

ward still faster, and her foot was already on the overhanging bank, when Alick drew her forcibly back.

"Are you mad, Annie," he cried, to try the stepping-stones in such a spot? (flood) And he threw his strong arm round her.

"Let me go, Alick! I must get home to Marri," she said, struggling to get free; and she might have succeeded in doing so, for she was nearly his equal in physical strength, had not a vivid flash lighted up the scene at the moment, and showed her the peril which awaited her. The generally calm Nathan Water was swelling like a cauldron, and careering down to the Clyde with uncontrollable forces. As if a thick curtain had been withdrawn by the flash, she saw sticks and stones whirled past her by the raging and boiling waters. She saw the banks giving way before her eyes, and the trees that grew on them nodding to their fall. It was a glorious but terrific picture, as the whole bend of the river illuminated by that fearful light shone out for one single instant, then disappeared in the darkness. But short as that glance had been, it had shown her that had not Alick pulled her back, she must have been engulfed in the waters, and no mortal power could have brought her to shore alive. The imminence of the danger from which she had been saved overcame her with a sudden weakness; she trembled; her struggle ceased, her head drooped on Alick's shoulder, and she burst into tears.

"Annie," he said soothingly, "dinna greet, for you see I couldna let you drown yourself afore my een, and no' try to save you;" and the stalwart arms that had lately so sturdily opposed her will, now folded her in a close embrace.

"Oh, Alick," she replied, with her usual simple truthfulness, "it's no' that gars me greet but the thought that my willfulness might hae cost your life as well as my ain."

He stooped down and pressed a first kiss on the brow that still rested on his shoulder.

"Annie, my own Annie!" he whispered; "what would life be to me wantin' you?"

"Dinna say that, Alick," she said, hurriedly, and rousing herself from the momentary yielding to her softer feelings; "this is neither a time nor a place to think of such things. I maun gang hame to Marri."

It was impossible for Annie after that Sabbath adventure to conceal either from herself or Alick that they loved each other dearly; but no persuasions could induce her to consent to be his wife. In vain he represented that he should consider Marri's presence in his household as a blessing, and that he had been so long accustomed to her mother's ways that he should find no difficulty in accommodating himself to them.

"It was true that Mrs. Livingstone was a little afraid of him, but that was so much the letter, as it evidently kept her in check."

Annie shook her head.

"No' knew better what her mother really was, and to what she would expose them both; and she loved Alick too dearly to inflict such anxiety and annoyance upon him."

"Then could she not remain in her present home and have a lassie to wait on her?" Alick asked. He was well to do in the world; he could easily afford the expense, and that would make all straight.

But Annie was firm in resisting every temptation. On that same night when Alick had saved her life, she had knelt down by Marri's bed, and in her presence had vowed a vow to the Lord, that nothing should ever persuade her to yield to him in this matter. And she would not, she could not, be a covetous.

"Well, well, Annie," Alick said with a faint smile; "a willful wife maun hae her way. He that will to Couper maun do Couper; but if Annie Livingstone is no' to be my wife, do'it tak' me if any other shall hae me." And he marched out of the cottage.

The tears sprang to Annie's eyes—they came there very often now—but she wiped them away, and said—

"Ay, ay, he thinks so the now; but men canna wait as women do, hoping and hoping when the heart is sick and the spirit faint. He will marry some day; and it'll be for his happiness, I will be thankful."

Still it was very hard for her to be thankful, when, year by year, she saw him courted by the bonniest lasses of Clydesdale; or learned that Alick Caldwell had been the blithest singer at the Hogmenny (last night of the year) ball at Blunkbonnie, or that every one suspected that the true valentine Ellen Lauder got on St. Valentine's day came from "bonnie Alick." At length the report of his engagement to Ellen became so prevalent, that even Marri believed it, and one fine day, when returning from Lanark, where she had been to carry home her "sewing work," Annie herself met Alick and Ellen walking together in the fir-wood. A pang went through her heart at this confirmation of all she had heard, and she was startled to find from it how little belief she had hitherto had in the truth of the story. Yet it was only natural and right that it should be true. It was now three years since she had refused Alick, and very few men would have waited for her so long.

Thus thinking, she was a little surprised to see him come to the cottage as usual, and bring with him Marri's nossgay, and some numbers of a periodical, with which he had supplied her regularly since its commencement. But though he had not forgotten to be kind to Marri, Annie fancied that he looked less cheerful than he generally did; and, with the view of putting him at ease, she took courage to congratulate him on his marriage to Ellen, and to wish him every happiness.

He got up, and advancing straight to the place where she stood, he took her two hands in his, and said seriously—

"Annie, do you mean what you say? Do you really believe that I love, or, rather, that I mean to marry Ellen, while you are still Annie Livingstone?"

The color came and went in Annie's cheek, and her eyes fell under his steady glance; but she answered faintly—

"I did mean it, Alick; and I think you would only do what is right and prudent if you married her."

"And you, Marri," he said, turning to the poor cripple. "What do you think?"

"That a man is the better of a wife, she said quietly, "and that as you will never get Annie, you must just as well take Ellen."

Alick looked distressed, and muttered—

"For if I forsake me, Marri, I'll be us't up wi' Jean."

That is what the mild sing of the Ewebuchs says. I ken that," he added; "but it is not my doctrine, Marri. I consider marriage in a higher and nobler light; and if Annie refused me, I must then rest as I am. So now you have my thoughts on the matter, and you must never again insult me by believing the nonsense of the Nathan Foot chatteringers."

And thus things went on, month after month, and year after year; and the only comfort poor Annie had in her life of trial was the conviction that she was doing her duty. As age advanced on daft Jeanie, she became more unmanageable; and all the

exertions her daughter could make were scarcely sufficient to keep her eccentricities within bounds, and to support her and Marri. But Annie contrived it somehow; and not even Alick guessed the bitter struggles, the personal sacrifices, the weariness and the starvation she endured to keep her poor mother from the parish, and to provide for Marri the little luxuries which in her position were actual necessities.

The Aik, however, came at length, and when it was least expected. "Daft Jeanie" took a fever and died, and Annie's toils were comparatively light thenceforward; but in one particular it seemed as if the release had come too late, for Alick, weary of waiting as many years as Jacob served for Leah, had quitted Nathan-Foot a few months previously. Some said he had gone to Edinburgh, some said to London; but, at all events, he had disappeared entirely from the neighborhood; and in those days of heavy postage, so little intercourse was kept up between distant friends, that even his brother at Blunkbonnie only wrote to him at long intervals. Thus it happened that nearly a whole year elapsed ere Alick learned that daft Jeanie was gone at last, and that the folk thought poor Annie had a good ridance of her; but nevertheless she looked marri'd and pale than she had ever done before.

The news caused Alick to hurry back to Nathan-Foot, and one beautiful spring afternoon he reached the home of his childhood. He had walked from Lanark; and, somewhat overcome by heat and fatigue, he paused under the shadow of the fir-wood to collect his thoughts ere he re-entered Annie's cottage. He looked down on the Clyde and its rolling waters, on the green grass fields, on the apple orchards, white with blossom; and as he recalled the many striking incidents which connected Annie with these familiar objects he pictured how she would greet him now. Would not her eyes light up, as they used to do long ago, when he chanced to come on her suddenly? her cheeks brighten, and her lips smile upon him? and would she not speak to him as she had spoken on that eventful night, in that sweet, touching, tentative voice that still rung in his ear? The very thought of it made his heart bound within his breast, and caused him to quicken his pace as he took the path leading to the cottage. To his surprise he found several groups of people gathered round the door; and there was something in their strange way of looking at him, as he advanced, that sent a chill through his veins he scarce knew why.

"How is Annie?" he asked abruptly of an acquaintance who stood in the doorway.

"Gang in yourself, and see?" was the enigmatical answer; "her troubles are past to my thinking."

What did the man mean? Alick had not the courage to ask the question in words; but, on entering the kitchen, he turned white and faint, as the mourning groups standing round seemed to give a gradual confirmation to his fears.

"Annie, Annie!" he exclaimed, as he darted forward toward the inner room, "I maun see my Annie at co' again."

He roughly thrust aside those who strove to prevent his entrance into the chamber where the corpse lay.

"She's there, Alick," they whispered, "but you maun gang in, you maun gang in."

Alick made no answer; but pushed open the half-closed door. On the rough lichen-table stood the open coffin; men and women were gathered around it; and the