

## Choice Literature.

HEATHER BELLES.

A MODERN HIGHLAND STORY.

CHAPTER XII.—Continued.

When Florence went home she told everything to her sister, who undertook to get her father's opinion. He indicated in a quiet smile his full acquiescence in the proposal; and next afternoon his younger daughter went to Altbreac for a longer stay, as it proved in the sequel, than she either intended or expected it to be.

The old House of Altbreac had at one time been occupied by the proprietor. It was a square castellated building, standing on rising ground a little above the river; and by the side of the long garden in front a noisy watercourse sought its way persistently to lose itself in the broad stream. Carrie's room was over the front porch, on the top of which a little window garden had been formed. Beneath the leaded glass panes of the porch had at various times found a refuge and a home. There they lived and multiplied undisturbed, sipping the honey from the sweet flowers above them, and paying a visit at times through the open window to the sick girl's chamber. Florence had not been a day installed in her new sphere before she effected little short of a revolution in the room. To the ordinary comforts, of which there was no lack, she added many small luxuries and objects of beauty which her tasteful ingenuity suggested, and which mitigated—Carrie could scarce say why—the sense of ailment and seclusion. The relations between patient and nurse was most cordial, for there was much in common between the two girls. Even in face and figure they were not unlike; the same buoyant temperament distinguished both; and each found in the other, more than she had ever done before, an exuberance and sprightliness of spirit which harmonized with her own. In Carrie's case that natural gaiety was chastened by suffering; in that of Florence it was tempered by Christian principle. The hand of God and the grace of God drew very tightly the bonds of their mutual interest and love.

We need not detail the various stages of Carrie's illness. At times she was prostrated by severe pain, and more than once there were symptoms of serious danger. She had, however, her intervals of comparative ease and quiet; and after she was put under Florence's care, made progress which amazed the doctor, though Carrie herself declared she knew the whole secret of the change. A tender heart, a watchful eye, a wise judgment, combined with a noiseless step and skilful hand—these had wrought wonders. Carrie grudged to detain Florence longer than the few days which was all her father proposed at the first, but the days ran into weeks, and by and by no one either thought or spoke of her leaving Altbreac.

As the time sped by, and the two girls were often alone for hours at a stretch, there were two themes which came to the surface again and again in their loving converse, during the intervals of rest and relief from pain which Carrie enjoyed. One of these was the fortunes of Archie Graham and of the young student who had gone to find him. Of that subject the invalid never wearied. She told her nurse the whole story of her relations to Archie—what girl in the circumstances could have kept the secret to herself?—and eagerly questioned and cross-questioned Florence as to every detail of his case. There was much to make her sad respecting her lover, yet she was able, in a degree which surprised her companion, to forget the shady side of things and conjure up a brighter future. Florence humoured her in all her confidences, and entered with a heartiness, not, perhaps, very real, but surely pardonable, into all her speculations and whims. Carrie more than once detected (as none but a girl like her could) faint shades of misgiving in Florence's references to her brother, but these were quite exceptional, and at all events not hard to explain. The sick girl tried on these occasions to make things easier for her friend by expatiating on the fine manly qualities of Roderick McKay. It was delightful to tease and banter Florence on such a theme, but she little dreamt how thin was the ice beneath her feet. It was only the untiring self-command and good humour of her friend which averted more than once an unfortunate plunge which would have caused sorrow to them both. So entirely, however, did Florence keep herself under control that in general she was able under the merry torture of her teasing to parry without a symptom of uneasiness every feint and assault. This was all the harder a task, inasmuch as allusions to Roderick caused her pain of a kind more exquisite and acute in some respects than that caused by references to her brother.

One sunny afternoon Florence wheeled round the bed so that Carrie might see from her pillow the golden gleam with which the sinking sun was swathing the rocky mountain sides on the opposite side of the glen. The air was still and balmy; and not a sound was audible save the continuous murmur of the river and the fretful buzz of a bee which had tarried too long within the window pane.

Florence drew the attention of her invalid to the little fringe of flowers and leaves which peeped over the window sill; but Carrie showed that, for the time at least, her thoughts were further away.

"Look, Florie dear, at the sunshine on these hills. I am sure I can actually see among the stones in the corrie. And there, I declare, is the old woman's cottage where some people I know used to visit at times. You must take me there some day, won't you, like the dear, good creature you are?"

"Perhaps I may," replied her nurse, "when you are able for it, and proof against all enchantment and spells."

"Oh dear! I wish I could go this minute," sighed the invalid, as if a fresh accession of pain had arrived. "People say it's very wicked and all that, but, upon my word, I don't see it. It would be such jolly fun. I suppose the old body burns incense, and fills the place with

smoke, and puts things in vases, and looks at the lines in one's hand, doesn't she?"

"I never saw or knew her do any of the things you mention," was the matter-of-fact reply; "unless it be about the smoke, and it isn't incense; it's decayed vegetable matter, commonly called peat."

"Oh stupid! she's not the proper sort of witch at all," cried Carrie. "Anyway, I know what I should ask her. Let me see—ever so many things! When Archie is coming home, and if he's getting better, and what our future is to be, and all the rest of it. And then—what a selfish creature I am, to be sure!—there's all about you and a tall, fine looking young man, and a manse, and happiness, just as it's all going to happen, you know."

"If you're so sure about it," said Florence, sceptically, "what would be the use of consulting old Meg on the subject?"

"Oh, just to confirm it all, and throw a fine mysterious air about it, and help us to enjoy it beforehand. But have you heard anything to-day?"

"Nothing whatever; that is, nothing definite. But, you know, Carrie, I often guess at things. Your uncle has been very busy this day or two getting letters and writing letters; and to-day there came a lawyer, or some such body, all the way from Inverness, and there have been consultations and so on."

"What of all that?" replied Carrie. "My uncle has always such a lot to do. I'm sure I'm glad I'm not a lawyer, and never likely to marry one. It must be awful prosy work; don't you think so?"

"But supposing," said Florence, busily dusting the toilet table, and not even turning as she spoke, "supposing it had reference to a pretty young lady and a sighing lover far away, and that sort of thing?"

"You don't mean it! Do you think it is about Archie? What has put that into your wise noddle, my dear nurse?" exclaimed Carrie.

"Well, for one thing, your uncle has such an arch knowing look about him any time I have met him to-day. It just seems as if he would say, 'Wouldn't you like to know something, Miss Florie?' I'm sure there's something under it."

"You might try to get it out of him, Florie. He couldn't refuse to tell you, I'm sure."

"No, no," answered Florence. "I can't ask; we must just wait. Remember Pandora's box."

"Very well. But, Florie, I want to ask you to do something. Will you fetch me that little box—the one with the ivory mounting; and bring me my keys too; you know where they are; there's a good girl."

The young lady did as desired; and then, on a suggestion from Carrie, looked to see that the door was closed.

"Now," said the sick girl, "I'm going to do this." As she spoke, she took Archie's ring, and put it on the third finger of her left hand. "And more, it's going to stay there. Now, how do you like it?" she continued archly, holding it up to the sunlight.

"It's so pretty," said her companion; "but—you're not going to keep it there."

"Of course I am. Why not? I like to have it on; it's so jolly!"

"Perhaps it is, but is it quite safe? What if some one were to see it?"

"No one shall see it but you; and you wouldn't tell, surely. I'll slip it off when anybody is coming. I mean to keep it on at night too: it will help me to sleep. A morphia pill would be nothing to it. So! there it is, and there it shall be."

"I have another objection, if you don't think me rude," said Florence. "These pale fingers are going to get fuller and fleshier by and by. What if you cannot get it off some fine day?"

"Oh, how jolly! That would be a rare lark," cried Carrie merrily. "And then the whole plot would be out. I declare I must write a novel some day. What should we call it? 'The Hidden Ring,' three volumes, 31s. 6d. But seriously, I hope some one else will bring a ring when he comes home, even a prettier one than this, if that is possible."

"What do you mean," said Florence, a little embarrassed, and suddenly discovering a fold of the coverlet which required to be smoothed down.

"Just as it you don't know," cried Carrie. "Some people are very stupid to-day. I must develop your faculties, Miss. Suppose it were Roderick McKay, student of divinity; and suppose he brought one for Miss Florence Graham, sick nurse, presently residing at Altbreac House, Glenartan. Is that plain?"

"More plain than practical. You were right to say 'suppose' and 'suppose.' I don't want love in a hypothesis, especially one that has no foundation."

"No foundation! Whom else could he love but you? After knowing you, to whom else could he give his heart? Tell me that, I pray."

"Yourself, for instance," said Florence, for lack of any better loophole of escape.

"Me! me! He couldn't love me! I'm not good enough for him. Besides he knows—I mean, he thinks—that Archie and I have a common stock of that affection some where between us. No, no, I wouldn't steal him from you for anything. All the same, if you had seen us together on the top of Blackford Hill one fine evening, I verily believe you would have been jealous. It was so interesting-looking, you know."

"Yes; and who gave you the ring, I should like to know? You have no proof whatever that it came from my brother. Perhaps it's only a clever ruse on McKay's part to turn your thoughts to himself."

"You wicked thing! I could eat you up, only there would be one sweet creature the less in the world. I'll tell you my mind very plainly, and you mustn't be stupid this time. You are often thinking of Roderick McKay. I see it when your elbow is on the window-sill, and you are gazing intently out, but seeing nothing. And he is thinking of you as often, perhaps oftener, and when he comes home you will meet, and it will all be settled in

an hour or two. That's my creed on the subject; and wouldn't it like to be behind the scenes just to hear the lull!"

This brilliant picture was too much for Florence Graham. She turned her head aside to hide a fast-forming tear. Then in a moment Carrie saw what she had done, and tried to make amends as best she could. She held out her arms, and Florence sunk in her penitent embrace. Carrie was first to recover speech.

"Florie, my dear Florie, forgive me. I am so wicked, so awfully wicked. I'm sure I didn't mean it. Do forget what I have said. I will never, never speak so again."

The summer shower was soon over, and the sun shone out again. Carrie was a better patient than ever that night; and Florence looked carefully to see that the magic ring was on the finger ere they went to sleep.

The other subject which often formed the staple of their conversation was personal religion, a theme into the sacred enclosure of which it is not our province to enter in such a narrative as this. This much, however, we must record, that in the highest and best sense the visit of Florence Graham to Altbreac proved a blessing to Carrie Craig. After sore battling for a time with fears and feelings, she emerged at length into the broad sunshine of faith and hope; and her affliction was made an instrument in God's hand for her rapid advancement in knowledge and holiness. In the society of Florence also she reaped the sweet benefits which flow from the communion of saints, for even in spiritual things they kept no secrets from one another.

One evening they had a long talk together on the blessed privilege of being kept by God. They dwelt long upon the words, "As the apple of the eye," and "Graven on the palms of My hands"—as expressions denoting the absolute and happy security of the saints. Next evening Carrie called Florence to her side, and quietly handed her a sheet of paper on which were the following verses:

"KEPT."

Kept! It was the Master's prayer,  
For His loved ones ere He died.  
Kept! It is the Master's promise,  
Word of Him who never lied.

Kept from falling, though I stumble  
On the rough and slippery track,  
Yet will He, my faithful Shepherd,  
To His bosom bring me back.

Kept from fainting. Though the struggle  
Often fierce and fitful prove,  
Through it all my Lord upholds me  
In the strong arms of His love.

Kept from fretting. Though the worries  
Of this weary life assail,  
He who loveth careth for me,  
That assurance cannot fail.

Kept from fearing. Though the dangers  
Crowd around my pilgrim feet,  
He will bear me bravely onward  
Till I tread the golden street.

Kept for ever! Safe in heaven,  
All my sins and sorrows past,  
Unto God be all the glory,  
While eternal ages last.

For the time at least all that came of the verses was this, that Florence insisted they should be inserted in the pages of her album by the hand of her who first wrote them; and there they are still to be found.

(To be continued.)

## THE SHOOTING OF ARCHBISHOP DARBOY.

The days of Monday and Wednesday, the 23rd and 24th of May, 1871, were anxious days at La Roquette, but there were no very striking incidents. About six o'clock on Wednesday evening a detachment of forty of the National Guard, belonging to the "Vengeurs of the Republic," as they were called, arrived at the prison with a captain, first and second lieutenants, a commissaire of police, and two civil delegates. They all wore bright-red scarfs. Entering the office of the jailer, these civil delegates demanded of the director of the prison the release of the hostages, saying that they were commanded to shoot them. The director at first refused to deliver up the prisoners, saying that he would not consent to such a massacre of men confided to his care without more formal orders. A long dispute thereupon arose, which finally ended in the director's giving consent to deliver up six certain victims who had been designated. The men awaited the decision impatiently in the court, and as soon as the delegates had got the consent of the director to give up the prisoners they all mounted the staircase peil-mell to the first story, where the hostages were then confined.

In the presence of such a contemplated crime a silence came over these assassins, who awaited the call of the names of the victims. The President Bonjean, occupying cell No. 1, was first; the Abbe Deguerry, occupying cell No. 4 was the second; and the last called was Monseigneur Darboy, Archbishop of Paris, who occupied cell No. 23. The doors of the cells were then opened by the officer of the prison, and the victims were all ordered to leave. They descended, going to the foot of the staircase, where they embraced each other, and had a few words, the last on earth. Never was there a more mournful cortege, nor one calculated to awaken sadder emotions. Monseigneur Darboy, though weak and enfeebled by disease, gave his arm to Chief Justice Bonjean, and the venerable man, so well known in all Paris, Abbe Deguerry, leaned upon the arms of the two priests. A good many straggling National guards and others had gathered around the door of the prison as the victims went out, and they heaped upon them the vilest epithets, and to an extent that aroused the