SHENAC'S WORK AT HOME

MARGARET MURRAY ROBERTSON

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CHAPTER ONE.

A long time ago, something very sad happened in one of the districts of Scotland. I cannot tell you how it all came about, but a great many people were obliged to leave their homes where they and their forefathers had lived for many generations. A few scattered themselves through other parts of the country; a few went to the great towns to seek for a livelihood; but by far the greater number made up their minds to leave for ever the land of their birth, and rose in the new, strange world beyond the sea a home for themselves and their children.

I could never make you understand what a sorrowful time that was to these poor people, or how much they suffered in going away. For some of the old left children behind them, and some of the young left their parents, or brothers, or sisters; and all left the homes where they had lived through happy years, the kirks where they had worshipped God together, and the kirkyards where lay the dust of the dear ones they had lost.

And, besides all this, they knew little of the land to which they were going, and between them and it lay the great ocean, with all its terrors. For then they did not count by days, as we do now, the time that it took to cross the sea, but by weeks, or even by months; and many a timid mothershrank from the thought of all her children might have to suffer ere the sea was passed. Even more than the knowledge of the many difficulties and discouragements which might await them beyond it, did the thought of the dangers of the sea appal them. And to all their other sorrows was added the bitter pain of saying farewell for ever and for ever to Scotland, their native land. It is true that not among all her hills or valleys, or in all her great and prosperous towns, could be found room for them and theirs; it is true that a home in the beloved land was denied them: but it was their native land all the same, and eyes that had refused to weep at the last look of dear faces left behind, grew dim with tears as the broken outline of Scotland's hills faded away in the darkness.

But out of very sorrowful events God oftentimes causes much happiness to spring; and it was so to these poor people in their banishment. Into the wide Canadian forests they came, and soon the wilderness and the solitary place were glad for them; soon the wild woods were made to rejoice with the sound of joyful voices ringing out from many a happy though humble home. And though there were those among the aged or the discontented who never ceased to pine for the heather hills of the old land, the young grew up strong and content, troubled by no fear that, for many and many a year to come, the place would become too strait for them or for their children.

They did not speak English these people, but a language called Gaelic, not at all agreeable to English ears, but very dear to the heart of the Scottish Highlander. It is passing somewhat out of use now; but even at this day I have heard of old people who will go many miles to hear a sermon preached in that language— the precious gospel itself seeming clearer and richer and more full of comfort coming to them in the language which they learned at their mother's knee.

“It was surely the language first spoken on earth, before the beguiling serpent came to our mother,” once said an old man to me; “and maybe afterwards too, till the foolish men on the plain of Shinar brought Babel on the earth. And indeed it may be the language spoken in heaven to−day, so sweet and grand and fit for the expression of high and holy thoughts is it.”

It is passing out of use now, however, even among the Highlanders themselves. Gaelic is the household language still, where the father and mother are old, or where the grand−parents live with the rising generation; but English is the language of business, of the newspapers, and of all the new books that find their way among the people. It is fast becoming the language in which public worship is conducted too. There are very few books in the Gaelic. There are the Bible and the Catechism, and some poems which they who understand them say are very grand and beautiful; and there are a few translations of religious books, such as “The Pilgrim's Progress,” and some of the works of such writers as Flavel and Baxter. But though there are not many, they are of a kind which, read often and earnestly, cannot fail to bring wisdom; and a grave and thoughtful people were they who made their homes in this wilderness.

Among those who were most earnest in overcoming the difficulties which at every step meet the settler in a new country were two brothers, Angus and Evan MacIvor. Their farms lay next to each other. They were fortunate in securing good land, and they were moderately successful in clearing and cultivating it. They lived to a good old age, and the youngest son of each succeeded him in the possession of the land. It is about the families of

these two sons that my story is to be told.

The two cousins bore the same name, Angus MacIvor; but they were not at all alike either in appearance or character. The one was fair, with light hair and bright blueeyes; and because of this he was called Angus Bhan, or Angus the fair, to distinguish him from his cousin, who was very dark. He had a frank, open face and kind manner; and if anyone in the neighbourhood wanted a favour done, his first thought was sure to be of Angus Bhan.

His cousin Angus Dhu, or Angus the black, had a good reputation among people in general. He was honest and upright in his dealings, his word could be relied on; but his temper was uncertain, and his neighbours called him “close,” and few of them would have thought of looking to Angus Dhu when they wanted a helping hand.

When these two began life they were very much in the same circumstances. Their farms were alike as to the quality of the soil and as to the number of acres cleared and under cultivation. They were both free from debt, both strong men accustomed to farm− work, and both, in the opinion of their neighbours, had a fair chance of becoming rich, according to the idea of wealth entertained by these people.

But when twenty years had passed away the affairs of the two men stood very differently. Angus Dhu had more than realised the expectations of his neighbours. He was rich—richer even than his neighbours supposed. More than half of his farm of two hundred acres was cleared and under cultivation. It was well stocked, well tilled, and very productive. Near the site of the log−house built by his father stood a comfortable farm−house of stone. All this his neighbours saw, and called him a prosperous man; and now and then they speculated together as to the amount of bank−stock to which he might justly lay claim.

The world had not gone so well with Angus Bhan. There was not so much land under cultivation, neither was what he had so well cultivated as his cousin's. He had built a new house too, but he had been unfortunate as to the time chosen to build. Materials were dear, and a bad harvest or two put him sadly back in the world. He was obliged to run into debt, and the interest of the money borrowed from his cousin was an additional burden. He was not successful in the rearing of stock, and some heavy losses of cattle fell on him. Worse than all, his health began to fail, for then his courage failed too; and when there came to that part of the country rumours of wonderful discoveries of the precious metals in the western parts of the continent, he only faintly withstood the entreaties of his eldest son that he might be permitted to go away and search for gold among the mountains of California. His going away nearly broke his mother's heart; and some among the neighbours said it would have been far wiser for young Allister to stay at home and help his father to plough and sow and gather in the harvest, than to go so far and suffer so much for gold, which might be slow in coming, and which must be quick in going should sickness overtake him in the land of strangers. But the young are always hopeful, and Allister was sure of success; and he comforted his mother by telling her that in two or three years at most he could earn money enough to pay his father's debt to Angus Dhu, and then he would come home again, and they would all live happily together as before. So Allister went away, an left a sorrowful household behind.

And there was another sorrowful household in Glengarry about that time. There was only *sorrow* in the hearts of Angus Bhan and his wife when their first−born son went away; for he went with their consent, and carried their blessing with him. But there were sorrow and bitter anger in the heart of Angus Dhu when he came to know that his son had also gone away. He was not a man of many words, and he said little to anyone about his son; but in his heart he believed that he had been beguiled away by the son of Angus Bhan, and bitter resentment rose within him at the thought.

A few months passed away, and there came a letter from Allister, written soon after his arrival in California. His cousin Evan Dhu was with him. They had done nothing to earn money as yet, but they were in high spirits, and full of hope that they would do great things. This letter gave much comfort to them all; but it was a long time before they heard from the wanderers again.

In the meantime the affairs of Angus Bhan did not grow more prosperous. It became more and more difficult for him to pay the interest of his debt; and though his cousin seldom alluded in words to his obligation, he knew quite well that he would not abate a penny either of principal or interest when the time of payment came.

A year passed away. No more letters came from Allister, and his father's courage grew fainter and fainter. There seemed little hope of his ever being able to pay his debt; and so, when Angus Dhu asked him to sell a part of his farm to him, he went home with a heavy heart to consult his wife about it. They agreed that something must be done at once; and so it was arranged that if Allister was not heard from, or if some other means of paying at

least the interest did not offer before the spring, the hundred acres of their land that lay next to the farm of Angus Dhu should be given up to him. It was sad enough to have to do this; but Angus Bhan said to his wife,—

"If anything were to happen to me, you and the children would be far better with half the land free from debt, than with all burdened as it must be till Allister comes home."

They did not say much to each other, but their hearts were very sore—his, that he must give up the land left to him by his father; hers, for his sake, and also for the sake of her first− born son, a wanderer far away.

That autumn, when the harvest was over, the second son, Lewis, set off with some young men of the place to join a company of lumberers, who were, as is their custom, to pass the winter in the woods. It was a time of great prosperity with lumber− merchants then, and good wages could be earned in their service. There was nothing to be done at home in the winter which his father, with the help of the younger children, could not do; and Lewis, who was eighteen, was eager to earn money to help at home, and eager also to enter into the new and, as he thought, the merry life in the woods. So Lewis went away, and there were left at home Hamish and Shenac, who were twins, Dan, Hugh, Colin, and little Flora, the youngest and dearest of them all. The anxieties of the parents were not suffered to sadden the lives of the children, and the little MacIvors Bhan were as merry young people as one could wish to see.

Though they were not so prosperous, they were a far happier household than the MacIvors Dhu. There waS the same number of children in each family; but Angus Dhu's children were most of them older than their cousins, and while Angus Bhan had six sons and two daughters, Angus Dhu had six daughters and two sons. "His cousin should have been a far richer man than he, with so many sons," Angus Dhu used to say grimly. But three of the boys of Angus Bhan were only children still, and one of them was a cripple. And as for the daughters of Angus Dhu, they had been as good as sons even for the farm−work, labouring in the fields, as is the custom for young women in this part of the country, as industriously and as efficiently as men—far more so, indeed, than their own brother Evan did; for he was often impatient of the closeness with which his father kept them all at work, and it was this, quite as much as his love of adventure and his wish to see the world, that made him go away at last. The two eldest daughters were married, and the third was living away from home; so, after Evan left, there were four in their father's house— three girls and Dan, the youngest of the family, who was twelve years of age. The children of these two families had always been good friends. Indeed, the younger children of Angus Dhu had more pleasure in the house of their father's cousin than in their own home; and many a winter evening they were in the habit of passing there.

They had a very quiet winter after Lewis went away. There was less visiting and going about in the moonlight evenings than ever before; for the boys were all too young to go with them except Hamish, and he was a cripple, and not so well as usual this winter, and though the girls were quite able to take care of themselves, they had little pleasure in going alone. So Angus Dhu's girls used to take their knitting and their sewing to the other house, and they all amused themselves in the innocent, old− fashioned ways of that time.

Shenac seldom went to visit her cousins; for, besides the fact that her father's house was the pleasantest meeting−place, her brother Hamish could not often go out at night, and she would rarely consent to leave him; and no one added so much to the general amusement as Hamish. He was very skilful at making puzzles and at all sorts of arithmetical questions, and not one of them could sing so many songs or tell so many stories as he. He was very merry and sweet−tempered too. His being a cripple, and different from all the rest, had not made him peevish and difficult to deal with as such misfortunes are so apt to do, and there was no one in all the world that Shenac loved so well as her twin−brother Hamish.

I suppose I ought to describe Shenac more particularly, as my story is to be more about her than any of the other MacIvors. A good many years after the time of which I am now writing; I heard Shenac MacIvor—or, as English lips made, it, Jane MacIvor— spoken of as a very beautiful woman [the Gaelic spelling is Sinec]; but at this time I do not think it ever came into the mind of anybody to think whether she was beautiful or not. She had one attribute of beauty—perfect health. There never bloomed among the Scottish hills, which her father and mother only just remembered, roses and lilies more fresh and fair than bloomed on the happy face of Shenac, and her curls of golden brown were the admiration and envy of her dark haired cousins. They called little Flora a beauty, and a rose, and a precious darling; but of Shenac they said she was bright and good, and very helpful for a girl of her age; and her brother Hamish thought her the best girl in the world—indeed, quite without a fault, which was very far from being true.

For Shenac had plenty of faults. She had a quick, hot temper, which, when roused, caused her to say many things which she ought not to have said. Hamish thought all those sharp words were quite atoned for by Shenac's quick and earnest repentance, but there is a sense in which it is true that hasty and unkind words can never be unsaid.

Shenac liked her own way too in all things. This did not often make trouble, however; for she had learned her mother's household ways, and, indeed, had wonderful taste and talent for these matters. Being the only daughter of the house, except little Flora, and her mother not being very strong, Shenac had less to do in the fields than her cousins, and was busy and happy in the house, except in harvest−time, when even the little lads, her brothers, were expected to do their part there.

Hamish and Shenac were very much alike, as twins very often are— that is, they were both fair, and had the same−coloured hair and eyes. But, while Shenac was rosy and strong, the very picture of health, her brother was thin and pale, and often of late there had been a look of pain on his face that it made his mother's heart ache to see. They were all in all to each other—Shenac and Hamish. They missed Lewis less on this account, and they knew very little of the troubles that so often made their father and mother anxious; and the first months of winter passed happily over them after Lewis went away.

Christmas passed, and the new year came in. A few more pleasant weeks went by, and then there came terrible tidings to the house of Angus Bhan. Far away, on one of the rapids of the Grand River, a boat had been overturned. Three young men had been lost under the ice. The body of one had been recovered: it was the body of Lewis MacIvor.

“We should be thankful that we can at least bring him home,” said Angus Bhan to his wife, while she made preparations for his sad journey. But he said it with very pale, trembling lips, and his wife struggled to restrain the great burst of weeping that threatened to have way, that he might have the comfort of thinking that she was bearing her trouble well. But when she was left alone all these sad days of waiting, she was ready to say, in the bitterness of her heart, that there was no sorrow like her sorrow. One son was a wanderer, another was dead, and on the face of the dearly−beloved Hamish was settling the look of habitual suffering, so painful to see. Her cup of sorrow was full to the brim, she declared, but she knew not what she said.

For, when a few days had passed, there were brought home for burial two dead bodies instead of one. Her husband was no more. He had nearly accomplished his sorrowful errand, when death overtook him. He had complained to the friend who was with him of feeling cold, and had left the sleigh to walk a mile or two to warm himself. They waited in vain for him at the next resting− place, and when they went back to look for him they found him lying with his face in the snow, quite dead. He had not died from cold, the doctor said, but from heart−disease, and probably without suffering; and this comfort the bereaved widow tried to take to herself.

But her cup of sorrow was not full yet. The very night before the burial was to be, the house caught fire and burned to the ground. It was with difficulty that the few neighbours who gathered in time to help could save the closed coffins from the flames; and it seemed a small matter, at the time, that nearly all their household stuff was lost.

The mother's cup *did* seem full now. I do not think that the coming of any trouble, however great, could at this time have added to her grief. She had striven to be submissive under the repeated strokes that had fallen upon her, but the horrors of that night were too much for her, weakened as she was by sorrow. For a time she was quite distracted, heeding little the kind efforts of her neighbours to alleviate her distress and the distress of her children. All that kind hearts and willing hands could do was done for them. The log house which their grandfather had built still stood. It was repaired, and filled with gifts from every family in the neighbourhood, and the widow and her children found refuge there.

“Oh, what a sad beginning for a story!” I think some of my young readers may say, in tones of disappointment. It is indeed a sad beginning, but every sorrowful word is true. Every day there are just such sorrowful events happening in the world, though it is not often that trouble falls so heavily at once on any household. I might have left all this out of my story; but then no one could have understood so well the nature of the work that fell to Shenac, or have known the difficulties she had to overcome in trying to do it well.

CHAPTER TWO.

It was May−day. Oftentimes in the northern country this month is ushered in by drizzling rain, or even by the falling snow; but this year brought a May−day worthy of the name—clear, mild, and balmy. There was not a cloud in all the sky, nor wind enough to stir the catkins hanging close over the waters of the creek. The last days of April had been warm and bright, and there was a tender green on the low−lying fields, and on the poplars that fringed the wood; and the boughs of the maple−trees in the sugar− bush looked purple and brown over the great grey trunks.

There is never a May−day when some flowers cannot be found beneath these trees, and in the warm hollows along the margin of the creek; but this year there were more than a few. Besides the pale little “spring flower,” which hardly waits for the snow to go away before it shows itself, there were daffodils and anemones and wake−robins, and from the lapful which little Flora MacIvor sat holding on the bank close beside the great willow peeped forth violets, blue and white. There were lady−slippers too somewhere not far away, Flora was sure, if only Dan or Hughie could be persuaded to look for them a little farther down the creek, in the damp ground under the cedars, where she had promised her mother she would not go.

But the lads had something else to do than to look for flowers for Flora. Down the creek, which was broad and full because of the melting snow, a number of great cedar chips were floating. Past the foot−bridge, and past the eddy by the great rock, and over the pool into which the creek widened by the old ashery, the mimic fleet sailed safely; while the lads shouted and ran, and strove by the help of long sticks to pilot them all into the little cove by the willow where little Flora was sitting, till even the flower−loving little maiden forgot her treasures, and grew excited like the rest.

You would never have thought, looking at those bright faces, that heavy trouble had been in their home for months. Listening to their merry, voices, you would never have imagined that there were, in some hearts that loved them, grave doubts whether for the future they were to have a home together or no. But so it was.

Higher up the bank, where the old ashery used to stand, Shenac and Hamish were sitting. The triumphant shout with which the last and largest of the boats was landed, startled them out of the silence in which they had been musing, and the girl said sadly,—

“Children forget so soon!”

Hamish made no answer. He was not watching the little sailors. His face was quite turned away from them, and looked gloomy and troubled enough. The girl watched a moment anxiously; and then turning her eyes where his had been for some time resting, she cried passionately,—

“I wish a fire would break out and burn it to ashes, every stick!”

“What would be the good of that? Angus Dhu would put it all up again,” said Hamish bitterly. “He might save himself the trouble, though. He means to have *all* the land shortly.”

They were watching the progress of a fence of great cedar rails which three or four men were building; and no wonder they watched it with vexation, for it went from line to line, dividing in two parts the land that had belonged to their father. He was dead now, and their brother Allister was far away, they knew not where, in search of gold; and there was no one now, besides themselves, except their mother, and the little ones who were so thoughtless, making merry with the great cedar chips which Angus Dhu sent, floating down the stream.

“Nobody but you and me to do anything; and what can *we* do?” continued the lad with a desponding gesture. “And my mother scarcely seems to care to try.”

“Whisht, Hamish dear; there's no wonder,” said Shenac in a low voice. “But about the land. Angus Dhu can never get it surely!”

“He has gotten the half of it already. Who is to hinder his getting the rest?” said Hamish. “And he might as well have it. What can *we* do with it?”

“Was it wrong for him to take it, do you think, Hamish?” asked Shenac gravely.

“Not in law. Angus Dhu would never do what is unlawful. But he was hard on my father, and he says—”

Hamish paused to ask himself whether it was worth while to vex Shenac with the unkind words of Angus Dhu. But Shenac would not be denied the knowledge.

"What was it, Hamish? He would never dare to say a light word of our father. Did you not then and there show him the door?"

Shenac's blue eye flashed. She was quite capable of doing that and more to vindicate her father's memory.

"Whisht, Shenac," said Hamish. "Angus Dhu loved my father, though he was hard on him. There were tears in his eyes when he spoke to my mother about him. But he says that the half of the land is justly his, for money that my father borrowed at different times, and for the interest which he could not pay. And he wants to buy the other half; for he says we can never carry on the farm, and I am afraid he is right," added the lad despondingly.

"And what would become of us all?" asked Shenac, her cheeks growing pale in the pain and surprise of the moment.

"He would put out the money in such a way that it would bring an income to my mother, who could live here still, with Colin and little Flora. He says he will take Dan to keep till he is of age, and Elder McMillan will take Hugh. You are old enough to do for yourself, he says; and as for me—" He turned away, so that his sister might not see the working of his face. But Shenac was thinking of something else, and did not notice him.

"But, Hamish, we have written to Allister, and he will be sure to come home when he hears what has happened to us."

Hamish shook his head.

"Black Angus says Allister will never come back. He says he was an unsettled lad before he went away. And, Shenac, he says our Allister beguiled Evan, or he never would have left home. He looked black when he said it. He was angry."

Shenac's eyes blazed again.

"Our Allister unsettled—he that went away for our father's sake, and for us all! Our Allister to beguile Evan, that wild lad! And you sat and heard him say it, Hamish!"

"What else could I do?" said Hamish bitterly.

"And my mother?" said Shenac.

"She could only cry, and say that Allister had always been a good son to her and to my father, and a dear brother to us all."

There was a long pause. Shenac never removed her eyes from the men, who were gradually drawing nearer and nearer, as one after another of the great cedar rails was laid on the foundation of logs and stones already prepared for them along the field; and anger gathered in her heart and showed itself in her face as she gazed. Hamish had turned quite away from the fence and from his sister, towards the creek where his brothers were still shouting at their play. But he was not thinking of his brothers; he did not see them, indeed. He made an effort to keep back the tears, which, in spite of all he could do, would flow. If Shenac had spoken to him, they must have gushed out; but he had time to force them back before Shenac turned away with an angry gesture.

"It's of no use, Shenac," he said then. "There's reason in what Angus Dhu says. We will have to give up the farm."

"Hamish, that shall never be done!" said Shenac. "It would break my mother's heart."

"It seems broken already," said Hamish hoarsely. "And it is easy to say the land must be kept. But what can we do with it? Who is to work it?"

"You and I and the little lads," cried Shenac. "There is no fear. God will help us," she added reverently—"the widow and orphan's God. Hamish, don't you mind?"

Hamish had no voice with which to answer for a moment; but in a little while he said with some difficulty,—

"It is easy for *you* to say what you will do, Shenac—you who are strong and well; but look at me! I am not getting stronger, as we always hoped. What could I do at the plough? I had better go to some town, as Angus Dhu advised my mother, and learn to make shoes."

"Oh, but he's fine at making plans, that Angus Dhu," said Shenac scornfully. "But we'll need to tell him that we're for none of his help. Hamish," she added, suddenly stooping down over him, "do you think any plan made to separate you and me will prosper? I think I see black Angus coming between you and me with his plans."

Her words and her caress were quite too much for Hamish, and he surprised himself and her too by a sudden burst of tears. The sight of this banished Shenac's softness in a moment. She raised herself from her stooping posture with an angry cry. Separated from the rest of the fence−makers, and approaching the knoll where the brother and sister had, been sitting, were two men. One was Angus Dhu, and the other was his friend, and a

relation of his wife, Elder McMillan. He was a good man, people said, but one who liked to move on with the current,—one who went for peace at all risks, and so forgot sometimes that purity was to be set before even peace. There was nothing in Shenac's knowledge of the man to make her afraid of him, and she took three steps towards them, and said,—

“Angus Dhu, do you mind what the Bible says of them that oppress the widow and the fatherless? Have you forgotten the verse that says, `Remove not the ancient land−mark'?”

She stopped, as if waiting for an answer. The two men stood still from sheer surprise, and looked at her. Shenac continued:—

“And do you mind what's said of them that add field to field? and—”

“Shenac, my woman,” said the, elder at last, “it's no becoming in you to speak in that kind of a way to one older than your father was. I doubt you're forgetting—”

But Shenac put his words aside with a gesture of indifference.

“And to speak false words of our Allister to his mother in her trouble as though he had led your wild lad Evan astray. You little know what our Allister saved him from more than once. But that is not for to−day. I have this to, say to you, Angus Dhu: you must be content with the half you have gotten; for not another acre of my father's land shall ever be yours, though all the elders in Glengarry stood at your back.—I will not whisht, Hamish. He is to know that he is not to meddle between my mother and me. It's not or the like of Angus Dhu to say that my mother's children shall be taken from her in her trouble. Our affairs may be bad enough, but they'll be none the better for your meddling in them.”

“Shenac,” entreated Hamish, “you'll be sorry for speaking that way to our father's cousin.”

“Our father's oppressor rather,” she insisted scornfully. But she had said her say; and, besides, the lads and little Flora had heard their voices, and were drawing near.

“Children,” said Shenac, “you are to come home. And mind, you are not to set foot on this bank again without our mother's leave. It's Angus Dhu's land now, he says, and not ours.”

The creek—that part of it near which the willows grew, and where the old ashery used to stand—had been their daily resort every summer−day all their lives; and they all looked at her with astonishment and dismay, but none of them spoke.

“Come home to our mother, boys.—Flora, come home.” And Shenac lifted her little sister over the foundation of great stones, and beckoned to the boys to follow her.

“Come, Hamish, it's time we were home.” And Hamish obeyed her as silently as the rest had done.

“Hamish,” said the elder, “speak here, man. You have some sense, and tales such as yon wild girl is like to tell may do your father's cousin much harm.”

In his heart Hamish knew Shenac to be foolish and wrong to speak as she had done, but he was true to her all the same, and would hold no parley with the enemy. So he gave no heed to the elder's words, but followed the rest through the field. Shenac's steps grew slower as they approached the house.

“Hamish,” she said a little shamefacedly, “there will be no use vexing our mother by telling her all this.”

“That's true enough,” said Hamish.

“But mind, Hamish, I'm not sorry that I said it. I have aye meant to say something to Angus Dhu about the land; though I daresay it would have been as well to say it when that clattering body, Elder McMillan, was out of hearing.”

“And John and Rory McLean,” murmured Hamish.

“Hamish, man, they never could have heard. Not that I am caring,” continued Shenac. “It's true that Angus Dhu has gotten half our father's land, and that he is seeking the other half; but *that* he'll never get—*never*!” And she flashed an angry glance towards the spot where the men were still standing.

Hamish knew it was always best to leave his sister till her anger cooled, so he said nothing in reply. He grieved for the loss of the land as much as Shenac did, but he did not resent it like her. Though he believed that Angus Dhu had been hard on his father, he did not believe that he had dealt unjustly by him. And he was right. Even in taking half the land he had taken only what he believed to be his due, and in wishing to possess himself, of the rest, he believed he was about to do a kindness to the widow and children of his dead cousin. He believed they could never get their living from the land. They must give it up, he thought; and it was far better that it should fall into his hands than into the hands of a stranger. Had his cousin lived, he would never have wished for

the land; and he said to himself that he would do much for them all, and that the widow and orphans should never suffer while he could befriend them.

At the same time, he could not deny that he would be glad to get the land. When Evan came home, it might keep the lad near him to have this farm ready for him. He had allowed himself to think a great deal about this of late. He would not confess to himself that any part of the uncomfortable feelings that Shenac's outbreak had stirred within him sprang from disappointment. But he was mistaken. For when the girl planted her foot on the other side of the new fence, and looked back at him defiantly, he felt that she would make good her word, and hold the land, at least, until Allister came home.

He did not care much what the neighbours might say about him; but he told Elder McMillan that he cared, and that doubtless yon wild girl would have plenty: to say about things she did not understand, and that she would get ill−minded folks enough to hearken to her and to urge her on. And he tried to make himself believe that it was this, and nothing else, that vexed him in the matter.

“And what's to be done?” asked the elder uneasily, as Shenac and the rest disappeared.

“Done!” repeated his friend angrily. “*I* shall do nought. If they can go on by themselves, all the better. I shall be well pleased. Why should I seek to have the land?”

“Why, indeed?” said the elder.

“I shall neither make nor meddle in their affairs, till I am asked to do it,” continued Angus Dhu; but the look on his face said, as plainly as words could have done, “and it will not be very long before that will happen.”

But he made a mistake, as even wise men will sometimes do.

CHAPTER THREE.

I am glad to say that Shenac did not let the sun go down on her wrath. Indeed, long before sunset she was heartily ashamed of her outbreak towards Angus Dhu, and acknowledged as much to Hamish. Not that she believed he had acted justly and kindly in his past dealings with her father; nor was she satisfied that the future interests of the family would be safe in his hands. Even while acknowledging how wrong and foolish she had been in speaking as she had done, she declared to Hamish that Angus Dhu should neither “make nor meddle” in their affairs. They must cling together, and do the best they could, till Allister should come home, whatever Angus Dhu might say.

That her mother might yield to persuasion on this point, she thought possible; for the widow had lost courage, and saw only the darker side of their affairs. But Shenac stoutly declared that day to Hamish that no one should be suffered to persuade her mother to the breaking of her heart. No one had a right to interfere in their affairs further than should be welcome to them all. For her part, she was not afraid of Angus Dhu, nor of Elder McMillan, nor of any one else, when it came to the question of breaking up their home and sending them, one here and another there, away from the mother.

Shenac felt very strong and brave as she said all this to Hamish; and yet when, as it was growing dark that night, she saw Elder McMillan opening their gate, her first impulse was to run away. She did not, however, but said to herself, “Now is the time to stand by my mother, and help her to resist the elder's efforts to get little Hugh away from us.” Besides, she could not go away without being seen, and it would look cowardly; so she placed herself behind the little wheel which the mother had left for a moment, and when the elder came in she was as busy and as quiet as (in his frequently−expressed opinion) it was the bounden duty of all young women to be.

Now, there was nothing in the whole round of Shenac's duties so distasteful to her as spinning on the little wheel. The constant and unexciting employment for hands and mind that spinning afforded, and perhaps the pleasant monotony of the familiar humming of the wheel, always exerted a soothing influence on the mother; and one of the first things that had given them hope of her recovery after the shock of the burning of the house was her voluntary bringing out of the wheel But it was very different with Shenac. The strength and energy so invaluable to her in her household work or her work in the fields were of no avail to her here. To sit following patiently and constantly the gradual forming and twisting of the thread, did not suit her as it did her mother; and watchful and excited as she was that night, she could hardly sit quiet while the elder went through his usual salutations to her mother and the rest.

He was in no haste to make known his errand, if he had one, and he was in no haste to go. He spoke in slow, unwilling sentences, as he had done many times before, of the mysterious dealings of Providence with the family, making long pauses between. And through his talk and his silence the widow sat shedding a few quiet tears in the dark, and now and then uttering a word of reply.

What was the good of it all Shenac would have liked to shake him, and to bid him “say his say” and go; but the elder seemed to have no say, at least concerning Hugh. He went slowly through his accustomed round of condolence with her mother and advice to the boys and Shenac, and, as he rose to go, added something about a bee which some of the neighbours had been planning to help the widow with the ploughing and sowing of her land, and then he went away.

“Some of the neighbours,” repeated Shenac in a whisper to her brother. “That's the elder's way of heaping coals on my head— good man!”

“What do you suppose the elder cares about a girl like you, or Angus Dhu either?” asked Hamish with a shrug.

Shenac laughed, but had no time to answer.

“I was afraid it might be about wee Hughie that the elder wanted to speak,” said the mother with a sigh of relief as she came in from the door, where she had bidden the visitor good−night.

“And what about Hughie?” asked Shenac, resuming her spinning. She knew very well what about him; but her mother had not told her, and this was as good a way as any to begin about their plans for the summer.

Instead of answering her question, the mother said, after a moment's silence,—

“He's a good man, Elder McMillan.”

“Oh yes, I daresay he's a good man,” said Shenac with some sharpness; “but that's no reason why he should want to have our Hughie.”

The little boys were all in bed by this time, and Hamish and Shenac were alone with their mother. After a little impatient twitching of her thread, Shenac put aside her wheel, swept up the hearth, and moved about putting things in order in the room, and then she came and sat down beside her mother. She did not speak, however; she did not know what to say. Any allusion to the summer's work was almost surer to make her mother shed tears, and Shenac could not bear to grieve her. She darted an impatient glance at Hamish, who seemed to have no intention of helping her to−night. He was sitting with his face upon his hands, just as he had been sitting through the elder's visit, and Shenac could not catch his eye. It seemed wrong to risk the bringing on of a wakeful, moaning, miserable night to her mother; and she was thinking she would say no more till morning, when her mother spoke again.

“Yes, Elder McMillan is a good man. I would not be afraid for Hugh, and he would be near at hand.”

“Yes,” said Shenac, making an effort to speak quietly, “if Hugh must go, he might as well go to Elder McMillan's as anywhere—” She stopped.

“And Dan needs a firm hand, they say,” continued the mother, her voice breaking a little; “but I'm afraid for him. Angus Dhu is a stern man, and Dan has been used to a hand gentle as well as firm. But he would not be far away.”

Shenac broke out impatiently,—

“Angus Dhu's hand was not firm enough to keep his own son at home, and he could never guide our Dan. Mother, never heed them that tell you any ill of Dan. Has he ever disobeyed you once since—since then?” Shenac's voice failed a little, then she went on again, “Why should Dan go away, or any of us? Why can't we bide all together, and do the best we can, till Allister comes home?”

“But that must be a long time yet, if he ever comes,” said the mother, sighing.

“Yes, it may be long,” said Shenac eagerly. “Of course it cannot be for the spring work, and maybe not for the harvest, but he's sure to come, mother; and think of Allister coming and finding no home! Yes, I know you are to bide here; but the land would be gone, and it would be no home long to Allister or any of us without the land. Angus Dhu should be content with what he's got,” continued Shenac bitterly. “Allister will never be content to let my father's land go out of our hands; and Angus Dhu promised my father to give it up to Allister. Mother, we must do nothing till Allister comes home.—Hamish, why don't you tell my mother to wait till Allister comes home?”

“Till Allister comes home! When Allister comes home!” This had been the burden of all Shenac's comforting to her mother, even when she could take no comfort from it herself. For a year seemed a long time to Shenac; but three months of the year had passed already, and surely, surely Allister would come.

Hamish raised his face as Shenac appealed to him, but it was anything but a hopeful face, and Shenac was glad that her mother was looking the other way.

“But what are we to do in the meantime?” he asked, and his voice was as little hopeful as his face. For a moment Shenac was indignant at her brother. It would need the courage of both to make the future look otherwise than dark to their mother, and she thought Hamish was going to fail her. She was growing very eager; but she knew that the quick, hot words that might carry Hamish with her would have no force with her mother, and she put a strong restraint on herself, and said quietly,—

“We can manage through the summer, mother. The wheat was sown in the fall, you know, and the elder said we were to have a bee next week for the oats, and we can do the rest ourselves—Hamish and Dan and I—till Allister comes home.”

“It would be a hard fight for you all,” said the mother despondingly.

“You should say Dan and you and little Hugh and Colin,” said Hamish bitterly. “They could help far more than I can, unless I am much better than I am now.” And then he dropped his head on his hands again.

Shenac rose suddenly and placed herself between him and her mother, and then she said quietly,—

“And, mother, the elder thinks we can do it, or he wouldn't have spoken about the bee. Nobody can think it right that Angus Dhu should take our father's land from us; and the elder said nothing about Hugh; and Dan would never bide with Angus Dhu and work our father's land for him. Never! never! Mother, we must try what we can

do till Allister comes home."

There was not much said after that. There was no decision in words as to their plans, but Shenac knew they were to make a trial of the summer's work—she and her brothers—and she was content.

There were but two rooms downstairs in the little log house, and the mother and Flora slept in the one in which they had been sitting. So when Hamish came back from looking whether the gates and barn−doors were safely shut, he found Shenac, who had much to say to him, waiting for him outside.

"Hamish," she said eagerly, "what ails you? Why did you not speak to my mother and tell her what we ought to do? Hamish," she added, putting out her hand to detain him as he tried to pass her —"Hamish, speak to me. What ails you to−night, Hamish?"

"What right have I to tell my mother—I, who can do nothing?"

He shook off her detaining hand as if he was angry; but there was a sound of tears in his voice, and Shenac's momentary feeling of offence was gone. She would not be shaken off, and putting her arms round his neck she held him fast. He did not try to free himself after the first moment, but he turned away his face.

"Hamish," she repeated, "what is it? Don't you think we can manage to keep together till Allister comes home? Is it that, Hamish? Tell me what you think it is right for us to do."

"It is not that, Shenac; and I have no right to say anything—I, who can do nothing."

"Hamish!" exclaimed his sister, in a tone in which surprise and pain were mingled.

"If I were like the rest," continued Hamish—"I, who am the eldest; but even Dan can do more than I can. You must not think of me, Shenac, in your plans."

For a moment Shenac was silent from astonishment; this was so unlike the cheerful spirit of Hamish. Then she said,—

"Hamish, the work is not all. What could Dan or any of us do without you to plan for us? We are the hands, you are the head."

Hamish made an impatient movement. "Allister would be head and hands too," he said bitterly.

"But, Hamish, you are not Allister; you are Hamish, just as you have always been. You are not surely going to fail our mother now —you, who have done more than all of us put together to comfort her since then?"

Hamish made no answer.

"It is wrong for you to look at it in that way, Hamish," continued Shenac. "I once heard my father say that though you were lame, God might have higher work for you to do than for any of the rest of us. I did not know what he meant then, but I know now."

"Hush! don't, Shenac," said Hamish.

"No; I must speak, Hamish. It is not right to fret because the work you have to do is not just the work you would choose. And you'll break my heart if you vex yourself about—because you are not like the rest. Not one of us all is so dear to my mother and the rest as you are; you know *that*, Hamish. And why should you think of this now, more than before?"

"Shenac, I have been a child till now, thinking of nothing. My looking forward was but the dreaming of idle dreams. I have wakened since my father died—wakened to find myself useless, a burden, with so much to be done."

"Hamish," said Shenac gravely, "that is not true, and it's foolish, besides. If you *were* useless—blind as well as lame— if you were as cankered and ill to do with as you are mild and sweet, there would be no question of burden, because you are one of us, our own. If you were thinking of Angus Dhu, you might speak of burdens; but it is nonsense to say that to me. You know that you are more to my mother than any of us, and you are more to me than all my brothers put together; but I need not tell you *that*. Hamish, if it had not been for you, I think my mother must have died. What is Dan, or what am I, in comparison to you? Hamish, you must take heart and be strong, for all our sakes."

They were sitting on the doorstep by this time, and Shenac laid her head on her brother's shoulder as she spoke.

"I know I am all wrong, Shenac. I know I ought to be content as I am," said Hamish at last, but he could say no more.

Shenac's heart filled with love and pity unspeakable. She would have given him her health and strength, and would have taken up his burden of weakness and deformity to bear them henceforth for his sake. But she did not

tell him so; where would have been the good? She sat quite still, only stroking his hand now and then, till he spoke again.

“Perhaps I am wrong to speak to you about it, Shenac, but I seem to myself to be quite changed; I seem to have nothing to look forward to. If it had been me who was taken instead of Lewis.”

“Hamish,” said Shenac gravely, “it is not saying it to me that is wrong, but thinking it. And why should you have nothing to look forward to? We are young. A year seems a long time; but it will pass, and when Allister comes home, and we are prosperous again, it will be with you as it would have been if my father had lived. You will get to your books again, and learn and grow a wise man; and what will it signify that you are little and lame, when you have all the honour that wisdom wins? Of course all these sad changes are worse for you than for the rest. *We* will only have to work a little harder, but your life is quite changed; and, Hamish, it will only be for a little while, till Allister comes home.”

“But, Shenac,” said Hamish eagerly, “you are not to think I mind *that* most; I am not so bad as that. If I were strong—if I were like the rest—I would like nothing so well as to labour always for my mother and you all; but I can do little.”

“Yes, I know,” said Shenac; “but Dan can do that, and so can I But your work will be different—far higher and nobler than ours. Only you must not be impatient because you are hindered a little just now. Hamish, bhodach, what is a year out of a whole lifetime? Never fear, you will find your true work in time.”

“Bhodach” is “old man” in the language in which these children were speaking. But on Shenac's lips it meant every sweet and tender name; and, listening to her, Hamish forgot his troubles, or looked beyond them, and his spirit grew bright and trustful again—peaceful for that night at least. The shadow fell on him many a time again; but it never fell so darkly but that the sunshine of his sister's face had power to chase it away, till, by−and−by, there fell on both the light before which all shadows for ever and for ever flee away.

CHAPTER FOUR.

And so, with a good heart, they began their work. I daresay it would be amusing to some of my young readers if I were to go into particulars, and tell them all that was done by each from day to day; but I have no time nor space for this.

The bee was a very successful one. As everybody knows, a bee is a collection of the neighbours to help to do in one day work which it would take one or two persons a long time to do. It is not usually to do such work as ploughing or sowing that bees are had; but all the neighbours were glad to help the Widow MacIvor with her spring work, and so two large fields, one of oats and another of barley, were in those two days ploughed and harrowed, and sowed and harrowed again.

Shenac was not quite at her ease about the bee, partly because she thought it had been the doing of Angus Dhu and the elder, and partly because she felt if they were to be kept together they must depend, not on their neighbours, but upon themselves. But it was well they had this help, for the young people were quite inexperienced in such work as ploughing and sowing, and the summers are so short in Canada that a week or two sooner or later makes a great difference in the sowing of the seed.

There was enough left for Shenac and her brothers to keep them busy from sunrise to sunset, during the months of May and June. There was the planting of potatoes and corn, and the sowing of carrots and turnips; and then there was the hoeing and keeping them all free from weeds. There was also the making of the garden, and the keeping of it in order when it was made. This had always been more the work of Hamish than of any of the rest, and he made it his work still; and though he was not so strong as he used to be, there never had been so much pains taken with the garden before. Everybody knows what comfort for a family comes out of a well−kept garden, even though there may be only the common vegetables and very little fruit in it; and Hamish made the most of theirs that summer, and so did they all.

It must not be supposed that because Shenac was a girl she had no part in the field−work. Even now, in that part of the country, the wives and daughters of farmers help their fathers and brothers during the busy seasons of spring and harvest; and for many years after the opening up of the country the females helped to clear the land, putting their hands to all kinds of out−door work as cheerfully as need be. As for Shenac, she would have scorned the idea that there was any work that her brothers could do for which they had not the strength and skill.

Indeed, Shenac had her full share of the field−work, and much to do in the house besides. The mother was not strong yet, either in mind or body: she would never be strong again, Shenac sometimes feared, and she must be saved as far as possible from all care and anxiety. So the heaviest of the household work fell to Shenac. They had not a large dairy, and never could have again; for the greater part of their pasture and mowing land lay on the wrong side of the high cedar fence so hotly resented by the children. But the three cows which they had were her peculiar care. She milked them morning and evening, and, when the days were longest, at noon too; and though her mother prepared the dishes for the milk and skimmed the cream, Shenac always made the butter, because churning needed strength as well as skill; and oftener than otherwise it was done before she called her brothers in the morning.

Much may be accomplished in a short time by a quick eye and a ready hand, and Shenac had both. The minutes after meal−time which her brothers took for rest, or for lingering about to talk together, she filled with the numberless items of household work which seem little in the doing, but which being left undone bring all things into disorder.

When any number of persons are brought together in circumstances where decision and action become necessary, the leadership will naturally fall on the one among them who is best fitted by natural gifts or acquired knowledge to assume responsibility. It is the same in families where the head has been suddenly removed. Quite unconsciously to herself, Shenac assumed the leadership in the household; and it was well for her brothers that she had duties within−doors as well as in the fields. There were days in these months of May and June which were not half long enough for the accomplishment of her plans and wishes. I am afraid that at such times the strength of Hamish and the patience of Dan must have given out before she found it too dark to go on with their labours. But the thought of the mother, weary with the work at home, made her shorten the day to her brothers

and lengthen it to herself.

One of Shenac's faults was a tendency to go to extremes in all things that interested her. She had made up her mind that the summer's work must be successful; and to insure success all other things must be made to yield. It was easy for her to forget the weakness of Hamish, for he was only too willing to forget it himself; and as for Dan, though there was some truth in Angus Dhu's assertion to his mother that “he was a wild lad, and needed a firm hand to guide him,” he gave no tokens of breaking away as yet. Shenac had so impressed him with the idea that they must keep the farm as their own, and show the neighbours that they could keep it in order, that to him every successful day's work seemed a triumph over Angus Dhu as well as over circumstances. His industry was quite of his own free will, as he believed, and he gave Shenac none of the credit of keeping him busy, and indeed she took none of the credit to herself. In her determination to do the most that could be done, she might have forgotten her mother's comfort too; but this was not permitted. For if the mother tired herself with work, or if she saw anything forgotten or neglected in the house, she became fretful and desponding, and against this Shenac always strove to guard.

If Shenac were ever so tired at night, it rested her to turn back to look over the fields beginning to grow green and beautiful under their hands. They worked in those days to some purpose, everybody acknowledged. In no neighbourhood, far or near, were the fields better worth looking at than those that had been so faithfully gone over by Shenac and her brothers. Many a farmer paused, in passing, to admire them, saying to himself that the Widow MacIvor's children were a credit to her and to themselves; and few were so churlish as to refrain from speaking a word of encouragement to them when an opportunity came.

Even Angus Dhu gave many a glance of wonder and pleasure over his cedar rails, and gave them credit for having done more than well. He was very glad. He said so to himself, and he said so to his neighbours. And I believe he was glad, in a way. He was too good a farmer not to take pleasure in seeing land made the most of; and I think he was glad, too, to see the children of his dead friend and cousin capable of doing so well for themselves.

It is just possible that deep down in his heart, unknown or unacknowledged to himself, there lurked a hope that when Shenac should marry, as he thought she was sure to do, and when wild Dan should have gone away, as his brothers had done before him, those well−tilled fields might still become his. Perhaps I am wrong, and hard upon him, as Shenac was.

She gave him no credit for his kind thoughts, but used to say to her brothers, when she caught a glimpse of his face over the fence,—

“There stands Angus Dhu, glowering and glooming at us. He's not praying for summer rain on our behalf, I'll warrant.—Oh well, Angus man, we'll do without your prayers, as we do without your help, and as you'll have to do without our land. Make the most of what you have got, and be content.”

“Shenac,” said Hamish on one of these occasions, “you're hard on Angus Dhu.”

“Am I, Hamish?” said Shenac, laughing. “Well, maybe I am; but it will not harm him, I daresay.”

“But it may harm yourself, Shenac,” said Hamish gravely. “I think I would rather lose all the work we have done this spring than have it said that our Shenac was bearing false witness against our neighbour, and he of our own kin, too.”

“Nobody would dare to say that of me,” said Shenac, reddening.

“But if it is true, what is the difference whether it is said or not?” said Hamish. “You seem more glad of our success because you think it vexes Angus Dhu, than because it pleases our mother and keeps us all at home together. It does not vex him, I'm sure of that; and, whether it does or not, it is wrong for you always to be thinking and saying it. You are not to be grieved or angry at my saying it, Shenac.”

But both grieved and angry Shenac was at her brother's reproof. She did not know which was greater, her anger or her grief. She did not trust herself to answer him, and in a little time Hamish spoke again:—

“It cannot harm him—at least, I think it cannot really harm him, though it may vex him; and I'm sure it must grieve the girls to hear that you say such things about their father. But that is not what I was thinking about. It must harm yourself most. You are growing hard and bitter. You are not like yourself, Shenac, when you speak of Angus Dhu.”

The sting of her brother's words was in the last sentence, but it was the first part that Shenac answered.

“You know very well, Hamish, that I never speak of Angus Dhu except to you—not even to my mother.”

“You have spoken to Dan—at least, you have spoken in his hearing. What do you think I heard him saying the

other day to Shenac yonder?"

"Shenac yonder" was the youngest daughter of Angus Dhu, so called by the brothers to distinguish her from their sister, who was "our Shenac" to them. Other people distinguished between the cousins as they had between the fathers. One was Shenac Bhan; the other, Shenac Dhu.

"I don't know," said Shenac, startled. "What was it?"

"Something like what you were saying to me just now. You may think how Shenac's black eyes looked when she heard him."

Shenac was shocked.

"She would not mind what Dan said."

"No. It was only when Dan told her that *you* said it that she seemed to mind," said Hamish gravely.

"Dan had no business to tell her," said Shenac hotly; then she paused.

"No," said Hamish; "I told him that."

"I'll give him a hearing," began Shenac.

"I think, Shenac, you should say nothing to Dan about it," said Hamish. "Only take care never to say more than you think before the little ones, or indeed before any one again. You may vex Angus Dhu, and Shenac yonder, and the rest, but the real harm is done to us at home, and especially to yourself, Shenac; for you no more believe that Angus Dhu is a robber—the oppressor of the widow and the fatherless—than I do."

Shenac uttered an exclamation of impatience.

"I shall give it to Dan."

"No, Shenac, you will not. Dan must be carefully dealt with. He has a strong will of his own, and if it comes into his mind that you or any one, except our mother, is trying to govern him, he'll slip through our fingers some fine day."

"You've been taking a leaf out of Angus Dhu's book. There's no fear of Dan," said Shenac.

"There's no fear of him as long as he thinks he's pleasing himself, and that his sister is the best and the wisest girl to be found," said Hamish. "But if it were to come to a trial of strength between you, Dan would be sure to win."

Shenac was silent. She knew it would not be well to risk her influence over Dan by a struggle of any sort. But she was very angry with him.

"He might have had more sense," she said, after a moment.

"And indeed, Shenac, so might you," said Hamish gravely. "There should be no more said about Angus Dhu, for his sake and ours. He has been very friendly to us this summer, considering all things."

"Considering what I said to him, you mean," said Shenac sharply. "I was sorry for that as soon as I said it. But, Hamish, if you think I'm going down on my knees to Angus Dhu to tell him so, you're mistaken. He may not be a thief and a robber, but he's a dour carle, though he is of our own kin, and as different from our father as the dark is different from the day. And I can say nothing else of him, even for your sake, Hamish."

"It is not for my sake that I am speaking, Shenac, but for your own. You are doing yourself a great wrong, cherishing this bitterness in your heart."

Shenac was too much grieved and too angry to speak. She knew very well that she was neither very good nor very wise; but it had hitherto been her great pleasure in life to know that Hamish thought her so, and his words were very painful to her. She was vexed with him, and with Dan, and with all the world. Above all, she was vexed with herself.

She would not confess it, but in her heart she knew that a little of the zest would be taken from their labours if she were sure that their success would not be a source of vexation to Angus Dhu. And then Hamish had said she was injuring Dan—encouraging him in what was wrong—perhaps risking her influence for good over him.

The longer she thought about all this, the more unhappy she became. "Bearing false witness!" she repeated. It was a great sin she had been committing. It had been done thoughtlessly, but it was none the less a sin for that, Shenac knew. Hamish was right. She was growing very hard and wicked; and no wonder that he had come to think so meanly of her. Shenac said all this to herself, with many sorrowful and some angry tears. But the anger passed away before the sorrow. There were no confessions made openly; but, whatever may have been her secret thoughts of Angus Dhu, neither Dan nor Hamish nor anybody else ever heard Shenac speak a disrespectful word of him again.

Dan never got the “hearing” with which she had threatened him. She checked him more than once, when in the old way he began to remark on the evident interest that their father's cousin took in their work; but she did it gently, remembering her own fault.

The intercourse which had almost ceased between the families was gradually renewed—at least, between the younger ones. Shenac could not bring herself to go often to her cousins' house. She always felt, as she said to Hamish, as though Angus Dhu “eyed her” at such times. And, besides, she was too busy to go there or anywhere else. But her cousins came often to see her when the day's work was over; and Shenac, the youngest, who was her father's favourite, and who could take liberties that none of the others could have done at her age, came at other times. She was older than our Shenac by a year or so; but she was little and merry, and her jet−black hair was cut close to her head like a child's, so she seemed much younger. She could not come too often. She was equally welcome to the grave, quiet Hamish and the boyish Dan, and more welcome to Shenac than to either. For she never hindered work, but helped it rather. She brought the news, too, and fought hot, merry battles with the lads, and for the time shook even Hamish out of the grave ways that were becoming habitual to him, and did Shenac herself good by reminding her that she was not an old woman burdened with care, but a young girl not sixteen, to whom fun and frolic ought to be natural.

There were not many newspapers taken in those parts about that time; but Angus Dhu took one, and Shenac used to come over the fence with it, and, giving it to Hamish, would take his hoe or rake and go on with his work while he read the news to the rest. The newspaper was English, of course. Gaelic was the language spoken at home—the language in which the Bible was read, and the Catechism said; but the young people all spoke and read English. And very good English too, as far as it went; for it was book−English, learned at school from books that are now considered out of date. But they were very good books for all that. They used to have long discussions about the state of the world as they gathered it from the newspapers—not always grave or wise, but useful, especially to Shenac, by keeping her in mind of what in her untiring industry she was in danger of forgetting, that there was a wide world beyond these quiet lines within which they were living, where nobler work than the mere earning of bread was being done by worthy and willing hands.

CHAPTER FIVE.

July had come. There was a little pause in the field−work, for all the seed had been sown and all the weeds pulled up, and they were waiting for a week or two to pass, and then the haying was to begin. Even haying did not promise to be a very busy season with them, for the cutting and caring for the hay in their largest field would this year fall to the lot of Angus Dhu. It was as well so, Shenac said to herself with a sigh, for they could not manage much hay by themselves, and paying wages would never do for them. Indeed, they would need some help even with the little they had; for Dan had never handled a scythe except in play, and Hamish, even if he had the skill, had not the strength.

And then the wool. They must have their cloth early this year, for last year they had been obliged to sell the wool, and the boys' clothes were threadbare. If they could get the wool spun early, McLean the weaver would weave their cloth first. She must try to see what could be done. But, oh, that weary little wheel!

Shenac's mother thought it was a wonderful little wheel; and so indeed it was. It had been part of the marriage outfit of Shenac's grandmother before she left her Highland home. It had been in almost constant' use all these years, and bade fair to be as good as ever for as many years to come. There was no wearing it out or putting it out of order, for, like most things made in those old times, it had strength if not elegance, and Shenac's mother was as careful of it as a modern musical lady is of her grand piano.

I cannot describe it to you, for I am not very well acquainted with such instruments of labour. It was not at all like the wheels which are used now−a−days in districts where the great manufactories have not yet put wheels out of use. It was a small, low, complicated affair, at which the spinner sat, using both foot and hand. It needed skill and patience to use it well, and strength too. A long day's work well done on the little wheel left one far wearier than a day's work in the field.

As for Shenac, the very thought of it made her weary. If she had lived in the present day, she would have said it made her nervous. But, happily for Shenac, she did not know that she had any nerves, and her mother's wheel got the blame of her discomfort. Not that she ever ventured to speak a disrespectful word of it. The insane idea that perhaps her mother might be induced to sell it and buy one of the new−fashioned kind, like that Archie Matheson's young wife had brought with her, *did* come into her head once, but she never spoke of it. It would have been wrong as well as foolish to do so, for her mother would never try to learn to use the new one, and half the comfort of her life would be gone without her faithful friend, the little wheel.

“Oh, if I could get one for myself!” said Shenac. She had seen and used Mary Matheson's last summer, and now, hurried as she was at home, she took an afternoon to go with Hamish to see it again.

“Could you not make one, Hamish?” she said entreatingly; “you can do so many things.”

But Hamish shook his head.

“I might make the stock if I had tools; but the rest of it—no.”

The sheep were shorn. There were sixteen fleeces piled up in the barn; but a great deal must be done to it before it could be ready for the boys to wear. One thing Shenac had determined on. It should be sent and carded at the mill. The mill was twenty miles away, to be sure—perhaps more; but the time taken for the journey would be saved ten times over. Shenac thought she might possibly get through the spinning, but to card it by hand, with all there was to do in the fields, would be quite impossible.

This matter troubled Shenac all the more that she could not share her vexation with Hamish. The idea of selling the grandmother's wheel seemed to him little short of sacrilege; and neither he nor their cousin Shenac could see why the mother could not dye and card and spin the wool, as she had been accustomed to do. But Shenac knew this to be impossible. Her mother was able for no such work now, though she might think so herself; and Shenac knew that to try and fail would make the mother miserable. What was to be done? Over this question she pondered with an earnestness, and, alas! with a uselessness, that gave impatience to her hand and sharpness to her voice at last.

“What aileth thee, Shenac Bhan, bonny Shenac, Shenac the farmer, Shenac the fair? Wherefore rests the shadow on thy brow, and the look of sadness in thine azure eyes?” Hamish had been reading to them Gaelic Ossian, and Shenac Dhu had caught up the manner of the poem, and spoke in a way that made them all laugh.

Shenac Bhan laughed too; but not because she was merry, for her cousin's nonsense always vexed her when she was "out of sorts." But her cousin Christie was there, Mrs More, the eldest sister of Shenac Dhu; and so Shenac Bhan laughed with the rest. She was here on a visit from the city of M—−where she lived, and had come over to see her aunt, as Angus Dhu's children always called the widow. A heavy summer shower was falling, and all the boys had taken refuge from it in the house, and there were noise and confusion for a time.

"I want Christie to come into the barn and see our wool," said Shenac Bhan at last, when the shower was over. "And, Shenac— dark Shenac, doleful Shenac—you are to stay and keep the lads in order till we come back."

Shenac Dhu made a face, but let them go.

Mrs More was a pale, quiet woman, with a grave but kind manner, which put Shenac at her ease at once, though she had not seen her since her marriage, which was more than five years before. She had always been very kind to the children when she lived at home, and the memory of this gave Shenac courage to ask her help out of at least one of her difficulties.

"How much you have grown, Shenac!" said her cousin. "I hardly think I would have known you if I had seen you anywhere else. Yes, I think I would have known your face anywhere. But you are a woman now, and doing a woman's work, they tell me."

"We have all been busy this summer," said Shenac; "but our hurry is over now for a while."

Heedless of the little pools that were shining here and there, they went first into the garden, and then round the other buildings, and over to the spot, still black and charred, where the house had stood. But little was said by either of them.

"Do you like living in the city?" said Shenac at last.

"For some things I like it—for most things, indeed; but sometimes I long for a sight of the fields and woods, more for my wee Mary's sake than for my own."

"This is our wool," said Shenac, as they entered the barn; "I wish it was spun."

"Shenac," said her cousin kindly, "have you not undertaken too much? It's all very well for you to speak of Hamish and Dan, but the weight must fall on you. I see that plainly."

But Shenac would not let her think so.

"I only do my share," said she eagerly.

"I think you could have helped them more by coming to M—−and taking a situation. You could learn to do anything, Shenac, if you were to try."

But Shenac would not listen.

"We must keep together," said she; "and the land must be kept for Allister. There is no fear. We shall not grow rich, but we can live, if we bide all together and do our best."

"Shenac," persisted her cousin, "I do not want to discourage you; but there are so many things which a girl like you ought not to do—cannot do, indeed, without breaking your health. I know. I was the eldest at home. I know what there is to do in a place like yours. The doctor tells me I shall never be quite well again, because of the long strain of hard work and exposure when I was young like you. Think, if your health was to fail."

Shenac turned her compassionate eyes upon her.

"But your father was hard on you, folks say, and I have the work at my own taking."

Mrs More shook her head sadly.

"Ah, Shenac dear, circumstances may be far harder on you than ever my father was on me. You do not know what may lie before you. No girl like you should have such responsibility. If you will come with me or follow me, you and Hamish, I can do much for you. You could learn to do anything, Shenac, and Hamish is very clever. There are places where his littleness and his lameness would not be against him, as they must be on the land. Let my father take Dan, as he wished, and let Hughie go to the elder's for a while. The land can lie here safe enough till Allister comes home, if that is what you wish. Indeed, Shenac, you do not know what you are undertaking."

"Cousin Christie," said Shenac gently, "you are very kind, but I cannot leave my mother; and I am strong—stronger than you think. Christie, you speak as though you thought Allister would never come home. Was our Allister a wild lad, as your father says? Surely, he'll come home to his mother, now that his father is dead."

She sat down on the pile of wool, and turned a very pale, frightened face to her cousin. Mrs More stooped down and kissed her.

"My dear," she said gently, "Allister was not a wild lad in my time, but good and truthful—one who honoured

his parents. But, Shenac, the world is wide, and there are so many things that those who have lived in this quiet place all their lives cannot judge of. And even if Allister were to come back, he might not be content to settle down here in the old quiet way. The land would seem less to him than it seems to you."

"But if Allister should not come home, or if he should not stay, my mother will need me all the more. No, Cousin Christie, you must not discourage me. I must try it. And, indeed, it is not I alone. Hamish has so much sense and judgment, and Dan is growing so strong. And we will try it anyway."

"Well, Shenac, you deserve to succeed, and you will succeed if anybody could," said her cousin. "I will not discourage you. I wish I could help you instead."

"You can help me," said Shenac eagerly; "that's what I brought you out to say. Our wool—you are going back soon, and if the waggon goes, will you ask your father to let our wool go to the mill? The carding takes so long, and my mother is not so strong as she used to be. And that is one of the things I cannot abide. The weary little wheel is bad enough. Will you ask your father, Christie?"

Mrs More laughed.

"That is but a small favour, Shenac. Of course my father will take it, and he'll bring it back too; for, though it is not his usual plan at this time of the year, he's going on all the way to M—−with butter. There came word yesterday that there was great demand for it. The wool will be done by the time he comes back; and he is to take his own too, I believe."

Shenac gave a sigh of relief.

"Well, that's settled."

"Why did you not ask my father himself?" said Mrs More. "Are not you and he good friends, Shenac?" Shenac muttered something about not liking to give trouble and not liking to ask Angus Dhu. Mrs More laughed again.

"I think you are hard on my father, Shenac. I think he would be a good friend to you if you would let him. You must not mind a sharp word from the like of him. His bark is worse than his bite."

Shenac was inexpressibly uncomfortable, remembering that all the hard words had come from her and not from Angus Dhu.

"Well, never mind," said Mrs More; "the carrying of the wool is my father's favour. What can I do for you, Shenac?"

"You can do one thing for me," said Shenac briskly, glad to escape from a painful subject, and laying her hand on a shining instrument of steel that peeped from beneath the wool on which she was sitting. "You can cut my hair off. My mother does not like to do it, and Hamish won't. I was going to ask Shenac yonder; but you will do it better." And she began to loosen the heavy braids.

"What's that about Shenac yonder?" said that young person, coming in upon them. "I should like to know what you are plotting, you two, together—and bringing in my innocent name too!"

"Nothing very bad," said Shenac, laughing. "I want Christie to cut my hair, it is such a trouble; it takes a whole half−hour at one time or other of the day to keep it neat, and half−hours are precious."

"I don't like to do it, Shenac," said Mrs More.

Shenac Dhu held up her hands in astonishment.

"Cut your hair off! Was the like ever heard of?—Nonsense, Christie! she never means it; and Hamish would never let her, besides. She'll look no better than the rest of us without her hair," continued she, taking the heavy braids out of Shenac's hands and pushing her back on the pile of wool from which she had risen. "Christie, tell Shenac about John Cameron, as you told us last night."

While Shenac listened to the account of a sad accident that had happened to a young man from another part of the country, Shenac Dhu let down the long, fair hair of her cousin, and, by the help of an old card that lay near, smoothed it till it lay in waves and ripples of gold far below her waist. Then, as Shenac Bhan still sat, growing pale and red by turns as she listened, she with great care rolled the shining mass into thick curls over neck and shoulders.

"Now stand up and show yourself," said she, as she finished. "Is she not a picture? Christie, you should take her to the town with you and put her up in your husband's shop−window. You would make her fortune and your own too."

Shenac Bhan had this advantage over her cousin, and indeed over most people—that the sun that made them

as brown as a berry, after the first few days' exposure left her as fair and unfreckled as ever; and she really was a very pretty picture as she stood laughing and blushing before her cousins. The door opened, and Hamish came in.

"My mother sent me to bid you all come in to tea;" but he stopped as his eye fell on his sister.

"Tea!" cried Shenac Bhan. "I meant to do all that myself. Who would have thought that we had been here so long?" And she made a movement, as if to bind back her hair, that she might hasten away.

"Be quiet; stay till I bid you go," said Shenac Dhu, hastily letting the curls fall again. "I wonder if all the puddles are dried up?—She ought to see herself. Cut them off! The vain creature! Never fear, Hamish."

"Christie is to cut it," said Shenac Bhan, laughing, and holding the wool−shears towards Mrs More. "I must do it, Hamish; it takes such a time to keep it decently neat. My mother does not care, and why should you?"

"Whisht, Hamish," said Shenac Dhu, "you're going to quote Saint Paul and Saint Peter about a woman's hair being a covering and a glory. Don't fash yourself. Why, she would deserve to be a Scots worthy more than George Wishart, or than the woman who was drowned even, if she were to do it!"

"You had your own cut," said Shenac Bhan, looking at her cousin with some surprise. "Why should I not do the same?"

"You are not me. Everybody has not my strength of mind," said Shenac Dhu, nodding gravely.

"Toch! you cut yours that it might grow long and thick like our Shenac's," said Dan, who had been with them for some time. "Think of your hair, and look at this." And he lifted the fair curls admiringly.

Shenac Bhan laughed.

"It's an awful bother, Dan."

"But it would be a pity to lose it. What a lot of it there is!" And the boy walked round his sister, touching it as he went.

"She never meant to do it; but after that she could not," said Shenac Dhu, pretending to whisper.

"Our Shenac never says what she doesn't mean," said Dan hotly.

"Whatever other people's Shenacs do," said Hamish laughing.

Shenac Dhu made as if she would charge him with the great shears.

"Give them to Christie," said Shenac Bhan. "What a work to make about nothing!"

"She does not mean to do it yet," said Shenac Dhu; but she handed the shears to her sister.

"I don't like to do it, Shenac," said Mrs More. "Think how long it will take to grow again; and it is beautiful hair," she added, as she came near and passed her fingers through it.

"Nonsense, Christie, she's not in earnest," persisted Shenac Dhu.

With a quick, impatient motion, Shenac Bhan took the shears from her cousin's hand and severed one—two—three of the bright curls from the mass. Shenac Dhu uttered a cry.

"There! did I not tell you?" cried Dan, forgetting everything else in his triumph over Shenac Dhu. Hamish turned and went out without a word.

"There," said Shenac Bhan; "you must do it now, Christie."

Mrs More took the great shears and began to cut without a word; and no one spoke again till the curls lay in a shining heap at their feet. Then Shenac Dhu drew a long breath, and said,—

"Don't say afterwards it was my fault."

"It was just your fault, Shenac Dhu, you envious, spiteful thing," exclaimed the indignant Dan.

"Nonsense, Cousin Shenac.—Be quiet, Dan. She had nothing to do with it. It has been a trouble all summer, and I'm glad to be rid of it. I only wish I could spin it, like the wool."

"What a lot of it there is!" And Shenac Dhu stooped down and lifted a long tress or two tenderly, as if they had life.

"What will you do with it, Shenac?"

"Burn it, since I cannot make stockings of it. Put them in here." And she held up her apron.

"Will you give your hair to me, Shenac?" asked Mrs More.

"What can you do with it?" asked Shenac in some surprise. "Surely I'll give it to you, so that I hear no more about it." The curls were carefully gathered, and tied in Mrs More's handkerchief.

"Shenac Bhan," said the other Shenac solemnly, "you look like a shorn sheep. I shall never see you again without thinking of the young woman tied to the stake on the sands, and the sea coming up and up—"

"Shenac, be quiet. It is sinful to speak lightly of so solemn a thing," said her sister gravely.

“Solemn!” said Shenac. “Lightly! By no means. I was putting two solemn things together. I don't know which is more solemn. For my part, I would as soon feel the cold water creeping up my back, like—”

“Shenac,” said our Shenac entreatingly, “don't say foolish things and vex my mother and Hamish.”

Her cousin put her hand on her mouth.

“You have heard my last word.”

But the last word about the shining curls was not spoken yet.

CHAPTER SIX.

The day when the haying was to have commenced was very rainy, and so was every day for a week or more. People were becoming a little anxious as to the getting in of the hay; for in almost all the fields it was more than ripe, and everybody knows that it should not stand long after that. The fields of the Macivors were earlier than those of most people, and Shenac was especially careful to get the hay in at the right time and in good condition, because they had so much less of it than ever before.

And besides, the wheat−harvest was coming on, and where there were so few to help, every day made a difference. Whenever there came a glimpse of sunshine, Dan was out in the field, making good use of his scythe; for mowing was new and exciting work to him, though he had seen it done every summer of his life. It is not every boy of fourteen that could swing a scythe to such good purpose as Dan, and he might be excused for being a little proud and a little unreasonable in the matter. And after all, I daresay he knew quite as much about it as Shenac. When she told him how foolish it was to cut down grass when there was no chance of getting it dried, he only laughed and pointed to the fields of Angus Dhu, where there were three men busy, and acres and acres of grass lying as it had fallen.

“You are a good farmer, Shenac, but Angus Dhu, you must confess, has had more experience, and is a better judge of the weather. We're safe enough to follow him.”

There was reason in this, but it vexed Shenac to have Angus Dhu quoted as authority; and it vexed her too that Dan should take the matter into his own hands without regard to her judgment.

“Angus Dhu can get all the help he needs to make the hay when it fairs,” said she. “But if we have too much down we shall not be able to manage it right, I'm afraid.”

“There's no fear of having too much down. I must keep at it. Where there's only one man to cut, he must keep at it,” said Dan gravely. “If you and the rest of the children are busy when the sun shines, you will soon overtake me.”

“Only one man!” “You and the rest of the children!” Vexed as Shenac was, she could not help being amused, and fortunately a good deal of her vexation passed away in the laugh, in which Dan heartily joined.

This week of rain was a trying time to Shenac. Nothing could be done out of doors, for the rain was constant and heavy. If she could have had the wheel to herself, she would have got on with the spinning, and that would have been something, she thought. Her mother was spinning, however; and though she could not sit at the wheel all day, she did not like to have her work interfered with, and Shenac could not make use of the time when her mother was not employed, and very little was accomplished. There was mending to be done, which her mother could have done so much better than she could, Shenac thought. But her mother sat at the wheel, and Shenac wearied herself over the shirts and trousers of her brothers, and at last startled herself and every one else by speaking sharply to little Flora and shaking Colin well for bringing in mud on their feet when they came home from school.

After that she devoted her surplus energies to the matter of house−cleaning, and that did better. Everything in the house, both upstairs and down, and everything in the dairy, passed through her hands. Things that could be scrubbed were scrubbed, and things that could be polished were polished. The roof and the walls were whitewashed, and great maple−branches hung here and there upon them, that the flies might not soil their whiteness; and then Shenac solemnly declared to Hamish that it was time the rain should cease.

Hamish laughed. The week had passed far less uncomfortably to him than to his sister. He had made up his mind to the necessity of staying within−doors during such weather; and he could do so all the more easily as, with a good conscience, he could give himself up to the enjoyment of a book that had fallen into his hands. It was not a new book. Two or three of the first pages were gone, but it was as good as new to Hamish. It was a new kind of arithmetic, his friend Rugg, the peddler, told him. He knew Hamish liked that sort of thing, and so he had brought it to him.

Hamish was quite occupied with it. He forgot the hay, and the rain, and even his own rheumatic pains, in the interest with which he pored over it. Shenac did not grudge him his pleasure. She even tried to get up an interest in the unknown quantities, whose values, Hamish assured her, were so easily discovered by the rules laid down in

the book. But she did not enter heartily into her brother's pleasure, as she usually did. She wondered at him, and thought it rather foolish in him to be so taken up with trifles when there was so much to think about. She forgot to be glad that her brother had found something to keep him from vexing himself, as he had done so much of late, by thinking how little he could do for his mother and the rest; and she said to herself that Christie More had been right when she said that it was upon her that the burden of care and labour must fall.

"You are tired to−night, Shenac," said Hamish, as she sat gazing silently and listlessly into the fire.

"Tired!" repeated Shenac scornfully. "What with, I wonder. Yes, I am tired with staying within−doors, when there is so much to be done outside. If my mother would only let me take the wheel, that would be something."

"But my mother is busy with it herself," said Hamish. "Surely you do not think you can do more or better than my mother?"

"Not better, but more; twice as much in a day as she is doing now. We'll not get our cloth by the new year, at the rate the spinning is going on, and the lads' clothes will hardly hold together even now." Shenac gave an impatient sigh.

"But, Shenac," said her brother, "there is no use in fretting about it; that will do no good."

"No; if only one could help it," said Shenac.

"Shenac, my woman," said the mother from the other side of the fire, "I doubt you'll need to go to The Eleventh to−morrow for the dye−stuffs. I am not able to go so far myself, I fear."

The townships, or towns, of that part of the country are all divided off into portions, a mile in width, called concessions; and as the little cluster of houses where the store was had no name as yet, it was called The Eleventh; and indeed, all the different localities were named from the concession in which they were found.

"There is no particular hurry about going, I suppose, mother," Shenac answered indifferently.

"The sooner the better," said her mother. "The things are as well here as there, and we'll need them soon. What is to hinder you from going to−morrow?"

"If the morning is fair, I'll need Shenac's help at the hay, mother," said Dan with an air.

"I'll need Shenac's help!" It might have been Angus Dhu himself, by the way it was said, Shenac thought. It was ludicrous. Her mother did not seem to see anything ludicrous in it, however; for she only answered,—

"Oh yes, Dan; if it should be fair, I suppose I can wait." Hamish was busy with his book again.

"It's a very heavy crop," continued Dan. "It is all that a man can do to cut yon grass and keep at it steady."

Of course Dan did not mean to take the credit of the heavy crop to himself, but it sounded exactly as if he did; and there was something exceedingly provoking to Shenac in the way in which he stretched himself up when he said, "all that a man can do." A laughing glance that came to her over the top of Hamish's book dispelled her momentary anger, however.

"If Hamish does not mind, I'm sure *I* need not," she said to herself.

Dan went on:—"I shall put what I have cut to−day in the long barn. It will be just the thing for the spring's work."

Dan's new−found far−sightedness was too much for the gravity of Hamish, and Shenac joined heartily in the laugh. Dan looked a little discomfited.

"You must settle it with Shenac and your brother," said the mother.

"All right, Dan, my boy," said Hamish heartily; "it's always best to look ahead, as Mr Rugg would say.—What do you think, Shenac?"

"All right; only you should not say `my boy' to our Dan, but `my man,'" said Shenac gravely.

Even little Flora could understand the joke of Dan's assuming the airs of manhood, and all laughed heartily. Dan joined in the laugh good−humouredly enough.

"You see, Shenac," said Hamish, during the few minutes they always lingered together after the others had gone to bed, "Dan may be led, but he will not be driven—at least, not by you or me."

"Led!" exclaimed Shenac; "I think he means to lead us all. That scythe has made a man of him all at once. I declare it goes past my patience to hear the monkey."

"It must not go past your patience if you can help it, Shenac," said her brother. "All that nonsense will be laughed out of him, but it must not be by you or me."

"Oh, well, I'm not caring," said Shenac. "I only hope it will be fair to−morrow, so that I can get to help him. I could mow as well as he, if my mother would let me. However, it's all the same whether I help him or he helps

me, so that the work is done some way."

"We'll all help one another," said Hamish. "Shenac, you were right the other day when you told me I was wrong to murmur because I could not do more than God had given me strength to do. It does not matter what work falls to each of us, so that it is well done; and we can never do it unless we keep together."

"No fear, Hamish, bhodach, we'll keep together," said Shenac heartily. "I do hope to−morrow may be fine."

CHAPTER SEVEN.

But to−morrow was not fine; it was quite the contrary. Shenac milked in the rain, and gathered vegetables for dinner in the rain, and would gladly have made hay all day in the rain, if that had been possible. Not a pin cared Shenac for the rain. It wet her face, and twined her hair into numberless little rings all over her head, and that was the very worst it could do. It could not spoil her shoes, for in summer she did not wear any, unless she was in the field; and it took the rain a long time to penetrate through the thick woollen dress she always wore in rainy weather. Indeed, she rather liked to be out in the rain, especially when there was a high wind, against which she might measure her strength; and she was just going to propose to her mother that she should set out to The Eleventh for the dye− stuffs, when the door opened, and her cousin Shenac came in.

Rain or shine, Shenac Dhu was always welcome, and quite a chorus of exclamations greeted her.

“Toch! what about the rain! I'm neither salt nor sugar to melt in it,” she said, as Shenac Bhan took off her wet plaid and drew her towards the fire. “I must not stay,” she continued.—“Hamish, have you done with your book? Mr Rugg stayed at our house last night, and he's coming here next, and so I ran over the field to see his pretty things.—O Shenac, he has such a pretty print this time—blue and white.”

“But could you not see his pretty things last night? And are you to get a dress of the blue and white?” asked Shenac Bhan.

“Of course I could see them, but I could not take a good look at them because my father was there. He thinks me a sensible woman, and I can't bear to undeceive him; and my eyes have a trick of looking at pretty things as though I wanted them, and that looks greedy. But I'm not for a dress of the blue and white. Mysie Cairns in The Sixteenth has one, and that's enough for one township.”

“But Mr Rugg will not open his packs here; we want nothing,” said Shenac Bhan, “unless he may have dye−stuffs for my mother.”

“He has no dye−stuffs—you'll get that at The Eleventh,” said Shenac Dhu; “but it's nonsense about not wanting anything. I'll venture to say that Mr Rugg will leave more here than he left at our house, or at any house in the town−ship. I wish he would come.”

They all had plenty to say to Shenac Dhu, but that her mind was full of other things it was easy to see. She laughed and chatted, but she watched the window till the long, high waggon of the peddler came in sight, and then she drew Shenac Bhan into a corner and kept her there till the door opened.

“Good−morning, good−morning,” said the peddler as he came in. Glancing round the room, he stood still on the door−mat with a comical look of indecision on his face. “I don't suppose you want to see me enough to pay for the tracks I shall make on the floor,” he said to Shenac Bhan. “I don't know as I should have come round this way this time, only I've got something for you— something you'll be glad to have.”

Everybody was indignant at the idea of his not coming in.

“Never mind the floor,” said Shenac Bhan. “We don't want anything to−day, but we are glad to see you all the same.”

“Don't say you don't want anything till you see what I've got,” said Mr Rugg gravely. “I ha'n't no doubt there's a heap of things you would like, if you could get them. Now, a'n't there?”

“She wants a wig, for one thing,” said Shenac Dhu.

“Well, no; I calculate she'll get along without that as well as most folks. I don't see as you spoiled your looks, for all Mrs More said,” he added, as he touched with his long forefinger one of the little rings that clustered round Shenac's head. “Come, now, a'n't there something I've got that you want?” he asked as Shenac turned away with an impatient shrug.

“No; not if you haven't a wig. Do we want anything, mother? It is not worth while to open your box in the rain.”

Mr Rugg was already out of hearing.

“We can look at them, at any rate,” said Shenac Dhu. But Shenac Bhan looked very much as if she did not intend to do even that, till the door opened again, and Mr Rugg walked in, followed by Dan, and between them they carried a spinning−wheel.

“A big wheel, just like Mary Matheson's!” exclaimed Shenac Bhan.

“No; a decided improvement upon that,” said Mr Rugg, preparing to put on the rim and the head. The band was ready, too; and he turned the wheel and pulled out an imaginary thread with such gravity that all laughed. “Well, what do you think of it, girls?” he asked after a little time. “Will you have it, Miss Shenac?”

“I should like to borrow it for a month,” said Shenac with a sigh.

“It a'n't to be lent nor to be borrowed,” said the peddler; “leastways, it a'n't for me to lend. The owner may do as she likes.”

“How much would it cost?” asked Shenac with a vague, wild idea that possibly at some future time she might get one.

“I can tell you that exactly,” said the peddler. “I've got the invoice here all right, and another document with it;” and he handed Shenac a letter, directed, as she knew at a glance, in the handwriting of her cousin, Mrs More.

“It's from Christie,” said Shenac Dhu, looking over her shoulder. “Open it, Shenac; what ails you?”

Shenac opened the letter, and the other Shenac read it with her. It need not be given here. It told how Mrs More had taken Shenac's hair to a hair−dresser in the city, and how the money she had received for it had been given into the hands of Mr Rugg, who was to buy a wheel with it, as something Shenac would be sure to value.

“And here it is,” said Mr Rugg; “as good a wheel as need be.— It will put yours quite out of fashion, Mrs Macivor.”

It was with some difficulty that the mother could be made to understand that the wheel was Shenac's—bought and paid for. As for Shenac, she could only stand and look at it, saying not a word. Shenac Dhu shook her heartily.

“Here I have come all the way in the rain to hear what you would say, and you stand and glower and say nothing at all.”

“Try it, Shenac,” said Hamish, bringing a handful of rolls of wool from his mother's wheel.

“She'll need to learn first,” said Shenac Dhu.

But Shenac had tried Mary Matheson's wheel more than once; and besides, as Mr Rugg had often said, and now triumphantly repeated, she had a “faculty.” There really did seem nothing that she could not learn to do more easily than other people. Now the long thread was drawn out even and fine as any that ever passed through the mother's hands on the precious little wheel. The mother examined and approved, Shenac Dhu exclaimed, and the little lads laughed and clapped their hands. As for Shenac Bhan, she could hardly believe in her own good fortune. She did not seem to hear the talk or the laugh, but, with a face intent and grave, walked up and down, drawing out the long, even threads, and then letting them roll up smoothly on the spindle.

“Take it moderate, Miss Shenac,” said the peddler, “take it moderate. It don't pay to overdo even a good thing.”

But Shenac was busy calculating how many days' work there might be in the wool, and how long it would take her to finish it.

“The rainy days will not be lost now,” she said to herself triumphantly. “Of course I must stick to the hay; but mornings and evenings and rainy days I can spin. No fear for the lads' clothes now.”

“Hamish,” said Shenac Dhu, “I shall never see her without fancying she has a wheel on her head.”

Hamish laughed. His pleasure in the pleasure of his sister was intense.

“I don't know what we can ever say to Christie for her kindness,” he said.

“We'll write a letter to her, Hamish, you and I together,” said his sister eagerly. “I can't think how it all happened. But I am so glad and thankful; and I must tell Christie.”

The next day was fair. When Shenac went out with little Hugh to the milking in the pasture, she thought she heard the pleasant sound of the whetting of scythes nearer than the fields of Angus Dhu. She could see nothing, however, because of the mist that lay close over the low lands. But when she went out after breakfast to spread the grass cut by Dan during the rainy days, she found work going on that made Dan's efforts seem like play.

“Is it a bee?” said Shenac to herself.

No, it was not a bee, Aleck Munroe said, but he and the other lads thought there was as much hay down in their fields as could be well cared for, and so they thought they would see what could be done in their neighbour's. It was likely to continue fine now, as the weather had cleared at the change of the moon; and a few hours would help here, without hindering there.

“Help! Yes, indeed!” thought Shenac as she watched the swinging of the scythes, and saw the broad swaths of gram that fell as they passed on. Dan followed, but he made small show after the young giants that had taken the work in hand; and in a little while he made a virtue of necessity and exchanged the scythe for the spreading−pole, to help Shenac and the little ones in the merry, healthful work.

After this there were no more rainy days while the hay−time lasted. Shenac and Dan were not the first in all the concessions to finish the getting in of the hay, but they were by no means the last. It was all got in in a good state, too; and the grain− harvest began cheerfully and ended successfully. Shenac took the lead in the cutting of the grain.

In those days, in that part of the country, there were none of those wonderful machines which now begin to make farm−work light. The horses were used to draw the grain and hay to the barn or the stacks when it was ready; but there were no patent rakes or mowing or reaping machines for them to draw. All the wheat, and a good deal of the other grain, was cut down with the old−fashioned hook or sickle, the reapers stooping low to their work. It was tedious and exhausting labour, and slow, too. Shenac's “faculty” and perfect health stood her in good stead at this work as at other things. She tired herself thoroughly every day, but she was young and strong; and though the summer nights were short there was no part of them lost to her, for she fell asleep the moment her head touched the pillow. Even thoughts of the weary and suffering Hamish did not often disturb her rest. She slept the dreamless sleep of perfect health till the dawn awakened her, cheerful and ready for another day's labour.

They had very little help for the harvest. There was one moonlight bee. They say the grain is more easily cut with the dew upon it; and moonlight bees are common in Glengarry even now. But Shenac and her brothers knew nothing of this one till, on going out in the morning, they found more than half of their wheat lying ready to be bound up in sheaves.

The rest of the harvest was very successful. Indeed, it was a favourable harvest everywhere that year. There was rejoicing through all the township—through many town−ships; and even the most earthly and churlish of the farmers assented with a good grace when a day of thanksgiving was appointed, and kept it outwardly in appearance, if not inwardly with the heart.

As for Shenac, it would be impossible to describe her triumph and thankfulness when the last sheaf was safely gathered in. For she was truly thankful, though I am afraid her triumphant self− congratulation went even beyond her thankfulness. Her thankfulness was not displayed in a way that made it apparent to others; but it filled her heart and gave her courage to look forward. It did more than this: it gave her a self−reliance quite unusual—indeed not very desirable—in one so young; and there was danger, all the greater because she was quite unconscious of it, that it might degenerate into something different from an humble yet earnest self−reliance. But there was nothing of that as yet, and all the little household rejoiced together.

The spinning too had prospered. In the mornings and evenings, and on rainy days, the wheel had been busy; and now the yarn, dyed and ready, lay in the house of weaver McLean, waiting to be woven into heavy cloth for the boys; and the flannel for shirts and gowns would not be long behind. So Shenac made a pause, and took time to breathe, as Hamish said.

And, really, with a plentiful harvest gathered safely in, there seemed little danger of want; and Shenac's thoughts were more hopeful than anxious when she looked forward. The mother was more cheerful, too, than she had been since the father's death. She was always cheerful now, when matters went smoothly and regularly among them. It was only when vexations arose, when Dan was restless or inclined to be rebellious, or when the children stood in need of anything which they could not get, or when she fancied that the affairs of the farm were not going on well, that she grieved over the past or fretted for the home−coming of Allister. The little ones went to school again after the harvest—the little boys and Flora; and altogether matters seemed to promise to move smoothly on, and so the mother was content.

There was one thing that troubled the mother and Shenac too. The harvest−work had been hard on Hamish, and in the haste and eagerness of the busy time Shenac had not been so mindful of him as she might have been, and he suffered for it afterwards; and it grieved them all that his voice should be so seldom heard as it was among them, for Hamish never complained. The more he suffered, the more quiet he grew. It was not bodily pain alone with which he struggled on in silence. It was something harder to bear—a sense of helplessness and uselessness, a fear of becoming a burden when there was so much to bear already. And, worse than even this, there was the knowledge that there lay no bright future before him, as there might lie before the rest. He must always be a

helpless cripple. He could have no hope beyond the weary round of suffering which fell to his lot day by day. What the others did with a will, with a sense of power and pleasure, was a weariness to him. There were times when he wished that death might come and end it all; but he never spoke of himself, unless Shenac made him speak. His fits of depression did not occur often, and Shenac came at last to think it was better to let them pass without notice; and, though her eye grew more watchful and her voice more tender, she said nothing for a while, but waited patiently for more cheerful days.

CHAPTER EIGHT.

I dislike to speak about the faults of Shenac. It would be far pleasanter to go on telling all that she did for her mother and brothers and little Flora—how her courage never failed, and her patience and temper very seldom; and how the neighbours looked on with wonder and pleasure at all the young girl was able to accomplish by her sense and energy, till they quite forgot that she was little more than a child—not sixteen when her father died—and spoke of her as a woman of prudence and a credit to her family. She looked like a woman. She was tall and strong. She seemed, indeed, to have the health and strength which should have fallen to her twin−brother Hamish; and she was growing to seem to all the neighbours much older than he. I suppose this change would have come in any circumstances, after a while, for girls of seventeen are generally more mature than boys of the same age; but the change was more decided in Shenac because of the care that had fallen on her so early. Still, they were alike. They had the same golden−brown hair, though the brother's was of a darker shade, the same blue eyes, and frank, open brow. But the eyes of Hamish had a weary look, and his brow looked higher and broader because of the thin pale cheeks beneath it; and while he grew more quiet and retiring every day, no one could have been long in the house without seeing in many ways that Shenac was the ruling spirit there.

It was right it should be so. It could not have been otherwise, for her mother was broken in health and spirits, and Allister was away. Hamish was not able to take the lead in the labour, because of his lameness and his feeble health; and though he had great influence in the family councils, it was exercised indirectly, by quiet, sensible words, and by a silent good example to the rest.

As for Dan, his will was strong enough to command an army, and he had a great deal of good sense hidden beneath a reckless manner; but he was two years younger than his sister—quite too young and inexperienced, even if he had been steady and industriously disposed, to take the lead. So of course the leadership fell upon Shenac.

They all said, after a while—the neighbours, I mean—that it could not have fallen into better hands; and, as far as the family affairs were concerned, that was true. But for Shenac herself it was not so well. It is never well to take girls quickly out of their childhood, and it was especially bad for her to have so much the guidance of these affairs, for she naturally liked to lead—to have her own way; and, without being at all conscious of it, there were times when she grew sharp and arbitrary, expecting to be obeyed unquestioningly by them all.

She was always gentle with the mother, who sometimes was desponding and irritable, and needed a great deal of patient attendance; but even with the mother she liked to have her own way. Generally, Shenac's way was the best, to be sure; for the mother, weakened in mind and body, saw difficulties in very trifling things, and fancied dangers and troubles where the bright, cheerful spirit of her daughter saw none. So, though she yielded in word, she often in deed gave less heed to the mother's wishes than she ought to have done, and she was in danger, through this, of growing less lovable as the years went on.

But a sadder thing happened to Shenac than this. In the eagerness with which she devoted herself to her work she forgot higher duties. For there is a higher duty than that which a child owes to parents and friends—the duty owed to God. I do not mean that these are distinct and separate, or that they naturally and necessarily interfere with each other. Quite the contrary. It is only as our duty to our Father in heaven is understood and acknowledged that any other duty can be well or acceptably performed. And so, in forgetting God, Shenac was in danger of allowing her work to become a snare to her.

Humbly acknowledging God in all her ways, asking and expecting and waiting for his blessing in all that she undertook, she would hardly have grown unduly anxious or arbitrary or heedless of her mother's wish and will. Conscious of her own weakness, and leaning on eternal strength, she would hardly have grown proud with success, or sinfully impatient when her will was crossed.

But in those long, busy summer days, Shenac said to herself she had no time to think of other things than the work which each day brought. They had worship always, morning and evening, whatever the hurry might be. The Scriptures were read and a psalm was sung, and then the mother or Hamish offered a few words of prayer. They would as soon have thought of going without their morning and evening meals as without worship. It would have been a godless and graceless house, indeed, without that, in the opinion of those who had been accustomed to

family worship all their lives.

Shenac was not often consciously impatient of the time it took, and her voice was clearest and sweetest always in their song of praise. But too often it was her voice only that rose to Heaven. Her heart was full of other things; her thoughts often wandered to the field or the dairy, even when the words of prayer or praise were on her lips. She lost the habit of the few minutes' quiet reading of her Bible in the early morning, and also before she went to bed; and her prayers were brief and hurried, and sometimes they were forgotten altogether. She and Hamish had always been fond of reading, and though few new books found their way among them, they had gone over and over the old ones, liking them chiefly because of the long talks to which they gave rise between them.

Many of their favourite books were religious, and various were the speculations as to doctrine and duty into which they used to fall. There might have been some danger in this, had not a spirit of reverence for God's authority been deep and strong within them. It was to the infallible standard of the inspired volume that all things were brought. With what is written there all theories and opinions were compared, and received or rejected according as they agreed with or differed from the voice of inspiration. I do not mean that they were always right in their judgment, or that their speculations were not sometimes foolish and vain. But their spirit was right. They sought to know the truth, and, in a way, they helped each other to walk in it.

But all this seemed past now. There was no time for reading or for talking—at least Shenac had none. All day she was too busy, and at night she was too weary. Even the long, quiet Sabbath−day was changed. Not that there was work done on that day, either within or without the house. I daresay there were many in the township who did not keep the law of the Sabbath rest in spirit; but there were none in those days who did not keep it in letter, in appearance. In the fields, which through the week were the scenes of busy labour, on the Sabbath not a sound was heard save in the pastures—the lowing of the cattle and the bleating of the sheep.

Few people made the labour of the week an excuse for turning the Sabbath into a day of rest for the body only. The old hereditary respect for God's day and house still prevailed among them, and the great, grey, barn−like house of worship, which had been among the first built in the settlement, was always filled to overflowing with a grave and reverent congregation.

But among them, during all that long summer, Shenac was seldom seen. Her mother went when it was not too warm to walk the long three miles that lay between their house and the kirk, or when she got a seat in a neighbour's waggon; and Hamish and Dan were seldom away. But Shenac as seldom went.

“What is the use of going?” she said, in answer to her mother's expostulations, “when I fall asleep the moment the text is given out. It's easy to say I should pay attention to the sermon. The minister's voice would put me to sleep if I were standing at the wheel. Sometimes it takes the sound of the water, and sometimes of the wind; but it's hush−a−by that it says to me all the time. And, mother, I think it's a shame to sleep in the kirk, like old Donald or Elspat Smith. Somebody must stay at home, and it may as well be me.”

I daresay it was not altogether the fault of the minister that Shenac fell asleep, though his voice was a drowsy drone to many a one besides her. The week's activity was quite sufficient to account for her drowsiness, to say nothing of the bright sunshine streaming in through ten uncurtained windows, and the air growing heavy with the breathing of a multitude. Shenac tried stoutly, once and again; but it would not do. The very earnestness with which she fixed her eyes on the kindly, inanimate face of the minister hastened the slumber; and, touched by her mother or Hamish, she would waken to see two or three pairs of laughing eyes fastened upon her. Indeed she did think it a shame; but it was a yam struggle listening to words which bore little interest, scarcely a meaning, to her. So she stayed at home, and made the Sabbath−day a day of rest literally; for as soon as the others were away, and her light household tasks finished, she took her book and fell asleep, as surely, and far more comfortably, than she did when she went to the kirk; so that, as a day in which to grow wiser and better, the Sabbath was lost to Shenac.

She was by no means satisfied with herself because of this, for in her heart she did not believe her weariness was a sufficient excuse for staying away from the kirk; so whenever there was a meeting of any sort in the school−house, which happened once a month generally, Shenac was sure to be there. It was close by, and it was in the evening, and she could take Flora and her little brothers, who could seldom go so far as the kirk.

“Shenac,” said her cousin one day, “why were you not at the kirk last Sabbath? Such a fine day as it was; and to think of your letting Hamish go by himself!”

“He did not go by himself; Dan went with him, and you came home with him. And I did go to the kirk—at least I went to the school−house, where old Mr Forbes preached,” said Shenac.

“Toch!” exclaimed Shenac Dhu scornfully; “do you call *that* going to the kirk? Yon poor old body—do you call *him* a minister? They say he used to make shoes at home. I'm amazed at you, Shenac! you that's held up to the rest of us as a woman of sense!”

Shenac Bhan laughed.

“Oh, as to his making shoes, you mind Paul made tents; and his sermons are just like other folk's sermons: I see no difference.”

“The texts are like other folk's, you mean,” said Shenac Dhu slyly. “I daresay you take a nap when he's preaching.”

“No,” said Shenac Bhan, not at all offended; “that's just the difference. I never sleep in the school−house. I suppose because it's cool, and I have a sleep before I go,” she added candidly. “But as for the sermons, they are just like other folk's.”

“But that is nonsense,” said Shenac Dhu. “He's just a common man, and does not even preach in Gaelic.”

“But our Shenac would say Paul did not do that, nor Dr Chalmers, nor plenty more,” said Hamish, laughing.

“Hamish,” said Shenac Dhu severely, “don't encourage her in what is wrong. Elder McMillan says it's wrong to go, and so does my father. They don't even sing the Psalms, they say.”

“That's nonsense, at any rate,” said Shenac Bhan. “The very last Sabbath they sang,—

“`I to the hills will lift mine eyes.'

“You can tell the elder that, and your father, if it will be any consolation to them.”

“Our Shenac sang it,” said little Hugh. “John Keith wasn't there, and the minister himself began the tune of Dundee. You should have heard him when he came to the high part.”

“I've heard him,” said Shenac Dhu; and she raised her voice in a shrill, broken quaver, that made them all laugh, though Shenac Bhan was indignant too, and bade her cousin mind about the bears that tore the mocking children.

“But our Shenac sang it after, and me and little Flora,” continued Hugh. “And, Shenac, what was it that the minister said afterwards about the new song?”

But Shenac would have no more said about it. She cared very little for Shenac Dhu's opinion, or for her father's either. She went to the school whenever the old man held a meeting there, and took the children with her. It was a great deal less trouble than taking them all so far as to the kirk, she told her mother; and whatever the elder and Angus Dhu might say, the old man's sermons were just like other folk's sermons.

About this time there came a letter from Allister. The tidings of his father's death had reached him just as he was about to start for the mining district with his cousin and others; he had entered into engagements which made it necessary for him to go with them,—or he thought so. He said he would return home as soon as possible; but for the sake of all there he must not come till he had at least got gold enough to pay the debt, so that he might start fair. He could not, at so great a distance, advise his mother what to do; but he knew she had kind friends and neighbours, who would not let things go wrong till he came home, which would be at the earliest possible day. In the meantime, he sent some money—not much, but all he had—and he begged his mother to keep her courage up, for the sake of the children with her, and for his sake who was far away.

This letter had been so long in coming, that somehow they had fallen into the way of thinking that there would be no letter, but that Allister must be on his way; so, when Shenac got it, it was with many doubts and fears that she carried it home to her mother. She dreaded the effect this disappointment might have on her in her enfeebled state, and shrank in dismay from a renewal of the scenes that had followed her father's death and the burning of the house.

But she need not have feared. It was indeed a disappointment to the mother that the coming home of her son must be delayed, and she grieved for a day or two. But everything went on just as usual, and gradually she settled down contentedly to her spinning and knitting again; and you may be sure that whatever troubles fell to the lot of Shenac, she did not suffer her mother to be worried by them.

And Shenac had many anxieties about this time. Of course she had none peculiar to herself; that is, she had none which were not shared by Hamish, and in a certain sense by Dan. But Hamish would have been content with moderate things. Just to rub on as quietly and easily as possible till Allister came home, was all he thought they should try to do. And as for Dan, the future and its troubles lay very lightly on him.

But with Shenac it was different. That the hay and grain were safely in was by no means enough to satisfy her.

If Allister had been coming soon, it might have been; but now there was the fall ploughing, and the sowing of the wheat, and the flax must be broken and dressed, and the winter's wood must be got up, and there were fifty other things that ought to be done before the snow came. There was far more to do than could be done by herself, or she would not have fretted. But when Hamish told her to “take no thought for the morrow,” and that she ought to trust as well as work, she lost patience with him. And when Dan quoted Angus Dhu, and spoke vaguely of what must be done in the spring, quite losing sight of what lay ready at his hand to do, she nearly lost patience with him too. Not quite, though. It was a perilous experiment to try on Dan—a boy who might be led, but who would not be driven; and many a time Shenac wearied herself with efforts so to arrange matters that what fell to Dan to do might seem to be his own proposal, and many a time he was suffered to do things in his own way, though his way was not always the best, because otherwise there was some danger that he would not do them at all.

Not that Dan was a bad boy, or very wilful, considering all things. But he was approaching the age when boys are supposed to see very clearly their masculine superiority; and to be directed by a woman how to do a man's work was more than a man could stand.

If he could have been trusted, Shenac thought, she would gladly have given up to him the guidance of affairs, and put herself at his disposal to be directed. Perhaps she was mistaken in this. She enjoyed the leadership. She enjoyed encountering and conquering difficulties. She enjoyed astonishing (and, as she thought, disappointing) Angus Dhu; and though she would have scorned the thought, she enjoyed the knowledge that all the neighbours saw and wondered at, and gave her the credit of, the successful summer's work.

But her being willing or unwilling made no difference. Dan was not old enough nor wise enough to be trusted with the management. The burden of care must fall on her, and the burden of labour too; and she set herself to the task with more intentness than ever when the letter came saying that Allister was not coming home.

CHAPTER NINE.

It was a bright day in the end of September. Shenac had been busy at the wheel all the morning, but the very last thread of their flannel was spun now. The wheel was put away, and Shenac stood before her mother, dressed in her black gown made for mourning when her father died. Her mother looked surprised, for this gown was never worn except at church, or when a visit was to be made.

"Mother," said Shenac, "I have made ready the children's supper, and filled the sacks in case Dan should want to go to the mill, and I want to go over to see if Shenac and Maggie can come some day to help me with the flax."

The mother assented, well pleased, for it was a long time since Shenac had gone to the house of Angus Dhu of her own will.

"And, mother, maybe I'll go with Shenac as far as The Eleventh. It's a long time since I have seen Mary Matheson, and I'll be home before dark."

"Well, well, go surely, if you like," said her mother; "and you might speak to McLean about the flannel, and bespeak McCallum the tailor to come as soon as he can to make the lads' clothes; and you might ask about the shoes."

"Yes, mother, I'll mind them all. I'll just speak to Hamish first, and then I'll away."

Hamish was in the garden digging and smoothing the ground where their summer's potatoes had grown, because he had nothing else to do, he said, and it would be so much done before the spring. Shenac seated herself on the fence, and began pulling, one by one, the brown oak leaves that hung low over it. There was no gate to the garden. It was doubtful whether a gate could have been made with sufficient strength, or fastened with sufficient ingenuity, to prevent the incursions of the pigs and calves, which, now that the fields were clear from grain, were permitted to wander over them at their will. So the garden was entered by a sort of stile—a board was placed with one end on the ground, and the other on the middle rail of the fence—and it was on this that Shenac sat down.

"Hamish," she said after a little, "what do you think of my asking John Firinn to plough the land for the wheat—and to sow it too, for that matter?"

"I don't think you had better call him by *that* name, if you want him to do you a favour," said Hamish, laughing. "But why ask John Firinn of all the folk in the world?"

("Firinn" is the Gaelic name for "truth," and it was added to the name of one of the many John McDonalds of the neighbourhood; not, I am sorry to say, because he always spoke the truth, but because he did not.)

Shenac laughed.

"No; it's not likely. But I'm doing it for him because his wife has been sick all the summer, and has not a thread of her wool spun yet, and I am going to change work with them."

"But, Shenac," said Hamish gravely, "does our mother know? I am sure she will think you have enough to do at home, without going to spin at John Firinn's."

"I should not go there, of course; they must let me bring the wool home. And there's no use in telling my mother till I see whether they'll agree. It would only vex her. And, Hamish, it's all nonsense about my having too much to do. There's only the potatoes; and Hugh can bide at home from the school to gather them and the turnips, and Dan will be as well pleased if I leave them to him. I am only afraid that he has been fancying he is to plough, and he's not fit for it."

"No, he's not fit for it," said Hamish. "But I don't like John Firinn. Is there no one else?"

"No; for if we speak to the Camerons or Angus Dhu, it will just be the same as saying we want them to make a bee. I hate bees,— for us, I mean. It was well enough when they all thought it was just for the summer, and that then Allister would be home. But now we must do as other folk do, and be independent. So I must speak to John. He's not very trustworthy, I'm afraid; but that's maybe because few trust him. I don't think he'll wrong my mother, if he promises to do the land."

"Perhaps you are right, Shenac," said Hamish with a sigh.

"But, Hamish," said Shenac eagerly, "*you* could not do this work, even if you were well and strong." She was not answering his words, but the thoughts which she knew were in his heart. "Come with me, Hamish. It will do you good, and it would be far better for you to make a bargain with John Firinn than for me. Shenac yonder is

going. Come with us, Hamish."

"No," said Hamish. "The children are at the school, and maybe Dan will go to the mill; and my mother must not be left alone. And you are the one to make the bargain about the spinning. I don't believe John will be hard upon you; and if you are shamefaced, Shenac yonder will speak for you."

But Shenac did not intend her cousin to know anything about the matter till it should be settled, though she did not tell her brother so. She went away a little anxious and uncertain. For though she had been the main dependence all summer for the work both in the house and in the field, she had had very little to do with other people; and her heart failed her at the thought of speaking to any one about their affairs, especially to John Firinn. So it was with a slow step and a troubled face that she took her way over the field to find her cousin.

She had been a little doubtful all day whether she should find Shenac at home and at liberty to go with her, but she never thought of finding Shenac's father there. They were rolling— that is, clearing off—the felled trees in Angus Dhu's farther field, she knew, and Shenac might be there, and she thought that her father must be. She had not met Angus Dhu face to face fairly since that May−day by the creek; that is, she had never seen him unless some one else was present, and the thought of doing so was not at all pleasant to her. So when, on turning the corner, she saw his tall and slightly−bent figure moving towards her, in her first surprise and dismay she had some thoughts of turning and running away. She did not, however, but came straight on up the path.

"I was not sure it was you, Shenac," was her uncle's greeting; "you are seen here so rarely. It must be something more than common that brings you from home to−day, you have grown such a busy woman."

"I came for Cousin Shenac to go with me to Mary Matheson's, if she can be spared. Is she at home to−day?" said Shenac, with some hesitation, for she would far rather have made her request to Shenac's mother.

"Oh yes, she's at home. Go into the house. I daresay her mother will spare her." And he repeated a Gaelic proverb, which being translated into English would mean something like, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Shenac smiled to herself as she thought of her mother's many messages and her dreaded mission to John Firinn. It did not seem much like play to her.

But burdens have a way of slipping easily from young shoulders, and the two Shenacs went on their way cheerily enough, and I daresay a stranger meeting them might have fancied that our Shenac was the lighter−hearted of the two. The cloud fell again, however, when they came to the turn of the road that took them to Mary Matheson's.

"I have to go down to the McDonalds', Shenac. Just go on, and I will follow you in two or three minutes."

"To the McDonalds'!" repeated Shenac Dhu. "Not to John Firinn's surely? What in all the world can you have to do with him? You had better take me with you, Shenac. They say John has a trick of forgetting things sometimes. You might need me for a witness."

Shenac Bhan laughed and shook her head.

"There's no need. Go on to Mary's, and tell her I am coming. I shall not be long."

She wished heartily that Hamish had been with her, or that she could have honestly said her mother had sent her; for it seemed to her that she was taking too much upon her to be trying to make a bargain with a man like John Firinn. There was no help for it now, however, and she knocked at the door, and then lifted the latch and went in with all the courage she could summon.

She did not need her courage for a little time, however; but her tact and skill in various matters—her "faculty," as Mr Rugg called it—stood her in good stead for the next half−hour.

Seated on a low chair, looking ill and harassed, was poor Mrs McDonald, with a little wailing baby on her knee, and her other little ones clustering round her, while her husband, the formidable John himself, was doing his best to prepare dinner for all of them. It was long past dinner−time, and it promised to be longer still before these little hungry mouths would be stopped by the food their father was attempting to prepare. For he was unaccustomed and inexpert, and it must have added greatly to the sufferings of his wife to see his blundering movements, undoing with one hand what he did with the other, and using his great strength where only a little skill was needed. Shenac hesitated a moment, and then advanced to Mrs McDonald.

"Are you no better? Can I do anything for you?—Let me do that," she added hastily, as she saw the success of the dinner put in jeopardy by an awkward movement of the incompetent cook. In another moment Shenac's black dress was pinned up, and soon the dinner was on the table, and the father and children were seated at it. To her husband's entreaty that she would try and eat something, the poor woman did not yield. She was flushed and

feverish, and evidently in great pain.

"I am afraid you are in pain," said Shenac, as she turned to her, offering to take the baby.

"Yes; I let my sister go home too soon, and what with one thing and another, I am nearly as bad as ever again." And she pressed her hand on her breast as she spoke.

A few more words told the state of the case, and in a little time the pain was relieved by a warm application, and the weary woman lay down to rest. Then there was some porridge made for the baby. Unsuitable food it seemed, but the little creature ate it hungrily, and was soon asleep. Then the kettle was boiled, and the poor woman surprised herself and delighted Shenac by drinking a cup of tea and eating a bit of toasted bread with relish. Then her hands and face were bathed, and her cap straightened, and she declared herself to be much better, as indeed it was easy to see she was. Then Shenac cleared the dinner−things away and swept the hearth, the husband and wife looking on.

When all this was done, Shenac did not think it needed so much courage to make her proposal about the change of work. Mrs McDonald looked anxiously at her husband, who had listened without speaking.

"I think I could spin it to please you," said Shenac. "My mother is pleased with ours, though she did not like the big wheel at first; and you can speak to weaver McLean. I don't think he has had much trouble with the weaving. I would do my best."

"Could you come here and do it?" asked John. "Because, if you could, it would be worth while doing the ploughing just to see you round, let alone the wool."

Shenac shook her head. She was quite too much in earnest to notice the implied compliment.

"No; that would be impossible. I could not be away from home. My mother could not spare me. She is not so strong as she used to be. But I would soon do it at home. Our work is mostly over now. Our land does much the best with the fall wheat, and the wheat is our main dependence."

"I'm rather behind with my own work," began John; "and I heard something said about the Camerons doing your field, with some help."

"Oh, a bee," said Shenac. "But that is just what I will not have. I don't want to seem ungrateful. All the neighbours have been very kind," she added humbly. "But now that Allister is not coming home, we must carry on the place by ourselves, or give it up. We must not be expecting too much from our neighbours, or they will tire of us. And I don't want a bee; though everybody has been very kind to us in our trouble."

She was getting anxious and excited.

"Bees are well enough in their way," said Mrs McDonald. "And some of the neighbours were saying they would gather one to help me with the wool. But, John, man, if you could do this for the widow Macivor, I would far rather let Shenac do the wool."

"I would do it well," said Shenac. "I would begin to−morrow."

"But if you were to do the wool, and then something was to happen that I could not plough or sow the field, what then?" asked John gravely.

Shenac looked at him, but said nothing.

"What could happen, John, man?" said his wife.

"We could have it written down, however," said John, "and that would keep us to our bargain. Should we have it written down, Shenac?"

"If you like," said Shenac gravely; "but there is no need. I would begin the wool to−morrow, and do it as soon as I could."

"Oh ay, oh ay! but you might need the bit of writing to bind *me*, Shenac, my wise woman. I might slip out of it when the wool was done."

"John, man!" remonstrated his wife.

"You would never do that," said Shenac quietly. "If you wished to do it, a paper would not hold you to it. I don't see the use of a writing; but if you want one I don't care, of course."

But neither did John care, and so they made the bargain. John was to charge the widow a certain sum for the work to be done, and Shenac was to be allowed the usual price for a day's work of spinning; and it was thought that when the wool was spun and the field ploughed and sowed, they would be about even. There might be a little due on one side or the other, but it would not be much.

"Well then, it's all settled," said Shenac, and she did not attempt to conceal her satisfaction.

It came into John's mind that being settled was one thing and being done was quite another; but he did not say so. He said to himself, as he saw Shenac busy about his wife and child,—

"If there is a way to put that wheat in better than wheat was ever put in before, I shall find it out and do it."

He said the same to his wife, as together they watched her running down the road to meet Shenac Dhu.

"What in the world kept you so long?" asked her cousin. "Have you been hearkening to one of John Firinn's stories? Better not tell it again. What made you bide so long?"

"Do you know how ill the wife has been?" asked Shenac Bhan. Then she told how she found the poor woman suffering, and about the children and their dinner, and so was spared the necessity of telling what her business with John had been.

Greatly to the surprise of Angus Dhu and all the neighbours, in due time John McDonald brought his team into the widow Macivor's field. Many were the prophecies brought by Dan to Hamish and Shenac as to the little likelihood there was of his doing the work to the satisfaction of all concerned.

"It will serve you right too, Shenac," said the indignant Dan. "To think of a girl like you fancying you could make a bargain with a man like John Firinn!"

"Is it Angus Dhu that is concerned, and the Camerons?" asked Shenac. "It's a pity they shouldn't be satisfied. But if the work is done to please the mother and Hamish and me, they'll need to content themselves, I doubt, Dannie, my lad."

"Johnnie Cameron said they were just going to call a bee together and do it up in a day or two; and then it would have been done right, and you would have been saved three weeks' spinning besides."

"We're obliged to the Camerons all the same," said Shenac a little sharply. "But if it had needed six weeks' spinning instead of three, it would please me better to do it than to trouble the Camerons or anybody. Why should we need help more than other folk?" she added impatiently. "I'm ashamed of you, Dan, with your bees."

"Well, I'll tell them what you say, and you'll not be troubled with their offers again, I can tell you," said Dan sulkily.

"You'll do nothing of the kind," said Hamish. "Nonsense, Dan, my lad; Shenac is right, and she's wrong too. She's right in thinking the less help we need the better; but she should not speak as though she did not thank the neighbours for their wishing to help us."

"Oh, I'm very thankful," said Shenac, dropping a mocking courtesy to Dan. "But I'm not half so thankful for their help as I am for the chance to spin John Firinn's wool. And Dan can tell the Camerons what he likes. I'm not caring; only don't let us hear any more of their bees and their prophecies."

Lightly as Shenac spoke of the spinning of the wool, it was no light work to do. For her mother was not pleased that she had undertaken it without her knowledge and consent, and fretted, and cast difficulties in the way, till Shenac, more harassed and unhappy than she had ever been before, offered to break the bargain and send back the wool. Her mother did not insist on this, however, and Shenac span on in the midst of her murmurings. Then Hamish took the mother away to visit her sister in the next township, and during their absence Shenac kept little Flora away from the school to do such little things as she could do about the house, and finished the wool by doing six days' work in three, and then confessed to Dan in confidence, that she was as tired as she ever wished to be.

She need not have hurried so much, for mother came home quite reconciled to the spinning—indeed a little proud of all that had been said in Shenac's praise when the matter was laid before the friends they had been to see. So she said, as Mrs McDonald was far from well yet, she would dye her worsted for her; and Shenac was glad to rest herself with the pleasant three miles' walk to give the message and get directions.

Shenac's part of the bargain was fulfilled in spirit and letter; and certainly nothing less could be said as to the part of John Firinn. Even Angus Dhu and John Cameron, who kept sharp eyes on him during his work, had no fault to find with the way in which it was done. It was done well and in the right time, and it was with satisfaction quite inexpressible that Shenac looked over the smooth field and listened to her mother's congratulations that this was one good job well and timely done. Ever after that she was John McDonald's fast friend, and the friend of his sickly wife. No one ever ventured to speak a disrespectful word of John before her; and the successful sowing of the wheat−field was by no means the last piece of work he did, and did well, for the widow and her children.

CHAPTER TEN.

Winter set in early that year, but not too early for Shenac and her brothers. The winter preparations had all been made before the delightful stormy morning came, when Hugh and Colin and little Flora chased one another round and round in the door−yard, making many paths in the new−fallen snow. The house had been banked up with earth, and every crack and crevice in the roof and walls closed. The garden had been dug and smoothed as if the seeds were to be sown the next day. The barn and stable were in perfect order. The arrangements for tying up oxen and cows, which are always sure to get out of order in summer, had been made anew, and the farming−tools gathered safely under cover.

These may seem little things; but the comfort of many a household has been interfered with because such little things have been neglected. What may be done at any time is very often left till the right time is past, and disorder and discomfort are sure to follow. I daresay the early snow fell that year on many a plough left in the furrow, and on many a hoe and spade left in garden or yard. But all was as it should be at Mrs Macivor's.

In summer, when a long day's work in the field was the order of things, when those who were strong and able were always busy, it seemed to Hamish that he was of little use. This was a mistake of his. He was of great use in many ways, even when he went to the field late and left it early; for though Shenac took the lead in work and planning, she was never sure that her plans were wise, or even practicable, till she had talked them over with Hamish. She would have lost patience with Dan and the rest, and with her mother even, if she had not had Hamish to “empty her heart to.” But even Shenac, though she loved her brother dearly, and valued his counsels and sympathy as something which she could not have lived and laboured without—even she did not realise how much of their comfort depended on the work of his weak hands. It was Hamish who banked the house and made the garden; it was he who drove nails and filled cracks, who gathered up tools and preserved seeds, quietly doing what others did not do and remembering what others forgot. It was Hamish who cared for the creatures about the place; it was he who made and mended and kept in order many things which it would have cost money to get or much inconvenience to go without. So it may be said that it was owing to Hamish that the early snow did not find them unprepared.

A grave matter was under discussion within−doors that morning while little Flora and her brothers were chasing each other through the snow. It was whether Dan was to go to the school that winter. It was seldom that any but young children could go to school in the summer−time, the help of the elder ones being needed in the field as soon as they were old enough to help. But in the winter few young people thought themselves too old to go to school while the teacher could carry them on. Hamish and Shenac had gone up to the time of their father's death. But as for Dan, he thought himself old enough now to have done with school. He had never been, in country phrase, “a good scholar?”— that is, he had never taken kindly to his books—a circumstance which seemed almost like disgrace in the eyes of Shenac; and she was very desirous that he should get the good of this winter, especially as they were to have a new teacher, whose fame had preceded him. Dan was taking it for granted that he was the mainstay at home, and that for him school was out of the question. But the rest thought differently; and it was decided, much to his discontent, that when the winter's wood was brought, to school he must go.

Great was his disgust—so great that he began to talk about going to the woods with the lumberers; at which Shenac laughed, but Hamish looked grave, and bade him think twice before he gave his mother so sore a heart as such a word as that would do. Dan did think twice, and said nothing more about the woods. His going to school, however, did not do him much good in the way of learning, but it did in the way of discipline. At any rate, it left him less idle time than he would otherwise have had; and though his boyish mischief vexed Shenac often, things might have been worse with Dan, as Hamish said, and little harm was done.

Winter is a pleasant time in a country farm−house. In our country the summers are so short, and so much work must be crowded into them, that there is little time for any enjoyment, save that of doing well what is to be done, and watching the successful issue. But in winter there is leisure—leisure for enjoyment of various kinds, visiting, sewing, singing; and it is generally made the most of.

As for Shenac, the feeling that all the summer's work was successfully ended, that the farm−products were

safely housed beyond loss, gave her a sense of being at leisure, though her hands were full of work, and would be for a long time yet. The fulled cloth and the flannel came home. The tailor came for a week to make the lads' clothes, and she helped him with them; and tailor McCallum, though as a general thing rather contemptuous of woman's help, acknowledged that she helped him to purpose.

A great deal may be learned by one who begins by thinking nothing too difficult to learn; and Shenac's stitching and button−holes were something to wonder at before the tailor's visit was over.

Then came Katie Matheson to help with the new gowns. Shenac felt herself quite equal to these, but, as Shenac Dhu insisted, “Katie had been at M—−within the year, and knew the fashions;” so Katie came for a day or two. Of this wish to follow the fashion, the mother was inclined to speak severely; for what had young folk with their bread to win to do with the fashions of the idle people of the world? But even the mother did not object to following them when she found the wide, useless sleeves, so much sought after by foolish young girls, giving place to the small coat−sleeves which had been considered the thing in her own and her mother's youth. They were, as she said, far more sensible− like, and a saving besides. The additional width which Katie quietly appropriated to Shenac's skirt would have been declared a piece of sinful extravagance, if the mother had known of it before Shenac was turning round, from one to another, to be admired with the new dress on. She did cry out at the length. Why the stocking could only just be seen above the shoe tied round the slender ankle! There was surely no call to waste good cloth by making the skirt so long. “Never mind,” said Katie: “Flora's should be all the shorter;” and by that means little Flora was in the fashion too.

I daresay Shenac's pleasure in her new dress might have awakened amusement, perhaps contempt, among young people to whom new dresses are not so rare a luxury. But never a young belle of them all could have the same right to take pleasure and pride in silk or satin as Shenac had to be proud of her simple shepherd's plaid. She had shorn the wool, and spun and dyed it with her own hands. She had made it too, with Katie's help; and never was pleasure more innocent or more unmixed than hers, as she stood challenging admiration for it from them all.

Indeed, both the dress and the wearer might have successfully challenged admiration from a larger and less interested circle than that—at least, so thought the new master, who came in with Hamish while the affair was in progress. He had seen prettier faces, and nicer dresses too, it is to be supposed; but he had certainly never seen anything prettier or nicer than Shenac's innocent pride and delight in her own handiwork.

Shenac Dhu gave the whole a finishing touch as she drew round her cousin's not very slender waist a black band fastened with a silver clasp—an heirloom in the family since the time that the Macivors used to wear the Highland garb among their native hills.

“Now walk away and let us see you,” said she, giving her a gentle push.

Shenac minced and swung her skirts as she moved, as little children do when they are playing “fine ladies.” Even her mother could not help laughing, it was so unlike the busy, anxious Shenac of the last few months.

“Is she not a vain creature?” said Shenac Dhu. “No wonder that you look at her that way, Hamish, lad.”

The eyes of Hamish shone with pride and pleasure as they followed his sister.

“Next year I'll weave it myself,” said Shenac, coming back again. “You need not laugh, Shenac Dhu. You'll see.”

“Yes, I daresay. And where will you get your loom?” And Shenac Dhu put up both hands and made−believe to cut her hair. Shenac Bhan shook her head at her.

“I can learn to weave; you'll see. Anybody can learn anything if they try,” said Shenac.

“Except the binomial theorem,” said Hamish, laughing.

His sister shook her head at him too. Charmed with the “new kind of arithmetic” which Mr Rugg had brought, yet not enjoying any pleasure to the full unless his sister enjoyed it with him, Hamish had tried to beguile her into giving her spare hours to the study. But Shenac's mind was occupied with other things, and, rather scornful of labour which seemed to come to nothing, she had given little heed to it.

“I could learn that too, but what would be the good of it?” asked Shenac.

“Ask the master,” said Hamish.

“Well?” said Shenac, turning to Mr Stewart.

“Do you mean what is the good of algebra, or what would be the good of it to you?” asked Mr Stewart.

“What would be the good of it to me? I can never have any use for the like of that.”

“The discipline of learning it might be good for you,” said Mr Stewart. “I once heard a lady say that her

knowledge of Euclid had helped her to cut and make her children's clothes."

Shenac laughed.

"I daresay Katie here could have taught her more about it with less trouble."

"I daresay you are right," said the master. "And the discipline of the wheel and the loom, and of household care, may be far better than the discipline of study to prepare you for life and what it may bring you. I am sure this gown, for instance," he added, laying his finger on the sleeve, "has been worth far more to you already than the money it would bring. I mean the patience and energy expended on it will be of far more value to you; for you know these good gifts, well bestowed, leave the bestower all the richer for the giving."

"I don't know how that may be," said Shenac, "but I know I would rather have this gown of my own making than the prettiest one that Katie has made for twelve months."

I do not know how I came to speak of the winter as a season of leisure in connection with Shenac, for this winter was a very busy time with her. True, her work did not press upon her, so as to make her anxious or impatient, as it sometimes used to do in summer; but she was never idle. There were sewing and housework and a little wool−spinning, and much knitting of stockings and mittens for them all. The knitting was evening work, and, when Hamish was not reading aloud, Shenac's hands and eyes were busy with different matters. She read while she knitted, and enjoyed it greatly, much to her own surprise, for, as she told Hamish, she thought she had given up caring about anything but to work and to get on.

They had more books than usual this winter, and more help to understand them, so that instead of groping on alone, sometimes right and sometimes wrong, Hamish made great progress; and wherever Hamish was, Shenac was not far away. It was a very quiet winter in one way—there was not much visiting here and there. Hamish was not fit for that. Shenac went without him sometimes now. She was young, and her mind being at ease, she took pleasure in the simple, innocent merry−makings of the place. She was content to leave Hamish when she did not have to leave him alone, which rarely happened now. The master lived in the house of Angus Dhu, but it seemed that the humbler home of the widow and the company of Hamish suited him best, for scarcely two evenings passed without finding him there; and Shenac could go with a good heart, knowing that her brother was busy and happy at home.

Afterwards, when changes came, and new anxieties and cares pressed upon her, Shenac used to look back on this winter as the happiest time of her life. It was not merely that the summer's work had been successful, but that the summer's success seemed to make all their future secure. There was no doubt now about their being able to keep together and carry on the farm. That was settled. She was at rest—they were all at rest—about that. Their future did not depend now upon Allister's uncertain coming home. It would not be true to say she saw no difficulties in the way; but she saw none to daunt her. Even Dan seemed to have come to himself. He seemed to have forgotten his self−assertion—his "contrariness," as Shenac called it—and was a boy again, noisy and full of fun, but gentle and helpful too. The little ones were well and happy, and getting on well in school, as all the Macivors were bound to do. The mother was comparatively well and cheerful. Her monotonous flax−spinning filled up the quiet, uneventful days, and, untroubled by out−door anxieties, she was content.

But, in looking back over this happy time, it was to Hamish that Shenac's thoughts most naturally turned, for it was the happiness of her twin−brother, more than all the rest put together, that made the happiness of Shenac. And Hamish was happier, more like himself, than ever he had been since their troubles began. Not so merry, perhaps, as the Hamish of the former days; but he was happy, that was sure. He was far from well, and he sometimes suffered a good deal; but his illness was not of a kind to alarm them for his life, and unless he had been exposed in some way, or a sudden change of the weather brought on his old rheumatic pains, he was, on the whole, comfortable in health. But whether he suffered or not, he was happy, that was easily seen. There was no sitting silent through the long gloamings now, no weary drooping of his head upon his hands, no wearier struggle to look up and join in the household talk of the rest. There were no heart−sick broodings over his own helplessness, no murmurings as to the burden he might yet become. He did not often speak of his happiness in words, just as he had seldom spoken of his troubles; but every tone of his gentle voice and every glance of his loving eye spoke to the heart of his sister, filling it with content for his sake.

What was the cause of the change? what was the secret of her brother's peace? Shenac wondered and wondered. She knew it was through his friend, Mr Stewart, that her brother's life seemed changed; but, knowing this, she wondered none the less. What was his secret power? What could Hamish see in that plain, dark man, so

grave and quiet, so much older than he?

True, they had the common tie of a love of knowledge, and pored together over lines and figures and strange books as though they would never grow weary of it all. It was true that, more than any one had ever done before, the master had opened new paths of knowledge to the eager lad—that by a few quiet words he put more life and heart into a subject than others could do by hours and hours of talk. But all these things Shenac shared and enjoyed without being able to understand how, through the master, a new and peaceful influence seemed to have fallen on the life of Hamish.

She did not grudge it to him. She was not jealous of the new interest that had come to brighten her brother's life—at least at this time she was not. Afterwards, when new cares and vexations pressed upon her, she vexed herself with the thought that something had come between her brother and herself which made her troubles not so much his as they used to be, and she blamed this new friendship for the difference. But no such thoughts vexed these first pleasant months.

Hamish was indeed changed. Unrealised at first by himself, the most wonderful change that can come between the cradle and the grave had happened to him. He had found a secret spring of peace, hidden as yet from his sister's eyes. He had obtained a staff to lean on, which made his weakness stronger than her strength; and this had come to him through the master. There was a bond between the friends, stronger, sweeter, and more enduring than even that which united the twin brother and sister—the BOND OF BROTHERHOOD IN CHRIST On Norman Stewart had been conferred the highest of all honours; to him had been given the chief of all happiness. Through *his* voice the voice of Jesus had spoken peace to a troubled soul. To him it had been given so to hold forth the word of life that to a soul sitting in darkness a great light sprang up.

I cannot tell you how it came about, except that the heart of the master being full of love to Christ, it could not but overflow in loving words from his lips. Attracted first to Hamish by the patience and gentleness with which he suffered, he could not do otherwise than seek to lead him to the Great Healer; and his touch was life. Then all the shadows that had darkened the past and the future to the lame boy fled away. Gradually all the untoward circumstances of his life seemed to adjust themselves anew. His lameness, his suffering, his helplessness were no longer parts of a mystery, darkening all the future to him, but parts of a plan through which something better than a name and a place in the world might be obtained. Little by little he came to know himself to be one of God's favoured ones; and then he would not have turned his hand to win the lot that all his life had seemed the most desirable to him. Before his friend he saw such a life—a life of labour for the highest of all ends. Before himself he saw a life of suffering, a narrow sphere of action, helplessness, dependence; but he no longer murmured. He was coming to know, through the new life given him, how that “to do God's will is sweet, and to bear God's will is sweet—the one as sweet as the other, to those to whom he reveals himself;” and to have learned this is to rejoice for evermore.

The master's term of office came to an end, and the friends were to part. It was June by this time; and when he had bidden all the rest goodbye, Mr Stewart lingered still with Hamish at the gate. Hamish had said something about meeting again, and the master answered,—

“Yes, surely we shall meet again—if not here, yonder;” and he pointed upward. “We shall be true friends there, Hamish, bhodach; be sure of that.”

Tears that were not all sorrowful stood on the cheeks of Hamish, and he laid his face down on the master's shoulder without speaking.

“Much may lie between us and that time,” continued the master— “much to do, and, it may be, much to suffer; but it is sure to come.”

“For me, too,” murmured Hamish. “They also serve who only wait.”

“Yes,” said the master; “they who wait are blessed.”

“And I shall thank God all my life that he sent you here to me,” said Hamish.

“And I too,” said the master. “It seemed to me an untoward chance indeed that turned me aside from the path I had chosen and sent me here, and the good Father has put my doubts and fears to shame, in that he has given me you, and, through you, others, to be stars in my crown of rejoicing against that day. God bless you! Farewell.”

“God bless you, and farewell,” echoed Hamish.

So Mr Stewart went away, and Hamish watched till he was out of sight, and still stood long after that, till Shenac came to chide him for lingering out in the damp, and drew him in. She did not speak to him. There were

tears on his cheek, she thought, and her own voice failed her. But when they came to the light the tears were gone, but the look of peace that had rested on his face all these months rested on it still.

CHAPTER ELEVEN.

The happy winter drew to an end, and spring came with some pleasures and many cares. I am not going to tell all about what was done this spring and summer; it would take too long. Shenac and her brother had not the same eagerness and excitement in looking forward to the summer's work that they had had the spring before; but they had some experience, and were not afraid of failure. The spring work was well done, and with comparatively little help. The garden was made, and the first crop of weeds disposed of from some of the beds; and Shenac was beginning to look forward to the little pause in outdoor work that was to give her time for the wool again, when something happened. It was something which Shenac declared delighted her more than anything that had happened for a long time; and yet it filled her with dismay. An uncle, a brother of their mother, who resided in the neighbourhood of the C—−Springs, celebrated for their beneficial effects on persons troubled with rheumatic complaints, sent for Hamish to pass the rest of the summer at his house. The invitation was urgent. Hamish would be sure to get much benefit from the use of the baths, and would return home before winter, a new man.

Hamish alone hesitated; all the rest declared that he must go, and none more decidedly than Shenac. In the first delighted moment, she thought only of the good that Hamish was to get, and not at all of how they were to get on without him. She did not draw back when she thought of it, but worked night and day to get his things ready before the appointed time.

I do not know whether the union between twins is more tender and intimate than that between other brothers and sisters, but when Hamish went away it seemed to Shenac that half her heart had gone with him. The house seemed desolate, the garden and fields forsaken. Her longing for a sight of his face was unspeakable.

All missed him. A strange silence seemed to fall upon the household. They had hardly missed the master, in the bustle that had preceded the going away of Hamish; but now they missed them both. The quiet grew irksome to Dan, and he used in the evenings to go elsewhere—to Angus Dhu's or the Camerons'—thus leaving it all the quieter for the rest. The mother fretted a little for the lame boy, till a letter came telling that he had arrived safe and well, and not very tired; and then she was content.

As for Shenac, she betook herself with more energy than ever to her work. She did not leave herself time to be lonely. It was just the first moment of coming into the house and the sitting down at meals that she found unbearable. For the first few days her appetite quite failed her—a thing that had never happened within her memory before. But try as she might, the food seemed to choke her. There was nothing for it but to work, within doors or without, till she was too weary to stand, and then go to bed.

And, indeed, there was plenty to do. Not too much, however, Shenac thought—though having the share of Hamish added to her own made a great difference. But she would not have minded the work if only Dan had been reasonable. She had said to herself often, before Hamish went away, that she would be ten times more patient and watchful over herself than ever she had been before, and that Dan should have no excuse from her for being wilful and idle. It had come into her mind of late that Angus Dhu had not been far wrong when he said Dan was a wild lad, and she had said as much to Hamish. But Hamish had warned her from meddling with Dan.

“You must trust him, and show that you trust him, Shenac, if you would get any good out of him. He is just at the age to be uneasy, and to have plans and ways of his own, having no one to guide him. We must have patience with Dan a while.”

“If patience would do it,” said Shenac sadly.

But she made up her mind that, come what might, she would watch her words and her actions too with double care till Hamish came home again. She was very patient with Dan, or she meant to be so; but she had a great many things pressing on her at this time, and it vexed her beyond measure when he, through carelessness or indifference to her wishes, let things intrusted to him go wrong. She had self−command enough almost always to refrain from speaking while she was angry, but she could not help her vexed looks; and the manner in which she strove to mend matters, by doing with her own hands what he had done imperfectly or neglected altogether, angered Dan far more than words could have done.

They missed the peace−maker. Oh, how Shenac missed him in all things where Dan was concerned! She had not realised before how great had been the influence of Hamish over his brother, or, indeed, over them all. A

laughing remark from Hamish would do more to put Dan right than any amount of angry expostulation or silent forbearance from her. Oh, how she missed him! How were they to get through harvest−time without him?

"Mother," said Dan, as he came in to his dinner one day, "have you any message to The Sixteenth? I am going over to McLay's raising to−morrow."

"But, Dan, my lad, the barley is losing; and, for all that you could do at the putting up of the barn, it hardly seems worth your while to go so far," said his mother.

Shenac had not come in yet, but Shenac Dhu, who had come over on a message, was there.

"Oh, I have settled that, mother. The Camerons and Sandy McMillan are coming here in the morning. The barley will be all down by dinner−time, and they'll take their dinner here, and we'll go up together."

"But, Dan, lad, they have barley of their own. What will Shenac say? Have you spoken to your sister about it?" asked his mother anxiously.

"Oh, what about Shenac?" said Dan impatiently. "They will be glad to come. What's a short forenoon to them? And I believe Shenac hates the sight of one and all. What's the use of speaking to her?"

"Did you tell them that when you asked them?" said Shenac Dhu dryly.

"I haven't asked them yet," said Dan. "But what would they care for a girl like Shenac, if I were to tell?"

"Try and see," said Shenac Dhu. "You're a wise lad, Dan, about some things. Do you think it's to oblige you that Sandy McMillan is hanging about here and bothering folk with his bees and his bees? Why, he would go fifty miles and back again, any day of his life, for one glance from your sister's eye. Don't fancy that folk are caring for *you*, lad."

"Shenac Dhu, my dear," said her aunt in a tone of vexation, "don't say such foolish things, and put nonsense into the head of a child like our Shenac."

"Well, I won't, aunt; indeed I dare not," said Shenac Dhu, laughing, as at that moment Shenac Bhan came in.

"Shenac, what kept you?" said her mother fretfully. "Your dinner is cold. See, Dan has finished his."

"I could not help it, mother," said Shenac, sitting down. "It was that Sandy McMillan that hindered me. He offered to come and help us with the barley."

"And what did you say to him?" asked Shenac Dhu demurely.

"Oh, I thanked him kindly," said Shenac, with a shrug of her shoulders.

"I must see him. Where is he, Shenac?" said Dan. "He must come to−morrow, and the Camerons, and then we'll go to the raising together. Is he coming to−morrow?"

"No," said Shenac sharply; "I told him their own barley was as like to suffer for the want of cutting as ours. When we want him we'll send for him."

"But you did not anger him, Shenac, surely?" said her mother.

"No; I don't think it. I'm not caring much whether I did or not," said Shenac.

"Anger him!" cried Dan. "You may be sure she did. She's as grand as if she were the first lady in the country."

This was greeted by a burst of merry laughter from the two Shenacs. Even the mother laughed a little, it was so absurd a charge to bring against Shenac. Dan looked sheepishly from one to the other.

"Well, it's not me that says it," said Dan angrily; "plenty folk think that of our Shenac.—And you had no business to tell him not to come, when I had spoken to him."

"What will Sandy care for a girl like Shenac?" asked his cousin mockingly.

"Well, *I* care," persisted Dan. "She's always interfering and having her own way about things—and—"

"Whisht, Dan, lad," pleaded the mother.

"I didn't know that you had spoken to Sandy—not that it would have made any difference, however," added Shenac candidly.

"And, Dan, you don't suppose any one will care for what a girl like Shenac Bhan may say. He'll come all the same to please you," said Cousin Shenac.

"Whether he comes or not, I'm going to McLay's raising," said Dan angrily. "Shenac's not *my* mistress, yet a while."

"Whisht, Dan; let's have no quarrelling," pleaded the mother.— "Why do you vex him?" she continued, as Dan rushed out of the room.

"I did not mean to vex him, mother," said Shenac gently.

This was only one of many vexatious discussions that had troubled their peace during the summer. Sometimes

Shenac's conscience acquitted her of all blame; but, whether it did or not, she always felt that if Hamish had been at home all this might have been prevented. She did not know how to help it. Sometimes her mother blamed her more than was quite fair for Dan's fits of wilfulness and idleness, and she longed for Hamish to be at home again.

Dan went to the raising, and, I daresay, was none the better for the companionship of the offended Sandy. Shenac stayed at home and worked at the barley till it grew dark. She even did something at it when the moon rose, after her mother had gone to bed; but she herself was in bed and asleep before Dan came, so there was nothing more said at that time.

The harvest dragged a little, but they got through with it in a reasonable time. There were more wet weather and more anxiety all through the season than there had been last year; but, on the whole, they had reason to be thankful that it had ended so well. Shenac was by no means so elated as she had been last year. She was very quiet and grave, and in her heart she was beginning to ask herself whether Angus Dhu might not have been right, and whether she might not have better helped her mother and all of them in some other way. They had only just raised enough on the farm to keep them through the year, and surely they might have managed just to live with less difficulty. Even if Dan had been as good and helpful as he ought to have been, it would not have made much difference.

Shenac would not confess it to herself, much less to any one else, but the work of the summer had been a little too much for her strength and spirits. Her courage revived with a little rest and the sight of her brother. He did not come back quite a new man, but he was a great deal better and stronger than he had been for years; and the delight of seeing him go about free from pain chased away the half of Shenac's troubles. Even Dan's freaks did not seem so serious to her now, and she made up her mind to say as little as possible to Hamish about the vexations of the summer, and to think of nothing unpleasant now that she had him at home again.

But unpleasant things are not so easily set aside out of one's life, and Shenac's vexations with Dan were not over. He was more industrious than usual about this time, and worked at cutting and bringing up the winter's wood with a zeal that made her doubly glad that she had said little about their summer's troubles. He talked less and did more than usual; and Hamish bade his mother and Shenac notice how quiet and manly he was growing, when he startled them all by a declaration that he was going with the Camerons and some other lads to the lumbering, far up the Grand River.

“I'm not going to the school. I would not, even if Mr Stewart were coming back; and I am not needed at home, now that you are better, Hamish. You can do what is needed in the winter, so much of the wood is up; and, at any rate, I am going.”

Hamish entreated him to stay at home for his mother's sake, or to choose some less dangerous occupation, if he must go away.

“Dangerous! Nonsense, Hamish! Why should it be more dangerous to me than to the rest? I cannot be a child all my life to please my mother and Shenac.”

“No; that is true,” said Hamish; “but neither can you be a man all at once to please yourself. You are neither old enough nor strong enough for such work as is done in the woods, whatever you may think.”

“There are younger lads going to the woods than I am,” muttered Dan sulkily.

“Yes; but they are not going to do men's work nor get men's wages. If you are wise, you will bide at home.”

But all that Hamish could get from Dan was a promise that he would not go, as he had first intended, without his mother's leave. This was not easy to get, for the fate of Lewis might well fill the mother's heart with terror for Dan, who was much younger than his brother had been. But she consented at last, and Shenac and Hamish set themselves to make the best of Dan's going, for their mother's sake.

“He'll be in safe keeping with the Camerons, mother, and it will do him good to rough it a little. We'll have him back in the spring, more of a man and easier to do with,” said Hamish.

But the mother was not easily comforted. Dan's going brought too vividly back the going of those who had never returned; and the mother fretted and pined for the lad, and murmured sometimes that, if Shenac had been more forbearing with him, he might not have wanted to go. She did not know how she hurt her daughter, or she never would have said anything like that, for in her heart she knew that Shenac was not to blame for the waywardness of Dan. But Shenac did not defend herself, and the mother murmured on till the first letter came, saying that Dan was well and doing well, and then she was content.

About this time they had a visit from their Uncle Allister, their mother's brother, in whose house Hamish had

passed the summer. He brought his two daughters—pretty, cheerful girls—who determined between themselves, encouraged by Hamish, that they should carry off Shenac for a month's visit when they went home. They succeeded too, though Shenac declared and believed it to be impossible that she should leave home, even up to the day before they went. The change did her a great deal of good. She came back much more like the Shenac of two years ago than she had seemed for a long time; and, as spring drew on, she could look forward to the labours of another summer without the miserable misgivings that had so vexed her in the fall. Indeed, now that Hamish was well, whether Dan came home or not, she felt sure of success, and of a quiet and happy summer for them all.

But before spring came something happened. There came a letter from Allister—not this time to the mother, but to Angus Dhu. It told of wonderful success which had followed his going to the gold country, and made known to Angus Dhu that in a certain bank in the city of M—−he would find a sum of money equal to all his father's debt, with interest up to the first day of May following, at which time he trusted that he would give up all claim to the land that had been in his possession for the last two years, according to the promise made to his father. He was coming home soon, he added; he could not say just when. He meant to make more money first, and then, if all things were to his mind, he should settle down on his father's land and wander no more.

It was also added, quite at the end of the paper, as though he had not intended to speak of it at first, that he had had nothing to do with the going away of his cousin, as he had heard the lad's father had supposed, but that he should do his best to bring him home again; “for,” he added, “it is not at all a happy life that folk must live in this golden land.”

To say that Angus Dhu was surprised when this letter came would not be saying enough. He was utterly amazed. He had often thought that when Allister was tired of his wanderings in foreign lands he might wander home again and claim his share of what his father had left. But that he had gone away and stayed away all this time for the purpose of redeeming the land which his father had lost, he never for a moment supposed. He even now thought it must have been a fortunate chance that had given the money first into Allister's hand and then into his own. He made up his mind at once that he should give up the land. It did not cost him half as much to do so as it would have cost him two years ago not to get it. It had come into his mind more than once of late, as he had seen how well able the widow's children were to manage their own affairs, that they might have been trusted to pay their father's debt in time; and, whatever his neighbours thought, he began to think himself that he had been hard on his cousin. Of course he did not say so; but he made up his mind to take the money and give up the land.

And what words shall describe the joyful pride of Shenac? She did not try to express it in words while Angus Dhu was there, but “her face and her sparkling eyes were a sight to behold,” as the old man afterwards in confidence told his daughter Shenac. There were papers to be drawn up and exchanged, and a deal of business of one kind or another to be settled between the widow and Angus Dhu, and a deal of talk was needed, or at least expended, in the course of it; but in it Shenac took no part. She placed entire reliance on the sense and prudence of Hamish, and she kept herself quite in the background through it all.

She would not acknowledge to any one who congratulated her on Allister's success, that any surprise mingled with her pleasure; and once she took Shenac Dhu up sharply—gave her a down− setting, as that astonished young woman expressed it—because she did not take the coming of the money quite as a matter of course, and ventured to express a little surprise as well as pleasure at the news.

“And what is there surprising in it?” demanded Shenac Bhan. “Is our Allister one whose well−doing need astonish any one? But I forgot. He is not *your* brother. You don't know our Allister, Shenac.”

“Don't I?” said Shenac Dhu, opening her black eyes a little wider than usual. “Well, I don't wonder that you are proud of your brother. But you need not take a body up like that. I'm not surprised that he minded you all, and sent the money when he got it; but it is not, as a general thing, the good, true hearts that get on in this world. I was aye sure he would come back, but I never thought of his being a rich man.”

Shenac Dhu sighed, as if she had been bemoaning his poverty.

“She's thinking of Evan yonder,” said Shenac Bhan to herself. “Our Allister is not a rich man,” she said gravely. “He sent enough to pay the debt and the interest. There is a little over, because your father won't take the interest for the last two years, having had the land. But our Allister is not rich.”

“But he means to be rich before he comes home,” persisted Shenac Dhu; “and neither he nor Evan will be content to bide quietly here again—never. It aye spoils people to go away and grow rich.”

Shenac Bhan looked at her with some surprise.

“I cannot answer for Evan, but our Allister says he is coming home to stay. I'm not afraid for him.”

“Oh, but he must be changed after all these years. He has forgotten how different life is here,” said Shenac Dhu with a sigh. “But, Shenac, your Allister speaks kindly of our Evan—in the letter your mother got, I mean.”

“That he does,” said Shenac Bhan eagerly. “He says they are like brothers, and he says your father need not be sorry that Evan went away. He needed hardening, and he'll win through bravely; and Allister says he'll bring Evan with him when he comes. You may trust our Allister, Shenac.”

“May I?” said Shenac Dhu a little wistfully. “Well, I will,” she added, laughing. “But, Shenac, I cannot help it. I *am* surprised that Allister should turn out a rich man. He is far too good for the like of that. But there is one good thing come out of it—my father has got quit of the land. You can never cast that up again, Shenac Bhan.”

Shenac Bhan's cheek was crimsoned.

“I never cast it up to you, Shenac Dhu,” said she hastily. “I never spoke to any one but himself; and I was sorry as soon as I said it.”

“You need not be. He thought none the worse of you, after the first anger. But, Shenac, my father is not so hard a man as folk think. I do believe he is less glad for the money than he is for Allister and you all. If Evan would only come home! My father has so set his heart on Evan.”

Though Shenac took the matter quietly as far as the rest of the world was concerned, she “emptied her heart” to Hamish. To him she confessed she had grown a little doubtful of Allister.

“But, Hamish, I shall never doubt or be discouraged again. If Allister only comes safe home to my mother and to us all, I shall be content. We are too young, Hamish. It does not harm you, I know; but as for me, I am getting as hard as a stone, and as cross as two sticks. I shall be glad when the time comes that I can do as I am bidden again.”

Hamish laughed. “Are you hard, Shenac, and cross? Well, maybe just a little sometimes. I am not afraid for you, though. It will all come right, I think, in the end. But I am glad Allister is coming home, and more glad for your sake than for all the rest.”

CHAPTER TWELVE.

It is May−day again—not so bright and pleasant as the May−day two years ago, when Hamish and Shenac sat so drearily watching Angus Dhu's fence−building. They are sitting on the same spot now, and the children are under the big willow, sailing boats as they did that day—all but Dan. You could not make him believe that he had done such a foolish thing as that two years ago. Two years! It might be ten for the difference they have made in Dan. He only came back from the Grand River two days ago, and Shenac has not ceased wondering and laughing at the change in him. It is not merely his new−fashioned coat and astonishing waistcoat that have changed him. He has grown amazingly, and his voice is almost always as deep and rough as Angus Dhu's; and the man and the boy are so blended in all he says and does, that Shenac has much ado to answer him as gravely as he expects.

"Hamish," he called out from the top of the fence on which he was sitting, "you are a man of sense, and I want to ask you a question. Whose fence is this that I am sitting on? Is it ours, or Angus Dhu's?"

Hamish had not considered the question. Indeed, Dan did not wait for an answer.

"Because, it is of no use here. If it is ours, we'll draw the rails up to the high field, and get them out of the way before Allister comes home. If it belongs to Angus Dhu, we'll—we'll throw the rails into the creek."

"There's no hurry about it, is there?" said a voice behind him; and Dan, jumping down, turned about, and with more shamefacedness than Shenac would have believed possible, met the offered hand of Angus Dhu.

"I heard you had come back again, Dan, lad; and I thought you would not let the grass grow under your feet.—Are you for putting my good rails in the creek, Hamish, man?"

Hamish was laughing too much at Dan's encounter to be able to answer at once. Shenac was laughing too; but she was nearly as shamefaced as Dan, remembering her own encounter on the same ground.

"If it is Allister you're thinking about, he's not here yet, and you need not be in a hurry. And as to whether the rails are yours or mine, when the goods are bought and paid for there need be no words about the string that ties them. But for all that, Dan, lad, I have something to say to your mother yet, and you may as well let them be where they are a while.—Are you for sending my good rails down the creek, too?" he added suddenly, turning to Shenac.

"It was Dan's plan, not mine," said Shenac. "Though once I would have liked to do it," she added candidly.

"No, Shenac," said Hamish; "you wanted to burn it. Don't you mind?"

"O Hamish!" exclaimed Shenac.

Angus Dhu smiled.

"That would be a pity. They are good rails—the very best. And if they were put up too soon, they can be taken down again. You have heard from your brother again?"

"No; not since about the time of your letter," said Hamish. "We are thinking he may be on the way."

For an instant an eager look crossed the face of the old man, but he shook his head.

"No. With gold comes the love of it. He will stay where he is a while yet."

"You don't know our Allister," exclaimed Shenac hotly.

But Hamish laid his hand on hers.

"Whisht. He's thinking of Evan," he said softly.

"He'll not be here this while yet," continued Angus Dhu, not heeding the interruption. "You'll have the summer before you, I'm thinking; and the question is, whether you'll take down the fence just now, while the creek is full," he added, smiling significantly at Dan, "or whether you'll let things be as they are till you have more help. I have done well by the land, and will yet, and give you what is just and right for the use of it till your brother comes. But for what am I saying all this to children like you? It is your mother that must decide it."

Accordingly, before the mother the matter was laid; but it was not the mother who decided it. Shenac could hardly sit still while he spoke of the time that might pass before Allister should come home. But when he went on to say that, unless they had more help, the boys and Shenac could not manage more land than they had already, she felt that it was true. Hamish thought so too, and said heartily to Angus Dhu that the land would be better under his care till Allister should come.

Dan was indignant. He felt himself equal to anything, and declared that, with two men at his disposal, he

could make the farm look like a different place. But the rest had less faith in Dan than he had in himself. He did not conceal his disgust at the idea of creeping on through another summer in the old, quiet way, and talked of leaving it to Hamish and Shenac and seeking work somewhere else. But they knew very well he would never do that, now that Allister might be home among them any day; and he did not. There was no pulling down of the fence, however. It stood as firm as ever; but it was not an eyesore to Shenac now.

The spring passed, and the summer wore away slowly, for there was no more word of Allister. Shenac did not weary herself with field− work, as she had done the last two years; for she felt that they might get help now, and, besides, she was needed more in the house. Her mother had allowed herself to think that only a few weeks would pass before she should see her first−born, and the waiting and suspense told upon her sadly. It told upon Shenac, too. In spite of her declaration to Hamish, she did feel anxious and discouraged many a time. Hamish was ill again, not always able to see to things; and Dan was not proving himself equal to the emergency, now that he was having his own way out−of−doors. That would not matter much, if Allister were come. He would set all things right again, and Dan would not be likely to resist his oldest brother's lawful authority.

But if Allister did not come soon? Shenac shrank from this question. If he did not come soon, she would have something else to think about besides Dan's delinquencies. Her mother could not endure this suspense much longer. It was wearing out her health and spirits; and it needed all Shenac's strength and courage to get through some of these summer days. It was worse when Hamish went again for a few weeks to his uncle's. He must go, Shenac said, to be strong and well to welcome Allister; and much as it grieved him to leave his sister, he knew that a few weeks of the baths would give him the best chance to be able to help her should this sad suspense change to sadder certainty and Allister never come home again. So he went away.

Often and often, during the long days that followed his going away, Shenac used to wonder at herself for ever having been weary of the labour that had fallen to her during the last two years. Now, when her mother had a better day than usual, when little Flora could do all that was needed for her, so that Shenac could go out to the field, she was comparatively at peace. The necessity for bodily exertion helped her for the time to set aside the fear that was growing more terrible every day. But, when the days came that she could not leave her mother, when she must sit by her side, or wander with her into the garden or fields, saying the same hopeful words or answering the same questions over and over again, it seemed to her that she could not very long endure it. A fear worse than the fear of death grew upon her—the fear that her mother's mind would give way at last, and that she would not know her son when he came. Even the fear that he might never come seemed easier to bear than this.

Shenac Dhu helped her greatly at this time. Not that she was very cheerful herself, poor girl; but the quick, merry ways she would assume with her aunt did her good. She would speak of the coming home of Allister as certain and near at hand, and she would tell of all that was to be done and said, of the house that he was to build, and of the gowns that Shenac Bhan was to wear, while her aunt would listen contentedly for a while. And when the old shadow came back, and the old moan rose, she would just begin and go over it all again.

She was needed at home during the day; but all the time that Hamish was away she shared with Shenac Bhan the task of soothing the weary, wakeful nights of the mother. She sat one night in the usual way, speaking softly, and singing now and then, till the poor weary mother had dropped asleep. Rising quietly and going to the door, she found Shenac Bhan sitting on the step, with her head on her hands.

“Shenac,” she said, “why did you not go to bed, as I bade you? I'll need to begin on you, now that aunt is settled for the night. You are tired, Shenac. Why don't you go to bed?”

Her cousin moved and made room for her on the step beside her. The children were in bed, and Dan had gone away with one of Angus Dhu's men to a preaching that was going on in a new kirk several miles away. It was moonlight—so bright that they could see the shadows of the trees far over the fields, and only a star was visible here and there in the blue to which, for a time, the faces of both were upturned.

“You're tired, Shenac Bhan,” said her cousin again; “more tired than usual, I mean.”

“No, not more tired than you are. Do you know, Shenac, your eyes look twice as big as they used to do, and twice as black?”

“Do they? Well, so do yours. But no wonder that you are growing thin and pale; for I do believe, you foolish Shenac Bhan, that it sometimes comes into your mind that Allister may never come home. Now confess.”

“I often think it,” said Shenac, in an awed voice.

“Toch! I knew it by your face. You are as bad as my aunt.”

“Do you never think so?” asked our Shenac.

“Think it!” said Shenac Dhu scornfully. “I trow not. Why should I think it? I will not think it! He'll come and bring Evan. Oh, I'm sure he'll come.”

“Well, I'm not always hopeless; there is no reason,” said Shenac. “He did not say he would come at once; but he should write.”

“Oh, you may be sure he has written and the letter has been lost. I hardly ever take up a paper but I read of some ship that has gone down, and think of the letters that must go down with it, and other things.”

Each saw the emotions that the face of the other betrayed in the moonlight.

“And think of the sailors,” continued Shenac Dhu. “O Shenac, darling, we are only wearying for a lost letter; but think of the lost sailors, and the mothers and sisters that are waiting for them!” A strong shudder passed over Shenac Bhan.

“I don't think you know what you are saying, Shenac,” said she.

“Yes; about the lost letters, and the sailors,” said Shenac Dhu hurriedly. “The very worst that can happen to us is that we may lose the letters. God would never give us the hope of seeing them, and then let them be drowned in the sea.”

The thought was too much for them, and they burst into bitter weeping.

“We are two fools,” said Shenac Dhu, “frightening ourselves for nothing. We need Hamish to scold us and set us right. Why should we be afraid? If there was any cause for fear there would be plenty to tell us of it. Nobody seems afraid for them except my father; and it is not fear with him. He has never settled down in the old way since the letter came saying that Allister would bring Evan home.”

Yes, they needed Hamish more than they knew. It was the anxiety for the mother, the sleepless nights and unoccupied days, that, all together, unnerved Shenac Bhan. It was the dwelling on the same theme, the going over and over the same thing—“nothing would happen to him?”—“he would be sure to come?”—till the words seemed to mock her, they made her so weary of hoping and waiting.

For, indeed, nobody seemed to think there was anything strange in the longer stay of Allister. He had stayed so long and done so well, he might be trusted surely to come home when the right time came. No, there was no real cause for fear, Shenac repeated to herself often. If her mother had been well and quite herself, and if Hamish had been at home, she thought she would never have fallen into this miserable dread.

She was partly right. It was better for them all when Hamish came home. He was well, for him, and cheerful. He had never imagined how sadly the time was passing at home, or he would not have stayed away so long. He was shocked at the wan looks of the two girls, and quite unable to understand how they should have grown so troubled at a few weeks' or even a few months' delay. His wonder at their trouble did them good. It could not be so strange —the silence and the delay—or Hamish would surely see it. The mother was better too after the return of Hamish. The sight of him, and his pleasant, gentle talk, gave a new turn to her thoughts, and she was able again to take an interest in what was going forward about her; and when there came a return of the old restlessness and pain, it was Hamish who stayed in the house to soothe her and to care for her, while Shenac betook herself with her old energy to the harvest−field.

The harvest passed. Dan kept very steady at it, though every night he went to the new kirk, where the meetings were still held. He did not say much about these meetings even when questioned, but they seemed to have a wonderful charm for him; for night after night, wet or dry, he and Angus Dhu's man, Peter, walked the four miles that lay between them and the new kirk to hear—“What?” Shenac asked one night.

“Oh, just preaching, and praying, and singing.”

“But that is nonsense,” insisted Shenac. “You are not so fond of preaching as all that. What is it, Dan?”

“It's just that,” said Dan; “that is all they do. The minister speaks to folk, and sometimes the elders; and that's all. But, Shenac, it's wonderful to see so many folk listening and solemn, as if it was the judgment day; and whiles one reads and prays— folk that never used; and I'm always wondering who it will be next. Last night it was Sandy McMillan. You should have heard him, Shenac.”

“Sandy McMillan!” repeated Shenac contemptuously. “What next, I wonder? I think the folk are crazed. It must be the singing. I mind when I was at Uncle Allister's last year I went to the Methodist watch−meeting, and the singing—oh, you should have heard the singing, Hamish! I could not keep back the tears, do what I would. It must be the singing, Dan.”

Dan shook his head.

"They just sing the psalms, Shenac. I never heard anything else— and the old tunes. They do sound different, though."

"Well, it goes past me," said Shenac. "But it is all nonsense going every night, Dan—so far too."

"There are plenty of folk who go further," said Dan. "You should go yourself, Shenac."

"I have something else to do," said Shenac.

"Everybody goes," continued Dan; and he repeated the names of many people, far and near, who were in the new kirk night after night. "Come with me and Peter to−night, Shenac."

But Shenac had other things to think about, she said. Still she thought much of this too.

"I wonder what it is, Hamish," said she when they were alone. "I can understand why Dan and Peter McLay should go—just because other folk go; and I daresay there's some excitement in seeing all the folk, and that is what they like. But so many others, sensible folk, and worldly folk, and all kinds of folk, in this busy harvest−time! You should go, Hamish, and see what it is all about."

But the way was long and the meetings were late, and Hamish needed to save his strength; and he did not go, though many spoke of the meetings, and the wonderful change which was wrought in the heart and life of many through their means. He wondered as well as Shenac, but not in the same way; for he had felt in his own heart the wondrous power that lies in the simple truth of God to comfort and strengthen and enlighten; and it came into his mind, sometimes, that the good days of which he had read were coming back again, when the Lord used to work openly in the eyes of all the people, making his Church the instrument of spreading the glory of his name by the conversion of many in a day. It did not trouble or stumble him, as it did his sister, that it was not in their church—the church of their fathers—that this was done. They were God's people, and it made no difference; and so, while she only wondered, he wondered and rejoiced.

But about this time news came that put all other thoughts out of their minds for a while. The mother was sleeping, and Shenac and Hamish were sitting in the firelight one evening in September, when the door opened and their cousin Shenac came in. She seemed greatly excited, and there were tears on her cheeks, and she did not speak, but came close up to Shenac Bhan, without heeding the exclamations of surprise with which they both greeted her.

"Did I not tell you, Shenac, that God would never drown them in the sea?"

She had run so fast that she had hardly a voice to say the words, and she sank down at her cousin's feet, gasping for breath. In her hands she held a letter. It was from Evan—the first he had written to his father since he went away. Shenac told them that her father had received it in the morning, but said nothing about it then, going about all day with a face like death, and only told them when he broke down at worship−time, when he prayed as usual for "all distant and dear."

"Then he told my mother and me," continued Shenac Dhu, spreading out a crushed morsel of paper with hands that trembled. It was only a line or two, broken and blurred, praying for his father's forgiveness and blessing on his dying son. He meant to come home with his cousin. They were to meet at Saint F—−, and sail together, But he had been hurt, and had fallen ill of fever in an inland town, and he was dying. "And now the same ship that takes this to you will take Allister home. He will not know that I am dying, but will think I have changed my mind as I have done before. I would not let him know if I could; for he would be sure to stay for my sake, and his heart is set on getting home to his mother and the rest. And, father, I want to tell you that it was not Allister that beguiled me from home, but my own foolishness. He has been more than a brother to me. He has saved my life more than once, and he has saved me from sins worse than death; and you must be kind to him and to them all for my sake."

"And then," said Shenac Dhu, "there is his name, written as if he had been blind; and that is all."

The three young people sat looking at one another in silence. Shenac Bhan's heart beat so strongly that she thought her mother must hear it in her bed; but she could not put her thought in words—"Allister is coming home." Shenac Dhu spoke first.

"Hamish—Shenac, I told my father that Allister would never leave our Evan alone to die among strangers."

She paused, looking eagerly first at one and then at the other.

"No," said Hamish; "he would never do that, if he knew it in time to stay. We can but wait and see."

"Wait and see!" Shenac Bhan echoed the words in her heart. If they had heard that he was to stay for months,

or even for years, she thought she could bear it better than this long suspense.

“Shenac,” said her cousin, reading her thought, “you would not have Allister come and leave him? It will only be a little longer whether Evan lives or dies.”

“No,” said Shenac; “but my mother.”

“We will not tell her for a little while,” said Hamish. “If Allister is coming it will be soon; and if he has stayed, it will give my mother more hope of his coming home at last to hear that he is well and that he is waiting for Evan.”

“And my father,” said Shenac Dhu. “Oh! if you had seen how he grasped at the hope when I said Allister was sure to stay, you would not grudge him for a day or two. Think of the poor lad dying so far from home and from us all!” And poor Shenac clung to her cousin, bursting into sobs and bitter tears.

“Whisht, Shenac, darling,” said her cousin, her own voice broken with sobs; “we can only have patience.”

“Yes,” said Hamish; “we can do more than that—we can trust and pray. And we will not fear for the mother, Shenac. She will be better, now that there is a reason for Allister's stay.—And, Cousin Shenac, you must take hope for your brother. No wonder he was downcast thinking of being left. You must tell your father that there is no call to give up hope for Evan.”

“O Hamish, my father loved Evan dearly, though he was hard on him. He has grown an old man since he went away; and to−day,— oh, I think to−day his heart is broken.”

“The broken and contrite heart He will not despise,” murmured Hamish. “We have all need of comfort, Shenac, and we'll get it if we seek it.”

And the two girls were startled first, and then soothed, as the voice of Hamish rose in prayer. It was no vague, formal utterance addressed to a God far away and incomprehensible. He was pleading with a Brother close at hand—a dear and loving elder Brother— for their brothers far away. He did not plead as one who feared denial, but trustfully, joyfully, seeking first that God's will might be done in them and theirs. Hamish was not afraid; nothing could be plainer than that. So the two Shenacs took a little comfort, and waited and trusted still.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN.

And so they waited. For a few days it did not seem impossible to Shenac that Allister might come; and she watched each hour of the day and night, starting and trembling at every sound. But he did not come, and in a little while Hamish broke the tidings to his mother, how they had heard that Allister was to have sailed on a certain day, but his Cousin Evan having been taken ill, they were to wait for another ship; but they would be sure to come soon.

Happily, the mother's mind rested more on having heard that her son was well, and was coming some time, than on his being delayed; and she was better after that. She fell back for a little time into her old ways, moving about the house, and even betaking herself to the neglected flax−spinning. But she was very feeble, going to bed early, and rising late, and requiring many an affectionate stratagem on the part of her children to keep her from falling into invalid ways.

It was a sad and weary waiting to them all, but to none more than to Angus Dhu. If he had heard of his son's death, it would not have been so terrible to him as the suspense which he often told himself need not be suspense. There was no hope, there could be none, after the words written by his son's trembling hands. He grew an old, feeble man in the short space between the harvest and the new year. The grief which had fallen on all the family when Evan's letter came gave way before the anxiety with which they all saw the change in him. His wife was a quiet, gentle woman, saying little at any time, perhaps feeling less than her stern husband. They all sorrowed, but it was on the father that the blight fell heaviest.

It was a fine Sabbath morning in October. It was mild, and not very bright, and the air was motionless. It was just like an Indian−summer day, only the Indian summer is supposed to come in November, after some snow has fallen on brown leaves and bare boughs; and now the woods were brilliant with crimson and gold, except where the oak−leaves rustled brown, or the evergreens mingled their dark forms with the pervading brightness. It was a perfect Sabbath day, hushed and restful. But it must be confessed that Shenac shrank a little from its long, quiet, unoccupied hours; and when something was said about the great congregation that would be sure to assemble in the new kirk, she said she would like to go.

“Go, by all means,” said the mother; “and Hamish too, if you are able for the walk. Little Flora can do all that is to be done. There's nothing to hinder, if you would like to go.”

There was nothing to hinder; the mother seemed better and more cheerful than she had seemed for many days. They might very well leave her for a little while; they would be home again in the afternoon. So they went early—long before the people were setting out—partly that they might have time to rest by the way, and partly that they might enjoy the walk together.

And they did enjoy it. They were young, and unconsciously their hearts strove to throw off the burden of care that had pressed so long and so heavily upon them.

“It has seemed like the old days again,” said Shenac as they came in sight of the new kirk, round which many people had already gathered. They were strangers mostly, or, at least, people that they did not know very well; and, a little shy and unaccustomed to a crowd, they went into the kirk and sat down near the door. It was a very bright, pleasant house, quite unlike the dim, dreary old place they were accustomed to worship in; and they looked round them with surprise and interest.

In a little time the congregation began to gather, and soon the pews were filled and the aisles crowded with an eager multitude; then the minister came in, and worship began. First the psalm was named, and then there was a pause till the hundreds of Bibles or psalm books were opened and the place found. Then the old familiar words were heard, and yet could they be the same?

Shenac looked at her Bible. The very same. She had learned the psalm years ago. She had heard it many a time in the minister's monotonous voice in the old kirk; and yet she seemed to hear it now for the first time. Was it the minister's voice that made the difference? Every word fell sweet and clear and full from his lips—from his heart—touching the hearts of the listening hundreds. Then the voice of praise arose “like the sound of many waters.” After the first verse Hamish joined, but through it all Shenac listened; she alone was silent. With the full tones of youth and middle age mingled the shrill, clear notes of little children, and the cracked and trembling

voices of old men and women, dwelling and lingering on the sweet words as if they were loath to leave them. It might not be much as music, but as praise it rose to Heaven. Then came the prayer. Shenac thought of Jacob wrestling all night with the angel at Jabbok, and said to herself, “As a prince he hath power with God.” Then came the reading of the Scriptures, then more singing, and then the sermon began.

Shenac did not fall asleep when the text was read; she listened, and looked, and wondered. There were no sleepers there that day, even old Donald and Elspat Smith were awake and eager. Every face was turned upward towards the minister. Many of them were unknown to Shenac; but on those that were familiar to her an earnestness, new and strange, seemed to rest as they listened.

What could it be? The sermon seemed to be just like other sermons, only the minister seemed to be full of the subject, and eager to make the truth known to the people. Shenac turned to her brother: she quite started when she saw his face. It was not peace alone, or joy, or triumph, but peace and joy and triumph were brightly blended on the boy's face as he hung on the words of life spoken there that day.

“They with the fatness of thy house
Shall be well satisfied;
From rivers of thy pleasures thou
Wilt drink to them provide,”

repeated Shenac. And again it came into her mind that Hamish was changed, and held in his heart a treasure which she did not share; and still the words of the psalm came back:—

“Because of life the fountain pure
Remains alone with thee;
And in that purest light of thine
We clearly light shall see.”

Did Hamish see that light? She looked away from her brother's fair face to the congregation about them. Did these people see it? did old Donald and Elspat Smith see it? did big Maggie Cairns, at whose simplicity and queerness all the young people used to laugh, see it? Yes, even on her plain, common face a strange, bright look seemed to rest, as she turned it to the minister. There were other faces too with that same gleam of brightness on them—old weather−beaten faces, some of them careworn women's faces, and the faces of young girls and boys, one here and another there, scattered through the earnest, listening crowd.

By a strong effort Shenac turned her attention to the minister's words. They were earnest words, surely, but wherein did they differ from the words of other men? They seemed to her just like the truths she had heard before—more fitly spoken, perhaps, than when they fell from the lips of good old Mr Farquharson, but just the same.

“For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

This was the text. It was quite familiar to her; and so were the truths drawn from it, she thought. What could be the cause of the interest that she saw in the faces of those eager hundreds? Did they see something hidden from her? did they hear in those words something to which her ears were deaf? Her eyes wandered from one familiar face to another, coming back to her brother's always with the same wonder; and she murmured again and again,—

“From rivers of thy pleasures thou
Wilt drink to them provide.”

“He that drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.”

“That is for Hamish, I'm sure of that. I wonder how it all happened to him? I'll ask him.”

But she did not. The bright look was on his face when the sermon ended, and while the psalm was sung. It was there when the great congregation slowly dispersed, and all the way as they walked home with the neighbours. It was there all day, and all the week; and it never left him. Even when pain and sickness set their mark on his face, through all their sorrowful tokens the bright look of peace shone still; and Shenac watched and wondered, but she did not speak of it yet.

This was Shenac's first visit to the new kirk, but it was by no means the last.

It would be out of place to enter here into any detailed history of this one of those awakenings of God's people which have taken place at different times in this part of the country; and yet it cannot be quite passed over. For a long time all the settlers in that neighbourhood worshipped in the same kirk; but when the time came which

proved the Church in the motherland—the time which separated into two bodies that which had long been one—the same division extended to the far−away lands where the Scottish form of worship had prevailed. After a time, they who went away built another house in which they might worship the God of their fathers; and it was at the time of the opening of this house that the Lord visited his people.

A few of those to whom even the dust of Zion is dear, seeking to consecrate the house, and with it themselves, more entirely to God's service, met for prayer for a few nights before the public dedication; and from that time for more than a year not a night passed in which the voice of prayer and praise did not arise within its walls. All through the busy harvest−time, through the dark autumn evenings, when the unmade roads of the country were deep and dangerous, and through the frosts and snows of a bitter winter, the people gathered to the house of prayer. Old people, who in former years had thought themselves too feeble to brave the night and the storm for the sake of a prayer−meeting, were now never absent. Young people forsook the merry gatherings of singers and dancers, to join the assemblies of God's people.

It was a wonderful time, all say who were there then. Connected with it were none of those startling circumstances which in many minds are associated with a time of revival. The excitement was deep, earnest, and silent; there was in use none of the machinery for creating or keeping up an interest in the meetings. A stranger coming into one of those assemblies might have seen nothing different from the usual weekly gatherings of God's people. The minister held forth the word of life as at other times. It was the simple gospel, the preaching of Christ and him crucified, that prevailed, through the giving of God's grace, to the saving of many.

At some of the meetings others besides the minister took part. At first it was only the elders or the old people who led the devotions of the rest, or uttered words of counsel or encouragement; but later, as God gave them grace and courage, younger men raised their voices in thanksgivings or petitions, or to tell of God's dealings with them. But all was done gravely and decently. There was no pressing of excited and ignorant young people to the “anxious seats,” no singing of “revival hymns.” They sang the Psalms from first to last—the old, rough version, which people nowadays criticise and smile at, wondering how ever the cramped lines and rude metre could find so sure and permanent a place in the hearts and memories of their fathers. It is said now that these old psalms are quite insufficient for all occasions of praise; but to those people, with hearts overflowing with revived or new−found love, it did not seem so. The suffering and sorrowful saint found utterance in the cry of the psalmist, and the rejoicing soul found in his words full expression for the most triumphant and joyful praise. They who after many wanderings were coming back to their first love, and they who had never come before, alike took his words of self−abasement as their own. So full and appropriate and sufficient did they prove, that at last old and experienced Christians could gather from the psalm chosen what were the exercises of the reader's mind; and the ignorant, or those unaccustomed to put their thoughts in words, found a voice in the words which the Sabbath singing and family worship had made familiar to them.

After a time, when the number of inquirers became so numerous that they could not be conveniently received at the manse or at the houses of the elders, they were requested to stay when the congregation dispersed; and oftentimes the few went while the most remained. Then was there many a word “fitly spoken;” many a “word in season” uttered from heart to heart; many a seeking sinner pointed to the Lamb of God; many a sorrowful soul comforted; many a height of spiritual attainment made visible to upward−gazing eyes; many a vision of glory revealed.

I must not linger on these scenes, wondrous in the eyes of all who witnessed them. Many were gathered into the Church, into the kingdom, and the name of the Lord was magnified. In the day when all things shall be made manifest, it shall be known what wonders of grace were there in silence wrought.

For a long time Shenac came to these meetings very much as Dan had done—because of the interest she took in seeing others deeply moved. She came as a spectator, wondering what it all meant, interested in what was said because of the earnestness of the speakers, and enjoying the clear and simple utterance of truth, hitherto only half understood.

But gradually her attitude was changed. It was less easy after a while to set herself apart, for many a truth came home to her sharply and suddenly. Now and then a momentary gleam of light flashed upon her, showing how great was her need of the help which Heaven alone could give. Many troubled and anxious thoughts she had, but she kept them all to herself. She never lingered behind with those who wished for counsel; she never even spoke to Hamish of all that was passing in her heart.

This was, for many reasons, a time of great trial for Shenac. Day after day and week after week passed, and still there came no tidings from Allister or Evan, and every passing day and week seemed to her to make the hope of their return more uncertain. The mother was falling into a state which was more terrible to Shenac than positive illness would have been. Her memory was failing, and she was becoming in many things like a child. She was more easily dealt with in one sense, for she was hardly ever fretful or exacting now; but the gentle passiveness that assented to all things, the forgetfulness of the trifles of the day, and the pleased dwelling on scenes and events of long ago, were far more painful to her children than her fretfulness had ever been.

With a jealousy which all may not be able to understand, Shenac strove to hide from herself and others that her mother's mind was failing. She punished any seeming neglect or disrespect to their mother on the part of the little ones with a severity that no wrong−doing had ever called forth before, and resented any sympathising allusions of the neighbours to her mother's state as an insult and a wrong.

She never left her. Even the nightly assembling in the kirk, which soon began to interest her so deeply, could not beguile her from home till her mother had been safely put to rest, with Hamish to watch over her. All this, added to her household cares, told upon Shenac. But a worse fear, a fear more terrible than even the uncertainty of Allister's fate or the doubt as to her mother's recovery, was taking hold upon her. Her determination to drive it from her served to keep it ever in view, for it made her watch every change in the face and in the strength of her beloved brother with an eagerness which she could not conceal.

Yes, Hamish was less strong than he had been last year. The summer's visit to the springs had not done for him this year what it had done before. He was thinner and paler, and less able to exert himself, than ever. Even Dan saw it, and gave up all thoughts of going to the woods again, and devoted himself to out− door matters with a zeal that left Shenac free to attend to her many cares within.

At last she took courage and spoke to her brother about her fears for him. He was greatly surprised, both at her fears and at the emotion with which she spoke of them. She meant to be very quiet, but when she opened her lips all that was in her heart burst forth. He would not acknowledge himself ill. He suffered less than he had often done when he went to the fields daily, though there still lingered enough of rheumatic trouble about him to make him averse to move much, and especially to brave the cold. That was the reason he looked so wan and wilted—that and the anxious thoughts about his mother.

“And, indeed, Shenac, you are more changed than I am in looks, for that matter.”

Shenac made an incredulous movement.

“I am perfectly well,” said she.

“Yes; but you are changed. You are much thinner than you used to be, and sometimes you look pale and very weary, and you are a great deal older−looking.”

“Well, I am older than I used to be,” said Shenac.

She rose and crossed the room to look at herself in the glass.

“I don't see any difference,” she added, after a moment.

“Not just now, maybe, because you have been busy and your cheeks are red. And as for being a great deal older, how old are you, Shenac?”

“I am—I shall be nineteen in September; but I feel a great deal older than that,” said Shenac.

“Yes; that is what I was saying. You are changed as well as I. And you are not to fancy things about me and add to your trouble. I am quite well. If I were not, I would tell you, Shenac. It would be cruel kindness to keep it from you; I know that quite well.”

Shenac looked wistfully in her brother's face.

“I know I am growing a coward,” she said in a broken voice. “0 Hamish, it does seem as though our troubles were too many and hard to bear just now!”

“He who sent them knows them—every one; and He can make his grace sufficient for us,” said Hamish softly.

“Ay, for you, Hamish.”

“And for you too, Shenac. You are not very far from the light, dear sister. Never fear.”

“And in that purest light of thine
We clearly light shall see,”

murmured Shenac. They were ever coming into her mind—bits of the psalms she had been hearing so much lately; and they brought comfort, though sometimes she hesitated to take it to her heart as she might.

But light was near at hand, and peace and comfort were not far away. Afterwards, Shenac always looked back to this night as the beginning of her Christian life. This night she went to the house of prayer, from which her fears for Hamish had for a long time kept her, and there the Lord met her. Oh, how weary in body and mind and heart she was as she sat down among the people! It seemed to her that not one of all the congregation was so hopeless or so helpless as she—that no one in all the world needed a Saviour more. As she sat there in the silence that preceded the opening of the meeting, all her fears and anxieties came over her like a flood, and she felt herself unable to stand up against them in her own strength. She was hardly conscious of putting into words the cry of her heart for help; but words are not needed by Him from whom alone help can come.

God does not always choose the wisest and greatest, even among his own people, to do his noblest work. It was a very humble servant of God through whose voice words of peace were spoken to Shenac. In the midst of her trouble she heard a voice—an old man's weak, quavering voice—saying,—

"Praise God. The Lord praise, O my soul.
I'll praise God while I live;
While I have being to my God
In songs I'll praises give.
Trust not in princes;"

and so on to the fifth verse, which he called the key−note of the psalm:—

"O happy is that man and blest,
Whom Jacob's God doth aid;
Whose hope upon the Lord doth rest,
And on his God is stay'd;"

and so on to the end of the 146th Psalm, pausing on every verse to tell, in plain and simple words, why it is that they who trust in God are so blessed.

I daresay there were some in the kirk that night who grew weary of the old man's talk, and would fain have listened to words more fitly chosen; but Shenac was not one of these. As she listened, there came upon her a sense of her utter sinfulness and helplessness, and then an inexpressible longing for the help of Him who is almighty. And I cannot tell how it came to pass, but even as she sat there she felt her heaviest burdens roll away; the clouds that had hung over her so long, hiding the light, seemed to disperse; and she saw, as it were, face to face, Him who came to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows, and thenceforth all was well with her.

Well in the best sense. Not that her troubles and cares were at an end. She had many of these yet; but after this she lived always in the knowledge that she had none that were not of God's sending, so she no longer wearied herself by trying to bear her burdens alone.

It was not that life was changed to her. *She* was changed. The same Spirit who, through God's Word and the example and influence of her brother, made her dissatisfied with her own doings, still wrought in her, enlightening her conscience, quickening her heart, and filling her with love to Him who first loved her.

It would not have been easy for her, in the first wonder and joy of the change, to tell of it in words, except that, like the man who was born blind, she might have said, "One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see." But her life told what her lips could not, and in a thousand ways it became evident to those at home, and to all who saw her, that something had happened to Shenac—that she was at peace with herself and with all the world as she had not been before; and as for Hamish, he said to himself many a time, "It does not matter what happens to Shenac now. All will be well with her, now and always."

CHAPTER FOURTEEN.

After long waiting, Allister came home. Shenac and Hamish had no intention of watching the going out of the old year and the coming in of the new; but they lingered over the fire, talking of many things, till it grew late. And while they sat, the door opened, and Allister came in. They did not know that he was Allister. The dark−bearded man lingering on the threshold was very little like the fair−faced youth who had left them four years ago. He made a step forward into the room, and said,—

"This is Hamish, I know; but can this be our little Shenac?" And then they knew him.

It would be vain to try to describe the meeting. The very happiest meeting after years of separation must be sorrowful too. Death had been among them since Allister went, and the bereavement seemed new to the returned wanderer, and his tears fell as he listened to the few words Hamish said about his father's last days.

When the first surprise and joy and sorrow were a little abated, Shenac whispered,—

"And Evan—Hamish, should we go to−night to tell Angus Dhu that Allister has come home?"

"What about Evan, Allister?" said Hamish.

"Do you not know? Did you not get my letter? I waited for Evan. He had been robbed and hurt, and thought himself dying. But it was not so bad as that. He is better now—quite well, I think. I left him at his father's door."

"At home! Evan at home! What did his father say? Did you see Angus Dhu?"

Shenac was quite breathless by the time her questions were asked.

"No; I could not wait. The field between there and here seemed wider to me than the ocean. When I saw the light, I left him there." And the manly voice had much ado to keep from breaking into sobs again as he spoke.

"His father has been so anxious. No letter has come to us since Evan's came to his father to say that he was dying. I wish the old man had been prepared," said Shenac.

"Oh, I am grieved! If I had but thought," said Allister regretfully.

"It is quite as well that he was not prepared," said Hamish. And he was right.

Shenac Dhu told them about it afterwards.

"My mother went to the door, and when she saw Evan she gave a cry and let the light fall. And then we all came down; and my father came out of his bed just as he was, and when he saw my mother crying and clinging about the lad, he dropped down in the big chair and held out his hands without saying a word. You may be sure Evan was not long in taking them; and then he sank down on his knees, and my father put his arms round him, and would not move—not even to put his clothes on," continued Shenac Dhu, laughing and sobbing at the same time. "So I got a plaid and put about him; and there they would have sat, I dare say, till the dawn, but after just the first, Evan looked pale and weary, and my father said he must go to bed at once. `But first tell us about your cousin Allister,' my father said. Evan said it would take him all night, and many a night, to tell all that Allister had done for him; and then my father said, `God bless him!' over and over. And I cannot tell you any more," said Shenac Dhu, laughing and crying and hiding her face in her hands.

"But as to my father being prepared," she added gravely, after a moment's pause, "I am afraid if he had had time to think about it, it would have seemed his duty to be stern at first with Evan. But it is far better as it is; and he can hardly bear him out of his sight. Oh, I'm glad it is over! I know now, by the joy of the home−coming, how terrible the waiting must have been to him."

Very sad to Allister was his mother's only half−conscious recognition of him. She knew him, and called him by name; but she spoke, too, of his father and Lewis, not as dead and gone, but as they used to be in the old days when they were all at home together, when Hamish and Shenac were little children. She was content, however, and did not suffer. There were times, too, when she seemed to understand that he had been away, and had come home to care for them all; and she seemed to trust him entirely that "he would be good to Hamish and the rest when she was no more."

"Folk get used to the most sorrowful things at last," said Shenac to herself, as, after a time, Allister could turn quietly from the mother, so broken and changed, to renew his playful sallies with his brothers and little Flora. Indeed, it was a new acquaintance that he had to make with them. They had grown quite out of his remembrance, and he was not at all like the brother Allister of their imaginations; but this making friends with one another was a

very pleasant business to them all.

He had to renew his acquaintance with others too—with his cousins and the neighbours. He had much to hear and much to tell, and after a while he had much to do too; and through all the sayings and doings, the comings and goings,—of the first few weeks, both Hamish and Shenac watched their brother closely and curiously. Apart from their interest in him as their brother whom they loved, and in whose hands the future of all the rest seemed to lie, they could not but watch him curiously. He was so exactly like the merry, gentle, truthful Allister of old times, and yet so different! He had grown so strong and firm and manly. He knew so many things. He had made up his mind about the world and the people in it, and could tell his mind too.

"Our Allister is a man!" said Shenac, as she sat in the kitchen one night with Shenac Dhu and the rest. The words were made to mean a great deal by the way in which they were spoken, and they all laughed. But her cousin answered the words merely, and not the manner:—

"That is not saying much. Men are poor creatures enough, sometimes."

"But our Allister is not one of that kind," said Dan, before his sister had time to answer. "He *is* a man. He is made to rule. His will must be law wherever he is."

Dan had probably some private reason for knowing this better than the rest, and Shenac Dhu hinted as much. But Dan took no notice, and went on,—

"You should hear Evan tell about him. Why, he saved the lives of the whole band more than once, by his firmness and wisdom."

"I have heard our Evan speaking of him," said Shenac Dhu, her dark eyes softening, as she sat looking into the fire; "but if one is to believe all that Evan says, your Allister is not a man at all, but—don't be vexed, Dan—an angel out of heaven."

"Oh, I don't know about that part of it," said Dan; "but I know one thing: he'll be chief of the clan, boss of the shanty, or he'll know the reason why.—O Shenac, dear, I'm sorry for you; your reign is over, I doubt. You'll be farmer−in−chief no longer."

The last words were spoken with a mingled triumph and pathos that were irresistible. They all laughed.

"Don't be too sorry for me, Dan," said his sister. "I'll try to bear it."

"Oh yes, I know: you think you won't care, but I know better. You like to rule as well as Allister. You'll see, when spring comes, that you won't put him aside as you used to put me."

"There won't be the same need," said Shenac, laughing.

"Won't there? It is all very fine, now that Allister is new. But wait and see. You won't like to be second−best, after having been first so long."

Both Hamish and Shenac Dhu were observing her. She caught their look, and reddened a little.

"Do you think so, Shenac Dhu?—You surely cannot think so meanly of me, Hamish?"

"I think there may be a little truth in what Dan says, but I cannot think meanly of you because of that," said Hamish.

"Nonsense, Hamish!" said Shenac Dhu; "you don't know anything about it. It is one thing to give up to a lad without sense, like Dan, but quite another thing to yield to a man like Allister, strong and wise and gentle. You are not to make Shenac afraid of her brother."

"I shall never be afraid of Allister," said Shenac Bhan gravely; "and indeed, Hamish, I don't think it is quite kind in you to think I like my own way best of all—"

"I did not mean that, Shenac," said her brother.

"But you are afraid I will not like to give up to Allister. You need not—at least, I think you need not," she added meditatively. "I shall be glad and thankful to have our affairs managed by stronger hands and a wiser head than mine."

"If stronger and wiser could be found, Shenac, dear," said a new voice, and Shenac's face was bent back, while her brother kissed her on the cheek and lip. "Uncle Angus thinks it would not be easy to do that."

They were all taken aback a little at this interruption, and each wondered how much he had heard of what had been said.

"Have you been long here, Allister?" asked Dan.

"No; I came this minute from the other house. Your mother told me you were here, Shenac Dhu."

"Did you hear what we were saying?" asked Dan, not content to let well alone.

“No; what was it?” said Allister surprised, and a little curious.

“Oh, you should have heard these girls,” said Dan mischievously. “Such stuff as they have been talking!”

“The chief of the clan, and the boss of the shanty,” said Hamish gravely; “and that was you, Dan, was it not?”

“Oh! what I said is nothing. It was the two Shenacs,” said Dan.

Shenac Dhu, as a general thing, was able enough to take her own part; but she looked a little shamefaced at the moment, and said nothing.

“What did they say, Dan?” asked Allister, laughing.

Shenac Dhu need not have feared. Dan went on to say,—

“I have been telling our Shenac that she will have to `knock under,' now that you are come home; but she says she is not afraid.”

“Why should she be?” asked Allister, who still stood behind his sister, passing his hand caressingly over her hair.

“Oh, you don't know our Shenac,” said Dan, nodding wisely, as though he could give some important information on the subject. The rest laughed.

“I'm not sure that I know anybody's Shenac very well,” said Allister gravely; “but in time I hope to do so.”

“Oh, but our Shenac's not like the rest of the girls. She's hard and proud, and looks at folk as though she didn't see them. You may laugh, but I have heard folk say it; and so have you, Shenac Dhu.”

“No, I never did,” said Shenac Dhu; “but maybe it's true for all that: there's Sandy McMillan—”

“And more besides him,” said Dan. “There's your father—”

“My father! Oh, he's no mark. He believes Shenac Bhan to be at least fifteen years older than I am, and wiser in proportion. But as for her not seeing people, that's nonsense, Dan.”

But Shenac Bhan would have no more of it.

“Shenac Dhu, you are as foolish as Dan to talk so. Don't encourage him. What will Allister think?”

Shenac laughed, but said no more.

They were right. Allister was a man of the right sort. Whether, if circumstances had been different, he would have been content to come back and settle down as a farmer on his father's land, it is not easy to say. But as it was, he did not hesitate for a moment. Hamish would never be able to do hard work. Dan might be steady enough by−and−by to take the land; but in the meantime Shenac must not be left with a burden of care too heavy for her. So he set himself to his work with a good will.

He had not come back a rich man according to the idea of riches held by the people he had left behind him; but he was rich in the opinion of his neighbours, and well enough off in his own opinion. That is, he had the means of rebuilding his father's house, and of putting the farm in good order, and something besides. He lost no time in commencing his labours, and he worked, and made others work, with a will. There were among the neighbours those who shook their cautious old heads when they spoke of his energetic measures, as though they would not last long; but this was because they did not know Allister Macivor.

He had not been at home two days before he made up his mind that his mother should not pass another winter in the little log−house that had sheltered them since his father's death; and he had not been at home ten days when preparations for the building of a new house were commenced. Before the snow went away, stone and lime for the walls and bricks for the chimneys were collected, and the carpenters were at work on windows and doors. As soon as the frost was out of the ground, the cellar was dug and stoned, and everything was prepared for the masons and carpenters, so that when the time for the farm−work came, nothing had to be neglected in the fields because of the work going on at the new house. So even the slow, cautious ones among the neighbours confessed that, as far as could be judged yet, Allister was a lad of sense; for the true farmer will attend to his fields at the right time and in the right way, whatever else may be neglected.

But the house went on bravely—faster than ever house went on in those parts before, for all things were ready to the workmen's hands.

May−day came, and found Allister and Dan busy in taking down Angus Dhu's fence—at least, that part of it that lay between the house−field and the creek.

“I didn't think the old man meant to let us have these rails,” said Dan. “Not that they are his by rights. I should not wonder if he were down upon us, after all, for taking them away.” And Dan put up his hands to shade his eyes, as he turned in the direction of Angus Dhu's house.

"Nonsense, Dan; I bought the rails," said Allister.

Dan whistled.

"If I had been you, I would have taken them without his leave," said he.

"Pooh! and quarrelled with a neighbour for the sake of a few rails."

"But right is right," insisted Dan. "Not that I think he would have made much ado about it, though. The old man has changed lately. I always think the hearing that our Shenac gave him on this very place did him a deal of good."

Dan looked mysterious, and Allister was a little curious.

"I have always told you that you don't know our Shenac. Whether it is your coming home, or my mother's not being well, that has changed her, I can't say. Or maybe it is something else," added Dan thoughtfully. He had an idea that others in the parish were changed as well as Shenac. "She's changed, anyway. She's as mild as summer now. But if you had seen her when Angus Dhu was making this fence—Elder McMillan was here;" and Dan went off into a long account of the matter, and of other matters of which Allister had as yet heard nothing.

"Angus Dhu don't seem to bear malice," said he, when Dan paused. "He has a great respect for Shenac."

"Oh yes, of course; so have they all." And Dan launched into a succession of stories to prove that Shenac had done wonders in the way of winning respect. For though he had sometimes been contrary enough, and even now thought it necessary to remind his sister that, being a girl, she must be content to occupy but a humble place in the world, Shenac had no more stanch friend and supporter than he. Indeed, Dan was one who, though restless and jealous of his rights when he thought they were to be interfered with, yielded willingly to a strong hand and rightful authority; and he had greatly improved already under the management of his elder brother, of whom he was not a little proud.

"Yes," continued he, "I think they would have scattered us to the four winds if it had not been for Shenac. She always said that you would come home, and that we must manage to keep together till then. Man, you should have seen her when Angus Dhu said to my mother that he doubted that you had gone for your own pleasure, and would stay for the same. She could not show him the door, because my mother was there, and he is an old man; but she turned her back upon him and walked out like a queen, and would not come in again while he stayed, though Shenac Dhu cried, and begged her not to mind."

"I suppose Shenac Dhu was of the same mind—that I was not to be trusted," said Allister.

Dan shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, as to that, I don't know. She's only a girl, and it does not matter what she thinks. But how it vexed her to be told what our Shenac said about her father."

"But the two Shenacs were never unfriendly?" said Allister incredulously.

"No," said Dan; "I don't think they ever were. Partly because Shenac yonder did not believe all I said, I suppose, and partly because she was vexed herself with her father. Oh yes, they are fast friends, the two Shenacs. You should have seen them the night Angus Dhu came to speak to my mother about the letter that came from Evan. Our Shenac was as proud of you as a hen is of one chicken, though she did not let the old man see it; and Shenac Dhu was as bad, and said over and over again to her father, `I told you, father, that Allister was good and true. He'll never leave Evan; don't be afraid.' I doubt Evan was a wild lad out yonder, Allister."

"Not wilder than many another," said Allister gravely. "But it is a bad place for young men, Dan. Evan was like a brother to me always."

"You were a brother to him, at any rate," said Dan.

"We were like brothers," said Allister.

"Oh, well, it's all right, I daresay," said Dan. "It has come out like a story in a book, you both coming home together. And, Allister, I was wrong about our Shenac in one thing. She does not mind in the least letting you do as you like. She seems all the better pleased when you are pleased; but she was hard on me, I can tell you."

"That's queer, too," said Allister, with a look in his eyes that made Dan laugh in spite of himself.

"Oh yes, I know what you are thinking: that there is a difference between you and me. But there is a difference in Shenac too."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN.

Dan was right,—Shenac was changed. Even if Allister had not come home, if the success of the summer's work had depended, as it had hitherto mainly done, upon her, it would have been a very different summer from the last. The labour, though it had been hard enough, from early morning till night every day of the year, was not what had been worst for her. The constant care and anxiety had been harder to bear. Not the fear of want. That had never really troubled her. She knew that it would never come to that with them. But the welfare of all the family had depended on her strength and wisdom while they kept together, and the responsibility had been too heavy for her. How much too heavy it had been she only knew by the blessed sense of relief which followed its removal.

But it would have been different now, even had her cares been the same, for a new element mingled in her life—a firm trust in God. She had known, in a way, all along that, labour as she might, the increase must come from God. She had always assented to her brother's gentle reminders of the heavenly care and keeping promised to the widow and the fatherless; but she had wearied and vexed herself, taking all the weight of the burden, just as if there had been no promise given, no help made sure.

It would have been quite different now. Even failure would have brought no such burden as had come with a sense of success before, because of her sure and certain knowledge that all that concerned her was safe in the best and most loving care.

And, with Allister between her and the summer's work, she had no need to trouble herself. Every day had strengthened her trust in him, not only as a loving brother, but as a wise man and a good farmer; and many a time she laughed merrily to herself as Dan's foolish words about her not wishing to give place to Allister came to her mind. She could never tell him or any one else how blessed was the sense of relief and peace which his being at home gave her. She awoke every morning with the restful feeling fresh in her heart. There was no half−conscious planning about ways and means before her eyes were open; no shrinking from possible encounters with Dan's idleness or wilfulness; no balancing of possibilities as to his doing well, or doing at all, some piece of work depending upon him.

She heard more in the song of the birds now than just the old burden, “It is time to be at work again.” It gave her quite a sense of pleasure now and then to find herself looking over the fields with delight just because they were fresh and green and beautiful, and not at all because of the tons of hay or the bushels of grain which they were to yield. Of course it was pleasant to anticipate a good harvest, and it was pleasant to know that there were wider fields to harvest this year, and that the barns would be full to overflowing. It did not in the least lessen the pleasure to know that this year success would not be due to her. Indeed, her pride in Allister's work was quite as great as it ever had been in her own, and the pleasure had fewer drawbacks. She could speak of it and triumph in it, and did so with Hamish and Shenac Dhu, and sometimes with Allister himself.

She was happy, too, in a half−conscious coming back to the thoughts and enjoyments of the time before their troubles had overtaken them. She was very young still, quite young enough to grow light−hearted and mirthful; and if her mother had been well, it would truly have seemed like the old happy days again.

Not that she had very much leisure even now. She did not go to the fields; but what with the dairy and the house−work, and after a little while the wool, she had plenty to do. There were two more cows in the enlarged pasture, and some of the people who were busy about the new house took their meals with them, so there was little time for lingering over anything. Besides, the house−work, which in the busy seasons had seemed a secondary concern, was done differently now. Shenac took pride and pleasure in doing everything in the very best way, and in having the house in order, the linen snow−white, and the table neatly laid; and the little log−house was a far pleasanter home than many a more commodious dwelling.

If there had lingered in Angus Dhu's heart any indignation towards Shenac for having interfered with his plans, and for having spoken her mind to him so plainly, it was gone now. They had no more frequent visitor than he, and few who were more welcome. His coming was for Allister's sake, his sister used to think; and, indeed, the old man seemed to see no fault in the young farmer. He gave him his confidence as he had never given it to any one before. After the first meeting he never spoke of what Allister had done for him in bringing Evan home, but

he knew it was through his care and tenderness that he had ever seen his son's face again, and he was deeply grateful.

There was another reason why he found pleasure in the young man's society. He had loved Allister's father when they had been young together, before the love of money had hardened his heart and blinded his eyes. His long trouble and fear for his son had made him feel that wealth is not enough to give peace. It had shaken his faith in the “god of this world;” and as God's blessing on his sorrow softened his heart, the worldly crust fell away, and he came back to his old thoughts—or rather, I should say, his young thoughts of life again.

Allister was just what his father had been at his age—as gentle, as manly, and kind−hearted; having, besides, the strength of character, the knowledge of men and things, which his father had lacked. He had always been a bold, frank lad. Even in the old times he had never stood in awe of “the dour old man,” as the rest had done. In the old times his frankness had been resented as an unwarrantable liberty; but it was very different now. Even his own children felt a little restraint in the presence of the stern old man; but Allister always greeted him cheerfully, talked with him freely, and held his own opinions firmly, though they often differed widely enough from those of Angus Dhu. But they never quarrelled. The old man's dogmatic ways vexed and irritated Shenac many a time; even Hamish had much ado to keep his patience and the thread of his argument at the same time; but Allister never lost his temper, and if the old man grew bitter and disagreeable, as he sometimes did, the best cure for it was Allister's good−humoured determination not to see it, and so they always got on well together.

Of all their friends, Angus Dhu was the one whom their mother never failed to recognise. She did not always remember how the last few years had passed, and spoke to him, as she so often did to others, as though her husband were still living and her children young; but almost always she was recalled to the present by the sight of him, and rejoiced over Allister's return, and the building of the new house, and the prosperity which seemed to be coming back to them. But, whether she was quite herself or not, he was always very gentle with her, answering the same questions and telling the same incidents over and over again for her pleasure, with a patience very different from anything that might have been expected from him.

There was one thing about Allister, and Shenac too, which greatly vexed their uncle. In his eyes it seemed almost like forsaking the God of their fathers when, Sabbath after Sabbath, they passed by the old kirk and sat in the new. He would have excused it on the days when old Mr Farquharson was not there and the old kirk was closed; but that they should hold with these “new folk” at all times was a scandal in his eyes.

It was in vain that Hamish proved to him that in doctrine and discipline—in everything, indeed, except one thing, which could not affect them in this country—the new folk were just like the old. This only made the matter less excusable in the eyes of Angus Dhu. The separation which circumstances might have made necessary at home—as these people still lovingly called the native land of their fathers—was surely not needed here, and it grieved and vexed the old man sorely to see so many leaving the old minister and the kirk their fathers had built and had worshipped in so long.

But even Angus Dhu himself ventured into the forbidden ground of the new kirk, when word was brought that Mr Stewart, the schoolmaster of two years ago, was come to supply the minister's place there for a while. He had a great respect for Mr Stewart, and some curiosity, now that he was an ordained minister, to hear him preach; and having heard him, he acknowledged to himself, though he was slow to speak of it to others, that the word of God was held forth with power, and he began to think that, after all, the scores of young people who flocked to hear him were as well while listening here as when sleeping quietly under the monotonous voice of the good old minister; and very soon no objection was made when his own Evan and Shenac Dhu went with the rest.

Mr Stewart had changed much since he came among them first. His health was broken then, and he was struggling with a fear that he was not to be permitted to work the work for which he had all his lifetime been preparing. That fear had passed away. He was well now, and well−fitted to declare God's gospel to men. It was a labour of love to him, all could see. The grave, quiet man seemed transformed when he stood in the pulpit He spoke with authority, as one who knew from deep, blessed experience the things which he made known, and no wonder that all listened eagerly.

Hamish was very happy in the renewal of their friendship, and Allister was almost as happy in coming to know the minister. He came sometimes to see them, but not very often, for he had many engagements, and his visits made “white days” for them all. Hamish saw much more of him than the rest, for he was comparatively idle this summer, and drove the minister to his different preaching stations, and on his visits to the people, with much

profit to himself and much pleasure to both.

It was a very pleasant summer, for many reasons, to Shenac and them all. The only drawback was the state of the mother. She was not getting better—would probably never be better, the doctor said, whom Allister had brought from far to see her. But she might live a long time in her present state. She did not suffer, and was almost always quite content. All that the tenderest care could do for her was done, and her uneventful days were made happy by her children's watchful love.

The entire renewal of confidence and intercourse between the two families was a source of pleasure to all, but especially to Shenac, who had never been quite able to believe herself forgiven by her uncle before. Two of Angus Dhu's daughters were married in the spring, and left their father's house; and partly because she was more needed at home, and partly for other reasons, Shenac Dhu did not run into their house so often as she used to do. But Evan was often there. He and Hamish were much together, for neither of them was strong, and much help was not expected from them on the land or elsewhere. Evan was hardly what he had been before his departure from home. He was improved, they thought, on the whole; but his health was not firm, and his spirits and temper were variable, and, as Shenac said, he was as different from Allister as weakness is from strength, or as darkness is from the day. But they were always glad to see him, and his intercourse with these healthy, cheerful young people did him much good.

The new house progressed rapidly. There was a fair prospect that they might get into it before winter, and already Shenac was planning ways and means towards the furnishing of it. The wool was sorted and dyed with reference to the making of such a carpet as had never been seen in those parts before; and every pound of butter that was put down was looked upon as so much security for a certain number of things for use or for adornment in the new house. For Shenac had a natural love for pretty things, and it was pleasant to feel that she might gratify her taste to a reasonable degree without hazarding the comfort of any one.

She made no secret of her pleasure in the prospect of living in a nice house with pretty things about her, and discussed her plans and intentions with great enjoyment with her cousin Shenac, who did not laugh at her little ambitions as much as might have been expected. Indeed, she was rather grave and quiet about this time, and seemed to shun, rather than to seek, these confidences. She was too busy now that Mary and Annie were both gone, to leave home often, and when our Shenac wished to see her she had to go in search of her. It was not quite so formidable an affair as it used to be to go to Angus Dhu's house now, and Shenac and her brother often found themselves there on summer evenings. But at home, as elsewhere, Shenac Dhu was quiet and staid, and not at all like the merry Shenac of former times.

This change was not noticed by Shenac Bhan so quickly as it would have been if she had been less occupied with her own affairs; but she did notice it at last, and one night, drawing her away from the door−step where the rest were sitting, she told her what she was thinking, and entreated to know what ailed her.

“What ails me?” repeated Shenac Dhu, reddening a little. “What in the world should all me? I am busier than I used to be, that is all.”

“You were always busy; it is not that. I think you might tell *me*, Shenac.”

“Well,” began her cousin mysteriously, “I will tell you if you will promise not to mention it. I am growing wise.”

Shenac Bhan laughed.

“Well, I don't see what there is to laugh at. It's time for me to grow wise, when you are growing foolish.”

Shenac Bhan looked at her cousin a little wistfully.

“Am I growing foolish, Shenac? Is it about the house and all the things? Perhaps I am thinking too much about them. But it is not for myself, Shenac; at least, it's not all for myself.”

But Shenac Dhu stopped her.

“You really *are* foolish now. No; of course the house has nothing to do with it. I called you foolish for saying that something ails me, which is nonsense, you know. What could ail me? I put it to yourself.”

“But that is what I am asking you. How can I tell? Many a thing might go wrong with you,” said Shenac Bhan.

“Yes; I might take the small−pox, or the bank might break and I might lose my money, or many a thing might happen, as you say; and when anything does happen, I'll tell you, you may be sure. Now tell me, is the wide stripe in the new carpet to be red or green?”

"You are laughing at me, Cousin Shenac," said our Shenac, gravely. "I daresay it is foolish in me, and may be wrong, to be thinking so much about these things and teasing you about them; but, Shenac, our Allister is a man now, and folk think much of him, and I want his house to be nice, and I do take pleasure in thinking about it. And you know we have been so poor and so hard pressed for the last few years, with no time to think of anything but just what must be done to live; and it will be so nice when we are fairly settled. And, Shenac, our Allister is so good. There never was such a brother as Allister—never. I would not speak so to every one, Shenac; but *you* know."

Shenac Dhu nodded. "Yes, I know."

"If my mother were only well!" continued Shenac Bhan, and the tears that had risen to her eyes fell on her cheeks now. "We would be too happy then, I suppose. But it seems sad enough that she should not be able to enjoy it all, and take her own place in the new house, after all she has gone through."

"Yes," said Shenac Dhu, "it is very sad."

"And yet I cannot but take pleasure in it; and perhaps it is foolish and unkind to my mother too. Is it, Shenac?"

There were two or three pairs of eyes watching—no, not watching, but seeing—the two girls from the doorstep, and Shenac Dhu drew her cousin down the garden−path towards the plum− tree before she answered her. Then she put her arms round her neck, and kissed her two or three times before she answered,—

"You are not wrong or foolish. You are right to take pride and pleasure in your brother and his house, and in all that belongs to him. And he is just as proud of you, Shenac, my darling."

"That is nonsense, you know, Cousin Shenac," said Allister's sister; but she smiled and blushed too, as she said it, with pure pleasure.

There was no chance after this to say anything more about the change, real or supposed, that had taken place in Shenac Dhu, for she talked on, allowing no pause till they had come quite round the garden and back to the door−step; but Shenac Bhan knew all about it before she saw her cousin again.

That night, as she was going home through the field with Allister, he asked her rather suddenly,—

"What were you and Cousin Shenac speaking about to−night when you went round the garden?"

"Allister," said his sister, "do you think Cousin Shenac is changed lately?"

"Changed!" repeated Allister. "How?"

"Oh, of course you cannot tell; but she used to be so merry, and now she is quite quiet and grave, and we hardly ever see her over with us now. I was asking her what ailed her."

"And what did she say?"

"Oh, she laughed at me, and denied that anything ailed her, and then she said she was growing wise. But I know something is wrong with her, though she would not tell me."

"What do you think it is, Shenac?"

"I cannot tell. It is not only that she is quieter—I could understand that; but she hardly ever comes over now, and something is vexing her, I'm sure. Could it be anything Dan has said? He used to vex her sometimes. What do you think it can be, Allister?"

There was a little pause, and then Allister said,—

"I think I know what it is, Shenac."

"You!" exclaimed Shenac. "What is it? Have I anything to do with it? Am I to blame?"

"You have something to do with it, but you are not to blame," said Allister.

"Tell me, Allister," said his sister.

There was a silence of several minutes, and then Allister said,—

"Shenac, I have asked Cousin Shenac to be my wife." Shenac stood perfectly still in her surprise and dismay. Yes, she *was* dismayed. I have heard it said that the tidings of a brother's engagement rarely bring unmixed pleasure to a sister. I daresay there is some truth in this. Many sisters make their brothers their first object in life—pride themselves on their talents, their worth, their success, live in their lives, glory in their triumphs; till a day comes when it is softly said of some stranger, or some friend—it may be none the pleasanter to hear because it is a friend—"She is more to him than you could ever be." Is it only to jealous hearts, ignoble minds, that such tidings come with a shock of pain? Nay, the truer the heart the keener the pain. It may be short, but it is sharp. The second thought may be, "It is well for him; I am glad for him." But the pang is first, and inevitable.

Allister had been always first, after Hamish, in Shenac's heart— perhaps not even after Hamish. She had never

thought of him in connection with any change of this kind. In all her plans for the future, no thought of possible separation had come. She stood perfectly still, till her brother touched her.

"Well, Shenac?"

Then she moved on without speaking. She was searching about among her astonished and dismayed thoughts for something to say, for she felt that Allister was waiting for her to speak. At last she made a grasp at the question they had been discussing, and said hurriedly,—

"But there is nothing to vex Shenac in that, surely?"

"No; unless she is right in thinking that you will not be glad too."

"I am glad it is Shenac. I would rather it would be Shenac than any one else in the whole world—"

"I was sure of it," said her brother, kissing her fondly.

Even without the kiss she would hardly have had the courage to add,—

"If it must be anyone."

"And, Shenac," continued her brother, "you must tell her so. She fancies that for some things you will not like it, and she wants to put it off for ever so long—till—till something happens— till you are married yourself, I suppose."

Now Shenac was vexed. She was in the way—at least, Allister and Shenac Dhu thought so. It was quite as well that the sound of footsteps gave her no time to speak the words that rose to her lips. They were overtaken by Mr Stewart and Hamish. It had been to see the minister that they had all gone to Angus Dhu's, for he was going away in the morning, and they did not know when they might see him again. It was late, and the farewells were brief and earnest.

"God bless you, Shenac!" was all that Mr Stewart said; and Shenac answered never a word.

"I'll walk a little way with you," said Allister. Hamish and Shenac stood watching them till they passed through the gate, and then Shenac sat down on the doorstep with a sigh, and laid her face upon her hands. Hamish looked a little astonished, but he smiled too.

"He will come back again, Shenac," he said at last.

"Yes, I know," said she, rising slowly. "I must tell you before he comes. We must not stay here. Come in; you will take cold. I don't know what to think. He expected me to be pleased, and I shall be in a little while, I think, after I have told you. Do you know it, Hamish?"

"I know—he told me; but I thought he had not spoken to you," said the puzzled Hamish.

"Did Allister tell you? Are you glad, Hamish?"

"Allister?" repeated Hamish.

"Allister has asked Shenac Dhu to be his wife," said Shenac in a whisper.

"Is that it? No, I had not heard that, though I thought it might be—some time. You must have seen it, Shenac?"

"Seen it! the thought never came into my mind—never once—till he told me to−night."

"Well, that's odd, too," said Hamish, smiling. "They say girls are quick enough to see such things. Are you not pleased, Shenac?"

"I don't know. Should I be pleased, Hamish? I think perhaps in a little while I shall be." Then she added, "It will make a great difference."

"Will it?" asked Hamish. "Cousin Shenac has almost been like one of ourselves so long."

"I suppose it is foolish, and maybe it is wrong, but it does seem to put Allister farther from us—from me, at least. He seems less our own."

"Don't say that, Shenac dear," said her brother gently. "Allister can never be less than a dear and loving brother to us all. It is very natural and right that this should happen. It might have been a stranger. We all love Shenac Dhu dearly."

"Yes," said Shenac; "I said that to Allister."

"And, Shenac, I am very glad this should happen. Allister will settle down content, and be a good and useful man."

"He would have done that anyway," said Shenac, a little dolefully.

"He might, but he might not," said Hamish. "They say marriage is the natural and proper state. I am glad for Allister, Shenac; and you will be glad by−and−by. I wish I had known this a little sooner. I am very glad,

Shenac."

Shenac sighed. "I suppose it is altogether mean and miserable in me not to be glad all at once; and I'll try to be. I suppose we must stay here now, Hamish," she added, glancing round the low room.

"Do you think so?" said Hamish in surprise. "No, you must not say so. I am sure it would grieve Cousin Shenac."

"There are so many of us, Hamish, and our mother is a great care; it would not be fair to Shenac. I must stay here and take care of my mother and you."

There was a long silence.

"Shenac," said her brother at last, "don't think about this just now; don't make up your mind. It is not going to happen soon."

"Allister says soon, but Shenac says not till—" She stopped.

"Well, soon or late, never mind; it will all come right. Let us be more anxious to do right than for anything else. God will guide us, Shenac. Don't let us say anything to vex Allister. It would vex him greatly, I know, to think that you and all of us would not go with him and Shenac."

"But it would not be fair to Shenac herself. Think what a large family there is of us."

"Whisht, Shenac, there may be fewer of us soon. You may marry yourself."

"And leave my mother and you?" Shenac smiled incredulously.

"Stranger things have happened," said her brother. "But, Shenac, our mother will not be here long, and Allister's house is her place, and you can care for her all the same there—better indeed. I am glad of this marriage, for all our sakes. Shenac Dhu is like one of ourselves; she will always care for the little ones as no stranger could, and for our mother. It *is* a little hard that *you* should not have the first place in the new house for a while, till you get a home of your own, after all the care and trouble you have had for us here—"

"Do you think that has anything to do with it, Hamish?" said Shenac reproachfully. "It never came into my mind; only when Allister told me it seemed as though I would be so little to him now. Maybe you are right, though. Everybody seems to think that I like to be first. I know I have thought a great deal about the new house; but it has been for the rest, and for Allister most of all."

"Shenac, you must not vex yourself thinking about it," said her brother. "I am more glad of this for your sake than for all the rest. I cannot tell you how glad I am."

"Well, I am glad too—I think I am glad; I think it will be all right, Hamish. I am not really afraid of anything that can happen now."

"You need not be, dear; why should you be afraid even of trouble?" said her brother. "And this is not trouble, but a great blessing for us all."

But Shenac thought about it a great deal, and, I am afraid, vexed herself somewhat, too. She did not see Shenac Dhu for a day or two, for her cousin was away; and it was as well to have a little time to think about it before she saw her. There came no order out of the confusion, however, with all her thinking. That they were all to be one family she knew was Allister's plan, and Hamish approved it, though the brothers had not exchanged a word about the matter. But this did not seem the best plan to her, nor did she think it would seem so to her cousin; it was not best for any of them. She could do far better for her mother, and Hamish too, living quietly in their present home; and the young people would be better without them. Of course they must get their living from the farm, at least partly; but she could do many things to earn something. She could spin and knit, and she would get a loom and learn to weave, and little Flora should help her.

"If Allister would only be convinced; but they will think I am vexed about the house, and I don't think I really cared much about it for myself—it was for Allister and the rest. Oh, if my mother were only able to decide it, I do think she would agree with me about it."

She thought and thought till she was weary, and it all came to this:—

"I will wait and see what will happen, and I will trust. Surely nothing can go wrong when God guides us. At any rate, I shall say nothing to vex Allister or Shenac; but I wish it was well over."

It was the first visit to Shenac Dhu which, partly from shyness and partly from some other feeling, she did dread a little; but she need not have feared it so much. She did not have to put a constraint on herself to *seem* glad; for the very first glimpse she caught of Shenac's sweet, kind face put all her vexed thoughts to flight, and she was really and truly glad for Allister and for herself too.

She went to her uncle's one night, not at all expecting to see her cousin; but she had returned sooner than was expected, and when she went in she found her sitting with her father and Allister. Shenac did not see her brother, however. She hastily greeted her uncle, and going straight to her cousin put her arms round her neck and kissed her many times. Shenac Dhu looked up in surprise.

“I know it now, Cousin Shenac,” said Allister's sister; and in a moment Allister's arms were round them both. It was Angus Dhu's turn to be surprised now. He had not been so startled since the day that Shenac Bhan told him her mind down by the creek. The girls escaped, and Allister explained how matters stood. The old man was pleased, but he grumbled a little, too, at the thought of losing his last daughter.

“You must make an exchange, Allister, my man. If you could give us your Shenac—”

Allister laughed. In his heart he thought his sister too good to be sent there, and he was very glad he had not the matter to decide.

“Shenac, my woman,” said the old man as they were going away, “I wonder at you being so willing to give up the fine new house. I think it is very good in you.”

“I would not—to anybody else,” said she, laughing.

“But she's not going to give it up, father,” said Shenac Dhu eagerly.

“Well, well, maybe not, if you can keep her.”

Shenac still pondered over the question of what would be best for them all, and wearied herself with it many a time; but she gave none the less interest to the progress of the house and its belongings. She spun the wool for the carpet, and bleached the new linen to snowy whiteness, and made all other preparations just the same as if she were to have the guiding and governing of the household. She was glad with Allister and glad with Shenac, and, for herself and the rest, quite content to wait and see what time would bring to pass.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN.

But a day came when Shenac saw how needless all her anxious thoughts about her mother's future had been, when she acknowledged, with tears of mingled sorrow and joy, that she had tenderer care and safer keeping than son or daughter could give.

All through the long harvest−days the mother failed slowly—so slowly that even the watchful eyes of Shenac did not see how surely. Then, as the autumn wore away, and the increasing cold no longer permitted the daily sitting in the sunshine, the change became more rapid. Then there was a time of sharper suffering. The long days and nights lingered out into weeks, and then all suffering was over—the tired heart ceased to struggle with the burden of life, and the widow was laid to rest beside her husband and son.

That this was a time of great sorrow in the household need not be told. Neighbours came from far and near with offers of help and sympathy. All that kind hearts and experienced hands could do to aid these young people in the care of their suffering mother was done; but all was only a little. It was the strong arm of Allister which lifted and laid down, and moved unceasingly, the never−resting form of the mother. It was Shenac who smoothed her pillow and moistened her lips, and performed all the numberless offices so necessary to the sick, yet too often so useless to soothe pain. It was the voice of Hamish that sometimes had the power to soothe to quietness, if not to repose, the ever−moaning sufferer. Friends came with counsel and encouragement, but her children never left her through all. It was a terrible time to them. Their mother's failure had been so gradual that the thought of her death had not been forced upon them; and, quite unaccustomed to the sight of so great suffering, as the days and nights wore on, bringing no change, no respite, but ever the same moaning and agony, they looked into one another's faces appalled. It was terrible; but it came to an end at last. They could not sorrow for her when the close came. They rejoiced rather that she had found rest. But they were motherless and desolate.

It was a very hushed and sorrowful home that night, when all the friends who had returned with them from the grave were gone, and the children were alone together; and for many days after that. If this trouble had come upon them a year ago, there would have been some danger that the silence and sadness that rested upon them might have changed to gloom and despondency on Shenac's part; for she felt that her mother's death had “unsettled old foundations,” and when she looked forward to what her life might be now, it was not always that she could do so hopefully. But she was quiet and not impatient—willing to wait and see what time might bring to them all.

By−and−by the affairs of the house and of the farm fell back into the old routine, and life flowed quietly on. The new house made progress. It was so nearly completed that they had intended to remove to it about the time their mother became worse. The work went on through all their time of trouble, and one after another the workmen went away; but nothing was said of any change to be made, till the year was drawing to a close. It was Hamish who spoke of it then, first to Shenac and then to Allister; and before Christmas they were quite settled in their new home.

Christmas passed, and the new year came in, and a month or two more went by, and then one night Shenac said to her brother,—

“Allister, when are you going to bring Shenac home?”

Allister had been the gravest and quietest of them all during the time that had passed since their mother's death. He was silent, though he started a little when his sister spoke. In a moment she came close to him, and standing behind him, laid her hand on his shoulder, and said softly,—

“It would be no disrespect to the memory of our mother, coming now. Hamish says so too. Shenac is not like a stranger; and it might be very quiet.” Allister turned and touched with his lips the hand that lay on his shoulder, and then drew her down on the seat beside him. This was one of the things which made Allister so different from other people in Shenac's eyes. Even Hamish, loving and kind as he was, had not Allister's gentle, caressing ways. A touch, a smile, a fond word, came so naturally from him; and these were all the more sweet to Shenac because she was shy of giving such tokens herself, even where she loved best.

“If Shenac would come,” said Allister.

Shenac smiled. “And will she not?”

“Should I ask it now, dear?”

“Yes, I think so,” said his sister gravely. “The spring will soon be here, and the busy time. I think it should be soon. Have you spoken to Shenac since?”

“No; I have not. Though I may wish it, and Shenac might consent, there is more to be thought of. We will not have you troubled, after all you have gone through, till you are quite ready for it —you and Hamish.”

“But surely Shenac cannot doubt I will speak to her myself; and I think it should be soon,” said his sister.

They were sitting in the new, bright kitchen, and it was growing dark. There was a stove in it, one of the latest kind, for use; but there was a great wide fireplace too, for pleasure; and all the light that was in the room came from the great maple logs and glowing embers. Little Flora had gone to the mill with Dan, Hamish was at his uncle's, and the other lads were not come in; so they had the house to themselves. There was silence between them for a little while, and then his sister said again,—

“I'll speak to Shenac.”

The chance to do so was nearer than she thought; for there was a touch at the door−latch, and a voice said softly,—

“Are you here, Cousin Shenac? I want to speak to you. Hamish told me you were quite alone.”

“Yes, she's quite alone, except me.” And Allister made one stride across the floor, and Shenac Dhu was held fast. She could not have struggled from that gentle and firm clasp, and she did not try.

“I thought you were at The Sixteenth, Allister,” said she. “I was there, but I am here now. And our Shenac wants to speak to you.”

He brought her to the fire−light, where our Shenac was waiting, a little shyly—that is, Shenac waited shyly. Allister brought the other Shenac forward, not at all shyly, quite triumphantly, indeed, and then our Shenac said softly,—

“When are you coming home, sister Shenac?”

With that the startled little creature gave one look into our Shenac's face, and breaking from Allister's gentle hold, she clasped her round the neck, and wept and sobbed in a way that astonished them more than a little. For indeed there was no cause for tears, said Shenac Bhan; and indeed she was very foolish to cry, said Allister—though there were tears in his own eyes; and as for Shenac Bhan, the tears did not stay in her eyes, but ran down over her face and fell on the soft black braids of the other Shenac's bowed head; for joy will make tears fall as well as sorrow sometimes, and joy and sorrow mingled is the source of these.

But indeed, indeed, I never thought of telling all this. When I began my story I never meant to put a word of love or marriage in it. I meant to end it at the happy day when Allister came home. But all Shenac's work at home was not done when her good and loving brother took the place she had filled so well. So my story has gone on, and will go on a little longer; though that night, when Shenac Dhu went away and Allister went with her, leaving Shenac Bhan to her own thoughts, she said to herself that very soon there would be nothing more for her to do. Allister and Shenac Dhu would care for the little ones better than she ever could have done; for the lads were wilful often, and sometimes her patience failed, and Allister would make men of them—wise, and strong, and gentle, like himself. And Shenac, sweet, kind, merry Shenac Dhu, would never be hard with the lads or little Flora, for she loved them dearly; and it would be better for the children just to have Allister and Shenac Dhu, and no elder sister to appeal to from them. It would be better that she should go away—at least for a little while, till other authority than hers should be established.

Yes; her work for the children was done. She said it over and over again, repeating that it was better so, and that she was glad and thankful that all would be so well. But she said it with many a tear and many a sigh and sob; for, having no experience of life beyond her long labour and care for them, it seemed to this foolish Shenac that really and truly her life's work was done. No, she did not say it in words, even to herself; but the future looked blank and bare to her. Any future that seemed possible to her looked rather dark than bright; and she feared—oh, so much! —to take her destiny in her hands and go away alone.

But not a word of all this had been spoken to Allister and Shenac Dhu. Not even Hamish had been told of her plans. No, not her plans—she had none—but the vague blending of wishes and fears that came with all her thoughts of the future. There would be time enough by−and−by to tell him; and, indeed, Shenac was a little afraid to let the light of her brother's sense and wisdom in on all her thoughts. For Hamish had a way of putting things in a light that made them look quite different. Sometimes this made her laugh, and sometimes it vexed her; but, whether or not, the chances were she would come round in time to see things as he saw them.

And, besides, there was something in this matter that she could not tell to Hamish—at least, it seemed to her that she could not, even if it would be right and kind to do so; and without this she feared that her wish to go away from home might not commend itself to him. Indeed, if it had not been for this thing which could not be told, she might not have wished to leave home. She would hardly have found courage to break away from them all and go to a new, untried life, of her own free will, even though her work at home were done.

This was the thing which Shenac thought she never could tell even to Hamish. One night, on her way home from his house, she had been waylaid by Angus Dhu, and startled out of measure by a request, nay, an entreaty, that “she would be kind to poor Evan.” Then the old man had gone on to say how welcome she would be if she would come home and be the daughter of the house when his Shenac went to Allister. He told her how fondly she should be cherished by them all, and how everything within and without should be ordered according to her will; for he was sure that union with one of her firm yet gentle nature was just what was needed to make a good man of his wayward lad. She had listened, because she could not break away, wishing all the time that the earth would open and that she might creep away into the fissure and get out of sight. For, indeed, she had never thought of such a thing as that. Nor Evan either, she was sure—she thought— she did not know. Oh, well, perhaps he had thought of it, and had tried to make it known to her in his foolish way. But she never really would have found it out or thought about it if his father had not spoken; and now she would never be able to think about anything else in the presence of either.

It was too bad, and wrong, and miserable, and uncomfortable, and I don't know what else, she said to herself, for it could never be—never. And yet, why not? It would seem natural enough to people generally; her aunt would like it, her uncle's heart was set on it, and Allister and Shenac Dhu would be pleased. Even Hamish would not object. And Evan himself? Oh, no; it could never be. She would never care for him in that way. He was not like Allister, nor like any one she cared for—so different from— from—Shenac was sitting alone in the dark, but she suddenly dropped her face in her hands. For quite unbidden, with a shock of surprise and pain that made her heart stand still for a moment, and then set it beating wildly, a name had come to her lips—the name of one so wise and good in her esteem that to speak it at such a time, even in her thoughts, seemed desecration.

“I am growing foolish, I think, with all this vexation and nonsense; and I won't think about it any more. I have enough to keep me busy till Shenac Dhu comes home, and then I'll have it out with Hamish.”

The wedding was a very quiet one. It was hardly a wedding at all, said the last−married sisters, who had gone away amid feasting and music. There was no groomsman nor bridesmaid, for Shenac Bhan could hardly stand in her black dress, and Shenac Dhu would have no one else; and there were no guests out of the two families. Old Mr Farquharson came up one morning, and it was “put over quietly,” as Angus Dhu said; and after dinner, which might have served half the township both for quantity and quality, Allister and his bride went away for their wedding trip, which was only to the town of M—−to see Christie More and make a few purchases. They were to be away a week—certainly no longer—and then the new life was to begin.

Shenac Bhan stood watching till they were out of sight; and then she stood a little longer, wondering whether she might not go straight home without turning into the house. No; she could not. They were all expected to stay the rest of the day and have tea, and visit with her cousins, who lived at some distance, and had been little in their father's house since they went to their own.

“Mind you are not to stay away, Hamish, bhodach,” whispered Shenac, as they turned towards the house; and Hamish, who had been thinking of it, considered himself in honour bound to return after he had gone to see that all was right at home.

It was not so very bad, after all. The two young wives were full of their own affairs, and compared notes about the butter and cheese−making which they had carried on during the summer, and talked about flannel and full−cloth and the making of blankets in a way that must have set their mother's heart at rest about their future as notable house−keepers. And Shenac Bhan listened and joined, seemingly much interested, but wondering all the time why she did not care a pin about it all. Flannel and full−cloth, made with much labour and pains, as the means of keeping Hamish and little Flora and the lads from the cold, had been matters of intense interest; and butter put down, and cheese disposed of, as the means of getting sugar and tea and other things necessary to the comfort of her mother and the rest, had been prized to their utmost value. But flannel and full−cloth, butter and cheese, were in themselves, or as a means of wealth, matters of indifference. Allister's good heart and strong arm were between them and a struggle for these things now; and that made the difference.

But, as she sat listening and wondering, Shenac did not understand all this, and felt vexed and mortified with herself at the change. Annie and Mary, her cousins, were content to look forward to a long routine of spinning and weaving, dairy−work and house−work, and all the rest. Why should she not do the same? She used to do so. No; she used to work without looking forward. She could do so still, if there were any need for it—any good in it —if it were to come to anything. But to work on for yards of flannel and pounds of butter that Flora and the rest, and all the world indeed, would be just as well without—the thought of that was not pleasant.

She grew impatient of her thoughts, as well as the talk, at last, and went to help her aunt to set out the table for tea. This was better. She could move about and chat with her concerning the cream−cheese made for the occasion, and of the cake made by Shenac Dhu from a recipe sent by Christie More, of which her mother had stood in doubt till it was cut, but no longer. Then there were the new dishes of the bride, which graced the table— pure white, with just a little spray of blue. They were quite beautiful, Shenac thought. Then her aunt let her into the secret of a second set of knives and forks—very handsome, which even the bride herself had not seen yet; and so on till Hamish came in with Angus Dhu. Then Shenac could have cried with vexation, she felt so awkward and uncomfortable under the old man's watchful, well−pleased eye; and when Evan and the two Dans came in it was worse. She laid hands on a long grey stocking, her aunt's work, and betook herself to the corner where Annie and Mary were still talking more earnestly than ever. She startled them by the eagerness with which she questioned first one and then the other as to the comparative merits of madder and—something else—for dyeing red. It was a question of vital importance to her, one might have supposed, and it was taken up accordingly. Mrs McLay thought the other thing was best—gave much the brighter colour; but Mrs McRea declared for the madder, because, instead of fading, it grew prettier the longer it was worn and the oftener it was washed. But each had enough to say about it; and this lasted till the lads and little Flora came in from their play, and Shenac busied herself with them till tea was ready. After tea they had worship, and sung a little while, and then they went home.

“Oh, what a long day this has been!” said Shenac, as they came in.

“Yes; I fancied you were a little weary of it all,” said Hamish.

“It would be terrible to be condemned to do nothing but visit all one's life. It is the hardest work I ever undertook—this doing nothing,” said Shenac.

Hamish laughed.

“Well, there is comfort in knowing that you have not had much of that kind of work to do in your lifetime, and are not likely to have.”

There were several things to attend to after coming home, and by the time all these were out of the way the children had gone to bed, and Hamish and Shenac were alone.

“I may as well speak to Hamish to−night,” said Shenac to herself. “Oh dear! I wish it were well over. If Hamish says it is right to go, I shall be sure I am right, and I shall not be afraid. But I must go—I think it will be right to go—whether Hamish thinks so or not. Hamish can do without me; but how shall I ever do without him?”

She sat looking into the fire, trying to think how she should begin, and started a little when Hamish said,—

“Well, Shenac, what is it? You have something to tell me.”

“I am going to ask you something,” said his sister gravely. “Do you think it is wrong for me to wish to go away from home—for a while, I mean?”

“From home? Why? When? Where? It all depends on these things,” said Hamish, laughing a little.

“Hamish, what should I do?” asked his sister earnestly. “I cannot do much good by staying here, can I? Ought I to stay? Don't tell me that I ought not to go away—that you have never thought of such a thing.”

“No, I cannot tell you that, Shenac; for I have thought a great deal about it; and I believe you ought to go—though what we are to do without you is more than I can tell.”

So there were to be no objections from Hamish. She said to herself that was good, and she was glad; but her heart sank a little too, and she was silent.

“You have been thinking about us and caring for us all so long, it is time we were thinking what is good for you,” said Hamish.

“You are laughing at me, Hamish.”

“No, I am not. I think it would be very nice for us if you would be content to stay at home and do for us all as you have been doing; but it would not be best for you.”

“It would be best for me if it were needful,” said Shenac eagerly; “but, Hamish, it is not much that I could do

here now. I mean Allister and Shenac Dhu will care for you all; and just what I could do with my hands is not much. Anybody could do it."

"And you think you could do higher work somewhere else?"

"Not higher work, Hamish. But I think there must be work somewhere that I could do better—more successfully—than I can do on the farm. Even when I was doing most, before Allister came, Dan could go before me when he cared to do it. And he did it so easily, forgetting it all the moment it was out of his hand; while I vexed myself and grew weary often, with planning and thinking of what was done and what was still to do. I often feel now it was a wild thing in us to think of carrying on the farm by ourselves. If I had known all, I would hardly have been so bold with Angus Dhu that day."

"But it all ended well. You did not undertake more than you carried through," said Hamish.

"No; it kept us all together. But, Hamish, I often think that Allister came home just in time. If it had gone on much longer, I must either have given out or become an earth−worm at last, with no thought but how to slave and save and turn everything to account."

"I don't think that would ever have happened, Shenac," said her brother. "But I think it was well for us all, and especially for you, that Allister came home just when he did."

"I don't mean that field−labour may not in some cases be woman's work. For a girl living at home, of course, it must be right to help in whatever way help is needed; but I don't think it is the work a woman should choose, except just to help with the rest. Surely I can learn to do something else. If I were to go to Christie More, she could find a place of some kind for me. Don't you mind, Hamish, what she once said about our going with her to M—−, you and me? Oh, if we could only go together!"

But Hamish shook his head.

"No, Shenac. It would be useless for me. I must be far stronger than I am now to undertake anything of that kind. And you must not be in a hurry to get away. You must not let Shenac think you are running away from her. Wait a while. A month or two will make no difference, and by that time the way will open before us. I don't like the thought of your taking any place that Christie More could get for you. You will be far better at home for a while."

"But, Hamish, you really think it will be better for me to go?"

"Yes—some time. Why should you be in haste? Is there any reason that you have not told me why you should wish to go?"

Shenac did not answer for a moment.

"Is it about Evan, Shenac?" asked her brother. "That could never be, I suppose."

"Who told you, Hamish? No; I think it could never be. Allister would like it, and Shenac Dhu; and I suppose to folk generally it would seem a good thing for me. But I don't like Evan in that way. No, I don't think it could ever be."

"Evan will be a rich man some day, Shenac; and you could have it all your own way there."

"Yes; Allister said that to me once. They all seem to think I would like to rule and to be rich. But I did not think you would advise me because of that, Hamish, or because Evan will be a rich man."

"I am not advising you, Shenac," said Hamish eagerly. "If you cared for Evan it would be different; but I am very glad you do not."

"I might come to care for him in time," said Shenac, a little wearily. "But I never thought about him in that way till—till Angus Dhu spoke to me."

"Angus Dhu!" exclaimed Hamish.

"Yes—and frightened me out of my wits," said Shenac, laughing a little. "I never answered a word, and maybe he thinks that I am willing. Allister spoke about it too. Would it please you, Hamish? I might come to like him well enough, in time."

"No, Shenac. It would by no means please me. I am very glad you do not care for Evan—in that way. I would not like to see you Evan's wife."

There was not much said after that, though they sat a long time together in the firelight.

"Did I tell you that I had a letter from Mr Stewart to−day, Shenac?" Hamish asked at last.

"No," said Shenac; "was he well?"

"He has a call to be minister of the church in H—−, and he is to go there soon; and he says if he can possibly

do it he will come this way. It will be in six weeks or two months, if he comes at all."

Shenac said nothing to this; but when Hamish had added a few more particulars, she said,—

"Perhaps it may seem foolish, Hamish, but I want to go soon."

"Because of Evan?" asked her brother.

"Partly; or rather, because of Angus Dhu," she said, laughing. "And Allister and Shenac would like it."

"But they would never urge it against your will."

"No; I suppose not. But it is uncomfortable; and, Hamish, it is not impossible that I might let myself be persuaded."

Hamish looked grave.

"I don't know but it is the best thing that could happen to me," Shenac continued. "I am not fit for any other life, I am afraid. But I must go away for a while at any rate."

Hamish said nothing, though he looked as if he had something to say.

"If you are willing, Hamish, it will go far to satisfy Allister. And I can come back again if I should find nothing to do."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN.

But Shenac's work at home was not all done yet. Sitting that night by the fireside with her brother, could she have got a glimpse of the next few months and all they were to bring about, her courage might have failed her; for sorrowful as some of the past days had been, more sorrowful days were awaiting her— sorrowful days, yet sweet, and very precious in remembrance.

A very quiet and happy week passed, and then Allister and his wife came home. There was some pleasure−seeking then, in a quiet way; for the newly−married pair were entertained by their friends, and there were a few modest gatherings in the new house, and the hands of the two Shenacs were full with the preparations, and with the arrangement of new furniture, and making all things as they ought to be in the new house.

But in the midst of the pleasant bustle Hamish fell ill. It was not much, they all thought—a cold only, which proved rather obstinate and withstood all the mild attempts made with herb− drinks and applications to remove it. But they were not alarmed about it. Even when the doctor was sent for, even when he came again of his own accord, and yet again, they were not much troubled. For Hamish had been so much better all the winter. He had had no return of his old rheumatic pains. He would soon be well again, they all said,—except himself; and he said nothing. They were inclined to make light of his present illness, rejoicing that he was no longer racked with the terrible pains that in former winters had made his nights sleepless and his days a weariness. He suffered now, especially at first, but not as he had suffered then.

All through March he kept his bed, and through April he kept his room; but he was comfortable, comparatively—only weak, very weak. He could read, and listen to reading, and enjoy the family conversation; and his room became the place where, in the gloaming, all dropped in to have a quiet time. This room had been called during the building of the house “the mother's room,” but when Hamish became ill it was fitted up for him. It was a pleasant room, having a window which looked towards the south over the finest fields of the farm, and one which looked west, where the sun went down in glory, over miles and miles of unbroken forest.

Even now, though years have passed since then, Shenac, shutting her eyes, can see again the fair picture which that western window framed. There is the mingling of gorgeous colours—gold, and crimson, and purple, fading into paler tints above. There is the glory of the illuminated forest, and on this side the long shadows of the trees upon the hills. Within, there is the beautiful pale face, radiant with a light which is not all reflected from the glory without—her brother's dying face.

Now, when troubles come, when fightings without and fears within assail her, when household cares make her weary, and the thought of guiding wayward hearts and wandering feet makes her afraid, the remembrance of this room comes back to her as the remembrance of Bethel or Peniel must have come to Jacob in his after− wanderings, and her strength is renewed. For there *she* met God face to face. There she was *smitten*, and there the same hand healed her. There she tasted the sweetness of the cup of bitterness which God puts to the lips of those of his children who humbly and willingly, through grace which he gives, drink it to the dregs. The memory of that room and the western window is like the memory of the stone which the prophet set up—“The stone of help.”

“I will trust, and not be afraid.”

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

The words seem to come again from the dear dying lips; and as they were surely his to trust to, to lean on when nought else could avail, so in all times of trouble Shenac knows that they are most surely hers.

But much sorrow came before the joy. March passed, and April, and May−day came, warm and bright this year again; and for the first time for many weeks Hamish went out−of−doors. He did not go far; just down to the creek, now flowing full again, to sit a little in the sunshine, with a plaid about his shoulders and another under his feet. It was pleasant to feel the wind in his face. All the sights and sounds of spring were pleasant to him—the gurgle of the water, the purple tinge on the woods, the fields growing fair with a tender green.

Allister left the plough in the furrow, and came striding down the long field, just to say it was good to see him there. Dan shouted, “Well done, Hamish, lad!” in the distance; and little Flora risked being too late for the school, in her eagerness to gather a bunch of spring flowers for him. As for Shenac, she was altogether triumphant. There

was no cloud of care darkening the brightness of her loving eyes, no fear from the past or for the future resting on her face. Looking at her, and at his fair little sister tying up her treasures for him, Hamish for a moment longed—oh, so earnestly!—to live, for their sakes.

Hidden away among Flora's most precious treasures is a faded bunch of spring−flowers, tied with a thread broken from the fringe of the plaid on which her brother sat that day; and looking at them now, she knows that when Hamish took them from her hand, and kissed and blessed her with loving looks, it was with the thought in his heart of the long parting drawing near. But she did not dream of it then, nor did Shenac. He watched with wistful eyes the little figure dancing over the field and down the road, saying softly as she disappeared,—

"I would like to live a little while, for their sakes."

Shenac did not catch the true sense of his words, and mistaking him, she said eagerly,—

"Ah, yes, if we could manage it—you and Flora and I. Allister might have the lads; he will make men of them. I am not wise enough nor patient enough. But you and Flora and I—it would be so nice for us to live together till we grow old." And Shenac cast longing looks towards the little log−house where they had lived so long and so happily.

But Hamish shook his head. "I doubt it can never be, my Shenac."

"No, I suppose not," said Shenac, with a sigh; "for Allister is to take down the old house—the dear old shelter—to make the garden larger. He is an ambitious lad, our Allister," she added laughing, "and means to have a place worthy of the chief of the clan. But, somewhere and some time, we'll have a wee house together, Hamish—you and I and Flora. Don't shake your wise head, lad. There is nothing that may not happen—some time.

"Do you remember, Hamish," she continued (and her voice grew low and awed as she said it)—"do you remember the night you were so ill? I did not say it to you, but I feared that night that you were going to die, and I said to myself, if God would spare you to my prayers, I would never doubt nor despond again; I would trust God always. And I will."

"But, Shenac, what else could you do but trust God if I were to die?" asked her brother gravely. "My living or dying would make no difference as to that."

"But, Hamish, that is not what I mean. It may seem a bold thing to say, but I think God heard my prayer that night, and spared you to us; and it would seem so wrong, so ungrateful, to doubt now. All will be for the best now, I am sure, now that he has raised you up again."

"For a little while," said Hamish softly. "But, Shenac, all will be for the best, whether I live or die. You do not need me to tell you that, I am sure."

"But you *are* better," said Shenac eagerly, a vague trouble stirring at her heart.

"Surely I am better. But that is not the question. I want you to say to me that you will trust and not be afraid even if I were to die, Shenac, my darling. Think where your peace and strength come from, think of Him in whom you trust; and what difference can the staying or going of one like me make, if He is with you?"

For just a moment it was clear to Shenac how true this was—how safe they are whom God keeps, how much better than a brother's love is the love divine, which does not shield from all suffering, but which most surely saves from all real evil.

"Yes, Hamish," she said humbly, "I see it. But, oh, I am glad you are better again!"

But was he really better? Shenac asked herself the question many a time in the days that followed. For the May that had come in so brightly was, after all, a dreary month. There were some cold days and some rainy days, and never a day, till June came, that was mild enough for Hamish to venture out again. And when he did, it was not on the hillock by the creek where Shenac spread the plaid, but close to the end of the old log−house, where the mother used to sit in the sunshine. For the creek seemed a long way off to Hamish now. When Allister came down the hill to speak to his brother, it came into Shenac's mind that his face was graver, and his greeting not so cheery, as it had been that May− day. As for Dan, he did not hail him as he had done then, but only looked a moment with wistful eyes, and then went away.

"Truly, the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun," said Hamish softly, as he leaned back against the wall. "I thought, the last time I was out, that nothing could be lovelier than the sky and the fields were then; but they are lovelier to−day. It helps one to realise `the living green' that the hymn speaks about, Shenac:—

"`There everlasting spring abides,
And never−withering flowers,'"

he murmured.

But Shenac had no answer ready. Day by day she was coming to the knowledge of what must be, but she could not speak about it yet. Nay, she had never really put it to herself in words that her brother was going to die. She had all these days been putting the fear from her, as though by that means she might also put away the cause. Now in the sunshine it looked her in the face, and would not be put aside. But, except that she sat very still and was very pale, she gave no token of her thoughts to Hamish; and if he noticed her, he said nothing.

"Shenac," said he in a little while, "when Allister takes away the poor old house to make the garden larger, he should make a summer−seat here, just where the end of the house comes, to mind you all of my mother and me. Will you tell him, Shenac?"

"He may never change the garden as he thought to do," answered Shenac. "He will have little heart for the plans we have all been making."

"Yes, just at first, I know; but afterwards, Shenac. Think of the years to come, when Allister's children will be growing up about him. He will not forget me; but he will be quite happy without me, as the time goes on; and you too, Shenac. It is well that it should be so."

Shenac neither assented nor denied. Soon Hamish continued:—

"I thought it would be my work to lay out the new garden. I would like to have had the thought of poor lame Hamish joined with the change; but it does not really matter. You will not forget me; but, Shenac, afterwards you must tell Allister about the summer− seat."

"Afterwards!" Ah, well, there would be time enough for many a thing afterwards—for the tears and bitter cries which Shenac could only just keep back, for the sickness of the heart that would not be driven away. Now she could only promise quietly that afterwards Allister should be told; and then gather closer about him the plaid, which her brother's hand had scarcely strength to hold.

"You are growing weary, Hamish," she said.

"Yes," said Hamish; and they rose to go. But first they would go into the old house for a moment, for the sake of old times.

"For, with all your cares, and all my painful days and nights, we were very happy here, Shenac," said Hamish, as the wide, low door swung back and they stepped down into the room. Oh, how unspeakably dreary it looked to Shenac—dreary, though so familiar! There was a bedstead in the room yet, and some old chairs; and the heavy bunk, which was hardly fit for the new house. There was the mother's wheel, too; and on the walls hung bunches of dried herbs and bags of seeds, and an old familiar garment or two. There was dust on the floor, and ashes and blackened brands were lying in the wide fireplace, and the sunshine streaming in on all through the open door. Shenac shivered as she entered, but Hamish looked round with a smile, and with eyes that were taking farewell of them all. Even in her bitter pain she thought of him first. She made him sit down on the bunk, and gathered the plaid about him again, for the air was chill.

It all came back: the many, many times she had seen him sitting there, in health and in sickness, in sorrow and in joy; all their old life, all the days that could never, never come again. Kneeling down beside him, she laid her head upon his breast, and just this once—the first time and the last in his presence— gave way to her grief.

"O Hamish! Hamish, bhodach! Must it be? Must it be?" He did not speak. She did not move till she felt tears that were not her own falling on her face. Then she rose, and putting her arms round him, she made him lean on her, all the while softly soothing him with hand and voice.

"I am grieved for you, my Shenac," said he. "We two have been nearer to each other than the rest. You have not loved me less because I am little and lame, but rather more for the trouble I have been to you; and I know something will be gone from your life when I am not here."

"Oh, what will be left?" said Shenac.

"Shenac, my darling, I know something that you do not know, and I see such a beautiful life before you. You are strong. There is much for you to do of the very highest work—God's work; and then at the end we shall meet all the happier because of the heart−break now."

But beyond the shadow that was drawing nearer, Shenac's eyes saw nothing, and she thought indeed that her heart was breaking— dying with the sharpness of the pain.

“It won't be long, at the very longest; and after just the first, there are many happy days waiting you.”

Shenac withdrew herself from her brother, she trembled so, and slipping down beside him, she laid her face on his bosom again. Then followed words which I shall not write down—words of prayer, which touched the sore place in Shenac's heart as they fell, but which came back afterwards many a time with a comforting and healing power.

All through the long summer afternoon Hamish slumbered and woke and slumbered again, while his sister sat beside him, heart−sick with the dread, which was indeed no longer dread, but sorrowful certainty.

“It is coming nearer,” she said to herself, over and over again— “it is coming nearer.” But she strove to quiet herself, that her face might be calm for his waking eyes to rest upon.

Allister and his wife came in as usual to sit a little while with him, when the day's work was done; and then Shenac slipped away, to be alone a little while with her grief. An hour passed, and then another, and a third was drawing to a close, and she did not return.

“She must have fallen asleep. She is weary with the long day,” said Hamish. “And you are weary too, Allister and Shenac. Go to bed. I shall not need anything till my Shenac comes.”

Shenac Dhu went out and opened the door of her sister's room. Little Flora was sleeping sweetly, but there was no Shenac. Very softly she went here and there, looking and listening in vain. The late moon, just rising, cast long shadows on the dewy grass as she opened the door and looked out. The pleasant sounds of a summer night fell on her ear, but no human voice mingled with the music. All at once there came into her mind the remembrance of the brother and sister as they sat in the afternoon at the old house−end, and, hardly knowing why, she went through the yard and down the garden−path. All was still without, but from within the house there surely came a sound.

Yes; it was the sound of weeping—not loud and bitter, but as when a “weaned child” has quieted itself, and sobs and sighs through its slumbers.

“Alone with God and her sorrow!”

Shenac Dhu dared not enter; nor shall we. When a stricken soul lies in the dust before God, no eye should gaze, no lip tell the story. Who would dare to speak of the mystery of suffering and blessing through which a soul passes when God first smites, then heals? What written words could reveal his secret of peace spoken to such a one?

That night all the grief of Shenac's sore heart was spread out before the Lord. All the rebellion of the will that clung still to an earthly idol rose up against him; and in his loving− kindness and in the multitude of his tender mercies he had compassion upon her. That night she “did eat angels' food,” on the strength of which she went for many a day.

Shenac Dhu still listened and waited, meaning to steal away unseen; but when the door opened, and the moonlight fell on her sister's tear−stained face, so pale and calm, now that the struggle was over, she forgot all else, and clung to her, weeping. Shenac did not weep; but, weary and spent with the long struggle, she trembled like a leaf, and, guiding each other through the dim light, they went home.

Shenac Dhu was herself again when she crossed the threshold, and when her cousin would have turned towards the door of her brother's room, she gently but firmly drew her past it.

“No; it is Allister's turn and mine to−night,” she said; and Shenac had no strength to resist, but suffered herself to be laid down by little Flora's side without a word.

She rose next morning refreshed; and after this all was changed. She gave Hamish up after that night; or, rather, she had given up her own will, and waited that God's will might be done in him and in her. It was not that she suffered, and had strength to hide her suffering from her brother's eye. She did not suffer as she had done before. She did not love her brother less, but she no longer grudged him to his Lord and hers. It was not that for him the change would be most blessed, nor that for her the waiting would not be long. It was because God willed that her brother should go hence; and therefore she willed it too.

And what blessed days those were that followed! Surely never traveller went down the dark valley cheered by warmer love or tenderer care. There was no cloud, no shadow of a cloud, between the brother and sister after that night. Though Shenac never said it, Hamish knew that after that night she gave him up and was at peace. It was a peaceful time to all the household, and to the friends who came now and then to see them; but there was more than peace in the hallowed hours to the brother and sister. It was a foretaste of “the rest that remaineth.” To one,

that rest was near. Between it and the other lay life—it might be long— a life of care and labour and trial; but to her the rest “remaineth” all the same.

He did not suffer much—just enough to make her loving care constant and very sweet to him—just enough to make her not grudge too much, for his sake, the passing of the days. Oh, how peacefully they glided on! The valley was steep, but it never was dark. Not a shadow, to the very last, came to dim the brightness of those days; and in remembrance the brightness lingers still.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN.

But I must go back again to the June days when Shenac's peace was new. The light came in through the western window, not from the sun, but from the glory he had left behind; and with his face upturned towards the golden clouds, Hamish sat gazing, as if he saw heaven beyond.

"Ready and waiting!" thought Shenac—"ready and waiting!"

For a moment she thought she must have spoken the words aloud, as her brother turned and said,—

"I have just one thing left to wish for, Shenac. If I could only see Mr Stewart once again."

"He said he would come, dear, in August or September," said Shenac, after a moment's pause.

"I shall not see him, then," said Hamish softly.

"He might come sooner, perhaps, if he knew," said Shenac. "Allister might write to him."

"I so long to see him!" continued Hamish. "I do love him so, Shenac dear—next to you, I think. Indeed, I know not which I love best. Oh, I could never tell you all the cause I have to love him."

"He would be sure to come," said his sister.

"I want to see him because I love him, and because he loves me, and because—" He paused.

"Have you anything to say to him that I could tell him afterwards? But he will be sure to come."

"You could write and ask him, Shenac."

"Yes; oh yes. Only Allister could do it better," said Shenac; "but I could let him know that you are longing to see him again."

But it was Hamish himself who wrote—two broken lines, very unlike the letters he used to take so much pains to make perfect. But the irregular, almost illegible, characters were eloquent to his friend; and in a few days there came an answer, saying that in a day or two business would bring him within fifty miles of their home, and it would go hard with him if he could not get a day for his friend. And almost as soon as his letter he himself came. He had travelled all night to accomplish it, and must travel all night again; but in the meantime there was a long summer day before them.

A long, happy day it was, and long to be remembered. They had it mostly to themselves. All the morning Mr Stewart sat beside the low couch of Hamish, and spoke or was silent as he had strength to listen or reply. On the other side sat Shenac, never speaking, never moving, except when her brother needed her care.

Once, when Hamish slumbered, Mr Stewart, touching her bowed head with his hand, whispered,—

"Is it well?" And Shenac answered, "It is well. I would not have it otherwise."

"And afterwards?" said her friend.

"I cannot look beyond," she murmured.

He stooped to whisper,—

"I will not fear, though the earth be removed, though the mountains be cast into the midst of the sea."

"I am not afraid," said Shenac. "I do not think when the time comes I shall be afraid."

After that Mr Stewart carried Hamish out to the end of the house, and there they were alone. When they came in again, one and another of his friends came to see Mr Stewart, and Hamish rested. As it grew dark, they all gathered in to worship, and then it was time for Mr Stewart to go. When all was ready, and he came to say farewell, Hamish slumbered. Shenac stooped down and spoke his name. Mr Stewart bent over him and kissed him on the brow and lips. As he raised himself, the closed eyes opened, and the smiling lips murmured, as Shenac stooped again to catch the words,—

"He will come again, to care for you always. I could hardly have borne to leave my Shenac, but for that."

Shenac lifted her startled eyes to Mr Stewart's face.

"Is he wandering?" she asked.

"No. Will you let me care for you always, Shenac, good and dear child?"

Shenac did not catch the true meaning of his words, but she saw that his lip quivered, and the hand he held out trembled; so she placed hers in it for a farewell. Then he kissed her as he had kissed her brother, and then he went away.

There was no break in the long summer days after this. Sabbaths and weekdays were all the same in the quiet

room. Once or twice Hamish was carried in Allister's strong arms to the door, or to the seat at the end of the house, and through almost all July he sat for an hour or two each day in the great chair by the western window. But after August came in, the only change he had was between his bed and the low couch beside it. He did not suffer much pain, but languor and restlessness overpowered him often; and then the strong, kind arms of his elder brother never were wearied, even when the harvest−days were longest, but bore him from bed to couch, and from couch to bed again, till he could rest at last. Sometimes, when he could rest nowhere else, he would slumber a little while with his head on his sister's shoulder, and her arms clasped about him.

When a friend came in to sit with him for a while, or when he was easy or slumbered through the day, Shenac made herself busy with household matters; for, what with the milk and the wool and the harvest−people, Shenac Dhu had more than she could well do, even with the help of her handmaid Maggie, and her sister strove to lighten the labour. But the care of her brother was the work that fell to her now, and at night she never left him. She slept by snatches in the great chair when he slept, and whiled away the wakeful hours when his restless turns came on.

She was not doing too much for her strength; she was quite fit for it all. The neighbours were more than kind, and many of them would gladly have shared the watching at night with her; but Hamish was not used to have any one else about him, and it could hardly be called watching, for she slept all she needed. And, besides, it was harvest−time, and all were busy in the fields, and those who worked all day could not watch at night. She was quite well—a little thin and pale—"bleached," her aunt said, by being in the house and not out in the harvest−field; but she was always alert and cheerful.

The coming sorrow was more hers than any of the others. They all thought with dismay of the time when Shenac should be alone, with half her heart in the grave of Hamish. But she did not look beyond the end to that time, and sought no sympathy because of this.

It is a happy, thing that they who bear the burdens of others by this means lighten their own; and Shenac, careful for her young brothers and little Flora, anxious that the few hushed moments in their brother's room—his prayers, his loving words, his gentle patience, his immortal hope—should henceforth be blended with all their inward life, never to be forgotten, never to be set aside, thought more of them than of herself through all those days and nights of waiting.

When a sudden shower or a rainy day gave the harvesters a little leisure, she used to make herself busy in the house that Dan might feel himself of use to Hamish, and might hear, with no one else to listen, a sweet, persuasive word or two from his dying brother's lips.

For Shenac's heart yearned over her brother Dan. He did so need some high aim, some powerful motive of action, some strengthening, guiding principle of life. All need this; but Dan more than others, she thought. If he did not go straight to the mark, he would go very far astray. He would soon be his own master, free to guide himself, and he would either do very well or very ill in life; and there had been times, even since the coming home of Allister, when Shenac feared that "very ill" it was to be.

And yet at one time he had seemed not very far from the kingdom. During all the long season of religious interest, no one had seemed more interested, in one way, than he. Without professing to be personally earnest in the matter, he had attended all the meetings, and watched—with curiosity, perhaps, but with awe and interest too—the coming out from the world of many of his companions, their changed life, their higher purpose. But all this had passed away without any real change to himself, and, as a reaction from that time, Dan had grown a little more than careless—very willing to be called careless, and more, by some who grieved, and by others who laughed.

So Shenac watched and prayed, and forgot herself in longings that, amid the influences of a time so solemn and so sweet, Dan might find that which should make him wise and strong, and place him far beyond all her doubts and fears for ever.

It was a day in the beginning of harvest—a rainy day, coming after so long a time of drought and dust and heat that all rejoiced in it, even though it fell on golden sheaves and on long swaths of new−cut grain. It was not a misty, drizzling rain; it came down with a will in sudden showers, leaving little pools in the chip−yard and garden−paths. Every now and then the clouds broke away, as if they were making preparation for the speedy return of the sunshine; but the sun did not show his face till he had only time to tinge the clouds with golden glory before he sank behind the forest.

"Carry me to the window, Dan," said Hamish. "Thank you: that is nice. You carry me as strongly and firmly

as Allister himself. You are as strong, and nearly as tall, I think," continued he, when he had been placed in the great chair and had rested a little. At any other time Dan would have straightened himself up to declare how he was an eighth of an inch taller than Allister, or he would have attempted some extraordinary feat—such as lifting the stove or the chest of drawers—to prove his right to be called a strong man. But, looking down on his brother's fragile form and beautiful colourless face, other thoughts moved him. Love and compassion, for which no words could be found, filled his heart and looked out from his wistful eyes. It came to him as it had never come before—what a sorrowful, suffering life his brother's had been; and now he was dying! Hamish seemed not to need words in order that he might understand his thoughts.

"I used to fret about it, Dan; but that is all past. It does not matter, as I am lying now. I would not change my weakness for your strength to−day, dear lad."

A last bright ray of sunlight lighted up the fair, smiling face, and flecked with golden gleams the curls that lay about it. There came into Dan's mind thoughts of the time when Hamish was a little lad, strong and merry as any of them all; and his heart was moved with vague wonder and regret at the mystery that had changed his happy life to one of suffering and comparative helplessness. And yet, what did it matter, now that the end had come? Perhaps all that trouble and pain had helped to make the brightness of to−day, for there was no shadow in the dying eyes, no regret for the past, no fear for the future. He let his own eyes wander from his brother's face away to the clouds and the sinking sun and the illuminated forest, with a vague notion that, if his feelings were not suppressed, he should do dishonour to his manliness soon. Hamish touched his hand, as he said,—

"It looks dark to you, Dan, with the shadow of death drawing nearer and nearer; but it is only a shadow, lad, only a shadow, and I am not afraid."

Dan felt that he must break down if he met that smile a moment longer, and, with a sudden wrench, he turned himself away; but he could not have spoken a word, if his reputation for strength had depended on it. Hamish spoke first.

"Sit down, lad, if you are not needed, and read a while to me, till Shenac comes back again."

"All right," said Dan. He could endure it with something to do, he thought. "What book, Hamish?"

"There is only one book now, Dan, lad," said Hamish as he lifted the little, worn Bible from the window−seat.

Dan could do several things better than he could read, but he took the book from his brother's hand. Even reading would be better than silence—more easily borne.

"Anywhere, I suppose?" said he.

The book opened naturally at a certain place, where it had often been opened before, and he read:—

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The sigh of satisfaction with which Hamish laid himself back, as the words came slowly, said more to Dan than a sermon could have done. He read on, thinking, as verse by verse passed his lips, "That is for Hamish," till he came to this:—

"For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."

"Was this for Hamish only?" Dan's voice was not quite smooth through this verse; it quite broke down when he tried the next; and then his face was hidden, and the sobs that had been gathering all this time burst forth.

"Why, Dan, lad! what is it, Dan?" said Hamish; and the thin, transparent fingers struggled for a moment to withdraw the great, brown, screening hands from his eyes. Then his arm was laid across his brother's neck. "They are all for you, Dan, as well as for me," he murmured. "O Dan, do not sob like that. Look up, dear brother, I have something to say to you."

If I were to report the broken words that followed, they might not seem to have much meaning or weight; but, falling from those dear dying lips, they came with power to the heart of Dan. And this was but the beginning. The veil being once lifted from Dan's heart, he did not shrink again from his brother's gentle and faithful ministrations. There were few days after that in which the brothers were not left alone together for a little while. Though the days were not many, in Dan's life they counted more than all the years that had gone before.

The harvest was drawing to a close before the last day came. The dawn was breaking after a long and weary night More than once, during the slowly−passing hours, Shenac had turned to the door to call her brothers; but thoughts of the long laborious day restrained her, and now a little respite had come. Hamish slumbered peacefully. It was not very long, however, before his eyes opened on his sister's face with a smile.

“It is drawing nearer, my Shenac,” he murmured.

Her answering smile was tearful, but very bright.

“Yes, it is drawing nearer.”

“And you do not grudge me to my rest, dear?”

“No; even at my worst time I did not do that. For myself, the way looked weary; but at the very worst time I was glad for you.”

The brightness of her tearful smile never changed till his weary eyes closed again. The day passed slowly. They thought him dying in the afternoon, and they all gathered in his room; but he revived, and when night came he was left alone with Shenac. There were others up in the house all night, and now and then a face looked in at the open door; but they slept, or seemed to sleep— Shenac in the great chair, with her head laid on her brother's pillow and her bright hair mingling with his. On her cheek, pale with watching and with awe of the presence that overshadowed them, one thin, white hand was laid. The compressed lips and dimmed eyes of Hamish never failed to smile as in answer to his touch she murmured some tender word—not her own, but *His* whose words alone can avail when it comes to a time like this.

As the day dawned they gathered again—first Dan, then Allister and Shenac Dhu, then Flora and the little lads; for the change which cannot be mistaken had come to the dying face, and they waited in silence for the King's messenger. He slumbered peacefully with a smile upon his lips, but his eyes opened at last and fastened on his sister's face. She had never moved through the coming in of them all; she did not move now, but spoke his name.

“Hamish, bhodach!”

Did he see her?

“How bright it is in the west! It will be a fair day for the harvest to−morrow.”

It must have been a glimpse of the “glory to be revealed” breaking through the dimness of death; for he did not see the dear face so close to his, and if he heard her voice, he was past all answering now. Just once again his lips moved, murmuring a name—the dearest of all—“Jesus;” and then he “saw him as he is.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN.

And having closed the once beaming eyes and straightened the worn limbs for the grave, Shenac's work at home was done. Through the days of waiting that followed, she sat in the great chair with folded hands. Many came and went, and lingered night and day in the house of death, as is the custom of this part of the country, now happily passing away; and through all the coming and going Shenac sat still. Sometimes she roused herself to answer the friends who came with well−meant sympathy; but oftener she sat silent, scarcely seeming to hear their words. She was "*resting*," she said to Dan, who watched her through those days with wistful and anxious eyes.

Yes, she was resting from the days and nights of watching, and from the labours and cares and anxieties of the years that had gone before. All her weariness seemed to fall upon her at once. Even when death enters the door, the cares and duties of such a household cannot be altogether laid aside. There was much to do with so many comers and goers; but there were helpful hands enough, and she took no part in the necessary work, but rested.

She took little heed of the preparations going on about her— different in detail, but in all the sad essentials the same, in hut and hail, at home and abroad—the preparations for burying our dead out of our sight. During the first day, Allister and his wife said, thankfully, to each other, "How calm she is!" The next day they said it a little anxiously. Then they watched for the reaction, feeling sure it must come, and longing that it should be over.

"It will be now," said Shenac Dhu as they brought in the coffin; and she waited at her sister's door to hear her cry out, that she might weep with her. But it was not then; nor afterwards, when the long, long procession moved away from the house so slowly and solemnly; nor when they stood around the open grave in the kirkyard. When the first clod fell on the coffin—oh, heart− breaking sound!—Dan made one blind step towards Shenac, and would have fallen but for Angus Dhu. Little Flora cried out wildly, and her sister held her fast. She did not shriek, nor swoon, nor break into weeping, as did Shenac Dhu; but "her face would never be whiter," said they who saw it, and many a kindly and anxious eye followed her as the long line of mourners slowly turned on their homeward way again.

After the first day or two, Shenac tried faithfully to fall back into her old household ways—or, rather, she tried to settle into some helpful place in her brother's household. The wheel was put to use again, and, indeed, there was need, for all things had lagged a little during the summer; and Shenac did her day's work, and more, as she used to do. She strove to be interested in the discussions of ways and means which Allister's wife was so fond of holding, but she did not always strive successfully. It was a weariness to her; everything was a weariness at times. It was very wrong, she said, and very strange, for she really did wish to be useful and happy in her brother's household. She thought little of going away now; she had not the heart for it. The thought of beginning some new, untried work made her weary, and the thought of going away among strangers made her afraid.

When it was suggested that she and little Flora should pay a long−promised visit to their uncle, at whose house Hamish had passed so many weeks, and that they should go soon, that they might have the advantage of the fine autumn weather, she shrank from the proposal in dismay.

"Not yet, Allister," she pleaded; "I shall like it by−and−by, but not yet."

So nothing of the kind was urged again. They made a mistake, however. A change of some kind was greatly needed by her at this time. Her brother's long illness and death had been a greater strain on her health and spirits than any one dreamed. She was not ill, but she was in that state when if she had been left to herself, or had had nothing to do, she might have become ill, or have grown to fancy herself so, which is a worse matter often, and worse to cure. As it was, with her good constitution and naturally cheerful spirit, she would have recovered herself in time, even if something had not happened to rouse and interest her.

But something did happen. Shenac went one fair October afternoon over the fields to the beech woods to gather nuts with Flora and the young lads, and before they returned a visitor had arrived. They fell in with Dan on their way home, and as they came in sight of the house, chatting together eagerly, there was something like the old light in Shenac's eye and the old colour in her cheek. If she had known whose eyes were watching her from the parlour window, she would hardly have lingered in the garden while the children spread their nuts on the old house−floor to dry. She did not know till she went into the house—into the room. She did not know till he was holding her hands in his, that Mr Stewart had come.

"Shenac, good, dear child, is it well with you?"

She had heard the words before. All the scene came back—the remembrance of the summer days, her dying brother and his friend —all that had happened since then. She strove to answer him—to say it was well, that she was glad to see him, and why had he not come before? But she could not for her tears. She struggled hard; but, long restrained, they came in a flood now. When she felt that to struggle was vain, she would have fled; but she was held fast, and the tears were suffered to have way for a while. When she could find voice, she said,—

"I am not grieving too much; you must not think that. Ask Allister. I did not mean to cry, but when I saw you it all came back."

Again her face was hidden, for her tears would not be stayed; but only one hand was given to the work. Mr Stewart held the other firmly, while he spoke just such words as she needed to hear of her brother and herself—of all they had been to each other, of all that his memory would be to her in the life that might lie before her. Then he spoke of the endless life which was before them, which they should pass together when this life—short at the very longest—should be over. She listened, and became quiet; and by−and−by, in answer to his questions, she found herself telling him of her brother's last days and words, and then, with a little burst of joyful tears, of Dan, and all that she hoped those days had brought to him.

Never since the old times, when she used "to empty her heart out" to Hamish, had she found such comfort in being listened to. When she came to the tea−table, after brushing away her tears, she seemed just as usual, Shenac Dhu thought; and yet not just the same, she found, when she looked again. She gave a little nod at her husband, who smiled back at her, and then she said softly to Mr Stewart,—

"You have done her good already."

Of course Mr Stewart, being a minister, whose office it is to do good to people, was very glad to have done good to Shenac. Perhaps he thought it best to let *well* alone, for he did not speak to her again during tea−time, nor while she was gathering up the tea−things—"just as she used to do in the old house long ago," he said to himself. She washed them, too, there before them all; for it was Shenac Dhu's new china—Christie More's beautiful wedding present—that had been spread in honour of the occasion, and it was not to be thought of that they should be carried into the kitchen to be washed like common dishes. She was quiet, as usual, all the evening and at the time of worship, when Angus Dhu and his wife and Evan and some other neighbours, having heard of the minister's arrival, came in. She was just as usual, they all said, only she did not sing. If she had raised her voice in her brother's favourite psalm,—

"I to the hills will lift mine eyes,"

she must have cried again; and she was afraid of the tears which it seemed impossible to stop when once they found a way.

Mr Stewart fully intended for that night to "let well alone." Shenac had welcomed him warmly as the dearest friend of her dead brother, and he would be content for the present with that. He had something to say to her, and a question or two to ask; but he must wait a while, he thought. She must not be disturbed yet.

But when the neighbours were gone, and he found himself alone with her for a moment, he felt sorely tempted to change his mind. As he watched her sitting there with folded hands, so quiet and grave and sweet, so unconscious of his presence, as it seemed to him, a fear came over him—a fear as to the answer his question might receive. It was not at all a pleasant state of mind. He endured it only while he walked up and down the room two or three times; then pausing beside her, he said softly,—

"Is this my Shenac?"

She looked up with only wonder in her eyes, he saw, with a little shock of pain; but he went on,—

"Hamish gave his sister to me, to keep and cherish always. Did he never tell you?"

"I do not understand you, Mr Stewart," said Shenac; but the sudden drooping of the eye and the rush of colour over her face seemed to say something else.

"To be my wife," he said, sitting down beside her and drawing her gently towards him. She did not resist, but she said hastily,—

"Oh, no; I am not fit for that."

"But if I am content, and can make you content?"

"But that is not enough. I am not fit. No; it is *not* humility. I know myself, and I am not fit."

It is just possible that Mr Stewart wished that he had for that night "let well alone."

"But I must have it out with her, now that I have begun," he said to himself as he rose and went to the door, at which a footstep had paused. Whoever it was, no one came in; and, shutting the door, he came and sat down again.

In the meantime, Shenac had been calling up a vision of the new minister's wife, the one who had succeeded old Mr Farquharson, and, in view of the prettily−dressed, gentle−mannered, accomplished little lady that presented herself to her mind, she had repeated to herself, more emphatically,—

"No, I am *not* fit."

So when Mr Stewart came back she was sitting with closely−folded hands, looking straight before her, very grave indeed. They were both silent for a moment; then Mr Stewart said,—

"Now, Shenac, tell me why."

Shenac started. "You must know quite well."

"But indeed I do not. Tell me, Shenac."

It was not easy to do so. In the unspeakable embarrassment that came over her, she actually thought of flight.

"I am not educated," she murmured. "I have never been anywhere but at home. I can only do common work. I am not fit."

"Hamish thought you fit," said Mr Stewart softly.

"Ah, yes; Hamish, bhodach!"

Her voice fell with such a loving cadence. All the pain and embarrassment passed out of her face, giving place to a soft and tender light, as she turned towards him.

"I was perfect in his eyes; but—you know better, Mr Stewart."

"The eyes of the dying are very clear to see things as they are," said Mr Stewart. "And as we sat at the end of the house that day, I think Hamish was more glad for me than for you. He was willing to give you to me, even for your sake; but he knew what a treasure he was giving to his friend, if I could win you for my own."

Her tears were falling softly. She did not try to speak.

"Will you tell me in what respect you think you are not fit?"

She did not know how to answer. She was deficient in so many ways —in every way, indeed, it seemed to her. She did not know where to begin; but she must speak, and quickly too, that she might get away before she quite broke down. Putting great force upon herself, she turned to him, and said,—

"I can do so few things; I know so little. I could keep your house, and—and care for you in that way; but I have seen so little. I am only an ignorant country girl—"

"Yes; I thought that myself once," said Mr Stewart.

"You must have thought it many times," said Shenac with a pang. It was not pleasant to hear it from his lips, let it be ever so true. But it took the quiver from her voice, and gave her courage to go on, "And all you care for is so different from anything I have ever seen or known, I should be quite left out of your real life. You do not need me for that, I know; but I don't think I could bear it—to be so near you and so little to you."

She rose to go. She was trembling very much, and could hardly utter the words.

"You are very kind, and I thank you; but—you know I am not fit. An ignorant country girl—you have said so yourself."

"Shall I tell you when I thought so, Shenac? Do you mind the night that I brought little Flora home, crying with the cold? It was the first time I saw your face. Do you mind how you comforted Flora, and put the little lads to shame for having left her? And then you thanked me, and asked me to sit down. And do you mind how you made pancakes for supper, and never let one of them burn, though you were listening all the time to Hamish and me? I remember everything that happened that night, Shenac—how you put away the things, and made a new band for the mother's wheel, and took up the lost loops in little Flora's stocking. Then you helped the little lads with their tables, and kept Dan in order, listening all the time to your brother and me; and, best of all, you bade me be sure and come again. Have you forgotten, Shenac?"

"It was for the sake of Hamish," said Shenac, dropping her head; but she raised it again quickly. "That does not make any difference."

"Listen. That night, as I went over the fields to Angus Dhu's, I said to myself that if ever I grew strong and well again, if ever I should live to have a kirk and a manse of my own—was I too bold, Shenac?—I said to myself you should help me to do my work in them as I ought."

Shenac shook her head.

"It was not a wise thought. You little know how unfit I was then, how unfit I am now."

"Say that you do not care for me, Shenac," said Mr Stewart gravely.

"No, I cannot say that; it would not be true. I mean, that has nothing to do with my being fit."

Mr Stewart thought it had a great deal to do with it, but he did not say so.

"You said you would be left out of my real life. What do you mean, Shenac? Do you know what my life's work is to be? It is, with God's help, to be of use to souls. Don't you care for that, Shenac? Do you think a year or two of life in the world—common life—could be to you what these months by your brother's death− bed have been, as a preparation for real life−work—yours and mine? Do you think that any school could do for you what all these years of forgetting yourself and caring for others have done—all your loving patience with your afflicted mother, all your care of your sister and the little lads, all your forbearance with Dan, all your late joy in him? If you cared for me, Shenac, you would not say you are not fit."

It was very pleasant to listen to all this. There was some truth in it, too, Shenac could not but acknowledge. He was very much in earnest, at any rate, and sincere in every word, except perhaps the last He wanted to hear her say again that she eared for him; but she did not fall into the trap, whether she saw it or not.

"I know I care for your work," she said, "and you are right—in one way. I think all our cares and troubles have done me good, have made me see things differently. But I could not help you much, I'm afraid."

"Don't say that, Shenac; you could give me what I need most— sympathy; you could help my weakness with your strength and courage of spirit. Think what you were to Hamish. You would be tenfold more to me. Oh, I need you so much, Shenac!"

"Hamish was different. You would have a right to expect more than Hamish."

But she grew brave again, and, looking into his face, said,—

"I do sympathise in your work, Mr Stewart, and I would like it to be mine in a humble way; but there are so many things that I cannot speak about. Think of your own sisters. How different I must be from them! Allister and Shenac saw your sister Jessie when they were in M—−, and they said she was so accomplished— such a perfect little lady—and yet so good and sweet and gentle. No, Mr Stewart, I could never bear to have people say your wife was not worthy of you, even though I might know it to be true."

"I was thinking how our bonnie little Jessie might sit at your feet to learn everything—almost everything—that it is worth a woman's while to know."

"You are laughing at me now," said she, troubled.

"No, I am not; and, Shenac, you must not go. I have a question to ask. I should have begun with it. Will you answer me simply and truly, as Hamish would have wished his sister to answer his friend?"

"I will try," said she, looking up with a peculiar expression that always came at the name of Hamish. He bent down and whispered it.

"I have always thought you wise and good, more than any one, and—"

There was another pause.

"It is a pleasant thing to hear that you have always thought me wise and good; but you have not answered my question, Shenac."

"Yes, I do care for you, Mr Stewart. It would make me happy to share your work; but I am not fit for it—at least, not yet."

In his joy and simplicity he thought all the rest would be easy; and, to tell the truth, so did Allister and his wife, who ought to have known our Shenac better. When Shenac Dhu kissed her, and whispered something about Christmas, and how they could ever bear to lose her so soon, Shenac spoke. She was going away before Christmas, and they could spare her very well; but she was not going with Mr Stewart for two years at the very least Allister had told her there was something laid up for her against the time she should need it, and it would be far better that she should use it to furnish her mind than to furnish her house; and she was going to school.

"To school!" repeated Mrs Allister in dismay. "Does Mr Stewart know?"

"No; you must tell him, Shenac—you and Allister. I am not fit to be his wife. You will not have people saying—saying things. You must see it, Shenac. I know so little; and it makes me quite wretched to think of going among strangers, I am so shy and awkward. I am not fit to be a minister's wife," she added with a little laugh that was half a sob. Shenac Dhu laughed too, and clapped her hands.

“A minister's wife, no less! Our Shenac!” And then she added gravely, “I think you are right, Shenac. I know you are good enough and dear enough to be Mr Stewart's wife, though he were the prince of that name, if there be such a person. But there are little things that folk can only learn by seeing them in others, and I think you are quite right; but you will not get Mr Stewart to think so.”

“If it is right he will come to think so; and you must be on my side, Shenac—you and Allister, too.”

Shenac Dhu promised, but in her heart she thought that her sister would not be suffered to have her own way in this matter. She was mistaken, however. Shenac was firm without the use of many words. She cared for him, but she was not fit to be his wife yet. This was the burden of her argument, gone over and over in all possible ways; and the first part was so sweet to Mr Stewart that he was fain to take patience and let her have her own way in the rest.

In Shenac's country, happily, it is not considered a strange thing that a young girl should wish to pursue her education even after she is twenty, so she had no discomfort to encounter on the score of being out of her 'teens. She lived first with her cousin, Christie More, who no longer occupied rooms behind her husband's shop, but a handsome house at a reasonable distance towards the west end of the town. Afterwards she lived in the school−building, because it gave her more time and a better chance for study. She spent all the money that Allister had put aside for her; but she was moderately successful in her studies, and considered it well spent.

And when the time for the furnishing of the western manse came, there was money forthcoming for that too; for Angus Dhu had put aside the interest of the sum sent to him by Allister for her use from the very first, meaning it always to furnish her house. It is possible that it was another house he had been thinking of then; but he gave it to her now in a way that greatly increased its value in her eyes, kissing her and blessing her before them all.

All these years Shenac's work has been constant and varied; her duties have been of the humblest and of the highest, from the cutting and contriving, the making and mending of little garments, to the guiding of wandering feet and the comforting of sorrowful souls. In the manse there have been the usual Saturday anxieties and Monday despondencies, needing cheerful sympathy and sometimes patient forbearance. In the parish there have been times of trouble and times of rejoicing; times when the heavens have seemed brass above, and the earth beneath, iron; and times when the church has been “like a well−watered garden,” having its trees “filled with the fruits of righteousness.” And in the manse and in the parish Shenac has never, in her husband's estimation, failed to fill well her allotted place.

The firm health and cheerful temper which helped her through the days before Allister came home, have helped her to bear well the burdens which other years have brought to her. The firm will, the earnest purpose, the patience, the energy, the forgetfulness of self, which made her a stronghold of hope to her mother and the rest in the old times, have made her a tower of strength in her home and among the people. And each passing year has deepened her experience and brightened her hope, has given her clearer views of God's truth and a clearer sense of God's love; and thus she has grown yearly more fit to be a helper in the great work beside which all other work seems trifling—the work in which God has seen fit to make his people co−workers with himself—the work of gathering in souls, to the everlasting glory of his name.

And so, when her work on earth is over, there shall a glad “Well done!” await her in heaven.

THE END.