

CHAPTER VI.

THE STORY OF THE LAND FACTOR.

“THERE maun hae been something that weighed on his mind,” remarked one of the women, “though your faither had nae power to get it frae him. I mind that, when I was a lassie, there happened something o’ the same kind. My faither had been a tacksman on the estate o’ Blackhall; an’ as the land was sour an’ wat, an’ the seasons for a while backward, he aye contrived — for he was a hard-working, carefu’ man — to keep us a’ in meat and claith, and to meet wi’ the factor. But, waes me! he was sune ta’en frae us. In the middle o’ the seed-time there cam’ a bad fever intil the country; an’ the very first that died o’t was my puir faither. My mither did her best to keep the farm, an’ haud us a’ thegither. She got a carefu’, decent lad to manage for her, an’ her ain e’e was on everything; an’ had it no been for the cruel, cruel factor, she might hae dune gey weel. But never had the puir tenant a waur friend than Ranald Keilly. He was a toun writer, an’ had made a sort o’ living, afore he got the factorship, just as toun writers do in ordinar’. He used to be gettin’ the haud o’ auld wives’ posies when they died; an’ there were aye some litigious, troublesome folk in the place, too, that kept him doing a little in the way o’ troublin’ their neebors; an’ sometimes, when some daft, gowked man, o’ mair means than sense, couldna mismanage his ain affairs eneugh, he got Keilly to mismanage them for him. An’ sac he had