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MR. HOGARTH'S WILL.

BY

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&c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MR. HOGARTH'S WILL.

CHAPTER I.

THE WILL.

In a large and handsomely-furnished room of a somewhat old-fashioned house, situated in a rural district in the south of Scotland, was assembled, one day in the early summer of 185—, a small group in deep mourning.

Mr. Hogarth, of Cross Hall, had been taken suddenly ill a few days previously, and had never recovered consciousness so far as to be able to speak, though he had apparently known those who were about him, and especially the two orphan nieces whom he had brought up as his daughters. He had no other near relations whom any one knew of, and had never been

known to regret that the name of Hogarth, of Cross Hall, was likely to become extinct. He had the reputation of being the most eccentric man in the country, and was thought to be the most inconsistent.

With the highest opinion possible of women, and the greatest pleasure in their society, he had never married; and with the greatest affection for his nieces, and the greatest theoretical confidence in them, he had hedged them about with countless laws and restrictions, and had educated them in a way quite different from the training of young ladies of their rank and prospects. He had succeeded two childless elder brothers in the possession of the estate; and Jane and Alice Melville were the only children of his only sister, who had been dead for fifteen years.

The funeral had just taken place, and the two girls had been summoned into the drawing-room to hear the will read by Mr. MacFarlane, the Edinburgh lawyer, who had drawn it out. They found in the room Mr. Baird, their uncle's me-

dical attendant, and a stranger whom they had never seen before—a tall, grave-looking man of about thirty-four, whose mourning was new, and who showed a deep interest in what was going on.

Both the man of law and the man of medicine looked nervous and embarrassed, and delayed proceeding to business as long as they possibly could; fumbling with knots of red tape; opening the closed curtains to admit a little more light, and then closing them again, as if the light was too strong; so that the sisters had time to look at the stranger, and to wonder who he was and what his business could be there. He also seemed to be taking notes of the young ladies in a quiet, timid manner.

At last the will was opened, and after the usual preamble, the lawyer's voice seemed to break a little. He cleared his throat, and continued in a lower tone—

"As I have come to the conclusion that the minds of men and women are radically the same, and as I believe that if the latter are trained in

the same way as the former they will be equally capable of making their own way in the world, I have acted upon this principle in the education of my two beloved nieces, Jane and Alice Melville, the only surviving children of my sister Mary Hogarth; and as I foresee that if I were to leave them wealthy heiresses my purpose would be completely thwarted, by Jane losing her independent character, and Alice sinking into a confirmed invalid, and by both being to a dead certainty picked up by needy spendthrifts, who will waste their fortunes and break their hearts, as their father, George Melville, served my poor foolish sister, I hereby convey and dispone all my property, whatsoever and wheresoever, heritable and moveable, to Francis Ormistown, otherwise Hogarth, at present head clerk in the Bank of Scotland, who is my son by a private irregular marriage contracted with Elizabeth Ormistown, on the ninth day of July, 18—, and who is my heir-at-law, though he would find it difficult to prove his claim, as he knows nothing of the relation between us, and as

the only party besides myself cognizant of the marriage dares not come forward to prove it, but whose progress I have watched with interest, who has made an honourable position for himself, without any assistance from me beyond a good education, who has served faithfully, and who is likely to rule uprightly, who has raised himself from nameless poverty, and whom, therefore, I judge to be worthy of wealth and honour: Provided always, that he shall pay to Jane and Alice Melville, my beloved nieces aforesaid, the sum of twelve pounds a year each, in quarterly payments in advance, for three years following my decease, when such payments shall cease, as by that time I believe they will be independent in circumstances: Provided also that he shall give to the said Jane and Alice Melville, the furniture and personal effects belonging to them, as mentioned more particularly in the schedule marked A, appended to this instrument; and that he shall give to the said Jane and Alice Melville no further assistance either in money or in money's worth, directly or indirectly, whatso-

ever: Also providing that the said Francis Ormistown, otherwise Hogarth, shall not marry either of his cousins; the marriage of such near relations being mischievous and improper.

"In case of any of these provisions being disregarded by the said Francis Ormistown, otherwise Hogarth, all my heritable and moveable property shall be divided among certain benevolent institutions, in the order and manner set forth in the schedule marked with the letter B.

"All these provisions I have made, as being the best for my surviving relatives; and I believe they will eventually acknowledge them to be such."

It would be hard to say which of the three parties interested, felt most astonishment at this extraordinary will. Jane Melville stood rigid and silent, with her face flushed and her eyes filled with tears, which she would not let fall. Alice's face lost all colour, and she seemed ready to faint. But the greatest excitement was shown by the fortunate legatee. He shook

from head to foot, steadying himself on the table—looked from the two girls to the two gentlemen with bewildered eyes—and said at last with difficulty, in a low, soft, tremulous voice—

"Was Mr. Hogarth in his senses when he made this will?"

"A little excited, but indisputably in full possession of his senses, strange as the will appears," said Mr. MacFarlane, the lawyer; "and Mr. Baird will corroborate my opinion."

Mr. Baird bowed his head affirmatively. "Quite true—his head was quite clear at the time. The will was made six weeks ago, and you, Miss Melville, know how well he was then. Very grieved, indeed—most inconceivable conduct—cruel—inconsiderate. I feel deeply for your disappointment. Try not to give way, Miss Alice—or perhaps you had better give way, it may relieve you. Mr. MacFarlane tells me that he remonstrated with Mr. Hogarth. Most painful duty—must obey instructions, of course. Your uncle seemed like adamant. I pity you with all my heart."

"And so do I, with all my heart," said Mr. MacFarlane.

"And does no one pity me?" said the low voice of the heir to all; but it was unheeded, for Alice had fainted. Her sister and Mr. Baird laid her on the sofa, and applied the usual restoratives.

Mr. MacFarlane began to speak in an undertone, to the new master, of the extent and value of the property he had thus suddenly come into possession of, and congratulated him rather stiffly on the turn of fortune that had raised him from a life of labour and comparative poverty to ease and affluence; but his embarrassment was nothing compared to that of the man whom he addressed. Francis Hogarth looked round the spacious room, and out of the window to the pleasant shrubbery and smooth-shaven lawn, and shuddered when he thought of the two young cousins, brought up apparently in the lap of luxury, who were to be turned out upon the world with 12*l.* a-year for three years. The elder sister seemed to have a vigorous and

robust constitution, but the younger looked delicate. He saw, in his mind's eye, two governesses, dragging out a weary and monotonous existence, far from each other, while he, possessed of superabundance, was debarred from helping them.

He advanced timidly to the sofa. Alice, who had recovered consciousness, covered her face with both her hands, and sobbed aloud. Jane turned towards him a glance, not of reproach, but of pity. He felt it, and took her hand.

"Believe me, Miss Melville, no one can regret this extraordinary will as I do. I will overturn it, if I possibly can."

"You cannot," said Jane; "it is quite in keeping with all my uncle's ideas—quite consistent with all he has told us over and over again. He had many strange notions, but he was generally in the right, and it *may* prove to be so now." The sigh that accompanied these words told how faint her hopes were.

"It has been positive unkindness to bring you up as he did, and now to throw you upon the

world. My beginning was different. How could he expect the same success for you—women, too?"

"And are women so inferior, then? It was my uncle's cherished belief that they were not. He said he never saw a woman take up man's work without succeeding in it. I must try to show that I will be no exception. He was not unkind to take us on our mother's death from a careless and unprincipled father, to bring us into a quiet and happy home, to educate us to the best of his judgment, to be always kind, always reasonable. Ah, no, my dear uncle, though this seems very hard, it was not meant for unkindness!"

"It is cruel, cruel," said Alice. "He must have been mad. What will become of us? What will become of us?"

At this burst of despair from Alice, Jane's courage gave way, and the heavy tears rolled down her cheeks. "Elsie, darling, at the worst we can only die, and we are not afraid of death. But no, we shall live to conquer all this yet."

"You cannot as yet lay any plan," said Mr. MacFarlane. "Mr. Ormistown—Mr. Hogarth, I should say—is in no hurry to take possession. You can have a month to look about you, and there is no saying what may turn up in a month."

"Certainly," said the new cousin; "I am sure I should be most happy to give the young ladies accommodation in this large house for as long as they please, if that is not forbidden by the will."

"A permanent residence is clearly forbidden; for no assistance, beyond the small money payment specified, can be offered or accepted; but I think a month to remain and to collect all their wardrobe and personal property may be permitted."

"I ought to return to the bank, and work till they find a substitute, and will leave my cousins the undisturbed possession of Cross Hall for a month. In the meantime, I feel as if my presence must be a painful intrusion. I must leave you."

"Perhaps," said Jane, "though you cannot give us money, you may be able to give us advice. You are going to Edinburgh; you may see or hear of something we could do."

"I should be most happy to do so. What line of life should you like to enter on?"

"Anything we could make a living by."

"Then I suppose a governess's situation?"

"I might teach boys, but I have not learned what would qualify me to instruct girls. But I do thoroughly understand bookkeeping, write a good hand, have gone through Euclid, and know as much of the classics as nine out of ten young men in my rank of life. But my uncle cared very little for the classics. I know a good deal of chemistry and mineralogy, but uncle was most pleased with my bookkeeping. How did you get on when you began to work for yourself?"

"I entered the bank as a junior clerk, at the age of sixteen, and got 30*l.* for the first two years. An unknown friend—I know now who he was—who had paid for my education and all

other expenses previously, sent me 12*l.* a year for three years to help out my earnings."

"And you could live on that?" said Jane.

"I did live on it somehow," said Francis. "My coats were very threadbare and my meals scanty, but I weathered these three years, and then I got a good step, and crept up gradually. I have been now in the same bank for seventeen years, and am at present in the receipt of 250*l.* a year, thinking myself rich and fortunate;—now I am rich and unfortunate. Why did not my father leave me to the career I had made for myself, and you to the inheritance you had been brought up to expect?"

"Thirty pounds a year to begin with," said Jane, half aloud; "250*l.* after seventeen years' work. Very sweet—all one's own earning. I am not afraid, only let Elsie keep up heart."

"I cannot," said Elsie; "I'll be dead long before seventeen years are over."

"I will take good care of you," said Jane.

"How are you to take good care either of

yourself or of me if we are starving?" said Elsie, with a fresh burst of tears.

"We will do our best. So you are going, Mr. Hogarth. Write to me if you can hear of anything for me. I will be much obliged to you. Good-bye."

Jane shook hands with her cousin kindly, and soon after Mr. MacFarlane, and Mr. Baird also, withdrew, leaving the sisters alone. Elsie wept till she was completely exhausted, while her sister sat at the table with pen and ink and paper before her, but writing nothing.

After a while Elsie started up from the sofa. "Jane," said she, "if we were to marry, it would put an end to all this perplexity. It was strange that uncle put in the clause forbidding us to marry that man. Neither of us would demean ourselves so much, but uncle disliked the marriage of near relatives. How strange that so little is said about the mother. I could not look at him, but you did. Is he like his father? My uncle was a very handsome man; I fancy this man is plain."

"I see little or no likeness to my uncle, but he is by no means plain-looking."

"Will he get into society? Do they consider such people legitimate?"

"The marriage was irregular, but legal," said Jane. "I see now the cause my uncle had to dislike the Scotch marriage law. He must have been made very miserable from some unguarded words spoken or written; but this does not prevent his son taking the position of a legitimate heir. He is quiet and unassuming, and will take a very good place in society."

"It was well," said Elsie, with a little faint laugh, "that this clause was inserted, for you seem to be in some danger."

"Not at all; but we were thrown together in very extraordinary circumstances, and I could not help feeling for his position as he felt for ours. Nor could I help asking for advice from him. I agree with my uncle about cousins. He was right there, as he always used to be. At least, he brought me up to think like him, and I can scarcely believe that what he has now done is wrong."

"But, Jane, setting this cousin out of the way, what do you think of William Dalzell?"

"I was just thinking of him when you spoke," said Jane, resolutely. "Uncle must have had him in his mind when he mentioned fortune-hunters in his will, for he never seemed to like him coming here so often; and just six weeks ago I had been going out riding with him every day. You said you were not well, and would not accompany us. I suppose I was giving him what people consider a great deal of encouragement. If my uncle had said plainly that he disapproved of the intimacy, I wonder if I would have given it up? Perhaps not—one does not like to be dictated to. It appeared to myself so strange that he should prefer me to you. And now I recollect that my uncle must have paid his last visit to Edinburgh just before he made his will; and there he would see this young man filling his place in the world so well, while I was behaving so foolishly. The contrast must have struck him, and he certainly has put an end to everything between Mr. Dalzell and myself."

"Oh, Jane, he is no fortune-hunter; this will make no change. If you marry him you must take me home with you, and tell him it is what I deserve for standing his friend so well."

"My dearest Elsie, you have talked a great deal about Mr. Dalzell, and I have rather foolishly listened to it, but that must be stopped now. I know he is poor; he thought to better himself by a wealthy marriage; and perhaps if I had been left now with 20,000*l.*, with nothing to do and nothing to think of, his agreeable qualities——"

"Well, you own he has agreeable qualities."

"Yes; I have always owned it—they might have induced me to marry him; and you, as the possessor of other 20,000*l.*, would have been a most welcome inmate of our house until you chose for yourself your own home. But now, Elsie, I know William Dalzell is not the man to encumber himself with a penniless wife and a penniless sister-in-law."

"He is not mercenary—I am sure he is not," said Elsie with animation.

"Perhaps he is not positively mercenary; but after all am I worthy of the sacrifice? Look at me, Elsie; even your sisterly partiality cannot make a beauty of me. My turn of mind is not suited to his; I have always felt that; and, above all, I am not very fond of him."

"Not very!"

"No; I have liked him a good deal; but now, in this crisis, when we have to begin life in earnest—when I am puzzling myself how to find food and clothing and shelter for you and me—I feel as if Mr. Dalzell's past attentions belonged to another world altogether, so I am putting them aside completely."

"Ah! but Jane, only listen to me. If he were to come now, and lay himself and all that he has at your feet, that would prove that he was no fortune-hunter, but a real true lover, as I always believed him to be."

"He will not do it," said Jane, quietly; and she now began to make some memoranda.

"We have no ornaments, Elsie," said she, sadly.

"No; I never heard you regret the want of them before."

"I should like to have something to sell. Emilia Chalmers has 200*l.* worth of jewellery, most of it left by her aunt. If we had so much, we might convert it into money, and might stock a little shop."

"A shop!" said Elsie, shuddering.

"Why not? One is more independent keeping a shop than in a governess's situation, and there my business knowledge would be of use. It is wrong and absurd to have a terror of a shop."

"I cannot help feeling a great repugnance to shopkeeping."

"Then would you rather be a governess, supposing you were capable?"

"Oh, Jane, that is such a hard life. I should be separated from you; and then one is worried by the children, and snubbed by the parents, sneered at by servants, and ignored by visitors."

"Then dressmaking? You work beautifully."

"The late hours, and the close rooms; do you think I could stand it?"

"I am a little afraid for you," said Jane, thoughtfully. "What would you like to do?"

"Why, I have never thought of doing anything but being with you, working a little, reading a little, going out a little, and having nobody over me but you, my own darling sister. It stuns me to be told that I must go to work for a livelihood."

"I hope we may be able to live together as you hoped, eventually; but in the meantime we must both put our shoulders to the wheel."

"Have we no friends who would give us a home—at least for a while, till we get accustomed to the thought of hard work?" said Elsie.

"We have no relations, and we have made but few friends. I fear no one would come forward to help us now that we need help so much. It is a pity that my uncle kept us so much to himself, and that we were so fully occupied with our own home duties that we had little or

no time for society. Now we have no capital for a start, and no friends to help us on, only our talents and our education—a small stock-in-trade, I fear."

In the course of the afternoon the man-servant, James, announced that Mr. Dalzell was below, and that he sent his compliments and wished to know how the young ladies were.

It was not the first visit since Mr. Hogarth's death. He had paid a visit of condolence on the following day, and had never been so affectionate or impressive in his manner to Jane as on that occasion.

"Show Mr. Dalzell upstairs, James," said Jane; "I think I should like to see him."

The man looked somewhat intelligent, and obeyed.

"I cannot see anybody—I am not fit to be seen," said Elsie, retreating in haste from the room; "and indeed, Jane, I wonder at you wishing to see him so soon after this dreadful news."

"He has been at the funeral, I suppose. It

is very proper of him to inquire for us, and very imperative that we should understand each other;—the sooner the better. But do not stay if you do not like. I should prefer to see him alone."

Mr. Dalzell was shown into the darkened drawing-room, where he was some time in discovering that Miss Melville was alone. A few of the kind commonplaces which had been so successful on his previous visit—remarks on the loss she had sustained, on the excellent character of her deceased uncle, and on the necessity of bearing the blow with fortitude, which her strong mind was quite capable of—were made by Mr. Dalzell in unconsciousness that they fell very differently on Jane's ears now. Jane asked for his mother, and heard that she was very well, and sent her kindest regards and condolences, and hoped that the Misses Melville would be able to see her on the following day.

"Were there many people at the funeral?" asked Jane.

"Oh yes, a great many; Mr. Hogarth

was so extensively known, and so much respected."

"Were there any strangers?"

"Several—to me," said Dalzell.

"Did you observe no one in particular?"

"Yes, a gentleman from Edinburgh, said to be a *protegé* of your uncle's, who took rather a prominent place on account of there being no male relative surviving."

"Have you heard," said Jane, with an effort —"have you heard anything of the will?"

"Nothing whatever—did not think it proper or delicate to inquire, though I saw Mr. MacFarlane after it had been read. It is a matter of no consequence to me how Mr. Hogarth has left his property. My feelings will be quite the same towards——"

"Stop," said Jane; "my uncle has left his entire fortune to this stranger from Edinburgh, who is his son by a private marriage. Elsie and I have had an education, and must make the best we can of it."

"Miss Melville, this is incredible—quite

incredible. You are merely trying me. Mr. Hogarth was incapable of such madness and injustice. It is not treating me well to play upon me in this way."

"In proof of what I say, here is a certified copy of the will—the final will—executed six weeks ago, when, as you know, my uncle was perfectly well both in body and mind. It is incontestable."

The bewildered young man tried to read the paper put into his hand, but he could not follow the written words. Jane's sad face and her manner convinced him, however, that she was telling him the truth.

"Now," said Jane kindly, "you have talked a great deal of nonsense to me when my position was very different; but I am quite aware that things are altogether changed. I will not feel at all hurt or angry about it. We part perfectly good friends. But you cannot afford to marry a wife without money, and I should be sorry to be a burden to any man."

William Dalzell looked at the girl he had

fancied himself in love with for the last few months, and felt that his love had not been of a very deep or absorbing character. If the two girls had been equal favourites of their uncle's, his choice would have fallen on Elsie, who was prettier, more elegant, more yielding, and, as he thought, more affectionate. Her impulsive and confiding manner, her little enthusiasms, her blunders, were to him more charming than Jane's steady good sense and calm temper. Jane never wanted advice or assistance; she was too independent in mind, and too robust in body, to care much about little attentions, though she had become accustomed to his in the course of time, and as there was no other person to compare him with, had allowed herself to think a good deal of him. Mr. Hogarth had always shown so marked a preference for Jane, and had so often expressed displeasure and impatience at Elsie's deficiencies; his property, not being entailed, was entirely at his own disposal, so that it was probable that Jane would be left the larger share of it, while if he made

love to Alice it was quite possible that she would be disinherited altogether, for he knew that he was not a favourite with the old gentleman. He did not think that anything could shake Mr. Hogarth's confidence in Jane, and he had been very careful in feeling his ground sure before he made a formal proposal. He had tried to persuade himself that Jane's face was charming, though not regularly handsome; so it was to some people, but he had not eyes to see the charm. Her figure was undeniably fine, her temper good, her principles to be depended on. Her education had been peculiar, and singularly secular—his mother had felt a little shocked at her want of religion—but then Mr. Hogarth was very odd, and when she was married she would see things differently; and on the whole Mrs. Dalzell felt that her handsome son had chosen with great prudence and good sense in fixing his affections upon the elder and the favorite niece. His small property was heavily encumbered, and such a marriage would make him hold up his head again in the

country. Mrs. Dalzell's attentions to Jane had been nearly as assiduous as her son's, and to the motherless girl they were quite as welcome; and she had shown so much affection for Alice, too, that both sisters had been very much captivated with her.

William Dalzell felt Jane's kindly-meant speech as a sort of reproach. He would have preferred to make a speech himself, and to have seen her more agitated. Though he had never thought himself very much in love, he believed he had inspired a strong love, and that it would be very hard for Jane to give him up. But things were completely taken out of his hands; she did not even now, in the first pain of parting, dream of breaking her heart. She was his superior, painfully his superior, and he did not like it.

"You are quite right, Miss Melville," said he; "what you say is quite true. I am involved and embarrassed, and could not offer you anything worth having."

"And I will make my own way in the

world," said Jane; "and, William Dalzell, do not be hurt if I give you one friendly piece of advice on parting—try to make your own way in the world too. Shake yourself clear of your own embarrassments by your own industry—a far better way than by marrying a rich wife."

She looked very kindly at the young man as she spoke, but he did not take the advice in the friendly spirit in which it was given. He answered rather shortly, that he dared to say he would do as well as other people, and then began to ask what she knew about the heir, if she had ever seen him before, or heard Mr. Hogarth speak of him. She answered—

"No, never; but I cannot answer questions. I cannot converse rationally any longer. You had better go away, Mr. Dalzell, and let me have a little rest, for I am rather weary."

The young gentleman stumbled down stairs, and rode home ruminating over the downfall of all his cherished expectations; while Jane said to herself, "It is over, and it is better so. He really is a smaller character than I thought he was."

CHAPTER II.

DISAPPOINTMENT AND HOPE; PROSE AND POETRY.

When Jane Melville told her cousin that her uncle had been always kind and always reasonable, she expressed her own opinion, for she had loved and honoured him so much that she felt no hardship in doing everything he wished; but no one else in the house or in the neighbourhood would have endorsed that opinion. When the rumour spread far and wide that he had disinherited his nieces in the expectation that the education he had given them would enable them to provide handsomely for themselves, the servants and workpeople about shook their heads, and said it was "aye weel kenned that the auld laird had a bee in his bonnet;" while the class

with whom Mr. Hogarth associated on more equal terms declared; that this last eccentricity of affection (for it was all done out of pure love), surpassed all his other oddities with regard to the girls, which had long been the talk of the whole country.

They had, as Jane sadly confessed, made but few friends. Their uncle's reasonable prejudices extended to morning visits, which he called a frivolous waste of time; and he had a similar dislike to evening parties; not on account of a puritanic disapproval of dancing, or of young people of different sexes meeting and having opportunities of getting acquainted with each other, but the hours were so irrational, and the conventional dress so unbecoming and dangerous to health, that he had prohibited Jane and Elsie from accepting the invitations that were showered on them when they had given up lessons and were supposed to be ready to come out. If people would meet at six, and break up before twelve, and wear dresses fashioned like their ordinary attire, Mr. Hogarth saw no objection

to evening parties. He had invited the neighbours to such a party, and mentioned in his note of invitation the conditions on which it was to be attended. A good many had accepted, partly from curiosity, and partly from a wish to be friendly; but, in spite of really good arrangements and an excellent supper, the party was not such a success as to be repeated often by Mr. Hogarth, and was never imitated by any of his guests.

The Misses Melville danced well, walked well, and rode admirably; they spent several hours every day in the open air; had learnt to swim, and to shoot both with bow and arrow and with rifle. Their physical education had been excellent, and had probably saved Elsie's life, for she was extremely delicate when young, but had gained strength as she grew up.

Their book education had been chiefly conducted by an old gentleman, who had lived for eight years in their house as tutor, and they had spent several winters in Edinburgh, to attend classes and lectures. No money, no care, and

no time had been spared on their education, so that it was rather a pity that, in the eyes of the world, it was so unsatisfactory when completed. Both had gone through the same routine; for Mr. Hogarth seemed to think that education made characters, instead of merely drawing out what there is in the original material, and he was disappointed that the uniformity of the training had not produced two characters more similar than those of Jane and Elsie. Jane's tendencies were to the practical and the positive; and she gladly availed herself of her uncle's whim to educate her like a man of business, regretting none of the accomplishments and showy acquirements which are too apt to be considered the principal part of female education. Expecting that she would be left in possession of considerable property, and virtually the guardian of her younger sister, she saw a fitness and propriety in her being taught the management of money, the science of agriculture, the care of an establishment, and the accurate keeping of accounts.

Elsie would have preferred another training, but it was not given to her; and though she made but a lame attempt to follow Jane's footsteps, and acquired only a superficial knowledge of what her sister was the perfect mistress of, her uncle believed that, bad as she was, she would have been much worse if she had not been forced into rational studies. Though she was not a marvel of solidity, she still had as good a knowledge of accounts, general information, history, and science, as is possessed by many boys who get on very well in business or in professions, when once set fairly to work.

Mr. Hogarth had no great opinion of the value of teaching languages, and thought that a knowledge of things was of far more importance than a knowledge of the names of things. The girls had learned, however, a good deal of Latin and Greek from Mr. Wilson, their tutor, who thought it a pity that Jane's fine abilities should not have a classical education; and he had induced Mr. Hogarth to agree to it by the argument that these languages are invaluable

for the ready and correct understanding of all scientific terms. French and Italian the girls themselves were anxious to learn; and as they had been promised a continental tour some fine summer, their uncle thought they might be useful acquirements then, so they had lessons from the best masters in Edinburgh, and profited by them. And here for the first time Elsie's progress had been far greater than Jane's. Mr. Hogarth had himself spent a good deal of time in his youth in France; but he had a higher opinion of French society than of French literature, and he thought that from the lips of brilliant Parisian women they would learn more of the spirit of the language and of the people than from the books they studied in classes or read at home.

Elsie had a natural taste for music, and a remarkably sweet voice in speaking, which, if it had been cultivated, would have made her an excellent singer; but her uncle was sure that to indulge her with a musical education would only weaken her mind. Mr. Hogarth had seen

no good come of music. A taste for singing and a fine voice had been the ruin of thousands —they had been most mischievous to Elsie's own father, and they had been the chief fascinations which had won upon his dear sister Mary. She and George Melville had sung duets together, and from that had been led to try a duet through life; and a very sad and inharmonious life they had made of it.

So poor Elsie's natural tastes were discouraged and thwarted; and after the positive lessons were over, and her education was said to be finished, she felt vacuity and *ennui* when Jane rejoiced in full employment. The housekeeping was ostensibly taken by the sisters in alternate weeks; but though Jane relinquished the keys for the stated period, she never relinquished the superintendence. She remembered what Elsie forgot; she looked forward where Elsie would have scrambled in the best way she could through the passing hour, and constantly thinking for her and remedying her blunders. Elsie was apt to forget that any responsibility rested on herself.

Nothing in their singular training was considered odder than that, while they were educated in a more masculine manner than most boys, they were obliged at the same time to make a greater proportion of their own clothes than any girls of their own rank or circumstances, and that they had been carefully and systematically taught to make them in the best manner possible. The only instructions which they had received from one of their own sex had been given to them by an excellent plain needlewoman, a first-class dressmaker, and a fashionable milliner; and in the last two branches Elsie's taste had made her excel her sister even more than in French and Italian.

At the time of their uncle's death, Jane was twenty-three years old, and Elsie two years younger. They had but very recently given up regular study, for their uncle thought girls were far too soon "finished," as it is called, and turned out in a very incomplete state of mental and moral development. He would not let them think themselves educated till they had seen more of the world than could be done in

Edinburgh, which was a city he had rather a contempt for, as a mere provincial capital, too superstitious and narrow-minded for his taste. Paris and London were the schools for men, and therefore, according to his notions, for women also; but when the time arrived for the tour on the Continent and the winter in London, which had been promised to the girls, he felt his health had given way, though he had no positive illness, and delayed leaving home till the following year, when he hoped to be able to enjoy it, and to show all he meant to show to the girls without fatigue or indifference. If he had been able to go with them on the previous year, as had been arranged, he would probably have left his fortune otherwise, for Mr. Dalzell's attentions had only been of recent date.

As the news of the will spread, every one said they really ought to call on the Melvilles, poor things; but no one was in a hurry to perform so disagreeable a duty. Mrs. Dalzell was so astounded by the change that was made in her son's prospects, and so embarrassed lest she

should be looked to for assistance in the present urgent necessities of the girls, that though she had been by far the most intimate and cordial of their friends, she was not the first to visit them. Three or four matrons had come and gone, who had made but short calls, and who had taken refuge in commonplace inquiries as to how and when Mr. Hogarth had been first taken ill, and at what hour he died, but had given very little sympathy, and no advice. The minister of the parish had called, as in duty bound, on the day after the funeral, and surprised both Jane and Elsie by a style of conversation very different from any they had ever heard from his lips. In his previous visits to Cross Hall he had never talked of anything but the weather, and crops, and the news of the neighbourhood. His tastes, his studies, his politics, and his faith were so opposite to those of Mr. Hogarth that there was no safety, and likely to be no pleasure, in conversation that left the neutral ground he took. But now, when the eccentric and sceptical Mr. Hogarth had crowned all his sins by an act of

such injustice to his nieces, and they were in affliction from bereavement and poverty, he wished to give them spiritual comfort, and to teach them something that he knew had been omitted in their education; but he couched his consolation in language that seemed strangely unfamiliar to the girls he addressed, and when he spoke of crosses to be borne, that God has made crooks in every lot that no man may make straight—when he dwelt upon the temptations of riches, and the difficulty with which the rich can enter the kingdom of Heaven, and hoped that his young friends would see the hand of God in this trying dispensation, and would follow humbly His leading—Jane, who hoped to conquer her difficulties, and did not mean to succumb to them, did not feel much comforted or edified by the well-meant exhortation. Both girls felt pained, too, by the reflections he cast on their late uncle, and by the warning to be prepared for sudden death, as this had been an instance of the Master coming when no one was looking for Him, and when the

loins were not girt, nor the light burning. Both girls had loved their uncle; and even though Elsie felt that he had been often hard to her, and that the will was not a just one, she could not bear the idea that Mr. Herries suggested of his probable place in the future state, while Jane felt indignant.

They had both hoped for some help and comfort from Mrs. Dalzell; but when her visit was so long delayed, their expectations fell considerably. Jane had become so tired of the useless kind of condolence that was offered, that she determined to ask for advice from the next person who came, and that happened to be Mrs. Dalzell. She spoke a little more freely and kindly to the girls than other people had done; but still she was keeping serious difficulties at arm's length, when Jane turned rather sharply round on her with the abrupt question—

"What do you think we ought to do, Mrs. Dalzell?"

"Indeed, I cannot say, Miss Melville. This most unaccountable conduct of Mr. Hogarth's

has taken us all by surprise, so much that I can think of nothing but overturning the will. I am sure when William told me of the extraordinary disposition of the property, I felt—I cannot tell you how I felt. Such a shocking thing to leave all to a son whom nobody ever heard of before, and to leave his sister's children destitute. You certainly have a claim on the heir, for a maintenance at least. He should be made to refund a part of the spoil."

"He would if he could, but it is forbidden. There is no help in that way," said Jane. "But employment, Mrs. Dalzell; can you suggest any employment for us?"

Mrs. Dalzell hesitated. "Mrs. Chalmers is in need of a finishing governess for Emma and Robina; but I am afraid neither of you two young ladies would suit her, for we cannot get music-masters here, and one must have a governess who has a good knowledge of music. If Mr. Maxwell had not just engaged a tutor for his boys, you might have perhaps undertaken that place, Miss Melville."

"I think I might," said Jane.

"Would it not be pleasanter, if we have to take situations, to go to a distance," said Elsie. "I do not think I could bear either you or myself to be near Cross Hall when everything is so changed."

"It would be more agreeable, I have no doubt, Miss Elsie; and I cannot help thinking that in such a place as Edinburgh or Glasgow, where there are masters and mistresses for everything, you could get on by having classes, or engaging as teachers at some institution. In the country we want governesses and school-mistresses to know everything a girl ought to learn."

"Is there nothing but teaching that we can do?" said Jane.

"Well, you know there is nothing that a gentlewoman can turn to in such circumstances as yours but teaching, and I would be very glad indeed to see you both in nice comfortable situations. By-the-by, Miss Elsie, I copied into my album the very sweet verses you sent

me, and have brought them back to you. Are they really your own? William says he thinks they are."

"Yes," said Elsie, "they are original."

"Well, I could not have thought it; they are extremely pretty."

"By-the-by," said Jane, "do you not know Miss Thomson, Mrs. Dalzell? My uncle always spoke of her with respect and admiration, as an instance of the skill and success with which a woman can conduct masculine avocations. A gentlewoman-farmer, and a thriving one. I wish we had known her."

"Oh, yes. I do know Miss Thomson. Of course we are not exactly in the same position, we being proprietors, while she is only a farmer; but she is a most excellent and estimable woman in her way, though she is a bit of a character. She is now growing old, and not so active as she has been."

"She is said to be a benevolent and kind-hearted, as well as a clever woman," said Jane.

"Oh, yes; and well she may be liberal, for

she has made money, and has not the status to keep up that old country families must maintain."

"I wonder if she would engage me as her helper, and teach me farming. I know a good deal of theoretical agricultural chemistry. Will you be so good as give me a letter of introduction to her; I should feel greatly obliged to you."

Mrs. Dalzell willingly granted this small request, and felt much disposed to magnify its importance. It would be a good thing if, without any trouble or sacrifice on her own part, she could aid her dear young friends by bringing them into contact with a person who was more able to further their views than herself. She was sure that Miss Thomson was the very person to apply to, for of course she would take an interest in a young lady so unfortunately situated. It was so well thought of on Miss Melville's part; but then Miss Melville was always so quick and sensible. The letter of introduction was written, and then Mrs. Dalzell took leave.

Next day Elsie was languidly reading the local weekly journal, when she came upon a paragraph which related to themselves. Mr. Hogarth's will was described and commented on. There was congratulation for the heir and commiseration for the nieces.

"Oh, Jane," said she, "is it not dreadful to be brought before the public in this way; everybody must be talking about us, and of course everybody has got hold of the story of William Dalzell and you too. I am glad they did not put that in the newspapers, at any rate. Every one will think that he gave you up, and will fancy you are so distressed about it."

"We cannot help either what people think or what they say. I do not wonder at the *Courier* making a long paragraph on the subject, for they have not had such an interesting piece of local news since Mr. Fisher committed suicide."

"I do not like the appearance of my own name in print," said Elsie.

"It is a very pretty name, nevertheless, and would look as well on the title-page of a book

as any I know—only in a newspaper you do not like it," said Jane. "I must bid you good-bye for a few hours now, for I am going to Miss Thomson's. I am going to ride, and will not be very long."

Miss Thomson had just taken up the local newspaper after her morning ride over the farm, and had read the peculiarly interesting paragraph relating to Mr. Hogarth's will, when Mrs. Dalzell's note was put into her hands, and Miss Melville was announced.

Miss Thomson was a very fine-looking old lady, with keen, though also kind grey eyes, looking out from rather shaggy eyebrows, and an open frank smile on her mouth. The colour of health still bloomed on a cheek that had seen sixty summers and winters, and the elasticity of youth had only been transformed into the dignity and repose of a green old age. It is better to be at the head of the commonalty than dragging in the rear of the gentry, and for substantial comfort, liberal housekeeping, generous almsgiving, and frank hospitality, the farmhouse of

Allendale was out and out superior to the mansion of Moss Tower, where the Dalzells had lived for at least two centuries.

As Mrs. Dalzell's note had been introductory and not explanatory, Miss Thomson could not guess the cause of the unexpected visit. She, however, kindly welcomed Miss Melville, and asked her to sit down, which Jane did with an ease and youthful dignity that was as suitable to her time of life as Miss Thomson's at threescore.

"I have called, madam," said Jane, "because I have always admired you, and wished to know you; and also because at this critical juncture I have thought that your advice would be far more valuable to me than that of people who have never made an effort or conquered an obstacle. You know our position"—and she glanced at the open newspaper.

"Yes, I do. I feel both surprised and grieved at your uncle's extraordinary settlement," said Miss Thomson.

"My uncle always used to point to you as an

instance of what women could do if they tried, and I am sure he must have had you in his eye when he felt so sure of my success in life. Could you, would you teach me to farm, and I will keep your books, write your letters, manage your household, be your factotum, if you will allow me. I have studied agricultural chemistry, and if you would permit me to learn from you the practical details of farming operations, I might really be of use to you."

Miss Thomson shook her head. "My dear girl, you do not know what you ask. Without capital, and a large capital, no one need think of taking a farm in Scotland; and all those things that you offer to do for me are precisely the things that I can do for myself, and I hope will be able to do for the next ten years. I should be the better for an assistant, it is true, but it must be some one who can ride to market, buy stock, sell to butchers, take or let grass parks, and oversee my working farm steward, for I am getting rather old for such long rides as I have been in the habit of taking on the

farm. And, my poor girl, anxious as I am to befriend you in your straits, and to encourage your honest ambition, I have nephews and nieces, and grand-nephews and grand-nieces of my own, who have all claims upon me. My two married sisters have large families, and not very much to keep them on, so I have to help in various ways. Do as you like, the burden of bringing up the next generation is pretty equally divided among us, and I am only thankful that Providence has so prospered me that I can be of use to the young people. I have arranged that my nephew, John Forrester, is to come and do for me what I cannot so well manage without help; and as I have no idea of falling behind the high farming of the times, I have given him a thorough course of the agricultural chemistry, so much in fashion, before he tries the practical branch of the science. I hope he will not be too new-fangled and upsetting altogether with his theories; but he is a good lad in the main, and I think he will do. Besides John, I have to help his brother James

to begin business, and I have two nieces whose education I am making more thorough than their parents could afford to do."

"So you have no room for me," said Jane. "I should have known it. I have no claim on any one, not a relation in the world but a sister, less fit to cope with it than myself, and a cousin, newly found under sad circumstances, and tied down not to assist us. But could you not give us any encouragement, for that is what I want most? Your own experience——"

"My own experience is very different from what yours can be. My father died in the early years of a long lease of twenty-one years, when he had laid out several thousands, all the capital he had, and all he could raise, upon the land, hoping to get it out again with interest and a large profit, for the farm was a fine one, though it had been badly managed before. He had no son to take up the lease; and had things been wound up, and the lease sold, there would have been a heavy loss. I believed that I could manage the concern, and got leave from the

landlord, rather as a favour, to continue on Allendale. I was industrious and methodical, and reduced the expenses of management below what they had been in my father's time, and consequently made more money than even he could have made of it. My landlord willingly took me again for a tenant when the lease was expired, particularly as I offered as much as any one for it. The value of the lease, stock, and crop, that I began business with, could not have been less for me to keep than 5,000*l.*, though if they had been sold they might have brought only half that amount. You see I had a good start. I like the work, and it likes me. I am a richer, a happier, and a more useful woman, than I could have been if I had had 20,000*l.* all left me in a lump."

"This is very different, indeed, from our case," said Jane. "It is the want of capital that I feel so very hard. I could make something of capital."

"I suppose that for you, Miss Melville, with nothing but youth, health, and a stout

heart, there is nothing but a governess's situation to be thought of. Society seems to say to gentlewomen who have not enough to live on, 'Teach or marry;' and the governess market and the marriage market are both sadly overstocked. People have not all got a taste for either alternative. Here am I, a sensible, well-disposed woman, but yet I never could teach in my life, and I never had any wish to marry."

"The world is large," said Jane; "there are thousands of fields of labour. Uncle did not wish us to be governesses, I am quite sure; he did not educate us for it; and I do not think he wished us to marry either."

"He should have left you a small competence—not enough to tempt others, but to save you from being tempted yourself," said Miss Thomson.

"I dare say he made a great mistake; but I think he fancied that the strong necessity for effort would stimulate us to exertion. To vegetate on a small annuity would not be so

pleasant as to earn even the same income for ourselves," said Jane.

"Well, my dear girl, I do not fear for you, though things look so very gloomy at present. You have got the stuff in you. There is promise of success in your step and voice—in your quick eye and honest smile. Is your sister like yourself?—no; you said she was less fit for the life that is before you; that is a pity."

"It is; but we love each other so dearly—we are all the world to each other."

"Well, that is good for both of you; love is just as great a necessity as air or food. I cannot help thinking that you should try your luck in Edinburgh; you are more likely to find what will suit you there than in a country side, like this of Swinton. Have you any friends there?"

"None to rely upon," said Jane.

"Your cousin that has come into such an inheritance, does he seem friendly?"

"Very much so, but he is forbidden to give us help."

"In money, perhaps; but it would be only right if he would take some trouble to make inquiries, and speak for you to any one he thinks could employ you. It would be a satisfaction to his own mind, besides."

"I have a letter from him this morning, saying that he has heard of something that he fears is not good enough for me, or either of us, and urging me to come to Edinburgh, to see for myself, offering me or both of us, if we are so inclined, the hospitality of his humble home, as he calls it. I cannot afford to go to a hotel, and we have no friend to whose house we could go uninvited, so I feel inclined to accept the invitation."

"You had better do so, Miss Melville; and as it may be a while before you meet with work, and as travelling about to look for it costs money, you will be so good as to take this, with my best wishes," said Miss Thomson, opening her desk and taking out a five-pound note and handing it to Jane, who, though she had fancied she never could have accepted money from a stranger, felt

this to be offered so frankly and kindly, that she thanked Miss Thomson and took it.

"This is the best sign of you yet—no foolish pride — no flying in my face with indignant disclaiming of what people call charity, and throwing the bit of paper on the carpet for the lass to sweep out, but a sensible and reasonable way of taking from a fellow-creature what she would take as pleasantly from you if she needed it and you had it to spare. You will do, Miss Melville; only mind, as the old Scotch proverb has it, 'You must set a stout heart to a stey brae.'"

On Jane's return to Cross Hall she found her sister in very much better spirits than when she set out for Allendale. An idea had struck Elsie, consequent partly on the remark Jane had made about her name looking well on the title-page of a book, and partly on her seeing in the Poet's Corner of the *Swinton Courier* some verses very inferior to her own which Mrs. Dalzell had returned to her. She was a poet; and what was there to hinder her from distin-

guishing herself in the literary world by thoughts that breathe and words that burn; and also from earning in this pleasant way a handsome income. Hope arose out of the vision; the fanciful and fragile mind that every one had despised and undervalued might, perhaps, do greater things than Jane's clear head and busy hands. Never had her ideas flowed more rapidly, or her words arranged themselves so well. She began by bewailing her own sad fate, the loss of fortune, and the desertion of friends; and the sincerity of her feelings made it feel like an inspiration. Things that appeared to her to be new thoughts crowded on her, and before Jane's return she had finished a short poem very much to her own satisfaction.

She would scarcely wait to hear the result of her sister's visit to Miss Thomson, but impetuously and affectionately made Jane sit down to listen to her lay.

"I wish I were a good judge, Elsie. It seems to me to be very pretty. Here and there I would alter a word; but, on the whole, I

think you have succeeded," was the welcome criticism.

"You think so; and you are so prosaic. I feel as if I could go on for ever writing. Don't you think you have seen worse verses printed, not in a newspaper, but in a book?"

"I read so little of that kind of literature; but I am sure you often read pieces to me, from both newspapers and books, that do not interest me half so much."

"Oh, Jane, I count so much on your good opinion, because I know that you will give it honestly, and because I think if I can please you I may please anybody." And Elsie looked so animated, so joyous, and so spiritual, that Jane's hopes rose. She, indeed, was no judge of poetry, but anything that could give courage and hope to her sister's mind must be a good thing.

"You must persevere, my dear. It will do yourself good, if no other good comes of it," said she.

"But other good is sure to come of it, Jane. Do not such things get printed, and of course

the writer is paid for them? I can write so fast; and now I know some of the real trials of life, I can speak from experience."

"And you are the type of the bulk of the poetry-reading public," said Jane thoughtfully. "The lady readers, I mean; generous, impulsive, and romantic; you ought to know what will suit the public taste. I wish you all success. But I have failed in my object, and have been advised to go to Edinburgh. You saw I had a letter this morning from Mr. Hogarth, with an invitation for both of us to come and live at his house, and look about us. You would not like to go?"

"No, Jane, I would far rather stay here and write; but it would be uncomfortable for you to go by yourself. I will go, if you very much wish it."

"No, my dear, if you think this writing is to be your vocation, it is not necessary for you to look for a situation, and I do not mind going by myself, only I feared you would be unhappy alone."

"I will be quite happy. I must have something better than this done while you are away."

"I must write to my cousin, accepting the invitation, and telling him when to expect me. The sooner I can go the better."

CHAPTER III.

CLOSED DOORS.

FRANCIS HOGARTH was waiting for Jane at the railway station, and as they walked together to his house in the outskirts of the town, she eagerly asked him about the situation he had heard of that he feared would not suit.

Her cousin hesitated a little, for it seemed so far below her deserts and her capabilities; but Mr. Rennie, the manager of the bank in which he had so long been employed, had told him that the —— Institution, the principal asylum for the insane in Scotland, and an admirably managed establishment, wanted a second matron; and that from the accounts he had heard of Miss Melville's practical talents, it was probable

that she would be the very person to fill the situation well. Jane eagerly asked after the duties and the salary, but Francis could not give her all the particulars she desired. Mr. Rennie was to see one of the Directors of the —— Institution on that evening, and was to make inquiries; he had some influence with one or two of the directors, and would use it in Miss Melville's favour if she was disposed to apply for it. It was expected that there would be at least fifty applications for it, and a little interest was a good auxiliary even to the greatest merits in the world. The duties, so far as Francis knew them, were the active superintendence of a large number of female servants, and the charge of all the stores, both of food and clothing, required for a household of several hundreds, who could none of them think for themselves. He did not know if she would come much in contact with the patients; he hoped not, for he thought it would be a sufficiently exhausting and anxious life without that. He had heard that the institution parted

with the present occupant of the situation for incompetence—that there had been both waste and peculation.

"I feel sure that my superintendence of my uncle's household, and my knowledge of accounts, should enable me to fill such a situation well, and from the number of applications, and the responsible nature of the duties, the salary should be handsome," said Jane. "I think I should send in an application, and I feel obliged both to Mr. Rennie and you for the suggestion. The establishment is well managed; you know it is one of those to which my uncle's property was to go in case you disobeyed his injunctions. He had a high opinion of the kind and rational treatment of the patients there. I do not see any objection to mingling with them either. I might be very useful."

"It seems a throwing away of your talents and acquirements, to make a mere housekeeper of you," said Francis.

"It is not such an insignificant office after all. What contributes to the comfort and happiness

of a family every day, and all day long, is surely as valuable a thing as much book-learning; and to keep such a large establishment going smoothly and satisfactorily requires much care and thought, and a particular kind of talent, which I think I possess, and which such a life will develop. When can I see Mr. Rennie, and when can I send in my application?"

"Mr. Rennie particularly desires to see you to-morrow morning; and if you like the prospect he holds out, your application can be sent in immediately."

When they reached the small but prettily situated cottage occupied by Francis, Jane was agreeably struck with the comfort and neatness of everything about it. The furniture, without being costly, was good of its kind; the very excellent collection of books was methodically arranged in ample book-shelves, and carefully preserved by glass doors; the bright fire in the grate—for though it was called summer, it was but a bleak cold day in Edinburgh; and the

respectable-looking middle-aged woman who had just laid the cloth for dinner, and now brought it in; all gave an air of comfort and repose to a dwelling much humbler than she had been accustomed to live in, but far better than any she could hope for a while to occupy. There were on a side table a few costly articles of *vertu*, and a magnificent folio of engravings, which had been bought by Mr. Hogarth since his accession to fortune; but substantial comfort had been attained long before.

Jane was rather surprised to see the large proportion of poetry and fiction that filled the book-shelves. Little did Mr. Hogarth the elder suppose that the bank clerk, whose outer life was so satisfactorily practical, had an inner life whose elements were as fanciful and unreal as poor Elsie's. His taste was certainly more severe and fastidious than hers, for he was older, and had read more; but his love, both of art and poetry, was very strong, and had been to him in his long solitary struggle with fortune a constant and unfailing pleasure. He had found

in them some amends for the want of relatives and the want of sympathy; and now his heart turned with strong affection to both of his cousins, and especially to the one who treated him with so much delicacy of feeling and such generous confidence. It was like finding a long-lost sister; there was so much to ask and to answer on either side. Jane liked to talk of her uncle; and Francis' curiosity about his unknown father, whom he had only occasionally seen at long intervals as a stranger who took a little interest in him, was satisfied by her clear and graphic descriptions of his opinions, his talk, and his habits; whilst she, beginning a new life, and doubtful of the issue, eagerly asked of his early experiences, and liked to chronicle every little step in a steady and well-deserved progress.

Though Jane had such a practical turn of mind, and such an excellent education, it must not be supposed that she knew much of the world. Educate women as you will, that knowledge is rarely attained at twenty-three; and

she had lived so much in a Utopia of her own, fancying that things that were right were always expedient, and that they should always be valued for their intrinsic worth, that she did not see the difficulties of her situation as clearly as many people who had not half her understanding. She and her uncle had been too apt to talk of things as they ought to be, and not as they actually were. With all Jane's quiet good sense, there were points on which she could be enthusiastic, and on this evening the successful cousin was struck by the warm expressions of an optimism in which he could not share, uttered by one who had good cause for complaint and dissatisfaction.

When the cousins went together to the Bank of Scotland on the following day, and were shown into Mr. Rennie's private room, Jane's hopes were somewhat damped by the details she received about the situation. The duties were even greater than she had supposed, consisting in the active and complete superintendence of a great many female servants, and a

slighter control over a still larger number of female keepers, who also acted as housemaids and chambermaids; the control of the work-room, so as to see that there was no waste, extravagance, or pilfering there; the arrangements necessary in the cooking and distribution of such large quantities of food, so that each should have enough, and yet that there should be no opportunity of theft; and the watchfulness required to prevent any of the girls employed in the establishment from flirting with any of the convalescent gentlemen. The wages given by the directors had been too low to keep servants long in the place, or to secure a good class of girls who would be above dishonesty or other weaknesses; and this made the duties of their superintendent particularly irksome; while there was a good deal to be done for the patients themselves, though not so much by the second as by the upper matron.

All this seemed a formidable amount of work for one head and one pair of eyes to do; and when Jane was told that the salary was 30*l.*

a-year, and that so many applications had been and were likely to be sent in, that great interest was necessary for success, she was by no means so decided on sending in hers. Even the privileges annexed to the situation, of a small bedroom for herself, and a parlour shared by two others, with a fortnight's holidays in the year, though very necessary to prevent the second matron being removed speedily into one of the wards, did not seem so tempting as to revive Jane's last night's enthusiasm.

"Surely," said she, "the payment is very small for the work and the responsibility."

"There is so much competition for a thing of this kind," said Mr. Rennie. "There are so many women in Scotland who have too little to live on, or nothing at all, that they will gladly snatch at anything that will give them food and lodging, and the smallest of salaries. I know of a situation of 12*l.* a-year that received forty-five applications from reduced gentlewomen. The payment is never in proportion to the work."

"But the work has been badly done hitherto, I understand," said Jane. "It is not having too little to live on that makes a woman fit for such a situation as this. Why do not they raise the salary and insist on higher qualifications?"

"I cannot tell why they do not, but so it is," said Mr. Rennie.

"Is there any chance of rising from second to first matron?" asked Jane. "That is worth 90*l.*, you say."

"In the course of fifteen or twenty years, perhaps; but the duties are very distinct at present, and require different kinds of talent."

"Yes," said Jane; "and great interest with the directors might get a new person in, and fiteen or twenty years' services would have less weight. I do not feel inclined to work twenty years for 30*l.* even with a better chance of 90*l.* at last than is offered here. It is at best a prison life, too; not the life I had hoped for, nor what I am best fitted for. My cousin's place is filled up here, I understand."

"Every one below Mr. Ormistown has got a

step, and we only want a junior clerk. No doubt we will have plenty of applicants."

"Will you take me?" said Jane. "Do not shake your head, Mr. Rennie. Cousin Francis, speak a word for me; I am quite fit for the situation."

"If you could do anything to further Miss Melville's views in any way you would lay me under a deep and lasting obligation, Mr. Rennie," said Francis. "I have most unconsciously done both of my cousins a great injury, which I am not allowed to repair. My late father had as much confidence in this young lady's talents and qualifications as he had in mine. I know she is only too good for the situation she asks for."

Mr. Rennie was disposed to try to please Mr. Hogarth. He had always had a high opinion of him, and had great confidence in his judgment and integrity. He was to take the chair at a dinner given to the whole bank staff by this man who had advanced all his subordinates one step, and left them pleased and hopeful; and he

could make the usual complimentary speeches with more sincerity than is common at public dinners. He had also introduced the new laird of Cross Hall to his wife and family on equal terms, and they had been very much pleased with him. But when Miss Melville again gravely asked for the vacant clerkship, his habitual courtesy could scarcely prevent him from laughing outright.

"It would never do, my dear madam," said he; "young ladies have quite a different sphere from that of ledgers and pass-books."

"But I would do the work," said Jane, opening a ponderous volume that lay on the manager's table, and running up a column of figures with a rapidity and precision which he could not but admire. Then on a piece of loose paper she wrote in a beautiful, clear, business-like hand an entry as she would put it in the book, showing that she perfectly well understood the *rationale* of the Dr. and the Cr. side of the ledger; and then gravely turning to Mr. Rennie, she asked him why she would not do.

"It is not the custom, my dear young lady; I can get young men in plenty who want the place."

"I have no doubt that you can, but I want it too; and, in consideration of the prejudice against my sex, I will take the place, and accept the salary you would give to a raw lad of sixteen, though I am an educated and experienced woman of twenty-three. I want something that I can rise by. I could be satisfied with the career of my cousin, without the fortune at the end. Young women in Paris are clerks and bookkeepers; why should they not be so here?"

"France is not Scotland, or Auld Reekie Paris. We consider our customs very much better than the French. Why, you know quite well it would never do. You would turn the heads of all my clerks, and make them idle away their time and neglect their work. You do not see the danger of the thing."

"No, I do not," answered Jane. "Do I look like a person who would turn any man's head? If I do such mischief, turn me off; but

I ask, in the name of common sense and common justice, a fair trial. If I do not give satisfaction I will stand the consequences."

The serious earnestness with which Jane pleaded for so strange an employment—the matter-of-fact way in which she stood upon her capabilities, without regarding suitabilities—impressed Francis Hogarth while it embarrassed Mr. Rennie. It was impossible to outreason so extraordinary an applicant, but it was still more impossible to grant her request. Skilled as the banker was in the delicate and difficult art of saying "No," it had to be said oftener and more distinctly to Jane Melville than to the most pertinacious of customers, to whom discount must be refused.

"I admire your spirit, Miss Melville. If one thing cannot be accomplished you must try another. But in an establishment like this, you see, I could not possibly take you in. A private employer might admire your undoubted ability; but I am responsible to a Board of Directors, and they would decidedly oppose such an innova-

tion. Your sex, you are aware, are not noted for powers of secrecy. I dare say it is a prejudice; but bank directors and bank customers have prejudices, and no one likes any additional chance of having his affairs made public."

"You know you are talking nonsense, my good sir," said Jane. "It is because women have never had any responsibilities that they have been supposed to be unworthy of trust. Where they have been honoured with confidence they have been quite as faithful to it as any men."

"But, my dear madam," said Mr. Rennie, "what would be the consequence if all the clever women like yourself were to thrust themselves into masculine avocations? Do you not see that the competition would reduce the earnings of men, and then there would be fewer who could afford to marry? The customs of society press hard upon the exceptional women who court a wider field of usefulness, but I believe the average happiness is secured by——"

"By a system that makes forty-five educated

women eager to give their life's work for 12*l.* a-year, and fifty applying for the magnificent salary of 30*l.* for a most exhausting and responsible situation. These are not all exceptional women, Mr. Rennie, but many of the average women whose happiness you are so careful of. You know there are enormous numbers of single women and widows in this country who must be supported, either by their own earnings or by those of the other sex, for they *must* live, you know."

Mr. Rennie smiled at Jane's earnestness.

"You smile, '*on ne voit pas la necessité*,' said Jane. "I dare say it would really be better for us to die."

"I am sure nothing was further from my lips than either the language or the sentiment. I think your case especially hard — *especially* hard."

"I thought it was, till I heard of these numerous applications; and the sad thing to me is, that it is *not* especially hard. Some innovation must be made: have you and your directors

not the courage to begin? I am willing to endure all the ridicule that may be cast on myself."

"There are other departments of business where your unquestionable abilities and skill might be employed and well paid for; but here, I must repeat, it is impossible—impossible—perfectly impossible. Mr. Hogarth is going to favour us with his company this evening, and Mrs. Rennie and my daughter Eliza would be most happy to see you. I would like to introduce my daughter to a young lady who knows business so well. You will be good enough to pardon my necessary incivility: most painful to me it has been to refuse your request, backed by such excellent reasons,—but you will accompany Mr. Hogarth, and show you are not unforgiving."

Jane accepted the invitation willingly. Francis was not pressed for time; the bank had released him without the usual notice, so he offered to accompany his cousin wherever she chose to go to.

"Do you think," said she, when they were

again in the street, "that I could get employment with any bookseller or publisher? I will try that next. Will you go with me to a respectable house in that line of business?"

There was no situation vacant for any one in the first two establishments they called at. In the third there was a reader wanted to correct manuscripts and proofs, and as Mr. Hogarth was supposed to be the person applying for the employment, he was asked his qualifications. When he somewhat awkwardly put forward Miss Melville, the publisher respectfully but firmly declined to engage her.

"Whatever I could or could not do—whatever salary I might ask—you object on account of my being a woman?" said Jane.

"Just so," said the publisher; "it is not the custom of the trade to employ *Ladies of the Press.* You do not know the terms or the routine of the business."

"I suppose I could learn them in an hour or two; but I see you do not wish to employ me, even if I had them at my finger-ends. Do

you employ women in no way in your large establishment?"

"Yes, as authors; for we find that many books written by ladies sell quite as well as others."

"But in no other way?"

"Only in this," said the publisher, taking the cousins into a small room at the back of his large front shop, where eight or ten nice-looking girls were busily engaged in stitching together pamphlets and sheets to be ready for the bookbinder. "It is light work; they have not such long hours or such bad air, nor do they need much taste or skill as dressmakers do."

"So their wages are proportionally lower," said Jane.

"Just so," said the publisher; "and quite right they should be so."

"Of course; but do they not rise from stitching to bookbinding?"

"Ah! that is man's work. I have bookbinders on the premises, to finish the work that the girls have begun."

"And they spend their lives in this stitching —no progress—no improvement—mere mechanical drudgery."

"Yes; and in time they get very expert. You would be amazed at the rapidity with which they turn the work out of their hands. The division of labour reduces the price of binding materially."

"No doubt—for you have girls at low wages to do what is tedious, and men at higher to do what is artistic; that is a very fair division of labour," said Jane, bitterly.

"Nay, nay; I believe our profession, or rather trade, is more liberal to the sex than any other. Write a good book, and we will give you a good price for it: design a fine illustration, and that has a market value independent of sex."

"I can neither write nor draw," said Jane, "but I would fain have been a corrector of the press; from that I might have risen to criticism, and become a reader and a judge of manuscript; but I see the case is hopeless. I suppose it is

not you, but society who is to blame. Perhaps I may be reduced to the book-stitching yet; if so, will you give me a trial? In the meantime, I wish you good morning."

The publisher smiled and nodded. "A most eccentric young woman, and, I daresay, a deserving one; but she takes hold of the world at the wrong end," said he, as she went out to pursue her inquiry elsewhere.

"Now," said Jane, "I can release you, for I will make my next application myself. If I fail here I really will be surprised, for I make it to one who knows me."

Mrs. Dunn, the head of the dressmaking and millinery establishment where the Miss Melvilles had been initiated into these arts, had been very handsomely paid for instructing them, had always praised Jane's industry and Elsie's taste, and had held them up as patterns for all her young people. Of course she knew, as all the world knew, that they had been disinherited by their uncle, but she fancied they had other influential friends or relatives; so when Miss

Melville was announced, she thought more of an order for mourning than of a request for employment. But the young lady, in her own plain way, went at once to the point.

"You were accustomed at the time I was with you to have a bookkeeper, who came regularly to make up your bills and your accounts. Have you the same arrangement still?"

"Yes, and the same gentleman; a first-rate hand at his figures; employed by many beside me," said Mrs. Dunn.

"Then he cannot miss one customer. Will you give the business to me on the same terms, for the sake of old times?"

"To you, Miss Melville! it is not worth your having. It is only by his having so many that he makes it pay, though he is as good an accountant as any in Edinburgh."

"I might in time get a good many too. Surely women might put all their work in the way of their own sex. I am quite competent; I convinced a bank manager to-day that I was

fit for a situation in his establishment, but he did not like the idea of taking a young woman amongst his clerks. You can have no objection on that score. You know I will be quiet, careful, and methodical."

Mrs. Dunn was very sorry, but really nobody ever thought of having young ladies to make up their books. It was not the custom of any trade. A gentleman coming in gave confidence both to herself and to the public; and she had no fault to find with Mr. McDonald—a most gentlemanly man, with a wife and family, too—it would not be fair to part with him without any cause. And, indeed, the business was not what it used to be—it needed the most careful management to get along, and she could not risk having a change in her establishment just at present; perhaps by-and-by."

"While grass grows horses starve," said Jane. "If I establish a reputation and get employment from others you could not object to me. Everyone is alike; neither man nor woman will give me a chance. I cannot blame you, Mrs. Dunn,

for thinking and acting so much like other people."

"I am sure it would be better for you to take a nice comfortable situation; but I thought you had friends. If there was any other way that I could serve you in I would be so happy. If you had asked to be taken into the work-room—but I suppose you look higher."

"I do not know how low I may look ere long, Mrs. Dunn. It is quite possible I may trouble you again, but in the meantime——"

"In the meantime I want you to come into the show-room and see the new sleeve just out from Paris—it would improve the dress you have on amazingly. I suppose that was made in Swinton. And you must see Mademoiselle; she is with us still, and as positive as ever; and many of the young people you will recognise. How we have all talked about you and Miss Alice lately. It was such an extraordinary settlement!"

Jane forced herself into the show-room, listened mechanically to the exclamations and remarks

of Mademoiselle, the forewoman, shook hands with all the work-girls she had known, looked with vacant eyes on the new sleeve, and heard its merits descanted on very fully; then went back into Mrs. Dunn's parlour, and had a glass of ginger wine and a piece of seed-cake with her; after which she took leave, and Mrs. Dunn felt satisfied, for she had paid Miss Melville a great deal of attention in spite of her altered circumstances.

"Where am I to go to now?" said Jane to herself as she again trod the pavement of Prince's-street and walked along it, then turned up into the quieter parts of the town where professions are carried on. She passed by shops, and warehouses, banks and insurance companies' offices, commission agencies, land agencies, lawyer's offices.

"Every one seems busy, every place filled, and there appears to be no room for me," she said to herself. "I must try Mr. MacFarlane, however; he knows something of me, and will surely feel friendly. I hope he will not be so

much astonished at my views as other people have been.

Mr. MacFarlane, however, was quite as much surprised as Mr. Rennie, or the publisher, when Jane asked him for employment as a copying or an engrossing clerk, either indoors or out of doors. He was quite as much disposed to exaggerate the difficulties she herself would feel from not understanding the forms of law, or not being able to write the particular style of caligraphy required for legal instruments. He had heard of the singular education Henry Hogarth, an old crony and contemporary of his own, had given to his nieces, and as his own old-bachelor crotchets lay in quite another direction, he had never thought of that education doing anything but adding to their difficulties, and preventing them from getting married. When the girls had been left in poverty he only thought of their trying for the nice quiet situations that every one recommended, but which seemed so hard to obtain, and then sinking into obscure old maidenhood in the bosom of a respectable family. When

Jane mentioned the matronship, Mr. MacFarlane strongly advised her to apply for it, for the salary was more than she could look for in a situation, and she would probably be more independent. But as for him employing a girl as a law-writer, what would the profession say to that? It was quite out of the question.

"I fear I have no turn for teaching, but I suppose I must try for something better than a situation. Could I not get up classes?"

"Oh! yes, certainly—classes if you feel competent."

"Not quite for French or Italian. My uncle was never satisfied with our accent; and we must advertise French acquired on the Continent now-a-days, if we want to succeed in Edinburgh. The things I could teach best—English grammar and composition, writing and arithmetic, history, and the elements of science—are monopolized by men; but I must make an effort. I am sorry my dear old friend, Mr. Wilson, is no more, he would have recommended me strongly;

but I will go to Mr. Bell. I studied under him for four winters, and though I am threatening him with competition, I know I was his favourite pupil, and I hope he will help me. I never would encroach on his field if I could find any elbow-room elsewhere."

This was another long walk, and to no purpose, for Mr. Bell was away from home, in bad health, for an indefinite period, leaving his classes in the care of a young man, who had been strongly recommended to him.

The other masters she had had were not likely to take nearly so much interest in her as Mr. Bell; but she was resolved to leave no stone unturned, and went to see several of them. They gave Miss Melville very faint hopes of success. Edinburgh was overdone with masters and mistresses, rents were very high, and classes the most uncertain things possible. But she might apply at one of the institutions. Thither she went, and found that her want of accomplishments prevented her from getting a good situation; and her want of experience was objected

to for any situation at all. With a few more lessons, and a little training, she might suit by-and-by.

She was glad that those long walks and many interviews occupied the whole day till the time Francis had appointed for dinner; she had not courage to face the empty house and the respectable woman-servant till she was sure her cousin would be at home to receive her. Heartsick, weary, and footsore she felt, when she reached the cottage where Francis was standing at the door to welcome her return.

"Well, friend," said he, "what news?"

"No good news. I suppose I must advertise. Perhaps there is one person in England or Scotland who would fancy I was worth employing, even though I am apparently very much at a discount."

"Are you much disheartened?"

"I am very tired," said she; "Rome was not built in a day. I was a fool to expect success at once."

"You are not too tired to go to Mrs. Rennie's

with me this evening. I have ordered a carriage to call for us."

"Thank you, I will need it, and my dinner, too, in spite of the wine and cake at Mrs. Dunn's."

Her cousin's quiet sympathy and kindness soothed the girl's aching and anxious heart; she told him her experiences; and though he was not very much surprised at the result, he felt keenly for her disappointment. She had brought a little piece of needlework to fill up vacant hours, and after dinner she took it out, and soothed her excited feelings by the quiet feminine employment. There was an hour or more to be passed before the carriage came for them, and Francis sat on the other side of the fire cutting the leaves of a new book, and occasionally reading a passage that struck him. Had any one looked in at the time, he could not have guessed at the grief and anxiety felt by both of the cousins. No; it was like a quiet domestic picture of no recent date, not likely to be soon ended. Jane's sad face lighted up with an

occasional smile at something said or something read; and Francis Hogarth saw more beauty in her countenance that evening than William Dalzell had ever seen in all the days he had spent with the supposed heiress whom he meant to marry.

CHAPTER IV.

AN EVENING AT MR. RENNIE'S.

After an hour spent in this quiet way, Jane Melville was sufficiently rested and tranquillized to go among strangers, in spite of her knowing the idle curiosity with which she was likely to be regarded. There was a small party at Mr. Rennie's; but excepting herself and the ladies of the family, it was composed entirely of gentlemen. Now that Mr. Hogarth had come into a good landed property, he had spent more than one evening in the family of the bank manager, and had been discovered to be presentable anywhere; that he had very tolerable manners and good literary taste; and both Mrs. and Miss Rennie recollected well how often papa had

spoken highly of him when he was only a clerk in the bank. Miss Rennie was about nineteen, the eldest of the family, rather pretty, slightly romantic, and a little fond of showing off her extensive acquaintance with modern literature. Her interest in Mr. Hogarth was great, though of recent date; and now to see one of the cousins whom he was forbidden to marry, on pain of losing all his newly-acquired wealth and consequence, was an exciting thing to a young lady who had suffered much from want of excitement. Her father had been able to tell her nothing of Miss Melville's personal appearance, though he had dwelt upon her abilities and her eccentric character, and told her age. Among the party was the publisher to whom Jane had applied for a situation, who had contributed his share of information about her; a young Edinburgh advocate, who had not very much to do at the bar; a Leith merchant, an old gentleman of property in the neighbourhood of the city, and two college students, all anxious to see people who were so much talked about.

"Decidedly plain and common-looking, and looks twenty-seven at least," was Miss Rennie's verdict on seeing Miss Melville.

"Plain, but uncommon-looking," was the opinion of the gentlemen on the subject. The open, intelligent, and womanly expression of countenance—the well-turned neck and shoulders—the easy, well-proportioned figure—though not of the slight ethereal style which Mr. Hawthorne admires, but rather of the healthy, well-developed flesh-and-blood character of British feminine beauty—might redeem a good deal of irregularity of features.

Though her self-possession had been sorely tried on this day, though she had been disappointed, and was now worn out and perplexed, and though her faith in human nature had been shaken, she made an effort to recover the equanimity necessary for such an evening as this, and succeeded. Her quiet and lady-like manner surprised Mr. Rennie; he had thought her masculine in the morning. She listened with patience and pleasure to Miss Rennie's playing

and singing, and then looked over some books of engravings and prints with the old gentleman, who was a connoisseur. And when the advocate and the publisher, between whom there seemed to be a good understanding, entered into conversation on literary matters, and successful and unsuccessful works, she, thinking of her sister and her hopes, listened most attentively.

"Well," said the legal gentleman, "I like smart, clever writing, and don't object to a little personality now and then. It pays, too."

"Those things certainly take well," said the publisher, "but there are other things that take better."

"What are they?"

"Not at all in your way, Mr. Malcolm; but yet at the present time there is nothing that pays so well as an exciting religious novel on evangelical principles. Make all your unbelievers and worldly people villains, and crown your heroine, after unheard-of perils and persecutions, with the conversion of her lover, or the lover with the conversion of the heroine—the

one does nearly as well as the other; but do not let them marry before conversion, on any account. Settle the hero down in the ministry, to which he dedicates talents that you may call as splendid as you please; make your fashionable conversation of your worldly people slightly blackguardly, and that of your pets very inane, with spots of religion coming out very strong now and then, and you will have more readers than Dickens, Bulwer, or Thackeray. Well-meaning mothers will put the book without fear into the hands of their daughters. It is considered harmless Sunday reading for those who find Sunday wearisome, and it is thought an appropriate birth-day present for young people of both sexes. I dare say these books are harmless enough, but their success is wonderfully disproportioned to their merits. They must be such easy writing, too, for you need never puzzle yourself as to whether it would be natural or consistent for such a character to steal, or for another to murder. 'The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,' and

the novelist at least takes no pains to know it."

"You fire me with a noble zeal and emulation," said Mr. Malcolm. "Is it true that the trumpery thing my sister Anne tormented me to order from you last week has gone through five editions?"

"Just about to bring out a sixth," said the publisher; "and the curious thing is that it is not at all exciting: but these American domestic quasi-religious novels (though novel is not a proper term for them) are the rage at present. If one could trust to their details of every-day life being correct, they might be useful as giving us the Americans painted by themselves; but there is so much that is false and improbable in plot and character, that one is tempted to doubt even the cookery, of which we have *quantum suff.*"

"The conversation is the greatest twaddle I ever saw," said Mr. Malcolm. "If the American people talk like that, how fatiguing it would be to live among them! I could not write so

badly, or in such bad English. I must take a successful English novel as my model."

"Mr. Malcolm is literary himself," said Miss Rennie, who had left the two students to amuse each other, and now joined the more congenial group. "He writes such clever things in magazines, Miss Melville, I quite delight to come on anything of his, they are so amusing."

"Miss Rennie, I am overwhelmed with gratitude for your good opinion. Then you like my style? Do you hear that, you ogre? Publishers, you know, Miss Melville, are noted for living upon the bones of unfortunate authors, and never saying grace either before or after the meal. This Goth, this Vandal, this Jacob Tonson, has had the barbarity to find fault with the last thing I put into the 'Mag.'"

"Well, I thought you had never done anything so good. It was so funny; papa laughed till he shook the spectacles off his face, and then all the children laughed too."

"Listen, thou devourer of innocents, thou fattener on my labour and groans. My work

was good, and my style better, fashionable as Miss Rennie's flounces, and piquant as the sauce we will have from our host at supper."

"The style has been fashionable," said the publisher, "but it is getting overdone. Everybody is trying the allusive style now, and wandering from the subject in hand to quote a book, or to refer to something very remotely connected with it. Every word or sentence is made a peg to hang something else on. Our authors are too fond of showing off reading or curious information; the style of the old essayists——"

"Bald and tame, with very little knowledge of the finer shades of character," interrupted Mr. Malcolm. "I wonder why you, as a critic, can compare our brilliant modern literature to such poor performances."

"They have their deficiencies, certainly; but there was a simplicity and directness in these old writings that we would do well to imitate."

"I had better imitate the style of the paying article at present, and write an evangelical

novel. I had better read up in it; but the unlucky thing is that they invariably put me to sleep; so perhaps I would do better to trust to my own original genius, and begin in an independent manner."

"Is it not a treat," whispered Miss Rennie to Jane, "to get a peep behind the scenes in this way? Mr. Malcolm is quite a genius. I am sure he could write anything; but he really ought not to go to sleep over those charming books. He is such a severe critic, I am quite afraid of him."

"Then you write yourself?" said Jane.

"Oh! how foolish of me to let you know in such a silly way. I write nothing to speak of. I never thought any one would take me for an authoress. But I do so doat on poetry, and it seems so natural to express one's feelings in verse—not for publication, you know—only for my friends. Once or twice—but this is a great secret—I have had pieces brought out in the 'Ladies' Magazine.' If you read it, you may have seen them; they had the signature of Ella

—a pretty name, is it not?—more uncommon than my own."

"Is it a fair question," said Jane, anxiously; "but did you receive anything for your verses?"

"You have such a commercial turn of mind, Miss Melville, as papa says, that you really ought to be in business. No; I did not receive, or, indeed, did I wish for any payment. I would mix no prose with my poetry."

"You are not in need of money," said Jane, with a slight sigh; and she turned to the publisher, and asked if he brought out new poems as well as new novels.

"Poetry is ticklish stuff to go off, particularly in Edinburgh," said he. "I am very shy of it, except in bringing out cheap editions of poems of established reputation, or reprints of American poets."

"Where there is no copyright to be paid for," said Mr. Malcolm; "I know the tricks of the trade."

Mrs. Rennie had asked Jane to play and sing, which she could not do, and then had engaged

in conversation with Mr. Hogarth for a considerable time. Now she supposed Jane must fancy she was not receiving sufficient attention from her hostess, considering that she was the only lady guest, so she came forward, and withdrew her from the animated conversation of the gentlemen, and proceeded to entertain her in the best way that she could. Her younger children (not her youngest, for they were in bed) were gathered around her, and the conversation was somewhat desultory, owing to their interruptions and little delinquencies. It was now getting time for them, too, to go to bed, and it was not without repeated orders from mamma, supported at last by a forcible observation from papa, that they bade the company good-night, and retired. They were all very nice-looking children, and not ill-disposed, though somewhat refractory and dilatory about the vexed question of going to bed.

Talking to them and about them naturally brought up the subject of education; and Jane timidly inquired if Mrs. Rennie was in want

of a governess, or if she knew any one who was.

"No; the children are all at school or under masters—the best masters in Edinburgh—for Mr. Rennie is extravagant in the matter of education. The children get on better—there is more emulation; and then there is such a houseful of ourselves, that we would not know where to put a governess, though it might otherwise be an economy," said Mrs. Rennie.

"I should like to have classes," said Jane—trying to speak boldly for herself; "to teach what I have learned under the same masters whom you are so pleased with—English philologically, with the practice of composition, writing, arithmetic, and mathematics. I can get certificates of my competency from the professors under whom I have studied. I must leave the neighbourhood of Swinton, where there is no field for me, and start in this line; my sister can assist me, I have no doubt."

"I never heard of such a thing, Miss Melville; you had much better take a situation.

The worry and uncertainty of taking rooms and paying rent, when there are so many masters that you cannot expect but a very few pupils, would wear you out in a twelvemonth. If I were to send you my two girls—and I am sure I have every reason to be satisfied with their present teachers—what would they do for you? Oh, no, Miss Melville. Take my advice, and get a nice quiet situation, or go into a school, where you might take music lessons in exchange for what you can teach now.

"I am too old to learn music," said Jane, "and I have no natural talent for it. As for a nice quiet situation, where am I to get it?"

"Surely, Miss Melville, you must have many friends, from the position you have held in ——shire; you must know many leading people. Consult with them. I am sure they would never advise you to take such a risk; I cannot conscientiously advise you to do it myself. Mr. Rennie was telling me about the matronship of the —— Institution. Don't you think that would be better? The salary is not

high, but there is no risk. I know one of the house-surgeons very well, and I know he says everything is very comfortable, and he is one of the pleasantest men I know."

"I am reconsidering the matter," said Jane. "I suppose if I make up my mind to it, the sooner I apply the better."

"I should say so," said Mrs. Rennie. "I am sure Mr. Rennie will give you all his influence, for he says you appear to be such a capable person. He told us all about your turn for figures and ledgers, and that sort of thing."

"I have naturally strong nerves, too," said Jane.

"Oh, they say it is nothing being in such a place, when you once get used to it."

"But what would become of my poor sister?" said Jane. "We did so much wish to be together; and in such a situation I could see so little of her."

"That would be the case in any situation; and what is there to prevent her from getting one for herself?"

"Just as much and more than prevents me. Still, twenty-four and thirty pounds a year would keep her tolerably comfortable till she can get employment or meets with success otherwise," said Jane, half thinking aloud. "I think I will write out my application when we get home to-night."

"Where are you staying—in Edinburgh?" asked Mrs. Rennie.

"At my cousin's."

"At Mr. Hogarth's?—you do not mean to say so!"

"He asked me to come and stay with him while I inquired about this situation, or anything else that might appear to be better. You know I cannot afford to take lodgings or live at a hotel, and no one else thought of offering me a home."

"It was very kind and well-meant on his part, no doubt; but it was scarcely advisable on yours to accept it."

"I spoke to Miss Thomson about it, and she saw no objection."

"Miss Thomson of Allendale: very likely she did not—she is used to do just as she pleases, and never minds what the world thinks."

"She was the only person who gave me either help, encouragement, or advice. I thought all she said was right and reliable. You do not know what it is to me, who have no relation in the world but Elsie, to find a cousin. He seems like a brother to me, and I know he feels like one. If it had been in his power to give me money to engage a lodging, perhaps he would have done so, but it is money assistance that is so strictly forbidden by the will."

"If he had only spoken to some experienced friend on the subject—if he had only spoken to *me*—I am sure it could have been better managed. In the meantime, if you have no objection to sharing Eliza's room, we will be glad to keep you here for the remainder of your stay in Edinburgh. You had better not go home with your cousin to-night."

Jane paused for a few minutes—many bitter thoughts passed through her mind. "I am much obliged to you for your kind offer, but I do not think I can accept it. If I have made a mistake, it has been committed already, and cannot be undone. To-night, I will write my application to the directors of the ——— Asylum; to-morrow I will be on my way to Cross Hall. I cannot, after such a day as this, collect my thoughts sufficiently in a strange house, among strangers, to do myself justice in my application, nor can I bear to let my cousin know that his brotherly kindness, and my sisterly confidence, may be misunderstood and misinterpreted. I have no mother, and no adviser. I had feared that perhaps the direct or indirect assistance of food and lodging for two days might peril my cousin's inheritance, —though Miss Thomson thought there was no danger of that either,—but I never imagined that any one would think the less of me for accepting it. If you do not tell him, he need never know it; for I am sure it was the last idea he could have entertained."

What sad earnest eyes Jane turned on Mrs. Rennie!—she could not help being touched with her expression and her appeal. A vision of her own Eliza—without friends—without a mother—doing something as ill-advised, and feeling very acutely when a stranger told her of it, gave a distinctness to Jane's present suffering that, without that little effort of imagination, she could not have realized. Besides, she had a great wish to think highly of Mr. Hogarth, and to please him; and the certainty that he would be extremely pained and, perhaps, offended by her suggestion that he had compromised his cousin's position by his good-natured invitation, had its influence.

"What you say is very reasonable, Miss Melville, but you forget that to-morrow is Sunday. You would not travel on the Sabbath, I hope?"

"I seem to have forgotten the days of the week in this terrible whirl," said Jane. "I would rather not travel on Sunday, but this seems a case of necessity."

"Not so," said Mrs. Rennie, kindly. "Come

and go to church with us to-morrow forenoon, and dine with us; if you feel then that you would prefer to stay here, you can easily manage to do so without making your cousin suspect anything. If you still are anxious to go home, you can do that on Monday morning; but I fancy Tuesday is quite early enough to send in your application."

"Thank you, Mrs. Rennie," said Jane. "I am very much obliged to you indeed for your kindness, and I think I will avail myself of it; but to-night—to night—I must have some quiet and solitude."

"I have been somehow or other separated from you all the evening," said Francis, as they were on their way home. "Have you enjoyed it at all? It was hard for you to have to see so many strangers after so trying a day."

"Rather hard," said Jane, with quivering lips. "Life altogether is much harder than I had imagined it to be. I want Elsie very much to-night; but I will see her as soon as I can possibly get home."

"You do not mean to go so soon? you have done nothing satisfactory as yet. We must make attempts in some other direction."

"I have made up my mind," said Jane; "I will apply for the situation I despised this morning. People outside of asylums seem to be as mad and more cruel. I will write my application to-night, and it will go by the first post."

"Do not be so precipitate; there is no need to apply before Tuesday, and I believe even Wednesday would do. Spend the intervening days in town; something suitable may be advertised in newspapers. You have not yet applied at any registry offices. You said Rome was not built in a day, yet a day's failure makes you despair. Do not lose heart all at once, my dear cousin. Though I never had anything half so hard to bear or to anticipate as you have now, I have had my troubles, and have got over them, as you will in the end."

The tone of Francis' voice gave Jane a little courage; but she was resolute in writing out her application before she went to bed. It was

beautifully written and clearly expressed. She asserted her qualifications with firmness, and yet with modesty, and gave satisfactory references to prove her own statements. Of all the applicants, she was the youngest; but Francis was sure that her letter would be the best of the fifty.

Though Jane thought this decisive step would set her mind at rest, sleep was impossible to her after such excitement, fatigue, and disappointment; and the solitude she had longed for only gave her leave to turn over all the painful circumstances of her position without let or hindrance. Never had she felt so bitterly towards her uncle. In vain did she try to recall his past kindness to soften her heart towards him; for all pleasant memories only deepened the gloom of her present friendless, hopeless poverty; and the prospect of her inevitable separation from Elsie, which had never been distinctly apprehended before, was the saddest of all the thoughts that haunted the night watches.

Francis had been invited with Jane to spend the day with the Rennies, and the cousins went to church with the family. Jane heard none of the sermon nor of the service generally. She had not been in the habit of paying much attention at church, and there was nothing at all striking or impressive in the preacher's voice or manner, or in the substance of his discourse, to arrest a languid or preoccupied listener. Jane was thinking about the Asylum, and about how much or how little it needed to make people mad—if they were often cured —and if they relapsed—a great part of the time; and when Miss Rennie asked her how she liked the sermon, Jane could not tell whether she liked it or not. Mr. and Mrs. Rennie confessed that Mr. M—— was nothing of a preacher, but he was a very good man and a private friend. They liked to go to their own regular parish church, and did not run after celebrated preachers; though Eliza was a great admirer of eloquence, and was very often straying from her own place of worship to go

with friends and acquaintances to hear some star or another, quite indifferent as to whether he were of the Establishment or of the Free Kirk, or of some other dissenting persuasion.

The conversation at Mr. Rennie's all Sunday afternoon was much more on churches, sermons, and ministers, than any Jane had ever heard before. She had never seen anything of the religious world, as it is called, and felt herself very much behind the company in information. Her cousin Francis was much better acquainted with the subject; he seemed to have heard every preacher in Edinburgh, and to know every one of note in the kingdom.

Mrs. Rennie, apparently in a casual manner, asked Jane to make her house her home while she remained in Edinburgh; and the invitation was accepted with the same indifferent tone of voice, which concealed great anxiety at heart.

"I should like my cousin to accompany me to my unfashionable chapel," said Francis. "Will you either join us or excuse us for the evening, as it is the only opportunity I may have

for a long time to take Miss Melville there? Miss Rennie, you are the only one likely to have curiosity enough to try a new church."

"I am sorry I cannot go this evening, for I have promised to go to St. George's, to hear Mr. C——, with Eleanor Watson and her brother. You had better come with me; it is the last Sunday he is to preach in Edinburgh," said Miss Rennie.

"You must excuse me this once," said Mr. Hogarth; "I have a great wish that Miss Melville should hear my minister. At any other time I will be at your command."

Miss Rennie could not disappoint either Eleanor or Herbert Watson, or herself; so Francis and Jane went alone to the little chapel. "It will do you good to hear a good sermon, and I expect that you will hear one."

The idea of getting any good at church was rather new to Jane; but on this occasion, for the first time in her life, she felt real meaning in religious worship. Never before had she felt the sentiment of dependence, which is the

primary sentiment of religion. She had been busy, and prosperous, and self-reliant; all she said and did had been considered good and wise; her position was good, her temper even, and her pleasures many. Now she was baffled and defeated on every side—disappointed in the present, and fearful of the future.

Prayer acquired a significance she had never seen in it before; the tone of the prayer, too, was different from the set didactic utterances too often called prayer, in which there is as much doctrine and as little devotion as extempore prayer is capable of. It was not expostulatory either, as if our Heavenly Father needed much urging to make Him listen to our wants and our aspirations, but calm, trusting, and elevated, as if God was near, and not far off from any one of His creatures—as if we could lay our griefs and our cares, our joys and our hopes, at His feet, knowing that we are sure of His blessing. Was this union with God, then, really possible? Was there an inner life that could flow on smoothly and calmly heavenward, in spite of the shocks,

and jars, and temptations of the outer life? Could she learn to see and acknowledge God's goodness even in the bitterness of the cup that was now at her lips?

It was no careless or preoccupied listener who followed point after point of the sermon on the necessity of suffering for the perfecting of the Christian character. The thoughts were genuine thoughts, not borrowed from old books, but worked out of the very soul of the preacher; and the language, clear, vigorous, and modern, clothed these thoughts in the most impressive manner. There were none of the conventionalisms of the pulpit orator, who often weakens the strongest ideas by the hackneyed or obsolete phraseology he uses.

"Thank you, cousin Francis," said Jane, as they walked back to Mr. Rennie's together. "This is, indeed, medicine to a mind diseased. I will make my inquiries as I ought to do tomorrow; but if I fail I will send in my application; and if I succeed there, I will go to this asylum in a more contented spirit. It appears

as if it were to be my work, and with God's help I will do it well."

Jane began her next day's work by calling on her Edinburgh acquaintances, and then went to the registry offices; but Monday's inquiries were no more successful than Saturday's; so she dropped her letter in the post, and felt as many people, especially women, do when an important missive has left them for ever to go to the hands to which it is addressed. It seems so irrevocable, they doubt the wisdom of the step and fear the consequences.

When Jane reached home and told her sister of the application she had sent in, Elsie was horrified at the prospect, and shook her sister's courage still more by the pictures she conjured up of Jane's life at such a place, and of her own without the one dearest to her heart; but after she had said all she could in that way, it occurred to her that if her poems succeeded, as she had no doubt they would, Jane's slavery need but be shortlived. Her work had made great progress during the short time of her sister's absence, and

she continued to apply to it with indefatigable industry. Scarcely would the ardent girl allow herself to think of anything but what to write;—the tension was too severe, but Elsie would take nothing in moderation.

CHAPTER V.

A HUMBLE FRIEND.

THE last week of the Misses Melville's stay at Cross Hall had begun before Jane heard of the result of her application for the matronship of the —— Institution. Mr. Rennie then wrote to her that the directors had appointed a widow, very highly recommended, and apparently very well qualified. Miss Melville's letter had received careful attention, and had favourably impressed all the directors; but her youth and her being unmarried were great objections to her, while the kind of housekeeping she had conducted at her uncle's was not likely to be the best school for the management of an establishment of this kind. Mr. Rennie was very

sorry for Miss Melville's disappointment, but he could not suggest any other situation likely to suit her.

Elsie jumped for joy when she heard of Jane's rejection, and kissed her sister over and over again. "We shall not be parted, darling; you will not go to slave among strangers and to be terrified by mad people. I cannot—really, I cannot do without you—you are my muse and my critic, as well as my best friend and adviser."

Jane was not quite so much exhilarated by her failure as her sister; but Elsie's extravagant delight comforted her not a little. While they were talking over this matter, Jane was called away to receive the linen from the laundress for the last time, and to bid her good-bye. Peggy Walker was somewhat of an authority in the district—a travelled woman, who had been in Australia and back again, and was now living with a family of orphan nephews and nieces, and an old man, their grandfather. Public rumour pronounced her a niggardly

woman, for though she had property she worked as hard as if she had nothing, and took the bread out of other folk's mouths; but as she was really an excellent laundress, she had the best custom in the neighbourhood, and her honesty, her punctuality, and her homely civility, had made her a great favourite with Jane Melville.

"I fear it must be good-bye this time, Peggy," said she; "next week's washing must be given to other hands."

"Eh, now, Miss Jean, ye dinna say so. I heard the new man was coming to the Hall, but no just so very soon as that. But ye are no going out of the place for good?"

"For good or ill, Peggy, we leave Cross Hall next Thursday."

"And where are you going to?"

"I wish I knew."

"Preserve us, Miss Jean! Are you and Miss Elsie, poor bit thing, unacquainted with where you are going to?"

"It is only too true."

"Well, I am going to leave the place too; but I ken well where I am going, and that is to Edinburgh."

"Why are you leaving Swinton? I thought you were doing very well here."

"I don't say that I have any cause to complain of my prosperity here; but, you see, Tam is wild to learn the engineering, and he wants to go to Edinburgh, where he thinks he will learn it best; and I don't just like to let him go by himsel', for though he is no a bad laddie, he is the better of a home and a head to it, and I would like to keep my eye on him. Grandfather makes no objections, and the bairns are all keen for Edinburgh, so I am going to flit next week. As for leaving this place, I am sure I have been growled at quite enough about coming from Australia and taking work away from my old neighbours, so I will try my luck where I don't know who I am taking custom from. I've been in and got a house and a mangle in a nice quiet part of the town, no owre far from Tam's place

where he is going to work, and a healthy bit it looks, too."

"Peggy, I wish I had your confidence and your reason for confidence. I, too, want to go to Edinburgh to try my luck there; but though my uncle spent quite a fortune on my education, and though I did my best to profit by it, I really can see no way of making my living."

"Hout tout," said Peggy, "no fear of you making a living, you could do that as well as me; but it is more than a living for yourself you are wanting; you are thinking of Miss Elsie, poor bit lassie, and would fain work for two. I mind well when my sister left the bairns to my care with her dying breath, I felt my heart owre grit. It was more than I, a single woman, with but seven pounds by the year of wages, could hope to do, to keep the bit creatures; but yet it was borne on my mind that I was to do it, and God be praised that He has given me the strength and the opportunity, and it is little burden they have been to any other body; and in due time, when they have got

learning enough, and are come the length to get the passage, I will take them back with me to Melbourne, where their prospects will be better than in the old country."

"Oh, Peggy! would Australia suit us? Would you advise us to go there?"

"No, Miss Melville, I scarcely think so. For the like of me it is the best place in the world; for the like of you I cannot be at all clear about it. I'll tell you my story some day, but not now, for I am pressed for time, getting everything in readiness for the flitting; and I want time to collect my thoughts; my memory is none of the best. But, Miss Melville, if I am not making too free, I have a little room in my new house that I would be blithe to let you and Miss Elsie have, and you could stay there quietly till something turns up for you."

"If we can afford the rent."

"Oh, the rent!" said Peggy; "you need not think about the rent, if you could only give the lasses a lesson in sewing (for I'm no very skilful with the needle, and my hands are so

rough with the washing and dressing that the thread aye hanks on my fingers), and make out my washing bills for my customers that are not so methodical as yourself. As for writing and counting, it is my abomination. There need no rent pass between us."

"Thank you, Peggy, thank you; that will suit us nicely. But tell me, can we—that is, Elsie and me—can we live in Edinburgh on twenty-four pounds a-year?"

"I have known many a family brought up decently on as little, or even less," said Peggy; "but then they were differently bred from you, and could live hard. Porridge and potatoes, and muslin kail, with a salt herring now and then."

"Well, porridge and potatoes it shall be," said Jane, "for three years, and then starvation, if the world pleases."

"If God pleases, Miss Jane; the chief thing is for us to place our trust in Him," said Peggy.

"You are right, Peggy, I suppose; but it is

hard to unlearn so much old schooling and to accept of new teachings. Did your faith support you when you were perplexed and disappointed—when friends were unfaithful, and the world hard and cruel?"

"My trials have not been just like yours; but whatever God sent, He gave me strength to bear; and it will be the same with you, Miss Jean, if you put yourself humbly in His hands. But the auld laird cared for none of these things; though I am sure when he left you so poorly provided for in this world, he behoved to have given you a good hold of the hope of a better;—besides that, it makes us contented with a very humble lot here below. I am, maybe, too free-spoken, Miss Jean, but I mean no disrespect."

"No offence can be taken where none is meant, Peggy; and friends are too scarce with us now for us to reject any good advice. I am very glad to know that we can subsist on our income, for I have not been accustomed to deal with such small sums."

"You have wealth of clothes, no doubt; enough to last you for a while; so there need be no outlay for that."

"And we have our own furniture—too much, I suppose, for your little room. We can sell the overplus when a push comes. I do not think anything could suit us better than your kind offer."

"I have heard," said Peggy, "that the folk hereabouts think you will be getting up a subscription."

"They are very much mistaken," said Jane; "the hardest living is preferable to that. I wish you could say that Melbourne, or any part of Australia, would do for us. Everybody was surprised when you returned to Swinton so suddenly."

"Well, I could send the bairns more money from Melbourne than I can make for them here, and no doubt the folk thought me foolish to leave such a place; but what good was the money to the poor things when there was no management, for the old man is but silly,

and the bairns had mostly the upper-hand of him, though whiles they did catch it. I have had my own ado with Tam for the last two years. I think I have got the victory now; but I must try and keep it. So, as grandfather dreads the water, I think I will stop in this country while he is to the fore, and meantime the lads and lasses must have their schooling and Tam his trade. But I keep on clavering about my own concerns, while you are in doubt and difficulties about yours. When do you leave Cross Hall?"

"I should like to leave on Wednesday, for my cousin comes to take possession on that day, and Elsie cannot bear any one to see us bidding farewell to our dear old home."

"I cannot just flit before Thursday."

"Well, I suppose we must stay to welcome the new owner; I have no objection to doing so."

"It may be painful to your feelings, Miss Melville, but yet I think it would be but right. There are things you may mention to the new

man that would do good to them that are left behind you. That poor blind widow, Jeanie Weir, that you send her dinner to every day, would miss her dole if it was not kept up; and I know there are more than her that you want to speak a good word for. I hear no ill of this Maister Francis; and though we all grudge him the kingdom he has come into, it may be that he will rule it worthily."

CHAPTER VI.

A BUNDLE OF OLD LETTERS.

ELSIE had a headache when Francis came to take possession of his new home, and scarcely made her appearance; but Jane, who felt none of her sister's shrinking from him, showed him over the house, and told him how it had been managed, hoped he would keep the present servants, and particularly recommended to his care the gardener, who, though rather superannuated and rheumatic, had been forty years in the service of the family, and understood the soil and the treatment of it very well.

He was not only glad to hear what she said, but was resolved to be guided by it, and took a memorandum of her poor pensioners, that they,

at least, should not suffer by Mr. Hogarth's will.

Then she walked with him over the grounds, and pointed out what improvements her uncle had made, and what more he had contemplated making. She was rather deficient in taste for rural beauty. She loved Cross Hall because it was her home, and because she had been happy there, rather than because she fully appreciated the loveliness of the situation and the prospect. Her cousin, townsman as he was, had far more natural taste. It was romantically situated, and the grounds were beautifully laid out; there were pretty hamlets in the distance, gentlemen's country seats embowered in trees, green cornfields, merry brooks, and winding valleys. Francis' eyes and heart were filled with the exceeding beauty of the landscape.

"You must be very sorry to leave all this, Jane," he said.

"I believe that is the least of my troubles. I am more sorry to leave these;" and she led him to the stables, and showed him the two beautiful

horses she and her sister had been accustomed to ride. "You will be kind to them for our sakes, and the dogs, too. I am—we are both—very concerned to part with the dogs."

"Should you not like to take any of them with you?" said Francis, eagerly.

"No, no; dogs such as these would be a nuisance in a crowded little room in Edinburgh, and I do not think they would like such a life, for their own part. You will take better care of them than we could possibly do. But I forget: you have, perhaps, as little affection for animals as I have taste for scenery."

"I am not naturally fond of pets—which is rather strange; for my solitary life should have made me attach myself to the lower animals. But perhaps I am not naturally affectionate. I must cultivate this deficient taste, however; and be assured that anything you have loved will always be cherished by me; and every wish that you may express, or that I can even guess at, that I am allowed to gratify, I will be only too happy to do so. It has been a strange and

stormy introduction we have had to each other; but I am so grateful to you for not hating me, that I chafe still the more at the cruel way in which my hands are tied. I have consulted several eminent lawyers in the hope of being enabled to overturn my father's will, but without success. If a man is not palpably mad he may make as absurd a settlement of his own property as he pleases; and your assertion of your uncle's peculiar opinions tends to support the validity of the testament. Though no one thinks that the disposition of the money will serve the end Mr. Hogarth intended, yet he believed it would, and the spirit and intention of the will must be carried out. Oh, my father! why did you not give me a little love in your lifetime instead of this cursed money after your death?"

"Cousin," said Jane cheerfully, "I believe you will make a good use of this money. As my uncle says, you have served well, and should be able to rule justly and kindly. I do not think so much about the improvement of the property by your taste as of the care you will

take of the condition of the people upon it. This last month has been a hard, but a useful school to me. I have thought more of the real social difficulties of this crowded country than ever I did before. Bringing my own talents and acquirements into the market, and finding myself elbowed out by competition, I think of those who have to do the real hard necessary work of the world with more sympathy and more respect. Not that I ever despised them—you must not imagine me to be so hard-hearted as that; but my feeling for them is deepened and heightened wonderfully of late. Now they are apt to say that *parvenus* are of all men the most exacting and the most purse-proud; and that a mistress who has been a servant is harsher to her female dependants than one who has been accustomed to keep domestics all her life. It is difficult for me to conceive this; but there must be truth in it, or it would not be a proverb in all languages. You will be an exception, Francis. You will have all my uncle's real kindness without his crotchets and his dictatorial manner.

You must not be offended if I call you a *parvenu* in spite of your birth. You have come suddenly into wealth that you were not brought up to expect."

"If I do not recollect my past life, I will certainly remember your present advice whenever I am tempted to think too much of myself and too little of others."

"Everything is to lead to the perfecting of your character, you see," said Jane.

"I cannot bear even improvement at the expense of any one's suffering but my own," said Francis.

"I have been thinking so much about that sermon I heard at your church. I do not know that the preacher brought out the particular point; but we are made such dependent beings, not only on God, but on each other, that we do indirectly profit by what we do not purchase by our own effort or pains. We would not choose to have it so; but when Providence brings on ourselves or others sorrows we grieve for, we are right to draw from them all the good we can.

It is something if my uncle's rather unjust will has given you property with a sobered sense of its privileges and a strong sense of its duties—something to set against Elsie's sufferings and mine. And, besides, the loss of it has done me one great benefit."

"Tell me what," said Francis, eagerly.

"It is quite possible, though I cannot tell how probable, that I might have married a man to whom I am not well suited in any respect, and who was still less adapted to make me happy if I had not been disinherited. I am thus frank with you, cousin Francis, for I should like to give you all the consolation I can."

"And you have been deserted by a lover, as well as impoverished; and you ask me to take consolation from it."

"No, no; nothing so bad as that. I only explained matters to him, and we parted. I am very glad of it. Be you the same," said Jane, looking frankly and cheerfully in her cousin's face, and the cloud passed off it.

"Your sister has no affair of this kind?"

"No; nothing," said Jane.

"And yet she seems to suffer more."

"Not now; she is busy writing a volume of poems that is to make our fortune. Dear Elsie! I hope it may."

"Poems—well, she may succeed; but I have more hope of you than of her."

"Because you know me better; but yet my efforts have all been very fruitless. I am not a judge of poetry, though I like what Elsie writes. I wished her to consent to my taking your opinion as to her verses, but she shrank from it with most unaccountable and, as I thought, unreasonable fear. I wonder how she can bring her work before the public if she dreads one critic."

"It is very natural, Jane. Among the public there may be some to admire, and some to depreciate; but the one critic to whom the author submits his work may be of the latter class, and there seems to be no refuge from him. It is curious to see the revelations of the inner

self that some authors make to the world—revelations that they would often shrink from making to their nearest friends. They appeal to the few in the world who sympathise with them, and disregard the censure of all the rest. And recollect that, though to you I am a friend, your sister has seen very little of me, and her first impression was exceedingly painful. If you have told her I am a good judge of poetry, she will be all the more averse to submit her compositions to my criticism, for my opinion might bias yours, and yours is her greatest comfort and encouragement. No one can wish her success more earnestly than I do. But for yourself, what are your present intentions?"

"If it were not for leaving Elsie, I might try for a situation as housekeeper in a large establishment; I know I am fully competent for that. I should prefer something by which I could rise, but the choice may not be given to me. We go to Edinburgh to-morrow. I do not think the small room we are going to will hold all the furniture we are entitled to, so will

you be good enough to let what we cannot accommodate remain at Cross Hall till we can send for it?"

"Certainly; you had better lock up your room with your own things in it, and take the key," said Francis.

"No, no; I am housekeeper enough to know that all rooms must have occasional air and sunshine. I can trust either yourself or the housemaid with the key, knowing well that everything will be kept safe."

"Where are you going to live?"

"With a very humble friend in —— street."

"That is very near where my earliest recollections of life in Edinburgh found me situated."

"Do you remember your mother at all?"

"I am not quite sure; but I think I have some shadowy recollection of a place before I came to Edinburgh, where I think I was with my mother."

"Do you think she is alive now?"

"Mr. MacFarlane says he believes she is. Do you think I should try to discover her?"

"Alive all these years, and never taking any care or notice of you! Very unmotherly on her part!" said Jane, thoughtfully.

"No one knows how she may be situated—her relations with my father must have been very miserable. I cannot tell who was most to blame—but if she were in distress, and I could help her, I am not forbidden to do that, though Mr. MacFarlane strongly advises me to make no inquiry."

"I think, if she hears of your inheriting Cross Hall, she is likely to come forward if she needs assistance, and you certainly should give it."

"I wish very much to look over Mr. Hogarth's private papers. Mr. MacFarlane has given me the keys of all his repositories. I particularly wish you to go over them all with me, as there may be many that concern you far more than myself. Could you spare me a few hours to-day for that purpose? I am in hopes that we may find some clue to this marriage, and perhaps some hint that might guide me in my conduct to my mother, supposing she is still

alive. If I could find anything that would upset or modify the will, I am sure your happiness in the discovery would be less than mine."

The long and patient search which extended over the greater part of two days discovered nothing whatever at all definite with regard to Francis' birth. No scrap of writing could be found that could be supposed to be from his mother. An old bundle of papers marked outside, "Francis' school bills, &c." was all that rewarded their search, and they gave no information except that his education had cost his father a considerable sum of money.

A packet of letters in a female hand, with a French post-mark, was eagerly opened by the cousins, and contained a number of long and confidential letters from a Marguerite de Véricourt, which extended over a number of years, and stopped at the year when Jane and Elsie came to live with their uncle. Jane's knowledge of French was better than her cousin's, and the sight of the words "*le pauvre François*" arrested her attention in the first she opened.

"We have come to something at last," said she, and she translated the passage, "'I am glad to hear that the poor Francis is doing so well at school—surely you must learn to love him a little now. My Arnauld grows very intelligent; and Clemence, with no teaching but my own, makes rapid progress.' That is all; your name is not mentioned again in this letter. We must go on to the next."

Letter after letter was glanced over, and then translated, because though there was little mention of the poor Francis, but such a short allusion to something Mr. Hogarth had written about him as was found in the first letter, there was much that was very interesting in them all. They were written with that curious mixture of friendship and love, so natural and easy to Frenchwomen, and so difficult to Englishwomen. Madame de Véricourt appeared to be a widow with two children, a boy and girl. Her letters showed her to be a capable and cultivated woman, passionately attached to her children, living much in society for part of the year in

Paris, but spending the summer in a country château, where she became a child again with the little ones. She wrote about her affairs, and her children's, as if she were in the habit of transacting business, and thoroughly understood it, and as if she knew Mr. Hogarth's whole history and circumstances, and took a very affectionate interest in them. She reminded him frequently of conversations they had had together, of long walks and excursions they had taken in company; her children sent messages to her good friend, and she took notice of expressions in his letters which had pleased or disappointed her.

For herself, she had been unhappily married when extremely young; but before the correspondence had begun she had been for some years a widow, and she was fully aware of the position of Mr. Hogarth. The most interesting letter of all was the last, which appeared to have been written in answer to his, telling of his resolution to adopt his sister's children; and she seemed very much delighted at the idea.

"Since you say that you cannot bring yourself to love the poor Francis, whom, nevertheless, my heart yearns after, and of whom I love to hear even the meagre details you give to me, I rejoice, my friend, that you have made a home for your sister's sweet little girls. You must have something to love. Ah! to me my Arnauld and my Clemence brought unspeakable comfort. I do not think of them as Philippe de Véricourt's children; they are the children whom God has given to me. I do not watch fearfully, lest his ungovernable temper and his selfish soul should be reproduced in them. I trust that God will make them good and happy, and aid me in my efforts towards that end. You cannot separate the idea of Francis from that of the woman who cheated you, and did not love you; who has blighted your hopes of domestic happiness; and who still, even from a distance, has the power to threaten you with exposing the disgrace that you are connected with her. I am sorry that you cannot feel as I do; but if you can love these little girls, it may

make you softer towards him. When you wrote to me of your poor Mary's sad death, and of the sadder life that had preceded it, I began to wonder whether, after all, your system of free choice in marriage produces greater happiness or greater misery than ours of a marriage settled by our parents.

"I recollect how bitterly I felt that I had been made over, without my wishes or tastes being consulted, to a man who cared so little for my happiness; but at least I had no illusion to be dispelled; I did not marry as your sister did, hoping to find Elysium, and landing in hopeless misery; and yet my parents loved me after their fashion. I have often thought that those whom we love, and who love us, have far more power to injure us than those who hate us; but, alas! neither friends nor enemies can injure us more than we do ourselves. Your sister Mary had the disenchantment to go through; I had to chafe at the coercion; while you, my friend, had to muse bitterly on the consequence of one rash speech of your own, which

chained you to an unworthy and detested wife.

"I think we need a future state that we may do justice to ourselves in it quite as much as to repair the wrongs we may have done to others. Which of us has really made the best of himself or herself? I try now for the sake of my children to be cheerful; but sad and bitter memories are too deeply interwoven with my being for me to succeed as I should wish. If I live, I hope that the fate of my Clemence may be happier than her mother's, so far as the state of society in France will allow of it: I will give her a choice, and, at any rate, a power of refusing even what appears to me to be a suitable marriage; for no doubt it is better for an intelligent and responsible human being to choose its own destiny, and to run its own risks. I fancy that the mistake in your English society is, that your girls have apparently the freedom of choice without being trained to make good use of it. If your sister Mary was as inexperienced and as ignorant as I was at the time when my

parents gave me to M. de Véricourt, she could not distinguish between the selfish fortune-hunter and the true lover; the conventional manners were all the same, and she chose for herself a life of misery. Your interference only roused the spirit of opposition, and without preventing the marriage, made your brother-in-law regard you with more dislike and suspicion. Ah! my friend, when I see a young girl about to be married, my heart is full of anxieties for her—I know the risk she runs. But I did not feel them much for myself. I grew into the knowledge of my unhappiness as I grew in knowledge of what might have been; but the recluse life of a French girl prevents her from expecting much from marriage but an increase of consequence. With us it is a step from tutelage to liberty—from nonenity to importance. It cannot be quite so much so in England; but, from the greater prevalence of celibacy, it has even more *éclat* and prestige than here, where marriage is the rule. The *trousseau*, the presents, the congratulations, the going into society under the

interesting circumstances of an engagement, must divert a girl's attention from the really serious nature of the connection she is forming.

"You will have pleasure in educating your little girls. Make them strong in body and independent in mind if you can. They are likely to be handsome, intelligent, and, if you continue to be prejudiced against poor Francis, rich. Give them more knowledge and more firmness than their poor mother had. I have no doubt that they will grow up good, for you will be kind to them. Girls all turn out well if you give them good training in a happy home; but as for happiness, that depends so much on their choice in marriage, that all you have done for them may be thrown away, if you do not educate them to be something more than amiable and pleasing companions. They must be trained to feel that they are responsible beings: let their reading be as various, their education as comprehensive, as you would give to boys of their rank. You know that ignorance is not innocence, and that some knowledge of the world is neces-

sary to all of us if we are to pass safely through it. I am glad to hear that Jane so much resembles you, and that Alice is so like her mother, and that you find their dispositions amiable and remarkably sincere.

"I have told you that I have difficulties with Clemence in the matter of truthfulness. She cannot bear to say or to do what she fancies will be disagreeable or painful to any one. She fears, if she does so, that she will not be loved; but I I think I am succeeding in convincing her that we must learn to bear pain, and occasionally to inflict it. When I stood over her last night with a cup of bitter medicine she drank it like an angel, and I said to her, 'My love, I taste this bitter taste with you, and would rather that I had not to give it to you; but if I, or any one whom you love, needs it, you must learn the courage to present it.'

"Arnauld disobeyed my orders one day last week, and played with his ball in the drawing-room, and broke a vase that I prized highly. Clemence took the blame on herself, for she

thought I should be less displeased with her than with her brother; but she was not sufficiently skilful to hide the truth. Her *bonne* was enraptured with her generosity, and embraced her with the *empressement* which is so ridiculous to your insular ideas; but Clemence saw that I was not pleased.

"'Mamma," said she, 'is it not right that I should bear something for Arnauld? I thought you would be so angry with him.'

"'More angry than he deserves?' said I.

"'No, mamma; but I thought he would feel it so much: and even if you were as angry with me, and punished me as severely as you would have chastised him, I should have felt that I did not deserve it.'

"'And that, on the contrary, you were very generous?'

"'Yes, mamma.'

"'Then Arnauld would have escaped altogether, and you would have borne any pain like a martyr?'

"'But would not Arnauld have loved me for it?'

"'I do not know, Clemence,' said I, 'He knew, when he did the mischief, that I would be displeased, and it is just and right that he should take the consequences. A noble soul feels a certain satisfaction in bearing deserved punishment, but it can never rejoice in the punishment of another for its fault. I know you meant kindly; but, my love, you should make no unnecessary sacrifices. Providence will bring to you many opportunities of giving up your wishes, and of bearing a great deal for others, but it must never be done at the sacrifice of truth.'

"Clemence was much impressed with what I said to her; and Arnauld, too, seemed to feel that it would have been mean to have taken advantage of his sister's mistaken generosity. I labour to make them think for themselves, for I often fear that my life will not be spared to guide them much longer. When you come again to France, bring with you your little girls. I have spoken to my children about them, and they are eager to become acquainted with them."

At the end of this letter was written, in Mr. Hogarth's handwriting, "Died, October 14th, 18—," shortly after the date of the letter.

"I wish," said Jane, "that my uncle had shown me these letters; but I suppose there are some things that one cannot tell to another person."

"There is no encouragement here to induce me to make inquiries about my mother," said Francis. "I think, for the present, I will let that matter rest."

CHAPTER VII.

UP AND DOWN.

When Jane had spoken of 20,000*l.* each, as the probable fortune of herself and her sister, if their uncle had made his will in their favour, she rather under than over estimated the value of Mr. Hogarth's property. She had expected that many legacies to old servants and bequests to several charitable institutions might have been left, and there still would have been that handsome sum for his adopted children. Francis Hogarth found that he had come into possession of a compact little estate in a very fine part of the country, a small part of which estate had been farmed by the proprietor, who had tried

various experiments on it with various success. There was also money invested in the funds, and money laid out in railway shares, as well as a considerable sum in the bank for any present necessity, or to be spent in the improvement of the property.

Elsie had expressed a doubt of her cousin's getting into society; but there appeared to be no likelihood of any of the country gentry looking down on the new laird of Cross Hall. The visiting acquaintance of people of sufficient standing in and about Swinton had consisted of twenty four marriageable ladies and only four marriageable gentlemen, even including William Dalzell, who was known to be both poor and extravagant, and an old bachelor proprietor, nearly as old as Mr. Hogarth, senior, and as unlikely to marry. Parties in the country were greatly indebted to striplings and college students home for holidays to represent the male sex. They could dance, and could do a little flirtation, and thought much more of themselves than they ought to do; but as for marrying, that was

out of the question. An exchange of two heiresses for one heir of Cross Hall could not but be considered to be an advantageous one. It was not in human nature that the young ladies themselves, and their fathers and mothers, and party-givers generally, should not be eager to know Francis Hogarth, and be more than civil to him. The court that is paid to any man who is believed to be in a position to marry, is one of the most distressing features in British society; it is most mischievous to the one sex, and degrading to the other. Long, long may it be before we see anything like it in the Australian colonies!

No doubt, if it is excusable anywhere, it is so in country or provincial society in Scotland. "We cannot help spoiling the men"—says a distressed party-giver in these latitudes, conscious that this state of things is not right, and half-ashamed of herself for giving in to it—"there are really so few of them." The sons of families of the middle and upper classes as they grow up are sent out to India, to the army,

to America, or to the Australian colonies. Even when they do not leave the kingdom, they leave the neighbourhood, and go to large towns, where they may practise a profession or enter into business with some chance of success. Their sisters remain at home with no business, no profession, no object in life, and no hope of any change except through marriage. Many of their contemporaries never return, but settle in the colonies or die there; but, if they do return with money—perhaps with broken constitutions and irritable tempers from India—they still consider themselves too young to look at the women with whom they flirted and danced before they left the old country, and select some one of a different generation, who was perhaps a baby at that time. Fathers and mothers see too clearly the advantages of an establishment to object to the disparity of years and the state of the liver, while the girl, fluttered into importance (as Madame de Véricourt says) by presents, and jewels, and shawls, thinks herself a most fortunate woman, particularly if she

is not required to go to India, but can have a good position at home.

So when a young man, not more than thirty-four, rather handsome, of good character, and apparently good temper, intelligent and agreeable, who went to church the first Sunday after he came to Cross Hall, and who was the legitimate heir to the old family of Hogarth, came to settle in the county as a neighbour, his having been clerk in a bank for eighteen years was not looked on as a drawback. He was all the more likely to take good care of his money now he had got it; and calls and invitations came from every quarter. Mr. and Mrs. Rennie, who had had visions of his being exactly the person to suit their Eliza, had a month's start of the country neighbours; but they feared the result of his being thrown among such families as the Chalmerses, the Maxwells, the Crichtons, and the Jardines. He had asked the Rennies to pay him a visit at Cross Hall in the autumn, when they always took a run to the country or to the seaside, and had accompanied his invita-

tion with a request, that if his cousins came to Edinburgh, the Rennies would show them some kindness and attention, which they readily promised to do.

If Mrs. Rennie had known his secret feelings towards the country families, she might have set her mind at rest as to their rivalry; but Francis was very reserved, and his training had not led him to place confidence in any one, till his heart had recently opened to his cousin Jane. He received the visits of his new neighbours civilly, and accepted their invitations; but the conduct of these people towards the disinherited girls made him secretly repel their advances towards his prosperous self. It appeared to show such barefaced worldliness and selfishness, that he shrank from the most insinuating speeches and the most flattering attentions.

He did not know how much of the coldness of Jane and Elsie's old neighbours proceeded from the dislike and suspicion with which Mr. Hogarth's religious opinions, or rather his reli-

gious scepticism, was regarded in a particularly orthodox district. They had exchanged formal visits, and had invited each other to large parties, because not to do so would have been unneighbourly; but with none of the people about Swinton had there ever been any familiar intimacy. Jane and Elsie were supposed to be deeply tinged with their uncle's heresies, and they were such very strange girls, having been so strangely brought up; and having no mother or female relative to exert any influence, their uncle had brought them up like boys, which everybody thought very improper. Emilia Chalmers, who was musical, could not get on with them at all; the three Miss Jardines, who were very amiable girls, with nothing in them, could not tell whether to call them blues or hoydens; their Latin and algebra on the one hand, and their swimming-bath, and their riding about the country without a groom on the other, made them altogether so unfeminine. Their uncle thought they were quite able to take care of themselves and of each other, and fancied

more mischief might arise from the attendance of a groom than could result from his absence; and the girls cared for no company in their rides till William Dalzell had offered his escort and made himself so agreeable.

Miss Maxwell and the Crichtons had failed to make either Jane or Elsie take any interest in a theological dispute on a point of doctrine between some neighbouring ministers which was agitating all Swinton at the time; and when at last Jane was forced to give an opinion on one side or the other, she gave it quite on the contrary side from the right one, so that they were sure the girls were quite as bad as their uncle. Both girls had been educated to express themselves very clearly and decidedly; whereas, as Emilia Chalmers says, whenever a young lady gives an opinion it should always be delivered *sotto voce*, that is, under the powers of the performer's voice, to borrow an image from her musical vocabulary. Even if she does know a thing very well, she should keep her knowledge in the background; there is a graceful timidity

that is far more attractive than such unladylike confidence.

"Depend upon it, gentlemen do not like it," Miss Jardine would say. "If Jane Melville were not an heiress, do you think William Dalzell would submit to her airs? I know him better than that."

But, yet, when the girls were shown to be no heiresses, every one was very sorry for them. If a subscription had been got up to assist them in their difficulties, there was no one who would not have given something. Even the Misses Crichton and Miss Maxwell would have subscribed as much as they did to the Foreign Missions, and that was no inconsiderable sum; and if Jane and Elsie had thrown themselves on the compassion of the neighbourhood, there were many who would have offered them a temporary home. But they preserved their independent spirit even though they were not heiresses, and could not sue *in formâ pauperis*. It was a subject of much conversation that the Misses Melville had preferred to go with Peggy Walker,

the laundress, to some poor place in the old town of Edinburgh, to making any application for assistance to people of their own sphere. What they could do under Peggy's auspices was not likely to be of a very brilliant description.

It is not to be supposed that Peggy Walker was not as good a judge of orthodoxy as the Misses Crichton and Miss Maxwell, but she had not so great a horror of the family at Cross Hall as they had; she had been for several years out of her own parish and country, and had learned some toleration. As she said, the old laird was a just man and a kind, and until he made his will she had no fault to find with him; and as for the young ladies, they were just the cleverest and the tenderest-hearted to the poor of all the gentry in the country-side. Many a tale of distress had Peggy told them, and had never failed to find the girls open their purses, or go to see the poor people. They had a liberal allowance, and had no extravagant tastes in dress; but their charities had been so extensive that at the time of their uncle's death, there was

no great balance in either girl's hands. They knew that Peggy was no niggardly woman, but a most liberal one according to her means and her opportunities—that she gave personal services out of a very busy life, and money, too, out of an income that had many claims on it.

The house-servants and the labourers in Mr. Hogarth's immediate employment were very sad at parting with the young ladies, who had always been so kind and so considerate. If the neighbours had thought the girls proud, none of the servants did. If Francis had not tried hard to please them all, and to make them feel that he regarded them for the sake of those who had been before him, it would not have been likely that he would have gained their good opinion; but he succeeded in doing so.

Peggy Walker thought she had got into a very snug and comfortable dwelling in a flat in —— street, and when she gave what she considered the most cheerful-looking apartment to the young ladies as their sleeping-room, she certainly did all she could for their accommoda-

tion. The old man, Thomas Lowrie, was particularly pleased with the look-out to the street. He could sit in his own chair and see all the bustle of life going on below, and made little complaint of the noise at first. The five children thought there was nothing so charming as running up and down the common stair, and were quite proud of their elevated position in the world; but the Misses Melville could not but feel an immense difference between their own ideas of comfort and those of the humble family with whom they lived. The floors were clean, and the stairs, too, after a fashion; but the coarse dark-coloured boards could not be made to look white. The walls which Peggy's own hands had sized of a dark-brown colour looked rough, and cracked, and gloomy. They were aware that their scanty means did not allow them to indulge in any separate meals or attendance, and Jane and Elsie began as they meant to go on, and shared the homely meals in the homely home. They had never thought that they had any luxurious tastes; but the very

plain fare and the inelegant service seemed to take away even the natural healthy appetite of youth. The noise of the children, and the querulous voice of their grandfather, with Peggy's sharp, decisive remarks, were all different from the respectful silence with which they had been attended at Cross Hall. Peggy was anxious to make the girls as happy as she could, and feared that they must feel this a downcome; but her hands were full of work, and her head of cares. She had made her venture in the world, too, and, with so many dependent on her, it was a considerable risk. They could not help admiring the wonderful patience which she had with the old man, who was not her own father, but merely the father-in-law of her dead sister. She allowed him a weekly modicum of snuff, and was particular that Tom, or one of the others, should read the Bible or the news to him in a clear, distinct voice, that the old man might be able to hear all of it. In all little things she gave way to him, but in all great and grave matters she judged and acted for herself, whatever

grumbling might follow. Over the children she kept a very careful watch; and even when she was absent on necessary business, her influence was felt in the household.

After the first day was over, and the girls had gone to their own room for the evening, Elsie broke out with—

"Jane, this is dreadful! How different from what I imagined poor people's lives to be! Nothing beautiful or graceful about it. Poets and novelists write such fine things about poverty and honest toil, and throw a halo of romance about them."

"Yet Peggy is above the average—far above the average," said Jane, thoughtfully: "these children are better taught and better mannered than three-fourths of the peasantry in Scotland, but yet it is a great change to us, a very great change."

"I am sure they might be a great deal better than they are. Oh, Jane, I really can eat nothing served up as it is done here; and that grumbling old man's Kilmarnock nightcap, and

his snuff, are enough to disgust one. Even at tea did you notice Peggy stirring the teacup with such vigour, and balancing her saucer in the palm of her hand?"

"I never fancied there was so much in little things," said Jane; "but we must get over our fastidiousness—we must indeed. It is a pity we were brought up so softly and delicately, though we thought we were so remarkably hardened by our uncle's training."

"I cannot even write to-night," said Elsie. "Everything looks so sordid and miserable, and the town here is so dirty and mean."

"We must walk out to-morrow a good long way—you know what beautiful walks we used to have all around Edinburgh. We must breathe fresh air and poetical inspiration."

"I wish I could write," said Elsie, turning over her sheets of manuscript. "I have been able to write a little every day since I began, no matter how grieved or anxious I have been. Who is it says that genius is nothing but industry? and I have been so industrious! I

must try to write to-night; we are settled as far as we can expect to be settled for some time, and I ought to begin as I mean to go on."

"No, my dear, you feel disappointed and disenchanted to-night; do not think of writing. Your work ought to be done at your best moments. To-morrow is a new day, and I believe it will be a fine one: sleep till to-morrow."

"But I cannot sleep either."

"Rest, then, as I mean to do."

A little tap at the door announced Peggy.

"Is there anything I can do for you, young ladies?"

"Nothing, thank you, Peggy, but come in," said Jane.

She entered, and found Elsie hurriedly gathering together her manuscript, with a heightened colour and some agitation. Love letters were the only conceivable cause of a girl's blushing over anything she had been writing, to Peggy's unsophisticated mind. "I should not interrupt

you, Miss Elsie; I did not know you had letters to write."

"It is not letters," said Jane; "she is writing a book."

"A book! Well, that is not much in my line; but no doubt books are things that are wanted in the world, or there would not be such printing-houses and grand shops for making and selling them. And you are expecting to get a price for that, Miss Elsie?"

"I hope so."

"Well, it is more genteel work than what I have been used to; but the pen was always a weariness to me. I thought shame of myself when I was in Australia, that I could write nothing to the bit creatures that I was spending my life for, but just that I was weel, and hoped they were the same, and bidding them be good bairns, and obedient and dutiful to their grandfather and grandmother, and that they should mind what the master said to them at school; and then I would send kind regards to two or three folk in the country-side, and signed myself

their affectionate aunt, Margaret Walker. But, dear me! I should have said fifty things forbye that senseless stuff. I am thinking, Miss Jane and Miss Elsie, that if they had been your nephews and nieces, and you had been parted from them by all these thousands of miles of land and water, that your letters would have been twice as often and ten times as long, full of good advice and loving words. I have heard bonnie letters read to me. I marvelled greatly at them—everything so smooth and so distinct, just as if the two were not far apart, but had come together for an hour or so, and the one just spoke by word of mouth all that the other wanted most to hear. I would like the bairns learned to write well and fast, for when the pen is slow, the heart cannot find utterance. I have heard worse letters even than my own, full of repetitions and stupid messages, and nothing said of what the body that got the letters wanted most to hear. There is a very great odds in letters, Miss Melville, and mine were so useless and so bare, that I thought it

better to sacrifice a good deal of money and come home to attend to the bairns myself, and to counsel them by word of mouth."

"Peggy, you have had adventures," said Jane: "I wish you could tell my sister and me all that happened to you when you were in Australia. Your life may be useful to us in many ways."

"Not to put into a book, I hope," said Peggy suspiciously. "I have no will to be put into a book."

"No fear of that," said Elsie.

"It's poetry you're writing, like Robbie Burns's. I can see the lines are different lengths. I'm thinking you'll have no call to make any poetry on me, so I may tell you my story. It may make you think on somebody or something out of your own troubles."

"It was a great wonder to the Swinton people that you returned a single woman," said Jane. "They say Australia is the country to be married in."

"I might have been married over and over

again, up the country, and in Melbourne too," said Peggy; "but you see I had the thought of the bairns on my head, and I did not feel free to change my condition. Some of them said if I likit them well enough I could trust to their doing better for the young folk than I could myself; but I never let myself like them well enough to trust them so far, though one or two of them were very likely men, and spoke very fair."

"Perhaps when you return to Australia you may make it up with one of them yet," said Elsie, who, in spite, of her depression, felt some curiosity as to Peggy's love passages.

"The best of them married before I left Melbourne, like a sensible man, who knew better than to wait on my convenience. I see, Miss Elsie, you are wondering that the like of me, that never was what you would call well-favoured, should speak of offers, and sweet-hearts, and such like; but in Australia it's the busy hand and careful eye that is the great attraction for a working man. I never had

much daffing or nonsense about me, and did not like any of it in other folk, but I had lots of sweethearts. But I'll tell you the whole story, as neither of you look the least sleeprie, and if I am owre long about it ye may just tell me so, and I'll finish it up the morn's night."

So Peggy sat down to tell her tale, while Elsie crept down on a little footstool, and laid her head in her sister's lap, glad to receive the fondling which Jane instinctively bestowed on her dependent and affectionate sister.

CHAPTER VIII.

PEGGY WALKER'S ADVENTURES.

"You see, Miss Jean and Miss Elsie, that my sister Bessie and me were always very much taken up with one another; she was a good bit aulder than me, and as my mother died when I was six years old, she was like a mother to me. I'll no say that she clapped and petted me as you are doing to your sister, Miss Jean, nor that she had the gentle ways of speaking that gentlefolks have; but verily, to use the words of Scripture, 'our souls were knit together in love,' and we thought nothing too great to do or to bear for one another. Bessie was far bonnier than me, but scarcely so stout; and Willie Lowrie, that had been at the school with her,

and a neighbour's son, courted her, when they came to man's and woman's estate, for a long time. My father was a cotter on Sandyknowe farm, a worthy, God-fearing man, but sore distressed with the rheumatics, that came upon him long before he was an old man, and often laid him off work. His sons went about their own business; and he used to say that though they might help him in the way of money nows and thens, it was from his two lasses that he had the most comfort. Bessie waited till I was grown up and at service in a good place, where I pleased the mistress, before she married Willie. My father went home with her, and lived but three years afterwards, saying always that Bessie and Willie were good bairns to him, and his grey hairs went down to the grave in peace.

"But, wae-sakes! bairns came to Bessie thick and fast, and Willie took a bad cough, and fell into a decline. He just wasted away, and died one cold winter day, leaving her with four young things, and another coming. Bessie

did not fold her hands in idle lamentation when the desire of her eyes was removed with a stroke. No, she went to the outwork, and wrought double hard; owre hard, poor thing, for after little Willie was born she never looked up. And then and there I vowed to God and to her that I would do a mother's part by her orphans as long as life was vouchsafed to me.

"Willie's father and mother had left Sandyknowe, and gone to a place about forty miles off. They were living poorly enough, but they came to me in my desolation, and offered to take the bairns if we—that is, my brothers and me—would help whiles with money to get them through. But, you see, James and Sandy were married men, with families of their own, and Robert and Daniel were like to be married soon, and it was borne on my mind that I was to be the chief person to be depended on.

"I went home to my place at Greenwells. It was a big farmhouse, and I was kitchenmaid, and had the milking of the kye, and the making of the butter and cheese to do, and such like,

and Mrs. Henderson said that I was a faithful industrious lass. But, dear me! what was seven pounds by the year to maintain the bairns? I thought over it and over it on the Sabbath night after I came home. I tried to read—the 14th of John's Gospel—but my heart would be troubled and afraid in spite of those bonnie consoling words. I knew the old people, the Lowries, were not the best hands for bringing up the bairns, for they were so poor. I had no money—not a penny—for you may guess that in my sister's straits I kept none in the shuttle of my chest, and no way of keeping a house over their heads by myself could I see. Mrs. Henderson came into the kitchen with Miss Thomson. You know Miss Thomson of Allendale. She was on a visit to the mistress; they are connections, you know.

"'Well, Peggy,' said Mrs. Henderson, 'I see you are just fretting, as usual.'

"'I'm no fretting, ma'am, I'm praying,' said I.

"'The best thing you can do,' said Miss Thomson.

"'Of course it is,' said Mrs. Henderson, 'provided it does not hinder work, and Peggy is neglecting nothing.'

"'I wish, ma'am, that you would let me take the housemaid's place, as well as my own; I can do more work if you would raise my wages.'

"'Nonsense, Peggy,' said the mistress, 'you are busy from morning till night; you cannot possibly do more than you are doing now. You cannot be in two places at once.'

"'No, ma'am, but I could take less sleep. I am stronger than ever I was; and I have so many to work for. The bairns-maid and me could manage all the housework.'

"Mrs. Henderson shook her head, and said it was not to be thought of, but she did not mind raising my wages to eight pounds by the year, for I was a good servant; and with that I had to be content—at least, I tried.

"Next day a fat turkey had to be killed and plucked, and I had an old newspaper to burn for singeing the feathers. I could not but look at the newspaper, when I had it in my hand, and

the first thing that struck my eye was, that domestic servants, especially if they were skilful about a dairy, might get a free passage to Melbourne, by applying to such a person, at such a place, and that their wages when they got out to Australia would be from sixteen to twenty-five pounds by the year. It was borne on my mind that I should go to Australia from the moment I cast eyes on that paragraph in the paper. I did not just believe everything that was in print, especially in the newspapers, even in those days; for I knew the real size of the big turnip that was grown in Mr. Henderson's field, and it was not much more than half what the 'Courier' had it down for, but I felt convinced that I should inquire about this matter of free passage to Australia. It was a providence that Miss Thomson was stopping in the house at the time, for she was a woman of by-ordinary discretion and great kindness; so I opened my mind to her, and she said I was right, and gave me a letter to the agent, who was a far-away cousin of her own, and three pounds in money forbye,

to buy fitting things for the voyage; and she told me how I was to send money home for the youngsters, and wrote a line to a friend of hers that lived close to the Lowries, asking her to look whiles to see that the bairns were well and thriving.

"It is not often that I greet, Miss Jean, but Miss Thomson twice brought the tears to my eyes, first with her kindness when I left Scotland, and again with her kindness when I came back, and brought her, no the siller—I would not shame her with giving back what had really been life and hope to myself and five orphan bairns—but some curious birds that I had got up the country, that she sets great store by. I told her how I had got on, and what had induced me to come back; I told her that I never could pay back my debt to her, and would not try to do it, but that if we prospered, there had been much of it her doing; and she said she admired nothing so much as my resolution and courage in going to Australia, until she admired still more my resolution and self-denial

in coming back. I do not think much of flattery, Miss Elsie—they say it is very sweet to the young and the bonnie—but these words of praise from a good woman like Miss Thomson made my heart swell and my eyes overflow. You have been at Allendale, Miss Jean; you must have seen the birds in the lobby."

Jane had been too much engrossed with her own affairs during her only visit to Miss Thomson to observe Peggy's birds, but she drew a good omen from the coincidence of Miss Thomson's assistance being given so frankly to two women both in distress and in doubt.

"How did you like the voyage, Peggy?" asked Jane.

"It is queer how that voyage has faded out of my mind, and yet it was a long one—over five months; they know the road better now, and do it quicker. I was not more than four months coming back in a bigger ship. I mind we had a storm, and all the women on board were awful feared, and a boy was washed overboard, and there was some ill-blood between the

captain and the doctor; but all that I could think on was to get to the end of the voyage, and make money to send home to the bairns.

"Well, to Melbourne we got at last, and a shabby place I thought it looked; but the worst of all was, that such wages as had been spoken of in the papers were not to be had at all, for if ever the folk there are in great want of anything, there seems to be abundance of it before it can be sent out; so I could not get the offer of more than thirteen pounds, and I mourned over the distance, and the five months lost on the passage, with such small advantage at the end of it. I said I wanted a hard place. I had no objections to go to the bush—I dreaded neither natives, nor snakes, nor bushrangers, but I behoved to make good wages. I was explaining this at the Agency Labour Office, when a gentleman came in—an Englishman I knew him to be by his tongue—and he said—

"'Like all new comers, this young woman is greedy of filthy lucre.'

"'I have come here to better my condition,' said I.

"'And so you will, in time,' said the gentleman, 'but you must not expect a fortune all at once.'

"'Are you in want of a servant, sir?' said I.

"'Very much; but I don't know that you will suit me.'

"'I'm thinking,' said I, 'that if the mistress were to see me she would be of a different opinion, sir.'

"'Very likely she would. I dare say Mrs. Brandon would highly approve of you. Perhaps, after all, you will do. What are you?'

"'Plain cook, laundress, and dairymaid,' said I.

"'Age? Mrs. Brandon would like to know.'

"'Twenty-five. I have got five years' character from one place, and three from another, and a testimonial from the minister. I may look rough, with just being off the sea, sir, but I think the mistress will find out that I am fit for any kind of work. I am not afraid of work or distance, or solitude, or anything.'

"'You are a trump,' said he, 'a regular brick; but confess that you are greedy. If I say thirty pounds a year, you will go more than a hundred miles up the country?' That was a great distance from town in those days, Miss Jean, though they think nothing of it now. All my fellow-passengers objected to such distances, but I had no objection.

"'Yes, sir,' said I, cheerfully, 'I will go, and be much beholden to you for the offer.'

"'And start to-morrow, wages to commence then?' said he.

"'The sooner the better,' said I. 'Only, if I want to send siller to my friends I may not be able to do it from such a wild place.'

"'I will manage all that for you,' said the gentleman. 'I am accustomed to do it for one of my shepherds. But recollect you will have to do a great deal of work for your high wages. The cows are wild, and must be bailed up and foot-roped. You may get an ugly kick or butt'——

"'As if I had never seen Highland kyloes!

I am not at all feared. Providence will protect me on land, as it has protected me by water. After five months of the sea, with only a plank between me and eternity, you cannot terrify me with kye.'

"'We have few conveniences for saving labour; but I see I need not explain anything to you; you can think of nothing but your thirty pounds a year; so, Mr. What's-your-name, draw up the agreement for a year.'

"The agreement was drawn out and signed Walter Brandon and Margaret Walker, and the next day I was on the road, if road you could call it, for the like of it you never saw—sometimes rough and tangled, sometimes soft and slumpy, sometimes scrubby and stony. I marvelled often that they kept in the tracks. I rode on the top of a dray through the day, and slept under it at night. There were four men with us; two of them were inclined to be rough; but I soon let them see that they would need to keep a civil tongue in their heads to deal with me. We were nigh a fortnight on the

road, but somehow I did not weary of that as I did of the voyage, for my wages were going on, and something making for the bairns of that journey."

CHAPTER IX.

PEGGY WALKER'S ADVENTURES.

"It was near dark on a Saturday when we got to Barragong, which was the name of Mr. Brandon's station. The master had got home long before us, for he had gone on his horse.

"'Well, Peggy,' said he, as I got off the dray, 'how do you like bush travelling? Slow, but sure, is it not?'

"'Uncommonly slow,' said I.

"'Why, you have got worse burnt on the top of the dray than even on shipboard. Spoiled your beauty, Peggy.'

"'My beauty is of no manner of consequence,' said I, 'it has not broke my work arm,

and that is more to the purpose. Will you please, Sir, to ask the mistress to show me the kitchen?'

"'You ask to see what is not to be seen,' said the master. 'There is no kitchen to speak of, and as for the mistress, it is a pure invention of your own.'

"'No mistress?' I gasped out; 'ye spoke of Mrs. Brandon.'

"'It was you that spoke of her, Peggy; and as I hope in time to have such a person on the premises, I made bold to say that you would suit her, and in the meantime I dare say we will get on very well. You will be really the mistress here, for there is not another woman within twenty miles.'

"I started back, fairly cowed at the thought of being in that wild place alone, among I knew not how many men of all sorts of characters.

"'It was not fair of you, Sir,' I said; 'I never thought but what you were married when you took me up so natural.'

"'But really, Peggy, you are the very

person we want here, and I can make it worth your while to stay. You want good wages, and you will get them; you are not a child, and you can take care of yourself. It is hard that because I am so unlucky as to have no wife, I am to have neither cleanliness nor comfort. Make the best of a bad bargain, Peggy; I confess that your eagerness after good wages led me too far, but I felt the temptation strong. Try the place for a week, and if you do not like it, you can go back. Mr. Phillips's drays are going into town, and if you cannot make up your mind to be contented here, you can return to Melbourne with them.'

"I took the measure of Mr. Brandon that week, and I came to the determination that I ought to stay. To be sure it was wrong of him to fetch me out on false pretences, as it were, but I had walked into the trap myself, and, as he said, he was in great need of a servant. He might be weak, but he was not wicked; at least, I felt that I could hold my own. It was a rough place for a gentleman to live in. Am I

wearying you, young ladies? I could leave off now, and go on the morn's night."

"I am interested very much in your story," said Elsie.

"And so am I," said Jane. "I know not where fortune, or rather, as you more properly call it, Providence may send us; and your experience has a peculiar fascination to me. Do, pray, go on."

"Well, as I was saying, it was a rough place, and he was a gentleman in his up-bringing and in many of his ways. You would not have believed, if you had seen him in Melbourne, and heard him speak such English, that he could go about in an old ragged, dirty shooting-coat, with a cabbage-tree hat as black as a coal nearly—that he could live in a slab hut, with a clay, or rather, a dirt floor, and a window-bole with no glass in it—and that he could have all the cooking and half the work of the house done at the fireside he sat at, and sit down at a table without a table-cloth, and drink tea out of tin pannikins. The notion of getting such wages in

a place with such surroundings quite dumbfoundered me; and he had the things, too; for by-and-by I found napery and china in a big chest that I used for a table out of doors; and bit by bit I made great improvements at Barragong. He gave me one of the huts for myself, and I was a thought frightened to sleep there my leafu' lane at first, but I put my trust in my Maker, and He watched over me. I cooked in my own hut, and settled up the master's. He began to think that a boarded floor would be an improvement, and he got the men to saw them up. Hard work it was for them; and ill-coloured boards they made; but when they were laid down, and a glass window put in, the master's hut looked more purpose-like.

"I was not feared for the wild kye when I saw that the stockkeeper would help me to get them into the bail; and when we got a milk-house dug out of the hill-side, I made grand butter. I'll not soon forget the day I had my first kirning. The stockkeeper—George Powell was his name—had got into the dairy, as I

thought, to lick the cream, for he was an awful hand on it; but he kept hanging about, and glowering at the milk-pans, and then looking at me, till at last he said some nonsense, and I told him to be off with his daffing; I would tell the master if he said an uncivil word.

"'I don't mean to be uncivil, Peggy; quite the contrary,' says he.

"'Then what do you mean?' says I, taking his hand off my shoulder, and driving it bang against the stone slab we put the milk-pans on.

"'I mean, Peggy, will you marry me?' says he; 'that's civil enough, surely.'

"'No I won't,' says I. 'Thank you for the compliment, all the same, but I have no wish to change my condition.'

"'Tell that to the marines,' says he. 'If you don't like me, tell me so; but none of that nonsense.'

"'I like you well enough; but what I say is no nonsense. I do not wish to change my condition.'

"'It would be a good change for you,' says

he. I wonder you are not frightened to stay here a single woman. Now, if you were my wife, I could protect you;' and he flourished the arm I had given the bang to—and a goodly arm it was.

"I told him about the bairns, and he just laughed at me. 'We'll see,' says he. 'We'll see. Wait a little.'

"Well, every kirning that he was not out at a distance on the master's business, did that man Powell come into the dairy and ask me the same question, and get the same answer; and three of the shepherds, and a little imp of a laddie that looked after the horses, made up to me too, and seemed to think it was not fair that I would choose none of them. Any woman with a white face might have had as many sweethearts; but I think it was my managing ways that took Powell's fancy. If a fairy could only move a lot of the women from the places where they are not wanted, and put them where they are, there would be a wonderful thinning taken out of Scotland and planted in Australia.

But ye see there are no fairies; and at such a distance, it costs a lot of money to move such commodities as single women. I have puzzled my brains whiles about the matter, Miss Jane, and many a time I have repented coming back to a place where hands are many and meat is scarce; but it will not be for long; and in the meantime I try to help all the distressed bodies that I know about; and that I have kept my five bairns from being a burden to anybody, is enough work for any woman either here or in Australia. I'm going off of my story; but the marvel to me that I was so beset with sweethearts that did not want them, while so many lasses here never can see the sight of one, always makes me think that there should be a medium, and that lasses should neither be ower much made of or neglected altogether. But to go back to the bush. I had to rule with a high hand at Barragong, and really to demean myself as if I were the mistress, to keep folk in their place. But the worst was to come.

"The master had not been well for a week or

so, and I had taken especial care of him, and got him gruel and such like, that he seemed very glad of; and he was getting better, and was sitting by the fire while I was setting down the supper, when he said——No, I cannot tell you what he said. No; he was not well, and may be did not know exactly what he was about. I cannot tell his words, though they are burned into my memory as clear and distinct as though I had heard them but yesterday, but they were most unbefitting words for him to say or for me to hear.

"I stood still for a whole minute or more, and looked him in the face. He did not like the fixed steady way I kept my eyes on him."

"'Say such a thing again if you dare,'" said I. "You had no such thought in your head or your heart when you brought me out to Barragong. I knew that by your eyes. You must treat me respectfully if you mean to call yourself a gentleman."

"'Don't be so very hot, Peggy. You have made a fellow so comfortable, that he may be

excused for thinking more of you than he used to do,' says he."

"'Think more of me!' says I; 'you think less of me, or you would not dare——'"

"'What was I to fancy,' says he, 'when you refuse Powell so pertinaciously, but that you are looking higher?'"

"'Mr. Brandon,' says I, 'George Powell is high enough for me, for he would make me his wife; and if I was free to marry, I would look for no higher match. But to think that what you offer is higher!—May God forgive you for the thought!'"

"'Why, Peggy, perhaps I may offer higher yet; you are a good and a clever girl, and will make an admirable wife.'"

"'Not to you, sir; nor to any one out of my own station. Do not think of making a fool of yourself, just because there is nobody here to compare with homely Peggy Walker.'"

"He looked at me more particularly than he had ever done before. I leaned my hands on the table, and squared my elbows, and spread

my great browned hand and red arms before him. He laughed, and said, 'Peggy, you are right; you are a worthy girl and a clever, and in the sight of God are worth ten of me; but when I think of taking you home and presenting you to my mother and sisters as Mrs. Brandon, it is rather comical. As for anything else, you are too good a girl, and I will say no more about it, only I wish you would marry Powell and be done with it.'"

"Well, Miss Jean, this was the beginning and the end of it with the master; but I think that man Powell was my greatest temptation, especially after Mr. Brandon's words. He really was a protection to me, for he was always civil and respectful in his language to me, and there was not one of the men who dared say the thing that would anger him. But it fell out that I was removed from Barragong before I had given in to Powell, though I'm not saying what might have happened if I had stopped there for six months longer.

"The master had a friend, a Mr. Phillips,

who lived twenty miles off, who had more stock and more men on his station than we had at Barragong;—a nice quiet gentlemanly man, who had done as silly a thing as Mr. Brandon had half evened himself to. He had married out of his degree, though he had more temptation to it than the other, for the lassie was very bonnie, and very young, and I dare say he thought he could learn her the ways of gentlefolks.

"Be that as it may, the lady, Mrs. Phillips, was expecting her inlying, and her husband had trysted a skilled nurse from Melbourne, for a doctor could not be had; but when the appointed time came, the nurse had made some other engagement, and could not or would not come; nor did she send a fit person in her place. There was not time to get any one from Melbourne, and Mr. Phillips came to Barragong and entreated me to come to his wife, and Mr. Brandon to spare me. I said I had but little skill, but that I would do the best I could for the poor lady in her straits, and the master said he would let me go with pleasure if I would

only promise to come back when Mrs. Phillips was well and about again.

"I thought I had been rather deceived in this instance too, for I fancied there was no woman about the place but the mistress herself; but I saw a well-grown strapping lass in the kitchen, and I thought she might have answered as well me; but I soon found out that though the woman (Martha they called her) had legs and arms and a goodly body of her own, she had no more head than a bairn, and would have been a broken reed to trust to in any time of peril or difficulty.

"It did not seem to me at first that Mrs. Phillips was so unlike a lady, for she had an English tongue, and she was very well-favoured, and sat quiet in her seat, and ordered folk about quite natural. She had been married now well on for a year, and had got used to be the mistress. But I had not been long there ere I found out her faults and her failings; and to my mind her husband had but a poor life with her, though he did seem to be very fond of the young

creature, with all her deficiencies. You see she had not an atom of consideration either for him or for any other body on the station; she was either too familiar or too haughty to the girl Martha; as for me, I knew my place better, and if she did not keep me at my distance, I could mostly keep her at hers.

"Not many days after I went to the Phillips's, she was taken ill and safely delivered of a fine lassie. I have seen women make a great fuss about bairns, till I cannot be surprised at anything they say or do, but the joy of the father over the wee Emily was beyond anything I ever saw. To see the great bearded man taking the hour-old infant in his arms, kissing it over and over again, and speaking to it in the most daft-like language, and calling on every one to admire its beauty! No doubt the bairn had as much beauty as a thing of that age can have, but I don't think any of the men he showed it to admired it much. I know Powell, for one, when he came with his master's compliments to inquire for Mrs. Phillips, and may be to have a

crack with myself, was not much taken up with the brat, as he called it. I had it in my arms, and it was greeting, poor thing, so I had no time to give Powell a word, except just the message for Mr. Brandon.

"Mrs. Phillips was by no means an easy lady to nurse. I knew well how strict old Tibbie Campbell, who used to nurse Mrs. Henderson, used to be about what a lying-in woman should have to eat and drink, and what care she took that she should catch no cold, and I thought I behoved to be as particular with Mrs. Phillips; but she would not hear reason. She said that such a climate as Scotland should be no rule for treatment in Australia, and she thought she should know her own constitution best, and what was likely to agree with her; so she would take no telling from me. As for Mr. Phillips, he would always give her what she wanted if she teased for it long enough, or if she began to greet, so she carried her point in spite of my teeth. And, poor thing, she suffered for it; for she first took the cold, and then the fever; she

was out of her senses for five weeks, and barely escaped with her life. It was a weary nursing. Mr. Phillips was wonderful in a sick-room, and relieved me greatly; but I had such an anxious life with the bairn as well as the mother. He used to beg me, with tears in his eyes, to save the bit lassie, if it was in my power, and the man's life seemed to hang on the little one's. His eye was as sharp as a mother's—sharper than most mother's—to notice if Emily looked worse or better. It was a novelty to me to see such care and thought in a man, not but what it is well a father's part to care for his own offspring, and to take trouble and fatigue for them.

"Mr. Brandon, all the time that the mistress was lying between life and death, was wondrous patient, and never made a complaint for the want of me, though I am sure things were at sixes and sevens at Barragong; but when Mrs. Phillips had got the turn, and was able to move about again, he sent me a message to come back. Well, I had promised, no doubt—and I had a far easier life at Mr. Brandon's than

where I was, and nothing had ever been said about wages by Mr. Phillips to me—but then the poor little lassie, it seemed as much as her life was worth to leave her to her mother and the lass Martha, for they had not the sense of an ordinary woman between them, and my heart clung to the bit bairn with great affection.

"One day Powell came over with the spring-cart to fetch me home, and I was in a swither what to do, for ye don't just like to press services on folk that do not want them; but by that time Mr. Phillips had got to know the necessity of the case, and it was only because he wanted the offer to come from his wife that he had not asked me before; but she was unreasonable, and he had to do it himself. She did not see why she and Martha could not manage the baby; she was sure Peggy was no such marvel; that there was no difficulty in feeding the child; that it was cruel to put a strange woman over to give her orders, for Peggy was far too independent for her place; and then Emily would love her nurse better than her own mother. I

know that was the way she went on to Mr. Phillips, but on this point he was unmoveable. When he asked me as a great favour to stay, I consented for the sake of him and of Emily.

"Powell was very angry at me for stopping, and took quite a spite to the little lassie that caused my stay. The way he spoke of that bairn decided me. If he could not be fashed with one, how could he be fashed with five? I was determined on one thing, that I should not have a house of my own unless there was room in it, and a welcome in it, for Bessie's orphans; so it was settled in my mind that day that I never could be Mrs. Powell.

"I stopped at the Phillips's for more than eighteen months. The mistress got used to me, and the bairn Emily was as fond of me as bairn could be. I had more freedom from sweethearts there at first, for the men were greatly taken up with Martha; but by the time I had been three months there I had nigh hand as many followers, as she called them, as she had herself. And followers she might well call them. I

could not go out with the bairn for a walk, or out to the kye, or turn my head any way, without one or other of them being at my heels. And when Martha got married to one of the men on the place, which happened ere long, I seemed to have the whole station bothering me; but I would have nothing to do with any of them. Mr. Phillips gave more credit than any of the folk I had ever seen to my yearnings after Bessie's orphans, and my resolutions to live single for their sake; but he never could see that they would be such a drawback to any decent man that liked me; but I knew there were few men so taken up with bairns as he was.

"Well, as I said, Mrs. Phillips, finding I did my work well and quietly, gave over interfering with me, and seemed to get to like me; but when her time was drawing near again, she was not disposed to trust herself to my care altogether, nor, indeed, was I very keen of the responsibility. She wanted to go to Melbourne, but the master would not hear of it; and not all

her fleeching, nor her tears, nor three days' sulks, in which she would not open her mouth to him, would make him give in to that.

"He seemed to have the greatest dread of parting with her, particularly to go to Melbourne; and it was a busy time of the year, so that he could not stay with her there. But he said he would go and fetch a doctor, if one was to be had, and keep him in the house till he was needed, and for as long as she was in any peril; and with that she behoved to be contented. He was as good as his word, for he fetched one from the town. I did not much like the looks of the man, but I said nothing, and the mistress seemed quite satisfied.

"But Mr. Phillips took me by myself, and says he to me, 'I believe this man is skilful enough and clever enough, but he has one fault —we must keep drink from him and him from drink, or we cannot answer for the consequences. But for this fault he would have had too good a practice in Melbourne for us to be able to have him for weeks here. There is no place near

where he can get drink, so I think we can easily manage to keep him all right. We need not tell Mrs. Phillips, Peggy.'

"Well, I kept watch over this Dr. Carter very well for a fortnight or more, and he seemed to go on all right; but after that time he got very restless, and I used to hear him walking about at night as if he could not sleep, and through the day he could not settle to his book as he used to do at first, or go to take a quiet walk, or ride not over far from the house, but took little starts and turned back, as if something was on his mind.

"I misdoubted him, but with all my watching I could see nothing. As ill luck would have it, the night the mistress was taken ill, and I went to call him up, there I found this man Carter as drunk as he could be, to be able to stand, with an empty brandy bottle beside him that he had knocked the head off. The keys were in my pocket, and not a bottle missing out of the press. There never was much kept in the house, for Mr. Phillips was a most moderate man, and tea

is the great drink in the bush; but in case of sickness we aye had some brandy by us. But the poor deluded man had got one of the men about the place to ride forty miles to get him this brandy that had just come at the time when he was especially needed to be sober. I told him the lady was wanting him, and Mr. Phillips and me shook him up; and he half came to himself; and if the mistress had not smelt the drink so strong upon him, she might not have known. She had another fine lassie, and all was going on very well, for the mistress was more reasonable. She had bought her experience very dear the time before, and would take a telling. When the doctor had got over his drinking fit he was very penitent, and spoke quite feelingly on the subject. Mr. Phillips turned off the man that had fetched him the brandy, and told all the men on the station the reason why. The man Carter did not want for skill, nor for kindness either, when he was sober; so, as we were more fearful for the fortnight after than the fortnight before the birth, we

just kept him on. Little Harriett was a fortnight old, and the mistress was doing so nicely that Mr. Phillips thought he might leave us for one of his out-stations, where he was wanted, and said he would not be home for two or three days. And then the poor demented creature of a drunken doctor contrived again to get hold of drink, and was far more outrageous this time. Mrs. Phillips was lying on the sofa in the parlour, when he came in and terrified her by roaring for more brandy; and when I came in to settle him, he grippit me by the arm and threatened me with I don't know what, if I refused him. The mistress entreated me to turn him out of doors—and so I did. He got on a horse of the master's—I marvelled how he kept his seat—and set off, and I felt easy in my mind.

"But I had just got the mistress quieted down, when the native boy Jim, that was always doing odd jobs about the place, came running past the window with such a look of terror on his face that I saw something was wrong. I ran out quick but quietly, to ask what was the matter.

"'Fire! Peggy,' says he; and then, sure enough, I looked out, and the grass was on fire, but very far off, and a strong wind blowing it right to the slab huts on the head station with their thatch roofs. Nothing could save us if it came near, and as I have told you it was a busy time, and the men were all hither and thither, and nobody left on the place but Martha, and Jim, and myself, and the mistress ill, and two infants, as I may say, for Emily was not thirteen months old. The only thing that could be done was to burn a broad ring round the houses, as I had seen done at Barragong; but that craved wary watching. By good luck the bairns were both sleeping, and Mrs. Phillips resting quiet, so I called Martha and Jim, and said we must take wet bags and green boughs and beat the fire out as we burned. Jim was as quick and clever as need be, and set about in earnest; but Martha said she could do nothing for terror, and prayed me to remember her situation.

"'Your situation,' says I, 'will be far worse

if you don't bestir yourself for your own safety. If you won't lend a hand for the sake of your poor helpless mistress and the innocent bairns, you behove to do it for the sake of your own four quarters.' So she got more reasonable, and helped us somewhat, but it was close work, for the fire was near. It was all that poor wretch of a doctor's doing, too, for he had been trying to smoke, and had dropped his lighted pipe in the dry withered grass, and it blazed up like wild; he got out of it, for he was travelling against the wind, while we were in the full waft of it. I thought the wind and the fire would beat us, and was like to throw up the work in despair, when I saw a man on horseback galloping for dear life. I thought it was the master at first, but it was Mr. Brandon, and he was nigh hand as good, for he fell to, and worked with all his might, and with his help we saved the house, and all the precious ones in it. In time the men dropped in, and they set about working to save the run, but if the wind had not providentially changed at night, they would

scarcely have been able to save it. As it was, there was thousands of acres of land laid bare, and a flock of sheep killed; the poor beasts have not the sense to run away out of the fire.

"Oh! the appearance of the place that night was awful to behold; and just before the wind chopped round the master came home, riding like fury.

"'We are all safe,' said I, as I ran to meet him, and I saw his face by the light of the blazing fires around us was as pale as death. 'Mrs. Phillips and the bairns are not a hair the worse. Thank God for all his mercies!'

"'Thank God!' said he, 'thank God! Now they are preserved, I can bear the loss of anything else!'

He came to his wife, and kissed her and the bairns with solemn, and, as I thought, with pathetic thankfulness. I was afraid she would be sorely upset with the terrible events of the day, and I never closed my eyes that night, but sat up by her bedside lest she should take a bad turn; but she did not seem any the worse of it,

and both her and the bairns got on brawly. The loss of the sheep was no such great matter in these times, for there was so little market for them, that we had to boil them down for the sake of the tallow—that could be sent to England. Times were changed before I left the colony, for the diggings made a great demand for sheep and cattle to kill; but when I was up the country the waistrie of flesh was sinful to behold. I have many a day sinsyne thought on the beasts and the sheep that were slaughtered there for the working men, and how the bits that they threw about or left on their plates might be a good dinner for many a hungry stomach in Scotland.

"Well, after I had been more than a year and a half at Mr. Phillips's, my wages just running on as they had done at Mr. Brandon's, and five pounds sent every quarter, as opportunity offered, for the bairns, I heard word of a cousin of William Lowrie's coming out to Melbourne, to follow his trade of a stone-mason there, and I had a strong desire to see him, to

ask after my orphans; for if my letters to them were but poor, the letters I got back were no better, so my heart was set on seeing Sandy Lowrie, who had lived close by, and knew the bairns well. It chanced that Mr. Phillips had a man and his wife on the station at the time that had no family. The man was nothing of a hand at work, but the wife was one of those bright, clever, cheery little Englishwomen that can turn hand to anything, and had such a fine temper—nothing ever could put her out. So, as she could do for the mistress as well as myself, I asked leave from the master and Mrs. Phillips to go to the town and see Sandy. The mistress was fashious, for she did not like anybody about her to please themselves, and she had got used to me, as I said before; but the master was as reasonable as she was the contrary.

"He said to me, the day before I left, 'Peggy, I owe you a great debt. You have saved the life of my wife and children.'

"'Under Providence, sir,' said I.

"'Under Providence, of course,' said he; 'but I fear Providence would have done little for them if Martha had been the only instrument Providence had at hand to use, so I am over head and ears in debt to you.'

"'No, Mr. Phillips,' said I, 'my work you have paid me well for; my kindness you have returned with kindness and consideration such as I never hoped to meet with in a strange land. If I have nursed and cared for your children you have comprehended my love for my own poor bairns; and this permission to visit Melbourne, that I may hear about them, is a great favour, and one I will never forget to be grateful for.'

"'You are not to let me off in this way,' said he. 'You will find a hundred pounds lying in the bank to your credit, which, as you are a prudent woman, you may be trusted to invest yourself in any way that you may judge best for yourself or the orphans. My idea is that you may take a little shop, and this sum would stock it. I could assist you with my

name further than the sum of money I have given to you, if it is necessary.'

"It flashed on my mind that this was a grand opening; but it seemed so selfish and greedy-like to take advantage of his kindness, and to leave him, and Mrs. Phillips, and the bairns, to further my own plans. I said as much to him, but he would not hear of a refusal.

"'You never can manage to do much for the children at service, for all your wages, except your own necessary expenses, goes home and is spent; but by having a little business, you may save more than you could send to them now, and get them a better education, and give them a better start. No doubt we will miss you here; but Mrs. Bennett is a very excellent person, and now I hear that Dr. Grant is going to buy Mr. McDougall's station, only fifteen miles off, we can get him to come on an emergency, though he says he would rather not practise. I will not say that we can do very easily without you, but we must not keep you always here.'

"The kindness of Mr. Phillips I will never forget. Well, it was done all as he planned it. I went to Melbourne and saw Sandy Lowrie, and he gave me good accounts of the bairns, as growing in stature, and Tam and Jamie keen of their learning, but the old woman, their grandmother, he said was sore failed, and no likely to be long spared.

"I took a little shop at a low rent, in a little village, a bit out of the town, for I was frightened to incur much risk, and I set up on my own footing, with 'M. Walker, general store,' over my door-cheek.

"I was doing a decent business, in a small way, among poor people mostly; and I set my face very steady against giving credit, for two reasons—first, that I was not clever enough to keep accounts; and besides that, it just does working folk harm to let them take on. At a time of sickness I might break through my rule, but at no other time. All the folk about me called me Miss Walker, very much to my surprise; and as I was thought to be making

money, I had no want of sweethearts. After I had gone on for some years the diggings broke out, and there was an awful overturn of everything in Melbourne. I made a lot of money, and I bought the shop from the landlord, and was very proud to get my title-deed written out on parchment, and to see myself a woman of landed heritable property; and then I made my will, too, for I had something to leave. I never was doing better in business in my life than when Robbie Lowrie, a brother of Sandy's, came out to go to the diggings, and maybe with an eye to make up to myself; but the news he brought me made me change all my plans and return to Scotland. He told me that the grandmother was dead, and that the old man, who never had half the gumption of his wife, was not able to control the five youngsters; so that they were getting out their heads at no allowance. Tam, in particular, he said, was a most camsteery callant; but the old man, he said, was fairly off all work, and not one of his own bairns were either able or willing to help him,

and I knew that he had an awful horror of the sea. So I let my shop, and sold the stock for time; and indeed the payments have no been owre regular, and the man that took it is still in my debt. I found the grandfather and the bairns were really as Robbie had said, and I have had my own work to set things to rights. They were in debt, too, though I had sent them double the money after I had the shop than before; but they just thought that a rich auntie in Australia was a mine of wealth, and the folk very unwisely gave them trust whenever they asked it. But they were doing very weel at the school, and I find it a hantle cheaper to give them learning here than in Melbourne; so it answers me better to bide here than to take them out, even if grandfather would agree. He was good to me and mine in my straits, and I cannot think to leave the old man now.

"But what with the rent and the schooling, and one thing and another, I found that the rent of my bit shop would not pay all expenses, so I took in washing and dressing for the folk about

Swinton. I was aye clever at it, and I got a great inkling about clear-starching and fine dressing from that Mrs. Bennett, at Mr. Phillips's station, for she was a particular good laundress. A body learns at all hands if one has only the will. And ye see, now, it seemed better for Tam and the rest that I should try my luck in a bigger place, and I hope I may not repent of it.

"That's all my story. It's no much to tell; but yet, ye see that none of my brothers have been burdened with my bairns. I have done it all myself."

Jane sat silent a few moments after Peggy had finished her narrative, and then thanked her gravely and earnestly for it. Elsie, too, had been much interested in the adventures of this clever, upright woman, and was only sorry it could not be available—neither incident nor sentiment—for her poetry.

"Now, I have kept you up long enough, young ladies. If what I have said gives you any heart, I will be glad. I hope you will sleep well, and have lucky dreams; so good-night."

CHAPTER X.

ELSIE'S LITERARY VENTURE, AND ITS SUCCESS.

ELSIE MELVILLE found the second day in —— Street better than the first. An early walk with Jane restored her to her equilibrium, and she sat down to write in her own room with more rapidity than before; while Jane went out and made inquiries at registry offices, or anywhere else that was likely to lead to employment; but day after day passed without success. Rather than do nothing, she assisted Peggy in the lighter parts of her work, made clothes for the children, and helped them with their lessons in the evening. Peggy was astonished at the progress which they all made with such assistance, and particularly delighted with the great

influence Jane had over Tom. As she grew accustomed to the ways of the house, she learned to endure the noise patiently, and she found these five young Lowries really interesting and remarkably intelligent. Tom especially was eager for knowledge, and his trade, which he entered into with all his heart, was calling out all his abilities and all his ambition. There were many things that he had difficulty in getting information about, for he was but a young apprentice, and the journeymen and older apprentices wanted him to wait on them rather than to learn the business. But he was not to be kept back in that way; he was determined to find things out for himself, and in every difficulty he found help and sympathy from Jane Melville. Her out-of-the-way knowledge made her a most useful auxiliary, and she rejoiced that there was one person in the world that she could assist with it. She did not forget Peggy's wish about the quick writing, and taught those peasant children to express themselves fluently on paper. Their manners were im-

proved under her influence, and what was still uncouth or clumsy she learned to bear with.

Another resource to lighten the weight of anxiety and disappointment was found in Peggy's extraordinary gift in finding out distressed people, which even in her new residence, did not desert her. Jane, who had been accustomed to put her hand in her purse for the benefit of Peggy's protégés, felt at first very grieved that she had nothing to give, but she learned that a great deal of good can be done with very little money, and satisfied herself by giving sympathy, personal services, and advice. It was astonishing what good advice she gave to other people for bettering their prospects, while she seemed quite unable to do anything for herself. But so long as Elsie was busy and hopeful with her poems, Jane could not bear to leave her; if they failed, they must try what they could do separately. In the meantime, she was more disposed to try classes than anything else, for her experience with the Lowries proved to her that she could teach clever children, at any rate, with success;

but as she could not get the promise of any pupils of the rank and circumstances that could make them pay, she hesitated about incurring any risk.

Elsie had completed poems sufficient to fill a small volume before her sister had seen any opening for herself. It was with some strong agitation on Jane's part, and still stronger on Elsie's, that they presented themselves to the publisher who had said he would give a good price for a good book written by a woman, and offered him the manuscript for publication. Alas! tastes differ as to what is a good book, and in nothing is there so much disparity of opinion as in the article of poetry. He did not give much encouragement to the sisters, but said he would read over the manuscript and give an answer in ten days. Any one who has ever written with the hope of publishing can fancy Elsie's feeling during these ten days. Her own verses rang in her ears; she recollected passages she might have altered and improved, and wondered if they would strike

the critic as faulty; then again she recalled passages which she fancied could not be improved, and hoped he would not skip them; now she would sit idle in the thought that, until she saw there was a market for her productions, there was no necessity for multiplying them; then again she would work with redoubled industry to see if she had not quite exhausted her fancy and her powers.

The final verdict was unfavourable:—"There is some sweetness of versification and of expression in Miss Melville's poems, but they are unequal, and want force and interest. They never would become popular, so that I feel obliged to decline the publication. Poetry is at all times heavy stock, unless by authors of established reputation."

Elsie sat sad and dispirited at this her first failure, but her sister comforted her by saying that Edinburgh was not the best market for anything new—London was the place where a new author had some chance. Elsie easily caught at the hope, and retouched some of

her most imperfect pieces before sending them to a great London house. To publisher after publisher the manuscript was sent, and after due time occupied in reading it, the parcel returned with the disappointing note—

"Mr. B——'s compliments, and he begs to decline with thanks Miss Melville's poems, as, in the opinion of his literary adviser, they could not answer the purpose of publication."

Or—

"Messrs. H—— and B——'s compliments, and though they are overstocked with poetry, they have read carefully Miss Melville's poems, but find them of the most unmarketable kind, so beg to decline publication."

Or—

"Messrs. S——, E——, & Co.'s compliments, and they regret that the subjective character of all Miss Melville's poems will make them uninteresting to the general reader. They therefore regret that they cannot bring them out."

When the notes were as brief as the foregoing samples, the pain was not so severe as in the

last which Elsie received, in which a careful but most cutting criticism accompanied the refusal. There is no doubt that Elsie's poems were crude, but she had both fancy and feeling. With more knowledge of life and more time, she was capable of producing something really worth reading and publishing. If there had been no talent in her verses, she would not have had a reading from so many good publishing houses; but she did not know enough of the trade to know this, and her humiliation at her repeated disappointments was exceedingly bitter.

There is no species of composition that should be less hurried than poetry. Even if it is struck off in a moment of inspiration, it should not be published then, but laid aside for alteration and polishing after a considerable time has elapsed; and much of our best poetry has been very slowly composed, even at first. Our poor little Elsie had prepared by great industry her volume of poems in less than four months, and had not taken time to reconsider them.

They were not narrative pieces, in which the interest of the story carries you along in reading, whether the diction is perfected or not, but mostly short lyrical poems, and contemplative pieces, which are always much more effective when found amongst other descriptions of poetry or in a magazine, than when collected together in a volume. They were generally sad, a common fault with poetesses; but poor Elsie had more excuse for taking that tone than many others who have done so.

She had to mourn the loss of fortune and the coldness of friends: the conduct of William Dalzell to her sister had made a deeper impression on her mind than on that of Jane. She had more capacity of suffering than Jane had, and when she took the pen in her hand, she felt that her life—and all life—was full of sorrow. Jane had induced Elsie to accompany her to the chapel, where she herself had learned her first lesson of submission and of Christian hope; but even in religion Elsie inclined to the contemplative and the tender rather than to the

active and the cheerful side of it. She looked with far more intense longing to the Heaven beyond the earth than Jane did, and had not the interest in the things about her to make the dreariness of her daily life endurable. Her poetry had been her one resource; and that appeared to be very weak and contemptible in the opinion of those who ought to know.

Whether the literary taster for the publisher last applied to was less engrossed with business than the others, or whether he thought it would do the aspiring poetess good to show her her faults, I cannot tell, but he wrote a long letter of critical remarks. There was one ballad—an idealization of the incident in Jane's life which had so much impressed Elsie, in which William Dalzell was made more fascinating and more faithless, and Jane much more attached to him than in reality—which this correspondent said was good, though the subject was hackneyed, but on all the others the sweeping scythe of censure fell unsparingly. "Her poems," he said, "were very tolerable, and not to be

endured;" mediocrity was insufferable in poetry. The tone of them was unhealthy, and would feed the sentimentalism of the age, which was only another name for discontent. If poetesses went on as they were doing now-a-days, and only extracted a wail from life, the sooner they gave up their lays the better. The public wanted healthy, cheerful, breezy poetry, with a touch of humour here and there, and a varied human interest running through it—a fit companion to the spirited novels of Charles Kingsley, then at the height of his fame. If poets were to teach the world, as they boasted that they were, they should not shut themselves up, and practise variations on the one poor tune, "I am miserable; I am not appreciated; the world is not worthy of me;" but go forth to the world and learn that there are nobler subjects for poetry than themselves. Then, with regard to Elsie's diction and rhymes, this critic selected a number of the most faulty and imperfect verses for censure, and Elsie had the miserable satisfaction of having to acknow-

ledge that they deserved it. I have little doubt that the critic thought he was giving the poetess a good lesson; but if he had seen the suffering that his letter caused, and the youth and inexperience, and the sad circumstances of the poor girl who received it, he would have repented somewhat of his very clever and satirical letter.

Heartsick and humbled, Elsie lost hope, and health, and spirits. She wrapped the rejected manuscript in brown paper, and put it in the farthest corner of one of her drawers. She was only prevented from committing it to the flames by Jane's interference.

"Now," said she, "I must be as busy as you. Peggy must teach me to iron—surely I can learn to do that—and let me make Nancy's frock. But, after all, Jane, this will not do for a continuance; we must seek for employment somewhere. I have spent a good deal of time over this useless work, and postages have come heavy on our small means. I must try to earn something."

The heavy tears fell fast on the frock as the girl worked at it; the listless hands dropped their hold of it occasionally, and she was lost in bitter thoughts. She however finished it, and then busied herself with a new bonnet for Peggy, which was to be made not at all fashionable, but big and rather dowdy. Elsie's taste rebelled a little at the uncongenial task; but she was doing her best to please Peggy when the postman delivered two letters to Jane—one from Francis, and the other from Mrs. Rennie. Francis' letters had been frequent, and had been a little interesting even to Elsie, and this one was more so than usual. He was coming to Edinburgh for a week or two, and meant to see them as much as possible during his stay. He was to be at a party at the Rennies' on New Year's Day, and his cousins were to be invited also; he trusted to meet them there. The Rennies had occasionally called, and shown the girls more kindness than any of their Swinton friends, or their other Edinburgh acquaintances. They had spent a fortnight, in

autumn, at Cross Hall, and had enjoyed it very much.

The note from Mrs. Rennie contained an invitation for both sisters to this party; and to girls who had been shut up so many months with no society but that of Peggy and her relations, the prospect of spending one evening among their equals in social position was very pleasant. Jane anticipated pleasure, besides, from seeing and talking with her cousin about everything and everybody in and about Cross Hall, as well as about a tour on the Continent which he had taken. Even Elsie's face brightened a little as she gave the last loving touches to her sister's dress, and said that she had never seen her look better, though she was a little thinner and paler than she used to be—to Elsie's eyes she was quite as pretty.

CHAPTER XI.

SOME GRAVE TALK IN GAY COMPANY.

FRANCIS had hoped to see his cousins before he met them at the party, but when he called at Peggy Walker's he found that they were out taking their customary long walk, so he met them in Mrs. Rennie's drawing-room for the first time. Certainly the two girls in mourning were not the plainest-looking in the room. Neither sister was beautiful, but Elsie was very nearly so, and her recent suffering had thrown more intensity into her expression, and made her look more lovely than ever. But it was to Jane that Francis' eyes turned affectionately and anxiously, and he grieved to see the traces of weariness, of care, and he even thought, of

tears, on the face which to him was the most interesting in the world. He shook hands with her warmly, and looked inquiringly in her face, and then drew her into a quiet corner in a window-seat, where they could talk without being much observed. Elsie did not sit beside them, but left them to their own conversation, assured that she would hear all that she cared to know by-and-by; yet she was not neglected, for Miss Rennie had taken a great fancy to her, and was determined, if possible, to get her partners. At Mrs. Rennie's parties there never was any scarcity of gentlemen, for they had an extensive family connection, and Mr. Rennie was a kind and hospitable man, who had a large acquaintance in the city. Miss Rennie had judged hardly of Jane's personal appearance at first sight, but she thought Elsie a most elegant and interesting creature.

"We have written so often and so fully to each other that I fancy that we have little to say now we meet," said Jane, smiling.

"We have written so much to each other

that we have all the more to say, Jane," said her cousin. "I never get a letter from you without its making me wish to talk over it with you. You have no news, however, I suppose?"

"No news," said Jane. "I wrote to you of Elsie's last bitter disappointment. It was a cruel letter; she felt it all the more, because she says it is all true. But, really, Francis, I think her poetry did not deserve it. She has never mentioned her verses since."

"And for yourself, you can see no prospect?"

"It seems impossible to get up the classes that I hoped for. I think I must take to Mrs. Dunn's and the dressmaking, for we cannot go on as we are doing."

"Ah! Jane, my cup of prosperity has very many bitter drops in it."

"And mine of adversity has much that is salutary and even sweet in it. Do not think me so very unhappy. If any one had told me beforehand of these months that I have passed since my uncle's death, I should have thought them absolutely intolerable, and would have

preferred death. But there is no human lot without its mitigations and ameliorations. God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb. I am not happy, perhaps; but I am not miserable. I have not to live with people whom I despise, for there never was a more estimable woman than Peggy Walker, or more promising children than her nephews and nieces. You cannot fancy what interest I feel in Tom, and how I am ambitious for him. He will make a figure in the world, and I will help him to do so. We women have no career for ourselves, and we must find room for ambition somewhere. I have no brother and no husband, and I find myself building castles in the air for Tom Lowrie and for you, Francis; for you are proving yourself the good master, the conscientious steward of the bounties of Providence that I hoped you would be; and is that nothing to be glad of? I know I look sad, but do not fancy me always in this mood; if you saw me in the evenings with Tom, and Nancy, and Jamie, and Jessie, and Willie, you would see

how cheerful I can be. Here, I am reminded too painfully of what I have lost; there, I feel that I have gained somewhat."

"You want to relieve my mind, my generous cousin, by making the best of your very hard lot."

"Every lot has its best side," said Jane, "and it is only by looking steadily at it that one can obtain courage to bear the worst. I see this in visiting the very poor people whom I wrote to you about. Some people are querulous in comparative comfort; others have the most astonishing powers of cheerful endurance. I have learned upon how very little the human soul can be kept in working order from a poor rheumatic and bed-ridden old woman, who is so grateful for the use of one hand while she is helpless otherwise, and who has had a very bad husband, and several very careless and cold-hearted children; but she has one son who comes to see her regularly once every three months, and brings her the scanty pittance on which she subsists; and surely I, with youth,

and health, and work to do, should try to be cheerful, even though the work is not such as I could prefer.——And you have been in France as well as England since I saw you last in August. I want to hear further particulars of your travels, since you say that you have more to give. They interested you very much, particularly those in France."

"Very much, indeed; all the more as I acquired the language. I wrote to you that I met with Clemence de Véricourt, now Madame Lenoir."

"Is she handsome?" asked Jane.

"No; I thought her almost ugly till she opened her mouth, and then I forgot it, and felt the charm of the most winning manner and the most brilliant conversational power in the world. Frenchwomen are not to compare with Englishwomen for beauty, but they can be irresistible without it."

"How did you get an introduction to her?" asked Jane.

French society is more accessible than it is

here; but I met with a French gentleman in a *café* who had known my father, and who recognized my name, who introduced me to a good many very pleasant salons, and to Madame Lenoir's among others. Arnauld is dead; he fell in Algeria. His sister speaks of him with the tenderest affection."

"Is she happily married? After all her mother's solicitude, it would be hard if she too were sacrificed."

"So far as I can see, she appears to be happy. The husband is of suitable years and good character; not so brilliant as his wife. But really what Madame de Girardin says appears to me to be true, that French women are superior to their so-called lords and masters. It is strange to me, who have been always so shy, and so shut out from society, to be introduced—or rather plunged—into so much of it."

"Had you not society of your own when you were in the bank—your fellow-clerks and their wives and sisters?"

"I had little intimacy with any of them, and

was particularly in want of acquaintances among the other sex. A man with no relations who recognized his existence, and who is conscious of the doubtfulness of his birth, as I was, does not like to push himself into society in a country like this of Scotland, where family connections are overrated. Now, every one seems to think that being owned by my father in his will quite sufficient, while I am more ashamed in my secret soul of my birth than I ever was."

"Indeed!" said Jane, "I thought it would have pleased you to be acknowledged."

"*You* should see, if the world does not, that if one party has juggled the other into a marriage, without any love on either side, it may involve legal succession to property, but does not make the birth a whit more respectable. I had a mother who did not care for me, and a father who did his duty, as he fancied, by me, but who disliked me, and they appear to have hated one another."

"You extorted respect and regard from your father, and you have cause to be proud of that.

If mutual love between parents is to be the great cause of pride of birth, I, too, have reason to be ashamed of mine, for I think my mother's love was worn out before many years of married life were over, and my father's never was anything but self-love and self-will. But whatever our birth may be, we are all God's children, and equal in His eyes, in that respect at least. ——Did Madame Lenoir speak to you of her mother?"

"Yes, she did, and recollected that my name was the name of an old and dear friend of her mother's; so she was especially kind to me for my father's sake. I saw Madame de Véricourt's portrait, too. She was prettier than her daughter, at least in repose; but neither of them were at all like my ideal; for I forgot the French class of face, and embodied my fancy portraits in an English type."

"You enjoyed French society, then?"

"Very much, indeed. The art of conversing these French people carry to great perfection. It is not frivolous, though it is light and spark-

ling; it is still less argumentative, but it has the knack of bringing out different opinions and different views of them. We pity the French for their want of political liberty, but the social freedom they enjoy is some compensation.——But what interested me still more than these brilliant salons, was the tour that I took through the country, and the careful observation of the condition and prospect of the small proprietors so numerous in France and Flanders. The contrast between the French small landowner and the English agricultural labourer is very great. Nothing has struck me as so pathetic as the condition of the English farm labourer—so hopeless, so cheerless. Our Scottish peasants have more education, more energy, and are more disposed to emigrate. Their wages are fixed more by custom than by competition, and their independence has not been sapped by centuries of a most pernicious poor law system; yet, though I think their condition very much better than those of the same class south of the Tweed, it is nothing like that of the peasant proprietor."

"They say that small holdings are incompatible with high farming," said Jane, "and that such a crowded country as Britain must be cultivated with every advantage of capital, machinery, and intelligence."

"So they say here; but the small proprietors of France and Flanders will tell another story, for they will give a higher price for land than the capitalist, and make it pay. The astonishing industry of the Flemish farmers in reclaiming the worst soil of Europe, and making it produce the most abundant crops, shows me the fallacy of our insular notions on that head. I cannot but regret the decrease of the yeomanry class in Great Britain, and the accumulation of large estates in few hands. Scotland, for instance, is held by 8000 proprietors or thereabouts, of whom I am one. I should like to try an experiment. You know that sandy flat, that is worth very little but for scanty pasture, at the back of the Black Hill, as it is called. I would divide it into allotments among the most industrious and energetic of my farm-labourers, and

show them the method pursued by the Flemish farmers, and see if in the course of ten years they are not growing as good crops as in the most favoured spots on the estate. 'Give a man a seven years' lease of a garden, he will convert it into a desert; give him a perpetuity of a rock, he will change it into a garden.' Your uncle did not think it would pay to reclaim that piece of land; I will try if our peasants have not the stuff in them to make the most of the land."

"What an excellent idea!" said Jane.

"I knew you would sympathize with this plan, and with another which I have also in my head—to build new cottages for all the agricultural labourers on the estate. It is shameful that while the proprietors' houses, and the farmers' houses, have been enlarged and improved so much during the last century, the cottage of the hind and the cotter should still be of the same miserable description; the partitions to be made at the labourer's own expense, and too generally done by the enclosed

beds, which are not right things in a sanitary point of view. The money value of the rent is increased, too, for so many weeks of reaping in harvest time is worth more now than a century back. I have got plans for the cottages which I wanted you to look at this morning; I think they will do."

"You must let Peggy see them; she was brought up in one of those cottages you speak of, and will know all their deficiencies. It will set a good example to the neighbourhood," said Jane.

"And, after all, it will not cost me more to build these cottages, and make thirty families more comfortable and more self-respecting, than it would to enlarge Cross Hall, as Mr. Chalmers advises me strongly to do—by building a new wing and adding a conservatory in the place of your modest little greenhouse. Every one knows I have come to the estate with money in hand instead of encumbrances to clear off, as so many proprietors have, so they can think of my spending it in nothing but in increasing my own

comfort or importance. Another reason for my trying these experiments and improvements is to see if we cannot keep some of our best people in Scotland. Our picked men, and many of our picked women, emigrate to America and Australia. The recent emigration to Australia since the gold-diggings were discovered has been enormous. It must hurt the general character of the nation that we lose our best and our ablest as they grow up. I confess that if I were in their place I should do the same; but let my experiment succeed, it may be imitated."

"Whether it is imitated or not, it is right to try it. I will watch the result with the greatest interest. You know nothing could give me greater pleasure than your success in such a noble work," said Jane, with sparkling eyes. "My uncle's will is to turn out no mistake."

"We must go over together the names of those I mean to give the allotments to. You know the people better than I do," said Francis.

"It is not fair that the commonages should be

enclosed to enlarge great estates; the waste lands should belong to the nation, and be given to the class that needs them most, and that could, perhaps, make most of them," said Jane. "You are bringing my uncle's theories into practice. If it were not for Elsie I should have nothing to regret in the settlement that my uncle made; and, perhaps, there is something brighter in store for her."

"Has she none of the alleviations that you are so good as to make the very most of?" asked Francis.

"She has more pleasure naturally in books and in nature than I have, but at the present time she appears to have lost her relish for both. She has felt that her estimate of her powers has been too great, and now it is far too humble. For myself, I think just as highly of my own abilities and acquirements as ever I did. I am sorry that your minister has left his church, for I hoped to become acquainted with him; and he looked so cheerful that I thought he might do Elsie good. This new clergyman does not

strike me as being so genial or kindly, though I certainly like his sermons and his devotional services very much. It is certainly not the least of the blessings of my adversity that I have learned to place myself in God's hands, and to feel that he will do all things well for me."

"Can you not place your sister in the same care?" asked Francis.

"It is easier to trust God for yourself than to trust Him for those whom we love," said Jane; "but I try hard for that amount of faith. Elsie is so weary of her life sometimes, it is difficult to give her courage. This is grave conversation for a dancing party; but you do not see the incongruity. If we cannot carry our religion into our amusements, and into our business, it will not be of much use to us."

The sound of a well-known voice arrested Jane's attention: it was that of William Dalzell, who was shaking hands with Mr., Mrs., and Miss Rennie very cordially, and then, in an embarrassed manner, doing the same with Elsie.

"How did our friends get acquainted with Mr. Dalzell?" said Jane.

"When they were visiting me at Cross Hall, we had a gathering of the neighbouring families, and Mrs. Rennie did the honours for me. Mr. Dalzell, with his mother, and two young lady cousins, were of the party. I thought the county people would have held themselves aloof from the more plebeian society of an Edinburgh banker, but he at least has condescended to accept Mrs. Rennie's invitation to her own house. The exclusiveness of classes, and sects, and cliques, is extremely amusing to me. But I am engaged to dance this dance with Miss Rennie, so you must excuse me."

As Francis went up to claim Miss Rennie's hand, a gentleman was in the act of asking it —"I am engaged to Mr. Hogarth—see my card—but as you are a stranger in Edinburgh, you will be obliged to me for introducing you to his cousin, one of the sweetest girls in the world, and one whose story is the most interesting and the most romantic I ever heard. Oh! Mr. Dalzell, I forgot you."

"This is sad, to be so easily forgotten. I had hoped that my requests had made more impression," said he.

"I do not think Laura is engaged for this dance. Excuse me a moment till I ascertain." Miss Rennie walked across the room, leaving William Dalzell and the stranger together, but she presently returned, with the assurance that Miss Wilson was disengaged, and would be happy to be introduced to Mr. Dalzell. Miss Wilson was a ward of Mrs. Rennie's, as Jane had heard, a West Indian heiress, somewhat stupid, and very much impressed with her own wealth and importance. Miss Rennie had a pitying sort of liking for her, though sometimes Laura's airs were too much for her, and they would not speak to each other for a week at a time. She had just left school, having made all the progress which money without natural ability or any of the usual incentives to application could attain, and was to live at the Rennies', which she thought a very dull place. This large party was the brightest thing in her horizon at

present, and she was looking her best, and took her place in the dance with one of the handsomest men in the room, with much more animation than was usual with her.

"Now," said Miss Rennie, "I have done my best for Mr. Dalzell. I must attend to my other stranger before I fulfil my engagement to you, Mr. Hogarth, and I hope you will excuse me, when it is to get a partner for Alice. Miss Melville, I suppose, does not care about dancing, she is so dreadfully matter-of-fact. I know you have been talking politics, or something as bad, in that corner all this evening."

So Miss Rennie led the stranger across the room, and introduced Miss Alice Melville to Mr. Brandon, from Australia.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. BRANDON IN EDINBURGH.

"You must excuse any blunders I may make in my dancing, Miss Melville, for I am an old bushman, and have been out of practice for many years," said Mr. Brandon.

In spite of Elsie's being an admirable dancer, she was too much excited to do her best, and the stranger made no great figure in his first *débût* in that line. Miss Rennie was inwardly rejoicing that she had herself got rid of him.

"What part of Australia do you come from?" asked Elsie, in the first pause.

"From Victoria, as it is called now. It was called Port Phillip when I went there."

"Have you been long in the colony?"

"A long time—long enough for all my friends to forget me. But yet I need make no complaint; they have all been very kind; but I think I am entitled to a spell now."

"To a what?" asked Elsie, to whom the term was new.

"To a rest, or rather a fling—a holiday. Ah! Miss Melville, you can have no idea what a rough life I have led for many years. You cannot fancy how delightful, how perfectly beautiful it is to me to be in such society as this after the Australian bush."

Miss Melville had a better idea than he fancied. It is curious to meet people as strangers of whom you know a great deal, and when Elsie looked at the very gentlemanly man beside her, whose dress was perfectly fashionable, whose air and mien were rather distinguished, and whose language, in spite of a few colonial colloquialisms, had the clear, sharp tone and accent which agreeably marks out an educated Englishman among an assembly of Scotchmen, and recollected the description of his dress and habi-

tation which Peggy had given, and the scenes and conversation which she had narrated, she was almost afraid of betraying her knowledge by her countenance.

"Have you been long home from Australia?" she asked, as a safe question.

"A few months, and am enjoying it intensely."

"And what brings you to Scotland? I suppose your relations are all English?"

"Oh, an Australian thinks he ought to see the whole of Britain, when he can visit it so seldom. A man is treated with contempt on his return if he has not seen the Cumberland lakes and the Scottish Highlands. But I have relations in Scotland besides;—the old lady sitting by Mrs. Rennie in black *moiré* (is it that you call it?) is a sort of aunt of mine, and is connected in some inexplicable way with the Rennies. Your Scotch cousinships are an absolute mystery to me; it is a pity I cannot understand them, for I am indebted to them for a great deal of hospitality and kindness, of which

this is one of the most agreeable instances;"—and Mr. Brandon looked at Elsie as if he meant what he said.

"It does one good to see a man enjoying a party; our fashionable style is for the indifferent and the done up," said Elsie, with a smile. "I do not know if gentlemen enjoy life in spite of that nonchalant or dismal manner; but I know it is not pleasant for the lookers on."

"I cannot see why they should assume such a disagreeable style of conduct. To me, you English and Scotch people seem the most enviable in existence—amusement after amusement, and education, elegance, and refinement to heighten every enjoyment. I often say to myself, 'Walter Brandon, my good fellow, this will not last; you must go back to your stations and your troubles in a few months;' but for the present I am in Elysium."

By this time they had finished their dance, and were standing beside Jane. She looked up at him with her steady eyes—"The happiness is in yourself—not in the country, in the amuse-

ments, or in the society. You have earned a holiday, and you enjoy it."

"All Australians feel the drawbacks of the colonies when they come to visit England," said Mr. Brandon.

"It depends on their circumstances, whether they do or not. I often wish that I were there," said Jane.

"And so do I," said Miss Rennie, who with Francis had just joined them. "There must be a grandeur and a freshness about a new country that we cannot find here; and those wonderful gold diggings, too, must be the most interesting objects in nature."

"The very ugliest things you ever saw—and as for grandeur or freshness, I never saw or felt it. The finest prospect I could see in Victoria is the prospect of getting out of it, particularly now that the diggings have spoiled the colony. We cannot forget Old England."

"Oh! of course I like patriotism," said Miss Rennie; "no country can be to us like the land of our birth."

"But I think we should try to like the land of adoption also," said Jane. "The Anglo-Saxons have been called the best of colonists, because they have adapted themselves so well to all sorts of climates and all sorts of circumstances."

"True—true enough," said Mr. Brandon. "The Adelaide men who came across to the diggings used to talk with the greatest enthusiasm about their colony, their farms, their gardens, their houses, their society. I fancied that it was because they left it for a rougher life, and that Adelaide was like a little England to them; but, perhaps, the poor fellows really liked the place. At any rate, almost all of them returned, though Victoria appeared to be by far the most prosperous colony. But I made an excellent colonist, in spite of my never becoming much attached to the place. I adapted myself to sheep wonderfully, and to black pipes and cabbage-tree hats, and all the other amenities of bush life; and now, Miss Rennie, will you be good enough to adapt yourself to me for a quadrille?"

Miss Rennie was not engaged, so she could not refuse. Elsie saw that her cousin wished to talk to her; she feared it was to be on the subject which was the most painful of all—her unfortunate poems. She fancied that he must think her presumptuous in her old ambition, and dreaded his condolences; so she made some pretext to move away out of hearing of his conversation with Jane, and stood by the hired musicians, who were the most unlikely persons in the room to know anything about her or her disappointment. Standing there, with her slight and graceful form stooping slightly, and her face cast down, Miss Rennie again pointed her out to Mr. Brandon, of whose dancing she was tired, and to whom she wished to talk, asking him if he did not think her a lovely creature, and explaining the very peculiar circumstances in which the two girls were placed.

"They have been well educated, papa says, but very peculiarly, so that their prospects are not the better for it. We live in a frivolous age, Mr. Brandon. I do not take much interest in Jane, but Elsie is a very sweet girl."

The Australian settler looked again more closely at Elsie, and acknowledged to himself, as well as to Miss Rennie, that she was certainly elegant.

"Shall we go to her now? she looks so deserted, Mr. Brandon. Oh! Mr. Malcolm, I must introduce you to Miss Melville's sister."

"And co-heiress in misfortune," said the young lawyer, shrugging his shoulder.

"She is lovely—come," said Miss Rennie. She took both gentlemen across the room. Elsie started when she saw them coming close up to her.

"Miss Alice Melville—Mr. Malcolm—a successful author. Your sister saw him here some months ago."

The sight of a successful author was rather too much for Elsie's present feelings. Her eyes filled with tears, but yet she must speak.

"Yes, Jane told me she had that pleasure," said she.

"Miss Melville is here also, I hope," said Mr. Malcolm.

"Yes, she is talking to—to Mr. Hogarth."

"To Mr. Hogarth? Yes, I see—very good friends they appear to be, in spite of circumstances. Two superior minds, you see."

"He takes such care of your horses and dogs, Miss Alice; and as for your room, when mamma proposed making it into a card-room, as it was larger than the library, he looked as black as thunder, and said he never would have cards played there. It was a Blue Beard's room, so we got no access to it."

"I thought he would be kind to the animals; he promised as much to Jane."

"Oh! indeed, he is as good as his word, then," said Miss Rennie. Then, recollecting that this talk must be painful to the girl, she turned to Mr. Malcolm, and asked how his evangelical novel was getting on.

"Finished, and in the press by this time."

"Will it be a success? But everything you write is a success, so I need not ask," said Miss Rennie.

"The pub. says it has not exactly the genuine twang, but I hope no one will observe that but

himself. I have more incidents in it than usual in works of the class—an elopement, a divorce, a duel, a murder, and a shipwreck."

"I must have a first reading, recollect. It must be so interesting," said Miss Rennie.

"Thrilling, I should say," said Mr. Brandon. "Well, to me there is a deep mystery in book-making. How one thing is to follow another—and another to lead to another—how everything is to culminate in marriage or a broken heart, and not a bit of the whole to be true, I cannot conceive; and as for poetry, it seems to me an absolute impossibility to make verses rhyme. Can you tell me how it is done, Miss Melville?"

Elsie started. "No, I cannot—I cannot tell."

"You must ask Miss Rennie about poetry," said Mr. Malcolm; "she does some very excellent things in that way."

"You perfidious creature, I see I must never tell you anything, for you are sure to come out with it at all times and all places," said Miss Rennie.

"It is a true bill then," said Mr. Brandon, bowing to the tenth muse. "I cannot help wondering at you. I must not approach so near you, for you are so far removed from my every-day prosaic sphere. I must take shelter with Miss Melville, who knows nothing about the matter. I cannot comprehend how people can make verses; it cannot be easy at any time."

"It is sometimes easier than at others," said Miss Rennie. "If the subject is good the words flow correspondingly fast."

"And what do you consider the best subject, —marrying or burying, love or despair? I suppose you have tried them all."

"Oh, no. Do not imagine me to be a real author — only an occasional scribbler. Mr. Malcolm can tell you that I do not write much."

"You must show Mr. Brandon your album," said Mr. Malcolm, "and let him judge for himself."

"Will you let me see it too?" said Elsie eagerly; "do let me see it."

"You may look over it together," said Miss Rennie good-naturedly, "though I do not show it to every one. It will perhaps convince Mr. Brandon that it is nothing so wonderful to write verses, and make him less distant in his manner. My own pieces are signed Ella."

Miss Rennie's album contained a number of selections from her favourite poets, but except her own there were no original verses in it. Her friends preferred copying to composing, and among a very large circle she was the only one who had tried any independent flight into the regions of poetry; so that it was natural she should think a good deal of herself, for every one begged for something of her own to put into their albums, though they could not reciprocate in kind. Mr. Malcolm contributed some smart prose pieces; Herbert Watson was clever at caricatures; Eleanor painted flowers sweetly; while Laura Wilson, ambitious to have something to show in Miss Rennie's album, had copied a number of riddles in a very angular hand, which was illegible to an unpractised eye.

Elsie and Mr. Brandon, however, had got the album to see Ella's verses, and they turned to them with curiosity and interest. Her quicker eye and greater experience, both in poetry and in ladies' handwriting, made her read each piece in less than half the time taken by Mr. Brandon, and she re-read and scanned every line and weighed every sentiment and simile while he was making his way to the end.

"Well, really this is remarkably good," said he. "I wonder Miss Rennie does not publish: she could fill a nice little volume. I am sure I have seen far worse verses printed. Have not you?"

"Yes," said Elsie. "I believe Miss Rennie has had pieces published in periodicals, but it is not so easy to get a volume printed."

"Of course, there is a risk; but then the pleasure, the fame, should count for something. To have one's name on the title-page of a pretty little volume must be very gratifying to the feelings."

"Oh no, not at all. I do not think so; but

I do not know anything about it. I should not speak."

"You shrink from any publicity; well, I suppose that is very natural, too, yet I should not think that Miss Rennie does so; and as she is the author, I am imagining her feelings. What is this other piece called?—'Life's Journey.' What can Miss Rennie know of life's journey—staying at home with her father and mother all her short life?"

"If she had been to Australia and back again, she would have been entitled to speak on the subject," said Elsie.

"But really it is a very pretty piece, after all," said Mr. Brandon, after he had read it.

"Though written by one who has never been further from home than Glasgow in her life," said Elsie.

"I do not mean that Miss Rennie's never being out of Scotland should make her know little; but you young ladies are taken such care of, that you know very little of what life really is."

"It must be a disadvantage to all female authors," said Elsie, "to know so little of business and so little of the world. I do not wonder at men despising women's books."

"Now, Miss Melville, have I really said anything that you should put such a construction on? If I have, I must ask pardon. I am only astonished at the extraordinary talent which your sex show in turning to account their few opportunities; and for my part, I should not like them to have greater means of knowing the world. I am not a reading man, by any means. My remarks about books are perfectly worthless, but I can only say that I think these verses very pretty. I don't know whether they are subjective or objective—transcendental or sentimental. In fact, between ourselves, I do not know what the three first words mean. I can give no reason for my liking them."

"But they please you," said Elsie; "and that is all a poet can wish."

"Oh, I thought the poets of this age gave themselves out as the teachers of the world;

but you take a lower view. I am glad to meet with some one who is reasonable. The young ladies have all got so clever, so accomplished, and so scientific since I left England, that I am a little afraid of them. I hope you are not very accomplished."

"Not at all," said Elsie.

"Don't you play the most brilliant music with great execution?"

"I do not play at all."

"Nor sketch from nature—nor draw from the round—nor paint flowers?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"Then you must have gone in for science, and you are more formidable than any of the sex."

"My uncle wished me to go in for science, but unluckily I came out without acquiring it."

"How glad I am to hear it! I can talk to you without being tripped up at an incorrect date, or an inaccurate scientific or historical fact. You can warrant yourself safe to let me blunder on?"

"Is it not very good of the young ladies to

set you right if you are wrong, and if they are able to do so?"

"It may be very good for me, but it is not at all agreeable. I cannot help wondering very much at the industry and perseverance that young ladies show in becoming so very accomplished. I am sure that many a lady spends as much time and energy in learning music as would, directed otherwise, realize a fortune in Australia."

"Yes, many men in Australia have got rich with very little toil," said Elsie; "but women cannot make fortunes either here or there, I suppose."

"So they content themselves with making a noise," said Mr. Brandon. "I like some music, Miss Melville; but not the brilliant style. It shows wonderful powers of manual dexterity, but it does not please me."

"My sister says, she wonders why so many women spend so much time over the one art in which they have shown their deficiency—that is, music."

"Their deficiency? I think they show their proficiency, only that I do not care about it; that is probably my fault, and not theirs."

"But Jane says, that as so many thousands —and even millions—of women are taught music, and not one has been anything but a fourth-rate composer, it shows a natural incapacity for the highest branch of the art. In poetry and painting, where the cultivation is far rarer, greater excellence has been attained by many women. Their inferiority is certainly not so marked as in music."

"That is rather striking, Miss Melville; but I did not expect such an admission from such a quarter. I see you are not strong-minded. My aunt, Mrs. Rutherford, and her daughters, have rather been boring me with their theory of the equality of the sexes: this is a first-rate argument. Will you take it very much amiss if I borrow your idea, or rather your sister's, without acknowledgment? I have felt so very small, because they were always bringing up some instance or other out of books which I had never

read, that to bring forward something as good as this, might make them have a better opinion of me."

"I am sure neither Jane nor I would care about the appropriation of the idea, though it seems rather treacherous to put ours into our enemy's hands."

"Your enemy's!—that is hard language for me. I trusted to your being friendly."

In spite of Mr. Brandon's expressed admiration for Miss Rennie's verses, he got soon tired of reading them, and preferred the intervals of conversation between the pieces. Before they had looked through more than half of the album, which was a very large one, he proposed to return to the dancing-room, and Elsie reluctantly left the book on the library table, hoping to snatch another half-hour to finish it. Miss Rennie's verses were decidedly inferior to her own;—even her recent humiliation could not prevent her from seeing this, and she felt a good deal inspirited.

Several times during the evening, she was on

the point of mentioning Peggy Walker's name to her old master, but she knew too much about them to be able to do it with ease; she, however, ascertained that he was to be some time in and about Edinburgh, and learned from Miss Rennie where Mrs. Rutherford lived, so that she could tell Peggy where she might find him, if she wished to see him.

In the quadrille which Elsie danced with Mr. Brandon, William Dalzell and Laura Wilson were at first placed as *vis-à-vis*, but they moved to the side, and Elsie had the pleasure of seeing her sister and cousin instead. But both sisters could not but hear the familiar voice making the same sort of speeches to Miss Wilson that he had done a few months ago to Jane. How very poor and hollow they appeared now! Elsie thought Miss Wilson would just suit him. She was rich enough to make him overlook her defects of understanding and temper, and what was even harder to manage, her very ordinary face and figure. There was an easy solution of Mr. Dalzell's cultivating the acquaintance of the

Rennies in this wished-for introduction to the wealthy ward.

Mr. Dalzell thought he ought to ask Jane to dance once, just to show that he did not quite forget his old friends. He tried Elsie first, but she was fortunately engaged to Mr. Malcolm, so he walked slowly to Miss Melville, and asked her hand in an impressive manner. She willingly accepted, and spoke to him as she would to any ordinary acquaintance. He was piqued; he had hoped to have made her a little jealous of his attentions to Miss Wilson, and tried to get up a little sentimental conversation about old times, and the rides they used to have, and the romantic scenery about Cross Hall and Moss Tower, but not the slightest sigh of regret could his ear catch. He apologized for not having been to see her, and said his mother regretted that her last visit to Edinburgh had been so hurried that she had no time. Jane said quietly that she had not expected to see either of them. Had she not found it dull living in the Old Town with Peggy Walker?—

No, she had never felt it dull; she had always plenty to do. Was Peggy as much of a character as ever?—Yes; she was glad to say, Peggy was the same admirable woman she had always been, and on nearer acquaintance her character became still more appreciated. The children must be a nuisance?—The children were particularly fine children, and a great resource to her. He thought Miss Alice was not looking well. Had she felt the want of the fresh country air?—For a moment this arrow struck her; a painful expression passed over her face, but she subdued her feelings quickly.—Yes, perhaps Alice did suffer from the change; but they were going to have a week's amusement while their cousin was in town, and she hoped her sister would be the better for it.

Neither Mr. Dalzell nor Jane were sorry when the dance was ended and they were relieved of each other's company; and he returned to Miss Wilson, while she joined Elsie in the library, where she was finishing her critical reading of Miss Rennie's album, with a better

coadjutor than the Australian settler, in the person of her cousin. She was rather afraid of him at first, but she found that in general their opinions were the same as to merits and demerits, and she could not help owning that it would have been well to have taken him into her counsels before she tried the public.

"I have been telling Francis," said Jane, "that I am making up my mind to go to Mrs. Dunn's."

"Then I will go with you, Jane; we must go together; you are not to have all the drudgery."

"I say I am only making up my mind; it is not made up yet. I will wait another week before I decide. You are to be in town for a few days, Francis, and you will see us every day before we go. I wish to have a little amusement before I settle; so, Elsie, let us arrange. The theatre to-morrow night, the exhibition on Thursday morning, a concert on Thursday evening, and on Friday an excursion to Roslin; Saturday I am not sure about, but we will see when the time comes."

Elsie stared at her sister; it was so unlike Jane to be pining for amusement. "I do not care for going out, I am so unfit for it. I would rather stay at home till the time comes to go to Mrs. Dunn's."

"No, we will not let you stay and mope at home. If it has somewhat unsettled my strong nerves to be living as we have done, so that I feel I must have a change, what will be its effect on you to stay at Peggy's without me?"

"Your sister would rather not go out with me," said Francis.

"No; I have been unjust and uncharitable to you, but I hope I will not be so again. Forgive me for the past, and I will promise good behaviour for the future."

"If you are not too tired in the morning, would not a walk be pleasant?" said Francis. "I want to show you what strikes me as the finest view of Edinburgh. I do not expect Jane to appreciate it; but from your remarks on these verses, I am sure you have an eye for nature, and a soul for it."

Elsie was pleased, and felt more kindly to her cousin than she had ever done before. There are times when a little praise, particularly if it is felt to be deserved, does a sad heart incalculable good. She agreed to the walk with eagerness, and looked forward to it with hope.

CHAPTER XIII.

PEGGY'S VISITORS, AND FRANCIS' RESOLUTION.

THE girls were somewhat later in rising on the morning after the party than usual, and when they got up, they found that Peggy was out on one of those errands that Jane and Elsie had been accustomed to do for her. She had got into very good custom, from her real skill and punctuality, even in the short time that she had tried her luck in Edinburgh; and this week she had had more work than she could manage. On these occasions she used to get the assistance of a very poor woman who lived at a considerable distance, who had once been a neighbour of her sister Bessie's, and had been kind to Willie when he was in his last illness. Jane,

sometimes with and sometimes without Elsie, had always gone to tell this woman about the work, but on this occasion Peggy had to take the long walk herself—not that she grudged it—for to put half-a-crown in poor Lizzie Marr's pocket was worth a good deal of trouble and fatigue.

She had returned about twelve o'clock, when the girls were getting ready to join their cousin in their promised walk, and just as she got to the top of the stairs, a man's foot was heard at the bottom. They were going for their bonnets, when a sharp tap was heard at the door, and Peggy opened it, and they beheld, not Francis, but Mr. Brandon.

"Well, Peggy," said he, "how are you? I thought I could not be mistaken in those elbows. I have followed you from Prince's Street all this long way, but you would never turn round, and I could not outstrip you, for you know we bushmen are no great walkers, and you always were a wonderful 'Walker' in every sense of the word. And how are you again, Peggy?"

Peggy shook hands with her old master, and gazed at him with great surprise.

"Surely, these are not the bairns you used to speak of?" said Mr. Brandon, looking at the Misses Melville with astonishment quite equal to hers.

"No; the bairns are all at the school—all but Tam—and he's at his trade, but they will be here for their dinners directly. These are two young ladies that have taken a room off me. They are no so well off as they should be, more's the pity," said Peggy, lowering her voice.

"I met them last night at a party. How do you do, Miss Melville?" said he, shaking hands with Elsie first, and then with Jane.

"But what brought you here on this day?" said Peggy.

"Just your elbows, Peggy. I was coming to see you at any rate, but I did not think you were here. You must have shifted your quarters. Here is your address," said Mr. Brandon, taking out his pocket-book—'Peggy Walker,

at Mr. Thomas Lowrie's, Swinton, —— shire.' I was going to see you to-morrow, but you have saved me a journey to no purpose."

"I brought the bairns into the town for better schooling, and on account of Tam; and grandfather finds it agrees brawly with him, too. Grandfather," said Peggy, raising her voice, "this is Master Brandon that you have heard me speak about whiles—the first master I had in Australia."

Grandfather expressed his sense of the politeness of Mr. Brandon in coming all that way to see Peggy. Not but what she was a good lass, and worth going a long journey to have a crack with.

"Well, Peggy," said Mr. Brandon, taking a seat near the fire, "and how do you like this cold country after so many years in a hot one?"

"The winters are not so bad, but the springs are worse to stand. But if a body's moving and stirring about they can aye keep heat in them."

"If moving and stirring can keep you warm

you will never be cold. But, Peggy, you will want to hear the news."

"Indeed do I," said Peggy; "the diggings are going on as brisk as ever, I suppose?"

"Just as brisk, and sheep as dear, and wool steady; so, you see, I've taken a holiday."

"But you're going back again?"

"I must go back, for I have not made my fortune yet. But, by-the-by, it is a great pity that you left Melbourne when you did. You would have been a wealthy woman if you had stayed. There's Powell—was he married before you went?"

"Ay, he was. I heard word of it in Melbourne."

"Well, he's as flourishing as possible; he will soon be richer than me. On his own account now. Bought a flock and run, for an old song; cured the sheep; and is now on the highway to wealth. Ah! Peggy, why were you not Mrs. Powell?"

"It was not to be," said Peggy, calmly; "but has he any bairns?"

"Two, Peggy; and he is very proud of them."

"Ay, ay; a man has need to be proud and pleased with his own. And the wife?"

"Oh, she's a nice enough person. Getting a little uppish now; but not the manager you are," said Mr. Brandon. "More given to dress and show, and that sort of thing. But I have a message for you from Mr. Talbot, the lawyer, you know, though I dare say he has written to you on the same subject."

"My man of business," said Peggy, with a little pride. "I have not heard from him for a long time."

"He is very sorry indeed, that you let the tenant have a right of purchase to your shop."

"Oh, it is not of much consequence—he never was a saving body; I don't think he will ever raise the 250*l.*"

"Will he not?—when the place is worth 2,500*l.* now; if he borrows the money, he will carry out the purchase, and thus you lose the chance of making a little fortune. He, of

course, will keep it on till the end of the lease, at the low rent he has it at, and then take it up for the price specified. You cannot think how vexed I felt to hear you had let this property slip through your fingers."

"It is a pity," said Peggy. "It would really have been a providing for the bairns; but they must just provide for themselves. I am, at least, putting them in the way of doing it. The rent comes in regular enough, and is a help; and the 250*l.* will come in some time, and set us up in some way of doing."

"250*l* is not the sum it used to be," said Mr. Brandon; "but, in your hands, I have no doubt it will be turned to good account."

"Here come the bairns now," said Peggy, as the quick, noisy steps of the heavily-shod children were heard clattering up the stairs.

"I will now see what you have made so many sacrifices for. Name them as they come in."

"Tom, Jamie, Nancy, Jessie, Willie."

"A fine lot of youngsters, upon my word;

and sure to make good colonists." And, as he said this, Mr. Brandon saw a tear stand in the eye of the devoted aunt at his praises of her orphan charge.

"God be praised, they have their health; and on the whole they are good bairns, though a thought noisy whiles," said she.

"There's a gentleman at the stairfoot," said Tom. "He says he has come for you and your sister, Miss Melville, and as it was our dinner-time, he would not come up."

"Bid him walk upstairs, for the dinner's no ready. Mr. Brandon was aye rather an off-put to work, and ye'll no get your dinner for a good quarter of an hour yet."

"We are quite ready," said Jane; "we will go at once. It is our cousin, who was to call for us."

"We may go out to play then for a bit?" said Willie.

"If ye'll no go far, and be sure to be in time for the school."

Francis came up, to be surprised at the sight

of Mr. Brandon, and to receive a hurried explanation of his presence at Peggy Walker's, and then they went for a walk. By daylight he was struck more with the change that had shown itself in both of his cousins, and with the poor home they had to live in. Jane's proposal on the previous night to go to Mrs. Dunn's had distressed him more than any other of her projects, and yet he could do nothing to prevent it, unless by making the sacrifice which my young lady readers think he should have made long ago, and given up the estate to marry his cousin. "All for love, and the world well lost," is a fascinating course of procedure in books and on the stage, but in real life there are a good many things to be considered. It was only lately that Francis had discovered how very dear Jane was to him. If such a woman had come across his path when he was in the bank with his 250*l* a-year, with any reasonable chance of obtaining her, he would have exerted every effort and made every sacrifice to gain such a companion for life. He would have given up

all his more expensive bachelor habits—his book-buying, and his public amusements, and thought domestic happiness cheaply purchased by such privations. And if Jane could have shared his brighter fortune, he would have offered his hand and heart long before. But now, even supposing that he had contracted no expensive habits, and he found that he had—that he liked the handsome fortune, and the luxuries annexed to it—it was not his own personal gratification that he was required to give up, but the duties, and the opportunities for usefulness that Jane so highly prized for him. He could not even expect to take as good a position in the world as he had quitted. His place at the Bank of Scotland was filled up, and the quixotic step he thought of taking was not likely to recommend him to business people. And he must prepare not only for providing for a wife and family, but for Elsie, too; and until this day Elsie had shrunk from him, and he had rather despised her; but during their walk he saw the affectionate and sincere nature of Jane's sister. He thought

that he could not only offer her a home, but that he had some prospect of making it a happy one, which is by far the most important thing in such matters, and he gradually brought himself to believe that it was right he should make the sacrifice. Other opportunities of usefulness might open themselves in some other sphere; he would give up Cross Hall to the benevolent societies if Jane would only consent to be his wife. The cousinship he thought no objection; they were both very healthy in body and in mind, and as unlike each other in temperament and constitution as if they were not related. Neither Jane nor Elsie was likely to keep her health at a sedentary employment; it was the daily long walk that had kept them so well as they were. It was not right to undervalue private happiness, after all, for any public object whatever. Here was the best and dearest woman in the world suffering daily, both in herself and through her sister, and he could make her happy; he knew that he could do that. If she refused, however, it would interfere with

the warm friendship that he knew to be her greatest comfort and his own most precious possession; but she could not, she would not refuse him. He saw the kind look of her eyes; and felt convinced that though Jane believed it was only friendship, the knowledge that she was all the world to him would change it into love. And then to begin life afresh; no longer solitary; no longer unloved; could he not conquer difficulties even greater than he had ever to contend with? He did not pay proper attention at the theatre that night. Jane and her sister were delighted with the performance, and forgot their daily life in the mimic world before them; but he was building such castles in the air all the time that he was not able to criticise the play or the acting, but left that to Elsie, who certainly did it very well.

CHAPTER XIV.

GOOD NEWS FOR FRANCIS.

WHEN the children went out, and the young ladies had gone with their cousin, Mr. Brandon took the opportunity of asking how it happened that the Misses Melville were staying with her. She explained their position in a more matter-of-fact way than Miss Rennie had done on the preceding night, and then dilated on their virtues, particularly on Jane's.

"So clever, and so sensible, and so willing! There's nothing she does not understand, and yet, poor thing, she says she must go to the dressmaking, for with all her by-ordinary talents and her by-ordinary education, there is not another hand's turn she can get to do. I'm sure

the pains she takes with the bairns at night, I just marvel at it. There's Tam, she can make him do anything she likes. It is a grand thing for a laddie when he is just growing to be a man to have such a woman as Miss Melville to look up to — it makes him have a respect for women."

"He need look no higher than you, Peggy," said Mr. Brandon.

"Ah! but you see I am not quick at the book learning. I'll no complain of Tam for want of respect to myself, for he is a good lad, take him altogether; but then, Miss Jean, she helps him with his problems and his squares, and runs up whole columns of figures like a lang-legged spider, and tells him why things should be so and so, and seems as keen to learn all about the engineering as himself; and she helps Jamie with the Latin, that he craikit on so lang to let him learn, though for my part I see little good it will do him, and him only to follow the joinering and cabinet-making trade; and Tam, he will no be behind, and he must needs learn it

too; and as for her writing, ye could read it at the other end of the room. And in her uncle's house there was such order and such government under her eye as there was not to be seen in another gentleman's house in the country. And yet, poor lassie, she says there's nothing but the dressmaking for her. And Miss Elsie, too, writing day and night, and cannot get a bode for her bit poems and verses, till now she is like to greet her een out over every letter she gets from London about them. I can see Miss Jean has been egging up Mr. Hogarth, as they call him—I'm no wishing him any ill, but I wish the auld laird had made a fairer disposition of his possessions—well, Miss Jean has been stirring up this Mr. Francis to take them out for the sake of Elsie, for she is just fading away."

"I like her the best of the two, and she is certainly far the prettiest. The eldest one is a little too clever for me, and too much disposed to preach, even in a ball-room."

"Well, I dare say she saw you had had rather little preaching in the bush, and I am

sure you were none the worse of all she said to you. But it makes us the more vexed at losing the real value of my bit property, for if I had had the twenty-five hundred pounds you speak about we could have begun business in Melbourne together. She can keep books, and Miss Elsie has a clever hand at the millinery;—we could have got on famously. I must let you see the bairns' writing-books, and the letters she learns them to write, and their counting-books, too."

Mr. Brandon looked and admired quite to Peggy's satisfaction; and then he spoke to the old man in a kindly way, calling him Mr. Lowrie, and saying he had often heard Peggy speak of him at Barragong. How much pleasure little courtesies like this give to poverty and old age! The old man's face brightened when he heard that he was known at such a distance by such a gentleman as this, and he answered Mr. Brandon's inquiries as to his health and his hearing with eager garrulity.

"Well," said Peggy, "I am no poorer than

I was if I had not known about the bit shop being worth so much; but when I think on Miss Jean and her sister, and the lift it might have been to them, I think more of it than I would otherwise do. And now, Mr. Brandon, I'll trouble you to move from the fireside; I must put out the kail. But you were aye fond of being in a body's way."

"I have it," said Mr. Brandon; "it will do."

"What will do?"

"You remember the Phillipses?"

"What should ail me to remember them? But I have such a poor head, I forget to ask the thing I care most about. How's Mr. Phillips, and how's Emily?"

"All well, and the other four, too."

"And Mrs. Phillips?"

"As well as ever, and handsomer than ever, I think."

"Oh! her looks were never her worst fault. But what did you mean by saying it would do?"

"The Phillipses came home in the vessel

with me, and are settled in London for good. I think the eldest Miss Melville would be exactly the sort of person they want to superintend the household, for Mrs. Phillips has as little turn for management as ever, and there is a considerable establishment. And, also, she might make Miss Emily and Miss Harriett attend to their lessons, for, though they have masters or some such things, they are too much the mistresses of the house to be controlled by anybody."

"Their father was always very much taken up with these lassies—Emily used to be like the apple of his eye; and the mistress is too lazy to cross them either, I'm thinking," said Peggy.

"Just so. If Miss Melville's preaching in season or out of season can give her a little more sense, I think Phillips will be all the better for it. She can keep house, admirably, you say; and that she is able to teach, these children's books testify. Tell Miss Melville to delay her resolution about the dressmaking till I communicate with Phillips, which I will do by to-day's

post. He is talking of coming up to the north shortly, principally to visit you, I think, so he may see her, and can judge for himself. Your account of the young lady seems everything that can be desired, and Mr. Phillips has such a high opinion of your judgment that your recommendation will carry great weight."

"He'll bring Emily with him to see me," said Peggy. "Tell him to be sure and bring Emily with him. I cannot ask you to take pot-luck with us."

"No, I thank you; I have just breakfasted. I do not keep such early hours as I did at Barragong. We turn night into day in these lands of civilization, and for a change it is remarkably pleasant. But how do you take to Scotch fare after Australia?" asked Mr. Brandon, eyeing with astonishment the infinitesimal piece of meat which made the family broth.

"I did not take quite kindly to the porridge at first, and missed the meat that we used to have in such abundance; but use is second nature, and though I whiles look back with

regret to the flesh-pots of Egypt, I have my strength, and I have some prospect of getting back to the land of wastrie and extravagance, as I aye used to say it was at Barragong; and Mr. Phillips's place, at Weriwilta, was worse still. And Mr. Phillips has made his fortune with all that waste, and with all his liberality, and a foolish wife, and an expensive family, and is living in London like a gentleman as he is," said Peggy. "And you really think he would be glad to have Miss Jean?"

"I have not a doubt of it; but good-bye for the present. I hear your youngsters rattling upstairs. I will see you again ere long, and must get better acquainted with them. Good-bye, sir," said Mr. Brandon, to Thomas Lowrie, who having never been called either Mr. or Sir in his life before, was lost in astonishment at the remarkably fine manners of Peggy's old master.

"A very civil-spoken gentleman, Peggy," said he. "It must have been a pleasure to serve a gentleman of such politeness."

"What a pity," said Peggy to herself, "that

I ever should have told the young ladies that daft-like story about me and the master. I wish I had bitten my tongue out first. But who was to think of him turning up like this? And he's just the man for Miss Elsie; but I have made her laugh at him, and I misdoubt if her proud spirit will bend to him. And after all, what the worse is he, if she had known nothing about it. And I dare say all young men are alike; and he's better than the most half of them. There was Elsie so taken up with that lad Dalzell, that came courting Miss Jean, and if she had heard half that was said about him, poor Mr. Brandon would have been a saint in comparison. But an opening for Miss Jane is aye worth something. To think of her being put under the like of Mrs. Phillips; and it's like I'll see Emily—a spoiled bairn, no doubt—but she had naturally a fine disposition, at least humanly speaking."

It was not in human nature, however, that Peggy should quite lose sight of her own concerns in her pleasure at the thought of Miss

Melville having something better to do than dressmaking. The recollection of the years of hard work that had converted her little shop into a freehold, her old pride in having her title made out on parchment, the hurry she had been in to get it let, to go home by a particular ship, and the obstinate way in which her tenant's wife insisted on a right of purchase, and her own reluctant admission of the clause, thinking that as the house was not new, 250*l.* was an outside value for it, and now to think of its being such a kingdom. The town had run up to her little suburban shop, and far past it; on every side the monster, Melbourne, had been adding to his extent, and now, on account of the bit of garden and large yard, that she had thought would be so nice for the children, when she had them out, and that she had bought very cheap, the value of her property was increased tenfold—but she was none the richer. The sacrifice she had made had turned out even greater than she had expected, and now she could not help thinking of how she would miss Miss Melville, and what

a loss it would be to her bairns; and how she was to keep Miss Elsie in tolerable spirits without her sister was another perplexity.

The duties of the day were gone through as usual, however; but when the children and the old man had gone to bed, Peggy made up her mind to make a martyr of herself, and to sit up for the young ladies, who had not been home all day, and with a piece of mending in her hands, which got on but slowly, she mused on her ill luck. Very tired and sleepy, and a little out of humour, she was when she opened the door for Jane and Elsie.

"Well, well! I just hope you're the better of your late hours, though they are not just what I approve of."

"Only once in a way, Peggy; our holiday will soon be over. But you should not have sat up for us—promise not to do it again. We have enjoyed the theatre to-night, have we not, Elsie?"

"Yes, but the disenchantment comes so soon again."

"I have no great opinion of theatres and

play-acting, and such like. I was once in a theatre in Melbourne, though," said Peggy.

"With one of your sweethearts, Peggy?" asked Jane.

"Whisht with your nonsense, Miss Jean; don't be talking of sweethearts to a douce woman like me," said Peggy, who, nevertheless, was rather proud of her Australian conquests, and liked to hear them alluded to now and then.

"But how did you like the play?"

"I cannot say I did. To see folk dressed up and painted, rampaging about and talking havers, just making fools of themselves. A wee insignificant-looking body setting up to be a king! and the sogers—you should have seen the sogers, as if they could ever fight."

"It is likely there was nothing very first-rate on the Melbourne boards at that time, but our play to-night was perfectly well got up," said Elsie, "and the acting was admirable."

"I'm no clear that at its best the theatre is a fit place for Christian men and women to frequent," said Peggy.

"You prefer the stern realities of life to its most brilliant illusions," said Jane.

"Speaking of the realities of life, Mr. Brandon says he knows of something likely to suit you, Miss Jane," said Peggy.

"Indeed!" said Jane, with an incredulous smile.

"At least, he says you must resolve on nothing till you hear from him. He is going to write to London to Mr. Phillips."

"Your Mr. Phillips—is he in London?"

"Yes; and Mr. Brandon says they are sorely in need of somebody to keep the house—for I fancy everything is at rack and manger if Mrs. Phillips has the management—and to make Emily and Harriett mind their books, for they are such spoiled bairns. I was showing Mr. Brandon what you could do with Tam and Nancy and the others, and he says you are exactly the person that they need; and I can see that it is wondrous feasible."

"What salary should I ask?" said Jane; "or should I leave it to Mr. Phillips?"

"You had better leave it to him; he is not such a skinflint as our benevolent associations. I always found both him and Mr. Brandon open-handed and willing to pay well for all that was done for them. To me, Mr. Phillips was most extraordinary liberal."

"Then you think it likely I will get this situation at a respectable salary?"

"I think you are almost sure of it."

"What good news for Francis, to-morrow!" said Jane.

END OF VOL. I.

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