

SKETCHES IN SCOTLAND IN "AULD LANGSYNE."*

MARY O' PIRLY-HILL.

CHAPTER III.

FROM this time forth, the road to Pirly-hill became as well known to us, and perhaps more frequented, than the road "to the kirk." In due time we found Mary possessed of all—far more than all—that ever we had expected to find in woman; unobtrusive, modest, but kind, lively, and cheerful, well-informed, considering her years and opportunities, with a slight dash of romance about her. If anything, she had, perhaps, rather too nice notions of the dignity of woman; but this was held in check by her strong common sense—a natural, clear perception of what was proper or improper in itself, with a resolute determination to act up to her impulses (so to speak) in this respect, regardless of consequences. Such, and a great deal more, was Mary (for we draw from nature, from a real original, no mere fiction); every night we were in her company, and on every occasion, she improved in our view; every night discovered some amiable or noble trait of character which we had not observed before, and, need we add, every night she "wormed" herself deeper and deeper into our affections, until she fairly engrossed them all, ardent though they were. Greatness and wealth command many pleasures, no doubt, but they have not a monopoly of all the happiness in the world; even the poorest of the poor have occasional snatches. The "pearly dew," the "flowery field," the "hoary hawthorn," the "scented birch," the "fragrant meadow," the "wimplin' burn," are no mere creations of the poet's fancy; they are actually and truly to be found in their season, abounding everywhere, and alike common to all. We are told, and told truly, that "the sun shines as brightly and as warmly upon the poor as upon the rich," but at times night brings joys to the poor as well as day; joys, too, that ill suit with the glaring eye of light. To take the instance in this, our brief "Sketch of Scotland in Auld Langsyne:"—A country lad has an appointment with his sweetheart, some fine summer evening. She resides at the distance of some three or four miles perhaps; so away he saunters, as if he were taking an ordinary walk, but, fearful of being watched, sets out in an opposite direction until out of sight. He then strikes off to the right or left, as the case may be, and avoiding every road, public and private, makes a circuit through the fields, sometimes skirting hedges, sometimes pursuing his course through a hollow, threading now his way through a plantation, or following the windings of a burn, until he comes within a *certain* distance of his destination. Every tree, every shrub, every flower, every blade of grass is in its glory, and everything forces itself on his attention; and if he has but a spark of poetry in his constitution at all—nor is this uncommon—he associates all with the object of his affections. Being now as near the house as he wishes to be as yet, he sets himself down in some snug place to think of the approaching meeting, or, perhaps,

to gaze at the fiery-red setting sun, as it suddenly dips down behind the distant blue hills, leaving, as it were, a blank in creation. Up he starts, again, and gradually and cautiously approaches the house, keeping a sharp look-out all the while that everything is quiet "about the toon," and that no interloper is hovering about; even that sharp-eared, long-tongue tell-tale, "Whitfeet," the colley-dog, must be guarded against. Having reached the "trysting-bush," he takes his seat, and "bides his time." All is quiet and lonely, not a breath of wind, the air mild and balmy, the western horizon still streaked with red, the sky overhead clear and blue, with a few stars shining in sparkling silvery light; not a thing endued with animal life visible except the bat, as it flits about with a wavy, flickering motion; not a sound heard save the distant "carroo, carroo," of the "cushat," (wood-pigeon), or the musical drone of the "bum-clock" humming lazily by. With a fluttering heart, he at length perceives a female figure steal out from the house. She cautiously proceeds a few steps, then pauses and looks about her, for if any stranger is lurking about, he is sure to make his appearance now. All is quiet; she throws her apron partly over her face, as if to hide her blushes; walks slowly forward; pauses and looks again; then playfully going to the wrong side of the bush, whispers, with timorous accents, "Are ye there?" Then comes the rush, the stifled scream, the fond embrace, when throb responds to throb; again a pause, until exhausted nature recovers herself; and then, hand in hand, in a trip "owre the flow'ry lea," or, perhaps, seated side by side on the "herd's hillock," at the foot of the ash-tree, the simple tale that has been told fifty times before is told over again, and former pledges again renewed. What equivalent wealth offers to these things we know not.

Our meetings in time became so frequent, that sleep seemed to be a thing almost unnecessary, and sometimes for a night was dispensed with altogether; yet all the while we made but comparatively few professions of love, and asked as few in return; inference with both of us seemed to have greater force than declaration, for both of us "loved not wisely, but too well." That this was the case is not greatly to be wondered at, for between us there was a community of years, sentiments, feelings, tastes, and even in our very failings there was something congenial. Any insult—that is, premeditated insult—or neglect on our part, would have produced a lasting separation, and any coldness or indifference on her's, would probably have brought about the same result. Both of us felt too keenly on points like these; but probably this was the charm, in some measure, which bound us together, for either we must have been all-in-all to each other, or nothing. Perfect happiness for any length of time is not the lot of man or woman. Amid all our sweet communings, we had our little whiffs and bickerings. Jealousy, though no ingredient of love, is probably inseparable from it, and it must be a very cool, sober, matter-of-fact love, indeed, that is not tinged with it. Both of us had, or thought we had, which is the same thing, something to complain of in this way.

When we went first to our village, there was a young woman of the name of Betty, who was the

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