

**HEATHER FROM THE
BRAE: SCOTTISH
CHARACTER SKETCHES**

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Heather from the Brae: Scottish Character Sketches by David Lyall

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DAVID LYALL

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BY
DAVID LYALL

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INTRODUCTION

THE outlook in the domain of fiction, whether one takes kindly or not to what is termed "the irruption of the Scot in literature," is certainly of late brightening. With the coming of writers of the stamp of Barrie, Crockett, and Ian Maclaren—to speak of those only who are handing on the traditions of the gallant and wholesome school of Scott—a healthier breath has passed over the novel and saved it from the polluting influences which have recently detracted from its good repute. But whatever school of the novel prevails, there can be little question of the desirableness, in the interests alike of art and of morals, of a turn to what is pure and elevating in the prose fiction of the time. As little question can there be, also, of the attractiveness of contemporary delineations of humble life, with its every-day heroisms, and its consecration of thought and purpose in the well-trodden paths of manly duty and Christian living. What has for a time muddied the pure streams of fiction, and obscured the truths it is calculated to teach, cannot, in the long run, contend successfully against the novel whose purpose is high and whose savor is good. Still less hope is there for the "decadent novel" when such prose idyls come to be written of the type we have in the present volume, from the pen of one of the now many writers of the day whose soulful and intensely human work has interposed to arrest the story-telling art from degeneracy. The writer of the following collection, David Lyall, shares with Ian Maclaren the gift, which seems to belong only to one who hails from the land of the heather, of investing Scottish character, its life and manners,

with the charm as well as the truthfulness of reality, illumined by the glow of feeling, and made human by the artlessness of the story-telling. The same quality belongs to both, of entering with a keen insight and profound sympathy into the common life of the Scottish people, and especially of portraying the hard-featured peasant saint, with all his stern kindliness of character, austere religion, and deep spiritual experience. With the same vivid dramatic gift which characterizes the school in which Lyall is fast earning distinction, some of his studies make him more kin to the singer of the Thrums epics, though he has the tenderness and pathos which remind one oftener of Maclaren. But though there is a strong national and literary kinship common to the three writers we have named, and though all breathe the same Thrums and Drumtochty air, David Lyall has a *genre* of his own, which gives an individuality as well as a distinctive charm to his work. This is seen particularly in the two touching and effectively told stories, "Robin" and "A Lost Lamb," which, though unrelated to each other, have the common link of human interest in what may be accomplished by "one of the weak things of the world." "At the Door" suggests "The Doctor's Story" in "The Bonnie Brier-Bush"; but the incident as well as the handling, it will be seen, are different, and set forth a picture as original as it is striking and admirably told. Equally diverse, in incident at least, are the stories under the grouping of "The Mistress of the Mount," and the studies are otherwise distinctively their author's own. No reader of these stories, in their now collected form, will, we are sure, fail to be delighted with the charm that pervades them; still less will he be likely to miss the many good things which are so liberally interspersed throughout the series. Nor, if his heart be right, will he fail to read them with increasing zest, and with a hearty admiration for the gifts of heart and brain with which their writer is so richly and beneficently endowed.

G. M. A.

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AFTER MANY DAYS

I. AT THE DOOR

THE doctor's gig drove out by the new lodge gate of Easterlaw about half-past eight on a Saturday night. It was the month of September, and in that late neighborhood the corn was scarcely yet ripe for the sickle. It was a lovely and pleasant evening, the close of a lovely and pleasant day. The moon the reapers love was high in the clear heavens, in which no cloud or shadow had a place. The hips and haws flamed in every hedge-row, and the rowans were ripe and red on the boughs. Bramble and crab-apple, too, were ready for those who knew where to find them, and the fullness of harvest and vintage brooded over the land.

"Steady, Willie, mind that sharp turn," said the doctor, as they swept through the gates.

His grave lips still wore the smile with which he had parted from the laird at the door, and his fingers tingled with the grip of his grateful hand. For, since sunset the previous night, Betty Haldane had been in the valley of the shadow; and