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The Orphans of Glen Elder.

Cover



A Tale of Scottish Life.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“CHRISTIE REDFERN'S TROUBLES,” ETC.



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THE ORPHANS OF GLEN ELDER.

CHAPTER I.

AUNT JANET'S VISIT.

“ P to the fifth landing, and then straight on. You canna miss the door.”

For a moment the person thus addressed stood gazing up into the darkness of the narrow staircase, and then turned wearily to the steep ascent. No wonder she was weary; for at the dawn of that long August day, now closing so dimly over the smoky town, her feet had pressed the purple heather on the hills that skirt the little village of Kirklands. A neighbouring farmer had driven her part of the way, but she had walked since then seven-and-twenty miles of the distance that lay between her and her home.

But it was not weariness alone that deepened the shadow on her brow as she passed slowly upwards. Uncertainty with regard to the welfare of dear friends had long been taking the form of anxious fears; and now her fears were rapidly changing into a certainty of evil. Her heart sickened within her as she breathed the hot, stifling air; for she knew that her only brother's orphan children had breathed no other air than that, during the long, hot weeks of summer.

At length she reached the door to which she had been directed; and, as she stood for a moment before it, the prayer that had often risen in her heart that day burst, in strong, brief words, from her lips.

There was no sound in the room, and it was some time before her eyes became accustomed to the dim light around her. Then the glimpse she caught, through the half-open door, of one or two familiar objects,—the desk which had been her father's, and the high-backed chair of carved oak in which her mother used to sit so many, many years ago,—assured her that she had reached her journey's end.

On a low bed, just opposite the door through which she gazed, lay a boy, apparently about ten years of age. His face was pale and thin, and he moved his head uneasily on his pillow, as though very weary or in pain. For a time all sense of fatigue was forgotten by the traveller, so occupied was she in tracing in that fair little face a resemblance to one dearly beloved in former years—her only brother, and the father of the child.

Suddenly he raised himself up; and, leaning his head upon his hand, spoke to some one in another part of the room.

“Oh me! oh me!” he said, faintly: “the time seems so long! Surely she must be coming now.”

“It's Saturday night, you ken,” said a soft voice, in reply. “She can't be home quite so soon to-night. But the shadow of the spire has got round to the yew-tree at the gate, and it won't be long now.”

The little head sank back on the pillow again, and there was a pause. “Oh me!” he murmured again. “It seems so long! I wish it was all at an end.”

“What do you wish was at an end?” said the same low voice again.

“All these long days, and my mother's going out when she's not able to go, and you sewing so busy all the day, and me waiting, waiting, never to be well again. Oh, Lily, I wish I was dead.”

There was the sound of a light step on the floor, and a little girl's grave, pale face bent over the boy.

“Whist, Archie!” said she, gravely, as she smoothed the pillow and placed his restless head in a more easy posture. “Do you not ken it's wrong for you to say the like of that? It's an awful thing to die, Archie.”

“Well, if it's wrong to be weary of lying here, I can't help it,” said the child; “but it's surely not wrong to wish to die and go to heaven, yon bonny place.”

“But it is wrong not to be willing to live and suffer too, if it be God's will,” said his sister, earnestly. “And what would *we* do if you were to die, Archie, my mother and me?”

“I am sure you could do far better than you can do now. You wouldn't need to bide here longer. You could go to Glen Elder to Aunt Janet, you and my mother. But I'll never see Glen Elder, nor Aunt Janet, nor anything but these dark walls and yon bit of the kirk-yard.”

“Whist, Archie,” said his sister, soothingly. “Aunt Janet has gone from Glen Elder, and she's maybe as ill off as any of us. I doubt none of us will ever go there again. But we won't think of such sad things now. Lie still, and I'll sing to you till my mother comes home.”

She drew a low stool to the side of the bed, and, laying her head down on the pillow beside him, she sang, in a voice low and soft, but clear as a skylark's, the sweetest of all the sweet Psalmist's holy songs. It must have been a weary day for her too. She got through the first two verses well; but as she began,

“Yea, though I walk through death's dark vale,”

her eyes closed, and her voice died away into a murmur, and then ceased. Her brother lay quite still, too; nor did either of them move when the traveller went forward into the room.

Many sad and some bitter thoughts were in her heart, as she stood gazing upon them in the deepening twilight. She thought of the time when her only brother, many years younger than herself, had been committed to her care by her dying mother. She thought of the love they had borne each other in the years that followed; how the boy had come to her for sympathy in his childish joys and sorrows; how he had sought her counsel, and guided himself by it, in riper years. She recalled with sadness the untoward events which had interfered to separate him from her and from his early home as he advanced to manhood. Things had not gone well with him in the last years of his life, and he sank under a burden of care too heavy to be borne by one of his sensitive nature. Now he was dead, and she grieved to think that she, his sister, in her old age of poverty, could not offer a home to his widow and orphan children.

The youth and middle age of Mrs. Blair had been more free from trial than is the common lot; but the last few years had been years of great vicissitude. She was now a widow and childless; for though it might be that her youngest son was still alive, she did not know that he was; and his life had been the cause of more sorrow than the death of all her other children had been.

She had been involved in the pecuniary troubles that had borne so heavily upon her brother, and when old age was drawing near she found herself under the necessity of leaving Glen Elder, the home where her life had been passed, to seek a humbler shelter. Since then she had lived content with humble means, as far as she herself was concerned, but anxious often for the sake of those whom she loved and longed to befriend. She had known they must be poor, but she had not heard of their poverty from themselves. They resided in a remote and thinly-peopled district in Scotland, where the means of communication were few and difficult. Nothing but vague reports had reached her. She had hoped against hope till the time came when she could set her fears at rest, or know the worst, by seeing them herself. Now, standing in the bare room, in the midst of many marks of want and sickness, it grieved her bitterly to feel how little she could do to help them.

“God help them!” she said, aloud; and her voice awoke the sleeper before her. For an instant the startled girl stood gazing at the stranger; then, advancing timidly, she held out both hands, exclaiming:

“Aunt Janet!”

“Yes, it is Aunt Janet,” said Mrs. Blair, clasping her in her arms; “if indeed this can be the little Lily I used to like so well to see at Glen Elder. You are taller than my little lassie was,” she added, bending back the fair little face and kissing it fondly. “But this is my wee Lily's face; I should know it anywhere.”

“Oh, Aunt Janet!” cried the child, bursting into tears; “I am so glad you are come. We have needed you so much!”

Mrs. Blair sat down on the bed, still holding the child in her arms. Poor Lilies! Tears must have been long kept back, her aunt thought, for she seemed to have no power to check her sobs, now that they had found way. Half chiding, half soothing her with tender words, she held her firmly till she grew calm again.

In a little while the weary child raised herself up, and said:

“Don't be vexed with me, Aunt Janet. I don't often cry like that; but I am so glad you have come. We have needed you sorely; and I was sure you would come, if you only knew.”

Mrs. Blair would not grieve her by telling her how little she could do for them now that she had come; but she still held her in her arms, as she bent down to kiss the little lad, who was gazing, half in wonder, half in fear, at the sight of

his sister's tears; and as she got a better view of his thin, pale face, she resolved that, if it were possible, he at least should be removed from the close, unhealthy atmosphere of his present home.

"You must be weary, aunt," said Liliás, at last, withdrawing herself from her arms, and untying the strings of her bonnet, which had not yet been removed. "Come and rest here in the arm-chair till mother comes home. Oh, she will be so glad!"

Mrs. Blair suffered herself to be led to the chair which had been her mother's; and, as she rested in it, she watched with much interest the movements of the little girl. In a few minutes there was a fire on the hearth, and warm water prepared, and then, kneeling down, she bathed the hands and face and weary feet of her aunt. Mrs. Blair felt a strange, sweet pleasure in thus being waited on by the child. Many months had passed since she had looked on one united to her by the ties of blood; and now her heart was full as she gazed on the children of her brother. There was something inexpressibly grateful to her in the look of content that was coming into the grave, wistful eyes of the little lad, and in the caressing touch of Lily's hand. In the interest with which she watched the little girl as she went about intent on household cares, she well-nigh forgot her own weariness and her many causes of anxiety. There was something so womanly, yet so childish, in her quiet ways, something so winning in the grave smile that now and then played about her mouth, that her aunt was quite beguiled from her sad thoughts. In a little while Lily went to the door, and listened for her mother's returning footsteps.

"I wonder what can be keeping her so late?" she said, as she returned. "This is not a busy time, and she said that she would be early home. Sometimes she is very late on Saturday night."

Once more she went to the head of the stairs, to listen; and then, returning, she sat herself on a stool at her aunt's feet.

"And so you are very glad to see me, Lily?" said Mrs. Blair, smiling upon the child's upturned face.

The bright smile with which the girl answered faded quickly as her aunt continued: "And you are very poor now, are you?"

"Yes, we are poor; and, yet, not so very poor, either. We have had some work to do, my mother and I; and we have never been a whole day without food. If Archie were only well again! That's our worst trouble, now. And mother, too, though she won't own to being ill, often gets very weary. But now that you are come, all will be well again."

"And maybe you'll take us all home to Glen Elder for a wee while, as you used to do," said Archie, speaking for the first time since his aunt's coming.

"Archie so pines for the country," said Liliás; "and we can hardly make ourselves believe that you live anywhere but at Glen Elder."

"My home now is very unlike Glen Elder," said Mrs. Blair, sadly. "But there is fresh air there, and there are bonny heather hills; so cheer up, Archie, laddie; it will go hard with me if I canna get you to Kirklands for a while at least, and you'll be strong and well before winter yet."

The boy smiled sadly enough, and the tears started in his eyes; but he did not answer.

"Archie is thinking that, maybe, he'll never be well again," said his sister. "The doctor says he may be a cripple all his life."

This was a new and unexpected sorrow to Mrs. Blair; and her countenance expressed the dismay she felt, as she questioned them about it.

"It was the fever. Archie was ill with the fever all the winter; and when the spring came he didn't get strong again, as we had hoped, and the disease settled in his knee. The doctor said if he could have got away into the country he might have grown strong again. And maybe it's not too late yet, added the little girl, eagerly. I'm sure the very sight of the hills, these bonny summer days, might make one strong and well."

"Well, he'll get a sight of the hills before very long, I trust; and I don't despair of seeing him strong and well yet," said Mrs. Blair, hopefully; and the children, reassured by her cheerful words, smiled brightly to each other, as they thought of the happy days in store for them.

Death had visited the homes of both since Mrs. Blair and her sister-in-law met last, and to both the meeting was a sad one. Liliass' mother was scarcely more calm than Liliass had been, as she threw herself into the arms of her long-trying friend. Her words of welcome were few; but the earnest, tearful gaze that she fixed upon her sister's face told all that her quivering lips refused to utter.

When the first excitement of their meeting was over, Mrs. Blair was shocked to observe the change which grief and care had made in her sister's face and form. She looked many years older than when she had last seen her. There was not a trace of colour on her cheek or lip, and her whole appearance indicated extreme weariness and languor. Little was said of the exertions and privations of the last few months; but that these must have been severe and many was to Mrs. Blair only too evident. The food placed upon the table was of the simplest and cheapest kind, and of a quality little calculated to tempt the appetite of an invalid; and she noticed with pain that it was scarcely tasted either by the sick boy or his mother.

"You are not well to-night, mother," said Liliass, looking anxiously at her as she put aside the untasted food.

"Yes, dear, I am as well as usual; but I am tired. The night is close and sultry, and the walk has tried me more than usual. I have not hard work now," she added, turning to Mrs. Blair. "This is not a busy time, and my employer is very considerate; but her place of business is quite at the other end of the town, and it's not so easy walking two or three miles on the pavements as it used to be among the hills at home."

"I fear you carry a heavier heart than you used to do in those days," said Mrs. Blair, sadly. "But are you not trying your strength more than you ought with these long walks?"

Mrs. Elder might have replied that she had no choice between these long walks and utter destitution for herself and her children; but she said, cheerfully, that it was only since the weather had become so warm that she had found the walk at all beyond her strength, and the hot weather would soon be over now.

"It's the country air mother wants, as well as me," said Archie; and the gaze which the weary mother turned upon her sister was as full of wistful longing as the little lad's had been. After a little pause, she said:

"Sometimes I think it would be great happiness to get away to some quiet country place, where I might earn enough to support myself and them. The din and dust of this noisy town are almost too much for me, sometimes; and I am not so strong as I once was. I think it would give me new life to breathe the air of the hills again. But if such is not God's will, we must even be content to bide here till the end comes." And she sighed heavily.

"Whisht, Ellen, woman," said her sister: "don't speak in such a hopeless voice as that. Whatever comes, God sends; and what he sends to his own he sends in love, not in anger. He has not left you to doubt that, surely?"

"Oh, no: I am sure of that. I have seen that it has been in love that he has dealt with us hitherto." And in a moment she added, a bright smile lighting up her pale face as she spoke:

"And I think I can count on a place prepared for me at last by my Saviour; but, for my children's sakes, I would like to wait a while. I would like to take them with me when I go."

"It may be that one of them will get there before you," said her sister. "He knows best, and will send what is best for his own."

"Yes, I know it," said Mrs. Elder in a startled voice, as she turned to look at the pale face of her boy, now almost death-like in the quietness of sleep. The silence was long and tearful; and then she added, as if unconscious of the presence of another:

"So that we are all guided safely to His rest at last, it matters little though the way be rough. 'I will trust, and not be afraid.'"

Long after the tired children slept, the sisters sat conversing about many things. Not about the future. Firm as was their trust in God, the future seemed dark indeed, and each shrank from paining the other by speaking her fears aloud. Of her husband Mrs. Elder spoke with thankfulness and joy, though with many tears. He had known and loved the Saviour, and had died rejoicing in his salvation. She had prayed that God would give her submission to his will, as the end drew near;—and he had given her not only submission, but blessed peace; and no trouble, however heavy, should make her distrust

his love again.

Had her husband been cut off in the midst of his days, without warning, she must have believed that it was well with him now. But, in the memory of the time before his death, the blessedness of his present state seemed less a matter of faith than of sure and certain knowledge. There could be no gloom, either in the past or the future, so thick but the light of that blessed assurance might penetrate it. In the darkest hours that had fallen on her since then, (and some hours had been dark indeed,) it had cheered and comforted her to think of the last months of his life. It was, in truth, the long abiding in the land of Beulah, the valley and the shadow of death long past, and the towers and gates of the celestial city full in sight.

“No! whatever may come upon us now,” she added, humbly, “nothing can take away the knowledge that it is well with him.”

Through the whole of the long history, given with many tears, Mrs. Elder never spoke of the poverty that had fallen upon them, or of her own ill-remunerated toil. His last days had been days of comfort, undisturbed by any apprehension with regard to the future of his wife and children; for the stroke which deprived them of the last remnant of their means did not fall till he was at rest.

The candle had long since sunk in the socket, and they were sitting in the darkness, which the moonlight, streaming in through the small attic window, only partially dispelled. Not a sound but the soft breathing of the sleeping children, and the hum of voices from the city below, broke the stillness of the pause which followed. Each was busy with her own thoughts. The prevailing feeling in Mrs. Blair's heart was gratitude, both for her dead brother and her living sister's sake. That his last days had been days of such peace and comfort, that his trust in Christ had been so firm and his hope of happiness so sure, was matter for fervent thanksgiving. Nor were the humble resignation and patient faith of his wife less a cause of rejoicing to her. She felt rebuked for her own fears and faithlessness, as the narrative went on; and she thanked God for the love that had been so mercifully mingled in the bitter cup that had been given them to drink.

Long after her sister was sleeping by her side, did Mrs. Blair lie awake, revolving in her mind some possible plan for finding a home for the widow and her children in the country; for that none of them could long endure such a life as they had lately been living, was only too evident.

It seemed to her that she had never felt her poverty till now. Bitterly did she regret her inability to help them. From the abundance that had blessed her youth and middle age a mere pittance had been saved, scarcely enough to maintain herself, and altogether insufficient to enable her to gratify her benevolent feelings by doing for them as she wished. She had removed from her early home to a little hamlet among the hills, and had taken up her abode in a cottage scarcely better than a mountain shieling; and there the last few years had been passed. She had opened a school for the children of the cottagers, happy in being useful in this way to those whom she could now assist in no other.

To this home, poor as it was, she longed to take the widow and children of her brother. Many a plan she considered for eking out her scanty means that she might do so; and the gray dawn was beginning to break before she closed her eyes in sleep. The future was still dark before her. She saw no way to bring about what she so earnestly desired. There was nothing to do but leave it all in the Hand which is strong to help in time of need. And what better could she do than cling to the promise which God has given?

“God of the widow! Father of the fatherless! interpose for them,” she prayed. And her prayer was heard and answered.

CHAPTER II.

HOW AUNT JANET'S PRAYER WAS ANSWERED.



ES: her prayer was heard and answered; but it was in God's way, not in hers.

When Mrs. Blair woke from her short and unrefreshing slumber, she found that the morning was far advanced. Liliias had been long astir. Breakfast was ready; and the child was now standing beside her mother, assisting her to dress. But the effort to sit up seemed too much for Mrs. Elder.

"It's no use trying, Liliias, my dear," she said, at last, laying her aching head back on the pillow again. "I'm either too ill or too weary to rise. Thank God, it is the day of rest. I shall be better to-morrow."

But this was not to be. Through all that long day she lay, tossing in restless wakefulness or moaning in feverish slumber. Mrs. Blair, too, worn out by her long journey and her sleepless night, seemed unable to make the slightest exertion. Liliias went from one to the other, ministering to their wants; and her loving voice and gentle touch brought comfort to their hearts, though she could not soothe their bodily pain.

"You are a kind little nurse, Liliias," said her aunt, detaining the hand that had been laid lovingly on her. "I am sure you have the will to help us, if you only had the power."

"Oh, I wish I could do something for you, aunt! I am afraid you are very weary. Maybe if I were to read a little to you, the time wouldn't seem so long." And she laid her hand on her own little Bible as she spoke.

"Yes, love, read: I shall be very glad to listen."

So she read, in her clear, childish voice, psalm after psalm, till her aunt could not but wonder at the skill with which she seemed to choose those most suitable to their circumstances. By-and-bye, after a little pause, she said:

"Someway, I like the Psalms, aunt. Do you not like them? They seem to say what we want to say so much better than we can ourselves."

"Yes, my child; that is true. And so you like the Psalms best, do you?" said her aunt.

"Not *best*,—at least, not always;—only when I am weary or sad. There are some chapters in the New Testament that I like best of all. This is Archie's chapter." And she turned to the fifteenth of Luke. "Archie thinks it is grand, this about the joy among the angels in heaven; and this, too, about the Father's love;" and she read "But when the father saw him, he had compassion upon him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him."

"Archie never tires of that," she said, smiling at her brother, who had been sitting with his eyes fixed upon her, listening as she read. "And this is the one I like best, about Mary, and Martha, and Lazarus." And she read the eleventh chapter of John, but paused before she got to the end.

"I never like to read the rest, about their taking counsel to slay Him, so soon after they had seen all this. Sometimes I can hardly make it seem true, it is so sad. But I like the story, oh, so much!" And she read again slowly, "'Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister, and Lazarus.'" And again, "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

"Do you not like it, aunt?"

"Yes, love; it is a fine chapter."

"It's maybe not better than many and many a one here," said Liliias, slowly turning over the leaves of her Bible; "but I happened on it once when I needed something to help me, and I've liked it ever since."

"And what time was that?" asked her aunt, much interested.

"Oh, it was long ago," answered Liliias, lowering her voice, and looking to see if her mother still slept. "It was just after father died. Mother was ill, and I thought God was sending us too much trouble; and I came upon this chapter, and it

did me so much good! Not that I thought Jesus would raise up my father again, but I knew he could do greater things than that if he pleased; and I knew he had not forgotten us in our troubles, more than he had forgotten Mary and Martha, though he stayed still in the same place where he was, two whole days after they had sent for him because their brother was sick. No trouble has seemed so bad since then; and none ever will again, come what may.”

“Come what may!” Little was Lillas thinking of all that might be hidden in those words. She gradually came to know, as that night and the next day and night passed away, and the dawning of the third day found her mother no better, but rather worse. Mrs. Blair had concealed her own anxiety, for the children's sake. Believing her sister's illness to be the consequence of over-exertion, she had thought that rest and quiet would be sufficient to restore her; but these three days had made no change for the better, and, fearing the worst, she asked Lillas if she knew any doctor to whom they might apply.

“Yes; there is Dr. Gordon, who attended my father and Archie. We have not seen him for a long time, but I think I could find his house.” And, with trembling eagerness, she prepared to go out.

It rained violently, but Lillas scarcely knew it, as she ran rather than walked along the street. It was still early, and the doctor had not gone out. When the servant carried in the little girl's message, he repeated the name several times, as if to recall it.

“Mrs. Elder!—I had lost sight of her this long time. Yes, certainly I will go. Where does she live now?”

The servant replied that the child who brought the message was waiting to show him the way; and in a few minutes he was ready to go with her. Lillas, who was standing at the door, started homeward as soon as he appeared, and hurried on almost as rapidly as she came, so that the doctor had some difficulty in keeping her in sight.

“Are you sure you are not mistaking the way?” said he, as Lillas waited for him at the corner of the street, or rather the alley that led to the attic; “surely Mrs. Elder cannot be living in a place like this?”

Lillas threw back her bonnet, and now, for the first time, looked in the doctor's face. “Yes, sir, we have lived here ever since the time you used to come and see Archie.”

“Oh, ho! my Lily of the valley, this is you, is it? Well, don't cry,” he added; for his kindly voice had brought the tears to the child's eyes. “We shall have your mother quite well in a day or two again, never fear.”

But he looked grave indeed as he stood beside her, and took her burning hand in his.

“You don't think my mother will be long ill?” said Lillas, looking up anxiously into his face as he stood beside the bed.

“No, my child; I don't think she will be long ill,” said he, gravely.

And Lillas, reassured by his words, and fearing no evil, smiled almost brightly again, as she went quietly about her household work.

“You think her dying, then?” said Mrs. Blair, to whom his words conveyed a far different meaning.

“She is not dying yet; but, should her present symptoms continue long, she cannot possibly survive. She must have been exerting herself far beyond her strength, or living long without nourishing food, to have become reduced to a state so frightfully low as that in which I find her.”

“She has been doing both, I fear,” said her sister, sadly. “She has sacrificed herself. And, yet, what could she do? They have had nothing for many months between them and want, but the labour of her hands, and the few pence that poor child could earn. God help them!”

“God help them, indeed!” echoed the doctor, earnestly.

He gave her what hope he could. He said it was possible, only just possible, that she might rally. It would depend on the strength of her constitution. Nothing that he could do for her would be left undone.

“In the mean time, we must hope for the best.”

But, with so much cause to fear, it was no easy thing to hope; and to Mrs. Blair the day was a long and anxious one. Her sister seemed conscious at intervals; but for the greater part of the time she lay quite still, giving no evidence of life, save by her quick and laboured breathing. When Dr. Gordon came again, at night, there was no change for the better; and, though he did not say so, it was evident to Mrs. Blair that he anticipated the worst.

“And must she die without recovering consciousness? Can she speak no word to her children before she goes?”

“It is possible she may die without speaking again. But if she revives so much as to speak, it will be very near the end.”

Lilias had gone out on an errand, so that she did not see the doctor; and her aunt's heart grew sick at the thought of telling her that her mother must so soon die. Archie evidently had some idea of his mother's state; for, though he did not speak, he gazed anxiously into his aunt's face as she turned away from the bed.

“Poor boy! Poor, helpless child!” she murmured, stooping suddenly over him. Poor boy, indeed! He knew it all now. He asked no questions. He needed to ask none; but he hid his face in the pillow, and sobbed as if his heart would break. At length Lilias' footstep was heard on the stair, and he hushed his sobs to listen. She came up step by step, slowly and wearily; for the watching and anxiety of the last few days and nights were beginning to tell upon her.

“Well, aunt?” she said, laying down the burden she had brought up, and looking hopefully into her aunt's face. Mrs. Blair could not speak for a moment; and Lilias, startled by her grave looks, exclaimed:

“Does Dr. Gordon think my mother worse?”

“She is not much better, I fear, love,” said her aunt, drawing her towards her and holding her hands firmly in her own. Lilias gave a fearful glance into her face. The truth flashed upon her; but she put it from her in terror.

“We must have patience, aunt. She has had no time to grow better yet.”

“Yes, love: we must have patience. Whatever God shall see fit to send on us, we must not distrust him, Lilias.”

“Yes, we must have patience,” said the child, scarcely knowing what she said. She went and knelt down beside the bed, and spoke to her mother; but her voice had no power to rouse her from the heavy slumber into which she had fallen. In a little while she rose, and went quietly about arranging the things in the room. Then, with needless care, the supper was placed on the table; for none of them could taste food. Then her brother was prepared for bed; but all the time she spoke no word, and went about like one in a dream.

When she stooped to kiss her brother a good-night, the little boy clasped his arms about her neck, and wept aloud. But she did not weep; she laid her head down on the pillow beside him, gently soothing him with hand and voice; and when at last he had sobbed himself to sleep, she disengaged his arms from her neck, and, rising, placed herself on a low stool beside her mother's bed.

Mrs. Blair thought it better to leave her to herself. Indeed, what could she say to comfort her? And so the child sat a long time, gazing into her mother's face, her own giving no sign of the struggle that was going on within. At first the one thought that filled her mind was that it was impossible her mother could be going to die. It seemed too dreadful to be true; and, then, it was so sudden! Her father had been with them for months after they knew that he must die, and her mother had been quite well only three days ago. No: it could not be!

And, yet, such things had been before. She thought of a little girl, rosy and strong, who had sickened and died in three short days; and it might be so with her mother. How should she ever live without her? Oh, if she could only die too, and have done with life and its struggles! Everything was forgotten in the misery of the moment; and with a moan that revealed to her aunt something of what she was suffering, she leaned forward on the bed.

“Lily,” said a voice beside her.

Lilias started. It was the first time her mother had spoken during the day, and the child bent eagerly over her, and kissed her.

“Lily, love, read to me the twelfth of Hebrews,” said her mother, in a low, changed voice.

By a strong effort, Lilius quieted herself, and read on till she came to the eleventh verse:—"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; but afterwards it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness to them that are exercised thereby."

"You believe that, Lily?" said her mother.

"Yes, mother," said the child, in a trembling voice.

"And you'll mind it by-and-bye, darling, and comfort your brother with the words? It won't be for long, Lily. You'll soon be with us there."

"Mother! mother!" gasped the child, losing her self-control, as she threw herself upon the bed and clasped her arms about her mother's neck. For a few minutes her frame shook with her sobs. Fearing the effect of this strong emotion on the mother, Mrs. Blair came to the bed; but she did not speak, and by a strong effort she calmed herself again.

"Lily," said her mother, in a moment or two, "I have many things to say to you, and I have not much strength left. You must calm yourself, darling, and listen to me."

"But, mother, you are not much worse to-night, are you?"

"God is very good to us both, my child, in giving me a little strength and a clear mind at the last. What I have to say will comfort you afterwards, Lily. I want to tell my darling what a comfort she has been to me through all my time of trouble. I have thanked God for my precious daughter many a time when I was ready to sink. Archie will never want a mother's care while he has you; and for his sake, love, you must not grieve too much for me. It will only be for a little while; and, then, think how happy we shall be."

There was a pause.

"Will you promise, Lily?"

"Yes, mother; I promise. It will only be for a little while."

"I do not fear to leave my darlings. God will keep them safe till we meet again."

There was a long silence after that; and then she called her sister by name, and Mrs. Blair bent over her.

"Kiss me, Janet. God sent you to us now. Comfort—Alex's bairns."

Again there was silence. The mother's hand moved uneasily, as if in search of something. Her sister lifted it, and laid it over her daughter's neck, and then it was at rest. Not a sound broke the stillness of the hour. They thought she slept; and she did sleep: but she never woke again. The early dawn showed the change that had passed over her face, and Lilius knew that she was motherless.

Of how the next days passed, Lilius never had a distinct remembrance. She only knew that when, on the third morning, strangers came to bear her mother away, it seemed a long, long time since she died. It seemed like looking back over years, rather than days, to recall the time when she lay with her arms clasped around her neck, and listened to her dying words.

During this time, Mrs. Blair had watched her niece with some anxiety. There was no violent bursts of grief, but there was a look of desolation on her face which it was heart-breaking to see. She was quiet and gentle through all; willing, indeed eager, to render assistance to her aunt when it was required; but as soon as she was free again she returned to the low stool beside the bed on which her mother lay.

The time was passed by Archie in alternate fits of violent weeping and depression almost amounting to stupor. Lilius tried hard to perform the promise made to her dying mother. She put aside her own sorrow to soothe his. She read to him; she sang to him; and when he would listen to neither reading nor singing, she would murmur such words of comfort as her mother had spoken to her; and their burden always was, "They are so happy now. They have found such rest and peace; and it will be but a little while, and then we shall be with them there."

And then, when he grew quiet and listened to her, she would try to meet his wistful looks with a smile; but when he

was quiet or asleep, she always returned to the place beside her dead mother.

But they bore her mother away at last; and then for a moment Liliass's strength and courage forsook her. The cry of her desolate heart would no longer be hushed.

“Oh, mother! mother!”

Even the sound of her brother's weeping had not power, for a time, to recall her from the indulgence of her grief.

On the morning of her sister's death, Mrs. Blair had written to a friend, asking him to make arrangements for conveying the orphans to her humble home; and they were to leave the town on the day succeeding that of the funeral. Little was left to be done. A few articles of furniture were to be disposed of, a few trifles, heirlooms in the family for several generations, were to be taken with them; and it was with a feeling of relief that Mrs. Blair welcomed the honest carrier of Kirklands who was on the morrow to convey them away from the unhealthy town to the free fresh air of their native hills. Only one thing more remained to be done, and the afternoon was nearly over before Mrs. Blair found courage to speak of it.

“Liliass, if you are not too weary, I should like you to go out for me to Dr. Gordon's, love, if it will not be too much for you.”

“I'm not weary, aunt. I'll go, if you wish.”

But she grew very pale, remembering the last time she had gone there.

“Liliass,” said her aunt, drawing her towards her, and kissing her fondly, “you have been my own brave, patient lassie to-day. You have not forgotten your mother's words?”

“Oh, aunt, I wish to be patient, indeed I do. But I fear I am not really patient at heart.” And she wept now as though her heart would break.

Her aunt let her weep freely for a few minutes, and then she said:

“It's not wrong for you to weep for your mother, Liliass; you must do that. But you know 'He doth not afflict willingly;' and you can trust his love, though you cannot see why this great sorrow has been sent upon you. You can say, 'Thy will, not mine, be done.'”

“I am trying, Aunt Janet,” said Liliass, looking up with a wavering smile on her lips, almost sadder to see than tears, as her aunt could not help thinking. She said no more, but kissed her and let her go.

It was with a grave face and slow step that Liliass took her way to Dr. Gordon's house. When she was fairly in the street, a wild desire seized her to go to the place where her father and mother lay, and she took a few rapid steps in that direction. It was not in the narrow kirk-yard seen from their window, but quite away in another part of the town, nearer to the place where they used to live; and Liliass paused before she had gone far, for she doubted if it would be right to venture down at that hour. She stood still a moment.

“I shall not see them. They are not there. I must have patience.” And she turned slowly back again.

It was growing dark in the room in which, for a few minutes, she waited for Dr. Gordon, and through the half-open door she caught a glimpse of a pleasant parlour, echoing with the music of voices. Happy, cheerful voices they were; but Liliass' heart grew sadder as she listened, and when at last Dr. Gordon appeared, it was with difficulty that she could restrain her tears.

Speaking very fast, as if she were afraid that her voice would fail her, she said, “We are going away, sir, to-morrow with my aunt, Mrs. Blair, and she sent me with this to you.”

The doctor took what the child held towards him, but instantly replaced it in her hands.

“And so that was your aunt I saw the other day?” said he.

“Yes; Aunt Janet Blair, our father's sister. We are going to live with her in the country, and it's far away; and, if you please, sir, would you come and see Archie again? My aunt didn't bid me ask you; but it would be such a comfort if you

would.” And she looked up beseechingly into his face.

“Yes, surely, with a good will,” said Dr. Gordon, heartily; “and to-night, too, it must be, if you are going to-morrow. No, no! my lassie,” he added, as Liliās made another attempt to place the money in his hand. “I have not yet eaten orphans' bread, and I'm not going to begin now.”

“But my aunt sent it, sir; and she was not always poor, and I think she would like you to take it.”

His only answer was to press her fingers more closely over the little packet of money, as he drew her towards the parlour-door.

“I will go with you by-and-bye; but first you must come in and see my boys. Mrs. Gordon wants to see you, too,” said he.

The room into which they passed was a large and pleasant one, and Liliās never forgot it, nor the kind words which were spoken to her there. The bright yet softened light of a lamp made all parts of it visible. Over the mantelpiece was a large mirror, and there were heavy crimson curtains on the windows, and many pictures on the walls. On a low chair, near the fire, sat a lady with a boy in her arms, and several other children were playing about the room. They became quiet as their father entered, and gazed with some curiosity on the stranger.

“This is my little friend, Liliās Elder,” said the doctor. “It is fortunate she came to-night. We might not have found her to-morrow.”

Mrs. Gordon received Liliās very kindly, speaking to her in a voice so tender that, in spite of herself, it brought the tears to her eyes. Noticing her emotion, Mrs. Gordon did not speak to her again for a moment, and, the children gathering round her, she quickly recovered herself in receiving and returning their greetings.

When tea was fairly over, and the boys had gone to bed, a long conversation took place between Liliās and her friends. Dr. Gordon was the father of six sons; but he had no daughter, and his heart overflowed with love and pity for the orphan girl. Through all the long illness of her father and brother, she had been an object of interest to the kind physician. Her never-wearying attention to both, and the evident comfort and support she had been to her mother in all her trials, had filled him with admiration and pleasure. For months he had lost sight of the family, and various circumstances had occurred to withdraw his thoughts from the subject; but now that he had found Liliās an orphan and in want, he longed to take her to his heart and home.

“I ought, perhaps, to have spoken first to your aunt,—your natural guardian;—but I think she will be willing to give you up to us. We will try and make you happy, my child.”

Liliās shed many grateful tears, as their plans were unfolded to her; but to all their kind words she had but one answer. It could not be. She could never leave Archie. He was ill and lame, and had no one else; and she had promised her mother always to take care of him.

It was in vain that they assured her that his health and comfort should be cared for; that, though for the present they might be separated, he would still be her brother, and that her change of circumstances would be as beneficial to him as to her in the end. They urged her to consider, and not to decide hastily. They would wait, weeks or months, till her brother was better, so that she could leave him with her aunt.

But no. It could not be. It would seem like forsaking him. She had promised their mother always to take care for him. Nothing could make it right to break that promise.

“Indeed you must not be grieved, or think me ungrateful,” she pleaded. “It would not be right. It would break Archie's heart to part from me now.”

And so they let her go. Dr. Gordon did not speak to her, but he held her hand firmly as they passed down the street. Liliās thought he was angry at her decision; but he was not angry. He was only grieved. When they reached the door, she lingered.

“Indeed, sir, I could not do any other way; and, if you please, don't tell my aunt all you have said to me to-night: she might think I would be sorry afterwards, and I wish you wouldn't tell her.”

“Well, child, I will not tell her, since it is your wish. But remember, if any trouble comes upon you, you must write and let me know.” And Lillas joyfully assented to the condition.

The doctor's visit comforted them all greatly. Archie's case he thought by no means so hopeless as he had once thought it. True, he might still be lame; but he might be strong and healthy for all that. The fresh air of the hills would, he believed, work wonders for him: so he bade him take heart; and the poor lad's pale face brightened as he said it.

To Mrs. Blair he spoke of her brother in terms of respect and affection that won her confidence at once; and when he earnestly entreated her to consider him as a friend to the children, and to apply to him if trouble should overtake them, she promised to do so, without hesitation or reserve.

When he bade “good-bye” to Lillas, he took her face between his hands and kissed her many times on lip and brow, calling her a firm little thing, though she seemed so gentle; and then he prayed, “God bless her,” and they were left alone.

CHAPTER III.

THE NEW HOME.



It was not without many tears that the two children bade farewell to the little, dark room that had been their home so long. True, they had suffered much in it. Many long, restless days and painful nights had Archie passed there; but it was associated with the memory of their mother, and it was like a second parting from her to leave it.

The morning was dark and dull. A heavy mist lay on the town, and for the first few miles their journey was silent and sad. But, as the sun rose higher, the clouds parted and the mist rolled away, revealing to the unaccustomed eyes of the children pleasant glimpses of hill and valley.

Their way, after they had fairly left the great city and its suburbs behind them, lay through quiet and unfrequented roads. They crossed a broad moor, and then for a time passed between low hills covered with broom or heather. Afterwards they came upon cultivated land lying around long, low farm-houses. Sometimes these dwellings were close by the road, and then they caught, with delight, glimpses of barn-door fowls and garden-flowers; and sometimes there were children playing on the green slopes around their homes. But oftener the farm-houses were far away on the hill-sides or in the quiet valleys. In some early fields they saw the reapers busy with the harvest; but most of the way was quiet,—even lonely. For miles and miles they saw no living thing save a gray plover whistling over their heads, or now and then a flock of sheep among the hills far away.

Much of the way Mrs. Blair walked, and sometimes Liliias walked with her; but she soon became weary. It was a day long to be remembered by the children,—their first day among the hills. After so long in the close streets of the town, it seemed as though they could never get enough of the clear, fresh air and the pleasant country sights and sounds. Everything seemed beautiful to them, moors, and hills, and golden harvest-fields. They did not talk much, only now and then one would point out to the other some new object of interest, a glimpse of blue water caught between the hills, or a lark upspringing from some grassy knoll, singing as it soared.

In the middle of the day they stopped near a little village to rest. The carrier went with his horse to the inn; but they sat down in the shadow of a tree by the wayside, and ate the simple food they had brought with them.

It was sunset before they reached their aunt's home; and a pleasant place it seemed to them, though so poor and small. It stood at a little distance from the village of Kirklands. On one side was a plot of garden-ground, which some former occupant of the cottage had redeemed from the common beyond. It was sheltered on two sides by a hawthorn hedge; and a low, white-washed paling separated it from the highway. There was little in it, except a few common vegetables, a border of daisies and heart's-ease, and a rosebush or two; but to Liliias it seemed a charming place; and it was not without reluctance that she obeyed her aunt's summons to come within when the dew began to fall.

It was, indeed, a new life that the brother and sister began at the cottage. During the first few weeks, the greater part of the time, when the days were fine, was passed out-of-doors. At first, Archie could not get beyond the turf seat at the end of the cottage; but Liliias found her way across the wide common and away to the hills and glens beyond. After a time, Archie was able, by the help of his crutches, to go with her; and many a pleasant path and quiet resting-place they found for themselves.

Their favourite resort was at the most distant point to which Archie for a while was able to go. A great gray rock, partly covered with heather and wild creepers, jutted out into the dry bed of a mountain stream. Passing round it, they found a low seat made by an abrupt rent in the rock, over which hung a slender mountain-ash. In the winter, or after heavy rains, this channel was filled with water; but now a tiny rivulet only trickled down the middle of the bed, making a pleasant murmur among the smooth, white pebbles over which it passed. Here the children spent many a happy hour.



HAPPY HOURS.

Their most common theme of conversation was their father and mother, and the events of the past two years. The memory of the time before that was more like a dream than like the recalling of events that had really taken place. Of their mother they spoke oftenest,—sometimes with tears and regret for their own loss, but sometimes, too, with joy at the thought of her gain, and the blessed rest to which she had attained.

“Do you think she was glad to go?” asked Archie, one day, after they had been talking a long time.

“Yes; I think she was very glad to go; but at first it grieved her sorely to think of leaving us behind. I almost think she would have gone sooner but for that. After Aunt Janet came, it was different. After that she seemed willing to go at any time.”

There was a pause, and then Archie said:

“It is a pity that she didn't know, before she went away, how we should come here, and what a bonny place it is. Lily, do you think she sees us now?”

“I don't know. She may. Anyway, after that night she was willing to leave us. Indeed, she told me the night she died that she didn't fear for us.”

The remembrance of that night always made Lilies' cheek grow pale; and she did not speak again for some time. At last she said:

“Yes, this is a bonny place, and we have been very happy here; but there is one thing I am grieved for. You know, Archie, Aunt Janet is poor, and I fear in this place I shall not be able to find anything to do to help her. I fear I can't bide here long.”

The thought of having to part from his sister had never come into Archie's mind, and he looked at her in astonishment, as he said:

“But where would you go?”

“Oh, I don't know yet. Only I think it's not right to burden Aunt Janet more than can be helped. I heard Mrs. Stirling say that Mrs. Graham, at the manse, wanted some one to sew and help among the children; and maybe I would do for her.”

“Oh, Lily, surely you wouldn't go away. What should I ever do without you?” said Archie, weeping.

“Whist, Archie,” said his sister, soothingly; “do you think I would like to go away from you? But if it is right, we mustn't think whether it is pleasant or not. We won't grieve before the time, however. Maybe I'll never have to go. We'll speak to Aunt Janet.”

And so that night, after Archie was asleep, Lillas spoke to her aunt.

“Are you weary of me, Lillas, that you wish to leave me so soon?” asked her aunt, gravely.

“Oh, aunt, you cannot think that. If it were only not wrong for me to bide here always!”

“And why do you not think it right to bide here always?” asked her aunt.

“Because I am young and strong, and I ought to be working for you, rather than that you should be doing so much for me.”

“But you have been working for me. You have helped me greatly since you came here.”

“Yes, a little, perhaps,” said Lillas, thoughtfully. “But that's not what I mean. Are you not very poor now, Aunt Janet?”

“Well, I cannot say that I am very rich,” said her aunt, smiling. “But I'm not so poor but that I can shelter my brother's orphan bairns for a while at least.” And then she added, gravely, “I have no doubt but you could make yourself very useful, and I daresay Mrs. Graham would like to have you there; but there are many reasons why such a thing is not to be thought of.”

“Will you tell me some of them, aunt?”

“You have no need to go, my child; and, even if you had, you are not strong enough. You are by no means fit for the work you would have to do there; though you could have no better place than the manse. No, no, my lassie! you must bide here among the hills, and gather health and strength for the struggles that life must bring to you as well as to others. All you could gain would but ill repay you for the loss of health; and you are not very strong, dear.”

“But I am stronger than one would think to see me; and I'll be getting stronger, living in a country place. I think I might be strong enough for Mrs. Graham.”

“But, even if you were strong enough, for all our sakes, it is not to be thought of that you should go now. Archie would pine without you. And unless you are weary of this quiet place, and wish for a change, you must put away all thought of leaving us, for a time at least.”

“Weary! Oh, no, aunt. And I know Archie would miss me; but he could spare me; and I could go if it was right. I can do a great many things, and I would try to learn.”

“Yes; you can do a great many things; and that is one reason why I can't spare you, Lily. I think I have the best right to my brother's daughter.” And she drew the little girl fondly towards her as she spoke.

“Oh, aunt,” exclaimed Lillas eagerly, “if I could really help you and be a comfort to you, I would like nothing half so well.”

“You can be useful to me. You are a comfort to me. I hardly know how I could part from you now, dear. Our way of living must be very humble; but that will not be so bad as being parted,—will it, my Lily? You have learned to love me a little, my child?”

Lillas answered by putting her arms round her aunt's neck, and kissing her again and again. Then, in a low voice, she said:

“You mind me of my father.”

“And you mind me of the brother I loved and watched over as a child, and honoured as a man. If it is God's will, we will not be parted, my beloved child.”

And so it was settled, and Lillas' heart was set at rest about the matter; and in the morning her face told the tidings to Archie before her lips could speak the words.

Mrs. Blair's cottage lay at the distance of several miles from the kirk of Dunmoor, which she had all her life attended. It was some time before Archie was able to go so far, and Liliias had stayed at home with him. At length, one fine, clear Sabbath in the end of September, Mrs. Blair yielded to their entreaties to be permitted to go with her; and early in the morning they set out. Instead of going by the highway, they took a pleasanter path over the hills, resting often, for Archie's sake, on some gray stone or mossy bank. The length of the way was beguiled by pleasant talk. Mrs. Blair told them of the Sabbath journeys to the kirk from Glen Elder when she and her little brother were all in all to each other; and Liliias and Archie could never grow weary of hearing of their father's youthful days.

Many in the kirk that day looked with interest on the children of Alexander Elder, as they sat by his sister's side, in the very same seat where he used to sit so many years ago; and many an earnest "God bless them!" went up to the Father of the fatherless in their behalf. Yes, it was the very same seat in which their father used to sit; and Liliias could hardly repress her tears as she saw his initials, with a date many years back, carved in the dark wood before her. The psalm-book, too, which he had used, had never been removed; and his name in a large, schoolboy's hand, was written many times on its blank leaves. Many of the Psalms were marked, too, as having been learned at such or such a time; and it was long before Liliias could think of anything but the little lad like Archie (only rosy and strong) who had sat there with his sister so many years ago. The voice that spoke from the brown old pulpit was the same to which he had listened; for the aged minister had been her grandfather's friend, and her father had grown up beneath his eye, one of the dearest of a well-beloved flock.

His face and voice were to Liliias like those of a dear, familiar friend; and when he spoke of the things of which she loved to hear, she could no longer restrain her tears: indeed, she never thought of trying.

"For my ways are not as your ways; neither are my thoughts as your thoughts," were the words from which he spoke; and when he told them how it was oftentimes the way of our good Father in heaven to lead his chosen, worn and weary, fainting beneath heavy burdens, over rough places, through darkness and gloom, but all safe home at last, the words went to the child's heart as though they had been spoken to her alone of all who were waiting for a portion there; and her heart made answer, "What does it matter? It is only for a little while, and then all safe home at last. Not one forgotten, not one left out, in that day."

Archie, too, listened intently, but not with tears. There was an earnest look in his eyes, and a grave smile about his mouth, as though he were hearing some glad tidings; and when the minister sat down, he leaned over towards his sister, and whispered softly:

"I like that."

And Liliias smiled in reply.

When the service was over, and Mrs. Blair and the children had passed out into the kirk-yard, Mrs. Graham, the minister's widowed daughter, came and invited them into the manse till it should be time for the service in the afternoon. Mrs. Blair went with her; but Archie was shy, and liked better to stay out in the pleasant kirk-yard; and Liliias stayed with him. The place had a quiet Sabbath look about it, which suited well the feelings of the children; and, as the resting-place of many friends of their father, it was full of interest to them. Many of the people who had come from a distance stayed also, and seated themselves, in small parties, here and there among the grave-stones; but not a loud or discordant voice arose to break the silence that reigned around.

The kirk itself was a quaint old building, around which many interesting historical associations clustered. The large stones of which it was built were dark with age; and the ivy that grew thickly over the western wall gave it the appearance of an ancient ruin. Dark firs and yew-trees grew around the kirk-yard, and here and there over the grave of a friend the hand of affection had planted a weeping-willow. On a low slab beneath one of these the brother and sister sat for a time in silence, broken at last by Archie.

"Oh, Lily! this is a bonny quiet place. How I wish they were lying here!"

"Yes," said Liliias, softly, "among their friends. But it makes no difference. I never think of them as lying there."

"Oh, no! they are not there. I suppose it is all the same to them. But yet, if I were going to die, I would like better to lie down here in this quiet place than among the many, many graves yonder in the town. Wouldn't you, Lily?"

“Yes; for some things I would. I should like to be where the friends I love could often come. Look yonder how all the people are sitting beside the graves of their own friends. That is Ellen Wilson and her brother beside their father's grave. I read the name on the stone as I came in this morning. And Mrs. Stirling's husband and children are buried there in the corner where she is sitting. She told me about them the last time she was in. I think the folk here must mind their friends better than they would if they never saw their graves.”

“But we'll never forget our father and mother, though we can't see their graves,” said Archie, eagerly; “I do wish they were lying here beside my grandfather and all the rest.”

Lilias did not answer, for they were about to be interrupted. Only one of the persons who were approaching them was known to her, and she did not think her a very agreeable acquaintance, and a slight feeling of impatience rose within her as she drew near.

Mrs. Stirling was one of those unfortunate persons who constantly move in an atmosphere of gloom. Her face seemed to express a desire to banish all cheerfulness and silence all laughter wherever she came. She had never, even in her best days, been blessed with a heavenly temper, and much care and many sorrows had made it worse. Men had dealt hardly with her, and God, she believed, had done the same. One short month had made her a widow and childless, and then other troubles had followed. From circumstances of comfort she had been reduced, by the carelessness and dishonesty of those whom she had trusted, to a state of comparative poverty. This last trouble had been, in a measure, removed, but the bitterness it had stirred in her heart had never subsided.

If a subject had a dark side, she not only chose to look at it herself, but held it up before the eyes of all concerned. Having once been deceived, she never ceased to suspect, and which was still worse, she even strove (from the best of motives, as she believed) to excite suspicion and discomfort in the minds of others; and, notwithstanding her well-known character as a prophesier of evil things, she did sometimes succeed in making people unhappy. She was, as the minister said, a pitiable example of the effects of unsanctified affliction, and a warning to all who felt inclined to murmur under the chastening hand of God.

During one or two visits at Mrs. Blair's cottage, Mrs. Stirling had made Lilias uncomfortable, she scarce knew why; and now, though she did not say so to Archie, she heartily wished she would stay at the other end of the kirk-yard.

“Weel, bairns,” she said, as she drew near, “your aunt didna take you with her into the manse. Are you not weary sitting so long on the stones?”

“No,” said Lilias. “Archie liked better to bide out here. This is a bonny place.”

“Oh, ay, it's a bonny place enow,” said Mrs. Stirling. Then, turning to Archie, she said, “And so you liked better to bide out here than to go in to your dinner at the manse? Well, it's a good bairn that likes to do what it's bidden. I dare say Mrs. Blair would have felt some delicacy in taking you both into the manse parlour; though why she should, is more than the like of me knows.”

To this there was no reply to be made; and in a minute, turning again to Lilias, she asked:

“And when are you going to the manse as nurse, my dear?”

Lilias said she was not going at all.

“No! Where then? To Pentlands? I told your aunt that Mrs. Jones, the housekeeper, wanted a lassie to help in the kitchen; but it's a place full of temptations for a young thing like you. I wonder at Mrs. Blair.”

Lilias replied, rather hastily, that she was not going anywhere just now; she was going to bide at home with her aunt.

“Well, well, my dear, you needn't be angry at my asking; though there's little wonder that the daughter of Alexander Elder shouldn't like to have it said that she ought to go and gain her bread as a servant. We can't always part with our pride when we part with our money. Nobody knows that better than I do.”

“It's not pride that keeps me at home,” said Lilias, in a low voice. “I would go gladly if my aunt thought it needful; but she says it is not.”

“Oh, well, my dear, I dare say your aunt knows best. She may have money that I didn't know of. Maybe you wasn't so

ill off as is said.”

“Whisht! do you not see that you are vexing the bairns? Never mind her, my dear,” said the pleasant-looking young woman whom Lillas had called Ellen Wilson, sitting down on the stone beside her. “I think this part of the country seems to agree with you both. Your brother looks much better than he did when he came first.”

Lillas smiled gratefully in answer to this, and looked with loving pride at her brother. But Nancy Stirling had not yet said her say.

“Looks better, does he? I wonder how he could have looked before? Such a white-faced creature I have seldom seen. He reminds me of the laddie that died at Pentlands, of a decline, a month since. I doubt he isn't long for this world.”

“Whisht!” again interrupted Ellen, “you don't know what you are saying, I think.”

“Archie is much better,” said Lillas, eagerly. “He couldn't set his foot to the ground when we first came here; and now he can walk miles.”

“Oh, ay: change of air is aye thought good for the like of him. But it's a deceitful complaint. We all ken that your father died of consumption,—and your mother too, it's likely.”

“No,” said Lillas, in a low voice. “She died of fever.”

“Mrs. Stirling,” exclaimed Ellen Wilson, “I canna but wonder that one that has had the troubles you have had, should have so little consideration for other folks. Do you not see that you are vexing the bairns?”

“Weel, it's not my design nor my desire to vex them,—poor things! It never harmed me to get a friend's sympathy; though it's little ever I got. I'll not trouble them.” And she went and seated herself at a little distance from the children.

An old man, with very white hair, but a ruddy and healthy countenance, had been walking up and down the path, his hands clasped behind his back, and his staff beneath his arm. As he passed the place where Mrs. Stirling sat, he paused, saying, in a cheerful, kindly voice:

“This is a bonny day, Mrs. Stirling.”

“Oh, ay,” replied Nancy, drearily; “it's a bonny day.”

“And a fine harvest we are getting,” said the old man, again,—“if we were only thankful to God for his undeserved goodness.”

“Oh, ay: considering all things, the harvest's not so bad in some places, and in others it's just middling. It's not got in yet. We must wait a while before we set ourselves up upon it.”

“It would ill become us to set ourselves up on that, or any other good gift of the Lord,” said the old man, gravely; “but you and I, Nancy, have seen many a different harvest from this in our day. We are ready enough to murmur if the blessing be withheld, and to take it as our right when it is sent. There's many a poor body in the country-side who may thank God for the prospect of an easy winter. He has blessed us in our basket and in our store.”

“Oh, well, I dare say I'm as thankful as my neighbours, though I say less about it,” said Nancy, tartly. “I dare say there's many a poor body will need all they have, and more, before the winter's over.”

“You see you needn't mind what Mrs. Stirling says,” said Ellen, who with the children had listened to the conversation thus far. “She's always boding ill. It's her nature. She has had many things to make the world look dreary to her,—poor woman! Yonder is James Muir, one of our elders,—a good man, if ever there was one. He knew your father, and your grandfather too.”

Yes, he had known their father well; and the next time he turned down the path he stopped to speak to them. Not in many words, but kindly and gravely, as his large, kind heart prompted; and Lillas felt that he was one that might be relied on in time of need.

“There's your aunt again, with Mrs. Graham and the manse bairns,” said Ellen, as they approached. They rose, and went to meet them at the kirk-door; and while their aunt and Mrs. Graham waited to speak a few words to James Muir,

they exchanged sly glances with the young people designated by Ellen as “the manse bairns.”

They were the grandchildren of the aged minister. Their father, his only son,—a minister too,—had, within a year, died in the large town where he had been settled, and his widow had come with her children to the manse, which was now their home.

Too shy to speak to the strangers, they cast many a look of sympathy on the lame boy and his sister who were both fatherless and motherless. By-and-bye the little Jessie ventured to put into Archie's hand a bunch of brilliant garden-flowers that she had carried. Archie did not speak; but his smile thanked her, and the flowers bloomed in the cottage-window for many days.

CHAPTER IV.

LIFE AT KIRKLANDS.

BUT all the days in Kirkland were not sunny days. The pleasant harvest time went over, and the days grew short and rainy. Not with the pleasant summer rain, coming in sudden gusts to leave the earth more fresh and beautiful when the sunshine came again, but with a dull, continuous drizzle, dimming the window-panes, and hiding in close, impenetrable mist the outline of the nearest summits. The pleasant rambles among hills and glens, and the pleasanter restings by the burn-side, were all at an end now. The swollen waters of the burn hid the stone seat where the children had loved to sit, and the sere leaves of the rowan-tree lay scattered in the glen. Even when a blink of sunshine came, they could not venture out among the dripping heather, but were fain to content themselves with sitting on the turf seat at the house-end.

For all Aunt Janet's prophecy had not come true, thus far. There were no roses blooming on Archie's cheeks yet; and sometimes, when Liliass watched his pale face, as he sat gazing out into the mist, she was painfully reminded of the time when he used to watch the shadow of the spire coming slowly round to the yew-tree by the kirk-yard gate.

But there were no days now so long and sad as those days had been. The memory of their last great grief was often present with them; but the sense of orphanhood grew less bitter, day by day, as time went on. Archie was not quite strong and well yet, but he was far better than he had been for many a long month; and Liliass' feeling of anxiety on his account began to wear away. Gradually they found for themselves new employments and amusements, and their life fell into a quiet and pleasant routine again.

A new source of interest and enjoyment was opened to them in the return of Mrs. Blair's scholars after the harvest holidays were over. There were between fifteen and twenty girls, and a few boys, whose ages varied from six to twelve or fourteen. They were taught reading, writing, and the catechism; and some of the elder girls were taught to knit and sew.

Archie used sometimes to be weary of the hum of voices and the unvaried routine of the lessons; but Liliass never was. To her it was a constant pleasure to assist her aunt. Indeed, after a time some of the classes were entirely given up to her care. She had never been much with other children, but her gentle tones and quiet womanly ways gave her a control over them; and even the roughest and most unruly of the village children learned to yield her a ready obedience.

Mrs. Blair had striven to do faithfully the work she had undertaken of instructing these ignorant children; but at her age the formation of new habits was by no means easy. The constant attention to trifles which the occupation required was at times inexpressibly irksome to her; and the relief which the assistance of Liliass gave her was proportionally great.

"I'm sure I know not how I ever got on without my lassie," she said, one day, after watching with wonder and delight the patience with which she arranged the little girls' work,—a task for which patience was greatly needed. "I shall grow to be a useless body if I let you do all that is to be done, in this way. Are you not weary with your day's work, Liliass, my dear?"

"Weary!" said Liliass, laughing. "I don't need to be weary, for all I have done. It's only play to hear the bairns read and spell. I like it very much."

"But it's not play to take out and put into shape, and to sew as you have been doing for the last hour. I fear I put too much upon you, Liliass."

"Oh, now you are surely laughing at me. I wish I could do ten times as much. Do I really help you, aunt Janet?"

"Ay, more than you know, my darling. But put by your work for a night, and run down the brae, and freshen the roses that are just beginning to bloom on your cheeks. We mustn't let them grow white again, if we can help it."

But the best time of all was when the children had gone home,—when, with the door close shut against the wintry blast, they sat together around the pleasant firelight, talking, or reading, or musing, as each felt most inclined. From her father's well-chosen library Mrs. Blair had preserved a few books, that were books indeed,—books of which every page contained more real material for thought than many a much-praised modern volume. Read by themselves, the quaint

diction of some of these old writers must have been unintelligible to the children; but with the grave and simple comments of their aunt to assist their understanding, a new world of thought and feeling was opened to them. Many a grave discussion did they have on subjects whose names would convey no idea to the minds of most children of their age. There was often a mingling of folly and wisdom in their opinions and theories, that amused and surprised their aunt. Archie's lively imagination sometimes ventured on flights from which the grave expostulations of Lillas could not always draw him.

"To the law and to the testimony, Archie, lad," was his aunt's never-failing suggestion; and then his eager, puzzled face would be bent over the Bible, till his wild imaginings vanished of themselves, without waiting to be reasoned away.

But the history of their country was the chief delight of those long winter evenings. One read aloud; but the eyes of both rested on the page with an eagerness that did not pass away after the first perusal. The times and events that most interested them were gone over and over, till they were ready to forget that they of whom they read had long since passed away: Murray and Douglas, John Knox and Rutherford, and Mary, lived and laboured, and sinned and suffered, still in their excited feelings. It is true, their interest and sympathy vacillated between the contending parties. They did not always abide by their principles in the praise or blame awarded. Their feelings were generally on the side of the sufferers, whoever they might be; and if their eyes sparkled with delight at the triumphant energy of Knox, their tears for poor Queen Mary were none the less sincere.

But it was the history of the later times that stirred their hearts to their inmost depths,—the times

"When in muirland and valley the standard of Zion,
All bloody and torn, 'mong the heather was lying,"

when Charles strove to put in shackles the Scottish mind, and quench in the Scottish heart that love for the pure and simple truth for which the best and noblest have died. About these times and these men they were never weary of reading and speaking.

"There will never more be such times in Scotland," said Archie, as Lillas shut the history, and took down the Bible and psalm-books for their evening worship.

"Thank God, no!" said his aunt, hastily; "though one might think, from your face, that it is no matter of thankfulness to you."

"I don't wish those times to come back," said the boy musingly; "but I wish I had lived then. It must have been worth a man's while to live in those days."

"And why is it not as much worth a man's while to live in the days that are to come as in the days that are past?" asked his aunt, with a smile.

Archie looked up quickly.

"I know what you are thinking, aunt:—that a poor cripple lad could have done as little then as he can do now." And Archie sighed.

"No: I was thinking that it needs as much courage and patience, and as much of God's grace, for a poor cripple lad to bear (as He would have him bear) the trouble He sends, as would have stood a man in good stead before the face of Claverhouse himself. The heroes of history are not always the greatest heroes, after all, Archie, my laddie."

"Maybe not, aunt; but, then, it's only a sore leg I have to bear; and who is the better whether I bear it well or ill?"

"Archie, man, you are speaking foolishly," returned his aunt, gravely. "It matters much to yourself whether you bear your trouble well or ill. It was sent to you for discipline, and that you might be better fitted for the honouring of His name; and He who sent it can make it answer these ends in you as well as though He had cast your lot in those troublous times, and made you a buckler of strength against his foes and the foes of his people."

"But, aunt," said Lillas, "it's surely not wrong to wish to be placed where we can do much for Him? I don't wonder Archie should wish to have lived in those days."

“No, love: such a wish is not wrong, provided it doesn't act as a temptation to neglect present opportunities. We are all by nature self-seekers, and in no small danger of giving ourselves credit for wishing to serve the Lord, when, maybe, he sees it is ourselves we wish to serve. The best evidence we can give that we would honour him in a larger sphere is, that we strive to honour him in the sphere in which he has placed us.”

“But after all, aunt, it would be grand to be able to do as much for God's cause as some of those men did. I can't think that any one, to say nothing of a poor cripple lad, has an opportunity to do as much now as those men had.”

“To do is a great thing in the sight of men. But I am thinking that, in His sight who sees further than man can see, *to suffer* may be greater than *to do*. But have patience, Archie, lad. He who has given you to suffer now, may give you to do before you die. You may have to fight the battles of the Lord in high places. Who knows?”

“That would be near as well as to fight with the dragoons: would it not, Archie?” said Lillas, laughing. “I'm sure it would be far easier.”

“Maybe not, my lassie,” said her aunt, gravely. “There may be battles fierce and sore that are bloodless battles; and Scotland may not be through all her warfare yet. But take the books, bairns, and let us be thankful that, whatever may befall us or our land, we have always the same word to guide us.”

There was one drawback to the happiness of the children, this winter; and it was felt for a time to be no slight one. They could not go to the kirk at Dunmoor, their father's kirk. The winter rains had made the way over the hills impassable; and the distance by the high road was too great for them. They learned in a little while to love the kindly voice of the minister of Kirklands parish, and they soon got many a kindly greeting from the neighbours at the kirk-door. But it was not the same to Lillas as sitting in her father's seat, and listening to the voice of her father's friend; and the getting back to the dear old kirk at Dunmoor was always told over as one of the pleasant things which the spring would bring back again.

At Christmas-time there came a new scholar to the school, and no small stir did her coming make there. For the first nine years of her life, Elsie Ray had been the neglected child of a careless and indolent mother. At her death, Elsie had come to the neighbourhood of Kirklands, to live with her grandfather and her aunt. She thus passed from one extreme of misfortune to the other. From roaming at large in whatever place and in whatever company she chose, she became at once the in-door drudge of her aunt and the out-door drudge of her grandfather. The father and daughter agreed perfectly in one respect. Their ruling passion was the same,—the love of money. It was believed in the neighbourhood that they had laid by a considerable sum; but nothing could be more wretched than their usual mode of life. Their business was the keeping of cows and poultry; and they found an efficient assistant in the strong and energetic Elsie. The life of constant occupation which she was obliged to live with them was less dangerous to an active-minded child than the idle, sauntering existence she had passed with her mother. But it left her no time for improvement; and she seemed likely to grow up in ignorance. The chance visit of an uncle saved her from this sad fate. Her grandfather so far attended to his remonstrances as to send her, during three or four of the least busy months, to Mrs. Blair's school.

It would be difficult to imagine a more unpromising pupil than Elsie appeared to be when Lillas first took her in hand; for to Lillas' especial care was she committed. Wonder unspeakable to the children in the school was the sight of a girl of Elsie's age who could not say the catechism, which every Scotch child begins to learn almost in infancy. But this was by no means the greatest defect in the education of the new-comer; for it soon appeared that “great A” and “crooked S” were as utter mysteries to her as any sentence in the catechism. And their wonder was by no means silent wonder. More than once during the first week was Elsie's ready hand raised to resent the mockery of her tormentors. It needed constant watchfulness on the part of Lillas to keep the peace; and nothing but her earnest and gentle encouragement would have prevented the girl from giving up, in disgust, the attempt to learn to read.

This was only for a short time, however. Her rapid improvement in reading, as well as sewing, was a constant source of wonder and delight to her young teacher; and soon the mocking of the children was silenced.

Nor was it in these things alone that improvement appeared. Incited partly by the precept and partly by the example of Lillas, a great change soon became visible in her appearance and manners. There was a decided attempt at neatness in her rather shabby garments; and a look from Lillas, or even the remembrance of her, had power to stay the utterance of the rude or angry word ere it passed her lips. Her naturally affectionate disposition had been chilled by the life she had been leading for the last few years, and her heart opened gratefully to the kindness of Lillas. Under her influence, her

good qualities were rapidly developed; and she soon became a great favourite with them all.

“It has made a great difference, Elsie's being here,” Liliias often said; and when one morning Elsie came with swollen eyes to say that she could come no more, Liliias felt inclined to weep with her. She comforted her, however, telling her she would often come with Archie to see her while she was feeding her cows on the hills, and that when the winter came again her grandfather would let her come back to the school. So Elsie dried her eyes, and promised to let no day pass without trying to read at least one whole chapter in the little Testament that Liliias gave her at parting.

There was no lack of incidents to break the monotony of their life during the winter. Among the most frequent and by no means the least interesting of these were the visits of Mrs. Stirling. She never passed to or from Kirklands—where all her little purchases were made—without calling; and a wonderful interest she seemed to take in all that concerned the children, especially Liliias; and she always met with a welcome. Not that her visits were usually very cheerful affairs. The conversation generally turned upon the troubles of life, great and small, and especially her own,—those she had experienced and those she dreaded.

Mrs. Blair was often greatly amused by the earnest and grave attempts of Liliias to make the world look brighter to poor Nancy. Sometimes these attempts took the form of sympathy, sometimes of expostulation; and more than once there was something like gentle rebuke in the child's words and tones. She could not boast of success, however. If Mrs. Stirling could not reply in words, she never failed to enter a protest against the cheerful philosophy of Liliias, by a groan, or a shake of the head, expressive of utter incredulousness. She was never angry, however, as Mrs. Blair was sometimes afraid she might be. Indeed, she seemed greatly to enjoy the little girl's conversation; and sometimes her visits were rather unreasonably lengthened.

Archie she never addressed but in terms of the deepest commiseration. At every visit she saw, or seemed to see, that he was changing for the worse; and “poor, helpless bairn!” or “poor, pining laddie!” were the most cheerful names she gave him. Her melancholy anecdotes of similar cases, and her oft-repeated fears that “he would never see the month of June,” vexed and troubled Liliias greatly. At first they troubled Archie too; but he soon came not to heed them; and one day, when she was in a more than usually doleful mood, wondering what Liliias would do without him, and whether it would save his life if his leg were cut off, he quite offended her by laughing in her face.

“To think of me wasting good breath sympathizing with you!” she exclaimed. “No, no! You're not so near heaven as I thought you. You're none too good to bide in this world a while yet. To think of the laddie laughing at me!”

CHAPTER V.

SUMMER DAYS AT KIRKLANDS.



AND so the winter passed away, and the spring came again,—the sunshine and showers of April, more than renewing the delight of the children's first weeks in Kirklands. They had never been in the country in the early spring before; and even “bonny Glen Elder,” in the prime of summer, had no wonders such as revealed themselves day by day to their unaccustomed eyes. The catkins on the willows, the gradual swelling of the hawthorn-buds, the graceful tassels of the silver birch, were to them a beauty and a mystery. The gradual change of brown fields to a living green, as the tender blades of the new-sown grain sprang up, was wondrous too. The tiny mosses on the rocks, the ferns hidden away from other eyes, were searched for and rejoiced over. No wild flower by the wayside, no bird or butterfly, no new development of life in any form, but won from them a joyful greeting.

And so there were again the pleasant wanderings among hills and glens, and the pleasanter restings by the burn-side. But they were not so frequent now for Liliass' life was a very busy one, and she could not, even if she had wished, have laid aside the duties she had taken upon herself. But her freedom was all the sweeter when her duties were done; and seldom a day passed without an hour or two of bright sunshine and fresh air, and never before had the world seemed half so beautiful.

And Liliass had another source of happiness, better than birds or flowers or sunshine: Archie was growing strong again. Before May was out, his crutches occupied a permanent place behind the cottage-door, and he was away on the hill without them, drinking in life and health with every breath of balmy air. He was no longer the little cripple, painfully following the footsteps of his sister, slackened to suit his lagging pace. Lame he was still, and always might be, and a slender “willow-wand of a laddie,” as Mrs. Stirling still declared; but there was a tinge of healthy colour on cheek and lip, and instead of the look that reminded Liliass of the shadow creeping round to the gate of the kirk-yard, there came back to his face the blithe look of earlier days. His very voice and smile seem changed; and his laughter, so seldom heard for many a weary month, was music to his sister's ear.

Her joy in his returning health was altogether unmingled. Sometimes, when weary of the noise and confinement of school, it quite rested and refreshed her to remember that he was out in the air and sunshine. She never murmured that he enjoyed it all without her; and when he came home at night, telling, triumphantly, of the miles and miles he had walked and the new sights he had seen among the hills, her delight was quite as great as his.

At first Archie had no other interest in his wanderings than that which pleasant sights and sounds and a consciousness of returning strength gave him. It was happiness enough to lie down in some quiet valley, with only his beloved book as his companion, or, seated on some hill-side, to gaze on a landscape whose loveliness has been the theme of many a poet's song.

But pleasant sights and sounds, and even his beloved book, did not always suffice him for companionship; and he soon found his way to more than one shieling among the hills; and more than one solitary shepherd soon learned to look for the coming of the lad, “so old-fashioned, yet so gladsome.” Sometimes he read to them from his favourite books; but oftener they talked, and Archie heard many a legend of the country-side from the lips that could tell them best.

His father and grandfather were well remembered by many whom they had befriended in time of need; and the lad listened with delight to their praises, and with equal delight repeated them to his aunt and Liliass when he came home.

But there were other things, which Archie spoke of in whispers to his sister when they were away together among the hills,—mysterious hints of their cousin Hugh Blair, and of his mother's troubles with him before he went away. Not that he had much to tell about him, for there was little said; but that little was enough to excite the curiosity and interest of the children with regard to him; and they were never weary of wondering why he went away, and where he was now, and whether he would ever come home again.

“I wonder whether Aunt Janet thinks much about him? I wonder why she never names him to us?” said Archie, one day, after they had been speaking about him.

Liliass was looking very grave.

"I'm sure she often thinks of him. And I don't wonder that she seldom speaks about him, when she can have little that is good to say."

"Maybe she thinks him dead," said Archie.

"No: I don't think that," said Lillas, sadly. And after a moment she added, "Last night the sound of her voice awakened me. She was praying for him; and it minded me of the 'groanings that cannot be uttered.' I am afraid Aunt Janet has troubles we know nothing about."

Yes, Mrs. Blair had troubles which the children did not know of, which they could hardly have comprehended had they known; and, of late, fears for Archie had mingled with them. The remembrance of her utter failure in guiding and governing her own son was ever present with her, filling her with anxiety with regard to Archie's future. She had no fears for Lillas, nor when her brother was a cripple had she fears for him. But now that he was strong and well,—now that he must necessarily be exposed to other influences, some of which could not but be evil, her heart grew sick with a feeling of self-distrust as to her own power to guide him.

It was this which made her listen with something like regret when Archie told of new friends made among the hills. His frank, open nature made him altogether unsuspecting of evil in others; and, knowing him to be easily influenced, she could not but fear that he might be led astray. Night after night, when Archie came home, she listened earnestly to hear the names of those with whom he had met; and, though she never heard anything from the boy's lips or saw anything in his actions to make her fear that he was changing for the worse, she could not feel quite at ease concerning him. For there ever came back to her the thought of her son,—her wandering but still beloved Hugh; and many and earnest were the prayers that ascended both for the guileless child and the erring, sinful man, that through all the snares and temptations of life they might be brought safe home at last.

She could not speak of her fears to Lillas. She could not find it in her heart to lay the burden of this dread upon the child. She was so full of the new happiness of seeing her brother strong and well again, that she could not bear to let the shadow of this cloud fall upon her. It would do no good; and she had really nothing but her fears to tell. So in silence she prayed, night and day, that God would disappoint her fears for Archie, and more than realize his sister's hope for him.

Mrs. Stirling's visits to the cottage did not become less frequent as the summer advanced, and her interest in Lillas seemed to increase with every visit. Not that she had ceased to torment the child with her discontented repinings for the past, or her melancholy forebodings for the future. There was always some subject for comment ready; and Nancy never let pass unimproved an opportunity to say something depressing. But Lillas was learning not to mind her; and this was all the easier to do, now that Archie's ill health could no longer be her theme.

"Oh, ay! he's looking not so ill," said she, one day, while she stood with Lillas at the gate, watching Archie, as he dug in the little garden; "and he's not very lame. If you could only be sure that it wouldn't break out again. Eh me! but he's growing to look awful like his cousin Hugh. It's to be hoped that he won't turn out as he has done."

Lillas gave a startled look towards the house-end, where her aunt was sitting, as she answered, hurriedly:

"Archie's like my father."

"You needna be feared that I'll speak that name loud enough for her to hear," said Nancy, answering Lillas' look rather than her words. "I have more respect for her than that. Poor body! she must carry a sore heart about with her, for all she looks so quiet and contented like."

Lillas sighed. The same thought had come into her own mind many and many a time within the last few months.

"Did my cousin Hugh do anything so very bad?" she asked, looking anxiously into Mrs. Stirling's face.

"I dare say the folk that blame him most have done far worse things than anything they can lay to his charge," said Nancy; "but there's little doubt he did what made him fear to look on his mother's face again, or wherefore should he not have come back? His name has never, to my knowledge, passed her lips from that day till this."

"But Donald Ross, up among the hills, told Archie that folk thought he had 'listed for a soldier, and that he couldna come back again."

“Well, maybe not,” said Nancy. “Far be it from me to seek to make worse what is bad enough already. It's not unlikely. But, as I was saying, Archie's growing awfu' like him, and it is to be hoped he will not take to ill ways. You should have an eye upon him, Liliias, my woman, that he doesn't take up with folk that 'call evil good, and good evil.' It was that was the ruin of Hugh Blair,—poor laddie!”

“Archie sees no one among the hills that can do him harm,” said Liliias, hastily,—“only Donald Ross and the Muirlands shepherds, and now and then a herd-laddie from Alliston. He aye tells us, when he comes home, who he has seen.”

“Eh, woman! I didn't mean to anger you,” exclaimed Nancy. “I declare, your eyes are glancing like two coals. But, if your aunt is wise, she'll put him to some kind of work before long. Laddies like him must aye be about something; and if they are doing no good it's likely they'll be doing evil. Your aunt should know that well enough, without the like of me to tell her.”

“But Archie is such a mere child,” remonstrated Liliias, forgetting for the moment that it was Mrs. Stirling, the grumbler for the country-side, that was speaking. “What ill can he get among the hills? And, besides, what work could he do? It's health for him to wander about among the hills. It makes him strong.”

“You're a child yourself for that matter,” said Nancy; “and I'm thinking what with those children's catechism and work, and one thing and another, you do the most part of a woman's work. And what's to hinder your brother more than you? It would keep him out of harm's way.”

Liliias suffered this conversation to make her uncomfortable for a few days, and then she wisely put it from her. She would not speak to Archie. She would not even seem to distrust him. And still the boy came and went at his pleasure, enjoying his rambles and his intercourse with his new friends, glad to go forth, and glad to come home again, where the sight of his face always made sunshine for his sister. And Mrs. Blair still went about with outward calm, but carrying within her a heavy and anxious heart, as by the sighs and prayers of many a sleepless night, Liliias well knew.

This was the child's one sorrow. Sometimes she longed to speak to her aunt about her cousin, and comfort her by weeping with her; but she never had courage to broach the subject. The wanderer's name had never been mentioned between them; and Liliias had something like a feeling of guilt upon her in hearing, as she could not but hear, the midnight mourning of the stricken mother.

“And to think that this trouble has been upon her for so many years!” she thought to herself, one night, as she lay listening to her aunt's sighs and murmured prayers. “It must be ten years at least; for I have no recollection of my cousin Hugh. And she has carried about this great grief all that time alone, and has sought comfort from no one. Oh, if I could but comfort her!” for Liliias did not know that there are some sorrows to which sympathy adds only bitterness.

Summer brought another pleasure to them all. Their Sabbath journeys over the hills to the kirk of Dunmoor were renewed; and, sitting in her father's seat, and listening to the words of salvation from the lips of her father's friend, Liliias grew more and more into the knowledge of “the peace of God that passeth all understanding.” Although but a child in years, early sorrow had taught her some lessons that childhood seldom learns. The heaviest of their sorrows did not press upon them now. There was not the poverty, the ceaseless toil, the constant and sometimes vain struggle for bread. She could speak of her father and mother calmly now, and Archie was strong and well again. And so the look of patience which her face had worn when her aunt first saw it lying on Archie's pillow in the dim attic room, was changing into a look of quiet content. Yet she was still unlike other children in many respects, though the difference was rather to be felt than seen.

Good James Muir did not speak to her as he did to the manse children or to Archie, but wisely and gravely, as he might have spoken to her aunt. Anne Graham, though a full year the elder, much to her own surprise, and to the surprise of all who knew her self-reliance, found herself deferring to the opinions of Liliias Elder. Not but that she enjoyed, as much as any of them, the simple pleasures that were within their reach; even little Jessie's never-absent laughter was not more full of heartfelt mirth than hers.

But as they came to know Liliias better, they all felt that there was “something beyond.” Even little Jessie said “she was like one that was standing on a sure place, and was not afraid;” and so she was.

One Sabbath morning, in the kirk, Liliias was startled by the sight of familiar faces in the minister's seat, faces

associated in her mind with a bright parlour, and kind words spoken to her there. The quick smile and whisper exchanged by the two lads told her that the Gordon boys had recognised her too.

“That's my father's 'bonny Lily,’” said Robert Gordon to young John Graham, who was looking gravely at the boys' carrying on a whispered conference notwithstanding the reading of the psalm.

And, when the sermon was over, and Lillas, with her aunt and her brother, stood in the kirk-yard, the boys pressed eagerly forward to shake hands with her, and express their joy at seeing her again.

“They are Dr. Gordon's sons, aunt,” said Lillas, in answer to Mrs. Blair's look of surprise. “I saw them that night.” And the vivid remembrance of “that night” made her cheek grow pale.

“I hardly knew you,—you have grown so bonny,” said Robert, gravely. Lillas laughed.

“Come into the manse, and you will see your young friends without interruption,” said kind Mrs. Graham. “Come, Archie.”

And so they passed a pleasant hour in the manse garden. The Gordons had come to pass the summer holidays with their cousins; and they would often come over the hills to see her, they said. They had a very pleasant time sitting on the grass in the shadow of the fir-trees. Even young John Graham, as he paced up and down the walk with a book in his hand, condescended to show a little curiosity as to the subject of their conversation, so earnest did their tones become at last; and John Graham was a college-student, and a miracle of wisdom in his sister's eyes. He wondered if it was all “Sabbath talk” that engrossed them so much; and his wonder changed to serious doubts, as his little sister Jessie's voice rose above the voices of all the rest.

But wise John was mistaken this time. The subject that engrossed them so much was at the same moment engrossing good James Muir and his brother elders on the other side of the kirk-yard wall. It was the sermon and the minister they were discussing.

Jessie was eloquent on the subject. Of course there never was such a preacher as her grandfather,—not even the great Dr. Chalmers himself, the child declared; and all the rest agreed. Even Robert Gordon, whose taste, if the truth must be told, did not lie at all in the direction of sermons, declared that he had not been very weary that day in the kirk. Jessie looked a good deal scandalized at this faint praise; but it was much from Master Robert, if she had but known all.

Then the question was started whether John would ever preach as well; and John had to pay the usual penalty of listeners, for all agreed that this was not to be thought of, at least, not for a long time to come.

This was the beginning of more frequent intercourse between Lillas and Archie and the manse children. Lillas was not often with them at first, for the “harvest-play” of the village children did not come so soon as the town-boys' holidays, and she could seldom be prevailed upon to leave her aunt alone in the school. But Archie's company soon became indispensable to the lads in their daily rambles among the hills. He had explored the country to some purpose; and not even the manse boys knew so many places of interest as he did, and he was often their leader in their long excursions.

It was a point of honour with Archie never to confess that he was tired while he could stand; and it was only a fortunate chance that prevented these long-continued wanderings from being an injury to him. They went one day to the top of the highest hill in the neighbourhood. Archie, as usual, led the way; and they had got well on their return, when he was obliged to confess to himself (though not to his companions) that he could go no farther.

They had just left the hills, and stood on the turnpike-road between Dunmoor and Kirklands, the other lads to go to the manse, and Archie to go home, a good two miles away yet. It seemed to him that he never could go so far; and, only waiting till the other lads were out of sight, he threw himself down on the grass at the roadside, utterly exhausted. The sound of wheels startled him in a little time, and soon John Graham, in the manse gig, made his appearance. He drew up at the sight of Archie, and, in some surprise, asked him what ailed him.

“Nothing,” said Archie, rising painfully. “We have been at the head of the Colla Hill; and I'm afraid I'm tired: that's all.”

“And that's enough, I think,” said John; for the lad's limbs were trembling under him. “Really these lads are very inconsiderate. You should not have let them lead you such a chase.”

“It was me that led them,” said Archie,—not exactly liking Master John's tone. “And I'll soon be rested again.”

But the horse's head was already turned, and John's strong arm lifted the weary boy to the seat at his side, and he was soon safely set down at the cottage-door. But it was some time before Archie appeared among the boys again, so long that John, after taking his brother Davie severely to task for his thoughtlessness, one fine morning walked over the hills to see if Archie were really ill.

“Ill? No! What should make me ill?” But Archie looked pale and weary, in spite of his denial. He was upon the turf seat at the end of the house; and, sitting down beside him, John took up the book he had been reading. It was a volume of Flavel.



TIRED OUT.

“Have you read much of this?” John asked, wondering at his taste. “Do you like it?”

“I haven't read much of it to-day; but Lilies and I read it last winter to my aunt, and I liked it well, not so well to read to myself, though, as some others.”

“What others?” asked John.

“Oh, the History of Scotland, and the Tales of the Covenanters, and some books of poetry that my aunt has got. But I like Flavel too. Don't you?”

“Oh, yes,” replied John smiling, and a little confused. “To tell the truth, I have not read much of him. Tell me what you think of him. Of this, for instance.” And he read the quaint heading of a chapter in the book he held in his hand.

It never came into Archie's mind that young John Graham was “just trying him,” as boys say; and, in perfect simplicity and good faith, he gave an abstract of the chapter, with comments of his aunt's, and some of his own upon it. It was not very clear or very complete, it is true; but it was enough to change considerably the expression of John's face as he listened.

This was the beginning of a long conversation. John Graham had laid out for himself three hours of hard reading after his bracing tramp over the hills; but it was past noon when he went in to see Mrs. Blair before he went away. He did not think the morning wasted; though in general, like all hard students, he was a miser respecting his time. When he was going away, he offered Archie any of his books, and said he would help him to understand them while he stayed at home.

“That won't be long now, however,” he added. “But why don't you go to school?”

“I should like to go to Dunmoor parish-school with Davie; but my aunt thinks it's too far.”

“Well, I think, after your scramble to Colla's Head, and the ten good miles besides, that you walked the other day, you might be able to walk to Dunmoor school. It is not far, if you were only stronger.”

Oh, Archie was strong; quite strong enough for that, if only his aunt and Liliias thought so; and maybe they might, if John would speak to them about it.

And so it was arranged; and when John went back to college and the Gordon boys went home, Archie found himself at David Graham's side, under the firm and not ungentle rule of the Dunmoor parish schoolmaster. Liliias' joy was scarcely less than his own; and the delight of welcoming him home at night quite repaid her for his absence during the day.

As for her, she began again the business of teaching with wonderful cheerfulness, and went on with wonderful success. Mrs. Blair's office of schoolmistress was becoming hers only in name, she declared; for Liliias did all that was to be done, while she sat quietly in her arm-chair, knitting or sewing, only now and then administering a word of caution or reproof to the little ones about her. The children loved their young teacher dearly. Not one of them but would have travelled miles to do her a pleasure; and over two or three her influence for good was very easily seen.

When the summer and autumn work was fairly over, Elsie Ray came back again to the school; and Elsie was a very different girl now from the shy, awkward, ill-clad creature who had come there a stranger last year. Naturally affectionate, as well as bright, she had from the first attached herself to Liliias in a peculiar manner, and, to please her, she had done her utmost to overcome her faults and improve herself in every way. Her clothes, of her own making, were now as neat as they had been before untidy. Her leisure time during the summer's herding had not been misemployed, and she was fast acquiring the reputation of being the best reader, writer, and sewer in the school; and no small pride did she feel in her acquirements. In short, as Mrs. Stirling declared, “she had become a decent, purpose-like lass, and Liliias Elder should have the credit of it.” Of the last fact Elsie was as well persuaded as Nancy was; and her gratitude and devotion to Liliias were in proportion. No sacrifice would she have considered too great to give proof of her gratitude to Liliias; and her good will stood her friend in good stead before the winter was over.

CHAPTER VI.

CLOUDS WITH SILVER LININGS.



LILIAS' troubles were not over yet. Even now a cloud was gathering, little, indeed, at first, and distant, but destined to overshadow her for many a weary month. Indeed, there were two, as Liliias sometimes thought, while she stood watching for her brother's homecoming beneath the rowan-tree in the glen. The way over the hills was hardly safe in the darkness, and the days were growing short again, and Archie could seldom get home by daylight now. She began to fear that it would be as their aunt had more than once hinted,—that he must stay at home till spring.

For herself, Liliias would have liked nothing half so well as a renewal of last winter's pleasures; but she was by no means sure that Archie would agree with her.

“He has got a taste of the school, and nothing else will content him now. And, besides, so clever as the master says he is, it would be such a pity to take him away just as he has well begun.”

But how to help it was the question; and Liliias revolved it in her mind so constantly that it quite depressed and wearied her at last, and a feeling akin to despondency began to oppress her. She did not speak to Archie of any change. He went and came, day by day, rejoicing in the new sources of delight that his books and his school afforded, evidently believing that his plans were settled for the winter; and Liliias would not disturb him a day sooner than was necessary, and so she bore her burden alone. In a little while she found that she never need have borne it at all. The disappointment that she dreaded for Archie never came; and this was the way it was averted.

It was Saturday afternoon,—a half-holiday in the school. The children had gone home, and there was quietness in the cottage. Liliias had given the last stroke of neatness to the little room. The dinner-table was set, and they were waiting for Archie. Liliias went to the gate and strained her eyes in the direction of the hill-path; and, with a slight sigh of disappointment, she hurried towards the house again. A strange voice close by her side startled her.

“You needn't spoil your eyes looking for Archie to-day, for I have given him leave to go with Davie to the manse, and I dare say Mrs. Graham winna let him want his dinner; and I'll take mine with you. You can get Archie any time, but it's not often that I am seen in any house but my own. You needn't look so disappointed.”

Liliias' smile quickly chased the shadow from her face, as she cheerfully invited the schoolmaster to come in; and, stooping low, he entered.

Mrs. Blair had known Peter Butler all his life, and she had often received him in a very different place from the low room into which he passed, but never with a more kindly welcome than she gave him now. She had none of that kind of pride which would make her shrink from a necessary exposure of her poverty to eyes that had seen her prosperity; and it was with no trace of embarrassment that she rose, and offered him the arm-chair to rest himself in after his long walk; but he declined it with respectful deference.

“Many thanks, Mrs. Blair, ma'am,” said he, seating himself on the end of a form near the door. Placing his hat beneath it, he took from his pocket a black silk cap, and deliberately settled it on his head.

“You'll excuse me, ma'am: I have used myself to wear this in the school, till it wouldna be safe to go without it. At my time of life, health mustna be trifled with, you ken.”

Mrs. Blair begged the master to make himself comfortable; and there was a moment's pause.

“I have taken the liberty to give yon laddie Archie a play this afternoon. I would like to have a few words with you concerning him, if you have no objection.”

Mrs. Blair eagerly assented, and Liliias' hand was arrested in the act of lifting the dinner from the hearth to the table. And she stood gazing at the master with a look so entreating as slightly to discompose him.

“It's not ill I have to tell of him, lassie. You need not look so like frightened.”

Lilias set down the dish in some confusion.

“And if you'll allow me to suggest, ma'am, you'll take your dinner while it's in season. My news will keep.”

The master had dined before he left home; but, with a delicacy that would have done honour to a man of greater pretension, he accepted Mrs. Blair's invitation as frankly as it was frankly given. A humble meal it was, and the master's eyes grew dim, remembering other days, as, reverently lifting his cap from his broad, bald brow, he prayed for God's blessing on the offered mercies.

During the meal, Mr. Butler talked fluently enough on many subjects; but when the dinner was fairly over, and Mrs. Blair and Lilias sat still, evidently waiting to hear what he had to say, he seemed strangely at a loss for words, and broke down several times in making a beginning. At last he said,—

“Well, Mrs. Blair, the short and the long of it is this. I have a favour to ask from you. You see, it's dull enough down at my house at this time of the year, and I find it long sitting by myself when the bairns have gone home. I have a certain solace in my books, it's true; but I begin to think there is some sense in the wise man's declaration, that 'much study is a weariness to the flesh.' At any rate, it comes to that at my time of life. So I wish you would spare that laddie of yours to me for awhile, and I'll promise you that what will be for my good will not be for his ill. That's what I have to say.”

There was a moment's silence; and then Mrs. Blair thanked him for his proposal, and for the manner in which it had been made. It was very kind in him, she said, to put the matter in that way, as though the obligation would be on his side. But it would be a great interruption to the quiet which she knew he valued so much, to have a lad like Archie always coming and going about him, and she doubted whether it would be right to accept his generous offer; though she feared the short days and the distance by the road would keep Archie away from the school for a few weeks at least. The master listened with great attention, and said:

“To your first remark, Mrs. Blair, ma'am, with all due deference, I must say, I put it in that light because it's the true light, and I see not well how I could put it in any other. And as for his being an interruption, if I should find him so at any time I would but to bid him hold his peace or go to his bed, or I could send him over to the manse to Davie yonder. He'll be no interruption to him, I'll warrant. And as to his biding at home, it must by no means be. He has just got well begun in more things than one, and there is no saying what might be the effect of putting a stop to it all. He might not take to his books so well again. Not that I think that, either; but it would be an awful pity to hinder him. He'll do himself and me credit yet, if he has the chance.”

Lilias smiled at these praises of her brother, and Mrs. Blair asked:

“Really and truly, Mr. Butler, apart from your wish to help him for his father's sake, do you wish for your own sake to have the boy to bide with you for awhile?”

“Really and truly for my own sake. I consider the obligation on my side. But just for the sake of argument, Mrs. Blair, ma'am, we'll suppose it to be otherwise. Do you mind the little house that once stood in Pentlands Park, and how many of my mother's dark days your presence brightened there? And do you not mind, when I was a reckless laddie, well nigh worsted in the battle of life, that first your father, and then your brother, took me by the hand and warded off the sore blows of poverty and neglect? And do you think I'm too bold in seeking an opportunity to show that I didn't forget, though I can never repay? Is it too great a favour for me to ask, Mrs. Blair?”

The master's voice had nearly failed him more than once while he was speaking. He was very much in earnest; and to what he had said, Mrs. Blair could have only one reply. Turning to Lilias, she said:

“Well, my dear, shall it be?”

The master had, with a few exceptions, a sort of friendly contempt for all womankind. With regard to “lassie bairns” there was *no* exception; and he was by no means pleased that the answer to his question should be referred to one of these. But Lilias' answer appeased him.

“Oh, yes,—surely, aunt. It will be much for Archie's good. And, besides,” she added, with a little hesitation, “I don't wonder that the master wants Archie for his own sake.”

“A sensible like lassie, that,” said the master to himself, looking at her with some such curiosity as he would have

looked at a strange beetle in his garden path, "that is wise like."

"Yes, if the master thought about Archie, as you do," said Mrs. Blair. "But have you counted the cost? It will be a sad lonely winter to you without your brother, Lily."

Lilias considered a moment, and drew a long breath.

"But it will be so much better for him; and he will come home sometimes."

"That he shall," said the master, "at regular times, on which you shall agree between you, and at no other,—that you need not be troubling yourselves needlessly about him. And he shall come in time, too, that there need be no waste of good eyesight watching for him."

And so it was settled. But Archie was by no means so delighted with the arrangement as Lilias had anticipated. He could hardly be persuaded that he could not in the winter walk backwards and forwards over the hills, as he had done in the fine days of summer and autumn. But when he was fairly settled in his little closet in the schoolmaster's quiet home, with a table full of books, and time to read them, and his friend Davie coming and going at his pleasure, he settled down with great content.

He did not miss his sister as she missed him. Poor Lilias! Many and many a time, during the first week of their separation, she asked herself if she had indeed counted the cost. She accused herself of selfishness in regretting a change which was so much for his good, and strove by attention to her duties to quiet the pain at her heart.

"I ought to be glad and thankful," said she to herself, again and again,—“glad and thankful;” but the dull pain ached on, and the days seemed like weeks; and when Saturday afternoon came at last, and Archie rushed in, with a joyful shout, a few minutes before he was expected, she surprised herself and him by a great flood of tears.

"Lilias, my child, what ails you?" said her aunt; while Archie stood gazing at her in silent consternation.

It was some time before she found her voice to speak.

"It's nothing, aunt; indeed it's nothing, Archie. I had no thought of crying. But I think my tears have been gathering all the week, and the sight of you made them run over in spite of me."

"Lily," said Archie gravely, "I won't go to the school again. You have been wearying for me, Lily."

It had been something more than "wearying,"—that dull pain that had ached at Lilias' heart since they parted. It was like the mother's unappeasable yearning for her lost darling. Her cheek seemed to have grown pale and thin even in these six days. Archie stood with one hand thrown over her neck, while with the other he pushed back the fair hair that had fallen on her face, and his eyes looked lovingly and gravely into hers. The tears still ran fast over her cheeks; but she forced back the sobs that were ready to burst out again; and in a little while she said, with lips that quivered while they smiled:

"Nonsense, Archie! You must go to the school. I haven't wearied much: have I, aunt? Every thing has been just the same this week, except that you didn't come home."

"A woeful exception," said her aunt to herself; but aloud she said, "Yes; just the same. We have missed you sadly; but we couldn't think of keeping you at home on that account. How do you like biding with the master?"

"Oh, I liked it well, after the first night or two. I have been twice at the manse, and Davie has been with me; and the master has more books than I could read in years and years; and I have had a letter from John Graham. It came with one to Davie."

And soon Lilias was listening to his history of the week's events with as much interest as he took in giving it. She strove by her cheerfulness to make Archie forget her reception of him. Indeed, it did not require a very great effort to be cheerful now. Her heart had been wonderfully lightened by the shedding of the tears that had been gathering all the week; and she soon laughed heartily over the merry stories he had to tell about his sworn friend Davie Graham and the master.

But Archie did not forget. That night, as they stood by the rowan-tree, looking down on the foaming waters beneath, he said:

“Lily, I don't believe Davie Graham's sisters love him as you love me.”

“They wouldn't need. Davie Graham's not like you. Besides, they have other brothers, and I have only you.”

“Yes; that may make a difference. But I'm sure I've been more trouble to you than brothers generally are to their sisters. I wonder you don't tire of it, Lily.”

“That's what makes me miss you so much. Oh, Archie! I thought the week would never be done.”

“It can't be right for me to bide at Dunmoor, when you miss me so much, Lily. I ought to give up the school for awhile, I think.”

But Liliass would not hear of such a thing. Stay from the school for her sake! No, indeed. That would never do, when he needed to go so much, and when she had been wishing for it for his sake so long! And, besides, it would be as much for her good as his, in the end. She would far rather have him a great scholar by-and-bye than to have his company now.

“If Aunt Janet were only well again!” she added, after a little pause; and a shadow passed over her face as she spoke.

This was the cloud that had been gathering and darkening; and it was not very long before that which Liliass had feared came upon her. Her aunt grew worse and worse; and when Christmas-time came round, she was not able to leave her bed. Privations to which she had been little accustomed during the greater part of her life were beginning to tell on her now. At first she was only feeble and incapable of exertion; but her illness soon assumed a more decided form, and a severe rheumatic attack rendered her, for a time, quite helpless. She was always cheerful, and strove to comfort Liliass by telling her that, though her illness was painful, it was not dangerous, and when the spring came round she might hope to be strong and well again. But months must pass before then, and the heart of Liliass sickened at the thought of all her aunt must suffer. Even Archie's absence came to seem but a small matter in comparison with this greater trial. By every means in her power she strove to soothe her sufferings; but, alas! it was little she could do, and slowly the winter passed away.

“Oh, so differently from the last!” thought Liliass, many a time.

It was long a matter of earnest discussion between them whether the school should be kept up through the winter, or not. Mrs. Blair was fearful that it would be too much for the child; but, hoping day by day to be better, and able to take her accustomed place among them, she yielded to Liliass' entreaties, and consented that they should come for awhile.

Liliass made a new discovery about this time. After her aunt's illness the housekeeping affairs fell altogether into her hands; and she was startled to find how very small the sum was that must cover their expenses from year's end to year's end. The trifle received from the school-children, paltry as it was, seemed quite too precious to be given up. Her aunt's comforts were few, but they must be fewer still without this. No: the school must be kept up, at what cost of labour and pains to her.

“Let me just try it a while, aunt,” she pleaded, “I am sure I can get on with you to advise me; and the days will seem shorter with the bairns coming and going.”

And so her aunt yielded, though only half convinced that she did right. There is no better promoter of cheerfulness than constant and earnest occupation; and so Liliass found it. She had no time during the day to think of the troubles that seemed gathering over them, and at night she was too weary to do so. But, though weary in body, her patience and energy never flagged. Indeed, never were so many children so easily taught and governed before. The gentle firmness of their young teacher wrought wonders among them. Her grave looks were punishment enough for the most unruly, and no greater reward of good behaviour could be given than to be permitted to go on an errand or do her some other little favour when school was over.

But her chief dependence for help was on Elsie Ray. Her gratitude for Liliass' kindness when she first came to the school was unbounded; and she could not do too much to prove it. It was Elsie who brought in the water from the well and the fuel from the heap. It was Elsie who went far and near for anything which the varying appetite of the invalid might crave. Liliass quite learned to depend on her; and the day was darker and longer than usual, that failed to bring Elsie to the school.

Mrs. Stirling's visits, too, became more frequent as the winter wore away; and there was seldom a Saturday afternoon,

be it raining or shining, that failed to bring her to the cottage. Nor was she by any means unwelcome there. For Nancy could be very helpful, when she willed it; and, by some strange witchcraft or other, Lillas had crept into her murmuring, though not unkind heart. It is true that she always came and went with the same ominous shake of the head, and the same dismal prophecy that, "unless she was much mistaken, Mrs. Blair would never set her foot to the ground again;" but she strove in various ways to soothe the pain of the sufferer, and her strong arms accomplished many a task that Lillas in her weakness must have left undone. Once, in Lillas' absence from the cottage, she collected and carried off the used linen of the family which had been accumulating for weeks, and quite resented the child's exclamation of surprise and gratitude when she brought them back done up in her very best style. "She had done it to please herself, as the most of folks do favours; and there need be no such ado made about it. If she had thought it a trouble, she would have left it alone."

She was never weary of suggesting new remedies for Mrs. Blair's complaint, and grumbled by the hour if each in turn had not what she called a fair trial. Fortunately, her remedies were not of the "kill or cure" kind. If they could do no good, they could do little harm; and Mrs. Blair was generally disposed to submit to a trial of them.

In all her intercourse with Lillas there was a singular blending of respectful tenderness with the grumbling sourness that had become habitual to her. The child's unfailing energy and patience were a source of never-failing admiration to her: yet she always spoke to her as if she thought she needed a great deal of encouragement, and not a little reproof and advice, to keep her in the right way.

"You mustn't grumble, Lillas, my dear, that you have to bear the yoke in your youth. I dare say you need all you're getting. Many a better woman has had more to bear. We all have our share of trouble at one time or another. Who knows but you may see prosperous days yet,—you and your aunt together? Though indeed that's more than I think," she added, with the old ominous shake of the head; "but, grumble here or grumble there, it will make little difference in the end."

Lillas would listen sometimes with a smile, sometimes with tears in her wistful eyes, but always with a respect which was all the more grateful to Nancy that it was not often given by those on whom she bestowed her advice.

But notwithstanding the kindness of friends, and (what Lillas valued even more) the weekly visits of Archie, the afternoon walks, and the long evening spent in talking over all that the week had brought to each, the winter passed away slowly and heavily. To the children in the school, Lillas always appeared in all respects the same; as indeed she was during school-hours. But when the little ones had gone home, and her household duties were all over, when there was no immediate call for exertion, her strength and spirits flagged. Sitting in the dim light of the peat fire, her weary eyes would close, and her work would fall upon her lap. It is true, the lowest tone of her aunt's voice would awaken her again, as indeed it would at any hour of the night; but, waking still weary and unrefreshed, no wonder that the power to step lightly and speak cheerfully was sometimes more than she could command. She was always gentle and mindful of her aunt's comfort; but as the spring drew near she grew quiet and grave, and her laugh, which had been such pleasant music in the cottage, was seldom heard.

"You never sing now, Lily," said her aunt, one night, as Lillas was busily but silently putting things to rights after the children had gone home.

"Don't I?" said Lillas, standing still. "Well, maybe not, though I had not thought about it. I am waiting for the birds to begin again, I suppose; and that won't be long now."

But spring seemed long in coming. March passed over, and left matters no better in the cottage. Indeed, it was the worst time of all. The damp days and bleak winds aggravated Mrs. Blair's illness, and increased her suffering. The young lambs and calves at home needed Elsie's care, and she could seldom come now; and Lillas' burden grew heavier every day. Two rainy Saturdays in succession had prevented Archie's coming home; and time seemed to move on leaden wings.

"You have need of patience, Lily," said her aunt one night, as the child seated herself on a low stool and laid her head down on the side of the bed.

"Have I, aunt?" said she, raising herself quickly; for she thought her aunt's words were intended to convey reproof.

"Yes; and God is giving it to you, my child. It ought to be some comfort to you, love, that you are doing good in the weary life you are leading. You are not living in vain, my child."

"I am quite happy, aunt," said Liliás, coming near, and speaking in a low, wondering voice.

"Blessed with the peace *He* gives his own through his dear Son our Saviour: thank God for that!" said her aunt, as she returned her caress.

March passed and April too, and May came warm and beautiful, at last. It brought the blessing so earnestly longed for by the weary Liliás,—comparative health to her aunt. Although she was not quite well yet, she was no longer confined to her bed; and, with some assistance, could walk about the house, and even in the little garden, now bright with violets and daisies. "She had aged wonderfully," Mrs. Stirling said; as indeed she had. Liliás could see that, but she had great faith in the "bonny summer days," and thought that now their troubles were nearly at an end.

The return of spring had not made the schoolmaster willing to part with Archie, and he was seldom at home more than once or twice a week. But, though Liliás still missed him, she had long ago persuaded herself that it would be selfishness on her part to wish it otherwise. It was for Archie's good; and that was more than enough to reconcile her to his continued absence.

But the pleasant May days did not make Liliás her old self again. She did not begin to sing with the birds; though she tried sometimes. The old burden was there, and she could not. Often she accused herself of ingratitude, and wondered what ailed her, that she could not be so cheerful as she used to be. The feeling of weariness and depression did not wait now till the children had gone home. Sometimes it came upon her as she sat in the midst of them, and the hum of their voices would die away into a dull murmur, and she would fall into a momentary forgetfulness of time and place. Sometimes it came upon her as an inexpressible longing for rest and quiet, and to get away from it all for a little while.

Her spirits were unequal; and it required a daily and unceasing effort to go about quietly, as she used to do. More than once she startled herself and others by sudden and violent bursts of weeping, for which, as she truly said, she could give no reason. In vain she expostulated with herself; in vain she called herself ungrateful and capricious. The weary weight would not be reasoned away.

At length the knowledge that she was over-tired, and not so well as usual, relieved her heart a little; but not very long. She was ill; and that was the cause of all her wretched feelings. She was not selfish and ungrateful. She would be her old self again when she grew better.

Yes; but would she ever grow better? and when? and how? Never in the school. She knew now that she had been doing too much for her strength,—that the longing to get away from the noise and turmoil did not arise from dislike of her work, but from inability to perform it. And, yet, what could she do even now? Her aunt was not able to take her old place in the school. Must it be given up? They needed the small sum it brought in as much as ever they had done, and more. Archie was fast outgrowing the clothes so carefully preserved; and where could he get more? And there were other things, comforts which her aunt needed, which must be given up, unless the school could be kept on.

She could not go to service now. She could not leave her aunt. If she could only get something to do that could be done at home. Or if she could only be a herd-girl, like Elsie Ray, or keep the sheep of some of the farmers, so that she might come home at night. Then she would soon get strong, and, maybe, have the children again after the harvest. Oh, if she only had some one to tell her what to do! The thought more than once came into her mind to write to Dr. Gordon; but she did not. He could not advise her. He could help them in no other way than to send them money. No: something else must be tried first. Oh, if she only knew what to do!

It would not have solaced Liliás much to know that the very same thoughts were hourly in the mind of her aunt. None of Mrs. Blair's friends knew the exact amount of her yearly income. None of them knew how small the sum was that the widow's little family had to maintain them, or imagined the straits to which they were sometimes reduced. Mrs. Blair blamed herself for not having done before what now seemed inevitable. She ought to have asked assistance, alms she called it, before it came to this pass with them; and yet she had done what she thought was for the best. She had hoped that her illness would not last long,—that when spring came all would go on as usual again.

But this could not be now. She had watched Liliás with great anxiety. She had seen the struggle which it had sometimes cost her to get through the days; and she knew that it could not go on long. Her own strength came back, but slowly. She could not take Liliás' place; and the children must go. Some change must be made, even if it involved the necessity of Liliás' leaving her for a while. Indeed, it might have been better, she sometimes thought, if she had never sought to keep the child with her. It would be hard to part from her now.

Lilias, in the mean time, had come to the same resolution. The school must be given up, and she must tell her aunt and Archie; but first she must think of something else, weeding, or herding, or going out to service. Suddenly a new thought presented itself. It would not have won for her much credit for wisdom in the parish, this idea of hers; but Lilias only wondered that it had not occurred to her before.

“I’ll ask Mrs. Stirling’s advice. If she’s not down before Saturday, I’ll go up and speak to her. She’ll surely know of something that I can do.”

CHAPTER VII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

MRS. Stirling's cottage stood not far from the high-road that leads to Dunmoor, at the distance of a mile and half from Kirklands. It was Nancy's own, and though humble and small, it was yet a very comfortable abode; for her reputation for neatness and order was as well established as her reputation for grumbling. There were no evidences of a refined taste about the place; but perfect order prevailed. There was not a weed in the garden without, nor a speck in the house within. Every article made of wood was as white as soap and sand or as bright as turpentine and wax and much rubbing could make it; and every piece of metal was dazzling to behold.

There were some relics of former grandeur, too: for Mrs. Stirling had not always lived in so humble a home. Her husband had been prosperous in a small way, but the property he left had been sadly mismanaged after his death, or there would have been a larger portion for his widow. But she had enough to supply her simple wants; and there were those among her neighbours so uncharitable as to say that she enjoyed the opportunity for murmuring which its loss afforded, more than she could have enjoyed the possession of twice her means.

"Mrs. Stirling might be as happy as the day is long, with nobody to trouble her from one year's end to the other," was the frequent remark of many a toil-worn mother, fighting with poverty and cares, in the midst of many children. Yet none of them would have changed her life of care for Nancy's solitary comfort. Not that Nancy did not enjoy life in her way. She enjoyed greatly putting things to rights and keeping things in order. She enjoyed her garden and her neighbours' good-natured envy on account of its superiority to their own. And, much more than people supposed, she enjoyed doing a good turn to any one who really needed it. It is true that her favours were, as a general thing, conferred ungraciously; but even those who had the least patience with her infirmities of temper availed themselves of her good offices, acknowledging that, after all, "her bark was worse than her bite."



A VISIT TO NANCY STIRLING.

During the last few months of their intercourse, Liliast had seen comparatively little of Mrs. Stirling's characteristic ungraciousness, and she felt very grateful to her for her many kindnesses during the winter. Unconsciously to herself, in seeking her advice she was making the return which her friend could best appreciate.

Mrs. Stirling was standing at the door, with her water-bucket in her hand, as Liliast came in sight that Saturday afternoon.

“Eh! yon's Liliass Elder coming up the hill. What can bring her here? I don't know the day when I have seen her so far from home. Eh, but she's a bonny, genteel little lassie! There's no doubt of that.”

It could not have been her apparel that called forth Mrs. Stirling's audible acknowledgment of Liliass' gentility; for her black frock was faded and scant, and far too short, though the last tuck had been let down in the skirt; and her little straw bonnet was not of this nor of last year's fashion. But Nancy's declaration was not a mistake, for all these disadvantages. Her greeting was characteristic.

“What made you come up the hill at that pace, you thoughtless lassie? Anybody to see you might think you had breath enough and to spare; and, if I'm not mistaken, you need it all.”

Liliass laughed as she shook hands, and then sat down wearily on the door-step.

“Ah, sit down and rest yourself. You'll be going to meet your brother, or, maybe, to take your tea at the manse?” said Mrs. Stirling, inquiringly.

“No: Archie's not coming home till the evening. He's going to Broyra with Davie Graham. I'm going no farther to-day. I came to see you, Mrs. Stirling. I want you to advise me.”

Nancy would not acknowledge to herself, and certainly she would not acknowledge to Liliass, that she was a good deal surprised and flattered by this announcement; and she merely said:

“Well, sit still and rest yourself first. I'm going down to the burn to get a drop of soft water to make my tea. It makes it best. Sit still and rest; for you look weary.”

Weary she was, too weary even to take in the lovely scene before her, the hills and valleys in their fresh May garments. Far away on the dusty highway a traveller was approaching; and her eyes fastened themselves mechanically upon him. Sometimes he lingered, and looked back over the way he had come, and then hurried on, as though his business would not brook delay. Still watching him as he advanced, Liliass idly wondered whence he came, and whither he was going, and whether it was hope or fear that urged him to such speed.

Then she thought of the many travellers on the highway of life, weary and ready to faint with the journey; and, closing her eyes, she strove to send a thought over her own uncertain future. She could see only a little way before her. The school must be given up; but what was to come after, she could not tell. She could think of no plan to bring about what she most wished,—the power to do something and yet stay at home with her aunt. Change and separation must come, and she could not look beyond these; and then she sighed, as she had done many a time before:

“Oh, if I were only strong and well again!”

So occupied was she with her thoughts that she had not noticed the return of Mrs. Stirling from the brook, and was only made aware of it when she put a cut-glass goblet filled with water in her hand. A very beautiful goblet it was, no doubt equal to the one for which the Roman emperor, in the story, paid a small fortune; and you may be sure it was a great occasion in Mrs. Stirling's eyes that brought it from the cupboard in the corner. No lips save those of the minister had touched the brim for many a month.

But Liliass was too much occupied with her own thoughts to notice the unwonted honour; and, strange to say, the slight was not resented. Placing the glass in Liliass' hand, Mrs. Stirling went into the house again.

As Liliass raised it to her lips, her eyes fell again upon the approaching stranger toiling along the dusty road, and her hand was arrested. He had again slackened his pace, and his face was turned full upon Liliass' as he drew near. Upon it care or grief, or it might be crime, had left deep traces. Now it wore a wild and anxious look, that startled Liliass, as, instead of passing along the high-road, he rapidly came up the garden-path towards her.

“Can you tell me if I am on the high-road to Kirklands?” he asked, as he drew near.

“Yes: go straight on. It is not much more than a mile from this place.”

He did not turn to go when she had answered him, but gazed for a moment earnestly into her face, and then said:

“Perhaps you can tell me——But no: I will not ask. I shall know the worst soon enough.”

The look of pain deepened in his face, and his very lips grew pale as he spoke.

“You are ill!” exclaimed Liliias, eagerly offering him the water she held in her hand. He drank a little, and giving back the glass, thanked her and went away. But before he had gone far he turned again, and, coming close to Liliias, said in a low, hoarse voice:

“Child, I see the look of heaven's peace on your face. Your wish must bring good to one like me. Bid me God-speed!”

“God speed you!” said Liliias, reverently, and wondering much. “And God avert the evil that you dread!”

She watched while he continued in sight, forgetting, for the time, her own troubles in pity for his.

“There are so many troubles in life,” she thought; “and each one's own seems worst to bear. When will it all end?”

Poor, drooping Lily! She had sat so long in the shadow of care that she was in danger of forgetting that there were lightsome places on the earth; and “When will it end?” came often to her lips now. Not that she was growing impatient under it; but she felt herself so weak to do or to endure.

“If I only were strong and well again! If God would only make me well again, and show me what to do!”

Mrs. Stirling's voice startled her at last.

“Come into the house, Liliias, my dear. There's a cold wind creeping round the hill, and the ground is damp yet. You mustn't sit longer there.”

She placed a seat for her in the bright little kitchen.

“I won't put you into the parlour; for a fire's pleasant yet, May though it be. Sit down here, and I'll be through with my baking in a few minutes.”

The kettle was already singing on the hearth, and fresh cakes were toasting at the fire. After the usual Saturday tidying-up, the room was “like a new pin;” and Liliias' eyes expressed her admiration as she looked about her. Nancy hastened her work and finished it, and as she seated herself on the other side of the hearth, she said:

“Well, my dear, what were you thinking to ask me?”

In a few words, Liliias told her all her trouble: how, though the spring had come, her aunt was by no means well yet, nor able to take charge of the school again; how she sometimes felt she was growing ill herself, at least she was sometimes so weary that she feared she could not go on long. Indeed, she tried not to be weary, but she could not help it. The feeling would come upon her, and then she grew dazed and stupid among the children; and she must try and get something else to do. This was what she wanted to be advised about.

By a strong effort, in her capacity of adviser, Nancy was able to keep back the words that came to the tip of her tongue:—“I knew it. Anybody might have seen the upshot. To put a lassie like that to do the work of a strong woman! What could one expect?”

She did not speak aloud, however, but rose and mended the fire under the tea-kettle, asking, as she sat down again:

“And what are you thinking of doing, my dear?”

“It's not that I'm really ill,” continued Liliias, eagerly. “I think it's because I have been within-doors so much. If I could get something to do in the open air, I should soon be as well as ever again. I can't go to service now, because I must stop at home with my aunt at night. She can't be left. But I thought if I could be a herd-girl like Elsie Ray, or get weeding to do, or light field-work, or something——” And she looked so eagerly and so wistfully that Nancy was fain to betake herself to mending the fire again. For there was a strange, remorseful feeling stirring not unkindly at Nancy's heart. To use her own words, she “had taken just wonderfully to this old-fashioned child.” Her patience, her energy, her unselfishness, her devotion to her aunt, had ever excited her admiration and respect. But that there was “a good thick layer of pride” for all these good qualities to rest upon, Nancy never doubted.

“And why not? Who has better right? The lassie is bonny and wise, and has good blood and a good name. Few have so much to be proud of. And if Mrs. Blair thinks it's more becoming in her brother's daughter to teach children the

catechism than to go out to common service, who can blame her that mind her youth and middle age?"

Indeed, it had always been a matter of congratulation to Mrs. Stirling that this "leaven of pride" prevented Liliass' absolute perfection; but now, to see "that delicate lassie, so bonny and gentle, more fit for the manse parlour or the drawing-room at Pentlands than any other place,"—to see her so utterly unmindful of pride or station, wishing so eagerly, for the sake of those she loved, to become a herd-girl or a field-labourer, quite disarranged all Nancy's ideas. By another great effort, she checked the expression of her feelings, and asked:

"And what does your aunt say to all this?"

"Oh, I have said nothing to her yet. It would only trouble her; and if I can get nothing else to do, I must keep the children till the 'harvest-play' comes. That won't be so very long now."

"But, dear me, lassie! it must be that you have awful little to live on, if the few pence you could earn would make a difference," said Nancy, forgetting, in her excitement, her resolution to say nothing rashly. "Surely it's not needful that you should slave yourself that way."

"My aunt would not like me to speak about it. But I ought to do all I can; and I would like herding best."

Nancy's patience was ebbing fast.

"Well, lass, you've sought advice from me, and you shall get it. You're just as fit for herding as you are for breaking stones. Now, just be quiet, my dear. What do you ken about herding, but what you have learned beneath Elsie Ray's plaid on a summer's afternoon? And what good could you do your aunt,—away before four in the morning, and not home till dark at night, as you would need to be?"

The last stroke told.

"I could do little, indeed," thought Liliass; but she did not speak, and soon Nancy said:

"As for light field-labour, if such a thing was to be found in the country-side, which is not my thought, your aunt would never hear of such a thing. Field-labourers canna choose their company; and they are but a rough set at best. Weeding might do better. If you could have got into the Pentlands gardens, now. But, dear me! It just shows that there's none exempt from trouble, be they high or be they low. Folk say the Laird o' Pentlands is in sore trouble, and the sins of the father are to be visited on the children. The Lady of Pentlands and her bairns are going to foreign parts, where they needn't think shame to be kenned as puir folk. There will be little done in the Pentlands gardens this while, I doubt. There's Broyra, but that is a good five miles away: you could never go there and come back at night."

"But surely there's something that I can do?" said Liliass, entreatingly.

"Yes, there's just one thing you can do. You can have patience, and sit still, and see what will come out of this. If I were you, and you were me, you could, I don't doubt, give me many a fine precept and promise from the Scriptures to that effect. So just take them to yourself, and bide still a while, till you see."

"I'll have to go on with the school yet," said Liliass, quietly.

"No, no, my lass: you'll do no such thing as that, unless you're tired of your life. You have been at that work over-long already, or I'm mistaken. Go into the house and look in the glass. Your face will never be paler that it is at this moment, Liliass Elder, my dear."

"I'm tired," said Liliass, faintly, her courage quite forsaking her, and the tears, long kept back, finding their way down her cheeks.

"Tired! I'll warrant you're tired; and me, like an old fool, talking away here, when the tea should have been ready long since." And Nancy dashed into her preparations with great energy. The tea was made in the little black teapot, as usual; but it was the best tray, and Nancy's exquisite china, that were laid on the mahogany stand brought from the parlour for the occasion; for Nancy seemed determined to do her great honour. By a strong effort, Liliass checked her tears after the first gush, and sat watching the movements and listening to the rather unconnected remarks of her hostess.

"It's not often they're taken down, except to wash," she said, as with a snowy napkin she dusted the fairy-like cream-

pot. "There's but few folk of consideration coming to see the like of me. Young Mr. Crawford doesn't seem to think that I belong to him,—maybe because I go so often to Dunmoor kirk. He hasn't darkened my door but once yet, and he's not like to do it now. They say he's to be married to one of Fivie's daughters; and I mind Fivie a poor herd-laddie. Eh me! but the Lord brings down one and puts up another! To think of the Lady of Pentlands having to leave yon bonny place! Who would have thought it? This is truly a changeful scene. Folk must have their share of trouble at one time or other of their lives. There was never a truer word said than that."

"Yes," said Lillas, softly: "it is called a pilgrimage,—a race,—a warfare."

Nancy caught the words.

"Ay, that's a good child, applying the Scripture, as you ought to do. But you can do that at your leisure, you know. Sit by the table and take your tea. I dare say you need it."

And indeed Lillas, faint and weary, did need it. She thought she could not swallow a crumb; but she was mistaken. The tea was delicious; for Mrs. Stirling was a judge of tea, and would tolerate no inferior beverage.

"I'm willing to pay for the best; and the best I must have," was the remark that generally followed her brief but emphatic grace before meat; and it was not omitted this time. "It will do you good, Lillas, my dear."

And it did do her good. The honey and cakes were beyond praise, and Lillas ate and was refreshed. When the tea was over, Mrs. Stirling rather abruptly introduced the former subject of conversation.

"And what were you going to do with your brother when you made your fine plans for the summer?" she asked.

"Archie's at the school, you know," answered Lillas, shrinking rather from Nancy's tone and manner than from her words.

"Yes: he's at the school just now. But he wasn't going to stop at the school, surely, when you went to the herding?"

"Oh, yes: he is far better at the school."

"Ay, he's better at the school than playing. But wherefore should not he go to the weeding or the herding as well as you?"

"Archie! Why, he's but a child! What could he do?"

"And what are you but a child?" asked Nancy, smiling. "I'm thinking there is little over the twelve months between you."

"But Archie never was strong. It would never do to expose him to all kinds of weather or to fatigue. Don't you mind such a cripple as he was when we came here? You used to think he wouldn't live long. Don't you mind?"

"Yes, I mind; but he did live, and thrive too; and he's the most lifelike of the two to-day, I'm thinking. Fatigue, indeed! and he ranging over the hills with that daft laddie Davie Graham, and playing at the ball by the hour together! What should ail him, I wonder?"

"But even if Archie were strong and well, and could gain far more than I can, it would yet be far better for him to be at the school. A man can do so little in the world if he has no education; and now is Archie's time to get it."

"Well, it may be. And when's your time coming?" asked Nancy, drily.

"Oh, it is quite different with me," said Lillas, with a feeble attempt at a laugh. "A woman can slip through the world quietly, you know. I shan't need learning as Archie will. And, besides, I can do a great many things; and I can learn though I don't go to the school."

"Learn, indeed! and slip through the world quietly!" exclaimed Mrs. Stirling, with an expression of mingled pity and contempt. "These may be your doctrines, but they're not mine. But it's easy seen what will be the upshot of this. It's just your aunt and your father over again. She would have laid her head beneath Alex Elder's feet, if it would have pleased him; and you are none behind her. Such ways are neither for your good nor his. There are plenty of folk that'll say to-day that your father would have been a stronger man if he hadn't been so much spared as a laddie."

"If Archie grows up to be such a man as my father was, I shall have no more to wish for him!" exclaimed Lillas, rising, with more of spirit in her voice and manner than Mrs. Stirling had ever witnessed there before.

"Eh, sirs! did you ever hear the like of that in all your born days?" (lifting her hands as if appealing to an invisible audience.) "As though I would say a word to make light of her father! It's well known there were few left like him in the country-side when he went away. And for her to put herself in such a passion! Not that I'm caring, Lillas, my dear. I think it has done you good. I haven't seen you with such a colour in your face this good while. But it ill becomes you to be offended with the like of me."

"I'm not angry. I didn't mean to be angry," said Lillas, meekly enough now; "but I can't bear to think you should suppose I would do anything that is not for Archie's good. I'm sure I wish to do what is right."

"I'm as sure of that as you are," said Nancy; "but Lillas, my dear, you must mind that it's not the sapling that has the closest shelter that grows to be the strongest tree. With you always to think and do for him, your brother would never learn to think and do for himself. It is not real kindness to think first of him. You must let him bear his share of the burden."

"But he's such a child," said Lillas; "and he was never strong, besides."

"Now, only hear her!" exclaimed Nancy, again appealing to an invisible audience. "You would think, to hear her speak, she was three-score at least. Lillas Elder, hear what I'm saying to you. You are just taking the best way to ruin this brother of yours, with your petting. All the care that you are lavishing on him now, he'll claim as his right before long, and think himself well worthy of it, too. Do you not wonder, sometimes, that he is so blithe-like, when you have so much to make you weary? I doubt the laddie is overfull of himself."

"You are wrong, Mrs. Stirling!" exclaimed Lillas, the indignant colour again flushing her face. "Archie is not full of himself. He would do anything for my aunt or me. And why should he not be blithe? I'm blithe, too, when he is at home; and, besides, he doesna know all."

The thought of what that "all" was—the struggle, the exhaustion, the forced cheerfulness—made her cheek grow pale; and she sat down again, saying to herself that Nancy was right, and that, for a while at least, she must rest.

"No; and he'll never ken as much as is for his good, if it depends on you. But he'll hear something ere he's many days older."

"Mrs. Stirling," said Lillas, rising, and speaking very quietly now, "you must not meddle between me and my brother. He is all I have got; and I know him best. He never was meant for a herd-boy or a field-labourer. He must bide at the school; and he'll soon be fit for something better; and can you not see that will be as much for my good as his? I must just have patience and wait; and you are not to think ill of Archie."

"Me think ill of him! No, no: I think he's a fine laddie, as his father was before him, and that makes it all the more a pity that he should be spoiled. But if you'll promise to be a good bairn, and have patience till you are rested and quite strong again, and say no more about your fine plans till then, I'll neither make nor meddle between you. Must you go? Well, wait till I cover the fire with a wet peat, and I'll go down the brae with you. I dare say you are all right: your aunt will be wearying for you."

As Nancy went bustling about, Lillas seated herself again upon the door-step. The scene was changed since she sat there before; but it was not less lovely with the long shadows upon it than it was beneath the bright sunshine. It was very sweet and peaceful. The never-silent brook babbled on closely by, but all other sounds seemed to come from a distance. The delicate fringes of young birches waved to and fro with a gentle, beckoning motion; but not a rustle nor a sigh was heard.

Yes, it was very sweet and peaceful; and, as she let her eyes wander over the scene, Lillas had a vague feeling of guilt upon her in being so out of tune with it all. Even in the days when she and Archie used to sit waiting, waiting for their weary mother, it had not been so bad. She wondered why everything seemed so changed to her.

"I suppose it is because I'm not very well. I mind how weary and restless Archie used to be. I must have patience till I grow stronger. And maybe something will happen that I'm not thinking about, just as Aunt Janet came to us then. There are plenty of ways beyond my planning; and the Lord has not forgotten us, I'm sure of that. I must just wait. There is

nothing else I can do. There! I won't let another tear come to-night, if I can help it."

She did her best to help it, for Mrs. Stirling came bustling out again, and they set off down the brae. She had leisure to help it, too; for from the moment the great door-key was hidden in the thatch, till they paused beside the stepping-stones, she did not need to speak a word. Nancy had all the talk to herself, and rambled on from one thing to another, never pausing for an answer, till they stood beside the brook. Here Nancy was to turn back.

"And now, Lillas, my dear, you'll mind what I have been saying to you, and that you have promised to have patience? It winna be easy. You have aye been doing for your aunt and your brother; and the more you had to do the better you liked it. But it's one thing to do, and it's another thing to sit with your hands tied and see them needing the help you canna give. I doubt you may have a sorer heart to carry about with you than you have kenned of yet. No that I'm feared for you in the end. And, though it's no pleasant thing to ask favours, I have that faith in you that I would come to you, and wouldna fear to be denied. I ken you would have more pleasure in giving than in withholding; and I would take a gift from you as freely as I ken it would be freely given."

She paused a moment, and Lillas tried to say that indeed she might trust her, for it would give her more pleasure than she had words to tell, to be able to do anything for so kind a friend.

"As to that, we'll say nothing," said Nancy, drily. But suddenly, changing her tone and manner, she added, "What I have to say is this. You'll not refuse to me what I wouldna refuse to you, you that are far wiser and better than I am, or ever expect to be? What's the use of having friends if you canna offer them a helping hand in their time of need? And mind, I'm no giving it," she added, opening her hands and showing three golden sovereigns. "There's no fear but I'll get them back with interest. There's nine-and-twenty more where these came from, in the china teapot in the press; though that's neither here nor there. And, Lillas, my dear, no soul need ever know." The last words were spoken beseechingly.

Lillas did not refuse the gift in words. She had no words at her command. But she shut Nancy's fingers back upon the gold, and, as she did so, she stooped and touched the brown, wrinkled hand with her lips.

"Indeed, it is not pride," she said, at last. "You must not think it's pride. But I am only a child; and it is my aunt who must accept and thank you for your kindness."

Nancy's face was a sight to see. At first she could have been angry; but her look changed and softened strangely at the touch of Lillas' lips upon her hand.

"My dear," said she, gently, "it's easy to say, 'my aunt;' but it is you who have borne the burden for her this while, poor helpless body!"

"Yes," said Lillas, eagerly. "Just because she is helpless, we must consider her the more; and she might not be pleased at my speaking to you first. But if we really need it, we will come to you; for you are a true friend. And you won't be angry?" she added, wistfully, as she held out her hand for good-bye.

"Angry with you! My little, gentle lammie!"

Her tones, so unlike Nancy's usually sharp accents, brought back the child's tears with a rush, and she turned and ran away. Nancy stood watching her as she went over the stepping-stones and up the bank, and she tried to walk quietly on. But as soon as she was out of sight she ran swiftly away, that she might find a hiding-place where she could cry her tears out without danger of being seen.

"It's the clearing-shower, I think; and I must get it over before I go home. If Archie were to see me crying, I should have to tell him all; and I'm sure I don't know what would happen then."

As the thought passed through her mind, a footstep sounded on the rocky pathway, and her heart leaped up at the sound of her brother's voice. In a moment he was close beside her. She might have touched him with her out-stretched hand. But the last drops of the clearing-shower were still falling.

"And I'm not going to spoil his pleasant Sabbath with my tears," she said to herself. So she lay still on the brown heather, quite unseen in the deepening gloaming.

"Lily!" cried Archie, pausing to listen. "Lily!" He grasped a branch of the rowan-tree, and swung himself down into


the torrent's bed. "Lily! Are you here, Lily?"

She listened till the sound of his footsteps died away, and then swung herself down as he had done. Dipping her handkerchief into the water of the burn, she said to herself, as she wiped the tear-stains from her face:

"I'll be all the brighter to-morrow for this summer shower." And she laughed softly to herself as she followed the sound of her brother's voice echoing back through the glen.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN.

“ have stayed too late. They'll be wondering what has kept me,” said Archie to himself, as he saw the firelight gleaming from the cottage window. “I wonder where Lily can be, that she didn't come to meet me? I wonder if anything has happened?”

Something had happened. He paused a moment at the door to listen, as a strange voice reached his ear. It was a man's voice. Going in softly, he saw his aunt in her accustomed seat, and close beside her, with his head bowed down on his hands, sat a stranger. There was a strange look, too, on his aunt's face, the boy thought, and the tears were running down over her cheeks. Wondering and anxious, he silently approached her.

“Archie, are you come home?” said she, holding out her hand to him as he drew near. “Hugh, this is your uncle's son. Archie, this is your cousin Hugh come home again.”

With a cry Archie sprang forward, not to take his cousin's offered hand, but to clasp him round the neck; and, trembling like a leaf, the returned wanderer held him in a close embrace.

“I knew you would come back,” said Archie, at last, through his tears. “I always told Lilies you would be sure to come back again. Oh, Aunt Janet! are you not glad? And you'll never go away again? Oh, I was sure you would come home soon!”

Even his mother had not received her prodigal without some questioning; and the sudden clasping of Archie's arms about his neck, the perfect trust of the child's heart, was like balm to the remorseful tortures of Hugh Blair, and great drops from the man's eyes mingled with the boy's happy tears.

“Archie,” said his aunt, after a little time, “who spoke to you of your cousin Hugh?”

“Oh, many a one,” answered Archie, as he gently stroked his cousin's hair. “Donald Ross, and the Muirlands shepherds, and Mrs. Stirling.” And then he added, in a hushed voice, “Lilies heard you speak his name in your prayers often, when you thought her sleeping.”

Hugh Blair groaned in bitterness of spirit. The thought of his mother's sleepless nights of prayer for him, revealed more of the agony of all those years of waiting than her lips could ever utter. He thought of this night and that in his career of reckless folly, and said to himself: “It may have been then or there that my name was on her lips. O God! judge me not in thine anger!”

The words did not pass his lips; but the look he turned to his mother's face was a prayer for pardon, and she strove to smile as she said, hopefully: “It is all past now, my son. God did not forget us,—blessed be his name!”

“And Lily,” exclaimed Archie, starting up at last. “Lily! where are you? Oh, will she not be glad?”

“I am here, Archie. What has happened?” said Lilies, at the door.

“Cousin Hugh has come home again,” he whispered, drawing her forward; and then she saw the stranger who had taken the water from her hand. He knew her, too, as the child who had bidden him “God speed!”

“Ah! is this the wee white Lily of Glen Elder?” said he, softly.

Lilies' greeting was very quiet.

“I am glad you are come home again, Cousin Hugh,” said she, as she gave him her hand; and then she looked at her aunt.

“God has been better to me than my fears. He has given me the desire of my heart. Blessed be his name!” whispered Mrs. Blair, as Lilies bent over her.

All that it is needful to give here of Hugh Blair's story may be given in a few words. He had not enlisted as a soldier,

as had been at first believed. But, in an hour of great misery and shame, he had gone away from home, leaving behind him debt and dishonour, fully resolved never to set foot in his native land again till he had reprieved his fortunes and redeemed his good name.

To redeem one's good name is easily resolved upon, but not so easily accomplished. He took with him, to the far-away land to which he had exiled himself, the same hatred of restraint, the same love of sinful pleasures, that had been his bane at home. It is true, he left the companions who had led him astray, and encouraged him in his foolish course; but, alas! there are in all lands evil-doers enough to hinder the well-doing of those who have need to mend their ways. He sinned much, and suffered much, before he found a foothold for himself in the land of strangers.

Many a mother's prayers have followed a son into just such scenes of vice and misery as he passed through, before God's messenger, in the shape of sore sickness, found him. Alone in a strange land, he lay for weeks dependent on the unwilling charity of strangers. The horrors of that fearful illness, the dreariness of that slow convalescence, could not be told. Helpless, homeless, friendless, with no memories of the past which his follies had not embittered, no hopes for the future which he dared to cherish, it was no wonder that he stood on the brink of despair.

But he was not forsaken utterly. When he was ready to perish, a countryman of his own found him, and, for his country's sake, befriended him. He took him from the poisoned air of a tropical city, away to the country, amid whose hills and slopes reigns perpetual spring; and here, under the influences of a well-ordered home, he regained health both of body and of mind, and found also in his countryman and benefactor a firm and faithful friend.

Now, indeed, he began life anew. Bound by many ties of gratitude to his employer and friend, he strove to do his duty, and to honour the trust reposed in him; and he did not strive in vain. During the years that followed, he became known as an honourable and a successful man; and when at last, partly for purposes of business and partly with a view to the re-establishment of his health, he determined to return home for a time, he was comparatively a man of means.

He had all this time been doing one wrong and foolish thing, however. He had kept silence towards his mother. He had not forgotten her. He made many a plan, and dreamed many a dream, of the time when, with all stains wiped from his name and his life, he would return to make her forget all that was painful in the past. He had never thought of her all these years but as the honoured and prosperous mistress of Glen Elder. It had never come into his mind that, amid the chances and changes of life, she might have to leave the place which had been the home of her youth and her middle age.

When he returned, to find a stranger in his mother's place, it was a terrible shock. All that he could learn concerning her was that she had had no choice but to give up the farm, and that on leaving it she had found a humble but welcome shelter in a neighbouring county; but whether she was there still, or whether she was even alive, they could not tell him.

As he stood before the closed door of what had once been his home, it seemed to him that a mark more fearful than that of Cain was upon him. Heart-sick with remorse, he turned away. Not daring to make further inquiries, lest he might learn the worst, he went on, past familiar places, with averted eyes, feeling in his misery that the guilt of his mother's death must rest upon his sinful soul unless he might hear her living lips pronounce the pardon of which he knew himself to be unworthy.

God was merciful to him. He opened the door of the humble cottage by the common, to inquire his way; and there, in the old arm-chair so well remembered, sat his mother, with her Bible on her knee. She did not know him, but she gave him kindly welcome, bidding him sit and rest, as he seemed weary. She did not know him till she felt his hot tears dropping on her hands, and heard him praying for pardon at her feet.

It would do no good to tell what passed between the mother and the son. That the meeting was joyful, we need not say; but it was very sorrowful, too. For years of sin and years of suffering must leave traces too deep for sudden joy to efface. Hugh Blair had left his mother in the prime of life, a woman having few equals as regards all that in a woman is admired. He returned to find her feeble, shrunken, helpless, with the hair beneath her widow's cap as white as snow. He had redeemed his good name; he had returned to surround her last days with comfort; he had brought wealth greater than had blessed her most prosperous time. But for all those years of poverty and doubt and anxiety, those years which had made her old before her time, what could atone for these? And as for her, even amid her thankful gladness the thought would come, "How shall I ever learn to put trust in him, after all these years? Can his guileless child's heart come back again to him?"

Oh, yes! the meeting was sorrowful, as well as glad.

With the joy of Archie and Liliias no misgiving mingled. Their cousin Hugh had come home again. That was enough for them. In his youth he had done many foolish things, and maybe some wrong things, they thought. He had sinned against God and his mother. He had left his home, like the prodigal, choosing his own will and way rather than do his duty. But now, like the prodigal, he had come home repenting; and the best robe and the ring for his hand these happy children made ready for him.

"There is joy among the angels to-night, Lily," said Archie, coming back to whisper it to her, after she thought he was asleep.

"Yes: 'this my son was dead, and is alive again; was lost and is found,'" answered Liliias, softly.

"And now Aunt Janet's midnight prayers will be changed to thanksgivings," was the last thought of the weary child, as she lay down that night. Her first thought in the morning was that her aunt would not want the children for a few days at least, now that her cousin had come home, and she would get rest and be well again. Her next was that Mrs. Stirling's golden sovereigns might stay with the other nine-and-twenty in the china teapot; and a curious feeling of regret mingled itself with the pleasure of the thought.

"I almost wish that I had taken them,—just to show her that it wasn't pride; but I dare say Hugh would be better pleased as it is. I wonder if he is strong and ready at doing things? He doesn't look very strong; but he is a man, and will know how to manage things; and my aunt will not be anxious and cast down any more. And now I see how foolish I was to vex myself with what was to happen to us. I might have known that the Lord was caring for us all the time. 'Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.'" Liliias repeated the words with a sudden gush of happy tears, hiding her face in the pillow, lest her aunt should see.

Hugh and Archie went over the hills to the kirk at Dunmoor that day; but Liliias dreaded the long walk a little, and she dreaded a great deal the wondering looks and curious questioning which the sight of the stranger would be sure to call forth. So she went to the kirk close at hand, saying nothing to the people who spoke to her of her cousin's return, lest their coming and going might break the Sabbath quiet of her aunt. And a very quiet afternoon they had together. Her aunt sat silent, thinking her own thoughts; and Liliias sat "resting," she said, with her cheek on her little Bible, and her eyes fixed on the far-away clouds, till the cousins came home again.

As for Archie, it was with a radiant face indeed that he went into the full kirk, holding the hand of his cousin Hugh. Some in the kirk remembered him, others guessed who he might be; and many a doubtful glance was sent back to the days of his wayward youth, and many an anxious thought was stirred as to whether his coming home was to be for good or for ill.

It was well for him that he had learned to hide his thoughts from his fellow-men, to suffer and give no sign of pain; or he would have startled the Sabbath quiet of the kirk that day by many a sigh and bitter groan. Sitting in his old familiar place, and listening to the voice which had taught and warned his childhood, it came very clearly and sharply before him how impossible it is to undo an evil deed. Closing his eyes, he could see himself sitting there a child, as his young cousin sat now at his side; and between this time and that, lay years darkened by deeds which, in the bitterness of his remorse and self-upbraidings, he said to himself "could never be outlived, never forgotten." These years had been lost out of his life, utterly lost for all good; but, oh, how full of sin to him, of pain to others! His sin might be forgiven, washed away in that blood which cleanseth from all sin; but could his mother, could others, who had suffered through it, ever quite outlive the shame and pain?

It seemed to him that the grave, earnest faces about him were settling themselves into sternness at the stirring of the same bitter memories and accusing thoughts; and he would fain have escaped from the glances, some of them kind and others half averted, that followed him into the kirk-yard when the service was over. But he could not escape.

Who could resist the look on Archie's joyful face, so frankly challenging a welcome for the returned wanderer? Not James Muir, nor the master, nor scores besides. Not even Nancy Stirling herself, when Archie, sending a smile up into her face, said:

"This is my cousin Hugh come home again."

"Oh, ay! he's come home again. I kenned him when he was a guileless laddie, like yourself, Archie, man," said Nancy, not sparing her little prick to the sore heart. "And where's your sister to-day? Is your aunt so ill yet as to need to keep her

from the kirk?" she added, with the air of finding a grievance in Liliias' absence. "Or is the lassie not well herself? She looked weary and worn enough when I bade her good-night at the stepping-stones in the gloaming. You're not come home over-soon, Maister Hugh. It's time your mother had some one to care for her besides these bairns."

Archie looked indignant; but Hugh said gravely and gently:

"You are right, Mrs. Stirling. You have been a kind friend to my mother and my cousin Liliias, they tell me; and I thank you from my heart."

Nancy looked not a little discomfited at this unexpected answer.

"It would have been liker Hugh Blair to turn on his heel and go his own way," said she, afterwards; "but it may be that many a thing that was laid to his door in the old days belonged less to him than to those who beguiled him into evil, poor lad! and, whether or not, it would ill become me to cast up to him his past ill deeds to-day."

"And all the folk were so glad to see him!" said Archie, when he came home. Hugh was lingering outside, speaking to a friend who had walked with them over the hills, and Archie spoke fast and earnestly, to have all told before he came in. "And they all minded on you, aunt, and said how thankful you would be, and how the Lord was good to you in your old age. And James Muir said he hoped he was never to go away again. And Allan Grant said that English Smith was to give up Glen Elder, and why should it not go back into the old hands again? They all said he would surely stay in the country-side now."

"And what said my son to that?" asked Mrs. Blair, tremulously. She had not ventured to ask him herself, yet.

"Oh, he said little. I think it was because his heart was so full. And, Lily, he put five golden sovereigns into the poor's box! Steenie Muir told me that he saw his grandfather count it, and he heard him say that now surely the Lord was to bring back the good days to Glen Elder; and he thanked God for your sake, aunt. And, Lily, who kens but you may be 'the wee white Lily of Glen Elder' again?"

"A 'wee white Lily' indeed," said her aunt, fondly and gravely. But Liliias laughed, first at the thought of the golden sovereigns, and Nancy's "nine-and-twenty more" destined still to be hidden away in the china teapot; and then a little at being called the "Lily of Glen Elder."

"It's like a story in a book, aunt. It would be too much happiness to have the old days come back again, the happy days at Glen Elder." And then her ready tears flowed at the thought that followed:

"They can never, never quite come back again."

CHAPTER IX.

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.

“**B**onny Glen Elder!” repeated Archie to himself many times, as, holding his cousin's hand, he walked over the fair sloping fields, and through the sunny gardens. His cousin repeated it, too, sometimes aloud, sometimes sighing the words in regretful silence, remembering all that had come and gone since the happy days when he, a “guileless laddie,” had called the place his home.

The farm had been rented by the Elder family for three generations. Archie's father had never held it. It had been in the hands of Hugh's father during his short lifetime. But Archie's father and grandfather had been born there, and his great-grandfather had spent the greater part of his life on the place; and it quite suited Archie's ideas of the fitness of things that it should again be held by his cousin, who, though he did not bear the name, was yet of the blood of these men, whose memory was still honoured in the country-side. It suited Hugh's ideas, too, but with one difference. He knew two or three things that Archie did not know. He had not come back a very rich man, according to his ideas of riches; though he knew the people about him might call him rich. He had come home with no plan of remaining; for he was a young man still, and looked upon the greater part of his life's work as before him. And through the talk he was keeping up with Archie, as they went on, there was running all the time the question, “Should the rest of his work be done in India, or in Glen Elder?” It was not an easy question to answer. He felt, with great unhappiness, that, whatever the answer might be, it must give his mother pain.

One thing he had determined upon. His mother was to be again the mistress of Glen Elder. This might be brought to pass in one of two ways. He could lease the farm, as his forefathers had done, and be a farmer, as they had been, living a far easier life than they had lived, however, because of the means he had acquired during the last ten years. Or, he could purchase Glen Elder, and invest the rest of his fortune for the benefit of his mother and his little cousins, and then go back to his business in India again. He thought his mother would like the first plan best; but it did not seem the best to him.

He was afraid of himself. He had never, in his youth, liked a quiet, rural life, and his manner of life for the past ten years had not been such as to prepare him to like it better. He feared that he could never settle down contented and useful in such a life; and he knew that an unwilling sacrifice would never make his mother happy. And, yet, would it be right to leave her, feeble and aged as she was? Of course his going away would be different now. He would leave her in comfortable circumstances, with no doubt about his fate, no fears as to his well-doing, to harass her. But even in such a case it would not be right to go away without her full and free consent.

It spoiled the pleasure of his walk,—that and some other thoughts he had; and he sighed as he sat down to rest on a bank where he had often rested when a child.

“I can fancy us all living very happily here, if some things were different,” he said at last.

“What things, Cousin Hugh?” asked Archie, in some surprise.

Hugh laughed.

“I ought to have said, 'if I were different myself,' I suppose.”

“But you *are* different,” said Archie.

“Yes,” said his cousin, gravely, after a moment's hesitation; “but oh, lad, I have many sad things to mind, and sinful things too. All these years cannot be blotted out nor forgotten.”

“But they are past, Cousin Hugh, and forgiven, and in one sense blotted out. There is nothing of them left that need hinder you from being happy here again.”

“Ah! well, that may be. God is good. But I was thinking of something else when I spoke first. I was thinking that I am not a farmer.”

“But you can learn to be one. It's easy enough.”

"I am afraid I should not find it easy. I am afraid I should not do justice to the place. It spoils one for a quiet life, to be knocked about in the world as I have been. And I know I could never make my mother happy if I were discontented myself; at least, if she knew of my discontent."

"She would be sure to see it. You couldn't hide it from her, if discontent was in your heart. My aunt doesn't say much, but she sees clearly. But why should you not be happy here? I can't understand it."

"No: I trust you may never be able to understand it. Archie, lad, it is one of the penalties of an evil life that it changes the nature, so that the love of pure and simple pleasures, which it drives away, has but a small chance of coming back again, even when the life is amended. It is a sad experience."

"But an evil life, Cousin Hugh! You should not say that," said Archie, sorrowfully.

"Well, what would you have? A life of disobedience to one's mother, ten years of forgetfulness, no, not forgetfulness, but neglect, of her. Surely that cannot be called other than an evil life. And it bears its fruit."

There was a long pause; and then Archie said:

"Cousin Hugh, I'll tell you what I would do. I would speak to my aunt about it. If it is true that you could never settle down contented here, she will be sure to see that it is best for you to go, and she will say so. I once heard James Muir say that he knew no woman who surpassed my aunt in sense and judgment. She will be sure to see what is right, and tell you what to do."

Pleasure and pain oddly mingled in the feelings with which Hugh listened to his cousin's grave commendation of his mother's sense and judgment; but he felt that there was nothing better to be done than to tell her all that was in his heart, and he lost no time in doing so, and Archie's words were made good. She saw the situation at a glance, and told him "what to do." Much as she would have liked to have her son near her, she knew that he was too old to acquire new tastes, and too young to be content with a life of comparative inactivity. She told him so, heartily and cheerfully, not marring the effect of her words by any murmurs or repinings of her own. She only once said:

"If you could but have stayed in Scotland, Hugh, lad! for your mother is growing old."

"Who knows but it may be so arranged?" said Hugh, thoughtfully. "There is a branch of our house in L——. It might be managed. But, whether or not, I have a year, perhaps two, before me yet."

But it came to pass, all the same, that before the month of May was out they were all settled at Glen Elder. Though "that weary spend-thrift," Maxwell of Pentlands, as Mrs. Stirling called him, could not break the entail on the estate of Pentlands, as for the sake of his many debts and his sinful pleasures he madly tried to do, he could dispose of the outlying farm of Glen Elder; and Hugh Blair became the purchaser of the farm and of a broad adjoining field, called the Nether Park. So he owned the land that his fathers had only leased; or, rather, his mother owned it; for it was purchased in her name, and was hers to have and to hold, or to dispose of as she pleased. His mother's comfort, Hugh said, and the welfare of his young cousin's, must not be left to the risks and chances of business. They must be put beyond dependence on his uncertain life or possible failure, or he could not be quite at rest with regard to them when he should be far away.

Glen Elder had not suffered in the hands of English Smith. As a faithful servant of the owner, he had held it on favourable terms, and had hoped to hold it long. So he had done well by the land, as all the neighbours declared; though at first they had watched his new-fangled plans with jealous eyes. It was "in good heart" when it changed hands, and was looking its very best on the bright May day when they went home to it. It was a happy day to them all, though it was a sad one, too, for Hugh and his mother. But the sadness passed away in the cheerful bustle of welcome from old friends; and it was not long before they settled down into a quiet and pleasant routine.

The coming home, and the new life opening before her, seemed for a long time strange and unreal to Liliias. She used to wake in the morning with the burden of her cottage-cares upon her, till the sight of her pleasant room, and the sunshine coming in through the clustering roses, chased her anxious thoughts away. The sense of repose that gradually grew upon her in her new home was very grateful to her; but she did not enter eagerly into the new interests and pleasures, as her brother did. Indeed, she could do very little but be still and enjoy the rest and quiet; for, when all necessity for exertion was over, that came upon her which must have come soon at any rate: her strength quite gave way, and, for some time, anxiety on her account sobered the growing happiness of the rest.

Even her aunt did not realise till then how much beyond her strength had been the child's exertions during the winter and spring. Not that she would acknowledge herself to be ill. She was only tired, and would be herself again in a little while. But months passed before that time came. For many a day she lay on the sofa in the long, low parlour of Glen Elder, only wishing to be left in peace, smiling now and then into the anxious faces of her aunt and Archie, saying, "it was so nice to be quiet and to have nothing to do."

But this passed away. In a little while she was beguiled into the sunny garden, and before the harvest-holidays set Archie at liberty she was quite ready and able for a renewal of their rambles among the hills again.

As for Mrs. Blair, the return of her son, and the coming home to Glen Elder, did not quite renew her youth; but when the burden that had bowed her down for so many years was taken away, the change in her was pleasant to see. For a long time she rejoiced with trembling over her returned wanderer; but as day after day passed, each leaving her more assured that it was not her wayward lad that had returned to her, but a true penitent and firm believer in Jesus, a deeper peace settled down upon her long-tried spirit, and "I waited patiently for the Lord; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He hath set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He hath put a new song in my mouth," became a part of her daily thanksgiving.

As for him, if it had been the one desire of his life to atone for the sorrow he had caused her in his youth, he could not have done otherwise than he did. He made her comfort his first care. Her slightest intimation was law to him. Silently and unobtrusively, but constantly, did he manifest a grave and respectful tenderness towards her, till she, as well as others, could not but wonder, remembering the lad who would let nothing come between him and the gratification of his own foolish desires.

"You dinna mind your cousin Hugh, Lillas, my dear?" said Mrs. Stirling to her, one day. "I mind him well;—the awfulest laddie for liking his own way that ever was heard tell of! You see, being the only one left to her, his mother thought of him first always, till he could hardly do otherwise than think first of himself; and a sore heart he gave her many a time. There's a wonderful difference now. It must just be that," added she, meditatively. "A new heart will I give you, and a right spirit will I put within you." Lillas, my dear, he's a changed man."

A bright colour flashed into Lillas' face, and tears started in her eyes.

"I am sure of it! We may be poor and sick and sorrowful again, but the worst of my aunt's troubles can never come back to her more."

He was very kind to his young cousins, partly because he wished to repay the love and devotion which had brightened so many of his mother's dark days, but chiefly because he soon loved them dearly for their own sakes. Lillas he always treated with a respect and deference which, but for the gentle dignity with which his kindness was received by her, might have seemed a little out of place offered to one still such a child.

With Archie he was different. The gravity and reserve which seemed to have become habitual to Hugh Blair in his intercourse with others, never showed itself to him. The frank, open nature of the lad seemed to act as a charm upon him. The perfect simplicity of his character, the earnestness with which he strove first of all to do right, filled his cousin with wonder, and oftentimes awoke within him bitter regret at the remembrance of what his own youth had been; and a living lesson did the unconscious lad become to him many a time.

No one rejoiced more heartily than did Mrs. Stirling at the coming home of Hugh Blair, and the consequent change of circumstances to his mother and his little cousins; but her joy was expressed in her own fashion. One might have supposed that, in her opinion, some great calamity had befallen them, so dismal were her prophecies concerning them.

"It's true you have borne adversity well; and that is in a measure a preparation for the well-bearing of prosperity. But there's no telling. The heart is deceitful, and it is no' easy to carry a full cup. You'll need grace, Lillas, my dear. And you'll doubtless get it, if you seek it in a right spirit." But, judging from Mrs. Stirling's melancholy tones and shakings of the head, it was plain to see that she expected there would be failure somewhere.

With keen eyes she watched for some symptom of the spoiling process in Lillas, and was slow to believe that she was not going to be disappointed in her as she had been in so many others. But time went on, and Lillas passed unscathed through what in Nancy's estimation was the severest of all ordeals. She was sent to a school "to learn accomplishments," and came home again, after two years, "not a bit set up." So Mrs. Stirling came to feel at last that she might have faith in

the stability of her young favourite.

“She's just the very same Liliās Elder that used to teach the bairns and go wandering over the hills with her brother; only she's blither and bonnier. She's Miss Elder of the Glen now, as I heard young Mr. Graham calling her to his friend; but she's no' to call changed, for all that.”

And Mrs. Stirling was right. Liliās was not changed. Prosperity did no unkind office for her. Those happy days developed in her no germ of selfishness. Still her first thought was for others, the first desire of her heart still was to know what was right, and to obtain grace and strength to do it. In some respects she might be changed, but in this she was the very same.

She grew taller, and wore a brighter bloom on her cheeks, and she gradually outgrew the look that was older than her years; but she never lost the gentle gravity that had made her seem so different from the other children in the eyes of those who knew her in her time of many cares.

Nancy had not the same confidence in Archie. Not that she could find much fault with him; but he had never been so great a favourite with her as his sister, and his boyish indifference to her praise or blame did not, in her opinion, accord with the possession of much sense or discretion.

“And, Miss Liliās, my dear, it's no' good for a laddie like him to be made so much of,” said she. “The most of the lads that I have seen put first and cared for most have, in one way or another, turned out a disappointment. Either they turned wilful, and went their own way to no good; or they turned soft, and were a vexation;—and it would be a grievous thing indeed if the staff on which you lean should be made a rod to correct you, my dear.”

But Liliās feared no disappointment in her brother.

“The law of the Lord is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide,” she answered, softly, to Mrs. Stirling; and even she confessed that surely he needed no other safeguard.

A great deal might be told of the happy days that followed at Glen Elder. Hugh Blair never went back to India again. He married—much to his mother's joy—one whom he had loved, and who had loved him, in the old time, before evil counsels had beguiled him from his duty and driven him from his home,—one who had never forgotten him during all those sorrowful days of waiting. Their home was at a distance; but they were often at Glen Elder, and Mrs. Blair's declining days were overshadowed by no doubt as to the well-doing or the well-being of her son.

Archie went first to the high school, and then to college. The master was loth to part from his favourite pupil; but David Graham was going. It would be well, the master said, for Davie to get through the first year of the temptations while his brother John was there “to keep an eye on him;” and Davie's best friends and warmest admirers could not but agree, and, though not even the doubting Nancy was afraid for Archie as his master was afraid for his more thoughtless friend, it was yet thought best that the friends should go together. Archie had some troubles in his school and college life, as who has not? but he had many pleasures. He gained honour to himself as a scholar, and, what was better, he was ever known as one who feared God and who sought before all things his honour.

Liliās passed her school-days with her friend Anne Graham, in the house of the kind Dr. Gordon. It need not be said that they were happy, and that they greatly improved under the gentle and judicious guidance of Mrs. Gordon, and that Liliās learned to love her dearly.

And when their school-days were over, there followed a useful and happy life at home. The girls kept up their old friendship begun that day in the kirk-yard, with fewer ups and downs than generally characterise the friendships of girls of their age. Another than Liliās might have fancied Anne's tone to be a little peremptory sometimes; but, if Miss Graham thought herself wiser than her friend in some things, she as fully believed in her friend's superior goodness; and not one of all the little flock that Liliās used to rule and teach in the cottage by the common, long ago, deferred more to her than, in her heart, did Anne.

So a constant and pleasant intercourse was kept up between them, and Liliās was as much at home in the manse as in the Glen. They still pursued what Davie derisively called “their studies.” That is, they read history and other books together, some of them grave and useful books, and some of them not quite so useful, but nice books for all that. Liliās delighted in poetry, and in the limited number of works of imagination permitted within the precincts of the manse. Anne

liked them too; but, believing it to be a weakness, she said less about her enjoyment of them. Indeed, it was her wont to check the raptures of Liliias and her little sister Jessie over some of their favourites, and to rebuke the murmurs of the latter over books that were “good, but not bonny.”

They had other pleasures, too, gardening, and rambles among the hills, and cottage-visiting. But the chief business and pleasure of Liliias was in caring for the comfort of her aunt, and in the guiding of the household affairs at Glen Elder. Matters within and without were so arranged that, while she might always be busy, she was never burdened with care; and so the quiet days passed on, each bringing such sweet content as does not often fall to the lot of any household for a long time together.

But, though Liliias took pleasure in her friends and her home, her books and her household occupations, her best and highest happiness did not rest on these. Afterwards, when changes came, bringing anxious nights and sorrowful days, when the shadow of death hung over the household, and the untoward events of life seemed to threaten separation from friends who were none the less dear because no tie of blood united them, the foundation of her peace was unshaken. “For they that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, that cannot be removed.”

Here for the present our story must close.

They went home to Glen Elder in May. Three years passed, and May came again, and Glen Elder and Kirklands, and all the hills and dales between, were looking their loveliest in their changing robes of brown and purple and green. The air was sweet with the scent of hawthorn-blossoms, and vocal with the song of birds and the hum of bees. There was not a fleck of cloud on all the sky, nor of mist on all the hills. The day was perfect, warm, bright, and still; such a day as does not come many times in all the Scottish year.

Nancy Stirling stood at her cottage-door, looking out over the green slope, and the burn running full to the fields beyond, and the far-away hills; and, as she looked, she sighed, and quite forgot the water-bucket in her hand, and that she was on her way to the burn for water to make her afternoon cup of tea. We speak of spring as a joyful season; we say, “the glad spring,” and “the merry, merry May;” and it is a glad season to the birds and the bees, the lambs and the little children, and to grown people, too, who have nothing very sad to remember. But the coming back of so many fair things as the spring brings, reminds many a one of fair things which can never come again; and hearts more contented than Mrs. Stirling's was, sometimes sigh in the light of such a day.

“It's a bonny day,” said she to herself, “a seasonable day for the country; and we should be thankful.” But she sighed again as she said it; and, for no reason that she could give, her thoughts wandered away to a row of graves in the kirk-yard, and farther away still, to a home and a time in which she saw herself a little child, so blithe, so full of happy life, that, as it all came back, she could not but wonder how she ever should have changed to the troubled, dissatisfied woman that she knew herself to be.

“Oh, well! It couldna but be so, in a world like this. Such changes aye have been, and aye must be,” said she, trying to comfort herself with the “old philosophy.” But she did not quite succeed. For the passing years had changed her, and it came into her mind, as it had often come of late, that she might perhaps have made a better use of all that life had brought her. But it was not a pleasant thought to pursue; and she gave a little start of relief and pleasure, as she caught sight of two figures coming slowly up the brae.

“It's Liliias Elder and Archie. She'll have nothing left to wish for, now that she has him home again. Eh! but she's a bonny lassie, and a good! And Archie, too, is a well-grown lad, and not so set up as he might be, considering.”

It was Liliias and her brother. Archie was at home, after his first session at the college; and Nancy was right: Liliias had little left to wish for.

“Well, bairns,” she said, after the first greetings were over, “will you come in, or will you sit down here at the door? It's such a bonny day. So you're home again, Archie, lad, and glad to be, I hope?”

“Very glad,” said Archie. “I never was so glad before.”

“You said that last time,” said Liliias, laughing.

“Well, maybe I did. But it's true all the same. I'm more glad every time.”

“And you didn't come home before it was time,” said Nancy. “You're thinner and paler than your aunt likes to see you, I'm thinking.”

“I'm perfectly well, I assure you,” said Archie.

“He will have a rest and the fresh country air again,” said Lillias. “He has been very close at his books.”

“Well, it may be that,” said Mrs. Stirling. “And so you're glad to be home again? You haven't been letting that daft laddie, Davie Graham, lead you into any mischief that you would be afraid to tell your sister about, I hope?”

Archie laughed, and shook his head. Lillias laughed a little, too, as she said:

“Oh, no, indeed. Even John says they have done wonderfully well: and after that you need have no fear.”

“It's not unlikely that two or three things might happen in such a place, and John Graham be none the wiser. And it's not likely that he'll say any ill of your brother in your hearing,” said Nancy, drily. “Not that I'm misdoubting you, Archie, man; and may you be kept safe, for your sister's sake!”

“For a better reason than that, I hope, Mrs. Stirling,” said Lillias, gravely.

“Well, so be it; though his sister is a good enough reason for him, I hope. But where have you been? To see Bell Ray? How is she to-day, poor body?”

“We have not been there,” said Lillias. “We meant to go when we came from home; but we stayed so long down yonder, that we had no time. I am going some day soon.”

“And where's 'down yonder,' if I may ask?” demanded Mrs. Stirling.

“At the moor cottage,” said Lillias. “We came over the hills to see it again, just to mind us of old times.”

“And we stayed so long, speaking about these old times, that we are likely to be late home,” said Archie; “and they are all coming up from the manse, to have tea in the Glen. We must make haste home, Lily.”

“Yes; and we stayed a while at the old seat under the rowan-tree. We could only just reach it, the burn is so full. And look at all the flowers I found in the cottage-garden,—heart's-ease, and daisies, and sweet-brier, and thyme. It seemed a pity to leave them, with nobody to see them. Give me something to put them in, Mrs. Stirling, and I'll leave some of them for you. We will have time enough for that, Archie, never fear.”

She sat down on the door-step, and laid the flowers on her lap.

“And wherefore should you be caring to mind yourselves of the old times, I wonder?” said Nancy, as she sat down beside her, holding the jug for the flowers in her hand. “Some of those days were sad enough, I'm sure. Maybe it's to make you humble.”

“Yes, and thankful,” said Lillias, softly.

“And those days were very pleasant, too, in one way,” said Archie.

“Ay, to you, lad. But some of them brought small pleasure to your sister, I'm thinking,” said Nancy, sharply. “You're a wise lad, but you dinna ken everything that came in those old times, as you call them.”

“But some of the things that I like best to remember happened on some of the very worst of those days,” said Lillias. “I should never have known half your goodness, for one thing. Do you mind that last day that I came to you? Oh, how weary I was that day!”

“And much good I did you,” said Nancy.

“Indeed you did, more than I could tell you then, more than I can tell you now,” said Lillias, giving the last touch to the flowers as she rose. “I like to think of those days. We are all the happier now for the troubles of the old times.”

“And truly I think you'll aye be but the happier for whatever time may bring you,” said Nancy, musingly, as she watched them hastening over the hill together. “To mind us of the old times,' quoth she. There are few folk but would be

glad to forget, and to make others forget, 'the hole of the pit.' And look at these flowers, now! Who but Liliass Elder would think of a poor body like me caring for what is good neither to eat nor to drink? She's like no one else. And as for her brother, he's not so set up as folk might expect. May they be kept safe from the world's taint and stain! I suppose the Lord can do it. I'm sure He can. 'The law of the Lord is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.' She said it of her brother once; and if it is true of him it's true of her. It is that that makes the difference. They have no cause to be afraid, even though 'the earth be removed.' Eh! but it is a grand thing to have the Lord on our side! Nothing can go far wrong with us then."

THE END.

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Transcriber's Note: Obvious errors have been corrected as follows: Annie to Anne; Archy changed to Archie; her's corrected to hers; your's to yours

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