

KATE ROSE AND 'HER BAIRNS.'

CHAPTER I.

I FIRST saw Kate when she was sixteen years old, and my visit to her then was under melancholy circumstances. It was on the evening of the day on which her mother was buried, and she and two younger children were now orphans, and in a strange land, for they had been in the district for five or six years only. Kate was a strange creature to look at. She was about four feet six in height, while her girth was quite as much. Her face was square; her cheeks heavy; her eyes and expression vague. A jacket or bed-gown of worsted stuff, secured by a straw band round her immense waist, and a petticoat of wincey, constituted her dress. Just then she had a strangely anxious look, bewildered and somewhat wild. The sexton had come to me that afternoon and told me of her arrival on the previous night. She had been in service at some distant place for one or two years past, and had now, on getting word of her mother's death, run back to the hovel that was called her home.

"She's a strange creatar," said the man. "There's no a pick o' meat inside the door. The neebours hae been offering her meal an sic like, but she winna hae it, saying, 'she's nae a beggar yet;' but the twa little anes may stairve. It's a good job we got the mither coffined afore she cam', else she wudna hae lettin' us beerry the auld woman yet, I'm thinkin', 'cause the session paid for the coffin."

I had called on her in consequence of this information. When I entered, she was sitting on a stool at the hearth, and she had the two children beside her, with an arm round each. There was no fire. She turned her strange, stolid face to me as I entered, but did not rise or speak. The only chair in the room looked very crazy, so I took a low stool to the opposite side of the hearth and sat down. We sat in silence for some minutes, during which she seemed entirely to ignore my presence, remaining motionless with her arms round her little ones. At last I said, "I knew your father, and have come to see if I can help you."

She surveyed me carefully, and did not reply for several minutes. Then her answer was, "Ye're braw;" and then after a pause, "Ye wisna at the beerial."

I explained that my health did not permit me to attend funerals; but that now I would gladly aid her in her trouble,

"But ye wisna at the beerial," said she again.

I was completely disconcerted. What could I make of such a creature?

Just then the little boy in her right arm said, piteously, "Oh! winna ye gie me ma meat?"

And a convulsive shudder passed through Kate's large frame; and she kissed the boy, saying—"Wheesht, ma bairnie."

"You must allow me to send some food for these children," I said.

Her reply was almost fierce, "Am no a beggar."

This was just as the sexton had told me; and I did not well know what to say next. I resorted to the dialect of the district. "Ye see am no vera rich, but there's mony nae sae weel aff; an' whiles I gie the len' o' twa three shillings whan folk need it, an' I aye get it back, ilka bawbee o't, wi' a blessing sometimes. I'll len' ye the noo, an' ye'll pay me back whan ye win it."

It was some time before she answered me. "Ma-an, ye're a frien'!" Then after a pause, and with emphasis "Weel, weel then."

I understood she would take a loan, so I got up and offered her ten shillings. She counted them, one, two, three, and so on, on the window-sill. Then she slowly counted five over again, and took up the five and put them in my hand, saying, "Yon'll dae."

So I left her, wondering at her singularity, and how she came to possess that spirit of independence. But before I left her, I patted the little heads that were in her charge, and spoke kindly words to them. Some time afterwards I learned that the hard farmer, whom

she had just left, had refused to give her any part of her wages because she went away at mid-term.

The family had strolled into the village some five or six years before. The father was an itinerant seller of razor strops, and mender of umbrellas. He was a very little man, scarcely four feet in stature, and slight of figure, contained in a swallow-tailed coat greatly too large for him, and crushed by a dress hat. He called at my cottage soon after he came among us, and I gave him a casual job, by which he earned a shilling; and while he worked, I conversed with him. He was intelligent, extremely dignified, and had a politeness of manner, savouring even of condescension. His soul was larger than its earthly tabernacle. We talked of places and persons he had seen in "his travels," for he assured me he was "a great traveller." Thereafter, when I met him in the street, he used to salute me by raising his battered chimney-pot hat with the most graceful of bows, which courtesy I as formally acknowledged, and this apparently gave satisfaction to him. But I learned that the village boys, too often emissaries of Satan sent to buffet peculiar men like Mr. Rose, occasionally made game of the little man, and in derision had nicknamed him "Wee Mannie Monsie."

He was not left long in the land. One stormy winter night I was passing through the lobby of my house, when I heard a tapping at the house door. I opened it, and saw a tiny figure in the rain and darkness, and I said, "Come in."

A little child girl stood before me, and breathlessly gave utterance to her mission—"Ma faither has the fevar and is deein'; an' mither sent me for an auld sark and a nicht-cap tae streik him wi'. His ain's a' tore."

Greatly shocked by the message, I asked who was her mother.

"Ye'll no ken her, maybe; faither's Wee Mannie Monsie."

The things she wanted were given to the child; but the man died not till the second day thereafter. Many weeks passed before I got the picture of misery presented by that most pitiful embassy erased from my mind. Now the mother was dead also.

While I was puzzling myself as to what employment could be provided for Kate, by which she might earn a living, however humble, I learned that she had already set to work, and was earning something. Morning, noon, and evening, saw her hastening to distant hill-sides and woods, and hurrying back with large loads of brushwood and heather and ferns. Some she used as firewood, more she sold, receiving a few pence for her load of branches of firewood, or of ferns for bedding cattle or pigs, and earning, I was assured, what would certainly keep the souls and bodies of them together. I saw that the poor girl's happiness was best consulted by letting her take her own course. I therefore contented myself by seeing Widow Ferguson, the old woman who lived "but and ben" with Kate and the two children,

and her I enjoined to instantly acquaint me if it should appear that their supply of food ran short.

"Oh, sir!" said the old woman, "She's a eident, thoughtfu' cretar, yon Kate, an' a cleanly. She redd oot the hail place, and biggit a fresh bed wi' heather an' brackens; an' she loos the bairns mortal. Oh, but she's a strange cretar!"

I went into Kate's room. It was swept and thoroughly clean—tables, stools, and all were clean and white. Standing at the end of the table was Kate, her face lighted up with an intense look of pleasure, while on each side of the table stood one of the children, with cheerful face and bright eyes. Each had a long horn spoon, and was busily supping porridge from an earthenware platter in the centre of the table. As I entered, the old perplexed look came back to Kate's face, and with more readiness of speech than she showed on my former visit, she said, "No yet."

She thought I came for the money. I sat down, saying, "I jist cam' in tae speir for ye. Maybe ye're needin' a shilling or twa till ye get regular wark."

"Frien'," was all she said; but she lifted the lid of a small box, scarcely twice the size of a lady's bonnet-box. It contained some meal. She took some money from the pocket of her frock, and showed four shillings and several pence; and she pointed to three heather-basses or mats in a corner, her own work, ready for sale. Then I got up, saying, "Ye'll do bravely, my lassie."

And she said, "Weel, weel then," and resumed her position of delight at the table, where the young ones were still feeding; and so I left her.

The two little ones were totally unlike their eldest sister. When I had known Kate for long years, I came to perceive lines of pleasantness in her face, and a family resemblance to the younger children; but in truth, these were not to be noticed at once. The little ones were positively pretty, and looked so notwithstanding their tattered clothing. The little girl Bella was ten years old; Bob, the boy, was seven. They were bright-eyed, intelligent, and chatty. No one would have imagined they were children of the same parents as Kate; but such diversities do occur in nature. And Kate was very fond of them, amply supplying to them the love of father and mother and sister in one. She toiled for them incessantly, and turned the most unlikely things to money.

About a couple of months after the mother's death, and while the villagers were looking on her exertions with amazement, it was rumoured that Kate had bought an old hand-pick and a hatchet; and all were wondering what she was to do with such unwomanly tools. Every morning for a week she started with these weapons on her shoulder, and returned not till night; and during these long days her sole food was a piece of oat-cake, with water from the brook. But she returned one night accompanied by a cart loaded with pine roots, so many that her little room was filled almost to the roof, and

almost altogether. These roots she taught the children to split up with wedges, while she was absent at other work, and in the following winter she realised a handsome sum by the sale of the splinters, which the poorer villagers bought, as, being full of resin, they burned with much flame, and so supplied a flickering light at their firesides. They were purchased in more comfortable houses as well, being very convenient for the lighting of fires. In splitting up this wood, the boy Bob got his thumb rather severely bruised. When Kate came home and saw the injury, she was like to go frantic. She first fell to kissing him, then she cried over him. Then she took the notion, "What if it'll no heal?" and she went raving about until Dr. Blake heard of her distress, and dressed the wound, and soothed poor Kate. The doctor told me that before he came away, she said "frien'," and "weel, weel, then," which I assured him were certain symptoms of future amity.

Kate went to harvest work, and wrought "by the thrieve;" that is, her payment corresponded to the number of sheaves which she cut down; and her unflinching industry, notwithstanding her heavy frame, enabled her to make more than ordinary wages. After harvest she came to me to repay the five shillings. I urged her to keep it as a present to the little ones, but she said, "Na, na, frien'; I can wark for them;" and she insisted on my taking the money.

I offered her a glass of wine, but this she very decidedly refused, saying, "Na, na, na," as if it had been

Dr. Blake's physic I had tendered to her. Then she went away, saying, "Good-bye, frien'."

While Blake was attending to the boy's thumb, I made him suggest that the little ones should go to school. Kate agreed to it with some hesitation. Blake said that he and I would pay the school fees; but Kate said, "Na, na, frien'."

My sister, however, sewed a frock for Bella, and I got Durrand, the tailor, to break down some old clothes and to make up a jacket and trousers for Bob; and in Kate's absence the little people were dressed in these garments. Widow Ferguson, their neighbour, told me that Kate "made a great clamour when she cam' hame and found them sae dressit, mair noise than e'er she made, exceptin' when Bob hurt his thoom."

She was for stripping off the clothes then and there, protesting, "I'm no a beggar." But the children cried, and explained that it was "the frien's" did it, and that their "auld duds" had been carried away.

At length, when the bairns had cried much, Kate admitted that "it was frien' like;" and the row stopped, and Kate said, "Weel, weel, then."

The children went to school, and Bob was a clever boy and apt at his lessons, although a rambling lad. Bella was attentive, and also prompt to learn, and a lively lassie, but douce and discreet beyond her years. So when Bob one day played truant, and went off to glean in the corn-fields, Bella told Kate when she came home at night, and Kate sat down on her stool and

began to cry. Then the little boy, who had been standing glumly at the back of the door, came to her and put his little arms round her neck, saying, "Kate, dinna greet, an' I'll nae dae it again;" and he also began to whine and howl more than if the strong girl had whipped him. Kate had to kiss him and fondle him in that great bosom of hers before she got him quieted, and prevailed on to take the porridge that she had prepared for his supper. Bob never "flee'd the schule" again.

As Martinmas approached, I spoke to the man who owned the bothy inhabited by the Roses, telling him I would pay the rent.

"She's a queer lass, yon Kate," said he. "She wunna be in debt ony way. She cam' tae me hinner end o' hairst, an' pay'd down the rent, the hail twenty-five shillings, an' made sure o' the bit placie for anither year, saying she wus gain tae wark reglar wi' Maister Masson at the Bught. She's a warkin' creatar', sir."

In fact, the man was right. Kate was fully equal to her undertaking to fend for and fence the little household that God had left to her charge; and she did it, working with a singleness of heart and purpose, and a steadiness of aim and end, that were truly wonderful. Of course, she was a special woman, for woman she looked; one of the "characters" of the village, for whom the elder people all had a kindly greeting as she passed to her daily toil or from it, for her labour of love commended itself to every heart possessed of

ordinary sympathies. Even those Arabs, the village boys, in whom the exhibition of kindly affection is apt to produce derision, had a kind of reverence for Kate, and did not molest her in her ways.

So the days and the seasons revolved, and Kate toiled through winter's storm and summer's heat, and perhaps for her gross frame the latter was the severer season of the two. But the children grew, and Bella was now a pretty lassie of fourteen years, of a comeliness surpassing most of the village children. Already all or most part of the care of the house indoors devolved on her. She kept it swept and garnished. Kate had gradually added some bits of furniture to its plenishing—a dresser, three deal chairs, and a dish-rack, in the shelves of which last stood the few bowls and plates which constituted their humble stock of crockery. All was clean and bright. Bella also did the cooking of the porridge and the making of the brose, and had Kate's meals ready against her outgoing and incoming. And Kate used to reward her for her unfailing attention in this by a display of love and show of pleasure, just as if little Bella did all the bread winning, and as if she, Kate, were entirely dependent on her. The little girl had her schoolboy sweethearts, too; and I have observed that schoolboys do not often make distinctions of wealth or rank in their boyish loves, and prefer a pretty face and neatness to better clothing and plain features, and "pride," as they call it. Chief

7

candidates for her favour were, Master Jack Watson, son of a farmer at Nether Howe; Jamie Robertson, a village boy; and George M'Gregor, the weaver's son. The little girl, with precocious coquetry, made game of the weaver's boy, and treated him very lightly; but she kept her preference, if she had any, for either of the two others "a secret" from them. I believe that she once whispered to Kate that Jack Watson was her sweetheart, whereupon Kate suddenly put the little girl from her knee, on which she had been sitting, and got up, saying, vehemently, "Na, na, na. Aye mate wi' yer equals, aye mate wi' yer equals."

It would be hard to say where Kate got her philosophy. Perhaps she had an instinctive sense of things that were dangerous, and thus naturally opposed them, just as she certainly had an instinct of love, more than human love, for her two orphan bairns.

And as the bairns grew up, Kate's love and anxiety for them increased. If they both were not in to receive her when she returned from her labour, she was restless and unhappy. "Whaur's Bob? What can be keepin' Bob?" she would go on crying out until the boy made his appearance.

One night he came in with his nose bleeding, and the din she made was frightful—"Wha did it? Wha did it? I'll fley him alive, the vagabone!" she screamed; and notwithstanding Bob's rémonstrances and assurances that it was all his own fault and got in fair fight, she would have gone to take summary

vengeance on the first boy she met, had not Widow Ferguson and Bella forcibly held her, so that she could not get away unless she was violent to Bella, which she could not be for her life.

And by-and-by came a night of cold and bitter showers, and before Kate came in fatigued and drenched with rain, while the children sat listening to the shower pelting on their little window, Bob said to Bella, "Puir Kate! she'll be a' droukit. I maun gang tae wark at somethin'. Whan am big, I'll keep ye twa i' comfort."

Bella said, "Am bigger nor ye. It'll be my time tae gae oot first. I'll speak o't tae Kate the night."

So when Kate came in wet, and tired, and downcast, the little girl said, while she helped off Kate's wet jacket, "I'm thinkin' it's time I wus takin' share o' the wark, an' that ye was restin', Kate."

"What is't?" asked Kate, to whose mind the thought embodied in these words was entirely novel, "What is't?"

So the little girl said it again. When Kate comprehended it, her speech was most decisive. "Ne'er say that again. A wee bit lassie lik' ye gang oot i' the warld, mang rouch weather and rouch men! Na, na; ne'er say it again."

And she sat down and did not touch her food, until the girl, who knew what ailed her, came and coaxed her, saying, "Ate yer supper, Kate; an' I'll no think o't; leastwise no for lang." Then Kate ate some food.

Did Kate meet rough men in her little world? No doubt she did. Men who jeered at her face and figure, who had no thought or sympathy for the great heart enclosed in that gross form, and who regarded her much as a beast of burden. But these she did not esteem the worst. For there were others who made brutal jests and spoke unclean words, and stern necessity compelled her to encounter them all. Can we wonder that she shrunk from the thought of her pretty and fragile sister exposed to such a world as that she laboured in?

In the spring of the following year Bella, being then about fifteen years old, ceased to attend school. The occasion of it was this. She had all winter worn a pair of old dilapidated boots, which certainly were no protection from damp or cold. But they were boots. Now the sole of one of them came clean away, and they could no more be worn. Kate had not the means of providing new ones, and Bella could not go to school barefooted like Bob; and therefore she stayed within doors.

When this had been the state of things for several days, Bella one night put her arms round Kate's neck and said, "Kate, I'm na gain back tae the skule mair. Ye maun lat me oot tae wark."

"Never, wee bairnie, never," was the peremptory answer.

No one can tell how long Kate would have resisted the proposal of the girl to aid herself by labour, if an

occurrence had not impressed on her the necessity for it. One of the farm-servants at the Bught caught cold, and fevered and died. Then Kate was deeply impressed with the uncertainty of life, and was greatly dejected by the insecurity of her "twa bairnies." It was clearly necessary that they should learn to earn their own bread, and so be self-dependent and prepared to meet the contingency of death coming to her, Kate. So with unwilling, shrinking heart, she said to Bella, "I'll no stan' against yer feein'; but dinna gang far frae me."

And all that night the poor woman wept and refused to be comforted by the little ones who were so dear to her.

So the little girl engaged herself as servant to the blacksmith at Howe, whose wife needed the help of a lassie for her cow and her children. Her wages were thirty shillings for the half-year, and a pair of shoes, and the blacksmith good naturedly gave an order for the shoes at once, although it was three weeks before the term. What a sad night that was, the night before the term. When Kate came in carrying her little pail of milk, and found the two children and her porridge awaiting her, she sat down and howled—"It's the last nicht I'll hae ye tae mak ma supper. Ye're gain awa' 'mang unkent folk, an' I'll no be wi' ye. Och, och!"

In vain the young ones insisted that it was the right thing; and tried to comfort her by saying that she should be thankful still to have Bob; and that Bob was

not likely to leave her, as he might go to a trade and so on. They even laughed, but it was sad laughing, as they told her how Bob had made the porridge for the last three days, and was quite expert in bed-making and in sweeping the floor and other domestic work. That she ate anything, was due to Bob pressing her to taste his porridge-making—"noo she kent it;" but I believe she slept not a wink that night. There were many tears before the little family broke up on the morning of term-day, although they were to see one another on the following Sunday, and although Howe was but three miles off. But when Kate's work was over that night, instead of going home for supper, she went away at a trot to the blacksmith's at Howe, to see her "bairnic," as she called her. Kate charged the lassie's employers to be kind to her, and blubbered a great deal; while Bob, alone in the cottage, was sorely puzzled and distressed by her unwonted delay in returning home. And this display of sisterly love did not lessen the kindness which Bella received in her new home. Indeed, they were very kind to her; and she was good tempered and gentle with the children of her master, and merited good will. So time gradually soothed Kate, and modified her views of her relations to her "bairns;" and she relapsed into her ordinary life of toil and peace.

Bella got on pleasantly in her new home. No doubt a life of servitude has its irksome things in the best of families, and Bella's life was no exception to the common lot. Ready obedience does not come naturally to

ordinary natures, and Bella was lively and impetuous. Yet she bore up wonderfully, knowing that it was matter of necessity to work and obey. Perhaps one of the most bitter things she experienced was this. When she had been there for a month, young Master Jack Watson, who used to make love to her at school, came riding to the smith, who practised farriery, asking him to see his father's cows. He came into the house and spoke to "the servant lassie," and did not "let on that he kent her a bit." Poor little girl! how she was vexed by this, fretting against the chain of her servitude as if it marked and degraded her. Very foolish, no doubt. But it takes some time of hard work and contumely and suffering to subjugate the heart, young and wayward, and force it to accept work and humility as its portion.

Of all her young sweethearts the only one who seemed to retain any of his boyish impressions was the despised George M'Gregor, now a lad about eighteen years old. Perhaps this was to some extent owing to the circumstance that the pew in church in which Bella sat was next to the family pew of M'Gregor the weaver, so that the young people saw each other once a fortnight. Sometimes, too, in summer evenings the young lad was found in the neighbourhood of the blacksmith's dwelling, and this was not lightly to be accounted for, as he was soft and flabby of person, and usually not at all given to pedestrian exercise. In truth, and in her heart, Bella recognised the youth as a sweetheart, and now her only sweetheart, although

with the bashfulness becoming their years and circumstances, the lad spoke no word of love.

Now it happened that William Durrand, the drainer, had work at Howe at that time, and used to get his tools repaired by the blacksmith, and the prettiness and simplicity of Bella caught his eye and fancy. So he "spoke her fairly;" and finding that she went to the village church every second Sunday, he waited for her on the road, half-a-mile away from the village or more. What his object was may be guessed, for he bore an indifferent, if not positively bad character. He met the lassie on her way, and accompanied her to Kate's humble abode, and went in with her and sat down. Kate took no notice of him, and did not speak to him, but set to hug and bedear her little sister as if no one was present. When he went out, however, she eagerly asked who he was. The maiden told the little she knew of him. But widow Ferguson came in and said, "He's an unco' bad fella. He mustna be lat gae aifter Bella." Then Kate looked very grave, and said "Na mair he wull." Well, on that day fortnight the man repeated it. He waited for the girl on the road and accompanied her home, and went into the cottage and sat down on the table. He was well dressed, and talked gaily with Bella. Kate stood at the hearth with a face like a thunder-cloud. To-day she did not fall to kissing her "bairn;" and, when Bella went up to her to be embraced, she dourly put her aside. But the man was scarcely seated on the table when the strong

woman seized him round the thighs, lifted him bodily up, carried him to the street door and tumbled him down on his back. Then she shut the door and came in and embraced her Bella as if nothing had occurred. The street was full of people going to church, so that the ludicrous incident was seen of many, and for a week the village and country-side echoed peals of laughter at "the dandy drainer's" discomfiture. It was averred that he "skailit his Kersemere breeks, back an' front o' them." No one found fault with the stalwart Kate. Indeed, she was nowise to be blamed, for she was ignorant of what the world knows as the "rebuff courteous," or the "civil repulse," and half measures were not according to her nature. The measure she took was happily effectual. "The drainer" did not accost Bella again.

In course of the harvest, Bella was sent one night to the village on some domestic mission by her master, and she reached her sister's cabin just as she was going to bed. Kate speedily re-dressed herself in petticoat and bedgown, and, in the village phrase "was like to eat" the young girl with loving kindness. When they had sat for some time—Bella chatting and Kate listening, and Bob, who was in bed and had been wakened up, chuckling and crowing—the boy said, "Winna ye sleep wi' us, Bella, this ae nicht?"

Then there came over Kate a great longing to get her sister once more in her arms in bed. She got up and seized upon Bella, and with solemn voice said, "Ye

maun cam tae bed, ma bairnie, aince mair." She would take no denial, although the girl said she was ordered to be quickly back, but she compromised the matter by agreeing that it should be "jist ae half hoor." So 'mid the crowing of Bob, and Kate's "hoo-hoo"-ing (her common sound of pleasure), the girls undressed, and lay down. Then there was a moment's silence, and they, poor tired people! all fell fast asleep. They slept until Bella awoke with a start to recall the state of matters. It was black night, and the peat fire had burnt down to ashes, and the lassie, not knowing how long she had slept, was distressed. In reality they had not slept many minutes. They got up and redressed, and Kate went with her bairnie all the way to her master's house prepared to explain the delay. What was their surprise to be greeted with "Hey, Bella, ye're quick back." So it was, their sleep notwithstanding, for they had hurried over the road. Then Bella must go down the road a piece with Kate on her homeward way, and lamented her sister's long walk and fatigue. "I'd gang twice as far tae hae ye in ma airms, ma bairnie," said the great woman as they parted.

On the term day Bella came to Kate with thirty shillings in her hand, and delivered the money to her. It was the first of her earnings, almost the first she ever had handled. She was in great spirits. "I'm na gain tae coff a thing wi't," said she, "Sae it'll pay the rent."

"It's peyed," said Kate. "We maun buy some claes for ye, bairnie."

Indeed, the little girl's clothes were of the poorest. She had never had bonnet, nor shawl, nor jacket, and her underclothing was scanty enough. Yet she resisted the proposal to buy clothes with her wages, because Kate "haed mair need." But the big sister prevailed. Clothes were to be bought, and then came a serious deliberation as to what the clothes should be, for the great need, and the little sum for disposal, made the matter of selection difficult. At length it was settled. Cloth for a black lustre jacket, a grey wincey skirt, "plaiding" for a petticoat, and a black straw bonnet with blue riband, consumed almost a pound of the poor little earnings. Then the girl said,— "I beet tae gie somethin' tae Bob. Shoon's best. He haes maist need o' shoon." So a pair of shoes were purchased for the boy at a cost of seven shillings and sixpence. Thus the money was dissipated, for the little balance was barely enough to pay for the making-up of the things. But how exultingly Kate cried out, when, a fortnight later, she next saw Bella in all the glory of her new clothes, "Ye're braw! ye're braw! ye're a leddy!" But the poor thing might have perished with her thin lustre boddice, had not her mistress kindly given her an old body of worsted stuff to wear underneath it.

CHAPTER II.

AT Whitsunday following Bella found a better situation as domestic servant in the family of Mr. Morris at the Lowes; and Kate, who never would have dreamed of leaving the service which she had first entered, was thereby induced to quit the Bught, and she also fee-ed herself at the Lowes as a field-worker, so that her sisterly love was daily satisfied by the sight of her "dear bairn." So she still persisted in calling Bella, although Bella was fully six inches taller than herself, and a girl so pretty and tidy that the lads of the country round turned admiring eyes to her. Bob, now thirteen, still attended school, still swept the room and made the porridge; and he was, I learned, an attentive scholar, a fair writer, and counted well; a fine-looking boy, and full of domestic love. Kate was very proud of him, and delighted, to the extent of her humble means, to provide him with clothing, and to wash and, in her rough way, to darn and mend for him. It was a pleasant June for them all that first June at the Lowes. Almost every night the youngster, his lessons learned, and the porridge-pan boiling, started for the Lowes to get a sight of Bella, and to return with Kate. And many "a piece," more or less dainty, the kindly Mrs. Morris made him eat,

while she added to his stock of clothing by gifts of her son's old things; and their lowly happiness seemed unmixed. But such sunshine could not be for ever. Before long a cloud cast its shadow on Bella; a dark shadow, although it fortunately passed away, and at first she did not know it was a shadow. The way of it was this: At the midsummer market at the village some tipsy lads took to violent courses, frightening the women, and beating and dispersing the men. Bella was at the fair, in charge of a cart with butter from the Lowes, there exposed to sale. She was alone in charge of it, sitting in the cart in the square. Around her came the wild lads and seized the cart, and set to drag it through the crowd. She wished to leap down, but with oaths and ill words they forced her to sit still, with the tears coursing down her cheeks. In the distance she saw George M'Gregor running away. Then a handsome lad came along, dressed in fustian, bearing a stout staff, and he stood before the disorderly gang and shouted, "Set down the cairt."

"No for ye, Wuddy Tam," said the foremost; but no sooner had he said it than he went to the ground, struck down by the young man's staff.

"Set douu the cairt," he said again, and the cart was set down; but instantly half-a-dozen men had closed with him, and clenched half-a-dozen sticks at his head. With ready fence and heavy blows he sent two of his assailants to the green; but then women and men rushed in, and the combat ended.

"Ye're a fearless creatar, Tam," said some; "ye're a' bluidy," said others, for the sticks had come in contact with Tam's head.

But he said, "Fetch the cairt back tae the square, men; the skemps daurna touch it agen;" and he walked by the cart-side while it was being replaced, and spoke cheerfully to Bella while she thanked him. Bella thought she had never seen any man half so heroic and chivalrous. "Yon brave chiel," she said to herself over and over again. "Wus ony ever lik' him. He laid about him lik' a lion." So the young man was photographed on her heart—the bravest of the brave, noble, lion-like. What did the little girl know of lions?

Who was Wuddy Tam? If you had inquired in the wide country round, I fear you would have heard little good of him. Indeed, Thomas Fraser bore a very bad character. The son of a crofter in the distant braes, he wrought on his father's land when it pleased him; and when it did not please him to work, he went idle. Strong, active, inured to climb hill and rock, he was one of the most daring, active, agile men of the district. A crack shot at the Christmas shooting-matches, swift of foot beyond any at the castle games at "harvest," he could put the stone and hammer further than any man of his years, and was envied of all the young men round. Need I say that he had been twice prosecuted for poaching, and was regarded by the gamekeepers as an extremely dangerous man. I believe no man to be utterly depraved; neither was Wuddy Tam, who had a kindly

heart and generous nature, sadly misdirected, but which erred more through spontaneous ebullition than mental depravity. As for shooting a pheasant, if a man can handle a gun, I don't see much moral wrong in that, although the professional poacher is certainly a bad man. Meantime, he grieved the hearts of his parents, humble and godly persons, and was universally regarded as a black sheep, and a sad discredit to the fold that owned him. Such was the man whose image was impressed on Bella's heart.

The daisies had folded their cups, the singing birds were silent and abed, the wakeful dove alone made thrilling plaint to his mate in distant dell, the voice of the tumbling rill filled the air with softened lullaby. It was a summer twilight a few nights after that market-day, and Bella was going to a grass field near the house to milk a cow, whose milk was specially appropriated to the wants of the house. She was not happy. She had now been two months at the Lowes; and still, in her want of knowledge and inexperience in the work of a better class of house, she was making mistakes and blunders and suffering rebukes. This day she had been more stupid than usual, and her mistress proportionably cross and sharp. So the girl walked through the dewy pasture, sad of heart, sorely feeling her ignorance, her weakness, and dependance. Suddenly beside the cow she was about to milk stood the person of Thomas Fraser.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

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And it fitted through the girl's mind, how much the arm of a strong man like this might help a weak thing like her along the path of life. She answered, "Ye helpit me aince already. I maun thank ye kindly for it."

Then there was a pause, during which the lad examined the cow, and spoke of its qualities; and the milking being finished, the maid arose and took up the milking-pail, and stood before the lad a couple of paces from him. For the sixth time Tom said, "It's a guid coo;" and she replied, "Vera guid."

No one can tell how long they might have stood thus, repeating the same thing, for when lad and lass are willing to linger, very few words and no change of ideas suffice to make what stands for a sufficiently active conversation. But as they stood, Bella saw the stock of a gun protruding from the lad's coat pocket, and she could trace the form of the barrel underneath his coat. Then she recollected that her lion was given to irregular courses, and was suggestively near to the preserved woods on the river bank below.

"Whaur ye gain' the nicht?" she asked, before she knew that she intended to question him.

"Ye're seein' ma gun," said he; "I'll no deny it. I'm gain' doun to the wudd. Wull I bring ye a birdie? There's nane sae bonny as yersel in the haill wudd though."

"Na," said Bella, "dinna dae it. It's maist unhappy lik'. Dinna be breakin' the law. Gang hame,

lad, ye'll be better for't. Dinna break the law, an' disgrace yersel' an' grieve hairts."

"Grieve hairts!" said he, "what hairts grieve at the luck o' Wuddy Tam?"

"Yer ain folks! It beet tae be, an' maybe yer ain hairt. I ne'er did ill but I grat for't."

"'O little ane," said he, "what ken ye o' ill-daein' or o' ill?"

"I ken it's wrang tae gae oot wi' a gun at nicht. Turn back," she said, urgently, "turn back and ne'er rue it."

"Wull it please ye gin I gae hame?"

"It wull that."

"May I come tae-morra nicht an' tell ye I did yer biddin'?"

"It wadna be nice o' me tae bid ye com'," she said coyly, "but I'll blithely ken that ye keepit frae evil."

"Weel, weel, I'll no finger trigger the nicht. Gude e'en, bonny doo!"

And he raised his cap with a grace and reverence such as lord might show to lady, and was gone, bounding over the pasture, and over the enclosure, till the gloaming hid him from her view. Could anything have touched the maiden's heart more than this yielding to her will in the desire that he should do rightly? From that hour her heart turned towards him in love, and I fear it so happened, the rather that he was wild.

I fear there was a current of lawlessness in Bella's

own nature which aided the growth of this unhappy love. For when her mistress found fault with her now, the girl would conjure up to herself how she would resent it when she came to be united to that bold man; and how quickly he would silence by word and act the speeches which wounded her. Already, although she had seen him but twice, she had, in heart and fancy, constituted him her lover, her protector, her master, in whom implicit faith was to be reposed, and to whom implicit obedience was to be yielded. What was she dreaming of? A life released from care and drudgery, elevated by the brilliancy and chivalry of this wild man, in whose shadow she was to have rest, and peace, and light, and happiness. For she ignored the things she knew—that she, a poor, weak thing, ignorant and in bondage, was able to guide, and had guided, the lion-like man, from at least one deed of wrong. Indeed, she did not perceive that his savagery and wild-beast nature were mainly what inspired her love. She never asked herself how the lion might consort with the lamb.

For a week, night after night, the man stood beside the dun cow while the girl milked it. Few words were spoken, and no word of love, but each knew the growing love of the other. No doubt the words of love and vows of loving would soon have come, but their meetings were interrupted. For Mr. Morris at the weekly-market, met Jeffs, the Earl's head gamekeeper, who asked, "What brings Wuddy Tam every night to the Lowes?"

Morris, professing ignorance of the fact, was then informed by Jeffs that or a week past Tam had been seen by the watchers, and followed nightly to the farm, and after a time was seen to go home again. Morris had no sympathy with Tam, and was bound by his lease to preserve the game. Therefore, on returning home, he questioned the grieve, and learned enough to believe that Tam came to the maid. Then said he, "Bring home the dun cow with the others;" and it was done. Morris also mentioned the matter to his wife; and she upbraided the servant, not wrathfully, but "for her good." And Bella stood by and heard her lion called "idler," and "vagabond," "a sly louter of fences," "a poacher," and "a thief." Oh, me! oh, me! Yet this very grave indictment of her noble animal had in it what deprived it of its sting, at least in part. "A louter of fences!" Yes, she admitted the impeachment. Had he not, night after night, come bounding to her side, taking the five-foot fence at a leap? Was it a crime so to come to her in peace and gentleness and love? Possibly the whole indictment was the same. That he was not a confirmed poacher seemed proved by his desisting at her bidding, and never bringing his gun again. Still the words pained her, suggesting doubts of the man as her fancy had painted him, and whether her fancy, or heart, or love—I suppose they are much the same in such a case—was rightly bestowed. So she stood and listened, and answered not a word.

Kate was told of it, too and gave utterance to many

an "Owow!" her usual sound of pain, while she laboured a-field that Saturday; but she said nothing to her sister. And Sunday came, and Bella must go to the village, for it was "her day out." She was going with heavy heart and slow steps, when Mrs. Robert, the grieve's wife, overtook her. The good woman instantly referred to the noble being imaged in Bella's heart. "He *is* a bad ane, a bitter bad ane. Never see his face again, lassie. Villain, poacher, blackguard, fau'se hairt! Ne'er speak till him. If ye're a true lass ye winna."

"It's a' ae great lee," said Bella, bursting into tears, for her heart had been full to overflowing for a couple of days. "It's a' ae lee," she cried.

"Na, lass, it's nae lee. Bide ye, I'll show ye the truth."

They walked in silence for a little way. Then the woman said, "Follow me," and led the girl from the road by a grassy lane, fenced by a ditch and a birchen hedge, interspersed with the wild rose and briar. The brilliant summer sun was shining, and the stillness of Sunday was abroad on the fields. And as Bella followed her guide, she saw the yellow buttercup and daffodil in the ditch, and the clustering roses on the hedge. She used to rejoice in the sight of them. Now she passed them without pleasure, and a feeling stole over her as if she had left the world and pleasure behind, when she turned from the highway. At length they stopped before a tumbledown bothy, miserable to look upon as a human habitation; and at the door, in the sunshine, sat an

aged woman—"Hoo's Rachel?" asked Mrs. Robert of the woman.

"On fut again," said the crone, "but nought left o' her but skin an' bane."

"An' the wean?"

"Weel eneuch; an' it's the imidge o' him."

"Haes he been tae see her?"

"Na, the fause vagabone! na. I gaid till his faither's, but he wadna come in sicht o' me; an' he sen' word by Black Jock that we nicht dae oor warst, for what cud we mak' o' him? The fause thief, an' waur than thief! I heard him swayre masel' he wad mairry her. The curse o' God an' ma broken hairt on him!"

A death-like sickness crept to Bella's heart. She grew pale and faint and cold; but she followed her guide into the cottage. On a low stool sat a wan and wasted woman dandling a baby. "Tell this girl, Rachel, whase is that bairn? It may dae her guid."

"Tam Fraser, Wuddy Tam, is its faither, an' a black Tam he is tae me."

Bella heard no more, for she fell senseless to the ground.

Her noble lion was, after all, a vulgar commonplace brute. Thank God! she recognised and accepted the fact. Yet the effort which cut him off and cast him from her was not painless; albeit her passion was of such brief life and slender roots. Providentially such efforts are not painless, for suffering and pain are the true discipline of the soul. Bella's discipline began

then and there; and it was very painful to go home to Kate, pale and abashed, confessing her folly, and weeping as if her eyes were fountains of tears. Greatly Bob wondered, for he could make nothing of it, excepting that Bella, his lively, loving Bella, had fancied that some fellow, whom he did not know, was good, whereas he was a bad fellow. Why should Bella cry for that? "It wus only a wrang guess," he said, "an' no muckle hairm in that." I daresay Kate's apprehension was little better. But she had a notion that it was "vera wrang tae be ta'en up wi' a vagabone." Yet both Bob and Kate soothed and comforted the sufferer with true, unselfish love, taking her tenderly in their arms and to their hearts. At length, Kate got her "bairnie" on her knee, with her head upon that more than mother's bosom, and, by-and-by, the grief and sobbing were soothed.

For it came to the little one as she lay in the arms of her great rough sister, that all love and love fancy were folly and evil, save the love of Kate and Bob. She saw the wildness of her imaginings, the deceitfulness and untruth of her heart. She saw, too, now afar off, the precipice towards which she, unrecking, had lately been wandering in blindness. So she shuddered at it all on her sister's bosom, until her golden hair fell down, reaching nigh to the floor, and covering Kate's rough skirt. Bob came then, and, grasping the dishevelled tresses, said, "I'll cut it a' aff."

And the young girl said, "Ye may if ye will."

“I micht be guessing wrang, an’ greet for it again,” said the boy.

But, indeed, so broken was she, so humbly glad and thankful to return to the haven of family love, that they might have stripped her of her hair and her beauty, and she would not have repined. For in that hour a higher and better beauty was overspreading her soul, in the loveliness of humility, and the acceptance of her lowly lot in life, in a full sense of the value of the love of that humble dwelling, and that therein lay her chief good.

“Ah!” she said to Kate, “it was a wild bad dream I haed. Thank God! I gat oot o’ it. I’ll win ma bit daily bread mair kindly noo, an’ eat it wi’ mair cheer.”

Kate dimly recognised that the evil was past, and thanked God, and hugged her “bairnie.” Thus Bella arose and went out from them regenerated, and went back to the Lowes with a new, although a painful, heart; designing to seek happiness in the wonted ways and sights of it, and ready to listen to the voice of wisdom when it spoke from anything but her own heart. That henceforth she would distrust. Curious it is, how, by ways we know not, our minds and affections are framed and modulated for the distant future, and we, for weal or woe, prepared for destined ends.

But Wuddy Tam did not at once renounce his desire to make love to the girl. He hung about the premises, and Bella was told that if she desired to avoid him, she must not go out at night, and as little alone as possible.

On her way to the village on Sundays, she often saw him, but she always had a companion. Frequently on such occasions he joined her on the road, and, after an exchange of greetings, walked along in silence, until she entered the church or the cottage. The girl shuddered at his approach, and did not breathe freely while he was near her.

Summer was ended and harvest past, and our poor friends toiled on in peace; not greatly feeling their toil, sweetened as it was with love. But Bob became restless in winter, and talked every day of "going to a trade." What trade was he fit for? He spoke to Mowat, the mason, and to Leask, the joiner; but they said he was too weak for their work, too young by four years. He "wudna be a tailor;" so that the only alternative before him was the trade of shoemaker, and a shoemaker he resolved to be. The wages were very poor. He was aware of that. Three shillings a week would be the average allowance for his five years' apprenticeship; and as a journeyman thereafter his earnings would not exceed ten. But the boy felt that it was wrong to be a burden on his sisters, and was ready to adopt any course of life that offered an instant way of earning even a little. It was consequently arranged that he should become apprentice to James Malcolm, the principal shoemaker, at New Year following; but circumstances intervened which changed the current of his life.

The end of December was extremely cold. Snow

came down in drifting sleety showers, and at morning the turnip fields were hard frozen and besprinkled with snow. Kate must stand in the frozen fields and root up the bulbs, so that the cattle might be fed and the roots stored, cold, pinching work, but common at that season on all the farms. Kate's shoes, however, were ill-suited to the occasion. Out of toe and down at heel, they were no protection against the frost-bound soil; and when she got home on the second night of this weather, the great toe of her right foot was sore and swollen. By morning the swelling extended to her ankle, and she could not move the limb without pain. Still, having uncomplainingly eaten her porridge at six o'clock, she was dragging herself to the door, intent on going to the Lowes, when the pain became so great that she could no longer bear it in silence. So she spoke of it to Bob. By the fire-light they examined the foot. The toe was blackened and swollen, and well-nigh as large as her huge wrist. Bob said that he would go to the Lowes and tell that she could not come. But this Kate would not listen to. She would "gang till her wark;" and so she started, escorted by Bob. They went out into the frosty morning, with its keen wind cutting through their slender garments. With much difficulty they got along the village street; but when they reached the open country, Kate sat down on a dyke and began to cry. She could not proceed.

The boy sped on to the Lowes, and the snowflakes began to fall, and he ran and leapt in the grey morning

moonlight, and shouted "They are plucking geese in Caithness; here's the feathers." But by-and-by the whirling shower blinded him. He could see neither to the right nor left; and the cold wind cut his breath away, and he could scarcely face the tempest. Through the drift a man hailed him, a man carrying a gun and a game-bag well filled, asking who he was and whither he was bound in such a storm. It was Wuddy Tam. He took the boy's hand and bore him along, saying,— "Whisper tae yer sister that I loe her yet, and that sometimes she comes atween me an' the hares." Without the man's aid the boy might never have reached the Lowes; but at length, chilled and staggering, he got into the farm-house, and told his tale. But so severe was the storm that, although the boy cried as he thought of Kate at the dyke side, they dared not let him venture back till it was broad daylight. When he reached the spot where he had parted from his sister, there he found her, still cowering in the shelter of the dyke, benumbed so that she could scarcely speak. She had waited his return. Now she could not walk at all; and Bob had to get some of the neighbours to help her, and so she reached home.

The sore toe was the result of cold, a species of frost-bite. Dr. Blake attended Kate, and was very gentle and patient with her. At one time he feared that he must amputate the foot, but the necessity for that passed by. Two months elapsed before she could put it under her again. And during this long period of

confinement Bob zealously and lovingly attended to her, although Malcolm, the shoemaker, told him that as he, Bob, did not enter on his apprenticeship, he must take another boy, and did so. Bob felt that his first duty was owing to Kate, and discharged it accordingly. Mr. Morris, too, was considerate, for Kate's usual supplies of meal were regularly sent to her.

It was during this period that the following whimsical incident occurred. Kate fell in love with her medical attendant Dr. Blake, and persuaded herself that he was in love with her. Blake was a bachelor, aged forty-four, and in fair practice, and therefore matrimonially eligible. It was quite to be expected that his kindness and attention to the almost friendless girl should touch her; but that her feelings should take the grotesque form of love is sufficiently singular. Blake told me of it himself. He said that for some time the woman used to welcome him on his visits, which were usually twice a-day, with the wildest of grinning, as she sat on her chair at the fireside, with her injured limb on a stool, and that the poor creature made unnecessary displays of her ankle and leg when he examined the foot; and that she always called him "Ma dear," and "Ma dear doctor." But he had thought nothing of it, until one day, as he came out of her room, Widow Ferguson followed him to the outside, saying, "Yon's a puir fulish creatar, doctor!"

"Well, she's not a bright woman," said the doctor.

"But she loveth much, therefore much shall be forgiven to her."

"Ay, that's jist what I wanted to speak about. The creatar's in luvè wì ye, an' tells o' it. Puir doited body!"

"What do you mean?"

"Jist what am sayin'. The puir creatar canna stop her mou' nicht nor day, aye crying 'The bonny doctor! the braw doctor! I luvè him; an' ye see he's courtin' o' me. He says I hae a braw leg, an' I ken I hae.' The creatar may gang dimentit, 'less ye tak' care."

Poor Blake was sadly disturbed on hearing of this most egregious folly. Seriously annoyed, he came straightway to me; and, notwithstanding his annoyance, I could not but laugh at his tale. But it had a serious aspect. What was to become of the poor idiotic woman, if he discontinued his visits, and how was he to remove her ridiculous fancies if he continued his attendance? One thing was certain, the poor thing, crass and dull of wit, but with a capacity for love above women generally, might become totally crazed of intellect, might be wrecked both mentally and physically, if subjected to a passion like this. So we talked earnestly of the difficulty. Argument and reason it would be vain to use. Rudeness and unkindness were not in Blake's nature, and I have seldom seen passion extinguished by them. What was to be done? Had Blake not repeatedly told me that he believed drastic medicines efficacious to remove from the mind nonsensical love fancies? Now was

the time to test his theory. Blake tried it; and drenched poor Kate with pills and black draught for a week, until Widow Ferguson declared "The nonsense is a' oot o' the lass's heid. She haesna said 'the doctor' for twa days." In truth, the dreaded affection was stayed; perhaps all the more readily that Blake aided his potions by a rough manner and much fault-finding.

It was during this confinement of Kate that a new friend of the family appeared in the person of Peter Crombie, cartwright at Lowestyle, a decent man and well-to-do; a widower, about forty-eight years of age, whose only daughter was of the same years as Bella. The way from the Lowes farm to the village passed his house at Lowestyle, and Bella had become acquainted with Mary Crombie, the only child of Peter, and had formed a close friendship with her. One Sunday, as Bella was passing to the village, Peter came to her and said, "Lass, it's the Lord's day; but if ye'll no tak' it amiss I'll send some neeps and taties tae yer sister." The girl thanked him, and said such kindness would be acceptable; and the present was sent, and was followed after an interval by a quantity of "sids" (the shellings of oats, from which the national "sowens" are prepared), and by other contributions, all welcome additions to the food of the little household. Bella very pleasantly thanked Mr. Crombie for these kindnesses; and so it was that, when Peter saw the girl coming along the roadway, he often laid down his tools and went out from his workshop to greet her. Mary also confided to

her friend that she was in love with her father's journeyman, brisk Hugh Cowie, "a weel-faured lad, an' a weel-doing."

One Sunday afternoon of this spring, Bella was in the cottage with Kate. Bob was at the Sunday school. It was just after Kate had recovered the use of her limb. The door opened, and Thomas Fraser stood before them, pale and haggard. He shut the door and advanced to them at the hearth. The girls were surprised and got up.

"Bella Rose," he said, "I hae soucht opportunity o' speech wi' ye aften, an' been aye bilkit. I ken ye hae been sairly pit against me, an' am owning I oucht to get few guid speeches or wishes frae onybody. Ma life haes been wasted an' waur, an' am seein' that misery an' wrack are afore me—that am gain headlong to ruin unless some luvin' powar stay me. For God's sake let me see ye sometimes, an' hope that if I dae weel an' recover masel, ye may some day listen tae me."

He spoke with excitement and with earnest pathos, as if his life and salvation depended on the reply, and thus he stood facing her. There was a pause, for Bella could not at once shape an answer.

"I God's name, and for God's mercy answer me," he urged.

Then Kate said, "Get oot, ye vagabone.

"I know I'm a vagabone, an' only fit for an ootcast, as ye say, woman; but mercy an' kindness may yet save me," he answered very humbly.

Bella at last made answer. "I ca' ye neither oot-

cast, nor vagabone, nor na ill name. I wud that a' God's creatars were guided i' the richt way. I wad fain help ye or ony tae dae what's richt; but ye canna expec' me tae pleedge masel, 'cause ye hae dune ill i' the bygane. Come tae me whan by a guid life ye've earned a better answer, an' maybe ye'll be no sae muckle dashed."

"Wunna ye say mair?" asked he, nervously grasping her hand.

But she withdrew it, saying, "Nae mair the noo."

And Kate impatiently said, "Noo, man, ye hae heard it a'."

"May I sit down?" he asked, wiping his forehead.

"Na, ye maunna," said Kate.

"Leastwise, gie me a drink o' water."

The draught was supplied him, and he went away. Next morning it was spread over all the district that Wuddy Tam and Black Jock and others had been set on in the night in the plantation of the Dell by the game-keepers; and Jock had fired on the keepers, and they were all in custody. How Bella grieved at all this. If she had held out a hope to the wild man; had she urged him to leave his bad courses for her sake, would he have done so, and been saved from this crime? Who can tell? No one can blame her, and she felt herself that she had said all she dared. But the vision of the haggard anxious face, the certainty she felt that the man loved her, and would have done something to win her love, made her sad at heart for many a day.

The gang were sentenced to transportation beyond seas at the next assizes at Inverwick.

In March several of the crofters in Braes of Langrig came to the village schoolmaster, asking him to name a lad to teach their children till mid-summer. He named Bob Rose, and the boy went off to the distant braes to teach some twenty young people, several of whom were as old as himself. Bella obtained a pound in advance of her wages from Mrs. Morris ; and, for she was neat of hand and good at stitchings, having purchased two yards of chequered woollen cloth, she made the youth a cloak, or what stood him instead of a cloak, for its dimensions were only those of a tippet. She bound the neck of it, too, with gorgeous scarlet plush ; and in the hills, no doubt, this contributed to the belief that the "young schoolmaster" was a swell. Yet the boy grieved at his hard lot in thus being torn from his home, and many nights cried secretly, as he lay in bed. The school-house was built of turf ; the most rudimentary of seminaries it was, to which each scholar carried his daily peat to provide the daily fire. The teacher's remuneration consisted of three pounds for the four months' tuition, with board and lodgings in the cabins of the crofters in the alternate weeks.

CHAPTER III.

Two years passed, and many changes occurred ; but none which much affected the lives of our humble ones. Kate and Bella were still at the Lowes, older, but perhaps not wiser ; and Bob was still in humble ways enacting the schoolmaster in destitute districts, and sedulously "studying,"—grounding himself in various branches of education, in the vague hope of some day going to college and becoming a real schoolmaster, beyond which great position his ambition aspired not. Bella had often urged Kate, now that she was alone, to give up her house and housekeeping, and to seek lodgings with some of the village families. But Kate would not. She was not social, and was entirely satisfied with her life, lying down and rising up, and eating her food in her lonely room, resorting to many expedients for increasing her personal comfort, seldom speaking to any one save when spoken to, and cherishing in extraordinary ways recollections and love of her "bairnies," for so she still addressed them. She was very proud of Bob ; and it was her white day when Bob contrived to visit her, on Saturday usually. Going to church with him and Bella was quite a grand affair.

In the September of that second year, the kindly Mrs. Morris died, sincerely lamented by her household ;

and this affected the lives of our friends, for in her stead there came to rule the family an elder sister of Mr. Morris, an earnest, austere woman, who had little experience of mankind, and whose government was mainly remarkable for its aim to be methodical. Now good order is essentially different from unbending precision of order and work in the economy of a farm and homestead; the latter almost always resulting in worry of the servants and irritation of the mistress, which are not at all productive of good work. Bella, who was under the immediate eye of Miss Morris, came in for a large share of discipline, and it was not at all pleasant to her. Her household work, in which the girl had thought herself proficient, was not satisfactory to the new mistress. Floors must be swept, beds made, and rooms arranged, all in new modes, so that the girl had to unlearn much of her previous practice. And when all was done, there was often fault to find. So Bella had a hard time of it. One thing which the lady abominated was the presence of followers, male or female, in the kitchen; and more loudly still she denounced the greeting or meeting of sweethearts out of doors. It also happened that old Weaver M'Grigor was gathered to his fathers, and his son George sat in his place and stead, possessor of the same looms, for there were two, and inheritor of the same circle of customers that supported his father. No doubt he had to maintain his old mother and a younger brother or two, but there was enough and to spare. So George, feeling the manliness

of his position, was disposed to enact the man, and recollected his old flame, Miss Bella ; and during this autumn he repeatedly presented himself at the Lowes. Now the girl tolerated him, even valued him for his sobriety and simple nature, and, no doubt, also, for his apparent love. Still he had not affected her fancy, and he did not propose marriage. Therefore she was heart-whole and slightly bored, and laughed when he protested most strongly. Love speeches ever sound foolishly in the ears of persons not in love.

George M'Grigor came to the Lowes after Miss Morris's accession to the government, as he had done for a month before ; and when the lady chanced to enter the kitchen while he was there, she snuffed with up-turned nose, and turned back ; and that evening she told "Isabella," for "Bella" was too familiar for the lady's style, that men, strange men, must not come about the house, that it was most unseemly. Bella said that the weaver "was an honest lad o' her's," that although he "hadna jist proffered her mairridge" he "was makin' up his mind till't," and finally that Mrs. Morris "nivar pit again' him comin'." To all this the lady replied that poor Mrs. Morris had been a foolishly indulgent mistress ; that if she had looked better after the morals of her people, many things that had happened would not have happened ; that it was quite unreasonable to make love while the girl should be working ; and, in fine, that she must not. Therefore, on the following Sunday, the girl told George the position

of matters, and that he must not come again. If he had been a clever fellow, he would have urged this tyranny of the mistress as an argument why the girl should seek relief and freedom, and happiness, in his love and home. But he was not a clever fellow, and did not ; and Bella, although she resented the arbitrary interdict, was not much grieved by it. The lad then took to visiting Kate, and so consoled himself, talking to her of the girl who was dear to them both, and Kate always welcomed him with her greeting of amity. He was her "frien'."

Kate, had ever since she went to the Lowes, called nightly at the farm-house to see her sister. She seldom stayed longer than a few minutes, and often only just went in and put her large hands on Bella's shoulders, saying, "Hoo are ye, bairn?" gazed into her face, and went off again. Miss Morris was, however, repeatedly shocked at seeing the ungainly woman in the kitchen ; and although she did not express her displeasure in words, she let it be known in unmistakable gestures. But one evening Kate came in drenched with rain, and cold ; and, after her wonted greeting, she sat down at the fireside and put her feet on the fender, effectually blocking up the fireside. There she was anything save ornamental. Bella and the other girls were standing about or at work. In came Miss Morris, who, seeing the huge creature, tossed her head, and gave utterance to a ladylike little snort. She went to the fireside, but Kate did not get up or seem affrighted in the least, and

smiled the most stolid of smiles on the refined lady, and rubbing her hands at the fire said, "Frien'." She had always greeted Mrs. Morris in this way ; but, thereupon, the lady flounced away, muttering indignantly, the only audible sound being, "Indeed." Presently the parlour bell rang, and Bella presented herself to Miss Morris in that room.

"What brings that monstrous woman to the kitchen? She has made me quite sick. She must not be there."

"It's only ma sister, mem," said Bella.

"That is no reason why she should come there. Do you suppose that the kitchen is to be filled from morning to night with the families of all of you? It is most unreasonable, I declare."

"She haes cam in every nicht sin' I jined service at the Lowes, three years syn an' a half gain', an' Mrs. Morris wus aye gled tae see her."

"Shall I never hear the end of my dear sister-in-law's management? You must take my way now. That woman, that sister of yours, must not return again ; and tell the girls that none of their relations are to occupy the fireside in that style."

"Ye hae the richt tae be mistress tae be sure ; but ye maun look for anither lass by the term, mem."

"Such insolence!" said Miss Morris, but the girl had disappeared.

Bella returned to the kitchen with the tears in her eyes. The girls asked what the matter was, and she explained it all ; but it was difficult to make Kate com-

prehend it. Unkindness of this nature was entirely novel to her, and her mind would not at once take it in; and it needed the tongues of the three girls to make her understand that it was ordered that she should go away and not return. When it did dawn on her, she got up and pushed away her stool, saying, "Losh! Losh!" and after a pause, "Cam awa', ma bairn;" and she gripped her sister's arm, and was for hauling her away, nor did she release her hold until Bella had explained that if she went then, she should get no wages. That night the other girls who shared the kitchen with Bella "gave warning against the term."

Next night Kate's plight was ludicrous. She found herself at the back door of the farm-house before she was aware of it. Then, recollecting the prohibition, she turned about and hurried away lest Miss Morris should see her, and fancy she had been within. She trotted off saying, "Losh! Losh!" but a quarter of a mile off, past Lowestyle, she sat down by the roadside, saying, "It's hard; it's gey hard;" and she sat there for an hour, I am sure. Then she got up and went home, and cooked and supped her porridge. Thereafter she undressed and was getting into bed, when she exclaimed, "Na tae hae seen ma puir bairn the day! I maun see her." And she proceeded to clothe herself again, from time to time repeating, "I maun see the bairn ere I sleep;" and so she continued to exclaim as she heavily trotted back to the Lowes. There the

inmates were still afoot, and Kate, standing at the door which she dared not enter, could hear their voices within. She recognised Bella's voice, and her footstep, too, as she moved about, and she said to herself, "That's the bairn; that's the bairn." But the bairn came not to the door. By-and-by, Kate removed to the kitchen window, where she could, in the light within and through a chink in the curtain, see her sister moving about at her work. How long Kate waited I do not know. Gloaming had long sunk into black night, and the girls had sat down by the fire, and Kate had begun to feel chill and drowsy before she said to herself, "She'll no com' oot, the bairnie! but it's guid tae see her." Then at length Kate went home.

Of course, now that Bella had "taken her leave," Kate must also give warning; and the sisters resolved to look out for other service near the village, so that, if possible, the happiness of seeing each other every day might be continued; and they did so, but in vain. Kate might have found employment convenient to her home, but she would not "fee" because Bella was not wanted. Bella might have had a suitable place five miles off, but her soul was bent on pleasing Kate; and, indeed, it would have pained Kate very sorely if Bella had gone beyond her daily ken. The end of it was, that the Martinmas term came, and both girls were disengaged; and, with a heavy heart, Bella had her little "kist" removed from the Lowes and deposited in Kate's bothy. That night, after paying

rent and squaring accounts with the world, the girls, between them, had four pounds all but a shilling. They had also a pickle of meal—just a day or two's supply, for Kate, in anticipation of the idle day, had half starved herself for a fortnight. They were not despondent, however; far from it; for their little fund seemed to them a large one. Was it not almost equal to four bolls of meal.

But that winter fuel was scarce and dear, and the girls thought it a bargain when with ten shillings they secured delivery of four loads of peats, for the weather was cold, and the winter, they knew, was long. Kate had gone out to forage for fuel, as she had done in other days, but the times were altered. On peat bank, and muir, and by the woods, stood spectral warning posts, bearing threats of prosecution against all trespassers; and from these Kate fled as if they had been pillars of fire. "I'll na pit it i' the pooar o' man tae hale me 'fore ony judge," said she; and so the quest for brushwood was abandoned. Then, in the long dark nights George M'Grigor came to urge his suit; and as he was both constant and tedious in his nightly visits, and as the girls could not altogether let out their fire while he chose to remain, his love-making caused a sensible diminution of their peat-stack; and on this point the girls being sensitive, I fear that his visits did not conduce to the progress of his suit. It showed want of thought thus to cause waste of their poor store; and at last Kate ceased to greet him with her thereto-

fore unvaried "Weel, frien'." Bella, too, in her altered circumstances, became peevish; not that there was anything immediately to worry the girl, but the whole conditions of her idleness were unsatisfactory, save and excepting that it was shared by her big sister. So at the end of a long visit, when George had sat till past eleven of the night, and was at length going away, and Bella went with him to the door to bar 'it after him, he having begun one of his love speeches in the doorway, she told him—

"It's a' nonsense luve-makin' at this oor o' the nicht, Geordie. Yer havers wunna warm oor hairts or taes; an' it's hard on oor wee stack o' peats; an' I wish ye wud fash us less."

The lad said "Guid nicht," as he used to do; but, said he, "I tak' the hint. I'll scald ma feet the nicht I gang back."

So this expensive love-making ceased. But by the first of January their petty supply of peats was well-nigh burnt up, and they had to purchase another boll of meal. And, when a fresh stock of fuel and the boll of meal had been provided, Kate counted in her hand just fifteen shillings of money remaining. They then resolved to eke out their provisions, and to make a stone of meal per week stand as food for them both.

And through the cold weary days of January, when each little addition to the length of the day brought an addition to the cold, the girls began to pine. Want of work, want of food, merely a smouldering peat as a fire,

all combined to wear them down, and to blench their faces; and there was no hope of improvement before Whitsunday. Then, when on a Sunday Bob come to see them, they made a sad pretence of having plenty of porridge and a wee drop of milk, so that he might not feel concerned for them, and might go back to the hills, believing they were not in want. "It'll be time eneuch tae mak' him share his mite wi' us when we're a' run oot," said Bella.

In the end of January Bella lost heart and spirits, and was filled with sad fancies and thoughts of an early death. Hunger was gnawing at her stomach, and fevering her mind, and she knew the cause of her disorder. Then Mary Crombie came to tell her that now at last her wedding day was fixed for the fifteenth of February; and that Hugh Cowie and she wished Bella to be present at the wedding.

"An' indeed," she said, "faither haes a great wark wi' ye, an' says ye maun be bridesmaid, or ain o' ma maids, whatever."

But Bella answered, "I canna gang tae the waddin'. I hae na a fittin' frock, and ye maun let me pass. But, Mary dear, for a' that, I wish you life-lang joy in Hugh. Indeed, I ken ye'll hae it."

Thus she declined the invitation, for against the fifteenth of February she looked forward to absolute want grimly besetting her. Indeed, when she heard of Mary's approaching happiness, this was what came to

her view—she pictured herself, in her diseased imagination, with her face ghastly, her form stretched, and her covering a shroud. Poor fanciful thing! How could she accept the invitation even from her only friend?

In a day or two thereafter came Peter Crombie himself, saying, "Lass, Mary tells me ye wunna com' tae oor waddin' for the cost o' a frock. Ye maun com'. The waddin' canna gang on wi'oot ye, I'm thinkin': an' here's a poond to gat the frock. That'll dae, winna it?"

It ought to have sufficed, but no, it did not.

"I canna hae it," she said. "I wad fain gang tae Mary's waddin', but I canna, canna."

She was thinking how much meal this pound might purchase, and could she spend it in a new frock? No, no. So she sat down and cried, to the astonishment of her visitor who could not at all understand it. He looked to Kate for an explanation; but all that Kate said was, "Weel, weel then, bairnie;" and the man went away sorely puzzled. He described the incomprehensible scene to his daughter and Cowie when he got home.

"She said she wad fain com' but she cudna; an' she grat an' she grat till my ain heart was sair for her; an' she looked sae thin an' white lik'."

"Tak' care," said Hugh Cowie, "that the lasses are nae in want."

"In want? In want!" said Crombie, "aith, that's jist it! An' lik' a gomeril, I ne'er thoct o' it! I wus

sae thrang wi' ye twa, I a'most clean forgot the puir lasses. In want, they maun be! We maun send them o' oor substance this very nicht."

And the man would forthwith have harnessed his horse and gone off to the village with a supply of food, if his daughter had not interfered.

"Ye see," she urged, "baith the girls are very prood, high-mindit lasses. Gin ye wus tae gang the noo, they wud tak' it an affront an' no a present. Ye maun let be till the morn whatever."

So Peter sat down protesting, "I wus aye thick in the heid, aye thick i' the heid."

"It's better tae be thick i' the heid than teuch o' hairt, faither. Nane can say ye're that, ony gait," said the daughter.

Hugh Cowie resided with his parents in the village, and the existing arrangement with his future father-in-law was, that on his marriage, he, Hugh Cowie, should take his abode at Lowestyle, there to live and work so that the father might have his daughter to manage his household as before. Once or twice Hugh had talked of the possibility of getting a settlement for himself, as the father-in-law being still little past the prime of life, it did not seem a reasonable thing for the new head of a family to be dependent even on his wife's father. In particular, Hugh had talked of the probability that he might get the business of old Paterson, cartwright at Balnabritchaig, in the event of that old man's death. And at all this Peter Crombie had grumbled, speaking

of the hardship of losing his daughter at his time of life, but at the same time appearing not seriously opposed to it. Now on that same night that Crombie proposed to drive to the village with food, and was induced to stay at home, Paterson lay dead at Balnabritchaig, and Hugh Cowie heard of it when he reached his home. The business was well known to be a good one, better than that at Lowestyle; and practically it was in the gift of the factor, who had the letting of the premises, and might, of course, appoint whom he liked, as, according to the custom of this district, the leases of such premises are granted in liferent to the artisans, under certain conditions and irritant clauses. Hugh immediately went back to Lowestyle to tell the news to Crombie, and to consult him. He was surprised to find Peter not only not violently opposed to the proposal to make an effort to secure the place, but strongly disposed to forward it. Said he, "Gin ye'll git it, I'll see yer hoose weel plenished, lad; an' ye'll share ma stock o' timmer." Of his own motion, too, he brought Cowie that night, late as it was, to Mr. Morris, to secure his co-operation in the matter. Morris received his neighbour kindly, for Crombie was not only a good and honest tradesman, but a man whose conduct entitled him to respect, and he was reputed to have laid by a round sum of money. "Canny, douce, and 'sponsible Peter Crombie," were common designations of him. Morris undertook to accompany them to the factor next day, and did so; and Hugh Cowie became the new cartwright at Balnabrit-

chaig. When the men returned and told their success to Mary, she was distressed. "Whatever will I dae? I canna leave ye, dear faither.

"Ye maun mairry, lassie. We're commandit tae mairry, an' be gien in marridge. Providence 'll no desert me." said the douce Peter Crombie.

Now the incidents of the day had been both exciting and fatiguing; but Peter Crombie when he had got dinner, set off to the village and presented himself in the cottage of the Roses. It was after nightfall, and he found both women within, sitting in darkness, and with minds blackened with despair, although he guessed not their feelings. The moon shone faintly through the cottage-window, giving just sufficient light to show the figures of the girls in the cheerless room. "Gude sake," said Peter entering, "sittin' i' the dark?"

"Weel, frien'," said Kate, recognising the voice. Her sister was silent. Kate took up a smouldering peat and began to blow at it with her mouth, making pretence to provide a light; and then Bella said half savagely, "Pit that doun, lass."

But Crombie took no notice of the irritable tones, and proceeded. "Aith! am a'maist in as muckle darkness masel. Ken ye what my dochter's dune on me noo?"

Bella drowsily said that she did not.

"Weel, then," said he, "Hugh Cowie has got the place an' bizness at Britchaig, an' he'll be aff the morn tae tak' possession; an' ma jaud Mary will folla him,

sune as they're wedded. I dunno what i' the airth tae dae." The women still remained silent; and seeing this, Peter went on, "But if ye lass, Bella, wad com' tae the Style, an' tak' Mary's place by me, an' kep ma sma' haddin' thegither, I cud see daylight through it; an' its that brought me oot this bauld nicht."

"I dinna ken about it, Mr. Crombie," said Bella. "It's com' gey suddent upon me; but I'll step up tae Mary the morn, gin I'm spaired, an' we'll see aboot it."

"If ye com' ye'll jist be lik' Mary, mistress o' ma hale bit plaicie," said he, getting up and going away. "Gude nicht, lasses; I'll see ye the morn, then."

"Tak' on till him for sure," said Kate.

When Crombie returned to his daughter and told her what had been his errand to the village, she snubbed him most undutifully. "Ye should hae left that tae me," she said, "I cud hae pit it richt for ye in no time. I wudna wonder though Bella wudna com', noo, jist for yer havers."

"Losh!" he exclaimed, "I'd be richt sad by that, for she's the only lass I wad lik' aboot ma han', noo ye're gain' awa."

Miss Mary was a sharp lass, and she thought more of her father's earnestness in this matter than perhaps it deserved. "Onyrate," she said to herself, "it concerns his comfort greatly, an' she's a true guid lass, whatever com's o' it."

Bella did come to her next day; and never did daughter more highly laud a parent than Mary did Peter

Crombie. He was just and kind, and regular in life and way. Bella must feel as if she were going to a home, to return kindness for kindness, and fidelity for cheerful, friendly treatment, and a certain wage. The bargain was made, and Peter rubbed his hands, saying, "I telt ye dochter, Providence wadna desert me, an' nae mair wull it."

"I wish I cud bind her till ye for life, faither," said Mary, with a twinkling eye. Mr. Peter Crombie replied not.

And Bella went "home" to Lowestyle at once. Mary Crombie would fain have had her sleep there, but Bella could not leave Kate in solitude. And now solitude was Kate's only privation, for Crombie sent peats and potatoes, and milk, with no stinting hand, for his two cows had calved. He covered his kindness by quoting Scripture. "Can the children of the bride-chamber fast while the bride is wi' them?" asked he with a peremptory and domineering air; and, indeed Scripture had before then been wrested to cover worse acts. Then there was hurry and scurry in dressmaking for the bride, and Bella sat most nights till midnight sewing. The bride, too, found somewhere the materials of a gown for Bella, who was to be bridesmaid after all. And Crombie who should have been in great grief at the loss of his daughter, was really more active and jubilant than for years, insisting on seeing Bella to the village when she went home so late, even when Hugh Cowie, to whom he was entrusting his daughter for life, was also

going there. "Indeed," he said, "I wad be lackin' in duty tae ma dochter, if I ran ony risks lik' that o' sendin' thae twa flichty young folk 'long that road i' the dark;" and at this insinuation he laughed very gaily.

Mary, tossing her head, said, "Deed, faither, Hugh may rin aff wi' her for what I care; I'd be best wi' ye, auld man."

Then the daughter would laugh, just a very little laugh, while her father actually looked grave at the words "auld man." I think Mary must have laughed a good deal "in her sleeve" on such occasions.

The wedding was celebrated on the appointed day, and the young couple went to Balnabritchaig, leaving Bella in charge at Lowestyle. But before they went, Mary took Bella aside, and, with much giggling, told her that she had no doubt her most excellent father was bent on getting married as quickly as he could. On this Bella looked serious, for she liked her situation, and had made up her mind to many years of quiet peace in the house of the cartwright. She therefore felt a twinge of jealousy as she asked, "Wha tae?" "What mak's ye think it?"

But Mary, instead of replying, set earnestly to laud and extol the many good qualities and the comfortable position of her sire.

"But wha is it, Mary?" asked Bella again.

Then said Mrs. Cowie, "Deed, or am no mistaen, ye're the lass yersel that ma dad haes set his hairt on."

"Noo, gae 'long wi' yer nonsense; but brides are aye allowed tae be daft."

But the bride, with much feeling, went on, "If I guess richt, be very kind an' tender tae faither, whan he'll speak tae ye. Think weel o' it afore ye refuse him. I'm telling it tae ye noo, 'cause I believe he haes set his hairt an' happiness on ye; an' in leavin' him, his happiness is muckle at ma hairt noo; an' there's few by yersel I wad lippan wi' his weal."

"Surely ye're haverin'," said Bella, as she kissed her departing friend.

Next day the douce and canny Peter Crombie said to his new housekeeper, "It winna dae for us, twa unmairried people, tae be in the hoose alane, for the 'prentice louns are na tae be countit. Ye maun fetch Kate till us. She'll be handy aboot the kye an' the oot door things, an' ye can mak' me new sarks an' stockin's." Having thought of it for some hours, Bella did as her master wished. Thus the cottage at the village became tenantless, and Kate and Bella at Lowestyle were as happy as ever in their lives. Nor were Mrs. Cowie's parting words thrown away on Bella, although Peter Crombie spoke no word inferring matrimony. What were Bella's thoughts? very simple ones. "If he asks me tae mairry him, it's ma duty tae tak' him." Very unromantic, but quite in harmony with what she had been and suffered. Her first love affair had taught her that quiet and sober affection, household love, like that of Kate and Bob, was the best love, the only love

from which a poor thing like her could have real happiness. She had much respectful regard for Crombie, and she said to herself, "Gin he haed a claim on me tae luve him, I'm sure I cud luve him wi' a' ma hairt an' i' truth." Then, too, Providence had led her to him and plenty, from deep poverty and privation. He was no niggard, she knew. If she became his wife, Kate had a home for life, at least for Crombie's life; and Crombie, if he died, would leave some means for living thereafter. Then he was very kind to Bob, urging Bob to come to him to study with the schoolmaster at the village for the time till October, thereafter to go to Aberdeen to compete for a bursary, towards which purpose Bob had now amassed some ten pounds. "Weel, I'll tak' him and be thankfu'," said she, "if he only seeks me." But the months went by without a word of love from Crombie.

I should say something of Mr. Peter Crombie's personal appearance. He was upwards of fifty, slight of figure, above the middle height, stooped a little, as men of his calling generally do, but his complexion was fresh and pinky, and he had hair still black. If there was nothing to allure, there was certainly nothing to repel the girl. Now, his daughter had guessed his secret thoughts quite correctly, and when she came on a visit to him early in May, and found that he had made no progress in his wooing, she set to tease him on the subject, and he confessed it. Then the wayward Mary (perhaps she guessed Bella's thoughts also) shouted for

Bella ; and, having brought them face to face, she said to her parent, "Say that forenent Bella noo, dad," and ran off and shut the door on them. I presume Crombie explained all this satisfactorily, for the other week I was at Lowestyle, and saw there an old friend of mine, still young in years but a matron, very canty and cosy. She is the mother of three children, who are a sad concern to my other old friend, Kate, whose "bairns" they specially are. Mr. Robert Rose is a student of divinity, and a young man of great promise.