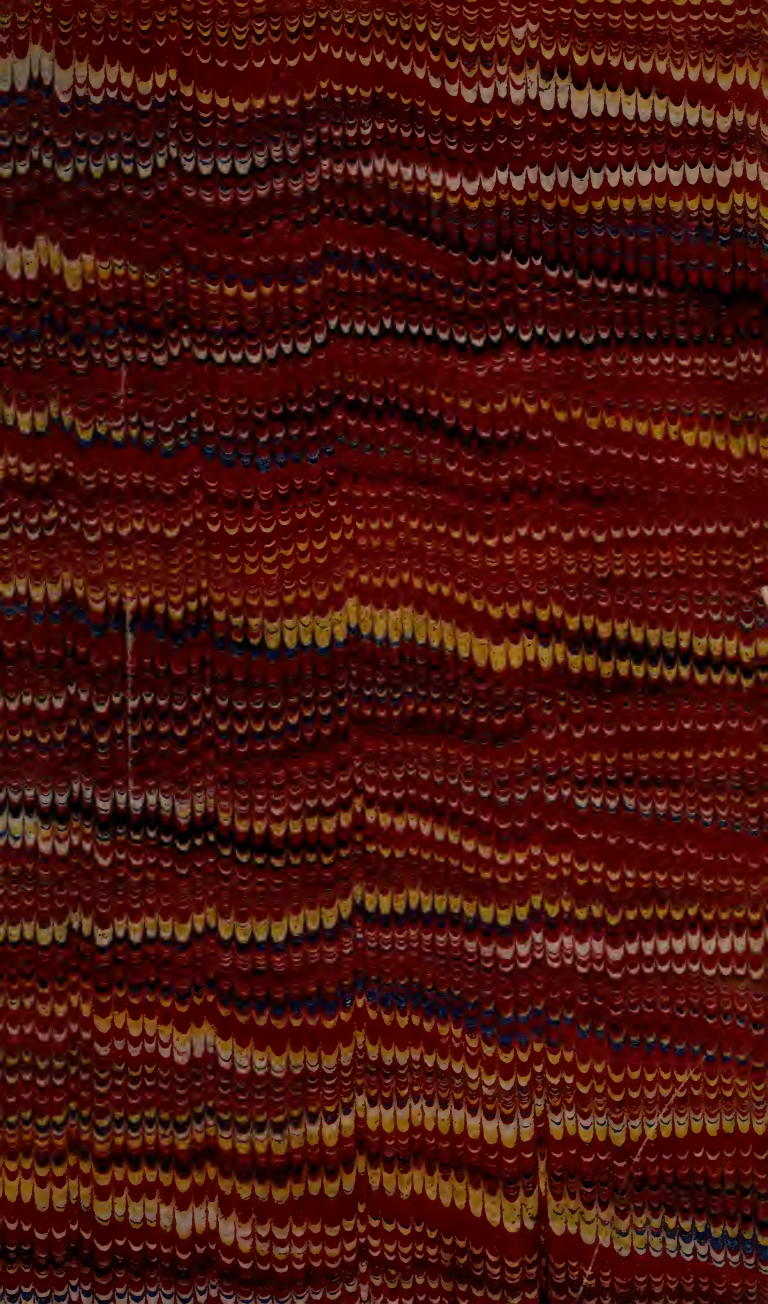


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MAY 13 2008

HARRY MUIR.

A STORY OF SCOTTISH LIFE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“PASSAGES IN THE LIFE OF MRS. MARGARET MAITLAND,”

“MERKLAND,” “ADAM GRAEME,” &c.

“God pardon thee! yet let me wonder, Harry,
At thy affections. . . .
The hope and expectation of thy time
Is ruined; and the soul of every man,
Prophetically, does forethink thy fall.”

KING HENRY IV.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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HARRY MUIR.

CHAPTER I.

The Count is neither sad nor sick, nor merry, nor well; but civil, Count—civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion.—MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

ON the eve of the important party, Cuthbert Charteris arrived at Allenders.

Half-frozen with his journey, and shaking from his coat large flakes of the snow, which trembled in the air, they took him into the dining-room, where a blazing fire, a late dinner, and the warm and smiling

welcome of Agnes greatly solaced the wayfarer. Harry had met him in Stirling, and driven him out; but Harry's carriage, though it could be closed, was not so comfortable on a December night as in the bright sunshine of a July day. Cuthbert made hurried inquiries after Martha and Rose, in answer to which Agnes began a most animated account of an unexpected call from "young Mr. Dunlop" to say that his sister would be very happy to come with him to Agnes's party. Little Mrs. Muir Allenders, had only ventured at the last moment to invite the baronet's daughter; and then with but the faintest expectation that Miss Dunlop would come. Agnes was greatly elated; and Rose and Martha were with Mr. Dunlop in the drawing-room.

But on the peaceful countenance of Cuthbert Charteris there passed a momen-

tary savageness. At this moment it seemed to him, in unconscious self-estimation, that he, as the newly-arrived guest and tried friend, should be the principal person at Allenders — whereas this young Mr. Dunlop, most probably a nobody, as Cuthbert concluded with amiable liberality, defrauded him of his welcome from the sisters, and drew away Harry from his side. It was true that Harry returned in ten minutes, and that Martha and Agnes changed places; but still Cuthbert involuntarily frowned. Might not Rose, in common courtesy, have come to greet him? Alas, poor Rose! for Cuthbert could not tell how she trembled at the bright fireside of the drawing-room, nor how the astonished Agnes threw shawls round her shoulders, and wondered what could make her so cold.

Mr. Charteris lingered long over his

dinner. Cuthbert, to tell the truth, was rather sullen, and made by no means a brilliant appearance to Martha and Harry, who sat with him while he refreshed himself. He had a great inclination, indeed, to wrap himself up again in his travelling dress, say a surly good-bye at the drawing-room door, and betake himself home without delay ; but Cuthbert disconsolately comforted himself, that it was only for one day, and sat with all his attention concentrated on the sounds from the staircase, doggedly assuring himself that no one would come. And no one did come ; and Cuthbert was enraged at the fulfilment of his own prophecy.

By and by, he went up-stairs, attended by Harry, who did not quite comprehend this singular mood, to his own room ; and Rose heard his voice on the stair, and trembled still more and more, though

young Mr. Dunlop sat by, and did all that in him lay to engage her attention. But poor Rose felt a great inclination to steal away to her own room and cry; for she in her turn, thought it strange, very strange, that Cuthbert should linger so long, and show so little wish to see her.

And when Cuthbert, his face still tingling from the cold blast without, entered the warm and cheerful drawing-room, and saw young Mr. Dunlop sitting beside the silent Rose, describing to her with animation some storied continental towns from which he had lately returned, the grave advocate felt himself yield to boyish pique and jealous resentment—"Civil as an orange, and something of that jealous complexion," the tone of his constrained greeting dismayed Rose, and when he had taken her hand in his own somewhat chill one, and let it fall again with scarcely

a pressure, he withdrew to the other side of the room, and began to talk to Martha. Rose, who had not been a very good listener before, became worse than ever now—but Mr. Charteris, trying to look very indifferent, occupied himself almost ostentatiously with Martha, and laughed at his own jokes, and became quite exuberant and demonstrative, though he never spoke to Rose.

But Rose would not tell her sister, when she unexpectedly brought a light to their dark room that night, why she was crying; it was for nothing at all, Rose protested—indeed nothing at all—but faster and faster the tears ran down her cheek, and she had much to do to keep back a rising sob. Martha put her hand over the wet eyes tenderly, and did not ask again—for she could guess without explanation, the cause of Rose's tears.

Next day Mr. Charteris rode out with

Harry to see the improvements. He was much interested in them, he said, and so he was—far more interested than he felt yesterday when he came.

Cuthbert had been having a consultation with himself during the night—a consultation in which he looked at various circumstances from a point of view exactly opposite to that of Rose. He saw “young Mr. Dunlop,” son of the rich Sir John, a wealthier man than he could ever be, devoting himself to her unequivocally, as Cuthbert thought—and Cuthbert in his heart devoutly believed that Rose’s gentle excellence needed only to be seen to win all love and honour. So he gravely asked himself whether it would be right for him, even if it were in his power, to stand in the way, and endeavour to secure for himself, who must struggle for years in the uphill road to success, one who would do honour to this

higher rank which seemed about to be laid at her feet. And Cuthbert, with the self-denial of a man who magnanimously gives up, what he sees no hope of ever attaining, said to himself: No—no—*His* affection, strong and powerful as it was, should never stand in Rose's way.

And this was no small trial to Cuthbert. He had come here prepared to say certain things which would have made one heart in Allenders leap. He had even gone so far as to confide his intention to his mother, and it was somewhat hard now to give it up, and go steadily back to his books and his struggles, relinquishing for ever the fairy solace of these disappointed hopes. It was hard—was it right? Cuthbert persuaded himself so, as he rode silently along those wintry lanes, where the snow lay thick under the hedges, and whitened every spray; but Cuthbert did not know how great a share

in it belonged to the pride which lay at the bottom of his heart.

When he returned to Allenders, Rose was busy with Agnes in preparation for the party. He did not see her, and this brought confirmation to his previous thoughts. Then came the party itself, an ordinary collection of well-looking, well-dressed people, among whom Cuthbert, with his pre-occupied thoughts, found very little to interest him. Miss Dunlop, it is true, a well-bred, trained, mature young lady, acquainted with the world, made herself very polite and agreeable, and evidently regarded Cuthbert as one of the most tolerable persons present; but then Mr. Dunlop was at Rose's side again, and Rose looked shy and pale, and embarrassed, shrinking from the glance and touch of her new attendant as an indifferent person never could do. Cuthbert turned away with a great sigh when he perceived her face flush

and grow pale, her hand tremble, her eyes cast down. He thought it was the stranger beside her, whose presence called forth these unwilling evidences of maidenly tremor and confusion; and he turned away, feeling as if some burning hand had clutched at his heart.

But Cuthbert could not see the wistful glances, which, when he painfully averted his eyes, dwelt upon him with inquiring sadness; and when he looked again, Rose was sitting, silent as before, with sudden flushes on her face, and sudden tremors in her frame, answering, it is true, with few words and a little melancholy smile, when any one addressed her, but entirely failing to make the impression which Harry had predicted for her pink silk gown. And there was Mr. Dunlop paying his devoirs gallantly; those easy assiduities of word and manner!—Cuthbert felt the strong love

sicken his own heart, as he said to himself that these had charmed the trustful spirit of his Lady Rose.

And Mr. Dunlop, observing the changes of her face, at first with a little amusement, very soon came to the same conclusion too, and was embarrassed and annoyed, gratified and proud. For nothing was further from the thoughts of the baronet's son, for whom the magnanimous Cuthbert was willing to sacrifice himself, than any particular admiration of Rose, or the faintest intention of offering himself to the sister of Harry Muir. But the young man was human, and not insensible to ladies' love. He thought, like Cuthbert, that his attractions had overpowered Rose, and his tone insensibly grew tender, and his attentions marked, till Rose, able to bear it no longer, stole away.

“Poor Rose Allenders,” said Miss Dunlop to Cuthbert, as Rose left the room. “She

seems to think John is in love with her ; she is a very nice little girl, I think, but some young ladies are so ridiculous, taking every little attention so seriously, and I really must speak to John."

But Cuthbert, if she knew it, could have thrown John out of the window with far greater pleasure than he handed John's sister to the new piano ; and immediately after he sat down for a full hour to watch the door, with so much tenderness and solicitude in his face, that Rose, when she stole in again, brightened as with a sudden sunshine. And Cuthbert's heart lightened a little too ; but still it was full of distrust and doubt, and he never drew near her to speak the words, or hear the response, which might have set this doubt at rest.

The night was over, and nothing but the most ordinary civilities had passed between them ; next morning he was to go away.

He stood on the threshold in his rough travelling coat and plaid, saying "Good bye," with a voice which slightly faltered. He had shaken hands with Rose in the dining-room, where they breakfasted, and now he thought he was taking farewell of Allenders. But as he looked back between Martha and Agnes who had come with him to the door, Cuthbert saw a shy lingering figure in the doorway of the room he had left. His heart warmed; he stepped back to take Rose's hand again, and press it kindly in another farewell. They said nothing except "Good bye;" but Cuthbert caught one timid upward glance, and Rose saw the full steady look which conveyed to her so much of what the heart meant to say. The cloud rose from her heart and floated away; in another moment Cuthbert was gone, and she sat down to her work in intense silence, eager to resume her dreams;

but Cuthbert rolled away on the frosty road, and looked back on Allenders, with a sadness at his heart.

He had hitherto unconsciously assumed to himself the right of assistance and succour if any emergency should come. Now he felt this gliding away from him—now he could no longer dream of carrying this Rose in his arms to the safe place where rains of adversity might beat upon its gentle heart no more. The future, of which he had speculated so much, grew misty and uncertain to Cuthbert. The little cloud of breath before him, hovering in the frosty air, rose up like a white mist upon distant Benledi, and obscured him, though he looked out from among the clouds; and so, over many a great event and many a weighty hour, this little present mist rose dim and disheartening, and Cuthbert could not look beyond it—could not in his blended pride, and eager-

ness, and anxiety, distinguish the simple truth under this momentary veil.

But Harry, by his side, spoke of his projects, and Cuthbert seemed to listen, and gave answers not so far astray, though Cuthbert's thoughts were little employed about Harry's improvements, and it cost him an effort to keep up his attention. They parted very cordially, however, and Harry urged upon his friend repeated invitations to return, which Cuthbert was fain to evade. He remembered Rose's parting glance, and could not prevail upon himself to resign the chance of going back; but again he thought of the previous day, the previous night, and sighed to himself heavily as he turned his face towards home. He thought he had looked his last upon Rose.

When Harry left Cuthbert, he went to his bankers and drew a very considerable sum from his "capital;" but Harry felt he

had been very economical lately, and could afford a little indulgence now ; so he ordered some pretty bits of jewellery which he had fancied Agnes wanted last night, and called on Gilbert Allenders and some other choice spirits, and dined with them at the principal inn, and spent the evening merrily ; nor was it until John had made repeated representations of the darkness of the night, and the necessity for getting home, that Harry suffered himself to be persuaded, and bade a reluctant good-night to his friends.

Charteris was bending over a mass of papers, schooling the heart which still throbbed so loudly, and wearying himself out with indifferent business, that his disappointment might not sit too near the source of his strength, when Harry, wearied by quite a different process, drove past the dark and silent houses at Maidlin Cross. The labourers there were lying down to the

untroubled slumber purchased by a toilsome day ; and the children were asleep in Allenders, and Martha was standing by the window of her own room, looking out into a darkness so profound, that it made her blind, and feeling a darkness profounder still within the heart, which she coerced into absolute silence ; when, drowsy and wearied out, dazzled with the lights, and annoyed by the quietness, Harry came home.

CHAPTER II.

He will hang upon him like a disease.

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

“I’VE a great mind to practice out here, Harry,” said Gilbert Allenders; “lots of scarlet-fever, and measles, and whooping-cough, to start a man. And I want to be decent and respectable, and get out of temptation. If you were in an interesting position, like me, I’d get you a couple of rooms at Allender Mains, and invite you to dinner every day, till you were set up. Interesting

children of Maidlin, you don't know how much you want a doctor!"

"And would you actually come out here in winter, Gilbert?" said Harry. "You don't know how dull it is sometimes."

Harry drew his hat over his eyes, and returned very gruffly the passing salutation of Geordie Paxton. It was now a week since he had visited his fields, and that was more than time to make Harry sick—as he said—of the whole concern.

"The duties of my profession, Sir," said Gilbert, solemnly: "a medical man is always a martyr to the public and his duty—always. By the way, Harry, what would you say to take a run up to town for a week or two, just before settling down? I think it would do me good."

And Mr. Gilbert laid his hand on his heart, and sighed, as if he were the most interesting invalid in the world.

“To town? Do you mean to Stirling? I am there often enough already,” said Harry.

“Stirling!” Mr. Gilbert put up his hand to arrange the great woollen cravat he wore and laughed hoarsely. “You don’t fancy I call that little hole of a place, town! How innocent you are, after all!”

“Am I?” Harry felt himself grow very angry, and kicking away a stone which happened to lie beside his foot, sent it spinning through a group of Maidlin boys, dispersing themselves and their “bools” in all directions. If it had only broken Gilbert Allenders’ shins instead, it would have pleased Harry better; but even this was a satisfaction.

“Very well aimed,” said Gilbert, approvingly. “What I mean is, London—town—there is but one ‘town’ in the

world. Come up with me, Harry, and I'll help you to enjoy yourself. Come."

"Help me to enjoy myself, will you?" said Harry, scornfully. Harry was more impatient of his companion to-day, than he had been for a long time.

"Come, come, we're old companions now," said Gilbert; "and I know you wouldn't dislike going to London: a man of your years and station, who has never been in London, is something quite unparalleled! The country should subscribe for a glass-case, and show you in it as a real old country-gentleman, who has never been in town all his life, and never means to go!"

"There is such a thing as going too far," said Harry, haughtily.

"Who was it said that, the first night I saw you—" said the malicious Gilbert; "don't you remember? But I wont aggra-

vate you, Harry; and you needn't look as if you could eat me. Come, will you go?"

"I don't care for seeing London. What is it to me?" said Harry, with dignity: "just half-a-dozen big towns compounded into one! What should send everybody to London? At the same time, perhaps I may go: it's just as well going there, as staying at home here, doing nothing. And there is really nothing to be done on the land just now, in such a frost."

"You have been quite a hero, Harry!" said Gilbert; "few men, I can tell you, could have done what you have done. You ought to give yourself a little rest. Such a thing as this, now," said Gilbert, pointing to a line of carts slowly proceeding, with much ringing of horses' hoofs and carters' clogs, along the frosty, whitened road, "just to stand and let those odorous carts pass by might upset a man of your organization:

yet you've been among them constantly for some two months, now. I envy you your force of resolution, Harry."

Poor Harry! this piece of flattery mollified his irritated temper more easily than anything else could have done. Half-conscious that he had already abandoned this last and most costly toy of his, it salved his conscience to have his perseverance wondered at. He put his arm in Gilbert's, with sudden friendliness.

"I think I shall go, after all," he said. "Armstrong can manage everything well enough. He has been accustomed to this sort of thing all his life; and, to tell the truth, it requires that, I am afraid, to make a farmer—that is to say, your thorough enthusiastic farmer. But now that January is over, I think a few weeks' change would quite set me up again: besides, spring always reconciles one to the country. So

I fancy we may settle upon going, Gilbert. When shall you be ready?"

"In a day—any time," said Mr. Gilbert, shaking the thin, powdery snow from the hedge, by a blow of his cane. "I haven't three ladies to look after me, as you have: the girls have their own affairs to mind, and so has the mamma. I get my wardrobe to superintend myself—different from you, Harry."

And not quite sure whether to be pleased, and accept this as a token of his superior importance, or to resent it as a check upon his manliness and independence, Harry began immediately to discuss the projected journey—how they should go, and when; and it was soon decided, very much more to Gilbert's satisfaction, than to the good pleasure of Agnes and Martha, at home.

For Agnes found out many little objections, and urged them with some pique

and displeasure. Agnes thought she herself, his wife, would have been a much more suitable companion for Harry than Gilbert Allenders; and she should have greatly liked to go to London, even at risk of leaving the baby. Martha said nothing: her hope was gliding out of her hands again, defying all her eager attempts to hold it; and steady darkness—darkness as of the Egyptian night, tangible and positive, was settling down upon Martha's heart.

“So you have had our Edinburgh friend here again, Miss Rose?” said Mr. Gilbert. “I suppose he will condescend to be civil to you. What is the man, Harry? Nothing but a Scotch W. S., I suppose?” •

“He is an advocate, and a gentleman,” said Rose, under her breath; and when she had said this, she turned to the window,

fearful of disclosing the vivid blush which covered her whole face.

“When I called on him with Harry in July—I would not say, in presence of ladies, what my impulse was,” said Gilbert, lifting his large bony hand, and displaying his ringed finger in relief against the black brushwood about his chin. “He looked at me with a malice which disgusted me. I suppose he thought I was in his way,” added Mr. Gilbert, complacently, bestowing upon Rose, who had just turned her head, roused and defiant, a most emphatic look of admiration.

And Harry laughed: Rose turned her eyes to him slowly, and felt her heart burn—that Harry should think so meanly of her as to fancy Gilbert Allenders could stand in Cuthbert’s way!

“But when Mr. Charteris looks at you, Rosie,” whispered Violet, “his lip aye moves,

and the lid comes over his eye. Last time, he looked as if he could greet: what was that for, Rose?"

But Rose made no reply.

There were, as Gilbert prophesied, great preparations in Allenders for Harry's departure, and various purchases made, that Harry's appearance away from home might be worthy the station which his little wife thought so exalted. None of them were quite prepared for the total insignificance which always falls upon a solitary visitor to London; and when Gilbert, putting up his own little carpet-bag, took occasion to remark, sneeringly, upon the great, new, shining portmanteau which Harry carried, neither himself nor Agnes, who had come to Stirling to see him away, were angry. They said "Poor Gilbert!" in a sympathetic look, and compassionated him, who had neither rank to maintain, nor a little wife

to help him to maintain it ; and when Agnes, as she went away, casting wistful looks behind her at Harry, caught a glimpse of Gilbert's great, sallow, unwholesome face, surmounted by its little travelling-cap, and encircled by its coarse, wiry hair, she could almost have been bold enough to turn back, and follow Harry. She contrasted them in her mind a hundred times, during her melancholy drive home, and had many a dreary thought about temptation, and evil company, and Harry "led away."

Poor Harry ! he was always "led away ;" for not one of his anxious watchers, could prevail with herself to speak of his errors in harder words than these.

As Agnes returned home, she called at Blaelodge to take up the children ; for their holidays were over, and they had returned to school ; and a little cluster of other children, also returning from school, hung

on behind the carriage, and kept up a little quick tramp of feet behind, tempting John now and then to wave his whip good-humouredly over their heads, and warn them that he would "come down the next time." But John, who came from Maidlin Cross himself, never came down; and Violet and Katie, peering out of the window on either side, nodded to the heads of their respective factions, and whispered to each other, who was at school, and who was "gathering stanes," as they passed, band after band—some with books and slates, some girded with their great work-aprons, returning from the field.

From the open doors at Maidlin Cross, the pleasant firelight shines out upon the road, reddening its sprinkled snow; and figures stand in the doorways, dark against the cheery light within; and voices ring, clear and sharp, through the air. The

carriage, now deserted by its band of attendants, begins to grow rather dreary as it advances into the darkness, and Agnes does not speak, and Katie and Violet cannot see each other's faces; but they are quite cheered and revived, so long as they can hear the far-off sound of those voices at Maidlin Cross.

And by the fireside Martha and Rose sit very silently. A faint sound comes from the river, and the wind whistles shrill among the leafless trees; but except these, and now and then an occasional noise from the kitchen, where Dragon has been summoned in to sit with Mysie and her companion, that there may be "a man in the house," there is perfect stillness within and without. They are both working—you would think they never do anything but work—and both are absorbed and lost in their own thoughts.

When at rare intervals they speak, it is to wonder how far Harry will be by this time, and what he will see in London, and when he will return; but they do not say to each other that they tremble for Harry, nor tell what distinct remembrances arise before them both, of the sad scenes of the past; yet now and then a sudden start, and quick look round this cheerful room, discover to you that they have forgotten where they are for the moment, and that the dim walls of Mrs. Rodger's parlour, the proper background of many a recalled grief, are more clearly present before them, than this brighter and more prosperous place.

Yet they are cheered, in spite of themselves, when Agnes and her little companions come in, dazzled, out of the darkness; and Lettie volunteers a confession of some fear as they came along

that dark road, close to the Lady's Well. Silence is not congenial to Agnes, and the baby cries loudly in the nursery; and little Harry, very sleepy, rouses himself up to devour cakes, and swallow as much tea as is permitted. So the night passes away; but a hundred times they fancy they hear Harry's summons at the outer-door; and almost believe, with a thrill between hope and fear, that he has come home.

The days pass, and grow into weeks, and still they sit all the long evening through, and again and again fancy they hear the sound of his return, and hold their breath in eager listening. A few letters, containing long lists of things he has seen, come to them tardily; but they never think of Harry, in his extreme occupation, carrying these letters about with him for a day or two, before he recollects to send them away. The

farm-manager comes now and then, anxious to see Allenders; for now the frost has broken up, and a genial dry season has succeeded it, and the cautious Armstrong is slow to do anything without his employer's approval. Some fertile, well-cultivated land, for a lease of which Harry was bargaining with Sir John Dunlop's factor, as a profitable addition to his own farm, has been secured by another applicant during Harry's absence; and the mason who contracted for Harry's new byres and stables, after a long delay by the frost, now refuses to go on, till he has received one of the payments to which he is entitled. But no answer comes to the letters in which these matters are spoken of—his short notes only speak of sights and constant occupation, and he never says when he is to return.

The cold, mild, early February comes in quietly; and the nightly rains patter upon

the trees, and swell the burn to hoarseness, and splash in the swollen river. In the morning, when the feeble sunshine falls dimly upon the lawn, and its flower borders, Violet and Katie rejoice over, here and there, a golden or purple crocus, and eagerly point out the buds swelling on the trees; but at night it is always rain, striking on the bare branches, and filling the whole air with a sound of mysterious footsteps passing to and fro around the lonely house. And within the house they all grow very still—they all listen for Harry's step, for Harry's call; and their hearts tremble, and their frames shiver, as every night they think he will return.

But February is nearly past, and a March gale, impatient of the slow progress of the year, has sprung up among the hills before his time, and rends the clouds over Demeyet, tossing them scornfully to the east and to

the west, when at last they hear Harry come home. And he does not come unexpectedly ; but has written before, stating day and hour, which he religiously keeps. His dress is worn, and out of order ; his shining new portmanteau frayed and dim, some articles of its contents lost, and almost all injured ; but he says nothing of excuse or apology for his long delay, and is fretted and irritated only when he hears of its results, liberally blaming everybody concerned. However, by and bye, everything goes on again—goes on after a fashion, languidly, and without success ; for Harry no longer cares about his fields.

CHAPTER IV.

. . . . Let them go,
To ear the land that hath some hope to grow,
For I have none.

KING RICHARD II.

It is the seed time—the time of hope. The lawn at Allenders is traced with an outline of living gold, crocuses clustering up like children out of the fresh awakened soil; and day by day the brown husks swell upon the trees, and the fields add pile by pile to their velvet mantle. Your heart leaps when you stand in the morning sunshine, and hear the burn call to the

river, and the river, with its happy voice pass on to the great sea. And all along this highway through which the children pass to school, the hedges put out timid leaves, venturing upon the chill, which in the morning brightness bid their lingering neighbours courage; and down among the long dewy grass, you can find here and there an early primrose, half timid, half triumphant, holding up its delicate chalice to receive the dew of heaven. The cows are marching gravely to their sweet pastures, the little "herds" straying after them, with all the winter's "schulin" over, perchance to be dreamt upon through these meditative silent days, perchance to spring up in songs, like the natural voices of the springs that run among the hills, perchance to be merrily forgotten; but cheerful voices ring about the land, and tender sunshine glistens on Demeyet, and an odour and fragrance of sweet Hope, makes

the wide atmosphere blessed. Sweet Hope ! inheritance and portion of human hearts, which God gives not to his very angels, but only unto *us*.

Ah, Hope—good Hope—God's tenderest angel!—coming back with the morning light to hearts which believed in the darkness, that thou wert gone for ever!—opening all doors, however barred, and when one hides his face from thee, touching him with wonderful touches, earnest and wistful, so that he cannot choose but look in thy sweet face again. Not always bright, not always gently pensive—desperate sometimes, and fearful to look upon, seeing nought before thee but a possibility; and sometimes looking down, solemn and grave, upon places which thou hast been constrained to leave, and whence faces of agony gaze up to thee, clutching at the skirts of thy garments, hoping against Hope !

The year passed on, the flowers blossomed, the early trees began to shake out their leaves about the house of Allenders—the odour of primroses came in at the door, the voices of children made the walls ring, and youth was with them all, to beguile them into careless faith; but Hope, hooded and veiled as for a journey, and dwelling no longer with them in their chambers, stood on the threshold ready to depart. Again and again the dim face turned, as if to stay, reluctant and loth to loose her garments from their eager hands; but she never entered freely to dwell with them again.

The works went on with intermitting energy: now altogether neglected, now forced forward with spasmodic exertions. The labourers at Maidlin grew pinched and care-worn, exposed to a capricious authority, which sometimes left them idle for a week or two, and then poured upon their hands arrears of

labour, which it was now too late to accomplish well. The wives murmured and recalled the steady "wage" which the old farmer gave; the men lounged round the Cross, and shook their heads, and prophesied ruin; the little shop newly opened, languished, and its keeper vainly lamented the folly which brought him to Maidlin. Sober agriculturists looking on, not without a quiet satisfaction in the truth of their own predictions, settled into their old quietness with a word of pity for Harry—poor Harry! His new farm buildings, built at great cost, stood empty and useless; his farm-manager, too cautious to proceed by himself, wandered about whole days to consult Allenders, and when he could not find him, or found him indisposed to enter upon necessary business, went home in irritation and disgust—went home to find Gilbert Allenders established in his respectable house, corrupting his young son and

offending his daughters ; and Armstrong, like the labourers, shook his head, and sighed a heavy sigh for poor Harry.

Within the house of Allenders they were all very silent. Martha, making no comment upon Harry's life, tried to blind her eyes, and take out of them the vigilant jealous love which would not be deluded. Poor little Agnes, dispirited and pale, went about the house with her baby, forgetting all her girlish songs and laughter. Rose, wearying and sickened of the dreams which had been her sole solace, worked on in silence, and never cared to stir abroad ; and merry little Katie Calder, the only free heart among them, could not comprehend the vague gloom which so often overpowered even Lettie—for Lettie's dreary thoughts had returned to her again.

“ Lettie, dinna be sae dull,” pleaded Katie Calder ; “ naebody ever sings or says a word

now—naebody but Allenders, and the doctor, when he comes ; but I dinna like the doctor, Violet, and they canna bide him at Maidlin Cross.”

“I think he’s a bad man,” said Violet, decidedly—and she clenched her hand, and stamped her little foot upon Dragon’s stair.

“Ay, bairns,” said Dragon ; “and I would like to hear somebody explain in a sensible way what gies him such a grip o’ Mr. Hairy. You’ll no ken, Missie ; you’re ower wee ; but if there was the like of Boston, or the young lad Livingstone, that converted sae mony hunder folk on the Monday of the preachings at the kirk of Shotts, or John Welsh, that wore the very stanes with his praying, to the fore now, I wouldna care to take my fit in my hand and gang away to ask their counsel : for, ye see, Mr. Hairy’s a different man from yon—a very different

kind o' man—and how the like of this chield has gotten such maistry over him is a miracle to me. I kent within mysel it was an ill sign when they ca'd him Hairy. There's ne'er been a Hairy Allenders from Leddy Violet's time till now."

Lettie would not speak of family concerns even to Dragon. She had already the instinctive pride which hides the wound in its own breast, and dies rather than complain; so she changed the subject rapidly.

"Dragon, you never told us the story about the laird that planted the oak; and I thought myself, when I was at the waterside, that I heard it groan; but how could it groan, Dragon, at the season the man was killed? How could it ken the seasons, and it only a tree?"

"It's just because ye have nae knowledge, Missie," said Dragon. "There's me mysel noo, an auld man. I'm aye cauld, and aye

creeping to my bit spunk of fire—ye might say how should I ken the seasons; but the oak has its fit constant in the earth, and its head to the sky, and hears the water every day, and feels the rain and the sun, and kens when to put forth its first leaves, and when to let them fa', better than the wisest man that ever lived upon this earth. And weel may it groan, the auld oak—it's langer in the service of the family than me; and do ye think I dinna groan mony a time, to see a fine lad like Mr. Hairy led away."

"Dragon, he's my Harry!" cried little Violet in a sudden passion, stamping her foot again violently on the stones, while the tears fell down her cheeks, and quivering lip and dilating nostril bore witness to the force of her feelings. "He's our Harry—he's my Harry, Dragon! and I wish God would take me—oh, I wish God would put me in a

grave, my lane, and kill me, if He would keep Harry well !”

And the tears poured down over Violet's cheeks, and she dashed her hand into the air, and cried aloud.

“ Poor little Lettie ! many an elder, many a wiser, never a more loving heart, has lost itself in such another agony, chafing against that inscrutable providential will, which we call fate.”

Katie Calder looked on with wonder and dismay. Honest little Katie could not comprehend what this strange emotion was ; but with *her* natural instinct she made instant endeavours to “ divert ” her little friend. And Dragon looked at Violet with his wandering light blue eyes, like a man half-awakened from a dream ; but as the child's highly-wrought feelings subsided, and she sat down on the steps and wept, he fell back into his old torpor. You could almost have

thought that this strange voice of passion in the child had rung back through the waste of years, and lighted upon the man's heart which lay sleeping in Edom Comrie's breast.

“Eh, Lettie, Willie Paterson's broken his leg,” said Katie Calder. “It was on the big slide between Mrs. Cogan's and Maidlin, and a' the boys play at his mother's window now, to let him hear them when he's lying in his bed. It was little Johnnie Paxton that told me, Dragon, when he came to the kitchen to see Mysie.”

“Willie Paterson's a fine laddie of himsel,” said Dragon, “and has a great notion of you, Missie; but mind, he's only a puir widow's son, and besides, he's gotten in among some muckle ill callants, and they're leading him away.”

“Dragon,” said Lettie gravely, “when folk are led away, are they no doing ill them-

selves? Is it a' the blame of the one that leads them away, and no their ain, Dragon?"

"Weeld, I'll just tell ye a story, Missie," said the old man. "When I was a young lad, I had ance a brother, and he was easy beguiled. So a sodger out of the town got him, and courted at him, and garred him drink, and led him into every kind of evil, till the poor callant lost his employ, and listed, and ga'ed away across the sea to the war. By a' accounts he was little steadier when he was away, than he had been at hame, though he had a guid heart for a' that, and was aye kind to his friends; and at the end of the war he came back just as simple as ever he was, with a sma' pension, and as many wounds as might have served a regiment. He wasna weel hame, when up turned this deevil of a sodger again—where the tane was, ye were sure to find the tither—and within a

year, George Comrie was dead and buried. Now ye've baith guid judgments to be bairns—wha was't that should bear the blame?"

"It was the sodger, Dragon," said Katie Calder, with instant determination.

Violet said nothing. She was pulling away the withered fibres of ivy from Dragon's wall.

"I think folk shouldna be led away," said Lettie slowly, after a considerable pause; "and you never say folk are led away when they do *good* things, Dragon. I think it was *his* blame too, as well as the other man's."

"He's in his grave this forty year," said Dragon, "but I mind him better than I mind his nameson, Geordie Paxton, that I saw only yestreen. Maybe I should have ga'en sooner to my account mysel, and wan beside a' my ain friends; but for a' I'm sae

auld, bairns, I never crave to be away ; and mony a young head I've seen laid in the mools, since my ain was as white as it is this day. No that I'm bragging o' that, Missie—but I'm auld, and I never feel ony dinnles noo. I think my heart has slippit down some gate, where trouble can never get a rug at it ; and I'm aye pleased with the light and the guid day, and wi' a book whiles, and a crack, and my meat regular, and naething to fash me ; and I see nae reason I have for deeing, though I *am* an auld man."

Strange, broken gleams shone out of Dragon's wandering eyes as he spoke, nodding his head feebly with a half-palsied motion—fitful glances, out of his torpor, of the heart and spirit which long ago made him a man ; but the soul dwelt benumbed in its wintry habitation, like some forlorn dweller among the hills whose hut the snow has buried—and

resigned itself to the slumbrous spell, without strength to struggle into consciousness of anything higher than the warmth and ease in which it lay.

CHAPTER V.

I have heard when one lay dying, after long
And steadfast contemplation of sure death,
That sudden there would spring delicious hope,
And boastful confidence of health restored,
Into the heart which had not threescore throbs
Of its worn pulse to spend—
There is a madness that besets the verge
Of full destruction — madness that hath wild
 dreams
Of victory and triumph.

“How’s the farm getting on, Harry?
Armstrong doesn’t seem very jubilant about
it. What’s to become of the land?” said
Gilbert Allenders.

They were sitting in the little round turret-room, looking out from the open door upon the lands of Allenders, and many a fair acre besides. A dewy May evening was shedding sweetness and peace over it all, and through the whole wide country before them the setting sun found out, here and there, a running water, and made all the hills aware of it with a triumphant gleam. Green corn rustling in the breeze, and gardens gay with blossoms, with here and there a red field of new ploughed earth, or a rich luxuriant strip of meadow to diversify them, spread round on every side; and the hum of animate life, the indistinct farmyard voice, the din of playing children, came to them dreamily, upon air which told you in loving whispers, of the hawthorn trees in those deep lanes below.

In Harry's eye shines an unusual gaiety; and the confidence which sometimes deserts

him, leaving him in such morose and sullen melancholy, has returned to-day. Not all natural is this renewal; for excitement, which makes Martha crush her hands together, and sends Agnes away secretly to weep, animates him with its passing gleam; but still he has command of himself, and is above Gilbert's sneers.

“What's to become of the land? It will do famously, of course!” said Harry; “and it's only Armstrong's caution that makes him quiet about it. If Fairly remains in the market for a year or two, I think I will buy it, Gilbert. They say it once belonged to the estate of Allenders, and Hoolie too, which is now Sir John's. I should like to bring the land up to what it was in the old times; and I say, Gibbie, man, you shall have a house, a regular red pill-box, with just such a surgery as will suit you; and settle down,

and have an appointment at once. to doctor all my tenants. I should have quite a band of retainers if Fairly were added to Allenders."

"It's very well *you* got the estate, Harry," said Gilbert, with a sneer, which poor Harry could not see. "If it had fallen into our hands, it might have remained as it was, till the end of time, and neither been improved nor increased. Thank you for the pill-box, Harry; I always knew you were a warm friend. I'll depend on getting it, I promise you."

"And so you shall, Gilbert," said Harry; "but I'm not quite prepared to buy Fairly now. I've ordered home a great stock of fine cattle. I don't know if we'll have room for them all; plough horses—magnificent fellows!—and the finest cows that ever were seen in the respect-

able Carse of Stirling; but they take a lot of money, all these things; and I should be very glad to have the harvest over."

"The harvest? But this first year, I suppose, you don't expect very much from it?" said Gilbert.

"Don't I? Well, we'll see," said Harry, laughing; "but I must be economical this year, Gilbert—going on at this rate won't do. I've spent a small fortune this year; to be sure, it was on the land," said Harry, musing; "cattle, stables, byres, Armstrong and all his labourers, not to speak of the plough graith, and the harrows, and the thrashing-machine, and all the things they have bothered me about; but we must be thrifty this year."

"I believe you've no memorandum of the money you lent me. I must make out one for you to-night, Harry," said

Gilbert, carelessly. "Do you know how much it is?"

"Not I," said the lofty Harry; "nor do I care to know. Never mind memorandums—we know each other too well for that."

And Harry, whose capital had shrunk to the final thousand, and whose last expensive purchase remained to be paid for, led the way down stairs in high glee, feeling himself already the second founder of the family, and rich in patriarchal wealth. At the gate, Agnes and Rose were looking out eagerly along the road, from which a tramp of hoofs penetrated into the very drawing-room of Allenders. Little Katie Calder stood upon the summit of the low wall, with one foot on a tree, and Martha a little behind them, looked out with much gravity and concern.

Great work-horses, with ribbons at

their ears, and elaborate decorated tails, were marching with heavy hoofs into Harry's stables; and the lowing of Harry's kine from the fields summoned the new milkmaids to lead them home. You would have thought it the most prosperous of homesteads, with its grey, thin house, and abrupt turret, telling of long descent and elder times; its superannuated Dragon witnessing to the family kindness which would not abandon an ancient servant; its great farm ranges, new and shining, which testified, or seemed to testify, to present energy and wealth; and its youthful family crowded about the gate, from pretty little matron Agnes to the meditative Lettie, standing by Dragon's side in the road without. Prosperous, peaceful, full of natural joys and pleasant progress; but Harry's flushed, excited face, and the coarse pretension of

Gilbert Allenders came in strangely to break the charm.

“Come along, Agnes, and see them,” said Harry, loudly. “I told you they were splendid fellows, Gilbert. Come, never mind your bonnet; and Gilbert will give you his arm, Rosie—come along.”

“Wait till I get a shawl on—for the servants, Harry,” said Agnes, freeing herself from his grasp.

“What about the servants? it’s only at your own door,” said Harry, securing her arm in his own; “and the light shines in your hair, Agnes, very prettily. Come away, little wife.”

And Harry went on singing—

“There’s gowd in your garters, Marion,
And siller on your white hause bane.”

to the secret misery of Lettie, who thought he was humiliating himself, and to the

great wonder and astonishment of Katie Calder.

But Rose drew firmly back, and would not go. Rose was very near hating Gilbert Allenders; so he went to the other side of Agnes, and they walked to the stables together—poor little Agnes, nearly choking all the way with wounded pride, and shame, and fear, lest Harry might be offended in spite of her compliance.

“Why has Lady Dunlop never called on you again? and what has become of that pedantic son of hers?” said Harry, when they had returned, and were taking the tea which Agnes hoped would subdue him. “It’s three or four months now since you called on them, Agnes—why does not her ladyship return your visit? and I should just like to know what’s become of young Dunlop.”

“Hush, Harry!—I don’t know—I can’t tell,” said Agnes, very humbly. “Young Mr.

Dunlop has never been here since that time—you mind, Martha—after Harry came back from London.”

“And why doesn’t the fellow come again?” said Harry. “A pretty man he is, to think we’re to keep on good terms with him, when he never does anything to keep it up himself. And what’s become of these Nettlehaugh people, and Haigh of Foggo Barns? I suppose it’s your fault, Agnes; you’ve been neglecting the proper forms—you’ve never called on them, I suppose?”

“Yes, Harry,” said again the very low, timid voice of Agnes, “you have forgotten—you went with me once to both Foggo and Nettlehaugh, and Martha and I went another time, and they have never called since.”

“I should like to know what they mean,” said Harry loudly, his face flushing to a deep crimson. “I suppose they think we’re not so good as them. Never mind, Agnes; never

mind, my little wife—you'll be a richer woman yet, and see your son a greater man than any half-dozen of these little lairdies. I'll have all the work, you know, and I'll take it gladly ; but little Harry shall be heir to better land than young Dunlop will ever see. A set of nobodies setting up for something ! I should like to know what they mean."

"They were very kind at first," murmured Agnes, scarcely able to restrain the tears with which her eyes were weighed down.

"They were very kind at first," repeated Martha distinctly, as she rose to leave the room ; "and to-morrow, when you are alone, Harry, I will tell you what they mean."

Never since she entered Allenders had Martha's voice had this tone before. Her brother started and turned to look after her, with something of the mingled look—defiance, reverence, respect and pain—which they all knew on his face long ago ; but Martha

was gone without another word. It had a singular effect on Harry. He sat down at the table, leaned his head upon his hand, and gazed with fixed eyes on the vacant space before him ; but he scarcely spoke again that night.

CHAPTER VI.

Nor can thy shame give physic to my grief,
Tho' thou repent ; yet I have still the loss.
The offender's sorrow lends but weak relief
To him that bears the strong offence's cross.

As a decrepit father takes delight
To see his active child do deeds of youth,
So I, made lame by fortune's dearest spite,
Take all my comfort of thy worth and truth.

SHAKSPEARE—(SONNETS).

THE next morning Harry sat in sullen silence at the breakfast-table, scarcely raising his head. Agnes and Rose, with faltering,

timid voices, never ceased addressing him. They pressed upon him the food which he could not taste, they asked his opinion with tearful eyes and a visible tremor on the most trifling matters, they laid caressing hands upon his shoulders when they passed behind his chair; but these affectionate acts were very visible. They could not conceal the suppressed excitement of their great anxiety, nor their consciousness that another crisis had come in Harry's fate.

And even little Lettie stirred on her chair restlessly, like a startled bird, and felt her heart leaping at her very throat, and scarcely could speak for her parched lips and the strong beating of this same little anxious heart. And no one knew what heavy throbs beat against Martha's breast—no longer fluttering and tremulous, but heavy as a death-knell. She said little, it is true, but still she addressed Harry

sometimes as usual—as usual—perhaps with a tenderer tone—though Harry made no answer, save in monosyllables, to any of them all; and Martha very speedily rose from her place, and left the room.

Another spasmodic attempt at conversation was made by Agnes and Rose, but their own hearts beat so loudly in their ears, that they trembled for Harry hearing them. Poor Harry! through those long slow moments which were hours to them, he hung idly over the table, trifling with his baby's coral—and it was not until all endeavours at speech had failed, and a total silence—a silence of the most intense and painful excitement to his companions—had fallen upon them, that rousing himself with an effort, and putting back the hair from his damp forehead, he slowly rose and went away.

Katie Calder, not understanding all this, and slightly depressed by it, had just stolen out of the room to gather up their books for school; so no one, save the wistful Lettie, was left with the young wife and Rose. They sat still for a short time in silence, eagerly listening to Harry's footsteps as he passed through the hall to his little library, and closed the door; and then Agnes clasped her hands upon her side, and gasped for breath, and said in a voice between a cry and a whisper:

“What will she say to him? Oh, what will Martha say to Harry, Rose?”

“I cannot tell—I cannot tell,” said Rose, wringing her hands. “Oh, if it were only over! I could break my heart when I look at Harry—I could break my heart!” And Rose put her hands over her face in just such

a passionate burst of restrained sobbing as had come upon Violet before.

After some time, they heard the slow footstep of Martha coming down the stairs, and both of them ran to the door to whisper an entreaty to her to "be gentle with Harry. Poor Harry!" They could scarcely say it for tears.

When Martha entered the library, Harry lounging in the window-seat, was languidly turning over a paper. He, poor Harry! was little less excited than they were, and heats and chills came over him, and his eye fell under Martha's mother eye; but the second nature which had risen like a cloud over that boy's heart which still moved within him, made him stubborn and defiant still. When she came in, he threw down his paper with a slight start, as of impatience; and turning to her, rapidly

asked: "Well, Martha, what have you to say to me?"

"Am I to have liberty to say it, Harry?"

"What folly to ask me such a question," said Harry, angrily. "Does my sister need to make a formal affair of it, like this, when she has anything to say to me? Sit down, Martha, and don't look as if you came to school me; I may not be able to bear *that* very patiently, and I should be sorry to hurt you. Sit down, and tell me what it is?"

Martha sat down with gathering coldness upon her face—coldness of the face alone, a mask to hide very different emotions.

"I come to-day while you are full master of yourself, and are alone," she said, with slow and deliberate emphasis—Harry did

not know that she compelled herself to speak so, lest the burning tide of other words should pour forth against her will —“to answer a question you asked yesterday. You desired to know what your neighbours meant by ceasing to seek you; Harry, I wish to tell you what they mean.”

Harry looked at her for a moment, as if about to speak, but rapidly turning away eyes which could not meet the steady gravity of hers, he took up his paper, and without looking at it, played with it in his hand.

“They mean,” proceeded Martha, slowly, “that they do not choose to extend the courtesies of ordinary life to one who scorns and never seeks, the ordinary respect which is every man’s right who lives without outward offence against God or man; they

mean that they cannot pretend to honour what you have set yourself to disgrace; they mean that the name, the house, the family, which you can resign for the meanest of earthly pleasures, have no claim of special regard upon them. Your life is known in every peasant's house; they talk of you at the firesides of your labourers: they say, poor Allenders, and tell each other how you are led away—Harry! I ask you what right you have to be led away? You tell me you are not a child, and will not bear to be schooled by me. What right have you, a man—a man, Harry—to suffer any other man to lead you into evil? And this is what your neighbours mean.”

Harry dashed the paper from him in sudden passion. “And what right have you—what right have you? Martha, I have

borne much: what right have you to speak to me in such words as these?"

"God help me! the dearest right that ever mother had," exclaimed Martha, no longer slowly; "because my soul has travailed and agonized; because I put my hopes upon you, Harry—my hopes that were once shipwrecked, to be cast away again! Look at me, mind me all your life, boy, before you defy me! Night and day, sleeping and waking, I have carried you on my heart. When I was in my first youth, I cried with strong crying, and pangs such as you never knew, for power and wealth, and to win it with my hands. Who was it for, but you? Then I came to a dearer hope. I thought *you* would win it, Harry; and I would eat bread out of your hands, and exult in you, and call upon the heavens and the earth to see

that you were mine. What of *my* hopes? They are ill to slay, but God has touched them, and they have died out of my heart. *I* have failed, and *you* have failed, and there is no more expectation under the sun. But I call you to witness you are mine—bought with the blood of my tears and my travail—my son, Harry—my son!”

He did not answer, he did not look at her, but only covered his face with his hands.

“We are worsted, but we need not be destroyed,” continued Martha. “I accept the failure that is past, and acquiesce in it, because it has been God’s will—but God never wills that we should fail in the future, Harry. God be thanked that *it* lies continually before us, free of stain. And hope is hard to me—maybe it is because my tribulations have not wrought patience, that experience does

not bring me hope. But I will hope again—I will make another venture, and look for another harvest, Harry, if you will bid me! Not like the last—God forbid that it should be like the last! I will turn my face towards the needful conquest we have to make—you and me—and hope for *that*, though it is greater than taking a city. But Harry, Harry, I cannot bear to see you sinking—harder than it is to them, who are weeping for you yonder, it is to me who cannot shed a tear. Harry, am I to hope again?”

But sad and terrible was the gleam in Martha's dry strained eyes; not like sunshine but like lightning, was the feverish hope for which she pleaded.

And Harry rose and took her hand, himself trembling with strong emotion. “From this day henceforth,” he vowed, with a

choking voice, "never more, Martha, never more, can I forget myself, and them, and you."

And there fell upon Martha a sudden relief of weeping, such as her eyes had not known for months. "You were once my boy, my bairn, Harry," she said, with a strange hysteric smile, "I cannot forget that you were my bairn, my little brother—Harry—my hope!"

And Harry covered his face once more, and was not ashamed to weep.

Poor Harry! for ever under the evil which had crusted his nature over, under all the pride, the jealousy, the self-assertion of conscious, remorseful, unrepentant sin, the boy's heart tender, fresh, and hopeful still dwelt in his breast. Only God can reconcile these strange contradictions; but when you reached to it—and many a time had this added

a pang to Martha's sufferings—you could not choose but deem it an *innocent* heart.

By and by Martha left the room—left him there to meditate upon this and on the past. Poor Harry's heart lightened ; in spite of himself, his attention wandered from these things of solemn weight and interest to little Harry playing under the walnut tree. Now and then, it is true, he put his hand over his eyes, and made his face grave, and mused, and even prayed ; but anon his mind wandered again. The great excitement of the last hour sank into repose, and Harry had seldom been so easily amused with the little stumbles and misadventures of his child. At the other window, Agnes and Rose, unable to see anything, with their sick hearts and tearful eyes, sat in absorbed silence, looking out indeed, but without noticing even the favourite boy. Above, Martha was kneeling before God, in prayer which wrung not her heart only, but

every fibre of her strained frame. Upon the sunny road without, little Lettie went silently to school, wiping a tear now and then from her cheek—all for Harry; while Harry sat in the window of his library, the cloud gone from his brow, and a smile upon his lip, watching his child at play—with simple pleasure and interest, as if he himself were a child.

And then he opened the window, and called to little Harry. With a sudden start, Agnes rose, and went out upon the lawn to read his face. His face was cloudless, smiling, full of quiet satisfaction and repose; and he had already begun to play with the child at the window. Agnes had only time to telegraph that all was well to Rose, when Harry called to her to get her bonnet and go out with him. With joy and relief she ran into the house to obey, and Harry met her at the library door, and said he wanted a little rest

and relaxation to-day, and that she must persuade Martha and Rose to let him row them down the river in the neglected boat; and Agnes went up-stairs singing, and half weeping for joy.

CHAPTER VII.

Fair, through the lattice of yon cloud, the sun
Throws to us, half in stealth, his parting smile.
Night comes anon.

IT was June weather now—warm and full, and a deep peace had fallen over Allenders. Harry, who was not naturally temperate in anything, was almost intemperate in his reformation now. He applied himself to business with devotion, had long consultations with Armstrong every morning, and repulsed coldly the usual familiarities of Gilbert Allenders. In his library,

they always found the table covered with estimates and calculations, with expensive schemes for thrift, and elaborate economics of farming; while out of doors, Harry went blithely about his fields again, conciliating once more the half-alienated favour of his workmen, and regaining for himself the elastic vigour and health, which had begun to be shaken. Agnes sang to her baby all day long, till the very air within the house grew rich with ballad fragments. Rose, still a little weary in her heart, and longing secretly for a new beginning to her old dreams, began to interest herself in the pleasant pursuits of free young womanhood, and forgot the family care, as well as her own individual one. Martha sank back quietly into a temporary repose—was ill for a few days, and afterwards very quiet—for her frame had been shaken by severe exhaustion; very different from the natural

good hope of common life, was the desperate stake for which she played; and when the moment, with all its pent-up and restrained excitement, was past, experience lifted its cold, prophetic voice again, and she could not choose but hear.

But the gossips at Maidlin Cross, glad to return to their kindlier opinion—for Harry's good looks, and naturally gracious manners, gave them a strong prepossession in his favour—congratulated each other that Allenders was steady now, and quite another man, and that "it bid to be" a great comfort to his sister and his wife—for they unconsciously put Martha before Agnes, doing reverence to the more absorbing love. And young Mr. Dunlop, seeing Harry's frank face brightened by renewed hope and wholesome pleasure, and hearing how sedulously he had begun to attend to all his concerns, was smitten with remorse

for his rudeness, and brought his mother in state to call on Mrs. Allenders, which her good-humoured ladyship would have done months ago but for his restraining. Prosperity and peace returned again, as it seemed ; and Harry's last thousand was still very little diminished.

But it chanced that Cuthbert Charteris suddenly looked in upon the astonished household, on the very day of Lady Dunlop's call. Cuthbert did not know that this call had a value quite separate from their pleasure in itself, to the family at Allenders ; and he thought the tremulous agitation of both Agnes and Rose originated in a cause very different from its real one. So Cuthbert was cold, constrained and unhappy ; scarcely able to conceal his contempt of Mr. Dunlop, and resolutely declining to remain, even for a

single night. They, in their turn, misunderstood him; they thought he had heard something unfavourable of Harry, and while they redoubled their attentions to himself, they overwhelmed him with references to Harry's goodness, and stories of the kindness with which all his labourers, and the little group of cottar wives at Maidlin, regarded Allenders. If Cuthbert had been sufficiently disengaged from his own engrossing concerns, these continual defences would have made him fear: as it was, he could think of nothing but the Rose, which had never seemed so fair in his eyes as now, when he convinced himself that another was about to bear it away.

Rose did not know what to think of Cuthbert. Had he been indifferent to her all along? But Rose, with a natural pride in many things, conjoined the most perfect

and unconscious humility in her estimate of herself; that he should be jealous, never entered into her mind—it was far easier to believe that he had never “cared;” and Rose blushed even to acknowledge to herself that she once thought he “cared,” by doubting it now. Yet there was something in Cuthbert’s eyes—something in the full, grave look she sometimes met, which filled Rose with a vague thrill of emotion; and when he was gone she remembered this, and ceased to comment upon the rest.

About a week after Cuthbert’s call, Harry went to Stirling, taking Agnes with him. They were going on business—to draw money, of which Agnes claimed a considerable portion for her household expenses; and Harry himself, to the great content of all, had invited her to accompany him. They were quite at ease and quiet at home,

and with the children, who rejoiced in a holiday, had taken a long ramble through woods and lanes in the afternoon, coming home laden with wild flowers. Even Martha, amused with Katie's radiant pleasure, and Violet's mingled reverie and mirth, had brightened quite insensibly, and Rose was as gay as the little girls themselves. They were all seated under the walnut tree on the lawn when Harry and Agnes returned, and not a shadow crossed any of them, except the ill-favoured one of Gilbert Allenders, as he came in at the gate, resolved to stay to dinner whether he was asked or no.

But the dinner past, and still Harry kept Gilbert steadily at a distance. They could not sufficiently admire his strength and resolution, and how bravely he resisted the tempter. Gilbert himself seemed slightly surprised

and baffled; and not a single disconcerted glance was lost on the rejoicing Agnes, with whom there was only a single step between the greatest alarm for Harry's stability, and the greatest pride and confidence in it.

But when the evening was considerably advanced, and they had all assembled in the drawing-room, Harry began to talk of what they had seen and heard in Stirling.

“Who do you think I met, Martha?” said the unthinking Harry. “Dick Buchanan, my old plague in Glasgow; and what do you think he told me?—I scarcely can believe it—that our friend Charteris was actually going to be married to his sister Clemie, a good-natured clumsy girl, whom I used to see going to school. I could not have expected such a thing of Charteris.”

And as Harry's eye rested on Rose, he

stopped suddenly, his face flushing all over with the deepest colour ; yet Rose displayed no motion. A slight start, a momentary paleness, and then she put out her hand as if to grasp at something, drawing it back by and bye with an unconscious motion of imagination, as if her prop had pained her—though she did not say a word.

But her head grew giddy, and the light swam in her darkening eyes ; and constantly in her mind was this impulse to take hold of something to keep herself from falling. When Gilbert took reluctant leave, and she rose to bid him good-night, her hand clutched at the back of an empty chair ; and when she went to rest, with a ringing in her ears and a dimness before her eyes, Rose held by the wall on her way to her own chamber—not to support herself, though even her form tottered, but to support her heart, which tottered more.

She did not think, nor ask, nor question anything; she was too much occupied in this same immediate necessity of holding herself up, and propping her stricken strength.

“I believe I am a fool,” said Harry, suddenly, when Rose withdrew; “I never thought—Charteris was here so short a time the other day, and it is so long since he came before—I never thought of Rose; but she took it very quietly, Martha. Is she interested, do you think? Will she feel it? I am sure, for my own part, I always believed that Charteris liked Rose, and I cannot tell what made me so foolish to-night.”

“Perhaps it was very well,” said Martha; “it must have been told, and the manner of telling it is a small matter; but Rose, as you say, took it very quietly. I dare say she will not care about it, Harry.”

Martha knew better—but she thought it

well to pass over the new grief lightly, since it was a grief which could not bear either sympathy or consolation.

But when Lettie next morning, prompted by a sudden caprice, ran "all the way" to the Lady's Well, to gather some wild roses and the fragrant meadow-queen for Martha, she saw some one sitting on the stone where Lady Violet sat, and was only fortified by the bright daylight to approach. But it was Rose's muslin gown, and not the silvery garments of the fairy lady, which lay upon the turf; and Rose was leaning with both her hands heavily upon the canopy of the well, and looking into the deep brushwood, as Lettie many a time had looked—though this was a deeper abstraction than even the long silent reveries of the poetic child. With a sudden consciousness that there lay some unknown sorrow here, the little girl came forward shyly, looking up with her wistful

eyes in her sister's face. It did not seem that she interrupted Rose's thoughts, and Violet began silently to gather her flowers. There were some wild roses, half-opened buds, which could be carried even by a school girl, without risk of perishing, for one of the "young ladies" at Blaelodge, whom Lettie liked greatly, and who much desired some tangible memorial of the place whence the Lady Violet of Lettie's oft-repeated story passed away; and a sweet fairy posie of the graceful queen of the meadow for Martha's especial gratification, and some drooping powdery flowers of grass, from which the seed was falling, for Lettie herself. When they were all gathered, Lettie sat down softly on the grass at Rose's feet, and laid the flowers in her lap, and was very quiet, venturing now and then a wistful glance up to the absorbed face above her.

And by and by, the heavy leaning of Rose's arms relaxed, and she leaned upon her knee instead, and looked down on Violet. "Lettie, I think my heart will break," said Rose, with a low sigh; and again she put out her hand.

She could not say so much to Martha: she could not tell it to another in all the wide world—for the shy heart would render no reason for its sudden grief; but she could say it to her little sister, who asked no reason—who did not speak at all in vain consolation, but who only looked up, with such a world of innocent sympathy and wonder in her dark, wistful eyes.

Poor Rose! a hero and martyr to her own pride of womanliness, will never tell what this blight is—never, if it should kill her—and she thinks it will kill her, poor, simple heart! Since she heard "it"—and she never describes to herself more

definitely what it was she heard—she has been in a maze, and never reasoned on it. She cannot reason on it—we so seldom *think*, after all, either in our joys or troubles—she only is aware of long trains of musings sweeping through her mind, like dreams, which place her in the strangest connection with Cuthbert and Cuthbert's bride, and bring them continually in her way; and she always assumes a sad dignity in her fancies, and will do anything rather than have them believe that this moves her; and then she tries to think of Harry, and of the family cares and expectations, to rouse her from this stupor of her own; and getting sick with the struggle—sick alike in body and in heart—lays down her head upon her hands, and faintly weeps.

“Now, Lettie, come; they will wonder where we are,” said Rose; and she

dipped her hand in the little marble basin of the Lady's Well, and bathed her aching eyes. Lettie, with a visionary awe, bathed hers too, as if it were an act of worship; and was very sad, in the depths of her heart.

Rose was a bad dissembler. It was quite impossible to hide from any one of them that she was very melancholy; but Harry saw less of the truth than the rest, for Rose struggled valiantly to smile before Harry, and to keep all her gloom concealed. He was a man, even though he was her dearest brother. She would suffer anything before she would disclose her heart to him.

Agnes, troubled and perplexed, not knowing whether to take notice of Rose's sorrow or not, paid her all manner of little tender attentions, as if she had been ill. Martha, asking nothing—for Martha knew very well

that Cuthbert had broken no word, nor had ever definitely *said* to Rose anything which could give grounds for this sadness —talked to her sometimes of the common trials which common people bear and overcome; sometimes awoke her out of a reverie, with a kind hand upon her shoulder, and a quick word in her ear; employed her all day long at something; watched her perpetually with a mother's unwavering care; but little Lettie, looking wistfully up, with her dark, melancholy eyes —Lettie, who knew that Rose's heart was "like to break," and who deserted all her play to sit beside her on the carpet, and press close to her feet, and caress them softly with her hand—Lettie was perhaps the best comforter of all.

But meanwhile the unconscious Cuthbert wearied himself with continual business, and

thought murderous thoughts of the innocent young Mr. Dunlop; till his mother, alarmed about his health, prevailed upon him, with many solicitations, to go away for a month, and travel, and rest. And Clemie Buchanan, more unconscious still, romped, to the full heart's content of a strong joyous girl of sixteen, among the Argyleshire hills, and reverencing greatly the lofty attainments of her cousin Cuthbert, would quite as soon have thought of marrying old Dr. Black, who christened her, and whose sermons she had laboriously listened to almost every Sabbath-day in all these sixteen years. Clemie had a sweetheart of her own—a young merchant, like her brothers; and Cuthbert, as he travelled southwards, cast longing looks towards Stirling, and scarcely could deny himself another glance at Allenders; but

looks do not travel over straths and rivers, and Rose never knew the affectionate longings, which could not prevail with themselves to relinquish her remembrance and her name.

CHAPTER VIII.

What man is he that boasts of fleshly might,
And vaine assurance of mortality,
Which, all so soone as it doth come to fight
Against spirituall foes, yields by and by?

FAERY QUEEN.

THAT day, beginning with deep sadness to one member of the family, and with anxious sympathetic concern to the rest, was the last day of hope and peace in Allenders.

For on the very next—another June day, rich with the most glorious mockery of joy and sunshine—Martha's last desperate hope

died in her heart. It had struggled long in its strange, feverish lifetime ; now it fell at a blow.

A gracious invitation to Sir John Dunlop's had come that evening to Harry ; and Harry spent the day with Gilbert Allenders in a ride to Stirling, from which he did not return, until the full time when Sir John would enter his stately dining-room. Agnes, dressed for a full hour, stood at the window trembling and miserable, looking for Harry ; and Martha was on the turret ; and Rose, roused out of her own trouble, wandered along the road with the children, to meet him. But when Harry came, he came with glittering eye and ghastly smiles, as they used to see him, long ago, in Glasgow ; and bidding Gilbert good-bye, with loud demonstrations of friendship, at the gate, came in great haste, and ran up-stairs, taking three

steps at a time, to get to his dressing-room, and make ready for Lady Dunlop's party. Agnes went after him timidly, to say it was too late, and to beg him not to go ; but Harry laughed first, and then frowned, and then commanded—he was resolved to go, whatever was the hour.

“ He is not fit to go, he will disgrace himself for ever, they will never speak to him again,” sobbed the little wife. “ Oh ! Martha, speak to him, tell him it is too late.”

Poor little Agnes ! she could not believe that Martha's “ speaking to him ” would have no effect.

In half an hour, he came down stairs, dressed, and considerably subdued, though still with an excitement only too easily perceptible.

“ Where's John with the carriage ? ” exclaimed Harry. “ Why does that fellow always

keep us waiting? why is he not at the door?" and he rang the bell violently.

"You are much too late, and they are punctilious people; I beg you will not go to-night. It is easy to send an apology," said Martha, who was calmer now than she had been through all her time of hope.

"It is this night, and no other, that I intend to go," said Harry; "and I am not inclined to suffer any more dictation. What's the matter, Agnes? why do you make her cry, Martha? Must I take her away with red eyes, all for your pleasure? Tell John to bring round the carriage instantly—instantly, do you hear? he has kept his mistress waiting long enough already."

And as the maid withdrew, startled and astonished, Harry himself went to the door, and stood upon the threshold, waiting for John.

“You’re not angry, Martha,” pleaded poor little Agnes; “he does not know what he is saying. And never mind sitting up, it would only grieve you; I must try to take care of poor Harry myself to-night.”

Martha made few demonstrations, but she put her arm round the little wife now, and kissed the cheek upon which the tears were still wet. This caress nearly overcame Agnes, but with a strong effort, she wiped her eyes, and went away.

Drearily passed that evening. A heavy shower came on as it darkened, and all the night through beat upon the leaves, so that Lettie, holding her breath as she learned her lessons, fancied that footsteps were travelling round and round the house—continually, without pause or intermission, round and round. And the wind whistled with a little, desolate, shrill cry, about the silent walls, and

the burn ran fast and full into the river. Every sound without became distinctly audible in the extreme quietness, and other sounds which did not exist at all, stole in, imagined, upon their strained ears. Sounds of carriage-wheels, which never advanced, but always rumbled on at a distance, shrill cries of voices hovering in the air, footsteps upon the stair, footsteps without—it was a dreary night!

And when it became late, and it was full time for Harry's return, Martha stole down stairs to the lower room, and opened the window, and stood by it in the dark, watching for their carriage-wheels. The jasmine rustled on the walls, with an early star of white specking its dark luxuriance—alas! those jasmine flowers! Martha plucked this half-opened one hastily, and threw it away—she could not bear its fragrance.

And Rose crept after her, and sat upon a chair at the window, leaning her throbbing brow on Martha's arm: "Hush! I hear them," said Martha; it was nothing but this imagined sound which had rung through all the night.

At last they came, and though the sisters heard Harry's voice while yet the carriage was hidden in the darkness, he handed his wife out very quietly, when they came to the door. On their way up-stairs, Agnes felt her hand caught in Martha's, and answered the implied question, in a tremulous whisper: "No doubt they saw—no doubt they saw—and pity me, Martha, for such a night; but maybe, maybe, it was not so bad as we might have feared."

That night nothing more was either asked or told, and it was not till the forenoon of the next day, when Harry

had gone out, that Agnes, leaning on Martha's arm, and with Rose bending eagerly over her on the other side, walked slowly along the mall, and told her story. They had been received with much stiffness and ceremony by Sir John, his son, and his daughter, who evidently thought their late arrival a quite unwarrantable assumption of familiarity. Kindly good-humoured, Lady Dunlop had soothed and comforted Agnes; but the *hauteur* of their reception plunged Harry into a fit of sullen silence, which was even more painful to see than his excitement. Then, Agnes said, some stranger present began to comment severely on the rude cothouses at Maidlin Cross, and to wonder why none of the neighbouring landlords interfered to provide better accommodation for their workmen. That Harry fired at

this, and challenging Sir John to do his part, pledged himself that on *his* property it should be immediately looked to, was only what the listeners expected to hear; but he did it with such vehemence and energy, Agnes reported, that some smiled, some looked grave and pitiful, all turned away, and for half an hour before they left, no one spoke to Harry or herself, save good Lady Dunlop, who called her my dear, and patted her shoulder, and did all she could to soothe the shame and bitter feelings, which the neglect of the others wounded beyond soothing.

But Harry was gone this morning to the builder who erected his barns, to see about model cottages; and Agnes almost for the first time began to be alarmed about the means. Could Harry afford to build model houses after all the outlay of

his expensive life? He who had pulled down houses and barns to build greater, and who had nothing to put into them, could he afford to go out of his way and spend money thus? But they had all been kept totally in the dark as to Harry's money matters. They had no idea how much he had wasted—how much had gone to Gilbert Allenders, and to the pleasures shared by him; but a momentary review of the past year startled them all. They looked in each other's scared faces, and shook their heads in sudden clear-sightedness, as Agnes asked the question, and the truth dawned upon them all.

“Na, na, lad; Allenders has plenty siller bye the land, ye may take my word for it,” said the slow voice of Geordie Paxton, speaking out of the hay-field at the end of the mall, opposite to Rose's favourite

oak. "I spoke to him mysel about that grand new harrow, and an improvement o' my ain in the plough-graith, when he started farming, and he never boggled at it a minute, though they baith cost siller. Then he has a free hand himsel, and keeps a plentiful house; and you'll no tell me that a man like Allenders—a fine lad, but apt to gang ajee whiles like ither folk—doesna take a good purse to keep himsel gaun, let alane the house and a' thae braw leddies. And so I have reason in my ain mind, as guid as positive knowledge—which I could only have, if he telled me himsel, Rob—to say that Allenders has a guid income coming to him, forbye the land; ten hunder a year—ay, twelve ye may ca' it—would not do more than keep up that house."

Agnes started in dismay, and instinctively

put her hand in her pocket for her little book ; but, unfortunately, Agnes always forgot to put down her housekeeping in this little book, though she had bought it herself expressly for the purpose ; and it was not Agnes's housekeeping that was called in question.

“ Sir John's man telled me,” said Geordie's companion, with the deliberation of certainty, “ that Allenders was naething but a writing clerk in an office afore he got the estate, and that he hasna a penny o' his ain ; the story is no mine, but I would like to hear wha should ken if it wasna Sir John's man ? ”

“ I dinna believe a word o't,” said Geordie, hastily. “ Would Sir John keep that auld body of an uncle of mine useless about the house, do you think, and gie him a' his ain gait, and cleed him, and feed him, for the auld family's sake, and because he's been a

faithful servant? I trow no; and folk that live in glass houses shouldna throw stanes. I reckon Sir John's no fashed wi' ower muckle siller himsel."

"That's naething to the question," returned his dogmatical opponent, after one or two sweeps of the scythe among the fragrant grass bore witness that they had resumed their work. "What I say is, that Allenders has naething but the estate, and there'll be a great smash some of thir days; ye can believe me or no, just as you like."

"He has his faults, puir lad, but he's young, and he'll mend," said Geordie; "and you wadna ask me to believe that Allenders is clean mad, and out of his wits, which is just the same as saying that he lives at this rate, and has nae siller o' his ain."

The listeners withdrew in dismay and

alarm. To Martha this gossip only confirmed many previous fears, but to the others it came like a revelation.

“If we were ruined, Martha, what would Harry do?” said Agnes. “*We* could work for ourselves, and I am sure I would never mind the change; but Harry—poor Harry it would break his heart. I thought there could be nothing harder to bear than last night, but, Martha, I think if there is no good change, it will kill me.”

“It must not kill you, Agnes,” said Martha, speaking very low. “Bairns, hear me; you must let nothing kill you, nothing crush you, even in your inmost hearts, till God sends the messenger that will not be gainsaid; and God grant that he may be far off from you both. Now it is coming—maybe ruin, maybe destruction, certain distress and anguish. If I could bear it all, you should

never hear when it drew near; but it must come upon you both—upon you both, tender delicate things, that should be blessed with the dews of your youth. But the end is coming which God knows; you must not pine, you must not weep, you must not waste your strength with mourning. Bairns, we have to wait, and be ready and strong, to meet it when it comes. This is what we have to do.”

As Martha spoke, she held in her grasp the soft warm hands of Agnes and Rose. They looked up to her, one on either side, like children to a mother, with lifted eyes, wistful and eager. It was not necessary to answer, but they went back again to the house together, with a strange strain in their hearts, something like the bodily strain which their eager bend towards Martha and anxious look up to her had produced. They were

warned, prepared, ready for the evil ; and they thought they had reached to the sublime sadness of patience, and would not fret or chafe over the daily griefs again, but rather would be strong for the end.

CHAPTER IX.

“Life will not flow as rivers flow, or seas ;
It is a flood, but made of raindrops ; days,
And hours, and moments—several, pitiless.”

BUT still the days, each with its daily burden, wore out the faltering strength, which tried to endure them calmly, and look towards the end—the end great and solemn, which would demand all their might when it came, was obscured with smaller miseries coming hour by hour, which called for less preparation, and were less easily endured.

Secretly within herself, Agnes said again that this would kill her—secretly Rose murmured that her heart was like to break ; and from the solemn calm of patience they descended into the burning fever of constant anxiety, of hourly jealous fear and watching ; but Martha's warning and the constant desire to see with their own eyes, and hear with their own ears, what Harry did and said, preserved them from the bodily maladies which might have attended this feverish strain of heart and mind. They were one in their anxieties, their thoughts, their fears ; yet none could trust the other to report for her what was every day's state—none could afford to be ill, or take shelter in bed or chamber. Day by day they watched, and night by night kept vigils, taking only such sleep as nature compelled.

And Harry, poor Harry ! went on sinking, neglecting the love which in his real heart

was dearer to him a hundred times, than all the objects he pursued in his infatuation. Like a man on the smooth incline of some frightful downright slope, he seemed to lose all power after the first impetus was given, and went sheer down without a pause or stay. Poor Harry! if he was sullen sometimes, at other some there came to him bursts of exceeding tenderness, remorseful and pathetic, as if his better angel was weeping within him, over his ruin; but still he went down—clutching at the flowers which waved over the edge of the precipice, and darting down its rapid incline with their torn blossoms in his hand; but the downward progress was never stayed.

The next day after Sir John Dunlop's unfortunate party, Harry, heated and defiant, took his builder with him to visit the cottages at Maidlin. Harry desired to see the finest plans, the best models, and to plant such an

exotic English village as great lords make for playthings, on that part of Maidlin which bordered on his estate.

“Don’t mind uniformity—don’t take any pains to make it correspond with the other half,” said Harry, in excitement and anger. “Let Sir John Dunlop have pigsties if he likes for *his* men. All I care about is my share, and you must spare no pains on that.”

“But the expense, Allenders?” said the builder, with perplexity and disconcertment, “it’s sure to take a heap of money.”

“Never mind the money,” said Harry loftily, “that is my concern—your’s is to make a handsome village on this side of the Cross, and the other houses can be pulled down afterwards; let me have plans and estimates as soon as they can be prepared, and see that you are not content with inferior models. Let Sir John look to his own; I have nothing to do with that.”

“Very well, Allenders,” said the man doubtfully, “very well; I’ll see about the plans, and if ye’re pleased, and no scared wi’ the expense, we may soon win to—but it’ll take a lot of siller.”

Young Mr. Dunlop passed on horseback along the highway as the man spoke. The stiffest and most formal salutations passed between him and Harry. Henceforth it was evident that there was no more friendship to be looked for there. The builder went home much perplexed, and had his plans prepared only very deliberately. He could not believe that so small an estate as Allenders could afford such an expensive whim as this.

And Armstrong shook his head over the fields, bearing still a scanty insufficient crop, and honestly deplored and lamented the daily visits which Harry paid to his lodger, Gilbert Allenders. Gilbert had scarcely the shadow of an excuse, in the way of medical practice,

for his residence here; and the universal prejudice which accused him of "leading away" the unfortunate young man of whom everybody was inclined to think well, was not without its foundation. But Harry—poor Harry! he was always "led away"—and it was so easy to find a tempter.

A life of coarse dissipation had become, by long practice, the natural breath of Gilbert Allenders; he could not live soberly and quietly as other men did; he felt it necessary to fill every day as it came with its proportion of excitements and pleasures, as he called them; and in a sense very widely apart from the commanded one, he took no thought for the morrow. It pleased him, in some degree, to "lead" Harry "away;" he felt a certain gratification in possessing the power; but though there might lurk at the bottom of his heart a secret grudge against

the stranger who had dispossessed him of the inheritance he once reckoned upon, and a secret pleasure in thus avenging himself, it lay far down in the depths, and Gilbert was totally unconscious of its existence. He rather liked Harry on the contrary—liked his society, his wit, and felt his participation in them impart a keener zest to his own recreations. For Gilbert was not a villain, nor ever pursued revenge with purpose or malice; he was only a man of evil habits and impure mind, who felt the burden of his own faults lightened when he could make others partakers in them. And only so far was it true that he led Harry away.

The harvest came with its sudden increase of labourers, and flocks of shearers crowded into Harry's fields; but the poor Highland wanderers and far-travelled Irish lingered about the farm-steading of Allender Mains,

and lost days that might have been profitable to them, waiting for the wages which Harry did not know were due.

The joyous autumn began to wane, and Harry's thrashing-mill began to work, throwing out its banner of blue smoke above the trees. But Harry's hopes came to no harvest—the long-neglected land still bore scantily—the slender crops did not pay, nor nearly pay for their culture. Not even William Hunter's rent came in now to give the embarrassed laird an income, and his second half-yearly payment of interest was due at Martinmas, with only enough remaining to pay it of his last thousand pounds ; and no provision made for the whole long year which must intervene between this and another harvest—nothing to continue the cultivation which should make another harvest profitable—nothing to maintain the

expensive household, which now in Allenders waited for its fate ; and Harry looked before him, and around, and muttered curses on his own folly, and saw no way of deliverance.

He could not spring out of his ruin, he could do nothing to make himself free ; but he could forget and drown it, and he did so.

No kindly neighbours now entered the house of Allenders. Good Lady Dunlop took stolen opportunities of alighting from her carriage on the road, when her daughter was not with her, to comfort the poor little wife, over whom her motherly heart yearned ; and the ladies of Nettlehaugh and Foggo Barns, made their salutations at church, and eased their consciences. Agnes herself began to grow nervous, to start at sudden sounds, and be shaken by passing voices. Her hand

trembled more than Harry's did, sometimes, and when he put away from him with loathing the simple, wholesome food he could no longer take, Agnes grew so sick that she could not keep her seat. Her baby did not thrive—he scarcely could in a house where the one great absorbing interest engaged every thought; no one sang to him now, except Mysie—scarcely any one had the heart to play with him—and the poor infant

“ — caught the trick of grief,
And sighed among its playthings.”

Rose, with no resource of dreaming left to her, tried to dull her heart with constant labour, and wandered out in the early morning, while the dew was still on the grass, to sit by the Lady's Well, where Lettie, wistful and anxious, found her out often, and sat at her feet in silence, touching her softly with little caressing hands, and wondering with

pensive thoughts over the mystery which made Rose "like to break her heart;" for Lettie knew that other griefs than the family fear for Harry, bore down upon the gentle spirit of her sister Rose.

And when Harry was out, they drew together instinctively, and sat working in Martha's room. And Martha roused herself, and with the ready associations and strange flow of simple words, which she thought were signs and tokens of approaching age, told them stories of actual life, homely, real histories, in which there was always interest, and often consolation. She wondered herself at the clear memory which recalled to her those numberless tales of the neighbour families in Ayr—stories of household affliction, sometimes only too like their own—but still one continued to lead to another; and Rose and Agnes worked beside her, and listened,

and the tedium of the long, sad hours was beguiled. Yet, though she did all this to give some partial and temporary lightening to them, heavy as death within her was Martha's own strained heart.

CHAPTER X.

“Two peaceful days. And what should hap in
these,
But things of common life? He will return
As safe as he went hence.”

LATE in the end of October, when Katie Calder began to speak of Hallow'een, and to consult with Jeanie Armstrong at Allender Mains, on the best place to pull the “kail-stocks,” and practise the other spells proper to the occasion, Harry told his anxious household that he was going to Edinburgh. They had observed that he was gloomy and de-

pressed for some days before, though he had been less than usual from home. Now he told them vaguely about money which was wanted, and expenses which had been incurred, and that his errand to Edinburgh was on business very important to him. When Martha and Agnes pressed for more definite information, Harry fell back upon his morose and gloomy silence. It was useless to be make inquiries, for many a thing must have been told, if Harry had begun to satisfy them, which he would never suffer to reach their ears.

And no one went with him to Stirling this time to see him off. When even Gilbert Allenders proposed to go, Harry answered him with an instant and not very courteous negative, and Agnes's wistful looks passed quite unnoticed. He rode away, silently, too much abstracted, as it seemed, to turn back and wave his hand to his wife and his sisters

at their window, as he was wont to do; but when he was past the gate and almost out of sight upon the road—out of sight entirely to eyes less eager—they saw him start and turn round, and wave back to them the usual gesture of farewell. Agnes thrust herself half out of the window of the drawing-room to return it, with tears in her eyes; and then she saw his head droop again upon his breast, and he rode away.

On the third night after, he had instructed them to send John with his horse to meet him in Stirling. He expected to arrive there at four or five in the afternoon, and to be home immediately after. With the most zealous care, Agnes recorded all Harry's directions, and impressed them on the mind of John when he returned. He had seen his master safely off upon the coach, and so far all was well.

The third night following was Hallowe'en,

and even Lettie, absorbed with the expectation of entertaining her little sentimental friend from Blaelodge, and one or two other children, with the appropriate pastimes of the night, forgot that Harry was coming home. But punctually to the hour, John and the horse trotted out from the gate of Allenders, followed by the wistful eyes of Agnes. Agnes longed to send the carriage; but such was not Harry's will, and in his present mood she could not contradict him.

Great fires blazed in the two family sitting-rooms, for the night was damp and cold, and needed this cheerful gleam to brighten it for the traveller. Some special delicacies for Harry's dinner were being superintended in the kitchen by Agnes herself, and the glittering tea-service sparkled already before the drawing-room fire, while Rose saw that Harry's own room grew bright and warm with firelight, and that everything he needed

lay ready for his comfort. The early night fell when they were thus employed ; but when everything was done that could be thought of, and preparations made as great as if he had been a year away, they sat down in the twilight, crowding about the window, and looking out from the warm flush of light within upon the uncertain grey which lay upon the sky and hills.

But the grey tints vanished, and the full gloom of night blotted out the landscape—blotted out even the gate and its trees—the very walnut on the lawn—and palpable blackness pressed upon the window, and upon the eyes which still looked steadily out on this compressed, uncreviced gloom—and Harry did not come.

They would not light candles to remind them that he was late—they would not hear the clock strike hour by hour. Sometimes with faint smiles they spoke to

each other of the childish mirth whose sounds they could hear ascending from below, but oftenest they were entirely silent, except for a whispered "Listen! I hear the horse on the road," or "This is Harry now;" but it never was Harry. And the sound of horses' hoofs seemed to echo perpetually through the starless solemn night. And midnight came, and still they watched — now in a very agony.

At last they heard the sound of the opened gate, and a single horseman became slowly perceptible approaching through the gloom. Throwing down the chair she had been seated on, in haste and excitement, Agnes ran down stairs, and Martha and Rose, putting restraint upon themselves, followed a little more slowly. But they had not reached the hall when they heard the voice of John, reporting

how Allenders had sent him on before to tell them that the coach had been detained much beyond its time, and that he himself was on the road, and would be immediately at home.

Poor little Agnes turned from the door, and, hiding her face in Martha's breast, wept quietly tears of deferred hope. And Rose went forward to the door in the darkness, anxious, if it were possible, to hear something of Harry's looks from John.

"Was my brother much wearied?" said Rose timidly. "The road is very dark. I am sorry you left him, John—he does not know the way so well as you."

"Allenders was very thoughtful-like," said John, with a quick apprehension of what she meant; "and I ken the coach was lang after its time; but I dinna think Allenders was wearied, to speak o'. And he guides the horse better than ony ither

body now, and he was very anxious to be hame."

She could not ask, nor be told more, and they went back to their window to watch again; while Rose, begging to be told whenever they heard Harry, had the fires hastily renewed, herself assisting sleepy Mysie, who, though she nodded by the kitchen fire would not go to bed, and leave them watching alone.

CHAPTER XI.

There's a dark spirit walking in our house,
And swiftly will the destiny close on us.

SCHILLER.

IT was nearly twelve o'clock when the Edinburgh coach reached Stirling, carrying Harry, much subdued and cast down, but in reality this time detained by obstacles over which he had no control. During all this journey he had been contemplating the grim strength of ruin face to face—feeling himself now utterly beyond help or hope,

able to do nothing but sit down and wait for the final blow. The place at which he had appointed his servant to meet him was some distance from the coach-office; and taking his little valise in his hand, Harry walked with a heavy, weary step, much unlike his usual elastic one, to find John.

The streets were still and deserted, the shops shut, the lights extinguished in almost every house he passed. The very public-houses, inns, and lower places of the same kind had put out all but one solitary lamp, which, just enough to light those who were within, looked dreary and melancholy to everybody without. Harry went along the street feeling himself an utter stranger here. This was partly true; for the friends he had made were of a very unpromising kind, and, themselves broken men for the most part,

could render little comfort to a man at the point of ruin ; but partly it was the mere desolation of the silent street, echoing to his footstep, which impressed the sensitive mind of Harry. He went along with his valise under his arm, and his pale face drooping—a face marked with lines of altogether new rigidity, and full of a silent forlorn despair, which it was touching to see in one so young, and naturally so hopeful. He could not tell what chill it was that overpowered his heart—ruin!—a descent from his rank and his inheritance—a return characterless, and with many a new habit of evil, to the occupation in which once before he had failed—worse than all, the remembrance of his sins, which returned to look him in the face like upbraiding spirits. Yet even this was not all: a vague dread, a shivering, mysterious presentiment of some unknown

evil to come, hovered over these real griefs, and gave them shape and form, in a torpor of despair.

He set out upon the road with his servant at a rapid pace; but in spite of himself, the tramp of John's horse, continually taking the course of his own behind, irritated him almost beyond endurance. He suffered it as long as he could, feeling his irritation a weakness; but at last yielded to the overpowering sense of annoyance which this trifling matter occasioned him, and sent his man on, following himself more slowly.

The night was very dark—dark as it is only in a perfectly rural country; and as the ringing silence closed about him, and he heard nothing but an occasional sigh from the river, or a faint flutter among the falling leaves, or the sound of his own progress upon the solitary road, Harry's thoughts strayed away from his

great miseries. Once or twice, a leaf in its descent blew across his face, and made his horse wince, and his heart beat—and then, there returned upon Harry his vague and inexpressible fear; but shut out from every *sight*, as he was, by this utter darkness, there rose up scenes of cheerful light before his imagination, beautiful to see: Uncle Sandy's house at Ayr—the little parlour in Glasgow—the home in Allenders to which he was returning. A strange, dreamy pleasure stole over him—he forgot his sins, his misfortunes, his near and inevitable ruin—he thought of the home enjoyments which no man had known more largely—he thought of his little loving wife—of the passionate affection of Martha—of Rose's gentler tenderness, and strange little poetic Lettie, with her wistful eyes. Poor Harry! his heart swelled with sudden relief as these came to his imagination:

little domestic remembrances, looks, words, innocent mistakes and blunders, things which long ago brought pleasant, kindly laughter, or tender tears to the faces of them all. The reins fell loosely on his horse's neck as he resigned himself to this repose; and the cottage firesides at Maidlin, and the boyish companions of Ayr, looked in, and interwove themselves with those fancies of home. Sometimes he tried to rouse himself, and a sharp pain shot through his heart as for a moment he remembered his real state and prospects; but still this singular dream returned upon him, and in his heart he thanked God!

Meanwhile, in Allenders they sit and watch, looking out with dread and sickening pain into the darkness, praying till their hearts are again "like to break." Sometimes Agnes kneels down by a chair, and hides her face, and utters a low un-

conscious cry; sometimes Martha walks heavily up or down the room, pausing in the midst, to think she hears in reality the sound which has mocked them in imagination all the night. "I am going to my own room—do not come to me," said Martha, at last, in a half-whisper, and she left them without another word.

But not to her own chamber to weep or pray, as they thought; Mysie nodding by the kitchen fire was suddenly startled by Martha's appearance, with a rigid white face like death, and a cloak enveloping her whole person. With a slight scream, the drowsy girl started to her feet, scarcely knowing if she saw a human being or a spirit.

"Mysie, you are bold," said Martha, with such distinct rapidity that her words seemed to occupy no time. "I want the

carriage instantly. I am going to seek my brother. Come, and show me what has to be done."

"I'll waken John," said the terrified Mysie.

"I do not require John. What is to be done, I can do myself. Give me a light."

But Mysie, who was in reality a brave girl, and could manage horses as easily as she managed the brown cow, and who besides doted on little Harry and the baby, and would not have hesitated at even a greater thing for their father, answered by lifting John's lantern; and catching down a plaid which hung on the wall as they passed, she led the way to the stables without another word.

It was a strange scene: Mysie excited, and still half-dreaming, forced the unwilling horse between the shafts; and Martha,

like a marble statue, with hands which never trembled nor hesitated, secured the fastenings in perfect silence. John could not have done this daily business of his in half the time which it took these women to lead the carriage softly out of the stables round by a lane behind the house into the highway. They had no time to seek for the lamps to light them, so Martha carried the lantern in her hand, and held it up into the darkness as they advanced, while Mysie drove on steadily towards Stirling.

They had not gone a mile, Martha continually lifting her lantern and gazing into the gloom, when they heard that some one on a galloping horse approached them. Martha rose to her feet, and held up the light. It seemed to scare the animal, who suddenly paused, with reins dangling on his neck and foam upon his

breast; but he was riderless. "It's Allenders' ain horse," said Mysie, in a strong hissing whisper through her closed teeth, as she touched the bay in the carriage with her whip, and with a leap they proceeded. But Martha desperately caught at the reins of the other horse, and grasped them—she could not, even in her agony for Harry, bear to think that her other children should receive such a dreadful shock as this, while she was not with them to strengthen them. And the exhausted animal went on quietly for a little time—then he began to plunge and rear, and turn towards home. "Let him go—let him go," again whispered Mysie, now desperate with anxiety and fright. "You canna get lookit at the roadside for hauding him—let him go."

And Martha did let him go.

Not twenty yards farther on, their horse suddenly came to a dead pause—and there, lying across the highway, was a dark figure, with a battered hat by its side, and the face gleaming ghastly in the light of Martha's lantern. She was bending over him before Mysie's first gasp of terror gave her breath; and Martha's white lips were calling upon God, upon God—but no sound came from them upon the heavy darkness.

And the heart beats faintly still in Harry's breast, and the blood oozes slowly from the cut upon his brow. She feels it warm upon her hands—this is how she knows it to be blood—as she lifts his death-like face upon her knee; and still as her hand presses upon his heart, and she bends her cheek to his lips to feel if he still breathes, Martha

calls upon the name of the Lord. The name—she can say nothing but the name—but in it is all prayer.

And now she lifts him up into her own arms, up to the fierce heart which has throbbled with passionate love for him all his life. Mysie humbly and with terror asks to help her; but Martha, rising from her knee with all her burden in her arms, thrusts away unconsciously the trembling aid, and places him—her boy, her son, poor Harry!—in the carriage like a child. Then through the gloom which no longer needs a light, through the horror of darkness which lies over them like a cloak of iron, pressing down upon their very hearts and hiding the face upon which Martha's eyes are fixed continually, though she can only *feel* it where it lies upon her knee—through this night of

solemn gloom and terror, which is the end—home!

And now, Harry's horse neighs and craves admittance at his stable-door; and John, roused out of the sleep from which Mysie had promised to wake him on his master's return, starts up terrified, and cannot find his lantern nor the key which Martha's trembling helper has left in the stable-door; and Rose and Agnes rush together, in terror which has no voice, to seek Martha in her room, and finding her gone, flee out into the impenetrable darkness and call to John for the lamps he cannot find, and carry uncovered candles—which, in the damp air, will not burn—to the gate, with a terrible apprehension of stumbling over Harry in their path; but, still, accident—any but the slightest—does not cross their distracted

minds, and they never once think of death !

Yet anguish and terrible dread come upon them as they struggle on along the dark way, groping for they know not what, while the darkness blinds their eyes, and chokes their very breath. But far on—far along the road, where there is a little eminence, half a mile away, appears a faint, slowly moving light. Instinctively drawing closer together, they stand, and listen, and watch this speck in the intense gloom. And Agnes does not know that her incoherent prayers are said aloud ; nor does Rose, though she remembers words of them after, like the broken words of a dream.

But the light comes nearer ; and John, who has turned his master's horse into the stable, and given him water, comes back, to grope his way to his young mistress on

the road, and stand beside her, watching the slow motion of this distant light. Defenceless and open stands the house of Allenders, where children lie asleep, serene and peaceful, worn out with pleasure; and not even the watchers at the gate, amid all their terror and apprehension, have any idea what it is, which comes towards them through the night.

What is it? Mysie, hearing some far-off whisper of voices, holds up her lantern, unwitting that the chief light it throws is upon those two behind. Martha, sitting rigid in the carriage, with a face of deadly whiteness on her knee, and her hand pressing upon the heart of the passive, insensible form—pressing against it, as if the frail life needed to be held fast, lest it should glide away. A shrill cry startles the darkness at their side, and Martha only knows

they have reached the gate of Allenders, when she hears Harry's little gentle wife fall heavily upon the ground, and is startled by the cry of Rose.

Mysie, frightened and exhausted, stopped the carriage. "Drive on!" said Martha, and her lips spoke the words half-a-dozen times before they broke, shrill and loud, upon Mysie's terrified ear. "Rose, be calm. John, carry Agnes in. I, myself, will care for Harry; he is alive."

Alive!—but that was all!

Candles stood wasting on the hall table, and the cold black air stole in heavily, damp and chill. Upon the stairs, a little white figure called on Martha and Rose, and shivered, and cast looks of terror on the open door. For Violet had been dreaming of Harry—dreaming terrible dreams—and she could not rest.

"Let me carry him. I'm stronger than

you, and I'll be as tender as a woman," pleaded the awe-stricken John.

But Martha pushed him aside. "A doctor—a doctor! instantly!"

It was all she could say, as she lifted up her burden.

It was well for Martha that her frame was strong, and hardly strung; for Mysie, who silently assisted, and supported poor Harry's feet, left still the great weight of his insensible form in Martha's arms; and Martha felt the strain when it was over—she knew nothing of it now.

Alas, poor Harry!—they laid him on his bed; they clustered round him, the faces which he had seen in his imagination two little hours ago, so fresh and bright. In this room, where the fire was faintly dying, were arranged many little things which Rose had fancied he might want when he came home; but there he lay, with the blood upon

his brow, unconscious, silent, with nothing but his heavy breathing to tell them that he was alive.

And immediately they heard the desperate gallop at which John set off, to bring the doctor. The doctor—not Gilbert Allenders, but a respectable surgeon in the neighbourhood—returned with him without delay ; and John took especial pains to inform him on the road, that Allenders was “as muckle himsel as I am,” when they parted.

Poor Harry’s leg was broken again ; he had sustained some severe internal injuries, and was terribly bruised over his whole frame. The surgeon remained all the night, and did everything it was possible to do, dispatching John to Stirling for assistance before the dawn. But when the grey still morning began to steal into the room, and Harry, faintly conscious, lay moaning on his bed, Agnes clasping her hands in sorrowful

entreaty; and lifting up her pathetic eyes to the doctor's face, asked if there was any hope.

When she asked, she had scarcely any doubt there was. Danger, suffering, even positive agonies of endurance were before him, she saw; but Harry's wife did not think he could die.

"We have always hope so long as there is life," said the doctor, turning his head away.

And Agnes gasped and fell again. It was the warrant of death.

"Will he die?" said Martha, crushing her hands together as she too looked, but with eyes that demanded an answer, in the doctor's face.

He waved his hand, and again turned away. The good man saw the mighty love which would detain and hold this parting soul, and he could not meet its despair.

“ Harry will die ! ”—no one said it ; no one spoke those terrible words of doom ; but it seemed to them all that the air was heavy with the sentence ; and from Martha, who never wearied and never closed her eyes, ministering by his bedside within, to little Lettie crouching close to his door, and praying that God would take her—only take her, and save “ my Harry ; ” there was not one among them who did not carry in their very face this great and terrible doom.

Wiping the deadly dewes from his brow, administering to him the almost hourly opiates, which no hand in the house, except her own, not even the surgeon’s, was steady enough to prepare, Martha watched by him night and day. Harry was seldom conscious, seldom able to recognize, or address his nurse ; but in his broken ravings were things that touched her to the heart ; things of the pure youth—the household life ;

nothing — they all thanked God for the especial mercy—nothing mingling with these innocent remembrances, of his times of secret sin.

CHAPTER XII.

“Fond dreaming hearts!—an old man and a child!”

“MISS LETTIE, the auld man’s ta’en an ill turn. He cries for you to gang and tell him how the maister is—will ye gang to the loft and speak to the auld man, Miss Lettie?”

Violet left her place at Harry’s door, and went.

Old Adam lay upon his bed in his ordinary dress, with his long, brown lean fingers

lying crossed upon the homely cover, as if they were clutching it—but in reality they grasped nothing. A feeble tremble was in his frame as he lay vacantly looking up to the rafters above him; and his ashy face, though it was indeed scarcely paler than usual, struck Violet with terror, as if it had been the very face of death.

“Oh Dragon, my Harry!” cried poor little Lettie.

“They tell me the horse had thrown him, and dragged him along the road wi’ ae fit aye the stirrup—was that true, Missie? and I aye kent mysel it was a thrawart beast, and no to be depended on,” said Dragon. “I’ve been lying here thinking on the puir lad, this haill morning; and I was just putting it ower in my mind if it wadna be best to crave the Lord to take *me*, and spare the young life; but I never can win that length though I

try—for I aye mind I'm a harmless auld body, doing ill to nae man, and what for should I ask to die?"

“Would God do that, Dragon? Would God take somebody else, and leave Harry? Oh! will ye ask Him to take me?” cried Harry's little sister, “for he's very ill, and Martha thinks he will die. Dragon, if God would take you and me, and save Harry, would you no come? and God would aye let us see the sun shining on the water, and a' body blythe in 'Allenders—Dragon, if we were in heaven!”

And Violet's passionate cry, and voice choked with sobbing, again awoke the old man's torpid heart. He raised himself from his bed feebly, and leaning on his elbow, looked at the little figure kneeling by his bedside, with its clasped hands, and gleaming eyes,—and Adam Comrie slowly shook his head.

“ Missie, I’m auld—I whiles forget things I ken weel, and speak as if I was a bairn mysel; but ae life canna redeem anither, little bairn. Na, na, I wad gang wi’ ye blythe, puir wee innocent heart, to take care of ye—if God didna send an angel to take care of us baith—” said the old man, with a momentary wandering, “ but there never was but Ane, that could redeem lives out of God’s hand with His ain. We’re a’ forfeit ourselves, bairnie; if my life was mine, and your’s your ain, we might offer them for Mr. Hairy; but God has your bit heartie in His hand, as well as mine, and will lay them quiet when it is His pleasure, and no a day before. There *was* Ane that had His life free to lay down, and free to take up—and there was but Ane. I’ve had glimmerings o’ Him mysel,” continued Dragon, fixing his unsteady eyes on the roof, and wandering from

the first subject into the more immediate personal interest which his own words recalled to him, “glimmerings like blinks of the sun out of clouds; but if I whiles lose mind of the Lord—for I’m auld and feeble, and sae lang in this world, that it’s ill to believe I have to gang away—if *I* whiles lose mind, that am but a puir useless creature, is that to say that He loses mind o’ me?—as if *He* didna ken what was the guid reason, wherefore, I wasna taken hence in my strength, but left to wear out my days like a sleep, and to forget! Ane might think the like o’ me, sae aged and frail, had been forgotten out of the course of nature, and left because He didna mind—but never you trow that, bairnie—I ken He minds, and when it’s my time, He’ll send for me, as thoughtful as if I was the grandest man on this earth. What’s about *my* memory, though it whiles

can carry naething but bairnly things? Is that to rule His, think ye, that grows not auld for ever? And I ken He never forgets.”

Absorbed and full of awe, Violet followed unconsciously the half-palsied wave of the old man's head and figure as he spoke, and watched the unusual gleam which shot from the eyes, which he in vain tried to fix on the rafter. Poor, dim unsteady eyes! they glanced about in every direction, as if they possessed some distinct energy and will of their own.

But when Adam sank back on his pillow, Lettie shivered and thought she had forgotten Harry—poor Harry! She could still hear his moan in her ears.

“ Oh, my Harry, my Harry! Dragon, do ye think God will take him up—up—yonder beside Him?” and Lettie turned her eyes full

of dark wistful reverence and fear upon the old man's face.

“Wad God take you, and me, think ye, to save him?” said Dragon, now wandering back into a mild half-delirious waking sleep, “but then we're forfeit—forfeit—and there was but Ane. I'm content to gang, bairnie, content to gang—where's your hand? and I dinna ken how we maun travel, but the angel will tell us when he comes; and I'll take care o' ye a' the way, for we're no to expect the angel, that's a stranger, to take heed to a' a little bairn's wants like the like of me. Ye can say we're ready. Ye can say I've got the better o' mysel, and I'm willing to gang.”

But Lettie, excited and terrified, dared not say aloud the strange prayer, “Take Dragon and me, and save Harry,” which was in her heart.

And Dragon's feeble hand tightened on hers, till Lettie looking up in fright and

sudden fear, saw that his head had fallen back, and that an ashy paleness like that of his face was creeping over the rigid fingers which grasped her own. But Dragon's loud and heavy breathing showed her that this was not death. Lettie withdrew her hand with pain and difficulty from his grasp, and ran to call assistance. She pressed her finger on her own pulse, as she followed Mysie and the doctor back again to the old man's bedside, and a strange cold thrill of fear and expectation shot through her frame. Poor little visionary Lettie! She thought her prayer was heard—she thought the angel had called Dragon, and it became her to be ready now.

But Lettie's shivering hope was vain. A slight, almost momentary, "shock" had come upon the old man, but it passed away. It passed away—nature began to warm again in the withered worn-out frame, and Lettie's

pulse beat true and steady, with a young life whose delicate strength should yet bear many things—while hour by hour the tide of strong manhood ebbed, and Harry, poor Harry! drew nearer to his grave.

CHAPTER XIII.

And Love himself, as he were armed in steel,
Steps forth, and girds him for the strife with death.

PICCOLOMINI.

THE doctors were in almost constant attendance—the minister of the parish came to pray by the bedside of the half-conscious patient, whose heavy moans broke in upon his supplication. The children of Maidlin, awe-stricken and full of wonder and curiosity, hung about the gate of Allenders, telling each other how Harry fell, and how the trail was found on the road, where his

horse had dragged him along the damp, loose soil. And their mothers came in bands in the early afternoon to speak of it with kindred awe and mystery, and stealing round by the back of the house, beckoned Mysie out to learn from her how the sufferer was. More dignified people, and even Sir John Dunlop himself, sent messengers to inquire for poor Harry ; and Gilbert Allenders, like an ill-omened shadow, continually hovered about the door.

Poor Harry ! they never spoke to each other, these women who watched him ; but Agnes and Rose perceived when they approached the bed that it was only a strong self-restraint which prevented Martha from thrusting them away. She was jealous now, even of them—she could not bear to see him touched by any hand but her own—as if it was her hand alone which could touch him without inflicting pain ; and they saw

her shiver when the surgeon drew near him, as if with bodily fear. And sometimes, when Martha laid Agnes down upon the sofa in this sad sick room, and covered her tenderly as if she were a child, an hour of feverish sleep would fall upon the little wife; and Rose, when sent to her own room for the night, after lingering at the door, and wandering up and down to see if anything could possibly be wanted which was not ready, would weep herself into a trance of slumber, from which the awakening was bitter—but Martha never slept.

And Harry lay upon his bed, unconscious, and never said a word which testified that he knew them there. Conscious of pain—conscious of the agony of being touched or moved, which drew from him those shrill cries and heavy moanings—and with dim, dreamy eyes, which seemed to recognize sometimes where it was he lay, as they

wandered over the well-known furniture ; but though he spoke of them all in his times of greater ease, and addressed them by loving names, which brought a swooning deadly sickness over Agnes, and convulsed Martha with a terrible tenderness, he never spoke to them as present beside him ; wandering, broken lines of thought, strange visible associations which connected one distant thing with another, came from him in an interrupted flow—and sometimes strange half-dreaming prayers, exclaimed vehemently at one time, at another repeated with a placid smile like a child's—"Lead us not into temptation—deliver us from evil," made up the prolonged and audible reverie of Harry's stricken soul.

On the morning of the third day, while Martha sat beside him on one side, and Agnes, with her face buried in the coverlet, knelt by the bed, silently praying and weep-

ing, on the other, a gradual awakening came to Harry's face. Martha, whose look never left it, saw the dreamy eyes light up, at first faintly, but gradually rising into life. Then he saw Agnes, and stealing his feeble hand along the bed, laid it on her head. She started up with a faint cry, and Harry's trance was broken.

"Am I to die?" he said, in a whisper, when for some moments they had held his hands in silence—his hands, one of which was bathed in the tears of Agnes, while on the other had fallen a single great burning drop, falling from Martha's heavy eyelid, like a drop of living fire.

But no answer came to him, except the convulsive sobs of Agnes, and a tightened and clinging pressure of the hand which lay in Martha's grasp.

"Then let me see them, Martha," said Harry, faintly; "let me see them all once

again. You will be better without me, and I will be better away. Oh God! my God! I have lost a life."

"But not a soul, Harry—not a soul," cried Martha, bending down her head, to kiss with burning vehemence the hand on which her tears fell now like hail-drops. "First look up, Harry, my son! my son!—and there is another life!"

And the dim eyes turned upward to the roof—to the human mortal screen built between him and the sky; and saw, not the heavens opened, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, but only a household of weeping women, half frantic with love and eagerness, crying aloud for him before the everlasting throne, where mercy sits and judgment; and a blank numbness was on Harry's soul. He could not throw himself before this footstool, and ask with his last breath for that deliverance which

comes from Him who never thrust one empty away. Sleep was upon him, and he craved repose; he trusted to them who interceded—he leaned with faint consciousness upon their supplications; but for himself he could ask nothing—his heart was voiceless, apathetic, asleep.

“Pray for me, Martha,” said Harry, faintly.

For this was all his hope.

Pray for him! When was it, working or resting, that Martha forgot thus to pray?

“And gather them all,” said Harry—
“gather them all in here, that I may see them before I die.”

He said the words with a faint, mournful pathos. He was not rebellious to his doom—poor Harry! but it seemed to him that he was sinking into some pensive, gentle rest. This was how the visible

death, drawing near, disclosed itself, in the midst of his great pain, to his heart.

And Martha called them in, one by one—Rose, Lettie, Katie Calder, little Harry, and the infant boy. You would have thought, to hear him speak, that this dying man was passing away into the heaven which he already knew for home, and that there interposed no obscuring cloud between him and the sky; or that this suffering of death consciously made up for all the evil that had gone before—for neither remorse nor terror overshadowed Harry, nor did he speak of faith. Poor Harry! this benumbed and quiet peace seemed all he desired.

And when he had bidden them farewell, gently, faintly, without any violence of emotion—with a perfect calm and submission, and what people call resignation

to the will of God—Harry laid himself down again to die.

But his head had scarcely fallen back again upon the pillow, when he started violently—a start which wrung from him a half scream of pain.

“Send for Lindsay, Martha!—send for Robertson, in Stirling! Any one—any one you can get most easily!—at once, before I die!”

Without hesitation, Martha went to obey his order; and John, who was swift and ready, was in the saddle in a very few minutes, galloping to Stirling for a lawyer.

But when Martha returned to the sick chamber, Harry had relapsed into unconsciousness, and she sat down, watching by him silently, as she had done before. Within a few hours the lawyer came. The whole country rang with the news of

the accident, and people forgot how they had condemned poor Allenders, in pity for him, and for the family, whose singular devotion to him it needed little discernment to discover. So Mr. Robertson had left his house at once, to his own inconvenience, to come to the dying man. But Harry lay upon his bed, communing aloud with his own heart; and the very lawyer turned aside and wept, as he heard this heart laid open. A sinful man had Harry been!—shipwrecked and lost! Yet it was a child's heart!

And Martha's words, or an influence more wonderful than them, was breathing on the chaos of this disturbed and wandering soul. Poor Harry! And his lips spoke aloud the texts and psalms which he had learned a child, at Martha's knee. In the room there was a hush like death, through which now and then the restrained

sob of Agnes struggled faintly. She was still lying in the same position, her face hidden, in prostrate, powerless grief; and Rose knelt beside her, pale as death, fixing the eyes, from which her tears fell down continually, upon Harry's face, while her throat quivered now and then with a convulsive gasp. Martha, at his other side, with her head bent upon her folded arms, shook with great tremblings, like successive waves—but no sound came from her; and the lawyer, afraid to move, and full of awe, stood silent at the foot of the bed. Through this scene ascended Harry's voice, low and faint, but distinctly audible; and now he reads from his child's memory, what has been read by his bedside only recently, in hope to catch some passing gleam of consciousness—the last words of the Lord!

Oh! wonderful, benign and tender words!

—spoken under the very death-shadow, by that One who alone was free to redeem—who can tell what was their influence upon the rapt soul, which, past all human intercourse, was still open to the dealings of the Lord? Mysterious awe and wonder hushed even their very prayers. No human speech could move him now, or reach his veiled and hidden soul: but the way was all open to God.

All through the night Harry continued thus—with broken prayers, and words of Holy Writ, mingling with the common things to which he sometimes returned—and towards the dawn he fell into a broken sleep.

The lawyer, meanwhile, waited. It was a singular kindness; but Harry might awake out of his trance at any moment, and this man, who had a kindly heart, was concerned for the family, and sufficiently in-

terested to give his time without much grudging. And they had all a vague expectation that Harry would awake from this sleep, in possession of his faculties.

They were right, he did so ; and after a few minutes of repose and contemplation, and of tender words to those around him, he started again, and asked for the lawyer. Mr. Robertson came from the library, where he had been sitting, and Harry sent his sisters and his wife away.

They were not long shut out from the sick room. The lawyer left the chamber and the house, with a farewell of deep and melancholy sympathy ; and for about an hour after, Harry continued conscious of their presence. But this consciousness was broken and disturbed ; and afterwards he sank back into a slumbrous, interrupted reverie, from which he never woke again.

CHAPTER XIV.

'Tis over—over : here is no present now ;
All life lies in the past.

OLD PLAY.

THERE is a deep hush upon Allenders, the silence of death ; and quiet footsteps glide about another sick room, passing by the door, where lies one who shall want human tendance never again. Poor little Agnes, worn out and broken, lies there very ill ; and they are watching her night and day, as a week ago they watched Harry—but with better hope.

And now all the dreary *business* of this time falls upon Martha. She thinks they will craze her—those necessary directions which she is compelled to give; and Martha cannot afford to risk either her mind or her health for the family's sake, which now hangs on her hands to be provided for. So the second day after Harry's death she wrote to Charteris, the only friend, near at hand, to whom she could apply.

Martha's letter was abrupt and short; she could not intimate what had come upon them in many words.

“My brother Harry is dead”—this was her letter—“Agnes is ill; and I alone am left to do what this trial requires to be done. You were his friend, and wished him well. Will you come to my aid in this extremity for his sake?”

It might have been the letter of a cold

heart. Cuthbert knew better than to think it was.

And from the window of Agnes's sick room, Martha, grave and tearless, watched them carry away the dead. There was a long funeral train, for now that he was dead, every one was ready to pay respect to poor Harry. Little Lettie weeping as if her heart would break, had seen the hearse stand at the door; now she grew suddenly still, chill, and full of mysterious terror; and when Mysie lifted her from the window, and softly opened the shutters, letting in the hitherto excluded sunshine, Lettie sat down on the carpet in the light, and shivered and sobbed, but could not weep. They had carried him away—poor Harry! where never mortal ear should hear, or mortal eye look on him again; and Lettie's little trembling heart was overpowered with irrestrainable longing to

see his face; and she could not remember it—could not recal, except in a mist, the features she knew so well.

A few of the most considerable followers of the funeral, Sir John Dunlop and his son, Mr. Haig of Foggo, and Cuthbert Charteris, who had arrived two days before, and arranged everything, returned with the minister, Mr. Robertson the Stirling writer, and Uncle Sandy, to the house. It was a considerable surprise to all, to find that there was a will, and they returned to be present while it was read.

The party assembled in the dining-room, where the blinds were still closed, and the funeral bread and wine remained on the table. When they had waited for some time, Martha and Rose and little Lettie came in. They were all already dressed in the deepest mourning, and

Rose, trembling and half-hysterical, was deadly pale; her eyes wandered from side to side, and she held up her head with a mechanical motion, as if only half-conscious where she was. Lettie, wistful and full of mysterious trembling, was still keenly alive to everything that passed, and attended, with her eyes fixed on every speaker with an intense regard, which riveted every word upon her mind. On Martha's usual appearance there was little change. Her eyes were more hollow, perhaps, and the wrinkles deeper in her brow; but that was all. Uncle Sandy, passive and absorbed, sat by them in perfect silence. The old man was greatly shaken with this unexpected grief.

"Before we begin to this business," said the minister, "let us pray again with and for this afflicted family. I am sure they

have all our deepest sympathy and good wishes. Let us commend them to the God of consolations.”

They were all standing before he concluded; but Cuthbert saw the little gasp and totter with which Rose left her chair, closing her eyes with the blindness of a worn-out heart. He had not time to think if his impulse was prudent; it was enough that he could not stand by, and see her unsupported, while he was there to give her help. He stepped forward hastily, and taking both her hands into his own, drew one of them through his arm, and held up her weakness with his strength. A little audible sob came from the overcharged breast of Rose. She did not think of Cuthbert, nor was he sufficiently callous to believe she could. She was thinking of poor Harry in his new grave, and longing, like Lettie, to see his face once

more; but she leaned upon the strong arm which supported her, and a vague, unconscious comfort came to Rose's heart.

But Martha, whose fate it was to stand alone—to whom no one came to offer support—whose heart knew its own bitterness, and whose cares there was none to share or lighten, held with both hands the back of a chair, and bent over it heavily with a stoop like the stoop of age. Lettie, standing near her, drew close to Martha with the same impulse which drew Cuthbert to Rose, and Lettie laid her head softly against her elder sister's arm. It moved the silent mourner into sudden irrestrainable tears, and she put out the arm which long exhaustion and straining had made almost rigid, and drew the child into her heart, pressing her there with a convulsive grasp. So were the sisters helped through this painful hour, each as suited her best.

When they were again seated, Martha spoke :

“ My sister is ill—Mrs. Allenders—she cannot receive you, gentlemen, nor thank you. I thank you in her stead. I thank you for paying this respect—for doing all the honour that can be done now—I thank you—I thank you. Have I to do anything more ?”

And Martha looked round for a moment vacantly ; she was forgetting herself like one in a dream.

Then the lawyer rose and read the will. It bequeathed all the lands—everything of which Harry died possessed—to Martha Muir Allenders. There was nothing in it but the barest words, which made it a lawful document, and Harry’s signature at the end.

A violent start came over Martha—a strange surprise upon the strangers present. “ Poor little Mrs. Allenders !” they whis-

pered to themselves, and wondered whether she would contest this will or no, or if it was worth her while, as they heard the land was greatly burdened. The only persons present who evinced no wonder, were Rose and little Lettie, to whom it seemed the most natural arrangement, that Martha should be their family head; but Sir John Dunlop rose coldly to shake hands with Miss Allenders of Allenders. He had no sympathy with her now.

“Stay,” said Martha, “stay, I beg; there is something more to be said. Was he—he—able to execute this when he did it. Was his mind clear? Tell me—let me not say his name more than I must.”

“Of sound mind,” said the writer gravely, “with perfect knowledge of what he was doing—cooler than I am now; he said he had broken your heart and

lost your hopes—that he had nothing remaining but the land, and he would give it to you, to make a better use of it than he had done.”

“He had remaining that was dearer than the land, and he bequeathed *them* to me,” said Martha with difficulty. “If this land is mine now, bear me witness that it is only for the boy—only for little Harry, his heir, for Agnes and her other child. I take the trust since he gave it—but nothing is mine—I tell you nothing is mine. Mr. Charteris, I trust it to you, to see a deed made equal to this will, securing the land to his lawful heir. Now, may we go away? I am faint and exhausted—I cannot speak; but thank you—thank you. Our best thanks to you all—to all who have been here to-day—for the respect—for the honour.”

And, as they came in, the three sisters left the room.

But the lawyer shook his head when Cuthbert asked him what he knew of Harry's affairs.

"Heavy debts, heavy debts," said Mr. Robertson—"I hear as much as five thousand pounds—and how can they ever pay that, off four hundred and fifty pounds a-year, which is all the estate yields. My opinion is, as a private friend, that they should sell the land. I cannot tell just now how much, but certainly it will require a heavy sum for a year or two to keep up the cultivation the way it has been begun. No doubt it will be very hard to give it up after such a capital is sunk in these fields; but then unless they have good friends to back them, how can they ever try to carry on with such a load? And I hear there's one

thousand of the debt, at least, at extravagant interest. My opinion is, they should sell the land."

"I don't think they will ever consent to that," said Cuthbert.

"It's easy to see," said the writer earnestly; "deduct two hundred and fifty for interest, it leaves them two hundred to live on—plenty, I confess, for a family of women, especially when there is a person of resolution among them like Miss Allenders; but if she should live a hundred years, she'll never be able to pay a penny of the principal off that. You are a friend, Mr. Charteris—I think you should advise Miss Allenders to sell the land."

"She herself knows best. I will speak to her," said Cuthbert; "it depends entirely on what she means to do."

A week after, they were able to lift

Agnes from her bed to a fireside sofa. Her fever was gone; but the sweet convalescence of an invalid surrounded by loves and cares, was sad and heavy to the young widow—for everything reminded her of Harry. She listened unawares to passing sounds without, and started and thought he was coming—fancied she heard his step on the stair, and the little cheerful stir with which he was wont to enter the outer room into which her own opened; and then she wept—poor youthful broken heart!—but there was relief in those floods of tears.

They were all sitting round her—Martha close by her on the sofa, supporting and gently moving, when she wished it, her delicate feeble frame. And Rose held the baby up to her, while little Harry, wondering, and solemnly silent, stood by her, with his arm resting on her knee. Uncle Sandy, much

shaken, and looking ten years older, stood behind at the window, trying, with much exertion, to compose himself, and speak to Agnes of the duty and necessity of resignation: but the good old man needed the exhortation as much as she did. Lettie, last of all, sat on a stool by the fire very silent, practising a stitch of "opening" which she had importuned Rose to teach her; and Katie Calder, behind Lettie, looked over her shoulder, and learned the stitch too.

"What are we to do, Martha?" said Agnes feebly. "Tell me, I will soon be well now—are we to go away?"

Martha laid her hand on little Harry's head, and drew him into the midst. The child stood gravely silent, looking up under her hand, with wondering eyes, and ruddy lips apart. Poor little Harry had cried a great deal through these seven days, for he could not understand why they led him after

the coffin, and made him stand beside the grave. He cried then with dread and terror, but since then, many a time had Harry asked Mysie what had become of papa.

“This bairn must have the land, free as when we came,” said Martha, calmly; “and when the land is clear and redeemed, Agnes, he must have fair fame, and family credit, and good report, to add to his inheritance. I am left in trust to clear the land for its heir: we must stay in Allenders.”

Agnes did not speak for a moment. She glanced round the room, first with a sick, despairing look, as if in fear of all its associations, then with tears and melting tenderness. The young mother put one feeble arm round her boy, and leaned her head upon Martha’s shoulder, “I am very glad,” she said, “very glad—we will have no other home.”

This was all that was said to her in her

weakness about the will, which might have added a concealed pang to Agnes's lawful grief—for now she too was jealous of Harry's love, and could not bear to think that any one had shared it with her, in anything near the same degree. Poor Harry! it was true that Martha and Uncle Sandy perceived the rash, unconsidering generosity, which set natural justice aside, to make this hasty will; but they said this to no one, nor to each other even; and in the hearts of all, Harry's sins were forgotten. He was already a saint canonized by sorrow and love.

“And Katie and me would like to do the opening,” said Lettie in a half-whisper; “and Martha, Katie wants you to tell her that she's no to go back to Miss Jean.”

“Oh, will you let me stay?” said little Katie, pathetically, “I'll never be ony trouble, and I could do the opening fine.”

“The bairn's bread will never be missed,”

said Uncle Sandy, leaning upon the back of the sofa where Martha sat. "Ye must come with me, bairns, for a change, and stay a while in Ayr to rest your minds, poor things!—and Martha, my woman, you have mony a hard thing to do—you'll have to see Miss Jean."

"Ay, uncle," said Martha, "and I hear there is somebody in Edinburgh besides; it's only about money, Agnes: nothing to vex you, my poor bairn; and you must trust me with all. Will you go with my uncle, Agnes?"

"If *you* will, Martha," said the poor little invalid, holding by her indulgent nurse.

"I will come for a day," said Martha; "but now I must learn about business," she added, with a faltering smile, "and take order for many things. I cannot be long away from Allenders. Rose will go with

you and the bairns. You have the bairns, Agnes, God be thanked! to comfort you."

And Rose, who had not spoken, again held up the baby, who stretched out his hand to pull his young mother's cap, and crowed and laughed in her face, struggling to reach her arms with baby glee.

Poor little unconscious fatherless boy! Very strange looked this impulse of infant joy among all those sorrowful faces; and with a burst, which none could restrain, they all bowed down their heads and wept.

All of them, from the old man sobbing aloud behind the little couch, and Martha, no longer able to preserve her self-control, to little Harry, struggling stoutly as he looks upon them all, and breaking out in a loud shivering sob before the tears come; and it is some time before they can recover themselves—before the invalid is carried to her

bed, and watched till she falls asleep, and they all disperse to do what they can, and conquer themselves. Martha and Uncle Sandy wait in the library for Charteris, who is to return to-day, bringing with him an account of poor Harry's debts—and their consultations are very grave; and you can fancy that on Martha's brow, care takes the place of sorrow—for no one knows the deep life grief, undisturbable and still, which lies at the bottom of her heart. Martha treats Agnes as if she were the principal sufferer; comforts Rose; soothes and consoles the very children, but does not say what she feels—that to all of them lie other interests, other hopes, and gladnesses within the world which they still are only entering—whereas herself sees nothing in the future but a monument of good fame, honour, and charity to be raised over Harry's grave. This is

the end which, proud of him, and jealous for him still, she proposes to herself, caring little what obstacles lie in the way; and Uncle Sandy understands the wish, but doubts in his heart, in spite of all his faith in Martha, and cannot see how she is to accomplish it.

Meanwhile Agnes sleeps—forgets her griefs, and strengthens the feeble health which has worn to so delicate a thread; and Rose, sitting beside her, overcome by much watching, constant fatigue, and a sorrow no less present and engrossing than the young widow's, falls into quiet slumber too, and has a faint pensive smile under the tears, which still fall in her dream; and Violet and Katie sit on the carpet at the drawing-room window, with their heads close together, learning other stitches. Sometimes, indeed, Lettie pauses to cry bitterly, and Katie wipes

eyes which stream in sympathy; but they are both much absorbed with this delicate craft, and are calculating how many "holes" they could do in a day, and how they will be able to help Martha; so the children are comforted.

And deep exhaustion and quietness is upon Allenders. Idly in the faint sunshine, Dragon sits on his stair-head, and thinks with a faint wonder of his own recovery and Mr. Harry's death, and cannot apprehend that it is true, but listens still for his quick ringing footstep, and calls to John to inquire why Harry's horse is left continually grazing in the meadow park; and John in the kitchen speculates in a subdued and sober tone, upon the changes which may happen, and thinks he will speak to the minister about a new place in case of the worst. In Maidlin Cross there is much speculation too,

and they wonder if the family will stay at Allenders, and whether they will sell the land: but nothing is known; and many an honest sigh for poor Allenders heaves from the broad breasts of his labouring men, and many a cottage mother lifts her apron mechanically to her eye, when she speaks of the "weel-spoken," kindly dead. Poor Harry! his whole world, gently and tenderly, let the veil of death fall over his evil deeds; remember only what he did well; and peace is upon his grave.

CHAPTER XV.

For mine inheritance I take this grave ;
Myself shall be its constant monument.
I have spent all my tears. In other fashion
Than with faint weepings must my dead be
mourned.

For on this little sod I have beside
A battle-ground. Think you the caitiff shame
Shall share this consecrated spot with me ?

OLD PLAY.

“THEY must not bid me ; I cannot sell the land,” said Martha, firmly.

Young Mr. Dunlop, deputed by his father to offer any “reasonable” assistance in arranging her affairs, or any quantity of

advice reasonable or otherwise, sat opposite her in the library; Cuthbert Charteris waited rather impatiently. They had been engaged in an important consultation when Mr. Dunlop entered, and Cuthbert was turning over some papers restlessly, and looking round now and then, as if about to speak; but young Mr. Dunlop still roused anything but peaceable feelings in Cuthbert's mind, and he remained silent.

“Of course, Miss Allenders, my father would never dream of forcing his advice upon you. All I have to say is, that in case you are disposed to sell the land, as we heard you were, Sir John would be glad to make you an offer for part of it—that is all.”

“I am much obliged to Sir John Dunlop,” said Martha, “but we have no intention—I cannot see we have any right—to dispose

of any part of Allenders. Thanks, many thanks; but we must try to increase, not to alienate."

After some time, Mr. Dunlop went away. He did not understand the quiet gravity with which he was received, and carried home such an account of Martha's callousness, that his sister laughed scornfully, and said Miss Allenders had provided for herself, and would soon recover of her grief. Good Lady Dunlop only shook her head, and secretly resolved to call at Allenders, and see about this for herself; she could not believe that Harry's trusted sister was callous to his loss, when she herself, Lady Dunlop, who never had known death, except twenty years ago, when she lost a very little lisping child—a meeting with the adversary which she never could forget—always lifted her handkerchief to her eyes, and gave a sigh to poor Allenders when his

name was mentioned. She could not believe in Martha's hardness of heart.

"It must be attended with very considerable expense," said Charteris. "You must either part with Allenders, or double its value—there is no alternative. And I do not see at present where this necessary seed of capital is to be procured. But we must try. You will come to Edinburgh then, on Monday, and see the creditor?"

"That is four thousand pounds, and Miss Jean one; and I have heard there were other bills," said Martha. "Yes, I will go on Monday. Can we pay all this, do you think, in one lifetime? And then there is the present money to be thought of; another thousand they say would do. We could manage to pay the interest of all that."

"But not to live besides," said Cuthbert, hastily.

Martha's head rose with a slight proud

motion. "I have provided for that," she said, with haughtiness; but immediately softening, added so frankly that Cuthbert was touched almost to tears: "I mean we are all ready to work, and very willing. We are now as we were before we came to Allenders; one is not—but what remains to do is for him; and we, all of us, sisters, and dearest to each other, are as we were."

As she concluded, her tears fell silently upon the desk before her. "God is visiting my heart with the dews of youth," said Martha, looking up with a sad smile of surprise. "I can cry now, whenever I would, like a bairn."

And Cuthbert, who was a man, and a strong one, felt his heart swell; and with a strong impulse of help, bethought himself what he could do for those sisters, to aid them in their work.

“The houses at Maidlin must stand for a time,” said Martha. “You will think me weak, Mr. Charteris, but I cannot abandon even them; and we must try to find a place for John, and to sell the carriage and the horses. We will keep the gig which the old Laird of Allenders left, and Mysie—”

Martha stopped, with white lips and a strong shiver. She was about to say, that Mysie, like many other country girls, could drive; but just then there occurred to her the time when Mysie made trial of her skill, through the darkness of that Hallowe'en night, and for a moment she was silent.

“It will do for Agnes; all the rest of us are strong,” resumed Martha, with a voice that sounded harshly. “I think I can undertake that the house itself will cost the land nothing; and Armstrong is

good and honest, and only wants some one to *bid* him do what he knows is necessary to be done; I can undertake that, too, I think. He was here yesterday. See what our calculations were, Mr. Charteris."

Charteris took the paper and read. Though not in the ordinary business form, it was a statement of expenses for a year, including the interest to Miss Jean, and Harry's other creditor. He asked to keep it, and she permitted him. Cuthbert began to be very sanguine; he thought he saw now where to find the money to complete poor Harry's experiment with the land.

Then he rose to take his leave.

"Can you not stay to-night? They will be disappointed," said Martha. "We have seen very little of you, Mr. Char-

teris, since—since we came here; but pray stay to-night, and cheer these poor girls. I am perhaps too much occupied for them, poor things! and they are going with my uncle to Ayr. Stay and see them to-night, or you will disappoint them.”

“Disappoint them? should I?” said Cuthbert, smiling faintly. “I stayed away because I thought myself very magnanimous and self-denying—perhaps it was only because my pride was wounded; but to disappoint them, or think I did, would be too great a pleasure—I must see them, to convince myself that I have not so much cause for pride.”

And Cuthbert, in a little flush of growing hope and gladness, looked up into Martha’s face—Martha’s face, calm and unchangeable, full of the great still sorrow, for which half an hour ago he

had himself wept, struck him like an accusation. He cast down his eyes in silence, and stood before her almost like a culprit; for the warm hopes and joys of the future looked selfish and small in the presence of this absorbed and quiet grief.

Just then Mysie entered, and gave Martha a letter. As she opened it, a piece of paper fell to the ground. Cuthbert lifted it up; it was a note for fifty pounds.

Martha ran over the note quickly, yet with perfectly collected attention; then, after a moment's hesitation, she handed it to Cuthbert, and sat down at her desk to write. The letter was from Gilbert Allenders.

“ Madam,

“ I borrowed at various times, little sums

from your brother, the late Allenders—I cannot undertake to say what they came to exactly, but not above this I enclose. I am leaving Allender Mains next week, and would be glad to call, if there is no objection; and would be glad to know whether I have your permission, as I believe I had the permission of your brother, to pay my addresses to your sister, Miss Rose. This is not a suitable time to ask, but I am anxious to know, and intend to settle down in Stirling; and will be profited, I trust, by the late solemn warning, which, I assure you, has caused me the deepest regret.

“ With much sympathy, and compliments to all the family,

“ I remain, dear Madam,

“ Yours faithfully,

“ GILBERT ALLENDERS.”

Cuthbert unconsciously crushed the letter

in his hand. Inconsiderable as his rival was, he was a rival still.

Martha's answer was very brief.

“ I return you, with thanks, the money you have sent me. We who remain have nothing to do with what passed between the dead and you. Let this be past, like everything else which put your names together. We are little disposed to receive callers. Without any discourtesy, I think it is better that you should not come.

“ MARTHA MUIR ALLENDERS.”

It was the first time she had signed her name so ; and Martha placed the fifty-pound note within her letter, when she had shown it to Cuthbert, who looked on with some astonishment. Collected and self-possessed as she was, Martha could not, without strong

emotion, either write or speak poor Harry's name, and her whole frame quivered with nervous excitement as she closed her letter. Cuthbert was much surprised; he thought this a piece of quite unnecessary generosity.

“Is it foolish?” said Martha, answering his look. “Well, be it so; but no one shall say that *he* gave this to a careless companion, and that it was exacted back again. I tell you, the meanest gift he ever gave, were it for his own destruction, is sacred to me—never to be reclaimed. It was his own. I will not hear a word of blame.”

And this irritation and defiance was the weakness of Martha's grief.

To subdue it, she rose abruptly, and went up-stairs to the drawing-room, where Agnes now sat by the fire, watching the wintry sunshine steal in at the window. Over the

bright hair, which never before had been covered with a matron's hood, Agnes wore the close, sombre cap of a widow. They had tried to persuade her that this was unnecessary; but poor little invalid, heart-broken Agnes had a little petulance too, and insisted. Wrapped in a heavy black shawl, and with everything about her of the deepest mourning, her face, closely surrounded by those folds of muslin, looked very thin and pale; but the faint colour of reviving health began to rise in her cheek, and Agnes sometimes, in the impatience of early sorrow, wept that she could not die.

Uncle Sandy sat beside her, and a faint attempt at conversation had been going on; but it failed often, and had long breaks of listless silence; and Cuthbert fancied the patient, uncomplaining sorrow of the old man—the weakness which seemed to have

fallen over him, the trembling hand, and husky voice, were almost the most moving of all.

Rose sat by the table, working; Lettie and Katie Calder were at the window; but you scarcely needed to look at their black dresses, to know that those strange words, "It is all over," with their solemn mystery of significance, had been lately spoken here. All was over—everything—life, death, anxiety, excitement. Their heads were dizzy, and their minds reeled under the recent blow; yet nothing was visible but langour, and a dim exhausted calm.

And this evening passed, as every other evening seemed to pass, like some strange vacant space, blank and still; yet Rose, when Cuthbert sat beside her, felt a grateful ease at her heart. It seemed as if some one had lifted from her, for a moment, her indi-

vidual burden ; and sad though the family was, and languid and melancholy the afflicted house, Cuthbert remembered this evening with a thrill of subdued and half-guilty delight, and again his heart longed, and his arms expanded, to carry away into the sunshine his drooping Rose.

CHAPTER XVI.

Albeit I neither lend nor borrow ;
Yet, to supply the ripe wants of a friend,
I'll break a custom.

MERCHANT OF VENICE.

“ANOTHER day—I must give another day,” said Cuthbert as he hesitated between the Edinburgh and the Glasgow coach. “ Nobody but I can do this business, and the business must be done, let my own do what it will—so now for Glasgow and my uncle.”

And Cuthbert climbed to the top of the coach, and discovered that the winds between

Stirling and Glasgow are very keen in November. He buttoned his coat tightly, and drew his plaid around him, with care and repeated exertions ; but neither coat nor plaid, nor both together, made such an excellent defence against cold, as the glow at his heart.

The office of the Messrs. Buchanan is unchanged. It is true, one clerk has gone to Australia, and another to the West Indies—that one is in business for himself, and two are dead ; but still Mr. Gilchrist's massive silver snuff-box glitters upon his desk, and still he contemplates its long inscription, and taps it lovingly, as he takes another pinch. Again, there is one clerk in the office who is a wit, and sings a good song, and is "led away," and still Dick and Alick, and John Buchanan, are cool and business-like in the counting-house, and enjoy themselves boisterously out

of it; though there are rumours that Dick is to be married, and "settle down."

The young Buchanans stare at Cuthbert's mourning—the crape on his hat, and his grave face—and wonder what far-away cousin must be dead, whom they have never heard of, and feel an involuntary guiltiness when they look upon their own coloured dress. Very far off and very poor must this cousin have been; they are all immediately prepared to defend themselves and to exclaim that they got no intimation.

"What is this for, Cuthbert?" said Mr. Buchanan hastily, pointing to the hat in Cuthbert's hand.

"Do you remember Harry Muir, uncle?" said Cuthbert. "Poor Harry! those bits of crape are all that remain to him, of this world's friendship, and honour."

Mr. Buchanan started, and was greatly

shocked. "Poor fellow! I thought he was prospering now, and doing well—poor fellow! poor fellow! When did it happen, Cuthbert?"

"I heard the other day he had turned out very wild," said Alick Buchanan.

"He always was; there was no making anything of him in the office," added Dick hastily.

Poor Harry! his old tempter and opponent felt a little twinge when he saw Cuthbert's mourning, and remembered him, without any particular satisfaction, of his own "joke," as he called it, about his cousin and his sister Clemie.

"Poor Harry! some of the best men in the county followed him to his grave," said Cuthbert, who understood very well the material he had to work upon, "and a universal regret went with him. Uncle, I have

a little business to talk over with you, if you will permit me. Are you at leisure now?"

"What's going to happen, Cuthbert?" said Mr. Buchanan, smiling: "a bride coming home, eh? and what will your mother say to that? But come along, I'll go down with you—you shall have the benefit of my experience."

Mr. Buchanan's plain unpretending one-horse carriage waited for him in the street below. The young men, very independent and uncontrolled, came home in such manner as pleased them; but Cuthbert had to wait till the streets, shining with lights, and loud with many voices, had faded into darkness behind them, and they were steadily proceeding over a quiet country road, before he could bring his business before his attentive uncle.

"I have very lately returned from the

funeral of Harry Muir," said Cuthbert, whose face had been gradually becoming grave, and who had begun to grow anxiously impatient of their lighter conversation; "and just now, uncle, I come direct from his house, where his sister has been consulting me about her future arrangements. One cannot but be interested in this family—they clung to him with such devotion; and all they care for now, seems to be to maintain his good name, and clear his son's inheritance. Poor Harry! few men are loved so, uncle."

"He was a very unsteady lad, Cuthbert," said the merchant, shaking his head.

"It might be so," said Cuthbert. "I do not dispute that; but now he is dead; and I have set my heart on having help to Martha—I mean to his elder sister, who has charge of everything. She needs immediate assistance, uncle. I state my business, you see,

very briefly ; and now refuse if you will. I am not to be discouraged by any number of Nays."

"Assistance !" exclaimed Mr. Buchanan hastily, fumbling in his breast-pocket for his purse, "do you mean to say they're so far reduced as that? No, no—no refusal, Cuthbert; I don't often shut my heart when there is real charity in the case."

"I know you don't, uncle, and this would be a great charity," said Cuthbert quick, feeling his face flush in the darkness; "but no alms—no alms. I will tell you the true state of the case now. The estate has had very little cultivation, and produces very indifferent crops. Poor Harry during the last year had begun to improve it, and expended a great deal of money on the land; but now he is dead, and the money spent, and a heavy debt upon the estate. They

could pay the interest off their income, but could not touch the principal. Now, what are they to do, uncle?"

"Why, Cuthbert, a man of your sense! only one thing is possible—of course, sell the land."

"But Martha will never sell the land. Martha will labour at it with her own hands before she alienates the child's inheritance," said Cuthbert, getting excited. "I want money for her to carry on the works with; and this money she will have, one way or another, I know. My own scheme, uncle," added Cuthbert, with a short laugh, under which a great deal of anxiety was hidden, "is that you should give her a thousand pounds, and charge no interest for a year or two, till she gets everything in progress. I think this is the best possible solution of the problem, kindly and Christian-like—"

While Cuthbert spoke, Mr. Buchanan employed himself deliberately in buttoning his coat over the comfortable breast pocket, where his purse trembled with a presentiment.

“Thank you, Cuthbert,” said the merchant drily, “I have no thousand pounds to throw away.”

There was a pause; for Cuthbert, though not at all discouraged, needed to recover himself a little before he resumed the attack.

“The land could be sold to-morrow for ten thousand pounds, or more than that—I speak hastily,” said Cuthbert. “It is burdened to the amount of five thousand, but after paying that, there remains abundance to satisfy your claim, and I can answer for the strictest honour in your debtor’s dealing. Poor Harry! This

Martha—this sister of his—clings to his every project. You could not see it without being deeply moved, uncle. She has a strong, ambitious, passionate mind, and his was a weak and yielding one; yet she clutches at every one of the rapidly changing projects which he took up and then threw down as toys of a day, and confers upon them a sort of everlastingness through the might of will and resolution with which she adopts them. Uncle, you must help Martha.”

Mr. Buchanan sat by him in silence, and listened, hastily fastening and unfastening the one particular button which admitted his hand to his warm breast-pocket, competent and comfortable. The good man was naturally benevolent to a high degree—a propensity which Cuthbert, who was his uncle’s favourite and chosen

counsellor, encouraged by all means in his power; but the rules of business was at Mr. Buchanan's finger ends, and their restraint came up upon him like a natural impulse, so that he actually did not know, good simple man, that his natural will was always towards the charity, and that this restraint was something artificial which interposed between him and his natural will.

“ Perfectly unbusiness-like, Cuthbert,” said the merchant. “ I wonder greatly why you should speak of such a thing to *me*. A man accustomed to regular business transactions has no tolerance for such affairs as this—they are out of his way. Your landed gentry or rich people, who don't know anything about where their money comes from, or how it is made—they are the people to carry such a story to.”

Very true in the abstract, good Mr. Buchanan—nevertheless, your nephew Cuthbert knows, as well as if you had told him, that your purse begins to burn your breast-pocket, and leaps and struggles there, desiring to get the worst over, and be peacefully at rest again. Cuthbert knows it; and Cuthbert takes advantage of his knowledge.

“Martha is trustee, and has charge of all,” said Cuthbert; “and there is little Mrs. Allenders herself, and her two babies. Little Harry, the heir, is a fine, bold, intelligent boy, young as he is, and will want no care they can give him—that is very sure. Then there are two other children quite dependant on Martha—her own little sister, and another, a distant relation, poor and fatherless whom they have kept with them ever since they went to Allenders. Now there can

be no doubt it would be easier for them to go away to some little, quiet, country house, and live on what they can earn themselves, and on the residue of what the land will bring; but Martha would break her heart. It is a generous devotion, uncle. She proposes to take the management of the farm herself, and has actually begun to make herself mistress of this knowledge, so strange for a woman; while the exertions of the others, and of her own spare hours, are to provide the household expenses, she calculates. All this is for Harry, and Harry's heir; and it is no burst of enthusiasm, but a steady, quiet, undemonstrative determination. Come, uncle, you will help Martha?"

"Is that the old sister—the passionate one?" asked Mr. Buchanan.

"The passionate one—yes."

"And there was surely one more that you

have not mentioned ; by the bye, Cuthbert," said Mr. Buchanan, hastily, "the boys used to say you went there often. There's nothing between you and any of them, I hope?"

"No, uncle!"—the humility of the answer struck Mr. Buchanan strangely. He almost thought for a moment that he had the little boy beside him, who used to spend holiday weeks in Glasgow, when Dick was a baby with streaming skirts, and "there was no word" of any of the others. It made the merchant's heart tender, even when he turned to look upon the strong man by his side.

But Cuthbert, for his part, thought himself guilty of disingenuousness, and by and bye, he added, "Don't let me deceive you, uncle. When I say no, I don't mean to imply that there will never be, nor that even

if there never is anything between us, it will be any fault of mine."

But Mr. Buchanan only shook his head—how it came about, he could not tell, but the good man's eyelids were moistened, and there came back to him momentary glimpses of many an early scene; he was pleased, too, however imprudent Cuthbert's intentions might be, with the confidence he gave him—for that his nephew was more than his equal, the good merchant very well knew.

So Mr. Buchanan shook his head, and satisfied his conscience with the mute protest; "he could not find it in his heart," as he said to himself afterwards in self-justification, to condemn his nephew's true love.

"But this is not to the purpose," continued Cuthbert. "A thousand pounds, uncle, with the estate of Allenders, and myself for your securities. I am getting on myself—I

shall soon have a tolerable business, I assure you, though this absence may put some of it in jeopardy. Give me my boon now, and let me hurry back to my office—a thousand pounds—and of course you will not accept any interest for a few years.”

Mr. Buchanan sighed. “It is a very unbusiness-like transaction, Cuthbert,” said the merchant.

“But not the first unbusiness-like transaction you have carried to a good end,” said Cuthbert, warmly. “Take comfort, uncle; the Christian charity and the natural love, will hold out longer than business. And now you have given me your promise, I must say three words to my aunt and Clemie, and ask you to let Robert drive me back again. I must be home to-morrow morning at my work.”

And travelling by night, in the discon-

solate stage-coach was nothing like so satisfactory as an express-train—yet Cuthbert went home, very comfortably; and very comfortably did the slumber of an unencumbered mind, and a charitable heart, fall over Mr. Buchanan, though still he shook his head at his own weakness, and was slightly ashamed to make a memorandum of so unbusiness-like a concern.

CHAPTER XVII.

“A bankrupt, a prodigal who dare scarce show his head on the Rialto; a beggar, that was used to come so smug on the mart. Let him look to his bond. He was wont to call me usurer: let him look to his bond. He was wont to lend money for a Christian charity; let him look to his bond.” —
MERCHANT OF VENICE.

A FEW days after this, Martha came to Edinburgh according to her appointment, to meet Harry's principal creditor, accompanied by Uncle Sandy who, “with all the bairns,” as he said, was to return home to Ayr whenever he was freed from his attendance on Martha.

The meeting was arranged to take place in Lindsay's office, and Martha carried with her the half-year's interest payable to this creditor. It was the last of his own four thousand pounds.

The man was a retired shop-keeper, eloquent on "the value of money," and thinking the five or six thousands which were the much-boasted result of his life, a great fortune, justly entitling its possessor to "a proper pride." Like most people, whose increase has been an accumulation of morsels, Mr. Macalister was terribly afraid of risk, and shrank from speculation with the most orthodox horror. Persuaded at first to invest his money in Harry's mortgage, because land was the most secure of banks, his ears had been keenly alive, ever since, to every morsel of news he could glean about Harry; and when Mr. Macalister heard he was *wild*, he trembled for his four thousand pounds. Then

came Harry's death, and hearing that the property was left only in the hands of women, Mr. Macalister had a vague notion that he had power to sell the lands of Allenders, and pay himself, very probably making a profit of the transaction; or that he might, if he would, take possession, and become Laird of Allenders in his own person; but he had never mentioned this grand imagination to any one, though it invested him with a visionary importance, which surprised his very wife. Yet Macalister was by no means a dishonest man, nor one who would deliberately set about benefiting himself by cheating his neighbours — by no means; but his exaggerated idea of the money which he had laboriously earned, made him believe that all this was in his power.

So he came to Lindsay's office very spruce

and shining, with an elaborate shirt-frill, and a new cane, determined to demand instant re-payment of the money, or failing that, to intimate his intention of entering upon possession of Allenders.

Lindsay, somewhat puzzled, was endeavouring to understand the solemn hints, and important allusions of Macalister, when Martha and her uncle entered his office. The creditor was somewhat taken by surprise ; and when he saw the deference with which the lawyer received this grave-looking woman in her deep mourning, Macalister faltered ; for he had never thought of “ the other party—” never, except as natural opponents and adversaries of whom he, in this connexion of debtor and creditor, had greatly the advantage.

“ I have been thinking—I’ll likely want my money, Miss Allenders,” said Macalister

after a few general words had passed, followed by an embarrassed silence.

“Mr. Lindsay will pay you the interest which is due,” said Martha; “and it would be a convenience to us if you did not—at least, immediately—claim your money. The works for which it was borrowed have not had time yet to be profitable; but a few years more, I trust—”

“Ay, Miss Allenders; but it’s not so easy for me to wait a few years more,” said Macalister, briskly, restored to his natural self-importance by Martha’s request; “for ye see, I can show you plainly—”

But what Mr. Macalister could have shown plainly, remained for ever unknown to Martha; for at that moment, a great commotion arose in the outer office, and the door of this room thrown violently open, disclosed the ghost-like face, inflamed

with fury, of Miss Jean Calder, who, holding Lindsay's clerk at arm's length, with her long fingers clutched upon his shoulder, had thrown the door open with her disengaged hand, and was about to enter the room.

Involuntarily, Alexander Muir drew back his chair, and Martha started. Like a visitant from the dead, the old woman, with a great stride, entered among them. Her tall, angular frame tottered, and her head shook, half with rage and excitement, half with the natural palsied motion of her extreme age. She was dressed in a large woollen shawl, once bright tartan, now as dim in its complexion as it was thin in its texture, and a large bonnet, standing out stiffly like a fan round her ghost face, which was encircled under it by a stiff ruff of yellow lace. Miss Jean made one great step

forward, and seizing upon Alexander Muir, shook him till herself was so thoroughly shaken that she scarcely could stand.

“Did I no tell ye—did I no warn ye, Sandy Muir, that I would pit my fit yet on his turf, that thought I was auld, and wished me dead, and had his covetous e’e on my siller? I’m saying did I no tell ye? And I’ll tell ye what, strange folk,” said Miss Jean, turning round with a glittering smile of malice, “I’m glad the reprobate’s dead—that am I!—for now he’ll keep nae honest body out of their ain.”

Martha started from her seat with a violent passion—mingled of burning grief and fury—in her face. Her hand clenched, her form dilated—you would have thought her about to strike down at her feet the incarnate demon, whose laugh of shrill malicious triumph rang over Harry’s grave; and,

for an instant, a perfect tempest—an overwhelming storm, to whose rage everything would have been possible—possessed Martha, like another kindred demon. Then she suddenly sat down, and clasping her hands together, leaned them on her knee, drawing up her person, and stretching out her arms to their full length as if the pain were some relief to her; for years of endurance had not quenched the passionate, fiery nature out of Martha's soul.

“He's in the hands of God—he's entered the life where no man makes shipwreck!” said Uncle Sandy, rising up. “Bairns, have pity upon this miserable woman, who kens not the day that her soul may be required of her. Curse her not, Martha; curse her not. And woman, I say, blessed are the dead—blessed are the young graves—blessed is the very pestilence and sword, that pre-

serves innocent bairns from living to be evened with the like of you !”

And, with a visible tremble of indignation shaking his whole frame, the old man sat down, unwitting that the curse he had forbidden Martha to speak, was implied in his own denunciation.

“ Let them laugh that win,” said Miss Jean ; “ and the play’s no played out yet, Sandy Muir. Where’s my guid siller ?—and where’s a’ the books and papers I furnished to yon lawyer chield, to make out your prodigal’s claim ? Weel, he’s dead—he has nae claim noo—and I crave to ken wha’s the heir ?”

“ His son,” said Martha, distinctly.

“ His son !—wha’s his son ? He was naething but a bit callant himsel. Ay, Sandy, my man, ye thought little of my skill in folk’s lives ; ye thocht Jean Calder

would have thrissels growing ower her ain head, or ever there came a grey hair in Harry Muir's! What are ye saying till't noo, Sandy? No uncle to a laird noo—uncle to naething, but six feet of grass and a headstane! I saw him ance wi' his hair fleeing in the wind, and his laugh that ye could have heard it half a mile off, and me hirpling on my staff, wi' never ane looking ower their shouther at me. I kent then in my heart, that auld as I was I would see him dead!—and it's true this day. Lad, may I sit down? I've come for my siller."

Lindsay put a chair towards her silently, and she half fell into it, half voluntarily seated herself. Poor respectable Macalister stood aghast, afraid of her wrinkled face, and the wild gleam in her frosty eyes. Martha, pressing her foot upon the ground,

as if she crushed something under it, and clenching her hands together, till the pain of them mingled with the burning pain in her heart, bent down her head and kept silence; while Uncle Sandy, elevating himself with a simple indignant dignity, seemed about to speak several times, but for a sob which choked him, and which he would not have Miss Jean hear.

“I’ve come for my siller!” repeated Miss Jean, stamping her foot upon the ground, to give her words emphasis. “What do ye ca’ this woman? It’s Martha, is’t? Weel, there’s little about *her* for onybody to envie, if it binna her bombazine. Ye would gie a hantle for the yard o’ that now? I wonder ye had the heart—a’ off the prodigal callant’s estate, and cheating folk that he’s awn lawful siller to. And it’s no as if ye were a young lassie either, or ane to be set off wi’ the like

o' thae vanities. I wonder a woman come to your years doesna think shame !”

“Listen, Auntie Jean,” said Martha, suddenly raising herself and speaking quick, as if to keep the resolution which she had brought to this pitch: “There is nothing to be envied in me. I have neither youth, nor good looks, nor happiness—and never had! You may deal with me on equal terms: I am able to give you as much as you have hitherto got for this money of yours. I want it, and you want the income from it—give it to me if you choose: if you do not choose, withdraw it at once, without another word. This is all I have to say to you. I will be glad if you take it away, and make me free of the connexion of your name; but I will change no arrangement willingly. Now, take your choice; and you, Sir, do the same. This is all I have to say.”

And Martha turning her eyes from them, looked to Uncle Sandy, who kept his fixed upon Miss Jean, and was still painfully composing himself to answer her.

“No,” said the old woman with a malignant, feeble laugh, “there’s naething to envie in you. I was a different looking woman to you in my young days, Martha Muir; but there was never a well-far’d bit about you a’ your life, and a temper like the auld enemy. I wish you nae ill. I wadna gang out of my gate to do eithe gude or ill to the like of you, for I dinna think ye’re worth my pains; but mony’s the bonnie lad, and mony’s the bonnie lass I’ve seen hame to the mools, that took their divert off me—and mony a ane I’ll see yet, for a’ that sneck-drawing hypocrite says.

“Ay,” said Martha, “the comely, and the blythe, and the hopeful die away. The like

of us that it would be a charity to take out of this world, live all our days, and come to grey hairs. Ay, auntie, the bairns are dying night and morning—the like of us lives on!”

“But bless the bairns, Martha—bless them whom the Master was at pains to bless,” cried Uncle Sandy, his eyes shining through tears. “I am old, too, and have seen sorrow; but God preserve and bless the gladness of the bairns!”

“Ye’re but a bairn yourself, Sandy Muir,” said Miss Jean, casting upon him a half-angry, half-imbecile glance out of her wandering eyes; “and I’ve gien Mr. Macer a missive about your twa hunder pounds. What does the like o’ you want wi’ siller? and your grand house and garden, my bonnie man, and a’ the young, light-headed gilpies ye train up to vanity? We’ll just see how muckle the wives and the weans will mind

about you in Ayr, when ye're gaun frae door to door wi' a mealpock and a staff; but ye need never seek frae me."

The old man rose with some dignity: "Martha, my woman, this does not become you and me," said Uncle Sandy, "we that have grief and the hand of God upon us, are no more to suffer railing than to return it. These folk have heard what ye had to say, and you're no a person of two minds, or many words. Let us go back to our sorrowful house, and our bereaved bairns, with neither malice nor curse in our hearts, leaving the ill-will with them that it comes from. Ye can hear their answer, Martha, from the gentleman. Ye have said what ye had to say."

Almost mechanically Martha rose to obey him, and took the old man's arm. But after she had left her seat and taken a few steps towards the door, whither Uncle Sandy

hastened her with tremulous speed, she turned round—perhaps only to speak to Lindsay who followed them, perhaps to look again at the old miserable woman, who still was of her own blood, and had scarcely a nearer relative than herself in the whole world.

“I’ve come from Ayr on the tap o’ the coach, my lane,” said Miss Jean, suddenly relapsing, as she did sometimes, into the natural passive state of age, which forgot in an instant the emotions which had animated the poor exhausted skeleton frame. “If it hadna been a decent lad that paid the odds of the charge, and put me in the inside atween this and Falkirk, I’m sure I wad have been perished wi’ the cauld, and never ane of you offering a puir auld woman a morsel to keep her heart. I heard from Mr. Macer, in Stirling, there was to be a meeting here the day, and I thought my canniest plan was to take my fit in hand, and trust nane of thae

sliddry writers. But, man, micht ye no be mending the fire the time ye're glowering at me? the tane's as easy as the tither, and there's as mony coals yonder standing in the scoop as would fill my bunker, and haud me gaun half the year. Coals maun be cheap here away, and I wadna scruple to make a bleeze, if you're sure the lum's clean; but I aye keep a frugal fire at hame: I'm a very careful woman. Sandy, do ye ken ony place hereawa where an auld body could get a sma' cheap meal? I'm very moderate in my eating mysel, but travel appetizes even a frail person like me; and what was yon ye was saying about the siller?"

Lindsay repeated what Martha had said in a few words. Mr. Lindsay did not by any means admire this occupation of his office. But Miss Jean's eyes wandered to Martha, who still stood silently looking on, and holding her uncle's arm.

“She’s no muckle to look at,” said the old woman, bending her shrivelled face forward, “but I’ve heard the voice she speaks wi’ afore, and it’s no like a fremd voice. Canna ye tell me what ye said about the siller yoursel, instead of standing there like a stane figure? and sit down and be quiet, honest man, now ye have gotten on the coals.”

This was addressed to Macalister, who very humbly, and with a look of fright at Lindsay, had replenished the fire at Miss Jean’s command. He now obeyed her again, with instant submission, feeling himself a very small person, and altogether forgetful of his imaginary grandeur.

Martha repeated her former words, where she stood, holding the arm of Uncle Sandy—and Uncle Sandy, still perceptibly trembling, averted his head with a simple pride and dignity, and held Martha’s arm closely in his own, as if with an impulse of protection.

“As lang as ye gie me fifty pounds by the year, ye can keep the siller till I hear of mair for it,” said Miss Jean, at last; “but where ane favours ye, and does ye charity, ye might show a decent respect. Woman, there’s the like o’ you that never was weel-favoured nor yet young, nor had as guid a wit in your haille buik as I hae in my little finger; but ane bows to ye, and anither gies ye a haud o’ their arm, and a’ body civil, as if ye were something—when ye’re naething but a single woman, without a penny in your purse, and needing to work for your bread day by day. But never ane, if it binna whiles a stranger, like him that put me in the inside of the coach, says a guid-e’en or a guid-day to me; and when I’m useless wi’ my journey, it’s no apples and flagons to keep my heart, but fechtin’ and contentions that I never could bide—for a’ body turns on me.”

And the poor old woman mumbled and

sobbed, and put up a great dingy handkerchief to her eyes.

Uncle Sandy's offence was gone—he could not see a semblance of distress without an effort to relieve it.

“I'll take ye in a coach to a decent place, Miss Jean,” said Alexander Muir, “and bid them take care of ye, and see ye safe hame, and be at all the charges, if you'll just think upon your evil ways, and take tent to your ain life, and harm the young and the heedless nae mair.”

“He thinks I'm a witch, the auld haverel,” said Miss Jean, looking up with a harsh laugh; “but never you heed, Sandy, we'll gree; and ye can tell the folk to take me an inside place in the coach, and I'll take care mysel to see they settle for a' thing, and I'll gang away the morn; so ye can gie them the siller—or I'll take charge of it and pay them mysel—its a' the same to me.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

All men make faults, and even I in this ;
Authorizing thy trespass with compare,
Myself corrupting, salving thy amiss,
Excusing thy sins more than thy sins are.

SHAKSPERE.

AND Martha had to meet lesser creditors to whom Harry owed smaller amounts for trifles of his own wardrobe, of furniture, and other inconsiderable things. But the sum they came to altogether was far from inconsiderable. Uncle Sandy, who steadily attended and supported her, was grieved sometimes by the bitter and harsh passion with which she received the faintest word

which implied blame of Harry. In every other particular Martha appeared a chastened and sober woman; in this the fire and pride of her nature blazed with an unchecked fierceness which grieved the gentler spirit. Within himself there was something also which sprang up with instinctive haste to defend the memory of Harry; but Martha's nervous impatience of the most remote implied blame, and the headlong fiery passion with which she threw herself upon any one who attempted this, made the old man uneasy. And people who encountered Martha's anger did not know its strange inconsistency, nor could have believed how well she was aware of Harry's faults, or how in her heart she condemned them; but Martha had devoted her life to restore to Harry's memory the honour he had lost in his person, and whoso struck at him, struck at her very life.

They were walking home on their return—

for the carriage was already sold—and John, who had not yet got another place, carried their little travelling-bags behind them. It was a bright November day, not very cold, but clear and beautiful, and the sunshine lay calmly like a glory on the head of Demeyet, crowning him against his will, though even *he* bore the honour more meekly than in the dazzling days of summer. The air was so clear, that you could see the white houses clustering at his feet, and hear the voices of distant farm-yards on every side, miles away, making a continual sound over the country, which seemed to lie in a silent trance of listening; and from this little height which the road descends, you can see the blue smoke of Allenders curling over the bare trees, and make out that the sunshine glances upon some bright childish heads under the stripped walnut on the lawn. Uncle Sandy, looking towards it, prays gentle prayers in

his heart—prays to the God of the fatherless, the widow, the distressed—to Him who blessed the children in His arms, and wept with the sisters of the dead; and has his good heart lightened and comforted, knowing who it is to whom he has in faith committed the charge of these helpless ones; and the old man has a smile upon his face, and many a word of tender kindness in his heart, to comfort the “bairns” at home—for they are all bairns to him.

But other thoughts burn at the heart of Martha, as she walks onward by his side. Unawares and unconsciously her soul shudders at the sunshine—hates with fierce impatience the voices and cheerful hum of ordinary life, which grow audible as they approach Maidlin, and shrinks from returning home—home, where that one vacant place and absent voice, makes her heart desolate for ever. Through her bitter repinings, Miss

Jean's exultation passes with a ghastly terror, and Martha shivers to think that this unholy age may come upon her, and has her heart full of questionings almost impious. That this old woman, envious, degraded and miserable, should be spared in the earth to see many a hopeful head laid low ; that poor old Dragon, basking in the sunshine, should live on from day to day, and see the children die ; that she herself should remain, and Harry be taken away. Martha said, " Why ? why ? " and groaned within herself, and was burdened, hating the very light, and shrinking with burning impatience from the respectful looks and half-spoken sympathies of these cottar women at Maidlin Cross. She could not accept sympathy ; she turned away with loathing from all except those who immediately shared her sorrow ; and even them she bore with sometimes painfully—for who could understand *her* grief ?

A blasting fiery unblessed grief burning her heart like a tempest—and a sullen gloom came over Martha's face as she averted her head, and walked on steadily, closing her ears to the pleasant natural sounds which seemed to crowd upon her with so much greater distinctness than usual, that they chafed her disturbed mind into very fury. "The spirit of the Lord left Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubled him." It was so with Martha now.

Little Mary Paxton has been learning to-day to make a curtsy—for she is to go to school for the first time to-morrow; and her big sister, Mysie, says the young ladies curtsy when they enter the school-room at Blaelodge. Mary has blue eyes, little ruddy lips, always parted by two small white teeth, which appear between them; and cheeks, which the sun has ripened, according to his pleasure, all the summer through. In her

little woollen frock and clean blue pinafore, Mary has been practising her new acquirement at the Cross. She is only four years old, and has a licence which the elder children have not ; so little Mary rises up from the step of the Cross on which she has just seated herself for a rest, and coming forward with her small steps, pauses suddenly on the road before Martha, folds her little bare hands on her breast, and looking up with the sweet frank childish face, and the two small teeth fully revealed by her smile of innocent satisfaction, makes her little curtsy to the lady, and stands still to be approved with the confidence of her guileless years.

Upon Martha's oppressed heart this falls like a blow under which she staggers, scarcely knowing for the moment from whence the shock comes. Suddenly standing still, and grasping at the old man's arm to support herself, she looks at the child—the child

who lifts up her sweet little simple face, with its smiling parted lips and sunny eyes, and look of perfect trust and innocence. Little Mary wits not that there are in the world such despairs and bitternesses as blind the very heart in Martha's breast ; and Martha's breast heaves with a great sob as this sudden stroke falls upon her. The old woman's haggard face, with its ghostly triumph, disappears from her mind—herself, heavy with the grief, which is greater than every other, passes away from her relieved sight. Standing still in perfect silence, a sudden burst of natural emotion which sweeps away all evil things before it, falls upon her as from the skies—a strong revulsion, like the witchèd mariner :

“ O happy living things ! no tongue
Their beauty might declare.
A spring of love gushed from my heart,
And I blessed them unaware :
Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
And I blessed them unawâre.”

The tears came in floods irrestrainable to Martha's eyes, and with another long sob, she snatched up the child in her arms, kissed its little innocent, surprised face, and covering her own with her veil, hurried away. But she had blessed them unaware—blessed all God's creatures out of a full heart, acquiescing in that mysterious love which apportions all things; and the natural sounds and sights were gall to her no longer, and the burden fell from her neck. All the way home she hid her tears, and restrained the sound of her weeping so far as possible; but Uncle Sandy saw and wondered, that Martha was indeed weeping like a child.

Two days after, Uncle Sandy with his family went to Ayr. They were to stay a month, Martha said, and Agnes and Rose acquiesced very quietly. What did it matter where these pensive, sorrowful days were spent? But Agnes went away, occupied with

many little necessary cares for her own delicate health, and for the children, who now had no maid to attend them; and Rose, charged with the care of all the little party, had countless small solitudes and responsibilities to interest her, and could even sometimes escape with a sigh into her own dream-country, and be charmed into a grateful repose; while Lettie and Katie Calder, could scarcely repress a certain childish excitement in prospect of the journey, and were in their full enthusiasm about new stitches, and the work they were to do in Ayr to help Martha. All had some such new-awakened interest to relieve the strain of constant grief, as human creatures mercifully find when God lays upon them the heaviest of His chastisements. But they went away, and left Martha with her one maid Mysie, and the poor old Dragon, in a house peopled with continual reminders of Harry—alone.

And as she lay upon her bed awake, through these gloomy, solitary nights, and dreamed of footsteps on the stair, and mysterious sighings through her silent room, the strong heart of Martha trembled. What if the spirit hovering by her, struggled in those inarticulate breathings to communicate something to the dull human sense, which cannot hear the delicate voices out of the unseen country? What if Harry—the true Harry—not him they laid under the sod in the churchyard of Maidlin—was straining his grander spiritual faculties by her side, to attain to the old mortal voice which only she could hear, and tell her what mercy God had communicated to his soul, and where its dwelling was? And Martha held her breath and listened, and with a throb of deeper grief was sensible of this thrill of fear which reminded her how great a gulf and separation lay now between her and the dead—a gulf

before which the human spirit fainted, refusing to front the forbidden mystery which yet its restless, curious thoughts assail on every side. But in the broad daylight many a time there seemed to Martha an eye upon her which benumbed her like a spell—a conscious presence going with her as she went and came, sitting silent by her side, fixing upon her constantly this fascinating eye.

Meanwhile everything extraneous was cleared away from their now simple and plain establishment. John was gone—and Mr. Buchanan's money lodged in the Stirling Bank restored credit and respectability to the steady and continuous care which began to rule over Harry's fields. At Martha's years there is difficulty in learning an altogether new occupation, and this was of itself distasteful and *outré* to a woman; but sometimes, though every one respected her presence, it happened that she heard indif-

ferent people speak of "poor Allenders," of the "warning" of his death as Gilbert called it, or of the shipwreck of his life. And this, which brought the burning blood to Martha's face, inspired her with power to overcome every obstacle. Harry—who in her heart needed no name—he had been too long the acknowledged centre there—it was to Martha the bitterest pain to speak of him to the uninterested and careless who, presuming on her mention of him, plied her with allusions to her brother, till her impatient sorrow could have turned upon them, and struck them down even with a blow. But even this Martha schooled herself to bear—schooled herself to tell the men with whom her necessary business brought her into contact, that this was Harry's will and that his intention; that he had proposed this work, and that charity, which she was bound to carry out, and would. Gradually these people came to look

upon him with a visionary reverence—this spirit of the dead whose intentions lived in a will so strong and unvarying; and his own weakness passed away, and was forgotten, in the strength which placed itself, like a monument, upon his grave.

CHAPTER XIX.

Here is no change but such as comes in me.

OLD PLAY.

MAGGIE MCGILLIVRAY clips no longer in the wintry sunshine at her mother's door. Poor little foolish girl, she has married a cotton-spinner, and at eighteen has a baby, and many cares upon the head which used to stoop under the light as she sang the "Lea Rig," and clipped at her web. And Bessie McGillivray, who has succeeded Maggie, has no such heart for either the work or the song, but drawls out the one dismally, and idles about the other, and thinks it would be a

great relief to marry a cotton-spinner too, and have no more webs to clip—a fate which she will accomplish one of these days. And Bessie is “cauldrife,” as her mother says, and prefers sitting at the fireside to-day, though the sunshine comes down mellow and warm through the November fog; so that the scene from Mrs. Rodger’s parlour window loses one of its most pleasant features, when there is nothing to look to opposite, but the idle light lying on the stones at Peter McGillivray’s door.

Mrs. McGarvie’s Tiger, still tawny and truculent, winks in the sun, as he sits upon the pavement, confronting it with his fierce red eyes. But Mrs. McGarvie’s red-haired Rob has gone to Port Philip to make his fortune in the bush, and pretty little Helen has undergone the universal destiny, and is married. There is change everywhere without—new names on the Port Dundas Road—

new houses springing up about its adjacent streets; but Mrs. Rodger's parlour, where Agnes and Rose, and Uncle Sandy, with the children, are now assembled, though a long succession of tenants have passed through it since they left it, remains still the same.

And still the same is gaunt Mrs. Rodger in her widow's cap—genteel and grim, terrible to taxgatherers, and innocent men of gas and water; and Miss Rodger, care-worn, faded and proud; and the prim Miss Jeanie. But “Johnnie,” in his chimney corner, has begun to be moved to better things than this perpetual idleness; and though he has not reached so far as to overcome himself, and his false and unwholesome shame, he is approaching to this better state; and a great clumsy good-natured lodger pays persevering court to Miss Aggie. The hoyden is decidedly reluctant, and resists and rejects him stoutly—but it is no use, for this is her fate.

And Agnes with the bright hair all hidden under her widow's cap, sits down by the window with her baby in her lap, and bending over it, attending to its wants, lets her tears fall silently upon its frock, and on the little round arms which stretch up to her, till a violent paroxysm comes upon her, and she has to leave the infant to Rose, and steal away into the inner room "to compose herself," as she says—in reality to sob and weep her strength away, and be exhausted into composure. Poor little unconscious child, upon whom this heavy baptism falls! for now, one by one, over the little hands with which he strokes her cheek, steal the tears of Rose. It was unwise of them to come here; the place is too full of memories.

By a way which Violet has often clambered up in the summer nights long ago, it is possible to reach the high field which, closely bordering upon Mrs. Rodger's house, is level

with the bed-room windows. Here in the dusk, when the night cold has scarcely set in, and one star trembles in the misty sky, strays Lettie's friend, Mr. John, pondering over many things; and here comes little thoughtful Lettie, to search the old corners, where she used to find them, for one remaining gowan, and keep it as a memorial of this place which is like home. From the edge of the field you can look sheer down upon the road with its din and constant population, and upon the lights gleaming scantily in those little nooks of streets about the Cowcaddens, where Violet knows every shop. From the other end of the field, close upon the dangerous brink where it makes abrupt and precipitous descent into a great quarry, comes the sound of those distinct measured strokes, broken by continual exclamations and laughter, with which two stout servants beat a carpet. The dust is out of it long ago, but still their rods

resound in quick time on either side, and their voices chime in unison; and now they trail it over the dark fragrant grass, and stealing to the edge call to the passengers below, who start and look around in amazement, and would not discover whence the voice comes, but for the following laugh, which reveals the secret. And by and bye a "lad" or two, and some passing mill girls, scramble up the broken ascent which communicates with the road; and often will the mistress look from her door in dismay, and the master call from the window, before Janet and Betsy lift their carpet from the grass, and recollect that it is "a' the hours of the nicht," and that there are a hundred things to do when they return.

But Lettie puts her hand softly into Mr. John's hand, and begins to answer, with many tears, his questions about Harry; and tells him how Martha is to do everything

that Harry wanted to be done, and that they are all to work at the "opening," and Katie Calder is to stay at Allenders; but neither of them are to go to school at Blaelodge any more. Violet does not quite know what makes her so confidential, and has a compunction even while she speaks, and thinks Martha would not be pleased—but yet she speaks on.

"And we're all to be busy and work at the opening; for Martha says we need not think shame," said Lettie; "and Katie and me will be able to help to keep the house, Mr. John; and Rose says it's better to work than be idle, and it keeps away ill thoughts; but I like best to think it's lane, without working, or to read books—only I've read all the books in Allenders, and I'm no to be idle any more."

"You see I'm aye idle yet, Lettie," said John.

“Oh yes; but then you never need—and you’ve aye been,” said Lettie, hastily; for to Lettie Mr. John was an institution, and his idleness was part of himself—a thing quite beyond discussion, and unchangeable.

But a burning blush came over John Rodger’s face, in the darkness, and Lettie saw instinctively that his feelings were wounded. This brought upon her a strange embarrassment; and while anxiously casting about for something to say, which should change this painful subject, she fell into a shy silence—which was only broken at last by Mr. John himself.

“No, Lettie, I have not been always idle, and I *have* need,” said the roused man; “and when I hear a little thing like you speaking about work, and helping to keep a house, it makes me think shame of myself, Lettie. You and your sisters, that might be

so different, working for your bread—and me this way !”

“ Ay, but Miss Jeanie and Miss Aggie work more than we do,” said Lettie, simply.

For always it is the angel from heaven, miraculous and strange, and not the daily revelations of Moses and the prophets, which these bewitched natures think will rouse them. Miss Jeanie and Miss Aggie, with all their little vanities, had hearts sincere in this point, and full of gracious unconscious humility. *They* never reminded the idler, that they worked for him ; never thought that they were pinched and restrained, in the ostentations they held so dear, because “ Johnnie” hung a burden on their hands ; never speculated, indeed, on the question at all, nor dreamed of giving reasons to themselves for the spontaneous natural impulse, which made this self-sacrifice unawares. And he himself never realized it either ; but he was struck

with the devotion of Martha and her household. This, unusual, strange—a thing he did not see every day—moved him; the other had scarcely occurred to him when Lettie spoke.

They left Glasgow the next day; for neither Agnes nor Rose could bear to remain in this house, so familiar to them of old; and they did not return to Mrs. Rodger's on their way home; but when Miss Aggie married the lumbering lodger, and came to be settled on the other side of the Firth, at Alloa, and received her sister as a visitor, Miss Jeanie made a pilgrimage to Allenders, and told them, with tears in her eyes, that Johnnie, now a clerk with a Port Dundas merchant, had said to her, that *she* should never want while he had anything, and had given her money to buy the expensive unsuitable upper garment she wore. Poor Miss Jeanie, with her vanities and simplicities, never discovered that he owed *her* gratitude;

but for these words of kindness she was tearfully grateful to him.

The month at Ayr passed very quietly. In this winter weather Uncle Sandy's little company of workers could no longer visit the leafless garden; and though there was sometimes a great fire made in the kitchen, and a special lamp lighted for them, yet their own fireside, the old man thought, was the most suitable place for them now. So the family were almost perfectly alone; left to compose themselves into those quiet days which were but the beginning of a subdued and chastened life. And Uncle Sandy did for them now, what Martha was wont to do through the terrible time which preceded Harry's death. He read to them sometimes;—sometimes he was himself their book and reader; and from his long experience, the young hearts, fainting under this great sorrow, learned how many trials life can live through, and were unwill-

lingly persuaded that the present affliction would not kill them, as they sometimes hoped it might ; but must lighten, perhaps must pass away. But they clung the closer to their sorrow, and defied the very chance of returning gladness ; and Agnes cut away the curls of her bright hair, and said she would wear this widow's cap her whole life through ; and Rose grew sick at sounds of laughter, and believed she would never smile again.

CHAPTER XX.

A gloomy piece this morning with it brings ;
The sun for sorrow will not show his head.

ROMEO AND JULIE T.

It was December, cold and dreary, when the family returned to Allenders. Their very return was a renewal of the first sorrow to both themselves and Martha. They came, and Harry was not there to welcome them ; they had never before felt so bitterly his absent place ; they came, but Harry came not with them—and Martha's very voice of welcome was choked with her anguish for the dead.

There had been much discussion with

Uncle Sandy, whom they were all anxious to induce to return to Allenders, and remain with them there. The old man did not consent. Reluctant as he was to be separated from them now, his own old house and neighbourhood were parts of his gentle nature. He could not leave them—could not relinquish his universal charge of “the bairns,” nor deprive his young embroiderers of the air and sunshine, to which no one else might think of admitting them. So Uncle Sandy brought his charge to Glasgow, and bade them an affectionate farewell, promising a yearly visit to Allenders; but he could not give up his little solitary home.

They settled immediately into the monotonous and still order of their future life. Martha's room, where there were few things to suggest painful remembrances, they made a little work-room; and here Agnes and Rose sat by the window at their work, and

Lettie and her little companion learned their lessons, and laboured with varying industry—now enthusiastic—now slack and languid, at the “opening,” in which they were soon skilled. And Martha, returning wearied from business out of doors, or in the library, came up here to take off her outer wrappings, and begin to the other labour which called for her. And Lettie on the carpet, and Katie on her little stool, kept up a running conversation, which sometimes gave a passing moment of amusement to the sadder elder hearts; and little Harry played joyously, beguiling his sad young mother into momentary smiles; and the baby began to totter on his little feet, and make daring journeys from the arms of Martha into his mother’s; and gradually there grew to be a certain pensive pleasure in their evening walk, and they roused themselves to open the window, when the little Leith steamer

shot past under the trees; and every day filled itself with its own world of duty, and passed on—slowly, it is true—but less drearily than at the first.

No one grudged now, nor mixed ill-feeling in the emulation with which neighbouring agriculturists watched the fields of Allenders. Something of fear and solemn awe startled the very labourers in these fields when Martha passed them, assiduous and diligent in all the work she set herself to do. They were not afraid of *her*—she did not impress them with more than the respect which they gave willingly as her right; but there was something solemn in a representative of the dead—a person living, as it seemed, but to carry out the thoughts and wishes of another who had passed away. The stir and thrill of renewed and increased industry came again upon Maidlin Cross. It was true they had no model

cottages yet, but the land lay marked out on the other side of the cross, where Harry's new houses were to be; and Armstrong thought Miss Allenders had answered him almost fiercely, when he proposed to plough this land, and enclose it in a neighbouring field. No—it was Harry's will those houses should be built, and built they must be, when justice and right permitted; and it soon came to be known in Maidlin, where Harry in his careless good-humour had promised anything without bestowing it, that it needed but a hint of this to Martha to secure the favour. And the works went on steadily and prosperously, and with a wise boldness Martha drew upon Mr. Buchanan's thousand pounds. Armstrong, no longer driven to the sad alternative of doing nothing, or acting on his own responsibility, became emboldened, and was no longer afraid to be now and then respon-

sible; and Allender Mains became a great farm-steading, and began to send off droves to Stirling market, and Falkirk tryste, and was managed as the cautious Armstrong never could have managed it, had all this gainful risk and expenditure been incurred for himself.

And on the Sabbath days when they leave the church—Agnes in her widow's weeds leaning on Martha's arm, and Rose leading the children—they turn aside to a little space railed off from the wall, where moulders the mossed gravestone of the old Laird of Allenders, and where the gowans and forget-me-nots grow sweetly under the spring sunshine upon Harry's breast. His name is on a tablet of white marble on the wall—his name and age—nothing more. They go there silently—almost as it seems involuntarily—towards their grave, and stand in silence by the railing, visiting the dead, but saying

nothing to each other; and after a little while, as silently as they came, the family go away. Nor do they ever allude to this visit, though the custom is never broken through—it is something sacred, a family solemnity, a thing to be done in silence.

And the ladies of Nettlehaugh and Foggo do not disdain now to call on Mrs. and Miss Allenders, nor even Miss Dunlop, though she stands upon her dignity, and has heard a secret whisper that these hands she condescends to shake, work at her collars and handkerchiefs, and earn bread by their labour. But at the end of the dining-room beside Cuthbert's window, some preparations were begun long ago for the erection of that conservatory which Miss Dunlop recommended to Harry—and to her mother's consternation, Miss Dunlop makes cool inquiries about it, and presumes they do not intend to carry it out now. Martha answers with a

blank gravity which she has learned to assume, to cover the pang with which she mentions his name, that other more important wishes of Harry's have to be carried out before she can come to this; but that what he intended shall be done without fail, and that it only waits a suitable time. "They say that Heaven loves those that die young," says Martha, with a grave simplicity, "yet the dead who die in their youth leave many a hope and project unfulfilled—and few have been so full of projects, and had so little time to work them out."

This is all—but Miss Dunlop, bewildered and conscience-stricken, dares scarcely speak again of the fickle weakness of poor Allenders, and all his vain, magnificent aspirations, and efforts to be great. She has a vague impression that she has blundered in her hasty estimate of poor Harry, and that it was indeed because his sun went down at noon

that none of his great intentions ripened into success—for no one ventures to prophesy failure to Harry's purposes now.

And Cuthbert comes when he can spare a day—comes to bring them news of the far-away world whose vexed and troubled murmurs they never hear, and to receive with affectionate sympathy, all they tell him of their own plans and exertions. Cuthbert is admitted to the work-room, and takes out Agnes and Rose to their nightly walk, upon which Martha, who, herself actively employed, has no need of this, insists; and Agnes leans upon him as on a good and gentle brother; and there comes a strange ease and repose to Rose's heart as she walks shyly by his side in the twilight, saying little, but preserving with a singular tenacity of recollection everything the others say. And Rose, waking sometimes now to her old personal grief—a thing which seems dead, distant and selfish,

under the shadow of this present sorrow—recollects that Martha's "capital" is from Mr. Buchanan — that Cuthbert is his favourite nephew, and that there may be truth yet in the story which fell like a stone upon her heart. But Rose only speculates unawares upon these individual anxieties—they seem to her guilty, and she is ashamed to harbour them—yet still unconsciously she looks for Cuthbert's coming, and when he comes grows abstracted and silent, and looks like a shy, incompetent girl, instead of the fair, sweet-hearted woman into whose fuller form and maturity her youth develops day by day. Yet Cuthbert's eyes are witched and charmed, and he has strangely correct understanding of every shy, half-broken word she says ; and Rose would start, and wonder, and scarcely believe, in her timid unconscious humility, could she see how these broken words remain in Cuthbert's heart.

CHAPTER XXI.

I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upward

KING LEAR.

“ I WAS born this day fourscore and five years ago,” said Dragon. “ It’s a great age, bairns, and what few folk live to see; and for every appearance that’s visible to me, I may live ither ten, Missie, and never ane be a prin the waur. I would like grand mysel to make out the hunder years, and it would be a credit to the place, and to a’ belonging till’t; and naebody wishes ill to me

nor envies me for my lang life. Just you look at that arm, Missie ; it's a strong arm for a man o' eighty-five."

And Dragon stretched out his long thin arm, and snapt the curved brown fingers—poor old Dragon ! Not a child in Maidlin Cross but could have overcome the decayed power which once had knit those loose joints, and made them a strong man's arm ; but Dragon waved it in the air exultingly, and was proud of his age and strength, and repeated again with earnestness : " But I would like grand to make out the hunder year."

Lettie, now a tall girl of fifteen, stood by Dragon's stair, arranging flowers, a great number of which lay before her on one of the steps. They were all wild flowers, of faint soft colour and sweet odours, and Lettie was blending hawthorn and primroses, violets and cowslips, with green sprigs of the sweetbriar, and here and there an early

half-opened wild rose—blending them with the greatest care and devotion; while Katie Calder, developed into a stout little comely woman-like figure, stood by, looking on with half contempt; for Katie already had made a superb bouquet of garden flowers, and was carrying it reverentially in her apron.

“It’s five years this day since Mr. Hairy came first to Allenders,” continued the old man, “and it’s mair than three since they laid him in his grave. The like o’ him—a young lad! and just to look at the like o’ me!”

“But it was God’s pleasure, Dragon,” said Lettie, pausing in her occupation, while the shadow which stole over her face bore witness that Harry’s memory had not passed away even from her girl’s heart.

“Ay, Missie,” said the old man vacantly; “do ye think the spirit gaed willingly away? I’ve thought upon that mony a time when

I was able to daunder up bye to the road, and see the farm; and it's my belief that Mr. Hairy will never get right rest till a's done of the guid he wanted to do, and a's undone o' the ill he did—that's my belief. I think myself he canna get lying quiet in his grave for minding of the work he left to do; and if there was ane here skilled to discern spirits, he might be kent in the fields. What makes the lady sae constant at it, think ye, night and morning, putting to her ain hand to make the issue speedier, if it's no that she kens about him that's aye waiting, waiting, and never can enter into his rest."

Lettie let her flowers fall, and looked away with a mysterious glance into the dark shade of the trees; for the vague awe of poetic superstition was strong upon Lettie still.

"Dragon," she said in a very low voice,

“I used to think I heard Harry speak, crying on me, and his footstep in his own room, and on the stair; and all the rest thought that too, for I have seen them start and listen many a time, thinking it was Harry. Do ye think it could be true? Do ye think, Dragon, it could be Harry? for I came to think it was just because he was aye in our mind that we fancied every sound was him.”

“Ane can never answer for the dead,” said the poor old Dragon. “Ane kens when a living person speaks, for ye can aye pit out your hand and touch them, and see that they’re by your side; but I pit out my hand here, Missie—it’s a’ clear air to me—but for aught I ken, an angel in white raiment may be standing on my stair-head, and anither within my door, laying a mark in the Book yonder

that I may open it the night at ae special verse, and read that and nae ither. How is the like o' me to ken? And you'll no tell me that Mr. Hairy winna stand by the bride the morn, and be the first voice to wish her joy, though we may ne'er hear what he says."

With a slight tremble, Violet, putting away her flowers, leaned upon the step, and looked again into the darkening shadow of the trees; and Lettie tried to think, and to pray in her simplicity that her eyes might be opened to discern the spirits, and that she might see Harry, if he were here. But again the mortal shrank from the visible immortality, and Lettie covered her eyes with a thrill of visionary fear.

"Dragon, look at Lettie's flowers," said Katie Calder; "she wants to put them on the table, where the minister's to stand, in-

stead of all the grand ones out of Lady Dunlop's; and I never saw such grand flowers as Lady Dunlop's, Dragon."

"The dew never falls on *them*," said Lettie, starting to return to her occupation; "and if you were in the room in the dark, you would never know they were there; but I gathered this by the Lady's Well, and this was growing at the foot of the stone where Lady Violet sat, and the brier and the hawthorn out of that grand hedge, Dragon, where *a'* the flowers are; and if I put them on the table in the dark, the wee fairy that Dragon kens, will tell the whole house they're there; but Lady Dunlop's have no breath—and mine are far liker Rose."

As Lettie speaks, some one puts a hand over her shoulder, and lifting her flowers, raises them up very close to a glowing radiant face; and Dragon, hastily getting up from the easy-chair on his stair-head, jerks his

dangling right arm upward towards the brim of the low rusty old hat, which he wears always. It is only persons of great distinction whom Dragon so far honours, and Dragon has forgotten "yon birkie," in his excited glee about the approaching wedding, and his respect for the "groom."

"Very right, Lettie," said the bridegroom, with a little laugh which has a tremble in it; "they are far liker Rose. And will you be able to come to the gate to-morrow, Dragon, and see me carry the flower of Allenders away?"

"But ye see, my man," said Dragon, eagerly, shuffling about his little platform, as he looked down on Cuthbert, "I never had her about me or among my hands, when she was a little bairn; and if it was either Missie there, or the ither ane, I would have a greater miss; for I've gotten into a way o' telling them stories, and gieing a word of

advice to the bit things, and training them the way they should go; so they're turned just like bairns o' my ain. But I wish Miss Rose and you muckle joy, and increase and prosperity, and that ye may learn godly behaviour, and be douce heads of a family; and that's the warst wish that's in my head, though you *are* taking ane of the family away, and I never was married mysel."

And Cuthbert, responding with another joyous laugh, shook hands with Dragon, after a manner somewhat exhausting to the loose arm, of whose strength the old man had boasted, and immediately went away to the waterside, to take a meditative walk along its banks, and smile at himself for his own exuberant boyish joy. Serious and solemn had been many of the past occasions on which he had visited Allenders; and now, as the fulfilment of all his old anticipations approached so certainly, so close

at hand, Cuthbert's moved heart turned to Harry—poor Harry! whose very name had a charm in it of mournful devotion and love!

The sun shone in next morning gaily to the rooms of Allenders, now suddenly awakened as out of a three years' sleep; and Agnes curls her bright hair, and lets the sunshine glow upon it as she winds it round her fingers, and with a sigh, lays away the widow's cap, which would not be suitable, she thinks, on Rose's wedding-day; but the sigh is a long-drawn breath of relief—and with an innocent satisfaction, Agnes, blooming and youthful still, sees her pretty curls fall again upon her cheek, and puts on her new white gown. It is a pleasant sensation, and her heart rises unawares, though this other sigh parts her lips. Poor Harry! his little wife will think of him to-day!

Think and weep, but only with a serene

and gentle melancholy ; for the young joyous nature has long been rising ; and Agnes, though she never can forget, laments no longer with the reality of present grief. It is no longer present—it is past, and only exists in remembrance ; and Agnes is involuntarily glad, and will wear her widow's cap no more.

And Martha is dressing little Harry, who will not be quiet in her hands for two minutes at a time, but dances about with a perpetual elasticity, which much retards his toilet. There are smiles on Martha's face—grave, quiet smiles—for she too has been thinking, with a few tears this morning, that Harry will be at the bride's side, to join in the blessing with which she sends her other child away.

And Rose, in her own chamber, in a misty and bewildered confusion, seeing nothing distinctly either before or behind her, turns back at last to that one solemn fact,

which never changes, and remembers Harry—remembers Harry, and weeps, out of a free heart which carries no burden into the unknown future, some sweet pensive tears for him and for the home she is to leave to-day; and so sits down in her bewilderment to wait for Martha's summons, calling her to meet the great hour whose shadow lies between her and the skies.

And Lettie's flowers are on the table, breathing sweet, hopeful odours over the bridegroom and the bride. And Lettie, absorbed and silent, listens with a beating heart for some sign that Harry is here, and starts with a thrill of recognition when her heart imagines a passing sigh. Poor Harry! if he is not permitted to stand unseen among them, and witness this solemnity, he is present in their hearts.

CHAPTER XXII.

Behold I see the haven now at hand
To which I mean my wearie course to bend.
Vere the maine shete, and beare up with the land,
The which afar is fairly to be kend,
And seemeth safe from storms that may offend.

FAERY QUEEN.

AGNES, with her relieved and lightened spirits, goes cheerfully about her domestic business now, and has learned to drive the little old gig, and sometimes ventures as far as Stirling to make a purchase, and begins to grow a little less afraid of spending money. For some time now, Agnes has given up the "opening"—given it up at Martha's special desire, and with very little reluctance, and no one does "opening" now

at Allenders, except sometimes Martha herself, in her own room, when she is alone. These three years have paid Miss Jean's thousand pounds, and one of Macalister's four, and Mr. Macalister is very happy to leave the rest with Miss Allenders, who, when her fourth harvest comes, has promised to herself to pay Mr. Buchanan. For assiduous work, and Martha's almost stern economy, have done wonders in these years ; and the bold Armstrong boasts of his crops, and his cattle now, and is sometimes almost inclined to weep with Alexander, that there is no more unfruitful land to subjugate and reclaim.

But before her fourth harvest time, Martha has intimated to Sir John Dunlop's factor that it was her brother's intention to make an offer for the little farm of Oatlands, now again tenantless, and Armstrong does not long weep over his fully attained suc-

cess ; though Oatlands has little reformation to do, compared with Allender Mains. And Harry's model houses are rising at Maidlin Cross ; sagacious people shake their heads, and say Miss Allenders is going too far, and is not prudent. She is not prudent, it is very true—she ventures to the very edge and utmost extent of lawful limits—but she has never ventured beyond that yet, nor ever failed.

And Harry's name and remembrance lives—strangely exists and acts in the country in which Harry himself was little more than a subject for gossip. To hear him spoken of now, you would rather think of some mysterious unseen person, carrying on a great work by means of agents, that his chosen privacy and retirement may be kept sacred, than of one dead to all the business and labour of this world ; and there is a certain mystery and awe about the very house where Harry's

intentions reign supreme, to be considered before everything else. So strong is this feeling, that sometimes an ignorant mind conceives the idea that he lives there yet in perpetual secrecy, and by and bye will re-appear to reap the fruit of all these labours; and Geordie Paxton shakes his head solemnly, and tells his neighbours what the "auld man" says—that Allenders cannot rest in his grave till this work he began is accomplished; and people speak of Harry as an active, existing spirit—never as the dead.

It is more than a year now since Rose's marriage, and not far from five since Harry's death, and there is a full family circle round the drawing-room fireside, where Mrs. Charteris has been administering a lively little sermon to Lettie about the extravagance of destroying certain strips of French cambric; ("It would have cost five-and-twenty shillings a yard in my young days," says the old lady),

with which Lettie has been devising some piece of ornamental work for the adornment of Agnes. But Lettie's execution never comes up to her ideal, and the cambric is destroyed for ever; though Katie Calder, looking on, has made one or two suggestions which might have saved it.

"For you see, my dear, this is *waste*," said Mrs. Charteris; "and ye should have tried it on paper first, before you touched the cambric."

"So I did," said Lettie, nervously; "but it went all wrong."

And Rose smiles at the childish answer; and Mrs. Charteris bids Violet sit erect, and keep up her head. Agnes is preparing tea at the table. Martha, with little Sandy kneeling on the rug before her, playing with a box of toys which he places in her lap, sits quietly without her work, in honour of the family party; and Uncle Sandy is telling Katie

Calder all kinds of news about her companions in Ayr.

Why is Lettie nervous? Cuthbert at the table is looking over a new magazine, which has just been brought in from Stirling with a supply of other books ordered by their good brother; and constant longing glances to this magazine have had some share in the destruction of Lettie's cambric. But Lettie is sixteen now, and Agnes thinks she should not be such a child.

“Here is something for you,” says Cuthbert, suddenly. “Listen, we have got a poet among us. I will read you the ballad of the ‘Lady's Well.’”

“She sat in her window like a dream,
She moved not eye nor hand;
Her heart was blind to the white moonbeam,
And she saw not the early morning gleam
Over the dewy land;
Nor wist she of aught but a tale of wrong,
That rang in her ears the dim day long.

“ Her hair was like gold upon her head,
 But the snow has fallen there ;
And the blush of life from her face has fled,
And her heart is dumb, and tranced, and dead,
 Yet wanders everywhere—
Like a ghost through the restless night,
Wanders on in its own despight.

“ But hither there comes a long-drawn sigh—
A thrill to her form, a light to her eye :
Only a sigh on the wind, I wiss ;
Keep us and guard us from sounds like this !
For she knew in the breath, for a mystic token,
The words of the rede, by that graybeard spoken.

“ The bridal robes are glistening fair
 In the gray eventide,
Her veil upon her golden hair,
 And so goes forth the bride—
Who went before to guide astray
All wayfarers from this way ;
Whose the voice that led her hence,
How that graybeard came, and whence ;
Known were these to her alone,
And she told the tale to none.

“ The fountain springs out of the earth,
 Nor tells what there it sees ;
And the wind with a cry, ’twixt grief and mirth,
 Alights among the trees.

She sat her down upon the stone,
Her white robes trailed o'er the cold green turf,
Her foot pressed on the dreary earth,
Alone, alone, alone.

Not an ear to hear, not a voice to tell,
How the lady passed from the Lady's Well.

“The lady sat by the Lady's Well.

When the night fell dark and gray ;
But the morning sun shone in the dell,
And she had passed away.

And no man knew on the coming morrow
Aught but the tale of an unknown sorrow ;
And nought but the fountain's silver sound,
And the green leaves closing in around,
And a great silence night and day,
Mourned for her vanishing away.

“But peace to thee, Ladie, lost and gone !

And calm be thy mystic rest.
Whether thou dwellest here unknown,
Or liest with many a kindred one,
In the great mother's breast ;
The woe of thy curse has come and fled,
Peace and sweet honour to our dead !”

But Lettie, growing red and pale, dropping
the paper pattern which Mrs. Charteris has
cut for her, and casting sidelong, furtive

glances round upon them all from under her drooped eyelids, trembles nervously, and can scarcely keep her seat. When Cuthbert comes to the end there is a momentary silence, and Martha looks with wonder on her little sister, and Agnes exclaims in praise of the ballad, and wonders who can possibly know the story so well. Then follows a very free discussion on the subject, and some criticism from Cuthbert; and then Martha suddenly asks: "It is your story, Lettie, and you don't often show so little interest. How do you like it? Tell us."

"I—I canna tell," said Lettie, letting all her bits of cambric fall, and drooping her face, and returning unconsciously to her childish tongue; "for—it was me that wrote it, Martha."

And Lettie slid down off her chair to the carpet, and concealed the coming tears, and the agitated troubled pleasure, which did not quite realize yet whether this was pain or joy, on Martha's knee.

Poor Lettie! many an hour has she

dreamed by the Lady's Well—dreamed out grand histories for “us all,” or grander still

“ —— Resolved

To frame she knows not what excelling thing
And win she knows not what sublime reward
Of praise and honour——”

But just now the sudden exultation bewilders Lettie; and there is nothing she is so much inclined to do as to run away to her room in the dark, and cry. It would be a great relief.

But the confession falls like lightning upon all the rest. Cuthbert, with a burning face, thinks his own criticism the most stupid in the world. Rose laughs aloud, with a pleasure which finds no other expression so suitable. Agnes, quite startled and astonished, can do nothing but look at the bowed head, which just now she too had reproved for stooping. And Mrs. Charteris holds up her hands in astonishment, and Katie claps hers, and says that she kent all the time.

But Martha, with a great flush upon her face, holds Lettie's wet cheeks in her hands, and bends down over her, but never says a word. Children's unpremeditated acts, simple words and things have startled Martha more than once of late, as if a deeper insight had come to her; and now there is a great motion in the heart which has passed through tempests innumerable, and Martha cannot speak for the thick-coming thoughts which crowd upon her mind.

That night, standing on the turret, Martha looks out upon the lands of Allenders—the lands which her own labour has cleared of every overpowering burden, and which the same vigorous and unwearied faculties shall clear yet of every encumbrance, if it please God. The moonlight glimmers over the slumbering village of Maidlin—over the pretty houses of poor Harry's impatient fancy, where Harry's labourers now dwell peacefully, and know that their improved condition was the will and purpose of the kindly-remembered dead. And the little spire of Maidlin Church

shoots up into the sky, guarding the rest of him, whose memory no man dares malign—whose name has come to honour and sweet fame, since it shone upon that tablet in the wall—and not one wish or passing project of whose mind, which ever gained expression in words, remains without fulfilment, or without endeavour and settled purpose to fulfil. And Martha's thoughts turn back—back to her own ambitious youth and its bitter disappointment—back to the beautiful dawn of Harry's life—to its blight, and to its end. And this grand resurrection of her buried hopes brings tears to Martha's eyes, and humility to her full and swelling heart. God, whose good pleasure it once was to put the bar of utter powerlessness upon her ambition, has at last given her to look upon the work of her hands—God, who did not hear, according to her dimmed apprehension, those terrible prayers for Harry which once wrung her very heart, gave her to see him pass away with peace and hope at the end, and has permitted her—her, so greedy of

good fame and honour—to clear and redress his sullied name. And now has been bestowed on Martha this child—this child, before whom lies a gentle glory, sweet to win—a gracious, womanly, beautiful triumph, almost worthy of an angel—and the angels know the dumb, unspeakable humility of thanksgiving which swells in Martha's heart.

So to all despairs, agonies, bitternesses, of the strong heart which once stormed through them all, but which God has chastened, exercised, at length blessed, comes this end. Harvest and seedtime in one combination—hopes realized, and hopes to come; and all her children under this quiet roof, sleeping the sleep of calm, untroubled rest—all giving thanks evening and morning for fair days sent to them out of the heavens, and sorrow charmed into sweet repose, and danger kept away. But though Martha's eyes are blind with tears, and her heart calls upon Harry—Harry, safe in the strong hand of the Father, where temptation and sorrow can reach him never more—the same heart rises up in the

great strength of joy and faith, and blesses God: Who knoweth the beginning from the end—who maketh His highway through the flood and the flame—His highway still, terrible though it be—who conducts into the pleasant places, and refreshes the failing heart with hope; and the sleep which He gives to His beloved, fell sweet and deep that night upon the wearied heart of Martha Muir.

THE END.

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