

**THE BLACK SHEEP  
OF THE PARISH**

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The Black Sheep of the Parish by The Lady Dunboyne

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**THE LADY DUNBOYNE**

**THE BLACK SHEEP  
OF THE PARISH**





LOTTIS HEATHCOTE AND HER MOTHER.

THE  
BLACK SHEEP OF THE PARISH.

BY  
THE LADY DUNBOYNE,

AUTHOR OF "THE MAJLANDS' MONEY-BOX,"  
ETC., ETC., ETC.



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## THE BLACK SHEEP OF THE PARISH.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### QUEEN MARGARET.

“SO the rumours that have been floating in the air are really coming true, and Uncle Henry is going to set up a curate! What do you say to the prospect, Meg? How will the Queen of Oldcourt like a Prime Minister to interfere with her domain?”

The speaker was a tall schoolboy, of the teasing age of fifteen; one of the few people who ventured to take liberties with his elder sister.

Margaret Gresham had been accustomed for nearly eight years to rule not only her father's house, but the whole parish and estate of Hacklebury, and it was little wonder if, at twenty, she was somewhat spoiled by the enjoyment of her undisputed sway.

Mrs. Gresham had died shortly after the birth of her youngest daughter, a delicate child now ten years old, who had been the object of Margaret's tenderest care, ever since she had

constituted herself the baby's guardian and protector against the rough play of sturdy Ralph, the next youngest in age.

The second girl was a gentle creature, who thought her elder sister perfection, and looked up to her with a simple homage which led, perhaps naturally, to a little tendency to domineering on the part of the stronger spirit. However, as time went on, almost every one, except perhaps the sisters themselves, recognised the fact that, if Margaret ruled the parish, Lina was the guardian spirit of the house. Little Belle's lessons were gradually handed over to her, and by degrees her father began to turn to Lina for help in the smaller details of domestic life. It was she who copied his letters, looked after the comforts of the few guests who visited their quiet house, arranged the flowers in the drawing-room, and kept the household accounts, always, however, dutifully submitting the latter to her sister's supervision. Margaret's time was fully engrossed with her Sunday school, her clothing club, coal club, parish library, the little dispensary which she kept in her own hands, and the wants, temporal and spiritual, of the twelve hundred inhabitants of the scattered parish of Hacklebury.

"She is worth more than a curate to me," the old rector, who was Mr. Gresham's uncle, had once said; and it was Margaret's pride and delight to dwell on the words. But as time went on, and the old gentlemen became more