

Choice Literature.

HEATHER BELLES.

A MODERN HIGHLAND STORY.

CHAPTER XIII.—A HIGHLAND SACRAMENTAL SEASON.

On the second Sabbath of June occurred what may fitly be termed the great event of the year in Glenartan, the summer sacramental occasion. It was one destined to be for ever memorable in the history of at least three in whom we are interested.

For many weeks past, Carrie Craig had been making wonderful progress toward convalescence. She had been able, first to sit in front of the house, enjoying the midday sun; then to stroll in company with Frances down by the river-side, and watch the trout spring on the glassy surface of the water; and at length to take long walks with her loved friends up and down the glen.

They sat one day on a rocky ledge in front of a deep brown pool on the stream. The sky had its background of blue, on which were painted rich foamy masses of white cloud deepening here and there into gray. Not a breath of air stirred. The only sounds to be heard were the fitful bleatings of sheep, now on this side, now on that of the river; the startled whirr of wings as they shot in rapid sweep over their heads; the scattered hum of bees busy among the beds of wild flowers; and the occasional flop of a trout as it sank again into the pool after an eager rise. The far hill-sides were beginning to assume the faint purple of the heather, the groups of trees around Altbreac were in full foliage, the grassy fields wore their richest green, and the banks of the stream on either side were garnished with varied species of wild floral. In the thickets and hedgerows were the delicate veitch; the woundwort, with its spikes of purple blossoms, and the St. John's wort, with its bright yellow stars, that flower of which the poet sings:

"Whose potent leaves
Have sovereign power o'er all the sullen fits
And cheerless fancies that besiege the mind."

By the banks of the stream bloomed the wild thyme, with its tiny purple flowers, and the silver weed, prized by country girls as a remedy for sun-burning, and valued also by one who thus chanted its praise:

"And silver weed, with yellow flowers,
Half hidden by the leaf of gray,
Bloomed on the banks of that clear brook
Whose music cheered my lonely way."

Near the edges of the clumps of trees lay broad beds of brambles, their sweet rose-like blossoms scattered all over the pretty leaves and trailing branches; while on the higher and dryer banks shone the myriad golden blossoms of the "bonnie broom." It was the dazzling splendour of this shrub which most attracted the admiration of the young ladies. Carrie began to express her delight.

"Do you know, Florie, there's nothing at this season like the brilliant broom? Look how gorgeous those bushes are! I think the dark green and the strong yellow are such a beautiful combination—simply perfect, don't you think so?"

"I quite agree with you," said her companion. "And then I am prosaic enough to remember that it is a most useful plant to man."

"In what ways?" asked Carrie. "I confess I am very ignorant on these matters."

"In many," replied Florence, assuming a didactic tone for the time. "The small branches are used for tanning leather; the fibres are employed instead of flax to make a coarse cloth; the green buds are sometimes pickled and eaten as capers; the wood, when old and hard, is valuable to the cabinetmaker for veneering; and we all know its utility in sanitary domestic work. There now, that's good enough for an encyclopedia! Even here in Glenartan I have seen the broom applied to a very useful purpose, of which you would hardly dream."

"What was that? I should like to hear."

"One dry September," replied Florence, "the heather on my father's farm took fire, and, like the proverbial candle, was burning at both ends. The men laboured long and hard with spades and all sorts of instruments to beat down the flames, but all to no purpose; on went the conflagration furiously. At last Archie, my brother, suggested the use of green broom; and in a short time the men, armed with long heavy branches, were lashing the burning heather vigorously. Every stroke told, and in an hour or so the companies met from either end, and the fire was over."

"How curious! Just like Archie to hit upon such a plan. The only thing special I can remember about the broom is the old tradition regarding the Plantagenets."

"What is that?" asked Florence. "If I have heard, I have forgotten it."

"Well, the story is this: It is said that a Prince of Anjou, having done something dreadfully wicked, inflicted penance on himself by lashing his own poor body with broom. You know the French name of the plant is *legnet*; so he was nicknamed 'Plantagenet,' and in due time the name was brought to England, when the Norman succession to the crown failed."

"There now, you fairly beat me in history, as usual. That was a study I never cared for, even when I got up whole pages by rote. But suppose I try you now—just for a bit of loving rivalry—in another line. Do you remember Wordsworth's lines about the broom?"

"No, I do not," said Miss Craig. "But I love to hear you repeating poetry, Florie. There is music in your voice like the carol of a bird. I'm listening."

"Tut, you almost provoke me to be silent," said Florence sharply, "but here they are—"

"On me such bonny summer showers,
That I am covered o'er with flowers;
And when the frost is in the sky,
My branches are so fresh and gay,

That you might look at me and say,
That plant can never die.
The butterfly, all green and gold
To me hath often flown,
Here in my blossoms to behold
Wings lovely as his own."

"Very pretty verses," said Carrie, "with just a tinge in them of the Lake school, as one might expect. Do you know, my memory is opening up. I have heard or read somewhere that the famous Linnaeus was a great admirer of the broom."

"Indeed, I was not aware of that," said Florence.

"Yes," continued the other, "and on one occasion—I think it must have been the first on which he had seen the plant in all its glory—he sprang out of his carriage to feast his eyes on its splendour."

"Well, Carrie dear," said Florence quietly, "let us leave the broom just now. Since we are alone here, and no one can overhear us, I wish to speak to you on a very different subject."

"Well, dear, say on. I am ready to hear, even though I have, for the last few minutes, been watching that splendid trout. See how slowly and majestically he winds about in the bottom of the pool there."

The theme which Florence Graham introduced to the notice of her friend was the public profession of religion. It would be impossible, within anything like reasonable limits, to do justice to the loving and animated conversation which ensued. We can only state its substance. Florence told her companion that, for several years, she had been thinking of making an open profession of Christ's name, by becoming a member of the Christian Church, and partaking of the Lord's supper. Many things had hindered her from taking this step hitherto: her own doubts and fears; the strong prejudice against young communicants prevailing in the North; the general drift of the preaching she had been hearing for years past (though not from Mr. Morrison); the solemn responsibility of the step itself, and the lofty estimate she had always entertained of the holy ordinance of the Supper. Now, however, she told Carrie she could hold back no longer. She must obey her Lord's dying command, "This do in remembrance of Me," unless some obstacle were put in her way. She had mentioned all this for the purpose of asking if her friend would not think of joining her in the step she proposed to take. To Carrie there seemed many difficulties in the way. In addition to those already mentioned by Florence as affecting her case, Miss Craig had others arising out of her own life and experience, chief of which was this, that she felt herself to be as yet no more than a "babe in Christ." Most of the objections raised by her friend, Florence Graham endeavoured quietly but strenuously to remove; and in the end they agreed to see Mr. Morrison, and put themselves under his teaching and guidance. In order to win Carrie's consent to this arrangement, Florence had specially pressed on her attention the words in Romans x. 9, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that Christ hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." From that passage she argued that genuine faith should ever be conjoined with hearty confession, and that the latter was a duty no less than the former. Time fled as they took "sweet counsel" together. Long loops of gray cloud, creeping upward from the West, had obscured the sun; the shadows on the hillside had darkened into deeper blue; and the bees had flown home laden with their yellow harvest, ere the two young ladies, startled by a messenger from the house, returned to Altbreac.

When, a few days later, Mr. Morrison came to see them, he informed them that Ellen McKay intended also to seek admission to the fellowship of the Church. In due course a little class composed of these three was formed at Altbreac. The minister gave them instruction, week by week, in the nature of the ordinance, and the duties connected with it; and they were ultimately, on the high recommendation of Mr. Morrison, received into Christian fellowship, and invited in the name of the Master to sit down, when the season should arrive, at the table of the Lord. Their kind instructor compared the young ladies, Florence, Carrie and Ellen, to the three Christian graces, Faith, Hope and Charity; though when like Paris asked to award the palm, or like Paul to say which was "the greatest," he respectfully declined to pronounce a judgment.

At a sacramental season in the Highlands there are religious services, not only on the Sabbath, but also on the Thursday, Friday and Saturday preceding, and on the Monday following. We shall not attempt a general or detailed description of all these "diets of worship," but shall content ourselves with a brief record of the various services as they came under the immediate observation of the three young ladies, to whom it was their first communion.

As usual in the North, the congregation was divided into two portions on all the sacramental days, excepting Friday; those worshipping in the Gaelic language meeting, like the pious women at Philippi, by the "river side" and under the open sky, while the scanty number who could understand nothing but English met in the church. All the arrangements were, of course, under the immediate control of Mr. Morrison, who was present, sometimes at the Gaelic, sometimes at the English service. Brother ministers from various and even distant parts of the country conducted public worship, and preached to the audiences assembled without and within; while great crowds came over sea and land from all the parishes round for a distance of twenty miles, to be partakers in the solemnities. Little groups of two and three travelled even from other countries like Sutherland and Caithness to witness, if not to participate in, the holy exercises.

On the Thursday, commonly known as the "Fast Day" (a season specially set apart for humiliation and prayer), the three young ladies entered church together, and sat side by side in Mr. Craig's pew. Carrie had invited the others to join her there, because they should then feel their sympathy closer, and she wished the support and solace of knowing that they were near. In the forenoon, Mr. McDonald, of Giendyne, preached from the words, Romans viii. 1,

"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus," a clear, practical discourse. There was no interval between the diets of worship. While a psalm was being sung, Mr. McDonald left the pulpit, which was immediately occupied by Mr. Ross, of Auchensallach, who chose as his text, Hosea xiii. 9, "O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help." His matter was excellent, but it was marred by a dull and drawing delivery. Before parting that evening it was arranged by the ladies that they should attend the Gaelic service in the church the next day, and hear "the men." Neither Florence Graham nor Carrie Craig had ever been present on such an occasion, nor were they likely to understand a word; yet they felt, not an impertinent or a frivolous, but a respectful curiosity, to witness the service, and Ellen McKay promised to convey to them afterward, as best she could, the substance of what was said.

Early on the Friday forenoon, young Miss Craig and the Grahams drove down the glen, and met Ellen McKay at the church door. It may be well here to offer a brief explanation regarding this "day of the men," since it is a feature of public religious life, characteristic of, and peculiar to, the Highlands of Scotland. "The men," were so styled, as one has pithily remarked, "not because they were not women, but because they were not ministers." They were Christian "men," in almost all cases elders, eminent for their personal piety, eminent for their deep acquaintance with the Word of God and divine truth generally, and eminent, at least most of them, for the gift of ready utterance and aptitude to teach. They came to occupy a peculiar and distinctive place, either in very large parishes where it was necessary to hold religious meetings ten, fifteen or even twenty miles from the regular place of worship or in districts where the ministers were at least cold toward evangelical religion, and where godly people were glad to rally around an able and pious Christian layman. It is not wonderful that in some cases their heads were turned, and they became thorns in the sides of the ministers; nor is it wonderful that some of them were not all they should have been—that is true of every order and rank of men. It is easy to sneer at the inconsistency and arrogance displayed by some among them; it is more difficult to imitate the deep personal godliness, and the active devotedness to the cause of Christ, which distinguished many of them. This, however, must be said, that they lived and laboured—the best of them—in darker days than ours; and it is at least open to question, whether their peculiar place and functions are any longer needful to the Church of Christ. The Friday sacramental occasions were known as "the day of the men," because on it they were called, in public conference, to discuss some point called the "Question," bearing on the evidences of personal religion. It was not in reality, though in appearance, an open conference. The ministers who presided knew the leading "men" of all the country, and only those who were fully accredited in their own congregations or districts were invited or allowed to take part. The service was specially intended to be useful to those who were engaged in the exercise of self-examination before participating in the Lord's supper.

On the Friday of which we have spoken, an immense audience assembled in the Free Church, which was filled to overflowing. At the opening of the services, Mr. Morrison himself occupied the pulpit. He "gave out" the first four verses of Psalm cxxxix to be sung. The precentor, who was the village schoolmaster, chose the tune "French," though it is more than doubtful whether two at least of the ladies recognized its familiar notes in their Gaelic dress. He led the congregation in singing the first line (we quote the English version):

"O Lord, Thou hast me searched and known,"

but as yet only a few voices ventured to join in the praise. He then read over the second line,

"Thou know'st my sitting down,"

deeply intoning the words in a clear and audible voice. This second line was then sung, and this time the whole congregation gradually lent their aid to swell the wondrous melody. Each of the remaining "seven lines" was treated in a similar manner, first read by the precentor and then sung under his leadership by the "class of the people." The practice of "reading the lines," as it is called, originated in the fact that many worshippers in the Highlands were unable to read either their own or any other language. In that case it served the useful purpose of enabling all to join in the praises of the sanctuary. The custom has been tenaciously adhered to in the Gaelic services, and when attempts have been made in certain parts of the country to secure its abandonment, serious disruption in congregations has in some instances been the consequence. The actual singing of the psalms in Glenartan, as elsewhere in the Highlands, was low, sweet and sad, the cadences sinking and swelling with peculiar solemnity. Many of the syllables were strangely prolonged by slurs, which, after a rippling course, returned again to the note from which they sprang. No devout mind could fail to be impressed with the tender pathos of these waves of song, as they rose and fell, now strong and now faint, like the weary sighs of the wind amid the mountains.

(To be continued.)

FINDING PHARAOH.

In the May *Century* are two profusely illustrated articles under the above caption describing the discovery of Pharaoh's tomb, and picturing its contents. From the first article by Mr. Wilson, the photographer, we quote this account of the way in which the tomb was located: In a line of tombs beyond the Ramesseum lived four sturdy Arabs named Abd-el-Rasoul. They supplied guides and donkeys to tourists who desired to visit the ruins of Thebes, and sold them genuine and spurious antiquities. When they found a mummy, it being forbidden by law to sell it, the head and hands and feet were wrenched off and sold on the sly, while the torso was kicked about the ruined temples until the