

## Choice Literature.

BY A WAY SHE KNEW NOT.

The Story of Allison Bain.

BY MARGARET M. ROBERTSON.

## CHAPTER I.

"Was she wrong?  
Is it wrong in the bird to escape from the snare of the fowler?  
Is it wrong in the hunted deer, to flee to the screening thicket?"

Dr. Hadden was standing at the open door of the manse, waiting patiently while his housekeeper adjusted his gray plaid on his shoulders in preparation for a long ride over the hills. His faithful Barbara was doing her part protesting, but she was doing it carefully and well.

"Such a day as it is!" said she, "Such a time of rain! Indeed, sir, I canna think for you to go so far. Mightna ye just bide still at home till they come to the kirkyard?" But the minister shook his head. "I will need to go, Barbara. Think of poor Allison Bain on this sorrowful day."

Ay, poor Allie! I'm wae for her this sorrowful day, as ye say. Greatly she'll need a good word spoken to her. But in a' the rain—and at your age—

"Ay! I am a good ten years older than the man we are to lay in the grave. I might, as ye say, meet them at the kirkyard, but I must see that desolate bairn. And I think it may be fair."

It was June, but it looked more like November. so low lay the clouds, and so close hung the mist over all the valley. For a week the sun had hidden his face, and either in downpour or in drizzle, the rain had fallen unceasingly, till the burn which ran down between the hills had overflowed its banks and spread itself in snailow pools over the level fields below. The roads would be "soft and deep," as Barbara said, and the way was long. But even as she spoke there was an opening in the clouds and the wind was "weaving round to the right air," for the promise of a fair day, and it was early yet.

"And rain or shine, I must go, Barbara, as ye see yourself. The powney is surefooted. And my son Alexander is going with me, so there is nothing to fear."

And so the two men set out together. "My son Alexander," whose name the minister spoke with such loving pride, was the youngest and best beloved of the many sons and daughters who had been born and bred in the manse, of whom some were "scattered far and wide," and some were resting beside their mother in the kirkyard close at hand. In his youth, Alexander had given "some cause for anxiety to his father and mother," as outside folks put it delicately, and he had gone away to America at last, to begin again—to make a man of himself, or to perish out of sight of their loving and longing eyes. That was more than fifteen years before this time, and he had not perished out of sight, as so many wanderers from loving homes have done. He had lived and struggled with varying fortunes for a time, but he had never failed once to write his half-yearly letter to his father and mother at home. The folk of the olden time did not write nor expect so many letters as are written and sent nowadays, and the father and mother lived hopefully on one letter till another came. And for a while the lad wrote that he was making a living, and that was all, and then he wrote that he was doing well, and just when he was almost ready to tell them that he was coming home to show them his young wife, there came word to him that his mother was dead. Then he had no heart to go home. For what would the manse be without his mother to welcome them there?

So he sent home to his father a gift of money for the poor of the parish, and stayed where he was, and did well still, with fair prospects of some time being a rich man, and then—after more years—God touched him, not in anger, but in love, though He took from him his only son and best beloved child. For then he remembered his father who had loved him, and borne with him, and forgiven him through his troubled youth, and had sent him away with his blessing at last, and a great longing came upon him to see his father's face once more. And so he had made haste to come, feeling all the way lest he might find the manse empty and his father gone. It was a home-coming both sad and glad, and the week of rain had been well-filled with a history of all things joyful and sorrowful which had come to them and theirs, in the years that were gone. And to-day father and son were taking their way over the hills, so familiar to both, yet so strange to one of them, on a sorrowful errand.

They kept the high road for a while, and then turned into a broken path over the higher ground, the nearest way to the farm of Grassie, where the "goodman" who had ploughed and sowed and gathered the harvest for fifty years and more lay dead of a broken heart.

Slowly and carefully they moved over the uneven ground which gradually ascended and grew less wet as they went on, the son keeping by his father's side where the roughness of the way permitted, in silence, or only exchanging a word now and then. The clouds parted as they reached the hill-top, and they turned to look back on the wide stretch of low land behind them, which "looked in the sunshine," the minister said, "like a new made world." They lingered for a while.

"We need not be in haste. It takes the folk long to gather at such a time, for they will come from far, and it is weary waiting. But I must have time for a word with Allison, poor lassie, before they carry her father away," added he with a sigh.

"But the sun may shine for Allison yet, though this is a dark day for her and a most sad occasion. Though her father's headstone be cold, let us hope that she may yet see good days in the home of her husband."

But the minister shook his head.

"She must see them there if she is ever to see good days again, but my fears are stronger than my hopes. Oh! man Alex! I'm wae for bonny Allie Bain."

"Is her husband such a wretch, then?"

"A wretch? By no means. I hope not. But he is a dour man of nearly twice her years. An honest man? Well, I have never heard him accused of dishonesty. A hard man he has been called, but he suits our thrifless laird all the better for that. He has kept his place as factor at Blackhills for fifteen years and more, and has grown rich, they say—as riches are counted among folk who for the most part are poor. And he is respected—in a way."

"Well, if I had been asked about it, I would have said that it was a rise in the world for Allie Bain to be made the mistress of the factor's fine house over yonder. I suppose he might have looked for a wife in almost any of the better families of the country-side, without much chance of being refused."

"Yes, but he is said to have set his heart on Allison Bain years ago when she was only a child—a strange-like thing for such a man to do. He went to work warily, and got her father and even her mother on his side—or so it is said. But Allie herself would have naught to say to him. She laughed at first, and then she scoffed at his advances, and Willie, her only brother, upheld her in her scorning—for a while. But Willie went wrong—and from bad to worse; but now he is in the tollbooth at Aberdeen, as you have heard. But I believe that even now the poor lassie would have a fairer chance of a peaceful life if they were to get away to begin again together, when his time is over, than she ever can hope for in the house of her husband. And the lad would be stronger, and have a better chance with his sister's help. I fear—though I would say it to none but you—I fear that Allison's consent was won at last by no fair means."

"I mind Willie, a nice little lad, merry and frank and well-doing. I should never have thought of such a fate for him."

"Yes, frank he was, and a fine lad in many ways; but he was not of a strong will, and was easily led away. Allison was the far stronger of the two, even when they were children. It breaks my heart to think what a woman she might have become in favourable circumstances, and now, I fear, she has much suffering before her. Her mother's helplessness—she was bedridden for years before she died—laid too much on Allison, and she has grown changed, they say, and hard. She was aye more like her father than her mother, except for her sweet looks."

"And how came the marriage about at last? And where was her brother?"

"He had fallen into trouble by that time. He had got in with ill folk that made use of him for their own purposes. There had been much meddling with the game on the Blackhills estate, and one night one of the gamekeepers got a sore hurt in a fight with some of those who had been long suspected. His life was despaired of for a time, and it was on Willie Bain that the blame was laid. At any rate he kept out of the way. It was said afterward that Brownrigg had wrought on his fears through some of his companions, and in the meantime to save her brother, as she thought, Allison's consent was won."

"It will be an ill day for Brownrigg when Allison shall hear of that."

"I doubt she has heard of it already. All I know is soon told. Brownrigg came to me one night, saying that Allison Bain had promised to marry him, and that the marriage must be in haste for this reason and for that, and chiefly because the mother was near her end, and would die happier knowing that her dear daughter was in good keeping. This was for me, it seemed—for I was told afterward that the minister was in no state for days before that to know what was going on about her."

"As for me, I had many doubts. But I had opportunity to speak to her or her father till after their deaths had been cried in the kirk, and I thought it was too late to speak then. But oh, man! I wish I had. For when he brought her down to the manse with only two friends to witness the marriage, and I saw her face, my heart misgave me, and I had to say a word to her whatever might happen. So, when Brownrigg's back was turned for a minute, I took her by the hand, and we went into my study together; and I asked her, was she a willing bride? Then there came a look on her face like the shadow of death; but before she had power to utter a word, the door opened, and Brownrigg came in. An angry man was he, and for a minute he looked as if he would strike me down, as I stood holding her hands in mine."

"Allison," I said, "you must speak to me. Remember this thing which you are to do will be forever. When once the words are spoken there can be no escape. May God help you."

"She wrung her hands from mine, and cried out:

"There is no escape now. And God has forgotten us." And then she looked round about her like a caged creature seeking for a way out of it all. When Brownrigg would have put his hand on her, though he did it gently, she shrank from him as if she feared a blow. The man's eyes were like coals of fire; but he was a strong man, and he put great constraint upon himself, and said calmly:

"I am at a loss to understand what you would be at, sir. You heard the banns published. Was there any in the kirk that day who had a word to say against it? I think you can hardly refuse to do your part."

"I said, 'Allie, where is your brother? What does he say to all this? What says he to his sister's marriage to a man old enough to be her father?'"

Brownrigg's face was an ill thing to see, but he said quietly enough, "Yes, Allie, my woman, tell him where your brother is,—if ye ken, and where he is like to be soon if he gets his deserts. Speak, lassie. Tell the minister if you are going to draw back from your word now."

"A great wave of colour came over her face, and it was not till this had passed, leaving it as white as death, that she said hoarsely that it had to be, and there was no use to struggle against it more."

"He has promised one thing," said she, "and he shall promise it now in your presence. I am to go straight home to my father's house, and he is not to trouble me nor come near me till my mother is safe in her grave."

"And then she turned to him: 'You hear! Now you

are to repeat the promise in the minister's hearing, before we go out of this room.'

"He would fain have refused, and said one thing and another, and hummed and hawed, and would have taken her hand to lead her away; but she put her hands behind her and said he must speak before she would go."

"And is not a promise to yourself enough? And will you draw back if I refuse?" But he did not persist in his refusal to speak, for she looked like one who was fast losing hold of herself, and he must have been afraid of what might happen next. For he said gently, always keeping a great restraint upon himself, "Yes, I have promised. You shall stay in your father's house while your mother needs you. I promise—though I think you might have trusted to what I said before."

"Alex, my lad, I would give all I have in this world if I had held out another hour. For the words that made them man and wife, were hardly spoken, when that happened which might have saved them both a lifetime of misery. They had only passed through the gate on their way home, when down the hillside, like a madman, came Willie Bain. And far and hard he must have run, for he was spent and gasping for breath when he came a id put his hand upon his sister. 'Allie!' he said, 'Allie!' and he could say no more. But oh! the face of his sister! May I never see the like look on face of man or woman again."

"Willie," she said, "have you made what I have done vain! Why are you here?"

"What have you done, Allie? And why shouldna I be here? Stone is well again, even if it had been me that struck the blow—which it was not—though I might have had some risk of n' being just able to prove it. Allie, what have you done?"

"But she on y laid her white face on his breast without a word."

"Allie," gasped her brother, as he caught sight of Brownrigg, "you havena given yourself to yon man—yon deevil, I should better say? They told me over yonder that it was to be, but I said you scorned him, and would stand fast."

"Oh! Willie! Willie!" she cried, "I scorned him, but for your sake I couldna stand fast."

"Then Brownrigg took up the word. 'Young man, if you ken what is good for your ain safety, you'll disappear again, and keep out o' harm's way. But that may be as pleases you. Only mind, you'll have nothing to say to my wife.'

"Your wife! You 'lack hearted liar and villain!' and many a worse word besides did the angry lad give him, and when Brownrigg lifted his whip and made as if he meant to strike him, Willie turned from his sister and flew at him like a madman, and—though I maybe shouldna say it—Brownrigg got his deserts for once, and he will carry the mark, the lad left on him that day, to his grave. He was sore hurt. They put him into the gig in which he had brought Allison down to the manse, and carried him home, and the brother and sister walked together to their father's house."

Their mother was nearer her end than had been supposed, for she died that night, and before she was laid in her grave there came an officer with a warrant to arrest poor Willie on a charge of having done bodily harm to one of Blackwell's keepers months before. Two of his cousins stood surety for him till after his mother's burial. No evidence could be got against him in the matter and he was allowed to go free. And then like a daft man, Brownrigg had him taken up again on a charge of assault with intent to kill. It was a mad thing for him to do, if he ever hoped to win the good will of Allison, but it was said to me by one who knew him well, that he was afraid of the lad, and that he had good reason to fear, also, that as long as Allison was under the influence of her brother, she would never come home to him as his wife. But he might have waited to try other plans first."

"Poor John Bain, Allison's father, you ken, had had much to bear with one trouble and another, for many a day, and the last one fell heavier than them all. On the day when his son was condemned to an imprisonment for eighteen months, he had a stroke and he never looked up again, though he lingered a while, and Allison refused to leave him. Brownrigg is a man who cares little what may be his neighbour's opinion with regard to him, but he could hardly venture to insist on his wife's coming home while her father needed her, for there was no one else to care for the poor old man."

"He came to the house while Mr. Bain lived, but one told me who saw him there often, that since the day of the marriage Allison has neither given him good word nor bid, nor touched his hand, nor lifted her eyes to his face. Doubtless the man must have his misgivings about his and about what is to happen now. It is a sad story thus far, with no possible good ending as far as can be seen."

"Ay! a most sad story. Poor Allie! There seem little hope for her, whatever may happen. As to her brother, I should like to see him, and I am sure I shall be possible. I should like to take him home with me when I go, and give him another chance."

"Ah! that is a good word of yours, my son. It would well done indeed to help the poor lad, who is not bad at heart. I never will believe that. But I fear he will do good here, even if he can keep the land, which is doubtful now, for things have gone ill with them this while, and Brownrigg, even for Allie's sake, would never forgive her brother."

"And it is as likely that her brother would never forgive him. Allison may in time forgive her husband, and may end in loving him after all. Time and change will wonders."

But the minister could not agree with his son.

"Another woman might forgive and love him, but never Allison Bain. She can never honour him, unless he should greatly change, and then I doubt it might be too late for love."

They were drawing near the house by this time, when