DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA (VOLUME I)

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DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA

BY
WILLIAM BLACK

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I.

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DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA.

CHAPTER I.

GODIVA.

"Well, Mary, it is a pretty plaything to have given you—a Highland estate!—and no doubt all your fine schemes will come right. But you will have to change three things first."

"Yes?"

"And these are human nature and the soil and climate of Scotland."

"Avaunt, Mephistopheles!—and go and give that porter a shilling."

The two speakers were on the platform of Invershin station, on the Highland line of railway. One of them was a tall young woman of distinguished presence and somewhat imperious carriage, as you could gather at a first glance; but the next second, if she happened to turn her face towards you, you would have perceived that her expression meant nothing but a bland gentleness and a prevailing and excellent good-humour. Perhaps it was the dimple in her cheek that did it—a dimple that came there readily whenever she regarded any one, and that seemed to say she was very willing to be pleased and to please: at all events, she found it easy, or had hitherto found it easy, to make friends. For the rest, she was of an erect and elegant figure; her complexion fair; her eyes grey-green, and full of light; her abundant hair of a sunny brown; her features regular enough and fine enough for all practical purposes. It was of this young woman that her friend and now her travelling companion, Kate Glendinning, was in the habit of saying—

"There's one thing I will confess about Mary Stanley: she's not quite honest. She is too happy. She is so happy in herself that she wants every one she meets to share in her content; and she is apt to say clever and flattering little things that are not quite true. It is for no selfish purpose; quite the reverse: still—you mustn't believe all that Mary says to you."

Thus Kate Glendinning of her dearest friend; but if any one else had ventured to say similar things in her presence—then, and right swiftly, there would have been pretty tempests and flashes of eye-lightning.

And now there came up to Miss Stanley a short, stumpy, red-haired and red-bearded man of extraordinary breadth of shoulder and bulk of frame. He had

a massive head despite his diminutive height; his mouth, drawn heavily down at each end, betokened a determined will, not to say a dogged obstinacy; and his small, clear, blue eyes, besides being sharp and intelligent, had a curious kind of cold aggressiveness in them—that is to say, when he was not talking to one whom it was his interest to propitiate, for then he could assume a sort of clumsy humility, both in manner and speech. This was Mr. David Purdie, solicitor, of Inverness. *An Troich Bheag Dhearg*—that is to say, the Little Red Dwarf—the people out at Lochgarra called him; but Mr. Purdie did not know that.

"The carriage is quite ready, Miss Stanley," said he, in his slow, deliberate, south-country accent; and therewithal the three of them passed round to the back of the station and entered the waggonette, Mr. Purdie modestly taking a seat by the driver. The two young ladies were well wrapped up, for it was in the beginning of April, and they had fifty miles before them, out to the Atlantic coast. Kate Glendinning, in looking after her companion's abundant furs and rugs, rather affected to play the part of maid; for this shrewd and sensible lass, who was in rather poor circumstances, had consented to accept a salary from her friend who was so much better off; and she performed her various self-imposed duties with a tact and discretion beyond all praise.

And as they drove away on this clear-shining afternoon, Mary Stanley's face was something to study. She was all eagerness and impatience; the colour mantled in her cheeks; her brain was so busy that she had scarcely a word for her neighbour. For she had heard a good deal and read much more, in Parliamentary debates and elsewhere, of the sufferings of the crofters, of the iniquities that had been practised on them by tyrannical landlords and factors, of the lamentations of the poor homeless ones thrust forth from their native shores; and now, in this little bit of the world that had so unexpectedly become hers, and in as far as she was able, wrong was to be put right, amends were to be made, and peace and amity, and comfort and prosperity were to be established for ever and ever. Perhaps the transcendental vision of the prophet Isaiah was hunting her: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad ... and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose." And if she were to summon back the poor exiles who had been banished—banished to the slums of Glasgow, perchance, or to the far plains of Manitoba?... "And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and ever-lasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." To be sure, as they now drove along the wide and fertile valley that is penetrated by the Kyle of Sutherland, she did not meet with much evidence of the destitution she had been led to expect. She had heard of bleak wastes and sterile altitudes, of ruined huts and dismantled steadings; but here, under the softly-wooded hills, were long and level stretches of arable land, the ploughmen busy at their work; the occasional crofts were

very far indeed from being hovels; and the people whom they saw, in the bits of gardens, or tending the cattle, looked well-clothed and well-fed. She ventured to hint something of this to her companion; and Kate, glancing at her, began to giggle.

"I really believe you are disappointed, Mary! Is there not enough misery for you? But never fear. If it's misery you're in search of, you have seldom far to go for it, in this world. Only I must tell you this—if you're so eager to relieve distress—that there is more of wretchedness, and crime, and squalor, and piteous human suffering in a single square mile of the slums of London or New York than you'll find in the whole of the Highlands of Scotland."

"That may be," said Miss Stanley, in her calm and equable fashion. "But you see, Käthchen, I have no call that way. I do not feel a direct responsibility, as I do in this case—

"It is a responsibility you are making for yourself," her friend said. "You know very well it was not for that your uncle left you the property. It was merely to spite your father and your brothers."

"There was a little more," was the good-natured reply (for she did not seem to resent this reference to her amiable relative). "I think it was to spite the people out there as well. My uncle and they never could get on; and he was not a man who liked to be thwarted. And of course he imagined that I, being a woman, would not interfere; that I would leave the estate to be managed by Mr. Purdie, and simply receive the rents. Well," she continued, and here she lowered her voice somewhat, and there was a touch of colour in her face that was perhaps the expression of some definite resolve, "I may allow Mr. Purdie to manage the estate, or I may not. But if he does continues to manage the estate, it will be under my direction."

Käthchen looked at her, and laughed a little.

"I don't think Mr. Purdie knows whom he has got to deal with," said she, under her breath.

They stopped that night at Oykel Bridge. Miss Stanley invited Mr. Purdie to dine with them; but he declined on the ground that he had business in the neighbourhood—an odd excuse, for the inn and its dependencies constitute the remote little hamlet. The two young women passed the evening by themselves, and talked: the one with generous ardour entering into all her wonderful schemes, the other (who knew the country, and the people) interposing now and again with a little modifying information. But really Käthchen was not unsympathetic. Her eyes, which were the attractive feature of her face, sometimes expressed a trifle of demure amusement; but she was not a quarrelsome or argumentative creature; and besides there is something about all fine humanitarian projects that one would rather believe in and welcome.

Next morning they resumed their drive, and very soon entered a much wilder country than that of the preceding day. Wilder but nevertheless beautiful—with its range upon range of russet hills, wine-stained here and there with shadow; its woods of leafless birch of a soft dark rose-lilac; its long undulations of waste moorland, yellow and brown; with now and again the sudden blue scythe-sweep of the river. For now they were traversing the lonely district of upper Strath-Oykel. Far ahead of them rose the giant bulk of Ben More, Assynt, its higher shoulders a solid mass of white. The sunlight around them was cheerful, no doubt; and yet there was a strange sense of solitariness, of voicelessness; and Mary, who was less concerned about the beauty of the landscape than about certain problems haunting her mind, called out to Mr. Purdie, who was again up beside the driver—

"Mr. Purdie, why are there no people living in this country?"

"Because there's nothing for them to live on," was the laconic answer. "It's fit for nothing but grazing sheep—and for grouse."

"Yes—the hills, perhaps," said she. "But look along the valley—by the side of the river."

"Ay, it's fine land, that," said he, grimly,—"for a wheen pesewepes!" And indeed the plovers were the only visible living things, jerking about in the air, dipping suddenly to the ground and swiftly rising again, with their curious squeaking call, and the soft velvet fluffing of their wings.

However, all that was nothing. By and by they had left the Oykel strath, and had entered upon a far higher and bleaker region, the desolation of which appalled her. There was not even the solitary shepherd's cottage they had seen down in the other valley; here was nothing but a wilderness of brown and ragged moorland, with deep black clefts of peat, and an occasional small tarn, without a bush along its shores, its waters driven a deep blue by the wind. Away in the west they could make out the spectral shapes of the Assynt mountains—Coul Beg, Coul More, and Suilven—remote and visionary through the universal haze of the heather-burning; but here, all around them, were these endless and featureless and melancholy undulations; and the silence was now unbroken even by the curious bleating of the plovers: once, and once only, they heard the hoarse and distant croak of a raven.

"Käthchen," said Mary, in a sort of piteous dismay, as she looked abroad over those sombre solitudes, "you have been all along the Ross and Cromarty coast; is it like *that*?"

"Plenty of it is worse," was the reply.

"And—and—my place: is it like that?"

"I have never been in to Lochgarra."

"But—but if it is like that—what am I to do for my people?"

"The best you can," said Käthchen, cheerfully.

It seemed an interminable drive. And then, in the afternoon, a premature darkness came slowly over; the mountains in the north gradually receded out of sight; and heavy, steady rain began to fall. The two girls sat huddled underneath one umbrella, listening to the pattering footfalls of the horses and the grinding of the wheels on the road; and when they ventured to peep forth from their shelter they beheld but the same monotonous features in the landscape: masses of wet rock and dark russet heather, black swamps, low and bare hills, and now and again the grey glimmer of a stream or tarn. It was a cheerless outlook; continually changing, and yet ever the same; and hour after hour the rain came down wearily. There was hardly a word said between those two: whither had fled Mary Stanley's dreams of a shining blue sea, a sunny coastline, and a happy peasantry busy in their fields and gardens, their white cottages radiant in the morning light? Käthchen, on the other hand, was inclined to laugh ruefully.

"Isn't it a good thing, Mary, that duty brought us here? If it had been pleasure, we should be calling ourselves awful fools."

But quite of a sudden this hopeless resignation vanished, and a wild excitement took its place.

"Miss Stanley," Mr. Purdie called to her, "we've come to the march."

"The what?"

"The march—the boundary of your estate."

Instantly she had the carriage stopped, and nothing would do but that she must get out and set foot on her own land: moreover, when Käthchen took down the umbrella, they found that the rain had ceased, and that the western skies were lightening somewhat.

"That is the march," said Mr. Purdie, pointing to a low, irregular, moss-grown wall—obviously a very ancient landmark; "and it goes right over the hill and down again to the Garra."

Leaving the highway, she stepped across the ditch, and stood on the moist, soft peat land.

"And this is mine!" she said to Käthchen, with an odd expression of face. "This is absolutely mine. Nobody can dispute my possession of it. This piece of the solid world actually belongs to me."

"And I suppose your rights extend as deep as ever you like," said Käthchen. "You might go all the way through, and have a walk in the streets of Melbourne, and get dry, and come back."

But Mary's quick eye had caught sight of what was to her the most important feature of the surrounding landscape. It was a cottage perched on a knoll above a burn—or, rather, it was the ruins of a cottage, the gables standing roofless, the thatch long ago blown away by the winds, the beams and fallen stones

lying among the withered nettles, altogether a melancholy sight.

"Now, isn't it shameful!" she exclaimed, in hot indignation. "Look at that! The very first thing I meet with! Do you wonder that people should talk about the Highland landlords? Some poor wretch has been driven away—perhaps at this very moment, in Canada or in Australia, he is thinking of the old home, and forgetting all the rain and discomfort there used to be, Mr. Purdie!"

"Yes, ma'am?" said he, coming a bit nearer; and Käthchen looked on, wondering if his doom was about to be pronounced.

"Who lived in that house?" Miss Stanley demanded.

"The schoolmaster," was the reply.

"The schoolmaster? And where is he now?"

"He's in his own house," the factor said. "We built him a new one and a better one, to be nearer the school and the village; and when he moved it was hardly worth while keeping the old one in repair."

"Oh," said she, a little disconcerted. "Oh, really. Then no one was sent away—from that cottage?"

"No, no—not at all—not at all," said he; and he followed her to the waggonette and politely shut the door after her—while Käthchen's face maintained an admirable gravity.

As the drove on again, the afternoon seemed inclined to clear; the skies were banking up; and there were faint streaks of lemon-yellow among the heavy purple clouds in the west. And very soon the road made a sweep to the left, bringing them in sight of the Connan, a small but turbulent tributary of the Garra. Here, also, they encountered the first signs of the habitations of men—little clumps of buildings clustered together just over a stretch of flat land that had clearly been recovered from the river-bed. Crofts, no doubt: each slated cottage surrounded by its huddled dependency of thatched barns and byres.

As the waggonette drew near to the first of these rude little settlements, the women disappeared into the outhouses, and the children hid behind the peat-stack; but there remained standing at the door of the cottage an elderly man, who regarded the strangers with a grave and perhaps rather sullen curiosity.

"Mr. Purdie," said Mary, in an undertone, "is that one of my tenants?"

"Yes, certainly—that is James Macdonald."

"I wish to make his acquaintance," said she; and she stopped the carriage, and got out.

There was no sort of fear, or unnecessary bashfulness, about this young woman. She walked right up the bank to the door of the cottage. The short thick-set man standing there had something of a Russian cast of countenance, with a heavy grey beard, shaggy eyebrows, and small, suspicious eyes. His clothes were weather-worn as to colour and much mended; but they were not in the least

squalid; and he had a red woollen comforter round his neck.

"Good evening!" said she, with a most winning smile.

But the propitiating dimple, that had hitherto been all-conquering, was of no avail here. He looked at her. He did not raise his cap.

"*Cha 'n 'eil beurla agam*," said he, with a sort of affected indifference.

She was taken aback only for a moment.

"What does he say?" she asked of Mr. Purdie, who had followed her.

"He says he has no English," the factor answered; and then he added, vindictively: "But he would have plenty of English if he wanted to tell you of his grievances—oh, ay, plenty! Start him on that, and he'll find plenty of English! He's one of the most ill-condeetioned men in the whole place—and I suppose he has enough English to understand that!"

"Tell him who I am," said she, rather disappointedly; for she had set out with the determination to get to know all the circumstances and wants and wishes of her tenants, especially of the poorer ones, without the intervention of any factor.

Hereupon Mr. Purdie, in unnecessarily severe tones, as it seemed to her, addressed a few sentences in Gaelic to the stubborn-looking old man, who, in turn—and with no abatement of his hostile attitude—replied in the same tongue. But to Mary's surprise, he suddenly added—fixing morose eyes upon her—

"She—no my laird! Ross of Heimra—my laird. Young Donald—he my laird. She no my laird at ahl!"

"Oh, but that is absurd, you know," Mary said, eagerly, and with a quick delight that she could enter into direct communication with him. "You forget—you are mistaken—my uncle bought the estate from the late Mr. Ross of Heimra. Surely you understand that? Surely you know that? The whole place was bought in open market. Mr. Ross sold the land, and all the rights belonging to it—yes, and the obligations, too; and my uncle bought it. Don't you understand?"

The man turned away his eyes, and sulkily muttered something in Gaelic.

"What is it?" asked Mary, compelled to appeal once more to the factor.

"Like the scoundrel's impertinence!" said the Little Red Dwarf, darting an angry look at the crofter. "He says the Englishman—that is your uncle, Miss Stanley—the Englishman bought the land but not the hearts of the people."

"And that is quite right!" Mary exclaimed. "That is quite right and true. Tell him I quite agree with him. But tell him this—tell him that if my uncle did not buy the hearts of the people, I mean to win them——"

"Oh, Mary," Käthchen struck in, rather shamefacedly, "don't talk like that! They won't understand you. Be practical. Ask him what complaint he has to make about his farm—ask him what he wants——"

"I can tell ye that beforehand!" said Mr. Purdie, in his irascible scorn. "He wants more arable land, and he wants more pasture; and both for nothing. And

no doubt he would like a steam plough thrown in, and maybe a score or two o' black-faced wethers——"

But Mary interrupted. She had formed for herself some idea, before she came to this country, as to how she meant to proceed.

"Mr. Purdie," said she, in her clear, firm way, "I wish you to ask this man if he has anything to complain of; and I wish you to tell me precisely what he says."

The Troich Bheag Dhearg, being thus ordered, obeyed; but he scowled upon the stubborn crofter—and it was apparent there was no love lost on the other side either. At the end of their brief, and unwilling, conversation, the factor made his report.

"Well, there are many things he would like—who could doubt that?—but in especial he wants the pasture of Meall-na-Cruagan divided amongst the crofters of this district, and the tax for the dyke taken off the rent. But Meall-na-Cruagan never did belong to the crofters at any time; and it is part of Mr. Watson's sheep-farm—he has it under lease."

"I will look into that afterwards," said she. "What is the tax you mentioned?"

"Well, when the dyke along there—the embankment," said the factor, "was built to keep the river from flooding the land, the interest of the money expended was added on to the rents of the crofts, as was natural—and that's what they call a tax!"

"How long have they been paying that tax?" she asked.

"It is about thirty years since the dyke was built."

"Thirty years!" she said. "Thirty years! These poor people have been paying a tax all this time for an embankment built to improve the property? Really, Mr. Purdie!——"

"They get the value of it!" he said, as testily as he dared. "The land is no longer flooded——"

"Tell this man," said she, with some colour mounting to her face, "that the tax for the dyke is abolished—here and now!"

"Godiva!" said Käthchen, in an undertone, with a bit of a titter.

And the factor would have protested from his own point of view. But this young woman's heart was all aflame. She cared nothing for ridicule, nor for any sort of more practical opposition. Here was some definite wrong that she could put right. She did not want to hear from Mr. Purdie, or from anybody else, what neighbouring landlords might think, or what encouragement it might give the crofters to make other and more impossible demands.

"I don't care what other landlords may say!" said she with firm lips: "You tell me that I improve my property—and then charge these poor people with the cost! And for thirty years they have been paying? Well, I wish you to say to this man that the tax no longer exists—from this moment it no longer exists—it is not

to be heard of again!"

The factor made a brief communication: the taciturn crofter answered not a word—not a word of recognition, much less of thanks. But Mary Stanley was not to be daunted by this incivility: as she descended to the waggonette, her face wore a proud look—right and justice should be done, as far as she was able, in this her small sphere: the rest was with the gods.

And again they drove on; but now was there not some subtle softening of the air, some moist odour as of the sea, some indication of the neighbourhood of the Atlantic shores? Clearly they were getting down to the coast. And unhappily, as they went on, the land around them seemed to be getting worse and worse—if there could be a worse. A wilderness of crags and knolls—of Hebridean gneiss mostly; patches of swamp, with black gullies of peat; sterile hills that would have threatened a hoodie crow with starvation: such appeared to be Miss Stanley's newly found property. But a very curious incident now occurred to withdraw her attention from these immediate surroundings—an incident the meaning of which she was to learn subsequently. They had come in sight of a level space that had evidently at one time been a lake, but was now a waste of stones, with a touch of green slime and a few withered rushes here and there; and in the middle of this space, on a mound that had apparently been connected with the mainland, was a heap of scattered blocks that looked like the tumbled-down ruins of some ancient fort.

"What is that, Mr. Purdie?" she called out, still anxious for all possible information.

A malignant grim came over the face of the Little Red Dwarf.

"That," said he, "was once Castle Heimra; and then it was Castle Stanley; and now it is nothing!"

He had scarcely uttered the words when the driver slashed at the neck of one of the horses; and both animals sprung forward with a jerk—a jerk so sudden and violent that Mr. Purdie was nearly pitched headlong from his seat. He threw a savage glance at the driver; but he dared not say anything—the two ladies were within hearing. Later on that evening Mary recalled this little incident—and seemed to understand.

Behold, at last, the sea!—a semi-circular bay sheltered by long black headlands; beyond that the wide grey plain, white-tipped with flashing and hurrying waves; and out towards the horizon a small but precipitous island, a heavy surge springing high along its southern crags. But she had time only for the briefest glance, for here was the village—her own village!—with its smithy, its schoolroom, its inn, its grocery store that was also a post-office, and thereafter a number of not very picturesque cottages scattered about amid bits of poor garden, just above the shore. Nay, at the same moment she caught sight of Lochgarra

House—her home that was to be: an odd-looking building that seemed half a jail and half a baronial castle, but was prettily situated among some larch-woods on a promontory on the other side of the bay. Of course they had driven through the little township almost directly; and now she could turn to the sea again—that looked strangely mournful and distant in the wan twilight.

"But where's the yacht?" she exclaimed.

"What yacht?" her companion asked, with some surprise.

"Why, the yacht I saw a minute ago—just before we came to the village: it was out yonder—close to the island——"

"Oh, nonsense, Mary!" said Kate Glendinning. "You may have seen a fishing-smack, or a lobster-boat—but a yacht at this time of the year!——"

"I declare to you I saw a yacht—for I noticed how white the sails were, even in the twilight," Mary insisted; and then she appealed to the factor: "Mr. Purdie, didn't you see a yacht out there a minute or two ago?"

"No, I did not," he made answer; and then he in his turn addressed the driver: "Did you, John?"

"No," said the driver, looking straight ahead of him, and with a curiously impassive expression of face—an expression of face that convinced Mr. Purdie, who was prone to suspicion, that the man had lied.

It was a kind of bewilderment to her, this taking possession: the going up the wide stone steps, the gazing round the lofty oak hall, the finding herself waited upon by those shy-eyed soft-spoken Highland maids. But when she was in the retirement of her own room, whither she had been accompanied by the faithful Kate, one thing stood out clear to her mind from amid all the long day's doings.

"Käthchen," said she—and she was pacing up and down the room—or going from window to window without looking out—as was some-times her habit when she was excited—"I mean to have my own way in this. It is not enough that the tax should be abolished—it is not enough. No doubt those poor people were saved from the risk of floods; but on the other hand the property was permanently improved; and it is monstrous that they should be expected to go on paying for ever. I tell you they have paid too much already; and I mean to see things made right. What do I care for Mr. Purdie, or the neighbouring landlords? If Mr. Purdie has any business to talk of when he comes along this evening—well, my little piece of business must take precedence. I am going to give Mr. Purdie the first of his instructions."

She paused for a second—and then she spoke with rather a proud and determined air: "Fifteen years of that tax to be remitted and returned!"

"Godiva!" said Käthchen, again; but there was not much sarcasm in her

smiling eyes.

CHAPTER II.
YOUNG DONALD.

"And if I am not the laird," said Miss Stanley, as the three of them took their places at table—for Mr. Purdie had accepted an invitation, and had come along from the inn to dine with the two young ladies—"if I am not the laird, I want to know who is the laird: I mean, I want to know all about my rival. What was it the stubborn old crofter called him? Young Donald—Young Ross of Heimra—well, tell me all about him, Mr. Purdie!"

But to Mary's surprise, the Little Red Dwarf remained sternly mute. Yet there was no one in the room besides themselves except the maid who was waiting at table—a tall and good-looking Highland lass, whose pretty way of speech, and gentle manner, and shy eyes had already made a pleasant impression on her young mistress. All the same, the factor remained silent until the girl had gone.

"I would just advise ye, Miss Stanley," said he, rather moderating his voice, which ordinarily was inclined to be aggressive and raucous, "I would just advise ye to have a care what ye say before these people. They're all in a pact; and they're sly and cunning—just beyond belief; ay, and ready to do ye a mischief, the thrawn ill-willed creatures!"

"Oh, Mr. Purdie!" Mary protested, in her good-humoured way, "you mustn't try to prejudice me like that! I have already had a little talk with Barbara; and I could not but think of what Dr. Johnson said—that every Highland girl is a gentlewoman."

"And not a word they utter is to be believed—no, not with a Bible in their hands," the factor went on, in spite of her remonstrance. "Miss Stanley, did ye hear me ask the driver as we came through the village if he had seen the yacht out by Heimra island—the yacht that ye saw with your own eyes? He said no—he had not seen it—and I knew by his face he was lying to me."

"But, Mr. Purdie," said Mary, again, "you did not see the yacht either. And I may have been mistaken."

"Ye were not mistaken," said the factor, with vicious emphasis. "For well I know what that was. That was nothing else than young Ross coming back from one of his smuggling expedeetions—the thieving, poaching scoundrel!—and little

thinking that I would be coming out to Lochgarra this very afternoon. But I'll be even with my gentleman yet!—for it's all done to thwart me—it's all done to thwart me——"

The factor's small clear eyes sparkled with malice; but he had perforce to cease speaking, for at this moment Barbara came into the room. When she had gone again, he resumed:

"I will just tell ye how I came to get on his track," Mr. Purdie said, with something of a triumphant air. "And first of all ye must understand, Miss Stanley, I take some little credit to myself for having routed out the illicit stills in this country-side; ay, I'm thinking they're pretty well cleared out now; indeed I'll undertake to say there's not a hidden worm-tub or a mash tun within twenty miles around. There was some trouble; oh, yes; for they're cunning creatures; and they stand by one another in lying and concealment; but I managed to get some information for the Preventive Staff all the same—from time to time, that was—and then I had a good knowledge o' the place—ye see, Miss Stanley, I was factor at Lochgarra before your uncle gave me back my post again; and so, with keeping the gaugers busy, we got at one after another of the black bothies, as they call them, until I doubt whether there's a *bothan dubh* between here and Strathcarron. Yes, I may admit I take some credit for that. I've heard folk maintain that speerits are a necessary of life in a bad climate like this; but what I say is, let people pay their rent before comforting themselves wi' drams. My business is with the rent. I'm not a doctor. Temperance, ay, and even total abstinence, is a fine thing for everybody."

"Won't you help yourself, Mr. Purdie?" said Kate Glendinning, with grave eyes, and she pushed the sherry decanter towards him. Mr. Purdie filled his glass—for the fifth time—and drained it off. Then he proceeded.

"However, this is my story. One day I had finished wi' my business here, and had set out to ride over to Ledmore, when the toothache came into my head just terrible, and I was like to be driven mad. I was passing Cruagan at the time—where ye spoke to James Macdonald, Miss Stanley—indeed, it was at James's house I stopped, and tied up the beast, and went in to see if I could get a drop of whiskey to put in the side of my cheek, for the pain was just fearful. Well, there was nobody in but James's old mother—an old, old woman—she could hardly move away from the fire—and says I, 'For God's sake, woman, give me some whiskey to drive away this pain.' Of course she declared and better declared there was none in the house; but at last, seeing I was near out o' my senses, she hobbled away and brought me—what do ye think?—a glass of brandy—and fine brandy, too. 'Hallo!' says I to the old cailleach, when the brandy had burned in my mouth for a while, and the pain was not so bad, 'where did ye get this fine stuff?' Would ye believe it, she declared and better declared that she found it!

'Find it, woman! Where did ye find it?' But no; that was all; she had found it. And then I began to think. Where was an old woman like that to get brandy? So says I all of a sudden, 'This is smuggled stuff. Ye need not deny it; and unless ye tell me instantly where ye got it, and how ye got it, the Supervisor will be here to-morrow morning, and in twenty-four hours ye'll be in Dingwall Jail!——'"

"Mr. Purdie," said Käthchen, interrupting—and with rather a cold manner—"was that your return for the old woman's kindness to you in your trouble?"

But he did not heed the taunt. He was exulting in his having trapped his enemy.

"She was frightened out of her wits, the wretched old creature. 'Donuil Og,' she says—Young Donald—it was from young Ross that she had got it. And now the case was clear enough! I had been suspecting something of the kind. And here was a fine come-down for the Rosses of Heimra;—the Rosses of Heimra, that in former days made such a flourish at the English court—dancing at Almacks, and skelping about wi' the Prince Regent; and now the last of the family come down to selling smuggled brandy to old women and a parcel of crofters and cottars! A fine way of earning a living! But it's all he's fit for—an idle ne'er-do-weel, that never did a turn of work in his life beyond poaching and thieving and stirring up ill-will behind one's back. But I'll be even with my gentleman! I'll have the Supervisor of Excise on to him; his fine little trips to the Channel Islands—I suppose it's the Channel Islands, where you get brandy for next to nothing—we'll soon put a stop to them; and when he finds himself before the Sheriff at Dingwall, he'll be singing another tune!"

A tap at the door—then Barbara entered; and the factor looked up quickly and suspiciously. But if the tall Highland lass had been listening her face said nothing.

"And the young man you speak of," Mary asked, "does he live all by himself—out on that island?"

"It's fit that he should live by himself," said Mr. Purdie, with his eyes beginning to twinkle fiercely again: for any reference to this young man seemed to completely turn his head. "He's nothing but a savage—brought up as a savage—amongst the rocks and crags—like a wild-goat—from his earliest years. What else could ye expect? There was his mother—a proud woman—proud and vindictive as ever was born—and she hears how her husband is gallivanting from this capital to that—throwing away his money on Italian countesses and riff-raff—indeed there was the one public scandal, but I cannot give ye particulars, Miss Stanley, the story is not for a young lady's ears at all: but the mother, she determines to go away and live in that island, and bring up her only child there; and there the two o' them live, like two savages, the laddie growing up as a wild goat would, clambering about the rocks and the shore and the hills. What could ye expect but

that he should turn out a poaching, thieving, smuggling rascal, especially with every man, woman, and child in the place—on the mainland here, I mean—ready to serve him and screen him? Truly it is a debasing thing to think of—such supersteetion; but these poor ignorant creatures—a name's enough for them—any Ross of Heimra, because he's a Ross of Heimra, is a little God Almighty to them; I think they would perjure their immortal souls for that impudent and brazen-faced young scoundrel out there. Brandy? Oh, ay, brandy! And I dare say he gets them tobacco, too; and makes a good profit on't; for what else can he live on? Heimra island is the last of all their possessions; if you go scattering your money among Italian countesses, you've got to cut up the estate, and fling it into the market, bit by bit, until you come to the final solid lump of it—which your uncle bought, Miss Stanley; and then the deserted wife, left to herself on that island out there, can live on whelks and mussels if she likes! Well, a fine lonely place to nurse pride! Plenty of time to think! The great estate gone—her husband at length dead and buried without ever having come near her—and this young whelp to look after—a wild goat among the rocks! No more grandeur now—though at times Lord This or Lord That, or even a Duke or Duchess, would come in their steam-yacht, or send her presents of game in the autumn—"

"Poor woman!" said Mary. "Is she out there still?"

"No, no—her troubles are over," said the factor, with some expression of relief. "There's one the less for these ignorant, supersteetious creatures hereabouts to fall down and worship, as if they were golden images. She died near a year ago; and would ye believe it, this son o' hers, instead of having her put into a Christian graveyard, had her buried on the western coast of the island, up on the top of the cliff, and there's a great white marble slab there, that ye might see for miles off. A nice kind of thing, that! Refusing Christian burial for his own mother! He's just a Pagan, neither more nor less—a wild savage—fearing neither God nor man—getting drunk every night, I'll be bound, on that smuggled brandy; and I'm no sure he would scruple to take your life if he found ye in a convenient place. It's a terrible thing to think of, a human being brought up like that, in a country of law and order and releegion. But I've no pity for him, not one jot! He and his have done me sufficient harm; but I'll be even with him yet—the cheat-the-gallows!"

Mary Stanley, though not much of a coward, seemed to shrink back a little in unconscious dismay. She had never seen such venomous rage working in any human creature's face; and it was rather an appalling kind of thing. But presently Mr. Purdie seemed to recollect himself; this exhibition of overmastering hate was not the best means of propitiating his new mistress; and so, making a determined effort to control himself (and helping himself to another glass of sherry at the same time) he proceeded to talk of business, with a certain constrained, matter-

of-fact air.

"You said before we came in to dinner, Miss Stanley," he began, in his slow and deliberate way, "that you wished fifteen years' of the dyke tax to be remitted and returned to the Cruagan crofters. Very well. Whatever is your pleasure. But have you considered what the result will be?"

"No," said Mary, "I do not wish to consider. I wish to have the thing done, because I think it is right."

"For one matter," said he, "they will take it, and not thank you."

"I do not care about that," she made answer. "We will see about the thanks, or no thanks, later on."

"But there's more," said the factor, rousing himself from his forced restraint of manner. "They'll just begin to think that the time for the universal getting of everything for nothing has come at last; and where will there be an end to their outrageous demands? The ignorant creatures!—they do not know what they want—they're like children crying for the moon; and they're encouraged by a set of agitators more ignorant than themselves—people in Parliament, and out of it, that never saw a peat-moss, and don't know the difference between a hog and a stirk—–"

"But wait a moment, Mr. Purdie," said she, with some touch of calm authority. "I can hardly tell you yet what I intend to do; I have all kinds of enquiries to make. But every one is well enough aware that, whatever the cause or causes may be, there is great distress among the crofters—great poverty—and, naturally, discontent; and when I hear of them almost starving for want of land—and such immense tracts given over to deer—-I know that a great wrong is being done. And that is not going to exist wherever I have a word to say."

"It cannot exist on this estate, Miss Stanley," the factor said, with confidence. "For we have not a single acre of forested land."

"What did I hear my brother say, then, about eleven stags in one season?" she demanded. "Why, he asked me to ask him up here this next autumn for the very purpose of going stalking!"

"Yes, yes, very likely," said the Little Red Dwarf, with the magnanimity born of superior knowledge. "The fact is that when the deer begin to get restless about the end of September and the beginning of October, a few stags and hinds come wandering on to our ground, between the Meall-na-Fearn and the Corrie-Bhreag mostly. But that is not forest; that is all under sheep; that belongs to Mr. Watson's sheep-farm: the stags the gentlemen get in the autumn are mere chance shots; we have not a bit of forested land. Indeed, Miss Stanley, ye'll rarely hear the crofters, in any part of the country, clamouring to have a deer forest split up amongst them; they know well enough what wretched and hopeless kind of stuff it is; they're wiser than the havering folk in Parliament. No, no; it's slices

off the big arable and pasture farms they want. And I can tell ye this," he went on, in quite a reasonable way (for young Ross of Heimra was off his mind now), "there's many a proprietor in the Highlands would be willing and even glad to break up his big sheep-farms into small holdings; but where is either landlord or tenant to find the money to pay for the housing, and steading, and fencing; and where is the new tenant to find stock? To change the crofters into small farmers would be a fine thing, no doubt—an excellent thing, a great reform; and it would pay the landlords well if it were practicable. But how is it practicable? Before the scheme would work, the crofter would have to be given land worth at least £20 a year; and where is the capital to come from for stock and steading?"

Mary listened, a little uneasily, but not much daunted; for this was merely the professional view; this was an advocacy of the existing state of things; and it was the existing state of things, in this small possession of hers, that she hoped to amend, if it was within her power. Nor could she argue with him, seeing she had no facts at her fingers' ends as yet, or, at least, none that she could rely on; for it was personal inquiry and observation that this young woman meant to trust.

"If they can make the small crofts pay——" said she, vaguely.

"But they cannot," said he, with south country bluntness. "The land is too poor; and there are too many of them wanting to live on it. Over there at Cruagan the crofters manage to earn a little money by serving as gillies in the autumn, and hiring their ponies to the sportsmen; and along the coast here they eke out a living with the fishing; but they would fairly starve on the crofts, if that was all. And then, besides the poor soil, I do believe they're the idlest and laziest creatures on God's earth! I'll undertake to say there has not been a boat put off from shore this last week past, though there must be plenty of stenlock in the bay——"

But here Käthchen struck in, a little indignantly. She had Highland blood in her veins; and she did not like to hear her countrymen and countrywomen traduced by an *Albannach*.

"Stenlock? You mean big lythe?" said she. "But you know very well, Mr. Purdie, there is no market for lythe. They're no use to send away. And even if they were—even if there were a market for them—how could the people get them sent? How often does the steamer call in here?"

"Oh, well, not very often at this time of the year," he said.

"But how often?" she persisted.

"Once in three weeks," said the factor.

And now it was Mary's turn to interpose, which she did eagerly and gladly, for she was ever on the alert for some actual and definite thing to tackle.

"Oh, really, Mr. Purdie, that is too bad! How can you expect them to be diligent with the fishing, if the steamer only calls in once in three weeks? That must be put right, and at once!" said she, in her generous ardour. "I will appeal

to the Government. I will appeal to the Treasury."

"You'd better appeal to Mr. MacBrayne," said Käthchen, drily; and therewithal that subject was laid aside for the moment.

Unfortunately this reasonable mood on the part of the Little Red Dwarf—if he could properly be called little whose great breadth of frame caused him to look like a compressed giant—did not last very long. His half-smothered hatred of the house of Heimra broke into flame again; and it is possible that a glass of whiskey which he took at the end of dinner, combined with the previous sherry, may have added fuel to the fire.

"I've warned ye, Miss Stanley, not to say a word about the Ross family, or what I've told ye, or about any of your plans, before that lass Barbara."

"Why all this mystery and suspicion!" said Mary, with a touch of impatience. "The girl seems a very obliging and good-natured girl indeed."

"She's a sister o' the head keeper," said the factor, with a watchful glance towards the door; "and that scoundrel of a young Ross is just hand-in-glove with every man-jack o' them. Do ye think they've got any eyes in their head if my young gentleman is after a salmon on the Garra, or lying in wait for a stag in the Corrie Bhreag? They would swear themselves black in the face that they did not see him if he was standing staring at them within twenty yards!"

"Very well, then; if you cannot trust the keepers, why not get others in their place?" she said, promptly. "Not that I care much about the game. I propose to give the crofters, big and little, free right to trap, or snare, or shoot all the hares and rabbits they can get hold of; I do not wish their little bits of holdings to be plundered by useless beasts. But grouse do no harm; and whether my own people come here next autumn, or whether I let the shooting, all the same there will be the employment of gillies' labour, and the hiring of the ponies."

"Yes!" said the factor. "The only money that ever finds its way into their pocket; and yet you'll find the idjuts declaring amongst themselves that not a single stranger should be allowed to come into the country!"

"That is foolishness," said Mary, calmly. "That is the idle talk of people who are poor and suffering, and do not know why they are poor and suffering. And I, for one, mean to take no heed of it; though, to be sure, it would be pleasanter to think I was a little more welcome. However, about those keepers: if they do not attend to their duty, if they allow poaching, why not get others in their place?"

"That would be worse," said Mr. Purdie, emphatically. "The strange keepers would be helpless; they would be outwitted at every turn. If ye knew the folk about here better, their clannishness, their cunning——"

"But are you sure this poaching goes on, Mr. Purdie," she interposed, "or is it only guesswork on your part? I presume Mr. Ross calls himself a gentleman."

"A gentleman!" said the factor, with that malevolent look coming into his

eyes again. "A gentleman that earns his living by selling smuggled brandy to a wheen crofters! A fine gentleman, that! I suppose when the Duke's yacht sails into the bay out there, my gentleman makes haste to hide away the bottles, and takes care to say nothing about the five shillings a gallon profit! Ay, ay, a remarkable change for the great family!—no playactoring about with the Prince Regent now, but selling contraband speerits to a lot of old women! And snuff, maybe? And tobacco? Penny packets!—a noble trade!" He laughed aloud, to conceal the vehemence of his hatred. "A fine come-down for high birth and ancient gentility—buried alive in an island, not daring to show his head even in Edinburgh, let alone in London, his only companions a wheen thieving gillies and scringe-net fishermen! But plenty of pride all the same. Oh, yes; pride and concealment, they go together in the Highland character: would ye believe it, when he denied his mother Christian burial, and made the grave up there on the hill, would he put up a respectable monument in the ordinary way, so that people could see it? No, no; it's on the sea-ward side of the island. Pride again, ye observe; a scorn of the common people; pride and concealment together."

"I should think it was a great deal more likely," said Käthchen, with some touch of anger, "that the mother chose where her own grave was to be." But Mary, with thoughtful eyes, only said: "Poor woman!"

"Ay, ay, pride enough," continued Mr. Purdie, in a more triumphant strain. "But their pride had a famous fall before your uncle and myself were done with them——"

At this Mary started somewhat.

"My uncle?" said she. "Why, what cause of offence could there have been between him and them? What injury could they possibly have done him?"

"Injury? Plenty of injury: in stirring up ill-will and rebellion among the tenants. It's yourself, Miss Stanley, will find that out ere long; oh, yes, wait till ye come to have dealings with these people, ye'll find out what they are, I'm thinking! A stubborn and stiff-necked race; and cunning as the very mischief; and revengeful and dark. But we broke their obstinacy that time!" He laughed again: a malignant laugh.

"I saw ye noticed it, Miss Stanley, as we came along this afternoon—the dried-up place that was once a loch, and the pile of stones——"

She remembered well enough; and also she recollected the vicious slash the driver had made at his horses when the factor was grinningly answering her question.

"Yes, but I did not quite understand what it meant," said she.

"I'll just tell ye."

Mr. Purdie poured himself out a little drop of whiskey—a very little drop—in an inadvertent way. There was quite a happy look on his face when he began

his tale.

"Ay; it's a fine story when people of obstinate nature meet their match; and your uncle, Miss Stanley, could hold his own—when there was proper counsel behind his back, if I may say so. And what had Mrs. Ross and her son to do with anything on the land? Heimra island out there had been reserved for them all the way through, as the estate was going bit by bit; and when Lochgarra went as well, there was still the island to preserve the name of the family, as it were. And was not that enough? What did they want—what could any one want—with Loch Heimra and Castle Heimra, when they had been sold into other hands? If they wanted the name kept in perpetuity, there was the island—which undoubtedly belonged to the Rosses; but the loch and the castle on the mainland, they were gone; they had been sold, given up, cut adrift. And so, says your uncle, 'we'll cut adrift the name too. They have their Heimra Island; that is sufficient: the loch and the castle are mine, and that must be understood by all and sundry.' Natural, quite natural. Would ye have people giving themselves a title from things not belonging to them at all, but to you? And what was the castle but a heap of old stones, with about six or seven hundred years of infamy, and bloodshed, and cruelty attached to it? Ay; they could show ye a red patch on the earthen floor of the dungeon that was never dry summer or winter. Many's the queer thing took place in that stronghold in the old days. 'Well, well,' says your uncle, 'if they will call themselves "of Heimra," let it be of Heimra Island. The loch and the castle are not theirs, but mine; and, being mine, I am going to give my own name to them. Loch Stanley—Castle Stanley—that's what they are to be. I'm not going to have strangers calling themselves after my property. Let them keep the island if they like——"

"Why, what did it matter?" said Mary. "They did not claim either the castle or the loch. It was merely the old association—the historical association; and what harm did that do to any one? And an interesting place like that, that has been in possession of the same family for centuries——"

"But, surely, a man has the right to do what he likes with his own?" said the Troich Bheag Dhearg, with the corners of his mouth drawn down, and his small eyes looking forth a challenge. "I can tell ye, Miss Stanley, your uncle was a man not to thwarted——"

"I dare say!" said Mary, coldly.

"Castle Stanley—Loch Stanley—that was now established; let them take their title from what belonged to them, which was the island. Ay; but do ye think the people about here would follow the change?" Mr. Purdie went on, with something more of vindictiveness coming into his tone. "Would they? Not one o' them, the stubborn deevils! There was not an old bedridden woman, there was not a laddie on his way to school, ye could get to say 'Castle Stanley' or

'Loch Stanley'; it was Loch Heimra and Castle Heimra from every one; and they held on to it as if it had been the Westminster Confession of Faith—the dour and bigoted animals they are! Even the very gamekeepers, that ye might think would be afraid o' losing their situation, they were just like the rest, though they had their plausible and cunning excuses. 'You see, Mr. Stanley,' they would say, 'if we tell the gillies about Castle Stanley they will think it is Lochgarra House we mean; and if we send them to Loch Stanley, they will be going down to the seashore.' But well I know who was at the back of all their stubbornness," the factor continued, with a scowling face. "Well I know: it was that idling, mischievous, thrawn-natured, impudent ne'er-do-weel, egging them on, and egging them on, and keeping himself in the background all the time. The dignity of his family! I suppose that was what he was after—the old castle and the old name; so that strangers might think that his mother and he had still property on the mainland! And I warned your uncle about it. I warned him. I told him that as long as that graceless scoundrel was in the neighbourhood there would be nothing but spite and opposition on the part of the tenantry. 'Well, then,' said he, 'for spite there will be spite, if it comes to that!' Miss Stanley, your uncle was not a man to be defied."

"I know," said Mary, with downcast face: she foresaw what was coming—and did not at all share in the savage glee the factor was beginning to betray.

"'Give them time, Mr. Purdie,' says he. 'If I buy a dog, or a horse, or a house, I can call it by what name I please; and so I can with a piece of water and an old ruin. But not too much time, Mr. Purdie—not too much time. If they have a will of their own, so have I. If there's to be neither Loch Stanley nor Castle Stanley, I'll make pretty well sure there will be neither Loch Heimra nor Castle Heimra. I'll put an end to those Rosses calling themself after any part of my property. I'll soon wipe out the last trace of them from the mainland, anyway; and they're welcome to the island out there, for anything I mind. The seven centuries of history can follow them across the water; I've no room for such things on my estate.' And that's just how it came about, Miss Stanley. Not one creature in the whole of the district but would stick to the old name; crofter, cottar, shepherd, fisher-laddie, they were all alike. There was no help for it; Your uncle was a determined man. Anyone that contended with him was bound to get the worst of it; and here he was dealing with his own. 'Very well,' said he, 'if there's to be no Castle Stanley, I'll take care there shall be no Castle Heimra. Mr. Purdie, get the loch drained of its last drop of water, and have every stone of the useless old ruin hauled to the ground!' And that's precisely what ye saw this afternoon, Miss Stanley!"

Her reply somewhat astonished the vain-glorious factor, who had perhaps been expecting approval.

"It was shamelessly done!" said she—but as if she were not addressing him

at all.

And then she rose, and Kate Glendinning rose also; so that Mr. Purdie practically found himself dismissed—or rather he dismissed himself, pleading that it was late. He made some appointment for the next morning, and presently left: no doubt glad enough to get a chance of lighting his pipe and having a comfortable smoke on his way home to the inn.

When the two girls went into the drawing-room—which was a large hexagonal room in the tower, with windows looking north, west, and south—they found that the lamps had not yet been brought in, and also perceived, to their surprise, that the night outside had cleared and was now brilliant with its thousands of throbbing stars. They went to one of the windows. The heavily-moaning sea was hardly visible, but the heavens were extraordinarily lustrous; they were even aware of a shimmer of light on the grey stone terrace without: perhaps it was from the gleaming belt of Orion that hung above a dark headland jutting out towards the west; while there, also, was the still more fiery Sirius, that burned and palpitated behind the black birch-woods in the south. And then they turned to seek the island of Heimra—out there on the mystic and sombre plain—under that far-trembling and shining canopy.

"Well," said Käthchen, with some vehemence of indignation (for her Highland blood had mounted to her head) "I know this, Mary: scapegrace or no scapegrace, if I were the young fellow living out there, I know what I should do—I would kill that factor! Isn't it perfectly clear it was he who goaded your uncle into pulling down the old castle and draining the loch?"

Mary was silent for a second or two. Then she said, in an absent kind of way—

"There are wrongs and injuries done that can never be undone. I can never rebuild Castle Heimra."

CHAPTER III.

THE CAVE OF THE CROWING COCK.

Mary Stanley's eyes had not deceived her; the boat of which she had caught a momentary glimpse was a smart little yawl of twenty tons or so, that was making in for Heimra Island; and there were three men on deck—two redcaps forward, the master at the helm. This last was a young fellow of about six and twenty,

a little, not much, over middle height, of somewhat pale complexion, and with singularly dark eyes and hair. The curious thing was this: though you could not say that any of his features were particularly fine (except, perhaps, his coal-black eyes, which were clearly capable of flame, if the occasion demanded) the general effect of them was striking; they seemed to convey an impression of strength—of a certain lazy audacity of strength; while the forehead revealed by the peaked cap being pushed carelessly backward denoted at once intelligence and resolution. But indeed at this moment the young man's attitude was one of merely quiescent indifference—though there was an occasional quick scrutiny of the neighbouring coast; all the graver perils of the voyage were over; they were running easily before a steady wind; and they would get safely to their anchorage ere the light had wholly died out of the western skies.

"Down foresail!" he called to the men. For now they were passing a headland that formed one of two arms encircling a sheltered little bay—a strangely silent and solitary-looking place it seemed in this mysterious light. Sterile, too; tumbled masses of rock with hardly a scrap of vegetation on them; a few clumps of birches here and there; an occasional dark green pine higher up the cliffs. But at all events it was quiet and still; the water lapped clear and crisp along the shingle; while the murmur of the outer sea was still everywhere around, and also, on the northern side of the bay, there was a long out-jutting reef where there was a continuous surge of white foam over the saw-toothed edge.

"Down jib!" The sound of a human voice was so strange in this solitude—far stranger than the mere rattle of blocks and tackle.

"Main sheet!"

The two men came aft: the steersman jammed down his helm; the vessel slowly rounded into the wind—the boom being hauled in meanwhile—the mainsail flapping and shivering in the light breeze.

"Stand by to let go!" was the next order; and the hands went forward again—the vessel gradually losing the way that was on her, until she seemed absolutely motionless.

"Let go!"

There was a splash and a roar that sent a thousand shuddering echoes through the silence. A heron uttered a hoarse croak and rose on heavy and slow-moving wings to make for some distant shelter. A pair of dunlins—unseen in the dusk—added their shrill piping cry. Then all was still again, save for the continual moaning of the surge on the distant reef.

"Give a haul at the topping-lift, lads!" This was the final direction; and then, with another keen look round the little bay, young Ross of Heimra—or Donuil Og Vich Iain Vich Ruari, as some were proud to call him—went down into the cabin to put a few things together before going ashore.

Of the two sailors now left on the deck one was a powerfully built man of about thirty, with a close-clipped brown beard, bushy brown eyebrows, and eyes of a clear Celtic grey. His name was Kenneth Macleod; but he was more generally known as *Coinneach Breac*—that is to say, Kenneth of the small-pox marks. His companion was younger than himself—a lad of twenty or two-and-twenty; long and loutish of figure; but with a pleasant expression of face. This was Malcolm, or rather, Calum, as they called him. Probably he had some other name; but it was never heard of; the long, lumpish, heavily-shouldered lad was simply known throughout this neighbourhood as Calum, or Calum-a-bhata, Calum of the Boat.

"It is I who will have a sound sleep this night," said he, in Gaelic, as he stretched his hands above his head and yawned.

"And I, too, when the work is over," said his neighbour, pulling out a short black pipe. "And now you see what it is to have many friends. Oh, I know you, Calum; you are a young lad: and you are strong: you think of nothing but fighting, like the other young lads. But let me tell you this, Calum; it is not a good thing, fighting and quarrelling, and making enemies; it is easier to make enemies than to make friends: and many times you will be sorry when it is too late, and when that has been put wrong which you cannot put right. For you know what the wise man of Islay said. Calum; he said—'*He who killed his mother a few moments ago would fain have her alive now!*"

"But who was talking about fighting, Coinneach—tell me that?" said the youth, angrily.

"I was giving you advice, Calum, my son," said Coinneach—lighting his pipe and pulling away, though there appeared to be very little tobacco inside. "I was telling you that it was a good thing to have many friends, as the master has. Oh, he is the one to make friends, and no doubt about that! For look you at this, Calum; you know what is stowed in the cabin; and here we come into the bay, without waiting for the night at all, and just as if there was nothing on board but a few tins of meat for our own use and a loaf or two. That is the wisdom of having many friends, as I am telling you. Why, if there was any one after us, if there was any one wishing to put trouble upon us, do you know what would have happened this evening?—there would have been a bonfire on every headland between Ru Gobhar and the Black Bay. And that is what I tell you, Calum, that it is a very good thing to have plenty of friends ashore, who are as your own kinspeople to you, and will come between you and the stranger, and will see that the stranger does not harm you. The master, he is the one to make friends with old and young; and believe me as far as that goes, Calum. Ay, you are a young lad; and you do not know what the world is; and you do not know what it is to go sailing with a hard skipper; and if you are an apprentice, a bucket of water in your bunk to wake you in the morning. But the master—oh, well,

now, look at this: if there is bad weather, and there is something difficult to be done, and you do it smartly, why, then he calls out to you 'Fhir mo chridhe!'[#] and that is a far more welcome thing to you than cursing and swearing; it is a far more welcome thing, and a good thing to comfort you." He shook the ashes out of his pipe, and put it in his pocket. "Well, now, see to the tackle, Calum, and we'll get the boat hoisted out, for the master will be going ashore."

[#] *Fhir mo chridhe!*—Man of my heart!

The boat—a twelve-footer or thereabouts—had been stowed on deck; but they soon had her launched over the side, and everything put ship-shape and in readiness. And presently the young man who had gone down into the cabin reappeared again; he threw some things into the boat, and took his place in the stern-sheets; the men shoved off, and presently they were well on their way to the beach, where there was a rudely-formed slip. By this time the streaks of lemon-hued light that had appeared in the west were dying away; darkness was coming over land and sea; already, in the east, one or two stars were visible between the thinning and breaking clouds. Young Ross landed at the slip, and made his way up to a level plateau on which stood a long, rambling, one-storeyed building mostly of timber: a sort of bungalow, with a slated porch, and with some little pretence of a garden round it, though at this time of the year nothing, of course, was visible in it but a few leafless bushes. At the door stood an old woman neatly and smartly dressed, whose eyes were still expressive enough to show how pleased she was.

"Good evening to you, Martha," said he in Gaelic, "and I hope you are well."

"Indeed I am all the better for seeing you back, sir," replied the old woman, with many smiles. "The house is no house at all when you are away."

She followed him obsequiously into the narrow hall. He only glanced at the newspapers and letters on the table. But there was something else there—a brace of grouse.

"Will I cook one of the birds for Mr. Ross's dinner?" she asked, her Highland politeness causing her to address him in the third person.

A quick frown came over his face.

"Who brought these here?" he demanded.

"Oh, well—they were left," said old Martha, evasively.

"Yes, yes, left; but who left them?" he asked again.

"Oh, well; maybe it was the Lochgarra keepers," said she.

"The keepers? Nonsense!" he said angrily. "Do you tell me the keepers

would shoot grouse at this time of the year, when the birds have paired, and soon will be nesting? It was Gillie Ciotach,[#] I'll be bound. Now you will tell the Gillie Ciotach, Martha, that if he does not stop his tricks I will have him sent across the land to go before the Sheriff at Dingwall; and how will he like that?"

[#] *Gillie Ciotach*—the left-handed young man.

"Oh, well, indeed, sir," said Martha, in a deprecating way, "the poor young lad meant no harm. He was coming over here anyway, because he lost a dog, and he was wishing to find the dog."

At this the young master burst out laughing.

"The Gillie Ciotach is an excellent one for lies, and that is certain!" said he. "His dog? And how could his dog swim across from Lochgarra to Eilean Heimra? Tell Gillie Ciotach from me that when he comes over here he may look after the lobsters, but he will be better not to tell lies about a dog, and also he will do well to leave the Lochgarra grouse alone. And now, Martha, if there is any dinner for me, let me have it at once; for I am going back to the yacht by-and-bye."

He went into the simply-furnished dining-room, where there was a lamp on the table and likewise a magnificent peat-fire ablaze in the big iron grate—a welcome change from the little stove in the cabin of the *Sirène*. He had brought his letters with him in his hand. He drew in a wickerwork lounging-chair towards the fireplace, and idly began to tear the envelopes open: here were tidings, various hushed voices, as it were, from the busy world that seemed so distant to him, living in these remote solitudes. It is true he had been away for a time from Eilean Heimra; but during that interval there had not been much of human companionship for him; nay, there was for the most part a greater loneliness than ever, especially when he took his watch on deck at night, sending the two men below for much-needed rest. Indeed these letters and newspapers seemed almost to make a stir and noise!—so used had he been to silence and the abstraction of his own thoughts.

Meanwhile Coinneach and Calum had returned to the yacht, had got some supper, and were now up at the bow, contemplatively smoking, and chatting to each other in their native tongue. Night had fallen; but the skies were becoming clearer and more clear; the starlit heavens were gradually revealing themselves. There was not a sound—since the rattle of the anchor had disturbed the quietude of the little bay.

"The work is not over yet," Coinneach was saying, in somewhat low tones, "and it is the part of the work that I have no liking for. Anything else I shrink not

back from, when the master wishes; he is the one to follow, and I will go with him wherever he desires; and that in safety, too—for who knows the navigation like himself, yes, and speaking every language that is known upon the earth? I will go with him wherever he wishes; I will do whatever he wishes. But, Calum, I have no liking for the Uamh coilich na glaodhaich."[#]

[#] *Uamh coilich na glaodhaich*—The Cave of the Crowing Cock.

"Nor I, Coinneach," said his companion. "Especially in the night-time."

"Day-time or night-time: what is the difference in the Uamh coilich na glaodhaich, when it is so dark that no man has ever been to the end of it, or knows to what it leads? Nor is any man likely to try to discover, since the one that went on and on, until he heard a cock crowing. Oh, God, that must have been a terrible thing, to be so near the edge of another world that you could hear a cock crowing there. And if the people had caught him and kept him—they would have taken him away to the place where the piper went when he played Cha till mi tuilich;[#] and that is a tale that is told of many caves; and it may be this, Calum, that all the great caves lead to that other world; but who can tell about such fearful things? A cock crowing—that is nothing—when you are in your own home, with the daylight around you; but to hear the crowing of a cock after you have gone away into the earth, then that tells you of wonderful things, for you know the saying, '*Deep is the low of a cow upon strange pasture.*' Well, well, what the master says must be done; but many's the time I am wishing that when the kegs have to be hidden, it was some other place we had for the hiding of them than the Cave of the Crowing Cock."

[#] *Cha till mi tuilich*—I shall never more return.

"Coinneach," said the lad, and he also spoke in a hushed kind of way, "how long ago is it since that one heard the cock crowing?"

"How long? Who can answer such questions? Can you tell me when the Macarthurs came into the world? For you have heard the saying, Calum: '*The hills and the streams and the Macalpines came together; but who can say when the Macarthurs came?*' It is a long time ago: it is not any use asking. Ay, and there was something before all of these." He paused for a second: then he said darkly—"That was—that was when the Woman was in these islands."

"What woman?" said Calum, with the eager curiosity of youth.

But Coinneach seemed disinclined to answer.

"Have you not heard?" said he. "But it is wise not to speak of such things."

"What woman was that, Coinneach?" his companion persisted, fixing his eyes on Coinneach's face, that was full of a sombre meditation.

"Did you never hear of her—the Woman that was here before there were any people in these islands or in the mainland either? But it is not prudent to speak."

"Who was she, Coinneach?" said Calum. "Surely she cannot hurt you if she was dead these many thousands of years?"

"Do not say that," he responded rather gloomily. "Who can tell?—for there are strange things. You know I am not a coward, Calum."

"That is what I know well!" said Calum, confidently. "How many days is it since you stood up against the French skipper, and he with four of them at his back?"

"Ay, but there are things that are more terrible than blows; and it is of these that I am afraid. Or perhaps not quite afraid; but I think. And that is the difference between one man and another man, Calum. There is always ill-luck happening; but one man will suffer it and not inquire, while the other man will ask what caused it or who it was that did him the harm. And if it is not always prudent to speak of such affairs, at least the truth is the safest: you know the saying '*Speak the truth as if you were in the presence of kings.*' And now I will tell you this, Calum, of a strange thing that happened to me when I was a boy."

He abated his voice, as if afraid of being overheard. Calum's eyes 'glowered' in the dusk.

"I had been over to Ru-Gobhar, where I had a sister married then; and I was returning home. It was a moonlight night; the sea very calm; there was no wind. Well, when I was at the highest point of the road, above the Black Bay, do you know what happened? But I will tell you what happened. And this is what I saw: the sea began to move, although there was not a breath of wind, and there was no noise either; only it moved and heaved in a terrible way; and there was a line of white, but it was more like white fire than white foam, all along the land, from Ru-Gobhar in to Minard, and all round the headlands to where I was. For I was standing looking, and very much afraid to see so strange a thing; and then this is what happened: I got to know that there was someone behind me; and then I got to know it was the Woman, and I durst not look round, for I was shaking with terror. May you never have such an experience in your life, Calum, as was mine that night. I knew that she had come across the sea, from the islands, noticing that I was alone and no one to help me; and now I knew that she was not only behind me, but in front of me, and all around me, though I could not see

anything, for I was in such terror. She did not speak to me, nor touch me; but I felt myself choking at the throat as if she had a grip of me; and I gave myself up for dead—for I could not run away from her—and I knew it was the Woman who had a grip of my throat. Well, well, I gave myself up for dead; but all of a sudden it entered my mind that she would carry me away out to the islands and bury me in one of the caves; and with that I made a great effort, and cried out 'God on the cross, save me, save me!' That was the last I knew of it; when I came to myself I was lying in the road, cold as a stone; and the sea was quite smooth again. May you never have an experience like my experience of that night, Calurn!"

Calum was silent for a little while. Then he said, slowly—

"Coinneach, do you suppose the Woman came from the cave where the cock was heard crowing?"

"How can I tell?" was the answer. "Perhaps I have said too much. But what I have said to you, that is the least part of what happened to me that night, for it is not to be spoken of." And then he rose; and put his pipe in his pocket. "Come, Calum, my son, we must take the boat ashore now, for the master will be coming down to the slip. But do not you speak of such things as I have told you; for it is not good to speak of them."

And to this Calum merely replied—

"What the master wishes is enough for you and me, Coinneach; but I would rather not be going into the Uamh coilich na glaodhaich this night."

They rowed the boat in to the shore—they could see their way well enough, for now the heavens were quite clear, and a universe of white worlds was shining down on them; and there they ran her bow into the soft seaweed by the side of the slip. They had not long to wait. There was a sound of footsteps on the gravel-path; then from out of the shadow emerged a figure into the open space above the beach; they knew who this was. Young Ross of Heimra seemed to be in no great hurry; his hands were in his pockets; he came down towards the boat with long, lounging, leisurely strides; and he was whistling a gay air that was unfamiliar to them—for Coinneach and Calum could hardly be expected to recognise '*La Noce de Jeanne*.'

"It is the master who is not afraid of anything," said the elder of the two men, under his breath.

"Indeed you may say that," rejoined Calum, as he, too, put his pipe in his pocket. "I think he would face old Donas[#] himself, and not ask for any allowance."

[#] *Donas*—the Devil.

Young Ross came down the beach.

"Lend a hand here, lads," he sung out, "and we'll take the other boat with us. Maybe we'll be able to do it in one trip; and I'm sure it's a good long sleep both of you will be wanting this night."

They speedily had the second boat launched and shoved along to the slip; then they attached the painter to the one in which they had come ashore; and presently they were pulling both boats quietly out to the *Sirène*. The gangway was open. Ross and the elder of the two men stepped on board; and proceeded to remove the skylight of the chief cabin—Calum securing the boats by the side of the yacht. And then began the final business of the expedition—the hoisting up on deck and the transferring to the boats alongside of a considerable number of kegs that were small enough to be handled with comparative ease. Young Ross, who was down in the cabin, worked just like the others: slim as his figure seemed, there was plenty of strength about his arms and shoulders. There was no lamp in the cabin, nor yet on deck; nor was there need of any; the black figures labouring away there did very well with the faint illumination shed by those thousands of tremulous stars. And in course of time the operation was complete; the casks that had been skilfully stowed in the main cabin of the *Sirène* were now ranged as tightly as might be in the boats alongside; then the men stepped in and took to the oars; while the young master went to the tiller. Calum had been told to put a couple of candles in his pocket; and he was not likely to forget that—for they were going to the Cave of the Crowing Cock.

It was a long and laborious pull—the boat astern acting as a heavy drag; moreover, even with this clear starlight, they dared not go anywhere near that saw-toothed reef that guarded the next small bay whither they were bound. They could hear each successive thud of the surge, and the long receding roar; and they could even descry in a kind of way the line of white foam that boiled and churned incessantly along the almost invisible rocks. But once they were round this dangerous point—giving it a significantly wide berth—they found themselves in smooth water again. Not a word was spoken. The two men toiled away at the oars—most likely thinking of the welcome sleep awaiting them when all was done. The land ahead seemed to grow darker as they approached, even as the black precipitous cliffs appeared to soar higher and higher into the clear starlit skies. Then there was a whispering of water: the beach was near. Young Ross bade them pull more gently now: he was trying to make out the most suitable landing-place—in amongst those mysterious shadows.

Eventually the two boats were grounded, and dragged up to be secure from the tide; while the work of getting the kegs out began.

"Calum," said the young master, "take the candles now and get them lighted; and mind you do not light them until you are well inside the cave."

Calum appeared to receive this commission very unwillingly; at all events he hesitated.

"It is asking for your pardon I am, sir," said he; "but—I have brought a pistol with me."

"A pistol? And why so?" said Donald Ross.

"It is the pistol that I would like to be firing into the cave," said Calum, rather timidly, "before any of us went into it."

"And what is your reason for that, Calum?"

Calum rather hung his head; but he said all the same—

"If there would be wild beasts in the cave, it will scare them before we go in."

"Wild beasts? And what wild beasts are there in Eilean Heimra?" Then the young man laughed. "Calum, is it a badger, or a wild cat, or an otter that you fear? Or is it not rather the Dark Person you are afraid of, who used to come every night to Lochgarra to ask Mr. Stanley if he was not ready yet? Did you believe that story, Calum; and did you not think the Dark Person very foolish to talk Gaelic to Mr. Stanley, when he was not understanding a word of it?"

Calum did not answer: he was shamefacedly awaiting permission to fire into that dreaded place.

"Well, well, Calum," young Ross said, good-naturedly, "you are not long from your mother's apron-string: if you are afraid, give me the candles, and keep the pistol in your pocket. Give me the candles—and lend Coinneach here a hand with the kegs."

But at this Calum raised his head.

"Indeed that will I not do," said he, "for it is not Mr. Ross that must go first into the cave, when I am here, or when Coinneach is here. If I am not to fire the pistol, then I will not fire the pistol. But it's myself that am going to light the candles in the cave."

"And a lucifer-match, Calum," said the young master, turning away from him, "will frighten wild beasts as well as any pistol—besides making a great deal less noise."

The Uamh coilich na glaodhaich was only a few yards distant; but the entrance to it was concealed by a huge mass—a perpendicular pinnacle—of rock; and when Calum had got behind this gigantic natural screen, there were no more cheerful stars to guide him; he was confronted by darkness and unknown terrors. And yet he scrupulously obeyed his instructions. His trembling fingers, it is true, grasped the pistol, but he kept it in his pocket nevertheless; while with his left hand he groped his way well into the cave—dreading at every moment to see two fiery eyes glaring on him—before he set to work to light the candles. And how feeble and ineffectual were the small red flames in this vast cavern! Their flicker-

ing hardly showed the roof at all; but it was not the roof that Calum was regarding; it was the far-reaching and black abyss in front of him, that led—whither? Perhaps the inhabitants of that other world could see better than himself, and were now regarding him?—that other world in which the dawn began in the middle of the night, and where there were cocks crowing when all the natural universe was asleep. He had to fasten each lighted candle into the neck of a bottle that had been left there for the purpose; but all the while he did so he was staring into that vague and awful space that the feeble, dull red glow did not seem to penetrate at all—staring into it as if he expected to find two white eyes and a ghastly countenance suddenly become visible. And then again, when he had placed the bottles on a shelf of rock that ran along one side of the cave, a few feet from the ground, he did not instantly turn and go. He retreated backward—cautiously, for the shelving shingle was loose and slippery—keeping his face towards that hollow darkness, so that he might guard himself against any strange thing, or be warned by hearing any strange noise. Then a colder stirring of air told him that he was outside; he made his way past the over-looming rock and into the clear star-light again; and with a beating heart—but a thankful heart withal—he went quickly along the beach and rejoined his companions.

By this time the kegs had been all got out; so that in case of any sudden danger, of which they appeared to have but little dread, the three of them could have jumped into one of the boats and made off. There remained, therefore, only the task of carrying along the casks and stowing them in the cave; and this work young Ross left to the two men. He remained on watch—if watch were needed—pacing up and down the shingle, looking at the far resplendent heavens and the darker sea, and listening to the continuous murmur of the distant surf. He had lit his pipe, too; he did not seem to have much apprehension of being interfered with. And indeed all went well; and in due course of time the two dark figures came along the beach with the intelligence that all the kegs had been safely stowed, and that they were now ready to row the master back to his own home.

"Coinneach," said Donald Ross, seated at the helm, when they were some way out on the black and tumbling water, that glanced and quivered here and there with the reflections of the stars, "they were telling me before we left in the yacht that the lady was shortly coming to Lochgarra House."

"And indeed I heard the same thing myself," said Coinneach, "and they were making ready at the big house for the coming of the Englishwoman."[#]

[#] *Ban-sassunnach* was the term he used. But young Ross had referred to her as *Baintighearna*, or lady-proprietor—a much more respectful appellation.

"And I have no doubt," the master continued, "that Purdie will come with her, to show her the property, and introduce her to the people."

"The Little Red Dwarf," said Coinneach; and then he muttered to himself: "It is the lowermost floor of hell that I am wishing for him, and for every one of his accursed house!"

Young Ross of Heimra took no notice of this pious ejaculation.

"Now listen," said he. "This is what I wish to say to you, Coinneach. When Purdie comes to Lochgarra with the lady who is the new proprietor, that would be a very good time indeed for widow Mac Vean to ask them to give her a cow in place of the one that she lost in the Meall-na-Fearn bog. Maybe they will give the poor woman a cow; and she will pay them back bit by bit if they allow her time."

"It is of no use asking the Little Red Dwarf for anything," said Coinneach, sullenly. "There is no goodwill in his heart towards the people. Nor is there any goodwill in their hearts towards him—God forbid that there should be any such thing. Indeed, now, there is something I could say about the Little Red Dwarf—But it does not serve to talk."

"What were you going to say, Coinneach?" the young master demanded—knowing Coinneach's ways.

"Oh, perhaps Mr. Ross would not like to hear," said Coinneach, evasively.

"Indeed, but I wish to hear. Now what is it you have to tell me about the Troich Bheag Dhearg?"

Coinneach was silent for a second or two.

"Well," said he, slowly, "it was some of the young lads they were saying that it only wanted a word from Mr. Ross. Yes; they were saying that. It was just a word from Mr. Ross; and they would see that the Little Red Devil did not trouble anyone any more, neither in this nor in any other country."

"Oh, indeed," said the master, placidly. "Then it is a murder the Gillie Ciotach and the rest of them are for planning—is that what you have to tell me?"

"I would not give a thing a bad name," said Coinneach, as he laboured at the oar. "No, no; they were not talking of a murder, or any bad thing like that. But—but there might be an accident; and a very good thing, too, if an accident happened to the Little Red Dwarf!"

"And what kind of an accident?"

"Oh well," said Coinneach, looking away out to the horizon as if the suggestion might come from any quarter. "Maybe he would be riding home on a dark night; and maybe there might be a wire stretched across the road; and if he was to break his neck, who could help that? And it is I who would laugh to hear that he had broken his neck; indeed I would laugh!" said Coinneach, though there was little laughter in his sombre tones.

"And that is what you call an accident, Coinneach? It is an accident that might end in your finding yourself with a hempen collar round your neck. And what was it set the young men talking like that?"

"Oh well, indeed, they were talking about the draining of the loch and the pulling down of Castle Heimra; and they were saying that nowadays the law was being altered by the people themselves, and that right and justice could be done without waiting for the courts. They were saying that. And they were saying that we have come into a new time, which is the truth. They were speaking of the people over there in the Lews; and the last that was heard was that the people would not wait any longer for more pasture to be given them; they would not wait for the courts; they were going to take the deer-forest to themselves, and hamstring every one of the stags—them that they could not eat; and they had got their tents and baggage ready, to go into the forest and take possession. In former times they would not have dared to do so; but times are different now; and people have not to wait for justice; it is they themselves who must say what is right, whether about the Little Red Dwarf, or anything else. They were telling me that. And who was to put the crofters and cottars out of the deer-forest over there in the Lews? Not all the policemen in the island: there are not enough. And if they were to send soldiers, the Queen's soldiers dare not fire on the Queen's subjects, or the officer would be hanged. That was what they were telling me."

"Coinneach," said the young master, "if the Gillie Ciotach and his companions are talking like that, they will be getting themselves into trouble one of these days. They'd better let the Little Red Dwarf alone; for one thing, I dare say he is safe enough; the devil looks after his own brats. But do not forget what I am telling you now—about Mrs. Mac Vean. Old Martha will be wanting you to go over to the mainland to-morrow; and when you are there, you can seek out Mrs. Mac Vean, and bid her tell the factor how her cow was lost in the Meall-na-Fearn bog. She can do no harm by asking."

"It's very little she will get from the Troich Bheag Dhearg," said Coinneach, gloomily, "whether by asking or any other way."

At last the long pull was over; and the men, having landed the master at the slip, set out again for the yacht. Young Ross of Heimra went up to the house. But before going in, he paused at the porch, to have a final look at the wonderful glories of that vast firmament—the throbbing Sirius low down in the south, the gleaming belt and sword of Orion, the powdered diamond-dust of the Pleiades, the jewelled head of Medusa, Cassiopeia's silver throne. And perhaps he was not thinking so much of those distant and shining worlds as of her who had first taught him their various names—of the worse than widowed woman who had shut herself up here in proud isolation, himself her only care. Well, she was at peace now; her wrongs and sufferings and bitter memories all come to an end;

surely there was nothing but quiet and sweet slumber around that white gravestone, far up there on the top of the cliff, overlooking the wide and lonely western seas.

CHAPTER IV.
THE BAINTIGHEARNA.

Next morning Mary went eagerly and joyously to the window, for here indeed was a welcome change: no more louring heavens and streaming roads, but a vast expanse of wind-driven sea, blue as the very heart of a sapphire, and yet with innumerable sudden flashes of white from the crest of its swift-hurrying waves. The sky cloudless; the fresh breeze blowing straight in from the Atlantic; the world all shining around her; even those long spurs and headlands, sterile as they were, looked quite cheerful in the prevailing sunlight. And out yonder, too, was the island of Heimra, to which her eyes would go back again and again with a curious interest. She thought of the lone mother, and of the boy brought up like a wild goat among the rocks. And if he had turned out a reckless and unscrupulous ne'er-do-well, an Ishmael with his hand against every man, well, that was a deplorable thing, though perhaps not to be wondered at; moreover it could matter little to her what such an outcast might think of her or of her family; but, nevertheless, deep down in her heart, there was an odd and ever-recurring feeling of compunction. She wished to be able to say "I am sorry." Certainly it was not she who had destroyed the last relic and monument of the ancient name—who had drained the loch and levelled the old stronghold with the ground; and he must know that; but she wished him to know more; she wished him to know how indignant she had been when she first heard of that monstrous and iniquitous act of vandalism. And then again (as she still stood gazing at the island out there in the wide blue waters, with the white foam springing high in the sunlight along its southern coasts) it seemed to her that she rather feared meeting this man. Rude and lawless and mannerless, might he not laugh at her stumbling apologies? Or in his Highland pride he might scorn her southern birth, and vouchsafe no word in reply? Well, being sorry was all that remained for her; what was done could not be undone; it was not within her power to bring back Castle Heimra from that waste of ruin.

She had got up very early, but she did not care to waken Kate, who was

no doubt tired with the long drive of yesterday; she thought instead she would quietly slip outside and have some little investigation of her surroundings. So she quickly finished dressing; went down and through the lofty oak hall; passed out upon the stone terrace, and from thence descended into the garden, where she found herself quite alone. The air was sweet and soft; there was a pleasant scent of newly-delved earth; and everywhere there was abundant evidence that the Spring had already come to this sheltered space—for there were masses of daffodils and primroses and wallflower all aglow in the warm sunlight, and there were bunches of blossom on the cherry-trees trained up the high stone wall. She went away down to the end of the garden, opened a door she found there, and, passing through, entered the wilder solitude of the woods. And ever as she wandered idly and carelessly along, the sense that she was the mistress and owner of all these beautiful things around her seemed to grow on her and produce a certain not unnatural joy and pride. For the moment she had forgotten all the problems in human nature and in economics that lay ahead of her; here she had all the world to herself—this picturesque world of silver-grey rock, and golden gorse, and taller larch and spruce, all dappled with sun and shadow, while the fresh odours of the Spring were everywhere around, and a stirring of the new life of the year. And then, when she had fought her way through the thick underwood to the summit of one of the westward-looking cliffs—behold! the dark blue sea, and the sunny headlands, and Eilean Heimra, with its thunder-shocks of foam. Heimra island again; it seemed to be always confronting her; but however long she might gaze in that direction, there was no sign of any white-winged yacht coming sailing out into the blue.

And then she scrambled down from this height to the water's edge; and here she discovered a most sequestered little haven—a small, semicircular bay sheltered from the land-winds by rocks and trees, while the pellucid green sea broke in ripples of silver along the cream-white and lilac pebbles. A most solitary spot—quiet, and sunny, and peaceful: she began to think that whatever might be done with other portions of her property, she would keep this little bit of picturesque seclusion entirely for herself. This, surely, could be of no use to anybody—the pebbly beach, the rocks purple-black with mussels or olive-green with seaweed, the clear water whispering along the shore. Political economy should not follow her hither; here would be her place of rest—her place of dreaming—when she was done with studying the wants of others, and wished to commune with her own soul.

But all of a sudden she found she was not alone: an apparition had become visible—a solitary figure that had quietly come round the rocky point, and was now regarding her with dumb apprehension. This was a girl of about five-and-twenty, who had something of an Irish cast of face: fair-complexioned, freckled,

a tilted nose, grey eyes wide-apart and startled-looking, and curly light-brown hair that was mostly concealed by the scarlet shawl she wore round her head and shoulders. She regarded Miss Stanley with obvious fear, and did not advance; her eyes, that had the timidity of a wild animal in them, had something more than that; they seemed to say that the poor creature was but half-witted. Nevertheless the young proprietress instantly concluded that this was one of "her people," and that, therefore, she was bound to make friends.

"Good morning!" said Mary, and she brought her wonder-working smile and dimple into play, as well she knew how.

A quick light, of wonder and pleasure, sprang into the girl's eyes. She came forward a little way, timidly. She smiled, in a pleading sort of fashion. And then she ventured to hold out her hand, timidly. Mary went forward at once.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance," she said, in her bland tones, "and you must tell me who you are."

But the girl, taking the hand that was offered to her, bent one knee and made a humble and profound curtsy (where she could have learnt this trick it is hard to say), and then she uplifted her smiling and beseeching eyes to the great lady (who was considerably taller than she), and still held her hand, and repeated several times something that sounded like *Bentyurna veen—Bentyurna veen.*[#]

[#] *Baintighearna mhin*—the gentle lady.

"I am very sorry I don't know Gaelic," said Mary, rather disappointedly. "Don't you know a little English?"

The girl still held her hand, and patted it; and looked into her face with pleased and wistful eyes; and again she was addressed as *Bentyurna veen.* And then, in this unknown tongue, something more was said, of which Mary could only make out the single word Heimra.

"Oh, do you come from Heimra island?" she asked, quickly.

But of the girl's further and rapid speech she could make nothing at all. So she said—

"I am really very sorry; but I don't know any Gaelic. Come with me to the house, and I will get some one to speak between us. Come with me, to Lochgarra House, do you understand?"

The girl smiled, as if in assent; and thereupon the two of them set out, following a winding path through the woods that eventually brought them to the garden gate. But here a curious incident occurred. Mary opened the gate, and held it for her unknown friend to follow; but at the same moment the girl

caught sight of Mr. Purdie, who had come along for instructions, and was now in the garden awaiting Miss Stanley's return. The instant that this stranger girl beheld the Little Red Dwarf, she uttered a quick cry of terror, and turned and fled; in a moment she was out of sight in the thick underwood. Mary stood still, astounded. It was no use her trying to follow. And so, after a second or two of bewilderment, she turned and went on to the house, saying a few words to Mr. Purdie in passing, but not with reference to this encounter. Some instinct suggested that she ought to seek for information elsewhere.

When she went into the dining-room she found that Käthchen had come down, and also that Barbara was bringing in breakfast.

"Barbara," said she, "do you know of a girl about here who seems to be not quite in her right mind, poor thing? A fair-complexioned girl, who wears a red shawl round her head and shoulders——"

"Oh, that was just Anna Chlannach[#] that Miss Stanley would be seeing," said Barbara, in her soft-spoken way.

[#] *Anna Chlannach*—Anne of the many curls.

"And does she come from Heimra Island?" was the next question.

"Oh, no, she is not from Eilean Heimra," said Barbara. "Maybe she would be speaking to Miss Stanley, and it is about her mother she would be speaking. Her mother died about two years ago; but Anna thinks she has been changed into one of the white sea-birds that fly about Eilean Heimra, and that she is coming back, and so she goes along the shore and watches for her. That is what she would be saying to Miss Stanley."

"Barbara, can you tell me why the girl should be afraid of Mr. Purdie?"

"Oh, well, indeed, ma'am, they were saying that Mr. Purdie was for having her sent away to an asylum; and it is no doubt Anna would rather be among her own people."

"To an asylum?" Mary demanded sharply. "For what reason? She does no harm?"

"There is no harm about Anna Chlannach," said Barbara, simply and seriously, as she busied herself with the table things. "There is no harm at all about Anna Chlannach, poor girl. But when Mr. Purdie wishes a thing to be done, then it has to be done."

The hot blood mounted to Mary Stanley's face.

"Oh, do you think so?" said she. "For I do not think so—not at all! It is not Mr. Purdie who is to be the master here—when I am here. I will let Mr. Purdie

understand that he is not to—to interfere with my people——"

"Mary!" said Kate Glendinning, in an undertone.

Mary was silent; she knew she had been indiscreet. But presently she said—

"Well, Käthchen, I see I must learn Gaelic."

"Gaelic," observed Kate, sententiously, "is a very intricate key; and then when you've got it, and put it in the lock, and turned it, you find the cupboard empty."

"Perhaps so with regard to literature—I do not know; but I want to be able to talk to the people here, without the intervention of an interpreter. Barbara," said she, to the parlour-maid, who had come into the room again, "do you know what *bentyurna veen* is?"

"*Baintighearna mhin*?" said Barbara, with a smile. "Oh, that is 'the gentle lady,' And that is what Anna Chlannach would be calling Miss Stanley, I have no doubt of that."

"Well, now, Barbara," Mary continued, "you must tell me how to say this in Gaelic—'*Am I welcome?*' What is that in Gaelic?"

But here Barbara became very much embarrassed.

"I am sure it is not necessary that Miss Stanley should say that—oh no, indeed," she answered with averted eyes.

"I am not so sure," said Mary, in her direct way. "I hope the time will come when I shall not have to ask such a question in going into any one's cottage; but at present I am a stranger, and I must make my way gradually. Now, Barbara, what is the Gaelic for 'Am I welcome?"

But still Barbara hesitated.

"If you would ask Mr. Purdie, ma'am, he would give you the good Gaelic."

"No, I will not," said the imperative young mistress. "I dare say your Gaelic is quite as good as Mr. Purdie's."

"And you would be saying 'Am I welcome?' in going into a house?" said Barbara, slowly—for translation is a serious difficulty to the untutored mind. "Oh, I think you would just say '*An e mo bheatha?*'; but why would Miss Stanley be saying such a thing as that?"

"'*An e mo bheatha?*'—is that right? Very well!"

"And how will you understand their answer, Mamie?" Kate Glendinning asked.

"I will read that in their faces," was the reply.

It was quite clear that the young proprietress had in no wise been disheartened by that first interview with one of her tenants on the previous evening. This fair-shining morning found her as full of ardent enthusiasm, of generous aspirations, as ever; and here was the carriage awaiting them; and here was Mr. Purdie, obsequious; and even Käthchen looked forward with eagerness to getting a gen-

eral view of the estate. Then their setting forth was entirely cheerful; the Spring air was sweet around them; the sunlight lay warm on the larches and on the tall and thick-stemmed bushes of gorse that were all a blaze of gold. But it was not of landscape that Mary Stanley was thinking; it was of human beings; and the first human being she saw was a little old woman who was patiently trudging along with a heavy creel of peats strapped on her back.

"The poor old woman!" she exclaimed, with an infinite compassion in her eyes. "Doesn't it seem hard she should have to work at her time of life?"

"She's a good deal better off than if she were in Seven Dials or the Bowery," said Käthchen. "But perhaps you would like to give her a seat in the carriage?"

"You may laugh if you like," said Mary, quite simply, "but it seems to me it would be more becoming if that poor old woman were sitting here and I were carrying the creel. However, I suppose we shall have to begin with something more practicable."

But was it more practicable?—that was the question she had speedily to put to herself. For no sooner had they left the wooded 'policies' and surroundings of Lochgarra House than they entered upon a stretch of country the sterility of which might have appalled her if only she had fully comprehended it. Land such as the poorest of Galway peasants would have shunned—an Arabia Petræa—rocks, stones, and heather—wave upon wave of Hebridean gneiss, the ruddy-grey knolls and dips and heights showing hardly a trace of vegetation or of soil. And yet there were human beings here, busy on their small patches; and there were hovels, some of them thatched, others covered over with turf tied down by ropes; while now and again there appeared a smarter cottage, with a slated roof, and lozenge-panes of glass in the window. Moreover, they had now come in sight of the sea again; yonder was a far-stretching bay of silvery sand; and out at the margin of the water, which was at lowest ebb, there were a number of people, mostly women and young lads and girls, stooping at work; while an occasional small dark figure, with a hump on its back, was seen to be crossing the expanse of white.

"What are they doing, Mr. Purdie?" Mary asked.

"They're cutting seaware for manure to put on their crofts," was the answer.

And at the same moment her attention was drawn to a man not far from the roadside who, in his little bit of rocky ground, was making use of an implement the like of which she had never seen or heard of.

"What is that, Mr. Purdie? Is it some kind of spade?"

"Oh, just a foot-plough—there's no other kind of plough would be of any use in this district."

And nothing would do but that she must descend and examine this novel method of tillage. She went boldly up to the man: he was a tall, lean, swarthy

person, severe of aspect, who kept a pair of hawk-like eyes fixed on the factor all the time he rather unwillingly answered her questions. For Mary, to her great delight, discovered that this man could speak English; and she wanted information at first hand; and indeed she immediately showed a very definite knowledge of what she was after. The man clearly did not like being cross-examined; again and again he resumed his delving operations with that long-coultered instrument that he worked with foot and arms; but she would take no heed of his sullen humour. What stock had he?—two cows, two stirks, eight sheep up on the common pasture, and a pony. What potatoes did he raise?—well, he would plant about two barrels, and maybe get ten or twelve barrels. Did he make any meal?—hardly any; the cows and stirks did not let his crops come to the threshing. And so forth, until Mary said—

"But I don't see where you get any capital to work the croft, or to increase the stock if we could give you more land. You don't seem to be getting any money."

"No, no money at ahl," said the crofter.

"Listen to him!" interposed Mr. Purdie, with an angry frown. "Let me tell you this, Miss Stanley: that man gets twenty-five shillings a week, gillie's wages, when the gentlemen are here for the shooting, and besides that he hires his pony to them at twenty-three shillings a week; and I suppose he's just the one to cry out that not a sportsman should be allowed to come into the country."

"Is it true that you get that money?" said Mary, calmly.

"Ay, that is true," he admitted, in rather a sulky fashion; "but it is not from the croft I get the money."

"Well, I am only making enquiries at present," said Miss Stanley. "I wish to know what improvements are possible—I wish to know what the people want——"

But here, to her surprise, she was interrupted.

"A railway," said the tall, black-a-vised crofter.

"A railway?" she repeated.

"Ay—a railway to Bonar."

"A railway to Bonar Bridge?" she said, staring at the man. "Why, what good would that do you? Take your own case. You say you have nothing to sell. Even if there were a railway to Bonar Bridge—and there couldn't be, for the cost would be enormous, and there would be no traffic to speak of—but supposing there were a railway, how would that benefit you?"

He made no reply; he merely worked away with the long and narrow coulter, turning up the poor soil. So she saw it was no use arguing with him; she bade him a cheerful "Good-morning!" and came away again.

And with a right gallant courage did she continue her house-to-house vis-

itation, desperately trying to win friends for herself, and wondering more and more that she was so ill received. She was not accustomed to sour looks and sullen manners; and in casting about for some possible reason for this strange behaviour she began to ask herself whether she might not get on better with these people if Mr. Purdie were well away back in his office in Inverness. One point struck her as being very peculiar; not a single man or woman of them asked for a reduction of rent. She thought that would have been the first thing for them to demand, and the simplest for her to consider; but it was never mentioned. They asked for all kinds of other things—when they would speak at all. They wanted herring-nets from the Government; they wanted more boats from the Government—and the instalments of repayment to be made smaller; they wanted the steamer to call in thrice a week, during the ling season; they wanted their arrears of debt to the curers to be wiped off; they wanted more pasture land; they wanted more arable land.

"As for pasture land," said Käthchen, in an undertone, as they were leaving one of these poor steadings, "I don't know whether you will be able to persuade Mr. Watson to give up a slice of his sheep-farm; but as regards arable land, Mary, you should tell those people they have made a mistake about you. You are not the Creator of the Universe: you can't make arable land out of nothing."

"Don't be profane," said Mary, severely. "And mind, I'm not going to have any giggling disparagement of my work: I can tell you, it promises to be very serious."

Serious enough! When they got back to Lochgarra House in the afternoon, her head was fairly in a whirl with conflicting statements and conflicting demands. She knew not how or where to begin; the future seemed all in a maze; while the personal reception accorded her (though she tried to think nothing of that for the moment) had been distinctly repellent. And yet, not satisfied with this long day's work, she would go down to the village in the evening, to see what was expected of her there.

"I suppose I can interfere?" she said, to Mr. Purdie, who was having tea with them.

"Beg pardon?"

"I suppose I can interfere? The village belongs to me, does it not?" she demanded.

"In a measure it does," said the factor. "Of course you are the Superior; but where feus have been granted, they have the land in perpetuity, while you have only the rent——"

"Oh, I can't interfere, then?" said she, with some disappointment that her sphere of activity seemed limited in that direction.

"You can step in to see that the conditions of the leases have been

respected——"

"But I can't do things?

"They'll let you do whatever ye like—so long as it means spending money on them," said Mr. Purdie, with grim sarcasm.

"The inn, for example?"

"The inn is different. We built the inn. The landlord is only a yearly tenant."

"We will go down and see him at once, if you please, Mr. Purdie," said Mary, with promptitude. "I have a scheme in my head. Käthchen, are you tired?"

Kate laughed, and dragged herself from her chair. Indeed, she was dead tired; but none the less she was determined to see this thing out. So the three of them proceeded along to the village as far as the inn—which was a plain little two-storeyed building, with not even a sign hanging over the door; and there they went into the stuffy little parlour, and sate down, Mr. Purdie ringing the bell and sending for the landlord.

"Aren't those things dreadful?" said Mary, glancing around at the hideous stone and china ornaments on the mantelshelf and elsewhere—pink greyhounds chasing a yellow hare; bronze stags that could only have been designed in wild delirium; impossible white poodles on a ground of cobalt blue, and the like; while on the walls were two gaudy lithographs—German-looking nymphs with actual spangles in their hair and bits of gold and crimson tinsel round their neck. "I must have all this altered throughout the cottages——"

"Oh, yes, Mamie," said Käthchen; "Broussa silks—Lindos plates—a series of etchings——"

But here was the landlord, a rather youngish and shortish man, who seemed depressed and dismal, and also a little apprehensive.

"Well, Peter," said Mr. Purdie, in his merry way, "what are ye frightened for? Ye've got a face as if ye'd murdered somebody. We're not going to raise your rent."

"It would be little use that—for I could not pay it," said the sad-looking young man with the cadaverous grey face and grey eyes.

"Won't you take a seat?" said Miss Stanley, interposing. "I have a proposal to make to you."

Peter Grant did not answer: he remained standing, stolidly and in silence.

"It seems to me," she went on, "that something should be done to bring visitors here in the spring, as well as the few that come through this way in the autumn. It would be a benefit all round—to the inn, and to the gillies who would be required, I mean for the salmon-fishing in the Garra. Now I don't particularly want the salmon-fishing in the spring months; and it seems to me if you were enterprising you would rent it from me, and advertise it, and let it to two or three gentlemen, who would come and live in your house, and give you a good profit.

Do you see?"

He answered not a word; he kept his eyes mostly fixed on the carpet; so she continued—

"Gentlemen will go very far for salmon-fishing now-a-days, so I am told; and you might give them quiet quarters here, and make them comfortable, and every year they would come back. And I should not be hard upon you in fixing the rent. Indeed, I would rather the proposal came from you. What do you think you could afford to give me for the spring fishing in the Garra?"

"Oh, as for that," said the young landlord, rather uncivilly, "I do not see that there should be any rent. For the people about here were saying that no one has a right to the salmon more than anyone else."

"Now you know you're talking nonsense," said Mary, with decision. "For if everyone had a right to the salmon, in a fortnight's time there would not be a single fish left in the river. And besides, do you forget that there is the law?"

"Oh, yes, Peter knows there is the law," interposed Mr. Purdie, who seemed to be in a most facetious mood. "Not more than two months ago Peter found that out when the Sheriff at Dingwall fined him ten shillings and ten shillings expenses for having carried and used a gun without a license. There is quite sufficient of law in the land, as Peter has just found out."

The young man's eyes were filled with a sullen fire; but he said nothing.

"However," continued Miss Stanley, not heeding this interruption, "I would not insist much on rent: I might even give you the spring fishing for nothing, if you thought it would induce the gentlemen to come and occupy the inn. It is an out-of-the-way place; but perhaps you would not be charging them very much either—not very much—I don't quite know what would be a fair rent to ask—"

"I would charge them £30 a month," said he.

She looked up, a trifle indignant.

"Oh, I see. The fishing is worth nothing while I have it; but it's worth £30 a month when you have it: is that how the matter stands? Do you call that fair dealing? Well, I haven't given you the fishing yet—not on those terms." She rose—rather proudly. "Come, Käthchen, I think we might go and have a look at this fishing that seems to alter in value so remarkably the moment it changes hands. We need not trouble you, Mr. Purdie. Good evening!" This last salutation was addressed to the landlord, who seemed to have no word of explanation to offer: then the two girls went out from the inn, and walked off in the direction of the river, which they had seen in passing on the previous evening.

Mary was no doubt considerably hurt and offended; and there were still further trials in store for her before the end of this arduous and disappointing day. She had proposed this excursion to the river chiefly in order to get rid of Mr. Purdie; but when she and Käthchen found themselves by the side of the

Garra, a vague curiosity drew them on, until they had penetrated into solitudes where the stream for the most part lay still and dark under the gloom of the steep overhanging banks. There was something strangely impressive in the silence and in the dusk; for while a distant range of hill flamed russet in the western light—an unimaginable glory—the stealthily creeping river was here almost black in shadow, under the thick birchwoods. And then suddenly she caught Käthchen by the arm. Surely there was some one there—a figure out in the stream—a faint grey ghost in the mysterious twilight? And then a startling thing occurred. The figure moved; and instantly, on the black and oily surface of the water there was a series of vivid blue-white circles widening out and out, and slowly subsiding into the dark again. Each time the grey ghost moved onward (and the two girls stood motionless, watching this strange phenomenon) there was this sudden gleam (the reflection of the clear-shining heavens overhead) that lasted for a moment or two; then the vague obscurity once more encompassed the unknown person, and he became but an almost imperceptible phantom. And was there not some sound in the all-pervading stillness?—an occasional silken 'swish' through the air? Mary understood what this was well enough.

"That man is poaching," said she, calmly—and she took no pains to prevent herself being overheard. "And I suppose you and I, Käthchen, have no means of arresting him, and finding out who he is."

Her voice was clear, and no doubt carried a considerable distance in this perfect silence. Immediately after she had spoken there were two or three further series of those flashing rings—nearing the opposite bank: then darkness again, and stillness; the spectral fisherman, whoever he was, had vanished into the thick birchwood.

But Mary Stanley made no doubt as to who this was.

"Now I understand," she said, bitterly, as she and her companion set out for home again, "why the salmon-fishing isn't worth £30 a month to me—when it does not belong to me! And now I understand what Mr. Purdie said about the poaching—and the connivance of everybody around. And yet I suppose Mr. Ross of Heimra calls himself a gentleman? I suppose he would not like to be called a thief? Well, I call him a thief! I call poaching thieving—and nothing but thieving—whatever the people about here may think. And I say it is not the conduct of a gentleman."

She was very angry and indignant; and the moment she got back to Lochgarra House she sent for the head-keeper. In a few minutes the tall and bushy-bearded Hector presented himself at the door of the room, cap in hand a handsome man he was, with a grave and serious face.

"Is any one allowed to fish in that river who pleases?" she demanded.

"I was not aware of any one fishing, ma'am," said the keeper, very respect-

fully.

"But is there no one watching?" she demanded, again. "Can any poacher who chooses have the run of the stream? Does it belong to everybody? Is it common property? Because—because I merely wish to know."

She was somewhat perturbed and excited; she did not think she was being dealt with justly; and she saw in the grave and reticent manner of the head-keeper only an intention of screening the culprit whom she herself had by accident detected a little while before.

"The fishing in the Garra is not very good in the spring," said the weather-browned Hector, "and we were not thinking it was much use to have a water-bailiff whatever."

"But surely it is your business to see that no poaching goes on, either on the river or anywhere else? Surely that is your duty? And if there were no fishing, would anyone fish?—you may trust a poacher to know! I'm sure," she went on, with something of a hurt manner, "it is very little I ask. I only want to be treated fairly. I am trying to do my best for every one in the place—I wish to do what is right by every one. But then I want to be treated fairly in return. And poaching is not fair; nor do I think it fair that you, as a keeper, should make excuses for it, or try to screen anyone, whoever he may be."

The man's face became rather pale—even under the weather tan.

"If Miss Stanley would be wanting to get another gamekeeper," he said, slowly and respectfully, "I would not be asking to stay."

"Oh, you would rather leave than interfere with Mr.——" She did not complete the sentence. She turned away and walked to the window. The fact is, it had been a long and harassing day; her nerves had got unstrung; and all of a sudden a fit of helplessness and despair came over her; it seemed impossible. she could ever struggle against this misconstruction and opposition and dislike.

Kate Glendinning turned to the keeper.

"You need not wait, Hector," said she, in an undertone.

Then she went to her friend. Mary had broken down completely—and was sobbing bitterly.

"Mamie!"

"I—I am not used to it," she said, between her sobs. "All day long, it has been nothing but hatred—and—and I am not used to being hated. What have I done to deserve it? I wish to—to do what is right by every one—and—and I tried my—my very hardest to make friends with every one. It is not fair—"

"No, it is not," said Käthchen, and she took her companion by the hand and led her back into the room. "But you must not be disheartened all at once. Give them time. They don't understand you yet. And I will back you to win over people against any one I ever knew: the fact is, Mary, you have always found it

so easy, that when you meet with a little trouble you are terribly disappointed. They don't hate you, those people; they don't know you—that is all."

And indeed the girl's naturally sunny temperament soon broke through these bitter mortifications.

"After all, Käthchen," she said, "I have not quite lost a day: I was forgetting that I made one friend." There was an odd smile shining from behind her tears. "It is true she is half-witted; but all the same I am glad that Anna Chlannach seemed to approve of me."

CHAPTER V.

THE MEALL-NA-FEARN BOG.

And once again a wild, clear, breezy morning; the sea a more brilliant blue than ever; the heavy surge bursting like a bombshell on the rocks of Eilean Heimra, and springing some sixty or seventy feet in the air. Altogether a joyous and gladdening sight—from the several windows of this spacious room in the tower; but nevertheless Kate, who was far from being a foolish virgin, observed that the wind must have backed during the night to the south, and therefore she began to talk about waterproofs. For Mr. Purdie was leaving to-day; and the two girls, thrown upon their own resources, had planned an excursion to those portions of the estate they had not yet visited—the higher moorland districts; and of course that had to be accomplished on foot. They did not propose to take a guide with them; they would simply go along to the 'march' beyond the little hamlet of Cruagan, and follow the boundary line across the hills. Sooner or later they would strike either the Corrie Bhreag or Glen Orme, with the lower parts of which they were acquainted.

And so, with some snack of luncheon in their pocket and a leather drinking-cup, and with their waterproofs over their arm, they set out—the sunlight pleasant around them, an odour of seaweed in the air. This was to be a little bit of a holiday: for this one day, at least, there were to be no persistent and patient questions met by sullen replies, no timid proffers of friendship answered by obdurate silence. And yet as they neared the village, Mary was reminded of her perplexities, and griefs, and disappointments; for here was the solitary policeman of the place, standing outside the small building that served him for both police-office and dwelling-house. John, as he was simply called—or more gener-

ally, Iain—was not at all a terrible-looking person; on the contrary he was quite a young man, very sleek and fat and roseate, with rather a merry blue eye, and a general appearance of good-nature: a stout, wholesome-complexioned, good-humoured young man, who was evidently largely acquainted with the virtues of porridge and fresh milk. When Mary saw him, she said,—

"Well, Käthchen, if they're all in league against me, even my own game-keepers, to screen the poaching that is going on, I will appeal to the policeman. He is bound to put down thieving of every kind."

"You'd better not, Mamie," was the instant rejoinder. "It would be very awkward if a question were asked in the House of Commons—about a Highland proprietor who had the shameless audacity to ask Her Majesty's own representative to watch a salmon-river in place of the ordinary keepers."

However, this project came to nothing in the present case; for as they drew near they found that the belted guardian of the peace was himself in dire trouble. An elderly woman—no doubt his mother—had opened an upper window in the small two-storeyed building; and she was haranguing and scolding him with an unheard-of volubility. What it was all about, neither Käthchen nor Mary had the least idea, for the old woman was rating him in Gaelic; but John, seeing the young ladies approach, grew more and more roseate and embarrassed. Of course he pretended not to hear. He gazed out towards Heimra Island. Then with his stick he prodded at the mass of seaweed by the roadside that was waiting there to be carted away. And then he smiled in a tolerant manner, as if all this tempest were rather amusing; and finally, not being able, in such humiliating circumstances, to face the two ladies, the upholder of the majesty of the law turned and beat a speedy retreat, hiding himself in the lower floor of the house until they should pass. So that on this occasion Mary had no chance of asking Iain whether he would catch poachers for her.

"I am sure," said she, as they were passing through the town, and over the Garra bridge, and up into the country beyond, "I do not care to preserve the game, if it were for myself alone. If I thought it would be really for the good of the people here, I would have every head of game on the estate destroyed, and every salmon netted out of the river. But you hear what they say themselves—many of them would never see money at all if it weren't for the gillies' wages, and the hiring of the ponies, and so on, in the autumn. Then the few deer that stray on to the ground, from the Glen Orme forest, they don't come near the crofts—they do no harm whatever, except, perhaps, to Mr. Watson's pasture, and he can easily get rid of them, if he likes, by saying a word to his shepherds. So that the shooting and the fishing are nothing but an advantage, and a very great advantage, to the people; and I tell you this, Käthchen, that I mean to preserve them as well as ever I can. And really it seems shameful that a gentleman in Mr. Ross's position

should have so little self-respect as to become a common poacher—"

"You forget how he has been brought up—according to Mr. Purdie's account," Käthchen put in.

But Mary did not heed the interruption. She was very indignant on this point.

"It is quite excusable," said she, "for the poor, ignorant people about here to believe that the Rosses of Heimra are still the rightful owners of the land. They know nothing about the law courts and agent's offices in London. They only know that as far back as they have heard of, and down to their own day, the land has belonged to the Rosses; and their Highland loyalty remains staunch and true; it is not to be bought over by the stranger; and perhaps it is not even to be acquired by kindness—but we'll see about that in time. However, what I say is this, that I don't complain of these poor people having such mistaken ideas; but Mr. Ross knows better; he knows well enough that he has not the least shadow of right to anything belonging to the Lochgarra estate; and that if he takes a grouse, or a hare, or a salmon, he is constituting himself a common thief."

But now, and for an instant, she was stricken dumb. They had come in sight of the dried-up loch and the waste heap of stones that once was Castle Heimra; and this sad spectacle seemed to put some strange fancies into her head.

"Käthchen," said she, "do you think he does it out of revenge?"

Now Kate Glendinning herself was of Highland blood; and she made answer boldly—

"I have told you already, Mary, that if I were young Ross of Heimra, and such an injury had been done to me and mine—well, I should not like to say what I should be inclined to do in return. A sentimental grievance!—yes; but it is sentimental grievances that go deepest down into the Highland nature, and that are longest remembered. But then on the other hand it seems to me that shooting game or killing salmon is a very paltry form of revenge. That is not how I should try to have it out with Mr. Purdie—for who can doubt that it was Mr. Purdie destroyed the loch and the castle?—I saw his air of triumph when he told the story. No; poaching wouldn't be my revenge—"

"There is more than that, Käthchen," Mary said, absently. "It isn't merely defying the keepers, or being in league with them. There is more than that. I wonder, now, if it is he who has set those people against us, so that they will never regard us but as strangers and enemies? It is not natural, their sullen refusal of kindness. There is something hidden—something behind—that I don't understand." She was silent for a second or two: then she said—"I wonder if he thinks he can drive me out of the place by stirring up this bitter ill-will."

"There is one way to get over the difficulty," said Käthchen, lightly. "Ask him to Lochgarra House. He is a Highlander: if he has once sate down at your

table, he cannot be your enemy afterwards."

A touch of colour rose to Mary's face.

"You forget the character he bears," she said, somewhat proudly.

And here they were at the Cruagan crofts; and the people were all busy in the wide stretch of land enclosed by a dilapidated fence of posts and wire. James Macdonald, the elderly crofter who had complained of the dyke-tax, was ploughing drills for potatoes; two or three women and girls were planting; and a white-haired old man was bringing out the seed-potatoes in a pail. The plough was being drawn by two horses wearing huge black collars—what these were for the two visitors could not imagine.

"Are you going to speak to him, Mary?" Kate asked in an undertone—as the plough was coming towards the end of the field.

"Yes, I am," said the young lady. "I want to see if the remission of the tax has had no effect on him. Perhaps he will have a little more English now."

There was no time to be lost—the horses were turning. She stepped across from the road.

"May I interrupt you for a moment? I want to ask you—"

Well, the grey-bearded man with the shaggy eyebrows did check the horses—perhaps he had meant to give them a rest at the end of the drill.

"Oh, thank you," said Mary, in her most gracious and friendly way. "I only wished to ask you whether Mr. Purdie had told you that there was to be no more tax for the dyke, and that there was to be fifteen years' of it given back."

The Russian-looking crofter regarded the shafts of the plough without removing his hands; and then he said—

"Yes—he was saying that."

Not a word of thanks; but perhaps—she generously thought—his English did not go so far.

"It is good dry weather for ploughing, is it not?" she remarked at a venture.

There was no reply.

"That very old man," she asked, "who is he—is he your father?"

"Yes."

"It seems a pity he should be working at his age," she went on, wishing to show sympathy. "He ought to be sitting at the cottage door, smoking his pipe."

"Every one will have to work," said the elderly crofter, in a morose sort of way; and then he looked at his horses.

"Oh well," said Mary, blithely, "I hope to be able to make it a little easier for you all. This land, now, how much do you pay for it? What is your rent?"

"It—thirty shillings an acre."

"Thirty shillings an acre? That is too much," said she, without a moment's hesitation. "Surely thirty shillings an acre is too much for indifferent land like

that!"

The small, suspicious eyes glanced at her furtively.

"I not saying it too mich," he made answer, slowly.

"Oh, but I will consult Mr. Purdie about it," said she, in her pleasantest way. "My own impression is that thirty shillings an acre is only asked for good land. But I will inquire; and see what can be done. Well, good morning!—I mustn't take up your time."

She was coming away when he looked after her.

"I not saying—it—too mich rent," said he; and then he turned to his plough; and his laborious task was resumed.

"Isn't that odd?" said Mary, as they were going along the highway again. "None of them seem anxious to have their rents reduced. All day yesterday—not a single complaint!"

"Well, Mamie," said Käthchen, "I don't know; but I can guess at a reason—perhaps they are afraid to complain."

This set Mary thinking; and they went on in silence. She wished she knew Gaelic.

When they came within sight of the ancient boundary line, they left the road, struck across a swampy piece of land where there were a few straggling sheep, and then set to work to climb the bare and rocky hill-side. It was an arduous climb; but both the young women were active and lithe and agile; and they made very fair progress—stopping now and again to recover their breath. Indeed, it was not the difficulty of the ascent that was present to their mind; it was the terribly bleak and lonely character of this domain they were entering. Higher and higher as they got, they seemed to be leaving the living world behind them; and then, when they reached a level plateau, and could look away across this new world, there was nothing but an endless monotony of brown and purple knolls and slopes, covered with heather and withered grass, and then a series of hills along the horizon, with one or two lofty mountain-peaks, dark and precipitous, and streaked here and there with snow. There was no sign of life; nor any sound. As they advanced further and further into this wilderness, a strange sense of intrusion came over them; it was as if they had come into a land peopled by the dead—who yet might be regarding them; they looked and listened, as if expecting something, they knew not what. They did not speak the one to the other; indeed, they were some little way apart—those two small figures in this vast moorland solitude. Then they came to a tarn—the water black as night—not a bush nor the stump of a tree along its melancholy shores. Nor even here was there the call of a curlew, or the sudden whirr of a wild-duck's wings. At this point the girls had come together again.

"Who can wonder at the superstitions of the Highlanders?" said Käthchen,

half absently.

Mary's answer was a curious one. She was looking at the black and oozy soil around her, with its scattered knobs of yellow grass.

"I suppose," she said, meditatively, "they send the sheep up here later on? But it must be wretched pasture even at its best."

All this time they had been shut out of sight of the sea by the higher ranges on their right; but by and by, when they had surmounted the ridge in front of them, they came in view of at least one new feature in the landscape—the river Garra, lying far below them, in a wide and empty valley. No hanging birch woods here, or deep pools sheltered by lofty banks, as in the neighbourhood where they had surprised the ghostly fisherman; but a treeless expanse of rather swampy-looking ground, with the river for the most part rushing over stony shallows.

"Did it occur to you, Käthchen, that we should have to cross that stream?" Mary asked, as they were descending the hill.

"Where is the difficulty?" said Käthchen, coolly. "We shall simply have to do as the country girls do, take off our shoes and stockings, wade over, and put them on again on the other side."

However, this undertaking they postponed for the present; for it was now mid-day; and they thought they might as well have luncheon when they got down to the side of the Garra. They chose out a rock wide enough to afford them seats; opened their small packages, and filled the leather drinking-cups at the stream. Up in these altitudes the water was not at all of a peaty-brown; it was quite clear, with something of a pale greenish hue; it had come from rocky regions, and from melting snow.

"It seems very odd to me," said Mary, as they contentedly munched their biscuits and sliced hard-boiled eggs, "that I should find myself in a place like this—a place that looks as if no human being had ever been here before—and yet be the actual owner of it. I suppose there never were any people living here?"

"They must have been clever if they did," said Käthchen. "To tell you the truth, Mary, the most part of the Lochgarra estate that I have seen is only fit for one thing, and that is to make heather brooms for sweeping kitchens."

"Ah, but wait," said the young proprietress, confidently. "Wait a little while, and you will see. Wait till you hear of all the improvements——"

"A railway to Bonar Bridge?" said Kate Glendinning, carefully lifting the leather cup.

"Now look here, Mephistopheles," said Mary, seriously. "I could murder you, without the least trouble. I am stronger than you; I could kill you, and hide you in a hole in the rocks, and you'd never be heard of again. So you'd better have a little discretion in flouting at my schemes. Ah, if you only knew! Why, listen to this, now: are you aware that there is a far greater demand for the Harris

homespun cloth than the people can supply? I discovered that at Inverness. I was told that half the home-spun sold in London is imitation, made in Manchester. Well, I propose to let them have the real homespun—yes, and plenty of it! And more than that; I'm going to have homespun druggets, and homespun plaids; and blankets, and shawls, and patch-work quilts; and all the carding and spinning and weaving, and all the knitting of the stockings, to be done by my own people. And I'll have a sale-room in London; and advertise in the papers—that they're the real things, and not sham at all; and if I have any friends in the South, well, let them show themselves my friends by coming forward and helping us! No charity—far from it; they get value, and more than value, for their money; why, where is there any such stuff as homespun for gentlemen's shooting costumes, or for ladies ulsters; and where can you get such warmth in winter from any other kind of stockings? I don't like to see so many women working in the fields—especially the old women—and carrying those heavy creels of seaweed; I'm going to get them lighter work—that will pay them better; and when their sons or husbands are away at the East Coast fishing, they will be earning almost as much at home. What do you think of this now? For a good web of homespun I can get 5*s.* a yard from the clothiers themselves; and they will do very well when they get 1*s.* or 1*s.* 6*d.* a yard profit; but when I sell in my own store at 6*s.* 6*d.* a yard, then that is all the more coming back to us here at home. Oh, I tell you, you will soon hear plenty of spinning-wheels going, and shuttles clacking, at Lochgarra!"

It was a pretty enthusiasm; and Käthchen did not like to say anything. Indeed it was Mary herself who paused in this dithyrambic forecast. She had chanced to look at the gathering skies overhead.

"Käthchen," said she, "it was a good thing we brought our waterproofs."

Kate Glendinning followed the direction of her glance.

"Yes," she answered, "and I think we'd better be getting on."

Then here was the business of getting over the stream. Mary went down to the edge of the river; pulled off her shoes and stockings covertly (covertly, in this solitude, where there was not even a hawk poised on wing!) and then put one foot cautiously into the swift-running water. The consequence was a shrill shriek.

"No," she said, "I can't do it. It's like ice, Käthchen! I'm going to put my shoes and stockings on again; and find some stones or rocks somewhere that I can get across."

"You'll fall in, then," said the matter-of-fact Käthchen, who was by this time over the ankles, and making good progress—with her teeth clenched.

But Mary did not fall in. She sought out shallows; and made zig-zag experiments with the shingle and with bigger stones; and if she did get her feet wet before reaching the other side, it was gradually. Very soon it was not of wet feet

they were thinking.

For when they ascended the opposite hill—entering upon a still wilder region than any they had as yet traversed—they became aware that all the world had grown much darker; and when at length they beheld the far line of the sea, it was of a curiously livid, or leaden, hue. The wind was blowing hard up on these heights; now and again there was a sting of moisture in it—the flying precursor of the rain. But the most ominous thing that met their gaze was a series of sickly-looking, formless clouds that seemed rising all along the western horizon; while the sea underneath was growing unnaturally black. Rising and spreading those clouds were, and swiftly; with a strange and alarming appearance—as if the earth were about to be overwhelmed: they looked close and near, moreover, though necessarily they must have been miles away. At first the two girls did not mind very much; all their strength was needed to withstand the buffetings of the wind; indeed, there was a kind of joyance in driving forward against the ever-increasing gale, though it told on their panting chests. They had to shout to each other, if they wished to be heard.

"Where is the 'march,' Mary?"

"I haven't seen any trace of it ... this side of the Garra ... But of course we're in the right direction ... We must get into the Corrie Bhreag sooner or later."

Then came the rain—at first in flying showers, but very soon in thin gauze veils that swept along between them and the distant hills. Waterproofs were donned now; but they proved to be of little use—they were blown every kind of way, with an immensity of ballooning and flapping and clapping; while they materially impeded progress. But nevertheless the two wanderers struggled on bravely, hurling themselves, as it were, against these rude shocks and gusts, until their wet hair was flying all about their faces, and their eyes were smarting with the rain. Sometimes they paused to take breath—and to laugh, in a rueful way.

"There's nothing so horrid as wet wrists!" Mary called to her companion, on one of these occasions, as she shook her arms and hands.

"It won't be wrists only, very soon," said Käthchen, in reply, as they started on again.

The gale increased in violence, so that on the higher slopes ahead of them the heather was beaten and driven into long waves of motion; while even through those whirling veils of rain they could see the torn shreds and tatters of lurid cloud that crossed the greyer sky. The moaning of the wind rose and fell in remote and plaintive cadence; and then again it would mount up into a shrill and long-continued scream, that struck terror to the heart. For there was no more laughter now. All their dogged, half-blind struggle against the storm did not seem to lead them any nearer to any practicable way of getting down to the coast; and they were afraid to leave the line they had conceived to be the march—

the imaginary line which they had hoped would bring them to the Corrie Bhreag, or, at furthest and worst, to some portion of Glen Orme. And if the dusk were to come down and find them in these trackless solitudes? During one of their pauses to recover breath, and to get their wet hair out of their eyes and lips, Mary took off her waterproof, and her companion followed her example; the worse than useless garments were secured by a lump of rock, and left to be searched for by a shepherd on the following day. Then forward again—with the wind moaning and howling across these desert wastes—with the driving rain at once blinding and stifling them—and a dim unspoken fear of the coming darkness gradually taking possession of their mind.

One odd thing was that though Mary Stanley was the taller and much the more strongly built of the two, she could not hold on as well as her smaller companion, who was in a measure familiar with the work of getting over heather-tufts and across peat-hags. Mary complained that the wind and the rain choked her—she could not breathe. And at last she stopped, panting, breathless, entirely exhausted with the terrible strain.

"Käthchen," she said, in a despairing sort of way, "I'm done. But don't mind me. I will stay here, until the storm goes over. If you think you can push on until you find some valley to take you down to the coast, then you will be able to get home——"

"Mamie, what are you talking about!" said Käthchen, indignantly. "I am going to keep by you, if both of us stay here all night. But we mustn't do that. Come, have courage!!

"Oh, I've a fearful amount of courage, but no strength," said Mary, with a very dolorous sort of smile. "Whenever I begin, I get caught by the throat. Well, here goes once more!"

And again they set forth with a desperate resolution, forcing themselves against the gale, though their own saturated clothes were dragging heavily upon them. But they had not gone on thus for many minutes when it somehow seemed as though this laborious stepping from one heather-tuft to another was becoming easier. Surely the land was trending down?

"Käthchen," Mary called out, brushing away the rain from her eyelashes, "here is a valley, and surely it must lead down to the sea. I don't know which it is——"

"Oh, never mind; we must take our chance," said Kate; "if we can get down to the coast-line anywhere, we shall be all right."

And so, notwithstanding their dire fatigue, they kept on now with lighter hearts; their progress becoming more and more easy, being all down hill. Not that this valley was anything in the nature of a chasm, but rather a hollow plain gradually sloping down to the west. And then again, the further they got away

from the wild heights they had left behind them, the violence of the storm seemed to diminish; they were better able to breathe; and if the rain did continue to fall, they were about as wet as they well could be, so that did not matter.

Suddenly Kate Glendinning uttered a joyful cry.

"Look! Look!"

Far away down the wide valley, and through the mists of the rain, they could make out a small cottage or hut; and there were signs of life, too—wavering smoke that the wind blew level as it left the chimney. This welcome sight put new animation into their exhausted frames; and they pushed forward right cheerfully now, little thinking that they were walking into a far more deadly peril than any they had encountered among the hills.

For when they got further down the valley, they found that there intervened between them and the cottage a circular plain; and although it certainly looked marshy, it never occurred to them that they ought to go round by the side of it. How could their feet be wetter? So they made straight across, Käthchen leading the way, and jumping from clump to clump of heather, so as to avoid the little channels where the black ooze and water might be deep.

But by and by she was forced to go more cautiously; and had to hesitate before choosing her course. For those oozy channels had grown broader; and not only that, but the land she had reached was very far from being solid—it trembled in a mysterious way. She still held on, nevertheless, hoping to reach securer foundation; and now she was not following any straight line whatever, but seeking anywhere and everywhere for a safe resting-place for her foot. Matters speedily grew worse and worse. She could not make the slightest movement without seeing the earth vibrate for twenty yards around her—an appalling phenomenon; and at last she dared hardly stir, for a sickening feeling had come over her that a single step might plunge her into an unfathomable abyss.

"Käthchen," said Mary, in a low voice (she was close behind), "don't you think we should try to go back?"

But the girl seemed absolutely paralyzed with terror. She turned an inch or two, and looked helplessly around.

"I—I don't know the way we came," she said—and her eyeballs were contracted as if with pain. "Will you try, Mary?"

And then she made a strenuous effort to pull herself together.

"No, no!—let me go first!" she said in a kind of desperation, "I am lighter than you."

"No," Mary made answer, quite calmly, "I will go first."

Yes, outwardly she was quite calm; but dismay had possession of her too. For the whole world underneath felt so strangely unstable; it shivered even as she stood; and as for going back the way they came—why, it seemed to her that

the smallest movement in any one direction must necessarily cause this quaking morass to open like the sea and engulf them for ever. She had undertaken to go first; but whither was she to go? When she put out a foot tentatively, the solid earth seemed to slide away from her in billows. Again and again she tried; and again and again she instinctively drew back—her whole frame trembling like the trembling soil beneath her; until at last she stood speechless and motionless, turning strange eyes towards Käthchen—eyes that asked a question her white lips could not utter. And the dusk was now coming over the world.

But help was near. They were suddenly startled by a sound—a distant cry—and at the same moment they caught sight of a man who had come running from the direction of the cottage. As soon as he perceived he was seen, he held up both arms: it was a signal to them not to move—as if movement were possible to them in this prostration of fear! He came along with an incredible rapidity, by the outskirts of the morass, until he was opposite them, and then he ventured in a little distance. But he did not attempt to approach them; with his hand he directed them which way to go; and they—their heart in their mouth the while—obeyed him as well as they could. By the time they got near to where he was waiting, they found themselves with some firmer consistency under their feet; and then, without a word, he turned and led the way off the morass, they following. There he paused for a second, to give them a brief direction.

"You must keep along the side; it is very dangerous," he said, in a somewhat cold manner.

But in an instant Mary had divined who this was. The young man with the pale, clear-cut features and coal-black eyes belonged to no shepherd's hut.

"I—I want to thank you, sir," she said, breathlessly (he had raised his cap to them slightly, and was going away). "If it had not been for you, what should we have done? It is a dreadful place—we were afraid to move—"

He glanced at her and her companion with some swift scrutiny.

"You are wet," said he, in the same distant and reserved fashion. "You will find a fire in the widow's cottage."

"You might show us the way," said Käthchen, half-piteously. "We are frightened."

After that he could not well leave them; though, to be sure, the way to the cottage was plain and easy enough, so long as they kept back from the dangerous Meall-na-Fearn bog. He walked ahead of them, slowly; he did not attempt to speak to them. His demeanour had not been unfriendly; on the contrary, it had been courteous; but it was courtesy of a curiously formal and reticent kind. Perhaps he had not known who these strangers were when he came so quickly to their help.

And in truth the two girls could hardly follow him; for now all the en-

feeblement of the terror they had suffered had come upon them; they were no longer strung up by a shuddering apprehension of being entombed in that hideous morass; and the previous fatigue, physical and nervous, that they had fought against so heroically, was beginning to tell now, especially upon Mary. At length she did stop; she said "Käthchen! Käthchen!" in a low voice; her figure swayed, as if she would fall to the earth; and then she sank to her knees, and burst into a wild fit of hysterical weeping, covering her face with her hands. Their guide did not happen to notice: he was going on: and it was becoming dark.

"Stay a moment, sir!" said Käthchen, in tones of indignant remonstrance. "My friend is tired out."

He came back at once.

"I beg your pardon," said he, gravely. "Tell her it is only a little way further. I am going on to get something ready for you."

And he did go on; so that it was left for Käthchen to encourage her companion, and subdue this nervous agitation.

"It is only the cold, Käthchen," said Mary, who was trembling from head to foot. "I suppose you are wet through, too."

But indeed the cottage was quite close by now; they made their way slowly; when they reached it, the door was open; and here was the young man, with his sailor's cap in his hand, giving a few further directions, in Gaelic, to an old woman and a young girl of thirteen or fourteen who appeared to be the sole occupants of the earthen-floored hut. There was a peat-fire burning, and a pannikin slung over it. The old woman went into the other apartment—the "ben" of the cottage—and returned with a black bottle, and some sugar; and presently she had brewed a most potent liquor which, in two tea-cups, she presented to the young ladies, and insisted on their swallowing. They were seated on a rude bench by the grateful warmth of the peat; they were made to finish this fiery draught; and here were oat-cakes and milk besides. Life seemed slowly to come back to them—to stir in their veins. But the young man who had guided them hither? Well, he had disappeared.

After some little time Käthchen happened to turn and look round.

"Where has the gentleman gone?" she asked.

It was the young girl with the jet-black hair and the wild, timid eyes who made answer.

"I was told to take the ladies to Lochgarra House," said she, in excellent English, and with a very pretty pronunciation.

"You? It is nearly dark!" Käthchen exclaimed. "Why did he leave us?"

But here Mary interposed in her mild, suave fashion; and she regarded the girl with kindly eyes.

"Yes, I am sure you will be able to show us the way very well," said she. "Only you must tell your mother—is she your mother?"

"My grandmother, lady," was the answer.

"Well, tell your grandmother that you must stay the night at Lochgarra House; you cannot come back here so late. We will send you along in the morning; or I will come with you myself."

But the old grandmother knew a little English too.

"Yes, yes, indeed, indeed," said she. "Whatever the ladies will be pleased."

And by and by they set out; the sure-footed young mountaineer acting as their guide. Night had fallen now, and there were no stars; but after they had gone on some time they could make out the sound of the sea—and it was a welcome sound, for it told them they were nearing the road that here runs all along the coast. And indeed it was not until they were actually in the highway that it occurred to Kate Glendinning to ask how far they had still to go before they got to Lochgarra.

"It will be about seex miles, or more than five miles whatever," was the answer.

"Six miles!" said Käthchen, faintly. "I wish we had stayed at your grandmother's cottage. Mamie, shall you ever be able to manage it?"

"I hope so, Käthchen," Mary said, though not very joyfully. "I am a little warmer now; and there is less wind blowing."

And so they went on—the unseen sea thundering beneath them in the dark, along the iron-bound coast—the wind sometimes rising into a mournful moan, but bringing no rain with it now. It was a long and weary tramp; but they were on a good road; and their brave little guide, whatever she may have thought of the darkness, went forward unhesitatingly.

Then of a sudden they beheld two points of fire away ahead of them; and presently there was a sound of wheels.

"I will give £20 for the loan of that carriage," said Mary, "whosesoever it is!"

"Why," said Käthchen joyfully, "in this neighbourhood, whose can it be but your own?"

And indeed it was. And not only that, but here was the gentle-spoken Barbara, profuse of compassion and pretty speeches; and she had brought with her an abundance of blankets—not shawls and wraps, or any feminine knickknackery—but substantial and capacious blankets, along with many smaller comforts and cordials. And when they had all four got into the shut landau (for the girls would not allow their young guide to go on the box) Mary said,—

"But who took the news to Lochgarra House, Barbara? Who told you to bring the carriage?"

"Oh, just the young master himself," said Barbara, with smiling eyes, as she

was busy with her ministrations. And then she corrected herself. "It was just young Mr. Ross of Heimra. And did Miss Stanley not know who he was?"

But Miss Stanley had known very well. And Käthchen had guessed.

CHAPTER VI.

GILLEASBUIG MÒR.

Käthchen was standing at the window, looking out upon the wild and wayward sea, that was all brilliantly dappled with sun and cloud, while Mary was at her dressing-table, preparing to go down to breakfast. It was a blowy and blusterous morning, after the storm; but the welcome sunlight was abroad again; and the heavens shone serene and fair.

"Never no more," Käthchen was solemnly remarking, as she regarded the wide plain of hurrying waves and the white sea-birds that dipped and sailed and circled in the light, "never no more shall I have a word to say against smuggled brandy. By rights, Mary, you and I ought both to be in a raging fever this morning; and you look as well as ever you did in your life, and I have only a little bit of a headache. Nor against poaching: I have nothing to say against poaching—when it suddenly produces somebody to get you out of a hideous and horrible morass, worse than any quicksand that ever I heard of. Do you know, I hardly dared put my foot to the floor this morning: I was afraid that frightful sensation would come back, as if I were standing on nothing, and just about to sink. Wasn't it terrible? I know I shall dream about it to my dying day." And then she said: "I wonder what took young Ross of Heimra up to that out-of-the-way place? Not poaching; for he had neither rod nor gun."

"More likely selling brandy to that old woman," said Mary; and then she added, with a touch of scorn: "A pretty occupation for a Highland gentleman!"

"Well, Mary," said Käthchen, reflectively. "I confess that story does not sound to me true. I should like to have some proof before believing it. No doubt it is just possible he may have wanted to make up to these poor people for Mr. Purdie having banished the illicit stills; and perhaps he could not afford to get them spirits for nothing; and so he may charge them what he himself has paid. But it is not like what a Highland laird would do, however poor he might be—and in a kind of way he still stands in the position of laird towards these people. No, it does not sound probable; but anyhow I mean to find out—if we are going along

to-day to thank the old woman for her kindness of last night. And whether it was poaching, or smuggling, or whatever it was, that took young Mr. Ross up to that hut, it was a very lucky thing for us: we should never have seen the morning if we had been left there."

"That is true enough," Mary admitted; but then she went on to say, with some asperity: "At the same time, a favour is twice a favour when it is graciously conferred. He seemed to me a most ill-mannered young man. I doubt whether he would have come near us at all if he had known who we were."

"Oh, I don't agree with you—not in the least!" said Käthchen, warmly. "I thought he was most courteous, and—and respectful. Remember, we were entirely strangers to him. And just think of his going all the way to Lochgarra to get the carriage sent for us—and very quickly he must have done it, too."

But Mary had not a word in favour of this young man whom she suspected of far worse offences (in her eyes) than killing salmon or bringing smuggled brandy into the district: she suspected him, in truth, of stirring up wrath and ill-will, and setting these people against her.

"I suppose," she said, rather coldly, "we must thank him, if we should see him."

"I, for one, mean to do so, and very heartily," Käthchen said at once. "I think he was most kind and considerate—if—if a little—a little reserved. And not at all the wild savage I had expected—most distinguished-looking, I should call him——"

"Come away down to breakfast, Käthchen," said Mary, taking her friend by the arm: she would hear no more on that subject.

In the hall they encountered the little Highland lass who had been their guide on the previous night; and she, looking up with timid eyes towards this tall and beautiful lady whose smile was so gracious and winning, said—

"Am I to be going home now?"

"Home?" said Mary. "Have you had your breakfast?"

"Oh, yes, indeed."

"Very well, you need not go yet; you may as well wait and come with us in the carriage—for we want to thank your grandmother for her kindness to us. You can amuse yourself in the garden, if you like, until we are ready."

She was obediently going away, but Käthchen stopped her.

"I don't think you ever told us your name."

"Just Isabel," said the little maid, in her pretty fashion.

"Of course you know Mr. Ross?" was the next question.

"Oh, yes."

"What was he doing up at your cottage last night?"

"Käthchen!" said Mary; but the little girl did not notice the interruption:

she answered quite simply,—

"He came up to ask about the cow."

"What cow?"

But here Isabel did begin to look a little frightened; and she glanced anxiously at Miss Stanley.

"Perhaps the lady will be angry—" she said, with shrinking eyes.

"Oh, no, she won't be angry," Käthchen interposed at once. "What about the cow? Tell me about the cow."

"It was my mother's cow that got into the bog and was drowned—'

"The bog we strayed into?" Käthchen exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that cattle have been swallowed up in that place?"

"Ay, many and many a one," said the little girl.

"I'll have it fenced round at once," said Mary, in her usual prompt and emphatic way, "no matter what it costs!"

"And the cow?" said Käthchen, encouragingly, to the little Highland lass. "What did Mr. Ross want to know about the cow?"

"Mr. Ross," continued Isabel, "he was sending a message that my mother would ask Mr. Purdie and the lady for a cow in place of that one, and the money to be paid back bit by bit as we could do it; yes, and Mr. Purdie was to be asked for the cow; and Mr. Ross he came up last night to see if we were to get the cow. But we were not hearing about it from any one."

Mary's face flushed with vexation.

"Why was I not told about this?" she said, turning indignantly to Käthchen. "What right had Mr. Purdie to decide—and go away without saying a word? I suppose he refused?—and that was to be all of it!"

But the little girl, hearing the lady talk in these altered tones, grew frightened; and tears started to her eyes.

"Please, I was not asking for the cow," she said, piteously; for she knew not what terrible mischief she had done. "I was not intending to make the lady angry——"

Mary turned to the girl, and put her hand in a kindly way on the raven-black hair.

"Don't you be alarmed, Isabel," she said, with a reassuring smile. "You have done no harm; you were quite right to tell me the story. And you need not be afraid; your mother shall have the cow; perhaps even two of them, if the byre is big enough. Now go into the garden and amuse yourself, until you hear the carriage come round."

However, it may here be said that in this instance Mr. Purdie was in no wise culpable. It appeared that the widow MacVean had two days before gone over to Cruagan, where she had a married daughter, in order to help in the fields;

and her only chance of presenting the petition was by intercepting the factor on his way homeward. Whether she did or did not present the petition was of no immediate consequence: Mary had resolved upon offering up this cow, or perhaps even two cows, as a sort of sacrificial thanksgiving for her deliverance from the Meall-na-Fearn bog.

After breakfast they set out, Isabel seated beside the driver. And once again they came in sight of the Minard township, with its poor little crofts on the rocky soil, and the long sweep of white sand where, the tide being out, the people were busy with their sickles cutting the seaweed from the rocks.

"I wonder," said Mary, meditatively, "if I couldn't revive the kelp-burning?"

"Oh, no," said Käthchen (who did not quite understand how indefatigable the young proprietress had been in qualifying herself for her new position). "That is all over now. Those were the grand days for the Highlands—for both the landlords and the people; but modern chemistry has spoiled all that."

"You don't know, then," said Mary, quietly, "that kelp-burning is carried on in some places at this moment? It is, though. Over in South Uist the crofters get from £2 10s. to £3 a ton for kelp. But perhaps they need all the seaweed they can get here for their crofts, or perhaps it isn't the right kind of tangle: I must find out about that."

They drove as far as they could along the road; and they had to descend from the carriage, to make the rest of their way on foot. And strange it was that the moment the two girls left the highway, and found themselves upon the yielding heather, they betrayed an unmistakeable alarm—looking all around them as if they feared to be betrayed into some hidden quagmire. But indeed at this point the land consisted chiefly of rocks and peat and stones; and gradually they got accustomed to following their sure-footed young guide who was going up the hill-side with the lightest of steps. Long before they had climbed to the cottage, they saw the old woman come out to scatter some remains of porridge to the hens: a pleasant-looking old dame she was, with silvery-grey hair and a rennet complexion; moreover (whether she had expected them or not) she was very tidily dressed—a clean white "mutch," a short-skirted blue gown, a white apron, and red stockings. When she saw the strangers, she remained outside; and when they came toiling up she saluted them with a grave and gentle "good moarning!" But beyond returning that salutation, Mary did not enter into further talk just then. Her eyes were drawn with a morbid fascination to the black morass that had so nearly proved fatal to her and her companion. She seemed to feel herself once more standing on that trembling soil, unable to move in any one direction, the darkness coming down. And had the darkness fallen, what would the morning have seen? The morning would have dawned upon that level waste just as it was now—silent, empty, all its secrets sucked down and buried for ever and ever.

A hideous and lingering death: the slow torture of the long and sombre hours, before utter exhaustion came, and despair, and a swooning into the unknown. She shivered a little: then she turned to the old grandmother, who was talking to Käthchen with such English as she could muster.

"Yes," she was saying, "my daughter, she over at Cruagan——"

"And so perhaps she did not speak to Mr. Purdie about the cow?" Mary interposed. "Very well. That's all right. Little Isabel was telling me about the cow that was lost. Well, I will see that you have one in its place."

The old woman could not speak; the withered, weather-wrinkled face wore a pained look, as if she were trying not to cry; and she furtively wiped her hand on her apron and timidly held it out—it was by shaking hands that she could best express her thanks. And here was an extraordinary thing!—here was actual gratitude, the very first symptom of it that Mary Stanley had encountered since she came to the place. But the next moment she was saying to herself bitterly:

"Why? Why is this old woman friendly? Because she saw that Mr. Ross of Heimra condescended to be civil to me yesterday evening. If he throws a word to me, then I am to be tolerated! But if I had come here by myself, I might have offered to double the size of her byre, and give her two cows instead of one, and there would have been nothing but sullen looks and silence. Was I not warned the moment I set foot in the place? It's Donald Ross of Heimra who is their laird. I am a stranger, and an enemy."

And now it was Kate Glendinning's turn to make a few discreet inquiries: for the allegation that a Highland gentleman would condescend to sale and barter was still rankling in her soul.

"Well, Mrs. MacVean," said she pleasantly, "that was very excellent brandy you gave us last night, and very welcome, too: I suppose we should have died of the cold and wet if you had not given us the hot drink. But where did you get brandy in an out-of-the-world place like this?"

An alarmed expression came into the old woman's face, though she endeavoured to conceal it. She looked away down the hill-side, and said vaguely:

"It was—in the house. Oh, ay—in the house."

"Yes; but where did you get it?" Kate asked.

There was a moment of silence—and distress.

"The brandy?—Mr. Ross—he ordering me to give it to you."

"Oh, yes," said the young lady, in the same off-hand sort of way, "and it was very thoughtful of him—and very kind of you. It seemed to bring us back to life again. I don't know what we should have done without it. I was only wondering where you got such good brandy in this part of the Highlands."

The old woman looked anxiously from the one to the other: were they trying to entrap her?—even after their generous promise that she should have

the cow.

"Oh, ay," she said, still clinging desperately to those evasive phrases, "the brandy—it in the house—and—and Mr. Ross, he ordering me to give it—and any one very pleased, whatever he wishes. And the ladies—very, very wet and cold—and a long weh home to Lochgarra—"

"Come, come, Mrs. MacVean," Käthchen said, "you ought to know that we don't want to make any trouble—is it likely, just after Miss Stanley has promised to give you the cow? I am asking only out of curiosity; and I can keep a secret as well as any one. And of course we are quite aware that it is Mr. Ross who brings the brandy into the neighbourhood—and very properly, too, for good brandy is better than bad whisky, and you must have something in the house in case of sickness. Very well: tell me what he charges you for it."

"Charges?" the old woman repeated, with a puzzled air.

"Yes," said Käthchen, encouragingly. "I only want to know for—for information; and I am not likely to tell any one. What do you pay him for it?"

Then the old grandmother understood; and though she did not say much, there was something in her tone that showed how keenly she resented this imputation.

"Pay—Mr. Ross of Heimra—for the brandy?" said she, as if it was herself who had been insulted; and she was turning angrily away. "You think—the young master—tekkin money from the like of me?"

"Then he gives you the brandy for nothing?" said Kate,—and this question at once arrested the old dame, who made answer somewhat sulkily—

"I not saying that—I not saying that at ahl."

"Of course not," said Käthchen, with cheerful good humour. "It is not necessary for you to say anything. But now I understand; and I am glad of it; for I have Highland blood in my veins myself, and I did not like to think of a Highland gentleman taking money for little kindnesses of that sort. And indeed I did not believe it; and I am very pleased indeed that you have made it possible for me to contradict such a ridiculous story."

Shortly thereafter—the old grandmother having been won into something of a more conciliatory mood by reiterated expressions of thanks and a circumstantial promise with regard to the cow—the two young women left; and as they descended the hill, Kate Glendinning was most triumphant about this refutation of what she considered a malignant slander. Mary, on the other hand, was inclined to be coldly severe in her judgment wherever young Ross of Heimra was concerned—though neither coldness nor severity formed part of her ordinary temperament.

"I don't see anything to be proud of, Käthchen," said she. "He is cheating the revenue, for one thing."

"Cheating the revenue," said Käthchen, in her matter-of-fact way, "is not likely to trouble a Highlander's conscience much. But I dare say he thinks the Government can get along well enough without taking any more taxation from these poor people; and I have no doubt he says to himself that if he pays for a bottle of good brandy for some poor woman with ague or rheumatism in her old joints, the Government can afford to let her have it without the duty. In a climate like this you must have spirits of some kind; and as I was saying to Mrs. MacVean, good brandy is better than bad whisky filled with fusel oil."

"I know perfectly well what his object is," Mary said, proudly and indignantly. "His object is simply to steal away the hearts of the people—and to stir up ill-will between them and whoever happens to be at Lochgarra House. They are all his friends—and my enemies. He can shoot and fish wherever he pleases; he has the run of the whole estate; he is welcome at every fireside; whilst I, when I want to lower the rents, and better the condition of the people in every way, and be their friend—well, I am kept outside at the door, and if I say 'Am I welcome?' there is no answer. For him—everything: for me—nothing. And I think it is hardly fair."

She spoke in a proud and hurt way, and her lips trembled for an instant: it was clear that she considered she had not deserved this ill-usage.

"No, no, no, Mary," her friend protested. "You are unjust, as far as Mr. Ross is concerned anyway. For one thing it is very likely that the poor people about here were accustomed to look to his mother for little comforts when they fell ill; and he may be trying to carry out the same kind of thing, in the only way that would occur to a man." Then a demure smile came into Käthchen's eyes. "But I will be honest with you, Mary. I don't think it is done to spite you at all: although your family have wrought him and his sufficient wrong. But if you were to ask me if it wasn't done with a determination to spite Mr. Purdie—in return for the destruction of the illicit stills—well, you see, people may act from various motives, and I shouldn't be surprised if that had something to do with it. As for stealing the hearts of the people—if you knew the curious loyalty and devotion of the Highlanders towards the old families, you would hardly think it necessary that Mr. Ross should have to make use of any bribe——"

"But why should they hate me?" Mary exclaimed—and Käthchen had no answer.

However, if Miss Stanley had on one or two occasions suspected that the presence of the detested factor might have something to do with the failure of her efforts to cultivate amicable relations with her tenants, here was an opportunity of seeing what she could do by herself; for on their way back they again came to the small township of Minard, where the amphibious population were busy in the crofts and along the shore. She dismissed the carriage; and proceeded

to make a few friendly little calls—guarding carefully against any appearance of intrusion, and, indeed, almost humbly begging for something of consideration and good-will. And she was resolved to take no heed of any surly manners or uncivil speech; for she was of a large, bland, magnanimous nature; and she had a considerable fund of patience, and gentleness, and sweetness, to draw upon. Then she had to remember that her uncle had been unpopular, and had no doubt amply earned his unpopularity. Moreover, a factor who stands between a wilful and domineering landlord and a tenantry not in the happiest condition, is most invidiously situated: he is the universal scapegoat, and is bound to be hated as well as feared. But here was she willing to make what atonement was possible; ready to sacrifice her own interests for the general good; and above all things anxious to make friends. With gifts in both hands, ought she not to have been welcome at every door? Then she was pleasant to look upon; her manner was gracious and winning; her eyes were kind. With the small children she could get on well enough: they knew nothing of any deep-slumbering feud.

But her charm of manner, her wonder-working smile, her unfailing good-humour, that had made life easy for her elsewhere, seemed to be of no avail here—with the grown-up folk, at all events. Not that they were rude: they were merely obdurate and silent. Of course, when she got this one or that pinned by a direct question, he did not absolutely refuse to reply; but their answers were so contradictory, and their demands in most cases so impossible, that no practical enlightenment was possible. One man wanted more boats from the Government; another said that more boats were of no use unless the Government supplied nets as well; a third said boats and nets were valueless unless they had a steamer calling daily. There was also a demand that the Government should build more harbours; and when Mary said, in reply to this, that she understood the harbours they had got—Lochgarra, that is to say, and Camus Bheag—to be about as excellent as any in the West Highlands, she was answered that the harbours were perhaps good enough—if there was a railway. Then there were some who did not seem to have any occupation at all.

"Don't you have anything to work at?" she said, to one tall and rather good-looking young fellow, who was standing looking on at the women and girls gathering the sea-tangle.

"My father has a croft," he made answer, in a listless way.

"But wouldn't you," she said, in a very gentle and hesitating manner, so as not to seem impertinent, "wouldn't you rather go away and find some work for yourself?"

"Aw, well, I was at Glasgow, and I was getting twenty shillings a week there."

"And you did not stay?"

"Well, I could not live there," he said, simply enough. "It is no use getting twenty shillings a week if you cannot live in a place; and in a few years I would be dead, if I was living in Glasgow. I am better to be alive here than dead in Glasgow."

"Then perhaps you go to the East Coast fishing?" she suggested.

"No, I am not going there now. I was there one or two years, but it did not pay me."

"And don't you do anything?" she asked again.

"Well, in January I am in the Naval Reserve."

"And the rest of the year you don't do anything?"

"Well, my father has a croft"—and that was about all the information she could extract from him.

As a final attempt she said to him, timidly—

"If I were to try to get you a boat and nets from the Government, would it be of service to you?"

"It would need eight of a crew," said he, with an obvious lack of interest, "and I would not be knowing where to find them."

However, a great surprise was in store for her: before getting back to Lochgarra on this occasion she actually encountered a human being who received her proffered friendliness and good-will with cheerful and unhesitating gratitude, and responded with a frank comradeship that quite won her heart. It is true the man was drunk; but at first she did not perceive that; and indeed she was ready to make ample allowances in her eager desire to establish pleasant relations with anybody, after the disheartening coldness she had just experienced at Minard. This man whom she and Käthchen overtook on their homeward way was a huge, lumbering, heavy-shouldered giant, with a prodigious brown beard and thick eyebrows, whose deep-set grey eyes (though a little bemused) looked at once intelligent and amiable. On his shoulder he had hoisted a rough wooden box; and as he trudged along he smoked a small black clay pipe.

"Good-day to you!" said Mary to the giant.

"Aw, good-deh, good-deh, mem!" said he, with a broad grin of welcome, and he instantly put the pipe in his pocket.

"That is a heavy box you are carrying," said she; "I wish I were driving, and I would take it along for you."

"Aw, it's glad I am I hef something to carry," said he, in a strong Argyllshire accent, "and I wass thinking that mebbe Miss Stanley herself would be for tekkin a lobster or two from me, for the house. Aw, I'll not be charging Miss Stanley mich for them—no, nor anything at ahl, if Miss Stanley would be for tekkin a lobster or two from me——"

"Oh, these are lobsters?" said she, with the most friendly interest.

"Ay, chist that," said the giant.

"And you will be sending them away by the mail-cart?" she asked.

"Ay, chist that—it's to London I am sending them."

"Oh, really," she said. "All the way to London? Well, now, I wonder if you would think me inquisitive or impertinent if I asked you how much you get for them?"

"How much? Aw, chist two-and-sixpence the dissen," said he, in a good-natured fashion, as if he hardly expected to get anything.

But Mary was most indignant.

"What?" she said. "Two-and-sixpence the dozen? It's monstrous! Why, it's downright robbery! I will write to the London papers. Two-and-sixpence a dozen?—and a single lobster selling in London for eighteenpence or two shillings, and that a small one, too. Isn't it too bad, Käthchen? I will write to the newspapers—I will not allow such robbery."

"It is a long weh of communigation," said the big, heavy-shouldered, good-humoured-looking man; "and Mr. Corstorphine he paying ahl the carriage, and sending me the boxes."

"I will get you twice as much as that for the lobsters," said Mary, with decision, "if I sell them among my own friends. I will guarantee you twice as much as that, and I will pay the carriage, and get you the boxes. What is your name?"

"Archie MacNicol, mem," said he; but the whisky had made him talkative, and he went on: "I am from Tarbert on Loch Fyne; I am not from among these people here at ahl. These people, they are not proper fishermen—aw, they are afraid of the sea—they will not go far out—I hef seen the East Coast men coming along here and tekkin the herring from under their very eyes. There is one of the Government boats that they got; and it is not paid for yet; and it is lying half-covered with sand at Achnacross, and no one using it at ahl. Ay, and the curers willing to give elevenpence a piece for ling. Ay, and I wass into Loch Hourn, and I got fifty crans of herring, and I wass curing them myself—

"But wait a moment," said Mary, to whom this information seemed a little confused. "If you are not tired, won't you keep on your way to the village, and we will walk with you? You see, I am anxious to get all the information I can about this place; and the people here don't seem to be very communicative—although it is altogether in their own interests that I should like to make inquiries. But they appear to be afraid of me—or there is some quarrely or ill-will, that I don't understand——"

"A quarrel with Miss Stanley?" said the lobster-fisherman, deprecatingly—for he was in a mellow and generous mood. "No, no—he would be a foolish man that would be saying that!"

"Very well," said Mary, as they were all three going on to the village, "tell

me about your own circumstances. I want to know how I can be of help to the people about here. I have not come to Lochgarra to raise rents, and collect money, and take it away and spend it in London. I want to live here—if the people will let me; but I don't want to live among continuous enmity and ill-will."

"Aw, yes, yes, to be sure, to be sure now!" said Archie, in the most amiable way, and Mary was entirely grateful to him for his sympathy—it was so unexpected.

"Tell me about your own circumstances," she went on. "Is there anything I can do for you and the other lobster-fishermen?"

"Aw, Cosh!" he cried (but it was the whisky that was responsible: Archie himself meant to be most polite). "Would Miss Stanley be doing this for us, now—would she be writing a letter for us to the Fishery Board?"

"Oh, certainly," she answered with promptitude, "if that will be of any service to you. What about?"

And here Big Archie (Gilleasbuig Mòr, as they called him) in his eagerness to tell his tale, stopped short, and deposited the lobster-box in the road.

"It's this way now—that there will be many a brokken head before long if something is not done. For they are coming from ahl quarters to the lobster-fishing—stranchers that hef no business here at ahl; and they are building huts; and where there is a hut there will soon be a house; and it does not require the wise man of Mull to tell any one the truth of that. Yes, and they will be saying they hef the right from the Fishery Board; but as I am thinking that is nothing but lies; for how can the Fishery Board give stranchers the right to come here and build huts on the crofts above the shore—ay, and going on, and paying no rent, either to Miss Stanley, or the crofter, or to any one? And Gillie Ciotach and me, ay, and two or three of the young lads, we were saying we would tek sticks and stones, and drive them into the sea—ay, though there might be a bluidy nawse here and there; and others would be saying no, that it was dancherous to do anything against the Fishery Board. And would Miss Stanley be for sending a letter to the Board, to ask if it is lies those people are telling us, and whether they can come and build a hut whenever they like?"

"Certainly I will," said she. "Only, there is to be no fighting and bloodshed, mind. Of course, the space occupied by a hut is a very trifling matter: I suppose what you really object to is those strangers coming to your lobster-ground?"

"Ay, chist that!" said Big Archie, eagerly.

"Very well. It seems to me quite absurd to think that the Fishery Board should have given any one the right to build huts; however, I will inquire; and then, if I get the answer I expect, you must go peaceably and quietly to those people, and tell them they are mistaken, that they have no right from the Fishery Board or from any one else, and that they must leave——"

"Evictions!" said Käthchen, under her breath: she saw trouble coming.

"Quite peaceably and quietly, you understand," Mary continued; "there must be no broken heads or anything of that kind; you must tell the people what the Fishery Board says, and then they will see that they are bound to go."

"Ay, ay, chist whatever Miss Stanley pleases," said Big Archie; and therewith he shouldered the heavy lobster-box again, and resumed his patient trudge, while he proceeded to give Miss Stanley some further information about those marauding fishermen and their evil ways.

But when they were nearing Lochgarra, Mary, who had been rather silent and abstracted for some little time back, said to him,—

"I suppose you have a boat, Mr. MacNicol?"

"Aw, ay, and a fine boat too," said Archie. "And if Miss Stanley herself would be wishing for a sail, I would bring the boat round from Camus Bheag."

"That is just what I have been thinking of," Mary said: they were now come in sight of the sea, and she was absently looking out towards the horizon.

"Ay, chist any time that Miss Stanley pleases, and I will not be charging anything," said the good-natured giant with the friendly (and bemused) eyes. "Aw, naw, there would be no charge at ahl—but chist a gless of whisky when we come ashore."

"Oh, I must pay you for your time, of course," said she, briefly. "I suppose you could bring your boat round this evening so that my friend and myself might start pretty early to-morrow morning? We should be ready by ten."

Käthchen turned wondering eyes upon her.

"But where are you going, Mamie?"

"I am going out to Heimra Island," she said.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PIRATE'S LAIR.

It was a bold undertaking; and Käthchen hardly concealed her dismay; but Mary Stanley was resolute.

"I must see my enemy face to face," she said. "I want to know what he means. Why should he stir up enmity and malignity against me? If he had any thought for those people who seem to regard him with such devotion, he would be on my side, for I wish to do everything I can for them. He ought to welcome

me, instead of trying to drive me out of the place. And if he fishes and shoots over the Lochgarra estate simply to spite me, suppose I refuse to be spited? Suppose I present him with the shooting and fishing, on condition that he allows me to be kind to these people? How would that do, Käthchen? Wouldn't that be a fine revenge? I think that ought to make his face burn, if he has anything of gentle blood left in him!"

There was a vibrant chord of indignation in her tone, as there generally was when she spoke of this young man; for she did not think she was being fairly treated. But Käthchen, ignoring the true sources of her dismay, began to urge objections to this proposed visit, on the ground of social observances.

"I do really think, Mamie, it will look strange for two unmarried girls to go away out and pay such a visit—and—to that lonely island. Now if you would only wait until the Free Church Minister comes home, he might go with us, and then it would be all right. Not that the Free Church Minister is certain of a welcome—if the young man is what he is said to be; but at all events he would be a chaperon for us."

But Mary would not hear of waiting; she would challenge her secret antagonist forthwith.

"Very well, then," said Kate Glendinning, more seriously than was her wont, "if we do go, we must have some excuse; and you must tell him you have come to thank him for having got us out of that frightful bog."

Nor did the uninviting look of the next morning cause Miss Stanley to alter her resolve. It was hardly a day for a pleasure sail. The wind, it is true, had abated during the night; and there was not much of a sea on; but the skies were heavy and lowering; and dark and sombre were those long headlands running out into the leaden-hued main. But there was the lobster-boat lying at anchor, in charge of a young lad; and the dinghy was drawn up on the beach; and a message had just come in that Big Archie was waiting below to carry wraps and rugs.

"Käthchen," said Mary, sitting hastily down to her writing-desk, "I have discovered that the Fishery Board sits at Edinburgh; but I can't find out who are the members. Do you think I should begin 'My Lords and Gentlemen' or only 'Gentlemen'?"

"I don't know," said Käthchen; "I should think 'Gentlemen' would be safer."

So, in happy singleness of purpose, Mary proceeded to write her letter about the alien lobster-fishermen—little thinking to what that innocent action was to lead; then she went and quickly got ready; and by and by the two girls were on their way down to the beach, accompanied by the gigantic and massive-shouldered Gilleasbuig Mòr. Big Archie, if the truth must be told, was moodily silent this morning: the fact being that on the previous evening he had wound up the day's promiscuous indulgence by "drinking sore," as they say in those parts;

and now his physical conscience was troubling him. But if his conversation was limited to monosyllables, and if he wore a sad and depressed look, he was, nevertheless, most kind and assiduous in his attentions to the two ladies; and when he had rowed them out in the dinghy, and got them ensconced in the stern of the bigger boat, he did everything he could for their comfort, considering the rudeness of their surroundings. And presently, when the anchor was got up, Big Archie came aft to the tiller; the young lad lay prone on the bit of deck forward, to keep a look-out; and Mary and her companion knew they were now pledged to the enterprise, whatever might come of it.

Indeed the two girls were themselves rather inclined to silence. It was a gloomy sort of morning; there was even a threatening of rain brooding over the distant headlands; and the dark sea lapped mournfully around them, with not a single swift-glancing flash of white. But the light breeze was favourable, and they made steady progress, unfamiliar features of the coast-line becoming visible on right hand and on left as they made further and further out to sea.

It seemed a long and weary time—given over to dreamings, and doubtings, and somewhat anxious forecasts. But all of a sudden Mary was startled by the voice of the skipper.

"Will Miss Stanley be for going in to Heimra?"

And then for the moment her courage failed her.

"What do you say, Käthchen? Do you think—we should send a message—before calling——?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Käthchen, with eagerness. "That is certainly what we ought to do."

"Oh, very well, then," said Mary, turning to the steersman (but there was a flush of self-conscious shame on her cheeks), "you need not take us to the house—we will merely have a look at the island—and some other day we will come out, when we have told Mr. Ross beforehand."

"Very well, mem," said Big Archie, holding on the same course, which was taking them by the south side of the island.

It was an angry-looking coast—steep and sheer—a long, low, heavy surge breaking monotonously along the black rocks. But when they got round the westward-trending headland, they gradually came in sight of the sheltered waters of the little bay, and of the sweep of silver beach, and the solitary cottage perched on its small plateau. And of course Käthchen's eyes were full of intensest interest, with something, too, of apprehension; for this (according to Mr. Purdie) was the pirate's den; this was the home of the outlaw whose deeds by night and day, by sea and shore, had gained him so dark a renown. But Mary's attention had been attracted elsewhither. She was regarding a white marble slab, placed high on the top of the cliff, facing the western seas.

"Look, Käthchen," she said, in rather a low voice. And then she turned to the silent little bay before her. "Poor woman!" she said. "It was a lonely place to live all those years."

Presently Mary bethought her of the errand that had brought her so far; and she repented of her irresolution.

"Can you take us into the bay, Mr. MacNicol?" said she, without staying to consult Käthchen.

"Aw, yes, mem, zurely."

"For it is a long way to have come—and—and I am anxious to see Mr. Ross."

"Aw, very well, mem," said Archie, at once altering his course.

And then she said, looking all round the bay:

"But where is the yacht?"

"Is it Mr. Ross's yat, mem? It wass lying in Camus Bheag when I wass coming aweh last evening."

"And was Mr. Ross on board?" Käthchen asked, with a quick sense of relief.

"Indeed I am not zure of that," said Archie. "For mebbe he wass sending the men over to the mainland, and himself staying on the island."

"In any case, Käthchen, that need not matter to you," Mary interposed. "You can remain where you are, and I will go up to the house by myself. Why should you bother about my business affairs?"

This was a view of the case that was not likely to commend itself to Kate Glendinning, who could nerve herself on occasion. When the lobster-boat had come to anchor, and they had gone ashore in the dinghy, she proceeded to walk up to the house along with her friend just as if nothing unusual was happening to her. She kept watch—furtively; but her outward air was one of perfect self-possession. As for Mary, she was too deeply engaged in thinking how her complaints and demands were to be framed to heed anything else at this moment.

They knocked at the door, and again knocked; after a little while the old woman Martha appeared—the surprise in her face being obvious testimony to the rarity of visitors to this remote island.

"Is Mr. Ross at home?" Mary asked.

It was a second or so before Martha recovered from her amazement—for she had not seen the lobster-boat appear in the bay, nor yet the strangers come ashore.

"Oh, no—he is over on the mainland," said the trimly-dressed old woman. "What a peety—what a peety!"

Mary was rather taken aback; however, she said:

"It is not of much consequence, for, if he is on the mainland—or if he is in the neighbourhood—I daresay I shall be able to see him before he returns to Heimra."

And then she was about coming away when Martha interposed, with Highland courtesy.

"But would not the leddies come in and sit down for a little while—and hef some tea, or a little milk, or something of that kind? Mr. Ross very sorry when he knows—to be sure—and a great peety him not here—"

"Oh, thank you," said Käthchen (whose face had lightened considerably when she heard of Donald Ross being absent), "it is very kind of you; and I am sure I shall be very glad to have a glass of milk, if you will be so kind."

Käthchen wanted no milk; but she suddenly saw before her a chance of having her curiosity satisfied without risk: she would be allowed to see what kind of lair this was in which the savage outlaw lived. And so the unsuspecting Martha led the way; and the two young ladies followed her into the passage, and into the first room leading therefrom, which was a kind of morning-apartment and study combined. They seated themselves, and she left to get them such refreshment as the out-of-the-world cottage could afford.

The two girls were silent; but their eyes were busy. The first thing that attracted their notice was a portrait over the mantelpiece—the portrait of a very beautiful woman, pale somewhat and dark, with refined and impressive features, and of a simple yet dignified bearing. A sad face, perhaps; but a face full of character and distinction: the first glance told you this was no common person who looked at you so calmly. Mary said nothing; Käthchen said nothing; but they knew who this was—the likeness was too obvious.

And as for the other contents of the room?—well, there were neither guns, nor rods, nor splash-nets, nor anything else connected with fishing or shooting, legal or illegal; but there was an abundance of books in the shelves that lined three walls of the apartment. Moreover, there was one volume lying on the table before them—beside a wooden pipe. They regarded this for some little time; but it was Käthchen who spoke first.

"Mary, would it be very impertinent if I looked?"

Mary Stanley laughed.

"I don't know," she said. "Most people do pick up things when they are left in a room. But we are in a peculiar position. We are here without the consent of the owner."

"Yes, that is so," said Käthchen, resignedly, and she remained still.

But she continued looking towards the book in a wistful way.

"It's only the title I should like to see," she began again. "What harm can there be in that? If Mr. Ross were here himself, I would take up the book in a minute—yes, I would! What do you say, Mary?"

"Well," said Mary, frankly, "I really should like to know what kind of literature commends itself to any one living in a strange place such as this. But at the

same time we are not his guests—we are intruders—or if we are guests, we are the housekeeper's guests, and it is but fair to her we shouldn't pry into secrets."

Käthchen had risen and gone across to the table: perhaps it would not be breaking the laws of hospitality if she could get a glimpse of the title of the book without actually laying hands on it? But the back of it was away from the light. In these desperate circumstances, Käthchen yielded to temptation; she hastily snatched up the volume, glanced at the title, and as quickly returned to her seat again.

"Good gracious!" said she. "That is fine entertainment for a lonely island—Joshua Williams's 'Real Property'!"

"A law book?" said Mary, with her face becoming suddenly grave. "I hope there is not going to be—any trouble—a lawsuit is such a dreadful thing——"

"Oh, no; I understand what that means," said Käthchen, "I know quite well. That is one of the books my brother had when he was reading up for the bar—I remember it because I spilt some ink over it, and he made me buy him another. I wonder, now, if Mr. Ross is reading up for the bar? Wouldn't that be a blessed dispensation of Providence for you, Mamie—if he were to go away and shut himself up in the Temple, and leave you Lochgarra entirely in your own hands, shooting, and fishing, and everything? Only," she added, "I don't quite understand how such a wild savage as Mr. Purdie described to us would be likely to get on with the Judges. I am afraid there would be scenes in court. What do they call dismissing a barrister?—not cashiering?—unfrocking?——"

Käthchen had suddenly to cease; for here was the elderly Martha, carrying a large tray amply provided with homely and wholesome fare—oatmeal cake, soda scones, marmalade, strawberry jam, fresh butter, and a jug of milk. And Mary did not pause before breaking bread in the house of her enemy; for she saw that the old housekeeper was anxious that her bounties should be appreciated; and besides, oat-cake and marmalade and fresh milk ought to recommend themselves to any healthily-constituted young woman. By and by, when Martha had left the room, Miss Stanley said—

"What shall I give her as we are going away, Käthchen? Half-a-sovereign?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Mamie, don't think of such a thing!" Käthchen exclaimed. "At any other time give her anything you like; but you must not pay for food in this house; you cannot imagine how offended she would be. She would take it as an insult offered to her master: she represents Mr. Ross in his absence—it is Mr. Ross who is entertaining us now——"

"Oh, it is Mr. Ross who is entertaining us?—yes of course," said Mary, thoughtfully; and—perhaps without noticing the coincidence—she put down the piece of oat-cake she held in her hand, nor did she take it up again.

And furthermore, as they were going down to the boat—having made due

acknowledgments to Martha for her hospitality—Mary walked as one in a dream; while Käthchen, rejoiced to have come through this dreaded ordeal with such unexpected ease, was in the gayest of humours. She did not notice her friend's reverie; she was chattering away about their foolhardiness in entering the savage's lair—about her surprise in finding no skulls and bones lying in corners—about the quiet and studious aspect of the place being a pretty cover for all kinds of dark and lawless deeds. Mary did not reply; once or twice she looked up to the white grave on the hill—she was thinking of other things.

But when they had all got into the larger boat again, and set out on their return voyage, Käthchen found a companion more of her own mood. The truth is that while the young ladies were being entertained in the front part of the house, Big Archie had slipped up to the back, had paid his respects to Martha, and had been presented, as is the custom in the west, with his morning dram. This welcome mitigation of his *Katzenjammer* had made a new man of him; and he was now disposed to be as talkative as hitherto he had been morose; so that, as he sate with his arm on the tiller, he was cheerfully telling the young lady all about himself, and his doings, and circumstances. And Käthchen, finding him thus sociable, and friendly, affected much interest, and plied him with appropriate questions.

"Do you keep a cow, Mr. MacNicol?" said she.

"Aw, now," said he, deprecatingly, "the young leddy will be mekkin me ashamed. It's chist Archie they'll be calling me."

"Very well, Archie—do you keep a cow?"

"I starve one," said Archie, with ironical humour.

"And a kitchen garden?"

"Aw, is it a garden? And you will not know that I wass tekken the prize for the garden, ay, more as three or four years? Well, well, now, there is no longer a prize given for the best garden, and it's a peety, too——"

"But tell me," said Käthchen, with some astonishment, "why was the prize stopped? It seems a very reasonable thing, a prize for the best kitchen garden among the crofters and fishermen—I'm quite sure Miss Stanley would give such a prize. Why was it stopped?"

Big Archie hesitated for a second or two; then he said, with a grin of confession—

"Well, now, I will tell you the God's truth, mem; for there's two ways about every story; and there's my way of it, and there's Mr. Purdie's way of it; and mebbe the one is true or the other. And this is my way of it: I wass gettin the prize—oh, yes, I will not deny that—year by year, and very proud I wass, too, of the cabbages, and the scarlet beans, and the like of that, and the thirty shullins of the prize a very good thing for me. And then kem the time the Minard crofters

they were for sending an appligation to Mr. Stanley for to have the rents revised, and I put my name to the paper too; but Mr. Stanley he would do nothing at ahl—he said 'Go to Mr. Purdie.' Then Mr. Purdie he sees my name on the paper; and he says, 'Very well, there will be no more prize for the garden, and you can do without your thirty shullins.' It wass a punishment for me, that I wass putting my name on the paper. Now, mem, that is my story about the prize——"

"I think it was very shabby treatment!" Käthchen exclaimed.

"And that is the way I see my side of it," continued Big Archie, honestly; "but I am not denying there may be another way. Aw naw, mem, I want to tell you fair; and Mr. Purdie he would hef another version for you, if you were to believe it——"

"Well, then, what is his version?" said Käthchen—for the time being rather priding herself on playing Mary Stanley's part.

"Well, I wass speaking to Mr. Pettigrew, the minister, and he wass speaking to Mr. Purdie, about getting the prize back, and Mr. Purdie he says to Mr. Pettigrew 'No, I will not give the prize back; for there was not enough competition, and Archie MacNicol he wass always tekkin the prize, and it wass the same as thirty shullins a year off his rent. The prize,' he wass saying, 'wass to encourache ahl the people to attend to their gardens, and not to give Archie MacNicol thirty shullins a year.' And that's the God's truth, mem, and both ways of the story; but what I will be thinking to myself is that there wass no talk of stopping the prize till Mr. Purdie found my name on the paper. That's what I would be thinking to myself sometimes."

Käthchen glanced rather timidly at her friend. But Mary was still in that curiously abstracted reverie—her eyes turned wistfully towards the now receding Eilean Heimra—her thoughts remote. So Käthchen merely said in an undertone—

"Very well, Archie, I will put both versions of the story before Miss Stanley, and I have no doubt she will do what is right. For my own part, I don't see why you should be deprived of the prize simply because you keep a smarter garden than the other people."

A great event happened this afternoon—nothing less than the arrival from the South of Mr. Watson, the sheep-farmer, Miss Stanley's principal tenant. The two girls had landed from the boat, walked along the shore, and were just about turning off towards Lochgarra House, when they were overtaken by some one riding a stout and serviceable little cob; and Mary instantly guessed who this must be—for persons on horseback are rare at Lochgarra. The stranger lifted his hat, but did not draw rein.

"Mr. Watson," said she—looking towards him with a plain intimation that she desired to speak with him.

Mr. Watson immediately pulled up, dismounted, and came towards her,

leading the cob by the bridle. He was a middle-aged man with a fresh complexion, grizzled hair, short whiskers, and shrewd blue eyes—looking prosperous and well-satisfied with himself, and with some little turn for jocosity about his firmly-set lips.

"I beg your pardon," she said, with a little embarrassment, "but—I wished to speak with you——"

"Miss Stanley?—I am glad to make your acquaintance," said he, in a marked south-country accent. And he bowed to Miss Stanley's companion.

"Won't you come into the house for a moment or two?" said Mary, with a vague notion that she ought to be polite to a tenant who paid her £1400 a year: moreover, she had ulterior ends in view. Mr. Watson consented; Mary went and called a gardener, who took charge of the cob; and then the two young ladies and the farmer proceeded up the stone steps, and through the hall, and into the wide hexagonal drawing-room in the tower. Then she asked him to be seated, adding some vague suggestion about a glass of wine and a biscuit after his ride.

"No, I thank ye," said Mr. Watson. "I am a teetotaller—not an ordinary thing in these parts. Ay, and a vegetarian. But I practise—I don't preach," he explained, with a complacent smile; "so I do no harm to other folk. Both things suit me; but I let other people alone. That's the fair way in the world."

"I wanted to ask you, Mr. Watson," said she, with a certain timidity, "whether you would be disposed to give up the pasturage of Meall-na-Cruagan?"

In a second the shrewd and humorous blue eyes had become strictly observant and business-like.

"To give it up?" he said, slowly.

"I mean," she interposed, "at a valuation. I know it is yours under the lease; we cannot disturb you; nor should I wish to do so, except entirely with your own goodwill."

"Miss Stanley," said he, "I will ask ye a plain question: what for do ye want me to give up the Meall-na-Cruagan?"

"The crofters——"

"Ay, ay, just that," said he, without much ceremony. "They've been at ye, in the absence of Mr. Purdie. Well, let me tell ye this: I am willing on my part to give up the Meall-na-Cruagan, at a fair valuation; but I warn ye that if ye hand it over to the crofters, they'll be not one penny the better off, and you'll be just so much the worse. Where are they to get the stock to put on it? They've enough grazing for what stock they've got."

"Yes, but it is not wholly that," said Mary. "I want to have them satisfied."

"Ye'll never see them satisfied, though ye gave them the whole Lochgarra estate for nothing," said this very plain-spoken person. "Surely ye are aware that the agents of the Highland Land League have been here, as they have been in ev-

ery hole and corner of the Highlands; and while some of them have been making reasonable enough demands, others of them have been showing themselves nothing but irresponsible mischief-makers, firing the brains of these poor creatures with revolutionary nonsense, and trying to turn the whole place into another Ireland. Well, well, it's not my business; it's not for me to speak; but I warn ye, Miss Stanley, that giving up Meall-na-Cruagan will not satisfy them. What many of them want—especially what the more ignorant among them want—is for the landlords to quit the country altogether, and leave them the entire stock, lock, and barrel of the estates—the land and all that belongs to it."

"I know," said Mary, quietly, "what the Land League have been doing; but if there had not been widespread discontent and distress they could not have done anything at all. And surely there was reason for the discontent; look at the reductions the Crofters' Commission have made—thirty and forty per cent. in some places. However, I am not concerned with the economic question of the Highlands generally; I am concerned merely with Lochgarra; and I want to do what is fair by the tenants; I want to see them satisfied, and as well-to-do and comfortable as the circumstances will allow. But what has been puzzling me since I came here," she continued—for this seemed a frank and well-wishing kind of man, and she was glad to have any sort of help or advice—"is that when I have spoken about lowering the rent, they have had nothing to say in reply. They seem rather to look to the Government for aid. Yet you would imagine that the lowering of the rent would be the first and all-important thing."

Mr. Watson smiled, in a condescending way.

"I think ye might understand why they would not complain to you about the rent."

"Why?" she demanded.

He hesitated—and there was an odd look on his face.

"I do not wish to say anything against friend Purdie," he observed.

"But I want to know the truth," she insisted. "How am I to do anything at all unless I know the exact and literal truth?"

"Well, well, let us put it this way," said Mr. Watson, good-naturedly. "There's some that would call Mr. Purdie a hard man; and there's some that would call him an excellent factor, business-like, thoroughgoing, and skilled in his work. It's not a nice position to be in at the best; it's not possible to please everybody. And there's different ways of dealing with people."

All this sounded very enigmatic. Mary could not in the least understand what he meant.

"I wish you to speak plainly, Mr. Watson," said she. "You may be sure it will be in absolute confidence."

He considered for a moment. Then he said:

"It's of little consequence to me. Friend Purdie and I get on very well, considering; and besides I have my lease. But I'll just give ye an instance of what has happened on this estate, and you'll judge for yourself whether it's likely the tenants would come to you for a reduction of rent, or ask ye to interfere in any way whatever. It was about four years ago that one of the crofts over at Cruagan fell vacant. Very well. Then Mr. Purdie would have it that the pasture of that croft should be taken by the other Cruagan crofters, each one paying his share of the rent; while the arable land of the croft should be added to the Glen Sanna farm, which was also vacant just then. The Cruagan crofters objected to that arrangement; Mr. Purdie insisted; and at last the crofters sent a petition to Mr. Stanley, asking to have the arable land of the croft as well, or else to be let alone. I am not saying anything against your uncle, Miss Stanley."

"But I want to get at the truth of the story, Mr. Watson," said Mary, firmly. "That is the main point. What happened?"

"I may explain that your uncle never interfered with Mr. Purdie," the farmer continued, rather apologetically, "and that's no to be wondered at. Many landlords make it a rule not to interfere with their factor, for of course he's doing the best he can for the estate, and knows about it better than they can know themselves. Then what happened, do ye say? What happened was this—at the very next term every crofter that had signed the petition was served with a notice to quit; and that was only withdrawn when they undertook to pay, each man of them, £3 a year additional rent—that is 15s. for their share of the added pasture, and £2 5s. as a fine for having objected to Mr. Purdie's arrangements. That's just what happened, Miss Stanley."

Mary was silent for a second or so—looking towards Käthchen, her eyes full of indignation.

"Why, it is one of the most abominable pieces of tyranny I ever heard of!" she exclaimed. And then she turned to Mr. Watson. "If people are treated like that, can you wonder if the Land League should find it easy to put revolutionary ideas into their head?"

"At all events," said Mr. Watson, with a shrewd and cautious smile, "ye will understand that they are not likely to apply to you for any lowering of rent. They know the consequences."

"Ah, do they?" said she quickly. "Well, I must show them that they are mistaken. I must convince them they have nothing to fear. They must learn that they can come to me, without dread of Mr. Purdie or anyone else. But," she added, with a bit of a sigh, "I suppose it will take a long time."

Alter some little further conversation, of no great moment, but marked by much civility on both sides, the farmer rose.

"Any time ye're passing Craiglarig, Miss Stanley, I should be proud if ye'd

look in."

"Indeed I will," said she, going with him to the door. "But I must tell you now how deeply I am indebted to you. And of course what you have said shall be kept in the strictest confidence."

"I have told ye the truth," said he, "since ye asked for it. But just mind this, Miss Stanley—good factors are no that common; and friend Purdie understands his business. He drives a hard bargain; but it's on your behalf."

"Yes," said she, "and now I am beginning to see why it is the people hate me."

That same evening the two girls, who had been out for a long walk, were coming down the Minard road towards Lochgarra. The twilight was deepening; the solemn inland hills were growing slowly and slowly darker, and losing their individual features; the softly lilac skies overhead were waiting for the coming night. Silence had fallen over the woods, where the birches showed their spectral arms in the dusk, and where the russet bracken and withered grey grass were now almost indistinguishable. It was a still and tranquil hour; sleep stealing upon the tired world; a little while, and the far, wide, mysteriously-moving sea would be alone with the stars.

But for Mary Stanley there was no sense of soothing quiet, even amidst this all-prevailing repose. On the contrary, her heart was full of turmoil and perplexity; insomuch that at times her courage was like to give way; and she was almost ready to abandon the task she had undertaken, as something beyond her strength. And then again a voice seemed to say to her "Patience—patience—hold on your way—dark as the present hour may be, the day will dawn at last." And in Käthchen she had an excellent counsellor; for Käthchen had an admirable habit of making light of troubles—especially those that did not concern herself; and she was practical, and matter-of-fact, neither over-sanguine nor liable to fits of black despondency. On the present occasion this was what she was saying, in her cool and self-possessed way:

"You see, Mamie, I understand the Highland character better than you do. All that sullenness and ill-will doesn't arise merely from high rent and Mr. Purdie's tyranny—though that no doubt has something to do with it. There are sentimental influences at work as well. There is the strong attachment towards the old family—very unreasoning, perhaps, but there it is; and there is resentment against those who have displaced them. Then there may be anger about your uncle having destroyed the ancient landmarks; and injuries of that kind are not easily forgotten or forgiven. But every hour that I am in this place," continued Käthchen, as they were making home through the strangely-silent dusk, "I am more and more convinced that what Mr. Purdie said was perfectly correct—that young Donald Ross of Heimra is just everybody and everything to those people.

He is all-powerful with them. Very well. I cannot believe that he has stirred up ill-will against you, or even that he wishes it to continue. He may do everything he can to thwart and madden Mr. Purdie—-why not?—I would do that myself, if I were in his place!—but how can he have any wish to injure you? Then what I say is this: if you really mean to go and see him, put entirely out of your mind what you may have heard about his private character, and his poaching and smuggling, and remember only that his influence over those people could make everything quite pleasant to you. Don't go to him as you did this morning, as an enemy to be challenged and reproached: no, what you have to do is just to lower your pride a little, and tell him that you have come to beg for a favour. In fact, I am convinced that a word from him would entirely change the situation. Mamie, are you going to ask for it?"

Mary Stanley did not answer: she walked on in silence.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACE TO FACE.

She was out in the solitude of the woods, and she was alone. It was early morning, clear, and calm, and still; the sun lay warm on the silver-lichened boulders that were dappled with velvet-green moss; the wandering air that stirred the pendulous branches of the birches brought with it a resinous odour, from the innumerable millions of opening buds. A profound silence prevailed, save for the hushed continuous murmur of an unseen rivulet, and the occasional distant call of a curlew.

A vague restlessness, and something even akin to despair, had brought her hither. For of course like other young people of the day she had coquetted with the modern doctrine that in times of trouble our great and gentle Mother Nature is the true consoler and comforter; she had read Wordsworth; and she had read Matthew Arnold upon Wordsworth:

"He too upon a wintry clime
Had fallen—on this iron time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
He found us when the age had bound
Our souls in its benumbing round—

He spoke, and loosed our heart in tears.
He laid us as we lay at birth
On the cool flowery lap of earth;
Smiles broke from us and we had ease.
The hills were round us, and the breeze
Went o'er the sun-lit fields again;
Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.
Our youth return'd; for there was shed
On spirits that had long been dead,
Spirits dried up and closely furl'd,
The freshness of the early world."

And now if she wished to forget the untowardness of human nature—if she wished to escape from her bitter disappointment on beholding her large and generous schemes met and checked on every hand by a sullen ingratitude—surely here was a seclusion that should have brought balm to her wounded heart. Moreover the morning light was cheerful; April as it was, a quiet warmth prevailed; she tried to please herself by recollecting that this fairy paradise actually belonged to her. And if human beings were so hard and unapproachable, why, then, she could interest herself in these harmless living creatures that were all so busy around her, under the quickening influences of the spring. From the dusty pathway in the opener glades the yellow-hammers were picking up bits of withered grass for their nest-building; black-caps swung back-downward from the sprays, to wrench the buds off with their bills; she stopped here and there to watch a beautiful beetle—shining bronze, or opaque green with a touch of scarlet on its legs; a tiny grey lizard, with its small eye bright as a diamond, lay basking on a shelf of rock, and remained absolutely motionless, hoping to be passed unnoticed. Then she came upon a little tuft of primroses—so shining pale—so full of dim suggestions—and of associations with the poets. Well, she looked at the primroses. They were very pretty. But somehow she could not keep thinking of them, nor of the fine things the poets had said of them. The fact was, in her present straits her heart was craving for human sympathy; she wanted to be of some use in the world; she wished to see eyes brighten when she appeared at the door, however poor the cottage might be. Primroses were pretty, no doubt—the firstlings of the year awoke pleasant and tender memories—but—but why were those people so obdurate? No, there was no solace for her; the sweet and soothing influences of nature were intruded upon, were obliterated, by the harsh facts and problems of human life. With those men and women almost openly declared her enemies, and with all her grand schemes gone away, what good could she get from primroses? And so, humiliating herself with the conviction that she was

nothing but another Peter Bell, she passed on through the woods, and eventually got down to the sheltered little bay where she had first met Anna Chlannach.

And on this occasion also she was destined to make a new acquaintance. She was idly walking up and down the lilac and cream-hued beach—and trying to persuade herself that she had found a refuge from the perplexities and mortifications that seemed to surround her in the busier world she had left—when a sound she had distantly heard from time to time now rose in tone until there could be no doubt about its nature: it was a human voice, proceeding from the neighbouring bay. She went as close as she could to the intervening promontory; then curiosity led her stealthily to climb the heathery slope; she made her way between rocks and under birches; and at last she paused and listened. It was a man's voice, of an unnaturally high pitch, and curiously plaintive in its monotonous sing-song. In the perfect silence she distinctly heard these words—

"Oh, my brethren, I charge you—I charge you by all that you hold dearest—that you keep the little children from the ruby wine!"

What could this mean? She pushed her way a little further through the thick underwood, and peered over. There was a small boat drawn up on the shore. Pacing slowly backwards and forwards on the shingle was a man of about twenty-eight or thirty, with a long and lugubrious face, a shaggy brown beard, and deep set eyes. Sometimes his head was bent down, as if in deep thought; and then again he would raise it, and extend his arm, as if addressing the opposite side of the bay, or perhaps Eilean Heimra out at sea; while ever and anon the curious feminine falsetto came back to the admonition—"Oh, my brethren, keep the little children from the ruby wine!"

Mary began to guess. Was this the Minister? Had he returned home; and had he seized the first opportunity to come away over to this solitary place, to rehearse his sermon for the following Sabbath, with appropriate intonation and gesture? She listened again:

"'Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes?' Ah, my friends, now that I have addressed each section of the community, each member of the family circle, now we come to the little babes—those tender flowers—those blossoms along the rough roadway of life—smiling upon us like the rainbows of the morning—and bedewing the earth with their consecrated tears. When I behold those gems of purest ray serene," continued the Minister, in his elevated chant, "my soul is filled with misgivings and sad prognostications. I observe in my daily walk the example that is set before them; the fathers in Israel are a stumbling-block to their own children; nay, even of the wisest it has been said, 'The priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink; they err in vision,

they stumble in judgment.' My friends, is it not a terrible thing to think of these blessed babes—these innocent tendrils sprouting up into glorious flowers, even as the Rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley—to think of them babbling with red mouths curses they cannot comprehend? Hold them back, I say! Snatch the fatal goblet from them! Let pleasure wave her ambrosial locks when and where she pleases—let mirth and joy prevail—but when the timbrel sounds and the cymbal is heard in the hall—then, at all events let those innocent ones be restrained from the deadly snare—keep, oh, keep the little children from the ruby wine!"

Unluckily this last appeal was addressed to Mary herself, or at least she thought so in her fright when she found the Minister's eyes turned towards her: instantly she bobbed her head down in the heather, and remained hidden there until the sermon—or perhaps it was a temperance lecture?—was ended. It did not last much longer. After the sonorous sentences had ceased, there was a moment's silence; then a grating on the beach; then a measured sound of oars: she concluded that the Minister, his flowery harangue rehearsed, was now making for home again; and she was free to get up from her concealment and return to Lochgarra House.

"Käthchen," she said, "the Minister has come back. I have seen him—though I—I, didn't speak to him. Now don't you think we ought to go along and make his acquaintance at once? He might help us: you say yourself the Free Church Ministers have an enormous influence in the Highlands."

Kate Glendinning did not receive this proposal with any great enthusiasm.

"There is one thing he might do," said she, "as I told you before, Mamie. It would be much easier for us to go and see Mr. Ross, if the Minister would take us under his escort."

"Mr. Ross!" said Mary, impatiently. "It is Mr. Ross, and Mr. Ross, with you from morning till night, Käthchen! You would think he owned the whole place!"

"Yes," said Käthchen, demurely, "that is just what he seems to do."

However, the interview to which both the young ladies had looked forward with so much anxiety came about in the most natural way in the world; and that without any intervention whatever. Mary and Käthchen, being down in the village, had gone into the post-office to buy some packets of sweets—bribes for the children, no doubt; and they were coming out again from the little general store when, in broad and full daylight, they met young Ross of Heimra face to face. There was no escape possible on either side; he was going into the post-office; they were coming out; and here they were, confronted. Well, it must be admitted that at this crisis Mary Stanley's presence of mind entirely forsook her. Ten hundred thousand things seemed to go through her brain at once; she could not speak; confusion burned red in her cheeks and on her forehead. And then he was so pale and calm and collected; for a second he regarded them both—and

with no furtive glance; he slightly raised his peaked cap, and would have passed them without more ado. It was Käthchen who made bold to detain him.

"Oh, Mr. Ross," said she, breathlessly, "we have never had an opportunity of thanking you—you left the cottage before we knew—and—and it was so kind of you to send the carriage——"

And here for a moment Käthchen also lost her head, for she had a horrible consciousness that when a man has saved your life it is ridiculous to thank him for sending a carriage. And then those coal-black eyes were so calmly observant; they were not generously sympathetic; they seemed merely to await what she had to say with a respectful attention. But Käthchen bravely began again: "You—you must not think us ungrateful—you see, you had left the cottage before we knew—and when we went out to Heimra, we did not find you at home——"

"I am sorry I was not there," he said.

"And—and of course we knew quite well what a dreadful position we were in—I mean that night when we wandered into the morass," continued Käthchen. "But for you we never should have got out again—we dared not move—and in the darkness what could we have done?"

"It is a dangerous place," he said.

"I—I am going to give Mrs. MacVean a cow in place of the one that was lost," Mary now ventured to put in; and here was she—the bold, the dauntless, the proud-spirited one!—here was she standing timidly there, her face still suffused, her eyes downcast. And this little speech of hers was like a plea for merciful consideration! He turned to her.

"The MacVeans have had a bad time of it since the shepherd died," the young man said, in a distant sort of way—but he was regarding her curiously.

Then all of a sudden it occurred to Mary that she ought not to stand there as a suppliant. Some sense of her wrongs and her recent trials came back to her; and here was the one whom she suspected of being responsible—here was her secret enemy—the antagonist who had hitherto concealed himself in the dark.

"I hope the widow will condescend to accept it, but who can tell?" said she, with greater spirit. "Really, they are the most extraordinary people! They seem to resent your trying to do them a kindness. I have been offering them all sorts of things they stand in need of; I am willing to lower their rents; I am going to arrange for more pasture; I propose to give prizes for the best homespun materials; and I would pay for getting over some of the Harris people, if instruction were wanted in dyeing or weaving—but they seem to suspect it is all for my own interest. I make them these offers—they will hardly look at them!"

"You may teach a dog to love you by feeding it," said young Donald Ross, coldly; "but the Highlanders are not dogs."

At this she fired up—and there was no more shamefaced girlish blushing in

her cheeks. Her eyes were as proud as his own.

"They are human beings, I suppose," said she, "and a human being might at least say 'Thank you.' But I do not know that I blame them," she continued—to Käthchen's great anxiety. "It seems to me there must be secret influences at work about here. It is not natural for people to be so ungrateful. Self-interest would make them a little more—a little more—amenable—if it were not for some evil instigation at work among them. And what can any one gain by stirring up ill-will? What can be the motive? At any rate, whatever the motive, and whoever he is, he might consider this—he might consider the mischief he is doing these poor people in making them blind to their own welfare. It seems a strange thing that in order to gratify envy, or hatred, or revenge, he should sacrifice the interests of a number of poor people who don't know any better."

Käthchen glanced apprehensively from the one to the other; but there was no flash of anger in those dark eyes, nor any tinge of resentment in the pale, olive-tinted face. The young man maintained a perfectly impassive demeanour—respectful enough, but reserved and distant.

"I wish them nothing but good," Mary went on, in the same indignant way, "but how can I do anything if they turn away from me? Why do they not come and tell me what they want?"

"Come and tell you what they want?—when they daren't call their souls their own!" he said.

"Of whom are they afraid, then?" she demanded.

"Of your agent, Miss Stanley," said he (and here indeed Käthchen did notice something strange in his eyes—a gleam of dark fire in spite of all his studied restraint). "What do they care about philanthropic schemes, or how can you expect them to talk about their wants and wishes, when what they actually know is that Purdie has the face of every one of them at the grindstone?" He altered his tone. "I beg your pardon. I have no right to interfere—and no wish to interfere. If you should think of coming out again to Heimra, Miss Stanley, to have a look over the island, I hope I may be at home. Good-morning!"

He again raised his cap—and passed on into the office. Mary stood undecided for a moment; then moved slowly away, accompanied by Käthchen. Before them was the wide sweep of the bay, with Lochgarra House at the point, and its background of larches. The sea was calm; the skies clear; it was a peaceful-looking morning.

Of a sudden Mary Stanley stopped—her eyes full of disappointment and vexation.

"Everything is at sixes and sevens—and worse than before!" she exclaimed to her companion. "What did I say, Käthchen? What did he say? Wasn't he very insolent?—well, not that, exactly—not exactly insolent—but—well, I am not used

to being treated with disdain. Why did he break off like that—with everything unsettled? Wasn't he very insolent?—or, at least, disdainful?—what did I say that he should treat me like that?"

"I know this," said the frivolous Käthchen, "that he has the most splendid eyes I ever saw in a human creature. I call him just distressingly handsome!"

"There is nothing so contemptible as a beauty man," said Mary, impatiently. "What has that got to do with it? I want to know why he treated me like that!"

"I thought he behaved with very great courtesy and self-respect," Käthchen made answer, "considering that you plainly intimated to him that it was he who stirred up all that ill-feeling against you."

"Very well: he had nothing to say for himself!" Mary exclaimed. "He made no defence. And then, you see, I—I wasn't quite prepared—I did not expect to see him—and I forgot about the fishing and shooting, or that might have made him a little ashamed of himself, and a little less arrogant." She turned and looked towards the post-office. "I wonder whether that was a map that he had rolled up in his hand or a chart? If he is going on board his yacht again, he must pass this way. I cannot have things left as they are—worse than ever!"

"I don't see how you are to mend them at present," said Käthchen. "If you had kept on as you began, in that friendly way, it might have been all very well; but then you grew indignant, and almost charged him with being the mischief-maker. And I must say I think he behaved with very great consideration and courtesy."

"Do you really think so?" said Mary, quickly—with her eyes still fixed on the post-office. And then she hesitated. And then she said: "Come, Käthchen, let us go back. I wish to make an apology to him——"

"Mary!" her friend protested. "How can you think of such a thing!"

"Oh, but you do not know. It is not about anything that has just happened. It is about the lake and the old castle. I quite forgot. And perhaps it is that that makes him so unforgiving. I must tell him that I am sorry."

But Käthchen shrank back.

"Make an apology for that?" said she. "You don't seem to understand, Mary. It is too serious for an apology. If you murder a man's father or mother, you can't go to him and say 'I am very sorry.'

"Will you go on to the house, then, Käthchen?" said Mary, simply. "I must put myself right with him—and after that he can be as disdainful as he chooses."

Of course Käthchen refused to be released; she went back with her; and just as they reached the little building, young Ross of Heimra came out. He had neither chart nor map in his hand now; whichever it had been, he had no doubt sent it away by post.

He seemed a little surprised; but was just as attentive and respectful as

before.

"There was something I forgot to say," she began, with obvious embarrassment, "and—and it is difficult to say it. It was not till I came here that I knew what my uncle had done—about—about Loch Heimra—and Castle Heimra. Well, there are some injuries, my friend here says, that can never be repaired. I suppose that is so. But at least you will allow me to say that I am sorry—more deeply sorry than you can imagine perhaps——"

"And there are some things that are best not spoken of," he said, calmly.

"Yes, I daresay that is so," she made answer, with a hopeless feeling at her heart that his tone and manner were alike implacable. "No doubt that is so. And yet—yet some little consideration might be shown towards any one who wishes to express regret. It was none of my doing; it never would have been of my doing. And though you, of course, would rather hear no apology—would rather not have the subject mentioned—still, there is another thing. The people about here—if they have any resentment against me because of the pulling down of Castle Heimra—then that is not fair. And any one having influence with them—well, it would be ill done of him to stir up anger against me on that account. I had nothing to do with it—I am very sorry it ever happened."

"Miss Stanley," said he—for he plainly did not wish to speak of this thing—"I think you are mistaken in supposing that any one is stirring up ill-will against you; and even the most ignorant of the people must know that you are not responsible for what happened before you came here. As regards myself, I do not wish for any apology or expression of regret; I wish for only one thing—forgetfulness. I think in such a case silence is the only amends."

So they parted for the second time; and when the two girls had gone some way towards Lochgarra House, Mary said,—

"Yes; but all the same I told him I was sorry."

And then again she turned and looked. Donald Ross had passed through the village, and was now going up to the Free Church minister's cottage.

"Käthchen," said she, rather absently, "there are a good many of them about here who seem to hate me; but I know there is not one of them who hates me as he does. And what had I to do with the pulling down of Heimra Castle?"

And that afternoon, as she stood at one of the windows in the tower, looking away out to sea, she saw the little white-winged yawl making for Heimra Island. She knew who was at the tiller—the man before whom she had abased herself, craving, and craving in vain, for some word of consideration and sympathy.

"Proud and implacable," she said to herself; and her wounded spirit was sore within her, and perhaps a trifle indignant, too; but she would make no further utterance. He had asked for silence and forgetfulness; and he had the right to say

what was to be.

Meanwhile the message that Mary had sent to the Fishery Board in Edinburgh had been duly received and considered; and when, after two or three days' interval, the answer came back to Lochgarra, it was to the effect that the alien lobster fishermen had either been misinformed or were making wilful misstatements: the Fishery Board had not given them the right to build huts, and, indeed, had no power to confer any such right. At once Mary sent for Hector the head-keeper; and bade him seek out Archie MacNicol, and convey to him this news.

"And tell him from me," she said, "that all he has to do is to explain to these men that they have no right to come here and build huts and use the fishing-grounds that naturally belong to the crofters in possession; and that they must go—and go peaceably."

"Would Miss Stanley be for having a sheriff's-officer over from Dingwall?" suggested the tall and handsome keeper, in his serious way.

"No, no, not at all!" she said. "The men must go, when they learn they have no right to be here. And if they refuse to go, haven't we got our own policeman?"

"Very well, mem," said Hector, and he left.

It was towards the dusk of evening, and raining heavily; but all the same Hector found Big Archie at work in his little bit of a garden. When Archie heard the news, he struck his spade in the ground, and stood upright.

"Aw, that's the fine news!" he exclaimed, joyfully, in Gaelic. "And we will soon be putting an end to the squatters now, Hector! Was I not saying it myself that they had no right to come here?—but now there is the message from the Fishery Board; and we will soon have the devils away from the lobster-ground. And when there is good news coming, you will be for taking a dram with me, Hector?"

Well, it is said there was once a Highland keeper who refused a glass of whiskey; but his name and neighbourhood are not known now. Hector followed Big Archie into the cottage, and there a black bottle was produced. Thereafter, the two men, having lit their pipes, set out through the dark and wet again, for Hector was returning to his own home, and Archie was going a certain distance with him in search of the Gillie Ciotach.

The stiff glass of whiskey had warmed Big Archie's heart; and as he strode along, the huge and heavy-shouldered giant grew garrulous.

"The young lady that has come here," said he, in his native tongue, "you know as well as I do, Hector, she means very well, but it is not the place for her at all. I say it is not the place for her at all. What can a young lady know about the price of sheep and the price of lobsters? It is a foolish thing! The place for her, now, Hector, that place is London, at the court of the Queen, among the great

ladies, in their fine clothes and jewels. You think I do not know about such things; but I do know; for I myself have relations with London; and it is from London I am hearing every fortnight, from Corstorphine. And the other day, when she was in my boat, I was saying to myself 'There is a fine and beautiful lady to be sitting in a coarse lobster-boat; and it is at the court of the Queen she ought to be; and not going about asking people to put in better chimneys, and the like of that. A woman—a woman has no right to be at the head of an estate; and I am not sure that the law allows it; maybe she is here only through Purdie, and he the master of the estate. Just think of that, Hector—if it is only Purdie that keeps out Young Donald from the estate: would not that be a thing to be considered? Now you know I am not from this place myself; I am from much farther south; but I am a Gael; I have no love for any Albannach or Sassunnach coming into this country against the wishes of the people; and if it is only Purdie, aw, God, it's myself that would willingly give Purdie a crack on the head. And think of young Donald of Heimra coming into the estates, would it not be a grand day that, Hector?—ay, and many a gun fired off, and the bagpipes, and flags, and taking the horses out of the carriage. Sure I am the Gillie Ciotach would go mad that day."

The mention of the Gillie Ciotach recalled the keeper to his own immediate affairs.

"If you see Gillie Ciotach, Archie," said he, "perhaps you will give him a word of caution. The other evening I heard a shot up by the Crom-allt; and I did not look. But the next time I hear a shot, I will look; and if I catch Gillie Ciotach, I will break his gun over his head, yes, and I will shoot his thief of a dog, too; for I am not going to get myself into trouble on account of the Gillie Ciotach. This you know, Archie, that when old Mr. Stanley was here, there was not much goodwill; and perhaps some of us may have shut our eyes a little; but things are different now; for here is my sister Barbara telling me again and again that the Baintighearna is the kindest lady she has ever known in the world, and that it is not at all what Purdie wishes to have done that she means to have done. Well, well, that is not my business; but my business is to look after myself; and I am not going to get into trouble on account of Gillie Ciotach."

At this point the two parted; and Big Archie went on to the inn. But he did not enter by the front-door; he passed round by the stable-yard, and made his way to a small lighted window that was partly open. He peeped in and listened at the same time—with a grin of satisfaction on his face, for he had found what he sought.

There were three men in this little sanded parlour, which was a sort of adjunct to the inn. They were seated round a table on which was an oil-lamp; and in front of each man stood a small pewter measure and also a glass. Two of the men were middle-aged, and of a sailor-like type; the third was a young fellow of

about four-and-twenty, whose bronzed complexion, regular features, and short-cropped curly brown hair made him rather good-looking, only that in regarding him one did not notice these things so much as the dare-devil expression of both eye and mouth. He also was dressed in something of sailor-like attire; while his broad Balmoral bonnet, pushed far back on his brown curls, revealed the fact that in his earlier youth he must have received a mighty slash along the side of his forehead. This was the Gillie Ciotach; and the Gillie Ciotach was singing—in high and nasal tones, while his two companions listened solemnly. Yet this was not really a melancholy song, this *Linn an aigh*, for it described the happy state of affairs that existed long ago, when the heather yielded abundance of honey, and the pastures abundance of milk, when there was no rent to pay, when any one could fish or shoot wherever he pleased, and when there was neither hatred nor fighting, nor thirst of wealth. Indeed, there was perhaps a touch of sarcasm in the verses; for the refrain informed whosoever might wish to know at what period of the world's history this golden age existed that it was *An uair bha Gàilig aig na h-eòin*—that is to say, *When all the birds in Gaelic sang*. However, whether the song was or was not intended to be merry, the audience received it in precisely the same fashion: when it ended, the one said 'Ay, ay' in a sad tone; the other sighed deeply; and then each mechanically proceeded to pour out a glass of whiskey. The Gillie Ciotach did likewise; by all three the whiskey was drank in absolute silence; there was a pause of internal meditation—and at this point Big Archie thought fit to open the door and enter, for he had been long enough out in the rain.

And no sooner had he told his story than the dare-devil leapt to his feet, a wild delight in his eyes.

"Aw, *Dyeea*, this is a fine thing!" he cried, sniffing the battle from afar. "I tell you now we will make short work of it—we will drive the squatters into the Minch, and if the devils can swim across the Minch, let them swim across the Minch, and if they cannot swim across the Minch, they can go down to their master below! Come away, boys, and make the preparation; for there will be a gay dance to-morrow!"

The big giant caught him by both shoulders, and threw him back into the chair.

"Did you hear me?" said he (but there was an ominous mirth in his eyes too). "Peaceably, peaceably; the Baintighearna says peaceably—they are to go peaceably."

"Aw, is it peaceably?" the Gillie Ciotach cried, with a loud laugh. "Well, if they will go peaceably, that is very good; but if they will not go peaceably, then we will make them sing a little song to-morrow—by God, Archie MacNicol, we will make them sing 'Farewell to Fiunary,' and maybe it is on the wrong side of

their mouth they will be singing the 'Farewell to Fiunary!"

CHAPTER IX.
THE BATTLE OF RU-MINARD.

All that night there was marching and counter-marching, and whipping up of recruits, and drinking of whiskey, and singing of *Gabhaidh sinn an rathad mòr.*[#] Big Archie and his peaceful, or pseudo-peaceful, counsels were no longer heeded; the movement had been taken up by the younger fellows, headed by the mischievous Gillie Ciotach; and the belief became general that orders had been received from the Fishery Board in Edinburgh to the effect that the Ru-Minard squatters were forthwith to be driven into the sea. And if the aliens should refuse to be so driven—should stand up in defence of their little bits of homesteads—what then?

[#] "We will take the highway."

"It is a lesson they will want," said the Gillie Ciotach, gaily, to his comrades (they were having a friendly glass together, in a barn lit up by a solitary candle), "not to come thieving on other people's lobster-ground, and building huts wherever they like, and not a penny of rent to the holder of the croft. It is a lesson they will want; and it is a lesson they will get—to take back home with them, and keep the others from coming here. Well, now, this is my opinion, that the best thing for giving a man a rap over the head is a tiller. A tiller with a handle to it—aw, that is a fine convenient thing!"

"I am going to take an oar over my shoulder," said a brawny young Hercules.

"And the more fool you, then," said the Gillie Ciotach, who was a blunt-spoken youth. "For I will tell you this, Feargus: if you strike at a man with an oar, and he steps aside so that you miss him, then he has you at his mercy—it does not need a wise man to show you that. Aw, God, a tiller is a fine thing, when the wood is strong—it is a tiller that will be my *orra-an-donais**[#] *to-morrow." He broke into a loud laugh. "We will teach them to be telling lies about the Fishery Board!—and it is little they are thinking now that to-morrow they will be singing*

**Farewell, farewell to Fiunary*!"

[#] *Orra-an-donais*—an amulet for sending one's enemy to perdition. *Donas* is Satan.

In the morning it was found that the rain had ceased; but worse than rain was threatening; for all along the west the skies were of a heavy and thunderous purple—a louring dark wall, as it were—while torn shreds of grey cloud were being blown along in advance, the precursors of a gale. Mary and Käthchen were both at the window, looking out at the angry heavens and the livid sea beneath, when the maid Barbara came quickly into the room. For the moment Barbara had lost her pretty shyness of manner; she was breathless and excited; her eyes were full of apprehension.

"Oh, mem," she said, "do you know what is happening? They have gone aweh up the road, a great many of the young lads, and others; and they have sticks with them; and they are singing *Gabhaidh sinn an rathad mòr*. Oh, I am sure there is harm coming of it! They were saying something of the strange fishermen out at Ru-Minard—and there will be fighting."

A sudden dismay filled Mary's heart—dismay, and a curious sense of helplessness. To whom could she turn for aid in such a crisis—and with every moment a thing of value?

"Barbara," she said quickly, "I must have some one to go with me. Is Hector there?"

"No, mem, he went up the hill this morning."

"Or Hugh?"

"No, mem, he was going over to Cruagan, to arrange about the heather-burning, so I was hearing him say."

Then Mary turned to her friend.

"Käthchen, who is there? Shall we ask the Minister?"

"Of course, he is the very person to ask—if you really mean to go, Mamie. But do you think you should?" Käthchen asked, with serious eyes. "It sounds like an open riot."

"I don't care—I must try what I can do—for I fear I am responsible," Mary said, in a kind of desperation; and then she turned to the young Highland lass: "Barbara, we shall want the carriage at once—as soon as ever the horses can be put to. Tell Sandy we are going over to find Mr. Pettigrew; he can come along and meet us. Tell him not to lose a second."

And almost directly afterwards the two girls were out-of-doors, hurrying along to the other side of the village, where was the Minister's cottage. Käthchen

was unmistakeably frightened; but all the same she ventured to say—

"Well, Mamie, your friends in London have almost given up asking when you are going to marry your cousin—you have kept him at arm's length so long. But I think if Mr. Meredyth were here just now, he would have a very good chance."

"Why?" said Mary, with a certain coldness.

"Because you want a man's assistance and advice," said Käthchen. "Isn't it as clear as daylight? The moment this news comes, you look round for some man to help you. Is the head keeper there? No. Or the under-keeper? No. Then you think of the Minister—anybody so long as he is a man. All quite natural, of course. Only I think if Mr. Frank Meredyth were here—and you finding yourself in constant trouble and perplexity—well, I think he would soon take up a very important position. He might even persuade you to let him send in to Inverness for a wedding-ring."

"People don't get married in order to make peace among their tenantry!" said Mary, a little proudly.

"Is he coming here in August?" asked the shrewd Käthchen.

"Fred wants me to ask him," Mary said, briefly; indeed, at such a time she was not thinking of any suitor; she was thinking of what might even now be going forward on the shores of Minard Bay.

The Rev. Mr. Pettigrew received the intelligence of the rising with a calm and gentle compassion.

"Dear me, dear me!" he said, in his high-pitched, unnatural voice, and he thoughtfully stroked his long and straggling beard. "What a sad thing to think of, when brethren might be living together in peace and ahmity! The heart of man is full of dangerous possibeelities—it is a sad thing to think of—at this season of the year, when all nature seems to know that the verdant spring is around us—when all is harmony and peace—to think that angry passions should arise in the heart of man—"

"Yes, but won't you come at once, Mr. Pettigrew?" said Mary, with distress in her eyes. "We may be able to do something to prevent bloodshed. The carriage will meet us—we may be able to overtake them."

But the Minister paused to consider.

"No doubt," said he, reflectively, "to prevent the shedding of blood is an admirable thing, a commendable thing, and praiseworthy. But there are times and seasons when even the wisest counsel is of no avail—when the heart of man is as a fiery steed, untameable, not to be bridled; and in these times and seasons, what is demanded of us is a judeecious sympathy, a constant sympathy, a sympathy that does not take sides, but longs for the return of peace and good will. Strange, indeed, that at this time of the year—"

"But won't you come with us at once, Mr. Pettigrew!" Mary said, in her despair. "The carriage will meet us. We must try what we can do. You see, I am in a measure responsible. I told them what the Fishery Board had said—that the stranger fishermen had no right to build huts—and—and I hoped they would go away quietly—but if there is to be fighting, then surely it is the Minister who should come and try to make peace."

"Ah, the carriage?" said Mr. Pettigrew, thoughtfully, as he took down his hat from a peg in the lobby. "That is well considered—well considered. For if in their anger these misguided craytures should take to throwing of stons, the carriage could be closed. Ay, ay, that is very well now; and if their wrath should be intemperate—for who can gauge the stubbornness of man?—then the carriage can be driven away at any moment. But what a sad thing to think of—sad thing!—when all might be dwelling in peace and ahmity—in peace and ahmity."

However, it was no consideration of personal safety that was uppermost in Mary Stanley's mind at this moment; indeed, so anxious was she to overtake the rioters that she and her two companions had very nearly got back to Lochgarra House before they met the carriage. Then the horses were turned round; and on they drove—past the brawling stream—past the larchwoods—and up to the height commanding a view of Minard Bay. And here, at the top, they encountered the first human being of whom they could ask the news. It was John the policeman. The plump, roseate, good-natured Iain was calmly seated on a low wall by the roadside; and he was unconcernedly regarding the wide stretch of white sand across which some small black figures were now seen to be in motion.

"What are you doing here, John?" said Mary, indignantly.

"I was just looking," said Iain, with an amiable smile—and he glanced in the direction of the people crossing the white sands.

"Yes, but why are you waiting here?" said she. "Don't you know that there is likely to be fighting? And it is your duty to prevent that!"

"They will be telling me," said Iain, slowly and comfortably, "that the strange fishermen have no right to be in the place. Very well, then. And if they are to be put out of the place, it's not for me to interfere. If they are wrong, let them go aweh; and if they will not go aweh, they will have to be put aweh."

This seemed a sound argument—to John.

"But what did the Lochgarra people say to you as they went by?" Mary demanded. "Didn't you see they were armed with sticks? Don't you know there will be fighting and bloodshed?"

"Aw, there may be a brokken head or two," said John, with a demure smile.

"Well, it is your duty to prevent that! These men have no right to take the law into their own hand. If the strangers will not go peaceably, they must be removed by the law—not by beating them with sticks. And you are standing

back here—and letting them do what they like!"

"And if they tek to fighting," said John, "it's not me that can stop them."

This also seemed painfully true.

"But you can do something," she insisted. "You can warn them. You can take their names. You can threaten them with a prosecution. You can tell them that—that—Mr. Pettigrew, who is it that prosecutes here?—the Sheriff at Dingwall?"

"Nay, but I am considering that there is much of reason in what John says," observed the Minister, in his lofty sing-song; "and perhaps we should do well to follow his example, and remain as spectators and witnesses. I perceive that this carriage cannot be closed; and therefore I do not think it would be prudent—rather would it be rashness, and culpable rashness—to go forward amid a storm of angry passions. Surely it would be more prudent for us to remain here, with the constituted representative of law and order?"

"But I am not going to remain here. John." she said, peremptorily, to the young policeman. "get up in front. Sandy, drive on quickly; we may get between those people yet, before the mischief has begun."

And so the horses went forward again—rattling away down the stony hill until they reached the soft and sandy road skirting the bay. The little township of Minard was quite deserted, save for the women, who stood in small groups in the fields or at the cottage-doors, watching what was going forward out there towards the long headland. Not that they could see very much, once the black figures had crossed the white breadth of sand; for the morning was dull and sombre; and the rocks of Ru-Minard, along which the crofters and fishermen were now making their way, were dark. But this much was obvious, that at a certain point the crowd stopped; while two of their number went forward—one of these being of gigantic size.

"This is Big Archie," said Mary, almost to herself, "and I warned him that he must get them to go away peaceably."

And no doubt it was as a deputation carrying peaceful proposals that Big Archie and his companion were now going forward to certain huts scattered just above the rocks, where also a number of dark figures could be dimly descried. Peaceful or not peaceful, the negotiations at all events involved delay; and this delay enabled the party in the carriage to drive along the road as far as was practicable; then the horses were stopped, and Mary got down to follow the rioters on foot. It was in vain that the Minister sought to dissuade her with plaintive remonstrances; she intimated to him that he could remain in the carriage if he chose. Käthchen, on the other hand, though she was thoroughly frightened, had but the one and sole idea—to remain by Mary Stanley's side, whithersoever she went. As for the easy-going Iain, he was distinctly inclined to hang back.

"What can I do?" said he, with occult amusement in his eyes. "If they will

brek one another's heads, how can I prevent it? If it is right that these men should go aweh, and if they will not go aweh, they cannot complain if they get their heads brokken for not going aweh."

But Iain's humorous indifference did not last very long. Mary, hurrying forward, and with eyes anxiously straining, could make out that the two men were now returning to their friends; presently the blustering wind blowing in from the sea brought a sound of confused and prolonged cheering; and she now perceived that the scattered assemblage was moving on. At the same moment there was the sharp report of a gun; and then it was that the policeman's face grew grave.

"Is there going to be murder?" said he.

She did not answer him; she was running now—and Käthchen by her side.

"We must—go right into the middle of it," she said, panting for breath, "and then—perhaps they will stop."

At first the Lochgarra and Minard fishermen advanced but slowly and cautiously upon the huts, not knowing where the enemy might mass himself. The fact is the aliens had been taken unawares; for while they were as determined as men could be to defend their homesteads, they had no time to seek for arms, supposing they could have obtained any, while up here on the rocky knolls there were no stones. They were running hither and thither about the huts, picking up any bit of wood or any broken oar they could find; but when they made a sort of group of themselves, to await the onset of their antagonists, it was clear that timber had failed them, and other weapons they seemed to have none. But there they stood, dauntless, sullen, silent—the sea behind them—their outnumbering foes in front.

And now the invaders knew what was expected of them. It was a shrill cry from the Gillie Ciotach that led the great hoarse volume of their cheers; and then, with all kinds of minatory exclamations, they rushed forward on the devoted band. Who could resist this whirling, tempestuous, compacted shock? For two or three wild seconds there was inextricable confusion; and snap here, snap there, cudgel met cudgel, or descended on solid crown; but it was all over directly; and the next phase of the battle was that the aliens, as if by one common impulse, had turned and fled—fled pell-mell down the rocks and towards the shore, their foes pursuing with fierce and joyous cries. And here it was that Mary Stanley made her appearance—breathless, dishevelled—trying to throw herself in the way of Big Archie, who was leading the pursuit.

"Archie!" she called to him. "How dare you! Let those men alone! I command you!"

But very little indeed did Big Archie care for her commands; it was another consideration altogether that at this moment caused himself and his companions

to pause. For the fugitives, as soon as they gained the beach, had taken refuge behind two boats drawn up there; and as the boats, with their spars and sails astern, and their lobster-creels and barrels at the bow, offered excellent shelter, while the beach afforded unlimited ammunition, the battle was not yet over. In truth, the stones that were now flying through the air decidedly checked the ardour of the pursuers; and it was at this moment that Mary again got up to Gilleasbuig Mòr.

"Archie!" she said, indignantly.

An accidental stone struck her on the shoulder. She did not mind. But another and a sharper one struck her on the wrist; and inadvertently she drew up her hand with a piteous little cry. She had been cut over the bone; blood was flowing profusely; and at sight of that, Big Archie—his eyes blazing with wrath—seemed to go mad altogether.

"Aw, *Dyeea*!" he cried; and he ran forward and leapt into the boat, on to the middle thwart; he sprang out on the other side; and began to lay about him with his cudgel as with the hammer of Thor, smiting and scattering his enemies in all directions. But she was after him in a moment—nimbly getting round the stern of the boat—and before he had wholly wreaked his vengeance, she had him by the arm. And here her interposition did save bloodshed; for the men, finding her between Big Archie and themselves, refused to throw the stones they had hastily picked up; quietude was secured at least in this corner of the battlefield.

But indeed the general interest had already been attracted elsewhere. When Mary turned to see what was going on landwards, she happened to notice certain small wavering shreds of pink. It was a very pale pink; on a clear day, it would hardly have been visible; but against the lurid sky it was distinct enough.

"What is that?" she said, with a sudden, conscious fear, to Big Archie.

The huge, heavy-shouldered fisherman (who was keeping an eye on his discomfited foes as he led the way round the stern of the boats) glanced towards the rocky knolls that had been the scene of the first onslaught, and said grimly,—

"It wass the Gillie Ciotaeh he wass bringing a can of petroleum with him this morning, and lobster-creels will be easy to set on fire."

"Do you mean to say they are burning down those poor men's huts?" she demanded, in a perfect agony of helplessness. "Archie, what is to be done? Why does not the policeman interfere?"

"Aw, it is no use now," said Big Archie, with much composure. "They are ahl on fire already—and a good job, too!—for we won the fight, and that is a proper end to it."

"And this is how you have kept your promise to me!" Mary said, in accents of bitter reproach.

"As sure as death, mem," said the big good-natured giant, "I wass doing

everything Miss Stanley said—peaceably, peaceably. When I went to them this morning, I wass saying to them 'You hef no right here.' They said, 'We hef the right here.' I said 'It is no use telling lies; for Miss Stanley she has written to the Fishery Board; and they hef given you no right whatever.' And then I says 'It is a fine thing for you to come here and tek what piece of land you want, and build your houses on it, and you not paying a penny of rent to the man that has the croft.' Then they said 'The land is not worth anything; it is only rock.' Then I says 'That is not your business, as you know very well; and other people hef to pay rent for it, whether it is rock or good land; and it is impudent men you are to come and tek things for nothing. I am from Tarbert on Loch Fyne,' says I, 'and it's stealing they would be calling that down there.' Well, mem, they were not liking that—"

"I should think not!" said Mary. "Is that what you call asking them to go away civilly and quietly?"

"But they would not go aweh at ahl, mem!" Archie protested, still looking towards those pink shreds of flame (and alas! for the poor discomfited aliens—they had emerged from their shelter, and gone a few yards up the beach, and were also regarding, hopelessly enough, the distant crowd and the work of destruction). "They were growing more and more impudent, mem; and they said they would not go aweh; and I said we would drive them aweh; and they said we could not do it. And then says I to them 'Do you see the carriage yonder?—for if you can mek out the people, it is the proprietor herself, and the Minister, and the policeman, and they are come down to see that you go aweh from this place ahltogether, and, by God, if you do not go aweh, we will drive you into the sea, and set fire to your houses.' 'You cannot do it,' says they—"

"But how dared you tell them that we had come down for any such purpose," said Mary, indignantly, "when we only came to prevent violence?"

"And how wass I knowing that, mem?" said he cunningly. "But I am sure there wass only the one end to it in any case, when they began to pick up the sticks. And we were not going to hef the land stolen, and the lobster-ground tekken up, and be beaten as well; for a man cannot stand everything, and we had sticks as well as they had sticks—"

"And so you began to fight in spite of all I told you!" she said. "And I do not know what harm has been done or how many have been hurt. You yourself, you would have been murdered if I had not come round by the boats and dragged you away."

"Is it murdering, mem?" said Big Archie, with a grin. "Aw, Cosh, there would hef been some murdering going before they murdered me!"

And now they came upon Käthchen, who was standing as one paralyzed, gazing upon the excited crowd who were collected round the burning huts, and

listening to their shouts and laughter. The moment she turned, she caught sight of Mary's hand, and uttered a quick cry of alarm.

"It is nothing, Käthchen," her friend said, "only I wish you'd tie this handkerchief round my wrist—and pull it tight; it will hurt less then."

"What made you go away down there, Mamie?" said Käthchen, in her distress. "I—wanted to stay by your side—but—but I could not face the stones. It was madness—"

"They did not intend to strike me," said Mary (whose shoulder was aching cruelly, as well as her wrist). "These poor men, they have nothing left now but their boats." And then she demanded: "But where was that booby of a policeman?—why did he not prevent them setting fire to the huts? And where is the Minister?"

Käthchen did not know; nor did she care much; all her interests were engrossed by the strange scene being enacted up there among the rocky knolls. For, despite the petroleum, and the heaping-on of lobster-creels and float-barrels, the huts did not burn well; the rain of the previous night had soddened the thatch, and perhaps the interiors were none too dry at the best of times; so that the incendiaries had to keep opening up draught-holes, or flinging on more petroleum, in order to encourage the flames. And then again that proved too slow work for their impatience. They got poles and broken oars to use as battering-rams; they charged the ineffectual doors, and tore down the smouldering roofs; and when the demolition of this or that rude dwelling was complete, there were loud and triumphant cheers. Mary did not seek to interpose. It was too late now. She looked on sadly, wondering what the poor wretches down by the boats were thinking, and not without some half-terrified consciousness that she was answerable for all this wreck and ruin.

"It is shameful!—it is shameful!" she said—almost to herself.

"Well, mem," said Big Archie, who still remained with the two young ladies, "I will ask you this—when you will find a wasps' nest in your garden, what will you do? You will not be for going forward and telling them they were right in tekkin up the place, and that you will not disturb them; aw, no!—I think it is a bunch of straw you will be carrying to the place, and setting a light to it, and putting the nest on fire. Aw, Cosh, that is the sure weh to get rid of them—"

"But these were not wasps—these were men like yourselves," said she, sharply. "They have as much right to live as you—"

"Ay," said Big Archie, scratching his head in assumed perplexity, "mebbe they hef as much right to live as we hef—but *not there*. For it wass Miss Stanley herself that would be saying that."

Mary's face flushed.

"I told you they were wrong in thinking they had any right to be there;

but I did not tell you to go and break out into lawlessness and set houses on fire with petroleum. Do you think that can be allowed? Do you think there is no government in this country? Do you think you can do just as you please? I tell you, the Sheriff from Dingwall will have to inquire into this matter."

Gilleasbuig Mòr did not like the mention of Dingwall.

"If it was brekkin the law," said he, rather gloomily, "it wass not us that wass brekkin it first. It was them fishermen. And now they can go aweh hom; and if they ever think of coming back here, they will remember the day they sah their houses on fire at Ru-Minard."

The work of demolition was now complete. Smouldering thatch and blackened rafters strewed the ground; nothing remained erect but the rude stone walls; the alien colony had lost its habitation. And then the invaders formed once more into a sort of irregular procession; they shouldered their staves and clubs; three ringing cheers were given—as a significant message to their vanquished opponents, who still remained down by the boats; and then the victors set out on their homeward march, the Gillie Ciotach's shrill voice leading off with "*Gabhaidh sinn an rathad mòr*"[#] while a rough and ready chorus was volunteered by the straggling ranks. Mary Stanley and Käthchen, accompanied by Big Archie, slowly followed, some distance intervening. In truth, Mary's heart was as lead: all things seemed to be going so ill—in spite of her most patient and unselfish endeavours.

[#] The chorus of this gay ditty has been thus Englished:

"We will take the good old way,
We will take the good old way,
We will take the good old way,
The way that lies before us;
Climbing stiff the heathery ben,
Winding swiftly down the glen,
Should we meet with strangers then,
Their gear will serve to store us!"

And now they came upon Iain the policeman—bland, benign, complacent as usual. Iain had remained some little way apart, to let the rioters go by; his share in the day's proceedings had been limited to a discreet and not unamiable observation.

"What are you doing here?" said Mary. "Why did you not interfere before

they had set the huts on fire? Don't you see the mischief that has been done?"

There was a whimsical, demure smile in Iain's eyes.

"I could not be tekkin up all them men," said he.

"Then what are you put here for at all?" she demanded. "Why did they send you to Lochgarra if you have no authority? What use are you in the place?"

Iain was far too smooth-tempered to take any umbrage. He did not even claim to be of any use.

"Aw, well," said he—and he lifted up a bit of dried seaweed and slowly pulled it to pieces, "the people about Lochgarra, there is not much harm in them."

"Do you call that no harm—setting fire to houses?"

Iain hesitated—for he wished to be very respectful.

"But if the fishermen had no right to build the houses?" he ventured to say, with down-cast eyes, and in the most propitiating tones. "And it was Miss Stanley herself who was telling them that."

"Did I tell them to set the houses on fire? Did I tell them to go and fight with sticks and stones? I told them to go and try to get those people away peaceably; and instead of that, here they break out into open riot, and work all the mischief they can, and you stand by and look on!"

"Aw, well," said Iain, pulling away at the seaweed, "there is not much harm done. There is not more than one or two has got a knock."

The hoarse, triumphant chorus—

"Gabhaidh sinn an rathad mòr
Gabhaidh sinn an rathad mòr
Gabhaidh sinn an rathad mòr
Olc air mhath le càch e!"'

was growing more distant now; the men were ascending the hill, towards their own homes—or still more likely they were going on to the village, to have a good, solid dram after this great exploit. And here was the waggonette, and Mr. Pettigrew therein, apparently confining his attention to certain slips of paper. When the two young ladies appeared and got into the carriage, the Minister put away his MS.; and when the horses had started for home, he lifted up his high and feminine voice, and said—

"It is a sad sight we have seen to-day—a sad sight—angry passions surmounting what should be the calm of the Christian soul—and among those who might well be living in peace and ahmity. And it is well for us who can keep apart, and view these things as a passing vision, and comfort ourselves with pious thoats. 'For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the

breastplate of faith and love: and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.' As for those poor men out at Ru-Minard, I fear they will be as the beasts of the field and the birds of the air in the matter of habitation; but they must seek for higher things; they must say to themselves 'For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come!'"

"You might have gone and tried to save their houses for them!" Mary exclaimed, bitterly.

But she would say no more. Indeed, she was silent all the way home. A sense of helplessness, of failure, of despair weighed upon her; all her fine courage and heroic spirit seemed to have fled. When they got to the top of the hill at Minard, she turned and looked towards the long promontory beyond the bay; and there was still a little smoke showing here and there amongst the smouldering ruins. In spite of herself tears rose to her eyes. This was the climax of all her splendid schemes. This was what she had been able to do for the neighbourhood that had been entrusted to her. Might it not be said of her—

'The children born of thee are sword and fire,
Red ruin, and the breaking up of laws'?

How long was it since she had come to Lochgarra?—and this was the end.

But as they drove on, they came in sight of Lochgarra Bay; and out there was Eilean Heimra. And no sooner had Mary Stanley's eyes lit on the distant island than something seemed to stir her heart with a proud indignation; and if she had spoken, as she dared not speak, she would have said—

"Ah, it is you, it is you out there who are responsible. It is not I. It is you alone who have control over these people; and yet you go and shut yourself up in selfish isolation; and leave me, a woman, to contend, and strive,—and break down!"

END OF VOL. I.

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