

LITERATURE, &c.

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RECTITUDE.

A TALE.

By Isabella Munro.

THE brightness of the day had passed from the bosom of Loch Earn, and the twilight dimness of the northern summer night was resting amid the lofty mountains which surround it, when a small boat sped rapidly along the head of the lake, passing quickly by each wooded promontory and secluded bay, until it reached the solitary island, which lay the only dark spot upon those star-lit waters. There the skiff paused, and its only occupant, a young Highlander, rose and glanced along the shore beyond the village of St. Fillans, towards the opening of the great valley of Strathearn, in quest of the light, which at that hour was wont to shine from the cottage window of old Murdoch Cameron; and cheering as is the beacon's glow to the eyes of the homeward bound mariner, were those rays to the gazer's heart, for beneath that lowly roof dwelt one whom Ronald Grant had learned to love with all the ardour of youth, and all the steadfastness of manhood, and perhaps even the more fervently that to his courage and presence of mind, under Providence was owing the very existence he prized so highly. For some two years since, Ronald had saved the life of Jessie Cameron, from one of the mountain accidents frequent in those wild districts, and thenceforward this being he had saved from death was dearer to him than all the world beside. And lowly as was his lot, yet he despaired not quite of gaining her, for not only did Jessie's brightest smile ever greet his coming but her father always extended a warm and kindly welcome to him who had plunged into the raging torrent to save the daughter whom a false step had nearly hurried to destruction. But weeks had passed away since last that smile had gladdened Ronald's heart, for he had been absent tending the sheep of his employer, McDonald, of Inverary, on a distant farm among the Aichtow hills, with no companion save hopeful thoughts to brighten his solitude. And now, on the very evening of his return, he was hastening across the lake, full of youthful buoyancy and happiness, to greet those so highly valued. Not long he lingered at Neish Island. That bright light once discerned, he urged his little bark onward with redoubled energy, and soon the strand was reached, and Ronald was at the entrance of Murdoch Cameron's abode.

'Ah, Ronald my lad, is this you?' was the salutation of Cameron; a very different welcome, and in a very different tone, from that which wont to meet the ears of his daughter's preserver; but little Ronald heeded it, for his glance had turned on Jessie, and a chill came over his heart as he noted how dim and heavy, with unshed tears, were the eyes that used to be so bright and joyous, and that the lips were pale and quivering, which tried to smile his welcome. Silent and astonished he took the seat offered to him, and then for the first time noticed that the Camerons were not alone, but that another occupied the post of honor; it was Angus McKenzie, the tenant of a small farm in Strathearn, and though in the eyes of the world far from being a rich man, yet immeasurably wealthy as compared with the humble shepherd, who had nought save an upright and truthful heart, and an earnest and dauntless spirit to recommend him; qualities which, however they might be estimated by Jessie Cameron, were little likely to prevail with her father, against the more substantial advantages of his rival, for such, with the quick discernment of a lover, Ronald soon perceived, was Angus McKenzie.

It is the influence of circumstances, more than the effects of time, makes men what they are; and youth, maturity, or old age, are scarcely so much to be counted by years as by events. And years seemed to have passed over the head of Ronald Grant when he landed the following morning at the little village of Loch Earnhead, after a night spent in solitude upon the lake, with the boastful declaration of Murdoch Cameron still ringing in his ears, 'that ere lang Jessie wad hae sheepland shepherds o' her ain, at her bonny farm in Strathearn;' so serious, silent, and reserved, had the hitherto light-hearted youth become.

Ere the lofty Benvoirlich had again cast his shadow over the broad valley of Loch Earn, Ronald already left its shores, to return to his distant charge, carrying from the world, as his portion, a crushed heart and shadowed spirit, that in the deep silence of those far-spreading solitudes, amid the tall mountains, the wild dark glens, and giant forests, he might muse in bitterness of soul on the hollowness and changeableness of man. Days, weeks, and even months had rolled over the head of the lonely shepherd and of the thoughts and actions of the world he knew no more than on the morning he had left Loch Earn, when chance brought him a visitant in the person of a passing pedlar, or packman, as they are termed in the Highlands.

'Oh, I have lots o' news ye wad like to hear,' replied the lowland trader, in croaking tones, to the Highlander's enquiry if anything was stirring. 'First, there's a bonny Jessie Cameron gangin' to marry that ill-faured loon, Angus McKenzie, he's a ne'er do weel—he skrimpt me o'er the price o' a bit shawl but yesterday. I aye thought she had a liking for yersel, but there's nae kenning the hearts o' the lassies!' he added with a sentimental sigh, and without appearing to perceive how his auditor winced beneath his observations. 'And

next, there's poor Janet Grant vera ill, an' no expect't to live out the week, and—'

'Janet Grant!' exclaimed Ronald, starting, 'not my sister, David Finlay, surely you do not mean her?'

'Deed, but I did though,' replied Finlay, 'she's the only Janet Grant I ken a'.'

And now early closing evening had not fallen, when Ronald Grant had obtained permission, and was already on his way to visit his sole surviving relative; and as now he felt his only remaining tie on earth; for when she should be gone, there would be none to care for his welfare, rejoice in his happiness, or even remember his existence, still less to mourn when the mountain sod should be laid above his head. The silence of night was on the bosom of Loch Earn when Ronald embarked upon its surface for the first time for months; not a breath stirred the deep waters, not a light glimmered along its shores, and the hush of deep repose seemed on all things, animate and inanimate, as gliding swiftly over the slumbering loch, he landed a little above the St. Fillan's at the entrance of the western Glentarkin, as passing through its wild defiles would materially shorten his journey. The moon was near its full, and shed over the land a silvery radiance beneath which its sterner features disappeared, and it gleamed forth with a strange and softened beauty. Lighted by those pale rays, Ronald had proceeded three miles up the pathless glen, and had reached the green and sloping declivity, where, between two rocky mountains, stands the great stone of Glentarkin, rising aloft its huge canopy-like form, beneath whose projecting sides one hundred men might easily find shelter. But now it seemed to Ronald that no living creature, save himself was in this wilderness, for even the harsh screech of the owl was hushed, and the whirr of the night-hawk's wing unheard, when suddenly a chorus of wild singing broke on the solemn stillness, and awoke the silent echoes of the mountains, ringing through their deep defiles as though demons held their revels in those inaccessible fastnesses. Scarcely had the first burst ended, when on turning an angle of the stone, Ronald beheld the singers, though they saw him not, for he stood in the deep shadow of the mountain, while the clear moonlight fell full upon them, and revealed a party whom he instantly perceived to be illicit distillers, while foremost in the wild merriment, and most intoxicated among the inebriated band, was the chosen husband of Jessie Cameron. Ronald was grieved at the sight; he might have been pardoned a glow of triumph at witnessing the unworthiness of the rival preferred before him, yet it was checked by the deep sentiment of pity he entertained for Jessie, whom he ever regarded as a victim. For he had never forgotten the quivering lips that had tried to smile his last welcome at her father's cottage, and still believed that all other feelings had been made to yield to filial obedience. Not long he paused to gaze on the degrading spectacle, for his was an errand that admitted of no delay, and he hastened forward with a heart filled with sorrow, both for the dying and the living, for Ronald's love for Jessie was generous and unselfish, and there was no sacrifice he would have made, if by it he could have secured her happiness; but now he knew this union must make her misery.

But David Finlay was as a very croaker as a raven, whose tones his voice resembled, and though Ronald found his sister ill and suffering, there was no apprehension of danger, but every hope of speedily returning health; and it was with a heart lighted of half its load, that, on the succeeding day, he retraced his homeward path, though his composure was sorely tried by the intelligence which met him at Loch Earnhead, that the following Tuesday was fixed on for the bridal of Jessie Cameron. The succeeding Tuesday's sun had risen and sunk on the shepherd in his solitude, and many another Tuesday had followed it, and of the welfare of his lost love Ronald had heard no further intelligence, when the substantial form of David Finlay appeared on the hill side, and, weary of his loneliness, and glad of even his company, Ronald advanced to meet him.

'What, Ronald, lad, you here?' was the greeting of the traveller. 'I thought you had been at St. Fillan's, courtin' bonny Jessie Cameron afore noo.'

Ronald crimsoned to the very temples at what he deemed the coarse raillery of his companion, but he answered calmly and steadily, 'Jessie's courtin' days are over now, and maybe mine too, and I doubt that Ronald Grant would be a welcome visitor in the dwelling of Angus McKenzie.'

'He's no room for many visitors in his present dwelling,' chuckled Finlay, using the broad lowland idiom, while the Highlander spoke in his own poetical and graceful Celtic. 'Hoot, mon, ye live out o' the world; do ye no' ken that Angus McKenzie's in prison?'

'In prison! Angus McKenzie's in prison!—and poor Jessie?'

'Oh, she's no' in prison,' exclaimed David laughing; 'he was ta'en up on the wadding morn, before the knot was tied, for sheep stealing, on the Thursday night afore, and he's been tried and found guilty.'

Further inquiry elicited the facts, that the sheep was one belonging to his own master, McDonald of Inverary, one of a distant flock behind the hills (though as a deaf and dumb boy brought the supplies to the shepherds, Ronald was still in ignorance of the circumstance;) that the skin and feet had been hidden beneath a pile of heather, beneath McKenzie's cottage, and that Angus himself had been absent from home all that night, and unable to give a satisfactory account of himself. What a wild gush of joy rushed through the bosom of Ronald

Grant as this recital met his ear, none but himself might know; nor how it swept away, for a time, all remembrance that on the guilt and misery of a fellow creature were built those bright hopes which thrilled his heart, banishing the dark tenants which so long had dwelt there. Hours passed by unnoticed, and still his thoughts dwelt on the rescue of Jessie, and the glad future that might yet be in store for him who had deemed his lot so desolate.

Suddenly a shock of electricity darted through his frame, destroying in one moment all the fairy like visions which had so lately gathered round his heart, as it flashed across his mind that Angus might be innocent of the crime imputed to him; for on the night on which the robbery had been committed, he had himself seen the accused man in the Western Glentarkin, at too great a distance from the Aichtow hills to reach them before morning, and in such a condition as to be utterly incapable of committing the theft even if on the spot. True, none but himself were available to know this, for it was not likely that McKenzie's companions dared to put themselves within reach of the law. And it was likewise true that none save himself was cognisant of his knowledge. It was his option by one word to loose the bonds of Angus McKenzie, and bind afresh those of Jessie Cameron, or to hold his peace and allow the law to take its course on a guiltless man. But he could not hesitate—the rectitude and honesty which form so inherent and striking a feature of the Scottish character in general, and the principals of religion, equity and honour, instilled into his heart from childhood, there to abide and strengthen, to guide his conduct through after life, as they had guided that of his forefathers, were all too deeply rooted in his breast to be shaken by the temptation, great as many have felt it, that assailed him. There was but one course for Ronald Grant; and successful rival as he was with one who was dearer to him than life, and much sorrow as he would bring on the head of that dear one, yet must McKenzie have justice at his hand.

No permission to quit his charge was needed, for Ronald had before obtained his master's leave to visit his sister, and again might see his little boat speeding along Loch Earn as rapidly as it bore him on a joyful errand; but his heart was heavy with the thought that his must be the and to raise a fresh barrier between him and her he loved so well, and rivit anew the chain he felt convinced she hated. Yet Rectitude and Justice demanded the sacrifice, and he nerved himself to offer it. But though he had reached St. Fillans, his journey was not yet ended; thirty long miles of mountain and glen lay between him and Perth, and they must be passed ere his object could be attained. The rain poured down in torrents on the lonely traveller, and the keen east wind blew in wild and furious blasts, bearing him backward by its violence, yet throughout that long and tempestuous night, sad, weary and travel worn though he was, the truthful spirit within wavered not in what it knew to be its duty. The following morning he entered the city of Perth, scarce more fatigued in body by the elementary strife he had been exposed to, than worn by mental suffering, yet firm and resolved to do another as he would he should do unto him; and the testimony which would exonerate McKenzie was given fully and unreservedly before a court that dreamed not how great a violence he did his feelings and prospects by such evidence. Indeed, to what extent even he himself knew not, for his employer, McDonald of Inverary, who was the prosecutor, intended to find the criminal was yet undiscovered, and indignant at the subterfuge of which he considered Ronald had been guilty, in asking time to visit his sister, and then employing it in such a manner, discharged him at once from the trust he had faithfully fulfilled from his boyhood.

If we are to judge of the propriety of our actions by their visible results, then had not Ronald Grant sufficient to deter him from ever more speaking the truth; for by so doing he had freed a man he despised, re- cemented an union which must forbid all hope of ever winning one he loved, and what had been his reward?—to be cast forth friendless and penniless upon the world, without a roof to cover his head, and knowing not where to turn in quest of employment. Yet he had a reward, a great and lasting one, of which McDonald of Inverary was unable to deprive him, in the possession of an approving conscience, which sustained him through all his trials it was now his lot to meet; and bade him bear in mind that all the blessings of life which might have been his, had he held his peace, would have been poisoned by the venomous tooth of the worm which never dies. Months passed on, and owing to McDonald's refusal to certify to his fidelity, Ronald Grant had been unable to obtain another situation, even in the humble capacity which he had formerly filled, and he now passed his time roving from loch to loch and glen to glen, seeking—generally in vain, for he was a stranger—some little employment. But the valley of loch Earn and its neighborhood he carefully avoided, for with a sentiment natural to a proud heart, he felt it an unspeakable satisfaction that his present destitution should remain unknown to the friends of his happier days, and it was therefore with a feeling naturally akin to vexation that he found himself confronted by David Finlay, in one of that worthy's perambulations through the Highlands.

'Ah, Donald lad,' he exclaimed, shaking his head reproachfully. 'Ye took the wrang road ye time; why could na' ye hae'd yer tongue, and let the world gang on its ain gate?'

'I saw but one road,' replied the highlander

in the poetic diction of his native Gaelic, 'and to that truth pointed the way; the other course was but the bed of a torrent, rugged and full of thorns.'

'I think ye ha' foun' this ane thorny enough,' rejoined the pedlar, with a grim smile. 'Its dragget ye oot o' house and hame. Ye'r no likely to meet the same chance again, or—'

'I should do the like again,' interrupted Ronald, 'when the foundation is bad, the building cannot be safe, and, and it is better to dwell on the hill side, than in a falling house.'

'It's an auld saying, young blood's hot blood, and I trow, ye dinna find the heather cauld,' replied the traveller, laughing. 'Howsoever, ye cooket Angus McKenzie's wadding feast for him, for Jessie Cameron says she will na ha' the companion o' stiel folks, and her father cares no much to gar her.'

Who may know the delight that filled the young man's heart, as those words met his ear? None save those who like him have been poor, desolate and hopeless. No longer he remembered that the purple heather was now his only couch, and the fish of the lochs his only sustenance; he was rich and happy in the thought that, though Jessie Cameron might never bless his eyes again, she was reserved for some brighter lot than to be the wife of the worthless Angus McKenzie. Again the summer sun had covered the trees with leaves, and the hill sides with flowers, but Ronald was still a wanderer, knowing not in the morning where he might lay down his head at night. At length he had roamed towards the bires of Balquidder, where amid lofty and picturesque mountains lie the calm still waters of Loch Voil, on whose shores the far-famed Rob Roy long resided; and where many of his exploits were performed, and are still the theme of its inhabitants. And there all that remains of the warrior lies at rest in that little churchyard at Balquidder, covered by a simple stone on which has been carved a sword—a fitting emblem of the man, of the race from which he sprung, and the times in which he lived.

The sun was sinking towards the distant heights of Siancha, when Ronald entered the valley of the Loch, and stood gazing in weariness of spirit upon the scene around him, the smiling aspect of the gleaming lake, the shimmer of the leaves, and the peaceful aspect of the dwellings that lay scattered along the shore, and a doubting wonder whether he should ever again find a dwelling place on earth across within his mind. At length, almost unconsciously to himself, his attention became attracted by the sail of a distant boat glancing in the rays of the setting sun, and he advanced towards it, ere long he perceived it was coming down the short but turbulent stream, which separates the Loch Doin from Loch Voil. Suddenly as it was entering the lake, a gust of wind from one of the mountain eddies, caught the sail and filling it beyond its power of resistance, buried it in the surging waters. In a moment Ronald cast off the mantle of apathy, which long and continued misfortune was beginning to cast around him, and rushing to the shore, dashed into the turbid lake, stemming the opposing current gallantly until he gained the spot where the accident had occurred; but nothing met the anxious glance he cast around; the boat had sunk to rise no more, and he had begun to fear that those she bore had shared her fate, when a dark object rising to the surface somewhat farther down attracted his observation. He swam hastily towards it, but it had sunk ere he could reach the spot, and it was only by diving, that he was enabled to grasp what proved to be a human being. Ronald was young and powerful, yet it was only by great and continued exertion that he bore his insensible burden to the shore, and when at length the body of the drowning man was laid on the strand, he sunk down beside him almost as helpless as himself. It was but a moment that was lost; the next saw him making every effort to restore to life the inanimate form that he had rescued, and ere long his exertions were crowned with success, for the stranger opened his eyes and murmured faintly.

'Alick, is that you, Alick?'

Ronald answered not, but a chill stole over him at the thought, that the person now asked for was probably sleeping at the bottom of the lake. And so it proved, Drummond of Glentyne, the owner of a large tract of country above loch Doin, had embarked in a small boat upon that Loch, with but a single attendant, and after sailing for some time about its narrow limits, had run down to loch Voil, and just reached it, when the sudden current of air precipitated both into the lake, where one had found a grave, and the other had sunk to never rise again, when the strong arm of Ronald interposed, at the risk of his own life, to rescue him from the silent depths of this loch. Nothing could exceed the gratitude of Drummond for the life thus gallantly saved, and he eagerly demanded in what way he might best serve his preserver. Ronald's heart beat high at hearing such words from the lips one powerful to aid him; but his request was modest and modestly preferred—he asked but the charge of a flock, when there might be a vacancy. But the humble petition was at once refused.

'No!' exclaimed the stranger, 'never shall the hand that saved Drummond of Glentyne from certain death, toil thus upon the land. Remain with me, and I will ensure that the life you nearly forfeited for me shall pass without cares or difficulty.'

In this charging himself with the fortune of Donald Grant, the owner of Glentyne had intended to bestow a small farm and stock upon him, as the reward of his eminent services; but