

## Choice Literature.

BY A WAY SHE KNEW NOT.

The Story of Allison Gair.

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## CHAPTER V.

"He waits a portion with judicious care,  
And 'Let us worship God,' he says with solemn air."

In the minister's home on Sabbath morning, the custom was for the two eldest lads to take turns with "the lass" in keeping the house, while all the rest, except Marjorie and the two youngest, went to the kirk. It cannot be said that this was felt to be a hardship by the lads—rather the contrary, I am afraid—when the weather and the season of the year permitted them to spend the time in the garden, or when a new book, not in the "Index expurgatorius" of Sabbath reading was at hand, or even a beloved old one.

Of course there were Sabbath-day tasks to learn. But the big boys were by this time as familiar with the Catechism as with the multiplication table, and a psalm, or a paraphrase, or a chapter in the New Testament, hardly was accounted by them as a task. Frequent reading, and constant hearing at family worship and at school, had made the words of many parts of the book so familiar to them that only a glance was needed to make them sure of their ground. It needed, perhaps, a second glance if another repetition was suddenly required. It was "licht come, licht go" with them—easily learned, easily forgotten—in the way of tasks. But in another way it was not so. The Word thus learned "in the house and by the way," and so associated with all else which their young, glad lives held, could never be quite forgotten; nay more, could never—in theory and opinion at least—cease to be authoritative as the law by which, wherever they might wander, their steps were to be guided. But the chief thing to them at present was, that even with "tasks" to learn, there was still time to enjoy their books.

The lads had the firmest belief in their father's power as a preacher. But it must be remembered that those were the days when a full two hours were not considered, either by preacher or hearers, too long to give to a discourse. And the minister's sons were expected so to listen that they should be able to give to their mother, at evening worship, all the "heads and particulars"—and they were usually many—and a good deal besides of the sermon. In those circumstances it is not surprising that their turn in the summer garden, or even at the kitchen fireside, should sometimes be preferred to going to the kirk.

So when it began to be noticed that Allison quietly made her arrangements to be in the house every second Sabbath, instead of every third, as would have been fair, Robin remonstrated.

"It's my turn at home to-day, Allie. No, Maysie, you mustna grumble. It's but fair that Allie should have her turn at the kirk as weel as the rest of us. You must just content yourself with me. I'm to bide to-day."

"I'm no' carin' to go 'o the kirk to-day," said Allison.

"But that's no' the question. I'm carin' to bide at home," and as his mother had already gone, and no appeal could be made to her, bide he did, and so did Allison.

When this had happened two or three times, it was considered necessary to take notice of it, and Mrs. Hume did so, telling her quietly but firmly how necessary it was that the minister's household should set a good example in the place. And, beyond that, she sought to make it clear that it was the duty of all to avail themselves of the privilege of worshipping with God's people on His day, in His house. If Allison—being the daughter of one who had been in his lifetime an elder in the established kirk, as Dr. Fleming had informed them—had any doubts of the propriety of worshipping with dissenters, that was another matter. But she should go to her own kirk, if she could not take pleasure in coming to theirs.

"It's a' ane to me," said Allison.

But on the next fine Sabbath morning she availed herself of the permission, and took her way to the parish kirk. She would like the walk, at any rate, she told herself, and she did enjoy the walk down the lanes, in her own sad fashion; but the lanes took her out of the way a little, and made her late.

That night, at worship time, when Allison's turn came to be questioned as to what she had heard at the kirk, she could tell the text. But she did not tell that she had learned it by overhearing it repeated by an old man to his neighbour, as they came after her up the road. Nor did she tell that, being late at the kirk door, and shrinking from the thought of going in alone among so many strange folk, she had passed the time occupied by the preaching sitting on a broken headstone in the kirkyard.

She never went there again. It was truly "a' ane" to one whose mind, the moment her hands and her head were no longer occupied with the round of daily work, went back to brood over the days and joys that could never return, or over the sorrow which could never be outlived.

"I see no difference. It's a' ane to me," repeated she, when Mrs. Hume, not wishing to seem to influence her against her will, again suggested that, if she preferred it, she should go to the kirk.

"Difference!" There was all the difference between truth only dimly perceived and truth clearly uttered, in what she would be likely to hear in the two kirks, in the opinion of the minister's wife. And if that might be not altogether a charitable judgment, it might at least be said that it would be but a cold exposition of the Gospel that old Mr. Geddes would be likely to give, either in the pulpit or out of it. But she did not enter into the discussion of the matter with Allison. She was well pleased that she should decide the matter for herself.

"For though she sits in the kirk like a person in a dream, surely some true, good word will reach her heart after a time," said her kindly mistress. She had a good while to wait before it came to that with Allison. But it came at last.

"Allison," said Mrs. Hume, coming into the kitchen one afternoon, "we'll do without the scones at tea to-night, in case the baking of them should make you late with other things. You mind you did not get to the meeting at all last time, and the minister wishes all his own family to be present when it is possible."

Allison raised herself up from the work which was occupying her at the moment, and for once gave her mistress a long look out of her sad brown eyes.

"It was not that I hadna time. I wasna carin'."

"I am sorry to hear you say that. The meetings are a means of grace which have been blessed to many; and though there may be some things said now and then which are not just for edification, yet—"

Allison shook her head.

"I didna hear them. I mean I wasna heedin'."

"Well, I will not say that my own attention does not wander sometimes. Some things are more important than others," said the minister's wife, a name or two passing through her mind, which it would not have been wise to utter even to the silent Allison; "but," added she, "we can all j in in the psalms and in the prayers."

Allison's answer was a slow movement of her head from side to side, and a look sadder than words. A pang of sympathy smote through the soft heart of her mistress.

"Allie," said she, laying her hand on her arm, "you pray also?"

"Lang syne—I used to pray—maybe. I'm no' sure."

She had left her work and was standing erect, with her hands, loosely clasped, hanging down before her. Her eyes, with the same hopeless look in them, were turned toward the window, through which the relenting sun was sending one bright gleam before he went away, after a day of mist and rain.

"I do not understand you, Allison," said Mrs. Hume.

"It could not have been right prayer, ye ken, since it wasna answered."

"But the answer may be to come yet. It may come in God's way, not in yours."

"Can the dead live again?" said Allison with dilating eyes.

"Surely, they will live again. Is it your father, Allie? or your mother? They served the Lord, you said yourself, and they are now in His presence. Death is not a dreadful thing to come to such as they, that you should grudge it."

Allison had sunk down on a low stool, and laid her face on her arm, but she raised it now as she answered:

"But they didna just die. They were killed. Their hearts were broken by the one they loved best in the world. That cannot be changed. Even the Lord Himself cannot blot out that and make it as if it had never been."

"The Lord Himself! Was there a sin in it, Allie? But do you not mind? 'The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanse us from all sin.' It can be blotted out. It is never too late for that."

But Allison made no answer. Rising with a cry, she turned and went out without a word.

Mrs. Hume was greatly moved, wishing earnestly that she had not spoken. If the minister had been in his study, she would have gone to him with her trouble. But he was out. So she went into the parlour, where she had only little Marjorie for company. She had not even Marjorie for the moment, for the child had fallen asleep in her absence. As she thought about it, she was not so sure that she had made a mistake, or that there was anything to regret. Better to be moved to anguish by sorrowful memories, or even by remorse, than to live on in the dull heaviness of heart, which had been Allison's state since she came to them, she thought at last, and she was sure of it when, after a little, the door opened, and Allison said, showing her face:

"I think, mem, if ye please, I will hae time for the scones I promised wee Marjorie."

"Very well, Allison," said her mistress quietly, and with a sudden lightening of the heart, she bent down and kissed the lips of her little sleeping daughter. She was greatly relieved. She could not bear the thought that she had hurt that sore heart without having helped it by ever so little. When the time came for the meeting, Allison was in her place with the rest.

The kirk, which could not be heated, and only with difficulty lighted, was altogether too dismal a place for evenings in the winter time. So the usual sitting room of the family was on one evening of the week given up to the use of those who came to the prayer meetings. This brought some trouble both to the mistress and the maid, for the furniture of the room had to be disarranged, and a good deal of it carried into the bed-room beyond, and the carpet, which covered only the middle of the room, had to be lifted and put aside till morning.

The boys, or it might be some early meeting-goer, helped to move the tables and the chairs, and to bring in the forms on which the folk were to sit, and sometimes they carried them away again when the meeting was over. All the rest fell on Allison. And truly, when morning came, the floor and the whole place needed special care before it was made fit for the occupation of the mother and Marjorie.

But to do all that and more was not so hard for Allison as just to sit still through the two hours during which the meeting lasted. It was at such times, when she could not fill her hands and her thoughts with other things, that her trouble, whatever it might be, came back upon her, and her mistress saw the gloom and heaviness of her heart fall on her like a cloud. It was quite true, as she had said, at such times she heard nothing of what was going on about her, because "she wasna heedin'." But to-night she heeded.

She had Marjorie on her lap for one thing, for the child's sleep had rested her, and her mother had yielded to her entreaty to be allowed to sit up to the meeting. Al-

lison could not fall into her usual dull brooding, with the soft little hand touching her cheek now and then, and the hushed voice whispering a word in her ear. So for the first time her attention was arrested by what was going on in the room, and some of the folk got their first good look at her sad eyes that night.

And if Allison had but known it, it was well worth her while both to look and to listen. The minister was the leader of the meeting, but it was open to all who had anything to say.

It was something else besides a prayer meeting on most nights. There was usually a short exposition of some passage of Scripture by the minister, and frequently a conversational turn was given to this part of the exercise. The minister had "the knack" of putting questions judiciously, to the great help and comfort of those who had something to say, but who did not well know how to say it. And though it must be acknowledged, as Mrs. Hume had admitted to Allison, that there were now and then things said which were not altogether for edification, on the whole, this method, in the minister's hands, answered well. It kept up the interest of the meeting to some who would hardly have cared to listen to a sermon out of the kirk, or on a week night. A few who were only occasional hearers on the Sabbath liked these informal discussions of precept and doctrine, as they would have liked the discussion of any other matter, for the mere intellectual pleasure to be enjoyed, and, as may be supposed, opportunities for this kind of enjoyment did not often occur in Nethermuir.

And there were a few men of another stamp among them—men to whom Mr. Hume and "his new doctrines," as they were called, had come, as sunlight comes into a day of darkness. Even in that time which was already passing away when these men were children, the time which its friends have called "the dark days of the kirk of Scotland," the Bible had been read and revered in all well-ordered households, and it was as true then as in the day when our Lord Himself had said it: "The words which I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." And so, through much reading of the Word, had come a sense of sinfulness and ill-desert which a vain striving to work out a righteousness for themselves could not quiet or banish, a longing for pardon from Him whom they had offended, and for a sense of acceptance and friendship with Him who had promised to save.

With regard to all this, it was but "an uncertain sound" which was uttered by the greater number of the teachers of the day; and so when men like Mr. Hume came preaching a free and full salvation through Jesus Christ, not only from the consequences of sin, but from the power and love of it, there were many through all the land who "heard the word gladly."

There were some in Nethermuir who had heard and heeded, and found the peace they sought, and who showed by their new lives that a real change had been wrought in them. These were the men who rejoiced the minister's heart and strengthened his hands both in the meeting and elsewhere; and though some of them were slow of speech and not so ready with their word as others who spoke to less purpose, yet it was from them that the tone of the meeting was taken.

It cannot be said that this privilege of speech was often abused. As for the sisters, they rarely went beyond a question, or a token of assent or approval, given in one word, when something which recommended itself to their taste and judgment had been well said. Mr. Hume refused to acknowledge that he did not sufficiently encourage them to do their part for mutual edification in the semi-privacy of these meetings in the manse parlour, and he did acknowledge that two or three whom he could name among them had all the right which a high intelligence, deep spirituality and sound common sense could give, to lift their voices when the right time came, to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering and doctrine." But his observation had taught him that these qualifications did not make a woman more ready or willing, but rather less, to put in her word at such times.

The teaching of the kirk by law established had been in past years vague and indefinite enough on several points of importance, it was truly said. But in the pulpit and out of it, on one point it had been full, clear and definite. A man must rule (well) his own household. "The husband is the head of the wife," who is not suffered "to usurp authority over the man," but who is to listen in silence, being "the weaker vessel"—and so on.

All this had been taught by word and deed for many a year and day—not always, it was to be feared, in the way or in the spirit that St. Paul would have approved. But it was still true that the best women and the wisest had best learned the lesson. So when the "missioners" came with new light on the matter—no longer insisting upon silence where a few of the brethren and sisters were met to edify one another—it was not, as the minister said, those who were best fitted for it who were the readiest to claim the right or the privilege, whichever it might be called; and as for him, he was not urgent about the matter, either to encourage or restrain.

The brethren, as a rule, were ready enough to fill up the time with exhortation or discussion, and might have been in danger sometimes of becoming too eager and energetic in their utterances if Mr. Hume had not, with equal gentleness and firmness, exercised his right to rule among them. To-night the folk had their Testament open at one of the chapters of Galatians, and when Allison's attention was first caught, the word was being passed backward and forward between Peter Gilchrist, one of the staunchest supporters of the little kirk, and old Saunners Crombie, staunch, too, in his way. Peter had grown both in knowledge and in grace since the day when he had become a friend of the minister, and he could take his part with the rest. He had "grown mair in gress than in A-knowledge, if sic a thing were possible," his friendly opponent, Saunners, declared.

And in Saunners' sense it was perhaps true. For "hair-splitting" and the art of finding and formulating distinctions where no real difference exists, to be learned well,