Geordie's Tryst

A Tale of Scottish Life

by Janet Milne Rae, 1844-1933

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Illustrations

Illustration:
Geordie's Herding Ended

Chapter I

Grace Campbell.

It was a chilly Scotch spring day. The afternoon sun glistened with fitful, feeble rays on the windows of the old house of Kirklands, and unpleasant little gusts of east wind came eddying round its ancient gables, and sweeping along its broad walks and shrubberies, sending a chill to the hearts of all the young green things that were struggling into life.

On the time-worn steps of the grey mansion there stood a girl, cloaked and bonneted for a walk, notwithstanding the uninviting weather.

"It's a fule's errand, I assure ye, Miss Grace, and on such an afternoon, too. I've been askin' at old Adam the gardener, and he says there isna one o' the kind left worth mindin' in all the valley o' Kirklands. So do not go wanderin' on such an errand in this bitter wind, missy."

The speaker was an old woman, standing in the doorway, glancing with an expression of kindly anxiety towards the girl, who leant on one of the carved griffins of the old stone railing.

Grace had been looking at the speaker with troubled eyes as she listened to her remonstrance, and now she said, meditatively, "Does old Adam really say so,

Margery?" Then with a quick gesture she turned to go down the steps, adding cheerily, "Well, there's no harm in trying, and as for the wind, that doesn't matter a bit. It's what Walter would call a nice breezy day. I'm really going, nursie. Shut the door, and keep your old self warm. I shall be home again by the time aunt has finished her afternoon's sleep." And Grace turned quickly away, not in the direction of the sheltered elm avenue, but across the park, by the path which led most quickly beyond the grounds. Presently she slackened her pace, and turning for a moment she glanced rather ruefully towards the high walls of the old garden, as if prudence dictated that she should seek fuller information there, before she set out on this search, which she had planned that afternoon. The old nurse's words on the subject seemed to have sent a chilling gust to her heart, harder to bear than the bitter spring wind. Old Adam certainly knew the countryside better than anybody else, she pondered, and he seemed to have given it as his decision that she would not find her search successful.

Was it a rare plant growing in the valley that Grace was in search of? Then, surely, the gardener was right; she should wait till the warm sunshine came, and the south winds wafted sweet scents about, leading to where the pleasant flowers grow among the cozy moss. Or did she mean to go to the green velvety haughs of the winding river to get her fishing-rod and tackle into working order at the little boat-house, and try to tempt some unwary trout to eat his last supper, as she and her brother Walter used to do in sunny summer evenings long ago?

These had been very pleasant days, and their lingering memories came hovering round Grace as she stood once again among the familiar haunts, after an absence of years. Echoes of merry ringing tones, in which her own mingled, seemed to resound through the wooded paths, where only the parching wind whistled shrilly to-day, and a boyish voice seemed still to call impatiently under the lozenge-paned window of the old school-room, "Gracie, Gracie, are you not done with lessons yet? Do come out and play." And how dreary "Noel and Chapsal" used to grow all of a sudden when that invitation came, and with what relentless slowness the hands of the old clock dragged through the lesson-hour still to run.

But the quaint old window has the shutters on it now, and the eager face that used to seek his caged playmate through its bars is looking out on new lands from his wandering home at sea. The little girl, too, who used to sit in the dim school-room seems to hear other voices calling to her this afternoon.

And while Grace stands hesitating whether, after all, it might be wise to go into the garden to hear what old Adam has to say before she proceeded to the high road, we shall try to find what earnest quest sent her out this afternoon, in spite of her old nurse's remonstrances and the east wind.

Grace Campbell's father and mother died when she was very young, and since then her home had been with her aunt. For the last few years Miss Hume had been so infirm that she did not feel able to undertake the journey to Kirklands, a small property in the north of Scotland, which she inherited from her father. Her winter home was Edinburgh, and Miss Hume for some years had only ventured on a short journey to the nearest watering-place, while her country home stood silent and deserted, with only the ancient gardener and his wife wandering about through the darkened rooms and the old garden, with its laden fruit-trees and its flowers run to seed. But, to Grace's great delight, her aunt had announced some

months before that if she felt strong enough for the journey, she meant to go to Kirklands early in the spring. It seemed as if in her fading autumnal time she longed to see the familiar woods and dells of her childhood's home grow green again with returning life. So the darkened rooms had been opened to the sun again, and on the day before our story begins, some of the former inmates had taken possession of them.

The three years during which Grace had been absent from Kirklands had proved very eventful to her in many ways. There had been some changes in her outer life. Walter, her only brother and playmate, had left home to go to sea. They had only had one passing visit from him since, so changed in his midshipman's dress, with his broadened shoulders and bronzed face, and so full of sailor life and talk, that his playmate had hardly composure of mind to discover till he was gone that the same loving heart still beat under the blue dress and bright buttons. And while she thought of him with a new pride, she felt an undercurrent of sadness in the consciousness that the pleasant threads of daily intercourse had been broken, and the old childish playfellow had passed away.

But as the golden gate of childhood thus closed on Grace Campbell, another gate opened for her which led to pleasant places. It had, indeed, been waiting open for her ever since she came into the world, though she had often passed it by unheeded. But at last there came to Grace a glimpse of the shining light which still guides the way of seeking souls to "yonder wicket gate." She began to feel an intense longing to enter there and begin that new life to which it leads. She knocked, and found that it was open for her, and entering there she met the gracious Guide who had beckoned her to come, whispering in the silence of her heart, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." Not long after Grace had begun to walk in this path, an event happened which proved to her like the visit to the "Interpreter's House" in the Pilgrim's story; but in order to explain its full eventfulness, we must go back to tell of earlier days in her aunt's home.

On Sunday mornings Grace usually drove with her aunt to church in decorous state. When Walter was at home he made one of the carriage party, though generally under protest, declaring that it would be "ever so much jollier to walk than to be bowled along in that horrid old rumble," as he used irreverently to designate his aunt's rather antique chariot. When they arrived at church, the children followed their aunt's slow steps to one of the pews in the gallery, where Miss Hume used to take the precautionary measure of separating them by sending Grace to the top of the seat, and placing herself between the vivacious Walter and his playmate. Notwithstanding this precaution, they generally contrived to find comfortable recreative resources during the service, bringing all their inventive energy to bear on creating new diversions as each Sunday came round. There was always their Aunt Hume's fur cloak to stroke the wrong way, if there was nothing more diverting within reach; had it only been the cat, whose sentiments regarding a like treatment of her fur were too well known to Walter, he felt that the pleasure would have been greater. Sometimes, indeed, the amusements were of a strictly mental nature, conducted in the "chambers of imagery." Miss Hume would feel gratified by the stillness of posture and the earnest gaze in her nephew's eyes. They were certainly not fixed directly on the preacher, but surely the boy must be listening, or he would never be so quiet. Grace, however, was in the secret, and

knew better. Walter had confided to her that he had got such "a jolly make-believe" to think about in church. The great chandelier which hung from the centre of the church ceiling, with its poles, and chains, and brackets, was transformed in his imagination to a ship's mast and rigging, where he climbed and swung, and performed marvellous feats, also in imagination, be it understood. And so it happened that Grace could guess where her brother's thoughts were when he sat gazing dreamily at the huge gilded chandelier of the city church.

Other imaginings had sometimes grown round it for Grace when it was all lit up in the short winter days at afternoon service, and queer lights and shadows fell on the gilded cherubs that decorated it, till their wings seemed to move and hover over the heads of the congregation. To Grace's childish mind they had been the embodiment of angels ever since she could remember; and even long after childish things were put away there remained a strange link between her conception of angelic beings and those burnished cherubs whose serene, shining faces looked down benignantly over the drowsy congregation on dark winter afternoons.

But all these imaginings certainly came under the catalogue of "wandering thoughts," from which the old minister always prayed at the opening of the service that they might be delivered. So it is to be feared that the sermon had not even the chance of the wayside seed in the parable of sinking into the children's hearts. The words of her aunt's old minister had as yet proved little more than an outside sound to Grace, though she was in the habit of listening more observantly than her brother. But there came a day when, amidst those familiar surroundings, with the molten cherubs looking serenely down on her, she heard words which made her heart burn within her, and kindled a flame which lasted as long as life.

It was on a Sunday afternoon in November, not long after Walter left. Miss Hume was ailing, and unable to go to church, so it was arranged that Margery should accompany Grace. The old nurse attended the same church, and Grace had been in the habit of going under her wing when her aunt was obliged to remain at home. The walk to church through the crowded streets was a pleasant change, and Grace was in high spirits when she ensconced herself at the top of Margery's seat—which was a much better observatory than her aunt's pew—where every thing could be seen that was interesting and amusing within the four walls. Besides, there were small amenities connected with a seat in nurse's pew which had great attractions for Grace when she was a little girl, and had still a lingering charm for her. In the pew behind there sat a worthy couple, friends of Margery, who exchanged friendly salutations with her on Sunday, always including a kindly nod of recognition to her charges if they happened to be with her. Then, at a certain juncture in the service, the worthy tinsmith, for that was his calling, would hand across the book-board his ancient silver snuff-box, of the contents of which he himself partook freely and noisily. Of course, Margery only used it politely, after the manner of a scent-bottle; and then Grace came in for her turn of it, with a warning glance from nurse to beware of staining her hat-strings, or any other serious effects from the odorous powder. If Walter happened to be invited to enjoy the privilege, he always contrived to secrete a deposit of the snuff between his finger and thumb, being most anxious to imitate the tinsmith's accomplishment. He was, however, afraid to make his first essay in church, in case of sneezing symptoms, and before he had a chance of a quiet moment to make the experiment

when they left the pew, he used generally to be caught by Margery, and summoned to put on his glove like a gentleman, and any resistance was sure to end in the discovery and loss of the precious pinch of snuff. Then the tinsmith's wife had also her own congenial resources for comfort during service, which she delighted to share with her neighbours. Grace used to receive a little tap on the shoulder, and, on looking round, a box of peppermint lozenges lay waiting her in the old woman's fat palm. These were very homely little interchanges of friendship, but they made part of the happy childish world to Grace, and years after, when the old pew knew her no more, and she asked admittance to it as a stranger, she glanced round in the vain hope of catching a glimpse of the broad, shining, kindly faces of the old couple, feeling that to see them in their place would bring back many pleasanter bygone associations than snuff and peppermint lozenges.

On this Sunday afternoon Grace perceived that there was something out of the ordinary routine in prospect. The pews were filling more quickly than they usually did. Strangers were gathering in the passage, and a general flutter of excitement and expectation seemed everywhere to prevail.

"What is going to happen, I wonder, Margery?" whispered Grace, impatiently; and presently the tinsmith leant across the book-board and kindly volunteered the information that they were going to have a "strange minister the night, and a special collection for some new-fangled thing."

And then Grace turned towards the pulpit in time to see the "strange minister," who had just entered it. He was a tall man, of a stately though easy presence, with grace and life in every gesture. As she looked at him Grace Campbell was reminded of an historical scene, a picture of which hung in the old hall at Kirklands, of a mixed group of Cavaliers and Puritans. This preacher seemed in his appearance curiously to combine the varied characteristics of both the types of men in these portraits. That graceful flexibility of tone and movement, the high forehead and waving locks, surely belong to the gallant old Cavalier, but there is something of the stern Puritan too. The resoluteness of the firm though mobile mouth betokens a strength of moral purpose, which does not belong to the caste of the mere court gentleman; about those delicately-cut nostrils there dwells a possibility of quivering indignation, and in the eyes that are looking broodingly down on the congregation true pathos and keen humour are strangely blended.

Presently the deep, flexible voice, which had the soul of music in its tones, re-echoed through the church as he called the people to worship God, and read some verses of an old psalm. Familiar as the words were to Grace, they seemed as he read them to have a new meaning, to be no longer seven verses with queer, out-of-the-way expressions, that had cost her trouble to learn as a Sunday evening's task, but a beautiful, real prayer to a God that was listening, and would hear, as the "strange minister's" voice pealed out,

"*Lord, bless and pity us,*
Shine on us with Thy face;
That the earth Thy way, and nations all
May know Thy saving grace."

And when the sermon came, and the preacher began to talk in thrilling words of that saving health which the Great Healer of souls had died to bring to all nations, Grace felt the reality of those unseen, eternal things of which he spoke as she had never done before. Then there were interspersed with those faithful, burning words for God beautiful illustrations from nature, which fascinated the little girl's imagination, as she sat gazing, not at the gilded cherubs to-night, but on the benignant, earnest face of the speaker. He surely must have been a sailor, or he could never have known so well what a storm at sea was like, she thought, as she listened, spell-bound, feeling as if she was looking out on the angry sea, with the helpless wrecking ships tossing upon the waves; but then in another moment he took them into the thick of some ancient battle, where the brave-hearted "nobly conquering lived or conquering died;" or it was to some fair, pastoral scene, and then the preacher seemed to know so well all the delights of heathery hills and pleasant mossy glades, that Grace thought he certainly must have been at Kirklands and wandered among its woods and braes. And into each of his wonderful photographs he wove many holy, stirring thoughts of God, and of those "ways" of his that may be known upon the earth, of which they had been singing.

Presently the preacher began to talk of what the worthy tinsmith had called the "new-fangled scheme," for which, he said, he stood there to plead that evening. He had come to ask help for the little outcast city children. It was before the days when School Boards were born or thought of that this gallant-hearted man sought to move the feelings and rouse the consciences of men on behalf of those who seemed to have no helper. It was for aid to establish schools for those destitute children, where they might be clothed and fed as well as educated, that he went on to plead. Grace sat entranced, listening to the preacher, as with the "flaming swords of living words, he fought for the poor and weak." Never before in the course of her narrow, sheltered child-life had she, even in imagination, been brought face to face with the manifold wants and woes of her poorer brothers and sisters, or understood the service to which the Son of Man summons all his faithful followers: "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

It seemed to Grace, when the preacher had ceased, as if a new world of loving work and of duty stretched before her; for could she not become one of that band whom the preacher called in such thrilling words to enroll themselves in this service of love?

When the eloquent voice paused, and the congregation began to sing again, Grace still felt the words sounding like trumpet-notes in her heart. How she longed to ask the minister to take her to those courts and alleys, and to tell her in what way she might best help those neglected ones. How many plans coursed through her eager little brain for their succour. But the preacher had said he wanted money for their help; a collection was to be made before they left the church.

Grace's store of pocket-money was slender, and, moreover, was not in her pocket now. How gladly would she have emptied her little silken purse, if she had only had it with her; but, alas! it lay uselessly in her drawer at home. Her conventional penny had been put into the plate at the door, as she came into

church, and Grace thought ruefully that she had nothing—nothing to give to help these poor forsaken ones, whose hard lot had so touched her heart. Just then, however, she happened to raise her hand to her neck, and was reminded of an ornament which she always wore, the only precious thing she possessed. It was an old-fashioned locket, with rows of pearls round it, and in the centre a baby lock of her own hair, which her mother used to wear. Her Aunt Hume had some time ago taken it out of the old jewel-case which awaited her when Grace was old enough to be trusted with its contents, and given it to her to wear, so it was her very own. But was not this a worthy occasion for bringing of one's best and most precious things? Might not this pearl locket help to bring some little outcast waif into paths of pleasantness and peace? Yes, the locket should be given to the special collection, Grace resolved; but it might not be wise, to divulge the intention to Margery, who had already replied, when she was asked by Grace if she could lend her any money, that nobody would expect a collection from such a young lady.

When the crowd moved away from the passage, and began to scatter, Margery and her charge left the old pew in the highest gallery and prepared to go down the great staircase which led to the entrance door. Near the door there stood two elders of the church, with metal plates in their hands, waiting for the offerings of the congregation. Grace had been holding hers tightly in her hand, having untied it from her neck and slipped the ribbon in her pocket, and now she laid it gently among the silver, and the pennies, and the Scotch bank-notes, hoping that it might slip unobserved between one of the crumpled notes, and so escape the detective glance of Margery's quick eyes. But her hope was vain. Nurse caught sight of the pearls gleaming pure and white among the other offerings: "Missy, what have you done? Your locket! your mamma's beautiful pearl locket! Did I ever see the like? It's a mistake, sir. Miss Campbell could not have meant it," she said, turning to the elder, with her hand raised to recapture it.

"Stop, Margery, it is not a mistake; I meant to put it there," replied Grace in an eager whisper, as she pulled her nurse's shawl, glancing timidly at the elder, as if she feared he was going to conspire with Margery, and that, after all, her offering would be rejected.

"Missy! are you mad? What will your aunt say? Really, sir, will you be so kind?"—and Margery did not finish her sentence, but looked piteously at the elder, who was glancing at the little girl with a kindly, though questioning expression in his eyes, saying presently:

"You may have your locket back, if you wish it, my child. Perhaps you have given it hastily, and may regret it afterwards, and we would not like to have your jewel in these circumstances."

"Oh, thank you, sir," Margery was beginning to say, in a grateful tone, when Grace interrupted her.

"No, please don't, sir, I will not take it back. It was my very own, and I have given it to God, to use for these poor, sad boys and girls," Grace added, in a tremulous tone.

Then the old elder looked at Margery, and said, "My friend, I cannot help you further. Neither you nor I have anything to do with this gift; it is between the giver and the Receiver."

There was something solemn in his tone which kept the still indignant Margery from saying more, and she prepared to move away with her charge. But, as she turned to go, she caught a glimpse of her acquaintance the tinsmith, who was in the act of dropping into the plate a crumpled Scotch bank-note, which he held in his broad palm.

"Bless me, they're all going daft together," muttered Margery, with uplifted hands, as she hurried away. "It was a very good discourse, no doubt, but to think of folk strippin' themselves like that—a pun'-note, forsooth, near the half of the week's work; the man's gone clean demented."

But the tinsmith's serene, smiling face showed no sign of any aberration of intellect, and Margery took Grace's hand, and hurried her through the crowd, resolved that she should not, for another instant, stand by and countenance such reckless expenditure.

Grace was conscious that her old nurse was still possessed by a strong feeling of disapproval regarding her donation, so she rather avoided conversation; besides, she had a great deal to think about as she walked along the crowded lamp-lit streets by Margery's side.

At last they reached the quiet square where Miss Hume lived, and as they crossed the grass-grown pavement and went up the steps to the house, Grace glanced up to the curtained window of her aunt's sitting-room, and suddenly remembered, with a feeling of discomfort, that Miss Hume must presently be told of the destination of her locket; if not by herself, certainly by Margery, who had just heaved a heavy sigh, and was evidently girding herself up for the painful duty of narrating the strange behaviour of her charge.

"Now, Margery, I'm going to auntie, to tell her about the locket, this very minute, so you need not trouble about it," said Grace, as she ran quickly upstairs to her aunt's room and closed the door.

Margery never knew exactly what passed, nor how Miss Hume's well-regulated mind was ever reconciled to such an impulsive act on the part of her niece. But, as she sat at her usual post by the old lady next day, while she took her afternoon's rest, Miss Hume said rather unexpectedly, when Margery concluded she was asleep, "Margery, you remember my sister? Does it not strike you that Miss Campbell is getting very like her mother? These children are a great responsibility to me; I wish their mother had been spared," she added, rather irrelevantly, it seemed to Margery, and then presently she fell asleep without any reference to the locket question.

But that night, when Grace was going to bed, she told her old nurse that her aunt had promised that when they went back to Kirklands again she might try to find some little boys and girls to teach, and that she would allow her to have one of the old rooms for her class. She did not tell how eagerly she had asked that, in the meantime, she might be allowed to try and help the neglected city children, to whose necessities she had been awakened by such thrilling words that day, though Miss Hume had thought it wise to restrain her impatience. But out of that evening's events had grown the cherished plan which sent Grace on such a chilly afternoon among the woods and braes of Kirklands to seek any boy or girl who might need her help and friendship.

Chapter II

The Search.

Miss Hume, Grace's aunt, left the management of Kirklands entirely in the hands of her business agent. Mr. Graham met the tenants, gathered the rents, arranged the leases, and directed the improvements without even a nominal interference on her part. And certainly he conscientiously performed these duties with a view to his client's interests. It may be wondered that Miss Hume did not take a more personal interest in her tenants, but various things had contributed to this state of matters. Indeed, she was now so infirm that it would have been difficult for her to take any active interest in things around her, especially as it had not been the habit of her earlier years to do so.

It was her younger sister, Grace's mother, who used to know all the dwellers in the valley so well that her white pony could calculate the distance to the pleasant farmyard at which he would get his next mouthful of crisp corn; or the muirland cottage, with its delicious bit of turf, where he would presently graze, as he waited for his young mistress, while she talked to the inmates. But if the little girl with her white pony could have come back again to Kirklands, they would have missed many a familiar face, and searched in vain for many a cottage. The pleasant little thatched dwellings, with velvety tufts of moss studding the roof, and pretty creepers climbing till they mingled with the brown thatch, telling of the inmates' loving fingers, were all swept away now, and in the place that once knew them, stretched trim drills of turnips, fenced by grim stone walls, to which time had not yet given a moss-covered beauty.

Mr. Graham had thought it wise for his client's interests to remove those little "crofts," and merge their kailyards into productive fields; so the dwellers in the greensward cottages had to wander townwards to seek shelter and work in city courts and alleys. The land was now divided into a few farms, on which stood imposing-looking houses, with knockers and latch-keys to the doors, where the little girl and the white pony would never have ventured to ask admittance, or cared to gain it—where "nobody wanted nothin' from nobody," old Adam, the gardener, had assured Margery, when she made anxious inquiries concerning the prospect of Grace's search, and who hoped that this circumstantial information might persuade her young mistress to abandon it.

The prophecy that it was "a fule's errand" rang unpleasantly in Grace's ear, as she crossed the park and climbed the rustic stiles which led to the high road. It was true she knew that during the last three years there had been many a "clearance" at Kirklands, for she remembered having overheard Mr. Graham congratulating her aunt on the larger returns owing to these improvements. But surely, she thought, there might still be found some little cottages like those to which she heard her mamma was so fond of going when she was a girl. Walter and she used certainly, she remembered, often to see children with bare, dust-stained feet on the road, when they happened to go beyond the grounds on a fishing

expedition, or down with their aunt through her lands; but her brother had been an all-sufficient playmate, and Grace's interest in the peasant children did not extend beyond a glance of curiosity. But now how gladly would she gather a little company of them to tell them that old sweet story, which had come to her own heart with such new strange sweetness, during these winter days, though she had heard it ever since she could remember. Grace hurried eagerly along the high road, looking at every turn for traces of any lowly wayside dwellings. There used to be a little clump of cottages here, she thought, as she stopped at a bend of the road where there were traces of recent demolitions, and a great field of green corn was evidently going to reclaim the waste place, and presently swallow it up. Behind where the vanished cottages had stood there stretched a glade of birch-trees, with their low twisted stems rising from little knolls of turf so mossy and steep, that the drills of turnips and potatoes could not possibly be ranged there without destroying their symmetry, even though the crooked birch-trees were to be swept away.

Grace wandered among the budding trees, and through the soft springy turf that was growing green again in spite of the bitter spring winds, but she found no little native lurking among the birches, and was disappointed to come to the other side of the wood much more quickly than she expected, without the détour being of any practical use.

The turf sloped away to a little stream that went singing cheerily over sparkling pebbles, bubbling and foaming round the base of grey lichened rocks, that reared their heads above the water, as if in angry remonstrance at their daring to interfere with its progress. On the opposite bank there stretched a bit of muirland pasture, studded with little knolls of heather, growing green, in preparation for its richer autumn tints. The pale spring sunlight began to grow more mellow in its light at this afternoon hour; it glinted on the little gurgling stream, lighted up the feathery birch glade, and lay in golden patches on the opposite bank, where Grace noticed some cattle begin to gather on the heathery knolls, as if they had come to enjoy the last hour of bright sunshine. Perhaps some little cottages may be sheltered behind those hillocks, Grace thought; and she began to examine how the grey rocks lay among the water, and whether she could possibly find dry footing across the stream. Presently she came upon a smooth row of stones, that were evidently used as a thoroughfare. She had already begun to cross them, keeping her eye cautiously fixed on the stepping-stones as she went along, when she was startled by a voice which sounded close beside her. On glancing round she saw on the opposite bank a boy standing with a huge twisted cudgel in his hand, brandishing it in a warlike attitude. He seemed to have suddenly appeared round one of the hillocks, and was now shouting excitedly, in his rough northern dialect, as he waved his stick:

"Hold back, mem; hold back, I tell ye. Blackie is in one o' his ill moods the day, and he's no safe. Dinna come a foot farther."

Grace stood bewildered, balancing herself on the stepping-stones; the apparition was so sudden that it almost took away her breath, and the commands were so peremptory that she did not dare to disregard them by going forward; but it seemed very hard to beat an ignominious retreat, for here seemed to be just what she was in search of—a boy as neglected-looking as any that were to be seen in

the courts and alleys of Edinburgh; of the very type which old Adam declared there was not one to be found in all the lands of Kirklands. His head was bare, and his flaxen hair so bleached by the sun that it looked quite white against his bronzed face. He looked at Grace with a grave interest in his large blue eyes, as if he would like to know a little more; but he still brandished his cudgel before her, and shouted resolutely:

"Hold back, or Blackie will be at ye."

"But who is Blackie?" asked Grace, with a gasp, looking furtively round in the direction of the birch wood, in case the said Blackie might be approaching from behind.

"Who's Blackie!" said the boy, repeating the question, as if to hold up to ridicule the absurd ignorance which it implied. "Do ye no ken that Blackie is Gowrie's bull—the ill-natertest bull in a' the country-side?"

"And what have you to do with Blackie?" asked Grace, glancing across to the hillocks, where some cattle grazed inoffensively, in search of the formidable animal.

"I herd him—I'm Gowrie's herd-laddie. They're all terrible easy-managed beasts but him, and he's full o' ill tricks. He can't bear woman-folks," added the boy, with a slight mischievous twinkle in his eye; for he felt more at his ease now, having assured himself that Blackie was much too intent on some sweet blades of grass to give any trouble at that moment.

"Gowrie! that's the old farm down in the hollow there, isn't it? And how long have you been herding?" asked Grace, who still stood on the stepping-stones, and pursued the conversation with the noisy little stream babbling round her.

"I was hired to Gowrie two year come Marti'mas, and afore that I herded some sheep on the hill yonder. We had a hut all to oursels. I slept wi' them a' night, and liked them terrible weel, a hantle better than the cattle," and his eye wandered regretfully to a bleak mountain slope, which had evidently pleasant associations for the little herd-boy.

"Did you ever go to school?" asked Grace, anxious to introduce her subject, for she thought she would like this boy for a scholar.

"Ay, did I once, when I was a wee laddie. I was in the 'Third Primer,' and could read pretty big words," and he fumbled in his jacket-pocket for the collection of dog-eared leaves which represented his store of learning.

"Of course you can't go to school now on week days, when you have to watch the cows; but perhaps you go to Sunday-school?" Grace asked; and will it make her desire to do good appear very narrow and small, if it must be confessed that she hoped to hear that he did not go to any? Her mind was soon set at rest, however, for he presently replied:

"The school at the kirk, ye mean? No; granny's dreadful deaf, and we don't go to the kirk. I belong to Gowrie a' the week, but I'm granny's on Sabbath; there's aye a deal to do, brakin' sticks and mendin' up things, ye see."

"And you really don't go to a Sunday-school?" exclaimed Grace, hardly able to restrain her satisfaction at this piece of information. "But, by-the-by, I have never asked your name. I should like to hear it, because I hope we are going to be friends."

"They call me Geordie Baxter," he replied, as he ran to check the wanderings of one of the cows, while Grace stood watching him, as she pondered how she might best frame an invitation asking him to be her scholar. He seemed so manly and independent, though he was so young; and, somehow, it was all so different from how she had planned her finding of scholars. She had been looking for a cottage where the tattered children might be crawling about the doorstep, making mudpies and quarrelling with each other; and then she thought she would knock at the door, after she had spoken to them for a little, and ask their mother if she might have them to teach on Sunday. But this boy, ignorant and neglected as he seemed to be, had certainly a manly dignity which made Grace's invitations more difficult than she expected; though, after all, he could only spell words of one syllable, and he went neither to school nor to church. Surely he was the sort of scholar she had been in search of. So when he returned to his former position opposite the stepping-stones, after having admonished the straying cow—

"Well, Geordie, I am going to ask you if you will come to Kirklands, where I live, on Sunday afternoons; and since you do not go to any school, I can read a little to you, and perhaps help you to learn something?" said Grace, not venturing to be more explicit on what she wished to teach. "Do you think you would like to come?"

"Ay, would I," he replied, eagerly. "I'm terrible anxious to learn to read the long words without spellin' them." And then he stopped and looked hesitatingly at Grace. "Would ye take Jean, I wonder?" he said, coming a few steps on the stones in his eagerness. "She's my sister, and a good bit littler than me, and she can't read any, but I'm thinkin' she could learn," he added, in a sanguine tone.

"Oh yes, certainly; I shall be so happy if you will bring your sister," replied Grace, looking radiant, for she had just been thinking that though Geordie was certainly a very valuable unit, he could hardly, in his own person, make the "Sunday class" on which she had set her heart.

"But I thought ye couldn't bear poor folk at Kirklands," said Geordie, reflectively, glancing at Grace, after he had pondered over the invitation. "Granny's aye frightened they will be takin' our housie from us, as they have done from so many puir folk;" and then the boy stopped suddenly, and a deep red flush rose under his bronzed cheek as he remembered that he must be speaking to one of those same "Kirklands folk."

"Oh, your grandmother needn't be afraid of that. I am sure my aunt would not wish to take away her home," replied Grace, hurriedly, also flushing with vexation, and resolving that she would certainly listen with more interest, if she happened to be present at the next interview, to Mr. Graham's narratives concerning the improvements, seeing that they seemed to involve the improving away of the natives off the face of the country.

Just then the sound of a horn came across the heather, and Geordie started off, saying, "There's Gowrie's horn sounding; I must away and gather home the kye." And he darted off across the hillocks in search of his scattered charges, giving a succession of whoops and shrieks as he brandished his cudgel and whirled about in the discharge of his duty, quite ignoring Grace, who still stood on the stepping-stones, feeling rather sorry that the interview had terminated so abruptly, for she remembered a great many questions she would like to have asked.

Presently Geordie, by dint of his exertions, managed to arrange the cattle, with the formidable Blackie in front, in quite an orderly procession, and he now prepared to move towards the farm, whose white gables were visible from the pasture. He never looked back at Grace, or gave any parting sign of recognition of her presence, and she began to fear that perhaps after all he might forget about her invitation and fail to appear on Sunday.

"You won't forget to come to Kirklands on Sunday afternoon, Geordie?" she called after him, trying to raise her voice above the noisy little stream.

"Didna I say that I would come and bring Jean? and I aye keep my trysts," he shouted back again, with a look of indignant astonishment that she should have imagined him capable of forgetting or failing to keep his promise; and then he trudged away cheerily, swinging his stick, more full of the idea of this "tryst" than Grace could guess, though his mind dwelt chiefly on the thought of what a grand thing it would be for little Jean to get a chance of learning to read. He was painfully conscious that he had signally failed in his attempts to teach her, and he was the only teacher she had ever had.

In this little, unkempt, sun-bleached herd-boy there dwelt a very tender, chivalrous heart, and on his little sister Jean all his wealth, of affection had as yet been bestowed. Never did faithful knight serve his lady-love more devotedly than Geordie had this little brown maiden, since her earliest babyhood.

They were orphans, and ever since they could remember their home had been with their grandmother, a frail, dreamy old woman, so deaf that the most active and varied gesticulation was the only means of conveying to her the remotest idea of what one wished to say. Geordie, indeed, was the only person sufficiently careless of his lungs to attempt the medium of speech, and then his conversation was pitched in the same key as when he performed his herding functions.

To the little Jean, Geordie had been playmate and protector in one, her absolute slave from the time she sat on her old grandmother's knee, and, tiring of that position, lisped out, "Deordie, Deordie," holding out her little brown hands so that he might take her, and then they would sit together on the earthen floor of the cottage, and the gipsy locks would intermingle with Geordie's flaxen hair, which yielded meekly to as rough treatment from the little brown fingers as ever hapless terrier of the nursery was called on to undergo. But Geordie's sun-bleached locks had always been at her service, and his head and hands too; though it was not much that the little herd-boy had been able to do for his sister. Often as he lay on the heather, watching his cows, he smiled with delight as he thought of the time when he should be promoted into a farm servant, with wages enough to send Jean to school, and to buy her a pretty print dress, all dotted with blue stars, like the one Mistress Gowrie wore. As yet all his earnings had gone to pay board to his grandmother, and for present necessities in the shape of shoes and corduroys. He had in one of his pockets a little chamois bag, containing a few shillings, which he always carried about with him; and it was one of his recreations to spread them on one of the flat, grey stones and count the silver pieces as they glittered in the sun. He knew well what he meant to do with them when the pile grew large enough; but its growth was a very slow one, and required much self-denial on Geordie's part, seeing that the component parts of each shilling were generally gathered in a stray penny now and then, which he earned by holding a market-going farmer's cob;

and if, by a rare chance, a sixpence happened to be the unexpected result of one such service, then Geordie felt that he was really getting rich, and would soon be able to buy what he had wished for so long. It was not anything for himself, or even for Jean, as might have been expected. Somebody had once told him that if his grandmother only had an ear-trumpet she would be able to hear people when they spoke to her. Geordie had the vaguest idea of what such an instrument might be like, but decided that probably it bore some resemblance in size or sound to the horn that summoned his cows home; and having ascertained how much money it would cost, he resolved that he would buy one for his granny whenever he could save the sum.

The boy's heart was full of tender pity for the old deaf woman, with her weird helpless ways, at whose side he had grown since his infancy; though she could hardly have been said to "bring him up," for Granny Baxter had been shiftless and unlovable when she was in possession of her faculties, and her character had not improved under her trying infirmities. Her grandson, however, always treated her with a tender patience which no querulousness of the old woman could weary. Not so little Jean. Only once she could remember her brother looking very grave and grieved, and it was one day when she had refused to do something that the old woman wanted, and put her in a white heat of passion by her rebellion. Having escaped beyond the reach of her poor granny's tottering feet, and, finding her way to the field where Geordie was herding, she began to narrate her story in triumph, when her brother's grave silence made her feel how naughty she had been. After that day little Jean always tried to "mind" granny more, though she never attained to the same unwearied service as Geordie.

That Jean's education was being sadly neglected her brother felt painfully, and he had made various efforts to teach her the little he knew himself; but the knowledge contained in the "Third Primer" barely sufficed for teaching purposes, and Geordie found, moreover, that the little Jean was by no means an apt scholar. Indeed, the most hopeless confusion continued to prevail in her small mind concerning the letters of the alphabet, notwithstanding all his efforts. The natural history lessons, however, had been a greater success; she had learnt from Geordie the names of most trees and flowers that grew wild in the valley, and knew the difference between a wagtail and a wren, which some people who know their alphabet do not. Geordie sometimes thought that it might be nice for Jean to go to the kirk, for it was from Jean's point of view that he looked at most things in life. But then there was the insuperable difficulty about Sunday clothes, so the idea had always been given up after due consideration each time it presented itself to his mind, and the church-going was reserved for that golden period when Jean would be clothed in the blue-starred print frock, and he should have a suit of Sunday clothes. Perhaps, with the encouragement of the ear-trumpet, even frail granny might be conducted to church, Geordie thought, hopefully, for he knew that she had the essentials of church-going, as they presented themselves to his mind, stowed away in an ancient chest-of-drawers where she kept her valuables.

But in the interval, and while these happy days of good wages and schooling for Jean and Sunday clothes still lay in the distance, this invitation to go to the house of Kirklands to be taught on Sunday afternoon was very delightful indeed, Geordie thought, as he trudged home with dust-stained feet, carrying his shoes slung

across his shoulders, to pay an evening visit to his granny, eager to tell Jean about the interview with the young lady and of the invitation. He knew the news would be welcome to his grandmother also, for it had been one of her standing grievances ever since he could remember that next rent day Mr. Graham would be sure to give her notice to quit. And, indeed, if the truth must be told, it was owing to Geordie's own useful and reliable qualities that the little household had not long ago been told to move on, and to make way for more money-making tenants. Farmer Gowrie was one of the oldest residents on the estate, and he had frequently, as he used daily to inform Granny Baxter, put in a good word for her with the agent, and begged him to let the little cottage stand during the old woman's lifetime; for where could he get a boy like Geordie at the same money, as he remarked to his wife, so handy, so careful, so fearless of Blackie, "the ill-natertest bull in all the country-side," who, under his guidance, was meek as a lamb.

But notwithstanding Gowrie's assurances that their home was safe, Geordie knew that his grandmother would be very much pleased to know, if he could make her understand the fact, that he had, that afternoon, talked with a lady from the "big hoose" itself. She seemed kind and "pleasant-spoken," and not at all the terrible ogre that Geordie always imagined the lady of Kirklands to be. As the rent day came round, and he went to the inn-parlour where the agent sat to receive the rents, he used to lay the money on the table and then turn away quickly with a beating heart, in case granny's oft-repeated prophecy should prove true, and the dreaded notice to quit should really be coming at last. But instead of any such terrible communication, after he had stood the penetrating glance of the bald-headed factor, a kindly nod used generally to follow, and presently Geordie was galloping home at the top of his speed to assure his grandmother that there was no word of "a flittin'" this Martinmas. And now he felt that their home was more secure than ever, for had not the lady said that she was sure nobody wanted to turn them out of it?

Geordie's chief source of delight during his walk home was the thought of what a pleasant outing the walk to Kirklands would be for Jean, for there were many things within the lodge gates that she had heard of and would like to see. Perhaps they might get a glimpse of the walled-in garden as they passed, which Geordie had heard of from his master, who was a friend of old Adam the gardener, and had been sometimes invited by him to take a turn through his domain. But the happiest thought of all was, that, perhaps, Jean might get more interested in her alphabet when the young lady taught her. He resolved that he must not forget to take the "Third Primer" with him, for it was possible that the young lady might not exactly understand what they needed to be taught; for, after all, she did not look so very old, he pondered, as he compared her appearance with Mistress Gowrie's, the one grown specimen of the female sex, except his grandmother, who made up his small world.

Chapter III

The First Scholars.

Grace Campbell hurried home with not less eagerness than her future scholar, to tell the news of her expedition at Kirklands. Her Aunt Hume was only half awakened from her afternoon nap, and glanced with dropsy eyes at the glowing face, as she listened to her niece's description of how and where she had found Geordie.

"Baxter! I do not remember that name; I must ask Mr. Graham who they are, and all about them, nest time he comes," said Miss Hume, after Grace had finished her eager narration, and stood twirling her hat in her hand, hesitating whether she should tell her aunt Geordie's impression of what sort of people the "Kirklands folk" were; but just at that moment tea was brought, and on reflection, Grace resolved that, for the present, it would be wise to keep silent on that point. Two days passed quickly, and Sunday afternoon found Grace hovering about the door of the little room which her aunt had given to her for her class. She had been seated in state at a table which Margery had placed for her, at what the old nurse considered a suitable angle of distance from the form arranged for the scholars; but Grace began to think it felt rather formidable to be waiting seated there, so she gathered up the books again, and wandered between the avenue and the little room, waiting with impatience the arrival of her first scholars, and having a vague fear lest they might not be forthcoming after all.

Meanwhile, Geordie and his little sister were toiling along the dusty highway in an excited, expectant state of mind. The shady elm avenue was a refreshing change after the hot white turnpike road. Geordie looked keenly about him, noting all the well-kept walks and shrubberies, among which he saw many plants that were not natives of the valley, and thought he should like, sometime, to examine them more closely.

At last they came in sight of the grey gables of the old mansion, and little Jean grasped her brother's hand more closely, and looked up with a frightened glance at the many windows, which seemed to her like so many great eyes all staring at her. She began to wish that she was safe back in her granny's cottage again, but consoled herself by thinking that as long as she had hold of Geordie's hand nothing very dreadful could possibly happen. Geordie, too, was somewhat overawed by the nearer view of the "big hoose," which certainly seemed much more formidable in its dimensions than it did from the moorland, where he used to get a glimpse of it while he watched the sheep, and then it looked no larger than the grey cairn which he made his watch-tower, but now it seemed to frown above him, and the windows, too, began to create uncomfortable sensations in his mind as well as Jean's.

With the sight of his friend of the stepping-stones, his flagging courage returned, for had he not conversed with her on his own domain, and been invited by her to pay this visit?

"This is Jean," he said, immediately looking up at Grace with his frank smile, as he gave his sister a little push forward.

“I have kept my tryst, ye see. You thought, maybe, I wouldna mind,” he added, smiling again at the absurdity of the idea that he should forget such an eventful engagement. “I am so very glad to see you, Geordie, and Jean, too. I must say I was a little afraid that you might forget to come,” added Grace, quite in a flutter of delight over the arrival of her scholars, which they little dreamt of. Then she happened to glance at Jean, who stood clutching her brother’s corduroys in a very frightened attitude, and Grace remembered that this was also a new experience for the scholars, and perhaps they, too, might be suffering from the nervousness which had been following her from the lawn to the class-room for the last hour as she waited for them.

Putting out her hand to Jean, she said, in an encouraging tone, “Come, I dare say you must be tired after your walk in this hot afternoon. We shall go to a little room that my aunt has given us to sit in, and see if we cannot find something nice to read and learn,” and Grace led the way up the old steps and across the hall, then through what appeared to the children quite a bewildering maze of dark passages, so dim and sombre after the bright sunshine, that Grace overheard Jean say in an, abrupt whisper, which was instantly smothered by her brother, “I’m afraid, Geordie; I’m no gain’ farther upon this dark road.”

At last the little company reached the room that had been assigned to them. It was the old still-room, but it had been long in disuse, and was scarcely less dim than the passages which led to it. The high narrow window only admitted a few slanting rays of sunlight, that danced on the white vaulted roof, which was queerly curved and arched by the windings of a narrow staircase above. It looked, however, none the less an imposing chamber to Geordie, who instinctively drew off his cap as he came in from the sunny glare of the fresh spring day to its semi-darkness.

Then Jean, who had decided that the best code of manners was to watch what Geordie did, and follow implicitly, began to pull the strings of her little bonnet, to remove it from her head. It had been a present from Mistress Gowrie on New Year’s Day, and this was the first occasion on which Jean had worn it, though it had often been taken from its resting-place in a red cotton pocket-handkerchief, and viewed with complacency. To-day, when it came to be-tied, she had to apply to Geordie, her unfailing help in all extremities; and he in his efforts to make an imposing bow like the one which decorated Mistress Gowrie’s ample chin, had knotted the strings after the manner of whipcord, so that they required all Grace’s ingenuity to disentangle them.

Presently, after all these preliminaries were satisfactorily accomplished, the young teacher seated herself at the table, and began, to fumble nervously among the books which she had brought to use. There was a little story-book that Walter and she used to like long ago, in which she thought would be nice to read to them, and her mother’s Bible, in which she had been searching all the morning for what might be best to choose as the first lesson, having selected and rejected a great many parables and incidents both in the New and Old Testaments, and was even now doubtful what they should begin to read.

The sight of the books reminded Geordie of his pocket compendium of knowledge, and coming to the table he laid the dog-eared “Third Primer” in Grace’s hand, saying, “I’ve been once through, but I’m thinkin’ I’ve maybe forgot it some. I

doubt Jean doesna know one letter from another, though I've whiles tried to make her understand," added Geordie, rather ruefully, as he glanced towards the smiling little maiden, who sat quite unabashed at this account of her ignorance.

Grace was rather taken aback by the sight of the spelling-book, and also by Geordie's statement as to the amount of his knowledge, though it was the same as he had made at their first interview. Grace, however, in her eagerness, had not understood its full import, so she gasped out in some dismay, "But you can read the Bible a little, can you not, Geordie?"

"Maybe I might, if I tried," replied Geordie, in a hopeful tone. "They were just goin' to put me into the Bible when I left the school. I have heard them reading out some of the stories, and I thought they wouldn't be that difficult to spell out. Maybe if I read in the primer for a while, ye'll put me into the Bible," he added, evidently having a strong idea of the necessity for a good foundation of spelling-book lore before proceeding to use it.

But Grace thought ruefully of all her high-flown plans for this Sunday class, and felt that it was a terrible descent to be restricted to the "Third Primer." But Geordie seemed convinced that through this dog-eared volume lay the only royal road to learning. He had already opened the book at one of the little lessons near the end which he seemed to think he had not sufficiently mastered in the "schoolin' days" already far away in the distance to the little herd-boy. He still stood by Grace's side at the table, and his finger travelled slowly along the page as he read, in the nasal sing-song tone in which the reading functions were performed at the parish school, one of those meaningless little paragraphs that are supposed to be best adapted by the compilers of primers for teaching the young idea how to shoot.

Grace sat listening, rather perplexed as to what course it would be best to pursue. This certainly was not the kind of ideal Sunday-class which she had in her mind all these months; indeed, this "Third Primer" was hardly orthodox food for Sunday at all, according to her ideas; and yet Geordie was laboriously travelling over the page with a dogged earnestness which she did not know how to divert into any other channel without doing harm in some shape or other. But presently help came to her from a quarter where she had least expected it.

Jean, who had been seated on the form unnoticed for several minutes, listening to Geordie's earnest but uninteresting sing-song, as he stood at the table leaning over his lesson-book, got tired of her neglected situation, and descending from her high seat, she planted her sturdy little legs on the floor, saying, in a decided tone, as she stumped away towards the door, "Geordie, I'm tired sittin' here. I'm away home." Jean's words fell like a thunderbolt both on Geordie and Grace. The blood mounted to the boy's face, and his earnest blue eyes turned anxiously towards the young teacher, to see what she was thinking of such an utter breach of good manners on Jean's part.

Illustration:
The First Lesson

Poor Grace felt bitterly conscious of sudden and terrible failure in this work which she had so longed to undertake. She had not been able to interest one

scholar for a quarter of an hour, and the other seemed only to have his heart set on learning to spell. “But it is not quite time to go home yet, Jean,” she faltered, as she watched the little girl’s efforts to open the door, since Geordie did not seem inclined to come to her assistance. “Indeed, we haven’t really begun yet,” continued Grace. “Come, Jean, would you not like to stay a little longer and hear a story from the Bible before you go? Geordie used to like them at school, he says;” and then, turning to the boy, who stood looking in grave reproving silence at Jean, she said, “Besides, Geordie, I think, perhaps, I did not quite explain to you the other day what I thought we should try to learn on Sunday afternoons when you come here. I shall be very glad to help you with spelling, too, you know, but I thought I should like to tell you something about the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour, and to read some of his wonderful words which we find in the New Testament. You have heard of him, have you not, Geordie?”

“Oh, ay, I’m thinkin’ I have. But it was in the Auld Testament they were readin’ when I was at the school. I mind there was a right fine story about a herd-laddie killin’ a big giant, that one o’ the laddies telt me once. You’ve heard it many a time from me, Jean.”

“Ah, yes, I know that story too,” Grace replied, brightening, as if a glimmer of light had come to her in her perplexity. “And if you will listen, I can tell you another story—about a Shepherd, too. I’m sure you would like it, if you would only come back for a little and listen, Jean,” said Grace, eagerly.

She did not venture to open the Bible, in case the little girl should think the book would imply another course of spelling, and be roused into immediate flight. Abandoning all her carefully arranged plans for teaching which she had been thinking of for so long, she looked into Geordie’s eyes, which were still wandering hungrily towards the unconquered pages of the primer, and began to tell of the Shepherd who watched the hundred sheep in a wilderness far away in a very hot country, where the burning sun dried up the streams and withered the pasture, and where it was very difficult to find food for either man or beast. And then she told of how very wise and tender this Shepherd was with his flock, looking after their wants day and night, and taking very special care of the silly, play-loving lambs, who did not guess what terrible dangers they might fall into; for there were wild beasts prowling about, ready to pounce upon them, and rushing torrents that came suddenly from the hillsides in rainy seasons, which would have drowned them in a minute, if the Shepherd’s watchful eye had not been there. He knew all their names, too, though sheep are so wonderfully like each other.”

“Did he though?” exclaimed Geordie. “He must have more wit than Gowrie’s shepherd, then. He has been wi’ them for more than a year now, and I dinna think he knows the one from the other so well as I do.”

Little Jean seemed to have abandoned her design of immediately returning home, and was gradually edging nearer the table, with her twinkling black eyes fixed on Grace.

“But I was going to tell you what happened to one of the little lambs in spite of the Shepherd’s watchful care,” Grace continued, feeling inspirited by the growing interest of her audience.

“Eh, but I hope none o’ the wild beasts ye spoke o’ got hold of it,” said Geordie, drawing a long breath.

“Well, there’s no saying what might have happened, but for the Good Shepherd. For the little lamb got lost—lost among bleak, sandy hills, where it could find no green blade to eat, and got very hungry and footsore. It could hear no kind shepherd’s voice that it used to love to listen to in happier days, but only terrible sounds like the bark of wolves, coming nearer, and lions prowling about when it began to get dark.”

“Puir lambie!” murmured Jean, whose face now rested on her little fat hands, while, leaning on the table, she looked up in Grace’s face; “it must surely ha’e been very frightened,” she added, in a compassionate tone; for she knew that she did not like to cross the turf in front of the cottage, after dark, without Geordie’s protecting hand.

“Yes, it surely must have been frightened enough, for it was certainly in great danger, and the Shepherd knew what a terrible plight it must be in, wandering about tired and hungry, far away from the fold. For what do you think he did?” Grace continued, looking at Geordie; “he actually left all the other sheep —the ninety-nine, you know—in the wilderness, and went away to seek for this poor little silly lost lamb.”

“Did he though! He must have been a real fine man,” responded Geordie, warmly. “There’s Gowrie’s shepherd lost a wee lambie among the hills not lang syne, and when Gowrie asked him, when he came home, why he didna look about among the heather for it, he said he couldn’t leave the rest, and that it was a puir sick beastie no’ worth much trouble. But it was a nice wee thing for a’ that, and it must have died all alone there, with nobody to give it a drop of water,” said Geordie, regretfully, for he had a tender heart for all dumb creatures. “I must tell Gowrie’s lad about this Shepaerd the very next time he comes round the hill. But did he find the lambie?” he asked, turning to Grace.

“Yes, he found it. He looked for it ‘till he found it,’ the story says. After wandering along a road full of danger and painfulness, and sorrowful sights of the terrible ruin the wild beasts had wrought, he came upon the little strange lamb, just when its heart was beginning to faint and fail. The story does not say that he punished it for running away and giving him so much trouble, or even that he spoke some chiding words and pushed it along in front of him with his crook, as I have sometimes seen shepherds on the road do when the sheep get footsore and weary and unwilling to go on with the journey.”

“Ay do they. They get their licks many a time when they don’t deserve them,” chimed in Geordie, in a pathetic tone.

“Well, but instead of any hard words or beatings, what do you think the Shepherd did? He took the little lamb into his own weary arms, and it lay safe and warm there, while he carried it all the way home to the fold.”

“Did he though?” exclaimed Geordie, in warmest admiration. “Eh, but the lambie must surely have been right fond of the Shepherd after that. I’m thinkin’ he would know his voice better than before, and follow him right close and canny. That’s the kind o’ shepherd all beasts would like, for they know fine when a body cares for them,” Geordie said, with a glowing face, as he looked up at Grace, and the “Third Primer” slipped unheeded on the floor.

Was it a mere chance coincidence that this remark of Geordie’s came at a moment when it made more easy of introduction to Grace that part of the parable

story which she was full of eagerness to tell to her first scholars? She desired that it might prove to them not merely a pleasant tale, which had beguiled an hour that had threatened to be a very weary one, to little Jean, at least; but that, through its homely dress, they might catch a glimpse of its higher meaning, and be able to trace the footsteps of the Great Shepherd of souls.

"Yes, Geordie," she continued, "one would certainly imagine that the sheep would follow such a shepherd very closely, and be very sure that his way was always best, and that he was leading them by wise safe paths, even when they seemed thorny and toilsome; but it is not so. I can tell you of a Shepherd who not only went through many painful dark desolate places, so that his flock might not stumble and fall when they came to follow, but ended by laying down his life for his sheep. And yet these very sheep do not always listen to his voice, nor follow the safe narrow paths which he has tracked out for them, through the wilderness, to the happy fold. I think you must both have heard of this Shepherd, Geordie, and little Jean too."

"I never knew a shepherd except Gowrie's, and he lost the bonnie lambie with the black face, that used to lick Geordie's hand," replied little Jean, with a doleful expression in her usually merry black eyes.

"Ah, but this Good Shepherd always searches for the lost sheep till he finds it, and then he carries it in his arms all the journey through to his beautiful home among the angels, and there is joy among them over the little found lamb. For it is the Lord Jesus Christ who calls himself the Good Shepherd, Jean, and who has told us this story about finding the lost sheep, that we might understand the better how he came to this world to save us from dark dangerous paths of sin that go down to death. For we have all strayed as this poor silly lamb did, and some of us are straying yet," continued Grace; and then, glancing at Geordie's earnest face, she said, "You have heard of the Lord Jesus Christ, who came to save us from our sins, have you not, Geordie?"

"I have heard tell o' him. But I didna just think he was so real-like as a shepherd with his sheep, or that he would have ta'en that trouble for *one*," Geordie replied, with a dreamy look in his eyes; but he did not say more.

Just then Margery knocked at the door, and intimated that the hour was expired, and little Jean again began to show some signs of restlessness, so Grace felt regretfully that the first afternoon had come to an end, and she had not followed any part of the programme which she had previously marked out. There was the hymn-book, with a tune all ready to sing to one of the hymns, which Grace had practised painstakingly on the piano the day before. But now she found that neither Jean nor Geordie could sing, so she thought it might be wise to select something simpler than she had chosen before, and ended by singing her oldest childish favourite, "The Happy Land." It was evidently new to the children; for their poor old deaf granny's was not a musical home. Geordie's eyes dilated with delight as he listened, and he kept giving Jean a series of nods across the table, in case she should by any chance miss the full enjoyment of such beautiful sounds.

A second knock from Margery, this time carrying a plateful of currant-cake which Miss Hume had sent to the children, fairly broke up the little gathering. Grace felt with disappointment that this first class had come sadly short of her

ideal, was a complete failure, in fact, when she remembered all that she had meant to say and do, and all the hoped-for responses on the part of the scholars.

In thinking of this afternoon long afterwards, when it lay in the clear rounded distance of the past, Grace used to smile as she remembered her restless impatience, and compare herself to the little girl who was always pulling up by the roots the flowers she had planted in her garden, to see how they were getting on.

When they prepared to leave the little still room, Grace handed Geordie his precious "Third Primer," which she found lying on the floor, and as he put it into his jacket pocket, he said with a smile, "I won't bring it back with me, I'm thinkin'. Ye'll maybe tell us some more about the Good Shepherd next time, and I can hold at the spellin' when I'm herdin', and maybe I'll soon be able to get into the Bible itself," he added, still firm in his belief that the only entrance lay through the spelling-book.

Grace, remembering little Jean's dislike to the exit through the dark passages, led the way to a door which opened into a path to the garden. Jean manifested undisguised satisfaction when the dim still-room precincts were fairly left behind, and they got into the pleasant old walled-in garden, where the yellow afternoon's sun was lying on the opening fruit-blossom, and bringing delicious scents out of the newly-blown lilac and hawthorn. She kept pulling Geordie's corduroys, to draw his attention to all that captivated her as they walked along the broad gravel walk. This was certainly a much pleasanter way home than along the dim passage, and Jean decided that the best part of the afternoon had come last. Presently Grace opened the door of one of the greenhouses, and they stood among richer colours and sweeter scents than before. The children had been surveying with admiring wonder the dazzling house glittering in the sun, which was making each pane sparkle like a diamond, but they never dreamt that it would be given to them to enter it, or indeed that it had an interior which could be reached, so entirely did it seem to belong to the region of the sun, not to the world of thatched cottages and grey walls.

"Eh, but surely this will be something like the happy land you were singin' aboot," Geordie said at last, with a long-drawn breath, after he had wandered about in silence for some time, revelling in the exotic delights of the first greenhouse he had ever seen.

"Oh yes, Geordie; there will be all this, and a great deal more; things so beautiful and, glorious that our poor minds can't even imagine what they will be like," said Grace, glowingly, feeling a thrill of pleasure to hear that the hymn had any meaning for the boy, so desponding was she concerning her efforts. "Look here, I'll just read to you about the pleasant place where the Good Shepherd leads his flock, after their journey on earth is over." And leaning against an old orange-tree, Grace read to her little scholars about that wonderful multitude "which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe

away all tears from their eyes." They stood quite still for a few moments after Grace had finished reading, each thinking some new thoughts.

In the mind of little Jean, to be sure, there certainly prevailed some confusion of ideas between the happy land of which she had been hearing, and the beautiful garden in which she stood. Indeed, to the end of her life, the yellow glitter of the sun on the Kirklands greenhouses brought to her mind the description of that "city of pure gold, as it were transparent glass;" and the tall tropical plants which were ranged round the shining floor were to her the embodiments of the trees whose leaves were for the "healing of the nations."

But Geordie's thoughts were most about that Shepherd Saviour who seemed to be able to lead his flock away from bleak, scorching places to such a blessed land as these words told of.

In spite of old Adam's approaching shadow on the gravel walk, Grace plucked a few of the rare, beautiful roses and gave them to little Jean, whose small fat hands were eagerly stretched out to receive the prize. They spent the remainder of their flourishing existence in a broken yellow jug on the window-sill of Granny Baxter's cottage, and were a joy to Jean for many days. And when it was the fate of their companions still left in their stately glass home to be gathered into Adam's barrow when their charms had past, and ignominiously flung away, Jean's roses had a more honourable future. After they had done their duty faithfully on the window-sill, the dead leaves were tenderly gathered and scattered in the drawers allotted to Jean in the ancient chest, where they made a sweet scent in their embalmment for many a day.

The little party arrived at last at the farther end of the garden, where there was a door in the high, red wall opening on a path which led to the turnpike-road. Grace turned the rusty key, and the children saw the familiar face of their native valley again. Giving a lingering backward glance into the pleasant garden which they had just left, they trotted away towards the dusty high-road, while Grace stood watching them till they were out of sight.

Chapter IV

Elsie Gray.

„I'll tell you what it is, Grace; that scholar of yours is far too fine a fellow to be left to tie companionship of old Gowrie's cattle any longer."

The speaker was a bright, breezy-looking lad in midshipman's dress, who was sauntering up and down the old terrace at Kirklands, in company with our friend Grace. She is a year older than when we saw her last at the garden-gate, parting with her two scholars after their first Sunday together. They have had a great many afternoons in company since then. Grace had remained in her summer home all through the long Scotch winter, and now autumn had come, bringing with it her brother Walter on a delightful holiday of six weeks, after an absence of years.

Miss Hume had got so frail the previous year, that she was unfit for the return journey to her house in Edinburgh, and the following months had only brought an increase of weakness. She now lay in her darkened room, with, her flickering lamp of life burning slowly to. its socket, while some young lives beside her were being kindled by glowing fires which would cause their hearts to burn long after the "glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay."

The little company in the still-room had somewhat increased, four others haying been added to the two first scholars. One of them was Elsie Gray, the forester's daughter, a pretty little girl with a sweet voice, and able to sing a great many hymns, so that Grace had no longer to perform solos to the still-room audience, but was accompanied by more than one voice timidly following Elsie's example, and joining in the singing. There were three other scholars from the borders of the next parish, and a very happy party they all made together. But it must be confessed that the warmest place in Grace's heart was reserved for the first scholar whom she had found that chilly spring day among the pasture lands which sloped down to the little stream. Judged by an educational standard, Geordie was certainly, with the exception of the little Jean, the most deficient of the company, in spite of his having manfully conquered the last pages of the "Third Primer," and got at last "intil the Bible." The other boys and girls still attended the parish school on week days, and seemed more or less very fairly in possession of the rudiments of education. Some things, however, which they read and heard in the little quiet room at Kirklands sank into their hearts as they had never done when they read them as the stereotyped portion of the Bible-reading lesson amid the mingled jangle of slates and pencils and pattering feet, with the hum of rough northern tongues, which prevailed in the parish school-room.

To Geordie even this discordant medium of education had been denied. Grace had set her heart on having him sent to school during the past winter. She saw what a precious boon such an opportunity appeared in Geordie's eyes when she suggested it to him. But Farmer Gowrie had to be consulted, and finding the herd-boy useful in winter as well as during the summer months, he decided that he could not possibly spare Geordie. And as for Granny Baxter, she could not understand what anybody could want with more learning who was, able to earn money. So Geordie had one day lingered behind the other scholars to tell Grace that the idea of going to school even during the winter quarter must be given up. There was always a manly reticence about the boy which made one feel that words of sympathy would be patronising; but Grace could see what a bitter disappointment it was, though he appeared quite unalterable in his decision that he "belonged to Gowrie," when Grace tried to arrange the matter by an interview with the farmer. He could only claim the boy week by week, and the young teacher did not see the necessity for such self-denial on Geordie's part.

Then Grace's store of pocket-money had been devoted to sending little Jean to school. This arrangement had been a source of great delight to Geordie—much more of an event to him, indeed, than to the phlegmatic little Jean, to whom the primer did not contain such precious possibilities as it did to her brother's eyes. Grace had arranged that she should go to a girls' school lately opened in the parish. It was the one to which Elsie Gray, the forester's daughter, went. On her way to school she had to pass Granny Baxter's cottage, and after Jean was

installed as her fellow-scholar, Elsie used generally to call and see if the little girl was ready to start, so that they might walk along the road together.

Elsie was a pale, fragile-looking girl, who looked as if she had grown among crowded streets, rather than blossomed in the open valley, with its flowing river and breezy hillsides. She was a very silent child, too, with a meek grace about all her movements; her large grey eyes shone out of her face with a luminous, dreamy light in them, which distressed her practical, rosy-faced mother, who used to say that she did not know where Elsie had come by "those ghaist-like eyes o' hers," and as for those washed-out cheeks, "there was no accountin' for them neither;" and the worthy matron would go on to narrate with what abundance and amplitude Elsie had been ministered to all her life; and yet Elsie glided about still and pale, with her large eyes shining like precious stones, generally hungrily possessed by some book which she held in her hand. She had an insatiable appetite for reading, and had long ago exhausted the juvenile library attached to the church, while the few books which comprised the forester's collection had been read and re-read by her many times. The farmer librarian, who remained half an hour after the congregation was dismissed on Sundays to dispense books for any that might wish them, in the room behind the church, had been obliged to give Elsie entrance to the shelves reserved for older people, after she had exhausted the youthful library. It is not to be supposed, however, that by this admission Elsie was allowed to plunge chartless into light literature. The shelves contained only books of the most sober kind, the lightest admixture being narratives of the persecutions of the Waldenses and stories of the Covenanting struggles. These Elsie read and pondered with intense interest, interweaving the scenes in her imagination with the familiar places and people round her, and living a far-away dreamy life of her own in the forester's cozy little nest, while her active-minded, busy-fingered mother made her cheese and butter, and reared her poultry, and was withal so very capable of performing her own duties, that the forester sometimes ventured to think, when Mrs. Gray complained of Elsie's "handlessness," that seeing the mistress was so well able for "her own turn," it was fortunate his little daughter chanced to be of a more contemplative disposition.

Mrs. Gray had heard from Margery of the Sunday class which her young mistress had opened at Kirklands, and though, as the forester's wife remarked, "Elsie had enough and to spare of schoolin' already," yet it would only be a suitable mark of respect to the lady of Kirklands to send her there on Sunday afternoons; and so it happened that Elsie became one of Grace's scholars, sitting in the little still-room on Sunday afternoons, her large tender eyes answering in sympathetic flashes as the young teacher talked with the little company of those wonderful days when the Son o Man lived upon the earth, or told them some story of the earlier times of the world, when God's voice was heard in the beautiful garden in the cool of the day, or when he guided his chosen people by signs and wonders.

In those days, however, the gospel tidings were not more to Elsie than many another pathetic story which she knew, and served simply as food for her imagination, though Grace's earnest words did throw a halo round the familiar incidents which the daily reading of a chapter in the New Testament had failed to

do. Yet it was not till some of the sharp sorrows of life had fallen upon Elsie that those words which she heard in the still-room came with living power to her heart, and became to her a light in dark days, a joy in sorrowful times, which nothing was able to take away from her.

And this was the little girl who used to knock gently at the door of Granny Baxter's cottage every morning as she passed along the road to school, arrayed in her pretty grey stuff frock, and with her snowy linen tippet and sun-bonnet. Sometimes she found little Jean's round smiling face peering against the peat-stack at the end of the cottage awaiting her coming, for a great friendship had sprung up between these two, though they were certainly very different in character. Elsie seemed to have a brooding protective care over the little unkempt Jean, exercising a sort of guardianship of her in the new life at school. She would often come to her rescue when Jean sat pouting over a blurred slate, en which she was helplessly trying to reproduce the figures on the blackboard, or give her timely aid amid the involvements of some question in the Shorter Catechism. It was Elsie who tied the bonnet-strings now, with more dexterous fingers than Geordie's, and performed many similar kindly offices besides; and little Jean was already learning from the forester's daughter many habits of tidiness which her poor, failing grandmother had not been capable of teaching her.

Sometimes, on their way from school, the girls would find Geordie perched on the paling of one of Gowrie's fields, while the cattle grazed within the fences, watching for their coming to enliven a lonely hour with their talk and news of school doings. His eye used to glisten with pride and pleasure as he watched the little Jean appear, carrying her books and slate, and already bearing many traces of civilising influences. And it is not to be wondered at if his eye rested with admiration sometimes on the sweet maiden, who was generally her companion, and that he learnt to watch eagerly for the first glimpse of the snowy sun-bonnet along the winding green lane which led from the girls' school to the high road. Sometimes Elsie used to bring one of her favourite books in her plaited-cord school-bag, and then the trio would sit in a shady corner, where Geordie's vigilant eye could still keep watch over his charge, while the little girl introduced her friends to some of the favourite scenes of her ideal world. Elsie seemed to understand, though she had never been told it in so many words, all about Geordie's intense desire for knowledge, and to appreciate his self-denial in remaining in his present post. And so it happened there grew up in her mind a tender sympathy for all that he had missed, side by side with an admiring belief in his character.

How many thoughts and ideas he surely must have, she used to think, after one of those meetings, when she took her solitary way home, after parting with Jean, and remembered Geordie's remarks, which seemed to throw new light on her favourite histories, and to touch with insight all that was most beautiful and true in them. Often Elsie used to delight the unvocal brother and sister by singing one of her hymns, which for days afterwards would echo in some "odd corner" of the lonely little herd-boy's brain. Sometimes, too, they discussed what they had been hearing on the previous Sunday at Kirklands; and Elsie always felt more interested in the lesson after hearing Geordie's gentle, reverent talk. And to Elsie, who had neither brother nor sister, there was an infinite charm in Geordie's

devotion to his sister Jean, and his unwearied anxiety for her happiness. She noticed, too, the tender, chivalrous care with which he ministered to his old grandmother, never wearying of her selfish, querulous ways, and sacrificing himself to her smallest wishes.

So it happened that a warm friendship sprang up between those three who sat side by side in Grace Campbell's little school-room; and their daily lives had become pleasantly interwoven during these past months. To Jean, Elsie appeared the embodiment of all that was worthy of imitation, from her snowy sun-bonnet to her gentle voice, both seeming equally unattainable to the little girl. When Geordie returned to the village on Saturday night, he used generally to hear from Jean some glowing narrative in Elsie's praise, to which Geordie's ears were quite wide open, though he sat bending over his books in the "ingle neuk" of the cottage kitchen.

When her idea of a winter at school had to be abandoned, Grace gave him a few helpful class-books, and tried to direct his efforts to learn as much as was possible; but, during the past year, her aunt's increasing weakness and dependence on her companionship made it impossible for Grace to give the boy such practical help as she would fain have done. But Geordie had been fighting his own battle manfully, and had made more progress than Grace guessed.

Walter had first been telling her as they walked on the terrace together, that the day before he had found Geordie busy with a geography book as he tended his cattle, and how pleased he had been to hear about the new lands Walter had seen. Like Elsie, Walter felt that, in Geordie's mind, things seemed to gather a richness and an interest with which his own impressions had not clothed them.

"You've no idea how many queer questions the fellow asked me about everything," continued Walter. "Indeed, Grace, I couldn't help thinking how much more good Geordie would have got out of all the things and places I've seen since I went away, than I have. And yet he's much too clever for a sailor's life. What can we do with him, Grace? I really can't bear to think of his drudging on as a farm servant to old Gowrie, though he seems quite contented with the prospect," and Walter turned to Grace, who glanced at her brother's kindly face with pleasure, though not unmixed with surprise, that he should take such an interest in her Sunday-scholar.

Walter seemed to look on Grace's class rather in a humorous light when he first heard of its existence on his return to Kirklands. And presently he had begun to grudge that she should devote herself to it, and thus deprive him of the pleasure of her society during the long Sunday afternoons, when they used to be together in the old days. And, in the midst of all her joy in having her brother with her again, Grace had been feeling with sadness that there was as yet no response in Walter's heart to those unseen, eternal things, which, in her efforts to share them with the little company on Sunday, had become increasingly vivid to her own mind. He used occasionally to rally her on her new fancies, which he seemed to think quite harmless and suitable for a girl, provided they did not cross his plans and fancies.

One day, when he was on his way to fish, he had happened to meet Geordie, who was herding his cattle near the stepping-stones. Geordie was a clever angler, and could wile more trout out of the river than most people, and Walter had been delighted with his information as to the fishing capabilities of the Kirklands river.

Since that day they had always been friends when they chanced to meet. Walter could never see the sun-bleached locks gleaming in the distance without crossing whatever gate or field happened to lie between, and going to have a talk with him; so the boys had seen much more of each other than Grace knew. She had often been obliged to leave "Walter to solitary rambles, owing to her aunt's, increasing dependence on her during her long illness, so it happened that she felt some surprise when she saw Walter more moved than was his wont as he eagerly discussed plans for helping Geordie.

"I'll tell you what it is, Gracie," said Walter, in his blunt way, as his quick eye detected Grace's slight surprise that he should have so warmly espoused the cause of her Sunday-scholar. "You know I have seen Geordie a good deal lately. We have had a lot of fishing talk, and all that, and I like the chap—he's a first-rate fellow. I can't bear to see a fellow so much better than myself trudging away behind those beasts of Gowrie's day after day. And, besides, Grace, the fact is I owe him something more than anything I may be able to do for him can ever repay. It isn't every fellow, I can tell you, who would have had the courage to say to me what he did," stammered Walter.

"What did he say, Walter?" asked Grace, more astonished than ever. "I thought you hardly knew more of Geordie Baxter than his name. You know he is my favourite scholar. But it is a long time since I have had a quiet talk with him. I well remember the first conversation we had, standing on the stepping-stones near that bend of the river where the birches grow."

"Ah, yes, I know the place. It's curious, it was just about that very spot I was going to tell you. I met him there, one day, not long ago, and he happened to say that he had been asking Gowrie to stop sending the cattle to that bit of pasture, because the stepping-stones made it a thoroughfare, and that bull had been getting more savage lately, and he could not always persuade people that it was dangerous to pass near him; but Gowrie had said it was nonsense, and so forth. Well, you see, I'm not very fond of old Gowrie, and when I saw how meekly Geordie submitted to him, I felt provoked, and began to speak a little strongly, as we middies sometimes do—swore, in fact. And if Geordie didn't make me feel more ashamed of myself than ever I did in my life. You've tried your hand on me before now, Gracie, and I'm sure you'll be glad to hear—well, that I'm going to try to lead a very different life now." Walter's voice faltered, and Grace looked at him with glistening eyes.

After a few moments' silence, she said, "But Walter, dear, you haven't told me yet what Geordie said."

"Well, Grace, I hardly think I should like to tell you all he said. But he came, and laying his hand on my shoulder, looked at me with those earnest eyes of his. 'You've been very kind to me, Maister Campbell,' he began, 'and it would be ill-done no to min' ye that ye are giving a sore heart to your best Friend ye have by takin' his dear name in vain,' and then he said a little more about it. I was so taken aback, Grace, I could hardly believe my own ears. It must have required a lot of downright courage to speak like that; there isn't a mid in all our crew who would have ventured to do so. And yet I dare say I'm in for something of the same kind when I go back again to the ship. For you know I must be a 'good soldier,' Grace," added Walter, with a gentle, fearless look in his eyes that carried Grace's

thoughts back to an early scene, when she stood in the crowded street in her nurse's hand, and watched her father's face as he rode alongside his men to his last battle. And as she looked at Walter's face, she remembered some old words which say, "He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city;" and she lifted up her heart, and gave God thanks that this young spirit, so dear and precious to her, had taken him for his Leader and Lord.

Chapter V

How Geordie's Herding Came to an End.

It was a lovely autumn evening. The valley of Kirklands lay flooded in the sunset glow. Its yellowing fields were tinged with warm-crimson and purple, and the golden light shimmered on the trees and fringed the dark fir tops. Never had her home looked more beautiful, Grace thought, when, at last, the brother and sister turned to go indoors, after their earnest talk. She stood leaning on the old carved railing of the steps, taking one more glance at the peaceful scene before she followed Walter into the darkening entrance-hall, when her eye caught sight of a stumpy figure which she thought she recognised.

It was little Jean Baxter, who hurried along the elm avenue as fast as her short legs could carry her. She looked breathless and excited, and when she came nearer Grace saw that she was tearful and dishevelled. She hastened down the steps to meet her, wondering what childish grief could be agitating the mind of the usually imperturbable little Jean. When she caught eight of Grace, she threw up her arms with a loud, bitter wail that rang among the old elms, echoing through their arching branches, and startling the birds that had just gone to roost. "Oh, Miss Cam'ell! Geordie, Geordie!—he's hurt; he's dyin'; Blackie's gotten hold o' him."

It was vain to ask anything more. Jean could only repeat her wailing refrain, so taking the child's hand, Grace quietly asked her to lead the way to where Geordie was, trying to quiet her bitter weeping by such soothing words as she could muster in the midst of her own distress at the possibility of any serious accident having happened to her favourite scholar. But poor little Jean's sad monotone still rang mournfully through the soft evening air as she trotted along by Grace's side—"Geordie's dyin'; Blackie's got hold o' him."

Grace, however, managed to learn from a few incoherent words that the boy was lying, in whatever state he might be, at the river side, near the stepping-stones. He had, that afternoon, taken the cattle, along with the dangerous bull, to the heathery knolls, where Gowrie's careful soul grudged that any morsel of pasture should remain unused. Geordie had always been most careful in warning unwary passers-by of their danger, for, though fearless enough himself, he still held that Blackie was the "ill-natertest bull in all the country-side," and never felt easy in his mind except when he had him within the fences of the upland fields. He had once or twice tried to tether the animal near one of the hillocks, but he saw that it

made his temper more dangerous than ever; besides, the little patches of green pasture were so scattered through the heather, and had carefully to be scented out by discriminating noses, that to have fettered poor Blackie to one spot seemed to him a crying injustice, uneasy as he felt at his being able to roam at large so near a thoroughfare. Geordie had never even allowed himself the luxury of Jean's company when there were no fences to put between Blackie and her.

But that day the harvest holidays had been given at the girls' school. There had been prizes distributed and an examination held which lasted till evening. Elsie Gray had got several trophies of her diligence, but the great and unexpected event of the day was that little Jean had actually got a prize. She was nearly beside herself with ecstasy as she clutched the gay crimson and gilt volume which was presented to her, and resented that it should even for a moment be absent from her arms to be admired by her companions. Then Geordie must hear about this unexpected honour, must see and touch the treasure at once; and Jean galloped off with the precious volume to the field where he was generally to be found perched on the paling, awaiting their coming. Elsie Gray followed, eager enough, too, to show her honours to the boy-friend, whose golden opinions she dearly loved to win. There was a pink flush on her usually pale cheek, as she glanced about in search of Geordie when they reached the field, panting and breathless after their race. But no Geordie was visible anywhere, and the field was quite empty and tenantless. Then Jean remembered, what she had forgotten in her excitement, that Geordie was to be herding at the hillocks to-day, and so she started off to find him, forgetful that his present post was forbidden ground.

The girls were not long in reaching the stepping-stones, and presently Jean was at Geordie's side, dancing round him with wild cries of delight, as she flourished her gay prize in his rather bewildered eyes. He had been lying with his face resting on his hands, on one of the soft knolls of turf, looking at the sunset, and thinking of the new lands of which he had lately been hearing from Walter Campbell. He seemed so possessed by his own thoughts and reveries that he heard no sound of coming footsteps till he looked up suddenly, and saw little Jean by his side. He jumped up from the turf, and began to look wistfully towards the river side to see if there was nobody else besides Jean coming to enliven a lonely hour.

Elsie had crossed the stepping-stones, and was moving towards the hillock on which he stood, with her sun-bonnet in one hand, and her heavy armful of shining prize books in the other with the golden sun's rays falling on her. Her dusky hair was hanging rather more loosely than usual, shaken out of its general smoothness by her hot face. The pale face was all aglow with pleasure, and her large eyes looked radiant with delight at the thoughts of the pleasure that little Jean's success, as well as her own, would give to Geordie. The boy stood with his flaxen hair all gilded by the sun, looking at her with a glad light in his blue eyes. For a moment only, and then, with a look of terror, he glanced in the opposite direction, remembering that this was dangerous ground. Blackie had been roused from his sleepy grazing by little Jean's cry of delight, and, looking up, his evil eye caught sight of Elsie, with her bright colours, made more dazzling by the sunset tints. With a toss of his head, and a few wild plunges, the brute, with his head near to the ground, and his eyes fixed on his prey, made his way towards her. Geordie shouted, "Back, Elsie; back on the stepping-stones!" but it was too late.

Elsie lost her presence of mind, and wavered backward and forward for a moment, till it was impossible to save herself by taking refuge on the other side of the stream, where Blackie, not knowing the advantage of stepping-stones, would probably not have troubled himself to follow her. In an instant Geordie had flung himself between the roused animal and Elsie. His stick still lay on the hillock, where he had been resting, so he had no weapon of defence, and Blackie, in his rage, would not spare the faithful lad, who had spent so many lonely hours by his side. In another moment, Geordie was lying gored and senseless on the heather.

Elsie had reached the stepping-stones, and stood there transfixed like a marble statue. Blackie might follow her now if he had a mind to, but he had not. After a glance at Geordie, he plunged away with his heels in the air through the heather, having an uneasy consciousness that he had lost his temper, and treated a good friend rather roughly.

As for little Jean, she had fortunately happened to be beyond Blackie's range of observation; for it was on Elsie that his sole gaze had been fixed, and he only vented his baulked fury on Geordie when the vision of bright colours slipped away. Gowrie's ploughman happened to be passing near, and had been a witness of the scene, though it was impossible for him to give timely help. Elsie Gray, he noticed, was now safe on the stepping-stones, and Geordie lying on the heather, with all the mischief done to him that Blackie was likely to do. But the enraged animal might attack somebody else presently, and the man thought the best service he could render was to secure Blackie against doing further injury. Never did repentant criminal receive handcuffs with more submission than the guilt-stricken Blackie the badge of punishment. There was a subdued pathetic look of almost human remorse and woe in the eye of the brute, as he was led past the place where Geordie lay low among the heather. The hands that had so often fed him and made a clean soft bed for him at night, often stroking his great knotted neck, and never raised in unjust punishment, lying helpless and shattered now, and the fair locks hung across his face, all dabbled with blood. Elsie was now kneeling by his side, but he was quite unconscious of her presence, and heedless of her low wailing, as she looked wildly round to see if nobody was coming to help Geordie, who had helped her so bravely. Little Jean had hurried shrieking to the farm, with the news of the accident, and Mistress Gowrie presently appeared, to Elsie's intense relief. She was a kindly woman, and felt conscience-stricken as she kneeled beside the little herd-boy; for she knew that it was not with his will that Blackie roamed at large among those knolls. She had happened to hear his last expostulation with her husband on the point; and this was how it had ended. But she did not think he was dead. Elsie could hardly restrain a cry of delight when she heard the whispered word that he lived still. How joyfully she carried water in her sun-bonnet from the flowing river, how tenderly she sprinkled it on his face and hands, and wiped the bloodstained locks.

And then old Farmer Gowrie came and stood with his hands behind his back, and a shadow on his furrowed face, as he gazed on his young servant with an uneasy stare. He kept restlessly moving backwards and forwards to see whether the still motionless figure showed any sign of life, till his wife reminded him that Granny Baxter was probably ignorant of the terrible accident which had happened to her grandson, and asked him to go and break the news to her. Little Jean had

been there before him, however; and Gowrie found the old woman crawling helplessly along in the direction of the knolls, quite stupefied by the terrible tidings that Jean had managed to convey to her deaf ears. The little girl seemed possessed with the idea that Miss Campbell would be sure to be able to help Geordie in this extremity; and so she left her old granny to find her way alone, and had hurried away in the direction of Kirklands to tell her sorrowful tale, meeting Grace, as we know, in the elm avenue, after her eventful talk with her brother.

They were already half-way to the stepping-stones, when Grace remembered—feeling it unaccountable that, even in her anxiety, she should have forgotten for an instant—that Walter must know what had happened to Geordie—Geordie, to whom he owed so much. She felt that she could not leave the little weeping girl to go on her way alone; but just as she was standing hesitating what it might be best to do, she met one of the dwellers in the valley, who promised to go at once and convey a message to her brother, and then she and Jean hurried on towards the fatal pasture lands. Before they crossed the stepping-stones which led to the knolls, Grace could see a little group bending over a spot in the heather; but no sound reached them through the calm evening air, except the rippling of the sunset-tinted river, which rolled between. And so Geordie was lying there gored, maimed, perhaps dying, as Jean persisted in saying. Grace felt her heart sink with fear, lest the sorrowful refrain should be true, as she crept silently near to the place where the little company was gathered. But Geordie was not dead.

"Here comes Miss Campbell," somebody said, and then the circle opened up, and Grace caught a glimpse of her scholar lying very quietly among the heather with his blue eye turned gladly to welcome his friend.

"It was only a faint, after all—and some bruises that will soon heal," Mistress Gowrie said, in a tone of relieved anxiety, as she rose from the turf where she had been kneeling to make way for Grace, who felt an intense relief as she bent smilingly over him, and talked gently of the danger past, with her heart full of thankfulness.

When little Jean saw the happy aspect of matters, her grief gave place to the wildest ecstasy of delight. Throwing herself down beside her brother, she shouted gleefully, "Oh, Geordie, Geordie, ye're no dyin' after all, ye're all right. I'll never greet again all the days o' my life," was the rash promise which she made in her joy, remembering Geordie's dislike to tears. Presently her thoughts reverted to her treasure, which, in her grief, had been forgotten. It had been dropped on the knoll when the accident happened, and Jean now bounded off gleefully in search of it.

A doctor had been sent for soon after the accident, but Geordie seemed so well that old Gowrie already began to regret that they had been in such haste in sending to fetch him. Presently Mistress Gowrie left the knolls and returned to her usual evening duties, which she felt were put sadly in arrear owing to this outbreak of Blackie's, and feeling truly thankful that it had ended so fortunately. She invited old Granny Baxter to have a cup of tea with her at the farm, which was a very great mark of graciousness on the part of "the mistress," and extremely gratifying to the old woman, to whom attentions of the kind came rarely.

It had been arranged, also, by the farmer's wife that Geordie should be moved into the "best bedroom" before the doctor came, and Granny Baxter was filled with pride when she was shown the woodruff-scented chamber, with its dark shining

floor, and among other impressive decorations from the farmyard, a waving canopy of peacock feathers above the ancient chimney-piece, where Geordie was to sleep among snowy sheets that night. But each time that they proposed he should be carried there from his rough bed among the heather, Geordie pled rather wistfully, “Just wait a wee while. I’m right comfortable here among the heather,” and once he added with a sad smile as he glanced at the farmer’s wife, “But I’ll no be able to supper the beasts the night, Mistress Gowrie. Maybe Sandy will look to them. Puir Blackie! give him a good supper; he didn’t mean any ill.”

Only Elsie Gray, of all the original group, still sat near Geordie, where she could watch every movement, though she could not be seen by him. She kept gazing at him with unutterable anguish in her eyes, and only she detected the sharp spasms that occasionally crossed his face, and felt his frame quiver with pain which he tried to conceal.

“Miss Campbell,” she whispered to Grace who was seated near her, “he’s very sore hurt, I’m sure of it. Oh, will the doctor no come soon!” and when Grace looked into Geordie’s face she began to share Elsie’s fears.

Presently Jean came bounding back in delight with her recovered treasure to lay it in Geordie’s hands. He looked at the gaily-bound book with his most pleased smile, and then glancing at Jean proudly, he said, “Eh, Jean, but ye’ll be learnin’ to be a grand scholar. I’m right glad ye have got to the school.”

Then the eager little girl must needs have the book in her own hands again, to search among the leaves for the illustrations which were interspersed, so that Geordie might be introduced to all the beauties of this wonderful volume. Geordie kept looking at her as she turned the leaves with a somewhat pitiful gaze, and presently he said in a low tone, “Jean, come a little nearer. I want to speak to ye, Jeanie. Do ye ken I’m maybe goin’ til the grand school the good Maister keeps waitin’ for us in the heavenly land? And I’ll be learnin’ a deal o’ things there that we canna learn down here,” he added, with a smile; and then he paused.

Jean looked up from her boot with bewildered eyes as she listened to Geordie’s words; a grave expression came into her face, but the shadow was only caused by her not understanding what he meant, for she knew that Geordie occasionally went beyond her depth.

“I’ll no ever herd Gowrie’s cows again, Jean, or wait at the fences for Elsie and you. I’m dyin’ Jeanie,” he added in a hoarse whisper, as he gazed sorrowfully at the little girl.

There was no mistaking the meaning of these words, and little Jean, dropping her precious book, burst into loud sobbing, as she flung herself on Geordie.

Grace had been watching the boy with a sinking heart, and a great fear began to take possession of her that what he said might be true, as a terrible spasm of agony crossed his face, and a groan of pain escaped him. She looked anxiously to see if there was any sign of the doctor coming, and taking little Jean aside, she told her that if she loved Geordie she must be brave and quiet, even though he was so very ill, as he seemed to think. Then she tried to speak some soothing words of comfort, but little Jean wailed out with a fresh burst of sorrow:

“Oh, Miss Cam’ell, why didn’t God keep him from Blackie, if he loves him as ye say? Ye mind how ye read to us in the Bible about him saving the herd-laddie out

o' the jaws o' the bear; oh, but, I think, he might have taken care of our Geordie;" and poor little Jean would not be comforted.

"Where's granny?" Geordie had whispered, and Elsie rose from her post at Geordie's head and flitted away like a little noiseless ghost to find the old woman. She met her at the farm, where, having finished her cup of tea, she was being shown some of Mistress Gowrie's feathered favourites in the farmyard.

"Mistress Gowrie, he's not better, as ye think; he says he's dyin', and wants to see granny," Elsie said, with quivering lips, as she reached them.

"Dying, child, nonsense! what do you mean?" said the farmer's wife, looking at Elsie to see if she was not dreaming. But Elsie looked terribly wide-awake and sorrow-stricken, and Mistress Gowrie went off in search of her husband.

Then Granny Baxter began to perceive that there was something wrong, and presently Elsie succeeded in making her understand, and began to guide her slow steps to where her grandson still lay. Oh, how slow they were, Elsie thought, as she glanced along the straight field path still to be crossed before they reached the knolls, and thought of what might be going on there. But had not Geordie wanted to see his grandmother, and surely she might endure for him who had done so much for her? So the little girl kept close by the old woman's side, who leant her wrinkled hand on Elsie's shoulder, while, with the help of her staff in the other, she hobbled along, with her eyes fixed upon the ground, groaning and muttering about this terrible blow that seemed likely to fall upon her.

"Granny, granny, I've been wearyin' for you," said Geordie, holding out both his hands, when at last Elsie's patience had guided the old woman to the spot. "Oh, but I'm no able to make her hear. Nae words o' mine can travel to her ear, and I had much to say to her," Geordie cried, with a suppressed sob, as some terrible internal pain seemed to seize him.

The old woman had seated herself by his side, and her withered fingers wandered trembling among his hair, as she moaned helplessly, "Oh, laddie, laddie, what's this that's come upon us?"

Suddenly, Geordie seemed to remember something, and, smiling brightly, he feebly raised his hand to his jacket-pocket, and drew out the little chamois bag, containing the slowly-gathered store of money with which he intended to buy the ear-trumpet for his poor deaf granny.

"I gathered the last sixpence yestreen, for holding the minister's horse," he said, as he laid the bag in her hand, "It's to buy a thing that makes deaf folk hear, granny. But she can't understand me, Miss Cam'ell," he murmured, sadly, as he looked at Grace, who was leaning over him; "and, oh, I would have liked well to tell her before I go away about the Good Shepherd that you first told me about, Miss Cam'ell. I dinna think she understands right what a Friend he can be to a body; and I've always been waitin' till I got that horn for makin her hear to tell her all about him, for it's no a thing that a body wad just like to roar at the tap o' their voice. But you'll maybe speak to her some of the things ye spak' to us, Miss Cam'ell. Ye'll have one less at the school now, ye see," he added, smiling sadly; and then turning with a look of tender pity on his grandmother, who watched him with wistful eyes, as if she knew that his lips were moving for her, he said, "Oh, tell her to listen to his voice, and let the sound into her heart. He was aye able to

mak' deaf folk hear, wasn't he, Miss Cam'ell?" said Geordie, with a bright smile as he turned to his young teacher.

They had now got ready a sort of litter, on which they meant to carry him to the farm; for Mistress Gowrie felt convinced that only more comfortable surroundings and a visit from the doctor was necessary for his complete recovery, and was resolved that no care of nursing on her part should be wanting to atone for any past indifference to the welfare of the little herd-boy with which she might reproach herself.

Geordie, seeing her anxiety to perform this deed of kindness, at last consented that they should take him from his lowly heather couch, and carry him to all the comforts of the best bedroom at Gowrie. But each time they tried to lift him the boy got so deathly pale, and seemed to suffer so intensely, that even Mistress Gowrie was obliged to acknowledge that it might be best to wait till the doctor came. Indeed, it soon became evident to all that Blackie's blows had touched some vital part, and Geordie's herding days were done.

He lay for a little while with closed eyes, seeming thankful to be undisturbed, and a silence fell on the group round him, not broken when Walter Campbell joined it; for a glance from Grace, and a look at Geordie's face, told him all. He stood there, in the freshness and strength of his youth, looking at the ebbing life of the boy whom he felt then as if he would have died to save. How he longed to tell him of all the blessing his words had brought to his soul, of the life-long gratitude which must surround his memory; but it was too late. Walter felt that he could not disturb the passing soul with anything so personal; but in the land where Geordie was going they would meet one day; and he would keep his thanks till then.

The silence had not been broken for several minutes. Poor little Jean had been trying to keep very brave and quiet, since Grace explained to her how much her noisy grief would vex Geordie. But Elsie, who had returned to her post at Geordie's head, and was seated silently there, now gave a smothered sob, which seemed to fall on Geordie's ear. He opened his blue eyes, and looking wistfully about, said in a faint whisper, "Elsie, I didna know ye was here. I saw you on the stepping-stones just when I was meetin' Blackie, but I thought you had been away home before now; it surely must be far on in the gloamin'. Eh, Elsie, but I'll no be able to keep the tryst for the bramble gatherin' wi' you," he said, in a mournful tone, turning towards her, and referring to a long-planned holiday, when they were to go together to search for brambles for Mistress Gowrie and the forester's wife's joint jam making. "But, Elsie, speak to me," he continued, feebly, holding out his hand, for he could not see her face where she sat, "We'll keep our tryst in the bonnie land beside the green pastures and the still waters ye often read to me about. Will we no', Elsie?"

"Oh, Geordie, I can't bear it. Why did you no let Blackie get hold o' me? Oh, Geordie, Geordie!" Elsie sobbed, as she crept round within sight of the boy, and knelt beside him with clasped hands and lines of agony on her face, that made the fair child look like a suffering woman.

Geordie turned his dying eyes upon her with a look of mingled love and sorrow, which none who saw it could ever forget; and stretching out both his hands, he said, "Oh, Elsie, will ye no give me one kiss afore I dee?"

And Elsie lifted up her fair face, which had been covered with her hands, and bending down, kissed the dying lips. Then, with a look of unutterable gladness and contentment, Geordie closed his eyes as if he was going to sleep.

Walter Campbell turned away for a moment, for, as he afterwards told one of his shipmates, "It was more than a fellow could stand, and he didn't mind confessing that he hadn't stood it." Presently he hurriedly joined the little group again, determined that Geordie must yet hear before he went away how his faithful words had, through God's grace burnt themselves into a wayward heart, and set a dead soul on fire. But he found that another Voice was falling on Geordie's ear, which was closed to all earthly sounds now; even that greeting to faithful ones which bids them enter into the joy of their Lord.

And so the poor bruised body did lie in Mistress Gowrie's woodruff-scented best bedroom, and among her snowy linen, that night after all, but Geordie was not there; his home was henceforth in the many mansions of the Father's house.

Chapter VI

An Old Friend with a New Name.

„Now, children, here we are at Kirklands, at last," said a lady with a pleasant voice, to an eager-looking group of boys and girls, who were clustering round her, in a large open travelling carriage, which had just drawn up in front of an old gateway, and waited for admittance.

"Kirklands at last," was re-echoed among the little party. The two boys seated beside the coachman glanced round at the occupants of the inside seats, feeling sure that, their higher position secured them superior information, and shouted in chorus, "Mamma, mamma, Kirklands at last."

"As if we didn't know that as well as you do," shouted back Willie, a curly-headed little fellow, seated beside his mother, who had a secret hankering after the higher place of his elder brothers, along with a desire to prove to them that their position was in no way superior to his own.

The old gates closed behind them, and the carriage bowled swiftly along the smooth avenue, with its branching elms overhead. The pleasant vistas of green, on all sides, were very grateful to the eyes of the young travellers, wearied with miles of a white dusty turnpike-road, on a hot July afternoon. They looked with delighted gaze on the new fair scene, and thought what happy evenings they would have among those green glades during the long summer days.

But there was one of the party to whom this scene was not new, but old and familiar, written over with many memories, some well-nigh overlaid in the turmoil of life, but which flickered up with new vividness as she looked on the calm sunlighted scene, and thought of other days. The years had brought many changes to her, and it was with mingled feelings that she gazed on this unchanged spot. Each grey-lichened rock stood out from the mossy floor with a face that was familiar; all the little winding woodland paths, she knew where they led to, and

could take the children to many a nook where wild flowers and delicate green ferns still loved to grow, at they did long ago when she used to gather them in these woods.

"Seventeen years ago! is it possible?" she murmured, as she leaned back in a corner of the carriage, and thought of the many leaves in the book of her life which had been folded-down since she took farewell of these green glades in her girlish days. And as she sits, quietly thinking, while the little group round her are making the green aisles resound with their merry laughter, we fancy, as we glance at her face, that it is one we have seen before in this valley. The "stealthy day by day" has certainly done its work; the outline of Grace's cheek is sharper than it used to be, and the eager, speaking eyes have lost somewhat of their fire, but there is a calm gladness in their gaze as she glances at the joyous faces round her, that speaks of lessons learnt, and sorrows past, during chequered days which have lain between the autumn evening, when we saw her last, and this July afternoon, when she is coming with her "two bands" to the home of her girlhood.

Miss Hume, Grace's aunt, had passed away from this world during that autumn seventeen years ago, and Grace had never revisited Kirklands since. Walter, to whom it belonged, was still a naval officer. His home on the sea had still more fascination for him than the inland beauties of Kirklands, which had been left to strangers during the intervening years.

For some time past it had stood empty and tenantless, and Walter had suggested that his sister, who had just come from a long sojourn abroad, should, with her children, take up her abode there. Her husband, Colonel Foster, was still on foreign service; and Grace, who longed to see the old home after all her wanderings, had readily agreed to go with her little flock and introduce them to the spot which was their dreamland of romance, the historic ground of all the pleasantest stories in their mother's mental library, often ransacked for their benefit.

Mrs. Foster's servants were already at Kirklands, making preparations for the arrival. The old rooms were being opened up once again, and shafts of golden sunlight streamed through the long-darkened windows, on the dark-panelled walls, as if to herald joyously the good news that "life and thought" were coming back to the deserted house.

As the carriage followed the windings of the avenue, the grey gables of the old mansion began to peep through the green boughs, their first appearance being announced by a jubilant chorus from the elder boys on the box, which made little Willie feel painfully that his range of vision was far from satisfactory. Presently, however, the timeworn walls could be seen by all the party, as the carriage wheeled round the old terrace, and the travellers reached the end of their journey. Then eager feet began to trot up and down the grass-grown steps, and climb on the old carved railing, where the griffins fascinated little Grace by their stony stare, as they used to do her mother years ago. The long-silent corridors began to resound with joyous laughter, as the merry party rambled through the old rooms, wishing to identify each place with historical recollections, founded on their mother's and Uncle Walter's stories. And was that really the tree that Uncle Walter made believe to be the rigging of a ship, and one day fell from one of its highest boughs? And where used they to keep their rabbits, and in what room did they

learn their lessons? These, and such questions, were generally asked in chorus, to which their mother had to endeavour to reply, as she wandered among the familiar rooms with her merry boys and girls.

"Mamma, do you know what I should like to see best of all? Two things, mamma," whispered little Grace, as she caught hold of her mother's dress.

"And what would my little girl like to see—the toys mamma used to play with when she was a little girl like Gracie? I believe I've carried the key of the chest where they lie buried about with me all these years;" and Mrs. Foster began to look in the little basket she held in her hand for a shining bunch of keys.

"It wasn't the toys I meant, though I should like to see them very much," replied the little girl, who was more timid and gentle than her brothers and sisters, and generally required more encouragement to unburden her small mind, "it is the room where you taught Geordie that I want to see—and Geordie's grave among the heather."

Some quick ears had caught a name that seemed to be a household word, and louder voices said, as the boy's clustered round their mother, "Oh yes, mamma, do show us where you taught Geordie and little Jean."

So Grace led the way through the dim passages that had once frightened little Jean, and whose gloom now made the small Grace cling close to her mother's side. The still-room was dark and unopened, for the servants had not thought it necessary to include it in their preparations. Grace went to the window and undid the fastenings, and the yellow afternoon sun streamed on the dusty wooden bench where Geordie, and Jean, and Elsie used to sit.

The merry voices were hushed for a moment, and the children looked in awed silence into the little room, as if it had been a shrine.

After they had gazed long and silently, and their mother went to fasten the window again, she said, "Children, we will come here and read God's Word on Sunday afternoons, as the little company you know about used to do long ago; and I hope you will all listen to the Good Shepherd's voice, and follow it as Geordie did;" and presently the children trooped quietly away along the dark vaulted passages.

There was no faithful Margery now to be trusted with everything, and able to put things straight in the twinkling of an eye, as her young mistress used to declare she alone was capable of doing, so Mrs. Foster had some unpacking and arranging preliminaries to superintend before she could join her eager little party out of doors. But when tea was over, and the sun had begun to scatter its orange and crimson tints over the Kirklands valley, Grace thought she would like to take a stroll among some familiar places before the darkness came.

After lingering on the old terrace for a little, she gathered her boys and girls round her, and said she was going to take them across the park. She wanted to visit a place she remembered well, a pleasant angle of a rising glade of birches, where she once stood mourning over the traces of an uprooted cottage. But Grace knew that another home had grown on the ruins of the former dwelling, and to it she bent her steps now, for there was one of its inmates whom she longed to see. There was something of the mingled feeling of interest and romance with which her children wore viewing these now yet familiar scenes, in Grace's desire to look on a face she had not seen for many years. Its image would rise before her,

chubby, smiling, and childlike, as of old; and then she remembered the evening when she had first seen it tear-stained and sad, as she crossed this path with the little fat hand in hers, as her own Grace's was now.

But Jean had not shed many tears since then. There was no happier home in all the valley than the white cottage, over which the birch-trees lovingly stretched their delicate fringes, her husband, the village carrier, used to think when he came within sight of it, after his day's journey was over, his parcels all delivered, and his horses "suppered" for the night. Generally his bright-looking wife was hovering near the door, waiting his coming with a little group round her as merry as the one that was now making the woods of Kirklands ring with their light-hearted laughter.

Grace had not told the children that she meant to take them to see little Jean that evening. She wanted first to go alone to the cottage and see her quietly there, for she had many things to hear and ask. Still, Grace had not been altogether a stranger to the home life there. Sometimes a letter, written and addressed with laborious carefulness, had followed her to remote foreign stations, and brought pleasant memories of dewy heather and fragrant birches as she read it among waving oleanders and palms. During all those years Grace had watched over Jean's welfare, and many things in her pretty home told of her thoughtful remembrance of Geordie's sister.

Illustration:
Old Scenes Revisited

The arrival of the family at Kirklands had taken place a few days earlier than was intended, so Jean had not happened to hear the news, and was all unconscious of the pleasure in store for her. How often she had longed to see the "young leddy of Kirklands," as she still called her, how many times she said to her husband that she would be sure to know her anywhere, though it was so many years since she had looked into her face. But now, as Jean sat matron-like with her sewing, in front of her cottage, while her children played near, she wondered what "strange lady" could be coming along the path. She called her straying little ones to her, in case they should be in the way, but she noticed that the stranger did not seem to think so, for she had just stopped kindly to stroke one little flaxen head, and Jean, with a mother's pride, felt grateful that "her bairn should be respeckit among the rest." But when the lady, still holding the little boy's hand, began to climb the mossy bank, and came towards her, Jean thought she had surely seen that face before. Though not till Grace had smiled, and said, holding out her hand, "Jean, is it possible you do not know me?" did she recognise her old teacher.

"Oh, Miss Cam'ell, Miss Cam'ell!" she said, with a cry of delight as she dropped her mending and rose to meet her. "Is it really yourself? I canna believe my verra eyes."

And when Grace gazed questioningly into the serene, beaming face of the little matron, she saw it had kept all that was best of its childish lineaments, and felt with thankful gladness that Geordie's Shepherd had not forgotten little Jean. Meanwhile the little loitering party came along the road, and seeing their mother

engaged in conversation beside the pretty cottage door, they were eager to know who of all the old friends she was talking to. Willie was the first to clamber up the mossy bank and reach the cottage. The others were following, when he joined them with an expression of mingled interest and disappointment on his face.

"I say Walter—Grace,—can you guess who mamma is speaking to? Well, it's Geordie's sister—little Jean."

Then they all crept shyly near their mother while she talked at the cottage door, glancing with interest at the inmate. But when little Grace could find an opportunity she whispered in a tone of disappointment, "Oh, mamma, is it really true what Willie says?" and then she added with a sigh, when Willie's news had been confirmed, "Oh, I'm so sorry; I do wish she could have stayed a little girl."

Her mother smiled at the childish idea; but she presently remembered that it was as the little herd-boy Geordie's image still lived in her memory, though nearly twenty summers had come and gone since he entered on that life in which earthly days and years are merged into eternity, where the old and feeble renew their strength, and the young grow wiser than the wisest hero.

Grace's boys and girls had all to be introduced by name to the smiling little matron, whose eye rested on them more or less appreciatively, as she recognised a likeness to their mother or their Uncle Walter.

Presently Grace turned to the little group, and said softly, "Children, would you like to come to the knolls of heather on the other side of the hill? I am going there now."

"Oh yes, mamma, I want to go," chimed an eager though subdued chorus of voices; and then the childish feet followed the two mothers as they wandered slowly through the birch trees and crossed the path which led to the stepping-stones. The water still splashed and gurgled noisily round them, and the knolls of heather stretched with unchanged contour on the other side. Beyond rose the white gables and thatched roof of the old farm of Gowrie; but the former master and mistress were gone now; and the young farmer, who had taken the lease, chafed considerably that he had not been able to include the bit of heathery pasture lands in the fields, seeing it had been previously secured by another tenant. It was the only piece of land owned by Grace in the valley, and through all these years of absence she had jealously guarded any encroachment upon her territory. Old Gowrie had, at her earnest request, relinquished his right to that portion of his domain in her favour, for he ceased to wish to make it one of his economies to have his cattle grazing there.

So it happened that though the pastoral valley had considerably changed its face, and had much of its ruggedness smoothed away in the course of years, this stretch of heather remained unreclaimed. It was still a thoroughfare, but a very safe one now, for its only dwelling was a grave.

On the day after Geordie's death Grace had gone to see the last resting-place destined for him in the little village churchyard. It was a dreary patch of ground which looked as if the suns ray's never penetrated through its high walls on the graves below. Crumbling grey-lichened headstones peeped dismally from among the long dank grass, and the little paths were overgrown with weeds. Everywhere there were traces of unloving carelessness of the dead. And though Grace knew full well that the silent sleepers below little heeded this selfish forgetfulness, these

surroundings sent a chill to her heart. She thought she should like all that was left here of her boy-friend to lie in pleasanter places. Far better he should rest underneath the heathery sod among the pleasant breezy knolls, consecrated by many a heavenward thought of the lonely little herd-boy, and by faithful words spoken in an accepted time to a wayward brother's heart. So Grace made her suit to the old farmer at a time when his heart was softened, and he was not unwilling to part with a spot written over with a stinging memory. Miss Hume, without even consulting Mr. Graham, had agreed to the transfer of the land; and so it happened that Grace, like the patriarch long ago, a stranger and sojourner in the land, held as a possession a burying-place.

The bright summer day had reached its dying hour when the little group stood on the bank of the river. The yellow sunlight was merging into deep orange and crimson, tinging with a wonderful variety of tints the lower landscape. The rippling water looked as if a sudden cross current of red wine had come flowing into it, and the little hillocks beyond, golden with gorse, were steeped in the mellow light.

The children followed their mother and Jean, with awed faces and hushed voices, along the little gleaming sheep-walk, fringed by sweet wild thyme and dog violets, with tendrils of deerhorn moss flinging their arms across the path. At length they came on a little marble slab, by the side of one of the knolls. The last golden shafts of sunlight were stealing over its memorial words, and the young eyes read in silence:

IN MEMORY OF
GEORDIE BAXTER,

Who went to the Fold above on the
7th of August, 185—.

„The Lord is my Shepherd;
I shall not want.“

Presently, the silent group heard footsteps behind, and when Grace glanced round she saw a woman, with two little boys by her side, coming along the little path towards the headstone. She stopped suddenly when she saw the strangers, evidently surprised by the unusual presence of visitors in that unfrequented spot, and, turning down another path, went away in the opposite direction. “Who is that, Jean?” asked Mrs. Foster; “surely I have seen the face before.”

“Dear heart, do ye not know her? It's Elsie Gray. We dinna think, John and me, that her bonnie face is much changed; but then we see it every day,” Jean replied, looking fondly after the retreating figure.

“Ah, is it really Elsie? I was just going to ask about her, Jean. But who are those children with her? I thought you told me in one of your letters that she lived quite alone?” asked Grace, stooping down to pluck a bluebell from Geordie's grave, instead of hurrying after this old friend, as the little Grace expected her mother to do.

Then the little matron went on to narrate how Elsie's home was still the forester's pretty cottage, though her father and mother were both dead. She had

never been married, which Jean remarked was a great pity, and hinted that a good many other people were of her opinion. But how the parish of Kirklands could ever have got on without her if she had gone away, or what life would be if she had not Elsie to go to in every joy and sorrow, Jean could not imagine, as she said she frequently remarked to "her John." Nobody's hands seemed to be fuller of helpful work, and nobody did it more cheerily, than Elsie Gray.

Then Jean explained that the two little boys were orphans whom she had taken to her comfortable home; and "it wasn't the first pair o' laddies she had made good for something," Jean added, admiringly.

"Oh, mamma, don't you want to speak to her? She has such a nice, beautiful face. Do let me run after her, and ask her to stop for a minute," said little Grace, eagerly.

Mrs. Foster glanced musingly across the knolls at Elsie's slender figure, as she sauntered peacefully home with her charge, and then she said, "No, my dear, we shall not trouble Elsie to-night; but I shall take you with me to see her in her own home to-morrow, if you wish it. I shall be going there."

The cold, grey light was beginning to steal over the woods of Kirklands, and the rosy tints that still hovered about the knolls would soon give place to the gloom of night, so Grace gathered her little party, and turned her steps towards the river.

The merry voices, hushed for a time, began again to resound through the still evening air, and the children went hurrying on with Jean, who had told them she must be going home to see after the milking of her cows, and cordially responded to their wish to join her at the process.

So Grace had been following slowly, and when she crossed the stepping-stones, she looked lingeringly back, for, with the sound of the rippling water had come the remembered echoes of Geordie's voice as she heard it first. Then she called to mind the chilly spring day when she had started on the search, pronounced so hopeless by old Adam the gardener, and how gleefully she hailed the unexpected appearance of the little herd-boy. She smiled as she remembered the childish eagerness that made her fear that he would not appear at Kirklands, as he had promised, and his rather reproachful reply that he "Aye keepit his trysts." And then there rose mingled memories of those trysts, which be had so faithfully kept in the little still-room, of her own childish incapacity for the work she had so longed to do, and of the sense of failure that hung over it so long.

And as she turned to follow her merry boys, who were clambering up the mossy bank, where the silvery bark of the old birch-trees were still streaked with rosy sunset hues, she felt how much she had learnt from the tender, earnest heart of Geordie.

„And comforted, she praised the grace
Which him had led to be,
An early seeker of that Face
Which he should early see.“