

THE PRIMROSE PATH.

—

VOL. I.

“A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet, not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute ;
No more.”

— “the primrose path of dalliance”

HAMLET, *Act I, Scene III.*

THE PRIMROSE PATH.

A CHAPTER

IN THE

ANNALS OF THE KINGDOM OF FIFE.

BY

MRS. OLIPHANT

AUTHOR OF

“The Chronicles of Carlingford,”

&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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SEARCY

TO

THE VERY REVEREND THE PRINCIPAL:

THE RIGHT REVEREND

THE MODERATOR:

ONE OF THE CHIEF LIVING ILLUSTRATIONS OF FIFE:

FROM

THE HUMBLE CHRONICLER OF THE KINGDOM

GREETING!

June, 1878.

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THE PRIMROSE PATH.

CHAPTER I.

THE old house of Earl's-hall stands on a long strip of land between two rivers, in that county affectionately known to its inhabitants as the kingdom of Fife. It is not a great house, but neither is it an insignificant one, though fortune has brought the family low which once held some primitive state in it: a quaint grey dwelling, not formed for modern wants. To make an ordinary dining-room and drawing-room in it would be as impossible as to content an ordinary band of modern servants with the accommodation provided in the low vaulted chambers below, which are all the

old house possesses in the way of kitchen or servants' hall ; but when you see its grey gable and turret projecting from among a cloud of trees, the old Scotch manor-house looks as imposing as any castle. The belt of wood round the little park, or what in Scotland is called "the policy," is old too, and as well-grown as the winds will permit. It is true that a great turnip-field, reaching up to the walls of the garden which lies on the southern side, has been thrust in between the house and the wood, and the policy is as ragged as a poor pony badly groomed and badly fed ; but these are imperfections which a little money could remedy very quickly. The house itself is very peculiar in form and consisted once of two buildings built on two sides of a court, and united by a mere screen of wall, in which is an arched doorway surmounted by a coat of arms. Probably, however, the second of these buildings which has now fallen into ruins, was a modern addition, the other being the ancient body of the house. It is of grey stone, three stories high, with a round turret at the western side, which rises

higher than the rest by one flight of the old winding stone staircase, and has a little square battlement and terrace at the top, from which you look abroad upon a wide landscape, not beautiful perhaps, but broad and breezy, rich fields and low hills, and vacant sea. To the right lies the village, with its church built upon a knoll in the rich plain, and its houses, grey, red, and blue, as the topping of chill bluish slate or rough-red generous tile predominates, clinging about the little height. Cornfields wave and nestle round this centre of rural population, and behind are the hills of Forfarshire, and a further line of the Grampians, half seen among the mists. The softly swelling heights of the Lomonds lie in the nearer distance, and in the foreground the Eden sweeps darkly blue, with a line of breakers showing the bar at its mouth, towards the low sandhills and stormy waters of St. Andrews Bay, a place in which no ship likes to find itself; while over the low sweep of the sands St. Andrews itself stands misty and fine, its long line of cliff and tower and piled houses

ending in the jagged edge of the ruined castle, and the tall mystery of St. Rule's, the square tower which baffles archæology. Such is the scene, rural and fresh and green, with a somewhat chill tone of colour, and many a token of the winds in the bare anatomy and shivering branches of the trees, and with no great amount of beauty to boast of: yet ever full of attraction and suggestion, as such a width of firmament, such a great circle of horizon, such variety of sea and land and hills and towers must ever be.

Through the doorway in the wall, which is rich with rough but effective ornamentation, boldly cut string-courses, which look as if there might once have been some kind of fortification to be supported, you enter a little court, from which the house opens—a square court, turfed and green, and containing a well and an old thorn tree. The ruined portion of the house, roofless and mouldering, is on the east side; the habitable part on the west, an oblong block of building; and at the well, on the day when this history opens, two figures, one old, one young, both full

in the gleam of westering sunshine which breaks over the wall. One half of the court is in deepest shade, but this all bright, so bright that the girl shades her eyes with one hand, while with the other she pumps water into the old woman's pail, who stands with arms akimbo, shaking her head and giving vent to that murmur of remonstrative disapproval, inarticulate yet very expressive, which is made by the tongue against the palate.

"Tt-tt-tt," says old Bell. "If ever there was a masterful miss and an illwilly, and ane that will have her ain way!"

"How can I be masterful and a miss too?" said the girl, laughing. Her arm grew tired, however, with the pumping, and she left off before the vessel was half full. "There!" she said, "I'll cry on Jeanie to do the rest for you. I'm tired now."

"Oh, Miss Margret! but you need not cry upon Jeanie. I am fit enough, though I'm old, to do that much for mysel."

"It's the sun has got into my eyes," said the girl; and she strayed away into

the shade, and seated herself upon a heavy old wooden chair that had been placed close to the door. The sun would not have seemed unbearably hot to anyone accustomed to his warmer sway ; but Margaret Leslie was not used to overmuch sunshine, and what she called the glare fatigued her. Such a mild glare as it was, a suffusion of soft light, more regretful at giving so little than triumphant in delight over its universal victory ! It had been rainy weather, and the light had a wistful suddenness in it, like a smile in wet eyes. Margaret withdrew into the shade. She was a girl of seventeen or so, the only daughter of this old grey house, the only blossom of youth about it except Jeanie in the kitchen, whom she did not “ cry on ” to help old Bell—not so much because old Bell declined the help, but because she herself forgot next moment all about it. Margaret had no idea that to say she would “ cry upon ” Jeanie was not the best English in the world. She was as entirely and honestly of the soil as her maid was ; a little more careful, perhaps, of her dialect ; not “ broad,” indeed, in her use of the vernacular, because

of the old father upstairs—but with an accent which would make a young lady of Fife of the present day shiver, and a proud and determined aversion to the “high English” which only disapproving visitors ever spoke, ladies who looked with alarm upon her, suggesting schools and governesses. Nowhere could there have been found a more utterly neglected girl than Margaret, whom nobody, except old Bell, had ever taken any care of, all her life. Bell had been very careful of her; had kept her feet warm and her head cool, had seen that she ate her porridge all the mornings of her childhood, and that there were no holes in her stockings; but what more could Bell do? She discoursed her young mistress continually, putting all kinds of homely wisdom into her head; but she could not teach her French, or to play the piany, which were the only accomplishments of which Bell was even aware.

“It’s no my fault,” the old woman said, putting out her open palms with a natural gesture of mild despair. “If I were to speak till I was hoarse (and so I have), what would that do to mend the maitter?”

The maister he turns a deaf ear, though I was to charm ever so wisely; and Miss Margret hersel'—ch, Miss Margret hersel', if she could learn a' that a young leddy should, in twa minutes by the clock it might be done; but hold her to one thing I canna', it wants somebody with more authority than me; and a bonny creature like that, and with a fortune coming till her from her mother! How is she ever to learn the piany or a word but broad Scots out here!"

Little Margaret cared for such lamentations. She sat softly swinging the heavy chair against the wall, which was not an easy thing to do. She had not the aspect or physiognomy adapted for a hoyden; her features were small and refined; her colour more pale than warm, lighted up by evanescent rose-flushes, but never brilliant; her hair singularly fine in texture and abundant in quantity, but of no tint more pronounced than brown, the most ordinary and commonplace of shades. Her face was a cloudy, shadowy little face, but possessed by a smile which came and went in the suddenest way, brightening her and every-

thing about her. No particular art of the toilette aided or hindered the prettiness of her little slight figure. If she was not as God made her, she was at least as Miss Buist in the village made her, in a dress of blue serge, as near the fashion as possible, of which the peculiarity was that it was rather tight where it ought to be loose, and loose where it ought to be tight. But Margaret's soul had not been awakened to the point of dress, and so long as it did not hurt, she minded little. Her shoes were made, and strongly made, by the village shoemaker; everything about her was of the soil. When she had swung her chair to the yall, she let it drop back again to its place, and swallowed a little yawn as she watched the water brim into the pail.

"What will I do," she said, "Bell? What will I do next, Bell?"

(If anyone thinks that Margaret ought to have said "What shall I do?" they are to remember that this is not how we use our verbs in the kingdom of Fife).

"Oh, Miss Margret! if you would but do one thing, just *wan* thing without changin' for *wan* hour by the clock!"

“ You’ve been saying that as long as I can mind. You, you never change, and that’s why I like to be aye changing. There are so few things to do in the afternoon. The morning’s better. There’s something in the air. I’m always content in the morning.”

“ Eh ay! you’re very content, flichterin’ about like the birds among the trees, wan moment on this branch, the ither on that; but the afternoon, Miss Margret, the aifternoon’s the time for rest—if you’ve been doing onything the fore part of the day.”

“ If you want to rest,” said Margaret; “ you, perhaps, Bell, that are getting old, and papa—I’ve seen *him* sleepin’. Figure such a thing! Sleepin’! with the sun in the sky!”

“ I can figure it real well,” said Bell; “ it’s no often a poor body gets the chance: but just to close your eyes in the drowsy time, when a’s well redd up, the fire burnin’ steady, and the kettle near the boil, and pussy bumming by your side, ah, that’s pleasant! it’s a kind o’ glimmer o’ heaven.”

“Heaven! the kettle on the boil, and pussy—that’s a funny heaven,” said Margaret, with a laugh.

“Weel, maybe it’s ower mateerial an image; but we’re poor fleshly creatures; and I was meaning a Sabbath afternoon, when you’ve come hame from the kirk, your Bible at hand, and a’ sae quiet,” said Bell, amending her first flight. “Jeanie stepping saft about the place, waiting till it’s time to mask the tea, and auld John on the other side of the fire, and nothing to do but to thank your Maker for a’ His mercies and think upon the sermon—if it was a sound sermon,” Bell added, after a pause, taking up her pail, “for I wouldna say they’re a’ of the kind that ye would like to mind and think upon in a Sawbath afternoon in the gloamin’. Miss Margaret, what do you say to run up the stair, and see if your papaw’s wanting anything? that would aye be something to do.”

“Oh, Bell, if you only had more imagination! You always tell me to run and see if papa is wanting anything: and he never wants anything, except, perhaps, a book from the high shelf, where they’re

all Greek, and I have to climb up upon the steps and get no good."

"And whase fault's that?" said Bell, reproachfully. She had set down the pail again and paused, looking with mournful eyes at the young creature seventeen years old, who did not know what to do with herself. "Whase fault's that? Did I no beg ye on my bended knees to learn your French book?—a' wee words, as easy! I could have learnt it mysel; and then ye would have had a' the shelves and a' the books open to you, and your papaw's learnin' at your finger's end."

"Do you think French and Greek are the same?" cried Margaret. "Why, they're different print even—the a b c's different; they are no more like the same thing than you and me."

"I'm no saying they're just the same," said Bell, a little discomfited. "One thing's aye different from another. When I was learnin' it was aw, bay, say that they learned me, no clippit and short like your English. But the creature kens something after a'," she said to herself as she went indoors with her pail. "A thing

like that with a' her wits about her canna be near a learned man without learning something. But no a note o' the piany!" Bell said, with a real sense of humiliation. For that want what could make up?

Margaret was left alone in the little court, and she soon tired of being alone. When she had remained there for about five minutes, watching the sun shine upon the ruin opposite to her, and print all the irregularities of the wall which connected it with the house, upon the broken turf of the court, she got up suddenly and went upstairs. Musing and dreaming were the only things upon which she could spend with pleasure more than "twa minutes by the clock," as Bell said. She would read, indeed, as long as anyone pleased, but that was an unprofitable exercise, and tended to nothing—for what was it all but foolish stories and daft-like poetry, and play-acting and nonsense? These things were naught in the estimation of the people in the house who were anxious about Margaret's education. The only member of the household who took no thought of her education at all,

was the master, who sat upstairs in solitary state. Even Jeanie the handmaiden in the kitchen, was very anxious on Miss Peggy's account. She wanted to see her young mistress go to balls, and have pretty dresses from Edinburgh, and enjoy herself. What was the use of being bonny and young if you stayed aye in one auld house and nobody saw ye? Jeanie asked herself. And this was a question which much disturbed and occupied her mind. Old John too, who was Bell's husband, and the male factotum, as she was the female, had his anxieties about Miss Peggy. When she began to want to have pairties and young folk about her, what should they all do? John demanded. He would be willing, and so would Bell, to "put themselves about" to the utmost; but what was to be done for chiney and plate? Wan dozen of everything might be enough for the family, but what would that do for a pairty? So that John's mind was disturbed also. But old Sir Ludovic what did he mind? Give him a book, and ye might mine the cellars, and throw your best bomb-shells at the tower, and he

would never hear ye. Such was the general opinion of the house.

There was no entrance hall in this primitive house; but only a little space at the "stair foot," the bottom of the well through which the spiral staircase wound its narrow way; but though it was dark, and the twist of the unprotected steps a little alarming to a stranger, Margaret ran up as lightly as a bird. At about half the height of an ordinary flight of stairs, there were two doors close to each other, forming a little angle. One of these Margaret pushed open softly. It led into a long room, running all the length of the building, panelled wherever the wall was visible, and painted white as in a French house; one side however was covered entirely with bookshelves. The depth of the recesses in which the small windows were embedded, showed the thickness of the wall. One at each end and one in the middle were all that lighted the long room; two or three others which had belonged to the original plan having been blocked up on account of the window tax, that vexatious impost. In the

centre of the room stood a large old japanned screen, stretched almost across the whole breadth, and dividing it into two. On the south side, into which the door opened, a large writing-table was placed upon the old and much worn Turkey carpet which covered the middle of the floor, and seated at this, but with his back to the sunshine, which was pouring in, sat an old man in a chair, reading. The window behind him and the window in the side each poured its stream of sunshine between the deep cuttings of the ancient walls, five or six feet thick, but neither of these rays of warmth and light touched this solitary inhabitant. He was so much absorbed in his reading that he did not hear the door open. Margaret came in behind him and stood in the sunshine, the impersonation of youth—the light catching her at all points, gleaming in her eyes, bringing colour to her cheek, making her collar and the edge of white round her hands blaze against the darkness of her dress. But no ray touched the old man in his chair. He was as still as if he

had been cut out of grey marble, his face motionless, the movement of his eyes as he read, the unfrequent movement necessary to turn the page, being all the sign of life about him. The book he was reading was a large old folio propped up upon a sort of reading desk in front of him. A large wide garment, something between a long coat and a dressing-gown, of dark-coloured and much worn velvet, wrapped round his thin person and gave it some dignity, and he wore a little black velvet skull-cap which made his fine head and thin white locks imposing. Margaret stood breathless, making no sound for a moment, and then said suddenly, "You look like Archimage in the cave, papa."

The old man made a faint movement of surprise; a wrinkle of impatience came into his forehead, a momentary smile to his lip. "Yes, yes, my little Peggy; go and play," he said. She stood for a moment behind him, hesitating, looking round her with eager eyes in search of something, anything, to interest her. She was neither surprised nor wounded to find herself thus summarily disposed of. She

was used to it. Finally seeing nothing likely to interest her, Margaret turned lightly away, and disappeared through a second door which was close to the one by which she had entered. This brought her into a small rounded room, with one window, a little white panelled Scotch-French boudoir, with a high mantel-piece and small antique furniture—a little square of Turkey carpet on the floor, a pretty old marquetry cabinet, and some high-backed chairs of the same covered with brocaded silk from some great grandmother's gown. Margaret knew nothing about the value of these old furnishings. She thought the walnut wood table, with its elaborate clustered legs, a much finer article, though it was often in her way. There were some old pictures on the walls, some books, and more ornament and grace than in all the rest of the house put together. What did Margaret care? She sang an old tune to herself, drumming with her fingers upon the window sill, and thinking what she should do. Then she drew open a drawer in the cabinet and took from it some old fancy work, faded

but fine, with a bundle of wools and silks in the same condition. It was the relic of some old lady's industry (Lady Jean, old Bell said, but how should she know?) which had been found in one of the periodical routings out of old presses and drawers in which Margaret delighted. The linen on which the work was half done was yellow, and the colours faded, but it had struck the girl's fancy, and she had carried it off with her to finish (this time a hundred years, Bell said satirically) Margaret took it out now and laid it on the table; then she went flying up the stone stairs, and all over the rooms to find her thimble and her scissors, which were not to be found. And while she tries to find these, what can we do better than let the reader know who old Sir Ludovic was, and how he came to have so young a child? Margaret's foot flying up stairs, and the sound she made of doors and drawers opening, and now an impatient exclamation (for the way thimbles hide themselves and refuse to be found!) and now a little snatch of song, was all that was audible in the still old house.

Bell and John and Jeanie in the kitchen had their cracks indeed as they took their tea; but sounds did not travel easily up the spiral stair, and the long room with its one inhabitant was as void of all movement as was the vacant little white-panelled chamber with Lady Jean's old work thrown on the table. All silence, languor, stillness; and yet one creature in the house to whom stillness was as death.

CHAPTER II.

THE Leslie had been settled at Earl's-hall since before the memory of man. How they were related to other Leslies in Fife, and out of it, I do not pretend to say. But this family itself was old enough to have carried any amount of honours, much less the poor baronetcy which was all it had got out of the sometimes lavish hand of fame. The family was old enough to have supported a dukedom, but not rich enough. Sir Ludovic had got but a moderate fortune from his father, and that which he would transmit to his son would be considerably less than moderate. Indeed it was not worth calling a fortune at all. When the Baronet began his life, the policy was a real policy, a pretty small park enough, with its girdle of hardy trees. No turnip field then thrust its plebeian presence and odour between

the house and its own woods; the garden was kept up with care, the other part of the house was still habitable and inhabited, and the greatest people in the country did not scorn to dine and dance in the rooms so well adapted for either purpose. But of all these good things, the rooms and old Sir Ludovic were all that remained. He had not done any particular harm at any time, nor had he wasted his means in lavish living, and nobody was so much surprised as he when his money was found to have been spent. "What have I done with it?" he had asked all his life. But nobody could tell; he had no expensive tastes—indeed he had no tastes at all, except for books, and his own library was a very good one. It was true he had indulged in three wives and three families, which was inconsiderate, but each of the wives had, greatly to the comfort of her respective children, possessed something of her own. Time went and came, however, taking these ladies away in succession, but leaving Sir Ludovic still in his great high-backed chair, older but otherwise not much different from what

he had ever been. The eldest son, also called Ludovic, was the only one now surviving of the first marriage; he was a man of forty-five, with a family of his own, a hard-working lawyer in Edinburgh, with no great income to keep up his position, and little disposed to welcome the burden of his father's little title when it should come. A baronetcy, and an old house altogether uninhabitable by a family, and entirely out of modern fashion—what should he make of these additions when his father died? He had made his own way as much as if he had been a poor schoolmaster's son, instead of the heir of an ancient and important family. He could not even take his children home to the old place, or give them any associations with it, for there was no room at Earl's-hall. "Your father might as well be in Russia," his wife sometimes said when she wanted a change for a little boy who was delicate. And privately, Mr. Leslie had made up his mind to sell the place, though it had been so long in the family, when Sir Ludovic died.

Of the second family there were two re-

maining, two daughters, one of whom had been married and had settled in England, the other who had not married, living with her. They were twins, and some five years younger than their elder brother. And neither did they come often to Earl's-hall, the same objection was in everybody's way. There was no room for them. And Sir Ludovic disliked letter-writing. They came occasionally to see their father, and to hold up their hands and shake their heads at the way in which little Margaret was being brought up. But what could these ladies do? To live at Earl's-hall was impossible, and to go and stay in a little cottage in the Kirkton, all for the sake of a small step-sister, and without even any security that they could really be of any use to her, was something more of a test than their lukewarm family affection could bear. And they hesitated about recommending a governess; for with an old gentleman so much addicted to marriage, who could tell what might happen? Though he was seventy-five he was the same man as ever, and very fascinating when he chose to exert himself;

and to have a new Lady Leslie would be a still greater horror than to have a young rustic for a step-sister. And then the child would be rich. It does not require much learning, as Mrs. Hardcastle says, to spend fifteen hundred a year.

So that Margaret was left alone. Her mother had been the richest of all Sir Ludovic's wives. She had been—more wonderful still—a young beauty, courted and ~~and~~ flattered, and how it was that she passed over all her younger admirers and fixed upon a man of fifty-five, a poor old Scotch baronet, nobody could divine. But she did so, and came home with him to Earl's-hall, and brightened it awhile with her youth and her wealth, and would have done wonders for the old house. Nothing less had been intended than to rebuild the ruin; though Sir Ludovic himself discouraged this, as the house, he reminded her, must pass into other hands. But poor Lady Leslie's fine projects came to a premature end, by means of a bad cold which she caught just after her little girl was born. She died, and the last gleam of prosperity died away with her. Margaret, it was true, was

rich, and the allowance her trustees made her was no small help even now to the impoverished household; though indeed the trouble these trustees gave, her father thought, was more than the money was worth. They wrote to Sir Ludovic about her education till he was roused to swear at, though not to profit by, the perpetual remonstrance.

“Education! what would they have at her age? A mere child,” he said.

“Eh, Sir Ludovic! but she’s sixteen,” Bell said, who was the only one in the house who ever ventured to keep up an argument with her old master.

“Pshaw!” the old man said; for what is sixteen to seventy-five? and besides, did he not see her before him a slim stripling of a girl, flitting about in perpetual motion, a singing voice, a dancing step, a creature never in the same place, as Bell said, for “twa minutes by the clock.” What does that kind of small thing want with education? Sir Ludovic liked her better without it, and so perhaps would most people; for are not the fresh wonder, curiosity, and intelligent ignorance of a

child its most captivating qualities? If we could but venture to take the good of them with a clear conscience and no thought of what the child will say to us when it ceases to be a child! Sir Ludovic had this courage. He did not think much of his duties to Margaret. She had duties to him—to be always pretty and cheerful, not to speak too broad Scotch, to get his books down for him when he wanted them, to put everything ready on his table, pens, pencils, and note-book, in case he should want to write something (which he never did), and to be neat and in order at meal times. In this one particular he certainly did his duty. Margaret had not the privilege of being untidy, which is allowed to most neglected heroines. Sir Ludovic required scrupulous neatness, hair that shone, and garments that were spotless, and ribbons as fresh as the day. Should not we all like just such a creature about us, fair as a new-blown rose, with a voice so toned and harmonious, a step with rhythm in it, a pair of eyes running over with understanding and interest, and no education

to speak of? If only the creature would not arise upon us after and upbraid us for its want of knowledge! But of this risk Sir Ludovic never dreamt. She could read, he supposed, for he saw her reading, and she could write he knew, for he had seen her do it. What could they want more?

Thus they lived, not discontented, from year to year. No one told Margaret to read, but she did so, perhaps with all the more pleasure because nobody told her. She read all the best poetry that is written in English, and a great deal that was not the best. She was so great in history that she had been a Lancastrian and taken an active, even violent, part on the side of her namesake, Margaret of Anjou, as long as she could remember—a more violent part even than she took for Queen Mary, though to that also she was bound as a true Scot. She had read Clarendon and Sir Thomas Brown, and Burton on Melancholy (not caring much for that) and an old translation of Froissart, and Paul and Virginia, and Madame Cottin's Elizabeth, and Don Quixote, all in translations; so that her range was tolerably wide; and everything

came natural to Margaret, the great and the small. Needless to say that all Sir Walter was hers by nature, as what well-conditioned Scots person of seventeen has not possessed our homelier Shakespeare from his or her cradle? Whether she loved best the Spanish Don, or Lord Falkland, or Sir Kenneth in the Talisman, was not to her mind perfectly clear. In this respect she was not so sure about Shakspeare. His lovers and heroes did not satisfy her youthful requirements; she loved Henry the Fifth, and Faulconbridge, and Benedick, but was not at all satisfied about the relations between Hamlet and Ophelia, naturally standing by her own side, and thinking that poor maiden badly used : which is as much as to say that the spell of story was still strong upon her, though the poetry went to her head all the same. These were the books Sir Ludovic saw her reading—but he took no notice and no oversight. He did not think of her at all as a responsible creature to be affected one way or other by what she read, or as undergoing any process of training for the future. The

future! what is that at seventy-five? especially to a man who amiably and without evil intention has always found himself the centre of the world? It is like the future of a child—to-morrow. He did not want to pry any further. What was to come, would come without any intervention of his. Had his child been penniless, probably he would have thought it necessary to remember that in all probability (as he expressed it) she would survive him. But she was rich, and where was the need of thinking? The great thing was that there was no room. The bed-rooms in the house were so few. Where could they put a governess, he asked Bell, and even Bell, though full of resources, could not reply. There was one good-sized room which Sir Ludovic himself occupied, and another quaint small panelled chamber in which Margaret was very snug and cosy, but beyond these scarcely any bed-chamber in the house was in a proper state of repair. What could anyone say against so evident a fact? "We could dine fifty folk," Bell said half proudly, half sadly, "and we could gie a grand ball after that

up the stair; but pit up one single gentleman that is no very particular, that's all we could do beside." It was a curious state of affairs. The two long rooms, one above the other, were the whole house.

Of the wealth which Margaret was to inherit, she knew absolutely nothing. There was a house "in England," a vague description which the girl had never much inquired into, seeing that till her twenty-first birthday it was very unlikely that she would have anything whatever to do with it. In the meantime it served a very pleasant purpose in her life. It was the scene of so many dreams and visions of that future which was everything to Margaret, that it could not be said to be an unknown place. She built it and furnished it, and planted trees and invented glades about the unrevealed place, such as in reality it could not boast of; everything that she thought most beautiful in her small experience of things, or which she found in her considerable experience of books, she placed in this distant mansion, where all manner of pleasant verdure was, which was not to be found in

Scotland, flowers and fruits, and green lawns, and abundant foliage, and sunshine such as never shone in Fife. She made pictures of it, and dreamed dreams, but no troublesome dash of reality disturbed the vision. She was the lady of the manor, a title which pleased her fancy hugely, and which she wove into many a fancy; but it was all as visionary as if she had found the Grange in a novel and appropriated it. If anything could have been more unlike an English manor-house than the quaint old dwelling in which her childhood had been passed, it was the dreams Margaret wove of her future home. Claude Melnotte's palace was more like that sunshiny fancy. No castle in Spain or in the air was ever more unreal. There wants no education to teach a girl how to dream, and the less she knows, so much the more gorgeous and delightful becomes the imagination. But naturally this was a branch of her training totally unknown to everybody connected with her. Sir Ludovic knew a great deal, but had not a notion of that branch of human effort, neither it may

well be supposed did Bell, though her instincts were clearer. When she saw her young mistress sit abstracted, her eyes far away, a half smile on her lips, Bell knew there must be something going on within the small head. What was it? There were no young men, or as Bell called them, "lauds" about, that could have caught her youthful eye. Bell knew that the romance of life begins early, and had some glimmering of recollection that before any "lauds" appear on the horizon in reality, there are flutters of anticipation in maiden souls, dreams of being wooed like the rest, "respectit like the lave." But Margaret had seen none of the rural wooings which are a recognised institution in Scotland, those knocks at the window and whispers at the door, which add the charm of mystery to the never-ending romance. Bell had taken care even that Jeanie's "laud" and his evening visits should be kept out of the young lady's notice. But then, if it was not the glimmer of poetic love that flickered on the horizon, what was it?

And except Bell, and perhaps Jeanie, no one had noticed the soft abstracted look that sometimes stole into Margaret's eyes, or knew her capacity for dreams. Mr. Leslie, when he came, took but little notice of his step-sister. He had a daughter who was older than she, indeed Margaret had become a great-aunt to the amusement of everybody during the previous winter. Her brother took very little notice of her. When he looked at her, he breathed a private thanksgiving that she was provided for, and would not be an additional burden upon him when his father died. It was only when Sir Ludovic was ill, or in difficulty, that Mr. Leslie came, and the reflection "Thank heaven I have not the lassie to think of," was the foremost sentiment in his breast. He had plenty of his own to exhaust all the fund of interest in his heart. She had no business ever to have been, this young creature whose presence in the old house made a certain difference naturally in all the arrangements; but being there, the chief fact was this fortunate one that she was provided for. So far as Margaret was con-

cerned, this was the only thing in his thoughts.

As for Mrs. Bellingham and her sister, Miss Leslie, they lived a long way from Fife. They were ladies who travelled a great deal, and spent all they had to spend in making their life pleasant. Mrs. Bellingham was childless and a widow, so that her married life did not count for much, though she herself regarded the elevation it gave her with much contentment. Now and then, instead of going to Switzerland or the Italian lakes, they would come to Scotland, making expeditions into the Highlands, and preserving everywhere their character as British tourists. Once there had been some question between them of inviting Margaret to accompany them on one of these expeditions, which it was thought might do her good and improve her manners, and give her a little acquaintance with the world. But on more mature reflection, it became apparent that the maid whom the two ladies shared between them, when on their travels, was by no means disposed to undertake the packing and toilette of a third.

“Many a girl would be glad to give a little assistance herself rather than trouble, for the chance of such a treat,” Miss Leslie said, who was the weak-minded sister; “and in that way, I really think we might manage—if dear Margaret was a sensible girl.”

“Margaret is not a sensible girl, and we could not manage at all, and I won’t have Forrester put about,” Mrs. Bellingham said, who took the management of everything upon her. “Besides, a girl—she would be an endless trouble to you and me. We should have to change our route to let her see this thing and that thing, and you would be afraid she did not enjoy herself, and the Lord knows what besides. There are many things in conversation even that have to be stopped before a girl. No, no; it would never do.”

And thus one hope for Margaret’s improvement came to an end. A similar failure happened about the same time in Edinburgh. When Mrs. Ludovic got that German governess, who was at once her pride and her dread, she was so much

affected by the grandeur and superiority as to suggest an arrangement to her husband by which his little sister might be benefited.

“It appears to me that we, who have such advantages, ought, perhaps, to share them a little with others that are not so well off. There is little Margaret at the Hall. What do you think? Sir Ludovic might send her to us to share the children’s lessons. Fräulein is an expensive luxury, and a little help with her salary would be no harm. And if Margaret had six months with our girls, it would do her a great deal of good; if it was only to learn German—”

“What does she want with German—what good would it do her to learn German?” said Ludovic, testily.

“Well, I’m sure, Ludovic, that’s not an easy question. I never thought you were one to ask for an immediate result. I am sure you all say learning anything is an advantage, whether the thing they learn is any use or not. I do not always see it myself,” said Mrs. Leslie; “but many is the time I’ve heard you all say so. And

if we could do Margaret a good turn, and at the same time save something on our own expenses—”

“Do Margaret a good turn! I do not see what claim she has on me. She has plenty of people to look after her if they would do their duty. Trustees of her money, and her mother’s relations, not to speak of my father himself, who has plenty of energy left when you cross him. Indeed, if you come to that, Jane and Grace are nearer to her than I.”

“Because the second is nearer the third than the first is,” Mrs. Ludovic said, who had some sense of humour. But she added, “Well! I never made any attempt to fathom you Leslies but I was baffled. I think there was never a set of people like you. I hope I’ll never be so left to myself as to try again.”

“We Leslies! The most of the Leslies nowadays are your own bairns.”

“That’s true, and more’s the pity,” said the lady, discharging an arrow as she went away.

And thus another attempt to do something for Margaret came to nothing.

Everything failed. It was nobody's business, perhaps. The trustees were strangers who did not know. Her father was old, and did not care to be troubled, and liked her best as she was. Her brothers and sisters, what had they to do with it? They were not their little sister's keeper. So between them all she was left to grow as she pleased, like a flower or a weed, nobody responsible for her, whatever might happen. Even a School Board, had there been one in the parish, what right would it have had to interfere?

CHAPTER III.

MARGARET searched a whole half-hour for her thimble, which was found at the end of that time in the pocket of a dress which she had not worn for a week ; but when she had found it, she no longer thought of Lady Jean's work. That purpose had faded altogether from her mind. She forgot even what she wanted the thimble for, and being seized with a sudden fancy for remedying the disorder of her drawers, immediately set to work to do so, with a zeal more fervent than discreet ; for as soon as she had turned the top drawer out, scattering all her light possessions, her collars and ribbons and bits of lace, out upon her bed, she was summoned by the bell for dinner, and thought of them no more. Margaret hastily arranged her hair, put on a bit of fresh ribbon, and rushed downstairs ; for to keep Sir Ludovic wait-

ing was a sin beyond excuse. On the other side of the great japanned screen which divided the room into two, stood the table, laid with scrupulous care, and served by John in his rusty but trim and sober "blacks," with a gravity that would not have mis-become an archbishop. Sir Ludovic had put down his book, he had washed his hands, and he was ready. He stood dignified and serious, almost as serious as John himself in the centre of the room, by the edge of the screen. *J'ai failli attendre*, might be read in the curve above his eyebrows; and yet he received his erring child with perfect temper, which was more than could be said for John, who gloomed at her from under his heavy eyebrows.

"Oh, papa, I am sorry," Margaret began. "I was busy—"

"If you were busy, that is no reason for being sorry; but you should not forget hours, they are our best guide in life," said her father; but he was not angry; he took her by the hand and led her in, handing her to her seat with stately ceremony. This daily ceremonial, which Margaret

hated, and would have done anything to avoid, was the means by which Sir Ludovic every day made his claim of high-breeding and unforgotten courtliness of demeanour, in presence of men and angels. Whosoever might think he had forgotten what was due to his daughter as a young lady and a Leslie, and what was due to himself as a gentleman of the old school, not a modern man of no manners, here was his answer. John looked on at this solemnity with gloomy interest; but Margaret hated it. She reddened all over her youthful countenance, brow and throat. Between the two old men she moved, passive but resentful, to her seat, and slid into it the moment her father released her, with ungrateful haste to get done with the disagreeable ceremony. They were "making a fool of her," Margaret thought. Though it occurred every evening, she never got less impatient of this formula. Then Sir Ludovic took his own place. He was not tall, but of an imposing appearance, now that he was fully visible. In the other half of the room, where all his work was done, he sat invariably with his back to

the light. But here he was fully revealed. His white locks surrounded a fine and remarkable face, in which every line seemed drawn on ivory. He had no colour save in his lips, and the wonderful undimmed dark eyes, darkly lashed and eyebrowed, which shone in all the lustre of youth. With those eyes Sir Ludovic could do anything—"wile a bird from the tree," old Bell said; and, indeed, it was his eyes which had beguiled Margaret's mother, and brought her to this old world place. But Margaret was used to them; perhaps she had not that adoring love for her father which many girls have; and especially at dinner, after the little ceremony we have recorded, she was more than indifferent to, she was resentful of his attractions. At that age he might have known better than "to make a fool," before John, day after day, of his little girl.

This day, however, the dinner went on harmoniously enough; for Margaret never ventured to show her resentment, except by the sudden angry flush, which her father took for sensitiveness and quickly

moved feeling. He talked to her a little with kind condescension, as to a child.

“You were busy, you said—let us hear, my little Peggy, what the busy-ness was.”

“I was doing—a great many things, papa.”

“Ah! people who do a great many things all at once are apt to get into confusion. I would do one thing, just one thing at a time, my Peggy, if I were a little girl.”

“Papa!” said Margaret, with another wave of colour passing over her, “indeed, if you would look at me, you would see that I am not a little girl.”

“Yes, you have grown a great deal lately, my dear. I beg your pardon. It is hard to teach an old person like myself where babyhood ends. You see, I like to think that you are a little girl. Eh, John? we like something young in the house, the younger the better—”

“No me, Sir Ludovic,” said John.

He was very laconic, wasting no words; and Margaret felt that he disapproved of her youth altogether. But this restored her to herself, and she laughed. For

John, though morose in outward aspect, was, as she very well knew, her slave actually. This made her laugh, and the two old men liked the laugh. It brought a corresponding light into Sir Ludovic's fine eyes, and it melted a little the morose muscles about John's closely-shut mouth.

"But I am not so very young," she said. "Jeanie's sister, who is just my age, has been in a place for a long time; and most people are considered grown up at my age. You ought not to make a fool of me."

"My little Peggy," said Sir Ludovic, "that is an incorrect expression. Nobody could make a fool of you except yourself. It is Scotch, my dear, very Scotch, which is a thing your sisters Jean and Grace have already often warned me against. You are very Scotch, they tell me."

"Set them up!" ejaculated old John under his breath.

Margaret reddened with ready wrath.

"And I *am* Scotch," she said. "How could I speak otherwise? They were always going on about something. Either

it was my shoulders, or it was my hair, or it was my tongue—”

“Your tongue! My Peggy, your idioms are strange, it must be allowed; but never mind. What had they to say against your hair? It is very pretty hair. I don’t see any ground to find fault there.”

“Oh, it was not in the fashion,” said Margaret. “You know, papa, you like it smooth, and that is not the fashion now; it ought to be all towsy, like my little dog and hanging in my eyes.”

“The Lord preserve us!” said old John. He was in the habit of giving utterance to his sentiments as constrained by some internal movement *plus fort que lui*; and no one ever interfered with this habit of his. “What next?” said the old man, with a shrug of his shoulders behind his master’s chair.

“Then you must continue to be old-fashioned so long as I live,” said Sir Ludovic. “Your sisters are very well-meaning women, my Peggy; but even when you are as clever as Mrs. Bellingham and as wise as Miss Leslie, you will not have fathomed everything. We’ll leave

the philosophy to them, my little woman, and you and I will manage the hair-dressing. That is evidently the point in which our genius lies."

Margaret looked up, somewhat jealously, to see whether she was again being made "a fool of;" but as no such intention appeared in her father's face, she returned to the consideration of her dinner. It was not a heavy meal. A little fish—"haddies," such as were never found but in the Firth, little milk-white flounders, the very favourites of the sea, or the homely herring, commonest, cheapest, and best of fish. But then, perhaps, they require to be cooked as Bell knew how to cook them. No expensive exotic salmon, turbot, or other aristocrat of the waters ever came to Sir Ludovic's table. Let them be for the vulgar rich, who knew no better. The native product of his own coasts was good enough, he would say, in mock humility, for him. And then came one savoury dish of the old Scotch *cuisine* now falling out of knowledge; no vulgar daintiness of the haggis kind, but stews and ragoûts which the best of *chefs* would not disdain.

This was all; the *plat doux* has never been a regular concomitant of a Scotch dinner, and Sir Ludovic was a small eater, and had his digestion to consider. It was not, therefore, a very lengthened meal, and as six o'clock was the dinner-hour at Earl's-hall, there were still several long hours of sunshine to be got through before night came. Now was the time when Margaret felt what it was to be alone. The long summer evening, loveliest, most wistful and lingering hour of all the day, when something in the heart demands happiness, demands that which is unattainable one way or another—is it possible to be young, to be void of care, to possess all the elements of happiness, without wishing for something more, a visionary climax, another sweetness in those soft, lingering, visionary hours? Margaret did not know what she wanted, but she wanted something. She could not rest contented as her father did, to sit over a book and see through the west window (when he chanced to look up) the flush of the sunset glories. To feel that all this was going on in the sky, and nothing going on

within, nor anything that concerned herself in earth and heaven, was not to be borne. The little withdrawing-room—the East Chamber, as it was called, though its window faced to the south—was already all dim, deserted by the sunshine. Lady Jean's work lay on the table, where Margaret had thrown it in the afternoon, but nothing living, nothing that could return glance for glance and word for word. It was but seven o'clock, and it would be ten o'clock, ten at the earliest, before night began to fall. Margaret got her hat and ran downstairs. She did not know what she should do, but something she must do. The little court was by this time quite abandoned by the sunshine, the body of the house lying between it and the west; but all the sky overhead was warm with pink and purple, and Bell was seated outside, with her knitting dropped upon her lap. Jeanie had gone out to milk the cow; and even Old John had strolled forth with his hands behind him, to see, he said, how the "pitawties" were getting on. The "pitawties" would have got on just as well without his supervision, but who could

resist the loveliness of the evening light?

“Our John he’s awa’, like Isaac, to meditate among the fields at eventide,” Bell said. “Eh, but it’s an auld custom that! and nae doubt auld Sawra, the auld mither, would sit out at the ha’ door, and ponder in her mind just like me.”

“But John is not your son, Bell,” said Margaret, with the literal understanding of youth.

“Na, I never had a son, Miss Margret, naething but wan daughter, and she’s been married and gone from me this twenty years. Eh, my dear, we think muckle of our bairns, but they think little and little enough of us. I might as well have had nane at all but for the thought.”

To this Margaret made no reply, her mind not taking in the maternal relation. She stood musing, with her eyes afar, while Bell went on.

“They say a woman has no after-pain when her first bairn’s born, because of the Virgin Mary, that had but Wan. But ay me, I’ve had mony an after-pain, and her too, poor woman, though no the same kind. I think of her mony a day, Miss Margret,

how she would sit and ponder things in her heart. Eh, they would be so ill to understand—till the time came.”

Still Margaret said nothing. The old woman pondered the past, but the girl's brain was all throbbing and thrilling with the future. The sound of something coming was in her ears, a ringing, a singing, a general movement and flutter of she knew not what. To Bell the quiet was everything; to Margaret, she herself was the universe, and all the horizon was not too big to hold the rustling pinions and approaching footfalls of the life to come.

“I think I will take a walk down the road,” she said suddenly, over Bell's head.

“Take a hap with you, in case it should get cauld. Sometimes there's a wind gets up when the sun goes down. And you'll no bide too long, Miss Margaret,” Bell called after her as she ran lightly away.

Margaret did not care for the wind getting up, nor foresee the possibility of the evening chillness after the warmth of the day. It was always chilly at night so near the sea; but seventeen years' experience to

the contrary had not dispelled Margaret's conviction that as the weather was at one bright moment, so would it always be.

The road down which Margaret went was not very attractive as a road. The hedges were low and the country bare. It is true that even the rigour of Fife farming had not cut down the wild roses, which made two broken lines of exquisite bloom on either side of the way. Long branches all bloomed to the very tips waved about in the soft air, and concealed the fact that the landscape on either side was limited to a potato-field on the right and a turnip-field on the left. But the wild roses were enough for Margaret. Were they not repeated all over the skies in those puffs of snowy vapour tinted to the same rose hue, and in the girl's cheeks, which bloomed as softly, when the exercise, and the flowering of the flowers, and the reflection of the sunset reflections had got into her young veins? The colour and sweetness rapt her for a moment in an ecstasy, mere beauty satisfying her as it does a child. But human nature, even in a child, soon wants something more, and in Margaret

the demand came very quickly. She forgot the loveliness all at once, and remembered the something that was wanted, the blank that required filling up. She turned aside into a byway along the edge of a corn-field with a sigh. The corn was not high, as it was but June, and when she turned her face away from the sunset, the world paled all at once all around her. Margaret went on more slowly, unconscious why. She went on hanging her young head till she came to a brook at the end of the field, over which there was but a plank for a bridge. The brook (she called it a burn) ran between two fields, and on one side of it grew an old ash tree, its trunk lost among the bushes of the hedge. Here a post, which had been driven into the ground to support the homely bridge, made a kind of seat upon which the wayfarer might pause and look at the homely yet pretty Kirkton with its old church on the brae. Margaret herself had intended to rest upon this seat. But when she was half-way across the plank, a sudden sound so startled her that she lost her footing, and though she saved herself from plunging into the burn alto-

gether by a despairing grasp at the bushes, yet she got her foot fast embedded in the damp bank, and there stuck, to her infinite embarrassment and disgust. Some one started from the seat at the sound of the suppressed cry she gave, and rushed to the rescue. It was, need it be said, a young man? yet not exactly of heroic guise. Margaret, crimson to the hair, and feeling herself the most gawky, the most awkward, the most foolish of distressed damsels, her ungloved hand all torn and pricked with the thorns of the branch which she had caught at, her foot held fast in the tenacious clay, did not know what kind of hoyden, what rude village girl, red and blowsy, she must have looked to the stranger. She looked a nymph out of the poetic woods, a creature out of the poets, a celestial vision to him. He sprang forward, his heart beating, to offer his hand and his assistance. Was it his fault? He feared it was his fault; he had startled her, moving just when she was in the act of crossing the plank. He made her a thousand apologies. It was all his doing, he hoped she would forgive him. He ex-

pended himself so in apologies that Margaret felt it necessary to apologize too.

"It was me that was silly," she said. "Generally, I never mind a sudden sound. What should it matter? Nobody would do me harm, and there's no wild beasts that I should be so silly. Oh, it's nothing; and it was all my fault."

"You are the queen in your own country. There should be nothing in your path to startle you."

"Oh, no, I'm not the queen," said Margaret, laughing. "I have to take my chance like other folk. You are a stranger here," she said, with friendly innocence. The fact that she was, if not the queen, as she said, yet at least a princess, the first young lady hereabouts, and known to everybody as such, made her friendly and made her bold. Supremacy has many agreeable accessories. The young man, who had taken off his hat and held it in his hand, half in respect, half in awkwardness, here blushed more deeply than she had done when she saw him first.

"I am not a stranger, Miss Margaret. I am Robert Glen, whom you used to play

with when you were a little girl; but I cannot expect you to remember me, for I have been long away."

"Oh—Rob!" she cried. Margaret was delighted. The vivid colour came flushing back to her cheeks out of pure pleasure. She held out her hand to him. He had not been so respectful when they had parted, which was ten years ago. "Indeed, I mind you quite well, though I should not have known you after all this long time; but how did you know me?"

"The first moment I saw you," he said, "and there is nothing wonderful in that. There are many like me—but only one Miss Margaret, here or anywhere else."

The last words he murmured in an undertone, but Margaret made them out. She laughed, not in ridicule, but in pleasure, just touched with amusement. How funny to see him again, and that he should know her; and still more funny, though not disagreeable, that he should speak to her so.

"I was vexed," she said, "very vexed that a stranger should see me so, my shoe all dirty and my hand all torn. It looked so strange; but I am not vexed now, since

it is only you, and not a stranger. Just look at me, such a figure! and what will Bell say?"

"You have still Bell?"

"Still Bell! who should we have but Bell?" cried Margaret, the idea of such a domestic change as the displacement of Bell never having so much as crossed her fancy. Then she added quickly, "But tell me, for I have not heard of you for such a long, long time. You went to the college, Rob?"

She said his name unadvisedly in the first impulse; but looking up at him, and seeing him look at her in a way she was unused to, Margaret's countenance flamed once more with a momentary blush. She shrank a little. She said to herself that he was not a little boy now as he used to be, and that she would never call him Rob again.

"Yes, Miss Margaret, I went to the college. I went through all the curriculum and took my degree some time ago."

"Then are you a minister now?"

Margaret spoke with a little chill in her tone. She thought that to be a minister

implied a withdrawal from life of a very melancholy and serious description, and that she might not be able to keep up easy relations with poor Rob if he had passed that Rubicon. She looked at him earnestly, with a great deal of gravity in her face. Margaret had not known many ministers close at hand, and never any so nearly on a level with her own youthful unimportance as Rob Glen.

“No,” he said, shaking his head. “No. My poor mother! I will never give her the pleasure I ought. I am not a minister, and never will be. I say it with sorrow and shame.”

“Oh!” cried Margaret, growing so much interested that her breast heaved and her breath came quick. “Oh! and what was that for, Mr.—Rob? You have not done anything wrong?”

“No,” he said, with a smile; “nothing wicked, and yet perhaps you will think it wicked. I cannot believe just what everybody else believes. There are papers and things to sign, doctrines—”

Margaret put her hands together timidly and looked into his face.

“You are not an infidel?” she said, with a look of awe and pain.

“No; I am—I don’t quite know what. I don’t examine too closely, Miss Margaret. I believe as much as I can, and I don’t think anybody does more; but I can’t sign papers, can I, when I do not know whether they are true or not? I cannot do it. I may be wrong, but I cannot say I believe what I don’t believe.”

“No,” said Margaret, doubtfully. This was something entirely out of her way, and she did not know how to treat it. She made a hurried sweep over her own experiences. “I always think it is because I don’t understand,” she said; and then, after another pause, “When papa says things I don’t understand, I just hold my tongue.”

“But I am obliged to say yes or no, and I can’t say yes. I hope you will not blame me, Miss Margaret; that would make me very unhappy. I have often thought you were one that would be sure to understand what my position was.”

Margaret did not ask herself why it was that she was expected to understand; but

she was vaguely flattered that he should think her approbation so important.

“Me! what do I know?” she said. “I have not been at the college, like you. I have never learned anything;” and, for almost the first time, it occurred to Margaret that there might be some reason in the animadversions and lamentations over her ignorance, of her sisters Grace and Jean.

“You know things without learning.”

“Oh!—but you are making a fool of me like papa,” cried Margaret. “And what are you doing now if you are not a minister? You have never been back again till now, at the Farm?”

“I am doing just nothing, that is the worst of it. I cannot dig, and to beg I am ashamed.”

“Beg!” she looked at him with a merry laugh. He was what Bell would have called “very well put on.” Margaret saw, by instinct, though she was without any experience, that Rob Glen could not have been a gentleman; but yet he was well dressed and very superior to everybody else about the Kirkton. “I suppose you

have come home on a visit, and to rest."

"Yes; but, Miss Margaret, all this time your foot is wet and your hand is scratched. Will you come to the house? Shall I go and get you dry shoes from Bell; what can I do?"

"Oh, nothing," said Margaret, "do you think I never got my feet wet before? I will change them when I get in. But I think I will go home now. What have you been doing? Oh, drawing!" she exclaimed with a cry of delight. She seized the book which he half showed, half withdrew. "Oh, I should like to see it—it is the Kirkton. Oh, I would like to draw like that. "Oh!" cried Margaret with a deep-drawn breath and all her heart in it, "what I would give!" and then she remembered that she had nothing to give and stopped short, her lips half open, her eyes aflame.

"Will you let me show you how to do it? It would make me so happy. It is as easy as possible. You have only to try."

Margaret did not make any reply in her eagerness. She turned over the book with delight. The sketches were not

badly done. There was the Kirkton, breezy and sunny, with its cold tones of blue; there were all the glimpses of Earl's-hall that could be had at a distance; there was the estuary and the sandbanks, and the old pale city on the headland. But Margaret had never come across anything in the shape of an artist before, and this new capability burst upon her as something more enviable, more delightful than any occupation she had as yet ever known.

"I have a great many more," said the young man, "if you will come to the house, or here to the burn to-morrow, I will show you some that are better than these."

"Oh, yes, I will come," said Margaret without hesitation. "I would like to see them. I never saw anything so beautiful. The Kirkton its very self, and Earl's-hall, old Earl's-hall. Papa says it will tumble down about our ears; but it never can quite tumble down and come to an end while there's *that*!" the girl said. If the artist had been Turner himself he could not have had finer praise.

And she let him walk the length of

the field with her, telling her about his wonderful art—then ran home, her heart beating, her mind roused, and amused, and delighted. The slow twilight was just beginning to draw a magical silvery veil over earth and sky. Margaret ran home hurried and breathless, occupied to the full, conscious of no more deficiencies.

“Have you been out all this time, Miss Margret?” said Bell, just rising from her seat by the door, “and you’ve had your foot in the burn. Go quick and change, my bonny pet. I’ve been ower lang in the court, and the dew’s falling, and a’ the stairch out o’ my cap. We’re twa fuils for the bonny gloamin, me and you.”

CHAPTER IV.

MARGARET went upstairs with her heart and her feet equally light. She was full of excitement and pleasure. It was true that she had not many excitements in her life, especially of a pleasurable kind; but those she had encountered had not been straightway communicated to some one, as the happy privilege of her age in most cases. Out of sheer inability to contain her sentiments and sensations in one small bosom, she had indeed often poured forth innocent disclosures into the ear of Bell. And when these concerned anything that troubled her, specially the remarks and criticisms of her sisters, Bell had been the best of confidants, backing her up steadfastly, and increasing her indignation by the sympathy of warm and strong resentment. But of other troubles and pleasures, Bell had not been equally understanding. And she was the last

person, Margaret felt, to whom she could tell the story of this evening's encounter. Bell would not have been amused and interested like Margaret. She would have opened great eyes of astonishment and exclaimed upon the audacity of Rob Glen in venturing to approach Miss Margaret. "Rob Glen! who was he to proffer his acquaintance to the young lady of Earl's-ha'." Margaret knew as well how Bell would have said this, as if she had actually delivered the tirade. Therefore the girl made no mention of her new friend. She ran upstairs, where she found Jeanie lighting a pair of candles on the table in the East Chamber.

"I've lighted Sir Ludovic's lights, and will you want anything more the nicht, Miss Margaret?" said Jeanie, her fair fresh face giving out more light than did the candles.

"Oh, Jeanie!" the girl began, but then she checked herself. No, she would not tell anyone, why should she? Better to keep it in her own mind, and then there would be no harm. Margaret was not often scolded, but she had a misgiving

that she might come in the way of that unusual discipline were she too communicative on the subject of her long conversation with Rob Glen.

She sat down in the East Chamber alone, her face and her eyes glowing. How pleasant it was to have an adventure ! The little white-panelled room was but poorly lighted by the two candles. The window still full of twilight, clouds of grey here and there, with a lingering tinge upon them of the sun or its reflections, hung like a great picture on the wall. There were one or two actual pictures, but they were small, and dark, and old, not very decipherable at any time, and entirely invisible now. On the table, in the speck of light which formed the centre of the room, of itself a picture had there been anyone to see, lay Lady Jean's old work, with its faded colours, in pretty harmony with all the scene around ; and centre of the centre, Margaret's face, not faded, but so soft in its freshness, so delicate in girlish bloom. She sat with her elbows on the table, her face set in the palms of her hands, her eyes looking

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into the light, making the two little flames of the candles into stars reflected in their clearness. A half-formed smile played about the soft curve of her lips. How pleasant it was to have an adventure at all ! And how agreeable the kind of the adventure ! Rob Glen ! yes, she remembered him quite well when she was seven years old. He had been twelve, a big boy, and very kind to little Miss Peggy. The farm, which was a small farm, not equal to the large farms of wealthy Fife, a little bit of a place, which his mother had kept up when she became a widow, was close to Earl's-hall ; and Margaret recollected how "fond" she had been of her playfellow in these old days, very fond of him ! before he went into St. Andrews to school, and then away to his uncle in Glasgow (it all came back upon her) to college. She remembered even, now she came to think of it, the scoffs she had heard directed by Bell and John at the Glens in general, who had not thought St. Andrews good enough for their son, but had to send him to Glasgow, set him up !. And here he was again. Margaret remembered how he had

carried her across the ditches and muddy places, and how she had kissed him when he went away ; she blushed at the thought and laughed a little. And now he had come back ! and he could draw ! that was the most interesting of all. He could make beautiful pictures of everything he saw. The Kirkton, poor little place, had never looked so attractive before. It had been only a little village of no interest, which sisters Jean and Grace held in the utmost contempt, driving Margaret wild with suppressed rage by the comparison they made between the Scotch hamlet and their English villages ; and now it was a picture ! She wondered what they would think of it now. Margaret gazed into the flame of the candles and seemed to see it hanging upon a visionary background. A beautiful picture : the grey old church with its rustic tombs, and all the houses clustered below, where people were living, waiting their advance and preferment into the grassy graves above. Here was the real mission of art accomplished by the humblest artist—to make of the common and well known a dazzling un-

discovered glory. Only the Kirkton, yet a picture! and all the doing of the old friend equally glorified and changed—Rob Glen. Margaret was more pleasantly excited, more amused, more roused in mind and imagination than perhaps she had ever been in her life.

A stirring in the long room close by roused her to a sense of her duties. That windowfull of sky had darkened, it was almost night: as much as it ever is night in Scotland in June, a silvery night with no blackness in it but a vague whiteness, a soft celestial reflection of the departed day. Evidently it was late, time to go to bed. Margaret pushed the door open which led into the long room. Sir Ludovic was closing his book. He kept early hours; for it was his habit to wake very early in the morning, as is so usual to old people. He turned to her with a smile upon his face.

“My Peggy, you are late; what has kept you amused so long to-night? It is you generally who let me know when it is time for bed. What have you been doing?”

“Nothing, papa,” but Margaret blushed. However, as she blushed so often this was nothing to remark.

“Put it up upon the shelf,” he said, “I have done with that one. It is heavy for you to lift, my dear. It is a sign that I am an old man, a very old man, my little Peggy, that I allow you to do everything for me; but at the same time there is a suitability in it. The young should learn to serve. When you are a full-blown lady, it is then that all the men you meet will serve you.”

“I want no men to serve me, papa. When I am middle-aged, as you say, I will have no servants but women. Is not Jeanie better to hand you your plate and fill you your wine than old John?”

“Old John and I have grown old together, my Peggy; but I think your taste is very natural. A young woman is a pleasanter object than an old man.”

“I did not mean that,” she cried with compunction, “you, papa, you are the handsomest of us all. There is no one to match you; but the like of Jeanie looks so clean and fresh, and John in his black clothes—”

“Looks like an old Cameronian minister, that is true; but, my Peggy, you must not judge by appearances. Before you are—middle-aged, as you say, you will learn that appearances are not to be trusted to. And by the way, what is it to be middle-aged? For my instruction I would like to know.”

Margaret paused to think. She stood looking at him with the big book in her hand, leaning it against the table, embracing it with one arm; then naturally, as she moved, her eyes sought the uncovered window, and went afar out into the silvery clouds to find her answer. As for her father, he sat with his ivory hands spread out on the arms of his chair, looking at her with a smile. Her slimness and gracefulness, and soft-breathing youth were a refreshment to him. It was like the dew falling, like the morning breaking to the old man; and besides the sense of freshness and new life, it was a perpetual amusement to him to watch the workings of her unaccustomed mind, and the thoughts that welled up in the creature's face. He had perhaps never watched the growth of a

young soul before, and he had never got over his first surprise and amusement at the idea that such a little being, only the other day a baby, only the other day running after a ball like a kitten, should think or have opinions at all.

“Middle-aged,” said Margaret, with her pretty head upon one side, and great gravity in her face. “Perhaps, papa, you will not have the same idea as I have. Would it be twenty-five? That is not old, of course; but then it is not young either. If you were going to have any sense, I think you would have it by that age.”

“Do you think so, my Peggy? That is but a little way to travel to get sense. Where is sense to be found, and can you tell me the place of understanding? It would be easily learned if it could be got at twenty-five.”

“Oh, but twenty-five is a very good age, papa. Me, I am only seventeen.”

“And you think you have a good deal of sense already, and have found out whereabouts wisdom dwells,” said Sir Ludovic, “then to be sure in eight years

more you will have .have gone a long way towards perfection."

"Papa, you are making a fool of me again."

"No, my dear, only admiring and wondering. It is such a long time since I was twenty-five; and I am not half so sure about a great many things as I was then. Perhaps you are right, my little Peggy; one changes one's opinions often after—but it may be that just then you are at the crown of the brae. Far be it from me to pronounce a judgment. Dante puts it ten years later."

"But what Dante means," said Margaret boldly, for ignorant as she was she had read translations of many things, even of the Divine Comedy—not having perhaps anything more amusing to read, which was the origin of most of the better knowledge she possessed. "What Dante means was the half of life, when it was half done."

"Ay, ay, that was it," said the old man, "half done! yet you see here I am at seventy-five still in everybody's way."

"Oh, papa," she said, fixing upon him reproachful eyes which two tears

flooded, brimming the crystal vessels over. "Oh, papa!"

"Well, my Peggy; I wonder if it is the better for you, that your old father should live on? Well, my dear, it's better for some things. The old nest is grey, but it's warm. Though Jean and Grace, you know, Jean and Grace, and even Mrs. Ludovic, my dear, all of them think it's very bad for you. You would be better they tell me in a fine boarding-school in London."

"Papa!"

"Oh, I'm not going to send you away, my little Peggy, not till the old man's gone—a selfish old man. You must be a good girl, and prove me right to everybody concerned. Now, good night, and run away to your bed; and you can tell John."

"Good night, papa. I will be a good girl," she said, half laughing, with the tears in her eyes, as she had done when she was a child; and she made a little pause when she kissed him, and asked herself whether she should speak to him about Rob Glen, and ask if he would like to see the pic-

tures? Surely to see such pictures would be a pleasure to anybody. But something kept Margaret silent. She could not tell what it was; and in the end she went away to tell John, without a word about her old acquaintance. Downstairs she could hear Bell already fastening the shutters, and Jeanie passed her on the stair, fresh and smiling, though sleepy, with a "Gude nicht, Miss Margret."

"Good night, Jeanie; and you'll call me early?" she said; upon which Jeanie shook her head with a soft smile.

"If you were aye as ready to rise as me to cry upon you!"

"I will rise to-morrow," said Margaret. How good she was going to be to-morrow! Light as a bird she ran down to the old couple downstairs. "John, papa is ready. You are to go to him this very minute. I stopped on the stair to speak to Jeanie, and papa will be waiting."

John answered with a grunt and groan. "And me, I'm to pay for it because little Miss tarries!"

Bell pushed him out of the kitchen with a laugh. "Gae away with you," she said.

“Miss Margret, my man John would stand steady and be cut in sma’ pieces with a pair o’ scissors sooner than that any harm should come to you. But his bark is aye waur than his bite. And what have you been doing all this night, my bonny bird? I’ve neither seen your face nor heard your fit upon the stair.”

“Oh, I was thinking,” said Margaret, after a pause; “thinking—”

“Lord bless us and save us, when the like of you begin thinking! And what were you thinking upon, my bonny dear?”

“Nothing,” said Margaret, musing. She had fallen back into the strain of her usual fanciful thoughts.

“Naething? That’s just the maist dangerous subject you can think upon,” said Bell, shaking her head; “that’s just what I dinna like. Think upon whatever you please, but never upon naething, Miss Margret. Will I come with you and see you to your bed? It’s lang since I’ve put a brush upon your bonny hair.”

“Oh, my hair is quite right, Bell. I brush it myself every night.”

“And think about naething all the time.

Na, Miss Margret, you mauna do that. I've gathered the fire, and shut the shutters, and put a' thing ready for Sir Ludovic's tea in the morning. Is there onything mair? No, not a thing, not a thing. Now come, my lamb, and I'll put you to your bed."

Margaret made no objection. She could follow her own fancies just as easily while Bell was talking as when all was silent round her. They went together up the winding stair, Bell toiling along with a candle in her hand, which flickered picturesquely, now here, now there, upon the spiral steps. Margaret's room was on the upper story, and to reach it you had to traverse another long hall, running the whole length of the building, like the long room below. This room was scarcely furnished at all. It had some old tapestry hanging on the walls, an old harpsichord in a corner, and bits of invalided furniture which were beyond use.

"Eh, the bonnie dances and the grand ladies I've seen in this room!" Bell said, shaking her head, as she paused for breath. The light of the one little candle scarcely

showed the long line of the wall, but displayed a quivering of the wind in the tapestry, as if the figures on it had been set in motion. "Lord bless us!" said Bell. "Oh, ay, I ken very well it's naething but the wind; but I've never got the better o' my first fright. The first time I was in this grand banqueting hall—and oh, but it was a grand hall then! never onything so grand had the like of me a chance to see. I thought the Queen's Grace herself could not possess a mair beautiful place."

"If it was any use," said Margaret, with a sigh.

"Oh, whisht, my bonnie bird. It's use to show what great folk the Leslie's were wance upon a time, and that's what makes us a' proud. There's none in the county that should go out o' the room or into the room afore you, Miss Margret. You've the auldest blood."

"But what good does that do if I am the youngest girl?" said Margaret, half piqued, half laughing.

She was proud of her race, but the empty halls were chill. She did not wait

for any more remarks on Bell's part, but led the way into her room, which opened off this banqueting hall, a turret room of a kind of octagon shape, panelled like all the rest. It looked out through its deepest window on entirely a different scene, on the moonlight rising pale on the eastern side, and the whitening of the sea, the *tremolar della marina*, was in the distance, the silvery glimmer and movement of the great broad line of unpeopled water. The girl stood and looked out while the old woman lighted the candles on the table. How wide the world was, all full of infinite sky and sea, not to speak of the steady ground under foot, which was so much less great. Margaret looked out, her eyes straying far off to the horizon, the limit beyond which there was more and more water, more and more widening firmament. She was very reluctant to have it shut out. To draw down a blind, and retire within the little round of those walls, what a shrinking and lessening of everything ensued! "But it's more sheltered like, it's no so cold and so far," said Bell, with a little shiver. She was not so fond of

the horizon. The thick walls that kept out the cold, the blind that shut out that blue opening into infinity, were prospect enough for Bell. She made her young lady sit down, and undid the loops of her silken hair. This hair was Bell's pride; so fine, so soft, so delicate in texture, not like the gold wire, all knotted and curly, on Jeanie's good-looking head, who was the other representative of youth in the house. "Eh, it is a pleasure to get my hands among it," said Bell, letting the long soft tresses ripple over her old fingers. How proud she was of its length and thickness! She stood and brushed and talked over Margaret's head, telling her a hundred stories, which the girl, half hearing, half replying, yet wholly absorbed in her own fancies, had yet a certain vague pleasure in as they floated over her. It was good to have Bell there, to feel the touch of homely love about her, and the sound of the voice which was as familiar as her own soft breath. Bell was pleased too. She was not offended when she perceived that her nursling answered somewhat at random. "What is she but a

bairn? and bairns' ways are wonderful when their bit noddles begin working," Bell said, with the heavenly tolerance of wise affection. She went out of the room afterwards, with her Scotch delicacy, to give Margaret time to say her prayers, then came back and covered her carefully with her hard-working hand, softened miraculously by love. "And the Lord bless my white doo," the old woman said. There were no kisses or caresses exchanged, which was not the habit of the reserved Scotchwoman; but her hand lingered on the coverlet, "happing" her darling. Summer nights are sweet in Fife, but not over-warm. And thus ended the long midsummer day.

CHAPTER V.

ROBERT GLEN, whose re-appearance had so interested and excited the innocent mind of Margaret Leslie, was no other than the farmer's son, in point of locality her nearest neighbour, but in every other respect, childhood being fairly over, as far removed from her as if she had been a princess, instead of the child of an impoverished country gentleman. In childhood it had not been so. Little Margaret had played with Rob in the hayfields, and sat by him while he fished in the burn, and had rides upon the horses he was leading to the water, many a day in that innocent period. She had been as familiar about the farm "as if it had belonged to her," Mrs. Glen had said, and had shared the noon-day "piece" of her little cavalier often enough as well as his sports. Even Bell had found nothing to say against this

intimacy. The Glens were very decent folk, not on a level with the great farmers of Fife, yet well to do and well doing; and Rob's devoted care of the little lady had saved Bell, as she herself expressed it, "many a trail;" but in the ten years from seven to seventeen, many changes occur. Rob, who was the youngest, had been the clever boy of the family at the farm. His mother, proud of his early achievements, had sent him to St. Andrews to the excellent schools there, with vague notions of advancement to come. That he should be a minister was, of course, her chief desire, and the highest hope of her ambition; but at this early period there was no absolute necessity for a decision. He might be a writer if he proved to have no "call" for the ministry; or he might be a doctor if his mind took that turn. However, when he had reached the age at which in Scotland the college supplants the school (too early, as everybody knows), Rob was quite of opinion that he had a call to be a minister; and he would have gone on naturally to his college career at St. Andrews, but for the arrival of an

uncle, himself sonless, from Glasgow, whose family pride was much excited by Rob's prizes and honours. This was his mother's brother, like herself come of the most respectable folk, "a decent, honest man," which means everything in Scottish moral phraseology. He was "a merchant" in Glasgow, meaning a shopkeeper, and had a good business and money in the bank, and only one little daughter, a fact which opened his heart to the handsome, bright boy who was likely to bring so much credit to his family. Whether Robert Hill (for the boy was his namesake) would have thought so highly of his nephew without these prizes is another question; but as it was, he took an immediate and most warm interest in him. Mr. Hill, however, felt the usual contempt of a member of a large trading community for every small and untrading place.

"St. An'rews!" he said, "send the boy to St. An'rews to sleep away his time in an auld hole where's there's naething doing! Na, na, I'll no hear o' that. Send him to me, and I'll look after him. We know what we're about in Glasskie; nane

o' your dreamin' and dozin' there. We ken the value of time and the value o' brains, and how to make use of them. There's a room that's never used at the tap o' the house, and I'll see till 'im," said the generous trader.

Mrs. Glen, though half offended at this depreciation of native learning, was pleased and proud of her brother's liberality.

"I'll no hear a word against St. An'rews," she said. "Mony a clever man's come out of it; but still I'm no blind to the advantages on the other side. The lad's at an age when it's a grand thing to have a man over him. No but what he's biddable; but laddies will be laddies, and a man in the house is aye an advantage. So if you're in earnest, Robert (and I'm much obliged to ye for your guid opinion of him), I'm no saying but what I'll take ye at your word."

"You may be sure I mean it or I wadna say it," said her brother; and so the bargain was made.

Rob went to Glasgow, half eager, half reluctant, as is the manner of boys, and in due time went through his classes, and

was entered at the Divinity Hall. A Scotch student of his condition has seldom luxurious or over-dainty life in his long vacations, six months long, and calculated for this purpose, that the student may be self-supporting, Rob did many things which kept him independent. He helped his uncle in the shop at first with the placidity of use and wont, thinking a good shop a fine thing, as who can doubt it is? But when Rob began to get on in his learning, and was able to take a tutorship, he discovered with a pang that a shop was not so fine a thing as he supposed. Early, very early, the pangs of intellectual superiority came upon him. He was clever, and loved reading, and thus got himself, as it were, into society before he was aware of the process that was going on within him, making friends of very different social position from his own. Then the professors noticed him, found him what is easily called "cultivated"—for he had read much in his little room over the shop, with constantly growing ambition to escape from his lowly place and find a higher—and one of them recom-

mended him to a lady in the country as tutor to her boys. This was a most anxious elevation at first, but it trained him to the habits of a class superior to his own; and after that the shop and its homely ways were anguish to Rob. Very soon he found out that it was inconvenient to go so far to college; then he found occupations in the evenings, even during the college session, and thus felt justified in separating himself from his kind uncle, who accepted his excuses, though not without a shade of doubt. "Well, laddie, well, laddie, we're no the folk to keep you if you can do better for yourself," the good shopkeeper said, affronted yet placable. The process is not uncommon; and, indeed, the young man meant no great harm. He meant that his younger life was pushing out of the husk in which it had been confined, that he was no longer altogether the same as the people to whom he belonged. It was true enough, and if it was hard, who could help that? It gave him more pain to take his plentiful meal rudely in the room behind the shop than it could give them to take it without him. So he

reasoned, and was right and wrong, as we all are, in every revolutionary crisis. Had he been bred a shopkeeper or a farmer lad, no such thoughts would have distracted his mind, and probably he would have been happier; but then he had not been brought up either to the shop or to the farm, and how could he help the natural development which his circumstances and training brought with them? So by degrees he dropped the shop. There was no quarrel, and he went to see them sometimes on the wintry Sunday afternoons, and restrained all his feelings of dismay and humiliation, and bore their "ways" as best he could; but there is nobody so quick as a vulgar relation to find out when a rising young man begins to be ashamed of him. The Hills were sore and angry with the young man to whom they had been so kind. But the next incident in Rob's career was one that called all his relations round him, out of sheer curiosity and astonishment, to see a prodigy unprecedented in their lives.

After he had gone through all the Latin and Greek that Glasgow could furnish, and

he had time for, and had roamed through all the philosophies and begun Hebrew, and passed two years at the Divinity Hall, this crisis came. Six months more and Rob would have been ready to begin his trials before the Presbytery for license as a probationer, when he suddenly petrified all his friends, and drove his mother half out of her senses, by the bewildering announcement that his conscience made it impossible for him to enter the Scotch Church. The shock was one which roused the entire family into life. Cousins unheard of before aroused themselves to behold this extraordinary spectacle. Such hesitations are not so common with the budding Scotch minister as with the predestined English parson, and they are so rare in Rob's class, that this announcement on his part seemed to his relations to upset the very balance of heaven and earth. Made up his mind not to be a minister! The first sensation in their minds was one of absolute incredulity, followed by angry astonishment when the "infatuated" young fellow repeated and stood by his determination. Not to be a

minister ! What would he be then ? what would satisfy him ? Set him up ! they all cried. It was like a fresh assertion of superiority, a swagger and flourish over them all, unbounded presumption and arrogance. Doubts ! he was a bonnie one to have doubts. As if many a better man had not signed the Confession before him, ay, and been glad to have the Confession to sign !

This at first was the only view which the kindred felt capable of taking. But by and by, when it became apparent that this general flutter of horror was to have no effect, and that Rob stood by his resolution, other features in his enormity began to strike the family. All the money spent upon him at the college, all the time he had lost ; what trade could he go into now with any chance of getting on ? Two-and-twenty, and all his time gone for nothing ! His uncle, Robert Hill, who had been as indignant as any, here interposed. He sent for his sister, and begged her to compose herself. The lad's head was turned, he said. He had made friends that were not good for a lad in his class of life, that had led him away in other ways,

and had made him neglectful of his real friends. But still the lad was a fine lad, and not beyond the reach of hope. This placable sentiment was thought by everybody to proceed from Uncle Robert's only daughter, Anne, who was supposed to regard her cousin with favourable eyes; but anyhow the suggestion of the Hills was that "the minister," their own minister, should be got to "speak to" Rob. Glad was the mother of this or any other suggestion, and the minister undertook the office with goodwill. "Perhaps I may be able to remove some of your difficulties," he said, and he called to himself a professor, one of those who had the young man's training in hand. Thus Rob became a hero once more among all belonging to him. Had the minister spoken? What had the minister said? Had he come to his right mind? the good people asked. And, indeed, the minister did speak, and so did the professor, both of whom thought Rob's a most interesting case. They were most anxious to remove his difficulties; nay, for that matter, to remove everything—doctrines and all—to free the

young man from his scruples. They spoke, but they spoke with bated breath, scarcely able to express the full amount of the "respect and sympathy" with which they regarded these difficulties of his. "We too—" they said in mysterious broken sentences, with imperfect utterance of things too profound for the common ear. And they did their best to show him how he might gulp down a great many things without hurting his conscience, which the robust digestion of the past had been able to assimilate, but which were not adapted for the modern mind. "There is more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in half the creeds," these gentlemen said. But Rob held out. He would have been foolish, indeed, as well as rarely disinterested and unsusceptible to the most delicate of flatteries had he not held out. He had never been of so much importance in the course of his life.

It may be doubtful, however, if it was his conscience alone which stopped him short in his career. Rob had learned in his tutorships and among the acquaintances acquired at college, to know that a Scotch

Minister did not possess so elevated a position as in rural Fife he was thought to do. The young man had a large share of ambition in him, and he had read of society and of the great world, that abstraction which captivates inexperienced youth. A minister could no more reach this than, indeed, could the country laird who was the highest representative of greatness known to Rob; but literature could (he thought), art could: and he could write (he flattered himself), and he could draw. Why then should he bind himself to the restraints necessary for that profession, when other means of success more easy and glorious were in his power? This was a very strong supplementary argument to strengthen the resistance of his conscience. And he did not give in; he preferred to go home with his mother, to take, as all his advisers entreated him, time to think everything over. Rob had no objections to take a little time. He wanted money to take him to London, to start him in life, even to pay off the debts which he said nothing of, but which weighed quite as heavily upon him as

his troubles of conscience. This was how he came to be, after such a long interval once more living with his mother at Earl's-hall farm. He had come home in all the importance of a sceptical hero, a position very dazzling to the simple mind, and very attractive to many honest people. But it was not so pleasant at home. Instead of being the centre of anxious solicitude, instead of being plied by conciliatory arguments, coaxed and persuaded, and respected and sympathized with, he found himself the object of his mother's irony and treated with a contemptuous impatience which he fain would have called bigotry and intolerance. Mrs. Glen was not at all respectful of honest doubt, and she had a thorough contempt for anything and everything that kept a man from making his way in the world. She was not indeed a person of refinement at all. She had lived a hard life, struggling to bring up her children and to "push them forrit," as she said. The expression was homely, and the end to be obtained perhaps not very elevated. To "push forrit" your son to be Lord Chancellor, or even a general officer,

or a bishop, is a fine thing, which strikes the spectator; but when all you can do is to push him "forrit" to a shop in Dundee, is the struggle less noble? It is less imposing at all events. And the struggling mother who had done her best to procure such rise in life and in comfort as was within her reach for her children was not a person of noble mind or generous understanding. When Rob came home, upon whom her highest hopes had been set, not prosperous like the others, but a failure and disappointment, doing nothing, earning nothing, and with no prospect before him of either occupation or gain, her mortification made her bitter. Fury and disappointment filled her heart. She kept silent for the first day, only going about her household affairs with angry energy, scolding her servants, and as they said, "dinging everything about." "So lang as she disna ding me!" said Jean the dairymaid; but it was not to be expected that any long time should pass before she began to "ding" some one, and ere long the culprit himself began to feel the force of her trouble.

“What are you doing?” she cried, “do you call that doing onything? drawing a crookit line with a pencil and filling it up with paint. Paint! ye might paint the auld cart if that’s the trade you mean to follow. It would aye be worth a shilling or twa, which is mair than ever thae scarts and splashes will be.” Or when Rob escaped into the seclusion of a book, “Read, oh ay, ye can read fast enough when it’s for naething but diversion and to pass the time; but ye’ll ne’er gather bawbees with your reading, nor be a credit to them that belong to you.” This was the sting of the whole. He was no credit to those who belonged to him, rather he was an implied shame; for who would believe, Mrs. Glen asked, that this sudden return was by his own will? “Na, na,” she said, “they’ll think it is for ill-doing, and that he’s turned away out of the college. It’s what I would do mysel’. And to think of all I’ve done, and all I’ve put up with, and a’ to come to naething! Eh, man! I would soon, soon have put an end to your douts. I would have made ye sure of ae thing, if it hadna been your uncle Robert

and his ministers, ye should hae had nae doubts about that: that no idle lad should sit at my fireside and devour the best o' everything. If ye had the heart of a mouse ye couldna do it. Me, I would starve first; me, I would sweep the streets. I would go down a coal pit, or work in a gawley chain afore I would sorn on my ain mother, a widow woman, and eat her out o' house and hame!"

Poor Rob! he was not very sensitive, and he had been used to his mother's ways and moods, or these reproaches would have been hard upon him. No doubt, had he been the innocent sufferer for conscience sake which he half believed himself to be, life would have been unendurable in these circumstances; but as it was, he only shrugged his shoulders, or jibed in return and paid her back in her own coin. They were both made of the same rough material, and were able to give and take, playing with the blows which would have killed others. Rob was not driven out of the house, out upon the world in despair, as a more sensitive person might have been. He stayed doggedly, not minding

what was said, till he should succeed in extracting the money which would be necessary for his start; and from this steady purpose a few warm words were not likely to dissuade him. He, on his side, felt that he was too much of a man for that. But it is not pleasant to have your faults dinned into your ears, however much you may scorn the infliction, and Rob had gone out on the day he met Margaret very much cast down and discouraged. He had almost made up his mind to confront fate rather than his mother. Almost—but he was not a rash young man, notwithstanding all that had happened to him, and the discomfort of issuing forth upon the world penniless was greater than putting up (he said to himself) with an old wife's flyting; but still the flyting was not pleasant to bear.

“Wha's that?” his mother said when he returned. “Oh, it's you! bless me, I thought it was some person with something to do. There was not the draigh in the foot that I'm getting used to. Maybe something's happened? You've gotten

something to do, or you've ta'en another thought? and well I wot it's time."

"No," he said, "nothing's happened, I'm tired enough and ready enough to take anything that offered, mother; but worse luck, nothing has happened. I don't know what could happen here."

"No, nor me neither," said Mrs. Glen, "when a lad hangs on at hame looking for luck like you, and never doing a hand's turn, it's far from likely luck will ever come the side he's on. Oh, pit away your trash, and dinna trouble me with the sight o't! Painting! paint the auld cart, as I tell ye, if you're that fond o' painting, or the byre door."

"Everybody is not of your mind," said Rob, stung by this assault. "There are some that think them worth looking at, and that not far off either: somebody better worth pleasing than—" you, he had almost said; but with better taste he added, "anyone here."

"And wha may it be that has such guid taste?" said the mother satirically, "a lass, I'll wager. Some poor silly thing or other that thinks Rob Glen's a gentle-

man, and is proud of a word from ane sae well put on. Eh, but it's easy to be well put on when it comes out of another person's pocket. It would be some lass out of the Kirkton. How dare ye stand there no saying a word, but smile-smiling at me?"

"Would you like it better if I cried?" he said, "smiling is not so easy always. I have little enough to smile at; but it is good sometimes to feel that all the world is not against me."

"And wha is't that's on your side? Some fool of a lass," repeated Mrs. Glen contemptuously. "They're silly enough for onything when a young lad's in the case. Who was it?" she added raising her voice, "eh, I would just like to gie her my opinion. It's muckle the like of them know."

"I doubt if your opinion would matter much," he said with an air of superiority that drove her frantic. "*I* respect it deeply of course; but she—a young lady, mother—may be allowed perhaps to think herself the best judge."

"Leddy!" said Mrs. Glen, surprised;

and instinctively she searched around her to find out who this could be. "You'll be meaning Mary Fleming, the dress-maker lass; some call *her* Miss; or may be the bit governess at Sir Claud's."

Rob laughed; in the midst of his troubles this one gleam of triumph was sweet. "I mean no stranger," he said, "but an old friend—one that was once my companion and playfellow; and now she's grown up into the prettiest fairy, and does not despise me even now."

Mrs. Glen was completely nonplussed. She looked at him with an air of imperious demand, which, gradually yielding to the force of her curiosity, fell, as he made no reply, into a quite softened interrogation. "An auld companion?" she said to herself, bewildered; then added, in a gentler tone than she had used since his return, a side remark to herself. "He's no that auld himsel."

"No," he said, "but she is younger, mother, and as beautiful as an angel, I think; and she had not forgotten Rob Glen."

His mother looked at him more and

more perplexed. But with her curiosity and with her perplexity her heart melted. Lives there a mother so hard, even when her anger is hottest, as to be indifferent to anyone who cares for her boy? "I canna think who you're meaning," she said, "auld companions are scarce even to the like o' me—I mind upon nobody that you could name by that name, a callant like you; auld playfellow! there's the minister's son, as great a credit to his family as you're a trial; but he's no a leddy—"

Again Rob laughed; he was indemnified for all his sufferings. "I will not keep you in doubt," he said, with a certain condescension. "It is little Margaret Leslie; you cannot have forgotten *her*, mother. If she is not a lady I don't know who is, and," he added, sinking his voice with genuine feeling, and a tender rush of childish recollection, "my little queen."

"Little Margaret Leslie," said his mother, looking at him stupefied, "you're no meaning Miss Margret at Earl's-hall?" she cried with a half shriek of astonishment, and gazed at him open-mouthed, like one in a dream.

CHAPTER VI.

MRS. GLEN was much more gentle with her son after this triumph of his. Margaret Leslie was but a girl, and her approbation did not mean very much ; but it was astonishing how the farmer-woman calmed down, and what a different aspect things began to take to her after she heard of this meeting. She said nothing more that night ; but stared at her son, and let him go, with a half reluctant relinquishment of her prey, for the moment. And many were the thoughts which crowded through her mind during the night. She had a respect for talent like all her nation ; but she did not admire the talent which was unpractical, and which did not serve a purpose. A young man who was clever enough to pass all his examinations with credit, to preach a good sermon, to get a living, that was what she could understand, and

she had been proud by anticipation in her son's ability to do all this; but when it turned out that he did not mean to employ his talent so, and when his cleverness dwindled down into something impalpable, something that could neither be bought and sold, nor weighed and measured, something which only made a difference between him and other men, without being of any use to him or placing him in the way of any advantage—instead of respecting it, Mrs. Glen scorned the miserable distinction. Clever! ay, and much good it did him. Tawlent! he would be better without it. Such unprofitable gifts exasperated her much more than stupidity would have done. But when she heard of the interview with Margaret Leslie, and the renewal of friendship, and the girl's delight with those "scarts," of which she herself was so contemptuous, her practical mind stopped short to consider. Perhaps, after all, though they would never make a living for him, nor were of any earthly use that she could see, these talents might be so directed by a wise and guiding hand as

yet to produce something, perhaps to bring him to fortune. A girl who was an heiress might be almost as good a thing for Rob as a kirk. To do Mrs. Glen justice she did not put the heiress on a level with the kirk, or sceptically allow the one to be as good as the other. She only seized upon the idea as a *pis-aller*, reflecting that, if the kirk was not to be had, a lass with a tocher might make some amends.

Here then was something to be done, something practical, with meaning and "an object" in it. Mrs. Glen dearly loved to have an object. It made all the difference to her. It was like going somewhere on business instead of merely taking a walk. The latter mode of exercise she could not abide; but put "an object" into it, and it changed the whole aspect of affairs. This was how her son Rob's hitherto useless accomplishments rose in her estimation now, when they began to appear no longer useless, but possibly capable of fulfilling some certain kind of end, if not a very exalted one. At once they acquired interest in her eyes. He himself and his presence at home ceased to be aimless,

useless, almost disgraceful, as she had hitherto felt them to be. When she got up next morning, it was with a sense of comfort and encouragement greater than she had felt since the unhappy moment when he had declared to her that it was not possible for him to be a minister. Even now, she could not look back without exasperation on that sudden change and downfall of her pride and comfort. But here at least was a prospect for him, a something before him, a way in which his talents, unprofitable as they seemed, might yet be made of practical use. The change in her manner was instantly apparent to her household. "The mistress has gotten word of something," Jean, the dairymaid, said, whose hope had been that she herself might not be "dinged" like everything else in the mistress's way. She did not "ding" anything on that blissful morning. She was even tolerant, though it cost her a struggle, when Rob was late for breakfast. Her whole being seemed softened and ameliorated, the world had opened out before her. Here was an object for exertion, an aim to which she could look

forward ; and with this life could never be quite without zest to the energetic disposition of Mrs. Glen.

The first sign of the improved condition of affairs that struck Rob occurred after breakfast, when his mother, instead of flinging a jibe at his uselessness, as she went off, bustling and hot-tempered, to her own occupations, addressed him mildly enough, yet with a hasty tone that sounded half shame and half offence. It was not to be expected, was it? that she should now encourage him in the habits she had despised and abused yesterday without some sense of embarrassment and a certain shamefacedness. A weaker woman would not have done it at all, but would have thought of her consistency, and kept silent at least. But Mrs. Glen was far too consistent to have any fears for her consistency. Her embarrassment only made her tone hasty, and made her postpone her speech till she had reached the door. When she had opened it, and was about to leave the room, she turned round to her son, though without looking at him. She said,

“ If you will draw, if you ca’ that draw-

ing, there's a very bonnie view of the Kirkton from the west green. I'm no saying you're to waste your time on such nonsense, but if you will do't, there's the bonniest view."

With this she disappeared, leaving Rob in a state of wonder which almost reached the point of consternation. It made him superstitious. His mother—*his mother!* to pause and recommend to him the bonniest view! Something must be going to happen. Never in his life had he been so surprised. He got up, half stupefied, as if under a mystic compulsion, and got his sketching-block and his colours, and went out to the west green. It was as if some voice had come out of the sky above him, or from the soil beneath his feet, commanding this work. What was he that he should be disobedient to the heavenly vision? He went out like a man in a dream, his feet turning mechanically to the indicated spot.

It was a fresh yet sunny morning, the dew not yet off the grass, for everything was early at the farm. The hills, far off, lay clear in softest tints of blue, dark yet

transparent, the very colour of aerial distance, while all the hues of the landscape between, the brown ploughed land, the green corn, the faint yellowing of here and there a prosperous field, the darkness of the trees and hedges, the pale gleams of water, rose into fuller tones of colour as they neared him, yet all so heavenly clear. The morning was so clear that Jean, in the byre, shook her head, and said there would be rain. The clearness of the atmosphere brought everything near; you might have stretched out your hands and touched the Sidlaws, and even the blue peaks of the Grampians beyond; and in the centre of the landscape lay the Kirkton, glorified, every red roof in it, every bit of grey-yellow thatch and dark brown wall telling against the background of fields; the trees scarcely ruffled by the light morning wind, the church rising like a citadel upon its mound of green, flecked with the burial-places of the past, the houses clustered round it, the smoke rising, a faint darkening, as of breath in the air, to mark where human living was. What a scene! yet nothing; the homeliest country, low hills, broad

fields, a commonplace village. For a moment Rob, though he had no genius, fell into a trance, as of genius, before this wonderful, simple landscape. "A voice said unto me, Write; and I said, What shall I write?" How put it into words, into colours upon dull paper? His head was filled with a magical confusion. For once in his life he approached the brink of genius—in the sense of his incapacity. He sat down, gazed, and could do no more.

By and by Mrs. Glen came strolling out from the house, with that assumed air of ease and leisure which is always so comically transparent. She meant to assume that she had nothing to do, and was taking a walk for pleasure, which was about as unlikely a thing as could have happened, almost as unlikely as pure interest in Rob's work, which was her real motive. She wanted to see what he had done, whether he had taken that bonniest view, how he was getting on with it, and if it was a thing which could, by any possibility dazzle and delight a young lady who was an heiress. Assuredly she had not sent out her son to dream over

the landscape, to do anything but draw it there and then, without delay, as if he had been sent to plough a field. She came up to him, elaborately unoccupied and at her ease, yet explanatory.

“I’ve just come out to look about me,” she said, with fictitious jauntiness. “So you’re at it again! Eh, laddie, what a waste o’ time and good paper, no to speak of thae colours that cost money. And how far are you on by this time? are you near done?”

Rob had the presence of mind to shut his book hastily.

“I have just begun, mother; but I did not think you took any interest in my poor drawing.”

“Me—take an interest? no! But if you’re to waste my substance and your ain time taking pictures, I may as well see what there is to see as other folk.”

“You shall see it when it is done,” said Rob. “It is not in a condition to show now. It is not a thing that can be done in a minute. There is a great deal of thought necessary—the different harmonies of colour, the relation of one part to another—”

Mrs. Glen was overawed.

“Ane would think it was some grand affair. A bit scart upon the paper, and a wheen greens and blues : and ye talk as if it was a battle to fight or a grand law-plea.”

“My dear mother,” said Rob, “many a man could fight a battle that could not draw the Kirkton, with all the hills behind it, and the clouds, and the air.”

“Air ! ye can paint air, ye clever lad !” cried Mrs. Glen, with a laugh. “Maybe you can paint the coos mowing and the sheeps baaing ? I would not wonder. It’s as easy as the air, which every bairn kens is no a thing you can see.”

“I don’t say I can do it myself,” said Rob ; “but I’ve seen pictures where you would think you heard the cows and the sheep—yes, and the skylarks up in the sky, and the hare plashing about in the wet woods.”

“Just that,” said his mother, “and the country gomerel that believes all you like to tell her. Among a’ thae bonnie things there should be a place for the one that’s to be imposed upon ; but you’ll no put me

there, I'll warrant you," she cried, flouncing away in sudden wrath.

This interruption roused Rob and put him upon his mettle. If it was well to have thus dignified his work in her eyes so that she should be concerned in its progress, the result was not an unmitigated good. Hitherto he had worked as the spirit moved him, and when he was not sufficiently stirred had let his pencil alone. But this would not do now that his labour had become a recognised industry. He betook himself to his task with a sigh.

Rob's artist powers were not great. He drew like an amateur, not even an amateur of a high order, and would not have impressed any spectator who had much knowledge of art. But he had a certain amount of that indescribable quality which artists call "feeling," a quality which sometimes makes the most imperfect of sketches more attractive than the skilfullest piece of painting. This is a gift which is more dependent upon moods and passing impulses than upon knowledge and skill; and no doubt the subtlety of those flying shadows, the breadth of the infinite morning

light, so pure, so delicate, yet brilliant, put them beyond the hand of the untrained craftsman. The consequence of this morning's work, the first undertaken with legitimate sanction and authority, was accordingly a failure. Rob put the Kirkton upon his paper very faithfully; he drew the church and the houses so that nobody could fail to recognise them; but as for the air of which he had boasted! alas, there was no air in it. He worked till the hour of the farm dinner; worked on, getting more eager over it as he felt every line to fail, and walked home, flushed and excited, when he heard his name called through the mid-day brightness. The broth was on the table when he went in, putting down his materials on a side-table; and Mrs. Glen was impatient of the moment he spent in washing his hands.

“You have as many fykes as a fine leddy,” she said. It had not occurred to her to make this preparation for her meal. She drew her chair to the table, and said grace in the same breath with this reproach. “Bless these mercies,” she said; and then, “Ye canna say but you’ve had

a lang morning, and naebody to disturb you. I hope you have something to show for it now."

"Not much," said Rob.

"No much! It's a pretence, then, like a' the rest! Lord bless me, I couldna spend the whole blessed day without doing a hand's turn, no if you would pay me for it. Eh, but we're deceived creatures," cried Mrs. Glen; "as glad when a bairn comes into the world as if it brought a fortune with it! A bonnie fortune! anxiety and care; and if there's a moment's pleasure, it's aye ransomed by days of trouble. Sup your broth; they're very good broth, far better than the like of you deserve; but maybe you think it's no a grand enough dinner for such a fine gentleman? Na, when I was just making up my mind to let you take your will and see what you could do your ain way—and you set up your face and tell me, no much! No much! if it's not enough to anger a saint!"

"There it is, you can judge for yourself," cried Rob with sudden exasperation. He jumped up from the table so quickly that his mother had no time to point out

his want of manners in getting up in the midst of his dinner. The words were stopped on her lips, when he suddenly placed the block on which he had been drawing before her. Mrs. Glen had not condescended to look at any of these performances before. It would have seemed a sort of acceptance of his excuse had she taken any notice of the "rubbitch" with which he "played himself," and she had really felt the contempt she expressed. Drawing pictures! it was a kind of childish occupation, an amusement to be pursued on a wet day, when nothing else was possible, or as a solace in the tedium of illness. But when Rob put down before her, relieved against the white tablecloth, the Kirkton itself in little, a very reproduction of the familiar scene she had beheld every day for years, the words were stopped upon his mother's lips.

"Eh!" she cried, in mere excess of emotion, able for nothing but a monosyllable. The very imperfection of it gave it weight in Mrs. Glen's unpractised eyes. "Losh me!" she cried, when she had recovered the first shock of admiration.

“Rob, was it you that did that? are you sure it’s your ain doing?” She could not trust her own eyes.

“And poor enough too,” said Rob, but he liked the implied applause, who would not? Praise of what we have done well may satisfy our intellectual faculties, but praise of a failure, that is a thing which really goes to the heart.

“Poor! I would like to ken what you mean by poor?” Mrs. Glen pushed away the broth and took up the block in a rapture of surprise and delight. “It’s the very Kirkton itself,” she said, “there’s Robert Jamieson’s house, and there’s Hugh Macfarlane’s, and there’s the way you go to the post, and there’s the Kilnelly burying ground, and the little road up to the kirk, no a thing missed out. And do you mean to tell me it’s a’ your own doing? Oh, laddie, laddie, the talents you’ve gotten frae Providence! and the little use you make o’ them,” added his mother, with a sudden recollection of the burden of her prophecy against her son, which could not be departed from even now.

Rob was so much encouraged that he ventured to laugh. "There is nothing I wish so much as to make more use of them," he said, "I ought to study and have good teaching."

"Teaching, what do you want with teaching? You were never one that was easy satisfied; what mair would you have?" she cried. She could not take her eyes from the drawing. She touched it lightly with her finger to make sure that it was flat, and did not owe its perspective to mechanical causes. "To think it's nae-thing but a cedar pencil and a wheen paints. I never saw the like! and you to do it, a laddie like you. It beats me. Ay, there's Robert Jamieson's house, and yon's Hugh Macfarlane's, and the wee gate into the kirkyard as natural! and Widow Morrison's small shop joining the kirk. I can 'most see the things in the window. I would like the Minister to see it," said Mrs. Glen.

"Not that one, it is not good enough; there are others, mother."

She cast upon him a half contemptuous glance. He was "no judge,"

even though it was he who had done it; how could he be a judge, when he had so little appreciation of this great work?

"It's a great deal you ken," she said, "I will take it mysel' and let him see it. He would be awfu' pleased. His ain kirk, and ye can just see the Manse trees, though it's no in the picture. And a' done in one forenoon. I suppose," she added suddenly, "the like of this brings in siller. It's a business like any other trade?"

"When they are better than that, yes, pictures sell; but you should not speak of it as a trade."

"I wish it was half as honest and straightforward as many a trade. Better than that! that's aye your way. But you have not suppit your broth. I would not say now," said Mrs. Glen in high good-humour, "(sit down and finish your dinner), but Miss Margret would like a look at that."

"It is not half good enough."

"Hold your peace, you silly lad. I hope I ken what I'm saying. She's but lonely, poor thing, no a young person to speak

to. It would divert her to see it. I would not forbid you now to give the young leddy the like o' that in a present. Sir Ludovic's our landlord after a'. He's no an ill landlord, though he's poor. It is aye a fine thing to be civil, and ye never can tell but what a kind action will meet with its reward. I see no reason why you should not take that to Miss Margret in a present," Mrs. Glen said.

CHAPTER VII.

ROB had not been so light of heart since he made that momentous decision about his profession which had so strangely changed his life. For the first time since then he felt himself an allowed and authorized person, not in disgrace or under disapprobation of all men, as he had hitherto been ; and the permission to carry his drawing of the Kirkton to Miss Margaret "in a present" amused him, while it gave at the same time a certain sanction to his engagement to meet her, and show her the other productions of his pencil. Rob had his wits about him more than Margaret had, though not so much as his mother. He was aware that to ask a young lady to meet him at the burn for what purpose soever, was not exactly what was becoming, and that the advantage he had taken of their childish friend-

ship was perhaps not quite so "like a gentleman" as he wished to be. He could not indeed persuade himself that his mother was any authority in such a question; but still the fact that she thought it quite natural that he should carry on his old relations with Margaret, and even encouraged him to make the young lady a present, gave him a sort of fictitious satisfaction. He would affect to take his mother's opinion as his authority, if his conduct was called in question, and thus her ignorance was a bulwark to him. He went out again after his broth, and worked diligently all the afternoon, though Mrs. Glen thought it very unnecessary.

"'Twill just spoil it," she said, "the like of you never knows where to stop, either you do nothing at all, or you do a hantle o'er much."

But on this point Rob took his own way. Certainly, even when you despise the opinion of those around, it is good to be thought well off. The moral atmosphere was lighter round him, and there was the pleasant prospect of meeting Margaret in the evening, and receiving

the delightful incense of her admiration; a more agreeable way of filling up this interval of leisure could not have been devised, had his leisure been the most legitimate, the most natural in the world.

While he sat at his drawing in the breezy afternoon, a further sign of the rehabilitation he had undergone was accorded to him. Voices approaching him through the garden which lay between the house and the west green, prepared him for visitors, and these voices were too familiar to leave him in doubt who the visitors were. It was the Minister, whom Mrs. Glen was leading to the spot where her son was at work on his drawing. "I'll no say that I expected much," said Mrs. Glen, "for I'm not one that thinks everything fine that's done by my ain. I think I'm a' the mair hard to please; but, Doctor, when I saw upon the paper the very Kirkton itsel'! Losh me! there wasn't a house but you would have kent it. Robert Jamieson's and Hugh Macfarlane's, just as like as if you had been standing afore them. It clean beats me how a lad can do that, that has had little time

for anything but his studies ; for, doctor, I never heard but that my Rob was a good student. He hasna come to a good issue, which is awfu' mysterious ; but a good student he aye was, and there's no a man that kens who will say me nay."

"I am well aware of that," said Dr. Burnside. "It makes it all the more mysterious, as you well say ; but let us hope that time and thought will work a change. I'm not one to condemn a young man because he has troubles of mind. We've all had our experiences," the good man said, as he came through the opening in the hedge to the west green, which was nothing more imposing than the "green," technically so called, in which the farmer's household dried its clothes—a green, or to speak more circumstantially "a washing green," a square of grass on which the linen could be bleached if necessary, and with posts at each corner for the ropes on which it was suspended to dry, being a necessity of every house in Fife, and throughout Scotland. There was no linen hung out at present to share

the breezy green with Rob. He sat on the grass on a three-legged stool he had brought with him; a low hedge ran round the little enclosure, with a little burn purling under its shadow, and beyond were the green fields and the village, with all its reds and blues. Behind him an old ash tree fluttered its branches and sheltered him from the sun.

"Well, Robert, and how do you do?" said Dr. Burnside, "I have come out to see you at your mother's instance. She tells me you've developed a great genius for painting; I am very happy to hear of it, but I hope you will not let the syren art lead you away from better things."

"What are better things?" said Rob, "I don't know any," and he got up to respond to the Minister's salutation. Dr. Burnside shook his head.

"That is what I feared," he said, "you must not give up for painting, or any other pleasure of this earth, the higher calling you were first bound to, my good lad. You've served your time to the Church, and what if you have passing clouds that trouble your spirit? Having put your

hand to the plough you must not turn back."

"Eh, that's what I tell him every day o' his life," said Mrs. Glen.

"I came on purpose to have a long conversation with you," said the Minister. "Yes, very pretty, very pretty. I am no judge of paintings myself, but I've no doubt it's very well done. I need not tell you I'm very sorry for all that's come and gone; but I cannot give up the hope, Robert, that you will see the error of your ways. I cannot think a promising lad like you will continue in a wrong road."

"If it is a wrong road," said Rob.

"Whisht, lad, and hearken what the Minister says; but before I go in, Doctor, look at the picture. Is't no wonderful? There's your ain very trees, and the road we've ga'en to the kirk as long as I can mind, and a' the whigmaleeries of the auld steeple. Na, I put nae faith in it at first, no me! but when I saw it, just a bit senseless paper, good for nothin' in itsel'! Take a good look at it, Doctor. It's no like the kind of thing ye'll see every day."

“Yes, Mrs. Glen,” said the Minister, “I do not doubt it is very pretty. I am no judge myself. I would like to hear what Sir Claude would say, he is a great connoisseur. But it was not about pictures, however pretty, that I was wanting to speak to Robert. My good lad, put away your bonnie view and all your paints for a moment, and take a walk down to the Manse with me. I would like to satisfy myself how you stand, and perhaps a little conversation might be of use. There is nothing so good for clearing the cobwebs out of the mind, as just entering into the state of the case with a competent person, one that understands you, and knows what to advise.”

“That is what I aye said when all thae professors in Glasgow was taighling at him; the Doctor at hame would understand far better, that is what I aye said. Go with the Minister, Rob, and pay great attention. I’ll carry in the things. But I wish ye would take a good look at the picture, Doctor; and ye’ll no keep him too long, for he has a friend to see, and two-

three things to do. You'll mind that, Rob, my man."

Never since the fatal letter which disclosed his apostasy had his mother addressed him before as "my man." And Rob knew that the Doctor was not strong in argument. He went with him across the fields he had just been putting into his sketch, with an easy mind. He was fond of discussion, like every true-born Scotsman, and here at least he was pretty sure of having the victory. Mrs. Glen for her part carried in "the paints" with a certain reverence. She put the sketch against the wall of the parlour, and contemplated it with pride, which was a still warmer sentiment than her pleasure. It was "our Rob" that had done that; nobody else in the country side was so clever. It was true that Sir Claude was a connoisseur, as the Minister said, and was supposed to know a great deal about art, but nobody had ever seen a picture of his to be compared with this of "our Rob's." Mrs. Glen set the sketch against the wall, and got her knitting and sat down opposite to it, not to worship, but to build

castles upon that foundation, which was not much more satisfactory than Alnascher's basket of eggs. The thought passed through her mind, indeed, that he who could do so much in this accidental and chance way, what might he not have done had he followed out his original vocation, which was a grievous thought. But then it never could have been in Rob's way to be Archbishop of Canterbury, or anything but a parish minister, like the Doctor himself, whereas, perhaps, with this unsuspected new gift, and out of his very idleness and do-nothingness, who could tell what might come? Mrs. Glen's imagination was of a vulgar kind, but it enabled her to follow out a perfectly feasible and natural line of events, and to settle what her own line of conduct was to be with admirable good sense. Not to press him, not to put herself forward as arranging anything, not to interfere with the young lady, but to wait and see how things would happen. Nothing could be more simple. The end was a mist of confusion before the farmer-woman's eyes. Perhaps she fell asleep, nodding over

her half-knitted stocking in the drowsiness of the afternoon, but if so, a vague vision of "our Rob" turned into Sir Robert, and reigning at Earl's-hall, glistened at the end of that vista. How he could be Sir Robert, by what crown matrimonial he could be invested with the title and the lands of which Ludovic Leslie, and not Margaret, was the heir, we need not try to explain. The dreamer herself could not have explained it, nor did she try; and perhaps she had fallen asleep and was not accountable for the fancies that had got into her drowsy brain.

As for Rob, he had a long conversation with the Minister, and posed him as he had intended and foreseen. Dr. Burnside's theology was ponderous, and his information a trifle out of date. Even in the ordinary way of reasoning, his arguments were more apt to unsettle the minds of good believers and make the adversary rejoice, than to produce any more satisfactory result; and it may be supposed that he was not very well prepared for the young sceptic, trained in new strongholds of learning which the good Doctor knew but by

name. Dr. Burnside shook his puzzled head when he went into the Manse to tea, "Yon's a clever lad," he said to his wife, "I sometimes think the devil always gets the cleverest."

"Well, Doctor," said Mrs. Burnside, who was a very strong theologian, "have you forgotten that the foolish things of this earth are to confound the strong?"

But the Doctor only shook his head. He did not like to think of himself as one of the foolish things of this earth, even though by so doing he might have a better hope of confounding the audacious strength of Rob Glen. But he pondered much upon the subject, and polished up his weapons in private, going through many an argument in his own mind, which was more successful, and preparing snares and pitfalls for the young heretic. He had patronised Rob when Rob was orthodox, but he respected him now as he had never done before.

"I think I will preach my sermon on the fig-tree next Sabbath morning," he said to his wife after tea. "I think that will stagger him if anything can."

“Well, Doctor,” Mrs. Burnside replied, “it will always be a pleasure to hear it; but I fear Robert Glen is one of those whose ears are made heavy, that they cannot hear.”

The Doctor shook his head again, out of respect to the Scriptures; but he was not so hopeless. Perhaps he believed in his sermon on the fig-tree more than his wife did, and he felt that to gain back the young man who had baffled him would be indeed a crown of glory. He spent an hour in his study that night looking up other sermons which specially suited the case. It gave him an interest in his sermons which he had not felt since Sir Claude gave up coming to the parish church, and seceded to the Episcopal chapel in St. Rule's. That had been a distressing event to the good doctor, but he had got over it, and now providence had been kind enough to send him a young unbeliever to convince. Perhaps the good folks of the Kirkton and the parish generally would have heard of this looking up of the old discourses with some apprehension; but the Doctor wrote a

new introduction to the sermon on the fig-tree, and that was some little gain at least.

Rob left his pastor with less respectfulness than the good Doctor felt for him. After running the gauntlet of the professors, and receiving all the attention he had received as the representative of honest doubt, it is not to be supposed that Dr. Burnside could impress him much, and he took up a great deal of time with his feeble argumentations. When, however, the Minister invited him to come to the Manse to tea, Rob made a very pretty speech about his mother. "She has been very kind to me, though I know I have disappointed her," he said, "and I must not leave her alone. I don't think I can leave her alone."

"That's the finest thing you've said, Robert," said the Doctor, "I see your heart is right although your head is all wrong," and with this they parted, and the good man came in to look over his sermons. As for Rob, he hurried home to collect some sketch-books for Margaret's benefit, and would not share his mother's tea, notwithstanding his pretty speech. But

it was astonishing how tolerant Mrs. Glen had grown. She shook her head, but she did not insist upon the bread and butter.

“I’ll have something ready for your supper if you havena time now,” she said; and entreated him to take the block with to-day’s drawing, which she thought might be offered “in a present” to the young lady.

“Not that, mother,” said Rob, “not till it is finished.”

“Finished!” she said, with a disdain which was complimentary, “what would you have? You canna mend it. It’s just the Kirkton itsel.”

And she would have liked him to put on his best black coat when he went to meet Miss Margaret, and the tall hat he wore on Sundays. “When you have good claes, why should ye no wear them? She should see that you ken the fashion and can keep the fashion with the best—as my poor purse will feel when the bill comes in,” she added with a sigh. But at last Rob managed to escape in his ordinary garments, and with the sketches he had chosen. After the events of the day,

which had been a kind of crisis in his career, Rob's mind was full of a pleasant excitement; all things seemed once more to promise well for him—if only this little lady of romance would keep her promise. Would she come again? or had he been flattering himself, supposing a greater interest in her mind than really existed, or a greater freedom in her movements? He lingered about for some time, watching the sun as it lighted up the west, and began to paint the sky with crimson and purple; and as he watched it, Rob was natural enough and innocent enough to forget most other things. Who could attempt to put that sky upon paper? There was all the fervour of first love in his enthusiasm for art, and as he pondered what colours could give some feeble idea of such a sky, he thought no more of Margaret. What impossible combination could do it? And if it was done who would believe in it? He looked at the growing glory with that despair of the artist which is in itself a worship. Rob was not an artist to speak of, yet he had something of the “feeling” which makes one, and

all the enthusiasm of a beginner just able to make some expression of his delight in the beauty round him ; and there is no one who sees that beauty so clearly, and all the unimaginable glories of the atmosphere, the clouds and shadows, the wonderful varieties of colour of which our northern heaven is capable, as the artist, however humble. He was absorbed in this consideration, wondering how to do it, wondering if he ever could succeed in catching that tone of visionary light, that touch of green amid the blue—or whether he would not be condemned as an impostor if he tried, when suddenly his book of sketches was softly drawn out of his hand. Looking round with a start, he saw Margaret by his side. She had stolen upon him ere he was aware, and her laugh at having taken him by surprise changed into her habitual sudden blush as she caught his eye.

“ You need not mind me,” she said, confused. “ I am very happy, looking at the pictures. Are you trying to make a picture out of that sky?”

“ If I could,” he said ; “ but I don’t know how to do it, and if I did, it would

not be believed, though people see the sunset every day. Did you ever see a Turner, Miss Margaret? Do you know he was the greatest artist—one of the greatest artists?”

“I have heard his name; but I never saw any pictures, never one except our own, and a few in other houses. I have heard, or rather I have read that name. Did he paint landscapes like you?”

“Like me!” Rob laughed. “You don’t know what you are saying. I am a poor creature, a beginner, a fellow that knows nothing. But he!—and he is very fond of sunsets, and paints them; but he dared no more have done that—”

Margaret looked up curiously into the western heavens. It was “all aflame,” and the glow of it threw a warm reflection upon her as she looked up wistfully, with a look of almost infantile, suddenly awakened wonder. Her face was very grave, startled and full of awe, like one of Raphael’s child-angels. The idea was new to her. She, who thought these sketches so much more interesting than the sunset, it gave her a new sensation to hear of the

great artist who had never dared to represent that which the careless heavens accomplish every day. Some floating conception of the greatness of that great globe of sky and air which kept herself suspended a very atom in its vastness, and of the littleness of any man's attempt at representing it, came suddenly upon her, then floated away again, leaving her as eager as ever over Rob Glen's poor little sketches. She turned them over with hurried hands. Some were of scenes she did not know, the lochs and hills of the West Highlands, which filled her with delight, and now and then an old tumble-down house, which interested her less.

"Would you like to draw Earl's-hall?" she said. "I know you have it done in the distance. But it is grand in the distance, and close at hand it is not so grand, it is only funny. Perhaps you could make a picture, Mr.—Glen, of Earl's-hall?"

"I should very much like to try. Might I try? Perhaps Sir Ludovic might not like it."

"Papa likes what I like," said Margaret.

But then she paused. "There is Bell. You know Bell, Mr.—Glen."

She made a little pause before his name, and he smiled. Perhaps it was better that she should not be so easily familiar and call him Rob. The touch of embarrassment was more attractive.

"Bell," she added, with a little furtive smile, avoiding his look, "is more troublesome than papa; and she will go and speak to papa when she takes it into her head."

"Then you do not like Bell? I am wrong, I am very wrong; I see it. You did not mean that!"

"Not like—Bell? What would happen if you did not care for those that belong to you?"

"But Bell is only your servant—only your housekeeper."

Margaret closed the sketch-book, and looked at him with indignant eyes.

"I cannot tell you what Bell is," she said. "She is just Bell. She took care of my mother, and she takes care of me. Who would be like Bell to me, if it were the Queen? But sometimes she scolds,"

she added suddenly, coming down in a moment from her height of seriousness ; “and if you come to Earl’s-hall, you must make friends with Bell. I will tell her you want to draw the house. She would like to see a picture of the house, I am sure she would ; and Mr. Glen,” said Margaret timidly, looking up in his face, “you promised—but perhaps you have forgotten—you promised to learn me—”

(Learn, by one of the curious turns of meaning not uncommon over the Border, means teach in Scotch, just as to hire means to be hired).

“Forgotten !” said Rob, his face, too, glowing with the sunset. “If you will only let me ! The worst is that you will soon find out how little I know.”

“Not when I look at these beautiful pictures,” said Margaret, opening the sketch-book again. “Tell me where this is. It is a little dark loch, with hills rising and rising all round ; here there is a point out into the water with a castle upon it, all dim and dark ; but up on the hills the sun is shining. Oh, I would like, I would like to see it ! What

bonnie places there must be in the world !”

“It is in the Highlands. I wish I could show you the place,” said Rob. “The colours on the hills are far beyond a poor sketch of mine. They are like a beautiful poem.”

Margaret looked up at him again with a misty sweetness in her eyes, a recognition, earnest and happy, of another link of union.

“Do you like poetry *too* ?” she said.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARGARET went home that evening with her head more full than ever of the new incident which had come into her life. More full of that, but not quite so much occupied, perhaps, by the thought of her new acquaintance. She had all the eagerness of a child to begin her studies, to learn how to make pictures as he did, and this for the moment took everything that was dangerous out of the new conjunction of young man and young woman which was quite unfamiliar to her, but which had vaguely impressed her on their first meeting. She came home this time no longer in a dream of roused and novel feeling, but with definite aims before her, and when she found Bell as usual seated outside the door in the little court, Margaret lost no time in opening the attack on the person whom she knew

to be the most difficult and unlikely to be convinced.

“Bell!” she cried, running in, breathless with eagerness, “something is going to happen to me. Listen, Bell! I am going to learn to draw.”

“Bless me, bairn!” cried Bell, drawing back her chair in semi-alarm. “Is that a’? I thought you were going to tell me the French were coming. No that the French have ony thought of coming now-a-days, pair bodies; they’ve ower muckle to do with themselves.”

“Bell—you don’t take the trouble to think about me, and I am so happy about it. There never was a time that I did not care for pictures. And there’s a view of Earl’s-hall from the Kirkton, and I cannot tell how many more. You know I always was fond of pictures, Bell.”

“No me! I never knew you had seen ony, Miss Margret,” said Bell, placidly; “but for my part, I’m sure I’ve no objection. I would like it far better if it was the piany; but education’s aye a grand thing, however it comes. Can do is easy carried about.”

“And will you speak to papa?” said Margaret. “Bell, I wish you would speak to papa; for he jokes at me, and calls me little Peggy, and you know I’m not little, but quite grown up.”

“Oh, ay, as auld as him or me—in your ain conceit,” said Bell; “but whisht, my bonnie doo, I wasna meaning to vex you. And what am I to speak to Sir Ludovic about?”

A slight embarrassment came over Margaret. She began to fidget from one foot to another, and a sudden wave of colour flushed over her face. It did not mean anything. Was it not the trouble of her life that she blushed perpetually, blushed for nothing at all, with every fresh thought that rushed upon her, with every new impulse? It was her way of showing every emotion. Nevertheless this time it made her feel uncomfortable, as if it might mean something more.

“I told you,” she said; “it is about learning to draw, and about letting him come here to show me the way.”

“Letting *him* come! that’s another story; and who’s him?” said Bell. She

made a rapid mental review of the county while she spoke—puzzled yet not disconcerted; there was nobody of whom the severest duenna could be afraid. There was Sir Claude—known to be very fond of pictures—but Sir Claude was a *douce* married man, who was very unlikely to take the trouble, and even if he did would hurt nobody. “Na, I canna think. Young Randal Burnside he’s away, that was the only lad in the countryside like to be evened to our Miss Margret, and him no half or quarter good enough. Na, ye maun tell me; there’s no *him* in the country that may not come and go free for anything I care.”

“Why should you care?” said Margaret. “But I will tell you who it is. It is Rob Glen, Mrs. Glen’s son, at Earl’s-lee. He used to play with me when I was little, and I saw him drawing a picture. And then he told me who he was, and then he said he would learn me to draw, if I liked to learn—and you may be sure I would like to learn, Bell. Fancy! to take a bit of paper out of a book, and put this house upon it or any

other house, and all the woods, and the hills, and the sky. Look at that puff of cloud! it's all rosy and like a flower; but in a moment it will be grey, and next moment it will be gone; but if you draw it you have it for ever. It's wonderful, wonderful, Bell!"

"Rob Glen," said Bell, musing. She paid no attention to Margaret's poetical outburst. "Rob Glen—that's him that was to be a minister; but something's happened to him, he's no conductit himself as he ought, or else he tired of the notion, and he's at hame doing naething." Bell paused after this historical sketch. "He wasna an ill laddie. He was very good to you, Miss Margret, when you were but a little troublesome thing, greeting for drinks of water, and asking to be carried, and wanting this and wanting that, just what puts a body wild with bairns."

"Was I?" said Margaret, with wide opened eyes. "No! Rob never thought me a trouble. You might do so," she added, with offence. "I cannot tell for you, but I am sure Rob—"

"I weel believe he never said a word.

He was great friends with you, I mind well—oh, great friends; and so he wants to learn you to draw—or you want him? I see nae great objection,” said Bell, doubtfully. “He’s a young man, but then you’re a leddy far above him; and you’re old friends, as you say. I will not say but what I would rather he was married, Miss Margret; but I see nae great objection—”

“Married!” said Margaret, her eyes bigger than ever with wonder and amusement, “Married!” She laughed, though she could scarcely have told why. The idea amused her beyond measure. There was something piquant in it, something altogether absurd. Rob! But why the idea was so ridiculous she could not say. Bell looked at her in her laughter with a certain doubt.

“Why should he no be married?” she said, “lads of that kind marry young—they’ve naething to wait for, the moment they get a kirk it’s a’ they can look for—very different from some. I dinna ken what Sir Ludovic may say,” she added, doubtfully. “Sir Ludovic has awfu’ high

notions ; a farmer's son to learn a Leslie. I canna tell how he'll take it."

"Bell !" cried Margaret, with indignation, "when you know it's you that have the high notions ! Papa would never think of anything of the kind ; but if you go and put them into his head, and tell him what to think—"

"Lord bless the bairn, me !" cried Bell, with the air of being deeply shocked ; and then she got up and went back into her kitchen, which was her stronghold. Margaret, for her part, slightly discouraged, but still eager, stole upstairs. If Bell was against her, it did not matter very much who was on her side. She went softly into the long room where her father was reading. Would it ever happen to her, she wondered, to sit still in one place and read, whatever might be going on—never thinking what was happening outside, untroubled whether it rained or was fine, whether it was summer or winter ? Though she came in and roamed about softly, in a kind of subdued restlessness, looking over the bookshelves, and flitting from window to window, Sir Ludovic took no notice.

With her own life so warm in her, it was stranger and stranger to Margaret to see that image of the calm of age; how strange it was! He had not moved even, since she came into the room, while she was so restless, so eager, thinking nothing in the world so important as her present fancy. When she had fluttered about for some time without attracting his notice, she grew impatient. "Papa, I want to speak to you," she said.

"Eh? Who is that—?" Sir Ludovic roused up as if he had been asleep; "you, little Peggy?"

"Yes; were you sleeping? I wondered and wondered that you never saw me."

"I don't think I was asleep," he said, with a little confusion. "To tell the truth I do get drowsy sometimes lately, and I don't half like it," he added, in an undertone.

"You don't like it?" said Margaret; she was not uneasy, but she was sympathetic; "but then don't do it, papa; come and take a little walk with me—" here she paused, remembering that to-night, for instance, Sir Ludovic would have been

much out of place, "or a turn in the garden, like John."

Sir Ludovic paid not much attention to what she said; he rubbed his eyes, and raised his head, shaking himself with a determination to overcome the drowsiness which was a trouble to him. "You must sit with me more, my little girl, and make a noise, a little sound is life-like. This stillness gets like—" he made a pause; was the first word that occurred to him an unpleasant one, not such as was agreeable to pronounce? "like sleep," he added, after a moment, "and I have no wish to go to sleep."

"Sleeping is not pleasant in the daytime," said Margaret, unintentionally matter-of-fact. The old man gave a slight shiver which she did not understand. It was no longer the daytime with him, and this was precisely why he disliked his unconscious doze; was it not a sign that night was near? He raised himself in his chair, and with the almost mechanical force of habit, began to turn over the leaves of the book before him. It was evident he had not heard her appeal. She stood by for a

moment not saying anything, then pulled his sleeve gently.

“Papa! it was something I had to say.”

“Ay, to be sure. You wanted something, my little Peggy? what was it? There are not many things I can do, but if it is within my power—”

“Papa! how strange to speak to me so—you can do everything I want,” said the girl. “And this is what it is:—I want—don’t be very much astonished—to learn to draw.”

“To draw? I am afraid I am no good in that respect and cannot teach you, my dear.”

“You? oh no! but there is one that would learn me.”

“My little Peggy, you are too Scotch—say teach.”

“Very well, teach if you like, papa, what does the word matter? but may he come to the house, and may I have lessons. I think it is the only thing that is wanted to make me perfectly happy.”

Sir Ludovic smiled. “In that case you had better begin at once. Mr. Ruskin himself ought to teach you after such a

sentiment. At once, my Peggy! for I would have you perfectly happy if I could. Poor child, who knows what may happen after," he said, meditatively, putting his hand upon her arm and smoothing the sleeve caressingly. Margaret, occupied with her own thoughts, did not take in the meaning of this; but she was vaguely discouraged by the tone.

"You are not like yourself, papa, what has happened?" she said, almost impatiently. "You are not—ill? It is waking up, I suppose."

"Just that—or going to sleep—one or the other. No, no, I am not ill—yet—And let us be comfortable, my little girl. Draw? yes, you shall learn to draw, and sit by me, quiet as a little mouse with bright eyes."

"You said just now I was to make a noise."

"To be sure, so I did. I say one thing one moment, and another the next; but after all they are much the same. So you sit by me, you may be quiet or make a noise, it will be all the same. Your noises are quiet, my Peggy. Your sleeve rustl-

ing, your hand moving, and a little impatience now and then, a start and a shake of your little head. These are noises an old man likes when Providence has given him a little girl."

"But really," said Margaret, with a crease in her forehead, "really! I am grown up—I am not a little girl."

"Well, my Peggy! it will be so much the better for you," he said, patting her sleeve. Margaret was vaguely chilled by this acquiescence, she could scarcely tell why; and the slight pain made her impatient, calling up a little anger causeless and vague as itself.

"Don't, papa," she said. "You are not like yourself. I don't know what is the matter with you. Then, he may come?"

"Yes, yes, at once;" said Sir Ludovic, with a dreamy smile; then he said, "But who is it?" as if this mattered little. Altogether, Margaret felt he was not like himself.

"Do you remember Rob Glen, papa? the son of Mrs. Glen at Earl's-lee; he used to play with me when I was a child; he was always very kind to me. Oh,

don't shake your head, you *must* mind him. Robert Glen at the farm?"

"I *mind*, as you say (Scotch, Scotch, little Peggy, you should not be so Scotch) a Robert Glen who took the farm thirty or forty years ago. By-the-by the lease must be almost out; but how you are to get drawing or anything else out of a rough farmer—"

"Papa!" Margaret put her hand upon his shoulder with impatience, "how could it be a Robert Glen of thirty or forty years ago? He is only a little older than me. He played with me when I was a little girl. He is perhaps the son, or he may be the grandson. He is a little older than me."

"Get your pronouns right, my little Peggy. Ah! the son; *va pour le fils*," said Sir Ludovic, with a drowsy smile, and turned back to his book. Margaret stood for a moment with her hand on his shoulder, looking at him with that irritation which is the earliest form of pain. A vague uneasiness came into her mind, but it was so veiled in this impatience that she did not recognise it for what it was.

The only conscious feeling she had was, how provoking of papa ! not to take more interest, not to ask more, not to say anything. Then she dropped her hand from his shoulder and turned away, and went to sit in the window with the first chance book she could pick up. She was not thinking much about the book. She was half annoyed and disappointed to have got her own way so easily. Had he understood her ? Margaret did not feel quite happy about this facile assent. It made of Rob Glen no wonder at all, no disturbing individuality. He was something more after all than Sir Ludovic thought. What was all her own tremor for, if it was to be lightly met with a *va pour le fils* ? She was not satisfied, and indeed the little rustlings of her impatience, her subdued movements, as she sat behind, did all for her father that he wanted. They kept him awake. The drowsiness which comforted him, yet which he was afraid of, fled before this little thrill of movement. Even if she had been altogether quiet, is there not a thrill and reverberation in the air about a thinking creature ? Sir Ludovic was kept

awake and alive by the consciousness of another near him, living in every nerve, filling the silence with a little thrill of independent being. This kept him, not only from dozing, but even from active occupation with his book. After a little while he too began to be restless, turned the pages hastily, then himself turned half round towards her. "My Peggy?" he said. In a moment she was standing by his side.

"What is it? did you want me, papa?"

"No, it is nothing, only to see that you were there. I heard you, that was all; and in the sound there was something strange, like a little spirit behind me—or a little mouse, as I said before."

"Had I better go away? would you rather be without me?"

"No, my little girl; but sit in my sight, that I may not be puzzled. The thing is that I can feel you thinking, my Peggy."

"Papa! I was not thinking so much—not of any thing in particular, not to disturb you."

"No, my dear, I am not complaining;

they were very soft little thoughts, but I heard them. Sit now where I can see you, and all will go right."

"Yes, papa. And you are sure you have no objections," Margaret said, after a moment's pause, standing by him still.

"To what? to the teaching of the drawing? oh, no objections—not the least objection."

"And you don't mind him coming to the house—I mean—Mr. Glen."

"Is that any reason why I should mind?" The old man asked quickly, rousing into something like vigilance.

"Oh no, papa—but I thought perhaps because he was not—the same as us—because he was only—the farmer's son."

"This is wisdom; this is social science; this is worthy of Jean and Grace," said Sir Ludovic. "My little Peggy! I do not know, my child. Is this all out of your own head?"

At this Margaret drooped a little, with one of her usual overwhelming blushes. "It was Bell," she said; but was it indeed all Bell? Some instinct in her had made a more penetrating suggestion, but

she could not tell this to her father. She waited with downcast eyes for his reply.

“Ah, it was Bell. I am glad my little Peggy was not so clever and so far-seeing; now run and play, my little girl, run away and play,” he said, dismissing her in his usual tone. She had roused him at last to his ordinary mood, and neither he nor she thought more of his desire that she should stay in his sight. Margaret went away with her heart beating to the west chamber, which was her legitimate sitting-room. She was half ashamed of her own fears about Rob, which her father had treated so lightly. Was it entirely Bell that had put it into her head that this new visitor might be objected to? And was it entirely because he was the farmer’s son? Margaret was too much puzzled and confused to be able to answer these questions. She was like a little ship setting out to sea without any pilot. An instinct in her whispered the necessity for guidance, whispered some faint doubts whether this step she was taking was a right one; but what could the little ship do when the man at the helm was so tranquilly

careless? At seventeen is one wiser than at seventy-five? it is not only presumptuous, it is irreligious to think so. And when her own faint doubt was laughed at by her father as being of the order of the ideas of Jean and Grace, what could Margaret do but be ashamed of it? Jean and Grace were emblems of the conventional and artificial to Sir Ludovic. He could not speak of them without a laugh, though they were his children; neither did they approve of their father—with some reason it may be thought.

Thus it was settled that Rob Glen should have access to Earl's-hall. Bell shook her head, but she did not interfere. "It will divert the bairn," she said to herself, "and I can aye keep my eye upon him." What was the need of disturbing Sir Ludovic, honest man? The Leslies had their faults, Bell reflected, but falling in love beneath them was not their weakness. They were very friendly but very proud. "As sweet and as kind to the poorest body as if they were their own kith and kin; but it's hitherto mayst thou come and no a step further,"

said Bell, "that's the way o' them all. Even our Miss Margaret, I would advise nobody to go too far with her. She's very young. She disna understand herself; but as for the canailye I would not counsel them to come near by our young lady, simple as she is; there's just an instinck; it's in the Leslie blood."

Thus all went smoothly in this first essay of wilfulness. Father and old duenna both consented that the risk should be run. But in Margaret's own mind there was one pause of hesitation. Had there been any opposition to her will she would have upheld Rob Glen to the utmost, and insisted upon her drawing lessons; but as it was, there came a check to her eagerness, which she did not understand, a subtle sort of hindrance in her path, a hesitation—because no one else hesitated. Was that all?

From this it will be seen that the ladies Jean and Grace were not so wrong as was supposed at Earl's-hall, when they shook their heads over their father's proceedings, and declared that he was not capable of being trusted with the charge

of a young girl. Any young girl would have been rather unsafe in such hands, but a girl with money, a girl who was an heiress ! As for Sir Ludovic, he went on serenely with his reading, or dozed over his book in the long room, and took no notice, or thought no more of the new teacher Margaret had got for herself. He was very glad she should do anything that pleased her. Now and then he was anxious, and his mind was occupied, by the drowsiness which came over him. He did not like this, it was not a good sign. It made his mind uneasy, for he was an old man, and knew he could not go on for ever, and the idea of death was far from pleasant to him. This he was anxious about, but about his child he was not anxious. She was not going to die, or anything to happen to her. She had a long time before her, in which no doubt many things would happen ; and why should her father begin so early to make himself uncomfortable about her ? He did not see the use.

CHAPTER IX.

WHILE these events were going on in the long room, and up the spiral stairs, thoughts not less important to her than those that moved her young mistress was going on in the head of Jeanie, the young maid-servant at Earl's-hall. Jeanie had been chosen as her assistant by Bell on account of her excellent character and antecedents, and the credit and respectability of all belonging to her. "An honest man's daughter," Bell said, "a man just by-ordinary," and the girl herself was so well-spoken of, so pretty spoken in her own person, with such an artless modesty in the soft chant of her voice, true Fife and of the East Neak, that there had been nothing to say against the wisdom of the choice. Jeanie was always smiling, always good-humoured, fresh as a rose and as clean, singing softly

about her work, with the natural freedom yet sweet respectfulness which makes a Scotch lass so ingratiating an attendant. Jeanie could not have waited even upon a stranger without a certain tender anxiety and affectionate interest—a desire not only to please, but to “pleasure” the object of her cares, *i.e.*, to give them pleasure with sympathetic divining of all they wanted. Whether it was her “place” or not to do one thing or another, what did it matter? Her own genuine pleasure in the cleanness and neatness she spread round her, and in the comfort of those she served, reached the length of an emotion. It did her heart good to bring order out of chaos, to make dimness bright, and to clear away stain and spot out of her way. She had been two years at Earl’s-hall, and before that had been away as far as the west country, where her mother’s friends were. Jeanie was her father’s only daughter, and great was his comfort and rejoicing when she came back to be so near him; for John Robertson was not well enough off to keep her with him at home, nor could he have

thought it good for Jeanie to keep her in his little cottage "learning no-thing," as he said. Perhaps there had risen upon Jeanie's bright countenance some cloud of uneasiness during these recent days, at least it had occurred to Bell, she could scarcely tell how, that something more than usual was in the girl's mind. "It'll do you good to go and have a crack with your father," she had said, the day after Margaret's second meeting with Rob Glen. Perhaps Bell wanted to have her young lady all to herself—perhaps it was only consideration for Jeanie.

"You can go as soon as the dinner is up," she said, "and take the old man a print o' our sweet butter, and twa-three eggs. It'll please him to see you mind upon him."

"No me, but you," said Jeanie; "and I'm real obliged to you, Bell."

Perhaps a rigid moralist would have said it was not Bell, but Sir Ludovic who had the right to send these twa-three eggs; but such a critic would have met with little charity at Earl's-hall, where, indeed, Bell's thrift and care, and notable

management, as constant and diligent as if the housekeeping had been her own, kept plenty as well as order in the house; nor did it ever occur to the good woman that she was not free to give as well as to increase this simple kind of household wealth. Jeanie set out in the summer evening, after six o'clock, when she had delivered the last dish into John's hands. She went along the country road with neither so light a step nor so light a heart as those which had carried Margaret in dreamy pleasantness between the same hedges, all blossomed with the sweet flaunting of the wild rose. Jeanie, as was natural, being three-and-twenty and a hard-working woman, was more solid and substantial than the Laird's daughter at seventeen; but it would have been difficult to imagine a more pleasant object, or one more entirely suiting and giving expression to the rural road along which she moved, than was Jeanie, a true daughter of the soil. She was not tall or slim, but of middle height, round and neat and well-proportioned, with a beautiful complexion impaired by nothing but a few freckles,

and golden-brown hair, much more "in the fashion," with its crisp undulations and luxuriant growth, than the brown silky locks of her young mistress. Dark eyes and eyelashes gave a touch of higher beauty to the fair fresh face, which had no particular features, but an air of modesty, honesty, sweet good temper, and kindness very delightful to behold. She was "a bonnie lass," no more, not the beauty or reigning princess of the neighbourhood, or playing any fatal *rôle* in the countryside. Jeanie was too good, too simple and kind for any such position; but she was a bonnie lass, and "weel respectit," and had her suitors like another. As she went along by herself in that perfect ease of solitude, unseen by any eye, which subdues all instincts of pride and self-command, a vague cloud became visible on her face. The smile with which she met her little world, true always, yet true sometimes rather in the sense of self-denial than of fact, faded away; her simple countenance grew serious, a curve of anxiety came into her forehead, not deadly anxiety, such as wrings the heart, but a wistfulness and

longing for something unattained, for something, perhaps, which ought to be attained, and which might end in being a wrong if withheld from her. Nothing so abstruse as this could be read in Jeanie's face, which would besides have cleared up and awoke into the soft sunshine of friendly response had any one met her ; but as she went on alone, with nobody to see, there was a gravity in her eyes, a wistfulness in the look which she cast along the field-path which Margaret had followed so pleasantly, which was not like Jeanie. Was she looking for some one who ought to be coming along that green and flowery path ? She breathed out a soft little sigh as she went on. " My faither will ken," Jeanie said to herself, and though there was this anxiety in her face, a certain languor was in her step, as of one by no means confident that the news she is going to seek will be comforting to hear.

The Kirkton, to which Jeanie was bound, and of which Rob Glen had made so many sketches, was, as already said, an irregular village surrounding the kirk from which it took its name, and built upon a mound,

which stood eminent over the low rich fields of Stratheden. The greater portion of the church was new, and quite in accordance with the eighteenth century idea of half-barn-half-meeting-house which, unfortunately, in so many cases represents the parish church in Scotland. But this was all the worse in the present case, from being added on to a beautiful relic of the past, the chancel of an old Norman church, still in perfect preservation, not resenting, but silently indicating with all the force of fact, the incredible difference between the work of the united and Catholic past, and the expedient of a Scotch heritor to house at the smallest possible cost, the national worship which he himself is too fine to share. The little round apse of the original church, with its twisted arches and toothed ornaments, brown with age and lichen, and graceful, natural decay, was the only part of it visible from the road along which our Jeanie was coming. Jeanie neither knew nor cared for the Norman arches, but the grassy mound that rose above her head, with its grave-stones, and the high steps which led up to

it, upon which the children clustered, were dear and familiar to her eyes. At the foot of the kirk steps was a road which led to “the laigh toun,” a little square or *place*,—semi-French, as are so many things in Scotland—surrounded by cottages; while the road, which wound round the base of the elevation on which the church stood, took in “the laigh toun,” in which was the post-office and the shop, and the “Leslie Arms,” and two or three two-storied houses, vulgar and ugly in their blue slates, which were the most important dwellings in the Kirkton. Jeanie, however, had nothing to do with these respectable erections; her steps were turned towards the high town, where her father’s cottage was. Everybody knew her on the familiar road. “Is that you, Jeanie?” the men said, going home from their work with long leisurely tread, which looked slow, yet devoured the way. The children on the kirk steps “cried upon her” with one voice, or rather with one chant, modulating the long-drawn vowels with the native sing-song of Fife. Even Dr. Burnside, walking stately down the brae,

shedding a wholesome awe about him, with hands under his coat-tails, stopped to speak to her.

"Your father is very well, honest man," the Doctor said.

When she reached the little square beyond the church, where the women were sitting at their doors in the soft evening air, or standing in groups, each with her stocking, talking across the open space like one family, a universal greeting arose.

"Eh, Jeanie, lass, you're a sight for sair e'en!" they cried. "Eh, but the auld man will be pleased to see you;" and "He's real weel, Jeanie, my woman," was added by various voices. This was evidently the point on which she was supposed to be anxious. The girl nodded to them all with friendly salutations. They had their little bickerings, no doubt, now and then; but were they not one family, each knowing everything that concerned the others?

"I'm real pleased to see you a', neighbors," Jeanie said; "but I maunna bide. I've come to see my faither."

“That’s right, Jeanie, lass,” the women said; “he’s been a good faither to you, and weel he deserves it at your hand.” “Faither and mither baith,” said another commentator; and Jeanie went on with a warm light of pleasure and kindness in her face. Perhaps her name in the air had caught her father’s ear, though no name was more common than Jeanie, or more often heard in “the laigh toun;” or perhaps it was that more subtle personal influence which heralds a new-comer—magnetical, electrical, who can tell what? As she made her way to the end of the square, where it communicated by a steep street with “the laigh toun” below, he came out to his cottage door. He was a tall man, thin and stooping, and very pale, his face sicklied o’er with more than thought. He wore the sign of his trade, a shoemaker’s apron, and looked along the line of houses with a wistful expression, like that which Jeanie had worn when she was alone. He was a man “above the common,” everybody said, for long years a widower, who had been “faither and mither baith” to his children; and only

some of them had repaid poor John. Those of the lads who were good lads had emigrated and gone far out of his neighbourhood and those who were within reach were not models of virtue. But Jeanie had always been his support and stay. His wistful inquiring look yielded to the tenderest pleasure as he perceived her; but there was no enthusiasm of greeting between the father and daughter. Few embracings are to be seen in Scotch peasant families. The cobbler's face lighted up; he said, "Is that you, Jeanie, my bonnie woman?" with a tone that had more than endearment in it. The sight of her brought a glow to his wan face. "You are as good as the blessed sunshine, my lass—and eh, but I'm glad to see you!"

"And me too, faither," said Jeanie. That was their greeting. "They tell me you're real well," she added, as they went indoors.

"A great deal they ken," said John Robertson, with that natural dislike to be pronounced well by the careless outside world which every invalid shares. "But I'm no that bad either," he added, "and

muckle the better for seeing you. Come in and sit you down."

"I have but little time to stay," said Jeanie.

As she went in before him the shade again returned to her face, though only for that moment during which it was unseen. The small window of the cottage gave but a dim greenish light, a sort of twilight after the full glow and gladness outside. But they were used to this partial gloom; and there seemed a consciousness on the father's part as well as the daughter's of something serious that there might be to say. He looked at her closely, yet half stealthily, with the vivacious dark eyes which lighted up his pale face; but he asked no question. And Jeanie, for her part, said nothing about herself. She asked when he had seen Willie, and if all was well with John, and he replied, shaking his head,

"Oh, ay, weel enough, weel enough for such a ne'er-do-weel."

"No a ne'er-do-weel, faither. Poor laddie! he's so easy led away; but by and by he'll tak' a thought and mend."

“Like the de’il—at least, accordin’ to Robert Burns. Ay, ay, Jeanie, by and by! But maybe he’ll break our hearts afore then.”

“And Willie, faither?”

“Since Willie ’listed, I try to think of him nae mair,” said the cobbler, with a quiver in his lips; then he added, “But he’ll be held weel under authority, as the centurion says in Scripture, and maybe it’s the best thing that could have happened for himself.”

“That’s aye what Bell says—”

“Bell! and what does Bell ken about it—a woman that never had a son! If I were to have my family over again, I would pray for a’ lasses, Jeanie, my woman, like you.”

“Eh, faither! but you mustna forget Robin and Alick, though they’re far away; and a’ the lasses are no like me,” said Jeanie, with a tear and a smile. “I might have been marriet, and far from hame; or I might have been licht-headed;” this she said with a faint laugh at the idea, and rising blush; for to be anything different from her modest self was half

incredible, half alarming. The cobbler shook his head.

“Another might, but no my Jean. But what is sent is the best, if we could but see it, nae doubt, nae doubt.”

“And that minds me,” she said, abruptly, with a little gasp of rising agitation. Then she stopped herself as quickly; “how is the work getting on? have ye aye plenty jobs to keep ye going, faither?” she added, as by an after-thought.

“No that bad,” said the shoemaker. “Plenty wark—pay’s no just the same thing. There was three pair last week for Merran Linsay, you ken she’s aye to be trusted.”

“Trusted!” said Jeanie, “ay for kindness and a good heart, but for the siller—”

“My heart’s wae for the poor decent woman,” said John Robertson, “with aye the wolf at her door. The shoes thae bairns gang through! no to speak of other things. How could I bid her depart, and get something elsewhere to put on their feet when she came to me? Would you ca’ that Christianity—no that I’m blaming

them that can do it," he added, hastily. "Na, whiles I wish I could do it; but nature's mair strong than wishing—"

"You are aye the auld man," said Jeanie, tenderly, "it's real foolish, faither, but I canna blame ye. I like ye a' the better. You would make shoes for a' the pairish, and never take a penny."

"Na, na, lass! there you're wrong," he said, briskly. "I charged a shilling mair than the price to auld Will Heriot, nae further gane than Friday last. He was in an awfu' hurry, and awfu' ill-tempered. I put on a shilling," said the cobbler, with a low laugh. "In the abstract it wasna right, and I'll no say but I may gie it back—but the auld Adam is strong now and then."

"No half strong enough," said Jeanie. "I wouldna gie him back, no a brass farden." Then she paused, and her countenance changed again—that scarcely perceptible darkening, paling, came over it, and this time she spoke quickly, with a little almost impatient determination, as if resolved not to allow herself any more to be crushed and silenced by herself.

“Faither,” she said, “you’ll ken he’s come back. Have you heard anything of Rob Glen?”

“Not a word, Jeanie, no a word. I thought that was what you were coming to tell me.”

There was a pause—Jeanie said nothing. She turned her face away, and made believe to look out at the dim little window, while the cobbler, with the delicacy of a prince, turned in the other direction that he might not seem to watch her.

“It’s a long time since the lad has been hame,” he said, with a slight tremor in his voice. “He will have many things to take him up; and his mother—his mother’s a proud woman; he knows neither you nor me would welcome him against the will o’ his ain folk.”

“It’s no that, faither,” said Jeanie, with a low sound like a sob, which escaped her unawares. “it’s no that. The like of that is nothing. Am I one that would judge a hard judgment? It’s no that.”

“You would never mean it, Jeanie, my my bonnie woman; but when the heart is

troubled the judgment a' ajee. You maun possess your soul in patience; maist things come right one way or anither to them that will wait."

Jeanie gave a weary sigh, the light dying out of her face. She kept gazing out of the little window, in a strained attitude, with the tears unseen, blinding her eyes. "It was just that I came for," she said, "to see if you could tell me what to do. He has made great friends, I kenna how, with our Miss Margaret, and he's coming to Earl's-ha'; maybe I'll have to open the door till him, maybe I'll have to show him up the stair—to say Sir till him, and never let 'on he's onything to me." Here a sob once more broke the hurrying current of Jeanie's words. "What will I do, faither—what will I do?" she cried, with an intense undertone of pain, which made the words tragical in their simplicity—smiling Jeanie, so fair and friendly, turning all at once into a tragic representation (for the millionth time) of disappointed love, and that aching loss which by reason of some lingering possibility of redemption for

it, is more hard to bear than despair.

“My bonnie woman !” said the cobbler ; the same ring of pain was in his voice ; but the very delicacy of his sympathy, and its acuteness, kept him silent. He made another pause ; “Jeanie, my lass,” he said, “in a’ the trials o’ this life I’ve found that true that was said to them that were first sent out to preach the Word. God’s awfu’ good, to give us the same for the common need as is for the divine. ‘Tak nae thought in that hour what ye will say.’ That’s aye the guide as long as you’re innocent of harm. It will be put into your mouth what is best.”

Jeanie turned upon him wistfully. “Is that a’ you have to say to me?—is that a’, faither ? I want mair than that ; will I take the thing just as it comes, or will I haud out o’ the way ? Will I let him see me, or will I no let him see me ? Will I throw it on him to acknowledge me for—a friend : or will I take it on me ? See how many things I have to ask ! It’s no just what to say.”

“I maun turn that ower in my mind,” said John ; and there was a pause. Jeanie,

after this little outburst, sat still with her head turned again towards the window, not looking at him, concealing the tears in her eyes, and the agitation of her face, which even to her father was not to be betrayed. As for John he dropped naturally upon his familiar bench, and took up unconsciously a shoe at which he had been working. The little knock of the hammer was the natural accompaniment to his thinking. Outside, the voices of the neighbours softened by the summer air made a murmur of sound through which some word or two fell articulate now and then through the silence. "She kens my mind; but she will gang her ain gait," one woman said to another; and then there arose a cry of "Tak care o' the bairn—it'll fa' and break its neck," and a rush of feet. All these sounds and a great deal more fell into the silence of the dim cottage room, where nothing but the little tap of the cobbler's hammer disturbed the stillness. Jeanie sat very still, her hands clasped in her lap, the moisture in her eyes, turning over many thoughts in her mind. The time that had been! the day

when they met in Glasgow, she a fresh country lass, half friend, half servant, in the house of her relation; he a student, half-gentleman, with his old red gown, the sign of learning, on his arm. How glad then had Rob been to see Jeanie! And even when he began to have "grand friends," and to eschew his uncle's shop, her smiling looks, her soft sympathy, had kept him always faithful. And Jeanie had not thought very much of the two years of silence since she came back to Fife. They were both young, and she knew that Rob's mother was not likely to smile upon so humble a daughter-in-law. But his return had roused all the past, and the thought of meeting him again had stirred Jeanie's being to the depths. Even this visit had changed the aspect of affairs for her. For it had not seemed possible that Rob could have entirely neglected her father, whom everybody esteemed, and she had come to the Kirkton—honestly to ask counsel in her difficulty, yet not without hope of hearing something that might charm all difficulty away.

"Jeanie," said her father, at last,

“whatever we meet with in this world there’s aye but one path for right-minded folk. You maun neither flee from your duty nor gang beyond your duty. We’ve nae business to rin away from trouble because it’s trouble, but we’ve nae call to put oursels in its way. If it’s clear that no person can let the lad in but you, open the door till him, take him up the stair—do it, my woman, and never think twice; but if it’s no needful, forbear. And as for leaving it on him to own you for a friend, you must not do that; it would be untruthful on your part, for I hope you’re ower weel bred, my bonnie woman, to pass any person you ken without a smile or a pleasant word. You wouldna disown your friend if he turned poor, and why should he, when he’s turned rich? or I should say grand in his ways, for rich Rob Glen will never be. Sae it will be but honest when you see the lad to say ‘How is a’ wi’ you, Robin,’ or ‘I hope you’re keeping your health,’ or the like of that. Say nothing of other things. Let no lad think you are seeking him; but neither should any lad think you are feared to let it be seen you

ken him. Na, I'll hear o' nae concealments; my Jeanie must be as clear as the running water, aye true, and scornin' to deceive. 'Ay,' you'll say, 'Miss Margaret, I ken Robert Glen.'"

"Ay," said the poor girl, with a wistful echo, "I ken Robert Glen!" she shook her head, and the tears with which her eyes were full, brimmed over. "Ay, that do I, faither; I wish I had never kent him, I wish I had never thought so weel of him. Eh, but it's strange—awful strange—to think ane ye *ken* can deceive! Them ye dinna ken are different. But to say a thing and no to mean it, faither—to give a promise and forget—to mak' a vow before the Lord and think nae mair o't! Can such things be?"

"Such things have been, Jeanie. I'm like you, I cannot believe in them; but they have been. And a' that you and me can do is to bear whatever comes, and be aye faithful and steady, and wait till you see the end."

"It's sae lang waiting," said Jeanie, with a smile in her wet eyes, as she rose from her seat; "and it's no as if it would be

ony satisfaction to see them punished for't that do amiss. But fareyewell, faither; I'm muckle the better o' your good advice. Thinkna of me, I'll win through. It's no like a thing that would make a person useless, no fit to do their day's work or get their living. I'll win through."

And the tears were all clear out of her brown eyes, and her smile ready, to meet the world with, when she came out of the dimness of the cottage door. John Robertson stood there watching her as she went along by the neighbours' doors, and it was more from the shadow on his face than on hers that the women divined some trouble in the family.

"Is't about Willie?" they said. "You should speak to your faither, Jeanie, a sensible lass like you. Though he's listed, what's to hinder but he may do real well yet?"

"I had an uncle, as decent a man as ever was, that listed in his young days," said another.

Jeanie received these consolations with her habitual smile.

"I think that too," she said. "There

wouldna be so muckle about good sodgers in the Bible if they were all bad men that listed ; and so I've tellt him."

So close to her heart did she wear it, that nobody suspected Jeanie's own private cincture of care.

CHAPTER X.

“PAPA has no objections,” said Margaret, demurely; “he says if you will come he will be—glad to see you.” This, however, being an addition made on the spot, she faltered over it, not quite knowing how it was to be supported by fact; and she added timidly, “Will you really take all that trouble for me? Perhaps I am stupid. I think very likely I am stupid; for I cannot draw anything—I have been trying,” she said, with a great blush.

“You have been trying! I should like to see what you have done. If you could have seen my stumbles and blunders, you would have had no respect for me at all,” said Rob Glen; “and how I dare now to take upon me to teach you, who probably know more than I do—”

“Oh, I know nothing at all, just nothing at all. What shall we do, Mr.

—Glen? I found a book and some pencils. I think there is everything in the world up in the old presses in the high room. What shall we do first? Might I begin with—the house? or a tree?”

“There are some preliminary exercises,” said Rob, “that are thought necessary; very simple—drawing straight lines, and curves, and corners. I am sure you will do them all—by instinct.”

“Oh!” said Margaret again. Her countenance fell. “But any child would draw straight lines; a straight line is nothing—it is just that,” she added, tracing a line in the soft brown upturned earth of the ploughed field through which the path ran. But when Margaret looked at it, she reddened and furtively attempted another. She had met Rob by the burn as before, and he was walking back with her towards home. The sky was overcast and lowering. The brief interval of lovely weather had for the moment come to an end. Clouds were gathering on all the hills, and the winds sighed about the hedges, heavy with coming rain.

“The furrow is straight,” said Rob,

“straight as an arrow; that is the ploughman’s pride; but it is not so easy to draw a straight line as you think. I have known people who could never do it.”

Margaret was crimson with the failure.

“It’s me that am stupid!” she cried, in sudden rage with herself. “How do the ploughmen learn to do it? There’s nobody to show them the way.”

“It’s their pride; and it’s their trade, Miss Margaret.”

“Oh!” cried Margaret, stamping her foot, “it shall be my pride, and my trade too. I will begin to-night when I go home. I will never, never rest till I can do it.”

“But it will never be your trade—nor mine,” said Rob Glen with a sigh. “I wish I knew what mine was. You are rich and a lady; but I am a poor man, that must work for my living, and I don’t know what I must do.”

“If I were you—” said Margaret. As she spoke she blushed, but only because she always did, not with any special signification in it. Rob, however, did not understand this. He saw the glow of

colour, the sudden brightness, the droop and sensitive fall of the soft eyelids : all things telling of emotion, he thought, as though the supposition "if I were you," had thrilled the girl's being ; and his own heart gave a leap. Did she—was it possible—feel like this for him already ? "If I were you," said Margaret, musingly, "I would be a farmer ; but no, not, perhaps, if I were you. You could do other things ; you could go into the world, you could do something great—"

"No, no," he said, shaking his head. "I? No, there is nothing great, nothing grand about me."

"How can you judge yourself?" said Margaret, with fine and flattering scorn ; "it is other people that can judge best. No ; if I were you, I would go away and paint and write, and be a great man ; and then you could come home and visit the place where you used to live, and see your old friends ; but just now I would go away. I would go to London, into the world. I would let people see what I could do—only first I would learn Margaret Leslie to draw," she said, with a

little laugh; "that would be kind—for she never could find anyone else to learn her about here."

"That would be the finest office of all," said Rob, inspired. "To go to London, every adventurer can do that; but to teach Miss Leslie is for few. I would rather have that privilege than—"

"Oh," cried Margaret, careless of the compliment, "and will you paint a picture, a great picture of Earl's-hall? I know we are poor. We are not great people, like the Bruces, or the Lindsays, or Sir Claude. We have not grand horses and carriages, and men in livery. That is just why I should like poor old mossy Earl's-hall to be in a bonnie picture, to make folk ask where is that? what beautiful old house is that? You see," she added, laughing, "it is not just a beautiful house. It is not what you would call comfortable, perhaps. Jean and Grace, that is, my old sisters, Miss Leslie and Mrs. Bellingham, are never tired of abusing it. It is quite true that we have not got a thing that can be called a drawing-room—not a real drawing-room," she said,

shaking her head. "You will wonder, but it is true. There is the long room, and there is the high room[!]; the one papa sits in; and we dine in it, and he lives in it; and the other is empty, and full of—oh, everything you can think of! But there is no drawing-room, only the little West Chamber, such a little place. They say it was Lady Jean's room, and Lady Jean—is the only ghost we have."

"Is she the lady with the silk gown?"

"She is the Rustle," said Margaret, not disposed to treat the family ghost lightly. "You never see her, you only hear as if a grand lady walked by with her train sweeping. I think there is that very train in the old aumrie, as Bell calls it. But what I was saying was, because it is so old, Mr. Glen, because it's not grand, nor even comfortable—oh, I would like a bonnie picture, a real beautiful picture, of poor old Earl's-hall!"

"You must make one," he said.

"Yes, if I can; but you must make one first. You must take a big sheet of paper and draw it all out; I will show you the best view; and you must paint in every

bit of it, the tower and the view from the tower (but, perhaps, after all, it would be difficult to put in the view, you must make another picture of that); and you must put it up in a beautiful frame, and write upon it 'Old Earl's-hall.' Oh! that will make Jean and Grace jump. They will say, 'Who can have done it? Earl's-hall—papa's place—that horrid, tumbledown old Scotch crow's nest!' " Margaret was a mimic, without knowing it, and mouthed this forth with the warmest relish in Mrs. Bellingham's very tone. But her own acting of her elder sister called forth lively indignation in the girl's warlike soul. "That's what they dare to call it," she cried, stopping to stamp her foot. "*My* Earl's-hall! But this is what you will do, Mr. Glen, if you want to please me. You will make a picture—not a common thing—a *beautiful* picture, that everybody will talk about; and send it to the biggest place in London, in the season when everybody is there, and hang it up for everybody to see."

"To please you," said Rob, "I would do a great deal—I would do—" he went

on, sinking his voice, "as much as man can do." Margaret scarcely turned to him as he began to speak; but when his voice sank lower, her attention was caught. She raised her head with a little surprise, and catching his eye blushed: and paused, arrested, and wondering—What did he mean? Her frank girlish astonishment was very discomposing; he himself blushed and faltered, and stopped in the middle of his pretty speech—"as much as man *can* do!" but it was not so very much she asked him for. It seemed necessary to Margaret to say this to make things clear.

"Oh, no," she said, with a shake of her head, "not that; though there are many men could not do what I want you to do, Mr. Glen; but you can do it easy—quite easy. What will I want to begin with?" she added, changing the subject abruptly, and with true Scotch disregard for the difference between shall and will. This gentle indifference to his protestations chilled Rob a little. She had been so sweet and gracious to him that her demand upon his services only as something that he could do

“easy, quite easy,” brought him to a sudden standstill. He did not know how to reply.

“It may not be much,” he said; “but it will be all I can do. Miss Margaret, I will begin to-morrow, to show that I want to please you; and if it is not a good drawing it will not be my fault, nor for want of trying.”

“I am sure it will be beautiful,” she said. “Oh, I would like to see Grace and Jean jump when they see all the people—all the fine folk in London running to look at old Earl’s-hall.”

Alas! Rob knew the great London people were not very likely to run in crowds to any performance of his. But the idea was delightful, however unlikely. He suffered himself to laugh, too, though he shook his head. He had never seen anyone so sweet, so enchanting, or felt so near to being transported and carried out of himself as by this gracious little lady. Never before, he thought, had he known what such enthusiasm was. He had not forgotten Jeanie, and perhaps others. He was a connoisseur indeed in these soft emotions, the excitement of

love-making, the pleasure of pursuit, the flattering consciousness of being admired and loved. All these sensations he knew well enough, not in any guilty way, except in so far as multiplicity of affections implied guilt; but this was not only something new, it was something altogether novel. Margaret had much of the great lady in her, simple as she was. She was not like his previous loves. Even in the little foolishnesses she said, there were signs of a wider world, of something more than even Rob himself, heretofore the oracle of his friends and sweethearts was acquainted with. All the Fife gentry, all the rural aristocracy, all the great world, so fine at a distance, seemed to glide towards him half caressingly, half mocking, in that girlish figure. It gave him a new sensation. He was dazzled, enchanted, drawn out of himself. Who could tell what this new influence might effect in a young man avowedly "clever," whose abilities everybody had acknowledged? Love had inspired men who had no such eminence to start from. Love had made the blacksmith a painter, why should it not make

Rob Glen a painter. To please her ! she had put it on that ground. She was not like any of those he had trifled with before. Love had done wonders in all ages, and why not now—if perhaps this new sentiment so mingled, yet so strange, so dazzling, so bewildering, might be Love.

“ If that is what will please you best,” he said, faltering a little with something which felt to him like real emotion, “ then it shall be done, Miss Margaret, you must let me say so, if man can do it—I mean, if my skill can do it. But perhaps the two things can be done together. I will begin to-morrow, and you can watch me. I will tell you all I know, and you will see how I do it, that will be better perhaps than the straight lines.”

“ Oh, a great deal better,” cried Margaret, fervently. “ Come early—be sure you come early, Mr. Glen. I will be ready. I will be waiting. I will let you see the best place for the view. And perhaps you would like to see the house ? and then I will go with you, and stand by you, and hold your colours and your pencils, and watch the way you do it. Oh !” cried Margaret, put-

ting her hands together, and breathing for than earnest invocation of all the good spirits of the elements. "Oh, that it may only be a fine day!"

This very prayer brought home to them both the too plain suggestion conveyed by these gathering clouds, that it might not be a fine day, and chilled their very souls within them. If it should rain! "I think," said Rob, but timidly, "that it is looking better. The sky is cloudy here, but it's clear in the quarter where the wind is, and a north wind is seldom rainy. I think it will be a fine day."

"Do you think so, Mr. Glen?" Margaret looked up at him very wistfully, and then at the sky. Then she cleared up all at once, though the sky did not. "Anyway," she said, "you will come? If it's wet, I could let you see the house. I think you would like to see the house. And bring a great many pictures and sketch-books to let papa see. Even if it is wet, it will be not so very bad," said Margaret, throwing a smile suddenly upon him like a light from a lantern. But then she recollected herself, and blushed wildly and

grew serious—for he was a man and a stranger; was he a stranger? No, she said to herself—and not even a gentleman, only Robert Glen. What fury would have been in poor Rob's heart had he known this last consoling sentiment which kept Margaret from feeling herself over-bold. But she did not mean all the arrogance and impertinence that appeared in the thought. Not all of it, nor half of it. She meant no impertinence at all. She parted with him where the bye-way came out upon the road, and went along the flowery hedge-row very demurely, thinking very kindly of Rob Glen. Margaret had not known before what it was to have a companion of her own age. Youth loves youth, all the more if youth has little experience of anything but age. Rob was a great deal more amusing (to Margaret) than Bell. This perhaps was a mistake, for Rob was not nearly so original as Bell was, nor so well worth knowing. But Margaret did not know that Bell was original. She knew all her stories, and was not too anxious to call forth that homely philosophy which so often (or so the girl

thought) was subtly adapted for her own reproof and discouragement. Rob was a novelty to Margaret, even more than she was to him. The prospect of his visit made her feel that even a wet day would be endurable. He amused her more than anyone had ever done before. And then she comforted herself that she could not be thought forward, or too bold, because after all he was not a gentleman or a stranger, but only Rob Glen!

Jeanie had got in before her young mistress, before the clouds had risen that threatened to cover the sky. What different thoughts were hers on the same subject! She listened to Margaret's voice talking to Bell, as she moved about putting everything in order for the night. What a sweet voice it was, Jeanie thought, speaking so softly, such bonnie English! no like us common folk. The tones which were so woefully Fifeish to Sir Ludovic, and which made Mrs. Bellingham cry, seemed the very acme of refinement to Jeanie; and when a lady spoke to him so sweetly, looked at him with such lovely e'en, would it be wonderful if Rob for-

got? And he was a gentleman himself, for what was it that made a gentleman but just education? and nobody could say but he had that. It gave Jeanie's heart a pang, but she was too just and candid not to see all this. How could he think of Jeanie Robertson with Miss Margaret for a friend? Jeanie went away into the depths of those low vaulted rooms, which formed the under-story of Earl's-hall in order to escape the sweet sound of Margaret's voice. Here there was a maze of rooms and cellars one within another, among which you might escape very easily from sounds without. You might escape, even, which was more difficult, from pursuers, even from persecutors, as had been known, it was said, in the old times; but ah me, in the very deepest of recesses, how could poor Jeanie escape from herself?

Next day, next morning, Margaret looked at the sky long before anyone was up at Earl's-hall. She looked out over the tree tops to the sea, which swept round in a semicircle as far as the eye carried. From the Eden to the Tay the silvery line swept the horizon one dazzling

curve of light. St. Andrews lay on her right hand, with all its towers and its ruins, and the glimmer of water beyond the headland on which it stood. Not a trace of smoke or human breath came from the brown old city, which stood there silent with a homely majesty in the profound stillness of the early morning. Not a human creature was awake between Margaret's window and the old town of St. Rule, except indeed in the fishing-boat with its brown sail, out upon the dazzling line of sea, which was bearing slowly towards the bar after a night's fishing, with scarce wind enough to move it. The birds were all up and awake, but nothing else—not the ploughmen and labourers, so early was it, the sun still low over the sea. The girl's heart leaped at the beauty of the sight, but sank again so far as her own interests were concerned. Is it not a bad sign when it is so bright so early? And the light which thus lavished itself upon the world with none to see it, had a certain pale gleam which frightened the young observer, too much used to atmospheric effects not to know something about

them. "Oh, what a lovely morning!" she said to herself; but even sanguine Margaret shook her head, thinking it doubtful if the day would be as fine. And oh, if she had but learned, if she could but make a picture of that old town upon the headland, lying voiceless in the morning light, with the great silver bow of the sea flashing round the vast horizon, all round to the vague shores of Forfarshire, and the dazzling breadth of Tay! If Rob were but here with his pencil and his colours! Margaret was in the enthusiast stage of ignorant faith, believing all things possible to Rob. He was to her the young Raphael, the Michael Angelo of the future. Or perhaps it would be better to say (but Margaret at that stage knew no difference) the Claude, the Turner of the new generation. She seemed to see all that scene transferred to canvas—nay, not even to canvas, to paper (but she knew no difference), dazzling, shining with early dew and freshness, with the chirp of the birds in it, and the silence of nature, fixed there never to die. Poor Rob and his box of water-colours! He would himself, fortunately,

at least when unintoxicated by the firmness of her faith in him, have had sense enough not to try.

But when the common world was awake, and when the working day had begun, the brilliancy did not last. First, mists crept over the sun, then the silver bow of the sea paled and whitened, the old brown tower turned grey, the blue sky disappeared. By eight o'clock everything was the hue of mud—sky, sea, and land together, with blurred shades of green and brown upon the last, but not an honest colour; and lastly, it began to rain, softly, slowly, persistently, at first scarcely audible upon the leaves, then pattering with continuous sound, which filled all the air. Nothing but rain! The very air was rain, not disagreeable, not cruel, but constant.

“Well, it’s aye good for the turnips,” said Bell; “and I’ll get my stocking done that’s been so long in hand.”

“And what do you say till the hay?” asked John, who was a pessimist, “and a’ the low land about Eden in flood already.”

But he, too, comforted himself by get-

ting out the oldest plate, and giving it "a good clean," which was an occupation he kept for this kind of weather; it is easier to endure a wet day when you are old than when you are young. Jeanie was less well off. When her work was done, she was not happy enough to take out the stocking, with which every woman in Fife is provided against a moment's leisure. To sit down tranquilly and turn the heel was not in Jeanie's power. She went up to her little turret room, and began to turn over her little possessions, and there found a keepsake or two from Rob, poor Jeanie! which filled her already-dewy eyes with tears. But even that was an occupation, and Margaret, who had no occupation, was worst off of all. She flitted all over the house, upstairs and down, sometimes disturbing Sir Ludovic with restless movements, taking down books and putting them up again, then flying downstairs to warm her hands by the fire and tease the long-suffering Bell.

"Eh, Miss Margret, if you would but try something to do! To see you aye

coming and going makes my head gang round and round."

"How can you sit there with your stocking?" cried Margaret, "as if you were a part of the day? Will nothing happen—will nothing ever happen? Will it go on till dinner-time, and then till bed-time, and nobody come?"

"Wha would come, or what should happen?" said Bell, startled. It was a new idea to her that succour should come from without. "I ken nobody that is such a fool as to come out of their ain house on such a day—but, bless me! what is that?" And lo, in a moment as they listened, making Bell wonder and Margaret clap her hands, there came—blessed sound—a knock at the door!

CHAPTER XI.

“PAPA,” cried Margaret, rushing in, her face bright with excitement and pleasure. Some one stood behind her on a lower step of the winding stair. They filled up that narrow ascent altogether with their youth and the importance of their presence, and of all they had to say and do. She went in lightly, her eyes dancing, her light figure full of eagerness, a large portfolio in her hands. She had no doubt either that this advent of something to break the tedium would be agreeable to her father too, or that he must feel, as she did, the influence of the falling rain and heaviness of the monotonous sky. She went in, taking him amusement, variety, all that she would herself have rejoiced to see coming. It was the best of introductions, she felt, for the new-comer. As for Rob, he stood

behind, ready to follow, with a little tremor in him, wondering how he would be received. He had never been in the company of anyone so dignified as Sir Ludovic before, never had addressed a titled personage, upon terms of anything like equality; and this of itself was enough to make him nervous. It seemed like an introduction into a new world to Rob. Then Sir Ludovic had the name of being a great scholar, a man of learning as well as a man of rank and position, and in every way above the range of a farmer's son; and, last of all, he was Margaret's father, and much might depend on the way in which he allowed the new visitor, who felt himself out of place at Earl's-hall, even while he felt himself "as good as" any one whom he might meet anywhere. Altogether it was an exciting moment. Rob was moved by the joyful welcome Margaret had given him, perhaps, to a higher idea of himself than he had ever entertained before. He had felt the flattery of it penetrate to his very heart. She had rushed out of the lower room, where she had been with Bell, almost meeting him at

the door. She had spoken before he had time to say anything, exclaiming how glad she was to see him. Rob had forgotten the rain. Notwithstanding that his mother had brought forth that very argument, bidding him "Go away with you; they would be glad to see you the day, if they never let you in again;" yet in the pleasure of being so received, he had forgotten the very chiefest cause of his welcome. The brightened looks, the eager greeting, were too pleasant, too flattering to be taken unmoved. It was not possible to believe that it was not for himself; and all these things had worked upon Rob to an extent he was scarcely aware of. He who had at first approached the young lady so respectfully, and with so little ulterior motive, and who had been half shocked, half amused at his mother's treatment of the renewed acquaintance between them, came almost with a bound to his mother's conclusion when he saw the brightness of Margaret's eyes this particular rainy morning. There could be no doubt that she was glad to see him; he was here by her own invitation. She was eager to asso-

ciate him with herself in the interests of the old house, and anxious to accept the lessons he offered, and to "put herself under an obligation" to him in this way. Margaret, entirely unacquainted with money and the value of things, never thought of any "obligation;" but he did, who was accustomed to consider the price of lessons, and to whom money's worth would never be without importance. He was very willing, very anxious to confer this favour; but he could not help attaching a certain significance to her acceptance of it, a significance entirely unjustified by any idea in Margaret's innocent mind. She was willing to accept the obligation; therefore, was it not at least permissible to think that some other way of clearing it, making up to him for his kindness, was in her mind? If she had any dawning thought of bestowing all she had upon him, of giving him herself and her money, her heiresship altogether, that would indeed be a very good reason for laying herself "under an obligation" to him. Thus Rob had come to think with a beating heart that there was meaning in the

innocent girl's happy reception of him, in her eagerness to introduce him to her father, and warm desire that he should please him. And thus the moment was very serious to him, like nothing he had experienced before.

But Sir Ludovic did not stir. He had dropped asleep again, and did not wake even at his daughter's call. As he lay back in his chair, with his old ivory hands spread out upon its arms, and his white hair falling back, Rob thought he had never seen a more venerable appearance. If it were possible that things should so come about, as that he should be familiar here, one of themselves perhaps, calling this old man father (such things had been—and his mother thought were likely to be again—and what else could be the meaning in Margaret's eyes?) Rob felt that he would have reason to be proud. Even the very idea swelled his heart. The room, upon the threshold of which he stood, was unlike anything else he had seen before. He had been in wealthy Glasgow houses where luxury abounded—he had seen

dwellings much more wealthy, costly, and splendid than Earl's-hall; but there was something in the aspect of the place, its grey noble stateliness outside, so poor yet so dignified, its antique old world grace within, the walls lined with books, the air of old establishment and duration that was in everything, which exercised the strongest influence over him. It was like a scene in a fairy tale; an old magician, and his fresh fair young daughter, so liberal, so gentle, receiving him like a princess, opening wide the doors to him. He stood, as we have said, in a kind of enchantment. He was on the borders—was it of Paradise? certainly of some unknown country, more noble, more stately than anything he had known before.

This train of thought was interrupted by Margaret, who came back to him walking softly, and putting her finger to her lips. "Papa has fallen asleep again," she said half annoyed, half anxious, and she pushed open softly the door of the little west chamber. "Here, come here," she said, and went in before him, pointing to a chair and clearing Lady Jean's

work and other obstacles with her own hands from the table. "Now let me see them," she cried. How eager she was, how full of interest and admiration! She spread the portfolio open before him which she had herself snatched from his hands and carried to her father. In it was the drawing of the Kirkton which his mother had suggested he should give "in a present" to Margaret. She was not aware yet of this happiness; but she was as simple as Mrs. Glen in ready admiration, and it seemed to her that nothing ever was more beautiful. "Oh!" she cried, struck dumb with wonder and delight. She said nothing more at first, then suddenly burst into ecstasy. "Did you ever see it from the tower, Mr. Glen? Oh, it does not look like that, you are so high above it. But I know that look just as well; that might be from the wood. It would be in the morning when the dew was on the grass. It would be when everything was quiet, the men away to their work, the children in the school, the women in the houses—and the church standing against the sky: oh, how

can you paint things that are not things?" cried Margaret, "the air, and the light, and the wind, and the shadows flying, and the clouds floating? Oh, how can you do it, how can you do it?"

Rob was carried away by this flood of delicious praise; he stood modest and blushing, deprecating yet happy. He knew at the bottom of his heart that his drawing was not a poem like this, but only very ordinary water-colour. He did not know what to say.

"You make me ashamed of my poor work. It ought to be a great deal better to deserve to be looked at, at all. The beauty is in your eyes," he said. But Margaret took no notice of this speech. She put that portfolio aside, and opened the other, and plunged into a world of amusement. These were his more finished works, the larger drawings which he had done from his sketches; and indeed, Rob had spent a great deal of time and trouble upon them; they had occupied him when he was going through the squabbles and controversies of the last few months. They had been his refuge and shelter from

a great deal of annoyance ; and sometimes, when he looked at them, he had thought they might be worthy of exhibition, and perhaps might help to make his fortune—at least might open the door to him and put him in the way of making his fortune. But at other times he fell into gulfs of despair, and saw the truth, which was that they were only very tolerable studies of an amateur. He shook his head now while Margaret praised them. “Only daubs,” he said, “only scratches. Ah, you should see real artist work. I am only an amateur.”

“And so you ought to be,” said Margaret, “an amateur means a lover, a true lover, doesn’t it? I mean of pictures, you know,” she added with her usual blush. “And if you do anything for love, it is sure to be better than what you do for—any other reason—for money. Could anybody paint a real beautiful picture for money? No,” cried the daring young theorist, “it must be for love.”

“I think so too,” said Rob. He reddened also, but with more conscious senti-

ment. "I think so too! and if I paint Earl's-hall it will be so."

"Will you?" said Margaret, grateful and happy. Love of her was not what the girl was thinking of, nothing was further from her mind, nor did it ever occur to her that the word had other meanings than that she gave it. Then she pushed the portfolio away from her, and changed the subject in a moment. "You cannot begin to make the picture, Mr. Glen, what shall we do now? Will I show you the house?" said Margaret with her Scotch imperfection of grammar, "or will you begin me with the straight lines, or will you (that would be the best) draw something and let me watch. Draw papa! I will open the door, look, like this; and he never stirs, I know he will never stir for an hour at a time. Oh, that is the thing I should like you to do. Draw papa!"

Her voice sank into a softer cadence not to disturb Sir Ludovic; but her face was more eager than ever. She put the door open, showing like a picture the other room within: the background of books in many tones of subdued colour, with

gleams of old gilding, giving a russet edge of light here and there. In the midst of the scene thus disclosed sat Sir Ludovic, his head with its silver locks leaning back upon his high chair.

"I cannot draw the figure," Rob had said with anxiety and alarm, feeling the task too much for him; but after all when he looked again there was not much of the figure visible. The wide old velvet coat was folded over the old student-sleeper's knees, only his cheek was visible, still perfect in its fine oval, and the outline of his noble old head against the dark leather of the chair. It was a study of still life, not a portrait, that was wanted. Rob looked at the "subject" thus proposed to him, and Margaret looked at him with great anxiety, to see in his face what he was going to do. Would he consent? Would he refuse to her this thing, which now that she had proposed it she felt that she wanted more than anything else in the world. Recklessly Margaret threw herself "under obligations" to the young man.

"Oh, if you please, do it!" she cried in

a half whisper, putting her two pretty hands together in a pretty spontaneous gesture of supplication. How could Rob resist, whose first desire was to please her, and to whom in pleasing her so many soft brightnesses of pleasure to himself opened up? Even without that motive, to do him justice, he would have been melted by her entreaty—he would have been proud to do anything for her.

“I don’t think I can do it; but if it will please you, Miss Margaret, I will try.”

“Oh, I know you can do it,” Margaret cried. “Oh, tell me what to bring for you—water? You have left your big book downstairs, but I will run and fetch it, and the pencils, and—”

“Miss Margaret, I cannot let you wait upon me.”

“Oh, but I will though, I like it. Fancy! when you are going to paint papa for me,” cried Margaret, flying downstairs. She came up again breathless, laughing and glowing, before he could think what was the right thing to do. “There it is,” she said, putting down the sketching block before him, “and I will bring the

water in a moment. You are not to stir. Oh, Mr. Glen, think what it will be to have a picture of papa."

"But I cannot indeed make a picture of him. I cannot draw the figure, it is quite different. I am not so clever as you think," cried Rob with sudden fright. Margaret, carried away by the flutter of haste and pleasure, and half childish familiar acquaintance, put up her hand as if to stop his mouth.

What wonder if Rob almost forgot himself. He half put out his hand to take hers, and he raised his eyes to hers with a look which somehow stopped the girl. She did not understand it, but it frightened her. She drew a little further away, and her usual blush rushed over her face in a flood of colour. "That will be the best place to sit," she said, half abashed, she could not tell why. And Rob remembered himself, and took his place as she indicated. She stood by him, the most eager watchful attendant. When she had got everything he could want, she put herself behind him, watching over his shoulder every line he drew. This

was bad for the drawing; but it was wonderfully enchanting and inspiring for the young man thus elevated into an artist, a genius, a creator. He felt her hand upon his chair, he felt her breath as she bent over him, a kind of perfumed atmosphere of her enveloped him. Her eagerness grew as lines began to come on the paper, he hardly knew how, her voice ran on close by his ear with exclamations and broken notes of soft subdued sound, half a whisper, half a cry. "Oh, is that how you begin?" Margaret cried, "me, I would have thought the chair first. Oh! that is his face and the line of the hair—yes; but what do you make that dot for in the middle? there is no spot there."

"You know we must measure the lines, and see that one is in proportion with the other," said Rob, holding up his pencil as a level; "it would not do to make one part larger than the other. I might take all my paper for one arm if I did not measure; and that is what beginners often do."

"Oh!" said Margaret. She watched him with her head a little on one side, her

lips just parted with eagerness and interest, her brown eyes all aglow. Sometimes her hand would touch his shoulder as she leaned more and more over him ; her breath moved the hair on his temples, and went through and through the young man. And he was very open to this kind of influence. It did not require any mercenary hopes, any dazzling realisation of an heiress, to send him into all the seductive beguilements of the love-dream. Jeanie had done it with her simple rural attractions—how much more her young mistress, with a whole romance about her, and so many charms, both visionary and real. Rob was not a fortune-hunter, bent on an heiress. This was what his mother would have had him to be ; but his nature was too susceptible for such a cold-blooded pursuit. He did what was far better, infinitely more likely to succeed, a greater stroke of genius than any skill of fortune-hunting—he fell simply over head and ears in love. He had done it before many times ; it was not the intense and real passion which now and then carries a man out of himself, the love that has no

room in its heart for more than one image. But still it was what he knew as that sentiment ; and it was quite genuine. A little mist came into Rob's eyes, through which he saw Sir Ludovic in his chair, the task he had set before him ; his heart beat in his ears, a soft confusion and excitement seized him. He did not know what he was doing, as he sat there with Margaret looking over his shoulder. His experiences before of this same kind had been pleasant enough, but none of them had possessed the charm, the sweetness of this. Not only was she more charming than any of his former loves, but he himself was vaguely raised and elevated as to another sphere of being. In the dazzlement and tremor of the new crisis, the gratification of his vanity and self-regard, he seemed to himself only now to have attained his true sphere.

“ Oh, how wonderful it is ! ” said Margaret ; “ two or three strokes with a lead pencil, and there is papa ! This is more wonderful than the views. Now his hand, Mr. Glen. How sleeping it is on the chair ! You could tell he was sleeping only from the look of his hand. Hasn't he

a beautiful hand? I never saw one like it. My sister Jean's is white with dimples in it; they say she has a pretty hand; but then she has so many rings, and she never forgets them. But papa's hand is beautiful, I think. Did you ever see one so fine? It has bones in it, but Jean's has no bones. It is like himself in little. Don't you think so, Mr. Glen?"

"You forget how little I know Sir Ludovic. I have not seen him since I was a boy. But very often the hand is like the owner of it, in little, as you say. Your own is, I have noticed that."

"Mine?" Margaret raised the hand referred to, and looked at it, then laughed softly. "Mine is a brown thin thing, all fingers."

"May I stop to look at it?" said Rob.

She laughed still more, and blushed, and held it out with a little tremor.

"It is nothing to look at—unless you know about the lines or can tell anyone's fortune. Can you tell anyone's fortune by their hand, Mr. Glen? Mine is as brown as a toad, and not soft and round like Jean's, nor like papa's. Oh, there is

nothing to look at in my hand. It is so brown. I think shame when I see a lady's; but then I always lose my gloves, or at least one of them," said Margaret, half penitent, half laughing. While this dialogue was going on, a change had begun; Sir Ludovic had not stirred when she went to call him, but the subdued sound of the voices, and that sense of being looked at which is so sure a spell against sleep, began at last to affect him; he stirred slightly, then made a little change of position; then he said drowsily, "Little Peggy! are you there, my little girl?"

She sprang away from Rob in a moment, leaving him somehow dazzled, disappointed, and impoverished, he could scarcely tell how. He would have caught at her dress to detain her, but dared not. He tried one whisper, however, very earnest and urgent.

"Stay, stay, Miss Margaret! He must not move till I have done. Do not answer, and he will doze again."

She only shook her head in reply, and went to her father's side lightly and rapidly like a bird.

"Yes," she said, "I am here, papa;

but keep still, you are not to move," and she put her arms round him, standing behind, her pretty hands—still pretty, though they were brown—upon his breast. "Now, quick, quick, Mr. Glen," she cried, not thinking how she had changed the group and the entire sentiment of the scene. All at once it became dramatic, and utterly beyond Rob, who had no gifts that way. He sat for a few moments vaguely gazing at her, lost in admiration and pleasure; but he shook his head. He could do no more.

"Eh, my Peggy? what has happened?" said Sir Ludovic, faintly struggling to wake himself. "Not to—move?—why am I not to move? I am—living, I think, still."

"He is drawing you, papa. Oh, you will spoil it—you will spoil my picture!" cried Margaret. She took away her arms from his shoulders, provoked and ready to cry. "If you only would have stayed still two minutes longer—oh, papa! and if you only would have been quick—quick, Mr. Glen! But now my picture's all spoiled," cried the girl.

Sir Ludovic came to himself in a moment at the name.

“Where is your—Mr. Glen?” he said, and sat upright and looked round. Then Rob rose, very much embarrassed, and came forward slowly, feeling more and more awkward. He felt like a country lout when he was in presence of this fine old gentleman. He did not seem able even to walk as he ought with Sir Ludovic’s eyes upon him, and grew very red and very uncomfortable; he had not so much as a hat to occupy his uncultivated hands, and all his self-possession and powers of speech seemed to go from him. Margaret, too, now that the moment had come, felt a little afraid.

“We came while you were sleeping, papa,” she said, unconscious that she was thus identifying herself with her visitor; “and as it was wet, and nothing else was to be done, and you were sleeping, and I could not disturb you, I asked Mr. Glen to draw you; and he has been making a beautiful picture—just you, your very

self, in your big chair—when you wakened. Why did you waken just at that moment to stop Mr. Glen's beautiful picture, papa?"

CHAPTER XII.

SIR LUDOVIC was not quite sure that he liked the sudden interposition between his child and himself of this Rob Glen. He half forgot the permission he had given that Rob Glen might come and teach drawing to Margaret—that was how he put it to himself. He was altogether cross and annoyed by the circumstances generally. The name of Rob Glen, and the description of him as Mrs. Glen's son at Earl's-lee, had sounded quite innocent, but the apparition of a good-looking young man had quite a different effect upon Sir Ludovic. Perhaps he did not look altogether a gentleman, but then he looked quite as much a gentleman as various Fife potentates whom Sir Ludovic readily recalled to mind, and whose claims to gentility were unquestionable. For that matter, young Fallow of Greenshaw, with

the best blood of the county in his veins, looked a much greater lout than Rob Glen; so that was no safeguard. And then he was half, or more than half affronted by the advantage they had taken of his doze. It might be Margaret's fault, but then he had no desire to blame his Peggy, and a great desire to find the young fellow pushing and disagreeable. He ought not to have permitted himself to take such a liberty as to make a drawing of a gentleman when he was asleep, notwithstanding any request that a foolish girl might make to him. By and by Sir Ludovic was mollified towards Margaret by her delight in having what she called "a picture" of him at any cost, and he would not forbid that it should be finished some time or other; but he did not for that fully forgive the artist, nor, indeed, did it make much difference that it was really a clever drawing, slight as it was. He was determined to give no further facilities for its completion, not to fall asleep again when Rob Glen was in the way. Perhaps if Sir Ludovic had wanted amusement as much as his daughter did,

Rob and his portfolios would have afforded him so much relief on this wet day, as to earn forgiveness; but unfortunately Sir Ludovic did not care for the rain. He was not depressed by it, nor were his other occupations interfered with. Rain or shine he sat in the same chair, and read over the same books, of which he was never tired. And what was a new little event to him? if it were innocent, only a bore and interruption, and if it were not innocent, an annoyance and trouble. Margaret would have been grateful to anybody, a pedlar, if no better could be had; but Sir Ludovic felt no want, and therefore knew no gratitude. He was civil. He looked at the portfolios and gave to their contents a faint praise. He did not deny that the outline of himself, just put in to be finished another time, was a clever drawing; but at the same time he made Margaret a little sign with his eyebrows to take the young man away. And though Sir Ludovic had been startled into alarm on Margaret's account at the sight of Rob Glen, it did not occur to him that he was increasing all the dangers by

thus requiring of her that she should get him away. He threw his child further and more intimately into the young man's society, though he felt it was not society for her; but what then? he was too fine a gentleman to be rude even to the farmer's son, but was he to take the trouble to talk to him, making conversation for a youth who did not amuse him, who bored him, who kept him from his books? This was a thing which Sir Ludovic did not understand. He gave Margaret that silent intimation of his will, and he opened his book, which was another hint to the intruder. If the young man would take the hint and go, so much the better—if not, then for this once it was better that Margaret should entertain him, and leave her father in peace.

“Perhaps we might go on with our lesson now, Mr. Glen,” said Margaret, with one of her sudden suffusions of colour. There was some meaning in it this time, for she felt that her father was wanting in courtesy, and was terrified lest Mr. Glen should think he was cavalierly treated. She took up the great portfolio

herself to carry it away, and would not let Rob take it from her.

“Why should not I carry it?” she said. “You came—to give us pleasure, not to please yourself, Mr. Glen—and of course I will carry the book. It is not at all heavy,” she said, lugging it along. Perhaps she intended to convince Sir Ludovic of his own indifference to his visitor and failure in the politeness necessary; and some idea of this kind did cross the old man’s mind, but too lightly to make the impression his daughter intended. It was not much to him to see her carrying big books, and he was glad to get rid of the visitor. He drew a long breath of relief when the young pair disappeared in the west chamber. He could not be troubled with Rob Glen. He had been civil enough. Sir Ludovic was not capable of being uncivil under his own roof; but why should he take more trouble? As for Margaret, the idea of any danger to her, or impropriety in this companionship for her, died out of his mind when put in comparison with his risk of being disturbed in his own person. He was glad

to get rid of the two—had Margaret even been alone he would have said, “Run away, my little Peggy, run and play,” in those habitual words which wounded Margaret’s pride of young womanhood so much. He opened his book, and set it straight before him, and placed himself at a more comfortable angle: and then—his eyelids began to come together once more, his head drooped on his breast, then settled on the back of his chair. It was afternoon and all was drowsy and still; very still was the long room now those younger creatures were gone. The rain streamed down outside with a soft continuous patter upon the trees. The skies were all gray, the earth all silent. The faintest hum, no more than might come from a beehive, might sometimes be audible from the west chamber, but the walls were thick and the doors fitted closely. If he heard the voices at all, they fell into the subdued patter of the rain, the general stillness. Afternoon—and seventy-five. What reason had he to keep himself awake, to insist upon living instead of sleeping through that heavy, silent, drowsy afternoon? And

yet he did not like to think he had been sleeping. When John came in behind the screen and began to prepare for dinner, Sir Ludovic sat upright with very wide open eyes. He was always erect, but now he sat bolt upright in his chair.

"Is that you, John?" he said, with unusual suavity, so that the old man might entertain no doubt of his perfectly wide-awake condition.

"Ay, it's just me, Sir Ludovic," said John. No one could have been more indifferent on this subject than John was. He knew very well that his master was apt to doze the afternoon through—but what of that? It was a privilege of his position, not a misfortune. Old John would gladly have dozed too, and found it entirely natural. He himself took a nap whenever he could get it, and though he would cling with natural vehemence to the fact that he had "not slept a wink," there was neither shame nor annoyance in his mind at being caught in the act. The signs of old age were not alarming nor troublesome to John; he had a distinct pleasure in perceiving them in his master,

and no objection to put them forth for himself, to boast a little of what he still could do "at my age," and to claim all manner of little exemptions on this score. The old master sat up very erect in his chair, with a great pretence of interest and absorption in his book, to cheat the other's observations, but the old servant was not to be cheated. He said to himself quite calmly and to Bell when he went downstairs, "Sir Ludovic's getting an auld man."

"No so much aulder than yoursel," Bell retorted promptly.

"Was I saying he was much aulder than mysel'? He's nearer ten years than five—and that makes a great difference; but you women are aye for comparisons," said John. "I said he was getting an auld man."

How differently the same sentiment mingled with the great stillness in the long room! Sir Ludovic did not want any change, he was well enough, willing to last just as he was, hoping nothing different, satisfied if he could only go on so. But here creeping about him,

irresistible, not even to be kept at arm's-length or regarded as something outside of himself, were the symptoms of change coming. How erect he sat, how wide-awake he forced himself to look! he would not own to the weakness, and perhaps, who could tell, by mere ignoring, might vanquish—or at least appear to vanquish it. But it was not to be forgotten, nor even resisted very effectively. Even John's movements, the passing of himself or his shadow across the light, the sound of his heavy old leisurely footsteps, the slight clang of the silver and tinkle of the glass as it was put on the table, began to take a certain rhythm, and to lull the listener once more. "There must be something the matter with me," Sir Ludovic said as he roused himself once more with an effort, and got up to shake himself free, by movement, from the spell. Movement, that must be what he wanted—a little exercise, which he was aware he had neglected sadly. But now perhaps it might be of use. He had to go to prepare for dinner, which was always of use in charming the drowsiness away.

Margaret came in a few minutes after with a little flutter and rustle of roused life about her, which was very different from the slumbrous atmosphere of old age, in which Sir Ludovic had discovered himself to be sinking. She was very eager, and at the same time doubtful, as to what he would say to her; he had not found her visitor so delightful as she had done, she felt. To Margaret the afternoon had been full of pleasure. The wet day, which in the morning had filled her with despair, had become more attractive than the finest of weather: Rob's society, the novelty of talking to him, of pouring forth her own ideas upon subjects with which Bell for instance had little sympathy, and of hearing from him a great deal which, if not very new in itself, was profoundly intellectual, brilliantly original to the little country girl—had transported Margaret. How clever he was, how well he could talk! She had never met with anybody like him. What worlds of books he had read! not perhaps such learned books (but of this she was not quite sure) as papa. But then papa did not talk of them, and Mr. Glen

was so willing to talk of them, mingling his own impressions and ideas with hers, quoting his favourite poets and leading Margaret herself, shyly with glowing eyes and flaming cheeks, to quote hers, and “say” verses out loud which she had said to herself with all the sweet enthusiasm of youth in many a solitary place, but had never found anybody to care for. Even Jeanie, Jeanie who was young, and full of natural poetry too, when Margaret had tried to “say” her beloved “pieces” to her, had dropped asleep, which had been one of the girl’s great disappointments in life. When she was younger, Bell indeed had listened with great complacency to these “pieces,” as proving how clever the child was ; but from that time to this when she suddenly found that Rob Glen knew them too, and would say half, asking if she remembered the next—most delightful of suggestions—she had found nobody who cared, nobody who would listen and respond. Margaret’s eyes grew brighter and brighter, the ready flush of feeling went and came over her face like the flying shadows on a sunshiny landscape, as quick

as those shadows fly upon the hills; and a soft excitement got possession of her. She talked as she had never talked in her life before, and impressed him as he impressed her by that easy poetry of youth which can look almost like genius in its early outpouring. A mutual admiration, a mutual interest thus sprang up between them: and how much your admiration of the superiority of another is increased by the certainty that the other shows his superiority by admiring *you*, who can doubt? Rob too felt all this. He was dazzled himself by the pretty simple strains of thinking and feeling which Margaret showed unawares, and he dazzled her (wittingly and of purpose) by his own eloquence, his theories, his deep thoughts, his lofty fancies. How delightful it all was, and how the hours of wetness out of doors, of slow-falling rain, and heavy clouds, and drippings and patterings and overflowings, tedious to everybody else, flew over the two young people in the little pannelled room! The drawing-lesson was not so happy; spite of all the master's efforts it had been impossible to get Mar-

garet's wavering pencil to execute the necessary straight line. This had been humbling; but it had been partially sweetened by Rob's assurance that many who could not overcome such a commonplace difficulty became excellent in colour, and in a sense of the harmonies of Nature. What a lovely phrase this was, "the harmonies of Nature!" Margaret felt instinctively that she would understand them, though she could not make a straight line. Then she took him over the house, showing him "the high room," which was over the long room, the vaulted gallery with its tapestries, which filled him with wonder and admiration. Neither of them perceived another figure, which retreated before them, getting out of their way as they lingered at every point of interest, and which was poor Jeanie, who finally took refuge behind the tapestry, with a forlorn wish to see and hear again the faithless "freend" who had forgotten her. The two stood close to that tapestry for some time, he talking, smiling upon the young lady, giving her a great deal of information (of dubious accuracy) about tapestry and art manufac-

tures, while Jeanie, in great terror of discovery, and still greater shame and horror of herself for so mean an action as "listening," lurked behind, scarlet with anxiety, confusion and wretchedness. Jeanie, however, it is needless to deny, was a little comforted by what she heard. Courtship goes quickly on the lower levels of society, and how Rob should occupy the time in talking of the old hangings which were just "an awfu' place for dust," if he really wished to make himself agreeable to Miss Margaret, Jeanie could not understand. "No a word but that the hail world might hear," she said to herself, puzzled but soothed, as she escaped to her little room in the top of the turret, after the others had gone away. She could hear their voices, with little breaks of laughter still going on, as they went downstairs—the same sound which was as the humming of bees to Sir Ludovic in his great chair. Not so, Jeanie knew, had Rob made his advances to herself. These approaches were much less abstract, far more rapid. Perhaps "he wasna meaning onything," perhaps it was but a

polite visit, for abstract reasons, occupied by abstract subjects. This thought consoled Jeanie, and made her heart swell with a secret pride in Rob's education and capability to hold his place with the best.

But after all this Margaret, it may be supposed, did not present herself quite so calmly as usual at the dinner-table. She had a little rose-tint, which was very seldom permanent, upon her pretty cheek, and her eyes glowed with unusual brightness. She was more resigned than usual to the ceremony of being handed to her seat, and did not think the two old men were making a fool of her, as she was apt to do; and she did not say anything, but awaited her father's questioning with much suppressed excitement. Sir Ludovic for some time disappointed her by saying nothing on the subject—which, when you expect to be questioned, and, indeed, to be found fault with, and stand on the defensive, is the most trying of all treatment. However, after a time, Margaret's pulses woke again to liveliest beating.

“Did your artist stay long, my Peggy?”

she heard Sir Ludovic saying, without any warning at all.

“Oh!—n-not very long, papa,” said Margaret, slightly faltering. Then, for she suddenly remembered that John, who knew everything that went on, did by no means hesitate to contradict her when he thought proper, she added hastily, “But first he learnt me to draw.”

“That was very clever of him,” said Sir Ludovic; “and did you learn, as you say, to draw—all in one lesson, my little Peggy? That was very clever of you, too.”

“Why should you always make a fool of me?” said Margaret pathetically. “You know I did not mean that, papa. But we tried; and then I let him see the house, and the high room, and the tapestry. We could not go up to the tower, because it was raining. He is to come another day,” said Margaret, with the extreme of simple candour, “to see the view from the tower. And he thought the tapestry was very fine, papa.”

“Did he, my little Peggy? Then I fear he cannot know very much about it,”

said Sir Ludovic. "He is rather a clumsy imitation of a hero, very rustic and Fifish, your Mr. Glen."

"You call *me* Fifish too," said Margaret, with a little laugh which expressed a good deal of irritation. The finest and most significant satire was implied in Margaret's tone. "If *me*, then anybody!" it seemed to say, with a mixture of wounded pride and sense of absurdity. Sir Ludovic forgot the moral he had meant to draw in his amusement. He laughed, with that tender laugh which is called from us by the dear follies of our children.

"Did I call you Fifish too, my Peggy? which shows I am a very ignorant, ridiculous old man. But he should not have begun that drawing of your old father while I—dozed. It is not often I doze," said Sir Ludovic, with the same uneasy feeling which Margaret had felt, that old John behind his chair was quite capable of contradicting him; "and if he had been a gentleman, I don't think he would have done it."

"Oh!" cried Margaret, clasping her

hands, "it was all my fault—I assure you it was all my fault, papa."

"Well, my little girl; but a gentleman would not have done it. He would not have taken an advantage of a man he did not know. Friends may do that kind of thing, but not a stranger, my little Peggy."

"Oh, papa!" cried Margaret, the tears coming to her eyes, "why will you always blame other people for what was my fault? He did not want to do it (this was a fib, but perhaps a pardonable one), it was me that wanted it, papa; and when I said to him, 'Oh, Mr. Glen, I have not got any picture of papa, not even a poor photograph—oh, draw me a picture of papa!' he did it; but it was me that wanted it—and how could he refuse me?"

"He would have been a brute if he had," said the old man, melted; "but still it is true, my Peggy, your stranger should not have done that, without my knowledge, the first time he ever saw me."

"As if he had not known you all his life!" cried Margaret. "He knew you as well as I did when we were little—when

you used to walk about. He wondered why you never walked about now; he asked me if you were ill, and I told him you were not ill, only—”

“Only what, my little girl?—old and useless?” said Sir Ludovic, with a pathetic undertone of protest, yet acquiescence, a wistful desire to be contradicted in his faltering voice.

“No—oh, I beg your pardon, papa. I did not mean to be so—impudent. It sounds so, but I did not mean it. I said you were only—lazy.”

Sir Ludovic laughed. What relief was in the laugh! what ease from the pang which had struck him! His little girl, at least, did not see the true state of affairs, and why should he not be able to look at this, at least, through her eyes?

“Perhaps there is some truth in it,” he said. “You were always saucy, my Peggy. If I were not so lazy, but moved about a little more, it might be better for me. What have you to say against that?” he cried, turning round half angrily to old John, who had given a significant “Humph” behind his chair.

“ Oh, just nothing at all, Sir Ludovic. I wasna speaking. But exercise is good for man and beast—when they’re no ower auld or ower frail.”

Sir Ludovic laughed again, though less pleasantly.

“ I will defy the cleverest talker in the world,” he cried, “ old John, you old grumbler, to make anything of you.”

“ I just aye say what I think, Sir Ludovic,” said the old man, without a smile ; but he chuckled when he went downstairs and recounted the incident to Bell. “ Would he hev me say he was as souple as a laud o’ twenty ?” said old John.

“ Ye auld grumbler, as Sir Ludovic weel says. Whatfor could you no say a pleasant word to pleasure the maister ?” cried the more sympathetic Bell.

CHAPTER XIII.

SIR LUDOVIC was reading a book which was of the greatest interest to him, connected with a branch of study in which he was strong, and in which he himself meant to leave his mark for other students ; but he could not fix his attention to it. Was it that he was drowsy again this fresh morning ? The rain and all the clouds had cleared away. The whole earth was freshened and sweetened by the deluge of the previous day, and everything was rejoicing in the return of the sun. The birds chirped more loudly than usual, and a playful little wind, a kind of baby-breeze, an elemental urchin, full of fun and mischief, was in the wood, shaking the trees, and sending showers of glittering drops at any moment upon the soaked and humid soil. The fragrance of the grass, and “goodly smell” of the

turned-up rich brown earth, that genial mother soil out of which was not man made, and unto which he goes back when the world is done with him, was in the air. Summer is so wide in her common blessings; for everybody something; to those who have, the joyful fruits of the earth, to those who have not, at least this goodly smell.

The window was open; the wind came in fresh and sweet, ruffling such papers as it could find about, and singing airy songs to Margaret as she went and came. But it was an air of a different kind that it breathed about Sir Ludovic in his chair. Drowsy?—no, he was not drowsy in the softness of the morning, but his mind was full of thoughts which were not cheerful. He had lived for so long a time in one steady, endless, unchanging routine, that it had seemed as if it never would end. The more active pleasures and toils of life must end, it is certain; but why should the gentle routine of a recluse life ever be disturbed? Five years ago, when he had been seventy, thoughts of the age he had attained and the crisis he had reached had

been in his mind. The full score of years had been accomplished, and what reason had he to expect that they should be prolonged? But they had been prolonged, and the old man had been lulled into absolute calm. He had good health; nothing except

“Those locks in silvery slips,
This drooping gait, this altered size,”

to remind him how near he must be to the end. He had risen up cheerfully in the morning, and gone to bed cheerfully at night; and what was to hinder that it should be so for ever? But now all at once the old man seemed to hear the messenger knocking at the door. He was knocking very softly as yet, only a confused, faint tapping, which might be some chance passer-by, and not the emissary of the Great King—tapping very softly, and the door had not yet been opened to him; but how if it was he? This was the thought that assailed Sir Ludovic with something like the same fretting, disturbing influence as actual knocking at the old door, faintly persistent, though never violent, might have had. He was impatient of it, but he had not been able to

get rid of it. After all, it was not wonderful that an old man should get tired and be drowsy in the afternoon. He had not for a long time acknowledged to himself that this was the case; but lately it had been difficult to deny it, and the little event of yesterday had forced it, with a deepened touch of the disagreeable, on his notice. Rob Glen's sketch, though it was so slight, had conveyed a stronger impression to his own mind of his own agedness and feebleness than all his other experiences of himself. The old figure reclining back in the easy-chair, thin, with meagre limbs following the angles of the chair, and languid helpless hands stretched out upon its supports: the sight of it had given Sir Ludovic a shock. He had been partially soothed afterwards by the natural desire of Margaret to have "a picture" of him, as she said. "Not like the grand gentleman over the mantel-piece," the girl had said, "but in your chair, sitting there with your book, as you have always, always been to me." This "always, always," had been a comfort to him. It had breathed the very essence of that continu-

ance which had seemed to become the one quality of life that mattered much; but notwithstanding Margaret's "always," the sketch had given him a shock. He thought of it again this morning as he sat in the same spot and felt now and then the soft puff of the fresh summer air. Was it perhaps that even Margaret, his little Peggy, was already conscious of that "afterwards," when it would be something for her to have even so slight a sketch of her father? That bit of paper would last longer than he should. When his chair had been set back against the wall, and his books all dispersed to the ends of the earth, how well he could fancy his little girl taking it out, crying, perhaps—then smiling, saying, "This is the one I like best of poor papa; that was how he used to be at the last." She would cry at first, poor little girl—it would make a great difference to his little Peggy; but after a while she would smile, and be able to tell how like it was to poor papa. So vivid was this imagination that Sir Ludovic almost seemed to see and hear already all that he imagined; and the fancy gave him

no pang. It was only part of a confused discomfort of which he could not get rid. This is so different from most of our disquietudes. In other matters it is almost certain that the future which alarms us will come with a difference at least. Our apprehensions will change, if no more, and we will be able to persuade ourselves either that the evil we fear may not come, or that it will not be so great an evil as we thought. But the case is otherwise when it is death that is coming, whether to another or to ourselves. That is the one thing which is not to be got rid of. Poor human nature, so shifty, so clever at eluding its burdens, so sanguine that to-morrow will not be as to-day, is brought to a stand before this one approach which cannot be eluded. No use attempting to escape from this, to say that something unforeseen may happen, that things may turn out better. Better or worse than we think, it may be; but there is no eluding it. Sir Ludovic could not steal past on one side or the other to avoid the sight of Him who was approaching. This was the inevitable in actual presence. If not to-

day, then to-morrow, next day; in any case coming always nearer and more near.

These thoughts had been forced upon him by the progress of events, chiefly by that drowsiness which he did not like, but could not ignore nor yet resist. Why should he be so ready to sleep? it had never been his way; and the thoughts it roused within him now, when it had forced itself on his attention, were very confusing. He was rather religious than otherwise, not a man of profane mind. True he had not of late, in the languor that had crept over him, been very regular in his attendance at church; but he was not undevout—rather on the whole disposed towards pious observances; and without going into any minuteness of faith, a sound believer. The effect of these new thoughts upon him in this respect was strange. He said to himself that it was his duty to think of his latter end, to consider the things that concerned his peace before they were for ever hid from his eyes. Anyhow, even if he was not going to die this would be right. To think of his latter end, to consider the things that

concerned his everlasting peace. Yes, yes, this was, there could be no doubt, the right thing as well as the most expedient; but as soon as he had repeated this suggestion to himself, the most trivial fancy would seize upon him, the merest nothing would take possession of his mind, till with a little start as of awaking he would come back to the recollection that he had something else to do with his thoughts, that he must consider his latter end. So easy it was to conclude that much, if that would do—but so difficult to go further! And all was so strange before him, far more confusing than the thought of any other change in life. To go to India, to go to China, would be troublesome for an old man—if such a thing had been suggested to him no doubt he would have said that he would much prefer to die quietly at home—yet dying quietly, when you come to think of it, is far more bewildering than going to China. It was not that he felt afraid; judgment was not the thing that appalled him. No doubt there were many things in his life that he might have done better, that he would gladly have altered alto-

gether, but these were not the things that oppressed him. Nothing could be further from the old man's mind than that thought of "an angry God" which is supposed in so much simple-minded theology to be the great terror of death. It was not an angry God that Sir Ludovic feared. He had that sort of dumb confidence in God which perhaps would not satisfy any stern religionist, but which is more like the sentiment of the relation which God himself has chosen to express His position towards men than any other ; a kind of unquestioning certainty that what God would do with him would be the right thing, the most just, the most kind ; but then he had no notion what kind of thing that would be, which made it very confusing, very depressing to him.

An old man, by the time he has got to be seventy-five has given over theorizing about life ; he has no longer courage enough to confront the unknown—quiet continuance without any break or interruption is the thing that seems best for him ; but here was an ending about to come, a breaking off—and only the un-

known beyond ; and no escaping from it, no staving it off, no postponement. All so familiar here, so natural, the well-known chair, the old cosy coat : and beyond—what ? he could not tell what : an end ; that was all that was certain and clear. He believed everything that a Christian should believe, not to say such primary principles as the immortality of the soul ; but imagination was no longer lively nor hope strong in the old man, and what he believed had not much to do with what he felt. This was not an elevated state of mind, but it was true enough. He himself felt guilty, that he could not realize something better, that he could not rise to some height of contemplation which would make him glad of his removal into realms above. This was how he ought to think of it, ought to realise it, he knew. But he could not be clear of anything except the stop which was coming. To sit in his old chair with his old book, the fresh morning air breathing in upon him, his little girl coming and going, these were not much to have, of all the good things of which the

world is full; but they were enough for him. And to think that one of these mornings he should no longer be there, the chair pushed away against the wall, the books packed up on its shelf, or worse, sent off to some dusty auction-room to be sold; and himself—himself: where would old Sir Ludovic be? shivering, unclothed in some unknown being, perhaps seeing wistfully, unable to help it, the dismantling of everything here, and his little girl crying in a corner, but unable to console her. He knew he ought to be thinking of high spiritual communion, of the music of the spheres. But he could not; even of his little Peggy crying for her old father and missing him, he did not think much: but most of the dull strange fact that he would be gone away, a thing so strange and yet so certain that it gave him a vertigo and bewildering giddiness—and sometimes, too, a kind of dreary impatience, a desire to get it over and know the worst that could happen: though he was not afraid of any worst. There was no Inferno in that vague world before

him, nothing but dimness : though perhaps that was almost worse than an Inferno, a wide, vague, confusing desert of the unknown.

These thoughts were present with him even while he held playful conversations with Margaret and talked to old John and Bell, always with a certain kindly mockery in all he said to them. He laughed at Bell, though she was so important a personage, just as he laughed at his little Peggy : yet all the while, as he laughed, he remembered that, to-morrow perhaps, he might laugh no more. One thing, however, that he did not think it necessary to do was to send for the doctor, to try what medical skill might be able to suggest towards a little postponement of the end. What could the doctor do for him ? there was nothing the matter with him. He was only drowsy, falling asleep without knowing why. Even now while Sir Ludovic sat upright in his chair and defied it, he felt his eyelids coming together, his head drooping in spite of himself ; and he felt a wondering curiosity in his mind, after a momentary absence of this kind, whether

other people noticed it? or if it was only himself who knew?

“Do you want anything, papa?” said Margaret, at the door. She had her hat in her hand, and stood at the door looking in, with little more than her head visible and the outline of her light summer frock.

“Going out, my little Peggy?” He raised his head with a start, and the young, fresh apparition seemed to float upon him through some door in the visionary darkness about, as well as through that actual opening at which she stood.

“I think so, papa: unless you want me. It is such a bonnie morning, and Mr. Glen is going to begin his sketch. He thinks,” said Margaret, with a little hesitation, “that it will be a better lesson for me to see him drawing than doing the straight lines; they were not very straight,” she added, with blushing candour. “I was not clever at them, though I tried——”

“Mr. Glen,” he said, with a little annoyance. “Mr. Glen again; did you not have enough of him yesterday?”

“Oh !” cried Margaret, half alarmed, “but yesterday it was to let you see the pictures, and to-day it is to learn me—”

“I hope he will not learn you—as you call it—too much,” said the old man. “I wish somebody would learn you English. I have a great mind—” But here he stopped and looked at her, and seeing the alarm on Margaret’s face, was melted by the effect which ought to have made him stern. Perhaps, it might be so short a time that she would have anyone to indulge her. “Well, my little Peggy ! run, run away, since you wish it, and learn.”

He ought to have been all the more determined because she wanted it so much. This was a lesson which his daughters Jean and Grace could both have taught him ; but an old man with a young girl is proverbially weak. It just crossed his mind, though, that he ought to write to Jean and Grace, and invite them to hasten their usual visit. On the whole they would take more trouble about his little Peggy than Ludovic could, to whom the old house would go. Sir Ludovic had no particular feeling one way or another about these

middle-aged people. They were people whom he knew very well, of course, belonging to the family ; but there was no special sympathy between them and himself. Ludovic had a large family and “ a good deal to do.” It was all he could manage to make his ends meet, to keep up his position, to do the best he could for his own children. And Jean and Grace would be very fussy, they would worry his little girl out of her life ; but still they would be kind to her, too kind ; no more of her own way for poor little Peggy. He could not but smile as this aspect of the future rose before him ; they would watch her so that she would be unable to put in a pin that they did not know of. And perhaps, in a way, it would be better for her ; perhaps she had done too much as seemed right in her own eyes. This Rob Glen, for instance—Sir Ludovic was by no means sure that he was doing exactly as was right about Rob Glen. He would see to it, he would speak to Bell about it ; and with this he floated away again on his own vague stream of thought, which was not thought.

Margaret came in, however, late in the afternoon, all aglow with enthusiasm and delight. "Oh, papa!" she cried, "it will make the most beautiful picture; he has taken it from the east, where you can see the house best, how it is built. I never knew it was so fine before. The tower all round, with that great ivy tree, and then the side of the house all in shade with the big windows that are shut up, the windows *there*, you know, papa, that would look out upon the court if you could see through them; and then the gable, and the round turret with the stair in it, and all the little openings. But the sun would not stay in one place," said Margaret laughing, "first it sent the shadows one way and then another, and gave Mr. Glen a great deal of trouble. I understand now about shadows," she added with a serious air of importance. Sir Ludovic had been getting drowsy again. Her coming woke him entirely, with a little pleased sensation of liveliness which roused his spirits.

"Have you been about your picture all this time?" he said.

“Yes, papa, out there among the potatoes. You could have seen us from the east window if you had liked to look. And Bell gave us ‘a piece’ at one o’clock just as she used to do when I was little. Often she would give Rob a piece too—I mean Mr. Glen,” said Margaret, blushing wildly, “I forgot he was not a boy now.”

“My little Peggy,” said Sir Ludovic, looking grave, “there are some things which you ought to be very careful not to forget.”

“I did not mean to be rude, papa,” said Margaret, half alarmed, “indeed it was not that. I don’t think I ever could be rude and hurt people’s feelings; indeed he said it himself; he said to Bell, ‘You often gave me my lunch when I was a boy,’ and she said, ‘Ay, Rob Glen, many’s the piece I’ve given you.’ I was rather shocked to hear her,” Margaret acknowledged, “but he only laughed, he was not offended; and so—”

“And so you did the same? that was not like my little girl,” said Sir Ludovic, “whatever happens you must always be civil. So it is a beautiful picture, is

it? as good a picture of the old house as of the old man it belongs to? two old things, my Peggy, that you will miss, that you will like to have pictures of when you go away."

"Papa!" Margaret looked at him with suddenly dilated eyes, "I am not going away."

"Not till I go first," he said with a sigh and a smile. "But that will not be long, that will come some time; and then my little Peggy, then—why you must go too."

Margaret came behind his chair and put her arm round him, and laid down her head on his shoulder. The old man could have cried too. He too was sorry for what was going to happen—very sorry; but he could not help it. He patted the arm that had been thrown round him. "Poor little Peggy, you will miss the old man and the old house; it is well you should have pictures of them," he said.

"I want no pictures now," cried Margaret weeping, "Oh, are you ill, are you ill, papa?"

“No, I am just as usual ; don’t cry, my little girl. Whisht, now whisht, you must not cry, I did not mean to vex you. But we must not have too much of Rob Glen or Mr. Glen, whichever is his name. It might be bad for him, my darling, as well as for you.”

“I don’t care anything about *him* or *them*, or anything,” cried Margaret, “all the pleasure is gone out of it. Will I send for the doctor, will I cry upon Bell? You must be feeling ill, papa.”

“*Will* you speak decent English?” said her father with a smile ; her anxiety somehow restored himself to himself. “Cry upon Bell, what does that mean, my little Peggy? You are too Ffish, you will not find anything like that in books, not in Shakespeare, or in—”

“It is in the Bible, papa,” said Margaret, roused to a little irritation in the midst of her emotion. “I am quite sure it is in the Bible ; and is not that the best rule.”

Sir Ludovic was a little puzzled. “Oh, yes, certainly the best rule for everything, my little gir! ; but the language, the

English is perhaps a little old-fashioned, a little out of use, a little—”

“Papa! is it not the word of God?”

Sir Ludovic laughed in spite of himself.

“It was not first delivered in English you know. It was not written here; but still there is something to be said for your view. Now, my Peggy, run away.”

But when she left him reluctantly, unwinding her arms from his shoulders slowly, looking at him anxiously, with a new awakening of feeling in her anxiety and terror, Sir Ludovic shook his head, looking after her. He was not capable of crossing his little girl; but he had his doubts that her position was dangerous, though she was far too innocent to know it. Unless what he had said were to disgust her altogether, how could he interfere to prevent the execution of this picture which it would be so pleasant for her to have afterwards. “Decidedly,” he said to himself, “decidedly! I must write to Jean and Grace.”

CHAPTER XIV.

AS there was, however, no more said on this subject, and Sir Ludovic was—probably having shaken off something of the heaviness of his mind by putting it in words—as gay as usual at dinner and during the evening, the impression on Margaret's mind wore off. She had been very unhappy for half an hour or so, then less wretched, then not wretched at all; deciding that it was nothing particular, that it was only some passing cloud or other, or a letter from her brother, or something which had vexed him about “business,” that grand mysterious source of trouble. Instead of going out that evening, she went downstairs to where Bell sat in her chair “outside the door,” breathing the quiet of the evening. Bell was full of the excitement of “the view.” “It will be

equal to ony picture in a museeum," said Bell. "To think a creature like *that*, that I mind just a little callant about the doors, should have such a power." Margaret, however, did not respond at first. Her mind was still occupied with her father, notwithstanding that his demeanour since had wiped much of the alarming impression away.

"Do you think papa is quite well?" she said. "Bell, will you tell me true? Do you think anything is the matter with papa?"

"The matter with your papa? is he complaining?" said Bell, hastily rising from her chair. "Na, no me, I've heard nothing; that's just the way in this world, the one that ought to ken never kens. Miss Margaret, what ails your papa?"

"It was me that was asking you, Bell, it was not him that complained; he spoke of—going away: that some day I would leave Earl's-hall, and some day he—would be gone," said Margaret faltering, large tears coming to her eyes.

"Was that a'?" said Bell, sitting down again on her chair. "Dyin' is a thing we

a' think of whiles. Sir Ludovic is just in his ordinary so far as I ken, just as particular about his dinner. No, no, my bonnie dear, you need not fash yourself about what the like of us old folk says. We say whiles mair than we mean; and other times it will come to us to think without any particular occasion (as we aye ought to be thinking) of our latter end."

"Would that be all, Bell?"

"That would just be all. I havena heard a word of ony complaints. He takes his meals aye in a way that's maist satisfactory, and John he would be the first to see if onything was wrang. Na, na, my bonnie doo, you need not fash your head about Sir Ludovic. He's hale and strong for his age, and runs nae risks: and the Leslie's are long-living folk. We mustna count upon that for ourselves," said Bell seriously, "I would not say sae to him; for to think of our latter end is what we should a' be doing, even the like of yoursel', young and bonnic, far mair auld folk; but auld Sir Paitrick lived to be ninety. I mind him as weel as I mind

my ain father : and every Sabbath in the kirk, rain or shine, a grand looking auld man with an e'e like a hawk. Na, na, my bonnie dear, trouble's aye sune enough when it comes ; we needna gang out to look for it ; but wait till it chaps at the ha' door."

This gave Margaret great comfort ; the tension of her mind relaxed, and even before Bell had done speaking her young mistress had done thinking. She went back with a bound to the more agreeable subject. "You are to be sitting here, Bell," she said, "just here, when the picture is done."

"Bless my heart!" said Bell ; the change was so sudden that she scarcely could follow it ; "the picture ? I thought you had forgotten all about the picture ; but, Miss Margret, what would ye hae an auld wife for, sitting here on her auld chair ? Something young and bonnie, like yourself now—or even Jeanie—would be mair to the purpose in a picture than an auld wife like me."

"But it is you I want," said Margaret with pretty obstinacy. "What should I care about myself ? And Jeanie is very

good but not like you. It must be you, Bell, or nobody. It would not be natural not to see you with your stocking outside the door."

"Weel, weel!" said Bell with the air of yielding, half against her will, "you were aye a wilfu' Miss, and would have your way, and few, few have ever crossed you. If a' your life be like the past, and ye win to heaven at the end, ye may say you were never out of it; for you've aye had your ain way."

"Do they get their own way in heaven?" said Margaret, half laughing, "but I wish you would not speak of the past like that, and my life. Nothing's past. It has always been just as it is now. Papa is only seventy-five, that makes fifteen years before he can be as old as grandpapa; and by that time I will be old myself. Why should there be any change? I like things to be as they are, you at the door, and John taking a look at the potatoes, and papa reading in the long-room. And the summer nights so long, so long, as if they would never end."

“But this ane is ending, and you must go to your bed,” said Bell. “The dew’s no so heavy to-night after the rain; but it’s time to go inbye and go to all our beds, it’s near upon ten o’clock.”

Margaret lingered to look at the soft brightness of the skies, those skies which never seemed to darken. And now that her mind was relieved, there was something else she wished to look at and pass a final judgment upon. Though it was ten o’clock and bed time, she could still see all there was to see in the little sketch-book which Rob had given her to draw in. She had made a few scratches in the intervals of her careful attendance upon the chief artist; and Rob had looked with satisfaction upon these scraps and said that this was good and that better. Margaret for her part surveyed them now with mingled hope and shame. They were not like the picture at all, though they were intended to represent the same thing; but perhaps if she worked very hard, if she gave her mind to it! Bell did not think very much of them, as she came and looked over the

young lady's shoulder. She shook her head. "He's a clever lad, yon," said old Bell, "but I wish he could learn you the pianny instead of drawing pictures. I canna think but you would come more speed." Margaret shut up her book hastily with some petulance, not liking the criticism, and this time she did not resist the repeated call to go "inbye." She could not but feel that a great deal was wanting before she could draw like Rob; but as for the piano which Bell brought up upon all occasions, what could Margaret do? She had tried to puzzle out "a tune" upon the old spinnet in the high room with indifferent success, and this had given Bell real pleasure. But then that was apt to disturb papa; whereas these scratches of uneven lines in the sketch-book disturbed nothing except her own self-esteem and ease of mind.

Margaret said nothing about it next morning, learning prudence by dint of experience, but was out among the potatoes arranging the artist's seat, and the little table to hold all his requirements, and the water for his colours, in readiness for his

appearance. The whole house indeed, except Sir Ludovic among his books, who had fallen back into his ordinary calm, externally at least, and asked no questions, was in agitation about this picture. Jeanie, poor girl, kept in the background altogether. She would not even come to look at the picture, though Bell adjured her to do so.

“What makes you blate, you silly thing?” Bell said. “It’s no a gentleman, it’s naebody but Rob Glen, Mrs. Glen’s son, at Earl’s-lee—a neebor lad, so to speak. You must have been at the school with him. Gang forward and see what’s doing, like the rest.” But nothing would make Jeanie gang forward. She felt sure by this time that he did not know she was here, and had begun to think that there was some mistake, and that perhaps he was not to blame. It wrung her heart a little, peeping from her turret-window, to see Miss Margaret hovering about him, looking over his shoulder, waiting on him, a more graceful handmaid than Jeanie; but at the same time a little forlorn pride was in her mind. Miss Margaret understood

about his painting no doubt, and could talk about things that were above her own range; but it was not in that stiff polite way that Rob would have conducted his intercourse with Jeanie. She watched them, herself unseen, with pain, yet with consolation. Not like that; not with so many commonplace witnesses—Bell lingering about looking on, even old John marching heavily across the lines of potatoes to take a look—would Rob have been content to pass the hours if she had been by instead of Margaret. But it was well for Rob to have such grand friends. She would not put herself in the way to shame him or make him uncomfortable. Jeanie went to her work magnanimously, and with a lightened heart. She would not even sing as she put the rooms in order, lest her voice should reach him through the open window, and he should ask who it was. She hid herself in the depths of the old house that he might not see her; but yet his presence made a difference in the atmosphere. She could not blame him now that she had seen him. And she had waited long already, and had not lost

heart. After all, Jeanie reflected, nothing was changed ; and insensibly a little confidence and hope came back to her ; for it was very evident for one thing that he did not know she was here.

As for Margaret, she was very happy in the fresh exhilaration of the morning air, in the excitement of what was going on, and in the society of her new friend. Nobody had so much amused her, occupied her, filled her mind with novel thoughts as Rob Glen. To watch him as he worked was an unceasing delight. He had chosen his place on the edge of the little belt of wood which encircled Earl's-hall. Had the Leslies been well-to-do this would have been a mere flower-garden for beauty and pleasure ; but as the Leslies were poor it was potatoes, a more profitable if less lovely crop. The fir-trees, of which the wood was chiefly composed—for that corner of Fife is not favourable to foliage—sheltered them from the sun, which streamed full upon the old house, with all its picturesque irregularities. The little court with its well and its old thorn tree, which lay so deep in shadow in the evening

was now full of light. The door standing open let in a mass of sunshine into the little vaulted passage which led to the lower story, and touched the winding stair with an edge of whiteness; and the huge old "ivy tree," as Margaret called it, the branches of which, against the wall which shut in the court on the west side, were like architecture, great ribs of wood, dark, mossy and ancient, as if they had been carved out of stone—shone and glowed, and sent back reflections from the heavy masses of blunt-leaved foliage, which clad the tower completely from head to foot. Bell's chair was placed in front of this open door to show where the figure was to be.

"But to pit me there in the forenoon with the sun in my e'en, and a' the work of the house lyin' neglectit!" said Bell. "Well I wat you'll never see me sae."

"It might be Sunday," suggested Rob, "the day of rest."

"The Sabbath's more than a day of rest," said Bell, reprovngly. "In the morning all right-minded folk are at the Kirk, the only place for them; and to gie

a stranger to suppose that me, I was letting ony idle lad draw my picture on the Lord's day !”

“Bell, Bell !” cried Margaret, horrified.

But Rob could afford to laugh.

“Never mind,” he said ; “I am not offended. Bell can call me an idle lad if she likes—so does my mother for that matter. She thinks I might as well swing on a gate all day as do what I am doing now.”

“Poor body !” said Bell, with a deep sigh of sympathy. “I feel for her with a’ my heart. But you’ll be wanting a piece,” she added, turning to go in, “and, Miss Margaret, there’s a cold air about. If I was you I would slip on a bit of a jacket or something. The earth’s damp amang the pitawties. I’ll send you out your piece.”

“I feel as if I were a boy again, fishing in the burn, when Bell speaks of a piece,” said Rob, in an undertone.

“I hope you are not angry,” said Margaret, humbly. “Bell always says whatever she pleases. She does not stand in awe of anybody—even my sister Jean, who is a grand lady—at least I am sure

she thinks she is very grand; but Bell never minds. You must not be angry, Mr. Glen."

"Angry! I am pleased. I like to feel myself a boy again; then too, if you will recollect, I had a beautiful little lady beside me, Miss Margaret, who would hold the rod sometimes and watch for a nibble."

"Don't call me *that*," said Margaret, with momentary gravity. "Yes—a funny little girl in a sun-bonnet. How glad I used to be when you caught anything! It was not very often, Mr. Glen."

"Not at all often, Miss Margaret; and sometimes you would take off your little shoes, and dabble your little white feet in the water—how white they were! I remember thinking the fishes would bite just to get nearer, just to have a sight of them."

"Indeed the fishes were not so silly," cried the girl, blushing, and half affronted, but too shy to venture on showing her offence. In such matters as this Rob's gentleman-breeding failed him. He did not know in what he had gone wrong.

"The sun is changing already," she said, hurriedly; "have you got your shadows right, Mr. Glen? I think you will soon want the umbrella."

"Not yet," he said, "I can work for another hour; but here is old John interfering with my foreground. Is this the 'piece?' It is not so simple as that you used to share with me on the burnside."

"It is a picnic," said Margaret, with a little awe, as John appeared, slowly progressing among the potatoes, with a white covered tray. John's approach was a solemnity under any circumstances, but across the long lines of potatoes it was still more imposing.

"You're to pit that on, Miss Margaret," he said, after he had set down his burden, with a sigh of relief, handing to her the little grey jacket which he carried over his arm.

"But it is not cold. I don't want it, the sun is shining; and, John, will you bring the big umbrella, the great big one with the heavy handle, to shelter Mr. Glen?"

"She said you were to pit it on. I maun finish one errant afore I begin anither," said the old man. "She said

there was a cauld air, and that you were to pit it on."

"I will when I am cold. Oh, tell Bell she has sent us a great deal too much. Chicken and cake, and white bread and cheese—and jam!" The last pleased the critic, and subdued her remonstrance. "But it is too much. I would like a little milk instead of the wine."

"She said the wine was better for ye," said the old man; "and she said you were to pit *that* on."

"Oh, John! you are worse, you are a great deal worse than Bell is. You never will hear any reason. She, if one speaks to her, one can make her see what is sense," cried Margaret, half crying; "but you, you are a great deal worse—you are tyrannical!"

"I am doing what I'm bid," said John. "It's no me. Do I ken when you should pit on your jaicket and when you should pit it off? But *she* said you were to pit that on."

"And Bell is a very sensible woman," said Rob. "It is cold this morning after the rain; and, John, I hope you will tell

her that her provision is noble. I never saw such a 'piece' before."

John made no reply. He gave a glance of surly disdain at the interloper. What had Rob Glen to do here, beside "our young leddy?" "And me to wait upon him—set him up!" the old man grumbled to himself as he went back grimly to the house, having seen one, at least, of his orders fulfilled. There were points upon which John was proud to think he himself was "maister and mair," but on ordinary domestic occasions he was content to accept the *rôle* of executor, and see that his wife's behests were carried out.

Margaret, in her grey jacket (which was not unacceptable, after all), went away from Rob's side and opened her sketch-book. She did not choose to be laughed at, which she felt to be possible, and it was time for her to try that gable again, which had eluded her so often. To jump at the outline of a rugged Scotch gable, after having proved your incapacity to draw a straight line, was, perhaps, a bold proceeding, and there was a perplexing little round of masonry penetrated by slits of

little windows, and giving light, as Margaret knew, to the second little spiral staircase, the one at the east end of the house, which tried her ignorance dreadfully, but which she returned to notwithstanding, again and again. Margaret was gazing up against the sky, intently studying this, when her eyes were caught by a face at the high window looking down as intently upon the group in the sunshine.

“Ah, Jeanie!” she said, with a nod and a smile; but Jeanie took no notice of the little salutation.

“Did you speak, Miss Margaret?” said Rob Glen, busy over his drawing, and not looking up.

“I was only nodding to Jeanie,” said the girl.

Jeanie! Rob did not budge. It was the commonest of names; there was nothing in it to rouse his special attention; and even if he had known that it was the one Jeanie with whom he had some concern, would that have made any difference? He worked on quite calmly. But Jeanie withdrew in haste, with a pang for which she could not account. She had

seen and heard, by the sound of the voices, that something was said between them ; but Rob never looked up to see who it was of whom Miss Margaret spoke. When Jeanie came back to peep again, they were sitting together at the little luncheon Bell had sent them, with much talking and soft laughter, sharing the same meal, and reminding each of humbler picnic meals eaten together in other years. As they grew more at ease with each other, the doubtful taste of Rob's compliments ceased to offend Margaret ; or perhaps in the greater intimacy of this odd conjunction, so absolutely free, yet so entirely under restraint, public to all the watchful eyes that guarded her, there was something that made him avoid compliments. There is always much that is suggestive in a meal thus shared by two, with no intrusive third to break its completeness. A certain romance enfolds the laughing pair ; the very matter-of-fact character of the conjunction, the domesticity, the homeliness, increase their sense of union. It suggests everything that is in life. The boy and girl over their "piece," the youth and the maiden over their im-

promptu repast : what was it but playing at honeymooning, a pleasant mockery, or essay at, or caricature of, the most serious conjunction. Even Margaret felt a certain half-delightful shyness of her companion in this odd union, free as her mind was of all embarrassing thoughts ; and as for Rob, the suggestion gave him a thrill of pride and pleasure not to be put into words. Jeanie stole to the window to look at them again, while they were thus engaged, and the sight went to her heart.

“ If I were you, I wouldna let them bide ower lang philandering, they twa,” said John. “ I’m no that sure that I would have left them there ava.’ Like twa young marriet folk, the ane forenenst the other—”

“ Haud your tongue, you ill-thinking man !” cried Bell, with a half-shriek. “ How dare ye ! But be a lassie the maist innocent that ever was born, ye’ll aye put it upon her that she kens as muckle as yourself.”

“ It’s no what she kens I’m thinking o’ : it’s a’ instinck,” said John. “ A lad and a lass—they’re drawn to ane anither ;

it's nature. I wish it was a gentleman that had come this gate instead o' that laud. Plenty gentlemen waste their time drawing pictures. There's Sir Claude; he's auld and a married man? I kent you would say that. Was I meaning Sir Claude? but he aye has his house fu' o' his ain kind; or even if it had been Randal Burnside—yon's a lad that will rise in the world; but whatever evil spirit sent us Rob Glen—”

“John, my man, you're no an ill man, and if you'll haud to the things ye understand—”

“I wuss there was one of ye a' that understood that poor bairn's living, and what's to come o' her,” said John. “Sir Ludovic, he's no lang for this world.”

“He's just in his ordinar, and his faither lived to ninety.”

“He's no just in his ordinar. I havena likit the looks of him this month past; and now he sees it himsel'.”

“Lord bless us, man!” cried Bell in alarm; “and ye never said a word to me!”

“What good would that have done if I had said a word to ye? You canna keep

out death. If He's coming, He'll come, and no be hindered by you or me. But now he's found it out himsel'. Will I tell ye what he said to me no an hour ago? but I'll not tell you; may be ye would think it was just naething, and pit your jokes on me."

"You may do just what you like," said Bell; "speak or no speak, he seems just in his ordinar to me."

"Is this like his ordinar?" says John, indignantly. "He says to me no an hour ago, 'Are the horses busy, John?' he said; and I says (for it doesna do to let on when wark's slack, you never ken what folk may take into their head), 'Oh, ay, Sir Ludovic,' I says, 'they're aye busy.' 'Could we have them for the carriage on Sunday?' he says. 'Weel, Sir Ludovic,' says I, 'it might be sae; but what would it be for? Miss Margret, she aye walks, and wouldna thank ye for ony carriage; and the ither leddies, they're no here.' Then he strikes his stick on the floor. 'Can I have the carriage on Sunday?' he cries, him that's aye so quiet. Aweel! that's a'; and if that doesna prove that

he's been turning many a thing ower in his mind."

"Was it to gang to the kirk?" said Bell, somewhat struck by awe; "he hasna been at the kirk this year or more."

"I tellt ye sae," said John; "and Sir Ludovic, he's no a man to make a careless end. He'll do all decently and in order. He'll no let the minister think he's neglectit. Ye'll give me out my best claes, as if it was a funeral. I ken what he means if naebody else does; and syne what is to become of that bairn?"

"Oh, man, haud your tongue, haud your tongue," cried Bell. "Sir Ludovic! that has aye been so steady and so weel in health. I canna credit what you say. Your best claes! Put on your bonnet, mair like, and gang and bid the doctor come this way, canny, the morn's morning, without saying a word to anybody. That's the thing for you to do. And now I'll send that laud away," she added, briskly. This was a little outlet to her feelings; and to do Bell justice, she was glad to have a moment alone after hearing this alarming news.

CHAPTER XV.

THE doctor came, very careful to explain that he had come to call out of friendship only, because it was so long since he had seen Sir Ludovic. But he could perceive nothing to justify John's alarm. Sir Ludovic was glad to see the neighbour who was more intelligent than most of his neighbours, and with whom he could have a little talk. The doctor was a plain man of homely Scotch manners and speech ; but he knew all about the county and everybody in it, and was not unacquainted with books. Sir Ludovic who was glad to be delivered from himself, and who found it easier to escape from the prospect which oppressed him, by means of society than in any other way, detained the doctor as long as he could, and listened with much more patience than usual to the gossip of the parish, and

smiled at the jokes which Dr. Hume carried about from patient to patient to "give the poor bodies a laugh," he said.

"Come back again soon," the old man said, accompanying his visitor to the door. The doctor was pleased, for he had seen Sir Ludovic much less complaisant. He stepped into the vaulted kitchen before he left the house, to tell Bell what he thought.

"I see no difference in him," said Dr. Hume, "he's an old man. We are none of us so young as we once were, Bell; and an old man cannot live for ever. He's bound to get an attack of bronchitis or something else before long, and to slip through our fingers. But I see nothing to be alarmed at to-day. There's a little bit of a vacant look in his eyes; but Lord bless us! many of us have that all our lives, and never die a day the sooner. He tells me the ladies are expected—"

"Na, but that's news, doctor!" said Bell, "the ladies! it's no their time for three months yet, the Lord be thanked, and I've never heard a word."

"Well," said the doctor, "now you're

warned, and you can take your measures accordingly. He certainly said they were coming. They're no the wisest women on the face of the earth; but still, if you are anxious, it would be a comfort, do you not think so? to have some of the family in the house."

"Ye dinna ken our ladies, doctor, you dinna ken our ladies," said Bell.

"Atweel, I ken a heap of ladies," said the doctor with a laugh. He liked a joke at women when it was to be heard. "One's very like another; but if it was only for his little Peggy, as he calls her, I should think he would be glad to have his daughters here."

"He's no a bit glad, no more nor the rest of us—nor Miss Margaret either," said Bell; and it was with a clouded countenance that she saw the doctor mount his horse at the door of the court. And when John came in to ask what Doctor Hume thought, she gave him an answer which was full of sorrowful impatience. "He said nothing it was any pleasure to hear," said Bell, and it was only later that she unbosomed herself of

her vexation. "He says there's nothing wrong; and syne he goes away telling me that the ladies are coming, and that it will be a comfort to have some of the family in the house. That means that a's wrong, so far as I'm equal to judging. Sir Ludovic in his bed wi' a long illness and the ladies here!"

Bell flung up her hands with a groan; the very idea was too much for her; but John was obstinate in his pre-conceived certainty.

"Na," he said, "Sir Ludovic will no have a long illness. He'll just fail, just in a moment, that's what he'll do. If I dinna ken him better than a dizzen doctors, it would be a wonder—me that have been his body-servant these twenty years."

"I maun gang up the stair and see for myself," said Bell. She tied on her clean apron with decision, and could not quite banish from her countenance the look of a person who would stand no nonsense, who was not to be taken in—but whose inspection would be final. And Sir Ludovic was pleased to see Bell too. He

was not annoyed to be disturbed. He turned towards her with a vague smile, and gave his book a scarcely perceptible push away from him. This little action made Bell's heart sink as she confessed afterwards. She would much rather have seen him impatient, and been requested to cut her errand short. On the contrary, her master was not displeased to talk. He let her tell him about the drawing which was still going on, and her own wonder that one who had been the other day "a callant about the doors" should possess such a wonderful gift.

"Callants about the doors are very apt to surprise us as they grow up," Sir Ludovic said, "and Rob Glen is certainly clever; but you must not let him lose his time here. It is certain that I cannot afford to buy his picture, Bell."

"But maybe the ladies would do it, Sir Ludovic," said Bell, seeing an opening, "maybe the ladies would like a picture of the auld house—though me at the door (as Miss Margaret will have me) would be a drawback. I hear from the doctor, Sir Ludovic, that you're expect

ing the ladies? I didna think it was near their time."

"To be sure," said Sir Ludovic, "I wrote, but the letter has never been posted. If you had not spoken I should have forgotten all about it. Bell—I thought they might come a little sooner."

"It's very true," said Bell with a grave countenance, "that it's bonnie weather; and when they were here last, in September, we had nothing but wind and rain; but for a' that when ladies have made their plans, its a great deal of trouble to change them, and it's aye in September they come. Do you no think, Sir Ludovic, they would like it better if you let them come at their ain time?"

"Do you suppose they would think it a trouble, Bell?" Sir Ludovic had written his letter as a matter of duty for his little Peggy's sake; but he was not disinclined to get out of it, to allow a feasible reason for not sending it, if such a one should present itself—for he did not anticipate the arrival of his daughters with any pleasure.

"Weel, Sir Ludovic, you see they've all their plans made. They're awfu' led-

dies for plans. You ken yoursel' it's a' laid out every day what they're to do ; and Mrs. Bellingham, she canna bide being put out o' her way."

"That's true, Bell, that's very true," said Sir Ludovic, suddenly remembering how his eldest daughter received any interference with her projects. "I am very glad you reminded me," said the old man, "after all, perhaps, I had better let things take their course. I thought it might be better, whatever happened, to have them here ; but as you say, Jean does not like any interference with—I think I will keep my letter to myself after all."

"And nothing's going to happen that I ken of, Sir Ludovic. We are all in our ordinar."

"That is very true, too," he said with a smile, "and now you can go away and tell John to bring me my wine and my biscuit. The doctor and you together have wasted my morning." He drew his book towards him again as he dismissed her. This was the only "good sign" that Bell saw in her master ; and her face was so grave when she went downstairs

that John paused in his preparation for his master's simple luncheon, with a sombre triumph.

"Aweel? You'll not tell me I'm an auld fuil again," John said.

"Then I'll tell you you're an auld raven, a prophet o' evil," said his wife with vehemence. "Gang up the stairs this moment and gie the maister his drop o' wine; he's crying for that and his biscuit, and there he might sit and you never take the trouble to gang near him. Oh, ay!" said Bell, dreamily, "oh ay! The bairn divined it, and the auld man saw it, and the doctor sees it too, though he winna say sae; and Bell's the last to ken! In our ordinar, just in our ordinar! but them that has e'en can see the end."

However though this foreboding gathered force by the adhesion of one after another, it was not as yet any more than a foreboding, and the days went on very quietly without any new event. The next Sunday, on which Sir Ludovic had intended to go to church, was very wet, and it was not until a fortnight after his first announcement of his intention, that the

old carriage was at last got out, and the horses, which had been making themselves useful in the farm, harnessed. They were not a very splendid or high-spirited pair, as may be conceived, but they answered the purpose well enough. It was a true summer Sunday, the sunshine more warm, the air more still, than on any other day. The roses were fading off the hedgerows, the green corn was beginning to wave and rustle in the fields ; the country groups that came from afar on every visible road, not all to the kirk on the hill (for there was a Free Church in the "laigh toun," not to speak of "the chapel," which was Baptist, and had a dozen members, like the Apostles), were sprinkled with light dresses in honour of the season, and all was still in the villages save for this gathering and animated crowd. The big old coach with its old occupant called forth much excitement in the Kirkton. Carriages and fine people had failed to the parish church. Perhaps it is one of the penalties which Scotland has paid for being no longer unanimous, and dividing herself into different camps, that her

gentry should have deserted that old centre of local life, and left the National Church which has played so large a part in Scots history. It is one of the least sensible as well as the least lovely features of modern Scotland. Of all the squires in this division of Fife, not one but old Sir Ludovic united in the national worship. The others drove miles away to the "English Chapel" at the county town, which was gay with their carriages and finery, like the corresponding "English Chapel" in Florence or Rome; very like it, indeed, in more ways than it is necessary to mention. Gentility poured thither, even the rich shopkeepers, or at least the manufacturers of the second generation; for to belong to the English Church gave a kind of brevet rank. Sir Ludovic, perhaps, was too indifferent to change his ways in his old age; and then neither he nor the world required any outward proof that he was a very superior person. Why it was that he had set his mind on going to church at all after this long gap in his attendance it would be hard to tell. He could not have

told himself. It was like a last visit to Court, a last parade to an old soldier, a thing to be done as long as he could calculate upon his time, before the days had arrived which he could see advancing, when he would no longer have command of his own movements. Sir Ludovic felt a sensation of relief when he had fairly set out. Of this thing, then, which he had determined to do, he was not to be balked. He was to have power and time to accomplish this last duty. The burial place of the Leslies was close to the east end of the church, the head of the vault touching the old chancel, a relic of the times when to be near that sacred spot in the morning quarter, "towards the sun-rising," was to be doubly safe. Here Sir Ludovic stood for a moment, looking less at the familiar grave than at the still more familiar landscape, the low hills round the horizon on three sides, the glimmer of the sea that filled up the circle, the broad amphitheatre of fertile fields that swept around. He did not care to turn from that wide and liberal prospect, all sweet with summer air and

warm with sunshine, to the heavy mass of stone that shut in the remains of his kindred. He gave one glance at it only, as he walked past, though it was that spot he had chosen to view the landscape from. A faint smile came upon his face as he looked at it. There was his place waiting and ready, and soon to be filled. He asked himself, with a little thrill of strange sensation, whether he would feel the breezes, such as were always rife in Stratheden, or have any consciousness of the landscape, when he lay there, as, by and by, he should be lying. He walked very steadily, yet with a nervous tremor, of which he himself was conscious, if nobody else, and kept his hand upon Margaret's shoulder, scarcely to support him—that was not necessary—but yet to give him a little prop. Some of the people, the elders and the farmers who felt themselves sufficiently important, threw themselves in his way, and took off their hats with kindly respect.

“I'm real glad to see you out, Sir Ludovic,” and, “I hope you're well this fine morning, Sir Ludovic,” they said.

The old man took off his hat and made them all a sweeping bow.

“Good morning to you all, my friends,” he said, and with a little additional tremor hurried into church, to be safe from all these greetings. The church, as we have already said, was a monstrous compound, such as perhaps only Scotland could produce now-a-days. The old door opened into a noble but gloomy old Norman Church, very small, but lofty and symmetrical, in the corners of which some old monuments, brass denuded of their metal (if that is not a bull), rude in Northern art, but ancient, and looking by dint of their imperfections more ancient than they were—were piled together. In the little round basement of the tower where there had been a tiny chapel behind the altar in the old days, a man in his shirt-sleeves stood pulling the rope, which moved a cracked and jingling bell; and the vast chancel arch opposite was blocked up with a wooden partition, through which, by means of a little door, you entered the new painted and varnished pews of the modern building, which Sir Claude Morton had built for the parish. The parish was

quite contented, be it allowed, and Sir Claude went to the English Chapel, and did not have his sins brought home to him every Sunday; and among the higher classes you may be sure that it was the old Reformers and John Knox who were supposed to be in fault, and not an enlightened connoisseur like Sir Claude, who did so much for the art-instruction of the world away from home. Sir Claude was the chief "heritor" of the parish, for the lands of the Leslie's had dwindled almost to nothing. We will not affirm that Sir Ludovic would have done much better, but then at least he was not a connoisseur. He for his part made no reflections upon this as he went in, and placed himself in the great square pew, the only one of the kind in the new church, all lined with red cloth, and filled with chairs instead of benches, which marked his own importance in the parish. He thought of the difference between the ^{new} old and the new without troubling himself about art, and with a little shiver acknowledged that the light and air, and brightness of the wooden barn were more comfortable than the

stately grace and dampness of the old building, which was like himself, chilled and colourless with age. But how many generations of old men like himself had passed under the great grey arch that “swore,” as the French say, at the vulgar new walls! A lifetime of threescore and fifteen years was as nothing in the history of that ancient place. And there it would stand for generations more, watching them come and go—It—and he with it, lying so close under the old stones. Would it be anything to Ludovic Leslie, once placed there, who came and who might go? This thought gave him, as it always did, a kind of vertigo and swimming of the brain. To fancy one’s self—*one’s self*, not another, as insensible to everything in life—

“Whirled round in earth’s diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.”

is that possible? Sir Ludovic tried, but could not do it. It made his head swim round and round.

All the time the people were taking their places, clattering in with much noise and perhaps not much reverence. Ordin-

arily they waited about, the men at least, until the bell stopped and the hour had struck. But perhaps out of respect to old Sir Ludovic, who had not been there for so long, and who might never, who could tell? be there again, for he was an old man—they came in after him, making a great noise, shutting and fastening after them the doors of their pews. And then Dr. Burnside walked into the pulpit, solemnly preceded by the beadle with the big Bible, and the service began. Neither Sir Ludovic nor his daughter paid any attention to the fact that the singing of the old metrical psalms was very rough and tuneless. Margaret did not know much better, having had no training, and heard no music; and Sir Ludovic, it must be confessed, was full of his own thoughts, and paid but little attention. He was scarcely caught even by the words of that Psalm, known from their cradles to all Scots, which Dr. Burnside hastily, and with some perturbation, on hearing of Sir Ludovic's presence, had changed for the one before chosen. Dr. Burnside had not had it in his power for a long time

now to set Sir Ludovic's duty before him. And when his wife brought him the news that the old carriage from Earl's-hall had passed with the Leslies in it, the minister had a moment of great excitement. His sermon had not been at all adapted for such an occasion, but had been addressed very generally to the parish world about its commonplace sins of gossip and fibbing, and such like. Dr. Burnside ran to his writing-table and hastily chose a sermon of a different complexion. He had preached it before, but he had a great and consoling consciousness that nobody paid much attention, and certainly Sir Ludovic had never heard it. It was about the conclusion of life. He did not think of it as touching himself, and never had known the tremulous attempt to realize that conclusion, which made Sir Ludovic's head turn round; but he knew that an old man ought to think of his latter end, and that it was of great importance not to neglect an opportunity that might not occur again.

"Will you tell the precentor, my dear, to wait a moment. I have some changes to make," the Doctor said hastily, and

thus it was that the Psalm was altered, and the one now chosen sung, to an unusual tune which had been intended for the former one, and which put the rude singers out—

“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.”

sang the rough rural voices. They sang as if the object of their worship was far away at sea, and required a hearty shout to catch his ear. And Sir Ludovic did not pay much attention. He had known the words by heart ever since he knew anything, which made them less striking to him. Besides he had no trouble on that point; he did not doubt the rod and staff that would support him; he wanted rather dimly to know what sort of place that dark valley was, and what—not whether it was bliss or despair, but *what*—lay beyond.

Dr. Burnside preached his sermon with great feeling and great meaning, so that everybody in church felt that it had a bearing upon Sir Ludovic; but Sir Ludovic himself did not see it. He propped

himself in the corner and listened respectfully, sometimes asking himself however, how Burnside could keep on so long, and why the fact of being in the pulpit should bring twaddle to the lips of a reasonable man. Once when the good doctor was moved by his own eloquence almost to weeping, Sir Ludovic was quite roused too, and sat more upright, and gave his whole attention to the speaker; but it was rather with an amazed desire to know what could have so much moved his old friend than from any mere personal motive. Even then he could not make it out. He said to himself that what you say yourself may possibly seem more striking than what another says; but still he could not see what Burnside had to cry about. Notwithstanding those thoughts, which were not visible, Sir Ludovic was a most respectful and devout worshipper. Though prayer is supposed to be extempore in the Church of Scotland, and the idea of reading their devotions out of a book would have shocked the people beyond measure, yet Sir Ludovic having gone to church regularly for a great many years, knew

Dr. Burnside's prayers by heart, and was able to follow them as closely as if they had been in a prayer-book. He knew where and how the habitual supplications would come. He knew in what words the good minister would embody his ascriptions of praise. All was familiar to him, as if it had been going on for ever, as if it would never come to an end.

By-and-by it was over, and the people all streamed out with equal noise and no more reverence, putting on their hats before they were out of church, and beginning to talk in loud whispers. It was over like everything else—another thing ended—another something removed between him and the end. This was the thought that came involuntarily to the old man. He smiled to himself, but not with pleasure, with a kind of amused pain or painful amusement, as the little roll of things to be done was worked out. Here was another over and done with, though it had begun only a moment since. Just so the philosopher might have watched the hours stealing away that lay between him and that slave with the hemlock, just so noticed the gradual deve-

lopment of the symptoms afterwards—the beginning of the deathcold, the rising gasp in the throat. Sir Ludovic was like Socrates, yet with a curious sense that it was somebody else he was watching, not, it could not be, himself. He felt half-inclined to laugh as the things to be got through lessened in number; and now this church-going was over, which was one of the last incidents of all.

“ Even though I walk in death’s dark vale,
Yet will I fear none ill.”

No, no, not any ill; but *what*? That was the question; and in the meantime this was ended too.

“ I think we may go now, the crowd is gone, papa,” whispered Margaret; and he assented with a smile. They came out again, once more through the fine Norman arch, which had been there from time immemorial.

“ Just there, my little Peggy, is where my place will be,” he said, still smiling, pointing to the wall of the apse; and came out with his hand upon her shoulder into the sunshine, his erect, delicate head, with

its white hair, held up with unconscious, gentle stateliness, leaning upon the young creature in her white frock—leaning only a very little, rather for love than for support. A great many people had lingered about the churchyard, scattered among the graves, to look at them. The parish that day had listened to the sermon much less drowsily than usual. They had recognised by instinct that it was not themselves but Sir Ludovic who was addressed, and they had all been interested to hear what the Doctor had to say to Sir Ludovic. They stood with friendly and shy curiosity, pretending to study the tombstones, to look at him as he came out. It was a long time since he had been there before, and who could tell if he would ever be there again?

And the sight of the pair touched the people. An old man leaning upon his child is always a touching sight, and Margaret's pretty slim figure in her white frock, her head raised to him, a look of wistful half-anxiety in her eyes, mixed with her pleasure in having him by her, made a great impression upon the kindly neighbours.

Some of the women unfolded the handkerchiefs which they carried with their bibles and put them to their eyes. He was "sore failed" since he had been last seen at the kirk—failed and frail, and no long for this world. And ah! how well the doctor had set his duty before him. The father and daughter went softly round the east end of the old church; and it was when they were passing the Leslie vault again, that Sir Ludovic suddenly stumbled. It was not "a stroke," nor any fainting on his part, as at first the trembling yet eager spectators thought, but only a projecting stone in his way, against which his foot caught. Margaret gave a cry of distress.

"It is nothing, my Peggy, nothing," said the old man. But the shock and the shake affected him, and he turned very pale, and tottered as he went on.

"Will he take my arm?—ask him to take my arm," said some one close by. Sir Ludovic did not wait to be entreated, he put forth his hand eagerly and grasped the strong young arm, which he

felt, without knowing whom it belonged to, to be sustaining and steady.

“That is right, that is all I want,” he said, and walked along the rest of the path to the carriage, leaning upon Rob Glen. Margaret was at his other side. He smiled at her, and bade her not be frightened. “This is all I want,” he said, leaning upon the young man. As for Margaret, she in her fright and anxiety thought nothing of the words he was saying ; but who can describe with what a thrill the repeated assurance went through the ambitious heart and glowing imagination of Rob Glen?

CHAPTER XVI.

THERE were a great many spectators of this scene in the churchyard. Mrs. Burnside, the minister's wife, had been detained most unwillingly by some importunate "poor bodies" from the "laigh toun," and was hurrying round from the other end of the church, with her son Randal, to speak to "the Earl's-hall family," when Rob Glen thus made himself conspicuous. There were various people who held the opinion that he had made himself conspicuous, and none more than Mrs. Burnside, who thought the group very incongruous. Margaret on one side, and a young country lad, Janet Glen's son, on the other! It was quite out of the question. But an old man was an ill guide for a young girl. She hastened round, calling Randal to follow, and reached the gate just as John was putting up the carriage steps.

“Margaret, my dear Margaret, will you not come to the Manse and get a glass of wine? And, Sir Ludovic, I hope you’re not hurt. The Doctor will be quite disappointed if he does not see you.”

Rob Glen stood at the carriage-door, but Mrs. Burnside took no notice of him.

“Thank you,” said Sir Ludovic, “I’m not hurt; but I’ve got a shake, and the best thing I can do is to get home. Tell the Doctor I will be glad to see him, very glad to see him, whenever he will come so far—with my thanks for a very good sermon.” He smiled, but he was still very pale, and old John stood upon little ceremony. He took his seat beside the coachman, and bade him in low tones “no to bide a moment if it was the Queen, but to get hame, to get hame.” The consequence of this was that the carriage was already in motion when Mrs. Burnside resumed.

“A glass of wine will do you good, Sir Ludovic; and here’s my son Randal. Margaret, my dear, you’re not going like this, without a word!” cried the Minister’s wife; but Margaret only waved her hand, and

said something that was inaudible in the rush of the carriage-wheels.

"I don't call this civil," said Mrs. Burnside, growing red. "I cannot think it civil, Randal, either to you or to me."

"It was not intended for incivility," said Rob Glen. "But Sir Ludovic was shaken. He was more shaken than you would have thought possible. It was the best thing he could do to get home, and I think I will go and tell the doctor. He has certainly grown much weaker within the last month."

How did Rob Glen know how Sir Ludovic had been for the last month? Mrs. Burnside looked upon him with a disapproving countenance. He had made himself a great deal too conspicuous. Janet Glen's son, a lad of no consideration! what right had he to put himself in the way?

"Sir Ludovic shows himself so little that there's very few can be able to judge," she said, meaning to snub the forward young man. And what should Randal do but neutralize all her dignity by making a step forward with friendly hand outstretched?

“Why this,” he said, “must be Rob Glen?”

“Oh, yes, it is Rob Glen,” said his annoyed mother; while Rob accepted the overture graciously. Randal was a year or two older than Rob, and had begun life in the company of the whole juvenile family at the parish school; an early association which made all his father’s parishioners his friends. He was a handsome young fellow, full of high spirits and kindness, but so shy that the paths of society were pain and grief to him. He had been absent for a long time, studying in Germany, and had but lately returned, and taken his place in Edinburgh, with every prospect of success at the bar; for he had a family firm of Writers to the Signet behind him. Though Randal had an old boyish kindness for little Margaret, her grown up looks had somewhat disconcerted him, and it was with more relief than regret that he had seen the carriage turn away. But Randal’s shyness did not affect him in respect to the people of the parish, to most of whom his notice was a favour; and, indeed, at this moment he had no

idea that it was anything else than an honour to Rob Glen.

“You may as well tell your father, Randal, that Sir Ludovic has gone,” said Mrs. Burnside, with a little nod to the intruder. “Good morning, Rob; I saw your mother, worthy woman, was out this morning. I am glad her cold is better,” and so saying she went slowly away towards the Manse in anything but a tranquil state of mind. She was not mercenary nor had she really engaged in any matrimonial speculations for her son. But he was a young man, she well knew, who would be a credit to everybody belonging to him, and if Margaret and he had met, and if they had taken a fancy to each other, why then—They had both a little money, indeed it was generally known that Margaret had more than a little; but upon this point the Minister’s wife assured herself that she had no information; and they were both well-born, (for the Burnsides were as old as anything in the county), and it would have been very suitable: he a rising young lawyer with a good profession and a good head, and the best of prospects

before him. There was no unworthy scheming in her desire to bring these two perfectly matched young people together. The question in her eyes was not, was Randal good enough for Margaret? But was Margaret good enough for Randal? But they had played together when they were children, and there was nobody far or near so like Margaret as Randal, so like Randal as Margaret. This was what Mrs. Burnside was thinking as she walked very gently towards the Manse. The children and the old women did not curtsy when they met her, for such are not the habits of rural Scotland; but the little things looked at her with shy smiles, and the women wished her good day, and were blyth to see Mr. Randal back. "And so am I, Jenny," she said, "more glad than words can say."

"Eh, mem, ye hae nae need to say it; a' the kirk," said the old woman sympathetic, "could see it in your face." And why should she not ask herself what was the very best thing to be had, the fairest and the sweetest to get for her boy? But that intrusive Rob Glen making himself so

conspicuous ! what was he, a country lad, nobody at all, not a gentleman, to put himself in Randal's way ?

“ And what have you been doing, Rob, all these years ? I've heard of you from time to time ; but I've been wandering, as you know, and for some time back I know nothing. Little Margaret Leslie, I thought her a child, and lo ! she's a lovely lady. I thought I should have found you in the pulpit preaching for my father ; but here you are without so much as a black coat. What has happened to you ? ”

“ Not much,” said Rob ; he paused rather nervously, and looked at his grey coat, wondering perhaps was it the proper dress to come to church in, even when you have ceased to think of being a minister ? Randal's coat was black, and he seemed to Rob a young man of fashion. This thought made him very uncomfortable. “ Indeed nothing at all has happened to me. I am a failure, Mr. Burnside. Your father tries to set me right ; but I am afraid we don't even agree as to the meaning of words.”

“ A failure ? ” said Randal puzzled.

“Yes ; the church is too exacting for me. I can’t sign a creed because my great grandfather believed it.”

“Ah, oh,” said the other young man ; it meant that he had nothing to say on the subject, and did not care to enter into it ; but it meant at the same time the slightest tone of disapproval, a gravity which would not smile. Randal thought a man should stick to his colours whatever they were. “And what are you doing now ?”

“Nothing ; idling, drawing, dreaming, losing my time ; absolutely nothing ;” then he added, for he did not want to conceal his privileges, “I have been busy for the last fortnight with a picture of Earl’s-hall.”

“Are you turning artist then ? I did not think the parish had any such possession. I hope I may come and see it,” said young Burnside, wondering whether he might venture to ask his old school-fellow to dinner. He would have done it instantly had he been alone. But his mother was not to be trifled with. As he hesitated, however, his father joined him, coming from the church.

“So Sir Ludovic has gone,” said the doctor, “I expected he would have waited to see you Randal, and perhaps gone on to the Manse; but he is looking frail, and perhaps he was wearied. It’s an unusual exertion for him, a very unusual exertion. Good day, Rob; I am glad to see you have resumed church-going; I hope it’s a good sign.”

“I don’t think it means much,” said Rob; “but perhaps it would be a good thing if I were to go on to the doctor, and tell him of Sir Ludovic’s stumble. It might be well that he should know at once.”

“What’s about Sir Ludovic’s stumble?” said the minister; while Randal called after the other as he went away, “I will come and see you to-morrow.”

Rob Glen replied with an acquiescing nod and wave of his hand. But he said within himself, “if you find me,” and went along with a jubilant step and all kinds of dreams in his head. Sir Ludovic had not received Rob with enthusiasm when he had gone to Earl’s-hall. He had not applauded his drawings as Margaret did, who knew nothing about it,

though he allowed them to be clever. But at the same time he had always tolerated Rob, never objected to his visits, nor to the hours which Margaret had spent flitting about his encampment among the potatoes. If he had disapproved of this association, surely he would have prevented it; and what could those words mean as the old man grasped at his offered arm, "This is all I want?" Wonderful words! meaning all and more than all that the brightest hopes could look for. "This is all I want." Margaret had taken no notice, but it did not seem possible to Rob that she could have heard such words unmoved. It is astonishing how easy it is to believe miracles on our own behalf. In any other case, Rob Glen would have had enough of the shrewd good sense of his class to know how very unlikely it was that Sir Ludovic Leslie should choose for his young daughter, who was an heiress, in addition to every other advantage she possessed, an alliance with the son of a small farmer in the neighbourhood, a "stickit minister," not at all successful or satisfactory even to his own humble kith and kin.

But the fact that it was he himself, Rob Glen, who was the hero, dazzled him, and threw a fictitious air of probability upon things the most unlikely. "This is all I want." What could the fond father, who has selected an admirable Crichton to ensure his child's happiness, say more?

"Oh ay," said Mrs. Glen, on her way home from church. "The Earl's-hall family makes a great work with our Rob. He's there morning, noon and nicht. I never see him for my part. Either he's drawing pictures of the house, or he's learnin' Miss Margret to draw them, or he's doin' something for Sir Ludovic. They take up a' his time that he never does a hand's turn for his ain affairs. It's an awfu' waste of time, but when there are young folk concerned, really you never can ken what's the maist profitable occupation; just nonsense, in that kind of way, is sometimes mair for their advantage in the long run; but that's no my way of judging in the general, far enough from my way."

"That is just what I was thinking," said Mrs. Cupar, of the Longriggs, a

neighbouring farm, but a much more important one. If Mrs. Cupar walked, it was because she chose to do so, not from any need to employ this vulgar natural mode of locomotion, for besides her husband's gig, there was a pony-chaise at her orders, and her dress was made by one of the best *artistes* in Edinburgh, and her daughters, who came behind, were young ladies who might have walked through the Park without remark, infinitely better dressed than Margaret Leslie. They were better than Margaret in a great many ways; they could play on the piano; and it was their mother's determination to keep them clear of Rob Glen, or any other suitor of his class, that made her so "neighbourlike" with Rob Glen's mother. If he had finished his studies in an orthodox way, and become a "placed minister," then, indeed, she might have relaxed her vigilance; but as matters were, no fox could have been more dangerous to the henroost than this idle young man of education, who was only a sma' farmer's son. Small farmers, who cannot be denied as part of the profession, yet who

sink it down among the ranks of the commonalty, are not liked by their larger neighbours in the kingdom of Fife.

“That is just what I was thinking,” said Mrs. Cupar. “I did not imagine you were one who would give in to idleness under any excuse.”

“No me,” said Mrs. Glen; “if my lad had taken up his head with foreign travel and wanderings about the world like that son of the minister’s, Randal—no that it’s our place to judge our neighbours;—but there is a time for everything, as is said in Scripture, and I’ve confidence in my Rob that it’s no just for nothing his stopping here so long. They make a great work with him at Earl’s-hall. Sir Ludovic, you see for yourself, is very frail. How he grippit to Rob’s arm! It’s a grand thing for an auld man to find a young arm to lean upon, and a kind person to be good to him.”

Mrs. Glen could not help bragging a little; she was as much elated as Rob was, and as entirely blind to all the difficulties, though in any other case, who would have seen more clearly? She had kept herself in the background, having

sense enough to see that Rob's mother could not further his pursuits, but she could not hold her tongue, or refrain from waving her flag of triumph before her neighbours, these neighbours who were themselves "up-setting" and gave themselves airs much beyond any possible at Earl's-lee. Mrs. Glen was not by any means sure that "the Misses" at Longriggs, and their mother had not designs of their own upon her son, and to tell the truth, either Bessie or Jessie Cupar would have been an excellent match for Rob. If he had fulfilled his fate and become "a placed minister," what could have been better? but Margaret Leslie and her fortune had intoxicated Mrs. Glen. She could not help flourishing this sublime hope before her neighbours eyes.

"Then we need not be surprised if we hear of an engagement," said Mrs. Cupar, "in that quarter." She thought the woman was daft, as she said to the girls afterwards. Miss Leslie! a beauty, and an heiress, and one of the proudest families in Fife. Surely the woman was out of her

wits ! but it was as well to give her her own way, and hear all that there was to hear.

“Na, it’s no for me to say ;” said Mrs. Glen. “I’m no saying just that. I’m saying nothing, it’s no my part, and Rob, he’s no a lad to brag ; but I keep my e’en open, and I form my ain opinions for all that. My son’s not just a common lad. Till something opens him up he’s real hard to divine. He’s more than ordinar clever for one thing, and when he gets with folk that can enter into his ways—I’m free to confess I’m no one of that kind mysel. I’ve nae education to put me on a par with him. There’s his pictures. You’ve no seen his pictures? I’m told, and I can well believe it,” said the proud mother, “that there’s many a warse in the National Gallery, though that’s considered the best collection in a’ the world.”

“Dear me, now, to think of that ;” said the other farmer’s wife. “Jessie and Bessie are both very good at drawing. They were considered to have a great taste for it ; but for my part I’ve always thought for a man that it was a great wastery of time.”

“No when it’s the best kind,” said Mrs. Glen, in her superior knowledge. “I wouldna say for the young ladies’ bits of drawings, but when it’s the right kind, there’s nothing I ken that brings in more money.” Rob’s mother felt justly that this was the true test. “There’s thousands on thousands o’ pounds to be made by it; but it wants a rael genius, and that’s just what Rob has shown.”

“Dear me,” said her listener again. Notwithstanding a natural under-current of scorn, she could not help being impressed by so positive an assertion. Had Jessie and Bessie shown real genius? There was something deeply impressive, even though she scarcely believed in it, in a thing by which thousands and thousands could be made.

“I must look out the girls’ sketches to-morrow,” she said, “and see what your son thinks of them. It must be a great comfort for you, Mrs. Glen, when he has made up his mind not to follow one thing, to find he has a good prospect in another. It’s not often a young man has that luck, when he gives up what he’s

been brought up to; but now I must bid you good-day, for this is our nearest road; and I hope you'll let me hear when anything happens." "The woman's daft," Mrs. Cupar said, as she went on. "She thinks because Sir Ludovic, poor old frail gentleman, gripped Rob's arm, finding him the foremost, that he's going to give her son his daughter Margaret Leslie! —that thinks herself of a different kind of flesh and blood from the like of you; and I would think myself sore brought down in the world if I had to give one o' you to Rob Glen!"

"Well, mamma," said one of the girls, "he is what the maids call a bonnie lad." "And very like a gentleman," said the other. They both gave a glance behind them as they spoke, not at all unwilling if truth were told to be overtaken by Rob Glen.

"Jessie, Jessie, how often must I tell you not to be vulgar? there is nothing so vulgar as that broad Scotch," cried the genteel farmer's wife. She was more horrified than Sir Ludovic was with Margaret's idioms and Fifeish confusion of

grammar; but the girls were not nearly so decided as to the folly of Mrs. Glen. They thought there was something to say on the other side. Margaret Leslie had no education, she had never been out of that old crow's-nest of a house. She had never had masters for anything, or seen the world. Family was not everything, nor money either; and if there was a nice-looking, handsome, well-educated young man who did not mind her want of education——. Mrs. Cupar thought her own girls were almost as daft as Mrs. Glen.

But there was another humble pedestrian coming after them, who was of the same opinion as the girls. Jeanie had seen Mrs. Glen and her son from a distance, but had not been seen by Rob, who had eyes only for Margaret, and under the shade of her book, the poor girl had watched him, all unconscious of her observation. He had not been at church before since he returned to his mother's house, and all his thoughts were bent, it seemed to Jeanie, upon the large square red-lined pew which held her master and Miss Margaret. Even if Mar-

garet were not there, was it likely that he would have greeted her in the face of day, he, a gentleman, and she but a servant-lass? Jeanie felt the impossibility of the connection more than she had ever done before. She had seen nothing, indeed, that was impossible in it when she had gone to his uncle's shop, or taken a Sunday walk with Rob out by Glasgow Green and upon the waterside. But here the reality of the matter burst upon her. She saw him walk past with Sir Ludovic leaning on his arm, while she hung back while "the kirk skaaled." She saw him shake hands with Randal Burnside. And she was nothing but Bell's helper, a servant-lass. Her father had been one of the Elders who stood at the plate on this eventful day, and John Robertson understood the wistful look his daughter gave him when the service was over.

"Ay, ay, he saw me weel enough—he could not help seeing me. He gave me a little nod as he passed quite civil—but—I would think na mair of such a whillie-wha," said John.

"You must not ca' names, faither,"

said gentle Jeanie; but it was a heavy heart which she carried along that same road, keeping far behind Mrs. Glen and Mrs. Cupar and the young ladies. It was no wonder to Jeanie, nor had she any doubt about Sir Ludovic. Who would not be glad of such a lad as Rob? She was not angry with Margaret, nor even with Rob himself, for that matter. It was her own fault ever to think that she was his equal. What was he but a laddie, that did not know his own mind, when he had pledged himself to her that ought to have known better? she was younger than he was, yet she ought to have known better; he was not a whillie-wha, as her father said, but only too tender-hearted, liking to please those he was with. Only this could ever have made him waste so much of his time and kindness upon John Robertson's daughter—a servant-lass—he that, at the least, would be “a placed minister!” At last Jeanie saw clearly the absurdity of the thought.