

had stood thoughtful, but again turning to the individual who had been intrusted to dispose of it, he inquired—

“And wherefore is she selling it?”

“Really, Maister Hardie,” replied the other, “I could not positively say, but I have little doubt it is for want—absolute necessity. The auld woman’s very frail and very ill—I hae to take a’ sort o’ things out to her the night frae the doctor’s, after selling the cow, and it’s not in the power o’ things that her daughter, industrious as she is, should be able to get them for her otherwise.”

Thomas again turned aside, and he drew his sleeve across his eyes. Having inquired the price sought for the cow, he handed the money to the seller, and gave the animal in charge of one of his herdsmen. He left the market earlier than usual, and directed his servant that the cow should be taken to Westruther.

It was drawing towards gloaming before Thomas approached the habitation of the widow; and, before he could summon courage to enter it for the first time, he sauntered for several minutes, backward and forward on the moor, by the side of the Blackadder, which there silently wends its way, as a dull and simple burn, through the moss. He felt all the awkwardness of an old man struggling beneath the influence of a young feeling. He thought of what he should say, how he should act, and how he would be received.—At length he had composed a short introductory and explanatory speech which pleased him. He thought it contained both feeling and delicacy (according to his notions of the latter) in their proper proportions, and after repeating it three or four times over by the side of the Blackadder, he proceeded towards the cottage, still repeating it to himself as he went. But, when he raised his hand and knocked at the door, his heart gave a similar shock upon his bosom, as though it mimicked him, every word of the introductory speech which he had studied and repeated again and again, short though it was, was knocked from his memory. The door was opened by Margaret, who invited him to enter. She was beautiful as when he first beheld her—he thought more beautiful; for she now spoke to him. Her mother sat in an arm-chair, by the side of the peat fire, and was supported with pillows. He took off his bonnet, and performed an awkward but his best salutation.

“I beg your pardon,” said he, hesitatingly, “for the liberty I have taken in calling upon you. But—I was in Kelso the day—and” — he paused, and turned his bonnet once or twice in his hands—“and,” he resumed, “I observed, or rather I should say, I learned that ye intended to sell your cow; but, I also heard that ye was very ill, and” — here he made another pause.—“I say I heard that ye was very ill, and I thought it would be a hardship for you to part wi’ crummie, and especially at a time when ye are sure to stand most in need o’ every ye. So I bought the cow—but, as I say, it would be a very great hardship for you to be without the milk, and what the cheese may bring at a time like this; and, therefore, I have ordered her to be brought back to ye, and ane o’ my men will bring her hame presently. Never consider the cow as mine, for a bachelor farmer like me can better afford to want the siller, than ye can to want your cow; and I might hae spent it far mair foolishly, and wi’ less satisfaction. Indeed, if ye only but think that good I’ve done, I’m mair than paid.”

“Maister Hardie,” said the widow, “what have I, a stranger widow woman, done to deserve this kindness at your hands? Or how is it in the power o’ words for me to thank ye? HE who provideth for the widow and the fatherless will not permit you to go unrewarded, though I cannot. O Margaret, hinny,” added she, “thank our benefactor as we ought to thank him, for I cannot.”

Fair Margaret’s thanks were a flood of tears.

“Oh, dinna greet!” said Thomas; “I would ten times over rather not hae bought the cow, but hae lost the siller, than I would hae been the cause o’ a single tear rowin’ down your boony cheeks.”—“O sir,” answered the widow, “but they’re the tears o’ gratitude that distress my bairn, and nae tears are mair precious.”

I might tell how Thomas sat down by the peat fire between the widow and her daughter, and how he took the hand of the latter, and entreated her to dry up her tears, saying his chief happiness would be to be thought their friend, and to deserve their esteem.—The cow was brought back to the widow’s and Thomas returned to Tollishill with his herdsman. But, from that night, he became almost a daily visiter at the house of Mrs. Lylestone. He provided whatever she