

the-valley. And here when weary of play the children sat exchanging their opinions, the fragrance of the lilies comforting them in spring-time. And on such occasions, the youngest Skye was filled with an instinctive hospitality, expressed on behalf of the spruce, urgently inviting any fraternal head or foot still in the sun, further within the protecting line.

The happiness which seemed to distinguish this simple family had never brought about forgetfulness of other claims. It is true there was some difference between them and the surrounding country-people, but it was a difference never emphasized by the Skyes and always overlooked by the others at any time of trouble.

One of the more intelligent and companionable farmers of the region regarded Stephen as his dearest friend, and such was the confidence between them that Stephen had not hesitated to become security for his neighbour in the matter of a very large sum of money, a sum representing in fact his own entire capital.

By unforeseen disasters the farmer was rendered unable to meet the payment of the bond when it was due, and the obligation passed to Stephen. It was a severe blow, and the first of a series that spread over two years—reverses following reverses—with a regularity which made them almost expected.

It became necessary to live with strict economy, which they endeavoured to do without changing the atmosphere of their home. But although their efforts were not unsuccessful, they could not keep the care from showing in their faces; and the children noted their anxiety, connecting it with the decreased expenditure, and speaking of it privately to one another. The youngest Skye alone ventured to refer to their straitened circumstances before his parents. He told them with innocent gravity of bearing that he knew they were becoming poorer, and that he and his brothers and his sister intended to give them all the assistance in their power.

The autumn of his seventh year had been preceded by the complete failure of their crops from bad weather, and found them about to face a winter which they feared. One bleak November afternoon Stephen entered the sitting-room earlier than was his wont, and stood beside his wife, whose busy hands relaxed at once. He stooped and drew her up into his arms, asking in a tone that struggled with despair:

“What do you think of it all, my wife?”

And Norah, looking into his eyes where she had long since seen the promise of her earthly joy, where she had learned to see the promise of a joy that outlives life, answered: