FROM

GENERATION TO GENERATION.

Dec. 31, 1879

BY

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"WANDERING WILLIE," "OWEN GWYNNE'S GREAT WORK," ETC.

"Dowglas! Dowglas!
Tendr and trew." The Houlute.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION.

INTRODUCTION.

This story passes from generation to generation. Perhaps it is very constant to none. It is begun by a fragment—only a fragment—which, however, may serve as a paper folded round the scattered sheets, to keep them together.

I don't think I can ever forget what he used to tell me about himself, as we sat on the hillside together.

I saw even then that his life had been a sad one—not a good useful life, though he softened it down to suit what he thought I, his hearer, ought to listen to. It was not that he wanted to make himself out better than he was—that was never Douglas's way, never—but he had
a man's tender reverence for a girl's ignorance of the world, and of evil. For his own sake—he was so true by nature, so earnest and manly in his humility and repentance for the past,—that for his own sake I think it would have been a relief to him to speak out strongly and boldly—to paint his life as black as he believed it to have been; but he never let himself go; he never forgot me and my happy unconsciousness of the sin and sorrow in the world. Yet he never excused anything that had been wrong—he was himself always,—himself, "tender and true."

And as I loved him, and even then saw how noble he was,—saw that where he had fallen he had most bravely, most humbly, raised himself again; that the excuses he would not make for himself were yet shadowed forth unconsciously in his own words, I, Diane de Beaurepaire, longed greatly that the world should understand him some day,—at least such a portion of the world, a very small one, it is true, as loved, praised, or blamed him.

So I used to write down his words, and I am sure I wrote them accurately, for I had always a good memory, doubly good for any-
thing in which he was concerned. And as I wrote and wrote (having much leisure in those days, while Douglas was out on the hills, or by the river, and his mother sat alone in her own room), the fancy came upon me of writing his life, and of making it as complete as I could.

Of course his way of telling it left it very imperfect. It was like a chain broken over and over again, till you could only gather up a few of the links that had fallen apart, and were scattered here and there. For Douglas did not speak as to a stranger. I was no stranger to him; he filled up outlines with which I was already in possession. The scenes of his home-life were familiar to me; he had not to describe much, and that was well. Douglas was not good at description, or at what is called character-drawing. Instead of explaining to you what he thought of people, he just told simply what they said and did, and by that means (for he was very just), I think one grew to understand with great clearness what they were like.

So when, as I have, said Douglas was out, looking after his sheep-farm or his fishing, and the house was very still and quiet, even
though it might be the busy hour of noon (but we were not a busy or a bustling household; just the mother, and may be good Cousin Grizel, and Douglas and I—who would there have been to make a stir and movement about the empty rooms?),—I sat alone in my little turret-room. There, in my own dear little turret-room, I wrote carefully things that the day before Douglas had said to me, and I began to see that strangers would make but poor work of the disjointed scraps, faithful and truthful though they might be, that I had gathered together.

I remember the very day that I laid down my pen, and, folding my hands, looked out of the window, picturing to myself a little scene in Douglas's boyhood that I had just chronicled. It was but a trifle—a very trifle, only a small boating adventure of his and Kenneth's. I scarcely know why I should have heeded, and preserved it among Douglas's sayings and doings. He had chanced to tell it me the evening before as he rowed me across from the opposite shore of the loch, where I myself had taken the boat to meet him. But, as I saw it, it was a pretty picture of the two
boys with their boat; and I fancied how the little sail was reflected in the clear shining loch, and how a pink and pearl cloud floated towards the sun setting over their heads, as they sailed home to their green and golden autumn woods.

I had that same picture before my eyes—my bodily eyes I would be understood to say—as I listened to Douglas, for it was a most fair evening, bright and soft with the mist and the heather, the white veil and red robe of the Highlands. And the pearl and pink cloud was there, and the boat with its shadow floating double, and before us were the fading woods—nay, why do I say fading?—rather brightening, glorifying, in their passing splendour of gold leaf.

So in the morning I read over my little record, laid aside my pen, and looked out to think. It was not wonderful that I always chose to think at that high window of mine, when my poor thoughts could go forth and be framed in such a setting.

Douglas's home was wild and beautiful, and he suited it, as a book I am fond of says a knight is bound to suit his castle, or a hermit his cell.
And just as the words of the old Scottish songs draw much of their significance from their wistful and pathetic airs, so Douglas's early life was set to the music, bound up with the loveliness of his home—Dalbraith.

Rock and mountain, loch and moorland, they lay beneath, above, around the old grey dwelling.

It became clear to me, looking and pondering, that as the waters of the loch down yonder drew much of their blue tinting from the sky, much of their purple, brown, or grey shadow from the overhanging hills, so Douglas's story had been coloured by its outward surroundings; and if it ever chanced that my little written book fell into alien hands, the crude colours and black shadows with which he himself had represented his life, would give no fair representation of the causes, the scenes, the people whose reflections had fallen over it.

It was because of this (though I can scarcely put my feeling about it into intelligible words), and partly because it would be to me such a labour of love, that I made up my mind to write Douglas's life;—Douglas's life as he and
others had told me about it—as I knew it—as it ought to have been seen.

I was pleased and proud of the task I had set myself—Douglas's biographer!—and I was resolutely minded to be fair, and honest, and painstaking, though my one reader, my sole public, would be—myself.

A man's life written by a woman, almost by a child! I knew that by all rules I was incompetent for such a task. Well, be it so; I would only write what I knew; I would not go one step beyond.

Scarcely any one knew him as well as I did. His words were few, and he spoke ever very unwillingly of himself. Of why it was that to me—me of all others—he told most of what was in his heart, I do not think that I am called upon to speak now.

It was my pride and my joy that so it was; that he, so silent, so brief in his speech with many, always trusted me.

And if half way in my work I have laid down my pen, it is only because the task has fallen into more able hands. Where his life became involved in that of others, I might have failed. And to my surprise,
that which I felt most deeply I failed to repeat.

Have you ever picked a sheaf of brilliant autumn leaves, glowing like transparent rubies in the sunlight, and carried them home to your dim room? If you have, you know that which I felt. Where was the glow, the glory, the crimson flame? All gone!

And just so from my written words had faded the rich glow that shone round them in my fancy when they were still unwritten. Alas! the leaves—the words—were alike worthless by themselves.

But, oh Douglas, my hero, whose story as a boy, I, a girl myself, passed so many happy hours in writing up in my turret-room, while the mavis and merle sang merrily out of doors, and the bees were gathering honey from the heather-bells—it is not from want of love that I leave it to another to tell the tale, of how in all your life you have been to me and to others—"tender and true!"
CHAPTER I.

DOUGLAS OF DALBRAITH.

"It was an English lady bright,
(The sun shines fair on Carlisle wall,)
And she would marry a Scottish knight,
For Love will still be lord of all."

*Lay of the Last Minstrel.*

Dalbraith was only a fragment of the great estates that had once belonged to Douglas's forefathers. It was their first possession and their last. Bit by bit had their territories fallen away from them in the troublous and hard-fighting times of early Scottish history. A younger branch of the great house of Douglas, they had always shown a genius for taking up with the losing side. Of course also in later times they were hot Jacobites, and after they had been out in the '45 their estates were confiscated, and only Dalbraith, won by a marriage with a Highland heiress, remained to them. It had been a fortress in their proud
feudal days—in their later prosperity a hunting lodge—now it was the resting-place of the old family, as it had been once their playground.

To eyes which had patience and skill to read the scattered signs, the house might perhaps tell its story with sufficient faithfulness.

Its one square tower and the crumbling bit of castellated wall stood up strong still in their rude masonry. Close by, the narrow windows and pepper-pot turrets told of the old hunting-lodge. Later, a hall and gallery, and a few rooms, had been added to the dwelling-house when the Douglas’s “came home.”

All now was weather-stained and storm-beaten alike, and over the whole building had settled that peculiar and tender charm that gathers round a fallen house.

There was no garden; there never had been one near the house. Rough grass grew right up to the walls, and rugged willow-trees bent over some patches of water that remained from the defaced moat.

Dalbraith House lay low, and the brae rose sharply between it and the loch. Only from one or two of its higher turrets could a glimpse
be caught of that winsome vision—the rippling stretch of water and its steep winding shores, the heather and broom-covered cliffs, and the big hills beyond.

In the old days they seem to have made little study of the site for their dwellings. Often you come upon them hidden away heedlessly under the shadow of a hill, with little but wild and desolate moor to be seen from the windows. And yet that very carelessness has a sort of charm, from its proud disregard of all the wealth of beauty lying within reach. The old lords of the soil were not careful, as are people in these anxious modern times, to make the very best possible display of the good gifts showered down lavishly upon them.

With a haughty consciousness of the glories of their land, they scorned to sue for an appreciation of them as do the southerners who have invaded their wild fastnesses now-a-days.

Though there were no trim pleasure-grounds near the house, "my Lady’s garden" lay towards the west along the sunny side of the hill. You reached it by a little rough glen that cleft the moor to let a brown burn flow into the loch. Crossing that you came at once
into the bright sunshine, for it had grown to be almost a superstition in those parts, that were there but one sun-gleam in the sky, it would surely shine upon the rose trees and yew hedges of my lady's garden.

The origin of the pretty fancy may well have been that it was planned and made by very happy people in a singularly lovely summer season, for it was laid out thirty years, or thereabouts, ago, when Ronald Douglas, Baron Douglas of Dalbraith, brought his English bride, Margaret Scrope, home to the north.

They worked at it together, he and she, early and late, and long afterwards it was remembered by the workmen how merry a business they made of it. Lord Douglas threw his whole heart into it, for he said his wife must miss the trim orderliness and faultless keeping of her English home. But it was not really as he thought; she scarcely cared for the new garden as much as he did. Stately as she looked, there was something that suited the young Lady Douglas, and specially charmed her, in the mingled wildness and homeliness of Dalbraith. She never had the least wish to alter things, or to make them either grander or
more modern. She just took the place to her heart at once, as she would have taken anything and everything that had to do with Ronald.

At home she had been the beauty of her family, and a certain composure and reserve in her manner made her brothers call her "very grand." They used to say that Meg would never marry; she was far too unimpressionable to take a fancy to any one.

But all this was very quickly changed when she met the young Scotchman, Lord Douglas. It was wonderful to see how Margaret woke up and brightened, and how light and life came into her beautiful still face.

It was abroad that they first saw one another—in the quiet old French town of Saint Germain en Laye.

Margaret's grandmother, who lived chiefly in Paris, used to spend her summers there, and all the Scropes knew it well, and were fond of the dreamy old place, with its air of departed grandeur. They liked the grand terrace overhanging the vineyards and the valley of the Seine, the sunward sloping côte, and the glades and alleys of the forest.
One summer, Margaret had gone there with her mother and some of the children, at the end of the London season. It was lovely, hot weather, and they were all happy at escaping from the bustle and noise of London. Margaret was as much pleased as her little brothers and sisters with the journey, for it was something of a journey in those days. They travelled slowly, crossing the sea to Hâvre, then posting through the quaint towns and sunny orchards of Normandy, and along the poplar-bordered roads to Paris.

Lord Douglas was in France, too, at that time. The Douglases, as long back as their first exile with James II., had formed French connections and friendships, which were handed down from father to son, and kept up from generation to generation. Time and distance, it is true, somewhat slackened the old ties when the family went back to Scotland, but they existed still, and of late had been drawn together again more closely.

Douglas had been visiting his French kinsfolk at their château in La Vendée, and one of his cousins fell ill in Paris when they were on their way together to Dalbraith.
As soon as he was sufficiently recovered to be moved, the doctors ordered him out of Paris for change of air. He was not to go far at first; and Douglas, in his capacity of nurse, fixed upon Saint Germain, partly because the doctor praised it for its fine air, and partly moved thereto by a sentimental remembrance of the time when his ancestors broke their hearts and wasted their substance, at the forlorn court of James II.

So on the afternoon of their arrival at Saint Germain, Douglas established his friend on a rush-bottomed chair on the parterre, with a glorious panorama, certainly, stretched out at his feet, and he went away himself on a Jacobite pilgrimage. There was very little to be seen. The Stuarts and their poor, proud, faithful followers, had passed away like a dream. They showed him the gloomy old Château, now a prison, with high and dreary walls built round it, and the church where King James lies buried. And then he walked back down the Allée des Soupirs, where they say the exiled king used to pace wearily up and down. The parterre, once part of the Royal Gardens, is now the favourite walk of the Saint Germain fashionable world. A military band was playing, and
people were sauntering up and down under the old cut chestnut trees, when Lord Douglas rejoined his cousin. It was the 12th of August, a gloriously fine day, and he was rather melancholy, thinking of his deserted moors.

As he turned the corner he encountered a merry troop of English children, with two or three ladies following them, and René de Beaurepaire knew the ladies.

So Margaret Scrope and Douglas were introduced to each other: they stood on the great terrace and looked down the valley towards that view of Saint Denis that it irked Louis Quatorze to have perpetually before his eyes, and they made out Mont Valérien, and Paris beyond like a dim cloud, with the dome of the Invalides. Then Douglas walked beside Margaret down the Allée des Soupirs, and she showed him the old hunting-gate of the forest.

There was a primitive little French fête going on. In the evening the parterre was illuminated by strings of coloured lamps hung from one tree to another, down the arcades of the straight chestnut walks. The Scrope children thought it a fairy scene of beauty and enchantment; but perhaps Margaret and Douglas
remembered it longer than any of them. The band of the Cuirassiers du Roi crashed out one stirring march after the other as the children went eagerly up and down the lighted alleys, with the elders following. Douglas won for himself golden opinions that night. He was willing to let them explore each booth and "guinguette" to their hearts' content. They visited all the swings and merry-go-rounds, where soldiers in full uniform and respectable mères de familles were revolving solemnly on little wooden horses; they laughed at the silent active dancers in their tent, and bought gilt ginger-bread and "sucre de pommes" at the bon-bon stalls.

The evening's entertainment came to an end with fire-works. Catherine-wheels whizzed, and rockets thundered up in the summer twilight, but the crowning glory of all was a "simulacre d'incendie" that sent the young Scropes into the seventh heaven of admiration and ecstasy. And while they looked at the fireworks, Douglas watched Margaret's beautiful face by the light of the mimic flames.

Half an hour afterwards he was leaning out of a window in the Hôtel du Pavilion Henri IV.
with his chin resting on his hands. The lights were all out in the chestnut alleys; the fête was putting itself to bed yonder on the parterre; a little fountain tinkled in the court of the hotel, and the moon was shining.

"Douglas," said his cousin, speaking from a sofa inside the room, "I'm afraid you must be frightfully bored here."

"I am not bored," answered Douglas, without turning his head. "Don't talk to me. I am so dreadfully in love."

And a week afterwards he was still lingering at St. Germain, though René de Beaurepaire had recovered, and was longing to be off. The whole Scrope party had come up one glowing August afternoon, to breathe the fresher air upon the terrace. The children were riding donkeys in and out among the trees at the entrance of the forest. Margaret and Lord Douglas had got their favourite Allée des Soupirs almost to themselves, except that by-and-by there came hobbling after them an old flower-woman, a pensioner of Margaret's grandmother, who carried a big basket on her arm full of fresh roses and carnations. She was an old, old woman, bent and lame and very ugly,
with bleary eyes, and a yellow handkerchief bound round her coffee-coloured visage, under which it looked like the face of a withered monkey.

"You look tired, Victoire," said Margaret, as she took a great cluster of rose-buds from Douglas's hand.

"Ah que ça Mamzelle Marguerite. Je souffre bien, ma pauv' petite demoiselle," mumbled the little old crone, peering up at the tall Margaret. "Je suis lasse, allez; je voudrais que le bon Dieu me retire.—Ah merci, mon beau Monsieur."

Perhaps Douglas's bright smile and still brighter five-franc piece modified Victoire's weariness of life for the moment. She grinned broadly, and then hobbled away in pursuit of another customer.

"Poor old thing!" said Lord Douglas, looking after her.

"Je voudrais que le bon Dieu me retire," repeated Margaret, with a half-smile. "I wonder if she really does wish it. How strange it seems for us to be so strong and happy, and—"

"Are you so happy?" interrupted Douglas. "Are you, really? I'm not. Margaret, I never can be again—unless—"
Just then, up came a donkey behind them at a surprised uncertain canter, and all the children swept round them, panting, and shouting to "Meg" to look at "Mary galloping."

Nevertheless, an hour later, Lord Douglas did confess that he was happy. Nay, if he and Margaret had been able to spare a thought from each other, to bestow on the old lame flower-woman, they would have acknowledged that the contrast between their lives and hers was more wonderful than ever.

They were married in the month of December, and after their wedding went straight home to the Highlands. The glens were white with winter when Margaret first saw them, and most people might well have hesitated to take a bride into so dreary a waste of snow as then lay for miles around Dalbraith. But she had set her heart on going, and already Douglas knew her well enough to have no fears.

No one came to break their solitude, and if in after years the sight of a snow-covered country ever made Margaret Douglas look sad, it was only because it recalled to her too vividly the beautiful days of her "ice honeymoon." She was far more like a child now in her youth-
ful gaiety and high spirits than she had ever been in her life before. "It was a sight for sair e'en," said the few onlookers, to see two people so happy, and so goodly to behold, as were the young husband and wife.

There were not many retainers now-a-days at Dalbraith; but the scattered group of gillies and foresters, keepers and fishermen, who lived in bothies up the hills or along the loch-side, were one and all proud of the "gran' leddy" that "My Lord" had won for himself in the south. They thought it the finest thing on this side the Grampians to see her, with her plaid wound round her and her petticoat kilted up, tramp through the snow beside her stalwart husband. "And she sae like a Queen," they would say to one another.

Poor Margaret was quite unconscious of the awe she inspired by her height, and her lofty manner, and her grave, clear intonation. At home, the boys said, "There goes Meg," and laughed at her when she was more than usually frigid, but it was different at Dalbraith.

In later times, when she had long won her place in the warm hearts of her Highland neighbours, Mrs. Maclean, the minister's good
little wife, used to be fond of telling how frightened she was of Lady Douglas the first time she got sight of her after her marriage. "She just looked at me out of her great big eyes till I was fain to run away and hide myself, and there was the minister, worthy man, with never a gracious word of exhortation or encouragement to help me out, but sitting up there in his best coat, smoothing his hat round and round and staring at her. A bit young lassie, too, as she was then, and he her own pastor and master!"

In truth, that first visit, a bridal one of solemn ceremony, had not been a success. All the autumn they had been talking of her coming, and many had been the consultations at the Manse as to how soon the sight of a woman's face would be a comfort, instead of an intrusion on the bride. For they heard of a mother and several sisters left behind in England, and it was rough weather in the North, and often when the wind was blowing its wild wintry tunes, tossing about the waters of the loch, and carrying hailstones on its wings, they wondered whether she ever found it lonesome or unhomely at Dalbraith.
So, mixed up with her natural curiosity, little Mrs. Maclean's heart was full of womanly sympathy, and of pleasure in the young wife's happy love. Lord Douglas, in his bachelor days, had been used to make himself very much at home in the Manse parlour, where the master and mistress of the house were young folks like himself, and he and Mrs. Maclean often used to talk of the wife he was to bring home, "as soon," he said, "as he could find any one who would be kind enough to come." He came over the loch one snowy evening, a day or two after the home-coming, and drank tea in the cosy parlour, just as he used to do, in the days that already they were beginning to call "old times."

It was too rough and blowy a day, he said, even for "my wife" (how proudly the words were uttered); but Mrs. Maclean must see Margaret soon; and he sat with the firelight flickering on his happy face, and talked of her, laughing at the idea of any one ever being shy with Margaret. So on the earliest fine day the all-important "first call" was to be made.

Unfortunately, Douglas was out of the way when the minister and his wife arrived at
Dalbraith. Even the hall did not look familiar to them—it used to be such a bare, cold place, but now Douglas had been at work on it, making it, like the loch-side garden, fit for Margaret. It had been filled with colour and warmth to welcome her, and most picturesquely comfortable it looked that wintry afternoon, when already the ruddy firelight was conquering the cold white dazzle of the snow outside. Touches and gleams of red played among the stag's horns on the walls, and the heads of bearded mountain goats, and the stands of Highland arms. Douglas had hunted up some gorgeous curtains of old needle-work, wrought by the hands of dead and gone daughters of the house of Dalbraith, but voted too antiquated for use by his mother long ago; great bright rugs—trophies of his own Eastern travels—covered the stone floor, and before the fire-place was stretched a huge black bear-skin, the wedding gift of an Indian cousin.

From time immemorial, a baronial-looking arm-chair, highly carved, rigidly upright, now mercifully cushioned, had stood in the corner of the wide, stone chimney-piece, and in that sat Lady Douglas, with her lap full of letters,
and in front of her crouched Douglas’s deerhound, one big protecting paw and his watchful face laid upon her knee.

That first half-hour was simply terrible. Margaret was so tall, and sat so still, and her gown, though perfectly plain, had a way of sweeping back into such severe and statuesque folds. She never seemed to smile, at least with the ready, encouraging, mechanical smile that Mrs. Maclean was used to. The little woman’s kind words of comfortable chat were frozen on her lips; Margaret sat looking at her with her grave, dark eyes, the idea of being at all formidable never even crossing her brain. The minister, good man, was simply struck dumb, as good men sometimes are, by a beautiful face, and he neither saw nor heeded his wife’s reproachful glances.

It seemed quite odd to Mrs. Maclean that Douglas himself could venture to be familiar and at home with his wife. What a comfort it was when he came in, stamping the snow off his feet, and bringing with him a rush of misty, frozen air. When Margaret gave him a letter to read, and he went away into the deeply-recessed window to catch the waning light,
Mrs. Maclean felt the despair of a ship-wrecked sailor, who watches the slow vanishing of a rescuing sail. In the middle of his reading Lord Douglas laughed out loud, and Margaret forgot what she was saying, and laughed too, suddenly and joyously. Then she got up and came close to Mrs. Maclean's chair, saying, "Do forgive us; you must think us too rude, really." After that the worst was over; Lord Douglas came back and stood by the fire, stirring the peats into a blaze with his foot, and telling them some story, at which he laughed, until the echoes woke in the old rafters, and sent him back his laugh cheerily.

Nevertheless no entreaties could prevail on Mrs. Maclean to stay and dine with them that day, though Margaret seconded her husband's invitation heartily and kindly. Still, as she stood by the door with her husband, watching her departing guests, her brother Harold would have said that she looked as if she had swallowed the poker.

"And were ye just moon-struck, Minister?" asked Mrs. Maclean, severely, as they walked down to the boat.
He shook his head with solemnity. "Eh, it's a grand face, Jeanie, a grand face she has, our young Leddy Douglas."

Therefore it was a great surprise to them to hear that this queen-like being delighted in snow-balling her husband; that she liked to run his messages, and would sit for hours on the hearthrug at his feet, looking up at him admiringly, and that on wet days the young couple used to play hide-and-seek in the queer nest of uninhabited rooms up at the top of the house, making the old walls ring with their steps and laughter.

They grew to understand her better by degrees. There came a day when to no one could Mrs. Maclean talk more comfortably about the parish and the bairns than to Margaret Douglas. And once when the Angel of Death crossed the threshold of the Manse, and "wee Isabel," the baby, the darling, the toddling, busy, bustling little creature, was summoned from her merry play, and shrill sweet laughter, and eager learning of her broken Scottish speech,—when she was gently called and silenced, lulled into dreamless sleep, and gathered tenderly into the quiet grasp of her
Father's messenger; then Lady Douglas came to the Manse. She was not absent or cold then. Her tears and kisses rained down on to the little flower-face that was still warm and fresh. She kissed the pretty feet, the baby curls, the tiny brown hands, and the dead daisies that they clasped; and then she took the sorrow-stricken mother in her arms, and held her there. After that they loved her at the Manse. But perhaps she had listened to her own heart then, and there learnt sympathy, for the nursery was no longer a dead letter at Dalbraith.
CHAPTER II.

"THE BONNIE HIELAND HEATHER."

"Down yon glen ye never will weary,
   The flow'rs are fair, and the leaves are green;
Bonnie lassie, ye maun be my dearie,
   And the rose is sweet in the dew at e'en."

There was sunshine at Dalbraith. High summer had come down upon the hills that knew so much of winter, and the rough peaks and outlines grew soft and brightened in her gracious presence. A while ago she plucked the snow-caps from the hoary mountain-heads, and flung them down in play to the leaping watercourses, to be melted and stained with moss, dyed with red earth, and sent down ruddy and racing into the burn below.

Now as midsummer drew on, the full loud music of the flowing water had fallen into a minor key. The stream went softly through the dry moorland, and at the Falls there were a thousand delicate rills that trickled and slid...
down channels in the rocks, in place of the one broad, white sweep with which at other times the rain-fed river flung itself down towards the loch.

The streams were too low for good fishing, said Lord Douglas, hospitably anxious, for the London season was on the wane, and there were rumours of many southern kinsmen who were coming to inspect "Meg's highland dungeon," all with grand vague visions of Douglas's salmon river, of his deer forest, and his moors.

Margaret Douglas stood one morning at the foot of the steps before the house, shading her eyes with one hand from the broad sunshine, and with the other stroking the nose of an old white shooting-pony. Laden with baskets and fishing-rods, old "Tam Glen" stood blinking drowsily in the sun, too well fed, or too sleepy, to trouble himself much about the carrot that Lady Douglas was dangling before his nose.

All round the sunlit heather was coming into bloom, though the full mass of colour had hardly yet flushed across the moor. Moss and bracken and birch-tree shone out like emeralds; the grey rocks threw sharp shadows down into
the hollows; and the distant corries, lilac-tinged, faded away into light. Far off a covey of grouse rose whirring on the wing, and a heron saile over head. In the foreground the pony’s old white coat made the central spot of the picture, it was such a trap to catch the sunbeams.

"The beastie makes one’s eyes water only to look at him," said Grizel Douglas, a maiden cousin who was staying at Dalbraith; "for all the world he’s like nothing but a heap of nice clean clothes just home from the wash."

She came down briskly from the open turret-door, and patted Tam’s shaggy shoulder so heartily that a small cloud of silver hairs flew up into the sunshine, and their owner turned back his pink eyes reproachfully towards the disturber of his slumbers.

Tam and Grizel Douglas were friends of many years standing. He was not half so white as now, when first she remembered him. Nor were her own stiff curls then tinged with grey. But time hath dealt gently with them both, as he generally does with those who go to meet him in a kindly and ungrudging spirit.
There must have been something intrinsically good and loveable in Grizel Douglas, to make all her people as fond of her as undoubtedly they were, though she had a way of riding rough-shod, with cheerful unconsciousness, over all their pet prejudices, and, as Lord Douglas said of her, she had never done a wrong thing in her life, nor said a right one.

Every family would be the better of a Cousin Grizel of its own. The Douglas kinsfolk almost quarrelled at times for the possession of their's. With a heart at leisure from itself, and a tough tireless body, Grizel revolved round the cousinhood, shedding the beams of her deft helpfulness wherever either joy, or sickness, or sorrow were to be shared or lightened. There were few to whom Lord Douglas had been more anxious to show his bride than to this homely cousin, with her long stories and her quaint knack of making untoward speeches.

"I thought you were never coming to see her," he said, as he held Grizel by both hands, when she arrived at Dalbraith in the spring following his marriage.

"And I would have been here sooner,
Douglas, with all my heart," she answered, taking his words literally, as was her wont; "much sooner, if I had known you wanted me, but they told me new-married folk were best left to themselves at first."

Dalbraith had for years been her holiday home. Her long comfortable visits were so managed as to disturb nobody; but she was always to the fore if she was wanted. Her hosts went their way, and she hers. The clachan and the manse were full of dear friends; the outlying huts across the moor and the wild sheep farms up the glen, all expected a speedy visit from mistress Grizzy. The farming, the shooting, the fishing of Dalbraith, had from her youth up been among the first interests of her life; and now she was beginning to be as proud of Margaret's beauty, as if she had chosen her out of all the world herself, to be married, as she would have phrased it, "upon" the young head of her family.

"Isn't the day too lovely?" said Margaret, after Grizel had made her peace with Tam by means of a bit of bannock.

"We are going to have soft weather," answered Grizel, looking with experienced eyes
at a thin creeping mist that was touching the hill-tops daintily.

"And Harold will get his fishing," added Douglas, coming down the steps.

"Harold, my eldest brother," explained Margaret; "I wish he was here now, and Winifred too."

"My dear!" exclaimed Grizel, in a tone of wonder and expostulation. "They that are in London, with the park to drive in, and attending grand festivals like the one you read of in your letter to-day, with the thousands of coloured lamps, and the exotic palm-trees on the stairs, and the band of His Majesty's Grenadier Guards playing dance music all through the night, and you are wishing to have them here."

"In this land of moorland and savages," added Douglas.

"I am not a woman of the world, my dear, and I am very thankful myself to be spared the glitter and distraction of a London life; it must surely turn your heads in time, what with the balls, and the conversation, and the admirers—"

Douglas and Margaret laughed.
“Not that they would trouble me, at my time of life especially,” went on Grizel; "and I never had any admirers, Margaret, not even when I was a young lass at home. Now I dare say that seems very strange to you, Douglas, my dear?"

“Very strange indeed, Grizzy,” said Douglas, patting her shoulder.

“I used to think it rather strange myself, and to wonder a little how it was,—and I never was a favourite with my mother. There were my three sisters, Barbara, and Nicola, and little Phemy, all first favourites; but they were each one taken from her early, either by death or marriage, and only I left with her, poor body, in her old age. That was strange too.”

“I would not be understood,” she began again, after a moment’s thought, “to blame my poor mother for making favourites, though I do reckon it a very sinful thing for a mother to do. I’ve been told that your mother loves you, Margaret, far beyond your sisters.”

“How do you expect Margaret to answer that?” said Douglas with a laugh. “You don’t mind dear old Grizzy’s speeches, Meg,” he added to his wife, as Grizel, still busily talking,
walked away with a nod and a smile, and he and Tam and Margaret took their slow way to the river-side.

A few weeks more, and guests from England began, by twos and threes, to gather at Dalbraith. Harold Scrope and his sister Winifred happened, by reason of good post-horses, and no small amount of impatience, to reach Dalbraith a day before they were expected. They arrived on a still August evening, "betwixt the gloaming and the mirk." It was getting late, and indeed the mirk had begun slowly to get the better of the gloaming. Moor and hill were growing softly indistinct, and only a faint glint of silver showed where the burn went tumbling along the glen, as the weary horses breasted the last steep bit of the brae, and then trotted stiffly down towards the house.

The bell by the turret-door was rung; they heard it clanging in the distance; a dog barked; then another echo faintly repeated the sound both of bell and bark; and then everything was silent again. No one came to answer the bell. Only the night air whispered in the willow trees, and some frogs croaked dismally.
"I say, Winifred, this is serious," said Harold, after he and his servant and the driver had set the bell pealing again and again, with no other result than to send the dogs into ecstasies of almost frantic barking. "There is evidently not a soul in the house. Have Meg and Douglas been carried off bodily by a rival clan, or are they taking a moonlight stroll, surrounded by their vassals? Yes, ring away, Maurice, by all means, though there's no one to let us in, that's clear."

"And I am so dreadfully hungry," said Winifred, jumping out of the carriage, and running a few steps backwards, to look up at the dim outline of the house. "No; there's not the glimmer of a light even in the attics."

"Neither in turret nor dungeon," said Harold.

"Nor in kitchen or scullery, which is more to the purpose," added Winifred.

"Nor in the buttery-hutch. I suppose there is a buttery-hutch; there always is in a Scotch house, isn't there?"

"A 'but and a ben' you mean," said Winifred, just as ignorant, and they laughed and walked round to the other side of the house.
Then suddenly there broke upon their ears the sound of bagpipes braying with fury some way off, a noise of voices shouting, and torches were waving and lights shining in the darkness.

"Bedlam broke loose," said Harold, composedly, making towards the lights.

"I hope if Meg is there, she will give us something to eat," responded Winifred.

The mystery was soon cleared up. It was Margaret's birthday, and a gillies' ball was going on.

Margaret, apprised somehow of their arrival, came running to meet them, and Douglas behind her waved a torch over her, showing her to her brother, rosier than he had ever beheld her, and panting slightly.

"You seem blown, Meg," he said, after she had welcomed them both. Winifred was confiding her great hunger to Douglas, and Harold, after a year's absence, had got his arm most comfortably round the waist of this well-beloved sister.

"Yes, that reel was fast and furious. You must come and look at them presently, it is so picturesque."

And so it was. The pipes, that, abuse
them as you will, set your heart beating and your feet moving, quicker than any other mortal music, were sending far abroad their wild, piercing, maddening notes; at once a squeal, a wail, a shriek of triumph, a moan, a monotonous hum, and a cataract of dancing, hurrying notes; and blending in or jarring against this music, came the strange guttural shouts and wild cries of the Highland dancers. "Heugh," called the deep voices of the men, and the women answered in shrill chorus, and the stamping feet kept the measure almost as strictly as the bagpipes, while the kilted figures whirled round and round, and the torches went tossing up and down.

"That I should live to see Meg dancing the houlachan in a barn," said Harold Scrope, panting between each word after his own exertions. "Just look at her face now!"

She was not dancing, but standing in the front of an eager circle of spectators, her hand on an old woman's shoulder, and her eyes fixed on Douglas, who was dancing a sword dance with the village "sutor."

An odd, swift, savage-looking dance it is, as the crossed swords lie gleaming on the floor,
and the quick steps, swift as lightning, light as hail-stones, fall around them. Strong, and sure, and rapid were the present dancers, and sudden grunts of approbation or shouts of encouragement reached them on all sides.

"Wonders will never cease," again observed Harold Scrope.

"What an atmosphere that was," he said an hour or so later, drawing a deep breath of pure night air, as he and Margaret stood on the steps of the house. They had just been escorted home, with shouts, and pipes, and waving torches, and Douglas had thanked the people in Gaelic for their hearty good wishes to his wife.

He and Winifred were laughing and searching for lucifer matches in the hall, for no one would dream of returning from the ball for the next three hours, and they had the house to themselves.

"What an atmosphere," repeated Harold.
"I suppose it was rather warm," said Margaret, looking back regretfully.

"Warm, my dear Margaret, with the crowd, and the smoke of the torches, and the steaming whiskey; you do put it very mildly."
“Isn’t it lovely now?” she asked, and they both stood and looked up at the sky, deep blue still, and but very faintly spangled with stars, for the lingering daylight of a northern night just tinged the air. The silvery birch-stems glimmered white, like trees in fairy land; the moor stretched away, solemn and broken; and beyond range after range of the great hills rose up black against the purple of the sky.

Margaret clasped her hands together in almost passionate gratitude. “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places,” she thought, but she only said aloud—“See, Harold, yonder is the deer forest.”

Harold took off his hat and waved it in the direction to which she pointed. “A welcome sight; good luck to you, and won’t I be with you soon,” he said cheerily, and then growing serious, as Margaret had done, under the still and holy influence of the night, he took her hand in his. “But somehow, Margaret, old woman, I don’t seem to mind even about the deer forest, now I have got you back again.”

“Douglas and I have lighted the hall,” said Winifred, appearing on the threshold, “and
I think it's beautiful. Margaret, do come in."

"I must say Meg and her Highlander are not bad to look at," said Harold, the next morning, as he and Winifred stood at the window watching Douglas and Margaret, who were strolling up and down on the grass below. "It reconciles me more to having my nose put out of joint."

He had been his sister's darling when she was at home, and since her marriage she believed herself to have become more devoted to him than ever; but "truth is truth," said the discerning brother, "and the fact is, that Meg can see no one in the world but Douglas."

"I always thought," he continued meditatively, "that when Margaret married—if she ever did find a husband—he would grovel at her feet, but as far as I can see it's rather the other way."

Notwithstanding his deposition from the first place in her affection, Harold was disposed to be enchanted with everything, from the freshness of the keen mountain air, to the "rude plenty," as he called it, of the proverbial Highland breakfast.
“And for once it’s a fine day,” he observed, as he closed a substantial meal with oat-cake and heather honey.

“But we have so much sunshine,” interrupted Margaret jealously.

“And so much sweet, refreshing rain,” added cousin Grizzy.

Harold and Winifred looked at her to see if there was any sarcasm hidden beneath her words; but no, she was evidently in earnest, and was eating her porridge with a kind, happy face. They soon found her out, and learnt to like her, and laugh at her, and be bored by her long stories, as was everybody else.

“It must be pleasant indeed for you to come up here, and find your sister so comfortable and happy,” she said to Harold.

They were standing on the steps ready to go out shooting, and Lady Douglas had just been called away. It was not in Harold to make a pretty speech, but he laughed and nodded.

“And I make no doubt,” pursued Grizel, “that you fancied she was coming to some sort of a rough place up in the wilds.”

“We said so, whether we thought it or not,” answered Harold.
"And then, what a surprise for you to find all so perfect at Dalbraith, and your dear sister looking as happy as any Queen; quite different, they tell me, to what she used to look at home."

"Meg wasn't so very miserable after all, at home," said Harold, almost nettled for a minute.

"My dear Malaprop," remonstrated Douglas.

"Eh, Douglas," and she looked at him with round, innocent eyes, "and isn't it always what I'm telling you, my dear, that you should remember what dear Margaret gave up for you; for Dalbraith is lonesome, Mr. Scrope, very lonesome, especially when the Colonel, Norman Douglas, is away; and just think of all Margaret left behind,—London, Douglas my dear, and balls—"

"Terrible, isn't it?" said Douglas.

"And she the beauty of the family," persisted Grizel, turning to Winifred—"the prettiest of you all beyond compare, they tell me."

"Yes; much the prettiest," answered Winifred, and everybody laughed.

"So tall and grand-looking," said Grizel, folding her hands, and nodding her head com-
placently. "They were all afraid of her at first—were the silly folk here about. Mistress Maclean, the minister's wife, she came to me, and she says, 'Miss Grizzy, I'm that frightened of her I can't get out my words.' 'My dear, it is but natural in you,' I said; 'it's not what we have been used to in these parts, so different as she is from yourself, and from all of us homely bodies, but you'll get used to her in time, never fear,' I said; and so she has."

"Poor Mistress Maclean," said Harold.

"You were not frightened of Meg, Grizzy," said Douglas.

"Ah, my dear," answered the old cousin, with a smile that lighted up her face; "you see I was like you; I just loved her from the very first."

And then, Colonel Douglas having joined them, the shooting party set off for the moors.

Norman Douglas had been away with his regiment all the winter; he was Lord Douglas's uncle, and had been his guardian, and his leave of absence was always spent at Dalbraith. Of late years, since his ward came of age, he had fashioned a queer dwelling for himself, in a solitary tower, perched, nobody knew how or
why, on the crags overlooking the loch. Whether watch-tower, prison, or fortress, in mediaeval times, none of the antiquaries could quite make up their minds. Some people thought it had just been built up there, because the view was so beautiful, looking down on the windings of the glen. However that might be, it had been suffered to fall almost completely into ruins, until Colonel Douglas took it into his head to restore it and to make it his home. Certainly it was an original kind of home; one single room above another for several stories, and a cork-screw staircase—that was the whole. A room or two at the foot of the tower gave Colonel Douglas his smoking-room and study, and he and his soldier servant wanted little more. For there was no lady at the tower—there never would be.

Norman Douglas had waited to marry until he was more than middle-aged, and his wife died early, leaving him a little son, called Kenneth, who was the only outward and visible token that he had ever been aught than an old bachelor. He had the gentle, courteous, slightly formal ways of one, and his unbounded reverence for women was one of his great
characteristics. "The essence of chivalry," he used to say, "is respect for women;" and every woman in his eyes was a "princess." In return for his homage all the women with whom he had to do loved him most dearly. There may have been a touch of quaintness given to his character by his hearty regret for the days of romance, and by his lofty sentiments, but there are few people who have inspired more genuine reverence and respect.

His life, though solitary, was not an unhappy one. He had his books, chiefly old chronicles and works on soldiering, his queer tower, his beloved regiment, one or two great friendships; and, above all, his firm trust and love for the God of his life-long worship, and the faith of his fathers. His creed, it may be, was too simple an one to suit the restlessness of modern thought. An unclouded belief in all the articles of "our glorious religion," to question one of which would have been an act alike of disloyalty and presumption in his eyes—a conviction of the honour and purity of the age of chivalry—a deep satisfaction and pride in the brave old race from which he sprung—these are possibly not the tenets that men commonly hold dearest
now-a-days, but they had served him well during a life of many vicissitudes, and they found him in its early autumn a vigorous, high-minded, much-loved man.

He had been so much like a father to Lord Douglas that his influence could be traced in many of his nephew's modes of thought, though the young man belonged of course to a later generation; one more reticent in expressions of feeling, less full of veneration for the past, and of faith in the virtues of ancient blood. "He is a gentleman," quietly spoken by Uncle Norman, with his head in the air, meant that any amount of fortitude, self-sacrifice, and generosity, not to mention courage, was well accounted for by that statement of a simple fact.

Margaret, delighting in him from the first day she knew him, could not resist startling him now and then, shocking his prejudices, and pretending to run down the good old times on which he pinned his faith.

Uncle Norman was half, and only half, alarmed. That Margaret was a bit of a radical Douglas had with great glee announced to him, but she came of a safe old Tory stock, and she
might say what she liked, provided she kept clear of the Stuarts, and was guiltless of any shadow of treason towards Mary, Queen of Scots.

There was one person at Dalbraith, who "princess," in right of her sex, though she must needs be, put his chivalry sorely to the proof, and that was Grizel.

"An inestimable woman is my dear kinswoman Grizzy," he used to say, with a sly gleam of fun in his eyes; "it is impossible to praise her too highly, but just a little—eh, my dear Douglas? you know; just a leettle too—yes, you understand."

The truth is that the two were rival storytellers, and were equally tenacious of their rights as such. Some stories there were which belonged clearly and indisputably to either one or the other. About these both were scrupulously honourable; others—family legends, old chronicles, ghost stories, or the like—belonged to the common stock, and with regard to any such difficulties were pretty certain to occur.

They were never approached without some civil, deprecatory, but very insincere remark.

"Grizel, I make no doubt, would relate the
anecdote far better than I can," Colonel Douglas used to begin; or Grizel would break in, "Cousin Norman must know best, and I would not presume to interfere, only it was my own cousin-german's grandfather, on my mother's side, that just chanced to be present when the circumstance took place."

After being thus disturbed, the Colonel would bow with stern courtesy, motioning to his rival to proceed, and Grizel, having effectually spoilt the point of his story, insisted on withdrawing from the contest, neither vouchsafing any attention to the request, that the other would "take up the thread of the narrative." Only one thing was tolerably sure—that whichever was prevailed upon to begin again, would find his or her discourse broken in upon at the third word.

At Grizel's Highland superstitions Colonel Douglas affected to laugh with gentle superiority; but it is doubtful whether they were not as dear to him as to her in his secret heart. Both believed firmly in second-sight and in witchcraft, and Grizel, at least, was convinced that the "good people" still haunted the Fairy glen.
It was a lovely little gorge, that Fairy glen, winding just under the craig of Norman's Tower, dainty with golden, green, or rose-tinted mosses, and sweet with gale and honeysuckle.

There the glen tree bloomed silvery white in spring, and birken bushes feathered the grey rock; and a hidden spring, the fairy well, laughed up with a bubbling sound of never-ending mirth, where "green grow the rashes."

And where a giddy bridge crossed the deep little glen, there was a dark Prince Charlie's cave. What matter that only Grizel believed the wandering Prince to have once sheltered there? Woe betide the wight that dared to question it before her!

The fairies were much more real personages, for sure it is that even on a summer evening no herd-boy dared to linger in the haunted glen, as he crossed it to "meet his bonnie lassie, when the kye comes hame."
CHAPTER III.

THE FOOT OF TIME.

"I've seen the smiling of Fortune beguiling,
   I've felt all its favours, and found its decay;
Sweet was its blessing, kind its caressing,
   But now 'tis fled—fled far away.
I've seen the forest adorned the foremost,
   Wi' flowers o' the fairest, maist pleasant and gay;
Sae bonny was their blooming, their scent the air perfuming,
   But now they are withered and a' wede away."

On the south side of Loch Dalbraith there stood a long, low, straggling old building, with a garden and an orchard, called the "Lady's Lodge." Thither, for generations past, when the head of the house died, thewidowed dames and spinster daughters of Dalbraith had withdrawn into dignified seclusion. In its queer little low rooms many "grannies," and "Auntie Kates," and "Cousin Jeans," had left their faded portraits, and the memory, just as' faint, of their harmless and uneventful lives.
The old Lodge had never looked so quaint and pretty as it did now, when its new daintiness of foreign adornment was mixed with the prim furniture of former days. Its present mistress, Lady Beatrix Stuart, had lived for a great part of her life abroad, and was one of those persons who surround themselves naturally with relics. She was born a Douglas, and was the aunt of the late Lord Douglas, and of his brother Norman. When her husband, Sir James Stuart, left her a widow two or three years before Margaret’s marriage, she came back gladly to the shadow of her old home; and her nephew and grand-nephew, Norman Douglas and the young Lord, were alike proud to welcome her.

One has sometimes seen pictures that have misty golden distances, against which figures in the foreground stand out cloudily, with a certain look of shadowy unreality.

Margaret Douglas, in some way, associated Lady Beatrix Stuart with that sort of visionary effect, perhaps because the first time she saw her she was standing in an orchard, the trees of which were in full bloom, and the pink and white blossoms were backed by a pure gold sunset.
Afterwards 'Aunt Beatrix' grew to be a most real and living presence in her daily life; but Margaret always remembered her with her face in shadow, as she saw her that first day, a slight figure, very erect and graceful, clad in a long black gown, the glimmer of a white muslin kerchief crossed over her breast, and the background of apple-blossom and gold.

There was a little golden-haired child clinging to her hand, and trampling on her black dress.

"There," said Norman Douglas, pointing towards her, as he and Margaret and Cousin Grizzy walked up to the Lady's Lodge one spring evening from the boat; "there is Aunt Beatrix, Margaret."

"Out of doors at her age, with nothing but her cap upon her head," said unromantic Grizel.

The boy was Kenneth Douglas, Norman's little son, who had been taken home by his father's aunt in the days following his young mother's death, and had lived with her ever since. He was just beginning to run alone now. As he stood there, staring gravely at the strange lady who was coming towards him
with his father, his sunny hair and fair face matching the sky and the apple-blossoms, he and the old lady made the prettiest contrasted picture of youth and age.

Lady Beatrix was not very old in reality; perhaps only about fifteen years older than her nephew Norman, but in speech and in dress, nay, in everything except in heart, she had long ago turned her back on youth. If there could be affectation in anything belonging to her, it was in the adjustment of the delicate lace "coifs" that she tied under her chin, and which were so arranged as to give her the appearance of a very old woman. Certainly they rather failed in their object; her dark eyes and her smile kept her for ever young, notwithstanding that the hair she wore raised on a cushion under her antique caps, was so white that it looked as if it had been powdered.

It was funny to see the pride that Colonel Douglas took in her. All his life she had been his ideal of perfection, his 'inspiration,' as he expressed it in his little high-flown way.

Lady Beatrix had been well accustomed to be petted and adored by the people who sur-
rounded her; old men and young men had alike fallen under the charm; her old father, her old husband—later on, the one son who used to carry his "little mother" about on his shoulder, and be vainer of her beauty than any of the lovers of her youth.

All these were gone from her now. Charley Stuart was in India, and his "little mother's" heart often trembled for him, because of the fighting going on. Life had heaped trouble on her, but the eyes that had wept so much were bright still, and the heart fresh and loving. Norman Douglas had in some measure taken the place of the absent son, and Lord Douglas worshipped her. Nothing could be prettier than the way she took their homage,—the bright, soft, tender manner, touched with old-world courtliness, and full of the gaiety and grace that belonged only to herself.

"I want you two to love each other, Margaret," said Colonel Douglas, on the evening of that first visit, while their boat was slowly crossing the loch on its way home. "Some day you must let me tell you all about her."

"I think she looks as if she must have had a story," said Lady Douglas.
"Yes, and so she has; rather a sad one. Did Ronald never tell you of it? I have heard her tell some parts of it myself."

"And so have I, often," said Grizel, pricking up her ears.

"Aye, doubtless, though she seldom speaks of herself. She was but a lassie, Margaret, when her troubles began; only about fifteen."

"Just upon sixteen," put in Grizel.

"Ah, well, yes; just upon sixteen, so I said," continued Norman. "You know she was born and brought up in France, and never left it until the Revolution had begun."

Grizel here struck in again.

"But maybe Margaret has not heard how Aunt Beatrix's father and mother never could bring themselves to leave Paris; indeed, her mother, the French Lady Douglas, never set foot in Scotland, not to mention Dalbraith, until she was driven to it by the troubles in her own country."

"That was just what I was telling Margaret," said Colonel Douglas.

"Ah, but, Cousin Norman, you ought to go back further than that," pleaded Grizel, almost with tears in her eyes. This was one of her
own best stories, and it was hard indeed to hear all the first part of it disposed of in this cursory fashion. Properly speaking, the whole genealogy of the Douglases ought to be gone into, to the third and fourth generation.

"Indeed you must go back a little further, just to make things clear to poor Margaret. Won't you just mention, that Lady Beatrix's father was born at Saint Germain? It seems to carry one far back, doesn't it, Margaret, to the days of the Stuarts? And she got her name from King James's Italian queen. Yes; her father was born at Saint Germain, and was always more of a Frenchman than a Scotchman, for he was twice married in France. His father had followed King James into exile in the year 1668—"

"Are we to have all the ancestors?" asked Colonel Douglas, with patient sarcasm.

"No, my dear Cousin Norman, no. Indeed, I was only wanting to point out the reason of Aunt Beatrix being rather foreign in her ways, just in her excuse—"

"Excuse!" echoed Colonel Douglas, firing up indignantly.

"For you see," Grizel pursued unheeding,
"her father, as I was saying, entered the French service, and when he was quite an elderly man, he married a young French lady for his second wife."

"True. Well, Margaret, her father married a young French wife—"

"Fresh from her convent, poor young thing," again struck in the inextinguishable Grizel. "She was called Mademoiselle Marie Hortense Alexandrine Diane de Beaurepaire," (pronouncing the long list of French names rather funnily,) "and she was in the flower of her youth, poor little lady, when they took her from her convent, and wedded her to our old grandfather."

"And Beatrix was her daughter," resumed Norman.

"Her second daughter—the eldest, Marie Thérèse Felicité, died young—"

"Ah, I believe there was a baby or two who did not live," said Norman, "but that's neither here nor there. Our aunt, Lady Beatrix—"

"You should say, Cousin Norman, that she was always called Lady Beatrix from her childhood, because poor King James had granted her grandfather the old Earldom of
Dalbraith, but Kenneth, her brother, never would take the title."

"Would not, or could not," said Norman, smiling; "but somehow Aunt Beatrix has always kept the 'lady' out of a spirit of loyalty to her father, and to the exiled family."

"But her story?" asked Margaret, striving to avert a discussion on the vexed question of King James's patents of nobility.

"Ah," said Grizel, "you should hear her talk about her young days herself. She tells it so prettily—about the old Hôtel de Beaurepaire in the Faubourg St. Germain, where they used to live with her mother's father, the Marquis de Beaurepaire, up on the fourth story; and then the Château in the forests of La Vendée, which they sometimes went to, and where they were so frightened of the wolves in winter. Her father was getting to be an old man then, (Beatrix was the child of his old age,) and her mother was fond of the world, and spent most of her time at Court. The old hotel in Paris had a courtyard, and a garden with fountains, and a 'boulingrin,' where little Beatrix used to play—"

"Never mind about all that now, Grizel,"
interposed Colonel Douglas. "I want to tell Margaret about René de Beaurepaire"

"He was with the army until Beatrix was fifteen. She never saw him," said Grizel, unable to refrain herself.

Who does not know the natural impulse to catch the reins out of a driver's hands when a horse is running away? It was almost as difficult to Grizel to resist trying to keep back the telling of this story, which was getting on so much too fast. There was such a "pretty" bit which ought to come in here, about the little girl's life in the garden of the old Hôtel, playing bowls with the old father who doted upon her, and learning her lessons from her noble dévote grandmother, Madame de Beaurepaire, for whom there remained so sad a fate in store.

But Norman had got his turn now.

"René was her cousin, and soon after he came back to Paris from the army, as Grizel says, he asked his uncle to let him be betrothed to his little Scottish kinswoman. It was all arranged in the formal French fashion; but René had fallen desperately in love, and she—well, I suppose she was very fond of him, but,
as she says herself, she was only a child, ready to be charmed with the first handsome young face that looked kindly at her. Well, to make a long story short—"

"Oh, Cousin Norman," broke reproachfully from Grizel.

"To make a long story short," repeated Colonel Douglas, firmly, "the storm was gathering darkly over France, and already the emigration had begun. Nothing would induce the old Marquis de Beaurepaire to leave Paris, and the Douglases stayed until nearly the last, but in the end it was thought right that they should go to Scotland, and they came home to Dalbraith; René coming with them to take care of them on the journey, for the old Lord was getting very infirm.

"Many years before that time he had sent home his only son Kenneth to look after poor deserted Dalbraith, and to send him what scanty rents he could collect, to Paris. And Kenneth took kindly to the old country, and was married—"

"Upon Alison, one of the Colquhouns of Erlistoun," said Grizel. "He was a thorough Scot, Norman, was your worthy father, Kenneth Douglas."
"And so was his wife," continued Norman, with a smile; "very Scotch indeed. Therefore it was a new experience to the French lady, who came straight from Versailles. But she was courageous and gay, like most of the emigrés, and ready to make the best of things, except when she thought of the old father and mother she had left to meet the storm alone. I was little more than a baby then, but Sholto, my eldest brother, well remembers their all arriving at Dalbraith, and the winsome little foreign lassie who turned the heads of all the sober Scotchmen hereabouts, and whom he used to call his ' wee auntie.'

"René de Beaurepaire, as I have said, escorted them to Scotland, but he did not stay long, for things looked blacker and blacker in France, and the Reign of Terror was beginning. He went back to try and save his uncle. There must have been a great deal that was good in him, but Beatrix, I imagine, was too young to care for him as he did for her. She liked to laugh and talk with him, but she hardly knew what it all meant, only she had the same kindly, loving nature then as now, and she wanted to see every one that came
near her looking happy. It went much deeper with him, poor fellow."

"Ah," said Grizel, "I have heard that he used to say she was a cruel person to love, and he was always wanting more from her than the child knew how to give."

"His was not the right kind of love," pursued Colonel Douglas. "It made him selfish and jealous. Am I tiring you with this long story, Margaret? I would not tell it you but that I think you ought to know the annals of our house."

"I would willingly relieve you of the trouble," said Grizel, her eyes glistening with hope.

But Colonel Douglas resumed his history hurriedly, and made no more apologies. "When it came to René's leaving Dalbraith to go back to France, he must have completely lost his head, I take it. He would have married Beatrix before he started if he could, without her father and mother's consent, or her own either; but as that was impossible, he made a very cruel bargain with her. Seeing him so miserable, and being very unhappy herself at his going back into great danger, she was ready to promise whatever he pleased; and
this was the compact to which he bound the poor ignorant child—that come what might, she was to wait ten years for him. Even if he was killed (as was most probable), she was not to marry any one for ten years. It was a wicked thing to ask of her, for he knew he was going back to almost certain death—and she knew it too, so that there was nothing she would not have been ready to do for him just then. I believe she offered to bind herself never to marry at all; but he had just grace enough left not to accept that; only, living or dead, those ten years of her life must, he said, belong to him. So she gave her word, and he went back to Paris in the height of the 'Terror.' There was not a very long time to wait for tidings of him. He was too late to save his people. The Marquis de Beaurepaire was dead already, and he saw the noble old Marquise guillotined before his eyes, on the day that he met his own fate. Beatrix heard of it all on her seventeenth birthday, so you see her troubles began early."

"It was fine of René to go back to Paris," said Margaret.
“He was a gentleman,” answered Colonel Douglas, quietly.

“But it was hard on poor Beatrix,” observed Grizel, taking advantage of her cousin's emphatic pause. “She was so unhappy that it was very easy for her at first to keep her promise—indeed, no one knew at that time that she had made it; but later on, her father and mother found it out, and she had a great deal to put up with. Naturally, they were indignant at her having been made to give such a promise, and everybody set to work to persuade her that it was not a binding one on her—but it was very little use their talking. They might have saved their breath to cool their porridge.”

“It would have been hard,” said Colonel Douglas, loftily, “to make a loyal nature such as hers break faith with the dead man who had loved her. But let me go on. Well, a year or two afterwards they took her to Edinburgh, when the French Princes were living at Holyrood; and there she had plenty of admirers, but she never gave one of them a hope or a smile.”

“Until”—interposed Grizel.

Colonel Douglas held up his hand. “Aye,
indeed, until," he continued, "a year later the poor child met her fate. *L'histoire se répète*, Margaret—it was a Frenchman again—another cousin, another Beaurepaire. But this was a very different man from poor René—the passionate, wayward, unformed youth, whose love had ever been a sort of burden to her. Raoul was a more distant cousin; he was a tried soldier, and one of the most accomplished gentlemen of his time. Moreover, he possessed the sort of prestige, in the eyes of Beatrix's mother, of having become the head of her family since the tragedies in Paris. He had been away from France, fighting with the allied armies for several years, and now he came to Edinburgh to pay his *devoirs* at Holyrood, and to lose his heart, hopelessly and utterly, to Beatrix Douglas. Poor Beatrix!—struggle as she would, and as she did, she was powerless to help herself. The new love was too much for her. The young Marquis de Beaurepaire would take no denial; he came back to her again and again. She implored her parents to take her away from Edinburgh, but he followed her to the Highlands; I suppose she saw that hide it as she would, it nearly broke her
heart to say him nay; and every one of her people was on his side. Well, well, it was all past and done with years and years ago, long before you were born or thought of, Margaret; but it is one of those circumstances that one cannot help looking back to with a great deal of regret—that marriage would have made so many happy, and I believe Raoul might have been a good man, and a great man, if he had married her then. As it was, it only looks to us as if it had spoilt his life and hers: but how do we know?—blind mortals as we are."

"You are getting on over fast again, Colonel Norman," said Grizel, warningly; and as she spoke the boat grated on the gravel of the beach.

And while Norman and Grizel were struggling who should tell most of her story, Lady Beatrix herself sat by the window where they had left her, and watched their boat on its way across the loch. Before her eyes—for she lived now greatly in the past—there rose pictures of many days that were long gone by. It would have been very strange to her, if she could have overheard the talk in the boat, and listened to those faint descriptions of
scenes that were to her as vivid—nay, it might well be more vivid—than the events of yesterday. It would have been strange to hear them touch so lightly the past troubles—guess at the struggle and perplexity that had once rent her life. They guessed, and she remembered, and the past lay dead and buried. They, smiling, told her story. She lived it over again, with its lost faces and silent voices, its laughter and sunshine, its smiles and bitter tears. It is not given to all to bind the past to the present by a strong and enduring cord. Many, as the years slip on, drop the thread of memory from careless or from busy fingers; but Lady Beatrix always held it fast. To-day it seemed as if she was spinning it afresh, because a new touch had been laid upon the web; and seeing Margaret Douglas for the first time at Dalbraith, reminded her of her own young days, and of her coming as a stranger and a foreigner to the home of her forefathers.

Even now she smiled as she recalled the meeting between her mother, with her air of the vieille cour, and the homely Scottish gentlewoman whom her step-son, Kenneth Douglas, had married—the Versailles curtseys,
the formal grace, and the well-turned speeches, on the one hand, and the quaint, stiff, but genuine kindliness of welcome on the other.

Lord Douglas, for all his life-long exile, had a warm corner for the Highlands in his heart. He had not been at Dalbraith since the year '45, when as a boy he paid it a brief and secret visit, on his way back to Paris, after the 'cause' had been lost at Culloden. Beatrix could see him now, with his hand on his heart, shivering a little in the mist-laden air, and apostrophising ma patrie.

Just as plainly she remembered her mother's gesture, the shrug and shudder with which she gathered her draperies round her, and the almost tragic sweep of the arm as she pointed out of the window towards the wilderness.

To Beatrix herself it was all as the realization of a dream; it was a wilderness, true, but a wilderness that blossomed for her as a rose. Long since, in the now-deserted gardens of the Hôtel de Beaurepaire, her father used to tell her wondrous tales of the land of rushing streams and blue mountains that her grandfather had renounced to follow his king.

It was a strange fate, mused Lady Beatrix,
that had linked her, both on her father’s side and on her mother’s, to the faithful followers of a fallen dynasty.

As a child, she had caught from her father a spark of his romantic and chivalrous devotion to the House of Stuart. And now her mother’s love for her own sovereigns was deepening into a mournful passion of loyalty that was almost a religion.

Yes; those were days that printed their traces deeply on the girl’s whole life, and made of Dalbraith a haunted place, peopled with the memories of her youth.

It was at Dalbraith, on a never-to-be-forgotten winter’s day, that the tidings reached them of Louis the Sixteenth’s death. It was by the loch-side that René de Beaurepaire, on the eve of his desperate journey to Paris, wrung from her, in his stormy love and jealousy, the promise that wrought her much evil, and altered the whole current of her life. A wild March evening; a red sunset; pines tossing in the wind; a grey sheet of ruffled water, touched here and there by crimson gleams—these would for ever after bring back to her the passionate pleading of his voice, the heart-ache of that parting.
And yet she loved Dalbraith—loved it more and more when the coy northern spring peeped shyly over the hill-tops, even though with the summer came the ending of suspense, and the seal of a terrible certainty was set upon their fears.

There followed in her memory a long peaceful time—a time that grew, almost against her will, to be a very happy time. She used to reproach herself then, that her young heart would grow light again. Later, she thanked God for it, as one is thankful, after a stormy night, for the cool, fresh morning hours before the heat and burden of the day.

"That was my play-time, the only one I ever had," she said, long afterwards. And so with the two 'laddies,' her nephews, as companions, among the dogs, and the ponies, and the boats, upon the heather hills, and by the moorland tarns, Beatrix bade a merry, unconscious farewell to the days of her childhood.

Only too soon came Edinburgh—the sad little mockery of a court at Holyrood, which, however, she loved from the first, because the sound of the French voices brought back a smile to her mother's face—Edinburgh, with its balls
and assemblies; and by-and-by the strange light that dawned upon her frightened her, it was so strong and bright, and made her heart beat so heavily.

Raoul de Beaurepaire!—the one love, the joy, the sorrow of her life. Ah! they might say he was her fate—they might look on at her sore struggle, confusing her with conflicting advice, or with loving entreaties, but to no one could she ever tell what the battle had cost her. For he, Raoul, treated the old engagement very lightly, and would have had her break faith with her dead cousin—would have had her lay aside the ill-starred promise, which already she owned, with a pang of bitter self-reproach, she had broken in her heart. And when he found he could not prevail with her—when again and again she bade him leave her, and at last she had forced him to believe that she was in earnest—he declared that he was ready to wait for her all the seven years that remained of her promise, as Jacob waited for his Rachel, counting them but as one day, for the love he bore her. They had gone back to Dalbraith ere this, and he followed her there, and would not be denied.
Her father was growing very old and feeble, and he longed greatly to see the child of his old age happy and provided for before he died. Her mother—ah! was it not enough for her that Raoul was a Frenchman?—and had he not bribed her with stories of the old ancestral château, standing deep in the woods of loyal La Vendée, which the tide of the Revolution had never reached, and where 'Mademoiselle Marie' was still affectionately remembered.

Beatrix could not meet her mother's wistful eyes; Lord Douglas's wishes sank deep into her heart, and Raoul held her hand, and looked into her eyes, as if she held his very life to give or to withhold. By this time, also, it seemed as if her whole being was merged into one wish, one thought, one prayer, that she might do him good and not evil all the days of her life. God's answer to that prayer remains a mystery—it was a very bitter one to her for many years, but at last she grew content—willing to leave the riddle to be read aright at the lifting of the veil.

"Not for seven years," said Beatrix, at last. "Remember, not for seven years;" but before she ended, Raoul was kneeling at her feet, as
if she had granted him all, in granting him this hope.

So, on a summer's day, they betrothed her for the second time in the hall at Dalbraith. How clearly she remembered it. Raoul's exulting smile, her father's joy, and the weight on her own heart. And then following, alas! how closely, came the gentle and peaceful closing of the old man's eyes.

Well, those seven years were lived through—endless as they seemed to look forward to—lived through hour by hour, month by month, year by year, at last. Raoul and Beatrix met sometimes, but not very often. Monsieur de Beaurepaire had rejoined the army soon after the death of Lord Douglas, and Beatrix went abroad with her mother, who was pining away in Scotland from home-sickness, the pathetic complaint of the exile. They went to Aix-la-Chapelle, and afterwards to Switzerland, leading a wandering and somewhat melancholy life among people who were exiles like themselves. Whenever it was possible, Raoul joined them, but those meetings brought only a pleasure to Beatrix which was largely mingled with pain. She saw that the waiting, weary enough for a
brave and patient nature like her own, was still worse for him than it was for her, and that it was doing him real harm. Sometimes he beset her with passionate prayers that she would release herself and him from their long bondage to her promise, and save him from the intolerable weariness of his life. A man, he told her, was not like a woman, to whom endurance and submission were natural.

Sometimes he was very gentle—satisfied, and made happy only by her presence; and when he left her, looking at her with a sad wistfulness that went nearer to shaking poor Beatrix's resolution than anything else in the world.

But through everything she never lost her hopefulness, or the bright sweetness that brought her love wherever she went.

And, after all, she was not called upon to wait those seven years. The end came when nearly six of them were gone. She and her mother had returned for a while to Dalbraith, where indeed all the great events of her life, whether for joy or for sorrow, seem to have come to her. She was beginning to think that the summer of her life was drawing near, that the long anguish
of patience was nearly over, and that it might be given to her to make Raoul forget the past in the happiness of the present. She had not seen him for some months, but her brother had written to him now and had asked him to join them at Dalbraith.

Directly they met, she saw that he was changed. Perhaps he had not fully realised it himself; perhaps he had intended to hide it from her, but she knew him too well for that to be possible.

It was all told the first time they were alone together, in the abrupt, reproachful words: "Beatrix, it was too much to ask of any man. I could not do it."

Then she knew—it seemed to her as if she had always known that so it must be. She spoke very gently, putting her hand on his arm as he paced restlessly up and down. She only said, "Yes, dear Raoul; I think it was too much."

"Oh, Beatrix, we might have been so happy. Beatrix, indeed it is your fault."

She sighed a little, but her eyes had not lost their trustful look as she raised them to his. "Was it my fault, Raoul? I don't know; but I am quite sure it was not yours."
"You don't know what you are talking about," he answered restlessly. "You don't understand."

"I think I do. I think we can put it right."

He shook his head, but he put his hand down on hers, which still lay upon his arm, and as he did so his eyes fell on the ring which he had put on her finger in her father's presence nearly seven years ago. "Right! oh, Beatrix," he said, with a low groan, "how can anything ever be right again?"

Beatrix stood thinking for a moment, and then she drew off the ring, and held it towards him. "If I send this ring to some one, with my love—then, Raoul?" and she looked up at him with a smile.

He bent down his head, and made no answer.

"Who is it, Raoul?" she asked presently, in a low, soft voice.

He looked up and caught her hands in his, drawing her to him roughly, with a strange passion of tenderness, and anger, and regret in his face.

"She is not like you, Beatrix, I know that; and yet I cannot help myself."
And in that sentence lay the key to the remainder of his life. It was not a good or a very happy one. He knew always that he had fallen short of his high hope, that he had placed his love a second time less nobly and purely than the first. Perhaps he was not a strong man, and that, as he said, he could not help himself. His fancy had only wavered for the moment. The glamour that had blinded his eyes soon faded, and it left him a gloomy and embittered man. To the last he remembered Beatrix; and those who were by him on his deathbed (for he died early), said that they could hear him whispering her name.

"Those Beaurepaires are always being thrown against us, for good or for evil," said Lord Douglas to his wife, when she told him that she had been hearing about Lady Beatrix's early life. "I really have a sort of superstition about it. It was a Beaurepaire, Margaret, who introduced us to each other—René de Beaurepaire—don't you remember?"

"The son of this man?" asked Margaret.

"Yes; Raoul's son. He is sure to turn up here sooner or later, for he is devoted to Aunt
Beatrix, who was good to him after his father died, and to Uncle Norman too."

"And to you, Ronald," added Margaret, jealously. "You, who nursed him so devotedly when he was ill."

"Ah well, Meg, I was not without my reward for that piece of business, so we won't say anything more about it. And now, which do you think tells a story best — Grizzly or Uncle Norman?"
CHAPTER IV.

AS MORNING SHOWS THE DAY.

"Though Fortune be saucy, and dourty, and dour,
And gloom thro' her fingers like hills thro' a shower,
When bodies hae got ae bit bairn o' their ain,
How he cheers up their hearts—he's the wonderful wean."

It was in the second year of their marriage that Ronald, their only son, was born to Douglas and Margaret. Life dawned on him when the bloom was on the heather, and the moors were in their glory.

With the Highland superstition that sees an omen in everything, the old wives about the place used to tell long afterwards, what a bonny morning of sunshine and glittering dewdrops was the forenoon of his birthday. But before twelve o'clock—quite early—the sky clouded over, and a heavy storm broke over the bright young day. The nurse shook her head at Grizel across the cradle, but young Ronald lay peacefully absorbed in trying to
swallow his fist, and was alike indiffer­ent to the evil presage, and to the grave, deep thunderclaps that rolled above his head.

They never called him Baby after he was christened. To his father and mother he was Ronald, or more generally Rollo; to every one else about him, the ‘wee bit Master.’

In truth his babyhood was somewhat slurred and hurried over, so anxious were all his belongings that he should early prove himself to be ‘a man.’ The dignity of his position as a ‘lad bairn’ was impressed very soon upon his mind, and little Ronald’s baby efforts to act up to what he felt was expected from him were sometimes pretty, sometimes almost pitiful to see. And yet it was rather a pity to hasten, with impatient feet, over that little opening bit of the path of life, upon which, after all, there is no return. It has its own simple, foolish charm, and the tottering footsteps beat out a tender, irregular music, that is wanting later on, in the steady tramp of the trained soldier marching to his battle.

Margaret Douglas rejoiced over her little son, wondered at him, watched him for hours, dreamt about his future, but she did not very
often toss him in her arms, or sing him nursery rhymes, and the coaxing nonsense that comes naturally to most young mothers would have sounded strange on her lips. Rollo himself taught her some ‘little ways’ in time; she learnt from him to play at ‘peep-bo,’ and to pretend Rollo was lost, searching for him in all impossible places, while he sat in full view, shouting with laughter on the sofa. Where once she had an idea she carried it out energetically, but the baby mostly took the initiative himself, blew the kisses, and bestowed, unasked, the romping hugs that are usually received as such unexampled favours at the hands of a young crown prince.

“I think he really must be an unusually beautiful child,” wrote Lady Douglas to her mother. “Every one thinks so; even I never saw a child the least like him, and you know I am not a baby-lover; so it must be true.”

As for Lord Douglas, he treated the new-comer after the fashion of most young fathers. For the first few weeks he was very much occupied with “it”—(that he should have called the wee bundle of cambric and flannel “it” was a sore trial to cousin Grizzy and the nurse). He held
it in his arms, whistled to it, warmed its pink curling toes at the fire, and declared that it knew him quite well, and liked him. The nurses looked on in admiration, and Margaret quite believed that "the boy" must like his father better than any one else.

Then began the shooting season. One evening Douglas put the little one down into his cot, with many professions of devoted love. He was out by starlight the next morning, had a grand day's deer-stalking, and, coming home happy and sleepy, forgot the baby for that night, and for many a one besides. "I like to know that he is all right, poor little chap, but I haven't time to go upstairs just now, you know, Margaret," he said, apologetically; but Margaret did not need excuses; her king could do no wrong, and she had only wondered a little bit hitherto at his devotion to the little boy.

A terrible rivalry existed between Ronald's nurse and the French 'bonne' of little Kenneth, Norman Douglas's small son. Kenneth had a year the start of his little cousin, but, according to his proud Marie, he had cut his first tooth, 'felt his legs,' and begun to talk
quite plain, at least a month younger than Ronald could be said to have accomplished any of these feats. Ronald was big and deliberate, and took his time about everything. However, at last the day came when he said "Daddy" so distinctly that nobody could mistake the word. He was then only a quarter of an inch shorter than Kenneth, and Lord Douglas had taken him for a walk. Marie hid her diminished head.

After that first walk Lord Douglas used often to take his son about with him. Ronald did his very best to keep up, grasping his father's finger tightly, but one of Douglas's long strides generally ended in the little fellow's measuring his length on the ground. To do Ronald justice, he did not cry, however hard the bump may have been. To be a man at each crisis of his small life was his earnest endeavour, and his father was his model. Not to cry when he hurt himself, to be afraid of nothing, to speak the truth, and love his mother, were the boy's notions of manliness, gathered partly from the exhortations addressed to him, and partly from a careful study of his father's bearing. In fact, as time went on, the
little Master of Dalbraith stood a good chance of being hardened off the face of the earth altogether, by the stern theories of his young father and mother. If he showed the least symptom of fear—and people are not heroes at three years old—Lord Douglas looked infinitely puzzled, and Lady Douglas sorrowfully indignant.

The helplessness of childhood was really as sacred to Lord Douglas as it is to most strong men, but he was slow to recognize its extent. Nothing could be more tender than his way of carrying and comforting the little fellow, if he was really in difficulties; and yet Rollo, being a sturdy child, of independent nature, often struggled through a considerable amount of cold and weariness, rather than complain to his father.

He grew up a thorough little mountaineer, fearless and hardy. Happy are they who can look back upon a boyhood such as his, as simple, pure, and brave.

Those were years of scarcity and great want in the Highlands, and the sufferings of his people sank deep into the heart of Lord Douglas. There were no luxuries in those days
at Dalbraith. The inmates lived frugally, even poorly, both Lord Douglas and his wife giving up their whole lives to lighten, as far as in them lay, the terrible want and misery that was around them. It was a grim battle that they had to wage with famine and despair; but it was fought on their side with unfaltering courage, strong will, and cheerful self-denial. There was nothing in the world that Douglas would not have given up to help his people, and Margaret seconded him with might and main. They never lost heart, even at the worst of times—that little band of workers, Douglas, and his wife, and Norman—only once or twice Douglas's courage well nigh gave way, and that was when it was first found necessary that some of the Highlanders should emigrate to Canada.

That nearly broke him down. The brave, patient people, who had met starvation with a dignified submission, whose hearts clung with so passionate a love to their glens and shielings, whose fathers, from time immemorial, had lived and died among the hills and moors of their own romantic land;—that they should have to leave it all, and go forth into exile!
To them it was as the bitterness of death; to Douglas, for them, a grief that he could hardly master or overcome.

Margaret never forgot the sorrow of the time when the emigrants were getting ready to leave Scotland. Douglas had done his duty; he had urged their going, but now he had to stand by and see the sacrifice carried out. His brief words, his troubled sleep and contracted brow, showed what he was feeling. Several bands had left the surrounding country before any of his own people could make up their minds to go out into the new world beyond the sea. But they knew that it must come to that.

One day Margaret had ridden with her husband many miles up into the hills, that he might bid farewell to a departing family—not from his own property. Those leave-taking were cruel work, but Douglas would not shrink from one of them; not to save himself a little pain would he let the people go away unnoticed; they should carry with them, at least, the memory of a few words of hope and of goodwill. But that day they were too late; the shepherd and his family whom they had come to seek, were already gone.
The hut was silent and deserted; no children were playing round the door, no sheep-dog's bark was heard in welcome or in warning. On the hearth in the middle of the floor were the dying peats of a fast fading fire—a heap of ashes—a faint canopy of smoke.

The door stood wide open, and the wind swept into the empty dwelling with a sigh, fluttering the bit of checked blue and white curtain that hung above the window, and shaking the rude latch of the closed door that led "ben." A broken birdcage hung in the unglazed window, but its door was open too, and the bird was gone. It was a dark and dreary-looking hut enough, but once it was a home.

Douglas stood looking round him for a few minutes, the silence and the desolation creeping coldly over his heart. He sat down on a broken wooden stool, beside the smouldering peats on the hearth-stone that was growing cold, and, covering his face with his hands, groaned aloud.

And then his own people began to go. It was better for them, there was no gainsaying that; hope and plenty awaited them out there;
but in the mean time a few hearts got broken on the way.

They came in a sort of rough procession to Dalbraith, that Lord Douglas might "set" them on their journey—a troop of gaunt, famine-stricken men and women, with despair and hope striving for mastery in their hearts. It was sad to watch them come winding down the mountain side, with their pipers playing a pibroch that echoed for the last time through the glen they were leaving.

There were old men and babies among them, women and little children. And such partings! Here and there a few words muttered in Gaelic, as the strong hands wrenched themselves asunder; wild sobs from the departing women; a scream sometimes from an old grandmother left behind. And beside such an one Lady Beatrix was generally to be found, holding the poor convulsed hands in hers, weeping bitterly with her, but withal speaking brave words of tender cheer, about the meeting again that was to be soon in "the Land o' the Leal."

Douglas went over to Canada with the first band of his people. He could not bear to let
them go out alone. When he had seen them settled, and in a fair way to do well, he came home somewhat comforted. There was hard work to be done still, but there was also now more hope. Years, however, like those he had gone through leave their mark for ever on a man’s life. He had grown stronger and at the same time gentler and more humble, as in that sharp ordeal he had learnt that none can lead a true life without the help of God.

While he was away Margaret remained at Dalbraith, trying, with Grizel’s help, to carry on her husband’s work, and waiting with what patience she might for his return. The time seemed to her to drag terribly. She envied Grizel’s busy contentment, and wondered at the unfailing brightness of Lady Beatrix, sometimes speculating, half idly, on how she herself could have borne such sorrows as all through her life had followed in the footsteps of her husband’s aunt. How impossible, she thought, ever to smile again. “But I could not live without Ronald,” she said to herself; “I should die.”

Even now a shadow, that was only half
confessed, had fallen over the Lady's Lodge. A little grandchild, Marion Stuart by name, had come there, sent home from India to the care of Lady Beatrix, and the small maiden brought with her a heavy disappointment. For there had been great hopes that her father—the only child of his mother—was himself coming home on leave to gladden her eyes once more. No one knew how Lady Beatrix had built on this meeting—how she had pined to see Charley's honest blue eyes, and to hear his voice again—how often lately she had lain awake with a beating heart, too happy and too full of hope to sleep.

And the blissful vision was so nearly coming true. Then alas! there had been some disturbances on an Indian frontier, Charley's regiment was ordered there, his leave postponed, and the little daughter was sent home to Scotland in the care of a brother officer's wife. It was a bitter disappointment, and perhaps the worst part of it was that Charley believed so fully that he was sending his mother by far the dearest, and the most welcome, part of himself. How dense people are sometimes, even the best and kindest! "When you have
our little rosebud on your lap, mother, you will not have time,” he wrote, “to miss your own old boy.”

His mother shook her head, cried over the letter, smiled, brushed away the tears, and kissed Charley’s dear blundering handwriting. “How little the boy knows, God bless him,” she said to herself, while she tried to smother the heartache, and to forget the sharp sting of an unshared disappointment. Truly Charley’s “rosebud” seemed beset with thorns.

“How pleasurable,” said Grizel, “for the dear Auntie to have Charley’s child to take his place in her heart,” and Lady Beatrix smiled and brightened, striving to put away the haunting sense of contrast; but she could not help thinking of Charley’s manly face, his kind voice, of the strong protecting clasp in which she always felt so safe and so happy, and her eyes brimmed over until a tear fell on the fair head of Charley’s little child. How glad he would have been—how much they would have had to say to one another; she remembered long firelight talks, and little old jokes shared between mother and son that no one else could ever have entered into, and she almost fancied
she could hear his quick step coming in, and his cheery laugh of pleasure.

Instead, on that first day she was holding close to her side a little silent bashful maiden of two summers, whose heart she could feel fluttering under her hand like an imprisoned bird. Little Marion did not cry, but her dumb agony of shyness was almost more painful to see than tears. She met all her grandmother's tender advances by burying her face in her hands, and sometimes stamping her tiny foot on the floor with an air of heartrending despair.

Lady Beatrix was at her wits' end. The little one's genuine suffering cut her to the heart; and then the blue eyes that she had just caught a glimpse of were so like Charley's, it had given her a strange thrill to meet them, and she could almost have cried because Charley's child would have nothing to say to her.

At last the small thing, after endless coaxing, had allowed herself to be lifted on to her grandmother's knee. Lady Beatrix's heart quite throbbed. The little hands were still tightly clasped over the eyes, and the head bent down; but it was something that she sat still, and allowed the soft hand to hold
her small bare leg without kicking it away as she had done hitherto.

Just then the door was suddenly burst open, and Lady Beatrix give up all for lost, as her other ward, little Kenneth Douglas, rushed noisily into the room.

"What's that?" he asked, in a shout of surprise, as he caught sight of the little drooping figure on Lady Beatrix's lap.

"Hush, Kenneth," she answered softly; "don't frighten her, take no notice, it is little Marion."

Kenneth came quite close, putting his hands behind his back, and staring at his small cousin at his ease.

"What has she got her fists in her eyes for?" he inquired.

"Don't talk so loud, Kenneth; she is shy."

"She is peeping at me all the time. I say, little baby," and he seized hold roughly of the wee leg that Lady Beatrix was touching as if it was made of egg-shell china.

"Kenneth, Kenneth, you will make her cry."

Not at all. To her grandmother's surprise, the little maiden slowly raised her head, and a shy sunny smile stole over her face.
"A boy," she said, slowly and distinctly.
"Yes," answered Lady Beatrix, hardly daring yet to speak above her breath; "a boy. Do you like him, Marion?"
No answer.
"She's dreadfully small, littler than Ronald;" and with an air of lordly indifference Kenneth strolled off to the window.
Marion looked after him, twisted herself suddenly off Lady Beatrix's lap, and trotted across the room.
"Boy," she said, insinuatingly planting herself in front of him.
Kenneth did not mean to be unkind, but he had got his most precious possession, a toy frigate in full sail, in his arms, and the little hands were stretched out alarmingly near to the fragile masts. He gave a friendly push intended to keep her off, but the little one was not very steady on her legs; she made one or two steps backwards and subsided on to the floor.
There was a moment's pause, while Lady Beatrix waited for the scream that must now surely come. Instead, however, there rung suddenly through the room the pretty silver
peal of a baby's laugh. Little Marion had taken it all in good part.

"Aden," she said, struggling to her feet, and approaching Kenneth.

"Aunt Beatrix," said the boy, solemnly, "she loves me very much indeed."

When Marion went up to her strange nursery that night, she would not look at Lady Beatrix, but she was grasping "Boy's" arm tightly, and a light had arisen on her desolation.

"Aunt Beatrix," said Kenneth, that same evening, after he had said his prayers, and he fixed his eyes steadily on his aunt's face, reading its wistfulness with the quick intuition of childhood, "Are you sorry because that baby likes me better than you?"

"Oh, no Kenneth, not if it makes her happy."

"I don't think she likes you very much," continued Master Kenneth.

"Perhaps she will by-and-by."

"As much as me?" he asked.

"We shall see."

"Aunt Beatrix," resumed the boy, going on with his own train of thought; "Father says that God loves you very much."
Strange power wielded by baby hands. A child’s frown may have the power to wound; a child’s unconscious words can heal and bless.

Lady Beatrix took the curly golden head between her hands and kissed it; “I know it, Kenneth,” she said, softly and gladly.

Only Margaret Douglas seemed at all to understand the silent trial and disappointment. “That little mite,” she said, the first time she saw Marion, and heard Grizel discoursing on the delight and satisfaction she must have brought to her grandmother. And with a caressing gesture, that was very rare in her, she took Lady Beatrix’s hand and held it closely in her own. The other glanced up with a quick smile of understanding and thanks for the unspoken sympathy; but presently, as if her heart smote her even for accepting it, her left hand went out, and gently sought little Marion’s fair head.

Time passed on; the three children left infancy behind them, and began to play their small parts in the family history. The girl was a sturdy, earnest, meditative little thing, possessed of a wonderful imagination, and of a tremendous power of hero worship. At
present all this was lavished on her cousin Kenneth, whose hazel eyes and coaxing ways carried all before him.

How Marion loved him, with his winning tongue and merry laugh, and all that she felt for him in the silence of that deep little heart of hers, she herself would certainly not have been able to describe; but she had unutterable day-dreams about herself and him, in most of which she was to have the joy of saving him from misfortune, and sometimes of having her head cut off for his sake. Quiet and self-contained when left to herself, she kindled into life, and glee, and bustle, when her hero was with her. She was the leader in their adventures; sometimes, truth to tell, his defender in danger.

There was a certain formidable-looking mountain goat, which had long been kept in captivity at Dalbraith. Notwithstanding his long beard and twisted horns, he was generally a peaceable animal enough, but one day, when the children had been teasing him rather too much for his good humour, he suddenly broke the cord that tethered him, lowered his head, and charged the whole party gallantly.
Kenneth and Ronald sought an inglorious safety in flight; but Marion spread out the skirt of her little frock, and bravely put herself in the forefront of the danger, retiring slowly with her face to the foe, and covering the retreat of the two boys. Lord Douglas came upon the scene just in time to pick up the little maiden as she was being rolled over and over on the grass, and to carry her home on his shoulder, where she sat perched up, shy and serious, and chiefly concerned that he should in no way suppose Kenneth to have been at all wanting in valour. "He had not got a petticoat to catch the goat, you see," said Marion.

Presently they met the two boys coming back, and followed by Lady Beatrix. Kenneth came running to meet them, laughing, and calling out that he hoped good little Moll had not been hurt. Ronald, for his part, kept rather in the back-ground, hanging down his head when he saw his father, while his little brown face was dyed with the deepest crimson.

"Here, Granny," said Lord Douglas, as he lifted Marion from his shoulder; "your lassie is braver than both our laddies put together."

"Bide a wee," answered Lady Beatrix, point-
ing back, with a smile, to poor Ronald’s shame-stricken little figure, “there’s no lack of mettle there.”

In truth, Ronald had not dreamt of running away from the goat until he was infected by Kenneth’s panic.

Such things are catching, as we all know, by many a sad war history. Instead of showing fight, as he had been preparing to do, he was demoralised by his cousin’s disappearance; and the danger appearing imminent, scoured away after him as fast as his short legs could carry him.

Lord Douglas looked at his little son’s scarlet face; and presently, sitting down on a rock hard by, lifted him on to his knee.

“Why did you run away?” he whispered, holding him against his breast.

“I was frightened,” answered the boy, choking with shame, but perfectly truthful.

Lord Douglas put his cheek down on to the curly head, and said no more; but something—some understanding—some tie—what was it? tightened between father and son, and never got loose again.

The two children at the Lady’s Lodge were as happy as are flowers in the sunshine.
"Granny," as they both called her, was the centre of their lives; her gift of sympathy with childhood enabling her to enter into and enjoy, for her own sake, many of the things which they liked best.

Often quaint and dainty scenes were enacted in her picturesque little drawing-room, on wintry afternoons, after the daylight was gone, and when the red glow of the fire shone against the walls, and out beyond the unshuttered windows. The dusk peering quietly in might see chairs and tables all pushed on one side, and Lady Beatrix, her little delicate erect figure thrown out by the ruddy light behind her, teaching Kenneth and Marion to dance the stately "minuet de la Cour," for which she had been famous in her youth.

It was pretty to see Marion's sturdy earnestness as she danced; and the native easy grace of Kenneth's steps and bows; but prettier far to watch the little grandmother, now pausing with slow dignity and regal air, her head raised, and her tiny foot pointed, now sinking down in one of those deep sweeping curtseys, that had lost none of their steady balance in the course of years. And as she moved, the atmosphere
of former days seemed to gather round her, brocaded robes to rustle, ghostly cavaliers to bend and sway before her, inaudible voices to speak gallantly or tenderly as she swept along.

Thus, at least, it appeared to one person, who sat in a dark corner, playing the minuet music on a strangely-shaped piano, with mother-of-pearl keys, and a tendency to asthma. That person was the old demoiselle de compagnie, who had been nursery governess to Charley Stuart, and who had known his mother even before those distant days. Brown-faced, stoutly built, Mademoiselle Aglaë, (or "Mamzelle Ugly," as she had long since grown content to hear herself called by Scottish tongues), was among the loving and faithful of the earth, and very familiar to her ears was the measured music of the gavottes and minuets which she played.

One of the hoarded treasures in Lady Beatrix's room was a tiny fiddle, laid away carefully in its case, which had once belonged to her uncle, the Baron de Saint Aulaire, and had been his inseparable companion in the days of the emigration, when he gave dancing lessons
in London. Aglaë Tailleur, daughter to the Intendant of his estates on the Loire, followed her master and mistress when they left France. They had endured many hardships—the Baron and Baronne, and the Angevin waiting-woman—for the dancing lessons at the best were very poorly paid; but after Lady Beatrix Stuart married she was able to cheer her old uncle’s closing days, and when he died he left to her care his two most constant friends, the little fiddle, and Mamselle Aglaë.

‘Miledi’ was now the only remaining link that connected Ugly with the young dream-life that she very imperfectly remembered—with the banks of the Loire, and the kinsfolk and acquaintance of her youth. The two women had clung to each other through many vicissitudes of fortune. They had brought up Charley Stuart, and seen him go out into the world; and now another generation had begun, and it was Charley’s little child who was dancing in the firelight.

On some evenings there was no dancing lesson, but the shaded candles were lighted on Granny’s table near the fire; and sitting very upright in her high-backed chair, she read
aloud "Les Veillées du Château" to the two children, as they sat cross-legged on the hearthrug at her feet.

César and Pulchérie, Delphine, Alphonse and Télismar, M. l’Abbé and Madame la Marquise, sententious shadows from the world of ancient France, came out bowing and moralising as in days of yore, while Kenneth and Marion listened entranced, or shouted with laughter over the prim virtues of the young de Clémires.

But "Bonne Maman," in the book itself, could hardly have enjoyed the "Veillées" more heartily than did their present reader, to whom old associations lent them reality. Château Champcery became her mother’s ancestral home in La Vendée; she could see her own Bonne Maman sitting serenely in the huge, dark, dilapidated rooms; she heard Lady Douglas lamenting gaily over the lost delights of Paris, and "les gens" grumbling over the dreariness of a country life.

Frequently the book was dropped on to her lap, and, still speaking French, she rapidly told the children story after story out of her own experience, each one with twenty times more life, and fun, and spirit in it, than any that
had ever dawned on the sage imagination of Madame de Genlis.

The boy and girl loved the book for Granny's sake. Once in after years, when Kenneth was a man, he stumbled on one of the little worn volumes, stowed away in the corner of a bookcase. He took it down and opened it, turning slowly over its brown, faded pages—a rush of recollections crowding over him, until he was surprised to find that the crabbed old printing was growing blurred and dim from the tears that filled his eyes.

Poor Kenneth, want of affection was never one of his faults. He only cared too much for love and praise, and dreaded the loss of them too keenly. All through his life he could not turn back unmoved to the bright, sweet memories of his childhood.

He was but fulfilling the law of his destiny when, a year or two afterwards, he grew to be entirely beyond petticoat government, and gave everybody belonging to him a great deal of trouble. His intentions were excellent; he meant no harm whatsoever when he all but blew up the house with gunpowder. On the contrary, his repentance and pious thankfulness
that Granny and Marion had not fallen victims to his experiments, were truly affecting.

But he did not turn over the new leaf that was expected of him; and a day came when justice, prompt and high-handed, descended on his head.

It came about in this way. The portrait (in pastels) of "Euphemia Douglas, Spinster, æt 45," had long possessed an unholy fascination for him; and a certain large pink rose, stuck primly in her blue stomacher, appeared in his eyes the most desirable target which any marksman could aspire to.

One day when, most unluckily for him, his father was sitting in the drawing-room, talking to Lady Beatrix, the deed was done, and an arrow, discharged with somewhat nervous haste from outside the window, found its mark (but fortunately half spent) in Granny's prettiest lace cap.

It took only two of Colonel Douglas's long strides to carry him to the spot, and the hapless archer was captured red-handed, the bow still grasped quivering in his arms.

Kenneth had never encountered anything so formidable as his father's bent brows, low
voice, and the fierce grasp that fastened on his shoulder like a vice. Lady Beatrix had been in real peril for an instant, and her nephew was sufficiently frightened to be very angry.

"That was your doing I suppose, sir," he said in a deep and shaky voice.

The boy faltered for a moment and looked round for Marion, who, as usual in the hour of danger, was quickly at his side. That instant's hesitation sealed his fate.

The sentence, quickly pronounced and irrevocable, was imprisonment at Norman's Tower until such time as his father's leave was over, and then a school in England.

Granny, as soon as she was certified that her ear had not been transfixed, was rather inclined to laugh, and to plead for the culprit, but neither her intercession nor the agonized supplications of Marion were of any avail.

An hour after, like Jock o' Hazeldean's lady, Marion was left "weeping by the tide," while the boat which carried off the still bewildered Kenneth was receding in the distance. Now it had reached the island, and the shadows from the rocks had fallen athwart it—now it
was rounding the point—now it was quite gone.

To have behaved thus to a lady,—for though poor Kenneth had aimed at a pictured "princess" he had actually hit a living one, and then to have hesitated to confess—could he have sinned more deeply against his father's twofold creed of chivalry and honour?

Never had the little fellow experienced such handling as he met with from Colonel Douglas that afternoon at Norman's Tower. If poor Marion could have seen him lying on the ground, with his face hidden on the floor, after his father had left him, she could hardly have mourned for him more bitterly than she did, as she sat in the deserted school-room and poured out her woes into Ugly's sympathising bosom.

And perhaps had Colonel Douglas known the abiding impression of terror that his son received from his severe looks and words, he would not so openly have manifested his displeasure. The child was a child still, and a shock was given to his nerves.

Little Ronald Douglas, over at Dalbraith, was of a sterner fibre than his cousin, and could have borne rough treatment better.
But the impression unwittingly given was, for good or for evil, irrevocably received. Later on in the evening Colonel Douglas returned home, his anger all gone, and nothing but a tender yearning remaining towards his little son. That was Granny's work. He talked to him in so gentle and fatherly a way that Kenneth's elastic spirits rose every minute, and when he sat at dinner with his father, in the queer barrack-looking dining-room, he felt every inch a man, and the troubles of the day were already not forgotten, but left behind.

At that same moment Marion, woman-like, was lovingly and sorrowfully laying aside the possessions he had most valued; his boats, his carpenter's tools, the big knife, whereof all the blades but one were broken, and the ill-fated bow and arrows. Slow tears were dropping on them as she put them one by one into the drawer—and just then his father was smiling kindly on him, and Kenneth was proudly holding up his glass that Adam Haldane, the Colonel's soldier-servant, might fill it half-full of wine.

A tall, gaunt, grim-looking personage was that same Adam, with a long nut-cracker nose
and chin, and a pair of rather cunning little red eyes to match his rusty hair. He had been all through the Peninsula with Norman Douglas, and he simply worshipped the ground his Colonel stood upon. His store of campaigning stories was inexhaustible. Whether most of them were true is quite another question. At all events Kenneth firmly believed them all. There was nothing in the world Adam would not have done for his master's son, to whom he had been a devoted nurse in the days of his motherless infancy. Indeed he loved the little fellow not wisely, but too well; for being thoroughly unscrupulous as well as very faithful, he never stopped at an untruth, if he could thereby get the young master out of any scrape. Kenneth, though rather shocked, was always grateful for his help. He stood in great awe now of his father; the mere drawing together of the grey eyebrows made his heart beat; and, on the other hand, a single word or look of approval filled him with elation.

He learnt two things from Adam while he was at Norman's Tower—one was, to adore his father with something of the old soldier's enthusiasm; the other, to hide away carefully,
half in love and half in fear, anything that might vex "his Honour," or bring displeasure on himself.

It really was an affecting scene, when Kenneth, now only held in a sort of honourable captivity, went to the Lady's Lodge, to say good-bye, on the eve of his departure for school. He sat on Granny's knee, his manhood all forgotten, his arms clasped round her neck, sobbing out that he was very sorry; he would not have hurt his dear, dearest, best Granny for the whole, whole world. Granny was crying heartily as she hugged him to her heart. Ugly, in her corner, shook with explosive grief. Even Colonel Douglas sniffed. Poor Marion only was quite past tears.

Thenceforward, her hero only reappeared at intervals, with a sort of fireworks of praise and triumph whizzing round his head. He was a very clever fellow, and his successes at school were really dazzling to himself, and everybody belonging to him.

Dalbraith was very proud of him. Ronald, who, a bigger fellow in body and mind, was also much slower in developing, thought his cousin one of the wonders of the world; but
he did not entirely understand him. His own progress through Eton was a much more deliberate affair. Alas! he was a greater hero to the fishermen and keepers at home than to his Eton masters. Already he was a good shot, and they boasted that he had a quicker eye to mark ptarmigan on the rocky hill than old Fergus himself, and a lighter hand for the "sawmon."

He was a thorough Highlander. His mother could sometimes have found it in her heart to be jealous of Kenneth’s prizes; but, on the other hand, Colonel Douglas looked rather wistfully at the young master of Dalbraith.

"Both fine lads, very fine lads," he used to say to Lady Beatrix; "but I sometimes think young Rollo has more of the real old Douglas in him."

"Wait till you hear Kenneth repeating Mr. Macaulay’s ‘Lays of Ancient Rome,’ to Marion, or the Battle-scene out of the ‘Lord of the Isles,’" she answered smiling, "and then watch his eyes light up."

"Ah, well," he rejoined, "the boy is such a man of the world. You should have heard him laugh at poor old Grizel’s stories
—now the other fellow was hanging on her words.”

It was quite true that Kenneth scouted all the Highland legends that were so sacred to Grizel, and perhaps, in his heart of hearts, to Colonel Douglas also, but they fascinated Ronald, and especially the many traditions that had gathered like moss on a ruin over the House of Dalbraith.

“Yes, we are very complete,” said Lord Douglas, laughing one evening, as they all sat round the fire in the hall. Harold Scrope had been drawing Grizel out, and weird and marvellous were the tales she told. “We have a ghost that nobody ever sees, and a prophecy that nobody believes.”

“I assure you, Ronald, they do believe in it,” said Lady Douglas. “Old Niel Mackenzie has many a time made me quite uncomfortable by repeating it. I don’t like that prophecy. It gives me a cold shiver down my back.”

“What is it about?” asked Harold. “May one hear it?”

“Oh, it’s very oracular,” said Douglas; “in Gaelic especially, it does not sound nearly so well in English. I have forgotten half of it,
but the end is something like this—'When kinsman's hand is dyed with kinsman's blood,—when true is false, and the loving heart grows cold—then the one son of the good father shall cross his threshold for the last time, unless there comes a lassie from the East, who can wash the red hand white.'"

"A hard task for the lassie," said Harold Scrope, with a laugh. "Is it supposed to be Meg, who has come from the East—from East Anglia, at all events?"

"Don't laugh," said Margaret. "I have never liked somehow to hear that prophecy."

"Meg, I always thought you were a strong-minded woman," observed her husband.

"Come, we'll change the subject," said Harold. "Rollo there looks as if some one was walking over his grave. Are you quite sure, Meg, you have never seen the ghost?"

"Indeed," said Grizel, "and I don't wonder at dear Margaret's feeling timid, when we know how often our Highland prophecies come true."

"Really, Cousin Grizzy?" asked Ronald eagerly; "really true?"

"What for not, laddie? Why, ye will
have heard about the Mackenzies of Seaforth, and I could tell no end of others."

"Oh, do tell me, Cousin Grizzy."

And therewith began a long half-whispered dialogue, Grizel recounting story after story in a low monotonous "awsome" voice, with her finger lifted impressively on high, Ronald sitting in front of her, with his elbows on his knees, and his chin propped on his hands, while his big grey eyes were fixed intently on her face.

The others looked round occasionally when his clear young voice broke in upon the solemn narrative: "I say, Cousin Grizzy! He didn't see it really? And what did the warlock do next?"

"Grizzy," said Lord Douglas, coming behind her chair at last; "I believed you to be a decent God-fearing body, instead of a doited heathen, with your auld wives' fables."

"Yes, but, father—wait one moment—and did he really hear the horses shaking their silver bridles under the moss, Cousin Grizzy?"

"Oh Rollo! oh Grizzy! Well, come, let us hear the end."

But Grizel was shocked, and would not tell
another word. "Only perhaps the day will come to some of you when you won't laugh at the 'doom of Dalbraith,'" she said, looking round waringly upon them all.

"I don't laugh now," said Margaret; and she got up from her chair, for it was time to go to bed, and the lights were burning dim, and the fire had sunk so low that there was a chill feeling in the hall.

Notwithstanding his father's laughter, Ronald fell asleep that night with the words of the prophecy running in his head—"When kinsman's blood is shed by kinsman's hand"—"the red hand white"—how did it go?—"a lassie from the East"—and then Ronald was asleep.
CHAPTER V.

"SNOW FALLS IN THE RIVER."

"How are ye a' at hame,
    I' my ain countree?
Are your kind hearts a' the same,
    I' my ain countree?
Are ye a' as fu' of glee,
As witty, frank, and free,
    As blithe as ye used to be,
I' my ain countree?"

Sandycombe, in Norfolk, the former home of Margaret Douglas, was undoubtedly a fine place. "A great big white and green place," as Ronald, accustomed to the wild brilliancy of the Highland colouring, once disrespectfully described it. There were broad white roads across the park; long lines of white stone balustrades, and terrace-steps round the house; a broad sheet of water that lay almost white in winter under the pale sky.

It all sounds rather cold—perhaps the place had rather a cold effect—but it was very fine.
The trees were large, and stately oak or elm avenues stretched straight away for miles, crossed here and there by fresh processions of younger trees. You could see for a long way down the chief avenue, for it took no turns, and the road beneath its shade had never a twist, nor an up nor a down, until it vanished far away through some lodge-gates into the deer-park.

The ground sloped from the terrace almost imperceptibly towards the mere, and hardly seemed to take the trouble to rise again on the opposite shore; but the sheet of water, on which floated several snowy swans, was very broad and handsome, and lay well in front of the chief façade of the house.

Just now it was winter, and the great stone-bordered flower-beds on the terrace, that glowed like tessalated pavement in the month of August, were skilfully planted with dwarf evergreens and golden yew. The scarlet geraniums had disappeared from the vases, and the orange-trees had moved into winter quarters.

Sandysmere was a place to command a certain admiration for its faultless keeping—a little weariness—perhaps a slight degree of awe.
Strangers might fall into the grievous mistake of fancying it was all too stiff and too grand for people to be at home in it—to laugh, or romp, or be untidy. That would have been a mistake indeed. There are certain windows up in that great pile belonging to play-rooms and nurseries, and school-rooms, that could tell rather a different story. But the perfect order of the whole was a little chilling, and as Ronald Douglas, one December evening, drove down the long avenue of bare trees, with his father and mother, he thought it tiresome to see no fallen leaves on the smooth-shaven turf; and truly pitiable, that the deer, languidly curious, should gaze tamely at the carriage as it went by.

It was a long time since Lady Douglas had spent Christmas at her old home. Her father had been in office for several years, and had been little at Sandysmere himself, and afterwards the whole family passed a couple of winters in Italy. Ronald had never seen the place, and had begun by being rather aggrieved at the prospect of going there for his Christmas holidays instead of home to Dalbraith. A few stray words, however, that Harold Scrope let fall about hunting produced a magical effect, and
he was arriving at Sandysmere with almost as much eagerness as his mother.

"It isn't freezing at all, is it, father? it feels quite stuffy and warm."

No, it was not freezing; the darkening, misty December afternoon was all that could be wished from a hunting point of view; and as the carriage drove under the stone portico, one or two men in red coats vanished through a side entrance, leaving Lord Sandysmere standing alone to bid his daughter welcome. He held her hand and led her into the great marble hall, its roof reaching up to the top of the house, where the sonorous echoes instantly carried Margaret back to her childish days; recalling wonderful games of hide-and-seek, and firelight romps upon the straight flight of stone stairs.

Lady Sandysmere was standing now upon the first step, and before Margaret had reached the top, a number of people were running down to meet her. There was a confusion of greetings, and Donald was shaken hands with by so many uncles and cousins, and kissed by so many aunts, that his notions of relationship were considerably enlarged.
There was a large party at Sandysmere, composed chiefly of the family, and it was Ronald’s first introduction into society.

An hour or two later he was standing in a dark corner of the drawing-room watching the guests as they came down before dinner.

On the hearth, in front of a huge fire that almost lighted the room, stood a man with a bald head, very restless dark eyes, a black moustache, and a riband at his bottom-hole. Ronald was perfectly confounded at seeing this individual rush forward as Lord Douglas came into the room, and throwing his arms round him, bestow a sounding kiss on each of his cheeks. Ronald’s English, still more his Scottish, prejudices were deeply hurt. His father was surely disgraced by being subjected to such an unheard-of indignity—kissed in the drawing-room before everybody! Ronald blushed crimson, and glanced furtively round the room to see if everybody was shocked, or still worse, if everybody was laughing. But no; people seemed to be taking it very quietly, and Lord Douglas himself looked pleased and rather excited. He was standing beside his unknown friend, who, after a profound and
elaborate bow, was in the act of raising Lady Douglas's hand to his lips.

"Making a fool of mother too," thought Ronald, indignantly. "Who can the fellow be? I wonder my grandfather likes to have him here."

But, behold, Lord Douglas was looking round as if in search of somebody. Margaret pointed to his corner, and here were both his father and the stranger coming across the room. "Yes, René," he heard Lord Douglas say, "he is my only son;" and then two hands were warmly held out to him, and for one fearful moment Ronald thought that he was going to be kissed too. He backed into a stand of hot-house flowers; tried to release at least one hand; glanced appealingly at his father; and, finally, hopelessly submitted to be drawn out into the light, scrutinised from head to foot by the quick black eyes, pronounced the image of "Papa," and patted on the cheek as if he had been a baby of six years old.

"Ah, coquin," said René de Beaurepaire, turning back to Lord Douglas with a laugh, "do you remember Saint Germain?"

And then other people entered by twos and
threes, and the room began to fill. Mary Scrope, the only remaining unmarried daughter of the house, appeared, surrounded as usual by an adoring body-guard of younger brothers and nephews. Ronald was enrolled into the corps next day, but just now he stood alone and watched. There was a tall man, and a short man, a man with a grey beard, a man with a red beard, and a man with no beard at all; there was a lady in black, a lady in pink, a lady in white, and a lady in pink, black, and white, all three. There were two girls dressed alike who stood side by side, and were talked to by the man with the red beard; and there was a couple who came in very late, and did not appear the least disconcerted, though the gong had sounded, and the folding-doors been thrown open with great pomp, at least five minutes before.

At dinner Ronald could not resist watching Monsieur de Beaurepaire with a sort of unwilling fascination. He despised the foreign way in which he handled his knife and fork and napkin; his courteous smile, and the low tone in which he was evidently making some pretty speech (awful humbug, Ronald felt
convinced), to the hostess, by whose side he was sitting.

But still there was something attractive in the clear, sharp speech; the slight gestures, the changeful expression; and once, when he had finished his soup, Ronald saw him lean forward and glance down the table towards Lord Douglas with a genuine smile and look of affection, that went far towards overcoming the boy's natural prejudice against a Frenchman.

Yet it was a melancholy face when in repose; and an older observer than Ronald would have discovered the cynical expression which had grown habitual to him, when he sat, as he was fond of doing, silent and observant.

Monsieur de Beaurepaire was a diplomat, and had been Minister both at a German and an Italian court. He married an Englishwoman, but his wife was dead. A keen sportsman, there was a charm to him in everything English; most of his spare time was spent in this country, and none of the later friendships of his life were half so dear to him as his early intercourse with Lord Douglas, and the bright young days he used to spend at Dalbraith.
It was his father, Raoul, Marquis de Beaurepaire, who loved and deserted Lady Beatrix Douglas. She had avenged herself in later times by a kindness and affection for the son, which he repaid with a sort of enthusiasm. It was René himself who had introduced Lord Douglas and Margaret Scrope to one another. The two families were always being oddly thrown together, and on both sides there was a sort of superstition on the subject.

"I wish that the hereditary friendship could be carried on through our children," said Monsieur de Beaurepaire that evening; and he laid his head on Ronald’s shoulder as he spoke. "Dites donc, shall it be so, my friend?"

Ronald was not of an age to care much about hereditary friendships; the speech sounded sentimental, and he could think of nothing to say in reply.

"You must send us over Gaston and Agénor to the Highlands some of these days," said Lord Douglas, coming to his help.

("French fellows—Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Ronald, in the silence of his own heart.)
"You have but those two, René, have you?"

"And my little Diane," answered M. de Beaurepaire, "my only daughter. Tell me, does my Lord shoot to-morrow?"

* * *

"Well, Margaret, how do you feel in civilised life again?" asked Harold Scrope, sitting down beside his sister. "It is odd to see you descended from your eyrie."

"All the people I remember look to me so old," said Margaret, contemplating the groups around her.

Harold laughed. "Do they?—they haven’t lived on Highland air and hodge-podge. I think they look much tamer and more comfortable than you do. You really have the look of an eagle among a lot of carefully-reared pheasants. Meg, I say, where is your worsted work?"

"I don’t possess any," answered Lady Douglas in her solemn way.

"Everybody is knitting, or playing on the piano, or doing something useful, except you. I am really afraid you are not like other people, Meg!"

It was true enough that Lady Douglas was
not too much like other people. She had lost that habit of little easy talk, that people get by living in the world. Perhaps she had never possessed it in any great degree; but there was a solitary look about her as she sat in the morning among the other ladies in the drawing-room, with no work to occupy her—her hands crossed on her knee, and her eyes following one speaker after another, as they talked idly on.

"Where do you get your little boy's shoes?" asked one young matron of another, with an air of intense interest; and then pocket-books were brought out and some invaluable addresses were exchanged. Margaret listened dreamily. Even the unwonted magnificence of her own velvet gown was oppressive to her.

The winter sun flooded the big room, the fire blazed, the brake went driving away down the straight white road across the park, carrying a party of shooters to a distant covert; from a far-off school-room came the faint sound of scales, played evenly, unevenly,—stopping, going on again,—faster, slower,—a grand confusion, and then a laborious return to the first note. The party round the fire talked about London;
about some Gerald and Adelaide whom Lady Douglas did not know; about little boys' shoes and new books—and she sat gazing out of the window, a vision of her youth coming back to her with the atmosphere of the room, scented by stephanotis and Russian violets, with the silvery chimes of a clock playing a well-remembered air, with the miniature of herself dressed in a white frock and blue ribbons, which lay on the table before her.

Coming home was hardly, to her, what it would have been to many people after so long an absence. She was very fond of her own family, and the scenes of her young days were dear and pleasant to her, but—every day she realized it more—Sandysmere was nothing to her in comparison with Dalbraith. That which her brother Harold had said of her in the early days of her marriage was even more true now. She could see no one in the world but Douglas. Her people recognized it with a smile and a sigh. It was pleasant to see her so happy, so absorbed. Lady Sandysmere took the second place in Margaret's heart, the more willingly that she was herself very fond of her son-in-law. No one could live with Douglas without
loving him, and there was a sort of lofty force of character about him that made itself more felt every year. They were all proud of belonging to him.

Margaret's son grew very popular at Sandysmere. No one liked him the less for what they called his staring likeness to his father. It was impossible to resist listening to the sound of his voice chattering away, and his merry infectious laugh, or to fail being cheered by the fearless sunshine on his face.

"It's a real blessing, Meg, that your boy does not talk loud, for it's my belief he never stops," said Harold Scrope, and in the family this was considered a great compliment, Uncle Harold so seldom praised any one. "Harold thinks Ronald has a remarkably sweet voice," said Ronald's grandmother, complacently.

The boy, perfectly unconscious of the good impression he was making, was enjoying himself supremely. He was in love, boy fashion, with all his cousins; and the aunts, captivated by his gentle and caressing manner, were in love with him. The uncles were propitiated by his thorough boyishness, his ready blush, and modest way of talking. Lord Sandysmere
took him out hunting, and Ronald acquitted himself well enough to make his grandfather proud of him.

"Nicest boy I ever saw," was the universal verdict of the elders. "Oh, we could not possibly spare Ronald before quite the end of the holidays," exclaimed all the young ones in chorus. "It would be too dull without him."

Margaret was pleased that every one liked her son, but to her it seemed a simple matter of course that Douglas's boy should be a favourite, because she really did think him very like his father. Ronald himself flushed crimson with pleasure when he was told that she had said so. He had not been brought up on compliments, but perhaps that was not a bad thing for him.

People often noticed how happy and comfortable the three—father, mother, and son—seemed together, though Margaret was not outwardly a caressing mother, and Lord Douglas was sometimes said to make Ronald treat her with an almost obsolete amount of courtesy and respect.

The last weeks of the year rolled quickly and cheerily away at Sandysmere, and the big
rooms that had looked strange and solemn at first, with their fine ceilings and dark pictures and tapestry, grew quite familiar, and were associated with all sorts of gaiety and fun.

There was one room which was always looked upon by the younger members of the family as the centre and kernel of their home. It was called the 'Den,' and a very charming old den it was. Tradition said that the black panelling round its walls, and the high wooden chimney-piece with its carved picture-frame, were the only relics that had been saved from the ancient Sandysmere Hall, burnt down more than a hundred years ago. That fire was still a standing grievance among all the Scropes. They never ceased mourning over the old hall; its picture hung in the Den, a beautiful old Tudor house, like "Hardwicke Hall, more glass than wall," most picturesque and inconvenient. But it was gone, and all that remained of it was to be found now in the Den.

Dear old room!—what histories it might have told. How many family councils had been held within its walls!—how many secrets whispered across its hearth! There, for good or for evil, the choice that was to decide a life-time had
frequently been come to; there quarrels had been made up with tears and kisses; it had witnessed the joy of meetings, and the silent sorrow of bereavement.

Mary Scrope reigned there now, and thither gathered all the younger people on the winter afternoons.

The kettle sang its inviting song for two whole hours each evening, on the old-fashioned hob (no urn was ever allowed to desecrate the Den), and Mary, generally in her riding-habit, sat pouring out an endless succession of cups of tea. In the big arm-chairs on each side of the fire, tired sportsmen, still in their scarlet coats and muddy boots, would be lounging half asleep. In front of the fire some devoted being knelt with a scorched face and a huge toasting-fork, supplying a hungry circle with hot toast. Choruses were practised round the school-room piano; old boxes of costumes were ransacked. Sometimes Lord Sandysmere looked in, and with a guilty “Don’t tell mother,” indulged in a stolen cup of tea. Monsieur de Beaurepaire regularly appeared, and, cup in hand, joined in the choruses while he sipped his “coptee,” as he called it.
To decorate the Den was the crowning work of Christmas. How they piled it up with holly and ivy and mistletoe! — the picture above the mantel-piece — a portrait of that Lord Sandysmere who was supposed to have let the old hall burn, — being decorated with a long spray of sharp-pointed holly-leaves that pricked his nose, and hid his eye under a scarlet lump of berries.

With all his stout championship of Scotland Ronald was forced to confess the superior cheeriness of an English Christmas.

This was an exceptional one in beauty. "All sparkling snow and blue sky," said Harold Scrope, "like one of Dickens's stories."

Mother Earth and Father Christmas were holding their silver wedding, and the old lady had arrayed herself in all her bravery to do her venerable bridegroom honour. Snowy raiment covered her, and she was adorned with glancing brilliants — his gifts — and delicate hoar-frost lace.

The hunting, with a sigh, gave place to skating on the mere.

Mary Scrope thought of nothing from morning till night but blankets, red cloaks, and flannel petticoats. "She ran about in the
village all day,” said her aggrieved kinsmen, “instead of staying with them on the ice like a reasonable being.”

To the village indeed she and Lady Douglas betook themselves nearly every day. It was a part of her youth to which Margaret returned gladly, though even there the changes made her feel old, and she could hardly recognize, in the hard-featured faces, and figures prematurely bowed, the rosy maidens, her seniors by a year or two, whom she had been so proud of teaching in the Sunday school. And the dear old bodies, her especial cronies, most of them were gone! — their chimney-corners and wooden elbow-chairs knew them no more.

The quaint East Anglian tongue is fast losing its individuality. Its oddity consists chiefly now in the curious sing-song in which it is delivered, and in the reckless bringing together of all the words the speaker least understands. It still sounded pleasantly in Margaret's ears. Greetings thickened on her as she walked up the village street. “Ah! old Bryant's cottage — is he still alive? Why, Mary, there is Rhoda Brighton, not looking a day older. She was ninety, I know, when you were born. Oh!
Widow Clark, do you remember me?" Ecstatic curtseys in the road.

"What sure, 'tis Lady Douglas, so tis! I han’t clapped eyes on you since you was wed, and that’s the tre-uth. But I saw you tied, that I did; I had a mind to go to Sans'mere Church that day, and so I took 'Liza Jane along. 'Twas a buty of a sight. I was fo'ced to flow to tears in the church-yard when you was a steering out, and so was 'Liza Jane. Won’t you come right in, my dear, and drop?"

Lady Douglas walked in and sat down as she was desired.

"See, Mrs. Clark, this is my son whom I have brought to see you!"

"What, sure? Well, bless him, bless him, and you han’t but that one. There’s my Nelly, she that used to stir round the housekeeper up at yours, she ha’ got seven, and two of them twinsies, but she ha’ buried five, and t’other is a going—(she’s a poor creature, is my Nelly, but very moderate, she is)—but 'tis a misgrace that you have but the one."

"The young gentleman don’t favour yu, Miss Margaret," said Eliza Jane, "but I allus’ said you were very like my old mother, for
you never carried no plush;” which being interpreted meant that Lady Douglas had never had a colour.

“I’m but sadly, Miss Margaret, my Lady, if you’ll accuse me,” sighed the more melancholy inhabitant of the next cottage, “but I mind you well. No, ’tis the rheumatiz that catch me here, and catch me there, so I am hampered to get hold of my breath. I often expect I shall be took off sudden.”

“And so I respect she will,” echoed her brisk daughter. “She ain’t long for here, the old lady ain’t, and ’twould be a mercy to herself, I often tell her, if ’twould please the Lord to take her. Last night now she shrook out, and I thought she was a going—”

“There’s no one knows what I suffer,” resumed Mrs. Collins, waving aside the interruption with dignity, “but God and my dear limbs; but I won’t contain you at the present, and I hop’ I see you well, my Lady, and your good gentleman tu.”

“And I hop’,” put in the old husband, who, sitting in the chimney-corner, had been shaking hands vehemently with Margaret during the whole conversation, “I hop’ he uses of you well,
for marriage 'tis a lottery. There was my son John, married a worldly woman, and he hadn't been wedded but a week when she took the stick to him, that she did.”

“That was very sad,” said Margaret; “poor John! I remember him when he was no older than my boy here.”

“Well, bless the lad,” said the old man, proceeding to shake hands in a prolonged way with Ronald, “and may he be a better man nor his father.”

“I say,” ejaculated Ronald indignantly, but his mother laughed at the familiar formula.

Mary was flitting busily from one house to another. They found her standing by the bed of a sick young man.

“Yes, my Lady, he fare to lay so long,” said the mother, outspoken and solemn, but not unkindly. “'Tis a dispense, but we must put up with him.”

Margaret asked if he had seen the doctor. Yes; William had got his two bottles of physic as 't were 'propriate.

“The tu medicines don’t fare to corroborate together,” observed his mother, “but my son he ha' condescended to both. He don't get
no strength, Miss Mary, for he have no perceivins for eating, and that’s where ’tis.”

“I fare,” interrupted the invalid, languidly, “as though I could pick a mite o’ rabbit.”

“Lawk, a rabbit!” continued his mother; “his mind du seem wonderful set on a rabbit. ‘Mother,’ he says to me last night, at half-past ten o’clock, or t’might be on the stroke of ’leven, ‘Mother,’ he sa’, quite as I might be speaking now, ‘if so be as I could happen of a rabbit, I du think,’ says he, ‘he would put a tiddy bit of life into my dear inside,’ and ” — very slowly—“I du believe, Miss Mary, as t’would.”

Mary promised that the rabbit should be forthcoming, on which William’s dull eyes brightened up wonderfully, and he managed to sit up and give a pull to his lank forelock of grateful expectation and farewell.

“Shall we go and see old Kitty?” asked Mary doubtfully, and hesitating on the threshold. But at this point Ronald’s patience, long sorely tried, gave way. Laying hold on Mary’s arm he protested that he had seen dozens of old women, and that his aunt had promised to come and play hockey on the
ice. Besides he knew Kitty was the horrid old thing in bed, whom Aunt Mary herself was afraid of, believing her to be Little Red-Riding-Hood’s Wolf dressed up in her Grandmother’s night-cap.

Guests came and went at Sandysmere; new friendships were made, and old ones knitted up afresh. Among these last was Monsieur de Beaurepaire’s devotion to Lord Douglas. They were fond of each other without agreeing. Indeed two people could not easily have been found who looked at life from more directly opposite ends. The Frenchman was tired of the world, and yet lived for nothing else. He was cynical and prejudiced, holding rather a low opinion of his fellow-men. But Lord Douglas always managed to call out his best side, and he had become an enthusiastic admirer of Margaret’s. She was so beautiful, looked so young, and was such a devoted wife. If his only daughter, his little Diane, could have been brought up under the care of such a woman, such a mother! Poor little one left to *bonnes* and governesses!

“Ah, Madame!” he said pathetically to Margaret, “if only you were of my nation.”
Margaret had become so far like other people that she had learnt to knit since she came to Sandysmere, and she was now struggling with an untidy grey fabric, supposed by very sanguine people to be a stocking, which might possibly be ready for Lord Douglas to wear when he went out deer-stalking next season.

She sat with her hands held out far before her, the grey yarn twisted hopelessly round her fingers, three of the needles crushed together in one hand, while with the other she was trying by main force to push the fourth needle into a very tight stitch. Her brow was contracted, and the worsted ball had rolled on to the floor, and wound itself hopelessly round the leg of M. de Beaurepaire's chair.

A little way off sat Margaret's sister Winifred, leaning luxuriously back in an arm-chair, an open book on the low table beside her, and a smart little child's sock growing visibly under her careless and rapid fingers. She knitted and read, glancing up occasionally with amused eyes at her unskilful pupil. Her comfort and prosperity were almost insulting; Margaret had made her stitch, but she forgot
to "purl," and was engaged in desperate difficulties. What at such a moment was to her the future of little Diane de Beaurepaire?

"Favour me," observed Diane's father impatiently, "by putting down that work; it does not suit your style."

"My style?" repeated Margaret, looking up.

"Yes! that tripotage does not suit you. It breaks the grand tranquillity which distinguishes you."

Lady Douglas laughed. "You can't think how difficult it is," she said, holding out her arm and straightening her stiffened fingers.

"Then let us leave it to those who can do no better. I recommence—Would, as I said before, that you and Douglas were my compatriots."

"And why?" inquired Lady Douglas, opening her eyes, and thinking how little she could join in the aspiration.

"In a few years we should enter into a family arrangement. I should then have some hope for my poor little daughter. She would be affianced to your son, and you would feel a mother's interest in the child."

"Ah, but you know I do not understand
girls,” said Lady Douglas, smiling. “I am glad I have only got a boy.”

“You would have made your daughter like yourself—true, good, simple, a real woman.”

“And I who cannot even learn to knit,” said Margaret.

He would not smile.

“Tell me, is there really no hope for my little girl?”

“But you are not talking seriously;” and Margaret laid down her work, and looked at him in dismay.

M. de Beaurepaire had fixed his piercing black eyes on her, and was evidently very serious indeed.

Just then Douglas came up to them with a message from Lord Sandysmere who wanted M. de Beaurepaire for a rubber of whist.

“We are discussing a projet de mariage,” said the latter, without rising. “Some of these days I want your Ronald to be my son-in-law.”

“You do us much honour,” said Ronald’s father, laughing. “Come, René, they are waiting for you.”

M. de Beaurepaire looked almost offended.
"My dear René, you know our English ways as well as I do," said Lord Douglas.

"But there are exceptional cases," resumed René, eagerly; "and my little Diane has no mother. She is being brought up à l'Anglaise. I wish her to make an English marriage—she is of your faith—and that your wife should form her mind and character would fulfil my most ardent dreams for her."

"We are very much honoured," repeated Douglas, "but you really must not talk of such a scheme in England. Every one would laugh at us. No, no; Ronald must be free to choose for himself as his father did before him."

"May he only be half as fortunate in his choice," was the Frenchman's inevitable rejoinder; but it was scarcely uttered with so good a grace as usual.

"Some years hence," he presently began again; but a new and urgent summons from his host cut him short.

He got up, made a formal bow to Lady Douglas, and with the words, "à une autre fois, Madame," he walked rather haughtily away.

Margaret and her husband looked at each other and laughed.
"I am afraid he is half offended?" said Margaret.

"More than half, I fancy. I should like to have seen poor Ronald's face if he had heard the proposal," said Lord Douglas.

"It really was very awkward; he actually seemed to mean it."

"Of course he did. Poor old René, I like him for being anxious about his child. I wish with all my heart we could help him without this preposterous plan."

"Oh, I hope he will not say any more."

"Why, I don't believe he will forget it; he is curiously persistent, and, as I told you before, we and the Beaurepaires are always being thrown against each other. There is a fate in it, Grizel would say. How should you like a French daughter-in-law, Meg?"

"Don't talk of it."

"It was a great compliment to you, you know," observed her husband. "I wish poor René had asked us anything in reason. Now, I must go and talk to your mother. Don't tell a soul, Meg, for Ronald's sake. I would not trust even Harold's discretion with such a good story. By the way, why should not Harold..."
marry Diane, and make your mother a happy woman?"

For Harold Scrope's determined bachelorhood was the one crumple in his mother's rose-leaf life.

Meanwhile, Ronald, shouting choruses in the next room at the top of his voice, was very far from guessing how his future life had been under discussion. Equally unconscious was a little maiden, far away in a big room of a big house, in a big German city, on that winter's night.

Two children were standing on chairs, in a window that looked out on a snow-covered Platz, with rows of lamps, and frosted trees, and a church over which the stars were shining, and were flattening their little noses against the panes.

One child wore a little tight cap on her round head, hiding her lint-white locks; and a black bodice fitted her small plump person. She was the house-porter's daughter, a thorough little German "Mädel," somewhat stolid and slow of speech.

The other child chattered away fast enough for both, and now and then a trill of the
merriest laughter rung gaily through the room. Between them they held a venerable, battered doll, with a cracked nose, and eyes that, owing to a broken spring mysteriously disposed in her body, refused either to open or shut properly. The little German grasped her by the legs, while the other energetically drove pins into her head to keep on a torn black wig.

“Everybody has to do it,” she was saying gravely; “but I think it must hurt, Gretchen.”

Gretchen looked at her with round, alarmed eyes.

“I know, because I see Pauline doing her hair every day, and sometimes Mrs. Doran. They stick the pins straight into their heads through the long plaits—so. I think the pins must run into their brain, but I suppose grown-up people do not mind the pain. Thou wilt have to do it too, Gretchen, when thou art big.”

“I won’t,” answered Gretchen, stolidly.

“Thou must; see, I will show thee how. I will only send in the pin a little way, not so far as thy brains.”

Armed with a big pin, she fell on to her small companion, and pierced through the little cap and the flaxen hair in a moment.
Gretchen gave a shriek of terror, and tumbled off her chair on to the floor.

"She has hurt me; she has hurt me!—she pricked me with a pin."

"Mademoiselle Diane," said a grave voice.

But Diane was on the ground already, with her arms round Gretchen's neck; "I am sorry, I am sorry; I did not mean to hurt thee; I thought everybody had to stick the pins in."

"Why did you not try on your own head, Mademoiselle Diane?"

"I did," said Diane, naïvely; "but my head is so hard, Gretchen's looked much softer. Dear little Gretchen, did I hurt thee, really? Oh, Gretchen," for Gretchen rolled on the floor, refusing to be comforted.

Two big tears made their appearance on Diane's cheeks. "See, Gretchen;" and she knelt on the floor and clasped her hands; "I will give thee any thing I have—thou shalt choose—only get well."

Gretchen ceased rolling, and peeped at Diane from under her arm. "See, Gretchen, all these pretty things. Do get up; oh, I am glad."

The two little maids presently went hand in hand to a table, on which Diane's Christmas
presents were still laid out. There were plenty of toys and bonbons, a little tea-set, a Swiss village in a wooden box, a boy with a hoop made of sparkling coloured sugar (most beautiful), a toy watch.

Some way off stood a cradle, in which lay one of those marvellous waxen babies that are only to be found in London; no composition, like poor old Rosalind; plump wax hands and feet, rose-coloured cheeks, staring china blue eyes, and, in place of a wig, soft curls that really seemed to be growing on the head itself.

Gretchen soon caught sight of this youthful beauty. "I want her," she said laconically.

"Oh, not her; I did not mean her; thou shalt have anything else. Oh, Gretchen, please. My father sent her all the way from England. I love her so."

Up went Gretchen's lip, and her round cheeks were puffed out ready for a cry.

"She said I might have what I liked."

"Not my father's doll, Gretchen, please not. Take all the rest—my watch, the sugar boy—but not her."

"I want her," sobbed Gretchen; "and thou hast pricked me with a pin."
“What shall I do?—oh, ma bonne, tell her to take the sugar boy.”

“You said she might choose what she liked, Mademoiselle Diane.”

The child grew very pale, and put her fingers into her eyes to force back the tears she was determined not to shed. In a few minutes she looked up, and stamped her foot.

“Take her, Gretchen, then, and go away, quick. You are wicked; I won’t play with you.”

Selfish little Gretchen, nothing loth, seized upon her prize, and was trotting off, bewildered, dazzled, hugging it very tightly to her breast.

“Wait,” called Diane, suddenly; “she will be cold without her cradle; take that too, and her bonnet; and, oh, Gretchen, be good to her.”

Gretchen grasped it all, half sobbing still; and clattered away as fast as her legs could carry her.

Diane looked after her, and then rushed back into the window, to fight out her battle as best she might, in the starlight and snow-whiteness.

An hour or two afterwards her ‘bonne’ went
to her bedside to see if she was asleep. Her eyes were still wide open, and her cheeks flushed; but cuddled close to her side she held the old doll with the broken nose, and wig awry, and the eyes that would neither shut nor open.

"It's all for the best after all, ma bonne," said the child; "for see, this poor old thing thought I did not love her any more, and now she is so happy, and I love her, and I will never have another doll; and"—a pause—"I think I forgive Gretchen."

"Go to sleep, Mademoiselle Diane."

"Yes, ma bonne." She nestled her cheek on to the black wig, drew old Rosalind closer to her side with a loving smile, and was asleep in a moment.

This was Ronald's little rejected bride.
CHAPTER VI.

DULE AND SORROW.

"Sweet the lavrock's note and lang,
Lilting wildly up the glen,
But aye to me he sings a'e sang—
Will ye no' come back again?

Will ye no' come back again,
Will ye no' come back again,
Better lo'ed ye canna be,
Will ye no' come back again?"

The month of August had come round again, and shooting had begun in the Highlands.

Both Ronald and Kenneth were at home,—a pair of boys, as Grizel proudly said, to make the hearts of any fathers glad.

It may be that Lord Douglas and his uncle thought so too, as they watched their sons walking on in front of them, with their guns over their shoulders one day, when they were shooting black game in the woods on the south side of Loch Dalbraith.
Ronald and Kenneth made rather a good contrast, for one was tall, straight, and dark-eyed like his mother, and his face was tanned brown by the summer sun and wind. The other still kept the brilliant fairness of his childhood, and was secretly rather ashamed of the red and white complexion and auburn locks, which old Adam Haldane told him made him look like a lassie.

There had been a merry luncheon among the rocks, at the foot of rather a steep hill, with the coppice of birch-wood, fir-trees, and beeches, through which they were next to shoot, straggling up its side.

Colonel Douglas had to leave them after luncheon, and the two boys went on alone with Lord Douglas. The three stood on the rocks above the loch for a few minutes, watching Norman's boat glide out from the bank, and then they turned to climb the rocky path up into the wood. Kenneth, who was usually not so good a shot as Ronald, was shooting uncommonly well that day, and Douglas had been praising him at luncheon. His cheeks had flushed under his cousin's commendation. Praise—always welcome to him—was doubly
sweet when spoken in his father's hearing, and he was eager to prove himself worthy this afternoon of the laurels he had earned in the morning. He had gone on rather in front, and the father and son followed,—Lord Douglas with his arm thrown caressingly over Ronald's shoulder.

It was a warm sunny day, in the month which, of all in the year, is the loveliest at Dalbraith.

Both the boys were too much taken up with their shooting to think much about the beauty of the familiar scene, but every year brought his beloved home nearer to Lord Douglas's heart. He stopped now for a minute to glance back over his shoulder at the shining loch lying down below, and at the birch-trees, where a golden glimmer was beginning here and there to gleam among the leaves. Under his feet was spread the thick carpet of gale and heather, and through breaks in the wood he could see it stretching far away into the open, only deepened to a more glowing red by the mellow sunshine of the afternoon. Some of the fronds of bracken were changing to a bright straw-colour, making dashes of yellow among the grey rocks
and purple heather. And above the delicate birches grew a few rugged Scotch firs, thrusting out their long red arms and sombre masses of foliage, against the deep blue of the sky.

A feeling of almost melancholy affection came over Lord Douglas as he lingered on the edge of the hill, and then the boys’ eager voices roused him, calling him to go on into the wood.

He went forward slowly, with Rory his piper, who had also been his foster brother, close behind him, and the others followed in line.

There had been several shots fired. Kenneth had missed once or twice, and was growing vexed and impatient. He fired recklessly at a rabbit that was fairly out of shot, and had scarcely reloaded his gun when he heard ‘mark’ called from two different spots at once. It was a long shot, but he took a rapid aim and fired; and at the same moment he heard the report of another gun.

It came from the direction which Ronald had taken through the wood. More shots had come to Ronald than to the others, and at the moment the bird rose at which he and Kenneth fired together, he was thinking that all the
luck seemed to come his way, and that he wished he could change places with his father.

He could not see whether he had hit his bird or not, but the instant after the shot was fired he became aware, how he scarcely knew, that something was wrong. There were confused sounds, and then a scream from Rory, shrill and sharp like a woman's, rang out on the air.

Ronald stood still,—transfixed,—listening, thrilled through with a vague horror—one or two men ran past him through the wood, and then as he gathered himself together to follow, Kenneth met him coming back, pale as death, and scarcely able to articulate—'Ronald, quick, your father is hurt; you hit him just now.'

"I!"

A mist gathered over his eyes, the heather seemed to rise up and smite him, and then the ground to be sinking away from beneath his feet, but he steadied himself and rushed on, stumbling blindly across the rocks and trees.

A knot of men that parted as he came up—a tangle of brushwood—a mass of trodden-down fern—a rowan tree bending under bunches of scarlet berries that dazzled him and seemed
to burn his eyes; and, on the ground, Rory holding Lord Douglas in his arms.

Ronald flung himself down beside his father. The face that rested against Rory's shoulder bore no look of pain, but it was of dull deadly whiteness, and the eyes were closed. Fergus and one or two of the others were trying with shaking and unskilled hands to staunch the blood that flowed from a wound in the side of his neck.

"Canna ye gar the bluid to stop?" Ronald heard Rory whisper with fierce suppressed impatience. "It's just drainin' his life awa.'"

"He's not bleedin' much," said Ronald, looking up imploringly into the faces round him.

"But I'm feared the bleedin' is inward," answered old Fergus.

Some one brought water and sprinkled it on to Lord Douglas's forehead. His eyes slowly opened. Perhaps he could see his foster-brother's look of stony despair as he bent over him, and the ashy face of his son. "Rory," he said, in a weak voice, and then a moment afterwards he smiled—"Ronald, my boy; poor fellow."

"You are better, father!" But the eyes
closed again, and the grey shadow deepened on his face.

The men had made a rough litter of some hurdles near at hand, and now they were tearing up ling and bracken in frantic haste that he might lie as softly as might be, while they carried him home to Dalbraith. Rory walking behind still supported his master’s head on his breast, and they moved away slowly down towards the loch.

Ronald followed among the others, the men brushing their sleeves often across their eyes, the dogs walking behind with wistful looks and drooping tails, well aware that something had gone wrong. Suddenly Ronald stood still as they drew near the boat.

"Did some one say that I did this?" he asked, snatching old Fergus’s arm, while a quick scarlet flush mounted to his forehead.

All were silent for a minute or two; the men looked on the ground; one of them shook his head; nobody cared to answer.

"Will you tell me?" again asked Ronald in a low clear voice.

Still silence. At last Adam Haldane, Colonel Douglas’s soldier servant, cleared his
throat, and said as if speaking to some one not present—"Puirt laddie!—indeed, and if he did it his ain sel', wha is there that will blame him for siccan a sair mischance?"

Ronald put his hand up to his throat, and Fergus held out his arms ready to catch him, but the boy did not fall. He staggered backwards for a step or two, then recovering himself went on quickly to the boat. Only once he spoke as they rowed carefully but quickly across, and that was to say with a great start—"Mother!"

"My puir bairn!" said Fergus, "she kens, she kens; they sent for Colonel Norman."

Yes; Margaret knew. Colonel Douglas had just told her of the accident, and as they reached the house they met her coming from the garden with a basket of roses still held unconsciously in her hand. Ronald sprang forward with an instinctive wish to shield her for yet a moment longer from the sight that awaited her, but she had no room or power for a single thought of him, far less for any sympathy with his especial share of suffering.

She just waved him away,—mechanically, it may be, but with a look on her face that made
the boy rush from her presence with despair in his heart. He dashed upstairs to his own room, and flinging himself face downwards on the bed, hid his eyes from the light. There he remained a long, long time; then suddenly he jumped up as if he could bear it no longer, and hurried down to his father's room. The door was locked, and he could hear low voices speaking within. Ronald tried the handle softly once or twice, and then growing desperate he knocked. Some one moved inside, and the door was opened by Lady Douglas. "Not now," she said, motioning him back. "The doctors have just come."

The boy tried to speak, tried to ask a question, but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and as he struggled for utterance the door was softly closed again, and he heard the key turned in the lock. Something seemed to drive him back to his own room.

The evening shadows had gathered, and the hours dragged on. Once or twice he crept to the door, and opening it looked out into the darkness and listened. Everything was perfectly quiet now; the hurried steps had ceased passing up and down below. There seemed
no one moving; nothing being carried towards his mother’s room. Those who were watching had gathered there; and nothing broke the stillness.

Once Ronald ventured out into the passage, and groped his way towards the stairs. He must hear, he must know; but a sudden chill of horror drove him back. A deadly terror took possession of him; and again, clear before his eyes, his mother’s face, his mother’s gesture, shaped themselves out of the darkness, and barred his way. He rushed back like one pursued.

In a fresh agony of shivering fear he flung himself down where he had lain before. Perhaps a merciful doze deadened for a while his overtaxed frame. An hour passed, of which he could render no account, and in which he did not suffer.

A step, and the opening of his door roused him. Ronald raised himself on to his elbow with a convulsive start, and saw Norman Douglas standing by his bed. He carried a candle in his hand, and he looked down on Ronald with grave, compassionate eyes.

“My boy,” he said, “I think you ought to...
be with your father now; I have come to fetch you."

"How is he?" whispered Ronald, in the hoarse, choked tone which was all he could command.

"He is sinking fast."

Ronald stood up, grasping at the table to steady himself, and shaken from head to foot with a convulsive shiver.

"Did mother send for me?" he whispered again.

"She has but one thought now," answered his uncle; "she is watching him."

"I can't bear it; oh, Uncle Norman, indeed I can't. Oh, Uncle Norman, you don't know what it is!"

"My boy," said Colonel Douglas, "this is not the moment to be thinking of yourself; think only of your mother. Put away your own share of the trouble, and be a man."

Something in the words reached Ronald's clouded faculties; he straightened himself, stretched his arms above his head for a moment, and went slowly before his uncle out of the door.

Down with hushed footsteps through the
silent house, into a room where Lord Douglas's things still lay carelessly about as he had left them that morning when he went out shooting with the boys, and where two doctors stood now by the fireplace waiting and unoccupied. Then on, guided by Norman, into a dim inner room, shaded and silent, except for a woman's low voice speaking.

By the bed knelt Lady Douglas, with one hand on her husband's shoulder, and the other holding his hand, while she talked to him, Lady Beatrix bending over her mean time, and trying very gently to draw her away. The latter glanced up as they came behind her.

"He is gone, Norman," she whispered through her tears.

The words fell on Ronald's ears just as for the first time he looked on death; and then, hearing his mother speak, he flung himself back against the wall.

"Darling," she was saying, "do speak to me. Don't, Ronald—don't go away just yet—not like that, without one dear word for me. I know you are soon going; you need not be afraid to tell me. I am very quiet; I know
that you are going very, very soon; but say
good-bye to Margaret, love, first.”

“Dear child, dearest Margaret!” Lady
Beatrix said; “come away now; indeed you
ought.”

Margaret looked swiftly up at her, and then
at her husband’s face. “I see,” she said, in a
changed voice, not louder, but with all the fond
softness gone from it. And she rose up and
stood beside the bed.

Ronald came round from the other side, his
arms held out eagerly to her, longing to throw
them round her, half with an impulse of pro-
tection, half hoping that she would gather him
in her arms like a child, and let him sob his
heart out on her shoulder.

But as she turned, with an abrupt, dazed
movement, she seemed to him, for the second
time, to be pushing him away from her. Most
probably she neither saw him nor heard his
cry of “Mother,” but he fell back instantly,
and she stood motionless for a time, with her
head raised and eyes widely opened, gazing
into vacancy. No one moved or spoke. There
were only the wild, passionate, heart-broken
sobs of the son to break the death-silence,
and the stony stillness of the mother, in her majesty of despair.

Lady Beatrix hid her face in an anguish of unavailing pity; and even Norman Douglas bowed his head, and stood for a few moments helpless, in the presence of such sorrow.

Then he went to Lady Douglas, and, putting his arm round her, said quietly, "You must come with me, Margaret;" and she yielded passively, letting him guide her like a blind person into the adjoining room. When she was gone, Ronald fell on the floor on the spot where his mother had been standing.

It was nearly noon on the next day before Lady Douglas left her room. She had not attempted before to go back into the room where she had watched the last night through; but now she rose up silently, as if with a tacit understanding that all was ready for her there.

The windows had been thrown wide open; and so, though the blinds were drawn down, the air raised them a little now and then, and let some rays of the midday sunshine stream into the room where Lord Douglas lay sleeping his sleep of death. He had always loved the sun,
and it did not seem unfit that a bright golden shaft of sunbeams now rested on his hand.

Before daybreak that morning some of those who had waited all the night for the heavy tidings that came with the dawn, had been away up the hills for miles, seeking the one solitary spot where white heather was now in blossom. It was known that every season since their marriage Lord Douglas had brought the first white heath-bells home to his wife. With a rough feeling of poetry they deemed it fit, therefore, that the rare and pure blossom should be gathered for his pillow. It was strewn so thickly round him that he seemed to be resting on the heather bed he had often slept on in the bothy up the hill; only instead of the purple bloom, was the waxy whiteness of this snowflake among flowers. And over his face also a like change had come—it had grown so pure and stainless under the grand, soft touch of death.

They had left one arm lying across his breast, but the other was straightened and placed carefully by his side, that the people who had loved him might come and kiss his hand.
Already that morning many kisses and many tears had fallen upon it. Silently—for the sake of her whom they knew to be near at hand, and also for his look of stately peace—men and women in sorrowful succession had knelt down by his side—bearded men bowed with suppressed sobs, and women young and old, who blessed him through their speechless weeping.

It was a rough and simple lying in state, but ennobled by the people's love. His piper, Rory, who had almost worshipped him, stood at his head, and the old forester was at his feet.

All that happened very early in the morning, almost before the sun had risen above the hills: now the last creaking, laboriously-hushed step had passed away through the still house, and the widow's place was left for her alone.

Rory and Fergus themselves moved from their statue-like attitude, and went softly out of the room as that inner door was opened, and then Margaret Douglas came in and knelt by him again.

But not as before. No words of entreaty
that he would speak to her rose to her lips after she looked at him. Ronald was gone! This was not Ronald—this carved and majestic image of a beautiful young man; young as her bridegroom had been; gentle, yet stern; with a grave smile on his lip, and a lofty expression of severe serenity that in his life her husband had never worn.

There was another person who with a fleeter and more noiseless step than either of his companions had hurried away from the bedside when Lady Douglas opened the door. Perhaps Norman Douglas had made a mistake when an hour or two ago he brought the poor boy Ronald, half crazed as he was with sorrow and crushed down with remorse, face to face with his dead father. To Colonel Douglas it had seemed that the sight was most comforting, —most elevating. The "sure and certain hope of a joyful resurrection" spoke to him so clearly from that restful face, but on poor Ronald the effect was very different.

He could hardly be persuaded to leave his room for fear of meeting his mother, who, he had a sad conviction, could not bear to have him in her sight. They told him she was
quiet, and that half an hour ago they hoped she had fallen asleep; and then his uncle desired him to go down.

There were whispering voices in the passage as he passed, and a woman's voice broken by weeping, said, "Eh, but it's a sair pity to put him underground, and he sae beautiful."

Ronald scarcely heard or heeded, for his heart was beating loudly with a great boyish fear and awe of death, that for the moment had well nigh blotted out every other feeling. But as he stood beside Fergus at the foot of the bed (they could not get him to go nearer—he, the slayer of his father, must not touch his hand, or kiss his brow); as he stood gazing, with stopped breath, an agony of yearning, and of compassion for the grand manhood wasted, shook him from head to foot.

It was long before he had looked at all; long before he raised his head from the hands in which he buried it as he crossed the threshold. It was only when he felt old Fergus's hand fall on his shoulder pityingly that he looked up. He had thought all would shrink away from him in horror, and he glanced up now surprised at the old man's face, and then
his eyes fell on the long straight figure, taller even than in life, lying before him.

From his eyes the look of satisfied peace, that spoke eloquently to Norman Douglas, was quite hidden; he only saw the goodly length of limb; the shapely hand, now rigid; the short, crisp, manly curls; the white heather-bells.

And the woman's words rang in his ears—"A sair pity, a sair pity." Almost maddened by the sharp sting of a trial that it was beyond the power of his age and strength to bear, half delirious fancies were crowding over his brain, and again and again that homely putting into words of his own feeling echoed in his hearing. He even heard his voice saying the words aloud—"a sair pity"—and then he started at having spoken where everything else was intensely silent. The loneliness of feeling was appalling to him too, for though his uncle had been very tender to him all the night, and patient over his wild bursts of grief, yet he was almost a stranger by comparison, and till now Ronald had been able to carry the burden of any trouble to either father or mother.

Both were gone now—the dead father hardly
seemed so far away and lost as the mother whose heart he had broken, and who had twice pushed him from her—so he thought—with horror and loathing in her face.

Dazed and absorbed as he was now, her first touch on the door roused him, and he was gone before she knew that he had been there. He went out of the house, driven by the longing to escape from her eyes, out and away into the hills, climbing higher and higher with a forlorn hope of getting away from his own pain.

They missed him presently from the house, and grew anxious at his absence. Colonel Douglas was very uneasy, and sent to search for him in several directions, but in the evening he came home of his own accord, poor boy, stealing into the kitchen like a thief; weary, exhausted, and thoroughly ashamed of being hungry, even though he was faint and giddy for want of food.

That night his uncle had the comfort of seeing him lying fast asleep, utterly worn out and spent. Norman Douglas stood and watched him, his young features relaxed from the hard rule of pain, and his fair boyish forehead smooth again.
The colour had come back to his cheeks as he slept, and he drew his breath softly and evenly. When—when awake, would his face wear that untroubled look?

With almost a more profound pity and yearning than that with which Ronald himself had looked a few hours ago on his dead father, Norman Douglas stood by the boy’s bed, and thought of the blight that had fallen on his life.

He looked very young to bear the weight of this strange sorrow, as many-sided as it was great and sudden. He was not old even for his age, and had gone deeply into nothing as yet. His very room, slightly furnished, with the cool night wind blowing in through the open and unshuttered windows, was completely a boy’s room, with all a boy’s treasures scattered about in it. A grandly bound book or two was set up on the drawers; Eton prizes, into which manifestly he had never looked. Hitherto he had been too happy in his out-of-door life at home even to open a book. In fact his whole library consisted of the pocket Testament his mother had told him never to part with when he first went to school; his Prayer-Book, Sir Walter Scott’s
poetry, Macaulay’s Lays, and a stray volume of one of James’s novels.

Over his bed an engraving from a picture of his mother, torn out of an old Book of Beauty, was pinned against the wall, and at his feet now lay curled up his dog Sandy, sleepy, winking, yet bound in conscience to keep one lazy eye half open while Norman Douglas stood by his master’s bed.

Yes; to Ronald’s uncle it was a yet sadder scene than that silent room downstairs.

True, Lord Douglas’s sun had gone down while it was yet noon, and in the prime of a noble, happy life, God had called him from his work—well-nigh before the heat and burden of the day had begun for him.

But one hour in the Vineyard—and that a cloudless one—then, unwearied and undaunted, he had gone home to take his wages. No such grief as had already fallen on his young son had ever crossed Lord Douglas’s path. How was Ronald to meet it? Would he crush it, or be crushed by it? Would it work good or evil to the nature that, as far as his uncle had been able to read it, as yet seemed pure and generous, but pliant and unformed? Who
would help him? The father, who best would have felt with him and for him—who, strong of will and tender of heart, would have set himself with all his might to aid him—his father was gone! Nay, there was the sting—the very core of bitterness, the "sorrow's crown of sorrow"—the father's death most miserably lay at the son's door. His father's death—his mother's widowhood—his ruined home—his youth left unguarded at the moment when his need was the sorest,—his own unconscious hand had wrought that world of woe!

Poor boy, poor boy!—a harsh black shadow verily, to have clouded his morning. A stern battle and a long battle was before him, to be waged with the world that lay outside him, as well as with his own undisciplined heart. From mistaken judgments, from words carelessly cruel, from the miserable notoriety that his story would invest him with,—who would shield him? From the recklessness of despair, or the gloom of despondency, what, and who, would be his aid? His mother?—and there Norman Douglas paused with a sigh.

The next time he went into his nephew's
room, which was early the following morning, Ronald was fully awake. If sleep had in one way been merciful to him, in another its effect appeared almost cruel, for he woke up strong and clear, all the confusion gone from his thoughts, and every power and faculty sharpened into the most intense capacity for suffering.

He lay quite quiet when Colonel Douglas entered, his arms behind his head supporting it, his eyes half open, and his brows slightly drawn together. He did not seem to notice his uncle, who thought it better not to speak to him, but thoroughly alarmed at his fixed look went straight to Lady Douglas's room. Never before had he thought Ronald the least like his mother; but now, when he went up to her, and she turned her white face and steady, glittering eyes towards him, he was struck with her likeness to the poor boy up-stairs, and he began to think that they might at all events meet grief after something of the same fashion.

"Margaret," he said, speaking softly and clearly as though she was a child, "have you rested a little? Are you better to-day?"

"Yes," was the mechanical answer.

"Can you listen to me for a few minutes?"
“Yes.”

“I want to speak to you about your boy.”

She put out her hand quickly as if to check him, but he took it in his own, and went on speaking in a voice that might have been stern, if it had not been for its deep, underlying compassion. “No, Margaret, you must not try to stop me. I have come on purpose to tell you about him.”

“Poor unfortunate boy!” she said, in a suppressed voice.

“Yes, indeed; yes, indeed — unfortunate boy. I want you to think what this is to him. Margaret, my poor broken-hearted child, I tell you that, deeply as I feel for you, and God only knows how deeply that is,—truly as I mourn with you, I am still more sorry for Ronald than for you.”

She paused for some time before answering, and then she said, “He is young; his life is all before him.”

“His life before him—yes, his life—but what a life! Is life in itself, and by itself, a gift so precious? Is there nothing sad in the thought of a life crushed at the very beginning? If you could see him, Margaret—if
you could only look at your boy's poor young face."

She shook her head and shrank back.

"You have a duty left, my child, a great and solemn duty. Our dear fellow there," signing to the next room, "would have been the very first to urge you to fulfil it. Margaret, he left his son to you. You must not let his life be spoilt."

"What can I do for him? what could I do?" she asked.

"I don't know, but I think," said the old soldier, simply, "that a kiss from his mother would do him the most good. May I bring him to you, Margaret?" and he took her hand.

"No," she answered; "I will go to him."

She got up and stood in the middle of the room; then she said, without looking at him, "Will you leave me alone a few minutes first, Uncle Norman?"

And so, presently, poor Ronald, still staring at the opposite wall, saw his mother come quietly into his room.

She did not speak, but she walked slowly up to his bedside, and Ronald, with a great
gasping, wondering cry of "Mother," flung himself upon her neck, crushing himself convulsively against her, and sobbing out broken words of thanks and sorrow.

"Mother, you here—good, good mother! you oughtn't—oh, mother, mother!"—it always came back to that—"mother, it's so dreadful!"

She let him pull her down upon his bed; and now she folded her arms round him as he lay quivering on her shoulder, and kissed his hair, for his face was hidden; but, alas! there had been a second's quick involuntary shrinking from him, and he felt it.

Very soon he drew himself away from her, and turning his face to the wall, covered it with his arm. His mother understood the action, and her heart ached for him. She hated herself for the icy, iron misery and constraint that held her, but she felt powerless to break through it. She knew it sounded in her voice, and made rigid the very fingers with which she tried to draw away his arm.

"Ronald, poor boy!—I know you are very miserable; I should like to comfort you if I could."

"It's awfully good of you, mother," he
whispered, and she saw the big tears drop on to his pillow.

She tried—tried hard to feel softened by them. She dried his wet cheeks softly with her handkerchief, touching him with gentle, motherly hands, but all the time she felt hard, envying him his tears, which were to her as the expression of a grief not too bitter for the relief of weeping.

Ronald lay passive and unresisting, but he no longer, as at first, tried to kiss her hand.

Again Lady Douglas tried "to do her duty" by him, and to utter as well as she could the words she had come here to speak.

"Ronald, in this great trouble that has come upon us there is no blame—no shadow of blame—on anybody. For some reason God has let us be crushed to the earth, but it was the fault of no one—not your fault, Ronald—never think it for a moment. No one can say a word of blame—they will only pity you. God knows I am selfish and bitter in my grief, but I pity you. I give you all the pity, poor unhappy boy, that I can spare from myself."

"Oh mother, mother," he sighed out; "don't, mother!"
“Yes; it is better I should speak—do you think I mind a little pain more or less?—and we will not speak of this again. But you are very young, and your life must not be spoilt by giving way to a morbid fancy. For it would be morbid; your father would have called it so. He would have told you to be brave, and to overcome it. He was brave, and you are his son. You must try to be like him.”

Her voice was growing husky and faint from pain. She ended in a choked whisper: “Live your life and conquer, and I pray God to help you. Only for a little while, Ronald, it is better for both of us not to see each other. I cannot bear it.”

She bent down again and kissed him, her cheek becoming, if possible, more ashy, more grey, as it touched his; and, with an imperious sign to him not to get up or to speak to her again, she went slowly away.

This time it was Ronald who shrunk back from the chill touch of her lips; Ronald’s eyes followed her to the door—with a hard look in them for the first time.

Poor woman!—she had done her best, and
failed. She had made a great effort in her agony; she had forced herself to speak to him and kiss him, but he only remembered of the interview her shudder as he held her in his arms, and the faint, hoarse words, "We must not meet, I cannot bear it."

They must not meet; she could not bear the sight of him. Yet he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow!
CHAPTER VII.

A WORLD WITHOUT A SUN.

"How long and dreary is the night,
When I am frae my dearie;
I restless lie fra e'en to morn,
Tho' I were ne'er so weary.
For oh! her lonely nights are lang;
And oh! her dreams are eerie;
And oh! her widow'd heart is sair
That's parted frae her dearie."

There was a tract of moorland lying north of Dalbraith, that was wilder, more savage and desolate by far, than any other part of the surrounding country.

You ascended to it by a rugged and stony pass that was all tumbled rock and granite, with a hoarse, though not full torrent flowing painfully along it, with many a fret and check and vexing eddy, over the jagged boulders that made its bed.

It was not a beautiful place, scarcely picturesque, but there was something singu-
larly weird and wild about it, and its savage loneliness was wonderful. Not a tree or shrub was to be seen from one end to another, and generally not a moving thing, with the exception of the grumbling water.

Making your way up to the further end of the strath, which rose gradually into rough natural steps and stairs of granite slabs, you came out at last upon a sweep of country that was hardly less stony and desolate than the glen itself, and which lay in the heart of the Dalbraith deer-forest. No human habitation lay within keen, except a rude bothy or shooting-lodge, built of the unhewn rocks which lay about, and thatched with heather.

This had been a favourite deer-stalking resort of Lord Douglas's, and in the autumn days that followed his death his son spent many hours there by himself. Foresters and gillies had deserted the spot now. He had no fear of any one's finding him; no stalker came to tell of a grand stag seen on the adjoining hills for the sport of the morrow; no pony with a slain deer roped on his back, followed by men and dogs and cheery voices, would come up the winding path to the door of the bothy.
Ronald could lie undisturbed for hours, on the rocks hard by, where his father had been wont to sit on many an autumn night, watching the stars come out, and the wild solitude fade away into the dusk. Ronald never waited for the darkness now. The place became indescribably eerie to him as soon as the light began to fail. Directly the sun dipped towards the western hills, and tints of pink and lilac crept along the heights, he got up, closed the door of the bothy on to the cold emptiness within, and went away down that darkening pass that looked so strangely melancholy in the dying light.

Sometimes from the summit of the craigs above his head, a stag would stand looking down on him, itself grandly distinct against the sunset sky; sometimes an eagle went soaring majestically over head, and swooped down with his prey into the eyrie that was perched on one of the narrow ledges in the cliff; sometimes, with its mournful cry, a curlew dipped to the water's edge. But Ronald, who a few weeks ago would have been deeply interested in the appearance of each one, never heeded stag or eagle or curlew now-
a-days. He walked on abstractedly, hurrying when the twilight seemed to be creeping on more quickly, then slackening his speed again, as the thought came back of the home that was more dreary still than the twilight world outside. What could he do better than keep away from the silent house, where his mother sat shut up in her own rooms, and where he hated the sight of the one plate that was daily laid for him in the dining-room?

Life, that had seemed to stand still for a while after the great crash, had begun to go on again somehow. People no longer whispered, or walked softly—windows were thrown open to the sunshine; Norman Douglas had gone back to his tower.

Empty and silent as was the house, it seemed to Ronald to be everywhere pervaded by his mother’s presence. He fancied she must hear his footstep in the hall—that she saw him when he crept like a thief, as he sometimes ventured to do, into his father’s study—that she thought him heartless for eating and sleeping now, as he used to do when Lord Douglas was alive. Poor fellow, he need not have troubled himself about that. Never before in all his life had
he been visited by those confused heavy dreams, steeped in misery and terror—never before had he known startled wakings that were full of a vague dread and horror, even before the reality came down upon him in its crushing weight.

The weather changed, and the atmosphere was dissolved in soft mist and rain. Ronald was too much of a Highlander to mind a wet jacket, but the rain prevented him from lying for hours together on the heather, and made his aimless rambles more cheerless than before.

It was only a shade less dreary out of doors than in the house. There the blank and the want of occupation was complete. He went wandering from room to room, standing still often to gaze with an aching heart at Lord Douglas's guns and fishing-rods, the sight of which was even more sad to the boy's fancy than the great heap of closed books and folded papers on the writing-table. Old Fergus had cleaned all the guns carefully, though now and then a tear had stained the polished steel as he worked, but he put them scrupulously back into their old order, ready for the hand that would never use them again. There they stood,
bright and cold,—lifeless, useless, idle, like all else, thought Ronald, from henceforth for ever.

On a table in the hall window lay a big old blotting-book, which used to be always full of Lord Douglas’s letters. Ronald opened it one day with a listless hand, and with a mingled wish and fear of finding something left there in his father’s handwriting.

But some one had been before him,—every scrap of paper had been taken away,—the only thing left between the leaves was a torn sheet covered with his own half-formed characters. Ronald took it up carelessly, but the colour flushed into his face as he recognized it. It was a copy of Grizel’s old family prophecy. He remembered writing it down a year ago, because it haunted him uncomfortably. “When kinsman’s blood,” he read now, “is shed by kinsman’s hand”—why, that had come true! Shuddering, he discovered that he himself had brought about the first part of the doom of Dalbraith. “When kinsman’s blood is shed by kinsman’s hand”—yes; that had been miserably fulfilled. “When false is true” (he could make nothing of that), “and the loving heart grows cold”—There Ronald dropped the
paper, and sat down feeling cold and stunned. Was not the most loving, the noblest heart in all the world lying now cold in death?—and more, had not his mother's heart turned from him and grown cold?

In his overstrained condition, the foolish old prophecy, which might mean anything or nothing, took an undue hold of his imagination. He felt that he had been overtaken by an inevitable fate; he had only fulfilled that which was his doom, and he must "dree his weird," as Grizel used to say. He did not care to read the rest of the oracular words; there was something he recollected about the "last son of a good father," and "a lassie from the East!"—but all that did not matter to him. The thing was that the prophecy had begun to come true, and that it had been by his means. Ronald brooded over the thought, but to no one in the world would he have been tempted to confess the impression it had made on him.

Meanwhile the weeks slipped away, the Eton holidays had long been at an end, and a good part of the winter half itself was over.

Lady Douglas roused herself at last to the
consciousness of this. She did not see her son often, and generally when she did so, it was Colonel Douglas who took him up to her room. Ronald kept out of his uncle’s way as much as he could, but Colonel Douglas watched him anxiously, and was disturbed by his increasing listlessness, and by his solitary ways. He spoke about him to Lady Douglas, but he was himself scarcely prepared for her quickly-formed decision, that Ronald must go back at once to Eton.

Colonel Douglas saw that the boy had not at all recovered from the shock of his father’s death, and he thought it would be almost cruel to send him, in his half-stunned state, to fight his way in the world of the great school. But, once aroused to the thought of her son’s future, Lady Douglas was inexorable. The idea that his grief must not be suffered to become morbid had taken full possession of her mind. She had a strange shrinking from the thought that any one could share her sorrow. The grief was hers—hers only—an exclusive possession that she guarded jealously.

Ronald must not waste his youth in vain regrets. Why should he? Life was before
him still, and hope, and possibly happiness. He had not lost his past, his future, his present, all at one stroke. Yes, she knew, poor fellow, he mourned his great misfortune bitterly, but he would get better among other boys. Work and cricket and all the rest of it would be the best things for him. He must not be encouraged to dwell upon the past; and besides, his education ought not to be neglected any longer. Other sons were not kept at home because their mothers were widowed!

"But," pleaded Colonel Douglas, "surely poor Ronald's is an exceptional case." Lady Douglas turned very pale, and shook her head. She could never bear to hear that Ronald had any especial cause for sorrow; and at last his uncle was compelled to yield the point.

It was a hard task to tell the boy of his mother's decision, and his heart nearly failed him. Ronald was utterly unprepared to return to his former life, every link with which seemed to have been summarily broken. He could not bear to face even the few people at Dalbraith, how was he to go back to Eton in the middle of the half-year with his story fresh upon him. The thought of all the eyes fixed on him in pity or curiosity was unendurable.
He implored his uncle in an agony to get a reversal of the cruel sentence, and Colonel Douglas, feeling for him more deeply than he cared to tell him, did ask, but asked in vain.

Lady Douglas sent herself for Ronald. She held his hand in her chill fingers, and gave him one of the strange kisses which he knew instinctively it cost her an effort to bestow, and she said, "You will do as I wish, Rollo, because I ask you, and because I know that it is right."

He only said "Yes, Mother," with quivering lips, and after that he uttered no word of pleading or complaint.

Colonel Douglas went with him to London. Ronald left home very quietly, and whatever was his dread of the ordeal before him, he kept it locked in his own heart.

"Good-bye, my dear," the old soldier said when they parted; "be strong, and brave, and manly. I don't think that in all my life I ever needed courage as much as you do now. Ask God to give it you, Ronald, and He will. Say your prayers, my boy, and do your best."

And then he kissed Ronald, and the boy saw that there were tears on the grey eyelashes.
The might of winter’s dreariness presently settled over Dalbraith.

It came down upon the Highlands that year in storm and tempest, with loud gales and pelting hail-storms, and frozen mists that blotted out the hills.

At night the winds lifted up their voices, and came sobbing, moaning, shrieking round the lonely house, until sleep was well nigh impossible, and the inmates lying wakeful and listening to the strong blasts that shook the windows and howled down the wide chimneys, almost believed that spirits in pain must be abroad upon the wind.

And then the snow fell, and lay, not smooth and brightly glistening, but tossed about and heaped up, so that there was danger in the deep, treacherous drifts, and in other places patches of black earth, swept bare by the wind, lay naked and unsheltered from the frost.

And while the storms raved outside, the stillness that seemed born of death reigned within the house. It was well for Margaret Douglas that there were none but old servants at Dalbraith — tried and faithful men and women, who loved her for herself, or for the
name she bore; for that winter, in the storm-besieged house, with the armies of snow and frost that beleaguered it on every side, and the garrison of deadly grief within, was enough to break down the most buoyant spirits.

As Dalbraith House lay low the snow-drifts round it were very deep; the burn was buried in snow, and the roads impassable. It was not even always possible to keep open the communication with the clachan. No winter had been like this one since Lady Douglas came to the Highlands as a bride. How the intense loneliness and the bitter cold affected her during those early months of her widowhood it was difficult for any one to guess—they had given up entreating her to go away. As far as they could see, she did not take much heed of the weather, and they could not tell if it was the wind she was listening to as she sat hour after hour silent and unemployed.

They supposed she must be thinking, from the abstracted look in her eyes, and from the way she sometimes lifted her hand up to her forehead, holding it there for a few minutes, and then letting it fall again heavily on to her knee. Sometimes they fancied she was living
her life over again in memory, and that the past was actually more real to her than the present.

Once a week Ronald wrote to her, short, unmeaning letters, that it cost him hours of misery to compose—and she always answered them immediately; though when Dalbraith was fairly snowed up, and the letters ceased to come, she showed no sign of missing them.

In her letters she never made any allusion to the changed aspect of everything at home. She told him how deep the snow was, and that she and the people he inquired after were well. Then she commented on his school news, and said that it gave her pleasure to hear he was working hard.

For Ronald had gone back to Eton with his uncle's words about manliness and true courage ringing in his ears. Everybody was very kind and considerate, and in some ways things were easier than he expected. He threw himself into his work as he had never done before, in the vague hope that it might please or comfort his mother, and perhaps help him to forget himself. It was weary drudgery; but he had no heart for
the old games or the boating, and one must do something, he supposed.

Once, when the half was drawing near its close, he mentioned the Christmas holidays in one of his letters, and ventured, after many doubts, to say something about hoping he should see her soon. The answer came quickly, and was very decided. He was not to go home for Christmas; she was writing to Sandysmere to arrange that he should spend the holidays there. It would not be worth while for him to take the long journey to the Highlands in the depth of so rough a winter; besides, in every way it was better he should not come. She begged that he would obey her wishes without question.

Colonel Douglas looked very grave when he was told of this. He was anxious about Ronald as well as about Margaret, and he thought it was not right or wise thus to banish the boy from his own home. Nevertheless, there was something in Lady Douglas's rigid, and at times, almost trance-like state, that made them all fear to rouse her, almost as one would dread breaking the long sleep of a sick person after the crisis of an illness. It ended
by Colonel Douglas going up again to London, and taking both Ronald and Kenneth abroad with him for the Christmas holidays.

But there was one person who could no longer refrain herself. When Grizel Douglas heard that Margaret still chose to be alone; that the Christmastide, so often a frightfully wild and dark season in those northern regions, was to roll over the solitary house of Dalbraith with no kindred voice to give the greetings of the holy time, no familiar face to break the spell of empty desolation, her heart burned within her.

That there are sorrows which are not ripe for comfort, she knew, but scarcely understood. At all events, the picture of Dalbraith, with its frost-bound moors, and white peaks, and death-stricken house, came between her and her rest. Her heart sickened at the merry voices and youthful mirth surrounding her in the house near Edinburgh, where she had been bidden to see the old year out and the new year in. She must needs go to Margaret and comfort her.

Neither distance nor snow-drifts could daunt her. She set out resolutely on one of the short December days, and the delays in the tedious
winter journey only troubled her because, once upon the way, she persuaded herself that each day which kept her away from Margaret was a loss. There was so much she would fain say to her—much that she felt dimly stirring in her own heart and striving for expression—such a yearning desire to “exhort” Margaret, and to show her how a sorrow never should be wasted.

At last she reached Dalbraith. After all, Lady Douglas was not quite alone. Of late she had become more restless, pacing up and down her room for hours together. And her old servants, getting frightened as they heard her footsteps passing to and fro, long after midnight, and on into the dark morning hours, took the matter into their own hands and sent for Lady Beatrix.

It was a rough journey in this wild weather for the frail old lady, made partly on a sledge that was pushed across the frozen loch, partly in a rude litter borne through the snow-filled glen on the shoulders of sturdy Highlanders, who had carried her off from her own house almost by force, in the hope that she would bring rest and sleep to their lady.

But though she came right bravely and
willingly, she knew beforehand that she could do no good.

Margaret had judged wisely for herself. She was one of those rarely-constituted persons who can best do battle by themselves with the unavoidable agony of regret. She greeted her uninvited guest gently; she put a force upon herself, and sat quietly, staying her monotonous wandering from room to room. She let the old lady sit by her holding her hand, and talking now and then in her soft, musical voice.

But Lady Beatrix saw that it was only a constraint, and after some hours, she said: “They meant well, Margaret, your kind people who fetched me here, but you know best, dear child. Tell me, shall I stay or go?” Margaret looked down into the sweet, fair, old face, she took up one of Lady Beatrix’s little, white, withered hands, and kissed it passionately, but she said in a whisper, “Go.”

It was impossible, however, to say the same to poor Grizel, when she arrived that same day, half frozen, and filled with love and zeal, from the other end of Scotland. She was so earnest, so humble, so overflowing with a boundless grief and pity as she looked into the changed
face of that Margaret, whom she had been wont to describe proudly as the one perfectly happy person in the world.

Lady Beatrix lost her calmness too, and could not help crying as poor Grizel knelt at her cousin’s feet, kissing her unresisting hands, and pouring on her every tender name in tones that were broken and almost choked with tears.

Margaret scarcely showed any surprise at seeing her, and the plans Grizel had laid anxiously with old Angus in the hall, that her coming should be broken to Lady Douglas gradually, proved quite unnecessary. Angus went away shaking his head and grumbling, when Grizzy broke down at the first sight of Margaret, forgetful of, or faithless to, the promise she had made outside the door, that she would be "just perfectly calm."

It was Margaret who was calm, and who looked at her with the half-impatient wonder that an open show of sorrow always seemed to awake in her. As yet sympathy was powerless to touch her.

"And oh, my Margaret," said Grizel, drying her eyes, and blundering uncompromisingly into the middle of what she longed to say—
"You see, my Margaret, that something wonderful is meant by all this; the loving God would not send such a sorrow without a meaning."

"Maybe," said Margaret, lifting her large pain-wearyed eyes listlessly for an instant.

"You see it; then that is something gained, my bonnie dear—something to comfort us. No pain is useless; we are to learn from it, dear Margaret; to learn."

"I do not care to learn; let me be, Grizel," as the earnest "Eh, Margaret, love?" was repeated the second time.

"But you would love to learn God's grand secret lesson," persisted Grizel, laying her hand on Lady Douglas's arm, "and then the bitter pain, oh, my bairn, the bitter, bitter pain would not be wasted."

Margaret put away the hand, not impatiently, but as if the words did not move her.

"I can't bear to see aught wasted," said Grizel, "not so much as a candle-end, and when I see it burning in a wrong place, I just long to move it; and so I cannot bear to think that your burning pain is not shedding some light into your poor heart, dear Margaret. Do you understand me?"
"No," said Margaret, with a weary dazed movement of the head.

"It was a kind of a wee parable, though I didn't see it myself at first," explained Grizel, rather pleased. "Let me try to show you—"

But Lady Beatrix softly took her hand. "Let the good God teach her, Grizel," she said in her tender voice. "Perhaps He can do it best when we are silent."

"If we are not wasting opportunities," replied honest Grizel, "but we are bounden to do all we can; and our poor Margaret—"

Again Lady Beatrice stopped her. "Dear Grizel, we can always pray," she said.

And Grizel went away into her own room, and prayed with tearful eyes that before Margaret's sorrow was taken away, she might be taught its lesson.

Lady Beatrix prayed too, silently, and there rose before her closed eyes the vision of a stormy sea, with waves that lifted angrily, and of a labouring boat over which those waves were breaking, for the wind was contrary, and the men toiled in rowing. Awhile ago, as she looked on the sorrowful face over which the
waves of trouble had beaten cruelly, pitilessly, the despairing prayer rose to her lips, "Lord, save us, we perish." But now (even though the words had been faithless), as of old, they were heard and answered. The calm Figure of One who carried Divine comfort in His Hand rose before her eyes, and the reproachful yet pitying Voice seemed to be saying to her, "O thou of little faith, wherefore did'st thou doubt?"

Looking back at Margaret she saw that, lulled by the quiet and the tender holding of her hand, the calm of sleep had stolen over her.

"Dear Grizel," said Lady Beatrix, when she was leaving Dalbraith next day, and there was dewy brightness in her dark soft eyes, "Dear Grizel, I am glad to leave you here, and I think God sent for you."

So the two women lived on alone together through the winter. Lady Douglas took her cousin's coming very quietly; she even thanked her for it once, and said she was glad, for that now her own people would be more at rest about her. They were in Italy this winter, and it was impossible for Lord Sandysmere to
face the cold of Scotland, or for his wife to leave him.

So they lived on alone, a monotonous and silent life. To Grizel it was not so utterly dreary as might have been supposed. She was useful, and that alone was to her as the breath of life. And as in her simple creed it was wrong and rebellious to grieve overmuch, she opened her heart willingly to such bits of comfort and cheering as lay within her reach.

The dear one who was gone had been taken to a brighter world; to the kind old heart that had loved him it was great consolation to speak of him and hear about him. That there were none like him left, that his noble life only grew brighter as it neared its end, that he was ready even for a change so sudden;—was it no comfort that all so spoke of him,—that all had loved him,—that he had been mourned as few are mourned in death? It was, to Grizel. And to gather up his words, to hear of the chance acts, the looks, the smiles of those days when he was standing all unconscious, face to face with death; to know which dog it was whose rough head he had last smoothed
with his hand; the hour when he had come down the turret-steps; what he said to Fergus as he went out into the sunshine with his gun over his shoulder; the very gesture with which he had waved a farewell to his wife, as she leant out of her window to see him go—all these things Grizel cared to know, and treasured in her heart—simple chronicles repeated, ah, how often! by the people who had loved him.

The months wore on; Ronald had not come home at Easter, but he was coming at Midsummer, which now was close at hand. Nobody spoke much about it to his mother. Grizel and Lady Beatrix talked of it together in whispers, wondering how it would all be. Was his mother watching for him—she who spoke no word? What welcome would she give her only son when he returned? And Ronald himself, would he, boy-like, have outlived his bitter sorrow?—would he be much changed?

How was it?—had he changed much?

He was older-looking, and he had grown more silent, much more silent. His life among comparative strangers had forced on him a power of outward reticence and self-command,
and the interests of the world in which he lived thrust themselves of necessity upon him.

There were moments when, in the broad light of everyday life, the past almost looked to him like a ghastly dream; there were others when it started up again into vivid and present reality.

One of these sudden shocks came to him one day that he was by himself in his boat on the river. It was a whole holiday, and as he rowed quickly, he overtook another boat full of people who were talking and laughing merrily. There were two or three ladies, and a couple of Eton boys, whose "people" having come down to see the place, were being shown, as its crowning glory, the broad, silvery Thames, dotted over with boats, as it especially is on a holiday in summer.

Ronald exchanged a greeting with his school-fellows, as his light boat went skimming past them, and then a reedy bend in the river hiding him from their view, he stopped, intending to let them get ahead of him again.

As he did so their voices clearly reached him; their boat was moving very slowly.
"Who was that boy, Reg?" said a girl's voice. "He had such a nice face, I thought."
"That? oh, that was Douglas; he is a very good-looking fellow, isn't he?"
"Is he a friend of yours?" asked some one else.
"Well, yes, he used to be. One does not see so much of him now. I daresay you have heard about him. He shot his own father last year."
"Oh, poor, poor fellow!" exclaimed a very compassionate voice.
"On purpose?" asked another, in shocked and awe-struck tones.
"Nonsense, Tiny. On purpose!—of course not. How can you talk such nonsense? It was an accident out shooting."
"Oh, I remember all about it," said a fresh speaker. "It was a terrible thing. His poor mother! Was that young Douglas? I wasn't looking when he passed. I should like to have seen him."
"Is he very miserable?" asked the girl they called Tiny. "I wonder he could ever hold up his head again."
"I say, look out—hush!" as the boat now
rounded the river-bend and came full upon Douglas's skiff drawn up near the bank.

For a moment both oarsmen stopped rowing in blank dismay, the next they sent their boat forward with a sudden spring that speedily put several reaches of shining water between it and Ronald's.

"There, Tiny; I wish you would not speak so loud," said Reg. "I declare he heard."

"Oh, no, no," cried Tiny.

"I tell you he could not help himself. He heard quite well; of course he did."

"Perhaps he did not, Reg. I daresay he wasn't listening," and the girl who had first spoken leant forward and took Tiny's hand in hers, for she had become quite white with compunction and regret.

"What shall we do?" again asked Reg.

"Make mother ask him to dinner at the Christopher," suggested the other boy.

"By the bye, yes, the very thing;" and before his mother had time to stop him, Reg had started up in the boat, and was shouting out—"I say, Douglas, my mother wants you to come and dine at the Christopher this evening."
Ronald had pulled his straw hat over his eyes, and was apparently quite intent on getting his boat back into mid-stream. He made no answer till another shout of "Douglas!" compelled him to look round, and then he only said, "Thanks, I can't."

Reg was beginning a remonstrance, but he was pulled down again into the boat, all his relations calling to him, "Don't, Reg; be quiet, Reg!" at once.

Ronald's skiff glided away towards Eton, and that was the end of the matter as far as Reg was concerned. Five minutes afterwards he had forgotten all about it.

But Ronald hurried up to his own room. He had heard, sure enough, both the thoughtless questions and the carelessly-given answers.

Was this the way his misfortune was handled by the outside world?—told lightly to curious strangers, wondered at, pitied, and misunderstood. "Did he do it on purpose?" Ronald repeated the words half aloud—on purpose! So that was what people thought.

And somebody else in the boat said she was sorry she had not seen him; and then they asked him to dinner, that they might look at
him, he supposed, as much as they liked. He wondered that they cared to have anybody to dinner who they thought might have shot his father on purpose—and he burst out into a laugh that was much more like a sob.

And this was how all his friends were talking! He had fancied they never told the story to any one, and thought of it only in respectful silence. Well, he knew better now. They told everybody that came to Eton who he was, and what had happened to him. All his life he must be pointed out like this, and invited to dinner by people who asked whether he did it on purpose.

That little foolish speech cut him to the heart more than all the rest. He could not forget it. The night that followed was as miserable an one to Ronald as any of those he had gone through just after his father’s death. He paced up and down the tiny room, pushing aside the table, and dashing his one chair out of the way, and crossing from door to window in a couple of strides.

“She wondered how I could ever hold up my head again,” he said to himself. “She was right there. I wonder at it too. I don’t
think I can stand it all much longer. 'Is he miserable?' that girl said. I should like her to try what it feels; I don't think she would care for it very much. If it was not for mother, I would just bolt, and go to some place where nobody ever heard of me before; but I suppose Uncle Norman would call that cowardly!' and then Ronald stopped and sat down on his bed, leaning forward on the table with his eyes covered with his hands, and there he remained a long while without moving, except for a deep sigh now and then.

That little scene on the river shook his confidence in his friends, and the rest of the half year passed heavily.

It was brightened only by the thought that at last he was going home. Dalbraith was Dalbraith after all, saddened and shadowed though it might be. There was no place in the world like it. There too he should have the comfort and relief of being alone again, without the fear of people watching him, or the haunting fancy that whenever two of his companions were whispering together, they were talking about him.

Above all, Ronald's whole heart turned to
his mother. Since he had been for so long entirely among strangers who could have no sympathy with either of them, the bond of their common sorrow seemed to have grown so strong that it must needs draw them close together. No one else could feel as they two did. Surely his mother would be glad to see him, and that dreadful shadow that had been between them would be forgotten. Perhaps she was even waiting for him to comfort her; at least she would let him try. The blank despair of a little while ago was lessened by this hope.

He would not be discouraged even when a letter came from Lady Douglas, advising him to spend his holidays once more in England. She did not forbid his coming home, but she feared he would find it dreary work, she wrote, for Dalbraith was changed, and she herself kept much to her own rooms.

Ronald's only answer to this was to fix the time of his arrival.
CHAPTER VIII.

THROWN AWAY.

"But when the mither cam' to hear it
She said, 'Ye disobedient son,
I've gie'n you learnin', I've gie'n you schulvn',
And will you to your ruin run?'"

"Bring some peats and light them up," said Grizel Douglas; "we must not have the callant coming home to a cold hearth-stone."

But the peats that evening were damp and would not burn. They soon crumbled down to a dull red.

Everybody knows how lovely and how fickle is a Highland summer. Now sunshine on the heather—now rain upon the moss.

In the North, Queen Summer is seldom suffered to hold her throne and sceptre undisturbed. Those rebel chiefs—the mighty wind, the sullen rain—rise up often in revolt against her sway; and Winter, her harsh impatient heir, sends down storm and cloud and tempest, to
tear from her, if so he may, that crown that he will wear full surely, when she has laid down to sleep, among the flowers of summers that are dead.

It was a very dark stormy night on which Ronald reached Dalbraith. One solitary light glimmered from a window in the house; otherwise he could scarcely have traced its dark outline rising out of the gloom. The bell at the turret-door echoed noisily, but it was a long time before he could hear footsteps within coming to answer it. In old time the door would have been flung open long before the dog-cart reached the crest of the brae, and his father would have been standing on the threshold.

It seemed as if a shadow waited there now, and that it fell upon him as he passed in. Old Angus coming at last, grasped his outstretched hand silently, and then welcomed him home as if by an afterthought. Ronald thanked him, and stood hesitating, thinking of the joyous rush that would have taken him half over the house, formerly, in less time than this.

"Where is my mother?" he asked in a low voice; "am I to go to her?"

"In the tower-room, Master Ronald,"
whispered back the old man, "and you'd best be going there at once."

Grizel's peat fire had sunk to a glimmer, and the hall was not lighted. There was a dim lamp burning at the further end of the gallery beyond, and as he walked slowly down it he heard the moan of the wind, as if it was praying for entrance at each window, and the rain-drops splashing down.

At the door of the turret-room he stood still and waited, listening for some movement within. Surely in that silent house his mother must have heard the bell, and it would be so much easier to greet her if he found her coming out to meet him. But nothing stirred; so presently he opened the door gently, and looked in. The room was dimly lighted, like the rest; only a pair of wax-candles stood on the writing-table, and his mother was standing near the chair from which she had just risen, and looking towards the door.

"Oh! is it you?" she said, coming forward quickly; "I thought I heard the bell. What a bad night for your journey. Poor fellow, how wet you are!" and she passed her hand over his soaked sleeve. "You ought to change your things at once."
"Presently—it does not matter, mother."

A feeling of utter shyness and constraint came upon him. His mother's quivering face and quick words, the trembling of her hand on his arm, and the attempt to treat this as if it were but an ordinary meeting, made him feel like a stranger in a strange house.

She busied herself in stirring the fire into a blaze, but the fire-irons rattled and fell out of her shaking hands, so she sat down, clasping them together on her black dress. The candle-light shone on her, and Ronald saw how grief had beaten all traces of youth out of her face. He stood silent, with something like an iron hand grasping at his throat. His mother spoke again directly, ringing the bell with nervous haste. "You must want something to eat. Rory,"—as the door opened,—"is supper ready for Lord Douglas?"

Ronald had perforce become used at Eton to hearing himself called by his father's name, but he winced as he heard it first from his mother. She slightly raised her voice as she pronounced it, as if determined not to spare herself, and she tried to steady the lips which would quiver with the pain. It may have been right that she should face the inevitable
at once. It was inevitable, but it was unfortunate for Ronald. Who knows how much her dread of meeting him was increased by knowing that she must call him by that name, which she would fain have buried with jealous silence in her heart?

It was part of her plan to face the pang at once. In those long months she had thought deeply, resolutely, and sternly. Out of the ruins of joy and love had risen a strange, hard, perverted ideal, which she called Duty.

Duty had ever been the key-note of Colonel Douglas's gentle yet lofty teachings. Margaret had fastened on the letter of his words, and let the spirit go. She would yield to no softness, would flinch before no pain; only what she renounced for herself she would not tolerate in others. Neither Ronald nor any one else must draw back where she could tread with an un-faltering step.

But, poor woman, she overrated her strength. In some of her words and ways there was the unconscious cruelty of weakness.

On this evening she sat opposite to Ronald while he stumbled hurriedly through his supper, hungry after his long journey, yet choking over
every morsel he tried to swallow with her eyes upon him.

"I am afraid, my boy," she said, when he had finished, "that you have made a mistake in coming home. It is lonely here now, and you will be dull."

"Mother," and he came round and knelt beside her chair, "don't say such things; I wanted to be with you."

"You must not think of me, Douglas."

"Oh!" he cried, "cannot you call me Ronald?"

A light flashed up suddenly in her eyes, "No, I can't. Leave me at least his name." Then, as she saw him draw back, she checked herself and took his hand. "My boy, be reasonable," she said.

"Am I unreasonable?" he asked, with a swelling heart.

To this she made no answer; but presently saying that she would leave him now to have a little talk with Grizel before he went to bed, she kissed him on the forehead, and went away.

Grizel had been keeping discreetly aloof in her own room that she might not disturb the meeting between Margaret and her son; but
she had not been able to resist creeping in to see the boy eat his supper. Ronald turned to her after his mother was gone, and with a burning blush that covered his whole face, he asked, in a low voice, "Grizel, does my mother hate me?"

"Hate you, hate you, Ronald? Whist, whist, my bonny man; how should she hate you that are the whole she has left on earth—her one bairn—her hope—and her joy that will be, by and bye, when the days of her mourning are accomplished? Ronald, laddie, you should not speak like that."

"She cannot forget," murmured Ronald, leaning his head on the chimney-piece, and turning his face away from Grizel.

"Forget, and how would she forget?—she cannot look at you without remembering—you, the innocent cause, my poor, dear boy—"

Ronald stopped her with a gesture of his hand. "Oh, don't," he groaned.

"Give her time, Ronald; give your poor mother time. It is but natural; she never sees you yet but she thinks of that awsome day."

"Grizel, be quiet; you nearly drive me out of my mind," said poor Ronald; "and yet I rather think you are a comfort."
"Am I, am I?" cried Grizel, with tears of pleasure in her eyes; "am I really a bit of a comfort to you? I can't do much, Ronald; but I would die for you to-morrow, gladly."

But though honest Grizel did her best to cheer him, she was scarcely better able in her simplicity than he was to understand the subtlety of grief, its strange wish for self-torture, its wilful monopoly of suffering.

Only the next day came another jar between Ronald and his mother. They had been talking over his school-life together, and discussing the prospects of the next half. Lady Douglas had got a letter from his Eton tutor, which she gave him to read, telling him, in warm words, of the pleasure it had given her.

Ronald was leaving her at last, somewhat comforted and re-assured; but as he reached the door she called him back. It was a glorious day after the rain, and the August sunshine was pouring in at the windows.

"By the way," she said, speaking quickly, and holding the open letter so as to shade her face, "I wanted to remind you that the 12th will soon be here. You had better see Fergus, and make your arrangements with him about your shooting."
"Mother!" called out Ronald, sharply, as if she had given him a blow.

She heard his exclamation and the horror in his voice, but she would not look at him.

"Yes," she continued; "you must settle these things for yourself now, I cannot look to them for you."

He recovered himself by a great effort, and spoke quietly, but very sadly. "Mother, can you think—you—can you imagine that I—I could shoot again?"

She looked up quickly, growing paler, if it were possible, than before. "That is foolish; I want you to have no morbid feeling, no false sentiment. Why, what difference can it make? Go out at once, and face it; I tell you I wish it. Do you suppose such a trifle as that makes any difference to me?"

"I don't know, mother; how can I tell?" he answered, with the bitterness that she was teaching him. "What do I know of your sorrow? I only know that I can't do it, and I won't."

"But if I wish it?"

"I wasn't thinking of you," said Ronald, roughly.

She looked at him again. Perhaps she saw
how deeply she had wounded him, for she spoke more gently. “My boy, I only spoke for your good; things are no easier because we put them off. I have told you this before. You must not brood over the past. At your age trouble cannot go very deep; turn away from it; leave it to those who cannot even wish to escape from it. Go out and enjoy yourself.”

“Mother,” he said, “you are too cruel.”

He stood by the window; the tears he was too proud to let fall burning in his eyes, and the hot iron of injustice scorching in upon his soul. Those were bad moments in the boy’s life.

“I do not mean to be cruel,” she answered; “I wish you to be reasonable, and strong, and sensible, ready to face the shadow that has fallen on your life, and so to dispel it. A boy like you should not shrink before a little pain. Go out bravely; only the first day or two can be hard at your age.”

“As there is a God in heaven,” broke out Ronald, passionately; “and as He sees and judges, I swear that never in my life shall my hand take a gun in it again—my hand that
killed my father! Uncle Norman," for Colonel Douglas had opened the door as he began to speak, "I call you to witness my solemn oath."

Lady Douglas silently left the room.

"You are too vehement, Ronald," said his uncle, laying his hand on the boy's shoulder.

"I cannot stand it," continued Ronald, his face all aflame with pain and anger; "I won't be treated so;" but Colonel Douglas checked him with a look and tone that had in them more sternness than his thoughts.

"Ronald, you are speaking of your mother."

"And he was my father," answered Ronald, with a bitter sob; "and she thinks I am not worthy to be called his son."

"You had better say no more now," said his uncle, trying to hide his pity and sympathy; "go out, and I will speak to your mother."

But Margaret, when he went, hot with indignation, to her room, met his rebuke with a humility and a pathos that disarmed him. "What can the poor fellow do here," she asked, "if all amusement is cut off from him? —and, Uncle Norman, his father wanted him to love Dalbraith."
"But so soon, Margaret; and his dear father has only been gone a year."

"Only a year," she echoed, with a world of dreary meaning in her voice.

Colonel Douglas stood sorrowfully aside, all the more conscious of his powerlessness to help, because he saw both sides so clearly. He understood the effort Margaret had made, her mistaken attempt to do her duty by her son, and her chilled, shocked feeling at the outburst which had met her. Neither could he wonder at Ronald, or blame him, for doubting his mother's love.

Lady Douglas did not try again to interfere with his pursuits, and for a time he held himself proudly and coldly aloof from her; but the boy's heart, after all, yearned for his mother, and he seemed to have made a resolve that he would try once more to win back his place with her. He was patient almost beyond his years, courting her as a knight of old would have courted his lady, with humble, wistful service. And in her blindness she threw it all away.

Norman Douglas was almost in despair. He used to pace up and down the little morning-
room at the Lady’s Lodge. “I can do no more,” he said; “it is of no use. For all her imposing ways I sometimes think our poor Margaret is no better than a spoilt child.”

She has been used to so much love,” pleaded Lady Beatrix; “she does not know how to live without it.”

“And so she throws away God’s last good gift? Ah! dear Lady, nothing would ever have made you bitter or unjust.”

But much as he pitied Ronald, Colonel Douglas had no intention of letting him become listless and idle. He ordered him out fishing, and watched him anxiously, until he saw that, even in spite of himself, the glorious sport was throwing its spell over him. The solitary excitement, the dash of the falling river or the stillness of its deep salmon pools, the gloom upon the water when clouds were overhead, the sudden glints of often unwelcome sunshine, the mad moments of excitement that made up twenty times for the hours of patient waiting—all these met Ronald’s unspoken need; and the great mother, Nature, gathered him kindly to her mighty heart. Duncan, the fisherman, was an apathetic, taci-
turn Highlander, whom nothing short of a big fish could galvanise into life; but he was a master of his craft,—and Ronald, being endowed with all the patient coolness, the steadiness of nerve and presence of mind that is necessary to a good fisherman, Duncan thought it worth while to take great pains with his education. But he never exulted openly, or gave his pupil a single word of praise.

One day Grizel burst upon them on the river-side, wading through a sea of dripping bracken and heather, and sending several stones thundering down into the water as she clambered down the bank. Sympathy in whatever he had in hand was by nature so welcome a thing to Ronald, that he even greeted Grizel gladly now, though her advent seemed likely to put an end to his chances for that day. She arrived, loudly promising silence, and her "whist-whist" in answer to Ronald's whispered caution seemed to awake the echoes in the opposite craigs, and only to lose itself among the distant rocks. But the deep interest in her face, its puckered anguish when Duncan gravely proposed to give up and go home for to-day, her wild delight when a fish (surely the
most deaf of his species) was hooked at last, disarmed Ronald, and it was a pleasure to him to show his prowess before such enthusiastic eyes. There was no holding Grizel, as the salmon rushed and plunged, and Ronald followed him down the stream. She tore along, stumbling over the rocks, clinging to the stems of overhanging trees, entangling herself wildly with Ronald’s rod, and all but taking a header into a rocky pool just as Duncan, his face expressing unutterable things, was drawing in the salmon with his landing-net. Ronald leant against a tree, and laughed till the glen rang again; and the sun streaming out all at once (for it was a day of cloud and storm, with flitting gleams and shadows), lighted up his face with a ray of yellow gold. Duncan had withdrawn in dudgeon behind a rock, round which the river swept just there with a swifter eddy, and Grizel came plunging up the bank, stamping the water out of her wet boots, and looking up at Ronald with delight.

“Eh, you may laugh, Ronald, but I just wish your mother could get a sight of you now, with the light in your eyes, and looking like the blithe laddie of a year ago.”
Hapless Grizel!—she wondered why the gloom fell suddenly over his face again, just as the swift storm-shadow settled down on the hill-top.

Ronald felt weary of it all. If it had not been for the fishing he would scarcely have had any regrets when the holidays came to an end, and he had to go back to Eton for his last half. Colonel Douglas had gone away, and Ronald went but seldom to the Lady's Lodge. His old childish familiarity with Marion had passed away, and she had grown shy and grave with him. Kenneth was reading with a private tutor in the south of England. And things never would go straight between Ronald and his mother.

Only a few days before his departure, he was told one morning, much to his surprise, that two young gentlemen had arrived and were "spiering" for him. Going round to the front of the house in great perplexity, he found his unexpected visitors waiting for him on the steps; for Rory, unused to people coming to call, and, in truth, rather indignant that any one should, under present circumstances, make an attempt to do so, had not invited them to go inside the door. They were two young fellows,
with knapsacks over their shoulders; one a school-fellow of Ronald's, the other his sailor-brother, whom Ronald had seen once or twice at Eton. Greetings and explanations were exchanged. The two brothers were making a walking tour through the Highlands, where everybody had been "tremendously" kind to them, and hearing that Dalbraith was not far from the Inn where they were staying for a couple of days, they had come over to look Douglas up.

Boys are as hospitable as Arabs, and there is, besides, a sort of free-masonry among Etonians that makes them claim each other's friendship as a matter of course, however and wherever they may meet.

It was quite impossible for Ronald to turn these two away. He flushed hotly at the bare thought, and yet how could he make his mother understand? Leaving his guests in the hall, he ran up to her room, and told her hurriedly that he must ask them to stay one night. "I could not help it, you see, mother; I'm very sorry—indeed, I could not help it."

She looked at him for a few minutes without speaking.
"Very well," she said, at last.
"You won't mind much, mother, will you?" he began again, getting more and more embarrassed. "Of course, I don't like it at all myself; but what could I do? You see it isn't my fault, don't you?"
She bent her head a little, and said "Yes."
"And they won't be in your way, you know, mother."
"Of course not," she rejoined quickly.
He lingered, longing to give her a kiss, or to put his arm round her, or in some way to prove that he was not disregardful of her. He was trembling from head to foot himself, with a sort of nervousness and dread of these guests—his own first guests at Dalbraith.
But Lady Douglas was bending over a book she held open on her lap, and her face was turned away from him. Ronald did not venture to go up to her, neither did he like to go away, so he remained standing awkwardly near the door. She did not notice him. "Good-bye, mother," he said at last.
"Good-bye, Douglas," she answered, in a low voice.
He went out and closed the door after him.
gently, and stood in the passage twisting his hands together, hating to go down, dreading having to face his friends; angry with them for coming; rebelling in his heart against the unnatural dreariness of his life. He dimly understood, too, that it was a bitter moment for his mother, in which the outside world broke for the first time upon the silence of that mourning house.

At last he went downstairs with a rush, and opened the hall-door. There they were waiting for him, the sailor sitting in Lord Douglas's great carved chair, his brother balancing a Highland claymore in his hand; and both looking so frankly unconscious of being in any one's way, so sure of their welcome, and of their host's delight at their arrival, that for a moment he stood still without knowing whether he was most provoked with them for not knowing better, or pleased at their want of perception.

"My mother does not see strangers—visitors, I mean," he said, coming forward and speaking rather stiffly, "but she hopes you will enjoy yourselves. What would you like to do?"

"Let us go out. I suppose we couldn't go
after the grouse?” suggested Frank Giffard, the Etonian.

“I never shoot,” answered Ronald, sharply and shortly.

To do the two young men justice, neither of them knew much of the real state of the case. Frank had not been at Eton when Ronald’s father died, and though he had heard the story, he had nearly forgotten it, while his brother Harry was out in China at the time. Some remembrance of the accident and its especial sadness suddenly dawned upon them.

“I say, old fellow,” exclaimed the sailor, jumping up and putting his hands on Ronald’s shoulders, “isn’t there a screw loose somewhere?—we ought not to have come, ought we?—hadn’t we better make ourselves scarce as fast as we can?”

“No, no, indeed; I’m particularly glad to see you. It’s uncommonly jolly of you to come;” and Ronald spoke all the more heartily for his previous coldness, and felt all the more heartily too. “It’s capital having you both. I’ll tell you what—we’ll go out fishing. It’s a first-rate day. I know you like fishing, Giffard.”

“Rather—I believe you,” echoed Frank;
"but is it all right? Are you sure you like to fish?"

"Yes, yes; I'm always at it. Come along, and we will find the fishermen."

Half an hour afterwards the three passed under Lady Douglas's window. It was open, and Ronald glanced up at it with an uncomfortable misgiving. Choosing the rods and flies had put his two friends quite at their ease again; now they were both talking at once, telling their travelling adventures, and laughing over them unrestrainedly. Ronald did not like to check them, but he flushed hotly once more as he fancied the merry, careless voices going up into his mother's room. Would she think that he was laughing with them? He hurried them on past the house and down to the river, and then he discovered his own silence with a start, finding that they were growing silent in their turn. So, recalling his thoughts by a great effort, he forced himself to talk and laugh, and to become a hospitable and gracious host. By degrees a kind of excitement crept over him—it was but the natural reaction from the strain under which he had been living. A wild merriment took possession of him; he
laughed at the smallest jokes, and talked louder and faster than he had ever done in his life. When they began fishing he did not take a rod himself, but went from one friend to the other, giving them the benefit of his experience and advice.

At one o'clock a pony came from the house with a luncheon-basket that made Duncan open his eyes with wonder. This was clearly not a day on which any business was to be done. As the three young fishermen sat on the grass round their basket, the air rang with their merriment. Ronald’s eyes were sparkling; he could not help being proud of his beautiful Dalbraith in its autumn garb. “The birch-trees seem as if they were hung over with gold sovereigns, and the other trees look like oranges and lemons and copper tea-kettles,” said Frank Giffard, poetically; “and it is all so jolly, you know, with the silver water spouting away, just like a scene at the theatre.”

Ronald’s high spirits never flagged all day—he would not let them flag. If a qualm came over him now and then, or a stab of memory recalled a certain other luncheon on the hillside more than a year ago, he stifled it with a
laugh and a fresh story. Duncan, watching him with grim astonishment, came to the conclusion that his young master was "fey."

But towards evening his exhilaration began to fade. He fancied that Rory looked at him reproachfully as he waited on them at dinner, and when they went out into the quiet starlight afterwards it was not so easy to keep thought at bay.

As soon as he decently could he conducted the two Giffards up to their rooms. "Well, we've had a tremendously jolly day," said Harry, as he closed his door.

Ronald rushed away to his mother's room and knocked. There was no answer, but bending down to listen he could hear that she was pacing up and down within.

Up and down—up and down without a pause. He tried the lock softly, but it was fastened. He stood listening to the footprint, restless and yet monotonous, for a few minutes; at last in a low voice he called her. She took no notice, probably she did not hear him; but it would have made any one sad to see the boy standing there, leaning against the wall, waiting, and listening wistfully outside the door, in vain.
The colour sank out of his cheeks—his brow knit—he looked years older than he had done awhile ago; while his merry mood ebbed away and shivered out of sight.

At last he gave up in despair and went away to his own room. There he dashed the door to, and blew out his candle, that no light even might look in upon him at the close of his "jolly" day.

The two Giffards were astir betimes next morning. Ronald went with them part of their way, and though it was his last day at home, he did not return until late in the afternoon. When he met Lady Douglas, neither of them made any allusion to his guests of yesterday, but from that time there was a little change in Ronald. It was very slight—hardly perceptible—still it was there. Henceforward he went his own way more, and tried less to please his mother.

The fame that had been so fair during all his time at Eton, got somehow rather dimmed during his last half. He was restless and idle. He got into bad company. Something seemed to have gone wrong with him, said his tutor. There was no great actual harm, but he would
be better away from Eton now. So the sun of his school-life went down cloudily at the end.

He braved it out with his mother, and sent her no answer to a severe letter she wrote to him, just at the moment when a few soft pitying words would have touched his heart.

Colonel Douglas was away with his regiment, and, left to his own devices, Ronald went to London when he quitted Eton. He was fast growing up, and a desperate craving after excitement had seized upon him. He longed by some means, he scarcely cared by what, to escape from the burden of gloom he had laboured under so long. He was very young, ignorant, and unwary. One or two of his companions took him to some races, and taught him to bet. Ronald gave himself up to this new enthrallment, and went on for a time in a sort of fever of excitement—then suddenly he awoke to the horrible consciousness that he had been losing heavily.

He was smitten with despair and with loathing of himself, but he did the best thing that remained to him under the circumstances, and went straight to Colonel Douglas with his
remorse and his confession. The gentleness that met him where he most expected harshness went far to save the poor boy. His uncle listened quietly, pitied, and forgave him, but he did not tell him of the compassion that secretly filled him, for the desolate position, and the home coldness which he believed to be the chief causes of the evil. Loyal as he was to his nephew's widow, there were moments when a flame of generous anger rose up against her in the heart of Norman Douglas.

Yet, once again he was forced to feel for her. Just now the money so wantonly lost was especially needed at Dalbraith. At a sufficiently low ebb at all times, the legal expenses of a succession had nearly drained the exchequer. And there was one old tenant—a loyal, faithful old man, one of Lord Douglas's truest friends—who had been patiently waiting for a long time until a new farm-steddning, much needed, could be put up on his farm. It had been promised by Lord Douglas, and was one of the last plans with which he had occupied himself; but his death had delayed its being carried out. Now the sum needed had been gathered
together again painfully, almost pound by pound, by Ronald's guardians; and this money had to be taken to pay the young heir's gambling debts.

The blow was very bitter to his mother. She was righteously, naturally, fatally displeased. It fell to her lot to tell the old farmer of this new delay, and to witness the grieved, surprised, puzzled expression on his rugged face.

To go back from a promise, and for such a cause, stung her haughty spirit to the quick; and that Ronald should thus belie an engagement entered into by his father was a thing she found it hard to forgive.

She did not write to him, but when Colonel Douglas refused to show him the letter he had himself received, Ronald guessed at its contents. He was broken down with remorse, and his uncle judged it wisest to spare him many words.

One thing it was possible to do. The moor and the deer-forest of Dalbraith could be let. There was a sore struggle before the family pride of Norman Douglas yielded to what he felt to be his duty. He belonged to the old school, to
which such dealings were both new and distasteful; but in this way only, money, to be spent among the people on the estates, could be obtained. That argument silenced, without reconciling Lady Douglas to the step. It might be that her husband would have wished it, and as she said rather bitterly to her uncle, “It will be no sacrifice to Ronald.”

“If it were ever so great a sacrifice, he has been extravagant, and he must pay the penalty,” answered Colonel Douglas.

Ronald thought so too. He agreed with a mute gesture, when his uncle told him of his decision and its reasons.

A few minutes after he looked up and said, “Uncle Norman.”

“Well, Ronald.”

“I think the river ought to be let too,” said Ronald, quickly.

“Hey-dey! why, Ronald, I thought it was the one thing you did care for.”

“I know. I would rather give up something I do care for.”

Colonel Douglas smiled, and made no immediate answer. It went against the grain with him to sever one of the only links that bound
Ronald to Dalbraith; but after all there might be things for him to learn in life more valuable even than the love of home. "And trust a Highlander for that," thought Norman.

The river at Dalbraith was let that year, and "dour and glum as a nor'-easter" did the sportsmen who rented it, find Duncan the fisherman.
CHAPTER IX.

LORD RONALD, MY SON.

"But wae, wae was the heavy mane
Gaed thro' that Castle ha', O;
When gloamin' cam' ae summer e'en,
Young Ronald was awa', O."

A few weeks afterwards an old Eton friend, who was going abroad for a long journey, asked Ronald to go with him. The two young fellows were to take a travelling tutor with them, who would to a certain extent look after them. They were to go to Canada to begin with, and after that their plans of travel were uncertain. Colonel Douglas thought the scheme a good one, Lady Douglas gave her consent, and the preparations were quickly made.

Ronald was staying in London at the empty house of his friend Hugh Raymond's father. The very day had come on the evening of which they were to start for Liverpool, when a letter was put into his hands. It was from Grizel—an incoherent, illegible, tearful epistle—
that, being wrongly directed, could not even arrive by the morning post like other people's letters, but must needs come straggling in, late in the afternoon, when it was all but too late to be of use to any one.

Tearing it impatiently open, Ronald found in it a piteous appeal to him not to leave England on any account without saying good-bye to his mother. Oddly mixed up together, were messages that Lady Douglas would have sent if she had been told of this letter, assurances from Grizel of his mother's love to him, and a harrowing description of what his own remorse would be if he went abroad without one farewell word or kiss.

Authorised or unauthorised, Ronald received the missive only too willingly as a summons from his mother. His heart, which he never could really harden towards her, had been failing him more every day as his departure drew near, but till now he had been given no excuse for going to her.

There was not a moment to be lost if he meant to catch the Scotch express that night. Rushing down to the hall, he seized hap-hazard on a portmanteau that was waiting with the
remainder of the luggage to be taken to the station. Then hailing a hansom, he was in the act of leaving a hurried, confused message with the servant, when Hugh Raymond himself came unexpectedly along the pavement.

"Douglas! Good heavens! what are you about? Where are you going off to?"

"Home—to Scotland. I have been sent for," answered Ronald, briefly. "I was just leaving a message for you. I can’t stay now, or I shall lose my train."

"But I say—stop a moment—what are you thinking of? We can’t wait for you."

"You must do as you please about that. I shall be back in less than a week. Great Northern. Quick!" he shouted to the cabman, and away went the hansom rattling down Brook Street, leaving Hugh Raymond and the tutor, who had just come out of the house, staring blankly at each other on the doorstep.

Late on the afternoon of his third day’s travelling, Ronald reached Dalbraith. He had not lost any time, and had scarcely stopped to eat, much less to sleep, on the road.

The stable-yard was empty when he dismounted there from the dog-cart which had
brought him the last stage of his journey, and as he met no one on his way to the house, he entered without ringing the bell, and ran upstairs at once to his mother's room.

Lady Douglas sat at her table writing. There was a softer, gentler expression than usual on her face. The letter that lay half-finished before her was a farewell to her son, and was touched with greater kindness—a more motherly and melancholy tenderness—than any she had written to him for months. She had not been told rightly of the day he was to leave England, and thought that her letter would be in plenty of time to reach him.

"Perhaps it is better that you should not come home before you go," she wrote; "but I wish you to know that you carry with you your mother's——"

The opening of the door startled her. She raised her eyes quickly, and a young man stood on the threshold, looking in on her. Her husband's influence had been all day very strongly over her. She had almost fancied that he was near her, approving of the kind words she wrote, and now——

Very tall, with the same dark eyes and hair,
seen indistinctly in the half light, standing in the heavy shadow of the doorway, and with the gloom of the passage behind him, it seemed to her for one short mad moment as if the Ronald of her youth—her husband—stood before her.

She started up with a wild cry of "Ronald!" He came hastily forward, and she knew him.

Some women would have been softened by the wonderful momentary likeness, but this woman it seemed to turn to stone. The keen agony of disappointment coming upon that brief second of unreasoning hope, the horror she had of being betrayed into showing strong emotion, even a strange pang of indignation at his glad, eager look as he approached her—all combined to make her heart stand still, and the blood freeze in her veins.

She disengaged herself from his arms, and putting one hand for support on the table behind her, she said, in a trembling voice:

"What are you doing here? Where are your friends?"

"Gone abroad, I believe. I came to you, mother."

"Do you want me to pay more gambling debts?"
To her own ears it scarcely seemed as if she herself was speaking. The words appeared to be uttered in her hearing, and some power outside herself forced her to repeat them aloud.

Ronald drew back.

"Did you send for me to ask me that, mother?"

"I did not send for you."

He turned away without another word, and left the room.

Lady Douglas fell back heavily into her chair, and sat motionless. Presently she took up the letter from the table before her and tore it in two, and the action seemed to bring back the life that had been almost suspended.

Bitter tears poured down her face. The pride and strength was all beaten out of her. She was torn from head to foot with sobs.

Then after the storm there came a great calm down upon her. The two faces—the father's and the son's—were distinctly now under her eyes; both, as if in very presence, were before her. The bewildered pain and surprise on the young face scarcely seemed to upbraid her more than did the frank, trusting eyes that she felt looking into hers with no reproach in them—
only a question why she had thus sent away their son.

"Ronald, forgive me," she said half aloud, and she covered her face with her hands.

A long time passed before she recollected herself, with a sudden start. Why had she left him alone so long under the impression of her cruel words?

She went hastily upstairs, and knocked at Ronald's door. There was no answer, and as she glanced in she saw that the room looked just as usual, with closed blinds, and no sign of preparation or habitation.

Evidently no one knew yet of his arrival. He must have come up straight to her.

He must be in the library below, she thought, or in the gallery or the hall. But each one of these was empty and undisturbed.

He had gone out to the stable, or perhaps he did not know that Norman was away, and was seeking him at the tower.

Lady Douglas rang the bell hastily, then she went back into the hall. A plaid that she knew to be Ronald's lay half on the table, half on the floor, just as he had thrown it down in his hurry. She gathered it up, and carried it with
her to the turret-door of the entrance, which she opened.

On the step outside stood Grizel, her bonnet awry, her eyes inflamed with tears, and beside her was Marion Stuart.

"Grizel, where is Douglas?" asked his mother hurriedly. "You have seen him."

"Oh, Margaret, I did not think he would come so soon," said Grizel, breaking forth into a fresh fit of crying, "and he is gone."

"Gone—where?"

"I meant to tell you I had written before he came. Now he is gone."

"Who is gone?"

"Ronald—your boy. Oh, my poor Margaret, I ought to have told you sooner, and now he is gone."

"Gone!" repeated Lady Douglas, and she began to tremble. "He cannot have gone far. He was with me only a few minutes ago."

"My poor Margaret, he has been away for more than half an hour."

Margaret rang the bell vehemently again and again. They heard it go echoing in long peals through the house.

"Follow my son," she cried; "find him;
bring him back. He cannot have gone far. I must see him."

Marion Stuart had stood looking silently into Lady Douglas's face. She started forward now. "Cousin Margaret, I will go." And she turned and flew along the road. She was fleet of foot, light of limb, and strong. They saw her cross the burn and scramble in a moment up the steep short cut, disdaining the easier windings of the road. She reached the top of the hill, turned aside into the shadow of the wood, and disappeared.

"It is no good at all. She cannot come up with him," said Grizel, sitting down on the stone step in despair. "How should she? and it is all my fault."

Others—messengers of a forlorn hope—had followed Marion. They went at Margaret's desire, but they knew it was of no avail.

"He came upon me like his own wraith," explained Grizel, "as I was standing, misdoubting nothing, in the hall. I heard a footstep run down the corkscrew stair. I thought it would be Marion, and I cried on her that I was here; but instead, Ronald came out upon me, white like the wall, a braw, tall laddie, and oh, Margaret! just the moral of his father."
She paused and dried her eyes, then went on again.

"He was for passing on without heeding me, for there was a queer, scared look in his eyes, and I cannot tell if he even saw me. But I just ran and caught him by his two hands, for I couldn't rightly speak, and he stooped down—a fine, bonny man with his tall head—and kissed me. 'God bless you, Grizzy,' he said; 'you meant all for the best.' And straight out of the hall, without another word.

"I ran after him round to the stable-yard, and there was the machine that brought him over from Invershane, and the horse still in the shafts, and the driver giving the poor beastie its bit and sup of water.

"'Aye,' Ronald was saying when I came up; 'feed him well, Sandy, for he'll need to go back faster than he came, for I'll have to catch the coach at Dalmally to-night.'"

"And you let him go?" said Margaret.

"Margaret, woman—what was I to do? The coachman lad grumbled out that his horse couldn't do the job, but Ronald just got up quietly and said he'd have to try; and he took the reins into his hands, and never heeded me
till he was just driving away. Then he said, 'I couldn't stay, Grizzy,' and lifted his cap from his head to little Marion, as if she had been a stranger—and away. And now that will be better than three quarters of an hour ago.'

"Yes," said Lady Douglas, in a quiet voice. "They cannot stop him;" and she went into the house.

Marion was brought back that evening by a sympathizing sheep-farmer, who, jogging home from a distant market, found her very weary, on the road, and mounted her on his own pony, after assuring her that he had met the Glasgow coach a mile and a bit on the other side of Invershane, and with his "ain twa een" had seen the young Lord on its roof.

There was no more to be done.

His mother wrote to him while her heart was still burning, her nerves thrilling, her repentance fresh and keen upon her, such a letter as should have brought him back to her feet and to her arms at once. It was such a letter as a mother and a proud woman could only write once in a life-time—such a letter, that, to think of it as she lay in her bed at
night, made her flush and tremble with mixed humiliation and thankfulness.

She sent it to Sir Piers Raymond's house in London, believing that as the ship he was to have gone in would have sailed, he would be sure to go there for tidings of his friend. Besides, they would know his whereabouts, and she had drawn a strong score under the "To be forwarded" on the cover. He would be sure to get it.

She waited long for his coming, starting whenever a ring, or the sound of wheels, or a quick step was heard.

He did not come.

Then she watched for an answer—in vain.

Months afterwards the letter was returned to her, enclosed in a note from Sir Piers Raymond, regretting that the housemaid left in charge of his London house had failed to forward to him the enclosed letter for Lord Douglas at the time, but that, judging by its post-mark and its ancient date, he thought it wiser to return it at this late period to Lady Douglas. That was the end.

She drew the old letter half out of its cover and read a few lines, wondering how it was
possible that she could ever have penned such words. The warm glow of feeling had long since sunk into ashes, failing a response. She read but half a page, and then tossed it just as it was into the fire.

It was unreasonable to feel hurt and wounded with Ronald for the fate of a letter that had never reached him. She knew that it was unreasonable; and yet what a chill those months of silence had sent into her heart.

Ronald had never been near London again. When he left it he knew that his friends purposed spending a day or two at Sir Piers Raymond's country house, on their way to Liverpool. It was barely possible that by rapid travelling he might catch the ship before she sailed. He liked the race across Scotland and half England against time. It gave him something to think about, and kept off other thoughts. He was lucky, and caught one or two trains unexpectedly.

When he got to Liverpool, the American steamer was all but moving. The people for the shore had left her, and her great engines were throbbing. But he got on board, how, did not matter very much. Hugh Raymond
was shaking him by the hand, welcoming and reproaching him in a breath, as they steamed down the Mersey.

A few days afterwards, Colonel Douglas received a hurried line or two by the pilot:

"Dear Uncle Norman,

"We are off at last, and I write to thank you for all your kindness to me. They say we are likely to have a fair run across. Will you say good-bye to Granny for me, and remember me to Kenneth when you see him?

"Your affectionate nephew,

"Ronald.

"I went to Dalbraith before we sailed, and saw my mother, and said good-bye to Grizel."

Colonel Douglas sent the note to Margaret, and that was all they heard of Ronald for a season.

He was away five years.

For two years of that time his mother and his uncle were well content that he should be abroad. The last three were years of growing anxiety and disquiet to both in their several ways.

As long as Ronald and Hugh Raymond kept together, Colonel Douglas was more at ease, even though their so-called tutor demanded his recall after eighteen months of incessant
journeying, being exhausted and alarmed at their wild schemes of further travel. He gave a good report of both on his return, but said they were bent on finding their way into all the most outlandish corners of the earth. Douglas was the leading spirit, but his friend followed willingly enough.

Sir Piers and General Douglas (as he had lately become) conferred together, and agreed that it was perhaps wiser to let the boys have their fling for a little while longer. Hugh, at all events, said his father, must be home for his coming of age next year. So, till then, General Douglas made up his mind to wait. He was a great deal at Dalbraith now, for his promotion had taken from him the command of his beloved regiment, and he had retired from active service. And though Douglas would soon be of age, and his guardianship nominally ended, the management of the estates fell entirely into his hands while their young master was roaming over the world. Lady Douglas, though she still interested herself keenly in everything that concerned the property, left the business part of it to him.

She said very little about her son's prolonged
absence. It may be that she grieved over it in secret—they could not tell. His unfortunate visit just before he started had only widened the breach between them, by throwing a constraint over their letters to each other. How could she write easily, when for many months she did not know whether or no he had wilfully left that one letter of hers unanswered?

The general was more visibly troubled about his nephew. He was extremely fond of the lad. "It was easy to see the young Lord had gotten on his honour's blind side," said Adam Haldane, discontentedly. Something in Ronald's circumstances, but more in Ronald's self, had by degrees knit his uncle's heart to him in warm affection. He had been compelled to be his champion—he was deeply sorry for him, and sometimes indignant on his behalf; and then he had a peculiar feeling of loyalty to Ronald as the young head of his house. To be the chief of the Douglas's of Dalbraith was still something in the eyes at least of Norman Douglas.

And in the last few years the boy's generous, true, faulty character, had fairly won his love. He fretted after him, and could not get him
out of his head; and when, after some months of rather impatient waiting, Hugh Raymond returned alone to fulfil the promise to his father, the poor General was bitterly disappointed.

He had looked upon Ronald’s accompanying his friend as so completely a matter of course, that he had not even thought of giving an order to that effect in any of his letters. Norman Douglas would indeed have been surprised if a command of his had been disregarded, but on this occasion he had given none. Ronald merely wrote that it was a pity Raymond had to go home, but as there was no hurry about his return, he might as well stay out as he was there, and see what there still remained to be seen.

General Douglas went up to London on purpose to see young Raymond, but it was wonderfully little which he could extract from the returned traveller. "They had parted at San Francisco. Douglas was very well; never had been better in his life, he should say. They had done California together, and he believed Douglas was going to Mexico, and that he wanted to see Texas. That would just suit the queer old fellow."
"Queer, eh? What sort of a fellow now?" asked the uncle anxiously.

"Well, you see," meditatively, "he is none too like other people."

"Rather hot-headed and restless, I dare say," observed the General with a smile.

"Restless! I believe you. He couldn't stand a day in any decent quiet place where one could get a respectable dinner and have a little peace. There never was such a reckless dare-devil fellow for getting you into every manner of scrape. But then," continued Hugh, relenting, "when he had got you up a tree, he was awfully good and plucky and cheery till he got you off clear again. Goodness knows at other times he is glum and silent enough."

General Douglas scratched his eyebrow with his tortoise-shell eye-glasses, and sighed. The description was not entirely reassuring.

"Well," he said, "perhaps he is just as well out of England just now" (it was at the beginning of the Crimean war); "he would be volunteering out to the East to join my boy Kenneth there, or something."

"Oh, he couldn't do that, could he?" observed Hugh.
"What do you mean?" asked the General quickly.

"Oh, I don't know. I thought he had made a vow never to shoot a man, or see a gun fired, or some humbug of that kind. They used to have a story about it at Eton."

"Rubbish," said General Douglas.

"Ah, I dare say. I don't know myself. Of course I never spoke to him about anything of the sort."

"It's wonderful to me how little you young fellows seem to know of each other after all this time," remarked General Douglas, with an impatient frown. To which Hugh Raymond responded only by a laugh.

Ronald's letters were even less enlightening than was his friend. They contained absolutely no clue to his character, and might have been published as one of those books of travels, in which a few stars are always to be found whenever something personal or a little interesting seems about to be told; only Ronald's letters would have needed no stars. Studying them with painful interest, as did the one or two people to whom they were addressed, they could see the school-boy scrawl gradually settle into
a firm, close, manly handwriting; the sentences grew shorter, the descriptions less diffuse and more careless. Occasionally an impression was powerfully rendered, or a thought expressed in terse, nervous language; but they were merely thoughts and impressions about outward things. He spoke of time with the careless prodigality of youth: "I might, perhaps, get there next year," he sometimes said of some place which he wished to see. And he was moving so constantly that letters were most uncertain in reaching him.

Then occurred long silences with their nameless fears. There was a blank of several months during which Ronald, last heard of at the foot of the Rocky Mountains, sent no tidings of himself, and which traced one or two new lines on his uncle's brow.

But when next they heard, he was far on his way home through Japan, China, and India. In the late summer he wrote from Alexandria. He was coming.

But was there some strange fate that dogged his footsteps? Could it be that the old superstition they had all laughed at, yet held good?

He was on board the steamer coming from
Alexandria to Marseilles, and at dinner the first day, he sat opposite to a lively, black-bearded young Frenchman, who eyed him with a good deal of attention.

Afterwards he came up to the tall Englishman as he was pacing the deck in the sunset, and taking off his hat, said courteously, "I believe we ought to know each other, Lord Douglas; my name is Gaston de Beaurepaire."

Yes; it must have been fate—for Gaston de Beaurepaire, the eldest son of Lord Douglas’s old friend, was an inveterate gambler.

Less than a month afterwards Norman Douglas received a short quiet note from his nephew, praying him as a proof of kindness—(perhaps the last proof, wrote Ronald, that his uncle would ever care to give him)—to come and meet him immediately in London.

Full of forebodings, the General hurried up to town. Alas! it was the old story. Ronald had been playing again, and losing. A few mad miserable days had undone at a stroke the work of years. Poor Dalbraith!—almost freed from its burdens by Norman’s patient toil and the mother’s ceaseless self-denial through the time of the young man’s minority! It did almost break
his heart to mortgage it again—and for this. For the old place, with its wide, poor acres, and its scanty rent-roll, was more precious than a kingdom in the eyes of Norman Douglas.

"Margaret," said General Douglas, "for all that's come and gone, your son is a grand creature."

Lady Douglas sat looking up at the General as he stood before the fire. There was a light of hopefulness in his eyes, and a glad ring in his voice.

"This has been a terrible business, my poor child; but it is over; we must forget it. I have good hopes now; upon my word I have."

Lady Douglas smiled a little. She would fain be glad and hopeful too, but it was not easy.

"I wish I had it in me to forget," she said.

He bent down and took her hand. "I shall wait until you see him. But you will mind our bargain, Margaret. For my sake no reproaches—not a disapproving look even, when your prodigal son comes home."

"He is not a boy now," she said, with another of her faint smiles.

"You will not scold him? Good! But I
want more than that. Why, Margaret, you might leave it to me. I am sure I was severe enough; aye, and sore enough! and I tell you now that I am satisfied. Should I have bound him else to come straight home to you? I swear to you," he added, firing up suddenly, "that you may trust your son!"

She looked up, somewhat moved by his energy. He met her eyes with his keen grey ones. "Be yourself, Margaret," he said, gravely. "Be loving—and be wise!"

A tinge of colour came into her pale face. If she had once sent him away, had she not paid the penalty in the course of these five years? She glanced up nervously at the clock. The hands were on the stroke of eight.

"He will soon be here," said General Douglas.

She pressed her hands against her heart as if it was beating heavily. The hall where they were sitting was lighted up.

"Where are they all?" she asked. "Granny, and Marion, and Grizel? They were all to be here to welcome him."

Almost as she spoke Lady Beatrix entered, and came quietly to sit down by Margaret, holding her cold hand.
There followed a tall, very fair girl, with clear, honest blue eyes, and a noble, brave, serious face, on which just now the flickering red colour of expectation was coming and going every minute. Then Grizel trotted in, in the highest state of glee and fidget, with her best cap on her head, and a clean pocket-handkerchief ready for immediate action folded in her hand. "For we shall all shed tears without a doubt," she said to Marion.

"Oh, Cousin Grizel, I hope not!" replied the girl, in a tone of horror.

Grizel hurried up to Lady Douglas. "And are you feeling sadly nervous, my dear?" she asked.

Margaret hastily straightened herself, and sat very upright, grasping both the arms of her chair.

"Certainly not," she answered, waving aside the fan with which Grizel had armed herself.

The latter held up her hand. "I hear a carriage!" she exclaimed suddenly.

Everybody started. Margaret half rose; the General walked quickly to the hall-door; Marion drew back into the shadow. "It was nothing," said General Douglas, coming back, and casting a look of reproof on Grizel. "It was just Grizel's imagination."
"I am sure I heard it. Hark! there again! Listen!"

"There isn’t even a sough of wind to-night," added the General, scarcely vouchsafing to notice her. "It is a remarkably still evening."

Of course it was a false alarm. Grizel continued to experience one every three minutes. Though she said nothing more, she was constantly starting to her feet, and kept them all in such commotion, guarding against the shocks they could not help receiving from her wild looks, that when at last, without sound of wheels or bell, the outer door was opened, and a tall man walked in, no one noticed him till he was nearly in their midst.

"Ronald," then said the General, quickly and quietly, "where did you spring from, my dear boy?" But nobody heeded the question, for there was a moment’s pause, and then Ronald was kneeling at his mother’s feet.

"My word!" said Grizel beneath her breath; "my word, but what a kingly-looking creature!"

* * * * *

"Uncle Norman," said Marion earnestly, later in the evening, as they two were left together for a moment after the others had dispersed;
"you do think, don't you, that he and Cousin Margaret will be happy together now?"

"It is in the hands of God, Marion," he replied. But something in the evening had damped his sanguine hopes.

It was certainly not any coldness on the part of either Ronald or his mother. Both appeared to be unable to keep their eyes off one another.

She sat gazing at him, her hands clasped together on her knee, and her great eyes seeming to burn in her pale face. And certainly no mother could have looked at him without pride. "Kingly-looking," as Grizel said, and of lofty stature, there was something in his dark splendour of beauty, that brought to the old cousin's mind the description of the "choice young man and goodly" whom the prophet Samuel had anointed king in Gilboa.

But not with the one great shock of meeting could be overthrown the barriers of years. Lady Douglas shrank with a strange shyness from being alone with him, and when the others tried to manage that they should be left together, she kept Lady Beatrix carefully by her side, while Ronald seemed trying to understand
and to meet her wishes with an acquiescence that was half proud and half humble.

In a few days they appeared to have drifted back into much their old manner of life. The young man was very grave, very silent, and had a look of hopelessness and discouragement about him that it distressed General Douglas terribly to see, and which, ever since they met in London, it had been his great wish to free him from. He watched Ronald, and hovered about him, like an old hen, Lady Beatrix told him, that could not get its one chick to be contented under the once familiar coop.

The General was always going up to Dalbraith, to see what the lad was after, or else coming across the loch to talk him over with Lady Beatrix.

Marion was reading in the window one day when one of these discussions was going on. She could not help listening, and her book dropped on to the window-sill before her as the two elders talked. General Douglas laughed for a moment when Granny gently made fun of him, but he was greatly in earnest.

"Now little Marion there," he said suddenly, "she sees and understands it all."
"I!" exclaimed Marion, turning round with such a start and such a rush of colour to her cheeks as could not but attract the attention of both uncle and grandmother.

"She was dreaming over her book. You frightened her, Norman," said granny quickly.

"I beg her pardon," and General Douglas held out his hand to her with a smile. "I know she is gentle and womanly enough to wish she could help all who stand in need of it." Marion came slowly and took his hand, but kept her head turned away.

"Ah, dear lady," he went on, speaking to Lady Beatrix, but still clasping Marion's hand with a kindly pressure, "you are the very last person to smile at a spoilt life—such fair promise wasted, such a power of affection and happiness and usefulness thrown away. Things seem always to have gone against him,—and for what? For an accident, a visitation of God, a misfortune that might just as well have fallen on one of us!" He felt Marion's hand tremble in his.

"I know the poor fellow has gone wrong of late. I don't defend him, dear lady, as you know,—but he has bitterly repented. I go
further back than these last unfortunate weeks; I look back, and I remember that lad with his sunny face; I remember what hopes his dear father had of him. I can see Ronald, on that very last day, laughing and larking with my own boy. I believe it has saddened Kenneth's life too, and no wonder. The one poor fellow was not more innocent in it all, not more blameless than the other." Marion tried to draw away her hand. "And so, Marion," he continued, turning to her, "you do not wonder that sometimes the old uncle's heart aches sorely for his boy."

Marion struggled to answer, and at the same time to hide the tears that had brimmed over her eyelashes, and one of which fell with a great splash on to the hand that was still held in General Douglas's.

He glanced up at her quickly, then turned his eyes away and became very thoughtful. Marion left the room, and the two who remained sat without speaking for a long time.

"Granny," said General Douglas at last, with a sort of shyness in his voice.

"Don't say anything, Norman," she answered quickly, and then they were silent again.
But from that day a thought, a wish, a hope dawned upon his mind. He tried to put it away at first with a "Pooh, nonsense!" but it was tenacious, and not easy to get rid of.

He could not help watching Douglas and Marion when they were together. Ronald's manner to women was one after his own heart, gentle, reverential, slightly formal; and of late he had acquired a melancholy dignity of bearing, that to his uncle's mind could scarcely fail to be attractive to any one with whom he was constantly thrown.

He looked at the young man through Marion's eyes, as it were, with wistful eagerness—sometimes wishing he were more cheerful, sometimes wondering what he talked to her about, or getting restless over his long days of solitary absence.

As for Marion, the General well-nigh fell in love with her himself; he thought her sweet, maidenly ways so lovable and perfect. She was almost cold in manner to her cousin, but no one could think she was indifferent. Quiet she always was, but her colour came and went; she could not seem unconscious of his presence, or keep herself from listening when he spoke,
whoever she might be talking to at the moment. The rare sound of his laugh lighted up her face. It was her evident constraint that gave most hope to the vicarious lover who was watching her thus earnestly;—her shy, modest little attempts to dispel the shadow on Lord Douglas’s face, if, as sometimes happened, he was silent and moody in her presence.

Uncle Norman was ashamed of himself for his eagerness, and for the impatience he felt when things appeared to be at a standstill. Twenty times a day he called himself a ridiculous old match-maker, but none the less his heart beat when he saw the two young people speaking to each other.

So much, so very much, seemed to him to be at stake—the welfare of his boy’s whole future. It might prove the turning-point for him; the lifting of the cloud. He had been tempted to despair, and then one day he thought he read the solution of the difficulty in Marion’s face. A happy home; a loving wife; the wholesome breaking in of sweet common influences, happy voices, laughter, light words and daily duties, on the long-sustained tragedy of his life. It was terrible to General Douglas to think that
all this certain good might be left undone for a girl’s whim, a young man’s halting fancy.

By-and-by he perceived that others were beginning to look on as well as himself. He caught a shrewd smile, and something that almost amounted to a wink, on Grizel’s kindly face, and he rejoiced to see it, though he frowned on her sternly in return.

“Gin our young Lord thocht o’ gettin’ wedded I should na be that set against it,” said Fergus significantly. The General cut him short so haughtily that his heart smote him afterwards, and he had to go back for a crack and a good-natured joke with the old man.

Thus weeks passed on. There was only a slight chill now and then, a faint misgiving about Douglas himself. Could it be possible that he was yet blind to the chance of happiness that might be within his reach?

One morning General Douglas had been doing some business with his nephew, in his own study at Norman’s Tower. It was a lovely day, and the sunshine was streaming in at the open window, playing with the white hair of the old soldier and lighting up his noble-looking countenance. Douglas, a misty
sunbeam dancing on his head, sat with his chin supported by his hand, dutifully attentive, but not greatly interested in the business before him. He looked, as his uncle could not bear to see any young man look, half weary, half indifferent.

Once or twice the General glanced at him over his spectacles, and rather sarcastically regretted that he was under the necessity of boring him, but he had no idea of letting him off before the work was done.

"Ronald," he said at last, and he threw down his pen, leant back in his arm-chair and crossed his legs. "You ought to marry, my dear boy."

"I, Uncle Norman?" answered Ronald, looking up with a stretch and a smile, "I don't believe there is any nice, good woman who would have me."

"Stuff and rubbish. I hate to hear you talk that unreal, morbid kind of nonsense. I tell you there are plenty of nice women who would take you and be thankful."

"I don't know any," said Ronald, rather absently.

The General did not quite like to say, "Then I do," though that was pretty nearly
what he had in his mind. He hesitated, looked at Ronald, and blushed as if he had been a young lady himself. "So the fellow really hasn't seen it," he thought with some concern.

"You are modest, my boy," he said aloud, patting the young man's shoulder.

Ronald shook his head, but made no answer. He was not very much occupied with the subject, which give him an advantage over the General, who was.

"You would be the better of a wife, Ronald," he said again.

"Can you find me one, Uncle Norman?" asked Douglas, smiling; but he was far from thinking there was any earnest in this idle talk. The question was so à propos that it took the General completely aback. He hummed and ha'd, blushed again, put his glasses on his nose, and throwing back his head pretended to read a letter. This was a manoeuvre to gain time, but to his dismay Ronald did not seem anxious to pursue the subject. He also took up one of the papers on the table.

"The blindness of some people astonishes me," burst out the baffled diplomatist, after a
few minutes, during which Ronald had been reading on unsuspiciously; "it looks as if they must shut their eyes on purpose."

"What is it, Uncle Norman?" and Ronald dutifully laid aside his paper, and looked puzzled and attentive.

"They can't see, or they won't see, what is for their own good; they let all the best chances in the world slip by. Either they won't use their eyes or they have not heart enough to care. It passes my patience to put up with the young people of the present day."

"Are you talking of me? What is it I have done?" asked Douglas; but his uncle went on unheeding—"Yes; it entirely passes my patience. I give you my word it fairly makes my blood boil to see such cool, calculating ways. Why, in my day if a fine young creature,—as sweet, kind, modest a little soul as ever lived,—fie, Ronald; can't you understand?"

Perhaps Ronald did begin to understand a little, for he coloured as frankly as the General had done.

"Do pray speak out, Uncle Norman. What is it that you mean?"
"I mean that I think you have a chance now, Ronald, and that you are a fool if you do not take it."

A pause.

"Do you really think that?"

"I do indeed; bless my soul, my dear boy," he said, calming down when he saw the emotion he had aroused in the young man, "I haven't lived all these years in the world for nothing."

"Will you mind telling me what has put it into your head?"

"Not I—tell you indeed!—that's your business to find out, not mine to tell."

"You must let me think this over," said Ronald, after another long interval. "It is a new thought to me."

"Judge for yourself, my dear fellow," answered the General.

Douglas leant over the table shading his eyes with his hand. "Is it possible?" he said softly. Then in a few minutes he looked up. "May I ask you one or two questions—my mother?"

"She will rejoice. I am convinced that she has thought of it, and that she wishes it."
"And granny?"

General Douglas took off his glasses, rubbed them, fitted them on again, and said rather huskily: "I believe you would have her granny's blessing."

"Thank you, Uncle Norman," said Douglas, holding out his hand. The General grasped it with a half-uttered petition that God would guide the young man aright; and then no more words were spoken on the subject.

There are surprises that cease to be surprises at all after the first moment of enlightenment.

Like memories lodged, but not lost, in some deep recess of the brain, and startled into life with curious distinctness by an unexpected touch, so it may be with impressions that have been unconsciously received. Ronald had been blind, and yet—

When he was gone General Douglas returned to his arm-chair, closed his eyes, drew a deep breath of relief, and smiled. It had been an anxious moment—a great risk—a serious step to take on the impulse of the hour. What if Ronald had not responded just in the way he had responded? It was a thing only to
be justified by success—but then, it had succeeded,—and so the General smiled.

Meanwhile Ronald was mounting the hillside with long and rapid strides. The sun struck hotly on the moor, but there was a great rock yonder that would make a covert from the heat. A brace of young grouse went whirring up; a mountain hare rushed across his path; how beautiful everything was looking! At last he threw himself down on the heather and tried to think coherently.

It was impossible to say how much the idea of being loved affected him. He had lived very little with women, and had in a manner lost his mother just as he was growing up to manhood. His ideas of family affection and of home-life had become invested with a halo of vague regretful tenderness and reverence. He had thought himself cut off from them, and had grown to believe that a good woman would shrink from linking her fate with his.

That Marion, brave, true, sweet Marion, who had known him ever since they were both children—to whom the tragedy of his life and its shadows were no secrets—that she, out of
her pure, womanly sympathy, had grown to care for him, seemed to him like the opening of a new and better life. He was very weary of the one he had been leading; it was all hollow and lonely, and worse than unsatisfying. The vision of a bright calm home, with a wife who loved him, came to him with a curious swell of hope. His feeling for Marion was not so much a young man's impetuous first love as the deep tenderness of a world-wearied and disappointed man, who turns back to the pure dreams of his youth and finds wondering they are still within his reach. That day, alone on the hill-side, he took Marion to his heart, vowing to her the deepest gratitude and the most faithful love.

General Douglas gave him leave a day or two afterwards to go and talk to "Granny," whom he had been preparing for the announcement. Ronald found her a little agitated and tremulous, for Norman, with all his preparation, had taken her by surprise, and had been as impetuous and eager in advocating his nephew's cause as if he had been a young lover pleading for himself.

She looked up with a kind of wistfulness at
Ronald as he came in; he seemed so tall in her little low-roofed drawing-room; and a feeling of anxiety so oppressed her that she did not speak directly.

"Uncle Norman told me I might come," he said, hesitating as he missed the customary bright welcome.

"Yes, Ronald; yes, come in; I was expecting to see you."

"Granny, you know what I want to say?" he began at once, as he took the little trembling hand that she stretched out to him.

"Yes; Norman has told me."

"And will you say yes, Granny?"

She clasped her hands tightly together, and sighed. When she spoke it was with a visible effort.

"Ronald, I should like to say yes. But I have a duty to my Marion. I have to ask myself—ought I to trust you with Charley's child?"

He started slightly. "I would try to be more worthy," he said, in a low voice.

"Norman so trusts you," she resumed, smiling, with her eyes full of tears, "that he is angry with my fears; but I am frightened, Ronald;" and she looked up into his face.
"Granny, I will so try to be better."

There was something about her that always made great big men as gentle and simple with her as little children; Douglas knelt down beside her chair and held her hand.

"Granny, I have been so unhappy," he said, bending down his head.

"My boy—" she put up her other hand and smoothed his hair caressingly—"I know; it has all been hard and sad; I should be glad if I could give you my little Marion to comfort you."

"I would take care of her," he whispered, with a tremble in his voice.

"Yes; I think so. You are true and faithful; but, Ronald, forgive Granny—I do so wish you had never met with poor René's unhappy son."

He held her hand tighter. "It frightens me for you, Ronald," she added, softly.

"Yes; I know."

"You yielded once, it might come to you in the same way again"—he sighed—"how can we be sure? I hurt you, my poor boy; you are good to be so patient, Ronald."

"May I tell you about it?" he asked, after a long pause.
"Yes, surely."

And then, still kneeling by her chair, in simple, humble, broken words, Ronald for the first time in his life made his confession in the ears of a kindly, gentle woman.

At first she listened with her hand held in his strong grasp; then she released it to put it on his shoulder; before he quite finished her arms were round his neck. Oh, Ronald! the cry was in her heart—Oh, Ronald, why has your mother never known you?

"Granny?" he said, looking up when they had both been quiet for some time.

Where were her fears—gone, or forgotten?

"If Charley says yes, take Marion," she whispered, "and my blessing with her."

The next thing taken in hand by General Douglas was the finding of an opportunity for Ronald to tell his tale to Marion. But somehow this was not so easy.

Perhaps Ronald preferred to choose his own time. Granny refused her help, telling the eager General that such things fall out much better when they are left to themselves. She even proposed to wait until Marion's father
returned from a journey he was making in Switzerland; but to that uncle and nephew both demurred.

Marion, however, grew provocingly shy and afraid of being left alone with her cousin, and Grizel was a marplot of the first order.

She had forgotten her suspicions, and, besides, was quite full of some interests of her own. In the spring she had been away visiting some relations, and since then, whenever the whole party met together, Grizel was sure to be talking of the MacMichaels of Dullsmuir.

Now the MacMichaels of Dullsmuir had long been subjects of dread to everybody at Dalbraith. They were excellent people no doubt, but they came into Grizel’s talk on every occasion. They were very numerous, they appeared to be indefatigable letter-writers, and the interests of one and all of them were terribly dear to Grizel.

Whether it was a letter from the Laird himself, with a ponderous account of his crops, and his Ayrshires; or from “our dear Jane,” about her trials, and her bairns, and her poultry-yard; or from one of the “Dullsmuir girlies,” Grizel never could keep it to herself. She was
pre-occupied and communicative, and after smiling, and frowning, and shaking her head over the letter in the morning, she went about frowning, and smiling, and shaking her head all day.

There were sons innumerable at Dullsmuir, all growing up, all “by ordinair” lads, and all unlucky. It seemed impossible to start them in life. They were perpetually making new ventures out into the world, and invariably falling back, defeated by fortune, on Dullsmuir.

It was very remarkable how active a share all Grizel’s friends were perforce compelled to take in the career of these young gentlemen. She was so vitally interested in them herself; she so confidently claimed sympathy in their few successes, and their many failures, that the Douglases found themselves full of triumph when Alick once contrived to pass an examination, and greatly humbled and cast down when Patie failed to get into a writer’s office in Edinburgh, and Gibbie to win a fellowship at Glasgow University.

As for “poor Bob,” nothing ever went well with him—that was not to be expected. Even Grizel gave him up with a long face.

But by dint of her certainty of sympathy
she did set all her family to work, even while they groaned, for the "dear MacMichaels." Lady Douglas herself was roused into writing long letters to her brother on Cosmo's behalf. Ronald was already deep in correspondence with a merchant he knew at Shanghae regarding Davie. Lady Beatrix thought she saw her way, through her son, to an opening in India for "poor Bob." Even the minister of Dalbraith, Doctor Maclean, had his own thought whether it did not behove him to have Patie at the Manse for a season, with a view to preparing him for the ministry. Amid all these brilliant prospects "Dullsmuir" and dear Jane were more active with their pens than ever. Letters rained down upon Grizel.

The MacMichaels threatened seriously to impede the settlement of affairs between Douglas and Marion. Several times had the General, as he thought, left them a free field, but on his return Grizel and Dullsmuir were masters of the situation. Marion seemed to cling to her old cousin, and to try and keep by her side, and Ronald listened to her with a grave patience that would have been admirable if he had heard a word she said.
On one occasion Marion was putting roses into a great jar, in the gallery at Dalbraith, and Douglas, sitting on the window-sill, half in and half out of the room, was talking to her. Uncle Norman, when he saw them, refrained from passing through the gallery, though it was his only way out of the house, but retreated, with a knowing twinkle in his eyes, into the turret-room, where he had nothing to do.

Having waited there what seemed to him an unconscionable time, he ventured forth, and opened the door discreetly. “And so,” he heard, “the Laird, honest man, passed the remark, that though the lad himself might not be just so solid as we wished, yet he would fain hope that poor Bob”—

“As I live; the MacMichaels again!” ejaculated the exasperated General.

At last, one evening at the Lady’s Lodge, he had managed to wheedle Granny out to see the sunset. Presently he came back to warn Mamselle Ugly that her lady might find the evening air fresh without a shawl; and as she hurried off in search of one he gave a severe and significant look to Grizel, who, standing near the window, was holding forth
with a placid smile, while Marion knitted, and Douglas just come in was sitting with his arms crossed on the table, in an attitude of resolute and patient waiting.

"By that, I would be understood to say, Ronald," went on Grizel, happily, "that Tibbie MacMichael is not to call a beauty. She'll not be that, but she's a sonsie lassie 'wi' her twa pawkie een,' as the song says; and young Morrison"—

"Grizel," growled a deep peremptory voice outside the window. She jumped up—"Eh? will you be wanting me, Cousin Norman?"

He beckoned to her silently.

The two who were left did not move for a moment—then Douglas got up.

"They say it's a lovely evening," said the girl, rising too, and hurriedly throwing down her work; shall we go out?

"Marion," said Douglas, laying his hand on hers—

END OF VOL. I.