

**GEORGE
MACDONALD**

HEATHER AND
SNOW

George MacDonald

Heather and Snow

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CHAPTER I

A RUNAWAY RACE

Upon neighbouring stones, earth-fast, like two islands of an archipelago, in an ocean of heather, sat a boy and a girl, the girl knitting, or, as she would have called it, *weaving* a stocking, and the boy, his eyes fixed on her face, talking with an animation that amounted almost to excitement. He had great fluency, and could have talked just as fast in good English as in the dialect in which he was now pouring out his ambitions—the broad Saxon of Aberdeen.

He was giving the girl to understand that he meant to be a soldier like his father, and quite as good a one as he. But so little did he know of himself or the world, that, with small genuine impulse to action, and moved chiefly by the anticipated results of it, he saw success already his, and a grateful country at his feet. His inspiration was so purely ambition, that, even if, his mood unchanged, he were to achieve much for his country, she could hardly owe him gratitude.

'I'll no hae the war!' lightly (*make light of*) me!' he said.

'Mebbe the war!' winna tribble itsel aboot ye sae muckle as e'en to lightly ye!' returned his companion quietly.

'Ye do naething ither!' retorted the boy, rising, and looking down on her in displeasure. 'What for are ye aye girdin at me? A body canna lat his thought gang, but ye're doon upo them, like doos upo corn!'

'I wadna be girdin at ye, Francie, but that I care ower muckle aboot ye to lat ye think I haud the same opingon o' ye 'at ye hae o' yersel,' answered the girl, who went on with her knitting as she spoke.

'Ye'll never believe a body!' he rejoined, and turned half away. 'I canna think what gars me keep comin to see ye! Ye haena a guid word to gie a body!'

'It's nane ye s' get frae me, the gait ye're gaein, Francie! Ye think a heap ower muckle o' yersel. What ye expec, may some day a' come true, but ye hae gien nobody a richt to expec it alang wi' ye, and I canna think, gien ye war fair to yersel, ye wad coont yersel ane it was to be expeckit o!'

'I tauld ye sae, Kirsty! Ye never lay ony weicht upo what a body says!'

That depen's upo the body. Did ye never hear maister Craig p'int oot the differ atween believin a body and believin *in* a body, Francie?'

'No—and I dinna care.'

'I wudna like ye to gang awa thinking I misdoobit yer word, Francie! I believe onything ye tell me, as far as *I* think ye ken, but maybe no sae far as *ye* think ye ken. I believe ye, but I confess I dinna believe *in* ye—yet. What hae ye ever dune to gie a body ony richt to believe in ye? Ye're a guid rider, and a guid shot for a laddie, and ye rin middlin fest—I canna say like a deer, for I reckon I cud lick ye mysel at rinnin! But, efter and a',—'

'Wha's braggin noo, Kirsty?' cried the boy, with a touch of not ill-humoured triumph.

'Me,' answered Kirsty; '—and I'll do what I brag o!'

 she added, throwing her stocking on the patch of green sward about the stone, and starting to her feet with a laugh. 'Is't to be uphill or alang?'

They were near the foot of a hill to whose top went the heather, but along whose base, between the heather and the bogland below, lay an irregular belt of moss and grass, pretty clear of stones. The boy did not seem eager to accept the challenge.

'There's nae guid in lickin a lassie!' he said with a shrug.

'There mith be guid in tryin to du't though—especially gien ye war lickit at it!' returned the girl.

'What guid *can* there be in a body bein lickit at onything?'

'The guid o' haein a body's pride ta'en doon a wee.'

'I'm no sae sure o' the guid o' that! It wud only hand ye ohn tried (*from trying*) again.'

'Jist there's what yer pride dis to ye, Francie! Ye maun aye be first, or ye'll no try! Ye'll never du naething for fear o' no bein able to gang on believin ye cud du 't better nor ony ither body! Ye dinna want to fin' oot 'at ye're naebody in particlar. It's a sair pity ye wanna hae yer pride ta'en doon. Ye wud be a hantle better wantin about three pairts o' 't.—Come, I'm ready for ye! Never min' 'at I'm a lassie: naebody 'ill ken!'

'Ye hae nae sheen (*shoes*)!' objected the boy.

'Ye can put aff yer ain!'

'My feet's no sae hard as yours!'

'Weel, I'll put on mine. They're here, sic as they are. Ye see I want them gangin throuw the heather wi' Steenie; that's some sair upo the feet. Straucht up hill throuw the heather, and I'll put my sheen on!'

'I'm no sae guid uphill.'

'See there noo, Francie! Ye tak yersel for unco courteous, and honourable, and generous, and k-nichtly, and a' that—oh, I ken a' about it, and it's a' verra weel sae far as it gangs; but what the better are ye for 't, whan, a' the time ye're despisin a body 'cause she's but a quean, ye maun hae ilka advantage o' her, or ye winna gie her a chance o' lickin ye!—Here! I'll put on my sheen, and rin ye along the laich grun'! My sheen's twice the weicht o' yours, and they dinna fit me!'

The boy did not dare go on refusing: he feared what Kirsty would say next. But he relished nothing at all in the challenge. It was not fit for a man to run races with a girl: there were no laurels, nothing but laughter to be won by victory over her! and in his heart he was not at all sure of beating Kirsty: she had always beaten him when they were children. Since then they had been at the parish school together, but there public opinion kept the boys and girls to their own special sports. Now Kirsty had left school, and Francis was going to the grammar-school at the county-town. They were both about fifteen. All the sense was on the side of the girl, and she had been doing her best to make the boy practical like herself—hitherto without much success, although he was by no means a bad sort of fellow. He had not yet passed the stage—some appear never to pass it in this world—in which an admirer feels himself in the same category with his hero. Many are content with themselves because they side with those whose ways they do not endeavour to follow. Such are most who call themselves Christians. If men admired themselves only for what they did, their conceit would be greatly moderated.

Kirsty put on her heavy tacketed (*hob-nailed*) shoes—much too large for her, having been made for her brother—stood up erect, and putting her elbows back, said,

'I'll gie ye the start o' me up to yon stane wi' the heather growin oot o' the tap o' 't.'

'Na, na; I'll hae nane o' that!' answered Francis.

'Fairplay to a!'

'Ye'd better tak it!'

'Aff wi' ye, or I winna rin at a!'

cried the boy,—and away they went.

Kirsty contrived that he should yet have a little the start of her—how much from generosity, and how much from determination that there should be nothing doubtful in the result, I cannot say—and for a good many yards he kept it. But if the boy, who ran well, had looked back, he might have seen that the girl was not doing her best—that she was in fact restraining her speed. Presently she quickened her pace, and was rapidly lessening the distance between them, when, becoming aware of her approach, the boy quickened his, and for a time there was no change in their relative position. Then again she quickened her pace—with an ease which made her seem capable of going on to accelerate it indefinitely—and was rapidly overtaking him. But as she drew near, she saw he panted, not a little distressed; whereupon she assumed a greater speed still, and passed him swiftly—nor once

looked round or slackened her pace until, having left him far behind, she put a shoulder of the hill between them.

The moment she passed him, the boy flung himself on the ground and lay. The girl had felt certain he would do so, and fancied she heard him flop among the heather, but could not be sure, for, although not even yet at her speed, her blood was making tunes in her head, and the wind was blowing in and out of her ears with a pleasant but deafening accompaniment. When she knew he could see her no longer, she stopped likewise and threw herself down while she was determining whether she should leave him quite, or walk back at her leisure, and let him see how little she felt the run. She came to the conclusion that it would be kinder to allow him to get over his discomfiture in private. She rose, therefore, and went straight up the hill.

About half-way to the summit, she climbed a rock as if she were a goat, and looked all round her. Then she uttered a shrill, peculiar cry, and listened. No answer came. Getting down as easily as she had got up, she walked along the side of the hill, making her way nearly parallel with their late racecourse, passing considerably above the spot where her defeated rival yet lay, and descending at length a little hollow not far from where she and Francis had been sitting.

In this hollow, which was covered with short, sweet grass, stood a very small hut, built of turf from the peat-moss below, and roofed with sods on which the heather still stuck, if, indeed, some of it was not still growing. So much was it, therefore, of the colour of the ground about it, that it scarcely caught the eye. Its walls and its roof were so thick that, small as it looked, it was much smaller inside; while outside it could not have measured more than ten feet in length, eight in width, and seven in height. Kirsty and her brother Steenie, not without help from Francis Gordon, had built it for themselves two years before. Their father knew nothing of the scheme until one day, proud of their success, Steenie would have him see their handiwork; when he was so much pleased with it that he made them a door, on which he put a lock:—

'For though this be na the kin' o' place to draw crook-fingered gentry,' he said, 'some gangrel body micht creep in and mak his bed intil 't, and that lock 'ill be eneuch to haud him oot, I'm thinkin.'

He also cut for them a hole through the wall, and fitted it with a window that opened and shut, which was more than could be said of every window at the farmhouse.

Into this nest Kirsty went, and in it remained quiet until it began to grow dark. She had hoped to find her brother waiting for her, but, although disappointed, chose to continue there until Francis Gordon should be well on his way to the castle, and then she crept out, and ran to recover her stocking.

When she got home, she found Steenie engrossed in a young horse their father had just bought. She would fain have mounted him at once, for she would ride any kind of animal able to carry her; but, as he had never yet been backed, her father would not permit her.

CHAPTER II

MOTHER AND SON

Francis lay for some time, thinking Kirsty sure to come back to him, but half wishing she would not. He rose at length to see whether she was on the way, but no one was in sight. At once the place was aghast with loneliness, as it must indeed have looked to anyone not at peace with solitude. Having sent several ringing shouts, but in vain, after Kirsty, he turned, and, in the descending light of an autumn afternoon, set out on the rather long walk to his home, which was the wearier that he had nothing pleasant at hand to think about.

Passing the farm where Kirsty lived, about two miles brought him to an ancient turreted house on the top of a low hill, where his mother sat expecting him, ready to tyrannize over him as usual, and none the less ready that he was going to leave her within a week.

'Where have you been all day, Frank?' she said.

'I have been a long walk,' he answered.

'You've been to Corbyknowe!' she returned. 'I know it by your eyes. I know by the very colour of them you're going to deceive me. Now don't tell me you haven't been there. I shall not believe you.'

'I haven't been near the place, mother,' said Francis; but as he said it his face glowed with a heat that did not come from the fire. He was not naturally an untruthful boy, and what he said was correct, for he had passed the house half a mile away; but his words gave, and were intended to give the impression that he had not been that day with any of the people of Corbyknowe. His mother objected to his visiting the farmer, but he knew instinctively she would have objected yet more to his spending half the day with Kirsty, whom she never mentioned, and of whom she scarcely recognized the existence. Little as she loved her son, Mrs. Gordon would have scorned to suspect him of preferring the society of such a girl to her own. In truth, however, there were very few of his acquaintance whose company Francis would not have chosen rather than his mother's—except indeed he was ill, when she was generally very good to him.

'Well, this once I shall believe you,' she answered, 'and I am glad to be able. It is a painful thought to me, Frank, that son of mine should feel the smallest attraction to low company. I have told you twenty times that the man was nothing but a private in your father's regiment.'

'He was my father's friend!' answered the boy.

'He tells you so, I do not doubt,' returned his mother. 'He was not likely to leave that mouldy old stone unturned.'

The mother sat, and the son stood before her, in a drawing-room whose furniture of a hundred years old must once have looked very modern and new-fangled under windows so narrow and high up, and within walls so thick: without a fire it was always cold. The carpet was very dingy, and the mirrors were much spotted; but the poverty of the room was the respectable poverty of age: old furniture had become fashionable just in time to save it from being metamorphosed by its mistress into a show of gay meanness and costly ugliness. A good fire of mingled peat and coal burned bright in the barrel-fronted steel grate, and shone in the brass fender. The face of the boy continued to look very red in the glow, but still its colour came more from within than from without: he cherished the memory of his father, and did not love his mother more than a little.

'He has told me a great deal more about my father than ever you did, mother!' he answered.

'Well he may have!' she returned. 'Your father was not a young man when I married him, and they had been together through I don't know how many campaigns.'

'And you say he was not my father's friend!'

'Not his *friend*, Frank; his servant—what do they call them?—his orderly, I dare say; certainly not his friend.'

'Any man may be another man's friend!'

'Not in the way you mean; not that his son should go and see him every other day! A dog may be a man's good friend, and so was sergeant Barclay your father's—very good friend that way, I don't doubt!'

'You said a moment ago he was but a private, and now you call him sergeant Barclay!'

'Well, where's the difference?'

'To be made sergeant shows that he was not a common man. If he had been, he would not have been set over others!'

'Of course he was then, and is now, a very respectable man. If he were not I should never have let you go and see him at all. But you must learn to behave like the gentleman you are, and that you never will while you frequent the company of your inferiors. Your manners are already almost ruined—fit for no place but a farmhouse! There you are, standing on the side of your foot again!—Old Barclay, I dare say, tells you no end of stories about your mother!'

'He always asks after you, mother, and then never mentions you more.'

She knew perfectly that the boy spoke the truth.

'Don't let me hear of your being there again before you go to school!' she said definitively. 'By the time you come home next year I trust your tastes will have improved. Go and make yourself tidy for dinner. A soldier's son must before everything attend to his dress.'

Francis went to his room, feeling it absolutely impossible to have told his mother that he had been with Kirsty Barclay, that he had run a race with her, and that she had left him alone at the foot of the Horn. That he could not be open with his mother, no one that knew her unreasoning and stormy temper would have wondered; but the pitiful boy, who did not like lying, actually congratulated himself that he had got through without telling a downright falsehood. It would not have bettered matters in the least had he disclosed to her the good advice Kirsty gave him: she would only have been furious at the impudence of the hussey in talking so to *her* son.

CHAPTER III

AT THE FOOT OF THE HORN

The region was like a waste place in the troubled land of dreams—a spot so waste that the dreamer struggles to rouse himself from his dream, finding it too dreary to dream on. I have heard it likened to 'the ill place, wi' the fire oot;' but it did not so impress me when first, after long desire, I saw it. There was nothing to suggest the silence of once roaring flame, no half-molten rocks, no huge, honey-combed scoriae, no depths within depths glooming mystery and ancient horror. It was the more desolate that it moved no active sense of dismay. What I saw was a wide stretch of damp-looking level, mostly of undetermined or of low-toned colour, with here and there a black spot, or, on the margin, the brighter green of a patch of some growing crop. Flat and wide, the eye found it difficult to rest upon it and not sweep hurriedly from border to border for lack of self-asserted object on which to alight. It looked low, but indeed lay high; the bases of the hills surrounding it were far above the sea. These hills, at this season a ring of dull-brown high-heaved hummocks, appeared to make of it a huge circular basin, miles in diameter, over the rim of which peered the tops and peaks of mountains more distant. Up the side of the Horn, which was the loftiest in the ring, ran a stone wall, in the language of the country a dry-stane-dyke, of considerable size, climbing to the very top—an ugly thing which the eye could not avoid. There was nothing but the grouse to have rendered it worth the proprietor's while to erect such a boundary to his neighbour's property, plentiful as were the stones ready for that poorest use of stones—division.

The farms that border the hollow, running each a little way up the side of the basin, are, some of them at least, as well cultivated as any in Scotland, but Winter claims there the paramouncy, and yields to Summer so few of his rights that the place must look forbidding, if not repulsive, to such as do not live in it. To love it, I think one must have been born there. In the summer, it is true, it has the character of *bracing*, but can be such, I imagine, only to those who are pretty well braced already; the delicate of certain sorts, I think it must soon brace with the bands of death.

The region is in constant danger of famine. If the snow come but a little earlier than usual, the crops lie green under it, and no store of meal can be laid up in the cottages. Then, if the snow lie deep, the difficulty in conveying supplies of the poor fare which their hardihood counts sufficient, will cause the dwellers there no little suffering. Of course they are but few. A white cottage may be seen here and there on the southerly slopes of the basin, but hardly one in its bottom.

It was now summer, and in a month or two the landscape would look more cheerful; the heather that covered the hills would no longer be dry and brown and in places black with fire, but a blaze of red purple, a rich mantle of bloom. Even now, early in July, the sun had a little power. I cannot say it would have been warm had there been the least motion in the air, for seldom indeed could one there from the south grant that the wind had no keen edge to it; but on this morning there was absolute stillness, and although it was not easy for Kirsty to imagine any summer air other than warm, yet the wind's absence had not a little to do with the sense of luxurious life that now filled her heart. She sat on her favourite grassy slope near the foot of the cone-shaped Horn, looking over the level miles before her, and knitting away at a ribbed stocking of dark blue whose toe she had nearly finished, glad in the thought, not of rest from her labour, but of beginning the yet more important fellow-stocking. She had no need to look close at her work to keep the loops right; but she was so careful and precise that, if she lived to be old and blind, she would knit better then than now. It was to her the perfect glory of a summer day; and I imagine her delight in the divine luxury greater than that of many a poet dwelling in softer climes.

The spot where she sat was close by the turf-hut which I have already described. At every shifting of a needle she would send a new glance all over her world, a glance to remind one somehow

of the sweep of a broad ray of sunlight across earth and sea, when, on a morning of upper wind, the broken clouds take endless liberties with shadow and shine. What she saw I cannot tell; I know she saw far more than a stranger would have seen, for she knew her home. His eyes would, I believe, have been drawn chiefly to those intense spots of live white, opaque yet brilliant, the heads of the cotton-grass here and there in thin patches on the dark ground. For nearly the whole of the level was a peat-moss. Miles and miles of peat, differing in quality and varying in depth, lay between those hills, the only fuel almost of the region. In some spots it was very wet, water lying beneath and all through its substance; in others, dark spots, the sides of holes whence it had been dug, showed where it was drier. His eyes would rest for a moment also on those black spaces on the hills where the old heather had been burned that its roots might shoot afresh, and feed the grouse with soft young sprouts, their chief support: they looked now like neglected spots where men cast stones and shards, but by and by would be covered with a tenderer green than the rest of the hill-side. He would not see the moorland birds that Kirsty saw; he would only hear their cries, with now and then perhaps the bark of a sheep-dog.

My reader will probably conclude the prospect altogether uninteresting, even ugly; but certainly Christina Barclay did not think it such. The girl was more than well satisfied with the world-shell in which she found herself; she was at the moment basking, both bodily and spiritually, in a full sense of the world's bliss. Her soul was bathed in its own content, calling none of its feelings to account. The sun, the air, the wide expanse; the hill-tops' nearness to the heavens which yet they could not invade; the little breaths which every now and then awoke to assert their existence by immediately ceasing; doubtless also the knowledge that her stocking was nearly done, that her father and mother were but a mile or so away, that she knew where Steenie was, and that a cry would bring him to her feet;—all these things bore each a part in making Kirsty quiet with satisfaction. That there was, all the time, a deeper cause of her peace, Kirsty knew well—the same that is the root of life itself; and if it was not, at this moment or at that, filled with conscious gratitude, her heart was yet like a bird ever on the point of springing up to soar, and often soaring high indeed. Whether it came of something special in her constitution that happiness always made her quiet, as nothing but sorrow will make some, I do not presume to say. I only know that, had her bliss changed suddenly to sadness, Kirsty would have been quiet still. Whatever came to Kirsty seemed right, for there it was!

She was now a girl of sixteen. The only sign she showed of interest in her person, appeared in her hair and the covering of her neck. Of one of the many middle shades of brown, with a rippling tendency to curl in it, her hair was parted with nicety, and drawn back from her face into a net of its own colour, while her neckerchief was of blue silk, covering a very little white skin, but leaving bare a brown throat. She wore a blue print wrapper, nowise differing from that of a peasant woman, and a blue winsey petticoat, beyond which appeared her bare feet, lovely in shape, and brown of hue. Her dress was nowise trim, and suggested neither tidiness nor disorder. The hem of the petticoat was in truth a little rent, but not more than might seem admissible where the rough wear was considered to which the garment was necessarily exposed: when a little worse it would receive the proper attention, and be brought back to respectability! Kirsty grudged the time spent on her garments. She looked down on them as the moon might on the clouds around her. She made or mended them to wear them, not think about them.

Her forehead was wide and rather low, with straight eyebrows. Her eyes were of a gentle hazel, not the hazel that looks black at night. Her nose was strong, a little irregular, with plenty of substance, and sensitive nostrils. A decided and well-shaped chin dominated a neck by no means slender, and seemed to assert the superiority of the face over the whole beautiful body. Its chief expression was of a strong repose, a sweet, powerful peace, requiring but occasion to pass into determination. The sensitiveness of the nostrils with the firmness in the meeting of the closed lips, suggested a faculty of indignation unsparing toward injustice; while the clearness of the heaven of the forehead gave confidence that such indignation would never show itself save for another.

I wish, presumptuous wish! that I could see the mind of a woman grow as she sits spinning or weaving: it would reveal the process next highest to creation. But the only hope of ever understanding such things lies in growing oneself. There is the still growth of the moonlit night of reverie; cloudy, with wind, and a little rain, comes the morning of thought, when the mind grows faster and the heart more slowly; then wakes the storm in the forest of human relation, tempest and lightning abroad, the soul enlarging by great bursts of vision and leaps of understanding and resolve; then floats up the mystic twilight eagerness, not unmingled with the dismay of compelled progress, when, bidding farewell to that which is behind, the soul is driven toward that which is before, grasping at it with all the hunger of the new birth. The story of God's universe lies in the growth of the individual soul. Kirsty's growth had been as yet quiet and steady.

Once more as she shifted her needle her glance went flitting over the waste before her. This time there was more life in sight. Far away Kirsty descried something of the nature of man upon horse: to say how far would have been as difficult for one unused to the flat moor as for a landsman to reckon distances at sea. Of the people of the place, hardly another, even under the direction of Kirsty, could have contrived to see it. At length, after she had looked many times, she could clearly distinguish a youth on a strong, handsome hill-pony, and remained no longer in the slightest doubt as to who he might be.

They came steadily over the dark surface of the moor, and it was clear that the pony must know the nature of the ground well; for now he glided along as fast as he could gallop, now made a succession of short jumps, now halted, examined the ground, and began slowly picking his way.

Kirsty watched his approach with gentle interest, while every movement of the youth indicated eagerness. Gordon had seen her on the hillside, probably long before she saw him, had been coming to her in as straight a line as the ground would permit, and at length was out of the boggy level, and ascending the slope of the hillfoot to where she sat. When he was within about twenty yards of her she gave him a little nod, and then fixed her eyes on her knitting. He held on till within a few feet of her, then pulled up and threw himself from his pony's back. The creature, covered with foam, stood a minute panting, then fell to work on the short grass.

Francis had grown considerably, and looked almost a young man. He was a little older than Kirsty, but did not appear so, his expression being considerably younger than hers. Whether self-indulgence or aspiration was to come out of his evident joy in life, seemed yet undetermined. His countenance indicated nothing bad. He might well have represented one at the point before having to choose whether to go up or down hill. He was dressed a little showily in a short coat of dark tartan, and a highland bonnet with a brooch and feather, and carried a lady's riding-whip—his mother's, no doubt—its top set with stones—so that his appearance was altogether a contrast to that of the girl. She was a peasant, he a gentleman! Her bare head and yet more her bare feet emphasized the contrast. But which was by nature and in fact the superior, no one with the least insight could have doubted.

He stood and looked at her, but neither spoke. She cast at length a glance upward, and said, 'Weel?'

Francis did not open his mouth. He seemed irresolute. Nothing in Kirsty's look or carriage or in the tone of her one word gave sign of consciousness that she was treating him, or he her, strangely. With complete self-possession she left the initiative to the one who had sought the interview: let him say why he had come!

In his face began to appear indication of growing displeasure. Two or three times he turned half away with a movement instantly checked which seemed to say that in a moment more, if there came no change, he would mount and ride: was this all his welcome?

At last she appeared to think she must take mercy on him: he used to say thirty words to her one! 'That's a bonny powny ye hae,' she remarked, with a look at the creature as he fed.

'He's a' that,' he answered dryly.

'Whaur did ye get him?' she asked.

'My mither coft (*bought*) him agen my hame-comin,' he replied.

He prided himself on being able to speak the broadest of the dialect.

'She maun hae a straucht e'e for a guid beast!' returned Kirsty, with a second glance at the pony.

'He's a bonny cratur and a willin,' answered the youth. 'He'll gang skelp throuw onything—watter onygait;—I'm no sae sure aboot fire.'

A long silence followed, broken this time by the youth.

'Winna ye gie me luik nor word, and me ridden like mad to hae a sicht o' ye?' he said.

She glanced up at him.

'Weel ye hae that!' she answered, with a smile that showed her lovely white teeth: 'ye're a' dubs (*all bemired*)! What for sud ye be in sic a hurry? Ye saw me no three days gane!'

'Ay, I saw ye, it's true; but I didna get a word o' ye!'

'Ye was free to say what ye likit. There was nane by but my mither!'

'Wud ye hae me say a'thing afore yer mither jist as I wud til ye yer lane (*alone*)?' he asked.

Ay wud I,' she returned. 'Syne she wad ken, 'ithoot my haein to tell her sic a guse as ye was!'

Had he not seen the sunny smile that accompanied her words he might well have taken offence.

'I wuss ye war anither sic-like!' he answered simply.

'Syne there wud be twa o' 's!' she returned, leaving him to interpret.

Silence again fell.

'Weel, what wud ye hae, Francie?' said Kirsty at length.

'I wud hae ye promise to merry me, Kirsty, come the time,' he answered; 'and that ye ken as well as I du mysel!'

'That's straucht oot ony gait!' rejoined Kirsty. 'But ye see, Francie,' she went on, 'yer father, whan he left ye a kin' o' a legacy, as ye may ca' 't, to mine, hed no intention that *I* was to be left oot; neither had *my* father whan he acceptit o' 't!'

'I dinna unerstan ye ae styme (*one atom*)!' interrupted Gordon.

'Haud yer tongue and hearken,' returned Kirsty. 'What I'm meanin 's this: what lies to my father's han' lies to mine as weel; and I'll never hae 't kenned or said that, whan my father pu't (*pulled*) ae gait, I pu't anither!'

'Sakes, lassie! what *are* ye haverin at? Wud it be pu'in agen yer father to merry me?'

'It wud be that.'

'I dinna see hoo ye can mak it oot! I dinna see hoo, bein sic a freen' o' my father's, he sud objeck to my father's son!'

'Eh, but laddies *ir* gowks!' cried Kirsty. 'My father was your father's freen' for *his* sake, no for his ain! He thinks o' what wud be guid for you, no for himsel!'

'Weel, but,' persisted Gordon, 'it wud be mair for my guid nor onything ither he cud wuss for, to hae you for my wife!'

Kirsty's nostrils began to quiver, and her lip rose in a curve of scorn.

'A bonnie wife ye wud hae, Francie Gordon, wha, kennin her father duin ilk mortal thing for the love o' his auld maister and comrade, tuik the fine chance to mak her ain o' 't, and haud her grip o' the callan til hersel!—Think ye aither o' the auld men ever mintit at sic a thing as faterin baith? That my father had a lass-bairn o' 's ain shawed mair nor onything the trust your father pat in 'im! Francie, the verra grave wud cast me oot for shame 'at I sud ance hae thought o' sic a thing! Man, it wud maist drive yer leddy-mither dementit!'

'It's my business' Kirsty, wha I merry!'

'And I houp yer grace 'll alloo it's pairt *my* business wha ye sail *not* merry—and that's me, Francie!'

Gordon sprang to his feet with such a look of wrath and despair as for a moment frightened Kirsty who was not easily frightened. She thought of the terrible bog-holes on the way her lover had

come, sprang also to her feet, and caught him by the arm where, his foot already in the stirrup, he stood in the act of mounting.

'Francie! Francie!' she cried, 'hearken to rizzon! There's no a body, man or wuman, I like better nor yersel to du ye ony guid or turn o' guid—'cep' my father, of coorse, and my mither, and my ain Steenie!'

'And hoo mony mair, gien I had the wull to hear the lang bible-chapter o' them, and see mysel comin in at the tail o' them a', like the hin'most sheep, takin his bite as he cam? Na, na! it's time I was hame, and had my slip (*pinafore*) on, and was astride o' a stick! Gien ye had a score o' idiot-brithers, ye wud care mair for ilk are o' them nor for me! I canna bide to think o' 't.'

'It's true a' the same, whether ye can bide to think o' 't or no, Francie!' returned the girl, her face, which had been very pale, now rosy with indignation. 'My Steenie's mair to me nor a' the Gordons thegither, Bow-o'-meal or Jock-and-Tam as ye like!'

She drew back, sat down again to the stocking she was knitting for Steenie, and left her lover to mount and ride, which he did without another word.

'There's mair nor ae kin' o' idiot,' she said to herself, 'and Steenie's no the kin' that oucht to be ca'd ane. There's mair in Steenie nor in sax Francie Gordons!'

If ever Kirsty came to love a man, it would be just nothing to her to die for him; but then it never would have been anything to her to die for her father or her mother or Steenie!

Gordon galloped off at a wild pace, as if he would drive his pony straight athwart the terrible moss, taking hag and well-eye as it came. But glancing behind and seeing that Kirsty was not looking after him, he turned the creature's head in a safer direction, and left the moss at his back.

CHAPTER IV

DOG-STEENIE

She sat for some time at the foot of the hill, motionless as itself, save for her hands. The sun shone on in silence, and the blue butterflies which haunted the little bush of bluebells, that is harebells, beside her, made no noise; only a stray bee, happy in the pale heat, made a little music to please itself—and perhaps the butterflies. Kirsty had an unusual power of sitting still, even with nothing for her hands to do. On the present occasion, however, her hands and fingers went faster than usual—not entirely from eagerness to finish her stocking, but partly from her displeasure with Francis. At last she broke her 'worset,' drew the end of it through the final loop, and, drawing it, rose and scanned the side of the hill. Not far off she spied the fleecy backs of a few feeding sheep, and straightway sent out on the still air a sweet, strong, musical cry. It was instantly responded to by a bark from somewhere up the hill. She sat down, clasped her hands over her knees, and waited.

She had not to wait long. A sound of rushing came through the heather, and in a moment or two, a fine collie, with long, silky, wavy coat of black and brown, and one white spot on his face, shot out of the heather, sprang upon her, and, setting his paws on her shoulders, began licking her face. She threw her arms round him, and addressed him in words of fondling rebuke:—

'Ye ill-mannered tyke!' she said; 'what richt hae ye to tak the place o' yer betters? Gang awa doon wi' ye, and wait. What for sud ye tak advantage o' your fower legs to his twa, and him the maister o' ye! But, eh man, ye're a fine doggie, and I canna bide the thought 'at yer langest day maun be sae short, and tak ye awa hame sae lang afore the lave o' 's!'

While she scolded, she let him caress her as he pleased. Presently he left her, and going a yard or two away, threw himself on the grass with such *abandon* as no animal but a weary dog seems capable of reaching. He had made haste to be first that he might caress her before his master came; now he heard him close behind, and knew his opportunity over.

Stephen came next out of the heather, creeping to Kirsty's feet on all-fours. He was a gaunt, longbacked lad, who, at certain seasons undetermined, either imagined himself the animal he imitated, or had some notion of being required, or, possibly, compelled to behave like a dog. When the fit was upon him, all the day long he would speak no word even to his sister, would only bark or give a low growl like the collie. In this last he succeeded much better than in running like him, although, indeed, his arms were so long that it was comparatively easy for him to use them as forelegs. He let his head hang low as he went, throwing it up to bark, and sinking it yet lower when he growled, which was seldom, and to those that loved him indicated great trouble. He did not like Snootie raise himself on his hindlegs to caress his sister, but gently subsided upon her feet, and there lay panting, his face to the earth, and his fore-arms crossed beneath his nose.

Kirsty stooped, and stroked and patted him as if he were the dog he seemed fain to be. Then drawing her feet from under him, she rose, and going a little way up the hill to the hut, returned presently with a basin full of rich-looking milk, and a *quarter* of thick oat-cake, which she had brought from home in the morning. The milk she set beside her as she resumed her seat. Then she put her feet again under the would-be dog, and proceeded to break small pieces from the oat-cake and throw them to him. He sought every piece eagerly as it fell, but with his mouth only, never moving either hand, and seemed to eat it with a satisfaction worthy of his simulated nature. When the oat-cake was gone, she set the bowl before him, and he drank the milk with care and neatness, never putting a hand to steady it.

'Now you must have a sleep, Steenie!' said his sister.

She rose, and he crawled slowly after her up the hill on his hands and knees. All the time he kept his face down, and, his head hanging toward the earth, his long hair hid it quite. He strongly suggested a great Skye-terrier.

When they reached the hut, Kirsty went in, and Steenie crept after her. They had covered the floor of it with heather, the stalks set upright and close packed, so that, even where the bells were worn off, it still made a thick long-piled carpet, elastic and warm. When the door was shut, they were snug there even in winter.

Inside, the hut was about six feet long, and four wide. Its furniture was a little deal table and one low chair. In the turf of which the wall consisted, at the farther end from the door, Kirsty had cut out a small oblong recess to serve as a shelf for her books. The hut was indeed her library, for in that bole stood, upright with its back to the room, in proper and tidy fashion, almost every book she could call her own. They were about a dozen, several with but one board and some with no title, one or two very old, and all well used. Most of her time there, when she was not knitting, Kirsty spent in reading and thinking about what she read; many a minute, even when she was knitting, she managed to read as well. She had read two of sir Walter's novels, and several of the Ettrick-shepherd's shorter tales, which the schoolmaster had lent her; but on her shelf and often in her hands were a Shakspeare, a Milton, and a translation of Klopstock's *Messiah*—which she liked far better than the *Paradise Lost*, though she did not admire it nearly so much. Of the latter she would say, 'It's unco gran', but it never maks my hert grit (*great*), meaning that it never caused her any emotion. Among her treasures was also a curious old book of ghost-stories, concerning which the sole remark she was ever heard to make was, that she would like to know whether they were true: she thought Steenie could tell, but she would not question him about them. Ramsay's *Gentle Shepherd* was there too, which she liked for the good sense in it. There was a thumbed edition of Burns also, but I do not think much of the thumbing was Kirsty's, though she had several of his best poems by heart.

Between the ages of ten and fifteen, Kirsty had gone to the parish school of the nearest town: it looked a village, but they always called it *the town*. There a sister of her father lived, and with her she was welcome to spend the night, so that she was able to go in most weathers. But when she staid there, her evening was mostly spent at the schoolmaster's.

Mr. Craig was an elderly man, who had married late, and lost his wife early. She had left him one child, a delicate, dainty, golden-haired thing, considerably younger than Kirsty, who cherished for her a love and protection quite maternal. Kirsty was one of the born mothers, who are not only of the salt, but are the sugar and shelter of the world. I doubt if little Phemie would have learned anything but for Kirsty. Not to the day of her death did her father see in her anything but the little girl his wife had left him. He spoiled her a good deal, nor ever set himself to instruct her, leaving it apparently to the tendency of things to make of her a woman like her mother.

He was a real student and excellent teacher. When first he came as schoolmaster to Tiltowie, he was a divinity student, but a man so far of thought original that he saw lions in the way of becoming a minister. Such men as would be servants of the church before they are slaves of the church's Master will never be troubled with Mr. Craig's difficulties. For one thing, his strong poetic nature made it impossible for him to believe in a dull, prosaic God: when told that God's thoughts are not as our thoughts, he found himself unable to imagine them inferior to ours. The natural result was that he remained a schoolmaster—to the advantage of many a pupil, and very greatly to the advantage of Kirsty, whose nature was peculiarly open to his influences. The dominie said he had never had a pupil that gave him such satisfaction as Kirsty; she seemed to anticipate and catch at everything he wanted to make hers. There was no knowledge, he declared, that he could offer her, which the lassie from Corbyknowe would not take in like her porridge. Best thing of all for her was that, following his own predilections, he paid far more attention, in his class for English, to poetry than to prose. Colin Craig was himself no indifferent poet, and was even a master of the more recondite forms of verse. If, in some measure led astray by the merit of the form, he was capable of admiring verse

essentially inferior, he yet certainly admired the better poetry more. He had, besides, the faculty of perceiving whether what he had written would or would not *convey* his thought—a faculty in which even a great poet may be deficient.

In a word, Kirsty learned everything Mr. Craig brought within her reach; and long after she left school, the Saturday on which she did not go to see him was a day of disappointment both to the dominie and to his little Phemie.

When she had once begun to follow a thing, Kirsty would never leave the trail of it. Her chief business as well as delight was to look after Steenie, but perfect attention to him left her large opportunity of pursuing her studies, especially at such seasons in which his peculiar affection, whatever it really was, required hours of untimely sleep. For, although at all times he wandered at his will without her, he invariably wanted to be near her when he slept; while she, satisfied that so he slept better, had not once at such a time left him. During summer, and as long before and after as the temperature permitted, the hut was the place he preferred when his necessity was upon him; and it was Kirsty's especial delight to sit in it on a warm day, the door open and her brother asleep on her feet, reading and reading while the sun went down the sky, to fill the hut as he set with a glory of promise; after which came the long gloamin, like a life out of which the light but not the love has vanished, in which she neither worked nor read, but brooded over many things.

Leaving the door open behind them, Kirsty took a book from the bole, and seated herself on the low chair; instantly Steenie, who had waited motionless until she was settled, threw himself across her feet on the carpet of heather, and in a moment was fast asleep.

There they remained, the one reading, the other sleeping, while the hours of the warm summer afternoon slipped away, ripples on the ocean of the lovely, changeless eternity, the consciousness of God. For a time the watching sister was absorbed in King Lear; then she fell to wondering whether Cordelia was not unkindly stiff toward her old father, but perceived at length that, with such sisters listening, she could not have spoken otherwise. Then she wondered whether there could be women so bad as Goneril and Regan, concluding that Shakspeare must know better than she. At last she drew her bare feet from under Steenie, and put them on his back, where the coolness was delightful. Then first she became aware that the sun was down and the gloamin come, and that the whole world must be feeling just like her feet. The long clear twilight, which would last till morning, was about her, the eerie sleeping day, when the lovely ghosts come out of their graves in the long grass, and walk about in the cool world, with little ghostly sighs at sight of the old places, and fancy they are dreaming. Kirsty was always willing to believe in ghosts: awake in the dark nights she did not; but in her twilight reveries she grew very nearly a ghost herself.

It was a wonder she could sit so long and not feel worn out; but Kirsty was exceptionally strong, in absolute health, and specially gifted with patience. She had so early entertained and so firmly grasped the idea that she was sent into the world expressly to take care of Steenie, that devotion to him had grown into a happy habit with her. The waking mind gave itself up to the sleeping, the orderly to the troubled brain, the true heart to the heart as true.

CHAPTER V

COLONEL AND SERGEANT

There was no difference of feeling betwixt the father and mother in regard to this devotion of Kirsty's very being to her Steenie; but the mother in especial was content with it, for while Kirsty was the apple of her eye, Steenie was her one loved anxiety.

David Barclay, a humble unit in the widespread and distinguished family of the Barclays or Berkeleys, was born, like his father and grandfather and many more of his ancestors, on the same farm he now occupied. While his father was yet alive, with an elder son to succeed him, David *listed*—mainly from a strong desire to be near a school-friend, then an ensign in the service of the East India Company. Throughout their following military career they were in the same regiment, the one rising to be colonel, the other sergeant-major. All the time, the schoolboy-attachment went on deepening in the men; and, all the time, was never man more respectfully obedient to orders than David Barclay to those of the superior officer with whom in private he was on terms of intimacy. As often as they could without attracting notice, the comrades threw aside all distinction of rank, and were again the Archie Gordon and Davie Barclay of old school-days—as real to them still as those of the hardest battles they had fought together. In more primitive Scotland, such relations are, or were more possible than in countries where more divergent habits of life occasion wider social separations; and then these were sober-minded men, who neither made much of the shows of the world, nor were greedy after distinction, which is the mere coffin wherein Duty-done lies buried.

When they returned to their country, both somewhat disabled, the one retired to his inherited estate, the other to the family farm upon that estate, where his brother had died shortly before; so that Archie was now Davie's landlord. But no new relation would ever destroy the friendship which school had made close, and war had welded. Almost every week the friends met and spent the evening together—much oftener, by and by, at Corbyknowe than at Castle Weelset. For both married soon after their return, and their wives were of different natures.

'My colonel has the glory,' Barclay said once, and but once, to his sister, 'but, puir fallow, I hae the wife!' And truly the wife at the farm had in her material enough, both moral and intellectual, for ten ladies better than the wife at the castle.

David's wife brought him a son the first year of their marriage, and the next year came a son to the colonel and a daughter to the sergeant. One night, as the two fathers sat together at the farm, some twelve hours after the birth of David's girl, they mutually promised that the survivor would do his best for the child of the other. Before he died the colonel would gladly have taken his boy from his wife and given him to his old comrade.

As to Steenie, the elder of David's children, he was yet unborn when his father, partly in consequence of a wound from which he never quite recovered, met with rather a serious accident through a young horse in the harvest-field, and the report reached his wife that he was killed. To the shock she thus received was generally attributed the peculiarity of the child, prematurely born within a month after. He had long passed the age at which children usually begin to walk, before he would even attempt to stand, but he had grown capable of a speed on all-fours that was astonishing. When at last he did walk, it was for more than two years with the air of one who had learned a trick; and throughout his childhood and a great part of his boyhood, he continued to go on all-fours rather than on his feet.

CHAPTER VI

MAN-STEENIE

The sleeping youth began at length to stir: it was more than an hour before he quite woke up. Then all at once he started to his feet with his eyes wide open, putting back from his forehead the long hair which fell over them, and revealing a face not actually looking old, but strongly suggesting age. His eyes were of a pale blue, with a hazy, mixed, uncertain gleam in them, reminding one of the shifty shudder and shake and start of the northern lights at some heavenly version of the game of Puss in the Corner. His features were more than good; they would have been grand had they been large, but they were peculiarly small. His head itself was very small in proportion to his height, his forehead, again, large in proportion to his head, while his chin was such as we are in the way of calling strong. Although he had been all day acting a dog in charge of sheep, and treating the collie as his natural companion, there was, both in his countenance and its expression, a remarkable absence of the animal. He had a kind of exaltation in his look; he seemed to expect something, not at hand, but sure to come. His eyes rested for a moment, with a love of absolute devotion, on the face of his sister; then he knelt at her feet, and as if to receive her blessing, bowed his head before her. She laid her hand upon it, and in a tone of unutterable tenderness said, 'Man-Steenie!' Instantly he rose to his feet. Kirsty rose also, and they went out of the hut.

The sunlight had not left the west, but had crept round some distance toward the north. Stars were shining faint through the thin shadow of the world. Steenie stretched himself up, threw his arms aloft, and held them raised, as if at once he would grow and reach toward the infinite. Then he looked down on Kirsty, for he was taller than she, and pointed straight up, with the long lean forefinger of one of the long lean arms that had all day been legs to the would-be dog—into the heavens, and smiled. Kirsty looked up, nodded her head, and smiled in return. Then they started in the direction of home, and for some time walked in silence. At length Steenie spoke. His voice was rather feeble, but clear, articulate, and musical.

'My feet's terrible heavy the nicht, Kirsty!' he said. 'Gien it wasna for them, the lave o' me wud be up and awa. It's terrible to be hauden doon by the feet this gait!'

'We're a' hauden doon the same gait, Steenie. Maybe it's some waur for you 'at wud sae fain gang up, nor for the lave o' 's 'at's mair willin to bide a wee; but it 'll be the same at the last whan we're a' up there thegither.'

'I wudna care sae muckle gien he didna grip me by the queets (*ankles*), like! I dinna like to be grippit by the queets! He winna lat me win at the thongs!'

'Whan the richt time comes,' returned Kirsty solemnly, 'the bonny man 'll lowse the thongs himsel.'

'Ay, ay! I ken that weel. It was me 'at tellt ye. He tauld me himsel! I'm thinkin I'll see him the nicht, for I'm sair hauden doon, sair needin a sicht o' 'im. He's whiles lang o' comin!'

'I dinna won'er 'at ye're sae fain to see 'im, Steenie!' 'I *am* that; fain, fain!'

'Ye'll see 'im or lang. It's a fine thing to hae patience.'

'Ye come ilka day, Kirsty: what for sudna he come ilka nicht?'

'He has reasons, Steenie. He kens best.'

'Ay, he kens best. I ken naething but him—and you, Kirsty!'

Kirsty said no more. Her heart was too full.

Steenie stood still, and throwing back his head, stared for some moments up into the great heavens over him. Then he said:

'It's a bonny day, the day the bonny man bides in! The ither day—the day the lave o' ye bides in—the day whan I'm no mysel but a sair ooncomfortable collie—that day's ower het—and sometimes ower cauld; but the day he bides in is aye jist what a day sud be! Ay, it's that! it's that!'

He threw himself down, and lay for a minute looking up into the sky. Kirsty stood and regarded him with loving eyes.

'I hae a' the bonny day afore me!' he murmured to himself. 'Eh, but it's better to be a man nor a beast Snootie's a fine beast, and a gran' collie, but I wud raither be mysel—a heap raither—aye at han' to catch a sicht o' the bonny man! Ye maun gang hame to yer bed, Kirsty!— Is't the bonny man comes til ye i' yer dreams and says, "Gang til him, Kirsty, and be mortal guid til him"? It maun be surely that!'

'Willna ye gang wi' me, Steenie, as far as the door?' rejoined Kirsty, almost beseechingly, and attempting no answer to what he had last said.

It was at times such as this that Kirsty knew sadness. When she had to leave her brother on the hillside all the long night, to look on no human face, hear no human word, but wander in strangest worlds of his own throughout the slow dark hours, the sense of a separation worse than death would wrap her as in a shroud. In his bodily presence, however far away in thought or sleep or dreams his soul might be, she could yet tend him with her love; but when he was out of her sight, and she had to sleep and forget him, where was Steenie, and how was he faring? Then he seemed to her as one forsaken, left alone with his sorrows to an existence companionless and dreary. But in truth Steenie was by no means to be pitied. However much his life was apart from the lives of other men, he did not therefore live alone. Was he not still of more value than many sparrows? And Kirsty's love for him had in it no shadow of despair. Her pain at such times was but the indescribable love-lack of mothers when their sons are far away, and they do not know what they are doing, what they are thinking; or when their daughters seem to have departed from them or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl broken. And yet how few, when the air of this world is clearest, ever come into essential contact with those they love best! But the triumph of Love, while most it seems to delay, is yet ceaselessly rushing hitherward on the wings of the morning.

'Willna ye gang as far as the door wi' me, Steenie?' she said.

'I wull do that, Kirsty. But ye're no feart, are ye?'

'Na, no a grain! What would I be feart for?'

'Ow, naething! At this time there's naething oot and aboot to be feart at. In what ye ca' the daytime, I'm a kin' o' in danger o' knockin mysel again things; I never du that at nicht.'

As he spoke he sprang to his feet, and they walked on. Kirsty's heart seemed to swell with pain; for Steenie was at once more rational and more strange than usual, and she felt the farther away from him. His words were very quiet, but his eyes looked full of stars.

'I canna tell what it is about the sun 'at maks a dog o' me!' he said. 'He's hard-like, and hauds me oot, and gars me hing my heid, and feel as gien I wur a kin' o' ashamed, though I ken o' naething. But the bonny nicht comes straucht up to me, and into me, and gangs a' throuw me, and bides i' me; and syne I luik for the bonny man!'

'I wuss ye wud lat me bide oot the nicht wi' ye, Steenie!'

'What for that, Kirsty? Ye maun sleep, and I'm better my lane.'

'That's jist hit!' returned Kirsty, with a deep-drawn sigh. 'I canna bide yer bein yer lane, and yet, do what I like, I canna, whiles, even i' the daytime, win a bit nearer til ye! Gien only ye was as little as ye used to be, whan I cud carry ye aboot a' day, and tak ye intil my ain bed a' nicht! But noo we're jist like the sun and the mune!—whan ye're oot' I'm in; and whan ye're in—well I'm no oot' but my sowl's jist as blear-faced as the mune i' the daylight to think ye'll be awa again sae sune!—But i' *canna* gang on like this to a' eternity, and that's a comfort!'

'I ken naething about eternity. I'm thinkin it'll a' turn intil a lown starry nicht, wi' the bonny man intil't. I'm sure o' ae thing, and that only—'at something 'ill be putten richt 'at's far frae richt the noo;

and syne, Kirsty, ye'll hae yer ain gait wi' me, and I'll be sae far like ither fowk: idiot 'at I am, I wud be sorry to be turnt a'thegither the same as some! Ye see I ken sae muckle they ken naething about, or they wudna be as they are! It maybe disna become *me* to say't, ony mair nor Gowk Murnock 'at sits o' the pu'pit stair,—but eh the styte (*nonsense*) oor minister dings oot o' his ain heid, as gien it war the stoor oot o' the bible-cushion! It's no possible he's ever seen the bonny man as I hae seen him!

'We'll a' hae to come ower to you, Steenie, and learn frae ye what ye ken. We'll hae to mak *you* the minister, Steenie!'

'Na, na; I ken naething for ither fowk—only for mysel; and that's whiles mair nor I can win roun', no to say gie again!' 'Some nicht ye'll lat me bide oot wi' ye a' nicht? I wud sair like it, Steenie!'

'Ye sail, Kirsty; but it maun be some nicht ye hae sleepit a' day.'

'Eh, but I cudna do that, tried I ever sae hard!'

'Ye cud lie i' yer bed ony gait, and mak the best o' 't! *Ye* hae naebody, I ken, to *gar* you sleep!'

They went all the rest of the way talking thus, and Kirsty's heart grew lighter, for she seemed to get a little nearer to her brother. He had been her live doll and idol ever since his mother laid him in her arms when she was little more than three years old. For though Steenie was nearly a year older than Kirsty, she was at that time so much bigger that she was able, not indeed to carry him, but to nurse him on her knees. She thought herself the elder of the two until she was about ten, by which time she could not remember any beginning to her carrying of him. About the same time, however, he began to grow much faster, and she found before long that only upon her back could she carry him any distance.

The discovery that he was the elder somehow gave a fresh impulse to her love and devotion, and intensified her pitiful tenderness. Kirsty's was indeed a heart in which the whole unhappy world might have sought and found shelter. She had the notion, notwithstanding, that she was harder-hearted than most, and therefore better able to do things that were right but not pleasant.

CHAPTER VII

CORBYKNOWE

'Ye'll come in and say a word to mother, Steenie?' said Kirsty, as they came near the door of the house.

It was a long, low building, with a narrow paving in front from end to end, of stones cast up by the plough. Its walls, but one story high, rough-cast and white-washed, shone dim in the twilight. Under a thick projecting thatch the door stood wide open, and from the kitchen, whose door was also open, came the light of a peat-fire and a fish-oil-lamp. Throughout the summer Steenie was seldom in the house an hour of the twenty-four, and now he hesitated to enter. In the winter he would keep about it a good part of the day, and was generally indoors the greater part of the night, but by no means always.

While he hesitated, his mother appeared in the doorway of the kitchen. She was a tall, fine-looking woman, with soft gray eyes, and an expression of form and features which left Kirsty accounted for.

'Come awa in by, Steenie, my man!' she said, in a tone that seemed to wrap its object in fold upon fold of tenderness, enough to make the peat-smoke that pervaded the kitchen seem the very atmosphere of the heavenly countries. 'Come and hae a drappy o' new-milkit milk, and a piece (*a piece of bread*)'.

Steenie stood smiling and undecided on the slab in front of the doorstep.

'Dreid naething, Steenie,' his mother went on. 'There's no are to interfere wi' yer wull, whatever it be. The hoose is yer ain to come and gang as ye see fit. But ye ken that, and Kirsty kens that, as weel's yer father and mysel.'

'Mother, I ken what ye say to be the trowth, and I hae a gran' pooer o' believin the trowth. But a'boby believes their ain mither: that's i' the order o' things as they war first startit! Still I wud raither no come in the nicht. I wud raither hand awa and no tribble ye wi' mair o' the sicht o' me nor I canna help—that is, till the cheenge come, and things be set richt. I dinna aye ken what I'm about, but I aye ken 'at I'm a kin' o' a disgrace to ye, though I canna tell hoo I'm to blame for 't. Sae I'll jist bide theroot wi' the bonny stars 'at's aye theroot, and kens a' about it, and disna think nane the waur o' me.'

'Laddie! laddie! wha on the face o' God's yerth thinks the waur o' ye for a wrang dune ye?—though wha has the wyte o' that same I daurna think, weel kennin 'at a'thing's aither ordeent or allooed, makin muckle the same. Come winter, come summer, come richt, come wrang, come life, come deith, what are ye, what can ye be, but my ain, ain laddie!'

Steenie stepped across the threshold and followed his mother into the kitchen, where the pot was already on the fire for the evening's porridge. To hide her emotion she went straight to it, and lifted the lid to look whether boiling point had arrived. The same instant the stalwart form of her husband appeared in the doorway, and there stood for a single moment arrested.

He was a good deal older than his wife, as his long gray hair, among other witnesses, testified. He was six feet in height, and very erect, with a rather stiff, military carriage. His face wore an expression of stern goodwill, as if he had been sent to do his best for everybody, and knew it.

Steenie caught sight of him ere he had taken a step into the kitchen. He rushed to him, threw his arms round him, and hid his face on his bosom.

'Bonny, bonny man!' he murmured, then turned away and went back to the fire.

His mother was casting the first handful of meal into the pot. Steenie fetched a *three-leggit creepie* and sat down by her, looking as if he had sat there every night since first he was able to sit.

The farmer came forward, and drew a chair to the fire beside his son. Steenie laid his head on his father's knee, and the father laid his big hand on Steenie's head. Not a word was uttered. The

mother might have found them in her way had she been inclined, but the thought did not come to her, and she went on making the porridge in great contentment, while Kirsty laid the cloth. The night was as still in the house as in the world, save for the bursting of the big blobs of the porridge. The peat fire made no noise.

The mother at length took the heavy pot from the fire, and, with what to one inexpert might have seemed wonderful skill, poured the porridge into a huge wooden bowl on the table. Having then scraped the pot carefully that nothing should be lost, she put some water into it, and setting it on the fire again, went to a hole in the wall, took thence two eggs, and placed them gently in the water.

She went next to the dairy, and came back with a jug of the richest milk, which she set beside the porridge, whereupon they drew their seats to the table—all but Steenie.

'Come, Steenie,' said his mother, 'here's yer supper.'

'I dinna care about ony supper the nicht, mother,' answered Steenie.

'Guidsake, laddie, I kenna hoo ye live!' she returned in an accent almost of despair,

'I'm thinkin I dinna need sae muckle as ither fowk,' rejoined Steenie, whose white face bore testimony that he took far from nourishment enough. 'Ye see I'm no a' there,' he added with a smile, 'sae I canna need sae muckle!'

'There's eneuch o' ye there to fill my hert unco fou,' answered his mother with a deep sigh. 'Come awa, Steenie, my bairn!' she went on coaxingly. 'Yer father winna ate a moufu' gien ye dinna: ye'll see that!—Eh, Steenie,' she broke out, 'gien ye wad but tak yer supper and gang to yer bed like the lave o' 's! It gars my hert swall as gien 't wud burst like a blob to think o' ye oot i' tho mirk nicht! Wha's to tell what michtna be happenin ye! Oor herts are whiles that sair, yer father's and mine, i' oor beds, 'at we daurna say a word for fear the tane set the tither greetin.'

'I'll bide in, gien that be yer wull,' replied Steenie; 'but eh, gien ye kent the differ to me, ye wudna wuss 't. I seldom sleep at nicht as ye ken, and i' the hoose it's jist as gien the darkness wan inside o' me and was chokin me.'

'But it's as dark theroot as i' the hoose—whiles, onygait!'

'Na, mother; it's never sae dark theroot but there's licht eneuch to ken I'm theroot and no i' the hoose. I can aye draw a guid full breath oot i' the open.'

'Lat the laddie gang his ain gait, 'uman,' interposed David. 'The thing born in 'im 's better for him nor the thing born in anither. A man maun gang as God made him.'

'Ay, whether he be man or dog!' assented Steenie solemnly.

He drew his stool close to his father where he sat at the table, and again laid his head on his knee. The mother sighed but said nothing. She looked nowise hurt, only very sad. In a minute, Steenie spoke again:

'I'm thinkin nane o' ye kens,' he said, 'what it's like whan a' the hillside 's gien up to the ither anes!'

'What ither anes?' asked his mother. 'There can be nane there but yer ain lane sel!'

'Ay, there 's a' the lave o' 's,' he rejoined, with a wan smile.

The mother looked at him with something almost of fear in her eyes of love.

'Steenie has company we ken little aboot,' said Kirsty. 'I whiles think I wud gie him my wits for his company.'

'Ay, the bonny man!' murmured Steenie. '—I maun be gauin!'

But he did not rise, did not even lift his head from his father's knee: it would be rude to go before the supper was over—the ruder that he was not partaking of it!

David had eaten his porridge, and now came the almost nightly difference about the eggs. Marion had been 'the perfect spy o' the time' in taking them from the pot; but when she would as usual have her husband eat them, he as usual declared he neither needed nor wanted them. This night, however, he did not insist, but at once proceeded to prepare one, with which, as soon as it was nicely mixed with salt, he began to feed Steenie. The boy had been longer used to being thus fed than most

children, and having taken the first mouthful instinctively, now moved his head, but without raising it from his knee, so that his father might feed him more comfortably. In this position he took every spoonful given him, and so ate both the eggs, greatly to the delight of the rest of the company.

A moment more and Steenie got up. His father rose also.

'I'll convoy ye a bit, my man,' he said.

'Eh, na! ye needna that, father! It's near-ban' yer bedtime! I hae naegait to be convoyt. I'll jist be about i' the nicht—maybe a stane's-cast frae the door, maybe the tither side o' the Horn. Here or there I'm never frae ye. I think whiles I'm jist like are o' them 'at ye ca' deid: I'm no awa; I'm only deid! I'm about somegait!'

So saying, he went. He never on any occasion wished them good-night: that would be to leave them, and he was not leaving them! he was with them all the time!

CHAPTER VIII

DAVID AND HIS DAUGHTER

The instant he was gone, Kirsty went a step or two nearer to her father, and, looking up in his face, said:

'I saw Francie Gordon the day, father.'

'Weel, lassie, I reckon that wasna ony ferly (*strange occurrence*)! Whaur saw ye him?'

'He cam to me o' the Hornside, whaur I sat weyvin my stockin, ower the bog on 's powny—a richt bonny thing, and clever—a new are he's gotten frae 's mither. And it's no the first time he's been owre there to see me sin' he cam hame!'

'Whatfor gaed he there? That wasna the best o' places to gang ridin in!'

'He kenned whaur he was likest to see me: it was me he wantit.'

'He wantit you, did he? And he's been mair nor ance efter ye?—Whatfor didna ye tell me afore, Kirsty?'

'We war bairns thegither, ye ken, father, and I never ance thought the thing worth fashin ye about till the day. We've aye been used to Francie comin and gaein! I never tellt my mither onything, he said, and I tell her a' thing worth tellin, and mony a thing forby. I aye leuch at him as I wud at a bairn till the day. He spak straucht oot the day, and I did the same, and angert him; and syne he angert me.'

'And whatfor are ye tellin me the noo?'

'Cause it cam intil my heid 'at maybe it would be better—no 'at it maks ony differ I can see.'

During this conversation Marion was washing the supper-things, putting them away, and making general preparation for bed. She heard every word, and went about her work softly that she might hear, never opening her mouth to speak.

'There's something ye want to tell me and dinna like, lassie!' said David. 'Gien ye be feart at yer father, gang til yer mither.'

'Feart at my father! I wad be, gien I bed onything to be ashamet o'. Syne I nicht gang to my mither, I daursay—I dinna ken.'

'Ye wud that, lassie. Fathers maun sometimes be fearsome to lass-bairns!'

'Whan I'm feart at you, father, I'll be a gey bit on i' the ill gait!' returned Kirsty, with a solemn face, looking straight into her father's eyes.

'Than it'll never be, or I maun hae a heap to blame mysel for. I think whiles, gien bairns kenned the terrible wyte their fathers nicht hae to dree for no duin better wi' them, they wud be mair particlar to hand straucht. I hae been ower muckle taen up wi' my beasts and my craps—mair, God forgie me! nor wi' my twa bairns; though, he kens, ye're mair to me, the twa, than oucht else save the mither o' ye!'

'The beasts and the craps cudna weel du wi' less; and there was aye oor mither to see efter hiz!'

'That's true, lassie! I only houp it wasna greed at the hert o' me! At the same time, wha wud I be greedy for but yersels?—Weel, and what's it a' about? What garred ye come to me about Francie? I'm some feart for him whiles, noo 'at he's sae muckle oot o' oor sicht. The laddie's no by natur an ill laddie—far frae 't! but it's a sore pity he cudna hae been a' his father's, and nane o' him his mither's!'

'That wudna hae been sae weel contrived, I doobt!' remarked Kirsty. 'There wudna hae been the variety, I'm thinkin!'

'Ye're richt there, lass!—But what's this about Francie?' 'Ow naething, father, worth mentionin! The daft loon wud hae bed me promise to merry him—that's a!'

'The Lord preserve's!—Aff han!'

'There's no tellin what nicht hae been i' the heid o' 'im: he didna win sae far as to say that onygait!'

'God forbid!' exclaimed her father with solemnity, after a short pause.

'I'm thinkin God's forbidden langsyne!' rejoined Kirsty.

'What said ye til 'im, lassie?'

'First I leuch at him—as weel as I can min' tho nonsense o' 't—and ca'd him the gowk he was; and syne I sent him awa wi' a flee in 's lug; hadna he the impidence to fa' oot upo' me for carin mair about Steenie nor the likes o' him! As gien ever *he* cud come 'ithin sicht o' Steenie!'

Her father looked very grave.

'Are ye no pleased, father? I did what I thought richt.'

'Ye cudna hae dune better, Kirsty. But I'm sorry for the callan, for eh but I loed his father! Lassie, for his father's sake I cud tak Francie intil the hoose, and work for him as for you and Steenie—though it's little guid Steenie ever gets o' me, puir sowl!'

'Dinna say that, father. It wud be an ill thing for Steenie to hae onybody but yersel to the father o' 'im! A muckle pairt o' the nicht he wins ower in loein at you and his mother.'

'And yersel, Kirsty.'

'I'm thinkin I hae my share i' the daytime.'

'And hoo, think ye, gangs the lave o' the nicht wi' 'im?'

'The bonny man has the maist o' 't, I dinna doobt, and what better cud we desire for 'im!—But, father, gien Francie come back wi' the same tale—I dinna think he wull efter what I telled him, but he may—what wud ye hae me say til 'im?'

'Say what ye wull, lassie, sae lang as ye dinna lat him for a moment believe there's a grain o' possibility i' the thing. Ye see, Kirsty,—'

'Ye dinna imagine, father, I cud for ae minute think itherwise aboot it nor ye du yersel! Div I no ken 'at his father gied him in charge to you? and haena I therefore to luik efter him? Didna ye tell me a' aboot yer gran' freen' and hoo, and hoo lang ye had loed him? and didna that mak Francie my business as weel's yer ain? I'm verra sure his father wud never appruv o' ony gaeins on atween him and a lassie sic like's mysel; and fearna ye, father, but I s' hand him weel ootby. No that it's ony tyauve (*struggle*) to me, though I aye likit Francie! Haena I my ain Steenie?'

'Gladly wud I shaw Francie the ro'd to sic a wife as ye wud mak him, my bonny Kirsty! But ye see clearly the thing itsel's no to be thought upon.—Eh, Kirsty, but it's gran' to an auld father's hert to hear ye tak yer pairt in his devours efter sic a wumanly fashion!'

'Am I no yer ain lass-bairn, father? Whaur wud I be wi' a father 'at didna keep his word? and what less cud I du nor help ony man to keep his word? Gien breach o' the faimily-word cam throw me, my life wud gang frae me.—Wad ye hae me tell the laddie's mither? I wudna like to expose the folly o' him, but gien ye think it necessar, I'll gang the morn's mornin.'

'I dinna think that wud be weel. It wad but raise a strife atween the twa, ohn dune an atom o' guid. She wud only rage at the laddie, and pit him in sic a reid heat as wad but wald thegither him and his wull sae 'at they wud maist never come in twa again. And though ye gaed and tauld her yer ain sel, my leddy wad lay a' the wyte upo' you nane the less. There's no rizzon, tap nor tae, i' the puir body, and ye're naewise b'und to her farther nor to du richt by her.'

'I'm glaid ye dinna want me to gang,' answered Kirsty. 'She carries hersel that gran' 'at ye're maist driven to the consideration hoo little she's worth; and that's no the richt speerit anent onybody or thing God thought worth makin.'

CHAPTER IX AT CASTLE WEELSET

Francie's anger had died down a good deal by the time he reached home. He was, as his father's friend had just said, by no means a bad sort of fellow, only he was full of himself, and therefore of little use to anybody. His mother and he, when not actually at strife, were constantly on the edge of a quarrel. The two must have their own way, each of them. Francie's way was sometimes good, his mother's sometimes not bad, but both were usually selfish. The boy had fits of generosity, the woman never, except toward her son. If she thought of something to please him, good and well! if he wanted anything of her, it would never do! The idea must be her own, or meet with no favour. If she imagined her son desired a thing, she felt it one she never could grant, and told him so: thereafter Francis would not rest until he had compassed the thing. Sudden division and high words would follow, with speechlessness on the mother's part in the rear, which might last for days. Becoming all at once tired of it, she would in the morning appear at breakfast looking as if nothing had ever come between them, and they would be the best of friends for a few days, or perhaps a week, seldom longer. Some fresh discord, nowise different in character from the preceding, would arise between them, and the same weary round be tramped again, each always in the right, and the other in the wrong. Every time they made it up, their relation seemed unimpaired, but it was hardly possible things should go on thus and not at length quite estrange their hearts.

In matters of display, to which Francis had much tendency, his mother's own vanity led her to indulge and spoil him, for, being hers, she was always pleased he should look his best. On his real self she neither had nor sought any influence. Insubordination or arrogance in him, her dignity unslighted, actually pleased her: she liked him to show his spirit: was it not a mark of his breeding?

She was a tall and rather stout woman, with a pretty, small-featured, regular face, and a thin nose with the nostrils pinched.

Castle Weelset was not much of a castle: to an ancient round tower, discomfortably habitable, had been added in the last century a rather large, defensible house. It stood on the edge of a gorge, crowning one of its stony hills of no great height. With scarce a tree to shelter it, the situation was very cold in winter, and it required a hardy breeding to live there in comfort. There was little of a garden, and the stables were somewhat ruinous. For the former fact the climate almost sufficiently accounted, and for the latter, a long period of comparative poverty.

The young laird did not like farming, and had no love for books: in this interval between school and college, he found very little to occupy him, and not much to amuse him. Had Kirsty and her family proved as encouraging as he had expected, he would have made use of his new pony almost only to ride to Corbyknowe in the morning and back to the castle at night.

His mother knew old Barclay, as she called him, well enough—that is, not at all, and had never shown him any cordiality, anything, indeed, better than condescension. To treat him like a gentleman, even when he sat at her own table, she would have counted absurd. He had never been to the castle since the day after her husband's funeral, when she received him with such emphasized superiority that he felt he could not go again without running the risk either of having his influence with the boy ruined, or giving occasion to a nature not without generosity to take David's part against his mother. Thenceforward, therefore, he contented himself with giving Francis invariable welcome, and doing what he could to make his visits pleasant. Chiefly, on such not infrequent occasions, the boy delighted in drawing from his father's friend what tales about his father, and adventures of their campaigns together, he had to tell; and in this way David's wife and children heard many things about himself which would not otherwise have reached them. Naturally, Kirsty and Francie grew to be good friends; and after they went to the parish school, there were few days indeed on which they did not walk at least

as far homeward together as the midway divergence of their roads permitted. It was not wonderful, therefore, that at length Francis should be, or should fancy himself in love with Kirsty. But I believe all the time he thought of marrying her as a heroic deed, in raising the girl his mother despised to share the lofty position he and that foolish mother imagined him to occupy. The anticipation of opposition from his mother naturally strengthened his determination; of opposition on the part of Kirsty, he had not dreamed. He took it as of course that, the moment he stated his intention, Kirsty would be charmed, her mother more than pleased, and the stern old soldier overwhelmed with the honour of alliance with the son of his colonel. I do not doubt, however, that he had an affection for Kirsty far deeper and better than his notion of their relations to each other would indicate. Although it was mainly his pride that suffered in his humiliating dismissal, he had, I am sure, a genuine heartache as he galloped home. When he reached the castle, he left his pony to go where he would, and rushed to his room. There, locking the door that his mother might not enter, he threw himself on his bed in the luxurious consciousness of a much-wronged lover. An uneducated country girl, for as such he regarded her, had cast from her, not without insult, his splendidly generous offer of himself!

Poor king Cophetua did not, however, shed many tears for the loss of his recusant beggar-maid. By and by he forgot everything, found he had gone to sleep, and, endeavouring to weep again, did not succeed.

He grew hungry soon, and went down to see what was to be had. It was long past the usual hour for dinner, but Mrs. Gordon had not seen him return, and had had it put back—so to make the most of an opportunity of quarrel not to be neglected by a conscientious mother. She let it slide nevertheless.

'Gracious, you've been crying!' she exclaimed, the moment she saw him.

Now certainly Francis had not cried much; his eyes were, notwithstanding, a little red.

He had not yet learned to lie, but he might then have made his first assay had he had a fib at his tongue's end; as he had not, he gloomed deeper, and made no answer.

'You've been fighting!' said his mother.

'I haena,' he returned with rude indignation. 'Gien I had been, div ye think I wud hae grutten?'

'You forget yourself, laird!' remarked Mrs. Gordon, more annoyed with his Scotch than the tone of it. 'I would have you remember I am mistress of the house!'

'Till I marry, mother!' rejoined her son.

'Oblige me in the meantime,' she answered, 'by leaving vulgar language outside it.'

Francis was silent; and his mother, content with her victory, and in her own untruthfulness of nature believing he had indeed been fighting and had had the worse of it, said no more, but began to pity and pet him. A pot of his favourite jam presently consoled the love-wounded hero—in the acceptance of which consolation he showed himself far less unworthy than many a grown man, similarly circumstanced, in the choice of his.

CHAPTER X

DAVID AND FRANCIS

One day there was a market at a town some eight or nine miles off, and thither, for lack of anything else to do, Francis had gone to display himself and his pony, which he was riding with so tight a curb that the poor thing every now and then reared in protest against the agony he suffered.

On one of these occasions Don was on the point of falling backward, when a brown wrinkled hand laid hold of him by the head, half pulling the reins from his rider's hand, and ere he had quite settled again on his forelegs, had unhooked the chain of his curb, and fastened it some three links looser. Francis was more than indignant, even when he saw that the hand was Mr. Barclay's: was he to be treated as one who did not know what he was about!

'Hoots, my man!' said David gently, 'there's no occasion to put a water-chain upo' the bonny beastie: he has a mou like a leddy's! and to hae 't linkit up sae ticht is naething less nor tortur til 'im! —It's a won'er to me he hasna broken your banes and his ain back thegither, puir thing!' he added, patting and stroking the spirited little creature that stood sweating and trembling. 'I thank you, Mr. Barclay,' said Francis insolently, 'but I am quite able to manage the brute myself. You seem to take me for a fool!'

'Deed, he's no far aff ane 'at cud ca' a bonny cratur like that a brute!' returned David, nowise pleased to discover such hardness in one whom he would gladly treat like a child of his own. It was a great disappointment to him to see the lad getting farther away from the possibility of being helped by him. 'What 'ud yer father say to see ye illuse ony helpless bein! Yer father was awfu guid til 's horse-fowk.'

The last word was one of David's own: he was a great lover of animals.

'I'll do with my own as I please!' cried Francis, and spurred the pony to pass David. But one stalwart hand held the pony fast, while the other seized his rider by the ankle. The old man was now thoroughly angry with the graceless youth.

'God bless my sowl!' he cried, 'hae ye the spurs on as weel? Stick ane o' them intil him again, and I'll cast ye frae the saddle. I' the thick o' a fecht, the lang blades playin about yer father's heid like lichts i' the north, he never stack spur intil 's chairger needless!'

'I don't see,' said Francis, who had begun to cool down a little, 'how he could have enjoyed the fight much if he never forgot himself! I should forget everything in the delight of the battle!'

'Yer father, laddie, never forgot onything but himsel. Forgettin himsel left him free to min' a'thing forbye. *Ye* wud forget ilka thing but yer ain rage! Yer father was a great man as weel's a great soger, Francie, and a deevil to fecht, as his men said. I hae mysel seen by the set mou 'at the teeth war clinched i' the inside o' 't, whan a' the time on the broo o' 'im sat never a runkle. Gien ever there was a man 'at cud think o' twa things at ance, your father cud think o' three; and thae three war God, his enemy, and the beast aneath him. Francie, Francie, i' the name o' yer father I beg ye to regaird the richts o' the neebour ye sit upo'. Gien ye dinna that, ye'll come or lang to think little o' yer human neebour as weel, carin only for what ye get oot o' 'im!'

A voice inside Francis took part with the old man, and made him yet angrier. Also his pride was the worse annoyed that David Barclay, his tenant, should, in the hearing of two or three loafers gathered behind him, of whose presence the old man was unaware, not only rebuke him, but address him by his name, and the diminutive of it. So when David, in the appeal that burst from his enthusiastic remembrance of his officer in the battle-field, let the pony's head go, Francis dug his spurs in his sides, and darted off like an arrow. The old man for a moment stared open-mouthed after him. The fools around laughed: he turned and walked away, his head sunk on his breast.

Francis had not ridden far before he was vexed with himself. He was not so much sorry, as annoyed that he had behaved in fashion undignified. The thought that his childish behaviour would justify Kirsty in her opinion of him, added its sting. He tried to console himself with the reflection that the sort of thing ought to be put an end to at once: how far, otherwise, might not the old fellow's interference go! I am afraid he even said to himself that such was a consequence of familiarity with inferiors. Yet angry as he was at his fault-finding, he would have been proud of any approval from the lips of the old soldier. He rode his pony mercilessly for a mile or so, then pulled up, and began to talk pettingly to him, which I doubt if the little creature found consoling, for love only makes petting worth anything, and the love here was not much to the front.

About halfway home, he had to ford a small stream, or go round two miles by a bridge. There had been much rain in the night, and the stream was considerably swollen. As he approached the ford, he met a knife-grinder, who warned him not to attempt it: he had nearly lost his wheel in it, he said. But Francis always found it hard to accept advice. His mother had so often predicted from neglect of hers evils which never followed, that he had come to think counsel the one thing not to be heeded.

'Thank you,' he said; 'I think we can manage it!' and rode on.

When he reached the ford, where of all places he ought to have left the pony's head free, he foolishly remembered the curb-chain, and getting off, took it up a couple of links.

But when he remounted, whether from dread of the rush of the brown water, or resentment at the threat of renewed torture, the pony would not take the ford, and a battle royal arose between them, in which Francis was so far victorious that, after many attempts to run away, little Don, rendered desperate by the spur, dashed wildly into the stream, and went plunging on for two or three yards. Then he fell, and Francis found himself rolling in the water, swept along by the current.

A little way lower down, at a sharp turn of the stream under a high bank, was a deep pool, a place held much in dread by the country lads and lasses, being a haunt of the kelpie. Francis knew the spot well, and had good reason to fear that, carried into it, he must be drowned, for he could not swim. Roused by the thought to a yet harder struggle, he succeeded in getting upon his feet, and reaching the bank, where he lay for a while, exhausted. When at length he came to himself and rose, he found the water still between him and home, and nothing of his pony to be seen. If the youth's good sense had been equal to his courage, he would have been a fine fellow: he dashed straight into the ford, floundered through it, and lost his footing no more than had Don, treated properly. When he reached the high ground on the other side, he could still see nothing of him, and with sad heart concluded him carried into the Kelpie's Hole, never more to be beheld alive:—what would his mother and Mr. Barclay say? Shivering and wretched, and with a growing compunction in regard to his behaviour to Don, he crawled wearily home.

Don, however, had at no moment been much in danger. Rid of his master, he could take very good care of himself. He got to the bank without difficulty, and took care it should be on the home-side of the stream. Not once looking behind him after his tyrant, he set off at a good round trot, much refreshed by his bath, and rejoicing in the thought of his loose box at castle Weelset.

In a narrow part of the road, however, he overtook a cart of Mr. Barclay's; and as he attempted to pass between it and the steep brae, the man on the shaft caught at his bridle, made him prisoner, tied him to the cart behind, and took him to Corbyknowe. When David came home and saw him, he conjectured pretty nearly what had happened, and tired as he was set out for the castle. Had he not feared that Francis might have been injured, he would not have cared to go, much as he knew it must relieve him to learn that his pony was safe.

Mrs. Gordon declined to see David, but he ascertained from the servants that Francis had come home half-drowned, leaving Don in the Kelpie's Hole.

David hesitated a little whether or not to punish him for his behaviour to the pony by allowing him to remain in ignorance of his safety, and so leaving him to the *agen-bite* of conscience; but

concluding that such was not his part, he told them that the animal was safe at Corbyknowe, and went home again.

But he wanted Francis to fetch the pony himself, therefore did not send him, and in the meantime fed and groomed him with his own hands as if he had been his friend's charger. Francis having just enough of the grace of shame to make him shrink from going to Corbyknowe, his mother wrote to David, asking why he did not send home the animal. David, one of the most courteous of men, would take no order from any but his superior officer, and answered that he would gladly give him up to the young laird in person.

The next day Mrs. Gordon drove, in what state she could muster, to Corbyknowe. Arrived there, she declined to leave her carriage, requesting Mrs. Barclay, who came to the door, to send her husband to her. Mrs. Barclay thought it better to comply.

David came in his shirt-sleeves, for he had been fetched from his work.

'If I understand your answer to my request, Mr. Barclay, you decline to send back Mr. Gordon's pony. Pray, on what grounds?'

'I wrote, ma'am, that I should be glad to give him over to Mr. Francis himself.'

'Mr. Gordon does not find it convenient to come all this way on foot. In fact he declines to do it, and requests that you will send the pony home this afternoon.'

'Excuse me, mem, but it's surely enough done that a man make known the presence o' strays, and tak proper care o' them until they're claimt! I was fain forbye to gie the bonny thing a bit pleesur in life: Francie's ower hard upon him.'

'You forget, David Barclay, that Mr. Gordon is your landlord!'

'His father, mem, was my landlord, and his father's father was my father's landlord; and the interests o' the landlord hae aye been oors. Ither nor Francie's herty freen I can never be!'

'You presume on my late husband's kindness to you, Barclay!'

'Gien devotion be presumption, mem, I presume. Archibald Gordon was and is my freen, and will be for ever. We hae been throuw ower muckle thegither to change to are anither. It was for his sake and the laddie's ain that I wantit him to come to me. I wantit a word wi' him about that powny o' his. He'll never be true man 'at taks no tent (*care*) o' dumb animals! You 'at's sae weel at hame i' the seddle yersel, mem, nicht tak a kin'ly care o' what's aneth his!'

'I will have no one interfere with my son. I am quite capable of teaching him his duty myself.'

'His father requestit me to do what I could for him, mem.'

'His *late* father, if you please, Barclay!'

'He s' never be Francie's *late* father to Francie, gien I can help it, mem! He may be your *late* husband, mem, but he's my cornel yet, and I s' keep my word til him! It'll no be lang noo, i' the natur o' things, till I gang til him; and sure am I his first word 'll be aboot the laddie: I wud ill like to answer him, "Archie, I ken naething aboot him but what I cud weel wuss itherwise!" Hoo wud ye like to gie sic an answer yersel, mem?'

'I'm surprised at a man of your sense, Barclay, thinking we shall know one another in heaven! We shall have to be content with God there!'

'I said naething about h'aven, mem! Fowk may ken are anither and no be in ae place. I took note i' the kirk last Sunday 'at Abrahaam kent the rich man, and the rich man him, and they warn a' the same place.—But ye'll lat the yoong laird come and see me, mem?' concluded David, changing his tone and speaking as one who begged a favour; for the thought of meeting his old friend and having nothing to tell him about his boy, quenched his pride.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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