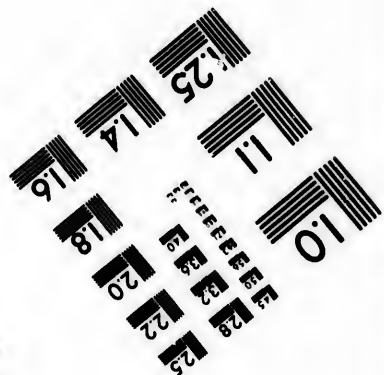
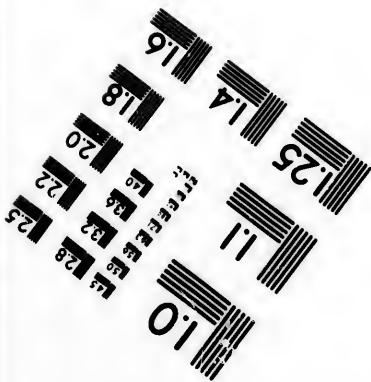
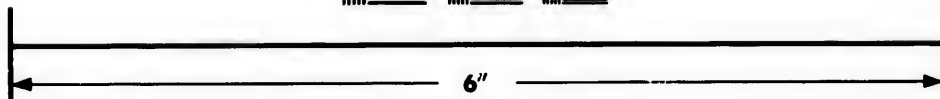
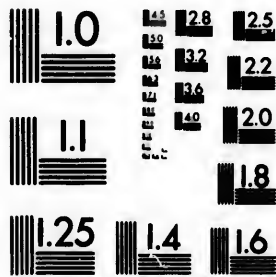


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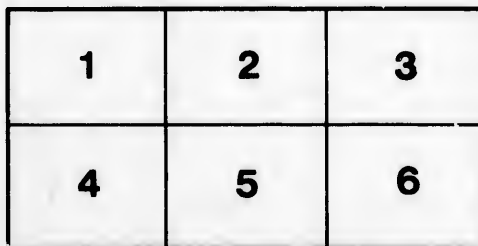
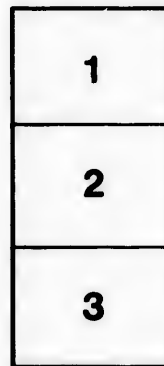
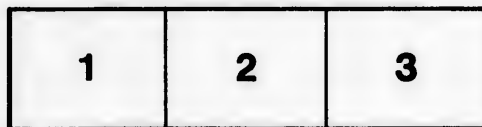
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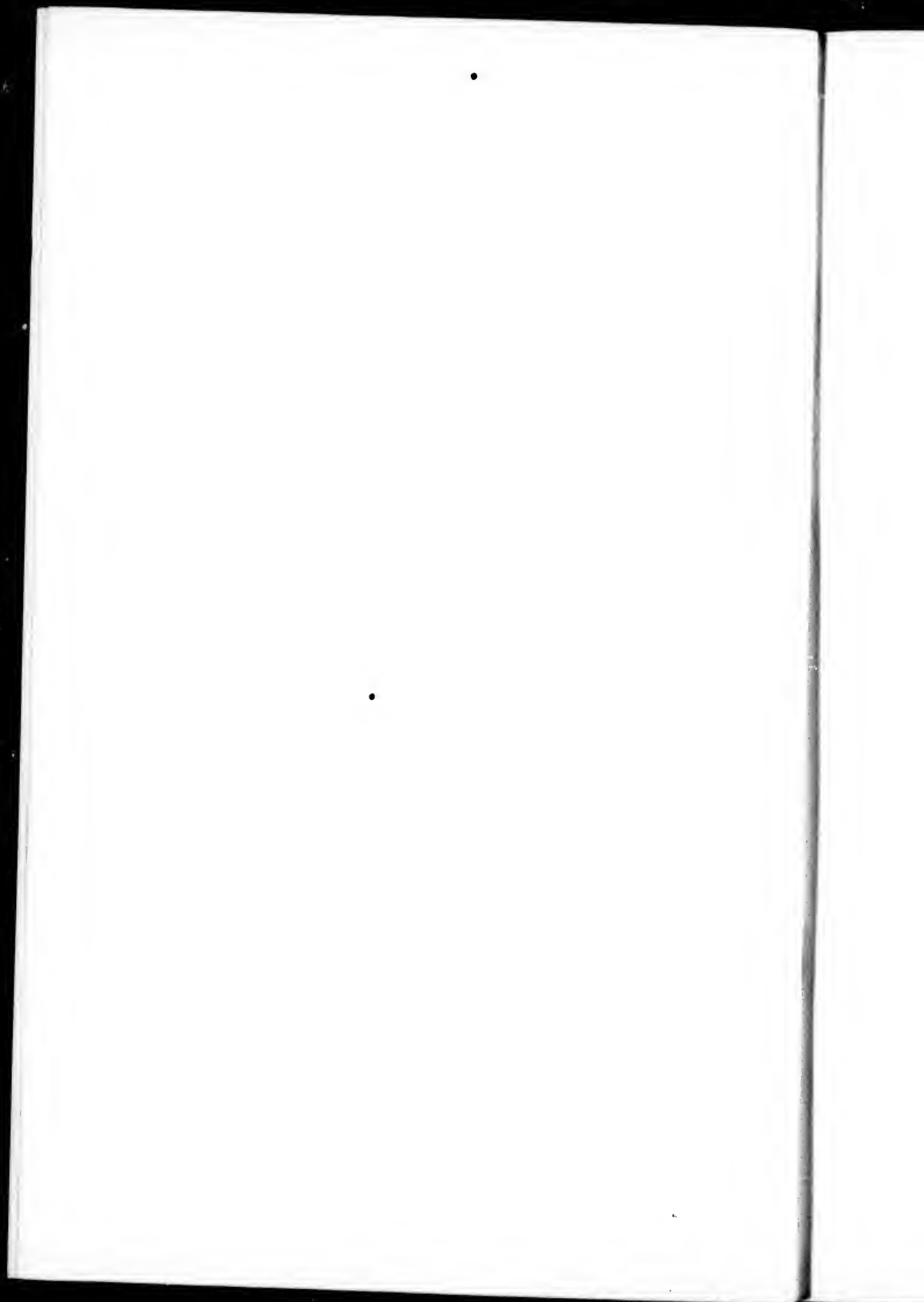
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SHADOWED LIVES.



FRONTISPIECE. — Page 18.

SHADOWED LIVES

BY

ANNIE S. SWAN

AUTHOR OF

"ALDERSYDE," "CARLOWRIE," "GATES OF EDEN," ETC.

"Into each life some rain must fall."

—*Longfellow.*

New Edition.

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1889

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SWAN, A. S.

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SHADOWED LIVES.



CHAPTER I.

GOSSIP.

A LITTLE village which looked a very haven of peace and rest. A straggling street of picturesque irregularly built houses, with a burn wimpling past the doors, on its way to the glen beyond. Sheltering hills, heather clad and crowned by sturdy firs on one side, and on the other miles and miles of fertile plain smiling with many a daisied meadow and yellow corn field. A place so far removed from the busy world that one would think its inhabitants secure from its care and strife. Not so. There were care and worldly-mindedness in their hearts, and an insatiable love of gossip. There was no railway station in Strathlinn, but the market town of D——, eight miles distant, was accessible by coach thrice a week. Wednesdays and Saturdays were days of unusual stir in the sleepy little village. The coach arrived from D—— at mid-day, and woe betide the stranger whom business or pleasure constrained to visit The Linn. No stone was left unturned to discover who he was and whence he came, and his antecedents and projects were dissected with scientific minuteness. The Linn Arms (high sounding title for so tiny an hostelry) was the rendezvous for the gossips,

for its buxom landlady had a weakness for tattling, and her sitting room was the most comfortable in the village. She was a widow, with five rosy rollicking children, and a heart big enough for as many more. A true friend in sickness and in health, in joy or in sorrow, was Mrs. Scott. Trouble seemed to melt away beneath the cheery smile on her kindly face. There was a lack of good society about The Linn; it was not a place to which prosperous business men would retire to pass the evening of their days, nor was it sought after by maiden ladies of independent means, though the exquisite beauty of the surrounding scenery might have tempted many to make it their residence, in spite of the drawbacks.

The minister and the doctor composed the aristocracy, and the latter could scarcely be included, for he dwelt fully two miles distant. He was a young man, lately come to The Linn, and had purchased from the Laird of Glentarne the small property of Cluny. Rumours were afloat that a fair young wife was in the clever doctor's head when he made his purchase. It may have been so. Hamilton of Glentarne was lord of the manor. Far and near the smiling homesteads owned his sway. And the old home of the Hamiltons was as fair an heritage as any man could desire. The grey old castle, with its weather-beaten towers and turrets stood upon a richly wooded slope overlooking The Linn, and commanding a magnificent view of the plain beyond. At the time of which I write the Laird of Glentarne was still a minor, and the only child of his widowed mother. They dwelt alone at the old castle, and it was whispered that it was not so happy a home for her since the old laird died, and that her son inherited all the vices of his race without the virtues. In time it may be ours to prove the truth of these whisperings. A still sultry summer day.

A cloudless sky above, and a brooding sunshine over all. The faint rustle of leaves in the summer woods, and the dreamy chirping of sleepy birds. No sound stirring the quiet in the village street save the hum of the bees, and the occasional clang of the hammer the blacksmith wielded in his mighty hand. In the wide porch of the Linn Arms stood the buxom landlady, gazing up the street, with one plump hand shading her eyes from the sun. She wore a light calico dress, and a lace cap adorned with huge red roses. She had discarded the badges of her widowhood shortly after her bereavement, a proceeding much commented on by the neighbours, though not one of them ventured to hint that she did not mourn her husband sincerely in her heart.

The forge was directly opposite the inn, and the blacksmith's pretty cottage adjoined. It was there Mrs. Scott's interest centred. She was privately wondering whether the smith's wife was too busy to feel inclined for a friendly chat. As if divining her wish her neighbour at that moment threw open the cottage door, and sauntered down to the garden gate. She was an angular woman, and a bony, with an eagle eye and a thin hard face. She wore a brown wincey dress, and a blue neckerchief crossed upon her bosom. Her rough hair was brushed tightly back from her brow, and fastened in a hard knot behind. An unpleasant woman to look at at any time, and especially unpleasant on a bright summer day, when everything else was beautiful.

"Fine day, Nancy," sounded Mrs. Scott's cheery voice through the stillness. "Craps should ripen the day."

"Maybe," retorted Mrs. Irvine, abruptly and snappishly. "It's a hantle warmer than need be, I'm thinkin'."

"Hoo's a' wi' ye the day," inquired her neighbour, not noticing the cross-grained speech. "Was that Jock I saw come hame the day."

"Ay, 'twas Jock, ye may be sure; bad ha'pennies aye turn up," returned Nancy, opening the gate and crossing the road. "Maister Bruce paid him aff yestreen for idleset, an' he just cam hame as cool as ye like. He disna care a bawbee, he says; he disna want tae be a grocer."

"What does his faither say?" enquired Mrs. Scott, sympathetically.

"His faither!" echoes Nancy, scornfully. "Ye ken brawly what Sandy Irvine is, Jean, a saft, daidlin' crater, wi' no a thocht in his heid but eat, an' sleep, an' smoke that consoondit pipe. If it wasna for me haudin' at him there wadna be muckle wark dune ower by. Men folk's naething but heart breaks."

Why Mrs. Irvine had ever entered the bands matrimonial, or how Sandy had ever screwed up courage to ask her, remain to this day inscrutable mysteries.

"Jist some men," corrected the widow, remembering her own husband. "They're no a' bad."

Nancy Irvine shook her head.

"An' as for bairns," she said, grimly, "they're beyond speakin' o'. I've jist ane, an' he's a hantle mair botner than he's worth. I dinna ken hoo ye manage five."

"They're guid bairns," said the widow, with motherly pride. "Geordie's jist his faither ower again."

At that moment a shadow fell across the sunlit path, and a slight graceful girl passed them, with a smile and a cordial good afternoon. Her face was one of the sweetest eyes could rest on, not because of its beauty, but because Heaven's own sunshine shone

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upon it. Even Nancy Irvine's grim mouth relaxed with momentary softness, for the minister's only child was dear to every one of his people.

"It's gaun tae be sune, I hear," whispered Mrs. Scott eagerly. "Doctor Forbes is gettin' a heap o' braw furniter hame tae Cluny, an' my guid-brither's gotten an order for some o' Miss Haldane's things. It'll be a sair day for the minister when she gets mairret, though she's no gaun faur awa."

"Nae doot," admitted Mrs. Irvine. "Deed, if she only kent it, she's better the noo than ever she'll be. Lassies are no wise mairryin' an' fleein' intae a peck o' troubles."

"I'm thinkin' the wund'll no get leave tae blaw on the Doctor's wife," said Mrs. Scott. "An' they'll be a braw couple, a perfect sicht for sair een."

"She'll be gaun up tae the schule tae tea wi' Miss Kenyon the noo," said Nancy Irvine. "The twa's never pairtet. I dinna like that Miss Kenyon, she's ower quiet an' sleekit."

"Nancy!" exclaimed Mrs. Scott, indignantly, "ye're the first that ever said an ill word aboot her. My certy, if some folk heard ye ye wadna be richt. There's no her better in a' The Linn, nor oot o'd aither."

"Humph," said Mrs. Irvine, "I'm no sayin' — Od there's that Jock awa intae the smiddy tae pit his faither aff his wark," and Nancy started off like an arrow. Mrs. Scott watched the lank awkward looking lad slouching into the forge, and when the next moment she saw his mother administer a smart slap on the side of his cheek, and heard her shrill tongue calling him for laziness, she retired into the house, her sides shaking with silent laughter.



CHAPTER II.

FORESHADOWINGS.

THE School stood at the further end of the village. A long low white-washed building (it was before the advent of the School Board), its wide doorway sheltered by two giant elms, towering above the low wall of the school-house garden. That wall could not have been intended for a barricade against intruders, for the school children scaled it unmolested, and made satisfactory acquaintance with the master's fruit trees under his very eyes. It is recorded that he has been known to shake the trees himself and help them to fill pockets and aprons. Surely that is a pleasant record, and one which some of us would do well to imitate.

On that July afternoon the door and windows of the school-house were flung wide open, and though the hum of voices sounded pleasantly enough outside, when combined with the close hot air within, it became infinitely trying. The master was giving them the Bible lesson which invariably closed the labours of the day, and once or twice his hand stole wearily across his brow as he gently tried to gain silence and an attentive hearing. He was not a young man, neither could he be called old, though his thin hair was plentifully streaked with grey. His forehead was high and broad, and deep thoughtful eyes looked out from beneath strongly marked brows. The mouth was as tender and mobile as a woman's. It was a fine

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face, one which men and women instinctively trusted, and on which little children loved to look. Christopher Kenyon was a man of much learning, of simple yet refined tastes, of childlike faith in the God above him, and a heart full of love and kindness to every living creature—one of these rare unselfish natures, which we may encounter once in a life time, not oftener. He was the idol of his scholars, though with the thoughtlessness of youth they did not scruple sorely to try his patience. Punctually at four (the school master was methodical in his habits), he gave the signal to disperse. In a moment the orderly room was a scene of wild confusion. Overturning desks and forms, knocking down books and slates without pausing to pick them up again, the children rushed pell mell into the still sunshine.

In two minutes the master was alone, and he stood in one of the windows watching with a dreamy smile, the light-hearted band trooping out of the playground. One figure lingered in the doorway, evidently longing, yet fearing to go back and talk to the master. It was a girl's figure clad in a loose pinafore and a short dress, beneath which peeped out a bare foot whose perfect symmetry a queen might have envied. She could not be more than fourteen, but already face and figure gave promise of a beauty which in womanhood would be marvellous. The features were delicately cut, the eyes were violet and shaded by exquisite lashes; while the small shapely head wore a crown of golden hair, loosely confined in a blue ribbon. When the master at length came to the door, she looked at him shyly as if her courage failed her.

"Well, Lizzie," he said, bending his deep kindly eyes upon her face, "Is there anything I can do for you?"

She raised her eyes to the grave thoughtful face, and said in a voice, which the broad guttural Scotch could

not make unmusical, "Please sir, I'm vext I didna dae what ye telt me the day, I'll hae my lessons perfect the morn," and before he could answer, she sped from him with step as light and fleet as a gazelle's. He remembered then that she had disobeyed him early in the day, and well pleased with the oddly expressed repentance, he locked the door, and went home to relate the little episode to his sister. Outside the playground, a tall handsome lad patiently awaited the penitent's coming; and he turned to meet her with a question on his lips, "I'm gaun doon the glen tae fish. Lizzie, are ye comin'?" The girl shook her head. "Ye needna waited for me, Jamie Duncan," she said pettishly, "I'm gaun straicht hame." A slight shade of disappointment crossed the lad's fine open face. "Come on, Liz," he said coaxingly. "Uncle Peter cam frae Embro' last nicht and brocht me a bonnie new rod. It'll catch a big troot every time ye drap in the line."

Lizzie looked incredulous.

"Whaur is't?"

"I left it i' the hoose till I saw whether ye wad come or no. We'll gang up past Lea Rig and get it."

"Weel, if ye'll carry my bag and let me fish maist o' the time," she stipulated, "I'll gang for a wee while."

"Come on then," said Jamie readily, never pausing to consider the extreme selfishness of her arrangements, and the two strolled leisurely down the village, and into the by-path leading to the glen.

"Walk slow, Liz, and I'll gang up tae the hoose for the rod and mak' up on ye afore ye get tae the brig."

Lizzie nodded, and swinging her hat over her arm, went on. When he joined her again she found her tongue in admiration of the rod, and soon the two stood together upon the old bridge, Lizzie receiving her first lesson in the art of angling. It was a pretty

picture. The girl in her picturesque dress, her face flushed with momentary excitement, and her eyes dancing with pleasure, anxiously watching the line dipping into the sparkling water, and the boy leaning against the moss grown-parapet, delighted with his companion's manifest enjoyment of his favourite amusement. In Jamie Duncan's nature also, there was something of the unselfishness which characterized the schoolmaster. In after years he had sore need of it all. The pair did not dream of curious eyes watching them scarcely a hundred yards away. Under a great beech tree almost hidden by its spreading boughs, two gentlemen were lounging, and for a time conversation had been at a discount. The younger of the two was only a youth, small of stature, and slightly built, and his sallow face was stamped with the weak indecision which had been the curse of the Hamiltons from the beginning. His eyes were languidly closed, and even in its repose, the face was not pleasant to look upon. The features were passable, but the expression was absolutely repellent. Cold, sneering and selfish were the long thin lips, and they were a true index of the heart within. His companion looked at least ten years his senior, and in personal appearance at least was infinitely his superior. His figure was tall and well proportioned, and the face undeniably handsome, yet in it also there was a subtle something, which repelled a close observer.

In Ralph Mortimer's face there was no trace of weak indecision, for there was none in the soul within.

"I say, Jasper," he said, after watching the picture on the bridge for a minute or two in silence. "Look there! a regular landscape. Who is the girl? A perfect beauty, by Jove!"

Jasper Hamilton indolently raised himself on one arm, and glanced in the direction indicated.

"Oh, that's Falconer's girl, the tenant of the Home Farm. You know him."

"Yes, I believe I've seen the fellow," returned Ralph. "And who is her cavalier. Quite interesting they look, 'pon honour."

"Duncan is his name," returned Jasper Hamilton, resuming his old position; "farmer's son up at Lea Rig." "I think I hear Maud's rapture if she could see that. She would think her a regular shepherdess. By Jove, what a face! and the figure will be as perfect in a year or two."

"If you like, since you speak of your sister, Ralph," said his companion, "I'll get my mother to ask her down while you are here."

Ralph Mortimer listened with a sneer on his lips.

"Ask Maud here," he repeated, "your lady mother would not do that even for you, my dear fellow, she only tolerates me because I'm your shadow whom you can't get rid of, but Maud —."

"I can ask who I will to Glentarne," interrupted Sir Jasper haughtily. "My mother would be courteous to any of my guests." "Yes, Lady Hamilton never fails in courtesy," admitted Mortimer, the scorn deepening in his face, "but she can and does make your guests deuced uncomfortable sometimes when they don't happen to please her fastidious taste. You are not altogether your own master, Jasper, as long as the old lady is to the fore."

The covert sneer brought the hot blood to Jasper's sallow cheek, but he did not resent the disrespectful allusion to his mother.

"The old lady knows whether or not I am my own master, I fancy," returned he with a half laugh. "She has discovered that I decline to remain tied to the maternal apron string, much as she would like it."

Ah well, indeed, that the all-patient, loving mother

did not hear the cruel words, she had borne much already.

"Let us disturb the embryo lovers," suggested Mortimer, changing the theme. "I want to hear the houri speak as well as get a better look at her. Come on."

"No need to get up," returned the other lazily, "I'll bring her. Lizzie," he shouted, "come here. I want you."

The girl started at the unexpected summons, and turned her surprised eyes to the spot where they lay; while the indignant blood surged to Jamie Duncan's face at the imperious voice.

"Dinna look round, Lizzie," he whispered. "It's the laird and his friend; but even the laird has nae business tae speak tae you like that. Dinna gang."

Lizzie hesitated between awe of the laird and her reluctance to leave her companion.

"Dinna gang, Lizzie," repeated he earnestly. "If they want ye, let them rise."

She turned her head and dropped the line into the water again, trembling at her own temerity in daring to disobey a personage so important as Sir Jasper.

"You don't seem to have much influence there," laughed Mortimer, enjoying his friend's defeat, and noting the angry light flashing in his eyes. "Since the mountain wont come to Mahomet, he must go to the mountain I suppose. Come on."

They both rose, and leisurely crossed the velvety turf to the water's edge.

Mortimer went close to Lizzie, and bending his bold eyes upon her fair downcast face, uttered a few words of praise, plain enough even to her unaccustomed ears. She was woman enough already to feel pleased by the notice of such a great gentleman as the laird's friend. But Jamie Duncan's soul chafed

alike at the words and the manner in which they were spoken.

"Come awa hame, Lizzie," he said, touching his cap to Sir Jasper. "We've bidden ower lang already."

He took the dripping rod from Lizzie's hand, and waited for her to accompany him.

"You can go, Duncan," said the laird imperiously; "Lizzie's way is ours. We can see her safely home."

He did not dare to disobey; yet he lingered a moment hoping the girl would prefer to go with him.

But she turned away with the gentlemen without so much as answering his parting greeting. Hurt and angry he shouldered his rod and set off home, little dreaming that the first act of the tragedy of Lizzie Falconer's life and his had been played that summer afternoon.



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CHAPTER III.

THE KENVONS.

IT was five years since Christopher Kenyon and his sister came to The Linn. Beyond the fact that they were orphans and of English birth, the gossips knew nothing of their antecedents. The application for the vacant mastership had been sent in the usual form, accompanied by exceptionally high testimonials. It bore the London post mark, and in due time the master arrived, bringing with him the grave, quiet, sad-eyed girl whom he introduced as his sister Sara.

At first they were looked upon with suspicious eyes as unknown intruders, who must be tried before being received into full intercourse with the dwellers in The Linn. They lived in strict seclusion, seeking kindness or favour from none ; until their unobtrusive gentleness and kindness of heart won them the few friends they cared to possess. To them it was evident that the past had some terrible sorrow which still shadowed their lives. Though Sara Kenyon was invariably serene and cheerful, she seldom laughed, and there was a tinge of sadness in her rare smile, which made it infinitely sobering. The strong, tender, perfect love between the brother and sister was something wonderful ; hers was the stronger nature, and the schoolmaster was nothing without her.

On the evening of the fishing expedition they were together in the sitting-room. He was busy with the registers, but he paused every few minutes to listen

and respond to the cheerful voice which was the dearest on earth to him. No, I am wrong; there was another, but of her he dared not dream.

The window was open, and the evening breeze swayed the white curtains to and fro and played with a stray ringlet on Sara Kenyon's brow, as she sat within their shade sewing busily. I do not know that many people would have called Sara Kenyon beautiful, for her face lacked colouring and regularity of feature. Soft brown hair, which no brush would induce to lie smooth above the low white brow, sweet hazel eyes, fringed by long lashes, a straight nose, and a grave womanly mouth, with lips slightly drooping were her only beauties; but it was a face which once seen would linger in the mind like a pleasant memory. She looked five or six-and-twenty, perhaps more. It was difficult to define her age, for her figure was wonderfully girlish in its outline. Her dress was almost severe in its simplicity, and she wore no ornament but a small gold brooch, with a flashing stone in its centre. It was a diamond of rare purity and lustre.

"Kit," she said presently, peeping round the curtain, "when you are done we might go to the manse for a little while. Mary has not been here this week."

"Yes, Sara."

The schoolmaster was a man of few words, but the look which accompanied his answer told how gladly he would go anywhere with her. Miss Kenyon folded up her work, and laid it in the basket by her side, and, leaning her arm on the window sill, looked out into the flower-laden garden.

"Kit, in the autumn I mean to uproot all these useless stocks, and plant a bed of roses under the window. Don't you think it would be an improvement?"

"Just as you like, dear," replied the grave, gentle voice. "What you do is always right."

"Or you think so, Kit," she said with a slight smile. "I see Mr. Haldane and Mary, and I know they are coming here. Let me put away these things. The table is littered with them. You can finish these books to-morrow, can't you, dear?"

"They are done now," returned the schoolmaster, helping in his slow awkward way to clear the confusion. "How quickly and yet how well you can do everything, Sara. It is a marvel to see you."

Before she could reply their visitors came. With the freedom born of close intimacy Mary Haldane entered without knocking, and peeped round the sitting room door.

"May I come in, Miss Kenyon? Papa is here also. Are you busy?"

Miss Kenyon opened the door wide, and held out both her hands.

"Come in, child. I thought I had lost you," she said. "Mr. Haldane, what has kept Mary from us for a week?"

The minister laughed.

"Ask her. I don't know," he replied, taking a seat at the open window. "Mr. Kenyon, is not teaching absolute toil in weather like this?"

"I have never thought about it in that light, sir," returned the schoolmaster. "It is always a pleasure to me."

"I peeped in at you the other afternoon, Mr. Kenyon," said Mary, leaning her hand on his shoulder, "and when I saw your face I wished I was the child beside you. Won't you take me for a scholar?"

The schoolmaster looked up into the sweet face, and some of its sunshine stole to his own. Yet he turned from her very gently, lest she should see his great love shining in his eyes. For it was her he

loved with all the strength of his intense nature, faithfully, tenderly, but as we know hopelessly. *She* did not know, or she could not have treated him with such playful affection. Miss Kenyon did not know, or she would not have spoken so often to her brother about Miss Haldane's approaching marriage.

"I have brought a book I thought you would like to see, Mr. Kenyon," said the minister, turning to Christopher. "It bears upon the theory you and I discussed the other evening."

"Thank you, Mr. Haldane."

Mary touched Miss Kenyon's arm. "Come outside, Sara. I know papa wants to talk to Mr. Kenyon, and we will be in the way."

"I am going to show Mary the improvements I am planning in the garden, Mr. Haldane," said Sara. "You won't mind our leaving you for a little."

"You know, I fancy, how well your brother and I can entertain each other," returned the minister, with a smile. "Stay as long as you please, and give my little girl some good advice. I think she wants it."

Miss Kenyon nodded, and throwing a shawl about her shoulders, followed Mary to the garden.

"Sara," said the girl, drawing her arm within her own, while the light voice took a deeper tone, "I am going to be married in the beginning of September."

"So soon, my dear?" asked Miss Kenyon, in surprise. "Why, that is six weeks hence."

"Yes," returned Mary, "I did not think it would be till Christmas, but John has a friend who offers to take his patients for a fortnight, and, besides, I don't want to leave papa in winter. He wearies so much in the long evenings."

"But you will be away from him in winter, at any rate," said Miss Kenyon.

"He has promised to come and stay with us till we

are tired of him," she said, "and you can imagine when that will be. John persuaded him. O Sara, you don't know how good he is."

"How old are you, Mary?"

The abrupt question surprised her listener.

"Twenty-one next month."

"You are very young, child," she said gravely, and suddenly drawing her into the arbour they were passing, she placed both her hands on the girl's shoulders, and looked into her face, a strange pathos in her own. "My darling, I hope God will be good to you in your married life, and that your husband's love may never fail you. Though I shall never be blest as you are, my prayers for your happiness are none the less sincere."

"Sara!"

She would have uttered the questions on her lips, but something in that patient, sorrowful face, kept them back, but her eyes filled with sudden tears.

Miss Kenyon stooped and kissed her, the only time she had ever done it, and said in her quiet cheerful voice,

"Come, dear, we must go in or I am afraid Mr. Haldane will be out to look for us," so they went back to the house. Before many minutes had gone another visitor came to the school-house. Returning from a long ride, Dr. Forbes caught sight of a sweet face at the window, and springing from his horse he tied it to the gate, and came up the garden path.

"Won't you come in, Doctor Forbes," said Miss Kenyon, but the young man shook his head.

"Not to-night, thank you, Miss Kenyon," he said, leaning against the side of the window, "Where has Mary gone."

Miss Kenyon laughed. "Not very far. Do come in and look for her." It was easy to see that the

young doctor was a welcome visitor in the school-master's house. He was one of the friends Christopher Kenyon and his sister had made in The Linn.

"Where have you been, John," asked the minister. Vulcan looks as if he had ridden a good many miles to-day."

"Thirty or thereabouts I believe," returned he, with a glance at the noble animal at the gate. "I was at D—— in the afternoon, and had to return by Glentarne; Lady Hamilton is not well."

Mary peeped round the curtain, and met a tender glance from her lover's grey eyes.

"I saw Lady Hamilton out driving yesterday, John," she said, "and I thought she looked remarkably well."

"She will never be well till her mind is at ease," returned the Doctor gravely, "Jasper Hamilton is at the bottom of his mother's illness."

"Is his visitor gone," inquired the minister, "he is no favourite with Lady Hamilton."

"How could he be? Little as I have seen of Mr. Ralph Mortimer, I have formed my own opinion of him. He will be the ruin of that weak lad unless he breaks off his friendship with him."

What was it that brought the grey pallor to Sara Kenyon's face, and almost forced a cry from her lips. She moved away from the window, before they had time to note the change in her face, and sat down in the shadow, pressing her hand to her heart as if to still its throbbing pain. She dared not meet her brother's eyes, but in his face also there was an undefinable change.

"Lady Hamilton tells me Mr. Mortimer is to leave Glentarne to-morrow," continued the Doctor, not knowing how Sara Kenyon's ears were strained to hear his words. "She did not say much, but it was easy to see the relief she felt."

"Poor Lady Hamilton!" breathed Mary, in tones of infinite pity.

"Vulcan is growing impatient, so I must go," said the doctor after a moment's pause. "Miss Kenyon, come and see how I have trodden down your flowers."

Miss Kenyon came to the window and looked out mechanically.

"There is no harm done," she said, and though the others noted nothing peculiar in her voice, to herself it sounded low and strange and far off. "I was telling Christopher I mean to plant some roses there in the autumn."

"I'll send Anderson down with some slips from Cluny then," returned the doctor, "as payment for damage done to-night. Good night, Miss Kenyon. Good night, Mr. Kenyon."

"Mary, we may as well go too," said the minister rising. "Get on your hat, the evening is coming on."

Mary obeyed him, wondering a little at the silence which seemed to have fallen on the brother and sister.

"Come back soon, Mary," Miss Kenyon whispered as she bade her good-bye, and she stood a moment on the door steps and watched the trio out of sight. Then she shut the door and went back to her brother. The shadows were gathering in the room, and falling gently on the schoolmaster as he sat with his head buried in his hand. Miss Kenyon closed the window, then went to his side, leaning her hands upon his shoulder. He looked up and took them both within his own, bending his eyes upon the pale still face.

"Even here, Sara," he said in a low voice, "we are haunted with the past; as if its memory were not sufficient for us to bear. My sister, what is to be done."

"Nothing, Kit; why should we do anything? You hear that he leaves Glentarne to-morrow. It is not

likely that he will ever know that we are here, and even if he did, do you think he would seek us? I think not."

The master sighed, sorely troubled in spirit.

"He may come back, Sara."

"Yes," returned the brave cheerful voice. "But he may go as he has gone this time without even knowing of our presence here. We will trust in God, my brother; He has never failed us yet."

Christopher Kenyon looked again into the steadfast face, shining with the light of a faith the angels might have envied. And there was unutterable love in his own.

"Sara, God has been good to us. We have each other left."

She looked beyond him, through the window, at the clear evening sky, where the summer stars were peeping out one by one, and the moon rising above the mists. She had freed her hands, and they were folded on his shoulder. Once or twice he felt them tremble.

"Christopher," she said in a low voice, "let us be thankful for the quiet refuge we have had here, and for the dear friends who have just left us. Remembering the past, dear, my heart is full of love and gratitude to God. O Kit! never let us forget His goodness to us." She passed one arm round his neck, and left a quiet kiss upon his brow.

"I think I shall go to bed," she said. "I feel tired and a little upset. Don't sit up late, Kit, or your head will suffer to-morrow."

Then she crept away to her own room and knelt down at the little window looking out upon the hills. Her hands were folded on the sill, and her head bowed low upon them. Once or twice a sob broke from the patient lips, but her eyes were dry. And it was midnight before she went to bed.



CHAPTER IV.

MOTHER AND SON.

A CHILL March afternoon. Spring was tardy in its coming, for though the month was nearing to its close there was scarcely a bud on hedge or tree. The countryside about The Linn was woefully dreary, and up at Glentarne the rugged old castle stood out among the gaunt beech trees, bare and desolate against the sullen sky. Yet within there were warmth and comfort.

In the drawing-room a log fire burned cheerily on the wide hearth. Its ruddy glow lay warm and bright upon the polished floor, and lit up the quaint fantastic figures on the antique cabinet in the opposite corner. The windows were small, and the heavy damask curtains almost excluded the light of day. In summer the drawing-room at Glentarne was unspeakably dreary.

In a low chair drawn close to the hearth a lady sat, with a white shawl thrown over her silk dress and her thin white hands folded listlessly on her lap. They were very white, and the blue veins were painfully visible. She was no longer young, but the patient suffering face still bore traces of the beauty which had won William Hamilton's heart. Her soft hair, though thickly streaked with grey, was still abundant and luxuriant, but it was confined under a close widow's cap. She was not the only occupant of the room.

Within the curtains at the western window a gentleman stood idly drumming his fingers on the pane. Four years had not made Jasper Hamilton's slight figure more manly looking, but it had deepened the all-absorbing selfishness in his effeminate face.

Once or twice the lady glanced round, but no word escaped her lips.

"What a wretched dull hole this is," muttered Sir Jasper, turning from the window and flinging himself into a chair. "It's enough to put a fellow into the blues."

His mother's sensitive ear shrunk from the coarse words.

"Your father spent all his life here, Jasper," she said gently. "He did not think it dull."

"My father was a— that is everybody isn't born with such a contented mind. I've been thinking seriously of putting up Glentarne to the hammer. It's too outlandish for me."

"There have been Hamiltons of Glentarne since it was built," returned Lady Hamilton, a slight flush rising to her pale cheek. "Have you no respect for the old name and race?"

"None. It's a beggarly inheritance," returned the young man, rising and pacing moodily up and down the floor. "If I had the cash the place would bring, the old name and race could go to the dogs."

"And spend the money at foreign gaming tables, Jasper," said his mother sadly. "Oh, my boy! that was a bitter lesson Ralph Mortimer taught you. It is ruining you."

The hopeful scion of the grand old race did not answer. He was evidently revolving something in his mind.

"Talking of the old name, mother," he said suddenly. "Unless I marry it must die out."

"Why should you not marry some day?" said his mother listlessly. "Time enough yet."

"I'm four-and-twenty now, so if I mean to bring a wife to Glentarne the sooner the better; don't you think so?"

"If you choose wisely, yes," returned Lady Hamilton, in the same listless tone; but the next words roused her.

"Mother, I have chosen; wisely too, I think, and I hope to bring my wife home before the year is out."

She sat up suddenly, and looked at him with a very searching look.

"You have kept it very close from me, your mother, Jasper," she said slowly. "Who is your promised wife?"

Under that steady gaze his eyes fell, and he moved uneasily from its range.

"I don't expect you to be pleased with her; you never are with my friends," he said rudely. "The future Lady Hamilton is Ralph Mortimer's sister Maud."

"O Jasper."

That was all, but the poor lady fell back in her chair, and something like a wail escaped her lips. In her heart of hearts there had been a lingering hope that when Jasper married it would be a good woman, who would use her influence to turn him from his evil ways, and she had dreamed of better days in store for Glentarne. The hope was gone, and despair had filled its place.

There was a long silence.

Then Jasper Hamilton came to the fire, and stood looking into his mother's face, no shadow of softening in his own.

"You have never seen her, mother," he said coldly,

"It might be as well to reserve your opinion till then."

"My opinion," repeated Lady Hamilton; "I passed none."

"You looked a great deal," he said. "Why should you object to Maud Mortimer being my wife?"

"She is no fit mate for a son of our house, unworthy though he be," returned she. "Although I do not know her, I speak from reliable knowledge of her."

"It will be as well to come to an understanding," he said then. "Of course, when my wife comes to Glentarne, she will be absolute mistress from the beginning, and I hope you will welcome her here and try to make her happy."

The bowed figure rose suddenly and stood before him, and he almost quailed beneath the look of outraged dignity in the pale worn face.

"I am your mother, and have done much for you, but this I will not do," she said haughtily. "That day Maud Mortimer enters this house, I leave it for ever. Till now, the women of your house have been of gentle birth and unblemished fame; yours will be the first *mesalliance* in the record of the family. Had Maud Mortimer been a peasant girl, lowly of heart and pure of life, I would have done what you ask, not only willingly but gladly; but I have nothing but scorn for the woman, the mention of whose name was the signal for a sneering jest from the frequenters of the gaming tables at Homburg."

Jasper Hamilton's sallow face grew almost livid in its passion. He bit his thin lips till they bled, but he could not deny the truth of his mother's words. She went to him then, all the old gentleness in her face, and laid her thin hand upon his arm.

"Jasper, is it too late?" she asked in low winning tones. "Can't you free yourself from these hateful

people, and begin life anew away from their influence. Ralph Mortimer has done much harm already. He has shown you how to waste the revenues of Glentarne, and I tremble to think what will be the consequence of bringing his sister here. With that hold upon you he can do more than he has done yet, and I fear the end will be ruin for the house of Hamilton."

"My wedding day is fixed for the fifteenth of July," he said, moving from her, and shaking off her pleading hand. "You talk a lot of nonsense, mother. Ralph Mortimer is as good a fellow as I have met anywhere. If you really mean that the same roof cannot shelter you and Maud, you have ample time to make your own arrangements."

He turned upon his heel, and quitted the room.

Like one turned to stone his mother stood where he had left her. Then she dropped upon the hearth, and pressed her hands to her eyes, as if to shut out some horrid vision. A long low moan escaped her parched lips.

"Woe, woe, woe. Utter ruin is at hand for the house of Hamilton!"





CHAPTER V.

SAUCY BEAUTY.

“**W**HUR ’s Lizzie, Peggie?”

“Jist awa oot tae bring in the eggs, John; she’ll be back the noo. I’m gaun tae send her up tae the schule wi’ a fresh egg an’ a bit butter tae Miss Kenyon. I canna forget hoo kind she was tae me when I was ill last winter.”

“Ay,” said the farmer abruptly, “She’s a douce young woman, Miss Kenyon.”

The farmer of Glentarne Mains was standing in the window of the kitchen, with his pipe in his mouth and his hands in his pockets. He had just come in from the hay field, and evidently something of importance was occupying his thought.

Far beyond the grey towers of Glentarne the western sky was radiant with the setting sun, and a warm golden glow lay upon the still farmyard, and crept into every corner of the large old-fashioned kitchen. At the fire-place, where, though it was midsummer, a fire burned cheerily, the farmer’s wife sat in an arm chair with a stocking in her hand. A pleasant motherly woman was Mrs. Falconer, still youthful-looking, although she was in her fifty-sixth year.

“Jamie Duncan cam tae me in the hayfield the night, Peggie, an’ socht oor Lizzie.”

A pleased smile stole to the mother’s lips.

“Ay! I was thinkin’ he wadna be lang. What did ye say?”

“Say, wife,” echoed John Falconer, wheeling round

and taking his pipe from his mouth; "I said he might tak' her, and my blessin' wi' her. I kent that ye wad say the same thing. I'm mair satisfied than I can tell. It's time the bairn had something tae settle her. She's a bonnie lass, Peggie; but there's mair nonsense in her heid than I like tae sae."

"Has he said onything tae Lizzie yet," inquired the mother gravely.

"I'se warrant he speired at her afore me; but here she is. I maun hae her askit."

Through the open door came the sound of a sweet voice singing a snatch of song, and in a moment more Lizzie Falconer came in, all unconscious of the subject her father and mother had been discussing.

The father's eyes followed her with a new interest as she set down the basket and began to count the eggs.

Bonnie! The bairn was as lovely as a poet's dream. Ralph Mortimer had spoken truly. In womanhood, Lizzie Falconer's face and figure were simply perfect.

"Lizzie, my lass," said the farmer, slyly, "I've fund out what mak's Jamie Duncan sae fond o' comin' ower here tae crack about the craps."

"Ay, faither."

The words fell carelessly from the pretty lips, but a slight blush rose to the fair cheek.

"It'll be a fine doon-sittin for you up at Lea Rig, Lizzie," continued he, in a grave tone, "an' as guid a man as ever trod the earth."

The dainty head turned suddenly, and the blue eyes filled with surprise.

"A doun-sittin' for me at Lea Rig, faither! Ye speak gey sure. What's putten that intae your heid?"

"Jamie Duncan cam tae me the nicht, Lizzie," said the farmer, laying his broad, brown hand on his daughter's slender shoulder, "and ask'd if I wad gie him my lassie for his wife."

She slipped from her father's detaining hand, and turned again to her work without speaking.

"Has Jamie said onything tae you yet, Lizzie?"

"I dinna want to be marrit yet, faither," returned the girl, evasively. "Jamie Duncan nicht hae let me alane. D'ye want tae get rid o' me?"

"Ye ken brawly, bairn," said the farmer, gravely, "that ye're the very licht o' my e'en; an' it's because I lo'e ye sae weel that I want tae see ye wi' a guid man o' yer ain afore my wark's dune. An' baith yer mither an' me are weel pleased wi' Jamie Duncan. Ye may think yersel' weel aff, Lizzie. There's mony a lass about The Linn wad gladly stand in yer shoon."

"Mither, hoo mony eggs wull I pit up for Miss Kenyon?"

A slight shade of displeasure crossed John Falconer's face at the wilful ignoring of his speech.

"Listen, Lizzie," he said again, laying his hand upon the girl's shoulder. "I doot ye've been playin' wi' Jamie Duncan this while; but, mind ye, though he lo'es ye, he's as prood as a prince. Dinna gang ower far, or ye'll rue't. He's no a man tae dangle for ever at a lassie's tail."

"If Jamie Duncan disna like tae wait my time, he can gang aboot his business," said the young beauty, saucily, as she tied her hat over her golden hair, and swung her basket over her arm. "There's mair chaps than him wad be gled enough to wait on me, I'm thinkin'. Mither, I'll no bide late."

And before her father could reply to her daring speech, she was half across the farmyard, and the echo of her careless song was borne back to them on the soft evening breeze.

"I'm no weel pleased the nicht, Peggie," said the farmer. "I doot we'll hae some trouble wi' Lizzie afore she's settled."

"Nonsense, John," replied the mother, with gay good humour. "She's only a bairn yet; sense'll come by-an'-bye. What dis men folk ken aboot lassies' ways? She's jist as fond o' the lad as she can be, but a wee saucy yet; she'll come roond by-an'-bye."

"Weel, I hope sae," said the farmer. "I'll hae tae gang up tae the field again, tho'. I doot it's gaun tae be wund; an' we'll hae the last o' the hay in the nicht. It's been a graund harvest, thank the Lord."

"I'll send up a bite an' sup tae the men in a while, John," cried his wife after him, as he left the house. "Aboot nine, maybe."

In the meantime Lizzie Falconer was making her way slowly, by a round-about road through the fields, to the village. When she come to the stile which separated her from the road, she saw a tall figure in the distance, which one glance told her was Jamie Duncan. Escape was impossible, so, preferring to wait for him rather than to meet him on the road, she set down her basket, and leaning against the stile, played idly with her hat strings. He quickened his pace, and in a few minutes was at her side.

"Faither's awa' back tae the fields again," she said, with a shy drooping of her eyelids, "I thocht I micht as weel wait an' tell ye."

"Ye ken brawly it was you I wanted tae see, Lizzie." "Ye've been oot every nicht I've been at the Mains, for a week back. What does it mean? Are ye no gled tae see me?"

"Maybe," was the reply, and Lizzie kept her eyes upon her hat, as if her life depended on it.

"Has yer faither no said onything tae ye aboot me, Lizzie," was the next question, and to that also she answered, coolly—

"Maybe."

"Lizzie," said the young man, very seriously, "ye've

tried me sair this while back, an' if it had been ony-body but yersel' I wadna hae putten up wi't a meent. But I'm gettin' tired o' your coquetin'. I maun hae ay or no the nicht. I hae telt ye, twenty times ower, hoo I lo'e ye, an' prayed ye tae be my wife. Is it tae be ay or no?"

She raised her head, with the mischievous smile which had turned half the heads in the country side, and said coolly—

"I'm no in a serious mood the nicht, Jamie; I'll tell ye some other time."

He caught one of her hands in his own, and looked into her face with impassioned eagerness.

"Lizzie, dinna torment me like this. Ye dinna ken hoo muckle yer answer means tae me. God forgie me, I believe I worship the very ground ye walk on."

It was impossible to listen to the earnest voice without being moved; for one moment a softened, almost tender light filled the saucy eyes, but it passed almost as quickly as it came.

"Jamie Duncan, I'm daft stan'in' here at this time o' nicht, an' me has tae gang tae the schule an' back afore darkenin'. Guid nicht. I'll listen tae ye some ither time," she said, carelessly, and with one dart from her mischievous eyes, and a parting smile on her sweet lips, she caught up her basket, and hurried down the road.

With his whole heart in his eyes, the young man watched the dainty figure out of sight. As he turned to leave the stile a close carriage came swiftly along from the direction of Glentarne. He paused a moment, and as it swept rapidly past caught a glimpse of its solitary occupant. It was Lady Hamilton on her way to the railway station at D——. To-morrow was Sir Jasper's wedding day, and she had bidden farewell to Glentarne. The bitterness of death was in her soul.



CHAPTER VI.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

A GAIN, on a fair summer afternoon the landlady of the Linn Arms and the blacksmith's wife were enjoying a gossip at the door of the inn. There was excitement in The Linn, whatever was its cause, for there were groups of two and three at every door, and a perfect hum of voices filled the quiet air. So much absorbed was Nancy Irvine that the sight of her husband leaning idly against one side of the smithy door, and her good-for-nothing son perched on the garden fence with his hands in his pockets, failed to rouse her righteous ire. Failing in all else, red-headed Jock had been set to work in earnest at his father's trade, and the ungainly lad had grown into a rough, uncouth looking young man, whose extreme laziness, combined with his imperturbable good temper and unutterable stupidity, were daily thorns in his mother's side. It was impossible to rouse Jock, even with the fiercest onslaughts from her tongue. She might as well have preached to a stone wall.

"They shouldna be lang noo, Nancy," said Mrs. Scott, shading her eyes and glancing down the road. "Its near five, and the train's due at D— afore four. The carriage gaed by about three, wi' the twa greys in it."

"Ay," said Nancy. "An' there was just ane tae drive her leddyship awa on Thursday nicht. Puir cratur', days is sair changed for her."

That reflection appeared to afford the blacksmith's

wife a melancholy satisfaction, but Mrs. Scott shook her head with real sorrow in her motherly face.

"Weel dae I mind the day Sir Willam brocht her hame. Ye wad hae thoct the hale o' The Linn good oot the road tae meet them, an' they took the horses oot and pu'd the carriage up tae the big hoose. I'm thinkin' there's no sae muckle tae dae at this ledly's hame comin'. Wheesht, I hear them comin'."

The rumble of wheels broke upon listening ears, and a cloud of dust in the distance gave warning of the appearance of a carriage. It drove up rapidly, and though it did not slacken speed when passing through The Linn, a feeble cheer was raised which Sir Jasper did not deign to notice. By his side, with a slight curl on her proud lips, sat his newly wedded wife, the mistress of Glentarne. The eager onlookers only caught a glimpse of a dark handsome face, with flashing black eyes, and the next minute the carriage had whirled out of sight.

"How much further is it to Glentarne, Jasper?" inquired Lady Hamilton in tones of ineffable weariness. "I am dead tired, and that sunshine is insufferable."

"My darling, we are almost home," said her husband, bending over her, his face softened by a gleam of tenderness. "See, there are the gates."

"I am glad to hear it," returned her ladyship ungraciously, her eyes wandering superciliously round as they swept up the wide avenue under the shade of the beeches, and her lips curled perceptibly when they drew up in front of the grey rambling old house which was to be her future home.

"Welcome home to Glentarne, Maud," whispered Jasper Hamilton, as they entered the old-fashioned porch. "It never had a fairer mistress."

There were a few servants waiting in the hall. The housekeeper came forward, and would have spoken,

but her mistress swept past her, saying to her husband, "Send some one after me to shew me my rooms, Jasper; and let dinner be on the table shortly."

The servants exchanged glances of surprise, which did not escape Sir Jasper's notice. "Shew Lady Hamilton her rooms, can't you, Tennant," he said angrily to the housekeeper, "and don't stand there all of you staring like idiots!"

The housekeeper turned and followed her new mistress upstairs, and found her standing within the drawing room door, surveying the room with contempt.

"I am come to shew you your rooms, my lady," said Mrs. Tennant. "They are not on this floor."

"Is this the drawing room?" inquired her ladyship, turning her flashing black eyes on the housekeeper's face. "I fancy so."

"Yes, my lady."

"Um. Something will require to be done there," she said half to herself. "Well, I am quite ready. I hope there are not many more stairs to climb."

Mrs. Tennant answered nothing. She led the way, her whole soul swelling with sorrow and indignation.

"These were Lady Hamilton's, Sir Jasper's mother's, rooms, my lady," she said, as she threw open a door on the next landing. "There is a sitting room, bed room, and dressing room. They are just as she left them."

Lady Hamilton went from room to room with the same half amused, half contemptuous smile on her lips.

"Well, they are old-fashioned enough to have been inhabited by one's great grandmother; but before long, Tennant," she added affably, "I hope to see some improvements in the house. Now, will you send up my trunks and some one to wait on me?"

"Lady Hamilton took her maid with her, my lady, but I shall do my best for you."

"Ah, thanks," said her ladyship languidly. "I dare-

say you'll do in the meantime. I have a French maid at home, who will follow me shortly. Now, see about my luggage quickly, please."

Mrs. Tennant bowed and withdrew.

"And it was for that proud hussey, Sir Jasper turned his mother from Glentarne," was her inward thought as she passed to do her bidding. "He'll be punished for it yet, or I am much mistaken."

In the drawing room, Jasper Hamilton paced restlessly up and down, awaiting his wife. Restlessly, and impatiently also, for his thoughts were not pleasant companions. That day he had brought home as his wife the woman he loved, or fancied he loved, and he ought to have been supremely happy. But there was a skeleton on the hearth.

It was six o'clock when the drawing-room door opened to admit his wife. In her rich evening dress, with rare jewels sparkling on hair and bosom, she looked superbly beautiful; but hers was not the face of a good woman.

Her husband went to meet her, with a passionate light in his cold cruel eyes, and a slight flush in his sallow cheek. "Maud, my darling, how beautiful you are. My wife, again welcome home." He passed his arm about the perfect figure, and would have drawn her to his breast, but she freed herself with a look of utter weariness, almost of disgust, on her haughty face.

"Don't bore me, Jasper," she said, moving from him to the hearth. "Such nonsense is only excusable before marriage, not after. There is no need for it now."

A red flush rose to his brow, and he bit his lip to keep back the angry words burning for utterance. His wife saw it, and smiled carelessly. She leaned her white arm on the marble mantel, and turned

the badge of wife-hood round and round upon her finger.

"I say, Jasper," she said suddenly, "where has your mother gone?—you did not tell me."

"To reside on her own property in Sussex," replied he. "Are you ready to go to the dining room?"

"It seems a pity that the old lady had to turn out for me," said she, with the same careless smile. "Why couldn't she stay; I should not have interfered with her."

"Are you ready to go to the dining room, Maud," repeated Jasper Hamilton. "Dinner is on the table."

"She might, at least, have stayed to welcome me," she said, again utterly ignoring his request, "and to have made my acquaintance. It was not decent civility to leave before."

"There is no need to discuss the matter, Maud," said Sir Jasper, his temper rising again. "My mother was at liberty to please herself. I tell you plainly she disapproved of our marriage, and it was better to leave Glentarne before you came here, and so avoid any unpleasantness."

"I see."

The careless smile still curved Lady Hamilton's lips, but the expression in the black eyes was not good to see.

"Why did your mother disapprove of your marriage with me?"

"There is no need, as I said before, to discuss the matter, Maud," said her husband, irritably. "Why will you persist?"

"Simply because I am anxious to know," was the reply. "And I mean to know, Jasper, so you may as well tell me now."

"This is scarcely the way to begin your married life, Maud," said Sir Jasper with increased irritability.

"It is no part of wifely duty to insist against her husband's wish."

A peal of mocking laughter broke from my lady's lips. "Look at me, Jasper," she said, drawing her figure to its full height, and coming nearer to him. He turned his eyes upon her face, and again, as it had done many times before, her beauty conquered him.

"Do I look like a woman who would make any man's will her law. Do you think that because I have married you that I am to have no thought, no wish that does not centre in *you*?"

The stinging emphasis on the last word roused every evil passion in her husband's heart, for it expressed all the utter scorn and contempt in which this woman held him. His sallow face grew livid in its passion, as it had done in that very room once before, and he moved from her afraid lest he should be tempted to raise his hand against the wife he had wedded but yesterday.

"It will be as well to understand each other," she said in her cool, haughty voice. "You can go your own way, while I —"

"Maud Mortimer!" interrupted her husband passionately, "Why did you marry me?"

Again the mocking laugh rang through the room.

"Shall I tell you?" she asked, with her amused smile. "I married you because I was tired of Ralph's snubbing, and because I wanted to be Lady Hamilton, with a home and a purse of my own. Good reasons, are they not?"

"Very good, my lady," said Sir Jasper with bitter emphasis. "And, mark you, I swear to you that you shall pay dearly for what you have won. Again, are you ready to go to the dining room?"

So with a bitter quarrel on its very threshold their married life began.



CHAPTER VII.

A COOL RECEPTION.

A WEEK had gone since Jasper Hamilton brought his bride home to Glenarne. It was Saturday morning, and Sara Kenyon was sitting at the breakfast table waiting for her brother.

The glorious sunlight flooded the whole room, and lay bright and beautiful on Sarah Kenyon's face. It was grave and sad, and her eyes were heavy. When nine pealed from the church tower, she opened the sitting-room door.

"Are you nearly ready, Christopher?"

"Coming, dear," and in a minute the schoolmaster took his seat at the table. His sister poured out his tea, and handed it to him in silence.

"Will you come back with the midday coach, Kit?" she said at length.

"No; I think I shall walk home," returned the schoolmaster. "I have some books to get, and there would be scarcely time to catch the coach."

"Don't forget yourself in the bookshops at D—as you used to do in London sometimes," his sister said with a slight smile. "Be sure and come home to tea. Mary is coming down this afternoon, and the doctor, too, if possible."

"Yes; I shall be home, dear. There is the horn! I did not think it was so late."

"Kit," she said, laying her hand upon his shoulder as he was opening the door, "Lady Hamilton will be here to-day."

"I scarcely think she will come at all, Sara," he said. "What end would it serve?"

"Heaven knows," replied Miss Kenyon. "Kit, I have been thinking lately it will be better for us to leave The Linn."

"We have been very happy here, Sara," said the master gently, and as he opened the door a flood of sunlight dazzled their eyes. "But we can talk this over another time."

He stooped and kissed her, as was his wont, and turned down the garden path. At the gate he paused, and, as if struck with a sudden thought, went back to the doorstep.

"If you think she will come to-day, Sara," he said slowly, "and if it would help you, I shall stay at home. What I have to do can be done next Saturday."

"No, no, Kit. I know it would only vex you to be obliged to meet her again. I am no coward, sir, and I think I shall manage best alone. Now, go. There is the coach coming up, and—remember to be home to tea," and with a parting smile Miss Kenyon shut the door, and went back to the breakfast table.

After luncheon that afternoon, Lady Hamilton ordered the pony carriage to be brought round to the door.

"I am going alone," she said, as she took the reins from the groom's hand. "If Sir Jasper returns before me, tell him I have gone to the village, and will be home before dinner."

"Very well, my lady," replied the man, glad to be relieved from attendance upon her. Further acquaintance with their new mistress had not impressed the servants with her amiability. She touched the ponies with her whip, and they started off at a pace which brought them to The Linn in fifteen minutes. She drew up at the gate of the schoolhouse, and stepped

out. Gathering her rich skirts gracefully over her arm, she went leisurely up the garden path, and tapped at the door with the end of the whip she still held in her daintily-gloved hand.

It was opened immediately, not by Miss Kenyon, as her ladyship had expected, but by Mrs. Forbes, who had come from Cluny only a few minutes before. Intense amazement was in Mary's face when she found herself face to face with Lady Hamilton.

"Is Miss Kenyon at home?" inquired her ladyship, in cool clear tones, which penetrated to the room where Sara Kenyon was busy.

"Yes, she is at home," replied Mrs. Forbes. "Will you come in, please?"

But before she could accept the invitation, Sara Kenyon's light step sounded in the lobby. She came forward, very pale, but calm and self-possessed, and she did not at first look at Lady Hamilton.

"Will you go in, please, Mary?" she said, laying her hand on Mrs. Forbes' arm. "I shall talk to Lady Hamilton here."

In sore amazement, Mrs. Forbes obeyed. Then Miss Kenyon looked full at her visitor, with a slightly enquiring gaze, but with no shadow of recognition in her face.

"Well, Sara, how are you?" asked her ladyship, familiarly; "you don't look very glad to see me."

She stretched out her hand, but Miss Kenyon moved away, as if afraid that it would touch her.

"What is your business with me, Lady Hamilton?" she said in a low quiet voice. "I have a visitor, as you see, and you must not detain me long."

"Oh, come now, Sara," said Lady Hamilton, slightly disconcerted, "don't talk like that. Let bygones be bygones, and say you are glad to see an old friend."

"It would not be true if I did say it," said Sara Kenyon, a red spot rising to either cheek. "If that is your errand, I am sorry it is fruitless. Allow me to bid you good afternoon."

Lady Hamilton bit her lip, and an angry gleam shot through her dark eyes.

"When Ralph told me you were here, I congratulated myself that I would not be without a friend when I came to Glentarne," she said. "Wont you make up, as the children say, and visit me sometimes at that wretched dull place up there," she pointed with her whip in the direction of Glentarne, and waited Miss Kenyon's answer.

"It would ill befit the schoolmaster's sister to place herself on a footing with the lady of Glentarne," said the low quiet voice, with an unmistakeable scorn in its tones. "I must bid you good afternoon, Lady Hamilton."

"The schoolmaster's sister is still Squire Kenyon's daughter," said her ladyship calmly. "How is Christopher? He and I used to be great friends."

There are limits to human endurance. Sara Kenyon's lips were firmly set, and the red spot burning on either cheek told the indignation she would not utter.

"Lady Hamilton, I must bid you good afternoon," she repeated. "And I must also ask you not to intrude upon me again. Remembering the past, I am amazed that you are not ashamed to do it. I thank you for your offered friendship; but I must decline it, once for all."

"Time was, when you would not have turned Maud Mortimer from your door," said my lady bitterly. "Well, good afternoon, Sara, since you wont ask me in," she added, suddenly recovering her equanimity. "And if you should think better of it, I shall be glad to see you at Glentarne whenever you like to come."

Miss Kenyon closed the door and left her visitor on the step, without offering a reply to the friendly invitation.

Again Lady Hamilton threw her skirts over her arm and swept down the path, a careless smile curving her scornful lips, but anger and bitter humiliation in her heart.

In the sitting room, in much surprise, Mrs. Forbes awaited her friend. She looked at her anxiously when she joined her, and saw that she was unusually agitated. She sat down at the table and leaned her head on her hands.

"You are surprised that Lady Hamilton should come here asking for me, Mary," she said at last.

"Yes," Mary admitted frankly.

"Years ago—before we came to Strathlinn—I knew her and her brother well."

Very bitterly were the words spoken, and there was unutterable pain on Sara Kenyon's face.

"Some other time, Mary," she said, rising, "I shall tell you the story of Christopher's life and mine, but not now. Forgive me if my manner is strange to-night; I have many painful memories to upset me. Now I must go and see after tea. Kit will be home in a very short time."

"There he is now," said Mary, "and John with him. I wonder where he picked him up."

The tea table that night was not so happy as it generally was, for there was a shadow on the face of its presiding genius.

Early in the evening the visitors took their leave, because Mary felt that Miss Kenyon wished to be alone.

And on the way home, as a matter of course, she confided the incident of the afternoon to her husband, and they marvelled over it together.



CHAPTER VIII.

HAPPY LOVE.

BY the middle of September not a stook was left standing in the cornfields about The Linn. An early and bountiful harvest had been the result of a fine seed-time and a warm dry summer; and the winter bade fair to be a cheery one. The crops on the Lea Rig were universally admitted to be the finest in the district. Old Simon Duncan had resigned the farm management entirely into Jamie's hands, and it amply repaid the painstaking labour the energetic young man bestowed upon it. They lived alone, father and son, in the old house on the hill-top, and it sorely needed a woman's supervision. It was many a year since Jamie Duncan's mother had been laid in the kirkyard, and the neighbours said Simon Duncan had never held up his head since. His only son was the very apple of his eye, the pride of his heart, the one object on which all his interest in life was centred. A life of hard toil and exposure, early and late, had prematurely broken down his constitution, and at sixty Simon Duncan was a frail weak old man, and it was feared he would not weather the storms of another winter. The fears were too well grounded, for, killed by the snell November blast, the feeble spark of life went quietly out one grey rainy afternoon, and at three-and-twenty James Duncan was left fatherless and motherless to inhabit the Lea Rig alone; but everybody knew he was only waiting

Lizzie Falconer's word to bring a mistress to the farm. She still kept him at arm's length, though he followed her like a shadow. Yet sometimes a sweet hope whispered in the true manly heart, that the time was at hand when she would not say him nay. During the winter months strange stories came from Glentarne, furnishing never-ending gossip for the villagers. The servants told of awful strife between the ill-matched pair, of quarrels so violent that they sometimes feared there would be murder done; for the Laird's ungovernable temper was roused by his wife's increasing extravagance, and most of all by her contemptuous ignoring of his authority. Lady Hamilton was not received into county society, but she filled the house with her own friends—a gay set of fashionable men and women, whose character and antecedents she did not too strictly investigate. Ay, Jasper Hamilton's mother was well away from Glentarne; the old house had fallen very low. The Kenyons were still at The Linn; Lady Hamilton had not again troubled the school-house with her presence, and though being so near Glentarne, the brother and sister had never happened to encounter her. That year the winter was severe and protracted; it was late in March before the last snow-storm disappeared under the first breath of Spring. But April was a glorious month, and ere it closed, wood and meadow were clothed with the delicate freshness of the loveliest season of the year. Though busy with the seed-time, Jamie Duncan found time and opportunity of seeing Lizzie Falconer oftener than he had ever done before. Taking his wife's advice, John Falconer never again mentioned Jamie Duncan's name to his daughter, and he was beginning to see that, after all, young people and their love affairs are best left alone. Just before sundown on the first evening in May, the young man

stepped into the kitchen at Glentarne Mains. His nightly visit had become an institution now, and the farmer often said, jokingly, to his wife, that he "wad miss Jamie's crack when Lizzie gaed up tae the Lea Rig." You will perceive that there did not exist a shadow of doubt in his mind regarding her future lot.

Lizzie was sitting in the window when her lover came in, and she bent her head demurely over her sewing, and answered his greeting in a scarcely audible whisper. He took the seat the farmer offered him, but he seemed absent and pre-occupied, and did not join in the conversation with his usual readiness.

"It's a bonnie nicht, Lizzie," he said, suddenly, interrupting the farmer in his prophecy regarding the harvest, "wad ye mind gaun oot a bit wi' me?"

Lizzie lifted her head, and flashed a glance of her bonnie blue eyes upon his face, and a slight blush rose to her own. But she spoke no word, only sewed on with increased industry.

"Ay, bairn, gang awa'," said the mother, with a sly glance at her husband. "Ye hinna been outside the door the day; but dinna bide ower lang."

"Very well, mither," replied the young damsel, wonderfully submissive, and without waiting to hear more, she caught up her hat and slipped out, leaving Jamie to follow.

"It'll be settled the nicht, guidwife," said the farmer, well pleased. "Weel, it's a lang lane that has nae turnin'."

Whether or not the proverb was aptly applied, it seemed to afford them amusement, for both had a hearty laugh over it.

Meanwhile the young pair had taken the winding path to the glen, and were walking in unusual and incomprehensible silence.

"Leddy Hamilton's brither cam' tae the castle the day," said Lizzie, at length feeling that something must be said to break the embarrassing silence.

"Did he?" inquired her companion, without much show of interest. "Lizzie," he broke off suddenly, "d'ye mind the day you an' me cam' doon tae fish at this very bit, an' you gaed aff hame wi' the Laird and his friend?"

"Ay, I mind," said Lizzie, absently; "it's a long time ago."

"Lizzie, I was sair angert that nicht, for I lo'ed ye then, I think, tho' I was only a laddie," said the young man, half jestingly. "Ye wadna leave me noo as ye did then, wad ye, Lizzie?"

For a moment the saucy eyes full of mischief met his, but they fell beneath his gaze, and she turned away her head to hide the crimson on her face.

"Lizzie, stand here a meenit," he said to her in low earnest tones, "I hae something tae say tae ye the nicht."

"Say awa' then, and be quick," she said, laughingly.

"Lizzie, are ye gaun tae be serious wi' me noo?" he asked, bending his grave winning eyes upon her face; "I've waited lang and patiently on ye tae listen tae me as ye promised last simmer."

"Weel, is that a', Jamie?" she asked, with a bewitching glance into his face. "I've heard a' that, an' mair, afore."

He caught both her hands and held them fast, and bent his head till she was obliged to look at him.

"Lizzie, gie me ay or no the nicht; if it's tae be 'no' tell me frankly, an' I'll bear it like a man, but if ye think ye can even care for me, nae maitter hoo little, tell me the noo, for I can bear this suspense nae langer."

The girl was a born coquette. "Hoo muckle o' that's true, Jamie?" she asked, daringly. "My mither whiles tells me that I can safely believe about a third o' what you chaps say tae me."

At that moment the sharp bark of a dog, followed by a long low whistle, startled them. "There's the laird," said Lizzie, "and my leddy's brither. Jamie, come on hame."

The young man turned his head, and saw Jasper and Ralph Mortimer leisurely approaching, with cigars in their mouths, and a pack of dogs at their heels.

"Stand here, Lizzie," he said, gently, "an' wait till they pass."

"Very weel."

She broke a twig from the tree, and bent her eyes upon it, while the gentlemen drew nearer to them.

"The Hebe I admired so much last time I was here, Hamilton, upon my word!" said Ralph Mortimer to his companion, "and her cavalier too. Have the embryo lovers grown into lovers in earnest. The deuce! what a beauty she is,—worth coming to this vile place to catch a glimpse of a face like that."

Jasper Hamilton sneered.

"You always were a fool about women, Mortimer," he said. "The girl's nothing extra; she's going to be married I hear. Ah! good evening, Duncan."

"Guid e'enin', Sir Jasper," returned the young man, touching his hat, and unconsciously moving in front of Lizzie, chafing at the look of insolent admiration Ralph Mortimer bent upon his darling's face.

"Have you forgotten me, Miss Falconer," said Ralph Mortimer, moving nearer to Lizzie; "I can hardly hope that among so many admirers so undeserving a one as I should be remembered."

A coarse laugh broke from Jasper Hamilton's lips, and Jamie Duncan's face grew pale with anger.

He drew Lizzie's arm within his own, and, not daring to trust his voice, he touched his cap again to the laird, and led her in an opposite direction.

"Ye needna hae been in sic a hurry, Jamie," said Lizzie pettishly; "ye wasna ceevil tae the laird."

"Lizzie!" The word was uttered in a tone of such mingled sorrow and surprise that it touched her in spite of herself.

"Will ye no come in, Jamie," she said in the winning way she knew so well how to assume. "It's no late yet."

"Late enough by the time I get hame," he replied coldly. "I'll see ye tae the door, but nae further."

She made some gay careless reply, then the two crossed the farmyard in silence, and stopped outside the porch at the kitchen door.

Duncan held out his hand, saying, in constrained tones, "Guid nicht, Lizzie; it's time ye were in."

She laid her hand upon his and looked into his face with a shy tender drooping of her eyelids.

"Lizzie! ye'll drive me mad," he said hoarsely. "For guid sake gie me some hope or send me awa a' thegither. I canna gang on like this. Wull ye be my wife or no."

"If ye'll hae me, Jamie," she said. "Could ye no see that I lo'ed ye a' the time?"

A sudden light of a great joy broke upon the true earnest face as he took his first lover's kiss from Lizzie Falconer's lips.





CHAPTER IX.

A BITTER AWAKENING.

JUNE'S loveliest days were fleeting, and still Ralph Mortimer remained at Glentarne. What kept him there was known only to himself, and one other. For the first few weeks Jamie Duncan was as supremely blest as an accepted lover ought to be. Lizzie did not avoid him now, and she had given him a shy promise to come to the Lea Rig before the year was out. One evening Lady Hamilton and her brother found themselves alone together in the drawing-room at Glentarne. There were no visitors in the house, and Sir Jasper had not yet left his dressing-room.

"Ralph," said Lady Hamilton, "Jasper is getting very tired of you."

"And so are you, *ma chère*," added her brother carelessly. "Well, I am sorry to inconvenience you, but I am not tired of you yet. In fact, I've been seriously thinking of staying till the 12th. The moors on this charming domain are really worth going over, and it will save me coming down again."

"The 12th," repeated her ladyship slowly. "That is six weeks hence. Ralph, you cannot mean it; for you must see plainly that Jasper wants to be rid of you."

"Bah! what is that to me; you ought to know by this time, Maud, how little I study Jasper Hamilton's likes or dislikes."

"You were not wont to be so fond of G'entarne," said my lady with a sneer. "Is that girl down at the farm the attraction? What a fool you are, Ralph; she is to be married in the autumn."

"Is she?" Ralph Mortimer turned to the window, and there was a smile on his lips, a smile a thousand times more repellent than his bitterest frown. There was a moment's silence.

"Have you seen any of the Kenyons?" was her ladyship's next question.

"No; but I should like to see the fair Sara once again," replied her brother half mockingly, "only I fear she would not accord me a very flattering reception. Do you remember the scene in the library at The Holt, the night Kenyon died. By Jove, what a tragedy queen she looked, though she is an insignificant woman on ordinary occasions!"

Lady Hamilton shrugged her shoulders. "She can be haughty enough when she likes," she said remembering how the insignificant woman had treated her. "Here comes Jasper." Shortly afterwards Ralph left the house.

Lighting his cigar, he struck into the wood, and went along the water's edge for about a mile, until he reached a little unfrequented dell, almost hidden by the tall belt of fir and beech trees. Against the trunk of a fallen tree stood a girl's figure, with the face half hidden by a broad sun hat. Ralph Mortimer went close to her, and, pushing back the hat familiarly from the golden head, touched the fair brow with his lips.

"I am late, Lizzie; but dinner was late, and I could not get out sooner. Have you waited long?"

"No."

The word was scarcely audible, and the girl's face grew crimson. Ay, and well it might be.

Returning by the fields from the market at D—,

Jamie Duncan passed close to the dell, and his dog, a keen hunter, scented a hare, and scampered through the trees after him, and his master followed him. And something met his eyes which almost made his heart stand still. Was that Lizzie alone there at dusk with Ralph Mortimer? Only a second did he hesitate, as if unable to credit his senses, then he strode through the dell and faced them.

"What are ye daein' here, Lizzie?" he asked, never looking at Mortimer, but keeping his stern eyes fixed upon the girl's conscious face. "Tell me the truth."

But she stood before him mute, and wild passion surged in his heart when he saw the appealing look she cast upon her companion.

"I met Miss Falconer," said Ralph Mortimer, coolly, recovering himself, "and, of course, stopped to speak to her. I meant to take her safely home; but I suppose my services will be dispensed with now."

For the first time the young man turned his flashing grey eyes upon the coward face.

"Ralph Mortimer!" he said steadily, "you lie."

An oath broke from Mortimer's lips, and the terrified girl crept nearer to her lover.

"This is my promised wife, Ralph Mortimer," he said quietly; "an' I kenna what brings her here wi' you at this time. Maybe ye can tell. But, mind, if I ever ken o' ye attempin' tae see or speak to her again ye'll feel the weight o' a strong man's airm. Come, Lizzie."

They left the dell together, she clinging to his arm, not daring to lift her shame-stricken eyes to his white and rigid face. In utter silence they walked home through the sweet summer dusk until they paused, as they had done many times before, outside the ivied porch.

"Here, Lizzie," said Jamie Duncan, then, "whaur I've listened tae the sweetest words that ever fell on man's ears, ye'll tell me the meanin' o' what I saw the nicht."

She leaned against the doorway, weeping helplessly, while he waited in stern, unyielding silence for her answer.

"Lizzie," he said again. "This is no a thing that can be settled wi' bairn's tears. Tell me the truth, was this the first time ye've met Ralph Mortimer?"

She shook her head, and hid her tear-stained face in her hands, but he removed them, and keeping them in his own, made her look at him.

"Tell me the truth," was all he said.

"I've seen him maybe half a dizzen times or sae at the dell," she said, between her sobs. "But I never will again, though there was no harm in't." He dropped her hands, and turned from her, she had hurt him cruelly. "Half a dizzen times! Oh, Lizzie, I wad hae trusted ye wi' my very life."

There was a moment's silence, then he held out his hand, and moved to go.

"I'll see ye the morn, maybe," he said, in a low, tired voice.

Lizzie went close to him, laying her head upon his breast. He could not repulse her. The golden hair he had so loved to see there, was dearer still than anything else on earth.

"Guid nicht, Lizzie," he said again. "I wad fain hope yer heart's mine yet, as mine is yours tae the end o' my life."

Then he gently unclasped her arms, and without another word, or even one backward glance, he went away home.

Two days later Ralph Mortimer left Glentarne.



CHAPTER X.

THE NIGHT BEFORE.

“**I** CANNA think what’s come ower Lizzie this while, Jamie,” said Mrs. Falconer. “She’s no like the same lassie. She’s quiet an’ douce enough noo tae please her faither, but I liket the bairn better as she was.”

Although Lizzie had been assured of her lover’s free and full forgiveness, he could not forget how sorely his faith had been tried. A new element had crept into his passionate love, a jealous fear which gave him rest neither night nor day. It was his one hope to be able to call her wife before Ralph Mortimer came again to Strathlinn, but it was not to be.

The weeks sped, and she would give him no definite promise, and September’s earliest days brought Ralph Mortimer back to Scotland. Ostensibly for the shooting, but in reality he was planning his revenge on the fearless young farmer who had called him a liar to his face. He had not forgotten, either, that summer evening in the dell. No, Ralph Mortimer was not the man to forget or forgive a real or fancied injury.

It was the middle of October before the harvest was ingathered about The Linn. The last sheaf on The Mains was led into the stackyard on a Tuesday afternoon, and it was John Falconer’s yearly custom to entertain his workpeople to supper at the conclusion of the harvest. So that day, as usual, the granary was

cleared, and a long table, stretching from end to end, groaned beneath the weight of good cheer the farmer's wife provided for the guests. If her hands and her head had not been so busily occupied she could not have failed to notice the strange unrest which seemed to possess Lizzie that day, but she *did* notice how eager the girl was to assist with the preparations; she seemed to dread being left a moment idle. About seven Jamie Duncan came over to The Mains anxious for a talk with her. But she avoided him, pleading that she had to wait on the guests. So he stood within the barn door, watching the dainty figure flitting to and fro, and the busy hands helping those seated at the table. Lover's eyes are sharp and critical, and he noticed in a moment the unusual simplicity of her attire. He knew she loved gay dresses, and bright ribbons, but to-night she wore a dark closely fitting robe, relieved only by a plain linen collar and cuffs. There was none of the fanciful adornments she usually wore, even her hair ribbon was discarded, and the rich golden waves were coiled simply behind the shapely head. Her face was pale, and her eyes avoided his; perhaps she feared he would see the mist of unshed tears marring their brightness.

It was nearly ten when the party broke up, and when they were all gone, Lizzie threw a shawl over her head, and went to the door to bid her lover good-night.

She took his arm, saying, in a low voice, that she would go with him to the farm yard. And when they paused there, and she turned her face to the light of the harvest moon, he saw that it was as white as the collar at her throat. Her eyes were gleaming with a strange brilliancy, and she clasped her hands together to still their trembling.

"Lizzie," he said very tenderly, "Are ye well enough; I never saw ye look as ill."

"Yes, yes, well enough," she said hurriedly, "only tired."

"Weel, I'll no keep ye standin'," he said; but she leaned against the gate as if she did not care to go yet."

"Lizzie," he said then, "Will ye tell me the night when ye'll be my wife, I'm weary waitin', and as ye ken the Lea Rig's been ready for its mistress for months."

She shivered, and hid her face in her hands.

"Dinna ask me the night, Jamie; this night o' a' nights, dinna speak o' that if ye lo'e me."

He went very close to her, and took her hands from her face, sorely puzzled to understand her.

"Ye're no weel, Lizzie, I can see; lassie, ye're as white's a ghost. I'll no bother ye the night, but mind ye'll hae tae answer sune."

She laid her slim hand on his broad shoulder, and looked into his face with a great wistfulness in her own.

"Jamie," she said, "d'ye loe me as much as ever?"

He passed his arm round the slender figure, and drew the golden head to his breast. "As much as ever, Lizzie," he repeated, with passionate tenderness. "Sae much that I believe it wad kill me tae lose ye noo. Mind, ye're a' I hae on earth."

She dared not stay there; she dared not listen to the words coming from the depths of the truest heart man ever gave to woman. She drew back from him sobbing, "Send me away, Jamie! send me away! I'm no worth sae much love; I wish ye didna care for me. I was never fit to be a wife tae a man like you."

"My darling, ye're worn out," he said, gently. "Say guid nicht, an' no be gettin' sic fancies intae yer heid. Please God, when ye're my wife, ye'll be the happiest woman in the warld; there'll no be a care come near ye, Lizzie, if I can help it ava'."

"D'ye think ye wad care for me through a', Jamie ; wad naething turn ye against me?"

"Listen, Lizzie," he said, almost solemnly, "I've telt ye afore that ye're dearer tae me than ony thing else on earth. My love canna change. It's stronger than death. Noo gang in, an' let me see ye wi' the auld roses on yer cheeks the morn ; I likena that white face."

He stooped and kissed her, not seeing how white and still was the face so near his own. She turned away from him, and he watched her till she reached the ivied doorway.





CHAPTER XI.

THE DAY AFTER.

NEXT morning a terrible rumour was abroad in The Linn. It was whispered with bated breath that during the night Lizzie Falconer, the Pride of The Linn, had left her home with Lady Hamilton's brother. One of the ploughmen at The Mains brought the news as he passed through the village with his cart before seven o'clock. Between nine and ten Jamie Duncan rode into the village, as he did every morning for his letters. On his way down he drew rein a moment to talk to Miss Kenyon, who was busy among her flowers, and he thought her manner never had been so odd. When he left her she stood watching the handsome manly figure, which looked its best on horseback, and a broken prayer fell from her lips.

"Lord, help him to bear it."

He wondered why the people looked at him so curiously, and directly he went down the street he saw that something unusual seemed to occupy the attention of the villagers. The women had left their morning work to discuss the news, and down at the inn door there was quite a gathering.

Jamie, having some business with the blacksmith, went leisurely down the street by his horse's side, reading as he went. Sandy was leaning against the door of the forge, his brawny arms folded, and the inevitable black pipe in his mouth, listening to the

talk of the women, and occasionally venturing to put in a word. But a hush fell upon them when the young farmer came up, and he looked from one to another, again amazed at the curious compassion in their faces.

"There's surely a stir in The Linn this morning, Sandy," he said carelessly. "What's the best o' the news."

"Hae ye no heard," inquired the smith staring at him; "but I needna ask, if ye kent ye wadna be speirin'. Indeed if ye kent ye wadna be here ava."

"What is't, Sandy?"

"The weemin'll tell ye," said Sandy, slipping into the forge to escape the task his easy mind had no wish to undertake, and, with a sudden indefinable fear at his heart, Jamie turned to the group at the inn door, and repeated his question. But they were also dumb.

"Will ye come in a meenit, Jamie," said Mrs. Scott at length, her motherly face full of pity; "I want tae speak tae ye."

Jock Irvine took his horse's bridle, and the young man followed the landlady into her own little parlour at the back. She shut the door before she uttered a word.

"I'll be better tae tell ye here, awa' frae a' the een," she said. "Jamie, my man, Lizzie Falconer's awa' wi' Ralph Mortimer."

For one moment he looked at her incredulously, and then as the full realization of her words came home to him, the whiteness of death overspread his face, and he clutched at the back of a chair for support.

"Is this kent for certain, Mrs. Scott?" he said, after a while, in a voice which the widow never forgot. "Is there nae doot?"

"Nane; her faither an' mither are maistly mad. I'm telt it wasna a thing onybody expeckit. We

didna ken she had even spoken tae the man. Jamie, my lad, I kent yer mither weel; my heart's sair for ye."

He heard the kindly words, and saw the pitiful tears in the widow's eyes, but at that moment he had no power to answer her. All feeling and sensation seemed dead; he stood looking through the window into the stable yard like one in a dream.

"I think I'll gang up tae the Mains," he said, "and hear aboot it; it's maybe no true."

He spoke with some difficulty, and a slight shiver ran through the stalwart figure as if he felt a sudden chill.

Mrs. Scott opened the door, with her apron to her eyes, and Jamie Duncan passed out into the clear October sunlight with the very blackness of midnight in his heart. He mounted his horse, and rode slowly with his head bent upon his breast. Sarah Kenyon saw him coming, and she opened the gate, and stood in the road waiting for him. But when he stopped, she uttered no word of sympathy; only looking into his haggard face with her pitying eyes, she said—

"When you have been up to the farm and learn the particulars, Mr. Duncan, come back to me; there is something I can tell you."

"Very well, Miss Kenyon," he answered. He did not even feel surprised at her words, but they roused some sudden energy in his heart, for he dug his spurs into the mare's glossy sides, and flew off like an arrow. Five minutes brought him to The Mains. Springing to the ground, he pushed open the kitchen door, and stood a moment on the threshold unobserved. If there had been a lingering hope in his mind, it was dispelled now, for there was an awful look of desolation about the familiar place. The blackened fire, the half-closed shutters at the window, the unnatural stillness reigning in the house told of the blow which

had fallen upon its inmates. And at the table, with his arms flung across it, and the poor old white head lying low upon them, sat John Falconer, and the iron had entered into his soul.

He seemed to know intuitively who was at the door, for he pushed back his chair, and turned to the young man with a hard set expression on his rugged face.

"Jamie, my man," he said, "I canna look upon yer face this mornin' for very shame; ye've been waur treated than even me, by her that was my dochter. But, lad, it was nae blame o' mine nor her mither's, we kent nought about it till six o'clock this morning." He paused, but Jamie's eyes upon his face asked for more.

"Her mither gaed tae wauken her, as she aye does, an' syne cam doon, but wonderin' what way she was sae lang o' comin' doon, she gaed up again, and fund that the bed hadna been sleepit in, and there was a letter tae you. She opened it and read it. I heard her scream, an' when I gaed up tae see, she was lyin' on the flure insensible. She's ——"

"The letter," said Jamie Duncan. "Let's see it."

The old man took a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket, and Jamie went into the sunshine to read it. This was all:—

"When you get this I shall be far away from you and from The Linn for ever, for Ralph Mortimer has promised to make me his wife. I loved you, Jamie, but never so madly as I do the man for whom I am leaving all; and he will make a lady of me, as I have always wanted to be. I could not have been happy at Lea Rig, for I always wanted to be something grander than a farmer's wife. I should have been discontented, and made you unhappy. Forget me if you can, and, if not, try to think kindly of me for the

sake of what I used to be in the old days when we played together. And, oh, Jamie, try and comfort my father and mother, and tell them that I hope to come back to them a lady to be forgiven for what I have done. Good-bye, good-bye, my last tears are for you, for I know your true heart; I never was worthy of its love.

“LIZZIE.”

Jamie Duncan folded up the paper, and put it in his pocket, then he turned to the old man with an iron resolution in his haggard face. “Mr. Falconer,” he said, “Lizzie was my promised wife, and though she’s lost tae me for ever, I’ve the best richt yet tae see whether that black-hearted villain (I daurna let his name upon my lips) has keepit his promise. If she be a truly wedded wife, well and guid, I’ll come hame and say nae mair, but if he has failed, he’ll answer for it tae me, and the Lord help me then tae keep my hands aff him.”

“Jamie,” said the old man with a great huskiness in his voice. “Let it a-be. She’s no worth the trouble noo, an’ she richly deserves tae be punished for her sin. Let it a-be.”

“I couldna rest, no kennin’ whaur she is, an’ how it is wi’ her,” said the young man in a low, hoarse voice. “I’m gaun frae The Linn this very nicht. Ye’ll gie a look tae the Lea Rig till I come back.”

“But, Jamie, ye dinna ken whaur they may be. Ye might wander for ever an’ no find them.”

“They canna be far awa, yet,” said the young man, moving to the mare’s side. “As sure as I stand here, I’ll meet Ralph Mortimer face tae face afore the week’s gane, an’ bring back news o’ Lizzie, guid or bad.”

“An’ whaur are ye gaun the noo,” enquired the old man, laying a trembling hand on the bridle, as Jamie sprang to the saddle.

"Tae Miss Kenyon's first, an' syne tae the laird's, an' then tae the station," and without another word he rode off.

In the window of her sitting-room stood Sara Kenyon waiting for Jamie Duncan. Christopher had gone to school more than an hour before, but the breakfast things still stood upon the table. Miss Kenyon's thoughts were far from household duties at that moment. When the young man again drew rein at the gate, she opened the door and motioned him to come in. Fastening the bridle to the gate-post, he obeyed her, and she led him into the sitting-room and shut the door. Then briefly in answer to her questions, he repeated what he had learned at the farm.

"Will you let me see the letter, Mr. Duncan?" she asked. "It is no idle curiosity which makes me wish to learn everything here." Looking with that pale patient face, lit up by the clear steadfast eyes, he knew that he could trust this woman with life itself, and took from his pocket-book the poor crumpled piece of paper and handed it to her without a moment's hesitation. A great pity filled her eyes as she read the blotted, unsteady lines, and her voice shook a little when she spoke.

"Do you intend to seek them," she asked.

"Ay, I'm gaun frae The Linn this very nicht, Miss Kenyon," he said in his clear resolute voice. "I've only tae gang tae the laird's an' spier for Ralph Mortimer's address."

Miss Kenyon took two turns up and down the floor, and then faced him, leaning one hand upon the table. "Perhaps you have wondered why I asked you to come here, and why I wished to know every particular. Let me tell you. Years ago, before we came to Linn, Ralph Mortimer ruined my father, and even caused his death."

The steady voice faltered as if some awful memory swept across her heart.

"I know him well, Mr. Duncan, none better, and you may fear the very worst. Poor Lizzie; she says here that he has promised to make her his wife, but never was a promise so utterly false. He will break her heart and cast her from him like a broken toy. If you can see her, and persuade her to come home, she will live to thank you all her life. Tell her I said it, who know that Ralph Mortimer is wicked and heartless to the core." The young man sprang to his feet as if grudging every moment which kept him from his purpose.

"There will be no need for you to go to Sir Jasper Hamilton or his wife," said Miss Kenyon, "I can tell you where you will find them. Go first to The Holt, Westdeane, Kent; the place belongs to Ralph Mortimer, and if they are not there, you will learn his whereabouts at the Carden Club, Horton Street, in London."

In silence Jamie Duncan noted the addresses. Then he held out his hand to her, his firm under lip quivering as he tried to thank her.

She laid her gentle hand on his tall shoulder, and all her great womanly pity shone in her face when she spoke. "I am a woman who has suffered much, Mr. Duncan, and I know the agony you endure to-day. My heart and prayers go with you in your journey, and God give you strength to bear what has come already, and what may come in the future. You will come to me when you return to Strathlinn?"

"Yes, yes."

The words fell brokenly from his lips, and with a grasp of her hand which spoke volumes, he hurried from her presence.



CHAPTER XII.

SARA KENYON'S STORY.

WHAT day there was no rest for Sara Kenyon. Feeling as if the little house could not hold her, she put on her bonnet immediately after dinner and went up the long hilly road to Cluny. And, to Mrs. Forbes' surprise and delight, she walked into the drawing-room shortly after three o'clock. The Doctor's young wife had grown older and more matronly looking, but the cares of wifehood and motherhood had not dimmed the sunshine on the sweet face. Two children had been born to her—a boy and girl; the latter, the elder of the two, bore Sara Kenyon's name. The son and heir was just beginning to toddle on his own sturdy little legs, and when her visitor was announced, mother was coaxing him with sugar plums to come to her from the end of the long room. She sprang to her, and kissed her with her usual impulsive affection.

"Sara! what an unexpected pleasure. You walked up, of course?"

"Yes, I walked," replied Miss Kenyon, abruptly. "I have come to tell you a long story, Mary; have you time to listen?"

"Yes; shall I send the children away?"

"No, let them stay," returned Miss Kenyon, in the same abrupt way. "You have heard about poor Lizzie Falconer, I suppose?" she said, suddenly.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Forbes, very gravely. "John

was at the farm this forenoon ; her mother is very ill. It is a terrible affair."

"This is my birthday, Mary," said Miss Kenyon, in the abrupt sudden manner so unusual to her; "I am thirty-one to-day. My father was the second son of Squire Kenyon of The Holt, an old and impoverished estate in one of the sunniest spots in Kent. Bit by bit the spendthrift Kenyons had lessened their inheritance, until, when my father entered into possession on the sudden death of his elder brother, The Holt was little more than a name. I don't think there were more than fifty acres of land together with the house and policies. My mother died when I was very young, and though my heart was breaking for her loss, there came a time when I was unspeakably thankful that she was at rest before the worst came. You have known only good men in your happy life, Mary, so I hardly think I can make you well understand what my father was. From the beginning he was taught that because he was a Kenyon of The Holt, all honest work was beneath him. Idleness was his ruin. I never saw The Holt until we went to live there, after it passed into my father's hands, when I was ten years old. Christopher was thirteen then, a quiet, studious boy, perfectly content and happy if allowed to live among books. He had no interest or care beyond his studies. I sometimes think if it had been otherwise—but that is a needless thought. Kit and I were almost entirely left alone. I don't think my father ever spent more than three months in the year at The Holt. He lived abroad and in London. When I grew older I learned why it was so. Sometimes money was plentiful in the house, and at other times our solitary domestic could scarcely procure us the necessaries of life. She had grown grey in the service of the Kenyons, and would, I

believe, have laid down her life willingly any day for us. I used to look forward with childish pleasure to the time when my father came home, for he brought his friends with him, and the house was gay and merry. But Kit used to dread it. He had a little den up in the tower looking to the West. What a place it was! and I think he lived there almost while my father remained at home."

Sara Kenyon paused a moment, and turned her eyes to the window.

"When I was fifteen," she resumed, "our faithful servant died, and it seemed to me that that was the beginning of my trouble. The household care rested on my shoulders, and my only help was a hired girl from the neighbouring village. You can imagine how the old house was kept. Old Bright told me before she died, that my father lived on what he won at the gaming table. I could not fully realise what that meant then, but still it gave me a shock, and her last words filled me with a strange sense of uneasiness.

"'Miss Sara,' she said. 'Take care of yourself when I be gone, and keep close to your brother. And when the Squire comes down, keep yourself away from the folk he brings with him. Oh, Miss Sara, dear, they'll never do ye any good.'

"I promised her through my tears to do her bidding, and during the years that followed, I tried my best, but it was impossible to keep my promise always. I cannot remember the time when I did not love my father with my whole heart. He was always kind to me, whatever may have been his treatment of others, and though, by-and-by, I saw and shrank from many traits in his character, my love did not diminish, only a great pity mingled with it. I was little more than seventeen, I think, when I first saw Ralph Mortimer and his sister, now Sir Jasper Hamilton's wife. They

came with my father to The Holt one Christmas time, and stayed with us nearly a month. I was a young inexperienced girl, Mary, who had never had a girl friend in her life, and on the first day Maud Mortimer came to The Holt I fell down and worshipped her. She was so gay, so gracious, and so beautiful, that in my simplicity I thought there was not her equal in the world. But from the first I shrank with unutterable dislike from her brother. I tried to overcome it, for I saw that my father wished me to be amiable to him, but the attention he lavished on me only increased my aversion to him. Maud told me then with a little pitiful air, that she and dear Ralph were orphans, and that the dear squire had been almost a father to them both, and could not be happy until he had introduced us to his little girl. Christopher was of no account, Mary. I used to wonder if my father had forgotten his existence, so utterly did he ignore him. While the Mortimers were with us, he was offered a tutorship from a friend of our mother's in Cumberland, and I was left alone. It was then I felt how utterly alone I was and how dependent on myself. My father and Maud Mortimer often hinted at Ralph's growing attachment to me, and I could see it plainly enough, but there was something about him which made me shiver. He had some influence over my father; he was growing old you see, and was weaker than he used to be; and his way of living aged him before his time. Before Ralph Mortimer left The Holt he asked me to be his wife. I refused as kindly as I could, though I don't think I concealed all the dislike I felt. There was another reason, Mary, I—I—cared for some one else. We were parted scarcely hoping to meet again, but my heart had gone with him. If I might not be his wife, I could be none other's. My father came to me and spoke more angrily than

he had ever done before. He told me Ralph would make me a good husband, that he was a gen'leman's son, and would be able to give me a better position than I had occupied; but, Mary, not a word of this was true. The case was that he was deeply indebted to Mortimer, who had promised to absolve him on condition that I became his wife. Between them they had sold me, but all my pride rose up in arms, and with a firmness I had never felt, much less shown before, I declined to become a party to it, even though the selling of The Holt should be the result. I pass over the scenes which followed; one was but a repetition of the other. That spring I saw the worst side of my father's character, and when they left early in the summer I experienced an unspeakable sense of thankfulness. In the autumn, Christopher came home for his month's holiday, before going abroad for the winter with his pupil. We had a quiet time of peaceful happiness, the last we were ever to enjoy at The Holt. I told him all my troubles, and he talked in his gentle way of the time when he and I should be in a little home of our own, not dreaming what was to lead to the making of that home, nor where it was to be. It was the end of September when he went away, and I clung to him at the last with a forlorn sense of desolation in my heart and a strange sense of coming evil. A month later my father came home accompanied, as he had been before, by Ralph Mortimer and his sister. My father looked worn and ill, and he seemed moody and irritable, and there was a certain cringing in his manner to the Mortimers which I did not like to see. They were changed also. Maud's manner to me was haughty and condescending, while her brother assumed an air of patronising familiarity which to me was infinitely humiliating. To be my father's guests,

their behaviour was very odd. A few uncomfortable days dragged themselves slowly away. I was wondering with a kind of desperation how I was to endure weeks of the same; but a great change was at hand. Late one still November afternoon the Mortimers were out somewhere, and we were left alone in the house. I found my father in the library, sitting with his face buried in his hands. I went to him, my heart full of yearning love, and kneeling beside him asked him to tell me what his trouble was, and above all why he was obliged to tolerate the Mortimers at The Holt. We might be so happy together, I said, if he would come and live quietly at home with me.

“‘My child,’ he said, taking both my hands in his trembling ones, ‘you don’t understand. There can never be any more happiness for me; my sins are visited on my head to-day.’

“He told me then what made my heart grow sick within me in its despair. It seems that some years before he had been guilty of some crime punishable by law. He did not tell me what it was and I never learned afterwards; but Ralph Mortimer knew it, and this was the hold he had upon him. Do you see, Mary, my father had to buy his silence. ‘It was he who first put the thought into my head, Sara,’ he said. ‘For I was in difficulties at the time and could not see a way to extricate myself, and then when I had done it he turned upon me and asked a price for his silence. Until now I have been able to meet his demands with money; but this time The Holt has passed into his hands. Sara, you and I are only guests in our old home, liable to be sent away at any time by its new owner.’ I hid my face, Mary, feeling as if no other sorrow could equal this one in depth, but I was mistaken. My poor father lifted my head

and looked into my eyes with a long, long look. If he had sinned he had also suffered, for his face was pinched and drawn, and there were deep ploughlines on his brow.

“‘My poor little girl,’ he murmured brokenly. ‘Look at me, Sara, with your mother’s eyes, and tell me that you forgive me for all I have been and done in the past.’

“I crept closer to his side, and laid my head on his breast, and for a long time there was nothing said. Then I heard the Mortimers returning, and springing up I left my father with a hasty kiss, and hurried to my own room. The one wild thought in my heart was to get away from The Holt, away from the presence of the people I felt as if I could never face again. I had locked my door, and when in passing to her own room Maud Mortimer tried to enter mine, I told her to leave me in peace for a moment. I threw open the window and knelt there, but the chill November air could not cool the fever on my brow, nor soothe the aching pain at my heart. It might be half an hour afterwards, an awful report rang through the house. I sprang up, and with lightning steps flew to the library. Ralph Mortimer was there and Maud, and, and——.”

Miss Kenyon paused, shuddering, and pressed her hand to her eyes, as if some terrible picture rose up before them.

“My father had shot himself through the heart, and he lay with his face downwards, and when they raised him there was the shadow of a smile on his white lips, as if death had been very welcome. I turned upon the brother and sister, some awful impulse prompting me to speak. I don’t remember if I would what I said, but I know they quailed beneath my scathing words. What followed, I remember only

dimly. A great commotion in the house, and Christopher coming home, and then the funeral. During these dreary days the Mortimers—especially Maud—treated us with a heartlessness I have never forgotten. They spared no effort to make us feel our position more acutely; and we were both very thankful to turn our backs on The Holt for ever, and hide ourselves in London. But Ralph Mortimer sought us out, and made my life a misery to me with his attentions and his oft-repeated request that I would go back to The Holt, the only difference being that I should be his wife. At last, weary and sick, we bethought ourselves to leave England and seek shelter in some far-off corner, free from all association with the past. So we came here, but even in this place, we have come in contact with those we avoided. You can understand now, why I refused Lady Hamilton admittance when she came. It was another proof of her heartlessness to intrude upon us, for she had treated me very cruelly."

Miss Kenyon paused abruptly, and leaned her head on her hands. "During all the years, Mary," she said, after a while, "I've been happy in your never-failing kindness. You have been a true friend. You knew nothing of our past, yet you gave me your friendship without a question or a doubt."

"Hush!" said the young wife, tears of pity and sympathy in her bright eyes. "To know you was to trust you. My poor Sara, how you have suffered!"

"It is past now, but the memory remains," returned Miss Kenyon wearily. "At times its bitterness seems almost too much for me to bear, yet God has been very good; I am ashamed sometimes of my want of thankfulness."

The little blue-eyed fairy who bore Miss Kenyon's name left her play and came to her, looking up into

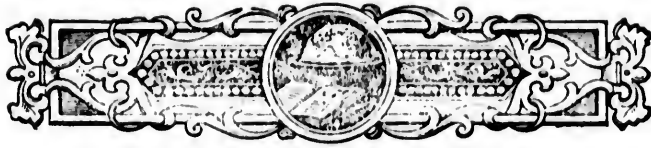
her face with wondering eyes, as if seeking to know why mamma and aunt Sara looked so sad.

"Sara Kenyon Forbes," repeated Miss Kenyon, laying a fond hand upon the sunny head. "You ought not to have given her my name, Mary. Would you if you had known?"

"It is my constant prayer, Sara," returned Mrs. Forbes, laying her hand on Miss Kenyon's shoulder, with a grave, sweet smile on her lips, "that my little girl may grow up as good a woman as the one whose name she bears. And when she is older she will learn, as I have done, to love and honour you with all her heart."

And the little one crept up into Miss Kenyon's arms, and clasped her hands about her neck, as if she understood and approved of her mother's words.





CHAPTER XIII.

FACE TO FACE.

ON the last evening in October, the London train due at Westleane was twenty minutes late, and only brought a single passenger to the place—a young man, tall and broad-shouldered, who asked the porter where he could find a night's lodging. The man directed him to the little inn across the way, and the stranger asked there if he could have some tea and a bed for the night. The landlady requested him to step into the cosy parlour, and proceeded to set the table with a cheerful alacrity very pleasant to see.

"Will you please tell me, ma'am," he said at length, "whether or no there's anybody at The Holt the now?"

"Yes, sir; Mr. Mortimer and his young wife are here. They came the other day, and took us all by surprise. Do you know them, sir?"

"They are living at The Holt, then," said the stranger. "Is it far from here?"

"Bless you, sir, no; only a mile—scarcely that," said the woman. "What a beautiful creature Mr. Mortimer's wife is; but nobody knows where she comes from; even the servants did not expect them. The marriage seems to be so sudden, though I don't know, either. Mr. Mortimer was always a strange gentleman; it is not long since he got The Holt—"

after poor Squire Kenyon's time. You will know the sad story of his death."

The stranger shook his head.

"Will ye tell me the road to The Holt?" he asked, rising, and moving to the door. "I think I'll walk as far; it's a fine night."

"Certainly, certainly," said the brisk little woman. "It's dark, but the moon should be up by-and-bye. You can't miss it, sir. Go straight along the road past the station, and you'll come to the gates on the left hand side. There's a lodge, but it's been empty since poor Squire Kenyon died; you'll easily find it. Shall I have supper ready when you come home, sir?"

"No, no, I shall not be long, thank you. Good night just now."

"Good night, sir—good night."

It was very dark, but there was a glimmer of brightness on the edge of the cloud, behind which the new moon was hidden. The road the stranger took was bordered on one side by a low ragged hedge, separating it from the fields; and, on the other, by a high stone wall, above which the oak trees reared their sturdy heads. He kept close to the wall, and walked slowly, with his head bent, until he reached the gates; as he passed through them he strode with quick firm step up the wide avenue. After the first hundred yards, it took a winding turn, and there he saw a grey mass shewing against the sky, brightened here and there by a lighted window. It was The Holt, and it held Lizzie. That was the one thought in the stranger's mind, and a mad impulse prompted him to enter it, and take her thence away back to the home she had left. He stepped from the gravel, and crossed the lawn, until he was close to the house. Two windows on the ground flat were brilliantly lighted, and the blinds only partially drawn. And this was what the

stranger saw—A large room, dingy and sombre in its furnishings, and a fire burning at the far end, and a woman's figure on a low chair at the hearth. Her back was to him, but these slender shoulders were Lizzie's, that was the golden head that had lain so often on his breast. He stood perfectly still, restraining with an iron hand the thousand impulses bounding in his heart. Then another figure sauntered up the room, a man's this time, and bent low over the chair upon the hearth. And he saw with what a smile her face was raised to meet his kiss, and there was a faint blush upon the rounded cheek.

Then, shivering, the stranger turned and went his way. As he passed through the gates once more, the clouds broke overhead, and a flood of trembling moonlight shone upon his face. So white and rigid was it, that when he returned to the inn, little Miss Tibbets wondered if the stranger had seen the ghost of Squire Kenyon up at The Holt.

The morning, the first of November, broke calm, still, and bright, with almost summer mildness in the air. Miss Tibbets' guest was up early. Before the household was stirring, she heard him walking overhead, and it increased her conviction that he was troubled in mind. He breakfasted at nine, and a little after ten left the house, and she watched that he took the road to The Holt. As he went again through the iron gateway in the stone wall, the clear morning light revealed the desolation within the policies. The avenue was strewn with the leaves of many autumns, and the turf, on either side, was overgrown with rank grass and nettles. Even the wide sweep of gravel in front of the house was carpeted with weeds. It would be impossible to describe the architecture of the house. The original mansion had been a square, solid pile, destitute of any attempt at

decoration, but there had been a tower added here, and a wing there, which gave it an odd picturesque appearance, further enhanced by the ivy of a century's growth, which crept about every window and into every crevice. Save for the thin line of blue smoke curling upward to the sky, there was little sign of life about The Holt on that November morning.

And when the stranger touched the knocker, the echo resounded through every corner of the quiet house. The door was opened immediately by a maid servant, who stared at the gentlemanly looking young man, as she waited to learn his business. Evidently visitors were rare at The Holt.

"Can I see the lady of the house?" inquired he quietly.

"Yes; that is, I'll see, sir. Will you step in, please?"

The stranger shook his head.

"Give me your name then, and I'll take it to my missus," said the girl, slightly perplexed.

He tore a leaf from his pocket-book and scribbled his name upon it, and handed it to her.

She left him on the doorstep, and he saw her go upstairs. She was not two minutes gone. "My missus declines to see you, sir," she said, politely but decidedly.

The stranger did not offer to move. There was something very odd about him, the girl thought. He tore another leaf from his pocket book and wrote upon it, "For your father and mother's sake, let me see you for a moment."

The girl looked dubious, as he asked her to take it to her mistress. But she was obliging and went, and did not read the message on her way upstairs.

It was ten minutes before she returned, with a sealed envelope in her hand. She gave it him, and deliberately shut the door in his face, as if acting

under instruction. But he stood there and read the message within, in the handwriting he knew so well, and which had evidently been penned by trembling fingers.

"I *cannot* see you. You are mad to ask me. Tell my father and mother I am married, and that I will write soon.
E. M."

He crushed it in his strong right hand as he had done another cruel message, and strode off with his hat drawn over his brows, and renewed bitterness in his soul. He had learned the truth, the truth he had hoped for, but why did his heart grow sick within him in its despair? Before him there stretched a dreary waste of years, during which it would be his task to try to forget. Ah! friends, when we need it most, the bliss of forgetfulness is far from our reach.

Just as the stranger neared the gates, a horseman drew rein there, and sprang down to open it. The stranger raised his head and their eyes met. Face to face the scoundrel and the true honest heart he had broken. There was a moment of intense silence. Then Ralph Mortimer swore a fearful oath. "You cur, what are you doing here? Get off the place or I'll set my dog to hunt you off; like the sneak you are!" With folded arms the stranger stood, looking upon the dark face, crimson with rage, his own pale with the intensity of suppressed passion.

"Ralph Mortimer, take care!" he said steadily; "I have sworn to keep my hands off you, but I may be tempted! O God!" he broke off with trembling lips, "Is this the man who calls my darling wife?"

"Your darling," sneered Ralph Mortimer, in his brutal triumph. "Did you think she ever cared for you. She only amused herself with you, and laughed to me over your boorish fondness."

"Ralph Mortimer," said the young man in a low steady voice; "I have said it before and I say it again, you lie."

Mortimer turned contemptuously aside. "Ay, but I am richly repaid to-day, I would not have missed meeting you here for a hundred guineas. But, remember, the next time you impertinently intrude upon the mistress of 'The Holt, I shall not be so lenient with you. I say, don't forget my hint about the dog. You might find him an unpleasant acquaintance."

In one moment Jamie Duncan's self-control was flung to the winds. He caught the whip from Mortimer's hand, and with all the force of his strong right arm, brought it across the dastard face. And Ralph Mortimer carried the mark of that stroke with him to the grave.





CHAPTER XIV.

THE LAST OF THE HAMILTONS.

TWO years after.

Time is a wonderful physician, but there are sores which even he cannot heal. Outwardly, there was not much change in the inmates of the farm-house at The Mains. The poor old father and mother buried their grief very deep, but the heart knoweth its own bitterness. Beyond what Jamie Duncan had to tell when he come home from England, nothing had been heard of Lizzie.

Her name was seldom mentioned in the house, but there were a thousand things which daily reminded them of the child they had lost. Little things—the poultry in the farmyard, waiting for her to feed them—the old pony who used to follow her everywhere, standing at the fence whinnying for the sound of her voice and the touch of her hand—the neglected garden—the empty room—the dreary stillness in the house;—these things broke the mother's heart every day. And at the end of the years the sorrow was as deep as at the beginning, and more hopeless. We think it is a bitter grief to lay a loved one in the grave, but there are things worse than death.

At Lea Rig abode Jamie Duncan in his loneliness. He was changed. His work was well and faithfully done as it had been, and his opinion carried weight among his neighbours, though they shook their heads, saying it was not good to see so old a head on young

shoulders. At six-and-twenty he was a grave, sedate, middle-aged man, with a memory in his heart which time would never dim. The years passed over The Linn without bringing any material change in their train. The gossips were busy, as of yore, but Lizzie Falconer's flight had given place long since to the ever fresh tales from Glentarne. Jasper Hamilton had added the sin of drunkenness to his other misdeeds, and he turned the home of his ancestors into a very Hades. His fits of drunken fury were frequent and terrible. The servants told how my lady was often obliged to lock herself in her own rooms for days at a time, in absolute fear of her life. Maud Mortimer had paid dearly for the name and position she had won. But was she humbled? Ten times haughtier and more scornful than of yore. No children had been born to them, for which, in her far-off Sussex home, Jasper Hamilton's mother was humbly thankful. A child of such parents would not be likely to do much honour to the house of Hamilton—better, far better, the name should die with her own unworthy son.

Between ten and eleven o'clock on a fair September morning, Jasper Hamilton and his wife were idling over their breakfast table. Regally beautiful was my lady, and faultless her attire. Not so her husband; careless even to slovenliness in his dress, his figure looked its worst, while the autumn sunshine lay mercilessly bright upon his effeminate face, with its coarse sensual mouth, and bleared unsteady eyes.

"Jasper," said her ladyship, coolly, "I don't mean to spend another winter in these backwoods. Next month I intend to go to the Continent, returning in the spring."

"*Indeed!* You seem to have it all laid out. And what if I object?" inquired Sir Jasper.

"Some people never learn," returned her ladyship enigmatically. "Do I generally give up my pleasure when you express disapproval?"

"No," replied her husband with an oath, to which she was too well accustomed to heed; "but I'm going to begin anew, and make you obey me, madam."

Lady Hamilton laughed—the quiet, insulting laugh which nearly drove him mad.

"Too late in the day, *mon ami*," she said carelessly. "You don't make Glentarne so agreeable that I should care to stay in it for ever. Look at yourself, Jasper, in the mirror there, and tell me if you are fit to be seen; if you won't stop that horrible drinking, I warn you what the end will be. Doctor Forbes told me yesterday you would not last long at the rate you are going just now."

"So you have been consulting Forbes as to the probability of your speedy release," he said, sneeringly. "But I'll outwit you and him too, yet. I'm not ready to depart, even to please such disinterested friends."

"I wonder the letters are never coming," said her ladyship, with a careless yawn. "Eleven o'clock, is'nt it? There ought to be one from Ralph, this morning. By the by, I'll need a cheque one of these days. I've hardly a copper left."

"Why, I gave you fifty pounds scarcely a week ago, Maud," said her husband rising from the table. "And I don't mean to give you another penny for a month at least. You waste more in a month than my mother needed for her own use in a year."

"Possibly," said her ladyship, rising also. "But there is a slight difference. Another thing too," she added, pausing at the door, "I need a new horse. That brute Chevalier threw me yesterday, and then went over a bank and cut his knees, I think the groom said."

"What right had you to mount Chevalier?" asked Sir Jasper, angrily. "I forbade you already. What fault have you to your own mare."

"Too slow for me," returned her ladyship, coolly. "I wrote to Benson yesterday, though, to send me on a good rider. I expect him to-morrow, that's what I wanted the cheque for, if you are anxious to learn."

Another oath broke from Sir Jasper's lips. "I'll tell you what it is, Maud," he said passionately. "I can't afford to keep you in such extravagance. If the beast comes, I'll send him back to Benson, and tell him not to fulfil any orders you may favour him with. Since you have rendered Chevalier useless, you can ride your own mare, or walk."

Very pale grew my lady in her angry passion.

"Benson knows, I fancy," she said coolly, "which of us to obey. And you have small need to talk of extravagance. How many horses do you use up in a year. The new one you brought home the other day would not cost less than a hundred."

"I only got him on trial, but I haven't mounted him yet. And he is only to cost eighty pounds."

"Humph! plenty I think. I wouldn't mount him, and fear isn't one of my characteristics. The groom says he is as full of vice as he can be."

Jasper Hamilton laughed. "He's as quiet as a lamb. I'm going to drive him to D——— this morning; will you come?"

My lady looked surprised. It was seldom, indeed, her husband expressed even so slight a desire for her company.

"No, thanks;" she said, "I haven't a horse I would ride into town, and my habit is in tatters with the fall I got; so I will wish you good morning and a safe journey."

From her dressing-room window, half an hour later,

she watched him ride away, and she saw that the fiery animal took all his rider's skill to restrain him.

"He'll come to grief or I'm mistaken," she said, as she flung herself on a couch and opened a French novel. That was how Lady Hamilton generally spent her mornings. The hours sped. Sir Jasper did not appear to luncheon as he had promised, but his wife felt no surprise. But when the dinner hour approached and he was still absent, a vague sense of uneasiness crept over her. She was in her dressing room shortly after six; waiting while her maid put a few finishing touches to the dress she meant to wear, when she heard a great commotion in the hall. Obeying her mistress's hurried order, the maid flew to discover its cause. But half-dressed as she was, Maud followed her, and leaning over the balustrade, saw a group of strange men carrying something between them—the prostrate form of her husband. Shuddering, she crept back to her dressing room, and listened while the heavy tread came nearer and nearer. Evidently they were taking him to his own room. It might be twenty minutes before a creature came to break the news to her, then the housekeeper entered and told her how it was.

"It happened on the way home, my lady," she said, "for he was seen leaving the town all right. Some men passing found him lying at a hedge side insensible, and the right leg is broken. He had lost control over the animal, they suppose, and had been thrown. He is alive yet, and the doctor has been sent for. Will you go to Sir Jasper, my lady?"

"No," said her mistress, decidedly. "Let every thing be done that is necessary till the Doctor comes. Let me know of his arrival, I wish to see him. Send me a cup of tea to me. I feel very faint."

Doctor Forbes arrived an hour later, and went

straight to the injured man. Lady Hamilton met him on the landing as he came out again, and heard from his lips that there was no hope of her husband's recovery. His keen eyes saw the sudden light leap into hers, and the look of relief which crossed the handsome face. It was easy to see what was the desire of this woman's heart.

"You will excuse me, I hope, if I suggest that Lady Hamilton ought to be immediately sent for," he said quietly. "It is possible Sir Jasper may recover consciousness. I cannot say, but in any case she ought to be here. I am on my way to the town at present, shall I telegraph?"

"No, thank you, Doctor Froles," replied her ladyship, mildly. "I shall despatch a groom immediately. Good evening."

"Good evening, Lady Hamilton," replied the Doctor, courteously, and again those searching eyes looked at her so keenly, that she was glad when he was gone.

It may have been forgetfulness, but no groom was sent to D—— that night. Her ladyship retired to rest between ten and eleven, and the housekeeper sat down at Sir Jasper's bedside to watch and wait. Shortly after midnight, the unconscious man turned uneasily, and she saw his lips move. Bending over him, the faithful soul tried to catch the whispered words. He looked at her eagerly, with the clear light of recognition in his eyes.

"Tenant, has my mother been sent for?"

"No, Sir Jasper. I spoke to her ladyship about it, but she said there was no necessity yet; and I could not do it of my own accord."

"Do it now, then," he said, with feverish impatience, "immediately, without a moment's delay. Tell her I am dying."

"Oh, Sir Jasper." There were tears in the woman's eyes as she hurried from the room to do his bidding.

The doctor feared the frail thread of life would snap before the mother came, but the dying man clung to it with such tenacity that he was alive when the carriage drove up to the door on the evening of the second day—alive, but no more.

In her favourite attitude, leaning gracefully against the marble mantel, with her velvet robe sweeping the hearthrug, was Maud Hamilton awaiting her husband's mother.

"Tell Lady Hamilton I await her in the dining room," she had said to the servants, and when the carriage whirled up, she turned her eyes expectantly to the door. Her message had been faithfully delivered, but the stately figure in its sombre widow's weeds passed the dining room without even a glance through the open door, and went straight upstairs to her son. The housekeeper left the room when she entered, only, in passing, she caught the slender gloved hand and pressed it passionately to her lips. Then she shut the door, and Lady Hamilton fell on her knees at the bedside, with a great cry—a cry which Maud Hamilton heard in the corridor, and even *she* dared not intrude. There were tears in Jasper Hamilton's poor dim eyes, and he touched his mother's hands as if it comforted him as it used to do in his childish days. She lifted his pale face to hers and kissed him, with a kiss which blotted out all remembrance of the past. No need for the weak penitent lips to ask forgiveness, for there was nothing but love in his mother's face. O, this mighty mother's love; there is none other like unto it on earth, for God has chosen to compare it with His own. There were no words spoken—none were needed—till the door opened, and Maud came in. There was an odd

expression of pride and defiance in the beautiful face, and yet a strange yearning look in her dark eyes. She was a woman after all, and there was a green spot hidden away somewhere in her heart.

"This is Maud, mother," said the sick man in a faint voice, and a red flush mounted to his cheek as he saw his mother rise to face her. These two women were bound to him by the nearest and dearest ties, and yet he trembled to see them meet. Whatever his mother may have felt, she hid it well, and she touched the hand her daughter-in-law offered her, though there was no smile upon her face.

"You were right about the beast, Maud," said Jasper. "It has done for me. Perhaps it is the best thing that could have happened."

"Hush, my son."

His mother's cool soft hand touched his lips, and she drew a chair close to his bedside, turning her face from his wife. What had come over *her* now? Her face was pale, and her lips quivering, and there was something like tears in her eyes. Her jewelled hand fell on the elder woman's shoulder, and she said—

"Lady Hamilton, wont you say one kind word to *me*? I am Jasper's wife." But before the astonished lady could make reply, the queenly figure had hurried from the room, as if ashamed of her impetuous words. And just then a sudden pain caused a low moan to escape the sufferer's lips, and his mother had to ring for assistance, and so she forgot Maud.

* * * * *

At daybreak Jasper Hamilton turned upon his side, and died as peacefully as a child would fall asleep. Only his mother was with him when the end came. He was the last of his race. Henceforth the house of Hamilton would be an existence of the past, and Glentarne the inheritance of strangers.



CHAPTER XV.

THE CARRIAGE FOR MISS KENYON.

DURING the dreary days intervening between the death and the funeral these two lonely women might have comforted one another.

But Lady Hamilton was cold and distant in her demeanour to her daughter-in-law, and, as may be imagined, Maud was ready to resent it bitterly. There was an indefinable change in Maud Hamilton. It might be only the natural outcome of the shock caused by the suddenness of her bereavement, and the solemnity of death in the house, but certain it was that much of her haughty manner had disappeared. It was noticed quickly enough by the servants.

The housekeeper commented on it to her old mistress, but she listened scarcely heeding. It was a mistake ; she might have shown a little more kindness and sympathy with her son's widow. She was not unfeeling, as we know, but there was a sore, bitter feeling in her heart against her which she might have tried to overcome. She did not guess how Maud's heart was yearning towards her ; she did not know how often she was very near seeking her, and begging again for a kind word. And so the days dragged their weary lengths along until the day appointed for the funeral. It was a large one, for Sir Jasper was well known, and many who had known him in life were anxious to pay the last tribute to his memory.

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It rained heavily all afternoon. Lady Hamilton kept her own room, and so did Maud, yet each was in the other's thoughts when the procession moved away, bearing Jasper Hamilton to his last resting place. Between four and five, the Kenyons were surprised to see the Glentarne carriage drive up to the gate of the schoolhouse. It was empty, but the coachman brought a note for Miss Kenyon. She broke the seal, and read it, then, without comment, handed it to her brother, and hastily drank the tea left in her cup. It was from Maud, and ran as follows:—

"I am in great trouble, Sara; and I think if I cannot speak to some one I shall die. My husband's mother will not see me. If you can forgive the past, come to me. I know I am asking a great deal, but I cannot help it—something makes me send for you; oh, do come."

Christopher looked up, and met his sister's eyes.

"You will go, Sara, of course," he said, as if there could not be a shadow of doubt about it.

"Yes," replied Miss Kenyon, gravely. "She is in trouble; and we must not be unforgiving."

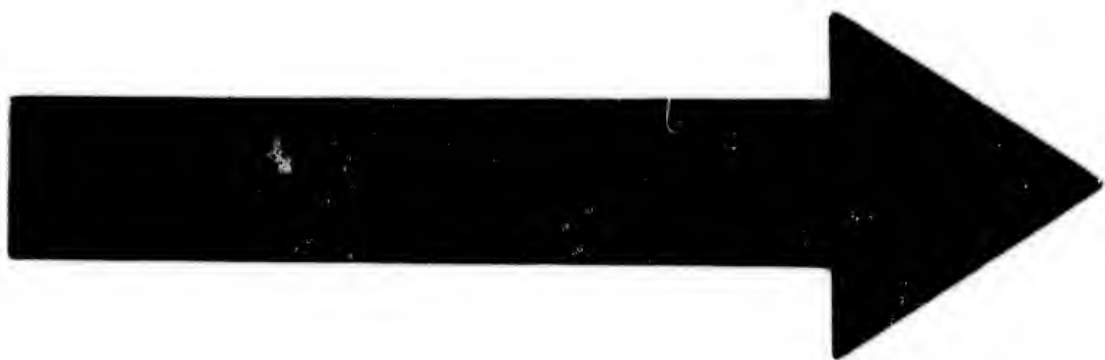
The schoolmaster came round to his sister, and kissed her. She understood him, and with a half sad, half happy smile, looked up into his face.

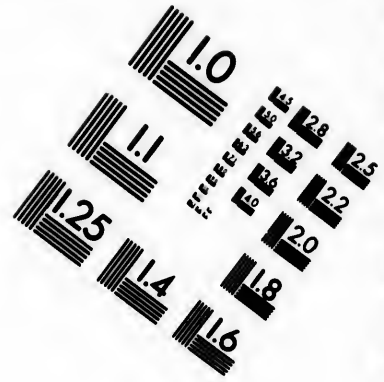
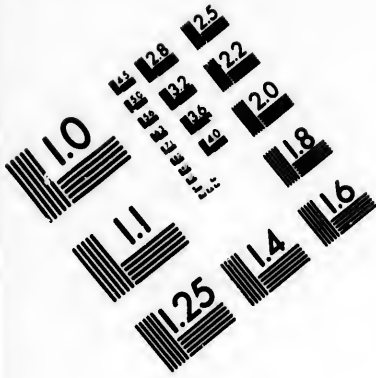
"It is what our mother would have me to do, Kit. I can remember her lessons yet."

Then she put on her bonnet and shawl, and went out to the carriage.

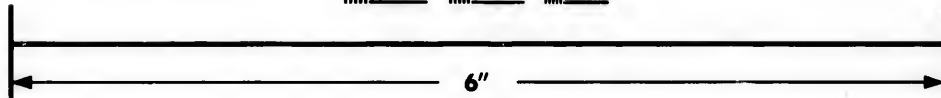
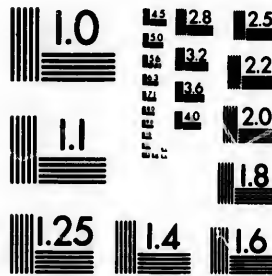
To say that there was amazement on the coachman's face weakly describes its expression.

Sara leaned back among the cushions, marvelling much that Maud Hamilton should have written so humble a letter to her. But she marvelled more when she was shown up into the luxurious dressing





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room and saw her. She was sitting, with her white hands clasped upon her heavy widow's dress, and her eyes bent upon the fire. And when Miss Kenyon came to her, and said gently—

"I am here, Lady Hamilton ; I am sorry for your trouble," the very sound of her voice broke her down utterly, and she cried like a child.

I believe it was the first time since her childish days.

Miss Kenyon stood beside her puzzled how to act.

"Will you sit down, please," said Maud at length, very humbly. "I want to talk to you."

Sara took a chair opposite her, and waited for her to begin.

"In the first place, Sara, I want to ask you to forgive me for my part in the past. Can you ever do it?"

"I have done it long ago," replied Miss Kenyon, in a low voice. "Let your mind be at rest on that point."

"I am ashamed to see you sitting there when I remember it," went on Maud, in the same humble voice. "I have been ashamed to think of it many times. O Sara, I am very wretched!"

The proud head bent low on her hands, and her voice was broken by sobs.

"I have been a wicked woman, but I have been punished for it, for in all my life I cannot remember one happy day. My mother died when I was a child, Sara, and I was left in Ralph's care. If he had been a good man, I might have been different; but his example and his life, you know what they would be for a young girl who had not even the memory of a mother's teaching to guide her. Our father was an officer in the army, but he died when I was only a few weeks old. Ralph inherited all his wild, sinful nature; and his aim was to get through life as easily

and as pleasantly as possible. We were left with a small portion, sufficient for our boy and girl needs; but when Ralph grew up he was wildly extravagant, and was never out of debt. He was proud of me, and I was useful to him, so he kept me with him, and took me abroad with him. You know he was a frequenter of the gaming table, and was generally in luck, although he sometimes lost largely. It was the easiest way of earning a livelihood, and suited his taste. At Homburg we met Jasper one year, and, knowing his weak, yielding nature, Ralph easily got him into his power. O Sara, I am ashamed to remember how often Ralph induced him to play! He was no match for Ralph, and he won thousands from him. He had a fancy for me from the first; and, to please Ralph, for I was afraid of him then, I encouraged it, till he made me an offer. I accepted him—a man whom I despised, I almost hated—simply for his possessions and the home he could give me; and I knew I should never get so brilliant a chance, for not one of those I flirted with would have married me, and I knew it. But I have been punished for it, for often since I came to Glentarne I have wished myself dead, so utter was my misery."

She paused, and Miss Kenyon spoke, in a low pitying voice, "I am very sorry for you, Lady Hamilton."

"I don't deserve it, Sara," she sobbed. "Tell me again you have forgiven me for the past; I can never forgive myself."

"Yes, I forgive you freely, as I hope to be forgiven," repeated Miss Kenyon. "I only want to ask one question, and then the past must be buried for ever. Will you answer it?"

"If I can—willingly."

"What—what was the crime my father spoke of? Was he guilty, do you know?"

Maud Hamilton's face grew crimson in its shame.

"It was forgery! and, but for my brother, it would never have been committed. It was he who urged him to it."

For one brief moment Sara Kenyon hid her face, then she rose, and came near to Lady Hamilton, and laid her hand upon her shoulder.

"Now we will talk of yourself. You say your husband's mother will not see you. Do you know why?"

"I deserve her scorn; but it is none the less hard to bear. O Sara, I wish I was a good woman."

"You may be," said Miss Kenyon, gently. "Live to prove it. Lady Hamilton used to be a kind-hearted woman; go to her, and try to make friends with her. She would not repulse you."

Maud shook her head.

"I fear she would, and I am so proud yet, Sara, I cannot force myself upon her; but I could love her if she would let me, and she could teach me to be good."

Sarah Kenyon thought a moment.

"If you will take my advice, go to her and tell her what you have told me. I am very hopeful of the result."

"It will need to be to-night, then, for she leaves Glentarne to-morrow."

"Let it be now," urged Miss Kenyon. "I must go. I am thankful now that I came, Lady Hamilton, if I have done you the smallest good."

"You are an angel, Sara," returned the humbled beauty. "I believe there is not another woman like you on earth."

Then she touched the bell, and ordered the carriage for Miss Kenyon.

Sara tied on her bonnet, and held out her hand, with a slight smile.

"Good-bye, Lady Hamilton. I am glad we part friends again."

But Maud did not touch the offered hand.

"Won't you kiss me, Sara?" she said wistfully. "It is so long since I heard a kind word from anybody."

Miss Kenyon pushed to the roots of the hair, but she did not refuse the request.

"God bless you, Lady Hamilton," she said earnestly. "And I hope you will find in the future the peace and happiness denied you in the past."

Then she went away.

* * * * *

Three days later, a carriage from Glentarne came again to the schoolhouse. Its occupant was the younger Lady Hamilton, and she stayed with Miss Kenyon for half-an-hour. She had acted upon her advice, and had come to tell her that henceforth her home was to be with her husband's mother. "She has been so good to me, Sara," she said brokenly. "I told her everything, and she treated me like a daughter of her own. With her I think I shall learn to be a good woman, and I owe it all to you. As long as I live, I shall never forget that."

And she never did.





CHAPTER XVI.

THE BEATING OF THE STORM.

MEANWHILE, how fared it with Lizzie Falconer
Let us see.

Four o'clock on a dull February afternoon. Lowering clouds overhanging the city, and a chill wind moaning through the trees in Hyde Park.

Walking restlessly up and down one of the broad walks, a woman with a baby in her arms. She was well dressed, and looked like a lady. Her figure was slight and delicate, and her face was pale, yet so lovely that passers-by looked at it in wonder. Up and down, up and down, with a red spot burning on either cheek, and a wild fever at her heart. Shall I tell you what it was? Jealousy! And it is cruel as the grave. Suddenly the woman pressed her baby closer to her breast, and with a strange tightening of her lips, looked in the distance. Leisurely approaching was a gentleman, handsome, and nearly middle-aged, with a young timid girl upon his arm. She had a sweet fair face and innocent brown eyes, which were bent upon the ground. Her companion was talking rapidly, with a smile on his face, which was faintly reflected on the girl's lips. As they drew near, the woman with the baby slipped behind a tree, as if to escape observation. But when they were close to her she stepped out, and cast one swift steady look into the gentleman's face. His grew livid; yet he turned to his companion, whose eyes had not been raised from the ground; and

the woman with the baby passed on. As she went through the park gates, the first drops of the coming storm began to fall, and a shiver ran through the delicate frame. She was far from home, and had money enough in her pocket to procure conveyance, yet possessed with a wild unrest, she went her way on foot. The sleeping child lay heavily in her arms, and when at length she reached her destination, she was scarcely able to sustain her own weight. It was a quiet street, and the houses were mostly the better class of boarding-houses. Everyone was full, for the locality was genteel, and was conveniently near the city's centre for business men. When the woman knocked at one of the doors, it was opened by a maid servant, neat and even stylishly dressed.

"La! Mrs. Mortimer," she exclaimed, "where 'ave you been out in all the rain; couldn't you get a 'bus or a 'ansom."

"Plenty of them, but I preferred walking," returned the woman wearily, as she crossed the threshold; "I am very tired. will you please send up tea immediately."

"Will Mr. Mortimer be home, ma'am?" enquired the girl.

"No! Tea for one," returned Mrs. Mortimer so sharply that the girl looked in amazement at her as she turned and went up stairs; and immediately departed below to inform her fellows that the first floor had been quarrelling again.

There was a cheery fire burning in the sitting room on the first floor, and the dreary twilight was deepening into darkness. Mrs. Mortimer sat down at the fire, and took off her baby's outer dress, then, carrying him into the adjoining bedroom, laid him in his crib. He was still sleeping soundly. A beautiful child he was, and startlingly like his mother. She kissed him once in an unusual sort of way, and then

taking off her own wet bonnet and shawl, went back to the sitting-room. She leaned one arm on the mantel, and bent her eyes upon the fire. Her dress fell in heavy folds about the slender figure, and the shoulders drooped a little, as if there was a burden there. She did not look like a happy woman. The lines about the mouth were too sadly marked, and the bonnie eyes had lost much of their brightness. And there was a strange gravity about her which Lizzie Falconer had never possessed.

As she looked into the glowing fire, great tears gathered in her eyes, and fell one by one, but she brushed them quickly away, for the girl entered with the tea tray. And she sat down and tried to eat. She was idling with her second cup when the door opened, and a gentleman came in—the same she had met in the afternoon. He was angry, and she knew it, and at first did not lift her eyes to his face. He strode into the bedroom, looked at the sleeping child, then came back, closing the door behind him.

“Will you have some tea, Ralph?”

Her voice was calm and steady, but it had a strange hard ring in it.

“What were you doing in the Park this afternoon?” he asked quietly, yet she knew the passion beneath that subdued voice.

She rose and looked at him, the firelight shining full upon her face. It was strangely resolute.

“I went, Ralph,” she said, “to watch you.”

“You did,” he sneered. “Well, I hope you were rewarded for your pains.”

She pressed her hand to her heart, and spoke again very rapidly.

“I will tell you all the truth, because I would scorn to hide it. It is long since I knew you had tired of me, your wife; but it is only since we came to London

that I have suspected you gave your love and attention elsewhere. The suspicion grew till it became a certainty; I watched for the proof I wanted, and said nothing until I found it yesterday in the note you carelessly left in your dressing room. That was what took me to the Park to-day, so that I might tell you that I knew."

"And what then?"

There was a mocking smile upon Ralph Mortimer's lips, and the words were jestingly spoken.

"You ask me, what then?" reiterated Lizzie, passionately. "You took me from my home, Ralph, where I was happy till I met you. I gave up all—all, God help me!—for you, and I have tried to be a good wife to you. Have I ever complained of your neglect, of your daily increasing unkindness? Have I ever answered your bitter words as I might have done? I have borne it all, as the just punishment for the suffering I knew I left behind me. But till to-day I have not known all the bitterness in store for me."

"Very pathetic," repeated Ralph Mortimer, with the same look and tone, "You say I took you from your home. Cast your memory back, and tell me if I found you unwilling to go."

She stood still, her hands clasped, no sound escaping her lips. Not yet had she grown so accustomed to his insulting words as to hear them unmoved.

"Ralph," she said; then, very wearily, "have you given the heart you used to say was mine, to the girl I met you with to-day."

Ralph Mortimer laughed.

"It is as much hers as it ever was yours," he said, carelessly; "and she amuses me as you did."

A crimson wave swept across Lizzie's face.

"You are speaking to your wife, Ralph," she said with proud dignity.

"Ay! or you think so!" he replied; and there was a significance in his tones she could not but observe.

"I think so? What do you mean?" The words fell low and trembling from her lips.

"Don't ask questions, if you are wise," he said calmly. "The answers are frequently unpleasant."

She moved nearer to him, a great horror seizing on her heart.

"Ralph," she said, "tell me what your words meant. If it was a cruel jest, say so.

"Don't bother," he said rudely. "Give me some tea; I am going out again."

She took no heed of his words.

"Tell me what you meant," she said steadily. "I was married to you; I remember it well. Why should you speak as if there was a possibility of doubt?"

For a moment he hesitated, but, pondering that the truth would need to be told some time, he answered her questions, with his eyes averted from her face.

"You are not my wife, Lizzie," he said. "The marriage was not legal; I can prove it to you if you will. See, I warned you not to ask unpleasant questions. There is no need to make a fuss. I don't mean to desert you if you choose to stay."

Fuss! never was word so needlessly applied. Save for the close pressure of the grave lips, and the contraction of the white brows as if in pain, there was no sign that she heard or comprehended his words. There are moments of agony so intense that the very life blood seems to be stilled in the veins. She uttered not one word. Moving to her old place at the fire, she turned her eyes to its glowing depths, an icy hand clutching at her heart. Ralph Mortimer caught up his hat, and left the house. For a long time Lizzie remained as he had left her. The fire was dying in the grate, only a red glow played about

her feet, and dimly on her face. Suddenly she fell upon the hearth, with her white face hidden, and a long stifled cry broke from her lips. And she did not rise until the servant's step sounded on the stair, then she went into the bedroom, and shut the door. The noise aroused the sleeping child, and he sat up in his crib, stretching out his arms to be lifted. For the first time in his short life his mother did not come to him. She opened the wardrobe, and took from it an old shabby dress, plainly made, and a hat and shawl she had not worn for many a day. These she put on. The baby watched her, wonderment on his face, till she took him up in a swift, sudden way, and without a word spoken, dressed him also. That done, she took a scrap of paper, and wrote upon it with a pencil:—

“I am going from you, taking my child with me. I have no message to leave, except that God may forgive you for what you have done. In time, perhaps, He may lead me to forgive you, too. Only one thing I have to say, if there be one tender memory of your mother in your heart, for her sake, spare the poor young girl I met you with to-day. That we may never meet again on earth is the only prayer of this crushed and broken heart.”

She laid it on the dressing table, and taking the child in her arms passed out of the room. Down stairs with swift noiseless step, and out into the street. Out into the storm and pitiless rain, with nothing in the wide world she could call her own but the baby at her breast.

And in a far-off Scottish home, a mother was praying for the child she never hoped to see again on earth.

And the storm grew fiercer and fiercer, and the moaning rain wept in the street.



CHAPTER XVII.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

"KIT."

"Yes, Sara."
"Though we have lived here so long now, I have never grown accustomed to the way Scotch people ignore Christmas. In England to-night there will be rejoicing everywhere. I wish I could hear one peal of bells above the storm; it would make me fancy myself a child again."

They were in their sitting room, the brother and sister, with their chairs drawn close to the hearth. Miss Kenyon's head was leaning on her hand, and there was a dreamy look upon her face, as if memories thronged about her heart.

"Suppose you go up and ring a peal from the church tower, dear," said the schoolmaster, touching her brown head in his gentle way. "The custom only needs a beginning."

"The good people would think I had taken leave of my senses," returned Miss Kenyon with a low laugh. "Kit, what's that? Was it a knock at the door?"

"Only the wind rattling the garden gate, I think, Sara," was the reply. "It hangs loosely on its hinges. It is a fearful storm."

Ay, so it was.

The wind shrieked and howled in its mad fury, whirling the falling snowflakes into a blinding maze,

and piling up drifts level with the hedges at every roadside. Such a storm had not been known in The Linn, even in the memory of the oldest inhabitant.

"Mary and her husband called for a few minutes this afternoon, Kit. I forgot to tell you," said Miss Kenyon, after a moment's silence. "They were driving from D——. How careful he is of her. They are very happy."

"Let us be thankful for it, Sara," said the schoolmaster, cheerfully. "You are crying, dear; what is it?"

She brushed the bright drops from her eyes, and looked up with her brave smile.

"Don't think I am selfish, or grudge them it, Kit," she said, laying her head down on his arm. "Sometimes I am very foolish, I know; but I am only a woman, Kit, and a weak one."

"A weak one!" interrupted her brother, touching her forehead with his lips. "If you are weak, who is strong, I wonder?"

"Only a woman, then, Kit," she said, smiling slightly, though her eyes were dim. "And I cannot quite forget—forget, you know what."

She spoke hurriedly now, and her voice was very low.

"It is foolish, is it not, to think about what is so long gone, and can never be part of my life again?"

"Not foolish, dear—very natural," returned the schoolmaster. "You——"

"Kit, there is some one knocking at the door," interrupted Miss Kenyon, starting up. "I heard it quite distinctly."

She left the room, and opened the outside door, to find a woman standing on the step, covered with snow from head to foot.

"Can I speak to you for a few minutes, please?" she said in a low, muffled voice, which Sara did not recognise.

"Come in," she said quickly. "You must have come far. Surely it is urgent need that brings you out of doors on such a night."

The woman stepped within the door, and pushing back her bonnet, turned her face to the light.

"Miss Kenyon, don't you know me?"

Sara Kenyon looked a moment wonderingly at the pale haggard face, at the deep blue eyes with the dark shadows beneath them, and shook her head. But there was something strangely familiar about the figure and the voice.

"Not—not Lizzie Falconer!" she stammered at length, a great light breaking over her. "Oh! I hope not."

The woman covered her face with her hands.

"Yes—Lizzie Falconer," she said in a low, hard voice. "Will you let me stay in this house for a little while. I have walked from D—to-night, and I am very weary, and I cannot go home yet."

Miss Kenyon shut the door, and bidding her follow, led the way to the little kitchen at the back. There was a blazing fire there, and the kettle singing on the hob.

"Let me help you to take off your wet things," she said in her kind firm way. "You must be wet through. Hush, don't speak yet; there is time enough. You will stay with me all night." Then she went to her room, and returned with some of her own things.

"Put these on," she said. "I shall be back directly."

Then she shut the door, and went to her brother.

He was walking up and down the floor, wondering who the visitor was, and why Sara was so long in coming.

"O Kit!" she said in a low, pitiful voice. "It is poor Lizzie Falconer come back home; and I can see, though she has said nothing yet, what the years

have held for her. She is so changed, Kit, you would not know her."

"Poor girl—poor girl." The words fell tenderly, pitifully from the schoolmaster's lips. "You have brought her in, Sara."

"Yes, yes. O Kit! think what it will be for the poor old pair at Glentarne. This will be a happy Christmas for them, I know, though Lizzie has come back poor and ill and wretched. Now I will go back to her. It will be better, I think, if she sees only me to-night; but I will come and tell you anything she may say to me."

And so she went back to the kitchen, to find the wanderer on her knees on the hearth, with her face hidden. The golden hair had escaped from its fastening, and fell on her shoulders, shining in the firelight.

Noiselessly Miss Kenyon proceeded to make some coffee, and to set the supper things upon the table. Then she went to the bowed figure, and her hand fell upon her shoulder, infinite gentleness in the light touch.

"Lizzie," she said, "come, take something to eat. You must be faint after such a walk on such a night."

A slight shiver ran through the slender frame, and a convulsive sob broke the stillness, but she did not raise her head.

"Come," said Miss Kenyon more firmly, "you *must* do what I ask; you will be ill after the drenching you got to-night."

"Ill," repeated the girl, rising, and turning her white face to the light once more; "I am ill, body and soul. Oh, Miss Kenyon," she cried suddenly, "if you knew, if you knew, you would not touch me."

A great pity shone in Sara Kenyon's eyes.

"My child, I do know. I knew what would be before you went; and, see, I don't shrink from you."

No she did not. She placed one arm about the drooping shoulders, and led her to the table, and stood beside her till she saw her drink some coffee and swallow a morsel of bread. Then, while she carried the supper tray to Christopher, Lizzie sat down close to the fire, as if she was very cold, and hid her face again in her hands. Sara left her alone for a time, and when she came back she found her weeping as if her heart would break. Miss Kenyon stood by the hearth with her arm leaning on the mantel, waiting till the tears were all shed.

"Miss Kenyon," said Lizzie, at length, with a gasp, "Is my—my mother dead?"

"They are both alive," returned Miss Kenyon quickly, "and waiting for you to come home every day."

"But not as I am; they will not forgive me when they know all," she moaned. "Oh, Miss Kenyon, I was never married. He told me a lie, and I believed it."

Miss Kenyon kneeled down on the hearth, and took both the poor trembling hands in her firm grasp, and turned her clear hazel eyes upon Lizzie's face.

"Listen, Lizzie," she said, "you know that I would not deceive you. When you go home to-morrow—to-morrow, remember, for no time must be lost—you will find nothing but love and forgiveness awaiting you. At first your father felt a just indignation, but it is all gone now. You will be taken as you are, just as God takes all who come to Him. O Lizzie! be very thankful for it, and thank God that you have not come home to find that your desertion killed them."

The worn blue eyes rested a moment on Miss Kenyon's sweet face, and then fixed upon the glowing fire.

"You will let me tell you, Miss Kenyon," she said in a very low voice, "how it was from the first."

"Yes," replied Sara gently, "if you are able."

"There is no need to tell you how I was persuaded to leave home. You can understand how a man like him could influence an inexperienced girl, full as I was of vanity, and longing for a grandeur above my station. We left that night," she said, "and reached Edinburgh the next afternoon. He took me to a hotel, and we were married, as I thought. Then we went on to England, to The Holt."

Miss Kenyon turned her face away. It had grown very pale, and her lips were trembling.

"We stayed there for nearly fifteen months. I was happy, or fancied myself so, for about half of that time. He was often away for weeks at a time, and I was very lonely, for it was a great house, standing alone among woods. There was a village near it, but I never went out. He would not let me speak of my father and mother or my home, and he taught me to talk as he did. He used to be angry if I forgot and said a Scotch word. I was very wretched for a time before my baby was born. Oh, Miss Kenyon, my poor little baby."

She stopped, sobbing, and again hid her face.

"Not very long after that," she continued, "we went to London to live. I don't know why. I didn't know anything about his affairs, and I dared not ask, for I was afraid of him. He was often unkind to me. I could tell you of days so miserable that I used to creep away up to my baby's crib, and pray that we might die, he and I together. And I was hungering to get home, starving to see my mother and my old home, and I dared not say it. He used to say things I could not understand, when he was angry, but their meaning became clear to me after. I had found out long ago that I had no real love for him in my heart,

as he had none for me ; and I used to wonder how my life was to be lived, and to pray, though it was sinful, that it might be very short. But though I did not love him, I was jealous—so jealous, that my life became a torment to me. I watched him like a serpent, until I found that he often went to see a young girl, the daughter of an old artist, in the city. She was a good girl, Miss Kenyon ; she was only being deceived, as I was. One day I had learned he was to meet her in the Park, and I went there, and saw them together ; and that night, when he came home, I spoke to him about it, and he told me then that I had no claim on him, that our marriage was a mockery, that I was no more his wife than the girl I had seen with him in the afternoon. Miss Kenyon, I swear to you that if I had not believed implicitly that he would make me his wife, I would never have left The Linn. You believe that?"

"Yes, I believe it," returned Miss Kenyon, and Lizzie caught her hand and touched it with her lips.

"I went away out of the house that night," she went on, "with only one thought in my heart—to get miles away from him if I could. It was a fearful night, I remember, but I did not seem to feel it. I had a little money in my pocket—*his* money ; and but for my baby's sake, I would not have touched it, and with that I procured a poor lodging in the very heart of the city, where I knew I was securely hid. I had to earn my living, and my baby's, too, and the only thing I could do was to sew ; and it is not easy to get work even in London. Sometimes," she said, with a great sob, "I had neither food nor fire. I did not mind for myself, but I knew my baby was pining away ; I could see it every day. I have stood on one of the bridges many a time, Miss Kenyon, with him in my arms, almost on the brink of ending my misery in

the river; but God kept me from that sin, though I was often sorely tempted. My own strength was failing me, want of nourishment, hard work, and anxiety for my baby made me ill; but I held up till he died. I cannot tell you how it was, I cannot speak about it yet, only I knew that if he had had proper nourishment he would have lived, and I could not get it for him. I saw him die; and I remember nothing for a long time. When I awoke, I was in an hospital, and they told me I had been ill three weeks; my baby was buried. I wanted to die then. Miss Kenyon, I think my heart was broken. But I mended slowly, and in another three weeks I was out of the hospital. Then I determined to come home; but it was months before I had saved from my scanty earnings enough to pay my way. My last penny was gone when I arrived in D—— this afternoon, or I should have stayed all night there. I do not know what made me come to you, except the remembrance of what you used to be before I went away. There was nobody else I could come to; and oh, Miss Kenyon, God bless you for your kindness, though I don't deserve it; I don't: indeed."

"You have been more sinned against than sinning, my poor child," said Miss Kenyon gently, "and you have been sorely punished for it. Now, you must go to bed; your face is quite white, and your hands are burning—come."

Obediently as a child, the drooping figure rose and followed Miss Kenyon to a bed-room. A fire had been lit there, and a cheery glow lay upon the pretty room.

"Oh, Miss Kenyon," said Lizzie, "it is a long time since I was in a room like this. I believe I am in a dream. Will you tell me, please," she said in a low, scarcely audible voice, "how—how Jamie Duncan is? Does he live in 'The Linn yet?'"

"He lives at Lea Rig still," returned Miss Kenyon, not looking at the girl's face. "Oh, Lizzie, Lizzie, it was a sore blow to him. He loved you very dearly."

"I know—I know."

The low voice broke, and again the tears filled her eyes.

"Oh, Miss Kenyon, if only I might wake to-morrow morning, and find the hideous past a dream. Are you *quite* sure my father and mother will take me back?"

"As sure as I am standing by your bedside to-night, Lizzie, when you go home to-morrow it will be indeed going home. Now, try and sleep; it is very late, and you look in sore need of rest."

She tried to free her hand, but Lizzie held it firmly in both her own; so Miss Kenyon drew her chair to the bedside, and sat by her till she fell asleep.





CHAPTER XVIII.

HOME.

CALM and smiling broke that Christmas morn over The Linn. Far and near the whitened fields sparkled beneath the sunshine, and the woods were a perfect vision of fairyland. The snow was fourteen inches deep, and the frost was as hard as iron. Farm work was at a standstill. But ere day-break the busy inmates of the farmhouse at The Mains were astir. Before the sun rose, Mrs. Falconer, careful for the comfort of her poultry, went out to feed them in the covered court adjoining their coop. Let us look at her as she steps from the ivied porch, and carefully crosses the slippery farmyard. A little older looking, a few more grey hairs, and a line here and there upon her brow, and a sort of hungry look in her deep motherly eyes, tell of the sorrow the years have held, but she has never given way to useless repining. She accepted the cross—the first she had been called upon to bear—with a patient, humble resignation, which her neighbours see with wonder and respect. She stood a few minutes, as she always did, watching the fowls at their breakfast;—these minutes were full of memories of Lizzie, for, as you know, the poultry had been Lizzie's special care. Coming out of the stable, the farmer saw her, and sauntered up to her side.

"There are some prime beasties there, guid wife," he said. "I'm thinkin' ye'll make a bonnie penny aff the chickens this year."

Mrs. Falconer smiled. She could smile sometimes yet, though it had lost much of its gladness.

"Ay; but, John," she said, her voice shaking a little, "there's nae muckle plesure in the money they bring noo. It's jist laid by for nae end that I can see. D'ye mind hoo ye used tae torment *her* about the pennies they brocht."

The farmer turned his head swiftly away. There was a moisture in his eyes, and a strangely troubled look upon his rugged face, which told how full of pain the memory was.

"Let's get oor breakfast, guid wife," he said abruptly. "It's gettin' on for nine. This'll be an idle day, I'm thinkin'. Wark's dune till fresh comes. But we canna complain."

The day wore on. In the afternoon, the farmer went off to D—— on business, and Mrs. Falconer took her knitting, and sat down by the kitchen fireside. The tins were still hung brightly on the wall, the sanded floor was as clean as it used to be, and the old eight-day clock ticked solemnly in the corner. But the strange stillness—it was *strange* yet, though of so long continuance—made the mother's heart ache, and her knitting fell, as it often did, from her hands, and her head leaned a little on her breast. But she did not cry; it might be that her tears had all been shed long ago. Slowly the Christmas sun sunk redly to rest, and the shadows began to gather in the corners of the kitchen. Mrs. Falconer was startled by a knock at the door.

In answer to her "Come in," Miss Kenyon entered, and shut the door again behind.

"Come awa' in, my wummin," said Mrs. Falconer, in her warm, motherly way, "I'm as gled to see ye as I can be, for John's awa' tae D——, and it's lanely here, ye ken."

Miss Kenyon took the seat offered to her, and the farmer's wife talked on, never noticing how quiet her listener was, nor what an unusual colour there was in her face.

"We'll just hae oor tea cosy, you an' me, the noo," she said, setting the kettle right on the fire. "John'll no be hame till late."

But at that moment the door opened, and the farmer came in.

"I forgot the paper I was gaun to D—— aboot, so I had tae come back afore I was half road," he said, in reply to his wife's amazement. "I'm richt gled to see ye, Miss Kenyon," he said, with a firm hearty grasp of her hand. "We'll hae oor tea, guid wife, if ye hae nae objections. It's a cauld nicht."

"I'll hae tae get the lamp set, tho'," replied his wife. "It's no fower, but it's dark."

"Wait a moment," said Miss Kenyon quickly. "I have something to say to you before the lamp is lit."

The farmer sat down in his arm chair, while his wife leaned against the white table, looking at her visitor in some surprise.

For the first time in her life, Sara Kenyon's womanly tact failed her. She looked from one to the other, not knowing how to tell them.

"Is't onything aboot oor bairn," said Mrs. Falconer, then, in a strange voice, "Miss Kenyon, is she deid?"

"O Mrs. Falconer! Mr. Falconer!" cried Miss Kenyon then, great tears running down her cheeks; "she has come home—she is here—I brought her with me—I left her standing at the door—I"—

There was a sudden noise behind; then from the shadow came forth a bent and drooping figure, and the firelight shone upon a face so changed that the father and mother scarcely knew it. Then a great cry rang through the quiet house.

"Father!—mother!—I am come home. Don't look upon me like that. I am Lizzie. Oh! take me back or I shall die."

She was kneeling at her mother's feet, not daring to look higher, till she felt a tear upon her face. Then she crept into her arms, and laid her tired head upon her mother's breast, and there was the light of a great joy in that mother's face. John Falconer did not move. His face was hidden, and his strong frame shaking from head to foot.

"John," said his wife, in a voice broken with joy, "hae ye nae word for the bairn ye lo'ed sae weel?"

He rose then, his rugged face quivering with emotion, and his strong arms closed about his wife and child as if they would never loose again. And his grey locks mingled with his daughter's golden ones, and she put up her lips and kissed him, and laid her arm about his neck.

But before this, Miss Kenyon had closed the door very softly, and gone away home.

* * * * *

Lizzie Falconer lay down in her own little room that night with a great sense of rest and peace and unutterable gladness in her heart. And the memory of her father's "good night" words, and of the last kiss her mother had pressed upon her lips, mingled with her dreams. But *they* could not sleep for joy. She had told them all, and it was agreed that the past should be buried for ever.

Early next morning, she slipped quickly downstairs, and performed the household duties that had been hers before. She lit the fire, swept up the hearth, and set the table for breakfast. Then, throwing a shawl over her shoulders, she crept out of doors. The sky was clear and starlit, and in the distant east the day was dawning. The dog set up a sharp bark from

his kennel, but when she went to him, whispering his name, he was like to break his chain in his mad joy. With swift step she crossed the familiar farmyard, and pushed open the door of the little stable, where the old pony used to stand, wondering if she would see him there still. Yes, there he was, his bonnie dappled head growing white with age, and his limbs stiffer than they used to be. She went up to the stall and caressed him, but no word could her quivering lips utter. He pricked up his ears, as if unable to believe the evidence of his senses, and then, with a low whinny of delight, rubbed his nose against her shoulder. Her arms crept about his neck, and she hid her face and wept. To see how she was remembered and loved, nearly broke her heart.

"O Lord," she said to herself, pausing within the ivied porch on her way back to the house, "let me never forget, as long as I live, Thy goodness to me, a poor sinful girl who has gone so far astray. And O God, help me, as long as my life and theirs shall last, to devote myself to my father and mother, to try, as far as lies in my poor power, to atone for the suffering I have caused them, and to shew my love and gratitude for their great love to me, who am deserving of nothing but their reproach. Keep me lowly in heart, and ever mindful of Thee. For Jesus' sake. Amen."

I cannot tell you, friends, how that father and mother watched their child that day, because my words are so weak. There was not one shadow of reproach in their thoughts of her, not a shadow of anger or resentment, only an infinite protecting love. She must be doubly cherished by them, because she had trodden a thorny path, and had come back with weak and weary feet to her childish home. It is such love as this which sometimes gives our human hearts a faint conception of the mighty heart of God.



CHAPTER XIX.

EXILED.

NEXT day John Falconer went up to Lea Rig to break the news of Lizzie's return to Jamie Duncan.

"It wadna dae," he said to his wife, "if the lad was tae come in sudden like an' see Lizzie here; and he may come ony meenit, an' as little maun he hear the news frae ither folk. He deserves this frae me, Peggie, for he's been a guid freend tae us baith."

After he was gone, Mrs. Falconer told Lizzie, and the girl crept away up to her own room, and shut the door; and at that moment even her mother did not dare to follow her.

John Falconer had never been up at the farmhouse on the hill since Lizzie went away. The young man had come often to The Mains, but the sight of the home he had hoped to see Lizzie occupy reopened afresh the terrible sorrow in the old man's heart. It was a bonnie place even in winter, only strangely still and desolate. Excepting two apartments on the ground floor, it was entirely locked up, and the rooms which had been furnished with such care and pride for the mistress who never came to inhabit them, were the prey of moth and dust. Jamie Duncan never entered them himself, and no other woman's eyes would ever rest upon them. So he had said in his anguish. The rough servant girl who answered John

Falconer's knock bade him come in, and she would go for the master; he was out in the barn.

He returned with her, and there was some surprise on his face when he saw who the visitor was.

"Shut the door, Jamie, lad," said the old man hurriedly. "I have something to tell."

News of Lizzie was the one thought in the young man's mind as he closed the door. I do not think she had been out of his heart for a day at a time since she went away. His was indeed the love which many waters cannot quench.

"Jamie, Lizzie cam' hame last nicht," said John Falconer in the same hurried manner; "an' I thoct it richt tae come up an' tell ye."

Jamie Duncan walked to the window, and looked out upon the snow-clad fields, his face working with emotion. It was a long time before his lips could frame an answer to the farmer's words.

"Hoo is't wi' her?" he asked, at last, in a husky voice. "Is she weel and happy?"

"She's come hame, my lad, like a lost sheep that's wandered faur frae the fauld, an' been oot in mony a blast. The villain wha stole her frae you an' me didna mak' her his wife, my lad; the mairrage was a mockery tae deceive her; an' when he tired o' her, he telt her the truth, kennin' it was the easiest way to get rid o' her. An' she left him, wi' her bairn, tae fecht the battle her lane in that great wilderness o' Lunnon, an' the bairn de'ed, and syne she cam' hame, O Jamie, my man, sae sairly changed ye wadna ken her; but I thank the Lord she's come hame. Jamie, hae ye never forgotten her yet?"

"Forgotten her?" returned the young man, more to himself than to him. "I've prayed that I micht forget her; but the prayer's no been answered."

I do not know what it was in the young man's

voice that made the old man feel that it would be better for him to go at once; he rose from his chair, put on his hat, and took his stick from the corner.

"Gud day wi' ye, Jamie," he said, his deep tones faltering a little. "I canna speak what's in my heart this day, maybe ye can guess. God bless ye, lad."

He hurried from the room, and Jamie Duncan moved to the door, and turned the key. He was hours in that room, alone with his agony, alone with the cross that had been pressing on his young shoulders for years. The conflict *had* told upon him, for his brow was deeply lined, and there were white threads among the glossy brown hair. And when he went forth, there was a half-formed resolution in his mind—a resolution to leave The Linn, and seek in another land the rest denied him here. Sore enough had the struggle been to live and work where every tree and flower, every bend and turn of the roads, reminded him of what he had lost; but now, when *she* was so near, the struggle would be too hard, even for his iron will, to bear.

Lizzie had come home; it would be better for both that he should go. For it would be impossible to avoid meeting each other, and that was an ordeal he did not care to face. The news of the return spread like wildfire in the village, and it furnished a topic for conversation for days. Now that Glentarne was shut up, there was a dearth of gossip in The Linn. The affair was discussed in all its bearings, and the general feeling was one of satisfaction, for the sake of John Falconer and his wife. But, as usual, Nancy Irvine and her kindred spirit, the Postmaster, passed their righteous condemnation on her. It afforded them a grim pleasure that she had come home broken-hearted and humbler, for she "aye was a saucy crater," said Nancy, "an' pride aye gangs afore a fa'."

"Wheesht, Nancy!" said a gentler neighbour; "she's suffered plenty, I'll warrant. Let her a-be."

In the course of the next few weeks another rumour got abroad, causing the wildest consternation in The Linn. It was, that Jamie Duncan had given up the Lea Rig, and was meditating leaving The Linn and Scotland for ever. The matter was kept very close, and the eve of his departure was at hand before credence was given to the rumour.

On a lovely April evening, Sara Kenyon was busy in her garden when Jamie Duncan came to the school-house. She guessed his errand, and led him into the sitting-room, without even a word of greeting.

"You have come to say good-bye, Mr. Duncan," she said. "Is it not so?"

He nodded, unable to trust his voice. Although he knew he was taking the best course, this leaving the only home and friends he had ever known was a very severing of the heart-strings.

"It is not easy to say much when the heart is full," said Miss Kenyon, with a slight smile. "You know how much Kit and I shall miss you; but I think you are doing right, Mr. Duncan; indeed, I am sure of it."

"I'm daein what seems tae me the only thing I can dae," returned the young man simply. "I'll no say but what it's been a sad trial tae me tae leave The Linn; but ye see it wadna be guid for either *her* or me to meet, an' it wad hae tae come some time."

"Have you never seen her yet?"

The young man shook his head.

"Never, face tae face; I got a glimpse o' her frae ane o' the fields ae day, an' I kent then that the suner I was awa' frae The Linn the better for me."

"You are going to Australia," said Miss Kenyon; "have you friends there?"

"Yes; my mither's only brither lives in Adelaide; it's there I'm gaun."

He had moved to the window, and above the budding beech trees he saw the blue smoke from The Mains curling upward to the sky.

"I'm gaun doon tae The Mains noo, Miss Kenyon," he said, "an' if she's there I'll see her. It canna maitter much noo, when I'm gaun awa' the morn. I think I wad like tae see her aince afore I gang"—

"I understand," said Miss Kenyon gently; "I shall tell Christopher to come and see you. He is in the study."

The young man wheeled round suddenly, and caught her hand in a grip of iron.

"Miss Kenyon, afore I gang, let me try tae thank ye for what ye've been, no only tae me, but tae her I daurna name," he said huskily. "I'll never forget it as long as I live; and tho' I'm gaun sae faur awa', I'll pray every day that the Lord may bless ye a' yer life."

Tears sprang to Sara Kenyon's eyes. No need for me to record her answer. Years after, in the lonely Australian wilds, where his exiled life was spent, Jamie Duncan remembered the precious words of womanly help and comfort, and then, as he did now, blessed their utterer.

* * * * *

He saw Lizzie alone that night; but what passed between them was never told. Even if it had been, I do not think I could write it. For, oh! are there not moments in the life of every one of us, over which it is best to draw the veil? The farmer met Jamie as he passed through the kitchen, and dared not speak to him, for he was weeping like a child.



CHAPTER XX.

SURPRISE.

THE Castle had been shut up since Sir Jasper's death, but at midsummer it transpired that the estate had been disposed of by private bargain. It was rumoured that the purchaser was an old man, unmarried, and possessed of enormous wealth; that he had amassed his fortune abroad, and, being of Scotch parentage, had come to enjoy it in his native land. But when August brought him to The Linn, they found him to be a man in the prime of life, and handsome enough to do credit to the grand old home he had made his own.

The gentleman's name was Liddel.

It happened one Saturday afternoon that Christopher Kenyon had strolled up as far as The Castle, not knowing that the new owner had arrived the previous day. He was leisurely making his way up the avenue, when in the distance he saw a tall figure approaching, dressed in a light tweed suit, a deer-stalker cap, and a gun over his shoulder. Wondering who he could be, the schoolmaster bethought himself of turning into the wood (he was shy of meeting strangers), but the gentleman, whoever he was, made his escape impossible by perceptibly quickening his pace until he was within a hundred yards of him. Then he stood stock still in the road, and absolutely stared at the schoolmaster. I am bound to say that, unlike him-

self. Kit returned the stare with interest. The stranger spoke first.

"Kit! In the name of all that's wonderful, is it you?"

The schoolmaster stared into the handsome frank face, too bewildered at first to speak.

"Robert Liddel!" he said at last, "I cannot believe it! How strange that we should meet here."

The stranger's right hand went forth and grasped Christopher's with a grip of iron.

"A little older looking, but the same Kit I used to know, as I stand here," said he a little quickly. "What brings you here? and where is Sara?"

"What brings you here, Robert?" said the schoolmaster, answering his question with another. "We thought you had died, or forgotten us abroad."

"Haven't you heard," said Liddel, "I came into a fortune, and bought Glentarne? My mother was a native of D——."

"Indeed!" No other word could Christopher Kenyon utter, so intense was his amazement.

"Come into the house, Kit," said Liddel; "and we can talk over old times. I want to know how you happen to be here, and all about you and Sara. She will be married now, I suppose?"

All these questions Christopher answered sitting with his friend in the library of The Castle, and it was long past the tea hour when he went back to the schoolhouse. He returned alone, but Liddel was to follow later in the evening.

Sara was leaning over the gate looking up and down the road, wondering what was keeping her brother; and when he came up she saw that he looked unusually excited.

"Where have you been, Kit," she said, holding open the gate. "I was thinking of going up to Cluny to seek you. Have you been there?"

"No ; I have been at The Castle."

"Taking tea with the new owner?" she asked merrily ; and he answered, "Yes."

When they entered the house, he suddenly laid his hand on her head, and looked into her face with an odd expression in his grave eyes.

"Sara, can you bear a great surprise?"

"Yes—what?"

"The new owner of Glentarne is Robert Liddel. I met him there, and have been with him these two hours. He has never forgotten us, Sara. We misjudged him. And he is coming here to-night to see you."

Then he went away, and left her to herself.

* * * * *

It was nine o'clock before Robert Liddel came. Christopher admitted him, and opened the sitting-room door, but he did not enter with him. Sara was standing on the hearth. She moved at the closing of the door, but did not turn her head. Robert Liddel went to her, and touched her arm, then she looked at him with a long searching look. At first these two, parted for so long, had no word to say.

"Sara," he said, at length, in the tones she remembered well, "have you no word of welcome for me—not one?"

Her lips quivered, and her eyes fell.

"I am glad to see you back," she said, with a slight constraint in her voice, and unconsciously she moved a little further from him.

For a moment, Robert Liddel looked at the only woman he had ever loved, wondering to see how little she was moved by his presence. She had loved him once, and he had thought it would be for ever ; but it had been a mistake, after all. She was as fickle as

the rest of them. There was not much change in her outwardly, in his eyes. She was more beautiful than she had ever been; but what did it matter if she was not "fair for him"?

"I have been vainly seeking for you, Sara, since I returned to England," he said, with quiet constraint. "And of all places in the world, I least expected to find you here."

"It is strange how people meet," she said confusedly. "I did not expect to meet you here, or—or anywhere."

"Why? Have you forgotten what passed between us the night before I left for Jamaica?"

Had she forgotten? No need to ask Sara Kenyon that question. She had not so many happy memories in her heart that the sweetest of all should be forgotten so soon.

Robert Liddel went close to her again, and bent his blue eyes on her downcast face, thinking how sweet it was, and yet so sorely changed!

"Sara, the hope of this meeting has been with me, I believe, night and day since I left you at The Holt that night," he said in his frank, true voice. "It is twelve years ago now, I think. I knew many changes might take place in that time; but that you would be so sadly changed to me I did not dream. What is its cause?"

The sweet hazel eyes were raised at length to his face, and the quiet voice trembled in its utterance?

"I am not changed—at least, not as you think, though I am growing to be an old woman now," she said hurriedly. "It is the suddenness. I so little expected it; and happiness has so long been strange to me, that I can scarcely realise it. O Robert, I—I——"

Her voice broke, but the tears which followed were

shed upon the breast which was henceforth to be her shelter for evermore.

* * * * *

It might be an hour after before Christopher ventured to peep in. Then Sara slipped away and busied herself with preparations for supper, while the two friends, who had been boys together at Westdeane, sat down, with a new bond between them, to live over again these long-gone days. What a pleasant meal that was! I cannot describe to you the unselfish happiness on Christopher's face; to see him there beaming on his sister and his friend was a sight so pleasant, and yet so touching, that Sara dared not look at him, and even Robert Liddel's gay eyes were dim.

Oh, it was a happy evening, made all the happier that it was only the precursor of many more to come.

"I can't realise it, old fellow," said Robert, as Christopher and he lingered at the gate. "I am afraid I shall wake up to-morrow, and find myself back among the sugar canes of Jamaica," he said, half jestingly; but his tone changed, and he added seriously, "Providence has been very good to me, Kit."

The schoolmaster glanced upward to the sky, and answered reverently, "He is good to every one of us, Robert, if we could but see it. His hand is with us alike in sunshine and shadow."

"My heart is full, old friend; good night, good night."





EPILOGUE.

JOHN Falconer and his wife are growing old and frail, but the down-hill path is made smooth and easy for them by the love and care of the grave, gentle, helpful woman, whom they still tenderly speak of as the bairn, Lizzie. That love and care have never faltered, never known change or wavering, since she came back. Well and faithfully has Lizzie Falconer kept her vow. She is a friend to all in trouble, and far and wide many lips mention her name in love and blessing. She is a beautiful woman still, but her face is shadowed, and will be to the end.

Two memories live with her. One a little mound in a far-away hospital graveyard, and the other, the faithful heart who is an exile for her sake. Old friends hear sometimes of Jamie Duncan. He has done well on the other side of the Pacific, and is a wealthy and prosperous man. He has never married, and never will. Sara writes to him constantly from her happy home at Glentarne, and his rare letters are ever welcome. She takes them to the farm, and reads them to John Falconer and his wife, then leaves them to Lizzie. *She* treasures them, how dearly the writer will never know.

In Robert Liddel's hands the inheritance of the Hamiltons flourishes as it never did before. He is a good landlord, and one of the most popular men in the county. He says he owes it to his wife. Those

who know her think he is right. In her beautiful home, happy in the devotion of her husband and the love of her children, Sara Kenyon's life is all sunshine now. Christopher lives with them. He has his own rooms in The Castle, and pursues his studies undisturbed, except by the children, who are seldom from his side. And in the summer time, it is a sight to see him the centre of a merry throng (for the young folks from Cluny are often at The Castle) allowing himself to be crowned and decked with daisy chains, made by loving fingers. He has a favourite among them—a little fairy with her mother's face and eyes, and her name is Mary Haldane Forbes. They wonder at it, for they have never guessed his secret. It will go with him to the grave.

Mrs. Liddel hears sometimes, also, from Maud Hamilton. She is the stay and comfort of Lady Hamilton's declining years. The change in the proud heart has been firm and lasting.

Of Ralph Mortimer there is nothing to tell. He seldom sees his sister, for now their ways lie apart. Whether or not he is ever visited by the remorse which comes sooner or later to the wicked is known only to himself and his Maker.

And in the dear old village among the hills Father Time is leaving his footprints. The blacksmith has gone, and the business dwindling away to nothing in Jock's hands. Nancy is a fretful invalid, bemoaning her troubles, and grumbling at the want of sympathy shown by the neighbours. Mrs. Scott is failing, too, but is cheery as of yore. Her bonnie daughter, Madge, is her right hand; and Geordie tenants the Lea Rig, with a wife and bairns of his own.

There is a new schoolmaster, a dapper individual, with bran new notions about educational systems, and a partiality for corporeal punishment. Whether or not

the children are better taught, I don't know ; but I *do* know that Christopher Kenyon's gentle rule is regretfully remembered by old and young.

The family at Glentarne have a firm hold upon the hearts of the people. Robert Liddel and his wife are ever ready to help a struggling brother or sister to fight life's battle ; and never even in good Sir William's time were the poor so generously remembered. They are faithful stewards, and their reward will not be denied them.

Farewell.



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