



# THE LAUREL BUSH.

## CHAPTER I.

It was a very ugly bush indeed; that is, so far as any thing in nature can be really ugly. It was lopsided—having on the one hand a stunted stump or two, while on the other a huge heavy branch swept down to the gravel-walk. It had a crooked gnarled trunk or stem, hollow enough to entice any weak-minded bird to build a nest there—only it was so near to the ground, and also to the garden gate. Besides, the owners of the garden, evidently of practical mind, had made use of it to place between a fork in its branches a sort of letter-box—not the government regulation one, for twenty years ago this had not been thought of, but a rough receptacle, where, the house being a good way off, letters might be deposited, instead of, as hitherto, in a hole in the trunk—near the foot of the tree, and under shelter of its mass of evergreen leaves.

This letter-box, made by the boys of the family at the instigation and with the assistance of their tutor, had proved so attractive to some exceedingly incautious sparrow that during the intervals of the post she had begun a nest there, which was found by the boys. Exceedingly wild boys they were, and a great trouble to their old grandmother, with whom they were staying the summer, and their young governess—"Misfortune," as they called her, her real name being Miss Williams—Fortune Williams. The nickname was a little too near the

truth, as a keener observer than mischievous boys would have read in her quiet, sometimes sad, face; and it had been stopped rather severely by the tutor of the elder boys, a young man whom the grandmother had been forced to get, to "keep them in order." He was a Mr. Robert Roy, once a student, now a teacher of the "humanities," from the neighboring town—I beg its pardon—city; and a lovely old city it is!—of St. Andrews. Thence he was in the habit of coming to them three and often four days in the week, teaching of mornings and walking of afternoons. They had expected him this afternoon, but their grandmother had carried them off on some pleasure excursion; and being a lady of inexact habits—one, too, to whom tutors were tutors and nothing more—she had merely said to Miss Williams, as the carriage drove away, "When Mr. Roy comes, tell him he is not wanted till tomorrow."

And so Miss Williams had waited at the gate, not wishing him to have the additional trouble of walking up to the house, for she knew every minute of his time was precious. The poor and the hard-working can understand and sympathize with one another. Only a tutor, and only a governess: Mrs. Dalziel drove away and never thought of them again. They were mere machines—servants to whom she paid their wages, and so that they did sufficient service to de-