but she would take care that he had no chance of palavering privately with Bell. The embarrassment of the moment had also shown her the time had come when it was necessary that both her husband and Bell should understand her wishes, so that no family cross-purpose in future should interfere with the realization of her plans.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN

"EVA, Eva, come fast and help me to catch this beautiful creature."

There was a rapid rustle of skirts in and out among the broom and boulders, quickening breath, and at last rippling palpitations of laughter as the pursuers dropped exhausted on a thymey knoll under the gracious shadow of a clump of hazels.

"I did not know pansies could fly," Eva said, with round eyes, when her breath had returned. "Oh, Miss Hetty, you had it in your parasol."

Hetty laughed at the dainty conceit.

"It was not a pansy, dear, but a lovely butterfly; see, there it is again, hovering above that wild rose bush, but it is safe, for we cannot follow it over the burn."

The governess and her companion were on their way to the Baidland Cairn. Their sensations of pleasure in the warm and fragrant air were enhanced by contrast. The previous afternoon was chill and leaden, slashed with grey lines of windy rain. From the school-room window Eva watched the distant trees tossing wispy tops of sombre green, while occasionally she turned a pink imaginative ear to the garden to catch the answer the flowers were whispering back to the rain. But this dreary, disappointing afternoon was succeeded by a perfect day, led in by the lark, and perfumed by the sweet odours of wood and corn-land. To Eva it brought the additional pleasure of a letter from her father, informing her that his book was out, and that he was leaving London the day after he wrote, and hoped to be back at Broomfields by the end of the week. Surely an early release from lessons and a long invigorating romp on the wholesome hillsides was not an unearned relaxation on such a day. They left the shade of the hazels, and were ascending the fern-fringed path, when the towsy head of a boy suddenly appeared above the

dry stone dyke on their right. He held a young turnip by the green tops in one hand, and a piece of white unenveloped paper in the other. The turnip was soft and succulent, and bore marks of strong appreciative teeth — it was not to be parted with, but he held out the paper to Hetty.

"I'm hurdin," he explained, "and canna come owre. If the kye miss me they'll be in the neeps."

Hetty went over to the dyke.

"What is it?" she inquired, taking the proffered paper from the boy's hand.

"I canna read it," he replied honestly. "It's frae a gangrel. I was to wait for an answer."

Eva looked at the ragged apparition with puzzled, wondering gaze; but the apparition went on munching his turnip with light-hearted unconcern. Then the gleam of a generous thought came over his face and his grey eyes softened.

"Tak' a bite," he said, holding the juicy end of the turnip out to Eva; "it's an awfu' sweet ane."

What did this strange missive say, the read-

ing of which touched the full gamut of Hetty's sensations as she stood there, pale and red, cold and hot by turns, totally oblivious to what was passing around her? This is what it said —

"Dear Hetty, I have just got your address; but although I am so near you my rig-out is not respectable enough for me to call at your place, or appear before you in the light of day. If you watch the boy returning you will see I am waiting your reply in the neighbourhood of the cross-roads. Could you meet me there at dusk? No one knows I have come back; much depends on seeing you alone. Just say yes or no to the boy. If you cannot come to-night I will wait at Drumoyne inn till I hear from you."

"You poor hungry little boy," Eva was saying; "have you nothing good to eat at home?"

Hetty folded the paper and laughingly explained to her pupil what a delicious thing to a boy a fresh young turnip is. Then she put a small silver coin in the messenger's hand.

"For him?" he inquired, pointing with the remainder of the turnip over his shoulder.

"No, for yourself."

The boy's eyes beamed incredulously.

"And what for the gangrel?"

"Just say — Yes."

The boy flung away the end of the turnip and took to his heels. For a brief space there was the rapid twinkling of two short legs, bare to the knees, over the swelling bosom of the clover field, then gradually feet, legs, body and head, the latter still wagging, seemed to sink into the ground as the eyes of the watchers passed on to the golden shimmer of the wheatland in the hollow beyond. Eva was too much engrossed with this child of the soil to observe her companion's discomposure.

The letter was from her cousin, Willie Hazlet, who had been a source of trouble to his relations. It was the old story, and not without parallel in the experience of many families. A well-intentioned attempt had been made to elevate the boy beyond his natural station, to lift him by education and association into a position which he had not the moral capacity to appreciate or retain. His father, in placing him in a high-class school, endeavoured frankly

to impress upon him that he was paying beyond his means, and warned him against indulging in the belief that he could afterwards be maintained on the same social plane. These admonitions entered the boy's ear, but they did not influence his reason. He became dissatisfied. To his mind there seemed to be something wrong in the economy of things. Why should *his* father not have plenty of money like the fathers of other boys? Somehow he got it into his head that it was parsimoniousness, and not actual want of substance, that was at the bottom of his own lack of liberal pocket-money, and the lectures on thrift to which he was subjected both in correspondence and during his vacation holidays. At the age of eighteen he was removed from school; the restraints of home-life were irksome. He wanted freedom and money to spend. Many of the fellows got leave to travel abroad with a tutor or companion. He wished to see life as other fellows saw it, not in the restricted circle of a provincial town, but in a grander sphere, where there was breadth and freedom. The expensive education had proved a double

failure; it had left him dissatisfied, as well as insufficiently qualified to enter even on the preliminary stages of a professional career. A junior clerkship in a bank occupied him for a time, but this, after numerous and vexatious episodes, he left, and clandestinely betook himself to sea. Hetty was pleased to hear from the wayward, self-willed prodigal, about whose fate they had feared the worst. She remembered him as a bright-faced, kind-hearted, and impulsive boy, when he used to spend his school holidays at the manse. The present might be the turning-point in his life. He had appealed to her, and she felt it to be her duty to respond to the appeal.

Hetty and her pupil continued their stroll to the top of the Baidlands, where they rested in the breezy sunshine, overlooking the undulating strath, through which the silver cord of the Garnet meandered, leading the eye onward past tawny cornfields to a sombre belt of pines, behind which the hazy smoke of Drumoyne, sheltered by the hill, curled and climbed. The one was thinking of the chequered wanderings of a wayward sailor lad, while the other specu-

lated audibly as to the presents her father would bring from London, and whether he would remain at home and never go away any more.

The upper disc of the sun was level with the tree-tops in Crosby Glen, and the reflected glow illumined the Manse windows as Hetty set out to keep her tryst. On nearing the spot where the main thoroughfare intersects the parish road she paused to still her pulse — eagerness had unconsciously given nimbleness to her step. There was a man on the slope of the parish road; a woman was approaching him from the opposite direction; for a moment they paused and spoke. The quick, searching eye of the sailor caught sight of his cousin as she emerged from the shadow of the hedge. As they saluted each other the figure on the hill paused, her back against the after-glow, and witnessed their meeting. The young man was the first to speak.

"I must begin our interview with an apology," he said. "It was too bad my asking you to meet me in this way, but I wanted your advice, Hetty, and could not appear in this garb at any respectable door." His weather-worn, tar-

stained clothes were not at variance with his words.

"Do not trouble about that," she replied. "I am so glad to see you home. How did you know where to find me? I was pleased to get your message."

"I ran away from the ship at Greenock, and of course forfeited my wages. I am sick of this life, but dare not go back to my father. I came to Drumoyne thinking to go on to the manse at Kilbaan, but learned from the innkeeper what changes had taken place there. Hetty, I have been a fool. I feel I am unworthy to look in any of your faces again."

"You need not speak like that, Willie; indeed you must not." The girl was moved by the bitter tone of self-reproach. "Your father is still your father, though you have not behaved well to him."

"Oh, I dare not expect anything from that quarter," he said rather cynically. "He wrote me after I left that as I had disregarded all his counsels, and so on; you know the kind of thing. My father has always been very severe."

"Do not be unreasonable, Willie; you admit

that your conduct has been foolish, and your father's severity, as you call it, was all meant in kindness to correct your faults. But how can I help you? After all that has taken place, I think it is your duty to write home and ask forgiveness."

"And be told that having made a thorny bed I must lie on it."

"No, Willie, I am sure you do your father injustice. If you are really sorry for your past, and say so to him frankly, I believe he would give you a fresh start. But was not this your own desire when you wrote me? What do you propose yourself?"

"I can hardly tell," he replied honestly, betraying the frailty of an irresolute mind. "I half thought of the army. Do you think I could get on as a soldier?"

His cousin looked in his downcast, helpless face. There was no strength of purpose in it. The army, she was sure, was a new fad, which would soon become as distasteful to him as the sea. It was another folly.

"No," she replied resolutely; "I do not think you would get on as a soldier. You do not

know what such a life means. Besides, it would be too late to change your mind when you discovered you did not like it. You tire of the sea, and the only penalty you pay for leaving it is the forfeiture of your wages; but you could not thus get away from the army. You doubt your father's forgiveness — I do not. Try which of us is right. If your belief should prove true, then the army is open to you. Willie," she said, taking the lad by the hand, her kindly eyes looking straight into his, "I think too much of you to let you go further wrong. You have invited me here to advise you — will you take my advice?"

He turned his face away from her gaze. There were tears in his voice as he spoke.

"Hetty," he said, "I believe you are right; but — but I cannot — just yet. I feel——"

"I know what you are thinking," she interrupted; "you cannot go back as you are. That can be put right. See, here is my purse." She had thought of this before leaving home, and put all her savings in it. "You will pay me back when you can. Put away your sea-clothes and get others. Go straight to Kilbaan; I will

write to my sister — she will expect you. I am sure also my father will write and make reconciliation easy. Trust on your father's part may be slow of coming — it can only be entirely established, after what has taken place, by honourable and persevering work. Are you prepared for that?"

"I will do my very best, Hetty," he said, with decision, the dawn of an honest purpose appearing on his face. "Then the result I anticipate is sure to follow." There was new resolution in his hand-shake at parting as he kissed her brow.

Hetty stood till his figure was silhouetted from the apex of the hill against the lingering rose of sunset. Poor boy! what a long race he had taken from his father's house to learn the comforts of home.

As she turned homeward there was a crackling amongst the brushwood behind the beech hedge. It was probably a sheep, or a delinquent collie among the rabbits. Joy shut the door against fear; her cousin Willie was dead, but was now alive again. She would hurry home and write the heartening news to Violet.

CHAPTER IX

A ROUP AT SMIDDY-YARD

THERE was a displenishing sale at Smiddy-yard — a roup it was called — and all the country-side turned out to buy, or see how prices ranged. Smiddy-yard was a large, well-stocked hill farm, owned by the late Stephen Barbour, better known as the Rev. Steenie Barbour, owing to his habitual use of scriptural forms of speech. In early life he was three parts on for the ministry, but "reisted" at fore-ordination and free will. He turned his college-lear to farming in succession to his father, and prospered. Two sons, inheriting their father's tastes, were at college, and the widow, being well left, resolved to displenish the farm and remove with her boys to the city.

The farm steading was large, and included a superior dwelling-house, barn, byre, stable, hay-loft, and potato-sheds, with an expansive court-yard between. Round about the walls of the