

but the effort was above his strength, and, again lying down, he extended his hand.

"This is kind, Mr. Lindsay," he said; "it is ill for me to be alone in these days; and yet I have few visitors save my poor old mother and Margaret. But who cares for the unhappy?"

I sat down on the settle beside him, still retaining his hand. "I have been at sea, and in foreign countries," I said, "since I last saw you, Mr. Ferguson, and it was only this morning I returned; but, believe me, there are many, many of your countrymen who sympathize sincerely in your affliction, and take a warm interest in your recovery."

He sighed deeply. "Ah," he replied, "I know too well the nature of that sympathy. You never find it at the bedside of the sufferer; it evaporates in a few barren expressions of idle pity! and yet, after all, it is but a paying the poet in kind. He calls so often on the world to sympathize over fictitious misfortune that the feeling wears out, and becomes a mere mood of the imagination; and with this light, attenuated pity, of his own weaving, it regards his own real sorrows. Dearest mother, the evening is damp and chill. Do gather the bed-clothes around me, and sit on my feet: they are so very cold, and so dead that they cannot be colder a week hence."

"O, Robert! why do you speak so?" said the poor woman, as she gathered the clothes around him, and sat on his feet. "You know you are coming home to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" he said; "if I see to-morrow, I shall have completed my twenty-fourth year,—a small part, surely, of the threescore and ten; but what matters it when 'tis past?"