

THE RED-TILED COTTAGE.

CHAPTER I.

YOU object to my sketches that they are mostly sad. It may well be so. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" What has a life of labour and poverty to show, but, chiefly, misery and its sores? I cannot paint for you elegance of deportment, refinement of mind and manner, and happy fortunes, from out the clay-built bothies in which my subjects live and move and have their being. You may turn your eyes away from the realities of life, and let fancy drape the world with beauty and goodness; but will that make the mass of life better or less sad? If the evil things of life are to be remedied, they must be looked in the face; and evil things there are, so many and so difficult of remedy, that the wisest investigator may well think it best to desist and turn away. It is good for man that he is beneficently constituted with so much power of endurance—the happy spirit of "contentment," as some name it—as I think, mere passive "submissiveness." Does either word denote that quality of the human mind mostly exercised

by living? Is life a thing chiefly to be borne as a burden with patience and resignation? Ah! truly, I fear it mainly is. Either our fathers have eaten sour grapes, or God has willed it; for the children's teeth are set on edge. But blessed, verily, is this same contentment or submissiveness, which, like charity, endureth all things, hopeth all things, is not puffed up.

It comes, too, without observation, as part and pertinent of life itself. The morning of life breaks fresh and dewily, with quickened senses and tendencies to laughter, and we buckle to the work of life exultingly; and gradually, as we labour, we get fixed into the yoke, and life is labour; and we endure it, clinging to it somewhat because of the fragrance enjoyed in the morning, somewhat in the hope that the sunset may be pleasant. What if both the fragrant morning had not been ours, and the hope of dewy or lustrous eve were denied to us? How should we bear it then? Thank God that the great majority of those who live into the heat and burden of the day have had some enjoyment in life's morning, or fancy they have had. But you see what my aim is; I am preparing you for another of my sad sketches from the life. I shall dash at it without further preface.

Out in the July noontide, in the turnip-field at the Bught, a score of women stood in the turnip-drills, "thinning the neeps." In front of them, or, as their own words put it, "over them," stood and watched the new grieve, a bright intelligent lad of twenty-four years, sharp

and vigilant, to see that time was not lost in gadding, and that the proper number of the plants was left.

“Haud yer gab, Lexy Bain,” he cried; “it’s no tae lark ye’re i’ the furs. Mind what ye’re aboot wi’ thae weeds.”

And Lexy Bain, a tall, slightly-made girl of twenty, blushed under the rebuke, and, deftly bending to her toil, sent the soil and superabundant plants spinning with her dexterously-handled hoe, and shot ahead of the group of women.

“Mair haste the less speed,” he cried again; “Lexy Bain’ll leave a scanty crop i’ that rig, I guess.” Was the grieve intent on annoying her? He took her hoe, and angrily went through the exercise. “Daftness ne’er yields guid wark,” he says; “ye better gie it up, if ye dinna mean tae attend tae ’t.”

Crimson-red flushed the young girl’s face—redder than the hot July sun could burn it. Her large, almond-shaped, dark eyes were suffused, so that her long black eyelashes could not conceal the oozing moisture. She could have flung down the hoe and gone off in open revolt; but, then, submissiveness comes early to the field-worker—her bread depended on her labour.

How came she there, with that lithe and graceful figure, that arched neck, and proud bosom, and dazzling black eyes, more fit for lordly hall than for the toil which pained her, framed more for love than labour? She was born in the ranks of those who toil. Her father was the village blacksmith. He was dead.

I daresay she was more agile than accurate, brighter

than her comrades, not better. A finely-moulded instep and delicate wrist bring little advantage to their possessor in the turnip-field. Dull wits and mechanical gray eyes see the sprouts more accurately, and spare the right one more regularly, than the spasmodic efforts of the liveliest field-nymph. So all through that day, and the next day, and onwards, the young grieve growled and fretted at Lexy Bain, until it seemed as if these two were sent into the field each to mar the comfort and peace of the other.

So, again, it was among the potato-drills, when they got an extra "overhaul." Lexy Bain broke "the crops," or, worse still, cut them right away; and the grieve fretted and swore, and almost made up his mind to turn her off the field. The girl blushed, and flushed, and looked such looks of disdainful dislike as pretty girls only can look. Apparently the multitude of her offences could not be accounted for by natural incapacity for such simple work. She must cut the potato-stems of purpose to worry him. He certainly thought so, and was by so much the more provoked. And, more provoking still, she could labour for hours, doing work better than the best of her gang. It was now and again only, in capricious intervals, that the frenzy seized her, and that the stems and nodding-bells, the beauty-bells of the potato-drill, went down by her destructive hoe. How long was he to stand it? Were his employer's crops thus to suffer at the caprice of this wayward woman? Over and over again he was on the

point of going to the farmer, Mr. Masson, who was his uncle, and stating the case to him, and obtaining his consent to dismiss her, for she was one of the half-year's women, and lived in the female bothy. Would to God that in those fretty summer days he had bade her begone!

Out in the corn-rigs in latter August, at six of the morning, the autumn sun is glinting somewhat shyly over the nodding grain-field. The lasses, their sickles stuck in the earth, are kilting their coats, and swathing their heads with white kerchiefs; the men are stripped to their shirt-sleeves, and are tightening their loins with girth or cravat. Out spoke the young grieve, "Kate and Betty, Bell, Doll, and Meg will shear for me; and, Lex, will ye mak' the half-dizen?"

"And, Lex, will ye mak' the half-dizen?" was said so softly, so unlike the tones of him whose right it was to command, that the very accents would have betrayed the man, although the whole field had not known the fact that Lexy Bain had captivated the grieve.

Lexy was standing completing her toilet, with a pin in her lips, so she spoke not, but she gave him a nod of her queenlike head, and a glance of those orbs with the dark fringes; and he flushed as only youth can flush when beauty, displaying all its ankles, smiles kindly on it. So, all day long, he followed her sickle, with his toil-heated pulses beating more confusedly for love of her; and when they rested at noon, he was seated by her side

behind the stook ; and for whom but her did he fetch the water-pitcher ?

And that proud nature of hers took her triumph half-tenderly, half-disdainfully. The man had not wholly won her heart, so as to make it fevered with the sympathy that beat in his. She would not wholly give it to him. So, when he tugged her linen boddice, or teased her in that rude, rough way, in which such men woo, she gave him saucy words, which half-daunted him, yet set him more aflame, as he gazed on the sun-browned beauty. Ah me ! What has life to compare to the emotion of young love, the loves of the young, when life is sustained on oatmeal, and the living body clothed in cottons ?

“ I loe ye, Lexy ! I'll dee unless I win ye.”

“ Na frichts o' yer deein' ! Daur ye win me, lad ? I'm thinkin' no.”

“ Ye'll pit me mad wi' yer doobtin' ! I'm daft in luve o' ye the noo.”

“ Luve, folk say, is lik' daftness jist. It's easy tae gang mad ; it's unco hard tae git ower. Sae I caution ye, ma lad. I'm uncoman feart o' daft folk.”

“ Winna ye be serious, lassie ? I'm nae daft, but I'm reemin' fu' o' luve ; and it's hard that ye winna own till't here amang the stacks awa. Ye're aye best till me whan the folk stan' by.”

“ What guid wad it dae ye ? Wad it nae dae ye ill ? What wad yer uncle, forby yer faither, say tae yer vows tae the lik' o' me ? ”

“Confoond baith uncle and faither! I’m fit to judge for masel’. I’m no tae hang on till them a’ ma days. I’d no be worth ma saut if I did!”

“But they wad ne’er stan’ yer takin’ a low lass lik’ me? Sae dinna think o’ it. It can bring only dool till’s baith.”

“Ma mither would surely be prood o’ yer beauty. I canna live unless ye loe me! It’ll a’ cam’ richt i’ the hinner-end.”

“I hae ma doots o’ it, lad; but ye needna grieve afore time.”

“Lat me kiss ye the meantime then, if I’m no tae grieve.”

And kiss her he did; but she showed no warmth in return. Fain would she have loved him, but she dared not yet give her nature the rein. She knew the gap between them, and doubted the man’s courage to leap it.

Now, the young grieve, Hugh Henderson, was the son of a “merchant” at Inverwick, and, having shown some wildness in his youth, he had been set to the pursuit of agriculture. He had studied veterinary surgery, and had served an apprenticeship in farm-work as a ploughman with his uncle, to whom he now filled the office of grieve. Country “merchants” are, in the general case, neither rich nor high born. Perhaps, on the whole, they are not proud men, but they affect a certain social position, and, generally, their wives are great sticklers for their dignity. Will the lad see the risks he is running of breaking with home and his friends? Will he

and this imperious girl together rush recklessly on the thick bosses of society? If so, assuredly they shall dash themselves to pieces.

He followed her into barn and byre, at early morning and at close of day. She must be in his rig in the field-work. He must be at her side in the thrashing-mill. She must load his cart. He must watch her at cow-milking. He helped her burdens, when he could without offence. He bought her presents as often as he went to town, just such little gifts as showed that she was in his heart while he was absent. He would have bought her gowns and shawls, but she would not have them—would not bind herself by accepting things that implied obligation to the donor. Proudly she told him, “Yer seekin’ o’ me is na fair. Yer folk are no ma ain kind. The winnin’ o’ ma breid is i’ ma han’s, an’ I winna, maunna bind them.” Yet still he followed her, to the bothy fireside, in her evening visits to the neighbouring farms, to the kirk on Sundays. His soul was bound to her. There was truth, somewhat at least of truth, in his exclamation, “I loe ye, Lexy! I’ll dee unless I win ye!”

The rivers meet down by the Bught. It is Hallowe’en and midnight. A glorious moon lights up the earth, and streams in silvery flashes from out the shadows of the birch-trees on the rippled river as it leaves the confluence. On the lichened stones out on the point stands the figure of a woman, erect and stately, come there no doubt to divine the future by wetting her “sark-

sleeve" at the meeting of the waters. She is pondering at the water-edge, for her heart is full. It would fain cling to some one, and she dare not commit it. "Will the Lord gie him to me?" she asked aloud. The voice was drowned in the gurgling of the waters; but instantly came an answer up the stream, shrieking and wailing, as of a soul destroyed. Startled, she fled from the water-brink into the birches, and into the arms of Hugh Henderson.

"Ye're no gluffed, Lexy dear? It's nocht but the hoolets."

"'Deed, I'm gluffed entirely, Hugh," she answered, trembling. "I spake somethin'; did ye hear me? An' yon skreetch cam' lik' an answer frae a ghaist tae me, an' I'm a' trimlin' yet."

"Noo, Lexy dear, 'fore God and the nicht-light, tak' me for yer luvver. Ye cam' here tae speir o' God wha he designs for ye. Mak' yer ain fate and fortune wi' luvve, and hae me noo."

"Wi' yon fricht and stairt I'm no masel the noo tae spake o' luvve or onything. Lat me calm doun awee."

He led her, still trembling, into the copse, and they sat down in the seductive moonlight, and between the gurgling waters, whose drowsy hum soothed them. Presently, under the dreamy influence of the time and place, they were in each other's arms; and she would take him "wi' a' her hairt and soul, if his frien's wad agree." The owlet shrieked again in the still night;

she heard it, but heeded not, for her heart went with the words that plighted her to the grieve.

When and how shall he tell his love to his uncle, that cross and dour Mr. Masson? When and how shall he redeem his promise to break the matter to his parents? Weary and long the nights, and heavy and dull the days are, until this pledge shall be redeemed, although Hugh still followed the lassie as lovingly, nay, more lovingly, than before she owned that her heart was his. "Ma wifie, ma dawtie, ma ain!" Will the son's full love not suffice without his father's countenance? Nay, much and deeply as she loved him, she would not have it so.

Who shall blame the lad, if, his great love notwithstanding, he now shrank from the avowal of it to his relations? He could have gone "through fire and water" for her, have dared every physical evil; but here his intrepidity failed him. What he lacked just now was moral courage to uphold him under loss of family love, the violence of family pride outraged, and the possible sneers of many worldly friends. She knew it, and offered him back his love and his vows. He would not have his freedom. What was life without her? He gave her writings calling her wife, and binding him to her beyond question. What she asked for was simply that before men and before the church, he should call her wife. She was not selfish. She was in no haste for the church, but his hesitation was a cloud of doubt which intercepted the sunshine of her happiness in his

love, and kept her sitting oft-times in gloom, yearning till the true light should break upon her.

Do not wonder over much at her anxiety. Women learn early in the field-squad that love may be only desire; and, instinctively they dread it as such when the lover is of a different social rank. Many of the peasant's rude lays narrate the sad tale of the peasant girl's error in this particular, and more rudely still point the sad moral. Why wonder, then, that the cloud obscured her young day of love, that she found only a broken and perplexed pleasure in his arms or protestations? "What way will I mak' sure that he looes me—*me*—no ma face or ma body?" she asked herself. "If I cud ken he looes me as I ken I loe him, I cud gae tae ma grave contentit?"

Then, when he pressed her to reciprocate his blandishments and his kisses, and blamed her reserve, she would say, "I dinna doot yer luv for me! I hae nae doot o' it. But when the warld an' wailth, an' faither an' mither pit against me, I misdoot the natur' o' man that it canna wi'stan' the onshock o' them a'."

Thus, his love brought her no true happiness, at least no happiness unalloyed; and slowly the winter days lengthened into spring, and the lark renewed his love-note in the young grass-fields where cows lowed to their calves, and still this shadow of doubt clung to her. Shall it ever be dispersed? Oh! that it had abode with her, subduing that wayward, fervid nature of hers, even though doubt had ripened into ascertained mis-

trust ! If it had so happened, then it might still have been well with them both.

He was very tender, as well as very ardent. She was fain, but hesitating. It was only when, in love's delirium, he pressed the lassie with excessive warmth, that she would speak of the doubt that haunted her. The bothy girls all knew his passion and his pledges, and greatly approved of them, and were, after the manner of their rough natures, full of sympathy for the lovers. The horsemen knew it too. The younger men cared not ; one applauded the grieve and encouraged him ; one elderly man shook his head, he had his doubts about it, he never saw good come of the like. This man gravely whispered to her, " For Gudesake, dinna lippen ower muckle tae him. His life is no but beginnin'. He may hae far tae wander frae the Bucht afore the sun set upon him." She gave him no tart answer ; he deserved none, and her reason sided with his speech. Will Hugh never break with the world, and take her and love for his portion ? What though the lasses, at his bidding, always, in the bothy at night, called her " Mrs. Henderson ?" That but little helped to give the gladness born of love that knows no fear.

Hugh was in earnest. She ought to have seen it and recognised it, and been contented. Then, if she had fenced herself, as the old man advised, she might have been happy while she waited. But longing and lingering for assurance was certainly wearying, lying heavy at her heart through her long working day, chill-

ing the kisses she allowed him, lightening the pressure of her arm upon his shoulder when together they met at night.

And love brought care to Hugh too, care which his Lexy could not share with him, any more than he could bear her burden of—what shall I call it?—doubt—that sadness which came of the doubting that compassed her true love.

He wanted her for his own, all his own. That was his first care, and he had well-nigh succeeded. Next came weary worldly thinking. What was he to do with her and for her, if she became all his? Surely that was no serious care? Yet much of care was in it. He was not a mere labourer, giving labour in exchange for food and clothing, but the style of man who becomes a large and prosperous farmer, and whose wife is "a lady." Now, how shall he contrive his fate that lovely Lexy shall reign queen of a homestead as well as of his heart? There was his care, his great and urgent difficulty. For he could not reconcile the two things, ardent love instantly pressing, and patient waiting for the few years that were sure to place him in a farm. "Waiting!"—he could not wait. He had never spoken to the girl of "waiting." But while he loved, and anxiously thought of the future, time set to evolve his destiny, perhaps as God willed it.

Mrs. Masson has on her stuff gown this bright April day, she will spend it in inspecting the steading, and in generally rummaging in corners, and in fault-finding.

She visited the hen-house, and thought of counting the fowls, and was indignant that they flew not around her at her "Chuck, chuck, chuck!" Only a few came to her, the hungry or the greedy ones, while at the dairy-woman's feeblest "Teuckie!" not a wing was left aside. Next she visited the byres and the bothies, commenting on their general uncleanness. Indeed, the men's bothy was so bare and untidy and cold, with the beds still as the men left them, that she turned away in disgust, to seek the room where the lasses abode. It was very untidy too, for in spring the women have little time from early morning till after seven at night to devote to tidiness. "Could not these foul clothes be kept elsewhere?" asked Mrs. Masson of the dairy-woman. "It's indecent to have them lying about in every corner. Their very stays too! How can they go about all day without stays?" she asked, as she took up one of these from a bedstead. A pin in it pricked her finger, and caused her to examine it. She found that the pin was used to secure a piece of paper inserted where a bone should be, opposite the left breast. Mrs. Masson thought it must be "a charm against toothache," which she had often heard that people wore thus, or some such thing, and curious to see it, she drew it out, telling the dairy-woman that she might say to the girl it was the mistress did it. Thus the charm ran—

"I, Hugh Henderson, residing at the Bught of Glenaldie, do hereby take you, Alexandrina Bain, to be my lawful wife, and do promise and oblige myself to

celebrate our marriage openly as soon as possible. So help me God. (Signed) H. HENDERSON."

There was no mistaking the bold handwriting. It was her nephew Hugh's.

She made no outcry about it. She carried the paper home with her. It troubled her sorely. What should she do?

Hugh came in to dinner at two, and put off his coarse boots in the lobby, and went upstairs to wash his hands. His aunt was waiting for him with that paper in her hand.

"You here, aunt!" and "Look here, Hugh!" was spoken simultaneously. A single glance told him what the paper was. It had burnt itself into his brain while he wrote it. "Well," she asked, "what folly's this?"

He was much unnerved, and his heart was beating wildly. He took a minute to compose himself while silently he washed his hands. Then he said, "I'll be quite frank, aunt; but you must tell me first how you came by the paper." A horrible fear was oppressing him that Lexy had given the writing to his friends to force on a marriage or a catastrophe; and he was resolved that, if she had done so, he would love her no more. Mrs. Masson told him how she came by it. "Well now, aunt, I love that lass, and I maun wed her."

"You silly boy! you don't know what you're saying. Are you ready to quarrel with father and mother, and all of us, for the sake of a lass from the barn and dung-heaps?"

"I don't see why there should be any quarrel about it, aunt. Surely to marry the prettiest girl in the Strath is no sin."

"Here is the great point, Hugh. She can never be a sister to your sisters, a daughter to your mother, not even a fitting companion for yourself. To involve such a woman in a false position, and all your friends in discomfort, *is* a sin."

"I canna see it, aunt! This is a girl sweeter and handsomer than any woman I know. But what's the good of talking about that? I love her dearly, aunt, and ye see am bound to her."

"Give her up, Hugh, and I put you down five hundred pounds to help you to the first farm that offers. Give her up, Hugh, do."

"I canna, auntie, I canna; and ye shouldna bid me. You see, she loves me as much as I love her, and I wouldna for ten thousand pounds bring grief to her. I canna, auntie!"

"God help me!" said poor Mrs. Masson, as the dinner-bell rung an extra peal for them. "What on earth shall I do in this difficulty?"

That night Hugh had another interview with his aunt. Her mind was decided. He must give up the girl, otherwise she must acquaint his father and her husband, and let them take such steps as they thought right. She had gone to have a "right look" of the lass, and declared that she was nothing in particular, certainly possessed of nothing to compensate Hugh for the evil

she would bring him. And Hugh was equally resolute. His damsel was all beauty, and purity, and goodness. It was not her doing. It was his own earnest seeking. She had over and over again offered him his freedom, and that writing since he gave it to her; she even made her acceptance of him contingent on the consent of his friends.

There the interview ended, for this last piece of information led Mrs. Masson to fancy that the girl was not devoid of good sense. She would see this Lexy tomorrow, and endeavour to prevail on her at once and absolutely to put an end to the courtship.

Of course Hugh told all these things to the girl of his heart. She did not miss the missive until he told her. Then she chid herself for her carelessness, her gross carelessness, that had precipitated a crisis before Hugh's "ain time." Again she urged him to take his freedom. "It'll be sair on me. I'll lang hae hairt-sickness, but, Hugh, what's that by yer happiness? Pain, at warst, is but passin', while life is lang. Leave me Hugh, an' gang tae yer ain folk. A gude cry will pit me richt."

Was he to be less generous? No, not although now he saw somewhat of the rashness and unwisdom of his loving her. No, he would have her, although poverty and toil, nay death itself, stood in the path along which the union was to lead him. How often had he whispered this into her doubting ear! Now she believed him. She would tarry for him as long as he listed.

Next day Lexy Bain stood in Mrs. Masson's room,

brought there by special command. She had gone palpitating, well knowing the reason.

“So my boy Hugh has taken it into his head to fall in love with you. He was always a daft callant; I am so pleased that you keep him at arm’s length. It’s very good and womanly of you. But it is so foolish!”

“There’s little or noucht in me tae win him, mem.”

“You’re a good-looking lass enough. But that won’t do for the world, you know; and it is so proper of you to say that you will not have him without the consent of his family—very right and proper. Now, I sent for you to see what was best to be done. I have burnt that line, you know.”

“What does he say himsel’ till’t?”

“O, he’s raving daft. ‘Nobody so beautiful as Lexy Bain,’ that is all that is in his head; and that he is pledged to you, and must have you. That’s *his* cry and way of it.”

“I loe him dearly.”

“Yes, yes; so do I; but you’re a sensible lass, a very sensible lass, from what he tells me of you. It would be the ruin of Hugh, you know.”

“What way the rooin o’ him, mem?”

“Why, in the first place, his friends would turn their backs on him.”

“Let’s unnerstan’ ane anither. I loe him dearly, an’ no for his frien’s, but for himsel’ alane—naething but himsel’. I canna tell ye what ye oucht tae dae; a puir thing like me is no for that. But this I ken that I loe

him, an' whae'er turns their back on him, if he wants me, I'm a' his, body an' saul o' me."

"The sooner *you're* from the Bught the better, my woman;" and while Mrs. Masson was speaking, in came Hugh. He put his arms round the girl, and kissed her, while his aunt stared in bewilderment.

"Just see, Aunt Masson, what you're doing," he said. "You send Lexy from the farm, and I go straight away with her to Kirktown. We'll be proclaimed to-morrow, and married next week, although by the law I'm already bound to her. The devil can't prevent it."

"The Lord pity us!" cried the old lady.

"But see, aunt, if you don't make a whaup about it, we'll not be rash. We're young, and can wait until I get a fair way of life like my equals. Then, if I please myself, where will be the harm of it. You'll wait for me, Lexy?"

"A hunner years," said the damsel.

What could Mrs. Masson do? For her petted nephew's sake she must temporise. Does good ever come of temporising with evil? I never saw it. Yet where is the evil of such love, ardent, honest, and outspoken?

O! the fulness and sweetness of that love which now filled Lexy Bain to overflowing. Her soul bowed down before the truth of him whom she had doubted. Henceforth his wish was her law, his desire her inspiration. Her life, her all, was his.

Mrs. Masson made no "whaup" about the matter. But somehow her ailing spouse began again to resume his charge of the farm-work, and to find his health improved as the April days lengthened. He declared he had been coddling himself too much, all along of that nephew of his, and that he must work still more. It would do him good.

How swiftly flew the three weeks to the first of May! Happy nights of ardent, unstinted, undoubting love—days that were brighter than the April sunshine, and, unlike that sunshine, were unchequered by aught like April showers.

But what was this great grief that came on May-day? Hugh's father had procured for him, and sent him an offer of, the office of farm-manager to the Laird of Craigineuk, sixty miles away from the Bught and love. He surely will not have it! He cannot leave her to take it! But will it not give him thirty pounds a-year, and a home and food? Well, well! These two are not utterly destitute of wisdom. He will, by-and-by, bring home his beauty, his love, his all. It will be wisest to part, that sooner they may meet not to part again. So, after one short week of tearful bursts and passionate clings, of frequent sobs and painful smiles, and vows fervid as earnest, he left her to the dull routine of labour, with heavy heart, aching and alone.

CHAPTER II.

“WILL hairst ne'er gang by?”

What is sadder than the wail of a sad soul against time, complaining of its tardiness, while the hours, with unrelaxing speed, are hurrying to “the dreeing of doom?” “Will the hairst ne'er gang by?” We cry out against the present sickness or weariness, although the speeding hours are all fleeting away before that hour when our loved ones shall be dust, or we, beloved, shall taste the bitterness of death. “Will the hairst ne'er gang by?” was the cry of Lexy Bain.

What was it to her that his frequent letters were loving—that he called her “beloved” and “wife?” Yes, that was much to her, but could anything compensate her for the lack of the loving presence of the living man? Nay, she must toil on sadly, mournfully, always feeling a great hollowness and yearning of heart; sometimes fretful.

Then, when harvest was past, she heard the whispers of the lasses in the bothy, “I'se warran' she luiks a' Mrs. Henderson shud be.” “Ay, he didna leave her a' by hersel'.”

But he will be true to her—she never for a moment doubted it, faithful and true, her lover, her husband.

Her grief came not of doubting. Her pain was the ever-gnawing craving for his coming back again. And, on the whole, she bore it bravely, longing for the happiness to come ; wishing, perhaps, that she could crush out a few months of the present. The past pained her not at all.

The translation of Hugh Henderson from the Bught to distant Craigneuk was not fortuitous, but the deliberate arrangement of his very sensible aunt, Mrs. Masson. She trusted that distance and fresh scenes and occupation would banish the image and love of this poor girl, which for the time was filling him. Her expectation was quite reasonable, if her nephew had been a reasonable man ; but he was most unreasonable, and only loved his absent idol more because he was deprived of her. Will he marry her ? Most assuredly he shall marry her. You may cease to fear for our heroine regarding that. Well, when shall he marry her ? Ah ! there lay his perplexity, his sore and sharp perplexity, somewhat aggravated by his engagement at Craigneuk. The old laird, Mr. Craigie of Craigneuk, was a stiff old fellow, with stately sons and statelier daughters. He was constantly insisting that his manager was a young gentleman, and as constantly warning him against a *mésalliance*; always fancying the lad in love with this or that small farmer's daughter, and warning him to beware. Then, too, Hugh was almost destitute of money, and must so remain until term-day. Could he, then, with his miserable fifteen pounds, bring home a wife to

the manager's cottage, and announce with a flourish of trumpets that he and she were spouses long before? Oh, the fates were very cruel to them! Why does not God make rugged places level in the way of true love?

She must cease from labour at Martinmas and seek a home. Where should she, could she, go but to her mother's? So before the term she saw her widowed mother, in her brother's absence, and, bent to the ground with her head buried in her mother's lap, she told it all,—yes, all; her love and betrothal, with pride; her condition, with burning blushes and a few tears.

Wearily sighed the old widow when she heard the story, and sadly she spoke—

“Ah! ye trust him, ma puir lassie! It's weel ye can think it, for men are sair deceivers, and the trustfu' aft-times fa'.”

“Mither, I ken the man,” she answered through her tears. “He'll be shure to me as deth.”

“Weel, weel, puir bairn! I trust God wills it. What shall we dae i' the meantime?” Oh, the crushing, sad meantime! She would come to her mother at the term, and the mother would help her to drink the bitterness that was mingled in her cup of love.

And at Martinmas she went painfully “home”—painfully, although half of Hugh's fifteen pounds was in her pocket. But her brother turned her from the door. “The house was his,” and he would only see shame and sorrow in her story. He would have no such woman, or

her "brat," to come in there. She might find a shelter where she could, her brother would not have any of her shame.

Slowly she dragged herself away, now first realising her isolation, and the coldness and hardness of the world around. She could scarcely realise it. Was it not all a horrid dream? Her love, her madness, her loneliness, her sorrow, were they all real things? Was her life a reality? Poor thing! Down by the river-bank she sat alone, confusedly thinking of it all, through the weird and chill November afternoon. How easily might not all her troubles and questionings be ended in that quiet cold pool! But at the thought Hugh and love came uppermost. She must live to be happy with him, and to make him happy. He was more to her than life or death. So she sat till the mirky gloaming, till the hooting owlets once again drove her back, with her love and sorrow, from the river to the village.

Hugh wrote her very soothingly, very hopefully. Let her spend the money she had in making herself comfortable, as well as she could. He would come to her at Christmas-time. No human power should keep him from her for a while of love, if he was spared. He could not stay with her. He could not carry her with him. But he would arrange for her as best he could. His loving presence would inspire her with courage and new life to bear her burdens until his time should come.

But at Christmas there was more delay and added

sorrow. Mr. Craigie would have Hugh to go to Edinburgh on business, and Hugh must go; and she must pine, and sicken, and suffer. "O God! will the days never end?"

When Hugh returned to Craigneuk, he knew he was a father. "You can't possibly be spared for another week just now," said Mr. Craigie. Will Hugh stay? No, not though certain death lay before him, much less the loss of his employment. "You may find another manager, if you like," said the true lad; and he is gone—gone to the bed-side of his suffering love, to kiss and to fondle his baby-boy.

He would only dare to stay a week. He was sure he would be received back, and his little salary would keep them nicely. He engaged the red-tiled cottage beyond the village square. As soon as she was well she should remove to it, and her mother would bear her company. How quickly she recovered in his presence! What were all her troubles now that he and baby were here? Silently she rejoiced, with a selfless joy ineffable. When shall it be always thus with her? When shall she be always blessed in his presence? The world and life, even baby, are all so soulless and inane without him. "It must be a year; it may be years," Hugh told her; and in the midst of her great joy, her sunshine, she turned her face to the wall and wept, because the night of his absence must come, and be so sad, and dark, and long. Poor Hugh saw her grieving. Could he stand it? Will he still aim at social rank and big

farms? In that little bed lay his portion, his happiness, his care.

"I will not, cannot part from baby and you, Lexy love," he said, slowly and distinctly; and he sat down by the bedside to scheme for the future. This was certain, he would not leave them.

When she understood it, there was a fierce conflict of feeling within her. Her urgent love, her joy in his being with her, in opposition to her desire that her happiness should come in his own way and time. And, when the tumult was stilled, she vehemently opposed his resolution. He must go back to the friends and the ways of life that God gave him. Her happiness would be completed time enough. "The wean, sae lik' his dear Dad, will comfort me. I'm twice as able tae bear the want o' ye noo as afore ye cam'."

For two days they talked of it, with deep anxiety, Hugh planning and laying out his future, and full of dreams of bright times—times of a brightness novel to him, and that his day-dream before had never compassed; for now he was flinging away all his ambition, and his thoughts were of humble happiness in such a cottage as he had rented, with scanty means, but with wife and child. Was he not a dear fellow, a true and good fellow, and deserving of all the love that a woman, or many women, could bestow on him, who could do and dare such acts of arrant folly?

The third day settled the matter. His father came in a carriage to the village, and sought him out by the

bedside of his wife and child, addressing him in words of passionate upbraiding, her in vile words of reproach. Hugh did not lose his temper, but his face was very pale. He told his father that she was his wife, and he humbly asked him to bless his grandchild. *He* bless such wife and child, never!—"harlot and bastard," he called them. He would curse them. Then Hugh firmly led him to the door. So the die was cast. Hugh's thoughts now all centre in his duty to those two poor ones, and how he might get bread for them. From father and mother, and the home of his childhood, he was an outcast and alien. Yet he was not greatly crushed by it. Youth is so very elastic.

His project was to start in business at the village as a veterinary surgeon. He would get married next week, and take up his abode with his dear ones in the red-tiled cottage. After his marriage he would go among the farmers and announce his calling. His skill was pretty well known already from his residence at the Bught. He had a diploma, and might reasonably hope for employment sufficient to give them food and clothing.

So they went to the red-tiled cottage and were married, and showed themselves as man and wife at church among the people, and they were very happy. Hugh got printed circulars intimating that he was to practise his profession, and sent them out to the farmers, and followed them up by calling in person. He called at the Bught too. His aunt would not see him. Mr. Masson told him he had played the fool. Generally, he

was received pleasantly enough, and urged to persevere, and, by-and-by, cases began to drop upon him.

All through this matter of the marriage, Hugh had had a strong sense that he was acting not only rightly, but generously; that, in some sort, he was a hero, gallantly sacrificing himself for his love. Now, when he went abroad, it was strange how little the people made of his heroism, how little they thought of his great sacrifice. No man hailed him as a brave fellow; no woman bent down to acknowledge the truth and constancy of his affection. What was it to them? It was provoking, nay, very irritating, this indifference of his little world to his so lofty deeds. If the world had taken up the quarrel of his father and family, and had turned its righteous back and withheld its hand from the perverse son and naughty man, he could have proudly and contentedly borne it. But that the world should plainly tell him that it cared not who his wife was, or where his home lay, or whether he had made or marred his happiness—that, indeed, was hard to bear.

So a shadow gathered on the young husband's brow, and his wife anxiously watched it, and dimly she guessed the cause. At least, the instincts of a true woman guided her. She took her helpless baby and threw herself and it upon his breast, and told him that he was their all in all; in faltering, broken little words she told it, reaching his open heart, and reminding him that it was in nowise for the world's applause that he had loved them, and that now his best happiness, all his

happiness, must come from them and with them, and not from that callous world. Recognising this great truth, more than half the conquest of his happiness lay in recognising it, he folded her and baby in his arms very tenderly—"His pair things! What was the world beside them?" Was he not rich in them?

Yet a great deal of alloy was mingled with the fine gold of his riches. He could not conceal the fact from himself, nay, he would have done wrong in not seeing and owning it. Could this poor lass from the straw-yard, even with love's gilding of her, fill up the outline which the lad had sketched for himself of all that his wife should be? It was not possible for her. With her house-work and her baby she must be oft untidy, wounding thereby her husband's heart and pride. So other clouds gathered into the husband's face. True woman still, she guessed what pained him, and soon her house and person, and her baby, were all in humble tidiness and neatness and beauty that poor man could desire. Then, proud of her, he made her train her luxuriant hair in raven ringlets round her snowy, queenly neck; and he renewed his first love, and courted his beauty again, her lover, her husband, her own. Oh, happy, happy, days, although their home was only a little cottage, and their table was but poorly set forth! Their loving hearts made light of that.

It was pleasant that he was getting some business. No doubt, it was fatiguing to walk far away into the hills to visit a sick cow, and to trudge back again, in

rain or sleety storm, dearly earning a five-shillings fee ; sometimes, when it was a widow's cow, giving his toilsome day for nought. But the loving greeting of that queen of love, with her ringlets and printed wrapper, pure as herself, and the sight of his kicking, lusty baby-boy, made him full amends for all his toil when the day was done. Then, too, as often happens to young doctors, he had some fortunate cases, and his reputation began to grow. And how encouraging it was that the Farmers' Club took him up, and installed him formally as their surgeon, and guaranteed him forty pounds a-year for attendance on their horses and cattle. If his accounts against the members, according to a scale agreed on, should exceed that sum he would receive the full amount of his earnings. Of that sum he was made sure. He was thus placed above want—he and his loved ones ; and how sweet to have achieved it by his unaided merit ! He did not know that that gruff old Mr. Masson was the mover of the arrangement, and had privately guaranteed the club against loss.

Thereupon he bought some better dresses for his queen ; and with his own hands he painted his cottage-door green, and liberally bestowed white paint on its interior and the window-sashes. He walked to Inverwick, and bought a piece of carpet for his parlour, and his queen sewed it up, and bound it, and laid it down : “ It will be sae nice for baby's feetie, when he com's tae walk.” Then he planted out with flowers the plot of ground before the cottage, and fenced it round with

wooden paling and a wicket-gate. So great comfort and beauty compassed them in their little cottage, and their hearts were full of peace and love.

Then the beauty and elegance of the horse-doctor's wife began to be spoken of and noised about. Her noble carriage, her beautiful head, her graceful simplicity, all were themes of general admiration. No doubt, the good people exaggerated her beauty, because at first they had wronged her ; but now they said they wondered not that a man should play the fool, if playing the fool was necessary to win her. And a few friends were gathered to them in those bright and happy days, and perhaps their hearts were lifted up. No doubt, Hugh was proud of her, and the doubtings that had first beset him when he flung himself with her upon the chances of life, were all gone from him. He wondered now how he had postponed his own happiness, and inflicted sad months of suffering on his dear one, in the foolish fear of facing the world with her. It was so simply done, when it was done ; and had brought such happiness withal. So he thought as he trained creepers over the walls of that bower of love, his cottage-home, and trimmed up the little garden, uprooting here a weed, there supporting a feeble flower-stem. Perhaps at his heart there lay a silenced wish that his mother should recognise that he had done rightly, and should receive his wife as her daughter even as the fairest and best of her daughters. If this good fellow had anything lacking which left the full measure of his happiness incomplete, that was it all.

And in early May, while still his garden gave him only a faint reward of flowers, his little son came to know him, and to crow and clamour to be taken, and jumped about by him. "Was it not jolly?" No amount of walking or riding wearied him so that he could not dandle his bright boy, till the wean fell asleep in the midst of the play.

And the heart of the mother clave very closely and tenderly to the babe's father, with delicate, tender love, so unlike the passionate love of a year ago. It was the same love, yet still not the same. It had grown and ripened into a truer, a nobler, a more tender affection for the tender heart and big soul of the true man, then, as now, her all in all.

Is there any other happiness to compare with this, that comes of humble-heartedness and love? If there is, I know it not, and care not to know it. I do not believe that stately palace, or wealth or rank, or all combined, could yield the sense of fulness and quiet gladness and security that filled and environed the red-tiled cottage, that true abode of love. So, on through the glad May, the days rolled on into brilliant June, and the garden put forth its crop of beauty and perfume. Their life was all sweetness and fragrance.

There came a bright June morning. They had supped their porridge and had their cup of tea, and Hugh was going to Knockdry to see some ailing beast there. He would certainly be back by two for dinner. His wife stood with baby at the door, that wonderful baby with

his sixth tooth cut that morning chattering and crowing, and feebly flinging his arms about in the glorious sunlight and balmy air. He kissed her, he kissed his baby, as he passed out. He went along his half-dozen paces of gravelled walk. From the border he plucked a white rosebud, and turned back to his wife in the doorway, and stuck it among her raven ringlets, and again he kissed her. He lingered for a minute at the little gate, then slowly strolled into the street; and she went down to the gate with her baby, her heart going after him in love and admiration. She watched him until he went out of sight, turning into the village square.

And as he went he thought of that young horse of old Ross's, that had smashed his cart and put him to defiance, until "he kent he cud mak' naething o' it." It was a handsome brute, with neat limbs and light head, the very thing for a saddle-horse. Hugh could have it for a five-pound note, and if he broke it and trained it, it must be worth twenty pounds or more. Now that would help his dear ones! And this was so bright a morning, just such a morning as will stir youth and high spirits to fresh enterprises. Hugh will have a look at the beast, perhaps ride it on trial to Knockdry.

He saw old Ross in the Square. "The brute's up by at Kirkstyle. The loun will gie him till ye. He's yers for five pun', an' welcome. But tak' care, he's a thrawn deevil." Hugh went up to Kirkstyle, to the offices there, and found Ross's "loun," and the lad put a riding-bridle on the horse's head, placed the old saddle

outside the stable-door, and led out the horse. "An cud ne'er saydle him i' the stall," he said. "I'll lift his fore-fut whiles ye pit on the saydle."

But Hugh told him not to bother. "Haud his head, I'll saydle him easily eneuch." He adjusted the stirrups for his riding, and then threw the saddle lightly over the horse's back, looking in the strength of his manhood the more powerful animal of the two. Then he stepped back to adjust the crupper.

"Tak' tent!" roared the lad. "He's gain' tae lat flee!" and the beast savagely drooped its head and flung out. Too late came the cry of warning. Hugh Henderson rolled over, beat down on the miry close, and lay motionless in the sunlight.

Loud shouted the lad for help as he hurried the brute into the stable, and assistance quickly came. The gathering men spoke to poor Hugh, and raised him. He answered them not, he heard not. His limbs dropped limply down. He was at least insensible. "Rin for Dr. Blake. He's shure nae tae be gane oot, yet." And the doctor quickly came. But what could he do? Hugh Henderson was dead! No outward injury, no pool of blood, showed how his life had gone out, yet it was too true, he was no more!

His wife, his widow, must be told; and in the bright noontide, scarcely an hour since in love and pride her eyes had followed him, they carried him back to her lifeless, and laid him down in the bedstead with those snowy curtains. They spoke their words of sympathy

but one by one they went out, and left her alone with her dead.

Kindly, although rough, women came to her. Stolidly and tearlessly she saw them, perhaps she was not aware of their presence. They assumed the control of this house of death, and set about performing its dread though sacred rites. She interfered not with them. They gave her her husband's watch, which they found in his pocket, still beating and going, although *his* heart had ceased to beat. She held it vaguely in her hand and it dropped upon the floor.

They tried to rouse her, saying he looked so sweet and handsome ; but she stirred not. Her baby fretted, and without speaking she suckled it, and it slept, and then she laid it on the bed beside its sire. A woman carried it away, and the mother did not see it. So two sleepless, tearless, days and nights went by, and then they bore him from her. That evening Dr. Blake found her at the newly-made grave, her baby sobbing on the sods, she pressing her aching temples, and moaning "Ma heid, ma heid!" Her poor, bruised, stricken head!

She had brain-fever badly after that, lying long in danger of death. Perhaps it would have been well that she had followed her loved one to the grave, for when health came back, reason, at least memory, came not wholly back. It seems that she forgets all those bright and happy days of wedded love and bliss, and their sad termination, for she always is expecting her lover to come to her, always mournfully longing and

waiting for his coming, with a melancholy, quiet expectation that is sad to behold. Those days of bitterness when he was absent from her, that dreary November and December, must surely have pained her sorely, when thus it is that the feelings then prevailing wipe out the memory of these later months of love. Carefully she trains her ringlets as he loved to see them. She will wear no mourning—only the pretty print frocks he admired. Thus, sadly, without murmur, she is waiting for her love.

She is in need of nothing but this love that can never come to her. Her father-in-law died soon after her husband, and left no settlement, so her baby-son succeeded to some house-property at Inverwick, yielding about a hundred pounds a-year. She is very thin and wasted; and Blake says that her yearnings for the coming of her dear one must wear her out before long.