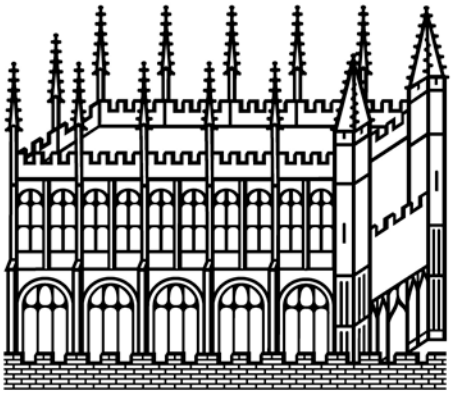

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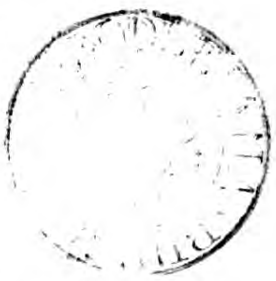
HESTER'S HISTORY.

A Novel.

(REPRINTED FROM "ALL THE YEAR ROUND.")

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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HESTER'S HISTORY.

CHAPTER I.

VISITORS IN THE TOWER.

HESTER had three lady visitors in her tower that night, and the first of the three was Janet Golden.

Miss Golden was dressing for dinner when she heard the wheels of a coach. Miss Golden was very pretty, as I think I have said before. She and her mirror were fully aware of this fact, and to-night they were taking note of it as usual.

Miss Golden was not a young lady to hear the

wheels of a coach without going to the window to see further into the matter. She put her face to the pane, and saw Sir Archie alight. She kept her face to the pane, and saw Hester alight. She pressed her face to the pane, and saw Sir Archie leading Hester up his steps to his hall-door.

It seemed that Miss Janet did not like what she saw. She quarrelled with her maid, and dismissed her in a pet; and after this had been accomplished she made a rent in her handsome dinner-dress; and after this last had been effected, she sat down before her fire, and began to think.

That effort, to a young lady of fashion, was just as difficult in those days as in these. Janet hardly knew what vexed her, and could not task herself so far as to find out. She ought to have been glad to see Sir Archie coming home, and she was not glad. She was weary of her life at Glenluce, and yet she would not go away.

She was longing to be back in London, and yet they talked of a wedding here. She was to be mistress in these glens, and she yawned at the dreary thought.

She had had a good resting time while Sir Archie was in London. She had been dull, to be sure, but she could not avoid that. She had been neither so gay nor so ill-humoured as when Sir Archie had been at home. She had had some leisure to remember that there was something in the world which she had fancied, and had not got. She had had it between her fingers, and thrown it away. She had expected it would come back again, but it had not come as yet. In the hurry of her daily business at Glenluce—which was to tease Sir Archie Munro—she had formerly had no time to remember what she wanted. In his absence she had gained leisure. And she had made such good use of her time that she could not see her way to forgetting, as before.

This Janet was, undoubtedly, a spoiled child of fortune. Luxury had been her nurse, her playfellow, her instructress. Her baby fingers had been amused by the whimsical distribution of many superfluous guineas. Gold had been a toy to her, and no one had ever thought it necessary to instruct her as to its value. She had always had so much that it seemed she had no need of any at all. She had not alone been saved from trouble in her own life, but she had never even come in contact with grief, suffering, or fear. Every one was thoughtful for her; every one was worshipful of her. Her hands were so full of everything that she could not stretch them forth to take hold of anything. There was nothing for her to choose, beyond the colour of a dress; there was nothing that she could dread, beyond the misfit of a boot. She had no need to check her tongue, for her impertinence was all wit: it were wrong to curb her temper, since her passions were only proof of a fine mettle. It

were silly to seek for wisdom, since her follies were found charms; it were idle to mend her ignorance from books, since there were always people willing to tell her anything which she might happen to want to know. Her life was as full of boons as her jewel case of gems, and if she wanted to be thwarted she must quarrel with her shoestrings. The period of her days was like a box choked up with sugar-plums, all sweet, all smooth, all alike, all unwholesome.

There was just one little thing which she had wished to keep, and had lost. It had not been much to keep, she had thought, and so had been careless to hold it. It had not been a great deal to lose, she had said, when she found it had slipped away. How much she had missed it when it was gone she was far too proud ever to dream of acknowledging to herself.

She had had so many suitors it would have been a labour to her to count them. Of high degree, of low degree, of richer and of poorer,

of younger and of older. And, if this thing which she had lost, which she regretted having lost, were the heart of a young, foolish, good-natured lover, what wonder that Miss Golden should feel dissatisfied with herself? It was as if some one overburthened with riches should stoop in search of a farthing. In addition to the discontentedness which had increased in her during his absence, Miss Golden was further disturbed because Sir Archie had returned; for above all other people who came near her, Sir Archie had the knack of setting her world upside down.

Now, if these scraps of information as to Miss Golden's private feelings be considered most disjointed and unsatisfactory, it can only be said that in such respects they are the more like the young lady's thoughts.

Could it have been the seamstress whom he was waiting upon like that? Miss Janet was asking questions of herself or the steel bars of her

glowing grate. They expected her to-night, and her room had been prepared. She claimed to be a lady. "I will go this moment and visit her, and see what she is like. And if it so happens she be the dressmaker, I'll give her a task at once."

A few moments after this valiant resolution had been come to, a tap fell on Hester's door; then the door was quickly opened, without pause for further ceremony, and Miss Janet made a very handsome picture in the doorway.

Her white velvet gown was half hanging from her waist; a brilliant scarlet shawl was twisted loosely round her shoulders. Her dark curls were gathered to the crown of her pretty head, and held there in a soft wreath by a glittering jewelled clasp. Her fair, saucy, satin-cheeked young face was held aloft with a sort of natural disdain. Her brown eyes were sparkling with an imperious curiosity.

Hester thus caught in her first act of secresy,

dropped her hands on the paper in a childish trepidation. So Janet saw her first, a look of fear in her up-turned eyes, hiding the letter she was writing with a guilty-looking impulse. Miss Golden noted the look and the gesture at the time, forgot about them afterwards, but later again remembered, when it might have been well she had still forgotten them.

"A sly little lackadaisy!" was Miss Janet's inward comment. "Beginning to write letters before she can well know where she is sitting. And hiding them up in a hurry, as if it were anybody's business but her own!"

Miss Janet had no reason for her ill-disposed feeling towards the young seamstress, except perhaps a general and undefined feeling that dressmakers had no business to be ladies. A humble sewing damsel with such an ambition should be checked. And if an enthusiastic nun like the Mother Augustine should encourage her, and if

a philanthropic matron like Mrs. Hazeldean should be imposed upon, all this was no reason why a gentleman like Sir Archie should stoop to wait on her like a lacquey. But such being actually the case, it was high time some person of common sense, and a proper perception of the fitness of things, should step in and show the young woman her mistake. So Miss Janet just stepped in, with her rent dress in her hand.

"You are the new seamstress, I believe," she said, with a little supercilious hesitation. "May I trouble you to mend my dress?"

Hester, so appealed to, was at her post in a moment, her needle threaded, thimble on finger, her hand steady, her face composed. It was only when people were too good to her, or too thoughtful for her, that she was likely to lose her presence of mind. This splendid haughty young lady must be Pierce Humphrey's Janet Golden. And Hester, out of sympathy for the

absent lover, set about the task of the mending with her fingers in their most dainty careful mood.

She stood close to Janet's shoulder, with her hands among the folds of white velvet. It was an odd dress, but a handsome dress, she remarked, with her trained accuracy of judgment in such matters. And the wearer was an odd person, but a handsome person, she went on to observe, with the untrained accuracy of her natural instinct.

"She is taller than I am, and more beautiful," thought Janet, as Hester's drooping hair touched her own bare white shoulder. Miss Janet had an advantage over Hester, for in a long, dim, ghostly strip of mirror set in a wall she could see the striking contrast made by two girlish forms and faces.

"And her ancestors might have been princes when mine followed the plough!" continued Miss Janet, following a new idea through her very capricious mind.

The dress was mended; and adjusted on the wearer by Hester's hands. Then Miss Janet stood aloof, and regarded her gentle tirewoman.

"You shall come down to dinner with me," she said suddenly, much as she might have said, "you shall have a piece of cake," to a child. "Lady Helen will be quite content if I desire it. I will lend you a pretty gown. I will not have you mewed up here by yourself."

Miss Golden in this proposal need not be wondered at too much. Some people who knew her well would not have been surprised to hear her begging of a beggar to take a present of her purse, or ordering her milliner to make her a bonnet out of a rainbow. She had an eye for beauty, and an instinct for breeding. She was a person who knew how to change her mind. She could give a blow and a kiss in the same breath.

"Thank you," said Hester, "but I have dined." And that was all she said. And this

being so, Miss Janet retreated to the door in high amazement.

"Good night!" she said, "and thank you for your service." And then looking over her shoulder before she closed the door:

"And I hope, young woman," she said, "that you understand your business. If not, you will find little welcome here."

Hester had hardly got over the surprise of this first visit when some other knuckles came tapping on her door. The handle was turned again, and the Honourable Madge put in her head.

"So you are the dressmaker, my dear?" she said. "And a very charming young dressmaker I declare! Thirteen for dinner they said, and I would not go down for the world. And dear Archie just come home, and my cherry tabinet quite wasted!"

And she stroked down her dress.

"Just what I was at her age!" she said, seizing Hester's hand, and holding her a little off, scanning her up and down with half-closed eyes. "But time will make havoc." And she swayed herself to and fro, lifted her hand to feel that the likeness of her lover was in its place upon her forehead, and looked askance at the fire, with a half-sad, half-bitter little smile.

"You will excuse me, my dear, if I poke your fire?" And she made a little frisk towards the hearth. "The night is so cold, and you look such a sociable young person!"

Hester placed her a chair, and fetched her a footstool, and then, at her bidding, sat facing her by the fender.

"What is the news from the world, my dear?" she said, dropping her voice and looking cautiously round her. "They do tell such tales of the times. But Lady Helen don't allow any newspapers to come in. And Sir Archie is as close as an oyster.

He laughs and says, 'I will not let them cut off your head, Cousin Madge.' (The Honourable Madge, my dear, to strangers.) So I said to myself, 'Our new dressmaker will have no scruples about telling me the truth.' "

"I know far less than you do, I am sure," said Hester, fearfully. "I have come straight from London, and I was shut up in a vessel or a coach all the way. In Dublin, at night there was a crowd in the streets. They said some one was being taken to prison. It was terrible, the crowd was so quiet."

"Ah, ah!" said Miss Madge, nodding her head. "better did they shout and roar. And hist! my dear—what is your name? Hester! Excuse the Christian name. It is so much more comfortable between friends. I call myself, Madge, the Honourable Madge. Ah!"

"This country is safe, is it not?" ventured Hester.

"Safe!" echoed Miss Madge, with a terrible little laugh. "Vesuvius, my dear, must be a nice safe place to live upon till the volcano begins to spout fire. Any night we may be hanged from our bed-posts."

Hester shuddered and drew nearer to the cherry tabinet.

"Or burned in our beds," said the Honourable Madge. "But that is no reason why we should have our dresses made unfashionably in the mean time. And I came here chiefly to compliment you on your dolls. Poor dolls would be burned, too, of course."

"But, madam," pleaded Hester, "please pardon me if I ask you, does not Sir Archie Munro discountenance the disturbances? He does not concern himself with the troubles?"

"Don't he?" cried the Honourable Madge, giving her head a toss, and snapping her fingers. "It may be that he don't. He may or he may

not. If I were a man I should, I can tell you, that's all. I would lead out my clan to do battle!"

And the Honourable Madge grasped the poker, and made a fierce little flourish with it in the air.

"Look in there," she said again, stabbing the fire, and making the red cinders drop about. "Does it not look like rows of houses burning? La, my dear, don't turn so pale. And I wanted so much to speak to you about my new pink silk. Well, I'll bring it you in the morning."

And soon after this she pirouetted towards the door, pointed her toes in her long sandalled slippers, kissed hands to Hester, and disappeared.

It was a very pale face that was raised in expectation when the third knock fell on Hester's door.

"Come in," said Hester, all her weariness and fearfulness in her voice.

"Have I come too soon?" asked Mrs. Hazeldean, advancing out of the shadows with two out-

stretched hands. "I ought to have let you rest. Have I come too soon?"

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread. But Hester did not announce that she had had two visitors already. She only said "no" in thorough earnest; finding her fingers covered up in the clasp of two warm hands; letting her eyes take their delight in this new comer's rare face.

CHAPTER II.

MISS JANET'S COMMUNICATIONS, AND A STORY OF A PASTY.

"A VERY nice girl indeed," pronounced Lady Helen, "and does great credit to Mary's judgment. She is so well-bred she actually makes one look to one's manners. I am only afraid that her instep is too high, and her shoulders have too elegant a slope."

"I never heard that those were signs of delicacy," said Mrs. Hazeldean. "And I think she looks healthy, if not very robust."

Lady Helen opened her languid eyes. "How

odd you are, Margaret," she said. "I did not speak of health. I mean that I am afraid she is too much of a lady."

"She is not above her work," put in Miss Janet, impelled by honesty to speak from her experience.

"She is not a fool, I can tell you," said Miss Madge.

And these were some of the comments that were made upon Hester. Sir Archie, who was present when they began, suddenly left the room before they were finished.

"There he goes!" cried Lady Helen, "not a bit changed since before he went away. I am sure there is something on his mind. He will read the papers; he will ponder and fret about the rebels. I have written to Mary about it. I can do no more."

The Honourable Madge began to hum. She was knotting a silk purse for her favourite Archie; and she gave herself a little rock in her chair

after she had accomplished each knot. She began to hum snatches of an ancient pet doggrel of the glens, composed about one of Sir Archie's ancestors:

"Archie Munro! Archie Munro!
Blessings go with you wherever you go!"

"I do fear he is getting into trouble," mourned Lady Helen.

"Long may the blast of the war-bugle blow,
Calling to battle brave Archie Munro!"

hummed the Honourable Madge in her little cracked voice.

"Leave Archie to himself," said Mrs. Hazeldean, hastily, raising her voice to drown the words of Madge's song. "Not one of us here is fit to advise him. He will act for the best."

"I wish you would hold your tongue, Madge," whimpered Lady Helen. "I don't think you would care if he were carried off from us to-morrow. And it's very easy for you to talk, Margaret, about his acting for the best, but I tell you that I have always been subject to presentiments."

Lady Helen's nostrils and lips began to quiver and Mrs. Hazeldean saw a rising storm of terror in her eyes. Therefore Hester was immediately sent for to take her ladyship's dimensions for a dress; which timely diversion of the nervous lady's thoughts was a godsend in its results to all the household.

"I shall ask you, Miss Cashel, to come with me and take a look over my wardrobe," said Lady Helen, rousing herself, with a sigh, to make the effort of encountering a frivolous necessity. "I am afraid you will be shocked at the state of neglect in which you will find it. Your nice ideas will be offended at seeing fashions six months old. For what with anxiety of mind, and the natural carelessness which steals upon one in a quiet place like this, I must own I have been neglectful of some of the duties of my state in life."

"They accumulate, you see," said Lady Helen, looking round her with a victimised air, while Hester stood aghast, among rows of scarce-worn

dresses. "The time will go on, and one's clothing must be renewed. Dresses will multiply, although I am so moderate. Queen Elizabeth had a dress for every day in the year, Miss Cashel. And yet she lived, you know, in comparatively a barbarous age."

Lady Helen put in that "you know" with an emphasis, and a manifest satisfaction, which showed how finely she appreciated the luxury of having a lady who had probably read history for her dressmaker.

When Hester went back to her tower room, carrying a load of finery in her arms, she found Miss Janet established at her fireside. A soft misty rain was drifting down the glen beyond the window. The world outside looked wrapped up in a rent white garment, some shaggy crowns of mountains, and some straggling arms of trees being here and there thrust through the ragged holes.

Miss Janet nodded at Hester when she entered,

and went on warming her silk-shod feet at the pleasant glow in Hester's grate. She had picked out the most comfortable chair, and lay lazily backward, looking down upon Hester's busy movements out of the dusky half-shut corners of her saucy brown eyes. Had she been a trifle less impertinent, Hester might have felt herself grow confused at such unexpected and continued observation. But the very excess of the rudeness made it seem folly to be disturbed by it. It was so plain, that the lady must be herself quite aware of it; and being thus aware, she must soon apologise and desist. Yet there was an uncomfortable feeling upon Hester that this proud Miss Janet Golden had taken an extraordinary dislike to her, was going to patronise her, and persecute her, and haunt her life, and trouble her. So thinking, but determined to be proof against little stings, she set forth her working materials, her box, and her little table, her reels of silk and her reels of thread, her scissors and her needle-

case, her bodkins and her thimbles; and she picked and she snipped, and she ripped out and she puckered in, with a very cheerful face, and Miss Janet looking on.

After a good long time, Miss Janet got up (Hester never minding), and came and stood before the seamstress, and remained there gazing and chafing, and gazing still and chafing more; and Hester still taking no notice of her, she suddenly caught up the mass of work—a delicate fabric of tulle and lace—and, wisping it up in her arms, sent it flying to the other end of the room, where it sank in a soft heap, and lay ignominiously in a corner.

"Would you sit there till Doomsday, you contented thing! sewing and sewing, and smiling to yourself? Would you?"

"Lady Helen's dress!" gasped Hester.

"Dress; dress! dress!" cried Miss Janet. "Nothing but dress! Let it lie in the corner. It will do it good. I have been wanting to tell

you something this hour, and you would not look up. I envy you, I admire you, I wish that we might be friends. I envy you, because you have got something to do, because you have not to go yawning about the house all the morning, falling asleep on all the couches, if lucky enough to be able to do it, and longing to pick out people's eyes, just for want of an occupation. I envy you, because you have not got everything you could wish for, because you look so pretty in that plain, plain gown, and were never in your life heaped up with gew-gaws as I am. And I would like to be friends with you, because you know how to make me ashamed of my impudence; and you cannot believe what a new sensation that is. And I would also like to be friends with you, because you are a fresh natural thing, coming into this place where we are all of us oddities. All of us oddities, I tell you. Sir Archie is an oddity of goodness; Lady Helen an oddity of silliness; Miss Madge is an oddity

of oddness; and I am an oddity of discontentedness."

Hester felt a little giddy with surprise by this time; but, naturally, the sensation was a pleasant one, especially coming so close upon her former fears.

"Do stop sewing for a while, till I talk to you," said Janet, seating herself comically on a little low stool, and looking up at Hester. "I want to tell you about myself. You see I am so selfish that I can hardly take an interest in anything but myself. I have been brought up to it. I think about myself, pamper myself, pity myself, hate myself; and this takes up my time pretty much from morning until night. I never was taught anything better that I could do. But somehow I never felt inclined to talk much about myself before. Now that the impulse has come, perhaps I may talk something off, and feel the better for it. I don't know."

"I can listen and sew," said Hester.

"No, you can't. At least you ought not to be able to do it," said Janet. "One thing is tiring enough at a time, at least I find it so. Perhaps, however, nothing tires you. I should not wonder. Well, I have got everything in the world that can be thought of. I have a beautiful slice of England, all my own. Every mile of it is a very garden of English order and beauty. I have a house — it has not the grand, wild, tamed-savage look about it that this old place has got, neither has it that air that you feel in these old rooms, which makes you want to keep dropping on your knees every moment, as if you were in a church. But it is a lightsome, brightsome, handsome, modern hall, with every new luxury and appliance under the sun; and too large, I believe, for any number of people that could be counted to live in. Well, I have plenty of money in banks and places. And I have carriages, and horses, and servants, and jewels; and I can put my foot on anybody's neck when

I like it. You needn't smile; I am not going to try yours.

"It all did very well for a time. I liked to be made a fuss about at school. I liked to be able to make rich presents to people, and see them looking astonished and overwhelmed. I liked coming home and being cheered by my tenantry, having bouquets presented to me by the village children, and being talked about as the youthful heiress. I enjoyed my two seasons in London, and then, at the end of the second, I began to get tired of being so stuffed up with pleasure. I was like Johnny or Harry when he has eaten too much plum pudding. And yet I went on eating and eating. Everything sickened me. I had done everything, seen everything, felt everything, and there was nothing more beyond, as far as I could discern, nothing for the latter half of my life, which I supposed I should have to go through like the rest of the human kind.

"The people were all the same, till I could

have knocked their heads together, in hopes of making a variety. Cut two men out of pasteboard, one after one pattern, another after another, two women the same, paint them and varnish them, and look at them through a multiplying glass; and there you will have society. And neither of the patterns suited me. The men were either too silly, or too clever for me. The women were like myself, sick of everything, choked up with flattery and amusement, looking desperately about to see if this were really all the world had got to offer them; or else they were worse, that is, contented at heart with the worthlessness of what they had got, yet pretending to be sick of it like the rest.

"Then I went back to my great house in the country, but I was no bigger in its vastness than a maggot in a cheese. And the place did not want me. Everything was going on too well. The people were all happy, my agent was wise and careful. I was quite a superfluous article in

my own establishment. I was too small for my big possessions. They wanted somebody with a great mind and a great heart to make use of them. I had neither. I could only waste money on my own petty frivolous desires. Dresses, and jewels——"

Miss Janet paused. Hester looked down on the luxurious creature who was complaining so bitterly, and laid her hands together involuntarily as she thought with a sudden joy of the Mother Augustine.

"What are you smiling at," Miss Janet said. "Well, there was a time came after that—I think the country after all did me good—when I got happy for a while, when I could have actually sat a whole day at a window like you, doing sewing, and smiling in a plain, plain gown. Could you believe it? But I am not going to tell you about that time. Bah! what was I talking about a moment ago? Dresses and jewels. You shall see my jewels."

And she ran away, and came back with a great brass-bound box in her arms.

"I am going to dazzle you, and make a picture of you," she said, and began loading Hester with bracelets and necklets, glittering chains, and blazing crosses, green gems, and purple gems, yellow gems, and diamonds.

Hester submitted to the operation with a smiling wonder at the novelty and absurdity of the scene.

"Now," she said, "I am like an Egyptian idol. I am a monster of magnificence."

"You are a Scheherazade—a 'beautiful Persian' —a fairy queen."

"A fairy queen would have dewdrops and bits of rainbow for her ornaments," said Hester. "She would be ashamed of your hard glaring stones and your clanking metals."

"So you despise them!" said Janet. "Well I would rather have your golden hair."

After this Miss Janet's affection for Hester seemed to grow and strengthen every day. Hester

was an interest for her in this old-fashioned, dull castle, where she had only been pretending to have an interest in things before. "You shall not do any sewing for me," she said; "you will have enough on your hands between Miss Madge and Lady Helen. You shall teach me to sew, and I will sew for myself." And she did actually pull a new gown to pieces, and set to work to put it together again with a needle and thread. Whether she ever wore the said gown after this performance it is happily not necessary to recollect. But the responsibility of a great labour on her hands often brought her to take a seat at Hester's side. And she was not fond of silence, having met with a companion to her taste. Having, unasked, made a confession of her own feelings and circumstances, she claimed the right to expect that the seamstress would give her a like history of her (Hester's) experiences. But Hester was not eloquent according to her desire. Yes, she had been for some years at a good school. Yes, she had learned her art from a first-rate modiste. It

would have been rude so to question her, had Janet met her in a drawing-room; but in a tower-room, with a needle in her hand, it was only sympathising and kind. But Hester was not communicative, was sometimes a little distressed. Yes, she had had a friend who had taken an interest in, and protected her. The name of that friend? Oh, there was the pink gauze floating into the fire! What a narrow escape for Miss Madge's new scarf!

Then, very often, Lady Helen came fluttering in, like an elderly butterfly, perched upon a chair for a little time, viewing with exquisite satisfaction the delicate operations which were progressing, but soon fluttered out again to her couches, her novels, and her dogs. And if any awful whispers should be going rustling about the passages, be sure the whisperers took care that Lady Helen's door was shut.

But, more often a great deal, there came Miss Madge to visit Hester. The Honourable Madge

had also her rooms in the tower, just a flight of winding stairs below Hester. And the Honourable Madge held it a Christian thing to be neighbourly; and, though come of a noble lineage, as she was careful never to forget, yet the Honourable Madge was so far a model Christian as to feel warranted in being neighbourly in excess with a nice young lady seamstress, who sat stitching at Miss Madge's elegant raiment, in the chamber above her head.

She grew so very neighbourly, indeed, that of a wintry evening, when Lady Helen and Miss Janet stepped, shivering in lace and gossamer, into their coach to drive half a dozen miles in search of their dinner, she, Madge, would come tapping to Hester's door with overtures for a mutual cup of tea. It was Hester's hour of ease, the hour when she wrote her letters. Her sewing of the day was laid aside, her fire was burning brightly, her desk open on the table.

"You do look so comfortable, my dear. Ah,

you sly thing, hiding away your letters! My dear, I have a soft corner for young hearts. This is a lover, I have no doubt."

"Not at all," said Hester, flushing indignantly, but keeping her hand upon the superscription of her letter.

"Well, well, child, I did not mean to offend you. But you look so very secret about it. Put it away now for the present. I have ordered up some tea."

Miss Madge had just finished her evening excursion round the passages and byways of the castle. She had been "up-stairs, and down stairs, and into my lady's chamber." With a dark shawl covering her usual gaudy dress, with her ringlets pushed out of her eyes, with the likeness of her lover a little awry upon her forehead, and with her finger laid on her lip, Miss Madge was in the habit of going prying about the servants' quarters, listening at the doors, taking cold in her eyes with looking through the key-hole of

Sir Archie's study door. But it must not be thought that Miss Madge had any sinister motive in these excursions. She did not want to know if Mike were making love to pretty Bridget, nor to be able to report that Polly was wearing her ladyship's new velvet spenser of an evening. It was only that poor Madge was possessed by the fearful uneasy spirit of the times. She went prying about in hopes of picking up the smallest scrap of news, like a famished bird seeking for crumbs. She had not always lived in a remote castle like this; she had been used to more liberty, which she liked in her wild way. The servants were not offended at her spying. They pitied her for having to live in times like these in a drawing-room, where tongues had less freedom than they allowed to themselves in the kitchen or pantry.

"I ax your pardon, ma'am, for the blundherin' big brute that I am! But the divil a bit of informashun is to be had these couple o' days!" Pat would say, indulgently, when he met her in some

shady corner, and nearly ran her down with his tray.

Perhaps it was the workings of this uneasy spirit, the desire to talk upon forbidden subjects, that drew her so near to Hester, who had evidently a kindred hunger for the secrets of the times.

"Ah, my dear," she said, parenthetically sipping her tea, in the pauses between her stories of her political experiences, "I was not always shut up in a stifling place like this, where nothing changes from year's end to year's end but the weathercock. Not but what it is comfortable, and respectable, and—ancestral, and all that. And some people must live walled up in an old castle, or family tradition, the poetry of an ancient lineage, and that sort of thing, would be scattered over the world and quite lost. But I lived in Dublin, my dear; this time last year I was in Dublin, and I warrant you I knew then which way the wind was blowing!"

By this time the Honourable Madge had finished her tea, and possessed herself of the poker, her favourite plaything. And she fell to raking out the two lower bars of the grate, till a long red gulf was laid bare, with rough heads and promontories; or it might be a wide fiery dungeon, with jutting buttresses of walls here and there, a rugged stooping roof, blocks, benches, and chains. This last idea was the one which Miss Madge laid strong hold of.

"Christmas in the dungeon, my dear," she said, with a little wave of the poker, explaining the vision which she had unveiled behind the bars. "Scene, Kilmainham Jail; time, the blessed Christmas in the year of disaster, seventeen hundred and ninety-six. 'When the pie was opened the birds began to sing,' my dear. See how they all crowd round the table, looking into the dish!"

Miss Madge's voice was triumphant, the poker was balanced on her fingers, her eyes were rivetted on the burning cinders. Hester, all excited, a

little frightened, but very curious, sat gazing from Miss Madge to the fire, and from the fire to Miss Madge.

"Russell breaks the crust," Madge went on, "and sinks back in his chair. See him, the brave, gentle Russell! Nelson starts up, and dives his hand into the dish. Young Teeling—poor boy!—claps his hands and shouts, 'Hurrah! Three cheers for our Christmas dish! Three cheers for the prisoners' pasty!' Ah, my dear, it was an excellent pasty, though I say it, who should not say it; for I helped at the making of it. I was staying with my friend M. I will not mention her name, my dear, for fear of accidents," said Miss Madge, looking over her shoulder. "My good friend M., as notable a housekeeper and as sound a politician as could be found in or out of the three kingdoms. She had got papers in charge —a bundle—worth a sackful of patriots' heads. She fretted about it so much that the flesh was fading off her bones. Those who entrusted the

papers to her keeping said, 'We have come to so desperate a pass that only a woman's ingenuity can help us.' And she turned to me in her dismay and whispered, 'Madge, could you not manage a disguise, and offer for a situation as turnkey?' But I said, 'M. (I will not mention her name, my dear), I said, my good friend, why should I put myself so much out of my way when you are such an excellent hand at making a pasty.'

"'Making a pasty?' she said; but there never was a sharper woman at taking a hint. And we made the pasty. Such a pie-crust! Blown up high like a soap blubble, rich and melting, crisp, and of a lovely light brown. And I'll warrant you there was inside meat substantial for prison digestion, and seasoning fit to tickle prison palates. Letters, my dear, and foreign newspapers, and home newspapers, with a goodly supply of writing materials to help to raise the crust. And never fear but we made our petition skilfully to the authorities, representing our womanly wish to

give the captives—so sadly far from the heads of their own dinner-tables—a harmless little treat on Christmas-day. And never fear but the governor was pleased to take in the dish, accompanied as it was by one similar in size, smell, and general perfection of appearance which came craving a humble corner on his governorship's own board. My dear, a pasty of such exquisite flavour was never turned out of an oven. The governor and all the little governors tasted of it, and our captives got their pie.

"My dear, I was so uplifted about it that my head was nearly turned, and I almost spoiled it all. I met my Lord Castlereagh that evening at a soirée, and I could not hold my tongue."

"'My lord!' I said, 'you would not guess on what a notable occupation I have been engaged this afternoon?'

"His lordship bowed.

"'I have been making a pasty,' I said.

"'A pasty?' said his lordship, quite astray.

"'A pasty,' I said. 'Would not your lordship like a slice?'

"When I looked at M., who was beside me, she had turned white, and like to faint. But his lordship only put his finger to his forehead, on the sly, as he turned away with a friend. I did not mind his thinking me mad, my dear. The far-fetched idea was a providential inspiration. Ridiculous as it may seem, it covered my indiscretion."

Many more tales like this did Miss Madge relate to Hester; but were I to follow her never so swiftly through them all, I should utterly lose the thread of this, my history. But Lady Humphrey had the pith of them in Hester's faithful letters.

CHAPTER III.

SIR ARCHIE TAKES A WALK DOWN THE GLEN.

It happened that on a ruddy November morning, Sir Archie met Hester coming along one of the shadowy, cloister-like upper corridors, with her arms full of white draperies—materials for finery no doubt—which fell over her shoulders, and drooped to her feet, and swathed her about like a winding-sheet. It might have been the reflection from all these white things, but her face seemed pale and her eyes had a startled look. Hester was nearly scared out of her life by the fears and wonders of the times, learned from nods and

signs, and hints of the servants, and the fantastic whispers of the Honourable Madge.

Hester curtseyed to Sir Archie; who bowed low to Hester, as low as if she had been a duchess. He stepped out of his way to open the door through which she had to pass; for which civility Hester dropped him a second curtsey; for which second curtsey Sir Archie made her another bow.

After she had vanished, Sir Archie walked down to his library with a slightly vexed look on his face. And he knew why he was vexed, which is not always the case with every one; but Sir Archie was not a man to be vexed about nothing. The trouble had passed from his face, however, by the time he took a book from the table and opened it at once at a place in which a mark had been laid. It was a volume of old-fashioned "characters," which most people know.

"She doth," said the noted page, "all things with so sweet a grace, it seems ignorance will not suffer her to do ill, being her mind is to do well."

Sir Archie read with a peculiar smile, laid down the book, and went out. He whistled to his dogs, and set off to walk down the glen.

There was an autumn flush still lingering about the world; though the frost was in the air. Very glorious colours dyed the mountain's sides, and a lustrous haze had strayed down out of the clouds and trailed its ragged splendour through deep gloomy gorges, and over bluff rocky crowns. The sea lay in the distance, a plain of misty blue, with moving streaks of violet where the clouds were passing. The foam of the river, the ascending smoke from cottages, a white gable, a yellow thatch, all caught a glow from that crimson blush with which the sun looked on the earth. Trees on high ground were getting bare; the golden bars of cloud began to show between their trunks, behind the fretwork of their branches, almost stripped of leaves.

Sir Archie walked leisurely down the glen. He had a word to say here and there, and he

turned aside into fields, and made descents into farm-yards or orchards that he might say it. He stopped at the forge at the corner of the road. The blacksmith was shoeing a farmer's horse, and Sir Archie had a chat with the blacksmith and the farmer. It was no use to think of talking of hay only; of a new roof for the forge; of the supply of turf saved for the winter among the poor; of the good harvest. The news of the day would be spoken of, and curses would come out, and fists would be clenched.

"You're a kind man, Sir Archie, an' a good lan'lord," said the blacksmith, sturdily, "an' my heart's wish and duty to you an' yours! But do you go an' talk about pace to them that hasn't got the steel between their ribs. I have a brother in the county Wicklow, an honest man, an' a good pacable man, and that man was sent home to his wife and childher the other day with a pitch cap on his shaved head. My sarvice to them with a willin' heart! but they've manyfac-

tured a couple o' rebels to their hand, at wan sthroke." And the blacksmith let fall his heavy hammer on the anvil, so that the red iron quivered, and the sparks flew up in showers all about his grim face.

The farmer was a gentle-looking old man, who had been riding a horse to that forge to be shod for over sixty years at the least.

"My son, your honour," he said, clearing a huskiness out of his throat, and beginning to speak in a quavering voice. "Your honour, my son——"

But suddenly broke down and burst into tears.

Half an hour afterwards, Sir Archie, proceeding on his way, left the two men still cursing and mourning over the anvil.

A bit further down the glen, a turning in the road brought him face to face with the happy eyes and bright cheeks of Mrs. Hazeldean.

"Who is sick or scheming now?" he said. He was much more like the brother of his hand-

some aunt than her nephew. Sometimes he even assumed an elder brotherly manner; which amused Mrs. Hazeldean highly.

"We are well met," he said. "I was just going to storm you in your parlour."

"Well," said she, "you can escort me back to my parlour, if that will do for you as well. Have you anything very particular to say to me?"

"Something so particular that I cannot say it on the highway. Especially as we are coming so near the village."

"Some more evil news, I suppose," said Mrs. Hazeldean, sadly.

"No," said Sir Archie, "I think not. It is a matter purely personal, at all events."

"Purely personal," said Mrs. Hazeldean, relieved. "Is it anything about Janet?"

"A little about Janet," said Sir Archie, smiling.

Mrs. Hazeldean gave her head a little shake, and sighed, but said nothing; only quickened her

steps towards her own door. Already her mind's eye beheld a wedding taking place: a wedding which she did not long to see.

She untied her bonnet-strings, and sat down upon her sofa. Sir Archie took a chair, and sat facing her and the light, resting his arms upon her dining-table.

"Now for it!" he said, and a grave change came over his manner. "Well, Aunt Margaret, I have come here all the way for the purpose of asking you to take specially under your protection that young girl whom my sister Mary has sent to the castle."

"Has Mary written again?" said Mrs. Hazeldean. "I have made several efforts to know the girl, but she has always been too busy, as yet, to make new acquaintances. I hope they are not working her to death."

"Mary has nothing to do with this," said Sir Archie, sticking to his point. "I have come to you of my own accord, and for reasons of my

own. I want you to take especial care of that girl for me."

"For you?" said Mrs. Hazeldean.

"For me," said Sir Archie, getting more earnest and quiet in his manner as he went on speaking. "Because, Aunt Margaret, some day when I have a good opportunity, when I have not quite so much care upon my mind, and when I have tried to pave the way towards some hope of success, I intend to ask that girl to be my wife."

Mrs. Hazeldean sat absolutely silent for the next three or four moments. Then she got up and came and stood beside her nephew.

"Archie," said she, with her hand upon his arm, "are you perfectly sane? My poor boy!"

"Quite sane, Aunt Margaret, and not a boy. That last is an important point for you to remember."

"But what does it mean, Archie? And who is she? And Janet——?"

"I will tell you what it means, and who she is, and about Janet," said Sir Archie. "Sit down again, Aunt Margaret, and let us be comfortable. I expect some little trouble at the castle, but I have counted upon you as my friend."

"Always, Archie; but, remember I am shocked."

"I know that; but I am going to make you easy in your mind. My mother, my sister, my aunt, have long been anxious for me to marry. Is that granted?"

"Yes."

"The lady they selected does not please me. I do not please her. The idea never did please Mrs. Hazeldean. Is that so?"

"That is so."

"Well, to-morrow I will have an interview with my mother for the purpose of assuring her that she must break off that absurd engagement, which never was more than a mockery. She made it, and she must unmake it. So far one

difficulty will be disposed of. As to who she is, I will tell you; for I have made it my business to find out. Her father was an Irish gentleman, who died in banishment for his political honesty. If this be a disgrace, then many shining names are under a cloud."

"Disgrace!" said Mrs. Hazeldean.

"Well, I can tell you enough about her family when we have time. In the mean time another point has been established. And now, with regard to what is the meaning of it, I can only say I have thought of this ever since the first time—most certainly since the second time, I saw her. It is something all-important which has happened to me; that is all. You may say it is romantic, out of the ordinary course of things, anything you like. I can only say it is something which I hardly believed in, but have experienced and realised. I have passed by many women, and never felt inclined to turn my head to see which way they went. But now, why, I am so

constantly looking over my shoulder that I can hardly see my way as I go along. There now is a confession for you, Aunt Margaret! You will understand about it better when you have closely observed her face."

"It is a good face," said Mrs. Hazeldean.

"A good face!" repeated Sir Archie, slightly provoked. "Well, as you say, it is a good face. Let that be."

"And the girl herself," said Mrs. Hazeldean; "how much does she know of all this?"

"Just as much as you knew an hour ago," said Sir Archie. "I will never enlighten her so long as she is in her present position under my roof. She shall not be annoyed and distressed, as she would be, as she must be. I will give myself a fair chance."

"A fair chance. Archie! do you know some people would think you very odd."

"Maybe I am odd, Aunt Margaret. You ought to know."

"Yes, I ought to know."

"Well, I will never disturb her, until we have seen some way of changing her condition. When she is out of my mother's reach—for my mother will be angry for a time—and when she is in some more independent position, then I will set to work in my own way."

"And in the mean time? What is it that you want me to do?"

"I want you to have her with you as much as you can. I want you to know her; and I want her to know me here, and get accustomed to me. You will do this, Aunt Margaret?"

Mrs. Hazeldean rose from her seat, and stood beside him again.

"You are determined upon this, Archie?" she said.

"Quite determined, Aunt Margaret. If you refuse to help me I will set to work some other way. Only of course you will keep my secret for the present."

"I have never seen any reason to distrust your judgment," said Mrs. Hazeldean.

"Well, do not begin now. Will you promise me?"

"You must first give me a fortnight to buy a new gown, and have it made."

"A new gown!" said Sir Archie.

"A new gown," said Mrs. Hazeldean. "I must have an excuse for bringing her here at first. I must send for a fine new dress, and borrow Hester from the castle to make it up. When you see me wear that gown you may ask for my opinion of your plans."

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. HAZELDEAN GETS A NEW GOWN.

"WELL, I must say you need a handsome dress, Margaret!" said Lady Helen. "I am glad to find you getting so much more like other people as to think of it. I shall be very pleased to lend you our young dressmaker for a week or so. You may trust her with anything. She is a most efficient person."

"What are you going to have?" asked Miss Madge, in an ecstasy of interest. "Have cerise satin—so useful for dinner. Not very serviceable

to be sure, but then a little French chalk is such an excellent thing for gravy stains."

"Thank you, Madge," said Mrs. Hazeldean, laughing; "but I believe cerise satin would take away my appetite."

"Would it now?" said the Honourable Madge, quite shocked. "Well, do you know I think I always eat better when I have a lively bit of colour about me."

"I hope you will smarten her up a little," she said to Hester. "It is a great opportunity for her, and I hope you and she will both take advantage of it. She wears very good materials, you know, my dear," said poor Madge, sighing, and feeling her own flimsy gown between her finger and thumb. "She is ladylike, I must say; but she selects such dowdy colours, and she has no regard at all for Paris style. She has all her gowns made high up to her throat, and she never puts a bit of powder in her hair. She means well, I am sure, for she is good, you know, my dear, as

good as gold; but it's a pity to see her waste herself as she does. For she is very handsome, is Margaret, though Helen don't see it.

"I shall miss you sadly, my dear. I have no relish now for the solitude of my own chamber, which used to please me vastly—for ten minutes or so at a time. There is no one else in this place who enters into the ideas that prey upon my mind. Yet I do not grudge you to her if you improve dear Margaret. You are a lady, my dear, and no one pretends to deny that. You must show her a good example. Take some of your pretty gowns, and wear them under her nose."

"No, Miss Madge," said Hester, "I will lock them all up in my trunk, and I have half a mind to lose the key. I am sick of pretty gowns. I believe I shall never wear anything all my days but a very old plain frock. When this gets threadbare"—looking at her sleeve—"it will be very nice. I think when I get time I will have a piece of sack-cloth and make myself a new dress.

I am tired of your pinks and your greens, your silks, and your gauzes."

The Honourable Madge stood transfixed for a few moments in silence.

"My dear," she said, presently, "with such ideas in your mind, I can't think where your genius came from."

And then she went away sorrowful, disappointed in her favourite.

So it had been arranged that Hester was to be lent out to Mrs. Hazeldean. The evening before her departure for the village, Lady Helen and Miss Golden drove away to dine somewhere at a distance; but they had not been gone above two hours when Miss Janet walked into Hester's tower-room with all her magnificent dining paraphernalia removed, and a dressing-gown thrown over her muslin petticoats.

"On such a night to be sent home again, after enduring to dress in the cold!" she exclaimed, with her chin raised to the extreme angle of

indignant vexation. And no wonder she was vexed. She had gone to the trouble of doing away with her pretty dark curls, in place of which a snow-white edifice, ornamented with roses, had been erected on her head. And I must say that her face looked very charming underneath it, surmounting her long wrapper of rose-coloured flannel.

"A pretty country to live in, if it is not safe to drive a few miles along the road at night!" continued Miss Janet. "I don't believe in it, for my part. I think the whole fuss has come of Sir Archie Munro's talent for ordering about, and protecting, forsooth! Not safe, indeed! Why, I never knew the people anything but civil and good-natured. And if it be not safe to drive a few miles along the road, what a nice prospect for my getting home to England!"

Miss Janet seated herself in Hester's low arm-chair by the fender, and made herself as comfortable as she could.

"Give up fidgetting about, do, and come and sit down and have a talk," she said to Hester. "What makes you so shy of talking to me, I wonder, when I am always telling you my concerns? It is a perfect relief to me sometimes to pour them out upon you. There is something so demure about you, as if you would not repeat a word for the world; and yet you contrive to let so much sympathy out of your eyes as to keep one going on! I'll promise not to say one word about dress, and you couldn't have a better offer than that in this place! Neither Miss Madge nor my Lady Helen would treat you half so liberally."

So Hester sat down with idle fingers and delivered herself up for the hour into Miss Golden's whimsical hands.

"It will be insufferably dull here, you know, for me during the next week," said Janet. "I do think I should have run away long ago if you had not arrived. And it is getting more stupid every day with us down below. I really used to

be a most entertaining person myself, but I get no encouragement now, and the consequence is I have completely subsided. Lady Helen pretends to know nothing about the shocking things that are going on in the country, and I believe she does live with her ears full of cotton wool, but a few little drops of horror must distill through, I think, for something is telling on her temper. Then there is Madge—why my war of wits with the Honourable Madge used to keep the household alive; but now she is so full of mystery, she actually grows silent—does not observe the little shafts I fling at her. As for Sir Archie, I half believe he is concerned with the rebels, so wrapt up in his own thoughts has he become; except, indeed, when his mother is present, and then it is amusing and highly edifying, I am sure, to see the efforts he puts forth to entertain her."

Miss Janet tossed her head, as if she thought there were other people whom he ought to think it worth his while to entertain.

"Why, Miss Golden," said Hester—"why do you think Sir Archie Munro is concerned with the rebels?"

"Well, I can hardly tell you," said Miss Janet, yawning, "except that he has grown so dull and anxious, and seems to expect dreadful things to happen. If perfectly loyal, I don't see what reason he has to be uneasy. He is making his arrangements as if he expected a siege, or something of that sort. He actually took an opportunity to advise me to go home the other day. A most hospitable bridegroom I declare!"

"Bridegroom!" repeated Hester, involuntarily, and then checked herself, shocked at her own thoughtlessness, for Miss Golden had been looking in the fire, and perhaps had forgotten her presence.

"Oh yes, to be sure, bridegroom!" said Janet, looking round, no way displeased nor abashed. "I thought every one knew about that pretty well. It is an old engagement, and promises to

be older before it is brought to a conclusion. If Lady Helen could get her way it might be finished off to-morrow. But she can't get her way!" said Miss Janet, with a little grimace of defiant satisfaction. "No, we are nice quiet easy-going people here, and we don't like to be hurried. We like to take our time. We are very comfortable as we are."

And Janet embraced her knee, and smiled at the fire, and appeared as cozy as any one could wish to be. Hester looked at the luxurious self-complacent young lady, and thought of Pierce. His ring was still round Hester's neck. That last command of the Mother Augustine had prevented the possibility of its ever being delivered by Hester to its rightful owner, now present. She could not explain her acquaintanceship with Mr. Pierce without discovering her connexion with Lady Humphrey. The intention had long been in her mind to return the ring, in a letter to the young gentleman; but what with letters to the Mother

Augustine, and letters to Lady Humphrey, every opportunity for her pen had hitherto been fully taken advantage of. She thought about Pierce, and his pains, and his hopes, and his fears, and she pitied him. And she looked upon Janet, and strongly desired to know the secret of her heart. She did not doubt that Pierce was forgotten, yet she could not make up her mind that Sir Archie was beloved. Janet's manner in speaking of him made her indignant. If he did not deserve something better than this, if the plighting of his troth had not called forth some deeper sentiment than Miss Janet seemed to feel, then the world was turning out a place altogether not worth living in.

"Yes, he actually advised me to go home," said Janet; "planning my journey as coolly as if he were my father sending me to school. He said I ought to lose no time; but I said, 'By your leave, Sir Archie; why?' He said, because there were going to be sadder doings yet in the country, that by-and-by I might want to escape, when travelling

might not be so easy. I was not going to be ordered off in that way. It did notsu it me. So I made him a curtsey, and said, 'By your leave, Sir Archie, I am not a coward; and I intend to stay a little longer.' And so I do. But I went to Lady Helen, and told her Sir Archie was turning me out of doors. I said I should go. She sobbed into her handkerchief and declared that she could not part with me. She promised me some pretty gaities at Christmas. And I consented to remain."

"How will gaities agree with the sad doings spoken of by Sir Archie?" asked Hester, who had got a little pale.

Janet shrugged her shoulders. "We are not going to make our plans to suit grumblers," she said. "I am dying for a little excitement. We will have all we can get. And I can tell Sir Archie, that I will not be turned back another night all because some ill-conducted soldiers are making a row among the people upon the road.

It is dull enough here all the time without having one's meagre bit of amusement taken away."

And Miss Golden, having delivered herself of these and other kindred sentiments, stood up, sighed, yawned, gave Hester a sudden desperate hug, and went away.

Hester, next morning, felt a great leaping at heart when she folded up Lady Helen's yards of tabinet and velvet, bombazine and paduasoy, laid them aside for an interval of rest, and departed in Mrs. Hazeldean's pony phaeton for the village. This was the friend who had been promised her by the Mother Augustine, with whom she was now going to become more closely acquainted. Hitherto she had only had glimpses of a bright dark face, even the momentary vision of whose strength and sweetness had made her unaccountably glad.

Mrs. Hazeldean's house stood among its trees, somewhat backward, high up at the end of the village street, just where it ascended a hill with

some toil; along the sides of which hill the houses lagged and straggled, as if some of them had not had strength and perseverance for the ascent. It had an ample, dark red, comfortable exterior, with expansive windows, well lined with warm draperies, with a jovial-looking knocker on the hall door, and just enough ivy on the gable and chimneys to soften off the edges of the ruddy walls, and blend the homely pile into the picturesque masses of the greenery around it. In the corners of the mossy lawn, round the boles of the old trees, the scarlet geraniums wove their burning hieroglyphics. Showers of vivid amber, and irregular drifts of rosy brown swept over branches that still kept a remnant of their summer draperies; over the tall trees that looked down upon the chimneys, the lower foliage of that sanctuary of sweets which was half garden, half orchard, away to the backward; and the denser leafiness of the sober grove that wandered away from the gable, behind which the sun had a trick of set-

ting with a particularly fiery glamour of wintry evenings.

Within, this house was a den of wholesome comfort, a very nest for repose. Everything was faultless, regular, in perfect order; yet nothing stiff, nothing monotonous, nor prim. "She hath looked well to the paths of her house, and hath not eaten her bread idle." So said her glittering table; so the choice pictures on her walls; so said her shining rooms, with their subdued glow of colouring and their gratefully tempered light; so the few servants, in their good humour with the world and worship of their mistress. So said the poor, who asked not in vain for the crumbs that fell from her board.

It was not easy to persuade Hester that she had come to this house a great deal more to rest than to do work. But very soon she began to realise that this wonderfully fine gown of Mrs. Hazeldean's, about which there had been some talk, was little but an excuse to bring her there,

a peg on which to hang a deed of kindness. True, some dark violet poplin, and some black velvet were suffered to be at her disposal for two or three hours every morning, but after that they were sure to slip through her fingers in an unaccountable manner, sometimes by one accident, sometimes by another. And the reading of choice books, pleasant chat, invigorating rambles through the frosty glens, refreshing visits to the friendly poor in the cottages, together with delicious spells of mere dreamy idleness, filled up the remainder of the measure of the days; till Hester began to wonder if she were still indeed Hester; not rather some other person who had been born under a lucky star, to be loved and petted, and indulged by Mrs. Hazeldean. Till Lady Helen, from her castle, began to send messages: to which Mrs. Hazeldean always replied that the work Hester had been sent to her to do was still far from being finished. And till Lady Helen began to grumble.

"I knew how it would be," she said. "I knew that dear Margaret would discover the girl's talent, and set about replenishing her whole wardrobe. Not that I grudge her the opportunity I am sure, nor yet that I think it is not needed. But Christmas is drawing near, and there is such a great deal to be done!"

Sir Archie Munro had always been in the habit of paying frequent visits to his aunt. She shared all his sympathies, she was in all his secret counsels. This was but natural, since it was true that there was not a person with an anxiety, or a trouble, who ever came near Mrs. Hazeldean without instinctively turning to her for something, he knew not what, of assistance, courage, or assuagement, which he felt blindly but unerringly sure she had to give. Thus there was not a matter requiring judgment, especially fine and strong, which Mrs. Hazeldean was not called upon, somehow, to judge; not a difficulty which other people gave up in despair which was not brought to Mrs.

Hazeldean to be solved. Above all, there was not a sorrow more than usually burthensome to her neighbour, of which she did not lighten the load by taking a share upon her shoulders. But then nobody knew this except the doctor and his wife; unless the people out of doors took to telling their own secrets, and to whispering her holy fame at their firesides, among their prayers.

So Sir Archie was in the habit of coming to talk over the affairs of the country with his aunt, and he did not think it necessary to discontinue his visits, because it so happened that Hester was in the house. And so pleasant was it round that fireside of an evening when the miseries of the country were laid aside for a while, so terribly interesting when they were not, that Hester began to slip naturally into her place in the family group, to forget for the time that she was a dressmaker, and almost to lose her awe of that grand goodly gentleman, Sir Archie

Munro. The only thing that surprised and disappointed her in him a little was his anxiety about Mrs. Hazeldean's new dress. She was so tired of this among the women at the castle, that it was rather a dismay to her to hear Sir Archie on the subject.

"Is this the new gown, Aunt Margaret?" he would ask, touching her sleeve. "I do assure you I am very anxious to see you in that dress."

And then he would look from Mrs. Hazeldean to Hester, and from Hester to Mrs. Hazeldean; till Hester would shrink back into her chair and feel intolerably guilty, being so conscious as she was of her strange idleness. But Mrs. Hazeldean would say, smiling,

"Patience, patience! I am in no hurry with that gown, Archie."

And there were times as well when Sir Archie happened in after he had seen his aunt's cloak fluttering alone upon the road, and gave Hester

still further lessons in making friends with him. I have not time now to set down the conversation which passed between them, but they were quaint enough and simple enough to put to shame the would-be wiser gossip of many people who would have liked to hear them. There was not a compliment in the whole of them, and yet, having assured Mrs. Hazeldean that he would not disturb Hester, Sir Archie was hardly so careful as he might have been. Hester's simplicity began to wonder. She began to tremble when she saw Sir Archie coming down the avenue alone, and to wish that Mrs. Hazeldean would not go out without her. I do not know how it was that he betrayed himself so far one day as to send Hester after his departure, flying up the stairs on the tip-toe of terror lest the very walls should hear her heart beating with delight, sadly wrong, but also with honest fear and remorse. What way was this that the sun had begun to shine, catching up all the colours of the world, and

weaving them together with its rays in an inextricable confusion of enchantment? Oh, Miss Janet Golden, what would you think of this? Oh, Sir Archie, the splendid and the great, why could you not remain the hero you used to be? Sat down Hester and wept. But the next day she arose up in amazement at her silly mistake. And she set to work to extol every one except herself. And this strange blunder which she had fallen into was not to be cleared up in her own mind, without leaving some traces which might endure many a day. It was a great pity she had been born such a fool, Hester thought. But having set herself somewhat to rights, she acknowledged that she had received a proper check for her forgetfulness of matters most important. And she tasked herself to improve her present opportunity of learning the political feelings of Sir Archie Munro. And she wrote many piteous letters on this subject to Lady Humphrey.

Mrs. Hazeldean was so persistently ingenious

in delaying Hester's operations on her dress that it required a very startling threat to bring her to her senses. Lady Helen and Miss Madge volunteered a sisterly excursion to her dwelling to inspect the many improvements which must have been made in dear Margaret's wardrobe by this time.

This proposal had its effect, and Hester was packed up and returned to her employers. And a few days afterwards Mrs. Hazeldean came to dine at the castle.

"How do you like my new dress?" whispered she to her nephew, as she took her seat by his side at the dinner-table. And she slightly held up, as she spoke, a silken purple fold of her right royal-looking robe.

Sir Archie flashed a bright look into her smiling face, and helped her to turkey. This was no time for sentiment. But it was remarked by Lady Helen, when the ladies reached the drawing-room, that dear Archie had been more like him-

self during dinner-time to-day than ever she had seen him since these hideous doings had begun in the country.

"And she sewed all this, did she?" he said, having found his way to Mrs. Hazeldean's side immediately on his reappearance in the drawing-room. "Every stitch of it?" he asked, examining the long-expected gown. "And what verdict have you brought me wrapped up in the folds of this handsome skirt?"

"Here is my answer," said Mrs. Hazeldean, as the door opened and Hester appeared, led by the Honourable Madge, who had seconded, quite rapturously, dear Margaret's request that the young inmate of the tower-room should be invited to the drawing-room; this being only a family party, no high-born guests present to be shocked. And Hester, in her trepidation at such condescension, had quite forgotten her resolution announced to Madge, of confining herself to the use of threadbare garments for the remainder of

her life, and had recognised the expedience of clothing herself in the pretty grey silk, and long coral ear-rings, which had so nearly brought her into trouble with the Mother Augustine. And in these, and with her hair packed round her head like so much twisted bullion, and with her face as fresh and fair as it could be, it were quite hopeless to find a sweeter looking young thing than our Hester looked on the occasion.

CHAPTER V.

MISS MADGE'S REBEL.

Lady Helen Munro might live with her ears full of cotton wool, and Miss Janet Golden might toss her head at having her horses turned on the road when going out for an evening's amusement; but there were fierce doings making a hot progress through the country, the perpetrators of which were but little concerned for the convenience of fair ladies.

Dire tidings did the daily post now bring to the peaceful fishing village, that had sat, gratefully, for so many hundred years, in the lap of its fertile glens, at the feet of its bountiful bay.

A hostile soldiery, utterly unchecked in their terrible licence, scoured the land. The flower of the population was melting off the mountain-sides; dales and hamlets were giving up their strength and pride to the prison, the torture, and the gibbet. Even already in our glen the wail of desolation had arisen among the cottages. Sir Archie Munro, in anguish for his people, strove in vain to shield them from the horrors of the times. Day by day one disappeared and another disappeared from among the hearty glensmen. Frantic tales of distress came flying to the castle. The servants clenched their hands and cursed over their work. Miss Madge sat up in her solitude and wept herself nearly blind. Lady Helen went into hysterics at every fresh piece of news. Miss Golden blanched and was silent for a while, but refused to believe one half the stories. And Hester sat up in her tower with her needle trembling in her fingers; for the stitching and ornamenting, the embroidering and

flouncing, had all to go on the same, just as if a rain of blood had not begun to fall over the land.

Miss Golden began to think that it had been better she had taken Sir Archie's advice and returned to England; but she was, as she had said, not a coward, and she made up her mind, bravely enough, to see the worst to its end. Lady Helen lamented sorely that she should have been the means of bringing her darling Janet to so miserable a country. Yet, in the same breath, her ladyship quarrelled with her son, because he proposed for the women of the household a prudent retreat to England or France till such time as these miseries should be over. No, why should they go flying over the world, to hide themselves, as if they were a set of rebels? She believed that Archie made the most of things. They could not get so bad as he seemed to expect. She would not set off on a journey in such times, to be dragged out of her coach and shot. She

would just lie by on the cosiest couch in her drawing-room, with the most interesting novel she could lay hands upon; and let no one come telling her frightful stories till this panic should have subsided, and the world have come to its senses!

One day a terrible cry arose throughout the glens, rolled along the valley, rang through the mountains. The name of a man, a rebel, hunted by the soldiers, was shouted from rock to rock, till the very echoes bandied it about with shuddering shrieks — was muttered in prayers by tongues that quivered and clove to the mouth with terror. This man was the joy and pride of his friends, foremost among the favourites of the lowly glenspeople. They hunted him in the morning, and they hunted him in the evening, and days went past, and even his own kinsfolk had no clue to his hiding-place. And a month went past. A stray goat had given him milk, and the heath had given him its berries; but these

resources having failed, he was at last driven by starvation from his lair. Pallid, shivering, his clothing saturated with the damps of the dripping cavern in which he had lain, tottering upon his feet with the weakness of hunger, fearing to meet the form of a man lest an enemy should make him his prey, or to draw near a dwelling lest destruction should come with him over the threshold of a fellow-creature; sick and desolate, he found himself driven by the very scourge of approaching death to creep down a little lower on the mountain side, were it even to warm his shivering limbs by the sides of the wandering kine, or to crave a handful of meal out of a roving beggar's wallet.

No such comfort for the hunted rebel. The soldiers espied his meagre stooping form, creeping along under the shelter of the whin-bushes and heathery knolls. It would have been difficult for eyes less practised in man-hunting to recognise the stalwart youth who had flown to the hills from the bayonet, in the bent shuddering creature who

sought shelter from the bonnie braes that had carried his feet with pride. But these soldiers were right skilful at their work.

The game was scented; the cry was up. Oh, that a jovial ruddy sun should ever look down and smile upon such a piteous scene! A brave son of the mountains, hunted like a fox to the death among those mountains, the pure love of mother-land being his crime. But then Lady Helen said he was very much to blame. He had been right well off in his cottage in the glens. Why need he take to troubling himself about the misery of his country? And certainly it was most inconsiderate of him to throw her ladyship into hysterics on her sofa.

The chase lasted long, for the rebel knew the secrets of his hills. But bloodhounds will not be balked when they have once scented blood, neither would our brave soldiers miss their prey. Yet, notwithstanding, when it was late in the afternoon this rebel, having been started some seven times since

morning, gave them the slip, and was lost sight of in the neighbourhood of the castle.

The cook had just sent up an afternoon cup of tea to the several bedrooms of the ladies. The red setting sun was warming up the comfortable haunts of the kitchen, pantries, housekeeper's room, and the various closets and passages of the servants' quarters. Several of the servants were gathered together in a passage discussing in whispers the latest news of the rebel hunt. Pretty Polly, Lady Helen's maid, was pale and red-eyed, struggling to put in her word between recurring agonies of tears. But then the rebel in question was her lover. When last she had seen him he had been handsome and stout, bringing her a bunch of gay ribbons from the fair. Now he was a shadow, a spectre of starvation, with a price upon his head, and bayonets lying in wait for him at every point from which the blessed wind could blow. Good God! who was this, here amongst them?

Pat, the butler, had opened a back door of the premises, leading into a thick grove, into which evening shadows were already creeping. A flying phantom, somewhat like a galvanised skeleton, had leaped past him through the doorway, clasped its hands in his face, and sped on further into the castle.

Poor Polly sank in a little pale heap in her corner, and was a trouble to no one till such time as people had leisure to look to her unasked. It was the best thing she could have done in the interests of her lover, for had she been conscious of what followed, her shrieks or her moans might have betrayed him. The other servants fell back on each side as our rebel dashed amongst them. No one spoke, but they signed to him to pass up the stairs. And up the stairs he fled.

"To the tower!" some one whispered. What tower, and where? Poor rebel dashed blindly onward, upward, beat the doors right and left with his feeble hands, burst over Miss Madge's thresh-

old in the end, and precipitated himself into the middle of her floor; stood in her very presence, quivering, suppliant.

The Honourable Madge was at her afternoon cup of tea. A cup of tea was a thing that had always comforted her greatly, and was the only medicine she found soothing during the sorrows of these times. She was seated on a settee in the corner of her room, with a table drawn up before her; a table on which were placed a tray, an ancient silver tea-pot, some thin bread and butter in a dish, some sweet winter apples, and a tea-cup with its saucer. And Miss Madge's feet were on a footstool. Nothing could be more comfortable and placid than the appearance which she presented amongst these kindly-looking arrangements.

The settee on which Miss Madge was sitting was long and low, and was placed in a corner with its back to the wall. It was covered very amply with chintz of a large pattern, Chinese pagodas on an amber ground, mandarins seated apparently

upon tea-chests, presenting roses to languishing ladies with curled-up toes and very arched eyebrows. And the settee was draped down to the ground with a garniture of that flouncing well known to be so dear to the Honourable Madge's heart.

Now if the Honourable Madge were mad, as had sometimes been whispered, most certain it is that she kept her madness for the amusement of her friends. On such an emergency as this she was found to be exceedingly sane.

"My friend! my friend!" cried Miss Madge, lapping her mittens, and upsetting her tea-cup into the lap of her yellow silk dress. But that was nothing even to Miss Madge, at such a moment. She whirled up the flounce of her settee with prompt hands.

"Get under!" she cried, in a frantic whisper. "Crawl! Get in and lie close. In, in!" And she pushed him in and packed him away till there

was not a vestige of him to be seen. "Now, God's mercy be with you, and keep as still as if you were dead!"

"And it may be that mocking will be catching," muttered Madge to herself, as she cleared up the signs of her own confusion, "for I think Death would have little to do but close your eyes!"

Down on her knees she went, drying up the spilt tea. She arranged her little tray, she drew her table nearer to her couch. She spread out her silken skirts, and picked up a novel, which she placed open in her lap to hide the tea-stains. She was sipping her tea with her eyes upon her book, when the door was a second time thrown open, and a gentleman, an officer in the King's service, appeared.

I say a gentleman, for this officer had been bred to some of the habits of a gentleman, though he had a taste for rebel blood. And he was a little

taken aback when he saw a simple-looking lady with astonished eyes raised at his intrusion, with her innocent cup of tea dropping sideways in amazement from its mincing hold in her genteelly arranged fingers, and with her fashionable novel on her knees.

"I beg pardon," he began, "you are surprised —the fact is——"

"Oh, pray don't apologise!" said the Honourable Madge, making violently graceful efforts to overcome a ladylike surprise and bashfulness, very creditable to any spinster on such an occasion. "It is I who should apologise for my stupidity. You have the advantage of me truly, though I have no doubt you are quite familiar to me if my memory were not so bad. To what do I owe the pleasure of such a charmingly unceremonious visit? Pray have a cup of tea, I always do of an afternoon. So refreshing! A cup of tea with such a book as this delightful Evelina in one's

hand, I call it a luxury, nothing less. And really, ha, ha! do you know I get so ridiculously absorbed in a story, ha, ha! I actually thought when I looked up that you were the hero, walking into the room."

And she reached down an ornamental cup and saucer of precious china, which was sitting most conveniently on a bracket above her head, poured some fragrant tea from her little silver pot, enriched it delightfully with thick cream and glistening sugar, and presented it with her sweetest smile to her gallant guest, as she was pleased to call him.

Now this soldier had heard tell that Miss Madge was a little "cracked." She was not a lovely woman, and her sweetness and her winningness were not much after his taste. However, her cup of tea was tempting, and the soldier was fatigued. He drank and he apologised.

"The fact is, madam," he said, "we have

been searching for a rebel, supposed to have taken refuge in the castle."

Miss Madge gave a piercing little scream, and her cup fell with a crash upon the tray.

"Ah, ah!" she shrieked, "they will be the death of me, those rebels! Oh, sir, be so good as not to go till you tell me. A rebel in the castle! Ah, my sad fate, a rebel! Promise me that you will search, or I shall not sleep a wink. Not a wink for a month!"

And the Honourable Madge's eyes began to roll, and her nostrils to quiver, and she began to flutter up and down in her seat. She had observed these ominous workings in Lady Helen on sundry occasions, and a hint was never lost upon Miss Madge. The officer made rapid protestations as to his activity, and terrified at the prospect of approaching hysterics, rang the bell violently, bowed, and retired.

But Polly mounted guard over her lover that

evening, in a very retired corner of the castle. And he was nursed and fattened. And when he was able to go forth, he went in search of better fortune.

CHAPTER VI.

HESTER IS PUZZLED.

It may be that Lady Helen Munro has appeared—in the few short glimpses of her character revealed within the limits of this hurried tale—as a person of a character quite weak, and utterly without any will of her own. I am glad to have an opportunity of showing how mistaken was the latter idea. Weak she was; but then people of a weak mind are often known to be possessed of a strong will, especially where the concerns of other people are in question.

No sooner did her ladyship hear her son state in plain terms his determination never to marry

the lady whom she had selected for his wife, than she immediately resolved that the wedding should take place with as little delay as was possible under existing circumstances. So long as he had remained quietly idle in the matter, delaying to begin his suit, she had been quite content with his humour, had seen no cause for haste. But when he declared himself anxious to put an honest straightforward finish to that very unsatisfactory sham which had been called his engagement, she at once became afflicted and insulted, and found that herself and dearest Janet had been extremely badly used.

"There need be no regret about it," Sir Archie said. "I am quite convinced that Miss Golden feels as I do. It will be pleasanter for all when the restraint of this mock engagement is removed. You will find that she will be pleased when you give her her release. You will know how to manage. It would be quite out of place for me to interfere in the matter."

"You know, Archie, I make every excuse for you," sobbed Lady Helen. "I feel very much being talked to by you in this meaningless manner, but I know how your poor head is turned about the rebels. If I believed what you say, as I did at the first shock, I should consider myself deeply insulted and dear Janet horribly wronged. But I do not believe you, dear Archie; I would not behave so wickedly towards you as to believe you. And my best advice to you is not to believe yourself. By-and-by you will be less worried, and your senses will come back. I will promise you to forget every word you have said."

"I have thought well over every word," said Sir Archie, "and I shall never at any time withdraw so much as one. I beg, mother, that you will understand me once for all, and do your best to set this matter to rights. I shall depend on you to do so."

And Sir Archie walked out of the room.

But none the more was Lady Helen convinced

that this marriage which she had planned should not take place.

"It is all nonsense," she said to Mrs. Hazeldean; "he cannot mean to live single all his life, and he never made much objection to dear Janet before. I don't believe he knows the difference between one woman and another. And as for letting such a splendid fortune slip through one's fingers, never to speak of the sweet girl herself, it is quite out of the question to think of it. Oh, I quite rely upon dear Archie's coming to his senses by the time these shocking rebels have been all hanged. And in the mean time if we could get him quietly married, and carried off to France, or Italy, or some other nice place where the people have no wrongs, nor miseries, nor anything unpleasant of that kind, and one need not be afraid to go to sleep in one's bed! A vessel could take us from the bay just at hand, and we need not run the risk of being shot at as rebels on the road, or taken out of our coach and hanged to a way-

side tree. I shall certainly lay my mind to it. And as for speaking to dear Janet, I shall do no such thing; except to consult her about getting her trousseau put in hand. Once that has been got ready, you know, Margaret, no man with a spark of feeling could draw back."

"You had better not thwart Archie," said Mrs. Hazeldean. "Take my word for it he means what he says. And as for getting ready a trousseau under the circumstances—if you want to make yourself and the young lady feel very foolish, I think you had better do it. I believe you will be wise to act according to Archie's desire."

But Lady Helen here put her handkerchief to her eyes. And when Lady Helen put her handkerchief to her eyes, eloquence were mere waste and reasoning foolisness. That very evening she opened her mind to Hester on the subject of Miss Golden's trousseau. And having done so she felt more at ease, so much so, indeed, that

she was enabled afterwards to tell Hester that she believed she need not begin the sewing for the wedding until the Christmas time should be over. She was planning some charades, some tableaux, some little gaieties, as an excuse to bring friends about, to make the evenings less dull than they had been. And Lady Helen had used a moderate word, when she called her evenings dull. She had a periodical attack of nightmare, coming on whenever dusk began to fall. She got on pretty well with her mornings, when she could state her opinions privately to every one who came near her, that dear Archie was over-anxious, could ransack her wardrobes, and plan masquerading costumes; but in the evenings she sat shrunk up in a corner of her sofa, starting convulsively when poor Pat opened the door never so softly, and thinking that every shriek of the rising wind was the howling of rebels getting punished. And thus it had come to pass through her terror that Hester received her orders of an evening, sitting

face to face with her ladyship, on one of her ladyship's embroidered drawing-room chairs. For Lady Helen's nervousness had a passion for gathering as many faces as possible round her couch. And if the faces could be found young and hopeful, as well as beautiful to look upon, they were by so much the more grateful to her ladyship's fearful eyes.

Miss Madge had begun another purse for Archie, and she knotted and knotted, and grew more silent and mysterious. Purses do wear out in the course of years, especially those of rich people, I suppose, who keep them pretty well filled. At all events, it is good to be provided against emergencies. The last had been red, but this was a green one, the sight of which colour amongst her fingers seemed to afford the Honourable Madge a most exquisite satisfaction. Not so Lady Helen. "Put that green thing away, Madge," she would whimper. "It is enough to compromise the whole family. As for

you, I don't believe you would have the slightest objection to be hanged any minute. But I think you might consider other people!"

Miss Golden sang, and made other music with her fingers, upon spinnet and guitar, with a kindly enough pity for the lady's nervous state. And every evening her voice grew louder and more defiant to all fears and dangers. Yet had certainly the roses left her cheeks.

Miss Janet had reported very truly of Sir Archie, when she stated that he made efforts to divert his lady mother. And he was wonderfully patient, for a man, with her long dissertations to Hester on the subject of the fashions, both of these and former days. And he even went so far, on one occasion, as to recommend for her perusal—he seated at her right hand, and Hester at her left—a certain book of ancient costumes which he had picked up somewhere as a curiosity of literature. And Lady Helen remembered this the next morning, when in high consultation with

Miss Madge, Miss Golden, and Hester, on the subject of stage properties, in Hester's tower room. And she bade Hester run to the library and fetch the said book of costumes.

Hester hesitated. "Sir Archie Munro may be in the library, your ladyship," she said.

"If he is, he will not eat you, child!" said Lady Helen. "Tell him I want the book he spoke of last evening."

So Hester went, lingered on the stairs, in the hall; but meeting a servant, and not wishing to be seen hanging about, as if she had been afraid of something, was obliged to walk boldly into the room.

Sir Archie was there, as Hester had feared he might be, and he seemed more than glad to see her, as Hester had feared he might seem. He found her the book, and held it out for her to take. And as he so held it out he looked at her face, with a grave, earnest, and a long look; never thinking to be rude indeed—not his worst

enemy could say that from such a look—but rather as if he were trying to read his future, of good or evil, of weal or woe—this being no time for speech—under eyelids that would not raise themselves, of a young shrinking face. But the book went from his hand, and Hester made quick steps towards the door.

"I beg you to wait a moment," said Sir Archie.

He did not want her to go just yet, but he was at a loss to know what to say that could keep her. He knew that he wanted to love her and to tell her that he loved her, but the time not being ripe he found it difficult to fill up the interval when such moments as the present arrived. There was that about her presence which hushed, while it attracted and made him glad, which left him little of his love in his bearing, save its dignity. But Hester had stoppod and was waiting quietly. She was so resolved not to be foolish again, to take everything that might come as quite meant in good faith, to accept it as a matter of course.

Sir Archie had some mediæval tastes, and he knew a holy face when he saw it in a picture, or out of a picture; and it impressed him. And as Hester stood a little off, with her yellow head shining against the brown wainscot, he remembered a painting in a dusky cloister of a very old monastery he had visited long ago. It was an angel with a golden censer, personifying prayer.

The memory brought with it a suggestion; and Sir Archie's next speech may not seem apt for the occasion.

"I am in danger and difficulty," he said; "I would ask you to pray for me."

"Yes," said Hester, readily, and with relief. She had feared he had been going to say—she knew not what.

But the ready, bright, relieved face, was too much for Sir Archie's prudence.

"Do so," he said, with a glow in his eyes of the real true love that was in him, "and I shall owe you a deep debt of gratitude. And if I live

through these times it will be the business of my life to show it, by making you happy—if you will let me——"

Sir Archie had not intended to say so much. He stopped, undecided whether it were generous at this moment to go on. But already Hester's courage was not proof against so much as had been said. This was not the first time that Sir Archie had so frightened her. She retreated to the door, her eyes fixed as if fascinated on a button of Sir Archie's coat. Her fingers felt the handle of the door. She dropped a hurried curtsey, and disappeared.

"Why are your cheeks so scarlet, child?" asked Lady Helen, somewhat sharply, as Hester gave her the book in the tower room.

"Dear me, Helen!" said Miss Madge, "you must expect that young things will run themselves out of breath upon a staircase. When I was a young thing I broke both my legs twice with taking flying leaps down-stairs."

Lady Helen shrugged her shoulders. "My good Madge," she said, "you were always an exceptional creature. I hope Miss Cashel does not take flying leaps down-stairs."

"No, indeed!" said Hester, so earnestly that her ladyship laughed; which was a good omen for the day. And the business of the properties went on.

"I shall perform in this!" cried Miss Janet, picking out a gown from a heap of strange garments. "What a dainty piece of finery! I shall play princess of the rebels, Queen of Ireland in my own right. I shall order the King of England to be brought before me in chains. And I shall put my foot upon his neck!"

Miss Janet threw herself into an attitude of mock defiance, holding the dress outspread before her. Lady Helen shrieked, and sank into a seat. The dress was a stiff white silk, richly wrought and ornamented with shamrocks in green, and with a green velvet train.

"Put it away!" cried Lady Helen. "Ah, my dear Janet! let it be torn up and burned! I wore it when the United Irish Society was in favour. What greens and what shamrocks were worn in those days! Let it be torn up and burned, every shred of it, lest it cost us our lives!"

"Poor gown!" said Miss Janet, coolly; "and I vow it is a brave gown. Ah, I pray you, Lady Helen, invite the king to dinner. I will dine at his very elbow in this gown. And if his majesty should make a remark, I shall modestly call his attention to the trees outside the window. And I shall say, 'I wonder your majesty does not indict the arch-rogue Nature for high treason!'"

But Lady Helen had fainted by this time. And in a scramble for smelling-bottles the morning's work came to an end.

"I am in danger and difficulty.—The busi-

ness of my life shall be to make you happy, if you will let me." Hester sewed all her seams on the wrong side of her cloth, and stitched a sleeve of one colour into a bodice of another. It was not to be expected that her poor head should be very clear this afternoon. Nevertheless, though Lady Helen had given orders for some harlequin costumes, it was also not to be expected that she should be satisfied unless some little method might appear to have been employed in their contrivance. So Hester was obliged to give up her work for the hour.

She put on her cloak and went down the glen. It was close upon Christmas now, and the frost crackled under her feet as she crossed the old drawbridge over the dried-up moat. The falls were bound up, and the air was quite still. Grey furrows seamed the face of the heavens. Sullen clouds, that looked as if bursting with a secret evil portent, leaned their rough edges on the

frowning hills, and looked down the sad valleys, as if expecting something. The cottage doors were shut, partly from cold, and partly from fear, and here and there a face, anxious or grieved, looked out from a window to see who was going past.

Hester walked for an hour, as fast as her flying feet could carry her, through the byeways of the hills, till she came in sight of the village; and then she sat down to draw breath. The openings of many glens lay under her eyes. She could follow their windings and foldings among the mountains, as they travelled on and up towards the skies, wrapping them with purple and amber, into their secret sombre resting places. But Hester's face was towards the village, and her eyes were on the chimneys of one house.

"I will go to her," said Hester, "and I will ask her what it means. I will tell her every word, if I were to die of shame the next minute!"

And so off Hester started again, nor paused till she stood in Mrs. Hazeldean's parlour.

Mrs. Hazeldean was sitting sewing by her fireside. A basket of bright flannels was at her feet, and a garment made of the same was on her knee. The sweet grave face looked as busy with thought as her fingers were busy with the needle. But there were no restless cares nor nervous fears behind that face. No solitude ever banished the tender look of lurking joy from those eyes and lips, nor yet the broad look of satisfied trust in a strength unutterable that had not failed, nor could fail, to furnish nerve for her right hand, and courage for her heart. No sad days could shadow that brow, but with a passing cloud. For the light that shone upon it was a reflex from a sun that knows no setting.

Mrs. Hazeldean was glad, surprised to see Hester come in; not quite satisfied with her face. She thought the girl looked a little wild and feverish. Had she walked too fast? Was she

cold, or hot? Why had she thought of coming so far on such a day, or at least why had she not come earlier? There would hardly be time for her to get home before dusk. Mrs. Hazeldean had removed Hester's hat, and smoothed back with two fond hands the fair locks a little blown astray by the mountain air; and she had pulled off her gloves, and was chafing some chilled fingers between her own warm palms.

All this was very trying for Hester. If the fever of her suspense had not made her almost reckless, her resolution must have melted into nothing at such treatment. But the thought of the flying moments pressed her hard; and the dread of returning to her work, it might be to a solitary room, with the burthen of that secret and that wonder still upon her, lent her tongue a desperation that did the part of real courage.

"I must not stay five minutes, Mrs. Hazeldean," said Hester, trying to answer two questions at once. "And I should not have come

out on such a day if I had not been driven out."

"My darling!" said Mrs. Hazeldean, alarmed; "who has driven you out?"

"No person," said Hester. "Nothing except my own distress of mind."

She had got her hands disentangled from among her friend's soft fingers by this time, and she had tied on her hat and stood ready for flight. She knew that she was running a terrible risk in speaking the words that were waiting on her tongue. She might be misunderstood; nothing else seemed so natural to expect as that she should. She might offend, disgust the friend who had cherished her. So she stood ready to fly from before this face that she loved, if it so happened that dear face should grow dark at her audacity.

"Distress of mind!" said Mrs. Hazeldean; and as she spoke she guessed even more than was the truth.

"I came here, Mrs. Hazeldean," said Hester, "to ask you if you know what Sir Archie means?"

Mrs. Hazeldean's eyes were on Hester's face, and saw the face turn white with the effort that had been made. Why had Archie been so foolish? Mrs. Hazeldean's two hands went suddenly forth, laid hold of the figure that stood so aloof, ready for flight, and pulled it down without ceremony against her knee.

"I cannot know what he has been doing," she said, "but I venture to say that he means to do well."

"Mrs. Hazeldean!" said Hester, "I must say something more. He—behaves strangely to me. I dare not understand him. I came to tell you this, though I thought that the telling might have killed me."

"Hester," said Mrs. Hazeldean, after one minute's pause, "I have not got any liberty to interfere with Sir Archie's secrets, but I will

say so much as this—I have known him all my life, and I believe that you may trust him."

Hester's face sank in her lap, and remained there as if the girl had been annihilated. But a few moments went by, and Hester's wits were alive again.

"But Mrs. Hazeldean," she began again, desperately.

But Mrs. Hazeldean stopped her mouth with a kiss. "I will not hear a word more," she said. "You shall not distress yourself with another syllable." And she was thinking what was to be done about Hester. She must take her from the castle, and get her under her own wing. "But I am glad you came here to-day, and I am glad you spoke to me," she went on. "So do not begin to fret lest you were wrong. Now, you shall not go back this evening. I will send them a message."

But Hester was on her feet.

"No, no, I am going," she said; and with-

out waiting to be staid, took her burning face out of the house, and up the glen on the track to the castle.

For Hester was not satisfied. She had not, after all her hardy efforts, had the daring to say, "But I have got orders concerning Miss Golden's wedding trousseau." She must have blundered very sadly in her speaking to Mrs. Hazeldean; or Mrs. Hazeldean must have made a great mistake. Why, it was only this very morning that Lady Helen had consulted her about the fashioning of a splendid bridal dress. So Hester had told her secret; and gained an extra heartache in exchange.

CHAPTER VII.

THE FRENCH ARE IN THE BAY.

Sewing is a kind of occupation for the hands which leaves the brain very free to think. More so almost than any other sort of work. Spinning makes a noise, and writing engages the mind, more or less. Sewing is silent, monotonous, mechanical; once a device has been shaped by the scissors, and the fingers know the tricks of the device.

Sewing is a sort of secret handwriting, peculiar to women. Many a strange history, many a life's poem, has been traced in thread by the

needle, hemmed into sheets, darned into stockings to be trodden under a thankless foot, stitched into wreathings of flowers and garlands. Every day these records are written, but never read. Characters marked in invisible ink will lie hidden in blank parchment, unsuspected, for years, and at last the breath of fire, like the touch of a wizard, will call them to light, and deliver their message. But no sage will ever translate the histories traced by the needle, of patience, of heroism, of passion, and anguish. How they are written, and stored, these poems! Every household has its stores of such family archives. In the linen chests they lie; on the shelves of deep presses; in the drawers strewn with lavender. In the wardrobe hung with dresses, in the cupboard with mended hose; in the locked drawer where the little trousseau is arranged, smooth and orderly, of the baby who died; in the trunks, packed between laughing and crying, of the bride who will shortly go forth. If a light were suddenly

given to read these hidden writings, what wild revelations, what beautiful lessons, what outpourings of joy, what majestic examples of endurance would not startle the world, and make it blush for the affectations it treasures in staring print!

Hester was making some little frills, and every stitch in them was aware that she had got into a scrape. They all knew exceedingly well that she had been thinking far too much about Sir Archie, and what he could mean, and what he could not mean; that she had followed a rash impulse and out-stepped all maidenly dignity in speaking of Sir Archie to his aunt; although Mrs. Hazeldean had been too noble to show displeasure at her conduct, to do anything but make an effort to soothe her. Though Mrs. Hazeldean had even gone too far in the effort, saying something most strange and startling, the meaning of which Hester in her confusion had not taken hold of; for it was not to be admitted for one moment

that some words which fast clung to Hester's memory could endure to bear the construction which a daring mind might put upon them.

So when the frills got far too wise, Hester bundled them away, and sat brooding over her fire like a second Cinderella, not unhappy because she could not go to a ball, but because her poor little lonely heart was sore, with an aching and a burning to which all her former troubles looked as mere flying shadows, as the fretting of a babe for broken toys.

And this brooding over the fire would not do. Hester had sense enough to take out her desk, and to task herself to the writing of some letters.

A letter to Lady Humphrey, and a letter to the Mother Augustine, and lastly one other, which ought to have been written long ago, a letter to Mr. Pierce in which his ring was to be enclosed. So a little note was penned, hoping that Mr. Humphrey would excuse the regretful writer, who had

found herself unable to fulfil his wishes about the ring. And when the letters had been folded and addressed Hester went into her bedroom for some wax which she had bought. And she left that foolish ring upon her desk among the papers.

Meantime the letters by evening post had arrived in the castle drawing-room. Miss Golden had had her share, had read, and had not been pleased. She was always looking out for some writing in one particular hand; and as this never appeared, it is not likely that her letters should make her glad. Lady Helen was asleep upon her sofa, so her letters had been laid beside her, at her hand. Miss Madge had read a letter from her good friend M., who had helped her to make that memorable pasty. Miss Madge was somewhat flushed, Miss Madge was quite elated. Miss Madge began to hum in a low voice to herself:

"The French are on the sea,
Says the Shan van Vocht.
Oh, the French are in the bay,
They'll be here without delay,
And the ——"

"What's that you are saying about the French, Madge?" asked Lady Helen, wakening. "I wish you would not talk about them. Bloodthirsty wretches!" And Lady Helen began to break the seals of her letters.

A scream followed the reading of the first, just as the drawing-room door opened, and Sir Archie came in.

"Archie! Archie!" cried her ladyship, "is this true, what they have written me? There is a rumour that a fleet of war-ships has left France, and that it is coming to the assistance of the rebels."

"I have heard it," said Sir Archie, "and I think it likely to be true. But you need not be uneasy, mother, they are not going to storm you in your drawing-room."

Sir Archie looked pale, yet cheerful. But Lady Helen was carried to her bed. And Miss Madge was in haste to reply to the letter of her friend M.; and she went humming her snatch of song

up the stairs to her tower-room, where she locked herself in, with pen and ink, for the night.

Miss Golden felt herself lonely and ill-treated. There was no chance of peace and a little gaiety to be had in this miserable country. The troubles were getting thicker in it every day that shone. And here was she, miles and miles away from the only friend she cared about, all for a foolish quarrel of her making, which ought to have been cleared up long ago. And now he was not thinking of her, would leave her to her fate. Oh, Pierce, Pierce! would that she were at home in England, near him!

Miss Janet was getting nervous when she indulged such thoughts as these, for she was not given to heaping reproaches upon her own so wilful head. And in such a desponding frame of mind she walked into Hester's room.

Hester was not there. Hester was in her bedroom. Miss Janet stood at the fire, and then Miss Janet walked to the table. On the table she

saw letters, and one of them addressed to Mr. Pierce Humphrey, captain in his Majesty's —— regiment. And she also saw a ring which she knew to be her own, at least a ring which had once been her own; and it was fastened to a ribbon which had been worn round the neck. And the sight made her sick, of the letter and of the ring.

The sight made her sick, because she was not in her usual frame of mind. If she had been like her ordinary self she would have called in a loud voice for Miss Hester to come forth out of her bedroom; and she would probably have with difficulty, if at all, restrained herself from boxing both the ears of that young woman, and pinching both her pale dainty cheeks. But there was a lump in Janet's throat, and a genuine unwonted throe of anguish and remorse tightening her heart. She crept away to her room in the humiliation of tears, and she certainly hated Hester—the sly thing—from that night.

But the next day she was not so sickly and

sentimental. She took occasion to instal herself for an hour in Hester's room, and she sat staring at the girl and putting questions to her.

"Do you know people in London called Humphrey?" asked Miss Golden.

"Yes," answered Hester, with a sudden vivid blush.

"What a soft silly fool the girl is!" thought Miss Golden. But Hester was only blushing because she was getting forced to disobey the Mother Augustine.

"People?" asked Miss Janet again, sharply.

"Yes, people," answered Hester.

"You know Lady Humphrey, of Hampton Court?"

"I know her," said Hester.

"And you also know her son, Mr. Pierce?" continued Janet.

"I know him also."

"Very probably Lady Humphrey was the friend of whom you told me once before?"

"Lady Humphrey was the friend."

"Humph!" said Miss Golden; and then added, with a sudden bitter change in her voice, "Has Lady Helen yet consulted you on the subject of a bridal trousseau?"

"Yes," answered Hester.

"See that you are industrious, then!" said Miss Janet, superciliously, and went, singing a sprightly catch, out of the room.

"The little ambitious monkey!" cried Miss Janet, in her chamber. "Must send a poor soldier back his ring because a fine estated baronet should admire her yellow hair! Miss Innocence! you have robbed me of my lover. Then I shall take especial care that you shall never find yourself mistress of Glenluce."

So Miss Janet could be rather coarse in her threats and suspicions when she was angry.

But Hester put down her sewing for a few moments while she reflected on the confession which she had been led into making. She might

as well have told Miss Golden all the tale of Pierce's ring. Well, it could not matter now. The ring had been returned with her explanation. Mr. Pierce could manage best his own affairs, without a doubt. And it were silly and very awkward, such a tale, at such a time, when the wedding robes were ordered, and the bridegroom was Sir Archie Munro.

"My dear," said Miss Madge, "what is this story that Miss Golden has been telling me? A secret connexion with Lady Humphrey! Secret I must say, since you never said a word of it. And the name of Lady Humphrey is a horror in this house. A horror to Lady Helen. My dear, Lady Helen is in a panic!"

"Lady Helen is often in a panic, Miss Madge," said Hester.

"My dear, don't grow pert. I never knew you pert. Miss Golden is pert, very. My dear, Lady Helen has some reason to be alarmed. A secret connexion with Lady Humphrey!"

"Not secret, Miss Madge. Mrs. Hazeldean has known of it!" said Hester, stoutly.

"Margaret. Ah! that is not so bad. Well, my dear, I wonder at Margaret. But you, perhaps, have never known any evil of Lady Humphrey?"

"No, Miss Madge," said Hester.

"Hist, then, my dear! and I will tell you what they say of her."

CHAPTER VIII.

A LITTLE WHISPER.

Miss Madge put her finger on her lips, and closed the door, walking backward and forward across the floor on tiptoe. Hester had retreated to the fireside, and stood there, a little horror-stricken, yet with a fixed determination in the midst of her confusion, not to put much faith in what Miss Madge might confide to her. A recollection came struggling to her mind of words which Lady Humphrey had spoken to her about former friendships, and the overturning of such friendships, between herself and this family at

Glenluce. Enemies, said Lady Humphrey, had made mischief. Evil tales had been told and believed. Hard things might be said. Let Hester not hearken to them. And in the same breath Lady Humphrey had announced her intention of watching over the troubled fortunes of Sir Archie Munro. Such generous rendering of good for evil had in one instant kindled Hester's enthusiasm, and exalted her benefactress to a place in her estimation which the lady had not before, and in no other manner could ever have attained to. To take her down from that place, she having been there so well established, would have given Hester the most exquisite pain, even though she had not time, at this moment, to realise, or even think of all that such dispossession might mean and entail. Evil tales were going to be told, hard things about to be said. Let Hester close her ears. Let Hester not hearken to them.

"Miss Madge," said Hester, a little sternly,

"Lady Humphrey has been my friend. I ought not, and I will not, hear anything against her."

"Very nice in you, my dear. I like you for it, and I forgive you that little pertness on account of it. But all the same, my dear, I intend you to hear my little whisper. I will put you on your guard. An innocent young thing connected with such a woman ought to be put upon her guard. She writes to you, my dear, and you write to her. An innocent—young—thing!"

Miss Madge repeated the last words slowly, and with a tender meditating air seldom observed in the flighty lady's manner. She had taken Hester's hands and held her off a little, and looked her up and down, and then glanced at the fire with a sigh, as she had a trick of doing when especially moved in her heart towards the girl.

"Sit down, my dear, and make yourself happy, and don't look so exactly like as if I were Queen

Eleanor standing over you with a drawn sword and a cup of poison. It is only a little whisper, and you need not believe it if you don't like it. I am not going to ask you to believe it. People who think proper to do so may believe, but for you it will be enough just to hear it. It will be painful to you, I know; but if you had to get both your eyes put out in order to save your life, your friends would feel bound to see it done. You will condemn my little whisper, deny it, and detest it; but you will never get it out of your memory, my dear. You may hunt it into the farthest closet, whip it down, and starve it. You may pile all your choicest furniture, and all your worst rubbish—if you have got any—on its head, but you will never get rid of it while you live. It will be there as your guardian, better than a bull-dog at your gate, than a file of armed men round your door!"

It was getting dark in the tower-room at this moment, and the firelight had got possession of

Miss Madge's grotesque shadow, and was making with it a weird pantomime on the wall; was sending it flying off on little wild excursions across the length of the ceiling, or gleefully flattening it down into a struggling heap against the scanty folds of the tapestry at the window. Hester's shadow lurked aside a little at her own elbow, out of the way of the violence of such play: only, at the flickering of one flame, it kept starting, starting, like something wincing in pain.

"Remember, my dear, that it is a secret. We do not tell it about the world. We never mention it even here amongst ourselves. If you were Miss Golden this moment, and were to ask me, 'Pray what do these hints about Lady Humphrey mean?' I should say, 'Nothing but nonsense,' and screw up my mouth and walk out of the room. Miss Golden is intimate with friends of Lady Humphrey's in London. We do not want to persecute Lady Humphrey. We only

want to forget Judith Blake. But you, my dear, you are neither Miss Golden, nor yet the world. There is a special reason why you should hear a little whisper."

"I give you warning, Miss Madge," said Hester, stoutly, "that whatever it may be I will not believe it."

"Well, my dear, you shall not believe it. If you have done with Lady Humphrey for ever, I will even allow you to forget all about it. But if you keep up a connexion with her, I advise you to remember, both for your own sake and the sake of the family in this house."

Miss Madge was grim and earnest. Her flightiness had fallen away for the moment, just as the capering flame had dropped down in the grate. By-and-by both would spring up again. But the energy and excitement of the fire, and of Miss Madge, had for the moment settled down into a solid glow.

"My dear, not to keep you longer in sus-

pense," said Miss Madge, dropping her voice very low, "*she was suspected of attempting to poison Lady Helen.*"

"I don't believe it!" gasped Hester; but the colour had gone out of her lips.

"No, my dear, you don't believe it. We agreed about that. You don't believe a word of it. And now I shall go on. I was a child at the time, my dear. I am ten years younger than Lady Humphrey. I was a little girl of twelve, and Judith Blake was a young woman of twenty-two. A handsome creature she was, as could be seen in the world, only her style was a little severe. People were terribly afraid of offending her. Not that she ever flew out in a passion, but she just gave you a frozen-up kind of glance out of her eyes, and you knew that you were booked for the next little compliment she could find an opportunity of paying you. And her compliments were not nice, my dear. Even I, poor little monkey that I was,

without many to notice me, would have rather sat in a corner all my days than be dragged out of it by a special attention from Miss Blake.

"Well, my dear, she had had it all her own way in this castle for a good many years, and she intended to keep having it her own way to the end of her days. She was a distant relation and dependant of Sir Archie's grandmother, the old Lady Munro, and she had lived in the castle from her childhood. Sir John—Archie's father, my dear—was a handsome young man at the time. Of course he and Judith had been playfellows, and he had a sort of affection for her. He was the kindliest creature that ever was born, and he was thoughtful about her dependent position. He made rather a fuss about her on that account; and the old lady, too, was kind and considerate, though she could be a hard old lady, as Judith learned to her cost.

"Judith had determined to be Lady of Glenluce, and she might have managed to gain her

point, had not Sir John happened to meet with Lady Helen. Cousin Helen at that time was a lovely creature. You are not to judge of that from what you see now. She did not wear well. At that time she was as beautiful as a Parian statue, and delicate, very delicate. She hadn't a good head; none of our family had ever much head to speak of, though lately, since she has taken so much to hysterics and sal volatile, I must say she is more weak-minded than she used to be. But Helen had such a beautiful face that nobody ever thought about her head.

"My dear, Sir John fell in love with Helen, and Helen with Sir John, and the match was most suitable; and the old lady, Sir John's mother, was delighted at the prospect. And Helen was brought here upon a visit.

"I came with her. Helen was always very good to me. She liked to have me with her. It used to be a pleasure to me just to sit and look at her, she was so lovely. And Helen knew it,

and she indulged me. She used to write to my mother, 'Send little Madge to me. I want to be admired. Nobody admires me properly but little Madge.' You see her beauty was such an admitted thing that she herself talked of it quite openly. I was with her when she received the invitation to Glenluce, and she accepted, on condition that I should accompany her. She bought me some pretty new frocks, the finest I had ever had, and we arrived at this castle for the first time together.

"I remember how we entered the drawing-room that evening. I, behind Helen, carrying her scent-bottle and fan. Helen was twenty-one just the day before. She sailed into the room like a swan. She had a long white throat, and she had a graceful way of turning her head about upon it and looking down on each side with a superior sort of air, that made people feel for the moment as if they liked to be looked down upon. I remember perfectly her exquisite appearance—I

saw her in an opposite mirror—as we entered, with her beautiful head on one side, and my little ugly face peeping out from behind her white shoulder. For I was a very ugly child, my dear, just at that time. I grew up better afterwards, and astonished everybody. But I was a very ugly child at that time.

"Judith Blake was sitting just a little behind the old lady's chair. I thought on the instant 'what a handsome face!' But that was one second before she looked up and saw Helen. Then a strange expression, which I soon grew familiar with, came over mouth and eyes. I resolved on the instant to keep out of her way so long as I should remain in the place.

"Well, my dear, I need not go on giving you a whole history of the family. From the first there was enmity between Helen and Judith Blake. Helen could be very haughty and slighting to people who did not appreciate her, and there were some who knew that Judith had

private reasons of her own for disliking the stranger, without the additional provocation of being treated with contempt. And I must say that Helen did treat her badly. Judith upon her side did not make much show of ill-will. There was nothing very noticeable in her manner, except sometimes that look, of which, I think, she could hardly have been conscious, or she would have made some effort to hide it. But no one who had ever seen it was likely to forget it.

"My dear, this is not a nice history, and you will be glad when I bring it to an end. Sir John and Helen became engaged. They arranged it one day whilst out riding. Judith was to have gone with them; but Helen's horse was found to be sick, and Judith's was required for Helen. The lovers were caught in a thunderstorm, and arranged their little affair while taking shelter in some romantic and out-of-the-way spot. Helen caught a cold, and was put to bed when she

reached home. The news of the engagement was not kept secret for a moment. Sir John told his mother without delay, and the old lady was too pleased to keep the matter to herself. We all knew what had happened when we sat down to dinner without Helen. We were all very merry, except Judith. I should have thought she, too, was ill, only I knew she had looked dark all day, on account of the horse. Dark about the eyes and mouth, and pale, as she always looked when anything had crossed her.

"Helen was ill with a sort of fever for two or three days after this. Margaret and I used to sit in her room all day, reading, or chatting, and telling stories over the fire. Dear Margaret was quite a child then. Sir John used to come to the door to ask how the patient did, and we used to have to go out and comfort him in the lobby. Judith, to our surprise, also came once or twice, and on one occasion, when we assured her Helen was asleep, she came into the room, and stood

between us looking down at the fire. It was late in the evening, and Margaret had in her hand a goblet of sweet drink, a dark-looking red stuff, made of some kind of preserves steeped in water. She was walking on tip-toe to place it on a table by the bed.

" ' What is that ?' asked Judith.

" ' Some drink for the night,' said Margaret. ' She is so thirsty.'

" ' Will she drink all that ?' asked Judith.

" ' Every drop of it,' whispered Margaret, and put her finger on her lip and looked at Judith, before she turned and stepped away on her toes across the room.

" Judith Blake did not like dear Margaret. She did not like me, but I think she liked me better than Margaret. She was not afraid of me, for I was afraid of her, and I saw that she did not like being observed. I had always kept out of her way as much as I was able. But dear Margaret was not afraid of her, and was quite too wise and

too quick, and kept her bright eyes a great deal too wide open—was altogether too fearless and straightforward to suit with the disposition of Judith Blake.

"My dear, I slept in Helen's room that night. She was restless, and fancied to have me. A bed was arranged for me on a couch in a corner. In the middle of the night I wakened, I knew not why, nor how—unless it had been the strangeness of the room—for there was no noise. But I saw Judith Blake crossing the floor. She was covered all down with something dark, and she made no more sound than if she had been a ghost. I first saw the dark figure, and knew not what it was, and should have screamed, I dare say, but for the fear of wakening Helen. But the next moment a little blaze sprang up in the slumbering fire, and I saw that Judith Blake was in the room. She stepped back behind the bed-curtains till the little blaze dropped down again; and then I saw again only the dark figure moving across the

room to the door. The door opened and closed, and she was gone.

"My dear, I thought it odd, but the matter did not keep me awake. I got up in the morning early, as I was accustomed to do. Helen was sleeping soundly, which was not usual with her at that hour. It was my habit to pay her a visit the first thing when I was dressed, and I always had found her awake and rather fretful. I also noticed as unusual that only a little had been taken from the tumbler of sweet drink by her side.

"I went out to the gardens. I was always fond of a garden, even in winter time. Just in the beech-alley, my dear—you know the beech-alley?—I met Judith Blake walking up and down. She had a shawl over her head, and looked pale and unwell. I had forgotten till that moment about seeing her the night before in Helen's room. I felt a little oddly, recollecting it; but she spoke to me very civilly, and

asked for Lady Helen. I said I believed she was better. She was sleeping very soundly. Judith drew back a step, and gave me one of those strange bad looks, of which I think she was unconscious. Then she passed on, and so did I, in the opposite direction. And I thought, as I ran along, 'How she does hate Helen!'

"After breakfast it was found that Helen still slept. Lady Munro desired Margaret and me to go out and take a walk; and we went, and took a walk. Even then my dear Margaret had a taste for going poking among the cottages. And I admit to you, my dear, that I admired her, and loved her for it, as I do to this day, only Helen don't see the good of it.

"We were out all the long, long morning, and when we arrived at home Lady Munro came to meet us in the hall. She laid hold of my hand and brought me with her up to her own private room—the room in which she was accustomed to

see the steward and the housekeeper, and any of the tenantry who might desire to have an interview with her ladyship. I was frightened out of my senses. I had broken a little ornament the day before. Margaret had assured me it did not matter, that she would make it all right with her mother. But Lady Munro was a little severe, though kind, and I was sure she was going to lecture me about her precious bit of china.

"She seated herself sternly, and placed me standing before her. Who had been in Helen's room the night before, after Margaret had placed the glass of drink by her side? Who? Sir John had come to the door. That was nothing. And a servant had been in to arrange the fire for the night. Had she approached near the bed? No. Had no one else been in after Margaret and Miss Blake had gone away? I now knew that her ladyship had been questioning Margaret. What

could it mean? I hesitated. What difference would it make if I announced Judith's midnight visit?

"'You hesitate,' said her ladyship. 'Did any one else come into the room before you slept?'

"I said, 'No—but——' I was very much afraid, my dear. I saw there was something wrong, and I was terrified at being forced to tell of Judith.

"'But what?' said Lady Munro, so dreadfully that I began to shake and to speak on the instant. I confided to her that Miss Blake had been in the room during the night.

"'That will do. It is what I feared,' said her ladyship, and she did not faint, though I stretched out my arms, seeing her totter in her chair. She steadied herself, however, by grasping both its sides, and remained so sitting, as pale and as fixed as the image upon a tomb; so long that I

ventured to touch her at last, and to ask if she were well.

"She said, 'Yes, yes, child; you may go away now. Remember, you are to say nothing about this.'

"My dear, the secret oozed out, though I did as I was bidden, and her ladyship thought to keep it to herself. Helen had slept so long that Lady Munro had become alarmed, had seen something unnatural in the heaviness of the slumber. She then examined the drink that remained in the tumbler by her side. It was drugged with laudanum, enough to have killed her, if dear Helen had but happened to swallow it all. I saw Lady Munro go up the stairs to Judith's room that night. My dear, these of yours are her very rooms. I saw her ladyship come in here and shut the door, and it was three long hours before she came out. She came out pale and frozen-looking, as if petrified with

horror. She had been very fond of, very good to, Judith Blake. She went straight to her own chamber, and saw no one more that night.

"The secret oozed out. People whispered, and pointed to Judith Blake. The villagers knew it, and the country folks knew it, and Judith Blake seemed to turn into a ghost, so pallid, and grim, and silent did she become. Lady Munro had more of these private interviews with her up in this room, which she rarely left. Wrestling-matches I think they were, from which poor Lady Munro, with all her sternness and resolution, used to come away worsted. One day she got her inveigled into a coach, and drove with her to the little convent beyond the village, where there was a simple mother abbess, renowned for touching people's hearts. This woman is still alive, and in the weakness of her age she shudders at the name of Judith Blake. Helen and I went home, and when Helen returned here as a bride, Judith

was gone, and was spoken of no more. Lady Munro was a good woman, and though she banished did not cease to protect her, so long as she needed protection. We heard of her marriage, but afterwards lost sight of her. Helen used to get ill if she was mentioned. Latterly we have heard of her from Sir Archie and Miss Golden. And we make no remark. We are willing to wish her well. Only we like her to keep very far aloof. And now you will understand, my dear, why I have told you this long story. You will understand why Lady Helen is in a panic."

CHAPTER IX.

VAIN ADVICE.

"It may all have been a mistake, Miss Madge," said Hester, with trembling lips; "the laudanum might have been an accident, and you might have dreamed that you saw her in the room."

"Well, my dear, I have not the least objection to that arrangement. You have heard my little whisper with great patience. You said you would not believe it, and you keep your word. Only one thing you shall promise me, that you will never forget it. If Lady Humphrey bids you do anything, you will bring this to mind before you obey her. If she forbids you to do anything, you will

recall my little story before you quite make up your mind that you would not like to disobey her. You see, my dear, I never was a genius, and I have a crazy way of my own, but I have a little knack of looking into things. I know what you are, and I know what Judith Humphrey is. And I believe she has not been kind to you for nothing."

And Miss Madge poked the fire, and the shadows resumed their gambols.

"God bless you, my dear," she said, solemnly, putting her hand on Hester's head with an air of real tragedy oddly mingled with the grotesque. "And believe me I have not pained you to furnish play for an idle tongue. I have done it for the best, my dear; I have done it for the best."

She went away. Hester sat alone, gazing stupidly round the room with such a distraught look on her face, that the shadows, if they were heeding, must have pitied her. That hard pale face, well remembered by Hester, described by Miss Madge, was watching her suspiciously from

every dusky corner. Yet she clung to her determination not to believe Miss Madge's story. Had it been anything less dreadful she might have allowed herself to think about it. But the tale was too wild. Lady Humphrey had been the victim of circumstances. A child, and a child with a fantastic brain like Miss Madge's, was the only witness against her. Against her who was watching over the fortunes of this house at this moment. Poor Lady Humphrey! It was this sorrow of her youth that had made her hard and cold. How would be with her, Hester, at this moment, did Miss Golden get some laudanum by mistake, and were she to be accused of having given it to her? Then Hester put her hands to her face in shame at the parallel her thoughts were thus drawing between the position in which she found herself in the castle at this moment, and that of Judith Blake in the times long ago. She wondered, with a frightened wonder that did not dare to dwell upon the

thought, if Sir John had troubled Judith as his son had troubled her. And then she flew off to assure herself of how gladly she, in her sad old age, would watch over the fortunes of a son of Sir Archie.

Then she thought of all the letters she had written to Lady Humphrey, and the urgent anxious letters which she had received from Lady Humphrey in return. Only for the secresy so constantly recommended in those letters, Hester would have made up her mind to enlighten Miss Madge as to the real state of Lady Humphrey's feelings. But patience for a little and all would be seen. Lady Humphrey's good service must be known some day, and all prejudice and mistakes cleared away. Then they would thank her, Hester, for her silence and her diligence. And Miss Madge would be ashamed of her little whisper. For it never for one moment occurred to this ignorant Hester, that the woman could make other than a friendly use of her know-

ledge. Had she not been so scrupulously obedient to Lady Humphrey, and given Miss Madge never so delicate a hint, that lady might have enlightened her with another little whisper. But a thousand little whispers must now have come too late. Hester's mischief was already quite accomplished.

A few days after this Hester was sitting at her window, the inevitable needle in her hand. She could see the tracks of raving streams that desolated the valleys, the smoke of cottages, the rainy fields, the wilder weeping peat-moss stretching in long red miles, the brown grandeur of upland moors, and the vivid purple of heathery crags, peeping out of the swathing vapours. She could see the gathering of mists and the mustering of clouds, and the wrestling of a fiery sunset with wintry chills and shadows. There was a gloom over the glens, and there was a gloom over the castle. Lady Helen talked no more about little Christmas festivities.

Miss Madge came weeping into Hester's tower-room. Miss Madge, weeping. The sight was so strange that Hester knew not what dreadful thing to imagine. She let fall her needle and arose, and stood timidly before the poor lady, begging with her eyes to be allowed to offer sympathy.

"My dear," said Miss Madge, "seat yourself. It is nothing which need trouble you. But it is woe and death to thousands in this unhappy country. Our fleet has been scattered and lost. Our fleet from France, which we have expected."

"We!" Hester repeated, mechanically, with an accent of terror.

"Yes, we," said Miss Madge. "My dear, I thought you understood that I was a rebel. I am a rebel. I do not deny it. I do not wish to conceal it, except as far as may be prudent for the safety of this household. My dear, I am not afraid that you will betray us."

"Oh, Miss Madge!" said Hester.

"There will be danger enough on all sides presently," said Madge. "We must all be careful, for the sake of our friends. For me, I am ready to give my life; but not to give the lives of those I love. Remember, my dear, that you are not a rebel. You are English, and the king will protect you. Terrible days are coming, and Irish blood will flow. Remember, my dear, that you are not a rebel."

Christmas came and went, and the spring advanced. Larks began to sing, and the sun to laugh in the rivers. The long brown sides of the mountains basked in the returning warmth, and the crags that had frowned all winter seemed to unbend their brows and smile as the little gold clouds floated over their heads. The heavy grey furrows were smoothed from the face of the sea, and the airy waves brought the blue of heaven to the shore. Cottage doors began to be opened fearfully, and anxious faces looked into the sunshine and brightened with passionate hope. Afflic-

tion ought surely to follow the threatening of the storm, and the mourning of the rain, and depart out of the land, and be forgotten. So gay a spring-tide could never smile on death and torture. So benignant a sun could not shed its benediction upon outrage. The singing of the birds, and the voices of the children at their play in the newly budded woods, must chase the phantom of terror from the world.

This was a dream, and only simple people indulged in it. Poor mothers who knew no better, and whose aching eyes would fain have seen dungeons open, and their sons coming back to them, even with the mark of the bitter scourge or the scars of cruel burning on their flesh; tender children, who held the robbing of a bird's nest to be an act undeserving of forgiveness; and desperate men, who had nerved their strong arms to strike one blow which should sweep misery and degradation from their homes for evermore.

Only a dream. The spring ripened and mel-

lowed into summer. The rivers might laugh, but men had decreed that they should run red with blood before the touch of another winter should bind them round their rocks. The sunshine might lie softly on the snug yellow thatches, and the pigeons might coo about the chimneys, but the homesteads so tenderly fostered must crumble into ashes, the flames of their destruction must make the stars grow pale.

For the world must see a nation, spoiled of its strength, like Samson blind and shorn, led out to make a spectacle for its masters.

CHAPTER X.

ON A SUMMER EVENING, AT SHANE'S CASTLE.

THERE is a little village near Dublin called Santry. In the days of my story there was a familiar excitement dear to the children of this village, which was the sound of a post-horn blown lustily from the distance, swelling nearer and nearer, which was also the sight of a wonderful coach coming whirling down the road, the coachman's scarlet coat shining through clouds of yellow dust. But one glowing May-day there was a new excitement in store for the children of the village of Santry. A crowd of a thousand

gloomy men came, and gathered in a field beside the road. And the children looked on in wonder, while car and cart, ploughshare and barrow were dragged from shed and from stable-yard, and placed in a strange barricade across the road. And when the coach came cheerily along, bringing its triumphant music down the hill, a few of those silent men stepped forth from the field and took possession of the horses. The music ceased, the passengers were escorted with courtesy to the houses of the villagers, a light was put to the straw under the perch where the driver had smoked his pipe for many years, and the gay wonderful coach became a bonfire, to the terror and admiration of the children, and the grim satisfaction of those gloomy men. The children did not know what it all meant; but the nation did. Before twenty-four hours had passed war was declared, and the country was in arms. A week passed, and battles had been fought and won, and fire and sword raged through the land.

The men of the North had not yet arisen. They waited in awful quietude the signal of their leader. It was during this terrible pause that Sir Archie Munro received an urgent message from his friend Lord O'Neal. The message was simply an invitation to dinner. A safe message; though this was hardly a time for giving dinners. But Sir Archie knew well that there was something important to be said—something which could not be trusted upon paper. Lord O'Neal was known to be a loyal man, and his passport in Sir Archie's hand was sufficient protection to bring him safely from Glenluce to Shane's Castle.

It was a glorious evening, about the first day of June, when Sir Archie Munro rode through Shane's Castle Park. He entered at the Randalstown gates, by which the silver Main dives under its bridge at the entrance to the little town. He turned his head to see the image of the golden sun quivering in the water, and the cozy village nestling among its May-flowers, and

turf-smoke, and apple-trees, away beyond the river, across the rugged bridge. But when he plunged into the park the river went with him; though hidden for a time behind the primrose dells and dingles, the green slopes and wooded hills. Now he had miles of smooth verdure on either hand, with, in the distance, golden bars of sunset glowing behind files of young trees that mustered on the upland. Now tall grand firs rose and confronted him at a sudden turning; directed him with their pointing fingers to lose himself in a sombre wilderness, where their more majestic brethren thronged together in dusky crowds, turning the day into night under the shadow of their foliage.

The darkness thickened. There was no sound of the horse's feet on the soft earth in the moist shade. A brown atmosphere of twilight lurked under the lofty roofing of the pines, and swept its heavy shade down their branches to meet the lower thickets. Then the ferns and the young

saplings, the tall tufts and purple drifts of the wild hyacinth, the snowberry and the blackberry, the matted mosses, and the scarlet-headed stalks of the nightshade, sprang together in magnificent disorder, and wove themselves into masses to enrich the splendid gloom. Here and there fierce red sparks from the sunset came glowering with lurid eyes through little holes in the thicket, as if a fire had been getting kindled in the underwood.

Now an opening shone through the dusk. The trees stood aside, and suffered the pathway to lead the way up to a stately bridge. Under the arches of the bridge flowed the river, suddenly flashing from behind the sombre pine-forest, broader, fuller, more luminous than when last seen. A lordly river, that for ages had laid its silver neck under the foot of the O'Neal, gathering legends and lilies as it hurried on its way to give its treasures to the mysterious keeping of the storied Lough Neagh. Now the cawing of rooks an-

nounced the neighbourhood of the castle. "War! war!" they seemed calling to one another across the trees.

Another turning and Sir Archie checked his horse, and sat gazing on the scene. There was the castle, a pile of hoary grandeur, with its roots in a green slope and its massive turrets in solemn relief against the burnished sky. There was the banshee's tower, the dwelling of the spirit who watched over the fortunes of the house of O'Neal. There was the face upon its side, sculptured in black marble, which had been placed there no one knew how, and which was to fall from its height and crumble into dust when the race of O'Neal should fail. There was the long rampart, with its rows of cannon levelled this moment at the sunset; its watch-tower at either end growing up out of the lough, hooded in ivy, with steps winding into the water. Beyond all these was the wide, shining, charmed Lough Neagh, stretching like a great sea to the horizon, shuffling gold

and crimson from ripple to ripple of its little waves, baffling the eyes that would fain look into its enchanted depths for a peep of the "round towers of other days." Away round the edge of the enchanted lough crept the lovely shores, fringed with stately trees, streaked with pale shell-strewn beach, enriched with glowing drifts of wandering flowers, that carried their bloom to the very margin of the water. Beautiful are the banks of this weird Lough Neagh as the ideal dwelling-place of a poet.

"And God has made our land so fair!" said Sir Archie, bitterly, groaning as he thought ot the agonised hearts that were rushing on death from end to end of the country. "Heaven has showered boons upon us surely. The misrule of men has added horror and desolation to the list."

There were no other guests at Shane's Castle that night. Sir Archie found his lordship alone. The dinner passed almost in silence. The guest

was pale and grave, the host a little absent in his manner, albeit mindful of the courtesies of the occasion. The well-trained servants made strange mistakes, and came and went breathlessly, afraid to lose a word that might be spoken by those they served. But little was said between those who dined till the attendants had disappeared. Then host and guest sat over their wine, looking out upon the shifting shining lough, haloed with the mingled glory of its natural beauty and the glamour of its mystical traditions.

"This wine is excellent," said Sir Archie, breaking the silence.

"The wine is good enough," said Lord O'Neal, impatiently. "I did not bring you here, however, to praise my wine."

"I know it," said Archie. "I have been waiting for you to speak."

"I beg your pardon," said his lordship. "These times are enough to break a man's temper. Well,

you have come here at the risk of your life to hear what I have to say to you. Let me say it at once, for at a moment's notice we may be interrupted. I have to tell you that you are a marked man, suspected of being secretly a leader of the rebels. I would counsel you to enlist under government at once, to take an open decided part, which will silence enemies—which will save you from destruction."

Sir Archie, pale and stern, put down his glass, leaned forward on the table, and looked his host in the face.

"And you are an Irishman," he said, "who give me this advice?"

Lord O'Neal's eye fell. A dark blush sprang to his face, and mounted to his very hair.

"I am an Irishman," he said, "and I give you this advice. I give it you because patriotism is useless at this crisis. England has been too clever to leave us strength to succeed in such a struggle as the present. Our veins have been

bled to make her strong to crush us. She will crush us, and she will not spare us one agony in the operation. Munro! I would not see your name and race swept off the land: never to speak of your six feet of noble manhood, which I have loved. For, Munro! we have been friends!"

"Ay, O'Neal!" said Sir Archie, and laid his hand on the lord's open outstretched palm. A long close clasp, and then then the hand of each was withdrawn, and the two sat silent, gazing on the shifting, glittering, mystical lake. Maybe it told them the truth, that they never should sit so together again; that ere many days had passed one of them should kiss the dust, cut down to the death at his own gates; the other should be a wanderer in bitter banishment.

Sir Archie was the first to speak.

"O'Neal," he said, "no two sons of this distracted country need quarrel because their opinions differ as to the possible cure of her misery, so

long as those opinions are grounded upon honesty. We live in the midst of inextricable confusion and horror. Our suffering blinds us, and no wonder if we dash against each other, rushing about madly, looking for some outlet from despair. I believe with you that no such outlet will be forced in the present struggle."

"None," said Lord O'Neal, gloomily.

"Listen to me then," said Sir Archie. "I will not buy my own safety by accepting a situation as executioner of my tortured countrymen. I——"

"Hold!" cried Lord O'Neal, fiercely. "I am not a Castlereagh!"

"God forbid!" said Sir Archie. "But neither am I your judge. You know your own conscience best. I am not going to reproach you, but to expose to you my own views and intentions. In the first place I may tell you that the suspicions you speak of are unfounded, for I am grieved—ay, ashamed—to have to say that I am not a

leader of the rebels. I ought to have been a leader of the rebels, and so ought you, and every man who has influence and power in the country. We have been systematically, and in cold blood, goaded to resistance. If we had all arisen as a man, and resisted, we should have compelled our rulers to treat us like the rest of humanity, and the world would have looked on and respected us. But we are timid; we stand aloof: we think to buy peace, to save bloodshed. Some of us are bought, others are led astray by our feelings or our theories. And so we sit on in our high places and groan idly; or worse, we turn a dastardly sword against our own, while the masses of our countrymen who have suffered, who have been familiarised with such tortures that the most horrible death has no terror for them, while they struggle wildly and are lost, for want of the assistance which they had a right to expect from us, which we have refused them. I tell you, O'Neal, that my own Glensmen, whom

I had thought to save and to serve, look on me with suspicion, as a coward, who will not risk life or property by putting himself at their head. They would not trust me now. They have ranked under other leaders. And I know that I have deserved it. I have earned it by my folly in hoping for humane measures from England. I stand alone now, shunned and suspected by both parties. Heaven knows that I have suffered, and acted for the best. But I tell you this solemnly, O'Neal: I would to God I had gone hand-in-hand from the first with Wolfe Tone and Lord Edward Fitzgerald."

Sir Archie suddenly stopped speaking, and buried his face in his hands.

"You are a madman!" cried Lord O'Neal, rising hastily. "You should know that when you speak in this manner your life is not worth a moment's purchase."

"I know it," said Sir Archie, rising also, and folding his arms calmly. "I know I am in your

power. I knew it when I came here this evening, intending to avow to you all that was in my mind. As for my life," he added, bitterly, "a brave man will rather die than feel dishonoured, even if no one in the world know the dishonour but himself. It may be that I have precious stakes in life as well as another, that I had hopes as sweet as heaven, and plans which a proud old age might have rejoiced to see accomplished. Yet the beginning and end of all my hopes and plans are in this: I have loved my country, and I have loved my countrymen. Rather than turn a sword against my people, I will give my blood to slake the thirst of the government; as far as it will go."

Lord O'Neal had walked away to a window. By-and-by he came back with tears in his eyes, and trembling as only a good man can tremble.

"Munro," he said, "you are a brave fellow. Would to God we were all more like you!

English gold has corrupted us; English smiles have lured us; English whips have scourged us; and English love has flattered us. We are like the house divided against itself that shall not stand. We are divided; and we shall be snapped in pieces like the streaks of flax that might have made a rope too tough for breaking. You and I have chosen different paths. But at least we are—brothers."

"Always, O'Neal," said Sir Archie, solemnly. And again the men pressed each other's hands.

"Not yet, Munro," said Lord O'Neal, as Sir Archie prepared to leave him. "I have still a word to say to you. Sit, and let us drink a glass together. We shall not drink such another for—how long? God knows! Futurity, even of a to-morrow, is strangely hid from us. When next we meet we shall know many things which we would now give much to discern."

And the lord looked dreamily across his glass, at the shadows falling gravely over the lough.

Was any thought in his heart of the shadow of death so soon to descend upon the prime of his days? The death that was his portion as the son of a doomed land.

"I wanted to tell you," said his lordship, rousing himself from his reverie, "that it is supposed you have got a spy in your household."

"I think that can hardly be true," said Sir Archie, "for I know all the servants at Glenluce. They have each been many years a part of the family, and I am acquainted with their friends and connexions."

"This person is not a servant," said Lord O'Neal. "She is the friend of a Lady Humphrey, a woman who has been building up a case against you. Her name is Hester Cashel. She has hardly been a year at Glenluce; but I understand she has made the most of her time."

Sir Archie started. A flush came over his face, which had been so pale. Then he laughed a little

short indulgent laugh at the ignorant folly of this news which his friend had just told him.

"It is a great mistake," he said, softly. "It is the perfection of a mistake. Any one inventing such a story ought to have chosen a better heroine."

Lord O'Neal was surprised at the change in his friend's manner. He looked at him with interest, and made a guess in his own mind.

"Well, I advise you to look to it," he said; "the name may be a mistake, but some one in your household is playing you false."

Soon after this it was dark, and the moon arose. Sir Archie mounted his horse, and Lord O'Neal walked by his side along the shores of the mysterious Lough Neagh. The warm still air was laden with the odours of the hawthorn and wild orange-tree. The moonlight came trickling through the shrouded glades; and afar off in the distance, the river could be discerned, dreaming beneath a coverlet of silver, under the watch-

ful shadow of the pine-trees. Lord O'Neal walked to the spot where the rooks slept in their nests. An old rook, wakened by the sound of the feet and voices, hurled his cry of "war! war!" downward out of his branches on the heads of the passers-by; just as the friends clasped hands and parted.

CHAPTER XI.

LADY HUMPHREY'S MESSENGERS.

THAT terrible spell of quietude lasted for days in the North, while in the South towns were burned to the ground, and doings were on foot, a whisper of which were enough to curdle the blood and make the heart turn sick. People seemed fixed in a sort of living death, during that fearful pause. They spoke in whispers, and their eyes were rivetted in a horrible fascination on the future of every hour that approached. What was about to happen? When must it happen? The North men did not delay from mere sluggishness.

They waited the signal of their leader. Antrim and Down had the knee bent, the bow strained. When would the awful oracle speak?

Loyal men put their heads together, and said, with bated breath, "They have not risen yet—they shall not rise." Lord O'Neal summoned a meeting of magistrates in his ancient town of Antrim, to be held on the seventh sunny day of that glorious glowing June. Then out spoke the oracle, and the flag of war was hoisted. The leader lifted his voice, and gave the signal to waiting thousands.

"To-morrow we march on Antrim," said his mandate; "drive the garrison of Randalstown before you, and haste to form a junction with the commander-in-chief. Dated, First day of Liberty, Sixth day of June, Seventeen hundred and ninety-eight."

Up rose the rebels. The fisherman left his boat, the smith his forge, the gardener left his roses to wither in the fierce sun, the farmer

thought it little that his fields should be laid waste and his crops trampled down. What was a man, or what were his acres, to the future of the country? Oppression was to be grappled with, and driven out of the land. Men and men were to meet, and settle this old grudge. Who feared death, or cared for pain? The supreme moment of a life-long tragedy had arrived. Let the husband bid farewell to the wife, and the wife give up the husband. Let the women become strong as men, and the men patient as women. Let the God of nations, the God of armies, the long-enduring God of peace, judge this day between the weak and the strong.

Down they poured from glen and mountain, up they started from field and bog, those outraged long-suffering men. They grouped themselves into bands, and they massed themselves into columns. Their wrongs were in their hearts; desperation in their faces. Soon from high

country and low country they were marching upon Antrim.

On the evening of the seventh of June dire tidings came flying through the glens. All day long the mountains had basked in the hot sun, and the golden clouds had brooded over them as luxuriantly as if the world had entered into a long truce with evil—as if there were nothing to be thought of for futurity but the splendour and perfection of creation. An air of holiday repose sat smiling on the hills and the fields. There was no sound of labour, no sturdy steps tramping to and fro. It might have been a Sabbath, only there were no staid groups round the door of the little church, no laughing lingerers by the river, no neat-shod lasses stepping over the stiles. It was as if the valleys had opened and swallowed the inhabitants, leaving solitude and nature face to face.

In the gardens at the castle there were long hot yellow paths, and beds that were blazing heaps

of colour, with here and there intense brown shadows huddled out of the way under a stooping frowsy bush, or a tree with sprawling branches. It was only June, but the roses had been born early this year, and already they thronged in full-blown multitudes, laying their hot cheeks together in the fiery air, or bearing down their branches, seeking moisture on the burning earth. And the gardener was not at hand, to give drink to the thirsty, to prop, nor to bind. There was no relief to be had for the most pampered blossom ; no hand even to gather up her leaves when she fell. So it was not because of human bloodshed that the flowers faded and shrivelled as in fear. They merely sickened and drooped of individual neglect and ill-treatment. Neither when the throstles and the blackbird were all mute the livelong day, was it because they could see horrid sights from their perch in the highest boughs. It was only that they were too faint and hot to sing.

Lady Helen had taken to her bed several days ago, and erected a strong wall of novels and smelling-bottles between herself and an unsympathising and most inconsiderate world. Her dogs lay on a cushion at her feet, and to these she made her moan; who could offer no irritating words of comfort in reply. Miss Golden was unwell, and there was not the slightest doubt but her disease was pure panic. She did not go to bed, however, nor did she make complaints. She held by her former assertion that she was not a coward. Her own particular woes relating to the lost Pierce and Hester's audacity made some distraction for her thoughts, and divided her mind with the terror of the moment. It diverted her a little to annoy Hester. She could not forgive her for having possessed that well-known ring, still less for having so heartlessly returned it. She also held her guilty for having attracted the grave Sir Archie, and it piqued her curiosity that Hester's sentiments were secret on this subject. She

could not even discover if the girl were conscious of the conquest she had made. At all events, it was a nice safe course to annoy the little minx. And in pursuance of this idea she kept Hester hard at work on the trousseau for an imaginary wedding.

So Hester sat in her tower-room sewing a bridal dress. The scanty curtains of tapestry—with their faces no longer nodding, in the absence of all breeze—were looped back far away from the window, the sash of which was open, vainly gaping for a draught of air. Hester, very pale, maybe with the heat, a little sick, maybe with the fright, sat puckering crisp white satin and fingering sumptuous lace. Her head was full of a strange mixture, enough to make a brain reel, of a wedding and finery, and flaming towns; of agonised wives and mothers, and strong men dying in their blood. And if sometimes tears would well up straight out of her heart to her eyes with a keen pain, and drop about without a moment's

notice, endangering the purity of the white satin, who, watching her from a corner, could have found fault with a sad seamstress, saying that it was a wicked thing to shed tears over a bridal dress? Who need speculate on those tears, foolishly asking what they meant? When sorrow was reigning from end to end of the land, why pry into one simple heart looking for secret sources of grief? Hester's tears, falling, kept time with the falling of the tears of a multitude. A few bitter drops more or less need make no wonder. Let them flow, and be swallowed up in the ocean of a nation's anguish.

The servants at the castle had taken to novel ways of life, and no one had heart to check them; even had any one had eyes to see that the wheels of the household needed oil. If they were seldom at their posts, there was no one to observe it; if they stood about in groups half the day, with pale faces and red-rimmed eyes, there was no one at hand to reprimand them. If the meats came

burnt to table and the wrong wine were decanted, was there any one with appetite to discover these mistakes? If the rarest gem of the drawing-room were swept down to the floor in fragments by a nervous twirl of Bridget's tremulous duster, who cared? The drawing-room was a desert. It might be arranged or it might not be arranged. The flowers in the vases might be dried up and mouldering there, for nobody thought of looking whether or not.

About sunset of that seventh glowing evening of June, Sir Archie was walking up and down his study floor. That long burning day had passed like a nightmare over his head. He had been abroad, and had looked down upon the ominous desolation of his glens. He knew where his stalwart men were to be found, and he knew what was the work on which their strong hands had fastened.

A messenger came knocking upon the door of Glenluce Castle, and, panting, pushed his way into the presence of Sir Archie. He had news.

A battle had been fought at Antrim—fought well by the rebels, but lost. Lord O'Neal had been carried to his castle to die. There had been another hard fight at Larne. A rumour was on foot that Sir Archie Munro had been declared to be a rebel; that colonel Clavering and his soldiers were marching towards the glens to attack Glenluce Castle. The women and children, the old men and the cripples, were flying to Sir Archie for protection. Even now they left their cottages with their babies and their crutches. Even now they came breathless down the hills and up the roads. Would Sir Archie take them in under shelter of the castle roof? Would Sir Archie shield the innocent and weak?

"All that the castle will hold," said Sir Archie. "Let them come. We can house a good many, thank God! While there is space for one there cannot be enough; so we have elbow-room at the window to ply our guns."

He despatched a messenger to reassure the

people, and then Sir Archie made a review of his position. Of able-bodied men he had only a few servants. He shuddered to think of the women of his family. Why had he not forced them to leave the country long ago? Regrets were idle now. His mother must be kept as long as possible in ignorance of what was impending. Thank God she was a willing prisoner in her own retired room. The young girls must be guarded. "I wonder," thought Sir Archie, "if poor Madge will stand my friend?" And he sent a message to the Honourable Madge.

The servant forgot her manners in her fright. She burst open Miss Madge's door without even the ceremony of a knock. Miss Madge had spent this day shut up in her chamber alone. Miss Madge! where was Miss Madge? Some gay garments stirred in a dark corner of the room. Miss Madge was on her knees, with her face against the wall. When might one pray if not now? Miss Madge had the soul of a warrior,

but she might not wear a sword. Miss Madge had the heart of a lion, but the battles must rage on without her presence or her help. Miss Madge must give assistance, else she would die of this suspense. So she bent her knees on a hard floor, and turned her face to a dark wall, and she battered the gates of heaven with her prayers.

Miss Madge was on her feet in an instant, cheerful and alert. Ere long she had got instructions from Sir Archie, and was giving orders about the castle as if for a festival. She walked into Hester's room, where she found Hester and Miss Janet, sitting trembling side by side; the unfinished bridal dress lying between them.

"We are going to stand siege, my dears," said the Honourable Madge, briskly, quite as if she had been saying, "We are going to give a ball." "The servants are a little frightened, naturally, and Lady Helen is not to know of it at present. There is much to be seen to, many arrangements

to be made. Which of you is strong enough to step about and help me?"

"I am ill, Miss Madge," said Janet; "I am really ill." And she looked it. "I could not go about with you. I believe I shall die of the fright. I hope it may happen before they come up here to kill me. At all events I shall wait here. I could not go down and ask them to do it."

"I thought you were not a coward," said Miss Madge, with some scorn.

"That was a boast—only a boast!" wailed Miss Golden. "I did not think that war was going to walk up to the castle gates. I am a coward now, I tell you. I am afraid. Oh, I am afraid!"

And she curled herself upon a sofa, and buried her blanched face in the cushions.

Miss Madge put her shoulder against the couch and wheeled it into a corner, out of reach of the window.

"What is this for?" asked Janet, pettishly.

"Only to be out of the way of bullets," answered the Honourable Madge, shortly.

A scream came from the sofa, followed by murmurings and mournings. "Oh, England! Oh, Pierce! Oh, wretched, wretched Janet!"

"I will send some one to sit with you," said Miss Madge, over her shoulder. Then, "Come," she said to Hester, "I see you are willing for work!" and grasping Hester's hand she led her off out of the room.

"We shall have to sort the people, you know, my dear," said Miss Madge. "See how they begin to pour in! We shall have to set up a nursery, and dormitories for the sickly old men. Not that I expect there will be much sleep to be had here to-night, but it is better to be in order. Sir Archie is busy getting the guns fixed at the windows. I don't know that we can help him much at that. But there may be wounds to be dressed during the night. Do

you happen to know anything of dressing a wound?"

"I have seen them dressed at the hospital," said Hester.

"My dear, that is most fortunate. We shall prepare some linen bands, and I will boil some healing herbs."

They went out to a kitchen garden to pluck the herbs, on a high ground away at the back of the castle. A solemn moon had risen, and the world was calm and cool. The soft velvet outline of the hills rose darkly against the mellow sky. All the perfume was streaming out of the flowers with the dew. The hammering at the windows where the guns were getting fixed was the only sound heard, except now and then at intervals the lowing of the cattle, coming down with its homely echo from the mountains.

Hester mounted on a bench, and looked around her. "What are those lights, Miss Madge," she said, fearfully—"those lights that are smoul-

dering on the hills? How they spring up! And another, and another! Good God! The flames are everywhere!"

"Those are the cottages — fired," said Miss Madge. "Don't faint, child—don't faint, I tell you. You can be brave if you wish. Will you be brave? Are you brave?"

"Yes," gasped Hester. "It is only the first shock."

"Good girl!" said Miss Madge, approvingly, brandishing her bunch of fresh herbs in Hester's face to revive her. "My dear, we are living in history—in the history of our time."

CHAPTER XII.

FIRE AND SWORD.

THE enemy was approaching. The people kept pouring in, frantic with terror, crouching into the corners which Miss Madge assigned to them. Wailing children, fainting mothers, mourning old men, and weeping girls. The windows were barricaded, except just where the guns protruded. Sir Archie, with his few assistants, stood ready at their posts. After a horrible spell of suspense the soldiers could be heard mustering without, more and more arriving, trampling of hundreds of feet, prancing and floundering and terrible jingling of

cavalry, shouting of fierce orders, oaths and triumphant menaces, and hideous mirth; and, finally, the opening roar of the guns.

Sir Archie replied gallantly to the salute. A hurried glance below smote his heart with the forlornness of his hope. Yet his courage did not fail. How were the soldiery to know that but a crowd of helpless people and a handful of strong men were all the force that opposed them from those windows? If but the fire could be kept up! Every morsel of metal about the castle was seized upon as treasure, and Hester and Miss Madge got a lesson in making bullets. A crippled old soldier, who had fought bravely for England in his youth, taught them and helped them. And so the night wore on. A piteous crowd half dead with fear, and so, happily, dumb; half a dozen grim desperate men feeding their guns; two screaming women, mad with terror, shut up in their several rooms with their attendants; two other women, pallid

faces soiled with smoke, low steady voices, hearts braced up with courage for the emergency, swift steps and blackened hands, toiling over a fire in a kitchen making bullets; nimble-footed boys, who were the making of brave men, running swiftly up and down, carrying fragments of new-found lead, bearing the newly-fashioned slugs up to the gunners; barricaded windows, darkness, deadly silence, smothered shrieks, muttered prayers, groans, and again silence, with over all the sickening, maddening roar of the assault, with the pressing, and the trampling, and the threatening of the assailants. These things were known within the castle. A glimpse of the scene without was like the opening up of hell: the glare of fire everywhere upon hosts of devilish faces, upturned, thirsting for blood.

"Miss, miss!" said a voice at Hester's elbow. It was Pat, the good-natured butler.

"I'm makin' bould to spake up sharp to you,

miss," said Pat. "There's not a blessed minute to be lost. I tell ye this is a more sarious business than we tuk it for at the startin'. There's swarms and swarms o' them out bye, an' there's new ones comin' on, hivin' over the lawns, an' the roads. I tell ye, miss, it's Sir Archie they want, an' ye must coax him to make off. I ax yer pardon, miss, but there's nobody could coax him but yerself. There's a smart trusty boy, with a stout bit of a boat, lyin' waitin' at the shouldher of the bay. He can get off out o' the back, an' creep along the ould moat. The divil a sight they'll see o' him, and we'll keep the guns blazin'. The sea's like Lough Neagh, an' there's not a breath o' wind. A stout couple o' oars will take him across to the Mull o' Cantire afore he's missed!"

"I'll tell him," said Hester.

"An' miss, I ax yer pardon. I mane ye well; feth I do! But it 'd be as good if ye'd go with

him. They're havin' it goin' that it was stories ye wrote to England that has brought down the murther on the masther. An' if the boys comes to believe it, they'll want to tear ye!"

"That is nonsense," said Hester. "A wild lie. It is nothing. I am going to tell Sir Archie."

He was still working with the guns. "Sir Archie!" she said. He could not hear her for the noise he was making. "Sir Archie!" she said, louder, and touched him on the arm to make him look up.

"Hester!" he said. Good God! My poor child!"

"There is a boat and a boatman at the curve of the bay," she said. "If you are gone, they will not hurt us. Fly!"

"That is a mistake," he said. "They would not know I had gone, and they would hurt you all the same. It will make no difference to them my

being here. It would make all the difference to you. I will not fly."

The stars had long hidden themselves in terror. The moon had grown whiter and whiter, and turned her face away; the bullets from the castle failed at last; even the buttons from the men's coats were getting rammed into the guns. There was the silence of despair within the castle, till a shriek suddenly arose that the building was in flames. Steady curling jets of fire began to arise towards the sky. At the same time a fresh band of cavalry came dashing up the road. The captain of this troop pressed frantically near the walls, and flung himself from his horse under the eyes of Colonel Clavering.

"This is a mistake!" cried Pierce Humphrey; "a devilish, detestable mistake! This is a loyal household. I tell you it is a hideous mistake. All I hold dear; the woman I love; an Englishwoman—*English*, I tell you—is shut up in these

burning walls. Call off your men!" stamping at the colonel—"call off your wolves, your hell-hounds!"

"They are hell-hounds," said Clavering, "and they will not be called off. These mistakes are common. Save whom you can."

Breaches had now been made in the castle. Terror-stricken creatures came flying out upon the bayonets that were waiting for them. Pierce Humphrey and a band of his men pressed in upon an errand of mercy. Other soldiers pressed in whose errand was not mercy. The triumph of the night were not complete unless the marked man, whose death had been the stake for which this noble game was played, were handsomely treated to torture, and most certainly given to death. So the soldiers braved the flames, and pressed in.

Sir Archie was still at his forlorn post. It seemed that he did not know yet that the castle

was burning. Nor did Hester, who stood by his side, rending iron buttons from a pile of garments that lay at her feet, and handing them over to Sir Archie as sorry food for the guns. They two were alone in the room. All their companions were either killed or had fled.

The door was burst open, and a group of soldiers dashed in. The wind that came with them blew out the light in the room. Hester shrank back in horror, and retreated, with her hands spread before her, till she reached the furthest wall of the chamber. It was an old-fashioned, long, low bedroom, and the walls were hung with silk. Hester's hand came against the loose hangings, and by instinct or inspiration she crept in behind their folds.

There was a terrible confusion in her head for some moments, but she knew pretty well that Sir Archie had been seized. She heard the soldiers cursing at the darkness, and one of them pulled

away the barricading from the window. He fell as he did so by a shot from without. Now the flames, which seemed to have been licking round the roof, curled inward through the open window and caught the woodwork of the room. The shock of the sudden light restored Hester to her senses. She heard the soldiers jeering and exulting over Sir Archie.

"We'll not cut him off in his sins," said one. "He'll have time to say his prayers."

"A fine easy death," said another; "not a scrape on his skin."

And by-and-by she knew they had taken themselves off—out of the burning-room. She stepped out from her hiding-place into the glare. Sir Archie was tied with strong cords, bound hand and foot, on the floor. The fire was creeping near him. They had left him so to its will. A few fierce vain struggles, a few bitter groans, and then Hester feared he had swooned. Not so; for

he felt her soft hand moving about him, passing over his shoulders, and under his arms, and round his neck, as with swift sharp snaps she cut the cords away from his limbs. In a few more moments he was on his feet, safe by her side. He had taken her into his arms close to his heart—there, in the glow of the burning room. But that was only folly when there was not a moment to be lost.

"Come quickly!" said Hester. "That boat may be waiting yet!"

CHAPTER XIII.

HESTER, THE SPY.

THE landing on which they emerged was in flames; also the staircase on before them. For those who had been ignorant of the planning of the castle there had been no hope. Sir Archie knew where to look for the small door which led to the narrow stair made of stone, which wound down, and down, all through the building, to the servants' quarters at the back of the castle. On the stone stair they were safe, and in a few moments they were breathing freely in open air. That back door, through which Miss Madge's

rebel had rushed one evening, was unfastened. Through this they passed out into a thick lonely grove near the small old-fashioned entrance. Then the ancient drawbridge was straight before them.

"My mother!" said Sir Archie. "I must return and look for her!"

"She's safe, sir—the family's all safe," said Pat, at his elbow. "It's you they're afther. It's yourself ye have to save! Cross the bridge, and get into the moat."

"You must not wait for me," said Hester. "I will run to the village, to Mrs. Hazeldean."

"I will not leave you till I leave you with her," said Sir Archie. "We will go on together."

Discussion could only waste time. Hester's fears put wings to her feet. The glare from the burning castle was all over the sky. They could hear the horrible roar of the flames, and the shouts of the soldiery. Showers of sparks fell

about them as they crept along in the hollow of the moat, sheltered under the high bank, with its fringes of ferns, and its drooping bushes.

They ventured on the road at last. By-and-by they heard a group of soldiers coming noisily along, and hid behind some bushes in the hedge. One of the soldiers swore he had seen something moving in the ditch, and poked among the bushes with his bayonet. The bayonet grazed Hester's arm as it stuck in the soft moss and earth by her side. Happily this soldier's companions believed he had been mistaken, and insisted on dragging him on. They were in haste to reach the scene of action.

After this little adventure Sir Archie kept clear of the road. It was safer, though slower, ploughing through the heather, with knolls and rocks for shelter at right and left. At some places he had to carry Hester, being deaf to her entreaties that he would go on without her. A grey lightness began to glimmer upon the air. "Oh God,

keep it dark till we reach the bay!" prayed Hester. But the night was on the wane. The clouds quivered and parted, leaned together a while, then loosened their hold, and fell back to north and to south, to east and to west, leaving the sky a sea of pallid green, with faint stars struggling and expiring in its depths.

The curve of the bay was reached at last, but a little distance from the village. The boat was still waiting, with the faithful boatman, who proved to be Madge's rebel, Polly's lover.

"I will not go," said Sir Archie, "till I leave you safe with Mrs. Hazeldean."

"Step into the boat!" cried Hester, almost maddened by the thought of the delay and its risk. "Do not lose an instant. When you are gone I shall be cautious, and take care of myself; but if you come a step further with me, I will throw myself on the first bayonet I meet."

Sir Archie looked at her in amazement, the

meek Hester quivering and glowing with passion.

"I cannot leave you to go by yourself," he said.

Hester was in despair: but a happy thought struck her, and changing her manner, she began to complain bitterly.

"Oh, why will you insist on destroying me?" she said, wringing her hands. "Do you not know that I am only in danger so long as I am in your company? When you are gone I shall be safe."

"She's right, yer honer," said the boatman. "Ye'll only be the ruin o' her."

Sir Archie, with a shock, seemed to see truth in this argument.

"I have been mad," he said, "not to think of that." And he sprang into the boat. "Fly, in God's name, then!" he cried, as he saw her standing alone and defenceless on the shore.

"I shall be quite safe!" cried Hester, radiant,

as she saw the boat move off. "Nothing can hurt me now."

Sir Archie, from the bay, saw her flying figure disappear among the houses of the village. Then he looked up his glen, and saw torrents of smoke and flame pouring and streaming above the trees, above the hills, into the green pale air of the dawn. He thanked God that those he loved were safe, and wondered bitterly about the helpless crowd that had taken refuge under his roof. But the boat sped farther and farther out to sea. A rival conflagration to that ghastly one of the hills burst forth among the clouds in the east. The sun rose, and Sir Archie was out of danger.

Meantime Hester sped on through the village. Not a living creature was to be seen. Heaps of ruins smoked on every side, and some of the larger houses still burned fiercely. Hester's heart died within her, as she thought that Mrs. Hazeldean's house might also lie in ashes. The doctor and his wife might be dead, buried under the

ruins of their home. Why not, when fire was everywhere? The very air seemed blazing, as the red light of the rising sun strengthened and came streaming from the east, glowing upon Hester's shoulders, falling before her on the road. Heaven and earth were burning. It seemed to her that she was flying through a wilderness of flames.

At such a time as this people think all of themselves, or nothing of themselves. At the first news of the attack upon the castle, Dr. Hazeldean had gone out from his house and taken his way up the glen. This husband and his wife had taken counsel together, and they had agreed that it was his duty to go and see to the wounded. So the doctor went forth, and Mrs. Hazeldean remained in her house.

She was on her knees in her parlour, alone, when she heard Hester's wild hands coming beating on her door and window. Her lamp was still burning, and her shutters closed. She had passed the long hours of the night in prayer, and she did

not know that the morning had already arisen. The noise aroused her rudely. She arose from her knees, and went boldly to her door. She expected less gentle visitors than the worn-out fugitive who clamoured for admittance. Why should she think to be spared in such an hour? The brave ruddy sunlight poured in on her from the outer world, and Hester fell sobbing into her arms.

"He is saved!" cried Hester; "he is saved."

"Who is saved?" asked Mrs. Hazeldean.

"Sir Archie," said Hester. "He is half across the bay by this time!"

She was a sorry figure for Mrs. Hazeldean's kind eyes to behold. Her face was blackened, her arm bled from the wound made by the bayonet, her clothes were scorched, her hands burned.

Happily it is not necessary to state here how many young babes and their mothers perished with the destruction of the Castle of Glenluce. In the morning which followed that woful night, it

was found that a heap of ruins was all that remained of the home of the Munros. Then came the rebels mustering, blanching, and raving, and cursing deeply over the murdered wives and mothers, the old men who were no more, and the maidens whom yesterday morning had beheld in their bloom. They had doubted Sir Archie, and held aloof from him. Now that he had suffered, that he had perished, as was supposed, in the flames with their kin, they held him a martyr to their cause, and vowed vengeance on his destroyers. None could tell that Sir Archie had been saved, except the Hazeldeans, Hester, and Pat, the butler. And none of these chose to speak. It was well he should be thought to have perished, so long as there could be danger of his being pursued. For to be suspected in these times was to be held guilty; to be hunted with relentless fury unto death.

So it was believed that Sir Archie had died among his people, his poor whom he had striven

so hard to save. Lady Helen Munro and Miss Golden had been rescued by Pierce Humphrey, and escorted to Shane's Castle, where Lord O'Neal lay dying. Miss Madge was also of this melancholy party.

When last we saw Miss Madge she was at work making bullets. Later she betook herself on a sad mission among the crowds of doomed fugitives. In the end she was dragged out of the flames in despite of her own recklessness, torn from an upper room, where she was scorching herself to death, throwing children out of the windows, with appeals to some soldiers not so fiendish as the rest. Poor Madge had been no beauty at any time of her life, in spite of her declaration made to Hester, that she had grown up well and astonished everybody. But she bore the scars of that night upon her face, till it was hid from public view in her coffin.

Soon it got abroad among the rebels that it was Hester Cashel, the spy, who had wrought all this

mischief; who had burned the castle with Sir Archie and his people.

Towards evening on the day after the attack on Glenluce a crowd of rebels assembled on Dr. Hazeldean's lawn. The doctor was again abroad upon his errand of mercy. Mrs. Hazeldean went out and parleyed with the ominous intruders. They were mad with untamed grief, savage with the thirst for vengeance.

"The spy!" they demanded. "The spy! We want the spy?"

"What spy?" asked Mrs. Hazeldean. "We have no spy here."

"The spy Hester!" they cried. "The cursed English spy who burned our women, and our children, and our master."

"You are terribly mistaken," said Mrs. Hazeldean. "She is not a spy. She had nothing to do with these horrors that have happened, beyond suffering in the midst of them, which she has done bravely."

"Bring her out!" they shouted, "or we will burn the house over her head!"

"I will not bring her out," said Mrs. Hazeldean, gazing unflinchingly on the terrible band. She stood bareheaded and defenceless amongst them, in the sunshine of the bright June day. One of the men raised his pike at her with a menace, but was instantly struck down by his leader.

"Learn manners, you coward!" cried the leader, and then turned to Mrs. Hazeldean.

"Madam," he said, "we do not wish to hurt you; but you must give up Hester Cashel, or we burn down your house."

"I will not give her up," said Mrs. Hazeldean, and turned, and walked towards her door.

The rebels marched after her, and pressed into her hall. Then Hester, who was up-stairs, heard them.

She was lying upon a bed in pain, having had leisure to suffer from her wounds. She sprang

up, listened, and remembered Pat's warning. She understood the state of the case. She dressed in all haste. Her scorched gown was gone, and she seized a white wrapper of Mrs. Hazeldean's, which was hanging somewhere at hand in the room. She thrust her hands through her tangled golden hair, sweeping it from her face. She hastened down the stairs.

A group of the rebels were in the parlour with Mrs. Hazeldean; she striving to pacify them; they chafing and threatening. When Hester appeared a thrill went through all present, for she looked like one risen from the dead. Her face was ghostly, in its whiteness and awful look of fear. With the unconscious gesture of pain, she stretched her burned hands piteously before her. But that thrill passed away, and the rage burst forth.

"Curses on her picture face!" cried one.

"A thousand deaths would be too little for her!" cried another.

"Let me die a thousand deaths in one, then," said Hester; "but do not hurt her," pointing to Mrs. Hazeldean.

The leader of the rebels looked at her with attention. Perhaps he had suffered less than the rest; perhaps for a moment he had doubts as to her guilt. He could feel admiration for her courage and her beauty; and pity for her youth. For a moment. Then the maddening recollection of last night's hideous deed returned.

"Why did you burn our women and children?" cried he, gnashing his teeth, and stamping.

"I did not burn them," said Hester. "I did what I could to save them."

"She lies, with her pale face!" cried some of the rebels. "Seize her, and have done with this!"

Two men laid hold of Hester's arms. She got dizzy, but strove hard to keep her senses and be

firm. "I saved him," she thought, "and now I will save her."

"Do not kill me here," she said to one of the men. "Take me a good way off. It would frighten her."

She moved away with her captors a step; but Mrs. Hazeldean threw herself on her knees before the door.

"Glensmen!" she cried, "for many long years I have loved you and worked amongst you. All the sympathy of my heart, all the help that was in my power, of my hands and of my purse, I have given you. If ever I have nursed your children, sat by your sick-beds, prayed with your dying, and streaked out your dead, I call on you, in the name of the God who will one day judge me and judge you, to spare me that innocent girl! If not, you shall drag her hence over my corpse."

The men's countenances changed as they re-

membered her merciful deeds. Tears of anguish trickled down scowling faces, as other scenes arose before them, conjured up by her sudden impassioned words. And many of the fiercest hung their heads.

The leader looked suddenly up, and scanned them all. He glanced from his band to the two women, from the two women back to his band. Perhaps that suspicion of Hester's innocence grew suddenly within him to a conviction—perhaps Mrs. Hazeldean's words had a special force for him.

"After that, boys," he said, "we can do no more."

He caught Hester, gently enough, round the waist, lifted her in a twinkling, and laid her on a sofa at the other end of the room.

"It shall never be said," he went on, "that Glensmen shed the blood of their friend! Shall it, boys?"

"No," was answered sullenly, with groans.

"Back, then, boys—back! Rise, madam," to Mrs. Hazeldean, "and don't be afraid. We are not ungrateful. We bind ourselves from this moment to protect your sacred house. Do we swear, boys? Raise your pikes, and swear!"

The pikes were raised amidst a gloomy murmur of obedience. And the terrible visitors went their way.

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW EVERYTHING ENDED HAPPILY.

ALL nightmares pass away. The morning dawns, and the terrible trouble is gone. Every one knows how the rebellion raged in Ireland in the year ninety-eight, but I will not say another word of its horrors in this tale. Glenluce had suffered the worst that could happen to it, and so was left in peace. The doctor's house remained unharmed, and the doctor and his wife pursued their mission of mercy among such of the poor people as survived, who came creeping by-and-by out of their hiding places in the mountains,

wandering back to look on the ruins of their homes, to weep on their blackened hearths, and call on Heaven to put an end to their sufferings. A temporary asylum was erected for the houseless, and nurse and physician were at hand.

By this time the North had become quiet, though war still raged in other parts of the country, and it was not certain what the issue might be. A heavy lonesome gloom overhung the glens, that had been so happy, and so homely. Some of the people were re-established in new homes, and some were assisted to emigrate. And it was formally made known that the estates of Sir Archie Munro, who had deservedly suffered punishment as a rebel, had been legally made over to Judith, Lady Humphrey, as a reward for her exertions in bringing treason to light.

Dr. Hazeldean urged his wife to leave the melancholy country, but so long as there was help to be given she would not quit her home. She looked upon herself as bound—by the mercy

the rebels had shown her—to show mercy in return to their kin. Most of the men who had granted her prayer on that memorable day had died a death of torture. She would shield and succour the few they had left behind.

Besides, these good Samaritans had taken Hester under their care. After that terrible scene, when she had been rescued from the rebels, she had fallen into a fever. Her life had been hardly saved by Dr. Hazeldean. Thus had she been twice snatched from death by these friends.

It was not the old Hester who rose from her sick-bed. She walked feebly into the glowing August sunshine, and looked upon the ruin she had made. She wondered why she had lived, and hoped to die before long. She was pointed to as the spy, whose life had been hardly bought by Mrs. Hazeldean's exertions. She did not even know whether Sir Archie had been saved after

all. No message had come from him, no news had been heard of his fate. His fishing-boat might not have carried him to an opposite shore. Inquiry were dangerous. It was well, just at present, that the world should think him dead. So there was nothing for those who waited but patience and suspense.

Poor Hester little knew that she was yet to be a happy woman. Just at this stage of her life she had to battle through a period that was worse than any death. Fire and sword were always before her eyes. In her fever she had raved of them a hundred times a day, and in the nights; offering her life to the soldiers, to the rebels, in exchange for the life of Sir Archie, or that of her watchful and tender nurse, Mrs. Hazeldean.

When able to move about, she would sit musing over all that happened, recalling every word which she had written to Lady Humphrey, wondering

at her own blindness and simplicity. She ac counted herself the murderess of all those people who had perished in the castle.

"I did not do it willingly," she said; "but *I did it.*"

When able to walk far enough, she would toil up the glen, and examine the blackened walls of the castle.

"There is the wall of the tower," she would say, "where I used to write my letters to Lady Humphrey. Yonder black hole was the window from which we fired our guns."

She would shrink behind Mrs. Hazeldean, when any of the country people met them on the road. She knew how they regarded her. The poorest creature would have shuddered at her touch.

"I ought to be put to death," she said once. "For taking one life people are made to give up their own. But I have taken the lives of near a hundred people."

This was a morbid frame of mind; but she had to live it through. All Mrs. Hazeldean's loving comfort and gentle preaching could not wear away this horror that kept preying on her mind.

"She will never know peace so long as she remains in this place," said the doctor. "We must take her away."

In the mean time letters reached them, letters written by Lady Helen, from London, where she was reposing after her terrible experiences, and rather enjoying, in a lugubrious way, her position as a heroine among wondering and sympathising friends.

"You know, dear Margaret," she wrote, "I always felt it my duty to look at your eccentric conduct from a charitable point of view. I have often passed over things when, as a sister, I might have advised you to think more of your own dignity. But I must say, that I never shall feel obliged to forgive you, if it be true what

people say, that you are harbouring that hateful Hester in your house. The treacherous creature who has caused the ruin of your family! Of course, when they wanted to cut her to pieces before your eyes, it was natural you should interfere. Such an occurrence happening in one's parlour would be highly objectionable. But she ought at once to have been handed over to the law, like all other people who have been guilty of great crimes. For of course it is ridiculous to say that poor dear Archie was a rebel, though I am sure I always told him he was, and foresaw from the first what would be the end of it. They say that her employer, Judith Humphrey, has got possession of the estates, so doubtless the young wretch, Hester, will receive a handsome dowry as her reward for her services. She will not need to work any longer at her needle. And ah, dear me! how sweetly she could make a dress! I call it a melancholy thing to see such a genius led astray. As for the estates, I intend to

go to law about them, as soon as I am strong enough. In the mean time it does not much signify, as there is no one left to pay rent, and the country must be quite a waste. I'm sure I wonder how you can bear to live in it,

"Apropos of Lady Humphrey, I have another shocking piece of news to communicate. Janet Golden, that girl whom I have treated as a daughter, has had the cruelty and audacity to marry the woman's son. Not but what the young man behaved well in saving us from the fire; though I must say he gave my arm a terrible twist when I was struggling very naturally in hysterics, and he insisted on dragging me quite roughly from the room. I never can get over the feeling that he knew all about his mother's wicked plot, though Janet and he both declare he did not. It seems it is quite an old affair between them, and our poor dear Archie —it afflicts me even to mention his name—was only a cat's paw made use of by Miss Janet

during a quarrel. I cannot understand it, I must own. The world must be coming to an end, *I* say. The conduct of people now-a-days is to be accounted for in no other manner. When you and I were girls, young women did not burn down castles, nor marry the deadly enemies of the friends who had cherished them."

It is not necessary to give Mrs. Hazeldean's reply to this letter. It did not silence Lady Helen, who committed pages of her sentiments to the tender mercies of the post; but it would be tedious to quote further from her ladyship's correspondence.

Side by side with those of Lady Helen came other letters from the Mother Augustine.

"Let nothing," wrote she, "let no mistaken counsel induce you to believe evil of our poor simple Hester. I must tell you that I have got Cousin Madge as a patient under my care. She arrived in London sadly burned and shaken about, and I advised her to come here into hospital,

where I might be able to attend to her myself. She was very glad to come, and she already gets quite better. She has given me all particulars of the strange sad events at Glenluce. She makes Hester a real heroine, and it is utterly impossible that the poor child could be guilty of the crime that is imputed to her. Lady Humphrey makes no secret of her share in the transaction. She has accomplished her work, and she has received her wages. Let us hope that she will yet have the honesty to clear poor Hester's name. Her son, who seems a good-hearted young man, came to see me the other day with his bride. He deplored his mother's conduct, and entreated me to believe that he had no share in, that he was completely in ignorance of, her plans. He swore that he would never own the estates of Glenluce. He had quarrelled sadly with his mother on the subject. She is an unhappy old woman after all. The bride of this young man, little Janet of old times, joined her husband in assuring me of the

innocence of Hester. Janet spoke very prettily of the girl's goodness and courage, and acknowledged, with regret, having annoyed poor Hester, on occasions, with her humours.

"And now I have reserved for the last a joyful secret, which I am almost afraid to commit to paper. Our dear Archie is alive and well. I dare not say more. Come quickly to London and bring Hester."

Very joyfully was that journey to London performed. The mother received the travellers in her pleasant parlour, the room into which Hester had been ushered on that memorable morning after the masquerade ball. There were with her Miss Madge and Sir Archie. Of course each of this party had his own story to tell. But, after all the miseries had been disposed of, there was exceeding joy in the old convent of St. Mark.

Five years passed away before the next im-

portant events of this story took place. These years had made Hester a bright healthy woman. Only one thing was wanting to make her thoroughly happy, and this, when it was offered her, she had put aside. She had twice refused to be Sir Archie's wife.

"I do not pretend," she said, "that I could not love you well, if it might be; but it never can, so long as your mother and the world believe that I entered your house as a spy—that I brought ruin on your family."

Nothing would induce her to go back to Glenluce. Before the doctor and his wife returned to their home, they left Hester in France, established as teacher of English in a quiet convent school.

So the five years passed away. In the mean time Lady Humphrey had gone to Ireland, to take possession of her Irish estates; but she had been obliged to return very quickly whence she came. No one at Glenluce would touch her

money; no one at Glenluce would till her ground. It was with difficulty she could procure for herself even the necessaries of life. She was hissed and threatened wherever she went. Her English attendants fled in terror from the place, and very soon she was constrained to do likewise.

So her ill-gotten possessions were not sweet to her ladyship. She returned to Hampton Court a wretched old woman. She had bitterly alienated her son. The wife she had coveted for him was his, with her wealth; but husband and wife were as strangers to her now. She quietly settled down to sickness and despair. Old age came on her quickly. If ever she had a heart, it was certainly broken.

On her death-bed she cried out for people to come to her.

"They cannot be so cruel," she said, "as to let me die, with all this load upon my soul!"

Her son came to her then, and brought his wife. And then they wrote for Hester, whom Janet received kindly in her luxurious London home. These young women had not met since they sat together one night in a darkening tower room with an enemy at the gates, and a bridal dress between them. But they did not choose to talk of that time just at first.

Hester was more changed than was Janet. Mrs. Pierce was quite as wilful as ever—quite as pretty also, though much more amiable and happy. But Hester had grown taller, and was much plumper than she used to be. Her timid girlish shyness had passed away; so also had the morbidness and melancholy.

It was a strange thing to Hester to come again to Hampton Court; to see once more the well-known rooms which had been the centre of her fairyland. It was stranger still the standing by Lady Humphrey's dying bed.

She had been sent for, to stand there, while a tardy act of justice was accomplished and written down. In the presence of Pierce and the presence of Janet; of Lady Helen Munro, who had with difficulty been brought to the spot as the most necessary of the witnesses; of Mrs. Hazeldean, who had come from Glenluce; and of Sir Archie, who was no longer forbid to show his face in England. And never fear but our Honourable Madge was of the group.

Lady Humphrey gave up her claim to the estates of Glenluce, and returned them with compunction to Sir Archie. And Lady Humphrey declared Hester to have been innocent of all knowledge of any private plans of hers, whether at the period of the girl's residence at Glenluce, before that period, or since.

"Send your daughter Mary to me," she said to Sir Archie, when her mind began to wander, and she took him for his father who was dead. "I saw her in a pretty parlour, with a black veil

upon her head. She had a crucifix hanging by her side. Send her to talk to me. And hark ye! *tell her to bring the crucifix!*"

"You are worthy to be a Munro, my dear!" said the Honourable Madge to Hester on the eve of her wedding-day. "And I don't know that I could say anything more, unless I said, 'You are worthy to be a M'Naughten.' An Honourable M'Naughten. And of course you never can be a M'Naughten now, so there is no use talking about that. But you are going to be a Munro, and Munros don't grow under every hedge, I can tell you."

Lady Helen was present at the marriage; an unhoped for piece of condescension. The only thing she deplored in the whole affair at the last, was the fact that propriety would not suffer Hester to make her own dress for the occasion.

"Such finish as she would have given to it,

my dear!" she said to Janet; to whom she had long been reconciled.

So Hester was married to Sir Archie, and they went bravely back to settle in their desolated glens. The village was soon restored to more than its former thriftiness. Cottages rose on the hill sides, and farmhouses in the valleys. Yellow thatches shone once more in the sun, and pigeons cooed again about the chimneys. A new castle was built, but its site was chosen far from the old one. The charred walls that recalled the dreadful past were cleared away, and the grass grows soft and green above its cellars and foundations. Only the ancient drawbridge and the moat remain to mark the spot where the former castle stood.

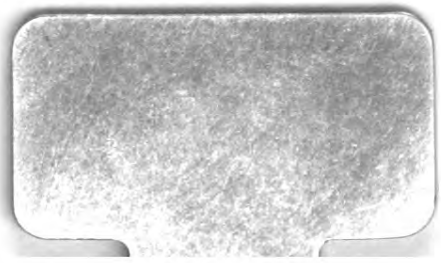
Lady Helen never returned to the glens. Her nerves had received a shock, she said, which would oblige her to live in London for the future. Not so Miss Madge, who consented with much joy to take up her abode with Hester.

Said Hester, speaking of the new castle to Mrs. Hazeldean:

"The best thing about it, in my mind, is, that it is nearer by half a mile, than the old one, to you."

Her arms were round Mrs. Hazeldean's neck. Sir Archie was standing by. It was the first day of their habitation of the new home of the Munros.

But Hester's grandson lives now in that castle, with his grandchildren.

THE END.

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