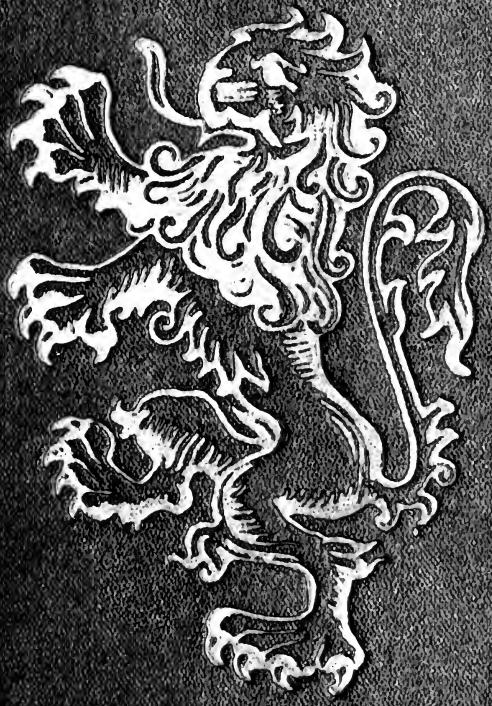

Edith Windus
1891.

THE LINDSAYS.

THE LINDSAYS

A Romance of Scottish Life

BY

JOHN K. LEYS

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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CONTENTS OF VOL. I.

THE LINDSAYS.

PROLOGUE.—FOUR LETTERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRST LETTER.

Hubert Blake to Sophy Meredith.

THE CASTLE FARM, MUIRBURN,
KYLESHIRE, N.B., *Sept.* 12, 187–.

MY DEAR SOPHY,

I only arrived here last night, so you see I am losing no time in redeeming my promise. I can hardly tell you what I think of my new cousins; they are not to be known in a day, I can see that much. As for the country and its inhabitants generally—well, they are as different from an English county and

English country-folks as if they were in different continents, and that is all I can say at present.

I left the railway at a tiny station called Kilmartin, and found 'the coach' waiting in the station yard. It was not a coach, but a queer dumpy omnibus, about two-thirds of the size of a London 'bus, with three big, raw-boned horses harnessed to it. I was lucky enough to get a seat in front beside the driver. It was just a little before sunset; and I wish I could put before you in words the freshness of the scene. We were ascending a rising ground in a very leisurely fashion. On either side of the road was a steep bank thickly clothed with crowsfoot and wild thyme. Above us on either side stretched a belt of Scotch firs. The sunset rays shone red on the trunks of the pines, and here and there one could catch through them a sight of the ruddy west, showing like a great painted window in a cathedral. The air was soft, and laden with the sweet smell of the firs, and yet t was cool and exhilarating.

As soon as we got to the top of the ridge we began to rattle down the other side at a great rate. It was really very pleasant, and thinking to conciliate the weather-beaten coachman at my side, I confided to him my opinion that of all species of travelling coaching was the most delightful.

'Specially on a winter's nicht, wi' yer feet twa lumps o' ice, an' a wee burn o' snaw-watter runnin' doon the nape o' yer neck!' responded the Scotch Jehu.

I laughed, and glanced at the man sitting on my right, a big, brown-faced, gray-haired farmer, in a suit of heavy tweeds, who sat leaning his two hands on the top of an enormous stick. He was smiling grimly to himself, as if he enjoyed the stranger being set down.

'Fine country,' I remarked, by way of conciliating *him*.

'Ay,' said he, with a glance at the horizon out of the sides of his eyes, but without moving a muscle of his face.

'And a very fine evening,' I persisted.

'Ay—micht be waur.'

Upon this I gave it up, lighted a cigar, and set myself to study the landscape. We had got to a considerable elevation above the sea-level; and in spite of the glorious evening and the autumn colours just beginning to appear in the hedges, the country had a dreary look. Imagine one great stretch of pasture barely reclaimed from moorland, with the heather and stony ground cropping up every here and there, divided into fields, not by generous spreading hedgerows, but by low walls of blue stone, built without mortar. The only wood to be seen was narrow belts of firs, planted here and there behind a farmhouse, or between two fields, and somehow their long bare stems and heavy mournful foliage did not add to the brightness of the scene, though they gave it a character of its own. But the country is not all moor and pasture. It is broken every now and then by long, deep, winding ravines, clothed with the larch and

the mountain ash, each one the home of a bright brawling stream.

We had travelled for half an hour in silence, when the farmer suddenly spoke.

'Ye'll be frae the sooth, I'm thinkin'.'

He was not looking at me, but contemplating the road in front of us from under a pair of the bushiest eyebrows I ever saw. For a moment I thought of repaying his bad manners by giving him no answer, but thinking better of it I said 'Ay,' after the manner of the country.

'Ye'll no hae mony beasts like they in England, I fancy,' said he.

We were passing some Ayrshire cows at the time, small, but splendid animals of their kind; and I soothed the old man's feelings by admitting the fact.

'Are ye traivellin' faur?' he asked.

'Not much farther, I believe.'

'Ye're no an agent, are ye?'

'No,' I answered.

'Nor a factor?'

'No.'

(He was evidently puzzled to make out what an Englishman was about in his country, and I determined not to gratify his curiosity.)

'Ye'll maybe be the doctor?'

'No.'

'Sharely ye're no the new minister?' he exclaimed with an expression of unfeigned alarm.

I calmed his fears, and again we proceeded on our way in silence.

When we had gone perhaps some seven or eight miles from the railway station, I noticed a stout dog-cart standing at the corner of a by-road, under a tall, straggling thorn hedge. The youth who was seated in it made a sign to the coachman to stop, and I was made aware that the dog-cart had been sent for me. I got down, and as I bade good-night to the cross-questioning farmer, I observed a grim smile of triumph on his firmly compressed lips. He evidently knew the dog-cart, and would now be able to trace the mysterious stranger.

I and my portmanteau were finally left on the side of the road, and the young man in the dog-cart civilly turned the vehicle round (with some difficulty on account of the narrow road), and drew up beside me, to save my carrying my luggage a dozen yards. At first I was a little uncertain whether I had one of my third (or fourth, which is it?) cousins before me, or simply a young man from Mr. Lindsay's farm. He was dressed in very coarse tweeds, and his hands were rough, and spoke of manual labour, and he breathed the incense of the farm-yard; but I thought his finely-cut features and sensitive lips bespoke him to be of gentle blood, and, luckily, I made a hit in the right direction.

'You are one of Mr. Lindsay's sons, I think —that is to say, one of my cousins,' I said, as I shook hands with him.

The youth's face lighted up with a blush and a pleasant smile as he answered that he was, and held open the apron of the dog-cart for me to get in. In another moment we

were off, the sturdy old mare between the shafts carrying us along at a very fair pace.

There are some people, Sophy, who wear their characters written on their faces, and Alec Lindsay is one of them. I could see, even as we drove together along that solitary lane in the autumn twilight, that his was a frank, ingenuous nature, shy, sensitive, and reserved. I mean that his shyness made him reserved, but his thoughts and feelings showed themselves in his face without his knowing it, so little idea had he of purposely concealing himself. Such a face is always interesting; and besides, there was an under-expression of dissatisfaction, of unrest, I hardly know what to call it, in his eyes, which was scarcely natural in so young a lad. He could not be more than eighteen or nineteen.

After half an hour's drive we approached the little town, or village—it is rather too large for a village, and much too small to be called a town—of Muirburn. It consists of one long double row of two-storied houses

built of stone and whitewashed, with one or two short cross streets at intervals. The houses had not a scrap of garden in front of them, nothing but a broad footpath, the playground of troops of children. The lower part of these dwellings had a bare, deserted appearance, but I found that they were used in almost every case as workrooms, being fitted up with looms. In one or two of the windows a light twinkled, and we could hear the noise of the shuttle as we passed.

In the middle of the village stood a large square building, whitewashed all over, and provided with two rows of small square windows, placed at regular intervals, one above and one below.

'What is that building?' I asked.

'The Free Church,' answered my companion, with a touch of pride.

A church! Why, it was hardly fit to be a school-house. A mean iron railing, which had been painted at some remote epoch, alone protected it from the street. It was the very

embodiment of ugliness; its sole ornament being a stove-pipe which protruded from one corner of the roof. Never, in all my life, whether among Hindoos, Mahometans, or Irish peasants, had I seen so supremely ugly an edifice dedicated to the service of the Almighty.

'That's the United Presbyterian one,' said Alec, pointing with his whip to a building on the other side of the street, similar to the one we had just passed, but of less hideous aspect. It was smaller, and it could boast a front of hewn stone, and neat latticed windows, while a narrow belt of greensward fenced it off from the road.

Just then we passed a knot of men, perhaps ten or a dozen, standing at the corner of one of the side streets. All had their hands in their pockets, all were in their shirt-sleeves, and all wore long white aprons. They were doing nothing whatever — not talking, nor laughing, nor quarrelling, but simply looking down the street. At present our humble

equipage was evidently an object of supreme interest to them.

'What are these men doing there?' I asked.

'They're weavers,' answered Alec, as if the fact contained a reason in itself for their conduct. 'They always stand there when they are not working, in all weathers, wet and dry; it's their chief diversion.'

'Diversion!' I repeated; but at that moment the sweet tinkle of a church-bell fell upon my ears. I almost expected to see the people cross themselves, it sounded so much like the Angelus. It is the custom, I find, to ring the bell of the parish church at six in the morning and eight in the evening, though there is no service, and no apparent need for the ceremony. I wonder if it can be really a survival of the Vesper-bell?

The bell was still ringing as we passed the church that possessed it. This was 'the Established Church,' my companion informed me — a building larger than either of its competitors, and boasting a belfry.

'What does a small town like this want with so many chapels?' I asked my cousin.

I could see that I had displeased him, whether by speaking of Muirburn as a small town, or by inadvertently calling the 'churches' chapels, I was not sure. As he hesitated for an answer I hastened to add:

'You are all of the same religion—substantially, I mean?'

'Well, yes.'

'Then why don't you club together and have one handsome place of worship instead of three very—well, plain buildings?'

'What?' exclaimed Alec, and then he burst into a roar of laughter. 'That's a good joke,' said he, as if I had said something superlatively witty; 'but I say,' he continued, with a serious look in his bonny blue eyes, 'you'd better not say anything of that kind to my father.'

'Why not?' I asked, but Alec did not answer me.

His attention was attracted by a child

which was playing in the road, right in front of us. He called out, but the little one did not seem to hear him, and he slackened the mare's pace almost to a walk. We were just approaching the last of the side streets, and at that moment a gig, drawn by a powerful bay horse, appeared coming rapidly round the corner. It was evident that there must be a collision, though, owing to Alec's having slackened his pace so much, it could not be a serious one.

But the child? Before I could cry out, before I could think, Alec was out of the trap and snatching the little boy from under the horse's very nose. I never saw a narrower escape; how he was not struck down himself, I cannot imagine.

The next moment the gig, which had brushed against our vehicle without doing it much damage, had disappeared down the road; and a woman, clad in a short linsey petticoat and a wide sleeveless bodice of printed cotton, had rushed out of the opposite house and was

roundly abusing Alec for having nearly killed her child. Without paying much attention to her, Alec walked round to the other side of the dog-cart to see what damage had been done, and muttering to himself, 'I'm thankful it's no worse,' he climbed back into his place, and we resumed our journey, while the young Caledonian was acknowledging sundry tender marks of his mother's affection with screams like those of a locomotive.

Another half-hour's drive brought us to a five-barred gate which admitted us to a narrow and particularly rough lane. We jolted on for a few minutes, and then the loud barking of several dogs announced that we had arrived at the farm. But I must keep my description of its inhabitants for my next epistle. I am too sleepy to write more. Good-night.

Your affectionate cousin,

HUBERT BLAKE.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECOND LETTER.

Hubert Blake to Sophy Meredith.

THE CASTLE FARM, MUIRBURN, N.B.
September 15.

DEAR SOPHY,

I think I shall like this place, and shall probably stay till the beginning of winter. I have begun a large picture of a really beautiful spot which I found close by two days ago, and I should like to see my painting well on to completion before I return, lest I should be tempted to leave it unfinished, like so many others, when I get back to town.

I had a very hospitable welcome from Mr. Lindsay on the night I arrived. He met me at the door—a tall, broad-shouldered, upright man, perhaps sixty years of age, with the

regular Scotch type of features, large nose, and high cheek-bones. I could see, even at first, that he is the sort of man it would not be pleasant to quarrel with.

He led me into a wide passage, and thence into a large low-roofed kitchen with a stone floor. Here there were seated two or three men and as many women, whom I took to be farm-servants. There was no light in the place, except that which came from a bit of 'cannel' coal, stuck in the peat fire. The women were knitting; the men were doing nothing. No one took the trouble of rising as we passed, except one of the young men who went to look after the mare.

After crossing the kitchen we passed through a narrow passage, and entered a pleasant and good-sized room in which a large coal fire and a moderator lamp were burning.

Did you ever see a perfectly beautiful woman, Sophy? I doubt it. I never did till I saw Margaret Lindsay. I was so astonished to see a lady at the Castle Farm that I positively

stared at the girl for a moment, but she came forward and shook hands with the utmost self-possession.

'I'm afraid you have had a cold drive, Mr. Blake,' she said; and though she spoke in a very decidedly Scotch accent, the words did not sound so harshly from her lips as they had done when spoken by her father. For the first time I thought that the Doric might have an agreeable sound.

I will try to tell you what Margaret is like. She must be nearly twenty years of age, for she is evidently older than her brother, but her complexion is that of a girl of sixteen, by far the finest and softest I ever saw. She is tall, but not too tall for elegance. Her eyes are brown, like her father's, and her hair is a dark chestnut. Her features are simply perfect—low forehead, beautifully moulded eyebrows, short upper lip—you can imagine the rest. You will say that my description would fit a marble bust nearly as well as a girl of nineteen, and your criticism would be just. Margaret's

face is rather wanting in expression. It is calm, reserved, not to say hard. But her deliberate almost proud manner suits her admirably.

I can see you smiling to yourself, and saying that you understand now my anxiety to get my picture finished before I leave the farm. All I can say is, you never were more mistaken in your life. I am not falling in love with this newly-discovered beauty, and I certainly don't intend to do anything so foolish. But I could look at her face by the hour together. I wonder whether there are any capabilities of passion under the cold exterior.

I took an opportunity when Alec was out of the room to narrate our little adventure by the way, and just as I finished my recital the hero of the story came in.

'So you managed to get run into on the way home, Alec,' said his father, with a look of displeasure. 'I should think you might have learned to drive by this time.'

The lad's face flushed, but he made no answer.

'Is the mare hurt?' asked the old man.

'No, she wasn't touched,' answered his son. 'One of the wheels will want a new spoke; that's all.'

'And is that nothing, sir?'

'No one could possibly have avoided the collision, such as it was,' said I; 'and I've seldom seen a pluckier thing than Alec did.'

The old man looked at me, and immediately changed the subject.

When tea (a remarkably substantial meal, by the way) was over, the farm-servants and the old woman who acts as housemaid were called into the large parlour in which we were sitting for prayers, or, as they call it here, 'worship.' I can't say I was edified, Sophy. I dare say I am not a particularly good judge of these matters, but really there seemed to me a very slight infusion of worship about the ceremony. First of all Bibles were handed round, and Mr. Lindsay proceeded to read a few lines from a metrical version of the Psalms, beginning in the middle of a Psalm

for the excellent reason that they had left off at that point on the preceding evening. Then they began to sing the same verses to a strange, pathetic melody. Margaret led the tune, and it was a pleasure to listen to her sweet unaffected notes, but the rough grumble of the old men and Betty's discordant squeak produced a really ridiculous effect. Then a chapter was read from the Bible, and then we rose up, turned round, and knelt down. Mr. Lindsay began an extempore prayer, which was partly an exposition of the chapter we had just heard read, and partly an address to the Almighty, which I won't shock you by describing. At the end of the prayer were some practical petitions, amongst them one on behalf of 'the stranger within our gates,' by which phrase your humble servant was indicated. The instant the word 'Amen' escaped from the lips of my host, there was a sudden shuffling of feet, and the little congregation had risen to their feet and were in full retreat before I had realized that the service was at

an end. I fully expected that this conduct would have called down a reproof from Mr. Lindsay, but it seemed to be accepted on all hands as the ordinary custom. Half an hour afterwards I was in bed, and sound asleep.

I awoke next morning to a glorious day. The harvest is late in these parts, you know, and the 'happy autumn fields,' some half cut, some filled with 'stooks' of corn, were stretching before my window down to a hollow, which I judged to be the bed of a river.

After breakfast I had an interview with my host, and managed to get my future arrangements put upon a proper footing. Of course I could not stay here for an indefinite time at Mr. Lindsay's expense; and though at first he scouted the proposal, I got him to consent that I should set up an establishment of my own in two half-empty rooms—the house is twice as large as the family requires—and be practically independent. I could see that the old man had a struggle between his pride and his love of hospitality on the one hand, and

the prospect of letting part of his house to a good tenant on the other; but I smoothed matters a little by asking to be allowed to remain as his guest until Monday. Poor man, I am sorry for him. He used to be a well-to-do if not a wealthy 'laird,' and owned not only the Castle Farm, but one or two others. Now, in consequence of his having become surety for a friend who left him to pay the piper, and as a result of several bad seasons, he has been forced to sell one farm and mortgage the others so heavily that he is practically worse off than if he were a tenant of the mortgagees. This 'come down' in the world has soured his temper, and developed a stinginess which I think is foreign to his real nature. I fancy, too, he had a great loss when his wife died. She was a woman, I am told, of education and refinement. It must have been from her that Margaret got her beauty, and Alec his fine eyes.

But I have not told you what the neighbourhood is like. Well, the farmhouse is

built on the side of a knoll, and at the top is a very respectable ruin. The castle, from which the farm takes its name, must have been a strong place at one time. The keep is still standing, and its walls are quite five feet thick. Besides the keep, time has spared part of the front, some of the buttresses, and some half-ruined doorways and windows. But the whole place is overgrown with weeds and nettles. No one takes the slightest interest in this relic of another age : nobody could tell me who built it, or give me even a shred of a legend about its history.

As I was wandering about the walls of the ruin, trying to select a point from which to sketch it, I was joined by Alec Lindsay. He had one or two books under his arm ; and he stopped short on seeing me, as if he had not expected to find anyone there.

'Don't let me interrupt you,' I said, beginning to move away. 'You make this place your study, I see.'

'Sometimes I bring my books up here,' he

replied. 'There is a corner under the wall of the tower which is quite sheltered from the wind. Even the rain can hardly reach it, and I have a glorious view of the sunset when I sit there on fine evenings.'

'I should like to see the place,' said I, anxious to put the lad at his ease; and he led me to a corner among the ruins, from which, as he said, a wide view was obtained.

Near at hand were pastures and harvest-fields. Beyond them was the bed of the river, fringed with wood, and the horizon was bounded by low moorland hills.

'From the top of that one,' said Alec, pointing to one of the hills, 'you can catch a glint of the sea. It shines like a looking-glass. I would like to see it near at hand.'

'Have you never been to the seaside?' I asked.

I must have betrayed my surprise by my voice, for the boy blushed as he answered:

'No; I have been to Glasgow once or twice, but I have never been to the salt water.'

(The seaside is always spoken of as 'the coast' or 'the salt water' in this part of the country.) 'I have never been beyond Muirburn, except once or twice, in my life,' he added, as the look of discontent which I fancied I had detected in his face grew stronger.

'May I look at your books?' I asked, by way of changing the subject.

'Oh yes; they're not much to look at,' he said with a blush.

I took them up—a Greek grammar, and a school-book containing simple passages of Greek for translation, with a vocabulary at the end of the volume.

'Is this how you spend your leisure time?' I asked.

'Not always—not very often,' answered Alec. 'Often I am lazy and go in for Euclid and algebra—I like them far better than Greek. And sometimes,' he added with hesitation, as if he were confessing a fault—'sometimes I waste my time with a novel.'

'I would not call it wasting time if you read good novels,' said I. 'What do you read?'

'Only Sir Walter and old volumes of *Blackwood;* they are all I have got.'

'You could not do better, in my opinion,' said I emphatically. 'Such books are just as necessary for your education as a Greek delectus.'

'Do you think so?' said the lad, with wondering eyes. 'These are not my father's notions.'

'Shall I leave you to your work now?' I asked, rising from the heather on which we were lying.

'I like to have you to talk to,' said Alec, half shyly, half frankly. 'I seldom do get anyone to talk to.'

'You have your sister,' I said involuntarily.

'Margaret is not like me. She has her own thoughts and her own ways; besides, she is a girl. Will you come and see the "Lover's Leap?" It's a bonny place.'

'Where is it?'

'Only half a mile up the Logan.'

'You mean the stream that runs through the valley down there?'

'No; that's the Nethan. The Logan falls into it about a mile farther up.'

We were descending the knoll as we talked; and on our way we saw a field where the reapers were at work. As we approached, we saw a tall form leave the field and come towards us. It was Alec's father.

'I think, Alec,' said the old man, 'you would be better employed helping to stack the corn, if you're too proud to take a hand at the shearing, rather than walking about doing nothing.'

The lad blushed furiously, and made no answer.

'Alec meant to have been at work over his books,' said I; 'but he was kind enough to show me something of the neighbourhood. It doesn't matter in the least, Alec; I can easily find my way alone.'

'Oh, if you have any need for the boy, that's another matter,' said Mr. Lindsay.

I protested again that I could find my way perfectly well, and moved off, while Alec turned into the field with a set look about his mouth that was not pleasant to see.

The cause of the discontent I had seen in the lad's face was plain enough now. He is treated like a child, as if he had no mind or will of his own. I wonder how the boy will turn out. It seems to me a toss-up; or rather, the chances are that he will break away altogether, and ruin himself.

I went on my way to the bank of the river, by the side of a double row of Scotch firs. It was one of those perfect September days when the air is still warm, when a thin haze is hanging over all the land, when there is no sound to be heard but now and then the chirp of a bird, or the far-off lowing of cattle—a day in which it is enough, and more than enough, to sit still and drink in the silent influences of earth and heaven, when

anything like occupation seems an insult to the sweetness and beauty of nature. Across the little river was a large plantation of firs, growing almost to the water's edge; and I could feel the balmy scent of them in the air.

As I reached the river I overtook Margaret Lindsay, who was walking a little way in advance of me. She had a book under her arm, an old volume covered in brown leather. We greeted each other, and I soon found that she was bound, like myself, for the 'Lover's Leap.'

'I will show you the place,' she said; 'we must cross the river here.'

As she spoke she stepped on a large flat stone that lay at the water's edge; and I saw that a succession of such stones, placed at intervals of about a yard, made a path by which the river could be crossed. The current was pretty strong, and as the water was rushing fast between the stones (which barely showed their heads above the stream), I

hastened to offer Margaret my hand. But the girl only glanced at me with a look of surprise, and with the nearest approach to a smile which I had seen in her face, she shook her head and began to walk over the stepping-stones with as much composure as if she had been moving across a floor. Now and then she had to make a slight spring to gain the next stone, and she did so with the ease and grace of a fawn. I followed a little way behind, and when we had gained the opposite side we walked in single file along the river-bank, till we came to the spot where the Logan came tumbling and dancing down the side of a rather steep hill to meet the larger stream. The hill was covered with brush-wood and bracken, and a few scattered trees; but a path seemed to have been made through the bushes, and up this path we began to scramble. Once or twice I ventured to offer Margaret my hand, but she declined my help, saying that she could get on better alone.

After a few minutes of this climbing,

Margaret suddenly moved to one side, and sprang down to a tiny morsel of gravelly beach, at the side of the burn. I followed her, and was fairly entranced by what I saw. A little way above us the gorge widened, allowing us to see the trees, which, growing on either side of the brook, interlaced their branches above it. From beneath the trees the stream made a clear downward leap, of perhaps thirty or forty feet, into a pool—the pool at our feet—which was so deep that it seemed nearly as black as ink. The music of the waterfall filled the air so that we could hardly catch the sound of each other's words; and if we moved to the farther end of the little margin of beach, we heard, instead of the noise of the waterfall, the sweet babbling of the burn over its stony bed.

'Do you often come here?' I asked, as we stood at the edge of the stream, some little distance from the fall.

'Yes, pretty often when I wish to be alone, or to have an hour's quiet reading.'

'As you do to-day,' said I; 'that's as much as to say that you want to have an hour's quiet reading now.'

'So I do,' said the girl calmly.

'Or, in other words, that it is time for me to take myself off.'

'I did not mean that,' said Margaret, with perfect placidity. 'Would you like to go up to the top of the linn?'

'Very much,' said I, and we scrambled up the bank to the upper level of the stream, and gazed down upon the black rushing water and the dark pool beneath, with its fringe of cream-coloured foam.

'So this is the "Lover's Leap,"' I remarked.

'Yes,' said Margaret. 'They say that once a young man was carrying off his sweetheart, when her father and brothers pursued them. The girl was riding on a pillion behind her lover. As the only way of escape, he put his horse at the gap over our heads—it must have been narrower in those days than it is

now—missed it, and both himself and the lady were killed in the fall.'

'Dreadful!' I exclaimed.

'Of course it isn't true,' pursued Margaret tranquilly.

'Why not?' I asked.

'Oh, such stories never are; they are all romantic nonsense.'

'How different your streams are from those in the south,' said I, after a pause; 'Tennyson's description of a brook would hardly suit this one.'

'What is that?' she inquired.

'Don't you know it?' I asked, letting my surprise get the better of my good manners.

'No, I never heard it,' she said, without the least tinge of embarrassment; so I repeated the well-known lines, to which Margaret listened with her eyes still fixed on the rushing water.

'They are very pretty,' said the girl, when I had finished; 'but I should not care for a

brook like that. I should think it would be very much like a canal, wouldn't it?—only smaller. I like my own brook better; and I like Burns's description of one better than Tennyson's.'

'Has Burns described a brook? I wish you would quote it to me,' said I.

'Surely you know the lines,' said Margaret; 'they are in "Hallowe'en."'

I assured her I did not, and in a low clear voice she repeated:

'Whyles owre a linn the burnie plays,
As through the glen it wimples;
Whyles round a rocky scaur it strays;
Whyles in a wiel it dimples.
Whyles glitterin' to the noontide rays,
Wi' bickerin', dancin' dazzle,
Whyles cookin' underneath the braes,
Below the spreading hazel.'

'I think they are beautiful lines, so far as I understand them,' was my verdict. 'What is "cookin'," for example? I know it does not mean frying, or anything of that kind, but——'

I stopped, for the girl looked half offended

at my poor little attempt to be funny at the expense of a Scotch word.

'There is no word for it in English, that I know of,' she said. 'It means crouching down, contentedly, in a comfortable place. If you saw a hen on a windy day under a stook of corn, you might say it was "cooking" there.'

'Thank you,' I replied; 'I won't forget. And now I must be off, for I know you came here to read.'

If in my vanity I had hoped for permission to remain, I was disappointed. Nothing of the kind was forthcoming.

'I hope you have got an interesting book,' said I, wondering what the old brown-leather volume could be.

'You might not think it very interesting,' answered Margaret, raising her lovely eyes to mine, as tranquilly as if she had been speaking of a newspaper. 'It is only a volume of old sermons. Good-bye till dinner-time, Mr. Blake;' and so saying she turned to seek her favourite nook, at the side of the waterfall.

'Old sermons!' I exclaimed to myself as I left her. 'What a singular girl she is. Fancy——'

But my reflections were cut short, for I 'lifted up mine eyes' and saw a mountain ash—they call them 'rowan trees' here—full of berries.

Sophy, such a tree is the most beautiful object in nature; there is no way of describing it, no way of putting its beauty into words. If you doubt what I say, look well at the next one you see, and then tell me if I am wrong. Good-night.

Ever yours affectionately,

HUBERT BLAKE.

P.S.—I mean to get M. to sit for her portrait to-morrow; but I see that in order to gain this end I shall have to use all my skill in diplomacy, both with the young lady and with her respected father.

H. B.

CHAPTER III.

THE THIRD LETTER.

Hubert Blake to Sophy Meredith.

THE CASTLE FARM, MUIRBURN, N.B.,
September 17.

MY DEAR SOPHY,

It did not occur to me, when I agreed to consider myself Mr. Lindsay's guest until to-day, that the arrangement would entail my spending the greater part of a glorious autumn day within the walls of the Muirburn Free Kirk—but you shall hear. I suspected, from something which fell from my host at breakfast, that the excuses which I intended to offer for my not accompanying the family to church would not be considered sufficient; but when I ventured to hint at something of

the kind my remark was received by such a horrified stare (not to speak of the look of consternation on Margaret's beautiful face), that I saw that to have made any further struggle for freedom would have been a positive breach of good manners. I submitted, therefore, with as good a grace as I could; and I was afterwards given to understand that to have absented myself from 'ordinances' that Sunday would have been little short of a scandal, seeing that it happened to be 'Sacrament Sunday.'

If you ask a Scotchman how many sacraments there are, he will answer, if he remembers the Shorter Catechism, two. If, however, he is taken unawares, he will answer, one. Baptism is popularly considered to be a mere ceremony, of no practical importance to the infant recipient of it. It is regarded chiefly as an outward sign and token of the respectability of the parents, since it is only administered to the children of well-behaved people. 'The Sacrament' means the Lord's

Supper, which is administered in Presbyterian churches generally four times, but in country places often only twice a year. This, as it happened, was one of the 'quarterly' Communions, and as such popularly considered as of less dignity than those which occur at the old-fashioned seasons of July and January.

We set off about a quarter-past ten in the heavy, two-wheeled dog-cart which brought me here. I manifested an intention of walking to the village, and asked Alec to accompany me, but Mr. Lindsay intervened and protested strongly against my proposal. He said it would not be 'seemly,' by which I suppose he meant that it would be inconsistent with the dignity of the family, if a guest of his house were to be seen going to church on foot; but I could not help suspecting that he envied Alec and myself the sinful pleasure which a four-mile walk on so lovely a morning would have afforded us.

I can see that my elderly cousin (three times removed) is one of those people who are

thoroughly unhappy unless they get their own way in everything, and never enjoy themselves more than when they have succeeded in spoiling somebody's pleasure. I mentally resolved to have as little to do with the old gentleman as I possibly could, and mounted to the front seat of the dog-cart, which, as the place of honour, had been reserved for me.

As the old mare trotted soberly along, I could not help noticing the silence that seemed to brood over the fields. I have remarked the same thing in England, but somehow a Scotch Sunday seems even more still and quiet than an English one. Is it merely a matter of association and sentiment? Or is it that we miss on Sundays hundreds of trifling noises which on week-days fall unconsciously upon our ears?

Presently we began to pass little knots of people trudging along churchwards. The old women carried their Bibles wrapped up in their pocket-handkerchiefs to preserve them from the dust, along with the usual sprig of

southern-wood. The men, without exception, wore suits of black, shiny broadcloth. They seemed to be all farmers. Very few of the weavers or labourers have any religion whatever (so far as outward rites go), any more than your unworthy cousin ; and I can't help thinking that the necessity for shiny black clothes has something to do with it. The women are different ; as usual in all countries, and in all creeds, they are more devout than the men.

On the way we passed a group of young women just inside a field not far from the town, who were sitting about and stooping in various attitudes. I could not conceive what they were about, and turned to my host for an explanation.

He gravely informed me that they were putting on their shoes. Being accustomed throughout the week to dispense with these inventions of modern effeminacy, they find it extremely irksome to walk for miles over dusty roads in shoes and stockings. They

therefore carry them in their hands till they reach some convenient field near the town which is the object of their journey, and then, sitting down on the grass, they array themselves in that part of their raiment before going into church.

We were now close to the town, and the sweet-toned little bell which I had heard on the evening of my arrival, along with a larger one of peculiarly strident tone in the belfry of the United Presbyterian Kirk, were 'doing their best.' There were whole processions of gigs or dog-carts such as that in which we were seated. No other style of vehicle was to be seen.

I was rather amused to see that the corner at which on week-days the weavers stand in their shirt-sleeves was not left unoccupied. The place was crowded with farmers, most of them highly respectable-looking men, clad in long black coats and tall hats. As to the hats, by the way, they were of all shapes which have been in fashion for the last twenty years,

some of them taller than I should have supposed it possible for a hat to be.

We alighted at the door of an inn, and I noticed that the inn yard was crowded with 'machines,' *i.e.*, dog-carts and gigs, which I thought pretty fair evidence of the prosperity of the country. Then we proceeded to our place of worship. In the little vestibule was a tall three-legged stool covered with a white napkin, and upon this rested a large pewter plate to receive the contributions of the faithful. Two tall farmers, dressed in swallow-tail coats, tall hats, and white neckties of the old-fashioned, all-round description, were standing over the treasury, and in one of them I recognised my acquaintance of the coach. I was prepared to nod him a greeting, but he preserved the most complete immobility of countenance, and kept his gaze fixed on the horizon outside the church door, as if no nearer object were worthy of his attention.

I found the church filled with dreadfully narrow pews of unpainted wood, and facing

them an immensely tall pulpit, with a subsidiary pulpit in front of the other at a lower elevation. There were carpets on the staircase which led up to the pulpits, and the desks of both were covered with red cloth, with elaborate tassels. From either side of the upper pulpit there projected slender, curving brass rods about two feet long, terminating in broad pieces of brass, fixed at right angles to the rods. What the use of this apparatus was I could not imagine. A steep gallery ran round three sides of the little building; and in front of the pulpit was a table covered with a white cloth.

I was not so uncharitable as to suppose that those who came here to worship were guilty of any intentional irreverence, but certainly they carried out the theory that no reverence ought to be paid to sacred places very completely. No male person removed his hat till he was well within the doors; and in many cases men did not uncover themselves till they were comfortably seated. No one so much as thought

of engaging in any private devotions. I was surprised to see that the congregation (which was, for the size of the building, a large one) was composed almost entirely of women and children; but as soon as the bells stopped ringing, a great clatter of heavy boots was heard in the vestibule, and the heads of families, whom I had seen standing at the corner, poured into the place. Like wise men, they had been taking the benefit of the fresh air till the last available moment.

Hardly had the farmers taken their seats when a man appeared, dressed entirely in black, carrying an enormous Bible, with two smaller books placed on the top of it. Ascending the pulpit stairs, he placed one of the smaller books on the desk of the lower pulpit; and then, going a few steps higher, he deposited the other two volumes on the desk of the higher one. He then retired, and immediately the minister, a tall, dark man, with very long black hair, wearing an immense gown of black silk, black gloves, and white bands

such as barristers wear, entered the church and ascended to the pulpit. He was followed by an older man dressed in a stuff gown, who went into the lower pulpit. Last of all came the door-keeper, who also went up the pulpit stairs and carefully closed the pulpit door after the minister. The man in the stuff gown was left to shut his own door, and he did so with a bang, as if in protest at the want of respect shown to him, and his inferior position generally.

The ritual part, as I may call it, of the service being over, the minister rose and gave out a psalm, just as old Mr. Lindsay does at prayers ; and as he did so, the man in the stuff gown got up, and pulling out two thin black boards from under his desk, he skilfully fixed one of them on the end of the brass rod which projected from the right-hand side of the pulpit; and then, turning half round, he fixed the other upon the similar rod on the left-hand side. On each of these boards I read, in large gilt letters. the word 'Martyrdom.' I could not imagine,

even then, the meaning of this ceremony ; but Alec informed me afterwards that it was meant to convey to the congregation the name of the tune to which the psalm was to be sung, so that they might turn it up in their tune-books, if they felt so inclined.

When the minister had read the verses which he wished to have sung, he gave out the number of the psalm again in a loud voice, and read the first line a second time, so that there might be no mistake. He then sat down, and the little man beneath him, rising up, began to sing. I very nearly got into trouble at this point by rising to my feet, forgetting for the moment that the orthodox Scotch fashion is to sit while singing and to stand at prayer. (I am told that in the towns a good many churches have adopted the habit of standing up to sing and keeping their seats during the prayer; but older Presbyterians look upon this custom, as, if not exactly heretical, yet objectionable, as tending in the direction of ritualism, prelacy, and other

abominations.) For a line or two the precentor was left to sing by himself, then one or two joined in, and presently the whole body of the congregation took up the singing. I was surprised to find what a good effect resulted—it was at least infinitely better than that of an ordinary choir of mixed voices led by a vile harmonium or American organ. Many of the voices were rough, no doubt; and the precentor seemed to make it a point of honour to keep half a note ahead of everybody else; but, in spite of this, the general effect of so many sonorous voices singing in unison was decidedly impressive.

As soon as the four prescribed verses had been sung, the minister rose up to pray, and everybody got up at the same time. You know I am not easily shocked, Sophy; and hitherto, though I had seen much that was ludicrous and strange, I had not seen anything that I considered specially objectionable; but I must say that the behaviour of these good folks at the prayer which followed did shock

me. They simply stood up and stared at each other; perhaps I noticed it more particularly because I, being a stranger, came in for a good share of attention. Many of the men kept their hands in their pockets; some were occupied taking observations of the weather, through the little windows of plain glass, half the time. The minister, I noticed, kept his hands clasped and his eyes tightly closed; and some of his flock, among whom were my host and his daughter, followed his example; but the majority, as I have said, simply stared around them. They may have been giving, meanwhile, a mental assent to the truths which the minister was enunciating; I dare say some of them were; but as far as one could judge from outward appearances they were no more engaged in praying than they were engaged in ploughing. The prayer lasted a very long time; when it was over we heard a chapter read, and after another part of a psalm was sung the sermon began. This was evidently the event of the day, to

which everything said or done hitherto had been only an accessory ; and everybody settled himself down in his seat as comfortably as he could.

From what I had heard of Scotch sermons I was prepared for a well-planned logical discourse, and the sermon to which I now listened fulfilled that description. But then it was, to my mind at least, entirely superfluous. Granting the premisses (as to which no one in the building, excepting perhaps my unworthy self, entertained the slightest doubt), the conclusion followed as a matter of course, and hardly needed a demonstration lasting fifty minutes by my watch. I was so tired with the confinement in a cramped position and a close atmosphere that I very nearly threw propriety to the winds and left the building. Fortunately, however, just before exhausted nature succumbed, the preacher began what he called the 'practical application of the foregoing,' and I knew that the time of deliverance was at hand. And I

must say that, judging from the fervour with which the concluding verses of a psalm were sung, I was not alone in my feeling of relief. As soon as the psalm was ended everybody rose, and the preacher, stretching out his arms over his flock, pronounced a solemn benediction. The 'Amen' was hardly out of the good man's mouth when a most refreshing clatter arose. No one resumed his seat. Everybody hurried into the narrow passages, which were in an instant so crammed that moving in them was hardly possible. Here, again, I am convinced that there was no intentional irreverence; it was merely a custom arising from the extremely natural desire of breathing the fresh air after the confinement we had undergone. As we passed out I overheard several casual remarks about the sermon, which was discussed with the utmost freedom.

'Maister McLeod was a wee thocht dry the day,' said one farmer.

'But varra guid—varra soon',' responded his neighbour.

'I thocht he micht ha' made raither mair o' that last pint,' said the first speaker.

'Weel—maybe,' was the cautious reply.

We went over to the inn for a little refreshment, and in three-quarters of an hour the bells began to jangle once more. This was more than I had bargained for; but there was no help for it. I could not offend my host by retreating; and besides, I was desirous of seeing for myself what a Scottish Communion Service was like.

After the usual singing of a few verses of a psalm, and prayer, the minister descended from the pulpit, and took his place beside the table beneath, on which there had now been placed two loaves of bread, and four large pewter cups. From this position he delivered an address, and after it a prayer. He then took a slice from one of the loaves of bread which were ready cut before him, broke off a morsel for himself, and handed the piece of bread to one of several elderly men, called 'elders,' who were seated near him. This

man broke off a morsel in the same way, and handed the remainder of the bread to another, and so on till all the elders had partaken. Four of the elders then rose, and two went down one side of the church, and two down the other side, one of each pair bearing a plate covered with a napkin, and holding a loaf of bread cut in slices, which they distributed among those of the congregation who were sitting in the centre of the church, and who alone were about to take part in the rite. The ceremony is, in fact, very much, or altogether, the same as the 'love-feasts' among the Methodists; except that the Methodists use water while the Presbyterians use wine. There is nothing of the sacramental character left in the ordinance; it is avowedly a commemorative and symbolic rite, and nothing more.

In the meantime perfect silence reigned in the little building. There was literally not a sound to be heard but the chirping of one or two sparrows outside the partly-opened

windows. Have you ever noticed how impressive an interval of silence is at any meeting of men, especially when they are met together for a religious purpose? Silence is never vulgar; and it almost seems as if any form of worship in which intervals of silence form a part were redeemed thereby from vulgarity. Whatever may have been the reason, this service impressed me, I must confess, in a totally different way from that in which the long sermon in the morning had done.

Suddenly a gentle falsetto voice fell upon my ear; and looking up, I saw that the elders, having finished their task, had returned to the table, and that a little white-haired man had risen to address the people. He wore no gown, but he had on a pair of bands, like his friend Mr. McLeod, which gave him a comical sort of air. This, however, as well as the curious falsetto or whining tone in which his voice was pitched, was forgotten when one began to listen. The old

man had chosen for his text one of the most sacred of all possible subjects to a Christian; and no one who heard him could doubt that he was speaking from his heart. A deeper solemnity seemed to fall upon the silent gathering. I glanced round, but whatever emotions were excited by the touching address, none of them were suffered to appear on the faces of the people. On Alec Lindsay's face, alone, I noticed a look of rapt attention; his sister's beautiful features seemed as if they had been carved in marble.

Before the old minister sat down he raised one of the large cups (which had been previously filled with wine from a flagon), and handed it to one of the elders, who, after drinking from it, passed it to his neighbour. After the ministers and elders had tasted the wine, two of the latter rose, and each proceeded down one of the passages, bearing a large pewter cup, while he was followed by one of his fellows carrying a flagon. The cups were handed to the people still sitting

in the pews, exactly as the bread had been, and circulated from one to another till all the communicants had partaken of the wine. Then followed another address, from the black-haired gentleman this time ; and with a prayer and a little more singing the ceremony came to an end.

As we emerged into the afternoon sunshine, and waited for 'the beast to be put in,' as the innkeeper called it, I could not be sorry that I had sacrificed my inclinations and had seen something of the practice of religion in this country.

But I dare say you have had enough of my experiences for the present — so, good-night.

Your affectionate cousin,

HUBERT BLAKE.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FOURTH LETTER.

Hubert Blake to Sophy Meredith.

THE CASTLE FARM, MUIRBURN, N.B.
Oct. 5, 187–.

MY DEAR SOPHY,

Yesterday there was a 'feeing fair' at Muirburn, and under Alec's guidance I paid a visit to the scene of dissipation.

But, first of all, I wish to tell you of a curious Scotch custom that fell under my notice the evening before. Alec and I were returning from a short ramble in the 'gloaming,' *i.e.*, the twilight, when we happened to meet a young couple walking side by side. As soon as they caught sight of us they separated, and walked on opposite sides of

the road till we had passed. This, it seems, was according to local ideas of what is proper under such circumstances. As we went by I glanced at the girl, and saw that she was one of Mr. Lindsay's farm-servants.

'So Jessie has got a sweetheart,' I remarked.

'Very likely,' said Alec, with a laugh; 'but I don't think Tom Archibald is her lad. He is only the "black-fuit."'

'The *what?*'

'The "black-fuit." Dae ye no ken—I mean, don't ye know what that is?'

On confessing my ignorance, I learned that the etiquette of courtship, as understood among the peasantry of south-west Scotland, demands that no young ploughman shall present himself at the farm on which the young woman who has taken his fancy may happen to be employed; if he did so, it would expose the girl to a good deal of bantering. He invariably secures the services of a friend, on whom he relies not only for moral support, but for actual assistance in his enterprise.

At the end of the working-day, when the dairymaids, as we should call them in England, have 'cleaned themselves,' and are chatting together in a little group at the door of the byre, John, the friend, makes his appearance, and presently contrives to engage the attention of Jeanie, who is the object of his friend's devotion. The other girls good-naturedly leave them alone, and John suggests that 'they micht tak' a bit daun'er as far as the yett' (*i.e.*, the gate). Jeanie blushes, and picking up the corner of her apron as she goes, accompanies the ambassador to the gate and into the lane beyond. There, by pure accident, they meet Archie, and he and John greet each other in the same way as if they had not met each other for a week. The three saunter on together, under the hawthorn, till suddenly John remembers that he will be 'expeckit hame,' and takes his departure, leaving Archie to plead his cause as best he may.

I declared my conviction that the custom

sprang from unworthy fears of an action for breach of promise; but Alec was almost offended by this imputation on the good faith of his countrymen, and assured me most seriously that that kind of litigation was unheard of in Kyleshire.

Next day we went to the fair. The object of this gathering is to enable farmers to meet and engage their farm-servants, male and female; it takes place twice a year, the hiring being always for six months.

The village, or 'the toon,' as they always call it here, was in a state of great excitement. There was quite a crowd in the middle of the street, chiefly composed of young women in garments of many colours, in the most enviable condition of physical health; and young giants of ploughmen in their best clothes, with carefully oiled hair. On the outskirts of the crowd (which was as dense as four hundred people could possibly make it), were a few queys, *i.e.*, young cows, and a few rough farm-horses. The public-houses were

simply crammed as full as they would hold. There was a swing, and a merry-go-round, and a cheap-Jack. There was also a sort of lottery, conducted on the most primitive principles. You paid sixpence, plunged your hand into a little wooden barrel revolving on a spindle, and pulled out a morsel of peculiarly dirty paper bearing a number. This entitled you to a comb, or an accordion with three notes, or a penny doll, as the case might be.

What chiefly impressed me was the sober, not to say dismal, character of the whole thing. I saw no horse-play, no dancing, no kiss-in-the-ring, or games of any kind. One might have thought it was an ordinary market-day, but for the crowd and the cracking of the caps on the miniature rifles with which the lads were shooting for nuts. This, in fact, was the only popular amusement; and, as all the boys and young men took part in it, and all held the muzzle of their weapon within twelve or fourteen inches of the mark, I perceived that every proprietor of a nut-barrow would have

been ruined if he had not secured himself against bankruptcy by prudently twisting the barrels of his firearms.

There was, by the way, one other amusement besides the shooting for nuts: every young man presented every girl of his acquaintance with a handful of nuts or sweetmeats, the degree of his regard being indicated by the quantity offered. I convinced myself that some of the prettier and more popular girls must have carried home several pounds' weight of saccharine matter.

We did not leave the village till it was getting dark and the naphtha lamps were blazing at the stalls. Probably the fun was only beginning, but we did not stay to witness it. Happily, the drinking seemed to be confined to great, large-limbed farmers, on whom half a bottle of whisky seemed to make not the slightest impression, beyond loosening their tongues. As the night advanced, however, a change must have occurred, for I was told afterwards that Hamilton of Burnfoot (my

friend of the coach and of the offertory) had been seen sitting upright in his gig, thrashing with all his might, and in perfect silence, a saddler's hobby-horse, which some wag had put between the shafts in place of his steady old 'roadster.'

On the way home Alec and I had some confidential conversation as to his future.

'Mr. Blake,' he began, 'what do you think I ought to be?'

'How can I tell, Alec?' I answered; 'what would you like to be?'

'That's just what I don't know,' said the lad gloomily. 'I don't know what I am fit for, or whether I am fit for anything. How can I tell, before I have seen anything of the world, what part I should try to play in it?'

'You have no strong taste in any direction?'

'No; I can't say that I have. I like the country, but I am sick of the loneliness of my life here. I long to be out in the world, to be up and doing something, I hardly know what.

You see, I know so little. What I should like is to go to college for the next three or four years—to Glasgow, or Edinburgh—and by that time I would have an idea what I could do, and what I should not attempt.'

'But do you think,' I said, with some hesitation, 'that you are ready to go to college?'

'Why not? Don't you think I am old enough? I am almost nineteen. I dare say you think I am too ignorant; but there are junior classes for beginners. I can do Virgil and Cicero, and I think I could manage Xenophon and Homer.'

'What is the difficulty then?'

'My father thinks it would be wasting money to send me to college, unless I were to be a minister or a doctor, and I don't want to be either the one or the other.'

'But you must be something, you know.'

'Yes, but I won't be a minister. Do you know that I was once very nearly in the way of making my fortune through paraffin oil.

and lost my chance through an ugly bull-pup?'

'Really? How was that?'

'Mr. Lindsay of Drumleck——'

'Is *he* a relation of yours?' I interposed.

(It was a surprise to me to hear that I was, ever so distantly, related to a millionnaire.)

'He is my father's uncle,' said Alec. 'Well, last year he sent for me to pay him a visit, and he had hinted to my father that if I pleased him he would "make a man of me." I didn't please him. The very day I went to his house, I happened to be standing near a table in the drawing-room on which there was a precious vase of some sort or other. There was a puppy under the table that I didn't see; I trod on its tail, and the brute started up with a yowl and flew at my leg. I stooped down to drive it off, and managed to knock over the table, vase and all. You should have seen the old man's face! He very nearly ordered me out of the house. I don't

believe he particularly cared for the thing, but then you see he had given five-and-twenty pounds for it. It ended my chances so far as he is concerned at any rate; and, to tell the truth, I wasn't particularly sorry. I shouldn't care to spend my life in making oil.'

'But, my dear fellow, it seems to me you are too particular. Take my advice, and if you have an opportunity of getting into your grand-uncle's good books again, don't lose it.'

'Oh! he has taken another in my place, a fellow Semple—I don't think much of him. He is a grand-nephew, too. I shouldn't wonder if he makes him his heir; and I don't care. I don't wan't to be a Glasgow merchant, any more than I want to be a Kyleshire farmer.'

'Ah! Alec, are you smitten too?' I said. 'You want to climb, and you will not think that you may fall. I didn't know you were ambitious.'

'I want to go into a wider world than this one;' said the lad, and his eyes flashed, and his voice trembled with excitement. 'I want to learn, first of all; then I want to find what I can do best, and try to make a name for myself. I want to rise to the level of——oh! what am I talking about?'

He broke off abruptly, as if ashamed of his own enthusiasm.

For my own part I felt sorry for him. I always do, somehow, when I see a brave young spirit eager to meet and conquer fortune—a ship setting sail from port, colours all flying, guns firing, crowds cheering. How many reach the harbour? How many founder at sea? One is wrecked in this way, another in that. One gallant bark meets with head-winds nearly all the way; another is run down by a rival and is heard of no more; a third, after baffling many a wintry gale, goes down in smooth water, within sight of land. How many unsuccessful men are there in the world for every one who succeeds? And of

those who gain their heart's desire, how many can say, 'I am satisfied'?

October 29.

I was fairly amazed to find this unfinished letter, begun three weeks ago, between the leaves of my blotter this morning. Another example of my incurable laziness!

My stay here is almost at an end. My large picture is nearly completed. My portrait of Margaret is finished; and though it is not what I would like it to be, I think it is the best thing I have done yet. I leave tomorrow morning, and hope to be with you in a day or two. Alec goes with me as far as Glasgow, for he has persuaded his father to send him to college—or rather, the old man has yielded to the lad's discontent, backed by my expressions of the high opinion I hold of his abilities. I fancy Mr. Lindsay thinks his son will yet be an ornament to the Free Kirk, but, if I am not very much mistaken, Alec will never change his mind on this point.

We had a regular family council, at which the matter was settled. The old man sat on his chair, bolt upright, his hands folded before him. Alec sat near by while his future was being decided, carelessly playing with a paper-knife on the table. Margaret was, as usual, at her sewing; but I could tell by little signs in her face, that for once her composure was more than half assumed.

'You had your chance a year ago,' said the old man in a harsh unyielding tone, 'and you threw it away. Why should I stint myself, and go back from my task of buying back the land, to give you another one?'

'I don't wish you to stint yourself,' said the boy half sullenly.

'I don't want to injure your sister,' said his father, in the same tone.

'Do you think *I* wish Margaret injured? If you cannot spare five-and-twenty pounds without inconvenience, there's an end of it.'

'It's not the first winter only,' began Mr. Lindsay.

'But I can support myself after that,' interrupted Alec; 'I can get a bursary; I can get teaching——'

'You'll have to give up idling away your time over *Blackwood* then,' said the old man, with a grim smile.

Alec's face flushed, and he made no reply.

Then, having proved that Alec's wish was wholly unreasonable and impracticable, Mr. Lindsay gave his consent to the proposal, and, to cut short further discussion, told Margaret to bid the servants come to 'worship.'

I was rather surprised that Margaret had said nothing on her brother's behalf, and a little disappointed that she had not declared that her own interests ought not to stand in the way of her brother's education; but I found that I had misjudged her.

'Well, I owe this to Margaret,' said Alec to me, as soon as we found ourselves alone together.

'To your sister?' I said, with some surprise.

'Yes; my father thinks more of her opinion than he does of anybody else's, and I know she has been urging him to let me go. As for that about injuring her, it is all stuff. Do you think I would take the money, if I didn't know my father could afford it perfectly well?'

I hardly knew what reply to make to this, and Alec went on:

'There will be a row between them one of these days. My father will want her to marry Semple. I know he is in love with her; and Margaret won't have him.'

'I should think not, indeed!' I exclaimed.

I had seen this young fellow, and I confess I took a violent dislike to him. He came over to the farm one afternoon, and I thought I had never seen a more vulgar creature. He was dressed in the latest fashion—on a visit to a farmhouse, too! He had a coarse, commonplace face, a ready, officious manner, and the most awful accent I ever heard on the tongue of any human being. I cannot say I

admire the Scotch accent; it is generally harsh and disagreeable; but when it is joined to an affectation of correctness, when every syllable is carefully articulated, and every *r* is given its full force and effect, the result is overpowering. The young man was good enough to give me a considerable share of his attention, and I could hardly conceal my dislike of him. He patronized old Mr. Lindsay, was loftily condescending to Alec, and treated Margaret as if she ought to have been highly flattered by the admiration of so fine a gentleman.

'Your respected cousin seemed to me as if he were greatly in need of a kicking,' I said to Alec.

'If he gets even a share of Uncle James's property he will be a rich man,' said Alec thoughtfully. 'My father would think it a sin for Maggie to refuse a man with a hundred thousand pounds.'

'So would a good many fathers, I suppose,' said I.

I am sorry to see Alec's attitude to his

father ; yet I fear he judges the old man only too accurately.

For the last few days we have had nothing but rain. Rain, rain, rain, till the leaves were fairly washed off the trees, and the very earth seemed as if it must be sodden to the rocks beneath. Yesterday afternoon I felt tired of being shut up in the large bare room which I have been using as a studio, so I put on a thick suit, and went out for a stretch in the midst of a perfect deluge. I crossed the river by a stone bridge, about a mile lower down, as the stepping-stones were covered, and soon I got to a wide expanse of country, composed of large sodden green fields, barely reclaimed from the moor, and even now, in spite of drains, partly overgrown with rushes. There were no fences ; and the hardy cattle wandered at will over the land.

It was inexpressibly dreary. There was little or no wind—no clouds in the sky—only a lead-coloured heaven from which the rain fell incessantly. There was not a house,

not a tree, not a hedgerow in sight; and the rain-laden atmosphere hid the horizon.

Suddenly I heard the noise of singing, the singing of a child. I was fairly startled, and looked round, wondering where the sound could come from. I was on the border between the moor and the reclaimed land; and there was literally nothing in sight but the earth, the sky, and the rain, except what looked like a small heap of turf left by the peat-cutters. Could some stray child be hidden behind it? If so, I thought, its life must be in danger.

I hurried up to the mound of peats, and as I did so, the sound of the song became stronger. Then it ceased, and the little singer began a fresh melody:

> 'Behind yon hills where Lugar flows,
> 'Mang muirs an' mosses mony, O,
> The wintry sun the day has closed——'

He stopped suddenly as he caught sight of me, and a fine collie which had been lying beside him made a dash at me.

'Doon, Swallow! Lie doon, sir!' cried the child, and the dog obeyed at once.

It was not a heap of peats, as I had supposed, but a tiny hut, just large enough to hold a boy sitting upright, ingeniously built of dry peats. It was open to the east, the lee side, and was quite impervious to the weather. The little fellow seemed to be about twelve years of age, a stout, rosy-cheeked laddie, clad in an immense Scotch bonnet and a tattered gray plaid; and his little red bare feet peeped out beneath his corduroys.

'What on earth are you doing here, child?' I exclaimed.

'Eh?' asked the boy, looking up in my face with surprise.

'Why are you here? Why are you not at home?'

'Man, I'm herdin'.'

'Herding what?'

'The kye.'

At that moment some of the young cattle

took it into their heads to cross the ditch which separated their territory from the moor, and the boy with a 'Here, Swallow!' sent the dog bounding after the 'stirks.'

'And do you stay here all alone?'

'Ay.'

'All day long?'

'Ou, ay.'

'Poor little fellow!' was on my lips, but I did not utter the words. The child was healthy and strong, and not, apparently, unhappy. He held a 'gully' in one hand, and a bit of wood, which he had been whittling while he sang, in the other. Why should I, by expressing my pity for his solitary condition, make him discontented with his lot?

Fortunately I had in my pocket a few coppers, which I presented to him. You should have seen the joy that lighted up the child's face! He looked at the treasure shyly, as if afraid to touch it, so I had to force it into his hand. I don't think I ever

saw before such an expression of pure unalloyed delight on a human countenance. He was so happy that he forgot to thank me.

'What will you do with them?' I asked.

He opened his hand and pointed to the pennies one after another.

'I'll buy sweeties wi' that ane, an'—an' bools wi' that ane, an'—an'—an' a peerie wi' that ane; an' I'll gi'e ane to Annie, and I'll lay by twa!'

'Prudent young Scotchman,' said I; 'and pray, what are "bools"? Marbles, I suppose. And what is a "peerie"?'

The boy thought I was laughing at him.

'Div ye no ken that?' he asked, with some suspiciousness and a dash of contempt.

I assured him I did not.

'Ye tie't up wi' a string, an' birl't on the road, an' it gangs soon' soon' asleep.'

'Oh, a top you mean.'

'A peerie,' persisted he.

'Ah, well; it's the same thing. Good-day, my boy,' said I.

The little fellow got up, draped as he was in his ragged plaid, and putting one hand with the precious pennies into his pocket, solemnly extended to me the other.

'I dare say,' said I to myself, as I looked back and saw the child counting over his treasure once more with eager eyes, 'I dare say there isn't a happier creature this day between Land's End and John O'Groats, than this herd-boy, in his lonely hut on the sodden, dreary moorland!'

And so it is, all the world over. I should think myself very hardly used by fortune, if I had to live alone in a grimy city for six months on five-and-thirty pounds, and had to get up every day before dawn to grind away at Latin and Greek; yet here is young Lindsay with his blue eyes ready to leap out of his head with excitement and delight at the bare prospect of it! It is a curious world. But I must look after my packing; for in

order to reach Glasgow to-morrow, we must be stirring long before daylight. Till we meet, then,

Your affectionate cousin,

HUBERT.

CHAPTER V.

THE SHIP SETS SAIL.

A SUDDEN change in the weather had whitened the fields of the Castle Farm, and covered the puddles in the narrow lane with thin clear sheets of ice. Little or nothing was said at the breakfast-table; but as Alec Lindsay went into the empty kitchen to fasten a card on his little cow-hide trunk, his sister followed him, and stood over him in silence till one of the men came in, lifted the box, and carried it away.

'You will write home every week, won't you, Alec?' she said.

'Every week, Maggie! what in the world shall I get to say?'

'Tell us what your life is like, whether

your lodgings are comfortable, what sort of people you take up with.'

'Well; all right.'

'And, Alec, you had better write to father and me time about; and when you write to me you can send a little scrap for myself as well.'

'That you needn't show to anybody? I thought that was against your principles, Meg. Don't mind me, I was only making fun of you,' he added, suddenly throwing his arms round his sister's neck; 'of course I will send you a little private note now and then. Don't cry, Maggie.'

'I'm not crying.'

'Yes, you are.'

'It will be very lonely without you, Alec, all the long winter.'

'I almost wish I weren't going, for your sake; but I know you have helped me to get away, Maggie, and it was awfully kind of you.'

Here Mr. Lindsay's voice was heard calling

out that the travellers would miss the coach if they did not set off at once.

'Nonsense! We shall only have to wait at the roadside for twenty minutes,' said Alec under his breath. But he gave his sister a last hug, shook hands with his father, and mounted the back-seat of the dog-cart, where his trunk and Blake's portmanteau were already deposited.

In another minute they were off; and Alec, looking back, saw the light of the lantern shine on the tall figures of his gray-haired father and his sister, framed in the old stone doorway as in a picture.

The stable was passed, the long byre where the cows were already stirring, the stack-yard, the great hay-rick, the black peat-stack flanking the outmost gable; and as each familiar building and well-remembered corner faded in turn from view, Alec in his heart bade them good-bye. He felt as if he would never see the old place again—never, at least, would it be to him what it had been. When he came

again it would be merely for a visit, like any other stranger. The subtle, invisible chains that bind us to this or that corner of mother earth, once broken, can hardly be reforged; and Alec felt that no future leave-taking of the Farm would be like this one; henceforth it would belong not to the present, but to the past.

As the travellers had foreseen when they set out, they had a good twenty minutes to wait at the corner of the lane till the coach came up; then came the long, monotonous drive, the horses' hoofs keeping time to 'Auld Lang Syne' in Alec's head all the way; then the railway journey. Blake had, as a matter of course, taken a first-class ticket. Alec had, equally as a matter of course, taken a third-class one. When this was discovered, Blake took his seat beside his friend, laughing at the uneasiness depicted on Alec's face, and declined without a second thought the lad's proposal that he too should travel first-class and pay the difference of fare. But the

incident caused Alec acute mental discomfort, which lasted till they reached Glasgow.

When the train steamed into the terminus, it seemed as if it were entering a huge gloomy cavern, where the air was composed of smoke, mist, and particles of soot. The frost still held the fields in Kyleshire; but here the rain was dripping from every house-top, and the streets were covered with a thick layer of slimy mud.

Blake shuddered.

'I've got nothing particular to do, Alec,' said he; 'let me help you to look for lodgings.'

But Alec had no mind to let his friend see the sort of accommodation with which he would have to content himself; and the artist saw that the lad wanted to decline his offer, without very well knowing how.

'Or perhaps you'd rather hunt about by yourself?' continued Blake. 'Well, in that case, I think I'll be off to Edinburgh at once, and go to London that way. Anything to be out of this.'

He stopped suddenly, and hoped that his companion had not heard his last words. They took a cab to Queen Street; and after seeing his friend off to Edinburgh, Alec set out on his quest of a shelter. A few steps brought him to the district north of George Street, where, in those days, the poorer class of students had their habitations. The streets were not particularly broad, and the houses were of tremendous height, looking like great barracks placed one at the end of another, though their hewn-stone fronts saved them from the mean appearance of brick or stucco exteriors. After a good deal of running up and down steep staircases (for these houses are built in flats), Alec at last pitched upon a narrow but lofty sitting-room, with a still narrower bedroom opening from it. For this accommodation the charge was only eight shillings a week.

After a peculiarly uncomfortable meal, Alec Lindsay set out for 'The College.'

The University of Glasgow, founded by

a Bull of one of the mediæval Popes, had in those days its seat in the High Street, once the main thoroughfare of the city, but long since fallen from its old estate. The air seemed thicker, more full of smoke and soot, of acid vapours and abominable smells, in this quarter, than in any other part of the town.

An ancient pile of buildings faced the street; and a quaint gateway gave access to the outer quadrangle or 'first court,' as Alec soon learned to call it. Here a solid stone staircase, guarded by a stone lion on one side and a unicorn on the other, led to the senate-room above; and an archway led to a quadrangle beyond.

But Alec had scarcely time to observe as much as this. Hardly had he set foot within the gateway, when a gigantic man wearing a huge black beard stalked up to him, and without more ado caught him by the arm, while a small crowd of half a dozen lads of his own age, wearing gowns of red flannel, swarmed round him on the other side.

'I say!' exclaimed the big man; 'you're going to matriculate, aren't you?'

'Of course; that's what I came here for.'

'And where were you born?'

'Where was I born?' asked Alec, in bewilderment.

'Yes; be quick, man. Do you come from Highlands or Lowlands, or from beyond the Border?'

'Why do you want to know?'

'He comes from the county of Clackmannan; I know by the cut of his hair!' yelled a red-haired, freckled youth of some seventeen summers.

'Get out, you unmannerly young cub!' cried the big man, making a dash at the offender, without releasing his hold of Alec's arm.

'Are you Transforthana?' cried another. 'Oh, say if you're Transforthana, like a good fellow, and don't keep us in suspense.'

'He's Rothseiana! I know it!' bawled out a fourth.

At this point a little man in spectacles darted from a low doorway on the left with a sheaf of papers printed in red ink, which he began to distribute as fast as he could. Instantly the men who had fastened upon Alec left him, and rushed off to secure one of the papers, and Alec followed their example.

After some little trouble he got one, and then elbowing his way out of the crowd, began to read it. He found it was a not very comical parody of 'Come into the garden, Maud,' the allusions being half of a political, half of an academical character.

Looking up with a puzzled air, Alec encountered the gaze of a man ten or twelve years his senior, who was regarding him with a look of mingled interest and amusement. He was considerably over six feet high, and broad in proportion. He wore a suit of tweeds, a blue Scotch bonnet, and a reddish-brown beard. He had the high cheek-bones and large limbs of the true Highlander, and

one of his eyes had a slight cast. When he smiled, he had a cynical but not unkindly expression.

'I wish you would tell me what all this nonsense is about,' said Alec.

'What nonsense would ye like to pe informed apoot?' inquired the other in a strong Highland accent—'the nonsense in that bit paper? Or the nonsense o' these daft callants? Or the nonsense o' this haill thing?' and he waved his thick stick round the quadrangle.

'What is all this stir about? Why were a' these fellows so anxious to know where I was born?'

'One quastion at a time, my lad,' answered the big Highlander. 'They are electin' a Lord Rector; the ploy will gang on for a week or ten days yet. And they vote in "nations," according to the part o' the country they belong to. I was born in the Duke's country, and consequently my vote is worth conseederably more than that o' yon

wee spectacled callant who was kittled in the Gorbals, for example.'

'I was born in Kyleshire,' said Alec.

'Then you're Rothseiana,' said the stranger, 'and your vote's worth more than mine. I'd advise ye to choose at once, and put down your name at one club or the other, or they'll tease your life out.'

'But who are the candidates?'

'Mr. Sharpe, and Lord Dummieden, of course.'

Alec knew Mr. Sharpe's name as that of an ex-Cabinet Minister on the Liberal side, who had the reputation of being a scholar, but who had never written anything beyond two or three pungent articles in *The Debater*.

'And who is Lord Dummieden?'

'What!' answered the Highlander; 'is it possible that you have never heard of the "History of the British Isles before the Roman Invasion," in sixteen volumes, by the Right Honourable James Beattie, Viscount Dummieden, of Crumlachie?'

Alec gave an incredulous look, and the other laughed outright.

'Don't be offended,' said the Highlander. 'Have you matriculated yet? No? Come awa' then, and I'll show you the way.' He passed his arm through Alec's as he spoke, and led him to a tiny office in a corner of the quadrangle which was half filled with students.

'What is your name?' asked Alec's new friend, as they stood waiting their turn to enter their names in the volume kept for the purpose. Alec told him. 'Mine's Cameron —Duncan Cameron. I'm a medical. This is my third year. Have you got lodgings?'

'Yes; at No. 210, Hanover Street.

'Does your landlady look a decent body? I'll come round and see if she has a room to spare for me,' he added, without waiting for an answer.

Presently Alec obtained, in exchange for one of his father's one-pound notes, a ticket bearing his name, and the words '*Civis Universitatis*

Glasguenis' printed in large letters underneath.

'That's all right,' said Cameron; 'now come along, and I'll show you the Professors' Court. You have to call on the Latin and Greek professors, and get your class-tickets. The fee is three guineas each.' He led Alec through an archway into a second and larger quadrangle, then across it and through another archway into a third. 'That's the museum,' said Cameron, pointing to a building with handsome stone columns; 'and that's the library,' he added, pointing to a narrow structure, built apparently of black stone, on the right.

The two young men turned to the left, passed through an iron gateway, and found themselves in a gloomy and silent court, formed by the houses of the various professors, which, like the library, were black with smoke and soot-flakes.

After the professors of 'Humanity' (as Latin is called in the north) and of Greek

had been duly interviewed, Alec and his friend returned to the High Street without going back to the quadrangles; and in a few minutes they pulled Mrs. Macpherson's brightly-polished bell-handle.

'I've brought a friend, a fellow-student, who wants to know if you have any more rooms to let,' said Alec.

'Is he a medical?' asked the good woman, knitting her brows.

'I am proud to say that I am,' said Cameron.

'Then this is no the place for you ava.'

'An' what for no?'

'I've had eneuch, an' mair than eneuch, o' thae misguidet callants, wi' their banes, an' their gases, an' their gruesome talk, an' their singin' sangs, an' playing cairds, an' drinkin', till twa, or maybe haulf-past on a Sabbath mornin'. Na, na; I'll hae nae mair o' the tribe, at no price.'

But this opposition made Cameron determined that under that roof and no other

would he take up his abode for the winter. He bound himself by a solemn promise to introduce neither bones, human or animal, nor chemicals of any kind, upon the premises, and to behave himself discreetly in other respects. He then remembered that his aunt's husband's cousin was a Macpherson; and when it came out that the landlady's 'forbears' came from Auchintosh, which was within a day's sail of the island where the Camerons had their home, all objections were withdrawn.

A large dingy sitting-room, with a 'concealed bed' constructed in a recess, so that the room could also be used as a bedroom, was pronounced by Cameron to be too grand; and on Mrs. Macpherson saying that all her other rooms were let except an attic, he asked if he might see that apartment. They climbed up a steep and narrow staircase, and presently stood in a long narrow room, right under the slates, so low in the ceiling that Cameron could only walk along one side of it. It was

furnished with a narrow bedstead, a small deal table, and two or three stout chairs.

'First-rate!' exclaimed Cameron. 'The very thing;' and going to the skylight, he pushed it open and thrust out his head and shoulders. 'Plenty of air here—not fresh, but better than nothing. What is the rent?'

The rent was five shillings and sixpence a week, and after a vain effort to get rid of the sixpence, and an elaborate agreement on the subject of coals, the bargain was concluded.

'That's settled,' said Cameron; 'and now I'm off to the Broomielaw to get my impedimenta oot o' the *Dunolly Castle*. Will ye come?'

Having nothing better to do, Alec readily acquiesced; and the two young men walked down Buchanan Street with its broad wet pavements, and through the more crowded Argyle Street and Jamaica Street, till they reached the wharf.

Here all was damp and dismal. Coal-dust covered the ground; water, thick with coal-

dust and mud, dripped from the eaves of the huge open sheds; a smell of tar filled all the air. To Alec, however, nothing was dismal, nothing was depressing. All was new, strange, and interesting. A few vessels of light burden lay moored at the opposite side of the narrow river; a river steamer, her day's work ended, was blowing off steam at the Broomielaw.

'You will hardly believe it, Cameron,' said Alec, gazing with all his eyes at these commonplace sights, 'but I never saw a ship or a steamer before.'

'Hoots, man,' replied his companion; 'I've been on the salt water ever since I can remember; but then, till I came here three years sin', I had never seen a railway train—I used to spend hours at one of the stations watching them—and, what is more, I had never seen a tree.'

'Never seen a tree!'

'No; they won't grow in some of the islands, you know, at least not above five

or six feet high. But there's the *Dunolly Castle.*'

There lay the good vessel which had so lately ploughed the waters of the Outer Hebrides, a captive now, bound fast by stem and stern.

Cameron jumped on board, and soon re-appeared dragging a full sack behind him, while a seaman followed with a heavy wooden box on his shoulder, and a big earthenware jar in his left hand. Several porters with big two-wheeled barrows now proffered their services. Cameron selected one, and having loaded the barrow with a sack of oatmeal, a small barrel of salt herrings, two great jars which Alec rightly conjectured to contain whisky, and the wooden box, he proceeded to pilot the porter to Hanover Street.

'Tak' care o' the jaurs!' he cried out in some alarm, as the porter knocked his barrow against a corner. 'They're just the maist precious bit o' the haill cargo; and if ye preak ane o' them, she'll preak your heid, as I'm a leefin' man!'

'Why do you bring your provisions instead of buying them here? Is it any cheaper?' asked Alec.

'Cheaper! Fat the teil do I care for the cheapness? I prefer my own whisky, and my own oatmeal, I tell you; it is better than any you can buy here,' answered the proud and irate Highlandman.

But when Alec and he were better acquainted, he acknowledged that the oatmeal and whisky were presented to him by relatives, as aids to the difficult task of living for six months on twenty pounds.

Next morning Alec woke to a blinding, acrid, yellow fog, which the gaslight faintly illumined. It was still dark when he emerged into the street and took his way to the College, with a copy of one of Cicero's orations and a note-book under his arm. As he reached his destination the clock struck eight, and immediately a bell began to tinkle in quick, sharp, imperative tones.

The junior Latin class, he found, met in

the centre of a long narrow hall, lit by a few gas-jets flaring here and there. On both sides of the hall were tall windows, outside of which was the yellow cloud of fog. There was no stove or heating apparatus whatever. A raised bench ran along one side of the long room, and there were black empty galleries at either end. In the centre stood a pulpit, raised about two feet above the floor, and in this the Professor was already standing.

About two hundred men and boys were seated in the benches nearest the pulpit, some wearing the regulation red gown, and some without it, while beyond them the black empty benches stretched away to the farther end of the hall, which lay in complete darkness.

All was stillness, but for the tinkling of the bell. Suddenly it stopped, and that instant a janitor banged the door, shutting out late comers inexorably.

Everybody stood up, while the Professor repeated a collect and the Lord's Prayer in

English. Then he began to call the roll in Latin, and as each student answered 'Adsum!' he was assigned a place on one of the benches, which was to be his for the rest of the session. Alec's place was between a stout little fellow of sixteen, son of a wealthy Glasgow merchant, and a pale overworked teacher, who had set his heart on being able to write 'M.A.' after his name.

The work of the class then began. The Professor gave a short explanation of the circumstances under which the oration which he had selected was made. He read and translated a few lines, explaining the various allusions, the nature of a Roman trial, and the meaning of the word 'judices.' He then, by way of illustrating the method of teaching, called on one of the students to construe a few lines, and proceeded to ask all sorts of questions, historical and philological, passing the questions from man to man and from bench to bench. He then prescribed a piece of English to be turned into Latin prose.

Before he had ceased speaking the clock struck; the bell began to ring; the Professor finished his sentence and shut his book. The lecture was at an end.

The next hour Alec spent chiefly in wandering round the College Green, a kind of neglected park thinly populated with soot-encrusted trees, which lay at the rear of the College buildings. At ten o'clock the junior Greek class met; and Alec entered a small room crammed with students, who were sitting on narrow, crescent-shaped benches raised one behind the other, and fronting a semicircular platform at the lower end of the room. The book-boards, Alec noticed, were extremely narrow, and neatly bound with iron. The procedure here was much the same as it had been in the Latin class, except that there were no prayers, the devotions being confined to the classes which happened to meet earliest in the day.

At eleven there was another hour of Latin, Virgil being the text-book this time; and then

lectures were over for the day, so far as Alec was concerned.

All day long the committee-rooms of the rival Conservative and Liberal Associations were filled with men, consulting, smoking, enrolling pledges, and inditing 'squibs' and manifestoes; and as a Liberal meeting in support of Mr. Sharpe was to be held that evening in the Greek class-room, Alec determined to be present, hoping to hear some arguments which might help him to decide how he ought to vote on this momentous occasion.

In this expectation, however, he was disappointed. Before he came in sight of the lighted-up windows of the class-room he heard a roar of singing—the factions were uniting their powers to render a stanza of 'The Good Rhine Wine' with proper emphasis. The place was packed as full as it would hold, the Professor's platform being held by the committee-men of the Liberal Association. As soon as the song was ended, a small man in spectacles was voted into the chair. He

opened the proceedings by calling upon a Mr. Macfarlane to move the first resolution, and (like a wise man) immediately sat down.

Mr. Macfarlane, a young man of great size with a throat of brass, was not popular. Cries of 'Sit down, sir!' 'Go home, sir!' 'Speak up, sir!' were mingled with volleys of peas, Kentish fire, cheers for Lord Dummieden, and the usual noises of a noisy meeting.

The little man in spectacles got up, and, speaking in a purposely low voice, obtained a hearing. He reminded his Conservative friends that the Liberals had not spoiled the Conservative meeting on the previous evening, and said it was only fair that they should have their turn. This was greeted with loud shouts of 'Hear! hear!' and Mr. Macfarlane began a second time. But soon he managed to set his audience in an uproar once more. His face was fairly battered with peas. Men got up and stood on the benches, then on the book-boards. One fellow had brought a policeman's rattle, with which he created a din so intolerable

that three or four others tried to deprive him of it. One or two stout Conservatives came to the rescue, and finally the whole group slid off their narrow foot-hold on the book-boards, and fell in a confused heap on the floor, amid loud cheers from both parties.

After this episode order was restored, and a fresh orator held the attention of the audience for a few minutes. Unfortunately he stopped for a moment, and the pause was immediately filled by a student at the farther end of the room blowing a shrill, pitiful blast on a child's penny trumpet. The effect was comical enough; and everybody laughed. At that moment a loud knock was heard at the door, which had been locked, the room being already as full as it could possibly hold. The knock was repeated.

'I believe the perambulator has come for the gentleman with the penny trumpet,' said the chairman in gentle accents.

This sally was greeted with a loud roar of laughter; and when it died away, comparative silence reigned for five minutes.

Then came more cheers, songs, and volleys of peas; and when everybody was hoarse the meeting came to an end, the leading spirits on both sides adjourning to their committee-rooms, and afterwards to the hotels which they usually patronized.

These meetings were continued for about ten days, and then the vote was taken. The four 'nations' had each one vote. Two voted for Mr. Sharpe, and two for Lord Dummieden. And then the Chancellor, in accordance with old established practice, gave his casting vote in favour of the Conservative candidate.

It was over. The manifestoes and satirical ballads were swept away; and the twelve hundred men and boys settled down to six months' labour.

CHAPTER VI.

A NEW EXPERIENCE.

For the next six weeks Alec Lindsay's life was one unvarying round of lectures, and preparation for lectures. For recreation he had football on the College Green, long walks on Saturday afternoons, and long debates with his friend Cameron. The debates, however, were not very frequent, for the Highlander was working twelve hours a day.

'I mean to get a first-class in surgery,' he said to Alec one Saturday night, as the two sat over their pipes in Alec's sitting-room; 'and then perhaps the Professor will ask me to be an assistant. If he does, my fortune is made, for I know my work.'

'Ay, that's the great thing,' said Alec absently. 'Don't you ever go to church, Cameron?' he added abruptly.

'As seldom as I can,' said the other, with a side look at his companion; 'but don't take me for a guide.'

'I can't help it,' replied the lad, still gazing into the fire; 'we all take our neighbours for guides, whether we acknowledge it or not.'

'More or less, no doubt.'

'Don't you think one *ought* to go to church?'

'How can I tell? Every man for himself, my lad.'

'That won't do,' answered Alec, rousing himself and facing his friend; 'right's right, and wrong's wrong; what is right for one man must be right for every man—under the same circumstances, I mean.'

'Will you just tell me,' said Cameron, half defiantly, 'what good going to church can do me? I know the psalms almost by heart, and I know the chapters the minister reads almost

as well. As for the prayers, half of them aren't prayers at all, and the other half I could say as weel at hame, if I had a mind. And the sermons!—man, Alec, ye canna say ye think they can do good to any living creature.'

'Some of them, perhaps.'

'When I find a minister that doesna tell us the same thing over, and over, and over again, and use fifty words to say what might be said in five, to spin out the time, I'll reconsider the p'int,' said Cameron.

'But you believe there's a God,' said Alec.

'That's a lang stap furret,' said the other.

'But do you?'

'Well, I do, and I dinna. I don't believe in the Free Kirk God. It's hard to think this warl could mak' itsel': but I hae my doots.'

'Then you're an Agnostic?'

'What if I am? Are ye scunnered?'*

* Disgusted.

'No—and yet——'

'Or what if I should tell you I have chosen some other religion? Why should I be a Presbyterian? Because I was born in Scotland. That's the only reason I've been able to think of, and it doesn't seem to me to be up to much.'

Alec was secretly shocked, though he thought it more manly not to show it.

'I believe in the Bible,' he said at last.

'That doesna help you much,' said Cameron, with some contempt. 'Baptists, Independents, Episcopalians, the very Papists themsel's, and thae half-heathen Russians, wad tell ye that they believe in the Bible. Ye micht as weel tell a judge, when he ca'ed on you for an argument, that ye believe in an Act o' Parliament.'

'Hae ye an aitlas?' he continued after a pause. 'Here's one.'

He turned to a 'Mercator's projection' at the beginning of the volume, and scratched the spot which represented Scotland with his

pencil. He then slightly shaded England, the United States, and Holland, and put in a few dots in Germany and Switzerland.

'There!' he said, as he pushed the map across the table; 'that's your Presbyterian notion o' Christendom. There's a glimmerin' in England and the States, but only in bonny Scotland does the true licht shine full and fair. As for Germany, Holland, an' Switzerland, they're unco dry, no tae say deid branches. The rest o' mankind—total darkness!'

'But you might have said the same thing of Christianity itself at one time, and of every religion in the world, for that matter,' protested Alec.

'Nae doot,' retorted Cameron, 'but that was at the beginning. This is Christianity, according to the gospel o' John Knox and Company after nineteen centuries! A poor show for nineteen hunder' years—a mighty poor show!'

He got up as he spoke, and knocking the

ashes out of his pipe, prepared to move to his own quarters.

'Let's change the subject,' said Alec. 'Here's a letter I got this morning, and I don't know how to answer it.'

'What's this?' said the older man, taking the thick sheet of paper between the tips of his fingers. '"Mr. James Lindsay presents his compliments to Mr. Alexander Lindsay, and requests the pleasure of his company at dinner on Tuesday the 27th inst., at half-past six. Blythswood Square, December, 187–." Is this old James Lindsay o' Drumleck?'

'Yes.'

'Are you a connection of his?'

'Grand-nephew.'

'And why can't you answer the note?'

'I don't want to go. I haven't been brought up to this sort of thing, and I don't care to go out of my way to make myself ridiculous in a rich man's house. Besides, I don't want to go to the expense of a suit of dress clothes. And then, my uncle and I were not particularly

smitten with each other when I saw him last.'

'Don't be a fool, Alec,' said Cameron quietly. 'You can't afford to throw away the friendship of a man worth twenty thousand a year.'

'That phrase always reminds me,' remarked Alec, 'of what one of the Erskines—I don't remember which of them it was—once said, when some one said in his company that so-and-so had died worth three hundred thousand pounds—"Did he indeed, sir? And a very pretty sum, too, to begin the next world with."'

Cameron smiled grimly.

'You'll have to go, Alec,' he repeated; 'and you needn't be afraid of appearing ridiculous. Do as you see others do, and keep a lown sail; better seem blate than impident.'

'My father would be in a fine way if he heard that my uncle had invited me, and that I had refused the invitation,' said Lindsay.

'And quite right too,' rejoined Cameron.

'Besides, Alec, the old man is your father's uncle, and you ought to show him some respect.'

'That wasn't the reason you put in the fore-front,' said Alec slyly.

For reply Cameron, who had reached the door, picked up a Greek grammar, flung it at his friend's head as he muttered something in Gaelic, and banging the door behind him, ascended to his own domicile.

Exactly at the appointed hour Alec presented himself at his grand-uncle's house in Blythswood Square. The square had once been fashionable, and was still something more than respectable, because the houses were too large to be inhabited by people of moderate means; but the situation was dull and gloomy to the last degree. Within, however, there was a very different scene. Entrance-hall, staircase, drawing-room, were all as brilliant as gas-jets could make them. The walls, even of the passages, were lined with pictures, good, bad, and indifferent. Every landing, every corner,

held a statue, or at least a statuette, or a bust upon a pedestal.

When Alec was ushered into the drawing-room, he could hardly see for the blaze of light; he could hardly move for little tables laden with china, ormolu, and bronzes. Fortunately, Sir Peter and Lady Colquhoun were entering the reception-room just as Alec reached it, so that he made his entrance in their wake, and, as it were, under their lee.

The room was already pretty well filled, and more guests were continually arriving. On the hearth-rug stood a little old man, with a mean, inexpressive face, scanty hair which was still gray, thin gray whiskers, small eyes, and a fussy consequential air. When he spoke, it was in a high-pitched, rasping voice; and he invariably gave one the impression that he was insisting upon being noticed and attended to.

This was Mr. Lindsay of Drumleck. He stared at Alec for an instant, then gave him his hand in silence, and, without addressing a

word to him, continued his conversation with the Lord Provost's wife. Alec's face flushed. His first impulse was to walk out of the room, and out of the house ; but on second thoughts he saw that that course would not even be dignified. He retreated to a corner, and set himself to watch the company.

For the most part they sat nearly silent—fat baillies and their well-nourished wives —hard-featured damsels of thirty or forty summers, in high-necked dresses and Brussels lace collars—one or two stout ministers—such was the assembly. Alec was astonished. He had expected, somehow, that he should meet people of a different type.

'Take one or two dozen people from behind the shop-counters in Argyle Street,' he said to himself (with boyish contempt for the disappointing), or even a few Muirburn ploughmen and weavers, give them plenty of money, and in three weeks they would be quite as fine ladies and gentlemen as any I see here.'

As the thought passed through the boy's

mind, the door was thrown open, and the names of 'Professor Taylor and Miss Mowbray' were announced. A tall, lean man, with long hair and crumpled old-fashioned garments, entered, and beside him walked a young lady with her eyes on the ground.

She was dressed in a cream-coloured costume, with just a fleck of colour here and there. She was indeed remarkably pretty, and possessed a soft, childlike grace which was more captivating than beauty alone would have been. She had a small, well-rounded figure—a little more and it would have been plump—abundant dark-brown hair, and a soft, peach-like complexion. Her eyelashes were unusually long; and when, reaching her host, she half-timidly raised her eyes to his, Alec (who was sitting in the background) felt a little thrill of pleasure at the mere sight of their dark loveliness.

She was the first lady, the first young lady, at least, whom he had seen, and he looked at her as if she were a being to be worshipped.

But Laura Mowbray was indeed pretty enough to have turned the head of a more experienced person than the laird's son.

Professor Taylor and his niece moved to one side; her dress almost brushed against Alec. She glanced at him for an instant; without intending it he dropped his eyes, and the girl looked in another direction with a little inward smile.

In three or four minutes dinner was announced, and Laura fell to the care of James Semple (the cousin who had taken Alec's place at the oil-works), who had just come in. There were more men than women in the party, and Alec and one or two of the less wealthy guests were left to find their way into the dining-room by themselves at the end of the procession. Fortune, however, favoured Alec. When he took his seat, he found that he was sitting between a pale, inoffensive-looking youth and—Laura Mowbray.

He literally did not dare to look at her, much less to address her; he was not sure,

indeed, whether the rules of society allowed him to do so in the absence of an introduction. In a little time, however, his shyness wore off; he watched his opportunity; but before he found one, his neighbour remarked in her soft English accent, and in the sweetest of tones:

'What dreadful fogs you have in Glasgow!'

Alec made some reply, and the ice once broken, he made rapid progress.

'Everybody I meet seems to be related to somebody else, or connected with some one I have met before,' said Miss Mowbray. 'You have all so many relations in this part of the country, and you seem never to forget any of them. In London it is different. People seldom know their next-door neighbours; and it is just a chance whether they keep up cousinships, and so on, or not.'

'Really? I think that is very unnatural.'

'Oh! *so* unnatural! Life in London is so dreadfully conventional and superficial. Don't you think so?'

'I dare say; but I have never been in London.'

'Have you, Mr. Semple?' she asked of the gentleman on her left.

'No, I haven't,' he answered shortly.

He did not approve of Miss Mowbray paying any attention to Alec, regarding her as for the time being his property. On this Laura left off talking to Alec, and devoted herself to the amusement of Mr. Semple.

Soon, however, she took advantage of his attention being claimed by the lady on his left, to turn again with a smile to Alec.

'Mr. Semple tells me you are at College. My uncle is a professor there, but he has hardly any students, because history is not a compulsory subject in the examinations. How do you like being at College?'

Alec was grateful for her interest in him, and gave her his impressions of College life. Then she turned once more to her legitimate entertainer, who was by that time at liberty.

Alec had already had far more intercourse with his lovely neighbour than he had dared to hope for; but the dinner was a long one; and as Mr. Semple's left-hand neighbour happened to be a maiden aunt with money, she was able to compel his attention once more before the close of the meal.

'You live in a beautiful part of the country, I believe,' Miss Mowbray remarked to Alec.

'I don't know; I like it, of course; but I don't know that it is finer than any country with wood and a river.'

'Oh, you *have* a river? I am so passionately fond of river scenery.'

'Yes, and we have a castle,' replied Alec; and before the ladies rose he had described not only the castle, but the moorland and the romantic dell which was his sister's favourite retreat, to his much-interested neighbour.

When at length the ladies followed Miss Lindsay—a distant relation who superintended Mr. Lindsay's establishment—out of the room,

Alec felt as if the evening had suddenly come to an end.

Semple, who had vouchsafed him rather a cool nod in the evening, tried in vain to make him talk.

'How do you like College?'

'Pretty well.'

'Dreadful underbred set. Why don't you go to Oxford?'

Alec made no reply.

'Or Edinburgh—they are a much better class of men at Edinburgh, I'm told.'

And Mr. Semple turned away to join a conversation about 'warrants,' and 'premiums,' and 'vendor's shares,' 'corners,' 'contangos,' and 'quotations,' which to Alec was simply unintelligible.

At the other end of the table a conversation of another character was in progress—one hardly less interesting to those who took part in it, and hardly more interesting to an outsider. It seemed that a wealthy congregation of United Presbyterians had built

themselves an organ at considerable expense, without obtaining the sanction of their co-religionists; and an edict had gone forth that the organ must be silent on Sundays, but might be used for the delectation of those who attended the prayer-meeting on Wednesday evenings.

'I look upon it as the thin end of the wedge,' said the Reverend Hector MacTavish, D.D., striking his fist on his knee. 'You begin with hymns, many of them wishwashy trash, some of them positively unscriptural. Then you must have a choir for the tunes, as if the old-fashioned long metre and common metre were not good enough; then comes an organ; then the Lord's Prayer is used as a part of the ritual—mark you, as a part of the ritual—I have no objection to the Lord's Prayer when it is not used on formal, stated occasions. After that, you have a liturgy.'

'No, no, Doctor; you are going too fast,' murmured one of the audience.

'And I maintain that with a liturgy there is an end to the distinctively Presbyterian form of worship.'

'But where would you draw the line?' inquired a mild, sallow-faced young man who had imbibed his theological opinions at Heidelberg, and was in consequence suspected of latitudinarianism, if not of actual heresy.

'Where our fathers drew it, at the Psalms of Tavid!' thundered Mr. MacTavish, striking his unoffending knee once more.

'Then I fear you render Union impossible,' said the young minister.

'And what if I do, sir?' said Dr. MacTavish loftily; 'in my opinion we Free Churchmen are ferry well as we are, and need no new lights to illuminate us.'

The young man received the covert sneer at his German training and his liberal ideas with a smile; and Alec listened no longer, but relapsed into dreamland. The dispute, however, continued long after most of the men had returned to the drawing-room, and

Alec rose from his chair while an animated discussion was in progress on the point whether the use of an organ was favourable to spiritual worship or tended to sensuousness, and whether the fact that the New Testament was silent on the subject, condemned the organ and its followers by anticipation.

When Alec entered the drawing-room, Miss Mowbray was singing. He retreated to a corner and stood as one spell-bound. He watched for an opportunity of speaking to her again, but there was none; however, on passing him on her way to the door on her uncle's arm, she gave him a little bow and smile, which he regarded as another proof of her sweetness of disposition.

The theologians had not finished their disputations, and were continuing them in a corner of the drawing-room, when Alec took his departure.

He walked back to his poor and empty room with his head among the stars. She had talked with him, smiled upon him, treated

him as an equal. He would find out where she lived, and contrive to meet her again. How lovely she was, how sweet, how pure, how good! The wide earth, Alec Lindsay was firmly convinced, contained no mortal fit for one moment to be compared with the girl whose soft brown eyes and gentle, almost appealing, looks still made his heart beat as he remembered them.

CHAPTER VII.

A SUNDAY IN GLASGOW.

'WELL, Alec, how did you get on last night?' asked Duncan Cameron of his friend, when they met as usual the day after the dinner at Blythswood Square.

'Oh, all right. It was rather a stupid affair.'

'Rather stupid—not quite worth the trouble of attending? And yet you were half afraid of going! Don't deny it.'

'I said it was stupid; and so it was,' said Alec, reddening. 'Nobody said anything worth listening to, so far as I heard.'

'That means nobody took much notice of *you*, eh?'

'What an ill-conditioned, sneering fellow

you are, Cameron,' replied Alec tranquilly. 'You'll never get on in the world unless you learn to be civil.'

'It isn't worth my while to be civil to you,' said Cameron. 'Wait till I'm in practice and have to flatter and humour rich old women. What did your uncle say to you?'

'Hardly anything—just a word or two, as I was coming away.'

'You ought to cultivate him, Alec.'

'I wish you wouldn't speak like that, Duncan,' said Alec roughly. 'Do you think I'm the sort of fellow to flatter and fawn upon an old man I don't like, simply because he is rich?'

'There's no need for flattering and fawning,' replied Cameron; 'but you've no right to throw away such a chance at the very outset of your life.'

'Do you think, then, that it's manly or honourable to visit a man as it were out of pure friendship, when your only object is to make him useful to you?'

'There's no question of friendship, ye gowk; he's your relation, and the head of your house. It's your duty to pay him your respects occasionally.'

'Paying my respects wouldn't be of much use,' retorted Alec. 'You're shirking the question. Is it honourable to—I don't know the right word—to try to ingratiate yourself with anyone in the hope of getting something out of him?'

'Why not?'

'It's not honourable; and I would not respect myself if I were to do such a thing,' said Alec, with much dignity.

Cameron laughed inwardly, but he made no response, and there was silence for a few minutes between the two friends. The older man was thinking how absurd the boy was, and how a little experience of life would rub off his 'high-fantastical' notions. Then he wished that he had a grand-uncle who was a millionnaire. And then he fell to wondering whether, on the whole, it was best to despise

wealth, as Alec Lindsay did, or to acquire it.

'I suppose it is too late now to take another class?' said Alec, half absently.

'I should think so,' responded his friend. 'What class did you think of taking? Mathematics?'

'No; History.'

'History! That isn't wanted for a degree. What put that into your head?'

'Oh, I don't know. I only thought of it.'

Cameron did not know that the learned Professor of History had a niece named Laura Mowbray.

That evening about ten o'clock, when the medical student went down to his friend's room, as was his custom at that hour, he found Alec poring over some papers, which he pushed aside as Cameron entered.

'Come in,' he cried, as the other paused in the doorway. 'I'm not working.'

The Highlander took up his usual position,

standing on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, and proceeded to light his pipe.

'They tell me you're doing very well in the Latin class—sure of a prize, if you keep on as you're doing,' he said, after smoking for a minute in silence.

'Oh, it's no use; I can't do Latin prose,' answered Alec discontentedly. 'How can I? I've never had any practice. Just look at this—my last exercise—no frightful blunders, but, as the Professor said, full of inelegancies;' and he handed his friend a sheet of paper from his table as he spoke.

Cameron took the paper, and regarded it through a cloud of smoke.

'What's this?' he exclaimed. 'Poetry, as I'm a livin' Heelandman! Just listen!' and he waved his hand, as if addressing an imaginary audience.

Alec's face burned, as he rose and hastily snatched the paper from his friend's grasp. Cameron would have carried his bantering

further, but he saw that in the lad's face which restrained him.

'Already!' he muttered, as he turned away to hide his laughter.

'Are you going home for the New Year?' asked Alec, when his embarrassment had subsided.

'Me? No! We have only a week's vacation, or ten days at most. The *Dunolly Castle* sails only once a week in winter; and if the sailings didn't suit, I should have hardly time to go there before I had to come away again. And if a storm came on I should be weather-bound, and might not get south for another week.'

'It must be very dreary in the north in winter,' said Alec.

'Ay—but you must come and see for yourself some day.'

Alec was silent; he was thinking that he should like to ask his friend to spend the vacation week with him at the Castle Farm;

but he did not care to take the responsibility of giving the invitation.

The following Sunday was one of those dismal days which are common in the west of Scotland during the winter months. It was nearly cold enough for snow, but instead of snow a continuous drizzle fell slowly throughout the day. There was no fog ; but in the streets of Glasgow it was dark soon after midday.

Alec Lindsay went to church in the forenoon as usual; then he came home and ate a cold dinner which would have been very trying to any appetite less robust than that of a young Scotchman.

Finding that he had a few minutes to spare before setting out for the afternoon service (which takes the place of an evening service in England), he ran upstairs to his friend's room.

'I wish you would come to church with me, Duncan,' he said, as he seated himself on the medical student's trunk.

The invitation implied a reproach; but Cameron was not offended at this interference

with his private concerns. In the north a man who 'neglects ordinances' is supposed to lay himself open to the reproof of any better-disposed person who assumes an interest in his spiritual welfare. For reply he muttered something in Gaelic, which Alec conjectured, rightly enough, to be an exclamation too improper to be said conveniently in English.

'Fat can ye no leaf a man alone for?' he said aloud, reverting, as he did when he was excited, to his strong Highland accent.

Alec said no more; but Cameron, whose conscience was not quite at rest, chose to continue the subject.

'I go to the kirk when I'm at home,' he said, 'an' that's enough. I go to please my mother, an' keep folk from talking—but it's weary work. I often ask myself what is the good of it?—the whole thing, I mean. There's old Mr. Macfarlane, the parish minister of Glenstruan—we went to live on the mainland two years ago, you know. He's a decent man—a *ferry* decent man. He ladles oot castor

oil an' cod-liver oil as occasion requires, to the haill parish, an' the next ane tae, without fee or reward. He's a great botanist, and spends half his time in his gairden—grows a' sorts o' fruit—even peaches, I've been told. When the weather's suitable he gangs fishin'. On Sabbath he has apoot forty folk in his big barn o' a kirk. He talks tae them for an oor, an' lets them gang. He's aye ready to baptize a wean, or pray wi' a deein' botoch,* but it's seldom he has the chance. I'm no blamin' the man. It's no his faut that the folk gaed ower bodily to the Free Kirk at the Disruption, an' left him, a shepherd wi' ne'er a flock, but a wheen auld rams, wha——'

'But there's the Free Kirk,' interrupted Alec, 'and it's your own kirk, I suppose.'

'No,' said Cameron. 'If anything, I belong to the Establishment. Save me, is my daily an' nichtly prayer, frae the bitter birr o' the Dissenters.'

Alec laughed, and the other went on :

* Old man.

'There's Maister MacPhairson, the Free Kirk minister. He's a wee, soor, black-a-vised crater, wi' a wife an' nine weans. Hoo he manages to gie them parritch an' milk I can *not* imagine. He's jist eaten up wi' envy an' spite that the parish minister has the big hoose, and he has the wee ane. He mak's his sermons dooble as lang to let folk see that he does a' the wark——'

'A very good reason for not belonging to the Free Church,' interposed Alec; 'but I don't see what all this has got to do with the question.'

'I'm only showing that the religious system of this country is in a state of petrifaction,' said Cameron, abandoning the Doric—'fossilization, if you like it better.'

Alec laughed.

'A pretty proof,' he cried.

'Oh, of course, the state of religion in one corner of the Hielans is only an illustration; but it's much the same everywhere. I don't see, to put the thing plainly, that we should be very much worse off without any kirks,

and what we want with so many is a mystery to me. What was the use of building a new one in every parish at the Disruption, I should like to know?'

'You know as well as I do,' answered Alec. 'A great principle was at stake.'

'"The sacred right o' the nowte* to chuse their ain herd," as Burns puts it,' interposed Cameron.

'Not only that; the question was whether the Church should submit to interference on the part of the State,' said Alec.

'And by way of showing that she never would submit, she rent herself in twa, and one half has spent the best part of her pith ever since in keeping up the fight wi' the tither half. What sense is there in that, can ye tell me?'

'That's all very well,' said Alec, 'but it seems to me that if a man finds a poor religion around him, he ought to stick to it as well as he can till he finds a better one.'

* Cattle.

'There's sense in that, Alec,' said Cameron; 'and I'll no just say I've no had my endeavours to find a better.'

'Where can ye find a better?' asked Alec, shocked at this latitudinarianism.

'I didna say I had succeeded, did I? But I've tried. I went a good deal among the Methodists in my first year at College. I was wonderfully taken with them at first—thought them just the very salt of the earth. But in six months, I found they groaned and cried "Amen" a little too often—for nothing at all. Then, my next session, I wandered about from one kirk to another, and then I stayed still. Sometimes I've even gone to the Catholics.'

'The Catholics!' exclaimed Alec, with horror. If his friend had said that he had occasionally joined in the rites of pagans, and had witnessed human sacrifices, he could hardly have shocked this son of the Covenanters more seriously.

'Hoots, ay!' said the Highlander, with a

half-affected carelessness. 'There's a lot o' them in Glenstruan.'

'At home? In the north?' asked Alec, in astonishment.

'Yes; in out-of-the-way corners there are many Catholics. In some parishes there are but few Protestants.'

'How did they come there?'

'They have always been there.'

It was news to Alec, Scotchman as he was, that there are to this day little communities of Catholics hidden among the mountains of Ross and Inverness, living in glens so secluded that one might almost fancy that the fierce storms of the sixteenth century had never reached them.

Wondering in his heart how it was possible that even unlettered Highlanders should have clung so long to degrading superstitions, Alec descended from his friend's garret, and set off alone for St. Simon's Free Church. The Free Churchmen in the Scotch towns frequently name their places of worship after the Apostles,

not with any idea of honouring the Apostles' memory, but solely by way of keeping up a healthful and stimulating rivalry with the Establishment. Thus we have 'St. Paul's,' and 'Free St. Paul's'—'St. John's,' and 'Free St. John's'—and so forth.

Alec set out alone, and he felt very lonely as he made his way over the sloppy pavements. Among all these crowds of respectably-dressed people, there was not one face he knew, not the least possibility that anyone would give him a greeting. He would much rather have stayed at home over a pipe and a book, like Duncan Cameron; but his conscience would have made him miserable for a month if he had been guilty of such a crime. The jangling of bells filled the murky air. Most places of worship in Scotland have a bell, but very few have more than one. There is, therefore, no reason why each church should not have as large and as loud a bell as is consistent with the safety of the belfry.

In a short time Alec reached 'Free St.

Simon's,' a building which outwardly resembled an Egyptian temple on a small scale, and inwardly a Methodist chapel on a large scale. In all essential points the worship was exactly a counterpart of that to which he had always been accustomed at Muirburn; but the details were different. Here the passages were covered with matting, and the pews were carpeted and cushioned. Hassocks were also provided, not for kneeling upon, but for the greater comfort of the audience during the sermon.

The tall windows on either side of the pulpit were composed of painted glass. There were no idolatrous representations in the windows; only geometrical figures — Alec knew their number, and the colour of each one of them, intimately.

At Free St. Simon's the modern habit of standing during psalm-singing had been introduced. The attitude to be observed at prayer was as yet a moot question. Custom varied upon the point. The older members

of the congregation stood up and severely regarded their fellow-worshippers, who kept their seats, propped their feet on their hassocks, put their arms on the book-boards, and leant their heads upon their arms. This posture Alec found to be highly conducive to slumber; and he had much difficulty in keeping awake, but he did not care to proclaim himself one of the 'unco guid' by rising to his feet, and protesting in that way against the modern laxity of manners.

The prayer was a very long one, but at last it was over; and then came a chapter read from the Bible, another portion of a psalm, and the sermon. The preacher was both a good man and a learned one, but oratory was not his strong point; and if it had been, he might well have been excused for making no attempt to exert it at such a time and under such circumstances. The text, Alec remembered afterwards, was 'One Lord, one Father of all,' and the sermon was an elaborate attempt to prove that the Creator was in no

proper sense the 'Father' of all men, but of the elect only. The young student listened for a time, and then fell to castle-building, an occupation of which he was perilously fond.

When the regulation hour-and-a-half had come to a close, the congregation was dismissed; and Alec Lindsay went back to his lodgings, weary, depressed, and discontented. After tea there was absolutely nothing for him to do. He did not feel inclined to read a religious book; and recreations of any kind were absolutely forbidden by the religion in which he had been brought up. After an hour spent in idling about his room, he set out to find a church at which there was evening service, thinking that to hear another sermon would be less wearisome than solitude.

Wandering through the streets, which at that hour were almost deserted, he at last heard a church bell begin to ring, and following the sound he came to a stone building, surmounted by a belfry. After a little hesi-

tation, Alec Lindsay entered, and was conducted by the pew-opener to a seat. The area of the building was filled with very high-backed pews, set close together, and a large gallery ran round three of the walls; but the chapel was evidently not a Presbyterian place of worship, for on either side of the lofty pulpit was a reading-desk, nearly as high as the pulpit itself.

Presently the bell stopped, and an organ placed in the gallery opposite the pulpit began to sound. Then a clergyman in white surplice and black stole ascended to the reading-desk on the right of the central pulpit, and Alec Lindsay knew that he was, for the first time in his life, in an 'Episcopal' chapel.

The service was conducted in the plainest manner possible. The psalms were read, the canticles alone being chanted; and the clergyman, as he read the prayers, faced the congregation. The hymns were of a pronounced Evangelical type, and the sternest Calvinist could have found no fault with the sermon.

But to Alec all was so entirely new and strange that he sometimes found it difficult to remember that he was supposed to be engaged in worship.

The prayers were over, and the sermon had begun, when Alec noticed, at some little distance, a face, the sight of which made his hand tremble and his heart beat. It was Laura Mowbray. She was sitting alone in her corner, her only companion being a maid-servant, who sat at the door of the pew. Her profile was turned towards Alec, its clear white outline showing against the dark panelling behind her. Almost afraid to look in her direction, for fear of attracting her attention, or of allowing those sitting near him to guess what was passing in his mind, he took only a glance now and then at the object of his worship. It was worship, rather than love, with Alec Lindsay. Courtship, and marriage, and the practical considerations which these things entail, never entered the boy's mind. He had seen his ideal of beauty, of refinement, of

feminine grace; and he was content, for the present at least, to worship her at a distance, himself unseen.

When the service was over, he left the chapel, and placed himself at an angle outside the gateway, where he could see her as she passed out. He recognised her figure as soon as it appeared, but to his great disappointment her face was turned from him. By chance, however, she looked back to see if the maid were following her, and for one instant he had a full view of her face. It was enough, and without a thought of accosting her, Alec went home satisfied.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE ROARING GAME.

When the Christmas holidays drew near, Alec obtained his father's permission to ask his friend, Duncan Cameron, to spend a week at the Castle Farm; and, after a little hesitation, Cameron accepted the proposal.

'There's just one thing, Duncan, I would like you to mind,' said Alec, as they drew near the farm; 'my father's an old man, and he doesn't like to be contradicted. More than that, he doesn't care to hear anyone express opinions contrary to his own, at least on two subjects—politics and religion. If you can't agree with him on these points, and I dare say you won't, hold your tongue, like a good fellow.

And my sister—you'd better keep off religion in her case too.'

'Why didn't you tell me this before?' was Cameron's inward thought; but he only said he would of course be careful not to wound the old gentleman's susceptibilities.

Mr. Lindsay received his guest with a hearty welcome—it was not one of his faults to fail in hospitality—indeed, a stranger might have thought that he was better pleased to see his guest than his son. He led the way through the great stone-floored kitchen to the parlour, where an enormous fire of coals was blazing, and where the evening meal was already laid out on the snowy table-cloth.

'You had better warm your hands before going upstairs,' he said to Duncan. 'You must have had a very cold drive. Margaret!' he called out, finding that his daughter was not in the sitting-room. 'Margaret! where are you? Come away at once.'

In his eyes Margaret was a child still. He was a little annoyed that she should have

been out of the way, and not in her place, ready to welcome the guest.

Margaret, however, had taken her stand in the dairy, which was on the opposite side of the passage from the kitchen. She wanted to greet her brother in her own way. And Alec, as soon as he saw that she was not with his father, knew where she was. The dairy had been a favourite refuge in their childish days. It was a little out of the way, and seldom visited, while it commanded a way of retreat through the cheese-house.

As soon as his father had taken charge of Cameron, Alec hurried back through the kitchen, ran along the passage, opened the dairy-door, and there, sure enough, was Margaret.

'Maggie!' he cried; and the two were fast locked in each other's embrace.

It was but eight weeks since they had parted; but they had never been separated before.

For a moment neither spoke.

'What made you come here, Maggie?' asked Alec, with boyish inconsiderateness.

'I came for the cream for tea,' said Margaret.

'Oh, Maggie!'

'I did indeed. Go and get me a light. Oh, Alec! it has been so lonely without you!'

She kissed him again, and pushed him out of the dairy. Then she burst into tears. He was not so glad to see her as she had been to see him. He was changed; she knew he was changed, though she had not really seen him. He was going to be a man, to grow beyond her, to forget, perhaps to despise her. Why had he asked why she had come there? Surely he might have——

At this point in Margaret's reflections, Alec returned with a candle, and seeing the traces of tears on his sister's cheeks, he turned and gave her another hug. She tenderly returned the caress; but her first words were:

'Why did you bring a stranger home with

you, Alec? And we are to be together such a short time, too!'

'Oh, nonsense, Maggie! Cameron is a great friend of mine, and you'll like him, I'm sure. But there's father calling; we must go.'

Mr. Lindsay had divined what his daughter had been doing; but he thought it was now quite time that she should come forward and play her part as hostess.

'You go first, Alec,' she said, taking up the cream-jug which she had brought as her excuse for her visit to the dairy.

'And I tell you, sir, that till we have the ballot we can have no security against persecution,' Mr. Lindsay was exclaiming, as they entered the sitting-room. 'A man cannot vote now according to his conscience unless he is prepared to risk being driven from his home, to lose his very livelihood. Let me give you an instance——'

But here Margaret came forward, calm and serene as usual. Cameron rose to meet her; and the political harangue was cut short by

the appearance of a stout damsel with cheeks like peonies, bearing an enormous silver teapot.

Cameron was struck by Margaret Lindsay's beauty, as everyone was who saw her; but the effect was to render him shy and ill at ease. He felt inferior to her; and the calm indifference of her manner made him fancy that she treated him with disdain. Mr. Lindsay did most of the talking; Cameron, mindful of his friend's warning, sat almost dumb, totally unlike his usual self. Alec began to think that he had made a mistake in inviting him to the Castle Farm.

As it happened, a keen frost had set in some days before, and farm operations were at a standstill. Margaret was busy next morning in superintending matters in the dairy and the kitchen; but the three men had nothing to do. Mr. Lindsay fastened on his guest, and extracted from him a full and particular account of the state of agriculture and of religion in the island of Scalpa and the

neighbouring mainland before the one o'clock dinner.

In the evening, however, there was a promise of a little break in the monotony of life at the farm. A message was brought to Alec enjoining him to be at 'The Lang Loch' by half-past nine next morning, and take part in a curling-match between the Muirburn parish and the players of the neighbouring parish of Auchinbyres.

'You can't possibly go, Alec,' said the laird, when the message was delivered; 'Mr. Cameron won't care to hang about here alone all day.'

Mr. Lindsay was secretly proud of his son's reputation as a curler; but he did not wish him to go to the match, because he did not care that he should be exposed to the contaminating influences of a very mixed company, and he did not relish the prospect of Alec's carrying away his friend and leaving him alone for the day. But when Duncan heard of the match he declared that he must see it

—there was hardly ever any frost worth speaking of in the Hebrides; and he had never seen a curling-match.

'You'll want the dog-cart to take your stones to the loch, Alec,' said Mr. Lindsay. 'I think I will go with you, and go on to Netherburn about those tiles.'

'I wish you would come with us, Maggie,' said Alec. 'Father will be passing the loch on his way back in half an hour, and he can pick you up and bring you home. The drive will do you good.'

To this arrangement Margaret consented, and early next morning the little party set out in the keen wintry air. The sun, not long risen, was making the snow sparkle on the fields, and turning the desolate scene into fairyland.

After an hour's drive they arrived at the scene of the match—a sheet of water, on one side of which the open moor stretched away to the horizon, while on the other side there was a thin belt of fir-trees. The ice, two or three

acres in extent, was covered with a sprinkling of snow, which had been carefully cleared from the 'rinks.' The rinks were sixty or seventy yards long by six or eight wide, and they showed like pools of black water beside the clear white snow.

Already the surface of the little lake was dotted with boys on 'skeitchers,' as skates are called in that part of the country; and the margin was fringed with dog-carts from which the horses had been removed. The stones, circular blocks of granite, nearly a foot in diameter, and about five inches thick, fitted with brass handles, were lying in order on the bank on beds of straw.

Quite a little crowd of farmers, farm-servants, and schoolboys were assembled beside the stones, waiting till the match should begin. Lord Bantock, the chief land-owner in that part of Kyleshire, was there, his red, good-humoured face beaming on everybody, his hands thrust into the pockets of his knickerbockers, the regulation green

broom under his arm. Next him stood a little spare man in a tall hat. This was Johnnie Fergus, draper, ironmonger, guardian of the poor, and Free Church deacon in the neighbouring village of Auchinbyres.

Nothing was ever done at Auchinbyres without Johnnie Fergus having a hand in it. He was a man of importance, and he knew it. No man had ever seen Johnnie in a round hat. He always carried his chin very much in the air, and kept his lips well pursed up, and spoke in a peremptory tone of voice—especially when (as on the present occasion) he was in the company of his betters.

Next to him stood Hamilton of the Holme, a great giant of a man, slow in his movements, slow in his speech, wearing the roughest of rough tweeds, and boots whose soles were at least an inch in thickness. At present, however, he was encased as to his lower man in enormous stockings, drawn over boots and trousers, to prevent him from slipping about

on the ice; and many of the players were arrayed in a similar fashion.

'Come awa', Castle Fairm!' cried one of the crowd as Mr. Lindsay drove up. 'Aw'm glaid to see ye; ye play a hantle better nor yer son.'

'Na, na, Muirfuit,' responded the laird; 'my playin'-days are by.'

Meantime Lord Bantock strolled over to the dog-cart, his ostensible reason being to shake hands with Mr. Lindsay, whom he recognised in his fallen state as one of the small gentry of the county.

'Are you going to honour us with your presence, Miss Lindsay?' he asked, as he helped Margaret to alight.

'Only for half an hour,' she answered, as she sprang lightly to the ground. 'You will be back by that time?' she continued, addressing her father.

'In less than an hour, at any rate,' he answered as he drove away; and Margaret, seeing some schoolgirls whom she knew en-

gaged in sliding, went off to speak to them.

At this point a loud roar of laughter came from the group of men standing at the side of the loch; and Lord Bantock, who dearly loved a joke, hurried back to them.

'Old Simpson is telling some of his stories; let us go and hear him,' said Alec Lindsay, as, passing his arm through his friend's, he led him up to the little crowd.

A tall man with a lean, smooth face, dressed in a high hat and black frock-coat, and wearing an old-fashioned black silk handkerchief round his neck, was standing in a slouching attitude, his hands half out of his pockets, while the others hung around in silence, waiting for his next anecdote.

'That minds me,' he was saying, as Alec and Cameron came up, 'that minds me o' what auld Craig o' the Burn-Fuit said to wee Jamieson the writer.* Craig was a dour,† ill-tempered man; and though he had never

* A lawyer. † Hard.

fashed the kirk muckle, the minister cam' to see him on one occasion when it was thocht he was near his hinner-en'.

'"Ye're deein', Burn-Fuit," says Maister Symie.

'"No jist yet, minister," says Craig.

'"I doot ye're deein'; an' it behoves ye to mak' your peace wi' the haill warl'," says the minister.

'Craig gied a sigh, as if it was the hardest job he could set himself tae. After a heap o' talkin' the minister got him persuaded to see Jamieson, who just then was his great enemy —he aye had ane or twa o' them—an' forgie him for some ill-turn the writer had dune him. An' wi' jist as much persuasion he got Jamieson to come to the deein' man's bedside, and be a pairty to the reconciliation.

'Sae the twa met, and had a freenly crack i' the minister's presence. Guid Mr. Symie was delighted. As the writer was depairtin', they shook hands.

'"Guid-day, Maister Jamieson," says Craig.

"Ye've done me many an ill-turn, but I forgie ye. But mind—mind, if I get weel, a' this gangs for nowt!"'

A laugh followed the schoolmaster's story; and the group dispersed to see that the preparations which were being made on the ice were duly performed. A small hole had already been bored at each end of the principal rink. Each of these was to be in its turn the 'tee,' or mark. At some distance from each of the tees, a line called the 'hog-score' was drawn across the ice. Stones which did not pass this line were not to be allowed to count, and were to be removed at once from the ice. A long piece of wood, with nails driven through it at fixed intervals, was now placed with one of its ends resting on the tee, and held there firmly, while it was slowly turned round on the ice. The result of this operation was that the ice was marked by circles drawn at equal distances from the tee, by which the relative distances of two stones from the central point could be easily determined.

The players having been already selected, the match began as soon as this was done.

Alec Lindsay, being one of the youngest men present, was told to begin, his adversary being Simpson the schoolmaster.

Cameron and Margaret, standing together on one side of the players, who assembled at one end of the rink, watched Alec, who went forward, lifted one of his father's heavy granite stones, and swung it lightly in his hand. Meanwhile one of the players from his own side had gone to the other side of the rink, and holding his broom upright in the tee-hole, enabled Alec to form a more accurate idea of the distance.

Swinging his stone, Alec stooped down, and with no apparent effort 'placed' it on the ice. Away it sailed with a loud humming sound, sweet to a curler's ear.

Every man eagerly watched its rate of speed, while some, running alongside, accompanied it on its course.

'Soop it up! Soop it up!' cried some of

the younger members of the Muirburn side; and they began to sweep the ice in front of the stone with their brooms, so as to expedite its progress.

'Let her alane! She's comin' on brawly!' cried Hamilton, from the other end of the rink, in an authoritative tone. They immediately left off sweeping; and two of the Auchinbyres men, acting on the principle that if the stone had, from the Muirburn players' point of view, just enough way on it, they had better give it a little more, began to ply their brooms vigorously in front of it.

These attentions, however, did no harm. The stone glided up towards the tee, slackened its speed, and finally stopped, exactly where it ought to have stopped, about a foot in front of the mark.

A slight cheer greeted this good shot; and 'Ye'll mak' as guid a player as your faither, Alec!' from one of the bystanders made Margaret's face flush with pleasure.

It was now the schoolmaster's turn. One of

his side took Hamilton's place as pilot; and the old man, playing with even less apparent effort than Alec had used, sent his stone right in the face of his adversary's. The speed was so nicely graduated that Alec s stone was disposed of for good, while Simpson's stone occupied almost exactly the spot on which Alec's had formerly rested.

Again Hamilton advanced to lend the young player his advice, while Alec took up his remaining stone, and went to the front. He sent a well-aimed shot, but rather too powerfully delivered, and the adversaries of course hastened to make it worse by sweeping. The stone struck Simpson's slightly on one side, sending it to the left, while it went on towards the right, and finally stopped considerably to the right of the tee, but near enough to make it worth guarding. The schoolmaster's next shot was not a success. His stone went between the two which were already on the ice, and passing over the tee landed about two feet beyond it.

This gave a chance to the Muirburn men. Their next player placed his stone a long way from the tee, but right in front of Alec's, so that it was impossible, or almost impossible, to dislodge the latter without first getting rid of the former. To him succeeded Johnnie Fergus; and he, preferring his own judgment before that of the official guide, played the guard full on, with the result that he sent it well into the inner circle, while his own stone formed a very efficient guard for that of his enemy. As every stone which, at the end of the round, is found nearer the tee than any-one belonging to a player of the opposite side counts for one point, the Muirburn men had now two stones in a position to score; and they patiently surrounded them with guards, which the Auchinbyres players knocked away whenever they could. So the game went with varying success, till only one pair of players was left for that round—Hamilton, playing for Muirburn, and Lord Bantock, who belonged to the enemy.

Things at that moment were very bad for the Muirburn men. Four stones belonging to the opposite side were nearer the tee than any one of their own; while a formidable array of guards lined the ice in front of them.

Hamilton went and studied the situation carefully. Then he went back, and played his first shot.

'Soop it! Soop it! Soop it!' roared the schoolmaster, flourishing his broom, and dancing like a maniac. He alone, of the Auchinbyres players, understood the object of the shot, and saw that it could only be defeated, if at all, by giving it a little extra impetus. But the advice came too late. The brooms were plied before it like lightning, but the stone came stealing up like a live thing, and just avoiding an outlying guard, gave a knock to one stone at such an angle that the impetus was communicated to a second and from it to a third, while it took the third place, thus cutting off two of the adversaries' points.

'Noo, m' lord, a wee thocht tae the richt o' this,' said Johnnie Fergus, as he stooped down and held his broom over the spot where he desired Lord Bantock's stone should come in.

But Lord Bantock had been given the place of honour as last player more out of consideration for his rank than for his skill. He played with far too much force, and sent his stone smashing on one of the outside guards, from which it rushed to the side of the rink and disappeared.

'Did I no tell ye no to pit that sumph at the tail?' quoth Johnnie in an undertone of deep disgust, as he rose from his stooping posture.

'Haud your tongue, man! I've seen his lordship play as weel as ony deacon amang ye,' said the leader, angry at being suspected of unduly favouring the great man.

But with a cry of expectation from the crowd, Hamilton's second stone left his hand and came spinning over the ice, right in the track of its predecessor. A roar went up from the players, as the Muirburn men rushed

forward, and distributing themselves over the path which the stone had to traverse, polished it till the ice was like glass. The stone came in beautifully, displaced the best stone, and took the first place, by cannoning off another of the enemy.

A loud hurrah greeted this feat, and Lord Bantock stepped forward, determined to do something to redeem his reputation, which he knew had suffered from the result of his former effort.

An old farmer ran as fast as his years would permit to offer his lordship a word of advice before the last shot was fired.

'All right, Blackwater,' said Lord Bantock, with a nod, as he planted his feet firmly on the ice, and gripped the handle of his stone, as if he would bend the brass. Away went the stone with a rush, and a roar from the crowd. Crash—crash—it struck against one and another; but it had force enough to go on. Smash it came among the group of stones, sending them flying in all directions,

while everybody jumped aside to avoid a collision. It was not a first-rate shot; but it was successful. The first, second, third, fourth, and fifth stones were knocked, or rather knocked one another, out of the way. Lord Bantock's stone itself went right ahead, ploughing a path for itself in the snow beyond the rink. Alec's second stone, long since considered to be out of the running, was found to be half an inch nearer the tee than any one belonging to the other side; and the Muirburn men accordingly scored one towards the game.

At the other rinks, meanwhile, subsidiary contests were in full progress, and the scene was a very animated one. It was, however, very cold work for bystanders, and Cameron, as he saw that his companion was shivering in spite of her winter clothing, proposed to Alec that Margaret and himself should set out at once for the farm, leaving Mr. Lindsay to overtake them when he returned. To this arrangement Alec of course assented, and Margaret and Cameron set off together.

Most young men would have been glad to be in Cameron's place; but the Highlander felt very ill at ease. He began to seek for a subject which might be supposed to be interesting to a girl, and dismissed one after another as totally unsuitable. The silence continued, and the young man was nearly in despair, when Margaret, totally unconscious of any embarrassment, came to his assistance.

'That is the way to Drumclog,' she said, pointing to a moorland road which crossed their path; 'Alec and you ought to walk over some day.'

'Is there anything to see there?' inquired her companion.

'Have you never heard of the Battle of Drumclog?' asked the girl in surprise.

The Highlander was obliged to confess that he had not.

'Have you never read of the persecutions of the Covenanters, and Graham of Claverhouse, and the martyrs?' asked Margaret again, with wonder in her eyes.

'Oh yes, of course; but I didn't know that these things happened in this part of the country.'

'Yes,' said Margaret. 'The Martyrs' Cairn is only a little way beyond Blackwater. You know the Covenanters were not allowed to worship in their own way, and they used to meet in hollows of the hills and on the open moors. The country was full of soldiers, sent to keep down the people; and when the Covenanters went to the preaching, they used to take arms with them. One Sabbath morning a large number of them were attending a service on the lonely moor at Drumclog when the English soldiers, who had somehow heard of the gathering, bore down upon them. They were dragoons, led by "the bloody Claverhouse," as they call him to this day. Providentially there was a bog in front of the Covenanters. The horses of the dragoons could not cross it; and those soldiers who did cross at last were beaten off by the Covenanters, and many of them were killed.'

'I remember it now,' said Cameron; 'I have read about it in "Old Mortality."'

'The most unfair book that ever was written!' exclaimed Margaret with some heat —'a book that every true Scotchman should be ashamed of.'

'I don't see that,' returned Cameron; 'I think Sir Walter held the balance very fairly.'

'He simply turns the Covenanters into ridicule and tries to make his readers sympathize with the persecutors,' said Margaret.

'Well, you can't deny that a good many of them *were* ridiculous,' said Cameron lightly.

'And you have no sympathy for these brave men who won our liberties for us with their blood!' exclaimed the girl.

'I don't say that,' said the young Highlander cautiously; 'but I'm not so sure about their having won our liberties for us,' he added with a laugh. 'There wasn't much liberty in the Highlands when *their* King got the upper hand.'

Then he tried to change the subject; but Margaret answered him only in monosyllables. This daughter of the Covenanters could not forgive anyone who refused to consider those who took part in the petty rebellion of the west as heroes and martyrs. She made their cause her own, and decided that Cameron was thenceforth to be regarded as a 'malignant.'

As for Cameron, he mentally banned the whole tribe of Covenanters, as well as his own folly in offering any opposition to Margaret's prejudices; and before he could make his peace with her Mr. Lindsay drove up, and the *tête-à-tête* came to an end.

Duncan Cameron had felt the spell of Margaret's beauty, as everyone did who approached her. But he had made a bad beginning in his intercourse with her, and he now felt a strong sense of repulsion mingling with his admiration. It was not only that he despised her narrowness of mind; there was between the two something of the old antagonism between Cavalier and Puritan. For

the rest of his stay at Castle Farm he avoided meeting her alone, and only spoke to her when ordinary politeness required it. And yet, whenever she addressed him, he felt that the fascination of her beauty was as strong as ever. When Alec came home on the day of the curling-match, and shouted out in triumph that Muirburn had won, Margaret's eyes flashed, and her cheek flushed in sympathy; and Cameron, watching her, forgot that she had not forgiven him for his lack of sympathy with the men of Drumclog.

CHAPTER IX.

THE END OF THE SESSION.

At the end of the appointed week the two young men returned to Glasgow, and braced themselves up for the remaining four months of work. At the northern Universities the academic year ends (except for a few supplementary medical classes) with the 1st of May. Alec Lindsay had a great deal of leeway to make up, as he had never had a proper grounding in either Latin or Greek; but he did his best, and felt pretty sure of being able to take at least one prize.

Of course he found his way back to the Church of England chapel at which he had seen Miss Mowbray; and on more than one occasion he was gratified by a sight of her.

As to the Anglican form of worship, he regarded it with very mixed feelings. He was pleased by the stately simplicity of the collects, and by the rhythm of the chants. The service was free from the monotony of the Presbyterian form, and it was more 'congregational' than anything to which he had been accustomed. But it was some time before he could divest himself of the idea that he was witnessing a kind of religious entertainment, ingeniously devised and interesting, but by no means tending to edification. He felt like his countrywoman, who when taken to a service at Westminster Abbey said afterwards: 'It was very fine—but eh! that was an awfu' way o' spending the Sabbath!' The voice of conscience is as loud when it condemns the infraction of a rule founded only in prejudice as when it protests against a breach of the moral law itself; and for several Sunday evenings Alec Lindsay left the chapel with the feeling that he had been guilty of a misdemeanour—he had been playing at worship.

The unexpressed idea in his mind (a result of his Presbyterian training) was that collects, and chants, and ceremonial observances in general, were too interesting, too pleasing to the natural man, to be acceptable to the Almighty. But by degrees this feeling wore off; and when he became familiar with the Prayer-book, he found that it was an aid rather than a hindrance to devotion.

The end of the session drew near; and the April sun shone clear and fair through the smoke-cloud of Glasgow. It was a Saturday afternoon, and Alec determined to console himself for the loss of a long walk, for which he could not afford time, by putting a book in his pocket, and taking a stroll in the park.

Those who are most attached to the country care least for parks. A piece of enclosed and tended pleasure-ground, whether it is large or small, always affects the lover of nature with a sense of restraint, of formality, of the substitution of an imitation for a reality. Trim gravelled walks are but a poor substitute for a

grass-grown lane; a neglected hedgerow, a bit of moorland, or even a corner of a common, will hold more that is beautiful, more that is interesting to one who loves the open country, than acres of park, with all their flower-plots and ticketed specimens of foreign shrubs; for in a thorn hedge or a mound of furze one recognises the inexpressible charm that Nature only possesses when she is left to work by herself.

Yet, to a dweller in cities, parks are worth having. They are, at least, infinitely better than the streets. So, at least, thought Alec Lindsay this April afternoon, as he wandered along the deserted pathway, under the budding trees. Glasgow is fortunate in at least one of its parks. The enclosure is of small extent, but then it is not merely a square of ground planted with weedy young trees and intersected by roads. It is a bit of the valley of the Kelvin; and it includes one side of a steep rising-ground which is crowned by handsome houses of stone. The little river itself is

always dirty, and in summer is little better than a sewer with the roof off; but seen from a little distance it is picturesque, and lends variety to the scene.

Alec was wandering along one of the pathways, watching the sunlight playing in the yet leafless branches, and trying to cheat himself into the idea that his mind was filled with Roman history; when suddenly he found himself face to face with—Laura Mowbray. She was dressed, not in winter garments, though the air was cold, but in light, soft colours, which made her look different from the Scotch damsels whom Alec had seen in the streets. She seemed the impersonation of the spring as she slowly approached Alec with a smile on her face. Of course he stopped to speak to her.

'I have come out for a turn in the park, for I really couldn't bear to stay shut up in the house on such a glorious day,' said Laura. 'Uncle wouldn't come with me, though I teased him ever so long. He said he was

very busy; but I think people sometimes make a pretence of being studious,' and she glanced at Alec's note-book as she spoke.

Alec laughed and thrust the book into his pocket, and turning round walked on slowly by the girl's side.

'If you had an exam. to prepare for, you wouldn't much care whether people thought you studious or not,' he said.

'How is your uncle?' asked Laura.

'I'm sure I can't tell.'

'Can't tell! You wicked, unnatural creature! I am quite shocked at you.'

'He was very well when I saw him last—that is, about three months ago—with the exception of a fearfully bad temper.'

'Don't you know that it is highly unbecoming of you to speak of anyone older than yourself in that disrespectful way?'

But Laura's look hardly seconded her words; and Alec went on:

'It is quite true, though. I wonder Aunt Jean can put up with him.'

'Who is Aunt Jean? Miss Lindsay? The lady who lives with your uncle and keeps house for him?'

'Yes.'

'She is a relation of your uncle's, isn't she?'

'Oh yes; a cousin in some degree or other.'

'Mr. Lindsay never married, I believe,' said Miss Mowbray.

'No; he has no relations nearer than'—'nearer than I am,' he was going to have said; but he stopped and substituted—'nearer than nephews and nieces.'

'And he has plenty of them, I suppose? All Scotch people seem to have so many relations; it is quite bewildering.'

'Uncle James is my father's uncle, you understand,' said Alec; 'and there are only two in our family, my sister and I; that is not so very many.'

'No. But have you really a sister?' exclaimed Laura, turning round so as to face her companion for an instant.

'Yes, one sister: Margaret.'

'How lucky you are! I have no brothers or sisters; I have only my uncle. How I wish I knew your sister! And Margaret is such a pretty name.'

'It is common enough, anyway.'

'But not commonplace; oh! not at all commonplace. If I had a sister I would call her Margaret, whatever her real name might be. By the way, have you seen Mr. Semple since that night of the dinner-party?'

'No.'

'And you don't seem very sorry for it?' said the girl, with a little smile.

'No; I can't say I care much for Cousin James.'

'*He* is a relation of Mr. Lindsay, too, isn't he?'

'Yes; his mother was a Lindsay, a niece of my grand-uncle's. He is in the oil-works; and I dare say he will become manager of them some day.'

Miss Mowbray was silent for a few moments; then she stopped and hesitated.

'Do you know, I don't think I ought to allow you to walk with me in this way. Suppose we were to meet anyone we knew!'

Alec flushed to the roots of his hair.

'I beg your pardon!' he exclaimed.

'Oh, I don't mind; but—Mrs. Grundy, you know.'

'Do you know that you can see Ben Lomond from the top of the hill?' said Alec, suddenly changing the subject.

'No; *really?*'

'Yes; won't you let me show it to you? It's a beautiful view, and only a few steps off.'

Miss Mowbray seemed to forget her scruples, for she allowed herself to be led up a narrow winding path, fringed with young trees, which led to the top of the rising ground.

'If I had known you a little longer,' began Laura, with some hesitation, 'I think I would have ventured to give you a little bit of my mind.'

'About what?' asked Alec with sudden eagerness.

Laura shook her head gravely.

'I fear you would be offended if I were to speak of it,' she said.

'Indeed I would not. Nothing you could say could offend me.'

'Well, if you will promise to forgive me if I *should* offend you——'

'You couldn't offend me if you tried,' said Alec warmly.

'Then I will tell you what I was thinking of. I don't think you should neglect your grand-uncle as you do.'

'Neglect!'

'Yes. It is not kind or dutiful.'

'Neglect! My dear Miss Mowbray, you are altogether mistaken. We can't neglect those who don't want us. He hasn't the slightest wish, I assure you, to see me dangling about him.'

'There! You promised not to be offended; and you are!'

'Indeed I am not.'

'Yes, you are. I won't say another word.'

'Oh, Miss Mowbray! How can you think I am offended? What have I said to make you fancy such a thing? On the contrary, I think it so very, very good of you to take so much interest——'

Here Alec stopped, for he saw that his companion was blushing, and that somehow he had made a mess of things. He had not yet learned that some species of gratitude cannot find fitting expression in words.

'I think it is my turn to say that I have offended you,' he said after a pause.

Laura laughed—such a pleasant, rippling laugh!

'It is getting quite too involved. Let us pass an Act of Oblivion, and forget all about it.'

'But if you think I ought to call on my uncle,' began Alec—'no; don't shake your head. Tell me what you really think I ought to do.'

'Do you like Miss Lindsay?' asked Laura, without replying to the question.

'Aunt Jean? Yes; much better than I like Uncle James.'

'Then you can go to see *her* now and then; and when you are in the house go into your uncle's room and ask how he is, if he is at home. We ought not only to visit people for our own pleasure, but sometimes because it is our duty to do so.'

'Yes, you are quite right; and I will do what you say. But here we are at the top of the hill. What a delightful breeze, isn't it? Do you see that blue cloud in the distance, just a little deeper in tint than those about it?'

'Yes; I see it.'

'That is Ben Lomond, nearly four thousand feet high.'

'Really?' said Miss Mowbray; but there was not much enthusiasm in her voice.

Alec, on the contrary, stood in a kind of rapture which made him forget for the moment

even the girl at his side. The sight of distant mountains always affected him with a kind of strange, delicious melancholy—unrest mingling with satisfaction, such as that which filled the heart of Christian when from afar he caught a glimpse of the shining towers of the celestial city.

The English girl watched the look in the young Scotchman's face with wonder not unmixed with amusement. When with a sigh Alec turned to his companion, she, too, was gazing on the far-off mountain-top.

'I really must go now,' she said softly, holding out her hand.

'May I not go to the park-gate with you?'

Laura shook her head; but her smile was bright enough to take the sting from her refusal.

'Good-bye.'

And in another moment Alec was alone.

The sun had gone out of his sky. He sat down on a bench, and began to wonder how

he had dared to converse familiarly with one so beautiful, so refined, so far removed from his ordinary friends, as Laura Mowbray. Then he recalled her great goodness in interesting herself in his concerns, and of course he resolved to follow her advice. He could think of nothing but Laura Mowbray the whole afternoon. He recalled her looks, her smile, her lightest word. To him they were treasures, to be hidden for ever from every human eye but his own; and in every look and word he found a new ground for admiration, a new proof of Miss Mowbray's intelligence, sweetness, and goodness.

Next week he acted upon her suggestion, and paid a visit to Blythswood Square. He was received by Miss Lindsay, a tall, spare, large-featured woman, whose gray hair was bound down severely under her old-fashioned cap.

'Weel, Alec; an' what brings you here?' was her greeting, as she held out her hand without troubling herself to rise.

'Nothing particular: why do you ask?'

'Ye come sae seldom; it's no often we hae the pleasure o' a veesit frae you.'

'I canna say much for my attentions, Aunt Jean; but then I canna say much for your welcome,' returned Alec, flushing as he spoke.

'Hoots, laddie! sit doon an' behave yersel'. My bark's waur nor my bite.'

'And how's my uncle?'

'Much as usual. I don't think he's overly weel pleased wi' you, Alec, my man.'

'What have I done now?'

'It's no your daein'; it's your no-daein'. Ye never look near him.'

'He doesn't want to be bothered with me.'

The door opened, and the master of the house came in. He gave Alec his hand with his usual dry, consequential air, and hardly looking at him, made some indifferent remark to his cousin.

'Here's Alec sayin' he doesna believe you want to be bothered wi' him,' she said.

The old man seated himself deliberately, and made no disclaimer of the imputation.

'You'll be going home for the summer?' he asked.

'Yes; I am going home at the end of the month; but I should like to get a tutorship for the summer, if I could.'

'Humph!'

'What are you going to be?' asked Mr. Lindsay after a pause — 'a doctor, or a minister, or what?'

'I don't know yet,' said Alec.

His uncle sniffed contemptuously.

'A rowin' stane gethers nae fog,'* put in Aunt Jean.

Alec changed the subject; but his grand-uncle soon returned to it.

'The sooner ye mak' up yer mind the better, my lad,' said the old man. 'Would you like to go into the oil-works?' he added, as if it were an after-thought.

* Moss.

'I hardly know, sir. I would like another year at College first,' said Alec. 'But thank you all the same, Uncle James;' and as he spoke he rose to take his leave.

Mr. Lindsay paid no sort of attention to the latter part of the reply. He took up a newspaper, and adjusting his spectacles began to read it, almost before the lad had turned his back.

In another week the session was practically at an end. The prize-list, settled by the votes of the students themselves, showed that Alec had won the fourth prize, which in a class numbering nearly two hundred was a proof of at least a fair amount of application; and he also won an extra prize for Roman History.

'You don't seem much elated,' said Cameron to his friend, when he brought home the splendidly-bound volumes of nothing in particular. 'You've either less ambition or more sense than I gave you credit for.'

'I expected something better,' said Alec.

'Self-conceit, you should have said, not sense, Duncan.'

If Alec were conceited he got little to feed his vanity at home. His father looked at the books, praised the binding, asked how many prizes were given in the class, and said no more. Secretly he was gratified by his son's success; but it was one of his principles to discourage vainglory in his children by never, under any circumstances, speaking favourably of their performances. No one would have guessed from Alec's manner that he cared a straw whether any praise was awarded to him or not; but he felt none the less keenly the absence of his father's commendation.

The month of May went by slowly at the Castle Farm. Alec was longing for change of occupation and change of scene. One morning he chanced to notice an advertisement which he thought it worth while to answer. A Glasgow merchant, whose wife and daughters had persuaded him to spend

four months of the year at the seaside, wished to find some one to read with his boys three hours a day, that they might not forget in summer all that they had learned in winter. For this service he was prepared to pay the munificent sum of five guineas a month. As it happened, the merchant's address was a tiny watering-place on the Frith of Clyde, where Mr. James Lindsay had a large 'marine villa.'

In reply to Alec's letter, the advertiser, Mr. Fraser, asked only one question, whether the applicant were a relation of Mr. James Lindsay of Drumleck. Alec replied that he was, and was forthwith engaged.

For once Alec had taken a step which pleased his father. The laird commended his son's intention of earning his own living during the summer; and Alec fancied that his father used towards him a tone of greater consideration than he had ever adopted before. Margaret was much chagrined at her brother leaving home so soon after his return; but

she did not say a word on the subject. She knew she had not reason on her side; and she was too proud to show her mortification. It might have been better if she had spoken her mind; for a coolness sprang up between brother and sister, which even the parting did not quite remove.

CHAPTER X.

ARROCHAR.

THE Clyde is not, except in the neighbourhood of Lanark, a particularly interesting river. When Scotchmen talk of the scenery of the Clyde they are thinking, not of the river, but of the frith which bears its name. When Alec Lindsay set out for Arrochar to enter upon his duties as tutor to Mr. Fraser's boys, he embarked at Glasgow; and he was much disappointed to find that for the first part of his journey there was little to satisfy his love of the picturesque.

The day was gloomy; there were but few passengers on board the *Chancellor*. For a long way the narrow stream flowed between dull level fields. When it became broader

there appeared a long dyke adorned with red posts surmounted by barrels, built in the channel to mark the passage. This did not add to the beauty of the scene. Now and then the steamer met one of her own class on its homeward journey; sometimes she overtook a queer, melancholy-looking, floating dredger, or a vessel outward-bound, towed by a small and abominably dirty tug-boat.

But about twenty miles below Glasgow the scene changed. A wide expanse of water stretched away to the horizon. On the left lay a large town over which hung a dense cloud of smoke, but away to the west, beyond the blue water, could be seen the bold bases of steep hills rising from the sea itself, their summits being hidden in the clouds. At Greenock all was life and bustle. Several steamers plying to different points of the coast lay at the pier, and a crowd of passengers who had come by train from Glasgow streamed down from the railway-station to meet them.

Alec stood on the bridge watching them

with considerable amusement. Here was a group of elderly maiden ladies, sisters probably, to whom their month 'at the salt water' was the great event of the year. After much debate they had decided to go to Kilcreggan this year, instead of to Rothesay. Each carried an armful of wraps, small baskets, and brown-paper parcels, and each rushed to a separate steamer, as if thinking it more desirable that one at least should be right than that all should be wrong. Each appealed excitedly to a porter for directions, and eventually all assembled at the gangway of the proper steamer. But the combined evidence of the porters was insufficient. Each of the three travellers made a separate demand, one on the master, another on the chief officer, and a third upon the steward, in order to know whether the steamer was really going to Kilcreggan. At last they were satisfied, settled themselves with their belongings in a sheltered corner, and began to eat Abernethy biscuits.

Then came a whole family—an anxious

mother, an aunt more anxious than the mother, two servants, and six children, who were running in different ways at once, and had to be manœuvred on board like so many young pigs. As soon as they were shipped, two of them immediately made for the engine-room, while the others rushed to the bulwarks, and craned their necks over the side as far as they possibly could without losing their balance.

In one corner was a little band of rosy school-girls in tweed frocks and straw hats, cumbered with a collection of novels, tennis-bats, and fishing-rods. Here and there were one or two gigantic Celts returning to the hill country, while a few pale-faced young men stepped on board with knapsacks on their shoulders. But the male passengers were few at this hour of the day. A few hours later the steamers would be black with men leaving the roar and worry of the city to sleep under the shadow of the hills.

At length the bells clanged for the last

time; the gangways were pushed on shore; the old lady who always delays her departure till that period made her appearance, and was somehow hoisted on board; the escape-pipes ceased their roaring; and one after another the steamers glided off upon the bosom of the frith.

And now, suddenly, the sun shone out, showing that the sea was not a level plain of water, but covered with a million dancing wavelets. The sunshine travelled westward over the sea, and Alec followed it with his eyes. It rested on the distant hills, and then the haze that covered them melted away, and they revealed themselves, dim in outline, violet-coloured, magnified in the mist. As the steamer drew nearer them it became plain that the nearer hills were much lower than those beyond, and that many of them were covered with pines up to a certain height. Above the woods they were often black—that was where the old heather had been burnt to make room for the young shoots, or

light brown—that was where masses of last year's bracken lay; sometimes they were white with glistening rocks, or green from never-failing springs.

And now it could be seen that between the woods and the seashore ran a white road, and that the coast was dotted for miles with houses, of all shapes and sizes, each standing in its own ground, and sheltered by its own green leaves. There was no town anywhere —nothing approaching to one; but every three or four miles a few houses were built in a little row, affording accommodation for a grocer's and a baker's shop; and opposite the shops there was invariably a white wooden pier, affording an outlet to the rest of the world.

Soon after crossing the frith, the *Chancellor* made for one of these landing-places. Round the pier there swarmed half a dozen pleasure-boats of all sizes, some the merest cockle-shells, navigated (not unskilfully) by mariners who were barely big enough to make the oars move through the water.

The rocky shore was adorned with groups of girls who were drying their hair after their morning's dip in the sea, and dividing their attention between their novels, their little brothers in the boats just mentioned, and the approaching steamer. The water being deep close to the edge of the rocky coast, the pier was a very short one; and Alec Lindsay, looking over the edge, through the green water swirling round the piles of the pier, could see the pebbles on the shore twenty feet below.

Ropes were thrown out and caught, and hawsers were dragged ashore by their aid. With these the steamer was made fast at stem and stern, gangways were run on board, and a score of passengers disembarked. In another minute the steamer had been cast loose and had gone on her way. The pier, the pleasure-boats, the girls on the rocks, the white dusty road, the hedges of fuchsia, had disappeared. In a quarter of an hour another pier had been reached where exactly

the same scene presented itself. No town, no promenade, no large hotels—not even a row of public bathing-machines, or a German band.

After three or four stoppages the *Chancellor* began to get fairly into Loch Long. The hills on either side were not high, and were covered only with grass and heather; but they had, nevertheless, a certain quiet beauty. It seemed as if they made a world of their own, and as if they were contemptuously indifferent to the foolish beings who came among them for an hour in their impudent, puffing steamer, and were gone like a cloud. Right in front was one bold eminence, perhaps a thousand or twelve hundred feet high, which divided the waters of the upper part of Loch Long from those of Loch Goil on the west. Gazing at its weather-beaten rocks and its sketches of silent moorland, one could hardly help tasting that renovating draught—the sense that one has reached a place where man is as nothing, a sphere which is but nominally

under his sway, where he comes and goes, but leaves behind him no mark upon the face of nature.

Leaving this eminence upon the left, the channel became narrower, and the inlet seemed to be completely land-locked. In front the nearer hills seemed to lie one behind another, fold upon fold, while beyond some much loftier peaks raised their blue summits to heaven. Alec Lindsay never tired of gazing on them. If he turned away his eyes, it was that he might refresh them with a change of scene—the low green rock, the salt water washing the white stones under the heather on the hillside, the tiny rainbow in the foam of the paddle-wheels—and return with new desire to the sight of the everlasting hills. Strange, he thought to himself, as he gazed on the shadow of a cloud passing like a spirit over a lonely peak—strange that the sight of masses of mere dead earth and stone, the dullest and lowest forms of matter, should be able to touch us more profoundly than all the lovely

sights and sweet sounds of the animated world!

In a few miles the top of the loch was reached. The mountains, standing like giants 'to sentinel enchanted land,' rose almost from the water's edge. A few cottages stood clustering together at the mouth of a defile which gave access to Loch Lomond on the east. One or two large houses (of which 'Glendhu,' Mr. James Lindsay's seaside residence, was one) stood at intervals along the shore.

Alec's first care after landing was to provide himself with a lodging, as (much to his satisfaction) he was not required to live in Mr. Fraser's house; and he was fortunate enough to find the accommodation he wanted in a cottage close to the seashore.

In the afternoon he called on Mrs. Fraser, and found her a fat, florid, good-natured looking woman, ostentatiously dressed, and surrounded by a troop of her progeny.

'Come away, Mr. Lindsay,' she said gra-

ciously, as she extended to him a remarkably well-developed hand and arm. 'I'm just fairly delighted to see you. It will be an extraordinary pleasure to get rid of Hector and John Thompson, though it should be but for three hours in the day. You wouldn't believe, Mr. Lindsay, what these two, not to speak of Douglas and Phemie—I often tell her father she should have been a boy—cost me in anxiety. I wonder I'm not worn to a shadow. The day before yesterday, now, not content with going in to bathe four times, they managed to drop Jamsie—that's the one next to Douglas, Mr. Lindsay—over the edge of the boat, and the bairn wasn't able to speak when they pulled him in again.'

'Oh, ma!' protested the young gentleman referred to, 'I could have got in again by myself, only John Thompson hit me a whack on the head with his oar, trying to pull me nearer the boat.'

'I don't think it's safe for the boys to be out in the little boat by themselves, without

either me or their father to look after them. I don't mind their being in the four-oar. What do you think, Mr. Lindsay ?'

'Really, I can hardly say, Mrs. Fraser, seeing that I know nothing of boating. I haven't had a chance of learning; I hope you will give me a lesson,' he added, turning to his new pupils.

The boys, who had been staring at Alec with a suspicious expression, brightened up at this; and it was arranged that the first lesson in boating should be given next day.

On the following afternoon Alec called at Glendhu, his uncle's house, to inquire whether any of the family had arrived; and was told that they intended to come down in about a fortnight. In the evening, as he looked over his newspaper, his eyes fell upon a paragraph which informed him that Mr. Taylor, Professor of History in the University of Glasgow, had died suddenly the day before. Alec was shocked and surprised at the news; but the thought that was uppermost in his mind was

that in all probability he would never see Laura Mowbray again. Now that her uncle was dead she would go back to her friends in London; and in a few months she would forget him. Not until that moment had Alec realized how constantly the thought of this girl had been in his mind, how he had made her image play a part in all his dreams. And now it was over! The world which had seemed so fair and bright but an hour ago was dull and lifeless now.

But the companionship of Mrs. Fraser's boys and girls saved him from sinking into a foolish melancholy. He tried hard for three hours every day to make them learn a little Latin grammar and history, and a great part of every afternoon was spent in their company. They taught him to row and steer, and to manage a sail. But his chief delight was in the mountains. He was never tired of wandering among their lonely recesses; he loved the bare granite rocks and crags even better than the sheltered dell where the silver birches

clustered round the rapid stream. He learned to know the hills from every point of view, to select at a glance the practicable side for an ascent; and before a fortnight was over he had set his foot on the top of every peak within walking distance of Arrochar.

About three weeks after his arrival, Alec heard that his uncle and Miss Lindsay had come down; and one evening soon afterwards he went to see them.

From the windows of the drawing-room at Glendhu the view was magnificent. Under the low garden-wall were the still, blue waters of the loch; and right in front 'The Cobbler' lifted his head against the glowing western sky.

Alec was waiting there in silence, absorbed in the spectacle, when he suddenly heard a soft voice behind him.

'Mr. Lindsay!'

No need for him to turn round. The tones of her voice thrilled through every fibre of his body.

Yes; it was she, simply dressed in black, standing with a smile on her face, holding out her hand.

'Why don't you speak to me? Won't you shake hands?'

'Lau—— Miss Mowbray!'

'Certainly. Am I a ghost?'

'I thought you were far away—gone back to your friends in England.'

'No,' said Laura tranquilly, seating herself on a couch; 'my poor uncle left me as a legacy to Mr. Lindsay; and here I am. You have not even said you are glad to see me.'

'You know I am glad. But I was sorry to hear of your loss, and sorry to think of your grief.'

'Yes; it was very sad, and *so* sudden,' answered Laura, casting down her eyes. 'And how did you come to be here?' she asked, lifting them again to her companion's face. Alec told her; and then his uncle and Miss Lindsay came into the room.

'So you've got a veesitor?' said the old lady to Laura, as she came forward.

'Oh no!' answered the girl. 'I had no idea anyone was in the room when I came in; and your nephew stared at me as if I had been an apparition.'

She smiled as she spoke; but Alec noticed that as soon as the elder lady turned away the smile suddenly faded.

Nothing worth mentioning was said in the conversation that followed. Alec hoped that before he took his leave he would receive a general invitation to the house; but nothing of the kind was forthcoming. That, however, mattered little. Laura was here, close to him; they would be sure to meet; and of course he was at liberty to go to Glendhu occasionally. He went home to his lodgings wondering at his good fortune. The rosy hue had returned to the earth, and Arrochar was the most delightful spot on the habitable globe.

The one event of the day in the village was the arrival of the steamer and the departure of

the coach which carried passengers to Tarbert on Loch Lomond. It was a favourite amusement of the inhabitants to lounge about the landing-place on these occasions, ostensibly coming for their letters and newspapers, but really pleased to see new faces and make comments about the appearance of the tourists. Laura Mowbray generally found it necessary to go to the post-office about the time of the steamer's arrival; and Alec was not long in turning the custom to his own advantage.

As he was walking back with her to Glendhu one day, he noticed that she was rather abstracted.

'I wonder what you are thinking of, Miss Mowbray,' he said. 'You have not answered me once since we left the pier.'

'Haven't I? I'm sure I beg your pardon.'

'See that patch of sunlight on the hill across the loch!' cried Alec enthusiastically. 'See how it brings out the rich yellow colour of the moss, while all the rest of the hill is in shadow.'

'You ought to have been a painter,' said his companion.

'Don't you think Arrochar is a perfectly *lovely* place?' returned Alec.

'Yes; very pretty. But it is very dull.'

'Dull?'

'Yes; there is no life—no gaiety. It is said that the English take their pleasures sadly; but they are gaiety itself compared with you Scotch. You shut yourselves up in your own houses and don't mix with your neighbours at all. At least you have no amusements in which anyone can share. The boating, tennis, bathing, everything is done *en famille.* There is no fun, no mixing with the rest of the world. In an English watering-place people stay at hotels, or in lodgings; and if they tire of one place they can go to another. Then they have parties of all kinds, and dances at the hotels. Here everyone takes a house for two months, and moves down with servants, plate, linen, groceries, perhaps even the family piano. I only wonder

they don't bring the bedsteads. Having got to their houses, they stay there, and perhaps never see a strange face till it is time to go back to town. It's a frightfully narrowing system, not to speak of the dulness of it.'

'I never thought of it before,' said Alec. 'I don't care to know more people myself; I am never at my ease with people till I know them pretty well. But I am sorry if you find it dull.'

'Well, of course I couldn't go to dances or anything of that kind just yet; but it is dreadfully tiresome to see no one from one day to another, to have no games or amusements of any kind.'

'There are always the hills, you know,' said Alec.

Laura glanced at her companion to see whether he was laughing, and perceiving that he was perfectly serious, she turned away her face with a little *moue*.

'The hills don't amuse me; they weary me; and sometimes, when I get up in the night

and look at them, they terrify me. Think what it would be to be up among those rocks on a winter's night, with the snowflakes whirling around you, and the wind roaring—ugh! Let us talk of something else.'

They did so, but there was little spirit in the conversation. Alec could not conceive of anyone with a heart and a pair of eyes who should not love these mountain-tops as he did himself. He had already endowed Laura with every conceivable grace, and he had taken it for granted that the power to appreciate mountain scenery was among her gifts. Here, at least, was a deficiency, a point on which his mind and hers were not in harmony.

With feminine tact Laura saw that she had disappointed her companion in some way, and she easily guessed at the cause.

'I see you don't appreciate my straightforwardness,' she said, after a little pause. 'Knowing that you have such a passion for mountain scenery, I ought to have pretended that I was as fond of it as you are yourself.'

'No, indeed.'

'That would have been polite; but it would not have been quite straightforward. I always say the thing that comes uppermost, you know; I can't help it.'

Of course she did; and of course her simple honesty was infinitely better than even a love of Scotch scenery. The latter would no doubt come with more familiar acquaintance with it. And was she not herself the most charming thing that the sun shone down upon that summer day?

Laura knew very well that this, or something like it, was the thought in the lad's mind as he bade her good-day with lingering eyes. Perhaps she would not have been ill pleased if he had said what he was thinking; but it never entered into his head to pay the girl a compliment: he would have fancied it an impertinence.

'What a queer, stupid boy he is!' said Laura to herself, as she peeped back at him while she closed the gate behind her. 'I

can't help liking him, but he is so provoking, with his enthusiastic, sentimental nonsense. Heigh-ho! There's the luncheon-bell. And after that there are four hours to be spent somehow before dinner!'

CHAPTER XI.

A RIVAL.

'HULLO! Semple!'

'Hullo! Alec!'

'Didn't expect to see *you* here.'

'As little did I expect to see *you*.'

'When did you come?'

'Only last night; by an excursion steamer.'

'Staying with Uncle James?'

'Yes: he asked me to spend my holidays down here, and I thought I might as well come.'

'How long do you get?'

'Three weeks; but I may take a month.'

An unreasonable jealousy of his cousin

sprang up in Alec's breast at that moment. Five minutes before he was perfectly satisfied with his lot; now, because another occupied a more favourable position than himself, he was miserable. He had been able to meet Laura nearly every day; but this fellow was to live under the same roof with her, to eat at the same table, to breathe the same air. To see her and talk to her would be his rival's daily, hourly privilege.

'Splendid hills!' said Semple.

Alec made no reply. The scenery was too sacred a subject to be discussed with one like Semple.

'What do you do with yourself all day?' asked the new-comer.

'Oh, I take a swim in the morning, give the boys their lessons from ten to one; then I generally take a row, or a walk, or read some Horace.'

'I should think you'd get dreadfully tired of it, after a bit. There are no places where they play tennis, I suppose?'

'Not that I know of.'

'I expect I shall find it rather dull.'

Another jealous pang shot through Alec's heart. Laura and his cousin were agreed on this point. What more natural than that they should amuse each other? In a day or two Semple would be on better terms with Laura than he was himself. Of course he would fall in love with her—and she?

Anyone watching the course of affairs at Glendhu would have thought that Alec's foreboding was in a fair way of being realized. Laura was very gracious to her guardian's nephew, and overlooked in the prettiest manner his little vulgarities. The two were constantly together, and neither seemed to feel the want of a more extended circle of acquaintance. It was nobody's fault, for Semple had been invited to Glendhu before Mr. Taylor's death had caused Laura to become a member of Mr. Lindsay's family; but Miss Lindsay determined that she would at least introduce another guest into the house.

She wrote to Alec's sister, and asked her to spend a fortnight at Loch Long.

When the invitation reached the Castle Farm, Margaret's first impulse was to decline it without saying anything to her father, partly out of shyness and a sense of the deficiencies in her wardrobe, partly because she could not easily at that season be spared from the farm. But when Mr. Lindsay asked if there was anything in her aunt's letter, Margaret felt bound to mention the matter to him; and he at once insisted upon her going.

Margaret's advent, however, made little practical difference in the usual order of things at Glendhu. Mr. Semple at first offered her a share of his attentions; but she received them so coldly that he soon ceased to trouble himself about her, and devoted himself to Laura as before, while Margaret seemed perfectly contented with her own society when Miss Lindsay was not with her guests.

There was little intimacy between the two girls, and the blame of this could not fairly be attributed to Laura.

'I am so glad you have come, Miss Lindsay,' she had said on the first occasion when they were left alone together. 'May I call you "Margaret"? I think it is such a perfectly lovely name.'

'Of course you may,' said the matter-of-fact Margaret.

'And you will call me "Laura," of course.'

But Margaret avoided making any reply to this, and practically declined to adopt the more familiar style of address; and Laura soon returned to the more formal 'Miss Lindsay.'

Alec was, of course, more frequently at his uncle's, now that his sister was staying there; but his visits did not afford him much satisfaction. With Semple he had little in common. There was a natural want of sympathy between the two; and besides, Semple looked down upon Alec as being 'countrified,' while Alec

was disposed to hold his cousin in contempt for his ignorance of everything unconnected with the making and the sale of paraffin oil. As to Laura, he seldom had a chance of saying much to her; while his intercourse with his sister was more constrained than it had ever been before. Margaret saw quite plainly that as her brother was talking to her, his eyes and his heart were hankering after Laura Mowbray; and she felt mortified by his want of interest in what she said to him, though she was too proud to show her feeling, except by an additional coldness of manner.

One evening Alec called at Glendhu, and, as usual, he found the younger portion of the family in the garden. Margaret was sitting by herself on a bench overlooking the sea, with some knitting in her hand, while the other two were sauntering along one of the paths at a little distance. Alec waited till they came up, and then he said:

'I have borrowed Mr. Fraser's light skiff; suppose we all go for a row? You can row

one skiff and I the other,' he added, turning to Semple.

'Oh, delightful!' cried Laura. 'It is just the evening for a row. You will come, Miss Lindsay, won't you?'

'I have no objections,' said Margaret, quite indifferently.

Laura turned and ran into the house for wraps, while a rather awkward silence fell upon the rest of the party. Semple moved away from Margaret almost at once, and hung about the French window, so as to be ready to intercept Laura as soon as she issued from the house. Alec felt in a manner bound to remain with his sister; and she would not see his evident desire to follow Semple to the house, and so have a chance of securing Laura for his companion. When at length the English girl appeared, with a dark-green plaid thrown over her shoulder, Semple sprang at once to her side; and, without paying the slightest attention to Alec or his sister, they hurried down to the water's edge. In a few minutes more

they had appropriated the best of the two boats (the one Alec had borrowed) and were floating far out on the loch.

Alec could not help his disappointment appearing in his face; and his sister noticed and resented it.

'Don't row at such a furious rate; you'll snap the oars,' she said tranquilly, as her brother sent the boat careering over the waves.

He stopped, and tried to look pleasant, but he could not shut his ears to the gay laughter that came to him across the water from the other boat.

'They seem merry enough,' said Alec.

'Yes,' said Margaret spitefully. 'Miss Mowbray seems in very good spirits, considering that her uncle has not been dead much more than a month.'

'How unjust you are!' cried Alec hotly. 'As if she ought to shut herself up, and never laugh, because her uncle died! It would be hypocrisy if she did.'

'There I quite agree with you,' said Margaret, with an ill-natured smile.

'You mean that Laura could not be sincerely sorry?'

'I think she is very shallow and heartless,' said Margaret, sweetly tranquil as ever.

Alec was furious.

'You girls are all alike,' he said with suppressed passion. 'Either you are always kissing and praising one another, or running each other down. And the more refinement, and delicacy, and beauty another girl has, the more you depreciate her.'

Margaret merely curled her lip contemptuously, and sat trailing her hand through the water, without making any reply.

Nothing more was said till Alec was helping his sister out of the boat on their returning to land.

'Don't let us quarrel. I am sorry if I have vexed you, Maggie,' he said.

'I'm not vexed,' she answered, in a not

very reassuring tone, keeping her eyes upon the rocks at her feet.

Her brother's real offence was that he had fallen in love with Laura, and that she now occupied a very secondary place in his heart. And that she could not forgive.

'Won't you come up to the house?' she asked.

'No; and you can tell that cad that the next time he wants Mr. Fraser's boat he had better borrow it himself.'

So saying, Alec shouldered the oars and strode away.

Though he had defended Laura passionately when his sister spoke her mind about that young lady, Alec felt that he had been badly used. He had certainly made the proposal to the whole party, but he had pointedly looked at Laura and spoken to her; and she had replied in the same way. There was, indeed, a tacit understanding between them at the moment, that she would be his partner for the evening; and it was chiefly from a

spirit of coquetry that she had chosen to ignore it afterwards.

But Laura showed no trace of embarrassment when she met Alec in the village next day.

'Why didn't you come into the house last night?' she said with a smile.

'I didn't think it mattered.'

'Why are you so cross? I suppose I have managed to offend you again. I never saw anyone so touchy and unreasonable!'

'It doesn't very much matter—does it?'

'Why?'

'I mean, you don't really care whether—oh!—never mind.'

'Now, I really believe you are annoyed because I went in your cousin's boat last night, instead of yours. But what could I do? I couldn't say, "I prefer to go with Mr. Lindsay"—could I?'

'No; but—but you never seem to think of me at all now, Miss Mowbray.'

'Nonsense!' answered the girl, as a pleased

blush came over her face. 'And to prove my goodwill, I'll tell you what I will do. I will let you take me for a row this evening.'

'Will you?'

This was said so eagerly that Laura could not help blushing again.

'The others are going to dine at Mr. Grainger's to-night, over at Loch Lomond side.'

'But I am to be with the Frasers to-night!' exclaimed Alec in dismay. 'Would not to-morrow night do as well?' Then, seeing that his companion did not seem to care for this change of plans, he added: 'But I dare say I can manage to get away by half-past eight. That would not be too late, would it? It is quite light until after nine.'

'I will be in the garden, then; but I must go now,' said Laura hurriedly, as she bade him good-day.

The evening went by as on leaden feet with Alec Lindsay, as he talked to Mr. Fraser, or listened to his wife's interminable easy-going

complaints about her children and her servants, and tried to appear interested, and at his ease. He could not keep the thought of the coming meeting out of his mind.

With rather a lame excuse he left Mr. Fraser's house not many minutes after the appointed time, and very soon afterwards he was gliding under the garden-wall of Glendhu. For some minutes no one was visible, and Alec began to fear that a new disappointment was in store for him. But presently a figure began to move through the shadows of the trees. It was Laura! She stepped without a word over the loose rocks and stones; then, hardly touching Alec's outstretched hand, she lightly took her place at the stern, and met Alec's gaze with a smile.

'Do you know, I feel horribly guilty, and all through you,' she said, as the boat moved swiftly out into the loch.

'Why should it make any difference that there is no discontented fellow-creature in another boat behind us?' asked Alec gaily.

Laura shook her head, but made no reply. Leaning back in the stern she took off her hat, and let the cool breeze blow upon her face. Alec thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. The delicate curves of her features, the peach-like complexion, the melting look in her eyes, made him feel as if the girl seated near him was something more than human.

'Don't you think we have gone far enough?' said Laura gently, when Alec had rowed some way in silence.

He stopped, resting on his oars.

'How still it is—and how beautiful!' she exclaimed in the same low voice.

Not a sound but the faint lapping of the water on the boat fell upon their ears. The hills were by this time in darkness, and the stars were beginning to glimmer in the twilight sky. Beyond the western hills the sky was still bright, with a glow that seemed less that of the sunken sun, than some mysterious halo of the northern night. A

faint phosphorescence lingered about the drops of sea-water upon the oars. Nothing but the distant lights in the cottage windows seemed to be in any way connected with the commonplace, everyday world.

'Hadn't we better go back? It is really getting dark,' said Laura, as gently as before; and Alec obediently dipped his oars and turned the bow of the boat towards Glendhu.

All his life long Alec remembered that silent row in the dim, unearthly twilight. There was no need for words. They were sitting, as it were, 'on the shores of old romance,' and tasting the dew of fairyland. That hidden land was for this short hour revealed to them; they were breathing the enchanted air.

It was almost dark when Alec shipped his oars and drew the boat along the rocks outside the garden-wall.

'How dreadfully late it is! I hope they have not come back,' said Laura, as she rose to go ashore.

Alec took her hand, so small and white, with the tiny blue veins crossing it, in his own rough brown fingers, and when he had helped the girl ashore he stooped and kissed it.

A moment afterwards, a soft 'good-night' from the garden assured him that the act of homage had not been taken amiss. If he had lingered a minute or two longer he would have heard Miss Lindsay's voice calling out in some anxiety, and Laura Mowbray's silvery accents replying:

'Yes; here I am, Miss Lindsay—it is so much cooler out of doors. My headache is almost quite gone, thank you; the cool sea-breeze has driven it away. How did you enjoy your party? How I wish I could have gone with you!'

But before Laura reached the house, Alec was once more far out in the loch. He wished to be alone, to indulge the sweet intoxication which was burning in his veins.

When at last he returned to his little room

he found a letter awaiting him which had been sent on from home. The address was in an unfamiliar handwriting, and breaking the seal he read as follows :

'CAEN LODGE, HIGHGATE, N.,
'*July* 10, 187–.

'MY DEAR LINDSAY,

'You will be surprised to hear that you may see me the day after this reaches you. I want to see how your beautiful river scenery looks in this glorious summer weather. If it is not convenient for me to stay at the farm, I can easily find quarters elsewhere.

'Ever yours,

'HUBERT BLAKE.'

As Alec foresaw, when he read this note, Blake found existence at the Castle Farm with the sole companionship of Mr. Lindsay to be quite impracticable; and next day he arrived at Arrochar and took up his quarters in the little inn at the head of the pier.

CHAPTER XII.

'YOU MUST GIVE ME AN ANSWER.'

MARGARET LINDSAY, not the scenery of the Nethan, was the real attraction which drew Hubert Blake to the north. He was not in love with her; certainly, at least, he felt for her nothing of the rapturous passion which Alec felt for Laura Mowbray. But he admired her immensely. He undertook the long journey from London that he might feast his eyes on her beauty once more; and when he found that she was at Arrochar he straightway betook himself thither.

Blake was by this time a man nearer forty than thirty years of age, who was still without an aim in life. He had an income which

rendered it unnecessary for him to devote himself to the ordinary aim of an Englishman—the making of money; and to set himself to charm sovereigns which he did not need out of the pockets of his fellow-creatures into his own, for the mere love of gold or of luxury, was an idea which he would have despised as heartily as Alec Lindsay himself would have done. Blake had also great contempt for the brassy self-importance and self-conceit which is the most useful of all attributes for one who means to get on in the world. He looked at men struggling for political or social distinction, as he might have gazed at a crowd of lunatics fighting for a tinsel crown. 'And after all,' he would say to himself, 'if I am idle, my idleness hurts no one but myself. At least, I do not trample down my fellow-men on my journey through life.'

He was not satisfied; but he was not energetic enough to find a career in which he could turn his talents and his money to

good advantage. He was a great lover of nature, and he had a wide and tolerant sympathy for his fellow-men. The one thing he loved in the world was art.

It was not long, of course, before he was a member of the little circle at Glendhu, and he looked on at the little comedy that was being played there with good-natured amusement. Laura Mowbray soon discovered that the stranger was insensible to her charms, that he quite understood her little allurements, and regarded them with a good-humoured smile. He saw quite plainly that she was enjoying a double triumph; and on the whole he thought that though she devoted by far the greater part of her time to Semple, she had a secret preference for his friend Alec. He spent most of his time in making sketches of the surrounding scenery; and though he was not an enthusiastic climber, Alec was often able to persuade him to accompany him to some of the loftier peaks.

One day before Margaret's visit came to an

end, Alec proposed that the whole party—that is, Blake, Laura Mowbray, his sister, Semple, and himself—should make an ascent of 'The Cobbler.' He described the view which was to be obtained from the top of the mountain in terms which fired even Laura's enthusiasm; and the ascent was fixed for the following forenoon.

The morning was rather cloudy, but not sufficiently so to make the party abandon the expedition, especially as Alec pointed out that they would find it much easier to climb than they would have done if the day had been one of brilliant sunshine. They rowed over to the foot of the hill, so as to save walking round the head of the loch; and were soon in a wilderness of heather and wild juniper.

The ascent, they found, though by no means difficult, was long and tiresome. The girls, indeed, if they had consulted merely their own inclination, would have turned back at the end of the first hour; but it never occurred to Margaret to give way to her feeling of fatigue,

and Laura was too proud to be the first to complain.

Everyone was glad, however, when Blake proposed a halt about half-way up. They threw themselves down on the heather, and tasted the delicious sense of rest to strained muscles and panting lungs.

'I am afraid this is rather too much for you,' said Alec to Laura, noticing her look of weariness.

'Oh, I shall get on after I have rested,' she replied; 'but it is so tiresome to imagine, every now and then, that the crest before you is the top of the hill, and to find when you arrive there that the real summit seems farther off than ever.'

'The finest views are always to be had half-way up a mountain,' said Blake. 'How much we can see from this knoll! There is Loch Lomond, Ben Lomond, Ben Venue, and I don't know how many Bens besides—a perfect crowd of them. Then we can see right down the loch and out into the frith. Let us be

content with what we have. Miss Mowbray and your sister would prefer, I think, to wait here with me, Alec, while you and your cousin get to the top and back again.'

But this proposal was not entertained; and in a quarter of an hour the whole party were on foot once more.

Up to this point Semple had succeeded in monopolizing the society of Laura; but he had found that to guide the steps of a delicately nurtured girl over a rough Scotch mountain, and help her whenever she came to a steep place, was no light labour. For the rest of the climb he was content to leave her a good deal to Alec, while it fell to Blake's lot to look after Margaret.

One after another the ridges were overcome, the prospect widening with every step, till the last grassy knoll was surmounted, and the bare rocky peak stood full in view at a little distance. It was, indeed, so steep that Laura was secretly terrified, and had to be hauled up for a good part of the way.

An involuntary cry burst from the lips of each, as one by one they set foot upon the windy summit. Far away, as it were upon the limits of the world, the sun was shining on a sea of gold. The two peaks of Jura lifted up their heads, illumined by the radiance. All around them was a billowy sea of mountain-tops—Ben Crois, Ben Ime, Ben Donich, Ben Vane, Ben Voirlich, and a hundred more, with many a lonely tarn, and many a glen without a name. At their feet lay the black waters of the lochs; and far in the south were the rugged hills of Arran.

'Look!' cried Laura, 'the steamer is no bigger than a toy-boat; and the road is like a thin white thread drawn across the moor!'

'Come here,' said Alec to Blake with a laugh, beckoning as he spoke.

Blake followed him, and found that on one side, where there was a sheer descent of many hundred feet, a rock, which was pierced with a natural archway, jutted out from the body of the mountain.

'This is the "needle-eye,"' said Alec, 'and everybody who comes up here is expected to go through it.'

'Nonsense! Why, man, a false step there would mean——'

'There's not the slightest danger, if you have a good head. I have been through twice already,' returned Alec, as he disappeared behind the rock.

A cry from Laura told Blake that she had witnessed the danger. Margaret, whose cheek had suddenly grown pale, gripped her tightly by the arm.

'Don't speak,' she said hoarsely; 'it may make his foot slip.'

In a minute he reappeared, having passed through the crevice.

'Alec, you shouldn't do a thing like that; it's a sin to risk your life for nothing,' said Margaret, in a tone of cold displeasure.

'There's not the slightest danger in it,' protested Alec.

'None whatever,' echoed Semple; but he

did not think it necessary to prove the truth of his opinion.

'I think we ought to be off,' said Alec; 'there's a cloud coming right upon us; and if we don't make haste we shall have to stay here till it passes.'

His meaning was not quite plain to his companions; but they soon saw the force of his remark. They had accomplished but a small part of the descent when they found themselves suddenly in the midst of a cold, thick, white vapour. It was not safe to go on, so the little company crouched together under a boulder, and watched the great wreaths of mist moving in the stillness from crag to crag.

As soon as the mist got a little thinner, they recommenced the descent, for their position was not a very pleasant one. Semple was in front, while Blake and Margaret followed, and Alec and Laura brought up the rear, when it happened that they came to an unusually steep part of the hillside which

they thought it best to cross in a slanting direction. The soil was of loose, crumbling stone, with here and there a narrow patch of short, dry grass, and, at intervals, narrow beds or courses of loose stones. A short distance below there was an unbroken precipice of at least five hundred feet.

Alec was helping Laura across one of those narrow beds of stones, the others being some little way in advance, when they were startled by a deep rumbling noise, and a tremulous motion under their feet. The whole layer of stones, loosened by the rain and frost, was sliding down towards the precipice! With a cry Alec hurried his companion on; but her trembling feet could hardly support her. The movement of the stones, slow at first, was becoming faster every moment; and Alec's only hope lay in crossing them before they were carried down to the edge of the cliff. For a minute it seemed doubtful whether they would be able to cross in time; but Alec succeeded in strug-

gling, along with his half-fainting companion, to the edge of the sliding stones, and placed her, just in time, upon a sloping but solid bank of earth.

In a few minutes more the stones had swept past them, and had disappeared over the cliff.

But the position which Alec had reached was hardly less dangerous than the one they had escaped from. Behind them was a deep chasm which the treacherous stones had left. In front the mountain rose at a terrible slope. Alec scanned it closely, and it seemed to him that though he might have scaled it at a considerable risk, it was quite impracticable for Laura without help from above. If he were to make the attempt, and fall, he knew he would infallibly dash her as well as himself over the precipice.

Some feet above their heads there was a ledge of rock from which it might be possible to assist them ; but where were Blake and the others ? They were out of sight, and the

sound of Alec's shouts, cut off by the rocks above, could not reach them. Worst of all, the mist seemed to be closing upon them more thickly than ever.

The question was, Could they maintain their position till help could reach them? Soon it became evident that they could not. The ledge of grass-covered rock on which they stood was so narrow that they could not even sit down; and it was plain that Laura could not stand much longer.

There was only one way of escape. Eight or ten feet below was a shelf of rock, frightfully narrow, and, what was worse, sloping downwards and covered with slippery dry grass. But Alec saw that if he could reach it, he could make his way round to the top of the rock, and then he could stretch down his hand so as to help Laura up the steep.

'Oh, Mr. Lindsay, what *shall* we do?' cried Laura, turning to Alec her white, despairing face. 'Oh, look down there! What a dreadful death!'

'Death! Nonsense! There is no danger—not much, at least. See, now, I am going to drop down on that bit of grassy rock, and climb round to the top. Then I'll be able to help you up.'

'But I could never climb up there! I should fall, and be killed in a moment!'

'Not a bit, if you have hold of my hand.'

'But you won't leave me?' cried Laura, clutching Alec by the arm as she spoke; 'you won't leave me all alone in this dreadful place?'

'Only for a minute.'

'But I can't stand any longer.'

'Yes, you can. Turn your face to the rock, and lean against it. Don't look downwards on any account.'

And with these words Alec slipped off his shoes, slung them round his neck, and let himself hang over the cliff. It was an awful moment, and for a second or two the lad's courage failed him. But it was only for an instant. Setting his teeth hard, he let go,

'"But"—what?' she asked.

'But it will be very lonely for me. Life does not seem worth living when you are not near me.' And then, hardly knowing what he said, he poured out the story of his love. He seized her hands, as they lay idly in her lap, and seemed unconscious of the efforts she made to withdraw them. He gazed into her face, and repeated his words with passionate earnestness, again and again:—'I love you, Laura; I love you; I love you!'

Laura threw a glance around, to make sure that no one was in sight; and then, slipping her hands away, she covered with them her blushing face. When she looked up, she met Alec's passionate gaze with a smile.

'Oh, hush! hush!' she said. 'Why do you speak so wildly?'

'Because I love you.'

'But we are far too young to think of such things. I don't mean to get married for—oh! ever such a long time. And you—you have to take your degree, and choose a profession.

We will forget all this, and we shall be friends still, just as before.'

'It can never be just as before,' said Alec.

'Why not?'

'It is impossible. But you won't refuse me, Laura?' he pleaded. 'If you only knew how much I love you! Don't you love me a little in return? Sometimes I can't help thinking you do.'

'Then all I can say is, you have a very strong imagination.'

'You don't?' cried Alec despairingly.

Laura shook her head, but smiled at the same time.

'You must give me an answer,' said Alec, rising to his feet. He was dreadfully in earnest.

'And I say that at your age and mine it is ridiculous to talk of such things.'

'Nonsense! We are not too young to love each other. *Can* you love me, Laura? What you have said is no answer at all.'

'I'm afraid it's the only answer I can give

you,' said Laura, with a saucy smile, rising in her turn, and gliding past her companion. 'Don't be absurd; and don't be unkind or disagreeable when we meet again, after we come back from our tour. Good-bye.'

He stood, looking after her, without saying another word. And she, turning when she reached the French window, and seeing him still standing there, waved her hand to bid him adieu, before she disappeared.

END OF VOL. I.

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