

required—all that was ordered her. He spoke not of love to Margaret, but he wooed her through his kindness to her mother. It was, perhaps, the most direct avenue to her affections. Yet, it was not because Thomas thought so that he pursued this course, but because he wanted confidence to make his appeal in a manner more formal or direct.

The widow lingered many months, and all that lay within the power of human means he caused to be done for her, to restore her to health and strength, or at least to smooth her dying pillow. But the last was all that could be done. Where death spreadeth the shadow of his wing, there is no escape from sinking beneath the baneful influence of its shade. Mrs. Lylestone, finding that the hour of her departure drew near, took the hand of her benefactor, and when she had thanked him for all the kindness which he had shewn towards her, she added—

"But, O Sir, there is one thing that makes the hand of death heavy. When the sod is cau'd upon my breast, who will look after my poor orphan—my bonny fatherless and motherless Margaret? Where will she find a hame?"

"O Mam," said Thomas, "if the like o' me durst say it, she need na hae far to gang to find a hame and a heart too. Would she only be mine, I would be her protector—all that I have should be hers." A gleam of joy brightened in the eyes of the dying widow. "Margaret!" she exclaimed faintly; and Margaret laid her face upon the bed and wept.

"O my bairn! my poor bairn!" continued her mother, "shall I see you protected and provided for before I am 'where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest,' which cannot be long now?"

Thomas groaned—tears glistened in his eyes; he held his breath in suspense. The moment of trial, of condemnation or acquittal, of happiness or misery, had arrived. With an eager impatience he trembled to hear her answer. But Margaret's heart was prepared for his proposal. He had first touched it with gratitude, he had obtained her esteem; and where these sentiments prevail in the bosom of a woman whose affections have not been bestowed upon another, love is not far distant—if it be not between them, and a part of both.

"Did ever I disobey you, mother?" sob-

bed Margaret, raising her parent's hand to her lips.

"No, my bairn, no!" answered the widow, and raising herself in the bed, she took her daughter's hand and placed it in the hand of Thomas Hardie.

"Oh!" said he, "is this possible? Does my bonny Margaret really consent to make me the happiest man on earth? Shall I have a gem at Tollishill that I wadna exchange for a monarch's diadem?"

It is sufficient to say, that the young and lovely Margaret Lylestone became Mrs. Hardie of Tollishill; or, as she was generally called, "Midside Maggy." Her mother died within three months after their marriage, but died in peace, having, as she said, "seen her dear bairn blessed wi' a leal and a kind gudeman, and one that was weel to do."

For two years after their marriage, and not a happier couple than Thomas and Midside Maggy were to be found on all the long Lammermoor, in the Merse, nor yet in the broad Lothians. They saw the broom and the heather bloom in their season, and they heard the mavis sing before their dwelling; yea, they beheld the snow falling on the mountains, and the drift sweeping down the glens; but while the former delighted, the latter harmed them not, and from all they drew mutual joy and happiness. Thomas said that "Maggy was a matchless wife," and she that "he was a kind, kind husband."

But the third winter was one of terror among the hills. It was near the new year the snow began to fall on a Saturday, and when the following Friday came, the storm had not ceased. It was accompanied by frost and a fierce wind, and the drift swept and whirled like awful pillars of alabaster down the hills and along the glens.

"Sweeping the flocks and herds."

Fearful was the wrath of the tempest on the Lammermoors. Many farmers suffered severely, but none more severely than Thomas Hardie of Tollishill. Hundreds of his sheep had perished in a single night. He was brought from prosperity to the brink of adversity.

But another winter came round. It commenced with a severity scarce inferior to that which had preceded it, and again scores of his sheep were buried in the snow.