WHITE WINGS, VOLUME III

Title: White Wings, Volume III
A Yachting Romance

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Release Date: September 27, 2013 [eBook #43830]

Language: English

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK WHITE WINGS, VOLUME III (OF 3) ***

Produced by Al Haines.

WHITE WINGS:

A Yachting Romance.

BY

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"GREEN PASTURES AND PICCADILLY," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

London:
MACMILLAN AND CO.
1880.

LONDON:
R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR.
BREAD STREET HILL.

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WHITE WINGS:

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CHAPTER I.

A CONFESSION.

What could the solitary scouts, coming back from the various points of the island, know of this quick, unwilling cry of pain, and of the forced calm that followed it? They had their own sorrows. There was a gloom upon their faces. One and all bore the same story—not a seal, not a wild duck, not even a rock pigeon anywhere.

"But it is a fine thing to be able to straighten one's back," says the Laird, who always seizes on the cheerful side; "and we have not given up hope of your getting the sealskin yet, Miss Mary—no, no. The Doctor says they are away hunting just now; when the tide gets low again they will come up on the rocks. So the best thing we can do is to spend plenty of time over our luncheon, and cross the island again in the afternoon. Aye; begun already?" adds the Laird, as he goes up to the canvas, and regards the rough outlines in charcoal with a critical air. "Very good! very good!" he says, following the lines with his thumb, and apparently drawing in the air. "Excellent! The composeetion very clever indeed—simple, bold, striking. And a fine blaze of colour ye'll have on a day like this; and then the heavy black hull of the smack bang in the foreground: excellent, excellent! But if I were you, I would leave out that rock there; ye would get a better sweep of the sea. Don't distract the eye in sea pieces; bold lines—firm, sound colour: and there ye are. Well, my lass, ye have the skill of constructing a picture. Tom Galbraith himself would admit that, I know——"

But here the Laird is called away by his hostess.

"I would advise you, sir," says she, "to have some luncheon while you can

get it. It is a very strange thing, with all you gentlemen on board, and with all those guns lying about, but we are drawing nearer and nearer to starvation. I wish you would give up hunting seals, and shoot something useful."

Here our young Doctor appears with certain bottles that have been cooling in the water.

"There must be plenty of rock pigeons in the caves we passed this morning, on the other island," he says.

"Oh, not those beautiful birds!" says she of the empty larder. "We cannot have Hurlingham transported to the Highlands."

"Whoever trys to shoot those pigeons won't find it a Hurlingham business," he remarks.

But the Laird has a soul above luncheons, and larders, and pigeon-shooting. He is still profoundly absorbed in thought.

"No," he says, at length, to the young lady who, as usual, is by his side. "I am wrong!"

She looks up at him with some surprise.

"Yes, I am wrong," he says, decisively. "Ye must keep in that island. Ye must sacrifice picturesqueness to truth. Never mind the picture: keep the faithful record. In after life ye will be able to get plenty of pictures; but ye may not be able to get an exact record of the things ye saw when ye were sailing with the *White Dove*."

"Well, you know, sir," observes Miss Avon, with a somewhat embarrassed smile, "you don't give me much encouragement. You always speak as if I were to be compelled to keep those sketches. Am I to find nobody silly enough to buy them?"

Now, somehow or other of late, the Laird has been more and more inclined to treat the sale of Mary Avon's pictures as a most irresistible joke. He laughs and chuckles at the mere mention of such a thing, just as if Homesh were somewhere about.

"Sell them!" he says, with another deep chuckle. "Ye will never sell them. Ye could not have the heart to part with them."

"The heart has to be kept in proper subjection," says she, lightly, "when one has to earn one's living."

Queen Titania glances quickly at the girl; but apparently there is no profound meaning concealed in this speech. Miss Avon has taken her seat on a shelving piece of grey rock; and, if she is concerned about anything, it is about the safety of certain plates and knives and such things. Her hand is quite steady as she holds out her tumbler for the Youth to pour some water into the claret.

Luncheon over, she returns to her work; and the band of seal-hunters, taking to cigars and pipes, sit and watch the tide slowly ebb away from the golden-

brown seaweed. Then, with many a caution as to patience and silence, they rise and get their guns and set out. Already there is a disposition to slouch the head and walk timidly; though as yet there is no need of any precaution.

"*Glückliche Reise!*" says Miss Avon, pleasantly, as we pass.

Angus Sutherland starts, and turns his head. But the salutation was not for him; it was meant for the Youth, who is understood to be the most eager of the seal-hunters. And Mr. Smith, not having his answer pat, replies, "I hope so;" and then looks rather confused as he passes on, carefully stooping his head though there is no occasion whatever.

Then, by following deep gullies and crawling over open ledges, we reach points commanding the various bays; and with the utmost caution peer over or round the rocks. And whereas yesterday, being Sunday, the bays were alive with seals, disporting themselves freely in full view of a large party of people who were staring at them, to-day, being Monday, finds not a seal visible anywhere, though every one is in hiding, and absolute silence must have reigned in the island, ever since the lobster fishers left in the morning. No matter; the tide is still ebbing; the true hunter must possess his soul.

And yet this lying prone for hours on a ledge of exceedingly rough rock must have been monotonous work for our good friend the Laird. Under his nose nothing to look at but scraps of orange lichen and the stray feathers of sea birds; abroad nothing but the glassy blue sea, with the pale mountains of Jura rising into the cloudless sky. At last it seemed to become intolerable. We could see him undergoing all sorts of contortions in the effort to wrest something out of his coat-pocket without raising any portion of his body above the line of cover. He himself was not unlike a grey seal in the shadow of the rock, especially when he twisted and turned himself about without rising an inch from the surface. And in time he succeeded. We could see him slowly and carefully unfold that newspaper—probably not more than a week old—just beneath his face. He had no need of spectacles: his eyes were almost touching the page. And then we knew that he was at rest; and the hard rock and the seals all forgotten. For we took it that this local paper was one which had written a most important leading article about the proposed public park for Strathgovan, calling upon the ratepayers to arise and assert their rights and put a check on the reckless extravagance of the Commissioners. The Laird himself was openly pointed at as one who would introduce the luxury of the later Romans into a sober Scotch community; and there were obscure references to those who seemed to consider that a man's dwelling-house should become nothing more nor less than a museum of pictures and statues, while they would apply taxes raised from a hard-working population in the adornment of places of recreation for the idle. But do you think that the Laird was appalled by this fierce onslaught? Not a bit of it. He had read and re-

read it to us with delight. He had triumphantly refuted the writer's sophistries; he had exposed his ignorance of the most elementary facts in political economy; he was always rejoiced to appear before Tom Galbraith and Mary Avon as one who was not afraid to suffer for his championship of art. And then, when he had triumphed over his enemy, he would fold the paper with a sort of contented sigh; and would say with a compassionate air, "Poor crayture! poor crayture!" as if the poor crayture could not be expected to know any better.

At last—at last! The Laird makes frantic gestures with his newspaper—all the more frantic that they have to be strictly lateral, and that he dare not raise his hand. And behold! far away out there on the still, blue surface, a smooth round knob, shining and black. Without a muscle moving, eager eyes follow that distant object. The seal is not alarmed or suspicious; he sails evenly onward, seldom looking to right or left. And when he disappears there is no splash; he has had enough of breathing; he is off for his hunting in the deep seas.

What is more, he remains there. We catch no further trace of him, nor of any other living thing around those deserted bays. Human nature gives in. The Youth gets up, and boldly displays himself on a promontory, his gun over his shoulder. Then the Laird, seeing that everything is over, gets up too, yawning dreadfully, and folds his newspaper, and puts it in his pocket.

"Come along!" he calls out. "It is no use. The saints have taught the seals tricks. They know better than to come near on a working day."

And so presently the sombre party sets out again for the other side of the island, where the gig awaits us. Not a word is said. Cartridges are taken out; we pick our way through the long grass and the stones. And when it is found that Miss Avon has roughed in all that she requires of her present study, it is gloomily suggested that we might go back by way of the other island, that so haply we might secure the materials for a pigeon pie before returning to the yacht.

The evening sun was shining ruddily along the face of the cliffs as we drew near the other island; and there was no sign of life at all about the lonely shores and the tall caves. But there was another story to tell when, the various guns having been posted, the Youth boldly walked up to the mouth of the largest of the caves, and shouted. Presently there were certain flashes of blue things in the mellow evening light; and the sharp bang! bang! of the gun, that echoed into the great hollows. Hurlingham? That did not seem much of a Hurlingham performance. There were no birds standing bewildered on the fallen trap, wondering whether to rise or not; but there were things coming whizzing through the air that resembled nothing so much as rifle bullets with blue wings. The Youth, it is true, got one or two easy shots at the mouth of the cave; but when the pigeons got outside and came flashing over the heads of the others, the shooting was, on the whole, a haphazard business. Nevertheless, we got a fair number for Master

Fred's larder, after two of the men had acted as retrievers for three-quarters of an hour among the rocks and bushes. Then away again for the solitary vessel lying in the silent loch, with the pale mists stealing over the land, and the red sun sinking behind the Jura hills.

Again, after dinner, amid the ghostly greys of the twilight, we went forth on another commissariat excursion, to capture fish. Strange to say, however, our Doctor, though he was learned on the subject of flies and tackle, preferred to remain on board: he had some manuscript to send off to London. And his hostess said she would remain too; she always has plenty to do about the saloon. Then we left the *White Dove* and rowed away to the rocks.

But the following conversation, as we afterwards heard, took place in our absence:—

"I wished very much to speak to you," said Angus Sutherland, to his hostess, without making any movement to bring out his desk.

"I thought so," said she; not without a little nervous apprehension.

And then she said quickly, before he could begin—

"Let me tell you at once, Angus, that I have spoken to Mary. Of course, I don't wish to interfere; I wouldn't interfere for the world; but—but I only asked her, lest there should be any unpleasant misapprehension, whether she had any reason to be offended with you. 'None in the least,' she said. She was most positive. She even seemed to be deeply pained by the misunderstanding; and—and wished me to let you know; so you must dismiss that from your mind any way."

He listened thoughtfully, without saying anything. At last he said—

"I have determined to be quite frank with you. I am going to tell you a secret—if it is a secret——"

"I have guessed it," she said, quickly, to spare him pain.

"I thought so," he said, quite quietly. "Well; I am not ashamed of it. I have no reason to be ashamed of it. But, since you know, you will see that it would be very embarrassing for me to remain longer on board the yacht if—if there was no hope——"

He turned over the leaves of a guide-book rapidly, without looking at them; the hard-headed Doctor had not much command over himself at this moment.

"If you have guessed, why not she?" he said, in a somewhat hurried and anxious manner. "And—and—if I am to go, better that I should know at once. I—I have nothing to complain of—I mean I have nothing to reproach her with—if it is a misfortune, it is a misfortune—but—but she used to be more friendly towards me."

These two were silent. What was passing before their minds? The long summer nights in the far northern seas, with the glory dying in the west; or

the moonlight walks on the white deck, with the red star of Ushinish lighthouse burning in the south; or the snug saloon below, with its cards, and candles, and laughter, and Mary Avon singing to herself the song of Ulva? She sang no song of Ulva now.

"Mary and I are very intimate friends," says the other deliberately. "I will say nothing against her. Girls have curious fancies about such things sometimes. But I must admit—for you are my friend too—that I am not surprised you should have been encouraged by her manner to you at one time, or that you should wonder a little at the change."

But even this mild possibility of Mary Avon's being in the wrong she feels to be incompatible with her customary championship of her friend; and so she instantly says—

"Mind, I am certain of this—that whatever Mary does, she believes to be right. Her notion of duty is extraordinarily sensitive and firm. Once she has put anything before her as the proper thing to be done, she goes straight at it; and nothing will turn her aside. And although there is something about it I can't quite understand, how am I to interfere? Interference never does any good. Why do not you ask her yourself?"

"I mean to do so, when I get the chance," said he, simply. "I merely wished to tell you that, if her answer is 'No,' it will be better for me to leave you. Already I fancy my being on board the yacht is a trouble to her. I will not be a trouble to her. I can go. If it is a misfortune, there is no one to blame."

"But if she says '*Yes!*'" cried his friend; and there was a wonderful joy in her eyes, and in her excess of sympathy she caught his hand for a moment. "Oh, Angus, if Mary were to promise to be your wife! What a trip we should have then—we should take the *White Dove* to Stornoway!"

That was her ultimate notion of human happiness—sailing the *White Dove* up to Stornoway!

"I don't think there is much hope," said he, rather absently, "from her manner of late. But anything is better than suspense. If it is a misfortune, as I say, there is no one to blame. I had not the least notion that she knew Mr. Howard Smith in London."

"Nor did she."

He stared rather.

"They may have met at our house; but certainly not more than once. You see, living in a country house, we have to have our friends down in a *staccato* fashion, and always by arrangement of a few at a time. There is no general dropping in to afternoon tea."

"He never met her in London?" he repeated.

"I should think not."

"His uncle, then: did she never see him before?"

"Certainly not."

"Then what does he mean by treating her as a sort of familiar friend who was likely to turn up any time at Denny-mains?"

His companion coloured somewhat; for she had no right to betray confidences.

"The Laird is very fond of Mary," she said, evasively. "It is quite beautiful to see those two together."

He sate for a little time in silence; and then begged to be excused—he would go on deck to smoke. But when, some little time thereafter, we returned from our brief fishing, the dark figure walking up and down the deck was not smoking at all. He paused as the gig was hauled fast to the gangway.

"What luck?"

"About two dozen."

"All lithe?"

"About half-a-dozen mackerel."

And then he assisted Mary Avon to ascend the small wooden steps. She said "Thank you!" as she withdrew her hand from his; but the words were uttered in a low voice; and she instantly crossed to the companion and went below. He stayed on deck, and helped to swing the gig up to the davits.

Now something had got into the head of our Admiral-in-chief that night. She was very merry; and very affectionate towards Mary. She made light of her foolish wish to go away to the south. She pointed out that this continuous fine weather was only hoarding up electricity for the equinoctials; and then we should have a spin!

"We are not going to let you go, Mary; that is the long and the short of it. And we are going to keep hold of Angus, too. He is not going away yet—no, no. We have something for him to do. We shall not rest satisfied until we see him sail the *White Dove* into Stornoway harbour!"

CHAPTER II.

ONLY A HEADACHE.

Stornoway harbour, indeed! The weather was laughing at us. The glass had steadily fallen until it had got about as low as it could go with decency; and yet

this next morning was more beautiful, and bright, and calm than ever! Were we to be for ever confined in this remote Loch of the Burying Place?

"Angus! Angus! where are you?" the Admiral calls out, as she comes up on deck.

"Here I am," calls out a voice in return, from the cross-trees.

She raises her head, and perceives the ruddy-faced Doctor hanging on by the ratlines.

"Where is the fine sailing weather you were to bring us—eh?"

"I have been looking for it," he replies, as he comes down the rigging; "and there is not a breath anywhere."

"Very well," she says, promptly; "I'll tell you what you must do. You must get everybody who can handle a gun into the gig and go away up to the head of the loch there, and shoot every living thing you can see. Do you understand? We are on the brink of starvation! We are perishing! Do you want us to boil tarred rope into soup?"

"No," he says, humbly.

"Very well. Away you go. If you can't bring us any wind to take us into a civilised place, you must provide us with food; is that clear enough?"

Here Captain John comes aft, touching his cap.

"Good morning mem! I was never seeing the like of this weather, mem."

"I don't want to see any more of it," she says, sharply. "Did you bring us in here because there was a convenient place to bury us in? Do you know that we are dying of starvation?"

"Oh, no, mem!" says Captain John, with a grin; but looking rather concerned all the same.

However, her attention is quickly called away by the sound of oars. She turns and regards this small boat approaching the yacht; and the more she looks the more do her eyes fill with astonishment.

"Well, I declare!" she says, "this is about the coolest thing I have seen for ages."

For it is Miss Mary Avon who is rowing the dingay back to the yacht; and her only companion is the Youth, who is contentedly seated in the stern, with his gun laid across his knees.

"Good morning, Mr. Smith!" she says, with the most gracious sarcasm. "Pray don't exert yourself too much. Severe exercise before breakfast is very dangerous."

The Youth lays hold of the rope; there is a fine blush on his handsome face.

"It is Miss Avon's fault," he says; "she would not let me row."

"I suppose she expected you to shoot? Where are the duck, and the snipe, and the golden plover? Hand them up!"

"If you want to see anything in the shape of game about this coast, you'd better wait till next Sunday," says he, somewhat gloomily.

However, after breakfast, we set out for the shallow head of the loch; and things do not turn out so badly after all. For we have only left the yacht some few minutes when there is a sudden whirring of wings—a call of "Duck! duck!"—and the Doctor, who is at the bow, and who is the only one who is ready, fires a snap-shot at the birds. Much to everybody's amazement, one drops, and instantly dives. Then begins an exciting chase. The biorlinn is sent careering with a vengeance; the men strain every muscle; and then another cry directs attention to the point at which the duck has reappeared. It is but for a second. Though he cannot fly, he can swim like a fish; and from time to time, as the hard pulling enables us to overtake him, we can see him shooting this way or that through the clear water. Then he bobs his head up, some thirty or forty yards off; and there is another snap-shot—the charge rattling on the water the fifth part of an instant *after* he disappears.

"Dear me!" says the Laird; "that bird will cost us ten shillings in cartridges."

But at last he is bagged. A chance shot happens to catch him before he dives; he is stretched on the water, with his black webbed feet in the air; and a swoop of Captain John's arm brings him dripping into the gig. And then our natural history is put to the test. This is no gay-plumaged sheldrake, or blue-necked mallard, or saw-toothed merganser. It is a broad-billed duck, of a sooty black and grey; we begin to regret our expenditure of cartridges; experiments on the flavour of unknown sea birds are rarely satisfactory. But Captain John's voice is authoritative and definite. "It is a fine bird," he says. And Master Fred has already marked him for his own.

Then among the shallows at the head of the loch there is many a wild pull after broods of flappers, and random firing at the circling curlew. The air is filled with the calling of the birds; and each successive shot rattles away with its echo among the silent hills. What is the result of all this noise and scramble? Not much, indeed; for right in the middle of it we are attracted by a strange appearance in the south. That dark line beyond the yacht: is it a breeze coming up the loch? Instantly the chase after mergansers ceases; cartridges are taken out; the two or three birds we have got are put out of the way; and the Laird, taking the tiller ropes, sits proud and erect. Away go the four oars with the precision of machinery; and the long sweep sends the gig ahead at a swinging pace. Behold! behold! the dark blue on the water widening! Is it a race between the wind and the gig as to which will reach the *White Dove* first? "Give me your oar, Fred!" says the Doctor, who is at the bow.

There is but a momentary pause. Again the shapely boat swings along; and with the measured beat of the oars comes the old familiar chorus—

... Cheerily, and all together!
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
Soon the flowing breeze will blow;
We'll show the snowy canvas on her—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
Wafted by the breeze of morn
We'll quaff the joyous horn together!—
Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!—
Ho, ro, clansmen!

"We'll beat! we'll beat!" cries the Laird, in great delight. "Give it her, boys! Not one halfpennyworth o' that wind will we lose!"

The bow cleaves the blue water; the foam hisses away from her rudder. It is a race of the North against the South. Then the chorus again—

Ho, ro, clansmen!
A long, strong pull together!—
Ho, ro, clansmen!

Hurrah! hurrah! As the gig is run alongside, and guns and birds handed up, that spreading blue has not quite reached the yacht; there is no appreciable stir of the lazy ensign. But there is little time to be lost. The amateurs swing the gig to the davits, while the men are getting in the slack of the anchor chain; the women are incontinently bundled below, to be out of the way of flapping sheets. Then, all hands at the halyards! And by the time the great White Wings are beginning to spread, the breeze stirs the still air around us; and the peak sways gently this way and that; and they who are hard at work at the windlass are no doubt grateful for this cool blowing from the south. Then there is a cessation of noise; we become vaguely aware that we are moving. At last the *White Dove* has spread her wings; her head is turned towards the south. Good-bye! you lonely loch, with the silent shores and the silent tombs—a hundred farewells to you, wherever we may be going!

And slowly we beat down the loch, against this light southerly breeze. But

as we get further and further into the open, surely there is something in the air and in the appearance of the southern sky that suggests that the glass has not been falling for nothing. The sea is smooth; but there is a strange gloom ahead of us; and beyond the islands that we visited yesterday nothing is visible but a wan and sultry glare. Then, afar, we can hear a noise as of the approach of some storm; but perhaps it is only the low sound of the swirling of the tides round the shores. Presently another sound attracts attention—a murmured hissing, and it comes nearer and nearer; dark spots, about the size of a threepenny-piece, appear on the white decks. The women have scarcely time to send below for their sunshades when the slight shower passes by—the decks are not even left damp. Then further and further we creep away towards the south; but where we expected to catch some far glimpse of the Irish coast—the blue line of Rathlin or the Antrim cliffs—there is only that dim, sultry haze.

Then another sound—a dull *flop! flop!*—in the distance; and the stragglers who have remained below after luncheon are hastily summoned on deck. And there, far away in the haze, we can dimly descry the successive curved forms of a school of dolphins, racing each other, and springing twenty or thirty feet in the air before they come down with that heavy thud on the water. Those of us who have watched the beautiful lithe fish racing and chasing by the side of an Atlantic vessel, would fain have been somewhat nearer; but we can only see the dim forms springing into the haze. Then the dull pistol-shots in the south slowly cease, and we are left alone on the low murmuring sea.

"But where is Miss Mary?" says the Laird, suddenly becoming aware of the absence of his chief companion.

"Oh, she is in the saloon!" says his hostess, quickly and anxiously. "She is doing something to one of her water-colours. I suppose we must not disturb her."

"No, no; certainly not," returns the Laird, lightly; and then he adds, with a smile which is meant to be very significant, "There is never any harm in hard work. Let her go on; she will have a fine collection of sketches before she leaves the *White Dove*."

But our Queen Tita does not respond to that careless joke. There is a curious, constrained look on her face; and she quite peremptorily negatives a suggestion of the Youth that he should go below for the draught-board. Then one of us perceives that Angus Sutherland is not on deck.

Has the opportunity come at last, then, for the clearing away of all secret troubles? What end is there to be to this momentous interview? Is it Stornoway harbour? Is our frank-eyed young Doctor to come up with a silent wonder and joy on his face—a message that needs no speech—a message that only says, "About with the yacht, and let us run away to the northern seas and Stornoway?" The friend of these two young people can hardly conceal her anxiety. She has got

hold of the case of an opera glass, and opens and shuts it quickly and aimlessly. Then there is a step on the companion way; she does not look; she only knows that Angus Sutherland comes on deck, and then goes forward to the bow of the gig, and stands by himself, and looks out to sea.

There is silence on board; for a low rumble of thunder has been heard once or twice, and we are listening. The mountains of Jura are dark now, and the sultry mist in the south is deeper in its gloom. This condition of the atmosphere produces a vague sense of something about to happen, which is in itself uncomfortable; one would almost like to see a flash of lightning, or hear the thunderous advance of a storm breaking in upon the oppressive calm.

The Laird goes forward to Angus Sutherland.

"Well, Doctor, and what think ye of the weather now?"

The younger man starts and turns round, and for a second looks at the Laird as if he had not quite comprehended the question.

"Oh, yes!" he says. "You are quite right. It does look as if we were going to have a dirty night."

And with that he turns to the sea again.

"Aye," says the Laird, sententiously. "I am glad we are in a boat we need have no fear of—none! Keep her away from the shore, and we are all right. But—but I suppose we will get into some harbour to-night, after all?"

"It does not matter," he says, absently; and then he goes away up to the bow. He is alone there; for the men have gone below for dinner—with the exception of John of Skye, who is at the helm.

Presently the special friend of the young man puts aside that opera-glass case, and walks timidly forward to the bow of the yacht. She regards him somewhat anxiously; but his face is turned away from her—looking over to the gloomy Jura hills.

"Angus," she says, briskly, "are we not going very near Jura, if it is West Loch Tarbert we are making for?"

He turned to her then, and she saw by his face that something had happened.

"You have spoken to her, Angus?" she said, in a low voice; and her earnest, kind eyes regarded the young man as if to anticipate his answer.

"Yes."

For a second or so he seemed disinclined to say more; but presently he added, scarcely looking at her—

"I am sorry that I must leave you the first time we get near land."

"Oh, Angus!"

It was almost a cry—uttered in that low, piteous voice. Then he looked at her.

"You have been very kind to me," said he, so that no one should hear. "It is only a misfortune. But I wish I had never seen the *White Dove*."

"Oh, Angus; don't say that!"

"It is my own fault. I should never have come from Edinburgh. I knew that. I knew I was hazarding everything. And she is not to blame——"

He could say no more, for one or two of the men now came up from the forecastle. His hostess left him and went aft, with a hurt and indignant look on her face. When the Laird asked why Miss Mary did not come on deck, she said, "I don't know," with an air which said she had ceased to take any further care in Mary Avon's actions. And at dinner, what heed did she pay to the fact that Mary Avon was rather white, and silent, and pained-looking? She had been disappointed. She had not expected the friend of her bosom to act in this heartless manner. And as for Howard Smith, she treated that young gentleman with a cold courtesy which rather astonished him.

After dinner, when the men folk had gone on deck, and when she was preparing to go too, a timid, appealing hand was laid on her arm.

"I would like to speak to you," said the low voice of Mary Avon.

Then she turned—only for a second.

"I think I know enough of what has happened, Mary," said she; "and it would not be right for me to intermeddle. Young people are the best judges of their own affairs."

The appealing hand was withdrawn; the girl retired to the saloon, and sate down alone.

But here, on deck, an eager council of war was being held; and Angus Sutherland was as busy as any one with the extended chart—the soundings barely visible in the waning light—and proposals and counter proposals were being freely bandied about. Night was coming on; dirty-looking weather seemed to be coming up from the south; and the mouth of West Loch Tarbert is narrow and shallow in parts, and studded with rocks—a nasty place to enter in the dark. Moreover, when should we get there, beating against this south-easterly wind? What if we were to put her head round, and run for some improvised harbour among the small islands under the shadow of the Jura hills, and wait there for daylight to show us across the Sound?

There was but one dissentient. Angus Sutherland seemed oddly anxious to get to West Loch Tarbert. He would himself take the helm all night; if only the men would take their turn at the look-out, one at a time. He was sure he could make the channel, if we reached the mouth of the loch before daylight. What! with nothing shallower on the chart than four fathoms! How could there be any danger?

But the more prudent counsels of John of Skye at length prevail, and there

is a call to the men forward to stand by. Then down goes the helm; her head slews round with a rattling of blocks and cordage; the sheets of the head-sails are belayed to leeward; and then, with the boom away over the starboard davits, we are running free before this freshening breeze.

But the night is dark as we cautiously creep in under the vast shadows of the Jura hills. Fortunately in here the wind is light; the *White Dove* seems to feel her way through the gloom. All eyes are on the look-out; and there is a general shout as we nearly run on a buoy set to mark a sunken ship. But we glide by in safety; and in due course of time the roar of the anchor chain tells us that we are snug for the night.

"But where is Miss Mary?" says the Laird, in the cheerfully-lit saloon. He looks around him in an uncomfortable and unsettled way. The saloon is not the saloon when Mary Avon is out of it; here is her chair next to his as usual, but it is vacant. How are we to spend the last happy hour of chatting and joking without the pleased, bright face, and the timid, gentle, shy, dark eyes?

"Mary has gone to her cabin," says her hostess. "I suppose she has a headache."

She supposes the girl has a headache, and has not asked! And can it be really Mary Avon that she is speaking of in that cold, hurt, offended way?

CHAPTER III.

IN THE DARK.

And then the next morning the Laird is infinitely distressed.

"What! not better yet?" he says. "Dear me! I wish I could be a woman for a while, to take some tea in to her, and read to her, and coax her into better spirits. What a bad headache it must be!"

But this generous sympathy on the part of one who is little more than an acquaintance touches the heart of Mary Avon's particular friend. She reproaches herself for her cruelty. She not only gets the tea and takes it into the cabin, but she adopts a domineering tone, and declares that until the young lady begins her breakfast she will not leave the place. And then she looks at the timid, worn face; and her hand is placed gently on the hand of her friend, and she says in a lower voice—

"Mary, don't think I am angry. I am only a little bit disappointed. But I

don't blame you—you could not help it. It is a pity; that is all."

The girl's face remains rather sad; but she is quite self-possessed.

"You will let me go away," she says, looking down, "when we get to some harbour?"

"There is no need," says her friend, regarding her. "Angus will leave us to-day, as soon as we get across to Cantyre."

"Oh!" she said, quickly, and looking tip with a brief appeal in her eyes. "I hope not! Why should he go away? I must go; I would rather go."

"Oh, no, Mary!" her friend said. "If there is any 'must' in the matter, it is on his side; for you know his time is very valuable, and you must have guessed why he has already far exceeded what he proposed to himself as his holiday. No, no, Mary; let us forget what has happened as soon as we can, and make the best of the rest of our sailing. The Laird would have a fit if you seriously threatened to go. And I am sure you are not to blame."

So she kissed her on the cheek, by way of reconciliation, and left. And she told the Laird that Mary had been dutiful, and had taken some breakfast, and would be up on deck in course of time.

Meanwhile, those who had gone on deck had found the *White Dove* lying in a dead calm, some three miles away from her anchorage of the previous night; her sails hanging limp; a scorching sun on the white decks, and a glare of light coming from the blue sky and the glassy blue sea.

"Well, Angus," says his hostess, very merrily—for she does not wish to let the others guess the reason of his sudden departure; "you see the weather does not approve of your leaving us. What has become of your thunderstorm? Where is the gale from the south, John?"

"I was never seeing the like of this weather, mem," said the bearded skipper. Then he added, anxiously, "And is Dr. Sutherland himself going away from the yat?"

"He would like to," she says; "but how is he ever to see land again if you banish the wind so?"

"But it will no be like this long!" says Captain John, eagerly—for he appears to think that Dr. Sutherland has got tired of the fine weather. "Oh, no, mem! I will answer for it. If Dr. Sutherland will wait another day, or two days, I am sure there will be plenty of wind. And we can lie in West Loch Tarbert for one day, or two days—–"

"And starve?" she says, abruptly.

But now it appears that one or two of the men have heard of a mysterious village lying somewhere inland from the mouth of the loch; and from a comparison of these vague rumours we gather that we may not be so far from

civilisation after all. Perhaps we may once again behold loaf-bread. Visions

of cutlets, fowls, grouse, and hares arise. We shall once more hear some echo of the distant world if perchance there be in the place a worn and ancient newspaper.

"Ay," said the Laird, hastily. "I would like to see a Glasgow newspaper! I'm thinking they must have got the steam fire-engine by now; and fine games the bairns will have when they begin to practise with it, skelping about in the water. It would be a grand thing to try it in the public garden when we get it; it would keep the shrubs and the borders fine and wet—eh?"

"And it would be quite as interesting as any plaster fountain," says his hostess, encouragingly.

"As handsome every bit," says the Laird, laughing heartily at his play of imagination, "as any bit laddie done up in stucco, standing on one leg, and holding up a pipe! It's a utilitarian age, ma'am—a utilitarian age; we will have instead of a fountain a steam fire-engine—very good! very good!—and they bodies who are always crying out against expenditure on decoration will be disappointed for once."

The Laird had at last discovered the whereabouts of the mysterious village on the Admiralty chart.

"But what newspaper will we get in a place hidden away like that?—out of the reach of all communication wi' the world. They'll be a century behind, mark my words. It is when ye live within a reasonable distance of a great centre of ceevilisation, like Glasgow, that ye feel the life of it stirring your own place too; and ye must keep up with the times; ye must be moving. Conservative as I am, there is no supersteetious obstinacy about me; moving—moving—that's the word. The more important the matter in the interest of the public, the more necessary is it that we should have an impartial mind. If ye show me a new sort of asphalte, do ye think I would not examine it, jist because I recommended Jamieson and MacGregor's patent?"

He appealed boldly to his hostess.

"Oh, certainly; certainly you would!" she says, with an earnestness that might have made Jamieson and MacGregor quail.

"For three weeks," says the Laird, solemnly, "I was on that committee, until it seemed that my breakfast, and my dinner, and my supper every day was nothing but tar-smoke. What wi' the experiments without and within, I was just filled with tar-smoke. And would ye believe it, ma'am, one o' they Radical newspapers went as far as to say there were secret influences at work when Jamieson and MacGregor was decided on. My friends said, 'Prosecute the man for libel;' but I said, 'No; let the poor crayture alone; he has got to earn his living!'"

That was very wise of you, sir," says his hostess.

"Bless me! If a man in public life were to heed everything that's said about him," observes the Laird, with a fine air of unconcern, "what would become of

his time? No, no; that is not the principle on which a public man should found his life. Do your best for your fellow-creatures, and let the squabblers say what they like. As ah say, the poor wretches have to earn their living."

Here Mary Avon appeared, somewhat pale and tired-looking; and the Laird instantly went to condole with her, and to get her a deck chair, and what not. At the same moment, too, our young Doctor came along—perhaps with a brave desire to put an end to her embarrassment at once—and shook hands with her, and said "Good morning; I hope your headache is better." Her hand was trembling as it fell away from his; and her " Yes, thank you," was almost inaudible. Then she sate down, and the Laird resumed his discourse.

"I was once taken," said he, "by a fellow commissioner of mine to a sort of singing place, or music hall, in Glasgow."

"What?"

"They wanted to have some such place in Strathgovan," continued the Laird, paying no heed; "and I was asked to go and see what sort of entertainment was provided in such places. It was a sorrowful sight, ma'am—a sorrowful sight; the wretched craytures on the stage laughing at their own songs, and the people not laughing at all, but given over to tobacco smoking, and whisky, and talking amongst themselves. No glint of humour—stupid, senseless stuff. But there was one young man sung a song that had a better sound in it—I cannot remember the words—but I sometimes think there was common sense in them: it was about minding your own business, and doing your own work, and letting fools say or think of ye what they please. Aye, I think there was something in that young man; though I doubt, by the look of his eyes, but he was a drinker."

He turned to Mary Avon, who had been content to be a mute and unobserved listener.

"Well, Miss Mary," said he, brightly, "and the headache is going? And are ye looking forward to getting letters and newspapers when we get back to the world? There is a post-office at that village of Clachan, John?"

"Oh, aye, sir!" said John; "there will be a post-office."

The Laird looked up at him reproachfully.

"But why cannot ye learn the English pronunciation, man? What's the necessity for ye to say *posht offus*? Cannot ye pronounce the plain English—*post oafficc*?"

"I am not very good at the English, sir," said Captain John, with a grin.

"Ye'll never learn younger."

Then he went to Mary Avon, and suggested that a walk up and down the deck might do her headache good; and when she rose he put her hand on his arm.

"Now," said he, as they started off, "I do not like headaches in young people;

they are not natural. And ye may think I am very inqueesitive; but it is the privilege of old men to be talkative and inqueesitive—and I am going to ask you a question."

There was certainly no effort at keeping a secret on the part of the Laird; every one might have heard these two talking as they quietly walked up and down.

"I am going to ask ye, plump and plain, if ye are not anxious about going to London, and worrying yourself about the selling of your pictures? There now; answer me that."

"Not very much, sir," she says, in a low voice.

"Listen to me," he said, speaking in a remarkably emphatic way. "If that is on your mind, dismiss it. I tell you what: I will undertake, on my own responsibeelity, that every painting in oil, and every sketch in oil, and every water-colour drawing, and every sketch in water-colour that ye have on board this yacht, will be sold within one fortnight of your leaving the yacht. Do ye understand that?"

"You are very kind, sir."

"I am not bletherin'," said he; "no man ever knew me draw back from my word. So put that anxiety away from your mind altogether, and let us have no more troubles. I could sell—I could sell four times as many for ye in a fortnight! Bless ye, lassie, ye do not know the people in the West of Scotland yet—ye'll know them better by and by. If there's one thino- thev understand better than another it is a good picture; and they are ready to put their hand in their pocket. Oh! they Edinburgh bodies are very fine creetics—they have what they believe to be an elegant society in Edinburgh—and they talk a great deal about pictures; but do they put their hand in their pocket? Ask Tom Galbraith. Ask him where he sets three-fourths of his income. He lives in Edinburgh; but he gets his income from the West of Scotland. Tom's a wise lad. He knows how to feather his nest. And when he has become independent of the picture-dealers, then he'll go to London, and fight the men there on their own ground."

"I should like to see some of Mr. Galbraith s work," she said, "before I return to England."

"You will have plenty of leisure to look at them by and by," replied the Laird, quite simply. "I have some of Tom's very best things at Denny-mains."

It was not until the cool of the afternoon that a light breeze sprung up to fill the sails of the *White Dove*, and press her gently on towards the coast of Cantyre. By this time every one on board knew that Angus Sutherland was leaving, and leaving for good.

"I hope ye will come and see me at Denny-mains, Dr. Sutherland," said the Laird, good-naturedly, "when ye happen to be in Scotland. I have a neighbour there ye would be glad to meet—a man who could talk to ye on your own

subjects—Mr. Stoney."

Our Doctor paid but little heed. He was silent, and distraught. His eyes had an absent and heavy look in them.

"A most distinguished man," the Laird continued. "I am told his reputation in England is just as great as it is in this country. A very distinguished man indeed. He read a paper before the British Association not many years ago."

"About what, do you remember?" said the other, at last.

"H'm!" said the Laird, apparently puzzling his memory. "Ye see, a man in my poseetion has so much to do with the practical business of life, that perhaps he does not pay just attention to the speculations of others. But Mr. Stoney is a remarkable man; I am astonished ye should have forgotten what the paper was about. A most able man, and a fine, logical mind; it is just beautiful to hear him point out the close fitness between the charges in the major proposeetion in the Semple case, and the averments and extracts in the minor. Ye would be greatly delighted and instructed by him, Doctor. And there's another thing."

Here the Laird looked slyly at Mary Avon.

"There's a young leddy here who has a secret of mine; and I'm thinking she has not said much about it. But I will make a public confession now: it has been on my mind for some time back that I might buy a screw yacht."

The Laird looked triumphantly around; he had forgotten that it was a very open secret.

"And wouldn't it be a strange thing if this very party, just as we are sitting now, were to be up at this very spot next year, on board that yacht?—wouldn't that be a strange thing?"

"It would be a jolly pleasant thing," said the Youth.

"You are very kind to include me in the invitation," said Angus Sutherland; "but I doubt whether I shall ever be in Scotland again. My father is a very old man now; that is the only thing that would call me north. But I think I could q-et on better with my own work by going abroad for some years to Naples, probably. I have to go to Italy before long, any way."

He spoke in a matter-of-fact way; we did not doubt that he might pursue his researches better in Naples.

It was in the dusk of the evening that we slowly sailed into West Loch Tarbert—past a series of rocks and islands on which, as we were given to understand, seals were more abundant than limpets. But whereas the last haunt of the seals we had visited had introduced us to a solitary and desolate loch, with sterile shores and lonely ruins, this loch, so far as we could see, was a cheerful and in- habited place, with one or two houses shining palely white amid the dark woods. And when v/e had come to anchor, and sent ashore, although there were no provisions to be got, the men returned with all the necessary information for

Angus Sutherland. By getting up very early next morning, and walking a certain distance, he would catch a certain coach, which would take him on to Tarbert on Loch Fyne in time to catch the steamer. And so that nicrht, before we turned in to our respective cabins, the Doctor bade us all formally good-bye; and Mary Avon among the rest. No one could have noticed the least difference in his manner.

But in the middle of the night, in the ladies' cabin, a sound of stifled sobbing. And the other woman goes over to the berth of her companion, and bends her head down, and whispers—

"Mary, why are you crying? Tell me!"

She cannot speak for a time; her whole frame is shaken with the bitter-sobs. And then she says, in a low, trembling, broken voice—

"He has not forgiven me. I saw it in his face."

CHAPTER IV.

TO ABSENT FRIENDS!

Next morning, however, every one perceived an extraordinary change in the appearance and manner of the girl. Mary Avon had come back to us again, with all the light and life of her face, and the contented gentleness of the soft black eyes. What had wrought the transformation? Certain confidential assurances in the silence of the night that Angus Sutherland, so far from not forgiving her, had insisted that she was not to blame at all. Or the natural reaction after a long strain of anxiety? Or merely the welcome fresh breeze of the morning, with the cheerful, wooded shores, and the white houses shining in the sunlight? Any how there was quite a new expression in her face; and we heard the low, sweet laugh again. It is true that, once or twice, as she walked up and down the deck with the Laird, her eyes grew pensive as she looked away along the hills on the southern shores of the loch. That was the direction in which Angus had left in the morning. And these hills were somewhat overcast; it seemed to be raining inland.

Moreover, there was something else to make our breakfast party a glad one. The two men who had rowed our young Doctor across the loch at break of day had had the curiosity to pierce inland as far as the village of Clachan; and the scouts had brought back the most glowing accounts of the Promised Land which they had discovered. They had penetrated a fertile and deeply-wooded valley;

and they had at length come upon a centre of the highest civilisation. There was a post-office. There was a telegraph-office. There was a church, the clock of which struck the hours.

"Just fancy that!" exclaimed our hostess. "A clock that strikes the hours!—and a telegraph-office! We might send a telegram to ask whether the country has been invaded anywhere, or whether the Prime Minister has committed suicide."

"I would like to hear about the steam fire-engine," said the Laird almost to himself.

"However, breeze or no breeze, seals or no seals," she says, with decision, "we must stay over a day here, to have the yacht thoroughly provisioned. We cannot go on skating on the edge of tinned meats. We must have a plentiful supply of fresh vegetables, and fresh milk, and eggs and butter; and then two or three joints are always so serviceable—cold, I mean, for luncheon; and if Fred cannot get any game, at least he must get us some fowls. What do you say, Mary? Shall we walk over to this place, and clear the way for Fred?"

"Oh, no!" says the other, lightly; "you and I are going with the seal shooters. They never get near anything; so we cannot be in the way. I assure you, sir, we shall be as quiet as mice," she adds, addressing the Laird.

"Ye will come with us, and ye will speak just as much as ye please," said the Laird, dogmatically. "What signifies a seal? The crayture is good for nothing! And the idea of you two going away by yourselves into the country! No—no; come away and get ready, Howard. If ye cannot shoot a seal with the two leddies in the boat, ye will never do it without. And the sea breezes, Miss Mary," he added, with an approving air, "are better for ye than the land breezes. Oh, aye; ye are looking just fine this morning."

A short time thereafter he was on deck, looking around him at the pleasant trees and the blue waters, when Miss Avon joined him, fully equipped for the expedition; and just at this moment they began to hear a sound of music in the stillness of the morning air. And then they perceived a rude old rowing-boat, pulled by a small boy of twelve or so, coming nearer and nearer; while another small boy of about the same age was peacefully reclining in the stern, his head thrown back so that it met the full glare of the morning sun, while he played vigorously but rather inaccurately "The Campbells are coming" on a tin whistle.

"Look at that!" said the Laird with delight; "is not that perfect happiness? Look at his pride and laziness—having another boy to pull him about, while he shows off on the penny whistle. Dear me, I wish I was that young rascal!"

"He seems happy enough," she said, with a sigh.

"That is because he does not know it," remarked the Laird, profoundly. "If you proved to him that he was happy, it would immediately vanish."

"You cannot be consciously happy; but you may be consciously unhappy—

that is rather hard," said she, absently.

However, these two philosophers were withdrawn from this occult point by a summons from the Youth, who had already got the rifles and cartridges into the bow of the gig. And, indeed, as we rowed away from the yacht, in the direction of the rocks at the mouth of the loch, Miss Avon seemed determined to prove that, consciously or unconsciously, she was happy enough. She would not even allow that Angus Sutherland could have felt any pang of regret at leaving the *White Dove* and his friends.

"Poor chap!" said the Laird, with some compassion, as he turned his head and looked away towards those gloomy hills; "it must have been a lonesome journey for him this morning. And he so fond of sailing too; I'm thinking when he saw what a nice breeze there was, he was rather sorry to go away. I should not wonder if it was wi' a heavy heart that he went on board the steamer."

"Oh, no, sir! why should you think that?" said Mary Avon, quickly and anxiously. "If Dr. Sutherland had nothing to consider but yachting, he might have been sorry to go away. But think what lies before him; think what calls him! Look at the position he has won for himself already, and what is expected of him! and you would have him throw away his splendid opportunities in yachting? There is not a University in Europe where he is not known; there is not a man of science in Europe who does not expect great things of him; and—and—how proud his father must be of him!"

She spoke eagerly and almost breathlessly; there was a pink flush in her cheek, but it was not from shamefacedness. She seemed desperately anxious to convince the Laird that our Doctor ought to have left the yacht, and must have left the yacht, and could not do anything else but leave the yacht. Meanwhile, her friend and hostess regarded her curiously.

"A man with such capacities as he has," continued the girl, warmly, "with such a great future before him, owes it to himself that he should not give way to mere sentiment. The world could not get on at all if people—I mean if the great people, from whom we expect much—were always to be consulting their feelings. Perhaps he was sorry to leave the yacht. He does like sailing; and—and I think he liked to be among friends. But what is that when he knows there is work in the world for him to do? If he was sorry at leaving the yacht, you may depend on it that that had passed away before he stepped on board the steamer. For what was that trifling sentiment compared with the consciousness that he had acted rightly?"

Something about the precision of these phrases—for the girl but rarely gave way to such a fit of earnest talking—seemed to suggest to the silent person who was watching her, that this was not the first time the girl had thought of these things.

"Idle people," said this youthful controversialist, "can afford to indulge in sentiment; but not those who have to do great things in the world. And it is not as if—Dr. Sutherland"—she always faltered the least bit just before pronouncing the name—"were only working for his own fame or his own wealth. It is for the good of mankind that he is working; and if he has to make this or that sacrifice, he knows that he is doing right. What other reward does a man need to have?"

"I am thinking of the poor old man in Banffshire," said her friend to her, thoughtfully. "If Angus goes away to Italy for some years, they may not see each other again."

At this the girl turned strangely pale, and remained silent; but she was unnoticed, for at this moment all attention was attracted towards the seals.

There they were, no doubt, and in large numbers. We could see the occasionally moving forms, scarcely distinguishable from the brown sea-weed, on the long projecting points of the low rocks; while here and there one of the animals could be made out, poising himself in a semi-circle—head and tail in the air—like a letter O with the upper four-fifths cut off. But the problem was, how to get anywhere within shot. The rocks, or small islands, had no doubt certain eminences in the middle; but they were low and shallow all round. Obviously it was no use bearing straight down on them from our present position; so it was resolved to give them a wide berth, to pull away from the islands altogether, and then approach them from the south, if haply there might in this wise be some possibility of shelter. It was observed that Queen Titania, during these whispered and eager consultations, smiled gravely and was silent. She had been in the Highlands before.

Seals are foolish animals. We were half a mile away from them; and we were going still farther away. The rocking of the water made it impossible for us to try a haphazard shot even if we had had a rifle that would have carried anything like 800 yards with precision. There was not the least reason for their being alarmed. But all the same, as we silently and slowly paddled away from them—actually away from them—the huge bodies one by one flopped and waddled and dropped into the water with a splash. In about a minute or so there was not a seal visible through our best binoculars. And Queen Titania calmly smiled.

But, as everybody knows, there are two sides to an island, as to everything else. So we boldly bore down on the shores nearest us, and resolved, on getting close, on a cautious and silent landing. After many a trial we found a creek where the stern of the gig could be backed into fairly deep water, along a ledge of rock, and then two of us got out. The ladies produced their knitting materials.

With much painful stooping and crawling, we at length reached the middle ridge, and there laid down our rifles to have a preliminary peep round. That stealthy glance revealed the fact that, on the other side also, the seals had been

alarmed and had left the rocks; but still they were not far away. We could see here and there a black and glistening head moving among the lapping waters. Of course it would have been madness to have risked our all on a random shot at sea. Hit or miss, the chances were about equal we should not get the seal; so we quietly retired again behind the ridge, and sate down. We could see the gig and its occupants. It seemed to one of us at least that Queen Titania was still amused.

A dead silence: while we idly regard the washed-up stores of sea-shells around us, and patiently await the return of the seals to the rocks. Then a sudden noise that makes one's heart jump: a couple of terns have discovered us, and the irate birds go wheeling and shrieking overhead with screams that would have aroused the Sleeping Beauty and all her household. In their fright and wrath they come nearer and nearer; at times they remain motionless overhead; but ever continues the shrill and piercing shriek. The face of the Youth is awful to see. Again and again he puts up his rifle; and there is no doubt that, if he were to fire, he might accomplish that feat which is more frequently heard of in novels than elsewhere—shooting a bird on the wing with a rifle. But then he is loth to throw away his last chance. With a gesture of despair, he lowers his weapon, and glances towards the gig. Queen Titania has caught his eye, and he hers. She is laughing.

At length we venture to hazard everything. Furtively each rifle is protruded over the ledge of rock; and furtively each head creeps up by the stock, the hand on the trigger-guard. The caution is unnecessary. There is not a sign of any living thing all around the shores. Even the two sea-swallows, alarmed by our moving, have wheeled away into the distance; we are left in undisturbed possession of the island. Then the Youth clambers up to the top of the rocks and looks around. A skart, perched on a far ledge, immediately takes flight—striking the water with his heavy wings before he can get well on his way: thereafter a dead silence.

"It was the tern that did that," says the Youth, moodily, as we return to the gig. "The seals must have known well enough."

"They generally do contrive to know somehow," is the answer of one who is not much disappointed, and who is still less surprised.

But this wicked woman all a-laughing, when we return to the gig!

"Come, children," says she, "we shall barely be back in time for lunch; and we shall be all the longer that Angus is not here to sing his '*Ho, ro, clansmen!*' But the quicker the sooner, as the Highlandman said. Jump in!"

"It was all owing to those sea-swallows," remarks the Youth, gloomily.

"Never mind," says she, with great equanimity. "Mary and I knew you would not shoot anything, or we should not have come. Let us hasten back to see what Fred has shot for us, with his silver sixpences."

And so we tumble into the gig; and push away, and have a long swinging

pull back to the *White Dove*.

There is still some measure of justice meted out upon the earth. The face of this fiend who has been laughing at us all the morning becomes a trifle more anxious when she draws near the yacht. For there is Master Fred idling up at the bow, instead of being below looking after the vast stores he has got on board; and moreover as we draw near, and as he comes along to the gangway, any one can perceive that our good Frederick d'or is not in a facetious frame of mind.

"Well, Fred, have you got a good supply at last?" she cries, taking hold of the rope, and putting her foot on the step.

Fred mumbles something in reply.

"What have you got?" she says, when she is on deck. "Any game?"

"No, mem."

"Oh, never mind; the fowls will do very well."

Fred is rather silent, until he explains that he could not get any fowls.

"No fowls? What butcher's meat, then?" says she, somewhat indignantly.

"None? Nothing?" says she; and a low titter begins to prevail among the assembled crowd. "Have you not got a joint of any sort?"

Fred is almost unwilling to confess—he is ashamed, angry, disconcerted. At last he blurts out—

"I could get nothing at all, mem, but fower loaves."

At this there was a roar of laughter. What had become of all her fresh milk, and butter, and eggs; her mutton, and fowls, and cutlets; her grouse, and snipe, and hares? We did not care for our privation; we only rejoiced in her discomfiture.

"That is just like a Scotch village," says she, savagely; "spending all its money on a church bell, and not able to keep a decent shop open! Do you mean to say you could not get a carrot, or a cabbage, or a pennyworth of milk?"

"No, mem."

"John," she says, in a domineering way, "why *don't* you get the sails up? What is the use of staying in a place like this?"

John comes forward timidly, and stroking his great beard: he half believes in these furious rages of hers.

"Oh, yes, mem, if ye please, mem, I will get the sail set—but—but the tide will be turning soon, mem, and the wind, she will be against us as soon as we get out of the loch; and it will be a long, long time before we get to Crinan. I not well aquent with this place, mem: if we were up in our own part of the Highlands, do you think the people would let the *White Dove* be so long without the fresh cabbage and the milk? No; I not think that, mem."

"But we are not in our own part of the Highlands," says she, querulously; "and do you think we are going to starve? However, I suppose Fred can give us

a biscuit. Let us go below."

Our lunch was, in truth, simple enough; but perhaps it was this indirect appeal to Fred that determined that worthy to surprise us at dinner that evening. First of all, after we had returned from another ineffectual seal-hunt, we found he had decorated the dinner-table in an elaborate manner. There was a clean cloth, shining with the starch in it. There was a great dish of scarlet rowans in the middle of the table; and the rowans had a border of white heather—fathered at Loch-na-Chill: the rowans were for lovely colour, the heather was for luck. Then, not content with that, he had put all our available silver on the table, including the candlesticks and the snuffer-tray, though the sun had not yet sunk behind the Jura hills. But the banquet defies description. The vast basin of steaming kidney soup, the boiled lithe, the fried mackerel, the round of tongue, the corned beef, the tomatoes, the pickles, the sardines, the convolutions of pudding and apricot jam: what Fishmonger or Drysalter or Gunmaker could have wanted more? Nor was there any Apemantus at the feast; there was the smiling and benign countenance of the Laird, who again and again made facetious remarks about the kirk bell of Clachan. Then he said more formally—

"Ladies and gentlemen, I am going to ask ye to drink a toast."

"Oh, uncle!" said the Youth deprecatingly; "we are not at a commissioners' meeting at Strathgovan."

"And I will thank ye to fill your glasses," said the Laird, taking no heed of Young England and his modern want of manners. "I have to ask ye, ladies and gentlemen, to drink the health of one who is an old and valued friend of some of us, who is admired and respected by us all. It would ill become us, now that he has been separated from us but by a day, that we should forget him in his absence. We have come in close contact with him; we have seen his fine qualities of temper and character; and I am sure no one present will contradict me when I say that, great as are his abeelities, they are not more remarkable than his modesty, and his good humour, and his simple, plain, frank ways. With a man of less solid judgment, I might be afraid of certain dangerous tendencies of these times; but our friend has a Scotch head on his shoulders; he may be dazzled by their newfangled speculations, but not convinced—not convinced. It is a rare thing—I will say it, though I am but a recent acquaintance, and do not know him as well as some now at this hospitable board—to find such powers of intellect united with such a quiet and unassuming manliness. Ladies and gentlemen, I give ye the health of Dr. Angus Sutherland. We regret that he has gone from us; but we know that duty calls, and we honour the man who stands to his guns. It may be that we may see him in these waters once more; it may be that we may not; but whatever may be in store for him or for us, we know he will be worthy of the hopes we build on him, and we drink his health now in his absence, and

wish him God-speed!"

"Hear! hear!" cried the Youth, who was greatly amused by this burst of old-fashioned eloquence. But Mary Avon sate white and trembling, and quite forgot to put the glass to her lips. It was her hostess who spoke next, with a laugh.

"I think, sir," said she, "I might give you a hint. If you were to go up on deck and ask the men whether they would like to drink Angus's health, I don't think they would refuse."

"It is a most capital suggestion," said the Laird, rising to take down his wideawake.

CHAPTER V.
SUSPICIONS.

It was handsomely done on the part of the Laird to pay that tribute to his vanquished and departed enemy. But next morning, as we were getting under weigh, he got a chance of speaking to his hostess alone; and he could not quite forego a little bit of boasting over his superior astuteness and prescience.

"What did I say, ma'am," he asked, with a confident chuckle, "when ye made a communication to me on the subject of our friend who has just left us? Did I not offer to make ye a wager, though I am but little of a gambler? A gold ring, a sixpence, and a silver thimble: did I not offer to wager ye these three articles that your guesses were not quite correct? And what has become of Dr. Sutherland now?"

His hostess is not in this gay humour. She answers with a touch of reserve—

"If I made any mistake, it was about Mary. And I had no right to suspect anything, for she never took me into her confidence; and I do not approve of elderly people prying into the affairs of young people."

"Pry?" says the Laird, loftily and graciously. "No, no; no prying. But judgment?—is there any harm in one keeping one's eyes open? And did not I tell ye, ma'am, to be of good heart—that everything would go properly and smoothly?"

"And has it?" she says, sharply, and looking up with a glance of indignation.

The Laird, however, is so wrapped up in his own thoughts that he does not notice this protest.

"She is a fine lass, that," he says, with decision. "Did ye ever hear a young

girl speak such clear common sense as she spoke yesterday, about that very Doctor? There is no affected sentiment—there is nothing of your Clarinda and Philander noavel-writing—about that lass: did ye ever hear such good, sound, clear common sense?"

"I heard her," says his hostess, shortly.

By this time we had weighed anchor, and the *White Dove* was slowly sailing down the loch, before a light northerly breeze. Then Mary Avon came on deck, followed by the attentive Youth. And while everybody on board was eagerly noticing things ahead—the seals on the rocks at the mouth of the loch, the windy grey sea beyond, and the blue mountains of Jura—Mary Avon alone looked backward, to the low lines of hills we were leaving. She sate silent and apart.

The Laird stepped over to her.

"We have just been talking about the Doctor," says he, cheerfully. "And we were saying there was plenty of good common sense in what ye said yesterday about his duties and his prospects. Oh, ay! But then ye ken, Miss Mary, even the busiest and the wisest of men must have their holiday at times; and I have just been thinking that, if we can get Dr. Sutherland to come with us next year, we will, maybe, surprise him by what ye can do wi' a steam yacht. Why, during the time we have been lying here, we might have run across to Ireland and back in a steam yacht! It is true there would be less enjoyment for him in the sailing; but still there are compensations."

His hostess has overheard all this. She says, in her gentle way, but with a cold and cruel clearness—

"You know, sir, that is quite impossible. Angus will not be in Scotland for many a day to come."

The girl's face is hidden; apparently she is still gazing back on those slowly receding hills.

"Toots! toots!" says the Laird, briskly. "The lad is not a fool. He will make an occasion if he considers it desirable: there is no compulsion that he must remain in Eetaly. I think I would even lay a wager that we will have just the same party, and the Doctor included, on that steam yacht next year, and in this very place: is it a wager, ma'am?"

"I am afraid you must leave us out," she remarks, "at all events. And as for Angus Sutherland, I shall be surprised if ever he sees West Loch Tarbert again."

Why had not Mary Avon spoken? The Laird went a step nearer her, and put his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Well, Miss Mary," said he; "what are we to do to show these people their lolly and wickedness—eh? I think I will leave it to you."

"Oh, no, sir!" This, or something like this, she was understood to say, in a low voice; but at the same moment she rose quickly, crossed the deck, put a

trembling hand on the companion way, and went below. Just as she disappeared, she could not quite conceal her face; and there was a look on it that startled the Laird. Had the girl been stealthily crying all the time she had been looking back at those distant hills?

The Laird was greatly disturbed. He said nothing, for he would not have it understood that anything had happened; but any one could see by his preoccupied manner that he was seriously troubled. He had directed a quick, sharp glance of surprise and inquiry at his hostess; but just then she was stepping aside to get out of the way of Captain John. The Laird sate down by himself, and remained in a profound silence. He seemed to pay no attention to what was going on.

But there was brisk work enough all over the yacht. For now we had got clear of the long promontory and its islands; and out here in the open there was a pretty heavy sea running, while the wind began to freshen up a bit. There was a squally look about the sea and sky; it was considered prudent to lower the topsail. Now and again there was a heavy shock at the bows, and then a dipping of heads to dodge the flying shreds of spray. In the midst of all this Miss Avon appeared again.

"I thought we should catch it," said she, in the blithest of tones; and she addressed herself particularly to the Laird. "And it is better to be prepared. But, oh dear me! what a nuisance a waterproof is!"

And indeed the wind was blowing that hooded and caped garment all about her head, so that her dark hair was becoming considerably dishevelled. The Youth came to her assistance; put a cushion and a shawl for her just beside her hostess, under the lee of the weather bulwarks; then she snugly ensconced herself there, and seemed to be very merry and happy indeed.

"Don't you often wish you were a fish, when the weather is wet?" she says, gaily, to her friend; "so that you might be perfectly indifferent?" And here she cries "Oh!" again, because a drop or two of spray has come flying past the keel of the gig and just caught her on the crown of her waterproof.

Nothing can exceed her talk, her laughter, her cheerfulness. She nestles close to her friend; she is like a spoiled child; she makes fun of the Youth's attempts to steer. And the Laird is regarding her with a grave wonder—perhaps with some dark suspicion—when she lightly addresses herself to him again:

"But what about that strong man, sir? You were going to tell us the story yesterday, when you were interrupted."

It was a cunning device. How could a professed story-teller refuse to rise to the bait? The watchfulness disappeared from the face of the Laird: in its place a sort of anticipatory laughter began to shine.

"But it was Tom Galbraith heard of that man," said he, in a deprecating

way. "Did I not tell ye? Oh, ay! it was Tom Galbraith heard of him when he was in Rossshire; and it was he told me of the wonderful things that man could do, according to the natives. Did not I tell ye of his rolling an enormous stone up a hill, and of the stone being split into nine pieces; yet not any one man could roll up one of the nine pieces? But I was going to tell ye of his being in Prince's Street, Edinburgh; and a coach and four was coming whirling along; the horses had run away, and no one could stop them. M'Kinlay was walking along the street, when the people called to him to look out, for the four horses were running mad; but the Rossshire Samson was not afraid. No, no——"

Here a wisp of spray somewhat disconcerted the Laird; but only for a moment. He wiped the salt water from the side of his neck, and continued, with suppressed laughter bubbling up in his eyes.

"The man that told Tom Galbraith," said he, "was a solemn believer, and spoke with reverence. 'M'Kinlay,' says he, 'he will turn to the street, and he will grab at the four horses and the coach, and he will took them up in his two hands—*shist like a mice*.'"

"*Shist like a mice*." The Laird preserved a stern silence. The humour of this story was so desperately occult that he would leave the coarse applause to us. Only there was an odd light in his eyes; and we knew that it was all he could do to prevent his bursting out into a roar of laughter. But Mary Avon laughed—until John of Skye, who had not heard a word, grinned out of pure sympathy.

"He must have been the man," said Miss Avon, diffidently—for she did not like to encroach on the Laird's province—"whom Captain John told me about, who could drink whisky so strong that a drop of it would burn a white mark on a tarred rope."

But the Laird was not jealous.

"Very good—very good!" he cried, with extreme delight. "Excellent—a real good one! 'Deed I'll tell that to Tom Galbraith!"

And the high spirits and the facetiousness of these two children continued through lunch. That was rather a wild meal, considering that we were still sawing across the boisterous Sound of Jura, in the teeth of a fresh northerly breeze. However, nothing could exceed the devotion of the Youth, who got scarcely any luncheon at all in his efforts to control the antics of pickle jars and to bolster up bottles. Then when everything was secure, there would be an ominous call overhead, "*Stand by forrard, boys!*" followed by a period of frantic revolution and panic.

"Yes," continued the Laird, when we got on deck again; "a sense of humour is a great power in human affairs. A man in public life without it is like a ship without a helm: he is sure to go and do something redeeclous that a smaller man would have avoided altogether. Ay, my father's sense of humour was often said

by people to be quite extraordinar'—quite extraordinar'. I make no pretensions that way myself."

Here the Laird waved his hand, as if to deprecate any courteous protest.

"No, no; I have no pretensions that way; but sometimes a bit joke comes in verra well when ye are dealing with solemn and pretentious asses. There is one man in Strathgovan——"

But here the Laird's contempt of this dull person could not find vent in words. He put up both hands, palm outwards, and shook them, and shrugged his shoulders.

"A most desperately stupid ass, and as loquacious as a parrot. I mind fine when I was giving my earnest attention to the subject of our police system. I may tell ye, ma'am, that our burgh stretches over about a mile each way, and that it has a population of over 8,000 souls, with a vast quantity of valuable property. And up till that time we had but two policemen on duty at the same time during the night. It was my opeenion that that number was quite inahdequate; and I stated my opeenion at a meeting of the commissioners convened for that purpose. Well, would ye believe it, this meddlesome body, Johnny Guthrie, got up on his legs and preached and preached away; and all that he had to tell us was that we could not add to the number of police without the consent of the Commissioners of Supply and the Home Secretary. Bless me! what bairn is there but knows that? I'll be bound Miss Mary there, though she comes from England, would know as much about public affairs as that?"

"I—I am afraid not, sir," said she.

"No matter—no matter. Live and learn. When ye come to Strathgovan, we'll begin and teach ye. However, as I was saying, this bletherin' poor crayture went on and on, and it was all about the one point, until I got up and, 'Mr. Provost,' says I, 'there are some human beings it would be idle to answer. Their loquacity is a sort of function; they perspire through their tongue—like a doag.' Ye should have seen Johnny Guthrie's face after that!"

And here the Laird laughed and laughed again at Johnny Guthrie's discomfiture.

"But he is a poor bletherin' crayture," he continued, with a kind of compassion. "Providence made him what he is: but sometimes I think Johnny tries to make himself even more rideeklous than Providence could fairly and honestly have intended. He attacked me most bitterly because I got a committee appointed to represent to the Postmaster that we should have a later delivery at night. He attacked me most bitterly; and yet I think it was one of the greatest reforms ever introduced into our Burgh."

"Oh, indeed, sir?" says his hostess, with earnest attention.

"Yes, indeed. The Postmaster is a most civil, worthy, and respectable man,

though it was a sore blow to him when his daughter took to going to the Episcopal Church in Glasgow. However, with his assistance we now get the letters that used to be delivered in the forenoon delivered late the night before; and we have a mail made up at 10 P.M., which is a great convenience. And that man Johnny Guthrie gabbling away as if the French Revolution were coming back on us! I am a Conservative myself, as ye know, ma'am; but I say that we must march with the times. No standing still in these days. However, ye will get Johnny Guthries everywhere; poor bletherin' craytures who have no capacity for taking a large view of public affairs—bats and blindworms as it were: I suppose there is a use for them, as it has pleased Providence to create them; but it would puzzle an ordinary person to find it out."

With much of the like wise discourse did the Laird beguile our northward voyage; and apparently he had forgotten that little incident about Mary Avon in the morning. The girl was as much interested as any one; laughed at the "good ones;" was ready to pour her contempt on the Johnny Guthries who opposed the projects of the Laird's statesmanship. And in this manner we fought our way against the stiff northerly breeze, until evening found us off the mouth of Loch Crinan. Here we proposed to run in for the night, so that we should have daylight and a favourable tide to enable us to pass through the Dorus Mor.

It was a beautiful, quiet evening in this sheltered bay; and after dinner we were all on deck, reading, smoking, and what not. The Laird and Mary Avon were playing chess together. The glow of the sunset was still in the western sky, and reflected on the smooth water around us; though Jura and Scarba were of a dark, soft, luminous rose-purple.

Chess is a silent game; the Laird was not surprised that his companion did not speak to him. And so absorbed was he with his knights and bishops that he did not notice that, in the absolute silence of this still evening, one of the men forward was idly whistling to himself the sad air of Lochaber.

Lochaber no more! And Lochaber no more!
We'll maybe return to Lochaber no more!

It was the old and familiar refrain: Hector of Moidart was probably not thinking of Lochaber at all.

But suddenly the Laird, staring down at the board, perceived some little tiny thing drop on the farther edge from him; and he quickly looked up. The girl was crying. Instantly he put out his great hand and took hers, and said, in a low voice, full of gentleness and a tender sympathy—

"Dear me, lassie, what is the matter?"

But Mary Avon hastily pulled out her handkerchief, and passed it across

her eyes, and said hurriedly—

"Oh, I beg your pardon! it is nothing: I—I was thinking of something else. And is it your move or mine, sir?——"

The Laird looked at her; but her eyes were cast down. He did not pay so much attention to the game after that.

CHAPTER VI.

CERTAINTY.

Next morning there is a lively commotion on board. The squally, blustering-looking skies, the glimpses of the white horses out there on the driven green sea, and the fresh northerly breeze that comes in gusts and swirls about the rigging—all tell us that we shall have some hard work before we pierce the Dorus Mor.

"You won't want for wind to-day, Captain John," says the Youth, who is waiting to give the men a hand at the windlass.

"'Deed, no," says John of Skye, with a grim smile. "This is the kind of day that Dr. Sutherland would like, and the *White Dove* through the Dorus Mor too!"

However, the Laird seems to take no interest in what is going forward. All the morning he has been silent and preoccupied; occasionally approaching his hostess, but never getting an opportunity of speaking with her alone. At last, when he observes that every one is on deck, and eagerly watching the *White Dove* getting under weigh, he covertly and quietly touches our Admiral on the arm.

"I would speak to ye below for a moment, ma'am," he says, in a whisper.

And so, unnoticed amid all this bustle, she follows him down into the saloon, wondering not a little. And as soon as he has shut the door, he plunges *in medias res*.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; but I must speak to ye. It is about your friend, Miss Mary: have ye not observed that she is sorely troubled about something—though she puts a brave face on it and will not acknowledge it? Have ye not seen it—have ye not guessed that she is grievously troubled about some matter or other?"

"I have guessed it," said the other.

"Poor lass! poor lass!" said the Laird; and then he added, thoughtfully, "It is no small matter that can affect so light-hearted a creature: that is what I want

to ask ye. Do ye know? Have ye guessed? Surely it is something that some of us can help her wi'. Indeed, it just distresses me beyond measure to see that trouble in her face; and when I see her try to conceal it—and to make believe that everything is well with her—I feel as if there was nothing I would not do for the poor lass."

"But I don't think either you or I can help. Young people must manage their affairs for themselves," says his hostess, somewhat coldly.

"But what is it?—what is it? What is troubling her?"

Queen Titania regards him for a moment, apparently uncertain as to how far she should go. At last she says—

"Well; I am not revealing any confidence of Mary's; for she has told me nothing about it. But I may as well say at once that when we were in West Loch Tarbert, Dr. Sutherland asked her to be his wife; and she refused him. And now I suppose she is breaking her heart about it."

"Dear me! dear me!" says the Laird, with eyes opened wide.

"It is always the way with girls," says the other, with a cruel cynicism. "Whether they say 'Yes' or 'No' they are sure to cry over it. And naturally; for whether they say 'Yes' or 'No,' they are sure to have made an irretrievable blunder."

The Laird is slowly recovering from his first shock of surprise.

"But if she did refuse him, surely that is what any one would have expected? There is nothing singular in that."

"Pardon me; I think there is something very singular," she says, warmly. "I don't see how any one could have been with these two up in the north, and not perceived that there was an understanding between them. If any girl ever encouraged a man, she did. Why, sir, when you proposed that your nephew should come with us, and make love to Mary, I said 'Yes' because I thought it would be merely a joke! I thought he would please you by consenting, and not harm anybody else. But now it has turned out quite different; and Angus Sutherland has gone away."

And at this there was a return of the proud and hurt look into her eyes: Angus was her friend; she had not expected this idle boy would have supplanted him.

The Laird was greatly disturbed. The beautiful picture that he had been painting for himself during this summer idleness of ours—filling in the details with a lingering and loving care—seemed to fade away into impalpable mist; and he was confronted by blank chaos. And this, too, just at the moment when the departure of the Doctor appeared to render all his plans doubly secure.—He rose.

"I will think over it, ma'am," he said, slowly. "I am obliged to ye for your information: perhaps I was not as observant as I should have been."

Then she sought to stay him for a moment.

"Don't you think, sir," said she, timidly, "it would be better for neither you nor me to interfere?"

The Laird turned.

"I made a promise to the lass," said he, quite simply, "one night we were in Loch Leven, and she and I were walking on the deck, that when she was in trouble I would try to help her; and I will not break my promise through any fear of being called an intermeddler. I will go to the girl myself—when I have the opportunity; and if she prefers to keep her own counsel—if she thinks I am only an old Scotch fool who should be minding my own business—I will not grumble."

And again he was going away, when again she detained him.

"I hope you do not think I spoke harshly of Mary," said she, penitentially. "I own that I was a little disappointed. And it seemed so certain. But I am sure she has sufficient reason for whatever she has done—and that she believes she is acting rightly——"

"Of that there is no doubt," said he, promptly. "The girl has just a wonderful clear notion of doing what she ought to do; and nothing would make her flinch." Then he added, after a second, "But I will think over it; and then go to herself. Perhaps she feels lonely, and does not know that there is a home awaiting her at Denny-mains."

So both of them went on deck again; and found that the *White Dove* was already sailing away from the Trossachs-like shore of Loch Crinan, and getting farther out into this squally green sea. There were bursts of sunlight flying across the rocks and the white-tipped waves; but ordinarily the sky was overcast, masses of grey and silvery cloud coming swinging along from the north.

Then the Laird showed himself discreet "before folk." He would not appear to have any designs on Mary Avon's confidences. He talked in a loud and confident fashion to John of Skye, about the weather, and the Dorus Mor, and Corrievrechan. Finally, he suggested, in a facetious way, that as the younger men had occasionally had their turn at the helm, he might have his now, for the first time.

"If ye please, sir," said Captain John, relinquishing the tiller to him with a smile of thanks, and going forward to have a quiet pipe.

But the Laird seemed a little bit confused by the rope which John had confided to him. In a light breeze, and with his hand on the tiller, he might have done very well; but this looped rope, to which he had to cling so as to steady himself, seemed puzzling. And almost at the same time the *White Dove* began to creep up to the wind; and presently the sails showed an ominous quiver.

"Keep her full, sir!" called John of Skye, turning round.

But instead of that the sails flapped more and more; there was a rattling of

blocks; two men came tumbling up from the forecastle, thinking the yacht was being put about.

"Shove your hand from ye, sir!" called out the skipper to the distressed steersman; and this somewhat infantine direction soon put the vessel on her course again.

In a few minutes thereafter John of Skye put his pipe in his waistcoat pocket.

"We'll let her about now, sir," he called to the Laird.

The two men who happened to be on deck went to the jib-sheets; John himself leisurely proceeding to stand by the weather fore-sheet. Then, as the Laird seemed still to await further orders, he called out—

"Helm hard down, sir, if ye please!"

But this rope bothered the Laird. He angrily untwisted it, let it drop on the deck, and then with both hands endeavoured to jam the tiller towards the weather bulwarks, which were certainly nearer to him than the lee bulwarks.

"The other way, sir!" Mary Avon cried to him, anxiously.

"Bless me! bless me! Of course!" he cried, in return; and then he let the tiller go, and just managed to get out of its way as it swung to leeward. And then as the bow sheered round, and the *White Dove* made away for the mouth of Loch Craignish on the port tack, he soon discovered the use of the weather tiller rope, for the wind was now blowing hard, and the yacht pitching a good deal.

"We are getting on, Miss Mary!" he cried to her, crushing his wideawake down over his forehead. "Have ye not got a bit song for us? What about the two sailors that pitied all the poor folk in London?"

She only cast down her eyes, and a faint colour suffused her cheeks: our singing-bird had left us.

"Howard, lad!" the Laird called out again, in his facetious manner, "ye are not looking well, man. Is the pitching too much for you?"

The Youth was certainly not looking very brilliant; but he managed to conjure up a ghastly smile.

"If I get ill," said he, "I will blame it on the steering."

"'Deed, ye will not," said the Laird, who seemed to have been satisfied with his performances. "I am not going to steer this boat through the Dorus Mor. Here, John, come back to your post!"

John of Skye came promptly aft; in no case would he have allowed an amateur to pilot the *White Dove* through this narrow strait with its swirling currents. However, when the proper time came we got through the Dorus Mor very easily, there being a strong flood tide to help us; and the brief respite under the lee of the land allowed the Youth to summon back his colour and his cheerfulness.

The Laird had ensconced himself beside Mary Avon; he had a little circle of

admiring listeners; he was telling us, amid great shouts of laughter, how Homesh had replied to one tourist, who had asked for something to eat, that that was impossible, "bekass ahl the plates was cleaned;" and how Homesh had answered another tourist, who represented that the towel in the lavatory was not as it should be, that "more than fifty or sixty people was using that towel this very day, and not a complaint from any one of them;" and how Homesh, when his assistant stumbled and threw a leg of mutton on to the deck, called out to him in his rage, "Ye young teffle, I will knock the stairs down your head!" We were more and more delighted with Homesh and his apocryphal adventures.

But now other things than Homesh were claiming our attention. Once through the Dorus, we found the wind blowing harder than ever, and a heavy sea running. The day had cleared, and the sun was gleaming on the white crests of the waves; but the air was thick with whirled spray, and the decks were running wet. The *White Dove* listed over before the heavy wind, so that her scuppers were a foot deep in water; while opening the gangway only relieved the pressure for a second or two; the next moment a wave would surge in on the deck. The jib and fore-staysail were soaked half-mast high. When we were on the port tack the keel of the gig ploughed the crests of those massive and rolling waves. This would, indeed, have been a day for Angus Sutherland.

On one tack we ran right over to Corrievrechan; but we could see no waterspouts or other symptoms of the whirling currents; we could only hear the low roar all along the Scarba coast, and watch the darting of the white foam up the face of the rocks. And then away again on the port tack; with the women clinging desperately to the weather bulwarks, lest perchance they should swiftly glide down the gleaming decks into the hissing water that rolled along the lee scuppers. Despite the fact of their being clad from top to toe in waterproofs, their faces were streaming with the salt water; but they were warm enough, for the sun was blazing hot, and the showers of spray were like showers of gleaming diamonds.

Luncheon was of an extremely pantomimic character; until, in the midst of it, we were alarmed by hearing quick tramping overhead, and noise and shouting. The Youth was hastily bidden to leave his pickle jars, and go on deck to see what was happening. In a second or two he returned—somewhat grueful—his hair wild—his face wet.

"They are only taking in the mizen," says he; "but my cap has been knocked overboard, and I have got about a quart of water down my neck."

"It will do ye good, lad," observed the Laird, in the most heartless manner; "and I will now trouble ye to pass me the marmalade."

Patiently, all day long, we beat up against that inexorable north wind, until, in the afternoon, it veered a point or two to the east, which made an appreciable

difference in our rate of progress. Then, the farther the wind veered, the more it became a land wind; and the sea abated considerably: so that long before we could make out Castle Osprey on the face of the hill, we were in fairly calm waters, with a light breeze on our starboard beam. The hot sun had dried the decks; there was a possibility of walking; some went below to prepare for going ashore.

We were returning to the world of telegrams, and letters, and newspapers; we should soon know what the Commissioners of Strathgovan were doing, and whether Johnny Guthrie had been fomenting sedition. But it was not these things that troubled the Laird. He had been somewhat meditative during the afternoon. At last, finding an occasion on which nearly everybody was below but his hostess, he said to her, in a low voice—

"The more I reflect on that matter we spoke of this morning, the more I am driven to a conclusion that I would fain avoid. It would be a sad blow to me. I have built much on the scheme I was telling ye of: perhaps it was but a toy; but old people have a fondness for their toys as well as young people."

"I don't quite understand you, sir," said the other.

"We will soon learn whether I am right," said the old Laird, with a sigh; and then he turned to her and regarded her.

"I doubt whether ye see this girl's character as clearly as I do," said he. "Gentle, and soft, and delicate as she seems to be, she is of the stuff the martyrs in former days were made of: if she believes a thing to be right, she will do it, at any cost or sacrifice. Do ye mind the first evening I met her at your house—how she sate and talked, and laughed, with her sprained ankle swollen and black all the time, just that she might not interfere with the pleasure of others?"

The Laird paused for a moment or two.

"I have been putting things together," he continued—but he did not seem proud or boastful of his perspicacity: perhaps he would rather have fought against the conclusion forced on him. "When she was up in the north, it seemed to you as if she would have married the young man Sutherland?"

"Most undoubtedly."

"The lass had her bit fortune then," said the Laird, thoughtfully. "Not much, as ye say; but it would have been an independence. It would have helped him in the world; it would have left him free. And she is proud of what he has done, and as ambeetious as himself that he should become a great man. Ay?"

The Laird seemed very anxious about the varnishing of the gig; he kept smoothing it with his forefinger.

"And when he came to her the other day—it is but a guess of mine, ma'am—she may have said to herself beforehand that she would not be a drag on him, that she would leave him free to become great and famous, that the sentiment

of the moment was a trifling thing compared to what the world expected from Dr. Sutherland. Ye will not forget what she said on that point only the other day. And she may have sent him away—with her own heart just like to break. I have just been putting one or two possibeelities together, ma'am——"

The colour had forsaken the cheeks of the woman who stood by his side.

"And—and—if she was so cruel—and, and heartless—and, and monstrous—she ought to be horsewhipped!" she exclaimed quite breathlessly, and apparently not knowing what she was saying.

But the Laird shook his head.

"Poor lass! poor lass!" he said, gently; "she has had her troubles. No doubt the loss of her bit fortune seemed a desperate thing to her; and you know her first anxiety is conteenually for other people—particularly them that have been kind to her—and that she thinks no more of herself than if she had no feelings at all. Well, ma'am, if what I am guessing at is true—it is only a speculation o' mine, and I am far from sure; but if that is all that has to be put right, I'm thinking it might be put right. We should thank God that we are now and again able to put some small matter straight in the world."

The Laird was more busy than ever with the varnish, and he went nearer the boat. His fingers were nervous, and there was a strange, sad look in the sunken grey eyes.

"Poor lass! if that is all her trouble, it might not be difficult to help her," said he; and then he added slowly—and the woman beside him knew, rather than saw, that the sad grey eyes were somehow wet—"But I had thought to see her living at Denny-mains: it was—it was a sort of toy of my old age."

CHAPTER VII.

A PARABLE.

Now we had not been five minutes within the walls of Castle Osprey when great shouts of laughter were heard in the direction of the library; and presently the Laird came quickly into the room where the two women were standing at the open window. He was flourishing a newspaper in his hand; delight, sarcasm, and desperate humour shone in his face. He would not notice that Queen Titania looked very much inclined to cry, as she gazed out on the forlorn remains of what had once been a rose-garden; he would pay no heed to Mary Avon's wan cheek

and pensive eyes.

"Just listen to this, ma'am, just listen to this," he called out briskly; and all the atmosphere of the room seemed to wake up into cheerfulness and life. "Have I not told ye often about that extraordinary body, Johnny Guthrie? Now just listen!"

It appeared that the Laird, without even bestowing a glance on the pile of letters lying waiting for him, had at once dived into the mass of newspapers, and had succeeded in fishing out the report of the last meeting of the Strathgovan Police Commissioners. With a solemnity that scarcely veiled his suppressed mirth, he said—

"Just listen, ma'am: 'The fortnightly meeting of the Strathgovan Police Commissioners was held on Monday, Provost McKendrick in the chair. Mr. Robert Johnstone said he had much pleasure in congratulating the chairman and the other gentlemen assembled on the signal and able manner in which the fire brigade had done their duty on the previous Saturday at the great conflagration in Coulterside buildings; and he referred especially to the immense assistance given by the new fire engine recently purchased by the commissioners. (Hear! hear!) He could assure the meeting that but for the zealous and patriotic ardour of the brigade—aided, no doubt, by the efficient working of the steam-engine—a most valuable property would have been devoted *holus bolus* to the flames.'"

The Laird frowned at this phrase.

"Does the crayture think he is talking Latin?" he asked, apparently of himself.

However, he continued his reading of the report—

"'Provost McKendrick, replying to these observations, observed that it was certainly a matter for congratulation that the fire brigade should have proved their efficiency in so distinct a manner, considering the outlay that had been incurred; and that now the inhabitants of the Burgh would perceive the necessity of having more plugs. So far all the money had been well spent. Mr. J. Guthrie'"—but here the Laird could not contain his laughter any longer.

"That's the Johnny, ma'am," he cried, in explanation, "that's the Johnny Guthrie I was telling ye about—the poor, yaumering, pernickity, querulous crayture! 'Mr. J. Guthrie begged to say he could not join in these general felicitations. They were making a great deal of noise about nothing. The fire was no fire at all; a servant-girl could have put it out with a pail. He had come from Glasgow by the eleven o'clock 'bus, and there was then not a trace of a fire to be seen. The real damage done to the property was not done by the fire, but by the dirty water drawn by the fire brigade from the Coulter-burn, which dirty water had entirely destroyed Mrs. MacInnes's best bedroom furniture."

The Laird flourished the newspaper, and laughed aloud in his joy; the mere

reading of the extract had so thoroughly discomfited his enemy.

"Did ye ever hear the like o' that body?" he cried. "A snarlin', quarlin', gruntin', growlin', fashious crayture! He thinks there could not be any fire, just because he was not in time to see it. Oh, Johnny, Johnny, Johnny, I'm just fair ashamed o' ye."

But at this point the Laird seemed to become aware that he had given way too much to his love of pure and pithy English. He immediately said, in a more formal manner—

"I am glad to perceive, ma'am, that the meeting paid no heed to these strictures, but went on to consider whether the insurance companies should not share the expense of maintaining the fire brigade. That was most proper—most judeecious. I'm thinking that after dinner I could not do better than express my views upon that subject, in a letter addressed to the Provost. It would be in time to be read at the monthly sederunt."

"Come along, then, Mary, and let us get through our letters," said his hostess, turning away with a sigh from the dilapidated rose-garden.

As she passed the piano, she opened it.

"How strange it will sound!" she said.

She played a few bars of Mary Avon's favourite song; somehow the chords seemed singularly rich and full and beautiful after our long listening to the monotonous rush of the sea. Then she put her hand within the girl's arm and gently led her away, and said to her as they passed through the hall

"'Oh, little did my mither think
When first she cradled me'

that ever I should have come back to such a picture of desolation. But we must put a brave face on it. If the autumn kills the garden, it glorifies the hills. You will want all your colour-tubes when we show you Loch Hourn."

"That was the place the Doctor was anxious to veesit," said the Laird, who was immediately behind them. "Ay. Oh, yes, we will show Miss Mary Loch Hourn; she will get some material for sketches there, depend on't. Just the finest loch in the whole of the Highlands. When I can get Tom Galbraith first of all persuaded to see Bunessan——"

But we heard no more about Tom Galbraith. Queen Titania had uttered a slight exclamation as she glanced over the addresses of the letters directed to her.

"From Angus!" she said, as she hurriedly opened one of the envelopes, and ran her eye over the contents.

Then her face grew grave, and inadvertently she turned to the Laird.

"In three days," she said, "he was to start for Italy."

She looked at the date.

"He must have left London already!" said she, and then she examined the letter further. "And he does not say where he is going."

The Laird looked grave too—for a second. But he was an excellent actor. He began whistling the air that his hostess had been playing. He turned over his letters and papers carelessly. At length he said, with an air of fine indifference—

"The grand thing of being away at sea is to teach ye the comparateevely trifling importance of anything that can happen on land."

He tossed the unopened letters about, only regarding the addresses.

"What care I what the people may have been saying about me in my absence?—the real thing is that we got food to eat and were not swept into Corrievrechan. Come, Miss Mary, I will just ask ye to go for a stroll through the garden wi' me, until dinner-time; our good friends will not ask us to dress on an evening like this, just before we have got everything on shore. Twenty-five meenutes, ma'am? Very well. If anybody has been abusing me in my absence, we'll listen to the poor fellow after dinner, when we can get the laugh made general, and so make some good out of him; but just now we'll have the quiet of the sunset to ourselves. Dear, dear me! we used to have the sunset after dinner when we were away up about Canna and Uist."

Mary Avon seemed to hesitate.

"What! not a single letter for ye? That shows very bad taste on the pairt of the young men about England. But I never thought much o' them. From what I hear, they are mostly given over to riding horses, and shooting pheasants, and what not. But never mind. I want ye to come out for a stroll wi' me, my lass: ye'll see some fine colour about the Morven hills presently, or I'm mistaken."

"Very well, sir," said she, obediently; and together they went out into the garden.

Now it was not until some minutes after the dinner-gong had sounded that we again saw these two, and then there was nothing in the manner of either of them to suggest to any one that anything had happened. It was not until many days afterwards that we obtained, bit by bit, an account of what had occurred, and even then it was but a stammering, and disjointed, and shy account. However, such as it was, it had better appear here, if only to keep the narrative straight.

The Laird, walking up and down the gravel path with his companion, said that he did not so much regret the disappearance of the roses, for there were plenty of other flowers to take their place. Then he thought he and she might go and sit on a seat which was placed under a drooping ash in the centre of the lawn, for from this point they commanded a fine view of the western seas and hills. They had just sat down there when he said—

"My girl, I am going to take the privilege of an old man, and speak frankly

to ye. I have been watching ye, as it were—and your mind is not at ease."

Miss Avon hastily assured him that it was quite, and begged to draw his attention to the yacht in the bay, where the men were just lowering the ensign, at sunset.

The Laird returned to the subject; entreated her not to take it ill that he should interfere; and then reminded her of a certain night on Loch Leven, and of a promise he had then made her. Would he be fulfilling that solemn undertaking if he did not, at some risk of vexing her, and of being considered a prying, foolish person, endeavour to help her if she was in trouble?

Miss Avon said how grateful she was to him for all his kindness to her; and how his promise had already been amply fulfilled. She was not in trouble. She hoped no one thought that. Everything that had happened was for the best. And here—as was afterwards admitted—she burst into a fit of crying, and was very much mortified, and ashamed of herself.

But at this point the Laird would appear to have taken matters into his own hand. First of all he began to speak of his nephew—of his bright good nature, and so forth—of his professed esteem for her—of certain possibilities that he, the Laird, had been dreaming about with the fond fancy of an old man. And rather timidly he asked her—if it were true that she thought everything had happened for the best—whether, after all, his nephew Howard might not speak to her? It had been the dream of his old age to see these two together at Denny-mains, or on board that steam yacht he would buy for them on the Clyde. Was that not possible?

Here, at least, the girl was honest and earnest enough—even anxiously earnest. She assured him that that was quite impossible. It was hopeless. The Laird remained silent for some minutes, holding her hand.

"Then," said he, rather sadly, but with an affectation of grave humour, "I am going to tell you a story. It is about a young lass, who was very proud, and who kept her thoughts very much to herself, and would not give her friends a chance of helping her. And she was very fond of a—a young Prince we will call him—who wanted to go away to the wars, and make a great name for himself. No one was prouder of the Prince than the girl, mind ye, and she encouraged him in everything, and they were great friends, and she was to give him all her diamonds, and pearls, and necklaces—she would throw them into his treasury, like a Roman matron—just that he might go away and conquer, and come back and marry her. But lo, and behold! one night all her jewels and bracelets were stolen! Then what does she do? Would ye believe it? She goes and quarrels with that young Prince, and tells him to go away and fight his battles for himself, and never to come back and see her any more—just as if any one could fight a battle wi' a sore heart. Oh, she was a wicked, wicked lass, to be so proud as that, when

she had many friends that would willingly have helped her.... Sit down, my girl, sit down, my girl, never mind the dinner; they can wait for us.... Well, ye see, the story goes on that there was an old man—a foolish old man—they used to laugh at him, because of his fine fishing-tackle, and the very few fish he caught wi' the tackle—and this doited old body was always intermeddling in other people's business. And what do you think he does but go and say to the young lass: 'Ha, have I found ye out? Is it left for an old man like me—and me a bachelor too, who should know but little of the quips and cranks of a young lass's ways—is it left for an old man like me to find out that fine secret o' yours?' She could not say a word. She was dumbfounded. She had not the face to deny it: he *had* found out what that wicked girl, with all her pride, and her martyrdom, and her sprained ankles, had been about. And what do you think he did then? Why, as sure as sure can be, he had got all the young lass's property in his pocket; and before she could say Jack Robinson, he tells her that he is going to send straight off for the Prince—this very night—a telegram to London——"

The girl had been trembling, and struggling with the hand that held hers. At last she sprang to her feet, with a cry of entreaty.

"Oh, no, no, no, sir! You will not do that! You will not degrade me!"

And then—this is her own account, mind—the Laird rose too, and still held her by the hand, and spoke sternly to her.

"Degrade you?" said he. "Foolish lass! Come in to your dinner."

When these two did come in to dinner—nearly a quarter of an hour late—their hostess looked anxiously from one to the other. But what could she perceive? Mary Avon was somewhat pale, and she was silent: but that had been her way of late. As for the Laird, he came in whistling the tune of the Queen's Maries, which was a strange grace before meat, and he looked airily around him at the walls.

"I would just like to know," said he lightly, "whether there is a single house in all Scotland where ye will not find an engraving of one or other of Mr. Thomas Faed's pictures in some one of the rooms?"

And he preserved this careless and indifferent demeanour during dinner. After dinner he strolled into the library. He would venture upon a small cigar. His sole companion was the person whose humble duty in this household is to look after financial matters, so that other folks may enjoy themselves in idleness.

The Laird lay back in an easy chair, stretched out his legs, lit his cigar, and held it at arm's length, as if it were something that ought to be looked at at a distance.

"You had something to do with the purchase of Miss Mary's American stock, eh?" said he, pretending to be concerned about the end of the cigar.

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Funded Five per Cent."

"What would be about the value of it now?"

"Just now? Oh, perhaps 106, or 107."

"No, no, no. I mean, if the bonds that that ill-faured scoondrel carried away with him were to be sold the now, what money, what English money, would they fetch?"

But this required some calculation.

"Probably about 7,300*l*."

"I was asking," said the Laird, "because I was wondering whether there was any chance of tracing them."

"Not the least. They are like bank-notes—more useful indeed, to a swindler than even bank-notes."

"Ay, is that so?" said the Laird; and he seemed to be so charmed with his whistling of the air of Queen's Maries that he returned to that performance. Oddly enough, however, he never ventured beyond the first line: perhaps he was afraid of missing the tune.

"Seven thousand, three hundred," said he, meditatively. "Man, that's a strong cigar—little, and black, and strong. Seven thousand, three hundred. Girls are strange craytures. I remember what that young Doctor was saying once about weemen being better able to bear pain than men, and not so much afraid of it either——"

And here the Queen's Maries came in again.

"It would be a strange thing," said the Laird, with a sort of rueful laugh, "if I were to have a steam yacht all to myself, and cruise about in search of company, eh? No, no; that will not do. My neighbours in Strathgovan will never say that I deserted them, just when great improvements and serious work have to be looked forward to. I will not have it said that I ran away, just to pleasure myself. Howard, my lad," he added, imaginatively addressing his absent nephew, "I doubt but ye'll have to whistle for that steam yacht."

The Laird rose.

"I think I will smoke in the garden now: it is a fine evening."

He turned at the door, and seemed suddenly to perceive a pair of stag's horns over the chimney-piece.

"That's a grand set o' horns," said he; and then he added carelessly, "What bank did ye say they American bonds were in?"

"The London and Westminster."

"They're just a noble pair o' horns," said he emphatically. "I wonder ye do

not take them with ye to London." And then he left.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RELEASE.

We had a long spell ashore at this time, for we were meditating a protracted voyage, and everything had to be left ship-shape behind us. The Laird was busy from morning till night; but it would appear that all his attention was not wholly given to the affairs of Strathgovan. Occasionally he surprised his hostess by questions which had not the least reference to asphalte pavements or gymnasium chains. He kept his own counsel, nevertheless.

By and by his mysterious silence so piqued and provoked her that she seized a favourable opportunity for asking him, point-blank, whether he had not spoken to Mary Avon. They were in the garden at the time, he seated on an iron seat, with a bundle of papers beside him; she standing on the gravel-path with some freshly-cut flowers in her hand. There was a little colour in her face, for she feared that the question might be deemed impertinent; yet, after all, it was no idle curiosity that prompted her to ask it. Was she not as much interested in the girl's happiness as any one could be?

"I have," said he, looking up at her calmly.

Well, she knew that. Was this all the answer she was to get?

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said he, after a second, "if I seem to be making a mystery where there is no mystery. I hate all foolishness like that. I do not myself believe there is anything of the kind; but I will just ask ye to wait for a day or two before speaking to the lass herself. After that, I will leave it all in your hands. I trust ye will consider that I have done my part."

"Oh, I am sure of that, sir," said she: though how could she be sure?

"There is not much I would not do for that lass," said he, somewhat absently. "She has a wonderful way of getting a grip of one's heart, as it were. And if I could have wished that things had turned out otherwise——"

The Laird did not finish the sentence. He seemed to rouse himself.

"Toots! toots!" said he, frowning. "When we are become men, we have to put away childish things. What is the use of crying for the moon? There, ma'am, is something serious and practical to consider—something better worth considering than childish dreams and fancies."

And then, with much lucidity and with a most dispassionate parade of arguments on both sides, he put before her this knotty question: whether it was a fit and proper thing for a body like the Strathgovan Commissioners to own public-house property? That was the general question. The immediate question was whether the "William Wallace" public-house, situated in the Netherbiggins road, should be re-let or summarily closed? On the one hand it was contended that the closing of the "William Wallace" would only produce a greater run on the other licensed houses; on the other hand, it was urged that a body like the commissioners should set an example and refuse to encourage a mischievous traffic. Now the Laird's own view of the liquor question—which he always put forward modestly, as subject to the opinion of those who had had a wider legislative and administrative experience than himself—was, that the total suppression of the liquor traffic was a chimera; and that a practical man should turn to see what could be done in the way of stringent police regulations. He was proceeding to expound these points when he suddenly caught sight of the Youth, who had appeared at the gate, with two long fishing rods over his shoulder. He dropped his voice.

"That just reminds me, ma'am," said he. "I am greatly obliged to ye—my nephew equally so—for your great kindness to him. I think it will not be necessary for him to trespass on your forbearance any longer."

"I don't quite understand you."

"I think I will let him go back to his own pursuits now," said the Laird.

"Oh, no," she said. "By all means let him come with us to Stornoway. He has been very good in not grumbling over any inconvenience. You would not send him away—just as we are going to start on our longest cruise?"

She could not say anything further at the moment, for the Youth came up the gravel-path and threw the two huge rods on to the lawn.

"Look there, uncle!" he cried. "I don't care what size of lithe you get on the line, I'll bet those rods won't break, any way. Sutherland used to be lamenting over the big fish you lost up in the north: try them with those things!"

Here their hostess passed on and into the house with her flowers. Uncle and nephew were left by themselves.

"Howard, lad," said the elder of the two men, "bring that chair over, and sit opposite me, I do not want my papers to be disturbed. There are one or two matters of business I would like to put before ye."

The Youth did as he was bid. The Laird paused for a second or two; then he began—

"When I asked ye to come to the Highlands," said he, slowly, "I put an alternative before ye, with certain consequences. There were two things, one of which I wanted ye to do. Ye have done neither."

Howard Smith looked somewhat alarmed: his hostess was not there to put a jocular air over that bargain.

"Well, sir," he stammered, "I—I could not do what was impossible. I—I have done my best."

"Nevertheless," said the Laird, in a matter-of-fact way, "neither has been done. I will not say it has been altogether your fault. So far as I have seen, ye have been on very good terms with the young leddy; and—and—yes, paid her what attention was expected of ye; and——"

"Well, you see, uncle," he interposed, eagerly, "what was the use of my proposing to the girl only to be snubbed? Don't I know she cares no more about me than about the man in the moon? Why, anybody could see that. Of course, you know, if you insist on it—if you drive me to it—if you want me to go in and get snubbed—I'll do it. I'll take my chance. But I don't think it's fair. I mean," he added hastily, "I don't think it is necessary."

"I do not wish to drive ye to anything," said the Laird—on any other occasion he might have laughed at the Youth's ingenuousness, but now he had serious business on hand. "I am content to take things as they are. Neither of the objects I had in view has been accomplished; perhaps both were impossible; who can tell what lies in store for any of us, when we begin to plan and scheme? However, I am not disposed to regard it as your fault. I will impose no fine or punishment, as if we were playing at theatre-acting. I have neither kith nor kin of my own; and it is my wish that, at my death, Denny-mains should go to you——"

The Youth's face turned red; yet he did not know how to express his gratitude. It did not quite seem a time for sentiment; the Laird was talking in such a matter-of-fact way.

"—Subject to certain conditions," he continued. "First of all, I spoke some time ago of spending a sum of 3,000*l.* on a steam yacht. Dismiss that from your mind. I cannot afford it; neither will you be able."

The young man stared at this. For although he cared very little about the steam yacht—having a less liking for the sea than some of us—he was surprised to hear that a sum like 3,000*l.* was even a matter for consideration to a reputedly rich man like his uncle.

"Oh, certainly, sir," said he. "I don't at all want a steam yacht."

"Very well, we will now proceed."

The Laird took up one of the documents beside him, and began to draw certain lines on the back of it.

"Ye will remember," said he, pointing with his pencil, "that where the estate proper of Denny-mains runs out to the Coulter-burn Road, there is a piece of land belonging to me, on which are two tenements, yielding together, I should say, about 300*l.* a year. By and by, if a road should be cut so—across to the

Netherbiggins road—that land will be more valuable; many a one will be wanting to feu that piece then, mark my words. However, let that stand by. In the meantime I have occasion for a sum of ten thousand three hundred pounds—"

The Youth looked still more alarmed: had his uncle been speculating?

"—and I have considered it my duty to ask you, as the future proprietor of Denny-mains in all human probability, whether ye would rather have these two tenements sold, with as much of the adjoining land as would make up that sum, or whether ye would have the sum made a charge on the estate generally, and take your chance of that land rising in value? What say ye?"

The Laird had been prepared for all this; but the Youth was not. He looked rather frightened.

"I should be sorry to hear, sir," he stammered, "that—that—you were pressed for money——"

"Pressed for money!" said the Laird severely; "I am not pressed for money. There is not a square yard of Denny-mains with a farthing of mortgage on it. Come, let's hear what ye have to say."

"Then," said the young man, collecting his wits, "my opinion is, that a man should do what he likes with his own."

"That's well said," returned the Laird, much mollified. "And I'm no sure but that if we were to roup[#] that land, that quarrelsome body Johnny Guthrie might not be trying to buy it; and I would not have him for a neighbour on any consideration. Well, I will write to Todd and Buchanan about it at once."

[#] To roup, to sell by public auction.

The Laird rose and began to bundle his papers together. The Youth laid hold of the fishing-rods, and was about to carry them off somewhere, when he was suddenly called back.

"Dear me!" said the Laird, "my memory's going. There was another thing I was about to put before ye, lad. Our good friends here have been very kind in asking ye to remain so long. I'm thinking ye might offer to give up your state-room before they start on this long trip. Is there any business or occupation ye would like to be after in the south?"

The flash of light that leapt to the young man's face!

"Why, uncle!" he exclaimed eagerly, diving his hand into his pocket, "I have twice been asked by old Barnes to go to his place—the best partridge shooting in Bedfordshire——"

But the Youth recollected himself.

"I mean," said he seriously, "Barnes, the swell solicitor, don't you know—Hughes, Barnes, and Barnes. It would be an uncommonly good thing for me to stand well with them. They are just the making of a young fellow at the bar when they take him up. Old Barnes's son was at Cambridge with me; but he doesn't do anything—an idle fellow—cares for nothing but shooting and billiards. I really ought to cultivate old Barnes."

The Laird eyed him askance.

"Off ye go to your pairtridge-shooting, and make no more pretence," said he; and then he added, "And look here, my lad, when ye leave this house I hope ye will express in a proper form your thanks for the kindness ye have received. No, no; I do not like the way of you English in that respect. Ye take no notice of anything. Ye receive a man's hospitality for a week, a fortnight, a month; and then ye shake hands with him at the door; and walk out—as if nothing had happened! These may be good manners in England; they are not here."

"I can't make a speech, uncle," said the Youth slyly. "They don't teach us those things at the English public schools."

"Ye gowk," said the Laird severely, "do ye think I want ye to make a speech like Norval on the Grampian Hills? I want ye to express in proper language your thankfulness for the attention and kindness that have been bestowed on ye. What are ye afraid of? Have ye not got a mouth? From all that I can hear the English have a wonderful fluency of speech, when there is no occasion for it at all: bletherin' away like twenty steam-engines, and not a grain of wheat to be found when a' the stour is laid."

CHAPTER IX.

"WHILE THE RIPPLES FOLD UPON SANDS OF GOLD."

The days passed, and still the Laird professed to be profoundly busy; and our departure for the north was further and further postponed. The Youth had at first expressed his intention of waiting to see us off; which was very kind on his part, considering how anxious he was to cultivate the acquaintance of that important solicitor. His patience, however, at last gave out; and he begged to be allowed to start on a certain morning. The evening before we walked down to the shore with him, and got pulled out to the yacht, and sate on deck while he went below to pack such things as had been left in his state-room.

"It will be a strange thing," said our gentle Admiral-in-chief, "for us to have a cabin empty. That has never happened to us in the Highlands, all the time we have been here. It will be a sort of ghost's room; we shall not dare to look into it for fear of seeing something to awaken old memories."

She put her hand in her pocket, and drew out some small object.

"Look," said she, quite sentimentally.

It was only a bit of pencil: if it had been the skull of Socrates she could not have regarded it with a greater interest.

"It is the pencil Angus used to mark our games with. I found it in the saloon the day before yesterday;" and then she added, almost to herself, "I wonder where he is now."

The answer to this question startled us.

"In Paris," said the Laird.

But no sooner had he uttered the words than he seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"That is, I believe so," he said hastily. "I am not in correspondence with him. I do not know for certain. I have heard—it has been stated to me—that he might perhaps remain until the end of this week in Paris before going on to Naples."

He appeared rather anxious to avoid being further questioned. He began to discourse upon certain poems of Burns, whom he had once or twice somewhat slightingly treated. He was now bent on making ample amends. In especial, he asked whether his hostess did not remember the beautiful verse in "Mary Morison," which describes the lover looking on at the dancing of a number of young people, and conscious only that his own sweetheart is not there?

"Do ye remember it, ma'am?" said he; and he proceeded to repeat it for her—

'Yestreen, when to the trembling string
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw.

'Though this was fair, and that was braw,
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sighed and said amang them a',
"Ye are na Mary Morison."'

—Beautiful, beautiful, is it not? And that is an extraordinary business—and as old as the hills too—of one young person waling[#] out another as the object of all the hopes of his or her life; and nothing will do but that one. Ye may show

them people who are better to look at, richer, cleverer; ye may reason and argue; ye may make plans, and what not: it is all of no use. And people who have grown up, and who forgot what they themselves were at twenty or twenty-five, may say what they like about the foolishness of a piece of sentiment; and they may prove to the young folks that this madness will not last, and that they should marry for more substantial reasons; but ye are jist talking to the wind! Madness or not madness, it is human nature; and ye might jist as well try to fight against the tides. I will say this, too," continued the Laird, and as he warmed to his subject, he rose, and began to pace up and down the deck, "if a young man were to come and tell me that he was ready to throw up a love-match for the sake of prudence and worldly advantage, I would say to him: 'Man, ye are a poor crayture. Ye have not got the backbone of a mouse in ye.' I have no respect for a young man who has prudence beyond his years; not one bit. If it is human nature for a man of fifty years to laugh at sentiment and romance, it is human nature for a man at twenty-five to believe in it; and he who does not believe in it then, I say is a poor crayture. He will never come to anything. He may make money; but he will be a poor stupid ass all his days, just without those experiences that make life a beautiful thing to look back on."

[#] *Waling*—choosing.

He came and sate down by Mary Avon.

"Perhaps a sad thing, too," said he, as he took her hand in his; "but even that is better than a dull causeway, with an animal trudging along and sorely burdened with the world's wealth. And now, my lass, have ye got everything tight and trim for the grand voyage?"

"She has been at it again, sir," says his hostess, interposing. "She wants to set out for the south to-morrow morning."

"It would be a convenient chance for me," said the girl simply. "Mr. Smith might be good enough to see me as far as Greenock—though, indeed, I don't at all mind travelling by myself. I must stop at Kendal—is that where the junction is?—for I promised the poor old woman who died in Edinburgh that I would call and see some relations of hers who live near Windermere."

"They can wait, surely?" said the Laird, with frowning eyebrows, as if the poor people at Windermere had attempted to do him some deadly injury.

"Oh, there is no hurry for them," said she. "They do not even know I am coming. But this chance of Mr. Smith going by the steamer to-morrow would be convenient."

"Put that fancy out of your head," said he with decision. "Ye are going to no Greenock, and to no Kendal, at the present time. Ye are going away with us to the north, to see such things as ye never saw before in your life. And if ye are anxious to get on with your work, I'll tell ye what I'll do. There's our Provost M'Kendrick has been many a time telling me of the fine salmon-fishing he got at the west side of Lewis—I think he said at a place called Gometra——"

"Grimersta," is here suggested.

"The very place. Ye shall paint a picture of Grimersta, my lass, on commission for the Provost. I authorise ye: if he will not take it, I will take it myself. Never mind what the place is like—the Provost has no more imagination than a boiled lobster; but he knows when he has good friends, and good fishing, and a good glass of whisky; and, depend on it, he'll be proud to have a picture of the place, on your own terms. I tell ye I authorise ye."

Here the Youth came on deck, saying he was now ready to go ashore.

"Do you know, sir," said his hostess, rising, "what Mary has been trying to get me to believe?—that she is afraid of the equinoctials!"

The Laird laughed aloud.

"That *is* a good one—that *is* a good one!" he cried. "I never heard a better story about Homesh."

"I know the gales are very wild here when they begin," said Miss Avon seriously. "Every one says so."

But the Laird only laughs the more, and is still chuckling to himself as he gets down into the gig: the notion of Mary Avon being afraid of anything—of fifteen dozen of equinoctial gales, for example—was to him simply ludicrous.

But a marked and unusual change came over the Laird's manner when we got back to Castle Osprey. During all the time he had been with us, although he had had occasionally to administer rebukes, with more or less of solemnity, he had never once lost his temper. We should have imagined it impossible for anything to have disturbed his serene dignity of demeanour. But now—when he discovered that there was no letter awaiting any one of us—his impatience seemed dangerously akin to vexation and anger. He would have the servants summoned and cross-examined. Then he would not believe them; but must needs search the various rooms for himself. The afternoon post had really brought nothing but a newspaper—addressed to the Laird—and that he testily threw into the waste-paper basket, without opening it. We had never seen him give way like this before.

At dinner, too, his temper was no better. He began to deride the business habits of the English people—which was barely civil. He said that the English feared the Scotch and the Germans just as the Americans feared the Chinese—because the latter were the more indefatigable workers. He declared that if the

London men had less Amontillado sherry and cigarettes in their private office-rooms, their business would be conducted with much greater accuracy and dispatch. Then another thought struck him: were the servants prepared to swear that no registered letter had been presented in the afternoon, and taken away again because there was no one in the house to sign the receipt? Inquiry being made, it was found that no such letter had been presented. But finally, when the turmoil about this wretched thing was at its height, the Laird was pressed to say from which part of the country the missive was expected. From London, he said. It was then pointed out to him that the London letters were usually sent along in the evening—sometimes as late as eight or nine o'clock. He went on with his dinner, grumbling.

Sure enough, before he had finished dinner, a footstep was heard on the gravel outside. The Laird, without any apology, jumped up and went to the window.

"There's the postman," said he, as he resumed his seat. "Ye might give him a shilling, ma'am: it is a long climb up the hill."

It was the postman, no doubt; and he had brought a letter, but it was not for the Laird. We were all apprehensive of a violent storm when the servant passed on and handed this letter to Mary Avon. But the Laird said nothing. Miss Avon, like a properly-conducted school-girl, put the letter in her pocket.

There was no storm. On the contrary, the Laird got quite cheerful. When his hostess hoped that no serious inconvenience would result from the non-arrival of the letter, he said, "Not the least!" He began and told us the story of the old lady who endeavoured to engage the practical Homesh—while he was collecting tickets—in a disquisition on the beauties of Highland scenery, and who was abruptly bidden to "mind her own pussness"; we had heard the story not more than thirty-eight times, perhaps, from various natives of Scotland.

But the letter about which the Laird had been anxious had—as some of us suspected—actually arrived, and was then in Mary Avon's pocket. After dinner the two women went into the drawing-room. Miss Avon sate down to the piano, and began to play, idly enough, the air called *Heimweh.* Of what home was she thinking then—this waif and stray among the winds of the world?

Tea was brought in. At last the curiosity of the elder woman could no longer be restrained.

"Mary," said she, "are you not going to read that letter?"

"Dear me!" said the girl, plunging into her pocket. "I had forgotten I had a letter to read."

She took it out and opened it, and began to read. Her face looked puzzled at first, then alarmed. She turned to her friend.

"What is it? What can it mean?" she said, in blank dismay; and the trem-

bling fingers handed her the letter.

Her friend had less difficulty in understanding; although, to be sure, before she had finished this perfectly plain and matter-of-fact communication, there were tears in her eyes. It was merely a letter from the manager of a bank in London, begging to inform Miss Avon that he had just received, through Messrs. Todd and Buchanan, of Glasgow, a sum of 10,300*l.* to be placed to her credit. He was also desired to say, that this sum was entirely at her own free disposal; but the donor would prefer—if she had no objection—that it should be invested in some home security, either in a good mortgage, or in the Metropolitan Board of Works Stock. It was a plain and simple letter.

"Oh, Mary, don't you understand—don't you understand?" said she. "He meant to have given you a steam yacht, if—if you married Howard Smith. He has given you all the money you lost; and the steam yacht too. And there is not a word of regret about all his plans and schemes being destroyed. And this is the man we have all been making fun of."

In her conscious self-abasement she did not perceive how bewildered—how absolutely frightened—this girl was. Mary Avon took back the letter mechanically; she stood silent for a second or two; then she said, almost in a whisper—

"Giving me all that money! Oh, I cannot take it—I cannot take it! I should not have stayed here—I should not have told him anything—I—I—wish to go away——"

But the common sense of the elder woman came to her rescue. She took the girl's hand firmly, and said—

"You shall not go away. And when it is your good fortune to meet with such a friend as that, you shall not wound him and insult him by refusing what he has given to you. No; but you will go at once and thank him."

"I cannot—I cannot," she said, with both her hands trembling. "What shall I say? How can I thank him? If he were my own father or brother, how could I thank him?——"

Her friend left the room for a second, and returned.

"He is in the library alone," said she. "Go to him. And do not be so ungrateful as to even speak of refusing."

The girl had no time to compose any speech. She walked to the library door, timidly tapped at it, and entered. The Laird was seated in an easy-chair, reading.

When he saw her come in—he had been expecting a servant with coffee, probably—he instantly put aside his book.

"Well, Miss Mary?" said he cheerfully.

She hesitated. She could not speak; her throat was choking. And then, scarcely knowing what she did, she sank down before him, and put her head and

her hands on his knees, and burst out crying and sobbing. And all that he could hear of any speech-making, or of any gratitude, or thanks, was only two words—

"*My father!*"

He put his hand gently on the soft black hair.

"Child," said he, "it is nothing. I have kept my word."

CHAPTER X.

BACKWARD THOUGHTS.

That was a beautiful morning on which we got up at an unearthly hour to see the Youth depart—all of us, that is to say, except Mary Avon. And yet she was not usually late. The Laird could not understand it. He kept walking from one room to another, or hovering about the hall; and when the breakfast-gong sounded, he refused to come in and take his place without his accustomed companion. But just at this moment whom should he behold entering by the open door but Mary Avon herself—laden with her artistic impedimenta? He pounced on her at once, and seized the canvas.

"Bless me, lassie, what have ye been about? Have ye done all this this morning? Ye must have got up in the middle of the night!"

It was but a rough sketch, after all—or the beginnings of a sketch, rather—of the wide, beautiful sea and mountain view from the garden of Castle Osprey.

"I thought, sir," said she, in a somewhat hesitating way, "that you might perhaps be so kind as to accept from me those sketches I have made on board the *White Dove*—and—and if they were at Denny-mains, I should like to have the series complete—and—and it would naturally begin with a sketch from the garden here——"

He looked at her for a moment, with a grave, perhaps wistful, kindness in his face.

"My lass, I would rather have seen you at Denny-mains."

That was the very last word he ever uttered concerning the dream that had just been destroyed. And it was only about this time, I think, that we began to recognise the simple, large, noble nature of this man. We had been too much inclined to regard the mere husks and externals of his character—to laugh at his assumption of parochial importance, his solemn discussions of the Semple case, his idiotic stories about Homesh. And it was not a mere freak of generosity that

revealed to us something of the finer nature of this old Scotchman. People as rich as he have often paid bigger sums than 10,300*l.** for the furtherance of a hobby. But it was to put away his hobby—it was to destroy for ever the "dream of his old age"—that he had been thus munificent towards this girl. And there was no complaint or regret. He had told us it was time for him to put away childish things. And this was the last word said—"My lass, I would rather have seen you at Denny-mains."

The Laird was exceedingly facetious at this breakfast-party, and his nephew had a bad time of it. There were mysterious questions about Messrs. Hughes, Barnes, and Barnes; as to whether consultations were best held in stubble or in turnips; or whether No. 5 shot was the best for bringing down briefs; and so forth.

"Never mind, uncle," said the Youth good-naturedly. "I will send you some partridges for the larder of the yacht."

"You need not do anything of the kind," said the Laird; "before you are in Bedfordshire the *White Dove* will be many a mile away from the course of luggage steamers."

"Oh, are you ready to start, then, sir?" said his hostess.

"This very meenute, if it pleases you," said he.

She looked rather alarmed, but said nothing. In the meantime the waggonette had come to the door.

By and by there was a small party assembled on the steps to see the Youth drive off. And now the time had come for him to make that speech of thanks which his uncle had pointed out was distinctly due from him. The Laird, indeed, regarded his departure with a critical air; and no doubt waited to see how his nephew would acquit himself.

Perhaps the Youth had forgotten. At all events, having bidden good-bye to the others, he shook hands last of all with his hostess, and said lightly—

"Thank you very much. I have enjoyed the whole thing tremendously."

Then he jumped into the waggonette, and took off his cap as a parting salute; and away he went. The Laird frowned. When he was a young man that was not the way in which hospitality was acknowledged.

Then Mary Avon turned from regarding the departing waggonette.

"Are we to get ready to start?" said she.

"What do you say, sir?" asks the hostess of the Laird.

"I am at your service," he replies.

And so it appeared to be arranged. But still Queen Titania looked irresolute and uneasy. She did not at once set the whole house in an uproar; or send down for the men; or begin herself to harry the garden. She kept loitering about the door; pretending to look at the signs of the weather. At last Mary said—

”Well, in any case, you will be more than an hour in having the things carried down; so I will do a little bit more to that sketch in the meantime.”

The moment she was gone, her hostess says in a hurried whisper to the Laird—

”Will you come into the library, sir, for a moment?”

He obediently followed her; and she shut the door.

”Are we to start without Angus Sutherland?” she asked, without circumlocution.

”I beg your pardon, ma’am,” said the wily Laird.

Then she was forced to explain, which she did in a somewhat nervous manner.

”Mary has told me, sir, of your very, very great generosity to her. I hope you will let me thank you too.”

”There is not another word to be said about it,” he said simply. ”I found a small matter wrong in the world that I thought I could put right; and I did it; and now we start fresh and straight again. That is all.”

”But about Angus Sutherland,” said she still more timidly. ”You were quite right in your conjectures—at least, I imagine so—indeed, I am sure of it. And now, don’t you think we should send for him?”

”The other day, ma’am,” said he slowly, ”I informed ye that when I considered my part done I would leave the matter in your hands entirely. I had to ask some questions of the lass, no doubt, to make sure of my ground; though I felt it was not a business fit for an old bachelor like me to intermeddle wi’. I am now of opinion that it would be better, as I say, to leave the matter in your hands entirely.”

The woman looked rather bewildered.

”But what am I to do?” said she. ”Mary will never allow me to send for him—and I have not his address in any case——”

The Laird took a telegram from his breast-pocket.

”There it is,” said he, ”until the end of this week, at all events.”

She looked at it hesitatingly; it was from the office of the magazine that Angus Sutherland edited; and was in reply to a question of the Laird’s. Then she lifted her eyes.

”Do you think I might ask Mary herself?”

”That is for a woman to decide,” said he; and again she was thrown back on her own resources.

Well, this midge of a woman has some courage too. She began to reflect on what the Laird had adventured, and done, for the sake of this girl; and was she not prepared to risk something also? After all, if these two had been fostering a vain delusion, it would be better to have it destroyed at once.

And so she went out into the garden, where she found Miss Avon again seated at her easel. She went gently over to her; she had the telegram in her hand. For a second or two she stood irresolute; then she boldly walked across the lawn, and put her hand on the girl's shoulder. With the other hand she held the telegram before Mary Avon's eyes.

"Mary," said she, in a very low and gentle voice, "will you write to him now and ask him to come back?"

The girl dropped the brush she had been holding on to the grass, and her face got very pale.

"Oh, how could I do that?" said she, in an equally low—and frightened—voice.

"You sent him away."

There was no answer. The elder woman waited; she only saw that Mary Avon's fingers were working nervously with the edge of the palette.

"Mary," said she at length, "am I right in imagining the cause of your sending him away? May I write and explain, if you will not?"

"Oh, how can you explain?" the girl said, almost piteously. "It is better as it is. Did you not hear what the kindest friend I ever found in the world had to say of me yesterday, about young people who were too prudent, and were mercenary; and how he had no respect for young people who thought too much about money——"

"Mary, Mary!" the other said, "he was not speaking about you. You mercenary! He was speaking about a young man who would throw over his sweetheart for the sake of money. You mercenary! Well, let me appeal to Angus! When I explain to him, and ask him what he thinks of you, I will abide by his answer."

"Well, I did not think of myself; it was for his sake I did it," said the girl, in a somewhat broken voice; and tears began to steal down her cheeks, and she held her head away.

"Well then, I won't bother you anymore, Mary," said the other, in her kindliest way. "I won't ask you to do anything, except to get ready to get down to the yacht."

"At once?" said the girl, instantly getting up, and drying her eyes. She seemed greatly relieved by this intimation of an immediate start.

"As soon as the men have the luggage taken down."

"Oh, that will be very pleasant," said she, immediately beginning to put away her colours. "What a fine breeze! I am sure I shall be ready in fifteen minutes."

Then the usual bustle began; messages flying up and down, and the gig and dingay racing each other to the shore and back again. By twelve o'clock everything had been got on board. Then the *White Dove* gently glided away

from her moorings; we had started on our last and longest voyage.

It seemed innumerable ages since we had been in our sea-home. And that first glance round the saloon—as our absent friend the Doctor had remarked—called up a multitude of recollections, mostly converging to a general sense of snugness, and remoteness, and good fellowship. The Laird sank down into a corner of one of the couches, and said—

"Well, I think I could spend the rest of my days in this yacht. It seems as if I had lived in it for many, many years."

But Miss Avon would not let him remain below; it was a fine sailing day; and very soon we were all on deck. A familiar scene?—this expanse of blue sea, curling with white here and there; with a dark blue sky overhead, and all around the grand panorama of mountains in their rich September hues? The sea is never familiar. In its constant and moving change, its secret and slumbering power, its connection with the great unknown beyond the visible horizon, you never become familiar with the sea. We may recognise the well-known landmarks as we steal away to the north—the long promontory and white lighthouse of Lismore, the ruins of Duart, the woods of Scallasdale, the glimpse into Loch Aline—and we may use these things only to calculate our progress; but always around us is the strange life, and motion, and infinitude of the sea, which never becomes familiar.

We had started with a light favourable wind, of the sort that we had come to call a Mary-Avon-steering breeze; but after luncheon this died away, and we lay icily for a long time opposite the dark green woods of Fuinary. However, there was a wan and spectral look about the sunshine of this afternoon, and there were some long, ragged shreds of cloud in the southern heavens—just over the huge round shoulders of the Mull mountains—that told us we were not likely to be harassed by any protracted calms. And, in fact, occasional puffs and squalls came over from the south which, if they did not send us on much farther, at least kept everybody on the alert.

And at length we got it. The gloom over the mountains had deepened, and the streaks of sunlit sky that were visible here and there had a curious coppery tinge about them. Then we heard a hissing in towards the shore, and the darkening band on the sea spread rapidly out to us; then there was a violent shaking of blocks and spars, and, as the *White Dove* bent to the squall, a most frightful clatter was heard below, showing that some careless people had been about. Then away went the yacht like an arrow! We cared little for the gusts of rain that came whipping across from time to time. We would not even go down to see what damage had been done in the cabins. John of Skye, with his savage hatred of the long calms we had endured, refused to lower his gaff topsail. At last he was "letting her have it."

We spun along, with the water hissing away from our wake; but the squall

had not had time to raise anything of a sea, so there was but little need for the women to duck their heads to the spray. Promontory after promontory, bay after bay was passed, until far ahead of us, through the driving mists of rain, we could make out the white shaft of Ru-na-Gaul lighthouse. But here another condition of affairs confronted us. When we turned her nose to the south, to beat in to Tobermory harbour, the squall was coming tearing out of that cup among the hills with an exceeding violence. When the spray sprang high at the bows, the flying shreds of it that reached us bore an uncommon resemblance to the thong of a whip. The topsail was got down, the mizen taken in, and then we proceeded to fight our way into the harbour in a series of tacks that seemed to last only a quarter of a second. What with the howling of the wind, that blew back his orders in his face; and what with the wet decks, that caused the men to stumble now and again; and what with the number of vessels in the bay, that cut short his tacks at every turn, Captain John of Skye had an exciting time of it. But we knew him of old. He "put on" an extra tack, when there was no need for it, and slipped though between a fishing-smack and a large schooner, merely for the sake of "showing off." And then the *White Dove* was allowed to go up to the wind, and slowly slackened her pace, and the anchor went out with a roar. We were probably within a yard of the precise spot where we had last anchored in the Tobermory bay.

It blew and rained hard all that evening, and we did not even think of going on deck after dinner. We were quite content as we were. Somehow a new and secret spirit of cheerfulness had got possession of certain members of this party, without any ostensible cause. There was no longer the depression that had prevailed about West Loch Tarbert. When Mary Avon played bezique with the Laird, it was to a scarcely audible accompaniment of "The Queen's Maries."

Nor did the evening pass without an incident worthy of some brief mention. There is, in the *White Dove*, a state-room which really acts as a passage, during the day, between the saloon and the forecastle; and when this state-room is not in use, Master Fred is in the habit of converting it into a sort of pantry, seeing that it adjoins his galley. Now, on this evening, when our shifty Friedrich d'or came in with soda-water and such like things, he took occasion to say to the Rear-Admiral of the Fleet on board—

"I beg your pardon, mem, but there is no one now in this state-room, and will I use it for a pantry?"

"You will do nothing of the kind, Fred," said she quite sharply.

CHAPTER XI.
A TOAST.

"I am almost afraid of what I have done; but it is past recall now:" this is the mysterious sentence one hears on climbing up the companion next morning. It is Queen Titania and the Laird who are talking; but as soon as a third person appears they become consciously and guiltily silent. What does it matter? We have other work on hand than prying into twopenny-halfpenny secrets.

For we have resolved on starting away for the north in spite of this fractious weather. A more unpromising-looking morning indeed for setting out could not well be imagined—windy, and wet, and squally; the driven green sea outside springing white where it meets the line of the coast; Loch Sunart and its mountains hidden away altogether behind the mists of rain; wan flashes of sunlight here and there only serving to show how swiftly the clouds are flying. But the *White Dove* has been drying her wings all the summer; she can afford to face a shower now. And while the men are hoisting the sail and getting the anchor hove short, our two women-folk array themselves in tightly-shaped ulsters, with hoods drawn over their heads; and the Laird appears in a waterproof reaching to his heels; and even the skylights have their tarpaulins thrown over. Dirty weather or no, we mean to start.

There are two or three yachts in the bay, the last of the summer-fleet all hastening away to the south. There is no movement on the decks of any one of them. Here and there, however, in sheltered places—under a bit of awning, or standing by the doors of deck-saloons—we can make out huddled groups of people, who are regarding, with a pardonable curiosity, the operations of John of Skye and his merry men.

"They take us for maniacs," says Queen Titania from out of her hood, "to be setting out for the north in such weather."

And we were nearly affording those amiable spectators a pretty sight. The wind coming in variable gusts, the sails failed to fill at the proper moment, and the *White Dove* drifted right on to the bows of a great schooner, whose bowsprit loomed portentous overhead. There was a wild stampede for boat-hooks and oars; and then with arms, and feet, and poles—aided by the swarming crew of the

schooner—we managed to clear her with nothing more serious than an ominous grating along the gig. And then the wind catching her, she gradually came under the control of Captain John; and away we went for the north, beating right in the teeth of the gusts that came tearing over from the mouth of Loch Sunart.

"It's a bad wind, mem, for getting up to Isle Ornsay," says John of Skye to the Admiral. "Ay, and the sea pretty coorse, too, when we get outside Ardnamurchan."

"Now, listen to me, John," she says severely, and with an air of authority—as much authority, that is to say, as can be assumed by a midge enclosed in an ulster. "I am not going to have any of that. I know you of old. As soon as you get out of Tobermory, you immediately discover that the wind is against our going north; and we turn round and run away down to Iona and the Bull-hole. I will not go to the Bull-hole. If I have to sail this yacht myself, night and day, I will go to Isle Ornsay."

"If ye please, mem," says John of Skye, grinning with great delight over her facetiousness. "Oh, I will tek the yat to Isle Ornsay very well, if the leddies not afraid of a little coorse sea. And you will not need to sail the yat at all, mem. But I not afraid to let you sail the yat. You will know about the sailing now shist as much as Mr. Sutherland."

At the mention of this name, Queen Titania glanced at Mary Avon, perceived she was not listening, and went nearer to John of Skye, and said something to him in a lower voice. There was a quick look of surprise and pleasure on the handsome, brown-bearded face.

"Oh, I ferry glad of that, mem," said he.

"Hush, John! Not a word to anybody," said she.

By this time we had beat out of the harbour, and were now getting longer tacks; so that, when the sheets were properly coiled, it was possible for the Laird and Miss Avon to attempt a series of short promenades on the wet decks. It was an uncertain and unstable performance, to be sure; for the sea was tumultuous; but it served.

"Mutual help—that's the thing," said the Laird to his companion, as together they staggered along, or stood steady to confront a particularly fierce gust of wind. "We are independent of the world—this solitary vessel out in the waste of waters—but we are not independent of each other. It just reminds me of the small burghs outside Glasgow; we wish to be independent of the great ceety lying near us; we prefer to have a separate existence; but we can help each other for all that in a most unmistakeable way——"

Here the Laird was interrupted by the calling out of Captain John—"*Ready about!*" and he and his companion had to get out of the way of the boom. Then they resumed their promenade, and he his discourse.

"Do ye think, for example," said this profound philosopher, "that any one burgh would have been competent to decide on a large question like the clauses of the Police Act that refer to cleansing and lighting?"

"I am not sure," Miss Avon admitted.

"No, no," said he confidently, "large questions should be considered in common council—with every opportunity of free discussion. I do not much like to speak about local matters, or of my own share in them, but I must take credit for this, that it was myself recommended to the Commissioners to summon a public meeting. It was so, and the meeting was quite unanimous. It was Provost McKendrick, ye must understand, who formally made the proposal that the consideration of those clauses should be remitted to the clerks of the various burghs, who were to report; but the suggestion was really mine—I make no scruple in claiming it. And then, see the result! When the six clerks were agreed, and sent in their report, look at the authority of such a document! Who but an ass would make freevolous objections?"

The Laird laughed aloud.

"It was that crayture, Johnny Guthrie," said he, "as usual! I am not sure that I have mentioned his name to ye before?"

"Oh, yes, I think so, sir," remarked Miss Avon.

"It was that crayture, Johnny Guthrie—in the face of the unanimous report of the whole six clerks! Why, what could be more reasonable than that the lighting of closes and common stairs should fall on the landlords, but with power to recover from the tenants; while the cleansing of back-courts—being a larger and more general measure—should be the work of the commissioners and chargeable in the police rates? It is a great sanitary work that benefits every one; why should not all have a hand in paying for it?"

Miss Avon was understood to assent; but the fact was that the small portion of her face left uncovered by her hood had just then received an unexpected bath of salt water; and she had to halt for a moment to get out a handkerchief from some sub-ulsterian recess.

"Well," continued the Laird, as they resumed their walk, "what does this body Guthrie do but rise and propose that the landlords—mind ye, the landlords alone—should be rated for the expense of cleaning the back-courts! I declare there are some folk seem to think that a landlord is made of nothing but money, and that it is everybody's business to harry him, and worry him, and screw every farthing out of him. If Johnny Guthrie had half a dozen lands of houses himself, what would he say about the back-courts then?"

This triumphant question settled the matter; and we haled the Laird below for luncheon. Our last glance round showed us the Atlantic of a silvery grey, and looking particularly squally; with here and there a gleam of pale sunshine falling

on the long headland of Ardnamurchan.

There was evidently some profound secret about.

"Well, ma'am, and where will we get to the night, do ye think?" said the Laird, cheerfully, as he proceeded to carve a cold fowl.

"It is of no consequence," said the other, with equal carelessness. "You know we must idle away a few days somewhere."

Idle away a few days?—and this *White Dove* bent on a voyage to the far north when the very last of the yachts were fleeing south!

"I mean," said she hastily, in order to retrieve her blunder, "that Captain John is not likely to go far away from the chance of a harbour until he sees whether this is the beginning of the equinoctials or not."

"The equinoctials?" said the Laird, anxiously.

"They sometimes begin as early as this; but not often. However, there will always be some place where we can run in to."

The equinoctials, indeed! When we went on deck again we found not only that those angry squalls had ceased, but that the wind had veered very considerably in our favour, and we were now running and plunging past Ardnamurchan Point. The rain had ceased too; the clouds had gathered themselves up in heavy folds; and their reflected blackness lay over the dark and heaving Atlantic plain. Well was it for these two women that luncheon had been taken in time. What one of them had dubbed the Ardnamurchan Wobble—which she declared to be as good a name for a waltz as the Liverpool Lurch—had begun in good earnest; and the *White Dove* was dipping, and rolling, and springing in the most lively fashion. There was not much chance for the Laird and Mary Avon to resume their promenade; when one of the men came aft to relieve John of Skye at the wheel, he had to watch his chance, and come clambering along by holding on to the shrouds, the rail of the gig, and so forth. But Dr. Sutherland's prescription had its effect. Despite the Ardnamurchan Wobble and all its deeds, there was no ghostly and silent disappearance.

And so we ploughed on our way during the afternoon, the Atlantic appearing to grow darker and darker, as the clouds overhead seemed to get banked up more thickly. The only cheerful bit of light in this gloomy picture was a streak or two of sand at the foot of the sheer and rocky cliffs north of Ardnamurchan Light; and those we were rapidly leaving behind as the brisk breeze—with a kindness to which we were wholly strangers—kept steadily creeping round to the south.

The dark evening wore on, and we were getting well up towards Eigg, when a strange thing became visible along the western horizon.

First the heavy purple clouds showed a tinge of crimson, and then a sort of yellow smoke appeared close down at the sea. This golden vapour widened, cleared, until there was a broad belt of lemon-coloured sky all along the edge of

the world; and in this wonder of shining light appeared the island of Rum—to all appearance as transparent as a bit of the thinnest gelatine, and in colour a light purple rose. It was really a most extraordinary sight. The vast bulk of this mountainous island, including the sombre giants Haleval and Haskeval, seemed to have less than the consistency of a cathedral window; it resembled more a pale, rose-coloured cloud; and the splendour of it, and the glow of the golden sky beyond, were all the more bewildering by reason of the gloom of the overhanging clouds that lay across like a black bar.

"Well!" said the Laird—and here he paused, for the amazement in his face could not at once find fitting words. "That beats a'!"

And it was a cheerful and friendly light too, that now came streaming over to us from beyond the horizon-line. It touched the sails and the varnished spars with a pleasant colour. It seemed to warm and dry the air, and tempted the women to put aside their ulsters. Then began a series of wild endeavours to achieve a walk on deck, interrupted every second or two by some one or other being thrown against the boom, or having to grasp at the shrouds in passing. But it resulted in exercise, at all events; and meanwhile we were still making our way northward, with the yellow star of Isle Ornsay lighthouse beginning to be visible in the gathering dusk.

That evening at dinner the secret came out. There cannot be the slightest doubt that the disclosure of it had been carefully planned by these two conspirators; and that they considered themselves amazingly profound in giving to it a careless and improvised air.

"I never sit down to dinner now, ma'am," observed the Laird, in a light and graceful manner, "without a feeling that there is something wanting in the saloon. The table is not symmetrical. That should occur to Miss Mary's eye at once. One at the head, one my side, two yours; no, that is not as symmetrical as it used to be."

"Do you think I do not feel that too?" says his hostess. "And that is not the only time at which I wish that Angus were back with us."

No one had a word to say for poor Howard Smith, who used to sit at the foot of the table, in a meek and helpful capacity. No one thought of summoning him back to make the arrangement symmetrical. Perhaps he was being consoled by Messrs. Hughes, Barnes, and Barnes.

"And the longer the nights are growing, I get to miss him more and more," she says, with a beautiful pathos in her look. "He was always so full of activity and cheerfulness—the way he enjoyed life on board the yacht was quite infectious; and then his constant plans and suggestions. And how he looked forward to this long trip! though, to be sure, he struggled hard against the temptation. I know the least thing would have turned the scale, Italy or no Italy."

"Why, ma'am," says the Laird, laughing prodigiously, "I should not wonder, if you sent him a message at this minute, to find him coming along post-haste and joining us, after all. What is Eetaly? I have been in Eetaly myself. Ye might live there a hundred years, and never see anything so fine in colour as that sunset we saw this very evening. And if it is business he is after, bless me! cannot a young man be a young man sometimes, and have the courage to do something imprudent? Come now, write to him at once! I will take the responsibility myself."

"To tell you the truth, sir," said the other timidly—but she pretends she is very anxious about the safety of a certain distant wine-glass—"I took a sudden notion into my head yesterday morning, and sent him a message."

"Dear me!" he cries. The hypocrite!

And Mary Avon all the while sits mute, dismayed, not daring to turn her face to the light. And the small white hand that holds the knife: why does it tremble so?

"The fact is," says Queen Titania carelessly, just as if she were reading a bit out of a newspaper, "I sent him a telegram, to save time. And I thought it would be more impressive if I made it a sort of round-robin, don't you know—as far as that can be done on a telegraph-form—and I said that each and all of us demanded his instant return, and that we should wait about Isle Ornsay or Loch Hourn until he joined us. So you see, sir, we may have to try your patience for a day or two."

"Ye may try it, but ye will not find it wanting," said the Laird, with serious courtesy. "I do not care how long I wait for the young man, so long as I am in such pleasant society. Ye forget, ma'am, what life one is obliged to live at Dennymains, with public affairs worrying one from the morning till the night. Patience? I have plenty of patience. But all the same I would like to see the young man here. I have a great respect for him, though I consider that some of his views may not be quite sound—that will mend—that will mend; and now, my good friends, I will take leave to propose a toast to ye."

We knew the Laird's old-fashioned ways, and had grown to humour them. There was a pretence of solemnly filling glasses.

"I am going," said the Laird, in a formal manner, "to propose to ye the quick and safe return of a friend. May all good fortune attend him on his way, and may happiness await him at the end of his journey!"

There was no dissentient; but there was one small white hand somewhat unsteady, as the girl, abashed and trembling and silent, touched the glass with

her lips.

CHAPTER XII.
EXPECTATIONS.

It was a fine piece of acting. These two continued to talk about the coming of our young Doctor as if it were the most simple and ordinary affair possible. All its bearings were discussed openly, to give you to understand that Mary Avon had nothing in the world to do with it. It was entirely a practical arrangement for the saving of time. By running across to Paris he would jump over the interval between our leaving West Loch Tarbert and this present setting-out for the north. Mary Avon was asked about this point and that point: there was no reason why she should not talk about Angus Sutherland just like any other.

And, indeed, there was little call for any pale apprehension on the face of the girl, or for any quick look round when a sudden sound was heard. It was not possible for Angus to be anywhere in our neighbourhood as yet. When we went on deck next morning, we found that we had been idly drifting about all night, and that we were now far away from any land. The morning sun was shining on the dark green woods of Armadale, and on the little white sharp point of Isle Ornsay lighthouse, and on the vast heather-purpled hills in the north; while over there the mountains above Loch Hourn were steeped in a soft mysterious shadow. And then, by and by, after breakfast, some light puffs of westerly wind began to ruffle the glassy surface of the sea; and the *White Dove* almost insensibly drew nearer and nearer to the entrance of that winding loch that disappeared away within the dusky shadows of those overhanging hills. Late on as it was in the autumn, the sun was hot on the sails and the deck; and these cool breezes were welcome in a double sense.

We saw nothing of the accustomed gloom of Loch Hourn. The sheer sides of the great mountains were mostly in shadow, it is true; but then the ridges and plateaus were burning in the sunlight; and the waters of the loch around us were blue, and lapping, and cheerful. We knew only that the place was vast, and still, and silent; we could make out scarcely any sign of habitation.

Then, as the *White Dove* still glided on her way, we opened out a little indentation of the land behind an island; and there, nestled at the foot of the hill, we descried a small fishing-village. The cottages, the nets drying on the poles,

the tiny patches of cultivated ground behind, all seemed quite toy-like against the giant and overhanging bulk of the hills. But again we drew away from Camus Ban—that is, the White Bay—and got further and further into the solitudes of the mountains, and away from any traces of human life. When about mid-day we came to anchor, we found ourselves in a sort of cup within the hills, apparently shut off from all the outer world, and in a stillness so intense that the distant whistle of a curlew was quite startling. A breath of wind that blew over from the shore brought us a scent of honeysuckle.

At luncheon we found to our amazement that a fifth seat had been placed at table, and that plates, glasses, and what not had been laid for a guest. A guest in these wilds?—there was not much chance of such a thing, unless the King of the Seals or the Queen of the Mermaids were to come on board.

But when we had taken our seats, and were still regarding the vacant chair with some curiosity, the Laird's hostess was pleased to explain. She said to him, with a shy smile,

"I have not forgotten what you said; and I quite agree with you that it balances the table better."

"But not an empty chair," said the Laird, severely; perhaps thinking it was an evil omen.

"You know the German song," said she, "and how the last remaining of the comrades filled the glasses with wine, and how the ghosts rattled the glasses. Would you kindly fill that glass, sir?"

She passed the decanter.

"I will not, begging your pardon," said the Laird, sternly, for he did not approve of these superstitions. And forthwith he took the deck chair and doubled it up, and threw it on the couch. "We want the young man Sutherland here, and not any ghost. I doubt not but that he has reached London by now."

After that a dead silence. Were there any calculations about time; or were we wondering whether, amid the roar and whirl and moving life of the great city, he was thinking of the small floating-home far away, amid the solitude of the seas and the hills? The deck-chair was put aside, it is true, for the Laird shrank from superstition; but the empty glass, and the plates and knives, and so forth, remained; and they seemed to say that our expected guest was drawing nearer and nearer.

"Well, John," said Queen Titania, getting on deck again, and looking round, "I think we have got into Fairyland at last."

John of Skye did not seem quite to understand, for his answer was—

"Oh, yes, mem, it is a fearful place for squahls."

"For squalls!" said she.

No wonder she was surprised. The sea around us was so smooth that the

only motion visible on it was caused by an exhausted wasp that had fallen on the glassy surface and was making a series of small ripples in trying to get free again. And then, could anything be more soft and beautiful than the scene around us—the great mountains clad to the summit with the light foliage of the birch; silver waterfalls that made a vague murmur in the air; an island right ahead with picturesquely wooded rocks; an absolutely cloudless sky above—altogether a wonder of sunlight and fair colours? Squalls? The strange thing was, not that we had ventured into a region of unruly winds, but that we had got enough wind to bring us in at all. There was now not even enough to bring us the scent of the honeysuckle from the shore.

In the afternoon we set out on an expedition, nominally after wild-duck, but in reality in exploration of the upper reaches of the loch. We found a narrow channel between the island and the mainland, and penetrated into the calm and silent waters of Loch Hourn Beg. And still less did this offshoot of the larger loch accord with that gloomy name—the Lake of Hell. Even where the mountains were bare and forbidding, the warm evening light touched the granite with a soft rose-grey; and reflections of this beautiful colour were here and there visible amid the clear blue of the water. We followed the windings of the narrow and tortuous loch; but found no wild-duck at all. Here and there a seal stared at us as we passed. Then we found a crofter's cottage, and landed, to the consternation of one or two handsome wild-eyed children. A purchase of eggs ensued, after much voluble Gaelic. We returned to the yacht.

That evening, as we sate on deck, watching the first stars beginning to tremble in the blue, some one called attention to a singular light that was beginning to appear along the summits of the mountains just over us—a silvery-grey light that showed us the soft foliage of the birches, while below the steep slopes grew more sombre as the night fell. And then we guessed that the moon was somewhere on the other side of the loch, as yet hidden from us by those black crags that pierced into the calm blue vault of the sky. This the Lake of Hell, indeed! By and by we saw the silver rim appear above the black line of the hills; and a pale glory was presently shining around us, particularly noticeable along the varnished spars. As the white moon sailed up, this solitary cup in the mountains was filled with the clear radiance, and the silence seemed to increase. We could hear more distinctly than ever the various waterfalls. The two women were walking up and down the deck; and each time that Mary Avon turned her profile to the light the dark eyebrows and dark eyelashes seemed darker than ever against the pale, sensitive, sweet face.

But after a while she gently disengaged herself from her friend, and came and sate down by the Laird: quite mutely, and waiting for him to speak. It is not to be supposed that she had been in any way more demonstrative towards

him since his great act of kindness; or that there was any need for him to have purchased her affection. That was of older date. Perhaps, if the truth were told, she was rather less demonstrative now; for we had all discovered that the Laird had a nervous horror of anything that seemed to imply a recognition of what he had done. It was merely, he had told us, a certain wrong thing he had put right: there was no more to be said about it.

However, her coming and sitting down by him was no unusual circumstance; and she meekly left him his own choice, to speak to her or not as he pleased. And he did speak—after a time.

"I was thinking," said he, "what a strange feeling ye get in living on board a yacht in these wilds: it is just as if ye were the only craytures in the world. Would ye not think, now, that the moon there belonged to this circle of hills, and could not be seen by any one outside it? It looks as if it were coming close to the topmast; how can ye believe that it is shining over Trafalgar Square in London?"

"It seems very close to us on so clear a night," says Mary Avon.

"And in a short time now," continued the Laird, "this little world of ours—I mean the little company on board the yacht—must be dashed into fragments, as it were; and ye will be away in London; and I will be at Denny-mains: and who knows whether we may ever see each other again? We must not grumble. It is the fate of the best friends. But there is one grand consolation—think what a consolation it must have been to many of the poor people who were driven away from these Highlands—to Canada, and Australia, and elsewhere—that after all the partings and sorrows of this world there is the great meeting-place at last. I would just ask this favour frae ye, my lass, that when ye go back to London, ye would get a book of our old Scotch psalm-tunes, and learn the tune that is called *Comfort*. It begins 'Take comfort, Christians, when your friends.' It is a grand tune that: I would like ye to learn it."

"Oh, certainly I will," said the girl.

"And I have been thinking," continued the Laird, "that I would get Tom Galbraith to make ye a bit sketch of Denny-mains, that ye might hang up in London, if ye were so minded. It would show ye what the place was like; and after some years ye might begin to believe that ye really had been there, and that ye were familiar with it, as the home of an old friend o' yours."

"But I hope to see Denny-mains for myself, sir," said she, with some surprise.

A quick, strange look appeared for a moment on the old Laird's face. But presently he said—

"No, no, lass, ye will have other interest and other duties. That is but proper and natural. How would the world get on at all if we were not to be dragged here and there by diverse occupations?"

Then the girl spoke, proudly and bravely—

"And if I have any duties in the world, I think I know to whom I owe them. And it is not a duty at all, but a great pleasure; and you promised me, sir, that I was to see Denny-mains; and I wish to pay you a long, long, long visit."

"A long, long, long visit?" said the Laird cheerfully. "No, no, lass. I just couldna be bothered with ye. Ye would be in my way. What interest could ye take in our parish meetings, and the church *soirées*, and the like? No, no. But if ye like to pay me a short, short, short visit—at your own convenience—at your own convenience, mind—I will get Tom Galbraith through from Edinburgh, and I will get out some of the younger Glasgowmen; and if we do not, you and me, show them something in the way of landscape-sketching, that will just frighten them out of their very wits, why then I will give ye leave to say that my name is not Mary Avon."

He rose then and took her hand, and began to walk with her up and down the moonlit deck. We heard something about the Haughs o' Cromdale. The Laird was obviously not ill-pleased that she had boldly claimed that promised visit to Denny-mains.

CHAPTER XIII.

"YE ARE WELCOME, GLENOGIE!"

When, after nearly three months of glowing summer weather, the heavens begin to look as if they meditated revenge; when, in a dead calm, a darkening gloom appears behind the further hills, and slight puffs of wind, come down vertically, spreading themselves out on the glassy water; when the air is sultry, and an occasional low rumble is heard, and the sun looks white; then the reader of these pages may thank his stars that he is not in Loch Hourn. And yet it was not altogether our fault that we were nearly caught in this dangerous cup among the hills. We had lain in these silent and beautiful waters for two or three days, partly because of the exceeding loveliness of the place, partly because we had to allow Angus time to get up to Isle Ornsay, but chiefly because we had not the option of leaving. To get through the narrow and shallow channel by which we had entered we wanted both wind and tide in our favour; and there was scarcely a breath of air during the long, peaceful, shining days. At length, when our sovereign mistress made sure that the young Doctor must be waiting for us at

Isle Ornsay, she informed Captain John that he must get us out of this place somehow.

"'Deed, I not sorry at all," said John of Skye, who had never ceased to represent to us, that, in the event of bad weather coming on, we should find ourselves in the lion's jaws.

Well, on the afternoon of the third day, it became very obvious that something serious was about to happen. Clouds began to bank up behind the mountains that overhung the upper reaches of the loch, and an intense purple gloom gradually spread along those sombre hills—all the more intense that the little island in front of us, crossing the loch, burned in the sunlight a vivid strip of green. Then little puffs of wind fell here and there on the blue water, and broadened out in a silvery grey. We noticed that all the men were on deck.

As the strange darkness of the loch increased, as these vast mountains overhanging the inner cup of the loch grew more and more awful in the gloom, we began to understand why the Celtic imagination had called this place the Lake of Hell. Captain John kept walking up and down somewhat anxiously, and occasionally looking at his watch. The question was whether we should get enough wind to take us through the narrows before the tide turned. In the meantime mainsail and jib were set, and the anchor hove short.

At last the welcome flapping and creaking and rattling of blocks! What although this brisk breeze came dead in our teeth? John of Skye, as he called all hands to the windlass, crave us to understand that he would rather beat through the neck of a bottle than lie in Loch Hourn that night.

And it was an exciting piece of business when we got further down the loch, and approached this narrow passage. On the one side sharp and sheer rocks; on the other shallow banks that shone through the water; behind us the awful gloom of gathering thunder; ahead of us a breeze that came tearing down from the hills in the most puzzling and varying squalls. With a steady wind it would have been bad enough to beat through those narrows; but this wind kept shifting about anyhow. Sharp was the word indeed. It was a question of seconds as we sheered away from the rocks on the one side, or from the shoals on the other. And then, amidst it all, a sudden cry from the women—

"John! John!"

John of Skye knows his business too well to attend to the squealing of women.

"Ready about!" he roars; and all hands are at the sheets, and even Master Fred is leaning over the bows, to watch the shallowness of the water.

"John, John!" the women cry.

"Haul up the main tack, Hector! Ay, that'll do. Ready about, boys!"

But this starboard tack is a little bit longer, and John manages to cast an

impatient glance behind him. The sailor's eye in an instant detects that distant object. What is it? Why, surely some one in the stern of a rowing-boat, standing up and violently waving a white handkerchief, and two men pulling like mad creatures.

"John, John! Don't you see it is Angus Sutherland!" cries the older woman pitifully.

By this time we are going bang on to a sandbank; and the men, standing by the sheets, are amazed that the skipper does not put his helm down. Instead of that—and all this happens in an instant—he eases the helm up, the bows of the yacht fall away from the wind, and just clear the bank. Hector of Moidart jumps to the mainsheet and slacks it out, and then, behold! the *White Dove* is running free, and there is a sudden silence on board.

"Why, he must have come over from the Caledonian Canal!" says Queen Titania, in great excitement. "Oh, how glad I am!"

But John of Skye takes advantage of this breathing space to have another glance at his watch.

"We'll maybe beat the tide yet," he says confidently.

And who is this who comes joyously clambering up, and hauls his portmanteau after him, and throws a couple of half-crowns into the bottom of the black boat?

"Oh, Angus!" his hostess cries to him, "you will shake hands with us all afterwards. We are in a dreadful strait. Never mind us—help John if you can."

Meanwhile Captain John has again put the nose of the *White Dove* at these perilous narrows; and the young Doctor—perhaps glad enough to escape embarrassment among all this clamour—has thrown his coat off to help; and the men have got plenty of anchor-chain on deck, to let go the anchor if necessary; and then again begins that manoeuvring between the shallows and the rocks. What is this new sense of completeness—of added life—of briskness and gladness? Why do the men seem more alert? and why this cheeriness in Captain John's shouted commands? The women are no longer afraid of either banks or shoals; they rather enjoy the danger; when John seems determined to run the yacht through a mass of conglomerate, they know that with the precision of clock-work she will be off on the other tack; and they are laughing at these narrow escapes. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that only one of them laughs. Mary Avon is somewhat silent, and she holds her friend's hand tight.

Tide or no tide, we get through the narrow channel at last; and every one breathes more freely when we are in the open. But we are still far from being out of Loch Hourn; and now the mountains in the south, too—one of them apparently an extinct volcano—have grown black as night; and the wind that comes down from them in jerks and squalls threatens to plunge our bulwarks under water.

How the *White Dove* flees away from this gathering gloom! Once or twice we hear behind us a roar, and turning we can see a specially heavy squall tearing across the loch; but here with us the wind continues to keep a little more steady, and we go bowling along at a whirling pace. Angus Sutherland comes aft, puts on his coat, and makes his formal entry into our society.

"You have just got out in time," says he, laughing somewhat nervously, to his hostess. "There will be a wild night in Loch Hourn to-night."

"And the beautiful calm we have had in there!" she says. "We were beginning to think that Loch Hourn was Fairyland."

"Look!" he said.

And indeed the spectacle behind us was of a nature to make us thankful that we had slipped out of the lion's jaws. The waters of the loch were being torn into spindrift by the squalls; and the black clouds overhead were being dragged into shreds as if by invisible hands; and in the hollows below appeared a darkness as if night had come on prematurely. And still the *White Dove* flew and flew, as if she knew of the danger behind her; and by and by we were plunging and racing across the Sound of Sleat. We had seen the last of Loch Hourn.

The clear golden ray of Isle Ornsay lighthouse was shining through the dusk as we made in for the sheltered harbour. We had ran the dozen miles or so in a little over the hour; and now dinner-time had arrived; and we were not sorry to be in comparatively smooth water. The men were sent ashore with some telegram—the sending off of which was the main object of our running in here; and then Master Fred's bell summoned us below from the wild and windy night.

How rich and warm and cheerful was this friendly glow of the candles, and how compact the table seemed now, with the vacant space filled at last! And every one appeared to be talking hard, in order to show that Angus Sutherland's return was a quite ordinary and familiar thing; and the Laird was making his jokes; and the young Doctor telling his hostess how he had been sending telegrams here and there until he had learned of the *White Dove* having been seen going in to Loch Hourn. Even Miss Avon, though she said but little, shared in this general excitement and pleasure. We could hear her soft laughter from time to time. But her eyes were kept away from the corner where Angus Sutherland sate.

"Well, you *are* lucky people," said he. "If you had missed getting out of that hole by half an hour, you might have been shut up in it a fortnight. I believe a regular gale from the south has begun."

"It is you who have brought it then," said his hostess. "You are the stormy petrel. And you did your best to make us miss the tide."

"I think we shall have some sailing now," said he, rubbing his hands in great delight—he pretends to be thinking only of the yacht. "John talks of going on to-

night, so as to slip through the Kyle Rhea narrows with the first of the flood-tide in the morning."

"Going out to-night!" she exclaimed. "Is it you who have put that madness into his head? It must be pitch dark already. And a gale blowing!"

"Oh, no!" he said, laughing. "There is not much of a gale. And it cannot be very dark with the moon behind the clouds."

Here a noise above told us the men had come back from the small village. They brought a telegram too; but it was of no consequence. Presently—in fact, as soon as he decently could—Angus left the dinner-table, and went on deck. He had scarcely dared to glance at the pale sensitive face opposite him.

By and by Queen Titania said, solemnly:

"Listen!"

There was no doubt about it; the men were weighing anchor.

"That madman," said she, "has persuaded Captain John to go to sea again—at this time of night!"

"It was Captain John's own wish. He wishes to catch the tide in the morning," observed Miss Avon, with her eyes cast down.

"That's right, my lass," said the Laird. "Speak up for them who are absent. But, indeed, I think I will go on deck myself now, to see what's going on."

We all went on deck, and there and then unanimously passed a vote of approval on Captain John's proceedings, for the wind had moderated very considerably; and there was a pale suffused light telling of the moon being somewhere behind the fleecy clouds in the south-east. With much content we perceived that the *White Dove* was already moving out of the dark little harbour. We heard the rush of the sea outside without much concern.

It was a pleasant sailing night after all. When we had stolen by the glare of the solitary lighthouse, and got into the open, we found there was no very heavy sea running, while there was a steady serviceable breeze from the south. There was moonlight abroad too, though the moon was mostly invisible behind the thin drifting clouds. The women, wrapped up, sate hand-in-hand, and chatted to each other; the Doctor was at the tiller; the Laird was taking an occasional turn up and down, sometimes pausing to challenge general attention by some profound remark.

And very soon we began to perceive that Angus Sutherland had by some inscrutable means got into the Laird's good graces in a most marked degree. Denny-mains, on this particular night, as we sailed away northward, was quite complimentary about the march of modern science, and the service done to humanity by scientific men. He had not even an ill word for the *Vestiges of Creation*. He went the length of saying that he was not scholar enough to deny that there might be various ways of interpreting the terms of the Mosaic chronology; and

expressed a great interest in the terribly remote people who must have lived in the lake-dwellings.

"Oh, don't you believe that!" said our steersman good-naturedly. "The scientifics are only humbugging the public about those lake-dwellings. They were only the bath-houses and wash-houses of a comparatively modern and civilised race, just as you see them now on the Lake of a Thousand Islands, and at the mouths of the Amazon, and even on the Rhine. Surely you know the bath-houses built on piles on the Rhine?"

"Dear me!" said the Laird, "that is extremely interesting. It is a novel view—a most novel view. But then the remains—what of the remains? The earthen cups and platters: they must have belonged to a very preemitive race?"

"Not a bit," said the profound scientific authority, with a laugh. "They were the things the children amused themselves with, when their nurses took them down there to be out of the heat and the dust. They were a very advanced race indeed. Even the children could make earthen cups and saucers, while the children now-a-days can only make mud-pies."

"Don't believe him, sir!" their hostess called out; "he is only making a fool of us all."

"Ay, but there's something in it—there's something in it," said the Laird seriously; and he took a step or two up and down the deck, in deep meditation. "There's something in it. It's plausible. If it is not sound, it is an argument. It would be a good stick to break over an ignorant man's head."

Suddenly the Laird began to laugh aloud.

"Bless me," said he, "if I could only inveigle Johnny Guthrie into an argument about that! I would give it him! I would give it him!"

This was a shocking revelation. What had come over the Laird's conscience that he actually proposed to inveigle a poor man into a controversy and then to hit him over the head with a sophistical argument? We could not have believed it. And here he was laughing and chuckling to himself over that shameful scheme.

Our attention, however, was at this moment suddenly drawn away from moral questions. The rapidly driving clouds just over the wild mountains of Loch Hourn parted, and the moon glared out on the tumbling waves. But what a curious moon it was!—pale and watery, with a white halo around it, and with another faintly-coloured halo outside that again whenever the slight and vapoury clouds crossed. John of Skye came aft.

"I not like the look of that moon," said John of Skye to the Doctor, but in an undertone, so that the women should not hear.

"Nor I either," said the other, in an equally low voice. "Do you think we are going to have the equinoctials, John?"

"Oh no, not yet. It is not the time for the equinoctials yet."

And as we crept on through the night, now and again from amid the wild and stormy clouds above Loch Hourn the wan moon still shone out; and then we saw something of the silent shores we were passing, and of the awful mountains overhead, stretching far into the darkness of the skies. Then preparations were made for coming to anchor; and by and by the *White Dove* was brought round to the wind. We were in a bay—if bay it could be called—just south of Kyle Rhea narrows. There was nothing visible along the pale moonlit shore.

"This is a very open place to anchor in, John," our young Doctor ventured to remark.

"But it is a good holding-ground; and we will be away early in the morning whatever."

And so, when the anchor was swung out, and quiet restored over the vessel, we proceeded to get below. There were a great many things to be handed down; and a careful search had to be made that nothing was forgotten—we did not want to find soaked shawls or books lying on the deck in the morning. But at length all this was settled too, and we were assembled once more in the saloon.

We were assembled—all but two.

"Where is Miss Mary?" said the Laird cheerfully: he was always the first to miss his companion.

"Perhaps she is in her cabin," said his hostess somewhat nervously.

"And your young Doctor—why does he not come down and have his glass of toddy like a man?" said the Laird, getting his own tumbler. "The young men now-a-days are just as frightened as children. What with their chemistry, and their tubes, and their percentages of alcohol: there was none of that nonsense when I was a young man. People took what they liked, so long as it agreed with them; and will anybody tell me there is any harm in a glass of good Scotch whisky?"

She does not answer; she looks somewhat preoccupied and anxious.

"Ay, ay," continues the Laird, reaching over for the sugar; "if people would only stop there, there is nothing in the world makes such an excellent night-cap as a single glass of good Scotch whisky. Now, ma'am, I will just beg you to try half a glass of my brewing."

She pays no attention to him. For first of all she now hears a light step on the companion-way, and then the door of the ladies' cabin is opened, and shut again. Then a heavy step on the companion-way, and Dr. Sutherland comes into the saloon. There is a strange look on his face—not of dejection; but he tries to be very reticent and modest, and is inordinately eager in handing a knife to the Laird for the cutting of a lemon.

"Where is Mary, Angus?" said his hostess, looking at him.

"She has gone into your cabin," said he, looking up with a sort of wistful

appeal in his eyes. As plainly as possible they said, "Won't you go to her?"

The unspoken request was instantly answered; she got up and quietly left the saloon.

"Come, lad," said the Laird. "Are ye afraid to try a glass of Scotch whisky? You chemical men know too much: that is not wholesome; and you a Scotchman too—take a glass, man!"

"Twelve, if you like," said the Doctor, laughing; "but one will do for my purpose. I'm going to follow your example, sir; I am going to propose a toast. It is a good old custom."

This was a proposal after the Laird's own heart. He insisted on the women being summoned; and they came. He took no notice that Mary Avon was rose-red, and downcast of face; and that the elder woman held her hand tightly, and had obviously been crying a little bit—not tears of sorrow. When they were seated, he handed each a glass. Then he called for silence, waiting to hear our Doctor make a proper and courtly speech about his hostess, or about the *White Dove*, or John of Skye, or anything.

But what must have been the Laird's surprise when he found that it was his own health that was being proposed! And that not in the manner of the formal oratory that the Laird admired, but in a very simple and straightforward speech, that had just a touch of personal and earnest feeling in it. For the young Doctor spoke of the long days and nights we had spent together, far away from human ken; and how intimately associated people became on board ship; and how thoroughly one could learn to know and love a particular character through being brought into such close relationship. And he said that friendships thus formed in a week or a month might last for a lifetime. And he could not say much, before the very face of the Laird, about all those qualities which had gained for him something more than our esteem—qualities especially valuable on board ship—good humour, patience, courtesy, light-heartedness——

"Bless me," cried the Laird, interrupting the speaker in defiance of all the laws that govern public oratory, "I maun stop this—I maun stop this! Are ye all come together to make fun of me—eh? Have a care—have a care!"

He looked round threateningly; and his eye lighted with a darker warning on Mary Avon.

"That lass, too," said he; "and I thought her a friend of mine; and she has come to make a fool of me like the rest! And so ye want to make me the Homesh o' this boat? Well, I may be a foolish old man; but my eyes are open. I know what is going on. Come here, my lass, until I tell ye something."

Mary Avon went and took the seat next him; and he put his hand gently on her shoulder.

"Young people will have their laugh and their joke," said he.

"It was no joke at all!" said she warmly.

"Whisht, now. I say young people will have their laugh and their joke at a foolish old man; and who is to prevent them? Not me. But I'll tell ye what: ye may have your sport of me, on one condition."

He patted her once or twice on the shoulder, just as if she was a child.

"And the condition is this, my lass—that ye have the wedding at Denny-mains."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE EQUINOCTIALS AT LAST.

There was no dreaming of weddings at Denny-mains, or elsewhere, for some of us that night. It had been blowing pretty hard when we turned in; but towards two or three o'clock the wind increased to half a gale, while heavy showers kept rattling along the decks. Then there were other sounds. One of the men was heard to clamber up the iron ladder of the forecastle; and as soon as he had put his head out, his contented exclamation was, "Oh, ferry well; go on!" Then he came below and roused his companions. Presently there was a loud commotion on deck. This was enough for our Doctor. One could hear him rapidly dressing in his little state-room—then staggering through the saloon, for the wind was knocking about the *White Dove* considerably—then groping his way up the dark companion. For some time there was a fine turmoil going on above. Another anchor was thrown out. The gig and dingay were brought in on deck. All the skylights were fastened down, and the tarpaulins put over. Then a woman's voice—

"Angus! Angus!"

The Doctor came tumbling down the companion; by this time we had got a candle lit in the saloon.

"What is it?" was heard from the partly opened door of the ladies' cabin.

"Nothing at all. A bit of a breeze has sprung up."

"Mary says you must stay below. Never mind what it is. You are not to go on deck again."

"Very well."

He came into the saloon—all wet and dripping, but exceedingly pleased to have been thus thought of—and then he said in a tragic whisper:

"We are in for it at last."

"The equinoctials?"

"Yes."

So we turned in again, leaving the *White Dove* to haul and strain at her cables all through the night—swaying, pitching, groaning, creaking, as if she would throw herself free of her anchors altogether, and sweep away over to Glenelg.

Then, in the early morning, the gale had apparently increased. While the women-folk remained in their cabin, the others of us adventured up the companion-way, and had a look out. It was not a cheerful sight. All around the green sea was being torn along by the heavy wind; the white crests of the waves being whirled up in smoke; the surge springing high on the rocks over by Glenelg; the sky almost black overhead; the mountains that ought to have been quite near us invisible behind the flying mists of the rain. Then how the wind howled! Ordinarily the sound was a low, moaning bass—even lower than the sound of the waves; but then again it would increase and rise into a shrill whistle, mostly heard, one would have said, from about the standing rigging and the crosstrees. But our observation of these phenomena was brief, intermittent, and somewhat ignominious. We had to huddle in the companion-way like Jacks-in-the-box; for the incautiously protruded head was liable to be hit by a blast of rain that came along like a charge of No. 6 shot. Then we tumbled below for breakfast, and the scared women-folk made their appearance.

"The equinoctials, Angus?" said Queen Titania, with some solemnity of face.

"Oh, I suppose so," said he cheerfully.

"Well, I have been through them two or three times before," said she, "but never in an exposed place like this."

"We shall fight through it first-rate," said he—and you should have seen Mary Avon's eyes; she was clearly convinced that fifteen equinoctial gales could not do us the slightest harm so long as this young Doctor was on board. "It is a fine stroke of luck that the gale is from the south-west. If it had come on from the east, we should have been in a bad way. As it is, there is not a rock between here and the opposite shore at Glenelg, and even if we drag our anchors, we shall catch up somewhere at the other side."

"I hope we shall not have to trust to that," says Queen Titania, who in her time has seen something of the results of vessels dragging their anchors.

As the day wore on, the fury of the gale still increased: the wind moaning and whistling by turns, the yacht straining at her cables, and rolling and heaving about. Despite the tender entreaties of the women, Dr. Angus would go on deck again; for now Captain John had resolved on lowering the topmast, and also on getting the boom and mainsail from their crutch down on to the deck. Being

above in this weather was far from pleasant. The showers occasionally took the form of hail; and so fiercely were the pellets driven by the wind that they stung where they hit the face. And the outlook around was dismal enough—the green sea and its whirling spindrift; the heavy waves breaking all along the Glenelg shores; the writhing of the gloomy sky. We had a companion, by the way, in this exposed place—a great black schooner that heavily rolled and pitched as she strained at her two anchors. The skipper of her did not leave her bows for a moment the whole day, watching for the first symptom of dragging.

Then that night. As the darkness came over, the wind increased in shrillness until it seemed to tear with a scream through the rigging; and though we were fortunately under the lee of the Skye hills, we could hear the water smashing on the bows of the yacht. As night fell that shrill whistling and those recurrent shocks grew in violence, until we began to wonder how long the cables would hold.

"And if our anchors give, I wonder where we shall go to," said Queen Titania, in rather a low voice.

"I don't care," said Miss Avon, quite contentedly.

She was seated at dinner; and had undertaken to cut up and mix some salad that Master Fred had got at Loch Hourn. She seemed wholly engrossed in that occupation. She offered some to the Laird, very prettily; and he would have taken it if it had been hemlock. But when she said she did not care where the *White Dove* might drift to, we knew very well what she meant. And some of us may have thought that a time would perhaps arrive when the young lady would not be able to have everything she cared for in the world within the compass of the saloon of a yacht.

Now it is perhaps not quite fair to tell tales out of school; but still the truth is the truth. The two women were on the whole very brave throughout this business; but on that particular night the storm grew more and more violent, and it occurred to them that they would escape the risk of being rolled out of their berths if they came along into the saloon and got some rugs laid on the floor. This they did; and the noise of the wind and the sea was so great that none of the occupants of the adjoining state-rooms heard them. But then it appeared that no sooner had they lain down on the floor—it is unnecessary to say that they were dressed and ready for any emergency—than they were mightily alarmed by the swishing of water below them.

"Mary! Mary!" said the one, "the sea is rushing into the hold."

The other, knowing less about yachts, said nothing; but no doubt, with the admirable unselfishness of lovers, thought it was not of much consequence, since Angus Sutherland and she would be drowned together.

But what was to be clone? The only way to the forecastle was through the

Doctor's state-room. There was no help for it; they first knocked at his door, and called to him that the sea was rushing into the hold; and then he bawled into the forecastle until Master Fred, the first to awake, made his appearance, rubbing his knuckles into his eyes and saying, "Very well, sir; is it hot water or cold water ye want?" and then there was a general commotion of the men getting on deck to try the pumps. And all this brave uproar for nothing. There was scarcely a gallon of water in the hold; but the women, by putting their heads close to the floor of the saloon, had imagined that the sea was rushing in on them. Such is the story of this night's adventures as it was subsequently—and with some shamefacedness—related to the writer of these pages. There are some people who, when they go to sleep, sleep, and refuse to pay heed to twopenny-halfpenny tumults.

Next morning the state of affairs was no better; but there was this point in our favour, that the *White Dove*, having held on so long, was not now likely to drag her anchors and precipitate us on the Glenelg shore. Again we had to pass the day below, with the running accompaniment of pitching and groaning on the part of the boat, and of the shrill clamour of the wind, and the rattling of heavy showers. But as we sat at luncheon, a strange thing occurred. A burst of sunlight suddenly came through the skylight and filled the saloon, moving backwards and forwards on the blue cushions as the yacht swayed, and delighting everybody with the unexpected glory of colour. You may suppose that there was little more thought of luncheon. There was an instant stampede for waterproofs and a clambering up the companion-way. Did not this brief burst of sunlight portend the passing over of the gale? Alas! alas! when we got on deck, we found the scene around us as wild and stormy as ever, with even a heavier sea now racing up the Sound and thundering along Glenelg. Hopelessly we went below again. The only cheerful feature of our imprisonment was the obvious content of those two young people. They seemed perfectly satisfied with being shut up in this saloon; and were always quite surprised when Master Fred's summons interrupted their draughts or bezique.

On the third day the wind came in intermittent squalls, which was something; and occasionally there was a glorious burst of sunshine that went flying across the grey-green driven sea. But for the most part it rained heavily; and the Ferdinand and Miranda business was continued with much content. The Laird had lost himself in Municipal London. Our Admiral-in-chief was writing voluminous letters to two youths at school in Surrey, which were to be posted if ever we reached land again.

That night about ten o'clock a cheering incident occurred. We heard the booming of a steam-whistle. Getting up on deck, we could make out the lights of a steamer creeping along by the Glenelg shore. That was the Clydesdale going north. Would she have faced Ardnamurchan if the equinoctials had not moder-

ated somewhat? These were friendly lights.

Then on the fourth day it became quite certain that the gale was moderating. The bursts of sunshine became more frequent; patches of brilliant blue appeared in the sky; a rainbow from time to time appeared between us and the black clouds in the east. With what an intoxication of joy we got out at last from our long imprisonment, and felt the warm sunlight around us, and watched the men get ready to lower the gig so as to establish once more our communications with the land. Mary Avon would boldly have adventured into that tumbling and rocking thing—she implored to be allowed to go; if the Doctor were going to pull stroke, why should she not be allowed to steer? But she was forcibly restrained. Then away went the shapely boat through the plunging waters—showers of spray sweeping her from stem to stern—until it disappeared into the little bight of Kyle Rhea.

The news brought back from the shore of the destruction wrought by this gale—the worst that had visited these coasts for three-and-twenty years—was terrible enough; and it was coupled with the most earnest warnings that we should not set out. But the sunlight had got into the brain of these long-imprisoned people, and sent them mad. They implored the doubting John of Skye to get ready to start. They promised that if only he would run up to Kyle Akin, they would not ask him to go further, unless the weather was quite fine. To move—to move—that was their only desire and cry.

John of Skye shook his head; but so far humoured them as to weigh one of the anchors.

By and by, too, he had the topmast hoisted again: all this looked more promising. Then, as the afternoon came on, and the tide would soon be turning, they renewed their entreaties. John, still doubting, at length yielded.

Then the joyful uproar! All hands were summoned to the halyards, for the mainsail, soaked through with the rain, was about as stiff as a sheet of iron. And the weighing of the second anchor—that was a cheerful sound indeed. We paid scarcely any heed to this white squall that was coming tearing along from the south. It brought both rain and sunlight with it: for a second or two we were enveloped in a sort of glorified mist—then the next minute we found a rainbow shining between us and the black hull of the smack; presently we were in glowing sunshine again. And then at last the anchor was got up, and the sails filled to the wind, and the mainsheet slackened out. The *White Dove*, released once more,

was flying away to the northern seas!

CHAPTER XV.

"FLIEH! AUF! HINAUS!"

This splendid sense of life, and motion, and brisk excitement! We flew through the narrows like a bolt from a bow; we had scarcely time to regard the whirling eddies of the current. All hands were on the alert too, for the wind came in gusts from the Skye hills, and this tortuous strait is not a pleasant place to be taken unawares in. But the watching and work were altogether delightful, after our long imprisonment. Even the grave John of Skye was whistling "Fhir a bhata" to himself—somewhat out of tune.

The wild and stormy sunset was shining all along the shores of Loch Alsh as we got out of the narrows and came in sight of Kyle Akin. And here were a number of vessels all storm-stayed, one of them, in the distance, with her sail set. We discovered afterwards that this schooner had dragged her anchors and run ashore at Balmacara; she was more fortunate than many others that suffered in this memorable gale, and was at the moment we passed returning to her former anchorage.

The sunlight and the delight of moving had certainly got into the heads of these people. Nothing would do for them but that John of Skye should go on sailing all night. Kyle Akin? they would not hear of Kyle Akin. And it was of no avail that Captain John told them what he had heard ashore—that the *Glencoe* had to put back with her bulwarks smashed; that here, there, and everywhere vessels were on the rocks; that Stornoway harbour was full of foreign craft, not one of which would put her nose out. They pointed to the sea, and the scene around them. It was a lovely sunset. Would not the moon be up by eleven?

"Well, mem," said John of Skye, with a humorous smile, "I think if we go on the night, there not mich chance of our rinning against anything."

And indeed he was not to be outbraved by a couple of women. When we got to Kyle Akin, the dusk beginning to creep over land and sea, he showed no signs of running in there for shelter. We pushed through the narrow straits, and came in view of the darkening plain of the Atlantic, opening away up there to the north, and as far as we could see there was not a single vessel but ourselves on all this world of water. The gloom deepened; in under the mountains of Skye

there was a darkness as of midnight. But one could still make out ahead of us the line of the Scalpa shore, marked by the white breaking of the waves. Even when that grew invisible we had Rona light to steer by.

The stormy and unsettled look of the sunset had prepared us for something of a dirty night, and as we went on both wind and sea increased considerably. The south-westerly breeze that had brought us so far at a spanking rate began to veer round to the north, and came in violent squalls, while the long swell running down between Raasay and Scalpa and the mainland caused the *White Dove* to labour heavily. Moreover, the night got as black as pitch, the moon had not arisen, and it was lucky, in this laborious beating up against the northerly squalls, that we had the distant Rona light by which to judge of our whereabouts.

The two women were huddled together in the companion-way; it was the safest place for them; we could just make out the two dark figures in the ruddy glow coming up from the saloon.

"Isn't it splendid to be going like this," said Miss Avon, "after lying at anchor so long?"

Her friend did not answer. She had been chiefly instrumental in persuading Captain John to keep on during the night, and she did not quite like the look of things. For one thing, she had perceived that the men were all now clad from head to foot in oilskins, though as yet there was nothing but spray coming on board.

Our young Doctor came aft, and tried to get down the companion-way without disturbing the two women.

"I am going below for my waterproof and leggings," said he, with a slight laugh. "There will be some fun before this night is over."

The tone of the girl altered in a moment.

"Oh, Angus," said she, grasping him by the arm. "Pray don't do that! Leave the men to work the boat. If there is any danger, why don't they make away for the land somewhere?"

"There is no danger," said he, "but there will be a little water by and by."

The volume of the great waves was certainly increasing, and a beautiful sight it was to mark the red port-light shining on the rushing masses of foam as they swept by the side of the vessel. Our whereabouts by this time had become wholly a matter of conjecture with the amateurs, for the night was quite black; however, Rona light still did us good service.

When Angus Sutherland came on deck again, she was on the port tack, and the wind had moderated somewhat. But this proved to be a lull of evil omen. There was a low roar heard in the distance, and almost directly a violent squall from the east struck the yacht, sending the boom flying over before the skipper could get hold of the mainsheet. Away flew the *White Dove* like an arrow, with

the unseen masses of water smashing over her bows!

"In with the mizen, boys!" called out John of Skye, and there was a hurried clatter and stamping, and flapping of canvas.

But that was not enough, for this unexpected squall from the east showed permanence, and as we were making in for the Sound of Scalpa we were now running free before the wind.

"We'll tek the foresail off her, boys!" shouted John of Skye again, and presently there was another rattle down on the deck.

Onwards and onwards we flew, in absolute darkness but for that red light that made the sea shine like a foaming sea of blood. And the pressure of the wind behind increased until it seemed likely to tear the canvas off her spars.

"Down with the jib, then!" called out John of Skye; and we heard, but could not see, the men at work forward. And still the *White Dove* flew onwards through the night, and the wind howled and whistled through the rigging, and the boiling surges of foam swept away from her side. There was no more of Rona light to guide us now; we were tearing through the Sound of Scalpa; and still this hurricane seemed to increase in fury. As a last resource, John of Skye had the peak lowered. We had now nothing left but a mainsail about the size of a pocket-handkerchief.

As the night wore on, we got into more sheltered waters, being under the lee of Scalpa; and we crept away down between that island and Skye, seeking for a safe anchorage. It was a business that needed a sharp look-out, for the waters are shallow here, and we discovered one or two smacks at anchor, with no lights up. They did not expect any vessel to run in from the open on a night like this.

And at last we chose our place for the night, letting go both anchors. Then we went below, into the saloon.

"And how do you like sailing in the equinoctials, Mary?" said our hostess.

"I am glad we are all round this table again, and alive," said the girl.

"I thought you said the other day you did not care whether the yacht went down or not?"

"Of the two," remarked Miss Avon shyly, "it is perhaps better that she should be afloat."

Angus was passing at the moment. He put his hand lightly on her shoulder, and said, in a kind way—

"It is better not to tempt the unknown, Mary. Remember what the French proverb says, 'quand on est mort, c'est pour longtemps.' And you know you have not nearly completed that great series of *White Dove* sketches for the smoking-room at Denny-mains."

"The smoking-room!" exclaimed the Laird, indignantly. "There is not one of her sketches that will not have a place—an honoured place—in my dining-

room: depend on that. Ye will see—both of ye—what I will do with them; and the sooner ye come to see the better."

We this evening resolved that if, by favour of the winds and the valour of John of Skye, we got up to Portree next day, we should at once telegraph to the island of Lewis (where we proposed to cease these summer wanderings) to inquire about the safety of certain friends of ours whom we meant to visit there, and who are much given to yachting; for the equinoctials must have blown heavily into Loch Roag, and the little harbour at Borva is somewhat exposed. However, it was not likely that they would allow themselves to be caught. They know something about the sea, and about boats, at Borva.

CHAPTER XVI.

AFTER THE GALE.

"Well, indeed!" exclaimed the Laird, on putting his head out next morning. "This is wonderful—wonderful!"

Was it the long imprisonment in the darkness of the equinoctials that made him welcome with so much delight this spectacle of fair skies and sapphire seas, with the waves breaking white in Scalpa Sound, and the sunlight shining along the Coolins? Or was it not rather our long isolation from the ordinary affairs of the world that made him greet with acclamation this picture of brisk and busy human life, now visible from the deck of the yacht? We were no longer alone in the world. Over there, around the big black smacks—that looked like so many hens with broods of chickens—swarmed a fleet of fishing-boats; and as rapidly as hands could manage it, both men and women were shaking out the brown nets and securing the glittering silver treasure of the sea. It was a picturesque sight—the stalwart brown-bearded men in their yellow oilskins and huge boots; the bare-armed women in their scarlet short-gowns; the masses of ruddy brown nets; the lowered sails. And then the Laird perceived that he was not alone in regarding this busy and cheerful scene.

Along there by the bulwarks, with one hand on the shrouds and the other on the gig, stood Mary Avon, apparently watching the boats passing to and fro between the smacks and the shore. The Laird went gently up to her, and put his hand on her shoulder. She started, turned round suddenly, and then he saw, to his dismay, that her eyes were full of tears.

"What, what?" said he, with a quick doubt and fear coming over him. Had all his plans failed, then? Was the girl still unhappy?

"What is it, lass? What is the matter?" said he, gripping her hand so as to get the truth from her.

By this time she had dried her eyes.

"Nothing—nothing," said she, rather shame-facedly. "I was only thinking about the song of 'Caller Herring;' and how glad those women must be to find their husbands come back this morning. Fancy their being out on such a night as last night. What it must be to be a fisherman's wife—and alone on shore——"

"Toots, toots, lass!" cried the Laird, with a splendid cheerfulness; for he was greatly relieved that this was all the cause of the wet eyes. "Ye are jist giving way to a sentiment. I have observed that people are apt to be sentimental in the morning, before they get their breakfast. What! are ye peetying these folk? I can tell ye this is a proud day for them, to judge by they heaps o' fish. They are jist as happy as kings; and as for the risk o' their trade, they have to do what is appointed to them. Why, does not that Doctor friend o' yours say that the happiest people are they who are hardest worked?"

This reference to the Doctor silenced the young lady at once.

"Not that I have much right to talk about work," said the Laird, penitently. "I believe I am becoming the idlest crayture on the face of this world."

At this point a very pretty little incident occurred. A boat was passing to the shore; and in the stern of her was a young fisherman—a handsome young fellow, with a sun-tanned face and yellow beard. As they were going by the yacht, he caught a glimpse of Miss Avon; then when they had passed, he said something in Gaelic to his two companions, who immediately rested on their oars. Then he was seen rapidly to fill a tin can with two or three dozen herrings; and his companions backed their boat to the side of the yacht. The young fellow stood up in the stern, and with a shy laugh—but with no speech, for he was doubtless nervous about his English—offered this present to the young lady. She was very much pleased; but she blushed quite as much as he did. And she was confused, for she could not summon Master Fred to take charge of the herrings, seeing this compliment was so directly paid to herself. However, she boldly gripped the tin can, and said, "Oh, thank you very much;" and by this time the Laird had fetched a bucket, into which the glittering beauties were slipped. Then the can was handed back, with further and profuse thanks, and the boat pushed off.

Suddenly, and with great alarm, Miss Avon remembered that Angus had taught her what Highland manners were.

"Oh, I beg your pardon!" she called out to the bearded young fisherman, who instantly turned round, and the oars were stopped. "I beg your pardon," said she, with an extreme and anxious politeness, "but would you take a glass of

whisky?"

"No, thank ye, mem," said the fisherman, with another laugh of friendliness on the frank face; and then away they went.

The girl was in despair. She was about to marry a Highlander, and already she had forgotten the first of Highland customs. But unexpected relief was at hand. Hearing something going on, John of Skye had tumbled up from the forecastle, and instantly saw that the young lady was sorely grieved that those friendly fishermen had not accepted this return compliment. He called aloud, in Gaelic, and in a severe tone. The three men came back, looking rather like schoolboys who would fain escape from an embarrassing interview. And then at the same moment Captain John, who had asked Fred to bring up the whisky-bottle, said in a low voice to the young lady—

"They would think it ferry kind, mem, if you would pour out the whisky with your own hand."

And this was done, Miss Mary going through the ceremony without flinching; and as each of the men was handed his glass, he rose up in the boat, and took off his cap, and drank the health of the young lady, in the Gaelic. And Angus Sutherland, when he came on deck, was greatly pleased to hear of what she had done; though the Laird took occasion to remark at breakfast that he hoped it was not a common custom among the young ladies of England to get up early in the morning to have clandestine flirtations with handsome young fishermen.

Then all hands on deck: for now there are two anchors to be got in, and we must not lose any of this pleasant sailing breeze. In these sheltered and shining waters there are scarcely any traces of the recent rough weather, except that the wind still comes in variable puffs, and from all sorts of unexpected directions. In the main, however, it is N. by E., and so we have to set to work to leisurely beat up the Sound of Raasay.

"Well, this is indeed like old times, Mary!" Queen Titania cries, as she comfortably ensconces herself in a camp-chair: for Miss Avon is at the helm, and the young Doctor, lying at full length on the sunlit deck, is watching the sails and criticising her steering; and the Laird is demonstrating to a humble listener the immeasurable advantages enjoyed by the Scotch landscape-painters, in that they have within so small a compass every variety of mountain, lake, woodland, and ocean scenery. He becomes facetious, too, about Miss Mary's sketches. What if he were to have a room set apart for them at Denny-mains, to be called the *White Dove* Gallery? He might have a skilled decorator out from Glasgow to devise the furniture and ornamentation, so that both should suggest the sea, and ships, and sailors.

Here John of Skye comes aft.

"I think," says he to Miss Avon, with a modest smile, "we might put the gaff

topsail on her."

"Oh, yes, certainly," says this experienced mariner; and the Doctor, seeing an opportunity for bestirring himself, jumps to his feet.

And so, with the topsail shining white in the sun—a thing we have not seen for some time—we leave behind us the gloomy opening into Loch Sligachan, and beat up through the Raasay narrows, and steal by the pleasant woods of Raasay House. The Laird has returned to that project of the Marine Gallery, and he has secured an attentive listener in the person of his hostess, who prides herself that she has a sure instinct as to what is "right" in mural decoration.

This is indeed like old times come back again. The light, cool breeze, the warm decks, the pleasant lapping of the water, and our steerswoman partly whistling and partly humming—

"They'll put a napkin round my e'en,
They'll no let me see to dee;
And they'll never let on to my faither and mither,
But I am awa' o'er the sea."

And this she is abstractedly and contentedly doing, without any notice of the fact that the song is supposed to be a pathetic one.

Then our young Doctor: of what does he discourse to us during this delightful daydreaming and idleness? Well, it has been remarked by more than one of us that Dr. Angus has become tremendously practical of late. You would scarcely have believed that this was the young F.R.S. who used to startle the good Laird out of his wits by his wild speculations about the origin of the world and similar trifles. Now his whole interest seemed to be centred on the commonest things: all the Commissioners of the Burgh of Strathgovan put together could not have been more fierce than he was about the necessity of supplying houses with pure water, for example. And the abuse that he heaped on the Water Companies of London, more especially, and on the Government which did not interfere, was so distinctly libellous that we are glad no alien overheard it.

Then as to arsenic in wall-papers: he was equally dogmatic and indignant about that; and here it was his hostess, rather than the Laird, who was interested. She eagerly committed to her note-book a recipe for testing the presence of that vile metal in wall-papers or anything else; and some of us had mentally to thank Heaven that she was not likely to get test-tubes, and zinc filings, and hydrochloric acid in Portree. The woman would have blown up the ship.

All this and much more was very different from the kind of conversation that used so seriously to trouble the Laird. When he heard Angus talk with great common sense and abundant information about the various climates that suited

particular constitutions, and about the best soils for building houses on, and about the necessity for strict municipal supervision of drainage, he was ready to believe that our young Doctor had not only for his own part never handled that dangerous book the *Vestiges of Creation*, but that he had never even known any one who had glanced at its sophistical pages except with a smile of pity. Why, all the time that we were shut up by the equinoctials, the only profound and mysterious thing that Angus had said was this: "There is surely something wrong when the man who takes on himself all the trouble of drawing a bottle of ale is bound to give his friend the first tumbler, which is clear, and keep the second tumbler, which is muddy, for himself." But if you narrowly look into it, you will find that there is really nothing dangerous or unsettling in this saying—no grumbling against the ways of Providence whatsoever. It is mysterious, perhaps; but then so would many of the nice points about the Semple case have been, had we not had with us an able expositor.

And on this occasion, as we were running along for Portree, our F.R.S. was chiefly engaged in warning us against paying too serious heed to certain extreme theories about food and drink which were then being put put forward by a number of distinguished physicians.

"For people in good health, the very worst adviser is the doctor," he was saying; when he was gently reminded by his hostess that he must not malign his own calling, or destroy a superstition that might in itself have curative effects.

"Oh, I scarcely call myself a doctor," he said, "for I have no practice as yet. And I am not denying the power of a physician to help nature in certain cases—of course not; but what I say is that for healthy people the doctor is the worst adviser possible. Why, where does he get his experience?—from the study of people who are ill. He lives in an atmosphere of sickness; his conclusions about the human body are drawn from bad specimens; the effects that he sees produced are produced on too sensitive subjects. Very likely, too, if he is himself a distinguished physician, he has gone through an immense amount of training and subsequent hard work; his own system is not of the strongest; and he considers that what he feels to be injurious to him must be injurious to other people. Probably so it might be—to people similarly sensitive; but not necessarily to people in sound health. Fancy a man trying to terrify people by describing the awful appearance produced on one's internal economy when one drinks half a glass of sherry! And that," he added, "is a piece of pure scientific sensationalism; for precisely the same appearance is produced if you drink half a glass of milk."

"I am of opinion," said the Laird, with the gravity befitting such a topic, "that of all steemulants nothing is better or wholesomer than a drop of sound, sterling whisky."

"And where are you likely to get it?——"

"I can assure ye, at Denny-mains——"

"I mean where are the masses of the people to get it? What they get is a cheap white spirit, reeking with fusel-oil, with just enough whisky blended to hide the imposture. The decoction is a certain poison. If the Government would stop tinkering at Irish franchises, and Irish tenures, and Irish Universities, and would pass a law making it penal for any distiller to sell spirits that he has not had in bond for at least two years, they would do a good deal more service to Ireland, and to this country too."

"Still, these measures of amelioration must have their effect," observed the Liard, sententiously. "I would not discourage wise legislation. We will reconcile Ireland sooner or later, if we are prudent and conseederate."

"You may as well give them Home Rule at once," said Dr. Angus, bluntly. "The Irish have no regard for the historical grandeur of England; how could they?—they have lost their organ of veneration. The coronal region of the skull has in time become depressed, through frequent shillelagh practice."

For a second the Laird glanced at him: there was a savour of George Combe about this speech. Could it be that he believed in that monstrous and atheistical theory?

But no. The Laird only laughed; and said:

"I would not like to have an Irishman hear ye say so."

It was now abundantly clear to us that Denny-mains could no longer suspect of anything heterodox and destructive this young man who was sound on drainage, pure air, and a constant supply of water to the tanks.

Of course, we could not get into Portree without Ben Inivaig having a tussle with us. This mountain is the most inveterate brewer of squalls in the whole of the West Highlands, and it is his especial delight to catch the unwary, when all their eyes are bent on the safe harbour within. But we were equal with him. Although he tried to tear our masts out and frighten us out of our senses, all that he really succeeded in doing was to put us to a good deal of trouble and break a tumbler or two below. We pointed the finger of scorn at Ben Inivaig. We sailed past him, and took no more notice of him. With a favouring breeze, and with our topsail still set, we glided into the open and spacious harbour.

But that first look round was a strange one. Was this really Portree Harbour, or were we so many Rip Van Winkles? There were the shining white houses, and the circular bay, and the wooded cliffs; but where were the yachts that used to keep the place so bright and busy? There was not an inch of white canvas visible. We got to anchor near a couple of heavy smacks; the men looked at us as if we had dropped from the skies.

We went ashore and walked up to the telegraph office to see whether the adjacent islands of great Britain and Ireland—as the Cumbrae minister called

them—had survived the equinoctials; and learned only too accurately what serious mischief had been done all along these coasts by the gale. From various points, moreover, we subsequently received congratulations on our escape, until we almost began to believe that we had really been in serious peril. For the rest, our friends at Borva were safe enough; they had not been on board their yacht at all.

That evening, in the silent and deserted bay, a council of war was held on deck. We were not, as it turned out, quite alone; there had also come in a steam yacht, the master of which informed our John of Skye that such a gale he had not seen for three-and-twenty years. He also told us that there was a heavy sea running in the Minch; and that no vessel would try to cross. Stornoway Harbour, we already knew, was filled with storm-stayed craft. So we had to decide.

Like the very small and white-faced boy who stood forth to declaim before a school-full of examiners and friends, and who raised his hand, and announced in a trembling falsetto that his voice was still for war, it was the women who spoke first, and they were for going right on the next morning.

"Mind," said Angus Sutherland, looking anxiously at certain dark eyes; "there is generally a good sea in the Minch in the best of weathers; but after a three or four days'—well——"

"I, for one, don't care," said Miss Avon, frankly regarding him.

"And I should like it," said the other woman, "so long as there is plenty of wind. But if Captain John takes me out into the middle of the Minch and keeps me rolling about on the Atlantic in a dead calm, then something will befall him that his mother knew nothing about."

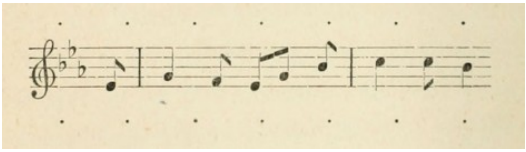
Here Captain John was emboldened to step forward, and to say, with an embarrassed politeness—

"I not afraid of anything for the leddies; for two better sailors I never sah ahl my life lang."

However, the final result of our confabulation that night was the resolve to get under way next morning, and proceed a certain distance until we should discover what the weather was like outside. With a fair wind, we might run the sixty miles to Stornoway before night; without a fair wind, there was little use in our adventuring out to be knocked about in the North Minch, where the Atlantic finds itself jammed into the neck of a bottle, and rebels in a somewhat frantic fashion. We must do our good friends in Portree the justice to say that they endeavoured to dissuade us; but then we had sailed in the *White Dove* before, and had no great fear of her leading us into any trouble.

And so, good-night!—good-night! We can scarcely believe that this is Portree Harbour, so still and quiet it is. All the summer fleet of vessels have fled; the year has gone with them; soon we, too, must betake ourselves to the

south. Good-night!—good-night! The peace of the darkness falls over us; if there is any sound, it is the sound of singing in our dreams.



Music fragment

CHAPTER XVII.

"A GOOD ONE FOR THE LAST."

"Ah, well, well," said the Laird, somewhat sadly, to his hostess, "I suppose we may now conseeder that we have started on our last day's sailing in the *White Dove*?"

"I suppose so," said she; and this was before breakfast, so she may have been inclined to be a bit sentimental too.

"I'm thinking," said he, "that some of us may hereafter look back on this sailing as the longest and grandest holiday of their life, and will recall the name of the *White Dove* with a certain amount of affection. I, for one, feel that I can scarcely justify myself for withdrawing so long from the duties that society demands from every man; and no doubt there will be much to set right when one goes back to Strathgovan. But perhaps one has been able to do something even in one's idleness——"

He paused here, and remained silent for a moment or two.

"What a fine thing," he continued, "it must be for a doctor to watch the return of health to a patient's face—to watch the colour coming back, and the eyes looking happy again, and the spirits rising; and to think that maybe he has helped. And if he happens to know the patient, and to be as anxious about her as if she were his own child, do not ye think he must be a proud man when he sees the results of what he has done for her, and when he hears her begin to laugh again?"

Despite the Laird's profound ingenuity, we knew very well who that doctor

was. And we had learned something about the affection which this mythical physician had acquired for this imaginary patient.

"What a sensitive bit crayture she is!" said he, suddenly, as if he were now talking of some quite different person. "Have ye seen the difference the last few days have made on her face—have ye not observed it?"

"Yes, indeed I have."

"Ye would imagine that her face was just singing a song from the morning till the night—I have never seen any one with such expressive eyes as that bit lass has—and—and—it is fairly a pleasure to any one to look at the happiness of them."

"Which she owes to you, sir."

"To me?" said the Laird. "Dear me!—not to me. It was a fortunate circumstance that I was with ye on board the yacht, that is all. What I did no man who had the chance could have refused to do. No, no; if the lass owes any gratitude to anybody or anything it is to the Semple case."

"What?"

"Just so, ma'am," said the Laird composedly. "I will confess to ye that a long holiday spent in sailing had not that attraction for me it might have had for others—though I think I have come to enjoy it now with the best of ye; but I thought, when ye pressed me to come, that it would be a grand opportunity to get your husband to take up the Semple case, and master it thoroughly, and put its merits in a just manner before the public. That he does not appear to be as much interested in it as I had reason to expect is a misfortune—perhaps he will grow to see the importance of the principles involved in it in time; but I have ceased to force it on his attention. In the meanwhile we have had a fine, long holiday, which has at least given me leisure to consider many schemes for the advantage of my brother pareeshioners. Ay; and where is Miss Mary though?"

"She and Angus have been up for hours, I believe," said his hostess. "I heard them on deck before we started anyway."

"I would not disturb them," said the Laird, with much consideration. "They have plenty to talk about—all their life opening up before them—like a road through a garden, as one might say. And whatever befalls them hereafter I suppose they will always remember the present time as the most beautiful of their existence—the wonder of it, the newness, the hope. It is a strange thing that. Ye know, ma'am, that our garden at Denny-mains, if I may say so, is far from insigneeficant. It has been greatly commended by experienced landscape gardeners. Well, now, that garden, when it is just at its fullest of summer colour—with all its dahlias and hollyhocks and what not—I say ye cannot get half as much delight from the whole show as ye get from the first glint o' a primrose, as ye are walking through a wood, on a bleak March day, and not expecting to see

anything of the kind. Does not that make your heart jump?"

Here the Laird had to make way for Master Fred and the breakfast tray.

"There is not a bairn about Strathgovan," he continued, with a laugh, "knows better than myself where to find the first primroses and bluebells and the red deadnettle, ye know, and so on. Would ye believe it, that poor crayture, Johnny Guthrie was for cutting down the hedge in the Coulterburn Road, and putting up a stone dyke!" Here the Laird's face grew more and more stern, and he spoke with unnecessary vehemence. "I make bold to say that the man who would cut down a hawthorn hedge where the children go to gather their bits o' flowers, and would put in its place a stone wall for no reason on the face of the earth, I say that man is an ass—an intolerable and perneecious ass!"

But this fierceness instantly vanished, for here was Mary Avon come in to bid him good morning. And he rose and took both her hands in his and regarded the upturned smiling face and the speaking eyes.

"Ay, ay, lass," said he, with great satisfaction and approval, "ye have got the roses into your cheeks at last. That is the morning air—the 'roses weet wi' dew'—it is a fine habit that of early rising. Dear me, what a shilpit bit thing ye were when I first saw ye about three months ago. And now I daresay ye are just as hungry as a hawk with walking up and down the deck in the sea-air—we will not keep ye waiting a moment."

The Laird got her a chair, next his own of course; and then rang Master Fred's bell violently.

"How's her head, skipper?" said Queen T., when the young Doctor made his appearance—he had roses, too, in his cheeks, freshened by the morning air.

"Well," said he frankly, as he sate down, "I think it would be judicious to have breakfast over as soon as possible; and get the things stowed away. We are flying up the Sound of Raasay like a witch on a broom; and there will be a roaring sea when we get beyond the shelter of Skye."

"We have been in roaring seas before," said she, confidently.

"We met a schooner coming into Portree Harbour this morning," said he, with a dry smile. "She left yesterday afternoon just before we got in. They were at it all night, but had to run back at last. They said they had got quite enough of it."

This was a little more serious, but the women were not to be daunted. They had come to believe in the *White Dove* being capable of anything, especially when a certain aid to John of Skye was on board. For the rest, the news was that the day was lovely, the wind fair for Stornoway, and the yacht flying northward like an arrow.

There was a certain solemnity, nevertheless, or perhaps only an unusual elaborateness, about our preparations before going on deck. Gun-cases were

wedged in in front of canvases, so that Miss Avon's sketches should not go rolling on to the floor; all such outlying skirmishers as candlesticks, aneroids, draught-boards, and the like, were moved to the rear of compact masses of rugs; and then the women were ordered to array themselves in their waterproofs. Waterproofs?—and the sun flooding through the skylight! But they obeyed.

Certainly there did not seem to be any great need for waterproofs when we got above and had the women placed in a secure corner of the companion-way. It was a brilliant, breezy, blue-skied morning, with the decks as yet quite white and dry, and with the long mountainous line of Skye shining in the sun. The yacht was flying along at a famous pace before a fresh and steady breeze; already we could make out, far away on the northern horizon, a pale, low, faint-blue line, which we knew to be the hills of southern Lewis. Of course, one had to observe that the vast expanse of sea lying between us and that far line was of a stormy black; moreover, the men had got on their oilskins, though not a drop of spray was coming on board.

As we spun along, however, before the freshening wind, the crashes of the waves at the bows became somewhat more heavy, and occasionally some jets of white foam would spring up into the sunlight. When it was suggested to Captain John that he might set the gaff topsail, he very respectfully and shyly shook his head. For one thing, it was rather strange that on this wide expanse of sea not a solitary vessel was visible.

Farther and farther northward. And now one has to look out for the white water springing over the bows, and there is a general ducking of heads when the crash forward gives warning. The decks are beginning to glisten now; and Miss Avon has received one sharp admonition to be more careful, which has somewhat damped and disarranged her hair. And so the *White Dove* still flies to the north—like an arrow—like a witch on a broom—like a hare, only that none of these things would groan so much in getting into the deep troughs of the sea; and not even a witch on a broom could perform such capers in the way of tumbling and tossing, and pitching and rolling.

However all this was mere child's play. We knew very well when and where we should really "get it": and we got it. Once out of the shelter of the Skye coast, we found a considerably heavy sea swinging along the Minch, and the wind was still freshening up, insomuch that Captain John had to take the mizen and foresail off her. How splendidly those mountain masses of waves came heaving along—apparently quite black until they came near, and then we could see the sunlight shining green through the breaking crest; then there was a shock at the bows that caused the yacht to shiver from stem to stern; then a high springing into the air, followed by a heavy rattle and rush on the decks. The scuppers were of no use at all; there was a foot and a half of hissing and seething salt water all along the

lee bulwarks, and when the gangway was lifted to let it out the next rolling wave only spouted an equal quantity up on deck, soaking Dr. Angus Sutherland to the shoulder. Then a heavier sea than usual struck her, carrying off the cover of the fore hatch and sending it spinning aft; while, at the same moment, a voice from the forecastle informed Captain John in an injured tone that this last invader had swamped the men's berths. What could he do but have the main tack hauled up to lighten the pressure of the wind? The waters of the Minch, when once they rise, are not to be stilled by a bottle of salad oil.

We had never before seen the ordinarily buoyant *White Dove* take in such masses of water over her bows; but we soon got accustomed to the seething lake of water along the lee scuppers, and allowed it to subside or increase as it liked. And the women were now seated a step lower on the companion-way, so that the rags of the waves flew by them without touching them; and there was a good deal of laughing and jesting going on at the clinging and stumbling of any unfortunate person who had to make his way along the deck. As for our indefatigable Doctor, his face had been running wet with salt water for hours; twice he had slipped and gone headlong to leeward; and now, with a rope double twisted round the tiller, he was steering, his teeth set hard.

"Well, Mary," shrieked Queen Titania into her companion's ear. "We are having a good one for the last!"

"Is he going up the mast?" cried the girl in great alarm.

"I say we are having a good one for the last!"

"Oh, yes!" was the shout in reply. "She is indeed going fast!"

But about mid-day we passed within a few miles to the east of the Shiant Islands, and here the sea was somewhat moderated, so we tumbled below for a snack of lunch. The women wanted to devote the time to dressing their hair and adorning themselves anew; but purser Sutherland objected to this altogether. He compelled them to eat and drink while that was possible; and several toasts were proposed—briefly, but with much enthusiasm. Then we scrambled on deck again. We found that John had hoisted his foresail again, but he had let the mizen alone.

Northward and ever northward—and we are all alone on this wide, wide sea. But that pale line of coast at the horizon is beginning to resolve itself into definite form—into long, low headlands, some of which are dark in shadow, others shining in the sun. And then the cloudlike mountains beyond; can these be the far Suainabhal and Mealasabhal, and the other giants that look down on Loch Roag and the western shores? They seem to belong to a world beyond the sea.

Northward and ever northward; and there is less water coming over now, and less groaning and plunging, so that one can hear oneself speak. And what is this wagering on the part of the Doctor that we shall do the sixty miles between Portree and Stornoway within the six hours? John of Skye shakes his head; but

he has the main tack hauled down.

Then, as the day wears on, behold! a small white object in that line of blue. The cry goes abroad: it is Stornoway Light!

"Come, now, John!" the Doctor calls aloud. "Within the six hours—for a glass of whisky and a lucky sixpence!"

"We not at Styornaway Light yet," answered the prudent John of Skye, who is no gambler. But all the same, he called two of the men aft to set the mizen again; and as for himself, he threw off his oilskins and appeared in his proud uniform once more. This looked like business.

Well, it was not within the six hours, but it was within the six hours and a half, that we sailed past Stornoway lighthouse and its outstanding perch; and past a floating target with a red flag, for artillery practice; and past a barque which had been driven ashore two days before, and now stuck there, with her back broken. And this was a wonderful sight—after the lone, wide seas—to see such a mass of ships of all sorts and sizes crowded in here for fear of the weather. We read their names in the strange foreign type as we passed—*Die Heimath*, *Georg Washington*, *Friedrich der Grosse*, and the like—and we saw the yellow-haired Norsemen pulling between the vessels in their odd-looking double-bowed boats. And was not John of Skye a proud man that day, as he stood by the tiller in his splendour of blue and brass buttons, knowing that he had brought the *White Dove* across the wild waters of the Minch, when not one of these foreigners would put his nose outside the harbour?

The evening light was shining over the quiet town, and the shadowed castle, and the fir-tipped circle of hills, when the *White Dove* rattled out her anchor chain and came to rest. And as this was our last night on board, there was a good deal of packing and other trouble. It was nearly ten o'clock when we came together again.

The Laird was in excellent spirits that night, and was more than ordinarily facetious; but his hostess refused to be comforted. A thousand Homeshes could not have called up a smile. For she had grown to love this scrambling life on board; and she had acquired a great affection for the yacht itself; and now she looked round this old and familiar saloon, in which we had spent so many snug and merry evenings together; and she knew she was looking at it for the last time.

At length, however, the Laird bethought himself of arousing her from her sentimental sadness, and set to work to joke her out of it. He told her she was behaving like a school-girl come to the end of her holiday. Well, she only further behaved like a schoolgirl by letting her lips begin to tremble; and then she stealthily withdrew to her own cabin; and doubtless had a good cry there. There

was no help for it, however: the child had to give up its plaything at last.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ADIEU.

Next morning, also: why should this tender melancholy still dwell in the soft and mournful eyes? The sunlight was shining cheerfully on the sweep of wooded hill, on the grey castle, on the scattered town, and on the busy quays. Busy was scarcely the word: there was a wild excitement abroad, for a vast take of herring had just been brought in. There, close in by the quays, were the splendidly-built luggers, with their masts right at their bows; and standing up in them their stalwart crews, bronze-faced, heavy-bearded, with oilskin caps, and boots up to their thighs. Then on the quays above the picturesquely-costumed women busy at the salting; and agents eagerly chaffering with the men; and empty barrels coming down in unknown quantities. Bustle, life, excitement pervaded the whole town; but our tender-hearted hostess, as we got ashore, seemed to pay no heed to it. As she bade good-bye to the men, shaking hands with each there were tears in her eyes; if she had wished to cast a last glance in the direction of the *White Dove*, she could scarcely have seen the now still and motionless craft.

But by and by, when we had left our heavier luggage at the inn, and when we set out to drive across the island to visit some friends of ours who live on the western side, she grew somewhat more cheerful. Here and there a whiff of the fragrant peat-smoke caught us as we passed, bringing back recollections of other days. Then she had one or two strangers to inform and instruct; and she was glad thai Mary Avon had a bright day for her drive across the Lewis.

"But what a desolate place it must be on a wet day," that young person remarked, as she looked away across the undulating moors, vast, and lonely, and silent.

Now, at all events, the drive was pleasant enough: for the sunlight brought out the soft ruddy browns of the bog-land, and ever and again the blue and white surface of a small loch flashed back the daylight from amid that desolation. Then occasionally the road crossed a brawling stream, and the sound of it was grateful enough in the oppressive silence. In due course of time we reached Garra na-hina.

Our stay at the comfortable little hostelry was but brief, for the boat to be

sent by our friends had not arrived, and it was proposed that in the meantime we should walk along the coast to show our companions the famous stones of Callernish. By this time Queen Titania had quite recovered her spirits, and eagerly assented, saying how pleasant a walk would be after our long confinement on shipboard.

It was indeed a pleasant walk, through a bright and cheerful piece of country. And as we went along we sometimes turned to look around us—at the waters of the Black River, a winding line of silver through the yellow and brown of the morass; and at the placid blue waters of Loch Roag, with the orange line of seaweed round the rocks; and at the far blue bulk of Suainabhal. We did not walk very fast; and indeed we had not got anywhere near the Callernish stones, when the sharp eye of our young Doctor caught sight of two new objects that had come into this shining picture. The first was a large brown boat, rowed by four fishermen; the second was a long and shapely boat—like the pinnace of a yacht—also pulled by four men, in blue jerseys and scarlet caps. There was no one in the stern of the big boat; but in the stern of the gig were three figures, as far as we could make out.

Now no sooner had our attention been called to the two boats which had just come round the point of an island out there, than our good Queen Titania became greatly excited, and would have us all go out to the top of a small headland and frantically wave our handkerchiefs there. Then we perceived that the second boat instantly changed its course, and was being steered for the point on which we stood. We descended to the shore and went out on to some rocks, Queen Titania becoming quite hysterical.

"Oh, how kind of her! how kind of her!" she cried, "to come so far to meet us!"

For it now appeared that these three figures in the stern of the white pinnace, were the figures of a young lady, who was obviously steering, and of two small boys, one on each side of her, and both dressed as young sailors. And the steerswoman—she had something of a sailor-look about her too; for she was dressed in navy blue; and she wore a straw hat with a blue ribbon and letters of gold. But you would scarcely have looked at the smart straw hat when you saw the bright and laughing face, and the beautiful eyes that seemed to speak to you long before she could get to shore.

And then the boat was run into a small creak; and the young lady stepped lightly out—she certainly was young-looking, by the way, to be the mother of those two small sailors—and she quickly and eagerly and gladly caught Queen Titania with both her hands.

"Oh, indeed I beg your pardon," said she—and her speech was exceedingly pleasant to hear—"but I did not think you could be so soon over from Styornaway."

[*Note by Queen Titania.*—It appears that now all our voyaging is over, and we are about to retire into privacy again, I am expected, as on a previous occasion, to come forward and address to you a kind of epilogue, just as they do on the stage. This seems to me a sort of strange performance at the end of a yachting cruise, for what if a handful of salt water were to come over the bows and put out my trumpery footlights? However, what must be must, as married women know: and so I would first of all say a word to the many kind people who were so *very* good to us in these distant places in the north. You may think it strange to associate such things as fresh vegetables, or a basket of flowers, or a chicken, or a bottle of milk, or even a bunch of white heather, with sentiment; but people who have been sailing in the West Highlands do not think so—indeed, they know which is the most obliging and friendly and hospitable place *in the whole world.* And then a word to the reader. If I might hope that it is the same reader who has been with us in other climes in other years—who may have driven with us along the devious English lanes; and crossed the Atlantic, and seen the big cañons of the Rocky Mountains; and lived with us among those dear old people in the Black Forest; and walked with us on Mickleham Downs in the starlight, why, then, he may forgive us for taking him on such a tremendous long holiday in these Scotch lochs. But we hope that if ever he goes into these wilds for himself, he will get as good a skipper as John of Skye, and have as pleasant and *true* a friend on board as the Laird of Denny-mains. Perhaps I may add, just to explain everything, that we are all invited to Denny-mains to spend Christmas; and something is going to happen there; and the Laird says that so far from objecting to a ceremony in the Episcopal Church, he will himself be present and give away the bride. It is even hinted that Mr. Tom Galbraith may come from Edinburgh as a great compliment: and then no doubt we shall all be introduced to him. And so—Good-bye!—Good-bye!—and another message—*from the heart*—to all the kind people who befriended us in those places far away!——T.]

THE END.

LONDON: R. CLAY, SONS, AND TAYLOR, PRINTERS.

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