

under a shade of a pink satin hat and feathers, this delusion of theirs was dispelled. Mary's exultation knew no bounds, and Jamie said, "Can this fine lady be my daughter?" nervously, and with tears in his eyes. And Ailsie sat on a chair in the middle of the floor she had swept so often, and cried, and pulled off her fine hat, and threw it to the furthest corner of the kitchen, vowing she would never leave her father and mother to go and live with Lady Betty. And Lady Betty, who was present, was not a bit angry, although the beautiful hat was spoiled; but began telling how she would educate Ailsie, and take her to see the distant world, and how she would dress her like a princess and marry her to some grand gentleman, who should either bear the name of MacQuillan, or adopt it.

But Ailsie, only crying worse at this than before, she threw a purse of gold into Mary's lap, and began describing all the good things she would do for Jamie and his wife if Ailsie would only come with her; how she would build them a pretty house; how they should have servants to attend them, and horses and cows, and money at command. And Ailsie, listening to this, cried more violently than ever, with her swollen eyes staring through the door, out to the hill that led across to Hughie's. Then, when Lady Betty had done, Mary the mother began.

Ailsie took her eyes from the open door, and looked at her father. But Jamie, afraid to mar his child's brilliant prospects, only hung his head, and said never a word at all.

Then Ailsie's heart seemed to break with one loud sob. "I'll go feth!" cried she, "an' may God forgive ye all!" and rushed out of the cottage and down the lanan, bareheaded and weeping. Midway she stopped on the road, and, pulling off one of her pretty shoes, she flung it from her with all her might till it struck the trunk of a fir tree growing on the hill that led to Hughie's.

"That's the slipper to you, for good luck, Hughie Devnish!" she said; "an' if ever I forget you to marry a fine gentleman, may the Lord turn my gran' gowns into rags again, an' the bit that I ate into sand in my mouth!"

So Ailsie said good-bye to home. The next day Lady Betty and Miss MacQuillan departed from Castle Craigie for the Continent.

#### CHAPTER IV.

Four years passed away, and Jamie and Mary had grown accustomed to their improved circumstances, Lady Betty having proved as good as her word in bestowing on them all those benefits which she had enumerated when coaxing Ailsie away with her. Whether they were quite satisfied with the freak that fortune had played with them, they themselves knew best. When a neighbour went in to see them, Mary had always some grand talk about "my daughter, Miss MacQuillan"; but the widow Devnish often shook her head, saying they were dull enough when nobody was by, and feared Ailsie had forgotten them.

Ned Muckelheru, and Mebaffey the miller, had each consoled himself with a wife long ago. Hughie Devnish still taught his school, and his mother still called him in to his supper of evenings; but he was not the same Hughie, the wit who vowed, never since the night of Lady Betty's ball, when he had taken the strange whim of going serving at the castle. That some one had put a charm on him that night, from the effects of which he had never recovered, was the widow Devnish's firm belief. He was "as grave as a judge," she said, from morning till night, all wrapped up in the improvement of his school, never would go to a dance or a fair like other young men, and say what she might to him, would admit no thought of taking a wife, though his means would allow of it now, since he had got some tuitions among the gentry folks of the neighbourhood. The widow Devnish was very proud of her son, but she was sorely afraid there was "something on him." For, strangest of all, once, when she came into his schoolroom at dusk unnoticed, she saw him looking at a little kid shoe, with long silken sandals hanging from it. "She'll forget," he was saying, as he turned it about and wound the silken sandals round it, "of course, of course, she'll forget."

All this time, while things had been going on so with these vulgar and insignificant folks at home, neither Ailsie or Lady Betty had been seen at Castle Craigie. Lady Betty surrounded her protégée with French, Italian, drawing, and music masters. But with these had Ailsie concerned herself but little. "Hughie Devnish could never tache me," she would say, coolly, when they were ready to wring their hands with vexation, "an' I don't think its likely ye're any cleverer than him." However, there were some things that Ailsie did learn in time. Being observant and imitative, she acquired a habit of speaking tolerable French, and when talking English she modified, though she did not by any means give up, her brogue. She very soon learned to flirt a fan, to carry her handsome gowns with ease, and to develop certain original graces of manner, which were considered by many to be very charming in the pretty heiress of Lady Betty's Indian thousands. Altogether, the patroness found herself obliged to be content, though the young lady could read neither French nor Italian, nor yet could she play on the spinnet or guitar.

Ailsie's education being thus finished, Lady Betty set her heart on an ambitious marriage for her favourite. She introduced her to society in Paris, and saw her making conquests right and left at the most fashionable watering-places on the continent. Ailsie's sparkling eyes were enchantingly foiled by her diamonds, and proposals in plenty were laid at her feet. But Ailsie, though enjoying right merrily the homage so freely paid to her, only laughed at the offers of marriage, as though it were quite impossible to regard them as anything but so many very capital jokes. Lady Betty did not join in this view of the matter, but she had patience with her heiress for a considerable time, as Ailsie always mollified her displeasure by saying, on her refusal of each "good match," "I will marry a better man still, Lady Betty."

After four years Lady Betty, who was a wilful old lady, and whose patience was exhausted, quarrelled with her about it, and before she recovered her temper she took ill and died, and Ailsie found herself one day sad and solitary in Paris, without the protection of her kind indulgent friend.

Tears would not mend the matter now, nor would they alter the will which Lady Betty had left behind her, the conditions of which were fair enough, said Ailsie's suitors, when the contents of the important document became known. One year had the impatient old lady given her chosen heiress, in the space of which time to become a wife. And if at the end of that year she was still found to be a spinster, not a penny had she, but might go back to the cottage at the top of the lanan, and take back with her her father and mother to work for them as before, to milk her cows, and feed her hens, and persuade herself, if she liked, that her wit, and her diamonds, and her beauty, and her lovers, had all had their existence in a tantalising dream, which had visited her between roosting-time in the evening and cock-crow of a churning morning. But, should she marry before the year was out, bestowing on her husband the name of MacQuillan, then would the shade of Lady Betty be appeased, and the Indian thousands and the Irish rentals, together with the old ancestral halls of Castle Craigie, would all belong to Ailsie and the fortunate possessor of her wealthy little hand.

Very fair conditions, said the suitors, and proposals poured in on Ailsie. But lo and behold! the fainty-hearted damsel proved as obstinate as ever; and, in the midst of wonderment and disappointment, having attained the age of twenty-one, and being altogether her own mistress, she wrote to her retainers at Castle Craigie to announce her arrival there upon a certain summer day. Great was the glory of Mary MacQuillan when she received a letter from her daughter, desiring that her father and mother should at once take up their abode at the castle, being there to receive her on her arrival. Great, indeed, was her triumph when Miss O'Trimmins sat making her a gown of brown velvet, and a lace cap with lappets, in which to meet her child, and when Jamie's blue coat with the bright gold buttons came home.

Ailsie brought a whole horde of foreigners with her, brilliant ladies of rank, who called her pet and darling in broken English—and needy marquises—and counts with slender means, who were nevertheless very magnificent persons, and still hoped to win the Irish charmer. Balls, plays, and sports of all kinds went on at the Castle, and those of the gentry-folks who, from curiosity, or a better feeling, came to visit Ailsie, found her in the midst of a roomful of glittering company, dressed in a blue satin sacque and pearl earrings, with her hair dipping into her eyes in very bewitching little curls, and seated between Mary in the brown velvet and lappets, and Jamie in the new coat with the buttons. They went away saying she was wonderful indeed, considering, delightfully odd and pretty, and they wondered which of those flaunting foreigners she was going to marry in the end. Meantime the year was flying away, and the old neighbours of her mother's began to shake their heads over the fire, of nights, and to say that if Ailsie did not take care, she might be a penniless lass yet.

Things were in this position when, one fine morning, Miss MacQuillan, driving out with some of her grand friends, thought proper to stop at the door of Hughie Devnish's schoolhouse. The schoolmaster turned red and then pale, as he saw Ailsie's feathers coming nodding in to him through the doorway, followed by a brilliant party of grandees, and two footmen dragging a huge parcel of presents for his girls and boys. Ailsie coolly set her ladies and gentleman unpacking the parcel and distributing its contents, whilst she questioned the schoolmaster upon many subjects with the air of a little duchess, whose humour it was to make inquiries, and who never, certainly, had seen that place, much less conversed with that person before.

Hughie endured her whim with proud patience, till, just before she left him, on opening his desk to restore a book to its place, she demanded to see a certain little dark thing which was peeping out from under some papers. Then with evident annoyance, he produced a little black kid shoe. So the story runs.

"Why, it's only a slipper!" said Ailsie, turning it about and looking at it, just as the widow Devnish had detected Hughie in doing. "What an odd thing to keep a shoe in a desk! But it looked like the cover of a book. Good morning."

As the party drove off, it is said that one of the gentlemen remarked that the schoolmaster was a fine-looking intelligent fellow, fit for a better station than that which he filled. And it is further said that next day Ailsie made a present to this gentleman of a snuff-box worth a hundred guineas.

When Ailsie went to her room on her return home on this August afternoon, she walked over to a handsome gold casket which stood upon her table, unlocked it, and took out a little kid slipper, which looked as if she must have stolen it out of Hughie's desk. In the sole of it was pinned a slip of paper, on which were scrawled, in a crude hand, the words:

"If ever I forget you, Hughie Devnish, to marry a fine gentleman, may the Lord turn my gran' gowns into rags agen, and the bit that I ate into sand in my mouth."

"And the Lord's goin' to do it very fast," said Ailsie, falling back into her old way of talking, as she looked at this specimen of her old way of writing, "if I do not look to 't very soon, an' be keepin' my word! An' God knows, Hughie Devnish," she added, as she looked her box again with a sharp snap, "you're more of a gentleman any day the sun rises on you, than ever poor Ailsie 'll be of a lady!"

And I am given to understand that shortly after this the lady of the castle sent a message to her guests to say that she was indisposed (Ailsie had picked up a few pretty words) from the heat, and must beg them to excuse her absence from amongst them for the rest of the day.

It was on this very evening that Hughie Devnish was walking up and down his schoolroom floor, musing, I am told, on the impossibility of his enduring in the future to have Ailsie coming into his school at any hour she pleased, to play the mischief with his feelings, and the lady patroness amongst his boys and girls. He had just come to the point of resolving to give up his labours here, and go off to seek his fortune in America, when cwick! went the latch of the door, and (of course, thinks he, it must be a dream) in walked Ailsie. Not the Lady Bountiful of the morning, in satin gown and nodding