable and wearied; and it's night, when nae man can work. The Lord will let His message bide till the morn.'

'It must be said to-night,' he said, 'do you think a man watches and wrestles with Him in the night and the storm for nought? I speak not of my will, and I will not ask you what is yours. Ailie, the Lord has revealed to me that you and I must go forth together to His work, bound together like Christ and His Church. You cannot go alone

for you're young and weak. He has appointed me to you for a protector. He has said unto me, O man, fear not to take unto thee thy wife!'

Ailie retreated a step from the window with a little cry of alarm; but the next moment she returned and bent out towards him with almost a tone of tenderness in her voice. There had been a certain thrill of fear and wonder at first; but pity overcame every other feeling. 'Oh, Mr. John,' she said, softly, bending towards him, forgetting in her natural emotion the fictitious title of their prophetic brotherhood, and dropping back unawares into common use and wont: 'what has happened this night has driven you wild. It's grief and sorrow—it's no the Lord.'

'What has happened this night I know not,' said Mr. John, in his exaltation, 'what I know is the word and revelation of the Lord. This world has nothing to do with what has passed between Him and me on the hill. Satan has tried me sore and sifted me like wheat. I have been in the desert like the prophet. I have heard the thunder and the storm and the earthquake; but He was not in the storm; and now there has come this small still voice. Ailie, this word is to me and to thee. Prepare! I would go forth, if that were possible, as soon as it is day.'

Then there was a pause. The clouds parted,

driven by the angry wind, and the sky lightened faintly with a pale gleam which showed the man's worn face and wild aspect as he stood before the window. No human sentiment was in his voice. It was not love that prompted this extraordinary intimation. His eyes were turned away from her, wandering into the darkness. And nature was not dead in Ailie's breast: she struggled against the sudden claim thus made upon her. Wonder, and horror, and natural repulsion, rose in her mind. And yet who was she to stand against the Lord?

'Oh, no, no,' she cried; 'we must wait. There will be clearer light. If such a thing as this is to be, it will be established in the mouth of two or three witnesses. I wouldna trust to myself, my lane. Oh, no, no; we must wait for clearer light.'

'Take heed that ye perish not from lack of faith,' said Mr. John. 'Take heed that you despise not the Lord's message. Is it a little thing that He should drive a man forth to the hill like Elijah to charge him with this; and that you should set His revelation at nought,—you whom He has gifted with His Spirit? The guilt of the gifted is more than the guilt of common folk. If the flesh is content or not, what matters? Ailie Macfarlane, hear the Word of the Lord! and see ye sin not against the Holy Ghost.'

A shudder ran through Ailie's sensitive frame. 'No,' she cried, 'no, no, never that. I'm His handmaid to do His pleasure. But oh, there's nought can be done this night. The night's for rest and thought and prayer. It may be the Lord will show His will to me too. And there's my father and my mother,' cried Ailie with a little gush of tears. She had contemplated leaving them in the solemnity of her prophetic fervour, a Virgin-missionary, without realisation of the griefs of nature. But this new suggestion threw her back upon her natural self. She faltered and withdrew further back into the gloom of her chamber. 'The Lord has aye shown me His will Himself, sooner or later; and I canna in one moment turn my back upon my kith and kin.'

'Let the dead bury their dead,' said her extraordinary suitor, in a voice which seemed to ring round the house like a groan. And then he added with a tone of authority which struck chill to Ailie's heart: 'Hitherto you have been a law to yourself, and no man has been set over you; but the wife must take the Lord's will through her husband who is her head.'

Ailie fell down on her knees trembling, and held fast by the sill of the window.

'I'm no man's wife,' she cried; 'and I'm feared and bewildered, and see naething clear. Oh, for

the Lord's sake, gang away from me for this night !'

Mr. John turned his eyes which had been fixed on the pale opening in the clouds to her face. 'Yes,' he said, 'I'll go; the flesh can bear no more. Go on your knees to Him, and not to me. And He may make it clear to you if He thinks fit; but in light or in darkness I call on you to obey. Is His servant to stand still because there is no light ?'

'I'll pray !' cried Ailie, with a gasp. And he withdrew from the window, stumbling over the little flower-borders in the cottage-garden, and gazing vaguely up into the white break in the sky. His haggard, pale face fascinated her in its abstraction. She rose, and closed her window with nervous hands, still gazing at him; when suddenly another window opened—that of the attic over the cottage door.

'Wha 's there?' cried a voice. Instinctively Ailie shrank back, but yet kept her ear at the opening that she might hear. It was the voice of her mother, who had been roused by the conversation below.

'Wha are ye, disturbing honest folk in the middle of the night, and what do you want here ?'

‘It’s me,’ said Mr. John, raising his head listlessly. ‘I was sent to her with a word from the Lord.’

Old Janet Macfarlane uttered a hasty exclamation. ‘I’m meaning no reproach to you, Mr. John; but I wish your words would come in the day.’

Mr. John made no answer. He stepped over the paling once more, and paused at the door, immediately under the old woman’s window. Fatigue was beginning to tell upon him: his passion was dying out. He had no longer any strength to defend himself. Perhaps Janet’s heart smote her as she saw his listless step; or perhaps the natural rural impulse of communicating information was her on’y motive. She paused a moment, searching in her mind something keen and sharp to say to him—but finding nothing, bent out from her window over the leafy, embowered porch.

‘Mr. John,’ she said, with solemnity; ‘nae doubt you’ve heard the news?’

‘What news?’

‘Margaret at the Glebe is wi’ her Saviour,’ said the old woman. ‘She died at ten o’clock. Good night.’

The noise of the window closing rang over all

the silent Loch and silent heavens, and went echoing, echoing away into the hollows of the hills. It struck the man in his despair like the thunder of dissolving earth and heaven.

THE END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.