

What's Mine's Mine — Volume 3

George MacDonald



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WHAT'S MINE'S MINE

By George MacDonald

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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WHAT'S MINE'S MINE

CHAPTER I

AT A HIGH SCHOOL.

When Mercy was able to go down to the drawing-room, she found the evenings pass as never evenings passed before; and during the day, although her mother and Christina came often to see her, she had time and quiet for thinking. And think she must; for she found herself in a region of human life so different from any she had hitherto entered, that in no other circumstances would she have been able to recognize even its existence. Everything said or done in it seemed to acknowledge something understood. Life went on with a continuous lean toward something rarely mentioned, plainly uppermost; it embodied a tacit reference of everything to some code so thoroughly recognized that occasion for alluding to it was unfrequent. Its inhabitants appeared to know things which her people did not even suspect. The air of the brothers especially was that of men at their ease yet ready to rise—of men whose loins were girded, alert for an expected call.

Under their influence a new idea of life, and the world, and the relations of men and things, began to grow in the mind of Mercy. There was a dignity, almost grandeur, about the simple life of the cottage, and the relation of its inmates to all they came near. No one of them seemed to live for self, but each to be thinking and caring for the others and for the clan. She awoke to see that manners are of the soul; that such as she had hitherto heard admired were not to be compared with the simple, almost peasant-like dignity and courtesy of the chief; that the natural grace, accustomed ease, and cultivated refinement of Ian's carriage, came out in attention and service to the lowly even more than in converse with his equals; while his words, his gestures, his looks, every expression born of contact, witnessed a directness and delicacy of recognition she could never have imagined. The moment he began to speak to another, he seemed to pass out of himself, and sit in the ears of the other to watch his own words, lest his thoughts should take such sound or shape as might render them unwelcome or weak. If they were not to be pleasant words, they should yet be no more unpleasant than was needful; they should not hurt save in the nature of that which they bore; the truth should receive no injury by admixture of his personality. He heard with his own soul, and was careful over the other soul as one of like kind. So delicately would he initiate what might be communion with another, that to a nature too dull or selfish to understand him, he gave offence by the very graciousness of his approach.

It was through her growing love to Alister that Mercy became able to understand Ian, and perceived at length that her dread, almost dislike of him at first, was owing solely to her mingled incapacity and unworthiness. Before she left the cottage, it was spring time in her soul; it had begun to put forth the buds of eternal life. Such buds are not unfrequently nipped; but even if they are, if a dull, false, commonplace frost close in, and numb the half wakened spirit back into its wintry sleep, that sleep will ever after be haunted with some fainting airs of the paradise those buds prophesied. In Mercy's case they were to grow into spiritual eyes—to open and see, through all the fogs and tumults of this phantom world, the light and reality of the true, the spiritual world everywhere around her—as the opened eyes of the servant of the

prophet saw the mountains of Samaria full of horses of fire and chariots of fire around him. Every throb of true love, however mingled with the foolish and the false, is a bourgeoning of the buds of the life eternal—ah, how far from leaves! how much farther from flowers.

Ian was high above her, so high that she shrank from him; there seemed a whole heaven of height between them. It would fill her with a kind of despair to see him at times sit lost in thought: he was where she could never follow him! He was in a world which, to her childish thought, seemed not the world of humanity; and she would turn, with a sense of both seeking and finding, to the chief. She imagined he felt as she did, saw between his brother and him a gulf he could not cross. She did not perceive this difference, that Alister knew the gulf had to be crossed. At such a time, too, she had seen his mother regarding him with a similar expression of loss, but with a mingling of anxiety that was hers only. It was sweet to Mercy to see in the eyes of Alister, and in his whole bearing toward his younger brother, that he was a learner like herself, that they were scholars together in Ian's school.

A hunger after something beyond her, a something she could not have described, awoke in her. She needed a salvation of some kind, toward which she must grow! She needed a change which she could not understand until it came—a change the greatest in the universe, but which, man being created with the absolute necessity for it, can be no violent transformation, can be only a grand process in the divine idea of development.

She began to feel a mystery in the world, and in all the looks of it—a mystery because a meaning. She saw a jubilation in every sunrise, a sober sadness in every sunset; heard a whispering of strange secrets in the wind of the twilight; perceived a consciousness of unknown bliss in the song of the lark;—and was aware of a something beyond it all, now and then filling her with wonder, and compelling her to ask, "What does it, what can it mean?" Not once did she suspect that Nature had indeed begun to deal with her; not once suspect, although from childhood accustomed to hear the name of Love taken in vain, that love had anything to do with these inexplicable experiences.

Let no one, however, imagine he explains such experiences by suggesting that she was in love! That were but to mention another mystery as having introduced the former. For who in heaven or on earth has fathomed the marvel betwixt the man and the woman? Least of all the man or the woman who has not learned to regard it with reverence. There is more in this love to uplift us, more to condemn the lie in us, than in any other inborn drift of our being, except the heavenly tide Godward. From it flow all the other redeeming relations of life. It is the hold God has of us with his right hand, while death is the hold he has of us with his left. Love and death are the two marvels, yea the two terrors—but the one goal of our history.

It was love, in part, that now awoke in Mercy a hunger and thirst after heavenly things. This is a direction of its power little heeded by its historians; its earthly side occupies almost all their care. Because lovers are not worthy of even its earthly aspect, it palls upon them, and they grow weary, not of love, but of their lack of it. The want of the heavenly in it has caused it to perish: it had no salt. From those that have not is taken away that which they have. Love without religion is the plucked rose. Religion without love—there is no such thing. Religion is the bush that bears all the roses; for religion is the natural condition of man in relation to the eternal facts, that is the truths, of his own being. To live is to love; there is no life but love. What shape the love puts on, depends on the persons between whom is the relation. The poorest love with religion, is better, because truer, therefore more lasting, more genuine, more endowed with the possibility of persistence—that is, of infinite development, than the most passionate devotion between man and

woman without it.

Thus together in their relation to Ian, it was natural that Mercy and the chief should draw yet more to each other. Mercy regarded Alister as a big brother in the same class with herself, but able to help her. Quickly they grew intimate. In the simplicity of his large nature, the chief talked with Mercy as openly as a boy, laying a heart bare to her such that, if the world had many like it, the kingdom of heaven would be more than at hand. He talked as to an old friend in perfect understanding with him, from whom he had nothing to gain or to fear. There was never a compliment on the part of the man, and never a coquetry on the part of the girl—a dull idea to such as without compliment or coquetry could hold no intercourse, having no other available means. Mercy had never like her sister cultivated the woman's part in the low game; and her truth required but the slightest stimulus to make her incapable of it. With such a man as Alister she could use only a simplicity like his; not thus to meet him would have been to decline the honouring friendship. Dark and plain, though with an interesting face and fine eyes, she had received no such compliments as had been showered upon her sister; it was an unspoiled girl, with a heart alive though not yet quite awake, that was brought under such good influences. What better influences for her, for any woman, than those of unselfish men? what influences so good for any man as those of unselfish women? Every man that hears and learns of a worthy neighbour, comes to the Father; every man that hath heard and learned of the Father comes to the Lord; every man that comes to the Lord, he leads back to the Father. To hear Ian speak one word about Jesus Christ, was for a true man to be thenceforth truer. To him the Lord was not a theological personage, but a man present in the world, who had to be understood and obeyed by the will and heart and soul, by the imagination and conscience of every other man. If what Ian said was true, this life was a serious affair, and to be lived in downright earnest! If God would have his creatures mind him, she must look to it! She pondered what she heard. But she went always to Alister to have Ian explained; and to hear him talk of Ian, revealed Alister to her.

When Mercy left the cottage, she felt as if she were leaving home to pay a visit. The rich house was dull and uninteresting. She found that she had immediately to put in practice one of the lessons she had learned—that the service of God is the service of those among whom he has sent us. She tried therefore to be cheerful, and even to forestall her mother's wishes. But life was harder than hitherto—so much more was required of her.

The chief was falling thoroughly in love with Mercy, but it was some time before he knew it. With a heart full of tenderness toward everything human, he knew little of love special, and was gradually sliding into it without being aware of it. How little are we our own! Existence is decreed us; love and suffering are appointed us. We may resist, we may modify; but we cannot help loving, and we cannot help dying. We need God to keep us from hating. Great in goodness, yea absolutely good, God must be, to have a right to make us—to compel our existence, and decree its laws! Without his choice the chief was falling in love. The woman was sent him; his heart opened and took her in. Relation with her family was not desirable, but there she was! Ian saw, but said nothing. His mother saw it too.

"Nothing good will come of it!" she said, with a strong feeling of unfitness in the thing.

"Everything will come of it, mother, that God would have come of it," answered Ian. "She is an honest, good girl, and whatever comes of it must be good, whether pleasant or not."

The mother was silent. She believed in God, but not so thoroughly as to abjure the exercise of a subsidiary providence of her own. The more people trust in God, the less will they trust their own judgments, or interfere with the ordering of events. The man or woman who opposes the heart's desire of

another, except in aid of righteousness, is a servant of Satan. Nor will it avail anything to call that righteousness which is of Self or of Mammon.

"There is no action in fretting," Ian would say, "and not much in the pondering of consequences. True action is the doing of duty, come of it heartache, defeat, or success."

"You are a fatalist, Ian!" said his mother one day.

"Mother, I am; the will of God is my fate!" answered Ian. "He shall do with me what he pleases; and I will help him!"

She took him in her arms and kissed him. She hoped God would not be strict with him, for might not the very grandeur of his character be rooted in rebellion? Might not some figs grow on some thistles?

At length came the paternal summons for the Palmers to go to London. For a month the families had been meeting all but every day. The chief had begun to look deep into the eyes of the girl, as if searching there for some secret joy; and the girl, though she drooped her long lashes, did not turn her head away. And now separation, like death, gave her courage, and when they parted, Mercy not only sustained Alister's look, but gave him such a look in return that he felt no need, no impulse to say anything. Their souls were satisfied, for they knew they belonged to each other.

CHAPTER II

A TERRIBLE DISCOVERY.

So entirely were the chief and his family out of the world, that they had not yet a notion of the worldly relations of Mr. Peregrine Palmer. But the mother thought it high time to make inquiry as to his position and connections. She had an old friend in London, the wife of a certain vice-chancellor, with whom she held an occasional correspondence, and to her she wrote, asking if she knew anything of the family.

Mrs. Macruadh was nowise free from the worldliness that has regard to the world's regard. She would not have been satisfied that a daughter in law of hers should come of people distinguished for goodness and greatness of soul, if they were, for instance, tradespeople. She would doubtless have preferred the daughter of an honest man, whatever his position, to the daughter of a scoundrel, even if he chanced to be a duke; but she would not have been content with the most distinguished goodness by itself. Walking after Jesus, she would have drawn to the side of Joanna rather than Martha or Mary; and I fear she would have condescended—just a little—to Mary Magdalen: repentance, however perfect, is far from enough to satisfy the worldly squeamishness of not a few high-principled people who do not know what repentance means.

Mrs. Macruadh was anxious to know that the girl was respectable, and so far worthy of her son. The idea of such an inquiry would have filled Mercy's parents with scornful merriment, as a thing ludicrous indeed. People in THEIR position, who could do this and that, whose name stood so high for this and that, who knew themselves well bred, who had one relation an admiral, another a general, and a marriage-connection with some of the oldest families in the country—that one little better than a yeoman, a man who held the plough with his own big hands, should enquire into THEIR social standing! Was not Mr. Peregrine Palmer prepared to buy him up the moment he required to sell! Was he not rich enough to purchase an earl's daughter for his son, and an earl himself for his beautiful Christina! The thing would have seemed too preposterous.

The answer of the vice-chancellor's lady burst, nevertheless, like a bombshell in the cottage. It was to this effect:—The Palmers were known, if not just in the best, yet in very good society; the sons bore sign of a defective pedigree, but the one daughter out was, thanks to her mother, fit to go anywhere. For her own part, wrote the London correspondent, she could not help smelling the grains: in Scotland a distiller, Mr. Peregrine Palmer had taken to brewing in England—was one of the firm Pulp and Palmer, owning half the public-houses in London, therefore high in the regard of the English nobility, if not actually within their circle.—Thus far the satirical lady of the vice-chancellor.

Horror fell upon the soul of the mother. The distiller was to her as the publican to the ancient Jew. No dealing in rags and marine stores, no scraping of a fortune by pettifogging, chicane, and cheating, was to her half so abominable as the trade of a brewer. Worse yet was a brewer owning public-houses, gathering

riches in half-pence wet with beer and smelling of gin. The brewer was to her a moral pariah; only a distiller was worse. As she read, the letter dropped from her hands, and she threw them up in unconscious appeal to heaven. She saw a vision of bloated men and white-faced women, drawing with trembling hands from torn pockets the money that had bought the wide acres of the Clanruadh. To think of the Macruadh marrying the daughter of such a man! In society few questions indeed were asked; everywhere money was counted a blessed thing, almost however made; none the less the damnable fact remained, that certain moneys were made, not in furthering the well-being of men and women, but in furthering their sin and degradation. The mother of the chief saw that, let the world wink itself to blindness, let it hide the roots of the money-plant in layer upon layer of social ascent, the flower for which an earl will give his daughter, has for the soil it grows in, not the dead, but the diseased and dying, of loathsome bodies and souls of God's men and women and children, which the grower of it has helped to make such as they are.

She was hot, she was cold; she started up and paced hurriedly about the room. Her son the son in law of a distiller! the husband of his daughter! The idea was itself abhorrence and contempt! Was he not one of the devil's fishers, fishing the sea of the world for the souls of men and women to fill his infernal ponds withal! His money was the fungous growth of the devil's cellars. How would the brewer or the distiller, she said, appear at the last judgment! How would her son hold up his head, if he cast in his lot with theirs! But that he would never do! Why should she be so perturbed! in this matter at least there could be no difference between them! Her noble Alister would be as much shocked as herself at the news! Could the woman be a lady, grown on such a hot-bed! Yet, alas! love could tempt far—could subdue the impossible!

She could not rest; she must find one of them! Not a moment longer could she remain alone with the terrible disclosure. If Alister was in love with the girl, he must get out of it at once! Never again would she enter the Palmers' gate, never again set foot on their land! The thought of it was unthinkable! She would meet them as if she did not see them! But they should know her reason—and know her inexorable!

She went to the edge of the ridge, and saw Ian sitting with his book on the other side of the burn. She called him to her, and handed him the letter. He took it, read it through, and gave it her back.

"Ian!" she exclaimed, "have you nothing to say to that?"

"I beg your pardon, mother," he answered: "I must think about it. Why should it trouble you so! It is painfully annoying, but we have come under no obligation to them!"

"No; but Alister!"

"You cannot doubt Alister will do what is right!"

"He will do what he thinks right!"

"Is not that enough, mother?"

"No," she answered angrily; "he must do the thing that is right."

"Whether he knows it or not? Could he do the thing he thought wrong?"

She was silent.

"Mother dear," resumed Ian, "the only Way to get at what IS right is to do what seems right. Even if we

mistake there is no other way!"

"You would do evil that good may come! Oh, Ian!"

"No, mother; evil that is not seen to be evil by one willing and trying to do right, is not counted evil to him. It is evil only to the person who either knows it to be evil, or does not care whether it be or not."

"That is dangerous doctrine!"

"I will go farther, mother, and say, that for Alister to do what you thought right, if he did not think it right himself—even if you were right and he wrong—would be for him to do wrong, and blind himself to the truth."

"A man may be to blame that he is not able to see the truth," said the mother.

"That is very true, but hardly such a man as Alister, who would sooner die than do the thing he believed wrong. But why should you take it for granted that Alister will think differently from you?"

"We don't always think alike."

"In matters of right and wrong, I never knew him or me think differently from you, mother!"

"He is very fond of the girl!"

"And justly. I never saw one more in earnest, or more anxious to learn."

"She might well be teachable to such teachers!"

"I don't see that she has ever sought to commend herself to either of us, mother. I believe her heart just opened to the realities she had never had shown her before. Come what may, she will never forget the things we have talked about."

"Nothing would make me trust her!"

"Why?"

"She comes of an' abominable breed."

"Is it your part, mother, to make her suffer for the sins of her fathers?"

"I make her suffer!"

"Certainly, mother—by changing your mind toward her, and suspecting her, the moment you learn cause to condemn her father."

"The sins of the fathers are visited on the children!—You will not dispute that?"

"I will grant more—that the sins of the fathers are often reproduced in the children. But it is nowhere said, 'Thou shalt visit the sins of the fathers on the children.' God puts no vengeance into our hands. I fear you

are in danger of being unjust to the girl, mother!—but then you do not know her so well as we do!"

"Of course not! Every boy understands a woman better than his mother!"

"The thing is exceedingly annoying, mother! Let us go and find Alister at once!"

"He will take it like a man of sense, I trust!"

"He will. It will trouble him terribly, but he will do as he ought. Give him time and I don't believe there is a man in the world to whom the right comes out clearer than to Alister."

The mother answered only with a sigh.

"Many a man," remarked Ian, "has been saved through what men call an unfortunate love affair!"

"Many a man has been lost by having his own way in one!" rejoined the mother.

"As to LOST, I would not make up my mind about that for a few centuries or so!" returned Ian. "A man may be allowed his own way for the discipline to result from it."

"I trust, Ian, you will not encourage him in any folly!"

"I shall have nothing to do but encourage him in his first resolve, mother!"

CHAPTER III

HOW ALISTER TOOK IT.

They could not find Alister, who had gone to the smithy. It was tea-time before he came home. As soon as he entered, his mother handed him the letter.

He read it without a word, laid it on the table beside his plate, and began to drink his tea, his eyes gleaming with a strange light, Ian kept silence also. Mrs. Macruadh cast a quick glance, now at the one, now at the other. She was in great anxiety, and could scarce restrain herself. She knew her boys full of inbred dignity and strong conscience, but was nevertheless doubtful how they would act. They could not feel as she felt, else would the hot blood of their race have at once boiled over! Had she searched herself she might have discovered a latent dread that they might be nearer the right than she. Painfully she watched them, half conscious of a traitor in her bosom, judging the world's judgment and not God's. Her sons seemed on the point of concluding as she would not have them conclude: they would side with the young woman against their mother!

The reward of parents who have tried to be good, may be to learn, with a joyous humility from their children. Mrs. Macruadh was capable of learning more, and was now going to have a lesson.

When Alister pushed back his chair and rose, she could refrain no longer. She could not let him go in silence. She must understand something of what was passing in his mind!

"What do you think of THAT, Alister?" she said.

He turned to her with a faint smile, and answered,

"I am glad to know it, mother."

"That is good. I was afraid it would hurt you!"

"Seeing the thing is so, I am glad to be made aware of it. The information itself you cannot expect me to be pleased with!"

"No, indeed, my son! I am very sorry for you. After being so taken with the young woman,—"

Alister looked straight in his mother's face.

"You do not imagine, mother," he said, "it will make any difference as to Mercy?"

"Not make any difference!" echoed Mrs. Macruadh. "What is it possible you can mean, Alister?"

The anger that glowed in her dark eyes made her look yet handsomer, proving itself not a mean, though it might be a misplaced anger.

"Is she different, mother, from what she was before you had the letter?"

"You did not then know what she was!"

"Just as well as I do now. I have no reason to think she is not what I thought her."

"You thought her the daughter of a gentleman!"

"Hardly. I thought her a lady, and such I think her still."

"Then you mean to go on with it?"

"Mother dear," said Alister, taking her by the hand, "give me a little time. Not that I am in any doubt—but the news has been such a blow to me that—"

"It must have been!" said the mother.

"—that I am afraid of answering you out of the soreness of my pride, and Ian says the Truth is never angry."

"I am quite willing you should do nothing in a hurry," said the mother.

She did not understand that he feared lest, in his indignation for Mercy, he should answer his mother as her son ought not.

"I will take time," he replied. "And here is Ian to help me!"

"Ah! if only your father were here!"

"He may be, mother! Anyhow I trust I shall do nothing he would not like!"

"He would sooner see son of his marry the daughter of a cobbler than of a brewer!"

"So would I, mother!" said Alister.

"I too," said Ian, "would much prefer that my sister-in-law's father were not a brewer."

"I suppose you are splitting some hair, Ian, but I don't see it," remarked his mother, who had begun to gather a little hope. "You will be back by supper-time, Alister, I suppose?"

"Certainly, mother. We are only going to the village."

The brothers went.

"I knew everything you were thinking," said Ian.

"Of course you did!" answered Alister.

"But I am very sorry!"

"So am I! It is a terrible bore!"

A pause followed. Alister burst into a laugh that was not merry.

"It makes me think of the look on my father's face," he said, "once at the market, as he was putting in his pocket a bunch of more than usually dirty bank-notes. The look seemed almost to be making apology that he was my father—the notes were SO DIRTY! 'They're better than they look, lad!' he said."

"What ARE you thinking of, Alister?"

"Of nothing you are not thinking of, Ian, I hope in God! Mr. Palmer's money is worse than it looks."

"You frightened me for a moment, Alister!"

"How could I, Ian?"

"It was but a nervo-mechanical fright. I knew well enough you could mean nothing I should not like. But I see trouble ahead, Alister!"

"We shall be called a pack of fools, but what of that! We shall be told the money itself was clean, however dirty the hands that made it! The money-grubs!"

"I would rather see you hanged, than pocketing a shilling of it!"

"Of course you would! But the man who could pocket it, will be relieved to find it is only his daughter I care about."

"There will be difficulty, Alister, I fear. How much have you said to Mercy?"

"I have SAID nothing definite."

"But she understands?"

"I think—I hope so.—Don't you think Christina is much improved, Ian?"

"She is more pleasant."

"She is quite attentive to you!"

"She is pleased with me for saving her life. She does not like me—and I have just arrived at not disliking her."

"There is a great change on her!"

"I doubt if there is any IN her though!"

"She may be only amusing herself with us in this outlandish place! Mercy, I am sure, is quite different!"

"I would trust her with anything, Alister. That girl would die for the man she loved!"

"I would rather have her love, though we should never meet in this world, than the lands of my fathers!"

"What will you do then?"

"I will go to Mr. Palmer, and say to him: 'Give me your daughter. I am a poor man, but we shall have enough to live upon. I believe she will be happy.'"

"I will answer for him: 'I have the greatest regard for you, Macruadh. You are a gentleman, and that you are poor is not of the slightest consequence; Mercy's dowry shall be worthy the lady of a chief!'—What then, Alister?"

"Fathers that love money must be glad to get rid of their daughters without a dowry!"

"Yes, perhaps, when they are misers, or money is scarce, or wanted for something else. But when a poor man of position wanted to marry his daughter, a parent like Mr. Palmer would doubtless regard her dowry as a good investment. You must not think to escape that way, Alister! What would you answer him?"

"I would say, 'My dear sir,'—I may say 'My dear sir,' may I not? there is something about the man I like!—'I do not want your money. I will not have your money. Give me your daughter, and my soul will bless you.'"

"Suppose he should reply, 'Do you think I am going to send my daughter from my house like a beggar? No, no, my boy! she must carry something with her! If beggars married beggars, the world would be full of beggars!'—what would you say then?"

"I would tell him I had conscientious scruples about taking his money."

"He would tell you you were a fool, and not to be trusted with a wife. 'Who ever heard such rubbish!' he would say. 'Scruples, indeed! You must get over them! What are they?'—What would you say then?"

"If it came to that, I should have no choice but tell him I had insuperable objections to the way his fortune was made, and could not consent to share it."

"He would protest himself insulted, and swear, if his money was not good enough for you, neither was his daughter. What then?"

"I would appeal to Mercy."

"She is too young. It would be sad to set one of her years at variance with her family. I almost think I would rather you ran away with her. It is a terrible thing to go into a house and destroy the peace of those relations which are at the root of all that is good in the world."

"I know it! I know it! That is my trouble! I am not afraid of Mercy's courage, and I am sure she would hold out. I am certain nothing would make her marry the man she did not love. But to turn the house into a hell

about her—I shrink from that!—Do you count it necessary to provide against every contingency before taking the first step?"

"Indeed I do not! The first step is enough. When that step has landed us, we start afresh. But of all things you must not lose your temper with the man. However despicable his money, you are his suitor for his daughter! And he may possibly not think you half good enough for her."

"That would be a grand way out of the difficulty!"

"How?"

"It would leave me far freer to deal with her."

"Perhaps. And in any case, the more we can honestly avoid reference to his money, the better. We are not called on to rebuke."

"Small is my inclination to allude to it—so long as not a stiver of it seeks to cross to the Macruadh!"

"That is fast as fate. But there is another thing, Alister: I fear lest you should ever forget that her birth and her connections are no more a part of the woman's self than her poverty or her wealth."

"I know it, Ian. I will not forget it."

"There must never be a word concerning them!"

"Nor a thought, Ian! In God's name I will be true to her."

They found Annie of the shop in a sad way. She had just had a letter from Lachlan, stating that he had not been well for some time, and that there was little prospect of his being able to fetch her. He prayed her therefore to go out to him; and had sent money to pay her passage and her mother's.

"When do you go?" asked the chief.

"My mother fears the voyage, and is very unwilling to turn her back on her own country. But oh, if Lachlan die, and me not with him!"

She could say no more.

"He shall not die for want of you!" said the laird. "I will talk to your mother."

He went into the room behind. Ian remained in the shop.

"Of course you must go, Annie!" he said.

"Indeed, sir, I must! But how to persuade my mother I do not know! And I cannot leave her even for Lachlan. No one would nurse him more tenderly than she; but she has a horror of the salt water, and what she most dreads is being buried in it. She imagines herself drowning to all eternity!"

"My brother will persuade her."

"I hope so, sir. I was just coming to him! I should never hold up my head again—in this world or the next—either if I did not go, or if I went without my mother! Aunt Conal told me, about a month since, that I was going a long journey, and would never come back. I asked her if I was to die on the way, but she would not answer me. Anyhow I'm not fit to be his wife, if I'm not ready to die for him! Some people think it wrong to marry anybody going to die, but at the longest, you know, sir, you must part sooner than you would! Not many are allowed to die together!—You don't think, do you, sir, that marriages go for nothing in the other world?"

She spoke with a white face and brave eyes, and Ian was glad at heart.

"I do not, Annie," he answered. "'The gifts of God are without repentance.' He did not give you and Lachlan to each other to part you again! Though you are not married yet, it is all the same so long as you are true to each other."

"Thank you, sir; you always make me feel strong!"

Alister came from the back room.

"I think your mother sees it not quite so difficult now," he said.

The next time they went, they found them preparing to go.

Now Ian had nearly finished the book he was writing about Russia, and could not begin another all at once. He must not stay at home doing nothing, and he thought that, as things were going from bad to worse in the highlands, he might make a voyage to Canada, visit those of his clan, and see what ought to be done for such as must soon follow them. He would presently have a little money in his possession, and believed he could not spend it better. He made up his mind therefore to accompany Annie and her mother, which resolve overcame the last of the old woman's lingering reluctance. He did not like leaving Alister at such a critical point in his history; but he said to himself that a man might be helped too much; and it might come that he and Mercy were in as much need of a refuge as the clan.

I cannot say NO worldly pride mingled in the chief's contempt for the distiller's money; his righteous soul was not yet clear of its inherited judgments as to what is dignified and what is not. He had in him still the prejudice of the landholder, for ages instinctive, against both manufacture and trade. Various things had combined to foster in him also the belief that trade at least was never free from more or less of unfair dealing, and was therefore in itself a low pursuit. He had not argued that nothing the Father of men has decreed can in its nature be contemptible, but must be capable of being nobly done. In the things that some one must do, the doer ranks in God's sight, and ought to rank among his fellow-men, according to how he does it. The higher the calling the more contemptible the man who therein pursues his own ends. The humblest calling, followed on the principles of the divine caller, is a true and divine calling, be it scavenging, handicraft, shop-keeping, or book-making. Oh for the day when God and not the king shall be regarded as the fountain of honour.

But the Macruadh looked upon the calling of the brewer or distiller as from the devil: he was not called of God to brew or distil! From childhood his mother had taught him a horror of gain by corruption. She had taught, and he had learned, that the poorest of all justifications, the least fit to serve the turn of gentleman, logician, or Christian, was—"If I do not touch this pitch, another will; there will be just as much harm done; AND ANOTHER INSTEAD OF ME WILL HAVE THE BENEFIT; therefore it cannot

defile me.—Offences must come, therefore I will do them!" "Imagine our Lord in the brewing trade instead of the carpentering!" she would say. That better beer was provided by the good brewer would not go far for brewer or drinker, she said: it mattered little that, by drinking good beer, the drunkard lived to be drunk the oftener. A brewer might do much to reduce drinking; but that would be to reduce a princely income to a modest livelihood, and to content himself with the baker's daughter instead of the duke's! It followed that the Macruadh would rather have robbed a church than touched Mr. Peregrine Palmer's money. To rifle the tombs of the dead would have seemed to him pure righteousness beside sharing in that. He could give Mercy up; he could NOT take such money with her! Much as he loved her, separate as he saw her, clearly as she was to him a woman undefiled and straight from God, it was yet a trial to him that she should be the daughter of a person whose manufacture and trade were such.

After much consideration, it was determined in the family conclave, that Ian should accompany the two women to Canada, note how things were going, and conclude what had best be done, should further exodus be found necessary. As, however, there had come better news of Lachlan, and it was plain he was in no immediate danger, they would not, for several reasons, start before the month of September. A few of the poorest of the clan resolved to go with them. Partly for their sakes, partly because his own provision would be small, Ian would take his passage also in the steerage.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE.

Christina went back to London considerably changed. Her beauty was greater far, for there was a new element in it—a certain atmosphere of distances and shadows gave mystery to her landscape. Her weather, that is her mood, was now subject to changes which to many made her more attractive. Fits of wild gaiety alternated with glooms, through which would break flashes of feline playfulness, where pat and scratch were a little mixed. She had more admirers than ever, for she had developed points capable of interesting men of somewhat higher development than those she had hitherto pleased. At the same time she was more wayward and imperious with her courtiers. Gladly would she have thrown all the flattery once so coveted into the rag-bag of creation, to have one approving smile from the grave-looking, gracious man, whom she knew happier, wandering alone over the hills, than if she were walking by his side. For an hour she would persuade herself that he cared for her a little; the next she would comfort herself with the small likelihood of his meeting another lady in Glenruadh. But then he had been such a traveller, had seen so much of the great world, that perhaps he was already lost to her! It seemed but too probable, when she recalled the sadness with which he seemed sometimes overshadowed: it could not be a religious gloom, for when he spoke of God his face shone, and his words were strong! I think she mistook a certain gravity, like that of the Merchant of Venice, for sorrowfulness; though doubtless the peculiarity of his loss, as well as the loss itself, did sometimes make him sad.

She had tried on him her little arts of subjugation, but the moment she began to love him, she not only saw their uselessness, but hated them. Her repellent behaviour to her admirers, and her occasional excitement and oddity, caused her mother some anxiety, but as the season came to a close, she grew gayer, and was at times absolutely bewitching. The mother wished to go northward by degrees, paying visits on the way; but her plan met with no approbation from the girls. Christina longed for the presence and voice of Ian in the cottage-parlour, Mercy for a hill-side with the chief; both longed to hear them speak to each other in their own great way. And they talked so of the delights of their highland home, that the mother began to feel the mountains, the sea, and the islands, drawing her to a land of peace, where things went well, and the world knew how to live. But the stormiest months of her life were about to pass among those dumb mountains!

After a long and eager journey, the girls were once more in their rooms at the New House.

Mercy went to her window, and stood gazing from it upon the mountain-world, faint-lighted by the northern twilight. She might have said with Portia:—

"This night methinks is but the daylight sick;
It looks a little paler: 'tis a day,
Such as the day is when the sun is hid."

She could see the dark bulk of the hills, sharpened to a clear edge against the pellucid horizon, but with no colour, and no visible featuring of their great fronts. When the sun rose, it would reveal innumerable varieties of surface, by the mottling of endless shadows; now all was smooth as an unawakened conscience. By the shape of a small top that rose against the greenish sky betwixt the parting lines of two higher hills, where it seemed to peep out over the marge into the infinite, as a little man through the gap between the heads of taller neighbours, she knew the roof of THE TOMB; and she thought how, just below there, away as it seemed in the high-lifted solitudes of heaven, she had lain in the clutches of death, all the time watched and defended by the angel of a higher life who had been with her ever since first she came to Glenruadh, waking her out of such a stupidity, such a non-existence, as now she could scarce see possible to human being. It was true her waking had been one with her love to that human East which first she saw as she opened her eyes, and whence first the light of her morning had flowed—the man who had been and was to her the window of God! But why should that make her doubt? God made man and woman to love each other: why should not the waking to love and the waking to truth come together, seeing both were of God? If the chief were never to speak to her again, she would never go back from what she had learned of him! If she ever became careless of truth and life and God, it would but show that she had never truly loved the chief!

As she stood gazing on the hill-top, high landmark of her history, she felt as if the earth were holding her up toward heaven, an offering to the higher life. The hill grew an altar of prayer on which her soul was lying, dead until taken up into life by the arms of the Father. A deep content pervaded her heart. She turned with her weight of peace, lay down, and went to sleep in the presence of her Life.

Christina looked also from her window, but her thoughts were not like Mercy's, for her heart was mainly filled, not with love of Ian, but with desire that Ian should love her. She longed to be his queen—the woman of all women he had seen. The sweet repose of the sleeping world wrought in her—not peace, but weakness. Her soul kept leaning towards Ian; she longed for his arms to start out the alien nature lying so self-satisfied all about her. To her the presence of God took shape as an emptiness—an absence. The resting world appeared to her cold, unsympathetic, heedless; its peace was but heartlessness. The soft pellucid chrysolite of passive heavenly thought, was a merest arrangement, a common fact, meaning nothing to her.

She was hungry, not merely after bliss, but after distinction in bliss; not after growth, but after acknowledged superiority. She needed to learn that she was nobody—that if the world were peopled with creatures like her, it would be no more worth sustaining than were it a world of sand, of which no man could build even a hut. Still, by her need of another, God was laying hold of her. As by the law is the knowledge of sin, so by love is selfishness rampantly roused—to be at last, like death, swallowed up in victory—the victory of the ideal self that dwells in God.

All night she dreamed sad dreams of Ian in the embrace of a lovely woman, without word or look for her. She woke weeping, and said to herself that it could not be. He COULD not be taken from her! it was against nature! Soul, brain, and heart, claimed him hers! How could another possess what, in the testimony of her whole consciousness, was hers and hers alone! Love asserts an innate and irreversible right of profoundest property in the person loved. It is an instinct—but how wrongly, undivinely, falsely interpreted! Hence so many tears! Hence a law of nature, deep written in the young heart, seems often set utterly at nought by circumstance!

But the girl in her dejection and doubt, was worth far more than in her content and confidence. She was

even now the richer by the knowledge of sorrow, and she was on the way to know that she needed help, on the way to hate herself, to become capable of loving. Life could never be the same to her, and the farther from the same the better!

The beauty came down in the morning pale and dim and white-lipped, like a flower that had had no water. Mercy was fresh and rosy, with a luminous mist of loveliness over her plain unfinished features. Already had they begun to change in the direction of beauty. Christina's eyes burned; in Mercy's shone something of the light by which a soul may walk and not stumble. In the eyes of both was expectation, in the eyes of the one confident, in the eyes of the other anxious.

As soon as they found themselves alone together, eyes sought eyes, and met in understanding. They had not made confidantes of each other, each guessed well, and was well guessed at. They did not speculate; they understood. In like manner, Mercy and Alister understood each other, but not Christina and Ian. Neither of these knew the feelings of the other.

Without a word they rose, put on their hats, left the house, and took the road toward the valley.

About half-way to the root of the ridge, they came in sight of the ruined castle; Mercy stopped with a little cry.

"Look! Chrissy!" she said, pointing.

On the corner next them, close by the pepper-pot turret, sat the two men, in what seemed to loving eyes a dangerous position, but to the mountaineers themselves a comfortable coin of vantage. The girls thought, "They are looking out for us!" but Ian was there only because Alister was there.

The men waved their bonnets. Christina responded with her handkerchief. The men disappeared from their perch, and were with the ladies before they reached the ridge. There was no embarrassment on either side, though a few cheeks were rosier than usual. To the chief, Mercy was far beyond his memory of her. Not her face only, but her every movement bore witness to a deeper pleasure, a greater freedom in life than before.

"Why were you in such a dangerous place?" asked Christina.

"We were looking out for you," answered Alister. "From there we could see you the moment you came out."

"Why didn't you come and meet us then?"

"Because we wanted to watch you coming."

"Spies!—I hope, Mercy, we were behaving ourselves properly! I had no idea we were watched!"

"We thought you had quarrelled; neither said a word to the other."

Mercy looked up; Christina looked down.

"Could you hear us at that height?" asked Mercy.

"How could we when there was not a word to hear!"

"How did you know we were silent?"

"We might have known by the way you walked," replied Alister. "But if you had spoken we should have heard, for sound travels far among the mountains!"

"Then I think it was a shame!" said Christina. "How could you tell that we might not object to your hearing us?"

"We never thought of that!" said Alister. "I am very sorry. We shall certainly not be guilty again!"

"What men you are for taking everything in downright earnest!" cried Christina; "—as if we could have anything to say we should wish YOU not to hear?"

She put a little emphasis on the YOU, but not much. Alister heard it as if Mercy had said it, and smiled a pleased smile.

"It will be a glad day for the world," he said, "when secrecy is over, and every man may speak out the thing that is in him, without danger of offence!"

In her turn, Christina heard the words as if spoken with reference to Ian though not by him, and took them to hint at the difficulty of saying what was in his heart. She had such an idea of her superiority because of her father's wealth and fancied position, that she at once concluded Ian dreaded rejection with scorn, for it was not even as if he were the chief. However poor, Alister was at least the head of a family, and might set SIR before, and BARONET after his name—not that her father would think that much of a dignity!—but no younger son of whatever rank, would be good enough for her in her father's eyes! At the same time she had a choice as well as her father, and he should find she too had a will of her own!

"But was it not a dangerous place to be in?" she said.

"It is a little crumbly!" confessed Ian. "—That reminds me, Alister, we must have a bout at the old walls before long!—Ever since Alister was ten years old," he went on in explanation to Christina, "he and I have been patching and pointing at the old hulk—the stranded ship of our poor fortunes. I showed you, did I not, the ship in our coat of arms—the galley at least, in which, they say, we arrived at the island?"

"Yes, I remember.—But you don't mean you do mason's work as well as everything else?" exclaimed Christina.

"Come; we will show you," said the chief.

"What do you do it for?"

The brothers exchanged glances.

"Would you count it sufficient reason," returned Ian, "that we desired to preserve its testimony to the former status of our family?"

A pang of pleasure shot through the heart of Christina. Passion is potent to twist in its favour whatever can

possibly be so twisted. Here was an indubitable indication of his thoughts! He must make the most of himself, set what he could against the overwhelming advantages on her side! In the eyes of a man of the world like her father, an old name was nothing beside new money! still an old castle was always an old castle! and that he cared about it for her sake made it to her at least worth something!

Ere she could give an answer, Ian went on.

"But in truth," he said, "we have always had a vague hope of its resurrection. The dream of our boyhood was to rebuild the castle. Every year it has grown more hopeless, and keeps receding. But we have come to see how little it matters, and content ourselves with keeping up, for old love's sake, what is left of the ruin."

"How do you get up on the walls?" asked Mercy.

"Ah, that is a secret!" said Ian.

"Do tell us," pleaded Christina.

"If you want very much to know,—" answered Ian, a little doubtfully.

"I do, I do!"

"Then I suppose we must tell you!"

Yet more confirmation to the passion-prejudiced ears of Christina!

"There is a stair," Ian went on, "of which no one but our two selves knows anything. Such stairs are common in old houses—far commoner than people in towns have a notion of. But there would not have been much of it left by this time, if we hadn't taken care of it. We were little fellows when we began, and it needed much contrivance, for we were not able to unseat the remnants of the broken steps, and replace them with new ones."

"Do show it us," begged Christina.

"We will keep it," said Alister, "for some warm twilight. Morning is not for ruins. Yon mountain-side is calling to us. Will you come, Mercy?"

"Oh yes!" cried Christina; "that will be much better! Come, Mercy! You are up to a climb, I am sure!"

"I ought to be, after such a long rest."

"You may have forgotten how to climb!" said Alister.

"I dreamed too much of the hills for that! And always the noise of London was changed into the rush of waters."

They had dropped a little behind the other pair.

"Did you always climb your dream-hills alone?" asked Alister.

She answered him with just a lift of her big dark eyes.

They walked slowly down the road till they came to Mrs. Conal's path, passed her door unassailed, and went up the hill.

CHAPTER V

PASSION AND PATIENCE.

It was a glorious morning, and as they climbed, the lightening air made their spirits rise with their steps. Great masses of cloud hung beyond the edge of the world, and here and there towered foundationless in the sky—huge tumulous heaps of white vapour with gray shadows. The sun was strong, and poured down floods of light, but his heat was deliciously tempered by the mountain atmosphere. There was no wind—only an occasional movement as if the air itself were breathing—just enough to let them feel they moved in no vacuum, but in the heart of a gentle ocean.

They came to the hut I have already described as the one chiefly inhabited by Hector of the Stags and Bob of the Angels. It commanded a rare vision. In every direction rose some cone-shaped hill. The world lay in coloured waves before them, wild, rugged, and grand, with sheltering spots of beauty between, and the shine of lowly waters. They tapped at the door of the hut, but there was no response; they lifted the latch—it had no lock—and found neither within. Alister and Mercy wandered a little higher, to the shadow of a great stone; Christina went inside the hut and looked from its door upon the world; Ian leaned against the side of it, and looked up to the sky. Suddenly a few great drops fell—it was hard to say whence. The scattered clouds had been drawing a little nearer the sun, growing whiter as they approached him, and more had ascended from the horizon into the middle air, blue sky abounding between them. A swift rain, like a rain of the early summer, began to fall, and grew to a heavy shower. They were glorious drops that made that shower; for the sun shone, and every drop was a falling gem, shining, sparkling like a diamond, as it fell. It was a bounteous rain, coming from near the zenith, and falling in straight lines direct from heaven to earth. It wanted but sound to complete its charm, and that the bells of the heather gave, set ringing by the drops. The heaven was filled with blue windows, and the rain seemed to come from them rather than from the clouds. Into the rain rose the heads of the mountains, each clothed in its surplice of thin mist; they seemed rising on tiptoe heavenward, eager to drink of the high-born comfort; for the rain comes down, not upon the mown grass only, but upon the solitary and desert places also, where grass will never be—"the playgrounds of the young angels," Bob called them.

"Do come in," said Christina; "you will get quite wet!"

He turned towards her. She stepped back, and he entered. Like one a little weary, he sat down on Hector's old chair.

"Is anything the matter?" asked Christina, with genuine concern.

She saw that he was not quite like himself, that there was an unusual expression on his face. He gave a faint apologetic smile.

"As I stood there," he answered, "a strange feeling came over me—a foreboding, I suppose you would call it!"

He paused; Christina grew pale, and said, "Won't you tell me what it was?"

"It was an odd kind of conviction that the next time I stood there, it would not be in the body.—I think I shall not come back."

"Come back!" echoed Christina, fear beginning to sip at the cup of her heart. "Where are you going?"

"I start for Canada next week."

She turned deadly white, and put out her hands, feeling blindly after support. Ian started to his feet.

"We have tired you out!" he said in alarm, and took her by both hands to place her in the chair.

She did not hear him. The world had grown dark about her, a hissing noise was in her ears, and she would have fallen had he not put his arm round her. The moment she felt supported, she began to come to herself. There was no pretence, however, no coquetry in her faintness. Neither was it aught but misery and affection that made her lay her head on Ian's shoulder, and burst into a violent fit of weeping. Unused to real emotion, familiar only with the poverty-stricken, false emotion of conquest and gratified vanity, when the real emotion came she did not know how to deal with it, and it overpowered her.

"Oh! oh!" she cried at length between her sobs, "I am ashamed of myself! I can't help it! I can't help it! What will you think of me! I have disgraced myself!"

Ian had been far from any suspicion of the state of things, but he had had too much sorrowful experience to be able to keep his unwilling eyes closed to this new consternation. The cold shower seemed to flood his soul; the bright drops descending with such swiftness of beauty, instinct with sun-life, turned into points of icy steel that pierced his heart. But he must not heed himself! he must speak to her! He must say something through the terrible shroud that infolded them!

"You are as safe with me," he faltered, "—as safe as with your mother!"

"I believe it! I know it," she answered, still sobbing, but looking up with an expression of genuine integrity such as he had never seen on her face before. "But I AM sorry!" she went on. "It is very weak, and very, very un—un—womanly of me! But it came upon me all at once! If I had only had some warning! Oh, why did you not tell me before? Why did you not prepare me for it? You might have known what it would be to hear it so suddenly!"

More and more aghast grew Ian! What was to be done? What was to be said? What was left for a man to do, when a woman laid her soul before him? Was there nothing but a lie to save her from bitterest humiliation? To refuse any woman was to Ian a hard task; once he had found it impossible to refuse even where he could not give, and had let a woman take his soul! Thank God, she took it indeed! he yielded himself perfectly, and God gave him her in return! But that was once, and for ever! It could not be done again!

"I am very sorry!" he murmured; and the words and their tone sent a shiver through the heart of Christina.

But now that she had betrayed her secret, the pent up tide of her phantasy rushed to the door. She was reckless. Used to everything her own way, knowing nothing of disappointment, a new and ill understood passion dominating her, she let everything go and the torrent sweep her with it. Passion, like a lovely wild beast, had mastered her, and she never thought of trying to tame it. It was herself! there was not enough of her outside the passion to stand up against it! She began to see the filmy eyed Despair, and had neither experience to deal with herself, nor reticence enough to keep silence.

"If you speak to me like that," she cried, "my heart will break!—Must you go away?"

"Dear Miss Palmer,—" faltered Ian.

"Oh!" she ejaculated, with a world of bitterness in the protest.

"—do let us be calm!" continued Ian. "We shall not come to anything if we lose ourselves this way!"

The WE and the US gave her a little hope.

"How can I be calm!" she cried. "I am not cold-hearted like you!—You are going away, and I shall never see you again to all eternity!"

She burst out weeping afresh.

"Do love me a little before you go," she sobbed. "You gave me my life once, but that does not make it right to take it from me again! It only gives you a right to its best!"

"God knows," said Ian, "if my life could serve you, I should count it a small thing to yield!—But this is idle talk! A man must not pretend anything! We must not be untrue!"

She fancied he did not believe in her.

"I know! I know! you may well distrust me!" she returned. "I have often behaved abominably to you! But indeed I am true now! I dare not tell you a lie. To you I MUST speak the truth, for I love you with my whole soul."

Ian stood dumb. His look of consternation and sadness brought her to herself a little.

"What have I done!" she cried, and drawing back a pace, stood looking at him, and trembling. "I am disgraced for ever! I have told a man I love him, and he leaves me to the shame of it! He will not save me from it! he will not say one word to take it away! Where is your generosity, Ian?"

"I must be true!" said Ian, speaking as if to himself, and in a voice altogether unlike his own.

"You will not love me! You hate me! You despise me! But I will not live rejected! He brushes me like a feather from his coat!"

"Hear me," said Ian, trying to recover himself. "Do not think me insensible—"

"Oh, yes! I know!" cried Christina yet more bitterly; "—INSENSIBLE TO THE HONOUR *I* DO YOU, and all that world of nothing!—Pray use your victory! Lord it over me! I am the weed under your foot! I

beg you will not spare me! Speak out what you think of me!"

Ian took her hand. It trembled as if she would pull it away, and her eyes flashed an angry fire. She looked more nearly beautiful than ever he had seen her! His heart was like to break. He drew her to the chair, and taking a stool, sat down beside her. Then, with a voice that gathered strength as he proceeded, he said:—

"Let me speak to you, Christina Palmer, as in the presence of him who made us! To pretend I loved you would be easier than to bear the pain of giving you such pain. Were I selfish enough, I could take much delight in your love; but I scorn the unmanliness of accepting gold and returning silver: my love is not mine to give."

It was some relief to her proud heart to imagine he would have loved her had he been free. But she did not speak.

"If I thought," pursued Ian, "that I had, by any behaviour of mine, been to blame for this,— " There he stopped, lest he should seem to lay blame on her.— "I think," he resumed, "I could help you if you would listen to me. Were I in like trouble with you, I would go into my room, and shut the door, and tell my Father in heaven everything about it. Ah, Christina! if you knew him, you would not break your heart that a man did not love you just as you loved him."

Had not her misery been so great, had she not also done the thing that humbled her before herself, Christina would have been indignant with the man who refused her love and dared speak to her of religion; but she was now too broken for resentment.

The diamond rain was falling, the sun was shining in his vaporous strength, and the great dome of heaven stood fathomless above the pair; but to Christina the world was black and blank as the gloomy hut in which they sat. When first her love blossomed, she saw the world open; she looked into its heart; she saw it alive—saw it burning with that which made the bush alive in the desert of Horeb—the presence of the living God; now, the vision was over, the desert was dull and dry, the bush burned no more, the glowing lava had cooled to unsightly stone! There was no God, nor any man more! Time had closed and swept the world into the limbo of vanity! For a time she sat without thought, as it were in a mental sleep. She opened her eyes, and the blank of creation stared into the very heart of her. The emptiness and loneliness overpowered her. Hardly aware of what she was doing, she slid to her knees at Ian's feet, crying,

"Save me, save me, Ian! I shall go mad! Pardon me! Help me!"

"All a man may be to his sister, I am ready to be to you. I will write to you from Canada; you can answer me or not as you please. My heart cries out to me to take you in my arms and comfort you, but I must not; it would not comfort you."

"You do not despise me, then?—Oh, thank you!"

"Despise you!—no more than my dead sister! I would cherish you as I would her were she in like sorrow. I would die to save you this grief—except indeed that I hope much from it."

"Forget all about me," said Christina, summoning pride to her aid.

"I will not forget you. It is impossible, nor would I if I could."

"You forgive me then, and will not think ill of me?"

"How forgive trust? Is that an offence?"

"I have lost your good opinion! How could I degrade myself so!"

"On the contrary, you are fast gaining my good opinion. You have begun to be a true woman!"

"What if it should be only for—"

"Whatever it may have been for, now you have tasted truth you will not turn back!"

"Now I know you do not care for me, I fear I shall soon sink back into my old self!"

"I do care for you, Christina, and you will not sink back into your old self. God means you to be a strong, good woman—able, with the help he will give you, to bear grief in a great-hearted fashion. Believe me, you and I may come nearer each other in the ages before us by being both true, than is possible in any other way whatever."

"I am miserable at the thought of what you must think of me! Everybody would say I had done a shameless thing in confessing my love!"

"I am not in the way of thinking as everybody thinks. There is little justice, and less sympathy, to be had from everybody. I would think and judge and feel as the one, my Master. Be sure you are safe with me."

"You will not tell anybody?"

"You must trust me."

"I beg your pardon! I have offended you!"

"Not in the least. But I will bind myself by no promises. I am bound already to be as careful over you as if you were the daughter of my father and mother. Your confession, instead of putting you in my power,

makes me your servant."

By this time Christina was calm. There was a great load on her heart, but somehow she was aware of the possibility of carrying it. She looked up gratefully in Ian's face, already beginning to feel for him a reverence which made it easier to forego the right to put her arms round him. And therewith awoke in her the first movement of divine relationship—rose the first heave of the child-heart toward the source of its being. It appeared in the form of resistance. Complaint against God is far nearer to God than indifference about him.

"Ian Macruadh," said Christina solemnly, and she looked him in the eyes as she said it, "how can you believe there is a God? If there were, would he allow such a dreadful thing to befall one of his creatures? How am I to blame? I could not help it!"

"I see in it his truth and goodness toward his child. And he will let you see it. The thing is between him and you."

"It will be hard to convince me it is either good or loving to make anyone suffer like this!" protested Christina, her hand unconsciously pressed on her heart; "—and all the disgrace of it too!" she added bitterly.

"I will not allow there is any disgrace," returned Ian. "But I will not try to convince you of anything about God. I cannot. You must know him. I only say I believe in him with all my heart. You must ask him to explain himself to you, and not take it for granted, because he has done what you do not like, that he has done you a wrong. Whether you seek him or not, he will do you justice; but he cannot explain himself except you seek him."

"I think I understand. Believe me, I am willing to understand."

A few long seconds of silence followed. Christina came a little nearer. She was still on her knees.

"Will you kiss me once," she said, "as you would a little child!"

"In the name of God!" answered Ian, and stooping kissed her gently and tenderly.

"Thank you!" she said; "—and now the rain is over, let us join Mercy and the chief. I hope they have not got very wet!"

"Alister will have taken care of that. There is plenty of shelter about here."

They left the cottage, drew the door close, and through the heather, sparkling with a thousand rain-drops, the sun shining hotter than ever through the rain-mist, went up the hill.

They found the other pair sheltered by the great stone, which was not only a shadow from the heat, but sloped sufficiently to be a covert from the rain. They did not know it had ceased; perhaps they did not know it had rained.

On a fine morning of the following week, the emigrants began the first stage of their long journey; the women in two carts, with their small impedimenta, the men walking—Ian with them, a stout stick in his hand. They were to sail from Greenock.

Ian and Christina met several times before he left, but never alone. No conference of any kind, not even of eyes, had been sought by Christina, and Ian had resolved to say nothing more until he reached Canada. Thence he would write things which pen and ink would say better and carry nearer home than could speech; and by that time too the first keenness of her pain would have dulled, and left her mind more capable of receiving them. He was greatly pleased with the gentle calm of her behaviour. No one else could have seen any difference toward himself. He read in her carriage that of a child who had made a mistake, and was humbled, not vexed. Her mother noted that her cheek was pale, and that she seemed thoughtful; but farther she did not penetrate. To Ian it was plain that she had set herself to be reasonable.

CHAPTER VI

LOVE GLOOMING.

Ian, the light of his mother's eyes, was gone, and she felt forsaken. Alister was too much occupied with Mercy to feel his departure as on former occasions, yet he missed him every hour of the day. Mercy and he met, but not for some time in open company, as Christina refused to go near the cottage. Things were ripening to a change.

Alister's occupation with Mercy, however, was far from absorption; the moment Ian was gone, he increased his attention to his mother, feeling she had but him. But his mother was not quite the same to him now. At times she was even more tender; at other times she seemed to hold him away from her, as one with whom she was not in sympathy. The fear awoke in him that she might so speak to some one of the Palmers as to raise an insuperable barrier between the families; and this fear made him resolve to come at once to an understanding with Mercy. The resulting difficulties might be great; he felt keenly the possible alternative of his loss of Mercy, or Mercy's loss of her family; but the fact that he loved her gave him a right to tell her so, and made it his duty to lay before her the probability of an obstacle. That his mother did not like the alliance had to be braved, for a man must leave father and mother and cleave to his wife—a saying commonly by male presumption inverted. Mercy's love he believed such that she would, without a thought, leave the luxury of her father's house for the mere plenty of his. That it would not be to descend but to rise in the true social scale he would leave her to discover. Had he known what Mr. Palmer was, and how his money had been made, he would neither have sought nor accepted his acquaintance, and it would no more have been possible to fall in love with one of his family than to covet one of his fine horses. But that which might, could, would, or should have been, affected in no way that which was. He had entered in ignorance, by the will of God, into certain relations with "the young woman," as his mother called her, and those relations had to be followed to their natural and righteous end.

Talking together over possibilities, Mr. Peregrine Palmer had agreed with his wife that, Mercy being so far from a beauty, it might not be such a bad match, would not at least be one to be ashamed of, if she did marry the impoverished chief of a highland clan with a baronetcy in his pocket. Having bought the land cheap, he could afford to let a part, perhaps even the whole of it, go back with his daughter, thus restoring to its former position an ancient and honourable family. The husband of his younger daughter would then be head of one of the very few highland families yet in possession of their ancestral acres—a distinction he would owe to Peregrine Palmer! It was a pleasant thought to the kindly, consequential, common little man. Mrs. Palmer, therefore, when the chief called upon her, received him with more than her previous cordiality.

His mother would have been glad to see him return from his call somewhat dejected; he entered so radiant and handsome, that her heart sank within her. Was she actually on the point of being allied through the

child of her bosom to a distiller and brewer—a man who had grown rich on the ruin of thousands of his fellow countrymen? To what depths might not the most ancient family sink! For any poverty, she said to herself, she was prepared—but how was she to endure disgrace! Alas for the clan, whose history was about to cease—smothered in the defiling garment of ill-gotten wealth! Miserable, humiliating close to ancient story! She had no doubt as to her son's intention, although he had said nothing; she KNEW that his refusal of dower would be his plea in justification; but would that deliver them from the degrading approval of the world? How many, if they ever heard of it, would believe that the poor, high-souled Macruadh declined to receive a single hundred from his father-in-law's affluence! That he took his daughter poor as she was born—his one stipulation that she should be clean from her father's mud! For one to whom there would even be a chance of stating the truth of the matter, a hundred would say, "That's your plan! The only salvation for your shattered houses! Point them up well with the bird-lime of the brewer, the quack, or the money-lender, and they'll last till doom'sday!"

Thus bitterly spoke the mother. She brooded and scorned, raged inwardly, and took to herself dishonour, until evidently she was wasting. The chief's heart was troubled; could it be that she doubted his strength to resist temptation? He must make haste and have the whole thing settled! And first of all speak definitely to Mercy on the matter!

He had appointed to meet her the same evening, and went long before the hour to watch for her appearing. He climbed the hill, and lay down in the heather whence he could see the door of the New House, and Mercy the moment she should come out of it. He lay there till the sun was down, and the stars began to appear. At length—and even then it was many minutes to the time—he saw the door open, and Mercy walk slowly to the gate. He rose and went down the hill. She saw him, watched him descending, and the moment he reached the road, went to meet him. They walked slowly down the road, without a word spoken, until they felt themselves alone.

"You look so lovely!" said the chief.

"In the twilight, I suppose!" said Mercy.

"Perhaps; you are a creature of the twilight, or the night rather, with your great black eyes!"

"I don't like you to speak to me so! You never did before! You know I am not lovely! I am very plain!"

She was evidently not pleased.

"What have I done to vex you, Mercy?" he rejoined. "Why should you mind my saying what is true?"

She bit her lip, and could hardly speak to answer him. Often in London she had been morally sickened by the false rubbish talked to her sister, and had boasted to herself that the chief had never paid her a compliment. Now he had done it!

She took her hand from his arm.

"I think I will go home!" she said.

Alister stopped and turned to her. The last gleam of the west was reflected from her eyes, and all the

sadness of the fading light seemed gathered into them.

"My child!" he said, all that was fatherly in the chief rising at the sight, "who has been making you unhappy?"

"You," she answered, looking him in the face.

"How? I do not understand!" he returned, gazing at her bewildered.

"You have just paid me a compliment—a thing you never did before—a thing I never heard before from any but a fool! How could you say I was beautiful! You know I am not beautiful! It breaks my heart to think you could say what you didn't believe!"

"Mercy!" answered the chief, "if I said you were beautiful, and to my eyes you were not, it would yet be true; for to my heart, which sees deeper than my eyes, you are more beautiful than any other ever was or ever will be. I know you are not beautiful in the world's meaning, but you are very lovely—and it was lovely I said you were!"

"Lovely because you love me? Is that what you meant?"

"Yes, that and more. Your eyes are beautiful, and your hair is beautiful, and your expression is lovely. But I am not flattering you—I am not even paying you compliments, for those things are not yours; God made them, and has given them to me!"

She put her hand in his arm again, and there was no more love-making.

"But Mercy," said the chief, when they had walked some distance without speaking, "do you think you could live here always, and never see London again?"

"I would not care if London were scratched out."

"Could you be content to be a farmer's wife?"

"If he was a very good farmer," she answered, looking up archly.

"Am I a good enough farmer, then, to serve your turn?"

"Good enough if I were ten times better. Do you really mean it, Macruadh?"

"With all my heart. Only there is one thing I am very anxious about."

"What is that?"

"How your father will take my condition."

"He will allow, I think, that it is good enough for me—and more than I deserve."

"That is not what I mean; it is that I have a certain condition to make."

"Else you won't marry me? That seems strange! Of course I will do anything you would wish me to do! A condition!" she repeated, ponderingly, with just a little dissatisfaction in the tone.

Alister wondered she was not angry. But she trusted him too well to take offence readily.

"Yes," he rejoined, "a real condition! Terms belong naturally to the giver, not the petitioner; I hope with all my heart it will not offend him. It will not offend you, I think."

"Let me hear your condition," said Mercy, looking at him curiously, her honest eyes shining in the faint light.

"I want him to let me take you just as you are, without a shilling of his money to spoil the gift. I want you in and for yourself."

"I dare not think you one who would rather not be obliged to his wife for anything!" said Mercy. "That cannot be it!"

She spoke with just a shadow of displeasure. He did not answer. He was in great dread of hurting her, and his plain reason could not fail to hurt her.

"Well," she resumed, as he did not reply, "there are fathers, I daresay, who would not count that a hard condition!"

"Of course your father will not like the idea of your marrying so poor a man!"

"If he should insist on your having something with me, you will not refuse, will you? Why should you mind it?"

Alister was silent. The thing had already begun to grow dreadful! How could he tell her his reasons! Was it necessary to tell her? If he had to explain, it must be to her father, not to her! How, until absolutely compelled, reveal the horrible fact that her father was despised by her lover! She might believe it her part to refuse such love! He trembled lest she should urge him. But Mercy, thinking she had been very bold already, also held her peace.

They tried to talk about other things, but with little success, and when they parted, it was with a sense on both sides that something had got between them. The night through Mercy hardly slept for trying to discover what his aversion to her dowry might mean. No princedom was worth contrasting with poverty and her farmer-chief, but why should not his love be able to carry her few thousands? It was impossible his great soul should grudge his wife's superiority in the one poor trifle of money! Was not the whole family superior to money! Had she, alas, been too confident in their greatness? Must she be brought to confess that their grand ways had their little heart of pride? Did they not regard themselves as the ancient aristocracy of the country! Yes, it must be! The chief despised the origin of her father's riches!

But, although so far in the direction of the fact, she had no suspicion of anything more than landed pride looking down upon manufacture and trade. She suspected no moral root of even a share in the chief's difficulty. Naturally, she was offended. How differently Christina would have met the least hint of a CONDITION, she thought. She had been too ready to show and confess her love! Had she stood off a little, she might have escaped this humiliation! But would that have been honest? Must she not first of all

be true? Was the chief, whatever his pride, capable of being ungenerous? Questions like these kept coming and going throughout the night. Hither and thither went her thoughts, refusing to be controlled. The morning came, the sun rose, and she could not find rest. She had come to see how ideally delightful it was just to wait God's will of love, yet, in this her first trouble, she actually forgot to think of God, never asked him to look after the thing for her, never said, "Thy will be done!" And when at length weariness overpowered her, fell asleep like a heathen, without a word from her heart to the heart.

Alister missed Ian sorely. He prayed to God, but was too troubled to feel him near. Trouble imagined may seem easy to meet; trouble actual is quite another thing! His mother, perhaps, was to have her desire; Mercy, perhaps, would not marry a man who disapproved of her family! Between them already was what could not be talked about! He could not set free his heart to her!

When Mercy woke, the old love was awake also; let Alister's reason be what it might, it was not for her to resent it! The life he led was so much grander than a life spent in making money, that he must feel himself superior! Throned in the hearts, and influencing the characters of men, was he not in a far nobler position than money could give him? From her night of doubt and bitterness Mercy issued more loving and humble. What should she be now, she said to herself, if Alister had not taught her? He had been good to her as never father or brother! She would trust him! She would believe him right! Had he hurt her pride? It was well her pride should be hurt! Her mind was at rest.

But Alister must continue in pain and dread until he had spoken to her father. Knowing then the worst, he might use argument with Mercy; the moment for that was not yet come! If he consented that his daughter should leave him undowered, an explanation with Mercy might be postponed. When the honour of her husband was more to her than the false credit of her family, when she had had time to understand principles which, born and brought up as she had been, she might not yet be able to see into, then it would be time to explain! One with him, she would see things as he saw them! Till her father came, he would avoid the subject!

All the morning he was busy in the cornyard—with his hands in preparing new stances for ricks, with his heart in trying to content himself beforehand with whatever fate the Lord might intend for him. As yet he was more of a Christian philosopher than a philosophical Christian. The thing most disappointing to him he would treat as the will of God for him, and try to make up his mind to it, persuading himself it was the right and best thing—as if he knew it the will of God. He was thus working in the region of supposition, and not of revealed duty; in his own imagination, and not in the will of God. If this should not prove the will of God concerning him, then he was spending his strength for nought. There is something in the very presence and actuality of a thing to make one able to bear it; but a man may weaken himself for bearing what God intends him to bear, by trying to bear what God does not intend him to bear. The chief was forestalling the morrow like an unbeliever—not without some moral advantage, I dare say, but with spiritual loss. We have no right to school ourselves to an imaginary duty. When we do not know, then what he lays upon us is NOT TO KNOW, and to be content not to know. The philosopher is he who lives in the thought of things, the Christian is he who lives in the things themselves. The philosopher occupies himself with God's decree, the Christian with God's will; the philosopher with what God may intend, the Christian with what God wants HIM TO DO.

The laird looked up and there were the young ladies! It was the first time Christina had come nigh the cottage since Ian's departure.

"Can you tell me, Macruadh," she said, "what makes Mrs. Conal so spiteful always? When we bade her

good morning a few minutes ago, she overwhelmed us with a torrent of abuse!"

"How did you know it was abuse?"

"We understand enough of Gaelic to know it was not exactly blessing us she was. It is not necessary to know cat-language to distinguish between purring and spitting! What harm have we done? Her voice was fierce, and her eyes were like two live peats flaming at us! Do speak to her."

"It would be of no use!"

"Where's the good of being chief then? I don't ask you to make the old woman civil, but I think you might keep her from insulting your friends! I begin to think your chieftdom a sham!"

"I doubt indeed if it reaches to the tongues of the clan! But let us go and tell my mother. She may be able to do something with her!"

Christina went into the cottage; the chief drew Mercy back.

"What do you think the first duty of married people, Mercy—to each other, I mean," he said.

"To be always what they look," answered Mercy.

"Yes, but I mean actively. What is it their first duty to do towards each other?"

"I can't answer that without thinking."

"Is it not each to help the other to do the will of God?"

"I would say YES if I were sure I really meant it."

"You will mean it one day."

"Are you sure God will teach me?"

"I think he cares more to do that than anything else."

"More than to save us?"

"What is saving but taking us out of the dark into the light? There is no salvation but to know God and grow like him."

CHAPTER VII

A GENEROUS DOWRY.

The only hope of the chief's mother was in what the girl's father might say to her son's proposal. Would not his pride revolt against giving his daughter to a man who would not receive his blessing in money?

Mr. Peregrine Palmer arrived, and the next day Alister called upon him.

Not unprepared for the proposal of the chief, Mercy's father had nothing to urge against it. Her suitor's name was almost an historical one, for it stood high in the home-annals of Scotland. And the new laird, who had always a vague sense of injury in the lack of an illustrious pedigree of his own to send forward, was not unwilling that a man more justly treated than himself should supply the SOLATIUM to his daughter's children. He received the Macruadh, therefore, if a little pompously, yet with kindness. And the moment they were seated Alister laid his request before him.

"Mr. Palmer," he said, "I come to ask the hand of your daughter Mercy. I have not much beyond myself to offer her, but I can tell you precisely what there is."

Mr. Peregrine Palmer sat for a moment looking important. He seemed to see much to ponder in the proposal.

"Well, Macruadh," he said at length, hesitating with hum and with haw, "the thing is—well, to speak the truth, you take me a good deal by surprise! I do not know how the thing may appear to Mrs. Palmer. And then the girl herself, you will allow, ought, in a free country, to have a word in the matter! WE give our girls absolute liberty; their own hearts must guide them—that is, where there is no serious exception to be taken. Honestly, it is not the kind of match we should have chosen! It is not as if things were with you now as once, when the land was all your own, and—and—you—pardon me, I am a father—did not have to work with your own hands!"

Had he been there on any other errand the chief would have stated his opinion that it was degrading to a man to draw income from anything he would count it degrading to put his own hand to; but there was so much he might be compelled to say to the displeasure of Mr. Palmer while asking of him the greatest gift he had to bestow, that he would say nothing unpalatable which he was not compelled to say.

"My ancestors," he answered, willing to give the objection a pleasant turn, "would certainly have preferred helping themselves to the produce of lowland fields! My great-great-grandfather, scorning to ask any man for his daughter, carried her off without a word!"

"I am glad the peculiarity has not shown itself hereditary," said Mr. Palmer laughing.

"But if I have little to offer, I expect nothing with her," said the chief abruptly. "I want only herself!"

"A very lovely mode of speaking! But it is needless to say no daughter of mine shall leave me without a certainty, one way or the other, of suitable maintenance. You know the old proverb, Macruadh,—'When poverty comes in at the door,'—?"

"There is hardly a question of poverty in the sense the proverb intends!" answered the chief smiling.

"Of course! Of course! At the same time you cannot keep the wolf too far from the door. I would not, for my part, care to say I had given my daughter to a poor farmer in the north. Two men, it is, I believe, you employ, Macruadh?"

The chief answered with a nod.

"I have other daughters to settle—not to mention my sons," pursued the great little man, "—but—but I will find a time to talk the matter over with Mrs. Palmer, and see what I can do for you. Meanwhile you may reckon you have a friend at court; all I have seen makes me judge well of you. Where we do not think alike, I can yet say for you that your faults lean to virtue's side, and are such as my daughter at least will be no loser by. Good morning, Macruadh."

Mr. Peregrine Palmer rose; and the chief, perplexed and indignant, but anxious not to prejudice, his very doubtful cause, rose also.

"You scarcely understand me, Mr. Palmer," he said. "On the possibility of being honoured with your daughter's hand, you must allow me to say distinctly beforehand, that I must decline receiving anything with her. When will you allow me to wait upon you again?"

"I will write. Good morning."

The interview was certainly not much to the assuagement of the chief's anxiety. He went home with the feeling that he had submitted to be patronized, almost insulted by a paltry fellow whose consequence rested on his ill-made money—a man who owed everything to a false and degrading appetite in his neighbours! Nothing could have made him put up with him but the love of Mercy, his dove in a crow's nest! But it would be all in vain, for he could not lie! Truth, indeed, if not less of a virtue, was less of a heroism in the chief than in most men, for he COULD NOT lie. Had he been tempted to try, he would have reddened, stammered, broken down, with the full shame, and none of the success of a falsehood.

For a week, he heard nothing; there seemed small anxiety to welcome him into the Palmer family! Then came a letter. It implied, almost said that some difficulty had been felt as to his reception by EVERY member of the family—which the chief must himself see to have been only natural! But while money was of no consequence to Mr. Palmer, it was of the greatest consequence that his daughter should seem to make a good match; therefore, as only in respect of POSITION was the alliance objectionable, he had concluded to set that right, and in giving him his daughter, to restore the chief's family to its former dignity, by making over to him the Clanruadh property now in his possession by purchase. While he thus did his duty by his daughter, he hoped the Macruadh would accept the arrangement as a mark of esteem for himself. Two conditions only he would make—the first, that, as long as he lived, the shooting should be Mr. Palmer's, to use or to let, and should extend over the whole estate; the second, that the chief should assume the baronetcy which belonged to him.

My reader will regard the proposition as not ungenerous, however much the money value of the land lay in the shooting.

As Alister took leave of his mother for the night, he gave her the letter.

She took it, read it slowly, laughed angrily, smiled scornfully, wept bitterly, crushed it in her hand, and walked up to her room with her head high. All the time she was preparing for her bed, she was talking in her spirit with her husband. When she lay down she became a mere prey to her own thoughts, and was pulled, and torn, and hurt by them for hours ere she set herself to rule them. For the first time in her life she distrusted her son. She did not know what he would do! The temptation would surely be too strong for him! Two good things were set over against one evil thing—an evil thing, however, with which nobody would associate blame, an evil thing which would raise him high in the respect of everyone whose respect was not worth having!—the woman he loved and the land of his ancestors on the one side, and only the money that bought the land for him on the other!—would he hold out? He must take the three together, or have none of them! Her fear for him grew and possessed her. She grew cold as death. Why did he give her the letter, and go without saying a word? She knew well the arguments he would adduce! Henceforward and for ever there would be a gulf between them! The poor religion he had would never serve to keep him straight! What was it but a compromise with pride and self-sufficiency! It could bear no such strain! He acknowledged God, but not God reconciled in Christ, only God such as unregenerate man would have him! And when Ian came home, he would be sure to side with Alister!

There was but one excuse for the poor boy—and that a miserable one: the blinding of love! Yes there was more excuse than that: to be lord of the old lands, with the old clan growing and gathering again about its chief! It was a temptation fit to ruin an archangel! What could he not do then for his people! What could he not do for the land! And for her, she might have her Ian always at home with her! God forbid she should buy even such bliss at such a cost! She was only thinking, she said to herself, how, if the thing had to be, she would make the best of it: she was bound as a mother to do that!

But the edge of the wedge was in. She said to herself afterwards, that the enemy of her soul must have been lying in wait for her that night; she almost believed in some bodily presence of him in her room: how otherwise could she account for her fall! he must have been permitted to tempt her, because, in condemning evil, she had given way to contempt and worldly pride. Her thoughts unchecked flowed forward. They lingered brooding for a time on the joys that might be hers—the joys of the mother of a chief over territory as well as hearts. Then they stole round, and began to flow the other way. Ere the thing had come she began to make the best of it for the sake of her son and the bond between them; then she began to excuse it for the sake of the clan; and now she began to justify it a little for the sake of the world! Everything that could favour the acceptance of the offer came up clear before her. The land was the same as it always had been! it had never been in the distillery! it had never been in the brew-house! it was clean, whoever had transacted concerning it, through whatever hands it had passed! A good cow was a good cow, had she been twenty times reaved! For Mr. Palmer to give and Alister to take the land back, would be some amends to the nation, grievously injured in the money of its purchase! The deed would restore to the redeeming and uplifting influence of her son many who were fast perishing from poverty and whisky; for, their houses and crofts once more in the power of their chief, he would again be their landlord as well! It would be a pure exercise of the law of compensation! Hundreds who had gone abroad would return to replenish the old glens with the true national wealth—with men and women, and children growing to be men and women, for the hour of their country's need! These were the true, the golden crops! The glorious time she had herself seen would return, when Strathruadh could alone send out a regiment of

the soldiers that may be defeated, but will not live to know it. The dream of her boys would come true! they would rebuild the old castle, and make it a landmark in the history of the highlands!

But while she stood elate upon this high-soaring peak of the dark mountains of ambition, sudden before her mind's eye rose the face of her husband, sudden his voice was in her ear; he seemed to stand above her in the pulpit, reading from the prophet Isaiah the four Woes that begin four contiguous chapters:—"Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine!"—"Woe to Ariel, to Ariel, the city where David dwelt! Add ye year to year; let them kill sacrifices; yet I will distress Ariel."—"Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my spirit, that they may add sin to sin!"—"Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the holy one of Israel, neither seek the Lord!" Then followed the words opening the next chapter:—"Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment. And a man shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest." All this, in solemn order, one woe after the other, she heard in the very voice of her husband; in awful spiritual procession, they passed before her listening mind! She grew cold as the dead, and shuddered and shivered. She looked over the edge into the heart of a black gulf, into which she had been on the point of casting herself—say rather, down whose side, searching for an easy descent, she had already slid a long way, when the voice from above recalled her! She covered her face with her hands and wept—ashamed before God, ashamed before her husband. It was a shame unutterable that the thing should even have looked tempting! She cried for forgiveness, rose, and sought Alister's room.

Seldom since he was a man had she visited her elder son in his chamber. She cherished for him, as chief, something of the reverence of the clan. The same familiarity had never existed between them as between her and Ian. Now she was going to wake him, and hold a solemn talk with him. Not a moment longer should he stand leaning over the gulf into which she had herself well nigh fallen!

She found him awake, and troubled, though not with an eternal trouble such as hers.

"I thought I should find you asleep, Alister!" she said.

"It was not very likely, mother!" he answered gently.

"You too have been tried with terrible thoughts?"

"I have been tried, but hardly with terrible thoughts: I know that Mercy loves me!"

"Ah, my son, my dear son! love itself is the terrible thing! It has drawn many a man from the way of peace!"

"Did it draw you and my father from the way of peace?" asked Alister.

"Not for a moment!" she answered. "It made our steps firmer in the way."

"Then why should you fear it will draw me from it? I hope I have never made you think I was not

following my father and you!"

"Who knows what either of us might have done, with such a temptation as yours!"

"Either you say, mother, that my father was not so good as I think him, or that he did what he did in his own strength!"

"Let him that thinketh '—you know the rest!" rejoined the mother.

"I don't think I am tempted to anything just now."

"There it is, you see!—the temptation so subtle that you do not suspect its character!"

"I am confident my father would have done just as I mean to do!"

"What do you mean to do?"

"Is it my own mother asks me? Does she distrust her husband and her son together?"

It began to dawn on the mother that she had fallen into her own temptation through distrust of her son. Because she-distrusted him, she sought excuse for him, and excuse had turned to all but justification: she had given place to the devil! But she must be sure about Alister! She had had enough of the wiles of Satan: she must not trust her impressions! The enemy might even now be bent on deceiving her afresh! For a moment she kept silence, then said:—

"It would be a grand thing to have the whole country-side your own again—wouldn't it, Alister?"

"It would, mother!" he answered.

"And have all your people quite under your own care?"

"A grand thing, indeed, mother!"

"How can you say then it is no temptation to you?"

"Because it is none."

"How is that?"

"I would not have my clan under a factor of Satan's, mother!"

"I do not understand you!"

"What else should I be, if I accepted the oversight of them on terms of allegiance to him! That was how he tempted Jesus. I will not be the devil's steward, to call any land or any people mine!"

His mother kissed him on the forehead, walked erect from the room, and went to her own to humble herself afresh.

In the morning, Alister took his dinner of bread and cheese in his pocket, and set out for the tomb on the

hill-top. There he remained until the evening, and wrote his answer, sorely missing Ian.

He begged Mr. Peregrine Palmer to dismiss the idea of enriching him, thanked him for his great liberality, but declared himself entirely content, and determined not to change his position. He could not and would not avail himself of his generosity.

Mr. Palmer, unable to suspect the reasons at work in the chief's mind, pleased with the genuineness of his acknowledgment, and regarding him as a silly fellow who would quixotically outdo him in magnanimity, answered in a more familiar, almost jocular strain. He must not be unreasonable, he said; pride was no doubt an estimable weakness, but it might be carried too far; men must act upon realities not fancies; he must learn to have an eye to the main chance, and eschew heroics: what was life without money! It was not as if he gave it grudgingly, for he made him heartily welcome. The property was in truth but a flea-bite to him! He hoped the Macruadh would live long to enjoy it, and make his father-in-law the great grandfather of chiefs, perpetuating his memory to ages unborn. There was more to the same effect, void neither of eloquence nor of a certain good-heartedness, which the laird both recognized and felt.

It was again his painful turn. He had now to make his refusal as positive as words could make it. He said he was sorry to appear headstrong, perhaps uncivil and ungrateful, but he could not and would not accept anything beyond the priceless gift of Mercy's hand.

Not even then did Peregrine Palmer divine that his offered gift was despised; that idea was to him all but impossible of conception. He read merely opposition, and was determined to have his way. Next time he too wrote positively, though far from unkindly:—the Macruadh must take the land with his daughter, or leave both!

The chief replied that he could not yield his claim to Mercy, for he loved her, and believed she loved him; therefore begged Mr. Peregrine Palmer, of his generosity, to leave the decision with his daughter.

The next was a letter from Mercy, entreating Alister not to hurt her father by seeming to doubt the kindness of his intentions. She assured him her father was not the man to interfere with his management of the estate, the shooting was all he cared about; and if that was the difficulty, she imagined even that might be got over. She ended praying that he would, for her sake, cease making much of a trifle, for such the greatest property in the world must be betwixt them. No man, she said, could love a woman right, who would not be under the poorest obligation to her people!

The chief answered her in the tenderest way, assuring her that if the property had been hers he would only have blessed her for it; that he was not making much ado about nothing; that pride, or unwillingness to be indebted, had nothing to do with his determination; that the thing was with him in very truth a matter of conscience. He implored her therefore from the bottom of his heart to do her best to persuade her father—if she would save him who loved her more than his own soul, from a misery God only could make him able to bear.

Mercy was bewildered. She neither understood nor suspected. She wrote again, saying her father was now thoroughly angry; that she found herself without argument, the thing being incomprehensible to her as to her father; that she could not see where the conscience of the thing lay. Her terror was, that, if he persisted, she would be driven to think he did not care for her; his behaviour she had tried in vain to reconcile with what he had taught her; if he destroyed her faith in him, all her faith might go, and she be left without God as well as without him!

Then Alister saw that necessity had culminated, and that it was no longer possible to hold anything back. Whatever other suffering he might cause her, Mercy must not be left to think him capable of sacrificing her to an absurdity! She must know the truth of the matter, and how it was to him of the deepest conscience! He must let her see that if he allowed her to persuade him, it would be to go about thenceforward consumed of self-contempt, a slave to the property, no more its owner than if he had stolen it, and in danger of committing suicide to escape hating his wife!

For the man without a tender conscience, cannot imagine the state to which another may come, who carries one about with him, stinging and accusing him all day long.

So, out of a heart aching with very fullness, Alister wrote the truth to Mercy. And Mercy, though it filled her with grief and shame, had so much love for the truth, and for the man who had waked that love, that she understood him, and loved him through all the pain of his words; loved him the more for daring the risk of losing her; loved him yet the more for cleaving to her while loathing the mere thought of sharing her wealth; loved him most of all that he was immaculate in truth.

She carried the letter to her father's room, laid it before him without a word, and went out again.

The storm gathered swiftly, and burst at once. Not two minutes seemed to have passed when she heard his door open, and a voice of wrathful displeasure call out her name. She returned—in fear, but in fortitude.

Then first she knew her father!—for although wrath and injustice were at home in him, they seldom showed themselves out of doors. He treated her as a willing party to an unspeakable insult from a highland boor to her own father. To hand him such a letter was the same as to have written it herself! She identified herself with the writer when she became the bearer of the mangy hound's insolence! He raged at Mercy as in truth he had never raged before. If once she spoke to the fellow again, he would turn her out of the house!

She would have left the room. He locked the door, set a chair before his writing table, and ordered her to sit there and write to his dictation. But no power on earth or under it would have prevailed to make Mercy write as her own the words that were not hers.

"You must excuse me, papa!" she said in a tone unheard from her before.

This raising of the rampart of human dignity, crowned with refusal, between him and his own child, galled him afresh.

"Then you shall be compelled!" he said, with an oath through his clenched teeth.

Mercy stood silent and motionless.

"Go to your room. By heaven you shall stay there till you do as I tell you!"

He was between her and the door.

"You need not think to gain your point by obstinacy," he added. "I swear that not another word shall pass between you and that blockhead of a chief—not if I have to turn watch-dog myself!"

He made way for her, but did not open the door. She left the room too angry to cry, and went to her own.

Her fear of her father had vanished. With Alister on her side she could stand against the world! She went to her window. She could not see the cottage from it, but she could see the ruin, and the hill of the crescent fire, on which she had passed through the shadow of death. Gazing on the hill she remembered what Alister would have her do, and with her Father in heaven sought shelter from her father on earth.

CHAPTER VIII

MISTRESS CONAL.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer's generosity had in part rested on the idea of securing the estate against reverse of fortune, sufficiently possible though not expected; while with the improvements almost in hand, the shooting would make him a large return. He felt the more wronged by the ridiculous scruples of the chief—in which after all, though he could not have said why, he did not quite believe. It never occurred to him that, even had the land been so come by that the chief could accept a gift of it, he would, upon the discovery that it had been so secured from the donor's creditors, at once have insisted on placing it at their disposal.

His wrath proceeded to vent itself in hastening the realization of his schemes of improvement, for he was well aware they would be worse than distasteful to the Macruadh. Their first requirement was the removal of every peasant within his power capable of violating the sanctity of the deer forest into which he and his next neighbour had agreed to turn the whole of their property. While the settlement of his daughter was pending, he had seen that the point might cause trouble unless previously understood between him and the chief; but he never doubted the recovery of the land would reconcile the latter to the loss of the men. Now he chuckled with wrathful chuckle to think how entirely he had him in his power for justifiable annoyance; for he believed himself about to do nothing but good to THE COUNTRY in removing from it its miserable inhabitants, whom the sentimental indulgence of their so-called chief kept contented with their poverty, and with whom interference must now enrage him. How he hated the whole wretched pack!

Mr. Palmer's doing of good to the country consisted in making the land yield more money into the pockets of Mr. Brander and himself by feeding wild animals instead of men. To tell such land-owners that they are simply running a tilt at the creative energy, can be of no use: they do not believe in God, however much they may protest and imagine they do.

The next day but one, he sent Mistress Conal the message that she must be out of her hut, goods and gear, within a fortnight. He was not sure that the thing was legally correct, but he would risk it. She might go to law if she would, but he would make a beginning with her! The chief might take up her quarrel if he chose: nothing would please Mr. Palmer more than to involve him in a law-suit, clear him out, and send him adrift! His money might be contemptible, but the chief should find it at least dangerous! Contempt would not stave off a land-slip!

Mistress Conal, with a rage and scorn that made her feel every inch a witch, and accompanied by her black cat, which might or might not be the innocent animal the neighbours did not think him, hurried to the Macruadh, and informed him that "the lowland thief" had given her notice to quit the house of her fathers within a fortnight.

"I fear much we cannot help it! the house is on his land!" said the chief sorrowfully.

"His land!" echoed the old woman. "Is the nest of the old eagle his land? Can he make his heather white or his ptarmigan black? Will he dry up the lochs, and stay the rivers? Will he remove the mountains from their places, or cause the generations of men to cease from the earth? Defend me, chief! I come to you for the help that was never sought in vain from the Macruadh!"

"What help I have is yours without the asking," returned the chief. "I cannot do more than is in my power! One thing only I can promise you—that you shall lack neither food nor shelter."

"My chief will abandon me to the wolf!" she cried.

"Never! But I can only protect you, not your house. He may have no right to turn you out at such short notice; but it could only be a matter of weeks. To go to law with him would but leave me without a roof to shelter you when your own was gone!"

"The dead would have shown him into the dark, ere he turned me into the cold!" she muttered, and turning, left him.

The chief was greatly troubled. He had heard nothing of such an intention on the part of his neighbour. Could it be for revenge? He had heard nothing yet of his answer to Mercy! All he could do was to represent to Mr. Palmer the trouble the poor woman was in, and let him know that the proceeding threatened would render him very unpopular in the strath. This he thought it best to do by letter.

It could not enrage Mr. Palmer more, but it enraged him afresh. He vowed that the moment the time was up, out the old witch should go, neck and crop; and with the help of Mr. Brander, provided men for the enforcement of his purpose who did not belong to the neighbourhood.

The chief kept hoping to hear from the New House, but neither his letter to Mercy nor to her father received any answer. How he wished for Ian to tell him what he ought to do! His mother could not help him. He saw nothing for it but wait events.

Day after day passed, and he heard nothing. He would have tried to find out the state of things at the New House, but until war was declared that would not be right! Mr. Palmer might be seeking how with dignity to move in the matter, for certainly the chief had placed him in a position yet more unpleasant than his own! He must wait on!

The very day fortnight after the notice given, about three o'clock in the afternoon, came flying to the chief a ragged little urchin of the village, too breathless almost to make intelligible his news—that there were men at Mistress Conal's who would not go out of her house, and she and her old black cat were swearing at them.

The chief ran: could the new laird be actually unhousing the aged, helpless woman? It was the part of a devil and not of a man! As he neared the place—there were her poor possessions already on the roadside!—her one chair and stool, her bedding, her three-footed pot, her girdle, her big chest, all that she could call hers in the world! and when he came in sight of the cottage, there she was being brought out of it, struggling, screaming, and cursing, in the grasp of two men! Fierce in its glow was the torrent of Gaelic that rushed from the crater of her lips, molten in the volcanic depths of her indignant soul.

When one thinks of the appalling amount of rage exhausted by poor humans upon wrong, the energy of indignation, whether issued or suppressed, and how little it has done to right wrong, to draw acknowledgment or amends from self-satisfied insolence, he naturally asks what becomes of so much vital force. Can it fare differently from other forces, and be lost? The energy of evil is turned into the mill-race of good; but the wrath of man, even his righteous wrath, worketh not the righteousness of God! What becomes of it? If it be not lost, and have but changed its form, in what shape shall we look for it?

"Set her down," cried the chief. "I will take care of her."

When she heard the voice of her champion, the old woman let go a cat-like screech of triumph, and her gliding Gaelic, smoothness itself in articulation, flowed yet firier in word, and fiercer in tone. But the who were thus ejecting her—hangers on of the sheriff-court in the county town, employed to give a colour of law to the doubtful proceeding—did not know the chief.

"Oh, we'll set her down," answered one of them insolently, "—and glad enough too! but we'll have her on the public road with her sticks first!"

Infuriated by the man's disregard of her chief, Mistress Conal struck her nails into his face, and with a curse he flung her from him. She turned instantly on the other with the same argument ad hominem, and found herself staggering on her own weak limbs to a severe fall, when the chief caught and saved her. She struggled hard to break from him and rush again into the hut, declaring she would not leave it if they burned her alive in it, but he held her fast.

There was a pause, for one or two who had accompanied the men employed, knew the chief, and their reluctance to go on with the ruthless deed in his presence, influenced the rest. Report of the ejection had spread, and the neighbours came running from the village. A crowd seemed to be gathering. Again and again Mistress Conal tried to escape from Alister and rush into the cottage.

"You too, my chief!" she cried. "You turned against the poor of your people!"

"No, Mistress Conal," he answered. "I am too much your friend to let you kill yourself!"

"We have orders, Macruadh, to set fire to the hovel," said one of the men, touching his hat respectfully.

"They'll roast my black one!" shrieked the old woman.

"Small fear for him," said a man's voice from the little crowd, "if half be true—!"

Apparently the speaker dared no more.

"Fire won't singe a hair of him, Mistress Conal," said another voice. "You know it; he's used to it!"

"Come along, and let's get it over!" cried the leader of the ejection-party. "It—won't take many minutes once it's well a going, and there's fire enough on the hearth to set Ben Cruachan in a blaze!"

"Is everything out of it?" demanded the chief.

"All but her cat. We've done our best, sir, and searched everywhere, but he's not to be found. There's nothing else left."

"It's a lie!" screamed Mistress Conal. "Is there not a great pile of peats, carried on my own back from the moss! Ach, you robbers! Would you burn the good peats?"

"What good will the peats be to you, woman," said one of them not unkindly, "when you have no hearth?"

She gave a loud wail, but checked it.

"I will burn them on the road," she said. "They will keep me a few hours from the dark! When I die I will go straight up to God and implore his curse upon you, on your bed and board, your hands and tools, your body and soul. May your every prayer be lost in the wide murk, and never come at his ears! May—"

"Hush! hush!" interposed the chief with great gentleness. "You do not know what you are saying. But you do know who tells us to forgive our enemies!"

"It's well for HIM to forgive," she screamed, "sitting on his grand throne, and leaving me to be turned out of my blessed house, on to the cold road!"

"Nannie!" said the chief, calling her by her name, "because a man is unjust to you, is that a reason for you to be unjust to him who died for you? You know as well as he, that you will not be left out on the cold road. He knows, and so do you, that while I have a house over my head, there is a warm corner in it for you! And as for his sitting on his throne, you know that all these years he has been trying to take you up beside him, and can't get you to set your foot on the first step of it! Be ashamed of yourself, Nannie!"

She was silent.

"Bring out her peats," he said, turning to the bystanders; "we have small need, with winter on the road, to waste any of God's gifts!"

They obeyed. But as they carried them out, and down to the road, the number of Mistress Conal's friends kept growing, and a laying together of heads began, and a gathering of human fire under glooming eyebrows. It looked threatening. Suddenly Mistress Conal broke out in a wild yet awful speech, wherein truth indeed was the fuel, but earthly wrath supplied the prophetic fire. Her friends suspended their talk, and her foes their work, to listen.

English is by no means equally poetic with the Gaelic, regarded as a language, and ill-serves to represent her utterance. Much that seems natural in the one language, seems forced and unreal amidst the less imaginative forms of the other. I will nevertheless attempt in English what can prove little better than an imitation of her prophetic outpouring. It was like a sermon in this, that she began with a text:—

"Woe unto them," she said—and her voice sounded like the wind among the great stones of a hillside—"that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the earth!"

This woe she followed with woe upon woe, and curse upon curse, now from the Bible, now from some old poem of the country, and now from the bitterness of her own heart. Then she broke out in purely native eloquence:—

"Who art thou, O man, born of a woman, to say to thy brother, 'Depart from this earth: here is no footing for thee: all the room had been taken for me ere thou wast heard of! What right hast thou in a world where

I want room for the red deer, and the big sheep, and the brown cattle? Go up, thou infant bald-head! Is there not room above, in the fields of the air? Is there not room below with the dead? Verily there is none here upon the earth!' Who art thou, I say, to speak thus to thy fellow, as if he entered the world by another door than thyself! Because thou art rich, is he not also a man?—a man made in the image of the same God? Who but God sent him? And who but God, save thy father was indeed the devil, hath sent thee? Thou hast to make room for thy brother! What brother of thy house, when a child is born into it, would presume to say, 'Let him begone, and speedily! I do not want him! There is no room for him! I require it all for myself!' Wilt thou say of any man, 'He is not my brother,' when God says he is! If thou say, 'Am I therefore his keeper?' God for that saying will brand thee with the brand of Cain. Yea, the hour will come when those ye will not give room to breathe, will rise panting in the agony, yea fury of their need, and cry, 'If we may neither eat nor lie down by their leave, lo, we are strong! let us take what they will not give! If we die we but die!' Then shall there be blood to the knees of the fighting men, yea, to the horses' bridles; and the earth shall be left desolate because of you, foul feeders on the flesh and blood, on the bodies and souls of men! In the pit of hell you will find room enough, but no drop of water; and it will comfort you little that ye lived merrily among pining men! Which of us has coveted your silver or your gold? Which of us has stretched out the hand to take of your wheat or your barley? All we ask is room to live! But because ye would see the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, ye have crushed and straitened us till we are ready to cry out, 'God, for thy mercy's sake, let us die, lest we be guilty of our own blood!'"

A solitary man had come down the hill behind, and stood alone listening. It was the mover of the wickedness. In the old time the rights of the people in the land were fully recognized; but when the chiefs of Clanruadh sold it, they could not indeed sell the rights that were not theirs, but they forgot to secure them for the helpless, and they were now in the grasp of the selfish and greedy, the devourers of the poor. He did not understand a word the woman was saying, but he was pleased to look on her rage, and see the man who had insulted him suffer with her. When he began to note the glances of lurid fire which every now and then turned upon him during Mistress Conal's speech, he scorned the indication: such poor creatures dared venture nothing, he thought, against the mere appearance of law. Under what he counted the chiefs contempt, he had already grown worse; and the thought that perhaps the great world might one day look upon him with like contempt, wrought in him bitterly; he had not the assurance of rectitude which makes contempt hurtless. He was crueller now than before the chief's letter to his daughter.

When Mistress Conal saw him, she addressed herself to him directly. What he would have felt had he understood, I cannot tell. Never in this life did he know how the weak can despise the strong, how the poor can scorn the rich!

"Worm!" she said, "uncontent with holding the land, eating the earth that another may not share! the worms eat but what their bodies will hold, and thou canst devour but the fill of thy life! The hour is at hand when the earth will swallow thee, and thy fellow worms will eat thee, as thou hast eaten men. The possessions of thy brethren thou hast consumed, so that they are not! The holy and beautiful house of my fathers,—"
She spoke of her poor little cottage, but in the words lay spiritual fact. "—mock not its poverty!" she went on, as if forestalling contempt; "for is it not to me a holy house where the woman lay in the agony whence first I opened my eyes to the sun? Is it not a holy house where my father prayed morning and evening, and read the words of grace and comfort? Is it not to me sacred as the cottage at Nazareth to the poor man who lived there with his peasants? And is not that a beautiful house in which a woman's ear did first listen to the words of love? Old and despised I am, but once I was younger than any of you, and ye will be old and decrepit as I, if the curse of God do not cut you off too soon. My Alister would have taken any two of you and knocked your heads together. He died fighting for his country; and for his sake the voice of man's love

has never again entered my heart! I knew a true man, and could be true also. Would to God I were with him! You man-trapping, land-reaving, house-burning Sasunnach, do your worst! I care not." She ceased, and the spell was broken. "Come, come!" said one of the men impatiently. "Tom, you get a peat, and set it on the top of the wall, under the roof. You, too, George!—and be quick. Peats all around! there are plenty on the hearth!—How's the wind blowing?—You, Henry, make a few holes in the wall here, outside, and we'll set live peats in them. It's time there was an end to this!"

"You're right; but there's a better way to end it!" returned one of the clan, and gave him a shove that sent him to the ground.

"Men, do your duty!" cried Mr. Palmer from behind. "*I am here—to see you do it! Never mind the old woman! Of course she thinks it hard; but hard things have got to be done! it's the way of the world, and all for the best.*"

"Mr. Palmer," said another of the clan, "the old woman has the right of you: she and hers have lived there, in that cottage, for nigh a hundred years."

"She has no right. If she thinks she has, let her go to the law for it. In the meantime I choose to turn her off my land. What's mine's mine, as I mean every man jack of you to know—chief and beggar!"

The Macruadh walked up to him.

"Pardon me, sir," he said: "I doubt much if you have a legal right to disturb the poor woman. She has never paid rent for her hut, and it has always been looked upon as her property."

"Then the chief that sold it swindled both me and her!" stammered Mr. Palmer, white with rage. "But as for you who call yourself a chief, you are the most insolent, ill-bred fellow I ever had to do with, and I have not another word to say to you!"

A silence like that before a thunderstorm succeeded: not a man of the clan could for the moment trust his hearing. But there is nothing the Celtic nature resents like rudeness: half a dozen at once of the Macruadhs rushed upon the insulter of their chief, intent on his punishment.

"One of you touch him," cried Alister, "and I will knock him down. I would if he were my foster-brother!"

Each eager assailant stood like a block.

"Finish your work, men!" shouted Mr. Palmer.

To do him justice, he was no coward.

"Clansmen," said the chief, "let him have his way. I do not see how to resist the wrong without bringing more evil upon us than we can meet. We must leave it to him who says 'Vengeance is mine.'"

The Macruadhs murmured their obedience, and stood sullenly looking on. The disseizers went into the hut, and carried out the last of the fuel. Then they scooped holes in the turf walls, inside to leeward, outside to windward, and taking live peats from the hearth, put them in the holes. A few minutes, and poor Nannie's "holy and beautiful house" was a great fire.

When they began to apply the peats, Alistair would at once have taken the old woman away, but he dreaded an outbreak, and lingered. When the fire began to run up the roof, Mistress Conal broke from him, and darted to the door. Every one rushed to seize her, Mr. Palmer with the rest.

"Blackie! Blackie! Blackie!" she shrieked like a madwoman.

While the men encumbered each other in their endeavours to get her away, down shot the cat from the blazing roof, a fizz of fire in his black fur, his tail as thick as his neck, an infernal howling screech of hatred in his horrible throat, and, wild with rage and fear, flung himself straight upon Mr. Palmer. A roar of delighted laughter burst forth. He bawled out—and his bawl was mingled with a scream—to take the brute off him, and his own men hurried to his rescue; but the fury-frantic animal had dug his claws and teeth into his face, and clung to him so that they had to choke him off. The chief caught up Mistress Conal and carried her away: there was no danger of any one hurting Mr. Palmer now!

He bore her on one arm like a child, and indeed she was not much heavier. But she kept her face turned and her eyes fixed on her burning home, and leaning over the shoulder of the chief, poured out, as he carried her farther and farther from the scene of the outrage, a flood of maledictory prophecy against the doers of the deed. The laird said never a word, never looked behind him, while she, almost tumbling down his back as she cursed with outstretched arms, deafened him with her raging. He walked steadily down the path to the road, where he stepped into the midst of her goods and chattels. The sight of them diverted a little the current of her wrath.

"Where are you going, Macruadh?" she cried, as he walked on. "See you not my property lying to the hand of the thief? Know you not that the greedy Sasunnach will sweep everything away!"

"I can't carry them and you too, Mistress Conal!" said the chief gayly.

"Set me down then. Who ever asked you to carry me! And where would you be carrying me? My place is with my things!"

"Your place is with me, Mistress Conal! I belong to you, and you belong to me, and I am taking you home to my mother."

At the word, silence fell, not on the lips, but on the soul of the raving prophetess: the chief she loved, his mother she feared.

"Set me down, Macruadh!" she pleaded in gentle tone. "Don't carry me to her empty-handed! Set me down straight; I will load my back with my goods, and bear them to my lady, and throw them at her feet."

"As soon as we get to the cottage," said the chief, striding on with his reluctant burden, "I will send up two men with wheelbarrows to bring them home."

"HOME, said you?" cried the old woman, and burst into the tearless wailing of a child; "there is a home for me no more! My house was all that was left me of my people, and it is your own that make a house a home! In the long winter nights, when I sat by the fire and heard the wind howl, and the snow pat, pat like the small hands of my little brothers on the window, my heart grew glad within me, and the dead came back to my soul! When I took the book, I heard the spirit of my father reading through my own lips! And oh, my mother! my mother!"

She ceased as if in despair.

"Surely, Nannie, you will be at home with your chief!" said Alister. "My house is your house now, and your dead will come to it and be welcome!"

"It is their chief's house, and they will!" she returned hopefully. "They loved their chief.—Shall we not make a fine clan when we're all gathered, we Macmadhs! Man nor woman can say I did anything to disgrace it!"

"Lest we should disgrace it," answered the chief, "we must bear with patience what is sent upon it."

He carried her into the drawing-room and told her story, then stood, to the delighted amusement of his mother, with his little old sister in his arms, waiting her orders, like a big boy carrying the baby, who now and then moaned a little, but did not speak.

Mrs. Macruadh called Nancy, and told her to bring the tea-tray, and then, get ready for Mistress Conal the room next Nancy's own, that she might be near to wait on her; and thither, when warmed and fed, the chief carried her.

But the terrible excitement had so thinned the mainspring of her time-watch, that it soon broke. She did not live many weeks. From the first she sank into great dejection, and her mind wandered. She said her father

never came to see her now; that he was displeased with her for leaving the house; and that she knew now she ought to have stayed and been burned in it. The chief reminded her that she had no choice, but had been carried bodily away.

"Yes, yes," she answered; "but they do not know that! I must make haste and tell them! Who can bear her own people to think ill of her!—I'm coming! I'm coming! I'll tell you all about it! I'm an honest woman yet!"

Another thing troubled her sorely, for which she would hear no consolation; Blackie had vanished!—whether he was killed at the time of his onslaught on Mr. Palmer, or was afterwards shot; whether, disgusted with the treatment of his old home, or the memory of what he had there suffered, he had fled the strath, and gone to the wild cats among the hills, or back to the place which some averred he came from, no one could tell. In her wanderings she talked more of her cat than of anything else, and would say things that with some would have gone far to justify the belief that the animal was by nature on familiar terms with the element which had yet driven him from his temporary home.

Nancy was more than uneasy at having the witch so near, but by no means neglected her duty to her. One night she woke, and had for some time lain listening whether she stirred or not, when suddenly quavered through the dark the most horrible cat-cry she had ever heard. In abject terror she covered her head, and lay shuddering. The cry came again, and kept coming at regular intervals, but drawing nearer and nearer. Its expression was of intense and increasing pain. The creature whence it issued seemed to come close to the house, then with difficulty to scramble up on the roof, where it went on yowling, and screeching, and throwing itself about as if tying itself in knots, Nancy said, until at last it gave a great choking, gobbling scream, and fell to the ground, after which all was quiet. Persuading herself it was only a cat, she tried to sleep, and at length succeeded. When she woke in the morning, the first thing she did was to go out, fully expecting to find the cat lying at the foot of the wall. No cat was there. She went then as usual to attend to the old woman. Mistress Conal was dead and cold.

The clan followed her body to the grave, and the black cat was never seen.

CHAPTER IX

THE MARCHES.

It was plainly of no use for the chief to attempt mollifying Mr. Palmer. So long as it was possible for him to be what he was, it must be impossible for him to understand the conscience that compelled the chief to refuse participation in the results of his life. Where a man's own conscience is content, how shall he listen to the remonstrance of another man's! But even if he could have understood that the offence was unavoidable, that would rather have increased than diminished the pain of the hurt; as it was, the chief's determination must seem to Mr. Palmer an unprovoked insult! Thus reflecting, Alister tried all he could to be fair to the man whom he had driven to cut his acquaintance.

It was now a lonely time for Alister, lonelier than any ever before. Ian was not within reach even by letter; Mercy was shut up from him: he had not seen or heard from her since writing his explanation; and his mother did not sympathize with his dearest earthly desire: she would be greatly relieved, yea heartily glad, if Mercy was denied him! She loved Ian more than the chief, yet could have better borne to see him the husband of Mercy; what was wanting to the equality of her love was in this regard more than balanced by her respect for the chief of the clan and head of the family. Alister's light was thus left to burn in very darkness, that it might burn the better; for as strength is made perfect through weakness, so does the light, within grow by darkness. It was the people that sat in darkness that saw a great light. He was brought closer than ever to first principles; had to think and judge more than ever of the right thing to do—first of all, the right thing with regard to Mercy. Of giving her up, there was of course no thought; so long as she would be his, he was hers as entirely as the bonds of any marriage could make him! But she owed something to her father! and of all men the patriarchal chief was the last to dare interfere with the RIGHTS of a father. BUT THEY MUST BE RIGHTS, not rights turned into, or founded upon wrongs. With the first in acknowledging true, he would not be with the last even, in yielding to false rights! The question was, what were the rights of a father? One thing was clear, that it was the duty, therefore the right of a father, to prevent his child from giving herself away before she could know what she did; and Mercy was not yet of age. That one woman might be capable of knowing at fifteen, and another not at fifty, left untouched the necessity for fixing a limit. It was his own duty and right, on the other hand, to do what he could to prevent her from being in any way deceived concerning him. It was essential that nothing should be done, resolved, or yielded, by the girl, through any misunderstanding he could forestall, or because of any falsehood he could frustrate. He must therefore contrive to hold some communication with her!

First of all, however, he must learn how she was treated! It was not only in fiction or the ancient clan-histories that tyrannical and cruel things were done! A tragedy is even more a tragedy that it has not much diversity of incident, that it is acted in commonplace surroundings, and that the agents of it are commonplace persons—fathers and mothers acting from the best of low or selfish motives. Where either Mammon or Society is worshipped, in love, longing, or fear, there is room for any falsehood, any cruelty, any suffering.

There were several of the clan employed about the New House of whom Alister might have sought information; but he was of another construction from the man of fashion in the old plays, whose first love-strategy is always to bribe the lady's maid: the chief scorned to learn anything through those of a man's own household. He fired a gun, and ran up a flag on the old castle, which brought Rob of the Angels at full speed, and comforted the heart of Mercy sitting disconsolate at her window: it was her chiefs doing, and might have to do with her!

Having told Rob the state of matters between him and the New House—

"I need not desire you, Rob," he concluded, "to be silent! You may of course let your father know, but never a soul besides. From this moment, every hour your father does not actually need you, be somewhere on the hills where you can see the New House. I want to learn first whether she goes out at all. With the dark you must draw nearer the house. But I will have no questioning of the servants or anyone employed about it; I will never use a man's pay to thwart his plans, nor yet make any man even unconsciously a traitor."

Rob understood and departed; but before he had news for his master an event occurred which superseded his service.

The neighbours, Mr. Peregrine Palmer and Mr. Brander, had begun to enclose their joint estates for a deer-forest, and had engaged men to act as curators. They were from the neighbourhood, but none of them belonged to Strathruadh, and not one knew the boundaries of the district they had to patrol; nor indeed were the boundaries everywhere precisely determined: why should they be, where all was heather and rock? Until game-sprinkled space grew valuable, who would care whether this or that lump of limestone, rooted in the solid earth, were the actual property of the one or the other! Either would make the other welcome to blast and cart it away!

There was just one person who knew all about the boundaries that was to be known; he could not in places draw their lines with absolute assurance, but he had better grounds for his conclusions than anyone else could have; this was Hector of the Stags. For who so likely to understand them as he who knew the surface within them as well as the clay-floor of his own hut? If he did not everywhere know where the marchline fell, at least he knew perfectly where it ought to fall.

It happened just at this time that THE MISTRESS told Hector she would be glad of a deer, intending to cure part for winter use; the next day, therefore,—the first of Rob of the Angels' secret service—he stalked one across the hill-farm, got a shot at it near the cave-house, brought it down, and was busy breaking it, when two men who had come creeping up behind, threw themselves upon him, and managed, well for themselves, to secure him before he had a chance of defending himself. Finding he was deaf and dumb, one of them knew who he must be, and would have let him go; but the other, eager to ingratiate himself with the new laird, used such, argument to the contrary as prevailed with his companion, and they set out for the New House, Hector between them with his hands tied. Annoyed and angry at being thus treated like a malefactor, he yet found amusement in the notion of their mistake. But he found it awkward to be unable to use that readiest weapon of human defence, the tongue. If only his EARS AND MOUTH, as he called Rob in their own speech, had been with him! When he saw, however, where they were taking him, he was comforted, for Rob was almost certain to see him: wherever he was, he was watching the New House! He went composedly along with them therefore, fuming and snorting, not caring to escape.

When Rob caught sight of the three, he could not think how it was that his father walked so unlike himself.

He could not be hurt, for his step was strong and steady as ever; not the less was there something of the rhythm gone out of his motion! there was "a broken music" in his gait! He took the telescope which the chief had lent him, and turned it upon him. Discovering then that his father's hands were bound behind his back, fiercest indignation overwhelmed the soul of Rob of the Angels. His father bound like a criminal!—his father, the best of men! What could the devils mean? Ah, they were taking him to the New House! He shut up his telescope, laid it down by a stone, and bounded to meet them, sharpening his knife on his hand as he went.

The moment they were near enough, signs, unintelligible to the keepers, began to pass between the father and son: Rob's meant that he must let him pass unnoticed; Hector's that he understood. So, with but the usual salutation of a stranger, Rob passed them. The same moment he turned, and with one swift sweep of his knife, severed the bonds of his father. The old man stepped back, and father and son stood fronting the enemy.

"Now," said Rob, "if you are honest men, stand to it! How dared you bind Hector of the Stags?"

"Because he is not an honest man," replied one of them.

Rob answered him with a blow. The man made at him, but Hector stepped between.

"Say that again of my father," cried Rob, "who has no speech to defend himself, and I will drive my knife into you."

"We are only doing our duty!" said the other. "We came upon him there cutting up the deer he had just killed on the new laird's land."

"Who are you to say which is the stranger's, and which the Macruadh's? Neither my father nor I have ever seen the faces of you in the country! Will you pretend to know the marches better than my father, who was born and bred in the heather, and knows every stone on the face of the hills?"

"We can't help where he was born or what he knows! he was on our land!"

"He is the Macruadh's keeper, and was on his own land. You will get yourselves into trouble!"

"We'll take our chance!"

"Take your man then!"

"If he try to escape, I swear by the bones of my grandfather," said the more inimical of the two, inheritor of a clan-feud with the Macruadhs, "I will shoot him."

Bob of the Angels burst into a scornful laugh.

"You will! will you?"

"I will not kill him; I don't want to be hanged for him! but I will empty my shot-barrel into the legs of him! So take your chance; you are warned!"

They had Hector's gun, and Rob had no weapon but his knife. Nor was he inclined to use either now he

had cooled a little. He turned to his father. The old man understood perfectly what had passed between them, and signed to Rob that he would go on to the New House, and Rob might run and let the chief know what had happened. The same thing was in Rob's mind, for he saw how it would favour the desires of his chief, bringing them all naturally about the place. But he must first go with his father on the chance of learning something.

"We will go with you," he said.

"We don't want YOU!"

"But I mean to go!—My father is not able to speak for himself!"

"You know nothing."

"I know what he knows. The lie does not grow in our strath."

"You crow high, my cock!"

"No higher than I strike," answered Rob.

In the eyes of the men Rob was small and weak; but there was something in him notwithstanding that looked dangerous, and, though far from cowards, they thought it as well to leave him alone.

Mercy at her window, where was her usual seat now, saw them coming, and instinctively connected their appearance with her father's new measures of protection; and when the men turned toward the kitchen, she ran down to learn what she could. Rob greeted her with a smile as he entered.

"I am going to fetch the Macruadh," he whispered, and turning went out again.

He told the chief that at the word her face lighted up as with the rise of the moon.

One of the maids went and told her master that they had got a poacher in the kitchen.

Mr. Palmer's eyes lightened under his black brows when he saw the captive, whom he knew by sight and by report. His men told him the story their own way, never hinting a doubt as to whose was the land on which the deer had been killed.

"Where is the nearest magistrate?" he inquired with grand severity.

"The nearest is the Macruadh, sir!" answered a highlander who had come from work in the garden to see what was going on.

"I cannot apply to him; the fellow is one of his own men!"

"The Macruadh does what is just!" rejoined the man.

His master vouchsafed him no reply. He would not show his wrath against the chief: it would be undignified!

"Take him to the tool-house, and lock him up till I think what to do with him. Bring me the key."

The butler led the way, and Hector followed between his captors. They might have been showing him to his bed-room, so calm was he: Bob gone to fetch the chief, his imprisonment could not last!—and for the indignity, was he not in the right!

As Mr. Palmer left the kitchen, his eye fell on Mercy.

"Go to your room," he said angrily, and turned from her.

She obeyed in silence, consoling herself that from her window she could see the arrival of the chief. Nor had she watched long when she saw him coming along the road with Rob. At the gate she lost sight of them. Presently she heard voices in the hall, and crept down the stair far enough to hear.

"I could commit you for a breach of the peace, Mr. Palmer," she heard the chief say. "You ought to have brought the man to me. As a magistrate I order his release. But I give my word he shall be forthcoming when legally required."

"Your word is no bail. The man was taken poaching; I have him, and I will keep him."

"Let me see him then, that I may learn from himself where he shot the deer."

"He shall go before Mr. Brander."

"Then I beg you will take him at once. I will go with him. But listen a moment, Mr. Palmer. When this same man, my keeper, took your guest poaching on my ground, I let Mr. Sercombe go. I could have committed him as you would commit Hector. I ask you in return to let Hector go. Being deaf and dumb, and the hills the joy of his life, confinement will be terrible to him."

"I will do nothing of the kind. You could never have committed a gentleman for a mistake. This is quite a different thing!"

"It is a different thing, for Hector cannot have made a mistake. He could not have followed a deer on to your ground without knowing it!"

"I make no question of that!"

"He says he was not on your property."

"Says!"

"He is not a man to lie!"

Mr. Palmer smiled.

"Once more I pray you, let us see him together."

"You shall not see him."

"Then take him at once before Mr. Brander."

"Mr. Brander is not at home."

"Take him before SOME magistrate—I care not who. There is Mr. Chisholm!"

"I will take him when and where it suits me."

"Then as a magistrate I will set him at liberty. I am sorry to make myself unpleasant to you. Of all things I would have avoided it. But I cannot let the man suffer unjustly. Where have you put him?"

"Where you will not find him."

"He is one of my people; I must have him!"

"Your people! A set of idle, poaching fellows! By heaven, the strath shall be rid of the pack of them before another year is out!"

"While I have land in it with room for them to stand upon, the strath shall not be rid of them!—But this is idle! Where have you put Hector of the Stags?"

Mr. Palmer laughed.

"In safe keeping. There is no occasion to be uneasy about him! He shall have plenty to eat and drink, be well punished, and show the rest of the rascals the way out of the country!"

"Then I must find him! You compel me!"

So saying, the chief, with intent to begin his search at the top of the house in the hope of seeing Mercy, darted up the stair. She heard him coming, went a few steps higher, and waited. On the landing he saw her, white, with flashing eyes. Their hands clasped each other—for a moment only, but the moment was of eternity, not of time.

"You will find Hector in the tool-house," she said aloud.

"You shameless hussey!" cried her father, following the chief in a fury.

Mercy ran up the stair. The chief turned and faced Mr. Palmer.

"You have no business in my house!"

"I have the right of a magistrate."

"You have no right. Leave it at once."

"Allow me to pass."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself—making a girl turn traitor to her own father!"

"You ought to be proud of a daughter with the conscience and courage to turn against you!"

The chief passed Mr. Palmer, and running down the stair, joined Rob of the Angels where he stood at the door in a group composed of the keepers and most of the servants.

"Do you know the tool-house?" he said to Rob.

"Yes, Macruadh."

"Lead the way then. Your father is there."

"On no account let them open the door," cried Mr. Palmer. "They may hold through it what communication they please."

"You will not be saying much to a deaf man through inch boards!" remarked the clansman from the garden.

Mr. Palmer hurried after them, and his men followed.

Alister found the door fast and solid, without handle. He turned a look on his companion, and was about to run his weight against the lock.

"It is too strong," said Rob. "Hector of the Stags must open it!"

"But how? You cannot even let him know what you want!"

Rob gave a smile, and going up to the door, laid himself against it, as close as he could stand, with his face upon it, and so stood silent.

Mr. Palmer coming up with his attendants, all stood for a few moments in silence, wondering at Rob: he must be holding communication with his father—but how?

Sounds began inside—first a tumbling of tools about, then an attack on the lock.

"Come! come! this won't do!" said Mr. Palmer, approaching the door.

"Prevent it then," said the chief. "Do what you will you cannot make him hear you, and while the door is between you, he cannot see you! If you do not open it, he will!"

"Run," said Mr. Palmer to the butler; "you will find the key on my table! I don't want the lock ruined!"

But there was no stopping the thing! Before the butler came back, the lock fell, the door opened, and out came Hector, wiping his brow with his sleeve, and looking as if he enjoyed the fun.

The keepers darted forward.

"Stand off!" said the chief stepping between. "I don't want to hurt you, but if you attempt to lay hands on him, I will."

One of the men dodged round, and laid hold of Hector from behind; the other made a move towards him in

front. Hector stood motionless for an instant, watching his chief, but when he saw him knock down the man before him, he had his own assailant by the throat in an instant, gave him a shake, and threw him beside his companion.

"You shall suffer for this, Macruadh!" cried Mr. Palmer, coming close up to him, and speaking in a low, determined tone, carrying a conviction of unchangeableness.

"Better leave what may not be the worst alone!" returned the chief. "It is of no use telling you how sorry I am to have to make myself disagreeable to you; but I give you fair warning that I will accept no refusal of the hand of your daughter from any but herself. As you have chosen to break with me, I accept your declaration of war, and tell you plainly I will do all I can to win your daughter, never asking your leave in respect of anything I may think it well to do. You will find there are stronger forces in the world than money. Henceforward I hold myself clear of any personal obligation to you except as Mercy's father and my enemy."

From very rage Mr. Palmer was incapable of answering him. Alister turned from him, and in his excitement mechanically followed Rob, who was turning a corner of the house. It was not the way to the gate, but Rob had seen Mercy peeping round that same corner—anxious in truth about her father; she feared nothing for Alister.

He came at once upon Mercy and Rob talking together. Rob withdrew and joined his father a little way off; they retired a few more paces, and stood waiting their chief's orders.

"How AM I to see you again, Mercy?" said the chief hurriedly. "Can't you think of some way? Think quick."

Now Mercy, as she sat alone at her window, had not unfrequently imagined the chief standing below on the walk, or just beyond in the belt of shrubbery; and now once more in her mind's eye suddenly seeing him there, she answered hurriedly,

"Come under my window to-night."

"I do not know which it is."

"You see it from the castle. I will put a candle in it."

"What hour?"

"ANY time after midnight. I will sit there till you come."

"Thank you," said the chief, and departed with his attendants.

Mercy hastened into the house by a back door, but had to cross the hall to reach the stair. As she ran up, her father came in at the front door, saw her, and called her. She went down again to meet the tempest of his rage, which now broke upon her in gathered fury. He called her a treacherous, unnatural child, with every name he thought bad enough to characterize her conduct. Had she been to him as Began or Goneril, he could hardly have found worse names for her. She stood pale, but looked him in the face. Her mother came trembling as near as she dared, withered by her terror to almost twice her age. Mr. Palmer in his fury took a step towards Mercy as if he would strike her. Mercy did not move a muscle, but stood ready

for the blow. Then love overcame her fear, and the wife and mother threw herself between, her arms round her husband, as if rather to protect him from the deed than her daughter from its hurt.

"Go to your room, Mercy," she said.

Mercy turned and went. She could not understand herself. She used to be afraid of her father when she knew no reason; now that all the bad in his nature and breeding took form and utterance, she found herself calm! But the thing that quieted her was in reality her sorrow that he should carry himself so wildly. What she thought was, if the mere sense of not being in the wrong made one able to endure so much, what must not the truth's sake enable one to bear! She sat down at her window to gaze and brood.

When her father cooled down, he was annoyed with himself, not that he had been unjust, but that he had behaved with so little dignity. With brows black as evil, he sat degraded in his own eyes, resenting the degradation on his daughter. Every time he thought of her, new rage arose in his heart. He had been proud of his family autocracy. So seldom had it been necessary to enforce his authority, that he never doubted his wishes had but to be known to be obeyed. Born tyrannical, the characterless submission of his wife had nourished the tyrannical in him. Now, all at once, a daughter, the ugly one, from whom no credit was to be looked for, dared to defy him for a clown figuring in a worn-out rag of chieftainship—the musty fiction of a clan—half a dozen shepherds, crofters, weavers, and shoemakers, not the shadow of a gentleman among them!—a man who ate brose, went with bare knees, worked like any hind, and did not dare offend his wretched relations by calling his paltry farm his own!—for the sake of such a fellow, with a highland twang that disgusted his fastidious ear, his own daughter made a mock of his authority, treated him as a nobody! In his own house she had risen against him, and betrayed him to the insults of his enemy! His conscious importance, partly from doubt in itself, boiled and fumed, bubbled and steamed in the caldron of his angry brain. Not one, but many suns would go down upon such a wrath!

"I wish I might never set eyes on the girl again!" he said to his wife. "A small enough loss the sight of her would be, the ugly, common-looking thing! I beg you will save me from it in future as much as you can. She makes me feel as if I should go out of my mind!—so calm, forsooth! so meek! so self-sufficient!—oh, quite a saint!—and so strong-minded!—equal to throwing her father over for a fellow she never saw till a year ago!"

"She shall have her dinner sent up to her as usual," answered his wife with a sigh. "But, really, Peregrine, my dear, you must compose yourself! Love has driven many a woman to extremes!"

"Love! Why should she love such a fellow? I see nothing in him to love! WHY should she love him? Tell me that! Give me one good reason for her folly, and I will forgive her—do anything for her!—anything but let her have the rascal! That I WILL NOT! Take for your son-in-law an ape that loathes your money, calls it filthy lucre—and means it! Not if I can help it!—Don't let me see her! I shall come to hate her! and that I would rather not; a man must love and cherish his own flesh! I shall go away, I must!—to get rid of the hateful face of the minx, with its selfrighteous, injured look staring at you!"

"If you do, you can't expect me to prevent her from seeing him!"

"Lock her up in the coal-hole—bury her if you like! I shall never ask what you have done with her! Never to see her again is all I care about!"

"Ah, if she were really dead, you would want to see her again—after a while!"

"I wish then she was dead, that I might want to see her again! It won't be sooner! Ten times rather than know her married to that beast, I would see her dead and buried!"

The mother held her peace. He did not mean it, she said to herself. It was only his anger! But he did mean it; at that moment he would with joy have heard the earth fall on her coffin.

Notwithstanding her faculty for shutting out the painful, her persistent self-assuring that it would blow over, and her confidence that things would by and by resume their course, Mrs. Palmer was in those days very unhappy. The former quiet once restored, she would take Mercy in hand, and reasoning with her, soon persuade her to what she pleased! It was her husband's severity that had brought it to this!

The accomplice of her husband, she did not understand that influence works only between such as inhabit the same spiritual sphere: the daughter had been lifted into a region far above all the arguments of her mother—arguments poor in life, and base in reach.

CHAPTER X

MIDNIGHT.

Mercy sat alone but not lonely at her window. A joy in her heart made her independent for the time of human intercourse. Life at the moment was livable without it, for there was no bar between her and her lover.

The evening drew on. They sent her food. She forgot to eat it, and sat looking, till the lines of the horizon seemed grown into her mind like an etching. She watched the slow dusk swell and gather—with such delicate, soft-blending gradations in the birth of night as Edwin Waugh loves to seize and word-paint. Through all its fine evanescent change of thought and feeling she watched unconsciously; and the growth, death, and burial of that twilight were ever after a substratum to all the sadness and all the hope that visited her. Through palest eastern rose, through silvery gold and golden green and brown, the daylight passed into the shadow of the light, and the stars, like hope in despair, began to show themselves where they always were, and the night came on, and deeper and deeper sank the silence. Household sound expired, and no step came near her door. Her father had given orders, and was obeyed. Christina has stolen indeed from her own room and listened at hers, but hearing nor sound nor motion, had concluded it better for Mercy as well as safer for herself, to return. So she sat the sole wakeful thing in the house, for even her father slept.

The earth had grown vague and dim, looking as it must look to the dead. Its oppressive solidity, its obtrusive HERENESS, dissolved in the dark, it left the soul to live its own life. She could still trace the meeting of earth and sky, each the evidence of the other, but the earth was content to be and not assert, and the sky lived only in the points of light that dotted its vaulted quiet. Sound itself seemed asleep, and filling the air with the repose of its slumber. Absolute silence the soul cannot grasp; therefore deepest silence seems ever, in Wordsworth's lovely phrase, wandering into sound, for silence is but the thin shadow of harmony—say rather creation's ear agape for sound, the waiting matrix of interwoven melodies, the sphere-bowl standing empty for the wine of the spirit. There may be yet another reason beyond its too great depth or height or strength, why we should be deaf to the spheral music; it may be that the absolute perfection of its harmony can take to our ears but the shape of silence.

Content and patient, Mercy sat watching.

It was just past midnight, but she had not yet lighted a candle, when something struck the window as with the soft blow of a moth's wing. Her heart gave a great leap. She listened breathless. Nothing followed. It must have been some flying night-thing, though surely too late in the year for a moth!

It came again! She dared not speak. She softly opened the window. The darkness had thinned on the horizon, and the half-moon was lifting a corner above the edge of the world. Something in the shrubbery

answered her shine, and without rustle of branch, quiet as a ghost, the chief stepped into the open space. Mercy leaned toward him and said,

"Hush! speak low."

"There is no need to say much," he answered. "I come only to tell you that, as man may, I am with you always."

"How quietly you came! I did not hear a sound!"

"I have been two hours here in the shrubbery."

"And I not once to suspect it! You might have given me some hint! A very small one would have been enough! Why did you not let me know?"

"It was not your hour; it is twelve but now; the moon comes to say so. I came for the luxury of expectation, and the delight of knowing you better attended than you thought: you knew me with you in spirit; I was with you in the body too!"

"My chief!" she said softly. "I shall always find you nearer and better than I was able to think! I know I do not know how good you are."

"I am good toward you, Mercy! I love you!"

A long silence, save of shining eyes, followed.

"We are waiting for God!" said Alister at length.

"Waiting is loving," answered Mercy.

She leaned out, looking down to her heaven.

The moon had been climbing the sky, veiled in a little cloud. The cloud vanished, and her light fell on the chief.

"Have you been to a ball?" said Mercy.

"No, Mercy. I doubt if there will be any dancing more in Strathruadh!"

"Then why are you in court dress?"

"When should a Celt, who of all the world loves radiance and colour, put on his gay attire? For the multitude, or for the one?"

"Thank you. Is it a compliment?—But after your love, everything fine seems only natural!"

"In love there are no compliments; truth only walks the sacred path between the two doors. I will love you as my father loved my mother, and loves her still."

"I do like to see you shining! It was kind of you to dress for the moon and me!"

"Whoever loves the truth must love shining things! God is the father of lights, even of the lights hid in the dark earth—sapphires and rubies, and all the families of splendour."

"I shall always see you like that!"

"There is one thing I want to say to you, Mercy:—you will not think me indifferent however long I may be in proposing a definite plan for our future! We must wait upon God!"

"I shall think nothing you would not have me think. A little while ago I might have dreamed anything, for I was fast asleep. I was dead till you waked me. If I were what girls call IN LOVE, I should be impatient to be with you; but I love you much more than that, and do not need to be always with you. You have made me able to think, and I can think about you! I was but a child, and you made a woman of me!"

"God and Ian did," said Alister.

"Yes, but through you, and I want to be worthy of you. A woman to whom a man's love was so little comfort that she pined away and died because she could not be married to him, would not be a wife worthy of my chief!"

"Then you will always trust me?"

"I will. When one really knows another, then all is safe!"

"How many people do you know?" asked the chief.

She thought a moment, and with a little laugh, replied,

"You."

"Pardon me, Mercy, but I do want to know how your father treats you!"

"We will not talk about him, please. He is my father!—and so far yours that you are bound to make what excuse you can for him."

"That I am bound to do, if he were no father to either of us. It is what God is always doing for us!—only he will never let us off."

"He has had no one to teach him, Alister! and has always been rich, and accustomed to have his own way! I begin to think one punishment of making money in a wrong manner is to be prosperous in it!"

"I am sure you are right! But will you be able to bear poverty, Mercy?"

"Yes," she answered, but so carelessly that she seemed to speak without having thought.

"You do not know what poverty means!" rejoined Alister. "We may have to endure much for our people!"

"It means YOU any way, does it not? If you and poverty come together, welcome you and your friend!—I see I must confess a thing! Do you remember telling me to read Julius Caesar?"

"Yes."

"Do you remember how Portia gave herself a wound, that she might prove to her husband she was able to keep a secret?"

"Yes, surely!"

"I have my meals in my room now, so I can do as I please, and I never eat the nice things dear mother always sends me, but potatoes, and porridge, and bread and milk."

"What IS that for, Mercy?"

"To show you I am worthy of being poor—able at least to be poor. I have not once tasted anything VERY nice since the letter that made my father so angry."

"You darling!"

Of all men a highlander understands independence of the KIND of food.

"But," continued Alister, "you need not go on with it; I am quite convinced; and we must take with thanksgiving what God gives us. Besides, you have to grow yet!"

"Alister! and me like a May-pole!"

"You are tall enough, but we are creatures of three dimensions, and need more than height. You must eat, or you will certainly be ill!"

"Oh, I eat! But just as you please! Only it wouldn't do me the least harm so long as you didn't mind! It was as much to prove to myself I could, as to you! But don't you think it must be nearly time for people to wake from their first sleep?"

The same instant there was a little noise—like a sob. Mercy started, and when she looked again Alister had vanished—as noiselessly as he came. For a moment she sat afraid to move. A wind came blowing upon her from the window: some one had opened her door! What if it were her father! She compelled herself to turn her head. It was something white!—it was Christina! She came to her through the shadow of the moonlight, put her arms round her, and pressed to her face a wet cheek. For a moment or two neither spoke.

"I heard a little, Mercy!" sobbed Christina. "Forgive me; I meant no harm; I only wanted to know if you were awake; I was coming to see you."

"Thank you, Chrissy! That was good of you!"

"You are a dear!—and so is your chief! I am sorry I scared him! It made me so miserable to hear you so happy that I could not help it! Would you mind forgiving me, dear?"

"I don't mind your hearing a bit. I am glad you should know how the chief loves me!"

"But you must be careful, dear! Papa might pretend to take him for a robber, and shoot him!"

"Oh, no, Chrissy! He wouldn't do that!"

"I would not be too sure! I hadn't an idea before what papa was like! Oh what men are, and what they can be! I shall never hold up my head again!"

With this incoherent speech, to Mercy's astonishment and consternation she burst into tears. Mercy tried to comfort her, but did not know how. She had seen for some time that there was a difference in her, that something was the matter, and wondered whether she could be missing Ian, but it was merest surmise. Perhaps now she would tell her!

She was weeping like a child on her shoulder. Presently she began to tremble. Mercy coaxed her into her bed, and undressing quickly, lay down beside her, and took her in her arms to make her warm. Before the morning, with many breaks of sobbing and weeping, Christina had told Mercy her story.

"I wish you would let me tell the chief!" she said. "He would know how to comfort you."

"Thank you!" said Christina, with not a little indignation. "I forgot I was talking to a girl as good as married, who would not keep my secrets any more than her own!"

She would have arisen at once to go to her own room, and the night that had brought such joy to Mercy threatened to end very sadly. She threw her arms round Christina's waist, locked her hands together, and held her fast.

"Hear me, Chrissy, darling! I am a great big huge brute," she cried. "But I was only stupid. I would not tell a secret of yours even to Alister—not for worlds! If I did, he would be nearer despising me than I should know how to bear. I will not tell him. Did I ever break my word to you, Chrissy?"

"No, never, Mercy!" responded Christina, and turning she put her arms round her.

"Besides," she went on, "why should I go to anyone for counsel? Could I have a better counsellor than Ian? Is he not my friend? Oh, he is! he is! he said so! he said so!"

The words prefaced another storm of tears.

"He is going to write to me," she sobbed, as soon as she could again speak.

"Perhaps he will love you yet, Chrissy!"

"No, no; he will never love me that way! For goodness' sake don't hint at such a thing! I should not be able to write a word to him, if I thought that! I should feel a wolf in sheep's clothing! I have done with tricks and pretendings! Ian shall never say to himself, 'I wish I had not trusted that girl! I thought she was going to be honest! But what's bred in the bone—!' I declare, Mercy, I should blush myself out of being to learn he thought of me like that! I mean to be worthy of his friendship! His friendship is better than any other man's love! I will be worthy of it!"

The poor girl burst yet again into tears—not so bitter as before, and ended them all at once with a kiss to Mercy.

"For his sake," she said, "I am going to take care of Alister and you!"

"Thank you! thank you, Chrissy! Only you must not do anything to offend papa! It is hard enough on him as it is! I cannot give up the chief to please him, for he has been a father to my better self; but we must do nothing to trouble him that we can help!"

CHAPTER XI

SOMETHING STRANGE.

Alister did not feel inclined to go home. The night was more like Mercy, and he lingered with the night, inhabiting the dream that it was Mercy's house, and she in the next room. He turned into the castle, climbed the broken steps, and sat on the corner of the wall, the blank hill before him, asleep standing, with the New House on its shoulder, and the moonlight reflected from Mercy's window under which he had so lately stood. He sat for an hour, and when he came down, was as much disinclined to go home as before: he could not rest in his chamber, with no Ian on the other side of its wall! He went straying down the road, into the valley, along the burnside, up the steep beyond it, and away to the hill-farm and the tomb.

The moon was with him all the way, but she seemed thinking to herself rather than talking to him. Why should the strange, burnt-out old cinder of a satellite be the star of lovers? The answer lies hid, I suspect, in the mysteries of light reflected.

He wandered along, careless of time, of moonset, star-shine, or sunrise, brooding on many things in the rayless radiance of his love, and by the time he reached the tomb, was weary with excitement and lack of sleep. Taking the key from where it was cunningly hidden, he unlocked the door and entered.

He started back at sight of a gray-haired old man, seated on one of the stone chairs, and leaning sadly over the fireless hearth: it must be his uncle! The same moment he saw it was a ray from the sinking moon, entering by the small, deep window, and shining feebly on the chair. He struck a light, kindled the peats on the hearth, and went for water. Returning from the well he found the house dark as before; and there was the old man again, cowering over the extinguished fire! The idea lasted but a moment; once more the level light of the moon lay cold and gray upon the stone chair! He tried to laugh at his fancifulness, but did not quite succeed. Several times on the way up, he had thought of his old uncle: this must have given the shape to the moonlight and the stone! He made many attempts to recall the illusion, but in vain. He relighted the fire, and put on the kettle. Going then for a book to read till the water boiled, he remembered a letter which, in the excitement of the afternoon, he had put in his pocket unread, and forgotten. It was from the family lawyer in Glasgow, informing him that the bank in which his uncle had deposited the proceeds of his sale of the land, was in a state of absolute and irrecoverable collapse; there was not the slightest hope of retrieving any portion of the wreck.

Alister did not jump up and pace the room in the rage of disappointment; neither did he sit as one stunned and forlorn of sense. He felt some bitterness in the loss of the hope of making up to his people for his uncle's wrong; but it was clear that if God had cared for his having the money, he would have cared that he should have it. Here was an opportunity for absolute faith and contentment in the will that looks after all our affairs, the small as well as the great.

Those who think their affairs too insignificant for God's regard, will justify themselves in lying crushed under their seeming ruin. Either we live in the heart of an eternal thought, or we are the product and sport of that which is lower than we.

"It was evil money!" said the chief to himself; "it was the sale of a birthright for a mess of pottage! I would have turned it back into the right channel, the good of my people! but after all, what can money do? It was discontent with poverty that began the ruin of the highlands! If the heads of the people had but lived pure, active, sober, unostentatious lives, satisfied to be poor, poverty would never have overwhelmed them! The highlands would have made Scotland great with the greatness of men dignified by high-hearted contentment, and strong with the strength of men who could do without!" Therewith it dawned upon Alister how, when he longed to help his people, his thoughts had always turned, not to God first, but to the money his uncle had left him. He had trusted in a fancy—no less a fancy when in his uncle's possession than when cast into the quicksand of the bank; for trust in money that is, is no less vain, and is farther from redress, than trust in money that is not. In God alone can trust repose. His heart had been so faithless that he did not know it was! He thought he loved God as the first and last, the beginning, middle, and end of all things, and he had been trusting, not in God, but in uncertain riches, that is in vile Mammon! It was a painful and humiliating discovery. "It was well," he said, "that my false deity should be taken from me! For my idolatry perhaps, a good gift has failed to reach my people! I must be more to them than ever, to make up to them for their loss with better than money!"

He fell on his knees, and thanked God for the wind that had blown cold through his spirit, and slain at least one evil thing; and when he rose, all that was left of his trouble was a lump in his throat, which melted away as he walked home through the morning air on the hills. For he could not delay; he must let his mother know their trouble, and, as one who had already received help from on high, help her to bear it! If the messenger of Satan had buffeted him, he had but broken a way for strength!

But at first he could not enjoy as he was wont the glory of the morning. It troubled him. Would a single note in the song of the sons of the morning fail because God did or would not do a thing? Could God deserve less than thanks perfect from any one of his creatures? That man could not know God who thanked him but for what men call good things, nor took the evil as from the same love! He scorned himself, and lifted up his heart. As he reached the brow of his last descent, the sun rose, and with it his soul arose and shone, for its light was come, and the glory of the Lord was risen upon it. "Let God," he said, "take from us what he will: himself he can only give!" Joyful he went down the hill. God was, and all was well!

CHAPTER XII

THE POWER OF DARKNESS.

He found his mother at breakfast, wondering what had become of him.

"Are you equal to a bit of bad news, mother?" he asked with a smile.

The mother's thoughts flew instantly to Ian.

"Oh, it's nothing about Ian!" said the chief, answering her look.

Its expression changed; she hoped now it was some fresh obstacle between him and Mercy.

"No, mother, it is not that either!" said Alister, again answering her look—with a sad one of his own, for the lack of his mother's sympathy was the sorest trouble he had. "It is only that uncle's money is gone—all gone."

She sat silent for a moment, gave a little sigh, and said,

"Well, it will all be over soon! In the meantime things are no worse than they were! His will be done!"

"I should have liked to make a few friends with the mammon of unrighteousness before we were turned out naked!"

"We shall have plenty," answered the mother, "—God himself, and a few beside! If you could make friends with the mammon, you can make friends without it!"

"Yes, that is happily true! Ian says it was only a lesson for the wise and prudent with money in their pockets—a lesson suited to their limited reception!"

As they spoke, Nancy entered.

"Please, laird," she said, "Donal shoemaker is wanting to see you."

"Tell him to come in," answered the chief.

Donal entered and stood up by the door, with his bonnet under his arm—a little man with puckered face, the puckers radiating from or centering in the mouth, which he seemed to untie like a money-hag, and pull open by means of a smile, before he began to speak. The chief shook hands with him, and asked how he could serve him.

"It will not be to your pleasure to know, Macruadh," said Donal, humbly declining to sit, "that I have received this day notice to quit my house and garden!"

The house was a turf-cottage, and the garden might grow two bushels and a half of potatoes.

"Are you far behind with your rent?"

"Not a quarter, Macruadh."

"Then what does it mean?"

"It means, sir, that Strathruadh is to be given to the red deer, and the son of man have nowhere to lay his head. I am the first at your door with my sorrow, but before the day is over you will have—"

Here he named four or five who had received like notice to quit.

"It is a sad business!" said the chief sorrowfully.

"Is it law, sir?"

"It is not easy to say what is law, Donal; certainly it is not gospel! As a matter of course you will not be without shelter, so long as I may call stone or turf mine, but things are looking bad! Things as well as souls are in God's hands however!"

"I learn from the new men on the hills," resumed Donal, "that the new lairds have conspired to exterminate us. They have discovered, apparently, that the earth was not made for man, but for rich men and beasts!" Here the little man paused, and his insignificant face grew in expression grand. "But the day of the Lord will come," he went on, "as a thief in the night. Vengeance is his, and he will know where to give many stripes, and where few.—What would you have us do, laird?"

"I will go with you to the village."

"No, if you please, sir! Better men will be at your door presently to put the same question, for they will do nothing without the Macruadh. We are no more on your land, great is our sorrow, chief, but we are of your blood, you are our lord, and your will is ours. You have been a nursing father to us, Macruadh!"

"I would fain be!" answered the chief.

"They will want to know whether these strangers have the right to turn us out; and if they have not the right to disseize, whether we have not the right to resist. If you would have us fight, and will head us, we will fall to a man—for fall we must; we cannot think to stand before the redcoats."

"No, no, Donal! It is not a question of the truth; that we should be bound to die for, of course. It is only our rights that are concerned, and they are not worth dying for. That would be mere pride, and denial of God who is fighting for us. At least so it seems at the moment to me!"

"Some of us would fain fight and have done with it, sir!"

The chief could not help smiling with pleasure at the little man's warlike readiness: he knew it was no

empty boast; what there was of him was good stuff.

"You have a wife and children, Donal!" he said; "what would become of them if you fell?"

"My sister was turned out in the cold spring," answered Donal, "and died in Glencalvu! It would be better to die together!"

"But, Donal, none of yours will die of cold, and I can't let you fight, because the wives and children would all come on my hands, and I should have too many for my meal! No, we must not fight. We may have a right to fight, I do not know; but I am sure we have at least the right to abstain from fighting. Don't let us confound right and duty, Donal—neither in thing nor in word!"

"Will the law not help us, Macruadh?"

"The law is such a slow coach! our enemies are so rich! and the lawyers have little love of righteousness! Most of them would see the dust on our heads to have the picking of our bones! Stick nor stone would be left us before anything came of it!"

"But, sir," said Donal, "is it the part of brave men to give up their rights?"

"No man can take from us our rights," answered the chief, "but any man rich enough may keep us from getting the good of them. I say again we are not bound to insist on our rights. We may decline to do so, and that way leave them to God to look after for us."

"God does not always give men their rights, sir! I don't believe he cares about our small matters!"

"Nothing that God does not care about can be worth our caring about. But, Donal, how dare you say what you do? Have you lived to all eternity? How do you know what you say? GOD DOES care for our rights. A day is coming, as you have just said, when he will judge the oppressors of their brethren."

"We shall be all dead and buried long before then!"

"As he pleases, Donal! He is my chief. I will have what he wills, not what I should like! A thousand years I will wait for my rights if he chooses. I will trust him to do splendidly for me. No; I will have no other way than my chief's! He will set everything straight!"

"You must be right, sir! only I can't help wishing for the old times, when a man could strike a blow for himself!"

With all who came Alister held similar talk; for though they were not all so warlike as the cobbler, they keenly felt the wrong that was done them, and would mostly, but for a doubt of its rectitude, have opposed force with force. It would at least bring their case before the country!

"The case is before a higher tribunal," answered the laird; "and one's country is no incarnation of justice! How could she be, made up mostly of such as do not love fair play except in the abstract, or for themselves! The wise thing is to submit to wrong."

It is in ordering our own thoughts and our own actions, that we have first to stand up for the right; our business is not to protect ourselves from our neighbour's wrong, but our neighbour from our wrong. This

is to slay evil; the other is to make it multiply. A man who would pull out even a mote from his brother's eye, must first pull out the beam from his own eye, must be righteous against his own selfishness. That is the only way to wound the root of evil. He who teaches his neighbour to insist on his rights, is not a teacher of righteousness. He who, by fulfilling his own duties, teaches his neighbour to give every man the fair play he owes him, is a fellow-worker with God.

But although not a few of the villagers spoke in wrath and counselled resistance, not one of them rejoiced in the anticipation of disorder. Heartily did Rob of the Angels insist on peace, but his words had the less force that he was puny in person, and, although capable of great endurance, unnoted for deeds of strength. Evil birds carried the words of natural and righteous anger to the ears of the new laird; no good birds bore the words of appeasement: he concluded after his kind that their chief countenanced a determined resistance.

On all sides the horizon was dark about the remnant of Clanruadh. Poorly as they lived in Strathruadh, they knew no place else where they could live at all. Separated, and so disabled from making common cause against want, they must perish! But their horizon was not heaven, and God was beyond it.

It was a great comfort to the chief that in the matter of his clan his mother agreed with him altogether: to the last penny of their having they must help their people! Those who feel as if the land were their own, do fearful wrong to their own souls! What grandest opportunities of growing divine they lose! Instead of being man-nobles, leading a sumptuous life until it no longer looks sumptuous, they might be God-nobles—saviours of men, yielding themselves to and for their brethren! What friends might they not make with the mammon of unrighteousness, instead of passing hence into a region where no doors, no arms will be open to them! Things are ours that we may use them for all—sometimes that we may sacrifice them. God had but one precious thing, and he gave that!

The chief, although he saw that the proceedings of Mr. Palmer and Mr. Brander must have been determined upon while his relation to Mercy was yet undeclared, could not help imagining how differently it might have gone with his people, had he been married to Mercy, and in a good understanding with her father. Had he crippled his reach toward men by the narrowness of his conscience toward God? So long as he did what seemed right, he must regret no consequences, even for the sake of others! God would mind others as well as him! Every sequence of right, even to the sword and fire, are God's care; he will justify himself in the eyes of the true, nor heed the judgment of the false.

One thing was clear—that it would do but harm to beg of Mr. Palmer any pity for his people: it would but give zest to his rejoicing in iniquity! Something nevertheless must be determined, and speedily, for winter was at hand.

The Macruadh had to consider not only the immediate accommodation of the ejected but how they were to be maintained. Such was his difficulty that he began to long for such news from Ian as would justify an exodus from their own country, not the less a land of bondage, to a home in the wilderness. But ah, what would then the land of his fathers without its people be to him! It would be no more worthy the name of land, no longer fit to be called a possession! He knew then that the true love of the land is one with the love of its people. To live on it after they were gone, would be like making a home of the family mausoleum. The rich "pant after the dust of the earth on the head of the poor," but what would any land become without the poor in it? The poor are blessed because by their poverty they are open to divine influences; they are the buckets set out to catch the rain of heaven; they are the salt of the earth! The poor are to be always with a nation for its best blessing, or for its condemnation and ruin. The chief saw the

valleys desolate of the men readiest and ablest to fight the battles of his country. For the sake of greedy, low-minded fellows, the summons of her war-pipes would be heard in them no more, or would sound in vain among the manless rocks; from sheilin, cottage, or clachan, would spring no kilted warriors with battle response! The red deer and the big sheep had taken the place of men over countless miles of mountain and moor and strath! His heart bled for the sufferings and wrongs of those whose ancestors died to keep the country free that was now expelling their progeny. But the vengeance had begun to gather, though neither his generation nor ours has seen it break. It must be that offences come, but woe unto them by whom they come!

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NEW STANCE.

The Macruadh cast his mind's and his body's eye too upon the small strip of ground on the west side of the castle-ridge, between it and the tiny tributary of the strath burn which was here the boundary between the lands of the two lairds. The slope of the ridge on this side was not so steep, and before the rock sank into the alluvial soil of the valley, it became for a few yards nearly level—sufficiently so, with a little smoothing and raising, to serve for a foundation; while in front was a narrow but rich piece of ground, the bank of the little brook. Before many days were over, men were at work there, in full sight of the upper windows of the New House. It was not at first clear what they were about; but soon began to rise, plain enough, the walls of cottages, some of stone, and some of turf; Mr. Palmer saw a new village already in process of construction, to take the place of that about to be destroyed! The despicable enemy had moved his camp, to pitch it under his very walls! It filled him with the rage of defeat. The poor man who scorned him was going to be too much for him! Not yet was he any nearer to being placed alone in the midst of the earth. He thought to have rid himself of all those hateful faces, full of their chiefs contempt, he imagined, ever eyeing him as an intruder on his own land; but here instead was their filthy little hamlet of hovels growing like a fungus just under his nose, expressly to spite him! Thinking to destroy it, he had merely sent for it! When the wind was in the east, the smoke of their miserable cabins would be blown right in at his dining-room windows! It was useless to expostulate! That he would not like it was of course the chief's first reason for choosing that one spot as the site of his new rookery! The fellow had stolen a march upon him! And what had he done beyond what was absolutely necessary for the improvement of his property! The people were in his way, and he only wanted to get rid of them! And here their chief had brought them almost into his garden! Doubtless if his land had come near enough, he would have built his stoy at the very gate of his shrubbery!—the fellow could not like having them so near himself!

He let his whole household see how annoying the thing was to him. He never doubted it was done purely to irritate him. Christina ventured the suggestion that Mr. Brander and not the chief was the author of the inconvenience. What did that matter! he returned. What right had the chief, as she called him, to interfere between a landlord and his tenants? Christina hinted that, evicted by their landlord, they ceased to be his tenants, and even were he not their chief, he could not be said to interfere in giving help to the destitute. Thereupon he burst at her in a way that terrified her, and she had never even been checked by him before, had often been impertinent to him without rebuke. The man seemed entirely changed, but in truth he was no whit changed: things had but occurred capable of bringing out the facts of his nature. Her mother, who had not dared to speak at the time, expostulated with her afterward.

"Why should papa never be told the truth?" objected Christina.

Her mother was on the point of replying, "Because he will not hear it," but saw she owed it to her husband not to say so to his child.

Mercy said to herself, "It is not to annoy my father he does it, but to do what he can for his people! He does not even know how unpleasant it is to my father to have them so near! It must be one of the punishments of riches that they make the sight of poverty so disagreeable! To luxury, poverty is a living reproach." She longed to see Alister: something might perhaps be done to mitigate the offence. But her father would never consent to use her influence! Perhaps her mother might!

She suggested therefore that Alister would do nothing for the sake of annoying her father, and could have no idea how annoying this thing was to him: if her mother would contrive her seeing him, she would represent it to him!

Mrs. Palmer was of Mercy's opinion regarding the purity of Alister's intent, and promised to think the matter over.

The next night her husband was going to spend at Mr. Brander's: the project might be carried out in safety!

The thing should be done! They would go together, in the hope of persuading the chief to change the site of his new village!

When it was dark they walked to the cottage, and knocking at the door, asked Nancy if the chief were at home. The girl invited them to enter, though not with her usual cordiality; but Mrs. Palmer declined, requesting her to let the chief know they were there, desirous of a word with him.

Alister was at the door in a moment, and wanted them to go in and see his mother, but an instant's reflection made him glad of their refusal.

"I am so sorry for all that has happened!" said Mrs. Palmer. "You know I can have had nothing to do with it! There is not a man I should like for a son-in-law better than yourself, Macruadh; but I am helpless."

"I quite understand," replied the chief, "and thank you heartily for your kindness. Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Mercy has something she wants to speak to you about."

"It was so good of you to bring her!—What is it, Mercy?"

Without the least hesitation, Mercy told him her father's fancy that he was building the new village to spite him, seeing it could not be a pleasure to himself to have the smoke from its chimneys blowing in at door and windows as often as the wind was from the sea.

"I am sorry but not surprised your father should think so, Mercy. To trouble him is as much against my feelings as my interests. And certainly it is for no convenience or comfort to ourselves, that my mother and I have determined on having the village immediately below us."

"I thought," said Mercy, "that if you knew how it vexed papa, you would—But I am afraid it may be for some reason that cannot be helped!"

"Indeed it is; I too am afraid it cannot be helped! I must think of my people! You see, if I put them on the other side of the ridge, they would be exposed to the east wind—and the more that every door and window would have to be to the east. You know yourselves how bitterly it blows down the strath!

Besides, we should there have to build over good land much too damp to be healthy, every foot of which will be wanted to feed them! There they are on the rock. I might, of course, put them on the hillside, but I have no place so sheltered as here, and they would have no gardens. And then it gives me an opportunity, such as chief never had before, of teaching them some things I could not otherwise. Would it be reasonable, Mercy, to sacrifice the good of so many poor people to spare one rich man one single annoyance, which is yet no hurt? Would it be right? Ought I not rather to suffer the rise of yet greater obstacles between you and me?"

"Yes, Alister, yes!" cried Mercy. "You must not change anything. I am only sorry my father cannot be taught that you have no ill will to him in what you do."

"I cannot think it would make much difference. He will never give you to me, Mercy. But be true, and God will."

"Would you mind letting the flag fly, Alister? I should have something to look at!"

"I will; and when I want particularly to see you, I will haul it down. Then, if you hang a handkerchief from your window, I will come to you."

CHAPTER XIV

THE PEAT-MOSS.

For the first winter the Clanruadh had not much to fear—hardly more than usual: they had their small provision of potatoes and meal, and some a poor trifle of money. But "Lady Macruadh" was anxious lest the new cottages should not be quite dry, and gave a general order that fires were to be burned in them for some time before they were occupied: for this they must use their present stock of dry peats, and more must be provided for the winter. The available strength of the clan would be required to get the fresh stock under cover before the weather broke.

The peat-moss from which they cut their fuel, was at some distance from the castle, on the outskirts of the hill-farm. It was the nearest moss to the glen, and the old chief, when he parted with so much of the land, took care to except it, knowing well that his remaining people could not without it live through a winter. But as, of course, his brother, the minister, who succeeded him, and the present chieftain, had freely allowed all the tenants on the land sold to supply themselves from it as before, the notion had been generated that the moss was not part of the chief's remaining property.

When the report was carried to Mr. Peregrine Palmer, that the tenants Mr. Brander and he were about to eject, and who were in consequence affronting him with a new hamlet on the very verge of his land, were providing themselves with a stock of fuel greatly in excess of what they had usually laid in for the winter—that in fact they were cutting large quantities of peat, besides the turf for their new cottages; without making the smallest inquiry, or suspecting for a moment that the proceeding might be justifiable, he determined, after a brief consultation with men who knew nothing but said anything, to put a stop to the supposed presumption.

A few of the peats cut in the summer had not yet been removed, not having dried so well as the rest, and the owners of some of these, two widows, went one day to fetch them home to the new village, when, as it happened, there were none of the clan besides in the moss.

They filled their creels, helped each other to get them on their backs, and were setting out on their weary tramp home, when up rose two of Mr. Palmer's men, who had been watching them, cut their ropes and took their loads, emptied the peats into a moss-hag full of water, and threw the creels after them. The poor women poured out their wrath on the men, telling them they would go straight to the chief, but were answered only with mockery of their chief and themselves. They turned in despair, and with their outcry filled the hollows of the hills as they went, bemoaning the loss of their peats and their creels, and raging at the wrong they had received. One of them, a characterless creature in the eyes of her neighbours, harmless, and always in want, had faith in her chief, for she had done nothing to make her ashamed, and would go to him at once: he had always a word and a smile and a hand-shake for her, she said; the other, commonly called Craftie, was unwilling: her character did not stand high, and she feared the face of the

Macruadh.

"He does not like me!" said Craftie.

"When a woman is in trouble," said the other, "the Macruadh makes no questions. You come with me! He will be glad of something to do for you."

In her confidence she persuaded her companion, and together they went to the chief.

Having gathered courage to appear, Craftie needed none to speak: where that was the call, she was never slow to respond.

"Craftie," said the chief, "is what you are telling me true?"

"Ask HER," answered Craftie, who knew that asseveration on her part was not all-convincing.

"She speaks the truth, Macruadh," said the other. "I will take my oath to it."

"Your word is enough," replied the chief, "—as Craftie knew when she brought you with her."

"Please, laird, it was myself brought Craftie; she was not willing to come!"

"Craftie," said the chief, "I wish I could make a friend of you! But you know I can't!"

"I do know it, Macruadh, and I am sorry for it, many is the good time! But my door never had any latch, and the word is out before I can think to keep it back!"

"And so you send another and another to back the first! Ah, Craftie!
If purgatory don't do something for you, then—!"

"Indeed and I hope I shall fall into it on my way farther, chief!" said Craftie, who happened to be a catholic.

"But now," resumed the chief, "when will you be going for the rest of your peats?"

"They're sure to be on the watch for us; and there's no saying what they mightn't do another time!" was the indirect and hesitating answer.

"I will go with you."

"When you please, then, chief."

So the next day the poor women went again, and the chief went with them, their guard and servant. If there were any on the watch, they did not appear. The Macruadh fished out their creels, and put them to dry, then helped them to fill those they had borrowed for the occasion. Returning, he carried now the one, now the other creel, so that one of the women was always free. The new laird met them on the road, and recognized with a scornful pleasure the chief bending under his burden. That was the fellow who would so fain be HIS son-in-law!

About this time Sercombe and Valentine came again to the New House. Sercombe, although he had of late had no encouragement from Christina, was not therefore prepared to give her up, and came "to press the siege." He found the lady's reception of him so far from cordial, however, that he could not but suspect some new adverse influence. He saw too that Mercy was in disgrace; and, as Ian was gone, concluded there must have been something between them: had the chief been "trying it on with" Christina? The brute was always getting in his way! But some chance of serving him out was certain to turn, up!

For the first suitable day Alister had arranged an expedition from the village, with all the carts that could be got together, to bring home as many peats as horses and men and women could together carry. The company was seen setting out, and report of it carried at once to Mr. Palmer; for he had set watch on the doings of the clan. Within half an hour he too set out with the messenger, accompanied by Sercombe, in grim delight at the prospect of a row. Valentine went also, willing enough to see what would happen, though with no ill will toward the chief. They were all furnished as for a day's shooting, and expected to be joined by some of the keepers on their way.

The chief, in view of possible assault, had taken care that not one of his men should have a gun. Even Hector of the Stags he requested to leave his at home.

They went in little groups, some about the creeping carts, in which were the older women and younger children, some a good way ahead, some scattered behind, but the main body attending the chief, who talked to them as they went. They looked a very poor company, but God saw past their poverty. The chief himself, save in size and strength, had not a flourishing appearance. He was very thoughtful: much lay on his shoulders, and Ian was not there to help! His clothes, all their clothes were shabby, with a crumpled, blown-about look—like drifts, in their many faded colours, of autumnal leaves. They had about them all a forgotten air—looked thin and wan like a ghostly funeral to the second sight—as if they had walked so long they had forgotten how to sleep, and the grave would not have them. Except in their chief, there was nothing left of the martial glance and gait and show, once so notable in every gathering of the Clanruadh, when the men were all soldiers born, and the women were mothers, daughters, and wives of soldiers. Their former stately grace had vanished from the women; they were weather-worn and bowed with labour too heavy for their strength, too long for their endurance; they were weak from lack of fit human food, from lack of hope, and the dreariness of the outlook, the ever gray spiritual horizon; they were numbed with the cold that has ceased to be felt, the deadening sense of life as a weight to be borne, not a strength to rejoice in. But they were not abject yet; there was one that loved them—their chief and their friend! Below their level was a deeper depth, in which, alas, lie many of like heart and, passions with them, trodden into the mire by Dives and his stewards!

The carts were small, with puny horses, long-tailed and droop-necked, in harness of more rope than leather. They had a look of old men, an aspect weirdly venerable, as of life and labour prolonged after due time, as of creatures kept from the grave and their last sleep to work a little longer. Scrambling up the steep places they were like that rare sea-bird which, unable to fly for shortness of wing, makes of its beak a third leg, to help it up the cliff: these horses seemed to make fifth legs of their necks and noses. The chief's horses alone, always at the service of the clan, looked well fed, well kept, and strong, and the clan was proud of them.

"And what news is there from Ian?" asked an old man of his chief.

"Not much news yet, but I hope for more soon. It will be so easy to let you hear all his letters, when we can meet any moment in the barn!"

"I fear he will be wanting us all to go after the rest!" said one of the women.

"There might be a worse thing!" answered her neighbour.

"A worse thing than leave the hills where we were born?—No! There is no worse for me! I trust in God I shall be buried where I grew up!"

"Then you will leave the hills sure enough!" said the chief.

"Not so sure, Macruadh! We shall rest in our graves till the resurrection!" said an old man.

"Only our bodies," returned Alister.

"Well, and what will my body be but myself! Much I would make of myself without my body! I will stay with my body, and let my soul step about, waiting for me, and craving a shot at the stags with the big branches! No, I won't be going from my own strath!"

"You would not like to be left in it alone, with none but unfriendly Sasunnachs about you—not one of your own people to close your eyes?"

"Indeed it would not be pleasant. But the winds would be the same; and the hills would be the same; and the smell of the earth would be the same; and they would be our own worms that came crawling over me to eat me! No; I won't leave the strath till I die—and I won't leave it then!"

"That is very well, John!" said the woman; "but if you were all day with your little ones—all of them all day looking hunger in your face, you would think it a blessed country wherever it was that gave you bread to put in their mouths!"

"And how to keep calling this home!" said another. "Why, it will soon be everywhere a crime to set foot on a hill, for frightening of the deer! I was walking last month in a part of the county I did not know, when I came to a wall that went out of my sight, seeming to go all round a big hill. I said to myself, 'Is no poor man to climb to heaven any more?' And with that I came to a bill stuck on a post, which answered me; for it said thus: 'Any well-dressed person, who will give his word not to leave the path, may have permission to go to the top of the hill, by applying to—'—I forget the name of the doorkeeper, but sure he was not of God, seeing his door was not to let a poor man in, but to keep him out!"

"They do well to starve us before they choke us: we might else fight when it comes to the air to breathe!"

"Have patience, my sons," said the chief. "God will not forget us."

"What better are we for that? It would be all the same if he did forget us!" growled a young fellow shambling along without shoes.

"Shame! Shame!" cried several voices. "Has not God left us the Macruadh? Does he not share everything with us?"

"The best coat in the clan is on his own back!" muttered the lad, careless whether he were heard or not.

"You scoundrel!" cried another; "yours is a warmer one!"

The chief heard all, and held his peace. It was true he had the best coat!

"I tell you what," said Donal shoemaker, "if the chief give you the stick, not one of us will say it was more than you deserved! If he will put it into my hands, not to defile his own, I will take and give it with all my heart. Everybody knows you for the idlest vagabond in the village! Why, the chief with his own hands works ten times as much!"

"That's how he takes the bread out of my mouth—doing his work himself!" rejoined the youth, who had been to Glasgow, and thought he had learned a thing or two.

The chief recovered from his impulse to pull off his coat and give it him.

"I will make you an offer, my lad," he said instead: "come to the farm and take my place. For every fair day's work you shall have a fair day's wages, and, for every bit of idleness, a fair thrashing. Do you agree?"

The youth pretended to laugh the thing off, but slunk away, and was seen no more till eating time arrived, and "Lady Macruadh's" well-filled baskets were opened.

"And who wouldn't see a better coat on his chief!" cried the little tailor. "I would clip my own to make lappets for his!"

They reached the moss. It lay in a fold of the hills, desert and dreary, full of great hollows and holes whence the peat had been taken, now filled with water, black and terrible,—a land hideous by day, and at night full of danger and lonely horror. Everywhere stood piles of peats set up to dry, with many openings through and through, windy drains to gather and remove their moisture. Here and there was a tuft of dry grass, a bush of heather, or a few slender-stalked, hoary heads of CANNACH or cotton-grass; it was a land of devoted desolation, doing nothing for itself, this bountiful store of life and warmth for the winter-sieged houses of the strath.

They went heartily to work. They cut turf for their walls and peats for their fires; they loaded the carts from the driest piles, and made new piles of the fresh wet peats they dug. It was approaching noon, and some of the old women were getting the food out of "my lady's" baskets, when over the nearest ridge beyond rose men to the number of seven, carrying guns. Rob of the Angels was the first to spy them. He pointed them out to his father, and presently they two disappeared together. The rest went on with their work, but the chief could see that, stooping to their labour, they cast upward and sidelong glances at them, reading hostility in their approach. Suddenly, as by common consent, they all ceased working, stood erect, and looked out like men on their guard. But the chief making them a sign, they resumed their labour as if they saw nothing.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer had laid it upon himself to act with becoming calmness and dignity. But it would amaze most people to be told how little their order is self-restraint, their regular conduct their own—how much of the savage and how little of the civilized man goes to form their being—how much their decent behaviour is owing to the moral pressure, like that of the atmosphere, of the laws and persons and habits and opinions that surround them. Witness how many, who seemed respectable people at home, become vulgar, self-indulgent, ruffianly, cruel even, in the wilder parts of the colonies! No man who has not, through restraint, learned not to need restraint, but be as well behaved among savages as in society, has yet become a true man. No perfection of mere civilization kills the savage in a man: the savage is there all

the time till the man pass through the birth from above. Till then, he is no certain hiding-place from the wind, no sure covert from the tempest.

Mr. Palmer was in the worst of positions as to protection against himself. Possessed of large property, he owed his position to evil and not to good. Not only had he done nothing to raise those through whom he made his money, but the very making of their money his, was plunging them deeper and deeper in poverty and vice: his success was the ruin of many. Yet was he full of his own imagined importance—or had been full until now that he felt a worm at the root of his gourd—the contempt of one man for his wealth and position. Well might such a man hate such another—and the more that his daughter loved him! All the chief's schemes and ways were founded on such opposite principles to his own that of necessity they annoyed him at every point, and, incapable of perceiving their true nature, he imagined his annoyance their object and end. And now here was his enemy insolently daring, as Mr. Palmer fully believed, to trespass in person on his land!

Add to all this, that here Mr. Peregrine Palmer was in a place whose remoteness lightened the pressure of conventional restraints, while its wildness tended to rouse all the old savage in him—its very look suggesting to the city-man its fitness for an unlawful deed for a lawful end. Persons more RESPECTABLE than Mr. Palmer are capable of doing the most wicked and lawless things when their selfish sense of their own right is uppermost. Witness the occasionally iniquitous judgments of country magistrates in their own interest—how they drive law even to cruelty!

"Are you not aware you are trespassing on my land, Macruadh?" cried the new laird, across several holes full of black water which obstructed his nearer approach.

"On the contrary, Mr. Palmer," replied the chief, "I am perfectly aware that I am not!"

"You have no right to cut peats there without my permission!"

"I beg your pardon: you have no right to stand where you speak the words without my permission. But you are quite welcome."

"I am satisfied there is not a word of truth in what you say," rejoined Mr. Palmer. "I desire you to order your people away at once."

"That I cannot do. It would be to require their consent to die of cold."

"Let them die! What are they to me—or to anybody! Order them off, or it will be the worse for them—and for you too!"

"Excuse me; I cannot."

"I give you one more warning. Go yourself, and they will follow."

"I will not."

"Go, or I will compel you."

As he spoke, he half raised his gun.

"You dare not!" said the chief, drawing himself up indignantly.

Together Mr. Palmer and Mr. Sercombe raised their guns to their shoulders, and one of them fired. To give Mr. Palmer the benefit of a doubt, he was not quite at home with his gun, and would use a hair-trigger. The same instant each found himself, breath and consciousness equally scant, floundering, gun and all, in the black bog water on whose edge he had stood. There now stood Rob of the Angels, gazing after them into the depth, with the look of an avenging seraph, his father beside him, grim as a gratified Fate.

Such a roar of rage rose from the clansmen with the shot, and so many came bounding with sticks and spades over the rough ground, that the keepers, knowing, if each killed his two men, they would not after escape with their lives, judged it more prudent to wait orders. Only Valentine came running in terror to the help of his father.

"Don't be frightened," said Rob; "we only wanted to wet their powder!"

"But they'll be drowned!" cried the lad, almost weeping.

"Not a hair of them!" answered Bob. "We'll have them out in a moment! But please tell your men, if they dare to lift a gun, we'll serve them the same. It wets the horn, and it cools the man!"

A minute more, and the two men lay coughing and gasping on the crumbly bank, for in their utter surprizal they had let more of the nasty soft water inside than was good for them. With his first breath Sercombe began to swear.

"Drop that, sir, if you please," said Rob, "or in you go again!"

He began to reply with a volley of oaths, but began only, for the same instant the black water was again choking him. Might Hector of the Stags have had his way, he would have kept there the murderer of AN CABRACH MOR till he had to be dived for. Rob on his part was determined he should not come out until he gave his word that he would not swear.

"Come! Come!" gasped Sercombe at length, after many attempts to get out which, the bystanders easily foiled—"you don't mean to drown me, do you?"

"We mean to drown your bad language. Promise to use no more on this peat-moss," returned Rob.

"Damn the promise you get from me!" he gasped.

"Men must have patience with a suffering brother!" remarked Bob, and seated himself, with a few words in Gaelic which drew a hearty laugh from the men about him, on a heap of turf to watch the unyielding flounder in the peat-hole, where there was no room to swim. He had begun to think the man would drown in his contumacy, when his ears welcomed the despairing words—

"Take me out, and I will promise anything."

He was scarcely able to move till one of the keepers gave him whisky, but in a few minutes he was crawling homeward after his host, who, parent of little streams, was doing his best to walk over rocks and through bogs with the help of Valentine's arm, chattering rather than muttering something about "proper legal fashion."

In the mean time the chief lay shot in the right arm and chest, but not dangerously wounded by the scattering lead.

He had lost a good deal of blood, and was faint—a sensation new to him. The women had done what they could, but that was only binding his arm, laying him in a dry place, and giving him water. He would not let them recall the men till the enemy was gone.

When they knew what had happened they were in sad trouble—Rob of the Angels especially that he had not been quick enough to prevent the firing of the gun. The chief would have him get the shot out of his arm with his knife; but Rob, instead, started off at full speed, running as no man else in the county could run, to fetch the doctor to the castle.

At the chief's desire, they made a hurried meal, and then resumed the loading of the carts, preparing one of them for his transport. When it was half full, they covered the peats with a layer of dry elastic turf, then made on that a bed of heather, tops uppermost; and more to please them than that he could not walk, Alister consented to be laid on this luxurious invalid-carriage, and borne home over the rough roads like a disabled warrior.

They arrived some time before the doctor.

CHAPTER XV

A DARING VISIT.

Mercy soon learned that some sort of encounter had taken place between her father's shooting party and some of the clan; also that the chief was hurt, but not in what manner—for by silent agreement that was not mentioned: it might seem to put them in the wrong! She had heard enough, however, to fill her with anxiety. Her window commanding the ridge by the castle, she seated herself to watch that point with her opera-glass. When the hill-party came from behind the ruin, she missed his tall figure amongst his people, and presently discovered him lying very white on one of the carts. Her heart became as water within her. But instant contriving how she could reach him, kept her up.

By and by Christina came to tell her she had just heard from one of the servants that the Macruadh was shot. Mercy, having seen him alive, heard the frightful news with tolerable calmness. Christina said she would do her best to discover before the morning how much he was hurt; no one in the house seemed able to tell her! Mercy, to avoid implicating her sister, held her peace as to her own intention.

As soon as it was dark she prepared to steal from the house, dreading nothing but prevention. When her dinner was brought her, and she knew they were all safe in the dining-room, she drew her plaid over her head, and leaving her food untasted, stole half down the stair, whence watching her opportunity between the comings and goings of the waiting servants, she presently got away unseen, crept softly past the windows, and when out of the shrubbery, darted off at her full speed. Her breath was all but gone when she knocked at the drawing-room door of the cottage.

It opened, and there stood the mother of her chief! The moment Mrs. Macruadh saw her, leaving her no time to say a word, she bore down upon her like one vessel that would sink another, pushing her from the door, and pulling it to behind her, stern as righteous Fate. Mercy was not going to be put down, however: she was doing nothing wrong!

"How is the Macruadh, please?" she managed to say.

"Alive, but terribly hurt," answered his mother, and would have borne her out of the open door of the cottage, towards the latch of which she reached her hand while yet a yard from it. Her action said, "Why WILL Nancy leave the door open!"

"Please, please, what is it?" panted Mercy, standing her ground.

"How is he hurt?"

She turned upon her almost fiercely.

"This is what YOU have done for him!" she said, with right ungenerous reproach. "Your father fired at

him, on my son's own land, and shot him in the chest."

"Is he in danger?" gasped Mercy, leaning against the wall, and trembling so she could scarcely stand.

"I fear he is in GREAT danger. If only the doctor would come!"

"You wouldn't mind my sitting in the kitchen till he does?" whispered Mercy, her voice all but gone.

"I could not allow it. I will not connive at your coming here without the knowledge of your parents! It is not at all a proper thing for a young lady to do!"

"Then I will wait outside!" said Mercy, her quick temper waking in spite of her anxiety: she had anticipated coldness, but not treatment like this! "There is one, I think, Mrs. Macruadh," she added, "who will not find fault with me for it!"

"At least he will not tell you so for some time!"

The door had not been quite closed, and it opened noiselessly.

"She does not mean me, mother," said Alister; "she means Jesus Christ. He would say to you, LET HER ALONE. He does not care for Society. Its ways are not his ways, nor its laws his laws. Come in, Mercy. I am sorry my mother's trouble about me should have made her inhospitable to you!"

"I cannot come in, Alister, if she will not let me!" answered Mercy.

"Pray walk in!" said Mrs. Macruadh.

She would have passed Mercy, going toward the kitchen, but the TRANCE was narrow, and Mercy did not move.

"You see, Alister, I cannot!" she insisted. "That would not please, would it?" she added reverently. "Tell me how you are, and I will go, and come again to-morrow."

Alister told her what had befallen, making little of the affair, and saying he suspected it was an accident.

"Oh, thank you!" she said, with a sigh of relief. "I meant to sit by the castle wall till the doctor came; but now I shall get back before they discover I am gone."

Without a word more, she turned and ran from the house, and reached her room unmissed and unseen.

The next was a dreary hour—the most painful that mother and son had ever passed together. The mother was all this time buttressing her pride with her grief, and the son was cut to the heart that he should have had to take part against his mother. But when the doctor came at length, and the mother saw him take out his instruments, the pride that parted her from her boy melted away.

"Forgive me, Alister!" she whispered; and his happy kiss comforted her repentant soul.

When the small operations were over, and Alister was in bed, she would have gone to let Mercy know all she could tell her. But she must not: it would work mischief in the house! She sat down by Alister's bedside, and watched him all night.

He slept well, being in such a healthful condition of body that his loss of blood, and the presence of the few shot that could not be found, did him little harm. He yielded to his mother's entreaties to spend the morning in bed, but was up long before the evening in the hope of Mercy's coming, confident that his mother would now be like herself to her. She came; the mother took her in her arms, and begged her forgiveness; nor, having thus embraced her, could she any more treat her relation to her son with coldness. If the girl was ready, as her conduct showed, to leave all for Alister, she had saved her soul alive, she was no more one of the enemy!

Thus was the mother repaid for her righteous education of her son: through him her pride received almost a mortal blow, her justice grew more discriminating, and her righteousness more generous.

In a few days the chief was out, and looking quite himself.

CHAPTER XVI

THE FLITTING.

The time was drawing nigh when the warning of ejection would doubtless begin to be put in force; and the chief hearing, through Rob of the Angels, that attempts were making to stir the people up, determined to render them futile: they must be a trick of the enemy to get them into trouble! Taking counsel therefore with the best of the villagers, both women and men, he was confirmed in the idea that they had better all remove together, before the limit of the earliest notice was expired. But his councillors agreed with him that the people should not be told to get themselves in readiness except at a moment's notice to move. In the meantime he pushed on their labour at the new village.

In the afternoon preceding the day on which certain of the clan were to be the first cast out of their homes, the chief went to the village, and going from house to house, told his people to have everything in order for flitting that very night, so that in the morning there should not be an old shoe left behind; and to let no rumour of their purpose get abroad. They would thus have a good laugh at the enemy, who was reported to have applied for military assistance as a precautionary measure. His horses should be ready, and as soon as it was dark they would begin to cart and carry, and be snug in their new houses before the morning!

All agreed, and a tumult of preparation began. "Lady Macruadh" came with help and counsel, and took the children in charge while the mothers bustled. It was amazing how much had to be done to remove so small an amount of property. The chief's three carts were first laden; then the men and women loaded each other. The chief took on his hack the biggest load of all, except indeed it were Hector's. To and fro went the carts, and to and fro went the men and women, I know not how many journeys, upheld by companionship, merriment, hope, and the clan-mother's plentiful provision of tea, coffee, milk, bread and butter, cold mutton and ham—luxurious fare to all. As the sun was rising they closed every door, and walked for the last time, laden with the last of their goods, out of the place of their oppression, leaving behind them not a cock to crow, a peat to burn, or a scrap that was worth stealing—all removed in such order and silence that not one, even at the New House, had a suspicion of what was going on. Mercy, indeed, as she sat looking from her window like Daniel praying toward Jerusalem, her constant custom now, even when there was no moon to show what lay before her, did think she heard strange sounds come faintly through the night from the valley below—even thought she caught shadowy glimpses of a shapeless, gnome-like train moving along the road; but she only wondered if the Highlands had suddenly gifted her with the second sight, and these were the brain-phantasms of coming events. She listened and gazed, but could not be sure that she heard or saw.

When she looked out in the morning, however, she understood, for the castle-ridge was almost hidden in the smoke that poured from every chimney of the new village. Her heart swelled with joy to think of her chief with all his people under his eyes, and within reach of his voice. From her window they seemed so many friends gathered to comfort her solitude, or the camp of an army come to set her free.

Hector and Rob, with one or two more of the clan, hid themselves to watch those who came to evict the first of the villagers. There were no military. Two sheriff's officers, a good many constables, and a few vagabonds, made up the party. Rob's keen eye enabled him to distinguish the very moment when first they began to be aware of something unusual about the place; he saw them presently halt and look at each other as if the duty before them were not altogether CANNY. At no time would there be many signs of life in the poor hamlet, but there would always be some sounds of handicraft, some shuttle or hammer going, some cries of children weeping or at play, some noises of animals, some ascending smoke, some issuing or entering shape! They feared an ambush, a sudden onslaught. Warily they stepped into the place, sharply and warily they looked about them in the street, slowly and with circumspection they opened door after door, afraid of what might be lurking behind to pounce upon them at unawares. Only after searching every house, and discovering not the smallest sign of the presence of living creature, did they recognize their fool's-errand. And all the time there was the new village, smoking hard, under the very windows, as he chose himself to say, of its chief adversary!

CHAPTER XVII

THE NEW VILLAGE.

The winter came down upon them early, and the chief and his mother had a sore time of it. Well as they had known it before, the poverty of their people was far better understood by them now. Unable to endure the sight of it, and spending more and more to meet it, they saw it impossible for them to hold out. For a long time their succour had been draining if not exhausting the poor resources of the chief; he had borne up in the hope of the money he was so soon to receive; and now there was none, and the need greater than ever! He was not troubled, for his faith was simple and strong; but his faith made him the more desirous of doing his part for the coming deliverance: faith in God compels and enables a man to be fellow-worker with God. He was now waiting the judgment of Ian concerning the prospects of the settlers in that part of Canada to which he had gone, hoping it might help him to some resolve in view of the worse difficulties at hand.

In the meantime the clan was more comfortable, and passed the winter more happily, than for many years. First of all, they had access to the chief at any moment. Then he had prepared a room in his own house where were always fire and light for such as would read what books he was able to lend them, or play at quiet games. To them its humble arrangements were sumptuous. And best of all, he would, in the long dark fore-nights, as the lowland Scotch call them, read aloud, at one time in Gaelic, at another in English, things that gave them great delight. Donal shoemaker was filled with joy unutterable by the Rime of the Ancient Mariner. If only this state of things could be kept up—with Ian back, and Mercy married to the chief! thought the mother. But it was not to be; that grew plainer every day.

Mr. Palmer would gladly have spent his winter elsewhere, leaving his family behind him; but as things were, he could not leave them, and as certain other things were, he did not care to take them to London. Besides, for them all to leave now, would be to confess defeat; and who could tell what hurt to his forest might not follow in his absence from the cowardly hatred of the peasants! He was resolved to see the thing out. But above all, he must keep that worthless girl, Mercy, under his own eye!

"That's what comes of NOT drinking!" he would say to himself; "a man grows as proud as Satan, and makes himself a curse to his neighbours!"

Then he would sigh like a man ill-used and disconsolate.

Both Mercy and the chief thought it better not to venture much, but they did occasionally contrive to meet for a few minutes—by the help of Christina generally. Twice only was Mercy's handkerchief hung from the window, when her longing for his voice had grown almost too strong for her to bear. The signal brought him both times through the wild wintry storm, joyous as a bird through the summer air. Once or twice they met just outside the gate, Mercy flying like a snow-bird to the tryst, and as swiftly back through

the keen blue frost, when her breath as she ran seemed to linger in the air like smoke, and threaten to betray her.

At length came the much desired letter from Ian, full of matter for the enabling of the chief's decision.

Two things had long been clear to Alister—that, even if the ground he had could keep his people alive, it certainly could not keep them all employed; and that, if they went elsewhere, especially to any town, it might induce for many, and ensure for their children, a lamentable descent in the moral scale. He was their shepherd, and must lose none of them! therefore, first of all, he must not lose sight of them! It was now clear also, that the best and most desirable thing was, that the poor remnant of the clan should leave their native country, and betake themselves where not a few of their own people, among them Lachlan and Annie, would welcome them to probable ease and comfort. There he would buy land, settle with them, and build a village. Some would cultivate the soil under their chief; others would pursue their trades for the good of the community and themselves!

And now came once more the love of land face to face with the love of men, and in the chief's heart paled before it. For there was but one way to get the needful money: the last of the Macruadh property must go! Not for one moment did it rouse a grudging thought in the chief: it was for the sake of the men and women and children whose lives would be required of him! The land itself must yield, then wings to forsake it withal, and fly beyond the sea!

CHAPTER XVIII

A FRIENDLY OFFER

It was agreed between mother and son to submit the matter to Ian, and if he should, be of the same mind, at once to negotiate the sale of the land, in order to carry the clan to Canada. They wrote therefore to Ian, and composed themselves to await his answer.

It was a sorrowful thing to Alister to seem for a moment to follow the example of the recreant chiefs whose defection to feudalism was the prelude to their treachery toward their people, and whose faithlessness had ruined the highlands. But unlike Glengarry or "Esau" Reay, he desired to sell his land that he might keep his people, care for them, and share with them: his people safe, what mattered the acres!

Reflecting on the thing, he saw, in the case of Ian's approval of the sale, no reason why he should not show friendliness where none was expected, and give Mr. Peregrine Palmer the first chance of purchase. He thought also, with his usual hopefulness, that the time might come when the clan, laying its savings together, would be able to redeem its ancient homesteads, and then it might be an advantage that they were all in the possession of one man. Such things had been, and might be again! The Lord could bring again the captivity of Clanruahd as well as that of Zion!

Two months passed, and they had Ian's answer—when it was well on into the spring, and weather good for a sea-voyage was upon its way. Because of the loss of their uncle's money, and the good prospect of comfort in return for labour, hard but not killing, Ian entirely approved of the proposal. From that moment the thing was no longer discussed, but how best to carry it out. The chief assembled the clan in the barn, read his brother's letter, and in a simple speech acquainted them with the situation. He told them of the loss of the money to which he had looked for the power to aid them; reminded them that there was neither employment nor subsistence enough on the land—not even if his mother and he were to live like the rest of them, which if necessary they were quite prepared to do; and stated his resolve to part with the remnant of it in order to provide the means of their migrating in a body to Canada, where not a few old friends were eager to welcome them. There they would buy land, he said, of which every man that would cultivate it should have a portion enough to live upon, while those with trades should have every facility for following them. All, he believed, would fare well in return for hard work, and they would be in the power of no man. There was even a possibility, he hoped, that, if they lived and laboured well, they might one day buy back the home they had left; or if not they, their sons and daughters might return from their captivity, and restore the house of their fathers. If anyone would not go, he would do for him what seemed fair.

Donal shoemaker rose, unpuckered his face, slackened the purse-strings of his mouth, and said,

"Where my chief goes, I will go; where my chief lives, I will live; and where my chief is buried, God grant I may be buried also, with all my family!"

He sat down, covered his face with his hands, and wept and sobbed.

One voice rose from all present:

"We'll go, Macruadh! We'll go! Our chief is our home!"

The chief's heart swelled with mingled gladness and grief, but he answered quietly,

"Then you must at once begin your preparations; we ought not to be in a hurry at the last."

An immediate stir, movement, bustle, followed. There was much talking, and many sunny faces, over which kept sweeping the clouds of sorrow.

The next morning the chief went to the New House, and desired to see Mr. Palmer. He was shown into what the new laird called his study. Mr. Palmer's first thought was that he had come to call him to account for firing at him. He neither spoke nor advanced a step to meet him. The chief stood still some yards from him, and said as pleasantly as he could,—

"You are surprised to see me, Mr. Palmer!"

"I am."

"I come to ask if you would like to buy my land?"

"Already!" said Mr. Palmer, cast on his enemy a glare of victory, and so stood regarding him. The chief did not reply.

"Well!" said Mr. Palmer.

"I wait your answer," returned the chief.

"Did it never strike you that insolence might be carried too far?"

"I came for your sake more than my own," rejoined the chief, without even a shadow of anger. "I have no particular desire you should take the land, but thought it reasonable you should have the first offer."

"What a dull ox the fellow must take me for!" remarked the new laird to himself. "It's all a dodge to get into the house! As if he would sell ME his land! Or could think I would hold any communication with him! Buy his land! It's some trick, I'll lay my soul! The infernal scoundrel! Such a mean-spirited wretch too! Takes an ounce of shot in the stomach, and never says 'What the devil do you mean by it?' I don't believe the savage ever felt it!"

Something like this passed with thought's own swiftness through the mind of Mr. Palmer, as he stood looking the chief from head to foot, yet in his inmost person feeling small before him.

"If you cannot at once make up your mind," said Alister, "I will give you till to-morrow to think it over."

"When you have learned to behave like a gentleman," answered the new laird, "let me know, and I will refer you to my factor."

He turned and rang the bell. Alister bowed, and did not wait for the servant.

It must be said for Mr. Palmer, however, that that morning Christina had positively refused to listen to a word more from Mr. Sercombe.

In the afternoon, Alister set out for London.

CHAPTER XIX

ANOTHER EXPULSION.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer brooded more and more upon what he counted the contempt of the chief. It became in him almost a fixed idea. It had already sent out several suckers, and had, amongst others, developed the notion that he was despised by those from whom first of all he looked for the appreciation after which his soul thirsted—his own family. He grew therefore yet more moody, and his moodiness and distrust developed suspicion. It is scarce credible what a crushing influence the judgment he pretended to scorn, thus exercised upon him. It was not that he acknowledged in it the smallest justice; neither was it that he cared altogether for what such a fanatical fool as the chief might think; but he reflected that if one could so despise his money because of its source, there might be others, might be many who did so. At the same time, had he been sure of the approbation of all the world beside, it would have troubled him not a little, in his thirst after recognition, that any gentleman, one of family especially, however old-fashioned and absurd he might be, should look down upon him. His smouldering, causelessly excited anger, his evident struggle to throw off an oppression, and the fierce resentment of the chief's judgment which he would now and then betray, revealed how closely the offence clung to his consciousness.

Flattering himself from her calmness that Mercy had got over her foolish liking for the "boor," as he would not unfrequently style the chief, he had listened to the prayers of her mother, and submitted to her company at the dinner-table; but he continued to treat her as one who had committed a shameful fault.

That evening, the great little man could hardly eat for recurrent wrathful memories of the interview of the morning. Perhaps his most painful reflection was that he had not been quick enough to embrace the opportunity of annihilating his enemy. Thunder lowered portentous in his black brows, and not until he had drunk several glasses of wine did a word come from his lips. His presence was purgatory without the purifying element.

"What do you think that fellow has been here about this morning?" he said at length.

"What fellow?" asked his wife unnecessarily, for she knew what visitor had been shown into the study.

"The highland fellow," he answered, "that claims to do what he pleases on my property!"

Mercy's face grew hot.

"—Came actually to offer me the refusal of his land!—the merest trick to get into the house—confound him! As much as told me, if I did not buy it off-hand, I should not have the chance again! The cheek of the brute! To dare show his face in my house after trifling with my daughter's affections on the pretence that he could not marry a girl whose father was in trade!"

Mercy felt she would be false to the man she loved, and whom she knew to be true, if she did not speak. She had no thought of defending him, but simply of witnessing to him.

"I beg your pardon, papa," she said, "but the Macruadh never trifled with me. He loves me, and has not given me up. If he told you he was going to part with his land, he is going to part with it, and came to you first because he must return good for evil. I saw him from my window ride off as if he were going to meet the afternoon coach."

She would not have been allowed to say so much, had not her father been speechless with rage. This was more than he or any man could bear! He rose from the table, his eyes blazing.

"Return ME good for evil!" he exclaimed; "—a beast who has done me more wrong than ever I did in all my life! a scoundrel bumpkin who loses not an opportunity of insulting me as never was man insulted before! You are an insolent, heartless, depraved girl!—ready to sacrifice yourself, body and soul, to a man who despises you and yours with the pride of a savage! You hussey, I can scarce keep my hands off you!"

He came toward her with a threatful stride. She rose, pushed back her chair, and stood facing him.

"Strike me," she said with a choking voice, "if you will, papa; but mamma knows I am not what you call me! I should be false and cowardly if I did not speak the truth for the man to whom I owe"—she was going to say "more than to any other human being," but she checked herself.

"If the beggar is your god," said her father, and struck her on the cheek with his open hand, "you can go to him!"

He took her by the arm, and pushed her before him out of the room, and across the hall; then opening the door, shoved her from him into the garden, and flung the door to behind her. The rain was falling in torrents, the night was very dark, and when the door shut, she felt as if she had lost her eyesight.

It was terrible!—but, thank God, she was free! Without a moment's hesitation—while her mother wept and pleaded, Christina stood burning with indignation, the two little ones sat white with open mouths, and the servants hurried about scared, but trying to look as if nothing had happened—Mercy fled into the dark. She stumbled into the shrubbery several times, but at last reached the gate, and while they imagined her standing before the house waiting to be let in, was running from it as from the jaws of the pit, in terror of a voice calling her back. The pouring rain was sweet to her whole indignant person, and especially to the cheek where burned the brand of her father's blow. The way was deep in mud, and she slipped and fell more than once as she ran.

Mrs. Macruadh was sitting in the little parlour, no one but Nancy in the house, when the door opened, and in came the wild-looking girl, draggled and spent, and dropped kneeling at her feet. Great masses of long black hair hung dripping with rain about her shoulders. Her dress was torn and wet, and soiled with clay from the road and earth from the shrubbery. One cheek was white, and the other had a red patch on it.

"My poor child!" cried the mother; "what has happened? Alister is away!"

"I know that," panted Mercy. "I saw him go, but I thought you would take me in—though you do not like me much!"

"Not like you, my child!" echoed the mother tenderly. "I love you! Are you not my Alister's choice? There are things I could have wished otherwise, but—"

"Well could I wish them otherwise too!" interposed Mercy. "I do not wish another father; and I am not quite able to wish he hadn't struck me and put me out into the dark and the rain, but—"

"Struck you and put you out! My child! What did he do it for?"

"Perhaps I deserved it: it is difficult to know how to behave to a father! A father is supposed to be one whom you not only love, as I do mine, but of whom you can be proud as well! I can't be proud of mine, and don't know quite how to behave to him. Perhaps I ought to have held my peace, but when he said things that were not—not correct about Alister, misinterpreting him altogether, I felt it cowardly and false to hold my tongue. So I said I did not believe that was what Alister meant. It is but a quarter of an hour ago, and it looks a fortnight! I don't think I quite know what I am saying!"

She ceased, laid her head on Mrs. Macruadh's knee, then sank to the floor, and lay motionless. All the compassion of the woman, all the protective pride of the chieftainess, woke in the mother. She raised the girl in her arms, and vowed that not one of her house should set eyes on her again without the consent of her son. He should see how his mother cared for what was his!—how wide her arms, how big her heart, to take in what he loved! Dear to him, the daughter of the man she despised should be as the apple of her eye! They would of course repent and want her back, but they should not have her; neither should a sound of threat or demand reach the darling's ears. She should be in peace until Alister came to determine her future. There was the mark of the wicked hand on the sweet sallow cheek! She was not beautiful, but she would love her the more to make up! Thank God, they had turned her out, and that made her free of them! They should not have her again; Alister should have her!—and from the hand of his mother!

She got her to bed, and sent for Rob of the Angels. With injunctions to silence, she told him to fetch his father, and be ready as soon as possible to drive a cart to the chief's cave, there to make everything comfortable for herself and Miss Mercy Palmer.

Mercy slept well, and as the day was breaking Mrs. Macruadh woke her and helped her to dress. Then they walked together through the lovely spring morning to the turn of the valley-road, where a cart was waiting them, half-filled with oat-straw. They got in, and were borne up and up at a walking-pace to the spot Mercy knew so well. Never by swiftest coach had she enjoyed a journey so much as that slow crawl up the mountains in the rough springless cart of her ploughman lover! She felt so protected, so happy, so hopeful. Alister's mother was indeed a hiding place from the wind, a covert from the tempest! Having consented to be her mother, she could mother her no way but entirely. An outcast for the sake of her Alister, she should have the warmest corner of her heart next to him and Ian!

Into the tomb they went, and found everything strangely comfortable—the stone-floor covered with warm and woolly skins of black-faced sheep, a great fire glowing, plenty of provisions hung and stored, and the deaf, keen-eyed father with the swift keen-eared son for attendants.

"You will not mind sharing your bed with me—will you, my child?" said Mrs. Macruadh: "Our accommodation is scanty. But we shall be safe from intrusion. Only those two faithful men know where we are."

"Mother will be terribly frightened!" said Mercy.

"I thought of that, and left a note with Nancy, telling her you were safe and well, but giving no hint of where. I said that her dove had flown to my bosom for shelter, and there she should have it."

Mercy answered with a passionate embrace.

CHAPTER XX

ALISTER'S PRINCESS.

Ten peaceful days they spent in the cave-house. It was cold outside, but the clear air of the hill-top was delicious, and inside it was warm and dry. There were plenty of books, and Mercy never felt the time a moment too long. The mother talked freely of her sons, and of their father, of the history of the clan, of her own girlhood, and of the hopes and intentions of her sons.

"Will you go with him, Mercy?" she asked, laying her hand on hers.

"I would rather be his servant," answered Mercy, "than remain at home: there is no life there!"

"There is life wherever there is the will to live—that is, to do the thing that is given one to do," said the mother.

In writing she told Alister nothing of what had happened: he might hurry home without completing his business! Undisturbed by fresh anxiety, he settled everything, parted with his property to an old friend of the family, and received what would suffice for his further intents. He also chartered a vessel to take them over the sea, and to save weariness and expense, arranged for it to go northward as far as a certain bay on the coast, and there take the clan on board.

When at length he reached home, Nancy informed him that his mother was at the hill-house, and begged he would go there to her. He was a good deal perplexed: she very seldom went there, and had never before gone for the night! and it was so early in the season! He set out immediately.

It was twilight when he reached the top of the hill, and no light shone from the little windows of the tomb.

That day Mercy had been amusing her protectress with imitations, in which kind she had some gift, of certain of her London acquaintance: when the mother heard her son's approaching step, a thought came to her.

"Here! Quick!" she said; "Put on my cap and shawl, and sit in this chair. I will go into the bedroom. Then do as you like."

When the chief entered, he saw the form of his mother, as he thought, bending over the peat-fire, which had sunk rather low: in his imagination he saw again the form of his uncle as on that night in the low moonlight. She did not move, did not even look up. He stood still for a moment; a strange feeling possessed him of something not being as it ought to be. But he recovered himself with an effort, and kneeling beside her, put his arms round her—not a little frightened at her continued silence.

"What is the matter, mother dear?" he said. "Why have you come up to this lonely place?"

When first Mercy felt his arms, she could not have spoken if she would—her heart seemed to grow too large for her body. But in a moment or two she controlled herself, and was able to say—sufficiently in his mother's tone and manner to keep up the initiated misconception:

"They put me out of the house, Alister."

"Put you out of the house!" he returned, like one hearing and talking in a dream. "Who dared interfere with you, mother? Am I losing my senses? I seem not to understand my own words!"

"Mr. Palmer."

"Mr. Palmer! Was it to him I sold the land in London? What could he have to do with you, mother? How did they allow him to come near the house in my absence? Oh, I see! He came and worried you so about Mercy that you were glad to take refuge from him up here!—I understand now!"

He ended in a tone of great relief: he felt as if he had just recovered his senses.

"No, that was not it. But we are going so soon, there would have been no good in fighting it out. We ARE going soon, are we not?"

"Indeed we are, please God!" replied the chief, who had relapsed into bewilderment.

"That is well—for you more than anybody. Would you believe it—the worthless girl vows she will never leave her mother's house!"

"Ah, mother, YOU never heard her say so! I know Mercy better than that! She will leave it when I say COME. But that won't be now. I must wait, and come and fetch her when she is of age."

"She is not worthy of you."

"She is worthy of me if I were twenty times worthier! Mother, mother! What has turned you against us again? It is not like you to change about so! I cannot bear to find you changeable! I should have sworn you were just the one to understand her perfectly! I cannot bear you should let unworthy reasons prejudice you against anyone!—If you say a word more against her, I will go and sit outside with the moon. She is not up yet, but she will be presently—and though she is rather old and silly, I shall find her much better company than you, mother dear!"

He spoke playfully, but was grievously puzzled.

"To whom are you talking, Alister?—yourself or a ghost?"

Alister started up, and saw his mother coming from the bedroom with a candle in her hand! He stood stupefied. He looked again at the seated figure, still bending over the fire. Who was it if not his mother?

With a wild burst of almost hysteric laughter, Mercy sprang to her feet, and threw herself in his arms. It was not the less a new bewilderment that it was an unspeakably delightful change from the last. Was he awake or dreaming? Was the dream of his boyhood come true? or was he dreaming it on in manhood? It

was come true! The princess was arrived! She was here in his cave to be his own!

A great calm and a boundless hope filled the heart of Alister. The night was far advanced when he left them to go home. Nor did he find his way home, but wandered all night about the tomb, making long rounds and still returning like an angel sent to hover and watch until the morning. When he astonished them by entering as they sat at breakfast, and told them how he had passed the night, it thrilled Mercy's heart to know that, while she slept and was dreaming about him, he was awake and thinking about her.

"What is only dreaming in me, is thinking in you, Alister!" she said.

"I was thinking," returned Alister, "that as you did not know I was watching you, so, when we feel as if God were nowhere, he is watching over us with an eternal consciousness, above and beyond our every hope and fear, untouched by the varying faith and fluctuating moods of his children."

After breakfast he went to see the clergyman of the parish, who lived some miles away; the result of which visit was that in a few days they were married. First, however, he went once more to the New House, desiring to tell Mr. Palmer what had been and was about to be done. He refused to see him, and would not allow his wife or Christina to go to him.

The wedding was solemnized at noon within the ruined walls of the old castle. The withered remnant of the clan, with pipes playing, guns firing, and shouts of celebration, marched to the cave-house to fetch thence the bride. When the ceremony was over, a feast was ready for all in the barn, and much dancing followed.

When evening came, with a half-moon hanging faint in the limpid blue, and the stars looking large through the mist of ungathered tears—those of nature, not the lovers; with a wind like the breath of a sleeping child, sweet and soft, and full of dreams of summer; the mountains and hills asleep around them like a flock of day-wearied things, and haunted by the angels of Rob's visions—the lovers, taking leave only of the mother, stole away to walk through the heavenly sapphire of the still night, up the hills and over the rushing streams of the spring, to the cave of their rest—no ill omen but lovely symbol to such as could see in the tomb the porch of paradise. Where should true lovers make their bed but on the threshold of eternity!

CHAPTER XXI

THE FAREWELL.

A month passed, and the flag of their exile was seen flying in the bay. The same hour the chief's horses were put to, the carts were loaded, their last things gathered. Few farewells had to be made, for the whole clan, except two that had gone to the bad, turned out at the minute appointed. The chief arranged them in marching column. Foremost went the pipes; the chief, his wife, and his mother, came next; Hector of the Stags, carrying the double-barrelled rifle the chief had given him, Rob of the Angels, and Donal shoemaker, followed. Then came the women and children; next, the carts, with a few, who could not walk, on the top of the baggage; the men brought up the rear. Four or five favourite dogs were the skirmishers of the column.

The road to the bay led them past the gate of the New House. The chief called a halt, and went with his wife to seek a last interview. Mr. Peregrine Palmer kept his room, but Mrs. Palmer bade her daughter a loving farewell—more relieved than she cared to show, that the cause of so much discomfort was going so far away. The children wept. Christina bade her sister good-bye with a hopeless, almost envious look: Mercy, who did not love him, would see Ian! She who would give her soul for him was never to look on him again in this world!

Kissing Mercy once more, she choked down a sob, and whispered,

"Give my love—no, my heart, to Ian, and tell him I AM trying."

They all walked together to the gate, and there the chief's mother took her leave of the ladies of the New House. The pipes struck up; the column moved on.

When they came to the corner which would hide from them their native strath, the march changed to a lament, and with the opening wail, all stopped and turned for a farewell look. Men and women, the chief alone excepted, burst into weeping, and the sound of their lamentation went wandering through the hills with an adieu to every loved spot. And this was what the pipes said:

We shall never see you more, Never more, never more! Till the sea be dry, and the world be bare, And the dews have ceased to fall, And the rivers have ceased to run, We shall never see you more, Never more, never more!

They stood and gazed, and the pipes went on lamenting, and the women went on weeping.

"This is heathenish!" said Alister to himself, and stopped the piper.

"My friends," he cried, in Gaelic of course, "look at me: my eyes are dry! Where Jesus, the Son of God, is

—there is my home! He is here, and he is over the sea, and my home is everywhere! I have lost my land and my country, but I take with me my people, and make no moan over my exile! Hearts are more than hills. Farewell Strathruadh of my childhood! Place of my dreams, I shall visit you again in my sleep! And again I shall see you in happier times, please God, with my friends around me!"

He took off his bonnet. All the men too uncovered for a moment, then turned to follow their chief. The pipes struck up Macrimmon's lament, Till an crodh a Dhonnachaidh (TURN THE KINE, DUNCAN). Not one looked behind him again till they reached the shore. There, out in the bay, the biggest ship any of the clan had ever seen was waiting to receive them.

When Mr. Peregrine Palmer saw that the land might in truth be for sale, he would gladly have bought it, but found to his chagrin that he was too late. It was just like the fellow, he said, to mock him with the chance of buying it! He took care to come himself, and not send a man he could have believed!

The clan throve in the clearings of the pine forests. The hill-men stared at their harvests as if they saw them growing. Their many children were strong and healthy, and called Scotland their home.

In an outlying and barren part of the chief's land, they came upon rock oil. It was so plentiful that as soon as carriage became possible, the chief and his people began to grow rich.

News came to them that Mr. Peregrine Palmer was in difficulties, and desirous of parting with his highland estate. The chief was now able to buy it ten times over. He gave his agent in London directions to secure it for him, with any other land conterminous that might come into the market. But he would not at once return to occupy it, for his mother dreaded the sea, and thought to start soon for another home. Also he would rather have his boys grow where they were, and as men face the temptations beyond: where could they find such teaching as that of their uncle Ian! Both father and uncle would have them ALIVE before encountering what the world calls LIFE.

But the Macruadh yet dreams of the time when those of the clan then left in the world, accompanied, he hopes, by some of those that went out before them, shall go back to repeople the old waste places, and from a wilderness of white sheep and red deer, make the mountain land a nursery of honest, unambitious, brave men and strong-hearted women, loving God and their neighbour; where no man will think of himself at his brother's cost, no man grow rich by his neighbour's ruin, no man lay field to field, to treasure up for himself wrath against the day of wrath.

THE END.

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