

## CHOICE LITERATURE.

## ALDERSYDE.

A BORDER STORY OF SEVENTY YEARS AGO BY  
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## CHAPTER V.

## "At Waterloo."

Four years brought about many changes in Ettrick Vale. Two children were born to the house of Ravelaw, but failed to make any link between the ill-matched pair. Their unhappy life was the talk of the country side. So also was the second marriage of Mrs. Riddell the elder, to a London banker, and her removal to the metropolis.

About the same time Scottrigg lost its bonnie flower, sweet Marjorie, who became a great lady, the Countess of Dryburgh. Her brother, true-hearted young Walter, had loved Isabel Nesbit too dearly to see another bride, and was therefore likely to abide and comfort his father and mother for the loss of Marjorie.

In tranquil happiness at Windyknowe abode Miss Nesbit, Marget Drysdale, and the bairn. He was the very sunshine of the house, "Auntie's pet" and Marget's "ain, ain bairn." He grew so like his mother that many a time Miss Nesbit's eyes filled with tears, thinking, if she had but lived, what a gladness her boy would have infused into her heart.

His soldier father was still fighting in a foreign land, for there seemed to be no end to the wars and rumours of wars. But the decisive blow which restored peace to blood-stained and exhausted Europe was struck at last.

On a fair June evening, when the air was heavy with scent of hawthorne and sweetbrier, and a great slumberous calm brooded over the earth, Mr. Douglas, the lawyer, came in haste to Windyknowe. By the open dining-room window sat Miss Nesbit at her sewing, with the bairn chattering at his play by her side. It was her thirty-second birthday, and she looked her age to the full. The lovely hair was plentifully streaked with grey, and though her face was sweet and tranquil as of yore, there was a wistful drooping of the grave, womanly mouth, and a continual yearning shadow in the eyes, which told of the heart sickness of hope deferred. I do not believe Tibbie was ever out of her heart for a moment at a time, and she still looked forward to a day coming when she should once more see her face to face. She rose when the lawyer entered the room, and welcomed him with a cordial smile. They were friends of long standing, and each knew the other's worth. Then the little Walter ran to him, clamouring for the customary toss in the air which Mr. Douglas had taught him to expect. After a minute's gay banter with him, he turned to Miss Nesbit and asked her to send him from the room for a little.

"Rin the Marget, my pet; Auntie'll send for ye by and by," she said; and the bairn, accustomed to implicitly obey, ran off at once.

"Poor child he is a very tiny Laird of Aldersyde," said the lawyer; and Miss Nesbit rose up with a deepening shadow in her eyes.

"Has anything happened to the Captain Nesbit, Mr. Douglas?"

"There was a great battle fought near Brussels on Sunday, Miss Nesbit, and the Captain fell fighting at the head of his regiment."

Miss Nesbit grew very pale. She could not pretend to any great grief; yet such a sudden death was a shock, though she had daily expected it for months back.

"Near Brussels on Sunday, did ye say?" she said falteringly.

"Yes; at Waterloo. Napoleon is utterly beaten, but at awful cost. There'll be mourning in many a home to-day, Miss Nesbit."

"So my mitherless bairn's an orphan bairn noo!" said Miss Nesbit with mournful tenderness. "Puir wee Walter!"

"You will have an additional care on your shoulders now, Miss Nesbit," said the lawyer, beginning to pace up and down the floor—"the keeping of Aldersyde in trust for its unconscious heir."

"Ay."

"Very low, almost inaudible, was the monosyllable, because at the moment she was renewing in her heart the vow she had made to Mary in her dying hour.

"How does Aldersyde stand at present, Mr. Douglas?" she asked by and by.

"I regret to say that the affairs of Aldersyde have relapsed into the state in which your father found them. The estate is heavily mortgaged again," returned the lawyer with some hesitation.

"In such short a time!" echoed Miss Nesbit in dismay.

"What did Hugh Nesbit pit his revenues?"

"He was a man of extravagant habits, and denied himself nothing," answered Mr. Douglas. "He could have spent double his income, and yet been in debt."

"God helping me, Mr. Douglas, Walter shall enter on an unburdened heritage, as his father did afore him; but I pray and hope he'll mak a better use o't," said Miss Nesbit solemnly. "I'll look efter the interests o' Aldersyde as ye hae done sae faithfully in the past, an lay by all the rents tae pay aff the mortgages. I can keep the bairn brawly aff my ain."

"Not many orphan children have such unselfish devotion bestowed on them and their interests," said the lawyer with a smile. "Well, I'll bid you good day; we can have a talk over matters another time."

Miss Nesbit scarcely heard. She was looking away over in the direction of the chapel of St. Mary.

"The Laird'll readily be buried where he fell," she said musingly.

"Yes; he and many thousands more have found a grave on Waterloo," returned Mr. Douglas.

An unbidden tear trembled in Miss Nesbit's eye at the thought that the two brief lives which had been so closely linked, and had drifted so far apart, were united again by

the great Leveller. She showed the lawyer out herself, and then went to the kitchen, where Marget was baking, assisted by the bairn. It was marvellous to see how she let him hinder her work, and tease her life out. Miss Nesbit lifted him from his stool, and held him close to her heart, while a dry sob broke from her lips.

"Auntie's pet, Auntie's orphan bairn," she whispered; and though the child could not understand her, Marget was not slow to catch the meaning of her words.

"What's an orphan bairn, Auntie?" asked the child wonderingly.

"It means that ye hae naeboddy in the world noo, my pet, but me and Marget," said Miss Nesbit, and the child nestled his head on her shoulder, saying contentedly that he wanted no more in the world.

By and by when the bairn was left alone again with Marget, she wiped her floury hands, and gathered him closely in her arms. In the ben end, Miss Nesbit could hear the pitying tender words she said over and over to him: "Marget's ain, ain bairn; Marget's bonnie wee man; there's bounds and hearts that'll work and lo'e ye mair than them that's awa, my ain, ain bairn!"

So the little Laird of Aldersyde was not likely ever to know the innermost desolation of the word "orphan."

Next day having some business in Melrose, Miss Nesbit went down to Aldershope to catch the morning coach. While she stood waiting at the inn door, she beheld the Laird of Ravelaw coming down the village on his black horse. She was ready to acknowledge him by a bow; but he alighted at the inn door, threw his reins to an ostler, and came towards her.

They shook hands in silence; then Miss Nesbit said inquiringly:

"Ye'll hae heard the news, I dinna doot?"

"Yes; Douglas told me," returned Ravelaw.

"Did you know that my brother-in-law, Louis Reynaud, fell also?"

Miss Nesbit paled to the lips.

"I-didna ken he was a soldier," she said with difficulty.

"Every Frenchman is a soldier," answered Ravelaw briefly, and then stood looking at her in silence as if waiting for another question. It came at last—two faltering, eager words wrung from the very agony of her heart.

"What's Tibbie?"

"In Paris; at least she was there with Reynaud and their little daughter not many months ago. I have many a time been on the point of speaking to you about your sister, but you always avoided me in a very pointed way," said Ravelaw with a slight bitterness in his deep voice.

"She could hardly come hame herself frae France?" said Miss Nesbit more to herself than to him.

"Not alone in the present troubled state of the country," he made answer.

Then Janet Nesbit turned away from him, for there was something in her heart like to overwhelm her.

Oh, why was life so hard? The longing to flee to her one sister, left widowed and friendless in a strange land, swept over her; and yet she had not in all the world as much money as the journey would cost. By and by she turned to the Laird of Ravelaw again, and forced herself to change the subject.

Is Mrs. Riddell well, an' the bairns?" she asked.

"Yes, pretty well; but my wife is never strong, you know," said Sandy Riddell discontentedly.

"Your little Laird will be growing a big fellow now, Janet?"

"Ay; Walter thrives brawly, an' a dear bairn he is," returned Miss Nesbit from the fulness of her heart. "The coach is unco late frae Rowantree the day, surely?"

"Five minutes behind," said Ravelaw, glancing at his watch. "Well, good-bye, Janet. Wish me luck in my French journey: I go to-morrow."

Miss Nesbit's startled eyes looked straight into his, but she spoke never a word.

"My wife desires me to learn some particulars about her brother's death and his affairs; and besides, some one must see to Isabel," he continued avoiding her keen glance.

Instinctively she guessed that Isabel was the chief object of his journey.

"Sandy Riddell, I thank ye," she said simply and frankly.

"Ye hae lifted a heavy load aff my heart wi' these words."

"If she is alive and able, Janet, I shall bring her back to you," said Sandy Riddell, his voice slightly tremulous. "I need no thanks. God knows, anything I can do is little enough to atone for my indirect hand in your sister's unhappy marriage."

"Nevertheless I do thank ye, as only a sister can," repeated Miss Nesbit gently.

Looking upon the sweet, true womanly face, and the tender, pathetic eyes uplifted to his, a great agony of regret swept across the heart of the Laird of Ravelaw; and not knowing what thing he might be tempted to say, it behoved him to get away out of Janet Nesbit's presence as fast as possible.

"Well, I'm off!" he said with apparent carelessness.

"In about a month from now, all being well, you may expect Isabel at Windyknowe with another charge for you. The house will be lively enough, surely, with two little ones in it?"

A tender smile crept about Miss Nesbit's lips. Tibbie's bairn! Oh, what a treasure it would be to her heart!—nearer, dearer even than the heir of Aldersyde.

"God prosper yer journey, Sandy Riddell, an' bring ye safely hame; an' if He permits tae look upon my sister's face again, maybe He'll help my tae thank ye better nor I can the day," she said in her earnest way.

Then they parted, as they had not parted for many years, and she went on her way, light of heart, to Melrose.

The day seemed very long; for she was eager to be at home to tell Marget the glad news, and to speak to Walter about the little playmate he would have by and by.

The afternoon was well past when the coach again set her down in Aldershope; and what was her amazement to be-

hold Marget and the bairn standing hand in hand at the inn, waiting for the coach!

Whenever she slighted, the bairn ran to her, and hid his face in the fold of the gown. Never in his life had "Auntie's pet" been so long parted from the being he loved most on earth, and his little heart was full.

"Blas the bairn," said Marget with a smile and a tear. "I hae hae a bonnie life o't the day. Next time ye gang awa, ye'll tak him wi' ye, I mak sure. For peace' sake, I was obliged tae bring him tae meet ye."

Miss Nesbit lifted him in her arms, thanking God for the clinging of the little hands about her neck. Only He knew how rich she felt herself in the love of the bairn.

"The days been a lang day tae me as weel, Marget," said Miss Nesbit as they turned their steps towards Windyknowe. "I hae great news to tell. Tibbie's man was killed in the great battle and she'll be coming hame tae me by and by."

Marget looked dumfounded and incredulous.

"The Lord be thankit!" she ejaculated at length.

"Whaur is she?"

"Faur awa in France, Marget," said Miss Nesbit with a sigh. "Left alane wi' her little bairn in a strange land in the time o' war."

"Has she a bairn?" asked Marget in an awe-struck voice.

"Ay, a wee lassie. It'll be grand, Marget, tae see Walter and her play thegither!"

"I canna thank o' Tibbie wi' a bairn o' her ain. She was but a bairn herself in my een," said Marget.

"I am thirty-two past, and Tibbie's twenty-seven. No sic a bairn after a'!" Miss Nesbit reminded her.

"Mercy me, hoo time flees! Was't Mr. Douglas telt ye a' this the day?"

"No, Marget; I met the Laird o' Ravelaw this mornin' in Aldershope, an' he's gaun awa the morn tae bring Tibbie hame."

"That's very weel dune o' the Laird o' Ravelaw," said Marget.

"Ay, it's weel dune. If he hadna offered I would hae been obleeted tae find ways an' means tae gang myself," said Miss Nesbit.

Marget lifted up her hands in horror and surprise.

"My certy, ye're no feared. Gang awa among Hottentots in a foreign kinty, whaur there's naething but wars an' wholesale murders, an' that awfu' Bonapart! That wad be a gowk's jaunt for a lane wummin!"

Miss Nesbit laughed in the lightness of her heart, and turned to talk to the bairn at her side about the little stranger from over the sea who was coming by and by to share their home.

From that very day she began to make preparations for Tibbie and her child. The erring one would find a warm welcome waiting her, and would see what loving hands had worked for her, and what loving hearts had looked and longed for her return.

There was no bitterness in her thought of the sister who had so ill repaid her unselfish love and care, only a great unspeakable thankfulness that in God's mercy she would be permitted to shelter once more her own kin beneath her own roof-tree.

Oh, but the days were long!—not only to her, but to Marget and the bairn as well. It was an amusing and touching thing to see him lay aside certain of his playthings for the expected stranger, and to hear his constant earnest talk of her.

Slowly for them July drew to its close. Again the song of the reapers echoed over hill and dale, and again a harvest moon shone on Ettrick's silver stream, and on the rushing Yarrow. Then they began to count hours instead of days, and the bairn would sit half the time on the gate watching for the coach which was so long in coming.

One evening, when August was half gone, Miss Nesbit was sitting by the fire in the gloaming, with Walter on her knee, when there came a great rumbling of wheels on the avenue. Marget flew to the door like a being possessed. Miss Nesbit set down the child, and rose, feeling for the moment as if strength and consciousness would leave her in the sickness of her suspense. She could not move, even when the steps came towards the room. She looked up when the door opened; then her eyes fell again, and she pressed her hand to her heart, for the Laird of Ravelaw entered alone. He came towards her, carrying something wrapped in shawls in his arms, and spoke a few brief, hurried words.

"I was obliged to leave her, Janet. Here's the child."

"Deid or livin', did ye leave her?" fell in a whisper from Miss Nesbit's bloodless lips.

"She died two days after I reached her. I stayed but to bury her in the English corner of Pere la Chaise, then came home with her poor little child."

There was a moment's intense silence.

"God's will be done!" said Miss Nesbit, then, in a strange broken voice, and stretched out her arms to take home another orphan bairn.

## SHAKESPEARE AND HIS GRANDDAUGHTER.

So it was on this particular morning that Judith went and got hold of little Bess Hall, and quickly smartened up her costume, and carried her out into the garden. Then she went to the barn, outside of which was the dog's kennel; she unclasped the chain and let free the huge, slow-stepping, dun-coloured beast, that seemed to know as well as any one what was going toward; she affixed to his collar two pieces of silk ribbon that did very well for reins; and then she sat little Bess Hall on Don Roderigo's back, and gave her the reins to hold, and so they set out for the summer-house.

On that May morning the wide and gracious realm of England—which to some minds, and especially at that particular season of the year, seems the most beautiful country of any in the world—this rich and variegated England lay basking in the sunlight, with all its lush meadows and woods and hedges in the full and fresh luxuriance of the spring; and the small quiet hamlets were busy in a drowsy and easy.