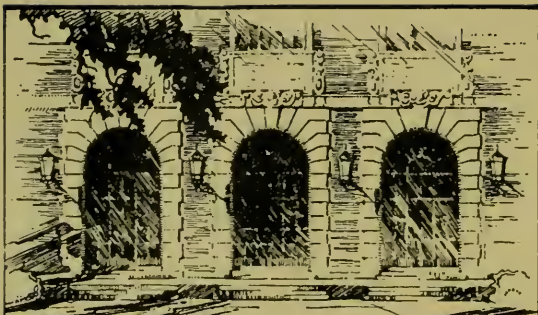


COLVILLE
OF THE
GUARDS



AUTHOR OF
THE ROMANCE OF WAR

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COLVILLE OF THE GUARDS

BY

JAMES GRANT

AUTHOR OF

“THE ROMANCE OF WAR,” “THE CAMERONIANS,”

“THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER,”

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,
13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1885.

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COLVILLE OF THE GUARDS.

CHAPTER I.

BIRKWOODBRAE.

‘You are a dear and good-hearted jewel, Mary!’ said Ellinor. ‘How you can constantly face and soothe the sorrows and miseries of all these poor people, I cannot conceive; I am not selfish, I hope, and yet the frequent task would be too much for me.’

‘You are not without a tender heart,’ replied Mary, as she set down her little hand-basket, now empty. ‘I have paid but one visit to-day—a very sorrowful one—and I am glad to be back again in our

own pretty home. When I saw old Elspat the funeral was over, and dear Dr. Wodrow had brought her back to the little lonely cottage from which her husband had been borne away. It was so sad and strange to see the empty bed, with a plate of salt upon the pillow, and the outline of his coffin still on the coverlet, and the now useless drugs and phials on a little table close by—sad reminiscences that only served to torture poor Elspat, whose grey head the minister patted kindly, while telling her, in the usual stereotyped way, that whom He loved He chastened—that man is cut down like a reed—all flesh is grass, and so forth. But old Elspat shall not live alone now—she is to come here, and be a kind of factotum for us.’

‘That is like your kind, considerate heart, Mary; always thinking of others and never of yourself.’

‘When I think of the brightness of our own home, Ellinor—though death has

twice darkened it—and compare it with that of old Elspat, my heart throbs with alternate gratitude and sorrow.’

‘Poor Elspat Gordon.’

The speakers were sisters, two bright and handsome girls, one of whom had just returned from an errand of charity and benevolence, while the younger was seated in a garden before her easel and paint-block, on which she was depicting, for perhaps the twentieth time, the features of their home, Birkwoodbrae—works of art in which their favourite fox-terrier Jack always bore a prominent part; and Jack, his collar duly garlanded with fresh rosebuds and daisies, was now crouched at the feet of the fair artist.

Mary Wellwood was fair-haired, with darkly-lashed eyes of violet-blue. Many would call her very handsome, but few merely pretty. She was far beyond the latter phrase. With all its soft beauty and dimples, there were too much decision

and character in her face to justify the simple term prettiness, while it was a face to haunt one a life long!

Two years younger than Mary, Ellinor was now twenty. Her dark hazel eyes were winning in expression, and, like Mary's, longly-lashed, and what lovely lips she had for kisses! Hers was no button of a mouth, however. Critics might say that it was a trifle too large; but her lips were beautifully curved, red, and alluring, often smiling, and showing the pure, pearl-like teeth within; and yet, when not smiling, the normal expression of Ellinor's face was thoughtful.

The orphan daughters of Colonel Wellwood—a Crimean veteran—the two girls lived alone in their pretty sequestered home at Birkwoodbrae. They had not a female relation in the world whom they could have invited to share it; and though sometimes propriety suggested a matron or chaperone as a necessity to two hand-

some and ladylike girls, living almost under the shadow of the manse, and as the minister, Dr. Wodrow, had been left by their father on his death-bed a species of guardian to them, 'why hamper themselves with some uncomfortable old frump, when they could be perfectly happy without her, with their father's old servants about them?' was always the after reflection of each.

Thus for three years the time had glided away, and Mary's life we shall show to have been a busy, active, and useful one; adding to and nearly doubling indeed the little income left them by their father, through her own efforts in the production and sale of the agricultural produce of the few acres of Birkwoodbrae, with a skill and independence of spirit that won the admiration and respect of all who knew her.

Yet the house they loved so well, and the patch of land around it, did not belong to the orphan sisters.

The heir of the entail—for, according to ‘Shaw’s Index,’ small though the property of Birkwoodbrae might be, it had been entailed as far back as 1696, with date of tailzie 1694, by Ronald Wellwood, a remote ancestor, who was one of the many victims of King William’s treachery at Darien—the heir of entail, we say, held a lucrative diplomatic appointment abroad, and left his two nieces in undisturbed enjoyment of the house and lands.

Thus the latter, in Mary’s care, had become quite a little farm, the produce of which, in grazing—even in grain—butter, eggs, and poultry, doubled, as we have said, the pittance left to her and her sister by their father, the improvident old colonel.

In the words of Herbert’s *Jacula Prudentum*, Mary Wellwood’s motto had ever been, ‘Help thyself and God will help thee.’

The house of Birkwoodbrae was a little

two-storied villa, with pretty oriel windows, about which the monthly roses, clematis, and virginia creeper clambered: and it had been engrafted by the colonel on an old farmhouse, the abode of his ancestors, which had two crow-stepped gables and a huge square ingle-lum—the later being now the ample kitchen fireplace of the new residence, and in the remote quarter of the little household.

A lintel over the door that now led to the barnyard told the date of this portion of the mansion, as it bore the legend often repeated by Mary:—

‘BLISSIT BE GOD FOR AL HIS GIFTIS. R. W. 1642,’

and showed that it had outlived the wars of the Covenant and the strife that ended at Killiecrankie; and by its wall there grew a hoary pear-tree, called a longovil—the name of a kind of pear introduced into Scotland by Queen Mary of Guise, the Duchess of Longueville.

This part of the house was, or used to

be haunted by a goblin known as 'the Darien Ghost,' a spectre that used to appear during the blustering winds of March, on the anniversary of the storming and sack of Fort St. Andrew by the Spaniards, when a thousand Scotsmen perished, among them, Ronald, the Laird or Gude-man of Birkwoodbrae. This ghost was a heavily-booted one, with spurs that were heard to jingle as it went; and it was wont to appear by the bedside of some sleeping visitor, over whom it would bend with pallid face and gleaming eyes; and those who had found courage enough to strike at the figure with hand or sword, found, to their dismay, that notwithstanding his heavy-heeled boots, by some idiosyncrasy, peculiar perhaps to ghosts, the stroke passed unimpeded *through it*; but Mary averred that since the railway had come through Strathearn, less and less had been seen of the Darien spectre, and now it came no more.

Around the house were groups of lovely silver birches, the 'siller birks' that gave the place its name; in front the ground sloped gently downward, till the little garden, with its well-kept plots and parterres of flowers, ended in a park of emerald green grass, where the spotlessly white sheep and brindled cattle grazed amid the sweetest sylvan scenery, the vivid colours of which were now brought forth by the fleecy whiteness of the clouds, the deep blue of the sky, and the brilliance of the sunshine; and, as William Black has it, 'I have heard Mr. Millais declare that three hours' sunshine in Scotland is worth three months of it at Cairo.'

When Mary came forth into the garden again, she wore an old straw hat to save her complexion from the glare, and had the smartest and most becoming of lawn-tennis aprons pinned over her dress, with Swedish gloves upon her hands, as she proceeded to snip and train some strag-

gling sprays of roses about the walls of the house, and seemed to do so with loving and gentle care, as if the said house was a thing of life, and sensible of the love she bore it; while uttering many a yelp and gurgle, Jack, the fox-terrier, overwhelmed her with the wildest of canine caresses.

Now Jack was deemed a wonderful 'doggie' in his way, and had been the gift of Elspat's husband, an old Gordon Highlander, who had followed Roberts to victory, and had Jack by his side in more than one battle in Afghanistan. Jack was all muscle, and white as snow, save two tan-coloured spots, one over the right eye and the other in the centre of his back. He was the perilous enemy of all dogs, and cats too, and at the sight of one or other his muscles grew tense, his hair bristled up, and he showed his molar tusks; but otherwise he was absurdly

meek and gentle, and in appearance belied his combative nature.

‘Is it not strange, Ellinor,’ said Mary, resuming the subject of their conversation, ‘that Elspat’s husband, who never recovered from the wound received three years ago in a battle in India, had a presentiment that he would die of it, and on the anniversary of the very day, hour, and moment he was hit, he expired? Yes, Jack, and you, my dear little doggie, were there too,’ she added, nestling Jack’s head in her pretty neck. ‘In spite of all that Dr. Wodrow said and inveighed against superstition, the piper would lead the funeral party thrice *deisal-wise* round the burial-ground before entering it.’

‘And no doubt the doctor would quote his ancestor’s famous *Analecta*,’ said Ellinor.

‘On that occasion he did not,’ replied Mary; ‘but it’s too bad of you, Ellinor, to

quiz the dear old man, who does his duty so well. I always recall what papa used to say, that no one who does not try with all the strength one possesses to do some good to those about them, can possibly say they do their best to live usefully and honestly. Oh, Ellinor, what a delicate arum lily you have there!' Mary suddenly exclaimed.

'I am putting it in my foreground. It came with some lovely peaches.'

'From Robert Wodrow?'

'Yes,' replied Ellinor, with a soft and pleased smile, for thereby hung a tale, as young Robert Wodrow (of whom more anon), the minister's only son, from his boyhood had sighed for Ellinor, and was never perfectly happy but when with her, and, like the lover of Rosamund Gray, 'he could make her admire the scenes he admired, fancy the wild flowers he fancied, watch the clouds he was watching, and not unfrequently repeat to her the

poetry which he loved, and make her love it too.'

And so, in early youth, the boy and girl had grown fond of each other—far fonder than either of them at first suspected.

'By the way,' said Mary, suddenly, and pausing in the act of snipping off a decayed rose with her garden scissors, 'the Dunkeld family are back at Craigmhor.'

'With visitors, of course?'

'As usual—gentlemen to shoot when the season opens in a week or two; and one, a Captain Colville—a very handsome man—is, I hear, the intended of that haughty girl, Blanche Galloway.'

'Well, I am not ill-natured,' said Ellinor, with her pretty head on one side, as she reproduced Robert Wodrow's lily in flake-white; 'but the man who marries Blanche won't have his sorrows to seek. However, we shall not call, unless they do so first, of course; so these people are nothing to us.'

‘Nay,’ said Mary; ‘with visitors at Craigmhor, the housekeeper must necessarily require more eggs, fowls, flowers, and I know not what.’

‘Sending these things to market at Perth or Forteviot is all very well, but I do dislike orders from the great folks at the manor house.’

‘So do I, but needs must, you know, Ellinor.’

‘What would papa have thought?’

‘Had he thought more at times we had not been reduced to such shifts—not that I upbraid him, poor old man.’

‘I detest catering for these great folks, who ignore our existence, save by a bow—more often a stare—at church,’ persisted Ellinor.

‘I care not—together we are independent, and happy here as the day is long: are not you so, Ellinor?’

‘Yes; but how if one of us were to get married? Such things happen.’

‘Don’t speculate on that, though I think Robert Wodrow does,’ said Mary, with something between a laugh and a sigh, as she took her way to the hen-court to see after her fowls.

CHAPTER II.

MARY'S ADVENTURE.

ON the following day, after seeing old Elspat duly installed in one of the cosiest rooms of the old portion of the mansion as a kind of housekeeper, Mary Wellwood put on her garden-hat, brought forth her fishing-tackle, tied a pretty basket round her waist, and, taking her rod, a dainty little one—the gift of Ellinor's admirer, Robert Wodrow—set forth, accompanied by Jack, to get a trout or two from the May, for Mary was an expert angler, giving, ere she departed, a last look at her favourite hen, with a callow brood of primrose-coloured chickens, over which she clucked noisily in the sunshine amid a

wisp of straw, while eyeing Jack the terrier with keen alarm and antagonism.

Mary left Ellinor again at her easel, and smiled when she saw that the latter had given some finishing touches to her costume, and had stuck a sprig in her lace collarette, in expectation of a visit from Robert Wodrow and his mother. She knew well of the loving friendship and incipient regard that had long existed between Rob and Ellinor; and that as friends of years' standing each had begun—she hoped—to feel that in all the world the other was the dearest, and a union for life would of course follow.

But young Wodrow, who was now past his twentieth year, had 'his way to make' in the world, and, till he had graduated in medicine, matrimony was not to be seriously thought of.

She had one or two errands of mercy to fulfil ere she reached the river side, and began to put her rod together, and

deftly did so with purpose-like little hands, that were cased in her garden-gloves, while Jack kept close by her side. In the woods there were no cats to worry, but he had sharp eyes for the rabbits that scudded about—sharp as any poacher or game-keeper could have.

The day was a bright and lovely one in summer. The pale primrose had come and gone, and the bluebells were already fading out of the woods; the sorrel was becoming redder, and the wild strawberry, with its little white flowerets, was peeping out in unlikely places. The grass in the meadows was green and studded with golden buttercups, and the voice of the cushat dove could be heard at times among the silver birches—the ‘siller birks’ that cast their quivering and aspen-like shadows on the waters of the bonnie May, which is a fine stream for trout, ten miles in length, from its rise among the Ochils to its confluence with the lovely Earn.

Everywhere here the scenery is rich and beautiful, and the banks of the May are very varied. In one part a long and deep channel has been worn by its waters through the living rocks which almost close above it, and far down below they gurgle in obscurity with a deep and mysterious sound. At another place they pour in silver spray over a linn, thirty feet in height, and form a beautiful cascade, and everywhere the glen scenery is picturesque and richly wooded with the graceful silver birch, which is so characteristic of the Scottish Highlands, where it climbs boldly the brows of the steepest hills and rocks, though the oak prevails in the valleys of the Grampians.

There had been recently a 'spate,' or summer flood in the river, so the trout took to the fly greedily, and intent on her task. Mary had nearly filled the little basket that hung at her waist with fish—two or three of which weighed heavily—

and cost her little fingers no small trouble to disengage the hook from their gills, ere she became aware that she had a companion in her sport, of which she was very fond. But though Mary loved to dangle a little rod over a brook that teemed with finny denizens, it was, of course, quite beyond her strength or skill to hold a big rod over a river for the chance of hooking a 'pounder.'

Mary Wellwood had reached a part of the stream where it was more difficult to fish, as its banks were thickly wooded, when she saw near her, similarly occupied, a gentleman, who, though he did not seem to watch her, certainly did so, for to his eyes angling seemed an odd amusement for a young girl—a lady especially—though it is not more so than archery, and certainly not so much as bringing down a grouse upon the wing, a feat attempted by some damsels now-a-days.

Clad in a rough tweed suit, with fishing-

boots that came above his knees, a straw hat, the band of which was garnished with flies and lines, he was a man above the middle height, apparently nearer thirty than twenty, handsome in figure and in face. The latter was of a rich, dark complexion, with regular features; a heavy, dark brown moustache, and unmistakably keen hazel eyes. He was a man with a fine air and of decided presence.

He had been observing Mary Wellwood for some time before she was aware of his presence or vicinity, and the consequence was that for each trout he caught the girl caught three; for while she was solely intent on making the fly, with which her hook was baited, alight on the eddying water in the most delicate manner directly above where she supposed the fish to be, he was, as he would have phrased it, 'taking stock' of her lissom and graceful figure, which her tight costume showed to the utmost advantage as she stooped over

the stream; the perfect form of her 'thoroughbred' ears and hands, and the exceeding fairness of her skin, which was of that snowy kind which usually accompanies light brown hair, and Mary's was of a brilliant light brown, shot with gold, when the ruddy flakes of sunshine struck it through the trees aslant.

Desirous of getting away alike from his observation and vicinity, Mary lifted her line in haste, but, alas! it was caught by the root of a silver birch, which held it fast a little beneath the water, and from which, after drawing off her gloves, she sought in vain to disentangle it. Here was a dilemma.

'Permit me?' said the stranger, planting his rod in the turf, and lifting his hat as he came towards her. He at once succeeded in releasing her hook and line, while Jack at once fraternised with him.

'Thanks—thank you so much,' said Mary, colouring a little, as she quickly

wound the line up, and with a bow passed on to a part of the stream some yards further down; the stranger had looked at her shapely white hand, as if he longed to take it within his own, and, as if by magnetism, was strongly attracted towards it.

But Mary—who intended to catch just one more fish—had barely resumed her operations before a most unforeseen mishap occurred to her. After a 'spate,' the water of the May is often dark in some places, and to reach a pool wherein she knew by past experience some fine trout were sure to be lurking, by the assistance of a stone she reached a flat boulder fully six feet from the bank, but her foot—light though it was—had barely left the former ere it turned over in the current and vanished, leaving her isolated amid the stream, whereat her terrier yelped and barked furiously.

The distance was too great for her to

leap; moreover, the bank was steep there, and to fall would end in a complete immersion, and, gathering her skirts above her little booted feet, she looked around her with a comical air of perplexity and dismay, which her companion of the rod was not slow to perceive, and again he instantly approached, but this time with an absolute smile rippling all over his face.

‘You cannot leap this distance without risk, and so must permit me to assist you again,’ said he, stepping at once into the water, which rose midway up his long fishing-boots. He put an arm round her—a strong arm she felt it to be—and at once lifted her to the bank.

‘I have to thank you again, sir,’ said Mary, blushing in earnest now.

‘I am so glad that I was within sight—you were quite in a scrape, perched on that fragment of rock, with the dark water eddying round you,’ said he, again lifting

his hat; 'but perhaps you can repay me by indicating the nearest path to Craigmhor?'

Mary did so, on which, still lingering near, he remarked,

'And so these are the Birks of Invermay, so famed in Scottish song, and story, too, I believe? It is indeed a lovely spot!'

'Lovely, indeed,' replied Mary, as the praise of her native glen went straight to her heart; 'even we, who live here all the year round, never tire of its beauty.'

'I am here for the first time; I came to this quarter only yesterday, and the alternately bold and sylvan nature of the scenery impressed me greatly. You must be fond of fishing,' he added, with a well-bred smile, 'and seem more expert with your rod than I.'

'But I only know the May,' replied Mary, taking her rod to pieces as a hint that she was about to withdraw, on which the stranger began to do the same.

‘I have fished for trout in many places—even in the Lake of Geneva,’ said he, ‘and, curiously enough, the fish there are precisely the same as those in Lough Neagh in Ireland.’

‘In weather so clear and light as this—even after flood—it is no easy task to lure them to destruction here,’ replied Mary, ‘and a light enough basket is often carried home, even from the best parts of the stream.’

‘Such has been my fortune to-day,’ said he, as he quietly proceeded by her side; but now Mary remembered that the path she had indicated to him as leading to Craigmhor was also the one she had to pursue to reach Birkwoodbrae.

‘Our May trout are very beautiful, and are as good in quality as in appearance,’ remarked Mary, scarcely knowing what to say.

‘I hope you do not venture to such places as this in winter,’ said he, pointing

to some rocks that overhung the shaded stream.

‘Why?’ asked Mary, laughing.

‘Because, when the water freezes—as I suppose it does—and these rocks are covered with snow, there must be danger.’

‘I fear you look at them with a Londoner’s eyes.’

‘I am a Londoner—in one fashion—Captain Colville of the Guards.’

‘Oh, I do not fear the snow,’ said Mary; ‘I have been up on the summit of yonder hill when it was covered deep with snow,’ she added, pointing to a spur of the Ochils, while her eyes kindled, for under the shadow of those mountains she was born; ‘but I was only a child then.’

‘And what object took you up at such a time, may I ask?’

‘To save a wee pet lamb, that else must have perished in the snow.’

‘And did you carry it down?’

‘Yes—of course.’

‘By Jove!’ exclaimed the Guardsman, twirling his moustache.

‘We call that place Crow Court,’ said Mary.

‘Why?’ he asked.

‘Because sometimes in summer the crows collect there in such numbers that the green hillside is blackened with them, as if they had all been summoned for the occasion; and sometimes they have been known to wait for a day or two while other crows were winging their way hither from every quarter of the sky. Then a great clamour and noise ensue among them, and the whole will fall upon one or two crows that have been guilty of something, and after picking and rending them to death they disperse in flights as they came.’

The Guardsman knew not what to make of this bit of natural history, and could only stroke his moustache again.

Something in this girl’s sweet but de-

terminated profile—something in the freshness of her character, and her slightly grave manner, as that of one already accustomed, but gently, to rule others, had a strange charm for Leslie Colville—for such was his name—though he was evidently a man accustomed to the ways of West-End belles and Belgravian mammas. Yet this girl never flattered him even by a smile, and her violet-blue eyes met his keen dark hazel ones as calmly as if their sexes were reversed, while her whole manner had the provoking indifference and the conscious air of self-possession which can only be acquired in the best society; and yet, to his very critical eye, her costume was rather unsuited to the atmosphere of Regent Street and Tyburnia, being extremely plain, and destitute of every accessory in the way of brooch, bracelet, ring, or even the inevitable bow.

To him it seemed quite refreshing to talk to a girl who, with all her loveliness,

evidently seemed not to know how to *flirt* or even think about it.

‘I must now bid you good-morning,’ said Mary, on reaching a hedge-bordered path that led to her home.

‘What is the name of that house so charmingly embosomed among birches?’ he asked.

‘Birkwoodbrae.’

‘Birkwoodbrae—indeed!’ he repeated, with a start that Mary detected, but believed it to be simulated, and felt somewhat offended in consequence.

‘The name seems to interest you,’ said she, coldly, almost with hauteur.

‘Do you reside there?’ he asked, while regarding her so curiously that Mary felt her natural colour deepen.

‘Yes, and have done so since my father’s death,’ and, bowing again, she quickly withdrew, while he, with hat in hand, looked after her.

‘These are the last trout we shall

have for a time—of my own fishing at least, Ellinor,' said Mary, as she relieved herself of the basket and told of the forenoon adventures.

'Why?'

'I have no wish to be escorted by any of the visitors at Craigmhor; least of all by Captain Colville, the *fiancé*, as I understand he is, of that intolerable girl, Blanche Galloway.'

'I should think not,' replied Ellinor, laughing at her sister's unusual air of annoyance.

But the sisters had not heard the last of Captain Leslie Colville.

CHAPTER III.

THE INTRODUCTION.

A DAY or two after the rencontre we have narrated, when the sisters were quietly reading in their little drawing-room, the curtained windows of which opened to the lovely glen, through which May flows, visitors were announced—two strangers and their old friend the parish minister.

The latter entered, hat in hand, with the cheery confidence of one who knew he was welcome, saying,

‘My dear girls, allow me to introduce two new friends—Captain Colville and Sir Redmond Sleath—Miss Wellwood—Miss Ellinor Wellwood.’

A few well-bred bows, with the sub-

sequent inevitable remarks about the weather followed, and as all seated themselves, Dr. Wodrow said,

‘ We have had a long ramble by the Linn, and even as far as the King’s Haugh, and have just dropped in to have a cup of afternoon tea, my dears.’

Mary sweetly gave a smile of welcome and assent, as her hand went to the bell.

The old minister, who knew that for reasons yet to be explained, Captain Colville was anxious to see once more the fair girl whom he had met and succoured by Mayside, had artfully arranged the proper introduction, which had now come to pass, and the end of which he—good, easy, and unthinking man—could little then foresee.

Sir Redmond, as he was introduced to Mary, took his glass out of his right eye, where it had hitherto been, and placed it in his left to focus Ellinor when introduced to her, each time bowing very low, yet

with an expression of appreciative scrutiny in his face.

The transference of his glass from eye to eye was perhaps a small matter in one way, yet in another it was very indicative of the man's cool *insouciance* of character and bearing.

On the unexpected arrival of these visitors, the first thoughts of the sisters were that their household furniture was decidedly the worse for the wear, that it was all old-fashioned, and that the curtains, carpets, and chairs were all toned down by time; yet everything was scrupulously clean, and in all its details Birkwoodbrae was evidently the home of gentlewomen of taste and refinement. Flowers, artistically sorted, were distributed wherever they might be placed with propriety, with all the pretty trifles and nick-nacks peculiar to the atmosphere of 'the British drawing-room,' while the newest music lay upon the open piano, and Colville's observ-

ant eye quickly detected the latest novels and illustrated papers too.

‘Miss Wellwood and I are already old friends,’ said Captain Colville, with a pleasant smile, as he slid at once into conversation with Mary, laughingly, about their meeting by the river.

‘You have not been fishing for some days past, Miss Wellwood,’ he remarked, incidentally.

‘No, I have been otherwise occupied,’ replied Mary, as she thought ‘he has been looking for me, or has missed me,’ and she knew not whether to be flattered or provoked by the discovery, while, with secret pleasure, Colville was looking into her minute and handsome face, with its starry blue eyes, and tender, mobile mouth—a face as rare in its candour and innocence of expression as in its delicate beauty.

Sir Redmond Sleath—of whom more anon—was tall, fair-haired, and undoubtedly handsome, with a tawny or blonde

moustache, and regular features. He was every way the style of man to please a woman's fancy, yet to those who watched him closely it was evident that his blue eyes—for they were a species of cold China blue rather than grey—had a shifty, almost dishonest expression, and that no smile ever pervaded them, even when his lips laughed.

He was in morning costume, with accurately fitting, light-coloured gloves, and a dainty 'button-hole' in the lapel of his black coat; while Colville wore a dark velvet shooting-coat and tan gaiters, his thick, brown hair carefully dressed, his dark moustache pointed, a plain signet ring glittering on his strong brown hand—an onyx, which bore, as Ellinor's sharp, artistic eye observed, the Wellwood crest, or one uncommonly like it—a demi-lion rampant; but then the crests of so many families are the same.

Dr. Wodrow, the minister of Invermay

(called of old the Kirktown of Mailler), was a tall, stout, and more than fine-looking man, with aquiline features, and a massive forehead, from which his hair, very full in quantity, and now silvery white, seemed to start up in Jove-like spouts, to fall behind over his ears and neck. He had keen, dark-grey eyes, always a pleasant smile, with a calm, kind, and dignified, if not somewhat pompous, manner, born, perhaps, of the consciousness that, after the laird, he was a chief man in the parish.

His one little vanity, or pet weakness, was pride in his descent from the pious but superstitious old author of 'Analecta Scotica,' and other almost forgotten works, but who was a great man in his time, before and after the Treaty of Union, and in honour of whom he had named his only son 'Robert.'

The afternoon tea proceeded in due course, served in fine old dragon china,

brought in by old Elspat, a hard-featured little woman, in deep black, owing to her recent bereavement, who curtsied in an old-fashioned way to each and all, and with whom the minister shook hands, somewhat to the surprise of his London friends.

‘What a splendid type of dog you have here, Miss Wellwood—all muscle and sinew—half bull, half fox terrier,’ said Colville, in a pause of the conversation, patting Jack, who was nestling close to Mary’s skirt, for the captain deemed rightly that her dog was a safe thing to enlarge upon.

‘He is indeed a pet—the dearest of dogs,’ she replied, tickling Jack’s ears, and getting a lick of his red tongue in return.

‘Are you not afraid of him?’ asked Sir Redmond, a little nervously.

‘Afraid of Jack—I should think not!’ replied Mary, laughing.

But somehow Jack seemed to have an antipathy for the baronet, and growled and showed his molar tusks very unmistakably each time that personage focussed him with his eyeglass.

The cabinet portrait of an old officer, in uniform with epaulettes and one or two medals, seemed to attract the interest of Leslie Colville.

‘That is papa,’ said Mary, in an explanatory tone.

‘Ah, he was in the service, then,’ said the captain, smiling. ‘So am I—in the Scots Guards.’

‘The Scots Guards! Then perhaps you know our cousin, Captain Wellwood.’

‘Of course I know him intimately,’ he replied, with some hesitation, while colouring deeply.

Mary thought there was something strange in his manner, as he spoke in a low and indistinct voice, heard by herself alone, so she pursued the, to her, rather

distasteful subject no further, but the captain added,

‘A lucky dog—he has succeeded lately to a pot of money—quite a fortune, in fact.’

‘Lucky indeed,’ assented Sir Redmond. ‘By Jove, there is nothing like money for enabling one to enjoy life. Don’t you think so, doctor?’

‘No,’ replied the minister, shaking his white head, ‘I agree with my worthy ancestor, who remarks, in the third volume of his *Analecta*, that “wealth is apt to abate the godly habits of a people.” Of course, Sir Redmond, you have read Wodrow’s *Analecta*.’

‘Sorry to say, my dear sir, that I never heard of it.’

‘Indeed. It was the labour of twenty-seven years. Thus, you may see that he was unlike Hué, the learned Bishop of Avranches, who used to say that all human learning could be comprised in one volume folio.’

Sir Redmond felt himself somewhat at a loss here, and ignoring the minister, whom he deemed 'an old parish pump,' he turned again to Ellinor Wellwood, some of whose framed landscapes drew attention to her merits as an amateur artist, and led to the production of a portfolio of her sketches, over which the baronet hung, as well as over herself, in real or well-simulated admiration.

The latter could scarcely be, as Ellinor had so many personal attractions, her long lashes imparted such softness to her dark hazel eyes, and the contour of her head and neck seemed so graceful and ladylike as Sir Redmond stooped over her, and complimented her artistic efforts.

Meanwhile Jack, with his hair bristling up, and his bandy legs planted firmly on the carpet, was growling, snarling, and showing such manifestations of making his tusks acquainted with the baronet's calves or ankles, that he had to be igno-

miniously taken out of the room by Elspat.

‘Dogs have strange instincts and antipathies,’ said Dr. Wodrow, rather unluckily, and unaware of all his words implied. ‘Ah,’ he added, as Ellinor displayed one of her drawings, ‘that is the Holy Hill of Forteviot, and these stones you see depicted among the turf possess a curious legend—the story of a miller’s daughter who married a king—a story you must get Miss Wellwood to tell you one of these days. And so you have given old Elspat a home here, Mary,’ he added, smoothing her bright hair with his hand, as he had been wont to do when she was a child, caressingly.

‘Yes, for Ellinor and I both love the poor old creature.’

‘You are one after God’s own heart, Mary,’ said the minister, his grey eyes kindling as he spoke.

‘We have never forgotten the strange weird dream—if dream it was—she had in the winter night before dear papa died.’

‘And this dream?’ said Captain Colville, inquiringly, and regarding the girl’s face with genuine interest.

‘Was a waking one—tell him, Mary,’ said Dr. Wodrow, seeing that she hesitated to speak of such things to an utter stranger.

‘When papa was on his death-bed,’ said she, ‘the winter snow covered all the hills; it lay deep in the glen there, and even the great cascade at the Linn hung frozen like a giant’s beard in mid-air. About the solemn gloaming time Elspat saw from her cottage window a strange, dim, flickering light leave our house here, and proceed slowly towards the village church, by a line where *no* road lies, and pass through the churchyard wall at a place where no gates open, and then, at a certain point,

it vanished! At that precise time papa died, and when the funeral day came—a day never to be forgotten by us—the roads were so deep with snow that the procession took the way traversed by the light, and, as the gates were buried deep, the wall was crossed at the point indicated by the light, and the grave was found to have been dug where the light vanished.’

Mary’s gentle voice broke as she told this little story, and whatever Colville thought of it, though a town-bred Scotsman, no unbelief was traceable in his face.

‘We know not what to think of such things,’ said Dr. Wodrow, with one of his soft smiles; ‘but, as Sir William Hamilton says in his metaphysics, “to doubt and be astonished is to recognise our own ignorance. Hence it is that the lover of wisdom is to a certain extent a lover of the mythic, for the subject of the mythic is

the astonishing and the marvellous." But the corpse-light is a common superstition here, as the tomb-fires of the Norse used to be of old.'

CHAPTER IV.

ROBERT WODROW.

LEAVING Ellinor and Sir Redmond occupied with the contents of the portfolio, Mary, accompanied by the other two visitors, issued into the garden, where all the flowers of summer were in their brilliance. They lingered for a time at the door of the barnyard, surmounted by the quaint legend, and beyond which they could see Mary's cow standing mid-leg deep among luxuriant clover, while at the sight of her all the fowls, expectant of a feed, came towards her noisily in flights; nor were they quite disappointed, as the pockets of her lawn-tennis apron were not without some handfuls of corn, and

Colville could not help thinking what a charming picture she made at that moment, as she stood with her sheeny hair in the sunshine expatiating on the good qualities of her feathered subjects, among whom many of Lord Dunkeld's pheasants came to feed as usual, but the birds looked so beautiful in their brown and golden-tinted plumage that Mary had never the heart to drive them away.

'That is a beautiful Cochin China,' said she to Colville; 'she consumes a gallon of barley every ten days; and is not that black Spanish cock a splendid fellow? His feathers are like the richest satin, and how strongly his plumage contrasts with my snow-white dorkings; and are not these chickens like balls of golden fluff—dear wee darlings!'

And as she spoke, and scattered some grains among them from her quick white hands, the birds fluttered in flights about her, as if she was the mother of them all;

and, as she gave Colville some corn to throw among them, the Guardsman, with all his admiration of her, could not resist a covert smile at himself and his surroundings.

She looked so fresh and so innocent, and so ready to tell him all her little plans and of her local interests.

To him, a club man—a man of the world—accustomed to the giddy whirl of London life, the Parks, the Row, Hurlingham and Lillie Bridge; Lord's Cricket Ground, garden and water-parties, 'feeds' at the 'Star and Garter,' and heaven only knows all what more—it was a new sensation this, and a wonderfully pleasant one.

He was next obliged to visit her ducks as they swam to and fro in an artificial pond—

'With glassy necks of emerald hue,
And wings barred with deepest blue
That sapphire gives; and ruddy breast
By the clear dimpling waters pressed,'

as Dr. Wodrow quoted the poet; and then her brown owl, which had been caught by Robert Wodrow, nearly at the risk of his life, in the ruined tower of Invermay, and now sat in a hollow of the garden wall secured by a net, behind which it winked and blinked and waited for a sparrow or a field-mouse; and the girl seemed so bright and independent, so happy and so busy with all the objects which formed her little cares, that Leslie Colville surveyed her with a kind of wonder and curiosity, for, while being perfectly ladylike, perfectly bred and delicately nurtured, she was so unlike any woman he had ever met before; her world was, in many respects, one altogether apart from his.

Meanwhile Sir Redmond, the very picture of bland laziness, though secretly keen as a ferret, with his glass in his left eye and his hands thrust into his trousers pockets, and his hair parted like a woman's in the middle, was standing before Ellinor,

and contemplating her with evident satisfaction, for he was a *vaurien* by nature.

‘And you have come here to shoot?’ said she, as the portfolio was relinquished at last.

‘To shoot—yes,’ he replied; ‘this will be my first turn at the game in Scotland.’

‘Robert tells me that the gleds have sucked half the grouse eggs this season.’

‘Gleds—what are they—nasty little boys?’

‘They are a kind of crow,’ replied Ellinor, laughing excessively.

‘And who *is* Robert?’ asked Sir Redmond, slowly, readjusting his eyeglass.

‘The son of Dr. Wodrow,’ replied Ellinor, colouring a little, as he could perceive.

‘He prognosticates a bad look-out for us on the 12th of next month?’

The normal expression of Sir Redmond’s face, which was perhaps lazy insolence, seemed to change when a smile spread over it, and then the sensual lips, partly

hidden by their fair moustache, became almost handsome. In Ellinor's sketches there had been ample food for ready conversation. Sir Redmond had seen all the picture galleries in Europe, and, whether he understood it or not, could talk of art with all the ease and fluency of a well-bred man of the world who was desirous of pleasing, and he had watched with growing interest her changing face and the brightening expression of her sweet eyes that had become trained to observe all things; but now that the portfolio was closed, the conversation had begun to flag a little.

'Robert also told me,' said Ellinor, to fill up an awkward pause, 'that as the grouse had been seen close to the barn and orchard walls, it is a sign of a severe winter.'

'It is too soon to think of winter yet; but he seems to be an authority in zoological matters, this Mr.—Mr.——'

‘Wodrow.’

‘Ah, yes—Robert Wodrow.’

‘He is here to speak for himself,’ said Ellinor, with just the slightest *soupeçon* of confusion or of annoyance in her manner as a young man entered unannounced, and was at once introduced to Sir Redmond Sleath, who, in responding to his bow, proceeded at once to focus him with his eyeglass.

With a well-knit, well-set-up figure, Robert Wodrow was an active-looking young fellow, somewhat less in stature than Sir Redmond, less dignified in air and bearing, yet not less like a gentleman. He had his father’s regular features, his open character of face, and honest dark-grey eyes, in which at times there was a thoughtful expression, the result of hard study. At others a merry, devil-may-careish one, the result of life among the rollicking medical students of a great University.

Without adverting to any subject on which the two had been talking with reference to himself, he proceeded at once to address Ellinor.

‘I have brought the ferns you wished for,’ said he, placing in her hand a tuft of sprays.

‘Oh, thanks; my wish was so slightly expressed.’

‘It was a command to me,’ he said, in a low voice.

‘How far did you walk for them?’

‘More than ten miles down Earnside.’

‘Ten miles!’

‘Near to Strath Allan.’

‘Dear me—the Allan Water!’ said Sir Redmond. ‘Is that the place where the miller’s lovely daughter so sadly misconducted herself in the sweet spring time of the year?’

Robert’s reply to this question was only a cold and haughty stare, under which even the baronet’s *insouciance* nearly failed

him, but from that moment the two men instinctively felt themselves enemies.

‘Why did you take so much trouble for a mere trifle, Robert?’ asked the girl.

‘Because I heard you express a wish to have that particular fern, Ellinor,’ replied the young fellow, whose eyes seemed to say that he would have gone ten times the distance ungrudgingly for one of her old smiles, or for the smile she was now according, not to him, but to her strange visitor, whose eyebrows were slightly and inquiringly elevated, as he glanced at the speaker, who seemed so much *en famille* at Birkwoodbrae, and called Ellinor by her Christian name, and who saw that she placed the fern leaves on the table, and soon—Robert Wodrow thought too soon—forgot all about them apparently.

‘You have known Robert long, I presume, Miss Ellinor?’ said Sir Redmond, with a twinkle in his cold, china-blue eyes,

and as he would have spoken of a boy or a child.

‘I have known him all my life,’ she replied.

‘Indeed!’ drawled the other, who now rose and took up his hat, as Colville and Dr. Wodrow appeared, and were about to depart, and, bidding adieu to the ladies, the two visitors from Craigmhor bent their steps in that direction, while the minister lingered behind.

‘Isn’t she pretty!’ exclaimed Sir Redmond, as they proceeded along the highway that seemed like a private avenue, so thickly was it bordered and over-arched by beautiful and drooping silver birches.

‘She—who—which?’ asked Captain Colville, with a slightly ruffled tone.

‘Ellinor—the youngest sister.’

‘*Miss* Ellinor Wellwood,’ said Colville, with an accent on the word, ‘is downright lovely, man; but you think every girl pretty, especially when in the country.’

‘And away from contrasts, you mean; but excuse me; I am neither so facile nor so inflammable as that comes to; yet I do know a handsome girl when I see one; and by Jove, little Ellinor is one to cultivate. Two such girls living there alone seems a singular proceeding.’

‘In your eyes, I have no doubt,’ replied Colville, stooping to light a cigar, and hide the expression of annoyance that crossed his face; ‘but it is not so much, perhaps, in the place where their parents have been respected; and where all know them well, and seem to love them.’

‘Dressed as I could dress her,’ continued Sleath, still pursuing one thought, and that an evil one, ‘she would make quite a sensation—never saw such hair and eyes, by Jove.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Leslie Colville, coldly.

‘Well, among other things, I mean that she is a deal too pretty to be thrown away

upon that Scotch country clodhopper, who is evidently spoony upon her—has known her all her life, and all that sort of thing, don't you know.'

'Whom do you mean now?'

'This—well—ah—what's his deuced name—Robert Wodrow.'

'The son of a very worthy man—a friend of mine, Sir Redmond.'

'Oh—ah—indeed.'

Colville's face darkened and grew rather stern.

Why?

We shall be able to let a little light on his secret emotion in time to come.

Meanwhile the speakers were the source of some speculation among those they had just quitted.

'Who are those gentlemen, Dr. Wodrow?' asked Mary.

'Captain Colville, of the Household Brigade, and Sir Redmond Sleath, a baronet, and wealthy, I believe, friends

of the Dunkeld family, come here for the Twelfth. Are you pleased with them?’

‘Oh, yes,’ replied Ellinor, but Mary remained silent.

‘Perhaps one may prove like the hunter who came in the olden time to hunt here, and wooed the pretty maid of Forteviot,’ said the doctor, laughing, and pinching her soft cheek.

‘And Captain Colville is engaged to Blanche Galloway, is he not?’ she asked.

‘So I believe. A man of undoubted wealth, he has lately succeeded to property of various kinds, and means, it is said, to urge his claim in the female line to the peerage of Ochiltree, which has been dormant since the death of David, fourth lord, in 1782. He has thus assumed the name of Colville.’

‘Lord Colville of Ochiltree,’ said Mary, softly and thoughtfully.

‘Yes—he claims that peerage, my dear,’ replied Dr. Wodrow. ‘I have a great and

melancholy respect for our dormant, extinct, and—more than all—for our attainted peerages. The men who held them were generally, if not all, true to Scotland, which is more than we can say for our mongrel and often cockney-born peers of the present day; but Captain Colville would be one, good, honest, and true, I doubt not.'

'And his own name?'

'I do not precisely know,' replied the minister, whose son listened to all this with a lowering brow, but lingered a little behind his father, and, while the latter was striding along the green lanes towards the manse, Robert was telling Ellinor over again of all his hopes and plans, and his expectation of certainly graduating in medicine at Edinburgh, and that he would get his diploma very shortly; and then—and then—what then?

A kiss given in secret seemed more than a reward for all his labours and con-

sumption of the midnight oil in a lonely lodging up a common stair near the old '*Academia Jacobi VI. Scotorum Regis*,' and where he had pored for many a weary hour over 'Quain's Anatomy,' 'Christison's Dispensatory,' 'Balfour's Botany,' and so forth, inspired by his love for Ellinor Wellwood, and now he left her, with his heart full of happy dreams of the future.

'Why did Dr. Wodrow bring those two strange gentlemen here?' remarked Ellinor.

'You may well surmise,' said Mary; 'to visit two girls living alone as we do. It is so unlike him and his usual care.'

'*That* Captain Colville struck me as being very inquisitive about us and our surroundings.'

'I do not think so,' replied Mary; 'but his friend appeared a very *blasé* man of the world indeed, if I am a correct judge. But, if afternoon tea was merely their object, why not have gone to the manse?'

Gentlemen visitors—especially of such

a style as these two—one a baronet, the other a Guardsman and claimant of a peerage—were not very usual at Birkwoodbrae; so, apart from the natural surmises as to why the old minister, usually so wary, chary, and shy about all introductions, should have brought these two to pass, the two girls had much to speculate upon that proved of considerable interest to both.

Old Colonel Wellwood, as we have said, when on his death-bed, had verbally left his two orphan daughters in the care and custody of his old friend the minister, and faithfully and kindly had the latter and his worthy better-half taken the trust upon them.

But no influence could induce the sisters, Mary especially, to quit Birkwoodbrae and reside at the manse. There was a strong spirit of independence in the girls, and believing in self-help they continued to reside in the house wherein their parents

died, undisturbed, as we have said, by their kinsman, who was far away abroad.

Till the next Sunday in church the sisters of Birkwoodbrae saw nothing of their two visitors. The latter—ignoring the service, or seeming at least rather indifferent about it—were in Lord Dunkeld's pew, a large, old-fashioned one, panelled with carved oak, lined with crimson velvet, and having a little oak table in the centre of it. An arched window, in which some fragments of the original stained glass of pre-Reformation times remained, was near, and through it the sunshine streamed on the handsome face and unexceptionable bonnet of Blanche Galloway, who barely accorded the sisters a bow, and then bent her over her book, which she shared with Captain Colville.

Her father, the old lord—of whom more anon—seemed to doze, while Sir Redmond, when not glancing towards Mary and Ellinor Wellwood, seemed to occupy him-

self with studying the faces, not of the hard-featured country congregation, but of the Scoto-Norman chancel arch, which exhibited elaborate zig-zag rows of heads of fabulous figures and animals, characteristic of church architecture in the days of William the Lion and Alexander I. A few coats armorial were discernible here and there, emblems of races, conquests, honours, and dignities of later times, all of which had passed away; tombs where whilom hung the helmets, banners, and swords of those who defended Scotland when Scotland was true to herself, and the days when she would sink to be a neglected province were unforeseen.

Of Dr. Wodrow's sermon Ellinor took little heed. With the watchful and loving eyes of Robert upon her she was only anxious to get away from church without being addressed by Sir Redmond Sleath, and as the latter and his friend the captain were on 'escort duty' with the

fair Blanche, Mary fully shared her anxiety and wish ; thus both sisters were on the wing by the close of the last psalm, that sound so welcome to the shepherd-dogs, who were coiled under their master's pews, and at the first notes thereof were seen to yawn and stretch forth their legs in anticipation of a fight in the churchyard, or a scamper after the sheep on the breezy sides of the hills.

Leslie Colville and Sir Redmond were not, however, though we have said it, 'friends.' Their natures were too dissimilar for that; they were merely acquaintances, and, like some other guests, had met for perhaps the first time at Craigmhor.

Both were—to the casual eye—unexceptionable in manner and appearance ; but Colville's nature and disposition were open, manly, candid, and genuinely honest ; while those of Sir Redmond, whose baronetcy dated from 'yesterday,' were crooked,

selfish, and secretly prone to many kinds of dissipation and evil. He had gone through the worst curriculum of both that the worlds of London and Paris can furnish. His very eyes and lips, at times, told as much.

Discovering speedily that Leslie Colville resented any loose or slighting remarks concerning the young ladies at Birkwoodbrae, and that he still more would be disposed to resent any attentions on his part towards them, though *why* or wherefore seemed very mysterious, Sir Redmond Sleath contrived to pay more than one visit, and to bestow more than one attention in secret, at least unknown to Colville; he, a sly Englishman of the worst type, conceiving that the other was only a 'sly Scotsman,' with views of his own, as *he* himself had.

On the pretence of bringing books, music, flowers, and so forth to the sisters, but more particularly Ellinor, Sir Redmond

had found his way to the little villa rather oftener than Dr. Wodrow, and still more than the latter's son, would have relished. Hence, one day when Robert came to Birkwoodbrae, he saw the wished-for ferns he had gone so far and so lovingly to procure—not planted in her little fernery, but—lying dead, withered, and forgotten in a walk of the garden.

Robert Wodrow made no remark on this, but the neglect seemed somehow to tell a bitter tale to his heart.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUNKELD FAMILY.

‘Ah, London is the true place for life! One exists only in the country, but in London we live!’ exclaimed Lady Dunkeld.

‘You are right, my Lady Dunkeld!’ exclaimed Sir Redmond Sleath; but life in London had for him some elements to his listener unknown—or, if so, not cared for—flirtations with pretty actresses, dinners to fast fair ones at the ‘Star and Garter,’ cards, billiards, pool, and pyramid, all very nice things in their way, but ruinous if carried to excess, even by a bachelor of Sir Redmond’s means.

‘I agree with you also, mamma,’ said her daughter; ‘but what is it to be—a

ball, or dinner-party, or a garden-party we must give, if not all the three?’

‘A garden-party by all means, Blanche.’

And Blanche shrugged her shoulders with the quaint foreign gesture which she inherited with her French blood, and took a sheet of paper from her desk to make out a list of names, to which her father, the old peer, listened with perfect indifference, if he listened at all.

Though descended from Patrick Galloway, who was minister of the Gospel at Edinburgh in the reign of James VI., the Dunkeld family, as the Scottish Peerage tells us, were first ennobled in the person of Sir James Galloway of Carnbee, in Fifeshire, who was Master of the Requests to James VI. and Charles I., Secretary of State and Clerk to the Bills, and was ‘created Lord Dunkeld by patent on the 15th of May, 1645.’ After intermarriages with the families of Duddingston and Dudgehope, we come to ‘James, third Lord Dun-

keld, who was bred to the army, and was accounted a very good officer,' says Douglas; 'he joined Lord Dundee when he raised forces for King James VII., and was with him at the battle of Killiecrankie.'

There he was one of the foremost in that heroic charge, before which

'Horse and man went down like drift-wood
When the floods are black at Yule,
And their carcasses were whirling
In the Garry's deepest pool.'

Outlawed, he became a colonel in the French service, and fell in battle but long after; his name appears as 'my Lord Dunkell' in the *Liste des Officiers Genereaux* for May 10, 1748.

James, the fourth lord, was also a general in the French army, and was a Grand Cross of St. Louis.

His grandson, the present lord, proved—untrue to the old traditions of his race—a very different, useless, and mediocre Scottish peer, of the type too well known in our day. He had no property in Scot-

land, and no more interest in her people, morally, practically, or politically, than a Zulu chief. He was proud of his descent and title, nothing more, and, not being very wealthy, thought, like his wife, that Leslie Colville would be a very eligible son-in-law; while at his death his title would inevitably pass to a second cousin, Colonel Charles Edward Galloway, *chef d'escadron* of a cavalry regiment, then quartered at Chalons-sur-Marne.

Lord Dunkeld had one pet vanity--a real or fancied resemblance in his profile to those of the Grand Monarque and the later Louis of France; a facial angle indicative of weakness certainly, if not of worse; but, if the idea pleased him, it did no one any harm.

Though thoroughly English bred, and English in all her ideas, as taken from her mother, the Hon. Blanche Gabrielle--so called from her grandmother, Gabrielle de Fontaine-Martel (daughter of the marquis

of that name)—had considerable French *espièglerie* in her manner, and many pretty foreign tricks of it, with her eyebrows and hands, but she was naturally cold, ambitious, selfish, and vain.

It was the luncheon-time at Craigmhor, which Lord Dunkeld only rented. The shooting had not yet begun; the circle therefore had some difficulty in getting through the days, and the necessity for some amusement being devised, 'something being done,' was on the tapis.

Blanche wore a dress of plain blue serge, with a simple linen collar and lace collarette encircling her slender neck. Her hair, of a light golden tint, was dressed in the most perfect taste by the deft fingers of Mademoiselle Rosette, her French maid. In contrast to her hair, her eyes were dark—large eyes, full of observation and expressive of sensitiveness; she had delicately cut lips, which always seemed to droop when she did not smile.

She had a general air of great softness and sweetness, which was most deceptive, as Blanche Galloway was secretly strong, with all the strength of one who in love, hate, or ambition could be fearless, and wily as fearless. Lastly, she had that which so often comes with foreign blood in a girl's veins, the faintest indication of a moustache, or down, at the corners of her red and mobile lips.

Luncheon, we say, was in progress. Colville, Sir Redmond, and some other guests (who have no part in our story) were busy thereat; and the old family butler—in some respects an old family tyrant, who resented any alteration in the daily domestic arrangements as something bordering on a personal affront—was carving at the sideboard.

It was high summer now. The chestnuts were in full leaf, and their shadows were lightened by the silver birches. The garden around Craigmhor was red with

roses ; the stone vases on the paved terrace were teeming with fragrant blossoms, and the stately peacocks, their tails studded with the fabled eyes of Argus, iridescent and flashing in the sunshine, strutted to and fro.

Craigmhór (or the Great Rock) was neither a Highland stronghold of the middle ages nor a Scoto-French château of the latter James's, but a very handsome modern villa, with all the appurtenances and appliances that wealth and luxury can supply in the present day, otherwise my Lady Dunkeld could not have endured it.

Once a belle in Mayfair, she had many remains of beauty still, as she was not over her fortieth year. Sooth to say—and we are sorry to record it—she did not like Scotsmen very much, but she rather approved of Leslie Colville. He was now very rich—the probable inheritor of a title nearly as old as that borne by her husband ; and having been educated

at Rugby, and being now in the Guards, he was a kind of Englishman by naturalization, a view which perhaps Colville would have resented.

For many reasons Lady Dunkeld did not care about a ball in the country; it was so difficult where to draw the line with regard to the invitations.

In London her balls were always a success—no one knew precisely how or why—yet they were so, though organised just like those of other people. Her cards of invitation were always in keen request, and, though she had the reputation of yearly launching into society, and getting excellent matches for a bevy of lovely girls, her daughter Blanche, now in her twenty-fourth year, was still upon her hands.

So the idea of a garden-party was carried *nem. con.*, as suitable to 'all sorts.'

They might have in the garden and lawn those with whom they could not

be intimate in the house. It was easy to entertain with ices, wine, and fruit, music, and chit-chat those whom they cared not to have at their mahogany, or to meet in the tolerably perfect equality of a ball-room. Oh, yes, a garden-party was just the sort of thing to have for the people about Craigmhor, who were not county people.

So, while some of the gentlemen withdrew to smoke and idle in the gun-room or stables, Blanche seated herself at her davenport, and, with a dainty gold pencil, proceeded to make out the list for her mamma.

Certain names were put down as a matter of course; those of adjacent landholders or the renters of shootings—many of whom were English idlers of good position; also ‘a paper lord,’ who lived in the vicinity, for, in absence of the real article, as Sir Redmond said, with a laugh, ‘the factitious rank that accrues

to the Scottish bench was always acceptable in Scotland.' But though Sir Redmond was a baronet, he came of a family which, like that of Mrs. Grizzle Pickle, 'was not to be traced two generations back by all the powers of heraldry or tradition.'

A country doctor and a clergyman or two, with their families, come next, including the Rev. Dr. Wodrow, of course.

'The Misses Wellwood, mamma?' said Blanche, inquiringly, as she looked up from her list. 'I saw them at church on Sunday.'

'Are these girls living alone—still?' asked Lady Dunkeld, 'without even an old maid to play propriety.'

'It is clearly against the rules of society, mamma.'

'As laid down by Mrs. Grundy. Have them, by all means,' said Lord Dunkeld; 'but for their extreme goodness, charity, and spotless lives, uncharitable people

might say uncharitable things. We must have them, Blanche; their father was a brave old officer.'

Whether it was some French associations and his half-blood that influenced him, we cannot say; but Lord Dunkeld by no means shared in the prejudices of his wife and daughter against the two orphan girls at Birkwoodbrae, more especially, as he admitted, their father had been, like himself and his fathers before him, a man of the sword.

'Put their names down, Blanche,' said Lady Dunkeld; adding mentally, 'men like Sir Redmond will be sure to get up a flirtation, which these cottage girls will be sure to misunderstand.'

'But will they come, mamma?' said Blanche. 'You know we have never called on them.'

'That is a matter easily remedied—deliver your invitations in person,' said old Lord Dunkeld.

‘And if we invite them here, are we also to invite the elder girl’s shadow?’ asked Blanche.

‘Her shadow!’ exclaimed Lady Dunkeld.
‘Who do you mean?’

‘That young man—I do not rightly know his name—to whom she is, Rosette tells me, engaged.’

‘Of course not; where would your list end if we went on thus?’

Blanche either meant Ellinor’s lover, or made a mistake; but somehow both Colville and Sir Redmond Sleath noted her words.

After a time it was discovered that ‘the young man’ referred to was Dr. Wodrow’s only son, so his name was included in the list.

‘How many such acquaintances as these people are made in a year and then dropped,’ observed Blanche, unaware that Captain Colville coloured with something of pain and even annoyance at her remark.

To all this sort of thing Sir Redmond

Sleath listened with attention. We need not conceal the fact or circumstance that this enterprising baronet had marked out the soft, dreamy, artistic, and gentle Ellinor for a kind of *affaire du cœur* peculiarly his own. Mary Wellwood, from her natural strength of character, he knew to be beyond the range of his nefarious views or schemes; and eventually, the warmth of his attentions to Ellinor were only curbed in public or veiled by a wholesome fear of his new acquaintance, Captain Colville, who, he thought, was 'idiotically smitten' by a fancy for or interest in Mary, for a time, of course, he supposed, 'as these things never lasted;' and he hoped, when the Guardsman went back to town and was fully under the influence of Blanche and her mother, to return to the vicinity of Birkwoodbrae on any pretence, and then have the field to himself.

For a man like Sir Redmond there was a strange fascination in achieving the con-

quest of, or in 'running to earth,' as he would have phrased it, a girl so pure and confiding as Ellinor, and whose beauty and helplessness inspired him with a kind of love, as he thought it, but a selfish love peculiarly his own.

It may excite surprise that such worldlings as Lord and Lady Dunkeld did not prefer a baronet as a *parti* for their daughter's hand; but Leslie Colville was by far the richer of the two, and possessed landed property in various directions; and, however Sir Redmond might admire Blanche Galloway, he dared not raise his eyes to her, for very sufficient reasons yet to be explained.

Finding that Colville, as we have said, was curiously disposed to resent some of his off-hand remarks about Mary and Ellinor Wellwood, he began to take refuge in professions of the greatest esteem for them both, and occasionally urged his regard for the youngest.

‘In love again—you—and with a little country lass?’ said Colville, laughing. ‘You who were over head and ears, as the saying is, with Lady Sarah, all last season, as repute said.’

‘When she loved me—if she was capable of it,’ replied Sleath, with a dark look, ‘she was indeed my Queen of Hearts.’

‘And now, having married that millionaire fellow, she is Queen of Diamonds. But what could you expect of a girl who was engaged to two men at once, and wore the engagement rings of *both*?’

‘Of course her heart was no longer her own when the millionaire solicited. She accepted him, and made a hecatomb of my letters and those of another fool, who is now broiling with his regiment in South Africa. “The world well lost for love” is poetic, certainly, but devilish stupid practically.’

Though entirely opposite and different in character and disposition, both these

men looked forward with pleasure to the anticipated garden-party—Colville with real satisfaction to the hope of meeting Mary Wellwood once more; and Sir Redmond to the chances of furthering his own particular views.

CHAPTER VI.

THE VISIT.

PUTTING some constraint upon themselves, we are sorry to say, Lady Dunkeld and her daughter on the following afternoon drove over to Birkwoodbrae, and sent in their cards to Mary and Ellinor Wellwood, who were busy in their little drawing-room with some piles of freshly-cut flowers; and though both were startled—or certainly surprised—by this unusual visit, nothing of that emotion was perceptible in their manner; yet the arrival of the London carriage, with its showy hammercloth, with the Dunkeld arms on the panels, a row of plated coronets round the top, the elaborate ‘snobbery,’ if we may call it so,

of rank—Scottish rank, too often without patriotism—was there—excited something akin to terror among the old servants; and the way in which one of the tall ‘matched footmen’ pulled the door bell, and the other banged down the carriage steps, went quite ‘upon the nerves’ of old Elspat Gordon, and the visitors sailed in, displaying those perfect toilettes which were suited to the Row, and which London alone can produce.

The beauty of the day, of the weather generally, more than all the beauty of Birkwoodbrae and its garden, ‘which seemed quite a love of a place, with all its roses and flowers,’ were all discoursed on rapidly and fluently by Lady Dunkeld and Blanche Galloway, while their observant eyes took in every detail of the sisters, their appearance, dress, and surroundings, with all of which they felt secretly bound to admit that no solid fault could be found, though the carpets, hang-

ings, and so forth had certainly seen better times.

‘We are to have a garden-party in a few days, Miss Wellwood,’ said Lady Dunkeld, ‘and hope to have the pleasure of seeing you and Miss Ellinor. Lest you might be out, I have brought your cards; but, being a country gathering, it will be, I fear, rather a tame affair,’ she added, smiling, as she laid the embossed and scented missives on the table.

Mary’s long lashes quivered as she glanced at Ellinor. Both bowed an assent, and murmured thanks, adding that they led very quiet lives now, and seldom went much abroad.

‘What are you making with all these beautiful flowers?’ asked Blanche Gallo-way; ‘two funeral chaplets apparently.’

‘They are so—green ivy leaves, white roses, and lily of the valley,’ replied Mary.

‘For what purpose?’

‘To lay on the graves of papa and

mamma. To-morrow is the anniversary of her death—she died in summer, papa in winter,' she added, with the slightest perceptible break in her voice.

'Oh, indeed; how good of you!' murmured Lady Dunkeld.

'How pretty!' cooed her daughter, one of those young ladies so carefully trained as to think it 'awfully bad form' to betray any emotion or feeling that was in any way natural.

'Sir Redmond Sleath was so enchanted with your drawings, Miss Ellinor,' said Lady Dunkeld, to change the subject, as woful ones were eminently distasteful to her. 'He is never weary of singing their praises.'

This was not strictly true, for the baronet had just barely mentioned the matter once, but poor Ellinor blushed with real pleasure.

'He is very good-natured,' said Miss Galloway, lest the listener might value Sir

Redmond's praises too highly; 'but fastidious—oh, very fastidious. Don't you think he has handsome eyes?'

'I did not observe them.'

'Indeed! They are a lovely blue.'

'I never before heard a man's eyes called lovely,' said Mary, laughing.

'And he is such a flirt!'

'Blanche, child!' expostulated her mother.

'But he has strange ideas—people say he will never marry,' added the 'child,' who was determined that, whatever Ellinor might think, she was not to flatter herself that she had made anything approaching a conquest. 'He has been everywhere, and, of course, has seen everything.'

'And is a male flirt, you say?' said Mary, smiling.

'Too awfully so; but then, most of the young ladies he knows are not disinclined to a little flirtation, and can take very good care of themselves.'

As Miss Galloway spoke, there was the slightest derisive erection of her delicate eyebrows, and the pointed intonation of mockery in her well-bred voice. All this was meant for Ellinor's edification, and she did not entirely forget it; but to Mary there seemed something discordant, flip-pant, and strange in thus discussing a visitor's ways or character.

'We all travelled together,' said Lady Dunkeld, 'and came straight from London to Perth. As for tarrying in Edinburgh, that was not to be thought of.'

'Of course not,' added Blanche, shrugging her shoulders. 'I don't think even Captain Colville with all his patriotism could stand the dulness, the narrow ideas, and the bad style of people there. All provincial towns are so unbearable after London.'

Mary Wellwood resented, but silently, their ungracious remarks. Her memories of Edinburgh were experiences never to

be forgotten; and she thought of the lovely valley gardens, the veritable river of greenery under the vast Castle Rock, the glorious white terraces of the New Town, the dark and history-haunted masses of the Old—the Regalia, Mons Meg, and all the rest of it, as she had seen them in the happiest days of her girlhood; and she felt pleased when Lady Dunkeld said:

‘Captain Colville had not been there for years; and he *was* disposed to stay a day or two behind us.’

‘Surely not for the sake of any beauty he saw,’ exclaimed Blanche, laughing; ‘but in many ways he is very different from Sir Redmond.’

He was indeed, we are glad to say; but in what particular manner the Hon. Blanche referred to, the sisters were not fated to know, as Lady Dunkeld now rose, the carriage was summoned, and saying with one of her sweet but stereotyped smiles, ‘we shall expect to see you at our

little affair, gave them the tips of her gloved fingers and swept away.

Mary and Ellinor looked at each other with a little expression of surprise and bewilderment in their faces, and both felt that Blanche Galloway had, to say the least of it, disappointed them by her general style.

Their emotions varied—one moment they felt flattered and pleased by the recognition of their own position and that once held by their parents in society which the sudden visit from the ladies of the great house implied.

At another moment they felt the reverse—feared they were being patronised, and thought they should decline the invitation.

Yet why?

To do so would be, perhaps, to adopt the position of an inferior; and the invitation might be the result of real kindness of heart, after all.

They knew not that they were indebted

for the whole affair chiefly to a few friendly remarks made by Lord Dunkeld, and more especially by Leslie Colville, though those of the latter caused some afterthoughts.

‘Men are very weak,’ surmised Lady Dunkeld; ‘but, of course, a man in Captain Colville’s position can mean nothing more than simplest kindness, but the girls are pretty—unfortunately for themselves, I think, more than pretty.’

The pride, admiration, and half-alarm of Elspat Gordon and other old servitors on the subject of the visit, which proved their nine days’ wonder, amused while it annoyed Mary. She had her own ideas—it might be fears for the future—and, though she said little, she thought a good deal.

The acceptances were written and despatched; and costumes were the next thing to be considered for the entertainment, of which Robert Wodrow heard the tidings with a very dark expression in his face indeed.

‘Of what are you thinking, Ellinor?’ asked Mary, softly, seeing the dark eyes of her sister fixed apparently on vacancy.

‘Only of how differently the lives of some of us are allotted, and how pleasantly some people are circumstanced, compared with others.’

‘Meaning ourselves and such as Blanche Galloway?’

‘Well, yes.’

‘Never mind, Ellinor dear,’ replied Mary; ‘I always say, blessed be God for all His gifts,’ she added, thinking of the legend over the old doorway.

CHAPTER VII.

DREAMS AND DOUBTS.

THE sun of a soft and balmy summer afternoon was, as the song has it,

‘ Glinting bright
On Invermay’s sweet glen and stream,’

on all the silver birches that grow thereby, on the rocky gullies through which the stream gurgles and babbles as it forces a passage towards the Earn, and on the green mound of the Holy Hill, of which its ceaseless current has swept so much away, when Mary Wellwood, alone, or attended only by her dog, and full of her own happy and innocent day-dreams, took a narrow path that leads northward down the side of the sylvan strath.

Her dress was plain, but fitted well her lithe and slender figure. She had on the daintiest of white cuffs and collar; a sunshade over her head lined with pink imparted to her soft face a glow that it did not naturally possess, and over her left arm were the two chaplets she and Ellinor had been so lately preparing.

No sound but the rustle of leaves and the twitter of birds broke the sunny stillness, till she eventually heard Jack, her fox-terrier, who was careering in front of her, barking and yelping with all the satisfaction of a joyous dog that has met with a friend, and almost immediately afterwards a turn of the rocky path brought her face to face with Captain Colville, who, rod in hand and basket on shoulder, had just quitted his fishing in the May after a satisfactory day's sport, and about whose well-gaitered legs Jack was leaping and bounding noisily.

‘When Jack was here, I knew his mistress could not be far off,’ said Colville, lifting his fly-garnished wideawake and presenting a hand with his brightest smile. ‘You know the saw, Miss Wellwood, “Love me, love my dog,” but it would seem that Jack loves me. And Jack is a travelled dog, I understand—one who has seen the world?’

‘Yes; Jack was a soldier’s dog—was with Roberts’ army in India, and in more than one battle,’ replied Mary.

‘I too have been in India—a bond between Jack and me,’ said Colville, as he produced a biscuit from his pocket, and the dog caught it with a snap.

‘He wags his dear old tail quite as if he recognised a comrade,’ said Mary, laughing, while Colville accompanied her along the narrow path over which the silver birches drooped their graceful foliage.

‘And so you and your sister, Miss Elli-

nor, are cousins of my brother-officer, Wellwood? said Colville, after a pause, and a little abruptly, as Mary thought.

‘I am sorry to say we are.’

‘Why sorry—he is not half a bad fellow?’

‘Well, I have no reason to be otherwise than quite indifferent on the subject of his existence. It was some family matter. Our parents were never friends, and he—he——’

‘What?’

‘Has chosen to forget there were such persons in the world as Ellinor and I; and considering that we have so few relations—none else nearly now——’ Mary paused, and her eyes fell on the chaplets through which her slender arm was passed.

‘He could never have seen you,’ said Colville, earnestly; ‘had he done so he would never have forgotten you, believe me; and when I tell him——’

‘Tell him nothing, pray.’

‘As you please, Miss Wellwood. I knew him in India, before I was in the Guards.’

‘Indeed.’

‘Yes; I remember his first dinner with our mess at Lahore—got screwed, as the phrase is; and how do you think he was taken to his bungalow?’

‘In a cab, perhaps,’ suggested Mary.

‘We carried him through the lines shoulder-high upon a door, with the bugles playing the “Dead March in Saul,” before him.’

‘Then he is dissipated?’

‘Oh—awfully—a wild fellow, in that sense.’

‘He was wounded in an affair with a hill tribe?’

‘So was I. Had your odious cousin been shot, I suppose you would not have cared much?’

‘Nay—nay—*nay*,’ exclaimed Mary; ‘can you think so vilely of me? Perhaps I might have wept for him?’

‘Indeed. Why?’

‘In the knowledge that, like Ellinor and myself, he had no father, mother, or other kindred to sorrow for him.’

Her voice, musical at all times, and sweetly modulated—for a chord seemed to run through every word—broke a little just then; and she coloured on seeing how earnestly her companion was regarding her.

‘For what purpose are those wreaths of flowers?’ he asked, softly, after a pause.

‘To lay upon our graves.’

‘Our graves,’ he repeated.

‘Papa and mamma’s graves, I mean.’

‘A melancholy duty.’

‘The only one that is left us now.’

‘May I accompany you?’

‘If you choose, Captain Colville.’

‘And where are they buried?’

‘Here,’ replied Mary, as she gently opened the gate of the churchyard, and they entered together.

It was an old and sequestered burying-ground—older than the days when Fordoun, the Father of Scottish History, wrote of the district as Fortevioch, a supposed corruption of the Gaelic for distant and remote. Old headstones, spotted with lichens and green with moss, were there half sunk in the ground amid the long rank grass; but the two graves that Mary sought so lovingly, were smoothly turfed and adorned with flowers planted by the hands of herself and Ellinor.

As she knelt to deposit a chaplet at the head of each, Colville read the inscription on the modest tombstone to the memory of Colonel Wellwood, of the Scots Fusiliers, and Ellinor his wife, and Mary, glancing upwards, saw that as he read a soft expression stole into his face, while he hastily, almost surreptitiously, lifted his hat, and then looked more kindly, if possible, at her.

‘Well,’ thought the girl, ‘he is, at least,

the best of good fellows to feel this interest in total strangers. It is, I suppose, what poor papa used to call "the Freemasonry of the service."

Anon came other thoughts that were less pleasing to her. Did real emotion and kindness prompt all this, or was it but a cunning attempt, by an affectation of sympathy and friendly interest, to gain her favour.

But she repelled the suspicion as something unworthy of him and of herself.

Quitting the churchyard in silence, he softly closed the gate, and they continued to walk on slowly a little way together, and Colville was silently recalling Mary's curious legendary story of the funereal light seen by Elspat, the old soldier's widow.

Mary Wellwood's manner and bearing proved to Colville wonderfully attractive. Easy, unaffected, and apparently unconscious of her own beauty, she was charm-

ing. She was equal, in all the attributes of good society, to any girl he had met, and Leslie Colville was no bad judge, as he had been brought up in an exclusive set, among whom any faults of breeding were discrepancies never to be atoned for.

And she—how was she affected towards him? Stealing a glance at his handsome face and figure from time to time, and listening to his very pleasant voice, Mary—somewhat of a day-dreamer—was thinking how delightful it would have been had God given her and Ellinor such a man as a brother to guide, love, and protect them.

It began to seem to both that they had been friends—companions certainly—for a longer time than they had known each other; they discovered so much in common between them, so far as sentiment and opinion went; but remembering Mr. Wodrow's assurance that Captain Colville was engaged to Blanche Galloway, she compelled herself to be somewhat reserved

in her manner towards him, yet more than once it thawed unconsciously. However, she was a little startled when, after a pause, he said suddenly, in a low and earnest tone, while looking down into her face,

‘Tell me something of your life here at Invermay, Miss Wellwood?’

‘Something of my life—what a strange request!’ exclaimed Mary, her dark blue eyes dilating as she spoke. ‘What can I tell you that could be of interest to you?’

‘Pardon me—how your time passes, for instance, I mean.’

‘As you see,’ she replied, smiling, ‘and as you have seen; my daily duties but repeat themselves. I have my little household to look after, accounts and taxes to pay—thanks to our kind kinsman abroad (for Birkwoodbrae is entailed) we have no rent to pay; I have my feathered family in the yard to supervise; my garden with its flowers and fruits; my poor pen-

sioners in the village and all round about.'

'A grey life for one so young and winning,' thought Colville; 'and with you,' he added aloud, 'so runs the world away?'

'Yes.'

'And all your people love you, Dr. Wodrow tells me?'

'I hope so—nay, I am sure they do,' replied Mary, with one of her brightest smiles.

'And you love the scenery here?'

'Yes—every rock and tree and stream; they have all their old stories and young associations to me.'

'And your old home at Birkwoodbrae?' he added, smiling at her enthusiasm.

'Yes—dearly, every stone of it!'

He paused a little, as if lost in thought, and then said,

'But surely you must miss something in your life, Miss Wellwood—you must be lonely amid these birchen woods?'

‘Lonely with Ellinor and all my work? Oh! no. I assure you I am not.’

‘But you cannot expect to have her—a girl so very handsome—always with you?’

‘Perhaps not,’ said Mary, and her long dark lashes drooped, as her thoughts hovered between poor Robert Wodrow and his probable rival, the tawny-haired Englishman.

‘Nor can she always have *you*; and what then?’ said Colville, lightly touching her hand, and lowering his voice in a way that to some there would have been no mistaking; but Mary, devoid of vanity, was all unconscious of it, and, disliking to talk about herself, now talked of other things.

Again and again Colville thought, in her perfect sweetness, humility, and composure, how utterly dissimilar she was in many ways from the town-bred girls he had been wont to meet in his London life especially, where the beautiful was so

often combined with the artificial, and even youth with utter hollowness of heart. Amid dinners, garden-parties, the Row, and the general *rôle* of his life as a Guardsman, the pet of many a woman and her fair brood, all the more that he was now the inheritor of a revenue that was great, he had been conscious of all that.

To Mary—who was a close observer in her way—it sometimes seemed that there was in Captain Colville's face, when he addressed her, a half-amused expression, mingling with much of undoubted admiration. The first was occasionally a source of pique to her; and the other was a source of pique, too, rather than pleasure; for, if he was the *fiancé* of Miss Galloway, he had no business to amuse himself with, or bestow admiration on, any other young lady, and these ideas made her manner to him reserved at times.

In being assisted over an awkward stone stile, though she required no aid, yet she

was compelled to take his proffered grasp,
but even then unconsciously her

‘ Very coldness still was kind,
And tremulously gentle her small hand
Withdrew itself from his, but left behind
A little pressure, thrilling, and so bland
And slight, that to the mind ’twas but a doubt.’

As her slim hand was quickly withdrawn from his, and she murmured her ‘thanks,’ Mary’s first thought was that it was cased in a somewhat too well-worn glove, and Colville perhaps remarked this too, for he said,

‘ Do you always wear gauntlet gloves?’

‘ No; but then I am so much in the garden among thorns and bushes that ordinary gloves are useless, and I used to get through so many of six and a quarter.’

‘ Surely even that is too large for a hand like yours,’ said he; and Mary now fairly blushed at the tenor of the conversation, and when he attempted again to take her shapely little hand in his

she resolutely withheld it, and, thinking of Blanche Galloway, said,

‘Please don’t, Captain Colville; and now I must bid you farewell, with many thanks for your escort.’

And Colville, who was under the impression, from Blanche Galloway’s mistaken remark, that Robert Wodrow was ‘the lover of the elder sister,’ thought he would not just then press his society further upon Mary Wellwood. Nor could he have done so, for just where the little wooded path they had been pursuing opened upon the highway, a well-appointed little park phaeton, drawn by a pair of beautiful ponies, and driven by Blanche Galloway, was seen drawn up under the trees about forty yards off.

‘The time has passed so quickly when with you, Miss Wellwood,’ said Colville, lifting his hat with an air of positive confusion, ‘that I forgot—I quite forgot——’

‘What, Captain Colville?’

‘That Miss Galloway’s pony carriage was to meet me here, and drive me home. Ah, there it is——’

‘And she too, I think,’ said Mary, turning, and growing pale with absolute pain and annoyance at the whole situation; yet, after all, there was nothing in it. However, the Honourable Blanche, after a glance at Mary from under her tied veil, turned away also; and Mary, with pride awakened and a sense of mortification, pursued the path to Birkwoodbrae.

But Jack, as if loth that the two should part, scoured backwards and forwards between them, till, after a time, he finally followed his mistress, and even from this, probably, Blanche angrily drew deductions.

We fear the captain did not enjoy much his drive home, though driven by a Park beauty in that luxurious pony phaeton, as Blanche put her own construction on the meeting and sudden parting—a construction far apart from the reality. She was

sorely piqued, and he was not surprised by her taciturnity, though he strove to ignore it, and expatiated on the beauty of the scenery, on lights and shades, tints and effects, as if he had been a Royal Academician; nor was he surprised when she remarked to him very pointedly and plainly in the drawing-room after dinner, when she was idling over the piano,

‘I don’t think mamma will approve much of your cultivating those strange girls at Birkwoodbrae.’

‘I do not do so,’ said he, stooping close to her pretty head; ‘but did not you and Lady Dunkeld call for them the other day?’

‘Out of curiosity—and urged, perhaps, by Dr. Wodrow, who greatly affects to favour them.’

‘Surely this is severe?’ urged Colville, gently.

‘Men, like women, cannot be too wary of chance medley acquaintances,’ persisted

Blanche, cresting up her handsome head.

‘I have somewhere read,’ said her mamma, who was now *au fait* of the whole episode, ‘that men may study women as they do a barometer, but only understand them on a subsequent day.’

‘It may be so,’ said Colville, ‘but what then?’

‘I agree with Blanche in her views of these Wellwood girls. People may do much in town that they cannot do in country places, where everyone’s actions are, as it were, under a microscope; where every trivial movement is known, freely commented upon, and often exaggerated by menials and the vulgar. Thus,’ continued Lady Dunkeld, with a very set expression on her usually placid face, ‘I am not sure—nay, I am quite certain—it does not agree with what society calls *les convenances*, visiting these young girls.’

‘In some respects you are right,’ replied Colville, colouring with real pain; ‘but I

was not visiting. I only met Miss Well-wood near the old burying-ground—moreover, they are ladies, she and her sister, perfect ladies!’ he urged, with a gleam in his dark eyes, which Lady Dunkeld was not slow to detect.

‘But living so eccentrically alone?’

‘So independently, let us say,’ he continued.

‘Captain Colville is quite their champion,’ said Blanche, with a laugh that was not very genuine; and then the subject dropped.

Lady Dunkeld exchanged a quick glance with her daughter, and slowly fanned herself with an inscrutable expression on her certainly aristocratic face, and adopting the imperturbable placidity generally peculiar to her class and style.

Her somewhat unmotherly and selfish views deeply pained Colville, for reasons peculiarly his own, but had quite an opposite and most encouraging effect upon the

enterprising mind of Sleath, who had listened in attentive silence.

A day or two subsequently a parcel came for Mary, addressed to Birkwoodbrae, but having with it no other clue than the vague one of the Edinburgh postmark. It contained, for both sisters, two beautiful boxes of gloves, all of the most delicate tints and finest quality. Each box was a miracle of carved white Indian ivory, lined with blue satin, a sachet of perfume on the under side of each lid, and their initials in silver on the upper.

Remembering what had passed at the stile, Mary Wellwood could not doubt who the donor was, and she flushed hotly with pleasure; yet it could all mean nothing—nothing but gallantry.

To decline the gifts would seem churlish and ungracious. She could not write, and resolved to wait for the first meeting with Colville to thank him.

Ellinor was quite in a flutter about the

gifts—more so than Mary, who really felt, after a time, some confusion and dismay, for in the course of her simple life no such episode had occurred before; and she was all unlike the fair Blanche, to whom boxes of gloves were as nothing, and who could book her bets for far more than gloves on the winner of the Oaks or the Derby with the prettiest air of *sang froid* in the world.

Mary's mind became filled with pleasant dreams, that joined with unpleasant doubts.

Was Colville really becoming an admirer of hers; or dared he be so, if the rumour about Blanche Galloway was true?

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRUCE.

ROBERT WODEBOW, full of thought, pursuing his way through a green hedge-bordered lane that led to Birkwoodbrae from the manse, suddenly heard the shrill yelp of a dog, followed by an execration, and at a little distance perceived Sir Robert Sleath, issuing from the garden gate at the mansion, in the act of picking up a large stone to hurl at Jack—Mary Wellwood's pet. Jack, by dashing through the hedge, shirked the stone, as all wise dogs do, but if the baronet had bestowed upon him a kick, as Robert never doubted, the terrier had enough of the bull in his blood to

remember it well, as Sleath found to his cost when the time came.

Closing the garden gate, he found himself face to face with young Wodrow. He had his hat partly on the back of his head, his hands thrust into the back pockets of his morning coat, a cigar in his mouth, and with an *insouciant* stare, and a species of dry nod that was supremely insolent and infinitely worse than no recognition at all, he passed on his way without speaking. Robert Wodrow, whose heart was already sore enough in more ways than one, felt it swell with passion as he entered the garden, which was still in all the beauty of summer.

He had lately felt in many ways that a change had come over Ellinor, but he had been, as yet, too proud to notice it to herself.

The baronet was shooting now every day, and Wodrow thought that, even if Ellinor was under that person's influence,

she might give him a little more of her society, as of old—even twenty minutes; but no, he could seldom or never see her alone; and while love and sorrow made him humble at one time, jealousy and disappointment made him proud and rancorous at others.

The sweetness of his disposition had departed; his studies were becoming confused or neglected; and none saw the change that was coming over him with more pain and anger than his mother.

Of all the men that had seen and admired Ellinor, his instinct told him that this man Sleath would prove the most dangerous; yet to his own sex the manners of the latter seemed far from winning.

And already Elspat Gordon and other old servants, with the keen observance and love of gossip peculiar to their class, had begun to prognosticate a more brilliant future for Ellinor Wellwood than the obscure career of a country doctor's wife,

and saw her the lady of 'a real live baronet,' and riding in a chariot to which that of Cinderella was as nothing in comparison; and, as if to make the mischief worse, rumours of *their* surmises and of their hopes reached somehow—but readily enough in a sequestered district—the ears of Robert Wodrow, and were as gall and wormwood to his soul.

All this might be mere wretched gossip; and though Ellinor might not actually have any regard for Sir Redmond, yet Robert Wodrow feared that somehow she was already in a dumb way yielding to or feeling his influence and power.

The subtle homage, the studied phraseology, and flattering air of gallantry and devotion which Sir Redmond infused into his conversation when alone—but only when alone—with Ellinor, had somewhat turned the girl's little head, and led her to draw comparisons between all that kind of thing and poor Robert Wodrow's 'use and

wont' style of attention and 'matter of course' position, as the lover of her maidenhood expanded from the playmate of her childhood.

Mary was away on some of her errands of mercy or work; Ellinor was alone when Robert approached, and found her idling in the garden, with a sunshade over her head; and his heart, of course, foreboded that there she must have been with the obnoxious visitor who had just departed.

Elspat had been brushing out her long and flowing dark brown hair, that was so rich and heavy as to seem almost a burden to her shapely head and slender neck; and Robert reflected savagely that thus she must have appeared before 'that fellow.'

She was adjusting with slender and deft little fingers, while a sweet, soft, self-satisfied smile rippled over her face, in her lace collarette, a tuft of stephenotis with two buds of a particular kind of rose that Robert knew grew in the conservatory of

Craigmhor alone; and his eyes fastened angrily on them at once, though she made no reference to them, or how they came to be there. The presence of the personage he had just passed fully accounted for that; he had doubtless transferred them from his own buttonhole to her hand, and Robert knew quite enough of 'the language of the flowers' to know what two rosebuds, so given, implied. And now her face wore—so Robert thought—just such a smile as that of Faust's Marguerite, when plucking the mystical rose-leaves in her garden.

Robert felt that the gap between them was widening; he did not present his hand, nor did she offer hers, but continued to adjust her little bouquet, while he stood before her with his hands thrust into the pockets of his grey morning-coat, and kicked away a pebble or two that lay in the gravelled walk.

'Ellinor!'

‘Well, Robert,’ she replied, a little nervously; ‘you have come to tell me that you have passed, I suppose?’

‘No.’

‘Why—what then?’

‘Because I have *not* passed.’

‘Not passed!’ said Ellinor, looking at him with genuine regret.

‘No—on the first of this month the medical degrees were conferred as usual, but not on me—not perhaps that you care much now,’ he added, in a thickening voice. ‘I shall have to try again—if, indeed, I ever try more.’

‘Why, Robert, what has come to you that you talk to me thus? I am most sorry for you indeed.’ She looked him earnestly, but Robert thought not honestly, in the face.

‘You are more intent on your own flirtations than my failure—a failure perhaps caused by yourself.’

‘Who can I flirt with here?’

‘You know best,’ replied Robert, sulkily.

‘Really, Robert, you are very unpleasant!’ exclaimed the girl, tears almost starting to her eyes, though there was a provoking twinkle in their hazel depths, nevertheless.

‘Now perhaps I am; but how long do you think I am going to stand this sort of thing?’

‘What sort of thing?’

‘The dangling after you of that English fool who has just left.’

‘This is going from bad to worse, Robert,’ replied Ellinor, with a pout on her beautiful lip. ‘It is being downright rude, and national reflections are in the worst possible taste.’

‘You have not been treating me well for some time past, Ellinor; you seem to grudge every moment you give me, and the little time you do spend with me, you seem no longer your old pleasant and hopeful self, but abstracted and *distracte*.’

‘You are always worrying me,’ retorted the girl, ‘and hinting of broken promises when I have never made any.’

‘Between us, they were scarcely necessary, Ellinor, and yet you have made me scores.’

‘I—when?’

‘Since we were children.’

‘Oh—of course, when we played at being sweethearts, and all that sort of thing.’

‘Played! It has been no child’s play with me at least.’

‘Such child’s play is ended now—and I won’t be scolded thus.’

She had never adopted this tone to him before, and young Wodrow was shocked, startled, and enraged; but still he dissembled, for love will tame and subdue the proudest heart, and his was full of great love for the girl who now stood before him, biting her nether lip, and shuffling the gravel with a little impatient foot.

‘Ellinor,’ said Robert, yet without at-

tempting to take her hand, 'if you did not quite encourage my love, you permitted and adopted it—you accepted it since we were happy little children that toddled and played about together—and that love has gone on, growing with my growth and strengthening with my strength; and I never dreamed of, never thought of picturing the time when you might cast me off. And now I never doubted that when I graduated——'

'Oh, Robert,' interrupted the girl, nervously, 'you are too romantic; too much of a boy——'

'I am not a boy now, and I won't be called one! and as for a romance—certainly you have become very matter-of-fact, when I have heard you laugh at even a competence as not being sufficient.'

'Shall I tell you what I think it should be?' said Ellinor, a little defiantly.

'Do,' he responded, gloomily.

'I think it means a handsome house—'

not a cottage (love in that is all very well, but may be apt to fly out of the windows); fine furniture—beautiful pictures and dresses—lots of servants—a carriage——’

‘Oh, stop, please! Since when have you found all these things necessary for existence? Dear Ellinor, people can be very happy together with less.’

‘Quiet as our lives have been here, Robert, poor Mary and I have often had wrung hearts and harassed spirits to keep up an outward and an empty show.’

‘What is enough for one, as mother often says, is enough for two.’

‘Perhaps, and perhaps not,’ said Ellinor, with a waggish expression.

Robert Wodrow did not reflect just then that ere long there might be more mouths than two to feed.

‘And all these new views of our prospects and of life generally, have occurred to you because——’

‘Because what?’

‘This man Sleath has come to Invermay.’

Ellinor grew pale. There were a few moments’ silence, and when Robert Wodrow spoke again his voice sounded strange even to himself.

‘I was never half good enough for you, Ellinor—I know that,’ said he, humbly, ‘yet I will never give you up until—until I hear you are fully engaged to him.’

‘Engaged! How your tongue does run on, Robert,’ replied Ellinor, with a curious laugh. ‘He has never even spoken to me in any very pointed manner; but rather than be worried thus,’ she added, with a swelling in her slender throat, ‘I must ask you to forget me—do.’

‘Men such as I am do not forget so easily, Ellinor.’ The angry colour died out of Wodrow’s dark face, and, clenching his hands, he muttered under his thick moustache—‘Curse him!’

‘He would not speak thus, Robert, if it

is Sir Redmond you mean. He has seen a great deal of the best of society.'

'And a great deal more of the *worst*, I suspect,' said her lover, more exasperated by the slightest defence of his supposed rival; but, nerving himself to be calm, he asked—'Am I, then, to suppose that you have not promised your future—the future that I have a right to say was not yours to assign—to this stranger—to this sudden interloper?'

'I have not. But why be so mysterious, tragic, and absurd, Robert?' she exclaimed, with a little gasping laugh that nearly became a sob; for, sooth to say, Ellinor's secret heart upbraided her, and she felt that she was treating the lover of her girlhood and the friend of all her years with duplicity.

'Then,' said he, 'why do you permit attentions that are purposeless to you, and most distasteful to me?'

‘Robert, what *do* you mean?’ she asked, plaintively.

‘I mean, why do you permit that tawny-haired fellow to flirt with you, and excite the comment of lookers-on?’

‘He does not flirt with me, Robert.’

‘Do you mean to say that his attentions are more serious than what is called flirtation?’

‘I say nothing about them,’ said Ellinor, annoyed and alarmed by his vehemence and categorical questioning.

‘Ah—indeed!’ he hissed through his clenched teeth.

‘I cannot prevent him saying things sometimes—without—without making a scene. Do not be hard upon me, Robert—I do love you—I always loved you; not perhaps as you wish—but—but——’

She paused, sobbed, and laid her sweet face upon his arm, which went caressingly round her bent and beautiful head, with

all its wealth of dark brown flowing hair.

‘You love me!’ he whispered, softly.

‘As an old friend—oh, yes.’

He withdrew, and again eyed her gloomily and silently.

‘Advise me, Robert,’ said she, imploringly.

‘In what can I advise you, if your own heart does not?’

‘We are both so miserably poor.’

‘And your new admirer is so rich?’

They were drifting among shoals again, so Ellinor made no reply.

‘I suppose he loves you? To judge by my own heart, Ellinor, I don’t wonder at it—but if so, why does he not at once come to the point and end his dangling? Why delay, and why conceal?’

‘Do not let us quarrel, Robert,’ said the girl, gently and sweetly, with her soft hazel eyes full of unshed tears; ‘we have always been such chums—such friends. Some

one is coming—kiss me once more—and kiss me quickly!’

A light step was heard on the ground near the garden gate, and the welcoming bark of Jack announced it was that of Mary returning.

The mutual kiss was swiftly given and taken; but to neither did it seem like the kisses of old.

Robert Wodrow felt that it sealed only a truce between him and Ellinor Wellwood; that neither were happy now, and that her heart was drifting away from him. Their farewell seemed to be like the summary of Lord Lytton’s advice,

‘In short, my deary, kiss me and be quiet.’

CHAPTER IX.

COLVILLE'S WARNING.

DESPITE the disparaging remarks or comments so ungenerously made by Lady Dunkeld and her daughter, a subsequent afternoon saw both Sir Redmond Sleath and Leslie Colville seated in the pretty drawing-room of the sisters at Birkwood-brae.

Sir Redmond had inadvertently dropped a hint that he meant to visit there, and, greatly to his annoyance, Colville proposed to accompany him.

It was an early day in August, and every breath of air was still; not a leaf was stirring in the silver birches without, or among the monthly roses that clambered

round the open windows which faced the pretty garden. Within the room all was arranged with care and taste, while the polished grate, filled with fresh flowers, the bouquets in jars and vases, the snow-white curtains, and other etcetera bore token of feminine diligence and skill.

Stretched on a deer-skin, Jack lay with sleepy eyes, half open to watch the movements of his mistress, when 'visitors' were announced by Elspat, with a peculiar and provoking smirk of satisfaction on her hard Scotch visage, and the costumes for the forthcoming garden-party, on which those clever fingers of the sisters were busy, were hastily tossed aside; the two gentlemen were ushered in, and Jack snarled and barked so furiously at Sir Redmond that he had to be carried bodily out of the room by Elspat.

The baronet affected to laugh, but felt in his heart that nothing would please him

better than to get 'a quiet pot-shot at that d——d cur!'

'We merely dropped in when passing,' said Sir Redmond, who, strange to say, seemed to be constrained, even awkward, in manner, and Ellinor was somewhat silent and abashed too.

'It is kind of you to visit us,' replied Mary, addressing herself, however, to Colville; 'we have so little amusement to offer; there is so little attraction; we live so quietly here at Birkwoodbrae.'

Colville looked as if he thought there was a good deal to attract, and his dark eyes seemed to say so as he looked into Mary's, which drooped beneath his gaze.

'Your presents came, Captain Colville. They are beautiful, and fit to perfection. Ellinor and I cannot sufficiently thank you,' she said, in a low voice.

'Oho!' thought Sir Redmond, 'he has been sending them presents. Eh! a sly dog.'

‘A few gloves are not worth mentioning,’ replied Colville, hurriedly. And then he added—‘How beautiful is the view all round this place, especially that with the silver birches and the stream glittering under their shadow. Ere I leave this, Miss Wellwood, you must show me some of your favourite places, your pet nooks—the scenery here is so full of picturesque spots.’

‘Ellinor knows all such places hereabout better than I do. They employ her pencil freely,’ said Mary, diffidently; ‘and they are the very abode of old legends, fairies, and so forth.’

‘I know that she is an artist possessed of both taste and skill,’ said Colville; ‘but is she also the musician?’ he asked, turning to the piano, which was open.

‘I am chiefly,’ replied Mary, smiling; ‘but I think you should hear Ellinor sing the “Birks of Invermay.”’

‘Who—or what are they?’ asked Sir Redmond, with a drawl.

‘Those very birches you see from the window,’ replied Mary, laughing.

‘And there is a song about them?’

‘There are several.’

‘Do let us hear at least one, Miss Ellinor,’ urged Sir Redmond, as he placed the piano stool before the instrument.

Accordingly Ellinor, without further preface or pressing, seated herself, and sang with great sweetness and pathos neither David Mallet’s affected stanzas nor Bryce’s ludicrous lines, but the simple old song of the sixteenth century to its wonderfully beautiful air:—

‘The evening sun was glinting bright
 On Invermay’s sweet glen and stream ;
 The woods and rocks in ruddy light
 Appeared as in a fairy dream.
 In loving fear I took my path
 To seek the tryst that happy day,
 With bonnie Mary, young and fair,
 Among the Birks of Invermay.

'It wasna till the pale moonshine
Was glancing deep in Mary's e'e,
That with a smile she said, "I'm thine,
And ever true to thee will be!"
One kiss—the lover's pledge—and then
We spoke of all that lovers say,
And wandered hameward through the glen,
Among the Birks of Invermay.'

At the mention of Mary's name in the song, the eyes of Colville involuntarily sought those of her who bore it, and she coloured perceptibly. The performance of Ellinor was duly applauded by Sir Redmond, though he afterwards confided to Colville it was 'the silliest piece of Scotch twaddle' he had ever heard. Yet his admiration of Ellinor personally was open and unconcealed, perhaps too much so, and of its own kind was no doubt genuine enough, and while she sang, Ellinor was inwardly hoping her hair was tidy and looked well, as she felt conscious he was gazing straight down on it; while Mary had an uncomfortable feeling that visits from these gentlemen might be miscon-

strued by Lady Dunkeld, their hostess, and still more so by her daughter—a conviction that at times made her almost cold in her manner to Captain Colville, whom she believed to be that young lady's especial property. And she blamed herself, and blushed for herself, in the consciousness that she sometimes treasured up, and repeated to herself, little things he had said—appeals to her taste, her opinion, and so forth. While Colville, however he was situated with regard to Miss Galloway, made no secret of how he delighted in the quaint frankness of Mary Wellwood since the afternoon he had first met her, when both were fishing in the May.

‘And so this locality is full of old legends of fairies and so forth?’ said Colville, referring to a previous remark of Mary's.

‘Yes; but then every foot of ground in Scotland has about it something historical

or legendary—all teems with the past.'

'The present is more to my taste, Miss Wellwood,' said Sleath, twirling out his straw-coloured moustache.

'It would not be so if you lived always, as we do, under the shadow of the Ochil mountains.'

'I agree with you, by Jove.'

But Mary did not perceive that they misunderstood each other.

'Sir Redmond is guiltless of romance as any man living, I believe, Miss Wellwood,' said Captain Colville, 'but London life makes one sadly prosaic and incredulous.'

'Has it made you so?'

'I hope not—I can scarcely say. But did not my old friend Dr. Wodrow hint that some old legend is connected with those stones, or the ruin, on yonder knoll by the river?'

'The Holy Hill?'

'Yes.'

'Ah,' said Mary, as a smile rippled over

her bright face, 'that is not a legend—it is history.'

'About what?'

'A miller's daughter who married a king.'

'Then it is a tale of the days

"When King Cophetua loved the beggar maid."'

'Something of that kind. But in the remoter ages of Scottish history the Holy Hill was the site of a royal residence; for there King Kenneth II. died, and there Malcolm III. was born—he who married Margaret of England.'

'These things didn't happen yesterday,' said Colville, smiling down into her earnest and animated face.

'In those days there was an old miller here in Forteviot who had one daughter named Edana, a girl of rare beauty, and who was famed therefor throughout all the land between the Earn and Forth.'

'And, of course, she had lovers in plenty?'

‘ So the story says ; but she would listen to none, nor was her heart stirred, till one morning, about Beltane time, when filling a jar with water at the May, there came riding under the silver birches—for silver birches were here then as now—a marvellously handsome young knight on a white horse, alone and unattended, and courteously he besought her for a draught of water, saying that he had ridden that morning from the Moathill of Scone, and was sorely athirst.

‘ He wore an eagle’s feather in his helmet, from under which his golden hair fell upon his shoulders like that of a girl. His mantle of striped scarlet, violet, and blue was fastened on his breast by a brooch of gold, and the rings of his coat-of-mail shone like silver in the morning sun.

‘ Edana had never looked on such a face and figure before, and he seemed equally taken by her great, if rustic, loveliness. He lingered with her long in the birchen

wood; thither he came again and again, and love between them ripened fast, as it seems always to have done in the olden time, if we are to believe song, ballad, and story.

‘The miller ere long heard of these stolen meetings, and his heart filled with alarm lest the so-called handsome stranger who had bewitched or won his daughter’s heart might prove some evil spirit of the Flood or Fell; but Edana said he could be no evil spirit who wore a crucifix round his neck, and daily said his prayers in the old chapel of Kirkton Mailler.

‘But the miller uttered an execration under his silver beard, put his battle-axe to the grindstone, and kept watch when next the young knight came; and then, behold, his heart seemed to die within him as he recognised—the king!

‘And so in time it quickly came to pass that Edana became the wife of Duncan, King of Scotland—the same king who was

slain at Cawdor—and the mother of Malcolm III., who was born at the Holy Hill, and hence an ancestress of Queen Victoria.’

With a soft yet strange smile on his face, Colville listened to this old story, and, brief though it was, Sleath, as it was not to his taste, would have yawned, had not good breeding forbade him.

‘Perhaps love and romance, too, still linger among the Birks of Invermay,’ said he, laughingly, and with some point in his manner; and there came a time when Mary recalled these words and saw their meaning; and now, deeming that their visit had been protracted long enough, the gentlemen rose to depart—Sleath only lingering to kiss his hand to Ellinor—surreptitiously, as he thought, but the jaunty action was detected by Colville.

Somehow, Mary thought she wished that Captain Colville—Miss Blanche Galloway’s

fiancé—had not called that afternoon; yet, if asked, she could not have told the reason why.

Was an interest in him growing in her heart unknown to herself—one beyond the wish that she and Ellinor had such a brother? It almost seemed so, for she felt altered in some way, but in what way she knew not, though the present and the future became curiously mingled in her thoughts, as they were just then in those of Ellinor.

Sleath was fast winning the fancy of the latter, if not her heart. She had been content with the love of Robert Wodrow and the prospect of a future with him; she thought now how different it would be to become the wife of a man who would give her rank, position, wealth, and she thought the time and 'the prince' had now come.

Yet with all this it was strange that her heart never thrilled at his voice or approach, nor did her pulses quicken at the

touch of his hand, as they had often done at the honest clasp of Robert Wodrow.

‘Why was this?’ she asked of herself.

‘You are very silent, Colville,’ observed Sleath, as they walked homeward together cigar in mouth.

‘There is something in that girl’s face which seems familiar to me, as if I had foreshadowed it in some dream!’ exclaimed Colville.

‘Which girl’s face?’ asked Sleath, sharply.

‘Mary’s—Miss Wellwood,’ replied Colville, colouring with annoyance at having been betrayed into confidence with a man he disliked.

‘Stuff,’ said Sir Redmond; ‘as if people foreshadowed faces in the Row or Regent Street! What would the fair Blanche think of this idea? And what a cock-and-bull yarn that was about the “gracious Duncan” and the miller’s daughter.’

‘Why doubt it?—the story is a pretty

one, any way,' said Colville, with annoyance in his tone.

'Let us skip Mary—it is her sister I admire.'

'Your demeanour to that young lady is rather strange, Sir Redmond,' said Colville, with a gravity of manner and eye that did not fail to strike his listener.

'Strange—how?'

'A very short intimacy seems to have placed you on rather friendly terms.'

'Rather,' replied Sir Redmond, tugging at the end of his moustachios, with a very self-satisfied smile on his *blasé* face. 'She is an unsophisticated kind of Jeanie Deans, or Effie rather, whom one may flirt with, patronise, or quarrel with and make it up again; treating her with any amount of *chic* when so inclined, and——'

Whatever in his profound vanity or spirit of insolence Sir Redmond was about to add, he paused. There was a dark, stern, and indignant expression in the face

of Leslie Colville that there was no misunderstanding just then.

'Hey—how—what the deyvil—are you smitten in that quarter too?' asked Sleath.

'No—what do you mean?'

'Thought you were, perhaps, that's all,' was the somewhat sulky response.

'I am not what you think,' replied Colville, quietly. 'I only warn you to adopt a different tone in reference to these young ladies, and to take care what you are about!'

'Now, what the devil is all this to *him*?' thought the baronet, malevolently; and he had hardihood enough to give his thought expression, on which Colville's face grew darker still.

'Sir Redmond,' said he, 'there is no use in beating about the bush with you. I have often heard you say that there was but one excuse in this world for matrimony.'

'Yes—well?'

'Miss Ellinor Wellwood is poor, as you

may say, yet you seem very attentive in that quarter.'

Confounded at what he deemed the presumption of all these queries, Sleath stuck his glass into his right eye, and glared through it at his companion with undoubted surprise.

'Attention,' he muttered; 'not at all! Who is thinking of matrimony? And if I were so, may I ask what it is to *you*?'

'More than you think,' replied Colville, with suppressed passion, as he adjusted his shirt cuffs; 'but enough of this subject—here is the gate of Craigmhor.'

Colville said no more; but he thought a good deal, and he muttered to himself a Spanish proverb,

'*Puerto abierta, al santo tiento*—the open door tempts the saint; and, by Jove, this fellow is no saint—so I shall keep my eye on him!'

Hitherto it had seemed to Ellinor, but to Mary chiefly (as she had no special ad-

mirer), that life had been dull and colourless—if a happy and contented one—at Birkwoodbrae; and already the days thereof—before these visitors came—seemed to be part of another and remoter existence; for love and the illusions of love were shedding their haloes over the present.

‘I hope dear Mary Wellwood will not make a fool of herself with that Captain Colville,’ said Mrs. Wodrow to her spouse, with reference to this very subject. ‘I hear that he has been calling at Birkwoodbrae again, though engaged, they say, to Miss Galloway. She is old enough to know that officers are the greatest flirts in the world—men not to be trusted. When *I* was a girl, I always heard so.’

Dr. Wodrow laughed softly, as he looked up from the notes of his next sermon, and said,

‘I don’t think, my dear, you ever had much experience of them out of novels;

but I will own to you that officers now-a-days are not like what they were at one time. Even my worthy ancestor, in 1724, deplores in his 'Analecta' that Christian officers had left no successors to such men as Colonel Blackadder, of the Cameronians, Colonel Erskine, and Major Gardiner, of Stair's Grey Dragoons—all men who could expound on the Gospel better than I.'

CHAPTER X.

THE GARDEN-PARTY AT CRAIGMHOR.

IT was the afternoon of a hot day early in August, when the sunlight bathed in glory all the scenery—green mountain and rocky glen, wood and water—about Craigmhor, giving alternately strong light and deep shadow, with a warmth of colouring over all, turning into a sheet like molten gold an artificial lochlet, where the ducks and coots swam together among the great white water-lilies.

On the balustraded terrace before the house, the rustic baskets of carved stone were ablaze with beautiful flowers; the hum of bees and the twitter of birds were

all about, but were unheard amid the buzz of many voices and the music of a rifle volunteer band that played on the smoothly-mown lawn that stretched away before the house till it ended in the woodland greenery of the park, or 'policy,' as it is called in Scotland—greenery that now showed blotches of yellow and russet upon the ferns, that whilom had seemed great green fans of emerald hue, amid which the dun deer rested when dewy evening fell.

But now the deer had all gone to the hill-sides, for promenading on the lawn and in the beautiful gardens, or seated near the tall, French windows that opened on the terrace, and the lace curtains of which were wafted gently on the breeze, were the many guests of Lady Dunkeld, whose garden-party was now, as Sir Redmond Sleath slangily said, 'in full blast.'

Mellowed by distance among the trees came the murmur of the unseen May over its rocky bed.

There were lawn-tennis courts, and the all but obsolete croquet, for those who were so minded; and in a gaudy-striped marquee ices, creams, jellies, champagne-cup, et cetera, distributed by solemn valets in showy liveries with powdered heads.

There were winding paths between beautifully-trimmed shrubberies, bordered by flowers of gorgeous hues; there were leafy, tunnel-like vistas, and long and stately conservatories with tessellated floors, wherein to flirt when the heat of the day proved too great; and there were bright-coloured rugs and soft cushions spread upon the grass, whereon the lazy might lounge or loll; and, as the guests were pouring in from carriage, phaeton, and dogcart, Lady Dunkeld, in the richest of London toilettes, received them with the same insipid and stereotyped smile for each and all—her words of welcome or offer of her hand varying only according to the social

position of those who approached her.

‘The second of the Wellwood girls who are coming here to-day is something of an artist, I hear,’ observed Lord Dunkeld.

‘I believe so,’ replied his lady; ‘and I hope she will not make her appearance a limp figure, æsthetically-dressed in a large-patterned gown of Anglo-Saxon fashion, with a lily in her hand. Oh, here they are! Dressed in the best taste, too!’

Weak, yet aristocratic though his profile, Lord Dunkeld looked every inch a peer in style and bearing. He was undoubtedly a striking-looking, elderly man, with hair now white as the thistledown, his person erect and unbroken as when he led his attalion against the Russian trenches at Sebastopol, and he received the two sisters, Mary and Ellinor Wellwood, with a warmth and courtesy that nearly made them forget the limp hand and wan smile of Lady Dunkeld, and the ill-concealed coldness, annoyance, and secret pique of Blanche

Galloway, though she veiled them under a well-bred smile of welcome, while resolved it should be their last, as it was their first, entertainment at Craigmhor, and such it eventually proved to be.

Nor were her emotions lessened by seeing how Colville hurriedly quitted a group to welcome them, and how smilingly Sir Redmond approached Ellinor from a conservatory, adjusting as he came a button-hole bouquet which he had recently received from the hand of her—Blanche Galloway, who was quite inclined to attract both gentlemen if she could.

Whatever views Lady Dunkeld and her daughter, the fair Blanche, may have had in the matter of the now wealthy Captain Colville and Sir Redmond Sleath, two little episodes in which these gentlemen were concerned developed themselves during the garden-party, which were rather beyond the calculations of the two ladies, and proceeded to some extent unknown to

them—but to some extent only, as Made-moiselle Rosette was abroad in the grounds, and had her shrewd French eyes remarkably wide open.

And Blanche Galloway became disagreeably surprised when she learned on what ‘friendly terms’ the sisters were with those two gentlemen, who as visitors at Craignhor she had rather been disposed to consider as her own peculiar property.

Robert Wodrow was there too, not to enjoy himself, but to watch Sir Redmond and Ellinor, as the latter could read only too distinctly in his lowering and upbraiding yet tender eyes, though he affected to converse gaily with Colville and others.

‘Let me get you some iced champagne cup,’ said Sir Redmond, in a low voice, as he offered Ellinor his arm and led her away, adding, with one of his unpleasant laughs, ‘Here is old Dr. Wodrow, with his Sabbath-day smile, and his wife, in her

awful toilette—our sulking friend the son too. They have been among the first to come, and will be the last to go away—like all stupid people. How like fish out of the water they look !’

Ellinor, to do her justice, felt a swelling in her throat at these remarks on those she had been so long accustomed to view as her dearest friends, and fanned herself almost angrily.

‘ And how is Jack, that surliest of curs, who always snaps and snarls at me as if I were a tramp or a beggar ?’ asked Sir Redmond.

Ellinor laughed now, and soon found herself chatting away with the glib Sir Redmond as if she had known him not only a few days, but a few years. How different he was in his fluency of speech, his perfect tone of manner and softness of voice, from Robert Wodrow.

Poor Robert Wodrow !

‘ What smooth tongues these southron

fellows have,' he was thinking, savagely, as his eyes followed the pair; 'and how she seems to listen to him, drinking in every word, like a moonstruck fool!'

And already he felt all the tortures of jealousy, 'the injured lover's hell.'

A suspicion that he was watched or suspected by Colville, after the latter's very distinct and open *warning*, inspired Sir Redmond Sleath with a secret emotion of revenge against him—a curiously mingled hatred and desire to triumph in his love affair with Ellinor; and since that warning had been given a coolness had ensued between the baronet and the guardsman—a coolness that outlasted their visit to Lord Dunkeld.

To Sir Redmond it seemed, as he thought over and over again, that a couple of fatherless and motherless girls living as they curiously did together, and alone 'with no one to look after them but an infernal old pump of a Presbyterian

parson,' were fair game to be run after in his own fashion, and Ellinor, as the one possessing less firmness of purpose, was certain to be the most easily netted.

As Sir Redmond led Ellinor away, Colville's brow grew dark as that of Robert Wodrow, and the baronet was not slow to detect this emotion and defy it.

'Was this jealousy and love of Ellinor? Did he admire her and Mary too?' thought the baronet. 'By Jove, it seems so.'

They were long absent from the main body of the guests, none of whom missed them perhaps, save Robert Wodrow and Miss Galloway. How long Colville did not precisely know, as he contrived to be elsewhere engaged himself.

While Mary was talking to old Mrs. Wodrow, who was indulging the while in a few peculiar and not very well-bred, if knowing, nods and smiles in the direction of Miss Galloway, over whose chair on the

terrace Captain Colville was stooping, she overheard him say, while the former was prettily making up for him a button-hole of stephenotis, with a white rosebud and maiden-hair fern—and say—with *empressement* but laughingly,

‘If lusty love should go in search of beauty,
Where should he find it fairer than in Blanche?
If zealous love should go in quest of virtue,
Where should he find it purer than in Blanche?
If love, ambitious, sought a match of birth,
Whose veins bound richer blood than Lady Blanche?’

He was only quoting Shakespeare, and did so laughingly, and not at all with the tenderness of love, Mary thought; but Blanche Galloway was evidently delighted, tapped him with her fan in mock anger, and then adjusted her bouquet in his lapelle.

On *what* terms were they, these two?

Mrs. Wodrow had evidently no doubt about it, as she whispered to Mary,

‘How sweet it is to watch young lovers!
I was right, you see.’

Mary felt something closely akin to pique and pain, and resolved to be upon her guard, while Mrs. Wodrow was, woman-like, appraising the cost of Lady Dunkeld's dress—'The best Lyons purple—must have cost a guinea a yard.'

'Captain Colville has been in love, or fancied himself so, a great many times, I hear,' resumed gossipy Mrs. Wodrow, 'but never got the length of being engaged until lately, I believe.'

'Then he *is* her *fiancé*,' thought Mary; 'but what matters it?'

Sooth to say, it was for her behoof, perhaps, that Mrs. Wodrow pressed these hints upon her.

'Come with me, Miss Wellwood,' said Captain Colville, suddenly approaching her; 'permit me to show you some of the grounds—the rosaries are indeed beautiful—after we have visited the refreshment marquee.'

He lightly touched her hand, and—fol-

lowed the while by a somewhat cloudy and inquiring glance from Blanche Galloway—she permitted herself to be led away from the terrace, and though resolved to be, as we have said, on her guard, and studiously indifferent, she could not help the increased beating of her heart, for the voice and eyes of Colville were very winning.

From the refreshment marquee they wandered through the rosaries, round the shrubbery, and past the artificial pond, till they reached the skirts of the lawn, and the hum of the voices there, and even the music of the band, became faint, and conversing with her, she scarcely knew on what, he led her to a seat—a rustic sofa—under the trees that formed the boundary of the pleasure-grounds.

‘Do you know that in the sunshine your hair is quite like gold, Miss Wellwood?’ said he, gazing upon her with unmistakable admiration.

‘I would it were real gold,’ replied Mary, laughing.

‘I would rather possess it as it is, and so would any man,’ said Colville, while Mary cast a restless glance at the distant groups of gaily-dressed promenaders, as aught approaching tenderness just then alarmed and annoyed her.

After a pause he said,

‘Those scarlet berries do not become your complexion. They are suited to a dark beauty, not a fair one.’

‘Ellinor pinned them in my collarette,’ replied Mary, colouring now.

‘Give me the berries, and I shall substitute *this*,’ he urged, taking the little bouquet of stephenotis buds and ferns from his lapelle. ‘Do exchange with me,’ he added, softly and tenderly.

‘But Miss Galloway—her gift to you—what will she think?’ urged Mary, timidly.

‘She will never notice the change; and if she does, what then?’

Mary thought this strange and ungal-lant, but ere she could prevent him, his deft hands had quickly achieved the exchange, and her scarlet berries were in his button-hole.

‘I cannot have you wear these, even if I wear your rosebuds. Give them back to me, please, Captain Colville.’

And she stretched out her hand implor-ingly, but he shook his head and smiled with a curious satisfied smile; and again Mary insisted on a re-exchange of the flowers.

‘Please, do not urge me,’ said he, also adopting an imploring tone. ‘I wish to keep them—to keep them for ever, if you will permit me; whatever has touched your cheek—your hand, must be sacred to me,’ he added, with perfect earnestness of manner.

‘Do not talk to me thus—for your own amusement, Captain Colville,’ said Mary, her eyes suffused with tears.

‘Amusement!’ he repeated, with a low tone of pain. ‘Can you think so meanly of me? If you knew the genuine emotion of my heart towards you, Mary Wellwood, and the true regard with which you have inspired me——’

‘I cannot, must not, listen to this,’ said poor Mary, attempting to rise in alarm, and most loth to precipitate a scene, but a touch of his hand restrained her.

‘Not listen to me! And why not?’ asked Colville; and then he remembered Blanche Galloway’s insinuation about young Wodrow, and paused.

‘It is unbecoming your position and mine. I feel that you are but amusing yourself with me,’ continued Mary, repressing a sob in her slender white throat with difficulty. ‘You are a rich man of fashion—a man about town, I believe the term is; I am but the orphan daughter of a very poor one——’

‘Of a gallant old officer,’ said Colville, softly.

‘True.’

‘And you actually think me a snob? It is very hard. Ere long I shall get *another* to plead for me,’ he added, laughing.

‘What can he mean?’ thought Mary.

‘You pardon me just now,’ said he, looking down upon her with great tenderness.

‘Yes,’ said Mary, sweetly and simply; ‘but do not offend me again.’

And bright though the sunny landscape around her, it seemed for a moment to grow brighter to her eyes, and her pulses quickened, for she felt a thrill at the tone of his voice and the expression of his eyes. She felt too, somehow, as if the world would never seem quite the same to her afterwards; and with this was blended an emotion of pain that these feelings were excited in her breast aimlessly and uselessly by the affianced of another!

It was almost a relief to her when he laughed, and, breaking the silence of a full minute or so, said,

‘Now, I am about to rival your sister, Miss Ellinor, in the achievement of something artistic,’ and, opening a pocket-knife, he proceeded to carve on the fine smooth bark of a tree that overshadowed the rustic sofa the letters ‘M. W.’

‘My initials,’ said Mary, watching his work.

‘Yes.’

‘I don’t think Lord Dunkeld will thank you for injuring his timber thus.’

‘I don’t care about Dunkeld’s timber. I’ve a good mind to be like that fellow in Shakespeare—what’s his name?—Orlando, and

“Carve on every tree
The fair, the chaste, and unexpressive she.”

Queer phrase that—means inexpressible, I suppose. See!’ he added, as he quickly cut three other initials beside Mary’s—L. W. C.—and the date.

‘Please, don’t—please, don’t,’ urged Mary, almost with tears in her tremulous tones.

‘Why?’ he asked, looking down upon her with a bright and winning smile.

‘These initials may be seen.’

‘By whom—and what then?’

Mary was silent, but thought only of Miss Galloway, though that young lady seldom favoured the woods with her society; and now Colville completed his work with a most orthodox true lovers’ knot, Mary growing more and more appalled as it proceeded.

‘You have a middle name?’ she asked, timidly.

‘Every fellow has now-a-days—snobbish, isn’t it? In my case I cannot help it.’

‘And the middle name?’

‘Don’t ask it—you know me but as Leslie Colville, and that is my genuine baptismal appellation.’

‘This bit of wood engraving may be deemed unfair to *her* if young Wodrow sees

it,' was the not ungenerous thought of Leslie Colville.

'What if Blanche sees it?' was the timid reflection of Mary; thus, mentally, these two were at cross-purposes. 'Do restore to me or cast away that bunch of berries,' she again said to him.

'I cannot think of it; but I shall conceal it, if you will permit me,' said he, as he kissed her little bouquet, and placed it in his breast-pocket.

His tenderness seemed very true, but might be—nay, Mary thought, must be—mere flirtation. He had said, 'Ere long I shall get another to plead for me.' Who was that *other*; and to plead for *what*?

It was all very mysterious, and for a moment or two Mary felt as one in a dream. Under the old trees where they lingered were cool and grateful shadows, and on the soft breeze from the gardens and shrubberies came the perfume of roses and heliotrope, with the drowsy hum of

modulated voices and the music of the band.

‘Listen,’ said he, touching her hand lightly, while his features brightened; ‘do you hear the sweet low air?’

‘It is “The Birks of Invermay.”’

‘How it brings the words of the sweet song back to me—

“It wasna till the pale moonshine
Was glancing deep in *Mary’s* e’e;
That with a smile she said ‘I’m thine,’
And ever true to thee will be!”

You see how it and the name have impressed me.’

‘Don’t, please, Captain Colville,’ said Mary, withdrawing her hand; ‘you should not go on this way. It is not honourable in you, and is annoying to me.’

‘What a puzzle you are!’ said he, looking at her with undisguised admiration, mingled with—to her annoyance—the slightest *souçon* of amusement in his handsome eyes, as she proceeded slowly across the lawn to rejoin the garden-party,

from which Mary felt he had purposely lured her.

Meanwhile, he was closely scrutinising the soft and downcast face of Mary—downcast because she was too conscious of the fervour of his regard.

With all her beauty, Mary Wellwood had not yet had a lover. No man had addressed her in terms of admiration or love, and this fact, together with the somewhat secluded life she led, made the (perhaps passing) attentions of Colville of more importance than they would have seemed to a young lady living in the world like Miss Galloway, and, if the gallant Guardsman was only amusing himself, it was rather cruel of him; so Mary's emotions were of a somewhat mixed nature.

Could she but fashion her little tell-tale face for a brief period, and make it stony as that of a sphinx!

A curious sense of wrong, of deception—even probable sorrow and affront, pos-

sessed her, mingled with that of a new and timid delight.

The touch of his hand seemed to magnetise her, and yet she longed to get away from the reach of his eyes, his subtle and detaining voice, for were they not the property of Blanche Galloway!

‘Why should he wrong her and love me, as I actually think he does?’ surmised Mary. ‘What can I be to him more than a flower perhaps by his wayside of life, to be passed and forgotten when he goes back to that gay world which is peculiarly his—the great whirling world of “Society.” Worthy of him; I, so poor can never hope to be, and that proud, imperious girl would soon teach him to forget me!’

So thought and mused the girl—fondly, sadly, and bitterly—and turning from the music of the band, and the gay groups that laughed and chatted around her, she gazed down a vista of silver birches that

led towards the house, and saw their stems glittering like silver columns in the flecks of sunshine.

Blanche Galloway was not long in discovering that the little bouquet her own hands had assorted for Colville was now in the breast of Mary Wellwood's dress, and as she turned bluntly away from the latter, Dr. Wodrow, who knew not the cause thereof, remarked to his better-half that their young hostess had given Mary 'a dark look—such a look as Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, might have given.'

Leslie Colville too ere long detected dark looks in the face of Robert Wodrow, who abruptly took his departure; and the former felt piqued and annoyed to find himself, as he believed, the rival of a mere 'bumpkin,' all unaware that Ellinor was the cause of Robert's wrath; and meanwhile where was that young lady?

CHAPTER XI.

IN THE CONSERVATORY.

IN an atmosphere of drooping acacias, little palms, curious ferns, cacti, and other exotics in tubs and pots, where the light was subdued by the greenery overhead and around, and where the plashing of a beautiful bronze fountain alone broke the stillness, for in the nook of that great conservatory to which Sir Redmond Sleath had successfully drawn Ellinor alone, the music of the band and the merry voices of the garden party were scarcely heard, they were seated together on a blue velvet lounge; and he, having possessed himself of her fan, was slowly fanning her, while

he hung admiringly over her—a process to which she submitted with a soft, dreamy smile in her speaking hazel eyes; while with every motion of the fan the ripples of her fine dark hair were blown slightly to and fro.

Certainly a short intimacy had put these two on terms of familiarity, for he said, as he ceased to fan her, and settled down on the lounge by her side, with one arm, casually, as it were, thrown along the back thereof,

‘I am not a stranger to you now.’

His voice was pleasantly modulated as he stooped over her, and looked down on her drooping eyelashes.

‘Oh, no—not now,’ replied Ellinor.

‘I am so happy to hear you admit this.’

‘Why?’

Ellinor felt her question to be foolish, as it was a leading one.

‘Can you ask me?’ said Sir Redmond, in a still lower voice, and venturing to

touch—just to pat—her hand; ‘there are many persons whom we may know for years, and yet find them somehow strangers, but it is not so with you and I.’

He now took her hand in his, and saw that it was delicately white—for she had drawn a glove off—and felt soft as velvet; he saw, too, that her white-veined eyelids with their long lashes drooped under his earnest gaze, and that her red lips quivered. Was he actually influencing her already? He could scarcely believe it, even with all his unparalleled assurance.

She glanced nervously round her.

‘Do not be alarmed, dear girl—darling Ellinor, let me say,’ whispered Sleath, in his most honeyed accents, for who was to call him to account for his impertinence, if impertinence it really was? ‘I shall be content to wait—to wait and win your love, if you will but let me hope. Some day—say one day you will listen to me, and I shall tell you more freely, more

boldly how I love you—how I shall make you my own !’

Ellinor trembled as she listened to these stilted phrases that came so glibly from his tongue—how often he had said them to others she little knew; and—even Robert Wodrow apart—she had never played with a man’s heart as Sleath was now playing with hers.

He said much more, running on in the same inflated style, feeling quite a zest in the, to him, well-nigh worn-out game of love-making; and Ellinor listened. She was far from being a fool, yet she failed to realise that his tones were very second-hand indeed, and that the real expression of his blue eyes, if triumphant, was also false.

Her voice trembled so that she made no response, and the flowers in the breast of her dress rose and fell with the quickened beating of her fluttered and, we are sorry to say, happy heart.

A conviction troubled her, nevertheless, and would not be put aside—that he would master her and compel her to love him blindly by the mere force of his—practised—will, and she strove to resist it.

‘You are over-confident, though flattering me, Sir Redmond,’ said she, a little defiantly at last.

‘And what does that prove?’

‘That you are not, perhaps, what you really profess to be—in love.’

‘With you?’

‘Yes,’ she replied, in a breathless voice.

‘Have you ere this learned what love is?’

‘I know what it should be like—timid and diffident,’ she replied, uneasily, as her thoughts flashed sorrowfully to poor studious Robert Wodrow.

‘You fear I do *not* love you?’ he asked, reproachfully.

‘I do not fear it.’

‘Look into my eyes.’

She did look, and her own lowered, for she saw that which so often passes for love with the unthinking or unwary—deep and burning passion; and again she glanced nervously around her, but felt impelled to remain where she was. Sir Redmond detected the motion, and, misconstruing it, said, with a contemptuous smile that was too subtle for her to perceive,

‘You and that—a—Mr. Robert Wodrow were sweethearts, as it is called, when you were children, I have heard.’

‘Indeed!’

‘Well?’

‘The very reason, if true, that we should wish to be no more to each other,’ replied Ellinor, with some annoyance, remembering certain angry and bitter speeches of Robert’s when last they met and parted, and some of his dark looks within the last hour.

Sir Redmond was radiant at this response. She drew on her gloves, and was

about to rise, when he detained her, and, drawing her suddenly towards him, boldly kissed her, not once, but twice!

She grew very pale, and drew back, and felt as if about to weep.

‘Why do you shrink from me, Ellinor?’ he asked, with tenderness, while detaining her hands.

‘I do not shrink; but—but all this has been so sudden.’

‘Listen to me, dearest—dearest Ellinor. With all your artistic tastes, you must of course appreciate pretty things?’

‘I do,’ she replied, tremblingly, not knowing what was coming next.

‘Do you admire this?’ he asked, drawing from a pocket and unclasping a scarlet morocco case, on the blue satin lining of which there reposed a necklace of virgin gold, with a locket attached, studded with coral and diamonds, both miracles of the jeweller’s art.

‘It is lovely!’ exclaimed the girl.

‘I am glad you like it, for it is yours.’

‘Mine!’ said the girl, in a breathless voice, as she felt herself grow pale, and recognised the costliness of the jewel, but scarcely knowing what she did or what she said, while a curious mixture of dumb joy in her new lover and remorse for the former one seized her.

She heard hurried and passionate words poured into her ear; she felt the firm, warm clasp of Sir Redmond’s hands on hers as he begged permission to clasp the necklet round her slender throat, while yieldingly she turned towards him, and deftly—he was not unused to episodes such as this—as he touched her soft, white skin, he clasped it on, his eyes glowing with fire and animation as he bent over her sweet little face.

The latter was pale rather than flushed, and her mobile lips were quivering as he pressed his to them, pursuing his advantage with all the courage, skill, and tact

his past rascally experience had given him; while the force of his sudden love, if it scared, also delighted Ellinor, though the upbraiding and set visage of Robert Wodrow seemed to rise between them.

‘One day I shall see the family diamonds of the house of Sleath sparkling on your brow and bosom, love,’ said he, kissing her eyes, as gravely as if the said house of Sleath had come in with the European rabble of the Conqueror. ‘And you promise to be mine, Ellinor?’ he added, pressing her close to him.

‘Yes,’ she replied, in a scarcely audible whisper.

‘There are some men who can love several women in succession—or imagine they do so. I am not one of these, believe me, darling! I have never—could never have done that. You, Ellinor, are the first love of my heart—my first and only one!’

How he talked, this man who knew well

what passion was, but never loved, and the girl was too truthful generally herself to doubt; so her heart throbbed as his honeyed words fell on her willing ear.

‘And so, love, we shall soon be made one now,’ he whispered, ‘with another caress.’

After a time she said, timidly and blushing,

‘You will tell—you will talk with Dr. Wodrow about all this, Redmond?’

‘How delicious to hear my name on your lips! But—Dr. Wodrow—why—is he a relation?’

‘No.’

‘Why then—what then?’

‘He is a kind of guardian; papa, on his deathbed, bequeathed Mary and me to his care.’

‘Consult him—impossible!’ said Sir Redmond, whose face darkened. ‘Why should we condescend to consult that old pump with the Sabbath-day face, when our own

hearts agree? Besides, if my uncle, from whom I have great expectations, knew that I had married a Scotch girl—he has such curious prejudices——’

‘Your uncle?’ queried Ellinor, timidly.

‘I have, unfortunately, an old and strangely-tempered relation in that degree. He is dying under an incurable disease, and probably cannot live out this winter—certainly not next spring. I am the heir to all his estates, and it is his fancy that I should marry into a family of title—’

‘Otherwise?’

‘I shall lose every shilling—every one!’

‘Poor man! If the end is so near, surely we can wait, Redmond—nay, of course, we must wait,’ she added, coyly and fondly.

‘I cannot wait, my love for you will not permit me, yet I am, though well enough off, not so rich that I can afford to lose a great inheritance. Could we—can we—but keep our marriage from his know-

ledge? But we will talk of all this another time, darling. I am too hasty, too impetuous, with you. People are coming this way. Take my arm; let us go!

And he led her out into the sunlighted lawn in such a state of bewilderment that but for the chain and locket, of which, to avoid explanations, she divested herself, she would have deemed the whole episode a dream.

So 'the song was sung, the tale was told, and the heart was given away.'

Ellinor, on rejoining her friends, looked about her, and felt somewhat of a relief that she could nowhere see Robert Wodrow, who, as we have said, had abruptly taken his departure, and even amid the splendour of Sir Redmond's proposal—for a splendid one it seemed to poor Ellinor—an emotion of reproach for unloyalty to Robert Wodrow, the first and early lover of her girlish life, rose up in her mind.

While her soul was yet loaded with the

memory of that, to her, most naturally great episode in the conservatory, on which all her future life was to turn, we may wonder what she would have thought had she overheard a few bantering words that passed between Sir Redmond Sleath and the Honourable Blanche Galloway as they were looking towards her and evidently talking about her, while Mrs. Wodrow, who was near, strained her ears to listen.

‘A wife, you say? No, my dear Miss Galloway; I can’t afford such a luxury in these times, and consequently cannot be a marrying man, unless——’

‘Unless what?’

‘I found one facile enough to have me, and with the necessary amount of acreage, coalpits, money in the Funds, or elsewhere.’

‘If so, why are you so attentive in *that* absurd quarter, where there is no money certainly?’ asked the lady, pointing to Ellinor with her fan.

‘Why, indeed!’ thought Mrs. Wodrow, exasperated about her son Robert.

Sir Redmond paused.

‘Why?’ asked the young lady again, categorically.

‘*Pour passer le temps,*’ replied Sir Redmond, with one of his insolent smiles, as he twirled out the ends of his tawny moustachios.

Mrs. Wodrow did not hear his answer, though she saw the expression of his face; and at this reply Miss Galloway smiled triumphantly and disdainfully while slowly fanning herself.

CHAPTER XII.

AFTER THOUGHTS.

THERE are generally two distinct sets of people at every country entertainment carrying out the principle of 'pig-iron that looks down on tenpenny nails;' but Lady Dunkeld's garden-party was voted a charming gathering. She had a special skill for assorting her guests, and did so accordingly, though some of our *dramatis personæ* assorted themselves; and the result was so far harmony, apparently—we say apparently, for it was not universal.

Thus Blanche Galloway was displeased with the manner in which Leslie Colville hovered about Mary Wellwood, while Col-

ville, and more especially Robert Wodrow, were both displeased by the conspicuous absence of Sir Redmond and Ellinor. Robert knew not where they had been, and somehow never thought of looking in the conservatories, and probably would not have done so had the idea occurred to him.

He had not been near her all day, and he was now, more than ever, beginning to realise bitterly that the girl he had loved so well all these years past, and who, he certainly thought, loved him, was going out of his life as completely as if she had never existed. Yet he could not relinquish her without another effort—another last appeal; though he quitted the gaieties of Craigmhor early with a sore and swollen heart.

The evening was far advanced when the sisters returned to Birkwoodbrae.

There was a letter lying on the dining-room table addressed to Ellinor in the

familiar handwriting of Robert Wodrow. Why did he write to her *now* when he lived so close by, as a hedge only separated Birkwoodbrae from the glebe? unless to tell her what he dared not trust his lips to do; and her heart foreboded this.

The letter lay almost beneath her hand white and glaring in the last flush of the sunset; but, until Elspat had retired and Mary had followed on some household matter intent, she did not trust herself to open it.

Then when there was no one by to observe her, she slowly opened the letter of the lover who too truly feared he had been supplanted by another.

Line after line—though it was brief—the words were loving and tender, but ended in bitterness and upbraiding; passion made them eloquent, and they burned into the heart of the girl as the eyes and voice of Robert haunted her; but she felt besotted by this new and showy admirer,

he was so different from homely, honest, Robert Wodrow—so different from any man she had ever met before; and why should Robert, who was only her friend—her old playmate, she strove to think, but with much sophistry, attempt to compete with him and control her movements.

‘I must give you up, Robert,’ she half whispered to herself; and then the idea occurred to her, ‘would she have done so had she never met Sir Redmond Sleath?’

The letter had a postscript:—

‘My darling, the windows of your room face mine over the orchard wall. If you have not cast me utterly out of your heart, for pity sake give me some sign then to-morrow—place a vase of flowers upon your window-sill, and I shall know the token.’

But Robert Wodrow next day, from earliest dawn till morn was long past, looked and watched in vain for the sign, but none was given to him; for though

the heart of Ellinor Wellwood was wrung within her, she was too completely under a new and baleful influence now, and the old love was fast being forgotten.

To do her a little justice, we must admit that her first impulse had been to accord the poor fellow the token for which his soul thirsted.

A vase of flowers, sent to her but that morning from Sir Redmond by the hands of his valet, was on the mantelpiece. She put her hands towards it mechanically, as if she would have placed it on her window sill in obedience to that pitiful letter; but strange to say the flowers were all *dead*—already dead and withered!

Why was this?

Something superstitious crept over the girl's heart as she looked on them; she turned away—and the token was not given.

Robert, we have said, watched with aching heart and aching eyes in vain.

Had the postscript escaped her notice? It might be so; and to this straw, like a drowning man, he clung. So the day passed on; and Ellinor began to think she had done wisely in not raising hopes only to crush them, and gave herself up to thoughts of Sir Redmond, and the secret contemplation of his beautiful gift.

Sir Redmond had poured into her ear much of love, of passion, of admiration, and so forth, certainly; but even to Ellinor's unsophisticated mind his proposal of marriage seemed a strange one.

Each sister had ample food for her own thoughts. Mary was rehearsing over and over again the cutting of the initials on the tree, and the manner of Colville to herself. If he really was engaged to Blanche Galloway (of which she had no positive proof), it was not flattering to either of them; yet the expression of his eyes seemed ever sweet, candid, and honest; and she gave fully her confidence to Ellinor.

The latter, who had never a secret to keep from her sister before, felt with shame and compunction that she had one now—one of vast importance to them both; but Sir Redmond had bound her to secrecy for a little time, and she could but trust; so fondly she thought over that scene in the conservatory—his proposal, a dazzling one, for would she not one day be Lady Sleath, proud, wealthy, and independent of all the world?

Even her parents, who were lying in their graves, with all their love of her, had never in their proudest and most exultant moments pictured for either of their children a future like this!

So she seemed to live in an enchanted world, out of which the figure of Robert Wodrow faded. 'Once in our lives,' says a writer, 'Paradise opens for all of us out of the dull earth, and moments, golden with the light of romance, shine upon us with a radiance like unto no other radiance

of time, and we do not stay to count the cost of the bitter desolation that follows. For Eve herself would scarcely have surrendered one memory of Eden for all the joys to be found upon earth.'

Colville, when in the solitude of his own room, overlooking the woods of Craigmhor, was full of his own thoughts, some of which were not very pleasant, as he was dissatisfied with himself. He had a little plan he wished to carry out, as we shall show in time, and he felt perhaps that he was acting foolishly. He had come from London with the Dunkeld family, who evidently expected more from him in regard to Blanche than he had yet evinced, and the rumour of their engagement was a false one.

He had also come with his mind inspired with doubt, indifference, even prejudice against some of those he had met, the Wellwood sisters in particular; and, instead of finding them objectionable in any way,

they were far more refined than himself, the 'curled pet' of many a Belgravian drawing-room.

Many a fair face in these regions was forgotten now, and his thoughts were all of Mary Wellwood—more than he dared acknowledge to himself. Though he had seen so little of her, he felt—was it the result of some magnetic affinity?—as if he had known her all his life; as if a full knowledge of her character had suddenly crept into his heart, and yet this was impossible just then.

'Mary Wellwood!' he murmured to himself.

He had heard of Colonel Wellwood's daughters in London more than once, from one who should have befriended them, but always omitted to do so, and whose views and opinions of two friendless girls were ever slighting and hostile; and now that he met and knew them, Colville despised himself for some of the thoughts in which

he had first indulged concerning them, and the more tenderly he thought of Mary the more reproachful of himself he grew.

He had made no declaration—no; he was neither so rash nor so foolish as that yet, with all his romance, if the object of her regard was Mr. Robert Wodrow.

Of her feelings towards himself he could not form the slightest idea, and her manner was a source of perplexity. One moment she was frank, genial, and without restraint; but the next, if he became in the least degree tender, she grew retiring, distant, and cold; and, though he knew it not, this bearing was born of the rumours concerning Blanche Galloway, and he was all unaware how local gossip had mixed up his name with that of this young lady.

On one occasion he suspected that Mary avoided him, and once she seemed nearly to dislike him; thus he was pleased that he had not too formally committed himself, and so, until he could put the matter

‘to the touch, to win or lose it all,’ he would but torment himself with doubts and fears in the way usual to all lovers; but ere the time came, events were to occur which, though in some measure caused by himself, the bitter issue of them he could never have foreseen.

The two chief episodes of the garden-party were of course well known to the two ladies at Craigmhor, as Mademoiselle Rosette had two bright and sharp French eyes in her head, and knew perfectly well how to use them.

‘I don’t like the conduct of Sir Redmond, of course, Blanche,’ said Lady Dunkeld, ‘and have no wish that he should involve himself with an obscure girl whom he met in our house.’

‘I believe it to be all nothing more than a mere *coquetterie de salon*,’ said Lord Dunkeld. ‘Sleath is not a marrying man.’

‘And Captain Colville’s conduct with the other sister, wandering away into

remote parts of the ground; I suppose that was a *coquetterie de salon* too, mamma,' said Blanche, her eyes sparkling with anger, while she shrugged her shoulders, and briskly used her dark blue and bronzy green fan of peacocks' feathers.

'What—how?'

'They strolled away from everyone together, and were absent ever so long.'

'This is intolerable; but men will be men, you see, Blanche. If Miss Wellwood had been a married lady it would not have mattered so much. I think when a young man is attached to a married lady it keeps him out of harm's way,' said Lady Dunkeld; 'however, we must take some decided measures with Miss Wellwood, and with Captain Colville too.'

'Dear mamma!' cooed Miss Blanche Galloway, and she laughed that worldly little laugh of hers, which was so indicative of her character.

The result of all this was that, when

Mary and Ellinor called ceremoniously shortly after the garden-party, Lady Dunkeld, who was seated at one of the drawing-room windows, on seeing them approach, rose hastily and retired.

‘No one was at home.’

Next day the sisters were scarcely noticed by Lady Dunkeld and her daughter at church.

Other persons were not slow to remark this, and the surmises thereon—though the two girls knew nothing about them—were the reverse of pleasant or flattering.

Mary observed the absence of Captain Colville, who was not in the Dunkeld pew; and on the following day she felt a keen pang on learning that he was gone for a few days to shoot with Lord Dunkeld in the Forest of Alyth.

So he had gone without paying her a farewell visit, thought Mary.

‘He is to return in a fortnight,’ said her informant, Mrs. Wodrow, near whose

chair Mary was seated on a tabourette in the cosy manse parlour, making up a gala-cap for the old lady ; and near her crouched Jack, watching the process.

The parlour was a pretty apartment, neither morning-room nor boudoir, though somewhat of both, with many indications of a woman's presence.

Rare old china was disposed in odd nooks, and china bowls with roses freshly gathered from the garden ; and the furniture, if old-fashioned, and pertaining to the early days of Mrs. Wodrow's home-coming to the manse as a young wedded wife, was all polished to perfection. On a shelf was an imposing row of the ' Wodrow Society's ' religious publications, including 'The Last Words of My Lady Coltness,' 'Of My Lady Anne Elcho,' the life of the gallant Covenanter, Sergeant John Nisbet of Hardhill, and so forth.

' *Apropos* of Captain Colville,' said the old lady, looking down on her young

friend, 'I hope you have not lost your heart to him, Mary?'

'I should think not,' replied Mary, stoutly, but colouring so deeply, nevertheless, that Mrs. Wodrow could see how the crimson suffused even her delicate neck.

'That is well, Mary; mischief enough has been wrought among us already,' resumed Mrs. Wodrow, her benign old face becoming cloudy.

Mary knew to what she referred, but seemed, or affected to seem, wholly intent on the cap; and Mrs. Wodrow looked admiringly and affectionately down on her dimpled wrists and little white hands.

'I do wish I had something nice and fresh for trimming!' she exclaimed, as she twirled round the cap for inspection. 'I think these rosebuds will do with this spray of ivy,' she added, searching a flower-box, and putting her head meditatively on one side.

'Then, Mrs. Wodrow,' she exclaimed,

‘if I fail to please you, you must be a dreadful coquette, you old dear!’

‘Thanks, pet Mary; when did you ever fail to please me?’ said the old lady, caressing the girl’s head, and adding, anxiously, ‘You do not look well, Mary; where were you this morning? Not in the clachan, I hope, as I hear there is scarlatina there.’

‘I have no fear; I took a kind message from Robert about a sick baby. I fear it is dying, and God pity the poor mother, the only light of whose life is likely to go out in darkness.’

‘You have a tender heart, Mary. Robert, poor Robert; you know he has failed to pass, Mary?’

‘Yes; I am so sorry, and so is Ellinor.’

‘Ellinor may well be,’ said Mrs. Wodrow, with some asperity.

‘Why?’ asked Mary, her colour deepening again.

‘Because her fair face has come between him and his wits, poor fellow, and

I shouldn't wonder if we lose him altogether.'

'Lose him!' repeated Mary, in a breathless voice; 'how?'

'He seems desperate and says that rather than slave for another session at college he will go for a soldier.'

'Oh, never, never think of such a thing!'

'He and Ellinor seem to have quarrelled.'

'Quarrelled—surely not! About what or who?'

'That man Sir Redmond Sleath, and his attentions to her.'

'They will make up this quarrel as they have made up others long ago,' said poor Mary, cheerfully, as she little knew to what a crisis the baronet's admiration for her sister was coming—nay, had come. She knew nothing of the scene in the conservatory and other minor scenes, of the present of jewellery, of utterances and

promises. She believed the whole affair was only a lovers' quarrel, stimulated by jealousy on Robert's part, and vanity on that of Ellinor; and meantime she sympathised with Mrs. Wodrow, and would have done so with Robert had he been there, but he was fully and painfully occupied elsewhere at that precise time.

'As children—as boy and girl, they may have quarrelled, Mary; but this affair will be a serious one for both, for Robert especially. His studies are neglected, his appetite is gone, and he looks the ghost of himself.'

Mary knew not what more to urge, as she had seen, with some anxiety, Sir Redmond's admiration of her sister, and said, after a pause,

'I wonder what manner of man Sir Redmond is?'

'Judging by the little I saw of him at the garden-party—where the mischief seems to have been done—not a good

man, Mary dear—not a good man, though a handsome one in his way, and to a young girl, I doubt not, fascinating, Yet I would rather see my daughter dead, if I had one, than married to a man with eyes so cold, so cruel and shiftily.’

‘But *who* is thinking of marriage?’ said Mary, with a slight laugh, little knowing that it was a contingency as remote from the thoughts of Sir Redmond as her own.

‘And I don’t think that Captain Colville—for all that Dr. Wodrow seems to like him so much—can be good in every way if he has such a friend or companion as Sir Redmond Sleath,’ said the old lady, shaking her head.

These provoking words haunted Mary for weeks after, as the tormenting fragment of a song or air will haunt us—not because we like it, though it will recur again and again. Then he had gone without the formality of a farewell visit. Had the Dunkeld ladies aught to do with that?

Mary's heart foreboded that they had.

Mrs. Wodrow was full of indignation at the worry and humiliation undergone by her son, and even the doctor was not disinclined to inveigh against garden-parties and such-like gatherings, as his ancestor did against theatres—'those seminaries of idleness, looseness, and sin,' as he termed them in *Analecta Scotica*.

The peaceful current of the sisters' life—the life they led at bonnie Birkwoodbrae, was soon to be roughly disturbed now, and events were to occur which they could never have foreseen.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST APPEAL.

ROBERT WODROW, on the afternoon referred to in our last chapter, was, we have said, engaged elsewhere than at the manse, and yet he was not very far away.

Incidents trivial at the time had now recurred with convincing and accumulating force to his feverish mind on one hand; on the other, he feared that he might have been too hasty in his condemnation, and too summary in his suspicions, in quitting the party at Craigmohr as he had done; yet *where* were these two all the time he had missed them, and what was the subject of their discourse while he had

been lingering amid the gay groups in the sunshine, and was grotesquely tortured by the music of the band?

And the token he had prayed for had not been accorded! How he loathed the little world in which he lived; how he longed to eschew everyone there, and get far away from the Birks of Invermay, for to see Ellinor among these with another, and that other, 'the slimy Sleath,' as he thought, would drive him mad.

To think of Ellinor—to meet and hang about her; to anticipate her every wish and want, so far as lay in his humble power, had been for years—in the intervals of his hard studies—the daily occupation of Robert Wodrow's life; and now all this was at an end; his 'occupation,' like Othello's, seemed gone.

Knowing that Mary was at the manse, he thought he would find Ellinor at home alone, and he was right, so he ventured near Birkwoodbrae to make a 'last appeal;'

and yet even in this he had been, to a certain extent, interfered with by his rival.

The latter, well aware of the time when Mary Wellwood was generally abroad among her poor people, or otherwise employed, had sent his valet, John Gaiters—a well-trained rascal—with a beautiful bouquet and a perfumed note to Ellinor.

In the note he urged her by every means in her power to preserve secrecy close as the grave concerning the terms on which they were, lest his expectations might be destroyed, and with them her own; and then he pressed her to meet him at a certain point near the Linn on the May, at a given time, when he would tell her more.

This missive was curiously and most warily worded to be the production of one who professed to be such an ardent lover. It did not bear even his signature, but only his initials mysteriously twisted into a species of monogram. To one more

worldly wise or less foolish than Ellinor, some doubts would have been inspired by its tenor alone, but she had none, and simply felt joy and tumult in her breast.

She clasped the golden locket round her neck, and with brightness spreading over her sweet face, contemplated herself in a hand mirror, while indulging in day-dreams of her future as Lady Sleath, being driven in a splendid carriage to Buckingham Palace, or down St. James's Street, with bare shoulders in broad daylight, with a train some yards long and diamonds in profusion, to be presented at the drawing-room in the gloomy old palace of the Tudors, surrounded by handsome fellows in snowy uniforms, who murmured compliments about her beauty.

Had 'dear Redmond' not described to her, too, something of the life they would lead together? Returning from Tyburnian and Belgravian balls at 6 a.m., breakfasting at mid-day, and then going for 'a

spin' in the Row, where cavaliers would surround her, or canter by her side and beg for waltzes at Lady A.'s and the Countess of B.'s. Then dress again for a flower *fête* at the Botanical Gardens; for pigeon-shooting at Hurlingham (wherever that was—poor Ellinor had not the ghost of an idea!) Sunday at the Zoo, and a dinner at the 'Star and Garter,' or it might be at the 'Trafalgar' in Greenwich, which she supposed to be one of H.M.'ships.

Suddenly, amid visions such as these, unheard or unannounced, Robert Wodrow stood before her, hat in hand, and in his eyes, keen and dark grey, a brooding light that boded evil to some one!

He was pale almost to ghastliness, and her eyes drooped, as if a weight oppressed their full white lids when they met his fixed gaze. However, he took her proffered hand mechanically, and then she tried to talk gaily, not knowing what she said; but the talk proved a miserable failure.

How he longed to take her in his arms once again ; to kiss her glossy brown hair, her damask cheek, her rosy lips ; to implore her to love him still and share his humble future ! But no ; it would be more cowardly to take any advantage than of any passing remorse she might feel ; and better was it, perhaps, that she should marry this other man, if he really loved her, and forget—if she could—that there was such a poor fellow as Robert Wodrow in the secluded world she would leave behind her ; and he said something of this to her in faltering accents, and for a time the heart of Ellinor faltered too—but for a time only.

The new vision was too bright to fade quickly away !

‘I am eating my heart out with sorrow and uncertainty—I am sick of suspense, Ellinor,’ he said, after a pause ; ‘our happy meetings, our walks, our talks, our plans

for the future—are they all as nothing to you now, Ellinor?’

‘That is it, Robert,’ she said, making a prodigious effort to be calm and cool; ‘you see, Robert, we have been so much together.’

‘All our days, Ellinor!’

‘Too much so—yes, all our days; so it never struck me that—that——’

‘What, darling?’

‘You cared for me in *that* way.’

‘Indeed! Your doubts come too late.’

‘Or I might have learned to care too,’ she said, with confusion.

‘You did love me, and care for me too, before that fellow Sleath came among us,’ said Robert, gloomily; for it seemed hard indeed that, after the happiness of their boyhood and girlhood, after all the budding hopes of riper years, under this man’s new and hateful influence, she made light of him and his love—mocked him, it seemed, laughed at him for being so fool-

ish to care for her 'in *that* way,' as she phrased it.

'Robert,' said she, after a pause, 'why be so angry about a little flirtation?'

She spoke deprecatingly, and her face wore a sickly smile.

'To flirt was never your wont, and I have read that the essence of flirting is that it is a stolen pleasure, the future results of which cannot be foreseen.'

'It would be tame between such old friends as you and I, Robert.'

'Tame indeed—and unnatural,' said he, huskily.

His eyes, which hitherto had been fixed upon her colourless face, now fell upon the ornament she was wearing—an ornament he had never seen before; and from its apparent value his heart too surely foreboded who the donor was; yet he disdained to refer to it, though he said, upbraidingly,

'Oh, Ellinor, how I have loved, and still

love you, is known only to Heaven and myself; yet never again shall my hand touch yours; never again my arm go round you; never more shall my lips touch yours, though yearning—oh, God only knows how intensely—longing to do so once again—only once again!

She evinced no sign of a truce in this position, and was devoutly hoping that Robert Wodrow would adopt some other *rôle* than that of lover.

‘Robert,’ she said, nervously, ‘are we not friends?’

‘No.’

‘Can we not be friends again?’

‘*Friends!* How can you ask me? It was, you well know, always understood,’ he continued, making an effort to be calm, ‘that when I could afford to marry, you, Ellinor, would be my wife. Why take all my love and give me back not an atom now?’

She accorded no answer.

‘You have ceased to be true to me. I have known and felt it for weeks past,’ he continued, ‘and yet I cannot regain my freedom of heart.’

Her head was weary, but her heart was beating wildly and painfully; and Robert’s eyes, as he surveyed her with all their sadness of expression, were expressive of the fondest love.

Never before had these two spoken or confronted each other with bitterness of heart until now, and each felt that for the other all was over, and that the tender past, ‘the grace of a day that was dead,’ would never come again.

‘Robert, I have always hated the idea of being poor,’ urged Ellinor, as if to extenuate herself, ‘and with you, a young, struggling, country practitioner, supposing the summit of your ambition won, I should never be otherwise. Pardon me,’ she

added, recalling the Alnaschar visions his visit had interrupted, 'if I speak unkindly.'

'Say, rather, cruelly, and you will be nearer the truth, Ellinor Wellwood; yet I am sorry for you.'

'Be not so, Robert. I repeat that I would never be happy poor—now,' she added, involuntarily.

'You have made that discovery since this interloper came!'

She was silent, but her silence was assent, and he took it as such.

'Not happy even at dear old Birkwoodbrae or the home I meant to provide close by it?' he said, reproachfully.

'Be reasonable, Robert; happen what may, we can always be dear friends.'

'Friends—again!' he exclaimed, sternly; 'you and I, Ellinor?'

Then his manner changed, for the greatness of his love made him very humble, and he said,

‘Do you know what you are doing—do you fully think of it even? You cannot love this man, Ellinor, whom, I suppose, you are going to marry, as you loved me.’

‘Marriage, Robert!’ said she, blushing deeply now; ‘how fast your thoughts run.’

‘How?’

‘If that is to be, it is in the future, of course—but just now——’

She paused with some confusion, as she thought of the injunctions laid by Sleath upon her.

‘You cannot love him?’

‘Perhaps not quite exactly yet, Robert,’ replied Ellinor, not knowing really what to say, and feeling some shame at the part she was acting; ‘but think of his position, and the place he can give me—a poor, almost penniless, girl—in society.’

‘And in that place you expect to be happy?’

‘I shall have substantial grounds for

happiness, and I think, Robert dear, you wish me well.'

'Heaven knows I do, though you are learning fast to forget. Search your heart, Ellinor,' he continued, piteously; 'think over our past, darling—of our mutually anticipated future, in which each seemed to see only the other. Against reason, hope, and all I hear I cannot forget, and hence I love you—love you still, Ellinor.'

He stretched out his hands to her, and his eyes grew very dim.

For a moment she was tempted to throw herself upon his loving breast, and there sob out her remorse and seek his forgiveness; but the demons of pride and ambition ruled her heart too strongly now, and she withheld or crushed the emotions of pity and generosity that so fleetly inspired her.

When that emotion came again they were far apart, and it came too late—too late!

How this last meeting *might* have ended it is difficult to say ; but Robert Wodrow, thinking it was useless to protract the agony he felt, pressed his tremulous lips to her right hand, and, without trusting himself to look again in her face, swiftly withdrew, and quitted the house.

Poor Robert ! She was indeed sorry for him—sorry that the old friendly relations, as she strove to deem them now, should be broken up. ‘They had been such chums’—Robert, more justly, deemed it ‘lovers’—in the dear past time that would never—could never—come again !

Better a thousand times, if it was to be, that they parted now, and that it was over—all over and done with, thought Ellinor, after a time.

Amid all this there was a strange and conflicting—a mysterious foreboding in her mind, that by casting off the honest love of Robert Wodrow she might be entailing future misery on herself.

The last appeal had been made, and, though in vain, young Wodrow did not regret that he had made it, but he feared that Ellinor might be following a shadow and missing the substance. So true it is that 'the golden moments in the stream of life rush past us, and we see nothing but sand; that angels come to visit us, and we only know them when they are gone.'

CHAPTER XIV.

GRETCHEN AND FAUST.

‘AND you have quarrelled with poor Robert?’ said Mary, somewhat reproachfully, to her sister.

‘Nay—not quarrelled, exactly,’ replied Ellinor.

‘What, then?’

‘Agreed to part.’

‘After—*all*; oh, Ellinor!’

‘All what?’

‘Well, you know what I mean.’

‘We have always been in the habit of calling each other by our Christian names, and by pet names, too, such as Robbie and Ellie—a bad system—and—and—in

fact, you know, Mary, we regarded each other rather as brother and sister than as —as—'

'Lovers—and in this new view of the situation you are no doubt influenced by Sir Redmond Sleath?'

'Perhaps,' replied Ellinor, doggedly, as she watched the hands of the clock.

'If he means honourably—and he dare not mean otherwise—you are perhaps worldly-wise. But poor Robert!'

The exclamation, though uttered low, found an echo in the heart of Ellinor. Yet she was inexorably intent on keeping her invited appointment, of which Mary had not, of course, the least suspicion.

'I do not like Sir Redmond,' said Mary, with a tone of decision.

'Why?' asked Ellinor, changing colour.

'He never looks me straight in the face, and at times, with all his *insouciance*, he can do nothing but tug out his moustache, as if to show off his white, useless hands.

He certainly has hung about you, Ellinor, more than I—considering our friendless and lonely position—have quite relished.’

‘Not perhaps more than Captain Colville has hung about you, Mary,’ retorted Ellinor, softly; ‘and I may as well admit that Sir Redmond always speaks to me of his love, and has asked me to love him in return.’

‘He has done this?’ exclaimed Mary, growing pale.

‘Yes,’ replied Ellinor, kissing her sister, perhaps to hide her own face.

‘Has he asked you to be his wife?’

The look of unrest—sorrowful unrest—she had detected more than once in Ellinor’s face crept over it now. The latter cast her sweet eyes down and made no reply, as in this important matter she was as yet tongue-tied.

‘Be wary—be wary, pet Ellinor, for it has been truly said that common-sense and honesty bear so small a proportion to

folly and knavery that human life at least is but a paltry province.'

'Is this out of one of Dr. Wodrow's sermons?' asked Ellinor, with some annoyance. 'Surely I am the best judge of what is for my own happiness.'

'Perhaps; but remember the proverb,' said Mary, thinking of the absent Colville and fading hopes. 'Happiness is like an echo which answers to the call, but does not come.'

'What an old croaker it is!' said Ellinor, as she laughingly kissed her sister again and slipped away from her.

She re-read Sir Redmond Sleath's letter—the first love-letter she had ever received, if we except the sorrowful and upbraiding epistle from Robert Wodrow. It seemed orthodox enough, as it began 'My darling,' but had no genuine signature, and there was very little devotion expressed in it, and was brief and curt.

Perhaps Sir Redmond disliked letter-

writing—most men do ; but there seemed something wanting in this letter—something she could not define, and the lack of which she felt and sighed over. Were Mary's words of warning affecting her ? It almost seemed so ; but she put the document carefully away in the most secret recess of her desk, and hastened to hold the meeting it solicited—and like the Gretchen of Goethe hastening to meet Faust, took her way to the trysting-place near the Linn, and long after in Ellinor's mind was the sound of the May, as it poured over the steep cascade, associated with this meeting and all the pain it caused her.

When she arrived, Sir Redmond was not there, and was ungallantly late in keeping his appointment ; but he and Lord Dunkeld had lately betaken themselves to wil-
ing away the evenings at *écarté*, though the baronet had a way of turning a king that would have made the fortune of any-

one compelled to pluck wealthy pigeons.

He came just when Ellinor was very much disposed to pout, and framed the most humble of apologies, as he was resolved to lose no time in carrying out his nefarious plans in absence of the Guardsman, who seemed to have—he knew not why, unless for evil schemes of his own—a mysterious interest in these two girls, of one of whom he stood somehow rather in awe.

Pressing Ellinor close to his heart, with her face nestled in his neck, he told her why he had asked for this meeting, and what he had now to propose for their own happiness, and that to deceive his wealthy uncle, from whom their marriage must be kept a secret—there could be no public ceremony—no notice in the newspapers, more than all!

‘Dare you trust yourself to me, darling Ellinor, and marry me privately; and then—then, before spring comes, assuredly—’

‘My heart recoils from such treachery to Mary—from all this secrecy; is it—*can* it be necessary?’ asked the girl, weeping.

‘Most necessary for our future, if it is to be a brilliant one, as I have no doubt you wish,’ he continued, caressing her, and then added, with a sophistry that would have been plain to anyone less simple or less easily deluded than Ellinor, ‘I am quite prepared to acknowledge our marriage to all the world, provided it does not, as it *must* not, reach my uncle’s ears.’

‘I have heard that trusting to Providence in the shape of elderly relations is often fatal,’ said Ellinor, with a sickly smile.

‘I shall get a special licence, if that will satisfy you, Ellinor darling!’ he urged, ignorant of the fact that in Scotland such a document was unknown, and that there the Archbishop of Canterbury had no more power than ‘General Booth.’

He left nothing unsaid to play upon her

weakness, but it was long before he could obtain a half silent consent from her, and, ere he did so, more than once an ugly gleam came into his eyes.

Though not unhandsome, the face of Sir Redmond was not always a pleasant one to look upon. A certain force about it there was, and those who watched it felt that its owner was not a man to be trifled with in anything that touched his self-interest or his evil purposes; that he was a man ready for emergencies and heedless of obstacles if he had an end in view.

Like a character recently described by a novelist, 'his great weapon was his inflexible will, aided by the reputation he had achieved of never allowing himself to be defeated. I need not say that he held women in the most supreme contempt, and openly expressed his opinion that every woman had her price. The only merit he assumed was in knowing the exact article of barter each had set her heart on.'

Such was the pleasant personage who had supplanted Robert Wodrow, and even while he was softly caressing the girl and subjecting her to his endearments, he was thinking of the time to come—the time when she would find herself separated from her loving sister, her only tie on earth—alone in the world, penniless and in his power, her character and position utterly lost, and when none would believe her most solemn protestations of innocence; then would be his hour of supreme triumph, when, like a bruised and wounded bird, she would come fluttering to him for succour and protection, and when he might be generous, and make her over to ‘that yahoo, Robert Wodrow.’

‘I shall have a splendid house in which to enshrine you when the time comes and I am free,’ continued the tempter; ‘you, my darling, have known no home but this sequestered one—apart from all the world—a world of which you know nothing.’

‘And poor Mary—how can I leave her?’

‘Nor need you do so—once we are away and have been made one we shall send for her; it will only be the matter of a post or two. I shall so love and cherish you both,’ urged Sleath, half laughing in his mind at the conviction that she would never see Mary again until—well, until he was tired of her. ‘Courage, little one, and you will be Lady Sleath—it is a second edition of the miller’s lovely daughter.’

‘I am not quite so humble as she was,’ said Ellinor, making a little *moue*.

‘Nor I so exalted as the “gracious Duncan.” To-morrow night, then, dearest Ellinor, at this hour—nine o’clock, I shall await you with a hired carriage at the corner of the lane below Birkwoodbrae, and a short drive will take us to the station, where we shall get the up train for London and the south!’

Ellinor answered only by her tears, and the silently-accorded kiss that gave *consent*,

and went shudderingly back to her home, feeling as if she was hovering on the verge of an abyss.

And she was so in more ways than one !

CHAPTER XV.

HOW FAUST SUCCEEDED.

THE day, an eventful one, indeed, to Ellinor—wore on; the ‘to-morrow night’ of Sir Redmond’s arrangements had become ‘to-night,’ and the hour of nine seemed to be approaching swiftly.

Mary’s warnings to Ellinor to ‘be wary’ recurred to the latter persistently and reproachfully, yet she never wavered or swerved from her purpose, though with reference to marriage there came to her memory the words of a writer who says it is a solemn thing when you come to think of it, that if you make a mistake in the matter you are in for it, and nothing can pull you out again.

Ellinor's ambition was, as we have shown, dazzled on one hand, while love and novelty lured her on the other. Her heart was wrung by the duplicity with which she was treating her sister, and the contemplation of what that sister's emotions would be when she was missed; but Sleath's brilliant promises and visions of the future that was before them, deadened the sense of the present for a time. .

She wrote a farewell letter to Mary, which the latter would in time find on her toilet table.

'The first step is taken now, I cannot retrace it,' thought Ellinor, as she closed this letter, a very incoherent and blurred one; 'and now to begone—to steal away without seeing darling Mary, whom I could not look in the face.'

Nervously and hurriedly she went through her drawers and repositories, selecting and thrusting into a hand-bag those articles which she thought were necessary

for her journey or flight. Now and then something turned up which reminded her of happy past hours, of Mary's love, and their parents' memory; she gazed with tear-blinded eyes on some faded photographs, and kissed them passionately as if she could neither look on them long enough nor part with them.

At last her assortment was made, and, fearful of meeting Mary, she threw on her hat and cloak, grasped her bag, slipped softly from the house by a back way, and passing through the old doorway with the date and legend on its lintel, went quickly towards the place of meeting, with her heart beating wildly, painfully, and all her pulses tingling.

The anxiety—the craving that had possessed her at times to get away from the reproachful eyes of Robert Wodrow and the upbraiding speeches of his mother, was about to be relieved now; for under the mal-influence of Sleath the girl's nature

seemed to have been changed, but the last words Mrs. Wodrow had said to her were in her memory then :—

‘ You took the love of my boy—the one deep love of his life it seemed to be—made a plaything of his heart, and then cast it aside to break and wither, it may be to die!’

Anyone who saw Ellinor at this juncture would have found a curious rigidity in the usually soft outline of her sweet face, and a perplexed and troubled expression in her hazel eyes as she walked onward, feeling it was not yet too late to return.

But she had passed her word, plighted her troth, given her promise to this man, and why should she not redeem her pledge? She was leaving a homely and dull, a grey and sequestered, if perfectly peaceful life, for the new and brilliant one to be shared with him, who loved her so well, and she would fulfil her contract.

Some—no doubt many—there would be who might have no pity for the rash imprudence of a motherless girl yielding to the temptation given her and eloping thus; and her name, her story, and her transgression, in many a false version, might be bandied from lip to lip, a conviction that galled and fretted her naturally proud spirit; but the consciousness of all this was inferior to a sense of what she knew Mary would feel, on finding herself deceived thus and left alone—alone to face the scandal, gossip, *esclandre*, and reprehension to which her act would give rise; and the knowledge gave Ellinor acute mental agony.

She had been that morning at the churchyard, as if to bid her parents farewell in spirit, and saw the last chaplets that she and Mary had woven lying on their graves, all withered now, and she had marvelled when flowers from her hands would be laid there again.

All was still around her now ; she could hear, however, the voice of Mary's tame owl in its nest in the garden wall, and the rush of the May over its rocky bed.

When might she hear that familiar sound in the sweet moonlight again ? Ay, Ellinor, when ?

Perfectly cool and audacious Sir Redmond Sleath was at the appointed place betimes, and though an intrigue or adventure of this kind was nothing new to him, his heart was certainly beating faster than usual under his well-cut coat as he quitted the hired brougham at the end of the lane which diverged from the highway towards Birkwoodbrae.

The moon, a sickly and slender one, was waning, and the chill, pale light of its crescent cast the shadows of the tall silver birches across the pathway as he picked his way forward to where the outline of the house at Birkwoodbrae came before him, with its grey walls and windows half

covered by masses of monthly roses and virginia creepers. The house and all around it seemed still as the grave. He had come betimes, we say, and was thus at his post a little before Ellinor came forth to meet him.

He heard no sound and saw no sign, and to him seconds seemed like minutes—minutes hours. Could anything have happened? Had Mary baffled the plans of Ellinor, or had the courage of the latter failed her at the last moment? He had known of such things; and there was a curious suppressed gleam—a latent glitter in his cold blue eyes that would not have been pleasant to see.

He heard the house clock strike the hour of nine, and just as the last stroke sounded he saw the waving of a dress and of a white skirt, the wearer of which turned into the lane, and he smiled as such men smile over the triumph of their own selfishness and heartlessness; but now

Ellinor, for she it was, paused in her approach, for something between a yell and a hoarse oath escaped Sir Redmond, blended with fierce growling, and he felt as if his right leg had been caught in the sharpest of mantraps.

True to the instincts of hate and vengeance for more than one kick administered by Sleath, Jack, the bull terrier, who had been upon the prowl, had caught the baronet by the calf of the leg and held him fast !

Now, whether it was a dog, a cat, a hare, or a rabbit on which Jack fastened, he never relaxed his hold while life remained in his victim ; and so, after tearing Sir Redmond's trousers from heel to waistband, Jack's sharp teeth were closed nigh to meeting in the muscles of his enemy's right leg.

And well might Ellinor pause in wonder and affright as she shrank under the shadow of a hedge, for to the fierce im-

precations of Sir Redmond, and the angry snarling of the dog, were added the swearing of the valet, John Gaiters, and the shouts of the brougham driver.

By the time the dog let go and trotted leisurely to the house, there was nothing left for Sir Redmond and his two attendants but an ignominious retreat, and they drove off accordingly.

To Sleath it was a matter for the fiercest exasperation that his carefully matured and well-laid scheme to entrap a beautiful and well-nigh friendless girl—a scheme on the very verge of its fruition—had been baffled, and baffled so absurdly, so grotesquely, and with so much physical agony, by ‘an accursed cur which he would yet shoot like a rat,’ as he hissed through his clenched teeth.

And Sleath was, strange to say, the more furious because he had meditated a perfidy towards Ellinor.

Terror of the dog’s bite and probable

hydrophobia made her would-be lover nearly beside himself. He came no more near Birkwoodbrae, so, for the present, she was safe from him. His pedestrianism was effectually marred for several days, and even had he been able to concoct any fresh nefarious scheme, events were about to occur at Birkwoodbrae beyond the conception of all.

However, on the day of the projected elopement, he had made all his arrangements for leaving Craigmhor, and, having formally bade adieu to Lord Dunkeld's household, he could not return, and had to carry out his plans for travelling south without the fair companion whom he intended should accompany him. In the snug comfort of a Pullman car he gave loose to the rage and mortification naturally inspired by his most humiliating and grotesque defeat. He drank heavily, and there was a fiendish expression of determination in his face that terrified even his

usually stolid valet, Mr. John Gaiters.

Though she heard the shrill voice of Elspat crying,

‘Oh, Miss Wellwood, Jack’s been up to mischief—fighting with something; his jaws are all over with blood!’

Ellinor knew not precisely what had happened: she only felt that all was over, how or why she knew not; but a revulsion of feeling took possession of her, a flood of tears relieved her, and on her knees by her bedside she thanked Heaven for her escape!

CHAPTER XVI.

EVIL TIDINGS.

THAT night before retiring to rest, when seated near Mary, and affecting to read to Ellinor quietly by the light of a pleasantly shaded lamp, all the stirring and startling events of the recent hour or two seemed a kind of dream—an unreality—though the illusion was apt to be dispelled by Mary's wondering surmises as to *what* Jack had been fighting with, and who made all the noise prior to the dog's return with somewhat ensanguined teeth and jaws!

Ellinor, as she looked furtively from time to time at Mary's sweet and placid face,

with its downcast looks and soft, yet firm expression, felt inclined to cast herself on her breast and confess all the story of the late escape. But her heart failed her; it was too full of shame for her duplicity, with doubt, bewilderment, and a strange kind of hope in the future.

Her day-dreams, as we have described them, were too bright and too recent to be quite dispelled or abandoned yet.

And both sisters were quite unaware that they owed the fact of their being placidly seated as usual together at that time to Jack the terrier, who lay asleep with his head resting on Mary's feet, yet snarling from time to time and showing his teeth; for he was dreaming—as dogs will dream—of his late encounter and revenge. For though Jack had snarled fiercely when assailed by Gaiter's foot and the driver's whip, he had made his first attack 'with that savage and insidious silence' which, as Bell in his British

quadrupeds says, indicate the character of the bull-dog; and, though called a fox-terrier, the gallant Jack had a strong cross of the bull in him.

Betimes next morning Ellinor sought the spot where she was to have met Sir Redmond. There the wayside grass was bruised, torn, and spotted with blood, which the dew of the August night had failed to wash away, and there lay a half-smoked cigar and a gentleman's kid glove. On the latter, Jack, who accompanied her, with cocked ears and tail, and with his bandy legs looking more impudent and confident than usual, pounced with a snort of triumph, and tore it to shreds with his teeth and paws, thus giving Ellinor the first light she had on last night's mystery.

There were marks close by where horses' hoofs had been planted, and the deep ruts of carriage wheels—a carriage brought for her; all silent witnesses that Sir Redmond had been there!

And all this had happened but last night—exactly twelve hours ago ; yet it looked as if a score of years had passed since she stole silently from her room and approached the shaded lane !

Troubles and hopes always look brighter by day than by night, in sunshine than under clouds and rain ; so Ellinor began to consider the whole affair with more composure.

To her it had seemed that, ‘although love in a cottage is a very fine thing, love in a Belgravian mansion was decidedly preferable ;’ but all that just then seemed to be over and done with, when, during the day, she heard incidentally through old Elspat of Sir Redmond’s sudden departure from Craigmhor—the departure in which she was to have shared !

She loved Sir Redmond with her head only, and not with her heart ; and though Robert Wodrow might not have quite

divined the difference, yet a difference in such love there is.

And Ellinor as she reflected, vowed to herself that never again would she risk the loss of position as Colonel Wellwood's daughter (even to be a baronet's wife), or place herself so foolishly in a comparative stranger's power, till he was free to claim and wed her, despite relations and wealth.

Little did the simple Ellinor know the reality of the escape she had so narrowly made from the pitfall prepared for her. '*Væ victis!* is the watchword of civilisation,' says a writer; 'a trustful, loving girl succumbs to the artifices of a scoundrel, and society punishes her by averting the light of its countenance from her, while the man who has committed a crime only next to murder in atrocity is let off scot-free. And so the world wags, my venerable masters! and it is a jolly one, take it at its worst aspect.'

Ignorant of the baffled elopement, of course, and perhaps of Sir Redmond's departure from the neighbourhood of Invermay, Robert Wodrow, intent on plans of his own, came near Ellinor no more, and seemed to ignore her existence.

And, strange to say, ere long she became indignant that he made no sign or advance; while rumour said he was perhaps going away, no one knew whither. There has seldom been a woman who liked to see a once avowed lover slip from her grasp; and Robert Wodrow certainly had been Ellinor's lover till the serpent entered her paradise in the shape of rank and ambition.

But we are somewhat anticipating the events of the day subsequent to her intended flight.

Mary, after evening fell, and having been round among some of her poor people, was seated somewhat thoughtfully alone, and seemed to have lost most of her

usual buoyancy of spirit. Was it a prevision of coming evil, she thought, or the result of the weather? The sun had sunk like a red, glowing ball behind the hills, and there was in the air an extraordinary stillness which produced a depressing effect upon her spirits.

The recent visits of Captain Colville and Sir Redmond Sleath, on the one hand, and the cold and haughty demeanour of Lady Dunkeld and her daughter, on the other, had begun to impress upon her the necessity for making a change in their little household, and having some pleasant, motherly, and elderly lady to reside with them as a chaperone; and her mind was full of thought on this matter when Dr. Wodrow was announced. She welcomed him with pleasure, as usual, all unaware that he was the bearer of tidings that would render all her plans for the future unavailing!

He noticed the cloud on Mary's face

through her smile of welcome, and, taking her hand kindly in his own, he said,

‘Mary dear, is there anything you particularly dread?’

‘How strange that you should ask me this,’ replied Mary, ‘for I am rather ashamed to say that I feel as if something of evil were about to happen—but the emotion is vague and undefined.’

‘Then you believe in presentiments?’

‘I do—sometimes—do not you, Dr. Wodrow?’

‘I am afraid I do,’ said he, with increasing kindness and gravity of manner. ‘So Robert and Ellinor have completely quarrelled?’

‘I fear so.’

‘George Eliot says that “Every man who is not a monster, a mathematician, or a moral philosopher is the slave of some woman or other.” But I came not to speak of Robert, poor fellow, but of something concerning yourself.’

‘Of me!’ said Mary, startled by the growing gravity of his manner.

‘Yourself and Ellinor! I have wanted much to see you all day, my dear.’

‘Why?’

‘I have news for you.’

‘Good news or bad?’

‘Bad, I grieve to say, my dear bairn,’ said he, as he paused again with something pitiful in his handsome old face, while Mary’s colour changed, and her heart began to beat quicker with pain and apprehension.

‘Have you had a letter from a Mr. Luke Sharpe?’

‘No—who is he?’

‘A lawyer—a writer to the signet in Edinburgh—who is the legal agent of your cousin Wellwood.’

‘What is all this to me—to us?’

‘Your uncle is dead. Your cousin is the next male heir—heir of entail—so Birkwoodbrae, and everything else of

which your uncle died possessed that is entailed, goes to him, and you and Ellinor can reside here no longer—so Mr. Sharpe has written me.’

He evidently said this with an effort—with manifest difficulty, and as if he dreaded to look in the face of Mary, who for some moments felt as if stunned, and gazed at the lawyer’s letter, which he placed before her, as she would at a serpent, and scarcely taking in its meaning.

‘Understand me, child. Your father’s elder brother, who permitted you to live unmolested here—as Birkwoodbrae was but a moiety of the entailed property—is dead, and young Wellwood, the guardsman of whom Captain Colville spoke so often, claims all.’

‘And we must go away?’ said Mary, in a low, strange, wailing voice, all unlike her own.

‘Away—yes—but where?’

‘God only knows!’

And as she spoke the girl wrung her slender interlaced fingers, while the old minister kindly patted her head, as he had often done in her childhood. After a pause, Mary said, in a voice broken more than once by a hard dry sob,

‘Our uncle in Australia would seem to have died months ago according to this letter, yet we only hear of the event now.’

‘Yes.’

‘And we have been living here in another person’s house, though we deemed it our own—another person’s, and not thinking of rent?’ she added, bitterly.

‘Yes.’

Mary thought the doctor took the matter somewhat placidly, and felt indignation mingle with her grief.

‘And for the roof that covered us, Ellinor and I have actually been indebted for months to our cousin Wellwood, the cold-blooded son of a cold-blooded father, who died at feud with ours, and amid the whirl

of London life never troubled himself about our existence, even when we were left as orphan girls upon the world. So we have been living here in dear, dear Birkwoodbrae in a fool's paradise, after all—after all!' continued Mary, with growing bitterness of tone and heart.

'“The paradise of fools—to few unknown,” as Milton has it,' said the doctor, sententiously.

'To turn us out of Birkwoodbrae is nothing less than the most cruel injustice!' resumed Mary, with anger.

'But legal. It is the law of entail.'

'Birkwoodbrae is twice as valuable now as it was when poor papa settled here some twenty years ago, and he and we have made it so. It is hard, it is bitter, our home—our dear home—we have known no other; and so near where *they* lie—papa and mamma—so near this house in which I closed their eyes.'

'I doubt not that if your cousin

Wellwood were properly appealed to——’

‘We should die rather than appeal to him!’ interrupted Mary, impetuously, while stamping her little foot upon the floor. ‘To do so would be enough to make papa turn in his grave. Though Birkwoodbrae is inexpressibly dear to Ellinor and to me. Papa used to say of cousin Wellwood as a boy, though he never saw him, that he was a puzzle to the whole family.’

‘How, Mary?’

‘Well, as—as—like a treacherous cuckoo’s egg that is dropped into a sparrow’s nest and becomes a puzzle to the poor sparrow, which wonders and compares it with her own little brood.’

‘What an odd simile, my dear,’ said Dr. Wodrow, his face actually rippling over with a smile brighter than Mary relished under the circumstances, and recalled the aphorism of that unpleasant fellow, J. J. Rousseau, that many people feel an inter-

nal satisfaction at the troubles of even their best friends.

‘Then you will not trust a little to humanity and to Wellwood?’

‘Death were preferable, I repeat!’ exclaimed Mary, though her tears were falling fast now.

‘Consider—blood is thicker than water, among us in Scotland particularly.’

‘Ellinor and I will never stoop so low,’ replied Mary, alternately interlacing her fingers in her lap, and mechanically caressing the head of Jack, who had placed his nose on her knee, and regarded her wistfully with his great black eyes, as if he knew instinctively that something distressed his mistress by the expression of her face.

‘Well, what will be, will be!’ said Dr. Wodrow, from his fatalist or Presbyterian point of view, as he cast his eye upward to the ceiling.

Mary heard his voice as one hears in a dream. The flies buzzed in the window

curtains, the last of the birds still twittered about among the climbing creepers at the open sash, the roses sent forth their fragrance still, and the drooping foliage of the silver birches was gently stirred by the soft evening breeze.

The old clock ticked loudly on the mantelpiece—unnaturally so—as Mary thought it seemed to do ‘when mamma and papa died;’ but when the minister urged again that she should attempt to temporise,

‘No,’ she exclaimed, emphatically, ‘we shall not accept a farthing or a farthing’s worth of what belonged to our common ancestors. It would ill become Colonel Wellwood’s daughters to do so now.’

‘Lady Dunkeld, I doubt not, has great influence with your cousin Wellwood.’

‘She knows him, then?’

‘Yes; people in “Society,” as it is called, all know something of each other.’

‘And you would have me seek his in-

terest through her? Enough of this, dear Dr. Wodrow. I think you should know me better,' said Mary, covering her eyes with white and tremulous fingers, as if she would thrust back her tears.

'The recognition of the inevitable in human affairs often brings composure when all else fails, we read somewhere,' said the minister.

'Whatever *is*, is doubtless best, and this apparent stroke of evil fortune may—nay, must be so,' said Mary; 'yet it is hard to bear just now—hard to bear.'

Dr. Wodrow regarded her bowed head with a soft, kind, and admiring smile.

'All will come right in the end, dear Mary,' said he, confidently, and then added, almost laughingly, 'I am sure Captain Colville's advice may prevail with you; and he will be back before I can return from Edinburgh, whither I must go on the morrow morning early.'

Mary's pallor increased at the mention

of Captain Colville's name; but she said, firmly and doggedly,

‘He is the last man in the world whose advice I would seek.’

But before the well-meaning old minister came back from his journey the crisis in the sisters' affairs seemed ended and over.

At last he was gone, and Mary sat for a time in the twilighted old dining-room as one who was stunned or in a dream, while the beloved and reverend figures of her dead parents seemed once again to occupy in fancy their favourite places by the hearth.

The good old honest furniture of the room was all of the ‘old school,’ and had been familiar to her from her childhood; the vast sofa with its wide arms and cosy cushions; the dark mahogany sideboard that was like a mural monument, with two urn-like knife-boxes thereon, and over which hung an old, old circular convex

mirror, surmounted by an eagle with a glass ball in its beak. The horsehair chairs were ranged in rank and file along the wall; and all these household features spoke to Mary's heart so much of the past and of home that the details of the room gave her a sensation of acute agony, as she caught them at a glance and covered her face with her hands.

She tried to realise the new life—the homeless life—that must lie before her and Ellinor now, and the rocks, the shoals, and pitfalls that too probably would be ahead.

Her first emotion of relief—if it could be called so—came when she shared her grief with the startled Ellinor; and far into the August night sat the two crushed creatures talking over the storm-cloud that had so suddenly enveloped them—a cloud that must have descended at some time, though as yet they had not quite foreseen it.

‘I cannot believe it—I cannot realise it!’ said they both, conjunctly and severally, again and again, as they mingled their tears and caresses together, each clinging to the other as if for consolation and help.

‘What on earth will become of us!’ exclaimed Ellinor, pushing back the masses of dark brown hair from her forehead.

‘We shall go away, and at once, in search of a new home—a little nest somewhere far away from all who know us, Ellinor; for the condolence, the wonder, surmises, and pity of neighbours would prove intolerable to me!’ exclaimed Mary. ‘We shall have to put our shoulders to the wheel, as poor papa used to say when in money straits. I must turn my French and music to account.’

‘And I my drawing,’ said Ellinor.

‘Yes, dearest,’ added Mary, kissing her, ‘my few accomplishments will require some brushing up, but your pencil is al-

ways a ready one ; and people never know what they can do till they try. But then, Birkwoodbrae—dear, bonnie Birkwoodbrae—to think we shall never see it more !’ exclaimed Mary, relapsing into a storm of grief again ; after which she became more composed, and began resolutely to think of the future that must be faced—the future which would necessarily begin for them on the morrow ; and as Mary was by nature independent and self-reliant, as she thought on the pittance left them by their father, she said that, by God’s help, they might battle with the world yet ; and battle with it too in London.

The human mind, it has been said, is naturally pliable, and, provided it has the most slender hope to lean upon, adapts itself to the exigencies of fortune, especially if the imagination be a gay and luxuriant one.

The dreary night of their new and great sorrow wore on till the small hours of the

morning came, and at last the sisters slept; and 'sleep is a generous robber that gives in strength what it takes in time.'

So the worthy old minister had gone to Edinburgh.

Mary conceived not unnaturally that this visit to the Scottish metropolis meant one to Mr. Luke Sharpe with reference to her cousin Wellwood, and the monetary affairs of herself and Ellinor; but she was determined on having no temporising, no patronage, or half-measure from that quarter; and resolved to leave Birkwoodbrae and to go forth to find another home in another land, and to this end she began restlessly, but resolutely, to take the means at once.

Strange to say, Ellinor, the romantic and volatile, did not seem so much cast down after a time. She had her own secret hopes, thoughts, and ambition, in which Mary had no share, or of which she had no exact knowledge as yet; but to the

latter to leave Birkwoodbrae, to see no more the kind old folks at the cosy manse; to see no more her pensioners, her feathered pets, and flowers, the hills, the glen, the rockbound stream, and the 'siller birks' that shaded it—to be far away from all and everything that was dear—to lose, more than all, the dawning love of her young heart—was indeed a catastrophe hitherto unlooked for, and at times her soul seemed to die within her. But she was more often in those moods to which the young are said to be subject in time of trouble—'in which the *existing* alone seems unendurable, and anything better than what *is*.'

CHAPTER XVII.

MARY'S PREPARATIONS.

GREATLY to the chagrin of Lady Dunkeld, there seemed no chance of extracting a proposal from Captain Colville, the rumour of whose engagement to her daughter was simply provincial gossip, and as for Sir Redmond Sleath, for certain cogent reasons of his own, perhaps he dared not make one, even if dazzled by the fair Blanche Galloway.

The invitation to Craigmhor seemed to be a failure as yet, so far as the former was concerned, for after the shooting began on the 12th of August, when not on the moors, he spent much of his time

most provokingly immersed in correspondence concerning the property to which he had succeeded and his peerage claim—both circumstances that greatly enhanced his value in the eyes of such a match-making mother as my Lady Dunkeld.

He was often found closeted in consultation with Doctor Wodrow, with whom he seemed to stand high in favour, and it was noted that they always separated in high good humour; so the supposition was, that the latter was seeking the wealthy Guardsman's good offices for his son Robert. What other matter could they have in hand?

Lady Dunkeld was therefore not sorry when Captain Colville took his temporary departure to shoot in the forest of Alyth, trusting to a change on his return.

If she had flattered herself that, amid the somewhat secluded life all led at Craigmhor, any fancy Colville had for Blanche would speedily manifest itself, she was

doomed to disappointment—angry disappointment, and worse; for, if the stories Mademoiselle Rosette told were true, the captain had spent somewhat too much of his time wandering, rod in hand, on the banks of the May, and tarrying for afternoon tea at Birkwoodbrae.

The result of all this was that Mary and Ellinor had become painfully conscious that many who were their friends before had now begun to view them coldly and distantly, why or wherefore, in their innocence, they knew not, because they were ignorant of malevolent hints regarding them dropped to chance visitors at Craigmhor, by elevation of the eyebrows, shrugs of the shoulder, or the impatient wave of a fan, if their names were mentioned; the ladies there—mother and daughter—were leaving nothing undone to injure them in the estimation of all, and even spoke of them as ‘young women who were above doing their duty in that state of life

to which Providence had called them.'

A consciousness of all this added to their new mortification, and increased their anxiety to be gone, and they worked away at their arrangements in a species of suppressed excitement, and Dr. Wodrow was still in Edinburgh.

It was neither a Sacramental Fast-day nor a Sunday at Birkwoodbrae, yet a strange stillness, as if death were there again, brooded over all the place; the house with its roses and creepers, the garden with its now untended flowers, the empty meadow, and the lovely silver birches; and poor Robert Wodrow, as sadly he approached the house for the last time, felt conscious of this as he passed, and with a bitter sigh looked around him.

Even Jack's bark was unheard; the scythe lay among the rich clover, the gate that led to the highway stood wide open, and near it lingered some cottar people,

with mouths agape, old and young, with grave and anxious faces, even with tears, for some of the young girls' 'belongings' had already been sent away, the gazers knew not where.

Something strange they thought had come to pass, yet the sunshine of the first of September lay golden on the woods, the pastures, the cattle, and the flower-gardens, though beneath was a great shadow like that of death over all, and Robert Wodrow, impressionable at all times, felt it; for the sisters were on the eve of departure, and another day or two—so quickly had Mary's preparations been made—would see all ended.

The bright sunshine of the autumn evening was touching, we have said, with fiery light the smooth silver stems of the tall birch-trees, and the birds still sang sweetly under the feather-like foliage that hung gracefully downward, unstirred by the faintest breeze, when, looking from

an open window on the scene she loved so well, Mary Wellwood paused in the bitter task of making up a list of their household effects ere she left the roof of Birkwood-brae for ever. After she was fairly gone, a letter to Dr. Wodrow would inform him of all their wishes, she was thinking, when suddenly Robert stood by her side, and put an arm kindly round her.

‘Why, you will kill yourself with all this work and anxiety; dear Mary, let me help you,’ said he.

‘I am nearly done,’ said she, wearily, and with a quivering lip; ‘there are but a few relics, books and so forth, I wish to keep——’

‘Leave it with me; save you, Mary, and the old folks at the manse, I have no one left to care for now.’

‘Poor Robert!’ said she, kissing his cheek, for she knew his meaning well.

No one can ‘minister to a mind diseased’ like a mother, it has been said; but Mrs.

Wodrow, to her sorrow, had signally failed to so minister to her son Robert.

‘And you have failed at the University, Robert?’ said Mary, after a pause.

‘Utterly!’

‘How—and why?’

‘I don’t know—at the last moment, somehow,’ said he, despondently, looking down on the carpet.

‘Ellinor, no doubt, was the cause?’ said Mary, softly.

He smiled bitterly, but made no reply.

‘You will try again, Robert dear?’ said Mary, patting his hand.

‘Never, Mary,’ he replied, in a low, husky voice; ‘God only knows how I toiled and toiled, at botany, anatomy, and chemistry—Balfour and Quain and Miller, and with *what* object; but I have taken my last shot, and shall grind no more.’

‘And what do you mean to do, Robert?’

‘Heaven knows—you will hear in time, Mary.’

She eyed him wistfully and sorrowfully, and then said,

‘After your quarrel with Ellinor——’

‘Don’t call it a quarrel, Mary—say coldness. Well?’

‘It is very kind of you to take the trouble to come here now.’

‘Kind—trouble; why, what has come to you, Mary, that you speak thus, and to *me*? A farewell letter might have done, but I—I preferred to come to the old place once again.’

‘Pardon me, Robert, but I am so crushed—so confused—that I scarcely know what I say.’

‘But is the step you are about to take absolutely necessary, and in such hot haste too?’

‘What step?’ asked Mary, as if to delay the bitterness of the admission.

‘Leaving Birkwoodbrae! I can’t make out the mystery of it at all!’

‘Alas! we must go; this house was

never ours—we dwelt here on sufferance ; and the place is another's now—another whom we know only by name and in family feud.'

'Can it be that God's world belongs only to rascals!' exclaimed young Wodrow, bitterly.

'Well, the rich and cruel seem to thrive best, for a time at least,' said Mary, a little infected by his mood.

'But to go away so far—so far as London?' he urged, with an air of bewilderment.

'The further the better now, Robert.'

'But the idea of making your own livelihood in that awful human wilderness, you and Ellinor, seems so strange—so perilous and unnatural.'

'Why so—don't thousands work?'

'And starve and die of broken hearts!'

'Robert, you are not encouraging.'

'I would that I could be so.'

'We must make the attempt as others

do and have done. We are well-nigh penniless now; without Birkwoodbrae and its accessories we could not live alone on the pittance poor papa left us, and here we could not add a penny to it. I don't think I am fit for much, Robert,' continued Mary, sadly and humbly, with tears in her soft, sweet eyes. 'No one will give me a high-class situation, my education has been so very simple, and beyond a little music'—her voice broke fairly now—'and Ellinor's pencil, she is very clever, you know——'

'I wish I could see this infernally grasping cousin of yours!' surmised Robert, angrily and reflectively.

'Don't think of it—I would not accept a favour from his father's son; for that father was—through life—the enemy of mine!'

'Why—and about what?' asked Robert.

'Some quarrel about a lady in their youth, as subalterns, I believe.'

'Oho—the old, old story!' said Robert,

gnawing his nether lip, and taking up his hat, but lingering still.

‘You will see Ellinor, Robert dear,’ said Mary, timidly and pleadingly. ‘I can call her from her room—it will be for the last time.’

The cloud on young Wodrow’s face deepened, as he said, in a low voice,

‘No, Mary—thank you—I dare not—would rather not see her again.’

‘Why?’ asked Mary, taking his hands caressingly between her own.

‘All my love for her might—nay, would break out for her with renewed force, for I am in some ways weak and unstable of purpose. Better not—better not—never again—never again,’ he muttered, huskily, and Mary kissed him with her eyes full of tears, for just then her heart was very sore indeed.

‘Besides, Mary, I have schooled myself for the future.’

‘And that *future*, Robert.’

‘You will learn in time. Curse that fellow,’ he suddenly exclaimed, his eyes flashing, as he referred to Sleath, ‘what evil chance brought him among us here? How I can recall his eyes, alternately sleepy and shifty, and the air of would-be high-bred tolerance and boredom with which he condescended to survey us all and everything here!’

In the gust of jealous anger that now possessed him, Mary knew that it was useless to urge again that he should see Ellinor, and after making her all offers of assistance and proffers of kindness, he strode suddenly away, muttering to himself the lines of Edmondstoune Aytoun.

‘Woman’s love is writ in water,
Woman’s faith is traced in sand,
Backwards, backwards let me wander,
To the noble northern land.’

The little money that Mary could spare from what she had been able to realise by the hasty sale of two pet cows and the stock of her fowl-yard, she bestowed, as far

as she could, upon Elspat and other old servants, all of whom were bowed down with wonder, grief and alarm at movements and changes so unexpected; and she felt that she would be glad when the parting with all—the final wrench—was over.

Between her and these subordinates there was a closer bond of sympathy than usually exists between mistress and servant—even in Scotland—now-a-days, and can scarcely be found south of the Tweed. 'My English readers,' says an English writer on this subject, 'will probably ridicule such a feeling on the part of a servant, for the majority of them are of the belief that money is the only connecting link of a household. So long as wages are regularly paid and the ordinary meals provided, a servant has only to do her duty properly, and leaves it as utter a stranger as when she entered it. There is no obligation on either side, and, if she goes, some one will be found to take her place.'

But it is not quite so yet in the kindly north country, especially the futher north we go ; for the influences of the old feudal system, and of the still older and dearer ties of clanship, linger among the hills and glens, knitting all ranks and conditions of men together, and long, long may they continue to do so.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE BRINK.

OF a more nervous organisation than Mary, Ellinor, suffering from reaction of spirits and a keen sense of all she had recently undergone, was far from well, and, amid the bustle of preparation for departure, remained much in the seclusion of her own room.

It was September now, we have said. The autumnal weather and autumnal tints had come somewhat early, and occasional showers brought coolness and freshness to the birchen woods, and pleasant odours came from them and even from the dusty highway and the parched meadows, where

the rich after-grass was ready for the scythe, and the grouse on the Perthshire hills had become but too fatally familiar with the crack and clatter of the breech-loader in the heathery glens.

Mary Wellwood had of late worked hard, very hard, rising earlier and going to bed later—so much so that her sweet face was beginning to look thin and careworn, and old Elspat remonstrated that she did not give herself time to take her meals, but ‘was for ever think, think, thinking and worrying over accounts and market-books.’

She had neither Dr. Wodrow nor Robert to advise or assist her then. The former was detained in Edinburgh on clerical or other business, and the latter absented himself for obvious reasons; so Mary worked alone, but no new or growing cares could change the sweet and grave expression of her face or the calm steadfastness of her violet eyes, yet a startled expression certainly came into them when

one evening Captain Colville was suddenly ushered in upon her, looking so handsome, brown, and ruddy from exposure among the hills.

There flashed upon Mary's mind the time, but a short space ago, when she had been thinking of a chaperone for herself and Ellinor: but all was changed since then, and there would be no need of one now.

He had just returned that morning from shooting in the forest of Alyth, had heard a rumour of their approaching departure, which the half-dismantled aspect of the drawing-room seemed to confirm. Why was it so?

He spoke so pleasantly and sympathetically as he seated himself near her, and she felt all the glamour of his proximity, of his presence, and her breast heaved tumultuously in spite of herself. She became nervous, and her eyes suffused deeply.

'Tears, Miss Wellwood?' said he, inquiringly.

‘We are going far away, Captain Colville—leaving this place for ever.’

‘I have heard something of it; but why leave Birkwoodbrae?’ he asked, smilingly.

Mary told him why.

‘And, on leaving, whither do you mean to go?’

‘London.’

‘Is that not a rash scheme?’

‘When the will is strong the heart is willing; and we never know what a day may bring forth.’

He gazed down upon her tenderly, admiringly, and, making a half effort to take her hand, paused and said,

‘You surely did not mean to spend all your life in this old tumbledown place, Miss Wellwood?’

‘Don’t call it tumbledown, please,’ said Mary.

‘I beg your pardon; but——’

‘It is very dear to me, as the place

where they lived and died,' interrupted Mary, with a little break in her voice.

'They—who?'

'Papa and mamma. It seems like yesterday when he died in the room above us, and when he said in a low, weak voice—"Don't cry, Mary darling—don't cry so; our separation is only for a time;" and then added, "Is that the daybreak?" "No," said I. "It is—it is—and *so bright!*" he exclaimed, and then died. Oh, Captain Colville, the light he saw must have been that of the other world, for just as he expired the clock struck midnight, and the lamp was burning very low.'

'Poor old gentleman! But take courage,' said Colville, with a soft smile, as he patted her shoulder; 'you have not yet left Birkwoodbrae.'

'What can he mean by this!' thought Mary, with a slight sense of annoyance, as she woke up from her dark dreamland.

'And your father, the colonel—he—he

—pardon me, left you little more than Birkwoodbrae when he died?’

‘His blessing was the best he had; Birkwoodbrae, I have said, was not his to leave. We have lived here on sufferance—Ellinor and I.’

Colville sat for a time silent, and Mary thought his question a very strange one, unless he had a deeper interest in them both than she thought he could possibly have; and, still pursuing a personal theme, he said,

‘I have heard from Dr. Wodrow that his son Robert was your sister’s admirer, and that they have quarrelled. Is not this to be regretted?’

‘Regretted indeed!’

‘You always seemed interested in him.’

‘As Ellinor’s lover—yes.’

‘I always thought he was *yours*.’

‘Mine—who said so?’

‘Miss Galloway, repeatedly.’

‘She had no authority for any such

statement,' said Mary, upon whom a kind of light was beginning to break, and Colville drew a little nearer, as he seemed very much disposed to take up the thread of the 'old story' where he had left it off on the afternoon when he carved their initials on the tree, carried off the bunch of berries, and gave her in exchange the bouquet of Blanche Galloway, before he went to Alyth.

'Is it not strange, Captain Colville,' said Mary, 'that day after day passes, and yet we hear nothing more of this new heir—this usurper of our poor little home—or of any special notice to quit Birkwoodbrae?'

'Amid the world he lives in, he may forget.'

'He and his father before forgot us always. But still, there is one patrimony of which he cannot deprive us—one near the churchyard wall!' said Mary, bitterly. 'However, things are at the worst with us now, and they will be sure to mend.'

He was observing the rare delicacy of her hand, as she caressed the head of Jack resting on her knee.

‘How you must loathe that cousin!’ said he.

‘Oh, no! Heaven forbid! He has never done us any active harm; yet we Wellwoods are very unforgiving in our feuds.’

‘So it would seem.’

‘I must never, never see him, and am most anxious to get away before he comes here, if he cares at all to visit so poor a place.’

‘He might fall in love with you—nay, would be sure to do so,’ said Colville, stooping nearer her, and lowering his voice. ‘Love, with cousinship, soon develops, and he might marry you.’

‘I would not marry *him* if there was not another man in the world!’ exclaimed Mary, reddening in positive anger, with a choking and half smothered sob in her

throat ; and Colville laughed excessively at her increased but momentary annoyance at his suggestion, which indeed was far from being an unnatural one.

‘If he saw you, he would certainly leave you in undisturbed possession of Birkwoodbrae.’

‘A speech meant to be gallant ; but he shall not see me if I can help it.’

He laughed again, and Mary felt piqued.

‘From what I hear of all the matter,’ he began, ‘from what I know of you——’

‘Of me, Captain Colville—what can you know of *me*?’ asked Mary, almost petulantly.

‘Shall I say, then, from what I know of your cousin Wellwood——’

‘Well—quick ; from what you know of him?’

‘Which I do as well as one fellow can know another in the same battalion, I am sure he would never dispossess so charming—two such charming cousins.’

‘Indeed! you have said something like this already.’

‘Would you not write to him and ask—’

‘Emphatically—no!’

‘Allow *me*, then?’ asked Colville, in his most persuasive tone.

‘Never! I—we shall be beholden to none! I thought, small as it is, that Birkwoodbrae was almost our patrimony; it proves to be his, so let him have it.’

‘And you——’

‘Have the world wide before me,’ she replied, with a quiver of her sweet upper lip; ‘with us—Ellinor and me—it may be as in *Strathallan’s Lament*—

“Ruin’s wheel has driven o’er us,
Not a hope may now attend;
The world wide is all before us,
But a world without a friend.”’

‘Heaven! I hope not,’ said he.

‘Why does he continue on this distasteful subject,’ thought Mary, ‘unless to prolong the conversation?’

He now proceeded to pat Jack’s head,

and as he did so his hand came more than once in contact with hers, and each touch sent a thrill to his heart, while with that mysterious instinct which tells a girl of the emotions with which she is inspiring an admirer, Mary, without turning her head, knew that the fond gaze of Leslie Colville was bent upon her.

What did he mean? To desert Blanche Galloway, or was he simply amusing himself with her, or with both? Her pride revolted at the idea. However, their acquaintanceship would soon be at an end, as he would be leaving like herself; and as if he divined her thoughts, he said something of his approaching departure.

‘I hope you will have some pleasant memories to carry away with you?’ said Mary, and then she could have bitten her tongue for making the surmise, and added, ‘I shall have none but sad ones—though Invermay is so lovely.’

‘Yes; but there are some memories of

it that will ever be dear to me—the hours I have spent here at Birkwoodbrae.’

If he was betraying himself, he paused, and Mary could feel how her heart was vibrating.

For a moment her long dark lashes flickered as she glanced at him timidly, and thought how happy his avowed love would make her was he at liberty to do so; and she remembered that when he was away at Alyth how she had felt a void in her heart, till adversity brought her other things to think of.

As Colville looked down on the ripples of the girl’s golden hair and on her saddened face, a great pity that was allied with something warmer and dearer stirred his heart, and bending over her downcast head, he lightly touched her hair with his lips.

‘Poor child!’ said he, and Mary drew haughtily back. She saw there was a smile on his face; it was a very fond one,

but she misjudged it, and felt assured that no lover would smile at such a time. Thus his manner perplexed her, so she said,

‘Do not forget yourself, Captain Colville, and that you are engaged to Miss Galloway.’

‘Engaged—to—Miss Galloway!’ he repeated, with genuine surprise and annoyance. ‘Not at all. Who on earth put that into your little head?’ he added, with a laugh.

‘Mrs. Wodrow always told me so,’ replied Mary, covered with confusion, but feeling very happy nevertheless.

‘Silly, gossiping old woman! No, Miss Wellwood: I am, thank Heaven, a free man—as yet.’

Here was a revelation—if true.

He was gazing on her now with eyes that were full of admiration and ardour, while the clasp of his hand seemed to infuse through her veins some of the force

and love that inspired him. In the glance they exchanged each read the other's secret, and he drew her towards him and kissed her. 'There are moments in life,' it is said, 'when joy makes us afraid: and this was one'—to Mary at least, and she shrank back—all the more quickly and confusedly that a visitor was approaching; and a half-suppressed malediction hovered on the lips of Colville as the portly Mrs. Wodrow was ushered in—ushered in at that moment!

He rose with annoyance, and still retaining Mary's hand in his, said hurriedly, and in a low tone, with a little laugh that was assumed to cover her confusion,

'Promise me that in the matter of leaving Birkwoodbrae you will do no more till I see you again *to-morrow*.'

'I promise,' replied Mary, trembling very much, and scarcely knowing what she said; and, bowing to Mrs. Wodrow, Colville took his departure, while the

pressure of his hand seemed to linger on Mary's heart. 'Who does not know,' says the authoress of 'Nadine,' 'the magnetic thrill—the strange and subduing sense of soul-communion, which sometimes lingers in a hand-clasp;' and with this thrill in her veins Mary addressed herself to the task of talking commonplace to old Mrs. Wodrow.

He had been on the brink of a proposal without doubt, yet none had been made.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE DEPARTURE.

TO-MORROW came, and the next day, and the next, but there was no sign of, or letter from, Captain Colville, so Mary resumed her arrangements all the more briskly and bitterly.

Ellinor had heard of his interview with Mary, and felt much tender interest and concern. Had he spoken of Sir Redmond Sleath, or his movements, she marvelled sorely; but failed to ask.

Meanwhile May's recent thoughts were of a very mingled and somewhat painful kind. The memory of his great tenderness of manner, of the kiss he had snatch-

ed, and the assertion that he was *not* the *fiancé* of Blanche Galloway were all ever before her in constant iteration, with the consciousness that no distinct avowal had preceded, and no proposal had followed the episode.

A kiss! Their lips had met but once, yet the memory of such a meeting often abides for ever.

‘How dared he kiss me! Why did I not prevent him?’ she thought, while her cheeks burned, and the conviction that he had been only amusing himself with her grew hourly stronger in her heart. She remembered, too, that he had laughed once or twice during the most earnest parts of her conversation about her troubles, and she thought that most people could hear of the misfortunes of others with tolerable equanimity.

Was he really engaged to Blanche Galloway after all? and was she the means of preventing the promised visit on ‘the mor-

row'—the visit that never took place?

His visit to Birkwoodbrae on the very day of his return from Alyth was certainly duly reported to that young lady by Mademoiselle Rosette, who had watched and followed him—and smiled brightly as she did so—for where is the French soubrette to be found who does not feel a malicious pleasure in knowing that her master or her mistress is being deceived?

The first day of Colville's absence after that thrilling visit dragged wearily on, and, when evening came and the sun set, Mary marvelled was it eight hours since she rose that morning. It looked more like eight hundred, and still longer looked the days that followed, till anger began to mingle with her depression, anxiety, and sense of unmerited humiliation, all of which enhanced her desire to be gone.

How little could she conceive that, wounded in the right hand by the explosion of a friend's fowling-piece when shoot-

ing, he was confined at first to bed, and then to his room at Craigmhor; that he was thus unable to write to or communicate with her; and that thus, too, probably she would never see him again, for by the evening of the third day the arrangements for the departure of Ellinor and herself were finally completed.

‘Would that I could peep into our future, Mary,’ said Ellinor, tearfully, on their last evening in their old home.

‘Ah! the future is indeed a mystery to us,’ said Mary; ‘but blessed be God for all His gifts!’ she added, in a broken voice, as she thought of the legend over the old doorway, through which they would pass no more.

Many relics were packed and sent to the manse, there to be kept till better times came; everything else was left in care of the still absent Dr. Wodrow, to be sold for their behoof; but, for reasons to be given, strange to say, nothing was *sold*.

Though the apparently strange conduct of Captain Colville in teaching her to love him, and exciting brilliant hopes in her heart only to let them fade, had so deeply mortified Mary that already his image was passing out of her busy thoughts, or seemed as only something to be forgotten as soon as possible, she was not without strong though vague hope of the future for Ellinor and herself; but hope has often been likened to the mirage of the desert, and as being often quite as illusory.

Ellinor, we have said, had thanked heaven for her escape from what must have proved a great and perilous *esclandre*; yet by one of those idiosyncracies of the female heart she also thanked heaven that London was to be the place of their exile; Sir Redmond was there, no doubt, and she felt assured that he loved her still. Mighty though the modern Babylon was—and of that mightiness she had not the slightest conception—they might meet again; and

even, if not, it would be pleasant to walk in the same streets where he walked or rode ; to breathe the same air that was breathed by him ; to be in the same place where *he* was.

So she had, to enliven the path before her, a little element of romance that was unknown to, and denied to the poor but more practical Mary ; and to her, foolish girl, it seemed that perhaps the dear old tale might conclude, after all, with wedding bells and vows of wedded love.

Why she should have indulged in these dreams it is difficult to say. Days upon days had passed, and, like Colville, the impassioned baronet, with whom she had been on the point of sharing her future, gave no sign, and she could make none. But she was yet to learn that 'all the fine old Grandisonian notions of honour and delicacy towards woman held by our grandfathers were exploded, or else deemed absolutely antediluvian and absurd.'

Now she longed to be gone—gone even from Birkwoodbrae. ‘She wanted to see life’ (she thought), ‘as poets and painters and young ladies picture it—a sort of misty, delicious paradisiacal existence of excitement, unfailing amusement, and perpetual delight.’

The old peace of mind was gone; she wished to leave all connected with it behind; and, poor girl, she little knew what was before her—it might be of penury, struggle, and despair!

Every movement, as the hour of departure approached, brought a fresh pang to the tender heart of Mary. She had parted with her pets and household cares. Her tame owl she had cast loose, and she watched him as he winged his way back to his eyrie in the ruined tower, from which Robert Wodrow in happier times had brought him.

Wearily and sadly she had all the dear familiar spots, and the cottars who dwelt

among them, to visit for the last time—hard and shrivelled hands to press and children to kiss. How should she ever get through it all?

She picked up a few daisies from the graves where her parents lay, and placed them between the leaves of her Bible, and then it seemed as if there was nothing more to do.

The evening seemed painfully sweet and silent and still when the sisters quitted their home for the last time, and to Mary it seemed that even 'the grasshoppers were silent in the grass.'

The keys were to be handed over by Elspat Gordon to a clerk of Mr. Luke Sharpe's when he chose to come for them. Elspat received the instructions drowned in tears, and as a spell against evil put in her pocket some grains of wheat, as it is, or was, a superstition in Scotland that in every grain there is the representation of a human face, said to be that of the

Saviour, and hence the efficacy of the spell.

In the railway-carriage Jack crouched at Mary's feet, and, looking up in her eyes, whined and whimpered, for dogs have strange instincts. All that was left to the sisters of Birkwoodbrae was the bunch of freshly-gathered roses which each carried in her hand, and many times did Mary bury her hot and tear-stained face among their cool and fragrant leaves.

'Good-bye!' she whispered in her heart to many an inanimate but familiar object, as it seemed to fly past and vanish, till the darkness of descending night shrouded all the scenery. Then Mary closed her eyes, and strove to think, while the clanking train glided swiftly and monotonously on.

The past, the present, and the future, so far as Colville was concerned, seemed to have melted into thinnest air; or perhaps the past alone, with its brief life and glow of love and hope, thrust itself poignantly forward.

CHAPTER XX.

THE HEIR OF ENTAIL.

THE sudden departure of the sisters from Birkwoodbrae, few knew precisely for where, caused something like consternation—at least, a great deal of commiseration—in the place they had left behind them. Their sweet, soft, ladylike faces and presence were missed ere long from the pew in which they had sat on Sundays from childhood; countless acts of kindness, goodness, charity, and benevolence were remembered now and rehearsed by cottage hearths and ‘ingle-lums’ again and again, and all deplored that the places

which knew them once would know them no more !

When, two days after their departure, Captain Colville, with a magnificent diamond ring for Mary, and intent on taking up the story of his love where he had left it off, rode over to Birkwoodbrae, he went in hot haste to the manse for intelligence, and then he and Dr. Wodrow looked blankly in each other's face.

‘Gone—what does it all mean?’ impetuously asked the captain, whose wounded hand was in a black silk sling, and who looked pale and thin.

‘It simply means that they have abruptly left us, and we may never see them again,’ replied Dr. Wodrow, with unconcealed grief and irritation.

‘Gone—gone!’ exclaimed Colville, changing colour, or losing it rather; ‘why did I not sooner tell them who I was—why act the part I did, and lure you into doing so, too?’

‘Ay—why, indeed,’ groaned the poor minister. ‘You see what strength of character they both possess—Mary, certainly, at least.’

‘And they have left no address—no clue?’

‘None.’

‘Mary wrote a farewell note to Mrs. Wodrow, saying she had not the heart to bid her good-bye verbally. Her friends of the past, she wrote, were no longer for her now—she had a new sphere of action to enter upon, a new life to lead, and new duties to fulfil, with much more to the same purpose, and that ere long she would write from London.’

‘London!’ exclaimed Colville, striking his right heel on the floor.

It would be an insult, perhaps, to the intelligence of the reader to assume that he or she has not already suspected that Leslie Colville and the encroaching cousin Leslie Wellwood were one and the same

person. Apart from his entailed property, he had succeeded to other possessions, requiring him with reference to his peerage claim to add to his own the name of Colville, and hence the *incognito* he had—for reasons of his own—been enabled to assume to his cousins, to Mrs. Wodrow, and others, including even that very acute party Sir Redmond Sleath. In short, save the minister, no one knew the part he wished to play.

‘The little drama from which you promised yourself so much interest, generous and romantic pleasure has been thoroughly overdone,’ said Dr. Wodrow, somewhat reproachfully.

‘Overdone, indeed!’

‘And doubtless has caused, and is causing great pain.’

‘Poor girl! Could I have believed that Mary——’

‘Possessed so much individuality, decision, and independence of character.’

‘Most true; the drama *has* been overdone, but can be quickly amended by a pleasant epilogue. And it would have been so some days ago but for this wretched accident to my right hand, which prevented me from writing to Mary or to you. Prejudiced, as you know, by my father against them, I wished to learn the real disposition and character of these girls before befriending them, as I intended to do; and, even while learning to love Mary, I carried my romantic schemes too far. Why the devil did we make all this mystery!’

‘*We*. It was your own suggestion and wish—not mine,’ said Dr. Wodrow, testily; ‘and now they have anticipated everything by going forth into the wide waste of the world and leaving us no clue.’

Colville bit his nether lip, twisted his moustache, and remained silent and perplexed. So the minister spoke again.

‘Captain Colville, I feared you meant to go on for ever playing at cross-purposes with the poor girls. How I wish I had interposed, as it was my duty to have done, ere it was too late; but you bound me to secrecy, as you know, and now they have gone far away, and with sore, sore hearts, you may be assured.’

And this secret, of which the Dunkeld family knew nothing, may explain the curious and laughing manner of Dr. Wodrow when speaking of Mr. Luke Sharpe the lawyer, and announcing to Mary the existence and intentions of the heir of entail.

‘Poor Mary—poor darling!’ said Colville, in a low voice. ‘Why did I play with her feelings and my own so long! Fool that I was not to declare my love and propose to her on the spot?’

‘Ay, fool indeed!’ commented Dr. Wodrow, roughly. ‘Think of all this worry, mischief, pain, and separation!’

‘In studying her character I shall have deceived her as to my own.’

‘She always seemed to think you were engaged to Miss Galloway.’

‘I know that now. Why did you not undeceive her?’

‘I had not your permission to move or explain in the matter.’

‘And we have parted like strangers almost! What must Mary have thought of me—what can she think of me still?’

‘That you were only amusing yourself with her.’

‘Hence the strangeness and coolness of her manner towards me at times. Oh, Dr. Wodrow, I never knew how much I loved that girl till now!’ exclaimed Colville, as he now realised fully in that time of pain and surprise that Mary Wellwood was the one woman in all the world for him.

About her there was an originality which struck him. She was unlike any other

girl he had seen ; she had a freshness and depth of thought which delighted as much as her beauty bewildered him ; and he must have loved her as a cousin if he had not loved her as something more.

And now she and Ellinor had gone—fled, as it were—to London in a kind of desperation and sorrow, brought about by his own folly and mismanagement—to London, of all places in the world for girls ignorant of it—beautiful, helpless, and poor !

‘But they will soon discover the trick we have played them, Dr. Wodrow,’ said Colville, looking up after a silent pause.

‘How ?’

‘If they look in the Army List they will see that there is only one Wellwood in the Guards—myself, Leslie Wellwood Colville.’

‘That is where they will never think of looking,’ replied Dr. Wodrow ; and he was right—the sisters never did ; besides, Army Lists were seldom in their way.

‘Had that confounded old gossip, Mrs. Wodrow, not come in at the time she did all would have been explained—I was on the point of telling my darling all!’ thought Colville, bitterly and angrily; ‘all would have been so different now, and I should have won the confidence, as I had evidently won the love of Mary Wellwood. And now to follow and to find her!’

‘Where?’ asked Dr. Wodrow, pithily and sharply.

‘True—true; I must be patient, and wait for tidings through you,’ said Colville, with something like a groan. ‘By the by, doctor, your son seems cut up about the departure of my cousins.’

‘No wonder, poor fellow—since boyhood Miss Ellinor was the apple of his eye.’

‘Ellinor?’

‘Yes—and they both seemed happy enough in their hope of each other till Sir Redmond Sleath came hovering about her.’

Colville’s face grew very dark.

‘I did not like your friend’s character,’ said the minister.

‘Friend—he was no friend of mine!’ said Colville, bluntly.

‘I saw through him soon after he first came here; I have had my experience of evil faces, and I could read his like a book.’

‘And what were his views regarding Ellinor?’

‘Matrimony, on the death of an uncle, I have heard, from whom he has great expectations.’

‘He has no uncle by male or female side. This was some specious falsehood!’ exclaimed Colville, with knitted brows.

‘How do you know this?’

‘As you may know it—by looking in the Baronetage.’

In the days that succeeded the departure of Mary and Ellinor most eagerly were letters looked for at the manse of Kirk-toun-Mailler, but none came from either, though both sisters had promised to write

whenever they had found a new home, however temporary, and periodically the path through the fields, by which the postman always came, was watched by anxious eyes.

How was this?—what had happened? were the constant surmises of Dr. and Mrs. Wodrow, as they looked gravely in each other's face, while more than once each day Colville came to the manse in hope of having tidings. Were both ill—stricken down by some sudden ailment and among strangers—they so gentle, so tenderly nurtured, and so refined in nature?

The doubt and perplexity were intolerable! And the upbraiding, almost despairing looks of Dr. Wodrow cut Colville to the heart.

With their departure by railway all clue was lost, and as the days ran on to weeks the anxiety that preyed on the minds of the good people at the manse became sore indeed, and to Colville, who knew what

London is, doubt was simply maddening!

From the heir of entail Mr. Luke Sharpe received instructions that everything was to remain intact and untouched at Birkwoodbrae till the sisters should come back and once more sit by its hearthstone; and old Elspat, who had been installed there in charge, held for a time a kind of daily levée of humble neighbours, whose inquiries, comments, and regrets were reiterated and ever recurrent.

But days, we have said, passed on and became weeks and more, and no tidings came of the lost ones, for so those among the Birks of Invermay began to consider them.

Captain Colville had rejoined his regiment in London; Sir Redmond Sleath was no one knew precisely where, and Robert Wodrow, whose evil genius he had been, abandoning his studies in a kind of despair, had disappeared. Thus a great gloom

reigned over the old manse, and the worthy descendant of the author of 'Analecta Scotica' could not find in any page thereof a passage to soothe him in his great sorrow.

With Colville's return to London a slight hope had grown in the old minister's heart that he might be the means of casting a little light on this painful mystery, but ere long that hope died away too.

September stole on, and October came, with its red, yellow, and russet autumnal hues; the leaves were falling on the empty air; hardy apples yet hung in the otherwise bare orchards for the coming frosts to ripen; dark berries clustered on the elder-trees; long rushes waved in the wind by the banks of the May, which careered the same as ever through its bed of rock towards the Earn; the call of the partridge and the few notes uttered by the remaining birds of the season came on the

low sighing breeze; winter was close at hand, and yet there came no tidings of Mary Wellwood or her sister.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.



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