WIDOW MACRAW

CHAPTER I

'SHE'S deid, she's deid!'

Three or four women all said it, and it was too true. The widow had her apron to her eyes, and, there was no mistake about it, her grief was unfeigned. She was a spare little woman, her thin figure clothed in a homespun gown, rough but clean. Her cap was neat and white, looking whiter for the broad black riband that bound it round her head. 'Am sair veesited and straited, neebors,' she said. 'God only kens what waey we're to win through noo!'

'Ay, ay, ay!' said the chorus of neighbours. 'It's vera hard, but it's His will, poor craitar!'

The widow sat down on the haunch of her dead cow, and wept many tears, quiet and hot.

'We canna help her na mair, friends,' the women said one to the other, 'we may be steppin';' and they went out of the byre and left her beside her dead beast, but not alone. There stood at the head of the cow-stall a young girl, quite a slip of a girl—thin, slender, and tall—a timid-looking lassie, who looked much less than the seventeen years that was her age. She also was piteously, although tearlessly, contemplating the defunct crummie. Perhaps she did not comprehend its death and the consequences of it in their entirety. 'Dinna greet, mither,' after a time, she said to the weeping widow. 'Dinna be greetin', mither.' Her sympathetic voice was near 'the greetin',' too.

'I canna help it, lassie. It wus maist oor a', an' it's taen frae us! Whaur can we look for breid, whan the beist's gane?' said the widow.

It was not unreasonable that the widow should mourn and feel desolated by the loss of her cow, for her mind took in the full compass of her misfortune—realised the whole evil that must follow upon it. That you may see her position somewhat as she felt it, I will briefly tell you her story.

Her husband, John Macrae, for Macrae was the real name, converted into 'Macraw' through local supposition of euphony, was a tall, bony man, who came into the district long years ago, from Ross-shire. After he had spent some years as a farm servant, he married this poor little woman; and, thereafter, losing regular employ, he built for himself, with permission of one of the small farmers, a bothy on the Langrig Braes, and toiled early and hard at all sorts of country work to win bread for his wife and the three little bairns that came to them. In his eager labour, striving to make a shilling, or, perhaps, but hardly, two, extra per week in 'piece-work' in a quarry, he overtasked and overstrained himself; and offended Nature, in her calm and unrelenting way, punished the transgression, making no account of the loving motive of the too assiduous toiler. The tall, spare Highlander laid down his ill-nourished and overtaxed body on a sick bed, 'put up blood,' and pined and died, leaving the poor ones he loved so well to struggle as they might, leaving them also, and only, that poor cow. That was six years ago.

Perhaps the fact that he was leaving them the cow mitigated for him the bitterness of his fate. Certainly it largely modified for them their great calamity. It was no fabulous animal, no miraculous mother of golden calves, but a commonplace 'coo,' valued highly, when poor John bought it, at the eight guineas, so hardly won and put together, which it cost him. Still it is wonder-

ful how much of the purchasing power of meal and necessaries may flow from a cow. The bairns had only a stinted allowance of the precious milk; the widow rarely tasted it, excusing herself on the shallow pretext that 'it didna agree wi' her.' With jealous care the cream was gathered and consigned to the little churn, the skimmed milk, saving 'the bairns' pairt,' all to the cheese-vat.

And the widow was so tidy, clean, and nice in her ways that she coaxed more butter and cheese from her cow than came from any other beast on the braes. Her butter and cheese were of such flavour and manufacture, too, that when she took her little stock to market at Hallowmas, it was eagerly sought for, and obtained the top price of the day. In this, and in his little wife, the achiever of it, the poor Highlandman used to glory over his moderate dram before he left the fair.

But cows must be fed that they may live and give milk, and from this law there was no exemption of the widow's. For weeks, too, it gave no milk, and yet needed feeding. Its licence to stray and pasture on 'the hill ground'—that is, on the common—cost £2 : 10s. a year. While the husband's willing arm had kept want far from his little household, his cow used to rejoice with other cows in the fields of second year's grass, rich with the speckled daisy and the yellow cowslip; yes, and at times in sweeter fields of odorous aftermath. But it shared the privation which death brought to the family—shared it, of course, in much the same spirit—dumb submissiveness. Its days 'in clover' were ended and gone. The widow could not purchase for it right of access to the daisied pasture field. Its acquaintance with straw, that great necessary of bestial, also well nigh ceased, for the bracken, and 'the rashes' green, and the hill-moss, carefully gathered and borne home by the widow and her daughter, were its bedding. It must pick up its living on the hillside. A stinted supply of

turnips, produced from the byre-manure, was its main food in winter, supplemented sparingly with boiled chaff, liberally in later winter and spring with bruised whins. It was a hard and endless task to gather and fetch for it; but its owners were kindly, even affectionately minded towards the beast. Yet withal, I dare say, it had times of ruminating with little solid matter therefor, while ever it was carefully milked while it yielded a drop. Well, there it was now, its days of milking and misery completed; and with it the widow's sole source of meal and money was dried up. Since John 'was called,' no such grief as this had come to her. Even then she did not feel so helpless, so hopeless, as now beside the dead cow. Perhaps the six years of hard toil and stint had worn and ground down her spirit, so that little sorrow sufficed to crush her.

The April sun was shining cheerily when these two poor mourners, the thin little widow and her thinner daughter, came out of the dark byre into the daylight. The shadows of the byre, I fear, were upon them so that they could not see that goodness was abroad on the earth. Present disaster, instant grief, blind the eyes of all of us for a time, for a time seal up all those springs within us that freshen life with hope. In the sunshine the widow only suffered fresh pangs, for her eye fell on the store of ferns and moss, 'the bedding' so carefully garnered for the beast. 'What's it a' noo?' she thought in pain. 'Och, och!' was all that escaped her lips, as, with her child, she went into the bothy that was their home.

The youngest boy had gone away ten days before 'tae the simmer herding.' His elder brother had been 'oot i' the fraim' for two years past, so these poor women were alone in their trouble. No doubt this was well. If the boys had had to be fed the evil would have been much greater. Indeed, if the widow could have seen it, there were not wholly wanting streaks of light

in her dark affliction. 'The callants were earning their ain bit breid and their brose.' And would it have been well for that lanky lassie to be slave of the cow for much longer?

By eventide it was arranged that 'Jamie Knockans wad fley the beist the morn.' The morrow came, and Mary got sick when she saw the man thrust his knife into her dead friend. She was sent away. The hardier widow stood by and helped the man. Hide and horns were worth a pound, a large sum, and of increased importance now that the cow was dead.

Besides the pound thus sorrowfully obtained, the widow's treasury contained a few shillings only. Nay, therein I say not quite aright, for, with the shillings, in 'the shottle' of the big chest, there lay two pound-notes, as all the children knew. But they were sacred. Against the day of her burial the widow kept them, and had kept them for full five years. The notes were not for this world's currency while she was of it.

Two or three days of saddened idleness, there being now no cow to attend, brought thought and resolution. What a silly proverb that is, 'No cow, no care.' Blackest care broods in the empty stall. But this was what they set their minds to—they must part. The young girl must seek service, the widow quit the spot where now she could find nought but miserable memories. She could not, would not, stay alone in the old home, where, in happier days, her husband rose up and went forth, came in and lay down; where her little brood, now scattered, had nestled and grown up, and peace and humble plenty had been with them all. No, she 'cudna bide there by hersel' alane.' She would take a room at the Kirktown. She would spin and do odd jobs, and God would feed her while He was pleased to leave her in the land.

They made up their minds, but few words passed between them. Indeed, after the first burst of grief for

the cow, they showed little outward sign of their inward misery. Hope will find utterance and words; habitual suffering is usually voiceless.

'Ye maun gang oot, Mary, be the term,' said the widow, with a sigh.

'Ay, mither, I maun gang, am thinkin',' completed the agreement that she should go, and they spoke not of it again.

But, by and by the feeing-market came round with the last week of April. Thither the old woman and the young one must go, that the latter might find an employer, that the mother might see to her daughter's feeing, and might find a new home for herself. When they closed the door of the vacant house and set out on their errand, the lassie was thinly although cleanly clad; the mother had on her old plaid shawl, carefully preserved from her better days. Heavy-hearted they were, doubtless, but still willing to live, very willing to toil that they might eat and live.

They got into the village before the fair was fairly constituted; so they went along the back street, asking for a room to be let—'ony place,' 'ony kin o' shelter whaur a lone body micht bide'; but not a crib could they hear of. The widow's face fell, and her heart too, for although she had been silent, her heart was full of her scheme, and now it seemed doomed to go wrong.

Then they stood in the great throng in the market-place, the Square, and great strange men came staring carelessly into their faces, and passed them by. It was two o'clock by and by, and no man had asked them, 'What dost thou here?' New fear was besetting the widow. The young lassie was feeling the keen north wind, for the sky had become overcast. At length there came along a man who recognised the widow and stood to speak to her. He was a tall, brawny, rough man, clad in homespun, with a plaid round his shoulders and a battered gray hat with a mourning band. He

stood to speak to the widow, and forthwith set his stick under his oxter, pulled out his snuff-box, and began to take snuff lavishly. Mrs. Macrae quickly told her errand at the fair. 'Did he need a lass like her Mary?'

The farmer took a leisurely and careful survey of the girl, calmly, as if he were looking at a cattle-beast. 'Na, she's gey licht an' wakelik' for wark,' he said slowly. 'Ye'll no fin' mony tae speir for her, I'm feart. Widow, what wad ye say tae fee yersel'? Ye'd make a faimous dey.' In fact, he wanted a dairy-woman and was willing to hire the widow, but he would have nought to say to her slight-limbed daughter.

'But ye see we maunna, canna pairt if she's no fee-ed.'

'Weel, weel, there's ma offer till ye. £3 : 10s., forbye cost as ordinair. I'll gie ye an oor tae rejec' it. Ye'll fin' me then by Polson's door.' And he left them in the crowd.

In the crowd, surging and swaying about, laughing, shouting, my-dearing, cursing, for the cold of the afternoon was bringing about no small demand for whisky, and the voice of the multitude was waxing hoarse. Up came a young farmer and laid his hand on the shoulder of Mary Macrae. 'Are you fee-ed?' he asked with a leer. 'Let's see your teeth.'

'Come along, Tom, don't you see she's no' speaned, man!' said a comrade. 'That old one would bite. Come along.' Staggering they passed away. Poor Mary! she had never thought much of herself, but her weakness and unworthiness now so confronted her that the tears were in her eyes. Was she indeed only fit to attend her mother's cow, fit to toil and slave for it alone? Now that there was no cow, must she helplessly weight down her mother?

Up came Kate Calder from the braes. 'Are ye no hired yet, Maraie?' asked she. Mary could not reply with words. Her face gave her answer, and Kate

understood it. 'Weel, then,' said Kate, 'come this way; here's a fairmer's wife wantin' a bairnsmaid.'

'Wha's she?' asked the anxious mother.

Kate 'kent naething o' her,' 'had jist heerd her speirin' for a lassie tae nurse and wark aboot.' But the woman was found,—a large, hard-visaged woman, at sight of whom the widow's heart turned faint. She did want a lassie to mind the bairns, to mind her cow, to clean the house—in fact to work indoors or out as need might be. For all this catalogue of services she would give no more wages than thirty shillings by the half year. Yet must the lassie find a home, and Mary Macrae was engaged to serve this Mrs. Davidson, who was the wife of a small tenant in the Newlands of Howe.

Now it was time for the widow to see Mr. Fraser, the old farmer at Knockdry, and, with her daughter at her side, she pressed her way towards Polson's inn. 'Hooray, hooray!' whooped a number of noisy lads, rushing from the inn door in half-tipsy uproar. 'Hooray, hooray!' shouted one little fellow of them as he came against the widow and almost overthrew her. 'Ah me, ah me!' groaned the woman audibly, for it was her elder boy, Sandy, who thus had run against her, and hurt her. There he was now, struggling to escape from Mary, who had seized him by the arm and by the coat. 'Stan', ye scaimp, Sandy, an' speak t' yer mither;' but with an oath the boy broke from her and fled. 'Wae's me!' said the widow. The women looked at each other, and there was a tear in the mother's eye; but they spoke not, and went on to the inn.

They found Mr. Fraser, and the widow hired herself to serve him, and thus their lives were to be severed. Meantime, they must trudge home, tired and hungry and sad, and in drenching sleet, for their separation was not to be till the term. For minds and bodies roughened by usage, and to the manner accustomed, the feeing-market may be no ordeal. To these two poor women

the day and its events were a real trial; to the younger more especially, who never, till then, had faced the world, crushing down the little elasticity of spirit that long privation had left her, and stamping her soul with abasement and self-depreciation. The two shillings got as arles the widow kept and carried home. They would help at the pinch to come at the term.

Half rations make weary, heavy-winged hours. Empty stomachs and idleness waste both body and soul. You know that the widow had some shillings, yet would she mete and measure the dole of meal, which was all the meal she had, and count out her few potatoes so as to stretch them, if possible, to the term-day. The daughter must have shoes and some little things, and these were not to be reconciled with plenteous feeding. But the term-day came at last—almost longed-for it came, although it was to extinguish their hearth-fire and give their home to a stranger.

The term-day came, and all their poor bits of deal furniture, and the spinning-wheel, having been duly washed and scrubbed with powdered freestone, were stuck up high amid the rafters of the outhouse of a neighbouring crofter, who kindly undertook to store them there. The big chest, filled with the much-prized blankets,—'Wha kens wha may need them yet?'—was deposited, with the lesser meal chest above it, in a corner of the outhouse, and covered over with sundry broken hurdles and the like to avert the eye of the covetous. By eight o'clock in the morning, they had eaten their last drop of water brose in their home, all their earthly goods having been removed, save the deal bed-frames, sold to the incoming tenant at the modest price of five shillings. Then they 'slocked' the fire, gazed wistfully round the bare and blank walls, and went on their ways.

What is the use of being sad over such a matter? You know that hundreds in our land on every term-day

have memories as sorrowful, lives as crushed, as these two, hearts with as little hope as there is fire in their extinguished ingles. Yet the sun shines blythely on the term-day, and the May wind whistles 'hope' to souls that hear it, and the laverock and all the birds sing forth the love and good that are in life.

They took their way together to the village. They wandered about visiting all the shops where such things as they wanted were for sale, priced them all, higgling and bargaining hardly, and going out and pondering the comparative prices and values of the goods. Thereafter they made their little purchases, and, when it was four o'clock, in a quiet corner of the Square, they ate each a pennyworth of wheaten bread—an unwonted luxury. Then they looked at each other, for their hour to part had come. They joined their hands, and the widow gazed into the face of her child. 'God bless ye, ma bairn, and keep ye, till we meet in peace.'

'Mither!' was all the daughter's answer, for the tears were in her eyes, and her voice failed her. A minute they stood thus looking. Their hands parted, and each went her way, stopping and looking back oft-times, till the curves of street and road hid them from each other.

They gave each other no kiss when thus they parted. Indeed, the peasant parent rarely kisses his grown-up offspring. Why it should be thus I know not. Perhaps the hard things of their lives gradually harden their ways so that they will not have softness to show itself in their manners. Hearts full of love or pity or sorrow for son or daughter may prompt the parents to words and acts full of intensest feeling; the unbidden tear may fill the parental eye, but the toil-strained arms are not stretched for embraces—kissing lips do not make exhibition of affection.

It is a weary, weary world, and mostly either the ways through it are dusty and dry, or the miry clay sticks

fast to slipping feet. And the weary way so occupies most of us that we cannot see the landscape, rich in beauty, that stretches all around. At least, Mary Macrae saw none of it, could see no merit in the scene that lay before her, on surmounting the topmost ridge on the south side of our valley. The undulating land stretched far to the south and west, towards the evening sun. Mile after mile spread the green and brown heath, with stretches of verdant pasture interspersed through it, with here and there blackened reaches, the calcined passages of recent muir-burn. Here and there also in the wide expanse stood a new-looking cottage, with its twenty or forty acres of new land attached to it,—new land recently rescued by dint of arm and pickaxe and fire from the ancient heath, and on which the new brairding grain was cropping out in lustrous green. Then there was the pine wood in the distance with the shooting-lodge on its outskirts, and afar off were the burnished crests of hills. She saw it, but she felt it not, for her heart was full of other things, and her little bundle was growing heavy on her arm as she wearily trudged in the glorious sunshine, feeling little else than the weariness of life.

It is a weary, weary world. It is good that there are corners of it where there is plenty of porridge. To one such corner Mary Macrae had come that night, for whatever might be the peculiarities of the large woman who claimed her services, she heaped the lassie's platter on her coming and bade her eat abundantly. 'Ye maun be hungry, lass. Sit doun an' tak' awa',' she said; and the young girl was an hungered and fain to eat, but she could barely taste of the food. And wherefore, pray? The platter was heaped and the invitation was rudely kind. But, oh me! she who had never eaten save in the old home, off the old board, from the hand of a parent, could you expect her, even in her hunger, 'tae fa' tae' and eat in the house of the stranger? She could

not eat with the great round eyes of three or four little folk staring at her, with three great men at the fireside watching her, she knew, over their tobacco pipes. She sickened even amid the fumes of the porridge, which at the first were so fragrant to her appetised. A mouthful sufficed to fill her. She could have burst into tears and been the better for it, as she sat looking at the porridge, for her heart was sore and her mind perturbed, there at the great deal table sitting alone.

'Is aught wrang with the parritch?' asked the mistress dourly. 'I ne'er see a lass warth muckle for wark that's feckless wi' her horn-spune.'

'But they'll ait wha winna wark,' said her husband gruffly from the fireside.

They meant not unkindly. It would have all been right if she had bluntly answered them that she had come to work and would do it, although to-night she could not eat. I do not think she took it for chiding, but she could find no words or voice for reply.

'Let her alane. She'll be forfouchten the nicht. A day or twa 'll bring her round,' said a man, speaking in a distinct way as if he had right to speak there. Mary timidly glanced at the speaker. He was sitting smoking, with a gun across his knees, and a shot-bag over his shoulder. He was what he looked—a gamekeeper,—and was brother of Mrs. Davidson. He had helped her husband to take the piece of land, to reclaim it and to stock it.

'If ye canna take it leave it, lass,' the mistress said. 'I'll show ye the byre afore ye gang tae bed. Come this way.' And the girl followed her.

Hugh Davidson, the head of the small household, was a hard-working man, who had about him not a little of rude comfort. There stood in his byre two good milch cows; and the girl's heart warmed at the sight of them, although they were woefully dirty. There was plenty of straw, too, although the season was so far

advanced. It would be her duty each morning, her mistress told her, to turn them into the 'pasture field ayont the whin fence' at five o'clock. The mistress herself would milk them thereafter, while the girl 'redd' up the house and clothed the bairns and made the porridge.

They returned to the dwelling-house and found Mr. Davidson and the gamekeeper at the door. The latter had a spy-glass at his eye, and was saying he must be going. When the women came up, he closed his glass and fixed a keen eye on the lassie, and smiled to her very kindly. He alone smiled to her, and the smile went to her heart and did her good, she thought.

With calmer mind Widow Macrae went through the well-appointed byres and steading at Knockdry, which had been partly built and much improved only the year before. There were many cows and many young beasts, and there was no mistress, and scanty help in much work. Therefore it was apparent that her labour and responsibility would be great. And even on this, the first night of her servitude, she found that old Fraser, who kept prying about, had in him something to justify the fame of being 'a cankered carle,' which had reached her since she fee-ed.

What a weird strange feeling Mary had that night as she undressed to lie down. She was to sleep with two of the children in 'the kitchen bed,' for the kitchen was not only kitchen, but family room and the bairns' sleeping-room as well. As she sat on the edge of the bed, she saw Davidson, her master, rake up the peat ashes on the hearth, deposit in them a large peat, heap it over with the ashes, and lay a flat stone upon the mass. He was 'resting' the fire for the night, that there might be 'a kindlin'' for the morrow. All her life long the girl had seen it done nightly by father or mother, or she had done it herself. But to-night she watched it as if it were a proceeding utterly new and strange to her,

while she listened also to the ticking of 'the wag-at-the-wa',' the German wooden clock, sonorously sounding in the silence of the house, loud over the breathing and teeth-grinding of the children beside her in the bed. 'Get intae bed, noo,' said the master, going off to the bedroom where he slept. She was left alone in the twilight gloom of the kitchen, and then she fell on her knees.

Long she knelt and long she sat thereafter on the bedside, with silent, unseen tears coursing her young face, and long it was before she unclothed herself and crept in beside the children in the chaff bed, while sleep came not to her even yet. The ticking clock kept her painfully awake. It struck two long before drowsiness came upon her, and the faint light of dawn was breaking through the uncurtained window. She was roused before five by her mistress calling to her—'Git up, lassie! ye maunna lat the morn slip by. D'ye hear?' Awaking, startled thus, for a moment she thought she was at home—for a moment thought that the voice was her mother's, and wondered in confusion at its harshness. But in a moment more she comprehended the change that had come to her, and her heart fainted within her. Quickly she got out of bed and arrayed herself in the old faded skirt and dilapidated jacket, which she had brought rolled up in her bundle, and sallied out to the cows.

The sun shone cheerily, freshly, hopefully, almost tenderly, as oft he shines on May mornings. The dew lay heavy on the grass and gowans, and the gowans were still scarcely half awake. The cuckoo's voice came faintly from afar, from some point unknown in the wilderness of heath. A hundred larks were high above the corn land and the young grass, pouring out their souls in petulant song. The air was resonant of bird and early bee; and the cattle lowed aloud when they heard her footstep at the byre door. Mary felt the

brightness, perhaps, too, a little of the hope and tenderness of the hour; and before she went into the byre, she went outside the little steading, and gazed over the wide-spread heath, so unlike her native braes. She thought of her distant mother and her vanished home, and her heart was swelling. But the cattle lowed again, and slowly she turned to her work, and raised the latch and entered the byre, speaking soft prow-ings to the beasts that were to be her charge.

She undid the neck chains quickly and turned the beasts' heads towards the door, and one by one they slowly, lumpishly, after the dull nature of them, began to move out, while she within stood speaking to them. Suddenly the gamekeeper stood at the byre door, impeding the cattle, and inquired if her master was up. 'I hae na seed him,' said the lassie. The man pushed his way past the beasts and stood beside her, speaking of the queys and the bright morning. Unexpectedly he seized her round the waist, and, taking her wholly by surprise, kissed her, ere she could resist or resent it. For the moment she was too stupefied to resent or resist, but then she burst into sobs and tears.

He was not an unkind man after his way. He let her go, and spoke soft words to her, saying he only meant fun and kindness, and had no thought to frighten her at at all. 'It's a way we hev' i' the countrae,' he said. But it took some time to quiet her, and dry her tears—some time before she went out of the byre into the sunlight, trembling and scared.

She drove her beasts into the dewy grass of the pasture field, where still, on the turfy soil, the herbage grew sparsely and with many weeds; and her heart was still beating and like to burst. She sat down, in the brilliant morning, on the western margin of the field, beside the ditch, now dry, which the cattle sought as it were instinctively. 'Ye'll be Hugh Davison's new lass,' said a girl-voice from beyond the ditch. 'He's gotten a

lass noo! Am Sandy Fergison's dochter. What's yer name?' Mary had got up at the first words. She saw a girl of about her own age, also in charge of some cattle; and the sight of her cheered and strengthened Mary. Not that 'Sandy Fergison's dochter' had in her or on her anything to captivate or inspire the 'new lass.' It was the girl-voice and the girl-figure that whispered to her of companionship, sympathy, hope. So Mary greeted the lassie warmly, and they quickly exchanged names and other scraps of personal information. Alexandrina, or 'Ina' Ferguson as she was usually named, was the daughter of the conterminous crofter, and she spoke frankly and cheerfully to the stranger. Then Mary, in better mood, returned to the cottage. Her master was already afield with his horses, and her mistress on foot in the house.

There was plenty of work for the girl—drudgery, humble drudgery, no doubt—but she found herself not unkindly treated, and there was plenty to eat of the frugal kinds of food which the family used, and which she shared with the family at the kitchen table. Fully occupied, her mind wandered not to the wakeful, painful thoughts of the night before. Making the porridge, she found appetite in its preparation, while the children talked to her, this one bidding her to 'mak' it thick,' that other to 'laive mony knots intil't.' At night she lay down weary and slept, not hearing the wakeful clock at all. Nay, she took the youngest child to her bosom ere she went to sleep, so changed had the things and occupations of the long day left her.

John Bremner, the gamekeeper, did not again treat her rudely. He was often at the farm and in the house, and his words and ways were always kind. Indeed, Mrs. Davidson was somewhat influenced by him in the fair treatment accorded to the girl. For during the first days, being a frequent visitor, he interfered, now to excuse the lassie's physical weakness, now to extenuate

her blunders or her awkwardness, so that sometimes she said in her heart, 'He's a kind fella, the keeper.' Thus the days passed by, and a month wrought a great change on the thin girl. She grew full and hearty on the oatmeal, and her work did not oppress her.

How fared it with her mother during this time? Well, you see, she was at the head of a great department, and therefore above the sympathy of the people around her; certainly without the sympathy of her employer, who expected her work to be done thoroughly because she was paid for it. Then, she was unaccustomed to command, and did not fully task the young woman who was her help in the byres, preferring to burden herself. Thus much fell to be done by herself—more, in fact, than was reasonable. To do it she had to work late and be up betimes to labour again, and after all many things were not done timeously. This old Fraser saw—this chiefly. He saw nothing of the many little improvements in the management of his dairy wrought by the widow. Therefore he grumbled and growled. 'What, that ca-alf nae fed yet? If the day war lang as twa, ye'd fill it wi' sax hoors' wark.' The widow's heart was heavy under such fault-finding, while her arms were weary with the hard strivings which still resulted in little that was noticeable beyond the commonplace doings of her predecessors.

Then the gaunt old churl would charge her with unfaithfulness, not insinuating it, but bluntly saying it, 'Ye maun hae maid awa' wi' the ile-cake! Whaur ever cud ye hae used a' yon o' it?' To the rigidly honest widow his suspicions were a sore trial; and her condition, alone, under the burden of her trust, was truly grievous to be borne. A mother's heart too will have its yearnings, and she had not heard of her daughter—her weak, inexperienced daughter—since the term-day. And that last sight of her boy, Sandy, was very sad. Under all these things, you need not wonder that the widow grew thinner as the days grew long, that faintness oft beset

her sad heart, and that oft her weary limbs grew feeble. Certainly the widow waned weaker in our Strath, while the daughter fattened and grew rosy on the muirlands, 'over the hill and far away.'

Indeed, Mary was changing, for, on the muirland, while she herded her cattle, with the children about her, pleasure tempted her. That gamekeeper came to her and the little ones, speaking kind words always,—soft words sometimes. He told her she was fair and bonny, and, in her youth and sprightliness, she believed him. To be sure, if she was bonny she was also sadly unkempt; but this, although apparent enough, was fully made up for by her prettiness and budding womanhood. And under cover of showing that he was pleased with her kindness to his little nephews and nieces, 'tae encourage the lassie,' he said, he bought her a quantity of ribbon—blue ribbon—well worthy to tie up her hair, on Sundays, when she went to church. There was enough of it, too, for her black straw bonnet; and with native taste she trimmed the bonnet, and her poor unthinking heart was lifted up when thus she was arrayed. Then he met her and protested she was very charming, and she coyly submitted to be kissed by him, and neither cried nor pouted. She never thought of evil. How could she, poor toiling drudge, in her innocence, suspect that the gift was aught other than the kindly gift of a good heart? So she rose up early, day by day, and did her daily round of duty, and felt no burden in her labour, because she seemed to satisfy those around her whom it was her business to please. Her mind was at peace, and therefore her life was still and sunny as the bright days of summer on the circumjacent muirs, those muirs on which the gamekeeper often sought her.

His coming was often, yet in nowise so as to alarm her. It was his business to traverse the muirland, to wend his way early and late through peat haig and wide-spreading heather, even to the distant tarn, to seek the

hoody craw, the sharp-sighted strong-winged falcon, and the no less destructive sea-gull, which all came on predatory errand to the haunt of the heathcock. Why should he not come daily to the farm of his sister 'tae speir war they weel?' Was it otherwise than kindly 'tae spake a lassie fair?' Was it other than the truth to tell her she was 'a bonny quean?'

Ina Ferguson said, 'Folk dinna lik' Black Jock, the keeper. He comes ower aften haverin' aboot yer fairm. Mind yersel, lassie.' Mary Macrae, as generous as she was innocent, was not pleased to hear evil insinuated against the man of whom she knew nothing but kindness towards her and the bairns, her charge.

There came to the quickset hedge of the pasture-field, where Mary daily herded with Davidson's little ones, a strong voiced mavis, who had his dwelling in some neighbouring furzy brake, and he poured out his noontide song with such vehemence that his little breast and throat seemed bursting with the great soul of song within him. Daily he came and wildly warbled, and Mary and the little ones knew him and looked for his coming, and rejoiced in it. 'Eh, Mary, look at it, lik' tae rive its neckie!' one little fellow would cry out when it came. 'Dinna scare it spakin' oot!' the child girl of them would whisper, with finger pointing to the spray on which the bird rested. One day the gamekeeper came among them with his bass voice, asking how they were. 'Wheesht, uncle, dinna gluff the throstle,' said the bairns. 'Look here,' said he, and up went the deadly tube, which he always carried, and there was a flash and a bang which startled them all; and, lo! the mavis had fallen from its twig, voiceless and motionless now, while a few of its speckled feathers were still fluttering downwards after it to the ground. There was a moment of frightened pause. Then the little boy ran forward and picked up the mutilated bird, and laid it in the lap of Mary Macrae, who burst into sobs and tears. 'What for wad ye kill

the throstle? What waey cud ye dae it?' she asked, weeping.

'Whaur's the hairm o' killin' them trash?' asked the man gruffly. 'But I didna ken ye set oucht upon it, or I wadna hae dune it. Ye look awfu' bonny greetin' for't. I'll kiss ye a' roond tae mak' ma paice for't.'

And he kissed the children, no doubt expecting to be entitled to kiss the maiden, but she would not suffer him. So he left them, not softened by her tenderness at all, but the rather inflamed, because she was good and innocent and tender-hearted, so unlike him.

In the last days of June, six brief weeks after her coming, the gamekeeper, being at our village, spent a crown piece in purchasing stuff for a printed frock for her,—a great gift, viewed and valued as such a gift could only be by one so young and in such need of better clothing. This present, although put on the ground of 'kindness tae the lassie who haes sair need o' a new frock,' opened the eyes of Mrs. Davidson to see something of her brother's heart. But 'it wus nane o' her business. Why for shud she interfere? John can plaise himsel', an' tak' the rooin' o' it.'

The lassie heard no voice save that which spoke the girlish dislike of Ina Ferguson, and that she heeded not. Of herself thinking no evil, and arrayed in this new garment and with those ribbons, her heart was puffed up, and life was pleasant, and she began to have but stray and few thoughts of the mother who a short time ago was to her, and for her, all in all.

CHAPTER II

The July market came, 'the midsummer fair' at Glenaldie village. The gamekeeper managed with the Davidsons that the lassie should be allowed to go to it —to meet her friends and what not. Indeed, he suggested to her to claim the servant's privilege of going to the fair, and she, all too readily, seized it, longing truly to see her mother's face again when once thought of that face and hope of seeing it were given to her. No doubt, too, the brave new frock and bright blue ribbons stirred up in her womanly desires to appear on the market day.

Her mother had thoughts of the market and preparation for it also. Two days before it, old Fraser was very excited and surly. 'Wull ye ne'er be dune potterin' aboot an' gie me detail an' waicht o' the butter and cheese?' he grumbled out, while the pale widow feebly strove to finish her ordinary work, so that she might go with him to the storeroom to deliver up to him the dairy produce, that it might be carried to the market. At length it was all weighed and set forth to him. 'There maun be a mistake aboot it, wumman!' he grimly said. 'There maun be a mistake somewhaur! It's full eicht stane butter an' mair nor I ever haed at midsammar, an' a great wheen mair cheese.' He counted the wooden kits again, and the kebbocks that lay piled on forms along the room. There was no mistake at all;

and he said gruffly, 'I kent ye war a guid dey, an' vera carefu'.' Too careful she was, in fact, for while he complimented her thus, the rows of cheeses went floating around her, and she staggered giddily among them to the wall. She was wholly exhausted. She must demit her charge and lie down on her uneasy bed.

When on the morrow she rose not, great was old Fraser's anxiety and distress, not on her account at all, but because 'a' thing wad gae wrang.' The cheapest way might be to find what ailed her, and Dr. Blake was sent for. To him the source of the malady was apparent. The woman was done up, had never been fit for so much work as lay in these byres and dairy, and never would be fit to cope with it. It would take a couple of weeks to set her on foot at all. Great was old Fraser's distress, yet still not for the illness of the widow, superinduced by zeal in his service, but because his cows and beasts were without superintendence, his milk and cream without due care. Grumbling and growling he went about the steading, making attempts to skim the milk himself, but, of course, bungling the operation. And now that the doctor said the woman's strength was insufficient for the work, would never suffice for it, he set himself coldly to think how he could get rid of her. It was fortunate that next day was the market-day. He might find somebody 'tae dae his turn,' and, at least, he would try.

John Bremner, the gamekeeper, was to guide the maiden by the short cut, through muir and moss, to the village, on the morning of the fair. By nine o'clock she met him on the heath a mile off, at the spot he had pointed out to her the night before, even at 'The Elf Cairn,' the knowe that rose in a round green cone from the circling waste of heather. He praised her appearance, her beauty, and he kissed her when they met. 'The feys lauch whan there's kissin' on the Elf Cairn,' he said. But it was a morning for laughter. The sun

was shining in his July strength. Scarcely a puff of wind was there to move the heath bells. The perfume of the mountain thyme hung heavily in the stagnant, sultry air. And away they went through the heather, pathed only by the sheep tracks, making for a hollow in the distant ridge on their sky-line, which the man pointed out to her, telling her it was above the farm of Braefoot, and scarcely a mile and a half from the village. It was a glorious wilderness of sunlight and purple interspersed with green. At first they were alone in it, as they passed through the scattered flocks which filled the air with cries for wandering lambs. They startled the grouse in coveys as they passed along. But a mile or two on their way they came upon a shepherd sheltering from the sun under a peat bank, while he smoked his pipe. With him the gamekeeper sat a while, smoking also, and when they got up to proceed, two women were coming through the moss about half a mile off. Mary was certain that one of them was Ina Ferguson, and desired to wait for her, but the keeper would not wait. He put his arm round her waist, with rural licence, and hurried her forward.

And as they went he promised her a handsome 'fairin',' and to take her to the peep-shows and the other entertainments of the fair, and he kissed and tugged at her in the way rude wooers will, and in such way as must have alarmed her if she had not known he was so kind. But she was not alarmed, and could not refuse him kisses, seeing that he took pleasure in them. And they left the women in the far distance, and at length, heated and tired, they reached the hollow on the sky-line, and looked down upon Glenaldie Strath and the village below them. Here there was a spring of water, and eagerly she stooped down on hands and knees that she might drink of the cool stream. But he took her by the waist and raised her. She must drink from his flask-cup and take some whisky with the water. This she

would not do, preferring to drink of the water pure, whereupon he scoffed and spoke roughly and was somewhat out of temper. 'Ye beit tae tak' a dram frae me on the market-day, since ye hae come wi' me as ma lassie.' But still she would not, and he scowled as he put up his flask. Then, for the first time, the maiden shrank from him, feeling in a dim way that she did not know him; feeling all the disparity of their years and conditions in life; feeling that all the acts of freedom which she had suffered as rough kindnesses to her, a little girl, might, possibly, be very wrong. For the first time, too, she thought of herself as a woman—thought also of the slaughter of the mavis. Her heart misgave her sorely, and she was like to cry. He renewed his blunt and kindly speeches as they went on their way, but her misgivings and her fear remained. It was half-past eleven when they reached the village.

Bremner had some things to do in the village, and he shewed her where he would meet her at two o'clock. Then he gave her half-a-crown as a fairing, and went on his business. She wandered about in the crowd, looking for 'kent faces' from the Langrig Braes, looking especially for mother and brother, proudly feeling the grandeur of her new print frock and decorations, feeling also the richness of that piece of money, her doubt of the donor quite gone in the excitement of the fair. Soon she found John, her younger brother, gaily eating oat-cake while he held his mistress's horse, unyoked beside her cart laden with butter and cheese. He was 'weel and gey cosy in his plaice,' he said. And he told her that Sandy was somewhere on the market-ground, for he had seen him. But he had seen and heard nought of his mother. Then the girl went in quest of Sandy, and when she had wandered long in the crowd she found him. He was a stolid laddie and had little outward show of affection for her, little concern to express for his widowed mother. But he had not seen his mother, and was sure

she was not at the fair. Knockdry, however, was not far away. He pointed it out to her on the hillside. If she desired to see her mother, two hours would bring her there and back.

While they were talking, a murmur ran through the crowd, and the people jostled and pushed aside and opened up a way for a cart which slowly passed through the throng in the village Square. It was a cart filled with straw, in which lay something rolled up in a blanket, which might be a corpse, but which quickly they heard people say was 'a sick wife ta'en hame tae the village.' At the unwonted and mournful spectacle Mary shuddered. 'Save us a'!' said she. 'Touns is awfu' plaices! the leevin' carried lik' deid.' But thought of the melancholy sight was quickly pushed from her by the bustling, shoving crowd, laughing, chaffing, gruffly babbling in the sweltering summer day. It was odd, was it not, that the girl had no recollection of the pain she endured when last she stood in the Square? But truly, in more than one way she was another creature, for she was full of health and blood and spirit, with the sense of womanhood freshly awakened in her. Presently it was two o'clock, and with Sandy she pressed her way to her rendezvous with the gamekeeper.

There he was waiting for her. No doubt he had had some drink, for he was in overflowing spirits. He was glad to see Sandy. 'He cudna help bein' gled to see the brither o' his winsome lass,' and he must treat them. In the Square were many places of entertainment, tents constructed of many pieces of wooden framework,—over which were spread and bound blankets and plaids. These were erected at regular intervals of six paces apart on the eastern side of the Square, and thither they must go with him. Sandy went readily in respect of the prospective dram. Mary would fain have declined to go. 'Na, plaise,' she said, 'come and show me the sichts,' for from her earliest days the market booths had

been impressed on her mind as 'the tents of sin.' But the man insisted. 'What for wad she no hae a bun and laimanaid? Wus it tae cross him?' and with hanging head and conscience pricking her, he led her away to the booths, with his strong arm round her waist.

He led her into a tent, where were many people clustered at rough tables, drinking, flirting, shouting; and in a corner was a fiddler playing away briskly. He would have led her into the midst of the throng, but she would not go. She would not pass beyond the table next the door, although he pressed her forward with such violence as he dared use. All her doubt and her fear of him came back with tenfold force. He called for cakes and whisky and 'the laimanaid.' Sweet cakes and whisky he promptly got, but the lemonade was run out. 'Then ony ither fuzzin' stuff,' he cried, but there was none. He had swallowed his dram, and so had Sandy. 'Bring mair whisky,' he shouted to the waiting-woman. 'Noo, Mary, ye maun tak' a dram frae me,' he said, and he set a glass of whisky in her hand. 'Plaise, Mr. Bremmer, am no for't,' said she.

She sat trembling with this cup of iniquity in her hand, for indeed she regarded it as unmitigated evil. That was the creed she had been reared to believe. And if she had drunk it, the first great step of her soul's demoralisation had been wrought out, because she would have felt that she had done wickedly. But while she sat trembling on the brink of the wrong-doing, still feebly saying, 'Oh, am no for't,' Ina Ferguson passed by, staring into the tent as she went. And Ina, catching sight of her, came directly forward and stood before her. 'Mary Macraw!' said she, 'dae ye ken o' yer mither, an' ye sittin' there drinking?' In an instant the glass was set down, half emptied in the process by her trembling hand, and Mary was up, asking, 'What o' my mither?'

'Ye shud ken yersel',' said Ina, with blunt vehemence. 'She's deein'! She was carried the day tae ma auntie's,

tae be nigh the doctar! Ye're her dochtar, I believe!'

Then Mary, with her face blenching through its sunbrowned skin, and with quivering lip, begged the girl to guide her to her mother. She asked Sandy to go with her. For the gamekeeper she had no words. He gripped her rudely and would have detained her; asked her to tryst him again at the same place in an hour, in two hours, or three hours hence. She did not, could not, answer him, would not be detained, but hurried to her mother.

The fact was that old Fraser had early in the day found on the market ground a woman large-boned and able-bodied, suitable for his dairy. 'Gae hame, Jock,' said he thereupon to his ploughman. 'Ye need fetch the seek widow wi' a cairt tae the town here-awa', tae be by han' the doctar. By the time ye're yokin' and here I'll hae a plaice fixt for her,' and the man obeyed the order. The farmer resorted to Widow Ferguson in the Back Street, whom he had known in former days, and to whom, since her widowhood, he had sent a yearly boll of potatoes at harvest time. She, he thought, would take in Widow Macrae in her illness and keep her till her restoration to health. He was ready to pay her, too, for the service, not with his coin, however, but with the widow's own money, for she had earned about a third part of her wages. He came to Widow Ferguson and told the hardship of his case, in having on his hands this sick widow who never would be fit for his work. 'I maun send her oot o' yon. It'll nae dae tae be ruined wi' a doctar's beell, like I'd be if she bides at Knockdry.' He offered a pound, saying it 'wad surely keep her the twa weeks the doctar says she'll tak'.' And Widow Ferguson agreed to receive her, did so, fully conscious that it might rest with her to have the burden of this patient on her hands and in her house for months. She saw, too, that the hard grudging man cared not save to

transfer his own burden to other shoulders, caring not how feeble those shoulders might be. The vulgar rich may calculate and grudge. The poor are full of sympathy for their fellow-sufferers, will ofttimes sacrifice of their little to succour sufferers greater than they who have nought at all. Thus it was that Widow Macrae was carted through the fair. She was 'the sick auld wife' whose case had caused Mary to shudder.

Well the widow knew that the reason for her hasty removal was but a pretext, that the truth was that the farmer wanted to rid himself of her; and while she asked the women to collect her few garments that she might prepare to go, her poor heart died within her, for truly the iron heel of poverty was sorely pressing on her soul. 'He'll be pittin' me on the Boord,' she thought, and the thought was misery and keenest pain. 'Weel, weel,' she said, 'it's a true word, "Whan thou art auld anither shall gird thee an' cairry thee whither thou wouldest not."' But ere she was ready for the way, for her faintness made her pause often in her humble dressing, she had resigned herself to the will and way of Providence. 'He ken's what's best for me! He aye kens and sees till't.' What else could she do? When man turned her out, rejected and despised her, what refuge had she but her trust in Him that ruleth all things? They helped her into the cart, spread a blanket over her as she lay therein, and sent her forward to the village.

The heat of the sun and her mind's turmoil made her very ill by the time she reached the village. In crossing the Square, bitterness even as of death, encompassed her soul, as the hoarse roar of the market-place broke around her. A vision came to her of the many market-days of pride and pleasure which she had spent in that throng. And forthwith she could have cried out in agony, for she was thinking that out there in the heedless multitude were probably her children, unconscious, perhaps heedless of her fate. Well, well, it is a sad, sore world.

Most happy phase of it that some few good Samaritans, more doubtless than are known to fame, are scattered over its surface.

Widow Ferguson went kindly out to her stricken sister, to help to fetch her from the cart into her earth-floored room. And indeed the sister widow was sorely stricken, even so that she seemed to be wandering in her mind. 'Am come, ye see,' she said hysterically, 'i' ma chariat, a puir craitar, but i' ma chariat, na less;—sommat o' a chariat o' fiery trubbilation, lik' what He aft gies them wha lo'e Him.' She had to be lifted down from the cart and carried in, and there she was laid on the low bed, with her widow's cap so clean and white, framing her poor thin white face; her eyes closed in weakness,—perhaps, too, in despair,—so that she looked more like a corpse than a living woman. Then it was that Ina Ferguson from the Newlands came to visit her aunt, the tenant of that humble room. 'Wha's that i' the bed, auntie?'

'Widow Macraw.'

'Widow Macraw! that maun be the mither o' ma neebar lassie.'

'Is she i' the marcat?—Gang oot and gie her word o' what's happened,' said the aunt.

Then Ina briefly told what she knew and thought of the patient's daughter.

Dr. Blake had either noticed or heard of the sorrowful procession of that cart through the market-place, and, full of indignation, he was quickly at the bedside. The patient was seriously exhausted. He got some one to fetch a bottle of wine from his house, and made her drink a liberal glass of it. He would send her beef-tea presently, for beef-tea in plenty and quiet would yet bring her round, he said. And while he was speaking in rushed Mary, followed stolidly by her brother. When the girl saw the wan, worn face, 'Oh! she'll dee!' she cried. 'An' I wusna mindin' I haed a mither! God

forgie me!' and she threw herself sobbing on the little bed.

I dare say it is good to weep when the heart is conscious of wrong, as Mary's heart was conscious now. One look into her mother's face had recalled all the mother's anxious love, all the mother's earnest struggles, in their long day of privation. While she wept by her mother's side and over her, Sandy shuffled to the bedside awkwardly. 'It's a' I hae,' he said, and he set down three half-crowns on the bolster. 'That's a good lad,' said the doctor. 'Mind your mother, lad, and God won't forget you.' Mary would fain have laid down her half-crown, too, but now to her, thoroughly awakened, it somehow seemed a treacherous, sinful coin, and she did not, could not, lay it down for the mother's use.

Dr. Blake encouraged them all. 'She'll come round very quickly,' he said. 'Your mother is not much over forty? Quite a young woman, in fact. You can knit and spin?' he asked her kindly. 'No doubt of it! You'll make a living nicely yet. But you must not think again of heavy work. You are not fit for that.' And a cordial better than kind words or wine was warming the poor woman's heart and reviving her, in the faces of the children she loved. Nor you nor I can tell or guess how her heart had yearned for her bairns—longed and yearned to behold them—in those hard days of toil that had wasted and worn down her life.

When hours had passed, Mary said she must go out for a little. She would come quickly back to her mother, she said. Widow Ferguson followed her to the door. 'Ye're a guid-hairted quean,' said the widow, 'an' am mindit tae warn ye.'

'What o'?' asked Mary hurriedly, for she was in haste.

'O' Black Bremner, the keeper, lassie. He haes snared an' wranged hairts afore yers, puir thing! The curse is upon him, an' he'll nae escaip it,' she answered assuredly.

Mary broke out into weeping. 'I ken somethin' o' it noo,' she said. 'On ma waey tae yer door, I seed Jean i' the passin'. It's sair on ma hairt is ma folly,' and she went on her way.

He came forward just a little inebriated, with a deal of leering, to welcome the girl, blear-eyed with weeping. 'I kent ye wad come back, ma bonny bird!' he cried, as he clutched at her extended hand. 'Whate'er's this?' he asked, looking in wonder at the half-crown piece which she had contrived to pass into his palm.

'I canna hae it! I maunna keep it!' she said, as she wrenched herself from his grip and stood facing him.

'What the deil's cam' ower ye?' he angrily asked.

'I winna hae ony man's siller that's no lik' me and that dinna lo'e me,' she answered gently.

'Wha spake o' looin' ye, ye fule!' said he, quite out of temper.

'Mair need that I shudna be boon' by yer siller,' said she with tears. 'Ye war laidin' me i' slippry waeys, an' noo I see it, we maun pairt. I'll no gang forrit for siller or braws.'

Then in his anger and whisky he swore at her and called her an ill and ugly name. And in the market-place, with the people now crowding around them, she said to them, 'May be I deserve it, friens',' and she took off her long neck ribbon of blue and flung it down, undid her bonnet, tore off the trimming and flung it away, while he cursed and swore and called her 'fule' again and again. 'If I haed ony duds, the puirest, I wad strip aff the goun tae, but I canna dae it the noo,' she said.

'Hoorah for the lassie!' shouted some.

'Ho, ho! Black Bremner! ye're diddled an' dune by ane lass!' cried others.

'Tak' anither glaiss, John!' and in his wrath and drink he would have struck her, but strong men held his arms, and earnest women came about the girl.

'He haesna wranged ye, puir thing?' they asked.

'Na, thank God!' she said in her tears, and they led her away through the throng.

Of course, Mary did not return that night to the Newlands under the escort of the gamekeeper. When she did go home, it was with Ina Ferguson, and in the cart of one of the neighbouring crofters, in which half a dozen other women were also homeward borne. On the road, as they jogged along, the women discussed the incidents of the day; and, great as had been the fair, the passage of the cart from Knockdry, and Mary's 'outcast' with Bremner, were the most interesting features of it for those who knew the man and her. The women all agreed that she 'haed dune the richt thing but i' a wrang waey a'thegither,' and of the truth of the latter part of the proposition Mary was fully conscious now. 'I' deed an' trouth, I wadna be in yer shoon for saxpence aince Hugh Davidson's wife cam' tae heer o' it,' said they all with one voice. Mary, half crying, said her mistress had always been kind to her. 'Weel, may be ye ne'er crossed her. She's an ill ane whan pit til't.' Thus the poor girl was full of fear and apprehension when she got to the little farm in the gloaming.

And although her return was quite timeous, yet in the way ill news will travel, the notable things of the fair had already been reported at Davidson's fireside, and due prominence given to Mary's rupture with his brother-in-law. Mrs. Davidson was full of indignation and resentment. That 'sic a demure jaud o' a lassie as that shud pit a brave man lik' John Bremner tae shaim, an' gie him a red face, i' the licht o' day an' afore folk,' was a thing intolerable. 'The baggage 'll neer venture wi'in airm's length o' me! Am certain she'll nae cam' back! An' we'll hae her jiled for't, Hugh!—jiled, though it cost us oor best coo, the slee limmer!'

But there came the girl in the gloaming, disappointing the woman's expectation of revenge through the Statute 'anent servants in husbandry,' and her coming

surprised the woman not a little. 'Ay, ye're plaisit tae come hame, mem,' she said, when the girl, with faltering step, had got into the centre of the kitchen. 'Ye're plaisit tae come hame, an' a bonny day ye hae haid o' it.' Not wholly certain of the temper of her mistress, not very certain of what she herself was saying, the girl made answer, 'It wus a vera guid day.'

'An' whaur, I wunner, did ye pairt wi' John Bremner? Am hearin' tell ye war passin' kind till him i' the town!' Then the girl saw that the worst was already known, and she stood mute before the accuser. Interpreting her silence as an admission of all she had been told, the woman went at her, 'Ye fause-hairted, double-faced limmer! Ye'd bruik the man's claes on yer back, though ye'd redden his face i' the thrang! Hoo daur ye come intae hoose o' mine i' the dark o' nicht? Wha kens the warthless loun ye hae been gallivantin' an' foregaitherin' wi' i' the road? I'll no hae ye tae come in here i' the dark o' nicht! Mak' awa wi' yersel' whaur ye hae been a' the day, or ma neif'ill fin' yer lug.'

The lassie stood on the floor not comprehending what was said; and as she stood, the woman came to her and struck her with her hard hand a slap that made the room resound. 'Strip aff that goun this minut',' she said, and the children awakened by the din, sat up in their bed and added their voices to the clamour. She was going to strike the girl again, but old Davidson came from the ben-room, saying, 'Wife, haud yer han'! There maun be nae fechtin' here.'

'I'll no thole her an oor under the same roof wi' me!' cried the fury.

'May be that,' said her husband. 'But we'll hae nae fustiwark tae mak' ill waur.'

'Mak' her pit aff ma brither's claes then!'

'Ye better dae it,' said the man.

Mary divested herself of the print frock and laid it on the bed.

'Noo! oot wi' ye! Aff this minut'!' cried the woman, and she shoved the girl from the door.

This is an unpleasant narrative. It was certainly a hard thing to undergo,—to be stripped and turned out in the dark night thus. She stood 'greetin'' a while 'at the end of the house.' Then she dried her tears somewhat and crept into the byre beside the cattle. And how came she to dry her tears? For this cause solely, that she said to herself, 'Thank God! I dinna drenk his whisky!' She could divest herself, nay, she was already bared of all the material things that the man had given to her. If she had sinned in drinking, she felt she could never have wholly put away the evil from her. She had her poor consolation, even in her dire distress.

Day breaks early on our hills in July, and with returning light came some diminution of her sense of present evil, some ease to her exhausted mind, although her plight was grievous enough. There was no course open to her save to return to her poor sick mother. It was hard to heap this trouble upon the mother's personal affliction, but 'it cudna be helpit noo.' And yet to leave the place wrung the poor girl's heart; for the bairns, the first children she had closely known, were dear to her, so that the pain of parting from them gave point and soreness to the mode of her leaving them.

She would have gone away at daybreak, but her clothes, poor clothing truly, 'the auld duds' of the Whitsunday, yet indispensable to her, were in the house, and she must needs get them out. So she sat down once again in the morning sunshine, in keener pain of soul than on that morning when first she went forth into the pasture-field as the new servant of the farm. At length, Hugh Davidson came out to send the cattle to the grass, and finding her, he spoke to her not unkindly 'Ye'll be waitin' for yer claes, nae doot. Noo, the mistress is nae up yet, sae gang in wi'oot speech, an' tak' the duds an' awa wi' ye. It's nae guid yer staipin'

here.' So she went into the house that was no longer her home, and put on her the things which she must wear, collected her other things and tied them up in an apron. And the clock ticked aloud in the silent dwelling, which, with the hearth unlighted, looked cold and cheerless and eerie. She looked on the sleeping children, 'Fair fa' the puir bairns!' she said; then, hearing Mrs. Davidson astir in the other room, she hastily departed.

Ina Ferguson met her not far from the house. 'That's what haes cam' o' it? Whaur dae ye haud for?' This inquiry opened up all her miserable position, for her only course was to seek shelter with Ina's aunt, and how was she, what right had she, to be sheltered and fed there? Her young life had surely become involved and burdened, and, for a moment, she could have wished her life was ended. But Ina asked the question again, and the girl painfully replied that she was bound to her mother, that with her was her only chance of shelter. 'I dinna ken what waey auntie'll dae? Her bit is sma'. But ye maun come tae ma faither's, an' break yer fast ere ye tak' the hull.'

Mary went with her, and they gave her food. Old Ferguson encouraged her too. She should make the Davidsons pay her wages. The harvest must be early also this warm, dry summer, and she would readily find work in the Strath. So she left them before midday and started by the hill ground for the village. She carried her bundle on her arm, and after the custom of her class, she did the journey bare-footed, bearing her shoes in her hand.

You know that she had traversed the hill just the day before, but then, in the gaiety of her heart, she had attended little to the way. Now, in her sadness, she wandered off the track and greatly increased the length of her journey. Weary as she was for want of sleep, dispirited by the events which had befallen her, her wandering was painful, for want and homelessness stared her in the face, so that often she sat down to cry. Then

in crossing a patch of burnt heath more trouble came to her, for as she went eagerly forward, she trode on a heather stump, hardened by the fire, and it penetrated the ball of her right foot, so that to extract it needed a great wrench. Only a few drops of blood oozed from the ragged puncture, but when she had limped a little way it became very painful, and the injured part swelled a great deal. She sat down to rest, but when she got up again, the foot and ankle-joint were stiffened and sore, so that the last mile of the hill was really distressing work.

At last she reached the well in the hollow of the hill-top, and, dejected and weary, she sat by it. Was she the same girl who, only twenty-four hours before, with laughter and bright thoughts, sparkling as the well itself, had drunk of the stream? Too true it is that calamity is most often nigh to us when the heart is lightest. She washed her bleared eyes, and tried to calm herself, in the view of the valley and village, which now seemed close at hand. When she was rested, she set out on what seemed the last stage of her journey, but still she found the injured foot more painful to use. She got upon the farm road, and passed the comfortable steading and the new farmhouse there, and she trudged and limped along. And as she limped, her injured foot chanced to rest on something which came into contact with the sore. Instinctively to relieve it, the left foot was hastily advanced, and in this action she knocked her bare toes against a stone, stripping them of the skin and causing them to bleed amain. This new misfortune quite undid her. She sat down in the ditch by the road-side to inspect her feet, with eyes that were blinded with her tears.

'The Lord be aboot us! Ye gied me a start, lass!' Mary, looking up from the ditch, saw a tall, gaunt man, with his hat heavily trimmed with crape and his throat loosely wrapped by a white muffler with black spots. 'Wha are ye?' he asked, intently gazing at her.

'I hae hurtit ma feet,' she said.

'Puir thing!' he said. 'Whaur's yer hame? Hae ye far tae gang?'

'I haena nae hame!' she answered, breaking into tears afresh. 'I scairce ken whaur I'm gaein'.'

'Odds! that's vera bad! Ye're but a young thing!' She was silent. 'Deed ye gluffed me!' he went on. 'Whan I seed ye wi' the wick o' ma e'e, sittin' there greetin', ye war sae lik' a puir thing we beeried twa week syne. Oich, oich!' said the lanky man, still surveying her wistfully.

'What way will I win tae the village?' asked she, looking at him through her tears.

'I'll tell ye that,' he answered. 'Ye cam' up tae the Square, and rest ye a bit, and get a cloot for yer taes. Come awa', puir queanie!' and he took her hand and helped her out of the ditch, saying, 'Noo, ca' canny.' Submissively she hirpled after him to the farmstead. He led her into the kitchen of the farmhouse, by the back door, and bade her sit down. 'Am maister here, lassie; an' they ca' me Jaimes Moffat. I'll sen' ben the wumman tae ye.'

A woman came and gave her a rag to bind her bleeding toes, but could find nothing to tie round the swollen right foot. And while Mary sat, seeing all things around her as in a dream confused, James Moffat returned.

'Confoond it, woman!' he cried, 'hae ye nae given her water to wash her feet? Gae, fetch it stracht! Ye hae nae mair sense than a nowt! Noo, lassie,' he continued, 'ye hae nae hame, ye sed. What's yer name, an' whaur ye gaein'?'

'Am Mary Macraw, an' ma mither's yont i' the village seeck.'

'Hoo! I hae ye noo! But ye canna be the brave lass that shaimed black Jock Bremner yestreen at the fair?'

'Jist a' that's for her,' said Mary shamefacedly, 'an' I tint ma plaice through it.'

'Na lassie,' he said to her kindly, 'dinna blush for't.

Ye did weel an' braively. Ye maun bide a wee an' get some mait, comin' off the hull. An' I ken aboot yer mither. I telt Fraser he was a dottrel fule! The eediat haid as muckle mair butter an' cheese by ordinair that wad pay her cost and wage oot ower an' agen, though he keepit her tae skim the milk an' see till the kirnin' an' nae mair. 'Aith, she wadna gang by Braefut for a hame were she weel the day. Och, och! lassie! ye're unco lik' the puir thing that's noo gane frae us. It's a sair warld, lassie!' and again he went away.

She had her feet washed and bound up, and was supplied with food. There was a cart going to the village with a drill harrow after six o'clock, and so she rested till that hour, and was then conveyed into the Back Street. The stricken mother was too deep in affliction much to feel this aggravation of distress. 'Weel, weel!' she said. '*He* warks his ain waey. We canna onderstan' it! We're puir things a'!' Widow Ferguson had expected this result of yesterday's outbreak. They had one common comfort, which was this,—that not more than three weeks lay between them and harvest, and Sandy's half-crowns would keep the girl in meal for so long. Mary told them that the farmer at Braefoot had offered her harvest work, but kindly as he had entreated her, her mind rebelled against returning to him if her sickle could find employment elsewhere. No wonder, for her soul was full of deadly fear of accepting the kindnesses of man. 'He's anither kind a'thegither, is Jaimes Moffat,' said Widow Ferguson. 'He used aince tae tak' a bit booze i' the inn, but am telt he's gien it ower clean e'er since the mason's dochter took badly. She's deid, puir lassie! and beeried, weeks gane by.'

'Be lik' he was fond o' her?' asked Mary.

'Folk clavers as muckle.'

'Puir man!' said the maiden, as she thought of his feeling as he had traced some resemblance of the dead girl in herself. Then, too, she saw that there might be

another form of kindness and tenderness in the heart of man besides that miserable, hideous spectre of it which had tempted and assailed her.

She was not, however, to search out the specialities of Moffat's character at that time. Before his crops were ripened for the harvest, even before the first of August, Dr. Blake procured for her an engagement at Fernbank shooting lodge, in her native braes of Langrig. There the Rev. Mr. Cresswell, an English clergyman, had had for many years a modest establishment, at which, with his wife, he spent the three months of autumn yearly, —sometimes a month or two of spring. He enjoyed his little bit of grouse-shooting in the way in which it is most to be enjoyed, walking for the exercise chiefly, accompanied over the hill-ground by his wife in good weather, shooting game for his table only, with a few brace at times for friends. To Fernbank, then, the young girl went as undermaid of all work, a fortnight before Moffat came to ask her to join his harvest-band. The worthy man was disappointed. He found her mother spinning at the fireside, in health almost restored. She had got her wheel and gearing brought in by a cart which came laden with peat for sale. But finding the daughter gone, said the farmer, 'Wumman, I'm mindit ye can be o' guid tae me and nae hurt tae yoursel'. Dinna ye mak' ony change till I'll see ye whan the corn is in. I canna spaik freely o' it the noo, bein' tae be busy wi' the hairst.'

And Moffat did see her in the first days of October. His proposal was, 'I gie ye, Widow Macraw, twa notes. That's nae muckle, but I'll gie ye a plaice for yersel' an' yer cost. I'll no ask muckle wark o' ye, but ye'll hae the key o' the milk, and the weicht o' the hens, an' ye'll see tae the milkin' and the kirnin', and ye'll be 'sponsible for the produce. I'm nae pittin' aff ane o' the dames that's on the toun the noo.'

And the widow accepted the offer thankfully, and at Martinmas went to Braefoot. Truly James Moffat was

a man wise in his generation. Being himself unmarried, a prudent and conscientious woman was very valuable to him. She has now been with him ten years, and he says 'That auld wife's mair tae me nor twa score poons ilka year since she came tae me. It's wunnerfu' what a hantel siller cam's oot o' a wheen hens' nests an' the lik'.' But it never will occur to him to increase the widow's wages from the original two pounds by the half year. 'She has nae need o' mair wages! Wha's complainin'?' asks he.

But indeed the Widow Macraw has much reason for gratitude to both Providence and him, for her days are full of usefulness, plenty, and peace. And her daughter Mary is the mistress of that farmhouse and steading to which ten years ago she followed the kindly man, halt and blear-eyed with weeping. Somehow he had fixed in his mind that she was the image of one whom he had loved and lost—lost by death, that form of loss which gives liveliest impress of loveliness gone from us. And this Mary whom he now has, has many qualities which suit her to be the wife of James Moffat, in which the love he lost was wholly lacking. Good sense is so much better than sentiment in the everyday work of life, such work and life as are presented on farmsteadings. But in many ways Mary Macraw has improved the conditions of her husband's life. Bound to him by gratitude as well as affection, his happiness is her first object. And to the simple, kindly man, she is dawtie and darling and all. I, friend of the worthy pair, stand by beholding and am glad. Once and again he has asked me whether I did not think her 'vera lik' puir Lizzie Mowat.' But looking at this buxom, full-sized woman, I can trace no resemblance to our dear dead friend. I can only account for Moffat's fancy by deeming that he is specially retentive of his first impression, that vision of the tearful face of the young girl as she sat weeping by the wayside.