DONALD ROSS OF HEIMRA

BY WILLIAM BLACK

Mary Stanley having inherited from an uncle a Highland estate in Scotland, Lochgarra, visits it, accompanied by a young lady friend and her factor, Mr. Purdie, with the secret intention of reforming every abuse in its management. The first tenant she meets gruffly complaining of a tax added to the rent paid by the crofters for a dike built to protect their land from floods, she declares it abolished. The evening after taking possession of Castle Heimra she resolves that half of that tax, which had been collected for thirty years, shall be restored to the crofters.

Purdie, dining with Miss Stanley and her companion, over the wine discloses his peculiar bitterness toward the tenants of the estate. He tells how, at his instigation, that young lady's late uncle drained the loch and tore down the castle in revenge because the natives would not recognise changes in their names corresponding with their changed ownership.

Donald Ross, the owner of the remnant of the Heimra estate, one tiny island, arrives off the coast in his yacht Sirene, manned by two trusty Highlanders. Waiting for night to fall he lands by the light of the stars his little cargo of smuggled French brandy and stows it in "the Cave of the Crowing Cock." His men inform him that some young crofters are ready at his word to cause the obnoxious factor to be killed by some seeming accident. He warns them against so dangerous a crime.

Mary, unattended, taking an early morning walk, muses on the stories of young Donald's wildness, and encounters a pretty, simple Highland girl, who answers her greeting in Gaelic, trustfully pats her hand, but runs off when she sees the factor approaching. She resolves to learn that language. After a day spent in interrogating tenants, all of whom grumble about everything else, but maintain a mysterious silence on the subject of rent, she observes a man poaching for salmon on the stream at twilight whom she divines to be Donald Ross.

Mary and her companion, Katchen, taking lunch, make a day's tramp over her estates, encountering uniform distrust, sullenness and reticence in her tenants. Caught in a driving rain they are bewildered and nearly swallowed up in a bog. They are rescued and led to the shelter of a cottage by a young man—Donald Ross—who without giving his name departs and sends Mary's maid and carriage for her.

Visiting next day their hostess of the sheltering cottage the young ladies learn to their surprise and relief that young Donald gives and does not sell smuggled brandy to the old woman. Encountering a good natured lobster fisherman on their homeward drive Mary engages him to take them sailing and announces her intention to visit the Isle of Heimra.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a bold undertaking, and Kathchen 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, Kathchen? 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 Kathchen, 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 Kathchen, 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.

"Kathchen," 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 Kathchen; "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 Gillieasbuig Mor. 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 lookout; 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 favorable, and they made steady progress, unfamiliar features of the coast line becoming visible on the right hand and on the 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, Kathchen? Do you think—we should send a message—before calling——?"

"Oh, yes, certainly," said Kathchen, 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 Kathchen's eyes were full of intenest 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, Kathchen," 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 Kathchen.

"Aw, yes, mem, surely."

"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' yacht, mem? It was lying in Camus Bheag when I wass coming awch last evening."

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

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

"In any case, Kathchen, 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 Kathchen, 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 neighborhood—I dare say 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 Kathchen (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."

Kathchen 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 and 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; Kathchen said no thing; 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 Kathchen 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 Kathchen, resignedly, and she remained still.

But she continued looking toward 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."

Kathchen 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 Kathchen 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' '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 undes s and what that means," said Kathchen, "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?——"

Kathchen had suddenly to cease; for here was the elderly Martha, carrying a large tray amply provided with bonnely and wholesome fare—oat-meal 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-meal 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, Kathchen? Half-a sovereign?"

"Oh, for goodness' sake, Mamie, don't think of such a thing!" Kathchen 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 Kathchen, rejoiced to have come through this dreaded ordeal with such unexpected ease, was in the gayest of humors. 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, Kathchen 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 he had hitherto 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 Kathchen, 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 makkin 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 humor.

"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 Kathchen, 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 shillins of the prize a very good thing for me. And then kem the time the Minard crofters they were for sending an application 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 heees 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 shillins.' 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!" Kathchen 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 Kathchen—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 was the same as thirty shillins 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 shillins 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."

Kathchen glanced rather timidly at her friend. But Mary was still in that curiously abstracted reverie—her eyes turned wistfully toward the now receding Eilean Heimra—her thoughts remote. So Kathchen 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 toward 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 toward him with a plain intimation that she desired to speak with him.

Mr. Watson immediately pulled up, dismounted and came toward 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 1,400 pounds 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 suggestions about a glass of wine and a biscuit after his ride.

IT WAS A ROUGH COAST.

"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 you 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 not be 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 you 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 every hole and corner of the Highlands; and while some of them have been making responsible 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 Crofter's 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 moument. 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 not 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, three pounds a year additional rent—that is fifteen shillings for their share of the added pasture, and two pounds five shillings 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 Kathchen, 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 any one else. "But," she added, with a bit of a sigh, "I suppose it will take a long time."

After 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 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 toward 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 gray grass were now almost indistinguishable. It was a still and tranquil hour; sleep falling 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 amid 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 Kathchen she had an excellent counsellor, for Kathchen 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 oversanguine 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 toward 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 Kathchen, 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 favor. 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.

[CONTINUED NEXT SUNDAY.]

TOLD BY THE HOSPITAL NURSE.

"Often have strange cases!" Yes, sir; frequently a case lies here
With a story interesting, oft pathetic, sometimes queer—
Novel-like, were not the heroes flesh and blood, as I and you.
Such a one I well remember—patient Number Fifty-two.
In the road a toddling child, a mother's agonizing scream—
And thundering down the roadway speeds a carter's frightened team.
All unnerved stares each bystander, seems there's nothing can be done;
A sudden rush, a hasty clutch, and the child from death is won.
But a horrid sight lies in the road for the gathering crowd to view—
A brave man crushed by the cruel wheels—he filled bed Fifty-two.
Through that night he suffered greatly, bravely bore it, Fifty-two;
But the morning, breaking gently, saw his hours on earth were few.
So I sat me down beside him, hinting with a bated breath
Life to all was so uncertain; had he ever thought of death?
Would he hear the Bible woman tell the tale of heavenly love,
Of the calm and peaceful haven far beyond the stars above?
Where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest,
Might I bring her to his bedside just to tell the story blessed?
"Yes," he whispered, "bring her to me; let me hear the good old Book.
Quickly came the Bible woman, by his bed her seat she took.
Noble little woman was she, gentle mannered in her ways;
Rumor said her life was blighted, crossed in love in bygone days.
And her life from thence devoted to the needs of sick and poor
Soothing with her sweet attentions stricken souls at death's dark door.
Quietly I stole away then, leaving her by Fifty-two,
Gently telling in her own way story old yet ever new.
But ere long the Bible woman beckoned me to come again,
Fifty-two was fast succumbing, death's cold creeping numbed his pain.
This I saw and whispered softly, "Ask him if we cannot send
Anywhere that he might mention, anywhere he has a friend."
Then the little Bible woman, in a voice as sweet as low,
Put the question gently to him, to receive his answer, "No."
Once again did she address him, with her soft hand on his brow,
Smoothed the burning, throbbing temples, "Fifty-two, you'll tell me now,
Let me take a cherished message, let me tell your conduct brave,
How you dashed into the roadway, risked your life a child's to save."
"P'raps it's best," then came his answer; "let them know the news at home.
No need now to struggle further, for I feel my time has come.
Years ago, when but a youngster, nothing but a country lad,
Life to me seemed bright and joyous, just a round of promise glad.
For I loved the squire's daughter and she loved me as I loved.
With amaze her father heard this, but with anger her reproved
For such waywardness in stooping after hands by him employed.
Said 'twas but a pack of nonsense; if again she him annoyed
By such folly he would stop it. For her sake I had to go,
Quit the old folk and my sweetheart—hard to do, as lovers know.
Yet I felt a kind of lightsome—country lads they hear so much
Of the fortunes in the big towns—God knows there are few of such;
For I've labored, hoped and struggled, while the old folk home they died.
Long it worked on with a stout heart, picturing with honest pride
The one day when I might venture to redeem the vow I'd made
To my cherished one that evening when we met in twilight shade.
Ere we parted, I remember, being seized by lover's whim,
Pleading for some trifling token her own Jack could take with him
Midst the mighty city's throbbing while he strove in Fortune's race—
Something he could dearly treasure, something he would no'er disgrace.
Years rolled on, I wore her token with a sacredness of heart;
As a knight of old I'd promised 'Death her charm and me should part,'
And it's coming, creeping on me—God, how true the words are now!
'Death her charm and me should part,' gasped he, "but I've kept my vow."
Sinking fast, he feebly whispered, "Tell her I've been loyal, true;
Nurse, you'll say a good word, won't you, for your patient, Fifty-two?
Give her this," and then he laid bare with a trembling, nervous hand
Round his neck a slender coil of dark brown hair in plaited band.
"Tell my Maggie I have worn it since she placed it there that night."
Here the Bible woman trembled, while her face turned ghastly white.
"Take it off, nurse, let me kiss it; say in heaven I wait for her."
But ere I could raise a finger, with excitement all astir
Sank the little Bible woman on her knees beside his bed,
"Jack, my own Jack! here's your Maggie!" Sir, I had to turn my head.
Painter ne'er could paint the picture round the bed of Fifty-two,
And its useless my attempting to describe the scene to you.
How he feebly murmured "Maggie!" How she sobbed in anguished joy,
While the old love leapt within her as she kissed her country boy.
"Strange if true, sir!" 'Tis indeed a story true as it is queer,
And the little Bible woman since his death still visits here.
This in strictest confidence, sir. That's the little lady there
By the table tending flowers. "What about the plait of hair?"
"Nurse," said she, "like him, I'll wear it, sacred now to me is this,
Consecrated by the ritual of my brave Jack's dying kiss."

S. B. McBEATH.

THE BOTTLE IMP

BY ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

II.

Now the house stood on the mountain side, visible to ships. Above, the forest ran up into the clouds of rain; below, the black lava fell in cliffs, where the kings of old lay buried. A garden bloomed about that house with every hue of flowers; and there was an orchard of Papaia on the one hand, and an orchard of fruitbread on the other; and right in front toward the sea a ship's mast had been rigged up and bore a flag. As for the house, it was three stories high, with great chambers and broad balconies on each; the windows were of glass so excellent that it was as clear as water and as bright as day; all manner of furniture adorned the chambers; pictures hung upon the wall in golden frames, pictures of ships, and men fighting, and of the most beautiful women, and of singular places; nowhere in the world are there pictures of so bright a color as those Keawe found hanging in his house. As for the knick-knacks, they were extraordinary fine; chiming clocks and musical boxes, little men with nodding heads, books filled with pictures, weapons from all quarters of the world, and the most elegant puzzles to entertain the leisure of a solitary man. And as no one would care to live in such chambers, only to walk through and view them, the balconies were made so broad that a whole town might have lived upon them in delight; and Keawe knew not which to prefer, whether the back porch, where you get the land breeze, and looked upon the orchards and the flowers, or the front balcony, where you could drink the wind of the sea, and look down the steep wall of the mountain, and see the Hall going by once a week or so, between Hookena and the Hills of Pele, or the schooners plying up the coast for wood and ava and bananas.

When they had viewed all, Keawe and Lopaka sat on the porch.

"Well?" asked Lopaka, "is it all as you designed?"

"Words cannot utter it," said Keawe. "It is better than I dreamed, and I am sick with satisfaction."

"There is but one thing to consider," said Lopaka. "All this may be quite natural, and the bottle imp have nothing whatever to say to it. If I were to buy the bottle and get no schooner after all I should have put my hand in the fire for nothing. I gave you my word, I know, but yet I think you would not grudge me one more proof."

"I have sworn I would take no more favors," said Keawe. "I have gone already deep enough."

"This is no favor I am thinking of," replied Lopaka. "It is only to see the imp himself. There is nothing to be gained by that, and so nothing to be ashamed of, and yet if I once saw him I should be ashamed of the whole matter. So indulge me so far and let me see the imp, and after that there is the money in my hand and I will buy it."

"There is only one thing that I am afraid of," said Keawe. "The imp may be very ugly to view, and if you once set eyes on him you might be very undesirous of the bottle."

"I am a man of my word," said Lopaka. "And here is the money betwixt us."

"Very well," replied Keawe, "I have a curiosity myself. So come, let us have one look at you, Mr. Imp."

Now, as soon as that was said, the imp looked out of the bottle and in again, swift as a lizard; and there sat Keawe and Lopaka turned to stone. The night had quite come before either found a thought to say or voice to say it with, and then Lopaka pushed the money over and took the bottle.

"I am a man of my word," said he, "and had need to be so, or I would not touch this bottle with my foot. Well, I shall get my schooner and a dollar or two for my pocket; and then I will be rid of this devil as fast as I can. For, to tell the plain truth, the look of him has cast me down."

"Lopaka," said Keawe, "do not think any worse of me than you can help. I know it is night and the roads bad, and the pass by the tombs an ill place to go by so late; but I declare since I have seen that little face I cannot eat or sleep or pray till it is gone from me. I will give you a lantern and a basket to put the bottle in, and any picture or fine thing in my house that takes your fancy, and be gone at once, and go sleep at Hookena with Nahinu."

"WELL," ASKED LOPAKA, "IS ALL AS YOU DESIRED?"

"Keawe," said Lopaka, "many a man would take this ill; above all when I am doing you a turn so friendly as to keep my word and to buy the bottle, and, for that matter, the night and the dark and the way by the tombs might be all tenfold more dangerous to a man with such a sin upon his conscience and such a bottle under his arm. But for my part I am so extremely terrified myself I have not the heart to blame you. Here I go, then, and I pray God you may be happier in your house and I fortunate with my schooner, and both get to heaven in the end in spite of the devil and his bottle."

So Lopaka went down the mountain and Keawe stood in his front balcony and listened to the clink of the horse's shoes and watched the lantern go shining down the path and along the cliff of caves, where the old dead are buried; and all the time he trembled and clasped his hands and prayed for his friend, and gave glory to God that he himself was escaped out of that trouble.

But the next day came very brightly, and that new house of his was so delightful to behold that he forgot his terrors. One day followed another, and Keawe dwelt there in perpetual joy. He had his place on the back porch; it was there he ate and lived and read the stories in the Honolulu newspapers; but when any one came by they would go in and view the chambers and the pictures. And the fame of the house went far and wide. It was called Ka-Hale Nui—the Great House—in all Kona; and sometimes the Bright House, for Keawe kept a Chinaman who was all day dusting and furbishing, and the glass and the gilt and the fine stuffs and the pictures shone as bright as the morning. As for Keawe himself he could not walk in the chambers without singing, his heart was so enlarged; and when ships sailed by upon the sea he would fly his colors on the mast.

"I AM KOKUA," SAID THE GIRL.

Some time went by until one day Keawe went upon a visit as far as Kailua to certain of his friends. There he was well feasted, and left as soon as he could the next morning and rode hard, for he was impatient to behold his beautiful house, and besides the night then coming on was the night in which the dead of old days go abroad in the sides of Kona; and having already meddled with the devil he was the more chary of meeting with the dead. A little beyond Honaunau, looking far ahead he was aware of a woman bathing in the edge of the sea; and she seemed a well grown girl, but he thought no more of