

Choice Literature.

HEATHER BELLES.

A MODERN HIGHLAND STORY.

CHAPTER IX.—Continued.

That letter cost McKay many an anxious thought. He took it up to his own room, and, sitting by the window, read it again and again in a whirl of conflicting feeling. Pacing to and fro between the window and the door, his feet unconsciously avoiding certain lines on the carpet (as they were wont to do when some anxious problem occupied his mind), he arrived by and by at certain definite conclusions. In the first place, he knew that Ellen his sister had an errand to Altbreac, where Carrie Craig, still feeble, but little the worse for her journey, had by this time arrived. There and then he wrote a brief letter to the young lady, informing her that he had heard from Archie, and enclosing the delicate gold ring which he was commissioned to deliver. At the same time, he charged both his sister and Miss Carrie to say nothing of Graham's communication, at least for a couple of days. By the same trusty messenger he sent a note to Mr. Craig, stating that he had again heard from Graham, and that his letter would require their most anxious consideration. He added that he would be glad to know when and where it would be convenient for the lawyer to meet him, to consult as to any action they might deem it right to take. In concluding, he intimated that he intended personally to see Miss Graham, to tell her of her brother's whereabouts and convey his greetings. Ere the evening was far advanced, Roderick and his sister went up the glen together; he, under a sense of duty, to see the elder Miss Graham; she, to convey her brother's letters to Mr. Craig and his niece. As they parted where the road branched off to the farm, Roderick charged his sister to see Miss Craig alone, and to say nothing to the uncle of her errand to Carrie. Both fulfilled their mission; and after they had returned and family worship was over, Roderick betook himself to his own room. He had much to think of, and spent an all but sleepless night. There were wheels within wheels in the chapter of Providence, with whose pages his own life had been so strangely interlined, and it was hard indeed to see how good to all was to be evolved in the end. The future was full of contingencies which might, and doubtless would, affect the condition of things as they were, in ways no human mind can foresee. Roderick McKay had no superstitious notions as to the nature and issues of prayer, but he cast himself on his knees that night, entreating his Heavenly Father to "make darkness light before him" and "crooked things straight." He knew that such approach to the footstool would calm and hallow his thoughts; but he knew more. He believed in prayer as an appointed means to direct guidance and Providential aid, and he earnestly, confidently, sought both the one and the other. Assured as he was that they who will watch Providence will never want Providence to watch, he saw what he believed to be God's hand in not a few aspects of the circumstances which occupied his thoughts, and specially in Graham's letter. At the same time, he knew that duty must be the constant ally of prayer, and that God's children cannot expect His blessing or His aid, save in doing constantly and conscientiously what they believe He calls them to do. With an intensity of application, almost painful, he bent his whole powers to the task of determining what it was right and wise to do; while he was ready, also, respectfully to bow to what Mr. Craig, in his far wider and larger experience, might deem to be best.

Early next morning a note came from the lawyer, informing Roderick that he had written to Mr. Morrison, asking that they might have the benefit of his counsel as well, and inquiring if it might be convenient for them all to take tea at the Manse at six o'clock that evening. The tea was of course a mere ruse to cover the interview desired, lest the matter might be talked of outside their own little circle. Hoping that this arrangement might not be unsuitable for the minister, Mr. Craig told the student to join them at that hour. Roderick returned an answer by the same messenger, in which he told Mr. Craig where Graham was, and what where the main contents of his letter, so that the lawyer might have at least a few hours to think the matter over before the appointed time.

By six o'clock that evening, Miss Morrison was ready to receive company. The snow-white cover of the tea-table was laden, some would say, overladen, with good things which one who did not know the minister's sister might imagine had come from the shop of a fancy baker. Mr. Morrison and Roderick McKay had already been closeted for at least an hour in the study, during which time the latter gave to the minister what information he could convey regarding Archibald Graham and his doings. They now strolled to and fro on the gravel in front of the Manse waiting for Mr. Craig. The lawyer arrived punctual to a minute, and they welcomed him at the little garden gate by the gable of the house. As the minister showed Mr. Craig in at the front door, Roderick McKay tarried a little behind, and we think it right to say why. Mr. Craig's coachman had quietly beckoned to him to remain, and, when the other two gentlemen had turned their backs to enter the house, gave the student a letter, which the latter saw at a glance was from Carrie. He prudently slipped it into his pocket, reserving its perusal to a more convenient occasion; and followed the others into the house.

Their intercourse at the tea-table was genial and pleasant, though it was conjoined with a chastened restraint which each one felt and understood. When the meal was over, and the girl was clearing the table, Miss Morrison announced that she would be occupied for some time at least with certain duties in the kitchen, and would leave the gentlemen to themselves. If there was a suspicion in the mind of Mr. Craig or the student that this was a device to keep the servants under her eye and prevent eavesdropping, perhaps it was not far from the mark.

When the gentlemen were alone in the study, Mr. Craig

drew a case from his pocket, and offered cigars to the others. Mr. Morrison smilingly declined, remarking that neither the example of Ralph Erskine nor his ingenious spiritualizing of the practice had yet reconciled him to smoking, though they knew he gave full license to others. Mr. Craig then began their conference on the painful circumstances which had been the cause of their meeting.

"Well, I think we had better at once compare notes about this sad affair. I called at Mr. Graham's on my way hither to ask if Miss Martha would care to come with me, but she would not hear of it, and I am not surprised. She was kind enough to say that she had full confidence in us, and that as, their legal adviser, I must, to the best of my judgment, act on behalf of her poor father and Florence and herself."

"How is Mr. Graham, by the by?" said Mr. Morrison anxiously. "I should have asked sooner had I known you had been there."

"In much the same condition, I am sorry to say," was the reply. "He is fractious and unmanageable to the last degree, as is always the case, even with the best temper, in cases of paralysis. But he is no worse, and there are already some signs that his powers of speech may return. Of course they have told him nothing of the latest news about Archie, and indeed it matters little, for his own condition seems to render him oblivious to all else. He is well off with two such splendid nurses as his daughters."

"I am sure he must be. They are most kind," said Mr. Morrison warmly.

"Kind is hardly the word for it," said Mr. Craig. "Their devotion and care are unbounded. In his sleepless nervous condition, they watch over him and bear with him as even a fond mother could scarce be found to do over her child. But we must proceed. We do not need to tell each other how deep and real is our sympathy with them all. We must now show it by doing for them the best we can. What is that to be?"

"I am sure," said Mr. Morrison, "Roderick and I will be glad to hear what you think. Your legal knowledge and wider experience will make us glad to hear you first."

"Well," said Mr. Craig, "I should like to know if you, Roderick, have anything more to tell us beyond what you have already felt free to communicate. I confess I cannot understand why you keep back anything, but I give you all credit for having reasons sufficient to yourself for so doing."

"I have nothing to add," replied the student, "to what I have already told you both. My conscience tells me I have kept back nothing which it is needful for you to know, and I trust that the issue of events will make that plain in due time. That is all that I can say."

"Very well," said Mr. Craig, "we shall delay no longer on that point. I hope you are right. As to what can be done, I have already said to Roderick that in my opinion we must get at Graham personally. How best to accomplish that, it is perhaps harder to say. We might try to put the machinery of the law in motion, but I am not sure if that would be either wise or safe for our purpose. I am not without hope that any case against Graham might break down. I do not know if evidence can be got even to prove that he was in the corrie that night at all. That we shall find out by and by. Then I confess I do not know if our extradition laws can touch him where he is. Monaco is an independent state, though stuck in the corner of what is now the seaboard of France. I question if either an English or French officer could arrest him within its bounds. Besides, if there is any chance that evidence against him may be wanting, I should not like to see him in the hands of the police at all, if that can be avoided."

"I quite agree with you in all that you have advanced," said Mr. Morrison, "but would it not do if we were to communicate with himself directly and try to persuade him to come home? We might tell him that as the prisoners refused to say anything, or turn King's evidence, he may yet escape altogether."

"I fear," said Roderick, "that would not work. You must consider what sort of fellow Graham is. He is proud and wilful, and now that he is away, with money to last him for a time in his pocket, I don't believe he would come home for the asking. My persuasion is, he would sooner make off to some other quarter. A disgraced man is often a haughty man, and would try to flee from humiliation as much as from condemnation."

"You are right there," said Mr. Craig. "I doubt much if Graham has yet realized his position. I believe even the excitement of his freedom and his fortunes since he left will have incapacitated him for sober or salutary reflection, even if he were naturally disposed to such an exercise."

"Then we must remember," said Roderick, "that he is ill; I hope it is nothing serious, but he has been confined to his room."

"I confess I had almost forgotten that," said the minister; "I am sure I shouldn't have done so. Well, if writing will not do, and none of us care to use the police, I hardly see what we can do."

There was a moment's pause, and then Roderick McKay ventured to propose another line of action.

"Will you allow me," he quietly said, "to suggest that if there were any one at Monte Carlo—or at some place not far off—whom we could entrust with the case, something might be done? Of course it's for us to consider how Graham might receive an entire stranger, however kindly and wisely he might be reproached. If no suitable person can be found, we need not even discuss the feasibility of employing such services. What do you think, Mr. Craig, or you know of any one?"

"Well, I do not," said Mr. Craig slowly and reflectively. "Of course we have our Free Church Station at Mentone, not many miles away; but the ministers in charge are constantly changing, and I do not know who is there at present."

"Oh, better not send a minister," said Roderick. "Other things being equal, some one else would be better, unless he were one among a thousand. I beg pardon, Mr. Morrison, but I am a divinity student myself, so I am pretty near my own condemnation."

"Oh, we understand you quite well, Roderick. I think you like to be a bit of a Philistine sometimes; you mustn't

speak so in every company. But there's no one else you can think of, Mr. Craig?"

"Not one," replied the lawyer. "I knew some Edinburgh people who were at Nice some time ago, but they are all gone. The season is far advanced for the Riviera."

"Perhaps it matters little," said the student; "I'm not much in love with my own suggestion. We should not like to entrust all we think or would like to a stranger, and still less, perhaps, would Graham be pleased to find that we had done so."

"Why should we?" said Mr. Craig. "I think I can improve on your idea. Suppose we get some one to go who knows all about the case already?"

"Who can that be?" said Mr. Morrison. "I did not think any one knew all the ins and outs of it but ourselves and the ladies."

"Perhaps not," said Roderick, who had already caught in the lawyer's eyes the direction of his thoughts. "Suppose Mr. Craig were to go?"

"Suppose Mr. McKay were to go," retorted the lawyer. "There's no one to say 'Suppose Mr. Morrison were to go,'" said that gentleman himself, in mock sadness, "and I have been banned already."

For a moment they relapsed into a smile, but it soon gave place again to anxious thought.

"Seriously, Mr. Morrison," said the lawyer, "I think McKay ought to go. I am too old, and too busy, and, I fear, too austere as well. I don't think Graham has any liking for me. The very sight of me would make him think the police were behind the door."

"I believe you are right, Mr. Craig," said Mr. Morrison. "I am sure I should have thought of such a thing sooner. Roderick is a young man like himself, and I suppose they have always been at least friendly toward one another."

"I'm not so sure of that," said McKay, "though it so happens indeed that he has written to me. But how am I to go? I have never been abroad, and I fear I should make a mess of everything, suppose I went. Really, Mr. Craig, I think you should try to go yourself. You have experience and moral weight which would be of immense service. What can one who is little more than a boy say to one like himself?"

"Now, now, we must come to a conclusion," said Mr. Craig. "Are you willing to go, McKay?"

It is doubtful whether the student would have yielded but for one element of which the other two were ignorant. Roderick could not forget that he held a secret from the Bay of the Boulders, which gave him a certain hold over Graham, even though the latter would have given anything that the student had not known it. Moreover, he would just on that account be able to work upon the best and tenderest spot in Graham's heart, and use it by God's blessing to draw him back toward better things. Yet again, McKay knew that he would be doing a service and a kindness to Carrie Craig, such indeed as he would have done to any lady in a like case—yet a kindness and a service which, in her case (he could scarcely deny it to himself), would be, no, not a labour of love—that he knew it was not—yet a pleasing duty at least. Rapidly before his mental vision these things passed,

Thought folded upon thought;

and led him, after what looked like a careful study of the mixed patterns on the carpet, to say—

"Yes, I will go if you think I am fit for the mission."

"And where?" asked Mr. Craig, who cared to see no one let the grass grow under his feet.

"To-morrow, if you like," said McKay, with a promptitude like that of a great commander called to serve Queen and country far away, though in this case the distance was a comparative trifle and the issues affected but a few.

"There now, that's business," said Mr. Craig with evident gratification. "I'm almost tempted, even at this eleventh hour of your studies, to try to win you back from the Gospel to the law, after all."

"Never think of that," said Mr. Morrison, in tones of doubtful seriousness. "Certain persons tried that with the Galatians, but the great Apostle warned those to whom he wrote against such 'witchery,' and called them fools for yielding to it."

"Well, for the present he may remain what he is," said the lawyer. "I have no vacancy in my office."

By this time a certain load was off their spirits. They had resolved what to do, and all that remained was to prepare for the doing of it. Mr. Craig gave Roderick many useful hints as to his journey, together with a cheque on the Bank of Scotland in Edinburgh, more than sufficient to cover all his expenses, and then, with many good wishes for the success of his errand, bade him farewell. The student went home for an hour or two, to inform his father and sister of his hurried departure on the morrow. He gathered together such articles of dress and travel as seemed indispensable, and then returned to the Manse. Mr. Morrison had invited him to sleep there overnight, so as to be ready for an early start next day, as it had been arranged that Dannie, with the good horse "Donald," should drive him as far as the nearest railway station. The minister and McKay sat in the study till past midnight, talking over a thousand details relating to the journey; then bade each other good-night, to meet again ere the morning had even begun to dawn.

(To be continued.)

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF RECENT POETRY.

It would be interesting to know how these little books of new poetry would affect an ingenuous and intelligent youth; but probably he could not tell if he read them. What one feels more and more, as he grows older, is that the new poetry does not seem to be made for him; and he suspects a charm and virtue in it that do not reach his soul through his toughened sensibilities. Very likely they are not in it, but he finds it to the advantage of his spiritual health to imagine them there; and he hopes to acquire merit by supposing that some one else may feel them. It is certainly not always easy to read this new poetry; but honestly, between one