

BARR AMELIA E.

SCOTTISH SKETCHES

Amelia Barr

Scottish sketches

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CRAWFORD'S SAIR STRAIT

CHAPTER I

Alexander Crawford sat reading a book which he studied frequently with a profound interest. Not the Bible: that volume had indeed its place of honor in the room, but the book Crawford read was a smaller one; it was stoutly bound and secured by a brass lock, and it was all in manuscript. It was his private ledger, and it contained his bank account. Its contents seemed to give him much solid satisfaction; and when at last he locked the volume and replaced it in his secretary, it was with that careful respect which he considered due to the representative of so many thousand pounds.

He was in a placid mood, and strangely inclined to retrospection. Thoughtfully fingering the key which locked up the record of his wealth, he walked to the window and looked out. It was a dreary prospect of brown moor and gray sea, but Crawford loved it. The bare land and the barren mountains was the country of the Crawfords. He had a fixed idea that it always had been theirs, and whenever he told himself—as he did this night—that so many acres of old Scotland were actually his own, he was aggressively a Scotchman.

"It is a bonnie bit o' land," he murmured, "and I hae done as my father Laird Archibald told me. If we should meet in another warld I'll be able to gie a good account o' Crawford and Traquare. It is thirty years to-night since he gave me the ring off his finger, and said, 'Alexander, I am going the way o' all flesh; be a good man, and *grip tight*.' I hae done as he bid me; there is £80,000 in the Bank o' Scotland, and every mortgage lifted. I am vera weel pleased wi' mysel' to-night. I hae been a good holder o' Crawford and Traquare."

His self-complacent reflections were cut short by the entrance of his daughter. She stood beside him, and laid her hand upon his arm with a caressing gesture. No other living creature durst have taken that liberty with him; but to Crawford his daughter Helen was a being apart from common humanity. She was small, but very lovely, with something almost Puritanical in her dainty, precise dress and carefully snooded golden hair.

"Father!"

"Helen, my bird."

"Colin is coming home. I have just had a letter from him. He has taken high honors in Glasgow. We'll both be proud of Colin, father."

"What has he done?"

"He has written a prize poem in Latin and Greek, and he is second in mathematics."

"Latin and Greek! Poor ghostlike languages that hae put off flesh and blood lang syne. Poetry! Warse than nonsense! David and Solomon hae gien us such sacred poetry as is good and necessary; and for sinfu' love verses and such vanities, if Scotland must hae them, Robert Burns is mair than enough. As to mathematics, there's naething against them. A study that is founded on figures is to be depended upon; it has nae flights and fancies. You ken what you are doing wi' figures. When is this clever fellow to be here?"

"He is coming by the afternoon packet to-morrow. We must send the carriage to meet it, for Colin is bringing a stranger with him. I came to ask you if I must have the best guest-room made ready."

"Wha for?"

"He is an English gentleman, from London, father."

"And you would put an Englishman in the room where the twa last Stuarts slept? I'll not hear tell o' it. I'm not the man to lift a quarrel my fathers dropped, but I'll hae no English body in Prince Charlie's room. Mind that, noo! What is the man's name?"

"Mr. George Selwyn."

"George Selwyn! There's nae Scotch Selwyns that I ken o'. He'll be Saxon altogether. Put him in the East room."

Crawford was not pleased at his son bringing any visitor. In the first place, he had important plans to discuss and carry out, and he was impatient of further delay. In the second, he was intensely jealous of Helen. Every young man was a probable suitor, and he had quite decided that Farquharson of Blair was the proper husband for her. Crawford and Blair had stood shoulder to shoulder in every national quarrel, and a marriage would put the two estates almost in a ring fence.

But he went the next day to meet the young men. He had not seen his son for three years, and the lad was an object very near and dear to his heart. He loved him tenderly as his son, he respected him highly as the future heir of Crawford and Traquare. The Crawfords were a very handsome race; he was anxious that this, their thirteenth representative, should be worthy, even physically, of his ancestors. He drew a long sigh of gratification as young Colin, with open hands, came up to him. The future laird was a noble-looking fellow, a dark, swarthy Highlandman, with glowing eyes, and a frame which promised in a few years to fill up splendidly.

His companion was singularly unlike him. Old Crawford had judged rightly. He was a pure Saxon, and showed it in his clear, fresh complexion, pale brown hair, and clear, wide-open blue eyes. But there was something about this young man which struck a deeper and wider sympathy than race—he had a heart beating for all humanity. Crawford looked at him physically only, and he decided at once, "There is no fear of Helen." He told himself that young Farquharson was six inches taller and every way a far "prettier man." Helen was not of this opinion. No hero is so fascinating to a woman as the man mentally and spiritually above her, and whom she must love from a distance; and if Crawford could have known how dangerous were those walks over the springy heather and through the still pine woods, Mr. Selwyn would have taken them far more frequently alone than he did.

But Crawford had other things to employ his attention at that time, and indeed the young English clergyman was far beyond his mental and spiritual horizon; he could not judge him fairly. So these young people walked and rode and sailed together, and Selwyn talked like an apostle of the wrongs that were to be righted and the poor perishing souls that were to be redeemed. The spiritual warfare in which he was enlisted had taken possession of him, and he spoke with the martial enthusiasm of a young soldier buckling on his armor.

Helen and Colin listened in glowing silence, Helen showing her sympathy by her flushing cheeks and wet eyes, and Colin by the impatient way in which he struck down with his stick the thistles by the path side, as if they were the demons of sin and ignorance and dirt Selwyn was warring against. But after three weeks of this intercourse Crawford became sensible of some change in the atmosphere of his home. When Selwyn first arrived, and Crawford learned that he was a clergyman in orders, he had, out of respect to the office, delegated to him the conduct of family worship. Gradually Selwyn had begun to illustrate the gospel text with short, earnest remarks, which were a revelation of Bible truth to the thoughtful men and women who heard them.

The laird's "exercises" had often been slipped away from, excuses had been frequent, absentees usual; but they came to listen to Selwyn with an eagerness which irritated him. In our day, the gospel of Christ has brought forth its last beautiful blossom—the gospel of humanity. Free schools, free Bibles, Tract and City Missions, Hospitals and Clothing Societies, loving helps of all kinds are a part of every church organization. But in the time of which I am writing they were unknown in country parishes, they struggled even in great cities for a feeble life.

The laird and his servants heard some startling truths, and the laird began to rebel against them. A religion of intellectual faith, and which had certain well-recognized claims on his pocket, he was willing to support, and to defend, if need were; but he considered one which made him on every hand his brother's keeper a dangerously democratic theology.

"I'll hae no socialism in my religion, any more than I'll hae it in my politics, Colin," he said angrily. "And if yon Mr. Selwyn belongs to what they call the Church o' England, I'm mair set up than ever wi' the Kirk o' Scotland! God bless her!"

They were sitting in the room sacred to business and to the memory of the late Laird Archibald. Colin was accustomed to receive his father's opinions in silence, and he made no answer to this remark. This time, however, the laird was not satisfied with the presumed assent of silence; he asked sharply, "What say ye to that, son Colin?"

"I say God bless the Kirk of Scotland, father, and I say it the more heartily because I would like to have a place among those who serve her."

"What are ye saying now?"

"That I should like to be a minister. I suppose you have no objections."

"I hae vera great objections. I'll no hear tell o' such a thing. Ministers canna mak money, and they canna save it. If you should mak it, that would be an offence to your congregation; if ye should save it, they would say ye ought to hae gien it to the poor. There will be nae Dominie Crawford o' my kin, Colin. Will naething but looking down on the warld from a pulpit sarve you?"

"I like art, father. I can paint a little, and I love music."

"Art! Painting! Music! Is the lad gane daft? God has gien to some men wisdom and understanding, to ithers the art o' playing on the fiddle and painting pictures. There shall be no painting, fiddling Crawford among my kin, Colin."

The young fellow bit his lip, and his eyes flashed dangerously beneath their dropped lids. But he said calmly enough,

"What is your own idea, father? I am twenty-two, I ought to be doing a man's work of some kind."

"Just sae. That is warld-like talk. Now I'll speak wi' you anent a grand plan I hae had for a long time." With these words he rose, and took from his secretary a piece of parchment containing the plan of the estate. "Sit down, son Colin, and I'll show you your inheritance." Then he went carefully over every acre of moor and wood, of moss and water, growing enthusiastic as he pointed out how many sheep could be grazed on the hills, what shooting and fishing privileges were worth, etc. "And the best is to come, my lad. There is coal on the estate, and I am going to open it up, for I hae the ready siller to do it."

Colin sat silent; his cold, dissenting air irritated the excited laird very much.

"What hae ye got to say to a' this, Colin?" he asked proudly, "for you'll hae the management o' everything with me. Why, my dear son, if a' goes weel—and it's sure to—we'll be rich enough in a few years to put in our claim for the old Earldom o' Crawford, and you may tak your seat in the House o' Peers yet. The old chevalier promised us a Dukedom," he said sadly, "but I'm feared that will be aboon our thumb—"

"Father, what are you going to do with the clansmen? Do you think Highlandmen who have lived on the mountains are going to dig coal? Do you imagine that these men, who, until a generation or two ago, never handled anything but a claymore, and who even now scorn to do aught but stalk deer or spear salmon, will take a shovel and a pickaxe and labor as coal-miners? There is not a Crawford among them who would do it. I would despise him if he did."

"There is a glimmer o' good sense in what you say, Colin. I dinna intend any Crawford to work in my coal mine. Little use they would be there. I'll send to Glasgow for some Irish bodies."

"And then you will have more fighting than working on the place; and you'll have to build a Roman-catholic chapel, and have a Roman priest in Crawford, and you ken whether the Crawfords will thole *that* or not."

"As to the fighting, I'll gie them no chance. I'm going to send the Crawfords to Canada. I hae thought it all out. The sheilings will do for the others; the land I want for sheep grazing. They are doing naething for themsel's, and they are just a burden to me. It will be better for them to gang to Canada. I'll pay their passage, and I'll gie them a few pounds each to start them. You must stand by me in this matter, for they'll hae to go sooner or later."

"That is a thing I cannot do, father. There is not a Laird of Crawford that was not nursed on some clanswoman's breast. We are all kin. Do you think I would like to see Rory and Jean Crawford packed off to Canada? And there is young Hector, my foster-brother! And old Ailsa, your own foster-sister! Every Crawford has a right to a bite and a sup from the Crawford land."

"That is a' bygane nonsense. Your great-grandfather, if he wanted cattle or meal, could just take the clan and go and harry some Southern body out o' them. That is beyond our power, and it's an unca charge to hae every Crawford looking to you when hunting and fishing fails. They'll do fine in Canada. There is grand hunting, and if they want fighting, doubtless there will be Indians. They will hae to go, and you will hae to stand by me in this matter."

"It is against my conscience, sir. I had also plans about these poor, half-civilized, loving kinsmen of ours. You should hear Selwyn talk of what we might do with them. There is land enough to give all who want it a few acres, and the rest could be set up with boats and nets as fishers. They would like that."

"Nae doubt. But I don't like it, and I wont hae it. Mr. Selwyn may hae a big parish in London, but the Crawfords arena in his congregation. I am king and bishop within my ain estate, Colin." Then he rose in a decided passion and locked up again the precious parchment, and Colin understood that, for the present, the subject was dismissed.

CHAPTER II

At the very time this conversation was in progress, one strangely dissimilar was being carried on between George Selwyn and Helen Crawford. They were sitting in the sweet, old-fashioned garden and Selwyn had been talking of the work so dear to his heart, but a silence had fallen between them. Then softly and almost hesitatingly Helen said "Mr. Selwyn, I cannot help in this grand evangel, except with money and prayers. May I offer you £300? It is entirely my own, and it lies useless in my desk. Will you take it?"

"I have no power to refuse it. 'You give it to God, durst I say no?' But as I do not return at once, you had better send it in a check to our treasurer." Then he gave her the necessary business directions, and was writing the address of the treasurer when the laird stopped in front of them.

"Helen, you are needed in the house," he said abruptly; and then turning to Selwyn, he asked him to take a walk up the hill. The young man complied. He was quite unconscious of the anger in the tone of the request. For a few yards neither spoke; then the laird, with an irritable glance at his placid companion, said, "Mr. Selwyn, fore-speaking saves after-speaking. Helen Crawford is bespoke for young Farquharson of Blair, and if you have any hopes o' wiving in my house—"

"Crawford, thank you for your warning, but I have no thoughts of marrying any one. Helen Crawford is a pearl among women; but even if I wanted a wife, she is unfit for my helpmate. When I took my curacy in the East End of London I counted the cost. Not for the fairest of the daughters of men would I desert my first love—the Christ-work to which I have solemnly dedicated my life."

His voice fell almost to a whisper, but the outward, upward glance of the inspired eyes completely disconcerted the aggressive old chieftain. His supposed enemy, in some intangible way, had escaped him, and he felt keenly his own mistake. He was glad to see Colin coming; it gave him an opportunity of escaping honorably from a conversation which had been very humiliating to him. He had a habit when annoyed of seeking the sea-beach. The chafing, complaining waves suited his fretful mood, and leaving the young men, he turned to the sea, taking the hillside with such mighty strides that Selwyn watched him with admiration and astonishment.

"Four miles of that walking will bring him home in the most amiable of moods," said Colin. And perhaps it would, if he had been left to the sole companionship of nature. But when he was half way home he met Dominie Tallisker, a man of as lofty a spirit as any Crawford who ever lived. The two men were close friends, though they seldom met without disagreeing on some point.

"Weel met, dominie! Are you going to the Keep?"

"Just so, I am for an hour's talk wi' that fine young English clergyman you hae staying wi' you."

"Tallisker, let me tell you, man, you hae been seen o'er much wi' him lately. Why, dominie! he is an Episcopal, and an Arminian o' the vera warst kind."

"Hout, laird! Arminianism isna a contagious disease. I'll no mair tak Arminianism from the Rev. George Selwyn than I'll tak Toryism fra Laird Alexander Crawford. My theology and my politics are far beyond inoculation. Let me tell you that, laird."

"Hae ye gotten an argument up wi' him, Tallisker? I would like weel to hear ye twa at it."

"Na, na; he isna one o' them that argues. He maks downright assertions; every one o' them hits a body's conscience like a sledge-hammer. He said that to me as we walked the moor last night that didna let me sleep a wink."

"He is a vera disagreeable young man. What could he say to you? You have aye done your duty."

"I thought sae once, Crawford. I taught the bairns their catechism; I looked weel to the spiritual life o' young and old; I had aye a word in season for all. But maybe this I ought to hae done, and not left the other undone."

"You are talking foolishness, Tallisker, and that's a thing no usual wi' you."

"No oftener wi' me nor other folk. But, laird, I feel there must be a change. I hae gotten my orders, and I am going to obey them. You may be certain o' that."

"I didna think I would ever see Dominie Tallisker taking orders from a disciple o' Arminius—and an Englishman forbye!"

"I'll tak my orders, Crawford, from any messenger the Lord chooses to send them by. And I'll do this messenger justice; he laid down no law to me, he only spak o' the duty laid on his own conscience; but my conscience said 'Amen' to his—that's about it. There has been a breath o' the Holy Ghost through the Church o' England lately, and the dry bones o' its ceremonials are being clothed upon wi' a new and wonderfu' life."

"Humff!" said the laird with a scornful laugh as he kicked a pebble out of his way.

"There is a great outpouring at Oxford among the young men, and though I dinna agree wi' them in a' things, I can see that they hae gotten a revelation."

"Ou, ay, the young ken a' things. It is aye young men that are for turning the warld upside down. Naething is good enough for them."

The dominie took no notice of the petulant interruption. "Laird," he said excitedly, "it is like a fresh Epiphany, what this young Mr. Selwyn says—the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the prisoners comforted, the puir wee, ragged, ignorant bairns gathered into homes and schools, and it is the gospel wi' bread and meat and shelter and schooling in its hand. That was Christ's ain way, you'll admit that. And while he was talking, my heart burned, and I bethought me of a night-school for the little herd laddies and lasses. They could study their lessons on the hillside all day, and I'll gather them for an hour at night, and gie them a basin o' porridge and milk after their lessons. And we ought not to send the orphan weans o' the kirk to the warkhouse; we ought to hae a hame for them, and our sick ought to be better looked to. There is many another good thing to do, but we'll begin wi' these, and the rest will follow."

The laird had listened thus far in speechless indignation. He now stood still, and said,

"I'll hae you to understand, Dominie Tallisker, that I am laird o' Crawford and Traquare, and I'll hae nae such pliskies played in either o' my clachans."

"If you are laird, I am dominie. You ken me weel enough to be sure if this thing is a matter o' conscience to me, neither king nor kaiser can stop me. I'd snap my fingers in King George's face if he bid me 'stay,' when my conscience said 'go,'" and the dominie accompanied the threat with that sharp, resonant fillip of the fingers that is a Scotchman's natural expression of intense excitement of any kind.

"King George!" cried the laird, in an ungovernable temper, "there is the whole trouble. If we had only a Charles Stuart on the throne there would be nane o' this Whiggery."

"There would be in its place masses, and popish priests, and a few private torture-chambers, and whiles a Presbyterian heretic or twa burned at the Grass-market. Whiggery is a grand thing when it keeps the Scarlet Woman on her ain seven hills. Scotland's hills and braes can do weel, weel without her."

This speech gave the laird time to think. It would never do to quarrel with Tallisker. If he should set himself positively against his scheme of sending his clan to Canada it would be almost a hopeless one; and then he loved and respected his friend. His tall, powerful frame and his dark, handsome face, all aglow with a passionate conviction of right, and an invincible determination to do it, commanded his thorough admiration. He clasped his hands behind his back and said calmly,

"Tallisker, you'll be sorry enough for your temper erelong. You hae gien way mair than I did. Ye ken how you feel about it."

"I feel ashamed o' mysel', laird. You'll no lay the blame o' it to my office, but to Dugald Tallisker his ain sel'. There's a deal o' Dugald Tallisker in me yet, laird; and whiles he is o'er much for Dominie Tallisker."

They were at the gate by this time, and Crawford held out his hand and said, "Come in, dominie."

"No; I'll go hame, laird, and gie mysel' a talking to. Tell Mr. Selwyn I want to see him."

CHAPTER III

Alas, how often do Christ's words, "I come not to bring peace, but a sword," prove true. George Selwyn went away, but the seed he had dropped in this far-off corner of Scotland did not bring forth altogether the peaceable fruits of righteousness. In fact, as we have seen, it had scarcely begun to germinate before the laird and the dominie felt it to be a root of bitterness between them. For if Crawford knew anything he knew that Tallisker would never relinquish his new work, and perhaps if he yielded to any reasonable object Tallisker would stand by him in his project.

He did not force the emigration plan upon his notice. The summer was far advanced; it would be unjustifiable to send the clan to Canada at the beginning of winter. And, as it happened, the subject was opened with the dominie in a very favorable manner. They were returning from the moors one day and met a party of six men. They were evidently greatly depressed, but they lifted their bonnets readily to the chief. There was a hopeless, unhappy look about them that was very painful.

"You have been unsuccessful on the hills, Archie, I fear."

"There's few red deer left," said the man gloomily. "It used to be deer and men; it is sheep and dogs now."

After a painful silence the dominie said,

"Something ought to be done for those braw fellows. They canna ditch and delve like an Irish peasant. It would be like harnessing stags in a plough."

Then Crawford spoke cautiously of his intention, and to his delight the dominie approved it.

"I'll send them out in Read & Murray's best ships. I'll gie each head o' a family what you think right, Tallisker, and I'll put £100 in your hands for special cases o' help. And you will speak to the men and their wives for me, for it is a thing I canna bear to do."

But the men too listened eagerly to the proposition. They trusted the dominie, and they were weary of picking up a precarious living in hunting and fishing, and relying on the chief in emergencies. Their old feudal love and reverence still remained in a large measure, but they were quite sensible that everything had changed in their little world, and that they were out of tune with it. Some few of their number had made their way to India or Canada, and there was a vague dissatisfaction which only required a prospect of change to develop. As time went on, and the laird's plan for opening the coal beds on his estate got known, the men became impatient to be gone.

In the early part of March two large ships lay off the coast waiting for them, and they went in a body to Crawford Keep to bid the chief "farewell." It was a hard hour, after all, to Crawford. The great purpose that he had kept before his eyes for years was not at that moment sufficient. He had dressed himself in his full chieftain's suit to meet them. The eagle's feather in his Glengary gave to his great stature the last grace. The tartan and philibeg, the garters at his knee, the silver buckles at his shoulder, belt, and shoon, the jewelled mull and dirk, had all to these poor fellows in this last hour a proud and sad significance. As he stood on the steps to welcome them, the wind colored his handsome face and blew out the long black hair which fell curling on his shoulders.

Whatever they intended to say to him, when they thus saw him with young Colin by his side they were unable to say. They could only lift their bonnets in silence. The instincts and traditions of a thousand years were over them; he was at this moment the father and the chief of their deepest affection. One by one they advanced to him. He pressed the hands of all. Some of the older men—companions of his youth in play and sport—he kissed with a solemn tenderness. They went away silently as they came, but every heart was full and every eye was dim. There was a great feast for them in the clachan that night, but it was a sombre meeting, and the dominie's cheerful words of advice and comfort formed its gayest feature.

The next day was calm and clear. The women and children were safely on board soon after noon, and about four o'clock the long boats left the shore full of men. Tallisker was in the front one.

As they pulled away he pointed silently to a steep crag on the shingly beach. The chief stood upon it. He waved his bonnet, and then the long-pent feelings of the clan found vent in one long, pitiful Gallic lament, *O hon a rie! O hon a rie!* For a few moments the boats lay at rest, no man was able to lift an oar. Suddenly Tallisker's clear, powerful voice touched the right chord. To the grand, plaintive melody of St. Mary's he began the 125th Psalm,

"They in the Lord that firmly trust
shall be like Sion hill,
Which at no time can be removed,
but standeth ever still.

As round about Jerusalem
the mountains stand alway;
The Lord his folk doth compass so
from henceforth and for aye."

And thus singing together they passed from their old life into a new one.

Colin had been indignant and sorrowful over the whole affair. He and Helen were still young enough to regret the breaking of a tie which bound them to a life whose romance cast something like a glamour over the prosaic one of more modern times. Both would, in the unreasonableness of youthful sympathy, have willingly shared land and gold with their poor kinsmen; but in this respect Tallisker was with the laird.

"It was better," he said, "that the old feudal tie should be severed even by a thousand leagues of ocean. They were men and not bairns, and they could feel their ain feet;" and then he smiled as he remembered how naturally they had taken to self-dependence. For one night, in a conversation with the oldest men, he said, "Crawfords, ye'll hae to consider, as soon as you are gathered together in your new hame, the matter o' a dominie. Your little flock in the wilderness will need a shepherd, and the proper authorities maun be notified."

Then an old gray-headed man had answered firmly, "Dominie, we will elect our ain minister. We hae been heart and soul, every man o' us, with the Relief Kirk; but it is ill living in Rome and striving wi' the pope, and sae for the chief's sake and your sake we hae withheld our testimony. But we ken weel that even in Scotland the Kirk willna hirple along much farther wi' the State on her back, and in the wilderness, please God, we'll plant only a Free Kirk."

The dominie heard the resolve in silence, but to himself he said softly, "*They'll do! They'll do!* They'll be a bit upsetting at first, maybe, but they are queer folk that have nae failings."

A long parting is a great strain; it was a great relief when the ships had sailed quite out of sight. The laird with a light heart now turned to his new plans. No reproachful eyes and unhappy faces were there to damp his ardor. Everything promised well. The coal seam proved to be far richer than had been anticipated, and those expert in such matters said there were undoubted indications of the near presence of iron ore. Great furnaces began to loom up in Crawford's mental vision, and to cast splendid lustres across his future fortunes.

In a month after the departure of the clan, the little clachan of Traquare had greatly changed. Long rows of brick cottages, ugly and monotonous beyond description, had taken the place of the more picturesque sheilings. Men who seemed to measure everything in life with a two-foot rule were making roads and building jetties for coal-smacks to lie at. There was constant influx of strange men and women—men of stunted growth and white faces, and who had an insolent, swaggering air, intolerably vulgar when contrasted with the Doric simplicity and quiet gigantic manhood of the mountain shepherds.

The new workers were, however, mainly Lowland Scotchmen from the mining districts of Ayrshire. The dominie had set himself positively against the introduction of a popish element and an alien people; and in this position he had been warmly upheld by Farquharson and the neighboring proprietors. As it was, there was an antagonism likely to give him full employment. The Gael of the mountains regarded these Lowland "working bodies" with something of that disdain which a rich and cultivated man feels for kin, not only poor, but of contemptible nature and associations. The Gael was poor truly, but he held himself as of gentle birth. He had lived by his sword, or by the care of cattle, hunting, and fishing. Spades, hammers, and looms belonged to people of another kind.

Besides this great social gulf, there were political and religious ones still wider. That these differences were traditional, rather than real, made no distinction. Man have always fought as passionately for an idea as for a fact. But Dominie Tallisker was a man made for great requirements and great trusts. He took in the position with the eye of a general. He watched the two classes passing down the same streets as far apart as if separated by a continent, and he said, with a very positive look on his face, "These men are brethren and they ought to dwell in unity; and, God helping Dugald Tallisker, they will do it, yes, indeed, they will."

CHAPTER IV

In a year after the departure of the clan, the clachans of Crawford and Traquare had lost almost all traces of their old pastoral character. The coal pit had been opened, and great iron furnaces built almost at its mouth. Things had gone well with Crawford; the seam had proved to be unusually rich; and, though the iron had been found, not on his land, but on the extreme edge of Blair, he was quite satisfied. Farquharson had struck hands with him over it, and the Blair iron ore went to the Crawford furnaces to be smelted into pig iron.

Crawford had grown younger in the ardent life he had been leading. No one would have taken him to be fifty-five years old. He hardly thought of the past; he only told himself that he had never been as strong and clear-headed and full of endurance, and that it was probable he had yet nearly half a century before him. What could he not accomplish in that time?

But in every earthly success there is a Mordecai sitting in its gate, and Colin was the uncomfortable feature in the laird's splendid hopes. He had lounged heartlessly to and from the works; the steady, mechanical routine of the new life oppressed him, and he had a thorough dislike for the new order of men with whom he had to come in contact. The young Crawfords had followed him about the hills with an almost canine affection and admiration. To them he was always "the young laird." These sturdy Ayrshire and Galloway men had an old covenanting rebelliousness about them. They disputed even with Dominie Tallisker on church government; they sang Robert Burns' most democratic songs in Crawford's very presence.

Then Colin contrasted them physically with the great fellows he had been accustomed to see striding over the hills, and he despised the forms stunted by working in low seams and unhealthy vapors and the faces white for lack of sunshine and grimy with the all-pervading coal dust. The giants who toiled in leather masks and leather suits before the furnaces suited his taste better. When he watched them moving about amid the din and flames and white-hot metal, he thought of Vulcan and Mount Ætna, and thus threw over them the enchantments of the old Roman age. But in their real life the men disappointed him. They were vulgar and quarrelsome; the poorest Highland gillie had a vein of poetry in his nature, but these iron-workers were painfully matter of fact; they could not even understand a courtesy unless it took the shape of a glass of whiskey.

It was evident to the laird that the new life was very distasteful to his heir; it was evident to the dominie that it was developing the worst sides of Colin's character. Something of this he pointed out to Helen one morning. Helen and he had lately become great friends, indeed, they were co-workers together in all the new labors which the dominie's conscience had set him. The laird had been too busy and anxious about other matters to interfere as yet with this alliance, but he promised himself he would do so very soon. Helen Crawford was not going to nurse sick babies and sew for all the old women in the clachan much longer. And the night-school! This was particularly offensive to him. Some of the new men had gone there, and Crawford was sure he was in some way defrauded by it. He thought it impossible to work in the day and study an hour at night. In some way he suffered by it.

"If they werna in the schoolroom they would be in the Change House," Tallisker had argued.

But the laird thought in his heart that the whiskey would be more to his advantage than the books. Yet he did not like to say so; there was something in the dominie's face which restrained him. He had opened the subject in that blustering way which always hides the white feather somewhere beneath it, and Tallisker had answered with a solemn severity,

"Crawford, it seems to be your wark to mak money; it is mine to save souls. Our roads are sae far apart we arena likely to run against each other, if we dinna try to."

"But I don't like the way you are doing your wark; that is all, dominie."

"Mammon never did like God's ways. There is a vera old disagreement between them. A man has a right to consider his ain welfare, Crawford, but it shouldna be mair than the twa tables o' the law to him."

Now Tallisker was one of those ministers who bear their great commission in their faces. There was something almost imperial about the man when he took his stand by the humblest altar of his duty. Crawford had intended at this very time to speak positively on the subject of his own workers to Tallisker. But when he looked at the dark face, set and solemn and full of an irresistible authority, he was compelled to keep silence. A dim fear that Tallisker would say something to him which would make him uncomfortable crept into his heart. It was better that both the dominie and conscience should be quiet at present.

Still he could not refrain from saying,

"You hae set yoursel' a task you'll ne'er win over, dominie. You could as easy mak Ben-Cruchan cross the valley and sit down by Ben-Appin as mak Gael and Lowlander call each other brothers."

"We are told, Crawford, that mountains may be moved by faith; why not, then, by love? I am a servant o' God. I dinna think it any presumption to expect impossibilities."

Still it must be acknowledged that Tallisker looked on the situation as a difficult one. The new workers to a man disapproved of the Established Church of Scotland. Perhaps of all classes of laborers Scotch colliers are the most theoretically democratic and the most practically indifferent in matters of religion. Every one of them had relief and secession arguments ready for use, and they used them chiefly as an excuse for not attending Tallisker's ministry. When conscience is used as an excuse, or as a weapon for wounding, it is amazing how tender it becomes. It pleased these Lowland workers to assert a religious freedom beyond that of the dominie and the shepherd Gael around them. And if men wish to quarrel, and can give their quarrel a religious basis, they secure a tolerance and a respect which their own characters would not give them. Tallisker might pooh-pooh sectional or political differences, but he was himself far too scrupulous to regard with indifference the smallest theological hesitation.

One day as he was walking up the clachan pondering these things, he noticed before him a Highland shepherd driving a flock to the hills. There was a party of colliers sitting around the Change House; they were the night-gang, and having had their sleep and their breakfast, were now smoking and drinking away the few hours left of their rest. Anything offering the chance of amusement was acceptable, and Jim Armstrong, a saucy, bullying fellow from the Lonsdale mines, who had great confidence in his Cumberland wrestling tricks, thought he saw in the placid indifference of the shepherd a good opportunity for bravado.

"Sawnie, ye needna pass the Change House because we are here. We'll no hurt you, man."

The shepherd was as one who heard not.

Then followed an epithet that no Highlander can hear unmoved, and the man paused and put his hand under his plaid. Tallisker saw the movement and quickened his steps. The word was repeated, with the scornful laugh of the group to enforce it. The shepherd called his dog—

"Keeper, you tak the sheep to the Cruchan corrie, and dinna let are o' them stray."

The dumb creature looked in his face assentingly, and with a sharp bark took the flock charge. Then the shepherd walked up to the group, and Jim Armstrong rose to meet him.

"Nae dirks," said an old man quietly; "tak your hands like men."

Before the speech was over they were clinched in a grasp which meant gigantic strength on one side, and a good deal of practical bruising science on the other. But before there was an opportunity of testing the quality of either the dominie was between the men. He threw them apart like children, and held each of them at arm's length, almost as a father might separate two fighting schoolboys. The group watching could not refrain a shout of enthusiasm, and old Tony Musgrave jumped to his feet and threw his pipe and his cap in the air.

"Dugald," said the dominie to the shepherd, "go your ways to your sheep. I'll hae nae fighting in my parish.

"Jim Armstrong, you thrawart bully you, dinna think you are the only man that kens Cumberland cantrips. I could fling you mysel' before you could tell your own name;" and as if to prove his words, he raised an immense stone, that few men could have lifted, and with apparent ease flung it over his right shoulder. A shout of astonishment greeted the exploit, and Tony Musgrave—whose keen, satirical ill-will had hitherto been Tallisker's greatest annoyance—came frankly forward and said, "Dominie, you are a guid fellow! Will you tak some beer wi' me?"

Tallisker did not hesitate a moment.

"Thank you, Tony. If it be a drink o' good-will, I'll tak it gladly."

But he was not inclined to prolong the scene; the interference had been forced upon him. It had been the only way to stop a quarrel which there would have been no healing if blood had once been shed. Yet he was keenly alive to the dignity of his office, and resumed it in the next moment. Indeed, the drinking of the glass of good-will together was rather a ceremonial than a convivial affair. Perhaps that also was the best. The men were silent and respectful, and for the first time lifted their caps with a hearty courtesy to Tallisker when he left them.

"Weel! Wonders never cease!" said Jim Armstrong scornfully. "To see Tony Musgrave hobnobbing wi' a black-coat! The deil must 'a' had a spasm o' laughing."

"Let the deil laugh," said Tony, with a snap of his grimy fingers. Then, after a moment's pause, he added, "Lads, I heard this morning that the dominie's wheat was spoiling, because he couldna get help to cut it. I laughed when I heard it; I didna ken the man then. I'm going to-morrow to cut the dominie's wheat; which o' you will go wi' me?"

"I!" and "I!" and "I!" was the hearty response; and so next day Traquare saw a strange sight—a dozen colliers in a field of wheat, making a real holiday of cutting the grain and binding the sheaves, so that before the next Sabbath it had all been brought safely home.

CHAPTER V

But during these very days, when the dominie and his parishioners were drawing a step closer to each other, the laird and his son were drifting farther apart. Crawford felt keenly that Colin took no interest in the great enterprises which filled his own life. The fact was, Colin inherited his mother's, and not his father's temperament. The late Lady Crawford had been the daughter of a Zetland Udaller, a pure Scandinavian, a descendant of the old Vikings, and she inherited from them a poetic imagination and a nature dreamy and inert, though capable of rousing itself into fits of courage that could dare the impossible. Colin would have led a forlorn hope or stormed a battery; but the bare ugliness and monotony of his life at the works fretted and worried him.

Tallisker had repeatedly urged a year's foreign travel. But the laird had been much averse to the plan. France, in his opinion, was a hotbed of infidelity; Italy, of popery; Germany, of socialistic and revolutionary doctrines. There was safety only in Scotland. Pondering these things, he resolved that marriage was the proper means to "settle" the lad. So he entered into communication with an old friend respecting his daughter and his daughter's portion; and one night he laid the result before Colin.

Colin was indignant. He wanted to marry no woman, and least of all women, Isabel McLeod.

"She'll hae £50,000!" said the laird sententiously.

"I would not sell myself for £50,000."

"You'd be a vera dear bargain at half the price to any woman, Colin. And you never saw Isabel. She was here when you were in Glasgow. She has the bonniest black e'en in Scotland, and hair like a raven's wing."

"When I marry, sir, I shall marry a woman like my mother: a woman with eyes as blue as heaven, and a face like a rose. I'll go, as you did, to Shetland for her."

"There isna a house there fit for you to take a wife from, Colin, save and except the Earl's ain; and his daughter, the Lady Selina, is near thirty years old."

"There are my second cousins, Helga and Saxa Vedder."

Then the laird was sure in his own heart that Tallisker's advice was best. France and Italy were less to be feared than pretty, portionless cousins. Colin had better travel a year, and he proposed it. It hurt him to see how eagerly his heir accepted the offer. However, if the thing was to be done, it was best done quickly. Letters of credit suitable to the young laird's fortune were prepared, and in less than a month he was ready to begin his travels. It had been agreed that he should remain away one year, and if it seemed desirable, that his stay might even be lengthened to two. But no one dreamed that advantage would be taken of this permission.

"He'll be hamesick ere a twelvemonth, laird," said the dominie; and the laird answered fretfully, "A twelvemonth is a big slice o' life to fling awa in far countries."

The night before Colin left he was walking with his sister on the moor. A sublime tranquillity was in the still September air. The evening crimson hung over the hills like a royal mantle. The old church stood framed in the deepest blue. At that distance the long waves broke without a sound, and the few sails on the horizon looked like white flowers at sea.

"How beautiful is this mansion of our father!" said Helen softly. "One blushes to be caught worrying in it, and yet, Colin, I fear to have you go away."

"Why, my dear?"

"I have a presentiment that we shall meet no more in this life. Nay, do not smile; this strange intelligence of sorrow, this sudden trembling in a soul at rest, is not all a delusion. We shall part to-morrow, Colin. Oh, darling brother, where shall we meet again?"

He looked into the fair, tender face and the eager, questioning eyes, and found himself unable to reply.

"Remember, Colin! I give you a rendezvous in heaven."

He clasped her hand tightly, and they walked on in a silence that Colin remembered often afterwards. Sometimes, in dreams, to the very end of his life, he took again with Helen that last evening walk, and his soul leaned and hearkened after hers. "I give you a rendezvous in heaven!"

In the morning they had a few more words alone. She was standing looking out thoughtfully into the garden. "Are you going to London?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes."

"You will call on Mr. Selwyn?"

"I think so."

"Tell him we remember him—and try to follow, though afar off, the example he sets us."

"Well, you know, Helen, I may not see him. We never were chums. I have often wondered why I asked him here. It was all done in a moment. I had thought of asking Walter Napier, and then I asked Selwyn. I have often thought it would have pleased me better if I had invited Walter."

"Sometimes it is permitted to us to do things for the pleasure of others, rather than our own. I have often thought that God—who foresaw the changes to take place here—sent Mr. Selwyn with a message to Dominie Tallisker. The dominie thinks so too. Then how glad you ought to be that you asked him. He came to prepare for those poor people who as yet were scattered over Ayrshire and Cumberland. And this thought comforts me for you, Colin. God knows just where you are going, dear, and the people you are going to meet, and all the events that will happen to you."

The events and situations of life resemble ocean waves—every one is alike and yet every one is different. It was just so at Crawford Keep after Colin left it. The usual duties of the day were almost as regular as the clock, but little things varied them. There were letters or no letters from Colin; there were little events at the works or in the village; the dominie called or he did not call. Occasionally there were visitors connected with the mines or furnaces, and sometimes there were social evening gatherings of the neighboring young people, or formal state dinners for the magistrates and proprietors who were on terms of intimacy with the laird.

For the first year of Colin's absence, if his letters were not quite satisfactory, they were condoned. It did not please his father that Colin seemed to have settled himself so completely in Rome, among "artists and that kind o' folk," and he was still more angry when Colin declared his intention of staying away another year. Poor father! How he had toiled and planned to aggrandize this only son, who seemed far more delighted with an old coin or an old picture than with the great works which bore his name. In all manner of ways he had made it clear to his family that in the dreamy, sensuous atmosphere of Italian life he remembered the gray earnestness of Scottish life with a kind of terror.

Tallisker said, "Give him his way a little longer, laird. To bring him hame now is no use. People canna thole blue skies for ever; he'll be wanting the moors and the misty corries and the gray clouds ere long." So Colin had another year granted him, and his father added thousand to thousand, and said to his heart wearily many and many a time, "It is all vexation of spirit."

At the end of the second year Crawford wrote a most important letter to his son. There was an opening for the family that might never come again. All arrangements had been made for Colin to enter the coming contest for a seat in Parliament. The Marquis of B— had been spoken to, and Crawford and he had come to an understanding Crawford did not give the particulars of the "understanding," but he told Colin that his "political career was assured." He himself would take care of the works. Political life was open to his son, and if money and influence could put him in the House of Peers, money should not be spared.

The offer was so stupendous, the future it looked forward to so great, Crawford never doubted Colin's proud, acquiescence. That much he owed to a long line of glorious ancestors; it was one of the obligations of noble birth; he would not dare to, neglect it.

Impatiently he waited Colin's answer. Indeed, he felt sure Colin would answer such a call in person. He was disappointed when a letter came; he had not known, till then, how sure he had felt

of seeing his son. And the letter was a simple blow to him. Very respectfully, but very firmly, the proposition was declined. Colin said he knew little of parties and cabals, and was certain, at least, that nothing could induce him to serve under the Marquis of B—. He could not see his obligations to the dead Crawfords as his father did. He considered his life his own. It had come to him with certain tastes, which he meant to improve and gratify, for only in that way was life of any value to him.

The laird laid the letter in Tallisker's hands without a word. He was almost broken-hearted. He had not yet got to that point where money-making for money's sake was enough. Family aggrandizement and political ambition are not the loftiest motives of a man's life, but still they lift money-making a little above the dirty drudgery of mere accumulation. Hitherto Crawford had worked for an object, and the object, at least in his own eyes, had dignified the labor.

In his secret heart he was angry at Colin's calm respectability. A spendthrift prodigal, wasting his substance in riotous living, would have been easier to manage than this young man of æsthetic tastes, whose greatest extravagance was a statuette or a picture. Tallisker, too, was more uneasy than he would confess. He had hoped that Colin would answer his father's summons, because he believed now that the life he was leading was unmaning him. The poetical element in his character was usurping an undue mastery. He wrote to Colin very sternly, and told him plainly that a poetic pantheism was not a whit less sinful than the most vulgar infidelity.

Still he advised the laird to be patient, and by no means to answer Colin's letter in a hurry. But only fixed more firmly the angry father's determination. Colin must come home and fulfil his wish, or he must time remain away until he returned as master. As his son, he would know him no more; as the heir of Crawford, he would receive at intervals such information as pertained to that position. For the old man was just in his anger; it never seemed possible to him to deprive Colin of the right of his heritage. To be the 13th Laird of Crawford was Colin's birthright; he fully recognized his title to the honor, and, as the future head of the house, rendered him a definite respect.

Of course a letter written in such a spirit did no good whatever. Nothing after it could have induced Colin to come home. He wrote and declined to receive even the allowance due to him as heir of Crawford. The letter was perfectly respectful, but cruelly cold and polite, and every word cut the old man like a sword.

For some weeks he really seemed to lose all interest in life. Then the result Tallisker feared was arrived at. He let ambition go, and settled down to the simple toil of accumulation.

CHAPTER VI

But Crawford had not a miser's nature. His house, his name, his children were dearer, after all, to him than gold. Hope springs eternal in the breast; in a little while he had provided himself with a new motive: he would marry Helen to young Farquharson, and endow her so royally that Farquharson would gladly take her name. There should be another house of Crawford of which Helen should be the root.

Helen had been long accustomed to consider Hugh Farquharson as her future husband. The young people, if not very eager lovers, were at least very warm and loyal friends. They had been in no hurry to finish the arrangement. Farquharson was in the Scot's Greys; it was understood that at his marriage he should resign his commission, so, though he greatly admired Helen, he was in no hurry to leave the delights of metropolitan and military life.

But suddenly Crawford became urgent for the fulfilment of the contract, and Helen, seeing how anxious he was, and knowing how sorely Colin had disappointed him, could no longer plead for a delay. And yet a strange sadness fell over her; some inexplicable symptoms as to her health led her to fear she would never be Farquharson's wife; the gay wedding attire that came from Edinburgh filled her with a still sorrow; she could not appropriate any part of it as her own.

One day when the preparations were nearly finished, Tallisker came up to the Keep. Helen saw at once that he was moved by some intense feeling, and there was a red spot on his cheeks which she had been accustomed to associate with the dominie's anger. The laird was sitting placidly smoking, and drinking toddy. He had been telling Helen of the grand house he was going to build on the new estate he had just bought; and he was now calmly considering how to carry out his plans on the most magnificent scale, for he had firmly determined there should be neither Keep nor Castle in the North Country as splendid as the new Crawfords' Home.

He greeted Tallisker with a peculiar kindness, and held his hand almost lovingly. His friendship for the dominie—if he had known it—was a grain of salt in his fast deteriorating life. He did not notice the dominie's stern preoccupation, he was so full of his own new plans. He began at once to lay them before his old friend; he had that very day got the estimates from the Edinburgh architect.

Tallisker looked at them a moment with a gathering anger. Then he pushed them passionately away, saying in a voice that was almost a sob, "I darena look at them, laird; I darena look at them! Do you ken that there are fourteen cases o' typhus in them colliers' cottages you built? Do you remember what Mr. Selwyn said about the right o' laborers to pure air and pure water? I knew he was right then, and yet, God forgive me! I let you tak your ain way. Six little bits o' bairns, twa women, and six o' your pit men! You must awa to Athol instantan for doctors and medicines and brandy and such things as are needfu'. There isna a minute to lose, laird."

Helen had risen while he was speaking with a calm determination that frightened her father. He did not answer Tallisker, he spoke to her: "Where are you going, Helen?"

"Down to the village; I can do something till better help is got."

"Helen Crawford, you'll bide where you are! Sit still, and I'll do whatever Tallisker bids me."

Then he turned angrily to the dominie.

"You are aye bringing me ill tidings. Am I to blame if death comes?"

"Am I my brother's keeper? It's an auld question, laird. The first murderer of a' asked it. I'm bound to say you are to blame. When you gie fever an invite to your cotters' homes, you darena lay the blame on the Almighty. You should hae built as Mr. Selwyn advised."

"Dominie, be quiet. I'm no a bairn, to be hectored o'er in this way. Say what I must do and I'll do it—anything in reason—only Helen. I'll no hae her leave the Keep; that's as sure as deathe. Sit down, Helen. Send a' the wine and dainties you like to, but don't you stir a foot o'er the threshold."

His anger was, in its way, as authoritative as the dominie's. Helen did as she was bid, more especially as Tallisker in this seconded the laird.

"There is naething she could do in the village that some old crone could not do better."

It was a bitterly annoying interruption to Crawford's pleasant dreams and plans. He got up and went over to the works. He found things very bad there. Three more of the men had left sick, and there was an unusual depression in the village. The next day the tidings were worse. He foresaw that he would have to work the men half time, and there had never been so many large and peremptory orders on hand. It was all very unfortunate to him.

Tallisker's self-reproaches were his own; he resented them, even while he acknowledged their truth. He wished he had built as Selwyn advised; he wished Tallisker had urged him more. It was not likely he would have listened to any urging, but it soothed him to think he would. And he greatly aggravated the dominie's trouble by saying,

"Why did ye na mak me do right, Tallisker? You should hae been mair determined wi' me, dominie."

During the next six weeks the dominie's efforts were almost superhuman. He saw every cottage whitewashed; he was nurse and doctor and cook. The laird saw him carrying wailing babies and holding raving men in his strong arms. He watched over the sick till the last ray of hope fled; he buried them tenderly when all was over. The splendor of the man's humanity had never shown itself until it stood erect and feared not, while the pestilence that walked in darkness and the destruction that wasted at noon-day dogged his every step.

The laird, too, tried to do his duty. Plenty of people are willing to play the Samaritan without the oil and the twopence, but that was not Crawford's way. Tallisker's outspoken blame had really made him tremble at his new responsibilities; he had put his hand liberally in his pocket to aid the sufferers. Perhaps at the foundation of all lay one haunting thought—Helen! If he did what he could for others, Helen would safer. He never audibly admitted that Helen was in any danger, but—but—if there should be danger, he was, he hoped, paying a ransom for her safety.

In six weeks the epidemic appeared to have spent itself. There was a talk of resuming full hours at the works. Twenty new hands had been sent for to fill vacant places. Still there was a shadow on the dominie's face, and he knew himself there was a shadow on his heart. Was it the still solemnity of death in which he had lately lived so much? Or was it the shadow of a coming instead of a departing sorrow?

One afternoon he thought he would go and sit with Helen a little while. During his close intimacy with the colliers he had learned many things which would change his methods of working for their welfare; and of these changes he wished to speak with Helen. She was just going for a walk on the moor, and he went with her. It was on such a September evening she had walked last with Colin. As they sauntered slowly, almost solemnly home, she remembered it. Some impulse far beyond her control or understanding urged her to say, "Dominie, when I am gone I leave Colin to you."

He looked at her with a sudden enlightenment. Her face had for a moment a far-away death-like predestination over it. His heart sank like lead as he looked at her.

"Are you ill, Helen?"

"I have not been well for two weeks."

He felt her hands; they were burning with fever.

"Let us go home," she said, and then she turned and gave one long, mournful look at the mountains and the sea and the great stretch of moorland. Tallisker knew in his heart she was bidding farewell to them. He had no word to say. There are moods of the soul beyond all human intermeddling.

The silence was broken by Helen. She pointed to the mountains. "How steadfast they are, how familiar with forgotten years! How small we are beside them!"

"I don't think so," said Tallisker stoutly. "Mountains are naething to men. How small is Sinai when the man Moses stands upon it!"

Then they were at the Keep garden. Helen pulled a handful of white and golden asters, and the laird, who had seen them coming, opened the door wide to welcome them. Alas! Alas! Though he saw it not, death entered with them. At midnight there was the old, old cry of despair and anguish, the hurrying for help, where no help was of avail, the desolation of a terror creeping hour by hour closer to the hearthstone.

The laird was stricken with a stony grief which was deaf to all consolation. He wandered up and down wringing his hands, and crying out at intervals like a man in mortal agony. Helen lay in a stupor while the fever burned her young life away. She muttered constantly the word "Colin;" and Tallisker, though he had no hope that Colin would ever reach his sister, wrote for the young laird.

Just before the last she became clearly, almost radiantly conscious. She would be alone with her father, and the old man, struggling bravely with his grief, knelt down beside her. She whispered to him that there was a paper in the jewel-box on her table. He went and got it. It was a tiny scrap folded crosswise. "Read it, father, when I am beyond all pain and grief. I shall trust you, dear." He could only bow his head upon her hands and weep.

"Tallisker!" she whispered, and he rose softly and called him. The two men stood together by her side.

"Is it well, my daughter?" said the dominie, with a tone of tender triumph in his voice. "You fear not, Helen, the bonds of death?"

"I trust in those pierced hands which have broken the bonds of death.

Oh! the unspeakable riches!"

These were her last words. Tallisker prayed softly as the mystical gray shadow stole over the fair, tranquil face. It was soon all over.

"She had outsoared the shadow of our night,
And that unrest which men misname delight."

The bridal robes were folded away, the bridegroom went back to his regiment, the heartsore father tried to take up his life again. But it seemed to him to have been broken in two by the blow; and besides this, there was a little strip of paper which lay like a load upon his heart. It was the paper he had taken from Helen's dying fingers, and it contained her last request:

"Father, dear, dear father, whatever you intended to give me—I pray you—give it to God's poor.

"HELEN."

CHAPTER VII

The dominie had felt certain that Colin would answer his letter in person, but after a long silence he received it back again. Colin had left Rome, and left no trace behind him. The laird knew that Tallisker had written, and he too had been hoping and expecting. But he received the news of his son's disappearance without remark. Life for some time was a dreary weight to him, he scarce felt as if he could lift it again. Hope after hope had failed him. He had longed so to be a rich man, had God in his anger granted him his wish? And was no other thing to prosper with him? All the same he clung to his gold with a deeper affection. When all other vices are old avarice is still young. As ambition and other motives died out, avarice usurped their places, and Tallisker saw with a feeling half angry, and half pitiful, the laird's life dwindling down to this most contemptible of all aims. He kept his duty as proprietor constantly before the laird, but he no longer seemed to care that people should say, "Crawford's men have the best laborers' cottages in Scotland."

"I hae made up my mind, Tallisker," said fretfully, "the warld thinks more o' the who mak money than o' those who gie it awa." Certainly this change was not a sudden one; for two years after Helen's death it was coming slowly forward, yet there were often times when Tallisker hoped that it was but a temptation, and would be finally conquered. Men do not lose the noble savor of humanity in a moment. Even on the downward road good angels wait anxiously, and whisper in every better moment to the lapsing soul, "Return!"

But there was a seed of bitterness in Crawford's heart, that was poisoning the man's spiritual life—a little bit of paper, yet it lay like a great stone over his noblest feelings, and sealed them up as in a sepulchre. Oh, if some angel would come and roll it away! He had never told the dominie of Helen's bequest. He did not dare to destroy the slip of paper, but he hid it in the most secret drawer of his secretary. He told himself that it was only a dying sentiment in Helen to wish it, and that it would be a foolish superstition in him to regard it. Perhaps in those last moments she had not understood what she was asking.

For a little while he found relief in this suggestion; then he remembered that the request must have been dictated before the fever had conquered her strength or judgment. The words were clearly written in Helen's neat, precise manner; there was not a hesitating line in the whole. She had evidently written it with care and consideration. No one could tell how that slip of paper haunted him. Even in the darkness of its secret hiding-place his spiritual eyes saw it clearly day and night.

To give to the poor all he had intended to give to Helen! He could not! He could not! He could not do it! Helen could not have known what she was asking. He had meant, in one way or another, to give her, as the founder of the new line of Crawfords, at least one hundred thousand pounds. Was it reasonable to scatter hither and yon such a large sum, earned, as he told himself pitifully, "by his ain wisdom and enterprise!"

The dominie knew nothing of this terrible struggle going on ever in the man's soul who sat by his side. He saw that Crawford was irritable and moody, but he laid the blame of it on Colin. Oh, if the lad would only write, he would go himself and bring him back to his father, though he should have to seek him at the ends of the earth. But four years passed away, and the prodigal sent no backward, homeward sign. Every night, then, the laird looked a moment into the dominie's face, and always the dominie shook his head. Ah, life has silences that are far more pathetic than death's.

One night Crawford said, almost in a whisper,

"He'll be dead, Tallisker."

And Tallisker answered promptly,

"He'll come hame, laird."

No other words about Colin passed between the two men in four years. But destiny loves surprises. One night Tallisker laid a letter on the table.

"It is for you, laird; read it."

It was a singular letter to come after so long a silence, and the laird's anger was almost excusable.

"Listen, Tallisker; did e'er you hear the like?"

"DEAR FATHER: I want, for a very laudable purpose, £4,000. It is not for myself in any way. If you will let me have it, I will trouble you with the proper explanations. If not, they will not be necessary. I have heard that you are well. I pray God to continue his mercy to you.

"Your dutiful son,

"COLIN CRAWFORD."

"Laudable purpose!" cried the unhappy father, in a passion. "The lad is altogether too laudable. The letter is an insult, Tallisker. I'll ne'er forgive him for it. Oh, what a miserable father I am!"

And the dominie was moved to tears at the sight of his old friend's bitter anguish.

Still he asserted that Colin had meant it to be a kind letter.

"Dinna tak want o' sense for want o' affection laird. The lad is a conceited prig. He's set up wi' himsel' about something he is going to do. Let him hae the money. I would show him you can gie as grandly as he can ask loftily."

And, somehow, the idea pleased the laird. It was something that Colin had been obliged to ask him for money at all. He sat down and wrote out a check for the amount. Then he enclosed it with these words:

"SON COLIN CRAWFORD: I send you what you desire. I am glad your prospects are sae laudable; maybe it may enter your heart, some day, to consider it laudable to keep the Fifth Command. Your sister is dead. Life is lonely, but I thole it. I want nae explanations.

"Your father,

"ALEX. CRAWFORD."

"What's the address, Tallisker?"

"Regent's Place, London."

The answer arrived in due time. It was as proper as a letter could be. Colin said he was just leaving for America, but did not expect to be more than six months there. But he never said a word about coming to Crawford. Tallisker was downright angry at the young man. It was true his father had told him he did not wish to see him again, but that had been said under a keen sense of family wrong and of bitter disappointment. Colin ought to have taken his father's ready response to his request as an overture of reconciliation. For a moment he was provoked with both of them.

"You are a dour lot, you Crawfords; ane o' you is prouder than the ither."

"The Crawfords are as God made them, dominie."

"And some o' them a little warse."

Yet, after all, it was Colin Tallisker was really angry at. For the present he had to let his anger lie by. Colin had gone, and given him no address in America.

"He is feared I will be telling him his duty, and when he comes back that is what I shall do, if I go to London to mak him hear me."

For a moment the laird looked hopefully into the dominie's face, but the hope was yet so far off he could not grasp it. Yet, in a dim, unacknowledged way it influenced him. He returned to his money-making with renewed vigor. It was evident he had let the hope of Colin's return steal into his heart. And the giving of that £4,000 Tallisker considered almost a sign of grace. It had not been given from any particularly noble motive; but any motive, not sinful, roused in opposition to simple avarice, was a gain. He was quite determined now to find Colin as soon as he returned from America.

In rather less than six months there were a few lines from Colin, saying that the money sent had been applied to the proper purpose, and had nobly fulfilled it. The laird had said he wanted no explanations, and Colin gave him none.

Tallisker read the letter with a half smile.

"He is just the maist contrary, conceited young man I e'er heard tell o'. Laird, as he wont come to us, I am going to him."

The laird said nothing. Any grief is better than a grief not sure. It would be a relief to know all, even if that "all" were painful.

CHAPTER VIII

Tallisker was a man as quick in action as in resolve; the next night he left for London, it was no light journey in those days for a man of his years, and who had never in all his life been farther away from Perthshire than Edinburgh. But he feared nothing. He was going into the wilderness after his own stray sheep, and he had a conviction that any path of duty is a safe path. He said little to any one. The people looked strangely on him. He almost fancied himself to be Christian going through Vanity Fair.

He went first to Colin's old address in Regent's Place. He did not expect to find him there, but it might lead him to the right place. Number 34 Regent's Place proved to be a very grand house. As he went up to the door, an open carriage, containing a lady and a child, left it. A man dressed in the Crawford tartan opened the door.

"Crawford?" inquired Tallisker, "is he at home?"

"Yes, he is at home;" and the servant ushered him into, a carefully-shaded room, where marble statues gleamed in dusk corners and great flowering plants made the air fresh and cool. It was the first time Tallisker had ever seen a calla lily and he looked with wonder and delight at the gleaming flowers. And somehow he thought of Helen. Colin sat in a great leathern chair reading. He did not lift his head until the door closed and he was sensible the servant had left some one behind. Then for a moment he could hardly realize who it was; but when he did, he came forward with a glad cry.

"Dominie! O Tallisker!"

"Just so, Colin, my dear lad. O Colin, you are the warst man I ever kenned. You had a good share o' original sin to start wi', but what wi' pride and self-will and ill-will, the old trouble is sairly increased."

Colin smiled gravely. "I think you misjudge me, dominie." Then refreshments were sent for, and the two men sat down for a long mutual confidence.

Colin's life had not been uneventful. He told it frankly, without reserve and without pride. When he quarrelled with his father about entering Parliament, he left Rome at once, and went to Canada. He had some idea of joining his lot with his own people there. But he found them in a state of suffering destitution. They had been unfortunate in their choice of location, and were enduring an existence barer than the one they had left, without any of its redeeming features. Colin gave them all he had, and left them with promises of future aid.

Then he went to New York. When he arrived, there was an intense excitement over the struggle then going on in the little republic of Texas. He found out something about the country; as for the struggle, it was the old struggle of freedom against papal and priestly dominion. That was a quarrel for which Scotchmen have always been ready to draw the sword. It was Scotland's old quarrel in the New World, and Colin went into it heart and soul. His reward had been an immense tract of the noble rolling Colorado prairie. Then he determined to bring the Crawfords down, and plant them in this garden of the Lord. It was for this end he had written to his father for £4,000. This sum had sufficed to transplant them to their new home, and give them a start. He had left them happy and contented, and felt now that in this matter he had absolved his conscience of all wrong.

"But you ought to hae told the laird. It was vera ill-considered. It was his affair more than yours. I like the thing you did, Colin, but I hate the way you did it. One shouldna be selfish even in a good wark."

"It was the laird's own fault; he would not let me explain."

"Colin, are you married?"

"Yes. I married a Boston lady. I have a son three years old. My wife was in Texas with me. She had a large fortune of her own."

"You are a maist respectable man, Colin, but I dinna like it at all."

What are you doing wi' your time? This grand house costs something."

"I am an artist—a successful one, if that is not also against me."

"Your father would think sae. Oh, my dear lad, you hae gane far astray from the old Crawford ways."

"I cannot help that, dominie. I must live according to my light. I am sorry about father."

Then the dominie in the most forcible manner painted the old laird's hopes and cruel disappointments. There were tears in Colin's eyes as he reasoned with him. And at this point his own son came into the room. Perhaps for the first time Colin looked at the lad as the future heir of Crawford. A strange thrill of family and national pride stirred his heart. He threw the little fellow shoulder high, and in that moment regretted that he had flung away the child's chance of being Earl of Crawford. He understood then something of the anger and suffering his father had endured, and he put the boy down very solemnly. For if Colin was anything, he was just; if his father had been his bitterest enemy, he would, at this moment, have acknowledged his own aggravation.

Then Mrs. Crawford came in. She had heard all about the dominie, and she met him like a daughter. Colin had kept his word. This fair, sunny-haired, blue-eyed woman was the wife he had dreamed about; and Tallisker told him he had at any rate done right in that matter. "The bonnie little Republican," as he called her, queened it over the dominie from the first hour of their acquaintance.

He stayed a week in London, and during it visited Colin's studio. He went there at Colin's urgent request, but with evident reluctance. A studio to the simple dominie had almost the same worldly flavor as a theatre. He had many misgivings as they went down Pall Mall, but he was soon reassured. There was a singular air of repose and quiet in the large, cool room. And the first picture he cast his eyes upon reconciled him to Colin's most un-Crawford-like taste.

It was "The Farewell of the Emigrant Clan." The dominie's knees shook, and he turned pale with emotion. How had Colin reproduced that scene, and not only reproduced but idealized it! There were the gray sea and the gray sky, and the gray granite boulder rocks on which the chief stood, the waiting ships, and the loaded boats, and he himself in the prow of the foremost one. He almost felt the dear old hymn thrilling through the still room. In some way, too, Colin had grasped the grandest points of his father's character. In this picture the man's splendid physical beauty seemed in some mysterious way to give assurance of an equally splendid spiritual nature.

"If this is making pictures, Colin, I'll no say but what you could paint a sermon, my dear lad. I hae ne'er seen a picture before." Then he turned to another, and his swarthy face glowed with an intense emotion. There was a sudden sense of tightening in his throat, and he put his hand up and slowly raised his hat. It was Prince Charlie entering Edinburgh. The handsome, unfortunate youth rode bareheaded amid the Gordons and the Murrays and a hundred Highland noblemen. The women had their children shoulder high to see him, the citizens, bonnets up, were pressing up to his bridle-rein. It stirred Tallisker like a peal of trumpets. With the tears streaming down his glowing face, he cried out,

"How daur ye, sir! You are just the warst rebel between the seas! King George ought to hang you up at Carlisle-gate. And this is painting! This is artist's wark! And you choose your subjects wisely, Colin: it is a gift the angels might be proud o'." He lingered long in the room, and when he left it, "Prince Charlie" and the "Clan's Farewell" were his own. They were to go back with him to the manse at Crawford.

CHAPTER IX

It was, upon the whole, a wonderful week to Tallisker; he returned home with the determination that the laird must recall his banished. He had tried to induce Colin to condone all past grievances, but Colin had, perhaps wisely, said that he could not go back upon a momentary impulse. The laird must know all, and accept him just as he was. He had once been requested not to come home unless he came prepared to enter into political life. He had refused the alternative then, and he should refuse it again. The laird must understand these things, or the quarrel would probably be renewed, perhaps aggravated.

And Tallisker thought that, in this respect, Colin was right. He would at any rate hide nothing from the laird, he should know all; and really he thought he ought to be very grateful that the "all" was so much better than might have been.

The laird was not glad. A son brought down to eat the husk of evil ways, poor, sick, suppliant, would have found a far readier welcome. He would gladly have gone to meet Colin, even while he was yet a great way off, only he wanted Colin to be weary and footsore and utterly dependent on his love. He heard with a grim silence Tallisker's description of the house in Regent's Place, with its flowers and books, its statues, pictures, and conservatory. When Tallisker told him of the condition of the Crawfords in Canada, he was greatly moved. He was interested and pleased with the Texan struggle. He knew nothing of Texas, had never heard of the country, but Mexicans, Spaniards, and the Inquisition were one in his mind.

"That at least was Crawford-like," he said warmly, when told of Colin's part in the struggle.

But the subsequent settlement of the clan there hurt him terribly. "He should hae told me. He shouldna hae minded what I said in such a case. I had a right to know. Colin has used me vera hardly about this. Has he not, Tallisker?"

"Yes, laird, Colin was vera wrong there. He knows it now."

"What is he doing in such a grand house? How does he live?"

"He is an artist—a vera great one, I should say."

"He paints pictures for a living! He! A Crawford o' Traquare! I'll no believe it, Tallisker."

"There's naught to fret about, laird. You'll ken that some day. Then his wife had money."

"His wife! Sae he is married. That is o' a piece wi' the rest. Wha is she?"

"He married an American—a Boston lady."

Then the laird's passion was no longer controllable, and he said some things the dominie was very angry at.

"Laird," he answered, "Mrs. Colin Crawford is my friend. You'll no daur to speak any way but respectful o' her in my presence. She is as good as any Crawford that ever trod the heather. She came o' the English Hampdens. Whar will ye get better blood than that?"

"No Hampdens that ever lived—"

"Whist! Whist, laird! The Crawfords are like a' ither folk; they have twa legs and twa hands."

"He should hae married a Scots lass, though she had carried a milking-pail."

"Laird, let me tell you there will be nae special heaven for the Gael. They that want to go to heaven by themsel's arena likely to win there at a'. You may as well learn to live with ither folk here; you'll hae to do it to a' eternity."

"If I get to heaven, Dominie Tallisker, I'll hae special graces for the place. I'm no going to put mysel' in a blazing passion for you to-night. Yon London woman has bewitched you. She's wanting to come to the Keep, I'll warrant."

"If ye saw the hame she has you wouldna warrant your ain word a minute longer, laird. And I'm sure I dinna see what she would want to hae twa Crawfords to guide for. One is mair than enough whiles. It's a wonder to me how good women put up wi' us at all!"

"*Humff!*" said the laird scornfully. "Too many words on a spoiled subject."

"I must say one mair, though. There is a little lad, a bonnie, brave, bit fellow, your ain grandson, Crawford."

"An American Crawford!" And the laird laughed bitterly. "A foreigner! an alien! a Crawford born in England! Guid-night, Tallisker! We'll drop the subject, an it please you."

Tallisker let it drop. He had never expected the laird to give in at the first cry of "Surrender." But he reflected that the winter was coming, and that its long nights would give plenty of time for thought and plenty of opportunities for further advocacy. He wrote constantly to Colin and his wife, perhaps oftener to Mrs. Crawford than to the young laird, for she was a woman of great tact and many resources, and Tallisker believed in her.

Crawford had said a bitter word about her coming to the Keep, and Tallisker could not help thinking what a blessing she would be there; for one of Crawford's great troubles now was the wretchedness of his household arrangements. The dainty cleanliness and order which had ruled it during Helen's life were quite departed. The garden was neglected, and all was disorder and discomfort. Now it is really wonderful how much of the solid comfort of life depends upon a well-arranged home, and the home must depend upon some woman. Men may mar the happiness of a household, but they cannot make it. Women are the happiness makers. The laird never thought of it in this light, but he did know that he was very uncomfortable.

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