GEORGE MACDONALD

WHAT'S MINE'S MINE — VOLUME 1

George MacDonald
What's Mine's Mine — Volume 1

http://www.litres.ru/pages/biblio_book/?art=35008585
What's Mine's Mine — Volume 1:

Содержание

George MacDonald
What's Mine's Mine — Volume 1

CHAPTER I.
HOW COME THEY THERE?

The room was handsomely furnished, but such as I would quarrel with none for calling common, for it certainly was uninteresting. Not a thing in it had to do with genuine individual choice, but merely with the fashion and custom of the class to which its occupiers belonged. It was a dining-room, of good size, appointed with all the things a dining-room "ought" to have, mostly new, and entirely expensive—mirrored sideboard in oak; heavy chairs, just the dozen, in fawn-coloured morocco seats and backs—the dining-room, in short, of a London-house inhabited by rich middle-class people. A big fire blazed in the low round-backed grate, whose flashes were reflected in the steel fender and the ugly fire-irons that were never used. A snowy cloth of linen, finer than ordinary, for there was pride in the housekeeping, covered the large dining-table, and a company, evidently a family, was eating its breakfast. But how come these

people THERE?

For, supposing my reader one of the company, let him rise from the well-appointed table—its silver, bright as the complex motions of butler's elbows can make it; its china, ornate though not elegant; its ham, huge, and neither too fat nor too lean; its game-pie, with nothing to be desired in composition, or in flavour natural or artificial;—let him rise from these and go to the left of the two windows, for there are two opposite each other, the room having been enlarged by being built out: if he be such a one as I would have for a reader, might I choose—a reader whose heart, not merely his eye, mirrors what he sees—one who not merely beholds the outward shows of things, but catches a glimpse of the soul that looks out of them, whose garment and revelation they are;—if he be such, I say, he will stand, for more than a moment, speechless with something akin to that which made the morning stars sing together.

He finds himself gazing far over western seas, while yet the sun is in the east. They lie clear and cold, pale and cold, broken with islands scattering thinner to the horizon, which is jagged here and there with yet another. The ocean looks a wild, yet peaceful mingling of lake and land. Some of the islands are green from shore to shore, of low yet broken surface; others are mere rocks, with a bold front to the sea, one or two of them strange both in form and character. Over the pale blue sea hangs the pale blue sky, flecked with a few cold white clouds that look as if they disowned the earth they had got so high—though none the less

her children, and doomed to descend again to her bosom. A keen little wind is out, crisping the surface of the sea in patches—a pretty large crisping to be seen from that height, for the window looks over hill above hill to the sea. Life, quiet yet eager, is all about; the solitude itself is alive, content to be a solitude because it is alive. Its life needs nothing from beyond—is independent even of the few sails of fishing boats that here and there with their red brown break the blue of the water.

If my reader, gently obedient to my thaumaturgy, will now turn and cross to the other window, let him as he does so beware of casting a glance on his right towards the place he has left at the table, for the room will now look to him tenfold commonplace, so that he too will be inclined to ask, "How come these and their belongings HERE—just HERE?"—let him first look from the window. There he sees hills of heather rolling away eastward, at middle distance beginning to rise into mountains, and farther yet, on the horizon, showing snow on their crests—though that may disappear and return several times before settling down for the winter. It is a solemn and very still region—not a PRETTY country at all, but great—beautiful with the beauties of colour and variety of surface; while, far in the distance, where the mountains and the clouds have business together, its aspect rises to grandeur. To his first glance probably not a tree will be discoverable; the second will fall upon a solitary clump of firs, like a mole on the cheek of one of the hills not far off, a hill steeper than most of them, and green to the top.

Is my reader seized with that form of divine longing which wonders what lies over the nearest hill? Does he fancy, ascending the other side to its crest, some sweet face of highland girl, singing songs of the old centuries while yet there was a people in these wastes? Why should he imagine in the presence of the actual? why dream when the eyes can see? He has but to return to the table to reseat himself by the side of one of the prettiest of girls!

She is fair, yet with a glowing tinge under her fairness which flames out only in her eyes, and seldom reddens her skin. She has brown hair with just a suspicion of red and no more, and a waviness that turns to curl at the ends. She has a good forehead, arched a little, not without a look of habitation, though whence that comes it might be hard to say. There are no great clouds on that sky of the face, but there is a soft dimness that might turn to rain. She has a straight nose, not too large for the imperfect yet decidedly Greek contour; a doubtful, rather straight, thin-lipped mouth, which seems to dissolve into a bewitching smile, and reveals perfect teeth—and a good deal more to the eyes that can read it. When the mouth smiles, the eyes light up, which is a good sign. Their shape is long oval—and their colour when unlighted, much that of an unpeeled almond; when she smiles, they grow red. She has an object in life which can hardly be called a mission. She is rather tall, and quite graceful, though not altogether natural in her movements. Her dress gives a feathery impression to one who rather receives than notes the look of

ladies. She has a good hand—not the doll hand so much admired of those who can judge only of quantity and know nothing of quality, but a fine sensible hand,—the best thing about her: a hand may be too small just as well as too large.

Poor mother earth! what a load of disappointing women, made fit for fine things, and running all to self and show, she carries on her weary old back! From all such, good Lord deliver us!—except it be for our discipline or their awaking.

Near her at the breakfast table sits one of aspect so different, that you could ill believe they belonged to the same family. She is younger and taller—tall indeed, but not ungraceful, though by no means beautiful. She has all the features that belong to a face—among them not a good one. Stay! I am wrong: there were in truth, dominant over the rest, TWO good features—her two eyes, dark as eyes well could be without being all pupil, large, and rather long like her sister's until she looked at you, and then they opened wide. They did not flash or glow, but were full of the light that tries to see—questioning eyes. They were simple eyes—I will not say without arriere pensee, for there was no end of thinking faculty, if not yet thought, behind them,—but honest eyes that looked at you from the root of eyes, with neither attack nor defence in them. If she was not so graceful as her sister, she was hardly more than a girl, and had a remnant of that curiously lovely mingling of grace and clumsiness which we see in long-legged growing girls. I will give her the advantage of not being further described, except so far as this—that her hair was long

and black, that her complexion was dark, with something of a freckly unevenness, and that her hands were larger and yet better than her sister's.

There is one truth about a plain face, that may not have occurred to many: its ugliness accompanies a condition of larger undevelopment, for all ugliness that is not evil, is undevelopment; and so implies the larger material and possibility of development. The idea of no countenance is yet carried out, and this kind will take more developing for the completion of its idea, and may result in a greater beauty. I would therefore advise any young man of aspiration in the matter of beauty, to choose a plain woman for wife—IF THROUGH HER PLAINNESS SHE IS YET LOVELY IN HIS EYES; for the loveliness is herself, victorious over the plainness, and her face, so far from complete and yet serving her loveliness, has in it room for completion on a grander scale than possibly most handsome faces. In a handsome face one sees the lines of its coming perfection, and has a glimpse of what it must be when finished: few are prophets enough for a plain face. A keen surprise of beauty waits many a man, if he be pure enough to come near the transfiguration of the homely face he loved.

This plain face was a solemn one, and the solemnity suited the plainness. It was not specially expressive—did not look specially intelligent; there was more of latent than operative power in it —while her sister's had more expression than power. Both were lady-like; whether they were ladies, my reader may determine.

There are common ladies and there are rare ladies; the former MAY be countesses; the latter MAY be peasants.

There were two younger girls at the table, of whom I will say nothing more than that one of them looked awkward, promised to be handsome, and was apparently a good soul; the other was pretty, and looked pert.

The family possessed two young men, but they were not here; one was a partner in the business from which his father had practically retired; the other was that day expected from Oxford.

The mother, a woman with many autumnal reminders of spring about her, sat at the head of the table, and regarded her queendom with a smile a little set, perhaps, but bright. She had the look of a woman on good terms with her motherhood, with society, with the universe—yet had scarce a shadow of assumption on her countenance. For if she felt as one who had a claim upon things to go pleasantly with her, had she not put in her claim, and had it acknowledged? Her smile was a sweet white-toothed smile, true if shallow, and a more than tolerably happy one—often irradiating THE GOVERNOR opposite—for so was the head styled by the whole family from mother to chit.

He was the only one at the table on whose countenance a shadow—as of some end unattained—was visible. He had tried to get into parliament, and had not succeeded; but I will not presume to say that was the source of the shadow. He did not look discontented, or even peevish; there was indeed a certain radiance of success about him-only above the cloudy horizon of

his thick, dark eyebrows, seemed to hang a thundery atmosphere. His forehead was large, but his features rather small; he had, however, grown a trifle fat, which tended to make up. In his youth he must have been very nice-looking, probably too pretty to be handsome. In good health and when things went well, as they had mostly done with him, he was sweet-tempered; what he might be in other conditions was seldom conjectured. But was that a sleeping thunder-cloud, or only the shadow of his eyebrows?

He had a good opinion of himself-on what grounds I do not know; but he was rich, and I know no better ground; I doubt if there is any more certain soil for growing a good opinion of oneself. Certainly, the more you try to raise one by doing what is right and worth doing, the less you succeed.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer had finished his breakfast, and sat for a while looking at nothing in particular, plunged in deep thought about nothing at all, while the girls went on with theirs. He was a little above the middle height, and looked not much older than his wife; his black hair had but begun to be touched with silver; he seemed a man without an atom of care more than humanity counts reasonable; his speech was not unlike that of an Englishman, for, although born in Glasgow, he had been to Oxford. He spoke respectfully to his wife, and with a pleasant playfulness to his daughters; his manner was nowise made to order, but natural enough; his grammar was as good as conversation requires; everything was respectable about him-and yet-he was one remove at least from a gentleman. Something

hard to define was lacking to that idea of perfection.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer's grandfather had begun to make the family fortune by developing a little secret still in a remote highland glen, which had acquired a reputation for its whisky, into a great superterrene distillery. Both he and his son made money by it, and it had "done well" for Mr. Peregrine also. With all three of them the making of money had been the great calling of life. They were diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving Mammon, and founding claim to consideration on the fact. Neither Jacob nor John Palmer's worst enemy had ever called him a hypocrite: neither had been suspected of thinking to serve Mammon and God. Both had gone regularly to church, but neither had taught in a Sunday school, or once gone to a week-day sermon. Peregrine had built a church and a school. He did not now take any active part in the distillery, but worked mainly in money itself.

Jacob, the son of a ship-chandler in Greenock, had never thought about gentleman or no gentleman; but his son John had entertained the difference, and done his best to make a gentleman of Peregrine; and neither Peregrine nor any of his family ever doubted his father's success; and if he had not quite succeeded, I would have the blame laid on Peregrine and not on either father or grandfather. For a man to GROW a gentleman, it is of great consequence that his grandfather should have been an honest man; but if a man BE a gentleman, it matters little what his grandfather or grandmother either was. Nay—if a man be a

gentleman, it is of the smallest consequence, except for its own sake, whether the world counts him one or not.

Mr. Peregrine Palmer rose from the table with a merry remark on the prolongation of the meal by his girls, and went towards the door.

"Are you going to shoot?" asked his wife.

"Not to-day. But I am going to look after my guns. I daresay they've got them all right, but there's nothing like seeing to a thing yourself!"

Mr. Palmer had this virtue, and this very gentlemanlike way—that he always gave his wife as full an answer as he would another lady. He was not given to marital brevity.

He was there for the grouse-shooting—not exactly, only "as it were." He did not care VERY much about the sport, and had he cared nothing, would have been there all the same. Other people, in what he counted his social position, shot grouse, and he liked to do what other people did, for then he felt all right: if ever he tried the gate of heaven, it would be because other people did. But the primary cause of his being so far in the north was the simple fact that he had had the chance of buying a property very cheap—a fine property of mist and cloud, heather and rock, mountain and moor, and with no such reputation for grouse as to enhance its price. "My estate" sounded well, and after a time of good preserving he would be able to let it well, he trusted. No sooner was it bought than his wife and daughters were eager to visit it; and the man of business, perceiving it would cost him much less

if they passed their autumns there instead of on the continent, proceeded at once to enlarge the house and make it comfortable. If they should never go a second time, it would, with its perfect appointments, make the shooting there more attractive!

They had arrived the day before. The journey had been fatiguing, for a great part of it was by road; but they were all in splendid health, and not too tired to get up at a reasonable hour the next day.

CHAPTER II.
A SHORT GLANCE OVER THE SHOULDER

Mr. Peregrine was the first of the Palmer family to learn that there was a Palmer coat of arms. He learned it at college, and on this wise.

One day a fellow-student, who pleased himself with what he called philology, remarked that his father must have been a hit of a humorist to name him Peregrine:—"except indeed it be a family name!" he added.

"I never thought about it," said Peregrine. "I don't quite know what you mean."

The fact was he had no glimmer of what he meant.

"Nothing profound," returned the other. "Only don't you see Peregrine means pilgrim? It is the same as the Italian pellegrino, from the Latin, peregrinus, which means one that goes about the fields,—what in Scotland you call a LANDLOUPER."

"Well, but," returned Peregrine, hesitatingly, "I don't find myself much wiser. Peregrine means a pilgrim, you say, but what of that? All names mean something, I suppose! It don't matter much."

"What is your coat of arms?"

"I don't know."

"Why did your father call you Peregrine?"

"I don't know that either. I suppose because he liked the name."

"Why should he have liked it?" continued the other, who was given to the Socratic method.

"I know no more than the man in the moon."

"What does your surname mean?"

"Something to do with palms, I suppose."

"Doubtless."

"You see I don't go in for that kind of thing like you!"

"Any man who cares about the cut of his coat, might have a little curiosity about the cut of his name: it sits to him a good deal closer!"

"That is true—so close that you can't do anything with it. I can't pull mine off however you criticize it!"

"You can change it any day. Would you like to change it?"

"No, thank you, Mr. Stokes!" returned Peregrine dryly.

"I didn't mean with mine," growled the other. "My name is an historical one too—but that is not in question.—Do you know your crest ought to be a hairy worm?"

"Why?"

"Don't you know the palmer-worm? It got its name where you got yours!"

"Well, we all come from Adam!"

"What! worms and all?"

"Surely. We're all worms, the parson says. Come, put me

through; it's time for lunch. Or, if you prefer, let me burst in ignorance. I don't mind."

"Well, then, I will explain. The palmer was a pilgrim: when he came home, he carried a palm-branch to show he had been to the holy land."

"Did the hairy worm go to the holy land too?"

"He is called a palmer-worm because he has feet enough to go any number of pilgrimages. But you are such a land-louper, you ought to blazon two hairy worms saltier-wise."

"I don't understand."

"Why, your name, interpreted to half an ear, is just PILGRIM PILGRIM!"

"I wonder if my father meant it!"

"That I cannot even guess at, not having the pleasure of knowing your father. But it does look like a paternal joke!"

His friend sought out for him the coat and crest of the Palmers; but for the latter, strongly recommended a departure: the fresh family-branch would suit the worm so well!—his crest ought to be two worms crossed, tufted, the tufts ouched in gold. It was not heraldic language, but with Peregrine passed well enough. Still he did not take to the worms, but contented himself with the ordinary crest. He was henceforth, however, better pleased with his name, for he fancied in it something of the dignity of a doubled surname.

His first glance at his wife was because she crossed the field of his vision; his second glance was because of her beauty; his

third because her name was SHELLEY. It is marvellous how whimsically sentimental commonplace people can be where their own interesting personality is concerned: her name he instantly associated with SCALLOP-SHELL, and began to make inquiry about her. Learning that her other name was Miriam, one also of the holy land—

"A most remarkable coincidence!—a mere coincidence of course!" he said to himself. "Evidently that is the woman destined to be the companion of my pilgrimage!"

When their first child was born, the father was greatly exercised as to a fitting name for him. He turned up an old botany book, and sought out the scientific names of different palms. CHAMAEROPS would not do, for it was a dwarf-palm; BORASSUS might do, seeing it was a boy—only it stood for a FAN-PALM; CORYPHA would not be bad for a girl, only it was the name of a heathen goddess, and would not go well with the idea of a holy palmer. COCOA, PHOENIX, and ARECA, one after the other, went in at his eyes and through his head; none of them pleased him. His wife, however, who in her smiling way had fallen in with his whim, helped him out of his difficulty. She was the daughter of nonconformist parents in Lancashire, and had been encouraged when a child to read a certain old-fashioned book called The Pilgrim's Progress, which her husband had never seen. He did not read it now, but accepting her suggestion, named the boy Christian. When a daughter came, he would have had her Christiana, but his wife persuaded him to be content with

Christina. They named their second son Valentine, after Mr. Valiant-for-truth. Their second daughter was Mercy; and for the third and fourth, Hope and Grace seemed near enough. So the family had a cool glow of puritanism about it, while nothing was farther from the thoughts of any of them than what their names signified. All, except the mother, associated them with the crusades for the rescue of the sepulchre of the Lord from the pagans; not a thought did one of them spend on the rescue of a live soul from the sepulchre of low desires, mean thoughts, and crawling selfishness.

CHAPTER III.
THE GIRLS' FIRST WALK

The Governor, Peregrine and Palmer as he was, did not care about walking at any time, not even when he HAD to do it because other people did; the mother, of whom there would have been little left had the sweetness in her moral, and the housekeeping in her practical nature, been subtracted, had things to see to within doors: the young people must go out by themselves! They put on their hats, and issued.

The temperature was keen, though it was now nearly the middle of August, by which time in those northern regions the earth has begun to get a little warm: the house stood high, and the atmosphere was thin. There was a certain sense of sadness in the pale sky and its cold brightness; but these young people felt no cold, and perceived no sadness. The air was exhilarating, and they breathed deep breaths of a pleasure more akin to the spiritual than they were capable of knowing. For as they gazed around them, they thought, like Hamlet's mother in the presence of her invisible husband, that they saw all there was to be seen. They did not know nature: in the school to which they had gone they patronized instead of revering her. She wrought upon them nevertheless after her own fashion with her children, unheedful whether they knew what she was about or not. The mere space,

the mere height from which they looked, the rarity of the air, the soft aspiration of earth towards heaven, made them all more of children.

But not one of them being capable of enjoying anything by herself, together they were unable to enjoy much; and, like the miser who, when he cannot much enjoy his money, desires more, began to desire more company to share in the already withering satisfaction of their new possession—to help them, that is, to get pleasure out of it, as out of a new dress. It is a good thing to desire to share a good thing, but it is not well to be unable alone to enjoy a good thing. It is our enjoyment that should make us desirous to share. What is there to share if the thing be of no value in itself? To enjoy alone is to be able to share. No participation can make that of value which in itself is of none. It is not love alone but pride also, and often only pride, that leads to the desire for another to be present with us in possession.

The girls grew weary of the show around them because it was so quiet, so regardless of their presence, so moveless, so monotonous. Endless change was going on, but it was too slow for them to see; had it been rapid, its motions were not of a kind to interest them. Ere half an hour they had begun to think with regret of Piccadilly and Regent street—for they had passed the season in London. There is a good deal counted social which is merely gregarious. Doubtless humanity is better company than a bare hill-side; but not a little depends on how near we come to the humanity, and how near we come to the hill. I doubt if one

who could not enjoy a bare hill-side alone, would enjoy that hill-side in any company; if he thought he did, I suspect it would be that the company enabled him, not to forget himself in what he saw, but to be more pleasantly aware of himself than the lone hill would permit him to be;—for the mere hill has its relation to that true self which the common self is so anxious to avoid and forget. The girls, however, went on and on, led mainly by the animal delight of motion, the two younger making many a diversion up the hill on the one side, and down the hill on the other, shrieking at everything fresh that pleased them.

The house they had just left stood on the projecting shoulder of a hill, here and there planted with firs. Of the hardy trees there was a thicket at the back of the house, while toward the south, less hardy ones grew in the shrubbery, though they would never, because of the sea-breezes, come to any height. The carriage-drive to the house joined two not very distant points on the same road, and there was no lodge at either gate. It was a rough, country road, a good deal rutted, and seldom repaired. Opposite the gates rose the steep slope of a heathery hill, along the flank of which the girls were now walking. On their right lay a piece of rough moorland, covered with heather, patches of bracken, and coarse grass. A few yards to the right, it sank in a steep descent. Such was the disposition of the ground for some distance along the road—on one side the hill, on the other a narrow level, and abrupt descent.

As they advanced they caught sight of a ruin rising above the

brow of the descent: the two younger darted across the heather toward it; the two elder continued their walk along the road, gradually descending towards a valley.

"I wonder what we shall see round the corner there!" said Mercy, the younger of the two.

"The same over again, I suppose!" answered Christina. "What a rough road it is! I've twice nearly sprained my ankle!"

"I was thinking of what I saw the other day in somebody's travels—about his interest in every turn of the road, always looking for what was to come next."

"Time enough when it comes, in my opinion!" rejoined Christina.

For she was like any other mirror—quite ready to receive what was thrown upon her, but incapable of originating anything, almost incapable of using anything.

As they descended, and the hill-side, here covered with bracken and boulders, grew higher and higher above them, the valley, in front and on the right, gradually opened, here and there showing a glimpse of a small stream that cantered steadily toward the sea, now tumbling over a rock, now sullen in a brown pool. Arriving at length at a shoulder of the hill round which the road turned, a whole mile of the brook lay before them. It came down a narrow valley, with scraps of meadow in the bottom; but immediately below them the valley was of some width, and was good land from side to side, where green oats waved their feathery grace, and the yellow barley was nearly ready for the

sickle. No more than the barren hill, however, had the fertile valley anything for them. Their talk was of the last ball they were at.

The sisters were about as good friends as such negative creatures could be; and they would be such friends all their lives, if on the one hand neither of them grew to anything better, and on the other no jealousy, or marked difference of social position through marriage, intervened. They loved each other, if not tenderly, yet with the genuineness of healthy family-habit—a thing not to be despised, for it keeps the door open for something better. In itself it is not at all to be reckoned upon, for habit is but the merest shadow of reality. Still it is not a small thing, as families go, if sisters and brothers do not dislike each other.

They were criticizing certain of the young men they had met at the said ball. Being, in their development, if not in their nature, commonplace, what should they talk about but clothes or young men? And why, although an excellent type of its kind, should I take the trouble to record their conversation? To read, it might have amused me—or even interested, as may a carrot painted by a Dutchman; but were I a painter, I should be sorry to paint carrots, and the girls' talk is not for my pen. At the same time I confess myself incapable of doing it justice. When one is annoyed at the sight of things meant to be and not beautiful, there is danger of not giving them even the poor fair-play they stand in so much the more need of that it can do so little for them.

But now they changed the subject of their talk. They had come

to a point of the road not far from the ruin to which the children had run across the heather.

"Look, Chrissy! It IS an old castle!" said Mercy. "I wonder whether it is on our land!"

"Not much to be proud of!" replied the other. "It is nothing but the walls of a square house!"

"Not just a common square house! Look at that pepper-pot on one of the corners!—I wonder how it is all the old castles get deserted!"

"Because they are old. It's well to desert them before they tumble down."

"But they wouldn't tumble down if they weren't neglected. Think of Warwick castle! Stone doesn't rot like wood! Just see the thickness of those walls!"

"Yes, they are thick! But stone too has its way of rotting. Westminster palace is wearing through, flake by flake. The weather will be at the lords before long."

"That's what Valentine would call a sign of the times. I say, what a radical he is, Chrissy!—Look! the old place is just like an empty egg-shell! I know, if it had been mine, I wouldn't have let it come to that!"

"You say so because it never was yours: if it had been, you would know how uncomfortable it was!"

"I should like to know," said Mercy, after a little pause, during which they stood looking at the ruin, "whether the owners leave such places because they get fastidious and want better, or

because they are too poor to keep them up! At all events a man must be poor to SELL the house that belonged to his ancestors! —It must be miserable to grow poor after being used to plenty! —I wonder whose is the old place!"

"Oh, the governor's, I suppose! He has all hereabout for miles."

"I hope it is ours! I SHOULD like to build it up again! I would live in it myself!"

"I'm afraid the governor won't advance your share for that purpose!"

"I love old things!" said Mercy.

"I believe you take your old doll to bed with you yet!" rejoined Christina. "I am different to you!" she continued, with Frenchified grammar; "I like things as new as ever I can have them!"

"I like new things well enough, Chrissy—you know I do! It is natural. The earth herself has new clothes once a year. It is but once a year, I grant!"

"Often enough for an old granny like her!"

"Look what a pretty cottage!—down there, half-way to the burn! It's like an English cottage! Those we saw as we came along were either like a piece of the earth, or so white as to look ghastly! This one looks neat and comfortable, and has trees about it!"

The ruin, once a fortified house and called a castle, stood on a sloping root or spur that ran from the hill down to the bank of the stream, where it stopped abruptly with a steep scaur, at

whose foot lay a dark pool. On the same spur, half-way to the burn, stood a low, stone-built, thatched cottage, with a little grove about it, mostly of the hardy, contented, musical fir—a tree that would seem to have less regard to earthly prosperity than most, and looks like a pilgrim and a stranger: not caring much, it thrives where other trees cannot. There might have been a hundred of them, mingled, in strangest contrast, with a few delicate silver birches, about the cottage. It stood toward the east side of the sinking ridge, which had a steep descent, both east and west, to the fields below. The slopes were green with sweet grass, and apparently smooth as a lawn. Not far from where the cottage seemed to rest rather than rise or stand, the burn rushed right against the side of the spur, as if to go straight through it, but turned abruptly, and flowed along the side to the end of it, where its way to the sea was open. On the point of the ridge were a few more firs: except these, those about the cottage, the mole on the hill-cheek, and the plantation about the New House, up or down was not a tree to be seen. The girls stood for a moment looking.

"It's really quite pretty!" said Christina with condescension. "It has actually something of what one misses here so much—a certain cosy look! Tidy it is too! As you say, Mercy, it might be in England—only for the poverty of its trees.—And oh those wretched bare hills!" she added, as she turned away and moved on.

"Wait till the heather is quite out: then you will have colour to make up for the bareness."

"Tell true now, Mercy: that you are Scotch need not keep you from speaking the truth:—don't you think heather just—well—just a leetle magentaish?—not a colour to be altogether admired?—just a little vulgar, don't you know? The fashion has changed so much within the last few years!"

"No, I don't think so; and if I did I should be ashamed of it. I suppose poor old mother Earth ought to go to the pre-Raphaelites to be taught how to dress herself!"

Mercy spoke with some warmth, but Christina was not sufficiently interested to be cross. She made no answer.

They were now at the part of the road which crossed the descending spur as it left the hill-side. Here they stopped again, and looked down the rocky slope. There was hardly anything green betwixt them and the old ruin—little but stones on a mass of rock; but immediately beyond the ruin the green began: there it seemed as if a wave of the meadow had risen and overflowed the spur, leaving its turf behind it. Catching sight of Hope and Grace as they ran about the ruin, they went to join them, the one drawn by a vague interest in the exuviae of vanished life, the other by mere curiosity to see inside the care-worn, protesting walls. Through a gap that might once have been a door, they entered the heart of the sad unhoping thing dropt by the Past on its way to oblivion: nothing looks so unlike life as a dead body, nothing so unfit for human dwelling as a long-forsaken house.

Finding in one corner a broken stair, they clambered up to a gap in the east wall; and as they reached it, heard the sound of a

horse's feet. Looking down the road, they saw a gig approaching with two men. It had reached a part not so steep, and was coming at a trot.

"Why!" exclaimed Christina, "there's Val!—and some one with him!"

"I heard the governor say to mamma," returned Mercy, "that Val was going to bring a college friend with him,—'for a pop at the grouse,' he said. I wonder what he will be like!"

"He's a good-big-looking fellow," said Christina.

They drew nearer.

"You might have said a big, good-looking fellow!" rejoined Mercy.

"He really is handsome!—Now mind, Mercy, I was the first to discover it!" said Christina.

"Indeed you were not!—At least I was the first to SAY it!" returned Mercy. "But you will take him all to yourself anyhow, and I am sure I don't care!"

Yet the girls were not vulgar—they were only common. They did and said vulgar things because they had not the sensitive vitality to shrink from them. They had not been well taught—that is roused to LIVE: in the family was not a breath of aspiration. There was plenty of ambition, that is, aspiration turned hell-ward. They thought themselves as far from vulgar as any lady in any land, being in this vulgar—that they despised the people they called vulgar, yet thought much of themselves for not being vulgar. There was little in them the world would call vulgar; but

the world and its ways are vulgar; its breeding will not pass with the ushers of the high countries. The worst in that of these girls was a FAST, disagreeable way of talking, which they owed to a certain governess they had had for a while.

They hastened to the road. The gig came up. Valentine threw the reins to his companion, jumped out, embraced his sisters, and seemed glad to see them. Had he met them after a like interval at home, he would have given them a cooler greeting; but he had travelled so many miles that they seemed not to have met for quite a long time.

"My friend, Mr. Sercombe," he said, jerking his head toward the gig.

Mr. Sercombe raised his POT-LID—the last fashion in head-gear—and acquaintance was made.

"We'll drive on, Sercombe," said Valentine, jumping up. "You see, Chris, we're half dead with hunger! Do you think we shall find anything to eat?"

"Judging by what we left at breakfast," replied Christina, "I should say you will find enough for—one of you; but you had better go and see."

CHAPTER IV.
THE SHOP IN THE VILLAGE

Two or three days have passed. The sun had been set for an hour, and the night is already rather dark notwithstanding the long twilight of these northern regions, for a blanket of vapour has gathered over the heaven, and a few stray drops have begun to fall from it. A thin wind now and then wakes, and gives a feeble puff, but seems immediately to change its mind and resolve not to blow, but let the rain come down. A drearier-looking spot for human abode it would be difficult to imagine, except it were as much of the sandy Sahara, or of the ashy, sage-covered waste of western America. A muddy road wound through huts of turf —among them one or two of clay, and one or two of stone, which were more like cottages. Hardly one had a window two feet square, and many of their windows had no glass. In almost all of them the only chimney was little more than a hole in the middle of the thatch. This rendered the absence of glass in the windows not so objectionable; for, left without ordered path to its outlet, the smoke preferred a circuitous route, and lingered by the way, filling the air. Peat-smoke, however, is both wholesome and pleasant, nor was there mingled with it any disagreeable smell of cooking. Outside were no lamps; the road was unlighted save by the few rays that here and there crept from a window, casting a

doubtful glimmer on the mire.

One of the better cottages sent out a little better light, though only from a tallow candle, through the open upper half of a door horizontally divided in two. Except by that same half-door, indeed, little light could enter the place, for its one window was filled with all sorts of little things for sale. Small and inconvenient for the humblest commerce, this was not merely the best, it was the only shop in the hamlet.

There were two persons in it, one before and one behind the counter.

The latter was a young woman, the former a man.

He was leaning over the counter—whether from weariness, listlessness, or interest in his talk with the girl behind, it would not have been easy, in the dim light and deep shadow, to say. He seemed quite at home, yet the young woman treated him with a marked, though unembarrassed respect. The candle stood to one side of them upon the counter, making a ghastly halo in the damp air; and in the light puff that occasionally came in at the door, casting the shadow of one of a pair of scales, now on this now on that of the two faces. The young woman was tall and dark, with a large forehead:—so much could be seen; but the sweetness of her mouth, the blueness of her eyes, the extreme darkness of her hair, were not to be distinguished. The man also was dark. His coat was of some rough brown material, probably dyed and woven in the village, and his kilt of tartan. They were more than well worn—looked even in that poor light a little shabby. On

his head was the highland bonnet called a glengarry. His profile was remarkable—hardly less than grand, with a certain aquiline expression, although the nose was not roman. His eyes appeared very dark, but in the daylight were greenish hazel. Usually he talked with the girl in Gaelic, but was now speaking English, a far purer English than that of most English people, though with something of the character of book-English as distinguished from conversation-English, and a very perceptible accent.

"And when was it you heard from Lachlan, Annie?" he asked.

After a moment's pause, during which she had been putting away things in a drawer of the counter—not so big as many a kitchen dresser—

"Last Thursday it was, sir," answered the girl. "You know we hear every month, sometimes oftener."

"Yes; I know that.—I hope the dear fellow is well?"

"He is quite well and of good hope. He says he will soon come and see us now."

"And take you away, Annie?"

"Well, sir," returned Annie, after a moment's hesitation, "he does not SAY so!"

"If he did not mean it, he would be a rascal, and I should have to kill him. But my life on Lachlan's honesty!"

"Thank you, sir. He would lay down his for you."

"Not if you said to him, DON'T!-eh, Annie?"

"But he would, Macruadh!" returned the young woman, almost angrily.

"Are not you his chief?"

"Ah, that is all over now, my girl! There are no chiefs, and no clans any more! The chiefs that need not, yet sell their land like Esau for a mess of pottage—and their brothers with it! And the Sasunnach who buys it, claims rights over them that never grew on the land or were hid in its caves! Thank God, the poor man is not their slave, but he is the worse off, for they will not let him eat, and he has nowhere to go. My heart is like to break for my people. Sometimes I feel as if I would gladly die."

"Oh, sir! don't say that!" expostulated the young woman, and her voice trembled. "Every heart in Glenruadh is glad when it goes well with the Macruadh."

"Yes, yes; I know you all love my father's son and my uncle's nephew; but how can it go well with the Macruadh when it goes ill with his clan? There is no way now for a chief to be the father of his people; we are all poor together! My uncle—God rest his soul!—they managed it so, I suppose, as to persuade him there was no help for it! Well, a man must be an honest man, even if there be no way but ruin! God knows, as we've all heard my father say a hundred times from the pulpit, there's no ruin but dishonesty! For poverty and hard work, he's a poor creature would crouch for those!"

"He who well goes down hill, holds his head up!" said Annie, and a pause followed.

"There are strangers at the New House, we hear," she said.

"From a distance I saw some young ladies, and one or two

men. I don't desire to see more of them. God forbid I should wish them any manner of harm! but—I hardly understand myself—I don't like to see them there. I am afraid it is pride. They are rich, I hear, so we shall not be troubled with attention from them; they will look down upon us."

"Look down on the Macruadh!" exclaimed Annie, as if she could not believe her ears.

"Not that I should heed that!" he went on. "A cock on the barn-ridge looks down on you, and you don't feel offended! What I do dread is looking down on them. There is something in me that can hate, Annie, and I fear it. There is something about the land—I don't care about money, but I feel like a miser about the land!—I don't mean ANY land; I shouldn't care to buy land unless it had once been ours; but what came down to me from my own people—with my own people upon it—I would rather turn the spigot of the molten gold and let it run down the abyss, than a rood of that slip from me! I feel it even a disgrace to have lost what of it I never had!"

"Indeed, Macruadh," said Annie, "it's a hard time! There is no money in the country! And fast the people are going after Lachlan!"

"I shall miss you, Annie!"

"You are very kind to us all, sir."

"Are you not all my own! And you have to take care of for Lachlan's sake besides. He left you solemnly to my charge—as if that had been necessary, the foolish fellow, when we are foster-

brothers!"

Again came a pause.

"Not a gentleman-farmer left from one end of the strath to the other!" said the chief at length. "When Ian is at home, we feel just like two old turkey-cocks left alone in the yard!"

"Say two golden eagles, sir, on the cliff of the rock."

"Don't compare us to the eagle, Annie. I do not love the bird. He is very proud and greedy and cruel, and never will know the hand that tames him. He is the bird of the monarch or the earl, not the bird of the father of his people. But he is beautiful, and I do not kill him."

"They shot another, the female bird, last week! All the birds are going! Soon there will be nothing but the great sheep and the little grouse. The capercailzie's gone, and the ptarmigan's gone! —Well, there's a world beyond!"

"Where the birds go, Annie?—Well, it may be! But the ptarmigan's not gone yet, though there are not many; and for the capercailzie—only who that loves them will be here to see!—But do you really think there is a heaven for all God's creatures, Annie? Ian does."

"I don't know what I said to make you think so, sir! When the heart aches the tongue mistakes. But how is my lady, your mother?"

"Pretty well, thank you—wonderfully cheerful. It is time I went home to her. Lachlan would think I was playing him false, and making love to you on my own account!"

"No fear! He would know better than that! He would know too, if she was not belonging to Lachlan, her father's daughter would not let her chief humble himself."

"You're one of the old sort, Annie! Good night. Mind you tell Lachlan I never miss a chance of looking in to see how you are getting on."

"I will. Good night, Macruadh."

They shook hands over the counter, and the young chief took his departure.

As he stood up, he showed a fine-made, powerful frame, over six feet in height, and perfectly poised. With a great easy stride he swept silently out of the shop; nor from gait any more than look would one have thought he had been all day at work on the remnant of property he could call his own.

To a cit it would have seemed strange that one sprung from innumerable patriarchal ancestors holding the land of the country, should talk so familiarly with a girl in a miserable little shop in a most miserable hamlet; it would have seemed stranger yet that such a one should toil at the labour the soul of a cit despises; but stranger than both it would seem to him, if he saw how such a man is tempted to look down upon HIM.

If less CLEVERNESS is required for country affairs, they leave the more room for thinking. There are great and small in every class; here and there is a ploughman that understands Burns, here and there a large-minded shopkeeper, here and there perhaps an unselfish duke. Doubtless most of the youth's

ancestors would likewise have held such labour unworthy of a gentleman, and would have preferred driving to their hills a herd of lowland cattle; but this, the last Macruadh, had now and then a peep into the kingdom of heaven.

CHAPTER V.
THE CHIEF

The Macruadh strode into the dark, and down the village, wasting no time in picking his way—thence into the yet deeper dark of the moorland hills. The rain was beginning to come down in earnest, but he did not heed it; he was thoroughbred, and feared no element. An umbrella was to him a ludicrous thing: how could a little rain—as he would have called it had it come down in torrents—hurt any one!

The Macruadh, as the few who yet held by the sore-frayed, fast-vanishing skirt of clanship, called him, was the son of the last minister of the parish-a godly man, who lived that which he could ill explain, and was immeasurably better than those parts of his creed which, from a sense of duty, he pushed to the front. For he held devoutly by the root of which he spoke too little, and it supplied much sap to his life and teaching—out of the pulpit. He was a genial, friendly, and by nature even merry man, always ready to share what he had, and making no show of having what he had not, either in wisdom, knowledge, or earthly goods. His father and brother had been owners of the property and chiefs of the clan, much beloved by the poor of it, and not a little misunderstood by most of the more nourishing. For a great hunger after larger means, the ambition of the mammon-ruled

world, had arisen in the land, and with it a rage for emigration. The uncle of the present Macruadh did all he could to keep his people at home, lived on a couple of hundreds a year himself, and let many of his farms to his gentlemen-tacksmen, as they were called, at lower rents; but it was unavailing; one after another departed, until his land lay in a measure waste, and he grew very poor, mourning far more over his clan and his country than his poverty. In more prosperous times he had scraped together a little money, meaning it, if he could but avoid spending it in his old age, for his brother, who must soon succeed him; for he was himself a bachelor—the result of a romantic attachment and sorrow in his youth; but he lent it to a company which failed, and so lost it. At length he believed himself compelled, for the good of his people, to part with all but a mere remnant of the property. From the man to whom he sold it, Mr. Peregrine Palmer bought it for twice the money, and had still a good bargain. But the hopes of the laird were disappointed: in the sheep it fed, and the grouse it might be brought to breed, lay all its value in the market; there was no increase in the demand for labour; and more and more of the peasantry emigrated, or were driven to other parts of the country. Such was the present treatment of the land, causing human life to ebb from it, and working directly counter to the creative God.

The laird retired to the humble cottage of his brother the pastor, just married rather late in life—where every comfort love could give waited for him; but the thought that he could

have done better for his people by retaining the land soon wore him out; and having made a certain disposition of the purchase-money, he died.

What remained of the property came to the minister. As for the chieftainship, that had almost died before the chief; but, reviving by union with the reverence felt for the minister, it took thereafter a higher form. When the minister died, the idea of it transmitted to his son was of a peculiarly sacred character; while in the eyes of the people, the authority of the chief and the influence of the minister seemed to meet reborn in Alister notwithstanding his youth. In himself he was much beloved, and in love the blessed rule, blessed where understood, holds, that to him that hath shall be given, he only who has being fit to receive. The love the people bore to his father, both pastor and chief, crowned head and heart of Alister. Scarce man or woman of the poor remnant of the clan did not love the young Macruadh.

On his side was true response. With a renewed and renovating conscience, and a vivid sense that all things had to be made new, he possessed an old strong heart, clinging first to his father and mother, and then to the shadow even of any good thing that had come floating down the ages. Call it a dream, a wild ideal, a foolish fancy—call it what you please, he was filled with the notion of doing something in his own person and family, having the remnant of the clan for the nucleus of his endeavour, to restore to a vital reality, let it be of smallest extent, that most ancient of governments, the patriarchal, which, all around,

had rotted into the feudal, in its turn rapidly disintegrating into the mere dust and ashes of the kingdom of the dead, over which Mammon reigns supreme. There may have been youthful presumption and some folly in the notion, but it sprang neither from presumption nor folly, but from simple humanity, and his sense of the responsibility he neither could nor would avoid, as the person upon whom had devolved the headship, however shadowy, of a house, ruinous indeed, but not yet razed.

The castle on the ridge stood the symbol of the family condition. It had, however, been a ruin much longer than any one alive could remember. Alister's uncle had lived in a house on the spot where Mr. Peregrine Palmer's now stood; the man who bought it had pulled it down to build that which Mr. Palmer had since enlarged. It was but a humble affair—a great cottage in stone, much in the style of that in which the young chief now lived—only six times the size, with the one feature indispensable to the notion of a chief's residence, a large hall. Some would say it was but a huge kitchen; but it was the sacred place of the house, in which served the angel of hospitality. THERE was always plenty to eat and drink for any comer, whether he had "claim" or not: the question of claim where was need, was not thought of. When the old house had to make room for the new, the staves of the last of its half-pipes of claret, one of which used always to stand on tap amidst the peat-smoke, yielded its final ministration to humanity by serving to cook a few meals for mason and carpenter.

The property of Clanruadh, for it was regarded as clan-

property BECAUSE belonging to the chief, stretched in old time away out of sight in all directions—nobody, in several, could tell exactly how far, for the undrawn boundary lines lay in regions of mist and cloud, in regions stony, rocky, desert, to which a red deer, not to say a stray sheep, rarely ascended. At one time it took in a portion at least of every hill to be seen from the spot where stood the ruin. The chief had now but a small farm, consisting of some fair soil on the slope of a hill, and some very good in the valley on both sides of the burn; with a hill-pasture that was not worth measuring in acres, for it abounded in rocks, and was prolific in heather and ling, with patches of coarse grass here and there, and some extent of good high-valley grass, to which the small black cattle and black-faced sheep were driven in summer. Beyond periodical burnings of the heather, this uplifted portion received no attention save from the mist, the snow, the rain, the sun, and the sweet air. A few grouse and black game bred on it, and many mountain-hares, with martens, wild cats, and other VERMIN. But so tender of life was the Macruadh that, though he did not spare these last, he did not like killing even a fox or a hooded crow, and never shot a bird for sport, or would let another shoot one, though the poorest would now and then beg a bird or two from him, sure of having their request. It seemed to him as if the creatures were almost a part of his clan, of which also he had to take care against a greedy world. But as the deer and the birds ranged where they would, it was not much he could do for them—as little almost as for the men and women that had gone

over the sea, and were lost to their country in Canada.

Regret, and not any murmur, stirred the mind of Alister Macruadh when he thought of the change that had passed on all things around him. He had been too well taught for grumbling—least of all at what was plainly the will of the Supreme—inasmuch as, however man might be to blame, the thing was there. Personal regrets he had none beyond those of family feeling and transmitted SENTIMENT. He was able to understand something of the signs of the times, and saw that nothing could bring back the old way—saw that nothing comes back—at least in the same form; saw that there had been much that ought not to come back, and that, if patriarchal ways were ever to return, they must rise out of, and be administered upon loftier principles—must begin afresh, and be wrought out afresh from the bosom of a new Abraham, capable of so bringing up his children that a new development of the one natural system, of government should be possible with and through them. Perhaps even now, in the new country to which so many of his people were gone, some shadowy reappearance of the old fashion might have begun to take shape on a higher level, with loftier aims, and in circumstances holding out fewer temptations to the evils of the past!

Alister could not, at his years, have generated such thoughts but for the wisdom that had gone before him—first the large-minded speculation of his father, who was capable even of discarding his prejudices where he saw they might mislead him;

and next, the response of his mother to the same: she was the only one who entirely understood her husband. Isobel Macruadh was a woman of real thinking-power. Her sons being but boys when their father died, she at once took the part of mediator between the mind of the father and that of his sons; and besides guiding them on the same principles, often told them things their father had said, and talked with them of things they had heard him say.

One of the chief lessons he left them wrought well for the casting out of all with which the feudal system had debased the patriarchal; and the poverty shared with the clan had powerfully helped: it was spoken against the growing talionic regard of human relations—that, namely, the conditions of a bargain fulfilled on both sides, all is fulfilled between the bargaining parties.

"In the possibility of any bargain," he had said, "are involved eternal conditions: there is relationship—there is brotherhood. Even to give with a denial of claim, to be kind under protest, is an injury, is charity without the love, is salt without the saltness. If we spent our lives in charity we should never overtake neglected claims—claims neglected from the very beginning of the relations of men. If a man say, 'I have not been unjust; I owed the man nothing;' he sides with Death—says with the typical murderer, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' builds the tombs of those his fathers slew."

In the bosom of young Alister Macruadh, the fatherly relation of the strong to the weak survived the disappearance of most

of the outward signs of clan-kindred: the chieftainship was SUBLIMED in him. The more the body of outer fact died, the stronger grew in him the spirit of the relation. As some savage element of a race will reappear in an individual of it after ages of civilization, so may good old ways of thinking and feeling, modes long gone out of fashion and practice, survive and revive modified by circumstance, in an individual of a new age. Such a one will see the customs of his ancestors glorified in the mists of the past; what is noble in them will appeal to all that is best in his nature, spurring the most generous of his impulses, and stirring up the conscience that would be void of offence. When the operative force of such regards has been fostered by the teaching of a revered parent; when the influences he has left behind are nourished and tended, with thorough belief and devoted care, by her who shared his authority in life, and now bears alone the family sceptre, there can be no bound set to their possible potency in a mind of high spiritual order. The primary impulse became with Alister a large portion of his religion: he was the shepherd of the much ravaged and dwindled Macruadh-fold; it was his church, in which the love of the neighbour was intensified in the love of the relation and dependent. To aid and guard this his flock, was Alister's divine service. It was associated with a great dislike of dogma, originating in the recoil of the truth within him from much that was commonly held and taught for true.

Call the thing enthusiasm or what you will, so you believe it there, and genuine.

It was only towards the poor of a decayed clan he had opportunity of exercising the cherished relation; almost all who were not poor had emigrated before the lands were sold; and indeed it was only the poor who set store by their unity with the old head. Not a few of the clan, removed elsewhither, would have smiled degenerate, and with scorn in their amusement, at the idea of Alister's clinging to any supposed reality in the position he could claim. Among such nevertheless were several who, having made money by trade, would each have been glad enough to keep up old traditions, and been ready even to revive older, had the headship fallen to him. But in the hands of a man whom, from the top of their wealth, they regarded as but a poor farmer, they forgot all about it—along with a few other more important and older-world matters; for where Mammon gets in his foot, he will soon be lord of the house, and turn not merely Rank, his rival demon, out of doors, but God himself. Alister indeed lived in a dream; he did not know how far the sea of hearts had ebbed, leaving him alone on the mount of his vision; but he dreamed a dream that was worth dreaming; comfort and help flowed from it to those about him, nor did it fail to yield his own soul refreshment also. All dreams are not false; some dreams are truer than the plainest facts. Fact at best is but a garment of truth, which has ten thousand changes of raiment woven in the same loom. Let the dreamer only do the truth of his dream, and one day he will realize all that was worth realizing in it—and a great deal more and better than it contained. Alister had no far-reaching

visions of anything to come out of his; he had, like the true man he was, only the desire to live up to his idea of what the people looked up to in him. The one thing that troubled him was, that his uncle, whom he loved so dearly, should have sold the land.

Doubtless there was pride mingled with his devotion, and pride is an evil thing. Still it was a human and not a devilish pride. I would not be misunderstood as defending pride, or even excusing it in any shape; it is a thing that must be got rid of at all costs; but even for evil we must speak the truth; and the pride of a good man, evil as it is, and in him more evil than in an evil man, yet cannot be in itself such a bad thing as the pride of a bad man. The good man would at once recognize and reject the pride of a bad man. A pride that loves cannot be so bad as a pride that hates. Yet if the good man do not cast out his pride, it will sink him lower than the bad man's, for it will degenerate into a worse pride than that of any bad man. Each must bring its own divinely-ordained consequence.

There is one other point in the character of the Macruadh which I must mention ere I pass on; in this region, and at this time, it was a great peculiarity, one that yielded satisfaction to few of the clan, and made him even despised in the strath: he hated whisky, and all the drinking customs associated with it. In this he was not original; he had not come to hate it from noting the degradation and crime that attended it, or that as poverty grew, drunkenness grew, men who had used it in moderation taking more and more as circumstances became more adverse, turning

sadness into slavery: he had been brought up to hate it. His father, who, as a clergyman doing his endeavour for the welfare of his flock, found himself greatly thwarted by its deadening influences, rendering men callous not only to the special vice itself, but to worse vices as well, had banished it from his table and his house; while the mother had from their very childhood instilled a loathing of the national weakness and its physical means into the minds of her sons. In her childhood she had seen its evils in her own father: by no means a drunkard, he was the less of a father because he did as others did. Never an evening passed without his drinking his stated portion of whisky-toddy, growing more and more subject to attacks of had temper, with consequent injustice and unkindness. The recollection may have made her too sweeping in her condemnation of the habit, but I doubt it; and anyhow a habit is not a man, and we need not much condemn that kind of injustice. We need not be tender over a habit which, though not all bad, yet leads to endless results that are all bad. I would follow such to its grave without many tears!

Isobel Macruadh was one of those rare women who preserve in years the influence gained in youth; and the thing that lay at the root of the fact was her justice. For though her highland temper would occasionally burst out in hot flame, everyone knew that if she were in the wrong, she would see it and say it before any one else would tell her of it. This justice it was, ready against herself as for another, that fixed the influence which her goodness and her teaching of righteousness gained.

Her eldest child, a girl, died in infancy. Alister and Ian were her whole earthly family, and they worshipped her.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.