

EFFIE HETHERINGTON



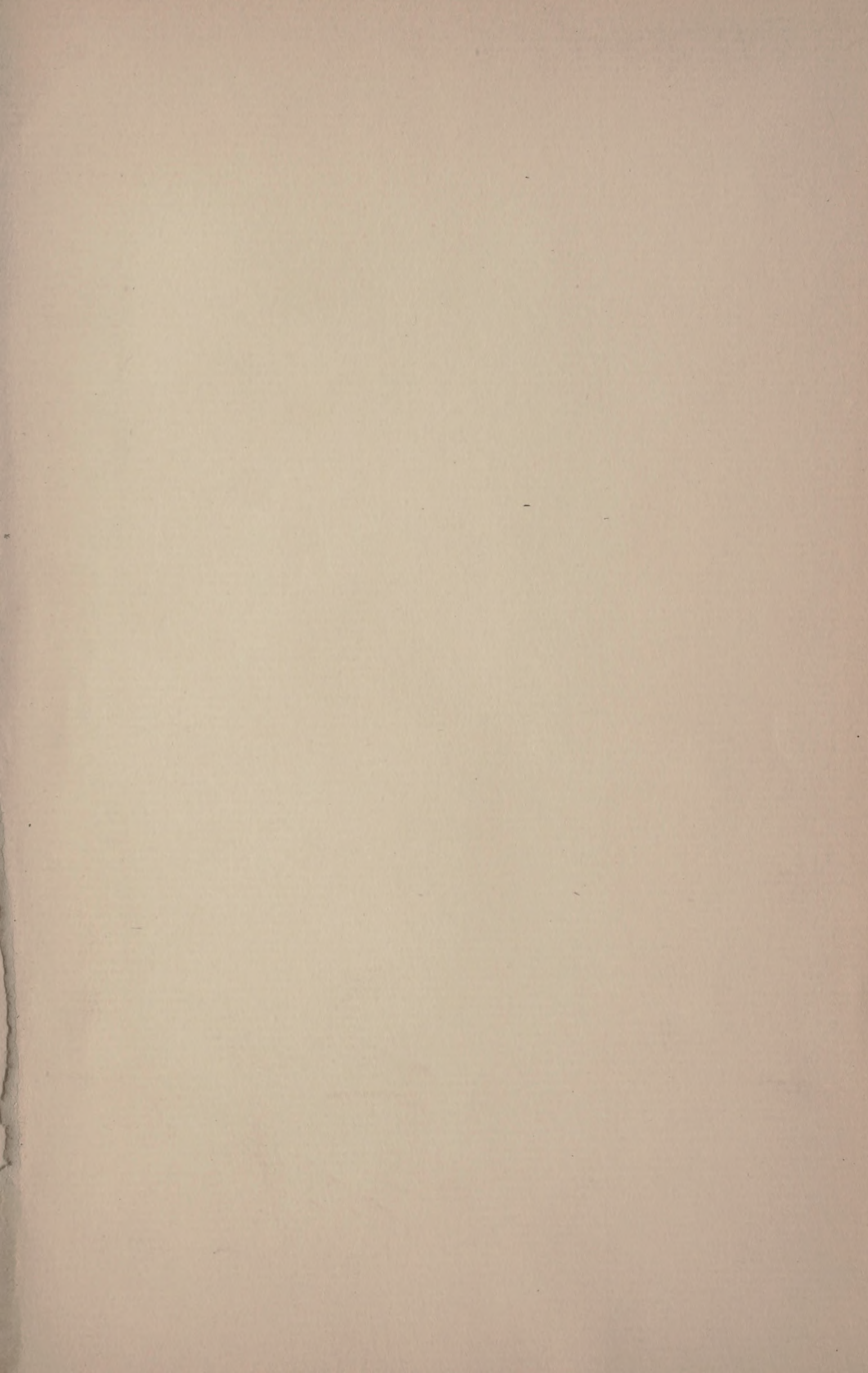
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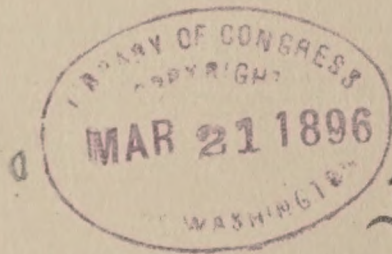
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.



EFFIE HETHERINGTON

EFFIE
HETHERINGTON

BY
Robert Buchanan



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BOSTON
ROBERTS BROTHERS
1896

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BOOK I.

THE PASSION OF RICHARD DOUGLAS.

“ Je dy toujours, et sans cesse diray,
Sans que jamais je change de propos,
Quand vos vertus à tous j’annonceray,
Que tout honneur en vous prend son repos.
Quelle beauté à vous compareray ?
Quel cœur gentil à bien du tout dispos ?
Digne m’estes pas du bien de l’autre vie,
Si votre los toujours ne le convie ? ”

LA CHANSON AMOUREUSE.

CHAPTER I.

HOW RICHARD DOUGLAS KEPT HALLOWEEN.

“Stroke her hair o’ gowden sheen,
Feel her cheek and close her een.
If she be a virgin maid,
She will smile nor be afraid ;
If she be an evil thing,
Down the flood her body fling,
Droon’d and rotten let her glide
Till the torrent meets the tide.”

KELPIE SONG.

ON the night of October 31, 1870, Richard Douglas, of that ilk, stood alone at the door of his weather-beaten dwelling, gazing out on the stormy waters of the Solway Firth. Though the rain was falling in torrents, and beating in upon him with great flecks of foam from the surging sea, he was bareheaded and stood, careless of the angry elements, with folded arms.

All was dark before him, save when the full moon glimmered out from the storm-cloud and flashed like fireflaught on the great Firth, on the dark stretch of moorland to the north, and on the distant mountains of Galloway beyond. The dismal house stood in

the centre of the Moss, and about a quarter of a mile from the sandy shore. There was no road thither, only a bridle-path communicating with the distant highway and leading through pastureless acres of desolate morass — the laird's savage patrimony, from which he took his name.

A lonely place; a lonely man, and the last of his name — poor as one gently born could be, ill-favoured both by nature and fortune, and with neither kith nor kin, wife nor friend. Thirty years past he had come into the world crying on the breast of a dead mother, and ten years later his father had broken his neck in a mad gallop homeward after a night of revel in the town of Dumfries, leaving the few barren acres and the dismal homestead as all the inheritance of his orphaned boy. The shadow of those early calamities had passed into the soul of Douglas, and made it dark and solitary. With the torso and trunk of a tall man, he was only five feet six inches high. But he was strong as Hercules, with the sinewy chest of a lion and the long muscular arms of a man-ape.

“Come ben, come ben!” cried a shrill voice from within. “What keeps ye there glowering in the cauld blast and the rain? Come ben, laird, and bar the door!”

He hesitated for a moment, then closed the door against the rushing wind, and, passing along a dark lobby, entered the kitchen — a large raftered chamber, dismal as a barn. A woman of seventy stood in the

ingle, muttering to herself as she bent over the peat fire.

“You’re drookit to the skin,” she cried, glancing round as he entered. “Come, laird, and dry your claise.”

Pausing in the light of an old-fashioned oil-lamp suspended from the ceiling, Douglas shook the rain-drops from his black hair and beard, and then walked over to the fire. His face would have been handsome, but the black eyes were too small and keen, and the features wore an habitual gloom; yet his expression grew gentle enough, and the eyes were not unkind as he glanced at the old woman, his sole companion and attendant in the lonely house.

“A black night, Elspeth,” he said, “and dour enough for Halloween. Yet I saw lights inland across the Moss, and there are folk gathering up at the farms.”

The woman sighed and shook her head.

“Ye should be there amang them, laird, instead o’ wearying at hame. What way will ye no’ be a man amang men — aye, and a wooer amang woovers like the rest? There are braw lassies wi’ grand tochers yonder, and the laird o’ Douglas might tak’ his choice.”

The man laughed — a curious laugh, like the croak of a corby crow; then taking from his breast-pocket a coarse briar-root pipe, lit it with a peat from the fire, and sat down. Elspeth watched him quietly, and

then continued, partly as if addressing him, partly as if communing with herself —

“Wae’s me if the house o’ Douglas is to waste awa’ like a house built on sand! Three generations hae I seen, and noo the laird stands alane, a withered stump, like the blasted tree up yonder on the Moss. Fain would I hear the cry o’ bairns in Douglas before I dee; and the time’s near, but the hoose is toom as a last year’s nest.”

“Just so,” said the man, staring moodily at the fire. “What then, woman?”

“What then, laird? Is it no’ a sin an’ a shame that it should be?”

“No, by God!” returned Douglas. “We were an ill race, and no one will miss the breed when it is blotted out. Let the house fall, since the devil has put his curse upon it, and his mark on *me!*”

“Ye’re like yer faither,” said Elspeth. “He was a dour man and ever discontentit, and the curse drove him to the drink for comfort, till he brak’ his neck on that mad gallop hame. Weel, weel, weel! It’s ill arguing wi’ your faither’s son! Yet had I my will, ye wadna be sitting there bent double like an auld man, but be up and abroad, among the gentry, looking for a bonnie bride this Halloween!”

Again the man laughed; this time almost fiercely. Then rising suddenly, he gazed out through a large window looking inland. Far across the Moss the lights were moving still.

“And there will be grand company,” continued Elspeth, “up at the moor the nicht. The Lamonts are there, and Miss Forsyth from Castle Gordon, and Lord Graeme’s factor wi’ his dochters hame frae France.”

“Damn them!” muttered Douglas.

“Aye, dawm awa’!” echoed the old woman. “But maist o’ them are rich, and some o’ them are bonnie, and a man might pick amang them blindfold and fare better than dwelling like a stirk in the stall.”

“Hold your tongue, you fool!” cried the laird, turning angrily. “I shall never marry.”

So saying he left the kitchen, and passed along the dark lobby to another room—a large and dismal chamber on the ground-floor, rudely furnished as a sitting-room. No carpet covered the floor, which was of polished black oak, like the rafters overhead. A long dining-table and a few oaken chairs were the only furniture, save a few faded oil-portraits on the walls, and some guns and fishing-rods suspended in a rack over the fireplace. An old-fashioned oil-lamp, like that in the kitchen, swung from the central beam, and before the smouldering fire lay several dogs—an old deerhound, toothless and blind, a couple of spaniels, and a black retriever—which looked round at their master’s entrance, but made no other sign. The table was covered with books and maps, and other books were scattered about upon the floor. Through the uncurtained window, which formed a

large recess with a time-worn oaken seat, came the fitful flash of the moonlight and the glimmer of the angry sea.

The storm roared, the rain splashed on the panes, and the house shook through and through with the force of the angry blast.

Lost in thought, Douglas paced up and down the chamber, unheeded by the dogs on the hearth, who were doubtless familiar with their master's disposition, and made no attempt to attract his notice. At last he paused before a painting on the wall, the picture of a woman, pale and wan, with faint, sad eyes looking out beneath an old-fashioned headdress, and mittened hands folded tranquilly in her lap of old brocade. He gazed at it long and silently. It was the face of his dead mother, whom in life he had never known. Close to it was another likeness, to which he turned at last, and now he might have been looking into a mirror, seeing reflected there his own gloomy features, his frowning brows, his deep-set, angry eyes; for it was the face of his father, the last laird of Douglas. This face, like his own, possessed an abiding gloom, but it was lighted from within by a lambent flame of grim humour, which played round the lips like sheet-lightning round the edge of a thunder-cloud; and well indeed had the unknown artist caught this peculiarity of one who, by his mad frolics—if the freaks of so stern a man could be called by such a name—had earned the title of “Dare-the-Deil.”

Douglas looked long and lingeringly at the woman's picture, but turned away impatiently from that of the man. Then, throwing himself into the armchair, he took up a book and tried to read. It was a curious book for such a person to study, but it bore the marks of frequent use, as if it had been much handled by its possessor — the "Decameron" of Giovanni Boccaccio, in a French translation, published with illustrations in aquafortis.

The book fell open, as if by constant habit, at the pages containing the eighth and ninth novels of the fifth day. These two wondrous tales appeared to have been read and re-read till paper and print were thumbed, and dog's-eared, and worn, far beyond all the rest of the book. Their subjects the reader will no doubt remember; the one describes how Anastasio Onesti, being in love with a lady, and despised, goes to Chiassi, and sees a lady pursued by a huntsman, and then torn down and devoured by dogs; the second tells the piteous history of Federigo, who, having spent all his substance for his lady's sake, slays for her, and sacrifices to her dainty appetite, his favourite hawk.

Little need had Douglas to follow the printed lines; every sentence, every syllable, of these narratives was familiar to him, burned as if with fire into his brain. Yet he read on eagerly, as if the themes were new. And as he read his dark face kindled, his eyes burned, and there hung round his heavy lips a light like the

lambent gleam round the mouth of his father's portrait; like, but different, more fierce and animal, more lurid and sensual, more characteristic of the burning fire in the man's troubled heart.

“And he saw, flying to him through the under-wood, with dishevelled hair, her tender body torn and bleeding, a beautiful young woman, after whom ran two black hounds, who bit her as she ran, causing her to utter piteous cries. Then came a rider on a black horse, looking with a fierce countenance, and gripping in his hand a dagger with which, uttering wild reproaches, he threatened the woman's life. . . . And the hounds seized her by the haunches, and dragged her down to the ground, when the fierce rider dismounted and went towards her.”

Facing the lines I have quoted was a picture of the scene, horrible enough, but distinguished for the beauty of the victim's face and figure. Douglas bent over it, as if drinking in every detail; as he did so, a sharp agony passed through his frame, and his features were distorted with emotion. Then, turning the pages over fiercely and impatiently, he read as follows:—

“Though he was so poor, Federigo had never till that day realised the poverty to which his reckless love and mad extravagance had brought him; but now, having nought in the house to set before his lady, he felt it sore, and angrily cursed his fortune, and went hither and thither vainly seeking for money, or for money's worth, which he might sell. . . . Sud-

denly he remembered his hawk, sitting on a perch in his room; and knowing not what else to do, he thought it might form a dish to please his lady, and he wrung its neck. Then did he tell his maidservant to pluck it and roast it; and, after covering the table with the only white tablecloth he had remaining, he hied into the garden with a cheerful face, and told his lady that all he could offer to her to eat was ready. Therefore she sat down with her companion, and, waited upon by Federigo, she ate the bird, not knowing what it was."

Why did the man's eyes grow dim? Why did his lips quiver like a grieving child's as he read these simple words? His emotion grew so great he threw the book aside, and, rising to his feet, strode up and down the room. The rain beat against the window panes, and the wind shook the lonely house, while he muttered to himself aloud —

"Elspeth is right; I should be out yonder, not lingering here. I shall go mad soon, if this goes on! Up there at the farms, away at the great house, the music is playing, and the lamps are burning, and the lassies are rustling in their silks. There's love-making and embracing in kitchen and in hall; but only old Elspeth and this rat-trap of a house for *me!* No fool like an old fool! Thirty years old, and fretful as a sick bairn. Damn the women! Damn their soft, smooth faces, and their scented hair, and all their winsome ways! Ay, damn them all — save *one!*"

He paused and raised his hands, which were clenched together. At that moment the wind fell, and there was a half silence, broken by a sound like horses' hoofs on the path which passed the house. He dropped his hands and listened. Mingled with the first sound came laughter of human voices; then a man's voice cried loudly, and a clear, bell-like woman's voice replied. Thereupon the wind and rain resumed their tumult; but in its midst he heard, to his amazement, a loud knocking at the front door.

CHAPTER II.

HOW DOUGLAS ENTERTAINED FAIR COMPANY.

“ The siller sheckle wags its pow
 Upon the brae, my deary;
The wind around the winnelstrae
 Is whistling never weary!
And its hey the blossom o’ the broom,
 And ho the wither’d thorn;
The bat glowers at the candlelight,
 And thinks it shining morn.”

OLD SONG.

TWO or three minutes afterwards old Elspeth entered the room.

“ Laird ! Laird ! ” she cried ; “ come but the hoose ! Here’s company bound for Castle Lindsay seeking shelter frae the storm. There’s Mr. Aird, the writer, frae Dumfries, and twa young gentlemen, and twa bonnie young leddies, all drookit to the skin ; and their grooms are outside half-dround, wi’ the puir horses jest wild wi’ fright.”

As she spoke, the sound of voices came through the open door, drowned in a moment by the peal of a thunderclap which shook the house. One who did not know Douglas would have said that he was para-

lysed with terror. His face had grown suddenly white as death.

“What brings them here?” he murmured.

“Noo, there’s a feckless question!” cried the old woman. “Did ye no’ hear? They were riding across the Moss when the storm came down, and they came here for shelter till it’s blaun by. Lord preserve us! Look at that!”

The last words were called forth by a sudden flash of lightning, so vivid that it seemed to wrap the whole room in liquid flame. Thunder followed almost instantly, a crash like the splitting of a solid mountain, followed by a discordant and awful roar. There was a scream from the kitchen, faint and terrified.

“That’s one o’ the young leddies!” said Elspeth. “She’s heysteerical — laughing ae minute and screeching the next.”

Douglas did not hear the end of the sentence. With an impatient cry he had left the room, and, rushing along the lobby, entered the kitchen, where his unexpected visitors had assembled. Pausing upon the threshold, he gazed upon them. There were five individuals in all — three gentlemen and two ladies. One gentleman, Mr. Aird, the solicitor, was a wiry little man of fifty, dressed in black; the two others, described by Elspeth as the “young Lamonts,” were young men of three-and-twenty and nineteen respectively, both clad in riding-coats and breeches, both top-booted and spurred. These three, and a dark-eyed

young lady of eighteen, wearing a dark riding-dress and low-crowned hat, were all standing, and gazing rather helplessly at the last member of the party, who, seated on a stool near the fire, was hiding her face in her hands and trembling hysterically. She, too, wore a riding costume, dripping and soaking with the rain. Her hat had fallen off, and her hair of dusky gold had unloosened itself and fallen over her shoulders. At every lightning flash and accompanying peal of thunder, which now came in rapid succession, she uttered low cries like a frightened bird, and seemed about to faint away.

“Effie! Effie!” cried the dark-eyed young lady. “How foolish you are! See, here is Mr. Douglas.”

Effie started, uncovered her eyes, and looked round, showing a delicately pretty face, and two large, wistful blue eyes; meeting the eager gaze of the owner of the house, she smiled faintly.

“I cannot help it, Lady Bell,” she said. “The lightning always terrifies me. Oh, Mr. Douglas, is the storm nearly over?”

Another flash answered her, but this time the thunder was less instantaneous and sounded further away.

“The storm is passing away,” answered Douglas. “There is nothing to be afraid of, Miss Hetherington. But in the name of all that is unlucky why are you abroad in such weather?”

The elder of the two young men, Arthur Lamont,

a slight and somewhat effeminate, but very handsome fellow, with auburn hair and a light moustache, answered the question.

“We have had a gallop to Dumfries, and were riding back to the Castle for the Halloween. It was a fine night when we started, and no sign of bad weather; but the rain caught us in the centre of the Moss near the Tyke Bridge, and then, by George! the storm came down! Our horses became almost unmanageable, and yours being the only house handy, we trotted in here.”

“Just so,” said Mr. Aird; “and very hard work we had to find you, as you may guess.”

Scarcely heeding the words said to him, Douglas had approached Miss Hetherington and was bending eagerly over her.

“You are dripping wet!” he exclaimed. “You will catch your death!”

“I don’t mind the soaking,” she answered, looking softly up into his face, “if that dreadful lightning will only cease. You know, Mr. Douglas, I had a sister struck dead by my side when we were playing in a field, and ever since then — oh! oh!”

Startled by another blinding flash, she caught hold of Douglas and clung close to him, hiding her face upon his arm. He trembled at her touch, and shook like a leaf. He tried to speak, but could not; he stood in strange agitation, moistening his dry lips nervously with the tip of his tongue; and through his

frame there ran a wild thrill of gladness as he felt the touch of the girl's warm cheek and clinging hands.

The young lady who had been addressed as Lady Bell glanced at Arthur Lamont, and shrugged her shoulders; then, turning to Douglas, she said —

“We are all in a sad plight, as you see. I, too, am dripping like a mermaid. But it is useless lingering here. We had better ride on, unless Effie Hetherington means to stay all night.”

Effie raised her face from the laird's arm, but still clung to his sleeve with her nervous hands.

“I beg your pardon, Lady Bell,” she said respectfully. “I scarcely know what I am doing — I am so terrified! But I am ready to go on if you wish it.”

“That you shall not!” cried Douglas. “You shall bide here till the storm is done! Elspeth!”

“Laird,” answered the old woman.

“Put some peat upon the fire — bestir yourself! Get hot water! And go ben to the sitting-room and bring the bottle. Don't be alarmed, Miss Hetherington. There is no danger *now*, except of cold and ague; but a glass of warm toddy will put *that* right.”

The kitchen was now full of a faint vapour, drawn by the blazing fire from the visitors' saturated forms. The men had taken off their hats, outer coats, and cloaks, and thrown them aside; but Lady Bell still wore her hat and riding-cloak, both of which were dripping wet. As for Miss Hetherington, she sat,

a pool of water at her feet, with her cloak around her, steaming, close to the fire.

“Let me take your cloak,” said Douglas, all of whose solicitude seemed to be for the one frightened girl.

She rose up, and he took the cloak from her shoulders. Meantime old Elspeth had hobbled back into the room with a bottle of whisky, which she placed upon the table, then, stooping down close to Miss Hetherington, she exclaimed —

“My conscience, leddy, your bonnie shoon are jest turn’d till pap, and your hosen are running water. Bide a bit, and let me tak’ them off, and dry them by the fire.”

Effie laughed, and glanced nervously at Lady Bell, who was watching the proceeding with an impatience she took no pains to conceal. At this juncture Arthur Lamont came forward and said —

“My dear Bell, *you* too are soaking! Give me your cloak to dry.”

“Oh, don’t mind *me*, Arthur!” answered the young lady, with a malicious laugh. “*I* am not salt or sugar, and shall not melt! Effie Hetherington is different — she is delicate, poor thing! and needs attention.”

By this time Effie had reseated herself, and was suffering Elspeth to draw off her shoes and stockings. As Lady Bell spoke, she looked round and smiled. For the moment her terror seemed to have passed away and given place to a sarcastic merriment.

“I am quite warm now,” she cried, holding two pretty naked feet towards the fire and toasting them in the glow. “Oh, Lady Bell, won’t you come and be toasted too?”

As Lady Bell turned petulantly away to address some trifling remark to Mr. Aird, the eyes of Arthur Lamont and Miss Hetherington met; it was only for a moment, but a close observer would have seen in it a hidden understanding, a secret sympathy. Douglas did not notice the look; he stood in the ingle hanging up the cloak, and glancing from the naked feet of the owner up to her white, ungloved hands. Few observing his gloomy face would have suspected the wild yearning which just then possessed him — a yearning to kneel down and shower kisses upon the girl’s rosy hands and feet.

“Silk stockings!” cried Elspeth, as she spread them out before the fire. “Silk stockings, and shoon mair fit for a fairy’s wear than a young leddy! Did ye ever see the like? Siccan hosen and shoon for Christian wear!”

There was a general laugh, in which Effie herself joined.

“Who could tell that it would rain so terribly? Do, Mr. Douglas, see to Lady Bell! Make her do as I am doing! She will be sure to catch cold!”

But Lady Bell was obdurate; she refused even to take off her cloak, and was still eager to hasten on. Even when the hot water was steaming on the table,

and Elspeth had deftly mixed one or two tumblers of whisky and water, the dark young lady refused to taste a drop. Mr. Aird and the young man helped themselves, while Douglas, taking a steaming glass from the table, brought it over to Effie Hetherington. Effie laughed at first and shook her pretty head; but at last, at the laird's gentle persuasion, she raised the glass to her lips.

“How strong it is!” she said gaily, with a little grimace. “But it's very nice and sweet! Make Lady Bell take some, Mr. Arthur; do!”

As she sat there in the glow of the firelight, her delicate features illumined, her shapely feet peeping like rosebuds from under her petticoat of lace, her golden brown hair poured over her shoulders, her large eyes full of mingled wistfulness and pleasure, Effie Hetherington looked prettier than ever. The health and happiness of youth — for she was only nineteen — seemed to irradiate her tall and graceful but firmly knitted form, and fill every look and word with nameless charm. She had all the clinging sweetness of the innocent maiden, lightly touched with the sparkling humour of the natural coquette; for a coquette she was by nature, and by habit one of those light delightful things who are too pretty to be loved by their own sex and shine best under the admiring eyes of men. Experienced in such matters, she did not fail to be fully conscious of her host's gloomy admiration; but again and again her eyes glanced

towards Arthur Lamont, as if she sought and expected a greater and more certain tribute *there*.

Women are strange, says the proverb. Effie was fully aware also of the annoyance she was causing to her friend and companion, Lady Bell; and this also she seemed to enjoy, either from feminine perversity, or for some more subtle reason. Though it was quite clear from her manner that she was the dark lady's inferior in rank and social position, she was her superior not only in natural charm but in all the daring arts with which women conquer the sterner sex. By natural right, she knew, Lady Bell should have been the centre of the picture, the leading object of interest, then and at all times; but the prettier woman had mastered the situation, and was secretly enjoying her little triumph — as pretty women will.

While Mr. Aird, the Lamonts, and Lady Bell gathered talking together round the table, and old Elspeth busied herself by the fire looking to the steaming clothes, Douglas remained persistently close to Effie, devouring her with his dark eyes.

“Are you stopping still at the Castle?” he asked presently.

Effie, who still had the tumbler in her right hand, held it up to the light, and nodded smilingly as she replied —

“Oh, yes; I have been there all the summer, but at the New Year I am going back to Edinburgh. I think,” she added, sinking her voice — “I think I

shall be bidden back to the marriage, but I am not sure."

"The marriage? — what marriage?"

"Mr. Arthur's, with Lady Bell!"

What a changeable little face! As she spoke the words, it grew suddenly over-clouded — a strange light came into her eyes, and the delicate mouth grew hard, almost cruel.

"Ah, yes," muttered Douglas; "I heard something about it. They have been engaged a long time?"

Effie laughed, and the laugh was not so pleasant as usual — a little bitter, perhaps, and scornful.

"Hush!" she whispered confidentially. "They must n't hear you. Yes, it's a long engagement, as you say. Do you believe in long engagements? People see too much of each other, and weary before the honeymoon. Don't you think so?"

"I — I don't know," answered the laird. "I have had very little experience."

"Of course not," said the girl, more lightly. "You are an old bachelor, Mr. Douglas. Folk say you hate women, but I'm sure that is n't true. I often wonder you have never married. You must be so lonely here."

Douglas trembled, and did not answer. I think, had they been alone, he could have seized the speaker in his arms, and, straining her to his bosom, have poured into her ears all the wild passion burning in his heart. Never in his life had he felt so happy as at

that moment. Effie's unaffectedness, her winning confidence, her freedom as to an old and trusted friend, were delicious beyond measure; for he saw in them not coquetry, but sympathy — even encouragement. He would have been content to have her remain thus for ever. In all the fever of his idolatry, he would have asked no more.

“Do you live here all alone?” she asked in a moment.

“Yes, with old Elspeth, my servant and foster-mother.”

“Don't you feel very dull?”

“Sometimes.”

“How do you amuse yourself?” she demanded, with a querying lift of the eyebrows.

“With books — with my own thoughts. When they become too much for me, I gallop into Dumfries, or roam out yonder by the sea.”

She looked into his face wonderingly, and the look to him seemed full of tenderness and compassion; then, meeting his ardent gaze, she blushed, and smiled again.

“Do you remember when we first met?”

Did he remember? As if he could forget!

“Yes; at the Mearns Farm, last year,” he replied. “The Carlyles are your kinsfolk — do you see them often?”

He did not tell her how often he had haunted the place in the hope of her coming over.

“Not often,” she said. “I have been kept so busy

at the Castle. Ah, Mr. Douglas, you cannot tell how sad it is to feel so poor and dependent! I ought to have been born rich, then I could have chosen my own company, and lived my own life. Sometimes I could cry — I feel so lost, so friendless!”

And again her eyes grew soft, filling with tears. She had spoken in a voice so low that her listener had to stoop down, his ear close to her lips, in order to catch the words; but there was no danger of being overheard, as the others were loudly discussing their arrangements for the ride onward. As she ceased, however, the conversation came to a pause, and the other members of the party, obeying a sign from Lady Bell, all turned their eyes on herself and Douglas. The latter, finding himself the object of their scrutiny, drew himself up quickly, and scowled at Arthur Lamont, whose face wore a peculiarly sarcastic smile.

By this time the lightning and thunder had ceased, but the rain was still falling heavily.

“I declare,” cried Effie, suddenly, “we have quite forgotten the poor grooms. How selfish we are!”

“Speak for yourself, Effie,” interposed Lady Bell. “I have been ready this half-hour, waiting your will; and by this time, if I had had my way, both ourselves and the poor grooms, as you call them, would have been safe home.”

“It’s pouring hard still,” said Douglas. “I’ll see what the men are doing, and give them some whisky to keep them warm.”

So saying, he took the bottle from the table, and strode out to the front door. The moment he had gone Lady Bell turned to Effie with a malicious laugh.

“Just like you, Effie Hetherington! You’d flirt with a stone dyke if no man were near!”

“Indeed, Lady Bell, nothing was further from my thoughts,” answered Effie, lightly.

“The man’s a savage,” cried the other; “and this place of his is only fit to shelter cattle. What was the man saying to you? He was glowering into your eyes like a mad thing! But it’s maybe more to the purpose to ask what you were saying to *him*?”

“Nothing very particular,” answered Effie, laughing. “I was asking if he lived here all alone, and he said, ‘Yes.’ And then he asked me if I was staying up at the Castle, and I said ‘Yes.’ And I think that was all.”

“You have met him before?” said Arthur Lamont. “I did not know that you were acquainted.”

“Oh, yes — slightly. We met at the Mearns Farm when I was visiting my kinsfolk. He’s a strange man, Mr. Arthur. He has dwelt here all his days, and has never married.”

“What’s strange in that?” broke in Mr. Aird. “The world is n’t all marrying and giving in marriage, and I’m on the bachelors’ list myself.”

“Well, then, Effie, there’s your chance!” said Lady Bell. “A bachelor and a house going a-begging!”

Think how grand it would sound — ‘ Mistress Douglas o’ Douglas ! ’ ”

Effie’s face flushed angrily, and again there passed that mysterious look between her and Arthur Lamont.

“ Many thanks, Lady Bell ; but I ’m not to be disposed of so easily. And *when* I ’m married, it will not be to a savage, as you call him, though I ’m sure he ’s been very kind. ”

Re-entering the kitchen at the moment, old Elspeth heard the last few words, and exclaimed —

“ Kind, my leddy ? Is it the laird ? He ’s kind and he ’s gude, for a’ that folk say o’ him, and for a’ that he hides himsel’ here like a stoat in a hole. But he ’s prood — prood — maybe he has reason. The blood o’ Douglas is o’ the best, and a Douglas o’ that ilk was a laird in King Jamie’s time. ” Then, turning to Lady Bell, she asked, with a curtesy, “ Is your leddyship Leddy Bell Lindsay o’ Castle Lindsay ? ”

“ Yes, good wife, ” was the reply ; “ I ’m Lady Bell. ”

Elspeth dropped another curtesy.

“ My gude man work’d for your faither langsyne, my leddy. I mind ye well when you were a wee lassie. Your mither was leeving then. And this young gentleman will be Mr. Arthur Lamont, to whom ye ’re contractit ? ”

Arthur Lamont nodded.

“ I kenned your faither, young sir, and your faither’s faither. An auld family, the Lamonts, but no sae auld as the Lindsays ! ”

The old woman would have gossiped on, but was stopped by the return of her master, of whom she stood in no little fear, and who silenced her with a scowl; and, dropping another curtsey to the young couple, she retired into the ingleside.

“The men are all right,” said Douglas, again addressing Effie Hetherington; “and the horses too for that matter. They’re sheltered round in the stables, and awaiting your pleasure.”

Effie glanced at Lady Bell as she said —

“I’m sure I shall never be able to ride Blinkbonny again. The mare shies at everything, and at the bridge I was nearly thrown.”

“You shall take Hawthorn, if you like,” interposed Arthur Lamont, “and I’ll ride the mare. But no, I forgot — the beast won’t carry a lady.”

“Something must be done,” cried Lady Bell, impatiently, “unless we are to stay here all night. I am really losing patience. First Effie grows hysterical about the lightning, as if her life were more precious than any others; then she pretends she is afraid to ride. She must go or stay. Perhaps Mr. Douglas will let her remain here until the morning.”

“Remain here till morning!” exclaimed Effie, as if greatly amazed and shocked. “*Here!*”

“Of course that will never do,” said Arthur Lamont, glancing at Douglas. “I think, Effie, you’d better make up your mind to ride the mare. She’ll be quiet enough, now the storm’s over.”

“I’m afraid!” said Effie, her blue eyes becoming misty with tears as she looked wistfully up into the young man’s face.

“Afraid!” repeated Lady Bell, scornfully.

Here Douglas broke in with gloomy decision —

“The young lady is right — yon beast is not fit for her to mount. I’ve seen the mare — she’s half dead with fright already. There is only one way. Let you others ride on to the Castle; I’ll have out my own horse and drive Miss Hetherington over.”

“But it’s so absurd!” cried Lady Bell.

“It would be worse than absurd if any accident happened to Miss Hetherington.”

“Well, as you please,” Lady Bell responded. “I’m sure Effie is fortunate in finding so thoughtful a protector. But maybe your conveyance will not content her; she has fanciful notions, and may want a coach and four.”

“How unkind you are!” exclaimed Effie. “Give me my shoes and stockings, good wife. I’ll go with you, Lady Bell. I’ll — I’ll ride Blinkbonny, though I get my death.”

“By Heaven, you shall not!” said Douglas, with almost savage vehemence. “Since you have come to this house, I’ll see you safe to your own door.”

Without condescending to discuss the matter further, Lady Bell left the room, signing to her lover to follow; but Arthur Lamont lingered behind for a moment, saying —

“I’m sorry, Effie, for all this mishap. It’s deucedly uncomfortable for everybody; and —”

“Oh, never mind me — go to Lady Bell,” answered the girl; and again the hard look came into her gentle eyes, and the cruel lines could be seen about her mouth.

“Come along, Arthur,” said Mr. Aird from the door. “Our friend Douglas will take good care of Miss Hetherington; and unless we hasten on, there’ll be no keeping Halloween till this night twelve-month.”

Slowly, and with seeming reluctance, young Lamont followed his brother and the lawyer, pausing at the door for a last glance at Effie.

“Take the lamp, woman,” said Douglas to Elspeth. “Light those people to the door.”

The old woman took down a small oil-lamp suspended above the ingle, and hastened from the kitchen. The moment she had gone Effie looked up at Douglas, and said to him sadly, quite with the freedom of an old friend —

“You see what I have to bear! Since she has become engaged to Mr. Arthur, Lady Bell has always been like that. I’m sure,” she added with a little nervous laugh, “she might wear the mask a little longer. She’s not married to him *yet!*”

Douglas was silent, full of his own thoughts.

“Do you think her pretty?” asked Effie, after a moment.

"Her? Whom?" he answered half vacantly.

"Lady Bell. Tell me frankly, now."

"I am no judge," was the reply. "She seems to give herself airs, at any rate."

"She has fine eyes," continued Effie, thoughtfully, looking at the fire; "and she is very rich and very accomplished."

"And proud as the devil!" said Douglas, with a rough laugh.

"Just so; she is very, very proud. She has been spoiled by her father, and by all her folk."

"I should n't wonder. That young fellow seems to fancy her. I rather admire *his* taste, not *hers*."

"Don't you like *dark* women?" asked Effie, smiling.

"No."

"That's very emphatic."

"It's God's truth. I like a woman to be fair, like — like the Madonna."

Full of her own thoughts, the girl hardly noticed the strange, eager tone in which this was spoken, nor, as her face was turned away, did she observe the passionate look upon the speaker's face. Rough and overbearing, unused to female society, Douglas bore himself with an air which well justified Lady Bell's description of him as "a savage."

"Though they are engaged," she said after a pause, "I believe he does not really love her. It's the old story. Mr. Arthur is rich, but he has not

wealth enough; and he is marrying her — for her money.”

“ Yes? ”

“ It is an arrangement between the two families. Dreadful, is it not? When I think of such things, I am sick of the world! ”

Here a sound of horses' hoofs, mingled with voices from without, showed that the riding party were preparing to take their departure. The next moment Arthur Lamont returned, ready for the journey. He hesitated for a moment on seeing Douglas, then said quickly —

“ You won't delay, Effie? We shall change our dresses directly we arrive, and join the party. If you are quick, you will be in the ball-room before midnight, after all.”

This time Effie did not even turn her head, or make any reply, so with a “good-night” nod to his host, the young man hastily disappeared.

“ Then there is company up yonder? ” asked the laird.

“ Oh yes — a ball, a supper, and all the stupid old customs of Halloween. The tenants will all be there, and many of the so-called gentry. But I'm sure *I* shall be too tired to dance! ”

Another sound of voices, a clatter of horses' hoofs, and then old Elspeth returned, lamp in hand.

“ Are they gone? ” asked her master.

“ Aye, they're gone, ” was the reply. “ The clouds

are clearing awa', and they'll hae a grand ride. Eh, but she's bonnie and awfu' high-manner'd is Lady Bell!"

"Shall we follow them soon?" said Effie, eagerly. "I do hope we shall not be long behind."

"I'll get the horse out at once," replied Douglas. "Do you, Elspeth, look after Miss Hetherington and prepare her for the drive. I sha'n't be long."

And taking the lamp from Elspeth's hand, he strode from the room. Thereupon the old woman, kneeling down, assisted Effie to draw on her shoes and stockings, which were by this time almost dry.

"What a kind old soul you are!" cried the girl. "You ought to have been a lady's-maid. But tell me, does Mr. Douglas keep no other servants?"

"Is it the laird? Na, na; he's his ain butler, and his ain body-servant, and his ain groom. He's in the stable noo, harnessing the only beast he keeps—a beast that tholes only saddle and bridle, and not *them*, unless the rider is a laird o' Douglas."

"Then he is very poor?"

"No' that pair neither," returned Elspeth, drawing on the last silk stocking. "Eh, lassie, your leg's like white satin, and you've a wee, wee foot, fit for Cinderella's slipper! Ye'll be ane o' the Hetheringtons o' Lochryan, I'm thinking?"

"Yes, Elspeth, and I'm kin to the lassie in the old ballad," said the girl; and as she sprang up

gaily, with the warm stockings and shoes on her feet, she half spoke, half sang, the old familiar lines —

“And ‘Hey, Annie?’ and ‘How, Annie?’
And ‘Annie, winna ye bide?’
And aye the more he cried, ‘Annie,’
The louder rair’d the tide!”

“Save us a’,” cried Elspeth, admiringly. “You’re a strange lassie! A wee while syne you were greeting, and sad and pale; *noo* you’re singing like a lintie, and looking bright as May morning!”

Effie laughed, and patted the old woman on the shoulder.

“The storm’s over,” she cried, “so why should the birds not sing?”

CHAPTER III.

HOW EFFIE THOUGHT OF BEAUTY AND THE BEAST.

“ When Love gangs sowing his seed around,
He flings it freely on the thorny ground;
And the glad green shoots creep up mang stanes,
On the barren moor, wi’ its mists and rains.
But when Love walks over the flowery mead,
Flings here awa’ a seed, and there awa’ a seed,
And some are crushed under Love’s ain heel,
And maist fare ill, tho’ a few thrive weel.”

JENNY O’ THE KNOWES.

IN less than ten minutes the kitchen door opened and the laird re-appeared.

“ Now, Miss Hetherington,” said he, “ if you are ready — ”

Effie was quite ready, and, indeed, was anxious to be gone ; so she rose to her feet at once, feeling very comfortable in her warm, dry stockings and shoes, and looked around for her cloak, which the laird hastened to bring and wrap around her shoulders.

As he performed this service, Douglas marvelled at the change which had come over the girl. Her face, which but a little while before had been wreathed in

smiles and bright as sunshine, was again sad and petulantly tearful. She was a young lady of many moods, and her moods changed as rapidly as the weather on an April day.

While she sat in the kitchen, the centre of all interest and the recipient of honours which should have fallen to her kinswoman's share, she felt pleased with herself, and consequently with every one about her; but no sooner did she find herself compelled to jog wearily home under the laird's escort than she regretted the tantalising spirit which had caused her to provoke her cousin so sadly. Above all, she felt angry to think she should have been prevailed upon to stay behind and allow her cousin to ride away by Arthur Lamont's side.

"I can fasten the cloak, myself, thank you," she said coldly, shaking away the hands of the laird, who was wrapping the mantle about her shoulders.

Douglas moved back a step, looking very like a zealous hound which has received a blow from its master, but he said nothing. With trembling fingers the girl fastened the clasp of her cloak, then she looked critically at her host.

"Heavens, what an ugly man!" she thought. "I really had no idea he was quite so horrid! We're like — hem! — Beauty and the Beast." But she smiled loftily, and said, "Did you say the carriage was ready, Mr. Douglas?"

"The carriage, such as it is, is at the door, Miss

Hetherington," he replied, "and the storm has passed away."

As he spoke he threw the door wide open, as if awaiting her to pass out into the night. They had looked at each other only for a moment; they had not uttered a word which all the world might not have heard. And yet, as the girl passed her host, she felt a strange chillness creep over her, and found herself wishing with all her heart that she was safely lodged in the Castle.

"What a dreary-looking night!" she said, as she stood on the threshold peering out into the darkness. "Are you sure the storm has passed away?"

Instead of answering her, the laird turned to his housekeeper.

"Hurry, Elspeth," said he, "and get some wraps; the night blows chill after the storm; and before we reach the Castle Miss Hetherington will be cold."

With a glance at the two, Elspeth moved away to do her master's bidding, while Effie Hetherington remained upon the threshold looking at the conveyance which was to take her home. As her eyes fell upon the vehicle her mood changed again; her eyes sparkled with merriment, her lip curled; she had much ado to restrain her laughter.

The "carriage" was neither more nor less than a broken-down, ramshackle "gig," which, judging from its appearance, might have been in the possession of the Douglas family for half a century or so; and

attached to this uninviting-looking conveyance was a shaggy, unkempt mare, more sturdy than beautiful, and the only thing in the shape of horse-flesh which was owned by Douglas.

By a mighty effort young madam restrained her inclination to scoff. When Elspeth returned with the rugs, the girl was about to mount gravely into the gig, when she made another discovery.

“Why, there is no road!” she said. “We cannot drive over the Moss, Mr. Douglas. What are we to do?”

The laird laughed.

“You’re as fearful as a bairn and as wilful,” he said. “All you have to do is to trust yourself to *me*.”

Still the girl hesitated, for some tone in the voice of her would-be protector made her shrink from him more fearfully still. Noting her hesitation, Douglas continued —

“The bridle-path which we must follow stretches for half a mile, Miss Hetherington, then we come into the country road; there is no need to be fearful. I’ll lead the mare, since you seem not over-confident, till we reach the highway.”

And before she had time to question this arrangement she felt herself lifted in the strong man’s arms and placed in the gig. She flushed nervously, and on the spur of the moment she felt inclined to resist what she considered a liberty, but a moment’s reflection convinced her of the extreme folly of such a line of

conduct. So instead of giving any sign of disturbance, she set about making herself comfortable for her drive, rolled herself up in the rugs which Elspeth had brought to her, and told the laird he might go on. Douglas went at once to the mare's head and seized the bridle, while Elspeth stood on the threshold of the kitchen and held the guttering candle on high. Thus the cavalcade moved away.

Though the storm had cleared, the night was dreary enough, and, moreover, it was so dark that when once they had passed out of the range of light afforded by the flickering candle, Effie could see nothing. The path was very spongy, and evidently full of ruts, for the gig jolted about like a country cart without springs.

Presently the atmosphere became lighter; the heavy clouds which had covered the sky broke up into jagged masses, from the edges of which the moonlight streamed forth.

The girl, rolled up in her rugs, felt warm and comfortable, and her spirits began to rise. She fell to thinking of the sports and merry-making they were about to have at the Castle that night, and she began to wish they might get on with a little more speed. Presently the gig came to a full stop. They had passed over the Moss and gained the highroad.

Douglas now took his seat beside the girl, and the mare trotted on.

Since they had left the house not a word had been

spoken, and even now the silence would have continued but for the girl. As her companion gathered up the reins and cracked his whip, she heaved a little sigh.

“That is better,” she said, as the gig began to roll smartly along. “Do you know, Mr. Douglas, I began to fear we should arrive at the Castle at the fag end of the fun?”

“Would that have grieved you, Miss Hetherington?”

“Most dreadfully. Though I have no doubt that Lady Bell will be as disagreeable as she knows how to be this evening, that won’t affect me one bit. I mean to try all the charms. I shall even go to the length of looking in the glass to try and decipher the face of my future husband.”

She paused, but he said nothing; so after a moment she continued —

“Do you ever keep Halloween at Douglas?”

“Never.”

“Ah, I suppose you would call that sort of thing frivolity. Yet you must be dull enough.”

She shuddered, for as she spoke a vision of the lonely man in the lonely house rose up, a gruesome picture before her eyes.

“I am lonesome,” said he; “but ’t is neither Douglas nor the moor which makes me so. Every man’s soul craves for human companionship — so does mine.”

“ You mean that you ought to marry,” said she, speaking very softly, but unconsciously shrinking still further from her companion’s side.

“ I mean,” he said, “ that I have found the one being who could make my life not only endurable but heaven upon earth ; ay, even if we two lived in a house a hundred times more dreary than Douglas, and never looked upon aught but the barren moor. Without her I shall always be what I am, — a lonely, miserable man.”

He paused, but the girl was silent ; again that feeling of fear overcame her. She looked at the dreary waste around them in mortal terror.

“ Could you drive a little faster, Mr. Douglas ? ” she said, trying with all her might to master the trembling of her voice. “ We are getting along so slowly that before we reach the Castle it will be midnight.”

“ Are you so anxious to be there ? Are you so happy at the Castle, Miss Hetherington ? ”

“ Happy ! ” she echoed, with a hard, joyless laugh. “ Do you call it happiness to be a poor relation ? When I found myself an orphan with fifty pounds a year and my rich kinsman offered me a home, I accepted gleefully, little dreaming what that offer meant ; I soon discovered, however, I was to be a little better than a servant, but was not to receive a servant’s wage. I was to bear with all the ill humours of my Lady Bell, and to take everything which

was not worthy of her acceptance! Anything was good enough for Effie Hetherington. You see, Mr. Douglas," she continued, after a pause, "I am just as lonely as you."

"You are as lonely as I!" he said, thoughtfully repeating her words. "But tell me this, would you change your life and degrading dependence for one of independence if you got the chance?"

She said —

"It is like a conundrum, and I never could guess it. You see, Mr. Douglas, there are so many pros and cons — the life of independence which would be offered for my acceptance might be as terrible to me in its way as the life of dependence; one never knows."

"You are a strange lass!" he said; and as he spoke, he gathered up into his broad, brown hand the slim, gloved fingers which were lying in the girl's lap. The girl gave a cry of pain, and struggled to draw her hand away; but though his grasp relaxed somewhat, he would not let go his hold. He bent down quite near to her, and fixed his black eyes almost fiercely upon her face.

"What are you?" almost as if communing with himself. "Are you a spirit, or are you a woman? Tell me, Miss Hetherington, why do you dislike me?"

"I do not dislike you," she said.

"You do; I see it in your eyes — in your shrinking form! Look at you now! If I were to loosen my hold you would throw yourself from the gig and

fly into the darkness. Yes, sooner than remain with me, you would rush, God knows where; and yet God knows I would not harm one hair of your head. What a frail little thing it is!" he continued; "see, I could crush you like a leaf! Do I harm you? Do I give you pain? And yet you fear me!"

"I wish you would hurry on!" she said, half laughing, half crying.

"Why should we hurry?" he said. "When we do reach the Castle, and you are gone, what will life be to me? Did you understand what I said just now? Did I make my meaning clear? Do you know who it is who can make life brighter to me? Ay, and even bring joy to Douglas!"

"Oh, pray do not ask me!" she said nervously; "I have been so upset by the storm. Indeed, it is not fair to talk to me in this way now!"

He let go her hand, gathered up the reins, and urged the mare on.

During the remainder of the drive not another word was spoken; but when, at length, the gig pulled up before the door of the Castle, and Douglas, having leapt out to the ground, tenderly lifted down his companion, she turned to him with a smile.

"I will send for one of the grooms to take the mare, and you will come in and join us?" she said.

But he shook his head.

"I must be driving home."

"But surely — surely not without crossing the

threshold! Do you fear to face Lady Bell? She will be graciousness itself to you."

"I fear no man or woman; but I have no place here."

"A wilful man will have his way," she said. "Well, since it must be, it must, I suppose, so good-night!"

She held out her hand, and the next moment regretted having done so. He seized it in both of his and covered it with kisses.

"Good-night, Miss Hetherington, and God bless you!" he murmured, and the next moment he was gone.

For a moment or two the girl remained where he had left her, standing on the steps of the Castle; she felt safe now, and could manage to laugh at the man who, a short time before, had inspired her with such fear.

"Mistress of Douglas," she said at last, "best beloved of its master, and proud possessor of the ramshackle gig and unkempt mare — what an honour! How my sweet kinswoman, Lady Bell, would triumph to find her prophecy fulfilled! The man is a savage creature! I'd as lief be caressed by a toad! Nevertheless, he may be useful — only in future I must avoid love-scenes on lonely moors!"

A chilly gust of wind struck her on the cheek and made her shiver; she ran lightly up the steps, and noiselessly entered the Castle.

Once inside, she paused again; sounds of mirth issued from the servants' hall, strains of music from the drawing-room. The fun was evidently well advanced — and she, who should have been at hand to help to entertain and amuse the guests, was still shivering in her half-dried clothes.

A footman crossing the hall saw her, and immediately made as if to open the drawing-room door, but she stopped him.

“I am going up to my room to dress,” she said; “will you tell Lady Bell that I have returned?”

She ran upstairs to her room. Here a bright fire was burning; lighted candles stood on her dressing-table, while on the bed were spread out all the pretty things she was to wear that night.

Hastily throwing off her cloak and hat, she went over to the window, opened it, and, leaning on the sill, looked out. How everything seemed to have brightened now that she was once more sheltered and safe! The moon, which had been struggling to free her face from masses of broken cloud, now shone forth in all her splendour, lighting up the landscape with the vividness of early dawn. She could hear the distant flow of the river, and the cry of some startled wood birds suddenly awakened from their rest. She thought of the lonely man driving back to his lonely dwelling, and shuddered again. Withdrawing her head, she ran about to close the window, when there came a tap at the door.

“Come in!” she cried.

The door opened and a woman entered — Lady Bell’s maid.

“My leddy has sent me to help ye to dress, Miss Hetherington,” said she, in a half-familiar, half-respectful tone, “and she bade me tell ye no’ to delay. The Lord preserve us!” she cried, as she saw the open window; “do you wish to take your death?”

Effie closed the window and walked leisurely over to the fire.

“You may help me to dress, Maggie,” said she; “but I don’t intend to hurry to-night for all the Lady Bells in the world.”

She took off her habit and sat down before the fire, while Maggie began to brush out her golden hair.

Maggie Mitchell, who acted to Lady Bell in the capacity of maid, felt herself to be a privileged inmate of Castle Lindsay, for she had been in the service of the Earl for many years. She was a short, sturdy-looking woman of about five and twenty, with hard, determined features, and a pair of black eyes which seemed to read one through.

“It’s a dour nicht for Halloween,” she said at last. “There’s nought but ill-humours ben the hoose, and storm without. Tell me, Miss Effie, what hae ye done to my leddy?”

“To Lady Bell? Nothing.”

“ Weel, she ’s in a terrible temper, and sae ’s the Earl. He was angered that you were taken by the storm ; and then, when my leddy and the rest came without you, he was angered still more.”

“ Things are going pretty badly down there, then, with so much ill-humour in the room ? ”

“ Weel, they ’re a bit better now. Mr. Arthur has brought round Lady Bell ; but for a’ that she ’s no’ in the best of humours wi’ you.”

“ Who is down there, Maggie ? ”

“ Oh, there ’s a goodly company in all ; the servants’ hall is just crammed full o’ the tenantry ; while as to the drawing-room, they seemed to have gathered in frae far and wide. All the gentry frae hereabouts, and the Earl in the midst o’ them, looking like the king o’ them all.”

“ And what are they doing — in the drawing-room, I mean ? ”

“ Oh, jest blethering. I jest peeped in when my leddy sent for me to tell you, and they seemed to be sitting like a lot o’ silly bleating sheep. Harken to that ! ” she cried, as the sound of music floated up from below. “ That ’s my Lady Bell’s touch ; I ken it in a thousand. Maybe her ill-humour has thawed before Mr. Arthur’s sunny smile. Eh ! but you look bonny,” continued she, as she eyed the girl from top to toe ; “ wi’ that dainty dress on ye, and them satin shoon, ye might be a fairy. Won’t that be enough to waken up the ill-humours of my Ledy Bell ! ”

Effie laughed, and shrugged her pretty shoulders, then she smiled and nodded to the maid.

“I can manage now, Mitchell,” said she; “you go down and enjoy yourself in the hall.”

“And ye’ll no’ delay in coming down?”

“I shall come as soon as I am ready, and I have not much to do.”

The maid departed, and Effie was left alone.

She still stood before the mirror, looking at herself and smiling. Her hair, fresh from a vigorous brushing, looked like a crown of gold; her dress clung about her in diaphanous folds, and her neck and arms were bare. She had no diamonds, like Lady Bell, but her beauty was so lustrous that she needed none. Her lips were full and red, and when she laughed, which she did very often, her face became radiant, a dimple showed in her chin, and her teeth shone like ivory.

“Why should it be impossible?” she said, communing with herself. “I am bonnie, though she is braw. It would be a triumph, my Lady Bell — a far different fate to becoming mistress of Douglas.”

CHAPTER IV.

HOW THERE WAS HIGH FEAST AT CASTLE LINDSAY.

“Fair and strange were the Fays to see,
Busk’d like leddies o’ high degree ;
And they took his hand and they led him ben,
And they played the music that maddens men.
In sarks o’ silk and robes o’ snaw,
 They danced around him with three times three,
And the waefu’ man in the midst o’ a’
 Smiled at the wondrous glamourie !
But the Fay o’ the moon was fairest there,
And he glower’d at her een and gowden hair ;
 And wae is me
 For the glamourie,
And wae is me for the heart’s despair !”

THE SHEWE OF FAIRE FAYES.

EFFIE HETHERINGTON had not exaggerated in the description of her life at Castle Lindsay. The only child of a distant kinsman of the family on the female side, she had been received in the great house on the footing of a poor relation, and the chief business of her life had been to afford companionship to the Earl’s only daughter, Lady Bell. It was not a lively house, for the Earl was a recluse, only going from time to time to Edinburgh or London, and making his stay there as short as possible. Of his

two sons, Lord Lindsay, the son and heir, occupied himself chiefly in foreign flirtations, seldom or never boring himself by coming home, while the other, an officer in a Highland regiment, and quartered abroad, divided his time between drill, card-playing, and tiger-shooting. Lady Bell had of course "come out" in due course; but in a forlorn and watery manner, suggestive of the Caledonian climate, and had then gracefully retired to Scotland.

The Earl of Drumshairn was a grim, somewhat melancholy man, who had been a widower for many years, and who inherited from Calvinistic ancestors a strong bias towards theological inquiry of the gloomiest kind. He had written voluminously on religious subjects, and his polemic on the subject of "Predestination," addressed to that doughty antagonist, the Rev. Andrew Muckleneb, of Glasgow, had made him famous in the land. The greatest excitement of his life seemed at the period of the religious revivals, when the Castle became a hunting-ground for all the fanatics of the south of Scotland. As heartily as John Knox himself, for whom he had a respect approaching to veneration, he hated and denounced the Church of Rome.

All this strong Puritanical bias did not prevent the Earl from having a keen eye to the main chance, from preserving his game, protecting his salmon rivers, and reserving all his other privileges as lord of the land. Moreover, he was as proud of his birth and ancestry

as any peer in Scotland. When he implored the Lord to be merciful to him, a sinner, and demonstrated that mortal man was to be saved by faith and not by works, he never doubted for a moment that saving grace was the hereditary possession of himself and all his family. Although quiet and severe in dress as a Free Kirk minister, he carried in his manner the grandeur of his lineage, and both when he summoned his retainers for morning and evening service, or when he said grace before and after meat, he conveyed to every onlooker that he was, by right of birth, in the personal confidence of the Almighty.

His nephew, Arthur Lamont, was the child of a half-brother who had shared, or professed to share, the Earl's religious views, and had on that account been forgiven a constant eclipse of worldly fortune. Arthur inherited a small estate in Tweeddale, and looked forward to Lady Bell's dowry as a means of relieving the acres heavily encumbered by his father.

Quiet and superficially amiable, he conciliated his uncle by agreeing with him heartily on all questions of theology, and, as Lady Bell had shown a strong fancy for him from childhood upwards, he was gloomily accepted by the Earl as her future husband. Nevertheless, those who were more familiarly acquainted with the young man's character failed to credit him with any superhuman virtues. He had seen a good deal of what is generally called "life." His private reading, when he read at all, was certainly not theo-

logical. He found it frequently necessary, for purposes of business or study, to visit London or the Continent, and generally, when he returned, he looked fatigued.

As for Lady Bell, she understood her lover thoroughly, and liked him none the less because he was, *au fond*, neither religious nor ascetic. She was a sharp-sighted, energetic girl, without a single pious predilection; and when, in the confidences of cousinship and courtship, Arthur told her awesome stories of his adventures in great cities, she was not in the least shocked. She knew a good deal about the world already through her brothers, and Arthur taught her more. She was quite convinced that marriage would complete her education.

For a long time Lady Bell and Effie Hetherington had got along very well together, for both were young and full of the joy of life.

They rode, hunted, studied, played, danced (on special occasions when dancing was permitted), and generally amused themselves in the gloomy house. When the Earl and his daughter went south to London or north to Edinburgh, Effie generally accompanied them. The young ladies understood each other as perfectly as both understood Arthur Lamont. Only when little differences arose did either wear any mask; generally speaking, they freely exhibited their caprices, their tempers, their love of adventures, and their detestation of formal religion.

Latterly, however, their manner to each other had

grown cooler and their conduct less confidential. Lady Bell became more shrewish and sarcastic; Effie affected moods of long-suffering martyrdom. Effie assumed the airs of superior beauty, Lady Bell those of superior social position.

The cause was not far to seek — Arthur Lamont.

Now, both the young ladies, as I have said, understood Arthur thoroughly, insomuch that Lady Bell took good care to trust him in Effie's company as little as possible; and that Effie, on her part, felt perfectly confident that no given pledge or tie of honour would prevent the young man from following his fancy at the first opportunity. Neither had the slightest respect for him on moral grounds. Both admired him intensely for his very deficiency in the popular virtues. He was handsome, amusing, and unprincipled — what other possible fascinations could hearty, vigorous, world-loving young women desire?

By the instinct peculiar to women, Lady Bell discovered her enemy. Disguise was utterly useless, and, to do her justice, Effie was open in her pretty warfare. The friend and companion, the merry *confidante*, was spreading her net of fascination for the engaged young man. The pauper was trying to run against the heiress. A spectator, especially of the male sex, would have seen nothing of all this, would never have suspected that such a race was being run; but the two girls knew it, and Arthur knew it, secretly determining to avail himself of the complication.

Scenes, of course, ensued — strong ones between Lady Bell and her lover, bitter and sarcastic ones between Lady Bell and Effie. Diplomacy, however, was necessary, as Lady Bell had really “no case.” Although she knew perfectly well that Effie was angling for Arthur, and that he was secretly yielding to the fascination, there was nothing in their outward conduct with which she could openly find fault. More than once she determined, in her indignation, to break off the match; and she would have done so had her hate for her rival been less. Moreover, in her own way she loved Arthur Lamont, and not even his palpable baseness had the power to cure her of her infatuation.

She tried hard to get Effie away, but without an open declaration of war that was impossible. She could not confide in her father, whose first act would have certainly been to break off the engagement and show Arthur the door for ever. She determined, therefore, to keep her eyes open, and to hasten on the marriage-day.

Things were at this stage on the night when they paid their memorable visit to Douglas. Never had Lady Bell been more vexed and irritated, and during the journey home with Arthur and the others she scarcely spoke a word. She had thawed a little, however, during the evening under Arthur’s soothing influence.

Prettily attired in black, with trimmings of white

lace, and with diamonds flashing in her hair, Lady Bell looked quite the belle of the assembly as she wandered to and fro on the arm of her *fiancé*. Her triumph, however, was short-lived. Fair and bright, simply dressed in white cashmere, Effie Hetherington appeared, and all eyes were turned upon her. A few pearls were her only ornaments, and even these were needless. She was a perfect vision of youth and beauty, and poor Lady Bell felt extinguished in a moment.

Smiling and blushing, Effie tripped up to her, and cried, with a nod to Arthur —

“Here I am, you see, safe and sound! And after such a journey! You should have seen the ancestral chariot in which that awful man drove me home. It was as comical as the doctor’s one-horse shay; and I thought every moment it would share the same fate and go to pieces.”

“You are a little ungrateful,” answered Lady Bell, with a toss of her head and a flash of her dark eyes. “Mr. Douglas is a gentleman, and put himself to great inconvenience on your account. You were quite as well able to ride home as I was.”

“I was simply terrified! And, really, I’m not at all ungrateful, for I was only joking.”

“I hope you had the courtesy to ask Mr. Douglas to come in?” said Lady Bell, coldly.

“I did ask him, and he refused. He’s not very sociable.”

“Sociable or not,” was the reply, “he’s of gentle blood, and can trace his lineage as far back as any gentleman in the county. My father has a great respect for his family, and would have been pleased to see him, I’m sure.”

“Well, he’s a savage sort of fellow,” interjected Arthur; “Effie’s right there!”

Lady Bell gave him an angry look, and then observed, smiling maliciously —

“I think Effie is throwing away a good chance. If she played her cards well, she might be Mistress Douglas.”

“Thank you!” cried Effie, with a laugh and a little mock curtsy; but her eyes met Arthur’s, and seemed to say, “You see how spiteful she is, and I’ve no one to take my part!”

At that moment there was a movement near the door of the room, and everybody seemed to look that way. Following the general gaze, Lady Bell saw, to her astonishment, the very man of whom they had been speaking standing near the threshold. He was still clad in his coarse, ordinary dress, but it was clear that he had had recourse to soap and water and a clothes-brush; his hair, too, was brushed carefully, and though he certainly looked a little uncouth and out of place in so fine a company, there was something in his powerful face and deep, thoughtful eyes to proclaim him no common man. He was leaning quietly against the wall, looking towards Effie and her kinswoman.

“Why, look!” said Lady Bell, “your cavalier is here, after all.” And, without observing Effie’s look of annoyance, she drew Arthur with her towards the door.

“I ’m so glad, Mr. Douglas,” she cried, holding out her hand, “that you ’ve not gone away without allowing us to return your hospitality. Effie was just telling us that you ’d driven back home.”

“I changed my mind,” answered Douglas, with a grim smile. “I halted at the inn yonder, and came back. I must ask you to forgive my dress, for I ’ve had no time to make myself presentable.”

“Why, of course!” said Lady Bell, looking radiant. “Besides, this is Liberty Hall to-night. If you ’re for a dance, I claim you as my partner!”

Arthur looked at his cousin in wonder. What did she mean by gushing so absurdly over this savage? he asked himself. Essentially conceited and shallow, he knew little of women. Had he known more, perhaps his adventures with them would have been less fortunate. It is the man of power and insight who, penetrating to the sources of female caprice, and reading the female heart like a book, stands aghast at his discoveries, and lets slip each golden chance.

In answer to Lady Bell’s last chance, Douglas replied —

“I fear I must leave you to those with more grace and lighter heels. But I thought the Earl, your father, thought dancing a pagan institution, to be religiously forbidden.”

“Then you wronged him altogether,” said Lady Bell. “My father, it is true, does not approve of dancing in general, and religiously forbids the waltz. In times of festival, however, and particularly at Halloween, he concedes the country dance, tolerates the quadrille, and approves the reel. You shall see for yourself, for I insist on presenting you to him.”

Thereupon, resigning Arthur’s arm and taking that of the laird, she sailed across the room to the place where the Earl was standing, surrounded by several members of the nobility and gentry and two elderly clergymen.

“Papa, I want to introduce Mr. Douglas.”

The Earl smiled and bowed, while a whisper, not unaccompanied by smiles and titters, ran round the room.

“Mr. Douglas of that ilk, I presume?” said the Earl, gravely. “Sir, I am glad to know you. I knew your father weel, though latterly, just before his lamented death, we met but seldom.”

A wonderfully gracious speech, seeing that the last laird had borne so dubious a character; but with the master of Lindsay Castle a thimbleful of sound doctrine outweighed a cartload of moral delinquency, and the laird, although a hard drinker, had been a doughty Presbyterian.

“And please, papa,” cried Lady Bell, “we all owe Mr. Douglas a debt of gratitude. The storm caught us when riding over the Moss, and the laird gave us a princely welcome!”

Princely ! Douglas opened his eyes and gave his grim smile. Then several other members of the local aristocracy, encouraged by the Earl's approval, claimed or made acquaintance with the newcomer, insomuch that his rough attire and home-bred manners were temporarily forgotten. Murmurs concerning him passed round the room. "A man of birth and gentle breeding, though eccentric and solitary." "Dare-the-Deil's son, ye ken, and as wild, they say, as his father." "Aye, a bachelor ; they say he's a meesogynist, and hates women-folk." "A handsome man, and proud as handsome !" "Lord save us all ! see till the mud on his boots !"

With no little consternation and annoyance Effie had witnessed the advent of Douglas. She had had quite enough of the man, at least for one day ; and when Arthur Lamont, finding his opportunity when Lady Bell made the presentation to the Earl, strolled over to her, she whispered, shrugging her pretty shoulders, "He looks like one of those phlegmatic Indians in Cooper's novels, does n't he ?"

"Savage enough, if that's what you mean," returned Arthur, languidly ; "but you took care to linger behind and enjoy his company."

"Nothing of the kind. I lingered behind because you were tiresome, and Lady Bell was in a temper !"

"See ! he's glowering at you. I believe he's a cannibal !"

Before the conversation could go any further

Douglas came over, accompanied by Lady Bell, who was still graciousness itself.

“ See, Effie, I’ve brought you Mr. Douglas. You must show your gratitude by entertaining him as much as possible. “ Arthur,” she added, “ papa is asking for you.”

And she led away her captive, leaving Douglas and Effie face to face — Effie flushing crimson and fully aware of the secret of Lady Bell’s graciousness, Douglas feasting his black eyes on the girl’s transcendent beauty.

“ You hear ? ” he said. “ I’m to be entertained. How do you propose to set about it ? ”

“ I’m sure I don’t know,” answered the girl, fully conscious that all eyes were upon her. “ You’d better let me take your arm, and I’ll show you over the place.”

Glad to get away, she hurried him from the room through the ante-chambers, along the lobbies, and on to the servants’ hall. But she had scarcely a word to say ; she was thoroughly out of temper at Lady Bell’s trick upon her.

“ How close it is ! ” she cried presently. “ Come this way, where we can get a little air.”

She led him to the foot of the grand staircase, close to the front door, which stood wide open. The moon was shining brightly on the threshold, and there Effie paused, full in its beams.

“ My God ! how beautiful you are ! ” cried Douglas, gazing upon her in wonder.

She shrank back angrily, for she was in no mood for flattery, and the man's savage admiration irritated her beyond measure.

"Pray don't talk nonsense, Mr. Douglas!" she said.

"I'll not talk at all if you'll let me stand and look at you."

"Thank you, I'm not an object for exhibition, and I object to being stared out of countenance. Perhaps you'd like some refreshment? If so, go to that room," pointing up the lobby, "and you'll find everything you wish."

"I wish nothing!" he cried.

"Then if you'll excuse me, I'll leave you. I must really go now."

He did not answer, but continued to gaze silently upon her. Then, as she turned to go, he suddenly took her hand.

"Effie!" he cried, and seemed about to draw her to his breast.

With an angry gesture she drew herself away, and ran, rather than walked, back into the drawing-room. "Effie, indeed!" she said to herself. "The savage is getting on; but it's all Lady Bell's fault, and I'll *never* forgive her!"

Left alone, Douglas did not stir, but leaning back against the door, and folding his arms, gazed up at the moon. His face shone, his features seemed transformed. He looked like a man who had seen some miraculous vision, and so indeed he had. Through

his troubled brain as he stood there rang the wild sea-music of the old ballad : —

“ And ‘ Hey, Annie ! ’ and ‘ How, Annie ! ’
And ‘ Annie, winna ye bide ? ’
The lig’t grew dark, the moon grew stark,
And gurly grew the tide.

“ And ‘ Hey, Annie ! ’ and ‘ How, Annie ! ’
And ‘ Annie, come hither to me ! ’
And aye the mair that he cried ‘ Annie,’
The louder rair’d the sea ! ”

He had never felt so happy, never so miserable. What he yearned and prayed for seemed so near to him now, and yet so far away.

Meantime, Effie Hetherington had rejoined the company, and was endeavouring with all her might to forget her annoyance. When the dancing began in the great hall, she looked round in terror, lest she should find her pertinacious admirer still at her elbow ; but he did not appear.

“ What have you done with Mr. Douglas ? ” asked Lady Bell.

“ I think he has gone home,” replied Effie. “ I’m sure I hope so ! ”

Lady Bell made inquiries, and ascertained from some of the servants that the laird had indeed left the Castle, seemingly with no intention of returning.

“ I suppose you’ve driven the poor gentleman away,” she said in an aside to Effie.

“Indeed, I’ve done nothing of the kind!” was the reply. “I was perfectly civil to him, Lady Bell!”

“Oh, yes, of course!” cried Lady Bell, smiling, and very contemptuously.

Effie Hetherington was not a young lady of angelic disposition, and every angry impulse within her was stimulated by her kinswoman’s manner, so that the delicate lines of her face were hardened, and the rosy hue of life faded altogether out of her cheeks. Have I pictured this chameleonic young lady in such a way as to bring her visibly before the reader? If not, it is time to try, though analytic description seldom succeeds in conveying the proper impression of a human face.

Her hair was the colour of dark gold; it was cut short at the back, but dressed in small crisp curls over her forehead — the *frons minima* of the ancients. Her eyes seemed blue, but were in reality shot through and through with grey shadows, with the faintest possible threads of absolute yellow; like herself, they were changeful and chameleonic — blue when she was merry or pitiful, grey when she was sad or thoughtful, cat-like when she was very angry. Her nose was small and well formed, but slightly *retroussé*, and below it was a veritable rosebud of a mouth, with the full underlip so well described by Suckling, “Some bee had stung it newly.” The chin was prominent, the jaw somewhat square, both giving an impression of determination which the mouth and nose contradicted.

The head was balanced forward on a strong, firm neck. The shoulders were broad for a woman; the breasts small; the waist slight and firmly laced; the arms long and finely formed, and the lower portions of the frame large and finely rounded. Neither hands nor feet were small, but both matched the tall and lissome body.

Such a description, with all its contradictions, conveys nothing of the infinite charm of the girl's personality. No feature of it could be set down as perfect, yet the total effect was lovely. Gentle yet arbitrary, tender yet self-willed, physically timid, and morally reckless, passing with the rapidity of lightning from one mood to another, Effie was simply, as I have said, chameleonic. If her caprices were infinite, so were her graces. She was the sort of woman a stupid man would fathom (or think he fathomed) in a moment; whom a moderately intelligent man would shrink from as impracticable and incomprehensible; and before whom a man of power and insight would admit the impotence of any possible analysis.

It was growing late, close, indeed, upon midnight, when Effie separated herself from a crowd of admirers, and ran upstairs to her bedroom. She had been planning all the evening, ever since the departure of Douglas, how to get away from the house unseen; for, like most persons of superior intelligence and vague moral impulses, Effie was superstitious. Drawing back the blind of her window, she saw that the

moon was shining brightly, and all without looked tempting for the old-fashioned charm she was about to try.

Opening a drawer, she took out a ball of thick silken thread, and, laughing nervously, thrust it into her bosom.

Pausing again, she returned and looked into the mirror. Catching sight of the pale reflection of her face, she felt her heart throbbing fearfully, but with another nervous laugh she hastened from the room.

CHAPTER V.

HOW EFFIE INVOKED THE GHOST.

“Lad and lass, to-night beware !
There is magic in the air!

“Winds are crying shrill, and, hark!
Ghosts are groaning in the dark!

“Who will dare this Hallow night
Leave the happy ingle light ?

“Who will dare to stand alone,
While the fairy thread is thrown ?

“Who this night is free from fear,
Let her ask, and she shall hear!”

THE NORTHERN WOOING.

VERY quietly Effie crept down the stairs until she reached the great hall, which she found quite empty and deserted. The door stood wide open, revealing a glimpse of the moonlit lawns and flower-beds, with the gloomy woods beyond. The wind was still loud, and from the boughs that tossed drearily against the sky came the dreary “sough” which mimics so well the mournful wash of the sea upon the shore.

Pausing a moment on the threshold, she looked out nervously. All was dark and still, save for that strange wind music; but from within came loud laughter and many voices from the kitchens, and gay music and sound of dancing feet from the ball-room above.

The air was very chill, and Effie wore only her white ball dress, so that her neck and arms were bare; her feet, too, were thinly covered with dancing-shoes of satin. Running back into the hall, where overcoats, cloaks, and wraps of all sorts lay awaiting their owners, she took down a heavy fur-cloak belonging to one of the guests, and threw it over her shoulders. Then with a little nervous laugh she ran out into the night.

Crossing the lawn, and turning to the right among the shrubberies, she followed a gravel path which wound along under the shadow of stately elms. In a moment she was in almost total darkness; but, looking up, she could see the moonlight just touching the topmost leaves with glints of frosty silver. Her heart began to beat nervously, for she dreaded the darkness and was very superstitious; but she ran on like a frightened deer, quite unconscious of the pools of wet rain which already soaked her shoes and stockings through. Darker and still darker it grew, as the moon passed in behind a cloud.

Suddenly she paused in terror, thinking she heard footsteps behind her. She glanced round, listening,

and saw only a great wall of blackness, heard only the deep-sea music overhead.

“ I was a fool to venture,” she thought ; “ but I ’ll see it through.” And she ran on, holding up her white skirts with one hand, and feeling her way with the other. Fortunately, she knew the path well, and in a few minutes she heard the sound of the waterfall prisoned in the heart of the wood. The words of the old charm rang wildly in her ear : —

“ Your back to running water,
Throw out the silken skein ;
Then glower into the darkness,
And you ’ll see your true love plain ! ”

She was still so near to the Castle that she could just hear the distant music, and away behind her, through the boughs, she saw the lights of the ball-room glimmering faintly. But the music and the brightness yonder seemed only to deepen the loneliness and darkness of the surrounding woods.

“ I wish I had never come,” she sighed. “ I don’t want to see my true love, for indeed I know him and he knows me. Of course it ’s all nonsense. I ’ve a good mind to run back.”

But a little space before she saw the woods opening on the moonlit space at the foot of the fall, and, tempted by the brightness, she went on and stood by the waterside.

Here the moonlight shone full upon her, shimmering on her golden hair and white satin dress ; and

though the linn roared above her, and the air was full of the deafening sound of the falling water, she saw the open sky and felt somewhat reassured.

Still trembling from head to foot, she placed her hand in her bosom and drew out a small ball of silken twine.

How her heart throbbed ! How her head swam ! Dizzy with the sound of the waterfall, and sick with fear, she turned her back on the dark pool at the foot of the linn, and faced the woods, the black boughs of which she could almost touch with her outstretched hand. Then laughing hysterically, she took between the trembling fingers of her right hand one end of the twine, and prepared to throw the ball into the darkness.

She tried to speak, though her tongue and throat were dry and parched with terror ; but mastering her emotion, she cast away the ball, which unwound itself as it flew through the air.

Gripping the loose end of the thread convulsively, she managed to murmur, almost inaudibly —

“ True love, true love, if there you be,
Ere I count wi’ three times three,
Grip the silk and answer me ! ”

Scarcely had the charm left her lips, when to her horror something in the darkness tugged softly at the silk.

She drew back with a cry, but her fingers still

closed upon the silk ; she felt it held firmly at the other end.

Half fainting, and scarcely knowing what she did, she murmured desperately —

“ True love, true love, if there you be,
Ere I count wi' three times three,
Show thy living face to me ! ”

Was she mad or dreaming ? Straight before her, just where the moonlight touched the edge of the wood, she saw — or thought she saw — the outline of a human face framed in the dark foliage with two great dark eyes fixed upon her ! It was only for a moment, but in that moment she recognised, or seemed to recognise, the features of the gloomy laird of Douglas !

Panic-stricken, half swooning, she uttered a wild scream, and, dropping the thread in horror, fled away along the path back to the Castle.

Fear seemed to give her wings, and still uttering faint cries, she flew along like a mad thing. Thank God, she could see the lights far away, and every moment brought her closer to them !

But as she went she heard, or seemed to hear, the sound of footsteps behind her, and a voice crying —

“ Stay ! Effie ! Effie ! ”

The sound, or the fancy, only made her run on faster.

Through the darkness, on and on she flew, until

she reached the edge of the lawn, and saw the lighted and open door. Rushing through the moonlight, across the lawn, she saw a figure standing on the gravel path, and recognised Arthur Lamont.

“Arthur!” she cried, wildly stretching out her hands.

Then with a hysterical laugh she fainted, and would have fallen had he not caught her in his arms.

In her terror and hysteria she did not notice Lady Bell, who had been standing on the threshold talking to her lover as he smoked his cigar.

“Who is it?” cried Lady Bell.

“Effie Hetherington,” answered the young man, throwing down his cigar and supporting the girl’s lifeless form. “I declare, Bell, she’s fainted away!”

So saying, he carried her into the hall and placed her in a chair. Attracted by the sounds, several servants flocked from the kitchens, and a number of ladies and gentlemen, who had been cooling themselves on the stairs, descended, murmuring in astonishment. Pale as death, but shivering tremulously, Effie lay back, supported on the young man’s arm.

Lady Bell looked on in no very gracious mood, while water was brought and sprinkled over the girl’s face. Then followed the usual details of a young lady’s fainting fit — inanition, spasmodic tremors, gradual recovery — until, finally opening her eyes and looking around her, Effie covered her face with her hands and began crying hysterically.

“What *does* it mean?” cried Lady Bell at last. “Effie, I will have an answer! Where have you been? What have you been doing? Speak!”

“Give her time,” said Arthur Lamont; “she’s not herself yet. Something has frightened her, I fancy.”

A sympathetic murmur came from the assembled groups.

“There is no end to her follies,” Lady Bell exclaimed. “She is more like a mad creature than a Christian girl! Why, look! her feet are soaking; she has been out in the woods!”

At last Effie ceased sobbing, and looked wildly up into Lady Bell’s face. Her breath still came and went convulsively, and her heart was wildly leaping in her bosom.

“Oh, Lady Bell, forgive me!” she moaned. “I ought never to have — to have gone. I thought it only a piece of fun, but I have been so terribly frightened!”

“What do you mean?” asked Lady Bell, sharply. “What frightened you? Was it lightning this time, or what?”

“No, no! It was — a face!”

“A face?”

“A face in the woods. I wanted to try the old charm, and I ran down to the linn and cast the thread; and, oh! some one gripped it; and I heard a voice; and I saw — I saw — the face!”

This explanation, terrible as it seemed to the

speaker, only elicited a general laugh. Every one present knew the familiar superstition, and many a fair lady there had longed to try the charm, but had lacked the courage.

“What nonsense!” cried Arthur Lamont. “Why, Effie, I thought you had more sense than to believe in such rubbish. There, there, you’re all right now.”

“Pray whose face did you see?” asked Lady Bell, with a sneer; for she was annoyed at her lover’s great solicitude and attention. “Was it a man’s or a bogie’s?”

“A man’s,” replied Effie, shuddering.

“And your true love’s, of course, Effie Hetherington! I hope it realised your expectations. But, remember, you should have kept your own counsel. Since you’ve told everybody what you were doing, you’ve destroyed the charm altogether, and maybe will not get a sweetheart at all, much as you seem to want one!”

“I *don’t* want one,” cried Effie, angrily, in the midst of another general laugh. “I only tried the charm for fun, and you have no right to say I want a sweetheart! It is very unkind.”

“Don’t tease her, Bell,” said Arthur, nervously. “It was only a piece of fun, as she says.”

“Of course, of course!” chimed in several voices.

“And if I’ve broken the charm,” continued Effie, “indeed, then I’m very glad; for the face I saw — and I *did* see it, Mr. Arthur — was no living creature’s.

Don't talk of it any more; I can't bear to think of it. It's too dreadful!"

Loud screams of laughter and clapping of hands now sounded from the servants' hall, where the merriment was evidently at its height. Everybody began to move in that direction, and Lady Bell touched Arthur on the arm, and signified her desire that he should accompany her thither. With a pitying glance at Effie he obeyed. Though several young men, who had been gaping in the background, thereupon stepped forward and offered Effie a sympathising audience, she paid no heed to them whatever, but followed her cousin and Arthur with her eyes until they disappeared. Then she drew a deep breath and set her white teeth together, forgetting all her recent fright in the bitterness of jealous pain.

"Shall I get you a glass of sherry wine, Miss Hetherington?" said a spruce young farmer, dressed within an inch of his life, and assuming for the nonce the airs of a high-bred cavalier.

"Eh, but you look awful pale!" cried another.

"And no wonder! A drop of whisky would maybe be better, for the young lady's wetted through."

"No, no!" she exclaimed impatiently. "I'm quite well now. Pray do not mind me—go and amuse yourselves."

At this moment she saw the Earl descending the staircase, with an elderly lady, splendidly plumed and

brocaded, hanging on his arm. As he reached the hall his eyes fell on the little group, and he beckoned Effie to him.

“What nonsense is this, Miss Hetherington?” he said. “I hear you have been alarming the whole company by pretending to see an apparition.”

He spoke with a strong Dumfriesshire accent, and pronounced it “appareetion.”

“Indeed,” replied Effie, “I meant no harm. I was trying a charm, and — and ——”

“Toots! you are a foolish lassie! Your religion should teach you that such things are only folly and superstition. Belief in ghosts and warlocks is against the very letter of Scripture, and worthy only of the Dark Ages.”

“Certainly,” cried the old lady, his companion; “but young folk will be young folk — and it’s Halloween!”

“In my young days, madam,” said the Earl, “Halloween was a holy and solemn time, not a heathen festival. Times are changed since then, and even I, you see, must drift with the times. Not that I forbid a few innocent sports and games, but I abominate superstition.”

The old lady laughed, and the two moved away towards the servants’ hall, whither the young men had also drifted. Effie stood there alone in the great hall, hesitating whether she should follow or creep off to bed. Curiosity to see what Arthur Lamont and

Lady Bell were doing conquered her first impulse to retire. By this time she had almost recovered her composure, though every now and again she thought, with a shudder, of the face she had seen beneath the linn.

“ Surely ’t was my fancy ! ” she thought. “ That horrible man was in my thoughts, and so, when I tried the charm, his face came uppermost. I ’ll never forgive Lady Bell for mocking at me ! Maybe it will be *my* turn next to laugh at *her* .”

More laughter and shouting, louder clapping of hands, came from within. She moved along the hall in the direction of the sounds, and came face to face with Jeanie Munro.

“ What are they doing ? ” asked Effie.

“ Playing at ‘ Hey, Willie Wine, ’ ” answered the girl ; “ baith the servant lasses and the young leddies. The Earl ’s looking on, as solemn as if he was in kirk ; and noo Miss Jess, the schoolmistress, has the floor, and has called out Mr. Arthur himsel’ .”

Without staying to hear another word, Effie ran along the lobby till she reached the entrance of the servants’ hall, which she found blocked up with a laughing throng. Standing on tip-toe, and peering over the shoulders of her neighbours, she saw that the tables had been cleared away, the forms arranged in a great semicircle round the fire, while the company, of all ranks and descriptions, seated and standing, were gazing delightedly at the two leading actors in

an old Scottish game. At a little distance stood the Earl, gravely looking on, while standing before the fire, and facing Arthur Lamont in his dress suit and silk stockings, was Miss Jess Forsyth, a bright-eyed, buxom woman of two or three and thirty, with a merry eye and a sharp tongue. Close by, leaning against the ingle, was Lady Bell.

“Bide a bit, Mr. Arthur,” Miss Jess was crying; “bide a bit, and I’ll fix ye yet.” And fixing her eyes on one of the dairymaids, who blushed and hid her face at the mention of her name, she chanted as follows:—

“I’ll gie ye Mary, frae Cumell braes;
She’ll milk thy kye and wash thy claes!”

The laugh went round at the doggerel, improvised for the occasion. Arthur Lamont joined; then, drawing himself up, he waved his silk handkerchief, and replied:—

“Mary’s bonnie and Mary’s bright,
Her cheese and butter are clean and white;
She’s made for a farmer, and not for me;
But I thank you for your courtesie!”

“Bravo! bravo!” cried many voices, and the laugh went round again.

The schoolmistress glanced round, and began anew—

“ Hey, Willie Wine, and ho, Willie Wine,
I hope frae home you ’ll no’ incline;
You ’d better ’light and stay all night,
And I ’ll gie thee a lady fine.”

To which Arthur replied in the usual formula —

“ Who will you give me if I bide,
To be my bonnie blooming bride,
And lie down lovely by my side? ”

This time Miss Jess’s choice fell on a tall spinster of uncertain age, the only daughter of a wealthy tenant farmer on the Earl’s estates.

“ I’ll gie thee bonnie Miss Dalrymple,
She ’s tall and fair, she ’s sweet and simple;
On her cheek there ’s a rose, in her chin a dimple! ”

This brilliant effort elicited roars of delight, in which every one but the spinster in question joined. Not at all nonplussed, young Lamont bowed to the lady, and replied —

“ Miss Dalrymple is a lady rare,
Her temper ’s sweet, and her face is fair;
But she ’s made for *Tam Peebles*, and not for me,
So I thank you for your courtesie! ”

Roar upon roar from all the company. The spinster was by no means beautiful, and her temper was considered none of the sweetest; while Tam Peebles was a young doctor of medicine, who was

supposed, with a sly eye to the main chance, to be paying her his addresses.

The schoolmistress looked round wickedly, and was prepared for the *coup de grâce*, with which the somewhat monotonous game invariably ended. She hemmed solemnly, and lifted up her forefinger, as she chanted —

“Then what do you say to Lady Bell?
She ’s straight and lively like yourself!”

Arthur smiled, and walking over to Lady Bell, he bowed, took her by the hand, and led her into the centre of the semicircle, saying —

“I ’ll set her up in this heart of mine,
I ’ll feed her well upon cakes and wine;
She ’s for no other, but just for me,
So I thank you for your courtesie!”

Then, to the huge delight of all present, he took her round the waist and kissed her three times, while she struggled and blushed for pleasure.

Effie Hetherington saw it all, and her lips went white and her eyes grew hard as steel. Then some one spoke to her, but who it was she could scarcely tell: she was so full of her own nervous vexation. The scene swam before her. She saw, as if in a dream, the grooms bearing in two great tubs full of water and placing them in the corner of the hall. In the tubs floated large rosy-cheeked apples, for which

the younger members of the company were to "dook," or duck. Meantime the centre of the hall was being cleared for dancing. Two pipers and three fiddlers, throned on a long table at the end of the room, began tuning up, while the company busied themselves choosing partners.

Young Tam Peebles had the honour of being selected by Lady Bell to lead off the country reel. All this Effie saw, and was looking on vacantly, when she felt a touch upon her arm, and found Arthur Lamont standing at her side.

"Effie, where have you been? I want you to be my partner," he said, smiling nervously.

"I 'll not dance to-night," she replied, turning her head away.

But he persisted, and while she was hesitating she saw Lady Bell looking at them both across the hall. Eager to assert herself against her rival, whatever might be the result, she suffered herself to be led upon the floor, and took her place among the dancers, opposite her partner.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE SPELL GREW.

“ Wingëd mouse wi’ mossy wing,
’Ware the sun, ye limmer !
Bats should sleep when laverocks sing,
Warm wi’ light and simmer.”

OLD SONG.

THAT night was one to be marked by a blood-stone in the calendar of a man’s life, never to be effaced from the memory, never to be forgotten by the Soul.

At once happy and despairing, blest and tormented, Douglas feasted his eyes on Effie Hetherington until he could bear to look no more ; then, as she was whirled round in the dance by Arthur Lamont, he crept away from the Hall, and returned gloomily home.

The dawn was dimly breaking as he approached his lonely dwelling. After unharnessing his horse with his own hands and leading it into the tumble-down stable, he wandered down to the sea-shore, and, pacing the sands, watched the grey waters of the Solway

tumbling in, tumultuous as his own thoughts. The sun broke at last crimson red, suffusing earth and sea and sky, and hung low in the heavens like another great bloodstone, blinding him with its rays.

Thenceforward, for several nights and days, his spirit was full and running over with a strange delight. He no longer felt lonely, even when most alone. All the incidents of that memorable evening repeated themselves to him again and again. He had only to stand by the sea, or to sit by the fire, or to open a book, and the girl's face arose before him; the heavens all night were full of her eyes, and the earth all day was conscious of her breath.

In his brooding imagination he reached out his arms and called her to him, and though she still shrank from him in terror, she seemed half yielding to the spell. He laughed to himself as he thought of her pretty fear, little realising yet what the fear meant.

Possibly enough, some potent brain-wave passed from him to her, for as surely as he was thinking of her, so were her thoughts turning to him. More even than the majority of her sex, Effie loved admiration, and admiration even from the wild man, a notorious misogynist, was not altogether to be despised. Amid her dull life at the Castle, where she was tortured daily between pride and jealousy, she again and again thought to herself, "There's one over yonder who would come to the beckoning of my finger, and eat the crumbs from out my hand;" and

though he was a dour man, not comely to look upon, neither curled nor scented nor soft-spoken, she longed for his presence, simply that she might realise her woman's power.

Of course, affection for such a monster was out of the question. Her feeling towards him physically was one almost of repulsion. But women can do what men ever find impossible — take pleasure in the worship of the other sex, even when it is offered by a being who is personally repellent.

So it came to pass, in the most natural way possible, that Douglas was drawn over to the outskirts of Castle Lindsay, and that there, as if by accident, after two or three visits which only ended in disappointment, he came face to face with Effie Hetherington. She was coming along the highroad from the village, and found him moving somewhat sheepishly near to the Castle gate.

“Mr. Douglas!” she cried, affecting a pretty astonishment. “So you've come over again at last.”

“Does that surprise you?” he asked, smiling.

“Well, no,” she returned, answering the smile with a look of pleasure. “I *thought* you'd come, sooner or later. Are you going on to the Castle?”

Douglas shook his head.

“Did you walk over?” she continued brightly; and on his answering “Yes,” proceeded, “At any rate, I'm very glad you've come. It's awfully dull

yonder, as you may imagine. A pair of engaged people and an old Cameronian of title are not very amusing company. Do you remember the pleasant drive we had that night? It was so nice of you to bring me over!"

All this in a breath, as if in sheer ebullience of gaiety. All the time she spoke, nevertheless, she was taking stock of the man, and thinking, "I was right; he's perfectly rough and savage." Not one word did she speak of a suspicion that had been haunting her mind, and which connected Douglas itself with the apparition she had seen when trying the charm that Halloween; but she added to herself, "If he dared to play that trick upon me, I'll pay him out for his presumption."

That meeting passed away uneventfully enough, but it was followed by other meetings at somewhat long intervals.

When the autumn waned and the snows of winter began to fall, Effie Hetherington went away for some months, in company with Arthur Lamont and Lady Bell, to visit kinsmen in Edinburgh. There she had a pleasant time, with many to flirt with and much to think of, and it was not often that she thought of Douglas. Twice, however, she wrote to him — pretty little notelets on pink scented paper, beginning — "Dear Mr. Douglas," detailing a little trivial gossip of the city, and ending, "Yours truly, Effie Hetherington." The last of these missives contained the following

postscript : — “ We shall be back at Castle Lindsay early in February, and I hope that you will be at home, and we shall meet again. I never forget how kind you have been to me, who have scarcely a *friend* in the world. How is old Elspeth? Give her my love. I suppose you have been *snowed up* ? ”

That was all, but it sufficed to keep the flame burning in the man's heart. Douglas treasured up the dainty scraps of paper, read the pretty writing over and over again, and drank intoxication through both sight and touch. Was the charm working? Would this dainty woman ever be his to have and hold? He thought of her, he dreamed of her, he was perpetually conscious of her spell upon him, and there was nothing else in the universe but one sweet face and form.

So the dismal house was not dismal, and the lonely man was never alone. Storm and sunshine were alike to him; he was safe in the heart of his self-sufficing passion. Out on the wild sea-shore, or away among the desolate moors, or at home among his books, he was ever full of the same yearning — for Effie Hetherington's return. More than once he was tempted to go to her, to take her in his arms, and to ask her to become his wife. He wrote to her again and again — long, wild letters worthy of a school-boy in love — but the letters were never sent. Once only he despatched a letter, and that was in answer to the letter with the postscript. It contained only two words — “ Come back.”

February had passed away, and the winds of March were blowing when Effie Hetherington returned. She came to Castle Lindsay, and the birds of the air carried the news of her coming to Douglas, but she herself made no sign. In simple truth, her pretty head was full of other thoughts. Lady Bell and she, fatigued with the excitements of Edinburgh, were both a little petulant and out of temper.

A fortnight passed, and Douglas, conscious of her near presence, suffered agonies, listening for the foot-fall which never came. With characteristic fortitude, however, he waited patiently, thinking always, "To-morrow, to-morrow we shall meet." At last he rode over, left his horse at a neighbouring inn, and boldly strode to Castle Lindsay. He had scarcely passed the gates when he met Effie coming from the Castle. Her face looked radiant at his approach, and all Heaven showered down upon him as they shook hands.

"At last!" said Effie, smiling. "I thought you were never going to call."

"I waited for *you*," he answered. "I thought —"

"That I would come to you? Well, I did think of doing so, but it would n't have been *comme il faut*. Besides, I've been so busy, and so — so *worried*. Lady Bell is worse-tempered than ever, and you know my dependent position."

"Where are you going?" asked Douglas, after a long pause, during which he had been gazing steadily into his companion's face.

“To the village — anywhere — nowhere in particular. I came out simply to get away from Lady Bell.”

“Then we’ll walk together,” said Douglas. “I wish to speak to you. I’ve been waiting all these months.”

She glanced at him from under her long eyelashes, and knew by instinct what was coming. With a little *frisson* of apprehension, she moved along by his side. He was trembling like a leaf, his lips were bloodless, his mouth dry as dust, and again and again, before he found speech, he moistened his lips with the tip of his tongue. None of these signs of complete nervousness were lost upon Effie; but although she felt proud of her mastery over the man, she felt for him nothing but a pretty contempt.

“How different,” she thought to herself, “to Arthur Lamont!”

They had passed out of the lodge gate, and were strolling along the open highway, before Douglas blurted out his confession.

“Effie,” he said, “I want you to become my wife.”

Without replying, she walked on, her eyes fixed upon the ground. She did not even seem to be surprised or startled. Trembling through all his frame, he attempted to take her hand.

“Please don’t!” she cried petulantly, turning away.

“Did you hear what I said?” he asked, trying in vain to meet her eyes.

“Yes, Mr. Douglas,” she replied, without a tremor, “I did hear you, and I’m sorry to have done so. I hoped and prayed so much that you would never spoil our friendship by such words.”

He paused as if stupefied, so far off was he still from understanding the woman on whom he had set his soul.

“Effie,” he said, “you knew from the first — you have known all along — that I loved you, and I’m here to-day to have your answer. Out with it! Yes or no? Let it be yes, and I’m the gladdest man God ever made. Let it be no, and I’ll take my Hell from you just as I would have taken Heaven!”

As his old manner asserted itself, and the strength within him bore down the first *gaucherie* of one unaccustomed to such confessions, her respect for him returned, and instead of replying to him cruelly, as she had been tempted to do, she prevaricated.

“You have taken me by surprise. I would rather not answer you — at least, give me time.”

“You’ve had time enough, and so have I!” he exclaimed. “I ask you again to become my wife. God knows I’ve little to offer you, either in goods or gear, and God knows too, I’m not the man to take any lass’s fancy. But I’ve set my heart *here*, and staked my soul as well; and I’m yours, Effie, for the damning or the blessing!”

“You are a strange man,” was Effie’s somewhat irrelevant reply.

“So you told me long ago. Well?”

She turned suddenly, and looked full into his eyes.

“Of course you know it is impossible,” she said.

“How — how?”

“In the first place, I’m not for marrying — I much prefer to remain as I am. In the second place, Mr. Douglas, I could never like you in that way.”

His brow frowned, and his face became clouded, but his gaze remained full on hers. She continued with more decision —

“I am sure you wish me to speak the truth. I have never thought of you, I could never think of you, as girls think of possible husbands. There is no one in the world whom I esteem more as a friend, but when you speak to me of love or marriage, I feel nothing but repulsion. I know that it is horrid for me to say it, but in that way you repel me more than any man I have ever met.”

He staggered as if under a blow, and seemed about to fall; then, regaining command of himself, he cried hoarsely —

“That’s enough. Good-bye!”

And before she could utter another word he was walking rapidly away. Startled and surprised, she called to him, but he did not seem to hear; and in a few minutes he had disappeared.

Three or four days passed, during which Douglas remained buried in his lonely home. I pass over the

man's sufferings, which could only be described in the old cant phrase, "The torture of the damned." But one morning, as he stood gazing at the sea from his dwelling, the post brought him this letter, under the lithographed heading, "*Un petit mot*" —

"I must speak to you. Pray come and see me again. I shall not be happy until I'm forgiven. — E. H."

A few hours later he was over at Castle Lindsay. She saw him from the house, smiled, and came forth to meet him, prettily dressed in a new spring costume, and carrying a parasol. They shook hands without a word, but he felt a gentle pressure which stirred all the life within him. Side by side they stole down the broad walk, and, turning into a quiet pathway, wandered towards the Castle woods.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW THE CUSHAT CROONED.

“Have ye heard the croon of the cushat creep
Through boughs of a leafy dell?
Like the cushat’s call, from the boughs of sleep
(Deep! deep! deep! deep!)
The faery murmur fell.”

THEY walked on until they entered the shadow of the woods, she leading and trailing listlessly her parasol, he following and feasting his eyes upon her form. The foliage all around them was full of the chatter of life; from time to time a rabbit scuttled across the path, or a squirrel ran up the fir-trees. Dominant over all sounds was the thick, amorous cry (deep! deep!) of the wood-dove.

She was the first to break the silence. *He* would have let it throb on for ever!

She paused, turned, and laughed, looking him full in the face.

“How quiet you are!” she said. “Haven’t you a word to say for yourself?”

He shook his head and tried to smile, but all he could do was to look at her, with that lifelong hunger she knew so well.

“Shall I tell you more about Lady Bell?” she asked lightly. “Well, I think she hates me worse than ever, and all because so many of the men-folk think me entertaining. And her worst temper is shown whenever I and Mr. Arthur snatch a word together. Yesterday I was playing in the drawing-room — some old German music — when he came in and sat down and listened. I declare he had n’t even spoken. But Lady Bell found us there, and was awfully angry.”

It was silly sooth, but to Douglas it was the music of the world. He listened, as if to the beating of his own heart. Deep! deep! sounded the coo of the cushat overhead.

“It’s strange, after all, that she should dislike me so. I never willingly offended anybody, and I used to be quite fond of Lady Bell. She is planning and planning to get me out of the house, and I’d oblige her if I knew where to go. But I’m a helpless sort of thing. It all comes of being a woman. You men have much the best of it. You can do what you like, go where you like, see what you like. Oh, how I should love to see the world, the great cities! the wicked places, like London and Paris! Lady Bell is going to Paris for her honeymoon. When I think of that I almost *bate* her.”

There was a rude wooden seat some twenty yards away from her, and as she spoke she sauntered to it, and sat down, hanging her head and picking the mossy

sward with the end of her parasol. Thick boughs of fir and larch darkened the air above and around her, and on every side gathered the thick undergrowth of nut-trees and brambles.

He sat down near to her, and almost instinctively she drew a little away.

“Do you hate me as much as ever?” he asked in a low voice.

“How stupid of you to ask such a question! You know I don’t hate you at all. It is n’t likely, or I should n’t ask you to meet me and have these long talks.”

“But you know what folk would say if they saw us sitting here together?”

She looked quickly at him with her clear blue eyes.

“I suppose they’d say that we were lovers, or ought to be,” she replied, laughing. “But I neither know nor care what they would say, for what does it matter to me? It amuses me to have some one to talk to, and you’re such an excellent listener.”

“Yes, when you’re speaking,” said Douglas. “Come, we’re good friends, at any rate?”

“We shall always be that, I hope.”

“And nothing more?”

“Nothing more,” she replied with decision. “I think by this time that you ought to understand that thoroughly. I’ve told you again and again.”

He rose to his feet, trembling violently, his eyes burning, his face an ashen white.

“Don’t tell me again *now!* Don’t, when we’re alone together, far away from the sight of any human soul!”

“I’m not afraid,” said Effie gently, “for I know well you’d never harm me.”

“Harm you — harm you?” he cried, looking upward. “Hear her! hearken to her, God in heaven! I could crush her in the palm of my hand, I could kill her as easily as a butterfly, and she cries to me, with a voice like the cry of a bairn, ‘I’m not afraid!’ Answer me,” he added, turning to her, “what is there hateful about me? Why do you smile upon me and yet shrink from me? Why do you tell me to meet you, and bring your troubles to me, and then make me suffer the torments of the damned?”

As he spoke he reached up with his powerful arms, tore down a great branch of an overhanging large tree, and rent it in his quivering hands. His face was convulsed with a savage pain.

“Oh, you’re impossible!” she said, rising. “I’ll go home.”

But he faced her on the pathway, looking at her with the shaggy torso and bloodshot eyes of a mountain bull.

“You sha’n’t go till I’ve done with you!” he cried, while she shrank back angrily. “What is there to prevent me from taking you in my arms and making you mine for ever? It would be justice, I tell you, to crush and break you as I crush and break this branch

of a tree; and if I did, no one would pity you, for you deserve no pity. You play with a man's soul as if it were a ball of sewing-silk, to toss to and fro, to wind and to unwind, as the humour pleases you. Do you know what you are doing, woman? Do you know what devils you are conjuring up?"

Pale with fear or anger, she drew herself erect and looked him firmly in the face.

"If you mean that I have ever said I liked you — more than as a friend — you are doing me an injustice. I'm not a coquette!"

"You are — and worse!" he answered between his set teeth.

"If that is your opinion of me, Mr. Douglas, we had better not meet again. I was wrong — I relied on your friendship. I thought — but there, why need we discuss it any more? Suffer me to pass."

He drew aside, and she passed him by; then turning on the path, she prepared, in the manner of virgins, her Parthian shafts.

"I was always honest with you. I told you I could never like you — as you wish. I tried hard not to wound your feelings, and I did not say how strongly you repelled me. Perhaps I should have done. Perhaps I should have said, as I feel, that of all men living ——"

"Cold and heartless, as I know," he muttered, interrupting her.

"I'm neither! I'm not cold, and I'm not heartless.

I'm a woman, with a woman's passions, I suppose. But when you asked me to be your wife, I shuddered as if something horrible had walked over me. Even the touch of your hand was sickening to me; and when I thought you cared for me as you said, I felt degraded — horrid —— ”

“ Stop there! Stop! ” he groaned out of the anguish of his heart. “ Stop and go — go! I wish to hear no more! ” and, throwing himself on the seat, he hid his face in his hands.

There was a long silence, filled only with the murmur of the woods and the cushat's solitary cry. When he looked up, haggard and broken, she was still standing there, looking at him with her wistful blue eyes.

With a gesture of agony he motioned her away.

“ Why are you so unreasonable? ” she said, returning and sitting near him. “ Why do you compel me to seem so unkind? I detest myself when I say such things to you, but you really make me. ”

His face was turned from her, and he did not answer; but, peeping over his shoulder, she saw one thick tear clinging to his eyelids. In an impulse of pity she reached out her little gloved hand and touched him on the shoulder.

“ Mr. Douglas! ”

Commanding himself with a supreme effort, he turned his face towards her.

“ Well? ”

“I want you to forgive me. I want you to understand that I am really sorry for you, and that I — I respect you. Why cannot we be friends?”

He looked at her intently.

“We can, if you will swear one thing.”

“Yes!”

“To meet me often — to let me see you, feel your breath upon me — to tell me everything you think and do — to show yourself to me as to your own looking-glass, concealing nothing — to say to yourself always, ‘I’ve one friend, one confidant, Richard Douglas!’”

“I should love that,” she answered, smiling. “Oh, I’ll promise! I’ll swear!”

“But one thing you must *not* tell me. I warn you now, as you’ve warned *me*.”

“And what’s that?”

“If ever you give your love to another man, don’t tell me *that*; don’t tell me his name.”

Quite herself again by this time, Effie pouted amiably.

“Then it won’t be half a confidence. I think my father confessor ought to be the first to know. Why must I not tell you?”

“Because ——”

He paused; his eyes still fixed upon her, but his face all heavily lined and shadowed, his lips set tight.

“Because?” she questioned.

“Because,” he answered, “if you do, I shall *kill* him — be sure of that.”

“ Oh, that ’s perfect nonsense,” she cried, rising. “ You talk as if we lived in the Dark Ages ! Besides, you ’ve no *right* to interfere with my happiness ! ” And she thought to herself, using even in thought her favourite expression, “ The man ’s *horrid* ! I wish we ’d never met.”

“ I cannot answer for myself,” said Douglas, “ so I ’ve warned you. God knows I want you to be happy ! And I think if my own death could help you, I would give you my life as freely as I ’ve given you my love. But I could n’t bear to see another man gain what I have lost, or rather, what was never mine. I envy the very air you breathe — the very dress that clings about you ! There ’s nothing in God’s universe but you, Effie ! ”

A love so overmastering, so tender, might have touched the quick of pity in another woman, might have made another woman ask herself, “ If, after all, my happiness lies *here* ? ” But Effie, though touched in a way, asked herself no such question. No great impulse, no tide of tumultuous feeling, ever coursed along those gentle veins, and no cry of the soul had power to stir her nature suddenly to any mood of spiritual insight.

She was flattered, even moved, by the man’s devotion ; she enjoyed beyond measure, and not without sympathy and pity, the spectacle of his humiliation ; but although she was a girl of infinite caprices, her physical instinct always mastered her and was in the

ascendant. Douglas repelled her on the sensuous side, and that, to a person of her temperament, was all-sufficient. As she watched the grandeur of his agony, she could not help reflecting how infinitely more pleasing were the lightsome good looks of shallow, masculine beauties like — like Arthur Lamont.

And yet, with all this, the man's companionship, her secret meetings with him, their frequent misunderstandings, his strength and weakness, filled her with a delightful sense of possession — such a sense as Circe may have felt when her naked foot was set on the neck of a new worshipper, whose human lineaments were slowly changing into the likeness of a beast. She would have been very miserable, for a day or two, if they had parted altogether; for something *risqué* and fascinating would have gone out of her life. She was sharp-sighted enough, moreover, to realise fully that the man's passion was far from being merely brutal. She saw clearly enough that it was her soul (or what he thought her soul) that he was agonising for, far more than for the possession of her person; that one "I love you" from her lips would have almost sufficed to still the tumult of a lifetime; that he would have been content, as it was, to sit passively and look at her for ever, if he could have been certain of her love.

It was her repulsion of him from the sensuous side that maddened him into the more brutal forms of passion. That, also, she knew well. One word or

look of spiritual love would have turned him into a lamb, tame and gentle and unaggressive. But with the secret refinement of cruelty which exists in the majority of pretty women, and in all light women, she loved to see the lion rage, even though it meant her own peril.

“ I *must* go now,” she said falteringly. “ They ’ll be wondering what has become of me.”

Douglas made no reply. His eyes were turned away, dark with thought.

“ Good-bye,” she added softly.

Still not looking at her, he answered, “ Good-bye ! ”

Then the dew went up into her eyes, and she went close to him and held out her hand. He took it and held it in his powerful grasp, and looked up into her face with the eloquence of despair. At that moment she felt very, very pitiful, and bending quickly down to him, she kissed him quickly — first upon one cheek, then upon the other. ✓

“ There ! ” she said hysterically. “ *Now* will you forgive me, and think I ’m sorry ? ”

The touch of her lips, cold and passionless though they were, unlocked the floodgates of his heart, so that the tears coursed down his cheeks, and, fairly sobbing, he held her hands to his lips and kissed them wildly. She made no resistance, but waited until he had recovered his self-command, when, releasing his hold upon her and passing his hand across his eyes, he rose up with a look of determination. ✓

“That’s over,” he said. “Oh, my angel, my darling, don’t think me a coward — don’t despise me for what you’ve seen this day.”

“I don’t think you a coward,” she answered gently; “and of course I don’t despise you. I like you very, very much.”

“I know, I know,” he cried with a touch of his old savagery. “Don’t let us talk about it any more,

“ ‘When we fell we aye gat up again,
And sae will we yet!’ ”

as the song says, and every man must dree his weird.”

“Of course,” she said, as they walked back side by side, “and every woman. I’m sure I’ve got to dree mine, for my life up yonder is positively detestable. By the by, Mr. Douglas, I’ve often wanted to ask you a question. Was it *you* who played the trick upon me when I tried the charm in the woods at Halloween?”

Douglas nodded.

“It was rather horrid of you, was n’t it? I was so terribly frightened. I really thought at first it was your wraith, and I made a terrible fool of myself, before Lady Bell and them all, when I got back to the Castle. What ever made you think of such a thing?”

“My folly.”

“You wanted to frighten me?”

“No! that would have been but poor comfort.

Don't talk about it. It is n't a pleasant recollection to either of us."

They walked silently on, through the lengthening shadows of the wood. Instinctively, as they went, Douglas placed his hand upon her arm.

"Oh, don't do that, please!" she exclaimed. "I can't tell you how I dislike it!"

To her surprise, Douglas, instead of yielding peacefully, uttered a savage oath, and strode on in front of her.

"Try to behave like a gentleman," she said. "After all, you *are* one, I suppose?"

"I'm *not*," he answered with a coarse laugh. "I'm Richard Douglas, of Douglas, whom God cursed from the cradle. Do you know what I shall do when we part?"

"No — what?"

"Ride into Dumfries and get drunk, as my father used to do. Perhaps I shall be lucky, like him, and break my neck on the road home."

"How horrid of you to talk like that!"

"I *am* horrid, as you call it; I begin to think you've taken all human likeness out of me. I feel an ugly animal, top to toe!"

"Then I'm sorry I kissed you. I hate ugly animals."

"Quite right, Effie. Hate me; that's the way to save me."

"And I object to your implying that *I've* made

you one. You'll say next that I've taught you to swear! On the contrary, I've *civilised* you, that's what I've done — I've civilised you. Living all alone in that barbarous place, with that witch-like old woman, you were fast forgetting your duties as a member of good society."

He laughed loudly, and looked at her; her face was shining quite merrily.

"What a little chameleon you are!" he cried. "Sing something to me to drive away care and the devil!"

She took him at the word, and, tripping along, sang in a low voice a verse of an old country song:

"Awa' frae me now, Sawnie lad,
And dinna fash me mair;
We a' ken weel your purse has gowd
And that your hand has lair —
But for your siller and your lair
I dinna care a flea;
My love is Tam the shepherd boy,
Who whistles o'er the lea!"

As the last notes passed from her lips, she saw to her astonishment two figures standing in the road beyond the wood — Arthur Lamont and Lady Bell.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW EFFIE PREPARED FOR WAR.

“ ‘It’s war to the knife,’ said the bonnie wee wife,
‘It’s war to the knife,’ said she ;
And she faced the rair o’ the rushing waves,
Kilting her coats to the knee.
But the waves rose up, and the tide crept ben,
And wringing wat fell she ;
For tho’ the lass had the strength o’ ten,
’T was fechting the muckle sea ! ”

OLD SONG.

IT was clear that the sound of voices and of singing had arrested them as they were passing along the highway. Lady Bell was smiling curiously and saying something sarcastic to her companion, whose expression betokened no little astonishment, if not annoyance.

“ We’re caught ! ” whispered Effie, flushing crimson ; then, commanding all her resources in a moment, she ran on quickly, and passed through the white gate leading into the road. Douglas followed slowly, scowling from right to left.

“ Dear me, Effie, where have you been ? ” said Lady Bell, still smiling. “ We wondered what wild thing

was singing through the woods. I see you've company — Mr. Douglas, is it not?"

"Yes," panted Effie. "We met by accident, and ——"

"Of course," said Arthur, with a dry laugh.

Lady Bell was looking towards Douglas, who had paused at the gate; so Effie cast a rapid glance at Arthur, and made a little gesture of supplication.

"Good-day, Mr. Douglas!" exclaimed Lady Bell, with increased amiability. "I'm glad the hermit has been tempted from his mossy cell, and that you've come over to Castle Lindsay at last. But what a charming concert you've been having!"

"Yes," said Douglas, smiling grimly.

"I was strolling through the woodland," cried Effie, "when I found Mr. Douglas seated there reading. You may imagine my surprise."

Lady Bell nodded.

"Oh, quite! An agreeable one, I'm sure — you are such old friends! I hope, Mr. Douglas, you are going up to Castle Lindsay?"

"No; I'm going on to Dumfries."

"But you'll come soon, won't you? My father will be glad to see you, I know, for he loves the old county families, does n't he, Arthur?"

"Immensely," said Arthur, with the same dry laugh as before.

It was an uncomfortable meeting; between the two men, as between the two women, there was a rapidly

changing current of irritation. Effie had now grown quite pale, and her under-lip was quivering angrily, for she knew that Lady Bell was twitting her unmercifully. As for Douglas, he felt a strong impulse to say or do something savage. Instinct told him that the handsome young aristocrat, delicately formed and perfectly dressed, placed him at a cruel personal disadvantage. So, without making any reply to the lady's invitation, he came out into the road, lifted his hat to Lady Bell and Effie, and walked slowly away.

"You'd better run after him, Effie," said Lady Bell. "He's mad with us for interrupting your *tête-à-tête*."

"How unkind of you to talk like that! I scarcely know the man, and our meeting was quite accidental."

"Really. As you came down the footpath you looked like a couple of lovers. Well, there's nothing to be ashamed of. Many a lass would jump at the laird."

"I've no intention of jumping at him or anybody," protested Effie.

"See, he's looking back! He has evidently something more to say to you, and Arthur and I are clearly in the way. Come, Arthur."

And with a smile of delighted malice Lady Bell took the arm of her betrothed and walked away, leaving Effie nonplussed in the centre of the road. Neither looked back for a long time, and when they

did so the girl was still standing irresolute, looking after them.

“She’s detestable,” she said to herself, feeling very much inclined to cry. “But never mind. If I choose to meet Mr. Douglas, it’s my affair, not hers. What shall I say to Arthur this evening? I can’t tell him that the horrid man loves me, and is my confessor-in-ordinary!”

At last, summoning up resolution, she walked rapidly along the highway, round a bend of which, where the cross-roads met, she found the laird waiting.

“You’ve got me into trouble,” she said angrily. “I shall never hear the last of this. Already, as you must have seen, she is coupling our names together.”

“That’s an honour to me,” returned Douglas, “though a barren one. That puppy was of the same mind, and made me feel inclined to thrash him for his impudence.”

“Good-bye,” said Effie, pausing suddenly, looking white to the very lips. “You had better not see me any more — at least, not here. If I have anything to say to you I’ll ride over to your place.”

The man’s eyes glistened.

“Promise to do that, and I shall have something to look forward to.”

“Oh, I’ll promise nothing. I *may* come, though I don’t think it’s likely;” and taking his offered hand, which pressed hers tenderly, she hurried away and was soon lost to his view.

The laird of Douglas stood like a man who has been waiting for the sun to smile behind a cloud. The shadow on his face was dark, but grim and sardonic.

“God bless her!” he thought, “how she can lie and lie! and I love her the better for it! It’s something, after all, to have this secret between us. A little more torment, a twist more of the rack, and sheer desperation might drive her into my arms. But no, ’t will never come to that, unless — unless ——— Oh, God, if she were only sick and broken, cursed and scorned and hated, that I might bend over her and lift her up and shield her in my bosom! And yet, don’t I know she’s a little devil, the angel! Don’t I know that one smirk of a handsome face, the face even of a calf like yon, would be sweeter to her than the best blood of my heart? She’ll *never* love me! She’ll never love anything but her own passing fancies, and the sunshine, and the caprice of pleasing and tormenting.”

Thus thinking, he passed on along the road leading to the inn where he had left his horse. Suddenly, with a cry of pain, he paused, threw up his arms, and cried aloud —

“Effie, Effie, Effie! Let her save or damn me, she’s the only woman in the world!”

Effie Hetherington had not miscalculated the inconvenience likely to ensue from the discovery of her secret interview with Douglas, and yet it came

that very evening in a form which she had scarcely anticipated.

At dinner, although she was silent and constrained, Lady Bell was unusually kind and gracious, smiling and nodding at Effie as if there were some secret understanding between them. The great meal over, and Arthur left at table with the Earl, she hurried Effie off to the morning room, and, sitting by her side, began an animated conversation.

“ I hope, Effie, that you were n't angry with us for spying upon you this morning; it was quite an accident, I assure you. But I want to tell you now that I was n't astonished, but very glad.”

“ Glad? Why?” asked Effie, opening her eyes wide.

“ To see you two together. Come, come, take me into your confidence for once, won't you?”

“ There's really nothing to confide in you about, Lady Bell. Our meeting, as I told you, was an accident, like your discovery of it.”

“ Then he's not in love with you?”

“ I'm sure I don't know. Suppose he is?”

“ Now I think you might do worse. He's not a rich man, but he's of old family, and wants a good wife to reform him. . . . I've often wondered, dear, what would become of you after Arthur and I are married, and I really think ——”

“ Well, it's no use thinking about it,” interrupted Effie, with growing irritation. “ I've no intention of reforming anybody, least of all Mr. Douglas.”

The two girls looked at each other steadfastly. There had never been any love lost between them, and now, although both wore a mask, there was no concealing the mutual dislike and suspicion. Lady Bell was first to break the silence.

“Arthur thinks it would be a good thing, too.”

“I’m sure I’m very much obliged to Mr. Arthur,” returned Effie, with a little forced laugh, “for taking so much interest in my fortunes. But really, Lady Bell, it’s too absurd; and as for Mr. Douglas, he’s simply horrid!”

“As a husband, you mean?”

“Of course, as a husband; in other respects, I suppose, he is amusing enough.”

“So he seemed,” returned Bell, spitefully, “when we caught you this morning.”

Effie jumped up with a cry.

“I feel very tired,” she said; “I think I’ll go to bed, if you’ve no objection?”

“Oh, none. But I’m sorry you won’t trust me.”

“Of course I trust you; but really, upon my word, things are not at all as you fancy. Good-night, Lady Bell.”

“Good-night.”

Left alone in the drawing-room, Lady Bell looked pale and angry.

“I’m certain she’s deceiving me,” she said to herself, “as she deceives everybody. But I’d give

my little finger if Mr. Douglas would carry her off, and never let me see her face again."

And presently when the Earl was nodding over a book, and she and Arthur were whispering side by side, Lady Bell said to him —

"I've spoken to Effie, and she denies that there is anything between her and Mr. Douglas."

"After all," returned Arthur, smiling, "what does it matter?"

"A great deal. Effie is a downright flirt, and it would do her good to be contracted to some honest man, who would take the nonsense out of her."

"What about the man?" asked Arthur, with a laugh. "If she's as bad as you say, it might be rather hard on *him*."

No more was said on the subject that evening, but Lady Bell was quite certain in her own mind that Arthur was far more interested in Effie Hetherington than he pretended to be; indeed, a woman far less keen-sighted than herself would have suspected as much long ago, as she had done. She never felt quite sure of her *fiancé* while Effie was in the way. The girl's indisputable beauty, her gentle, clinging ways, her peculiar influence over men generally, irritated her beyond measure.

Late that night, when the house was all asleep, Arthur Lamont and Effie stood whispering together in one of the loneliest corners of Castle Lindsay. The place where they stood formed a deep embrasure

overlooking the gardens, and was flooded by moonlight from without.

“If any one has a call to be jealous,” said the girl, “it is I. If Lady Bell only knew ——”

“Pray tell her!” was the reply. “I don’t much care. You know as well as I do that I’ve *got* to marry her, and there’s no way out of it; but I did think you cared for me, Effie, and I’m sorry that I’m mistaken.”

The girl, wrapped in a pink dressing-gown and with soft slippers on her bare feet, looked out wearily at the moonlight.

“I’ve no right to care for you,” she said, her lips trembling and her eyes full of tears. “It’s perfectly wicked and hopeless, and I feel ashamed of myself every time I look Lady Bell in the face. Always my luck, Arthur! Whenever anybody likes me, he’s sure to be somebody else’s property — a married man, or as good as married.”

“Do you include Douglas?”

“He, at least, respects me. He’d rather die than do anything to place me in a false position!”

“Magnanimous savage! Then why not make him happy or miserable, as the case may be?”

She sobbed silently.

“You don’t love me, Arthur! You never loved me!”

“Come, you know better than that,” he replied, putting his arms round her and resting her head upon his shoulder.

“*Do* you love me?” she whispered; and as, in answer, he kissed her cheek, warm and wet with tears, she said, still sobbing, “Oh, Arthur, I must go away! I shall never be able to bear it when you marry Lady Bell!”

A few minutes later Effie was in her bedroom, standing before a full-length mirror, and brushing out her golden hair by the light of two wax candles. Her tears were dried, and her face looked flushed and radiant. From time to time she bent forward and examined her features in the glass.

“She hates me because I’m prettier,” she thought, smiling at herself. “If Paris were sent down to decide the palm of beauty, it would n’t be Lady Bell that would have the golden apple! And there’s time yet! There’s many a slip between the cup and the lip, my Lady Bell! Suppose it should be Effie Hetherington instead of *you* that is to be woo’d and married and a’! I think I’d even marry Douglas, or the devil himself, to spite your ladyship!”

And full of these Christian sentiments she stepped into bed, and had scarcely laid her head on the pillow before she was sound asleep.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW DOUGLAS SWORE AN OATH.

“ Make me, make me a waxen man,
My image let it be;
Try it in fire to thy heart’s desire,
Ma belle dame sans merci!
And if it melts and flows away,
It’s frail and false like thee;
But if it burns till the Judgment Day,
You’ll ken it’s true like me! ”

TRUTH O’ THAT ILK.

HE was standing at the house-door, bareheaded, and looking wearily out to sea, when the sound of horses’ hoofs disturbed him, and, gazing round, he saw Effie Hetherington riding up on the white pony. Her face was hard set, and very pale, but she nodded to him with a forced smile, and held out her hand.

“ I’ve kept my promise,” she said, “ and come to confession, but I can’t stay long.”

He helped her to alight, and, while she waited for him at the open door, led her horse to the stables, unbridled it, and left it in a loose box; then, still trembling with happiness at the unexpected vision,

he returned to her and led her into the wainscoted parlour, which was living room and study combined. The table was strewn with books, paper, fly casts, fishing tackle, and other odds and ends, and the dogs were in their accustomed place before the fire.

“I’m all alone to-day,” he said; “Elspeth has gone marketing into Dumfries.”

She threw herself into the great armchair, and slowly and thoughtfully began to draw off her gloves. The dogs, gathering round her, gave her a friendly welcome, but their master drove them off to the kitchen with scant ceremony; then, standing erect on the hearthstone, he gazed at her long and curiously.

“Well?” she said at last, looking up at him. “Are you wondering what brought me over?”

“I never wonder at good fortune,” he replied, “or quarrel with unexpected gifts. I was only thinking that you look weary and a little sad.”

“I am both. Of course you’ve heard the news?”

“Of the marriage at Castle Lindsay? Yes.”

“They went away yesterday afternoon and caught the night train for the south. They go right through London to Paris, on to Vienna, and then to some watering-place in Austria—I forget its name. They’ll maybe be away six months, and maybe a year.”

She spoke slowly and listlessly, but there was a bright light in her eyes and a pink spot on each cheek.

“It was a stupid wedding,” she continued, with a faint laugh. “Old Mr. Sinclair, the clergyman, lost the place twice when reading the service, and I thought he was going to get adrift among the Burials. Lady Bell did n’t look like a bride at all, but wore her travelling dress — an ugly green thing, which made her complexion seem horrid — and Mr. Arthur looked bored out of his life. There was plenty of company afterwards, and a dance in the evening; but I was thinking all the time, ‘Suppose there should be a railway accident, what an end it would be to the bridal!’”

He loved to hear the sound of her voice while feasting his eyes upon her face, but there was something in her words which troubled and surprised him — a tone of bitter irritation, very unusual with her.

“Shall I get you something?” he said. “Some wine? There’s a bottle somewhere in the house.”

“Perhaps, before I go. Not now,” she replied; and reaching out her hand, she turned over the leaves of a book.

“You’d better not look at that,” said Douglas, quickly and nervously. “It’s not pretty — at least for a woman’s eyes.”

“Indeed? Well, so much the better if it’s ugly.”

“Don’t, please!” he cried, placing his hand on hers.

She looked up at him with a gleam of the old merry light in her eyes.

“Do you mean it is n't proper?”

“Maybe.”

“Never mind, I'm not such a very proper person,” she said, laughing and pushing his hand aside; then she added, glancing at the printed page, “Oh, you need n't be alarmed — it's Italian, and my accomplishments don't go beyond French and a little German.”

“All the better.”

“I'm not sure,” she returned thoughtfully, pouting her lips. “I should like to know everything that men know, and read everything that men read. I know it's horrid of me, but it's the truth. I suppose you think we women are made of sugar and spice and all that's nice? You never made a greater mistake in your life. We've a natural fascination for everything that's wicked. There's Lady Bell, for example, the bonnie bride of yesterday. It won't take Mr. Arthur long to find what *she* is!”

“You're hard upon her,” said Douglas, “and have ever been.”

“Because I *hate* her!” cried the girl, with flashing eyes. “And if you knew everything, you'd say with good reason. Be quite sure, however, that she returns the compliment. There never was any love lost between us.”

So saying, she rose and walked to the window, looking out upon the shores of the distant Firth. He followed her, and stood by her side.

“And you bide here all alone?” she said softly.

“ I should go mad with only that grey sea and those weariful distant hills to look upon. Why don't you leave the place and lead your life like a man? I would, if God had n't made me a girl, and ringed me round with a kirtle.”

“ I 've seen enough of the world not to care for it.”

“ Have you been abroad? On the Continent, I mean, among the great cities? ”

“ Yes.”

“ To Paris? Germany? Italy? ”

Douglas nodded.

“ And yet you can remain here? ”

“ Maybe that's the reason. I sowed my wild oats till I grew tired, and now —— here I bide.”

Effie looked curiously at him and laughed.

“ My respect for you is increasing, Mr. Douglas. I envy you also. What every woman, who *is* a woman, yearns for most, is to sow *her* wild oats before settling down.”

“ That's only a lassie's saying,” returned Douglas, smiling. “ Wild oats are ugly things.”

“ Ugly or pretty, I've a plentiful stock on hand. I could spend *years* in getting rid of them. I'd go wherever lights are lit, music playing, wine sparkling, folk whirling round and round until they drop. I hate stillness! I want life. Tell me,” she added, fixing her bright eyes on his, “ were you ever in love? ”

“ In love,” he echoed, his heart leaping. “ I —— ”

“ Oh, I don't mean the love folk feel up here in the

cold north. I mean were you ever in love with some one you knew to be wicked — a bad woman, one of those women every pure girl longs to be just for a day — the women who know everything, who have sucked the heart out of life, and have only one pleasure left, to make the men they meet as horrid as themselves. Come, tell me! I should like to know.”

“Well, yes, I have known such women.”

“And loved them?”

“I thought so,” he replied; “but I know now that there was no love there. Effie, I’ve only loved *once*, and though I should live for an eternity, I should never love again. I often think here in the old dwelling, that women can never love like *that!*”

“I fancy you’re right,” she said, with a sigh. “I’m sure *I* could n’t.”

“Not — not any one?”

“Not any one. Nature never meant me for a martyr, Mr. Douglas.”

“You are better and nobler than you think yourself.”

“I’m not at all noble — I’m not even good. Pray don’t credit me with any imaginary virtues. All I wish is to *live* to have my full measure of happiness — the sort of happiness I want, and which many would despise.”

Her eyes sparkled, her cheek flushed, and she had never looked so beautiful. With a mad impulse, he caught her in his arms and drew her to his heart; but

in a moment, panting and angry, she had released herself disdainfully, and turned a white face upon him.

“I was wrong to come here,” she said. “I see you wish to insult me.”

“Insult you! my God!”

“I have been candid with you from the first. I can never like you as you wish. How often must I remind you that when you treat me like that, you sicken me, and make me lose my self-respect!”

“I would rather die than do that!”

“You do it every moment, with every look, every word, and, most of all, with your touch. You ought to understand that by this time.”

“What is it you fear? Your conscience ——”

“It has nothing to do with conscience. I *have* no conscience. If I loved you, if I cared for you as women care for men, I should have no scruples of any kind. I suppose I am different from other women. Other women would be flattered and carried away by such feelings as yours, by such (if you like the word) devotion. It does not touch me in the least. It only makes me sick.”

She crossed the room, and again seated herself by the fire.

There was a long silence, horrible to the man, who was struck dumb by the pitiless cruelty of Effie's words. Blind and bewildered as he was, he knew in his soul that such words could never have come from the lips of a woman worth loving; that every mood

of this creature belied the other, and that none were noble; that there was in her nature a refinement of repulsion which could have its source only in a nausea towards all that was really spiritual and beautiful in human sentiment. She had spoken of creatures who had sucked the heart out of life, and who hated men. This pure girl, who at one moment seemed so scrupulous as to the touch, and at another had out of capricious pity stooped and kissed the man she loathed, who confessed to her yearning for things forbidden, whose intelligence was that of an animal and whose morality was that of a petted child, had attained to the æstheticism of vice without any experience of what vice was. He knew all this, and yet it did not lessen the weight of his passion by one solitary hair. He could have lain down like a dog and kissed the feet that spurned him.

The silence continued. There was no irksomeness in it to Effie, for her thoughts were already far away with Arthur Lamont and his bride. But at last Douglas could bear it no longer, and he spoke —

“Why did you come here? Why did you not leave me in peace?” he cried.

“If you wish me to go ——”

“I do not wish it. I wish nothing. You have killed all the wish and will within me.”

“Forgive me,” she said, the tears welling up into her eyes. “I am always causing you pain; but, as I told you long ago, you’re so *impossible*.”

Even his loyal nature rose at this old calumny.

“I’m what you’ve made me, Effie Hetherington!”

“Do you mean that I’ve encouraged you? If so, you’re very rude.”

“You *have* encouraged me. Not in words. No; women can lie with *them* — puzzle their victims and cheat themselves. But with looks, confessions, confidences, coquetries, caprices — what have you not done? I’ve only one last prayer to make for you, my woman. May God never play with your heart as you’ve played with mine!”

These words went home, and the girl shrunk as from a blow, grew deadly pale and placed her hand upon her heart. He moved quickly towards her, for she seemed about to faint.

But she recovered herself in another moment, and rose trembling.

“I’ll go now,” she said.

“At least let me get you some refreshment. It’s a long ride here and home again, and, maybe ——”

“I took no breakfast,” she replied; “only a cup of tea. If you don’t mind, I should like to *eat* something — a biscuit, a piece of bread, anything will do.”

He looked at her for a moment, and then left the room. Presently he returned, bringing with him on a tray some bread and butter and cold meat.

“The best I have,” he said apologetically, as he set it before her.

“Why, it’s splendid!” she cried, smiling. “What

a trouble you must think me ; but, really, I'm not a fairy, and can't live on air."

She ate heartily, with vigorous appetite, and, under his persuasion, drank also a glass of wine mixed with water. The wine was the last of some old Madeira which had belonged to his father.

"Shall I bring your horse round ?" asked Douglas, coldly.

"There's no hurry, unless you want to drive me away. Oh, Mr. Douglas," she added pleadingly, "why is it that we always quarrel? I want a true friend so much, and you *won't* let me find one in you."

"I shall always be your friend, if nothing more."

"You don't hate me for what I've said ?"

"Hate never bides in the same bield with love," he replied, and as he spoke his face was one grey mask of hopeless woe. "You might rely on me, for life or death."

"You care for me so much ?"

"Put that aside. Don't speak of it — it kills me. Try my friendship, as you call it — try it in hell-fire, if it pleases you — I'm ready."

She looked at him wistfully, and her bosom rose and fell in smothered sobs.

"I may, some day."

"If ever that day comes," said Douglas, quietly, "remember what I say. If you are ever sick or in trouble, if the doors of all the world are closed against

you, if you have neither friend nor shelter, and even if you deserve neither (which God forbid), come to me — I shall be prepared. Whatever changes, I shall be the same — that is, if I live. Trust me, as you would trust your God — you may safely do so. I think, Effie, that if I were lying in my grave, and you cried to me for help from above it, I should grow quick and come to you. For I swear to you that you are my light and my life, my world and my living soul ! ”

Steadfastly, firmly, almost without a tremor of the voice, he uttered this protestation, every syllable of which sank into the memory of the girl who listened, and as he spoke, his nature towered above hers as something god-like and terrible.

With a hysterical cry she reached out her hands to him ; he took them in his, and pressed them softly, but made no other sign of passion or emotion. Yet if at that instant he had taken her into his arms in all the ecstasy of his devotion, she would have yielded without a struggle ; not, perhaps, out of love — from very awe of his savage strength. The instant passed, and with it, so far as these two lives were concerned, passed all eternity.

They walked together to the front door, and stood side by side in the grey sunlight.

Her face was flushed with the blood of youth and strength, his grim and dark as with the shadow of years. She watched him thoughtfully when he left

her and entered the stable, then, as he disappeared from sight, sighed and shrugged her shoulders. All her sadness had passed away like a summer cloud.

Presently Douglas reappeared, leading her pony and his own horse, also saddled and bridled. She smiled to herself, but affected a pretty surprise.

“What! are *you* coming?”

“I’ll see you clear of the Moss, at any rate,” he answered, as he helped her into the saddle; then he vaulted on to his own steed, and they set forth.

The bridle path was narrow, and Douglas had to lead the way. A strange, wild figure he seemed, mounted on an animal gaunt, yet powerful. His slouch hat drawn over his eyebrows, his garments rough and long-worn, he stooped in the saddle like an old man. Involuntarily, Effie sighed and shrugged her shoulders again. Here was no form to win a young girl’s fancy, no beauty to set her heart astir; only a rugged, weather-beaten creature, rough and tough as a withered oak.

Further on, where the path widened, she cantered up to his side. Around them stretched the heather-stained reaches of the Moss, and to the left the Firth with its fringe of yellow sands. Seagulls passed slowly over them, as if passing over the sea; and from the dark, deep runlets which broke up the Moss uprose, whistling, the dunlin and the sandpiper. They could hear the breaking waves, though the line of foam was a good two miles away.

“How I love the sea!” she said. “Wherever that sleepless sound is heard, one is never quite lonely.”

He glanced at her and saw that her face was flushed with happiness, her nostrils expanded, her mouth drinking in the salt air.

Presently she proposed a gallop, and away they went along the soft road, she leading, he following, until she reined up to draw breath. All her light animal spirits seemed to have returned, all the misunderstanding with her companion to be forgotten.

So they left the Moss and came out on the highway. Not until they came in sight of Castle Lindsay did Douglas rein in his horse and say farewell.

“What a lovely ride we’ve had!” said Effie. “Will you scold me if I come over again, and soon?”

His face did not brighten, his eyes gave no gleam of joyful anticipation.

“You will please yourself,” he answered. “All I ask you to promise is to come to me whenever you are in trouble.”

“I hope you don’t imagine that trouble is in store for me?”

“I hope not; but if ever the day comes, remember. There will be always one door open, one man that has not changed.”

And so, with a wave of the hand, he rode away.

She sat in the saddle watching him until he disappeared. Then, leaning forward over the neck of her pony, she reflected—

“What does he mean? When he spoke to me of trouble that might come, his eyes seemed to read my soul. An impossible man, yet the only man in all the world who really loves me. Just like my fortune!”

Slowly and thoughtfully she made her way back to the Castle. The sun had gone in, the woods looked black and dismal, and there was a “sough” of the south-west wind that spoke of coming rain. In the dusk of that day, Effie Hetherington, like the laird of Douglas, seemed to have grown quite grey and old.

BOOK II.

THE SORROW OF EFFIE HETHERINGTON.

“O waly, waly, but Love is bonnie,
A little while when it is new,
But when it 's auld it waxeth cauld
And fades awa' like the morning dew.
I set my back against an aik,
I thought it was a trusty tree,
But first it bent, and syne it brake,
For my true love 's forsaken me!”

CHAPTER I.

HOW HALLOWEEN CAME ROUND ONCE MORE.

“ O wha will shoe my bonnie foot,
And wha will glove my hand ?
And wha will lace my middle jimp
With the lang, lang linen band ?

“ O wha will kaim my yellow hair
Wi' a new-made siller kaim ?
And wha will faither my young son,
Till Lord Gregory come hame ? ”

ANNIE O' LOCHRYAN.

“ **L** AIRD, laird ! ” cried old Elspeth.

Several knocks upon the door had preceded her entrance, but the laird of Douglas, with his eyes upon the fading fire and a long extinguished pipe between his teeth, took no heed of either. At the touch of the old woman's hand upon his shoulder, he turned with a start, which showed how sudden had been his awakening from his deep abstraction.

“ Eh ? what ? Who is it ? ”

“ Wha should it be, ” asked the old woman in return, “ but just mysel' ? I'm gawn to the toon, for we're just about clean out of bread, and the lazy loon,

Jack Calmont, that should hae been here three hours syne, is no' come yet. Why, laird, what ails ye, that ye sit here with the fire well-nigh oot and the night sae bitter cauld? Ye'll catch your death, gin ye gang on this gait, taking no mair heed o' yoursel' than a froward bairn."

She knelt before the hearth, and with shaking hands raked together the last glowing morsels of peat beneath the heap of grey ashes, carefully feeding the dying glow with fresh fuel.

Douglas, after his first startled look at her, had fallen back into his brooding quiet. As she rose, he took his tobacco-pouch from his pocket with an absent air, and filled his pipe, glancing meanwhile at the fire, with a set and troubled look.

Old Elspeth watched him askance. The pipe filled, he restored the pouch to his pocket, and made a desultory, wandering search about his person for a match, which ended in his falling back into his abstraction with the unlit pipe between his lips.

"Eh!" the old woman muttered quietly, with an accent of despairing calm, and tearing a fragment from a newspaper upon the table, lit it at the swinging lamp, and offered it to her master. He took it mechanically, set his pipe aglow, and leaned back in his chair, puffing intently.

"There's naething ye'll be wanting frae the toon, laird?" she asked, in a voice as purely commonplace and conventional as she could make it.

He returned no answer.

“Deil’s in the man!” she broke out, with a sudden exclamation, which awoke him for a moment from his trance of thought. “A body might just as well talk to a stane in the kirkyard. You’ve ne’er a word to thraw to a dog, let be to a puir auld Christian that has nursed and tended ye this ane and thirty year!”

“I beg your pardon, Elspeth; I was thinking.”

“Thinking! Aye, and muckle guid your thinking does!” muttered the old woman. Douglas moved impatiently in his chair. “I’d bet a saxpence, gin I had ane to bet, that ye dinna even ken what day o’ all days o’ the year it is, wi’ a’ your thinking.”

“Halloween, Elspeth. I know the day well enough. What of it?”

“What o’ it? Just naething o’ it. It passes like ilka other day i’ this hoose, wi’ naebody but a dour master like yoursel’ and a daft auld carline like me. And to think that it’s the hoose o’ Douglas should be the only hoose where the good auld time should be forgot. It was better in your faither’s time, Dare the Deil, as they ca’d him. There was bite and sup for them that chose to come on siccan occasion in his day, and a bonny leddy to mak’ them welcome, and a bright fire and a clean hearth. And noo! hech! but there’s a difference!”

Elspeth’s intention was kindlier than her words, she wanted only to rouse her master from the troubled trance in which he passed so many of his waking

hours. He sat with his bent head so that she could not see the flush on his cheek and the gloomy glitter in his eye.

“Times are sair changed,” she went on, “when a man like you, the best blood and the comeliest for miles around” (this was no flattery, but an article of Elspeth’s creed), “sits alane by his ain ingle on Halloween. What say I? Halloween? It’s aye the same times in this sad hoose!”

Douglas’ foot beat an impatient tattoo on the hearthstone and he puffed hard and fast at his pipe; Elspeth noted these signs of perturbation, and fearing an explosion of his anger hastened to change the subject.

“It’s wearin’ late,” she said, with a glance through the window at the gloomy prospect, which received more illumination from the snow upon it than from the last faint gleam of vanishing daylight visible through a rift in the heavy sky, “and I must be awa’ to the clachan. Is there anything ye’re needing, laird?”

“Nothing,” murmured Douglas, “nothing.”

“I’ll be no longer awa’ than I can help,” said Elspeth, “for indeed, it’s gaun to be nae canny night to be abroad in. It’s deep with snaw, and to-day I found the water in the pot frozen hard within a yard o’ the kitchen door.”

The laird made no comment on this meteorological marvel, but sat with his eyes again bent on the fire, as Elspeth had found him. She lingered still for a

moment, in hope of again hearing his voice, but he made no sign, and she left the room, closing the door gently behind her.

Time had not stood still with the Laird of Douglas, and, indeed, the last year had left deeper traces upon him than ten times such a space leaves upon happier men. The natural and habitual gloom that dwelt upon his face was deepened, the strong lines in his sad cheek scored more heavily; there was a look of despair grown half patient in his cavernous eyes; the long elf locks of his hair were touched with grey behind the ears.

Had he been a little richer, or had his lines of life been cast elsewhere than in that gloomy neighbourhood, with more possibilities of action — had he been of a more expansive or less profound nature — in a word, had he been otherwise than what he was, Douglas might have found some cure for the bitter and hopeless passion which had settled upon him. He rebelled against it at times, but it closed in upon him again, as a fog lifted for a moment from the face of a mountain by a flaw of wind, settles again when the disturbing cause is past.

Out on the barren moorland the wind was rising in fitful gusts, each louder and louder than the last, and between them the snow was falling in flakes as large as a child's hand. At last, a loud blast, which seemed to shake the house, and screamed with an eerie voice down the wide chimney, half-filling the

room with yellow peat smoke, roused the solitary man from his fruitless meditation. He walked to the door of the cottage and opened it. The whole country was scarred with lines of snow, heavy clouds were drifting overhead, revealing, only to quench as soon as seen, a solitary star here and there in the black expanse.

The stormy spirit of the night suited his mood well, as, with brows bending and chin forward, he faced the gusty wind. Thought after thought drifted through his brain, memory after memory, like fragments of rent cloud.

He had never troubled himself much with the problems of existence; born, as it were, without faith, he had cherished no illusions save one — that the heavenliest thing in the world was some passionate woman's love. For this he had craved and agonized, long before Effie Hetherington beset his path; and no stormy excesses of his youth, no experience of light women, had ever changed his first yearning. For the good and pretty, the conventional, women he had encountered, he felt no sympathy; many a fair face had passed him by unheeded. For, though the man was rough in outward bearing, he was keenly critical and capricious where the sex was concerned. A look, a word, the mode of wearing a dress, a walk, an attitude, had the power to disenchant him instantly. Only once in his life had he been on the point of marrying, and that was to a woman — a young

Belgian girl — whose beauty was no less extraordinary than her depravity. For a space he was mastered by her splendid animalism, so wildly in harmony with his own ; but he had hesitated, and during his hesitation she had found a richer lover and disappeared. It was well for him that she did so ; for their union (and he had contemplated actual marriage with her) would have had some terrible ending.

But the night when he, in the prime of manhood, met Effie Hetherington, he was captive in a moment. She fascinated him to the point of madness. Her strange beauty, her cleverness, her infinite caprice, were a revelation to the lonely man, and she, a natural coquette, with smiles and tears at command, played upon his nature as on a lover's lute. The look of her eyes, the turn of her head, the movements of her body, the touch of her hand, the rustle of her dress, kept alive the passion of his nature ; and when he found that no response came to his passion, that the prettiest thing in life was also the most cruel, his passion, instead of lessening, increased tenfold. Then came the series of interviews, of secret meetings, which had been at once his rapture and his torture. Pleased, humiliated, encouraged, soothed or insulted, he staggered on with closed eyes, following the dream he knew not whither. At last, his self-abnegation had been complete. He had become the captive of a frail being whom he could have destroyed with a touch.

And once again, standing in the night at his door,

he murmured aloud the wild words of the old ballad which seemed to express the saddest yearning of his soul —

“ And ‘ Hey, Annie ! ’ and ‘ How, Annie ! ’
And ‘ Annie, come hither to me ! ’
And aye the more that he cried ‘ Annie, ’
The louder rair’ d the sea ! ”

And suddenly, as he spoke the words, a Miracle ! Out of the night, out of the black mist of darkness and flying snow, came the figure of Effie Hetherington, fluttering to his door like a wounded bird, crying aloud his name, reaching out her arms and moaning piteously, till, spent and swooning, she sank at his feet !

With a cry, almost a shriek, he caught her up in his arms.

He could not see her face, but there was no need to tell him it was she — he would have known her among a thousand, amid utter darkness.

“ Effie, Effie ! ” he cried, and clasped her to his breast ; then, like one bearing the wealth of all the world, he carried her to the sitting-room, where the lamp was burning. The wind rushed in behind them.

He set her by the fire, in the great armchair, in which he had sat so many a night brooding over the thought of her and of his hopeless love. Supporting her neck with one arm, he gazed into her face : it was blue-white with cold, and her hair was wet with snow, and the flakes lay upon the cloak she wore

wrapped around her, and from head to foot she looked bruised and broken like a trodden flower. Partially recovering consciousness, she clung to him, sobbing, and uttering inarticulate moans.

“My God!” he murmured, “what is it? Why has she come here?”

As he spoke, her eyes opened and looked upon him.

“I have come!” she cried. “Keep, keep your promise!” — and once more she swooned away.

Utterly bewildered, he knelt down beside her, undid the fastening of her cloak, loosened her dress at the neck, calling her name and murmuring words of comfort; then springing to his feet, he took the spirit bottle from its shelf, poured a little of the contents into a glass, and trickled a few drops between her clenched teeth; and afterwards, seizing her cold hands in his, chafed them tenderly.

His promise? What did it mean? He was too dazed to understand, and — shall I add? — too happy. For to have her there with him in her utter helplessness, to minister to her needs, to touch her, to yearn over her — all this *was* happiness, too strange and wild for thought to measure.

At last the faint colour flickered into her cheeks, and she uttered a long, deep moan; then her fingers were lifted convulsively to her neck, and she seemed fighting for breath. She undid her dress more, and seemed relieved. He waited anxiously. At last she

looked at him again, in such despair, such agony, that he was absolutely terrified.

“Effie, my lass, what is it?” he cried.

She did not answer, but covered her face with her hands and wept. He placed his hand on her shoulder, and waited for her to speak; at last the words came.

“Don’t hate me! Don’t drive me away! Don’t send me back yonder! Don’t, don’t!”

She lay back crying in the chair, her face still covered, but he saw the red blood suffusing her neck and rushing up to flood her cheeks.

“What has happened?” he cried, still wondering. “Don’t be afraid. Your home is here. But speak — tell me!”

He paused, for as his eye met her figure a light flashed upon him. He recoiled with extended quivering hands, expressive of mingled tenderness and repugnance. For a minute he paused in that attitude like a man frozen, then with a cry he lifted up his clenched hands, and said —

“My God! my God!”

She heard his despairing moan, and shrank away in terror, uncovering her face, and gazing at him with a troubled and wondering look. Pale as death, weeping no longer, she paused, like one waiting to hear her death-sentence. His face was hard as a mask of stone, for at last he knew the truth. The time had come for him to keep his oath. She had come to him because he was the one man in the world whom she

had most wronged, because she was friendless, deserted, and, in the eyes of all Pharisees, a miserable sinner.

So hard and deadly did his face seem, and so painfully was the stony look prolonged, that at last the girl herself could bear it no more. Rising to her feet and tottering feebly, she said —

“Let me go! I should never have come! Forgive me — I will go away!”

Without a word, he placed a strong hand on either arm, and, though she struggled feebly, replaced her in the chair. Quite helpless to resist him, and growing weaker every moment, she sank back with half-closed eyes, the lids quivering, the tears just trembling through.

His tongue and throat were dry as dust; he tried for some minutes to speak, but vainly; only, with that life-long hunger of the eyes, he fed on the lineaments of her worn, sad face.

“Effie,” he said at last, in a low voice — “Effie, listen to me!”

She shrank away, but listened.

“The day I first loved you, my woman, I knew ’t would maybe end in a *tryst* of death or shame. I loved you, Effie, more than myself or God. The time’s come to prove me, and I’m ready, if it were to face both Death and Hell.”

Shivering and sobbing, she made a quick gesture with the hand, as if to implore him to be silent. But he proceeded —

“But, not even now, my woman, will I lie to you. What you ’ve brought me to-night is bitterer to bear than Death. But I ’ll take the gift, since ’t is the only one God cares to give. I ’ll take you, Effie, as I ’d take a poison flower to wear on my breast; I told you langsyne if ever you were in trouble to come to me, and, thank God! you ’ve come, and you ’re as sure of love and shelter here as if you ’d given me your heart. If I grieve, it ’s not for myself, my woman — it ’s for *you!* for *you*, Effie — the only thing I care for in the world.”

As he took her hand, gently and pityingly, she gazed again into his face, and saw that his eyes were dim, and two slow tears were rolling down his cheeks. Their eyes met, and he trembled like a man with the ague; then, like one death-struck, he sank upon his knees before her and buried his face in his hands.

CHAPTER II.

HOW DOUGLAS LISTENED IN THE NIGHT.

“The laverock and the mavis,
The bawkin and the jay,
The mire-snipe and the heather-bleat,
How many birds are they?
I carena now how many they be,
They ’ve mates to see them through,
But in my nest sits fatherless
The wee bird called ‘cuckoo’!”

BORDER SONG.

A STEP sounded in the passage outside the room, and Douglas, starting to his feet, with a hurried sign to Effie, which the latter obeyed by checking her sobs and cries, went hastily out. The intruder proved to be Elspeth.

“Are ye daft, laird,” she began, “to leave the door wide open on sic’ a night as this for any wandering thief to walk in? Look at the snaw that ’s driving ben — it ’s thicker than oot on the hill-side.”

“Never mind the snow!” said the laird: “bide here while I shut the door.”

There was something in his tone which checked the old woman’s reproof, and she stood silent, her

mouth ajar, till he had closed the door and returned to her.

“ Elspeth,” he said, “ you have served me long and well. I think you love me, and would help me if you could ? ”

“ The Lord kens it,” she answered, after a bewildered stare at him. “ What is it, laird ? Ye ’re as white as a ghaist ! Eh, what has happened since I left the hoose ? ”

“ Listen, then, woman ! Miss Hetherington is here.”

Elspeth started, and wonderingly repeated the name.

“ She is ill and in trouble,” added Douglas.

“ Puir lassie ! ” said Elspeth. “ What ’s wrang wi’ her ; and what, i’ the name of a’ that ’s uncannie, brought her here ? ”

“ That,” said Douglas, “ you will find for yourself. She ’s in the sitting-room ; take her to my room, put her to bed, and treat her kindly. Oh, Elspeth ! be gentle with her ! ”

“ Why should I no’ be gentle wi’ the puir lass ? ” asked Elspeth, not unnaturally surprised at the commendation and at the pleading tone in which it was made. “ Take me to her, laird.”

Douglas passed into the room before the old servant, and stood aside as she advanced towards Effie. The poor girl was crying softly and rocking herself to and fro, as if in great pain.

“ Eh, dear — eh, dear ! ” said Elspeth, pityingly ;

“dinna greet sae, my bonnie leddie. Eh!” she continued, brushing away the heavy mass of curling hair, “you ’re droukit like a sheep of a wet morn. Come awa’ — come ben to the laird’s room. You ’ll be best in bed, I ’m thinking, while your claise are dried. Ye can rest here till the morn, and the laird will find somebody to take news o’ your safety to the Castle.”

“Light the fire in the bedroom,” said Douglas, “and I will help Miss Hetherington there.”

The old woman shuffled away to execute his order. It was with a strange, half-insane joy that Douglas took the girl again in his arms. It was shame and misfortune that had brought her to the door; but, be that as it might, she was there, dependent on him — delivered up to him — at the mercy of that craving love which had been stifled in his heart so long.

He led her to the bedroom when Elspeth had lit the fire, and placed her in a chair beside the bed. She clung to him with all her strength as he endeavoured to leave her, but he gently disengaged himself. A wild, mad joy was in his face, and he knew that it deepened with every one of her mute, helpless, imploring caresses, and he was fearful that she should see it.

He passed out into the night. The snow had ceased to fall, and, save for a heavy bank of cloud low down on the horizon, the wind had swept the sky clear. The cold air blew about his throbbing temples and refreshed him as he walked backwards and for-

wards before the house, giving vent in strange mutterings and wild gestures to the passions which swayed and clamoured in his breast. To that wild joy — the knowledge of Effie's presence in his house — succeeded a raging wonder as to the identity of her betrayer. What infernal villain had conceived the idea of destroying that divine innocence and purity? Douglas swore, with deep and awful oaths, that if ever he learned the wretch's name he would follow him round the breadth of the world, and never rest until he had killed him. Pity and rage and mad rejoicing followed each other through his disordered mind. He recalled every circumstance of his former meeting with Effie — her every tone and look; he remembered how, hidden in the trees of that night year, furtively looking toward the lighted windows of the Castle — the casket which held his jewel — his heart had thrilled, his blood quickened and burned, at the light sound of her footstep upon the turf. He saw the slight white figure pause before him; heard her panting breath; saw the jewels glitter on the little hand that threw the thread; heard her voice, faint with terror, utter the charm; and saw her face blanch at his apparition between the bushes. He remembered their after meetings — her infinite coquetries — her affection of *camaraderie* and platonic friendship — her capricious tyranny and his own despair. And she was there — there in his house — at his mercy; delivered up to the implacable love which had pursued her so long!

As he re-entered the house, he found Elspeth waiting for him in the kitchen. Their eyes met, and he saw that the old woman, too, shared Effie's secret.

"Well," he asked, "is she in bed?"

"Aye," bitterly replied the old woman. "In the bed where your mother slept, and where you were born. Do ye no' think shame to have bidden me tak' her there?"

"No," returned the laird; "and hold your peace."

"I'll no' hold my peace," said Elspeth, frankly; "and what's mair, I'll no' be the howdie to your light-o'-love!"

"Mine, woman!" cried Douglas, staggering as if the word had stung him.

"And if no' yours, which God forbid! some other man's. Is there nae hospital in the toon, nae brake or whinbush by the roadside, that she should come here, where a' the warld must ken her shame?"

The man's face grew black and terrible.

"Damn you, be silent!" he said. "If you mean to talk like that, leave the house."

"I'll leave it, laird, for it's no place noo for a decent woman," and she shuffled towards the door.

"No, you shall stay!" said Douglas, gripping her arm. "You leap to conclusions like a fool. Suppose — suppose she is a wife."

"She wears nae ring."

"What of that?"

"And nae lawful wife within an hour o' bearing a

bairn would hae come by night to a stranger's hoose."

"She *has* come, and she shall stay," was the reply. "If you've no pity for her, think of the bairn unborn. Do my bidding. Help me to see her through this night. If you refuse, I'll do the work alone."

The old woman looked at him in surprise. She knew his temper and determination, and she saw in his face, moreover, a look of unusual resolve.

"Wae's me for this day!" she said. "I'll do your bidding, laird, as I hae done it my life long; and God forgive me for loving you better than my ain gude name, and the gude name o' the hoose that has sheltered me."

"God bless you, Elspeth," cried Douglas, in a choking voice.

Elspeth left the room; and the laird, after a long and agitated walk about the limits of the sitting-room, reseated himself in his chair, and sat in the dead silence of the house straining his ears to catch the slightest sound from the chamber in which his grim old servant kept dutiful but unsympathetic watch over the unfortunate lady so strangely given to his care. Rage and pity and the fierce joy of finding her in danger and sorrow under his roof were all wrestling in his mind again.

Presently Elspeth reappeared in the room.


"She's in sair pain, laird," she said, straining hard to keep her voice as unsympathetic as she could.

“ You used to ken something o’ medicines. Hae ye naething in the hoose that would ease her a wee? She’s near her time noo.”

Douglas rose, and, taking a medicine chest from the cupboard, set to work with tremulous hands to concoct a cordial draught. Elspeth took it, and left him, and the time began to drag more and more wearily, till presently fatigue and long-continued emotion began to take their natural effect, and he nodded at intervals in his chair, waking from each short period of unconsciousness with a sudden, guilty start.

The night was wearing towards morning, and still he waited. Suddenly a sound came to his ears; he started to his feet and stood waiting for its repetition. All was quiet again, so quiet that he could hear the strong, muffled beating of his heart. He crept to the inner door leading to his bedroom, and opened it. The sound came again, plain and unmistakable.

It was the cry of a new-born child.



CHAPTER III.

HOW THE WONDER GREW.

“ There was silence strange and deep
At our ain fire-en’,
And the winds were a’ asleep
At our ain fire-en’.
But the house at last was stirred,
And a faint wee sound was heard,
Like the cheeping of a bird,
At our ain fire-en’.”

THE BIRTH-SONG.

THE sound, repeated at intervals, troubled the stillness of the night, while Douglas, haggard and woe-begone, stood drinking it in, and clutching for support to the wood-work of the wall. Then there was a sound of moving to and fro, of low voices — Effie’s faint and just distinguishable. Tottering like a drunken man, he crept back to the kitchen, sat down before the fire, and waited.

Presently he heard footsteps, and Elspeth, grim as death, appeared before him, her eyes fixed on his.

“ Did ye hear, laird ? ” she asked.

“ Yes,” he whispered, clutching her by the arm.

“ Tell me about it ! everything ! quick ! ”

“The curse o’ God is on this hoose!” said the old woman. “A bairn is born, where never bride entered; and there’s neither gisson-robe, nor flannel, nor Christian comforting for the thing o’ sin. But I hae done your bidding, and nae howdie could do mair. The bairn lives, but I doot the mother is sinking fast.”

“Sinking!” echoed Douglas. “No, no; let me go to her,” and he rose to his feet.

“Laird, laird!” cried Elspeth, clinging to him. “Tell me the truth, tell auld Elspeth, wha’s been till ye as a foster-mither, and has rockit ye on the knee. It’s a lassie bairn with blue een like the mother’s; is it flesh and blood o’ *yours*?”

He looked at her in despair, and the tears were streaming down his cheeks.

“Yes, woman, mine — my bairn, whether she lives or dies! Whatever is *hers*, whatever is born of her, is part of me, understand that, now and for ever! Come, then.”

He followed her along the lobby to the lonely room, and when she entered he followed. All was still in the chamber. Deathly white, her fair hair streaming round her face, Effie lay back insensible upon the pillow, and never, in the man’s eyes, had she seemed so beautiful. Half blind with tears, he approached the bedside and looked upon her. His bosom rose and fell convulsively, he shivered through and through.

One white arm was extended outside the coverlet.

He reached down gently and felt the flickering pulse, then he turned to Elspeth and hurriedly whispered some instructions. All that he had learned as a lad, when walking the hospitals of Edinburgh, came back upon his memory, and in an instant he had decided what to do. The woman returned, bringing with her a bottle of spirits, a small portion of which he mixed in a tumbler, and with his right forefinger moistened the sufferer's lips. Then he questioned Elspeth again in a low whisper, and found that no physician could have done the necessary duties better.

All this time he kept his left finger on the patient's pulse, and presently he felt it quicken beneath his pressure. Slowly Effie's senses returned. She saw him, knew him, and turned her face away.

All pain, all anger was swallowed up now in an infinite tenderness and pity, in an almost impersonal sympathy and yearning.

"She 'll live!" he said to himself. "Thank God, she 'll live!"

And with throbbing temples and dilated nostrils he drank in the warmth of some new life. Stimulated by his sympathy, Elspeth prepared food and brought it to the bedside, and then for the first time Douglas turned his eyes away and saw the child.

It was lying, wrapt up warm, on the hearth, its cries stilled, its eyes closed — a little pink flower of life, just opening. As he bent over it, Elspeth touched him on the shoulder.

“Gang noo, laird! Lea’ me to do the rest; this is nae place for a man.”

He turned and met the eyes of Effie fixed wildly and imploringly on his. As meekly and quietly as the master of a house, at the bidding of a hired nurse, he stole from the room.

How strange it all seemed, as he sat brooding alone by the great-ingle of the kitchen! Here absolutely realised was an event which, if only imagined yesterday, would have driven him mad with jealousy and rage; and here was he, Douglas of Douglas, accepting it all as natural, almost a matter of course! There was not a spark of anger in his heart, not even a feeling of horror and surprise. He had asked her to come to him, and she had come, that was all. She was lying there, a mother, under his roof. She had taken possession of his home and of him. There was nothing extraordinary in it all, nothing that awoke in him the old savagery, the old sorrow. She had done as he had bidden her, and she was *there*.

From time to time, as the child’s cry came to his ears, he listened with a fierce sort of pleasure. It seemed for the moment as if Effie were his wife — the little one a part of his flesh and blood. All the rest was visionary and unreal. Whatever had happened, whatever might happen, Effie was *his* now, only his. She had no part nor parcel with humanity beyond the bield. The wave of the world had washed her to him, and left her in his care.

“She’s sleeping noo,” said Elspeth, entering softly and sitting down; “and I put the bairn beside her, and it took the breast. She grat sair when she caught sight o’ you and saw ye creepin’ awa’; but she ate the cow’s whey and wat her lips wi’ the speerits, and then she closed her een. Her head’s a bit light, but she’s a strong lassie, and nae doot she’ll live!”

“You ought to ken,” returned Douglas. “’T is not the first lass, by many, ye’ve tended at such a time.”

“But when the day dawns and the tale gangs roond, what’ll the neebors say? ’T will be lasting shame on the hoose o’ Douglas, unless you mak’ her your lawfu’ wife.”

Douglas laughed bitterly, and lit his pipe.

“Listen to me, woman,” he said. “I told ye a lie. The bairn is no bairn of mine!”

“Lord save us a’! Then wha’s its faither?”

“Who knows or cares?” returned the laird. “Damn him, whoever he is! and may be, by and by, he and I will have something to say to one another. But to-night let sleeping dogs lie.”

“Maybe he’ll make her amends!”

“Maybe!”

“But if ye’re speaking truth, laird, what brought the lassie here? Shame upon her to carry her burthen to an honest man’s door!”

“She came where she was waited for!” answered Douglas fiercely, though his stern eyes again grew dim.

“Aye, woman, I’d have waited through eternity to see this night! It’s meat and drink, life and blood, to know she’s lying helpless *here*.”

The old woman looked at him in wonder. “Mad, like his faither!” she thought to herself, and ruefully shook her head. For how could she understand this man, who scarcely understood himself, whose passion, instead of ebbing away in wrath, rose to the full tide of pity and swelled with disdain of all the world, save the one human being who had done him the deadliest wrong of all?

The night wore away, and presently the grey dawn crept in, with chilly, luminous fingers, touching the familiar objects one by one. Elspeth had returned to the chamber, and Douglas still sat by the fire; but as the light increased he rose and went to the door and looked out towards the sea.

The mists of night were clearing rapidly away from the water, and here and there were long splashes of dusky silver under the slowly opening clouds. It was a calm, cold morning, with little or no wind.

Haggard and pale with anxiety and want of rest, Douglas stood watching the morning break. Never, for many a long and desolate day, had his soul felt so utterly at peace. His face looked gentle in the light, as if a blessing fell upon it, and listening with a troubled heart, like that of stormy waters slowly subsiding into rest, he again heard the child’s “*yaumer*” breaking the silence of the house.

CHAPTER IV.

HOW RICHARD DOUGLAS KEPT HIS WORD.

“ And will ye hae my hoose, lady,
And will ye hae my hand ?
The hoose is toom, the land is bare,
And empty is my hand !
But gin ye hunger still for mair,
This bluidy knife I ’ll gie.
Sae cut my briest, howk out the heart
That ’s sick wi’ luvè for thee ! ”

LORD LANGSHAW.

DRIVING once in a car through the wilds of Western Ireland, and looking aimlessly at the dreary prospect of bog and lough, I was suddenly startled by a small object darting close to me, and almost instantly a little grey linnet flew upon my bosom, and, fluttering downward, rested in my open hand. At the same moment a sparrow-hawk, which had been pursuing and had nearly secured the tiny fugitive, wheeled off close to the car and floated rapidly out of sight. The small bird, folding its wings, and looking round with frightened eyes, rested motionless in my palm and made no attempt to escape. It knew where it could find refuge and it was safe. There it

remained with quickly beating heart for some minutes ; but at last, finding that its pursuer had quite disappeared, I opened my hand, and the little fugitive flew away.

Some such instinct as guided that poor bird had led Effie Hetherington to the house of Douglas that night.

In the extremity of her despair she had thought of the only living creature who might give her shelter in her shame, and save her possibly from misery and death. She had remembered his words, " If ever you are sick or in trouble, if you have neither friend nor shelter, or even if you deserve neither (which God forbid !) come to me — I shall be prepared. Whatever changes, I shall be the same — that is, if I live. Trust me as you would trust your God — you may safely do so."

After hiding her secret until the very last, after hoping against hope that time might point out some way out of her trouble, she had realised in her despair that the time had come for full discovery, and thereupon, blind and sick with terror, she had flown from Castle Lindsay. Her first wild impulse was to destroy herself, and for several hours, in mortal agony, she had hung over the water of the running river, seeking for courage to leap therein ; but the idea of death terrified her, and, torn with both pain of the body and anguish of the soul, she had crept on, moaning, to the lonely house on the Moss.

A man ignorant of the magnanimity of which masculine love is capable, might have said to her, "Of all dwellings in the world, go not there; of all creatures in the world, avoid the creature whom you have maddened into hopeless love." But, guided by her instinct, against her reason, she trusted in the man of men, and took her utter misery to him. The event justified her. The passion of Richard Douglas had burnt itself into a clear white flame of despairing devotion. Uncertain of all other succour in the world, she had come to *him*; that was enough.

Yet, perhaps, if she had known and comprehended everything, it would have terrified her. Even while he stood guardian over her, ready to give his life's blood for her, the mad hunger of a wild beast was upon him.

After the first wild rush of pitiful emotion, his thoughts travelled to the cause of her sorrow, and the fury of revenge burnt in the embers of his broken heart. He cherished one suspicion, which he determined to verify at the first opportunity, and then — In spite of this, never had she seemed so near and dear to him as in these weariful hours.

The knowledge of her presence filled the air like a perfume, and the cry of the child troubled the house like a spell. The worst had come, his cup of misery had overflowed full measure, but she was *there* — there, in his dwelling — there, where no one would come to take her from him — there, for life or death.

And he thought to himself: “ Was ever love like mine? Did ever man, in the hour of his own heart-breaking, cry aloud so truthfully, ‘ God is good ’? ”

“ And ‘ Hey, Annie ! ’ and ‘ How, Annie ! ’

And ‘ Annie, come hither to me ! ’

And aye the more that he cried ‘ Annie, ’

The louder rair’d the sea ! ”

She had come to him, she had come to him — in answer to his cry ; and the waves of the world might roll over them both now — he was content.

Lonely as the house was, such an event could not occur without the tongue of gossip talking far and wide. Old Elspeth, in her necessary visits to the village, to purchase such things as were needful in the emergency of new birth, spread the news unwittingly, and soon it was well known that a woman had come by night to the dwelling, and had given birth to a child. Rumour circulated various accounts of the difficulty, but the favourite impression was that the shame, if shame there were, had been brought home to the right door.

In the South of Scotland such little accidents happen, as the student of statistics well knows, pretty frequently. The Scottish marriage laws, with their beneficent retrospective action, encourage the vagaries of lovers, and do not of necessity visit the sins or follies of the parents on the heads of innocent children. Illegitimacy, therefore, is not an irre-

trievable evil ; after the birth of a child may come the child's legitimization and the Kirk's blessing.

In another respect, too, the Scottish law is considerate. A man and woman may be lawfully married without clerical or clerkly assistance ; it is sufficient that they declare themselves, before witnesses, to be husband and wife, and live together on that footing. The knowledge of this fact made many folk speculate whether Richard Douglas and Effie Hetherington were already, or meant to be, wedded. In that case, the accident was an ordinary one, soon to be forgotten.

On the morning of the second day, when Effie was out of all danger, and every necessity for child and mother had been provided out of the laird's purse, a tall figure approached the open door and greeted Douglas, who was standing there, by name.

Lean and spare, with mild blue eyes which seemed to belie the severity of his firm-set, clean-shaven mouth, appeared the grey-headed minister of the Established Church, Peter Macnab. In the eyes of the grave minister of the Established Church, Douglas was somewhat of a heathen, and out of the holy pale ; but the news of what had occurred had travelled to the manse, and an immediate mission to the heathen had become necessary.

“Fine weather,” said Mr. Macnab, beginning, as usual, with generalities. “The harvest will be good.”

Douglas nodded, but, still blocking the doorway, made no attempt to lead the way into the house.

“You ken, or guess maybe, what has brought me here, sir?” pursued the minister. “Although you are not a member of my flock, I have felt constrained to pay you a kindly visitation. May I ask, in the first place, if the young person is doing well — I mean, of course, physically — for I have heard that her condition has been perilous?”

“It has,” replied Douglas; “but the danger’s past.”

“And the bairn new-born?”

“Well, too,” was the grim reply.

The minister coughed nervously, for the laird’s manner was not encouraging. Then he said, with decision —

“Maybe, poor soul! she would like to see a minister of the Church? In that case, Mr. Douglas, I shall be happy to communicate with her at once.”

“She shall have your message,” returned Douglas, with a dark smile; “but at present she can see no one.”

“Related to you, may I ask?”

“No.”

“Not, then, your wife, as some have told me?”

“Neither my wife nor my kinswoman by blood.”

“And her little one, poor innocent lamb! Its *father?*”

Without replying, Douglas drew out his pipe, lit it

with a match, and smoked quietly, with his eyes on the far-off sea.

“ You are disposed, I see, to refuse me any information ? ”

Douglas nodded.

“ Yet I am interested, righteously interested, in an event so singular. I know,” continued the minister, with increasing warmth, “ that you have peculiar views of your own, both on religion and morality.”

“ So far from being peculiar,” replied Douglas, “ my views are shared by a large portion of mankind.”

“ And they are ? ”

“ If I expressed them, you ’d think me a savage, as maybe I am. Maybe ’t is enough to say that I feel more honoured than pleased by this visit.”

The minister’s pale cheek flushed faintly.

“ I know, Mr. Douglas, that you are not a communicant of our church.”

“ Nor of any,” answered Douglas, with a shrug of his powerful shoulders. “ When I want religion, which is seldom, I look up yonder. When I seek comfort, ’t is not near the kirkyard or the kirk-porch. The crows may be useful, and so may the black coats, but I never care to see them swarming near my bield.”

“ If you mean, sir, that you ’re an unbeliever, an atheist —— ”

At this moment the voice of old Elspeth came from within —

“Laird, will ye come ben? She’s up, and setting by the kitchen fire!”

“I insist on seeing this person!” cried Mr. Macnab, moving towards the open door.

“And *I* insist,” said Douglas, blocking the way, “that you go home and leave her and me in peace. You sha’n’t torture her with your curiosity, or bore her with your sermons. I’m sorry to seem rude; but there’s your road.”

And pointing to the path across the Moss, he turned, entered the house, and closed the door. Disgusted, indignant, and amazed, the clergyman stood hesitating for some minutes, and then, turning on his heel, shook the dust off his feet, and walked away, not without an angry determination to improve the occasion on the following Sunday.

Pale and agitated, Douglas walked towards the kitchen. There he paused, as if unable to brave the ordeal which was before him. But his strong will conquered, and he was soon standing, pale as death, before the woman of his hopeless love.

White as snow, propped up by pillows in the arm-chair by the fire, sat Effie Hetherington, her infant sleeping in her arms. The moment the laird’s eyes fell upon her, hers filled with tears, and, sobbing bitterly, she turned her face away.

“Don’t cry, Effie!” he said gently. “It’s poor comfort to say it, but what’s done can ne’er be mended.”

Elsbeth, who stood by looking, her eyes sharp as needles, and every sense alert, muttered as if to herself —

“Mended, is it? Ye canna mend the pitcher that breaks at the well, but a heart may be bruisit and no’ broken.”

“Silence, Elspeth!” cried Douglas. “And leave the room!”

Still murmuring, Elspeth shuffled away, for she knew her master too well to cross him at such moments.

Turning quietly to Effie, who was still hysterically sobbing, Douglas looked long and wearily at her and upon the child; and even then a mist came before him, and his heart seemed failing, and his voice failed to gather strength. At last, sighing heavily, he sat down in the ingle, and held his face between his hands.

Effie, who was watching him through her tears, grew silent. There was a long, despairing pause. At last Douglas looked up, and his face was worn and lined as the face of an old man.

“Effie!”

“Yes, Mr. Douglas,” she answered, sobbing.

“Will you listen to me, my woman? *Can ye listen?* I’m not here to utter one word of reproach, or to cast one stone of blame. I bade ye trust me, and you’ve done it; I bade ye come to me, and you’ve come. Happy or sorrowful, smiling or weeping,

you've passed into my life. I love you now as I loved you when we first met, as I shall love you with my dying breath."

"Oh, don't speak of it!" she moaned. "I've used you cruelly, and you're my only friend!"

"Thank God for that! Your friend, always your friend! and now I say it, before God, I would n't change that friendship for all else the world could give. I'm a strange man, I ken, and little skilled in the speech that wins its way to the heart of a woman; but maybe you'll understand. It's *this*, then, Effie dear; no shame nor sin can kill a love like mine. Though you were a thousand times more shamed and sorrowful, though you were low as the straw folk tread in the mire, ye'd still be more to me than life, and dearer to me than God!"

He spoke in a low voice, but every word was distinct and clear, and while she cried and listened she felt his hand laid lightly on her shoulder, while his breath was on her brow.

"Do you understand this, Effie, my doo? Have I made things clear at last?"

Trembling convulsively, she reached up, took his hand, drew it to her lips and kissed it; then, with a wild sob, she hung her head over the child.

"Yes, yes!" she cried. "But I'm not worth crying for — I'm not, indeed!"

"Do you think men love what's *worth*?"¹ he said

¹ Scottish idiom.

gently. "No, my lass. Love's love, and with that, all's said and done. I've bidden for ye with my life, with my flesh and blood, with the whole heart that's within me, and I'm not beaten even yet. Tell me how to save you, Effie! Tell me how to lift the shame from this bonnie head! Tell me how to give my soul for yours, and you'll be showing me the gates of heaven!"

"It's too late! You can do nothing — nothing!"

"Not even for this little one?" he pleaded softly. "Maybe I can. Tell me this, Effie — will the man marry you, and give this bairn a name?"

With something of the old flash in her eyes Effie looked up into his face.

"He cannot, and he will not! There's no hope — none!"

"Tell me his name!"

"No, no; I'll never do that!"

"Put me face to face with him, and he *shall* right you, by God!"

His look terrified her; she shrunk away, moaning, but the wild, unspoken threat passed away from his face like a lightning flash, and left his features grey and sorrowful.

"Let that pass," he said, "since there's no hope there; and oh, Effie, I'm glad and grateful that it's hopeless, for I'd have your last and only comfort come through me. Listen, my lass! There's one way yet. No man shall flight you. No living soul

shall cast a stone at you. You shall be my wife, and your bairn shall take my name ! ”

She uttered a cry of wonder, and again looked up at him. His face was ashen white, but gentle beyond expression.

“ You ’d *marry* me — *me* ? ” she cried.

“ I ’d marry you, Effie, if this dear shape were like Herod’s, and eaten up by worms. I ’d take you as God’s best gift, if you were a leper among women ! ”

His words terrified her, and she shrank from his touch as she had shrunk from it of old.

“ Don’t ! don’t ! ” she cried ; and he realised once more, in his extremity, that old repugnance of the flesh — saw again in the wild, sad eyes that no gleam of love was there.

“ But don’t misunderstand me any more,” he added sadly. “ I love you still, body and soul, but what I offer you is a free and unselfish gift. Take my name, Effie. Let me save you, and I swear to you that I ’ll be no more than a servant in your house, than a dog to guard your door. That ’s all I ask, my lass — to give you the last gift I have left, that you may bide here, or go hence, a blameless woman, sheltered from scandal by my name.”

He paused, waiting for her reply, and as he did so the child wakened and cried for the breast. He turned his face away, sick with despair, and then, by the silence which ensued, knew that the little one’s lips were drawing life and sustenance from the mother’s

veins. Without a word, he left the kitchen and walked out into the air, following a favourite walk which led over the Moss to the sea-sands.

There was little or no wind, and the smooth waves were tumbling in and breaking on the shore with a peaceful murmur. Patches of blue sky opened overhead, but all the rest of heaven was silver cloud, reflected with a cold-steel-like glimmer in the waters of the Firth. Great gulls hovered over the line of foam, and flocks of red-billed oyster-catchers winged from wet spot to spot as the tide receded.

He paced up and down, meditating. For how many a weary year he had done the same thing, watching the gloomy Firth and the faint hills of Kircudbright beyond, and always with that hunger in his heart, like the hunger of the restless waves.

The spirit of self-sacrifice, the zeal for martyrdom, grows with acts of abnegation. A proud and savage man, hating the world and living in solitude, Douglas had put his neck under the heel of one woman, and the more he had débased his manhood in so doing, the stronger grew his luxury of humiliation. His only hope of moral salvation seemed to lie that way. There was no deed of self-abasement of which he did not now feel capable.

Yet now and then, as he thought of that other man, as yet unknown to him, who had come between him and his dream of happiness, who had poisoned the very fountain of his passion, his face grew murderous

and savage, and as the measure of his pity for Effie Hetherington was his blood-thirst against her betrayer. He did n't pause to reflect, as saner men might have done, how long a chain of cheats and lies the girl herself must have been weaving; how, even when she was brightest and merriest with him, a coquettish and sweet comrade, she must have been hiding this secret in her breast! He was too much lost morally to dispense full justice to *her*, the light woman who had brought him so much woe — nay, he almost exonerated and justified her.

“She was honest with me from the first,” he said to himself. “I was her friend and comrade — nothing more. She warned me never to expect more than a friend might grant. . . . And yet! and yet! — it might have been merciful to leave me in peace! She played with my friendship, poor lass! although she *knew* it was love. She brought me the joy of her presence to keep my soul alive, and when her words were cruelest her disposition was most kind. And now, even now, 't is as clear as daylight that she has come hither only in despair.”

The man's knowledge of women was scant indeed. He had known only two types — the conventional woman who is pure, chaste, and passionless, regulating her life calmly by the written letter of the law, and the woman who sells herself in the market, without one thought or care save for her own immediate self-indulgence. Effie resembled neither. She was a

chameleon born out of the conflicting forces of these latter days — too pure to yield herself to what did not attract her physically, too full of passion to make the written law her strength and guide — a child who could weep hysterically at will, and be pitiful over a wounded bird or withered flower — a woman strenuously assertive of her own capricious nature. So pitiful, so pitiless! So cruel, yet so kind! How often, during these strange meetings, amid their sweet confidences and gusty quarrels, had Douglas hated himself, loathed the coarseness of his manhood, and yearned for the physical charms of men like Arthur Lamont! No military fop of the period had looked so often in the mirror, and always with the same despairing question, “What is there *here* to awaken a young girl’s love?” His very strength and vigour of life were hateful to him. And always in Effie’s presence he had felt at a disadvantage — savage, restless, irritable, and ill at ease, conscious of the fact that she found him ungracious and incapable of fascination. He felt that at any moment all his devotion would become worthless compared with the vapid, well-bred ease of some light worldling, some puppy which could rise on its hind-legs and drawl and dance.

So was it in the beginning, so is it, and ever shall be. Worth and true manhood count for nothing with women of the chameleon species. Earnestness is dull and tiresome, passion a monster with coarse and bad manners, kindling weariness and disgust. It is only

when bruised and cruelly broken that such women discover, too late, that life is not all prettiness and pleasant seeming; but even then, in their despair, they feel, as Effie Hetherington felt, the old repulsion against what is physically unpleasing. The twirl of a moustache, the cut of a coat, the movement of a hand, the curve of a throat avail far more than any splendour of the Soul.

Seen in the still light of that late summer morning, Richard Douglas looked every inch a man—well-built and powerful, strong, masterful, with a face that might have been carved out of grey marble by Michael Angelo. The strength of moral self-sacrifice at which he had arrived, the power of humiliating himself before an ideal, had dignified the very body of the man; he held himself erect, like a gladiator of the arena about to plunge the sword into his own breast. Against all living things but one he was fully armed and resolute; against that one helpless as a child—helpless, not through feebleness, but through the power of his own absolute wish and will.

When after an hour he returned to the house, he found that Elspeth had taken the child away, and that Effie was sitting in the same place, dozing, her eyes closed.

Thinking that she slept, he endeavoured to retire on tiptoe, but her eyes opened, and she beckoned to him.

“I ’m not sleeping,” she said, with a ghost of her old smile. “I ’m thinking — thinking over what you said a little while ago. In all the world I think there is no other man like *you* ; I know that now, when it is too late. Believe me, if the time could roll back and make me a happy girl again, I should know you better. But I ’m grateful, very grateful, and I thank you with all my heart.”

As she spoke, the sad smile faded and the warm tears were rolling down her cheek. Trembling, she held out her thin, white hand. He took it, and pressed it gently between his own. The soft, silken flesh he grasped was cold as clay.

“And you will let me serve you ? ” he said.

“No,” she answered, “not that way ; I ’ve wronged you too much already. Not even for the sake of the child.”

“In God’s name, why ? ”

“Because it would be heaping sin upon sin ; because it would be degrading *you* and not helping me ; and because, last of all — because — I *love* the man who has made me what I am.”

“He has left you. You yourself have told me that he will never make amends.”

“Never. I knew long ago that he could never do so. You ’ve no right to *pity* me, Mr. Douglas. I walked into the trouble with my eyes open — of my own free will. There was no deception, no broken vows, no lies on either side. I liked him, and I

hated another woman—that was all. That other woman is now his wife.”

In an instant the truth flashed upon him, and she, too, as she uttered the words, saw that she had betrayed herself.

“Arthur Lamont!” he cried.

She gave one wild look into his face, and covered her face with both hands, sobbing hysterically. He stood as if struck by lightning, and then, clenching his fists, uttered a frightful imprecation.

“Arthur Lamont!” he repeated. “I might have guessed it. Arthur Lamont! Do you know *this*, woman: he came back to the Castle with his lady last night?”

“Last night!” she echoed through her sobs, with a cry of surprise.

“Yes. He’s *there*, and I shall see him!”

But as he moved, livid with passion, she reached out her hands and entreated him to stay. He paused irresolutely, and their eyes met.

“You must not meet!” she pleaded. “I tell you Arthur is not to blame. I loved him—I thought perhaps that he would throw over Lady Bell and make me his wife. It was all my doing, not his. Promise me—promise me—you won’t harm *him*!”

“I’ll promise nothing till I’ve seen him face to face.”

“What will it avail? Nothing. I know he cares for me, that he will be sorry, but I know that he cannot help me. No one can help me now.”

CHAPTER V.

HOW ARTHUR LAMONT CAME HOME.

“O what is this, and wha is this,
Has stown my love frae me?
Altho’ he were my ain brother,
An ill death shall he dee !”

BONNY BALY LIVINGSTON.

FORTUNATELY, at the time of Effie’s flight, the Earl was away in Edinburgh, and the house was given over to the housekeeper and the servants. The housekeeper, Mrs. Wylie, a severe old lady of the Calvinistic persuasion, had never looked on Effie Hetherington with eyes of love; indeed, there had been tacit war between them for many a long day. Long before the crisis came the housekeeper had had her suspicions, which she had not been slow in communicating to the underlings of the establishment. But what drove poor Effie to desperation was the news that Arthur and Lady Bell were coming home.

Forty-eight hours before their arrival every soul in Castle Lindsay knew the cause of Effie’s sudden dis-

appearance — knew, that is to say, that the girl had become a mother, and was sheltering under the roof of Douglas. Mrs. Wylie, moving about the great house like its gaoler, with a chatelaine to which were attached numerous keys, looked grimly important, in the manner of all minor prophets. What she had long predicted had come true: Miss Hetherington was a black sheep.

Late in the evening the wedded pair arrived. Arthur looked bored and *blasé*, Lady Bell full of zeal and animal spirits. Mrs. Wylie, with the butler at her elbow, and the servants ranged behind her, stood on the threshold to receive them; and as they came up the steps from the carriage, there was a general curtsey.

“Will your leddyship dine at eight, as usual?” asked the housekeeper, after the first greetings were over.

“Yes, I think so,” said Lady Bell, and swept away, followed by her lady’s-maid.

Before following her upstairs, Arthur, who had been looking round somewhat nervously, lingered to ask a question.

“When did Miss Hetherington leave for Edinburgh?”

“Miss Hetherington,” answered the housekeeper, with a face as grim as a stone mask, “left the hoose three days syne, Mr. Arthur.”

Arthur nodded, for the information caused him

little surprise, it having been long arranged that Effie should depart before the home-coming, and join some distant relations in the north. He strolled carelessly up the staircase, quite unconscious of the looks exchanged between Mrs. Wylie and the butler, and the glances and whispers exchanged between the servants.

Upstairs, in the rooms prepared for her reception, Lady Bell yielded herself to the ministrations of her maid, and prepared herself for dinner. She looked radiant, and almost pretty; but when the first bell rang, and her toilette was almost concluded, she found herself face to face with Mrs. Wylie.

“With your leddyship’s permeession, I’d wish to speak to your leddyship.”

“Humph! won’t it do to-morrow morning?”

The housekeeper shook her head, and at her desire Lady Bell dismissed her attendants, and, anticipating some tiresome report concerning the *ménage*, or some complaint about the inferior servants, she threw herself in a large chair beside the looking-glass. At that moment there was a knock at the door.

“May I come in?” said Arthur.

“Yes, of course!” cried his wife, as Arthur appeared at the door in full evening-dress, and making a cigarette. “Only Mrs. Wylie wished to talk to me in private; but I suppose she won’t mind *you*.”

“It’s no’ a subject I’m caring to discuss before gentlemen,” said Mrs. Wylie, trembling indignantly;

“but maybe Mr. Arthur ought to ken. It’s about — Miss Hetherington.”

Lady Bell looked surprised, Arthur uncomfortably nervous.

“Well, what about her?” demanded Lady Bell, sharply.

“It’s jest this, your leddyship. Three night syne she left the hoose, without a word o’ warning, and she’s biding noo thereawa’, in the hoose of the Laird o’ Douglas.”

Lady Bell sprang to her feet, laughing. “Arthur, what did I tell you? I wager my little finger that it’s a match! Whether they’ve married in kirk, or have only jumped over a broomstick, it’s a match!”

“The warst’s to come, your leddyship,” said the housekeeper, dryly; “and auld tho’ I am, it’s a thing I blush to name. The night Miss Hetherington left Castle Lindsay she became a mither, and baith she and the bairn are biding thereawa’ wi’ the laird.”

Arthur Lamont turned white as death, and, leaning back against the woodwork of the door, gazed at the housekeeper in consternation. As for Lady Bell, she seemed startled, but not thunderstruck.

“A child? Effie Hetherington has had a child!” she exclaimed. “Arthur, do you hear?”

He did hear, and had much ado to master his emotion, but he managed to say, nervously fingering his cigarette —

“ Oh, it ’s impossible ! ”

“ It ’s Gospel truth, Mr. Arthur ! ” said Mrs. Wylie. “ A bairn — a lassie bairn — they ’re saying, and in yon hoose, where there ’s only a strange man and an auld wife ! ”

At that moment the gong sounded below. Arthur collected himself by a mighty effort.

“ It ’s a queer business,” he said, with as much *sang-froid* as he could command ; “ but I daresay it has a simple enough explanation. Come, Bell, let ’s go down to dinner.”

“ Of course they ’re married ! ” exclaimed Lady Bell, as they went down. “ Effie was always so sly and secret, and I always knew she favoured that man.”

They dined together in state, conversing only in monosyllables, and making no furthur allusion to the news they had heard ; but after dinner was over Lady Bell dismissed the servants, and, instead of repairing solitary to the drawing-room, remained with her husband while he smoked his cigar — he seated in an armchair, she occupying a stool at his feet. Irksome as he felt her presence, and eager as he was to be alone to think it all over, Arthur kept his feelings to himself, and was tender and solicitous as a bridegroom.

“ What are you thinking about, little woman ? ” he said, after a long pause, during which his wife had been gazing thoughtfully at the fire.

“ About Effie Hetherington. It is, as you said,

such a queer business. But shall I tell you the truth, Arthur? I'm glad she's gone for good."

"Why?"

"I never liked her."

"No?"

"And she was a born flirt! It would be horrible, though, if she had made a fool of herself and scandalised the family. You must ride over to-morrow and ascertain the truth about the matter."

"In any case," said Arthur, "you won't be too hard upon her? She has her faults, of course, but she was always affectionate."

"Oh, very!" said Lady Bell, with a cutting laugh. "I know she tried to make me feel jealous!"

"Absurd!"

"Confession, Arthur! You never really cared for her, did you?"

"Of course I did," answered Arthur, smiling; "that is, in a brotherly sort of way; but *now* ——"

The rest of the sentence was lost in a mutual kiss and embrace.

Long after Lady Bell had retired to rest Arthur Lamont pondered the situation.

During his absence abroad he had received only two letters from Effie addressed to him at "postes restantes," and the last of them, in a torrent of wild agony and despair, had warned him of her condition. There had been no intimation, however, that the crisis was so imminent, and in answer to it he had

merely warned her to get away from Castle Lindsay as soon as possible, and to seek shelter among strangers until the storm was over. This warning, he now discovered, had been unheeded, and the disastrous results were now apparent.

But the annoying part of the whole business was the news that she was sheltering in the house of Douglas. *There*, of all places! What madness had guided her thither? Was it possible that Effie was cunninger than he suspected, and perhaps a little less worthy of consideration? that, in plain words, she was going to make one lover the scapegoat of the other? It certainly looked like it, and if so, well! A scandal might be avoided after all.

Again and again he cursed himself for having incurred so great a danger. He had made an excellent marriage, and Lady Bell was a much more charming wife than he had anticipated — considerate, not exacting — womanly and affectionate. It was irritating beyond measure, at such a time, to have to face the consequences of an old folly. His fancy for Effie had quite flown away. Even the thought that Douglas might have been his rival scarcely caused him a heart-thrill. If (as Lady Bell suggested) Effie was married to Douglas, he was certain, from what he knew of the girl's character, that she would never betray his secret.

Well, whatever the consequences might be, he had to see them through. If the worst came to the

worst, and Lady Bell ascertained the truth, he was certain that even then he would not lose her. She might not be super-sensitive; her love for him was not of the sort which rushes to dangerous extremes. She might make things uncomfortable for a time, but with patience she would be soon won over, especially if the other woman, whom she so cordially detested, went under altogether.

The next day Arthur was abroad early, inspecting the stables and outbuildings, looking over the shrubberies and orchards, and generally surveying the estate. When he came in to an early lunch, Lady Bell asked him if he proposed going over to make inquiries about Effie. Perhaps, he said, but there was no hurry for a day, and he had to interview the lawyers.

“You’ll be inundated with callers, little woman,” he said; “so don’t be angry if I make myself scarce.”

She smiled and kissed him, and he strolled away. All the afternoon carriages and conveyances of all kinds rolled up to the Castle, and Lady Bell held *levée* in the great drawing-room. She loved her new position, and felt thoroughly happy, the more so as her husband had seemed as indifferent as herself to the fate of Effie Hetherington.

The head-keeper had no unpleasant reports to make. The head water-bailiff, however, had a different tale to tell. Night after night, from one point to

another, the river was being poached, and, though the salmon had been swarming up, they had been captured almost as soon as they reached the pools. The poachers were a wild gang, headed by one Hew Howard, a desperado in all matters where game of any kind was concerned; and the bailiffs, though they knew their men, were no match for them, and always unable to take them in *flagrante delicto*.

Arthur stood with Morrison, the head-bailiff, leaning over the bridge within the castle grounds. Just above them was a low weir, at the foot of which both grilse and salmon were thronging *en bloc*, and with leap upon leap, flashing in the sunlight, making their way to the Lang Pool, the finest cast in all the waters.

“There was a fresh last night, Mr. Arthur,” said Morrison; “but the river’s running down, and they’ll be netting the water the nicht, for there’s nae moon. I’ve stuck whins and brambles all owre the muckle pool, but ’t would tak’ mair than that to beat Hew Howard.”

“Shoot the fellow!” said Arthur; “shoot them all!”

“Well, sir, two can play at that game, and we’re six to Hew’s sixteen.”

As the bailiff spoke, there appeared, walking slowly over the bridge, with a small fishing-creel under his arm, a ragged giant, six foot high, black-haired and dark-complexioned, slouching of gait, and generally

disreputable. This was the very Hew Howard of whom they had been speaking, a rascal who combined lawful shoe-making with unlawful tampering with all products of land and water.

“The very man!” exclaimed Arthur; while Hew grinned savagely and made a sulky salutation. “What are you doing here? Why are you trespassing in the grounds?”

“Nae offence, Mr. Arthur,” was the reply. “Ye’re welcome back to Castle Lindsay. I’ve two or three flukes here and twa bonnie lobsters frae the Firth, and I’m taking them to the kitchen as a present till Lady Bell.”

So saying, he opened his creel, and revealed the flounders and lobsters in question. Morrison shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and scowled at the offering.

“You infernal scoundrel!” said Arthur, shaking his cane. “Don’t think to humbug me with your pretended gifts! Get out of this, and remember, I warn you. The next time you come fishing on our waters I’ll shoot you like a dog.”

“Serve you right, too!” added the indignant water-bailiff.

An ugly look passed over Hew’s determined face, but it was followed by another savage grin.

“Maybe Mr. Morrison has ta’en awa’ my character? It’s no’ *me* that nets the sawmon, ye ken weel.”

“Well, you know what you may expect. I mean what I say, my man.”

“I’ll tak’ tent, Mr. Arthur,” was the reply; “but they’re telling me in the clachan that the lads wha poach your pools (mair shame to them!) carry fire-arms as weel.” Turning on his heel, he added, with a chuckle, “And ye’ll no hae the flukes, Mr. Arthur?”

“After that warning,” said Arthur, as Hew disappeared from sight, “I think there’s not much danger. He knows what he has to expect.”

“That’s true, sir,” answered Morrison; “but he fears neither ball nor powther, man nor deil. I saw his een sparkle as he watched the clean-run fish louping yonder, and he’ll be here wi’ the nets this night.”

“How many watchers have you?”

“Four on the upper waters, three below.”

“Double them.”

“It’s no’ easy at sic short notice, but I’ll try.”

“Go to Innes, the keeper, and tell him to bring all his men with their guns. By Jove! we’ll teach these rascals a lesson.”

“But, Mr. Arthur, it’s clean against the law. Ye mind the trouble we had last year, when Hew’s brither was wounded in the airm. If the man had died, Innes would hae been tried for his life.”

“Do as I tell you,” returned Arthur, coldly. “If the law won’t help us, we’ll take the law into our own hands.”

That evening Arthur did not dress for dinner, but retained his rough shooting-dress, explaining to Lady Bell the state of affairs. Well accustomed to such little difficulties, she merely implored him to be careful and keep out of danger.

It was quite dark when Arthur took his gun, fastened his cartridge belt around his waist, and smoking his cigar, strolled through the shrubberies to the river-side. In the excitement of a possible adventure he had forgotten about Effie Hetherington.

The sun had gone quietly down, but there had been several heavy showers, just enough to freshen the river without raising the pools and rendering them too deep for wading. All was still and peaceful save for the occasional cry of an "old wife," or owl, from the dark woodlands. Gaining the river, Arthur stood waiting and listening. It had been arranged that Morrison and the rest should meet at the highest pool, about a mile and a half away, and work slowly down to the bridge, where Arthur was to meet them; but the watch was likely to occupy all night, as the poachers might make their appearance any time before daybreak.

He had finished one cigar, and was lighting another, when he heard the sound of footsteps. He started, dropped the match, and stood with his gun in readiness.

"Who's there?" he cried. "Is it you, Morrison? Or it is you, Innes?"

As he spoke he saw in the dimness a figure standing close to him. There was just enough light, in the first afterglow of the summer evening, for him to recognise it.

“Mr. Douglas?”

“Yes,” answered Douglas.

“I took you for one of the bailiffs,” said Arthur, forcing a laugh, “or for one of those infernal poachers. But what brings you here?”

“I came to look for *you*.”

“Indeed?”

“Yes, indeed. You know what has happened? Speak — out with it!”

The words were so fierce and savage, the gesture which accompanied them so fierce and threatening, that the young man recoiled, gripping his gun, but almost instantly the gun was torn from his grasp and flung violently into the river.

“Help, there!”

But at the cry, Douglas had pinned him by the arms and held him as in a vice.

“You devil! You smoothed-tongued, lying, treacherous devil! Do you ken what you owe me? Your life, your miserable life!”

Though amazed and terrified, Arthur Lamont found his voice again.

“Let me go, you savage! Do you want to murder me?”

“It would be no murder; it would be only killing

a reptile. Down on your knees! Pray as you never prayed before! Your time's come!"

Helpless as a child in the laird's powerful grip, Arthur found himself forced down upon his knees in the long wet grass, and there, struggling in vain, he cried —

"Are you mad? What have I done!"

He saw the laird's face thrust close to his, and met the glitter of two burning eyes.

"You've staked your life and lost," said Douglas. "If you could make amends I'd drag you to her feet, and fling ye down there for her to forgive or damn. But ye can't, ye can't, and so there's but one way left! Now, Arthur Lamont, the truth! Lying won't save you. The truth! It was you drove Effie Hetherington to shame? You're the father of her child?"

"Let me go," panted Arthur, "and I'll answer you. You're strangling me."

With an oath Douglas released his hold, and Arthur struggled to his feet; but the man's iron grip was still upon him, holding him to his place.

"The truth! Speak!"

"It may be as you say," gasped Arthur. "I can't tell. I only reached home last night."

"She has flown from your house to mine. A child has been born. Were you her lover? Damn you! yes or no?"

Arthur looked round in despair. It was now pitch dark, and he could scarcely even see his enemy's face.

If he uttered the truth, he felt that there was no escape.

“I tell you I know nothing. You may kill me, if you like, but I can tell you no more.”

At that moment there was the loud report of a gun, a babble of voices, a confused murmur, coming from the dark, upper portion of the river. Startled by the sounds, Douglas listened, and released his hold. Arthur Lamont seized the opportunity, plunged into the darkness and fled.

“Stop, you coward!” cried Douglas.

But, without pausing for a moment, Arthur rushed, bareheaded, in the direction of the sounds, which were increasing. Knowing every bend of the river, which he had fished from boyhood, he made his way rapidly through the darkness, and passing through a patch of woodland, came out on the banks of a long pool, where poachers, bailiffs, and keepers were wildly struggling together — some breast-deep in the water, fighting for the nets, others brandishing torches — all shrieking and crying like mad things. As Arthur emerged on the scene, the last torch was extinguished in the water, and the battle was continued between friends and foes alike.

Panting for breath, Arthur rushed against a man standing on the bank, and looking on.

“Who’s that?” he cried. “Innes?”

“Mr. Arthur?”

“Yes; it’s me. Give me your gun!”

The keeper did as he was ordered, but cried at the same moment —

“For God’s sake, Mr. Arthur, don’t fire! You’ll kill some of our folk! They’re fighting together like wild beasts.”

The shrieks and oaths continued, with sounds of struggling bodies and splashing water. The forms of the men were only dimly seen.

Suddenly, as he strained his eyes to discern the objects beneath and around him, Arthur Lamont received a murderous blow on the skull from some unseen weapon. Blindness and horror fell upon him. Then came another awful blow, crushing and obliterating all sense. He staggered forward through the darkness, dropped his arms as if death-struck, and fell with a splash into the surging waters of the pool.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SORROW OF EFFIE HETHERINGTON.

“A light look, a sparkling ee,
Win mair frae women than honestie !
A tinkling laugh, a face o’ mirth,
Win women mair than honest worth !
A tender whisper, a scented breath,
Win mair than love that is deep as death.”

AULD ELDER’S PROVERBS.

EARLY the next morning Effie sat by the fire, holding her infant to her breast. Elspeth was busy about the kitchen, saying little but looking whole volumes of righteous condemnation; for her spirit still revolted against the gentle intruder, and it was with difficulty that she forced her tongue to be even moderately civil. Still, she was just enough, according to her lights, not to condemn the child for its mother’s fault, and glancing towards it, as it lay helpless and feeble, drawing its life from the maternal fount, she ever and anon uttered low murmurs of commiseration.

“The meenister called yestreen,” she said at last,

pausing in her work ; “but the laird sent him about his business.”

She paused as if awaiting a reply, but Effie was silent, pressing her lips tight together, and gazing down with dim, tearful eyes upon the babe.

“Ye should see the holy man,” pursued Elspeth. “Maybe he might say a word to strengthen ye in the trouble ye hae to thole. He ’s douce-spoken and kindly, and full o’ sound sense as weel ’s sound doctrine.”

“I wish to see no one,” said Effie, in a broken voice, “except Mr. Douglas. Has he come home ?”

Elspeth nodded grimly.

“Aye. He cam’ home lang past midnight, but no’ to sleep, and noo he ’s awa’ on the sea-shore. Wae ’s me for him and his ! He ’s like a man demented since you cam’ here.”

A footstep was heard in the lobby, and Douglas appeared at the door. He looked worn and haggard, like one who had outwatched the night ; his eyes deep set under the brooding brows, his face tortured with some new pain which tormented him inwardly. Starting nervously, Effie looked towards him, reading his features with a dread she made no effort to conceal ; but without looking at her he crossed over to the ingle and stood with his back to the fire, frowning sternly at Elspeth and bidding her leave the room. This Elspeth did, grumbling a protest underbreath.

For some minutes Douglas stood in silence, still not looking at Effie, although her eyes were yet

wildly fixed on his. At last he spoke, but still with eyes averted.

“Was I right, yestreen, when I guessed that man’s name?”

He paused for an answer, but none came.

“You need not say a word,” he continued. “I know that I was right, and the wonder is I didn’t guess it from the first. Well, I’ve seen the man, and spoken with him face to face.”

Effie uttered a cry of terror, and clutching the child to her bosom tried to rise to her feet, but her strength failed her, and she sank back moaning. Douglas now looked at her, and crossing to her, placed his hand softly on her shoulder. Their eyes met, and hers fell before his intent and suffering gaze, while she murmured hysterically —

“What did you say to him? and why, oh, why did you go to him at all?”

“To call him to an account,” answered Douglas. “He answered me like the cur he is, and then ——”

“And then,” repeated Effie, trembling like a leaf. “You did not harm him? Tell me the truth — do not terrify me — you did not harm him?”

“If harm had come to him, would you *care*?”

“Yes! I have sworn to you already that I was most to blame. I — I loved him, and he is the father of my child.”

“Better no father than such a one as Arthur Lamont,” returned Douglas. “Think that he is lying in his grave, and forget him!”

The man's expression was so sad and ominous, and coupled with words of such significance, that Effie's worst fears were realised, and her first terror deepened into horrible certainty.

"You have killed him!" she cried, shrinking away in terror. "You have killed him!"

"And if I had," said Douglas, with a ghastly smile, "would you hate me for it, Effie Hetherington?"

"Yes, I should hate you!" she replied. "If you have done him any harm, I will never forgive you — never! I know you care for me — I know you have been good and kind — but I love Arthur, and you have no right to come between him and me."

The words came from her in a passion of sobs and tears, and for the time being all her shame and all her weakness seemed to be forgotten. There was even in her eyes a flash of the old scorn as she looked upon the man whom she still regarded, in spite of all his magnanimity, with a strange physical aversion. Douglas watched her quietly, only a faint tremor round the edges of his lips showing his deep emotion. His pity for her was so absolute that not even her strongly expressed repulsion could change it now.

"Effie," he said softly, "will you listen to me, my woman?"

"Not if you have harmed him, not if ——"

"When I left you last night," interrupted Douglas, "it was to find out that man and punish him for bringing you so great a sorrow. I found him — I spoke

to him, as I have said — and I would have killed him, had not God interposed.”

She looked at him in wonder, not comprehending the meaning of his words. At that moment Elspeth re-entered the kitchen, crying, “Laird, laird, will ye come but the hoose? Here’s Tam Hunter o’ Gander-cleugh at the door, wi’ awfu’ news frae Castle Lindsay;” and with this cry of terrible omen she disappeared again. With a rapid glance at Effie, who sat rigidly in her chair, as if turned to stone, Douglas strode out to the front of the house, where he found young Hunter, a sturdy yeoman and small farmer, seated on horseback, awaiting his coming.

“What’s this, Hunter?” asked Douglas.

“A bad business, laird, o’er at the Castle. Some scoundrels were poaching the river yestreen — there was a fight wi’ the keepers, and in the fight young Mr. Arthur gat his death!”

Elsbeth, who stood by listening, uttered a wail and wrung her hands, but behind her in the lobby there was another cry, then a sound as of a body falling to the ground. Turning quickly, Douglas saw and understood what had occurred. Effie Hetherington had placed her child down, and crept out to overhear the news, and the first words of the messenger had struck her like a blow, casting her prone and insensible just within the threshold.

With a cry, Douglas ran towards her, raised her in his arms, and carried her back to the kitchen. Before

he could place her down she had recovered, and struggling from his hold, she threw herself upon her knees by the armchair, sobbing and praying. There, without a word, he left her, and returned to the messenger.

“How did it happen?” he cried.

“Lord knows,” was the reply, “but his skull was smashed in, and he fell into the muckle pool, whaur they dragged for him at daybreak and found his body. It’s murder, they’re saying, Mr. Douglas; but they’ve ta’en Hew Howard and twa ither, and if it can be proved against them, they’ll maybe hang!”

“Go ben the house,” said Douglas to Elspeth, “and cease your noise, for no wailing and crying can bring the dead to life, and there’s one yonder who needs your help.”

Trembling and muttering to herself, the old woman obeyed. Stern and calm, Douglas leant back against the door, and lighting his pipe, talked on as coolly as one discussing the weather.

“A gruesome home-coming for the bride!” he observed, watching the smoke curl upward from his lips. “There’ll be wailing and gnashing of teeth over yonder this night and many a night to come. I’m sorry for Lady Bell!”

“She’s jest distractit they’re saying, and raving like a mad woman. Poor leddy! left a widow sae young, and mourning for a bridegroom cut off in the flower o’ his days.”

“Better men than he have died as young,” answered Douglas. “How can they make it murder against those poor devils? They were fighting in self-defence.”

“Self-defence or no self-defence, I hope they’ll hang them every one. The scoondrels! To kill an innocent gentleman, who was jest protecting his ain! But I maun be off, for I’ve a lang road before me. Good-day to ye, laird!”

“Good-day, Hunter,” answered Douglas, as the other trotted away.

Left alone, Douglas smoked on silently, but his expression of stern indifference had changed to one of ghastly pain. He stood with his head resting against the lintel of the door, and his eyes gazing darkly towards the distant sea.

* * * * *

Meanwhile the shadow of death lay over Castle Lindsay. The last gentle offices had been done to the young man who lay cold and stiff in death in the chamber where he had slept in life. All traces of his violent end were gently hidden, his handsome features were composed, and his delicate hands placed together on his heart. By his bedside knelt Lady Bell, sobbing in an agony of grief.

The old Earl came and went on tiptoe, too near himself to the great secret to sorrow much, while the housekeeper, long familiar with death, calmly ordered

everything and became supreme mistress of the situation. Again and again she had tried to comfort Lady Bell, but the only answer she had received was : “ Leave me, leave me ! Don’t speak to me ! I wish to be alone with him ! ”

“ Best let her bide,” said the old lady. “ God in His mercy sends such tears to keep the stricken heart from breaking ! Aye, let her greet her fill ! ”

The Earl, a stern man and a just, did not in his hour of tribulation forget the righteous thought of vengeance. He it was who interviewed both lawyers and police, and set them on the track of the men whom he believed guilty of the awful deed. Suspicion pointed clearly to Hew Howard, who was seized in his own forge, handcuffed, and carted off to Dumfries. Two of his companions shared the same fate. All three loudly protested their innocence.

And not one man among them all, neither the poachers themselves, nor the keepers by whom they were denounced, suspected that Richard Douglas had been in the woods of Castle Lindsay at the very hour when Arthur Lamont was done to death.

* * * * *

As Douglas stood moodily at the door, he heard the fluttering of a dress and the sound of a footstep behind him, and the next moment Effie Hetherington, a cloak thrown hastily over her shoulders, slipped past him and ran rather than walked from the house. For

an instant he stood stupefied, then, dashing his pipe down, he followed her. The sound of his footsteps behind her made her fly the faster, but he soon overtook her and blocked her way.

“Let me pass!” she cried, with wild eyes fixed on his.

“Where are you going?” he asked gently, holding out his arms to support her, while she tottered as if about to fall; but at the mere movement she shrank away in horror, and uttered a feeble cry for help.

“Effie, Effie!” he cried, still in the same gentle voice. “Are you mad? Come back to the house!”

“No! I am going yonder — to Castle Lindsay — to Arthur. I wish to know the truth — to satisfy myself that he is dead!”

“You shall not! You must not! Think of yourself! think of your child!”

“I hate myself! I hate the child!” she cried wildly. “I hate you for giving me shelter here. You — you killed him! murdered him! Yes, you are a murderer, a murderer, and I will tell all the world what you have done!”

“Effie, my woman, remember ——”

“I remember everything! Did you think I could forget? I always loved *him* and hated *you*. From the first moment we met I disliked and feared you, and now I know that I was right. I sicken at the sight of you, as I sickened when you spoke to me of love. You are loathsome to me, horrible, like a reptile. If

you touch me, if you speak kindly to me, you will kill me — yes, you will kill *me*, as you killed my Arthur ! ”

She spoke like a mad woman, desperate with pain and dread. The words might have passed, but there was no mistaking the looks, the tones — all the old repulsion was there, magnified by passionate despair. He listened quietly, but his heart bled as if with stabs from a knife.

“ Did you love him so much ? ” he said sadly, as she ceased her hysterical tirade. “ Well, then, I ’m sorry he is dead. I ’d give my own life now to bring him back. ”

“ You will give your own life ? Yes, it will be given — since you have murdered him, you shall atone. I myself will tell them that you were there last night — that you went to murder him, because you hated him for loving me ! ”

“ *You* will tell them that ? ”

“ Yes ! ” she cried.

“ Even if I had done it for your sake ? ” he asked, watching her with wistful eyes. “ Well, do so, Effie ; I shall not say a word ! ”

His quiet suffering mastered her more surely than anger could have done ; it reproached and humiliated her like a look from the Cross.

“ Forgive me, forgive me ! ” she sobbed, stretching out her hands in wild entreaty. “ I ’m wicked and ungrateful ; I know you ’ve been my only friend ; I

loathe myself for speaking as I have done, but I loved him so, I loved him so !”

Shaken by her mad mingling of many emotions like a reed in the wind, she fell to her knees on the Moss. Douglas stooped and lifted her. He felt her shudder at his touch, but she was too weak and spent to walk alone, and he led her tenderly back to the house.

CHAPTER VII.

LADY BELL.

“Wae ’s me for my love that ’s dead,
And wae ’s me weeping here—
They snatch the white wreath from the head
Of him I lo’ed so dear!”

BORDER BALLAD.

NEXT morning Hew Howard and his two companions were brought up before the magistrates at Dumfries, and formally charged with having, in the company of other persons yet unknown, compassed the death of Arthur Lamont. The old Earl, stern, grey, and silent, was accommodated with a seat upon the bench, and it was remarked that he several times held communication by short notes with the prosecuting solicitor. The prisoners were undefended, and all maintained a sullen silence. Hew Howard, when asked his name, calmly replied, “Ye should ken it weel. It’s no’ the first time I’ve stood here.” He looked at his lordship as he spoke with a curious expression, a sort of satisfied smile. The meaning of the words and look was plain enough to the mind

of everybody there present. On the last occasion on which Hew had made his appearance in the Dumfries dock it had been to answer a charge of poaching. The offence had been committed in Lamont's waters, and the murdered man had personally sentenced the prisoner to a year's imprisonment. During Hew's incarceration, matters had gone ill with his family, consisting of a bed-ridden wife and four young children. The wife had died of the effects of her privations within a few hours of her husband's release from durance. These things were in the minds of everybody in the court-house, and the ruffian's calm effrontery in thus recalling a mass of presumptive evidence certain to tell so heavily against him caused a groan and shudder to run through the packed auditory which had assembled to hear the examination. The old Earl's blanched face took a deeper pallor. Hew remained during the rest of the proceedings with that curious, satisfied smile upon his face, and it still lingered as he left the dock with his companions.

"It's just a hangin' job for the crowd o' them, my lord," said the presiding magistrate to the Earl. "Yon villain did the deed, as sure as we sit here."

Seven more of the gang were arrested that day. One of their number, in the hope of being admitted as Queen's evidence, had peached upon his comrades. It seemed likely that Arthur Lamont's untimely death would be terribly avenged. On the third day after the murder the whole of the party, sixteen in number,

were in custody, and were committed to take their trial at the now fast approaching Sessions on the capital charge.

The day of Arthur's funeral came. Douglas, by some strange phase of feelings which he himself could not have analysed, felt himself irresistibly drawn to witness the ceremony.

"Does she ken," asked old Elspeth — she never spoke Effie's name if she could avoid it — "does she ken what happens the day?"

"Not from me," answered Douglas.

"He was sib o' hers," said Elspeth. "Will ye no' tell her?"

"Let things bide, woman," said Douglas. "What good would it do for her to know it?"

"Ye'll be ganging there yoursel'?" said the old woman, glancing at the black frock-coat he wore.

He made no answer, except to turn to the window and take up the well-thumbed volume of Boccaccio as a signal to the old servant to leave the room. He sat staring at the book, turning leaf after leaf with no comprehension of what he read, when Effie entered.

She stopped short at the sight of him, with a quick catch of her breath. She too had noticed his unfamiliar costume, and had at once divined its meaning. She burst into tears and ran from the room.

The unwonted circumstances attending Arthur Lamont's death, his high position, his recent marriage,

the violence of his end, naturally inflamed public curiosity to its utmost pitch, and an enormous concourse assembled in the churchyard to witness the funeral. Lindsay Castle and the surrounding hostelries had been taxed to their utmost to accommodate the mourners of gentle blood who followed him to his last resting-place. He had not, in his lifetime, been much of a favourite with the tenantry, for his manner with his social inferiors had been apt to be abrupt and overbearing, and his excessive sternness to poachers had made him unpopular with a sport-loving population. But death, especially when it comes in so terrible a fashion, wipes out all scores, and there was only one feeling among the vast crowd which witnessed the lowering of his body to the earth — pity for the young life thus cut off in its flower, for the lonely lady who sat in solitary grief in Lindsay Castle, and for the old lord, too proud to show the least conscious trace of the emotion he needs must have felt, who stood beside his young kinsman's grave erect and stern, facing the waves of grief like a weather-worn rock.

What words can be found to express the emotions which filled the heart of Douglas as he stood, solitary and unmarked, amid the crowd? He had hated the man who lay cold and lifeless within a few feet of him, hated him with a passionate intensity which had nearly ended in the crime with which Effie had charged him, and of which she still believed him guilty. He hated Arthur still for the wrong he had done to the woman

he loved. There were moments when his detestation of the dead man stirred him to a futile anger against Fate, which had torn his vengeance from his hands, though, in milder moods, he had thanked God for being saved, even by such awful means, from that last extremity. His love for Effie had stirred every depth in his nature—a nature made up of depths and heights; and little as he had of the habit of introspection, he often stood amazed at the unsuspected capacities of passion it had disclosed in him. No other wrong the dead man could have done him, no conceivable cruelty or injustice to himself personally, would have survived in his mind the death of the offender. Death would have paid all accounts but that. But now, as he stood beside Arthur Lamont's open grave, listening to the tender and majestic words of the burial service, the sight of Effie's face, the sound of the low cry she had uttered in running from his presence that morning, the memory of all the grief and shame, the mere physical agony she had suffered by the act of the dead man, made his blood boil with a passion of impotent rage. He would have recalled Lamont to life for the satisfaction of feeling his throat in his grip again. He heard the dead man's tones and saw his face, and loathed the memory of his easy insolence and half-feminine prettiness as deeply as ever. Like Amyas Leigh, when he threw his sword into the sea, he cursed God that he was bereft of his just due of vengeance. Like Amyas, too, and many another

man, he was to learn that God had been kinder to him than he had thought.

He strode away across the barren Moss towards the desolate house which held his treasure and his torment. He was within a few hundred yards of his door when he heard the quick pit-a-pat of a horse's hoof behind him. He took no heed of it, but pursued his way till he heard his name called, and, turning, saw the rider reining in his horse within a couple of paces of him. He was a liveried groom, and Douglas recognised him at once as one of the Earl's servants.

"You'll excuse me," said the man, "but I've a note for ye, Mr. Douglas."

"A note! For me? Who is it from?"

"I'm thinkin' 't will be frae my lady; but ye'll ken when ye open it. 'T was Maggie Mitchell that gave it me."

He delivered the letter, and sat silent in the saddle while Douglas opened it. It was very short, and ran simply as follows —

"DEAR MR. DOUGLAS,— I want to see you. Will you come to the Castle at your earliest convenience? Your friend in deep sorrow, BELL LAMONT."

Douglas stood pondering with the note in his hand. He could conceive no reason why Lady Lamont should desire to see him.

"Good," he said, nodding to the groom, as he

turned in the direction of the Castle. "Give my compliments to your lady, and say I'm on my way to her."

"Ye might tak' the horse, if ye will, laird," said the groom. "It's a lang step to the Castle, and Maggie said 't was pressing."

He dismounted, and Douglas, with a brief word of thanks, climbed to the saddle. What could be the meaning of this mysterious summons, and what could Lady Bell want with *him*? They had not met half a dozen times in their whole lives, and had had no dealings together of any kind before or since that stormy night of Halloween, when she and Effie and Arthur Lamont had come for shelter to Douglas. The truth, or something like it, flashed into his mind suddenly as he trotted towards the Castle. The news of Effie's shame was quite public property, and would certainly have reached her kinswoman's ears by this time. Had she learned the parentage of the child? Even the constant pity and rage which filled his heart were for a moment diverted at that idea. Who could have had the stupid cruelty to tell the widowed bride such a secret at such a time?

* * * * *

Since her husband's death Lady Bell had remained for the most part in a condition which varied between raving hysteria and utter prostration. There had been grave fears for her reason, and a neighbouring doctor

had been called in to reside at the Castle during the period of danger. The wilder fits of grief had naturally worn themselves out and become less frequent, and she had fallen into a brooding quiet, a dull, dead lethargy terrible to see. Day and night she sat beside her husband's open coffin, not leaving it even for those brief intervals of sleep, save for whose beneficent effect the worst fears of those who surrounded her would certainly have been realised. When the last dread hour of parting came, she watched the hearse which contained the coffin and the long train of mourning carriages out of sight of her window in a strange calm. She seemed to have no more tears to shed. Maggie Mitchell, who was her companion at the moment, and who had cried bitterly as the funeral *cortège* left the house, was almost as much frightened at her quiet as she had been by the wilder expressions of her grief.

"It's no' canny," said Maggie to herself, as she watched her mistress's face, which had settled to the dead, set expression of a carven stone mask. "It's no' canny to see her look like that. I'd rather she'd hae her heesterics again."

"I can't breathe here," said Lady Bell, laying her hand upon her breast. They were the first words she had addressed to any one for some days. Maggie sat fascinated with fear, watching her. "I shall go downstairs, Maggie," she continued, in a voice hoarse with long weeping, but quite collected. "No. Don't

come with me. I can ring if I want you, and I want to be alone."

She passed down the wide staircase and into the hall. All but the lower regions of the house were empty, and she wandered at her will from room to room, finding some little ease in physical motion after her long watching in the chamber of death. Everything she looked at had some memory of Arthur, and her tears began to flow again. She came at last to the room which had been set apart for his special occupation, a fair-sized apartment on the ground floor, overlooking the stable-yard. His papers and letters were still scattered about the desk which stood beneath the open window; his guns and whips and fishing-rods were in order on their nails and racks upon the walls; the whole place seemed so full of him that as she entered she half-expected the familiar figure to turn towards her in the seat at the desk with the familiar bright smile. She fell into it herself, weeping bitterly; and an old collie dog, Arthur's favourite, who had followed her into the room, laid his grizzled head upon her knees and looked up into her face with a pitiful whimper of inquiry.

"He's gone, Dandie! He's gone!" she sobbed, embracing the dog's head with her hands. The dog whimpered anew, and she bent and kissed him, leaving her hot tears upon his shaggy face.

She sat there with the dog at her knees, weeping silently, for some time. The crisis of her grief had

passed, her tears were tender and healing. The whole atmosphere was redolent of her lost husband. Suddenly voices broke upon her ear from the stable-yard. She recognised them instinctively, though with no interest at first in what they said, as those of a stable-helper and a lass from one of the Earl's farms, who often came to the Castle with milk and eggs, and other country produce. They were quite near at hand, so near that but for the intervening wall she could almost have touched the speakers; and at a word, that went as it were by chance from ear to brain, she was stung to attention to their talk.

"Ay!" said the male voice, "he was a braw gentleman and a bonny, and sae mony a lassie thocht, forby my Lady Bell, puir woman. He was a deil amang the womenfolk."

"Lady Bell's nigh daft wi' his loss," said the girl. "Maggie Mitchell says it's just awfu' to be with her. She does naething but greet and cry oot frae morn to necht."

"Ay! It's natural, puir thing. She's what ye may ca' the offeecial widow. There's others that maybe hae mair cause to greet than Lady Bell."

"And wha are they?" asked the girl. She lived at a remote farm, and was naturally less well informed regarding current news and scandal than her interlocutor, who lived near the Castle, the capital, so to speak, of the country-side.

"Aweel, there's Miss Effie Hetherington, Bonnie

Effie, as they call her, and faith, they tell nae lee in ca'ing her bonnie, and she 's —— ”

“ Eh, man, I ken a' aboot that affair,” said the girl, “ but it 's nae sae sure as ye seem to think that the bairn is Mr. Arthur's.”

“ And whose suld it be ? ” asked the man.

“ There 's folk that think Mr. Douglas micht tell us, gin he would.”

“ Hoots ! ” said the man. “ Douglas ! Ye 're haverin', woman. The bairn 's nae mair Douglas's then it 's mine. What would a bonnie lass like Miss Hetherington be doing wi' a sour chiel like Douglas, wi' a face like a corner o' the Dumfries tolbooth ? ”

“ But 't is at his house she 's lyin', and the bairn was born there.”

“ Then it was born where it was no begotten,” said the fellow, with a hoarse laugh at his own wit, “ and that 's no sae uncommon as ye seem to think. It 's no a year ago that I was ganging home one night in the gloamin' that I saw them thegither — Mr. Arthur and Miss Hetherington — in the summer hoose ayant there by the waterfall, she sittin' on his knee, and he kissin' her. Ask your sense, woman, if a lass like her wadna rather be kissed by a bonny gentleman like that than by a half-daft auld carl like Richard Douglas.”

A voice called the fellow to the other side of the stable-yard. He answered the cry and obeyed it.

Lady Bell sat for a moment like one stricken to stone. Her tears had ceased as suddenly as if the

blaze of anger in her eyes had been veritable fire to scorch them up.

“Incredible! Infamous!” she gasped. “Arthur! Arthur!” she cried, as wildly as if her dead husband had stood before her to answer the monstrous charge. “It is n’t true! And yet ——!” A thousand little things — unremembered till now, almost unmarked at the time, rushed upon her mind to confirm the accusation — glances and words, trifles light as air, but of deadly import to her new-born jealousy. “I can’t bear it! I shall go mad! I must know! I must have proof! But how? See that wretch, and tear the truth from her. Ah! Douglas! He will know.”

She turned to the desk, and hastily scrawled the note we have already seen delivered to the laird. The funeral party were entering the avenue on their return from the burial-ground when the groom who carried it rode from the gates.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO WOMEN.

“ And wha shall hae this deid man’s blessing,
His licht-o’-love or me,
Since baith hae smiled neath his caressing
And sat upon his knee?
And wha shall sit at this deid man’s side
When life has past away,
The licht-o’-love or the waeful bride,
Upon God’s Judgment Day? ”

THE TALE OF TWA.

WHEN that possible solution of Lady Bell’s summons to Castle Lindsay broke on Douglas’s mind, he half mechanically reined in the horse he was riding, and reduced his quick trot to a walk. If by any channel the unfortunate woman had received an inkling of the truth, the interview between himself and her could hardly fail to be extremely comfortless to both parties concerned, and must also be worse than useless to Effie, now, as always, the chief interest in the thoughts of Douglas. His mind shot this way and that amid the tangled mazes

of thought and emotion, and fixed at last upon one definite idea. If his suspicion of the object of Lady Bell's invitation were true, and it was to learn of him the guilt or innocence of her dead husband that she had asked for the interview — suppose he lied, plump and plain, denied Arthur's paternity, and claimed Effie's child as his own? Douglas was naturally as little of a sophist as any man alive that day, but no Jesuit could have been quicker to see certain proximate advantages which might spring from that pious fraud. It would save the dead man's reputation. That was nothing, and much less than nothing, to Douglas, but it was much to Arthur's Lamont's kith and kin. It would spare Lady Bell a second blow as bitter — bitterer, perhaps, Douglas thought, than that first blow of her husband's death. These were after-thoughts, the main idea in Douglas's mind — a thought that filled him with a wild whirl of emotion — was that for him to claim the child, and take the dead man's burden on his shoulders, would force Effie to capitulate and marry him. His face flushed and paled, his heart beat like a sledge-hammer, his whole body trembled at the thought. That she did not love him, that such gratitude for his generosity, such admiration of his higher qualities generally as her shallow nature was capable of feeling, were powerless to overcome the physical repugnance she had conceived for him, mattered nothing. As he had told her, it was not the ordinary privileges of husbandhood he desired or

would ever claim. To shelter her from slanderous tongues, to protect her from all the world, to nurse her back from the gulf of sickness and suppression to the free air and sunlight of her sparkling youth — that was reward enough, and more than enough, for him. Love might come in time. It must and should. He would guard her so tenderly, watch over her with such utter generosity of affection, that she must end by loving him. That consensus of inherited prejudice and every-day practice which we call conscience, sense of honour, et cetera, put in a feeble plea. The means by which he proposed to gain that happy end were tainted. He must tell one lie straight, and live another for years to come. At the thought Douglas broke into a loud, discordant laugh — a laugh so wild and sudden that it startled the groom, whose swift stride had brought him almost even again with the lagging paces of the horse. A lie, forsooth! He would have lied till his soul was as black as Arthur Lamont's, he would have waded through blood to such a consummation. He dashed his heels into the horse's side, and rode to the Castle at full speed.

As he passed through the hall of the Castle in the track of the servant who led him to Lady Bell's boudoir, the clinking of plates and glasses and a subdued hum of conversation reached his ears from the great dining-room on the right, where the friends and relatives of the house sat at the funeral dinner. He could not but remember what a different kind of

feasting had gone on in the house when last he had crossed its threshold. The wide staircase, which had blazed with light and cheer, was swathed in black, the room to which the silent attendant led him had its windows darkened, and was lit only by the flame of the big wood fire upon the ample hearth.

“My leddy shall know ye’re here, sir,” said the servant.

Douglas nodded, and, as the man left the room, stood absently trifling with some object on the mantelpiece. He was still so occupied when Lady Bell entered the room. She gave him a cold hand, which not even the resolution to which she had strung herself could quite keep from trembling.

“You are well, I hope, Mr. Douglas?”

“I thank your ladyship.”

“Won’t you be seated?”

He gave her a formal and rather old-fashioned bow, and took the seat she indicated by a wave of the hand. She sat also, with her face turned from the firelight, and further concealed by her practised management of a little hand-screen. The blaze shone full on Douglas’s rugged lineaments, in which there seemed to her to be no change since she had last beheld them. A little thinner and greyer, perhaps, a trifle more lined about the sad eyes and the rocklike forehead, but that was all.

She felt, for she was a woman of quick touch and keen feeling, that with a man like Douglas, at once

simple and astute, it would be best to go as straight as might be to the object of her invitation, and waste no time in mere diplomatic beating about the bush.

“Mr. Douglas,” she began, speaking quietly and directly, though with a noticeable tremor in her voice, “I have sent for you to ask a question. The answer is of the very greatest importance to me. I implore you not to hide the truth from me from any motive of kindness. It would be a mistake — a dreadful mistake. Deal honestly with me.”

“I am at your service, madam,” said Douglas. He knew already that his guess was right from the gathering intensity of the voice and manner she so piteously strove to make purely commonplace.

“My unhappy kinswoman, Miss Effie Hetherington — she is staying at your house?”

“Yes,” said Douglas. “She is under my roof.”

“It was there her child was born?” Douglas bent his head. “I have heard a rumour — a dreadful rumour.” She stopped short, and her agitation was so great that Douglas, even in his own deep distress, could not help feeling a sharp pang of pity for her. “How she must have loved that blackguard!” was the thought in his mind, but he sat silent, keeping his eyes fixed on the blazing logs. “They say — oh, Mr. Douglas, how can I speak the word?”

“Let me help you, Lady Bell,” said Douglas. “They say that the child is the child of your dead husband, Arthur Lamont.”

“You have heard it too!” she cried.

“It is a common rumour,” he continued, speaking drily and coldly. “Comfort yourself, madam. It is not true.”

“Not true!” She sprang to her feet, and dropped the last thread of the too transparent pretence of calm she had worn. “Oh, thank God! Thank God for that! It drove me mad! It sickened me! It is barely an hour since I heard it, and I think in another hour I should have lost my reason.”

“Your husband was guiltless, Lady Bell. The child is mine.”

“Yours! Then you are married?” she queried rapidly.

“No,” said Douglas, still calmly. “We are not married.”

“Not in the kirk, perhaps, but before witnesses — before the registrar.”

“There has been no ceremony of any kind.”

“But — but,” she stammered, seeking some phrases to express her amazement.

“I must beg you, Lady Bell,” said Douglas, “to give me your confidence in return for mine. There are circumstances I don’t care to dwell on, which may keep us from marrying for some time to come.”

Lady Bell, as may be easily conceived, was too overjoyed at the dissipation of her doubts of her husband’s faithfulness to take any great interest in Effie’s circumstances for the moment. She made a

guess — a natural one under the circumstances — at the reasons which held Douglas from doing her cousin the justice of public re-instatement and legitimising his child. He had been a traveller for many years, and had returned to his desolate home a soured and moody man, and had been content, though of good blood and breeding, and in the full enjoyment of robust health, to live there, solitary and unfriended. “He married abroad,” thought Lady Bell, “and his wife is still alive.” It was a sufficiently discreditable business for the houses of Lindsay and Hetherington as things stood, but at least Arthur was blameless. He was back on his pedestal in her heart, she could pour out on his memory all the worship and devotion which, but for his tragic and untimely death, would have been his meed in the flesh. The moment Douglas had left her she sank upon her knees in an ecstasy of thanks to God. For the time the grief of widowhood itself was wiped from her heart. It is one of the tritest commonplaces of cynicism that the most efficacious way to retain the affections of a wife is to die soon after marriage, but there is a measure of quite uncynical and pathetic truth in it. Arthur’s death had cast a halo about him in his wife’s heart. He had hidden his vices and flaws of character from her with wonderful success during their brief period of married life, and her love and grief so magnified the surface virtues he had possessed that he shone in her mind with the radiance of an angel.

She remembered him as the handsomest, bravest, tenderest, most perfect of created beings. If anything could have added to her idolatry of him, it was the foul accusation she had harboured against him, now dispelled by the assurances of Douglas. She spent an hour or two of sweet adoration and bitter-sweet self-humiliation before Arthur's portrait, worshipping it, begging its pardon for the doubt she had dared to feel, abasing herself before it as her pride would never have permitted herself to do before the living original.

There had never been any love lost between herself and Effie; but, after all, blood goes for something, and years of close companionship for even more. The child was of her kin, and was in bitter trouble. She would go and see her, and speak what word of comfort she might. She quietly ordered a pony chaise to be in readiness at a little postern of the Castle, with which her boudoir easily communicated; and just after nightfall slipped, cloaked and hooded, from the house, and was driven to Douglas.

* * * * *

Douglas, meanwhile, strode back across the Moss homewards, in a changing mood which varied between exultation and despair. At one moment the success of his scheme looked certain, and at another doubtful, and his blood ran hot and cold with hope and fear. He foresaw, in any case, a scene of strong emotion with Effie, and braced himself to meet it. The

rudely furnished sitting-room was empty when he entered it, and he learned from old Elspeth that Effie was asleep. He had meant to tell her of his action at once, but the momentary reprieve was rather welcome than otherwise, though very soon the time began to drag terribly. He lit his pipe, and sat staring at the dim light of the peats on the hearth, or marching with ponderous yet silent tread to and fro along the length of the room. The dusk had deepened into night before his solitude was broken by Effie's entrance. She looked at him with a furtive fear in her large eyes, a look Douglas had grown accustomed to of late.

"Sit down, Effie, my woman, I've something to tell you." An extra depth in his deep voice warned the girl that the communication would be no ordinary one. "I saw Lady Bell this afternoon." He paused there again, and Effie, nervously watching her fingers as they twisted in her lap, waited for him to proceed. "She sent for me to go to her. Can you guess the reason why?"

"No," said Effie, faintly. "What was it?"

"She had *heard*," said Douglas, with a stress upon the word.

Effie's breast began to heave, and her cheek flushed with shame and anger.

"I suppose it's cried on the housetops all over the country," she said. "Well? And what had my kind cousin to say to you?"

“She wanted to know,” continued Douglas, “if it was true that her husband was the father of your bairn. I told her ‘No.’”

Effie started, raised her head, and for the first time looked directly at him, with a flushed face and wide eyes.

“I told her,” Douglas went on, “that the child was mine.”

Effie cowered for a moment in her seat, her face hidden in her hands, then sprang to her feet confronting him.

“For God’s sake,” he said quickly, “hear me out! I spoke the lie for your sake, Effie, for yours and hers. Oh, Effie, woman, think of it! How could I tell the poor lady the truth? Hasn’t she suffered enough? And see, Effie — see how it will save you, and set matters right. I’ve given your bairn a father, and you a home and a protector. Marry me, Effie, my lass, marry me, and your fair fame is saved.”

She shrank away from him, and he advanced, pleading passionately for a fuller hearing.

“Don’t think it was to serve my own ends that I said it. I swear before God it was for your sake, and for your sake only. I’ll never ask a husband’s privilege, never touch your hand or the hem of your dress. I’ll be your servant, your slave, your dog.”

In the passion of his emotion he caught her hand. She tore it from his grasp, shuddering as though she

had unawares touched some noxious thing. The physical repulsion he exercised over her seemed to have grown a habit of her blood, unconquerable.

“Ah!” she cried. “Don’t touch me! Not another word!” she said, as he again opened his lips to speak. “I leave this house to-night. I’d rather go out and die on the Moss than stay here with you. I’d rather be pointed at by every finger in Scotland as Arthur Lamont’s mistress than be your wife.”

A long, shuddering sob from the semi-darkness near the door stopped the torrent of their speech. Deathly pale, Lady Bell glided like a wraith into the circle of light cast by the lamp. Effie stared at the apparition with a stricken face, and a deep groan burst from Douglas.

“So!” cried Lady Bell, fronting the trembling girl with blazing eyes. “At last I know the truth. I knew your ambition, Effie Hetherington, though I seemed blind to it. I did not know till now that you had succeeded in it. The mistress of Arthur Lamont, the mother of his bastard child. Accept my compliments.” She swept a curtsey. “You, you intriguing little liar. You, a pauper I saved from the gutter!” Her rage strangled her. She stammered for words, and so gave Douglas an opportunity of checking the flood of insult.

“Why did you lie to me?” she answered to his first quietly spoken words. “Why did you expose me to the humiliation of this visit, of her presence?”

“ For God’s sake, madam,” said Douglas, “ leave us. You can do no good by staying. I would have kept you from the knowledge of the truth if I could. You know it now. Go, I implore you. Ah ! ”

He gave a scream, shrill as a woman’s, as Effie, overpowered by Lady Bell’s appearance and her own contending passions, fell to the floor.

“ You ’ve killed her ! ” he cried. “ Elspeth ! Elspeth ! Ye auld devil, come here ! ”

The old woman ran into the room and bent above the body.

“ She ’s in a swoond. Bear a hand, laird, and we ’ll get her till her bed.”

Douglas bore the lifeless body from the room, and when, a minute later, he returned, Lady Bell had gone.

CHAPTER IX.

“PARTING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW.”

“Douglas, Douglas, tender and true !” — OLD SAYING.

THERE are degrees and gradations, everywhere and in everything, even in despair itself.

Douglas had made his great throw for happiness, and had lost. A brief light had dawned upon the dismal prospect of his life, only to be quenched; he had beheld a resting-place of green trees and placid waters, only to find it a mirage amid the flat and interminable sands of existence. He was as a man under sentence of death to whom a respite comes, only to be succeeded by the ratification of the original doom. Take what illustration of despairing misery you will, it can hardly transcend his condition after the scene just revealed.

Elsbeth returned presently to the sitting-room, to find her master bent above the fire, looking, in the dim light of the lamp, more haggard and forlorn than she had ever before seen him. He gave no sign or knowledge of her presence.

“For God’s sake, laird,” said the old woman, “what has happened? The puir lass was in a dead swound, and when she cam’ to she was like one possessed, that ye read of in the Scripture. She’s quieter now, but she’s had a sair shock, and I doot there’s mair trouble in store for her, for she’s just clean demented. She goes on talkin’ till hersel’, saying over and over again, ‘That’s why he killed him. That’s why he killed him.’”

Douglas turned his face on her, a face of stark, dumb agony, and seemed about to speak, but turned again silently and stared at the fire with bright unwinking eyes.

“Ye’ll hae trouble wi’ her, I’m thinking, gin ye mean to haud her i’ the house, for she says she’ll no’ bide here. She’d be fine and welcome to gang for me. It was an ill wind that blew her here, I’m thinking.”

Elspeth was not a woman of much penetration, but she would have been stupid indeed if, with such events happening under her eyes, she had failed to read at least the main lines of the drama in which she was a subordinate actor. Her master loved Miss Hetherington, who was, in Elspeth’s eyes, a mere wanton and wastrel, who should have been driven from the threshold of any honest house to the public shame she merited. The old woman would have hated and despised the girl cordially enough merely for disdainng the laird’s suit, and she was beginning

to think that she had better reason than even that afforded for her detestation. The rumour of Arthur Lamont's parentage of Effie's child was abroad all over the country-side by this time, and had come to her ears as a matter of course. Effie's reiterated exclamation, "That's why he killed him," had illumined Elspeth's mind with a further flash of baleful light. The disgraced wanton dared to believe Richard Douglas the assassin of her paramour! It was only her fear of Douglas's gloomy and violent anger which held the old woman back from expressing her wrath and counselling Effie's immediate expulsion from the house.

Finding her master's silence impenetrable, Elspeth withdrew. It was wearing late, but Douglas sat on in a sort of half-waking trance. He was too utterly unselfish in his love to dwell long merely on his own sorrows. Despair had been to him as his normal moral atmosphere for months past, and he accepted his hopeless position as best he might. His thoughts were all of Effie, and they were full of infinite pity and tenderness, and even of a mournful admiration. How splendidly beautiful she had looked while repudiating his offer, and clasping to her breast the legacy of shame left her by the man she had loved, wrapping herself in it as in a mantle. A man of Douglas's brains who loves a worthless woman cannot help at times, however deep and sincere his affection may be, but get a glimpse of the woman's true nature.

Through all the unreal attributes of womanly perfection with which his love had dressed her, Effie's frivolity and worthlessness had more than once become apparent to Douglas's eyes. But now there was no more doubt of her possible. A woman who could love as she loved, who, at all possible cost of comfort, consideration, all that women most dearly prize, could hold to her faith to the dead villain who had betrayed her — what words could paint her heroism, what thought encompass it? She shone before the lonely, tortured man with tenfold radiance. She was more than worthy of all the worship, all the service he could render. The man's sore heart was wrung with pity and admiration and tenderness unspeakable.

We, who have followed Effie Hetherington's story thus far, with a more intimate knowledge of its details than Douglas could have, know how little of the heroic quality her rejection of his scheme for her salvation had expressed. Had that strange physical repulsion he exercised over her been one whit less pronounced, she would have yielded. Any one of a score of men for whose characters she felt far less esteem than that wrung from her by Douglas might have succeeded in winning her consent. She was one of those women — not at all an uncommon type — whose nerves stand them instead of heart and brains and conscience. Women of a far higher class than Effie belonged to are apt to be pitiless to the men who persecute them with a passion they cannot return, but

women of her type are most pitiless of all, for genuine passion frightens as well as bores them. Their Eros is a curled and scented darling with a flower in his buttonhole, and *au fait* in the last nuance of feminine fashion and the newest thing in the slang of the drawing-room. When he had descended upon poor Effie in the guise of Arthur Lamont, he had seemed a very innocent and pleasant deity indeed, quite of the drawing-room pattern, and with no such uncouth manners as he assumed in the person of Richard Douglas.

The poignant emotion Effie had suffered in hearing Douglas unfold his scheme, and in the scene with Lady Bell, so prostrated her that for the next few days she was forced to keep her bed. Douglas forbore to intrude his society upon her, and awaited with what patience he might a summons to her society, the one solace his life could offer him. Old Elspeth ministered to her needs with a sad and unsympathetic regularity, never speaking an avoidable word. She was Effie's only link with the outside world during this enforced confinement. The girl was naturally anxious to know in what guise her misadventure had reached the world, and made every indirect effort to draw Elspeth on to gossip, exerting her best blandishments to that effect. She might as well have tried to wheedle Ailsa Craig. The old woman was obstinately deaf to all hints, till Effie's curiosity finally broke down the pitiful remnant of pride which was left to her, and forced her to directer methods.

“What are they saying about me?” she asked Elspeth one morning, point blank. “I suppose everybody knows my story.”

“Know it!” echoed Elspeth. “Oh, ay! Faith, they ken it weel eneuch!”

“What are they saying?” asked Effie.

“Hoo should I ken a’ the havers that folk talk?” asked Elspeth, crustily.

“Who do they say is the father of my child?” asked Effie.

“Maist o’ them hae the sense to lay the debt whaur ’t is due. There’s just a twa three gowks that think otherwise, or say they think sae, ’t is a’ ane what they think or what they say. They’ll no say it twice, in *my* hearing.”

“Have they found out — do they know who —” she could hardly bring herself to shape the question — “do they know who murdered him?”

“There’s saxteen o’ them i’ the Tolbooth at Dumfries, charged with it, Hew Howard and his gang, ye ken. Folk say there’s a chance o’ the hail clamjamfray hanging for the job, if the lawyer chiel’s can’t find oot which o’ them it was that did the deed. Ma certie, but it’s hard measure, saxteen decent men that never harmed any man o’ a boddle’s worth, exceptin’ perhaps two three bit saumon or the like.”

“But are they sure these men did it?”

“Sure? Hech, sure eneuch. Mr. Arthur gaed oot wi’ the keeper bodies to capture them. He’d

better ha' bided at hame, an' kept a haill skin. There was more than one amangst them that owed him a grudge, forbye Hew, that's the likeliest to ha' dune it. But finish your brose, Miss Hetherington, and tak' the bairn, for the laird will be wearyin' for his dinner."

The arrest of the poachers was news to Effie, but it did not stir her from the belief which had grown fixed in her mind, that Douglas had done the deed to put Arthur out of the way, and so, leaving her utterly alone and friendless in the world, force her to the acceptance of the scheme he had sprung upon her.

So her shame was known, and her name the common theme of gossip through the country. The choice she had so bravely made to Douglas in words was upon her in stern fact, she would be pointed at as the dead man's light o' love. She must get away from the scene of her disaster. But how? She so utterly misread the character of the only friend she had in the world as to believe that he would thwart her in her endeavour to escape from public shame, and the idea of appealing for help to Douglas never for a minute occurred to her. She made up her mind to run away in the night, when the house was all asleep, as soon as she had gained the necessary strength to reach the Dumfries railway station. In leaving the Castle she had taken care to bring her few jewels and what money she was possessed of. She would go south to London, where nobody knew her or her story, and then — well, the future was not very clear. She

would find employment of some sort, perhaps get upon the stage, a career which had always had a great fascination for her since she had seen her first pantomime. She was far too pretty and too clever to be allowed to starve. But the child? She was not a model mother, and the shame the child had brought her was far greater than the pleasure of maternity, but she was not so heartless that she could look on the small face nestled to her breast in the abandonment of sleep and think of deserting it without some pang of natural sorrow. Douglas seemed fond of it. He would tend it for her sake, and some day she might send for it. She matured her plan that night before she fell asleep, and two days later felt strong enough to put it into execution. She waited till the house was still, and rose and dressed, shivering with cold and fright and weakness. She softly opened the door of the sitting-room. The lamp was out, and by the faint glow of the peat fire she saw that the room was empty. Quietly as a ghost she slid through the room, along the darkened passage, and raised the rude latch of the heavy door. The night was fine and starry, and in the dead calm of the air she could hear the distant rolling of the sea. The free air and the certainty of escape strung her muscles and called the blood to her cheek. She started at a run, and had covered fifty yards or so when her arm was seized. She turned with a panting shriek, and faced Douglas.

“Effie, my woman,” he said gently, “what’s this?”

“Let me go!” she cried. “Oh, Mr. Douglas, let me go.”

“Go!” he repeated. “Where could you go to, poor bairn?”

“Anywhere!” she panted. “Anywhere away from here. I can’t stay! I shall go mad! Everybody knows. Everybody is talking of me, and pointing at me. Let me go away, somewhere where people don’t know me, and I can live in peace. What right have you to stay me?” she cried, pleading giving way to anger, fed by the horror of his touch, for he still held her arm. “I will go!”

“Not now, or like this,” he answered.

“Then kill me!” she said. “Kill me, as you killed *him!*”

She broke into sudden wild weeping, and but for his support would have fallen to the ground. Douglas put his arm about her, and drew her unresisting back to the house.

CHAPTER X.

VALE !

“ Since there’s no hope, come, let us kiss and part —
Nay, I have done, you get no more from me.”

MICHAEL DRAYTON.

ON the night of Effie’s attempted flight Douglas took another, and, as he fondly hoped, the last, step towards the ultimate bourn of despair. Her action had brought him face to face with a necessity which he had not yet contemplated, but which he now saw to be inevitable — a parting, perhaps a final and complete parting, between Effie and himself. It was impossible that she should remain in the district where her life was known to everybody and the story of her shame was common property. In the delirious and unreasoning joy he had felt in harbouring her beneath his roof, in breathing the same air with her, he had never thought of this, not even her rejection of his heroic falsehood to Lady Bell had brought it home to him. She must go. Of that there could be no doubt. He sat long into the night, contemplating the hideous barrenness and desolation of the life that

awaited him when she would be far away. That too he was prepared to bear with the rest of his burden, for her sake, but it would be bitter — bitterer than all that had gone before.

He found no rest that night, which he spent in walking aimlessly about the Moss, at first in a mere hopeless abandonment of his whole nature to a barren, sterile grief for which he could find no outlet, and later in arranging a plan for Effie's departure. The need for action was urgent, and since there was no escape he forced himself to face the inevitable as calmly as he might.

“Ask Miss Hetherington to grant me the favour of a few words,” he said to Elspeth that morning after breakfast. A few minutes later Effie entered the room.

“You wanted to see me?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Douglas. “I have been thinking over what happened last night. You are right. This is no place for you to remain in. You must go.”

Effie clasped her hands, and looked at him with a glance of ardent gratitude. It was the first pleasurable expression any word of his had called to her face for months past, and it hurt him as no expression of hatred or repulsion could have done. But he had learned his lesson, and went on quietly, with no sign of the effort the words cost him to speak.

“You must go, and I have been thinking how best to arrange for your going. There is a cousin of

mine, Mary Campbell, the widow of a merchant in Aberdeen, and, from all I hear, she is very well to do. I did her a good turn years ago — never mind what — something she has not forgotten, and ingratitude does n't run in the Douglas blood. She would do more for me than what I am going to ask her."

"And that is ——?" asked Effie.

"Just this," continued Douglas. "To give you and the child a home. She's a good woman — a wee bit strict in matters of kirk discipline, maybe. She will shelter you and keep your secret, for my sake."

Effie's quick wits had been at work before he ceased to speak, considering the advantages and drawbacks offered by this scheme. To her thinking the latter were very much more pronounced. To sentence herself to pass the rest of her days in a northern provincial town, under the eye of a fanatical Presbyterian widow who would be the *confidante* of her shameful story, was a prospect which presented little allurements to her sensuous, pleasure-loving nature. The fact, also, that the person who was to afford her refuge was a near relative of Richard Douglas did not add to its attractions. Like all selfish people, she hated to be reminded of an obligation. It would perhaps be too strong a statement to say that she hated Douglas. Hatred is not a sentiment easily felt by people of her nature. She was miserable in his presence and under his influence, and her fear of the public shame she had brought upon herself was hardly

stronger than her desire to escape from his neighbourhood. But she had no scheme formed for which she could hope his acquiescence, so she listened without interrupting him, only silently forming a resolution that, whatever asylum she might find, it would not be in Aberdeen or anywhere else where she would ever be liable to see his face or hear his name again. All this passed through her mind in less time than it takes to read it—in much less time than is needful to write it.

“Well, Effie?” he asked, after some seconds of silence.

“You are very good,” she answered. “I don’t know how to thank you for all your care and kindness.”

“I will write to my cousin to-day,” he said. “You will want to make some purchases, I suppose. Tell Elspeth what you need, and she shall go into Dumfries and bring it for you.”

He kept his speech and voice studiously commonplace, and only the haggard eyes which dwelt upon her spoke of the poignant emotion which filled him.

“You are very good,” she said again. Perhaps some divination of his sufferings pierced her mind and filled her with a momentary tenderness, perhaps the action was dictated by a desire to eradicate any lingering suspicion he might harbour of her intention to deceive him, but she so far conquered her physical repugnance as to take his hand and carry it to her lips. He put his arms about her and drew her, shuddering, in his

strong embrace to his breast, and held her there for a little time. She felt his lips touch her hair. "God Almighty bless you!" he said in a deep murmur, and released her. She left him, and her shallow heart was, for a moment, touched and softened. But it hardened again a moment later, as she sat in the bedroom thinking of the purport of the words she had just heard. Her one passionate desire was to break utterly and completely with every tie which bound her to her past life, to start afresh and untrammelled. The more she thought of the plan Douglas had revealed to her, the stronger grew her detestation of the prospect it disclosed. A seeming acquiescence for long enough to throw Douglas off his guard was necessary. Any suspicion of her intentions he might yet retain once put to sleep, evasion would be easy. She held a consultation with Elspeth about the purchase of certain articles of wearing apparel, and her subdued manner and timid expressions of gratitude to her for the trouble she was taking half softened the old woman towards her. When next she saw Douglas, he silently handed her an unsealed letter. It was to his cousin, telling Effie's story briefly but fully, and very gently, and asking, for the sake of auld lang syne, an asylum for the girl. She gave it back to him with trembling lips and drooping eyes.

"You are very good," she said again. "I am not worth all the trouble you take about me. Indeed, indeed, I am not."

There was some genuine feeling in her words. The sense of her unworthiness and ingratitude was growing on her hour by hour, the feeling that even now she was plotting to deceive the man who had heaped such kindnesses upon her was almost unendurable.

“Worth!” he repeated. “You’re worth my heart’s best blood, Effie, and I’d give it if you needed it.”

There was none of the old wildness or violence in his speech; that had all gone. He spoke the words quite quietly, but she knew that they were true.

“I must get away,” she said to herself. “I shall go mad if I stay here.”

The best means of escape was the simplest. She waited until the early dusk had fallen, assumed her hat and cloak, and assured herself of the safety of her money and valuables. The child was asleep, and she did not dare to kiss the little pink face for fear of waking it from its slumber. It was the visible sign of her shame and humiliation, but as she bent above it for the last time the hot tears gushed from her eyes in pity of its helplessness. She dried them, and walked into the sitting-room, where Douglas was sitting according to his most melancholy wont, with an unheeded book open upon his knee. He looked at her in surprise.

“You are going out?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “I want fresh air. I feel as if I can’t breathe any longer in the house.”

“ But it ’s quite dark,” he said.

“ So much the better,” she answered. “ I shall not be long away.”

Her manner gave no hint of her purpose as she left the room. Douglas stood at the window, staring at the point where her slight figure vanished in the mist. No thought touched him that he had heard her voice and seen her face for the last time on this side of the grave. He returned to his melancholy musings by the ingle nook. He had had but little regular sleep of late days, and such repose as he had found had been principally in the form of short doses. He fell into one now, and awoke with a startled conviction that he had been asleep for many hours. The old-fashioned clock above the heavy mantel told him he had been unconscious for a few minutes only. He nodded again, and sank this time into a deep slumber, from which he was awakened by Elspeth.

“ Laird, laird ! For a’ sakes, what ’s gane wi’ Miss Hetherington ? ”

He sprang to his feet, staring wildly at the old woman.

“ I went into the bedroom to spier gin she ’d need of anything afore the morn, and she ’s no there.”

Douglas glanced at the clock, which was almost on the stroke of eleven.

“ Great God ! ” he exclaimed. “ She went out at seven. She ’s lost on the Moss ! Get lanterns ! Call for help ! ”

He ran from the house like a man distraught, shrieking "Effie!" Help came, but it was of no avail. They built a huge fire on a piece of rising ground to lead the wanderer back to the house, and Douglas beat the Moss till broad daylight, but no trace of the missing girl was found. Hoarse with shouting her name, weary with miles of running and leaping over bogs and watercourses, he stood alone on the shore of the Firth, with the lines of the old ballad ringing in his brain like a funeral knell —

“ And ‘ Hey, Annie ! ’ and ‘ How, Annie ! ’
And ‘ Annie, come hither to me ! ’
And aye the more he cried ‘ Annie, ’
The louder rair’ d the sea ! ”

Two days of such hideous misery as no pen could describe passed by, days of terror and wonder and doubt and wild conjecture, and on the morning of the third day a letter came. Douglas knew the hand, and an irrepressible cry of gratitude broke from his lips.

“ She ’s alive ! Thank God for that ! ”

The letter bore the London postmark, and ran as follows —

“ DEAR MR. DOUGLAS, — I scarcely know how to write to you. You must think me the most wicked and the most ungrateful of women, but indeed, indeed I am not ungrateful. I shall never forget your kindness and generosity. I shall think of you always as the truest and noblest friend that ever God gave to a

poor disgraced girl, and shall remember and honour you till I die. Forgive me, and try to forget me and all the pain I have caused you. I could not stay in Dumfries, or go to your cousin at Aberdeen. She would know my wretched story, I could never escape from the consequences of my weakness and folly. I am far happier among strangers. I shall try and find some honest employment by which I can live, and I promise that you shall hear of me from time to time, and know how I am getting on. My child is safe in your hands, I know, until the time comes when I can send for her. May she become a better and happier woman than her broken-hearted mother. Again and again I thank you and beg your forgiveness. Forgive and forget her who will always remain your unhappy and grateful friend,

“EFFIE HETHERINGTON.”

Douglas sat, still as a carven figure, with the letter in his hand. He had no sense of the heartless selfishness disclosed in its every phrase, no understanding of anything but the one simple and sufficing fact that she was gone and quite beyond his reach, and many hours passed before he could realise so much in more than the dimmest and vaguest fashion. The house seemed filled with her presence still as by some strange and subtle perfume. His heart and brain alike seemed numbed. The thought floated across his mind that so men felt when they were dead.

The child! She had left him the child. He rose, and walked with the slow gait and bowed shoulders of an old man into the bedroom. The baby lay, flushed and rosy, on the bed. As he bent over it, it awoke. The two bright blue eyes shone on him with a sudden sweet surprise. It gave a gurgling crow and stretched out its little arms. A nameless passion of pity and affection flooded his heart, and he bent closer still above the child, looking at it through a mist of tears.

EPILOGUE.

SEVENTEEN YEARS AFTER.

YOUTH, high spirits, summer sunshine, and the first glimpse of Paris! A combination of delights not often to be found in life, the most delightful of passing realities, an inexhaustible theme of happy memories. Effie will remember, so long as she remembers anything, every detail of that glorious time. The stir and bustle of London as she drove through the summer dusk to Charing Cross. The clangour of the traffic under the sonorous roof of the great station, the cross lights raying the misty canopy of smoke and steam, the shrill whistle of the guard and answering scream and pant of the engine, the delicious little shock with which the train started, the smooth, rapid journey through the darkening fields as the last dying gleams of day gave place to the mild light of the stars. Dover, with the boat waiting to receive them, puffing and groaning at the quay as if as impatient as any item of its living freight to span the thread of water which separated them from the goal of their pilgrimage. Steady lights ashore, long wavering tracks of brightness in the water, a salt smelling

breeze acting on healthy lungs and juvenile imaginations like a sort of aerial champagne, hollow trampings of heavy feet about the echoing deck, callings and counter callings of hoarse voices, a panting and rumbling from the engine-room, a sudden vertiginous, half fearful and wholly delicious sense of movement, settling to a rhythmic, snake-like motion as the boat takes the open water and glides to sea. A perfect night, the air, despite its briny crispness, soft to the cheek as the touch of velvet, great white stars dropping pure light down on the silver-crested waves of the void black water, just enough wind to make the vessel dance a steady and gentle minuet to the merry flapping and crackling of the steamer overhead.

Effie stood and watched the lights of Dover and their trails in the water fade from sight till the great beacon towering above them was the only rival of the patient stars. That faded too, little by little, and she was still straining her eyes after its last faint speck of brightness, when Douglas touched her on the shoulder.

“You ’ll see the lights of Grisnez in a minute or two, Effie.”

The girl clung to his arm, and together they looked forward over the plunging prow of the vessel till the Star of France flickered on their vision, faint as the last glimpse they had caught of the lights of Dover. They watched it grow, flashing out, after every brief minute of obscurity, with greater brilliance. The girl’s bright eyes dwelt upon it with a hungry eager-

ness for the great unknown world it seemed to typify to her fervent imagination. All that she had ever read of the history and literature of France was palpitating in her mind. Douglas could feel her heart beating against his arm. He could but think of that long bygone time, when he, as ardent and hopeful, well-nigh as innocent and pure, as the child who stood beside him, had first looked upon the beacon toward which they were sailing, with wonder and imagination and hope all seething in his bosom. He looked at the girl with a sad, wistful fondness in the dark eyes which gleamed from the penthouse of his grizzled brows, glad in her innocent joy, touched and pleased by her simple enthusiasm.

Calais, the scene of Dover over again, with a difference, a difference which proved to Effie what she found it difficult to believe, that at last she stood on foreign soil. A clamour of voices shouting profane French and ruinous English, shifting, shadowy figures in the alternate gleams and glooms of the quay, stolid *douaniers*, impervious to untravelled English matrons and their broods, dubious of the intention of the French government in relation to their effects, a knot of red-breeched soldiers, unimposing in stature but tremendous in regard to moustaches. Mrs. Campbell emerges from the ladies' cabin, dolefully apathetic in deportment, and with a complexion of sage green: the poor lady's first experience of salt water has been discomfoting.

“Are you hungry, Effie?” Douglas asks. “We have an hour before the train starts for Paris.”

“I am indeed!” Effie answers. “Though I don’t believe I should have known it if you had not asked me.”

So they go together to the buffet, a place so unlike the drear barracks which usurp that name in England, as is readily conceivable; with prettily painted walls and ceiling, innumerable little tables clad in snowy drapery and set out with the brightest of glass and cutlery, with a general air of fresh gaiety and spick-and-span neatness about it, where young gentlemen with waxed moustaches suspend the rattling of dominoes and the consumption of *petits verres* to gaze at the beautiful young Englishwoman. And indeed they might have travelled far indeed to find anything more delightful. The girl’s happiness shone in her face, her cheeks were rich with colour, her bright eyes roved with eager curiosity over every object within their ken. The very waiter was proud to serve her, and not a moustachio’d breaker of hearts in the room but envied the sad-faced, grizzled, elderly gentleman to whom she chattered so gaily.

On hissed the train again, where Douglas heroically foregoes his pipe till his cousin goes to sleep, then he lights up and watches Effie as she leans back in her corner, too happy to talk, too excited to sleep, looking out on the fat French pastures as the train glides swiftly through the dimly luminous night, till she can

contain her happiness in silence no longer, and crosses over to him.

“How good you are!” She put her arms round his neck and nestled to him in her pretty childish fashion. “I think you’re the best, kindest old dear in the world!”

He put his arm round her, and she sat still, looking out dreamily at the shadowy trees and hedges as they flitted by to the rhythmic waltz played by the panting engine and the ringing wheels, till she fell asleep.

Douglas’s thoughts were with the past; he glanced at the innocent sleeping face pillowed on his shoulder, and could have thought that it was that other face which had been his delight and torment eighteen years ago—years which had passed so slowly and yet seemed now so short. Where was she, that other Effie, so passionately loved, so tenderly pitied and regretted?

“Dead!” he murmured the words in his muffled hand. “Dead years ago. She must be dead. No word from her, no sign, no question about the child she left behind.”

He looked again at the child’s face, and his thoughts flew to the future. A thousand times the girl’s marvellous likeness to her unhappy mother had frightened him. He remembered her as she was on that night of Halloween when they had first met, radiant in youth and hope and beauty, as his Effie was now, and as he had last seen her, shrinking, haggard, shamefaced. All his love, all his strength had not sufficed to guard

her from evil. And now she seemed to have returned to earth, her old innocent and happy self, to wring his heart with fresh torments, perhaps, torments greater than he had suffered in the past. For there was in his love for this second Effie a perfection of purity, an utter and complete self-abnegation, as a father's love for a cherished daughter, to which he had only come in the former case after purgation of earthly passion by prolonged and terrible sorrow. This child was more to him than her mother had been; had she been veritably *his* he could not have loved her with a keener devotion. She was mother and child in one.

“God help me to shield her from all harm!” he prayed.

Effie woke as the train clashed and roared into the Gare du Nord with reverberate echoes as of theatrical thunder.

“Paris!” she cried. “Oh, is it Paris?”

“Aye,” said Douglas, “Paris, sure enough.”

They got their luggage passed by the *douane*, where even the impassable officials, charmed by the girl's bright face and childish impatience, were moved to make good speed in their examination, and scrawled their chalk hieroglyphics on the trunks after scant scrutiny of their contents, and, mounting into their *fiacre*, were driven by the bulbous-nosed, white-hatted *cocher* along the interminable Rue Lafayette, past the Opéra, and along the Rue de la Paix to a quiet little

hotel in the Rue Balzac. The Arc de Triomphe, which Effie was proud of knowing at first sight, was gleaming dimly in the early summer dawn as they reached their destination, and the birds were twittering in the fresh green of the trees.

Effie was afoot early that morning, and in her wild curiosity to see all that Paris had to show ran poor Mrs. Campbell quite off her feet in the first two days. But Douglas was her willing servant and courier, and made his staid middle age keep pace with her youth with the best grace in the world. They did things quietly, as became their modest income, but there were a good many wealthier people then in Paris who got less pleasure out of the city than they. The pits of many theatres knew them, the long corridors of the Louvre and the avenues of Versailles and St. Cloud. They passed delicious hours at the open-air concerts and cafés on the Champs Elysées, fields truly elysian to the ardent and untravelled girl. They made pilgrimages to all the spots Douglas remembered in connection with his student life, to the rambling old *hôtel Garni*, in which he had lodged, and sat in the gallery of the Odéon on the very seats which he and his chosen chum — a great surgeon now, whose name was known through Europe — had occupied on his first visit to that famous temple of the drama.

Of all the delights which Paris offered to Effie, the opera was the greatest. Music was her passion, and Douglas, who hardly knew “God Save the Queen”

from the "Marseillaise," was as happy in watching her pleasure in listening to it as she herself.

It was at the opera that the one remarkable event of the last eighteen years of his life happened to Douglas.

He and Effie and his cousin were seated in the *parterre* one evening, awaiting the rising of the curtain on the last act of "Faust," when a party, consisting of two ladies and half a dozen gentlemen, entered a box on the grand tier. They were laughing and chattering merrily among themselves, and made a considerable bustle in taking their places, so that they naturally attracted a good deal of attention from the rest of the house. Douglas, looking idly in their direction, gave a sudden start.

One of the ladies was Effie Hetherington !

He stared at her as if fascinated. She was fuller in figure, and years had not left her face unchanged ; but it was she, the lost and unforgotten, beyond the possibility of the most shadowy doubt.

Fortunately for Douglas, the business on the stage was for a moment of such enthralling interest both to Effie and his cousin that neither had noticed the sudden movement which had followed his recognition of his lost love, nor the fixed gaze he continued to bend upon her face as she leaned upon the edge of the box. He heard the pulsation of the huge orchestra and the voices from the crowded stage, faint and distant as the humming of a cloud of summer flies, leaning slightly forward, grasping the partition-rail in front of him.

How long he had sat thus fascinated he never knew, then or afterwards. It was probably only for a few seconds, it seemed to last a short eternity.

He was first faintly recalled to surrounding conditions by a movement on the part of the woman he watched. Her face, which, as she listened idly to the chatter of a gentleman beside her, had been turned with a vague smile on the stage, suddenly changed its colour and expression; a grey pallor and a look of fear, almost of horror, grew over it. She wiped her lips nervously with the kerchief she held in her hand, and her head turned in the direction of Douglas, at first slowly, her eyes, with an unnatural strained expression, quickly searching the long lines of faces beneath her, as if in mortal dread of what they sought so eagerly. At last they rested on his face.

She sat for a moment as if turned to stone, the terrible pallor of her face deepening as she looked at him, her jaw drooping, her eyes glazed as if with the last pangs of mortality. Her companion seized her hand with a startled look, and at that touch the spell seemed to dissolve. She smiled faintly, murmured a few words in answer to his anxious queries, and, rising, passed to the back of the box. Her female companion and the other cavaliers looked round as if questioning the reason of her movement, and then rose as if to accompany her. Scarce knowing what he did, Douglas rose also, and with a scarcely intelligible word of excuse to Effie and his cousin, struggled

through the close-packed mass of spectators in the *parterre* towards the exit. The crowd was too dense to admit of rapid movement, and his heart felt like bursting as he thought of the possibility of this short glimpse of the woman he loved being all that might be vouchsafed him after so many years of cruel doubt.

He got out into the air at last, and reached the carriage entrance. His eyes, unnaturally sharpened by the tense excitement, caught a glimpse of the second lady in the box just as she mounted a closed carriage. The door was banged, the footman clambered to the coachman's side, and the vehicle moved rapidly in the direction of the Rue de la Paix. Douglas followed it at a run, and coming presently to an empty *fiacre*, jumped into it and bade the driver continue the chase. The horse was, unfortunately, old and spavined, and made but slow progress, but still managed to keep the leading vehicle in sight until it turned into a street in the neighbourhood of the Parc Monceau. Douglas turned the corner in time to see its disappearance through a *porte-cochère*. He hastily paid and dismissed his driver, completing the distance on foot. As he entered the courtyard of the house, he was accosted by a concierge. He slipped a five-franc piece into the man's hand, and asked the name of the person, lady or gentleman, who lived there, and had just returned in the carriage.

“Madame Bertillon, *au premier*, monsieur.”

“A handsome woman,” said Douglas, whose wits

were beginning to work again. "Who and what is she?"

"A very amiable lady," said the concierge, with the quiet smile of his class in answering such a question.

A pang passed through Douglas's heart, but he turned his face away to hide the spasm which crossed it, and entered the house, mounting to the first floor. He pressed the electric button beside the door of the suite, which was rapidly opened by a liveried servant.

"Madame Bertillon?"

"C'est ici, monsieur. Does madame expect monsieur?"

"No; say that a gentleman, a stranger, begs earnestly to see her on business of the greatest importance."

He was shown into a little salon, beautifully furnished and decorated, and as he waited, the sound of laughter and the clinking of glasses reached his ears from a neighbouring room. Presently Madame Bertillon entered. She was, as Douglas had said, a handsome woman, tall, dark, with inscrutable black eyes, which at their first glance at him absorbed every detail of his appearance.

"You desired to see me, monsieur?"

"Yes. You have just returned from the Opéra, madame?" She bent her head. "One of your party was a lady, an Englishwoman?" She replied by the same movement. "My name is Douglas — Richard Douglas. Will you, madame, have the kindness to

tell that lady that I am here, and that I beg her by all she holds sacred to see me, if but for a moment ? ”

“ But she is not here, monsieur. ”

“ Not here ? ”

“ No ; she left us at the entrance of the Opéra, and went home. ”

“ For God’s sake, madame, deal honestly with me ! ”

The lady flushed angrily for a moment, but there was such a yearning and distress readable in his face that she held back the words which had risen to her lips, and answered, quietly —

“ I am doing so, the lady you seek is not here. ”

“ Will you give me her address ? ”

The lady hesitated.

“ Monsieur will see that he places me in an awkward predicament. He is a stranger to me, and the lady herself is only a casual acquaintance. It is a liberty I dare not take ! ”

“ Are you following her instructions in refusing me ? ” asked Douglas.

The lady shrugged her shoulders very slightly, but made no further answer.

Douglas’s head drooped haggardly upon his breast, and the woman watched him with something like pity in her bold black eyes.

“ Will you give her a message ? ” he asked, looking up again.

“ Any message you please, and willingly, ” she replied.

“Tell her,” he began, his deep voice throbbing as all he would have told her, had she stood then before him, boiled like lava in his heart — “tell her ——” he controlled himself by a strong effort. “Tell her,” he continued quietly, “that Richard Douglas is here in Paris, and that the child who sat beside him to-night is her daughter.”

The lady waited for him to continue.

“That is all.”

“She shall have the message, monsieur. Will you give me your address?”

“Hôtel de l’Amérique, Rue Balzac.”

The lady promised him the earliest possible information, and with that promise he rested content perforce.

The dawn broke over the city ere he reached home, worn out with long walking. He came down to breakfast haggard and weary, in a fever of suppressed excitement, puzzling Effie and Mrs. Campbell by his strange bearing.

The day passed and brought no news, and the next and the next again. On the fourth day came a curt missive, with no signature, to the effect that the lady whose address Mr. Douglas desired to know had quitted Paris, giving no hint of her whereabouts. Douglas groaned as he read the few cold words of the note, with a bitterer despair than he had known since Effie Hetherington’s flight eighteen years ago. She had seen both himself and the child at the Opéra, the terror of recognition in her face

had been proof enough of that. The refusal to see him he could have understood. Eighteen years of thought about Effie, of every remembered act and word, had given him an insight into her character. She was still the one woman on earth to him, the only feminine presence which had had power to illumine his passion and fill his life. But much of the old illusion was gone. He had come to see her more as in truth she was, fickle and headstrong, a feather blown by any chance gust of emotion, purposeless, and if not quite heartless, with no capacity of steady aim or settled purpose, neither affectionate nor passionate, but a mingling and neutralisation of both those natures, loving pleasure and abhorring pain. But that, after eighteen years of absence from the child she had borne, she should still reject the chance of meeting her, seemed strange and cruel. Was it from fear of the pain of the meeting, or from a desire to spare the child the evil knowledge of the circumstances of her birth, or from simple callousness? He could not think it was the last. But the poison of doubt and disappointment so rankled in his blood that at moments he was well-nigh mad. He had thought and believed that his passion for the child-woman he had known eighteen years ago was dead. It had sprung to life again in his heart at the mere sight of her face. He was possessed by a longing to see her again, to hear her voice, perhaps to touch her hand.

That old familiar demon, once reinstated, so shook him that he could not rest. He compelled himself to some semblance of calm before his cousin and his ward, and went about with them as much as possible during the day. But at night his passion conquered him, driving him out on long aimless rambles about the city. He had no sleep, save for brief moments of lethargy, when physical fatigue conquered him, and night after night he beat the pavement of Paris, south, east, north, and west, with a half-unconscious craving for the anodyne that muscular exertion will sometimes bring to the overweighted brain and jaded nerves.

One morning, some ten days after that brief glimpse of Effie, he stood upon the Pont des Arts. The sun had just risen, and was gilding the roofs and chimneys of the higher buildings. A breeze of dawn stirred the languid air and ruffled the sluggish waves of the river. Overhead a cloudless sky of illimitable depth and stainless purity stretched from horizon to horizon. The shadows of the buildings on either hand, and of the craft at rest upon the river, were reflected in the stream well-nigh as clearly as in a mirror. Presently, as he broodingly watched the scene, a glint of bright colour caught his eye in the centre of the stream. He watched it rise and fall with the slight motion of the water, at first with neither comprehension nor inquiry of its nature, till suddenly, with a gasp of horror, he saw that it was a

woman's dress. He ran from the bridge and down to the causeway, and, as he came upon it, a boat, manned by officers in the uniform of the Parisian police, darted from the opposite shore swiftly in the direction of the object. The boat paused for a moment beside it, and Douglas saw a limp and dripping form lifted from the water. The slow pace at which the boat approached the landing-stage told its own story. Had a spark of life remained it would have come at full speed. The boat came to the quay almost at Douglas's feet. Slowly and silently two of its occupants climbed the short flight of steps leading from the surface of the river, bearing their unconscious burden. They laid her on the stones, and Douglas, with a scream like a woman's, fell on his knees beside the body of Effie Hetherington.

“Effie! Effie! Oh, my God! she can't be dead! It is n't possible!”

He appealed wildly to the men, who stood looking down on him in silent wonder. The others came running up from the boat, and stood around him as he called on the dead woman's name, pressing her cold, dank body to his heart with eager, hungry hands.

“She's dead! she's dead!” he moaned, and let her slip from his hands back upon the stones of the quay.

The men stood whispering among themselves as he knelt with clasped hands above the body, and

one among them, approaching him, addressed him. Douglas stared at him, with no comprehension of the words, till the question was repeated.

“ You knew this unhappy lady, sir ? ” Douglas’s face was answer enough ; he was so numbed with horror and despair as to have lost the power of speech. “ The body must go the Morgue. Will monsieur accompany us ? ”

He saw the dripping figure laid upon a stretcher, heard the word given, and mechanically followed the silent procession to the little building behind the Cathedral, the sad scene of the epilogue of so many tragedies. As he walked his brain began to work again. A sudden thought made him start and clutch the arm of the officer at his side.

“ The Morgue ! ” he exclaimed. “ Will the body be exposed ? ”

“ I see no reason for it,” said the officer, “ as things stand. Bodies are exposed, not for the gratification of morbid curiosity, but for recognition, or to procure evidence of the circumstances of death. Monsieur can state the identity of the lady, and that should be sufficient.”

There was a little comfort in the reply, but as they walked on Douglas became conscious of obtruding doubts. His knowledge of Effie dated eighteen years back. He knew nothing of her life during all that period. The desire of saving her from that crowning degradation steadied his brain, and set him devising

means of escaping it. They arrived at their melancholy bourn, where the guardian of the Morgue received them with the stolid indifference natural to a man whose life was passed amid kindred horrors.

“C’est dommage,” he remarked, looking at the body with his hands in his pockets and a blackened pipe between his teeth, “une femme si belle.” The officer told him of Douglas’s recognition of the dead body, and of his desire to save the body from the exposure customary at the Morgue. “C’est selon,” he remarked apathetically; and, turning to the volume in which new arrivals were registered, asked Douglas what he knew. He shook his head at his communication. His orders were peremptory, and the evidence was insufficient to obviate the need of exposure. Under what circumstances had the lady died — by murder, suicide, or accident? Where was her domicile? Was she married or single? The police would ask to know all these things, and the means for finding them was the exposure of the body according to law. He was *désolé*, but what could he do? The officer standing by supported the grisly official’s dictum with a pitying shrug.

The very horror of the situation helped to steady Douglas’s mind. At all costs and by any means the final insult of the exposure of Effie’s body to the brutal curiosity of a Parisian mob must be averted. But how?

The remembrance of the lady of the Parc Monceau flashed through his brain. She could do at least this much — she could state the name under which Effie had been known in Paris, her domicile, perhaps her friends and acquaintances. He rushed from the Morgue into the street and found a carriage.

Arrived at Madame Bertillon's house, he roused the sleeping concierge, and bade him inform madame of his urgent need of seeing her at once. He accompanied the man into the house, and waited in the little salon into which he had been conducted on his former visit. Madame's answer was, as he had expected, that she could not see him at that hour. He must come later. He sent the concierge back with a more peremptory message, which the lady this time answered in person. The scowl of lowering anger on her handsome features changed at the look Douglas bent upon her. He gave her no time to ask questions, but in one eager sentence told her all. Perhaps it was a lingering remnant of womanly feeling, perhaps it was a feeling that to cross the will of this wild, fierce man might be dangerous, perhaps a mingling of the two, but she submitted to his imperative order that she should accompany him, and returned, after a brief absence, dressed for the street. Douglas had a second carriage in waiting, and the driver, incited by the promise of a triple fare, covered the distance to the Morgue in a wonderfully little time.

Madame Bertillon looked down on the dead face.

“I knew this lady. Her name is Lucie Vanstone. She is an Englishwoman, and lived at 106, Rue Colbert, Champs Elysées.”

“Is that enough to save the body from exposure?” Douglas asked the *gardien*.

“Yes, unless by further orders from the police. But there is still the post mortem. That will be easy. She died by drowning, poor little one. I know the symptoms, I. I have not been *gardien* here for fifteen years without learning so much.”

During the next day or two Douglas learned more than enough of that long space in Effie's life which had been so complete a blank to him. La Belle Anglaise had been a brilliant figure in the half world of Paris for some years past, and the gossiping journals chronicled her triumphs and eccentricities with comments cynical, flippant, and pitying, and made guesses of all sorts as to the secret of her tragedy. But it remained a secret. There was not the faintest suspicion of foul play on the part of any one, and suicide seemed as unlikely a solution of the mystery as murder. She was still young, still beautiful, with no troubles, monetary or otherwise, which could have prompted her to self-destruction. The brilliant, foolish, wicked life was ended, the passionate and world-worn heart was at rest at last. Among the thousands who babbled of the mystery of her death, one silent, suffering soul alone could guess

its secret. The man who had loved her with so pure and passionate a devotion, whose life she had wrecked, who loved her memory still with a divine compassion which no revelation of her infamy could tarnish, still found one pitiful and tragic explanation of her fate. That chance glimpse of the man she had so deeply wronged, and of the child she had abandoned, had wrought her nature to the pitch of self-annihilation. Horrible as the thought was, Douglas found something that almost might be called comfort in it. Better so, oh, surely, better so ! than that she should have gone back unrepentant and unmoved to the life she had been so long content to live.

* * * * *

“ You must find some means of amusing yourself alone to-morrow, Lizzie,” said Douglas to his cousin a night or two later. “ I want Effie to drive with me to-morrow. The carriage will be here at ten o’clock, my child. Be ready.”

He spoke with his ordinary grave calm, and though both Effie and his cousin had remarked the settled gloom and the secrecy regarding his movements of the last few days, they asked no questions.

“ If you have a plain, dark dress with you,” he added, after a moment’s pause, “ put it on.”

They drove away together in silence, and were clear of Paris before Effie ventured to ask the purpose of their drive.

“We are going,” said Douglas, “to a funeral at the church of St. Cloud.”

“A funeral,” repeated Effie, wonderingly.

“Yes. The funeral of a lady.” His voice was hardly more than ordinarily grave, though his eyes dwelt on Effie with an intense, haggard pity and affection. “I knew her years ago, when she was young and innocent and beautiful, like — like you, my dear!” The calm voice shook a little at its own veiled meaning. “She died the other day, alone and friendless. It is a fancy of mine that you should stand with me beside her grave.”

He said no more, and the silence remained unshaken between them till they reached the church, and took their way amid the flowering mounds. The broad expanse of tranquil country smiled about them, dotted here and there with peaceful villages and farms, verdant masses of trees, and below hummed the ceaseless tides of the great city.

They came at last upon a new-made grave — the first that had ever opened at Effie’s feet. A faint sound of measured and monotonous singing in the little church ceased, and a minute after the funeral *cortège*, led by a white-haired priest, came into the clear, bright sunshine, and approached them.

The solemn words were spoken, the clods pattered with hollow reverberations on the coffin lid. Douglas stood by, dry-eyed, with bent head, holding Effie’s hand in his. The tears were raining down her face,

they sparkled like dewdrops on the little bunch of flowers she took from her bosom and dropped into the grave.

“Say,” whispered Douglas, “God bless her!”

She repeated the words brokenly after him, and together they turned hand in hand and left the grave.

THE END.

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