

MISS M'GRAW'S ROMANCE.



MISS M'GRAW was sitting cosily over the bright fire in her "room" one chilly December evening. The kettle was singing merrily, and the table was spread for tea—the hour and the meal that were pleasantest to the schoolmistress; for over her quiet cosy cup of tea, when the day's work was done, she indulged in the

only unoccupied, day-dreamy time of her busy life.

Miss M'Graw's day-dream is brought to an abrupt conclusion by a timid knock at the outer door. Wondering who can be there on this dark December evening, she rises and opens it. A young girl is standing at the door, with a shawl thrown over her head and half concealing her face. "Jessie Glendinning!" she said, in a wondering tone: "what's brocht ye a' this way, lassie, in sic a nicht?"—for Jessie's home was at a farm-house two miles away.

"Mither sent me to Braeclench for candles, an' I just thoct I wad like to come in an' hae a crack wi' ye afore I gae'd hame," said the girl, in a low tone.

Miss M'Graw saw in a moment that something was wrong with Jessie. She could see that she had been crying bitterly.

"Come yer ways ben an' tak' a cup o' tea, Jessie," said the schoolmistress in a kindly tone. "It's been drawing this twenty minutes, so it should be guid noo." Jessie drank the tea mechanically, and Miss M'Graw went quietly on with hers, taking no notice. When she had done she put away the tea-things and cleared the table; then she sat down beside the girl, and said:

"Noo, Jessie, lassie, what's wrang wi' ye?—tell me, there's a guid lassie. Ye ken I'll help ye gin I can."

By degrees, with long sobbing intervals between, Jessie told her story. It was the old, sad, common story. A lad from a neighbouring town—a few months' flirtation—a few honeyed words—a half-uttered vow—a foolish little heart, half child's, half woman's, given away before she knew it—then separation—silence—pain quietly borne on her part—utter forgetfulness on his;—and now it was all over: a few days ago she had heard of his marriage. Poor foolish little heart to grieve for a toy so worthless!

Miss M'Graw heard the sad little tale to an end, only now and then gently stroking the poor little head that lay on her shoulder. She sat quiet and grave for some minutes after the girl had ceased speaking, and there was a moist look in her clear eyes and a quiver in her firm mouth not often seen there. At last she said in a low, gentle voice, "Jessie, lassie, it's no aften I speak o' thae things, an' I dinna like speakin' o' them—it's like openin' an auld wound; but gin it'll help ye I'll tell ye a story there's no mony folk alive noo that kens."

"Na, Miss M'Graw, dimma do that gin it hurts ye," said the girl, half raising her head from her mistress's shoulder.

"Ay, I'll tell ye, Jessie; it's no for auld folks like me, that's near the end o' the journey, to pit their foolish feelin's i' the way o' anything that'll help the puir young things that have it a' afore them."

"My father had a farm at the foot o' Ben Nevis. It was a bonny place, wi' the great hills a' roun', that were never the same twa hours thegither wi' the cloud-shadows passin' ower them, an' great deep blue hollows whar the sun couldna reach, an' whiles wreaths o' mist, like smoke, half hidin' their tops. Our farm was i' the valley, an' my father's sheep fed on the hills. Weel, I grew up i' the farm-hoos, an' whan I had dune my schulin' I used to be set to herd the sheep. I mind it a' fine: there was a muckle stane at the burn-side, wi' a birch tree hangin' ower it, an' I used to sit there for hours, wi' the sheep feedin' about me, an' a buik i' my han'; for I was aye fond o' readin'. I was the only woman-body about the place, besides the servant lass; for my mither had deed when I was a bairn, an' there was just my father, an' my brither, an' me, an' they were maist days on the hills wi' the sheep, sac I was a deal my laue. There was anither farm-hoos, aboot three miles af, across the hill; the burnie was the march atween us, an' the ither side o' the burn belonged to the ither farm. The folk that lived there then were ca'd Maedonald; an' there was a young lad, the farmer's son, they ca'd him Colin. Weel, whan I was herdin' my sheep on ae side o' the burn, he was herdin' his on the ither side, an' sac it aften fell oot that we got together. We were young things then, an' by-an'-by we fan' oot that we lo'ed ilk ither; an' Colin axed me for his wife, an' I daun'dna say him nae. We couldna marry then, for Colin was naething but his father's herd, an' I had nae money; but we were content to wait, for we saw ilk ither near ilka day.

"Ay, that was a happy time," and the schoolmistress gave a little sigh as she spoke; "but there were dark days ahint. My father an' brither kent a' aboot it, an' that Colin an' me keepit company, an' that as soon as he could get enough to tak' a farm for himsel' we were to be married. Weel, ae day, Dugal (that was my brither's name) cam' back frae the Falkirk cattle market, an' I ran oot to meet him. I thoct he lookit unco grave, but he said naethin' till I asked gin Colin had come hame wi' him (for they maist puir't gae'd an' cam' thegither); then he said very gravely, 'Na, lassie; Colin's no come hame.' His tone frightened me, an' I said, 'What's wrang?'

"Ye tell her, father," he said; an' up he got an' walked oot o' the room.

"Then father drew me on to his knee, an' tell me"—the schoolmistress's voice faltered as she spoke—"that at the tryst some wild lads had got hold o' Colin, an' got him to gang to the public wi' them; an' he had taken too much, an' no bein' used wi't he got waur than the ithers, an' a fecht got up amang them,