

MONA MACLEAN

MEDICAL STUDENT

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5521

MONA MACLEAN

M O N A M A C L E A N

M E D I C A L S T U D E N T

A N O V E L

BY

G R A H A M T R A V E R S

I N T H R E E V O L U M E S

V O L . I .

W I L L I A M B L A C K W O O D A N D S O N S

E D I N B U R G H A N D L O N D O N

M D C C C X C I I

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M O N A M A C L E A N,

MEDICAL STUDENT.



CHAPTER I.

IN THE GARDEN.

“ I WISH I were dead ! ”

“ H'm. You look like it.”

There was no reply for a second or two. The first speaker was carefully extricating herself from the hammock in which she had been idly swinging under the shade of a smoke-begrimed lime-tree.

“ No,” she said at last, shaking out the folds of her dainty blue gown, “ I flatter myself that I do not look like it. I have often told you,

my dear Mona, that from the point of view of success in practice, the art of dressing one's hair is at least as important as the art of dissecting."

She gave an adjusting touch to her dark-red curls and drew herself to her full height, as though she were defying the severest critic to say that she did not live up to her principles. Presently her whole bearing collapsed, so to speak, into abject despair, half real, half assumed. "But I do wish I were dead, all the same," she said.

"Well, I don't see why you should make me wish it too. Why don't you go on with your book?"

"Go on with it! I like that! I never began. I have not turned a page for the last half-hour. That's all the credit I get for my self-repression! What time is it?"

"A quarter past twelve.

"Is that all? And the lists won't be up till two. When shall we start?"

"About three, if we are wise—when the crush is over."

"Thank you! I mean to be there when the clock strikes two. There won't be any crush. It's not like the Matric; and besides, every one

has gone down. I am sure I wish I had! A telegram 'strikes home,' but the slow torture of wading through those lists——!"

She broke off abruptly, and Mona returned to her book, but before she had read half-a-dozen lines a parasol was inserted between her eyes and the page.

"It will be a treat, won't it?—wiring to the other students that everybody has passed but me!"

"Lucy, you are intolerable. Have you finished packing?"

"Practically."

"Do you mean to travel half the night in that gown?"

"Not being a millionaire like you, I do not. You little know the havoc this frock has to work yet. But I presume you would not have me walk down to Burlington House in my old serge?"

"Why not? You say everybody is out of town."

"Precisely. Therefore we, the exceptions, will be all the more *en évidence*. I don't mean to be taken for an 'advanced woman.' Some of the Barts. men will be there, and——"

But Mona was not listening. She had risen from the cushions on which she had been lounging, and was pacing up and down the grass.

“You know, Mona, you may say what you please, but you are rather white about the gills yourself, and *you* have no cause to be.”

Mona stopped and shot a level glance at her companion.

“Why not?” she said. “Because I have been ploughed once already, and so should be used to skinning like the eels?”

“Nonsense! How you contrived to fail once neither I nor any one else can pretend to explain, but certain it is that, with the best of will, you won’t achieve the feat a second time. You will be in the Honours list, of course.”

Mona shrugged her shoulders. “Possibly,” she said quietly, “if I pass. But the question is, shall I pass?”

““Oh the little more, and how much it is!

And the little less, and what worlds away!””

They were walking up and down together now.

“And even if you don’t—it will be a disgrace to the examiners, of course, and a frightful fag,

but beyond that I don't see that it matters. There is no one to care."

Mona's cheek flushed. She raised her eyebrows, and turned her head very slowly towards her companion, with a glance of inquiry.

"I mean," Lucy said, hastily, "you are—that is to say, you are not a country clergyman's daughter like me. If I fail, it will be the talk of the parish. The grocer will condole with me over the counter, the postman will carry the news on his rounds, and the farmers will hear all about it when they come in to market next Wednesday. It will be awfully hard on the Pater; he——"

"From what I know of him, I think he will be able to hold up his head in spite of it."

They both laughed.

"By the way, that reminds me"—and Lucy produced a letter from her pocket—"he is awfully anxious that you should come to us for a few weeks this vacation. You have no idea what a conquest you have made in that quarter. In fact I have been shining with reflected lustre ever since he met you. He thinks there must be something in me after all, since I have had the sense to appreciate you."

“I wonder wherein the attraction between us lies,” Mona said, reflectively. “I suppose I am really less grave than I appear, and you on the whole are less of a flibbertigibbet than the world takes you to be. So we meet on something of a common ground. I see in you a side of my nature which in the ordinary course of events I don’t find it easy to express, and possibly you see something of the same sort in me. Each of us relieves the other of the necessity——”

“Don’t prose, please!” interrupted Lucy. “I never yet found the smallest difficulty in expressing myself, and—the saints be praised!—you are not always quite so dull as you are to-day. I suppose you won’t come? What are tennis-parties and picnics to a Wandering Jew like you?”

“It is awfully kind of your father. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate his goodness; but I am afraid I can’t come.”

“I thought so. Is it the North Pole or the wilds of Arabia this time?”

Mona laughed. “To tell the truth,” she said, “I must have a day with my accounts and my bank-book before I stir from Gower Street.”

“What! *you*, Cræsus?”

“The reproach is deserved, whether you meant it for one or not. I have been spending too much. What with extra laboratory work in winter, and coaching last term——”

“And all those pretty dresses.”

“And all those pretty dresses,” repeated Mona, with the air of one who is making a deliberate confession.

“And nice damp uncut volumes.”

“Not too many of those,” with a defiant little nod of self-defence.

“And divers charities.”

“Nay, alas! My bank-book has not suffered much from them.”

“And concert tickets, and gloves for impecunious friends, not to say a couple of excellent stalls from time to time——”

“Nonsense, Lucy! Considering how hard we have worked, I don't think you and I have been at all extravagant in our amusements. No, no, I ought to be able to afford all that. My father left me three hundred a-year, more or less.”

“Good heavens!” If Mona had added a cipher, the sum could scarcely have impressed her companion more.

“There! that is so like you schoolgirls——”

“Schoolgirls, indeed!”

“You have your allowance of thirty or forty pounds, and you flatter yourselves that you dress on it, travel on it, amuse yourselves on it, and surreptitiously feed on it. You never notice the countless things that come to you from your parents, as naturally as the air you breathe. You go with your mother to her cupboards and store closets, or with your father to town, and all the time you are absorbing money or money’s worth. Then you get into debt; there is a scene, a few tears, and your father’s hand goes into his pocket, and you find yourself with your debts paid, and one or two pounds to the good. I know all about it. Your allowance is the sheerest farce. Cut off all those chances and possibilities, banish the very conception of elasticity from your mind, before you judge of my income.”

Lucy’s eyes had been fixed on the ground. She raised them now, and said very slowly, with a trick of manner she had caught from her friend—

“I don’t think I ever heard such a one-sided statement in my life.”

Mona laughed. "Every revolution and reformation the world has seen has been the fruit of a one-sided statement."

"I have already asked you not to prose. Besides, your good seed has fallen on stony ground for once. Please don't attempt to revolutionise or reform me!"

"My dear, if you indulge in the pedantry of quotation from ancient Jewish literature, pray show some familiarity with the matter of it. Although, as you remind me, I am not a country clergyman's daughter, you will allow me to remind *you* that the seed on the stony ground did spring up."

"Bother the seed on stony ground! You said your income was three hundred a-year."

"More or less. This year it happens to be less, and I have a strong suspicion that I am in shallow water. If, as I fervently hope, my suspicion is incorrect, I mean to have a fortnight's walking in Skye. In any case, I have promised to spend a month on the east coast of Scotland with a cousin of my father's."

"I thought you had no cousins?"

"No more I have—to call cousins. I never saw this one, and I don't suppose I should ever

have heard of her if she had not written to borrow twenty pounds from me a few years ago. She is quite comfortably off now, but she cannot get over her gratitude. I don't suppose she is exactly what you would call a lady. My grandfather was the successful man of the family in his generation, and my father was the same in the next; so it is my fault if cousin Rachel and I have not 'gone off on different lines.'"

"But why do you go to her?"

"I don't know. It is an old promise—in fact, she wants me to live with her altogether—and I am curious to see my 'ancestral towers.'"

"And have you no other relatives?"

Mona laughed. "My mother's sister has just come home from India with her husband, but we are just as far apart as when continents and oceans divided us. I don't think my mother and she quite hit it off. Besides, I can imagine her opinion of medical women, and I don't suppose she ever heard of blessed Bloomsbury."

"Wait a little," said Lucy. "When you are a famous physician——"

"I know—bowling along on C springs——"

“ Drawn by a pair of prancing, high-stepping greys——”

“ Leaning back on the luxurious cushions——”

“ Wrapt to the ears in priceless sables——”

“ My waiting - room crowded with patient Duchesses. Yes, of course, she will be sorry then. I suppose she will have an illness, some ‘obscure internal lesion’ which will puzzle all the London doctors. As a last resource she will apply to me. I wave my wand. Hey, presto! she is cured! But you can’t expect her to foresee all that. It would argue more than average intelligence, and besides, it would spoil the story.”

CHAPTER II.

THE LISTS.

THERE was no doubt about it. The lists were up.

As the girls passed through the bar from Vigo Street, they could see a little knot of men, silent and eager, gathered on the steps in front of the notice-case. Those who had secured a good position were leisurely entering sundry jottings in their note-books ; those behind were straining their eyes, straining every muscle in their bodies, in the endeavour to ascertain the one all-important fact.

“I told you we should have waited,” Mona said, quietly, striving to make the most of a somewhat limited stock of breath.

“If you tell me the name of the person you are interested in, perhaps I can help you,” said a tall man who was standing beside them.

“Oh, thank you,” Mona smiled pleasantly. “We can wait. We—are interested in—in several people.”

He stood aside to let them pass in front of him, and in a few minutes their turn came.

“Second Division!” ejaculated Lucy, in mingled relief and disgust, as she came to her own name. “Thank heaven even for that! Just let me take a note of the others. Now for the Honours list, and Mona Maclean!”

The Honours list was all too short, and a few seconds were sufficient to convince them——

“Oh!” burst involuntarily from Lucy’s lips, as the truth forced itself upon her.

“Hush!” said Mona, hastily, in a low voice. “It is all right. Come along.”

She hurried Lucy down the steps, past the post-office, and into Regent Street.

“You know, dear, there are those confounded telegrams to be sent off,” said Lucy, deprecatingly.

“Yes, yes, I know. There is no hurry. Let me think.”

They strolled along in the bright sunshine, but Mona felt as cold as lead. She did not believe that she had failed. There must be

some mistake. They had misspelt her name, perhaps, or possibly omitted it by accident. They would correct the mistake to-morrow. It could not be that she had really failed again. After all, was she sure that her name was not there ?

“Lucy,” she said at last, “do you mind going back with me to the University, and glancing over the lists again ?”

“Yes, do. We must have made a mistake. It is simply ridiculous.”

But in her heart of hearts she knew that they had not made a mistake.

The little crowd had almost dispersed when they returned, and there was nothing to prevent a quiet and thorough study of the lists.

“It is infamous,” said Lucy, “simply infamous ! Small credit it is to me to have passed when that is all the examiners know of their work !”

“Nonsense ! It’s all right. You know I had my weak subject. Come.”

“Will you wait here while I send off the telegrams ?”

“No, I will come with you.”

They passed out of the heat and glare into

the dusty little shop, and Mona leaned her elbow wearily on the counter. She had begun to believe it now, but not to realise it in the least. "How horribly I shall be suffering to-morrow!" she thought, with a shiver of dread.

"Weal and woe!" she said, smiling, as she read the telegrams Lucy had scribbled. "Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left."

"*Don't,*" said Lucy, with a little stamp of her foot. For the moment she was suffering more than Mona.

They walked home in silence to the house in Gower Street.

"Come in to tea? No? Well, good-bye, dear. Take care of yourself. My love and duty to your father and mother. Write to me here."

She nodded brightly, opened the door with her latch-key, and entered the cool dark house.

Very slowly she dragged herself up to her pretty sitting-room, and shut the door. She winced as her eye fell on the old familiar sights—Quain, and Foster, and Mitchell Bruce, the Leitz under its glass shade, and the box of what she was pleased to dub 'ivory toys.' Then her eye fell on her own reflection in the

draped mirror, and she walked straight up to the white, strong, sensitive face.

“Who cares?” she said, defiantly. “Not you nor I! What *does* it matter? *Ay de mi!* What does anything mean? What *is* success or failure after all?”

From which soliloquy you will be able to form a pretty definite idea of my heroine's age.

CHAPTER III.

"ADOLESCENT INSANITY."

"RATHER than go through all that strain again," said Mona the next morning, "I would throw up the whole thing and emigrate."

She was leaning back on the pillows, her hair all tumbled into curls after a restless night, her hands playing absently with the lace on her morning wrapper. "Why doesn't the coffee come?"

As she spoke, the maid came in with a tempting little tray. Mona was a lodger worth having.

"You look ill, miss," said the girl.

"No. Only a headache. I am not going out this morning. Bring the hot water in half an hour."

"What do people do when they emigrate?"

she went on, when the maid had gone. "They start off with tin pots and pans, but what do they do when they arrive? I wonder what sort of farmer I should make? There must be plenty of good old yeoman blood in my veins. 'Two men I honour and no third'—but the feminine of digging and delving, I suppose, is baking and mending. Heigh-ho! this can scarcely be checkmate at my time of life, but it looks uncommonly like it."

An hour later she was deep in her accounts; the table before her littered with manuscript books and disjointed scraps of addition and subtraction. The furrow on her brow gradually deepened.

"Shallow water!" she said at last, very slowly, raising her head and folding her arms as she spoke; "shallow water was a euphemism. It seems to me, my dear Lucy, that your friend is on the rocks."

She sat for a long time in silence, and then ran her eye quickly over a pile of unanswered letters. She extracted one, leaned back in her chair, and looked at the envelope critically.

"Not strictly what one would call a gentleman's letter," she said; "in fact, a sneering

outsider might be tempted to use the word illiterate. Well, what then?”

She took out the enclosure and read it through very carefully. She had tossed it aside thoughtlessly enough when it had found her, a fortnight before, in all the excitement of the examination; but now the utterances of the Delphic oracle could not have been studied with closer attention.

“MY DEAR COUSIN,—Yours safely to hand this morning, and very glad I was to get it. I am afraid you will find us dull company here after London, but we will do our best.”

(“H’m,” said Mona. “That means tea-parties—cookies and shortbread—a flower-show or two in the grounds of the Towers, no doubt,—possibly even a *soirée* in the chapel. Wild excitement!”)

“Nobody here knows anything about your meaning to be a doctor, and what we don’t know does us no harm. They would think it a queer kind of notion in these parts, as you know I do myself, and keep hoping you will find some nice gentleman——”

(“Gentleman!” groaned Mona.)

“——who will put the idea out of your head. My niece, who has been living with me for years, has just sailed for America to be married. You are almost the only friend I have now in the country, and I wish you could see your way to staying with me till you get married yourself. It would do no harm to save your own money a bit; your company would be gain enough to me. I must look out for some one at once, and it would make a great difference in my life to have you. Blood's thicker than water, you know.”

(“That I don't,” said Mona. “My dear woman, any chance advertiser in to-day's paper would probably suit you better than I. It is as bad as adopting a foundling.”)

“Write me a line when to expect you.

“Your affectionate cousin,

“RACHEL SIMPSON.”

Mona folded the letter thoughtfully, and returned it to its envelope. Then she rose from her writing-table, threw herself into a rocking-chair, and clasped her hands behind her head.

Many a perplexing problem had been solved to the rhythm of that pleasant motion, but

to-day the physical exercise was insufficient. She got up impatiently and paced the room. From time to time she stopped at the window, and gazed half absently at the luggage-laden hansoms hurrying to and from the stations.

"Shooting, and fishing, and sketching, and climbing," she thought to herself. "Why am I so out of it all? If there was a corner of the earth to which I really cared to go, I would undertake to raise the money, but there is not a wish in my heart. I scarcely even wish I had passed my examination."

She returned at last to the writing-table, took pen and paper, and wrote hastily without stopping to think. She was in the mood in which people rush at decisions which may make or mar a life.

"MY DEAR COUSIN RACHEL,—I was very busy and preoccupied when your letter reached me, or it would have been answered before now.

"I don't wonder that you see no need for women doctors—living as you do in a healthy country village, where I suppose no one is ever

ill unless from old age, a fever, or a broken leg. Perhaps if you saw something of hospital work here, you would think differently; but we can discuss that question when we meet. Whether I personally am qualified for the life I have chosen, is a quite separate question. About that, no doubt, there might be two unprejudiced opinions. I have not been very successful of late, although I am convinced that I have done good work; and I have been spending more money than I ought to have done. For these reasons, and for others which it is not so easy to put into words, I am anxious to escape for a time from the noise and bustle and excitement of London. I should like to be in some country place where I could think, and read, and live quietly, and if possible be of some little use to somebody. You are kind enough—not knowing what an unamiable, self-centred person I am—to offer me a home with you for an indefinite period; so, if you really care to purchase ‘a pig in a poke,’ I will come to you for six months. By the end of that time you will have discovered most of my faults, and will have found some one who would suit you a great deal better. I will pay you whatever you consider the equivalent of

my board, and if I can be of use to you in any way I shall be only too glad.

“ Believe me always

“ Your affectionate cousin,

“ MONA MACLEAN.”

Lunch was on the table before she had finished writing. She lifted the cover and looked at the nicely cooked dish with irrepressible disgust, then helped herself, and—fell a-dreaming.

“ Mona, my dear, this will never do,” she said, rousing herself with an effort. “ Checkmate or no checkmate, I can’t have you fading away like a lovely flower. What is the use of this *Niersteiner* if it does not make you eat? *Hörst du wohl?*” She made a heroic attempt if not a very successful one, and then proceeded to read over critically the letter she had just written.

She shrugged her shoulders as she closed the envelope.

“ Adolescent insanity !” she exclaimed cynically. “ Well, why not? Some of us are adolescent, I suppose, and most of us are insane.”

She put on her hat and strolled down towards Oxford Street to post the letter. It suited her

mood to drop it into the letter-box with her own hands, and besides, she was rarely so depressed as not to be amused by the shop-windows. To-day, however, as she wandered aimlessly on, the gay shows in Regent Street fell upon eyes that saw not. "If I had only passed," she said, "how happy I should be!"

She turned wearily homewards, and was met in the hall by the maid.

"If you please, miss, two ladies called while you were out. They were in a carriage, and they left this card."

Mona went up-stairs as she read it.

"Lady Munro" was the name on the card; an address in Gloucester Place, Portman Square, was scrawled in the corner; and on the back in pencil—

"So sorry to miss you. You must dine with us without fail on Friday at eight. No refusal."

A pleased smile crossed Mona's face.

"She is spoiling the story," she said. Then the smile was chased away by a frown.

"If only the story had not spoiled itself!"

And then she bethought herself of the letter she had posted.

CHAPTER IV.

SIR DOUGLAS.

WHEN Friday evening came, Mona took a curious pleasure in making the very most of herself.

She knew, as well as any outsider could have told her, that her present depression and apathy were but the measure of the passionate enthusiasm with which she had lived the life of her choice; and yet it was inevitable that for the time she should look at life wholly on the shadowed side. Past and future seemed alike gloomy and forbidding—" *Gräu, gräu, gleichgültig gräu*"—and the eager, unconscious protest of youth against such a destiny, took the form of a resolution to enjoy to the utmost this glimpse of brightness and colour. She would forget all but the present; new sur-

roundings should find her for the moment a new being.

When she reached Gloucester Place, Lady Munro and her daughter were alone in the drawing-room.

Lady Munro was one of those people who make a marked impress on their material surroundings. The rooms in which she lived quickly became, as it were, a part of herself, which her friends could not fail to recognise as such.

Eastern rugs and draperies clothed the conventional London sitting-room; luxuriant, tropical-looking plants were grouped in corners, great sensuous roses lolled in Indian bowls, and a few rich quaint lamps cast a mellow glow across the twilight of the room.

“Why, Mona, can it really be you?” Lady Munro rose from her lounge, and kissed her niece affectionately on both cheeks. For a moment Mona could scarcely find words. She was keenly susceptible at all times to the beauty of luxury, and the very atmosphere of this room called up with irresistible force forgotten memories of childhood. The touch of this gracious woman’s lips, the sound of her

voice, the soft *frou-frou* of her gown, all gave Mona a sense of exquisite physical pleasure. Lady Munro was not, strictly speaking, a beautiful woman; but a subtle grace, a subtle fascination, a subtle perfume were part of her very being. She was worshipped by all the men who knew her, but the most cynical of her husband's friends could not deny that she was no whit less charming in her intercourse with her own sex than she was with them. She was not brilliant; she was not fast; she was simply herself.

“This is my daughter Evelyn,” she said; and she laid her hand on a sweet, quiet, overgrown English schoolgirl—one of those curious chrysalis beings whom a few months of Anglo-Indian society transforms from a child into a finished woman of the world.

“I expect my husband every moment. He is longing to meet you.”

Evelyn slowly raised her blue eyes, looked quietly at her mother for a moment, and let them fall again without the smallest change of expression. In fact, Lady Munro's remark was a graceful modification of the truth. Sir Douglas Munro was nothing if not a man of

the world. He knew the points of a wine, and he knew the points of a horse; but above all he flattered himself that he knew the points of a woman. He had made a study of them all his life, and he believed, perhaps rightly, that he could read them like an open book. "Sweet seventeen" was at a cruel disadvantage in his hands, if indeed he exerted himself to speak to her at all. The genus *Medical Woman* was not as yet included in his collection, but he had heard of it, and had classified it in his own mind as a useful but uninteresting hybrid, which could not strictly be called a woman at all. In the sense, therefore, in which a lukewarm entomologist "longs to meet" the rare but ugly beetle which he believes will complete his cabinet, Sir Douglas Munro was "longing" to make the acquaintance of Mona Maclean.

The new beetle certainly took him by surprise when he came in a minute later.

"Mona!" he replied to his wife's introduction; "Mona Maclean—the doctor?"

Mona laughed as she rose, and took his proffered hand.

"Far from it," she said. "In the vacation I try to forget that I am even the makings of one."

She looked almost handsome as she stood there in the soft light of the room. Lady Munro forgot that her niece was a medical student, and experienced a distinct sense of pride and proprietorship. No ordinary *modiste*, she felt sure, had arranged those folds of soft grey crape, and the dash of glowing crimson geraniums on the shoulder was the touch of an artist.

“Mona is the image of her mother,” she said.

“Ye-e-s,” said Sir Douglas, availing himself of his wife’s relationship to look at Mona very frankly. “She reminds me a good deal of what you were at her age.”

“Nonsense!” said Mona, hastily. “Remember I am not used to flattery.”

“To receiving or to paying it?”

“To neither;” and she turned a look of very honest and almost child-like admiration on her aunt.

Sir Douglas looked pleased, although he himself had long ceased to pay his wife compliments.

“There’s a great deal of your father in your face, too,” he said. “You have got his mouth. Ah, he *was* a good fellow! I could tell you

many a story of our Indian life—a man in a thousand!”

“You could tell me nothing I should more dearly like to hear,” said Mona, with eager interest.

“Ah, well—some day, some day.”

A native servant announced dinner, and Sir Douglas gave Mona his arm.

“What! another scene from the ‘Arabian Nights’?” she said as they entered the dining-room. “It is clear that a very wonderful genius presides over your household.”

“You are going to have an Indian dinner, too,” said Lady Munro. “Nubboo makes all the *entrées* and soups and sauces. He is worth half-a-dozen English servants.”

Mona looked up at the dark bearded face under the voluminous white turban, but she could not tell whether Nubboo had heard the remark. All the philosophy of Buddha might lie behind those sad impenetrable eyes, or he might be thinking merely of the *entrées*; it was impossible to say. If the whole occasion had not seemed to her, as she said, a bit out of the ‘Arabian Nights,’ she would have thought it sacrilege that a man with such a face should be

employed in so trivial an occupation as waiting at table.

“When I look at Nubboo I can almost believe myself a baby again,” she said. “He seems like a bit of my dream-world.”

The feeblest ghost of a smile flitted across the man's face, as he moved noiselessly from place to place.

“It must be a dream-world,” laughed her aunt. “You cannot remember much of that!”

“I don't;” and Mona sighed.

Lady Munro and Mona kept the ball going between them during dinner. Evelyn only spoke now and then, to water down one of her mother's most piquant and highly seasoned remarks; and she did this with a hidden sense of humour which never rose to the surface in her face. Sir Douglas spoke as much as courtesy absolutely demanded, but no more. The new beetle was evidently perplexing him profoundly.

Lady Munro's feeling for her niece was one of mingled pride, affection, disgust, and fear—disgust for the life-work she had chosen, fear of her supposed “cleverness.” Lady Munro despised learned women, but she was not at all

willing that they should despise her. She exerted herself to talk well, but even Mona's evident admiration could not put her quite at her ease.

"How is it we have seen so little of you, Mona?" she said, when they had left Sir Douglas to his wine. "Where were you when we were last at home?"

"In Germany, I suppose. I went there for three years after I left school."

"To study music?"

"Both music and painting in a small way."

"You wonderful girl! Then you are a musician?"

"*Gott bewahre!*" burst from Mona involuntarily. "My musical friends thought me a Turner, and my artistic friends thought me a Rubinstein; from which you may gather the truth, that I had no real gift for either."

"So you say! I expect you are an 'Admirable Crichton.'"

"If that be a euphemism for 'Jack-of-all-trades and master of none,' I suppose I am—alas!"

"And does Homer never nod? Do you never amuse yourself like other girls?"

“I am afraid I must not allow you to call me a girl. I believe you have my grandmother’s family Bible. Yes, indeed, Homer nods a great deal more than is consistent with his lofty calling. I am an epicure in frivolling.”

“In what?”

“Forgive my school slang! It means that I indulge quite freely enough in concerts, theatres, and in picture-galleries—not to say shop-windows.”

“You don’t mean to say that *you* care for shop-windows?” and again Lady Munro’s glance rested with satisfaction on Mona’s pretty gown, although she was half afraid her niece was laughing at her.

“Oh, don’t I? You little know!”

“Pictures, I suppose, and old china and furniture and that sort of thing,” said Lady Munro, treading cautiously.

“Yes, I like all those, but I like pretty bonnets too, and tea-gowns and laces and note-paper and—every kind of arrant frivolity and bagatelle. But they must be pretty, you know. I am not caught with absolute chaff.”

“You don’t care about fashion, you mean.”

Mona drew down her brows in deep thought.

Clearly she was talking honestly. Then she shook her head with a light laugh.

“I am getting into deep water,” she said. “I am afraid I do care about fashion, fashion *quâ* fashion, fashion pure and simple.”

“Not if it is ugly?” questioned Evelyn gravely.

“Not if it is ugly, surely; but I question if it often is ugly in the hands of the artists among dressmakers. It is just as unfair to judge of a fashion as it issues from the hands of a mere seamstress, as it is to judge of an air from its rendering on a barrel-organ or a penny trumpet.”

Lady Munro laughed. “I shall tell my husband that,” she said. “Douglas”—as he entered the room—“you have no idea of the heresies Mona has been confessing. She cares as much about new gowns and bonnets as anybody.”

Sir Douglas looked at Mona very gravely. Either he had not heard the remark, or he was striving to adapt it to his mental sketch of her character.

He seated himself on the sofa beside her, and turned towards her as though he meant to exclude his wife and daughter from the conversation.

“Have you seriously taken up the study of medicine?” he asked.

“Now for it!” thought Mona.

She took for granted that he was a decided enemy of the “movement,” and although at the moment she was in little humour for the old battle, she was bound to be true to her colours. So she donned her armour wearily.

“I certainly have,” she said, quietly.

“And you mean to practise?”

“Assuredly.”

The examination and its concomitant sorrows were forgotten. She answered the question as she would have answered it at any time in the last three or four years.

“Are you much interested in the work?”

“Very much,” she said, warmly.

“I am sure you need scarcely ask that,” said Lady Munro, with a kind smile. “One does not undertake that sort of thing *pour s’amuser!*”

“There are other motives,” he said, looking severely at his wife. “There is ambition.” This was shrewdly said, and Mona’s respect for her opponent rose. A fit of coughing had interrupted him.

His wife looked at him anxiously. “I wish

you would prescribe for my husband," she said, smiling.

"*Don't!*" ejaculated Sir Douglas, fiercely, before the cough gave him breath to speak.

At this moment Nubboo announced a visitor, a cousin of Sir Douglas', and the latter seemed glad of an interruption which allowed him to have Mona entirely to himself.

He shook hands with his visitor, and then, returning to Mona's side, sat in silence for a few moments as if trying to collect his thoughts.

"The fact is," he broke out impulsively at last, "I am torn asunder on this subject of women doctors — torn asunder. There is a terrible necessity for them — terrible — and yet, what a sacrifice!"

Mona could scarcely believe her ears. This was very different from the direct, brutal attack she had anticipated. Instinctively she laid down her armour, and left herself at his mercy.

"I think you are unusually liberal to admit the necessity," she said, but her sweet earnest face said much more for her than her words.

"*Liberal!*" he said. "What man can live and not admit it? It makes me mad to think

how a woman can allow herself to be pulled about by a *man*. Fifty years hence no woman will have the courage to own that it ever happened to her. But the sacrifice is a fearful one. Picture my allowing Evelyn to go through what you are going through!" And his glance rested fondly on his daughter's fair head.

"I agree with you so far," said Mona, "that no woman should undertake such work under the age of twenty-three."

"*Twenty-three!*" he repeated. "It is bad for a *man*, but a man has some virtues which remain untouched by it. A woman loses everything that makes womanhood fair and attractive. You *must* be becoming hard and blunted?"

He looked at her as if demanding an answer.

"I hope not," said Mona, quietly, and her eyes met his.

"You *hope* not!" He dashed back her words with all the vehemence of an evangelical preacher who receives them in answer to his all-important question. "You *hope* not! Is that all you can say? You are not sure?"

"It is difficult to judge of one's self," said Mona, thoughtfully, turning her face full to his piercing gaze; "and one's own opinion would not be

worth having. I believe I am not becoming hardened. I am sure my friends would say I am not."

She felt as if he were reading her inmost soul, and for the moment she was willing that he should. No other argument would be of any weight in such a discussion as this.

He dropped his eyes, half ashamed of his vehemence. "No need to tell me that," he said, hurriedly. "I am used to reading women's faces. I have been searching yours all evening for the hard lines that must be there, but there is not a trace that is not perfectly womanly. And yet I cannot understand it! From the very nature of your work you must revel in scenes of horror."

"*That* I am sure we don't!" said Mona, warmly. She would have laughed if they had both been less in earnest. "You don't say that of all the noble nurses who have had to face scenes of horror."

"But you must become blunted, if you are to be of any use."

"I don't think blunted is the word. It is extremely true, as some one says, that pity becomes transformed from a blind impulse into a motive."

He seemed to be weighing this.

“You dissect?” he said presently.

“Yes.”

“Think of that alone! It is human butchery.”

“Of course you must know that I do not look upon it in that light.”

But a sense of hopelessness came upon her, as she realised how she was handicapped in this discussion. She must either be silent or speak in an unknown tongue. How could she explain to this man the wonder and the beauty of the work that he dismissed in a brutal phrase? How could she talk of that ever-new field for observation, corroboration, and discovery; that unlimited scope for the keen eye, the skilful hand, the thinking brain, the mature judgment? How could she describe those exquisite mechanisms and trceries, those variations of a common type, developing in accordance with fixed law, and yet with a perfectness of adaptation that *a priori* would have seemed like an impossible fairy tale? How cruelly she would be misunderstood if she talked here of the passionate delight of discovery, of the enthusiasm that had often made her forgetful of time and of all other

claims? "To be a true anatomist," she thought with glowing face, "one would need to be a mechanic and a scientist, an artist and a philosopher. He who is not something of all these must be content to learn his work as a trade."

Sir Douglas was looking at her intently. As a medical student she had got beyond his range. As a woman, for the moment, she was beautiful. Such a light is only seen in the eyes of those who can see the ideal in the actual.

But he had not finished his study. He must bring her down to earth again.

"Do you remember your first day in the dissecting-room?"

"Yes," said Mona. She sighed deeply, and the light died out of her eyes.

"A ghastly experience!"

"Yes."

"And yet you say you have not become blunted?"

"I do not think," said Mona, trying hard with a woman's instinct to avoid the least suspicion of dogmatism—"I do not think that one becomes blunted when one ceases to look at the garbage side of a subject. Every subject, I

suppose, *has* its garbage side, if one is on the look-out for it; and in anatomy, unfortunately, that is the side that strikes one first, and consequently the only one outsiders ever see. It is difficult to discuss the question with one who is not a doctor" ("nor a scientist," she added inwardly); "but if you had pursued the study, I think you would see that one must, in time, lose sight of all but the wonder and the beauty of it."

There was a long pause.

"When you are qualified," he said at last, "you only mean to attend your own sex?"

"Oh, of course," said Mona, warmly.

He seemed relieved.

"That was why my wife made me angry by suggesting, even in play, that you should prescribe for me. You women are—with or without conscious sacrifice—wading through seas of blood to right a terrible evil that has hitherto been an inevitable one. If you deliberately and gratuitously repeat that evil by extending your services to men, the sacrifice has all been for nothing, and less than nothing."

He spoke with his old vehemence, and then relapsed into silence.

His next remark sounded curiously irrelevant.

“How long do you remain here?”

“In London? I don’t quite know. I am going to visit a cousin in ten days or so.”

Sir Douglas took advantage of a pause in the conversation between his wife and their visitor.

“Bruce,” he said, “let me introduce you to my niece, Miss Maclean.”

“That,” he continued to his wife, with a movement of his head in Mona’s direction, “is a great medical light.”

Mona laughed.

“I am sure of it,” said Lady Munro, with her irresistible smile. “As for me, I would as soon have a woman doctor as a man.”

Sir Douglas threw back his head and clapped his hands, with a harsh laugh.

“Well,” he said, “when you come to say that—the skies will fall.”

“Douglas, what *do* you mean?” She looked annoyed. At the moment she really believed that she had been an advocate of women doctors all her life. Sir Douglas seated himself on a low chair beside her, and began to play with her embroidery silks.

When Mona rose to go, a little later, Lady Munro took her hand affectionately.

“Mona,” she said, “I told you we were starting on Monday morning for a short tour in Norway. My husband and I should be so pleased if you would go with us.”

Mona’s cheek flushed. “How *very* kind!” she said. “I am so sorry it is impossible.”

“Why?” said Sir Douglas, quickly. “You don’t need to go to your cousin till the end of the month.”

Mona’s colour deepened. “There is no use in beating about the bush,” she said. “The fact is, I am engaged in the interesting occupation of retrenching just now. You know”—as Sir Douglas looked daggers—“I have not the smallest claim on you.”

He laughed, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

“Don’t be afraid, Mona,” he said. “We are not trying to establish a claim on you. The great medical light shall go in and out as heretofore, without let or hindrance. Give us your society for a fortnight, and we shall be only too much your debtors.”

“It will make the greatest difference to all of us!” said Lady Munro, warmly.

And Evelyn, with the facile friendship of a schoolgirl, slipped her arm caressingly round her cousin's waist.

And so it was arranged.

"Shall Nubboo call you a hansom?" said Lady Munro.

"She doesn't want a hansom," said Sir Douglas. "Throw your gown over your arm, and put on a cloak, and I will see you home."

It was a beautiful summer night; the air was soft and pleasant after the burning heat of the day.

It was natural that Sir Douglas should be curious to see the habitat of his new beetle, and after all, he was practically her uncle; but she held out her hand, meeting his eyes with a frank smile.

"You have been very kind to me," she said. "Good night."

"I am afraid Lucy would say I had not 'stood up' to him enough," she thought. "But all he wanted was to dissect me, and I hope he has done it satisfactorily. What a curious man he is! I wonder if any one ever took quite that view of the subject before? Not at all the view of a Sir Galahad, I fancy"—and she

thought of a passage that had puzzled her in 'Rhoda Fleming'—"but he was kind to me, and honest with me, and I like him. I must try very hard not to become unconsciously 'blunted' as he calls it."

Her eye fell on a letter from her cousin, and she sat down in her rocking-chair, cast a regretful glance at the withered maidenhairs on her shoulder, and tore open the envelope.

"MY DEAR COUSIN,—Your letter has just come in, and very good news it is. All the world looks brighter since I read it. I will do my best to make you happy, and although you will have plenty of time to yourself, you will be of the greatest use to me. Both in the house and in the shop——"

"Good God!" said Mona; and letting the letter fall, she buried her face in her hands.

CHAPTER V.

“AN AGATE KNIFE-EDGE.”

IT is doubtful whether Mona had ever received such a shock in the whole course of her life.

She had always been told, and she had gloried in the knowledge, that her father's father was a self-made man; but the very fact that she did thus glory was a proof, perhaps in more ways than one, that the process of “making” had been a very complete one. She vaguely knew, but she did not in the least realise, what people may be before they are “made.” She had taken for granted, as she told Lucy, that her cousin Rachel was “not exactly what one would call a lady;” but she had unconsciously pictured to herself a pretty cottage embowered in roses, a simple primitive life, early dinners, occasional afternoon calls, rare tea-parties, and

abundant leisure for walking, reading, thinking, and dreaming on the rocks. Her love for the sea, and especially for the wild east coast, amounted almost to a passion, which hitherto she had had but little opportunity of gratifying; and this love, perhaps, had weighed with her as much as anything else, in the decision she had made.

She had talked with pride of the “good old yeoman blood” in her veins, but principle and dainty nurture shrank alike from the idea of the middleman—the shop.

She did not dream of withdrawing from the rashly concluded bargain. That simple way out of the difficulty never suggested itself to her mind. “After all, could I have done any better?” she said. “Even if Sir Douglas and my aunt took more than a passing interest in me, should I be content to devote my life to them? Nay, verily!” But all her philosophy could not save her from a *mauvais quart d’heure*—nor from a restless wakeful night—after she had read the letter.

And yet the situation appealed irresistibly to her sense of humour.

“If only Lucy were here to enjoy it!” she

said. And she found the necessary relief to her feelings in a long letter to her friend.

“ I can see you turn pale at the word *shop*,” she wrote, “ as I confess I did myself ; but I suppose your youthful and untrammelled imagination has taken flight at once to Parkins & Gotto or Marshall & Snelgrove. My dear, let me inform you at once that the town contains less than two thousand inhabitants ; and now, will you kindly reflect on the number of cubic feet which the Parkins & Gotto and Marshall & Snelgrove of such a place would find ample for the bestowal of their wares. My own impression is, that my sitting-room would afford sufficient accommodation for both, and I am not sure that there would not be room for Fortnum & Mason to boot.

“ If I only knew what I am to sell, it would be some relief. Tobacco was my first thought, but the place is not big enough to support a tobacconist. At whisky I draw the line — and yet, on second thoughts, I don't. If it is tobacco or whisky—behold my life-work ! But if it is toffee and ginger-bread horses, and those ghastly blue balls—what are they for, by the

way?—may the Lord have mercy upon my soul!”

She mentioned her meeting with the Munros, and the projected trip to Norway, and then—

“I hope the grocer duly congratulated you over the counter,” she concluded. “I take a fraternal interest in his behaviour now, and with characteristic catholicity I have gone farther afield, and have imagined the very words in which the postman delivered his tit-bit of information. I have even pictured the farmers forgetting the price of hay, and the state of the crops, in the all-absorbing topic of the hour.

“Your affectionate friend,

“MONA MACLEAN.”

“And now,” she said to herself, as she surveyed the alarming array of trunks and packing-cases which the servants had placed in the room,—“now I am in the position commonly described as having my work cut out for me! The valise must do for Norway, that trunk and hat-box for Borrowness, and all the rest must be warehoused at Tilbury’s.”

The consideration of her wardrobe provided

food for some reflection and a good deal of amusement.

“Pity there is no time to write to the ‘Queen’ for information as to outfit desirable for six months in a small shop at Borrowness!” she thought.

Finally, she decided on a plain tailor-made tweed, a dark-coloured silk, a couple of pretty cotton morning-gowns, and a simple evening-dress, “in case of emergency,” she said, but she knew in her heart that no such emergency would arise.

“The good folks will think those sweetly simple, and befitting the state of life to which it has pleased Providence to call me,” she said. “They would stare a little if they knew what I had paid for them, I fancy. Borrowness ‘*verstehet so was nicht,*’ as my dear old Frau used to say of Pauline and the asparagus.”

In the midst of her work Sir Douglas and Evelyn came in on some mythical errand. Lady Munro would have come herself, but she *was* so busy. Sir Douglas was in high spirits. It really was true of him, what Lady Munro had graciously said of all of them, that Mona’s going made the greatest difference in the

pleasure of the tour. From the point of view of personal companionship he had long since exhausted his wife, and Evelyn was still too crude and insipid to be thought of in that capacity. To his peculiar, and possibly morbid, taste, Mona's society had all the piquancy which was as desirable to his mind as were Nubboo's curries to his jaded Anglo-Indian palate.

It was sad work that packing. Many a bright hope and lofty ambition was buried with the books and instruments in the great wooden cases; and who could tell whether there would be any resurrection? Mona felt that another fortnight of life would bring her to the end of all things. “A world of failure and blighted enthusiasm behind,” she said, “a wild waste of vulgarity and mediocrity in front; and here I stand for an instant poised on an ‘agate knife-edge’ of fashion and luxury and popularity. *Carpe diem!*”

“And I'm sure, miss, if you'll give me what notice you can, I'll do my very best to have the rooms vacant again,” said the good-hearted Irish landlady, who kept dropping in at the most inconvenient moments to offer assistance and shed a few tears. “It's little trouble you've

given, and many's the time it's done me good to meet your bright face on the stair."

"You may be quite sure that if I am ever in London for any length of time, I shall try very hard to secure my old quarters," said Mona, cordially; "but it is impossible to tell what the future may bring;" and she sighed.

If lodgers could be made to order, Mrs O'Connor would fain have had hers a little more communicative. She was thirsting for an explanation of the fine carriage that had driven up to the door on Wednesday afternoon, and of the beautiful lady who had seemed so disappointed to find Miss Maclean out.

When the same equipage disappeared with Mona on Monday morning, and Mrs O'Connor had leisure to reflect on the apparent finality of this departure, in the light of the alternate high spirits and profound depression which had not altogether escaped her observation, she came to the conclusion that Miss Maclean was meditating a good match, but that she did not quite know her own mind.

CHAPTER VI.

THE NÆRODAL.

“DON'T talk to me of ‘kariols’ and ‘stolkjaerres,’” said Sir Douglas, hotly. “I never got such an infernal shaking in my life.”

Mona laughed. “Do you know,” she said, “I imagine that ‘kariols’ and ‘stolkjaerres’ have done more to make or mar Norway than all its mountains and fjords. They are so picturesque and characteristic, and they make up so neatly into wooden toys and silver ornaments. Scenery and sunsets are all very well, but it is amazing how grown-up children love to carry home a piece of cake from the party, and in this case the piece of cake serves as an excellent advertisement.”

“Fill your pockets with cake by all means, but let us have more substantial diet while we

are here. You girls may do as you like ; for the future, Maud and I travel in a calash."

They were all sitting on the grassy mounds and hillocks near the edge of the precipice, above the Nærodal at Stalheim.

The air was full of the fragrance of spicy herbs and shrubs, and the ceaseless buzz of insects in the mellow sunshine could be heard above the distant unvarying roar of the waterfalls.

In front lay the "narrow valley," bounded on either side by a range of barren, precipitous hills, half lost in shadow, half glowing in purple and gold. Some thousand feet below, like a white scar, lay the river, spanned by tiny bridges over which horses and vehicles crawled like flies. Behind, the pretty, gimcrack hotel raised its insolent little gables in the midst of the great solitude ; and beyond that, hills and mountains rose and fell like an endless series of mighty billows.

Lady Munro was leaning back in a hammock-chair, half asleep over her novel ; Sir Douglas puffed at his fragrant cigar, and protested intermittently against all the hardships he had been called upon to endure ; Evelyn, with the

conscientiousness of an intelligent schoolgirl, was sketching the Nærodal; and Mona leaned idly against a hillock, her hands clasped behind her head, her face for the moment a picture of absolute rest and satisfaction.

“Why don’t they bring the coffee?” said Lady Munro, stifling a yawn. “Evelyn, do go and inquire about it, do!”

“It has not been served on the verandah yet,” said Evelyn, without looking up from her work, “and you know they are not likely to neglect us.”

“No, indeed,” said Mona. “I can assure you it is a great privilege to poor little insignificant me to travel in such company. I have long known that the god of hotel-keepers all over the world is the hot-tempered, exacting, free-handed Englishman. I used to think it a base superstition, but now that I have all the privileges of a satellite, I see that it is a wise and beneficent worship.”

“You pert little minx!” said Sir Douglas, trying to control the twitching at the corners of his mouth.

“And I have also learned,” continued Mona, unabashed, looking at her aunt, “that a fasci-

nating manner of languid dignity, mingled with a subtle Anglo-Indian imperiousness, is worth a whole fortune in 'tips.' I mean to cultivate a far-off imitation of it."

"Mona, you are too bad!" Lady Munro had become much attached to her niece, but she never felt quite sure of her even now.

"My own belief is," said Evelyn, dreamily, "that the respect with which we are treated is due entirely to Nubboo."

"Well, he does give an air of distinction to the party, I confess," Mona answered. "When he is on the box of the calash I shall feel that nothing more is required of me."

At this moment a stolid, fair-haired girl, in picturesque Norwegian dress, appeared with a tray of cups and saucers, and Nubboo followed with the coffee. There was a perpetual dispute between them as to who should perform this office. Each considered the other a most officious meddler, and they ended, not very amicably, by sharing the duty between them.

"What a jumble you are making of the world!" laughed Mona, as she watched the retreating figures. "How do you reconcile it with your sense of the fitting to bring together

types like those? A century hence there will be no black, no white; humanity will all be uniformly, hideously, commonplacely yellow!"

"God forbid!" ejaculated Sir Douglas, with orthodox social horror of the half-caste. "Who the deuce taught these people to make coffee?"

"I am sure we have reason to know," sighed his wife, "that it is impossible to *teach* people to make coffee."

"*Nascitur non fit?* I suppose so, but it is curious—in a savage nation;" and he drank the coffee slowly and appreciatively, with the air of a professional wine-taster.

Mona rose, put her cup on the rustic table, and looked at Evelyn's painting. "*Wie geht's?*" she said, laying her hand caressingly on the girl's shoulder.

"If only the shadows would stand still! Mona, you are very lazy. Do come and draw. See, I've two sketch-blocks, and no end of brushes."

"Ah!" said Mona. "Let me really succeed with a *Dies Iræ*, or a Transfiguration, and then I shall think of attacking the Nærodal."

Evelyn raised her blue eyes. "Don't be cutting, please," she said, quietly.

“And why not, pray, if it amuses me and does you no harm? In the insolent superiority of youth, must you needs dock one of the few privileges of crabbed age? My dear,” she went on, seating herself again, “when I had reached the mature age of twelve I planned a great historic painting, *The Death of William II*. I took a pillow, tied a string some inches from one end, and round the kingly neck, thus roughly indicated, I fastened my own babyish merino cape, which was to do duty for the regal mantle. I threw my model violently on the floor to make the folds of the cape fall haphazard, and then with infinite pains I proceeded to make them a great deal more haphazard than the fall had done. To tell the truth, the size and cut of the garment were such that I might almost as well have tried to get folds in a collar.”

“No great feat,” said Sir Douglas, ruefully, “if it came from a Norwegian laundry! Well?”

Mona laughed sympathetically. “On the same principle I studiously arranged my head and arms on the dressing-table before the glass to look as if I had fallen from my horse, and I

studied the attitude till I flattered myself that I could draw it from memory. But the legs and the nether garments—there lay the rub! Heigh-ho, Evelyn! you need not grudge me my cheap cynicism as a solatium for the loss of the excitement that kept me awake making plans for hours at night, and the passionate eagerness with which I prosecuted my researches by day—between the boards of Collier's 'British History'!"

"But the picture," asked Sir Douglas; "does it survive?"

"Alas, no! Not even as an unfinished fragment. A laburnum-tree and two rose-bushes in the garden represented the New Forest, and I never watched any one leave the room without making a mental study of Wat Tyler disappearing among the trees. But the royal legs and nether garments were too great a responsibility."

"Why on earth didn't you get some one to lie on the floor as a model?"

Mona's face assumed an expression of horror.

"You don't suppose I spoke to any one of my picture! I was worlds too shy. Is that all you know of the diffidence of genius?"

“I expect it was a very clever picture,” said Lady Munro, admiringly.

“My dear aunt, I can see it clearly in my mind’s eye now, and although ‘the past will always win a glory from its being far,’ I cannot flatter myself that there is an atom of talent in that picture. There is not a strong line in it. I had plenty of resource, but no facility.”

“It must have been a great disappointment to you to leave it unfinished at last.”

“Oh dear, no! I believe the difficulty of the legs would have been surmounted in the long-run somehow, but I suddenly discovered that the true secret of happiness lay in novel-writing. I spent the one penny I possessed at the moment on a note-book, and set to work.”

“What was the title?” asked Evelyn, who had some thoughts of writing a novel herself.

“‘Jack’s First Sixpence,’” said Mona, solemnly.

“And the plot——?” asked Sir Douglas.

“——narrows itself naturally, as you will see, to what he did with the sixpence. I believe”—Mona’s lips quivered, and her eyes brimmed over with laughter, but she still spoke with great solemnity—“that after much reflection he deposited it in the missionary-box.

I clearly see, on looking back, that my budding originality found more congenial scope in art than in literature."

"And did that get finished?" asked Evelyn.

"It did—in the long-run; but it had a narrow escape. I had written some twelve pages, when I suddenly thought of a title for a new story. My next penny went on another note-book, and I wrote on the first page—

'The Bantam Cock and the Speckled Hen:

A Story.

By

Mona Maclean.'

It looked very well, but for the life of me I could get no further. To this day I have never had one idea in my head on the subject of that bantam cock and speckled hen. So I was forced to return to commonplace Jack; and a year later, when I went to school, the second note-book was filled up with four hundred dates, which I duly committed to memory. What a glorious thing education is!"

She sprang to her feet, ashamed of having talked so much, and was glad that the tardy arrival of the post from Vossevangen formed a

natural interruption to her reminiscences. The *portier* brought out a bundle of Indian letters and papers for Sir Douglas, and a letter for Mona in Lucy's handwriting. It "brought her down to earth with a run," as she candidly informed the writer a fortnight later, and she put it in her pocket with a frown. It was not pleasant to be reminded of a commonplace, sneering, workaday world beyond the hills and the sunshine.

"Nothing for me!" exclaimed Evelyn. "Maria and Annette promised faithfully to answer my letters by return."

"I don't think they've had time even for that," said Mona. "The Norwegians pride themselves on their facilities for posting letters, but you must not expect a reply!"

Sir Douglas went indoors to read and answer his letters in comfort, Evelyn proceeded diligently with her painting, and Mona announced her intention of going for a walk.

"I cannot rest," she said, "till I have explored that path that runs like a belt round the hills to the Jördalsnut. I shall be back in plenty of time for supper."

"My dear Mona!" exclaimed her aunt, "it

looks dreadfully dangerous. You must not think of it. A footpath half-way down a precipice!"

"It must be a horse-track," said Mona, "or we should not see it so distinctly from here. Certainly the least I owe you is not to run into any unnecessary danger; and I assure you, you may trust me. Do you see that cottage at the end of the path close to the Jördalsnut? When I get there, I will wave my large silk handkerchief. Perhaps you will see it if you are still here. *Au revoir!*" She kissed her aunt's dainty ringed hand, and set off at a good walking pace.

She had already made inquiry respecting the shortest way to the Jördalsnut, and she found it now without much difficulty. For half a mile or so it lay along the beaten road, and then turned off into the fields. From these, she passed into a straggling copse of stunted trees and tangled undergrowth, and emerged suddenly and unexpectedly on the brink of a deep gorge. Away down below, brawled and tumbled a foaming swollen tributary of the river, and Mona saw, with some uneasiness, that a plank without any kind of handrail did duty for a bridge.

“Now’s your chance, my dear girl,” she said; “if you mean to keep your head in a case of life and death, or in a big operation—keep it *now!*”

She gave herself a second to make up her mind—not another in which to think better of it—and then walked steadily across.

“After all, there was no danger for anybody one degree removed from an idiot,” she said, with characteristic contempt for an achievement the moment it had passed from the region of *posse* into that of *esse*.

But it was with renewed energy that she climbed the opposite side of the gorge and mounted the steep stony path that brought her out on the open hillside. Now that she was actually among them, the mountains towered about her in awful silence. The sky above and the river below seemed alike distant. The sun had gone down, and she stood there all alone in the midst of barren immensity. She took off her hat, tossed back the hair from her heated forehead, and laughed softly.

But she was only now at the beginning of the walk she had planned, and there was no time to lose. The path was, as she had thought, a horse-track, and the walk involved no danger, so long

as one did not too entirely lose sight of one's footing in the grandeur of the surroundings. Once she was almost startled by the sudden appearance of a man a few yards in front of her, a visitor at the hotel, probably, for he lifted his hat as he passed.

“Of all the hundreds who are passing through Stalheim to-day,” she thought, “only one takes the trouble to come along here, out of the eternal rush of kariols. What *do* they come to Norway for?”

Every step of the walk was keen enjoyment. She had never allowed herself to get out of touch with nature. “The ‘man’ shall not ‘perceive it die away,’” she had said in the confidence of youth. “Nature is jealous, I know, but she shall receive no cause of offence from me. She was my first friend, and she shall be my last.”

She reached the tiny homestead she had seen from Stalheim, and she waved her handkerchief for some minutes, looking in vain for an answering signal. She was very near the Jördalsnut now, but to her great disappointment she found herself separated from it by a yawning valley which it was quite impossible to cross. The path by which she had come was continued

along the hillside into this valley, turning upon itself almost at right angles.

“It’s clear I shall get nowhere near the dear old roundhead to-night,” she said, “but I may be able to see at least how the path reaches it ultimately.”

She walked on for some time, however, without coming to any turning, and her spirits began to flag. The whole scene had changed within the last half-hour. The air was damp; poor-looking, half-grown trees concealed the view; and the ground was covered with long, dank grass.

“I suppose I must turn,” she said regretfully. “I will take five minutes’ rest, and then be off home.”

She seated herself on a great mossy boulder, and suddenly bethought herself of Lucy’s letter. The familiar handwriting and words looked strangely out of place in this dreary solitude.

“MY DEAR MONA,—Perhaps you would like to know what I did when I read your letter. I sat on the floor and *howled*! Not with laughter,—don’t flatter yourself that your witticisms had anything to do with it. They only added insult

to injury. Don't imagine either that I mean to argue with you. It is impossible to influence you when your decision is *right*; and when it is *wrong*, one might as well reason with a mule. The idea! I told father you would walk through the examination in January and take your final M.B., when I did. It once or twice crossed my mind with horror that you might content yourself with a Scotch 'Triple,' or even a beggarly L.S.A.; but that you would be insane enough to chuck the whole thing, never so much as entered my head. It is too absurd. Because, as you are pleased to say, you have thrown three or four years of your life to the pigs and whistles, is that any reason why you should throw a fifth?

“And have you really the conceit to suppose that you would make a good barmaid—a profession that requires inborn talent and careful cultivation? Can you flirt a little bit, may I ask? Could you flirt if your life depended on it? Would anything ever teach you to flirt? Personally I take the liberty of doubting it. I suppose you think improving conversation and scientific witticisms will do equally well, or better?—will amuse the men, and improve them at the same time? *Gott bewahre!*”

“Do you consider yourself even qualified to be a linen-draper’s shop-girl? Are you in the habit of submitting to the whims and caprices of every Tom, Dick, and Harry who confers on you the favour of bargaining with you for a good penny’s-worth? Is it possible you do not realise the extent to which you have always been—to use a metaphor of your own—the positively electrified object in the field?—how we have all meekly turned a negative side to you, and have revenged ourselves by being positive to the rest of the world? Can you hope to be a comfort even to your cousin? Do you think she will enjoy being snubbed if she calls things ‘stylish’ or ‘genteel’? Do you imagine that ‘Evenings with the Microscope’ will fill the place of a comfortable gossip about village nothings and nonentities?

“Oh Mona, my friend, my wonderful, beautiful Mona, don’t be an abject idiot! Write to your cousin that you have been a fool, and let us see your dear face in October. How is the School to get along without you?

“In any case, darling, write to me, and that right soon. Why did you not tell me more about the Munros. The idea of dangling such

a delicious morsel as Sir Douglas before my eyes for a moment, only to withdraw him again? How could you tantalise me so? You know hot-tempered, military old Anglo-Indians are my *Schwärmerei*, &c., &c., &c.”

Mona laughed, but her eyes were full of tears. She was not seriously moved by Lucy's letter but it depressed her sadly, and suggested food for much reflection. She sat for a long time, her head resting on her hand, her eyes fixed absently on the page before her. Suddenly the sharp rap of a raindrop on the paper brought her to a recollection of her surroundings, and she started to her feet in alarm. It had grown strangely dark. She could see the mist gathering even through the trees, and the rain was evidently coming on in earnest.

CHAPTER VII.

A SON OF ANAK.

WHEN she emerged into the comparative light and openness of the Nærodal, she found, as she had feared, that the mist was creeping rapidly down the hillsides. It was raining heavily, and she must soon be enveloped in a thick, wet cloud.

“I am an abject idiot, as you say, Lucy,” she said, “but it was mainly your fault this time.”

She hurried along in breathless haste, but she was soon obliged to slacken her pace. Although the path was safe enough, it was broken away in some places, and already she could scarcely see a yard in front of her.

“I don’t mind the open hillside,” she gasped, “but how I am to get across an invisible plank,

with an invisible torrent roaring down below, heaven alone knows !”

And indeed she did mind the open hillside very much. In the clear daylight she had fancied herself half-way between earth and sky; now she was standing on a single square yard of stony ground in a universe of nothingness.

“It is simply impossible that I can find my way through that wood,” she went on, becoming almost calm from very despair. “It was a pure chance that I took the right path when the sun was shining.”

She had serious thoughts of deliberately spending the night on the hillside, and even sat down for a few minutes on a dripping stone; but her clothes were soaked through, and her teeth chattered with cold, so she was forced to go on.

“Shall I shout?” she thought. “No, I never shouted or screamed in my life, and I don’t mean to begin now.” But she knew well that she would have shouted eagerly enough, if there had been the faintest chance of her being heard. It was useless to shout to the mists and the barren hills.

Then for the first time it occurred to her that

her uncle would send out a search-party; but, after the first rush of relief, this seemed the worst fate of all. Anything would be better than all that fuss and disturbance. It would be too humiliating to provide food for days of exaggerated gossip in the hotel, to be constrained with much penitence to curtail or forego her solitary walks. And it might all have been so easily avoided if she had had her wits about her. "Oh Lucy, I *am* an abject idiot!" she groaned.

At this moment she fancied she heard a step on the stones some distance behind her. Yes, there was no doubt of it. Some one was coming. Uncertain whether to be relieved or more alarmed than before, she stood still, her heart beating fast. The steps drew nearer and nearer. It was horrible to feel a presence so close at hand, and to strain her eyes in vain. In another moment a broad, ruddy, reassuring face looked down at her like the sun through the mist, and she drew a long breath of relief.

"Bless my soul!" the owner of the face exclaimed, aghast at finding a young girl in such a dangerous situation, "you don't mean to say you are alone?"

“Yes,” laughed Mona. But the laugh was a very uncertain one, and revealed much that she would rather have kept to herself.

“Well, I am glad I have found you,” he went on, shaking a shower of water from his dripping straw hat. “I shouldn’t like to think my sister was out here alone on a night like this. Won’t you take my arm? I’m afraid you are very tired, and it can’t be easy to walk with your dress clinging to you so.”

Mona’s cheek flushed, but she was glad to take his arm. His tall, sturdy, tweeded figure belied the boyish, beardless face, and seemed like a tower of strength.

“You *have* had a soaking,” he went on, with a sort of brotherly frankness which it was impossible to resent. “So have I, but knickerbockers adapt themselves better to untoward circumstances than your things. Am I walking too fast?”

“Not a bit. I need not tell you that I shall be glad to get home.”

They both laughed at the equivocal compliment.

“Were you afraid?” he asked presently.

“Dreadfully,” said Mona, simply. “In fact,”

she added after a pause, "I am ashamed now to think how unnerved I allowed myself to get."

"Why — you had some cause. Few men would have strictly enjoyed the situation. How far had you gone?"

"I don't quite know. About a mile round the corner, I think. I was among the trees and did not notice the mist. By the way—did *you* get to the Jördalsnut?"

"No: I left my portmanteau at the inn, and started with that intention; but I went in for a bit of scrambling on this side of the valley, and then the mist drove me home. I am very glad it drove me to your assistance—not but what you would have got on all right without me."

"I can't tell you how glad *I* am. I really don't know what I should have done," and she raised her eyes to his with a frank look of gratitude.

He started, almost imperceptibly. There was a curious charm in that honest un-selfconscious glance, but there was something more than that.

"You are not travelling alone, are you?" he asked, after a minute's silence.

“No, I am with my uncle and aunt. Sir Doug—my uncle usually walks with me,—not that I think a chance accident like this is any argument against my going about alone if I choose.”

There was no answer. He was looking at her in an interested way, as if meditating the question profoundly.

“Please don’t tell any one you found me *in extremis*,” she went on; “it would be too great a disappointment to be obliged to give up my solitary walks.”

“How can I tell any one what is not true?” he said, recovering himself. “I did not find you *in extremis* at all. I did not even know you were frightened till you laughed. You looked at me with such dignified self-assurance when I hove in sight that I was more than half inclined to lift my hat and pass on.”

Mona laughed incredulously.

They trudged on for a time in silence. Once she looked up and found his eyes fixed on her face with an expression of amusement. “It is very odd,” he said, finding himself caught.

“What is?”

“Oh, I don’t know—the whole thing.”

He broke into a quiet laugh, and Mona joined in it from sympathy. He was a curious creature, this son of Anak, whose broad, glistening face gleamed at her so benevolently through the mist.

“Have you been long at Stalheim?” he asked.

“Only a few days.”

“Is the hotel good?”

“Ye-e-s. This part of Norway is in an awkward transition stage between the primitive inn and the cosmopolitan hotel.”

“Are there many tourists?”

“Oh yes! They go rushing through by hundreds every day. They stop to smoke a cigar, eat a dinner, or sleep for a night, and then join the mad chase of kariols again. They are noisy, too; my uncle gets quite indignant at the way they clatter about the wooden floors in their heavy boots, and shout their private affairs up-stairs and down-stairs, or from the verandah to the road.”

“I suppose he does,” and the son of Anak laughed again.

The mist was beginning to clear by slow degrees when they came to the crest of the abrupt descent that led to the torrent.

“I can't tell you how I was dreading this part of the way,” said Mona.

“Were you? Well, I must say it is a case where two are better than one. See, I will go first and hold out my hands behind me.”

They got across in safety, and in a wonderfully short time found themselves on the road.

“Don't you find it very dull here in the evening?” he asked.

“No. But I can imagine any one would who was accustomed to being amused.”

“You sit on the verandah, I suppose?”

“Not on the one overlooking the Nærodal. There is such a crowd there. We get one of the others to ourselves, and enjoy a cup of coffee, and a chat, or a quiet rubber.”

“Now do get off those wet things instantly,” he said as they drew near the house, “and promise me that you will have a glass of hot toddy or something equivalent. That's right!”—interrupting her thanks—“don't stand there for a moment. I shall take the liberty of presenting myself on the verandah after supper.”

Mona ran up-stairs with a smile, but his last words had caused her some alarm. What sort of reception might he look for on the verandah?

Lady Munro was considered extremely "exclusive"; and as for Sir Douglas, he classified the male tourists broadly as "counter-jumpers," and was indignant if they so much as looked at his niece and daughter. If her friend got a chance to speak for himself, nobody could fail to see that he was a gentleman, and in that case all would be well; but Sir Douglas was hasty, and not likely to welcome advances from a complete stranger.

"The fact is, I ought not to have hob-nobbed with him so," she said. "I need not have let my gratitude and relief run away with me. It is all my own fault. Yes, Lucy, I *am* an abject idiot!"

"Oh, I am so glad to see you!" cried Evelyn as Mona entered the room the cousins shared; "in another minute I should have told Mother."

"Where is aunt Maud?"

"She came in not long after you left, and has been asleep all the afternoon, so there was no one to tell Father. I should have gone to him in another minute. I have been so miserable."

"Plucky little soul! And she has actually had the stove lighted! I shall be dry in no

time. Luckily, the mist is clearing every minute."

"My Etna will be boiling directly, and I have got wine to make you some negus. Oh, Mona, do make haste! What a state you are in!"

Mona hastily exchanged her dripping clothes for a comfortable dressing-gown, and after wringing out her long hair, she seated herself by the stove, sipping her negus.

"You must have been in fearful danger; I have imagined such things!"

"Not a bit. A son of Anak came to my rescue; but more of that anon. Get me out some clean things, like a darling."

"What dress will you wear?"

"Which of my evening gowns has my maid laid out?" laughed Mona. "Ah, the delaine. Curious the partiality she shows for that delaine! Now tell me exactly how much time I have. I don't want to lose a moment of this *dolce far niente*, but I must not be late for supper, whatever happens."

She was not late. The bell rang just as she was fastening her brooch.

"Got back, Mona?" said Lady Munro, emerging fresh and fragrant from her room.

“Yes, thank you.” But before Mona had time to say more, Lady Munro turned to speak to Sir Douglas. It was impossible to begin a long story then.

The sudden change in the weather had induced many of the tourists to stay on, so the large dining-room was crowded. Mona just caught a glimpse of the son of Anak at the opposite end of another table, and she attempted once more to give a modified account of her afternoon's adventure. But the Fates were against her. A well-known Edinburgh professor was sitting opposite Sir Douglas, and the conversation became general.

“Let us hope he will give me five minutes' grace on the verandah,” she said resignedly; but she had just remarked, by way of introduction, that the mist had almost entirely cleared, and Sir Douglas was in the act of lighting his first cigar, when the door opened, and her friend strode in with an air of infinite assurance.

“Aunt Maud,” she began, but her voice was drowned in a general exclamation.

“Why, Sahib!” “Dickinson Sahib! Where on earth did you drop from?” “What a de-

lightful surprise!" "Who would have thought of seeing you here? Sit down and tell us all about it. Oh, I forgot—Mr Dickinson, my niece, Miss Maclean."

"I was sure of it," exclaimed the new-comer, shaking hands cordially with the astonished Mona. "If I had met her in the wilds of Arabia, I could have sworn that she was a relative of Lady Munro's." And then the whole story came out, with modifications.

"Well, I must say," said Mona, when the questioning and explanations were over, "that you have treated me extremely badly."

He laughed like a schoolboy. "I am sure you don't grudge me my very small joke."

"No—especially as it makes us quits. Now we can begin a new page."

"I hope it may prove as pleasant as the first."

"Prettily said, Sahib," said Lady Munro. "Now, be sensible and give us an account of your eccentric movements."

"Eccentric!" he said, meditating a far-fetched compliment, but he was a sensible man and he thought better of it. "That's easily done. One of my Scotch visits fell through—a death

in the house—so I ran over here for a few days. I thought I should probably run against you,—they say people always do meet in Norway. Of course, I knew you had sailed to Bergen.”

“And what is your route now?”

“Is it for you to ask me that, as the filing said to the magnet?”

Sir Douglas went in search of maps and guide-books, and Mr Dickinson took a low chair beside Lady Munro.

“I need not ask if you are enjoying your tour,” he said. “You are looking famously.”

“Oh yes, I think this primitive world quite charming, and the air is so bracing! You have no idea what a pedestrian I have become. When Mona and my husband go off on break-neck excursions, Evelyn and I walk for hours—the whole day long nearly.”

Mona looked up hastily. She had never heard of these wonderful walks; but her eyes met Evelyn’s, and her question died on her lips.

“And Sir Douglas?” asked Mr Dickinson.

Lady Munro laughed, a low sweet laugh. “Oh, of course, he always grumbles; he says he has lived on roast leather and boiled flannel ever since we came. But he is enjoying himself

immensely. It is a great thing for him to have Mona's company, as indeed it is for all of us. I am afraid she finds us dreadfully stupid. You have no idea what books she reads."

"At the present moment," said Mona, gravely, "I am reading *Moths*."

Everybody laughed.

"Then you are meditating a cutting critique," said her aunt.

"I am reading the book simply and entirely for amusement," said Mona. "I am getting a little tired of ormolu and marqueterie, but one can't have everything one wants."

"But you don't really care for Ouida?" said the Sahib, seriously.

Mona sighed. "If you force me to be critical," she said, "I do prefer sunlight, moonlight, or even glaring gaslight. Ouida takes one into a dark room, and, through a hole in the shutter, she flashes a brilliant gleam of light that never was on sea or land. But what then? She is a very clever woman, and she knows how to set about telling a story. One admires her power and *esprit*, one skips her vulgar descriptions, and one lets her morality alone."

Lady Munro laughed rather uneasily. She

would not have owned to any man that she read Ouida, and Mona puzzled her.

“After all, the child has been so buried in her studies,” she thought, “that she knows nothing of the world. She will learn not to say *risqué* things to men, and, fortunately, it is only the Sahib.”

Sir Douglas returned, and the conversation resolved itself into a discussion of routes and steamers.

“I will not sleep again at that horrid noisy Voss,” he said. “We must lunch and change horses there, and get on to Eide the same night.”

“Can you be ready to start at eight?” said the Sahib to Lady Munro.

“Oh dear, yes! I am up every morning hours before that.”

Sir Douglas laughed cynically.

“Who is Mr Dickinson?” said Mona, when she and Evelyn had retired to their room.

“Deputy-Commissioner of—I always forget the name of the place.”

“Never mind. Boggley Wallah will do equally well for me. And why do they call him Sahib? I thought everybody was a Sahib?”

“His family call him that for a joke, and it has stuck somehow. It was because he was very young when he got some appointment or other.”

“He looks a mere boy now.”

“I think he is thirty-three.”

“I wish you would not tell him that I am a medical student; I don't feel that I have done credit to my cloth. I should not like him to think medical women were muffs.”

“Oh, Mona, I do wish you would not be a medical woman, as you call it. Why don't you marry?”

“‘Nobody axed me, sir, she said.’ At least nobody that I call anybody.”

“If you would go out to India, somebody would ask you every week of your life.”

“Thanks. Even that is not absolutely my ideal of blessedness.”

“But you don't want to be an old maid?”

“That expression is never heard now outside the walls of a ladies' boarding-school,” said Mona, severely. “Oh, my dear, at the romantic age of seventeen you cannot even imagine how much I prize my liberty; how many plans I have in my head that no married woman could

carry out. It seems to me that the unmarried woman is distinctly having her innings just now. She has all the advantages of being a woman, and most of the advantages of being a man. I don't see how it can last. Let her make hay while the sun shines.

‘Ergreife die Gelegenheit! Sie kehret niemals wieder.’”

“Well, I know I should be very disappointed, if I thought I should never have little children of my own.”

“O Maternity, what crimes are perpetrated in thy name! Mothering is woman's work without a doubt, but she does not need to have children of her own in order to do it. You dear little soul! Never mind me. I wish you as many as you will wish for yourself when the time comes, and a sweet little mother they will have!”

CHAPTER VIII.

BONS CAMARADES.

“NONSENSE!”

“Fact, my dear fellow! I knew it before I knew her, or I simply should never have believed it. It’s an awful shock to one’s theories, don’t you know? — one’s views of womanliness and all that sort of thing. I have thought about it till I am tired, and I can’t make it out; but upon my soul, Dickinson, you may say what you like, the girl’s a brick.”

“I’m quite sure of that already, and I’m sure she’s clever enough for anything.”

“Oh—clever, yes! But clever women don’t need to—but there! I can’t go into all that again. I simply *give the subject up*. Don’t mention it to me again.”

“But you know I am a staunch believer in

women doctors. When my sister was so ill, the doctor at the station said she would be an invalid for life, and a staff surgeon who was passing through said the same. As a last resource I got a woman doctor to come a hundred miles to see her, and she brought Lena round in a few weeks. She knew her business, but — she was very different from Miss Maclean.”

“Wasn't she? That's just it! Oh, I know they're a necessary evil. I should like to see a man doctor look at my Evelyn, except for a sore throat or a cut finger! I have always upheld the principle, in spite of the sacrifice involved; but how could I tell that any of my own womankind would take it up? You see, she was left so much to her own resources, poor child! There was no one to warn her of what it all meant. I reproach myself now for not having looked after her more; but how on earth could I know that she was going to turn out anything in particular? Gad! Dickinson, when I think of all that girl must know, it makes me sick—*sick*; but when I am speaking to her—upon my soul, I don't believe it has done her a bit of harm!”

The entrance of Mona and Evelyn into the sunny breakfast-room interrupted the conversation for a moment, and it was presently resumed in a lighter and more frivolous vein over the trout and the coffee.

“Oh, trout, yes!” said Sir Douglas. “I never said anything against the trout. If it were not for that, we should all be reduced to skin and bone. Evelyn, where *is* your mother?”

It was eight o'clock, and the calash stood at the door, when Lady Munro appeared, serene and smiling; and then Evelyn and Mona had to hurry away and pack her valise for her.

“You know I've been up for hours,” she said, with a charming nod to the Sahib, as she seated herself at the table, “but I began to write some letters——”

“Humph!” said Sir Douglas, and shrugging his shoulders, he abruptly left the room.

When the tardy valise was at last roped on to the calash, and the *portier* was opening the door, the young Norwegian landlady came up shyly to Lady Munro.

“Will you haf?” she said in her pretty

broken English, holding out a large photograph of the hotel, with its staff on the doorstep.

Never had Lady Munro smiled more sweetly.

“Is that really for me? How very kind! I cannot tell you how much I shall prize it as a memento of a charming visit. Why, I can recognise all of you!” and she looked round at the worshipping servants.

A minute later they drove off in state, with Nubboo enthroned on the box in front, and Dickinson Sahib following on in a kariol behind.

It was a glorious summer morning. Not a trace of mist or cloud lingered about the hillsides; the Nærodal was once more asleep in sunshine and shadow.

“Well, I am sure we shall not soon forget Stalheim,” said Lady Munro. “It has been quite a new experience.”

“Quite,” agreed Sir Douglas. “It has been an absolutely new experience to me to see a hard-worked horse go up a hen’s ladder to bed, with only a bundle of hay for supper, and never a touch from his groom. It is astonishing what plucky little beasts they are in spite of it.”

“Now don't enjoy the scenery too much,” said the Sahib, driving up alongside. “You have been over this ground before, and human nature cannot go on enjoying keenly all day long. Save yourselves for the afternoon. The drive from Voss to Eide is one of the finest things in Norway.”

And so it proved. For the first few miles after they left Vossevangen, they drove through pine-woods and dripping cliffs, where every tiny ledge had its own tuft of luxuriant mosses; and then suddenly, at full speed, they began the descent to the sea-level.

“How *dreadfully* dangerous!” exclaimed Lady Munro.

“As good as a switchback,” laughed Evelyn.

“What engineers those fellows must be!” said Sir Douglas admiringly, as every turn brought them in sight of the two great waterfalls, and their faces were drenched with spray.

“It is like going round and round the inside of a mighty chalice,” said Mona.

And so it was; but the sides of the chalice were one living mass of the most glorious green, almost every square yard of which would have made a picture by itself.

When they reached the bottom, the driver suddenly dismounted, and proceeded to occupy himself with a piece of string and the weather-beaten straps that did duty for traces.

“Harness—broke!” he said calmly.

“The deuce it has!” exclaimed Sir Douglas. “I think you might have found that out at the top of the hill. Do you suppose our necks are of no more value than your own? Nubboo, just see that it is all right now.”

“How horrible!” and Lady Munro shuddered.

Nubboo delivered a lengthy report in his native language, and Sir Douglas shrugged his shoulders resignedly.

“We must just chance it,” he said. “I dare say it will be all right.”

“How *horrible!*” repeated Lady Munro.

But they reached Eide without further accident, although rain fell steadily during the last hour of the drive.

It is the pleasant and primitive practice at Eide, especially in rainy weather, for the visitors to assemble in the large entrance-hall and verandah to watch the arrival of new-comers.

“If the show had been got up expressly for their benefit, and they had duly paid for

their seats, they could not stare more frankly, could they?" laughed the Sahib, as he helped the ladies out of the calash. "There is not an atom of concealment about it."

"Great privilege for us, upon my soul, to afford so much entertainment!" growled Sir Douglas.

"Won't you come for a turn in the garden before you go up-stairs?" the Sahib asked Mona, when the question of rooms had been settled. "We have five minutes to spare before supper, and there is a fine view of the fjord."

"But alack! what a change after dear, rugged old Stalheim!" she said, as they strolled down to the water's edge. "This might almost be an Interlaken garden."

"Quite tropical, isn't it? But look at the fjord!"

It spread out before them in a soft, hazy golden light, and the tiny waves broke gently on the steps at their feet.

Mona's face kindled. She did not think it necessary to speak.

"And yet," she said a minute later, "it is a cruel fjord. It is going to take us back to

civilisation again." And then she could scarcely repress a laugh. "Civilisation, indeed! Civilisation in a small shop at Borrowness."

He looked at her quickly. Did she repent of the life-work she had chosen?

"In the stores of your knowledge," he asked presently, his eyes on the hills, "do you include geology?"

"Among the rags and tags of my information," she replied, "I do not." "Oh, Sir Douglas, Sir Douglas," she thought, "you faithless knight!"

"I seem to have put my foot in it," he thought vaguely, "but I cannot imagine how." And so he proceeded to do it again.

"They have a lot of quaint old silver rings at the hotel," he said, as they turned back, "and other ancient Norwegian curios. I should like your opinion of them. Are you an authority on the subject?"

"Far from it," she said. "But I should like very much to see them, and to compare the things I like with the things I ought to like. Pray," she added, with an expression of almost childlike entreaty, "don't let any one persuade you that I am a learned woman. I

wish with all my heart that I were, but I'm not, and I can't bear to feel like a hypocrite."

"I don't think any one will ever take you for *that*," he said, smiling.

"I suppose it must be my own fault," she went on, with curious impulsiveness, not heeding his remark. "I suppose my manner is dogmatic and priggish. But what can I do? When I am interested in a subject, I can't stop to think about my manner."

"If I might venture to advise," he said, "I should certainly say, 'Don't attempt it.'"

The next day they sailed for Odde. The fjord was smooth as glass, and every hamlet and tree on the peaceful hillsides was reflected in the water. It was a day for dreaming rather than for talking, and they scarcely spoke, save when each bay and gorge brought into view a fresh spur of the mighty glacier.

Early in the afternoon they reached Odde, beautiful Odde!—lying close to the edge of the fjord, embraced by the wooded hills, with pretty yachts and steamers at anchor in its bay, and the glacier looking coldly down from the great ice-sea above.

“We might almost be in England again,” said Lady Munro, as they sat at lunch in the dining-room of the Hardanger.

“Yes, indeed,” said Sir Douglas. “Civilised notions, half-a-dozen people in the place that one knows, two—actually two—shops, and *dinners*! Evelyn, you had better take a kariol and a tiger, and go shopping on the Boulevard!”

“I was just going to ask for your purse,” said Evelyn, calmly; “there are no end of things that I want to buy.”

Finally, they betook themselves to the shops *en famille*, and a scene of reckless expenditure ensued. Sir Douglas heaped presents on the “girls,” as he called Mona and Evelyn, and Lady Munro seemed to be in a fair way to buy up the whole shop.

“These old silver things *are* so pretty,” she said, childishly.

“And, at worst, they will do for bazaars,” added Evelyn.

The saleswoman became more and more gracious. She had considerable experience in serving tourists who, with reminiscences of a previous summer in Switzerland or Italy, offered her “a

pound for the lot," and her manner had acquired some asperity in consequence; but she quickly adapted herself to the people with whom she had to deal.

Mona watched her with a curious interest and fellow-feeling. "I ought to be picking up hints," she thought, with a smile. "I certainly might have a much worse teacher."

"Let me see. That's eleven and a half kroner," said a showy-looking man, taking a handful of gold and silver from his pocket. "I'll give you ten shillings."

No answer.

"Will you take ten shillings?"

"No, sir," very quietly.

He frowned. "Eleven shillings?"

"No, sir."

"What do you throw off?"

"Not—anything, sir," in slow but very unmistakable English.

He flounced out of the shop, leaving the things lying on the counter.

Not a muscle of the young woman's face changed, as she quietly returned the pretty toys to their place on the shelves.

"*Brava!*" said Mona to herself.

“A penny for your thoughts, Mona dear,” said Evelyn’s quiet voice a minute later. “Mr Dickinson has asked you twice how you like this old chatelaine. He wants to buy it for his sister.”

Mona laughed and blushed.

“My thoughts are worth more than a penny,” she said,—“to me at least.” In point of fact, she was wondering whether it would be a part of her duty to say “Sir” and “Madam” to her customers at Borrowness.

In the course of the afternoon the Munros met a number of friends and acquaintances, and the next few days passed gaily away in excursions of all kinds. Night after night the party came home, sunburnt and stiff, but not too tired to enjoy a bright discussion across the pleasant dinner-table. There was nothing very profound about these conversations. Everybody had toiled and climbed enough during the day. Now they were content to fly lightly from crag to crag over a towering difficulty, or to cross a yawning problem on a rainbow bridge.

But after all, they were happy, and the world was not waiting in suspense for their conclusions.

Sunday morning came round all too soon, and on Monday the Munros were to sail for Bergen. Mona was sitting alone on the verandah, watching the people coming to church. The fjord lay sparkling in the sunshine, and from every hamlet and homestead along the coast, as far as the eye could reach, boats were setting out for Odde. As they drew in to the pier, the voluminous white sleeves, stiff halo-like caps, and brilliant scarlet bodices, made a pretty foreground of light and colour in the landscape.

But in the midst of her enjoyment Mona drew a long, deep, heartfelt sigh.

A little later Evelyn joined her. "I have been looking for you everywhere, Mona," she said. "Mr Dickinson has set his heart on going to the Buarbrae glacier to-day. The others all went before we came, and I think it would be insane to tire ourselves the last day. Father says he has not got over that 'Skeddadle' waterfall yet. You don't care to go, do you?"

Mona's eyes were still fixed on the fjord.

"Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die," she said, half absently. "I will go with all the pleasure in life."

“Don’t be profane, Mona. You are the queerest, cleverest girl that ever lived.”

Mona laughed. “I don’t consider that I am queer,” she said; “I have good reason to know that I’m not clever; and all the world can see that I am not a girl. Otherwise, your description is correct. My compliments to the Sahib, and, if it please his Majesty to take me, I shall be only too glad to go.”

“No doubt it will please his Majesty. You should hear how he speaks to Mother about you. You will soon be on a par with that wonderful sister of his. I think he talks too much about his sister, don’t you?”

“No. He is among friends. I don’t suppose he would do it in a scoffing world. Evelyn, dear, there is no use telling you not to grow cynical. We all do in this used-up age. Cheap, shallow, cynical talk is the shibboleth of the moment, and if we are at all sensitive, it is a necessary armour. But don’t carry it into your immediate circle. In heaven’s name, let us live frankly and simply at home, or life will indeed be apples of Sodom.”

Evelyn looked rather blank. She did not know very well what all this meant, and still

less could she see what it had to do with Mr Dickinson's sister. But she felt rebuked, and the words lingered in her memory.

In five minutes more the Sahib and Mona set off.

"What magnificent training you are in!" he said admiringly, as he watched her lithe young figure mount the hill at his side. "Your walking has improved immensely in the last week."

"Yes; one does get rather flabby towards the end of term, in spite of such specifics as tennis. But I don't think the circumstances of our first meeting were very conducive to a just estimate of my powers."

They both laughed at the recollection.

"What an age ago that seems!" he said.

"I am sorry the time has dragged so heavily."

"Nay. The difficulty is to believe that ten days ago I did not know you. Now turn and look behind."

The village had sunk picturesquely into the perspective of the landscape. Beside them the river surged down over the rocks and boulders to the fjord, and the sound of church bells came through the still summer air.

"This is better than being in church," he said.

“Much ;—especially when one understands nothing of what is going on. But I am glad I have seen a Norwegian service. It is so simple and primitive, and besides”—she laughed—“I have a mental picture now of Kjelland’s Morten Kruse.”

“I do go to church as a rule,” he said. “In India I consider it a duty.”

Mona raised her eyebrows. “I go to church as a rule, too,” she said. “But it never occurred to me to look upon it in the light of a duty.”

“Don’t you think that in that, as in other things, one has to think of one’s neighbours?”

“I can’t bear the word ‘duty’ in such a connection. It seems to me, too, that the Spirit of Praise and Prayer bloweth where it listeth. One cannot command it with mathematical precision at eleven o’clock on Sunday morning. The Spirit of Praise comes when one is alone in a world like this. I think we lose our individuality when there is nothing human near to remind us of it, and become as much a part of this great throbbing glorying Nature as the trees and the grass are.”

“And the Spirit of Prayer?”

Mona smiled.

“The story of that,” she said, “is written on each man’s white stone.”

“And yet, if most people act on that principle,” he said, “they are a little apt to lose the Spirit of Praise and Prayer altogether. Don’t you think so?”

Mona did not answer the question for a moment. Then she met the eyes that were fixed on her face. “Yes,” she said frankly, “I do.”

They walked on for a few minutes in silence.

“And may I ask what you do go to church for?” he said at last. “Don’t answer if I take a liberty in asking.”

“You don’t at all; but it is a little difficult to say. I believe I go to church in order to get some one to think beautiful thoughts for me. When one’s life is busy with work that takes all one’s brain-power, there is little energy left with which to think beautiful thoughts. One loses sight of the ideal in the actual. I go to church in order to keep hold of it. If I were a seamstress I should probably go out among the hills on Sunday morning and think my beautiful thoughts for myself.”

“You make it, in fact, a question of the division of labour. We are to buy our beautiful

thoughts ready-made as we buy our boots, because a complicated state of society leaves us no time to make them."

"Precisely; and yet we are not exactly to buy them ready-made. I think it is Robertson who says that a thought is of no use to us, however beautiful, unless it is in a sense our own,—unless it makes us feel that we have been groping round it unconsciously, and all but grasping it. We cry 'Eureka!' when a beautiful thought strikes home, and we become aware for the first time that we have been in search of something. The moral of all this is, that our priest or preacher must be a man with a mind akin to our own, moving on the same plane, but if possible with a wider radius. This granted, his sect and creed are matters of infinitely little moment."

"But it seems to me that books would serve your purpose as well as sermons?"

"They serve the same purpose," she said; "but I am a strong believer in mesmeric influence, in the force of personality. Other things being equal, a voice impresses me much more than a printed page. Oh, I don't place sermons in a unique position by any means,

or even sermons and books. It is very much a question of keeping 'a border of pinks round the potato-patch.' All the endless things that open up our horizon might be classed together; they would differ only as to the direction in which they open up the horizon. It is quite true in one sense that I go to church for the same reason that I go to the theatre—to keep myself from getting worldly; but a good sermon—I say a *good* sermon—has a more direct bearing on the ordinary affairs of life. In fact, it helps us to see not only the ideal, but, as I said before, the ideal in the actual."

"I think I see what you mean, although theatres are not commonly supposed to serve the purpose of keeping one unspotted from the world."

"It seems to me that one can get worldly over anything, from ballet-dancing to sweeping a room, if one does not see beyond it. There is another side to the 'trivial round, the common task' question, true and beautiful as Keble's poem is. Worldliness seems to me to be entirely a question of getting into a rut."

"All you say is very fine," he said; "but, with the curious provincialism of a Londoner—seen

from the Anglo-Indian point of view—you are assuming that one has an unlimited number of preachers from whom to choose. What would you do if you were thrown back on one poor specimen of the ‘fag end of the clergy’?”

Mona raised her eyes in surprise.

“I should never dream of going to church at all,” she said, “unless there was something to be gained from the service.”

“And suppose you were in India, where the lives of the English do not exactly tend to bear out the teaching of the missionaries?”

“I should remember that it must be very poor teaching which would be borne out by hypocrisy on my part.”

“You would not go for the sake of example?”

“Most assuredly not. I don’t believe in conscious influence.”

They had come in sight of the Sandven-vand, and the little steamer stood at the pier. There were several other passengers on deck, so further conversation was impossible till they reached the other side. Then they made their way through the quaint, old village, and up the bank of the river towards the glacier. Already it was in full view. Wooded hills closed in the

valley on either side, and right in front of them the outlet was blocked, as it were, by a glowing, dazzling mountain of ice, snow-white under the cloudless blue sky.

“Oh, I *am* so glad we came!” And all the light from sky and glacier seemed reflected in Mona’s face.

“*Nicht wahr!*” he said, well pleased. “I was sure it would be worth while.”

Presently the view was hidden, as they passed under the trees that overarched the river.

“In fact,” he said suddenly, as if the conversation had never been interrupted, “you don’t believe in letting your light shine before men?”

“*That* I do!” she answered, warmly. “I believe in letting a clear, steady, unvarying light fall alike on the evil and the good. I do not believe in running hysterically round with a farthing dip into every nook and cranny where we think some one may be guided by it.”

“You are severe,” he said, quietly.

“Forgive me!” said Mona. “In truth, it is the metaphor that is too heavy for me: Fools and firearms—‘the proverb is something musty.’

Let me choose a weapon that I can use, and you will see what I mean.

“ Let us say that each man’s life is a garden, which he is called upon to cultivate to the best of his ability. Which do you think will do it best,—the man who, regardless of how his garden looks from the road, works honestly and systematically, taking each bed in its turn; or the man who constantly says, ‘ A. will be coming down the highroad to-day; I must see that the rose-bed is in good condition: or, B. will be looking over the hedge, I must get that turnip-patch weeded,’—and so on? ”

It was some time before he answered.

“ I think you are a little one-sided, if you will excuse my saying so.”

“ Please don’t talk like that. How could I help being grateful for an honest opinion?—the more unlike my own, the better for me. Was I dogmatic again? Please remember that, whatever I say, I am feeling after the truth all the time.”

He looked at her, smiling.

“ But such as your metaphor is, let us carry it a little bit farther. Let us suppose that your garden is laid out in a land where the soil is

poor and the people are starving. You know of a vegetable which would abundantly repay the trouble of cultivation, and would make all the difference between starvation and comparative comfort; but no one will believe in it. We will suppose that you yourself have ample means of livelihood, and are not dependent on any such thing. Would you not, nevertheless, sacrifice the symmetry of your flower-beds and grow my imaginary vegetable, if only to convince 'A. who comes down the highroad, and B. who looks over the hedge,' that starvation is needless?"

Mona smiled and held out her hand.

"Well said!" she cried, cordially. "A good answer, and given with my own clumsy weapon. I admit that I would try to exercise 'conscious influence' in the very rare cases in which I felt called upon to be a reformer. But I am glad that is not required of me in the matter of church-going."

"And the whole, wide, puzzling subject of Compromise?" he said. "Is there nothing in that?"

Mona's face became very grave. "Yes," she said, "there is a great deal in that—though

I believe, as some one says, that we studiously refrain from hurting people in the first instance, only to hurt them doubly and trebly when the time comes—there is a great deal in the puzzling subject of Compromise; but it has not come much into my life. There has been no one to care——”

Suddenly she laughed again and changed the subject abruptly.

“It is so odd,” she said, “so natural, so like our humanity, that we should argue like this—you in favour of conscious influence, I against it—and I make not the smallest doubt that your life is incomparably simpler, franker, more straightforward than mine.”

“That I do not believe,” he said, emphatically.

She looked at him with interest.

“I suppose you really don't. I suppose you are quite unconscious of being a moral Anti-septic?”

“A *what?*” he asked with pretended horror. “It doesn't sound very nice.”

“Doesn't it? I should think it must be rather nice to make the world sweeter, sounder, wholesomer, simply by being one's self.”

“Miss Maclean—you are very kind!”

“I wish I could say the same of you! I call it most unkind to make that conventional remark in response to a simple and candid statement of a fact.”

“It was not conventional. I meant it. It is most kind of a man’s friends to give expression now and then to the good things they think about him. One almost wonders why they do it so seldom. The world is ready enough to give him the other side of the question. The truth is—I was thinking how very difficult it would be to formulate a definition of you.”

Mona put her fingers in her ears with unaffected alarm.

“Oh, please don’t,” she said. “That would be a mean revenge indeed. It is one thing to say frankly the thought that is in our mind, and quite another to go afield in search of our opinion of a friend. There is a crude brutality about the latter process.”

“True,” he said. “And I did not mean to attempt it. In fact, I should not dream of pigeon-holing you.”

“You *are* unkind to-day. Did I deny that

you were fifty other things besides an Antiseptic? and may not an Antiseptic have fifty other chemical properties even more important than that one? Who talks of *pigeon-holing*?"

"You must have the last word, I see."

"Womanlike!" she said, pretending to sneer.

"Womanlike!" he repeated, mischievously.

"And now, pray note that *I* have presented *you* with the last word. Any woman could answer that taunt. Instead, I inquire what that shanty on the hill is?"

"That shanty, as you are pleased to call it, is the hotel and restaurant of the place. Shall we have lunch now, or after we have been on the glacier?"

"Oh, after! I cannot rest until I have felt the solid ice under my feet."

This proved to be no very easy achievement; but after a good deal of climbing, Mona's ambition was realised. Then they scrambled down to watch the water surging out from under the deep blue arches; and at last, tired and dishevelled, they betook themselves to the inn.

"I hope you are as hungry as I am," he said, with the old boyish manner, "and I hope we shall find something we can eat."

The "shanty" was clean and airy, with well-scoured floors, but the remains of lunch on the table certainly did not look very inviting, — a few transparent slices of Gruyère cheese, which seemed to have been all holes, some uninteresting-looking biscuits, and doubtful sausage.

"Have you coffee and eggs?" asked the Sahib. "Ah—that will do, won't it?"

"Coffee and eggs are food for the gods," said Mona.

"Or would be, if they did not spoil their appetites with nectar and ambrosia," he corrected; and they laughed and talked over the impromptu meal like a couple of children.

"How many ladies are there studying medicine just now?" asked the Sahib as they walked slowly homewards.

"Women? I don't quite know. About a hundred in the country, I should think."

"And what do the—I am afraid I had almost said the stronger sex—say to this infringement of their imagined rights?"

Mona looked at his stalwart, athletic figure.

"Pray don't apologise for calling them the stronger sex to me," she said, laughing. "I

am not at all disposed to try my strength against yours. Oh, of course there was immense opposition at first. That is matter of history now. But it would be difficult to exaggerate the kindness and helpfulness of most of the younger men; and a few of the older ones have been heroes all along."

"That is a 'good hearing.' Then do you think it could all have been managed without opposition, by dint of a little waiting?"

"*That* I don't!" she answered, warmly. "The first women, who were determined not merely to creep in themselves but to open up the way for others, must have suffered obloquy and persecution from all but the very few, at any time. If the lives of a little band of women—I had almost said if the life of *one* woman—could be blotted out, I wonder how many of us would have the courage to stand where we now do? It is a pretty and a wonderful sight, perhaps, to see a band of young girls treading the uphill path and singing as they go. 'How easy it is,' they say, 'and how sweet we make it with our flowers!' No doubt they do, and heaven bless them for it! But it has always seemed

to me that the bit of eternal work was the making of the road."

She spoke with so much earnestness that the Sahib was almost uneasy.

"That is more than true," he said, warmly. "It is the working of a universal principle. You know," he added shyly, "if you *were* going to take to a public life, I wonder you did not think of the platform."

"The *platform!*" Mona laughed merrily. "If you put me on the platform with an audience in front of me, I should do what a fellow-student tells me she did on receipt of my last letter—'sit on the floor and howl'!"

They both laughed. This anti-climax brought them comfortably down to everyday life again, and they talked about pleasant nothings for the rest of the way.

"Look here, Dickinson," said Sir Douglas, when they entered the hotel; "I won't have you walking off with Mona for a whole day together. She is my property. Do you hear?"

"I am sure it was I who discovered her on the hillside."

Mona held up her finger protestingly.

“Oh, I am Sir Douglas’s invention, without a doubt,” she said, putting her hand affectionately within her uncle’s arm; “you only re-discovered me accidentally. What a pity it is that every great invention cannot speak for itself and give honest men their due!”

The Sahib was very silent as he sat in the smoking-room that evening. He held a newspaper before him, for he did not wish to be disturbed; but he was not reading.

In India he was looked upon almost as a woman-hater, so little did he care for the society of the young girls who came out there; and Mona’s “cleverness” and culture, her earnest views of life, and the indefinable charm of manner which reminded him of Lady Munro, had all combined to make his short friendship with her a very genuine pleasure. Already he found himself thinking half-a-dozen times a-day, “I wonder what Miss Maclean would say about this,” or “I shall ask Miss Maclean her opinion of that;” and yet what a curious girl she was! It was a new experience to him to be told by an attractive young woman that he was a “moral Antiseptic”; and, in short, she puzzled

him. Women always are a *terra incognita* to men, as men are to women, as indeed every individual soul is to every other; but it might have been well for both of them if the Sahib could have read Mona at that moment even as well as she read him. He would have seen that she looked upon him precisely as she looked upon the women who were her friends; that it never occurred to her that he was man, and she woman, and that nothing more was required for the enaction of the time-worn drama; that, although she had taken no school-girl vow against matrimony, the idea of it had never seriously occupied her mind, so full was that mind of other thoughts and plans. He would have seen that the excitement and enthusiasm of adolescence had taken with her the form of an earnest determination to live to some good purpose; and that the thousand tastes and fancies, which had grouped themselves around this central determination, were not allowed seriously to usurp its place for a moment.

But he did not see. He could only infer, and guess, and wonder.

CHAPTER IX.

DORIS.

THE steamer was fast approaching Newcastle.

They had had some very rough weather, but now the sea was like a mill-pond, and the whole party was sitting on deck under an awning.

“Well, Mona dear,” said Lady Munro, “I am sure I don’t know how we are to say good-bye to you.”

“*Don’t!*” entreated Mona. “You make me feel that I must find words in which to thank you, and indeed I can’t!”

Her sensitive lips quivered, and Sir Douglas uttered a sympathetic grunt.

“You really must spend a month with us on the Riviera at Christmas,” went on her aunt. “We will take no refusal.”

“*Do!*” said Evelyn, putting her arm round her cousin’s waist.

“Thank you very much,” and Mona’s eyes looked eloquent thanks; “but it is quite out of the question.”

“I have put my hand to the plough,” she thought, “and I don’t mean to look back. Six months it shall be, at the very least.”

“And what is a month,” growled Sir Douglas, “when we want her altogether? I am afraid I promised that her incomings and outgoings should be without let or hindrance as heretofore—old fool that I was!—but how could I tell how indispensable she was going to make herself?”

“I *wish* you would not talk so,” said Mona. “I have never in all my life been so disgracefully spoilt as during the last fortnight. I should get simply unbearable if I lived with you much longer.”

“The fact is,” continued Sir Douglas, looking at his wife, “the greatest mistake of our married life has been that Mona did not come to us ten years ago, when your mother died.”

“I don’t fancy Mona thinks so,” said Lady Munro, smiling at her niece.

“No,” said Mona, and the slight flush on her cheek showed that her frankness cost her an effort. “It is good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. If I had not known hardship sometimes, and loneliness often, I could not have appreciated as I have done the infinite enjoyment of the last fortnight.”

“The fact is, you bear the yoke a deal too much,” said her uncle. “Bless my soul! you’re only a girl yet, and you can only be young once. And now you are going to mope, mope, mope, over your books.”

“You know I am going to my cousin in the first instance.”

“Yes—for a few weeks, I suppose! By the way, can’t you get out of that? I am sure we want you a great deal more than she does.”

“Oh no,” said Mona, hastily. “I can’t get out of that even if I wished to.”

“If you were cut out for a common drudge, I should not mind,” he went on; “but with your gifts—— Do you know, there is nothing to hinder your being a great social success?”

“Oh, indeed there is!” exclaimed Mona. “You have made me very happy, and I have shown my gratitude by forgetting my own

existence, and talking a great deal too much. But when my friends want to show me off, and beg me to talk—with the best will in the world, I seem unable to utter a word.”

“No wonder, when you live the life of a hermit. But if you gave your mind to it——”

Mona opened her lips to speak, and then thought better of it. There was no need to say that, at the best, social success seemed a poor thing to give one's mind to; attractive enough, no doubt, so long as it was unattained; but when attained, as the sole result of years of effort, nothing but Dead Sea fruit.

Sir Douglas got up and offered her his arm without speaking. They walked up and down the deck together.

“Where are your cigars?” she said. “I am sure you want one.”

“I don't,” he said, irritably. “I want you.” But he allowed her to get one out of his case for him nevertheless.

“And now, Mona,” he said more amiably, “I want you to tell me all about your money affairs—what you have got, how it is invested, and who looks after it for you.”

“You are very kind,” she said, gratefully;

“but please don't suppose I was thinking of money when I talked of hardship. I am quite a Cræsus now. I had to be very careful for a year or two, while things were unsettled.”

“And why the deuce did not you write to me? What did you suppose you had an uncle for? What is the use of your coming to us now, when you are quite independent and we can do nothing for you?”

Mona pressed his hand affectionately in both of hers.

“The use is problematical from your point of view, I confess, but from mine it is infinite. You have made me fancy myself a girl again.”

“And what are you but a girl? But come along, I am to hear all about your money.”

And they entered into a long and involved discussion.

The Sahib meanwhile was looking on in a mood as nearly approaching ill-humour as was possible to him. If Lady Munro and Mona had both been available, he might have been in some doubt as to which he should converse with; but Sir Douglas had settled the question by monopolising Mona, and she had become

proportionately desirable in his eyes. He persuaded himself that he had fifty things to say to her on this the last day of their companionship, and he considered himself much aggrieved. Moreover, Mona seemed to be submitting to a lecture, and the docile, affectionate smile on her face seemed strangely attractive to the neglected man.

Every moment his irritation increased, and when at last—with Newcastle well in sight—Mona left Sir Douglas and began to talk caressingly to her aunt and Evelyn, the Sahib rose abruptly from his chair and strode away.

Mona did not notice that he had gone. She liked him cordially, but, now that the moment of parting had come, her thoughts were fully occupied with her "own people."

"You will let us know of your safe arrival, won't you?" said Lady Munro. "I suppose you will be too busy to write often during the winter, and I am afraid none of us are very great correspondents; but remember, we trust you for next summer, if not before."

"You can't possibly get beyond Edinburgh to-night," said Sir Douglas, stopping in front of them and looking at his watch.

“I am afraid not,” said Mona. “But I am very anxious to go straight through, if possible.”

“I do not know why we should not all have gone north together,” he continued, turning to his wife. “Cannot we do it still? Your maid can bring your boxes.”

“My *dear* Douglas! Evelyn and I need no end of things before we can start on a round of visits.”

He shrugged his shoulders, and threw up his eyes resignedly.

“Mona cannot possibly spend a night in a hotel alone,” he said.

“You dear old uncle! You must remember I have not had you to take care of me all my life. But I am all right to-night. If I sleep in Edinburgh, it shall be with a friend.”

“What friend? Who is she?”

“She is a grade or two below the rank of a duchess, but I think she will satisfy even you. Doris Colquhoun.”

He smiled and nodded. On the whole, he was well satisfied to have a few days at his club, even if everybody was out of town.

“Well, I will at least see you safe into the train,” he said.

The Sahib had expected that this duty would fall to him, and it was with the least possible shade of injured dignity that he took Mona's proffered hand.

"I shall often think of our pleasant walks," she said, looking up with the frank, bright smile that made her face beautiful. But he tried in vain to find a suitable answer, and merely bowed over her hand in silence.

"Now remember, my dear girl," said Sir Douglas, as he passed the last of a series of periodicals through the window of the railway carriage, "if you want anything whatever, write to me, or, better still, come. You do not need even to wire unless you want me to meet you at the station. Just get into the first train and walk into our quarters as if they belonged to you. We are rolling stones, but, wherever we are, you will always find a home."

Mona did not answer. Her eyes were brimming over with tears.

The train glided out of the station, and Sir Douglas watched it till it was out of sight. Then he swore roundly at a small newsboy who was somewhat persistent in the offer of his wares, and walked back to the hotel in an

execrable temper towards the world in general, and towards his wife and daughter in particular.

Mona was alone in the carriage, but she did not allow herself for one moment the luxury of dwelling on the life she had left behind. She dashed away her tears, and brought all her power of concentration to bear on the heap of magazines at her side. But it was hard work. Visions of sunlight dancing on the rippling fjord, of waterfalls plunging from crag to crag, of mountains looming in solemn stillness, of deep blue columns supporting a sea of ice,—all these lingered on the retina of her mind, as the physical image persists after the eye is shut.

And with them came the faces—of which she *must not* allow herself to think.

Never, since she was a mere girl, had Mona known any lack of friends,—friends true and devoted ; but, in spite of moments of curious impulsiveness, a proud reserve, which was half sensitiveness, had always kept even the irrepressible Lucy more or less at a distance. None of her friends had ever presumed to lay claim to any proprietorship in her, as Sir Douglas now did ; and perhaps because it was something so new and strange, his blunt kindness was more

welcome than the refinement of tact to her sensitive nature.

It was growing dark when the train drew in to the Waverley Station.

"I want to go to Borrowness," said Mona, hastily. "Am I in time for the train?"

"Borrowness," repeated the porter meditatively, for the place was not one of European celebrity. "Well, ma'am, it's touch and go. If you have no luggage you might manage it."

"You will do nothing of the kind," said a quiet voice, and a neatly gloved hand was slipped into Mona's arm. "I never heard anything more absurd."

"Oh, Doris!" exclaimed Mona. "Why did you come? I told you I could only come to you if I missed the last train."

"Was not that the more reason why I should come here for a glimpse of you? I don't get the chance so often. But if you think you are going on with that tired face, and without any dinner, you are much mistaken. Mona, I am surprised—*you* of all people!"

"If you only knew it," said Mona resignedly, "you are very unkind."

"No, I am not. I will observe your own

conditions, and argue about nothing. Your will shall be law; I shall not even refer to your last letter unless you do. If you tell me that you are going to fly to the moon from the top of the Scott Monument, I shall merely wish you a pleasant journey. And indeed, dear, I am quite sure your train had gone."

"Well, let me telegraph to my cousin," said Mona, with a sigh.

Doris Colquhoun was not a little surprised at her easy victory, but in truth her friend was too worn out to argue.

"My own ponies shall take you out," said Doris. "They are something new since you were here, and they are such beauties. Do not laugh when you see my groom. Father hunted him out for me. He is about the size of a pepper-pot."

With a light practised hand she took the reins, the "pepper-pot" touched his hat with infinite solemnity, and they bowled away through the town and out into the suburbs.

"Your pepper-pot is a work of art, without doubt," said Mona, "but I fear he would not be of much use in case of an accident."

"So Father said. But the ponies are very

safe, and I don't know what fear is when I am driving. Father is well content to gratify all my whims, so long as I hold my peace about the one that is more than a whim."

Mona did not answer. Just then they entered the avenue of a brightly lighted house; and, with a magnificent sweep, Doris brought the ponies to a standstill in front of the steps.

Mona knew that here she was a very welcome guest, and when she found herself in the familiar dining-room, with the wood-fire crackling in the grate, and father and daughter quietly and unaffectedly enjoying her society, she felt cheered and comforted in spite of herself.

Mr Colquhoun was a shrewd, kind-hearted Scotch solicitor, or, to be more exact, a Writer to the Signet. He was a man of much weight in his own profession, and, in addition to that, he dabbled in art, and firmly believed himself to be a brilliant scientist *manqué*. He was a man of a hundred little vanities, but his genuine goodness of heart would have atoned for many more grievous sins. His gentle, strong-willed daughter was the pride of his life. Only once, as she told Mona, had she made a request that

he refused to grant, and in her devotion to him she wellnigh forgave him even that.

“Miss Maclean looks as if she would be the better of some sparkling wine,” said Mr Colquhoun, and he gave an order to the footman.

Mona smiled and drew a long breath.

“What a relief it is to be with people who know one’s little weaknesses!” she said.

“What a relief it is to be with people who know one wine from another!” he replied. “Now Doris drinks my Rœderer dutifully, but in her heart she prefers ginger-pop!”

Doris protested indignantly.

“Now don’t pretend that you are a wholesome animal,” said her father, looking at her with infinite pride. “You like horses and dogs, that is the one human thing about you. By the way, did you make any sketches in Norway, Miss Maclean?”

“Very few. Norway was too big for me. I did some pretentious *genrebilder* of women in their native dress, and a hut with a goat browsing at the foot of a tree that grew on the roof.”

“Both goat and tree being on the roof?”

“Both goat and tree being on the roof. The tree is a very common feature in that situation; the goat was somewhat exceptional.”

“So I should think,” said Doris. “I should like to see that sketch.”

“Oh, when you want to turn an honest penny,” said Mr Colquhoun, “I will give you fifty pounds for your sketch-book any day.”

“Indeed I am sorely in want of fifty pounds at the present moment,” laughed Mona, “and, regarded as a work of art, you might have the book for sixpence. But there is a sort of indecency in selling one’s diary.”

“It is not as a work of art that I want it,” he said candidly, “though there is something of that in it too. It is like your father’s college note-books.” He laughed at the recollection. “You have a knack of knowing the right thing to sketch, which is rare among men, and unique among women.”

“Thank you very much, but I am afraid I never appreciate a compliment at the expense of my sex.”

“Then you may accept this one with an easy mind,” said Doris. “The hit is not at the sex, but at my pine-forests and waterfalls.”

“Oh, pray do not let us get on the subject of Doris’s sex,” said Mr Colquhoun. “That is our one bone of contention.”

“One of a very few,” corrected Doris.

“I think they all reduce themselves to that.”

“Perhaps,” she answered gravely.

“And now I want to know how long you can stay with us, Miss Maclean. You must stay for lunch to-morrow, whatever happens. Some cronies of mine—scientific cronies, you know—are coming to look at a wonderful microscope I have been buying. It cost a pretty penny, I assure you. Professor Murray calls it the hundred-ton gun. We should be glad of the opinion of a lady fresh from one of the greatest physiological laboratories in the world.”

A courteous refusal was on Mona’s lips, but the description of the microscope sounded suspicious. She had had some experience of Mr Colquhoun’s method of purchasing scientific articles, and guessed that he had probably given fifty pounds for a cumbrous antiquated instrument, when he might have got a simpler, more efficient one for ten. She was determined that the “cronies” should not laugh at

the simple-hearted old man if she could help it; and if the opinion of a "lady fresh from one of the greatest physiological laboratories in the world" carried any weight, surely even a little perjury would be excusable in such a case.

"I will stay with a great deal of pleasure," she said; "but, whatever happens, I must catch the afternoon train."

When the evening was at an end, the two girls went together to Mona's room, and for a time they gossiped about all sorts of trifles.

"Well, I see you are very tired," said Doris at length. "Good night."

Mona did not answer.

"Are you sure you have got everything you want? Let me put that arm-chair under the gas. That's right. Good night."

Still there was no answer.

"Have you fallen asleep already, Mona, or do you not mean to say good night?"

"Oh, you old humbug!" said Mona suddenly, pushing an arm-chair to the other side of the hearth, and putting her friend unceremoniously into it. "Fire away, in heaven's name! Let me hear all you have to say. Now that I have come, I suppose we must thrash the whole thing

out. I withdraw all my conditions. Let us have it out and get it over!"

Doris was almost startled at her friend's vehemence.

"Well, of course, you know, Mona," she said hesitatingly, "it was a great disappointment to me."

"My failure? Naturally. I did not find it exactly amusing myself."

"I don't mean that. I do not care a straw about the failure, except in so far as it delays the moment when you can begin to practise. That was the fortune of war. But I do think you are doing a very wrong thing now."

"In what way?"

"Burying your wonderful powers in the petty life of a village."

"Look here, Doris. I mean to give you a fair hearing, though it is too late to change my plans, even if I wished to, which I don't; but suppose we drop my 'wonderful powers'? I fancy that theory is played out."

"All the examiners in the world could not change my opinion on that score. But we will not discuss the point. Taking you as you stand——"

“Five feet five in my stockings——”

“Please do not be frivolous. Taking you as you stand—a woman of education, culture, and refinement——”

“Youth, beauty, and boundless wealth—go on! Word-painting is cheap.”

“I thought you were going to give me a fair hearing?”

“So I will, dear. Forgive me!”

“It used to be a favourite theory of yours that ‘every man truly lives so long as he acts himself, or in any way makes good the faculties of himself.’”

“So it is still, now that you remind me of it. *Après?*”

“Oh, Mona, you know all I would say. *Are* you making good the faculties of yourself? With the most glorious life-work in the world opening before you—work that I would give all I possess to be allowed to share—you deliberately turn aside and waste six precious months among people who do not understand you, and who won’t appreciate you one bit.”

“I admire the expression ‘opening before me,’ when the examiners have twice slammed the door in my face. But, as you say, we won’t

discuss that. You talk as if I were going on a mission to the Hottentots. I am only going to my own people. I do not suppose I am any more superior to my cousin Rachel than the Munros are superior to me."

"Nonsense!"

"At least you will admit that she is my blood-relation. You can't deny that claim."

"I can't deny the relationship, distant though it is, but I do distinctly deny the claim. You know, Mona, we all have what are called 'poor relations.'"

"I suppose many of us have," said Mona, meditatively, after a pause. "You will scarcely believe it, but for the last three weeks I have been fancying that my position is unique."

"Of course it is not. We are all in the same boat, more or less. My brother Frank says that, after mature consideration on the subject of so-called poor relations, he has come to the conclusion that, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it is better to cut the connection at once and altogether."

Mona raised her eyebrows. "Doris Colquhoun quotes that?"

The colour rose to Doris's face, but she went on—

“Not because of their poverty. I do not need to tell you that. There are people who earn thirty pounds a-year by the sweat of their brow whom one is proud to have at one's table. It is because they have different ideas, speak a different language, live in a different world. What can one do at the best? Frank says, Spend a week in the country with them once a-year or so, and invite them to spend a fortnight in town. What is the result? They feel the difference between themselves and you, they don't like it, and they call you 'snob.' Suppose you ignore them altogether? The net result is the same. They call you 'snob.' The question is, Is it worth all the trouble and friction?”

“Doris, Doris,” said Mona, “that is the sheerest casuistry. You know no power on earth would tempt you to cut your own poor relations.”

“I don't know. The women all happen to be particularly nice. I should not break my heart if I thought I should never see some of the men again.”

“All women are particularly nice, according to you; no doubt my cousin Rachel would be included in the number. No, no; tell all that to the marines! I know you too well. And pray don't preach such dangerous doctrine. It would be precisely the people who have risen above their relatives only in the vulgar externals of life who would be most ready to take advantage of it.”

“Well, I confess that I always argue the matter with Frank. Personally, I don't see why one cannot be happy and cordial when one meets one's relations, without sacrificing one's self to them as you are doing.”

“I don't know that I am sacrificing myself. Perhaps,” she added suddenly with a curious smile, “I shall acquire at Borrowness some personal experience in the ‘wide, puzzling subject of compromise.’”

“Compromise!” repeated Doris. “Please don't go out of your way for that. The magnificent thing about your life is that there is no occasion for compromise in it. That duty is reserved for people with benighted old fathers. Borrowness is somewhere near St Rules, is it not?”

“Yes,” said Mona. “There is only the breadth of the county between them.”

“I know some very nice people there. I shall be proud to give you an introduction if you like.”

“No, no, no, dear,” said Mona, quickly. “My friends must be my cousin’s friends. Thank you very much all the same.”

“But, Mona, at the end of this miserable six months you will go on, won’t you?”

Mona frowned. “I have not the vaguest idea what I shall do at the end of the six months,” she said.

“You are taking your books with you?”

“Some old classics and German books, *weiter nichts*.”

“No medical books?”

“Not one.”

Doris sighed deeply.

“Don’t be so unhappy, dear. I wish with all my heart you could be a doctor yourself.”

“Oh, don’t talk of that. It is no use. My father never will give his consent. But you know, dear, I am studying by proxy. I am living in your life. You must not fail me.”

“You talk as if suffering humanity could

scarcely make shift to get along without me.”

“And that is what I think, in a sense. Oh, Mona”—she drew a long breath, and her face crimsoned—“it is so difficult to talk of it even to you. A young girl in my Bible-class went into the Infirmary a few weeks ago—only one case among many—and you should have heard what she told me! Of course I know it was only routine treatment. It would have been the same in any hospital; but that does not make it any better. She said she would rather die than go there again. No fate could have been worse.”

“Dear Doris! don’t you think I know it all? But you must not say no fate could have been worse. The worst fate is moral wrong, and there is no moral wrong where our will is not concerned.”

“Wrong!” repeated Doris, scornfully. “Moral wrong! Is it nothing then for a girl to lose her *bloom*?” Her face was burning, and her breath came fast. “Young men,” she said, scarcely above a whisper, “and all those students—mere boys! It drives me mad!”

Mona rose and kissed her.

“Dearest,” she said, “you are the *preux chevalier* of your sex, and I love you for it with all my heart. I feel the force of what you say, though one learns in time to be silent, and not even to think of it more than need be. But indeed, you make yourself more unhappy than you should. Some of the young men of whom you speak so scornfully are truly scientific, and many of them have infinite kindness of heart.”

“Don’t let us talk of it. I *cannot* bear it. But oh, Mona, go on with your work—*go on!*” She kissed her friend almost passionately and left the room.

“There goes,” thought Mona, “a woman with a pure passion for an abstract cause—a woman whose shoe-latchets I am not worthy to unloose.”

CHAPTER X.

BORROWNESS.

THE next afternoon the grey ponies trotted Mona down to Granton.

It was strange to find herself on the deck of a steamer once more ; the same experience as that of yesterday, and yet how different ! Yesterday she had been the centre of her little circle—admired, flattered, indulged by every one ; to-day she was nothing and nobody—a young woman travelling alone. And yesterday, she kept assuring herself, was the anomaly, the exception ; to-day was in the ordinary course of things—a fair average sample of life.

It would have been strange if her thoughts had been very bright ones, and a heavy groundswell on the Forth did not tend to make them any brighter.

“It’s a cross-water, ye ken,” an old countryman was explaining to a friend. “They say ye might cross the Atlantic, an’ no’ get onything waur.”

The wind was chill and cutting, and it carried with it an easterly haar, that seemed to penetrate to Mona’s very marrow. She was thankful when they reached Burntisland, and she found herself ensconced in a dirty, uncomfortable third-class carriage.

“If Borrowness is your destination,” Mr Colquhoun had said, “it is not a question of getting there sooner or later; it is a question of never getting there at all;” and so Mona began to think, as the train drew up for an indefinite period at every little station. And yet she was not anxious to hasten her arrival. The journey from Edinburgh to Borrowness was short and simple, compared with that which her mind had to make from the life behind to the life before.

“I have no right to enter upon it in the spirit of a martyr,” she said to herself, “even if that would make it any easier. For better or worse it is all my own doing. And I will not dream the time away in prospects and memories.

I will take up each day with both hands, and live it with all my might."

The twilight was beginning to gather when at length the guard shouted "Borrowness!" and Mona sprang to her feet and looked out.

It was a quiet, dreary, insignificant wayside station. A few men were lounging about—fisher-folk chiefly—and one woman.

No, that could not be her cousin Rachel.

During her life in London, Mona had often met an elderly lady whose dress was sufficiently eccentric to attract attention even in "blessed Bloomsbury." A short wincey skirt, a severely uncompromising cloth jacket, and a black mushroom hat, had formed a startling contrast to the frivolities in vogue; and, by some curious freak of fancy, a mental picture of this quaint old lady had always flashed into Mona's mind when she thought of her cousin.

But the woman on the platform was not like that. Her face was ruddy and good-natured, and her dress was a hideous caricature of the fashion of the year before. Every picturesque puff and characteristic excrescence was burlesqued to the last point compatible with recognition. Mona might have met fifty such

women in the street, and never have noticed their attire; but the hang of that skirt, the showiness of that bonnet, the general want of cut about every garment, as seen in that first momentary glance, were burnt into her recollection for a lifetime.

“No doubt, the woman I used to meet in London was a duchess,” she thought a little bitterly, “but this *cannot be* my cousin Rachel.”

She gave an order to the porter, alighted from the carriage, and waited — she scarcely knew for what. She was the only young woman who got out of the train there; so if Rachel Simpson were anywhere in sight, she must soon identify her cousin by a process of exclusion.

And so she did.

But she did it very slowly and deliberately, for Mona was looking rather impressive and alarming in her neat travelling dress, not at all unlike some of the young ladies who came to stay at the Towers.

The train puffed away out of the station, and then the little woman came up with a curious, coy smile on her ruddy face, her head a little on one side, and an ill-gloved hand extended.

Mona learned afterwards that this was her cousin's best company manner.

"Miss Maclean?" she said, half shyly, half familiarly.

"Yes; I am Mona Maclean. I suppose you are my cousin Rachel?"

They kissed each other, and then there was an awkward silence.

Rachel Simpson was thinking involuntarily, with some satisfaction, that she had seen Mona in a third-class carriage. She herself usually travelled second, and the knowledge of this gave her a grateful and much-needed sense of superiority, as regarded that one particular. She wondered vaguely whether Mona would object to having been seen under such disadvantageous circumstances.

"I suppose my luggage arrived about a fortnight ago?" said Mona, forcing herself to speak heartily. "You were kind enough to say you would give it house-room. What shall I do about this little valise?"

"Oh, the man will bring it to-night. Bill," she said familiarly to the rough-looking porter, "mind and bring that little trunk when ye gang hame."

“Ay,” said the man, without touching his cap.

Rachel Simpson was one of the many lower middle-class people in Scotland who talk fairly good English to their equals and superiors, but who, in addressing their inferiors, relapse at once into the vernacular. Mona greatly admired the pure native Scotch, and had looked forward to hearing it spoken; but her cousin's tone and accent, as she addressed this man, jarred on her almost unbearably. Mona was striving hard, too, to blot out a mental picture of Lady Munro, as she stood on the platform at Newcastle, giving an order with queenly graciousness to the obsequious porter.

The two cousins walked home together. The road was very wet with recent rain, and they had to pick their steps in a way that was not conducive to conversation; but they talked eagerly about the weather, the crops, the crossing to Burntisland, and everything else that was most uninteresting. Mona had never mentioned the Munros nor her visit to Norway.

In about five minutes they reached the house, and indeed it was not such a bad little house after all, opening, as it did, on a tiny, well-kept

garden. The two windows on the ground-floor had of course been sacrificed to the exigencies of the "shop"; and as they went in, Mona caught a glimpse of some extraordinary hats and bonnets in one window, and of dusty stationery and sundry small wares in the other.

"Marshall & Snelgrove and Parkins & Gotto," she said to herself judicially, "and I suppose Fortnum & Mason, are represented by those two wooden boxes of sweetmeats beside the blotting-books."

As they opened the glass door, the automatic shop-bell rang sharply, and an untidy girl looked out from the kitchen.

"It's you," she said briefly, and disappeared again.

Rachel Simpson would never have dreamt of giving a domestic order in the hearing of a visitor, so she went into the kitchen, and a whispered conversation took place while Mona waited in the passage. The old-fashioned clock ticked loudly, and the air was close and redolent of rose-leaves and mustiness. Evidently open windows were the exception here, not the rule. The house seemed curiously far away

from the beach, too, considering how small the town was.

“If I can only catch a glimpse of the sea from my bedroom window,” thought Mona, “I shall be happy in a garret.”

But it was no garret to which her cousin presently conducted her, nor, alas! did it command a view of the sea. It was a fair-sized room above the kitchen—a room filled up with ugly, old-fashioned furniture—and its window overlooked a wide prospect of cabbage-beds.

“Just come into the front parlour when you get off your things,” said Rachel, “and we’ll have a cup of tea.”

“Thank you,” said Mona pleasantly, and she was left alone.

She seated herself absently on a chair, and then sprang suddenly to her feet again.

“Well, you don’t suppose you are going to take stock *now*,” she said to herself savagely. “Wash your hands, and be quick about it!”

She took the liberty of opening the window first, however. The upper sash declined to move at all, and the lower one slipped down again as often as she raised it. In vain she

looked about the room for something to support it.

“Stay open you shall,” she said, “if I put my own head underneath! but I will resort to the Family Bible first,” and her eye rested on the substantial volume that surmounted the chest of drawers.

Finally, she rolled her travelling cloak into a tight bundle, and propped up the sash with that.

“A little rain will do you no harm,” she said, “and a little air will do this musty hole a vast deal of good.”

She looked about for hot water, but there was none, so with a shiver she washed in cold. Then after a glance at the distorting looking-glass, to make sure that her hair was smooth and her expression tolerably amiable, she betook herself to the front parlour.

There was no fire in the grate. There never was a fire in that grate while the white curtains were up from May to October. Rachel often indulged in the luxury of sitting by the kitchen fire when she was alone on a chilly evening, and had Mona known this she would thankfully have done the same; but Rachel’s “manners”

were her strong point, and she would have been horrified at the idea of suggesting such a thing to a comparative stranger. When Mona had really settled down, she could afford to be comfortable again, to use the old brown teapot, put away the plated spoons, and keep her Sunday bonnet for Sunday.

In truth the teapot on the table was a wonderful thing, and Rachel glowed with pride as Mona's eye returned to it incessantly; but Mona was only thinking vaguely that she had never before seen one single object—and that not a very big one—which so absolutely succeeded in setting at defiance every canon of common decency in art.

But all at once she thought of Rachel's affectionate letters, and her heart smote her. This woman, with her shop and all her ugly surroundings, her kind heart and her vulgar formalities, seemed to Mona so infinitely pathetic that, tired and overstrained as she was, she bit her lip to keep back a rush of tears.

“Do you know, dear,” she said warmly, “it is very kind of you to have me here.”

“Oh, I'm only too glad to have you, if you can make yourself happy.”

“No fear of that. Give me a day or two to settle down, and I shall be as happy as a king.”

“Yes, it does just take a while to get used to new ways and new people; but blood is thicker than water, I say. My niece, now, had settled down wonderfully. She knew all my ways, and we were so suited to each other. She was a great hand at the millinery, too; I suppose that’s not much in your line?”

Mona laughed. “I was going to say, like the Irishman, that I did not know, because I had never tried,” she said; “but I do trim my own summer hats. I should enjoy it immensely.” “And it will go hard with me,” she added to herself, “but I shall eclipse those productions in the window.”

“I am afraid,” said Rachel, uneasily, “we could not sell plain things like you had on. It was very nice and useful and that, of course, but they are all for the feathers and flowers here.”

“Oh, I should not attempt a hat like mine. It takes genius to do a really simple thing, don’t you think so?”

Rachel laughed, uncertain whether to take

the remark in jest or earnest. "Well, you know," she said, doubtfully, "it is easier to cover a hat up like."

"Very much," agreed Mona.

"And now you must make a good tea, for I am sure you are hungry after the journey. That's ham and eggs in front of you, and this is hot buttered toast,—only plain food, you see. I have made your tea nice and strong; it will do you more good."

"Farewell, sleep!" thought Mona, as she surveyed the prospect before her; and it occurred to her that the sound of champagne, creaming into a shallow glass, was one of the most delightful things on earth. She blushed violently when her cousin said a moment later—

"I suppose you are blue-ribbon? Everybody nearly is nowadays. It is wonderful how many of the gentry have stopped having wine on their tables. Nobody needs to have it now. The one thing is as genteel as the other, and it makes a great difference to the purse."

"Doesn't it?" said Mona, sympathetically, thankful that no answer had been required to the original question. "And after all," she thought, "when I am living a life like that of

the cabbages at the back, what do I want with the 'care-breaking luxury'?"

"I hope you don't object to the shop," Rachel went on presently, *à propos* apparently of the idea of gentility. "I don't really need it now, and it never did very much in the way of business at the best; but I have got used to the people dropping in, and I would miss it. And you know the ladies, the minister's wife and the doctor's wife like, they come in sometimes and have a cup of tea with me; they don't think me any the less genteel for keeping a shop. But I always tell everybody that it is not that I require to do it. Everybody in Borrowness knows that, and of course it makes a difference."

"The question of 'gentility,'" said Mona, with a comical and saving recollection of Lucy's letter, "seems to me to depend entirely on who does a thing, and the spirit in which it is done, not on the thing itself."

"That is just it. They all know me, you see, and they know I am not really caring about the shop at all. Why, they can see that whiles I lock the door behind me and go away for a whole day together."

Mona bit her lip and did not attempt an answer this time.

It was still early when she excused herself and went to her room. She paced up and down for a time, and then stopped suddenly in front of the looking-glass. It had become a habit with her, in the course of her lonely life, to address her own image as if it were another person.

“It is not that it is terrible,” she said gravely; “I almost wish it were; it is just that it is all so deadly commonplace. Oh, Lucy, I *am* an abject idiot!” And like the heroines of the good old days, when advanced women were unknown, she threw herself on the great four-post bed and burst into a passion of tears.

The torrent was violent but not prolonged. In a few minutes she threw away her handkerchief and looked scornfully at her swollen face.

“After all,” she said philosophically, “I suppose a good howl was the cheapest way of managing the thing in the long-run. That will be the beginning and the end of it. *Hörst du wohl?*—And if it so please you, Mistress Lucy, I don’t regret what I have done one bit, and I would do the same thing to-morrow.”

She curtseyed low to the imaginary Lucy, betook herself to bed, and in spite of grief, excitement, and anxiety, in spite of ham and egg, strong tea and hot buttered toast, she slept like a healthy animal till sunrise.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHOP.

No; it was clear that nothing could be done with her bedroom. That was a case for pure and unmitigated endurance. Mona felt thankful, as she looked round in the morning sunshine, that she had not brought with her any of the pictures and pots and artistic draperies without which young people find it almost impossible to travel nowadays. The heavy cumbrous furniture might possibly have been subdued into insignificance; but any moderately æsthetic colour would have been drowned in the harsh dominant note shrieked out by the old-world wall-paper.

She adhered rigidly to her resolution that last night's "howl" was to be the "beginning

and the end of it"; but as she leaned back on the stiff, hard pillows, her hands clasped behind her head, she looked the whole situation fairly in the face. It was not an inviting prospect by any means, but she was still young and enthusiastic, and resolution was strong within her.

"Good workmen do good work in any sphere," she thought, "and bad workmen do bad work in any sphere. It lies with myself. The game is all in my own hands. Heaven help me!"

"I hope you slept well," said her cousin, as she entered the parlour for breakfast.

"I never slept better in my life," said Mona, cordially.

"That's right!" and Rachel, who had suffered sundry qualms of doubt in the small hours of the morning, who had even drifted within a measurable distance of the appalling heresy that blood might not always and under all circumstances be thicker than water, was not a little comforted and strengthened in her old belief. It did still require an effort of faith to conceive that she would ever feel as much at her ease with Mona as she had done with her niece; but then, on the other hand, Mona was so very

stylish—"quite the lady"; and if she did not prove much of a hand at trimming bonnets, her manner was certainly cut out for "standing behind the counter."

"Were you meaning to go out this forenoon?" asked Rachel.

"I will do whatever you like. I have not made any plans."

"I was thinking it's such a fine day I might go over to Kirkstoun—it's only a mile and a quarter from here. Mrs Smith, a friend of mine there, lost her mother a few weeks ago, and I've never got to see her since. Her husband's cousin was married on my sister Jane, so she won't think it very neighbourly my never going near her."

"How very unpleasant for Jane!" was Mona's first thought. "I hope her husband's cousin was not very heavy;" but aloud she said—

"And you would like me to sit in the shop while you are away? I will, with pleasure. It will be quite amusing."

"No, you don't need to sit in the shop. As like as not nobody will be in; but you never can tell. You can sit at the window in the front

parlour, and watch the people passing, and if the bell rings you'll be sure to hear it. If there does anybody come, Sally can tell you the price of anything you don't know."

"Thank you."

"Of course, I might take you with me and lock the door, or leave Sally to mind the shop. I'm sure Mrs Smith would be delighted to see you at any other time, but she being in affliction like——"

"Oh, of course. She would much rather have you to herself. Anybody would under the circumstances."

"That's just it. If the weather keeps up so that we can wear our best things, I'll take you round to call on all my friends next week. There's really no pleasure in it when you've to tuck up your dress and take off your waterproof at every door."

"That is very true," said Mona, cordially. "There is no pleasure in wearing pretty things unless one can do it in comfort; and when I don my best bib and tucker, I like to show them to advantage. I am afraid, though," she added, with real regret, "I have not got a dress you will care for much."

“Oh, I daresay you’ll do very well. The great thing is to look the lady.”

They went on with breakfast in silence, but presently Rachel resumed,

“I daresay you’d like to go out on the braes, or down on the beach this afternoon. Now I wonder if there is any one could go with you? There’s Mary Jane Anderson across the way; she’s always ready to oblige me, but they’ve a dressmaker in the house just now.”

“Oh, I think we won’t trouble Miss Anderson this afternoon, thank you, dear. I love to explore new places for myself, and I will give you all my original impressions when I come in. I can’t tell you what a treat it is to me to live by the sea. I am sure I should find it company enough at any time.”

“Well, it’s a great thing to be easily pleased. My dear” — Rachel hesitated — “if anybody should come in, you won’t say anything about your meaning to be a doctor?”

Mona was much amused. “I should never even think of such a thing,” she said. “You may depend upon me, Cousin Rachel, not to mention the fact to any one so long as I am with you.”

They rose from the table, and after a great deal of preparation Rachel set out in her "best things," without fear of rain.

"Mind you make yourself comfortable," she said, reopening the door after she had closed it behind her. "I daresay you'll like the rocking-chair, and you'll find some bound volumes of the *Sunday at Home* in the parlour."

"Thank you," said Mona; "I do like a rocking-chair immensely."

The first thing she did, however, when her cousin was gone, was to get half-a-dozen strong pieces of firewood from Sally, and prop open all the windows in the house. Then she proceeded to make a prolonged and leisurely survey of the shop.

Accustomed as she was to shopping in London, where the large and constant turnover, the regular "clearing sales," and the unremitting competition, combine to keep the goods fresh and modern, where the smallest crease or dust-mark on any article is a sufficient reason for a substantial reduction in its price, she was simply appalled at the crushed, dusty, expensive, old-fashioned goods that formed the greater part of her cousin's stock-in-trade.

“I shudder to think what these things may have cost to begin with,” she said, straightening herself up at last with a heavy sigh; “but I should like to see the person who would take the whole thing, lock, stock, and barrel, in exchange for a five-pound note!”

She had just come to this conclusion when the shop-bell rang, and an elderly woman came in.

“Good morning,” said Mona, pleasantly.

The woman stared. She did not wish to be rude, but on the other hand she did not wish to be ridiculous, and such gratuitous civility from a stranger, in the discharge of an everyday matter of business, seemed to her nothing short of that; so she was silent.

“A yard o’ penny elastic,” she said, when she had sufficiently recovered from her surprise to speak.

Mona bowed, and took down the box from its place on the shelf.

“If ye’ve no’ got onything better than ye had the last time,” continued the woman, looking suspiciously at the battered pasteboard box, “I’ll no’ trouble ye. It lookit weel eneuch, but it a’ gaed intae bits the meenit it was touched.”

Mona examined the contents of the box critically.

"I certainly cannot recommend this," she said. "It's too old. We"—she suppressed a laugh that nearly choked her, as she found the familiar expression on her lips—"we shall be getting some in next week."

"It's twa month sin' I got the last," said the woman severely. "It doesna seem vera business-like tae be sellin' the same stuff yet."

"That is true," said Mona, frankly. "It must have been overlooked. I suppose there are other shops in the town where you can get what you want. If not, you can depend on getting it here this day week. Can I show you anything else?" "Not that there is a single thing in the shop I can show with much satisfaction to myself," she added mentally.

The woman frowned.

"I want some knittin'-needles the size o' that," she said, laying a half-finished stocking on the counter.

Mona drew a long breath of relief. Knitting-needles could not go bad like elastic; and if they were rusty, she could rub them up with emery-paper.

She opened the box with considerable satisfaction, but to her dismay she found needles of all sizes mixed up in inextricable confusion, and the bit of notched metal with which she had seen shopkeepers determine the size was missing. She knew this exacting old woman would never allow her to depend on her eye, and she hunted here, there, and everywhere, in vain. She preserved her calmness outwardly, but her forehead was moist with anxiety, when at length, more by good luck than good guidance, she opened the cash-drawer and found in it the missing gauge. Poor Mona! She experienced the same sense of relief that she had sometimes felt in the anatomy-room, when a nerve, of which she had given up all hope, appeared sound and entire in her dissection.

With some difficulty she found four needles of the same size, and wrapping them neatly in paper, she gave them to her customer. She was proceeding to open the door, but the old woman seemed to have something more to say.

“I aye like to gie my custom to Miss Simpson,” she said. “But what like way is this tae manage? And ye seem tae be new tae the business yersel’.”

“I am,” said Mona, “but I am very willing to learn. If you will have a little patience, you will find that in time I shall improve.”

She spoke with absolute sincerity. She had forgotten that her life stretched out beyond the limits of this narrow shop; she felt herself neither more nor less than what she was at the moment—a very inefficient young shopkeeper.

“Weel, there’s nae sayin’. I’ll be back this day week for that elastic;” and Mona bowed her first customer out.

She stood for a minute or two, with her eyes fixed on the floor, in a brown-study.

“Well,” she said at last, “if any lady or gentleman thinks that shopkeeping is child’s-play, I am prepared to show that lady or gentleman a thing or two!”

She had scarcely seated herself behind the counter, when the bell rang again, and this time the customer appeared to be a servant-girl. In spite of her tawdry dress, Mona took a fancy to her face at once, the more so as it did not seem to bespeak a very critical mind. In fact, it was the customer who was ill at ease

on this occasion, and who waited shyly to be spoken to.

“What can I do for you?” asked Mona.

“I want a new haat.”

Only for one moment had Mona thoughts of referring her to the nearest clergyman. Then she realised the situation.

“Oh!” she said. This was still a heavy responsibility. “Do you know exactly what you want, or would you like to see what we can suggest?”

“I’d like tae see what ye’ve got.”

“Is the hat for week-days or for Sundays?”

“For the Sabbath. Miss Simpson had some big red roses in the window a while back. I thocht ane or twa o’ them wad gang vera weel wi’ this feather.”

Mona took the small paper parcel in her hand, and gave her attention as completely to its contents as she had ever done to a microscopic section. It had been an ostrich-feather at some period of its existence, but it bore more resemblance to a herring-bone now.

“Yes,” she said tentatively. “The feather would have to be done up. But don’t you

think it is rather a pity to have both flowers and feathers in one hat?"

The girl looked aghast. "This was heresy indeed.

"The feather's gey thin by itsel'," she said, "but if it was half covered up wi' the flowers, it 'd look more dressed like."

Mona looked at the feather, then at the girl, and then she relapsed into profound meditation.

"Are you a servant?" she asked presently.

"Ay."

"Here in Borrowness?"

"Na; I've come in for the day tae see my mither. I'm scullery-maid at the Towers."

"What a pass things must have come to," thought Mona, "that even a scullery-maid should be allowed to dress like this in a good house!"

"The Towers!" she said aloud. "You have been very lucky to get into such a place. Why, if you do your best to learn all you can, you will be a first-rate cook some day."

The girl beamed.

"You know," Mona went on, reflectively, "a really first-class London servant would think it beneath her to wear either feathers

or flowers. She would have a neat little bonnet like this"—she picked out one of the few desirable articles in the shop—"and she would have it plainly trimmed with a bit of good ribbon or velvet—so!"

She twisted a piece of velvet round the front of the bonnet and put it on her own head. Surmounting her trim gown, with its spotless collar and cuffs, the bonnet looked very well, and to Mona's great surprise it appealed even to the crude taste of her customer.

"It's gey stylish," said the girl, "an' I suppose it 'd come a deal cheaper?"

"No," said Mona. "It would not come any cheaper at the moment, if you get a good straw; but it would last as long as half-a-dozen hats with flowers and feathers. You see, it's like this," she went on, leaning forward on the counter in her earnestness, "you want to look like the ladies at the Towers. Well, it is very natural that you should; we all want to look like the people we admire. The ladies have good things, and plenty of them; but that requires money, and those of us who have not got much money must be content to be like them in one way or the other,—we must either

have good things or plenty of things. A *common* servant buys cheap satins, and flowers and laces that look shabby in a week. No one mistakes her for a lady, and she does not look like a good servant. A really first-class maid, as I said before, gets a few good simple things, that wear a long time, and she looks—well—a great deal more like a lady than the other does!”

The girl hesitated. “I daursay I’d get mair guid o’ the bannet,” she said.

“I am sure you would. But I don’t want you to decide in a hurry. Take time to think it over.”

“Na, I’ll tak’ the bannet.”

Then ensued a discussion of details, and at last the girl prepared to go.

“And when you are getting a new dress,” said Mona, “get one that will go well with the bonnet—a plain dark-blue or black serge. You will never tire of that, and you have no idea how nice you will look in it.”

The girl looked admiringly at Mona’s own simple gown, and went away smiling.

“If all my customers were like that,” thought Mona, “I should be strongly inclined to pitch my tent in Borrowness for the rest of my natural life.”

Truly, it never rains but it pours. Scarcely had Mona closed the door on customer Number two, when customer Number three appeared, and customer Number three was a man.

“Good morning,” he said courteously.

“Good morning, sir.”

“I wonder if you have got such a thing as a really good piece of india-rubber.”

Mona took some in from the window, but it was hard and brittle.

“That is of no use,” she said, “but I have some more up-stairs.”

A few months before, in Tottenham Court Road, she had, as Lucy expressed it, “struck a rich vein of india-rubber,” pliable, elastic, and neatly bevelled into dainty pieces. Mona had been busy with some fine histological drawings at the time, and had laid in a small stock, a sample of which she now produced.

“I think you will find that quite satisfactory,” she said, quietly putting pencil and paper before him.

He tried it.

“Why, I never had such a piece of india-rubber in my life before,” he said, looking up in surprise, and their eyes met with one of

those rare sympathetic smiles which are sometimes called forth by a common appreciation of even the most trivial things.

“I am taking advantage of a holiday to make some diagrams,” he went on, “and, when one is in a hurry, bread is a very poor makeshift for india-rubber.”

Diagrams! The word sounded like an old friend. Mona quite longed to know what they were — botanical? anatomical? physiological? She merely assented in a word, however, and with another courteous “Good morning” he went away.

“A nice shopkeeper I make,” she said scornfully. “*Erstens*, I promise to get in new goods without knowing that the proceeding is practicable. *Zweitens*, I undertake to make a bonnet, which will doubtless prove to be entirely beyond my powers. *Drittens*, I give an estimate for said bonnet, which won't allow sixpence for the trouble of trimming. *Viertens*, I sell a piece of my own india-rubber without so much as a farthing of profit. No, my dear girl, it must be frankly admitted that, on to-day's examination, you have made something like *minus* fifty per cent!”

CHAPTER XII.

CASTLE MACLEAN.

THE sunlight broke and sparkled on the sea, and all the flowering grasses on the braes were dancing in the wind. Numberless rugged spurs of rock, crossing the strip of sand and shingle, stretched out into the water, and the long trails of *Fucus* fell and rose with the ebb and flow of every wave.

Mona was half intoxicated with delight. The mid-day dinner had been rather a trial to her. The "silver" was far from bright, and the crystal was far from clear; and although the table-cloth was clean, it might to all intents and purposes have been a sheet, so little pretension did it make to its proper gloss and sheen. It seemed incredible that, within little more than a stone's-throw of the dusty

shop and the musty parlour, there should be such a world of freshness, and openness, and beauty. No need for any one to grow petty and narrow-minded here, when a mere "Open Sesame" was sufficient to bring into view this great, glowing, bountiful Nature.

"It is mine, mine, mine," she said to herself. "Nobody in all the world can take it from me." And she sang softly to music of her own—

'Tis heaven alone that is given away,
'Tis only God may be had for the asking."

This stretch of breezy coast meant for her all that the secret passage to the *abbé's* cell meant for Monte Christo — knowledge, and wisdom, and companionship, and untold treasures.

A little distance off, a great column of rock rose abruptly from the beach, and Mona found to her delight that, with a little easy scrambling, she could reach the summit by means of a rude natural staircase at one side. On the top the rocks were moulded by rain and wave into nooks and hollows, and there was a fairy carpet of small shells and shingle, sea-campions and "thrift." In front of her, for leagues and leagues, stretched the rippling, dazzling sea ;

behind rose the breezy braes; and away to the left the afternoon sun shone on the red roofs, and was flashed back from the museum windows and weather-cocks of Kirkstoun. Mona selected a luxurious arm-chair, and ensconced herself comfortably for the afternoon.

The old clock was striking five when she entered the house.

“I do hope I am not late for tea,” she said. “I have had such a lovely time!”

“I see that,” said Rachel, smiling involuntarily as her eyes fell on the bright glowing face. “Get off your things, and come away.”

“And look, I found a treasure,” said Mona re-entering, “some Bloody Cranesbill.”

“Eh? Is that what you call it? It’s a queer-like name. It’s gey common about here. You’ll find plenty of it by the roadside among the fields.”

“Really? Or do you mean the Meadow Cranesbill? It is very like this, but purpler, and it has two flowers on each stalk instead of one.”

As Rachel belonged to that large section of

the community which would be wholly at a loss for a reply if asked whether a primrose and a buttercup had four petals or six, she remained discreetly silent.

But, curiously enough, Mona's childlike and unaffected delight in the sea and the flowers set her cousin more nearly at ease than anything had done yet.

"After all," she thought, "it's a great thing for a town-bred girl to stay in the country for a change, and with her own flesh and blood too. She must have been dull enough, poor thing, alone in London."

"When you want to get rid of me for a whole day," said Mona, presently, "I mean to go off on a botanising excursion round the coast. I am sure there must be lots of treasures blushing unseen."

"We'll do something better than that," said Rachel, after a moment's hesitation as to whether the occasion were worthy of a trump-card. "Some fine day, if we are spared, we'll take the coach to St Rules, and see all the sights. There's a shop in South Street where we can get pies and lemonade, and we'll have an egg to our tea when we come back."

“I should dearly like to see St Rules,” said Mona. “I have heard of the sea-girt castle all my life; and the prospect of an ‘egg to my tea’ is a great additional attraction. I cannot tell you all the gala memories of childhood that the idea calls up—picnics in pine-woods, and break-neck scrambles, and all sorts of adventures.”

She did not add that “pies and lemonade” were not a part of those gala memories; but in truth the idea of lunching “genteelly” with Rachel, on that squalid fare in a shop, depressed her as few hardships could have done.

“What are you in the way of taking to your supper in London?” asked Rachel. “I usually have porridge myself, but it’s not everybody that can take them.”

“Oh, let us have porridge by all means! I believe the two characteristics by which you can always diagnose a Scotsman are a taste for porridge, and a keen appreciation of the bagpipes. I mean to prove worthy of my nationality.”

“And do you like them thick or thin?”

“The bagpipes? Oh, the porridge! The question seems to be a momentous one, and

unless I leave it to you, I must decide in the dark. I imagine—it would be safer to say thin.”

“Well, I always take them thin myself,” said Rachel, in a tone of relief; “but some people—you’d wonder!—they like them that thick that a spoon will stand up in the middle! It’s curious how tastes differ, but it takes all sorts to make a world, they say.”

“Verily,” said Mona, earnestly. “But now I must tell you about my customers. You have not even asked whether I had any, and I assure you I had a most exciting time.”

“Well, I never! Was there anybody in? I was that taken up with Mrs Smith, you see, poor body!”

“Of course. But now you must know in the first place that I had three, whole, live customers,” and Mona proceeded to give a pretty full account of the experiences of the morning.

“That would be Mistress Dickson—I ken fine,” said Rachel, relapsing in her excitement into the Doric, “a fractious, fault-finding body. I’m sure she may take her custom elsewhere, and welcome, for me. I never heard the like. She aye has an eye to a good bargain, and

if I say I make sixpence profit out of her in a twelvemonth, it's more likely above the mark than below it."

"That I can quite believe," said Mona; "but you know, dear, the elastic had perished, and she was quite right to complain of that. We must get some fresh in the course of the week."

"Hoot awa! We'll do nothing of the sort. If the traveller comes round between this and then, we'll take some off him, but I'll not stir a foot to oblige old Betsy Dickson. She knows quite well that I don't need to keep the shop."

"But, dear,"—Mona seated herself on a stool at her cousin's feet, and laid her white hand on the wrinkled red one,—“I don't see that requiring to keep the shop has anything to do with it. If we keep it at all, surely we ought to keep it really well."

"And who says I don't keep it well? Nobody heeds old Betsy and her grumbling. Everything I buy is the best of its kind; not the tawdry stuff you get in the London shops, that's only got up to sell. You don't know a good tape and stay-lace when you see them, or I wouldn't need to tell you that."

“I am quite sure of it. But you know, dear, you can get good things as well as bad in the London shops, and you can get them fresh and wonderfully cheap. The next time you want a good many things, I wish you would let me go to London for them. I am sure at the Stores and some other places I know, I could make better bargains than you can with your traveller; and I would bring a lot of those dainty novelties that people expect to pay dear for in the provinces. We would make our little shop the talk of the country-side.”

“Hoot, havers, lassie!” laughed Rachel, no more entertaining the idea than if Mona had suggested a voyage to the North Pole. “Why, I declare,” she added, with a renewal of that agreeable sense of superiority, “you’re not like me; you’re a born shopkeeper after all! But who else was in?”

Mona drew a long face. “There was a *man*,” she said, with mock solemnity.

“Oh! I wonder who it would be? What like was he?”

“Tall,” said Mona, ticking off his various attributes on the fingers of her left hand, “thin, ugly, lanky. In fact,”—she broke off with a

laugh,—“in spite of his height, he conveyed a general impression to my mind of what one of our lecturers describes as ‘failure to attain the anatomical and physiological ideal.’ He was loosely hung together like a cheap clothes-horse, and he wore his garments in much the same fashion that a clothes-horse does.” (This, as her customer’s tailor could have certified, was most unjust. A vivid recollection of the Sahib was making Mona hypercritical.) “The down of manhood had not settled on his upper lip with what you could call luxuriance; he wore spectacles——”

“Spectacles!” repeated Rachel, alighting with relief on a bit of firm foothold in a stretch of quicksand. “You don’t mean—was he a *gentleman*?”

“I suppose so. Yes.”

“Oh! I might have gone on guessing for an hour. You said he was a *man*.”

“God made him, and so I was prepared to let him pass for one, as Portia says. Did you think the term was too complimentary?”

Rachel laughed. “Had he on a suit of dark-blue serge?”

“Now you suggest it, I believe he had.”

“And had he a pleasant frank-like way with him?”

“Yes.”

“It would be Dr Dudley. What was he wanting here?”

“India-rubber.”

“Well, I am sure there was plenty of that. I got a boxful years and years ago, and nobody has been asking for it at all lately.”

“I should imagine not,” thought Mona. “Once bit, twice shy.”

“Is he the resident *medicus*?” she asked.

“Oh no! He does not belong to these parts. He comes from London. When you were going down to the braes, did you notice a big white house with a large garden and a lodge, just at the beginning of the Kirkstoun road?”

“Yes—a fine house.”

“His old aunt lives there—Mistress Hamilton. She used to come here just for the summer, and bring a number of visitors with her; but latterly she has stayed here most of the time, unless when she is ordered to some Spa or other. She says no air agrees with her like this. He is her heir. She makes a tremendous work with him;

I believe he is the only living thing she cares for in the world. He mostly spends his holidays with her, and whiles, when she's more ailing than usual, he comes down from London on the Friday night, and goes up again on the Sunday night."

"He can't have a very large practice in London, surely, if he can do that."

"He's not rightly practising at all, yet. He has been a doctor for some years, but he is studying for something else. I don't understand it myself. But he is very clever; he gave me some powders that cured my rheumatism in a few days, when Dr Burns had been working away half the winter with lotions and fomentations, and lime-juice, and——"

"Alkalies," thought Mona. "Much more scientific treatment than the empirical use of salicin."

For Mona was young and had never suffered from rheumatism.

"——and bandages and that," concluded Rachel. "It's some time now since I've seen him. His aunt has been away at Strathpeffer all the summer, and the house has been shut up."

“But I have still another customer to account for;” and in some fear and trembling, Mona told the story of the scullery-maid and her bonnet.

“My word!” said Rachel, “you gave yourself a deal of trouble. I don’t see that it matters what they wear, and the hats pay better. Young folks will be young, you know, and for my part I don’t see why May should go like December.”

Mona sighed. “Perhaps I was wrong,” she said; “I don’t think it is a common fault of mine to be too ready to interfere with other people; but the girl looked so quiet and sensible, in spite of her trumpery clothes. Servants never used to dress like that; but perhaps, like a child, I have been building a little sand-dyke to prevent the tide from coming in.”

“What I can’t see is, why you should trouble yourself about what they wear. One would think, to hear you talk, that it was a question of honesty or religion like.”

Mona sighed again, and then laughed a little bitterly. “No doubt the folks here could instruct me in matters of honesty and religion,” she said; “but I did fancy this morning that I

could teach that child a thing or two about her bonnet."

"Oh, well, I daresay she'll be in on Monday morning to say she's thought better of it."

There was a long silence, and then Rachel went on, "My dear, how ever did you come by that extraordinary name? I never heard the like of it. They called your mother Margaret, didn't they?"

"Yes, Margaret is my own second name, but I never use it. So long as a name is distinctive, the shorter it is, the better."

"H'm. It would have been a deal wiser-like if you'd left out the Mona. I can't bring it over my tongue at all."

And in fact, as long as Mona lived with her cousin, she was constrained to answer to the appellation of "my dear."

"My dear," said Rachel now, "I don't think I ever heard what church you belong to."

Mona started. "I was brought up in the Church of England," she said.

"Surely your father never belonged to the Church of England?"

"He usually attended the church service out in India with my mother. I don't think he

considered himself, strictly speaking, a member of any individual church, although he was a very religious man."

"Ay. I've heard that he wasn't exactly sound."

"I fancy he would be considered absolutely sound nowadays,—

‘For in this windy world,
What’s up is faith, what’s down is heresy.’”

Rachel looked puzzled. "Oh!" she said with sudden comprehension. "No, no, you mustn't say that. Truth is always the same."

"From the point of view of Deity, no doubt; but to us poor 'minnows in the creek' every wave is practically a fresh creation."

"I wish you'd been brought up a Baptist," said Rachel, uneasily. "It's all so simple and definite, and there's Scripture for everything we believe. You must have a talk with the minister. He's a grand Gospel preacher, and great at discussions on Baptist principles."

"Dear cousin," said Mona, "five years ago I should have enjoyed nothing better than such a discussion, but it seems to me now that silence is best. The faith we argue about is rarely the

faith we live by; and if it is—so much the worse for our lives.”

“But how are we to learn any better if we don't talk?”

“Surely it is by silence that we learn the best things. It was from the loneliness of the Mount that Moses brought down the tables of stone.”

“I don't see what that has to do with it. There's many a one in the town has been brought round to sound Baptist principles by a sermon, or an argument on the subject. I believe you've no notion, my dear, how the whole Bible, looked at in the right way, points to the fact that the Baptists hold the true doctrine and practice. There's Philip and the Eunuch, and the Paschal Lamb—no, that's the plan of salvation,—and the passage of the Red Sea, and the true meaning of the Greek word translated 'baptise.' We'd a missionary preaching here last Sabbath, and he said he had not the smallest doubt that China, in common with the whole world, would eventually become Baptist. That was how he put it — 'eventually become Baptist.'”

“‘A consummation devoutly to be wished,’

no doubt," said Mona, "but did the missionary point out in what respect the world would be the 'förrader'?"

A moment later she would have given anything to recall the words. They had slipped out almost involuntarily, and besides, she had never lived in a Dissenting circle, and she had no conception how very real Rachel's Baptist principles were to her, nor how she longed to witness the surprise of the "many mighty and many wise," when, contrary to their expectations, they beheld the whole world "eventually become Baptist."

"Forgive me, dear," said Mona. "I did not mean to hurt you, I am only stupid; I don't understand these things."

"To my mind," said Rachel, severely, "obedience to the revealed will of God is none the less a duty because our salvation does not actually depend upon it,—though I doubt not some difference will be made, at the last day, between those who saw His will and those who shut their eyes and hardened their hearts. I have a very low opinion of the Church of England myself, and Mr Stuart says the same."

"Have you a Baptist Church here in Borrow-

ness?" asked Mona, thinking it well to change the subject.

"No; though there are a good few Baptists. We walk over to Kirkstoun. I suppose you will be going to sit under Mr Ewing?"

"Who is he?"

"The English Church minister. His chapel is near Mrs Hamilton's house. He has not got the root of the matter in him at all. He's a good deal taken up by the gentry at the Towers; and he raises prize poultry,—queer-like occupation for a minister."

"If it will give you any pleasure," said Mona, with rash catholicity, "I will go to church with you every Sunday morning."

Rachel's rubicund face beamed.

"You will find it very quiet, after the fashionable service you're used to," she said; "but you'll hear the true Word of God there."

"That is saying much," said Mona, rather drearily; "but I don't go to a fashionable church in London;" and a pang of genuine home-sickness shot through her heart, as she thought of the dear, barn-like old chapel in Bloomsbury, whither she had gone Sunday after Sunday in search of "beautiful thoughts."

“You tactless brute,” she said to herself as she set her candlestick on the dressing-table that evening, “if you have only come here to tread on that good soul’s corns, the sooner you tramp back to London the better.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE CHAPEL.

THE next morning the sun rose into a cloudless blue sky, and Mona found herself looking forward with pleasure to the walk into Kirkstoun. The road lay along the coast, and was separated from the sea by a stretch of yellow corn-fields. The inland scenery was flat and tame, but, after the massive grandeur of Norway, Mona's eye rested with quiet satisfaction on the smiling acres, cut into squares, like a giant's chess-board, by scraggy hedges and lichen-grown dykes.

They had gone about half-way, when a pleasant voice behind them said, "Good morning, Miss Simpson."

"Oh, good morning, doctor! My dear, this is Dr Dudley."

He lifted his hat and accommodated his long ramshackle stride to Rachel's podgy steps.

"How goes the rheumatism?" he asked.

"It's wonderful, doctor. Whenever I feel a twinge, I get the chemist to make me up some of those powders of yours, and they work like magic."

"That's right. You will give me a testimonial, won't you?"

"That I will, with all my heart. But you are surely forsaking Mr Ewing this morning? What will he say to that?"

"Even so, Miss Simpson. Fortunately, Mr Ewing is not touchy on that score. Your Mr Stuart asked me with charming frankness to come and hear him, so I am taking the first opportunity of accepting his invitation."

"I'm glad to hear it. You will hear a very different sermon to one of Mr Ewing's."

He laughed. "Mr Ewing is not a Chrysostom," he said, "but he is a good fellow and a gentleman, and in that capacity I think he has a distinctly refining influence on his people."

"No doubt, doctor; but don't you think it is better to have the water of life in an earthen vessel?"

“ Ah, yes,” he said, with sudden seriousness. “ If you give us the water of life, we won’t stop to criticise the bowl.”

“ Well, you wait till you hear Mr Stuart.”

An almost imperceptible smile played about his mouth. He glanced at Mona, and found her eyes fixed on his face ; but she looked away instantly. She would not be guilty of the disloyalty to Rachel involved in the subtlest voluntary glance of comprehension ; but her face was a very eloquent one, and his short-sighted eyes were quick.

“ *Que fait-elle donc dans cette galère ?*” he thought.

“ My dear,” said Rachel to Mona, in that mysterious tone invariably assumed by some people when they speak of things sacred, “ we always have the Communion after the morning service. Were you meaning to stay ?”

“ You would not have me, would you ?”

“ You’d wonder.” Rachel raised her voice. “ We’re very wide. Mr Stuart has got into trouble with several other ministers in the Union for his liberality. He says he will turn away no man who is a converted Christian.”

Dr Dudley’s eyes sparkled. “ I should have

thought a converted pagan would be even dearer to Stuart's heart."

"So he would, so he would, doctor. You know what I mean. Mr Stuart says the simple name Christian is not sufficient nowadays, because so many folks who call themselves by that name fight shy of the word 'converted.'"

Again Dr Dudley glanced at Mona, but this time she was on her guard.

"I think it is one of the grandest words I know," she said, proudly, looking straight in front of her. "But I think I won't stay to-day, dear, thank you. Shall I wait for you?"

"Please yourself, my dear, please yourself. There's always quite a party of us walks home together."

They had entered the quaint old town, and were greeted by a strong smell of fish and of seaweed, as they descended a steep angular street to the shore. Here a single row of uneven shops and tenements faced the harbour, alive to-day with the rich tints and picturesque outlines of well-patched canvas sails; and brown-faced, flaxen-haired babies basked on the flags at the mouths of the closes. A solitary gig was rattling over the stones, with a noise and stir quite

disproportionate to its size and importance ; and the natives, Bible in hand, were quietly discussing the last haul of herring on their way to the kirk.

Rachel led the way up another steep little hill, away from the sea ; and they entered the dark, narrow, sunless street, where the chapel stood in well-to-do simplicity, opposite a large and odoriferous tannery.

The interior of the chapel opened up another new corner of the world for Mona. Fresh paint and varnish and crimson cushions gave a general impression of smug respectability, and half the congregation had duly assembled in Sunday attire ; the women in well-preserved Paisley shawls and purple bonnet-strings, the little girls in blue ribbons and pink roses, and the boys severely superior in uncompromising, ill-fitting Sabbath suits, with an extra supply of "grease" on their home-cropped hair. Already there was a distinct suspicion of peppermint in the atmosphere, and the hymn-books and Bibles on the book-boards were interspersed with stray marigolds and half-withered sprigs of southernwood.

There was nothing remarkable about either service or sermon. The latter was a fair average specimen of thousands that were being

delivered throughout the country at the same moment. Those in sympathy with the preacher would have found something to admire—those out of sympathy, something to smile at; probably there was not a single word that would have surprised or startled any one.

The sun became very hot about noon. The air in the chapel grew closer and closer, the varnish on the pews more and more sticky, and the smell of peppermint stronger every minute. A small boy beside Mona fell asleep immediately after the first hymn; and, but for the constant intervention of Dr Dudley, who sat behind, a well-oiled little head would have fallen on her arm a dozen times in the course of the service. She was thankful that she had not promised to wait for Rachel, and as soon as the benediction had been pronounced, she escaped into the fresh air like an uncaged bird.

She had not walked far before she was overtaken by Dr Dudley.

“Well,” he said, “you will be glad to hear that the india-rubber has been doing yeoman service.”

Mona bowed without replying. She was annoyed with him for entering into conversation

with her in this matter-of-course way. No doubt he thought that a shop-girl would be only too much flattered by his condescension.

But Dudley was thinking more of her face than of her silence. One did not often see a face like that. He had been watching it all through the sermon, and it tempted him to go on.

“Pathetic soul, that,” he said.

“Mr Stuart?” asked Mona, indifferently.

“Yes. He is quite a study to me when I come down here. He is struggling out of the mire of mediocrity, and he might as well save himself the trouble.”

Mona smiled in spite of herself—a quick, appreciative smile—and Dudley hesitated no longer.

“After undergoing agonies of doubt, and profound study—of Joseph Cook—he has decided ‘to accept evolution within limits,’ as he phrases it. I believe he never enters the pulpit now without an agreeable and galling sense of how he might electrify his congregation if he only chose, and of how his scientific culture is thrown away on a handful of fisher-folk.”

Dr Dudley was amused with himself for talk-

ing in this strain; but in his present mood he would have discussed the minister with his horse or his dog, had either of them been his sole companion; and besides, he was interested to see how Mona would take his character-sketch. Would she understand his nineteenth-century jargon?

Her answer was intelligent if non-committal.

“He must be a man of sense and of self-repression,” she said quietly.

“Well, he does not preach the survival of the fittest and the action of environment, certainly; but that is just where the pathos of it comes in. If he were the man he thinks he is, he would preach those things in spite of himself, and without his people finding it out. The fact is, that in the course of his life he has assimilated two doctrines, and only two,—Justification by Faith—or his own version of the same,—and Baptism by Immersion as a profession of Faith. Anything else that he has acquired, or will acquire, is the merest accretion, and not a part of himself at all.”

“In other words, he resembles ninety-nine-hundredths of the human race.”

Dudley laughed. “Perhaps,” he said. “Poor

Stuart! I believe that in every new hearer he sees a possible interesting young sceptic, on whom he longs to try the force of concession. Such a tussle is the *Ultima Thule* of his ambition."

"It seems a pity that it should not be realised. The interesting young sceptic is a common species enough nowadays, and he rarely has any objection to posing in that capacity."

Dr Dudley had not been studying her for nothing all morning. Her tone jarred on him now, and he looked at her with his quick, keen glance.

"I wonder how long it is——" he said, and then he decided that the remark was quite unwarrantable.

Mona's stiffness thawed in a quiet laugh.

"Since I was an interesting young sceptic myself?" she said. "I suppose I did lay myself open to that. Oh, it is a long, long time! I don't find it easy to build a new Rome on the ashes of one that has been destroyed."

"Don't you?" he said, with quick comprehension. "I think I do, rather. It is such a ghastly sensation to have no Rome.

'Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,—'

“Go on,” said Mona.

“‘Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past.
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven by a dome more vast;
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life’s unresting sea!’”

Then suddenly it flashed on Mona wherein his great charm lay. He had one of the most beautiful voices she had ever heard.

“We might strike down to the beach here,” he said, “and go home by the braes. It is ever so much pleasanter.”

“Not to-day, I think,” said Mona; but what she meant was, “Not with you.”

They were deep in conversation when they reached Mrs Hamilton’s gate, and he was almost in the act of walking on with her to her own door; but he suddenly remembered who she was, and thought better of it. Not a very noble consideration, perhaps, when looked at from the standpoint of eternity; but even the best of us do not at all times look at life from the standpoint of eternity.

“Who is that young—person, who lives with

Miss Simpson?" he asked his aunt as they sat at lunch. He would have said "young lady" but for Mrs Hamilton's well-known prejudices on the subject. "She seems remarkably intelligent."

"She's a niece, I believe. Yes, she's sensible enough. I have not seen them since I came back."

"But you don't mean to say her mother was Miss Simpson's sister?"

"I suppose so. Why not?"

"Why not? Talk of freaks of Nature! This girl seems to be a sort of hidden genius."

"Oh, Ralph, come!" said the old lady, with a twinkle in her eye. "There's plenty of backbiting in Borrowness, and Miss Simpson's niece must expect to come in for her share of it, but I never heard *that* said of her yet!"

CHAPTER XIV.

REACTION.

THE first fortnight of Mona's stay at Borrowness was drawing to a close, and she was wellnigh prostrated with sheer physical reaction.

"It is certainly my due, after all the pleasant excitement of Norway," she thought; for she would not admit, even to herself, that the strain of settling down to these new conditions of life had taxed her nerves more than medical study and examinations had ever been able to do.

She tried hard to be brave and bright, but even Rachel's unobservant eye could not always fail to notice the contrast between her gaiety of manner and the almost woe-begone expression which her face sometimes wore in repose. Even the welcome arrival of the traveller, with samples

of elastic, *inter alia*, only roused her for a few minutes from the lethargy into which she had fallen. If she could have spent a good deal of her time at Castle Maclean, as she had dubbed the column of rock on the beach, things would have been more bearable; but the weather continued fine, and Rachel insisted on making an interminable round of dreary afternoon calls.

Day after day they put on their "best things," and sallied forth, to sit by the hour in rose-scented parlours and exert themselves to talk about nothing. Even in this, under ordinary circumstances, Mona would have found abundant amusement, but it was not the most appropriate treatment for a profound fit of depression.

"I suppose, if I had eyes to see it, these people are all intensely interesting," she said to herself; "but, heaven help me, I find them as dull as ditch-water!"

This opinion was probably mutual, for Mona's sprightliness of manner had entirely deserted her for the moment. It was all she could do to be tolerably amiable, and to speak when she was spoken to. Some of the people they called upon remembered vaguely that her father had

been a great man, and treated her with exaggerated respect in consequence; but to the majority she was simply Rachel Simpson's cousin, a person of very small account in the Borrowness world.

"We have still to go and see Auntie Bell," said Rachel at last; "but we'll wait till Mr Hogg can drive us out in his machine. He is always ready to oblige me."

"Who is Auntie Bell?"

"She's the same relation to me that I am to you; in fact, she's a far-away connection of your own. She's a plain body, taken up with her hens and her dairy,—indeed, for the matter of that, she manages the whole farm."

"A sort of Mrs Poyser?"

"I don't know *her*."

"Not know Mrs Poyser? Oh, you must let me read you about her. We shall finish that story in the *Sunday at Home* this evening, and to-morrow we will begin Mrs Poyser. It's a capital story, and I should dearly like your opinion of it."

Rachel had not much faith in the attractions of any story recommended by Mona; but, if it was about a farmer's wife, it must surely be at

least comprehensible, and probably more or less interesting.

The next morning Mona was alone in the shop. Her fairy fingers had wrought a wonderful change in her surroundings, but it seemed to her now in her depression that she might better have let things alone. "Oh, reform it altogether!" she said bitterly. "What's the use of patching—*what's the use?*"

The shop-bell rang sharply, and Dr Dudley came in. It was a relief to see some one quite different from the people with whom her social intercourse had lain of late.

"Good morning," he said. "How are you?"

"Good morning," said Mona.

She ignored his offered hand, but she was surprised to hear herself answering unconventionally.

"I am bored," she said, "to the last limit of endurance."

He drew down his brows with a frown of sympathy.

"Are you?" he said. "What do you do for it?"

"I do believe he is going to recommend Easton's Syrup!" thought Mona.

“Ah, that’s the trouble,” she said. “I am not young enough to write a tragedy, so there is nothing for it but to grin and bear it.”

“You ought to go out for a regular spin,” he said kindly. “There’s nothing like that for blowing away the cobwebs.”

“I can’t to-day, but to-morrow I am going for a twenty-mile walk along the coast”—“botanising,” she was about to add, but she thought better of it.

“Don’t overdo it,” he said. “If you are not in training, twenty miles is too much,” and his eye rested admiringly on her figure, as the Sahib’s had done only a fortnight before. He was thinking that if his aunt’s horse were less fat, and her carriage less heavy, and the world constructed on different principles generally, he would like nothing better than to take this bright young girl for a good rattle across the county.

“I think I am in pretty fair training, thank you. Can I show you anything this morning?” For Mona wished it to be understood that no young man was at liberty to drop into the shop for the sole purpose of gossip.

He sighed. “What have you got that is in

the least likely to be of the smallest use to me at any future period of my life?" he felt half inclined to say; but instead, he bought some pens—which he certainly did not want—and showed no sign of going.

"My dear," called Rachel's anxious voice, "come here quick, will you? Sally has cut her finger to the bone!"

"Allow me," said Dr Dudley, taking a neat little surgical case from his pocket. "That is more in my line than yours, I think," and he hastily left the room.

"Is it indeed!" said Mona saucily to herself, drawing the counterpart of his case from her own pocket. "Set you up!"

She was about to follow him, "to hold the forceps," as she said, when the bell rang again, and two red-haired, showily-dressed girls entered the shop. They seemed surprised to see Mona there, and looked at her critically.

"Some blue ribbon," said one of them languidly, with a comical affectation of *hauteur*.

Mona laid the box on the counter, and they ran their eyes over the poor little store.

"No, there is nothing there that will do."

Mona bowed, and replaced the box on the shelf.

“You don’t mean to say that is all you’ve got! Why, it is not even fresh. Some of it is half faded.”

“Truly,” said Mona, quietly. “I suppose you will be able to get what you want elsewhere.”

“I told you it was no use, Matilda, in a place like this,” said the elder of the two, looking contemptuously round the shop. “Pa will be driving us in to St Rules in a day or two. There are some decent shops there.”

“What is the use of that when I want it to-night? Just let me see the box again.”

She took up the least impossible roll of ribbon and regarded it critically.

“You can’t possibly take that, Matilda. Every shop-girl wears that shade.”

Matilda nudged her sister violently, and they both strove to prevent a giggle from getting the better of their dignity. Fortunately, when they looked at Mona, she seemed to be quite unconscious of this little by-play. The younger was the first to recover herself.

“I will take two yards of that,” she said, trying to make up for her momentary lapse by increased *hauteur*, and she threw half-a-sovereign on the counter, without inquiring the price.

Mona had just given her the parcel and the change, when Rachel came in full of obsequious interest, and inquiries about "your pa" and "your ma"; so Mona withdrew to the other side of the shop.

"I see you have got a new assistant, Miss Simpson," said Matilda, patronisingly.

"I'm happy to say I have,—a relation of my own, too,—Miss Maclean."

Rachel meant it for an informal introduction, but Mona did not raise her eyes from the wools she was arranging.

"You will be glad to hear that the wound is a very trifling one," said Dr Dudley's pleasant voice a moment later, as he re-entered the shop and walked straight up to Mona. "Good morning." In spite of his previous rebuff, he held out his hand cordially, and, although Mona was somewhat amused, she appreciated the kindness of his motive too warmly to refuse his hand again.

And indeed it was a pleasant hand to take—firm, "live," brotherly, non-aggressive.

But she responded to his salutation with a very audible, "Good morning, *sir*."

"Damnation!" he said to himself, "the girl

is as proud as Lucifer. She might have left the 'sir' alone for once."

From which you will perceive that Dr Dudley had heard something of the conversation which had just taken place, had guessed a little more, and had resolved in a very friendly spirit to play the part of a *deus ex machinâ*.

He went out of the shop in company with the red-haired girls.

"Do you know that young woman is a relation of Miss Simpson's?" asked one of them.

"I do."

"She might be a duchess from the airs she gives herself," said the other.

Dr Dudley was silent. It would be a gratuitous exaggeration to say that Mona would grace that or any other position, although the contrast she presented to these two girls made him feel strongly inclined to do so; and in any case it was always a mistake to show one's hand.

"Well, you needn't have said that about shop-girls all the same," said Matilda.

"I don't care! It would do her good to be taken down a peg."

"Ah, Miss Cookson," said Dr Dudley, thankfully seizing his opportunity, "don't you think

it is dangerous work trying to take people down a peg? It requires such a delicate hand, that I never attempt it myself. One is so very apt to take one's self down instead."

He lifted his hat with a short "Good morning," and strode away in the opposite direction.

"Where were your eyes?" said Rachel, when the customers had left the shop. "Miss Cookson was going to shake hands with you, I believe; and they're the richest people in Borrowness."

"Thank you very much, dear," replied Mona, quietly, "but one must draw the line somewhere. If our customers have less manners than Mrs Sanderson's pig, I will serve them to the best of my ability, but I must decline the honour of their personal acquaintance."

This explanation was intended mainly as a quiet snub to Rachel. In the life at Borrowness, nothing tried Mona more sorely than the way in which her cousin truckled to every one whom she considered her social superior; and it was almost unavoidable that Mona herself should be driven to the opposite extreme in her morbid resolution that no one should consider her guilty of the same meanness. "I don't

suppose for a moment that those girls would bow to Rachel in the streets of St Rules," she thought. "Why can she not be content to look upon them as customers and nothing more?"

Poor Mona! She was certainly learning something of the seamiest side of the "wide, puzzling subject of compromise." Hitherto she had been responsible for herself alone, and so had lived simply and frankly; but now a thousand petty considerations were forced upon her in spite of herself, because she felt responsible for her cousin too.

"Well, they do say the Cooksons are conceited and stiff," said Rachel, "but they're always pleasant enough to me."

She found considerable satisfaction afterwards, however, in detailing to one of her friends how Mona had taken the bull by the horns, and had attributed the stiffness on which the Cooksons so prided themselves to simple want of manners. She felt as the people did in Hans Andersen's story when the first voice had found courage to say, "But he has got nothing on!" and she never again absolutely grovelled before the Cooksons.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BOTANISTS.

IMMEDIATELY after breakfast the next morning, Mona slung her vasculum over her shoulder, strapped a business-like spud round her waist, tucked a well-worn 'Hooker' under her arm, and set off at a good brisk pace. Contrary to all expectations, the rain still held off; and, as physical exercise brought the blood to her face, the clouds of her depression rolled away like mountain mists in the sunshine.

She kept to the highroad for the first few miles, and then, when she was well past the haunts of men, struck on to the glorious, undulating, sandy dunes.

Botanising was not very easy work now, for most of the plants were in fruit, and sometimes not even the youngest member of an inflorescence

persisted, as a pale stray floret, to proclaim the pedigree of its family. But Mona was no tyro in the work, and her vasculum filled up steadily. Moreover, she was not disposed to quarrel with anything to-day, and when she reached the extreme easterly point of the county, and stood all alone at the water's edge, she felt the same sense of exultation and proprietorship that she had experienced on the wild pack-horse track above the Nærodal.

All at once her eye caught sight of some showy purple blossoms.

“Eldorado yo he trovado !”

she cried. “I verily believe it is a sea-rocket.” She transferred it to her vasculum, and seated herself on a rock for a few minutes' rest. She proceeded to undo her packet of sandwiches, singing to herself all the time, as was her habit when light-hearted and quite alone; but the words that came into her head were not always so appropriate as on the occasion of her first visit to the beach; and at the present moment she was proclaiming with all the emphasis befitting a second encore—

“Fo—r he's going to marry Yum-Yum”—

when a sudden intuition made her look round, and, to her horror, she saw two men regarding her with an amused smile.

One was elderly, ruddy, and commonplace ; the other was young, sallow, mournful, and interesting. Both carried vasculums a good deal more battered and weather-beaten than Mona's own.

She coloured up to the roots of her hair, and then made the best of the situation, laughing quietly, and proceeding with her sandwiches the while.

The ruddy man lifted his hat with a friendly bow. "But for the nineteenth-century character of your song," he said, "I should have taken you for the nymph of the coast."

"In a go-ahead county like this," said Mona gravely, returning his bow, "even the nymph of the coast is expected to keep pace with the times."

"True," he said. "I had forgotten where I was. Has the nymph of the coast got anything interesting in her vasculum?"

"Nothing really rare, I fear, though I have found a good deal that is new to me. Oh, by the way, I found a plant of penny-cress

in some waste ground near Kilwinnie. Is that common here?"

"*Thlaspi arvense*?" he said sceptically, looking at his sallow companion.

The younger man shook his head. "I never saw it in the neighbourhood," he said.

"I am quite open to conviction, of course," said Mona, and, rummaging in her vasculum, she produced a bunch of large, flat, green "pennies."

"Right," chuckled the elder man triumphantly—"see that?"

"Y-e-s. It's curious I never saw it before—and near Kilwinnie, too. But it seems all right; it is not likely to be a garden escape."

And they proceeded to compare specimens with much interest and enthusiasm.

"We intended to go on a little farther," said the elderly gentleman at last. "As you are botanising also, perhaps you will join us?"

Mona assented gladly, and they walked together a few miles along the coast, before turning back towards Kilwinnie.

"I suppose you have done no microscopic botany?" said her friend suddenly.

This, from Rachel's point of view, was ap-

proaching dangerous ground; but she was never likely to see these men again. They did not look like natives.

“Yes, I have done a little,” said Mona. “I have attended a botany class.”

“Indeed! May I ask where?”

“In London”—and as he still looked at her inquiringly, “at University College,” she added.

“Oh! Then you *have* studied botany! But they did not teach you there to spot *Thlaspi arvense*?”

“No; I taught myself that before I began to study botany. I think it is a pity that that part of the subject is so much ignored.”

“But botany, as taught at present, is much more scientific. Old-fashioned botany—especially as taught to ladies—was a happy combination of pedestrianism and glorified stamp-collecting.”

“True,” said Mona, “and if one had to choose between the old and the new, one would choose the new without a moment’s hesitation; but, on the other hand, it does give the enemy occasion to blaspheme, when a man can tell them that a flower is composite, proterandrous, syngenesious, &c., but when he is quite unable to designate it by its simple name of dandelion.”

Both the men laughed.

When they reached Kilwinnie, the elder of the two stopped and held out his hand.

“I am sorry we cannot offer to see you home,” he said; “but the fact is, dinner is waiting for me now at the inn, and I start for London to-night. If you are ever in town again, my wife and I will be only too pleased to see you,” and he handed her his card.

He did not ask her name, for the simple reason that he had already seen it in the beginning of her *Flora*.

When Mona looked at the card, she found that she had been spending the afternoon with a scientist of European celebrity.

“If redbeard be that,” she said, “what must blackbeard be, and why did he not give me his card too?”

She walked on at a good pace, realising only when she saw the lights of Kirkstoun, how dark it had grown. As she passed the post-office, she saw a knot of men assembled at the counter; for, in an unobtrusive way, the Kirkstoun post-office—which was also a flourishing grocer’s shop—served many of the purposes of a club. This it did the more effectually,

as the only female assistant was a wrinkled and spiteful old woman, whose virgin ears could not be injured by any ordinary masculine gossip.

Scarcely had Mona left this *rendezvous* behind her when she was overtaken by Dr Dudley.

“You are very late,” he said simply.

“Yes, but I have had a glorious time.”

“You are tired?”

“Healthily tired.”

“Cobwebs all gone?”

“Oh yes! In fact, they had begun to go when I saw you yesterday, or I could not have spoken of them.”

“Poor little soul!” he thought to himself, wondering how she escaped melancholia in the narrow limits of her life.

“You did not really mind those vulgar girls yesterday,” he went on awkwardly, after a pause.

For a moment she could not think what he was referring to.

“Oh no!” she said at last, with wide-open eyes of wonder. “How could I? They don’t come into my world at all. Neither their opinion of me, nor their want of manners, can possibly affect me.”

“That is certainly the sensible way to look at it.”

“I don’t know, after all, whether it is the right way. Probably their vulgarity is all on the surface. I believe there are thousands of girls like that who only want some large-souled woman to take them by the hand, and draw out their own womanhood. How can they help it if their life has been barren of ideals?”

He made a mental survey of the women in the neighbourhood, in search of some one capable of performing such a function.

“What a pity it is that they cannot see *you* as you are,” he said, looking at the dim outline of her face. “Large-souled women do not grow on every hedge.”

“Perhaps it would be more to the purpose if I could see myself as they see me,” she answered thoughtfully. “After all, with the honestest intentions, we scan our lives as we do our own poetry, laying stress on the right syllables, and passing lightly over a halting foot. You force me to confess that I said some very ill-natured things about those girls after they were gone; and I had not their excuse of being still in the chrysalis stage.

They may make better butterflies than I yet. Even a woman can never tell how a girl is going to turn out."

He laughed. "What is bred in the bone—" he said, "Their mother is my ideal of all that is vulgar and pretentious."

"Poor children!" said Mona.

"And the best of it is," he said, "that she began life as a small——"

He stopped short and the blood rushed over his face.

"Well," said Mona, quietly, "as a what?"

"*Milliner*," he said, kicking a stone violently out of his way, in a tempest of anger at his own stupidity.

"You don't mean to say," said Mona, "that you were afraid of hurting my feelings? Oh, please give me credit for having the soul of a human being!"

He walked with her to her own door that night. It was after dark, to be sure, but I am inclined to think that he might have done the same had it been noonday; and when he got home he asked his aunt no more questions about "Miss Simpson's niece."

CHAPTER XVI.

“JOHN HOGG’S MACHINE.”

“HE is curiously *simpatico*,” said Mona to herself the next morning. “I don’t know that I ever knew any one with whom I felt less necessity for clearing up my fog-beswathed utterances, or for breaking down my brilliant metaphors in milk; it is pleasant to be able to walk straight off into the eternal with somebody; but I like a man to be more of a healthy animal.” And a sunshiny memory passed through her mind of the “moral antiseptic,” the dear brotherly Sahib.

“I wonder who the other botanist was?” she went on presently, tumbling her pillows into a more comfortable position. “The Professor’s assistant perhaps, or possibly a professor himself. He certainly was a scientist, every inch of him,

from his silent tongue to the tips of his ill-groomed fingers."

It would have surprised her not a little if she could have seen the subject of her speculations an hour or so later. He was sitting behind the counter of a draper's shop in Kilwinnie, his head resting on his hand in an attitude of the deepest dejection. Mona was perfectly right when she declared him to be every inch a scientist; he was more so perhaps than even the great professor himself: but the lines had fallen unto him in a narrow little world, where his studies were looked upon as mere vagaries, on a par with kite-making and bullet-casting; where his college classes at St Rules had to be paid for out of his own carefully saved pocket-money; where his experiments and researches had to be conducted in a tumble-down summer-house at the foot of the old garden; and where, at the age of twenty, he was left an orphan with four grown-up sisters to support.

Had they all lived thirty years later, or in a less secluded part of the world, the sisters would probably have looked out for themselves, and have left their brother to make a great name, or to starve in a garret over his weeds and his

beetles, according as the Fates might decree ; but such an idea never occurred to any one of the five, although the sisters had all received sufficient instruction in music, painting, and French, to make them rather hard to please in the matter of husbands.

The lad was cut out for patient, laborious, scientific research, and he knew it ; but with four sisters on one's hands, and a balance at the bank scarcely large enough to meet doctor's bills and funeral expenses, scientific research seems sadly vague and indefinite, while a well-established drapery business is at least "something to lippen to."

So he laid aside his plans, and took up the yardstick as a mere matter of course, without any posing and protestations even to himself.

He so far asserted himself, that the microscope, the *hortus siccus*, and the neat pine-wood cabinets, took up a place of honour in the house, instead of skulking in out-of-the-way corners ; but now that fifteen years had passed away, although he was known to all the initiated as the greatest living authority on the fauna and flora of the eastern part of the county, he was beginning to pursue his hobby at rarer intervals

and in a more dilettante spirit. Now and then when some great scientist came into the neighbourhood, and appealed to him as to the habitat of this and as to the probable extinction of that, when his personal convoy on an expedition was looked upon as an honour and a great piece of luck, when in the course of walks round the coast he drank in the new theories of which the scientific world was talking, he felt some return of the old fire; but in the main, to the great relief of his sisters, he was settling down into a good and useful burgher, with a place on the town council and on sundry local boards, with an excellent prospect of the provostship, and with no time for such frivolities as butterfly-hunting and botanising.

When his acquaintances questioned him, he always stated his conviction that he had chosen, on the whole, the better part; but he never gave any account of hours like the present, in which he loathed the very thought of civic honours and dignity, and in which he painted to himself in glowing colours the life that might have been.

He was thinking much just now of the burly old professor whose visit he had keenly enjoyed;

and more even than of the professor he was thinking of Mona Maclean. All things are relative in life. Scores of men had met Mona who had scarcely looked at her a second time. She might be nothing and nobody in the great bright world of London; but into this man's dark and lonely life she had come like a meteor. He could scarcely have told what it was that had fascinated him. It was partly her bright young face, though he dreaded good-looking women; partly her light-hearted song, though he scorned frivolous women; partly her botany, though he laughed at learned women; and partly her frank outspoken manner, though he hated forward women. She bore no smallest resemblance to the mental picture that had sometimes floated vaguely before him of a possible helpmeet for him; and yet, and yet—look where he would, he could see her sitting on that rock, with all the light of the dancing waves in her eyes,—the veritable spirit of the coast as the professor had said. He even found himself trying to hum in a very uncertain bass,

“For he's going to marry Yum-Yum;”

but this was a *reductio ad absurdum*, and with

a heavy frown he proceeded to make out some bills.

It never occurred to him to question that she was far out of his reach. Anybody, he thought, could see at a glance that she was a lady, in a different sense from that in which his sisters bore the name. It was right and fitting that the great professor should give her his card, but who was he—the draper of Kilwinnie—that he should suggest another meeting?

But the second meeting was nearer than either he or Mona anticipated.

“We’re going to take tea with Auntie Bell this afternoon,” said Rachel next day. “Mr Hogg is going in to Kilwinnie on business, and he says if we don’t mind waiting half an hour in the town, he will drive us on to Balbirnie. I want to buy a couple of mats at Mr Brown’s; you can depend on the quality there better than anywhere here or in Kirkstoun; and we’ll just wait in the shop till Mr Hogg is ready.”

“But can he spare the time?” asked Mona, uneasily. She knew that Rachel could quite well afford to hire a trap now and then.

“Oh, he’s always glad to have a crack with

Auntie Bell, not to say a taste of her scones and cream. She is a great hand at scones."

This was magnanimous on Rachel's part, for her own scones were tough and heavy, and—though that, of course, she did not know—constituted one of the minor trials of Mona's life.

"But, dear," said Mona, "we are neglecting the shop dreadfully between us."

"Oh, Sally can mind it all right when she's cleaned herself in the afternoon. She is only too glad of a gossip with anybody. It is not as if it was for a constancy like; this is our last call in the meantime. Now the folks will begin to call on us, and some of them will ask us to tea."

Mona tried to smile cordially, but the prospect was not entrancing.

About half-past two, Mr Hogg came round in his "machine." Now "machine," as we all know, is a radical and levelling word, and in this case it was a question of levelling up, not of levelling down, for Mr Hogg's machine was simply a tradesman's cart. It was small, to be sure, and fairly new and fresh, and nicely varnished, but no one could look at it and doubt that it was what Lucy would have called

a "common or garden" cart. Rachel and Mona got in with some difficulty, and they started off along the Kirkstoun road. Here they met Dr Dudley. His short-sighted eyes would never have recognised them had not Rachel leaned forward and bowed effusively; then he lifted his hat and passed on.

They rattled through the streets of Kirkstoun, past the post-office, the tannery, the Baptist chapel, and other buildings of importance; and then drove out to Kilwinnie, where Mr Hogg politely deposited them at Mr Brown's door.

Here, then, Mona saw her "professor" measuring out a dress length of lilac print for a waiting servant-girl, and here the draper saw his fairy princess, his spirit of the coast, alighting with as much grace as possible from John Hogg's cart.

Mr Brown knew Rachel Simpson. She stopped occasionally to purchase something from him on her way to Auntie Bell's; his sisters often amused themselves by laughing at her dress, and the traveller told him comical stories about the way in which she kept shop.

For it must be clearly understood that Mr

Brown's shop was a very different thing from Rachel Simpson's. It was well stocked with substantial goods, and was patronised by all the people round about who really respected themselves. It was no place for "bargains" in the modern sense of the word. It was a commercial eddy left behind by the tide in days when things were expected to wash and to wear. There was no question here of "locking the door, and letting folks see that you did not require to keep the shop." A place like this must, on the face of it, be the chief aim and end of somebody's existence.

Rachel's descent from the cart was a somewhat tedious process, but at length it was accomplished successfully, and Mr Hogg drove away, promising to return for them in half an hour.

Poor Rachel was not a little flattered by the draper's cordial greeting. Leaving the "young man" to do up the print, he came forward, with stammering, uncertain words indeed, but with a beaming smile and outstretched hand. And he might be Provost next year!

"This is my cousin, Miss Maclean," she said. Mr Brown looked absolutely petrified.

"I think we have met before," said Mona, not a little surprised herself, taking his offered hand. "This is one of the gentlemen, dear, who helped me with my plants."

"Oh," said Rachel, rather blankly.

It had required all her "manners" to keep her from giving Mona a candid opinion of the common weeds which were the sole fruit of a long day's ramble, and Rachel had a very poor opinion of any *man* who could occupy himself with such trash. But, to be sure, he was a good draper—and he might be Provost next year!

And then he was so very cordial and friendly—that in itself would have covered a multitude of sins. As soon as Rachel had made up her mind about the mats, he hastened up-stairs, and returned with a stammering invitation from his sisters. Would Miss Simpson and her cousin come up to the drawing-room and wait there? When Mona came to know a little more of the Brown *ménage*, she wondered how in the world he had ever succeeded in getting that invitation.

But up-stairs they went, and were graciously received by the sisters. Mr Brown was wildly

happy, and utterly unable to show himself to any advantage. He wandered aimlessly about, showing Mona this and that, and striving vainly to utter a single sentence consecutively.

“Can’t you have tea?” he said in a stage-whisper to his sister.

“Oh, thank you,” interposed Rachel with a somewhat oleaginous smile, “it’s very kind, I’m sure, but we’re on our way to Mrs Easson’s, and we won’t spoil our appetites.”

“Are you going to be here long?” said the draper to Mona.

“At Borrowness? A few months, I expect.”

“Then you’ll be doing some more botanising?”

“Oh yes.”

“There’s some very nice things a little bit farther round the coast than we went the other day. Would you come some time with my sister and me?”

“I should be very glad indeed,” said Mona, warmly. “It is an immense advantage to go with some one who knows the neighbourhood.”

“Well, we will arrange the day—later on,” and he sighed; “but it won’t do to wait too long now.”

At this moment Mr Hogg rattled up to the

door, and the draper went down and helped his visitors into the cart.

“Why, I declare he’s getting to be quite a lady’s man,” said Rachel when they were well out of hearing. “I wonder what his sisters would say if he was to get married after all.”

Meanwhile the Browns discussed their visitors.

“It’s last year’s mantle,” said Number one, “but the bonnet’s new.”

“And what a bonnet!” said Number two.

“And she still shows two or three good inches of red wrist between her glove and her sleeve,” said Number three. “Nobody would think that girl was her cousin.”

“She’s not at all pretty,” said Number four, “but she’s quite ladylike. Do you know what she is, Philip?”

“I don’t,” he said nervously, “but I fancy she must be a teacher or something of that kind. She has been very well educated.”

“Ah, that would account for it,” said Number two. “It must be a nice change for her to come and stay with Miss Simpson.”

The draper stood at the window counting up his happiness. There was not a snobbish line in his nature, and Mona was not any the less

a fairy princess in his eyes because she seemed suddenly to have come within his reach. He knew his sisters did not want him to marry, and he was grateful to them now for having crushed in the bud certain little fancies in the past; but if he once made up his mind,—he laughed to himself as he thought how little their remonstrances would weigh with him. Of course there was a great chance that so bright and so clever a girl might refuse him; but fifteen years of his sisters' influence had not taught him to exaggerate this probability, and in that part of the country there is a strong superstition to the effect that a woman teacher is not likely to refuse what is commonly known as "an honest man's love."

CHAPTER XVII.

AUNTIE BELL.

THE slanting rays of the afternoon sun were throwing the old farmhouse, with its goodly barns and well-built stacks, into mellow lights and warm brown shadows, when Mr Hogg's pony drew up at the garden-gate. Before they had time to get down, Auntie Bell came out to greet them,—such a queer little woman, bent half double, and peering up at her visitors through her gold spectacles with keen expressive eyes. There was force of character in every line of her face and figure, even in the dowdy cap, the grey wincey gown, and snow-white apron.

“Why, it's Rachel Simpson,” she said. “Come awa' ben. Dick 'll tak' the powny.”

“This is my cousin, Miss Maclean,” said Rachel.

“Mona Maclean,” corrected the owner of the name.

Auntie Bell gripped her hand and studied her face with as little regard to her feelings as if she had been a horse or a cow, the furrow on her own brow deepening the while.

“Eh, but she’s like her faither,” she said. “The mooth an’ the chin——”

“Yes,” said Rachel, shortly. The subject of Mona’s father was not a congenial one.

“What w’y are ye no’ mairrit yet?” continued Auntie Bell, severely, still maintaining her grasp of Mona’s hand.

“‘Advanced women don’t marry, sir, she said,’” were the first words that passed through Mona’s mind, but she paraphrased them. “We don’t marry now,” she said. “It’s gone out of fashion.”

The muscles of Auntie Bell’s face relaxed.

“Hoot awa’,” she said. “Wait ye till a braw young man comes alang——”

“You will dance at my wedding then, won’t you?”

“That will I!” and Auntie Bell executed a momentary *pas seul* on the spot.

She stopped abruptly and drew down her brows with all her former gravity.

“I hope ye’re cliver,” she said.

“Thank you. As folks go nowadays, I think I am pretty fair.”

“Ye had need be, wi’ a faither like yon.”

“Ah,” said Mona, with sudden gravity, “I was not thinking of him. I am not clever as he was.”

“Na, na, I was thinkin’ that. He was”—this with great emphasis—“as fine a mon as iver I saw.”

“But did you know him? I did not know that he was ever in this part of the country.”

“Ay was he! He cam’ ae day, it may be five-an’-twinty year syne—afore there was ony word o’ you, maybe. He was keen to see the hoose whaur his faither was born, and we’d a crack aboot the auld folks, him and me. Rachel Simpson was at Dundee than. My word! ye’d hae thocht I’d been the finest leddy at the Towers. But come awa’ ben, an’ I’ll mask the tea.”

“Ye’ll find the place in an awfu’ disorder,” she went on to Rachel as they entered the spotless parlour. “I’m that hadden doon o’ the

hairvest, I've no' got my back strauchten'd up sin' it commenced ;” and she bustled in and out of the kitchen getting the tea.

“You don't let the girls do enough,” said Rachel.

“The lassies ! Hoot awa'. I canna bide their slatternly w'ys i' the hoose. I'm best pleased when they're oot-bye.”

“You havena been to see me for many a long day.”

“Me ! I've no' been onywhere ; I've no' seen onybody. I've no' been to the kirk sin' I canna tell ye whan. What w'y would I ? The folk wad a' be lauchin' at daft auld Auntie Bell wi' her bent back. The meenister was here seein' me. He cam' that day o' the awfu' rain, his umberella wrang side oot, an' his face blue wi' the cauld — ye ken what a thin, feckless body he is. ‘Come awa', ye puir cratur,’ says I, ‘come awa' ben tae the fire.’ An' he draws himsel' up, an' says he, ‘Why say, poor creature ?’ — like that, ye ken — ‘why say, poor creature ?’” And Auntie Bell clapped her hand on her knee, and laughed at the recollection.

At this moment Mr Hogg and Auntie Bell's

husband—a person of no great account—passed the window on their way into the house.

“Come awa’ tae yer tea, Mr Hogg. Hoot, Dauvid, awa’ an’ pit on anither coat. Ye’re no’ fit tae speak tae the leddies.”

David meekly withdrew.

“We were in seeing the Browns,” said Rachel, complacently. “They were wanting us to stay to tea.”

“Ay! I’ve no’ seen them this mony a day.”

“How is he getting on, do you know, in the way of business?” asked Mr Hogg.

Auntie Bell brought the palm of her hand emphatically down on the table.

“A’ thing i’ that shop is guid,” she said. “I’m perfectly convinced o’ that; but ye can get things a deal cheaper i’ the toon nor ye can wi’ Maister Brown, an’ folks think o’ naething but that. I aye deal wi’ him mysel’. He hasna just a gift for the shop-keepin’, but he’s been mair wise-like lately, less taen up wi’ his butterflies an’ things.”

Before her visitors had finished tea, Auntie Bell was hard at work, in spite of a mild remonstrance from Rachel, packing a fat duck and some new-laid eggs for them to take home

with them. Something of the kind was the invariable termination of Rachel's visits, but she would not have thought it "manners" to accept the basket without a good deal of pressing.

Mr Hogg was beginning to get impatient before the "ladies" rose to go.

"I'll see ye intae the cairt," said Auntie Bell to Mona, when the first farewells had been said. "Rachel 'll come whan she gits on her bannet."

As soon as they were in the garden, the old woman laid her hand impressively on Mona's arm.

"Are ye onything weel pit up wi' Rachel?" she whispered.

"Oh yes, indeed."

Auntie Bell shook her head. "It's no' the place for the like o' you," she said, and then further conversation was prevented by Miss Simpson's appearance.

"Well, you'll be in to see us soon," she said.

"Eh, I daursay you'll be here again first."

"I will, certainly," said Mona. "I mean to walk out and see you some day."

"Hoot awa', lassie. It's ower far. Ye canna walk frae Borrowness. Tak' the train——"

“Can't I?” laughed Mona, as Mr Hogg drove off.

“Why, why, *why*,” she thought as they trotted down to Kilwinnie, “did not the Fates give me Auntie Bell for my hostess instead of Rachel Simpson?”

CHAPTER XVIII.

A SILHOUETTE.

ABOUT a week after Mona's visit to Auntie Bell, Dr Dudley was sitting alone in the dining-room at Carlton Lodge. It was nearly midnight, and a terrific storm was raging outside. One of the great trees at the foot of the garden had been blown down into the road, carrying with it a piece of the wall; and the wind roared round the lonely house like a volley of artillery.

Within, a bright wood-fire was reflected dimly on the oak wainscot, and a shaded lamp threw a brilliant light on scattered books and papers, shrouding the rest of the room in suggestive shadows.

Dr Dudley rose to his feet, and kicked a footstool across the room. You would scarcely have

recognised his face as the one that had smiled at Mona across the counter. The wind played on his nerves as if they had been an instrument, but he was not thinking of the storm.

“Three years more before I can begin to do a man’s work in the world,” he said, “and nearly thirty lie behind me! It is enough to make one make tracks for the gold-fields tomorrow. What surety have I that all my life won’t drift, drift, drift away, as the last thirty years have done? Upon my soul”—he drew up the blind and looked out on the darkness, which only threw back his image and that of the room—“I envy the poor devils who are called out to their patients in this tempest, for shilling or half-crown fees!”

He was young, you see, but not very young; for, instead of indulging in further heroics, he bit his lip and returned to his books and papers. “*Hier oder nirgends ist Amerika!*” He drew down his brows, and read aloud from the mighty tome at his side, stopping now and then to add a few lines to the diagram before him.

He held very strongly that, in addition to practical work, which was wellnigh everything, there was only one way of mastering anything

approaching an exact science. Firstly, get the best handbook extant; secondly, read the diagrams only; thirdly, read the diagrams, letterpress and all; fourthly, read letterpress alone, constructing your own diagrams as you go. "For after all," he said, "another man's diagrams are but crutches at the best. It is only when you have assimilated a subject, and projected it again through the medium of your own temperament, that it is of any practical use to you, or indeed has any actual existence for you personally."

His opinion ought to have been of some value, for the study of an exact science was by no means the work for which his mind was best fitted; and it is not those whom Nature has endowed with a "royal road" to the attainment of any subject who are best able to direct their fellows.

The clock was striking two when he closed his books and extinguished the lamp. It was not his custom to work so late; he was oddly rational in such ways; but he had learned by experience that to act on the principle that "*Hier oder nirgends ist Amerika*" was the only cure—sometimes, alas! not a very effec-

tual one—for moods of depression and bitter self-reproach.

The hurricane had raged for several days, but next morning the sun shone down on a smiling innocent world, with a pleasant suggestion of eternal renewal.

“I am going for a long drive past Kilwinnie,” said Mrs Hamilton at lunch. “I am perishing for lack of fresh air; and I want you to go with me, Ralph.”

“I am sorry I can’t,” he said, shortly. It must be confessed that Dr Dudley was a man of moods.

“Oh, nonsense, Ralph! You have poked over those horrid books for days. You refused to come the last time I asked you, and that was centuries ago, before the storm began. I can’t have you always saying ‘No.’”

“It is a pity I did not learn to say ‘No’ a little earlier in life,” he said gloomily; and then, with a dismal sense that the old lady was mainly dependent on him for moral sunshine, he got up and laid his hand on her shoulder—

“‘I have been the sluggard, and must ride apace
For now there is a lion in the way,’”

he said, striving to speak cheerfully.

“I declare, Ralph, any one would think, to hear you talk, that you were a worn-out *roué*. What would have become of me for the last two years if you had been in busy practice? You know quite well that one might walk from Land’s End to John o’ Groat’s in search of your equal in general culture. Professor Anderson was saying to me only the other day that it was impossible to find you tripping. Whether the conversation turned on some unheard-of lake in Central Africa, or the philosophy of Hegel, or Coptic hymnology, or Cistercian hill architecture of the Transition Period, you were as much at home as if it was the weather that was under discussion. I told him he might have included the last new thing in bonnets.”

“No, no,” said Ralph, laughing in spite of himself. “That was too bad. You know I draw the line there. These things are too wonderful for me.”

“But you will come with me, won’t you?”

“You coaxing old humbug!” he said, affectionately, “I suppose I must. It will only mean burning a little more of the midnight oil. What havoc you must have wrought when you

were young, if you understood a man's weakness for flattery as well as you do now !”

“ Ah, but I did not,” she responded quietly, having gained her point. “ It takes a lifetime to fathom it.”

He laughed again, kissed her on the forehead, and consented to have some tart after all. People were rather at fault who thought the old aunt poor company for the clever young doctor.

In due time the sleek old coachman brought round the sleek old horse, and they set off at a quiet trot along the level highroad.

“ We must stop at Kirkstoun and speak to Hutchison about getting the wall put up,” said Mrs Hamilton. “ Well, it is like losing an old friend to see that tree ! But we shall be at no loss for firewood during the winter. We shall have some royal Yule-logs, well seasoned, to welcome you back.”

“ Do,” he said. “ There is nothing like them after meagre London fires ; and you know we must make the most of my Christmas visit. If you keep pretty strong, I must not come back till midsummer, when my examination is over. It won't do to come a cropper at my time of life. Just look at that wheat !

The harvest had promised well before the storm began, but the corn which was still uncut had been beaten down level with the ground, and the "stooks" were sodden with rain.

"Most of the corn will have to be cut with the sickle now," said the old lady. "Next Sunday won't be 'stooky Sunday' after all."

They drove on past Kilwinnie, discussing Dr Dudley's approaching departure, and the date of his return.

"Why, that surely is a strange steamer," said Mrs Hamilton, suddenly. "I wonder if she has been disabled. Can you see?"

"There is no use asking me about anything that is more than a yard off," he said. "I have left my eyes at home."

She handed him a field-glass, and he studied the vessel carefully.

"I don't know her from the Ark," he said, "but that is not surprising."

Before returning the glass, he swept it half absently along the coast, and he vaguely noticed two figures—a man's figure and a woman's—stooping towards the ground.

He would have thought nothing of it, but the man's hat was off, and—standing alone as they

were on the sandy dunes—they suggested to Dudley's mind the figures in Millet's "Angelus." He laughed at the fancy, focussed the glass correctly, and looked at them again.

Just then the woman straightened herself up, and stood in silhouette against sea and sky. He would have known that lithe young form anywhere; but—all-important question—who was the man? Dudley subjected the unconscious figure to a searching examination, but in vain. To his knowledge he had never seen "the fellow" before.

Mrs Hamilton unwittingly came to his assistance. She took the glass from him, and examined the vessel herself.

"No," she said, "I don't know her at all. I expect she is coming in for repairs. Why, I believe that is Mr Brown, the draper at Kilwinnie. You know he is quite a remarkable botanist, a burning and shining light—under a bushel. I suppose that is one of his sisters with him. They say he is never seen with any other woman."

"Confound his impudence!" muttered Dudley involuntarily.

"Why, Ralph, what do you mean? You

talk to me about 'the effete superstitions of an ancient gentry'; but even I have no objection to a well-conducted tradesman amusing himself with a scientific hobby in his spare time. It is a pity all young men of that class don't do the same. It would keep them out of a lot of mischief."

"Yes," said Dudley, rather vaguely.

He did not enter into any explanation of his strangely inconsistent utterance; but such silence on his part was too common an occurrence in his intercourse with his aunt to call for any remark.

Dr Dudley was not in love with Mona. It was his own firm conviction that he never would be really in love at all. All women attracted him who in any respect or in any degree approached his ideal; the devoted wife and mother, the artist, the beautiful dancer, the severe student, the capable housewife, the eloquent platform speaker,—in all of these he saw different manifestations of the eternal idea of womanhood, and he never thought of demanding that one woman should in herself combine the characteristics of all. He was content to take

each one for what she was, and to enjoy her in that capacity. He keenly appreciated the society of women; but the moment he was out of their presence—sometimes even before he was out of it—he found himself analysing them as calmly as if they were men. Yet ‘analyse’ is scarcely the right word to use, for Dr Dudley read character less by deliberate study than by a curious power of intuition, which few would have predicated from a general knowledge of his mind and character.

Mona would have been surprised at that time had she known how much truer was his estimate of her than was that of the Sahib. Almost at the first glance, he had understood something of both her simplicity and her complexity, her reserve and her unconventionality; almost at the first interview, he had realised that, whatever might be the case in the future, at present the idea of sex simply did not exist for her. She might well call him *simpatico*. He was appreciative almost to the point of genius.

Certainly no woman had ever attracted him precisely as Mona did. She attracted him so much that he had been fain to hold his peace about her, and to wish that she were not “Miss

Simpson's niece." And yet there was a pathos and a piquancy about her, in her dingy surroundings, which were not without their charm, and which appealed to a latent sense of the fatherly in him, the very existence of which he had scarcely suspected, for Dr Dudley was essentially a "college man."

"Surely, surely," he thought as he enjoyed his after-dinner cigar in his tiny smoking-room, "she would never look at that fellow. She could not be such a fool. If she had lived fifty years ago it would have been all *en règle*. She would have married him as a matter of course, and an excellent match for her too. She would in due course have 'suckled fools and chronicled small-beer,' and at the present moment her granddaughters would be holding entrance scholarships for Newnham or Girton.

"But it's not too late for *her* yet. If only that dear old aunt of mine were not such a confounded Conservative, I would get her to pay for Miss Maclean's education. By Jove! it would be education in her case, and not mere instruction, as it is with most of the learned women one meets; but even if my old lady had the money to spare, she would infinitely rather

give Miss Maclean her linen and her best bedroom furniture, and bestow her with a blessing on the draper !”

It did not occur to him to doubt that Mona was practically a fixture at Borrowness. His aunt had certainly spoken as if she were, on the one occasion when Mona had been mentioned between them. In truth, the old lady had taken for granted that he was referring to the real original niece, of whose departure for America she had never even heard ; and Ralph knew no one else in the neighbourhood who was at all likely to give him incidental information about Miss Simpson's assistant. She must of course have been brought up elsewhere—so much at least he could tell from her accent ; and, for the rest, he had always maintained that, in these latter days, the daughters of lower middle-class people stand a better chance of a good education than any other girls in the community : it was not altogether marvellous if one in a thousand made a good use of it.

CHAPTER XIX.

“LEAVES OF GRASS.”

THE next day, while Mrs Hamilton was enjoying her afternoon nap, Dudley seated himself as usual with his books; but his head ached, and he soon gave up the attempt to study.

“For every hour I work to-day, I shall waste two to-morrow,” he said; and taking a volume of poetry from the shelf, he strode down to the beach.

Other people besides Mona knew of “Castle Maclean”; perhaps some people had even discovered her predilection for it. Dudley reached the spot in about half the time that she would have taken, and scrambled up the huge uneven steps. There, comfortably ensconced at the top, sat the subject of his thoughts; a sketch-book open on her lap, and a well-used, battered paint-

box at her side. Dudley was too much of an artist to dabble in colours himself, but he knew one paint-box from another, and he was duly impressed.

“I beg your pardon!” he said. “So you know this place?”

“It is my private property,” she said with serene dignity, very different from her bright, alert manner in the shop,—“Castle Maclean.”

He bowed low. “Shall I disturb you if I stay?”

“Not in the least.” She put her head on one side, and critically examined her sky. “Not unless your hat absolutely comes between me and my subject.”

“Change in the weather, is not it?”

“Has it not been glorious!” she said enthusiastically, laying down her brush. “This rocky old coast was in its element. It was something to live for, to see those great waves dashing themselves into gigantic fountains of spray.”

“You don’t mean to say you were down here?”

“Every minute that I could spare. Why not? A wetting does one no harm in a primitive world like this.”

She glanced at his book and went on with her painting. Neither of them had come there to talk, and why should they feel called upon to do it?

“This is scarcely a lady’s book,” he said, —though he would not have thought this remark necessary to a “Girton girl,” —“but, if I may, I think I could find one or two things that you might like to hear.”

She smiled, well pleased. She had not forgotten how

“Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,”

had rolled out in his musical bass.

He read on for half an hour or so. Mona soon forgot her sketch and sat listening, her head resting on her hand.

He closed the book abruptly; he wanted no verbal thanks.

“And now,” he said, “for my reward. May I look at your sketches?”

She coloured awkwardly. How could she show them? The scraps from Norway, and Italy, and Saxon Switzerland, might be explained; but what of the memory sketches of “the potent, grave, and reverend signiors”

who had examined her at Burlington House? What of the caricature, which had amused the whole School, of Mademoiselle Lucy undergoing a *Viva*? What of her *chef-d'œuvre*, the study of the dissecting-room?

“I promised Rachel that I would keep the dreadful secret,” she said ironically to herself, “and I am not going to break my word.” But it cost her an effort to refuse. Some of the sketches were, in their way, undeniably clever, and she would have enjoyed showing them to him; and, moreover, she intensely disliked laying herself open to a charge of false modesty.

“I am sorry to seem so churlish,” she said, “but I would rather not show you the book.”

He was surprised, but her tone was absolutely final. There was nothing more to be said.

“If you like,” she said shyly, “I will pay you back in a poor counterfeit of your own coin. I will read to you, and you shall close your eyes and listen to the plash of the waves. That is one of my ideals of happiness.”

She took the book from the rock and began to read; but he did not close his eyes. Her

voice was not a remarkable one like his own ; but it was sympathetic, and her reading suggested much more than it expressed. He enjoyed listening to her, and he was interested in her choice of a poem ; but he liked best to watch her mobile, sensitive face.

“ One effort more, my altar this bleak sand ;
That Thou, O God, my life hast lighted,
With ray of light, steady, ineffable, vouchsafed of Thee,
Light rare, untellable, lighting the very light,
Beyond all signs, descriptions, languages,”—

She seemed to be repeating the words from memory, not reading them ; for her eyes were fixed on the hills beyond the sea, and her face was kindled for the moment into absolute beauty. Then, for the first time, a distinct thought passed through Dudley's mind that he would like the mother of his children to have a face like that.

“ She would make a man noble in spite of himself,” he thought ; but aloud he said—

“ You knew that poem ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ Did you know those I read ? ”

“ Not all of them. I knew *Vigil Strange* and *My Captain*.”

There was silence between them for a few moments.

“Have you the smallest idea,” he asked suddenly, “how you are throwing yourself away?”

She coloured, and was about to answer, but just then a gust of wind caught a page of her sketch-book, and blew it over.

She laughed, glad of an excuse for changing the subject.

“The Fates have apparently decreed,” she said, “that you are to see *this* sketch,” and she held it out to him.

It represented a red-cheeked, sonsy-faced girl, standing before a mirror, trying on a plain little bonnet. On all sides were suggestions of flowers and feathers, and brilliant millinery; and in the girl’s round eyes was an expression of positive horror.

Beneath the picture Mona had written, “Is life worth living?”

Dudley laughed.

“That looks as if there ought to be a story connected with it,” he said.

“Only a bit of one,” and she gave him a somewhat cynical account of her little scullery-maid.

“I withdraw my remark,” he said gravely. “You are not throwing yourself away. Would that we were all using ourselves to as much purpose!”

“Don’t make me feel myself more of a fool than I do already.”

“Fool! I was wishing there were a few more fools in the place to appreciate you — Ruskin for one!”

“I did try to comfort myself with recollections of Ruskin,” she said, with a suspicion of tears in her laughter; “but I could only think of the bit about the crossing-sweeper and the hat with the feather.”

He smiled. “You do Ruskin too much honour when you judge him by an isolated quotation,” he said. “I thought that distinction was reserved for the Bible.”

“But that is only the beginning of the story,” said Mona. “I have had several orders since for similar bonnets—more from the mothers than from the girls themselves, I am sorry to say,—and among them the one that suggested the sketch. Have you ever seen Colonel Lawrence’s quaint old housekeeper up at the wood?”

“Oh yes. Everybody knows the Colonel’s Jenny.”

“Her daughter went away to service some time ago, and came home to visit her mother the other day, with all her wages on her back, as Jenny expressed it,—such a poor, little, rosy-cheeked, tawdry bit of humanity! The mother marched her off to me in high dudgeon, and ordered a bonnet ‘like Polly’s at the Towers’; and that is exactly how the poor child looked when she tried it on. I could have found it in my heart to beg her off myself. Talk of breaking in a butterfly!”

“Yes,” he said. “One is inclined to think that human butterflies should be allowed to be butterflies — till one sees them too near the candle!”

“If we knew whether it were really worth while trying to save them,” said Mona, “I suppose we should indeed ‘know what God and man is’; as it is, we can only act on impulse. But this little Maggie does not belong to the most puzzling class. She is a good little thing, after all. I should not wonder if she had the germ of a soul stowed away somewhere.”

“She is a Maggie, is she?” he said, returning with a smile to the baby-face in the picture. “They are all Maggies here. One gets perfectly sick of the name.”

“Does one?” said Mona. “Queen Margaret is a heroine of mine, and my very own saint to boot.”

“Are you a Margaret?” he said. “You look like one. It is partly because the name is so beautiful that one resents that senseless ‘Maggie.’”

Mona was just going to say that with her it was only an unused second name; but his face had grown very grave again, and she did not wish to jar on his mood. How little we can tell in life what actions or omissions will throw their light or shadow over our whole future!

“What right have we,” he said musingly at last, “to say what is normal and what is not? How can we presume to make one ideal of virtue the standard for all? Look round the world boldly—not through the medium of tinted glass—and choose at random a dozen types. If there be a God at all, it is awful to think of His catholicity!”

Mona looked up with a smile.

“Forgive me, Miss Maclean,” he said. “I have no right to talk like that.”

“Why not? Is life never to be relieved by a strong picturesque statement? It takes a lot of conflicting utterances to make up a man’s *Credo*. When I want neat, little, compatible sentences, I resort to my cookery-book. Did you think,” she added mischievously, “that I would place you on a pedestal with Ruskin and my Bible, and judge you by an isolated quotation?”

He laughed, and then grew suddenly grave.

“Talking,” he said, “is *mein Verderben*. That is why I have chosen a profession that will give me no scope for it—not that I seem likely to make much of the profession, now that it is chosen! You see—my circumstances have been peculiar, and my education has been different in some respects from that of most men.” He hesitated, and then, without a word of introduction, urged by some irresistible impulse, he plunged into the story of his life. Perhaps he was anxious to see how it looked in the eyes of a capable woman; certainly he regarded Mona as a wholly exceptional being,

in his intercourse with whom he was bound by no ordinary rules.

“I left school when I was sixteen,” he said, “laden with prizes and medals and all that sort of thing. It was my misfortune, not my fault, that I had a good deal of money to spend on my education, and a free hand as to the spending of it. I am inclined sometimes to envy fellows whose parents leave them no voice in the matter at all.

“I went first to Edinburgh University for three years, and took my M.A. There are worse degrees in the world than an Edinburgh M.A. It means no culture, no University life, no rubbing up against one’s fellow-men; but it does mean a solid foundation of all-round, useful information, which no man need despise, and which is not heavy enough to extinguish the slumbering fires of genius should they chance to lie beneath. Of course, it is impossible to tell *a priori* what will prove an *education* to any man.

“When I left Edinburgh, I announced my intention of going to Cambridge. The classical professor wanted me to go in for the classical tripos, and the mathematical professor urged

me to stick to the ‘eternal,’ of which he believes mathematics to be the sole manifestation granted to erring humanity. But I was determined to have a go at Natural Science. There was a great deal of loose scientific talk in the air, and people seemed to make so much of a minimum of knowledge that I fancied three years of conscientious work would take a man straight in behind the veil. I went to work enthusiastically at first, while hope was strong, more quietly later when I realised that at most I might move back the veil an inch or two, while infinity lay behind; that humanity might possibly in three hundred years accomplish what I had hoped to do in three. Of course, I might have added my infinitesimal mite of labour and research, but I was not specially fitted for it. The difficulty all my life has been to find out what I was specially fitted for. However, I took my degree.”

“Tripos?” said Mona.

“Third Class,” he said contemptuously. “But I was not reading for a place. And, indeed, I grew more in those three years than in any other three of my life. Possibly it was the life at Cambridge. Possibly I might

have accomplished more on the plains of Thibet."

He drew a long breath. He had wellnigh forgotten who his companion was, and talked on to give vent to his feelings. After all, it mattered little if she missed a point here and there. She would grasp as much of the spirit of the story as most confessors do.

"Well, then, I travelled for a couple of years. I studied at Heidelberg, and Göttingen, and Jena. I heard good music nearly every night, and I saw all the cathedrals and picture-galleries. Then I came home, determined to choose a profession. I chose Medicine, mainly for the reason I gave you, and I studied in London for the examinations of the colleges. Why did I not choose the University? Would that I had! But you see I was past the age when boys 'get up' a subject with ease, and walk through brilliant examinations; and, moreover, in spite of a popular superstition to the contrary effect, two years of travel and art, and music and philosophy, do not tend to furbish up a man's mathematics and classics and natural science.

"Six months after I began to study I loathed

Medicine. To use a favourite expression here, it was neither fish, flesh, fowl, nor guid red herrin'. It was neither art, science, literature, nor philosophy. It was a hideous *pot-pourri* of all four, with a preponderating, overwhelming admixture of arrant humbug. Hitherto I had worked fairly well, but there had never been any moral value in my work. It was done *con amore*. Now that the *amor* failed, I scarcely worked at all. I suppose it was one of nature's revenges that, as I had gone into a profession because it demanded silent work, I talked more in those years than at any other period of my life. I read all things rather than medicine, I moved in any society rather than the medical world, but I rubbed along somehow. I passed my first examination by a fluke, and I passed the second likewise. I never was at a loss for a brilliant theory to account for erroneous facts, and with some examiners that goes a long way. When it came to preparing for my Final, I hated surgery because I had scamped my anatomy. Medicine might have shared the same fate, but I had done a good deal of physiology in Gaskell's laboratory at Cambridge — more than was

necessary, in fact—for the supposed connection between physiology and medicine is a purely fictitious one. The student has to take a header blindfold from the one to the other. It is almost incredible, but when I went up for my Final in due course, I did scrape through by the skin of my teeth. If ever any man got through those three examinations without a spill on the strength of less knowledge than I did, I should like to shake that man's hand. He deserves to be congratulated.

“The next thing was to look out for a practice, or a *locum tenency*; but, before doing so, I went down to Cambridge to visit some friends. While there I saw a good deal of M'Diarmid, the Professor of Anatomy. I don't know if you ever heard of him, but if ever a man made literal dry bones live, he does. Thoroughgoing to the soles of his boots—a monument of erudition—and yet with a mind open to fresh light as regards the minutest detail.”

Mona flushed crimson, but fortunately he was not looking. This was indeed approaching dangerous ground. She was strongly inclined to think that the professor in question was one

of “the potent, grave, and reverend signiors” in her sketch-book.

“It was so odd,” continued Dudley. “All my life, while other men walked in shadow, I had seemed to see the light of the eternal, but in medicine I had missed it absolutely. Ah, well! one word will do for a thousand. I am afraid I wrote my ‘Sorrows of Werther’ once more, for the last time in this world let us hope, and then I began all over again to work for a London degree.”

He stopped with an unpleasant sensation of self-consciousness. “And I wonder why I have inflicted all this on you,” he said, a little coldly.

“I think it was a grand thing to do—to begin over again,” said Mona. “You will make a magnificent doctor when you do take your degree, and none of those past years will be lost. You will be a famous professor yourself some day. How far have you got?”

“I passed the Matriculation almost immediately, and the Preliminary Scientific six months after. In July, I go in for my Intermediate, and two years later comes my Final. Once the Intermediate is over, a load will be

taken off my mind. It is all grist that comes to one's mill after that, but it requires a little resolution to plod along side by side with mere schoolboys, as most of the students are."

"It must be an excellent thing for the school-boys."

She was wishing with all her heart that she could tell him her story in return for his. Why had she made that absurd promise to Rachel? And what would Rachel think if she claimed permission to make an exception in Dr Dudley's favour? It was all too ridiculous, and when she began to think of it, she was inclined to wonder whether she really was the Mona Maclean who had studied Medicine in London.

"Why, it is after five," said Dudley suddenly, looking at his watch.

Mona sprang to her feet, and then remembered with relief that, as Rachel was going out to tea, she need not be punctual.

"But I ought to have been in time to prevent her wearing the scarlet cap," she thought with a pang of self-reproach.

"Shall you go on with your sketch tomorrow?" asked Dudley, as they walked up to the road.

“To-morrow? No; my cousin is going to take me to St Rules.”

“I thought Miss Simpson was your aunt?”

“No, she is my father’s cousin—one of the very few relatives I have.”

Dudley was relieved, he scarcely knew why.

“I might have known my old lady was not likely to know much about any one in the village,” he thought.

“Have you never been to St Rules?” he said aloud. “That is a treat in store. Almost every stone in it has a history. But I have an appointment with my aunt in Kirkstoun—I hate saying good-bye, don’t you?”

“I do.”

“I mean quite apart from the parting involved.”

“Oh, quite!”

He looked at her with curious eagerness, and then held out his hand. Apparently he had no objection to that.

“Well, so long!”

“*Sans adieu!*”

Mona sighed as she re-entered the dreary little sitting-room. However freely she might

let the breezes of heaven blow through the house in Rachel's absence, the rooms seemed to be as musty as ever five minutes after the windows had been shut.

The autumn evenings were growing chilly, but the white curtains, by the laws of the Medes and Persians, had to remain on duty a little longer; and great as was Mona's partiality for a good fire, the thermometer must have registered a very low figure indeed before she could have taken refuge in Sally's kitchen—at any other time than on Saturday afternoon, immediately after the weekly cleaning.

Tea was on the table. It had stood there since five o'clock.

Mona sighed again.

“If one divides servants,” she said, “into three classes—those who can be taught to obey orders in the spirit, those who can be taught to obey orders in the letter, and those who cannot be taught to obey orders at all—Sally is a bad second, with an occasional strong tendency to lapse into the third. I wish she had seen fit to lapse into the third to-night.”

She pushed aside the cold buttered toast, helped herself to overdrawn tea, and glanced

with a shiver at the shavings in the grate. In another moment her sorrows were forgotten. Leaning against the glass shade of the gilt clock on the mantelpiece, smiling at her across the room, stood a fair, fat, friendly budget in Lady Munro's handwriting.

“*Gaudeamus igitur!*” Mona seized the teacozy, tossed it up to the ceiling, and caught it again with an affectionate squeeze.

How delightful that the letter should come when she was alone! Now she could get the very maximum of enjoyment out of it. She stalked it stealthily, lest it should “vanish into thin air” before her eyes, took hold of it gingerly, examined the post-mark, smelt the faint perfume which, more than anything else, reminded her of the beautiful gracious woman in the rooms at Gloucester Place, and then opened the envelope carefully with her penknife.

She took out the contents, and arranged her three treasures on the table. Yes, there were three. They had all written. There was Sir Douglas's “My dear girl”; Lady Munro's “My darling Mona”; and Evelyn's “My very own dearest friend.”

They were not clever letters at all, but they

were affectionate and characteristic ; and Mona laughed and cried over them, as she sat curled up in the corner of the stiff unyielding sofa. Sir Douglas was bluff and fatherly, and to the point. Lady Munro underlined every word that she would have emphasised in speaking. "Douglas *was* so dull and so cross after we parted from you. In fact even now he is constantly talking of you—*constantly*." Evelyn gave a detailed circumstantial account of all they had done since Mona had left them,—an account interspersed with many protestations of affection. "Mother and I start for Cannes almost immediately," she wrote. "Of course Father cannot be induced to leave Scotland as long as there is a bird on the moors. Write me long letters as often as ever you can. You do write such lovely letters." All three reminded Mona repeatedly of her promise to spend the whole of next summer with them somewhere.

"How good they are!" Mona kept repeating. "How good they are!"

When Mona was young, like every well-conducted schoolgirl, she had formed passionate attachments, and had nearly broken her heart when "eternal friendships" failed. "I will

expect no friendship, no constancy in life,” she had said. “I will remember that here I have no continuing city—even in the hearts of the people I love. I will hold life and love with a loose grasp.”

And even now, when increasing years were making her more healthily human, true friendship and constancy had invariably called out a feeling of glad surprise. At every turn the world was proving kinder to her than she had dared to hope.

She was still deep in the letters when her cousin came home.

“Well,” said Rachel, “I’ve just heard a queer thing. You know the work I had last week, teaching Mrs Robertson the stitch for that tidy? Well, she had some friends in to tea last night, and she never asked me! Did you ever hear the like of that? She thinks she’s just going to get her use out of me!”

“I expect, dear,” said Mona, “that the stitch proved more than she could manage after all, and she was afraid to confess it.”

“Well, I never did know any one so slow at the crochet,” said Rachel, resentfully, releasing the wonderful red cap from its basket. “She

may look for some other body to help her the next time. But we'd better take our porridge and be off to our beds, if we're going to St Rules to-morrow."

Mona read her letters once more in her own room, and then another thought asserted itself unexpectedly.

"I wish with all my heart that I could have shown him the sketch-book, and made a clean breast of it," she said to her trusty friend in the glass; "and yet"—her attitude changed—"why should he stand on a different footing from everybody else?"

The face in the glass looked back defiantly, and did not seem prepared with any answer.

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