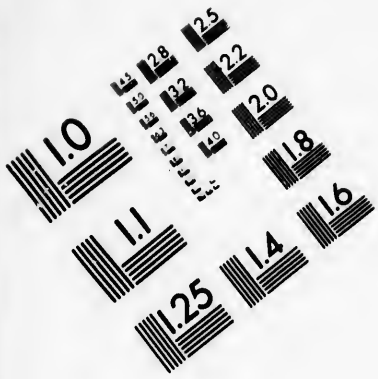

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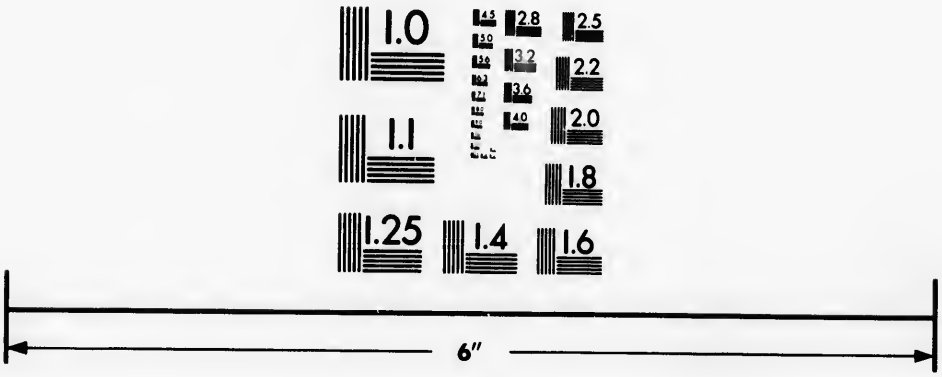

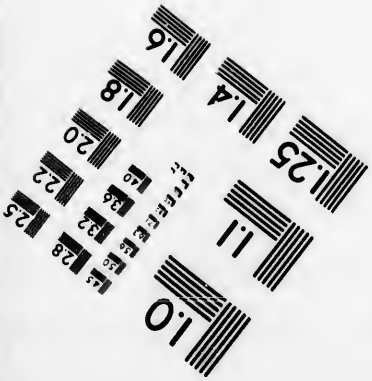

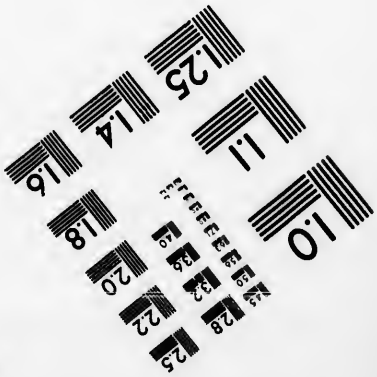

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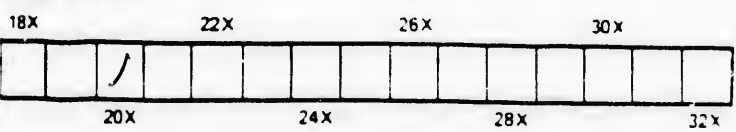

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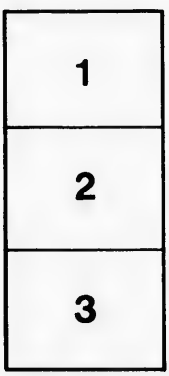

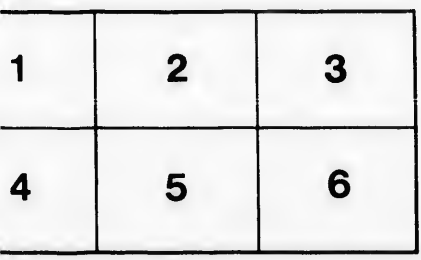

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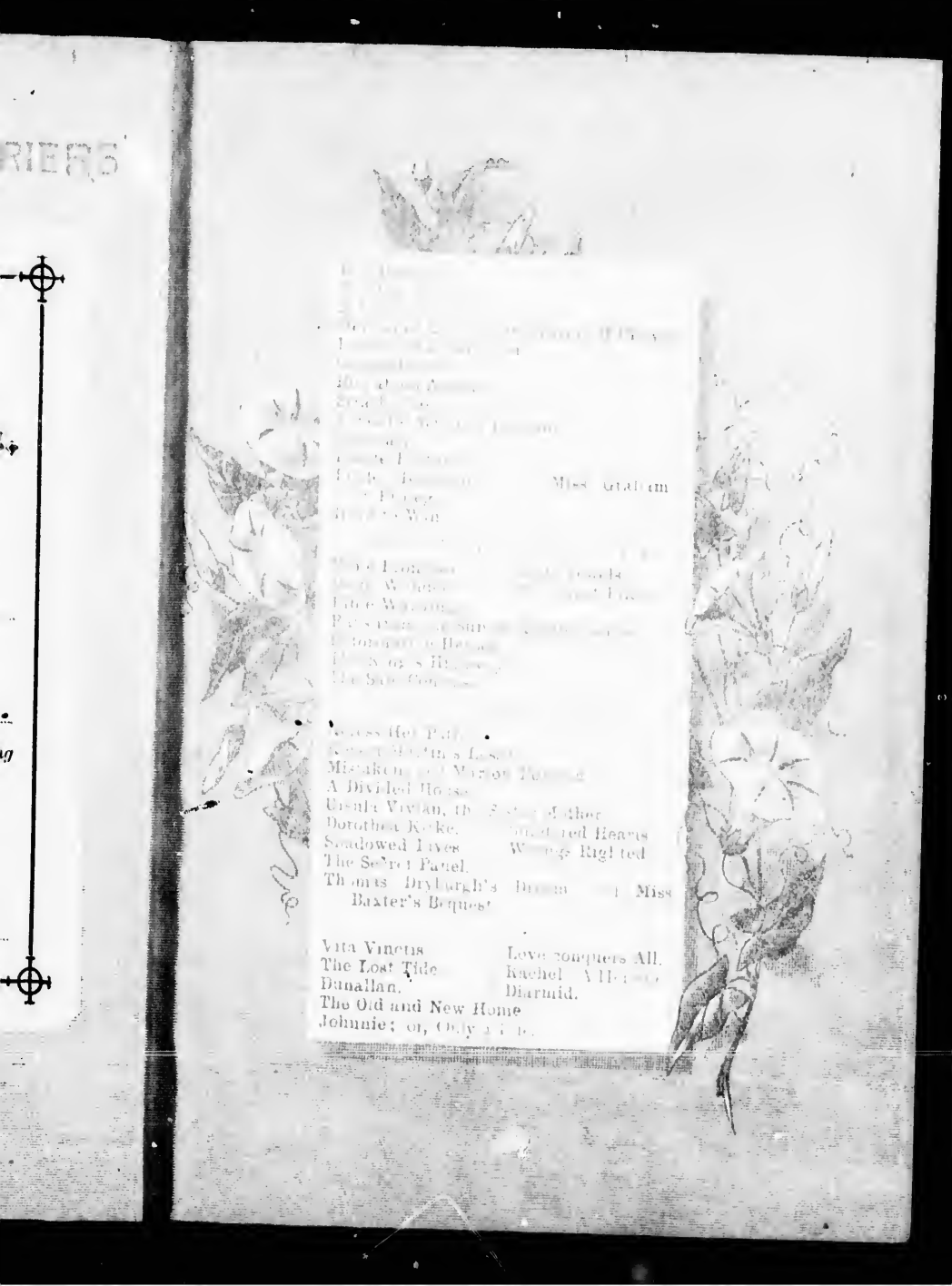

JOHNNIE; OR, 'ONLY A LIFE.'

HOWIE'S LAND. *Frontispiece.*

Frontispiece.

JOHNNIE

OR

'ONLY A LIFE'

By

ROBINA F. HARDY

AUTHOR OF 'JOCK HALLIDAY,' 'TOM TELFER'S SHADOW,'
'KATIE: AN EDINBURGH LASSIE,' ETC. ETC.

TORONTO
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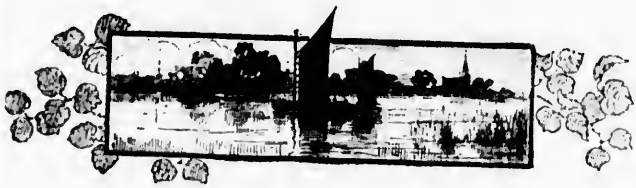
'—The foes are gathered on every side,
And rest not day nor night,
And the feeble little ones must stand
In the thickest of the fight.

. . . . . .

'—Child! tho' thy foes are strong and tried,
He loveth the weak and small;
The Angels of Heaven are on thy side,
And God is over all.'

ADELAIDE ANNE PROCTER.



JOHNNIE; OR, 'ONL' A LIFE.'

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CHAPTER I.

A FAMILY DINNER.

'I CANNA put up wi' a' this steer, weans! Ye maun gang awa' doon to the King's Park an' play yersels, or I get the hoose redd up. That weary vacance! Is't no' owre yet? 'Deed! if the schulemaister had as mony bairns as I hae, he'd be fain to begin his schulin' a bit sooner. Aff wi' ye! for I *maun* hae peace to get on wi' my wark!'

There were Willie and Robbie, Jeanie and Mary, Aleck and wee Davie (that was to distinguish him from the father, who was big Davie Laidlaw), and 'Curly,' otherwise known to the Christian world as

Jessie Ann, a very solemn, substantial young person of two years fully, and who was fortunately still 'the baby' of the family. These all got ready to sally forth at the maternal mandate from the stifling garret, where they had been scrambling about in an aimless fashion since dinner-time.

'Dinner-time!' did I say? Ah, gentle reader, do not conjure up too bright a picture of that domestic repast! The neatly-laid cloth, and comfortable though homely meal, which *might* be in even the poorest household, was not by any means the rule in Howie's Land, Friars' Gate. When the shrill voice of Mrs. Laidlaw, acting in place of dinner-bell or gong (which indeed it was well qualified to do), summoned her numerous brood from stair and entry to the noontide meal, they found some potatoes smoking attractively enough on the bare, broken-legged table, *minus* any useless plate or *assiette*. A big loaf, flanking them on one side, was being ruthlessly *shaved* down by the matron's experienced hand; and, the slices being administered all round, the children perched themselves on bed or fender, chair, stool, or window-ledge, as seemed best to each. No anxiety regarding dyspepsia, or any other such grievous malady to which flesh is heir,—especially flesh which assimilates its food too quickly,—ever seemed to trouble the Laidlaw

family. They made the viands disappear in a space of time so short that it rather resembled a circus trick than a ceremonious family meal. It might be a happy consequence, however, of their supplies being always rather under than over their capacity, that this haste seldom if ever injured them. Robbie might show symptoms of choking, to be sure; but that would be only for a moment,—a smart slap on his shoulders, administered by his mother's brawny hand, being at once a successful remedy. Or Curly might set up a loud howl, the 'tatties' having burnt her tongue by premature application; but that also was but a temporary affliction, leaving no serious results.

A healthier, happier band of children than these—considering their means of subsistence and manner of life—would have been difficult to find throughout the burgh of Friars' Gate, or any other metropolitan district; and not without some justifiable maternal pride did Mrs. Laidlaw contemplate them as she packed them all off to play in what she still termed, though living under Victorian rule, 'the King's Park.'

But stop!—they were not *all* sent forth. One remained whom I have not yet introduced to you, though he is the hero of our little story.

Before dinner was well begun, and consequently shortly before it finished, Mrs. Laidlaw said in her usual peremptory manner,—

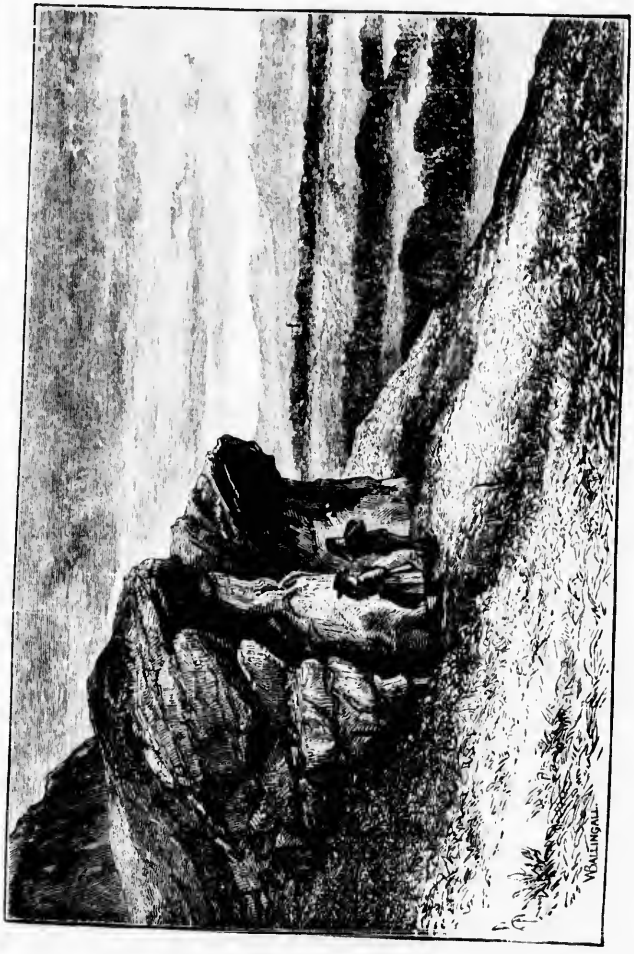
'Hae, Wullie! tak' thae up till Johnnie—noo mind! Ye'll whustle a' the road, an' we'll hear ye.'

It was some of the 'tatties,' and a 'pickle saut,' and a 'drap milk,' and the uniform shave of bread—all thrown higgledy-piggledy into a wooden porringer; but it was at least as good fare as any of the rest had got. Impartial justice was one of the finer traits in Mrs. Laidlaw's character, and one which I love to record.

But it was not the love of music for its own sake which prompted her to recommend the whistling performance. Willie was not a bad performer in that way. He often helped to fetch and carry for painters, and had studied the art under these well-known proficients in the empty rooms which they managed to make vocal as woods in spring. He had some ear, and could do 'Over the Water to Charlie' and 'The Bluebells of Scotland' without a mistake. Yet it was not for mere pleasure that Mrs. Laidlaw demanded one of these pleasing melodies.

No; they all knew what it was for, and Willie himself knew as well as anybody.

'I canna whustle, mother; ma mooth's fu',' he



IN THE KING'S PARK.

objected, speaking with that difficulty which a hunch of bread rudely inserted was likely to create.

'Aweel, ye maun try, Wullie, or Robbie 'll hae to gang. But them 'at gangs 'll get the bowl to scart oot.'

His mother's tone was calm and decided; and, at the prospect held out to the envoy in question, Wullie managed to gulp down his crust, and prepared for active service.

Up the short wooden stair he went two steps at a time, so it was no wonder that the 'Bluebells' had merely begun when he reached the top and was heard speaking to his little brother Johnnie.

'Hae, Johnnie, lad; there's for ye. It's a' there that I got, ony way. Man! I'd like to tak' ye doon on my back to the Loch wi' us!'

Johnnie's blue eyes looked up gratefully to his big brother as he uttered this kindly wish; but the sparkle of pleasure quickly died away again, and the thin white cheek was laid down on its dingy, ragged pillow with a short, impatient sigh that was not quite like Johnnie. For the little fellow had learnt through long years of suffering and helplessness a lesson of patience and contentment that many a greater personage might have envied. It had come to seem natural and fitting in his eyes that other 'bairns'

should scamper wildly up and down the long stairs—out into the blessed sunshine or the plashing rain, as he would have liked to do—oh, how dearly! Natural and fitting, too, that he should lie there alone, or with passing glimpses of companionship—always mured within the grimy, yellow-ochred walls, where the light faded so quickly, and the very air grew sick and weary. Why all this should be Johnnie did not know—he never even wondered why it was. Only it had gone on so long he had grown used to it, and any other state of things would have surprised him more.

But that vision of St. Margaret's Loch which Willie's chance words had suddenly called up was a very favourite one in Johnnie's dreaming hours. The rest had often described it to him with a rough but graphic eloquence, telling him how the blue water sparkled merrily in the sunshine, and the wee white sails of the toy boats danced up and down as if to music; while the banks and braes all round were bonnie with green grass and gowans and kingcups, and the grand big hill and the Crags looked over them all, 'just like the castles o' some giant,' Willie had said in one moment of poetic inspiration. And that scene remained for ever imprinted on the little invalid's fancy.

'I steek my een whiles,' he would say, 'an' see it a'—every bit o't; but yet—there's something that hinders it frae bidin' sae lang wi' me as I would like.'

But when Willie was off again, rattling down the stair in double-quick time to seize upon his reward,—that scraping out of the large bowl which his mother had promised,—Johnnie's spirits slowly revived; the potatoes assumed a somewhat attractive appearance in his eyes, and he propped himself up once more in order to enjoy them.

Half an hour later silence had settled over the Laidlaw mansion—silence deep and profound. It was not merely because the youngsters had gone off to play, and that Johnnie had sunk into a state of quietude—half day-dream and half slumber. The work of the day was not over by any means; in fact, Mrs. Laidlaw had made certain solemn preparations for that thorough cleaning-up of hearth and home which, in theory at least, she maintained as being proper to the weekly recurring festival of Saturday. It had been the unfailing custom in the houses of her mother and grandmother, as she well remembered in happy days, when she was a light-hearted lassie running about on the braes of Yarrow; but that was long ago. It had been her own custom too in early

married days, when she and her Davie had first set up housekeeping in the town; but these days too were receding quickly into a long-gone past, and some influences of the city life around her had not been altogether favourable in this respect.

Nevertheless, a rough clearing of the table had been effected; the chairs had been shoved into remote corners; some strips of matting thrown to one side; and a 'camstane cog' set down in business-like fashion on the dismantled hearth.

Then Mrs. Laidlaw suddenly disappeared. Some idea seemed to occur to her regarding the outer world which demanded instant attention. Stepping to the corner-cupboard, she took from it a small black bottle and a brown reticule basket, and then, throwing a shawl carelessly round her head and shoulders, she issued from her dwelling, with merely a word or two to Johnnie, assuring him of a speedy return.

CHAPTER II.

JOHNNIE'S FRIEND.

IT was getting on for four o'clock that afternoon before the door of Mrs. Laidlaw's house reopened, and even then it was not the mistress herself who appeared. Things of course remained pretty much as she had left them, the 'camstane cog' on the hearth, the tables and chairs shoved aside, the matting upturned. All was ready for the cleaning, but where was the cleaner? The fire had gone out; that was perhaps the only change, with the consequent departure of the family cat from its wonted place among the ashes to a snug corner in Johnnie's bed up-stairs.

The little boy had thoroughly wakened now, and was lying on his back looking up dreamily at the bit

of blue sky and the row of red chimney-cans just visible through the small square window over his head. He was scarcely aware of the long time that had elapsed since his mother's setting off, and it would not have either surprised or alarmed him to have known of it. Indeed, time was of little account to poor Johnnie. What did it mean to him after all? He would be lying there all the same whether time went fast or slow, whether people came or went. What did anything matter very much to him?

Suddenly, however, Johnnie became aware that there was some one in the room below, and that that some one was not his mother. He sat up and listened. It was like a man's step, though light for such, and it could not be his father, for he was off on a country job just then. Johnnie thought of thieves, and his little heart beat quickly.

'Is that you, mother?' he called out a little falteringly.

It was such a pleasant voice that answered from below that the boy forgot all his fears in a moment, and raised himself as far as he dared, so as to catch the first glimpse of the speaker, whose foot was now upon the wooden stair.

'It 'not the mother just yet,' said the new-comer in a cheery voice, that had a ring in it as of subdued

laughter and overflowing kindliness; 'but may I come up and see you all the same?'

'Ay—I dinna ken!' ejaculated Johnnie, not very sure what he ought to say. Visitors were not common occurrences with him. He had known of lady-visitors and Biblewomen looking in, certainly, but his mother never asked them to go up-stairs on account of the confusion, or 'mess' as she called it, that certainly did exist in the attic room, where the children were allowed to revel at their own sweet will, and where the family wardrobe struggled for a place among such refuse and lumber as had as yet found no favour in the pawnbroker's eyes.

It was a big stalwart form that now filled the doorway of Johnnie's room, bending itself to enter more easily. It was a full round face that looked down on his thin white cheeks, and they were big hands that took his own little wasted shreds of fingers tenderly in their grasp, and that smoothed his tangled hair more gently by far than his mother's hand had ever done. Altogether he seemed a sort of giant, this new friend of his,—but a giant so good, and loving, and kind, that no boy or girl need ever be the very least bit afraid of him. So firmly convinced was Johnnie of this fact, that, knowing not even his name, he yet lay back on his pillow with a long sigh of

relief, as if, now that this friend had come, he was at rest. It was enough to feel his strong hand holding him; no harm could possibly come to him just then.

'My brave little laddie!' That was all the stranger said at first, and he said it two or three times while he stroked the curly head. It wasn't likely such a big fellow would think of crying, certainly, and yet any listener might have suspected him of just the faintest quiver in his voice. He was reading the white face and the poor surroundings just as he might read an open book, and maybe—who knows?—some words of the story he read there *did* make him feel a little queer. But he got over it in a moment, if it was so. He asked Johnnie's name next, and had soon learned all about the family history, some facts of which he jotted down in a little notebook.

'Now,' he said, when this was finished, 'you are one of my friends, and I will come sometimes to see you, if you will ask me.'

Johnnie's eyes sparkled.

'Don't you want to know *my* name?'

'I dinna heed about *that*, if you'll mind to come back,' said Johnnie. Names were evidently of comparatively little consequence.

'Ah! but you must know what to call me if I'm your friend,' said the giant good-humouredly. 'My name is Cameron—Ronald Cameron. Do you like it?'

Johnnie was of a methodical turn of mind. He slowly and carefully considered the matter, and then gave his *ultimatum.*

'I like the first ane best—it's a bonnie name!'

'Well, you must call me by that,—"Mr. Ronald,"—that will do just as well as "Mr. Cameron" every bit. Will you remember it, or had I better write it down for you?

Remember it! Johnnie laughed at the notion of his forgetting that, or anything at all concerning this new friend. But he had something to tell Mr. Ronald before he went away,—something he did not like to say, but which, with an intuitive sense of honour, Johnnie felt must be said.

'Ye said I was a brave laddie,' he said in his slow, steady fashion. 'Ye said it first when ye came in. But I'm no' that, I'm no' a brave laddie—*I whiles greet.*'

'But brave men have been known to "greet," Johnnie; and what for no' a wee laddie like you?'

Johnnie shook his head. He was silenced, but not

convinced. It was a doctrine of 'Wullie's,' who was rather of the stoical persuasion, that to shed tears was the sure sign of a coward or a fool. No amount of tawse or cane at school—and he had got plenty—had ever forced him to this last refuge of human weakness. On one solitary occasion, feeling a slight dimness over his eyes, he glared up at his master with renewed daring, managing to blurt out regarding his flagellation, '*Man! I like it fine!*'

Judged by the standard of such a hero and martyr, of course Johnnie was but a weakling, and, though Willie could make ample excuses for his little brother, he never allowed him to imagine himself brave in any sense of the word.

Neither did Mr. Ronald now argue the point any further. Time was flying, and he had much to do that afternoon. He would come soon again, though, to Howie's Land. He seemed to be thinking of something else, too.

'Have you ever been in the country, Johnnie?' he asked suddenly.

Johnnie shook his head.

'Do you know where it is?' Ronald Cameron next asked, with mock gravity.

Johnnie did not laugh. The 'country' was evidently *one* spot of earth to him.

'Ay, I ken. It's owre yonder. Farther awa' nor the King's Park.'

'Just that, Johnnie. And it's a real bonnie place, you know, with green grass and gowans and buttercups, and burns to wade in, and trees to lie under, and hills far away. I can't tell you all about it just now, but you'll maybe see it some day. Would you like that?'

Johnnie had no words for answer this time, but his glowing face was enough.

'Well, you will go on being patient a little while longer, Johnnie, and that, mind you, is being brave—yes, it is. You must wait and see what good things your kind Heavenly Father may give you yet. You know all we have comes from Him, don't you?'

Johnnie was not sure. He looked doubtful, and said nothing.

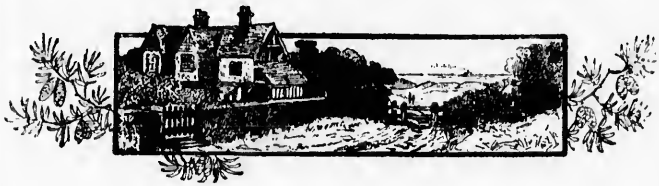
'Was it *Him* that sent you?' he asked, with a wistful earnestness in his tone.

'Yes,' said Ronald Cameron unhesitatingly, and Johnnie was satisfied. He did know something of this Heavenly Father's goodness now.

. . . . . .

There was a crash below as of some one falling and coming into violent collision with the furniture,

and Ronald, bidding a hurried good-bye to his new friend, hurried down to render what assistance he could to the unfortunate person. It proved to be no other than Mrs. Laidlaw herself, at last returned to the scene of her long-deferred household duties.



CHAPTER III.

MRS. LAIDLAW AT HOME AND ABROAD.

'IT'S an awfu' cratur that for gettin' in a body's gait! I maun hae 't pitten awa', I'm thinkin'. It's no vera safe for the weans, puir things.' So said Mrs. Laidlaw, now set on her feet again, but rubbing vigorously one knee, which had been injured in the late collision, and glaring savagely at the offending table, which she thus anathematized. She had herself pushed the little kitchen table into its awkward position near the door, but this had evidently escaped her recollection. There was a wild disorder about her dress and general appearance, an excited yet stupefied look in her eyes, and a pervading atmosphere of coarse spirits about her, none of which escaped the notice of Ronald Cameron. These were

symptoms he knew well, as a doctor knows the quickened pulse and heightened temperature of his fever patient; but they had never seemed so disappointing and dispiriting to him as now. He thought of the helpless little one he had just left. Poor Johnnie! Was *this* the mother he had been waiting and watching for?

One singular thing in Mrs. Laidlaw's conduct was, that she showed not the slightest surprise or even interest in the fact that a perfect stranger stood in her house, trying to arrest her attention. She merely addressed her observations to him as if he were the representative of the public at large, and it was evidently the most natural thing in the world to her that such a being should be present. But indeed Mrs. Laidlaw was at that moment in a highly elevated state of mind, which enabled her to regard, for the time being, all sublunary affairs—except those of a sharply incisive nature, such as her encounter with the table—with a calm and benignant indifference.

This high-souled abstraction was, however, fast giving way to the overpowering influence of sleep, and, with a sudden lurch, which sent young Cameron, substantial as he was, spinning into the middle of the room, Mrs. Laidlaw managed to reach the tent bed-

stead which upreared its curtainless framework on one side of the room, and there throwing herself carelessly down, closed her eyes peacefully with a few muttered words of incoherent wisdom,—

'A body maun hae *some* rest. Eh ay! it's an unco warld this we leeve in. Gang awa', and be guid bairns. I hae my wark to mind, an' it maun be done.'

Cameron stayed to hear no more. What *could* he do in a home like that? His heart was bleeding for the boy up-stairs; but it was worse than useless to go back to him just now. Perhaps merciful sleep would be sent to him for a while. What better could he hope for? Only a few steps down, however, he was met by the whole returning band of young Laidlaws. Here were Willie and Robb[illegible], the leaders of the expedition, trudging bravely under their respective burdens of wee Davie and Curly; while the little girls dragged the unwilling and generally rebellious Aleck, now by the hands, now by his flowing locks of auburn. They made a good deal of noise as they ascended the long dark stairs, meeting with companions and exchanging words of greeting or jest or defiance with them; but on the whole they were all happy and well-conditioned. Cameron, learning who they were, felt some comfort in their return on Johnnie's account.

'Here,' he said, addressing Willie, 'take this sixpence, and go and get some bakes or scones or something for your supper; and be sure and let Johnnie have some. You're a good brother, I'm sure, and won't forget that? I think—your mother'—he added, with some hesitation—'is not very well to-night.'

The children betrayed no alarm or even anxiety regarding their mother's health. Perhaps the bright silver sixpence had some share in allaying their apprehensions. Willie kept it in his own grasp, after letting the rest have a look at it all round, promising to go and buy something good for them with it as soon as he had got Curly set down. He soon found, however, that there was other business to attend to. His mother's prostrate attitude and half-intelligible remarks enabled the boy only too readily to diagnose her case, and with a smothered exclamation of impatience he laid his little sister down beside her, while he set himself to work with his usual stoical endurance to kindle the long dead fire, and set on the kettle for their evening meal, whatever that might be.

Meanwhile Ronald Cameron went on his rounds in that and in other stairs belonging to Howie's Land. He was a member of the Students' Guild, then newly started, and was full of enthusiasm in the cause. The work was new to him, but not uncongenial. He met

many that afternoon to whom his kind heart went out in ready sympathy—much that he could admire and respect, however poor the surroundings might be—but there was much, too, which could only fill him with loathing and disgust, and still more to grieve and sadden his spirit. In Mrs. Laidlaw's home alone *all* of these varied experiences had been fulfilled.

And yet it is only fair to Mrs. Laidlaw to say that the young missionary could hardly have made her acquaintance at a more unfortunate moment, and was in some danger of underrating her character so far as sobriety was concerned.

Circumstances, it is well known, are usually entirely beyond one's own control, and one is only responsible for the manner in which they are met. And so I think it was unlucky for Mrs. Laidlaw, that, slipping out that afternoon for a few moments, she should at the very foot of the stair encounter a group of country folks, belonging to a cheap trip from Galashiels, several of whom were old acquaintances;—Mary Morrison, who had been at Yarrow parish school with her long ago, and her 'man,' and her 'guid-brother,' and his wife, and so on—quite a family party; and they were hot and tired after a survey of Edinburgh Castle and Holyrood Palace, the Industrial Museum and the wax-work show. They were bound for the 'Rowan Tree'

now, a respectable public-house kept by a Galawater man, and to that refreshing shade they hospitably invited Mrs. Laidlaw, still to them the 'Jeanie Elliot' of other days. The latter made few objections, only regretting that she 'wasna mair redd-up like for sic company.' A few master-strokes, however, soon gave her toilette and coiffure a more finished appearance, the shawl was thrown gracefully over her shoulders in place of covering her head, and the black bottle was hastily deposited at an adjacent grocer's.

It was a lively party that soon gathered in one of the close dark 'boxes' of the 'Rowan Tree,' and the landlord himself joined them at intervals, keeping the ball rolling, as it were, with anecdotes of the old folk and the 'braw lads' of Gala Water. Fresh air and new scenery seemed of but little account with the party, and even the pleasures of sight-seeing had evidently lost much of their attractive power. But mirth and even song abounded, for Mary Morrison and Jeanie Elliot had been notable singers in the old days, and were fain to try a duet once more,—'When ye gang awa', Jamie,' being performed by special request.

Singing was voted to be 'drouthy wark,' but under the grateful shade of the 'Rowan Tree' that fault was easily remedied, and the light-winged moments flew

THE BRAES O' YARROW.

past unnoted. Still the best of friends must part, and railway companies are notoriously inexorable in regard to these separations. With much handshaking and many expressions of good-will and hopes to meet again, the party at last broke up, and Mrs. Laidlaw made what haste she could back to Howie's Land and her long-deferred cleaning. Alas! the grocer's window recalled to mind the little black bottle she had left there to fill, and, though she admitted to herself having had 'eneuch, an' maybe mair,' it would be a pity not to take the supply home with her. To-morrow would be Sunday, and, as she remarked, 'It's ill to get speerits on the Sabbath day.' Mrs. Laidlaw was still tolerably collected and clear. She spoke a few words to the grocer's apprentice in her ordinary manner, and felt confident in her own powers of speech and motion.

Suddenly a virago appeared on the steps of the shop door, and an angry *skirl* rang out on the air like a war-cry,—

'It was *you*, ye besom, that upset yer ash-backet owre my washin'-tub, and syled my clean claes. I'll gar ye ken what *my* ten fingers can dae to ye—that will I!'

Like an enraged tigress, Mrs. Laidlaw turned to meet this challenge, her eyes flashing fire and her whole frame trembling with excitement.

'How daur ye say that *I* meddled yer auld wizened cloots!' she retorted. 'My backet's as muckle richt to the close mou' as ony o' *your* rubbish, I trow. Keep off yer hands o' me, leein' jaud that ye are! or I'll send for the pollis to ye!'

These loud outcries were the signal for quite a little crowd to gather round the disputants, some taking the one part, some the other, all apparently biassed by private friendship rather than by any views regarding the merits of the case.

'Fire awa', Kirsty!' cried the supporters of the first speaker. 'Ye hae her there, an' nae mistake!'

'Dinna gie in to her, Jeanie, my wummin. Ye're a match for auld Kirsty Orrock ony day, I'll wager!'

The grocer's young man now came forward and ordered them to clear out from the front of his shop; and indeed it was time, business being entirely suspended by the fray.

After glaring at each other like two wild cats, and darting out words of venom and vituperation too coarse to be recorded here, the women flew at each other in the spirit of murder if not quite with its intent. Kirsty's hands were tangled in her opponent's hair, which now fell in wild confusion over her shoulders, while the latter struck out right and left with both

hands in a very unscientific though vigorous manner of attack. Fortunately the guardians of public safety were not on this occasion so far distant as they are often said to be, and a few pithy words from them soon ended the performance.

'Come awa' ben to my fireside, Jeanie,' said Mrs. Laidlaw's chief supporter, 'or ye get yersel' settled. Puir body, I'm wae for ye.'

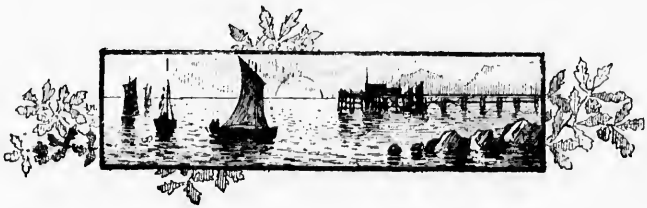
The kindly words brought the poor creature to tears. Already she felt how far she had fallen even from the dissipation at the 'Rowan Tree.' *That* had at least been full of friendliness and good-will; *this*, this last angry encounter, had been another thing altogether. The fire of hell—bitter hatred, foul language, and untameable passion—all these were born of it.

She was not just then collected enough to perceive how the one had led on to the other; how, without the previous loosening of the ties of duty and home, the wilder passions could never have been so lightly roused. Her only clear conviction was that she had failed to some extent of her own standard of excellence; that she had been cruelly ill-used and slandered, nevertheless; and that here, in Leezie M'Queenie, she had her sole friend and comforter.

Naturally, then, the black bottle, which had strangely enough stood the shock of conflict, was produced from

its reticule. Leezie had a corkscrew and two broken teacups ready for active use, and another hour and more of maudlin discourse, sometimes tearful, sometimes lively, gave the finishing touch to Mrs. Laidlaw's Saturday afternoon.

The rest has been told. And so, no wonder if Ronald Cameron took for a confirmed drunkard one who was as yet only in danger of becoming so. There were weeks, even months, when no one could accuse Mrs. Laidlaw of the least tendency to drink; and during these periods her husband and children were as well cared for as most. There had even been one whole year, lately, when she never 'touched,' as the phrase goes,—a bright and happy year. But, alas! the uphill path was steep and difficult at times, and the downward—oh, how easy!



CHAPTER IV.

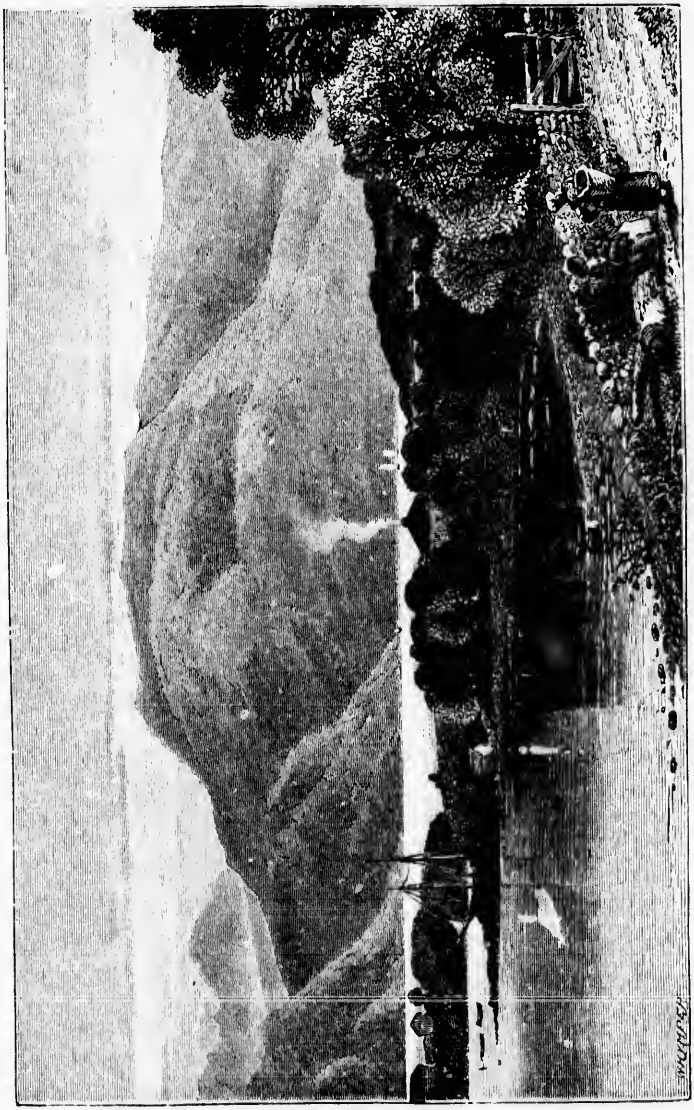
MILLWOOD.

IT was a pretty place. The house, a large wide-spreading *cottage ornée*, was encircled by emerald lawn and tennis-green, the former pricked out by glowing flower-beds and tiny fountains. Here and there ran long strips of greenhouse and conservatory, and pagoda-like arbours showed above the trim laurel bushes and rhododendrons. Its name could scarcely be called appropriate, except as suggestive of the utter absence of anything in the least resembling either a mill or a wood; but the whole place was a rich man's whim—he could, of course, call it what name he pleased. The blue waters of the Firth of Forth glittered merrily in front, and the beautiful city of Edinburgh rose

majestically at the back, so what more could possibly be desired? Mr. Ericsen, its owner, had been a successful corn merchant in Leith and Copenhagen. He was of Danish lineage, and very proud of it too. His wife, an Englishwoman, had never been able thoroughly to grasp the fact that other nations beyond the Channel and beyond London influences were to be considered as thoroughly civilised as her own. That Henry Ericsen, her husband, was superior to all other men since the creation, she most fully and devoutly believed; but then he was an exception,—a singular exception,—and, she would triumphantly ask, did not these very exceptions always prove the rule?

Obedience itself in every other particular, she therefore persistently refused to make her home on the shores of Kattegat or the Skagerrack, which her husband considered to be almost classic seas, breathing life and inspiration to the happy dwellers by their waves. This Scotch residence, then, was a compromise made by Mr. Ericsen on his partial retirement from busy life. In Scotland he could find some traces of his own land and race, and he was at least within easy reach of them at any time.

Mrs. Ericsen had been accounted quite a beauty in her youth, and was still a very handsome woman. A shade of anxiety habitual to her face alone marred



THE STAVANGER FJORD, NORWAY.

its pleasing aspect; but it was rather the result of natural temperament than of any actual trouble either past or present. Her four children—three boys and one girl—had grown up to early youth amiable and well-disposed in every way. No moment of vexation or disappointment had they ever willingly caused to the kind parents whose hopes were resting on them. Only, as time went on, the lads had to go away, of course, to college, or to foreign travel, or to business; while even Edith,—the one daughter of the house, indispensable to its light and happiness,—she too must be spared occasionally for some finishing lessons on the Continent, or long visit to her Scandinavian relatives. On one of these last, Edith had taken a great fancy to a young Norwegian girl, a distant cousin of her own name, Kaia Ericsen, and had insisted on bringing her home to complete her education in Edinburgh, as she greatly desired to do.

One of these long summer afternoons, the tennis-ground at Millwood was in full swing of play. Frank and Charlie were both at home just then, and they always brought shoals of companions in their wake. Edith, too, had mustered one or two girls from the neighbouring villas, but she was much more exclusive than her brothers, and made friends slowly. Several games were going on at once, and there might have

been another set, but for the want of a player. Edith came back to her mother's garden chair with something very like a frown gathering on her pretty face, saying,—

'Mother, dear, it is really too bad of Kaia!'

'*You* finding fault with Kaia, Edy!' said Mrs. Ericsen, raising her eyebrows in real or affected surprise. 'I thought she could do nothing wrong, according to your ideas.'

'Well, mother, I'm not exactly finding fault. Ky is as near perfection as any girl I know, and nearer than a good many; but, all the same, she is getting very careless about our tennis practice, and we shall never be able to join the tournament if she doesn't come home earlier on Saturdays. This is the third Saturday she has been an hour behind her time, and one set is quite spoiled by her absence just now.'

'She has so many classes, poor girl. You never worked half so hard, Edith. Even on *Saturdays* to have English literature and music would have quite shocked you. But Kaia must work for a living, remember, in another year; so you can't wonder she is so anxious.'

Edith shrugged her shoulders.

'I don't like to think of poor Ky "working for a living," as you elegantly put it. But, even if that must

be, I don't see why she should spoil our games in the meantime; neither do I understand why her hours should grow longer and longer every week! Now I must go and take Eva Grierson's place; she has given in.'

So saying, Edith was off, her spirits quite revived in an instant, and her mind full of the game. Her mother, however, kept thinking about Kaia, the absent. She looked at her watch, and tried to recall the girls' hours at those private classes of hers in town. 'Yes, Kaia has sometimes been too late in returning, now that I think of it,' she said to herself. 'I must inquire into it. There is no good in her overworking,—nor should I like her to get into any habit of idling about the streets with her companions. That is not one of her faults, however, I must say.'

Mrs. Ericsen had scarcely finished these reflections when the subject of them stood before her, the rosy flush upon her cheek and her quick breathing testifying to the speed with which she had sought her homeward way. She was a bright, handsome, attractive-looking girl, not by any means so regularly beautiful as Edith, but with a freshness and buoyancy about her which the other entirely lacked. Her dress was of simple style and cheap material, but it suited her lithe girlish figure to perfection. The sailor's hat

which she took off carelessly to fan her heated face had only a bit of blue ribbon to set it off. And yet Kaia looked as dainty as any belle of the tennis-green need wish to look, her sweet face and sensitive Scandinavian features being enlivened by eyes as blue as "forget-me-nots," while her plentiful coils of fair hair made a fitting crown for the whole. Kaia was indeed a pleasant picture to look upon just then. Mrs. Ericsen thought so as she looked, and again she wondered why the girl had been so often late.

'Kaia,' she said gently, 'sit down and tell me all you have been about to-day. You are late, my child. Has Miss Hawthorne extended your music hours?'

To her great surprise, a tell-tale flush mantled Kaia's cheek more vividly than heat and haste had done. What could it mean? Kaia was always frank and fearless, however; she did not hesitate a moment about her answer.

'I know I am late, Aunt Catherine,' she began, addressing Mrs. Ericsen as she had been taught to do, so as to make things home-like and familiar. 'But my hours have not been lengthened. I have been taking a walk.'

'With some of your companions?' asked Mrs. Ericsen, a little coldly.

'No, Aunt Catherine,' said Kaia, bending her

stately head a little. 'I met that—Ronald Cameron—you know—and'—

'*Ronald* Cameron!' repeated Mrs. Ericsen, in a tone still colder than before. 'Are you so intimate with him as to call him by his Christian name, Kaia?'

'Well, no; I call him *Mr.* Cameron, of course, when I am speaking to him; but you know that is what Walter calls him, and so'—

The girl stopped abruptly, as if uncertain how to proceed with her defence. She felt very much inclined to laugh, truth to tell, for the whole affair was ludicrous enough, being such a trifle in itself, but evidently magnified into something quite serious in Mrs. Ericsen's anxious mind. But she would not for worlds offend the kind friends and benefactors at Millwood, and constrained herself to see this incident with their eyes rather than her own.

'I am very sorry I went, dear auntie! I will not do so again, you may be sure, without asking your permission. But you know in my own country we seem so much freer in our ways. Neither father nor mother would think anything of my staying an hour or so late on a holiday. I forgot that you might think it strange.'

'You were keeping Edith and your other friends waiting, Kaia!' said the lady, still only half mollified,

though Kaia's artless look and manner were not without effect.

'Yes; I see that now. I am very sorry indeed. That was selfish, and so it was wrong, I know.'

'And where did you walk to, Kaia?' was Mrs. Ericsen's next question.

'You will think it a very funny walk, auntie!' said the girl, laughing and blushing. 'It was to no more delightful spot than the old Friars' Gate. You know that long dirty street leading down to Holyrood?'

'I have driven down that way, I think,' said Mrs. Ericsen, looking very much puzzled. 'What *could* take you to such a place, Kaia? But I believe there are some interesting and historic remains still to be found there. Is young Cameron antiquarian in his tastes?'

'Well, no, I don't think so,' said the young lady, breathing more freely now that she felt the worst was over. 'The fact is, he wanted to take me to see some poor people he is very much interested in. One in particular—a dear little boy—oh, so white and fragile-looking! And, as I have some spare time, we thought —I mean Mr. Cameron thought—that I might sometimes go up and see this little boy, just to amuse him a little, or read him a story, you know, or'—

'You went into one of those dreadful-looking houses, Kaia!' interrupted the lady. 'So dirty and wretched,

—full of fever, and measles, and whooping-cough, and everything dreadful! I am glad you have confessed all this, Kaia, for it must be put a stop to *at once!*'

Poor Kaia! her countenance fell. She had ruined one very bright vision of her future days, it seemed to her, by answering as she had done, frankly and fully. It was very hard.

'Go and change your dress at once, my dear, every bit of it. I insist upon it, before you join Edith and the rest,—before you even *speak* to them. The danger of infection from these places, I am told, is almost incredible. Perhaps you had better give Meldrum your skirt at once, to put in soak for the wash. How fortunate it is calico! I shall go and explain to Edith this fresh delay.'

Slowly, and with a very subdued, sorrowful look, the bright Norwegian girl rose and crossed the lawn towards the house, in obedience to her hostess's order. The life and spirit seemed suddenly to have died out of her, and, once in her own little room up-stairs, she gave way to a hearty fit of crying, which was perhaps the best thing she could do.

For some days back she had been indulging in certain bright visions of a near future, wherein she, Kaia Ericsen, with so little time and money of her own

at command, could yet enter on a new field of work, full of hope and promise, to brighten the hearts and lives and homes of many who had very little indeed of sunshine in them just then—sunshine which seemed to have flooded all her own life as far as she could remember. It was not that she thought herself better or more righteous than any in these poor darkened dwellings — very far from that! Not that she meant to give them advice or reproof—to point out that they were wrong and she herself right in this or that course. Indeed, she did not believe she could teach even the little ones among them. She was only learning to teach as yet. But she did want to go among these poor brothers and sisters of hers,—unknown hitherto and therefore neglected,—tell them she would be their friend if they would let her be so, share in their joys and sorrows, lighten their burdens if that might be, or, if not, let some of the gladness of her own lot—as books, pictures, music, what-not?—filter into theirs. This had been her dream, and perhaps, unknown almost to herself, there had been another dream, fairer and sweeter still, interwoven with it—one concerning herself more specially.

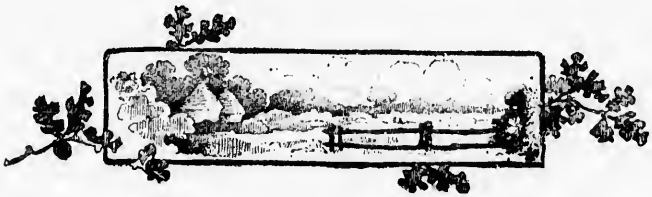
Both of these had been rudely shattered by Mrs. Ericsen's unexpected view of Kaia's proceedings, and, with the impulsive energy of her Scandinavian tempera-

ment, the girl plunged at once from bright hope and expectation to deep dejection and hopelessness.

Oh, to be home again! she thought,—home to the free and happy land of her childhood, where youth and happiness were as untrammelled as the bird upon the wing, where no one thought of frowning on a chance meeting or companionship, as hers had been that day. How lovely the Hardanger would be looking just then, its glorious mountains keeping guard over its glittering fjord, and the white masses of the Folgefond—that far-famed glacier—sparkling like towers of fairyland in the long, lingering sunset. Her own village of Aalvik, how pretty and peaceful it would be looking now, with her father's house on the promontory overlooking the bay, her mother standing on the patch of greensward just above it, calling her goats down from the steep hillside; while in the green boat rocking in the bay would be little Nils and Hans and Britta, playing by themselves, and perhaps wondering when Kaia would come to them! Oh, to be there indeed!

And yet Kaia looked suddenly up, checking herself as she said this, for she could not bear anything that had the least touch of untruth about it. The colour rose to her very brow as she whispered to herself, 'I am saying what is not quite true,

maybe!' For indeed Kaia did not wish to leave Scotland just so soon. She knew her own heart would be very sore indeed if a sudden order for her return to Aalvik were decreed. She would grieve deeply, and she could not help thinking that some one else would be grieved too, perhaps more deeply still. After a time Kaia dried her eyes, changed her dress, and made ready for the lawn-tennis party, determined to do all she could to please her Millwood friends.



CHAPTER V.

KAIA'S MESSAGE.

'I CANNA think what mak's thae folk fash themsel's to traik up that stair an' see Johnnie ilka time they come round,' observed Mrs. Laidlaw to her friend Leezie M'Queenie, who had just stepped in for a minute or two's crack over the news of the day. 'The missionar' used just to sit glowerin' round him in that airm-chair for a wee moment, and speir if he was ony better, maybe, but I never bade him gang up, an' he never gaed. But thae young veesitors—lads an' lassies, as I may ca' them—they wait for nae biddin' o' mine, but just say, "I'm awa' up to see Johnnie," or the like, an' up they are in a jiffey. I've ta'en a washin' cloot to it the day in case ony mair o' them may be here. It's an unco fash, to

be sure, an' a' for naething, but a body disna like to be misca'ed for keepin' an ill redd-up hoose or that.'

'I was thinkin' ye were unco braw the day,' responded Leezie, 'an' says I to mysel', it'll be for the guidman comin' hame.'

'For Davie!' exclaimed Mrs. Laidlaw, with a toss of her head; 'div ye think I wad' pit mysel' aboot that gait for my auld Davie? He wad never ken ony difference, and 'deed he wadna mind a preen's heid if he did. Ye ken little aboot the men-folk, lass, or ye wadna think sic havers.'

It was Leezie M'Queenie's turn now to toss her head in scornful fashion, for she did not much like the last retort. That lady's domestic relations had been for many years of a complicated nature, and, after various phases of social life, she now found herself wholly unable to say whether she had passed into the comparatively happy state of widowhood, or was still subject to matrimonial bondage. In this dilemma Leezie had set up again as a spinster, attached herself to the Friars' Gate Mission church, attended its meetings, got enrolled in various benevolent societies, and on the whole was making a good thing of it. Therefore it would be inexpedient to reply, as she might easily have done, to Mrs. Laidlaw's taunt; and in place of doing so, Leezie made some

excuse for a speedy departure, and left her neighbour still occupied with the new excitement of her 'redding-up.'

It was not only the wooden stair that was washed; Johnnie's garret had also undergone a partial cleansing, and the heaps of old refuse and lumber had been more tidily bestowed—under the bed most of it; while the little patient himself was looking much fresher and healthier after the application of warm water and soap to his thin white face and curly hair. Johnnie was very bright and eager that day; he was evidently expecting visitors, like his mother. His wasted hands twitched restlessly at the old torn coverlet, as if trying to make it lie more neatly, and he often glanced anxiously at some withering flowers stuck into a black bottle just by his pillow. They had been given to him a week ago, so no wonder they were withering now in that close atmosphere, and in the very narrow vase which alone the Laidlaw glass and china stores could supply.

'I wadna like her to think we had ta'en little heed o' them, mother,' said Johnnie. 'She'll be back again the day, maist like.'

'Hoots! you an' your fine folk, laddie!' responded his mother, with a cheery laugh, as she went on with her tidying-up process. 'Ye're awfu' ta'en up wi'

that young leddy, I'm sure. But what's come o' that lang, black-aviced loon that cam' wi' her? *He* hasna been back to see ye again, has he?'

Mrs. Laidlaw spoke with some asperity regarding the young man, to whom the epithet 'black-aviced' could scarcely be fairly applied. A touch of colour, too, mounted to her cheek as she spoke, for she was not quite dead to shame, and had a vivid though confused recollection of her first meeting with Ronald Cameron.

'No, he hasna been since *she* was, mother. I'm thinkin' they'll maybe come thegither again. But I'm no' very sure, for *he* said he was awfu' busy wi' some—ex—ex—I dinna mind what. And 'deed I'll no' mind, for ony ane o' them's aneuch for ae day. Eh, mother! it was like a glint o' sun in the room when him an' her was sittin' there!'

Johnnie had raised himself unconsciously as this burst of poetic enthusiasm seized him, and then, feeling his weakness, he fell back again on the pillow, which his mother had recently covered anew, and which was still a little whiter than his own face. The poetic simile did not find favour with Mrs. Laidlaw.

'Hoot awa' wi' yer havers, laddie! Ye think mair o' thae folk that ye never saw but ainee or twice, than

ye think o' the mother that bore ye, and that tyles and trauchles for ye baith nicht an' day.'

It might be an exaggerated view of her maternal cares and anxieties which these last words depicted, but it moved Johnnie's sensitive little soul to its very depths nevertheless. He stretched out his bits of arms and clasped them round his mother's neck, saying penitently,--

'No, no, mother! I like ye best o' a'. Dinna heed what I said!'

His mother was quickly mollified. She kissed her little boy with somewhat unusual tenderness, and then pretended to scold him for his coaxing ways.

'Ye're a rael *fraikin'* cratur, Johnnie! I haena time to pit aff makin' a baby o' ye like this. See, here's wee Curly greetin' sair wi' the earache. Ye'll tak' her beside ye, like a guid laddie, an' show her some o' yer bonnie picturs, or I get on wi' my washin'.'

Saturday is proverbially the slattern's day for washing, at least in Scotland. Still this Saturday contrasted very favourably indeed with one previous Saturday, and with many others in the Laidlaw household. For here were things all pretty straight and tidy, while the mother busied herself over a small tub in the kitchen window, from which emerged

one by one some under garments in various stages of decay, to be swung lightly on the wooden pole extending from the ledge out into the street, there to flutter and flap at the breeze's will until they were dry. The hearth was swept, and the kettle hissed upon the hob. Everything was in unwonted order, and evidently ready for visitors.

Alas! the hours wore slowly on, even till the late afternoon, and neither the light step of Johnnie's 'bonnie leddy,' nor the firmer tread of Ronald Cameron, were heard approaching. Some of the 'stair-folk' did indeed look in for a moment in passing, but these were not encouraged to-day by the mistress of the house, for some reason best known to herself. Not without a good deal of sarcasm and various uncomplimentary remarks did these discomfited acquaintances go on their way, but, though Mrs. Laidlaw heard most of the vituperation well enough, she made no alteration in her conduct, and deigned not a word of reply. This Saturday she had evidently set before herself a high standard of excellence, and meant to arrive at it too.

It was an unusually quiet day in the Laidlaw household, for the older children had set off early, marching to the Waverley Station under the gay

banners of a Lowgate Sunday school, which was bound for Newbattle Abbey and a day of pleasure. To be sure, it was not the trip of their own particular Sunday school, which was that of Friars' Gate Mission, with a trip still in prospect; but the young Laidlaws and many of their companions had a charming breadth in their views of ecclesiastical matters. They were never fettered by any narrow sectarian prejudices. To them it was of no moment whether the Sunday school in question—the one where tickets and ribbon badges were being just then distributed for an approaching holiday—were Established or Free Church, Episcopal or Independent, Baptist or Wesleyan, U.P. or E.U.: if a ticket or a badge could be obtained, they were ready to go. This laxity of opinion naturally led to a good deal of intermittent attendance at several Sunday schools during the year, rather than to a stedfast adherence to any one in particular. Their ideas may have got a little jumbled in the process, and their teachers may have lost interest in them somewhat, still it was the system commonly pursued in the neighbourhood. Parents and guardians made no objection, and, in the opinion of Robbie Laidlaw, at least, it was one which worked admirably.

'I hae been at fowr trupps the year already,' said

that astute youth; 'an' I'll maybe get to twa or three mair yet.'

'Ay, but, Robbie,' exclaimed his sister Jeanie, rather a conscientious little maiden in her own way, 'it's far mair wark. I've got *six* dooble verses to learn instead o' wan, and *three* catecheesms, forbye the Shorter!'

'Huts!' retorted Robbie scornfully; 'do ye think I learn ony o' them? No' me! That may dae for lassies, but it's no' for the like o' me.'

Robbie was evidently destined for one of the lords of creation in his own estimation. Jeanie only looked at him with a sort of mild wonder in her light blue eyes. She dearly loved the 'trupps,' but by some incomprehensible law of her nature she was inclined to learn her lessons too. Jeanie Laidlaw was a general favourite at her various schools and classes, being of a docile and affectionate nature, and rather quick-witted in some ways.

Robbie and Mary were the two wild and unmanageable ones, and it was fortunate for the domestic tranquillity that Willie held pretty firmly the reins of government in all their games and play-hours. None ventured to disobey or neglect any command of Willie's, and, as he was not the least of a petty tyrant, but on the whole kind and good-natured, as

well as inflexibly just, there was no need for rebellion.

But we are leaving Johnnie a long time to himself. He was lying wide awake in the twilight, with little Curly still by his side, her earache having long ago been lost in happy slumber. The sounds of household work below had died away, for his mother was busy over some mending now. Suddenly a voice struck upon his ear, which he had almost given up hope of hearing that day. It was his 'Mr. Ronald,' and he was talking cheerily and pleasantly to his mother. Johnnie had a vague sense that it was a great blessing he *had* come this evening, when everything was so nice and clean, and when his mother was what Johnnie called '*herself*.' Alas! he had often seen her not quite 'hersel',' and, though he scarcely knew why, it had always vexed him sorely. Perhaps he was too familiar with the unfailing results of such a state, the cross and passionate moods, the ugly words and even angry blows freely scattered among his brothers and sisters, if not bestowed on himself; the want of food and light, and comfort of all kinds,—yes, Johnnie knew them all well—too well!

Mr. Ronald was not long in coming up to see his little friend. He had a bright picture-book and a

bunch of roses in his hand, which he gave to Johnnie at once, saying,—

'These are from Miss Ericsen, Johnnie. She is very, *very* sorry she can't come to see you just now. But these are to keep you in mind of her for a little.'

Johnnie clasped the roses fast in his slender hands.

'What bonnie, bonnie flooers! They're just like hersel'!' he said in his funny old-fashioned way, at which Mr. Ronald laughed heartily.

'You are quite a poet, Johnnie,' he said. 'I'll tell the lady how much you liked her roses. Will you give me a reward for bringing them?'

Johnnie stared hard at his friend.

'*Me!* A *reward?* I hae naething o' my ain be'na'—and he looked round at his few possessions. Would the broken toys or the six marbles, his tin mug or his horn spoon, ever do for a *reward?*

Mr. Ronald relieved his mind on that score.

'No, no, Johnnie. I only want one of these roses for my button-hole, if you don't mind parting with *one*. Just the *wee'est* one you can find, or a green leaf only if you like.'

Johnnie's face brightened in a moment.

'I'll gie ye that,' he said, eagerly looking out what he thought the very finest of his goodly bunch, and laying it in Ronald's hand with a proud and happy

smile. His mother had to be sent for next to see and smell the rest, and to get a nice big dish to hold them all; the black bottle was far too small, it was discarded now with its faded treasures.

And then the picture-book! It was a large-sized one, with many coloured pictures of Bible scenes and incidents. Indeed, it would be quite a Scripture history to such as Johnnie. He gazed at it with wonder and delight.

'Is 't a' for *me?*' he whispered in rather an awe-struck tone.

'For you, yourself, Johnnie; from the lady. But to show the rest, you know, in good time.'

'Hoot ay!' exclaimed Johnnie, as if this latter suggestion had been quite unnecessary. And so it was—Johnnie was never selfish. 'What's wrang wi' *her?*' he next demanded.

'Nothing is wrong, Johnnie; she is well, only at present she cannot come to see you. That is all I can tell you. I saw her only for a few minutes this afternoon, when she gave me these for you, and the message.'

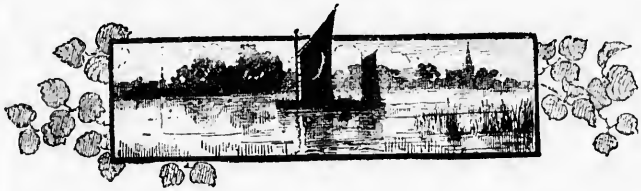
'Whatna message? I haena got that yet,' was the next demand. Johnnie was evidently a perfect miser where the 'bonnie leddy's' words were concerned.

'Well, just what I told you, my boy. That these were to make you remember her, and that she was *very* sorry she couldn't come. That was all the message.'

'Hoot, havers!' (this was a favourite phrase of Johnnie's, borrowed probably from his mother's *repertoire*). '*Remember* her! What for wad I be like to forget?'

Ronald smiled at the little enthusiast. Then a shade of sadness passed over his own countenance as he fastened the rosebud securely on his breast.

As usual, his time was limited. He had long hours of work and of study before him that night. So, saying a kind 'good-bye,' he hurried off, but he left a very happy little heart behind him in Howie's Land.



CHAPTER VI.

A SUNDAY AFTERNOON.

SUNDAY was emphatically a 'day of rest' at Millwood. If it be possible to obey any of the commandments *too* perfectly, then the Ericsens might be said to have reached that extreme with regard to the perplexing and often discarded Fourth of the Decalogue. To begin with the kitchen floor, cook, being exempted by the simple requirements of a cold dinner from any more strenuous exertions than of boiling some potatoes, and being a large, rather cumbrous person besides, was wont to fall into a state of utter inertia, only relieved by occasional yawns of an alarming and protracted nature. Housemaids, parlour-maid, and scullery-girl were only prevented from following cook's noble example by the superior

attractions of the toilet, and the necessity for some slight exertions in their respective spheres. Thomas, the old coachman, had, of course, an opportunity of spending the day in the bosom of his own family at the lodge, and probably went to church with them; but it was wonderful how many hours had to be spent in lounging about his orderly harness-room and his comfortable stable, not working, of course, but merely contemplating things in general, and the blissful repose of 'Sigurd' and 'Thorsa,' the fine Norwegian steeds under his charge. William, the gardener, too, seemed to find it necessary to watch with sleepy eyes the invisible growth within various frames and hot-beds, over which he wafted the soothing fumes of his beloved pipe. But enough of the vassals. The Ericsen family were themselves most exemplary in all respects, and unfailing in the matter of church attendance. They filled a comfortable, old-fashioned pew in St. Dunstan's, the large city church, which they had always been used to attend. But it was a long walk from Millwood to that place of worship, especially for Mrs. Ericsen, and, as has been observed, Thorsa and Sigurd were off work on Sundays. It was therefore deemed impossible to go more than once a day; and the idea of going to any nearer church in the evening never seemed to occur

to them. The Ericsens were thoroughly conservative in this matter certainly. And so it came to pass that, after the early dinner was over, Mr. Ericsen generally found himself nodding in his easy garden chair out in the conservatory opening off the drawing-room, while his wife sought either the shade of the verandah or the snugness of the fireside, some favourite book outspread upon her knees, with thoughts free to roam at will, and memories of the past weaving their spells around her. The younger members of the family circle were, of course, more active in their restfulness. A saunter round the gardens or through the orchard, even a stroll down to the beach, might be accomplished before tea; but more frequently the hours went by in quiet reading or pleasant chat in the thatched arbour or by the library window.

This Sunday evening of which we speak, being in the summer solstice, found Edith and Walter, along with Bruce Moreland, a Cambridge friend of Charlie's visiting at Millwood, seated under an old cedar-tree on the lawn, enjoying the view of glittering Firth and sunny slopes from its pleasant shade. They had books with them, having regularly encamped there, indeed, for an hour of reading, but they were not by any means too deeply engrossed for conversation.

'Where is your cousin?' asked young Moreland,—'Miss—I really never can get a hold of that Christian name of hers. *Is* it a *Christian* name, by the way? or is it as pagan as your old Thor and Odin, Miss Ericsen?'

'Oh, *Kaia* is quite a pretty name, and so easy to say!' returned Edith. 'I wish I had been called anything so nice instead of my Saxon appellation. I don't know whether you call Kaia a pagan name or not, Bruce; but Ky herself is the very best Christian I know. Why, she spends all her time on Sundays studying!'

Bruce Moreland laughed.

'Do all good Christians need to study so much?' he said. 'I'm afraid we're not much to boast of!'

Edith shrugged her shoulders, and gave a little sigh.

'Ky is the best girl I know; and she would be good enough even if she didn't study. But she likes to do as she was brought up to do in her home, and of course we don't interfere. She belongs still by correspondence to some Bible-class or something over yonder,'—here Miss Ericsen nodded her pretty little head in the direction where one might suppose Norway to be,—'and she has to write out whole

sheets of questions and answers, some of them *fearfully* hard!'

'Much *you* know about them, Edy!' said Walter, in a tone of good-humoured banter.

'Well, I did try, you know; but it made my poor head ache, and so I had to give it up,' returned the young lady.

'I shall be more frightened than ever to encounter Miss Kaia!' observed Moreland, with mock gravity. 'I have always felt there was something about her I didn't quite comprehend. I thought it might be the pagan element, you know; but now I see it all. A Biblical Encyclopædia and Cruden's Concordance all complete in one young lady is too much for me!'

Edith laughed, and then frowned severely, taking up her book to show that she did not quite like the freedom of Moreland's remark; while Walter sprang to his feet with a quick flush of anger on his cheek, saying,—

'I think we have all talked nonsense enough for one day. I'm going to the library for a fresh supply of books.'

While this random sort of conversation was going on, Mrs. Ericsen was enjoying her favourite view from the verandah, lightly shadowed also by richly flower-

ing clematis and honeysuckle, while the low hum of bees around her might well have soothed her to slumber. But Mrs. Ericsen was not of a sleepy nature. She was always too anxious and care-laden, even in her easy, affluent life, to sink readily into slumber. Just then many anxious speculations crowded her maternal mind. The future careers of Frank, Charlie, and Walter occupied her attention for a long time, in spite of a large volume open in her lap, and displaying at the top of its pages, in clear type,—

'SERMON XVI.—ON THE CARES OF THIS WORLD.'

Would Frank make a distinguished appearance at the Bar, as she fondly hoped he would? and would Charlie overwork at Cambridge, and die in a decline? Would Walter decide soon, and would his decision be in favour of Medicine, as he often threatened, or would he take to commercial life, as his father wished him to do? Who could tell?

Then Edith. What was to become of her in after years, when father and mother were no longer here to watch over her? In whose keeping would she place her happiness? Girls were *so* thoughtless!

From this point the lady's meditations wandered back to her own long past girlhood, tracing her own

path, through its many windings, up its hills of difficulty and down its vales of sorrow, till at last it ended, by God's blessed guidance, in a fair and goodly heritage. Here at least was a lesson of hope and trustfulness for those who were dearer to her than ever her own self had been.

But while Mrs. Ericsen thus reviewed her past youth, one memory of quite another kind awoke with peculiar force and tenderness. She seemed to be again a young girl, dressed in deep mourning, kneeling by a little grave. It was a first household grave, and the boy who lay there had been the 'loved of all.' Beside the quiet churchyard walls flowed the wide Severn, rich in song and story, and on the other side rose the ivied tower of her father's church, while the rectory windows caught the bright rays of a setting sun.

'Johnnie! Johnnie!' she said softly and wistfully to herself. It was strange she should have him so vividly before her that night, for it was thirty years and more since they had played together beneath the sheltering beech-trees or on the daisied field. But the boy's memory was sweet and fragrant still, and she willingly yielded herself to this dream of early days. He had always been a fragile, delicate child, never able to romp about with other boys, and

so, perhaps, became more closely the companion and playmate of his little sister. And the little sister learned to devote herself to him, and to find all her own happiness in his. Yet when the time of parting came, when Johnnie was sent for to his far-off, unseen home, never to come back and play with her as in the dear old days, then it seemed to the girl as if she had never done half enough to please him, never loved him even as she might have done if she had only known how soon he was to leave her! Oh, if Johnnie could come back only for a day, that she might tell him all this! That sorrow and that remorse were long, long past, and yet this Sunday night Mrs. Ericsen found tears dimming her eyes as she remembered it all.

She was forced to wipe them away hurriedly, for a servant came with a card, saying the gentleman wished to see Mr. Walter, but she could not find him, and rather thought Mr. Moreland and he had gone towards the shore.

Mrs. Ericsen looked at the card. It was Ronald Cameron's. 'Ask him to come here,' she said; and soon the young student was seated by her side, looking with surprise and admiration at the picturesque view in front, for Mr. Ericsen had so judiciously laid out his grounds, that from the verandah a charming

peep of blue waters and distant hills, framed in by waving boughs of forest green, greeted and refreshed eyes long used to city streets and dusty thoroughfares.

'I didn't know the Firth of Forth could look so—shall I say romantic?' Cameron said. 'You see it here to the very best advantage. What a lovely place this is!'

'I am glad you like it. You must come often when you have time, and see it under more favourable circumstances,' replied Mrs. Ericsen kindly. 'To-night I am sorry to find Walter is not at hand to welcome you. But do you know, Mr. Cameron, I am not altogether sorry; I wanted to have a few words with you myself. Now, are you at all inclined to run away and escape my little scolding?'

There was a pleasant raillery in her tones as she said this, and yet, truth to tell, Ronald Cameron did look a trifle nervous, as he realized that some reproof, however gentle, and however unmerited, was in store for him. He was anxious, for some reason which he could scarcely have explained to himself, to stand well with the Ericsen family, especially with the lady who held a rightful sway over Kaia's movements.

For a moment or two he did not reply, but kept

his eyes bent on the ground, where some blue clematis blossoms lay scattered by the breeze. He reviewed certain circumstances in that brief interval, and then, raising his head, said frankly,—

'I will gladly listen to anything you may wish to say to me, Mrs. Ericsen. I am quite sure it can only be something very kind and good, even if it be a "scold."'

'I am not so sure of your thinking it so,' said Mrs. Ericsen; 'but I will not keep you in suspense, at all events. Let me take the bull at once by the horns. You have put some wild ideas into the head of my thoughtless Norwegian lassie, Mr. Cameron. She thinks it is her duty to go into all sorts of horrid dens of disease and filth,—a Mrs. Elizabeth Fry on a small scale, I suppose,—never reflecting that she may by her imprudence cost the very lives of all her uncle's household by bringing infection back with her; and I should just like to know what good in comparison of such a dreadful calamity a girl like Kaia can do. A few tracts, I suppose, some tea and sugar among the old women, or some money, at all events, would do more in a week than *she* can do in a year of such absurd and dangerous *visiting*.'

Gentle as the lady was by nature, she had now worked herself up into a little blaze of temper, by

means of this recent annoyance of hers. Her eyes sparkled, her pale cheeks glowed. For a moment she paused to recover her composure. Ronald Cameron seized the opportunity.

'There is much truth in what you say,' he answered gently. 'The *home* is always first to be guarded, first to be considered, by every one of us. Whatever duties may spring up beyond it, the "keeper of the vineyards" dares not neglect his own.'

His words soothed Mrs. Ericsen's ruffled spirits wonderfully. 'A very sensible and reasonable youth, at all events,' she thought to herself. 'I wish Charles and Walter were always as amenable to guidance.'

'I am glad you see it so,' she said aloud. 'And therefore you will not wonder that I at once put a stop to Miss Quixote's romantic adventures, and have pointed out some pretty work for bazaars, and so forth, as a much more suitable way of regenerating the world—for girls like her to attempt, of course, I mean. It is quite different with clergymen and city missionaries, I know.'

'I quite admit your perfect right to decide in this matter,' replied Cameron; 'and I am sure you will find Miss Ericsen willing to believe that "obedience is better than sacrifice." But allow me to go back to

your first remarks. With one part I agreed at once, as you remember; but with the rest, *no!* You say that tracts and gifts and money can do as much or more good than personal visitation. *That* I cannot for a moment admit. That the gifts and money would be more welcome in the homes of the poor is very likely; but to please is one thing, to do real and lasting good is quite another.'

'I'm afraid I don't quite understand you,' said Mrs. Ericsen stiffly. She was troubled by this new turn of his discourse, and was perhaps not very willing to understand.

'Let me explain,' he said. 'A little picture from that very stair where Miss Ericsen began her work may do. And first, let me assure you that I carefully selected one as free from all infection as could be got anywhere. Really it is fairly clean and fairly decent, as things go.'

Mrs. Ericsen shook her head dubiously. Cameron proceeded,—

'I went yesterday to see a poor little fellow to whom she had spoken very kindly. He lies in a miserable garret all day by himself; it is a case of spine disease. They say nothing can be done, though he is only seven, I think, or eight. Very sad, isn't it? Well, Miss Ericsen had sent him a picture-book

and some flowers by me; but when I told him she couldn't come herself'—

'Saying a cruel aunt had forbidden her, I suppose?' was the sarcastic interruption.

'No; that was not for me to tell, and the "cruel" would not have been true,' replied Cameron, with a smile. Again his temperate words had a soothing effect. He went on. 'You would have wondered to see that poor wee chappie let the book and the flowers fall on his ragged bedcover, while he asked eagerly where "the bonnie leddy" was, and "what was wrang wi' her." And when I told him he was to remember her, there was a tear on his thin white cheek as he repeated my word, "*Remember!*" adding, "What for wad I forget?" Ah, Mrs. Ericsen, you would have granted *then* that the living touch, the personal sympathy, have a power which silver and gold can never equal!'

'I did not know Kaia had any spare money for these presents,' said Mrs. Ericsen, affecting a coldness which she did not feel, and thoroughly despising herself for the taunt, even while she made it. She was being convinced against her will, and perhaps found it hard to 'kick against the pricks.' 'Your young friend must be quite a poet, I am sure.'

'Yes, a poet. Poor Johnnie!' was all Cameron replied.

Mrs. Ericsen started. *That* name *again!*

'*Johnnie!*' she said softly. 'Is that the poor child's name? How strange! Tell me more about him.'

Young Cameron stared.

'Do you know him?' he said hesitatingly.

'No, no,' answered the lady impatiently. 'Merely an association of ideas. Please go on with your picture, as you call it.'

Thus encouraged, Ronald Cameron renewed his protraiture of wee Johnnie Laidlaw, with additional sketches of his surroundings, so graphically given, that Mrs. Ericsen listened to him with an interest that the last fashionable novel in three volumes from Douglas and Foulis' library could never have evoked.

But he was soon interrupted. Voices and steps were heard, which announced the return of Walter Ericsen and Bruce Moreland from their stroll, while Edith and Kaia at the same time made their voices audible in the drawing-room. Presently the whole party, including Mr. Ericsen, now revived by slumber, gathered on the verandah round Mrs. Ericsen and her visitor, and the latter reminded Walter of the object of this Sunday evening call.

'You promised to come with me to one of the students' meetings if we were in special want of help,' he said; 'and to-night we have a grand meeting in the New Hall. Ravensforth of Bristol is to speak, and we want to have plenty of the fellows to go round among the people afterwards, just to take them by the hand, you know, and say a kind word.'

Walter looked rather taken aback at this proposal.

'Oh, I can't!' he said. 'It's not in my line, you know. And—and—I've Moreland here to look after, too. You must really let me off, Cameron.'

Ronald looked disappointed.

'I had made sure of you *this* time,' he said; 'but just as you like.'

Moreland, who had been studying the young student's face with a look of curious, half-amused interest, here came most unexpectedly to the rescue.

'Don't make *me* a bugbear, Ericsen,' he said; 'I'll go too, if you don't mind, Mr. Cameron. If there's one thing I *can* do, it's speaking to people I never saw in my life before; and if I can say a helpful word to any poor beggar that has had worse chances than myself in the world, why, I'm your man. Not about

religion, of course, you know,—*mind that;* but if it's about turning up the right street or left, you know, and keeping a straight look-out ahead for everything that's good and true and worth living for,—all that sort of thing, you understand,—all I can say is, I'll be only too glad to have the chance.'

The Ericsen family looked rather blank at this extraordinary 'confession of faith,' but Ronald Cameron grasped the singular ally cordially by the hand, saying,—

'Come and welcome. You are on the right side, any way.'

So it was settled that Walter and his friend should both accompany Cameron to his Friars' Gate meeting, and, the evening being now well advanced, they set off at once.

Kaia and Ronald had only time for a very few words apart; but, as both looked exceedingly happy, it is probable that they found personal presence and sympathy in this case also more helpful than material objects.

'Mr. Cameron,' said Mrs. Ericsen, as she bade Ronald a kindly good-bye, 'will you come again and have a chat with me very soon, perhaps this week? I may have something else to say to you.'

'Most gladly,' answered the young man; adding, with a merry look in his blue eyes, 'it isn't to be "*scold*" this time, is it?'

'*Perhaps not*,' answered the lady, with a quiet smile.

CHAPTER VII.

IN FRIARS' GATE.

IT was no very grand or spacious hall to which Ronald Cameron guided his friends —only a rough, temporary building reconstructed from some ancient tenements whose lease of life had nearly expired. But, grimy and dismal as it might look to eyes in search of architectural grace or æsthetic loveliness, it was a bright and blessed spot—a perfect rainbow of hope, indeed, to the group of earnest young students who had secured it for their meetings in one of the darkest and most degraded quarters of the city.

These self-devoted home missionaries were all young and full of natural enthusiasm, but in many of them there breathed a spirit of new zeal and ardour that was not born of youth or of nature only, but

surely of that great Spirit which, breathing over the deep, dark waters at the earliest dawn of creation, said, 'Let there be light.'

Friars' Gate, despite the odour of sanctity still lingering in its name, was in many respects a region dark enough to awaken in any friends of humanity that pleading cry for 'Light—more light!' The processions and festivals of the old Romish Church had long passed away—its shrine of St. Mary's was lost even to memory, and its troops of friars, black and white and grey, had faded into oblivion. The publican's range of barrels and glittering brasses; the pawnbroker's aerial balls (once the insignia of a noble Italian house, now the beggar's refuge and the spendthrift's ruin); the barber's gaudy pole and swinging plate; the lodging-keeper's obtrusive board,—these now had their place, so far as decorative art was concerned, among the narrow streets and filthy wynds, the crowded courts and closes of Friars' Gate.

But, after all, 'It's sure to be the darkest the hour before the dawn;' and here at last were the student missionaries, eagerly pressing forward to do battle as best they might, even with their untried weapons and unproved armour, against the hosts of sin and death.

And here, as a first result of their movement, was the gaunt old ruin, which had in former days rung often

with the drunkard's glee and the swearer's oath, the brawling of women, the ribaldry of men, and the cries of helpless and miserable children, now warm and bright, not only with material warmth and comfort, but with a welcome and sympathy and brotherliness more needed by far. There was song too—sweet and holy song, which, coming from the lips of Christian women, seemed to have power like that divine strain that overcame the Sirens' song in classic story. For the people came in readily as soon as the soft-toned harmonium began pealing through the lighted hall, carrying out into the darkness its gentle summons. There were no long sermons to weary or deter them, for the Friars' Gate folk were not yet able for such 'strong meat,' being as regards church services the merest 'babes' as a general rule.

Many of these 'babes' were a study in themselves. Faces so grey and colourless, eyes bent so long on grovelling among garbage both moral and physical, that for any higher objects they had grown utterly useless. Clothing, the great marvel of which lay in its exceeding dilapidation and decay and the complicated nature of its fastenings. When were these garments changed, and how were they readjusted? Surely a scientific mind alone could grasp the secret of pinning that black petticoat, for instance, so

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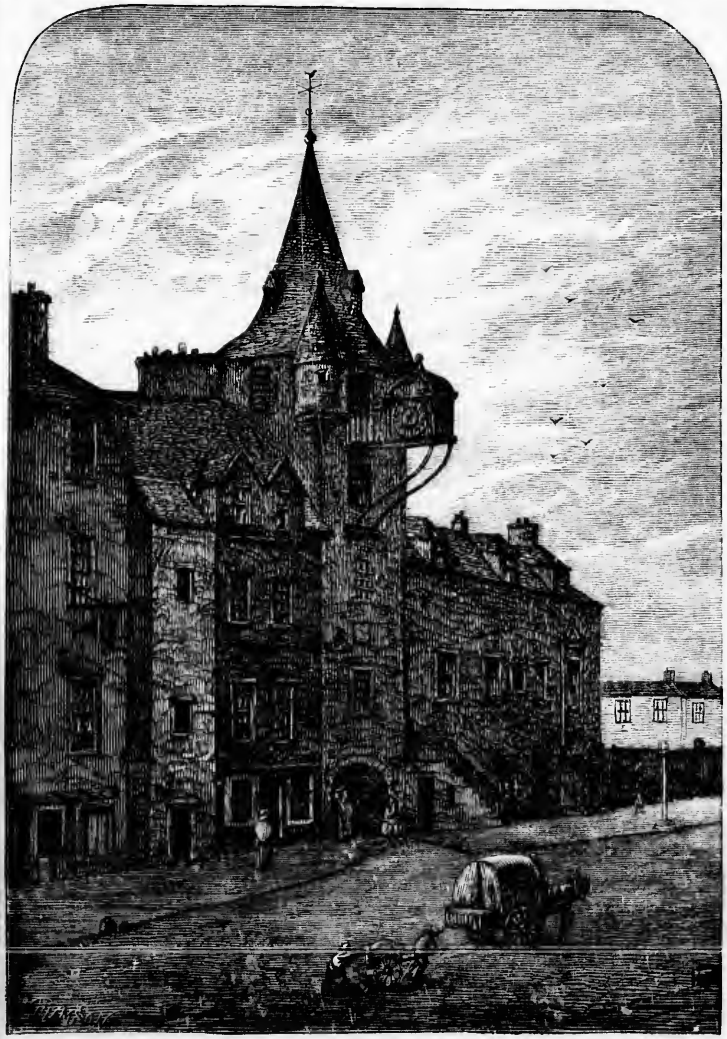


IN FRIARS' GATE.

numerous are its fissures! And this old dress coat, with yawning chasms here and there—has its owner any chart of its windings to guide him in his toilet?

Down, far down below earth's surface, geologists find masses of rock, some of them composed of very diverse material, but these, by some terrific power,—unseen, unknown,—have been literally crushed together into one indivisible mass. It was so in that Mission Hall in Friars' Gate that Sunday night; at least Bruce Moreland thought of that illustration as he sat in the farthest back seat he could find, watching the unfamiliar scene around him. 'These people and their garments are alike in one thing,' he said to himself. 'They have not grown up naturally in their present sphere. They have been in different lands and different surroundings; they may have fluttered—the garments at least—in gay sunshine, and made a part in many a goodly show; but here they are at last, all ground down into one dull, inert mass—hopeless, indifferent, degraded. And the strong hand that dragged them down and crushed all life and goodness out of them—what was it?'

Here Mr. Moreland's meditations terminated abruptly, for the service had begun, and his attention was arrested by the first notes of Mr. Sankey's well-known hymn, 'Jesus of Nazareth passeth by.'

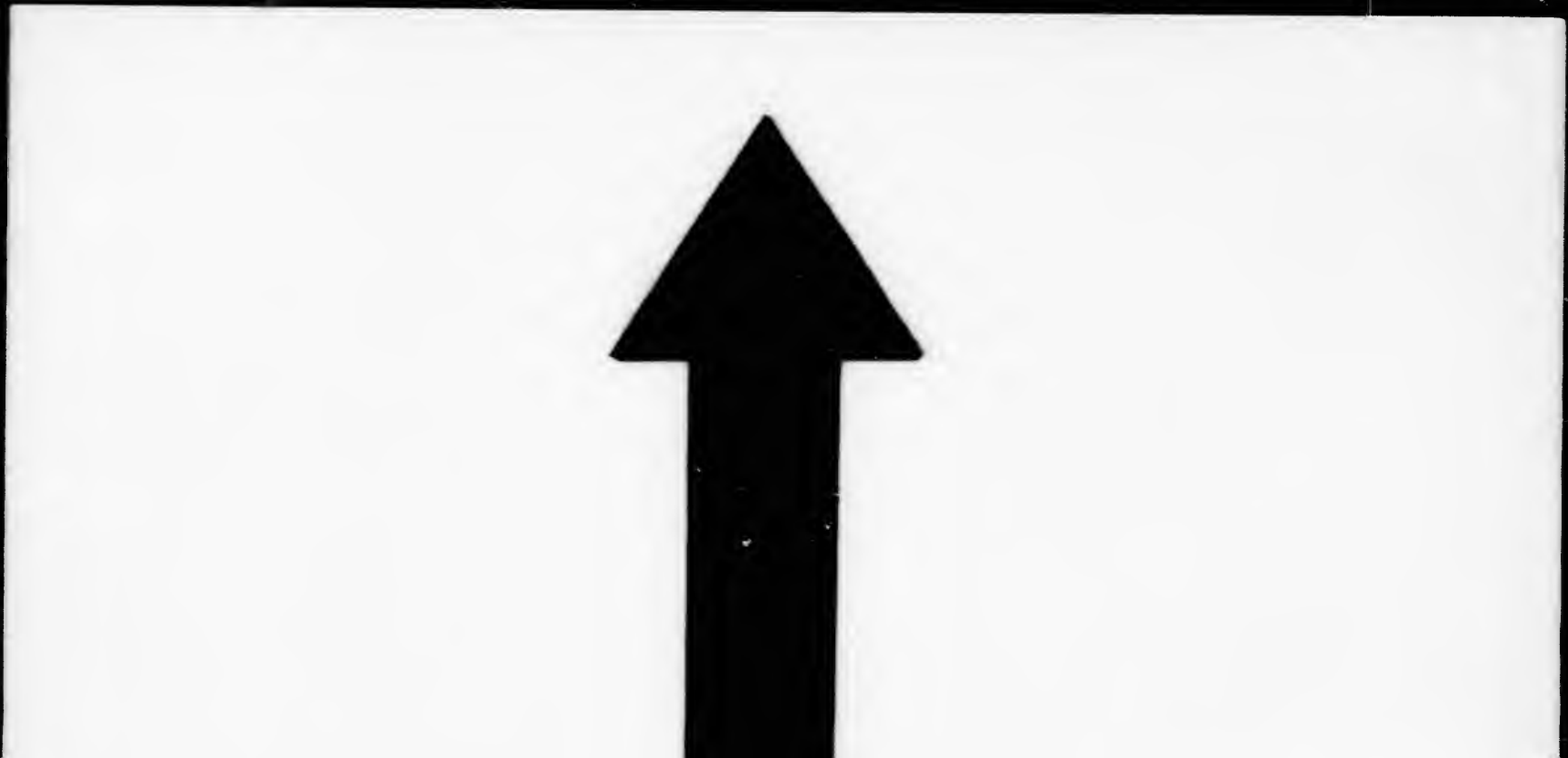
He thought he had never heard one so beautiful, for Bruce Moreland's experience in such matters was small even compared with that of the congregation around him. His university life at Cambridge was just over, and, having come into possession of a considerable fortune, he was, in his own phrase, 'just resting on his oars'—a state of repose of mind and body, during which he found his way much oftener to theatres, billiard-rooms, and smoking concerts than to devotional services of any sort. And yet he wasn't a bad sort of fellow either, as any of his friends would have testified. Generous, warm-hearted, and open to the best and noblest impulses, it was only that, born and brought up in an atmosphere of utter worldliness and pleasure-seeking, he really knew no higher aims.

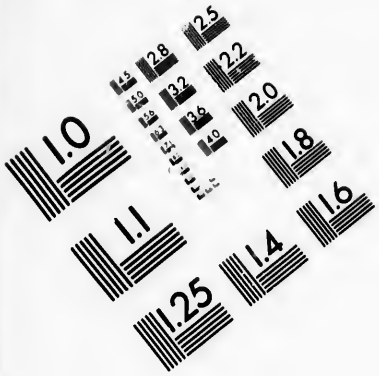
'Man was made to be happy, and he should try to make himself so. That's my creed and confession, you know,' he would say laughingly. 'Short and simple, isn't it? Ah! that's a proof of its being the right stuff, don't you see? The best way in everything is always the simplest!'

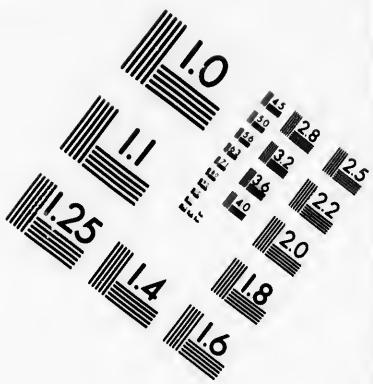
But we must return to the meeting, which went on apace. Ronald Cameron looked around him hopefully and thankfully. There was not one vacant spot that night, and the very people he wanted to see were

all there. There was Hepburn, the reformed drunkard, who they all feared had gone off again quite lately; and Brockett, the inveterate atheist, who would never listen to anybody but himself heretofore; and Scroggie, the malign and bitter opponent of the whole mission. Whether for good or evil, he was seated there on a back bench, apparently in a suitable frame of mind. Nor were acquaintances wanting among the fairer and weaker sex. Lizzie M'Queenie was planted right in front, with her old straw bonnet battered considerably and set to one side, but as yet withstanding the attacks of her usual sleepiness. Kirsty Orrock, too, the fair amazon of Howie's Land, was not far off, with a perfectly seraphic expression on her bronzed visage, which seemed to testify that for the present, at least, all feuds were forgotten.

Yes, Ronald Cameron felt happy as he thought of all these wanderers gathered for once at least within their Father's house of prayer. And must you blame him if another source of gladness was also present to his mind, making his own future more bright and hopeful than it had been? He had seen Kaia Ericsen once more — heard her voice, that thrilled his heart as no other could. And he had her guardian's frank and free welcome to Millwood still making music in his ears. Surely they would







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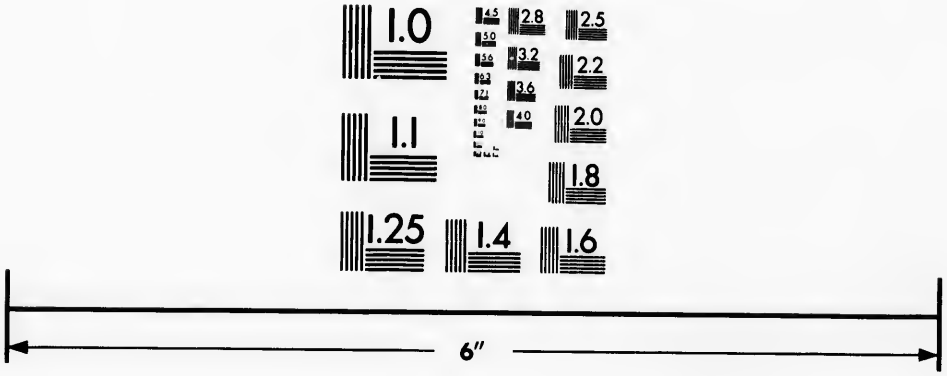

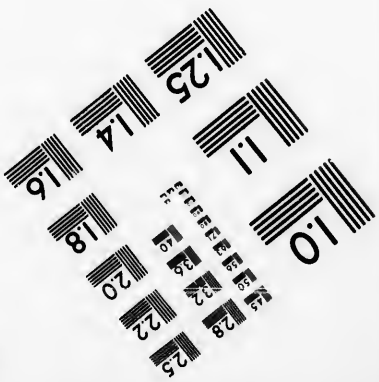

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often meet now, even though her visits to Howie's Land must remain a forbidden thing. But Cameron had work to do that night, and he honestly tried to put all thoughts of personal happiness by.

Mr. Ravensforth, the evangelist from Bristol, who was the chief spokesman of the meeting, was no ordinary orator. His style was very quiet and simple, yet possessed of a swaying power which many 'sons of thunder' might well have envied. A thin, spare form, evidently used to constant exertion; a countenance gravely benign, and so full of expression, that, even while he stood silently looking round on his hearers, as if trying to read the secrets of these many hearts, every wandering glance was arrested and fixed on him. These were the chief characteristics that struck Bruce Moreland as he mentally appraised the new type of human nature.

'Now I know what that fellow's going to say,' he decided: 'he's going to fire off suddenly upon drink, and taking the pledge, and all that sort of thing. I know the jargon they all go in for. I might as well take forty winks while he's at it. Of course it's the best thing for our mutual friends here—some of them look pretty much as if they needed it!'

'I have come a long way to speak to you to-night,' so the evangelist began, 'and it is to tell you a very

simple truth. Some of you have forgotten it—some never learned it. It is this—*You were made to be happy.*'

'By Jove! the fellow's taking a leaf out of my book!' This was Mr. Bruce Moreland's sudden mental ejaculation, as he sat up with fresh animation in his looks, and all thought of sleep forgotten. There was something strangely familiar in the voice as well as in the words.

'I do not ask any one of you,' Mr. Ravensforth continued, 'if you are rich or poor, good or bad, prosperous or ruined. If I might speak to-night to those who stand nearest to our monarch's throne, to those who wear the judge's ermine robe, or who throng our halls of learning—to the women of wealth, and luxury, and fashion—I would say to them the very same words—"You were made to be happy. Have you forgotten it? Have you never known it?"

'I do not know your names—your stories I shall never learn—in all likelihood I may never look on your faces again. But I do know that you are my brothers and my sisters, bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. I do know that my Father's heart is yearning for you now, that for you my Redeemer died. And I know that I *shall* meet you all again on one great coming day before the judgment throne, when heaven and

earth shall have passed away, and when our little life here is but a vanished dream. And, lest you should accuse me in that day of having left undone a brother's part, of having stood aside in cold indifference while you hurried past me into endless ruin, I come to-night, your brother and your friend, to grasp your hand in mine, and say, "Oh, remember! *Man was made to be happy.*"'

To give the whole of Mr. Ravensforth's address here is of course impossible, even if it were wanted. It will suffice to say that, passing from some vivid pictures of mere earthly pleasure, which he showed to be not more fleeting and fallacious in the coarser forms than in the more refined, he gradually unfolded to the eager listeners before him a picture fairer and more attractive by far than any of the others. And yet it was of a happiness within the grasp of every one there. It was of a life fit for the king's palace and the peasant's hut—for the senate and the workshop—the millionaire and the beggar alike. A life noble and unselfish — crowned with thorns, indeed, and yet with glory too; a peace abiding even in the midst of storm and shipwreck; a joy that brightens through the darkening days of earth, and rises at last to its native home in heaven.

It was as if he showed them some fair building of

costly and precious stones, with stately towers and battlements, with rich carving and delicate tracery,—a building full of wondrous treasures, enduring as eternity itself. And this might be their own! One feature of his pictured palace the artist did not by any means forget. Its glory and its gladness—its beauty and its wealth—its foundation and its corner-stone —was CHRIST.

When Mr. Ravensforth sat down another hymn was sung, followed by prayers and one or two short addresses; but some auditors then began to move off—the Friars' Gate people being generally of a rather restless nature. But one of them had gone quickly away who was not of their number, one who had volunteered, indeed, to remain and speak a word or two to inquirers, but who had himself unexpectedly received a message,—a home-thrust he called it,—and felt that he must go away and think over it in silence.

'Where are you going, Moreland?' whispered Walter Ericsen to his friend, as he encountered him in the doorway. 'The thing isn't over yet. Why, you were to speak to some of those fellows, you remember.'

'Don't remind me of my folly—my presumption,' answered Moreland hurriedly. 'My dear fellow, I've

been *spoken to* myself, that's what it is. No, don't hinder me, I want to think a bit. I'll come back in time for the walk home.'

Wondering very much whether Moreland spoke in jest or earnest, and rather inclined to the former view, Walter Ericsen let him go, only watching him a few minutes as he turned down towards the old palace of Holyrood, and the wide park beyond it, lying fair in the bright moonlight. Moreland lighted his cigar as he went, according to wont, and quickly disappeared.

It had been so strange and startling to Moreland to hear his own much-vaunted 'creed' preached from, and made a truth so utterly different from what he had always made it; to have a sort of electric light shed over his own heart and life, till their utter dross and vanity stood out in a relief which he could hardly brook. So strange and new an experience was it, that he could do nothing but listen with absorbing interest, forgetting even the speaker himself in the message he had come to deliver.

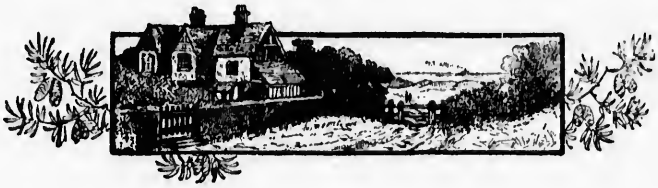
But now, pacing up and down in the starlight, with the cool sweet air of July fanning his temples, while silence girdled the great rocks above him and the sleeping waters of St. Margaret's Loch, he had leisure to think who this evangelist was.

His own earliest college days had been recalled to

him by Ravensforth's very first words. He had remembered then the most brilliant wrangler and prizeman of the year, and how often his speeches had been listened to with eager admiration by half the fellows, and the very dons and professors too. Politics, social reforms, popular science, anything and everything this man was ready for; and the success of a debate generally depended on whether or not he could be secured for it. But Ravensforth was *not* the name. No, Moreland couldn't recall the right name. It was a short, common name. Certainly it wasn't Ravensforth.

Suddenly another flash of memory illumined him. Wasn't he the fellow who got some piece of luck one morning—found himself heir to a grand estate, or fortune, or both. Nothing so likely as that he might have had to change his name for that. And then—yes, surely this was the story—people said that along with the great luck some great sorrow had come, and that he eventually lost his head over it, and grew very eccentric. Surely he had heard that the once brilliant scholar was now little better than a fool. The longer he thought over it, the plainer became his recollection of the circumstances. Then he said half aloud, 'Ravensforth is that man. And he is the same splendid fellow still,' he added. 'He spoke, as he said

himself, not to rich or to poor, but to all alike, as he would have spoken to the University Council, I believe. He spoke to *me*, anyway.' Lastly, after thinking long and earnestly over all that had come home to his own heart and conscience, Moreland said to himself emphatically, 'If Ravensforth is a fool, then a pity that the world is so wise!'



CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. ERICSEN'S PROJECT.

LONG before high noon on Monday, Millwood, from its pretty cottage even to its outmost garden wall, presented a very different and more lively aspect from that of the slumberous Sunday just preceding. It was, in fact, to some extent like the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty before and after the magic kiss of the daring prince.

Even Mrs. Ericsen moved about with some alacrity and cheerfulness, jingling various bunches of keys, all brightly burnished and duly labelled, evidently under the belief that looking into one cupboard after another, opening and shutting drawers, reviewing orderly arrays of china, glass, and silver, besides a multitude of heterogeneous articles, was the most arduous form of housekeeping.

The gentlemen were, of course, off to town on business, and the girls were at their classes or shopping there too. So their places were vacant, but the stirring sounds of the housemaid's broom, and the parlour-maid's pleasant clatter among her plates and knives, made some amends so far as noise was concerned. Cook was in the full tide of arrangements for hot luncheon and late dinner, and, what was as troublesome as either, the requirements of the servants' hall table; while the gardener's boy was, she said, 'worrying her life out' by bringing in hampers of different vegetables for immediate inspection and choice. Thorsa and Sigurd were undergoing a thorough grooming, and the stable-boy whistled his most lively melodies as he mopped out his well-flagged domain. Altogether, one might say that Millwood had waked to life again.

But along with her housekeeping cares Mrs. Ericsen had a new notion running in her head. A pleasant enough one, surely, for she smiled to herself often as the fancy recurred.

'I wonder how they will all like it,' she said to herself. 'And I do hope young Cameron will come back soon, that I may ask him about it.'

A nurse's couch long disused stood folded in one corner of the storeroom. It met her eye by chance.

'There is the very thing,' she thought. 'The poor boy could have that laid upon the lawn when the day is fine, or in the shade of the verandah—anywhere. Why, it looks as if it had been got on purpose for him.'

It may easily be gathered from this that Mrs. Ericsen had grasped the grand idea of having little Johnnie Laidlaw down to Millwood for a visit, but it was so strange and new an idea, that no wonder she felt quite in a little whirl about it. The little boy, whose name was the same as that of the long-lost companion of her childhood, and whose fate was in some respects so like to his, in others how very *unlike*—that little sufferer had found an entrance to her heart and sympathy, where others, as sorely afflicted as he, might long have knocked in vain. She had passed through long years of life accounted by herself and others a fair specimen of Christian worth and character. Yet never once before had it occurred to her that the blessings freely showered upon herself and her family were given not for herself and them alone. There were conventional charities, of course, fashionable philanthropies, claims of dependents, and so forth. These had never been neglected at any time. But living, loving, personal help and influence were utterly unknown. Perhaps at this late stage of life it was really more wonderful that she did awake

to some sense of it, than that she had never realized it at all. But a hidden spring had been touched at last by a master hand.

> 'God hath His mysteries of grace,
> Ways that we cannot tell:
> He hides them deep, like the hidden sleep
> Of him He loved so well.'

Mrs. Ericsen was sitting in the arbour at work that afternoon, when Kaia and Edith came bounding across the lawn in search of her.

'I have got this naughty girl home in good time to-day, mother dear,' said the latter, making her cousin throw down her pile of schoolbooks on the grass, and sit down with her on the rustic bench for a chat with her mother. Edith's excursions to town were few compared with Kaia's daily peregrinations, but she had always as much again to tell of all she had seen and heard, more particularly of what concerned the world of dress and fashion.

'I have seen a cap that will exactly suit you, mammy!' began the daughter of the house. 'You must go to Madame Angelica's showroom and have a peep at it. Some exquisite lace just framing in the sweetest violets you ever saw. I couldn't believe they were artificial till I touched them.'

Mrs. Ericsen smiled.

'I have no intention of going back to Madame Angelica's for a month at least, Edy; so don't put yourself to the trouble of tempting me. I am going to ask Kaia to take me some day soon to a rather less fashionable resort.'

'Are you going to take Ky as your guide instead of *me*, in affairs of the toilet?' exclaimed Edith, raising her pretty eyebrows in surprise, real or affected, whereat Kaia herself laughed merrily. 'Mother mine, that is a most dangerous step! I have warned you!'

Kaia's indifference regarding minor details of dress was a well-known joke among the Ericsens, though Edith was always the first to own that her careless cousin looked so well in *anything*, that it was quite mortifying to herself and other girls who spent a good deal of time before the mirror.

'My only boast is,' said Kaia, 'that I do find out much cheaper places than those you patronize, Edy; and I'm sure I don't know what would become of me if I didn't. Can I take you to any of my *bons marchés*, Aunt Catherine?'

'No, my dear; that is not what I had in view.'

Edith gave vent to an ostentatious sigh of relief.

'I am thankful for *that*,' she said. 'But do let us hear the worst, mother dear. I *cannot* stand suspense.'

But Mrs. Ericsen seemed to find 'the worst,' whatever it might be, rather difficult to come out with. She fidgeted about a little, and folded her cambric handkerchief in a number of very prim exact folds—a habit of hers which the girls knew very well as betokening some amount of abstraction or perplexity.

'St. Valentine's purse, I declare!' said her saucy and not too ceremonious daughter. 'What are we about to hear?'

Then, to their amazement, instead of any startling revelation such as they had expected, Mrs. Ericsen suddenly changed the subject.

'I have been wondering, Kaia, what we could do for that poor little boy of yours. Young Cameron told me some really very touching things about him, and—and—I trust, my dear, you know I did not mean to be at all harsh or unkind the other day when I forbade your visiting there. Indeed, I still hold to my opinion that'—

But here Kaia's arms were thrown warmly round her, and that young lady's tender entreaties were poured forth that she should never say any more about that, and never think her so foolishly ungrateful as not to understand that everything her aunt said and did was only kindness in some form or other.

So Mrs. Ericsen gave up the vain attempt to continue in that strain, and said instead,—

'But, Kaia, tell me what you think of my plan. Do you think the little boy would be happy if we brought him down here for a week or two, to get good air and food and a little careful nursing?'

'*Think!*' repeated the Norwegian girl warmly, now kneeling in ecstasy at her aunt's feet, while Edith stood looking on in blank amazement at the scene,—'*think!*—that Johnnie would believe himself in Paradise, if he ever heard of such a place. Oh, Aunt Catherine! are you really in earnest? Do you believe it is possible?'

'If Mr. Cameron assures us he can be removed without any danger to himself, I don't see anything to make it impossible, dear,' replied her aunt. 'I have been looking out one or two little things already which might be useful for him; and then, you know, he could be carried out to the lawn, or even down to the shore on fine days.'

'Oh, how delightful!' exclaimed Kaia. 'It will be such a pleasure to show Johnnie all these lovely flowers, and the bonnie Firth yonder, shining among the trees. And it will be best of all to see his look of wonder and delight.'

Even Edith seemed attracted by this vivid picture

of Kaia's, though she tried to frown and say it was '*Quixotic!*—very!'

'But, Kaia dear, we must do nothing rash,' said Mrs. Ericsen, returning to her ordinary tone and manner, and shaking out her handkerchief from its mystic folds, now that the *denouement* was fairly over. 'And I have a very great wish just to see this little fellow for myself, to understand his circumstances and those of his family, so that I may be better able to judge what is best to do. That is why I said I wanted you to take me somewhere. You know the way to—what is it called?'

'Howie's Land, Friars' Gate,' said Kaia promptly. 'I will be so glad, so very glad!'

'Shall we go to-morrow then? Only I almost think it might be better to wait till we have seen Ronald Cameron again, and hear if he considers the moving feasible. I asked him to come soon and see us at Millwood.'

Delays are dangerous, Kaia knew. What if this new fit of philanthropy were to go off as suddenly as it had come on?

'We might call and see Johnnie and his mother, you know, dear auntie,' she said; 'and not promise anything, or even hint at it until we were quite sure. Should you like to do that?'

Yes; Mrs. Ericsen thought that would do. But at that very moment the dressing-bell rang clearly across the little lawn, and the conference broke up abruptly.

It so happened that Kaia's prompt measures and her aunt's desire for some preliminary counsel proved capable of a united fulfilment. For so little had Ronald Cameron forgotten his invitation to return soon to Millwood, that he appeared in person that very evening, and enjoyed some hours of very agreeable society there, none the less that he was then and there informed of Mrs. Ericsen's benevolent scheme, which had been called into existence by his own unconscious pleading.

Cameron thought there could be little difficulty in transporting Johnnie down to Millwood, since the carriage was to be sent for him, and a travelling couch arranged in it. He undertook to see the dispensary doctor who attended the boy now and then, and make sure of this before the step was actually taken. And as to Mrs. Ericsen's meditated visit to Howie's Land, Cameron was at her service. He would be only too glad to escort her and Miss Ericsen to the place, if they would kindly tell him the day and hour. So the morrow was decided upon, very much to Kaia's contentment; and Cameron promised to

meet them in front of Holyrood Palace at four o'clock next afternoon.

'A very obliging young man,' was Mrs. Ericsen's verdict upon her chosen escort that night when he had left the house. 'He has so much to do, studying, teaching, and so forth, yet he made no difficulty at all about the time of our going, and all that, as so many others would have done. Walter, I hardly think *you* would have been so easily suited.'

'You haven't tried me, mother. I knew Cameron would jump at that missionary enterprise,' said Walter, with a sidelong glance which Kaia pretended not to observe. She was engaged just then in searching for a minute hole in her muslin dress, with somewhat unnecessary scrutiny.

But if Ronald Cameron received any meed of praise which on this occasion was not quite his own, it is only fair to him to say that he would have done as much or far more to oblige his friends, or even his foes if he had any, even without a sight of Kaia Ericsen for his guerdon.

CHAPTER IX.

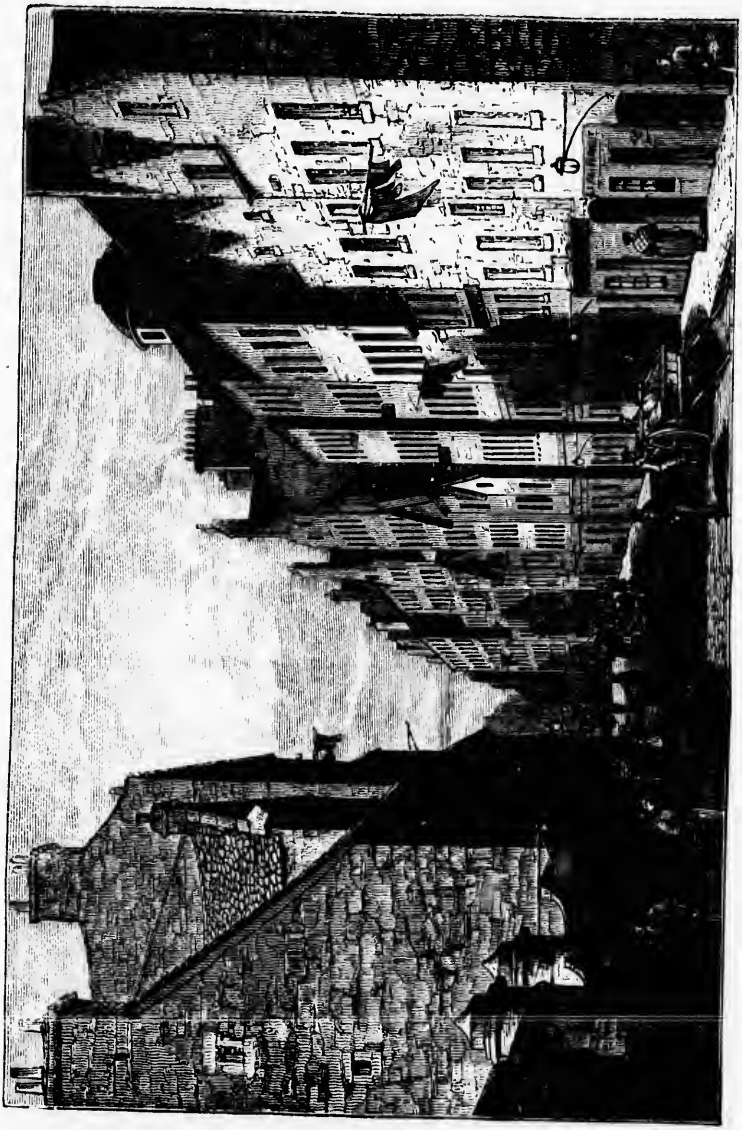
VISITORS IN HOWIE'S LAND.

THE appointed meeting at Holyrood duly took place. It was a bright, pleasant afternoon, when the summer sunlight gilded, yet did not 'flout the ruins grey,' while it streamed also with glad radiance into the dark wynds and closes of Friars' Gate, and lingered about the stairs in patches, or was quickly lost among dark shadows of heavy oaken beams and quaintly-scutcheoned doorways. Friars' Gate was very quiet and sleepy just then. Its inhabitants were pretty well dispersed at that time on their various pursuits, and it would be night before it resumed its height of mingled revelry and wretchedness. It would be difficult to describe the tumult of excited feeling and anxious apprehension that filled Mrs.

Ericsen's mind as she steadily mounted the long dark stairs leading to Johnnie's home. To many who have been, fortunately for the world in general, familiar with such visits from their early years, her feelings would seem too ridiculous even for belief. Yet to her this simple 'call' was nothing less than a trial.

Cameron went first in his capacity of guide, and his clear strong voice was ringing out its pleasant greetings on this side or that as he went, a sound which indeed seemed to poor Mrs. Ericsen, toiling up now far behind him in this *via dolorosa*, like the cheering voice heard by Christian in the Valley of the Shadow of Death — a sound full of much-needed encouragement. Kaia followed her aunt with bright and eager anticipation, only slackening her own speed so as to assist her fellow-pilgrim.

At last, however, the safe footing of Mrs. Laidlaw's house was fairly gained. It was in good order fortunately, and the matron herself was engaged in some household duties. It was one of Mrs. Laidlaw's 'good spells' at present, when she could really present a very fair aspect to an inquiring world. Her husband, David Laidlaw, was at home just then, which circumstance was also in favour of things being kept



FRIARS' GATE.

right in the family abode. He was a man who could 'take his glass,' as he styled it, and that was no small measure. Yet he brooked no dissipation of that kind in his helpmeet, and woe betide her if he ever came home to a locked door, a black hearth, or any other manifestation of a drinking-bout on *her* part. Willie, the eldest boy, inherited, as has been seen, much of his father's masterful spirit, and would sometimes even attempt the same lordly airs, but his mother boasted she could 'cowe' him yet. Not so could she with David, however, and, though she might go the length of 'casting up' his own shortcomings to him, and that in no measured terms, it was seldom indeed she ventured openly to imitate them.

And so the present occasion, when, figuratively, the Laidlaw banner was waving from the battlements of their mansion, the lord and master thereof being in residence, proved to be an excellent one for Mrs. Ericsen's first attempt at 'district visiting,' an ordeal under which she might even have sunk altogether had things been as Cameron had found them one afternoon not long ago.

Mrs. Laidlaw herself was greatly elated at the idea of a carriage and pair standing at her stairfoot, and its occupants honouring her first, if not solely, by

their visit. She had quick, observant eyes, and it took her no long time to discern between Kaia's frank and fearless bearing and the nervous, constrained courtesy of Mrs. Ericsen.

'Yon auld ane was rael feared like,' she said afterwards to Johnnie, in describing the entrance of the visitors, which, of course, he had not seen. 'I kenned fine she was feelin' gey like a fish oot o' the watter, though she tried to speak as free as the young ane, I'll say that for her. Thinks I to mysel', my bonnie wumman, ye're ane o' thae braw leddies that dinna ken they're born yet, as the sayin' gangs;—ay! and maybe trow themselves made o' better stour than the likes o' us puir folk! My certy! but she gethered up her skirts weel aboot her—and rael nate ankles she has—as she gaed up the garret stair an' owre the bits o' duds that I was reddin' up.'

But Mrs. Ericsen was not unfavourably impressed by this new acquaintance and unfamiliar scene. She recognised the elements of motherliness and home life even here, and she did understand that these transcended far all outward surroundings and material accessories. She was not fool enough to believe that a ragged gown and rough speech could make the mother less true and tender, or that Chippendale

furniture and costly draperies could alone constitute a happy home. And yet, withal, it must be confessed that Mrs. Ericsen's recognition of the brotherhood of humanity in this instance was pretty much that of the traveller who finds himself kindly received by a tribe of Esquimaux or Ojibbeway Indians!

It was in Johnnie's garret that this sense of strangeness and constraint began to wear off. In the little boy's thin white face, worn by suffering and saddened by solitude, there was a certain degree of refinement — partly native and intuitive, partly the result of circumstances—which quickly made itself felt.

Johnnie's being immured in this garret was only on account of the doctor's urgent expostulations against his little patient being in constant danger of a fatal accident through the restless activity of the whole family circle, especially his mother's mode of domestic management, which he, the doctor, frequently likened to the course of an elephant through a china shop.

In summer weather, he decreed, Johnnie might lie with perfect safety even in this fireless retreat. It would ensure him having some fresh air, at all events, and the younger children could go up and play quietly

beside him, but Johnnie's fragile spine would easily be set wrong for ever by the wrestling matches and general rollicking performances of his older brothers. So Johnnie remained in his garret till the cold winter season should come round again, though his mother grumbled loudly at the extra 'trampin' an' trailin'' that fell to her own lot in consequence.

'My poor little boy!' said Mrs. Ericsen kindly, taking one little wasted hand in her own. 'Are you very weary of lying here?'

Johnnie opened his blue eyes very wide at this question. It was one that had not occurred to him before, seemingly.

'Me? No!' he said slowly.

'But what makes you so contented, dear?' It was not a very wise question, perhaps, but in this case it did no harm. Another child might have begun to fancy he had some right to grumble, but not so Johnnie. He looked round the little room, his eyes seeming to point out to her various things: first the glass of roses, still wonderfully fresh and fair, at least in their owner's estimation; then some picture-books scattered about his bed, and a toy monkey perched on his pillow; and then, last, indeed, but by no means with least affection, he looked brightly over to where

Kaia and Ronald Cameron were standing talking to his mother. He nodded his little head, and said,—

'*They* come whiles to see me, ye ken.'

The quaint, old-fashioned way in which Johnnie expressed himself—familiar, yet not the least forward —amused Mrs. Ericsen. Her conscience did indeed prick her for a moment at his words, for she had done her best to deprive him of one comfort lately. It was not Kaia's fault that her presence had brightened him so seldom.

'You are a very good, patient little boy, I am sure,' she said; 'and I hope you will be well and strong some day. Do you know, I remember a little boy something like you. He was very often ill like you, and had to lie on his bed a long, long time. His name was Johnnie too. A dear, good boy! He would have liked to see you, and he would have tried to cheer you, for he knew what it was to suffer like you—so young.'

'Did he get better?' asked Johnnie, fixing a rather solemn gaze on the lady.

It was not the sort of question she would have liked, and she blamed herself for having led up to it.

'He got better from time to time, dear, and he grew

to be quite a big boy compared with you. Oh yes! he was twelve at least when he—well, you know, at last God took him home.'

Johnnie lifted his eyes to the skylight over his head, and then looked back inquiringly.

'Yes,' she said softly; 'he lived in a pretty home, Johnnie, with kind friends about him, and everything to make him happy, and he *was* a happy little fellow, only for that one thing, the having to lie so long like you, but then he went to another land, where there are no sick, weary little children, no tears, no grief, no sin. Everybody cried when he went away, Johnnie, but there was no need to cry for *him*.'

By this time Mrs. Laidlaw had preceded Cameron down the short wooden stair on her way to rummage the kitchen drawers for a paper he wanted, containing the address of the young dispensary doctor who had attended Johnnie, he having now started in business for himself in some other part of Edinburgh. Kaia was therefore the only other person present, and she listened in great surprise to her aunt's frank and confidential discourse. It was so unlike her to unfold her own family history, even to timeworn friends, in general. And how had Johnnie found his way to her heart so soon?

'*I* have scarcely once heard her speak of that little

brother of hers who died so long ago,' said Kaia to herself.

'I'm thinkin',' said Johnnie, in his slow, grave fashion, 'that the bonnie land he gaed to would be something like the country.'

'How, Johnnie?' asked Mrs. Ericsen, rather perplexed.

'I mean that it will hae plenty o' green grass an' gowans an' buttercups, an' burns to wade in, an' trees to lie underneath, an'—I dinna mind mair—but that's what Mr. Ronald said the country was like; an' if that laddie's in a place like that, what for wad onybody greet for him?'

This was a very realistic description in Mrs. Ericsen's ears. She gave a little gasp as she answered,—

'Perhaps you are right, Johnnie. Would you like to live in the country, and lie on the green grass under the big shady trees?'

'Ay would I! I've no' been there yet, but I ken fine whaur it is. Owre yonder ayont the King's Park, an' ayont St. Marget's Loch, an' ayont the hills, an''—

Here Johnnie's powers of topographical detail fairly came to an end, and he fell back on his pillow with a sigh, but immediately after opened his eyes very wide, and said,—

'I'm gaun there some day sune. Mr. Ronald said it.'

So brightly shone the blue eyes, and so thin and transparent was the little face, while a red spot burned feverishly on each wan cheek, that Mrs. Ericsen's heart bled as she looked in a kind of wonder at the boy. Was he speaking only of the ordinary earthly country, the happy heritage of so many Scottish children, and so often unheeded by them? Or was he straining after that other beautiful land which he had described as so very like to it? Or was he confusing them strangely together in his childish fancy? It was hard to say.

The visitors had agreed not to say anything to Johnnie or to his mother regarding the plan they had made for him, in case of the doctor forbidding his removal. But Ronald Cameron promised to ascertain at once what could be done. So, after some general conversation, the visit came to an end, and Mrs. Ericsen found herself once more in the outer world, with some new and very interesting views of life to consider.

CHAPTER X.

SETTING OUT.

THERE was considerable excitement manifested over all Howie's Land, and even about the adjacent stairs and closes, one afternoon that week, when the handsome carriage and fine horses, that had only a day or two before attracted so much attention, suddenly reappeared, without other occupants than the stout coachman on the box and a waiting-maid within.

There was a little delay, during which Thorsa and Sigurd pawed the causeway stones in a lordly manner, and neighed loudly, as if in resentment at the bold stare and vulgar criticism of the populace—treatment to which they were so little accustomed. Errand boys and girls gathered around,

resting their baskets in every variety of comfortable pose, most frequently having the empty ones inverted on their heads as a protection from the sun's rays, thereby causing divers anxious forebodings in the minds of intending purchasers. Windows were thrown up to their utmost limits, and groups of matrons and maidens hung themselves as far out as safety would permit, in the easy *abandon* of toilet so common in Friars' Gate and elsewhere during the working hours of the day.

Kirsty Orrock, of warlike celebrity, had actually suspended a regular hand to hand fight with a female foe resident on the same floor with herself, and the two were amicably enough settled at the same front window to enjoy the present *spectacle*—for Mrs. Orrock's windows, looking to the back, would have afforded her no such vantage-ground. It was as if, in knightly tournament, the white wand of office had suddenly interfered, and the brave warriors had laid their lances in rest for a moment. But, lest it should be thought by the owner of the front window that her noble foe had slacked for want of fire or courage, Kirsty Orrock kept up an under-current of that vituperative language in which she was so justly considered to excel, and which she had made her special study for many years.

'Ye leein' jaud that ye are! I'll sort ye weel for yon gin this steer was by. Ye needna glower at me like a wull-cat wi' your juck's face an' yer skelly een! I ken mair o' your— ! Eh preserve me, what's a' this? It's maist like a funeral. The laddie's no' deid, is he?'

This interruption was due to the fact that a small procession now made itself visible, emerging from the close mouth below. It consisted of Ronald Cameron and a young doctor, David Laidlaw and his eldest son Willie, carrying among them a sort of litter, on which lay little Johnnie, very white and still, and with eyes and lips closed tight, as if he were trying to endure pain without crying. Then followed Mrs. Laidlaw, with the younger children hanging on to her skirts, while the rest darted up and down like minnows in a pond.

'I'm thinkin' thae doctor chaps 'll be gaun to cut him up, puir lamb,' said Kirsty Orrock's fair combatant, who was possessed of a lively imagination, probably the cause of her being frequently stigmatized as a 'leein' jaud.'

'Hoots no, lass!' cried another lady in the background. 'Whaur did ye ever see them come wi' a carriage an' horses like yon frae the Infirmary? It's a thing mair like a hearse they send for ye—an'

nae wunner, for it's no' often folk comes oot o't leevin'!'

'Thae Laidlaws hae gotten awfu' up i' the warld, neebor, abune us puir folks,' skirled a woman from the flat above, who was also suspended half over the window. 'I wonder whatten a braw carriage 'll be comin' for you or me neist?'

'It'll maybe be the pollis-van 'gin ye dinna mend yer ways!' cried up a bystander—a witticism which took well among the crowd, but did not at all 'floor' the first speaker.

'Ye'll ken weel about hit, Sandy Armstrong! It sets ye to speak. Whan did ye get yer last hurl in't?'

Meanwhile the little procession had accomplished its task. By gentle yet skilful hands Johnnie was laid as comfortably as might be on a cushion stretched crosswise in the carriage for his reception. It was thought better that none of his own family should accompany him on this journey, but that he should be handed over at once to the careful guardianship of Meldrum, Mrs. Ericsen's waiting-maid, a kind and sympathetic person. Johnnie's mother, it was easy to see, would only have made him nervous by her tears and needless forebodings; while his sisters were too young to be of any use. David Laidlaw

had to return to his work at once; and Cameron, who would gladly have gone, could only promise himself and Johnnie an evening visit at Millwood before the week was out.

So Thorsa and Sigurd were at last relieved from durance vile. The carriage drove very slowly and carefully off, going round by the Park and Easter Road, so as to avoid the causewayed streets as much as possible. The errand boys and girls departed on their various missions; the groups withdrew from the open windows, and life went on as usual in Friars' Gate.

Johnnie's arrival at Millwood was also an event of considerable interest and excitement, though of a quieter and more refined nature than that exhibited in Friars' Gate. His tiny room was ready for him, with its pretty little bed and curtains of snowy whiteness. It opened off Meldrum's room, and to her care the little invalid was to be mainly entrusted. But everybody seemed anxious to have some hand in Johnnie's welfare. Cook had the nicest soup and simple pudding keeping hot for him, and the coachman's wife had sought out some of her own grandson's clothing suitable for his wear.

Kaia was off to her classes long before the carriage went for the boy, and did not see her *protégé* till

evening; but Edith gave him a smiling greeting, and patted the little curly head in a benevolent fashion quite surprising to herself, while Mrs. Ericsen's tears fell on the thin cheek as she kissed it, saying, 'Welcome, my brother's little namesake!'

Naturally Johnnie was rather bewildered and oppressed by all these new experiences; and it was not till a long sweet sleep had refreshed him, and he had seen his beloved Mr. Ronald again, that he began to think he might feel happy and at home, even in this lovely place, and with all these nice things within reach.

He scarcely knew himself when he wakened in his pretty little room, and saw pictures on the wall, and rosebuds nodding in at the open window, birds in a gilded cage hanging above, and a large white pussy-cat settled comfortably at his feet. Pussy's green eyes were fixed on the warblers in the bird-cage, but with a look of perfect resignation too, as if she had entirely given up any wicked designs she might once have cherished. Divining all this in a moment, Johnnie felt a keen interest awaking in him regarding the cat and bird drama and his other surroundings.

'Eh! but ye'll no' get leave to meddle wi' the birdies when I'm aside ye, pussy,' were his first

words, which soon brought the watchful Meldrum to his side, and then Johnnie was dressed in the fresh suit awaiting him, and laid on the moveable couch, which was henceforth to be his own special property; and so equipped, he was launched into the family life of Millwood.

It was a lovely evening, and he was taken out to the lawn for a little, where Kaia and Ronald first saw him, and thought him already looking ever so much better and healthier from the change. This was, however, doubtless owing to the excitement he had undergone—and, indeed, for some days after it was difficult to say whether Johnnie had been the better or the worse of it all. His mother came to see him, and, as she cried a great deal, that made Johnnie cry too, though neither of them could exactly have told the cause of their tears. It was very discouraging, especially to Mrs. Ericsen and Meldrum, who were doing all they could to make the boy happy; but Kaia, with quicker insight, decided that it was just what was to be expected, and she managed to persuade Mrs. Laidlaw that it was better for the boy not to see her for a while—rather to let his brothers and sisters represent her. Accordingly it was Willie and Robbie who came one Saturday afternoon, and their wonder and delight at all they

saw was so great that Johnnie felt ever so much prouder of his position all at once, and so became thoroughly reconciled to his absence from home and Howie's Land. Another Saturday it was Jeanie and Mary who came, but by that time Johnnie was quite master of the situation, and acted showman with great dignity, as well as fraternal affection. He could even walk a little on crutches now, with help and care. Dr. Newnham, an eminent physician in London, had been on a short visit to Millwood, and had given advice in Johnnie's case, which led to his being encouraged to try walking once more, an exercise which, now that his system was strengthened by good air and food, was found comparatively easy. Johnnie was immensely elated over these gymnastic feats. His imagination carried him forward by rapid strides to the time when he would be a big strong man, able to take his day's work with any of them, and bring home his wage on Saturday night to his mother.

'But what are you going to be, Johnnie?' asked Kaia one day, when Johnnie was especially sanguine.

Johnnie, contrary to his usual manner, hung his head, and did not seem inclined to answer.

'A mason like your father?' suggested Mrs.

Ericsen; but he shook his little curly head vehemently.

'A soldier?' asked Edith, laughing.

'Out with it, Johnnie!' said Walter, who often teased him in a kindly, good-humoured way,—'out with it quick, or I'll have the spade and dig it out, you know.'

Thus urged, Johnnie raised his face with a hot blush upon it, saying,—

'I'm gaun to be whatever Mr. Ronald is.'

The whole party were taken aback by this frank statement.

Mr. Ericsen looked over his newspaper, and said, 'I told you you were all spoiling that child.'

Walter laughed outright, and cried 'Bravo!'

'But, Johnnie,' said Kaia, firmly yet gently, 'you must know *that* is nonsense. Mr. Ronald is very learned and very clever, you know.' Here a bit of Johnnie's blush seemed to have got into her fair cheek. 'He will have to preach to a lot of people some day, and it isn't every little boy that can learn to do that, you must remember.'

'I mean,' said Johnnie doggedly, but undismayed alike by ridicule and remonstrance,—'I mean that I'm gaun to be Mr. Ronald's *servin'-man*, an' I'm gaun whaurever *he* gangs. If he fechts, I'll cairry

his sword an' his gun; an' if he preaches to folk, I'll *pit up the Bible.*'

It was a long speech this, and the fire of it had quite exhausted Johnnie's boasted strength. He sank back upon his cushion, and looked quite pale—not at all like the strong, active henchman he had been depicting. The Ericsens tried to cheer him again.

'Ah! now we understand you, Johnnie. That is all right,' said Kaia reassuringly. 'I'm sure Mr. Ronald will be very much pleased to think he has such a faithful little follower.'

'Fancy Ronald with a sword and gun!' said Walter aside to his sister; while she replied in the same tone,—'It will be quite a case of Don Quixote and Sancho Panza.'

'What do you mean by "putting up the Bible," Johnnie?' asked Mrs. Ericsen, who was still comparatively a novice as to Scottish ecclesiastical terminology; but Kaia darted in with—

'Oh, *I* know that, Aunt Catherine! Why, you know, the church-officer always takes up the Bible to the pulpit before the service begins.'

'But Johnnie has never been in church all his life, he tells me,' said her aunt. 'How does he know the customs so well?'

Johnnie heard this, and understood.

'I ken fine,' he said dogmatically. 'For Dan'l Dykes—he's the betherall o' the Auld Kirk in Friars' Gate, an' he bides up oor stair, an' he whiles comes to crack wi' my faither an' mother,—an' he says he has aye to pit up the Bible afore the minister. He got a sair fright ae time; for he had gane an' panded the Bible ae Monday mornin', an' by Setterday nicht he had lost the ticket, an''—

'What's all this, Johnnie?' exclaimed Walter, interrupting him. 'And what does "*panded*" mean? You are quite a little Sphinx to-day!'

'A what?' demanded Johnnie eagerly. He was marvellously quick at catching hold of new words and ideas.

'Oh, well, never mind! She wasn't a little boy, anyway, of course. Tell us what you mean by "panded." What did your old friend do to his Bible?'

'He took it to the *pawn*,' said Johnnie slowly, and with emphasis.

'Oh, I see! And then he lost the ticket, and couldn't get it back in time. Ha! ha! That was very funny. What did he do to get out of his scrape?'

But Mrs. Ericsen touched her son, motioning to

him to let the matter rest. It did not seem good to her that Johnnie should be encouraged to repeat stories from the life of Friars' Gate.

'Do the people near you often take things to the pawnshop, Johnnie?' asked Kaia, with an anxious, foreboding interest; for, now that her district visiting in Howie's Land was to a certain extent permitted, she was eager to learn as much of the manners and customs of her friends there as might be of use in her dealings with them.

Johnnie nodded assent. He seemed to know by instinct that this would be a measure disapproved of here.

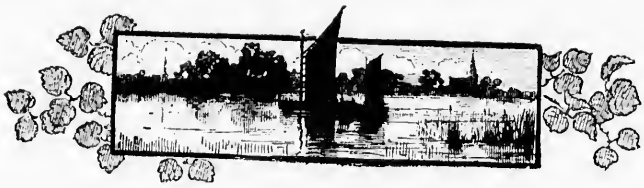
Kaia sighed—a sigh of vexation.

'It is very sad and very provoking,' she said. 'They just ruin themselves by that miserable system. And yet, I daresay,' she added, with softer feeling, 'it is often for necessary food; isn't it, Johnnie?'

'Whiles for drink,' said Johnnie laconically.

Here the subject was changed, and the party broken up by some fresh arrivals, among whom were Bruce Moreland and Mr. Ravensforth, who were now inseparable friends. Moreland had even agreed to accompany Ravensforth on an evangelistic tour through France, Italy, and Spain, having

means and time at his disposal; and, though neither able nor anxious to act as spokesman, he was more than ready for the *rôle* of courier and secretary, or, as Walter happily expressed it, 'Man Friday.'



CHAPTER XI.

JOHNNIE'S LESSONS.

MRS. ERICSEN had usually an hour or so of Johnnie entirely to herself after breakfast, when her two girls were off for the day on business or pleasure, and when Meldrum found abundant occupation in attending to her ladies' wardrobes—especially that of Miss Edith.

It was a warm, bright summer, and Mrs. Ericsen's favourite seat was still that shady verandah of hers, sheltered by drooping clematis and golden honeysuckle, with its pretty picture of blue sea framed in by leafy lime-trees just in front. Here Johnnie would be placed by her side on his little couch, with a supply of toys and picture-books enough to keep him amused for a fortnight at least, though

he was already more exacting in that respect than he had ever been in Howie's Land.

But Mrs. Ericsen would often lay down her own book or knitting to have a chat with this quaint, old-fashioned little visitor of hers, who had found his way to her heart very quickly by his gentle, uncomplaining nature and cheerful humour, touched with a gleam of unconscious pathos, which reminded her strangely of that other little Johnnie of the early days so long gone by.

This Johnnie astonished her sometimes by his singular mixture of knowledge and ignorance. There were things of which he spoke like a grown-up person, or rather, like one who was quite old in the world's ways. There were others, again, in which he showed less proficiency than might be expected from the youngest pupil at an infant school.

'Ye'll hae an awfu' heap to pay for coals an' gas here, I'm thinkin',' Johnnie would say, with a sympathetic sigh just observable in his tones; 'for gin ye burn sae muckle in the simmer-time, what wull 't be like in the winter?'

'Well, Johnnie, perhaps you are right,' Mrs. Ericsen would answer, with a pleasant smile. 'I dare-say your mother finds it pretty hard in winter to get coals enough sometimes, doesn't she? And you have

heard her complaining of it, I daresay, or a little boy like you would hardly have thought about it.'

He showed the same precocity when present at any interview between cook and the fishwomen who came often past Millwood gate in their picturesque garb, *en route* from Newhaven to the metropolis.

'Ye suld get that cod's heid for a penny or maybe three - ha'pence, wumman!' he would burst out suddenly, unable to behold the rapacious demands of the piscatorial dame weakly yielded to by his friend, for cook was a staunch ally of little Johnnie's. 'The heids is nae use to them; she kens that fine, she's gled to get them oot o' her creel. My mother buys them whiles, and biles them doon to get the strength, ye ken.'

'Well, to be sure, Johnnie!' cook would exclaim. 'To think of *you* knowin' all about fish-stock and the like! No, I never!'

But then, on the other hand, it might be that Mrs. Ericsen would ask him if he remembered the name of the good man who was saved when all the world was drowned. No, Johnnie had never heard of him, and seemed to take but little interest in his history.

'You surely know about Cain and Abel, Johnnie?'

asked Mrs. Ericsen one day, falling back on still more elementary ground. Johnnie shook his head. 'But our first parents, Johnnie—you *must* know about them, *surely!*'

Johnnie scratched his head in a vigorous manner that greatly alarmed his questioner. Even with the bath twice a day, there were other evils to be dreaded besides this dense ignorance of fundamental truths.

'I think I mind something about them—was 't them that gaed into the lion's den?'

His wits had evidently got jumbled a little over the perusal of the picture-book, and Mrs. Ericsen, greatly shocked, determined upon a more systematic course of instruction. She went in search of an old and well-worn volume which all her own children had loved and learned—'The Peep of Day;' and from that time forward an hour every morning was devoted to reading it aloud to Johnnie and questioning him thereon. His progress was marvellous, for Johnnie's intelligence was of no mean order, only it had hitherto been allowed to lie dormant to a great extent.

There could have been no happier hours for Johnnie than those he now passed by Mrs. Ericsen's side; and it seemed as if, while his bodily frame certainly grew stronger from day to day, the inner life, too, developed rapidly in new strength and growth. Fresh skies

were opening before his eager gaze, worlds of truth and beauty, of wonder and enchantment which he had never dreamed of before. For, besides the childish lore which was now familiar to him, he was learning other lessons all unconsciously both on the part of teacher and taught; since, in place of the coarse wrangling, the vulgar jests, the filthy garbage, as one might say, of converse that surrounded him in Friars' Gate, here was a life and intercourse so sweet and true and harmonious, softly ebbing round him, that, with his intuitive poetry, he styled it 'a kind o' *music*.'

These new friends of his were not without their own faults and failings, truly, though perhaps they were not of a nature to strike this little philosopher. One might hesitate to say that they had reached the highest standard of Christian life and character; yet theirs was a life breathing the spirit of Christ, and deriving its purity and sweetness, even if unconsciously, from Him. And most manifestly it was a life lived for the happiness of others, not themselves. Even Johnnie could easily perceive that, in place of Edith and Kaia grasping at any little passing pleasure, each for herself, the first thought was always how to put it in the other's way. These things were merely straws, to be sure, but they showed how the current

ran, and Johnnie watched this current daily with keen, steady observation. And then, even into his childish mind came the thought how different it all was at home in Friars' Gate, and how it *might* be the same if the people there only willed it. Why, they were not so different in other ways, after all! They were men and women of the same nature and the same country and colour. They hadn't the grand house and the plenty of money, to be sure, but there was nothing so clear to Johnnie's mind as the truth that money had nothing at all to do with this difference. And often, with a throb of his little heart, he would wish—oh, how fervently! —that he might carry back with him to the old home, which he still loved best of all, something of this blessed life; not the fine furniture and the beautiful pictures, the mirrors and carpets and curtains—oh no! but something very much better than any of these things, a something which Johnnie at least could find no name for. All this must be included in Johnnie's lessons.

Little did Mrs. Ericsen think that, while she was carefully explaining to him how God chose the children of Israel for His own people, and led them to a land flowing with milk and honey, the listener's eyes were also fixed on another book and a wider subject—that he was reading of a people

nearer home, an ideal land more fair than Canaan. Yet so it was.

The Ericsens were much later in leaving home for their usual holiday than they had ever been before. In fact, as a long tour in the Riviera and Italy had been determined upon, they were waiting for the cooler season to set in; and so it happened that Johnnie got leave to stay at Millwood nearly three months, a very long holiday for him, and one filled with blessing both for the body and the mind. Kaia alone left early in the autumn, as soon, at least, as her classes were over, for the Norse home at Aalvik was eagerly claiming her, and she was wearying to see her own family circle again. Johnnie shed few tears on the occasion,—he was always trying to be manly in that way, remembering Willie's verdict that weeping was only a thing for 'lassies,'—but there was a *wae* look in his pale, thin face that nobody could mistake, and when she had been driven away to the pier of Leith, where the *Kong Karl* was already getting up his steam for the crossing, Johnnie put his hands over his eyes, and said in a low voice, speaking only to himself, 'It's like as if a clud had gane owre the sun.'

So the rest of Johnnie's stay went happily on, and in due time his own leave-taking came round—certainly

not unaccompanied by tears, either on his own part or on that of the friends at Millwood. But he went home a much stronger and happier child than he had come thither, and a cordial welcome at home was not a-wanting.

'Johnnie! my ain wee laddie!' exclaimed Mrs. Laidlaw, in her own warm and voluble fashion. 'Foul fa' me if I dinna think the hoose has never been a'thegither richt since ye gaed oot o't! An' the bairns is to hae a gran' tea for ye this nicht, wi' scones an' gingerbreed, an' ye'll gie them a' your cracks. We'll be rael canty, like as we used to be!'

There was a haggard, restless look on his mother's comely face, and a hard ring in her voice, as if she might be suppressing some bitter recollections; but these were not very observable to Johnnie, keen as his eyes were, in the exciting moment of return. Mary and Aleck pressed eagerly round him with offers of stray sweeties and peppermint drops; Willie came running home from his work as soon as ever he got leave; while Robbie had been standing at the close mouth, executing summersaults and other gymnastic feats long before the carriage came in sight. Then Curly calmly settled her plump little person right on the top of this favourite brother as soon as he lay

down on his couch again, as if to claim a propriety in him which no rival might aspire to. And so that night at least was a happy one for Johnnie, though he had parted from so many friends for what seemed to him an age.

CHAPTER XII.

OVER THE SEA.

SEPTEMBER sunshine was still glowing on the lovely shores of the Hardanger Fjord, a soft golden mist helping to make a sort of fairyland of its many islands, creeks, and villages; while, far above all, the white glistering masses of the Folgefond glacier showed like the jasper walls and pearly gates of the New Jerusalem itself. It was a very happy little home circle that was met in glad reunion just then in the pleasant little village of Aalvik, where Kaia Ericsen, finding herself the centre of attraction to father, mother, brothers, and sisters, began to wonder how she had ever stayed away from them so long, and especially whether it would ever be possible for her to leave them again—perhaps for ever! For

such an idea *had* been of late not quite unknown to her mind. And, if the truth must be confessed, even this scene of unsurpassed beauty around her, and this home life, so rich in family affection and devotion if it was not rich in anything else, was not quite without a blank for her—a very real and constantly-recurring blank—even though Kaia took herself severely to task for ever thinking about it at all. She could not help her thoughts every now and then haunting the dull, grey streets and sombre squares of Edinburgh, from which Hans and Nils and little Britta were so sure she was glad to be away. And even the noisy hubbub of Friars' Gate, and the odorous stairs of Howie's Land, came often like a vision of bygone happiness to her soul. That blank, however, was destined to be speedily supplied, and in a way she little thought of.

'Come and help me to call in the goats, Kaia,' said her mother one afternoon, when they had been standing a while to watch the rich hues of purple and crimson and gold fading from the wide range of snowfields on the mountain summits.

'Yes, mother,' answered Kaia; but the words came in a slow, hesitating fashion, not like Kaia's wont. And good Mrs. Ericsen had trudged a long way up the steep hillside, puffing and panting as she

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called on her refractory charges, before it occurred to her to look round for Kaia and wonder at her carelessness.

'*Frygga! Tosta! Komm her strax! Vente! Vent! Skynde nu!* Why, where is that girl?' she muttered next, a little impatiently. 'I believe my Kaia is changed entirely since she went south. She used to be the first to give a helping hand.'

But it was not a bad excuse that Kaia had to urge for her delay this time. Her quick, bright eyes had seen a little boat far away down the Fjord, making its way rapidly as it might to Aalvik. That was no uncommon sight, to be sure. The Norseman's highway and byway alike are the blue waters fully as often as the rocky pass. Nearly everybody who visited Aalvik must come or go by boat. But Kaia saw a figure sitting in the stern that was someway strangely familiar to her. And yet it *could* not be the person she thought of. Impossible! How could *he* have found his way to Norway, and—of all out-of-the-way places in it—to their little Aalvik! But Kaia's colour deepened on her cheeks as she looked—for a reason did occur to her for Ronald Cameron's coming. Again the warm flush died away, and a chill of disappointment came over her, for maybe it was not Ronald after all. Meanwhile,

her mother's mandate, and the troublesome Frygga and Tosta and all their companions, were entirely forgotten. The little skiff was now and again hidden from her view by the numerous rocks and islets guarding the little harbour; and, as she could no longer restrain her ardent longing to know the truth or falsity of her conjecture, she hurried down to the shore, where her father was busily engaged with the older boys in mending a boat. He scarcely noticed Kaia as she passed, so intent was he on his work. Presently, however, she came running back to him with glowing cheeks and wildly-beating heart. Indeed she scarcely knew where she was at that moment.

'Father! father dear!' she said. 'That stranger in the boat yonder—I think he is that Mr. Cameron—you know. I must have mentioned him in writing home, I am sure'—

Kaia's manifest confusion and excitement could not escape Mr. Ericsen's notice. He looked up at her with a keen, searching glance.

The boys laughed outright.

'Of course!' cried Nils, the family tease and torment. 'It was "Ronald Cameron" every second line. We were quite tired of reading about him!'

'Is he really yonder—in that boat, Ky?' asked Hans, the older one, eagerly. 'Let me go and help pull ashore. I'd like first-rate to see him.'

'Hush, boys! Don't talk nonsense,' said Kaia, still in a state of nervous flutter. 'But, father, may I ask him to stay here? Will you give him a Norse welcome—*for my sake?*'

The last words were spoken very softly, almost inaudibly; but Ericsen understood. He gave a sort of sigh, half-amused, half-vexed.

'Well, Kaia! I thought you had come home to stay for good! But it shows the folly of letting you girls across the sea. You're never satisfied with an honest Norseman after that. But bring your friend by all means. Let me see what he's good for before I say any more.'

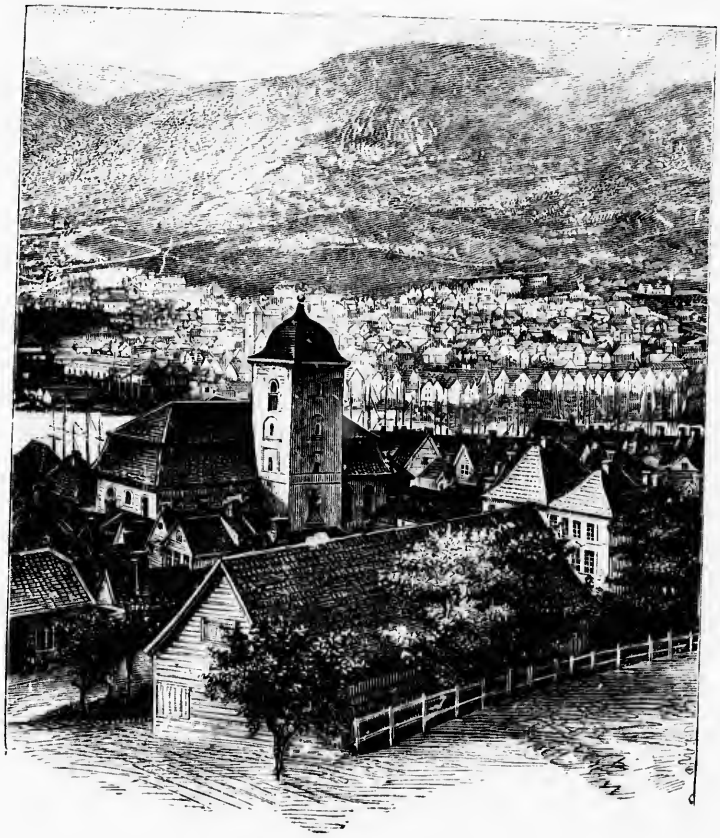
By this time Mrs. Ericsen had returned from the mountain-side, having secured the wandering attention of her goats, and left them in charge of the *pigas*, or dairy-girls, to be milked. She was in time to receive the unexpected guest, and do the honours of hostess to Kaia's friend, and nothing pleased the good lady more than such an exercise of hospitality.

Ronald Cameron's frank and pleasant address soon won the hearts of the whole Ericsen family, while his

stalwart frame and manly aspect added no little to his merits in their eyes. He explained how, the chance of a summer holiday having come to him earlier than he had dared to hope for, he had at once made tracks for what had long been to him the land of romance, and even penetrated so far up the Hardanger as Aalvik, without writing first to ask if Mr. Ericsen would receive him. He was merely a bird of passage, of course, and intended to leave on the morrow, perhaps, for Odde or Bergen,—he really didn't know which was the best route for him to take, but perhaps his kind host would put him on the way. All this Ronald got through with about as much embarrassment and confusion as Kaia herself had shown; and Mr. Ericsen only smiled when he talked of leaving on the morrow, saying,—

'All right, lad; I'll show thee on the map the best routes in due time, but thou must be content with the Hardanger here for a day or two yet.'

They were all so merry over that *aftensmad*, or supper, that the skies were glittering with stars, and the lady moon had arisen in all her splendour, when they took Ronald out for a stroll along the shore. Hans and Nils had poured stories from the



BERGEN

old Sagas and Eddas into his ears, and also humorous sketches of the life about Aalvik, which was scarcely less familiar to him than the exploits of the Vikings could have been. Little Britta and Frieda had taken possession of him at intervals time about, demanding stories of Britain in return, and whether there were any giants there still, or fairies; and if little girls played at houses as they did, and pretended they were *pigas* living up among the mountains. In spite of all their well-meant attentions, Ronald found means to disengage himself from the little chatter-boxes; and, while they were intent on some curious seaweed cast up by the tide, he found himself alone with Kaia on a little promontory of rock, looking down into the crystal depths below with wondering eyes. The starry heavens and the glacier-crowned mountains were all reflected therein as in a magician's mirror; while a solemn light, glowing still behind the dark ranges, told of the long day of northern lands, already shortening, indeed, but still long enough to surprise a southerner. There were no sounds except the drowsy tinkle of a cow-bell or the distant wind of a bugle far up among the upper pastures where the *sæters* were.

'This is Paradise itself, surely!' exclaimed Ronald, in a low but earnest tone.

Kaia laughed merrily enough; but there was a quiver in her voice as she tried to say carelessly,—

'Will you be content, then, with the Hardanger for a day or two, as my father bids you?'

'No,' said Ronald at once, 'I cannot be content with that. I came for something else. Have I come in vain, Kaia?'

He took her hand gently in his own as he called her by the name he had never ventured to say before except in day-dreams; and Kaia did not withdraw it.

But, so far as words go, the question had to remain unanswered that night; for Mr. Ericsen's voice was heard in peremptory recall,—

'Kaia! Hans! Britta! Where are you all? Come and let us take the young Scotsman for a moonlight row up the fjord a bit.'

Ronald Cameron was in no hurry to resume the tour of which he had spoken. He was more than willing, it seemed, to take this little Aalvik as a fair specimen of Norwegian scenery, and indeed remained so long under the Ericsens' hospitable roof, that the close of his holidays came upon him like a 'bolt from the blue;' and a sharp letter from Dr. Hammerwell, the divinity professor whose assistant he was, set

him off in a hurry at last, without his having seen either Bergen or any other town.

But Ronald Cameron went home to Scotland with all he wanted—all he had come for—the love of Kaia Ericsen, or rather its frank confession, and the promise of her father that one day, when he had a home to offer her, she would share his lot, wherever that lot might be cast.

He had often before this spoken to Kaia of his longing desire to give himself to the mission fields abroad, and in her heart a similar desire had kindled and grown. If she might only go with him,—it mattered not where—to what unknown trials, difficulties, and dangers,—to be his helpmeet in any and every fate that might befall, how happy she would account herself!

And how these two had talked by the hour, sitting on the rocks at Aalvik, with the rippling waters making glad music at their feet, of that new life they hoped to share, and the yet unknown country that was to be the scene of their life-work and their home. It might be many years—it would inevitably be a few—that must part them; but they were young and brave and hopeful. And, whatever happened, they could trust each other.

So one day Ronald Cameron left in the little

boat again just as he had come, Hans and Nils rowing him out to meet the big steamer; and Kaia turned back to follow her mother up the steep hillside in quest of Tosta and Frygga the incorrigible.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN SLIPPERY PATHS.

JOHNNIE LAIDLAW was fairly back to the old routine, or to something very like it. There was the same struggling, shifting, often very comfortless life which had been familiar to him since babyhood, again going on all round him. It certainly did not make him unhappy to find himself in the midst of it once more. Home is home all the world over, and Johnnie's heart was true to that pole. If it had its rough tussles to give him, it had its rough kindliness and cheeriness as well, and its familiar intercourse was nowhere else to be found.

He had been nearly three months away from his home, and in that time there had been some changes. One was in himself, for, as we have already seen, a

new idea of life had been unfolded to his mental gaze, and never again could the little world of Friars' Gate appear quite in the same light to him as it had once done. Another change was in his own home circle, and it was not long of being observed by Johnnie's quick eyes. We must go back for a little to recount the family history up to date. His father's presence at home had not been, as it generally was, sufficient to keep his mother from her unhappy tendency to drink. There had been several occasions on which the unfortunate creature, led on by one of the neighbours in the stair, had so far forgotten herself as to be quite helplessly intoxicated when her husband returned, while empty shelves and blank spaces here and there showed him only too plainly how the money had been procured. David Laidlaw was a man of violent passion when it was once aroused, and doubtless he had much provocation. Angry words and even blows were the immediate consequences, and these led to a course of domestic wrangling to which the Laidlaw household in all its vicissitudes had hitherto been a stranger. The children, especially Robbie and Mary, took part in these quarrels, now on one side, then the other, as childish caprice moved them. Willie kept a sullen, defiant silence throughout, while the younger ones cried and hid themselves for terror. Anything

like filial respect was out of the question, and a wild time of anarchy and misery ensued. Then David Laidlaw took himself off again to a country job, from which he sent home but slender resources to his family. His wife had been compelled to try factory work for some weeks, in the course of which it was absolutely necessary to keep sober. Mercifully during that time a zealous advocate of the temperance cause came in her way, and by wise and kindly dealing brought back to her wretched heart the hope of brighter days.

One night at Friars' Gate Mission Hall she had actually taken the pledge; and, with all her faults, Mrs. Laidlaw was not one to take a solemn vow like that carelessly or without any intention of keeping it. There was not only the gay illuminated card lying in her box to remind her of this vow; there was also the memory of an earnest prayer to God for His help in the hour of need. And so, hoping yet fearing, fallen indeed, but once more risen and set upon the upward way, Mrs. Laidlaw went back to her daily life. David Laidlaw came back for a brief visit soon after this. He found everything right, and his wife so much more like her old self that his own heart was touched, his own conscience stricken. He promised more liberal remittances, so that she might easily remain

at home and mind the house and children; also a speedy return to regular work in Edinburgh as soon as his present job was finished. So sunshine had come out again over the little household before Johnnie's return, and that event seemed to set a fresh seal to the domestic peace, for Johnnie was the general favourite, and had an influence for good even over these two bold spirits, Robbie and Mary, though older and presumably wiser than himself. But traces of the recent storm were by no means wanting. Johnnie saw how many old friends were amissing from the ranks of furniture and clothing, and he guessed right well where they had gone. His mother's haggard looks had not long escaped him, and he could interpret the vexed, troubled, remorseful expression wonderfully well. Besides this, his brothers and sisters were by no means slack in giving him lively descriptions of what had occurred; even Curly's rambling and incoherent reflections would have told him so much.

'Turly awfu' fightened,' she would say. 'Muzzer greetin' sair—sair. Faizer danged owre the muckle kist. Turly hid in yonder under the bed.'

Mrs. Laidlaw did not show Johnnie her abstainer's card, though in its way it was a treasure in her eyes, and though of all her children Johnnie was always

the chief confidant. For some reason or other it seemed as if she could not bear to tell him that there had been need of *that*. Perhaps there was a dim consciousness that, if she should ever break her vow, she would not like Johnnie to know she had done so. But, whatever the motive might be, of that one little episode Johnnie was supposed to be ignorant, though of course the other children's reticence was not to be relied on.

Johnnie was, as has been seen, no longer a prisoner in his garret now-a-days. The colder weather, of course, made it desirable that he should be within reach of the fireside warmth and comfort; besides which, he was so much stronger that he could exercise himself by hobbling up and down the landing of the staircase, and even venture a few steps up or down. It was no longer possible for him to lie whole days without any employment of some kind for restless fingers and inquiring mind, and it was even necessary for him, at least, to begin learning some sort of trade, with a view to his future maintenance. What, it may be asked, could a pale, feeble boy of eight or nine years think of attempting? The Kindergarten system, however excellently devised for the rosy finger-tips of well-fed, well-dressed little masters and misses, is scarcely required in the dark dens and

slums of the city. But children younger than Johnnie are forced into harness still, in spite of Factory Acts and School Board officers, and well for them if covert begging is not the profession selected. In Johnnie's case an easy opportunity of learning presented itself. The old beadle, Daniel Dykes, of whom he had often spoken when at Millwood, was a basket-maker by trade, and, as he was very fond of stepping in to have a 'crack' with the Laidlaws, he one day offered to teach Johnnie the elements of his craft. It might relieve the monotony of his weary hours,—that was all the kind old man thought of at first; but Mrs. Laidlaw seized upon the idea at once, as one likely to lead to Johnnie becoming self-supporting before many years were over. But, whatever the benefit might be in future, there was no doubt at all about its present blessing for Johnnie. His pale face took a brighter look of happiness whenever the old man put the long slender willows into his hands, and began showing him how to manage the first process of weaving them into one.

But Johnnie did not forget his other lessons. Mrs. Ericsen and Kaia had provided him with easy primers and large-type stories, so that with a little assistance he taught himself in time to read and spell very fairly

With these varied pursuits the winter when it came was by no means so dull and dreary as some he had known, even though his new friends were still far away upon their grand tour, and all he could get of his beloved Miss Kaia's company was a letter from that young lady from time to time. They were wonderful letters these with the Norwegian stamps outside, for which there was always a general clamour among the children; and some pictures of that fair land and its picturesque native costumes, besides the kind words and pleasant messages within. They were red-letter days in Johnnie's calendar when these came. Without 'Mr. Ronald's' aid the difficulty of answering them would probably have been insuperable; but that friend, the first and best of all in Johnnie's estimation, still remained to cheer him through the dark cold days of the long winter. Ronald had returned early in October, bringing with him a cheese made by Kaia's own fair hands as a special present to Mrs. Laidlaw, an offering received with no little pride and satisfaction by that lady.

The lengthening days of early spring had set fairly in before any very pinching straits occurred to the Laidlaw household. Then a long and severe frost threw David off work for many weeks, and, though

sure enough of a renewal of it in time, he had not been so provident as to keep the wolf from the door in the interval. One way or other everybody felt the difference. There were stinted meals and blackened hearths now and then, while Mrs. Laidlaw had to look out for any odd jobs of charing or sewing that came in her way. These were not often to be had, however.

In these circumstances, Johnnie did not wonder when one day Kirsty Orrock, that well-known and often-tried foe of his mother's, having put in her head at the door with an offer of work, was not rudely repulsed as on former occasions, but rather received with grateful welcome.

'Hae, my fine wumman! Can ye gie me a hand wi' thae sacks? I've to feenish them or nicht, an' I canna dae mair nor half.' So said the *pseudo* enemy.

''Deed will I! an' wi' a richt gude will,' said her neighbour. 'An', if it's a fair question, what's auld Wullie Shearer to gie for them?'

Kirsty Orrock's brow darkened ominously.

'I dinna see that *that's* ony concern o' yours, Lucky! I mean to mak' my ain bargain wi' ye, as is maist just an' seemly.'

'Aweel! aweel!' sighed Mrs. Laidlaw. 'A wilfu' woman maun hae her way! What will ye gie me?'

'There's twal o' them,' said Kirsty, counting them out. 'I'll gie ye saxpence for the lot.'

'Hoot toot! Awa' wi' you an' yer auld cloots!'

'Saxpence and a dram, then,' was Kirsty's next offer. It evidently did not suit her to let the negotiation end in smoke.

Mrs. Laidlaw started at the last word, and coloured as she looked hastily at Johnnie.

'I'm no' for ony o' yer drams!' she retorted sullenly.

'Aweel, we'll see aboot it, lass. I'll aither gie ye hit or the bawbees it's worth. There! ye'll no' complain o' that, surely!'

Saying this, she flung in the bundle of sacks, and rapidly departed to her own flat with the remainder.

It was rough, coarse work, but quickly and easily enough done. Johnnie watched his mother with drowsy interest as she sat stitching away by the window to catch the last brightness of the day. It was one of his languid times, for his food was but scant just then, and he was often what Mrs. Laidlaw termed 'dowff and dowie' in consequence. Presently he fell into a deep slumber, from which he was at last wakened by voices whispering in the dusky twilight of the room. He looked up. It was Kirsty Orrock and his mother talking. There was no one else present except the two younger children at play in

one corner, for his father had not yet returned, and the older boys and girls were having a game of some sort in the court below.

'It'll do ye a heap o' guid, lass!' said Kirsty, in a persuasive and sympathetic tone. 'Ye're rael gantin' an' gapin' like, just as I was feelin' mysel' a meenit syne. Tak' a drap, like a sensible kimmer as ye are, an' dinna heed thae havers o' the mission folk. They're just a wheen meddlin' fules that think themsel's better nor ither folk. I got this bottle filled scot free frae Duncan M'Robie when I settled up my lawin', an' I ken it's guid. But if ye winna, here's the tippence. I'll no' gae frae my word.'

It did not probably escape even Mrs. Laidlaw at that moment that Kirsty might find it more easy to pay her debts in this dram, which had cost her nothing, than in ready money. But she was weary and past hunger. The offered 'drappie' looked tempting enough. It could do little harm, just for once!

'I'll tak' just a tastin', then!' she whispered. 'Dinna speak loud to wake my puir laddie yonder.'

But Johnnie was thoroughly awake now; he heard the slow gurgle of some liquid as Kirsty poured it from her bottle into a teacup she had found handy. He heard his mother give a deep long-drawn sigh, as if half-relieved, half-regretful. Then he stayed to hear

no more. Feeble and helpless as he was, he jumped off the couch, and threw his arms round his mother's neck, crying,—

'*No, no, mother! ye winna do't! ye daurna do't!*'

Mrs. Laidlaw sprang to her feet like a demented person, and glared wildly at the boy. Johnnie had never spoken that way before. It was a moment of intense bitterness and disappointment.

'The deil's in ye, laddie!' she cried. 'That comes o' lettin' ye gang awa' to thae gran' folk! Ye maun rule yer faither an' yer mither next, nae doot. Awa' wi' ye to'—

Her passion had let loose the flood of coarse invective which for a while she had forgotten, and the rest of the speech had better be left out. It was not Millwood to which she consigned her son and all her other advisers. Johnnie was only too well used to such language. If it grieved him, it did not either surprise or terrify him.

But at the end of it, the miserable woman burst into a flood of hysterical tears, and, instead of pledging Kirsty Orrock in the cracked teacup, she bade that good friend instantly depart, to her great astonishment. Kirsty was, however, equal to the occasion. There was a chance of saving her twopence, and the spirits too. Drawing the cup towards herself, she gathered

her skirts together with great dignity, and swept out of the room, taking not only her bottle but the finished sacks along with her.

Johnnie lay down again in perfect silence. He was a good deal shaken and worn out by the exciting scene, and he feared any fresh outbreak of his mother's rage if he spoke.

Mrs. Laidlaw, however, did not again address herself directly to him, or to any one in particular. It was a general tirade in which she now indulged, raving about all the wrongs and miseries she had suffered from her youth to the present day, for which it seemed, according to her view of things, Divine Providence and the whole human race were alike responsible. This monologue was accompanied by a tremendous amount of slamming doors and banging about of furniture. Drawers were opened and shut with great violence, for apparently no special reason, and the smouldering fire suffered total extinction in the process of aggressive stirring to which she treated it. Curly and Aleck crept under the bed during this species of thunderstorm, which did not cease till the return of several members of the family, when it gave place to an ominous and appalling silence. It was Willie who lighted the fire and got the supper, such as it was, ready He asked no question, and Johnnie made no remark.

There was little pleasure or mirth that night in the family circle, and the mother's only comforting reflection was, that David himself was late that night, and the chances were in favour of her escaping an outburst of his wrath. It was just as she had guessed. David Laidlaw, when he did stagger home that night, was in no state to notice whether things at home were going right or wrong. It was not usual for him to come back in that state, yet it was not altogether unprecedented. Work might be slack and money might be scarce, but these seemed the very times when he and many of his associates could find enough to spend in the public-house. It was a bad omen for the weeks to follow. His wife would almost rather have taken the stormy scene she had been so glad to escape, now that she had time to reflect. Perhaps it was this state of matters that set her thinking sadly and tearfully that night by the smouldering embers, long after all the rest were sunk in slumber. After an hour or two of this remorseful and foreboding meditation, she started up and stole softly to Johnnie's bedside.

The boy wakened, feeling her arms thrown round him and her hot tears falling on his face.

'Mother!' he cried out, frightened by this unwonted emotion. 'Mother, what's wrang?'

'Wheesht, Johnnie! dinna wauken them a'. My

an' wee laddie, I'm rael wae for what I said to ye!'

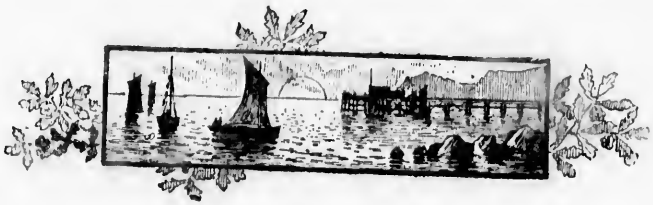
'Hoots, mother!' said Johnnie kindly, laying his thin cheek against hers. The action spoke volumes of forgiveness.

'But, Johnnie,' continued his mother, in a voice trembling and half-stifled by tears. 'Johnnie, if ye ever see me sae left to mysel' again, promise me, Johnnie,—ye'll—*dae yon*.'

Johnnie understood right well.

'Ay, mother,' he said simply. '*I'll dae yon*.'

Neither of them said any more on the subject,—neither then nor at any subsequent time. With one fond, motherly kiss, Mrs. Laidlaw left her boy to sleep again when he might, and retired to rest herself. But, few as the words were, Johnnie's solemn promise had been given in them. A promise to be kept, one day, even unto death!



CHAPTER XIV.

AT MILLWOOD AGAIN.

THE merry month of May had come, bringing her budding hawthorn, laburnum, and lilac, to brighten even the environs of the old grey city, which just then needed it sadly, to counteract the depressing influences of its annual influx of black broadcloth for the General Assemblies of the Churches, which were as usual gathered in solemn conclave on either side of the Castle Hill. Then, and not till then, was the villa of Millwood once more opened to the free air and sunshine, and the Ericsen family were again settled in their old home.

Kaia was with them too—for they had returned by her northern land, and brought her an easy captive with them from Aalvik. Of course it was not long

before she found her way to the familiar stair in Howie's Land, and great indeed was Johnnie's delight in beholding his 'bonnie leddy' again. Mrs. Laidlaw, too, was not slack in expressing her satisfaction; for to her, in her present uphill progress, any little word of cheer or even look of encouragement was a help.

''Deed it's jist like a glint o' sunshine in November to see ye aince mair, an' to hear your blithesome words!' she said, with evident sincerity. 'Mony a time hae we speired at Maister Ronald when ye micht be comin'; but he just aye shak' his heid, an' said no' to weary owre sair, for it wad be a whiley yet. An' I dootna he's as blithe as the lave o' us that ye're here!'

Kaia blushed, and did not contradict this last speculation, whereat Mrs. Laidlaw felt more than ever confirmed in certain shrewd guesses which had lately occupied her mind.

Friars' Gate was not without some advantage over better parts of the city during the season of ecclesiastical ceremony and viceregal display. Many a well-to-do burgher's wife and daughters would have prized such a window as the Laidlaws', from which Johnnie easily surveyed the celebrated 'Commissioner's Walk' and subsequent processions to or from the ancient

Palace of Holyrood. Under the grey, grimy front of Howie's Land, with its projecting drying poles, on which fluttered various nondescript garments, the *cortège*, gay with royal liveries of scarlet and gold, noisy with hoofs and spurs and clanking swords, would slowly wind or rapidly sweep along, day by day, and the eager eyes of Friars' Gate were feasted thereon even to satiety.

But one bright morning Johnnie Laidlaw was privileged to behold a still more interesting and attractive sight. It was the Millwood barouche, drawn by Thorsa and Sigurd, who were looking more fat and comfortable than ever; while from the carriage window Mrs. Ericsen herself looked out, with a pleasant smile of recognition. She had come to carry her little *protégé* off once more on a long visit to his country home, as she called it.

Mrs. Laidlaw had received due notice of this a week before, so Johnnie was ready 'in mind, body, and estate,' if a bundle containing some clean clothing may be distinguished by the latter epithet. The little fellow was in great spirits at going this time. There was no longer the feeling of strangeness and shyness to contend with. He knew right well the place he was going to, and the friends to whom he went. The willow wands were resigned without a sigh, for Johnnie had

been very tired lately of the long strain during warmer weather in the crowded rooms, since even the garret was close enough. He bade his mother a kind, affectionate good-bye, whispering,—

'Mother, ye'll no' let Kirsty Orrock come in-bye when I'm awa'?'

Johnnie had learned by sharp experience lately that the friendship of some people is more to be dreaded than open and avowed hostility.

'Na, na, laddie! Dinna ye fash yer heid aboot her!' was Mrs. Laidlaw's reassuring answer, and Johnnie was satisfied.

His little room was ready for him at Millwood—looking as pretty as ever in the May sunshine, though the roses were not yet tapping their heads against the window panes. Everybody seemed glad to see the boy again. His cheeks took a brighter colour, and his blue eyes sparkled more merrily than they had ever done before, as he recognised one after another the kind faces of his long-absent friends.

There were other visitors, too, at Millwood.

Bruce Moreland and his chosen 'leader,' as he called Mr. Ravensforth, were there on a brief furlough before setting off on a new evangelistic tour through China and Japan. Ravensforth had suggested making

this merely an extension of their late European circuit, and starting right off from Marseilles; but for some inexplicable reason it seemed that Mr. Moreland *must* return to Scotland first, and it was equally imperative that he should revisit Millwood.

Dr. Newnham, too, was there again, who had once advised to such good purpose in Johnnie Laidlaw's case, and he examined his old patient with renewed interest and more sanguine anticipation.

'That boy will be a tolerably strong fellow yet in time,' said he one morning; 'he will be able for active life, I'm sure, before many years are over his head.'

A *dictum* very acceptable indeed to Johnnie, though, when the Ericsens asked him again what he was going to be, he only smiled and shook his head.

'Are you still determined to be Mr. Ronald's henchman, Johnnie?' asked Edith laughingly.

Johnnie blushed crimson and looked down, but he said bravely, 'Ay.'

'But, Johnnie, you will have to think of something else, I fear,' said Mrs. Ericsen gently. 'Mr. Ronald is going to be a missionary in far, far countries. He is going to face many dangers and difficulties. It is a very hard life he has chosen; a little boy like you,

so weak and delicate, could *never* follow him. There are plenty other ways, Johnnie, of being a good and useful man, you know.'

'But if I grow big and strong?' asked Johnnie, looking up wistfully, with tears shining in his blue eyes. Ah! how unfit the poor fragile form and the pallid cheeks seemed for the life of daring and peril and fatigue. But Johnnie's soul was strong.

'A missionary,' said Mrs. Ericsen, screwing up her courage to say something very discouraging, for she wanted to put this foolish notion out of the boy's head,—'a missionary has often to make a great sacrifice.' Then she paused, uncertain how to explain.

Her little pupil sighed deeply; he understood better than she thought.

'That's what beats me,' he said despondingly.

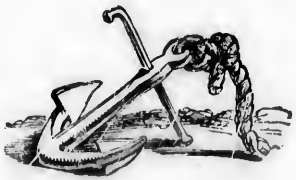
'What, Johnnie? what is it that beats you?'

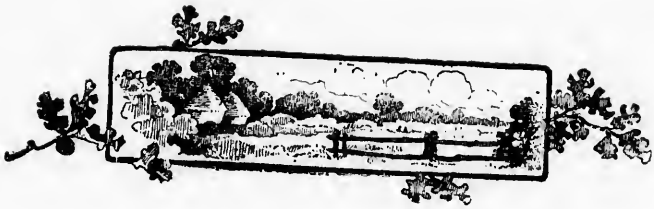
'It's the—the *sacrifice*,' said Johnnie, in a low, steady voice. 'Ye see, if I was tryin' to be a missionary, an' if I gaed wi' Maister Ronald, it would be *nae* sacrifice —it would be naething but to please mysel'. I doot that's no' like a missionary.'

The ladies could hardly restrain a smile at this view of the subject; but a kindly hand was laid on

Johnnie's flaxen head, and it was Bruce Moreland who said quietly,—

'Don't give in, Johnnie! only wait patiently. The day and the hour and the strength will all come yet. You will be a brave servant, maybe not of Ronald Cameron, but of Ronald's Lord and Master.'





CHAPTER XV.

KEEPING HIS WORD.

DR. NEWNHAM, before leaving Millwood that week, unfolded to the Ericsens a new course of treatment which he wished to be carried out in Johnnie's case—one which he fully believed would restore him to an almost perfect use of his limbs. It would involve, he said, six weeks of complete inaction.

Johnnie was told of this, and asked if he could promise to be perfectly still for the time prescribed.

'You will be able *then*, perhaps, to think of following Mr. Ronald,' said Edith encouragingly; 'so it will be worth the trouble, won't it, Johnnie?'

Johnnie's eyes sparkled their very brightest as he returned his usual affirmative, with quiet fervour,—'*Ay!*'

The next question was as to the place where this treatment was to be effected. At Millwood it would have been practicable enough, but Mr. Ericsen had taken a fancy to carry them all off to Ross-shire very early that summer. Of course, Johnnie might be conveyed thither; and they told him about the Highland hills and the blooming heather, the wild deer and the eagles' eyries, till he could dream of nothing else. But suddenly Johnnie changed his mind about this.

'I maun gang hame,' he said; 'I could lie weel aneuch in the garret. I want to be near my mother.'

'Why, Johnnie? She doesn't need you, does she?' asked Kaia, who was not without a shrewd suspicion that something Robbie or Mary had told him last time they came to see him had to do with this resolution.

But not even to her would Johnnie tell all his mind, so curiously reserved and reticent was he, though without the shadow of guile.

'I *maun* gang hame,' he only reiterated. So they let him have his way. A young medical student promised to take charge of the case, and see all Dr. Newnham's instructions properly carried out. So before the end of June the patient was fairly installed in his garret once more, and the new process of hopeful endurance commenced.

Millwood was again shut up for a season. It had seemed strangely dull to Edith Ericsen, especially ever since the departure of Bruce Moreland on his Eastern travels. But during his last brief visit he had found time to tell her of a long-cherished hope of his heart, and to win from her a promise that when he came back again it would be to part no more.

Both of them were much changed since the early days of their boy and girl friendship, but the changes had only drawn them closer to each other, and linked their destinies in one.

The hour of Ronald Cameron's departure for a distant mission field was drawing near at hand, and Kaia Ericsen, who was to accompany her husband thither, had gone home to Aalvik, for the final preparations. One way or other, Johnnie's new friends seemed all scattered just then, and there were times when he felt lonely even in the old familiar home.

In Howie's Land things had been going on pretty much as usual, apparently. The ups and down of life, its dark days and its bright ones, came and went by turns, as they ever do. Johnnie's quick eyes could not discern anything very far wrong just then. As for any little flaws in the domestic harmony, he was used to them. One thing only made him feel uneasy. That was a restless, miserable look which now and

then would flit across his mother's broad, good-natured countenance. It seemed almost as if some demon had suddenly twitched the muscles of her face, so strangely and terribly was its expression altered, though but for an instant. That it was a strong craving for the old stimulant even her little boy understood right well, but he could also see that she was bravely holding out against it as best she might. How would the battle fare? How would the struggle end?

There was little open reference made to the subject —little if any. It was only once, perhaps, when Kirsty Orrock and some friends were making a disturbance in the stair, evidently under the influence of M'Nab's best hard ale, or other improving mixture, that Mrs. Laidlaw, who was sitting by Johnnie's bedside, said eagerly, as if impelled to speak, and clasping her hands together tightly while she spoke,—

'Eh, Johnnie! *Gude grant I may never be like that again!*'

Johnnie's thin white hand was placed quietly and lovingly on the mother's brown brawny one, and a sigh of mingled relief and longing was his unspoken 'Amen.'

The weeks were growing long now to the little patient, and the steel framework in which he lay was

becoming very wearisome. Yet he bore it bravely, and hoped more than ever that the time was drawing near when he might rise a strong and hardy boy, able even to be 'Mr. Ronald's man.'

The last week of that July was one of unexampled heat all over Scotland. It was nowhere more sultry and oppressive than among the narrow closes and unsavoury stairs of 'Auld Reekie.' Howie's Land forgot the taste of fresh air altogether, and abandoned itself to heavy languor and slothful ease. Men smoked lazily by the close mouth, and women lounged half over the windows above, while some way or other the conversation of both, if less argumentative and quarrelsome than was usual with them, was also less refined and edifying. Doubtless the weather must have been to blame.

Mrs. Laidlaw, being a somewhat large and massive person, felt the depressing influence as much as anybody, and it was easy for Johnnie to perceive the darker shades of expression caused by her unhappy craving steal oftener than ever over her countenance. He was thinking sadly enough over this one afternoon, lying there in his garret with only Curly playing quietly on the couch beside him, when the sky suddenly darkened into an almost midnight gloom, and before long a terrific thunderstorm burst over the

city, merciful in its refreshing and cooling effects, yet most alarming and even destructive while it lasted.

Johnnie was not frightened. He took his little sister kindly in his arms, and soothed her fears as well as he could. Presently his mother too came to him for some word of comfort, for her nerves were by no means so strong as they had once been, and that thunder seemed to her like the crack of doom.

'Eh, Johnnie laddie! isna this maist awfu'? Div ye think there's ony fear o' the auld gable comin' doon. I'm jist a' in a trummle!'

'Hoots, mother! it'll be owre-bye in a wee while. "The hetter war the suner peace,"' was Johnnie's reassuring answer, and before very long his words came true. A heavy pelting rain relieved the angry skies and lightened the gloom. The crashing thunders rolled more distantly, and died away into a sullen growl. The lightning became less frequent and less vivid. The children, all except Curly, went out to the stair-head again to play, and their mother returned to some household task, but with a restless look about her eyes, and quickly-twitching muscles. Johnnie fell into a long, profound sleep, now that the air was cooler and less oppressive; but his sleep was disturbed by dreams: one was that his mother was wandering on the brink of an awful precipice, and that he was trying

all he could to run forward and save her, but the iron grasp of his 'frame' held him a prisoner sorely against his will. He woke suddenly, clutching at the iron instrument, and had already freed himself partly from its bondage, when he recollected himself and lay down, for the moment exhausted by his violent exertion. Everything was silent in the house.

'Curly,' he said, 'where's mother?'

'She's awa' oot,' replied the child, quite unconcernedly.

'What for? What did she say?' was the boy's next eager demand.

'Naething,' said Curly. 'She just took awa' the plaid.'

'*The plaid!*' echoed her brother, aghast.

It needed no adjective or other form of speech to distinguish the family heirloom in question. It was the Paisley 'filled-in' plaid of showy pattern and gay colours, which had been part of Mrs. Laidlaw's bridal attire, and which, in spite of many occasional peregrinations to the pawnbroker's, and even several lengthy sojourns under the hospitable golden balls, was still a sort of anchor on which much family pride and respectability might securely rely. Of late days Mrs. Laidlaw had worn it frequently on Sunday evenings at the Friars' Gate services, and to Johnnie

at least it was an evidence of her steady adherence to the temperance cause.

But this precious anchor had given! The Paisley plaid was away—and whither?

Johnnie did not need to ask that. Neither did he hesitate for one moment as to the course he must now pursue.

He was lying there weak and fragile, and almost chained. He could not get at his clothes without a long and troublesome search. The rain was dashing pitilessly against his skylight. The night was dark and stormy still. But none of these difficulties cost him more than a thought.

To break rudely the process of cure under which Dr. Newnham had laid him was to forfeit everything, all his hopes of future strength and happiness, every chance of following Ronald Cameron in his grand career. Johnnie remembered all that. But at any and every cost his sacred promise must be kept—he must '*dae yon!*'

It was not the work of a minute to free himself entirely from the steel fastenings that bound him still. Another saw him hastily wrapped in an old canvas sack, and, armed with his crutches, hastening down the stairs as he had never done all his life before. At the best his progress was but slow. Still the three

balls hung fatally near the Laidlaws' stair, which at present seemed an advantage. Neither was Raeburn's spirit-shop far distant. At one or other of these haunts Johnnie made sure of finding his mother. He reached the counter of the Three Balls almost breathless.

'Is my mother here?' he asked, almost in a whisper.

There was a lull of business at the time. Mr. Barker knew the Laidlaws, and recognised Johnnie.

'Why, you're little Laidlaw!' he said. 'Are you on your legs again? Yes, your mother's been—and in a precious hurry, too—she's left her ticket behind her! There it is. Corney Barker's an honest man, you see.'

Johnnie thanked him mechanically, and ran off at once, holding the ticket in his hand, though he scarcely knew what it was. Surely he was too late this time!

A few more weary minutes of hobbling along the miry streets and wrestling with wind and rain, then he found himself at Raeburn's door. The shop was thronged—the smell of whisky was strong enough to make a novice feel heady. Johnnie hung a moment by the brass railing outside the window, just to gather courage. At that very moment his mother dashed wildly down the steps, crying out,—

'*My ticket! my ticket!* Bide a meenit, Wullie! I'll be back the noo for the dram!'

She was wild with vexation at the loss of her pawn-ticket,—wilder still, perhaps, with the goading of her own awakening conscience. Haggard, dishevelled, fierce with suppressed passion and contending emotion, she was in no mood to give in submissively, as she had done once before, to Johnnie's entreaties.

In her hurried rush out of the shop, she knocked right up against the boy, who was still feebly clinging to the rail. He had heard his mother's words, and caught at their meaning eagerly, learning he was not yet too late.

'Oh, mother, mother!' he said in a low, earnest voice, holding her with his thin, fragile arms, from which the old canvas sack fell back, revealing their meagreness. 'You'll no' begin wi 't again! You'll no' break your word! Come hame wi' me, for it's cauld an' wet! Come hame to wee Curly an' them a'!'

Alas! the demon of drink, baulked and unsatisfied, was before him in his entreaties. Seized with a frenzy which she could not now control, the wretched woman, gnashing her teeth and stamping on the ground, hurled the feeble, helpless child—her own child, and the one she loved best of all—far from her into the dark miry slough of the gutter, hissing forth words of foul invective as she did so.

'*The foul fiend tak' ye!*' was all that Johnnie heard, however. The next moment he lay unconscious to all that passed around him. A butcher's cart dashed rapidly round the next corner. The wheel had sharply touched *something* as it whirled past—something lying huddled near the pavement. There was an outcry made by the people standing near, but the driver only mended his pace. Evidently he thought it prudent to avoid inquiries.

Another moment, and the unhappy woman who had caused the accident knelt distractedly by her boy's side, trying eagerly to find some trace of life in the apparently lifeless form. Johnnie was not dead, however. He opened his blue eyes faintly, and looked up at his mother's face.

'Oh, laddie, laddie!' she wailed out in tones that pierced the hearts of many in the quickly-gathered crowd. 'What hae I dune? I hae killed my ain—my best and bonniest! Oh, Johnnie! speak just ae word to me. I've cost ye *yer life*, my bairn. Oh, wae's—wae's me!'

'It's—only—*that*, mother!' whispered Johnnie, trying to comfort her even in his own hour of mortal weakness. 'I dinna mind for my—life. But—ye'll no' gang back—*yonder?*'

'Never till my dying day, laddie! wicked woman

that I've been! Oh, to think that I lost you for the sake o' that swine's wash! Never a drop o't will touch lips o' me or mine—God help us a'!'

By this time she had raised Johnnie into a safer posture. He lay in her strong arms, his head resting on her broad shoulder, while she poured into his ears those words of assurance, which, child as he was, were not beyond his grasp, nay, they were the very words he craved most to hear in that dying hour. For Johnnie was dying fast.

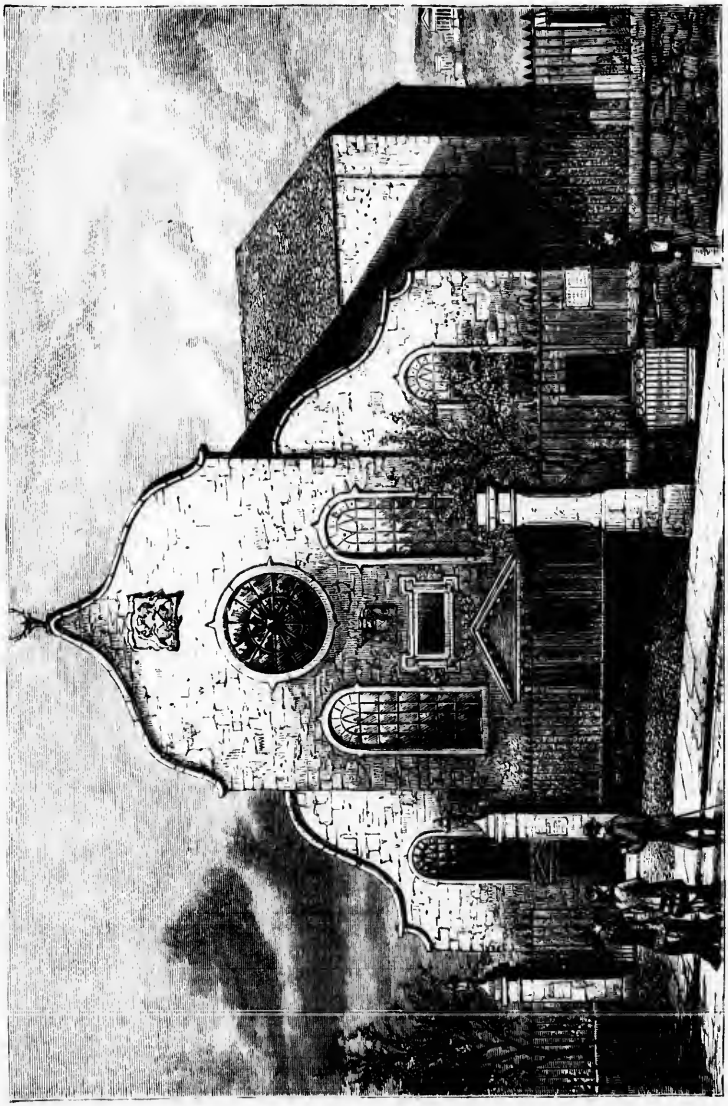
A doctor, summoned hastily from a passing cab, assured the despairing mother that it was vain to try removing him to his own home. The best that could be done was to lift him gently into the druggist's shop a few doors up the street; and in the little surgery there, laid as comfortably as circumstances would permit upon a bench with some rugs about him, Johnnie met the slow but sure advance of the last enemy. He knew no fear. He had learned of the great Father in heaven, whose he was, and knew that, however dark and strange the way might be, he was going home to Him.

But who can tell what varied memories came and went, what hopes had to be laid by for ever, what farewells had to be left unsaid? He could never follow his beloved Mr. Ronald now; he would never

hear the 'bonnie leddy's' voice again! The green grass of Millwood lawn and the glittering sea beyond it, the pretty room that had been his own, and the long verandah where he had played so happily and learned so many lessons that were better even than play,—all these would come and go like phantoms in a dream. They would be lost again in the more familiar forms and voices of home; and again all alike would vanish for awhile. Only the peace of God remained in his little soul, unchanged, unbroken. It was witnessed by the sweet, calm loveliness that stole over his thin, transparent face, and the smile that lightened up his blue eyes after some spasm of agony was past.

Did he know what he had done?—that he had voluntarily risked the loss of health and hope—perhaps life itself—to fulfil what seemed his duty, to save his mother from sin, from ruin?

If he could never be a missionary like Ronald Cameron, he had at least 'pleased not himself;' that one aspect of a true missionary's character which he had so early grasped—*that* he had attained to! Poor little enthusiast! Perhaps he scarcely recognised all this; he was too much of a child to understand it fully. But surely in some way the Spirit of God, speaking even as in times past to some faithful



CHURCH OF FRIARS' GATE.

hearts (of truths they might only behold as through a glass darkly), spoke to the soul of this little one, saying, 'Well done, good and faithful servant: enter *thou* into the joy of thy Lord.'

. . . . . .

David Laidlaw carried home that night in his strong arms a still and silent form, wrapped in the old rug which had been Johnnie's couch in the surgery. The children followed, weeping bitterly, but David himself spoke no word, though his twitching muscles showed that it was only by strong coercion that his pent-up emotions were restrained.

'No, David! not to-night! You will say no word of reproach to her to-night,' were the words of a good old city missionary, who walked by his side. 'Break not the bruised reed, I entreat you. Promise me, David.' And David promised.

Indeed, his wife was in no state to hear reproof. She went from one violent hysteric fit into another through that long wretched night, and at last sank into a state of utter unconsciousness, from which they feared she might never rally. But no one who saw her could doubt that it was purely the effect of grief on a long-tried and much-shaken nervous system.

Two days later Johnnie Laidlaw's remains were laid to rest in the old churchyard of Friars' Gate,

round which are grouped so closely still the dark closes and grimy stairs, the squalid houses and restless life which had been his earthly home for nine short years.

It may be that in that dark picture God's angels see with clearer eyes than ours some brighter lines irradiating the gloom, leading upwards and onward to a better, happier day even from the spot where Johnnie lived and died.

. . . . . .

This much only remains to be told. On the night of that lowly funeral, the Laidlaw family, from David himself down to little Curly, all united with Ronald Cameron, their best and most valued friend, in a quiet service round the family hearth. It was a solemn vow they took, never to taste, touch, or handle of the accursed thing again. And by God's grace that vow has been kept.

. . . . . .

The curling waves of the English Channel were kissing the prow of an outward bound vessel, on board of which sat a young missionary and his fair young wife.

'I can't help my last thoughts dwelling on Friars' Gate, Ronald,' she said. 'It will be so desolate without you.'

'Nonsense!' he replied; 'they have far better helpers left. And I often think of *one* who is with them still in a sense, whose little hand will point them up to heaven, maybe best of all!'

Yes,' she answered softly,—'JOHNNIE.'

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