

ALFRED HAGART'S HOUSEHOLD

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ALFRED HAGART'S HOUSEHOLD.

CHAPTER I.

IN WHICH JACK STARTS FOR HAWKHEAD, AND
HAGART IMPROVES THE OCCASION.

SATURDAY morning came at last. One of those warm, bright, serene November days—like the mood of a cheerful old man, when the passions have worn themselves out like the grinders, and the cheerfulness is the cheerfulness of reminiscence, and the memory plays with good deeds and happy faces—one of those bright November days in which summer and winter are curiously mixed; bright, but with a touch of pensiveness in it, and in which everything reminding one of the past season should fitly come to a close—in which the last

withered leaf should fall to the ground, and the last hip—with its scarlet skin withered, seamed, and puckered like the face of an old weather-beaten tar—should be plucked by the chattering chaffinch from the hedge—a November day that made you pensive like itself, for it carried the imagination to the past and the future: to the summer that was gone, and to the summer that was coming: to the life that had been, and to the life that was at hand—that touched alike memory and hope.

In his little bedroom, Jack slept soundly enough, but about seven o'clock he awoke, when the daylight was stealing in on the window, and he could not help thinking that it was, perhaps, the last time he should sleep there. Meditating on his approaching removal to Hawkhead, he began to get excited somewhat; his thoughts darted about like a swift on the wing; now it was Katy he was thinking about, now his mother, now the little schoolmaster, but mainly Hawkhead—that great, unknown, wonderful city, of which, before the evening, he was to be a denizen.

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While all this thinking was going on, the window became pure white, and in a short time Martha tapped at the bedroom door. He got up, and saw his new clothes placed on a chair beside his bed. In a moment, in a more vivid manner, they brought all the new life before him. When these were donned the new life would have begun.

The breakfast of the Hagart household was quiet that morning. Hagart was more silent than was his wont. Jack and his mother crumbled only a bit of toast, and drank a cup of tea. When breakfast was over, Hagart, in a loud mock-cheery tone of voice, announced that it was time to go, and Mrs Hagart and Jack rose at once. "Martha," cried he, "you'll take the things to the canal-basin after we start. If you leave this in half-an-hour or so, you will be in plenty of time. Don't be late, mind, and be careful to place them in the charge of the boatman. Now then, be a brave fellow, John," he said, as he was pulling on his gloves, and pottering about in the oddest corners in search of his stick. "Come along,

come along," he cried, after he had secured the stick, and was standing outside the door, midway between it and the gate, while Mrs Hagart was hanging over the boy, kissing him and crying. "Bless me," he said, looking back with rather a forced laugh, "you don't look, Margaret, as if John were going to turn out a Lord Chancellor. Come along."

"Go, go, darling!" said Mrs Hagart, who was holding her son tightly, and kissing him all the time.

With a lump in his throat as big as an apple Jack got clear of the maternal embrace, and he had no sooner turned out of the gate, than the whizz of an old shoe—which up till now Martha had been keeping in hiding under her apron—came past his ear; and then the girl came running out to have a last look, uttering a sort of hysterical giggle, which was compounded of laughing and crying in pretty nearly equal proportions. Jack knew that his mother would be at the window as he had seen her once before, but he did not dare to look back.

In silence they marched along the road toward Greysley till they drew near the distilleries, and could hear the roar of the river as it tumbled over the rocks; silently they turned up the little footpath which led along the distilleries, and silently they emerged on the canal bank. Along the bank they had not proceeded far when Hagart began slackening his pace a little—

“And so, John, you are leaving your father’s house and going into the world to seek your fortune, like the young people in the story-books!”

“Yes,” said John, making a brave effort to swallow the apple in his throat, which seemed, however, to be getting bigger.

His father went on a few paces without speaking, “It’s just twenty-five years and a few months since I left *my* father’s house to seek my fortune. Twenty-five years ago, and a few months! I remember it as if it were yesterday. It was a summer morning, and my father walked with me, as I am walking now with you. He’s been dead these many years;



and perhaps the time will come, John, when you will walk with a son of your own, and say the same of me."

The apple was so big in the throat now that it brought the tears into the boy's eyes.

"My father's farmhouse," Hagart went on, "was at Old Rome Forest in Ayrshire,—where Burns lived when he was correcting the proof sheets for the Kilmarnock printing press,—and that morning I got up early and took farewell of everything. I saw the hares scudding across the dim fields; I went down to the river in which I used to fish, and stood on the bridge looking down into it, and saw the trout darting about; and I remember that, as I looked down, from behind me the first ray of the sun flashed into the water, and turned the pebbles at the bottom to amber and gold. I climbed to the top of Dundonald Castle, and saw Arran far away with a white cloud on it, and the sea, nearer me, sparkling as with a million of newly-minted silver pieces; and a belt of surf white as snow on the yellow Irvine sands,

white as snow to the eye, silent as snow to the ear. I went into the garden to have a last look of a thrush's nest, and the mother bird went off with a whirr that made my heart jump, and then I took out the warm eggs one by one, and put them back again. I was very sorry and happy that morning, John. I was going to London. I had dreamed of London before that. Its great roar filled my imagination. I thought of London when I read in my Bible on Sunday evenings about Babylon, Damascus, and Nineveh, and the great cities of old."

"Did you like living in London?"

"Of course! who that ever lived in London could endure to live anywhere else? The English air is softer and warmer than ours. The English earth is fatter, the English trees are taller and greener. The voices of the English women are sweeter and more silvery. England is to Scotland, John, what the rose is to the broom, or the nightingale to the linnet. Everything there is plenteous, gracious, and of



soft outline ; everything here is harsh, angular, and high-cheeked-boned. You must see London, my boy ! There is the carved Abbey filled with the dust of kings, statesmen, soldiers, and poets. There is St Paul's with its dome and cross of gold standing above the smoke. You must stand on the floor of St Paul's and see the great roof floating above you like heaven. From the river you must see the dome looming through the sunset. You must see the moon rising over it, as it rises over the shoulder of a mountain. But it's a dreadful city, too, John. It's a terrible city. For every one it smiles on, it breaks the hearts of a thousand. It's the brilliant candle that attracts the moths of the three kingdoms—I was attracted like the rest, and singed my wings."

"Then you did not get on in London?"

"Has the cab horse that was once entered for the Derby got on well? No, I did not succeed. I went there with a sketch of Britannia weeping over the body of Nelson, and that sketch is in one of my old portfolios. I

cannot bear to look at it. I tried art, and I was starved into pattern-drawing—I suppose from some inherent weakness—I was too diffident, I know. But *you* must succeed. I don't care about myself so long as you get on; and I think you have very good chances. I have often watched when I was young the waves coming on the Irvine sands. One comes and breaks, and dissipates itself a yard from your feet; a second and a third does the like; but the fourth, with higher crest and of greater volume, sweeps over all the others, and drenches you to the knee. I am one of the broken and dissipated ones; you are the fourth, I hope, and will reach success."

Here Jack, who was at that time crossing the bridge which carried the canal over the river, said that he would do everything he could to succeed. The engineering difficulty presented itself again to his mind, but he dismissed it summarily.

"To succeed, a man must have constancy as well as hope; he must have bottom as well as spirit. You have, I think, your mother's

nature as well as mine. I give you the big sails, and the sharp, clean-cut bows; she gives you the ballast in the hold, the helm, and the hand and eye at the helm. I am sure that you will succeed, and that I shall see you covered with honours before I die."

In a short time they came in sight of the castle on the hill, on the other side of the canal bank. Hagart took no notice of it, but for the moment it absorbed his son's attention to the exclusion of everything else. The trees around its base were bare now, but broken tower and loophole, and the ragged rents of ruin, were even more clearly defined against the soft sky than when he saw it previously. No birds were flying over and across it. The incidents of the day when he went there with his sister came back upon his memory. Katy was again walking by his side in her bonnet and cloak. He remembered how proud he had been as her guide. He remembered the pleased flush on her cheek, and the look of wonder in her eyes. He remembered that she had said she would always remain at home with her

mother, and that he had expressed a desire to see foreign countries, and to knock about in the world; and, thinking how she had gone to that most foreign country of all, and that he was on his road to Hawkhead, the lump rose in his throat again. His father had been talking all the while, but he had not heard a word he was saying.

“What are you thinking about, John. I don’t think you are listening to me?”

At this, Jack gave a little start, and the Greysleyan cemetery, to which imagination had wafted him, faded out of his mind. “I was thinking of Katy,” he said; “and of the day when we were here together—the day when we met Aunt Kate at the station-house.”

“Poor Katy!” and Hagart walked on for a little in silence. “The meeting your aunt,” he resumed, “one would have supposed was a mere nothing—but it was the beginning of fortune, John. Who could have thought it! Your namesake in the story-book, when he planted the bean, had no idea what would be the result of his planting. I hope the bean

you have planted will grow as well as the one in the story, and that you will find a castle, and carriages, and horses at the top of it."

"And a great wild giant, too, who would like to make his supper on Jack," cried the boy, looking up with a half smile.

"Not so bad at all! Very good, indeed! A very neat turn that!" cried the father, with a shining face. "In your progress through the world you should study the art of conversation. You will find it extremely useful. The man who can talk well has a great pull over the man who can't. The two may be equally rich, but the one can get his money out of his purse when required, whereas the other can't, and with the onlooker seeing is believing. In this, as in other matters, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Yes, a great wild giant, as you say, who keeps watch over the castle, and the carriages, and the horses, and would like to sup on all who come near. Now then, John, what would you call this great wild giant of yours?"

"I don't know."

“*I* would call him Diffidence! I had my chance once, too, of the castle and the carriages and the horses, but Diffidence ate me up. Don’t undervalue yourself, whatever you do. Better over-estimate your abilities than underestimate them. If you turn tail, the world runs after you and smites you hip and thigh. If you charge the world boldly, the chances are, *it* runs away and allows you to gather up the spoils at your leisure. It was Mr Great-heart, you remember, who led the pilgrims through all their troubles. You must be bold, John, and stout-hearted!”

“Yes,” said John.

“To-day is your start in life,” said Hagart, flowing on copiously. “You are like a newly-raised regiment that has taken the field, and whose flag is a plain unadorned sheet of silk. So act, my boy, that when the campaign is over, the maiden sheet, riddled and tattered by bullets—for it is certain to be *that*, mind—shall be heavy with the embroidery of victories—something to be proud of—like one of the banners hanging up in Westminster Abbey.”

Jack, rather frightened by the picture, remained silent. Hagart still flowed on.

“Your mother and your aunt are of opinion that you should, when your university course is finished, enter on the study of the law, and I am quite agreeable that you should do so. I looked into a biographical dictionary the other day, merely to satisfy myself, and was astonished to find how many of the higher offices of state are open to successful lawyers, and how many of the past and present occupants of those offices have been originally as poor as you are. It’s a fine thing to sit on the bench or the woolsack. Lots of poor Scotch boys have risen to distinguished eminence in their several walks of life. Resolve that you shall rise to eminence. Above all things, as I said before, beware of diffidence. That has been my greatest foe—who knows what I might have been to-day but for that! A man once owed me some money in London before I married. My debtor’s way to his office, and my way to the boarding-school where I taught the young ladies water-colours

—your mother was one of the number, John, and very beautiful she was then—crossed each other. Well, I was afraid to meet him, afraid that he would think, ‘Here comes that fellow Hagart, with his bill in his face;’ and so, to avoid him, I reached the school by the most circuitous routes: if I saw my man coming, I bolted down the next street, or plunged into an opportune entry, or fairly turned on my heel and fled. He was the only debtor I ever had, and I was afraid of him. Creditors don’t usually act in that manner—at all events, none of *my* creditors ever did. Of course I never got my money. Yes, John, beware of diffidence!”

By this time they had reached the station-house, and saw several intending passengers lounging about on the wooden wharf. Hagart took out his watch, and found that they had hit the time exactly. They sat down on a little bench, and in about ten minutes after the black caps and scarlet jackets of the outriders were seen at a turn above the leafless hedge, and the moment after the long white passage-boat came in sight.

"Now, then," said his father, rising, and placing his hand on Jack's shoulder, "you are going off at last. When you become a great man, John, you must not forget us, mind."

Jack's heart was in his mouth, and he could say nothing.

"I don't know that I shall ever get on with Miss Kate, or whether she would care for me coming to her house. Perhaps she wouldn't care to see me there. In any case, John, we must manage to meet and have a talk. You will see your mother in Hawkhead frequently, of course, and you will spend some of your holidays with us. Perhaps you could manage, say every third Saturday, when the weather is fine, to take the boat as far as this, and I'll come out from Greysley to meet you, and talk with you. I daresay every third Saturday or so I could take, or make, a holiday. I could talk more freely to you here than at home, or in Hawkhead, and you could take the return boat, you know."

Jack drew his hand swiftly across his eyes, and said he would come.

“Very well. I’ll write, and arrange for our meetings. The walk will do me good, at any rate, cooped up as I am just now. I have not stretched my legs till to-day since I came back from Spiggleton. Now we must get you your seat, and look after your things.”

By this time the horses and their riders had drawn up a little beyond the station-house—but Jack had no interest in them to-day, he did not even notice whether they were his favourites, Smiler and Paddy-from-Cork. And the passage-boat came along the wharf with a bump. A seat was procured for Jack—his parcels were placed beside him. “Now, be careful when you arrive, and don’t get out till you see Miss Kate’s maid. You have seen her before ; will you recognise her?”

“Oh yes, I saw her once before.”

“Well, then, you are off now,” said Hagart, as he stepped out on the wharf. “God bless you, and hold you in His keeping! Be sure to write; and if you think of coming this length on a Saturday, let me know, and I’ll meet you.”

Jack tried to say something, but the words would not come. Meanwhile the riders cracked their whips, Smiler and Paddy-from-Cork started at a brisk trot, and the passage-boat glided away with a rippling sound from the wharf. Hagart looked after it till it reached the first bend, about a hundred yards beyond. The boat would be invisible in a few moments, so he took off his hat and waved a farewell, and Jack's eyes were so thick with tears, that it is very doubtful whether he saw the hat waving.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH JACK ARRIVES AT HAWKHEAD.

IT must be confessed that Jack felt very downhearted when, looking from the window of the passage-boat, the bend of the canal shut out his father's waving hat from his view. He was beset with a mighty feeling of loneliness; he felt cut away from all his former moorings,—and thinking of his father's lonely walk homewards, of the bare leafless cemetery at Greysley, of the dull day that his mother and Martha would endure on account of his absence, he secretly wiped away certain tears with his brand new cambric handkerchief. The apple had been big in his throat as he walked with his father along the canal bank, but now it was bigger and more intolerable than ever. But although grief is sharpest in youth, youth has a marvellous

power of recovering from it. Gradually the boy was weaned from his sorrow by the strange hedges, eminences, bridges, and, where the banks were high, by the far outlooks into the level country. The sorrow died away, and he began to taste the pleasure which was hidden in the feeling of strangeness. Then the talk of the passengers got into his ears, and began to interest him more than even the landscape flitting past. When the passage-boat had proceeded about a mile beyond the station-house, the apple had died as entirely out of his throat as if it had never been there, and he was able to turn from the window and take note of what was going on around him.

The passage-boat was long and narrow, its roof was arched, and covered with white canvas, and on either side a seat ran from end to end for the accommodation of passengers. On the present occasion the boat was more than two-thirds filled, and as its progress through the canal was perfectly silent, Jack could hear all that was going on. Near him sat a couple of Greysleyan weavers—he knew they belonged

to that honourable profession by the bundles of yarn wrapped up in red cotton handkerchiefs which they nursed on their knees before them—and these worthies, after discussing the merits of that distinguished friend of the people and hater of potatoes, the late Mr Cobbett, and agreeing that the British Sovereign and the British House of Peers were anachronisms in a free country, and should be abolished forthwith, and Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* substituted in their stead, became inextricably involved in political discussion. This was always the case when Greysleyan weavers met at the period of my story. They were staunch Radicals before Messrs Cobden and Bright and the Corn Law League had been heard of. Each weaver was a reformer, a political economist, a far-seeing politician, perfectly capable of showing the Premier the way to save the nation any day of the week, if the Premier would only take the trouble to consult him, which, unhappily for the present generation, the Premier never did. Right opposite, a middle-aged man, who wore a Waterloo medal on his breast, was talking



earnestly to his neighbour. The discourse was of battle, and Jack pricked his ears at once. Thanks to his father, he was familiar with all the battles and sieges of the great war which closed on the memorable eighteenth of June—the forlorn hope at Badajos, Soult's masterly manœuvre at Albuera which necessitated a change of front on the part of Marshal Beresford, the retreat to Torres Vedras and Massena's close pursuit, the fatal extension of Marmont's line at Salamanca—as Sir Archibald Alison himself. “An’ hoo did ye feel at Quarter Braw,” asked the soldier's companion, “when ye saw the Keerassers comin’ doon on ye? The noise of their galloping horses, an’ the shinin’ o’ their swords and breastplates maun hae been awfu’!” “To tell the truth,” said the soldier, “I felt very shaky. I began to think o’ my mother and sister at hame—I could see them plain enough, the one peelin’ potatoes, the other sweeping the floor, and the scarlet ridders outside shinin’ in at the window, an’ my gun began to shake in my hauns like that”—here he lifted his stick and made a tremulous

motion with it—"but the feelin' went off the moment the firing began. The first volley steadies yer nerves, just as a dram steadies them the mornin' after ye hae been fou." "Ay, man!" said the other, in an admiring tone; he was evidently acquainted with the beneficent effect of a dram in the circumstances alluded to. A passenger near spoke of New York, in which city he stated he had lived for several years—and he made the statement, too, in the quietest way, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world for a man to leave Britain, live in New York for a couple of years, and come back again! I think the far-travelled man interested Jack more than the political weavers beside him, or the soldier sitting opposite. He regarded him with a certain feeling of awe, and felt disappointed almost that there was nothing in his look which distinguished him from ordinary mortals. All this talk, the appearance of the different passengers, kept Jack's attention alive, and the time slipped past rapidly; and before he knew where he was, the long white passage-boat glided

into a wide basin, and gradually came to a stop alongside the stone pier. He got to his feet, while the thought, "This is Hawkhead at last," came upon him with a sort of shock. Then, remembering his father's parting injunction, he looked out of the window, and to his comfort beheld Ann waiting. So far everything had gone well with him, and the next thing to be done was to secure his luggage.

Amongst the last of the passengers, he stepped out on the stone pier with his parcels, where he was by Ann very heartily greeted. A porter was then secured, the parcels given into his charge, and then the two, the porter walking behind, passed out from the canal-basin and turned into a street, in which Jack noticed a large church in process of erection, a mighty maze of scaffolding around the spire, almost dizzying to look up to. Although this was by no means one of the busy thoroughfares of Hawkhead, the noise and bustle were sufficient to impress the boy. As they passed along, the noise increased; Jack had never seen so many people and so many vehicles

in his life. The sudden din, the general haste and eagerness, stunned and bewildered him. Crossing the broad bridge which spanned the river—the causeway a roaring mob of carts and carriages, passengers jostling each other on the pavements—he saw far-extended quays and forests of masts beneath, and asked a question of his conductress, but his voice was lost in the turmoil. Hawkhead Jack had dreamt of often, but his dreams had been of glitter and external splendour—not of the crush and tumult of human beings. Life in Greysley was like the splash of a summer lake—life in Hawkhead had all the energy and thunder of a roller from the Atlantic. After a while they escaped from the multitude of shops, the din of wheels and horses, the pressure of intent crowds, and gained the region of residences, of streets quiet, formal, and sedate. Here Jack found his voice again, and made good use of it in catechising Ann on every topic which the turbulence of Hawkhead had started in his mind. “Now then,” said Ann, “we turn up the next street to the right, and

then we are at home." Jack was impatient to reach the corner, and when he did reach it, there was the place at last in which his future life was to be led! The street was an eligible street enough—a highly respectable street—a street decidedly well-to-do in the world; a street which dined and dressed well, and went decorously to church on Sundays. But it was not in the least a beautiful street—on the contrary, it was a street staid and grave, heavy and frowning, stony and cold. Everything was as square and formal as line and plummet could make it. Nowhere could you trace any freak, or vagary, or touch of individual character. There was a dead set and resolved respectability about the street; the houses on the one side glared sternly on the houses opposite, and mutual petrification was the result. If a new pattern of window had crept into the street, it would have been put out of countenance by all the other windows. If a street door of another hue than a dingy olive had appeared in it, all the other dingy olive street doors would have been down on it at

once. My young gentleman was a good deal disheartened and appalled when he glanced along; and he thought regretfully for a moment of his father's house at Greysley, its suburban ease and air, and careless disregard of appearances, its country outlook of hills, and trees, and hedges. At Greysley one could do as one pleased. From Miss Kate's street there breathed a stern sense of duty, a resolved constraint, a determination to be dignified or to die in the attempt.

Jack had, as yet, no great experience of Mortimer Street—such being the name of the street in which Miss Catherine M'Quarrie lived, as the world was duly informed in the Hawkhead Post-Office Directory—seeing that he had merely turned into it, and had trodden its pavements for twenty yards or so,—but such was the impression it made upon him, if at the moment he could have put that impression into words. Meanwhile, Ann had stopped, and rung the bell of one of the houses, and of course Jack and the porter stopped too, the latter unslinging the luggage from

his back, and laying it down on the pavement.

Now that the boy had fairly arrived, he began to feel nervous, and his heart to thump in his breast in an alarming manner. He was curiously counting these thumps when the door opened, and entering, there was Miss Kate standing in the lobby, the light from the cupola in the roof falling upon her figure. He noticed only at the moment that she was dressed in the same manner as when he had seen her last in his father's house. Miss Kate came forward at once, and kissed him on the forehead—Jack was so fluttered that he did not know whether the salute was cold or warm, cordial or freezing,—and made the ordinary inquiries concerning the Greysleyan household. She then whipped out her purse, advancing to the open door, where the porter was standing with his hat off, learned his fare, paid, and dismissed him. “Now,” she said, addressing the maid-servant who had opened the door, “you and Ann will take Mr Hagart's luggage up to his bedroom. You had better go along

with them, John, and wash your hands and face—it will refresh you after your journey. You can then come down to me. Dinner will be served an hour earlier to-day, and I dare say you are hungry.”

Jack was conducted by the maids to his bedroom at the top of the house, and left there. It was a small and tidy apartment; the floor was covered with a carpet which had once adorned a room of larger dimensions, and which in its old age had been cut down to suit; there was a small white bed near the door; and the room contained, besides, a chest of drawers made of polished birch wood, a washhand-stand, and some three or four chairs. Jack took in the entire furniture at a glance. He performed his ablutions, put his hair carefully to rights, and wondered if any one would come to the door and call him. To kill the time, he looked out of the window, and saw in the fading light of the winter afternoon, a far-stretching wilderness of streets, dim and dingy, as if washed in with China ink. He then opened the door softly, and listened; but hear-

ing no one on the stairs, he closed it again. The little bedroom in which he had remained ten minutes or so had acquired something of a homely and a friendly look, and he still hesitated there, unwilling to adventure into the unknown regions of Miss Kate M'Quarrie's dwelling.

He had stood, perhaps, for five minutes with his hand on the open bedroom door, when he suddenly heard a footstep on the carpeted stair. Plucking up heart-of-grace, he descended, and encountered Ann on his way. "Miss M'Quarrie will see you in her own room. I was coming for you." And so they went down together. Ann tapped at the door: a voice said, "Come in," and Jack entered.

Miss M'Quarrie was sitting up near the window, where the wintry light was strongest. "I hope you found your room comfortable, and everything nice?"

Jack, in a somewhat inaudible and incoherent manner, expressed his approval of the arrangements made for him, and hesitated about the middle of the room. If the truth

were told, his instinct was to have dropped into a chair near the door.

"Come up here," said the old lady.

Jack advanced to the window; and when he got there, Miss Kate rose, placed her hands on his shoulders, and began to peruse his face as she had perused Katy's on the canal bank. Jack caught the eye bent upon him, and began to tremble almost under the inquisition.

"The eye is the eye of his grandfather, but the mouth is the mouth of Hagart," said Miss Kate, unconsciously speaking to herself, and paraphrasing the words of Isaac. "How the dead look out on us through the windows of a living face. Don't be afraid, John," she went on, as she still gazed on him; "you can't understand me yet, nor is it to be expected that you should. You and your mother are the only things which have been saved to me from the shipwreck of the past. Don't you think me a terrible old woman, John? Aren't you a little afraid of me? Do you think you will ever be able to like me?" and here the light of a smile came into Miss Kate's eyes.

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The smile relieved Jack immensely, but withal he was unable to articulate a syllable.

"You are thinking, I daresay, that you never will," said Miss Kate, with her withered and heavily-ringed hand still on the boy's shoulder; "but I don't expect that you will like me yet. Liking would be worth little, if it could be got so cheaply. Time will do much for both of us. Now, John, sit down."

John sat down, as he was bid.

"And so," she went on in her every-day tone and manner, "as we have entered into partnership, I'll tell you what I am about to do, and to which I have your mother's consent. On Monday you are to join the High School here, and if you are moderately diligent, you will be able to enter the Hawkhead University in three years from this. Should you like to enter the University?"

"I should like it very much," said Jack.

"Well, you shall enter it, then. You are to live with me, and I'll make you as happy as I can. You can spend your holidays at home, you know, and you will see your

mother here at times. If you should ever come to like me, you must not like her less, or value her less; and I am sure you never will. I don't think you should keep any secrets from me. Should you ever want anything, let me know at once. Should you ever fall into a scrape, let me know all about it frankly; I can forgive anything but selfishness, cowardice, and evasions of the truth. Keep your own place always. Should a schoolfellow ever insult you, knock him down if you can; and if you can't, hit your hardest—that was the way the men of my time acted, and one of them, at least, was nobler than any man of this. I am not afraid of torn clothes and a bloody face, John—a needle and thread, a sponge, and a basin of cold water put these things to rights; but a lie, or a cowardly action, you cannot so wash away; it remains, and eats into the nature as a canker eats into a fruit. I don't wish you to be quarrelsome—I wish you always to stand up for yourself."

Jack remembered that on the occasion of his combat with Thomson at the school in

Greysley, his mother had read him a similar homily. He was cudgelling his brains for some proper words of reply, when Ann, opening the door, announced that dinner was on the table.

“And I am sure our traveller is very hungry,” said Miss Kate. “Give me your arm, John. Gentlemen should always be attentive to ladies, you know.” And so Jack, with Miss Kate on his arm, marched out of the twilight sitting-room and entered the dining-room, which was in a full blaze of light.

The dining-room into which Jack walked with Miss Kate was the largest, as well as the best furnished, which he had ever seen, and he could not help contrasting it with the little sitting-room at home,—with the shells, and the rejected patterns made into gaudy cylinders, and the dusty peacock's feathers on the mantelpiece, and his father's three water-colour sketches on the walls. Everything at Mortimer Street seemed comfortable in the highest degree; the easy-tempered door did not creak on its hinges, between

him and the door there was a screen to prevent draughts, and the foot of the trim maid, as she brought in or removed dishes, was noiseless on the carpet. He observed, also, that there were portraits on the walls—military men, for the most part, with high-collared scarlet coats, which made them look as if nature had forgotten to provide them with necks, and with the most wonderful ruffles on their shirt-fronts, which made their breasts stick out as if they had been the breasts of pouter pigeons. In the intervals of dinner Jack marvelled much who these remarkable personages might be.

One of the portraits began to attract his attention mightily. It was a military gentleman standing with his arm stretched out in an attitude of command, and in the middle distance were elephants, and on the horizon palms and pagodas. This soldier had a stern, rocky countenance, and a quick eye, which seemed to concern itself in the strangest way with Jack's proceedings. He caught the eye bent upon him while he was engaged with the soup, and for a moment the spoon stopped half way.

The portrait took note of the mutton he devoured ; and when he looked up towards Miss Kate—a half-glassful of sherry in his hand, which the maid had poured out—with a dim idea that some little act of politeness was expected of him,—a bow at least, perhaps,—the eye of the portrait fairly arrested his and fixed it there.

“ Why do you look at that picture so ? ” said Miss Kate.

“ I don't know ; I suppose because the picture is looking at me.”

“ That was your granduncle John, General M'Quarrie, long the governor of Ceylon. He was my father's elder brother, and to him the General left the whole of his fortune. When my father died, the money was divided between my brother Hector and myself. Your mother got none of it, but she got—Hagart. The old General's money has been well kept by me—almost as well as if he had kept it himself. It has paid for the dinner you are eating, and the wine you are holding in your hand.”

“ And he looks as if he knew it did,” thought

Jack, as he put the wine to his lips in defiance of the watchful portrait.

"Did your mother ever tell you about your Uncle Hector?"

"I have heard her mention his name, but not often. He is a farmer in the Hebrides somewhere, is he not?"

"Yes, and a prosperous farmer too. A sort of Abraham, rich in flocks and herds. I don't see him often. His wife has been dead for some years. He has two daughters—Maggy, the younger, as sleek and gentle and pleased at being fondled as a pet rabbit. Oona, the elder girl, has quick eyes and black curling hair. You can comb out her locks to her waist, and released they spring back to her neck again like coils of steel—a high-spirited girl, but the world will break and tame her."

And so about all the portraits Miss Kate chatted to her new friend; and when dinner was over she took her customary nap in her easy-chair beside the fire, while Jack sat opposite with a book, glancing now at his aunt's sleeping face, now at the portraits; but for

the most part staring in the fire, and thinking of the strange day he had spent, and wondering what they were all doing at home in Greysley.

Miss Kate awoke when tea was being placed on the table; and after tea was over she produced a curious old marqueterie-box, around which lingered a foreign odour. This box she opened with a small silver key, and producing several miniatures, laid them on the table. "Look at these, John. This is the General—at whom you stared so much during dinner—when he was a young man. It was painted in London, when he went there to join his regiment."

"What strange dresses people wore in those days."

"That is just what people will say seventy years after this, when they look on the pictures of the men and women that are being painted now. Isn't he blooming and handsome! You see the difference between this and the portrait on the wall. That's what time and care, and battle and climate do."

Jack said there was a great difference indeed.

Miss Kate laid down the General's miniature and took up another. She looked at it for a little, and then laying her hand on the boy's head, bade him turn round full to the light. He did so, and Miss Kate looked at him and at the miniature she held in her hand alternately. "This is a picture of your grandfather," she said, at length, "and I think I can trace in you something of the family features. You have something of his trick of eye, and his build of forehead, and sometimes when the light falls on your half-face you put me in mind of him. The other portions of your face are not so like. Your father has given you his mouth, and your mother her smile. It's the M'Quarrie part of you that I like best."

"But," said Jack, "although I am like the M'Quarries I am still a Hagart," and there was just the slightest tinge of colour on his face when he said so.

Jack felt Miss Kate's eye go into him like a pin, but the next moment she laughed. "Wife and son are alike, I think. They think I wish to meddle with the man. This is your grand-



father's portrait. See if you can pick anything of yourself out of it."

When Jack was busily examining the picture, Miss Kate had lifted a third out of the box. "What do you think of this?" and she laid it down on the table before him.

It was the portrait of a girl in a strange fashion of dress, with an incomprehensible waist, and with gloves drawn up almost to her elbows. The face was beautiful—soft and round, with dimples and smiling eyes. A large comb was stuck in the back hair, and brown locks were clustering about the temples. This miniature was more attractive than all the others, and Jack gazed upon it with a feeling of pleasure.

"That's me," said Miss Kate.

"This!" and Jack looked up quickly.

"Yes! You can't believe I ever looked like that, can you? And here I am again."

The miniature this time represented a woman in a hat and a scarlet riding-jacket. The face was comely enough, but all the smiling vivacity and girlish grace had gone out of it. Jack

looked at both for a little while, and then, holding up the last, said in a hesitating tone of voice, "I think this one resembles you most."

"I daresay you do. The first is the portrait of Miss Catherine M'Quarrie dressed for her first ball. The second is Captain Kate, with more serious matters than balls to think about."

"But why Captain Kate?"

"That was the name people gave me in the Highlands—behind my back though—they took good care of that. You see I am painted in a scarlet jacket. When they were raising the Fencible Regiments to fight the French, I donned the king's colours, and rode about the country getting recruits. No sergeant at a fair with plenty of money to spend on drink, and knots of ribbons streaming from his hat, brought in such lots of men to head-quarters as I did. Captain Kate! Not a bad name for me many people think, I daresay."

Miss Kate then gathered up the miniatures and locked them in the marqueterie-box with the foreign odour. She then went into an ebony cabinet which stood in one corner of the



room, and from a drawer therein took out a small old-fashioned French watch, with a black ribbon attached. "This is for you, John," she said, as she placed the ribbon round his neck. "It is stopped at present, but we will have it put to rights next week. It belonged to your grandfather, and I hope it will beat against a heart as true."

"But how can I thank you?" said the boy, his face in a flood of pleasurable colour.

"Don't thank me at all. I don't like being thanked. You cannot take it more willingly than I give it. And now I had better ring for the bedroom candles. You must be tired. I suppose your mother taught you to say your prayers?"

"Yes," said John.

"Very well, then. Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

When Jack got up to his own room he stood admiring his watch for a long while, and thought he had never seen anything so pretty. He then put it under his pillow and began slowly to undress. When he had got half

through that operation, he sat down on a chair. He had left Greysley that morning, and he thought it wonderful at what a distance it seemed now. He had met Aunt Kate, and found the meeting not nearly so formidable a matter as he had expected. He then went to bed and fell asleep thinking of his mother; and towards morning—Miss Kate's genealogical talk still working in his brain—he dreamed that there was a great pyramid of M'Quarries—Governors of Ceylon, sheep-farmers, and what not—and that he was the stone newly laid on the very top of the M'Quarrie pyramid which made the pyramid complete.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH JACK HAS AN INTERVIEW WITH HIS FATHER.

IN the delicious, because stolen, conversations which took place between Miss M'Quarrie's maids and the maids of the immediate houses right and left, when the door brasses were being scoured of a morning, or when they crossed each other going messages during the day, or, when tidied up, they gossiped in each other's kitchens for an hour in the evenings when work was over—on such occasions Miss M'Quarrie's maids were wont to aver that the arrival of John Hagart was the greatest blessing that had ever befallen them. They stated that he gave them no additional trouble worth speaking about, and that since his coming the temper of their mistress had improved amazingly. She would flame out, of course, if the boy's breakfast

was not placed on the table at the very stroke of the clock ; if the boy's boots were not polished to the requisite degree of brilliancy, she would hold a household court-martial, and administer sharp rebuke right and left ; but, as far as regarded herself, she was unusually meek and forbearing. The maids, of course, were quick enough to see how the land lay. They served Jack assiduously, taking proper care the while that that zeal and assiduity should be brought under the observation of their mistress. They were in no wise inclined to hide their lights of attention under a bushel, when the exhibition of the said lights was likely to be beneficial. Jack had ameliorated the condition of Miss M'Quarrie's maids, and to that young gentleman Miss M'Quarrie's maids were very properly grateful.

Meanwhile, Jack had become familiar with his new life. On the Monday after his arrival he had been entered at the Hawkhead High School, and being ambitious, and not deficient in natural parts, he contrived to obtain and keep a rather distinguished place in the classes



there. He always dined with his aunt, who had changed the hour of dinner to suit his return from school; and after his lessons were prepared, it was his custom to go into her sitting-room, where she was always ready to chat with him. During the winter his mother had come into Hawkhead once or twice; had expressed delight at Jack's improved appearance; had dined and drunk tea with him and her sister; had stolen up to his room after Miss Kate had gone to bed, to sit there till all hours of the morning talking of household matters in Greysley and his now brilliant prospects. These visits were extremely pleasant to Jack; and although in the main happy enough, he looked forward to them as the pilgrim trudging across the desert sand looks forward to the next oasis on his route. During three months he had not seen his father, nor had he had any direct communication from him relative to meetings by the canal bank or elsewhere, and at this Jack was not astonished. He heard of his father's welfare every time his mother called, and he knew that inclination was not at fault

—that a pressure of work at Wedderburn Brothers and the bitter weather deterred him.

April came at length, with fair mackerel morning skies over Hawkhead, with lengthened light and prettier sunsets; and on a certain Thursday morning in that month, while Jack was dressing, Ann tapped at the door and presented him with a letter. At the moment, he had a dim idea that the handwriting was familiar; but it was a dim idea merely. Meanwhile he stared on the address.

“To

JOHN HAGART, Esq.,

Care of Miss Catherine M'Quarrie,

47 Mortimer Street,

Hawkhead.”

There it stood, clearly enough. The receipt of the first letter is an event in a boy's life. First of all, he draws a feeling of importance from the fact that some one has been at the trouble of writing to him; secondly, there is the odd feeling with which he sees his own name written for the first time by a strange hand. He sees the name which he has always

regarded as an integral portion of himself, removed to a distance from himself, and staring on him from a strange cover. It is like meeting one's own ghost. Hitherto the boy has been a shadowless being, but with the receipt of the first letter, the shadow, which will never thereafter leave him, comes to him and clings. "John Hagart, Esq." There it stood plainly enough on the envelope, and very wonderful it seemed to Jack as he stood gazing on it in his own room, with his jacket lying on a chair at hand. "'John Hagart, Esq.'; that's *me*," Jack murmured to himself as he turned it over and broke open the seal. The letter, as he half expected, was from his father, and ran as follows :—

"WEDDERBURN BROTHERS', *Wednesday*.

"MY DEAR JOHN,—We promised to meet, you remember, at the station-house every third Saturday, if the weather was fine. Hitherto the weather and other matters have prevented us from keeping our tryst. I have heard of you and all your doings from your mother.

On Saturday I shall be at the station-house in time for the passage-boat. Come out with it. I have a great scheme to speak to you about, which I trust you will approve. You will be able to get back by the return boat. Be sure and come.

“A blackbird has built in the holly in the garden, and the first egg was laid this morning.—Your affectionate father,

“ALFRED HAGART.

“To John Hagart, Esq.

“*P.S.*—Don’t let any one know of the scheme meanwhile.”

Jack read over the letter at least a dozen times, and with every reading it puzzled him more and more. What could his father’s wonderful scheme be? Why should he be enjoined to silence relative to this scheme, seeing that he was utterly ignorant of its nature? Why, of all persons in the world, should his father speak to *him* about it? Why not speak to his mother, for instance? He was in grievous bewilderment, and in that bewil-

derment he thrust the letter into his pocket, put on his jacket, and went down to breakfast.

When he got down, Miss Kate, who was at the breakfast table, looked up quickly.

"You have had a letter, John?" she said.

"Yes, aunt; a letter from home."

"I trust it brings no bad news?"

"N—no," said Jack, with a trifle of hesitation in his voice. "When I left home my father wished me sometimes on a Saturday to go out with the passage-boat as far as the station-house,—where Katy and I met you, you know,—so that we might have a talk. I was to have written, mentioning on what Saturday I would go; but I have not yet done so. The letter this morning wishes me to go out on Saturday next—to go by the boat from Hawkhead, and to return with the boat from Greysley."

"But if your father wishes to see you, why can't he come here?"

"I don't know. I rather think he doesn't like."

"Doesn't like! Why doesn't he like? Is the man afraid I am going to eat him?"

At this point the young gentleman thought it prudent to confine his attention to his egg and toast.

"I think it would be far better if your father came here."

"I daresay he will come after a little while. He is very shy, and doesn't quite like yet. But do you object to me going out to the station-house on Saturday, aunt?"

"Object! Heaven forbid! Why should I object to any wish of Hagart's? If I did, I should have your mother about my ears like a nest of hornets. No, no! go to the station-house on Saturday, if you like, John; and Ann will wait for you on your return."

Miss Kate said nothing more that day at breakfast, and so Jack went off to school highly pleased that he had secured his aunt's consent, although that consent had been accorded with an evident grudge.

Saturday was a brilliant day; and as the long white passage-boat slipped silently through the canal, the soft wind shook the trees on either bank, and every field of braided

wheat sent up its score or so of larks. Through the soft beat of horses' hoofs ahead, and the gentle swish of water at the bows, the larks could be heard distinctly. There were few passengers; there was no talk to absorb attention, and so Jack knelt on the seat, and with his face pressed against the windows, saw bridges, and ploughed fields with solemn rooks stalking in the wake of the harrow, and beech hedges, in which the green of the present spring strove with the russets of last autumn, flitting rapidly past. He knew he was near the station-house, and then all at once there was his father on the canal bank—seen but for a moment, yet for a space long enough to allow Jack to wave his hand, and Hagart to lift his stick in recognition. And then the passage-boat slowed, then it bumped once or twice against the wooden wharf, and when Jack stepped out, there was his father walking rapidly back towards the station-house.

At the station-house the arrival of the passage-boat always created some little stir. A passenger or two generally left the boat

—

there; two or three passengers were almost always in waiting, and then there were parcels to deliver and parcels to receive. On the present Saturday, however, there was less bustle than usual, and by the time that Hagart, his eyes sparkling with delight, had possessed himself of Jack's hand and was shaking it eagerly, the station-house master and his assistant had gone in, and the passage-boat—after the horses had a drink and the remainder of the pailful of water thrown on their fetlocks—was on its way to Greysley.

“Bless me, how much you have grown,” said Hagart. “Your mother has been quite lyrical of late about your improved appearance, and she has had better reason for her delight than I could possibly have believed. And you are going to be a strong fellow, too.” Here Hagart gripped Jack by the arm, and began to feel the sinew. “A fellow of your bone and thew would be better engaged wielding the axe of the backwoodsman than the pen of the lawyer. There is room for another Cortez yet in the world.”

Jack and his father were now walking slowly along the bank, the father's hand still upon the boy's shoulder.

"There must have been a period in my life when I was exactly the age that you at present are—exactly, to the flight of a moment and the beat of a pulse. I should like to know what I was about when I had breathed the precise number of years, months, weeks, hours, minutes, moments, that you have now breathed. Wouldn't it be strange to find out that?"

"What if you should find that you were sound asleep in bed?" said Jack, who, knowing that there was serious matter ahead, thought this kind of talk somewhat wild and fruitless. "I think Miss M'Quarrie was vexed that you did not come into Hawkhead and see me in her own house," he said.

"I can't do that, John; I can't. She knows I am poor, and she despises me for my poverty. If I met her, she would receive me with all the forms of civility; but all the while she would be thinking in her heart how much bigger her purse is than mine, and how much purer her

blood. Blood! Birth! I daresay, if the truth were known, my blood has come to me from Adam through as reputable veins as her own. It has coursed on its way through cleverer brains, I know."

"I don't think, father, that Miss M'Quarrie thinks anything of the kind," remonstrated Jack. "She has always been kind to me."

"Yes, but then you are half M'Quarrie, whereas I am pure Hagart—that makes a great difference. A little of the M'Quarrie leavens the whole Hagart lump, and makes it palatable to Miss Kate. But we need not talk of Miss M'Quarrie just at present, as we have more important matters to discuss. Suppose we sit down here and have it out." And so they sat down on the canal bank, on which the April sun was shining pleasantly.

"Now, John," said Hagart, very gravely, after they had seated themselves, "I wish you to give the proposal I am about to make your most serious consideration. You will see that if carried into execution, it will affect you as well as myself. I think in all matters of this

kind it is best to begin at the beginning, and, so far as possible, to go by documents."

Here Hagart produced a black pocket-book, which he opened with much deliberation, and after taking out a letter, he handed it to his son. "Read that," he said.

Jack opened the note, and read—

"GREYSLEY, *April* 15.

"DEAR SIR, — Your industry, talent, and taste have, during the comparatively short period you have been in our employment, given us much satisfaction. We have, therefore, pleasure in informing you that we are in a position to increase your salary one hundred pounds per annum — said augmentation of salary to date from the beginning of the present month,—Yours truly,

"WEDDERBURN BROTHERS.

"A. Hagart, Esq."

"Capital! first-rate!" cried Jack, who knew perfectly well what an additional hundred pounds a year meant. "This is the best news I have heard for a long while."

But lifting a deprecating hand, Hagart checked his son's enthusiasm. "I am cursed with an eye, John. I can see through professions. I can penetrate subterfuges. I can anatomise motives. I always look my gift horse in the mouth, and I always find it a miserable screw. I have done the Wedderburn Brothers yeoman's service. The designs I have produced—well, I shan't say anything about them, but *they* know their worth. They know, too, that trade will be brisker than it has been for years, and they wish to be perfectly prepared. When the British Government resolved to drive Napoleon out of Spain, they took care to have Sir Arthur Wellesley there. That is the reason they have increased my salary. I am given to understand that several Greysleyan houses have an eye on me, and are prepared to offer me more than even the Wedderburn Brothers."

"But here are the hundred pounds actually given you, whereas you only believe that other houses are prepared to offer you as much. Wedderburn Brothers have been very kind,



and I would rather have an additional hundred pounds from them, than an additional hundred and fifty from anybody else."

"But what would you say if I declined both? If I threw up all engagements, and became a free man once more? What would you say to that?"

"I think you would be acting very foolishly," said Jack, without a moment's hesitation.

"Whether such a course of proceeding would be foolish or not is the precise question I wish you to consider. And before you can consider it, it will be necessary for me to produce Document No. 2."

Hagart dived into the recesses of his pocket-book, and brought out a slip which had been cut out of a newspaper. "This is the document, John."

Jack took the slip handed to him, and read—

"A company has recently been established in London for the purpose of colonising the virgin lands of Central America. They have

already purchased from the Local Government a district of country comprising 1000 square miles. The climate is delicious, (pulmonary complaints being entirely unknown;) the region is watered by noble rivers; and as the buffalo in endless herds roams over the prairies, the table of the settler can always be supplied with fresh meat of a quality unknown in Europe. Indian corn, and indeed all the esculents of Europe grow luxuriantly in the open, while the wild turkey roosts in the woods. The Company's lands, as they stand, are offered at 2s. per acre; one shilling per acre to be paid to the agents of the Company (who will grant a receipt for the same) before embarkation, and the remaining shilling when the fifth harvest-home has been gathered in; or if the settler chooses, it may remain as a permanent burden on the ground, the interest being 5 per cent., and payable in London. To the small farmer, the ambitious operative, and the reduced gentleman, such an opportunity of securing independence, and even luxury, is not like to occur again during the present

century. Intelligent emigrants should make immediate application at the Company's offices, as the lands are being rapidly disposed of, more particularly to settlers from France and Germany.

“BALSHAZZAR & ABEDNEGO,
“London Docks.”

Jack read the glowing prospectus with a very blank countenance, and when he had got to the end of it, his father cried—

“Doesn't that stir your blood like the sound of a trumpet? Don't you see the wild turkey rising from his roosting place on the magnolia bough? Don't you feel the flavour of buffalo hump in your mouth?”

“But you don't intend to go there,” said Jack.

“As I said before, the propriety of taking such a step is precisely the question I wished to discuss with you. Let us look at the matter on all sides. I am, as you are aware, offered a hundred pounds a year of additional salary: what then? Even with that can I live

in a house like Miss Kate's? Can I go about the country like Stavert, making waterfalls of shillings and half-crowns in my breeches pocket? Can I ask these people to dine with me? Can I meet them anywhere, or at any time, on equal terms? Certainly not! In Central America all would be changed—there I should be independent, there I should call no man master. Now, as regards yourself. You are at present residing with your aunt, and it is your purpose when you have completed your university studies in humanity and logic, to devote yourself to the study of law. The law is a noble profession, no one is more inclined to admit that than I am. But then look at the difficulties that stand in your path. Before you can reach legal eminence you must have influence; and influence I have none. If we go to Central America, we shall occupy the place that Adam occupied, in a sense. We shall be the founders of a new race. The Spaniards took horses with them, and at this day there are troops of wild horses on the pampas. We shall take the name of

Hagart there, and it will spread even as the Spanish horses did. The name of Hagart will over-run America like a brilliant flower. When I think of it, I almost feel the father of a nation. I am tired, John, of being other people's servant. I wish to be thoroughly independent."

"But who *is* thoroughly independent?" cried Jack, in an excited tone of voice. "The Captain is under the command of the Colonel, the Colonel is under the command of the General, the General must take the orders of the Commander-in-Chief. Every one must obey orders."

"It strikes me that you are flying off at a tangent, John. But now, calmly, what do you think of my scheme?"

"I think it madness!"

"Well, there is nothing like having a decided opinion. I had hoped, John, to have received a more favourable verdict."

"But why seek a verdict from me? I am not able to advise on a matter of this kind. Why not speak to mother?"

Hagart rubbed his chin thoughtfully here. "Of course," he said, "I must speak to your mother; but I wished to know your opinion before I did so. Your mother—Heaven forbid that I should say anything against her, for she is the best of women and the best of wives—your mother, John—speaking critically, remember—is not in the least a woman of genius. She does not rise to great ideas. Had she been the wife of Columbus, Columbus would never have discovered America. If she were to meet Mrs Hemans, she would speak to Mrs Hemans about the darning of stockings."

Jack thought he had reached firm ground at last. He knew his mother would set her face against Central America, and he had a tolerably shrewd notion that whatever *she* set her face against would never come to pass. So having lost the greater portion of his terror of the project, he felt inclined to play with it.

"But suppose, father, we should resolve to emigrate, and that we should not be drowned on the way, what are we to do when we arrive in Central America?"

“Why, we should go with a large number of people, and the Company, I have no doubt, will have houses prepared for us. We would cut down trees, and cultivate the ground. In my youth, before I took to art, I was engaged in agricultural pursuits, and I know a good deal about them. We should not go alone, depend upon it. Mr Moorfields—who brought the project under my notice—assures me that no less than seventy persons are prepared to emigrate from Greysley alone. That would be a little colony in itself: and in our numbers there would be strength.”

“And who is Mr Moorfields?”

“A new friend of mine. The most talented fellow. He is always making plans for the benefit of others; but somehow he does not seem to succeed in his plans for himself. I suppose he is too unselfish. It was he who brought the project under my notice, and who sent me this prospectus.”

“But don't you think his not succeeding in his own plans is proof that he is not likely to succeed in his plans for others? People gene-

rally work most sincerely for themselves, do they not?"

Master Jack had imbibed considerable worldly wisdom, it will be seen, since his residence with Aunt Kate.

The conversation, which ran on till the scarlet-jacketed outriders, and the white roof of the long white passage-boat were seen approaching, need not be detailed at greater length. When the boat had left the station-house, carrying Jack as passenger, Hagart walked homeward towards Greysley, and as he walked he resolved that he should ask Mr Moorfields to dine with him, and cunningly bring the emigration scheme on the carpet. He expected the most strenuous opposition from his wife; but if any man could talk over Mrs Hagart, his new friend Moorfields was the man to do it.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH MISS KATE HATCHES A NOTABLE SCHEME.

ON his way home in the passage-boat, Jack was a good deal puzzled as to what course of action it behoved him to take in the circumstances. He had no idea that the emigration scheme would come to anything, but he could see perfectly well that it was calculated to create disturbance and annoyance at home. That his father, on such a matter, should have taken counsel with him appeared the strangest affair. That *he* should go to his father for advice was natural enough; but that, on such an important matter, his father should come to him, seemed reversing the proper order of things. Of this he thought a good deal. Then the question arose, how should he act in regard to his aunt. On the very night he had arrived

at Hawkhead she had desired that there should be no secrets between them. Here was a secret—would it be right to keep it from her? During the remainder of the journey he discussed this question in his own mind, and it was only when he stepped out on the pier at Hawkhead, and found Ann waiting for him, that he resolved to make a clean breast of it.

Miss M'Quarrie had prepared supper for the boy, and while he was eating it she sat at the table watching him, and replenishing his plate at intervals. Jack had resolved, while in the passage-boat, to make the whole matter known, and while engaged with supper he told all—that Wedderburn Brothers had increased his father's salary by one hundred pounds a year, and that his father meditated emigrating to Central America in pursuit of that independence which he loved, and which, he feared, could not be realised in the Old World. During certain portions of the recital there was an angry light in the old lady's eye, a good deal of scorn in her face, but through it all she was very quiet and attentive. When he had done

she said, "I am very glad you have told me this, John. Many boys would have kept it to themselves, and so caused mischief."

"You desired me, aunt, you remember, the first night I came here, to keep no secrets, and you have been too kind to make me think of disobeying you."

Miss M'Quarrie was silent for a while, and then she said, "Your father must have given great satisfaction to his employers, else they would not, unasked, have increased his salary one hundred pounds yearly. A hundred pounds is not a vast sum in itself, but a hundred pounds a year in addition to what one already has is a great thing."

"Of course he has given satisfaction," said Jack, who was delighted with this covert approval. "Father is very clever."

"Yes," said Miss Kate, in an absent tone, as if she was thinking of something else, "so you and your mother are always saying."

And here the matter dropped. A little later in the evening Miss M'Quarrie complained of headache, and went off to her own room; and

next day being Sunday, and Miss Kate still keeping her room, Jack and Ann went to church alone.

Monday morning is universally disliked by schoolboys, and by that portion of mankind who live in the receipt of fixed salaries. On the Monday morning succeeding the interview with his father on the canal bank, our young gentleman was late, and when he reached the breakfast-room there was Miss Kate waiting him, and dressed as if she meant to go out. "You are late, John," she said, as she poured out a cup of tea, and handed it across.

"Yes," said Jack; "but I'll just take a bit of toast this morning, and be off like a shot."

In a very short time Jack was off; and he had no sooner gone than Miss M'Quarrie directed Ann to call a coach. And the coach was no sooner at the door than Miss Kate stepped into it, and directed the jarvie to drive to the business chambers of Messrs Hook & Crook, Morning-dew Street, and to wait there.

At the business chambers of these distinguished legal practitioners Miss M'Quarrie was

well known. When she alighted, she encountered in the lobby a brisk clerk, with yellow hair brushed high from his forehead, and a pen stuck behind his ear, passing from one room to another with the letter-book, and by the brisk clerk, she was informed that Mr Hook was at that moment in his own room. To this room, knowing the way perfectly well, Miss Kate advanced, and, opening the door, found Mr Hook amongst his papers.

Mr Hook was dressed in sables, and was a gray-haired man of deferential address. He wore a double eye-glass at his breast, suspended by a chain, and this eye-glass was almost in constant use. Mr Hook without his eye-glass might be circumvented, but to circumvent Mr Hook *with* his eye-glass you felt to be an impossibility. When he placed his eye-glass on his nose, and began to peruse a deed of conveyance or a balance-sheet, you felt that if there existed in either an obscure flaw or a cunningly-concealed quirk, he would be sure to find it out. When he got you in the leather-covered office chair opposite, and, listening to your story, sur-

veyed you through the eye-glass, you felt he was reading your soul. Without his eye-glass Mr Hook was professionally great—with it he was invincible.

In the leather-covered chair Miss Kate was now seated. Mr Hook had wheeled his own chair round in her direction and adjusted his eye-glass. His legs were crossed, his elbows rested on the arms of his chair, his fingers were clasped. He was professional attention itself.

Miss Kate lost no time in preliminary fencing.—“You have heard me speak of my sister, Margaret Hagart—of her husband, and of her son; and you know that her son, John, is at present living with me?”

Mr Hook bowed in acquiescence.

“I have taken these people under my protection. I don’t know whether the ground is worth cultivating; but I have resolved to cultivate it. It is the only ground left me now.”

Mr Hook bowed again, this time a little more doubtfully.

“Alfred Hagart—my sister’s husband—is a

man of some cleverness, and no common sense. He is at present, as I understand, a designer of patterns, in the employment of Wedderburn Brothers, in Greysley."

"Clients of our own," interpolated Mr Hook.

"Very well—all the better, perhaps. He is at present in their employment, as I was saying, and his services have given so much satisfaction, that, without any seeking of his own, they have increased his salary by one hundred pounds per annum. That's one part of my story,—and the best part of it, too. The remainder is this:—Hagart, who is of a restless and fidgety disposition,—I suppose a morbid vanity is at the bottom of it,—has never been satisfied with his position in the world; and at this present moment he is talking of going off to Central America. Of course, he won't go,—I don't believe he has pluck enough to go. But then he will talk to my sister about going, and will worry, and annoy, and frighten her. I am anxious that she should be spared as much as possible. The idea of emigrating at all

shows me that Hagart is discontented—ill at ease. Now I wish to anchor him firmly.”

Hitherto Miss Kate had gone on swimmingly; but at this point the wind went out of the sail of her speech, and she hesitated, and boggled in a very extraordinary manner. Mr Hook noticed the change, and glanced up at her through his double eye-glasses.

Miss Kate twitched nervously at her gloves, and seemed in a slightly agitated state. “Mr Hook,” she said, when she had found her voice, “I wish you to undertake a mission on my behalf to the Wedderburn Brothers :—Go to them with the proposal that, if they will take Hagart into partnership—make him a recognisable member of their firm, place him in the enjoyment of a reasonable share of the profits accruing thereunto, that I shall pay them down two thousand pounds, or such higher sum as you and they may agree upon—provided that an absolute silence is retained now and for ever as to my share in the transaction, and that Hagart is allowed to believe that the partnership is offered him by the Wedderburn Brothers in



recognition of his distinguished merits; or, that, having heard of his intention to leave the country, they resolved to retain his valuable services even at that price. If the matter is gone into at all, I must stipulate for this bit of double-dealing. Hagart will suspect nothing. When the stroke of good fortune comes, he will think he has got no more than he deserves; and it will have the effect of putting him on pleasant terms with his own vanity, and with the world. You can tell Wedderburn Brothers from your own knowledge, that if they enter into my plan they can have my cheque for the money at an hour's notice."

Mr Hook was more startled with this speech of Miss Kate's than with anything which had occurred to him in the whole course of his professional career. "My dear Miss M'Quarrie, this is a most extraordinary proposal. Have you given it sufficient consideration? Are you certain the step you suggest is a wise one?"

"Its wisdom or unwisdom depends entirely upon the point of view. In one sense, of course, I might as well thrust the money into that fire;

but I have considered it well, and the step, I assure you, is perfectly wise and prudent. My sister will be provided for, as you know, after my death; but I wish to look after her during my lifetime, however short or long that may be now."

"If you have carefully considered the matter, and arrived at the conclusion that it is the right thing to do, Miss M'Quarrie, I have little doubt that it will be found the right thing in the end," said the judicious Mr Hook, who seeing no use in pulling against the stream, let himself float easily down upon it. "When should you wish me to wait on Wedderburn Brothers?"

"At once. To-day if you can, to-morrow at latest. And now I trust you perfectly understand my position. I wish to aid the Hagarts, but I wish to aid them secretly. The most utter silence must be maintained as to my part in the affair. If Hagart ever comes to know the secret history of the partnership, he will fret, and fume, and knock his foolish head against it, as a bluebottle knocks its head against the pane in the parlour. All this you

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will explain to the Wedderburn Brothers. I saw one of them at Hagart's house on the day of the funeral, and he seemed a pleasant, good-tempered man."

Mr Hook looked at his repeater. "I have one or two hours' business before me, but I shall be able to leave for Greysley at three o'clock this afternoon. I can see Wedderburn Brothers this evening."

"Very good," said Miss Kate, as she rose out of the leather-covered chair; "and you will of course let me know the result of the interview as soon as you can. It is a somewhat delicate mission, and you must use all your tact in the conduct of it."

"You may depend upon my doing my best," said Mr Hook, rising also. When he got upon his legs his professional manner slipped off, and he asked, in an easy conversational tone, "Have you heard anything of the Stavert people lately?"

"No," said Miss Kate; "have you?"

"Yes; Stavert is always dropping in for one purpose or another. Last time I saw him

I told him that John Hagart had gone to stay with you."

A somewhat malicious smile came into Miss Kate's face as she asked, "And what did he say?"

"He expressed the greatest surprise, and declared that your sister's husband was a double-dealing fellow; that he had on the occasion of the funeral hinted at the possibility of your nephew coming to live in Hawkhead, and that Hagart had then solemnly declared that his son never would—at least, if he could help it."

"And I daresay Hagart told the truth. I don't think it was his wish that John should come to live with me."

When they got into the lobby, Mr Hook said, "By the by, I had a letter from your brother Hector last week. His daughters are getting up, he says; and he is anxious that they should come to Hawkhead next winter, to get the benefit of the schools."

"If they do come, I suppose they will live with Stavert?"

"Well, I suppose so. They must be fine girls by this time."

They had now reached the coach which Miss Kate had hired. Mr Hook handed in his client and shut the door. "Now, Miss M'Quarrie," he said, while his hand lay on the window, "if you still think of making a lawyer of your nephew, we have always a desk at his service. He can work here and attend the University as well. There is nothing like having a youngster thoroughly grounded. In everything it is important to lay a firm and sure foundation."

"Many thanks ; you are very good. I will think about it. You will let me know the result of the interview as soon as you can, for I am naturally anxious. Good morning."

"Good morning."

And then Miss Kate drove home, and Mr Hook returned to his papers. He would leave for Greysley at three o'clock, and he had a good deal of work to get through before that time.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH MISS KATE RECEIVES LETTERS.

THAT arch conspirator Miss M'Quarrie sat in Mortimer Street waiting news. She kept her own secret of course. Nor had she long to wait, for on Wednesday morning the following letter was received :—

“GREYSLEY, *April 20, 18—*.

“MY DEAR MISS M'QUARRIE,—Agreeable to instructions, I waited on Wedderburn Brothers, and laid your proposal before them. They were taken a good deal aback at first, and seemed unwilling to accede; but by degrees they were brought to a more favourable state of mind. Yesterday morning they consented to accept Mr Hagart as a partner on the conditions proposed. Although I know the house to be thoroughly stable and solvent, I

would not conclude negotiations without an examination of their business books, which I found satisfactory. It was arranged that you should pay £2500; that Mr Hagart should receive a sixth share of the profits; that the utmost secrecy should be observed as to your share in the transaction; and that the accession of Mr Hagart to the partnership should be made as public as possible,—that it should be advertised in the Greysley newspaper, that circulars should be forwarded to their business friends and correspondents, and that the old dingy sign of ‘Wedderburn Brothers’ should be taken down, and a new one, with the words ‘Wedderburn Brothers and Hagart’ painted thereupon in gilded letters, should be placed in its stead. I laid a good deal of stress on the matter of publicity; as from our conversation the other day, I gathered that such publicity would be grateful to the feelings of your friend.

“When I obtain your approval of what I have done, the deed of partnership will be formally drawn out, signed and witnessed.

“You will be gratified to learn that Wedderburn Brothers speak in the highest terms of Mr Hagart's steadiness, character, and talent, and that the partnership is to be offered him in virtue of these qualities.

“I remain,

“Dear Miss M'Quarrie,

“Your obedient servant to command,

“JOSIAH HOOK.”

To Miss Kate the letter was entirely satisfactory, and Jack had no sooner gone—for she read it seated at the breakfast-table—than she got out her old-fashioned writing-desk, and scribbled a note to Mr Hook, expressing her complete approval of his arrangements, and instructing him to have the matter concluded without delay. When the note was folded and sealed, she rang for Ann, and sent her with it to the post-office.

When the note was despatched, Miss Kate arose and began to pace up and down the room, with her under lip stuck out and her hands folded behind her back, as was her habit

when immersed in thought. All kinds of ideas were coursing through her shrewd, old, worldly-wise, yet thoroughly tender and affectionate brain. She was a cynic, and she fed her cynicism on herself, as well as on others. She loved money, and was unwilling to part with it; and now having parted with a considerable sum for Hagart's good, she—without in the least repenting the step she had taken—was inwardly railing on Hagart for having made her do so. “The fool! Central America, forsooth! Tormenting himself and others with his quicksilver brain.” These, and sentences of similarly uncomplimentary import, she muttered as she marched up and down. And as up and down she paced, a beam of April light came into the room, and in the brightness the portrait of the Governor of Ceylon seemed singularly alert and vivacious, and watched the coming and going figure with an interested regard. Of this Miss Kate seemed to become conscious, for she paused in her walk and looked up. “Humph, *you* fought, and were parched by the hot sun, and lived and died among

strangers, and the money you earned with your life goes after this fashion. You would have thrown it into the sea rather." Miss Kate still looked at the portrait; but in a moment or so the April beam died out, and with it departed all speculation out of the countenance of the Governor. It became merely an ordinary picture in an ordinary gilded frame; and Miss Kate resumed her march, her hands behind her back, and her under lip stuck out.

My own impression is that in thus marching up and down, Miss Kate was not so much scourging Hagart as she was scourging herself. I rather fancy that some subtle sense of having been generous, of having performed an action worthy of commendation, was at the bottom of the whole commotion. She had never been much in love with her fellow-creatures, she had never believed in their nobility, their disinterestedness, their purity of motive; and, true to her cynical instincts, she would not willingly take that credit to herself which she was unwilling to render to others. When she thought of the large sum of money which she had given away,

this idea of generosity arose; and to get rid of it she flew to the opposite extreme, and almost made herself angry with the thought that she had given her money to a fool, in order to preserve herself and her sister from that fool's vagaries. And so poor Hagart suffered vicariously. She chewed carefully-selected bitters, in order to put a strange sweet taste out of her mouth. Such a sweetness was suspicious in a half-embittered life.

But as she marched up and down, the old face grew tenderer, and at last a pleasant light broke all over it. She suddenly remembered, by what occult power of association I cannot tell, that Jack's birthday fell on the following Monday. Then she thought what a nice thing it would be to hold it; then she thought what a pleasant thing it would be for the boy, if his father and mother would be present; then she thought it would be delightful, knowing what she knew, to witness these good people wearing their good fortune in its newest gloss. These notions took entire possession of her, and made her perfectly happy. The fruit looked so tempt-

ing, and smelt so pleasantly, that she could not help eating it; the idea was so agreeable that she could not forbear putting it into execution at once. So she sat down to her writing-desk again, and requested the pleasure of Mr and Mrs Hagart's company to dinner on the following Monday, being their son's birthday; and Ann had no sooner returned from posting the letter to Mr Hook, than she was sent out again to post the letter to Mrs Hagart.

When Jack returned from school he was told about the birthday dinner, and the invitation which had been sent, which caused him vast delight.

"When father has once been here," said he, "and gets to know you better, he won't ask to meet me at the station-house any more. He will come here at once."

"I daresay he will," said his aunt, with mysterious emphasis and a curious smile; "I don't think you will have any more meetings on the canal banks."

Two or three mornings thereafter a couple of letters were brought in, one addressed in a male



the other in a feminine hand ; and Miss Kate knew instinctively that they came from Hagart and her sister. She opened her sister's first, with just the slightest possible tremor in her hands.

“GREYSLEY, *April*, 18—.

“MY DEAR SISTER,—We shall have much pleasure in dining with you on Monday next, on the occasion of John's birthday. It is very, very kind of you to remember us.

“When your letter came I had just sat down to write to you. I have such a piece of good news to tell,—*such* good news that I can scarcely believe it to be true yet. The other afternoon, Mr Hagart was called into the counting-house of Wedderburn Brothers, and was told that, in consideration of his great services, they wished him to enter into partnership with them ; and that in the event of his consenting they were prepared to allow him a sixth of the profits. The announcement came on Alfred like a thunder-clap, as well it might. When he came home and told me, I was almost beside

myself. The matter is now entirely settled : the deed of partnership has been drawn up, and signed in proper order. What do you think of *that*? It will astonish you, I daresay. We shall be quite rich now, after all our struggles and anxieties. I have not yet calmed down : the good news has gone to my brain, as I once remember a glass of champagne going when I was a child, and I hardly know what I am about.

“And yet the news has made me sadder than I have been for years. I think of the little one that has been taken from me, of her scanty wardrobe, of the little I could do for her while she was with me ; of what I could do for her *now*, had she been spared. O sister, sister! I have been crying half the morning ; but I try to comfort myself with the thought that God can give her more in heaven than I ever could give her on earth, although I had the wealth of a queen.

“I have had to leave my writing for a little, and am calmer now. The pleasantest thing to me in this stroke of prosperity is the thought that it will reconcile you to my husband. I

know you considered I did wrong in marrying a poor man : I feel that something of the old grudge still lingers in your heart against him : but all that will be changed now. You never knew Alfred. You only knew his slender purse. I know his worth, his talent, his kind heart. He has waited long for his reward, but it has come at last. I am but a poor pen-woman, and cannot express all I think and feel. I would like to hold you in my arms, and tell you everything. Be sure and tell John. He will be so delighted, poor boy !”

“ And now I must stop, for my head is in a whirl. Excuse this scrawl, and believe me ever,

“ Your affectionate sister,

“ MARGARET HAGART.”

When Miss Kate had finished the perusal of this epistle, she made a hurried grasp at the other, as if seeking some sort of relief. When she opened it she found it written on business paper, with an engraved heading, “ Wedderburn Brothers & Hagart, Greysley,” running

along the top. As she divined, it was from Hagart himself, and ran thus :—

“MY DEAR MADAM,—My wife will tell you with what pleasure we accept your invitation to dinner on Monday, and how much that pleasure is increased by the event it celebrates.

“You will doubtless be surprised by the heading of this letter. I am now a partner in the house in which I was formerly a servant, and am proud to say that the partnership has been offered me as a reward for my services, and—as I suspect also—as a means of permanently securing these. When offered, I at once saw it my duty to accept it.

“The motive which may have induced Wedderburn Brothers to make the proposal can, of course, have no interest for you. It gives me, however, the utmost pleasure to inform you, that the partnership has been offered and accepted. I am perfectly aware of the feelings you entertained—and perhaps still entertain—towards me. The feeling on your part was perfectly natural ; and it was quite as natural that

the knowledge that the feeling existed should give me pain. I love my wife too much to be indifferent to the opinions of her relatives. Were I still in my former position, I should never have addressed you, and should never willingly have met you ; although all the while I would have cherished for you the sincerest regard, and the deepest gratitude for the kindness you have shown my son. A respect for your feelings, and my own proper pride, would have prevented all communication between us. But the case is different now. Without an indecent boast, I may congratulate myself that I have, unaided, and by the exercise of my own talents, gained a position of comparative opulence ; and while I rejoice in this for the sake of your sister and my son, I rejoice in it not the less sincerely, that it may show you that the poor artist on whom your sister bestowed her hand is perhaps not so contemptible a person as you may have at one time imagined.

• “I do not, madam, claim your friendship, nor your kindly regards. Had this not happened, I should not have intruded myself on

your attention. I have never before proffered you my hand. I proffer it now, because I know that now it is more likely to be accepted. I did not seek you in misfortune ; I seek you now in success : with you remains the issue, and by that issue I abide.

“ I remain, dear Madam,

“ Yours most respectfully,

“ ALFRED HAGART.”

The perusal of this epistle put Miss M'Quarrie a good deal out at first. The whole drift and movement of it was unexpected. There breathed from it a certain pride, an air of condescension, a generous cancelling and throwing away of undeserved wrong, which made the reader's eyes open in astonishment. The writer reposed so undoubtingly on the sense of his own merits ; he so fully believed that what had been gained, had been gained by his own right arm, that Miss Kate's first impulse was to be angry, and her second to laugh outright. “ Deuce take the man ! ” she muttered to herself ; “ he condescends to me as



if he were a king. He'll begin to patronise me next." The letter troubled her, and she still held it in her hand, as if it were something of which she had not got to the bottom. Then she read it over again, studying it sentence by sentence. The letter pleased her much better on a second perusal. When she finished it she got up, and began to march up and down the room, with a slight colour in her face. "There's something in the man, after all. I suspect I shall like him better when I come to know him better. Don Quixote was a fool, but he was a gentleman. Hagart is a fool, too, but there is an authentic touch of the gentleman in him. This letter, everything considered, with its queer mixture of pride, dignity, and humility, might have been written by the Don himself. If the poor man but knew what an ass he makes of himself by his vapouring and his fine forgiveness! He puts me in mind of that crack-brained, cross-gartered fool, Malvolio, whom I used to read about in the play-book when I was a

girl. But there is something noble in his letter. He does not know what secret influences have been at work, and he naturally takes all the credit of his success to himself. I suppose any man, situated as he is, would have done the same. Hagart should always ruffle it in the sunshine. The shade does not become him. His fine sentiments and a thousand a-year would make excellent companions. He certainly did not thrust himself on me while he was in adversity,—that's a vast deal in his favour. I like proper pride, and the standing-up for one's self. A fool is bad enough, but a sneak is ten thousand times worse. Hagart is not a sneak, at any rate. You may cure a fool of his folly, but never a sneak of his sneakishness. The hungry, greedy cowardice of the sneak is the lowest thing I have yet seen in man. Thank God, Hagart is not a sneak. I must write congratulatory notes to these people, I suppose, for of course I must be as much delighted and astonished as they are. What a singular coincidence," and



here the queer smile broke out again, lighting up the wrinkled face, "that I should have asked them to dinner, and that they should have such good news to tell me! One would almost think that the dinner had been given in honour of the good news. I must point out that to Margaret. Heigho! what a hypocrite I am getting in my old age, when I have taken to do a little good. I suppose virtue is like gold, it is unworkable without an admixture of alloy." And so Miss Kate sat down again to her writing-desk, and wrote a congratulatory note to her sister, and a frank, honest, outspoken—almost affectionate—one to Hagart. It was that writing that finally and for ever closed the family breach.

The cunningly-smiling missives were duly despatched, and when Jack came home to dinner in the afternoon his aunt communicated to him the wonderful news which had that morning reached herself. The boy felt as if a patent of nobility had been conferred upon him. There was a sudden unknown bright-

ness in the air, the cold mutton became paradisaical food, and was eaten off a golden plate. He had never felt so happy in his life before, and he had never seen his aunt look so happy.

"There will be no talking of going to Central America now," said Miss Kate, when she had finished.

"No. Father, when we walked together, always said he would come to something, and he has come to something now. He is very clever, you know."

"But now that your father has become a rich man he will despise me, will he not? He won't recognise a poor relation like me."

"I am sure he will never do that," said the boy, quickly. "He will like you very much when he knows you. And I am sure you will like him, aunt. You only require to meet to be friends. He is not proud; at least, not proud in that way."

"But isn't it lucky this thing should have happened just now? The partnership could

not have come at a better time. It seems almost providential, does it not?" And so with her own happiness and with the boy's, Miss Kate played. It was like a new trinket, to be toyed with and fingered, and to be set in the best light and admired.

CHAPTER VI.

THE BIRTHDAY DINNER IN MORTIMER STREET.

ON the Monday following, at half-past five o'clock, Miss M'Quarrie and Jack sat in the drawing-room in Mortimer Street, waiting their guests. They had not waited long when a fly drove up to the door, and the bell rang. Jack went to the window, and saw his father and mother step out of the vehicle; and he had hardly resumed his seat when Ann threw open the door, and announced Mrs and Mr Hagart. Mrs Hagart entered, looking very happy. She kissed Jack, and wished him many returns of his birthday; she kissed her sister, and held her in her arms for a moment; and then, turning round, formally introduced her husband. Hagart took the heavily-ringed hand stretched out to him, muttered the usual commonplaces

and then walked up to the fireplace, and stood in an easy manner on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire, surveying the entire room. Miss Kate and Mrs Hagart were seated together talking, and Jack could scan his father's movements at leisure. Hagart's advance to the fireplace, and the establishment of himself on the hearth-rug, almost took the boy's breath away. It seemed like an invasion of the sacredness of the quarter-deck. Never before in his life had he seen his father so cool, self-possessed, and regardless of dignities. The hearth-rug was appropriated as a mere matter of course. Jack was astonished, but his astonishment was increased when his father, leaning his back against the mantelpiece, called out—

“And so, John, you have completed the first year of your teens! Time is passing, my boy. Remember that Alexander conquered Asia, and that Pitt was a prime minister, when they were not many years older than you are now.”

Before Jack had recovered himself sufficiently for a reply, Ann had opened the door and laid a parcel on the table.

The parcel had no sooner been laid upon the table than Hagart advanced, and, unclosing it, revealed a richly-woven shawl. He then stepped toward the ladies. "Miss M'Quarrie," he said, gallantly, "accept an ear from the field of Wedderburn Brothers and Hagart;" and saying so, with a deft hand he whipped the rich covering around Miss M'Quarrie's shoulders.

At the moment Mrs Hagart's face was very pretty with smiles and blushes. "The very night, dear, that Alfred obtained the partnership, he told me that his first duty would be to look out for the nicest shawl he could find; and next day I went into Greysley, and, going over the whole stock, fixed on that one. Don't you think it pretty?"

"Beautiful," said Miss M'Quarrie, glancing from one shoulder to the other; "and I am sure I am very much obliged."

"It is my very best design, I think, and I am twenty times more pleased than you can possibly be," said Hagart; and then Ann announced that dinner was ready.

Hagart proffered his arm to Miss Kate, say-



ing as he did so : " One other obligation I ask, that you will do my present the honour of dining in it." Miss Kate gave a smiling assent, placed her hand on Hagart's arm, and the pair marched out of the room and went down-stairs.

Hagart's ease, self-possession, and gallantry were new to his son, and his surprise had in it the slightest tincture of alarm. As his mother and he were now in the room alone, he gave a hurried expression to his feelings.

" You foolish boy ! Your father and Miss M'Quarrie are fast friends now ; besides, long ago, when I knew him first, your father was familiar with fine houses—much finer houses than even this. He seems to-day ten years younger. He is at his ease, of course, why should he not ? Would you have him stand awkwardly near the door, as if he wished to steal the hats ; or to look as if he did not know what to do with his hands ? Take my arm, John." And so, in the wake of Hagart and Miss Kate, Jack and his mother went down-stairs and entered the lighted dining-room.

The Governor of Ceylon by the time the

company had seated themselves must have had the entire contents of the table by heart, and summed up the expense, so earnestly had he been surveying it since the lights had been brought in. Hagart sat down opposite, but was not yet conscious of the inquisitorial gaze. If his conduct was easy in the drawing-room, it was quite as easy in the dining-room. He seemed never to have sat at a table less richly furnished. He talked, carved, joked, and passed the wine. Jack was mute with wonder; Mrs Hagart was in a flutter of pleasure at her husband's brilliancy—the plume which had been so long draggled in the winter rain, was now burning like a flame of fire in the sunshine. Miss Kate watched Hagart narrowly, as if making up her mind finally about him. It was evident she was pleased on the whole; but every now and again, as the talk flowed on, a curiously meaning smile would gather about her mouth, the cause of which may be divined. When dinner was over and dessert placed on the table, Miss Kate lifting her glass, said: “I have a toast to propose. This is John’s birth-

day, and it is only proper that we should drink his health. Your good health, John!" "Your good health, John," said his mother, looking across the table at him with happy-rainy eyes. "Your good health, my boy," said his father, stretching across his hand and shaking his son's affectionately, "and may prosperity attend you." And poor Jack, while bowing his thanks, was terribly conscious that three pairs of fond eyes were bent on him.

It may have been to hide a slight flutter of parental feeling that induced Hagart to fill out a glass of wine at this moment and raise it to his lips. Whatever might be the motive, he did pour out the wine, and it was while in the act of drinking it that he encountered the eye of the watchful portrait. Without withdrawing his gaze, he placed the empty glass on the table: "Miss M'Quarrie, may I ask whose portrait that is on the wall opposite?"

"My uncle, General M'Quarrie, for many years Governor of Ceylon."

"Oh, indeed!" said Hagart. He dimly re-

membered hearing something of that distinguished military gentleman from his wife, years before. Somehow the General's pertinacious watchfulness, and something in Miss Kate's voice—for people who have the good fortune to count Generals in their family are perfectly conscious of the fact—troubled him. Something of his old suspiciousness of his hostess returned. He had been pluming himself on his recent good fortune; but to be a partner of the firm of Wedderburn Brothers and Hagart was nothing to having been a General and the Governor of an Oriental island. Was she thrusting in his face the family greatness? For the moment he thought so, and, struggling with this uncomfortable feeling, he trifled with his empty glass and remained silent.

Miss Kate was of course ignorant of what was passing in Hagart's mind, but although she had known, she could not have acted in a happier manner. The light tap of her glass on the table woke our friend from his gloomy reverie, and when he looked up he saw Miss Kate smiling upon him. "I have proposed

one toast already," she said, "and I think, before we leave the table, it is my duty, as it is certainly my pleasure, to propose another. We will drink prosperity to the well-known and distinguished firm of Wedderburn Brothers and Hagart," and so saying she smiled on Hagart again, bowed, and put her glass to her lips, while Jack and his mother tinkled their glasses in acclamation.

A sudden tide of generous crimson rushed over Hagart's face when Miss Kate had ceased speaking. He was ashamed of his suspicions. He felt that Miss Kate could not help having a distinguished relative. He felt certain that she had no intention of hurting his feelings. For the moment he almost hated himself for suspecting that she had any such intention. And as he saw that the whole table had its eyes fixed upon him, awaiting a response, he hurriedly swallowed a glass of wine, and cleared his throat, while the glasses tinkled again delightedly.

"Miss M'Quarrie," he began, "as the sole representative present of the firm of Wedder-

burn Brothers and Hagart, the pleasant task devolves upon me of returning thanks for the toast which you have so kindly proposed. In the name of the firm I thank you from the bottom of my heart. To-morrow, when I meet my respected partners, I shall inform them of the kind wish you have this evening expressed." Here there was another tinkle of applauding glasses, and when it was over the orator resumed.

"I have not the honour to be a General of the British army, like my friend in the gilt frame opposite; no one is likely to call me Governor, except my son"—here a smile dimpled itself round the table—"yet at the same time I may express the belief that, in the present posture of my affairs, I have some slight reason for self-congratulation. The partnership which I have gained may be a poor thing, but 'tis my own, as Touchstone says. If there be any honour in my present position, I have acquired it—as your relative acquired his military rank—by my sword." Here Miss Kate's face flew all into a beam, and she tinkled her glass

tremendously, which stopped the flow of the sentences. The thread of discourse being utterly snapped, Hagart blindly possessed himself of one of the ends. "This partnership was offered to me, I may state now, most opportunely. For some time back I had been meditating a step which would have caused great changes"—here a blank came over Mrs Hagart's face, and Jack flushed up to the roots of his hair. He knew what was the step alluded to, and having held the conversation with his father which we know about, he felt almost an accomplice—"which would have caused great changes, and made us the denizens of another hemisphere. That dream has gone like many another. I can speak freely of it now. The partnership was offered me, and I accepted it. In the name of the firm I again thank you." He had said his say, but he could not flatter himself that he had said it well.

After this speech the glasses tinkled only in a half-hearted way. The allusion to the great scheme which Hagart had been concocting,

and of which till now she had been entirely ignorant, made Mrs Hagart silent. Jack felt awkwardly conscious. Miss Kate thought it prudent to make no sign. Hagart filled out another glass of wine, and drank it, glancing up at the General's portrait as he did so, and when he had placed the glass on the table Ann brought the information that tea was laid in the drawing-room.

After tea Mrs Hagart sat down to the piano, and began to play slow pibrochs and wailing coronachs. To Hagart and Miss Kate that slow monotonous music brought back the past. Hagart remembered his early days of courtship when first he heard these melancholy airs; the happy days when Hope flew before him on brilliant wavering wings; when he was about to make a name in art; when his wife's cheek was rounder, her hair glossier, her voice not a whit more soft, her heart not nearly so tender—the days when he would have despised the partnership of which he was now so proud. Miss Kate sat apart on a settee, and at the call of the mournful notes,

from a remoter distance, there flowed over her a more sorrowful wave of reminiscence. The past bloomed for her again, but it bloomed with the flowers and herbs of sorrow—rue, the passion-flower, forget-me-not, love-lies-bleeding. With wistful eyes she was looking back to the far-off brightness of girlhood, almost sunken now beneath the horizon of memory. Her whole life seemed filled with the sound of falling tears and the sighing of farewells. To the player, from every vibrating key there came, not so much a sound as a ghost of childhood—of her early home, her father, her sister, of the family breach which seemed so cruel, so irreparable, but which was now happily healed. She sat unconscious of everything around her, playing an autobiography. To the boy, too, seated on a low stool close at hand, the weeping music brought imaginative influences. It came to him with a pleasant prophetic sadness—a sadness which he could not translate into anything definite, but which he felt the years in their courses would translate for him clearly enough.

After Mrs Hagart rose from the piano, the influence of the wailing music still remained on Miss Kate's party. Conversation proceeded, but only in a half-hearted way, and the appearance of Ann with the spirit-case and glasses was by all felt as a relief. They drew around the table, and Hagart brewed a tumbler of punch, and ladled out a glass to the ladies, and a quarter of a glass to his son. He then made a fresh supply for himself. Talk revived around the punch, and they became comparatively merry. Then Jack began to yawn, and his father to remember that he had next morning to proceed to Greysley by the early boat. In a short time Miss Kate rang for bedroom candles, and the party broke up. When Jack reached his own room, he hurriedly undressed, and his head had no sooner touched the pillow than he was sound asleep.

When they reached their bedroom, Mrs Hagart wormed the secret of the great scheme out of her husband. Up till the period of the speech in the dining-room, she had no idea that Alfred's thoughts had been running on

Central America. Although, when he walked into Greysley after the interview with his son at the station-house, Hagart had resolved to ask Mr Moorfields to dinner, and get him to broach the emigration scheme to his wife, and talk her over into acquiescence, he had never carried that resolution into effect. He had experienced a decided check in his son's opposition, and he was certain that his wife's opposition would be yet more decided. Unexpected difficulties rose in his way; and these difficulties he was afraid that even Mr Moorfields' showy manners and fluent tongue would not be able to remove. Then Wedderburn Brothers' offer of partnership came, and the great idea was relinquished entirely. The emigration scheme was checked by Jack, just as Napoleon was checked at Quatre Bras; the emigration scheme was defeated by the Wedderburn Brothers as completely as Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo. The scheme became utterly disorganised, broken and routed and scattered to the four winds of heaven.

To his wife that night he talked about it

frankly enough, and that good lady it kept long awake. She felt that, all unknown to herself, she had been toppling on the edge of a horrible precipice; and with her husband asleep at her side she lay awake, filled with the devoutest thankfulness that from her and hers this evil thing had been warded away. In the offer of the Wedderburn partnership she discerned the working of the Providence that numbers the hairs of human heads, and by whom the falling to the ground of even one of the sparrows of the air is not unregarded.

When Miss Kate reached her own room she sat down in a soft-cushioned chair near the fire; and if a spectator had been present, he would have seen her shoulders shaking with laughter beneath her rich shawl. "That poor dear innocent Hagart," she muttered to herself, "is better than a play. He marches about in his partnership, and is as proud of it as a red Indian of his war-paint, and his buffalo robe fringed with the scalps of his enemies; and his squaw looks on with admiration, and regards her lord as the greatest

and the best. It's perfectly beautiful, and only needs a stage and a row of footlights. He and General M'Quarrie! The partner of Wedderburn Brothers and the Governor of Ceylon!" Here the old shoulders were convulsed again. "If they but knew, the Babes in the Wood! What a stramash there would be; and how Hagart would come tumbling down like a shot eagle! He would be off to Central America at once. He never could look me in the face again after his vapouring, and his fine letters and speeches. And yet I like the man, although I can't help laughing at him. I suppose we have a kindly feeling towards the people we laugh at." Here Miss Kate got up, took the covering from her shoulders, drew a chair towards the light, spread the shawl carefully on the back of the chair, so that she might have a full and fair inspection of the same. She looked at it for a considerable time, turning the chair now this way and now that. "It's very nice and pretty of the two fools to have brought me this. Very nice and pretty indeed. This is one of

his designs, he says. It must have been a clever head out of which all these Indian pines and arabesques came. His talent ought to bring him to something." Miss Kate took the shawl from the chair, folded it up, and placed it in a drawer. She then came back beside the fire, and stared into it while it slowly crumbled away. The old, wailing tunes which she had heard up-stairs were in her memory again, and she was alone with dead faces and long-departed voices. Mrs Hagart, awake in her bed, was thankful to Providence—little suspecting that Providence was incarnated in the wrinkled woman sitting down-stairs beside the dying fire.

CHAPTER VII.

IN WHICH THE READER IS INTRODUCED TO MR
HECTOR M'QUARRIE AND HIS DAUGHTERS.

MR HECTOR M'QUARRIE had for some little time, as we heard from Mr Hook, been meditating the sending of his daughters south to Hawkhead for a season, that they might enjoy the benefit of the schools. Hector had a large sheep-farm in Skye; he had been for many years a widower, and the education of his daughters had been confided to the care of a governess. The work of education went on smoothly enough at Uanvohr. Under the care of Miss Weston the girls acquired a bold sloping style of handwriting; some knowledge of music and French; a little history, out of which the dates were continually slipping, and then the entire historical fabric came to grief, as comes a pinned-up tapestry when the pins suddenly give way; an acquaintance with the

simpler English classics, *Rasselas* and the *Vicar of Wakefield*, for instance; and a thorough proficiency in needlework. This was all very well, and Hector would probably have been quite contented with the education which Miss Weston was able to bestow on his daughters, if Miss Weston had been in a position to continue her services. But Miss Weston had her love passages. Years before, her troth had been plighted to a student of divinity; and as this student of divinity—having passed his trials before the Presbytery with flying colours, and developing a very pretty gift of pulpit eloquence—had recently been presented to the parish of Crossmyloof by a powerful patron, the period had arrived when Miss Weston must leave Uanvohr, and, with a changed name, take her place at the head of the manse-table. Miss Weston cried a good deal when she parted from her pupils—carried away a tress of Miss Oona's dark hair, which curled as if there was life in it, and a sleek tress of Miss Maggie's, which lay quiet and shining, as if waiting to be

stroked and fondled. The girls, to do them justice, were as sorry to part with Miss Weston as Miss Weston was to part with them. There was a great to-do, an inordinate amount of embracing and kissing on the morning on which Miss Weston was to leave. The cart was at the door in which her trunks were placed, and in which she was to take her seat; the girls, with breaking hearts, came out to have one last kiss; and Miss Weston, smiling through her tears, promised to send them a bit of her marriage-cake, which comforted them greatly.

It was when Hector was first made aware of Miss Weston's approaching marriage that he wrote to Mr Hook about sending his daughters south. Miss Weston's marriage took place during the summer; and it was arranged that Oona and Maggie should depart in August, so that they might be in Hawkhead when the schools should re-open. It was the opinion of Mr Hook and Miss Kate, that when the M'Quarrie girls came south they would to a certainty place themselves under the wing of

Mrs Stavert at Cuchullin Lodge. Such, however, did not turn out to be the case. Hector M'Quarrie hated to be under obligations to any one. He knew perfectly well that most fathers in his circumstances would have sent his girls, either to Mrs Stavert at Cuchullin Lodge, or to his sister at Mortimer Street. He knew, too, that his girls would be made welcome at either place; but then neither at Mortimer Street nor at Cuchullin Lodge could he board his daughters. He was resolved that when his girls went south they should be obliged to no one—that every service or civility rendered them should be fairly and honourably paid for. No one should ever boast that they had patronised his girls or taken them by the hand, or bestowed on them an unrequited kindness. Hector M'Quarrie defended himself against the world by his purse. There was a cold glitter of silver coins around him that repelled all advances—quite as dreadful to affection as a cold glitter of steel bayonets. To him the whole material and spiritual world was like a draper's shop; every article had its price attached to it in plain

figures—ready cash, and no abatement. When he wanted anything—a cow or a kindness—he paid his money for it, and asked no discount. He was an essentially fair man: he would no more impose on his neighbour than he would allow his neighbour to impose on him. He was generous, too, after a fashion; but his generosity was one-sided. He had no idea that it is more generous frequently to take than to give. Actuated by these motives and views of things, he resolved that his girls should neither reside with his sister nor Mrs Stavert; and he accordingly sought out a relative of his late wife's, resident in Hawkhead, and of somewhat straitened means—a widow lady, Mrs Wilson by name—who would gladly take charge of his girls, and who would quite as gladly take remuneration for her trouble.

The house of Uanvohr sat on the sea edge, and the rolling ground behind was islanded with birch-woods, and between these islands lay spaces of pasturage and arable ground. The only road which connected the farm with the outer world ran along a deep green glen, which

was invisible from the door. To the north-east, at the head of the narrow bay, were splintered peaks; and the huge bulk of Marsco, lined and wrinkled as the face of a crone of a hundred years, and gashed right across with the darkness of a ravine. Near the shore, immediately below the house, were the huts of the cotters; and here and there among the clumps of birchwood rose thin wreaths of blue smoke from turfen dwellings, which one would almost fancy had been dropped in those sheltered places by accident. Just where the coarse herbage and the sea-sand mingled, was a boat-house; beside it boats lay sideways, and keel uppermost; and right away from these, and stretching in front of the smoking huts, herring-nets were hung out on poles to dry. These cotters were dependants of the farm: men and women, they had served Hector M'Quarrie in one capacity or another, and much kindly feeling existed between them. Oona and Maggie were immense favourites with these simple people. They were constantly going in and out of the smoky dwellings, bearing messages, carrying

wine and cordials for the ailing child, or the bed-ridden man or woman stitched with rheumatism. Miss Oona, too—who had a taste for the wild and marvellous, and was fond of Gaelic songs and superstitions—delighted to escape of an evening to the cotters' huts; and, in the orange glow of the peat-fire and the light of the smoky lamp, would listen for hours to the old legends of the isles. And when the stories were done, proud was young Lachlan or Donald to escort the young lady to the house, while the stars were keen above, and the sound of the making tide could be heard on the shingly shore. At set of sun, on the evening before their departure—when the bay was a golden pavement, when the splintered peaks wore fiery edges; when the upper half of Marsco was bronze, the lower half shade; and when the rosy light fell prettily on boat-house and waving her-ring-nets; on cotters' huts, smoking peacefully, and undulating retreating ground, with birchwood islands—at set of sun that evening the girls put on their hats, and went down to the houses to say good-by. The brown-kilted

children stood aloof, the boys pulling red forelocks, the girls curtsying, as the young ladies passed; the men at work at the doors touched their bonnets, and when they entered, the women would wipe their best chairs, and bring them forward, and break out with a strange querulous whine or fond groan: "Oh, my *Cuillen*, my beauty, my bold black-eyed, that's going to leave us, blessings be with you! God keep you in His arms till you return! Oh, my darling, my lamb, my brown baby, with her mother's eyes—oh, my pet, it's my arms that would be proud to be your cradle!" and so on, would pour the torrent of fond ejaculation, with many a tender pressure, and kiss on cheek and forehead, between whiles. "God go with you, I pray, and bring you back again, my darlings!" Miss Oona was the spokeswoman on these occasions, and her words and smiles the poor people treasured as carefully as if they had been golden pieces. On this present afternoon she had many people to see, many parting words to say. She had to visit her nurse; shake hands with the gray-headed

shepherd who had carried her home in his arms years before, when she had sprained her ankle in crossing the stream up among the hills; to visit Ean, the cripple; to look in upon Duncan, who had served her father faithfully in fair weather and foul, and who was now paralysed on one side; and, generally, to make loosely-knit growing girls happy by the information that she had left old dresses for them up at the house. It was dark before their visits were over, and certain of the women accompanied them to the house, invoking blessings all the way, and at the porch door there was a final bout of kissing and embracing. "Oh, my pet, my darling, my beauty, it was my breast that fed you, my *Cuillen*. God bless you, and bring you back prettier than ever." Never did girls start on a journey attended by kinder wishes than did Miss Oona and Miss Maggie M'Quarrie.

Next morning Hector M'Quarrie, having some farm business to attend to, left the house early, promising, however, that he would ride across to the little village at which the

southward-going steamer touched, in time to accompany the girls on board, and consign them to the care of the stewardess, and bid them farewell. After the master left, the house was in vast commotion. The girls' trunks and the trunks of the maid who was to attend them, properly corded and addressed, were laid on the gravel at the front of the porch door, and the cart, which was to convey them and their luggage up the deep glen and over the hills, was already passing the cluster of barns and coming up the road. The maid-servant was standing on the gravel, and shouting something to the driver. The hour of parting had now come. The girls had been ready to start for some little time, and had kissed and been kissed by all the female servants half-a-dozen times in the course of the morning. But, although they had been prepared for it, the actual moment came upon them sharply. Maggie, in her own room, was breaking her heart over a brown terrier pup, the sole survivor of a litter of six weeks ago, the life of which had been spared at her

earnest intercession, and which she had adopted as her pet. This pup she kept in a warmly-lined basket, and fed it regularly with milk from the dairy. In the keenness of her pain she had flown up-stairs, caught up the little creature from its basket, and now, while it licked her fingers, she was pressing it to her bosom, leaning her cheek against its soft side, muttering words of endearment curiously compounded of Gaelic and English, her tears falling plenteously on its moist nuzzling nose. Oona, seeking the same relief as her sister, ran out of the house, and climbed a little eminence behind, from which a view of the bay and the hills could be obtained. "O Marsco!" she cried, gazing on the familiar objects through her falling tears, "O Marsco! O sea! O birchwoods, smelling sweetly after the rain! O shore and boats! I am going among strange faces; to live with people I never saw, and do not love: how can I live away from you? Will you remember me when I am gone, as I will remember you? Will you be glad to see me when I come

back?" At the very moment she was speaking, great wreaths of shining vapour were lifting off the rocky front of the monstrous hill, and wet lines beginning to shine out on it like silver; but through the thick veil of her falling tears the girl could not take note of the radiant changes. "Miss Oona! Miss Oona! Where are you? We're waiting for you. The cart's going to start." And at the call of voices the girl checked her sobs, dried her face, and came running down to the porch door, where the cart was standing with the trunks, and in which the maid and Maggie were seated—the latter with eyes red with weeping, and turning constantly to the window of the room in which she had left her pet—who was by this time selfishly coiled up in his basket and fast asleep, as is the manner of all pets, human and other.

When the cart got into motion, it drew after it all the Uanvohr domestics. They were unwilling to part with the girls yet, and they walked behind and alongside, wiping their eyes with their aprons, and talking rapidly in

Gaelic. So accompanied, the cart reached the end of the road running from the house, and began to dip down into the long green glen. Here the cotters were assembled, men and women, to bid their young mistresses farewell. The cart stopped for a little, and then there was another bout of kissing, embracing, and hand-shaking, the air the while undulating with ejaculatory blessings. When the vehicle proceeded, the people remained, and Oona and Maggie could see them waving their hands till the rising ground hid them from view. The cart was now in the green solitariness of the glen, the parting was entirely over, the tears were dried on the girls' cheeks, and right ahead the steep road could be seen climbing up through the clumps of birchwood. The steep road was reached, and Donald the driver came down and walked alongside. When the cart was half-way up the ascent, Marsco, azure with distance, became visible, the great wreath of vapour risen entirely from his crest and floating above him. Oona knew that at this point she would see the last of her mountain

friend. "See Marsco, Maggie!" she cried. "There's Marsco bidding us good-bye; he is taking off his cap to us." The quick pang was over; there was room for the play of fancy, and she kissed her hand to the mountain as if it had been a lover. "Don't you think he will be very lonely without us?" Maggie made no reply. She did not care in the least for Marsco; to her the terrier pup was metal more attractive.

When they reached the white village the first thing they saw was their father's red pony, Roger, haltered to an iron ring beside the merchant's shop. In a moment after Hector and the merchant came out from the shop and assisted them to alight. At the village the girls had dinner, and meanwhile their trunks were placed in the boat which would pull out to meet the steamer. Dinner was no sooner over than the red-funnelled steamer lay-to in the bay, waiting passengers. The boatmen were getting matters to rights at the shore, Hector hurried his daughters down, the boat was pushed off, the stalwart fellows bent to

their oars, and in a short time they were alongside the big vessel, the passengers looking down on them from the bulwarks. When they got on deck, there was little time to spare. Hector took the girls down-stairs, procured a berth for themselves and maid, commended them to the best attentions of the stewardess, whom he privately tipped. He then carried the girls up to deck again, for the steamer bell was ringing departure, and the boatmen alongside were getting impatient. "Now, dears," he said, as he kissed them, "you will be very comfortable, I hope. Write me as soon as you arrive. Mrs Wilson will be waiting for you, and will have everything nice. You will see your Aunt Kate and Mrs Stavert, and you will remember me kindly to both. Now, Oona, good-bye; good-bye, Maggie. Be sure you write;" and as he kissed them for the last time, a tear glistened in his gray eye, as a rain-drop glistens on a flint.

The boat was thrown off, the paddles of the steamer churned the water into pale green

foam, two handkerchiefs fluttered from the bulwarks, to which Hector waved his hat, and in a short time steamer and boat were invisible to each other.

The M'Quarrie girls reached Hawkhead safely and in due course. They were received by Mrs Wilson on landing; they attended a fashionable and flourishing institution for the education of young ladies; they called at Cuchullin Lodge and at Mortimer Street; and it was on a Saturday afternoon at Mortimer Street—Miss Kate had asked Oona and Maggie to bring over their needlework, and to spend the evening with her—that Jack first saw his cousins. That meeting he can remember perfectly to this day, although so many years have since then come and gone. The meeting was interesting in itself; and, besides, it was the next great event in the boy's life since the memorable dinner at which his father and mother were present.

When Jack entered the drawing-room on that Saturday afternoon, he was formally in-

roduced to his cousins. He went forward, and a tall girl with a pale face, and black hair, and wonderful black eyes, rose from her chair and took his hand, and hoped he was well, in an accent in which there was a foreign something—like the smell of the sea in the air—which was not unpleasing. This tall girl, dark-eyed and dark-haired, Jack knew to be his cousin Miss Oona M'Quarrie; but he felt that their cousinship would not bring them one whit nearer—at all events, *he* felt that he could not presume upon that relationship. If it was ever fated that they should like each other, their cousinship would not help them to it; would perhaps be rather a stumbling-block in the way. There was a strange something in Miss Oona's manner which struck the boy—strange to him, but perfectly natural in the circumstances. In the first place, the girl was Jack's senior by two or three years, which made a vast difference; then Miss Oona, having heard of Jack, was a little curious as to the sort of cousin he should turn out to be; and

with her hand still in Jack's, and with the foreign silver of her accent in his ear, she was endeavouring to come to definite conclusions concerning him. And to all this there may be added a certain hauteur of bearing; the natural reserve of unfamiliarity; and the just as natural condescension of the elder girl to the younger boy—it was these things in Miss Oona's air and manner, and felt at once by the boy's quick instincts, which gave Jack the impression, as he stood with her hand in his, that between them there was a gulf which cousinship should never be able to bridge. But this sense of subtle distance between the two was productive of benefit in another quarter. When Jack entered the room, Maggie rose as well as Oona, and—her cousin and her sister shaking hands—being aware by some swift clairvoyance that there was a jar somehow, she was naturally impelled to give the strongest expression to her own feelings, not only to gain relief to herself, but to cancel for Jack the slight hitch which she felt had

occurred. So, when Jack turned to her, standing with her white dress and brown hair a little farther back in the dusk of the room, she came forward frankly, with her face all in a smile, and placed both her hands in Jack's, who felt at once that although their acquaintanceship was barely a moment old, he had known his pretty cousin for years and years. In fact, this sense of intimacy seemed to run away back as far as consciousness extended; and it seemed impossible for Jack to conceive a time when he had not known her. He had not sat by her side for five minutes till she had flowed in, filling up all the gaps and interstices of his life.

Jack slipped into an empty chair beside Maggie, and Miss Oona, who seemed entirely unaware of his presence, resumed the discourse which his entrance had interrupted.

"I have told you about our dancing-master, but M. Lessels, the old French teacher, is the funniest and dearest little old man. He is as thin and brown as an old fiddle, aunt, and

wears the grayest beard. It is such fun to see him open the classroom door with a sliding step, to take a pair of white gloves out of his side pocket, to draw them on his withered fingers, to fold back his coat cuffs, and then to proceed to business with a bit of chalk on a black board. He is a polite and ceremonious fossil. And he has the keenest feelings, too; for if one of the girls makes a mistake, he smites himself on the forehead with his white-gloved hand. Many a time I have made him smite his poor forehead."

And here Miss Oona laughed a little liquid laugh.

"I was without my lesson one day, and he was nearly distracted. He smote his forehead in despair; 'Ah, Mees M'Quarree, I do not know what to do with you, you will be my death. You will be one honner, two honner, *five* honner years at the verb *avoir*, and you will not have it at the end.'"

It was a fact, although Miss Oona did not choose to mention it, that on the evening pre-

ceding M. Lessels's outburst, when that young lady should have been busy with her French grammar, she was crying her eyes out till long past midnight, over the pathetic pages of *Thaddeus of Warsaw*.

"But my dear" —— began Miss Kate, somewhat reproachfully.

"Oh, I hate French," cried the young lady; "I can't get on with it at all. I am sure I would learn my lessons if I could. But to go on with M. Lessels. The other morning I was a little late in entering the classroom. He did not notice me when I came in, and I heard him say, 'Mees M'Quarree is not here—of course. It is her translation day, and she will not come.' 'Good morning, M. Lessels,' said I, handing him a small moss-rose for his button-hole as I passed, and taking my place. 'Ah,' cried he, skipping back a pace or two, 'here is Mees M'Quarree, and on her translation day! Will she have her translation with her?' 'This is *not* my translation day, M. Lessels.' 'Then that is the way you have come. Ah, Mees M'Quarree, you will be my death, you will be

my death.' And yet I think M. Lessels likes me better than any one of the girls."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because he has asked me and Maggie to tea once or twice, and I don't think he has asked any of the other pupils. He has a sister who is as bony as himself, who snuffs, wears ringlets, puts her poor hands in black thread mittens, and is as sentimental as a novel. If you just saw him, with his gray hair frizzed, and his white waistcoat on, in honour of his guests. We drink tea. M. Lessels plays on the flute, Mam'selle warbles a little French song like a canary, and when that is done the old gentleman talks of the Emperor with tears in his eyes,—for he was a soldier in his youth, and fought at Wagram, and other great battles. He showed me a medallion of the Emperor the other evening. What a beautiful face it was, aunt; what a mouth and chin! To think that such a man spoke the language almost makes me in love with French."

"Buonaparte was a great rascal, and his father was an obscure Corsican attorney," said



Miss Kate, with some spice of asperity. "It would be better if M. Lessels taught you more French, and talked to you less about the Emperor, as he calls him."

Miss Oona rose in a coaxing way. "Now, aunty, don't be cross, or think me careless. My tongue runs away with me at times, and I am more attentive to my lessons than I say. I am indeed. To show you that I am industrious I have brought you this," and Miss Oona opened a little bag, and laid a piece of ornamental needlework on Miss Kate's knee, of the precise nature or use of which it may be excusable in a male chronicler to be in ignorance. "Miss Stevens told me that I had produced the best bit of work this session."

Miss Kate looked at the needlework for a moment in silence. She then, without saying a word, opened the door of a cabinet, and took out a roll wrapped up in paper. "Look here, girls," she said as she resumed her seat, and opening the roll revealed a sad-coloured sampler. "I worked that when I was younger than either

of you. And I was placed at no fashionable school, and had no fashionable mistress either. That was done before M. Lessels's Buonaparte was heard of."

The work of art spread on the old lady's knee was of the most curious description. In the centre was a many-windowed mansion, with an avenue running up to it fringed with triangular bushes. In the corners, right above the mansion, were trees of the knowledge of good and evil,—an Adam with an apple standing beneath the one, an Eve with an apple beneath the other, the serpent's mouth at her ear. Beneath the mansion, and on either side of it, two flying stags were represented, with their horns laid back and hounds after them in full cry. Around these images was worked an ornamental border; and just within the border meandered a scroll, with the legend, "Catherine M'Quarrie, whom God preserve, 1777." "You could not do that," said the old lady, "with all your teaching."

The girls were loud in their admiration.

"What patience you must have had," said Oona. "Your fingers must have been nimbler, and your needles finer than ours."

"How very dim it is, aunt," said Maggie; "all the colour has gone out of it."

"As it will go out of your cheek some day, if you live long enough," said Miss Kate, rolling up the sampler hurriedly, "It has faded, like myself, dear. Now, John, if you ring the bell, I'll tell Ann to bring up tea."

When tea was over, Oona went to the piano, and as Jack and Maggie were thrown together again they had some little talk.

"I did not know that I had a cousin like you," said the girl, "and I am very glad."

"But I knew you were my cousin, for Miss M'Quarrie told me," said Jack.

"You are away from home, just as we are away from home."

"This is my home now—but I have another."

"Were you sorry to leave home? Had you a soft brown beautiful terrier pup in a basket, which you were sorry to leave? I had."

"No; but I was sorry to leave my mother and Martha."

"Who was Martha?"

"The maid-servant at home: we had only one."

"Oh! papa has a dozen. But then some of them milk cows and churn butter. Were you ever in Skye?"

"No, never."

"Would you like to go?"

"Very much. I have heard my mother speak about it."

"Oh, you must come in summer some year, and I'll show you everything,—the pretty flowers that grow in the pools of sea-water among the rocks, and the grouse eggs amongst the heather. I like Skye far better than Hawkhead."

"Do you? Why?"

"Because I have so many pets there."

And so on. The pauses of Miss Oona's music the boy and girl filled up with such bald disjointed chat, and became very intimate and confidential in consequence. It was very pleasant to Jack and to Maggie. The latter part

of the evening sped much more rapidly than the earlier. In a remarkably short period, Miss M'Quarrie's drawing-room clock struck ten, and then there was a thundering ring at the door. The maid had arrived in a hackney coach to take the young ladies home to Mrs Wilson's.

When they were gone, Miss Kate said, "Well, John, how do you like your Highland cousins?"

"I like Miss Maggie best."

"Why?"

"I don't know. I suppose because she speaks to me."

"Don't you think Miss Oona pretty?"

"I can't say. I couldn't see her face for her eyes."

"Why that's the greatest compliment you could pay her eyes. I must tell her the next time I see her."

CHAPTER VIII.

WHICH TRAVERSES SEVERAL YEARS, AND RECORDS
VARIOUS MATTERS.

IN the present chapter the chronicler must don a pair of seven-league boots, and traverse rapidly a series of years. This story, whose progress has been as slow as an English river meandering through flat plains, has now to enter on an interval of rapids; and when the unwonted acceleration is over, its future will be as slow and humdrum as has been its past. The chapter will not be a long one, but before it is finished the M'Quarrie girls will have become women; Jack will have finished his university career, will have had a seat for long in the office of Messrs Hook and Crook, and become versant in all the outs and ins of their extensive business; Miss M'Quarrie's form will be more bent, her face more puckered, but her

eye will have retained its keenness, and her brain its nimbleness; in Mrs Hagart's glossy hair, time will have put not a few silver threads; and around Hagart's head—now slightly bald by the way—there will be shining the nimbus of a permanent prosperity. Having shod himself with the shoes of swiftness, let the chronicler now proceed!

While resident in Hawkhead the M'Quarrie girls were frequently at Mortimer Street of an evening, and just as frequently were they at Cuchullin Lodge. By the Staverts they were made welcome; and Jack, who occasionally accompanied them, was made welcome also. Jack admired the Cuchullin gardens and the Cuchullin nick-nacks—the old swords, the old cabinets, the old Bohemian glasses with the cracks across them which were the vouchers of age, and the old pictures representing snuffy saints and martyrs. In a sort of distant way he liked Miss Flora, who was a showy girl, a few years older than himself, and who patronised him; much better he liked Miss Kate Stavert, who was one or two years his junior,

and whom he could patronise. After a general and somewhat indefinable manner he liked the Stavert lads—Torquil, Norman, and the rest of them—bearing grand Highland names. Stavert also, whom he had before met on a memorable occasion, had a place in his favourable regards. But Mrs Stavert he did not like; and he was conscious, by a swift instinct, that precisely to the same extent that lady did not like him. She was a tall, blonde, smooth woman, cheeked like a faded peach, with eyes of no particular colour, which dilated and contracted in a peculiar sort of way. Her manner was soft, her step was soft; her light hair was softly and smoothly braided; her voice was soft and ingratiating. When in company she was continually whispering to her neighbour in confidential asides. She smiled frequently, but somehow her mouth and eyes had cut acquaintance, and never could be brought to smile in concert. Her smile was as artificial as her rouge—that is, *if* she rouged, of which I am not in the least aware. I have taken Mrs Stavert down to dinner twice or thrice, and while she

abused my best friends to my face, she was careful to tell me how much she admired my talents and my person and my manners; and I felt very much as if, preparatory to being swallowed, I was undergoing the process of lubrication. I confess I was scared by the soft voice and the politely-malign eyes contracting and dilating on me like a cat's. In truth, there was something feline about Mrs Stavert altogether. Her pleasant manners were like a cat's paw—velvety, yet with talons concealed in the velvet. She was vain, and delighted to lie coiled up in the fire-light of approbation. When pleased, the pupils of her eye contracted, the lids came sleepily down, and you almost thought you could hear her purr. So long as you stroked her with the pile it was agreeable enough; if you stroked her against the pile, up shot the electric spark, and out of the soft-stepping velvet came the claws. On all Jack's visits to Cuchullin Lodge, Mrs Stavert was studiously polite, but to the boy's simple unvitiated sense that politeness never seemed sincere. He did not like her. If left alone in

a room with her, he would have felt uneasy ; and without knowing why, he was certain that she did not like him. It is hardly worth while being a hypocrite in this world. People are not so easily deceived as people suppose. The great art in social tactics is to conceal art ; and the man who is known to be cunning, is never cunning enough. False colours are only of use to the privateer or the blockade runner so long as they are believed not to be false. Test the spurious coin of regard on the counter of instinct, and you know it in a moment by its ring.

The wintry stars shone keen above Cuchullin Lodge, and, save a speck of light from one chamber, the entire mansion was dark. Within that chamber lay Mr Stavert and his wife, careful even in the night watches of their own and their children's interests. Above the matrimonial couch Sleep hovered on downy wings, preparing silently to descend. Jack and the M'Quarrie girls had visited them that night, and there had been a little family dance, and thereafter a little family supper. The guests

had gone, the youthful members of the family were deep in dreams in rooms beneath; but in the upper chamber, with its speck of light, the fond parent pair were yet awake and plotting. Just before I shall play eavesdropper, Mrs Stavert had shot after Jack one of the arrows of her spite. Stavert turned uneasily on his pillow.

"Now, Eliza, ook here," he said, "I dislike that boy as much as you possibly can, and it is just because I dislike him that I don't wish to hear you give expression to your feelings. I dislike him, but I don't wish to show him that I dislike him—which I am sometimes tempted to do. You are in no such danger. You are too much a woman of the world to be betrayed into the expression of your true feelings. We have a daughter, Kate;"—and at this oracular statement, even in the dimness of the bed-chamber, Mr Stavert's eyes went into the corners that were next his wife.

"Well?" said the lady.

"She must marry young Hagart. I have made up my mind about that. They are about

the same age, and every way suitable. We have some years to come and go upon, and we can easily throw them together and get them to take a liking for each other. It is important that Hagart should take a liking for Kate, because, if needful, we can force her into a marriage against her inclination, while we cannot force him. He will have all his aunt's money, and if Kate marries him, it will come into the family. We should have got it in the first place, of course; but then, if we cannot catch the rain with one dish, we can catch it with another."

"If we get it through marriage," responded his spouse, "it will be just as good as if we got it under Miss Kate's will. As the dear girl's mother, I shall of course be her closest counsellor, and we shall make the young man do as we please. Unlike furniture, money is as valuable at first as at second hand."

"As we arranged, darling," Stavert went on, the marriage of Jack and Miss Kate being finally decided upon, and the opinions of neither of these young people consulted, "I

spoke to Torquil to-day about Miss Oona M'Quarrie, and urged him to get into her good graces as far and as speedily as possible. I merely dropped the hint, and in a moment the lad snuffed Miss Oona's fortune afar off. Hector married late in life, and has been a cautious, saving man all his days, and by this time he must have lined his purse extremely well. Didn't you think that Torquil was very attentive to her when she was his partner in the quadrille, and at the supper-table to-night, and that she was rather pleased with his attentions? I did. The smile never left her black eyes all the time."

"And that smile I rather fear. Miss Oona will be much more difficult to manage than John Hagart. But by care and attention both may be managed. Just leave them in my hands. We have plenty of time to work in, and if one mode of action fails, we can try another. Good-night."

And Sleep, with downy wings outspread above the matrimonial couch, slowly settled down.

In due time Jack left the Hawkhead High School, and was entered a student of the Hawkhead University. This university,—famous to all the ends of the earth,—with its smoke-blackened, long-extended, and quaintly-carved and windowed frontage; its flagged and antique courts, with well-worn and griffin-surmounted staircases springing therefrom; its low-roofed and indifferently-lighted classrooms; its green behind, in whose shady and sequestered alleys studious students walked arm-in-arm, and in whose centre the game of football was being constantly contested—this university, old and weather-worn, stood in one of the dingier portions of the city, and lent thereto a dignity and a sacredness which were much needed. We know what we are, but we know not what we shall be; and it pains me to think that in a little while the famous university will be a famous university no longer. Learning is about to take its flight westward to a spick and span new building on a sunny hill; and the old halls, which have heard so many eloquent voices, are about to



be transformed into a central railway station. And yet, in such a change, there is a certain fitness and propriety. The old building has brought its fate upon itself. It was the cradle of the infant steam-engine; and it is perhaps right that, when it has done its work, and fulfilled its original purpose, it should become the main home and haunt of the locomotive. Like Frankenstein, it will be slain by the monster it has created.

When the early winter days are closing in, the streets surrounding the Hawkhead University bristle with "lodgings to let;" and then all of a sudden a troop of flamingoes seem to have alighted on the Hawkhead pavements. During the entire day the streets surrounding and leading to the university are dotted with scarlet specks. At Hawkhead the students attending the classes in the faculty of arts wear scarlet cloaks; and when Jack's new one was sent home to Mortimer Street the evening before matriculation, he was forced by Miss Kate to equip himself in the glowing toga and to endure her private inspection.

The old lady, while regretting that the soldierly scarlet should ever be degraded to a scholar's use, was on the whole sufficiently complimentary. Next day, in his gaudy habili-ment, Jack sallied forth, and while walking along felt painfully conscious that every one was taking private note and cognisance of him. The veteran students whom he passed wore cloaks torn and frayed, and smeared with ink; but his was virgin scarlet, unsoiled by work or combat, and to every one it was dreadfully apparent that he was a greenhorn and a freshman. The Hawkhead students are exposed to the rude chaff of the streets; but for that chaff the older men care no more than a weather-beaten mariner cares for a splash of spray. This ordeal, on the morning in question, Jack had to pass, and his gown being hatefully glaring and new, and his feelings sensitive, he endured on his march to the university much real affliction. He had hardly turned the corner of Mortimer Street when a small baker's boy, carrying a basket of rolls on his head, transfixed him with his eye. Jack walked

past with as much dignity as he could assume; but he had not proceeded ten paces, when the wicked baker's boy deliberately took the basket of rolls from his head, placed it on the pavement, and then, curving both hands around his mouth, howled out, "Oh, the puppy! oh, the puppy!" (Anglice, *poppy*, but a play on the word was evidently intended by the wretch.) And this salutation, which went through Jack's soul like a bolt of ice, was caught up by another small boy at the next corner of the street, whose way lay in the same direction as Jack's, and who beguiled the tedium of that way by howling out the above opprobrious epithet, and observations still more irreverent at intervals. Our young friend ran the gauntlet of jeering and mockery with considerable fortitude, till, nearing the university, he was by a troop of children assailed with a round chorus sung in rude cadence,—

" Collie dowg,
Lift up yer lug,
An' let the gentry by ye."

At this greeting all the scarlet in Jack's

mantle rushed into his face, and he fervently resolved that he should obliterate that pestilent brightness of tint which attracted so much public observation and comment, and of which but yesternight he was so proud—that he should shred it up with knives, that he should spill a bottle of ink upon it, that he should bribe the maids at home to clean their blacking brushes upon it, that he should throw it in the gutter and dance upon it—that, in fact, he should do everything in his power to make the garment as dingy and as like an old soldier's tattered uniform as possible.

The scarlet mantle got dingy enough in a short time, however, and Jack became careless of popular jeer or witticism. A new life lay around him in the university, and he tasted all its novel sweetness. He made many friends, he attended the debating societies, he read and talked—in every way his mind opened, and he obtained new visions of the wondrous world. He has often told me of his Humanity Professor—a true scholar and gentleman, now gone to

his rest; of his haughty features, his proud blood, his gray eye, that froze ignorance or stupidity into a statue. "Do you mean to tell me, sir," he would say, rising on an unhappy culprit in the white wrath of scorn, "do you mean to tell me, sir, in cold blood, that so and so is so and so?" And when he did rise after that fashion the class felt that the Professor was not in a humour to be trifled with. Another university anecdote John is fond of repeating, and at which he laughs consumedly yet, as if it were a joint of fun which never grows less, at which you can cut and come again for ever. "Will you please define instinct, Mr ——," quoth the bland Professor on class-examination day to a country student, whose face was composed of mouth and eyes. "The Thirst for Blood," responded the rustic, in a sepulchral voice, eyeing his Professor hungrily the while. Into all that was stirring or picturesque in his new life the young fellow entered heartily. He was a capital hand at foot-ball on the college green. He liked the debating societies and the wordy strife; and at the time he gained con-

siderable applause by his advocacy of the claims of Napoleon to the title of a man of genius as against those of the Duke of Wellington. When the angry scarlet mantles streamed down the street—a sufficient walking-stick firmly clenched in each scarlet mantle’s fist—blue policemen in flight or pursuit—Jack was sure to be one of the crowd—in the van if advancing, in the rear if in retreat. While a body of students were retiring once through the snowy streets, policemen hanging persistently on the edges, and making a capture now and then, a wild charge was made—scarlet-mantled student clashing desperately against blue-clad policeman, the walking-stick pitted against the official truncheon—and this wild charge, with cap gone, and bleeding forehead, Jack valorously led. So led, the wedge of streaming scarlet mantles scattered for the time their blue adversaries; but the victory was not obtained for nothing. Hard blows were given and received, and just in the moment of success Jack was smitten down. Him, therefore, his companions assisted home; and with broken pate

and discoloured optics, delivered over to the tender charge of Miss Kate. Did that lady grieve over her nephew's disfigured countenance, and upbraid him for his riotous and ungentlemanly conduct? Not a whit. On the contrary, Miss Kate, who came of a fighting race, and who had a lot of the old blood about her heart, was prouder of her nephew's broken head than if he had brought home an armful of college prizes; and the discoloured eyes, slowly passing through rainbow changes of blue, green, and yellow to their original condition, were dearer to her than any professor's certificate of proficiency and irreproachable conduct. For, rightly or wrongly, to the old lady's thinking, college prizes and certificates of proficiency gave evidence of cleverness only, whereas the broken pate and the bruised face showed courage, and that moral quality she placed at the head of all manly virtues. I am inclined to believe that Miss Kate, while in attendance for a fortnight on John's sofa, felt more tenderly towards that young gentleman, had in reality a deeper respect for him, than

she ever had before. She regarded him as in some sort a gallant soldier borne bleeding from the field of honour. While Jack was so attended, a policeman, in another quarter of the town, who had no sofa to lie upon, was suffering from a dislocated shoulder and a couple of broken ribs, and of these injuries my young friend was in main part the author. Miss Kate did not know the condition of the poor Irishman; and even if she had known, I much fear she would not have expended much sympathy upon him.

Nor were occasional snowball riots and combats with policemen the only striking scenes to which the university introduced Jack. At Hawkhead, in common with the other Scottish universities, a Lord Rector fell to be elected every three years; and it was when my young friend had finished his course in arts, and was addressing himself to the study of law, that the election to this high and responsible office came round. The Hawkhead students were divided into two camps, Liberal and Conservative; and of the latter body—much moved thereto by the

influence of Miss Kate—Jack became a zealous adherent. In the hands of these two parties the election lay, and both sought earnestly for a befitting and talented representative. Committees were held in various places during the day, midnight conclaves sat in the old classrooms, to the disgust of the worthy janitor, whose duty it was to turn off the gas and lock the door, after the heated young men had departed; and at last the camps had chosen their men: the Conservatives put forward William Wordsworth, the venerable poet; the choice of the Liberals fell on Lord Turniptop, a local nobleman of considerable wealth and influence. These candidates had no sooner been fixed upon, than the university corridors became alive with squib and satirical poem. The Conservatives grew witty on his lordship's agricultural tastes, and wished to know if the ancient university of Hawkhead had become a market-garden, and if guano had at last taken the place of the classics. The Liberals bespattered Wordsworth in the most handsome way, and reprinted certain well-known passages from the *Edin-*

burgh Review, and from Lord Byron's *Don Juan* and *Vision of Judgment*. As the day of election drew near, the rival committees held nightly meetings in the university, and listened to, and cheered to the echo, the most eloquent and inflammatory addresses. On one of these occasions, Jack appeared before the Conservative committee, with an elaborate essay on the genius of William Wordsworth, and the moral and political tendency of his writings, in his pocket, the reading of which, it was fondly hoped, would kindle the Conservatives to yet more fiery zeal in the good cause, and convert at once from the error of their ways what benighted Liberals might be present. Accompanied by the members of the Conservative club, Jack marched into the crowded classroom, and side by side with the chairman took his seat on the tribune, beneath the solitary gas-lustre. The benches away into the gloom of distance were crowded with eager faces ; and the entrance of the orator of the evening and his party was welcomed with a burst of welcoming Conservative cheers, through which ran a

hollow bass of Liberal groans, portending tempest. In a few words the chairman opened the meeting, and then announced that Mr John Hagart would favour them with an address. Amid a tremendous uproar, Jack got up, placed his MS. on the reading-table before him, and began. The Liberal enemy, who were present in great numbers, were anxious to hear what my friend had to say, and so with but moderate interruption, he went on to pass a high eulogium on the immortal poet, "Who yet," I quote verbatim, "gilds the hills that gird Rydal Water, as by the solemn radiance of a setting star." Here uprose enthusiastic Conservative cheers, answered by satirical Liberal cachinnations. Put on his mettle by cheer and counter-cheer, Jack proceeded to state that Wordsworth was in the highest and best sense a Conservative, "that he was Conservative not only through his judgment, but through his imagination and his reverential eye. To him," he went on, "the scar of ancient earthquake on Helvellyn, the ivies on Brougham Castle, the torn battle flags that hang in the chapel of the seventh Henry,

are the sacredest things. In our present parliament he sees the Saxon Witenagemote—in the Speaker of the House, Alfred the Great.” This flight being on the whole pretty well received, Jack proceeded to hold up to contempt “that ridiculously-bedizened magpie of poetry, Lord Byron, who stole from Wordsworth, and at the same time abused him; who wrote heartless libels on the man whose shoe-latchets he was unworthy to unloose, libels which, to the disgrace of a so-called Liberal committee, have been raked from their noisome resting-places, and been allowed to disgrace the walls of our venerable university.” This arrow went home, and through the Conservative cheer was heard the Liberal yell of rage, while certain aggrieved individuals got upon benches and gesticulated unheard. Jack had by this time lashed himself into a noble indignation; with a flushed face he confronted his excited auditory, and in a voice which was heard clearly across the tumult, he shouted, “Libels, I repeat, which by their presence have disgraced the walls of this university! conduct more atrocious, more

infamous"——. Here a dissonant bray, as if a troupe of wild asses had stationed itself in one of the corners of the room, drowned all lesser noise; and Jack's eloquence was brought to a stop. The tumult became tremendous, the braying continued, cat-calls and whistlings arose on all sides, and the floor was vigorously thumped by boot-heel and walking-stick. After a while some sort of *quasi* order was resumed, and Jack proceeded with his discourse. He was about to point out some of the more nice and recondite beauties of the poet he so much revered, when again, from out the distant corner, came the hideous bray. This noise was the noise of the Liberal enemy, and of course could not be endured. The chairman arose, and made imploring dumb show, but was for a while unsuccessful. By the time a lull came he had lost his temper, and taking advantage of it he called out, "Gentlemen, certain donkeys from the Liberal common, [interruption,] where they have been browsing on congenial food—Thistles and Turniptop, [hideous uproar,] have found their way here. As on the placard call-

ing this meeting, and affixed to the college walls, it was intimated that the presence of gentlemen was requested, the donkeys alluded to are palpably intruders; if these animals do not desist from the noises, which however natural to themselves, are just as naturally distasteful to us, it shall be my duty to have them forcibly extruded. And I call upon every gentleman present to support the chair." On the delivery of this speech, from the dark corner came a mightier chorus of braying than ever. The angry chairman glanced inquiringly around his committee; he read eager assent in their eyes; and at once they left the tribune, and clambering over and along the crowded benches, made their way to the distant corner, where sat the disturbers of the peace. In a short time from the dark corner proceeded the sound of personal conflict. Every one was now standing on desks and benches to behold the tug of war, when all at once the gas was turned off, and confusion worse confounded. In the darkness, Liberal was ignorant of Conservative, and Conservative could no longer vex Liberal;

and in a quarter of an hour the excited young men were cooling themselves in the wintry moonlight as they dispersed through the college courts; and when they were all gone the janitor locked the classroom door, much pleased with the success of his *ruse*. Three days after it was announced in the Hawkhead newspapers that Lord Turniptop had been elected Lord Rector, by a large majority.

“Our institutions are in danger,” the chairman of the Conservative club—who was the son of a respectable tallow-chandler—remarked to Jack, as on the day after the announcement of the election of Lord Turniptop, the young men walked towards the office of Messrs Hook and Crook, where Jack had for some little time back been in possession of a desk. “Our institutions are in danger. The democratic tide is encroaching on all our ancient landmarks. The existence of Church and State is imperilled; in a short time England will be no place for a gentleman to live in. *I’ll* emigrate, for one.” And disgusted by the election of the Liberal and agricultural Lord Turniptop, Jack also

heaved a sigh over the departing greatness of his country.

During the years over which this chapter extends, the most eminent success attended the firm of Wedderburn Brothers and Hagart. Their business had increased wonderfully, the house was noted for the elegance of its designs, and in the best markets its shawls competed successfully with the choice productions of Norwich or Paris. Alfred still held a sixth share in the profits, but that sixth share had during recent years quadrupled in value. It was astonishing in how short a time he became familiar with prosperity: equally astonishing how that prosperity steadied him, how within the limits of severest common sense, it compressed the fluctuations of what Miss Kate called his "quicksilver brain." Hagart was a much more amusing person in evil fortune than in good—less amusing to an uninterested spectator—but more agreeable to live with, his wife thought with an occasional sigh for the old times. All the ancient, half-absurd, half-poetic vivacities—which sprang like wall-



flowers from the chinks of ruin—became curbed; the ancient perilous flightiness and eager vagaries of hope and desire, disappeared; and by comparison with his former self, he became staid, prudent, self-possessed, self-reliant. I have in my time read and heard certain praises of poverty, how in its chill air the hardier virtues bloom, but have always suspected those praises to be hollow and insincere. One noticeable fact is, that they are never written or spoken by poverty-stricken men, but always by men in tolerably comfortable circumstances. Men praise poverty, as the African worships Mumbo-Jumbo—from terror of the Malign Power, and a desire to propitiate it. To bring the best human qualities to anything like perfection, to fill them with the sweet juices of courtesy and charity, prosperity, or at all events a moderate amount of it, is required—just as sunshine is needed for the ripening of peaches and apricots. There are some natures that will take hurt from any condition of life; and the man that prosperity ripens into a spendthrift, is precisely the man

that poverty would have soured into a churl. Resignation to the will of Heaven, say under the conditions of fell disease, is of all human virtues the most graceful: and, although he has many more pleasant things to leave, it is a virtue much more easily practised by the rich man than by the poor one. The rich consumptive patient has gone to Madeira; for the alleviation of his disease, he has procured the best medical skill, and transported himself to the balmiest of climates, but, in spite of all, he is told that his hour is rapidly approaching; and so, with the scent of oranges at his open window, and the long drowsy roll of the tropic surf in his ear, without a murmur he resigns himself to the decree, and awaits the end. Take the poor city clerk. He is told his lungs are deeply affected, and that his sole chance of life is a voyage to Madeira, and residence there; but on account of a scant purse, that voyage and that residence are sheer impossibilities; and so in a dim chamber, with but a muslin screen slung across the window to save him from the insolent pertinacious curiosity

of the houses across the way, his ear pierced with the cry of the passing costermonger, he lies unmurmuring, resigned, ready to live or die as the Lord will. Both are equally resigned; but which of the resignations is the more pleasant sight in the eyes of angels? Not that of the rich sufferer, with the scent of oranges at his open window, we may be sure. He is resigned after exhausting every chance of life; the other is resigned with one chance not yet exhausted, with one die not yet thrown, a chance which poverty prevents him from taking advantage of, a die which poverty prevents him from throwing. I know that rich men die perfectly resigned at Madeira and elsewhere: I know that poor city clerks die resignedly at home, with no finer element to respire than smoky London air. I know it is hard for the rich man to die, but how much harder for the clerk? especially how harder for *him* to die without a murmur—without a sigh for the unattainable! Let us all pray to be preserved from poverty.

Miss Kate M'Quarrie was correct when she

remarked that Alfred Hagart and a thousand a year would accord admirably well. In the golden smile of guineas our friend became curiously sedate; prosperity did not in the least turn his head, for the reason perhaps that he was always expecting prosperity, that he regarded it as an estate of which he was the lawful heir, and on which, sooner or later, he would enter on possession. He exhibited nothing of the vulgar pride and self-glorification of the upstart; at the bottom of which lie surprise, wonderment, and unfamiliarity. All his life he was conscious that he deserved success; success had been long looked for, and when it came he was not in the slightest degree astonished. He came into it as a king comes into a throne from which he was long exiled, but which was his by right all the while. And of Hagart's prosperity the world soon had palpable evidence. A white marble monument in due time marked Katy's resting-place in the Greysleyan cemetery. He removed from his suburban residence to one of the best houses in the western outskirts of the little town, and in

the new house Martha was not the only servant. Nay, more, about the time that Jack entered the office of Messrs Hook and Crook, Hagart, on one of the western Greysleyan hills, was rearing a new and elegant villa, with spacious dining-room and drawing-room; a lot of sleeping apartments, a library with a deeply-recessed window filled with stained glass, so that on Sunday afternoons, when he read Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*, or Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Dying*, the coloured light would suffuse the page; a far-out-looking tower, which gave a noble view of Greysley in its smoke below, the Hawkhead river journeying to the sea, and occasionally, when a sun-beam came out, a glimpse of Hawkhead itself, with dwindled spires and chimney-stalks against the ashy distance. Hagart had a taste. If Duke of Devonshire, he would have created Chatsworth. And before the door there were sloping terraces; out from one wing of the house projected an airy conservatory filled with flowers, in the hues of which he took immense delight; and behind were gardens, with south-

ern-looking walls, against which fruit-trees were trained. In all these things Hagart took much delight,—most of all, I think, in reading Sir Thomas Browne in the recessed window of the library while the glass hues his page. “Sir Thomas Browne, Lord Bacon, Jeremy Taylor, and those old stately-sentenced writers,” he said to me, as we sat over our wine in the new dining-room after dinner, “should always be read with some little ceremony. One should dress before reading them, just as one dresses for dinner. That’s the reason I like to read them when the sun is shining on the stained glass in the library. To my mind the richly-solemn colour suits the richly-solemn thought. The peal of the organ should accompany the rolling periods.” Prosperity, as I have said, improved Hagart much. He became a changed man, to a great extent. In the early days he was like a bare tapestry: in the days of which I write he was like a tapestry covered all over with brave devices. Prosperity brought out his latent tastes, just as fire brings out writings in sympathetic ink. So far as my observation

went, Mrs Hagart did not develop much in the burst of sunshine. She was then, as I had ever known her, affectionate, gentle, tender, true; mistress of the kindest eye, mistress of the softest voice. She liked to talk to me about the old time, the old hardships, the old house; she would laugh pleasantly over her husband's brilliant schemes; could even poke a little fun at the Central American notion; but in her heart there was a constant ache and void. The little child which had gone out from her on the wintry day had never been forgotten, and I fancy now never will. One thing occasionally struck me as curious, and that was, that these good people expressed at no time any desire to have Jack back again from Aunt Kate. They saw him frequently, of course; once a month or so he spent a night with them, and turned the windows in the far-out-looking tower into a smoking-room; and then they occasionally in return visited him at Mortimer Street. That Mrs Hagart should have been content to allow her son to remain with Miss M'Quarrie was perhaps not

to be wondered at ;—but Hagart ? He objected to the project when as a poor man it was first mooted to him ; and now, when he had become a rich man comparatively, he was content to let things remain as they were. The truth is, that although he did not know, and perhaps never would know, how deep was his debt, he had come to like Miss Kate, and to feel grateful to her. The boy was contented in Hawk-head, and why should he interfere with that contentment ? Besides, as I suspect is always the case with natures fine at the core, success had made Hagart humble. He had drunk the champagne of prosperity, and on him it had a sedative influence. He was no longer flighty and self-assertive, and he no longer indulged in curious outflamings of personal dignity. What was the use now ? When you have won your battle you naturally lay down your arms. When you have presented your little bill to Fate, and she has paid you to the uttermost farthing, you are not in the least inclined to repine. When the world takes a man at his own valuation, the man does not grumble.

CHAPTER IX.

IN WHICH MISS MAGGIE WRITES A LONG LETTER.

DURING the year over which the last chapter extended, the M'Quarrie girls were frequently in Hawkhead; for three or four winters they were in attendance on the fashionable educational institutions, and subsequently they made flying visits to the city, either resident at Cuchullin Lodge or Mortimer Street for the time being; so that at the period of this present writing, John Hagart was on terms of entire intimacy with his cousins, more particularly with Miss Maggie. So far had this cousinly intimacy extended, that when Miss Maggie was at Hawkhead, John was as often in her company as he could possibly contrive; and when in summer the girls returned to Uanvohr, with Miss Maggie, John

carried on a somewhat voluminous correspondence. John's letters were filled with satirical descriptions of the evening parties he attended, of Hawkhead belles and beaux, of Miss Kate, of the office of Messrs Hook and Crook, and the like. Miss Maggie's—for that young lady gave him letter for letter with the most methodical punctuality—expressed the deepest interest in these matters, echoed and reflected them; and were full, besides, of the unexciting incidents of rural life, and always brought with them—to John's sense, at least—the smell of the Uanvohr birches. This correspondence had opened accidentally,—that is to say, when the young people parted they had come under no covenant to correspond,—but one letter had drawn on another, till at last, on both sides, the habit had been fairly formed, and could not be broken now without positive pain and regret. In John's writing-desk there had accumulated two or three packets of Miss Maggie's letters, full of pleasant trifling; and to the post night which would bring him another he always looked

forward with interest. Was John in love with his pretty cousin? If he had asked that question of himself, he would have answered by a decided negative. He would have pled guilty to liking: not guilty to love. But liking is love in bud. He was in love; but he was unconscious of it—as most quiet equable natures are for a while. You have walked out at early morning before the sun has visibly risen, and in the cool beamless light seen every object preternaturally clear, passionlessly distinct; and you have fancied in the strange distinctness of objects, and in the perfection of coolness and silence, that the world is waiting for something,—that the guard of honour has assembled, but that the king has not entered an appearance,—and before this conceit has had time to form itself in your brain, like one red-faced with haste, up bounces the sun, and the far-off hills, so coldly distinct a moment before, lose outline in a flush of heavenly roses; and the stream is covered with patines of fine gold; and the white cloud reddens passionately like a cheek;

and beneath it the lark sings in rapture; and the cool emotionless atmosphere is all at once pierced with the arrows of sun-fire, and the dumb colourless dawn has passed into a vocal morn, glittering with the hues of the humming-bird. There is the progress of the passion in image! John Hagart was in the dawn state when he was writing and receiving the letters: he was passively in love: but the time was coming when that love would become active; when he would become *conscious* that he was in love, and when that consciousness would transfigure the ideal world for him, just as the rising of the sun transfigures the material one. We can all remember such immortal moments. If we do not, we have not drunk the wine of life with the foam on.

With the contents of the majority of the letters accumulating in John Hagart's writing-desk we have no concern, and so let them lie in their own sweetness; but with *one* of Miss Maggie's epistles, received about this time, we have such intimate concern that I shall print it at length. It was received on a Wednes-

day night; and before he went to bed, John perused it and reperused it at least a dozen times. Here it is :—

“UANVOHR, *Thursday*.

“MY DEAR COUSIN,—I received your letter at three o'clock this morning, and read it in bed. The boy who was sent to —— with the post-bag lost his way coming home across the hills, and so was several hours late. I was very disconsolate at the non-arrival of the messenger, and went to bed as one goes on a wet night, perfectly certain that when one awakes the morning will be sunny. I knew that I would have your letter in the morning at any rate. When the boy came, Mary, who knew what I was expecting, brought it up to my room at once. I was very glad to get it, although I was wakened out of my sleep, and had to read it by my bedroom candle.

“And so you thought Miss Kate Stavert looked very well when you met her at the Flower Show! She must have improved since I saw her last. I admit she has a nice figure,

but she has not a regular feature in her whole face. She is a pleasant good-tempered girl enough, but not one of my beauties. Didn't you think her pink parasol rather showy? But that is the fault of the Hawkhead ladies; they all dress like dahlias, hollyhocks, and tiger-lilies.

"However, I shall soon see Miss Kate Stavert, and be able to judge for myself. And this brings me to the first part of my news. Papa had a letter from Mr Stavert the other day, to the effect that we—that is Oona and I—must be very dull at Uanvohr just now, and closing with an invitation to us to spend a month at Cuchullin Lodge. Wasn't it very nice and kind of him to remember us in our desolate estate? Papa will, I expect, allow us to go south in a week or two. I shall be very glad for one. I shall be glad to have another old-fashioned tea at Mortimer Street with dear old aunt. I hope her cold is better. Has she finished her sampler yet? When I come I shall see whether you have improved in your dancing since last winter. Can you accomplish

a galop yet without stumbling, or go through a waltz without getting giddy? When I come I'll put you through your dancing paces.

"And now for my second bit of news, which is serious. I wrote you, I think, two or three letters back, that we had heard some strange reports about Mr Willoughby's extravagances and wild conduct before he came to live near us at the foot of Marsco. Oona would not listen to these reports, and declared that she could instinctively pick out what nobleness there was in a man; and that she was satisfied that whatever might have been Mr Willoughby's early follies, he was good and honourable at the core. Papa, however, was not so entirely satisfied, and rode over to Marsco House. Mr Willoughby at once admitted that the reports which had been circulated about him were quite true; he confessed that he had been very foolish; that he had gambled a little, and dissipated a good deal; but that he was now entirely reformed, and that, by God's blessing, he would continue so to the end. *Papa* came home, had a long conference with

Oona, and in a day or two thereafter the engagement was formally concluded,—only it was arranged that the marriage would not take place for a year, Henry to be on his good behaviour during that time.

“A week or two ago he came over to Uan-vohr, and I saw a lover for the first time in my life. What a handsome one he was!—tall, (a good head and shoulders higher than you,) light-haired, blue-eyed, and with a step which makes you think that he had always walked on ground he could call his own. He was extremely gallant, and devoted himself entirely to us—actually helping us to pluck gooseberries and to plant saplings. He was of course especially attentive to Oona—every look was a declaration of love, every word homage; and of course she was very proud to lead about such a lion in a silken leash. But with all his quiet tones and manners, I suspect there is a hidden fierceness in him. There is a smouldering fire in his eye, which the slightest affront would poke into flame. If you had just seen him the day Oona's horse bolted! It is this

sheathed fierceness which is the great attraction to Miss Oona, for she has not a little of it herself. I believe he would fear no man, and would be tender to any child or woman.

“Just a week ago to-night I had gone to bed, feeling tired, leaving Oona busy with a book down-stairs. I do not know how long I had slept, when I was roused by the shutting of the door of my room. I started up, and there was Oona standing in the middle of the floor with a bedroom candle in her hand, her hair loose about her shoulders, and her face like a ghost's. She laid down the light on the table, and flung herself face downwards on the bed-clothes. I was nearly frightened out of my wits, and called out, ‘What is the matter? what has happened, Oona?’ She then got up, threw her arms around me, and began to cry. ‘Oh, Maggie, my heart is broken! Henry was drinking at the Narrowkyle market to-day, and has been fighting with a drover—as if he were no better than a drover himself. He promised me on his honour as a gentleman that he would be wild and reckless no more.

I am degraded, Maggie; he holds me in little esteem. He does not love me; he never could have loved me.' 'Who told you, Oona?' 'The men have just come home from the market, and Effie heard them talking about it'—(Effie is Oona's foster-mother, you must know, and loves her as her own child)—'the fight between the drover and the gentleman was in everybody's mouth. Effie could not rest after she had heard the news, and so she came wandering about the house; and seeing by the light in the window that I had not yet gone to bed, she tapped on the pane, and then I got up quietly and let her in. Effie told me all about it.' 'But perhaps, Oona, the story may not be true; or it may be grossly exaggerated.' 'It *is* true, it must be true,' cried she, withdrawing her arms, rising up to her full height, and stamping her foot. 'I'll pluck him out of my heart, although I should pluck out my life with him. False, cruel, cowardly. He has dragged my name through the mire. People will point the finger at me, and—and will pity me, pity *me*.' And then she burst into crying again, and began

marching up and down the room like a wild thing, and wringing her hands. I cried, too; and not knowing what to say or do, just watched her marching up and down, when she suddenly stopped and came towards me with a perfectly calm face with a smile upon it. 'Don't cry, dear; it's not worth crying about. I am sorry I have vexed you. It's all over.' Then she kissed me just as she used to do, bade me good-night, and, taking up the candle, was gone in a moment. When she left me my brain was in a terrible whirl, and I did not sleep a wink all night.

"Next morning Oona went to papa and told him her story, and insisted that the engagement should be broken off at once. Papa—who did not think knocking down a drover at a fair such a mighty crime, particularly if the drover was insolent—demurred, but Oona was peremptory; and so, after a good deal of argumentation, a letter bearing Oona's decision was despatched to Mr Willoughby at Marsco House. I suspect when he received it the poor young man was a good deal surprised, because next morning, a

little after breakfast, he came across the loch in his boat to make explanations. He was closeted with papa and Oona for a long time. What was said I don't know, but when he was going away—it happened that I was crossing the landing on the stair above at the time—I heard him say, 'I must accept your decision, of course, Miss M'Quarrie; but if you had ever loved me, you would not be so cruel.' 'Pardon me, Mr Willoughby; if I had *not* loved you, I would not have been so cruel, as you call it. It is my love which has placed the barrier between us.' That was all I heard, and it was a peep of light into the interior of Oona's heart. I could not love a man so intensely as she, and I suppose for that very reason I would be more soft-hearted towards him.

"Oona told me in the course of the day that the engagement was entirely broken off, although Henry had not been drinking at the market as she had been told, and had received provocation before he struck. And she requested that the subject should never more be mentioned between us. Of course I shall obey. But I

think that Oona likes to talk about it all the same, and that she goes down to Effie's hut to talk.

"So now my long letter is brought to a close. I don't know whether it was worth my while to write with so much particularity, but the affair is making a great noise in the country, and some rumour of it will be sure to reach Hawk-head before we arrive there. But I have told you the truth.

"Believe me,

"Your affectionate Cousin,

"MAGGIE."

This was an unwonted epistolary effort on the part of Miss Maggie, and John Hagart perused and reperused it with no inconsiderable puzzlement. The reader will have noticed the abrupt manner in which Mr Willoughby's name is introduced, and that abruptness was felt by John as well. And the odd thing was that it should be so, because incidental mention of that gentleman had been made in certain of Maggie's foregoing epistles; but then his name had always

been mentioned in connexion with Oona, and in the affairs of Oona John had only a secondary interest. What interested him in Maggie's letters was Maggie herself. Now however that Mr Willoughby had become interesting to Maggie on her sister's account, he had become of interest to John also; and so, to make himself aware of the entire state of the case, he went to his writing desk, took out a roll of the Uanvohr Correspondence, and doubled back upon it, seeking information concerning Miss Oona's discarded lover. The information thus obtained gathered from sentences scattered here and there, may be briefly summarised. Henry Willoughby was descended of a good old English stock, and rich withal. He was born in India, where both his parents died when he was nine years of age. He was then sent to England and placed under guardians; at the university he was regarded as clever, but could never betake himself to regular work. Coming up to London with some vague idea of reading law, he made ducks and drakes of a considerable portion of his money. This was the worst part

of his career. He pulled up; went down to the Western Islands in company with a friend to slaughter grouse; came to Skye, became interested in sheep-farming, found Marsco House and Farm for sale, purchased it, and established himself. At the house of a neighbour who had assembled Christmas guests he met Miss Oona M'Quarrie and fell in love with her. Of course, exaggerated rumours of his London career followed him to his Hebridean retreat; and having gathered all this from the letters before him, John could see at a glance why, as a prudent father, Hector M'Quarrie, before he would consent to his daughter's marriage, stipulated that Henry Willoughby should undergo a year's probation; and equally clearly could he understand how a proud girl like Oona should revolt at her engaged lover brawling at a cattle market, and how she should wince at such brawling becoming the talk of the country. Henry had been reckless before he had seen and loved her: must not that recklessness be deeply seated when it had *broken out* in such a flagrant manner after he

had done both, and when its suppression was the condition under which happiness was alone possible? Before he went to bed, John had the whole circumstances of the case before him, and, had he been asked, could have given a lawyerly opinion thereupon.

As Maggie surmised, rumours of the breaking off of the engagement, and of the circumstances which led thereto, were not long in reaching Hawkhead. One day at dinner John was somewhat startled by Miss Kate suddenly saying to him,

"And so Miss Oona's engagement with Mr Willoughby is broken off!"

"Yes, so I hear," said her nephew, cautiously, not liking to venture far on the perilous topic.

"I am very glad the girls are coming shortly, I must have a little talk with Oona. She must beware of pride. It's a cruel deity, and to propitiate it we often sacrifice our dearest and best."

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH MISS KATE HAS A TALK WITH MISS OONA.

THE M'Quarrie girls arrived at Cuchullin Lodge in due course; and one evening they came to Mortimer Street, bearing to John Hagart an invitation from Mrs Stavert to assist at a little dance on Tuesday evening of the following week. John was delighted with the invitation, and accepted it gladly. He was still more delighted with the bearers of the invitation. Over his cousins the years had passed, making changes. Oona was not a whit taller than when John saw her first at Mortimer Street on the evening she made so much fun of M. Lessels, her French teacher—in truth, she did not seem so tall as when on that often-remembered evening she rose upon him with her dark eyes; but she was woman

grown now, and beautiful, although of no common type. There was still the same strange foreign kind of ring in the silver of her speech; her eyes, which all along John had supposed to be black, were deep blue and lashed with darkness; her cheeks had that serious roundness and fulness that we see on antique casts and gems; and down on a broad, low forehead, came the black-blue hair in natural ripples. Her face was open candour and truthfulness itself. The greatest liar looking into her eyes could not help being veracious for once. And she had a fine figure, whose graceful, unconstrained, unsolicited undulations while walking or dancing were akin to the wavings of the breeze-bent birches of Marsco. By a natural instinct of taste she preferred white dresses, the pallor of the garment bringing out in keenest relief of contrast the darkness of eyes and hair. In appearance Maggie was as different from Oona as it was possible for a sister to be. She was several years younger, to begin with, and was not nearly so tall. Her hair was brown, her eyes were dove-like; she

had the prettiest little rosebud of a mouth, around which smiles were continually hovering like bees; and above all, she had the pleasantest, most heart-felt, most musical cackle of a laugh, which reminded you irresistibly of the flickering of sunshine on the surface of a stony brook. Maggie laughed often, and had she been a coquette it might have been suspected that she used her laugh as other beauties use their eyes. She was a general favourite, for in her manner there was a clinging, appealing, deferential something which flattered you and made you like her at once. She clung around you, and climbed into your favour, convolvulus-like—with beauty of blossom and touch of fairy tendril. The girls were to remain at Mortimer Street that night; John could see Oona, could hear Maggie laugh—and laughter came as naturally to her as fragrance to a flower—and was consequently as happy as a king.

In the course of the evening, while John was initiating Maggie into the mysteries of chess, Miss Kate, who all the time had been watching her opportunity, approached Oona. "Come

into my own room, my dear; I have something very special to say to you." And with that she led the way.

They had no sooner got into the room, in which a comfortable fire was burning, than Miss Kate turned suddenly round. "I wish you to tell me, my dear, about your engagement with Mr Willoughby, and the reason it has been broken off."

In a moment the serious pale face became all one pained rose. "Oh, don't ask me, aunt," cried the young lady. "I did not expect you would have known anything about it, else I would not have come. Don't ask any questions. The subject is very painful."

"I *have* heard about it, and you may be certain that other people have heard as well. I know the subject is painful, but the pain I inflict to-night may prevent a greater pain years hence. You love this man, Henry Willoughby?"

After a little pause Miss Oona said, "I did"
"Which with a girl like you means 'I do.' Very well. And is this man whom you say

you 'did love,' and whom I think you do love, a gentleman? You know what I mean by the term—something more than a handsome face, something deeper than a well-filled purse. Is he?"

Miss Oona, who had so much to say against her lover, was extremely glad to have the opportunity of saying something in his favour, and so she answered with pleased emphasis, "He is. As true a gentleman, I believe, as ever breathed; only"—and here the voice broke a little.

"Only what?" asked Miss Kate, coming down upon her niece at once.

"He deceived me," faltered Miss Oona.

"And did this 'as true a gentleman as ever breathed' deceive the girl whom he professed to love?" was the quick rejoinder. "There seems a screw loose there. Something like a contradiction in terms."

"But you don't understand me quite. That's not what I mean."

"Then what *do* you mean?"

Miss Oona, thus driven to the wall, was

forced to make the statement which all the while she had been striving to avoid. "I knew, papa knew," she proceeded, "that Mr Willoughby, before he came to reside in our neighbourhood, and before I knew him, had led an irregular life—nothing dishonourable, perhaps, to be laid to his charge, but at the same time a life erratic, fruitless, wild. All this he promised to reform; and papa would not allow the marriage to take place till the expiry of a year, so that the sincerity of his reformation might be tested. To these terms he consented, and the next thing I heard, aunt,"—here the young lady spoke quick and flushed all over with indignation,—“was that Mr Willoughby had gone to the market at Narrowkyle, had sat drinking in the booths there with men of low birth and no education, and that finally he got into a disgraceful brawl with an insolent drover and knocked him down; and all this while he knew the terms of our engagement and the reason why such terms had been imposed,—and in a public place, too, where people knew the relation in which we stood to each other.

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I at once insisted on the engagement being cancelled. Mr Willoughby had flagrantly broken his part of the compact, and I was no longer bound to stand to mine. Look to what he has exposed me! The people are talking about me. My name is as familiar in their mouths as their tobacco."

It was all out now. The whole case was laid before Miss Kate.

That old lady listened with much patience. "Now, Oona," she said, "I wish to ask you one or two questions. Was Mr Willoughby really drinking in the booths at Narrowkyle? was he to any appreciable extent the worse of liquor?"

"He says he was not."

"And do you believe him?"

"I do. But he had no right to be in the drinking-booth at all. That was not the place for him."

"Perhaps he was engaged in the study of character, my dear," said the old lady, with a slight smile. "The charge of intoxication, if ever made, must be given up. And now about

the drover. He was insolent, I think you said?"

"Brutally insolent, I am told, and insolent because a man of immense power, and who thought he could take what liberty he pleased. He insulted Henry, and Henry knocked him down."

"And upon my word I honour Henry, as you call him, for it," said the old lady, as she rose and marched up and down the room. "Do you mean to tell me, girl," she went on, turning suddenly to her niece, "that you would wish the man you love to have acted differently under the circumstances? Would you vow to love, honour, and obey a man who fears another, whether that other be drover or king? If you do, the blood that flows in your veins is not mine."

"But then, aunt, you must admit that it was an unfortunate occurrence. If Mr Willoughby's life had been blameless previously it would not have been so bad; as it is, it seems as if bad habits had taken such possession of him, that even for my sake he cannot forego them."

"I don't think it a bad habit to knock down the man who insults you," said the old lady.

"If Henry had been prudent he would not have allowed himself to be involved in any brawl; he should have taken care to have preserved my name from the mouths of the common people."

"Then it seems to me that you would have been better pleased if, instead of Henry knocking down the drover, the drover had knocked down Henry. *That* piece of news would have come to you like a bouquet, I suppose. *That* would have been a nice thing in the mouths of the common people. But who cares about the people? If you marry Mr Willoughby, you will marry him to please yourself, not to please them. The common people have a great deal too much to say now-a-days."

Notwithstanding her bold front, Miss Oona was not fighting for victory. Her heart was all the while on the side of the enemy, and she was secretly pleased with Miss Kate's vigorous onslaughts. It would not do, however, to show any signs of yielding, and so she said—

"You are a skilful advocate, aunt, and have driven me from several of my positions, but I don't admit I am beaten. I can't argue with you, and I don't think that this is a case that can be decided by argument. I feel *here* that Mr Willoughby has acted wrongly, imprudently, selfishly,"—and as she spoke the young lady placed her hand upon her heart.

"If you fall back on your heart, I have nothing further to say. Over that slippery ground I can't follow you. I daresay, in all matters of this kind, instinct is your best guide. I will admit, if it pleases you, that Mr Willoughby has acted foolishly, but because he has done so, is it necessary that you should act in a manner yet more foolish? Don't peril the happiness of a lifetime on a pique. Pride's chickens have bonny feathers, but they are an expensive brood to rear,—they eat up everything, and are always lean when brought to market. On such a matter I can speak with authority. A man who has been fifty years in his grave I loved once, and I quarrelled with him as you are about to quarrel with Mr Wil-



loughby. He is dust long ago, which the winds have blown hither and thither. Look at me! Don't cry, Oona. I shan't say another word. I shall leave the matter in your own hands. I wished to speak with you, and I have done it. And now, when you have wiped your eyes, we will join Maggie and John in the other room."

And so the interview was brought to a close.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH MRS STAVERT GIVES A LITTLE DANCE.

THE little dance at Cuchullin Lodge came off on the Tuesday evening specified, and to insure its success, the entire resources of the Cuchullin household were laid under contribution. In the drawing-room, sundry frowning carved cabinets of oak were removed, and a hundred nick-nacks stowed away beyond the whisk of tempestuous dresses. The door of the apartment was taken off, and the entrance looped up with white curtains, the floor was waxed, forms covered with red cloth were ranged along the walls, and a seat near the door was reserved for the use of the musicians. Mrs Stavert, with her best smile on, and glowing in purple silk, received her guests beneath the temporary canopy of white curtains, while her

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two youngest daughters, from fancy baskets, handed each, on entrance, a programme of the proceedings, at the top of which was emblazoned in silver the battleaxe of the Staverts, and to which was attached a tiny pencil by a bit of blue ribbon. Behind the lady of the house stood Mr Stavert and his sons, clad in full Highland costume; and still further back, just beneath the lights, in a loving sisterly group, stood the M'Quarrie girls and Miss Flora and Miss Kate Stavert. Mrs Stavert had stood beneath her canopy for a considerable time, and still carriage-wheels were heard on the gravel outside, and still, with their names shouted before them, her friends came flowing in. About ten o'clock there was a cessation in the number of arrivals, the musicians seized their instruments, and a quadrille was formed. Gallantly to the head of the room Sir Peter M'Calico led Mrs Stavert, gallantly to the foot of the room Mr Stavert led Lady M'Calico, and the dancing began. The first dance was ceremonious, and composed to a considerable extent of the elder people. When it was over

the elders retired from active duty. Mr Stavert retired with a friend into the depth of one of the windows. Mrs Stavert sat at the foot of the room, near the door, while the dance proceeded, and when it was done she fluttered about, providing partners for unappreciated damsels and solitary young men. The obese knight, his unwonted exertions over, leaned his elbow on the mantel-piece, talked of the variations of stock, and began to marvel at what hour supper would be served, and if it would be his fate to carve the turkey.

Dancing had continued for some little time before John Hagart reached Cuchullin Lodge. Making his way across the floor of waltzers,—in the whirling maze he noticed the waving tartans of Torquil and Norman,—he reached the side of Mrs Stavert, and was pleasantly rallied by that lady for his dilatoriness. “Young men are so different since I remember. When I was a girl, a young man would have looked forward to an evening like this for a whole fortnight, and would have been punctual to a moment—just as if the party

had been a dinner one. I can't guess what can be the reason. I am sure the girls are as pretty and as sweet-tempered as those your father used to dance with."

"I suppose they are," said John; "but I could not help being late. The truth is, we have been busy in the office lately, and I had an important paper to draw up, and got it finished only an hour ago. I came as soon as ever I could, you may be sure."

"Business of course must be attended to before everything, and I am glad you are so devoted to it. 'The hand of the diligent maketh rich,' you know. Kate, my love, you have not seen Mr Hagart!"

Miss Kate, to all appearance, had not seen John, but at the maternal voice she came forward with a smile. At the moment she was without a partner, and she and John were whirling amongst the waltzers immediately—a course of conduct on John's part which Mrs Stavert witnessed with much satisfaction and inward approval.

When the dance was concluded, and Miss

Kate conducted to a seat, John Hagart, amid the general buzz of conversation and laughter, sought out his friends. From the arm of a rising young Hawkhead doctor, Miss Flora Stavert bowed as he passed, and graciously extended her hand. He noticed Miss Oona in a distant corner of the room in close conversation with Torquil. He was lucky enough to catch Miss Maggie's eye; and that young lady, bowing to a young gentleman who wore an eye-glass, withdrew her hand from his arm, and came forward with the frankest greeting :

"Dear me, John, what has kept you? I have been looking for you all the evening."

"I had a tiresome paper to write at the office, and had to finish it before I left. I was engaged, besides, with some private business, which may turn out a good thing for me after a little. Mr Crook, one of our partners, has become infirm of late years, and it has been arranged to-day that I shall take over all his work, and become his successor in the firm. So you see I have been busy, and in

luck to boot. I hope you have been enjoying yourself?"

"But indifferently. Mrs Stavert paired me off with a dreadfully tall young man with an eye-glass, who dances, as he says, from a sense of duty. I hate eye-glasses in general, and that young gentleman's in particular. It looked down upon me like the open mouth of a cannon from a castle parapet." And here Miss Maggie shook her head, and wrinkled her forehead into a pretty look of comic horror.

"Well, then, seeing you have now secured a partner to your liking, may I have the pleasure of the next dance with you? What is it to be?" And John began to consult the card which hung at his button-hole.

Miss Maggie held up hers. "The next four dances are round ones, and you see I have written myself down as engaged to you for them all. I wish to see what improvement you have made. You danced very nicely with Kate Stavert a little ago."

"I am glad to hear it. I trust I shan't

forfeit your good opinion. Now then." And to the music Miss Maggie and John spun away among the whirling figures.

Although not at all a dancing man, John enjoyed himself extremely that evening. The music was good, the floor was good, and Miss Maggie was charming. He danced better than he ever danced before in his life, and his partner was profuse in her compliments. He was almost tempted to consider himself a man of wit, for at his gay remarks Miss Maggie broke into low musical laughter—very delightful to his ear and to his vanity.

Three of the four dances had been danced, and while the pair were waiting for the music to strike up for the fourth, Mrs Stavert came sailing up to them with a gentleman of no particular age in her wake. "Mr Wardour desires the pleasure of dancing the next dance with you, Maggie," she said with her blandest smile.

"But I am engaged to Mr Hagart for the next dance," said Maggie, in a slight tone of alarm.

"But you can't dance with Mr Hagart all night, my dear. Dancing engagements are not binding between near relations. Mr Hagart and you are cousins, and you can dance with him any time you choose. You must sacrifice your own private inclinations to the general benefit. Miss Maggie M'Quarrie, Mr Wardour!"

Miss Maggie curtsied, Mr Wardour bowed and muttered an inaudible something, then he extended his arm, and Miss Maggie, placing her hand on it, was led away.

"Kate, my darling," cried Mrs Stavert, "you must really take pity on Mr Hagart. He is without a partner and looks so solitary and woe-begone. You must really take pity on him." And John, putting the best face he could on the matter, marched off with Miss Kate Stavert. And I am certain that, during the dance that followed, Miss Kate thought John Hagart the stupidest young man in the room, and the gentleman of uncertain age Miss Maggie the most chilling and inaccessible of young ladies.

When supper time came Stavert emerged from the shadow of the window, gave his arm to Lady M'Calico, and carried her down-stairs, the company pairing off as inclination or the exigencies of dancing directed, and the rear being brought up by Mrs Stavert and Sir Peter M'Calico. When the last gentleman was seated, he found himself in the immediate proximity of the turkey, and as there was considerable demand for that noble fowl, it irked him that he had to send away all the more favourite and succulent slices. Greatness has its drawbacks. It is a pleasant thing to be the first man in a company,—not so pleasant to have an appetite and to be carver in general for the company. Sir Peter M'Calico had to carve the turkey not for himself but for others. Such had been his hard fate at almost every supper-table during that winter and spring. Over this bitter destiny the obese knight sighed. It was the fly in the ointment of his social greatness.

At the supper-table the elders tarried, and the younger people went up-stairs to resume dancing, and the dancing was conducted with

so much spirit that the room soon became hot, and the second drawing-room was thrown open in order that tired dancers might promenade therein. Torquil had devoted himself in the most unmistakable manner to Miss Oona M'Quarrie during the whole of the evening, and in this withdrawing-room, watching a favourable opportunity, he made formal proffer of his hand and heart. This interesting event was preconcerted. The Staverts, like the Czars of Russia, had a family policy, and this policy Torquil was carrying out. Some hint of the misunderstanding between Miss Oona and Mr Willoughby had reached the ears of the dwellers in Cuchullin Lodge, and it was resolved by the family that a blow should be struck at once. And in accordance with family arrangements Torquil struck the blow, but he struck it in all sincerity too, and with the most anxious desire that it should succeed.

Although Miss Oona was thunderstricken for a moment, she was disposed to treat the matter lightly. "You foolish boy," she said, "you must go and dance with some one else.

There are plenty of pretty girls in the room, and one face will obliterate the other. I am three years older than you, you know, and I look upon you as a very young man indeed. Had I not done so, I would not have accepted your constant attentions to-night."

"But no new face will ever make me forget yours, Miss Oona"—

"Nonsense. The love that is born in an hour will not outlive the hour. Choose another partner, and the love you have danced yourself into, you can easily dance yourself out of."

"But my love for you has not been born in an hour"—Torquil would have said more, but the rustle and talk of the elder people coming up-stairs was distinctly heard, and Oona was more than ever anxious to have the interview brought to a close.

"Now, Torquil, this must be brought to an end, and I daresay to-morrow you will think yourself very foolish. Take me into the drawing-room, and don't make a goose of yourself and of me. The people have come up-stairs, and may be here immediately."

The pain that passed into the lad's face gave him a look of dignity. "Let us go," he said, "I would rather die than compromise you in the least."

Oona turned round on him at once, and placed both her hands on his arm: "Torquil, are you in earnest? Am I to understand that—that you are sincere in what you have said?"

A flame of hope rose in Torquil's countenance, not so much at the words as at the concerned tone in which the words were spoken.

"I am perfectly sincere, Oona, and it pains me much that you doubt my sincerity. I have loved you for long, ever since you came from Uanvohr almost, but I never loved you so much as I do to-night. Do you believe me?"

"I am very, very sorry, Torquil; and I heartily beg your pardon if I have said anything that may have hurt you. But I must deal honestly with you. I cannot return this affection; it is utterly beyond my power. This answer is final, and you must accept it as final. I am sorry for the pain I cause you, but the pain will soon be got over, I hope; and if it

cannot be got over, it must just be borne. We must all do that. I trust you understand me, and that you believe the words I say are as painful to me as they can be to you. Shall we go, now?"

A loud clapping of hands came from the dancing-room, but Torquil did not hear. He bowed silently to his fate; and when they passed through the curtains to the dancing-room, Miss Oona felt that the eye of Mrs Stavert was fixed upon the pair.

The faces of both told tales; and the scrutinising eye lingered on them, and made its own silent comments. Happily, however, they could not have entered at a better time for avoiding general observation. As they came in they became witnesses of a great sight, and one which fully explained the burst of hand-clapping which Oona had heard a minute or two previously. A couple of broadswords lay crossed on the waxed floor, and around them, to appropriate music, with one hand gracefully reposing on his haunch, the other high in air, Mr Stavert, slightly excited by supper, was

performing Gillie Callum to the delight of the whole room, with the one or two exceptions that may be imagined. Stavert was devoted to the customs and garb of the Gael; he had a shapely limb, and on his performance of the sword-dance he especially prided himself. Nimbly he footed it around the glittering blade-points and the basket-handles. Now he penetrated for a moment into the perilous spaces described by the weapons, and then he backed out and danced round and round in a solemn manner. Then the music quickened; and with body slightly curved, one hand still on his haunch, the other still in air, he advanced boldly on the sword-blades; now his shoe-buckles flashed in front of them, now behind, now on the right side, now on the left, and never for an instant were the blades displaced. As the deft feet twinkled now here, now there, there were encouraging shouts and much clapping of hands, which made the deft feet all the defter. People stood up on forms that they might the better behold the wonderful sight; and between the shoulders of well-

dressed guests were peering the delighted faces of the female domestics of the house. It was but seldom that the master contributed to their amusement. At the triumphant close he bowed to the company, lifted the swords, sheathed them, and then walked with them away into the shadow of the window.

After this exhibition the dancing became more vigorous than ever, but to a certain extent it had changed its character. It became much less formal. The decorous quadrille and the giddy waltz were forsworn, and reels and country-dances took their places. The elder people, too, were drawn into the vortex. Stavert was mighty in the Reel of Hulacan; and Sir Peter M'Calico—his sufferings in the matter of the turkey entirely forgotten—led Mrs Stavert down the room in a country-dance. At the merry climax of the evening, John, despite the watchful eyes of Mrs Stavert, secured Maggie for a reel, which materially sweetened his departure. With the warmth of her frank hand still in his, he quietly stole

from the room, and went home in his cab, which had been waiting outside for a considerable time. The bonfire of the dance was at its brightest an hour after midnight; thereafter it began to decay, but its last embers did not expire till far in the morning.

Mrs Stavert's little dance was over, but it cannot be said that that lady looked back upon it with any considerable satisfaction. Several of her schemes had been more or less frustrated. She was seriously annoyed at John Hagart and Miss Maggie: she was downright angry with Miss Oona. She had drawn her own conclusions from the faces of the young people as they entered the room, and these conclusions had been verified in every particular, in a hurried conversation with her son towards the close of the evening. Torquil told his mother that, in conformity with the family policy, he had proposed to Oona, and that his proposal had been quietly but firmly rejected. To do the young man justice, he uttered no complaint. He frankly owned that he was unworthy of Oona—that he felt he was unworthy

of her all along; and that his rejection, although absolute, had been couched in the most considerate terms. He declared that he never admired and loved so much as now, when that love and admiration were hopeless. These statements made Mrs Stavert yet more angry. That her son had been rejected was bad enough—it was worse that he should feel disposed to kiss so devotedly the hand that rejected him. Where was his pride, his manhood, his self-respect? She had never been able to forgive any one who had wronged or slighted her; and it was her opinion that Oona had both wronged and slighted her son. She could not for the life of her understand Torquil's humbleness and tenderness of spirit; and had it been possible, she would have been angry with him also. Looking back on the dance, Miss Kate Stavert was not better pleased than was her mother. She had meant to captivate John Hagart, whom she had been all along taught to regard as her own private property; and John Hagart, in the seeing of the entire room, had allowed himself to be enslaved by that

light-headed fool Maggie M'Quarrie, with—as the young lady kindly phrased it—her look of stupid innocence, and her laughter when she had nothing to say for herself. Of all the denizens of Cuchullin Lodge, the one who looked back on the dance with the greatest pleasure was Miss Flora. Her plans had in no way been crossed; her vanity had not been wounded. She liked the rising young Hawk-head doctor, and the doctor had attached himself to her the entire evening, and been vastly agreeable.

Stavert and his sons had gone into Hawk-head, and an hour before noon the ladies were sitting at a late breakfast, and discussing the events of the previous evening. Mrs Stavert was desperately sulky, and while pouring out tea had indulged in the luxury of rating the maid. This produced an awkward pause; and, to break the silence mainly, Flora inquired of the company generally:

“When did John Hagart leave? I don't remember seeing him for the last hour or so.”

"I really can't say," said Miss Kate. "I didn't see much of him during the evening."

"If you wish to know anything about Mr Hagart, you had better ask Miss Maggie," said Mrs Stavert, playing with her spoon. "Mr Hagart had not the politeness even to bid me good-night. Miss Maggie will know when he went, because she danced with him the entire evening."

"Me! Mrs Stavert," cried poor Maggie, her face all in a crimson flush.

"Yes, you. The whole room remarked it. I should be sorry if one of my daughters had conducted herself so imprudently."

Maggie's eyes filled at once, and a slight colour came into Oona's face as her grave voice came to the rescue:

"I think, my dear Mrs Stavert, you are too hard on Maggie. If she did dance two or three dances with John Hagart last night, I don't see any harm in it. You know that John is her cousin, that she has known him for many years, ever since she came to school here first; and besides, she was a stranger to all the other

gentlemen in the room. I think her dancing with John Hagart was both natural and right."

"I was not aware that you were an authority on the proprieties," sneered the elder lady.

"Mamma!" put in Flora, in an alarmed, deprecating tone. Kate was silent; the little passage of arms, so far as it had yet gone, was not altogether unpleasing.

"I am totally unable to comprehend your meaning," said Oona, her dark eyes looking directly into Mrs Stavert's gray green ones.

Mrs Stavert winced a little, but spleen would have its way. "May I ask you," she said, her thin mouth drawn by an uneasy smile, "why you refused my son's offer last night?"

It was Oona's turn now to colour and tremble. "Did Torquil tell you that I had refused him? It was very wrong of him to tell you, at least in a way to make you angry. But I can't believe it. He is too noble not to have done me justice. The interview was as painful to me as it could possibly be to him; and I refused his offer for the most sufficient of all reasons."

"You refused him," said Mrs Stavert, speaking deliberately, so that every spiteful accent might go home and rankle, "you refused him because you are still hankering after Mr Willoughby."

"Mr Willoughby!" cried Miss Oona, half rising.

"Yes, Mr Willoughby—the adventurer, the waster of his substance in riotous living, the lover of low company, the brawler in drinking-booths and cattle markets, the man whom your father has forbidden his house; it was for his sake you refused Torquil—I know it."

Henry Willoughby had never so useful an ally as Mrs Stavert, and had he been present he ought to have kissed her out of sheer gratitude. Oona rose up to her full angry height, her cheeks burning, her eyes flashing. "You are saying what you know is not the truth, Mrs Stavert. Mr Willoughby is no adventurer, no waster of his substance in riotous living. He is an honourable man and a gentleman. You know, you know"—here the tears washed away the sentence. "Let us leave this at once,

Maggie. This is no place either for you or for me. I am sorry I cannot say good-by to Mr Stavert or to Torquil. They would not have permitted this. Good-by, Kate; good-by, Flora."

Mrs Stavert felt she had gone too far, and was willing to smooth matters, to apologise, even, but Oona rejected all pacific overtures with the queenliest scorn. In half-an-hour the M'Quarrie girls were proceeding from Cuchullin Lodge in a cab towards Hawkhead, with their luggage strapped on the roof. Mrs Stavert was sitting at home brooding gloomily over the *fracas*, and inwardly marvelling what her husband and Torquil would say when they returned and heard the news.

John Hagart was busy in his room at the office of Messrs Hook and Crook, when two young ladies were announced. To his consternation Miss Oona and Miss Maggie entered. He saw by their faces that something disagreeable had occurred, and jumping up, he closed the door, and inquired what was the matter. Maggie began to cry, and Oona related the

scene at Cuchullin Lodge, laying as little stress on Torquil's proposal, and on Mrs Stavert's accusations with regard to Henry Willoughby, as she could. John's indignation was unbounded, and he gave free vent to it. "What are you going to do now?" he said. "You must come home with me to Mortimer Street. Miss Kate will be glad to see you, I am sure. Come along; your cab is still at the door, and I shall go with you myself. My work must just wait for a little." And so he put away his papers, closed his desk, conveyed the ladies to the cab, and told the man to drive to Mortimer Street.

When John got home he told the man to wait, and entered in rather an excited state of mind. He got hold of his aunt and told her all that had occurred, with many an interjection and passionate parenthesis. When he had placed the girls fairly under the wing of Miss Kate, he went down to the cab, and told the man to drive to the office. The drive, which did not occupy a quarter of an hour, was a memorable one to the young man. For,

thinking, as he drove along, of Mrs Stavert's cruel conduct, of Maggie's beauty and distress, he made the discovery that he loved her. Into the cold, clear dawn of liking the sun of conscious love had arisen, and everything became vocal and many-coloured. He was almost frightened at the strange happiness that flowed in upon him. "It's very lucky," he thought to himself, "that I am to succeed Mr Crook. I'll shelter the poor darling then from every rude glance and every rude word." From that day forth Mrs Stavert stood in John Hagart's black book.

The girls remained at Mortimer Street for a fortnight; and when they were leaving for home, John succeeded in whispering in Maggie's ear, "Keep up your heart, and I'll come to see you in summer," and had for reward a tender pressure of the hand.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH HENRY WILLOUGHBY SHOTS A HERON,
AND FORMS A RESOLUTION.

ON the evening of the day on which the M'Quarrie girls left Mortimer Street on their return to Uanvohr, Henry Willoughby sat in the library at Marsco House reading *Samson Agonistes* with the lemon sky of a March sunset broken by the pointed gloom of the pine wood outside. The young man read till the light began to fail, and then he closed the book, his finger still keeping the place, and paced up and down through the apartment, his mind filled with austere music. "The reading of Milton always humiliates me," he said to himself, as he strode backwards and forwards. "What immeasurable altitude and solitariness of soul! what cruel purity and coldness as of Alpine snows! Chaucer gossips, Spenser

dreams, Shakespeare is mobile as flame, now Clown, now Emperor; now Caliban, now Ariel; at home everywhere, taking his ease in every condition of life,—but Milton is never other than himself; he is always autocratic—the haughtiest, scornfulest, stateliest, loneliest of human spirits. He daunts, repels, frightens, yet fascinates. He would sing the song of Paradise, and he left the task to the close of life, when smitten with blindness, pierced with ingratitude, and fallen on evil days and evil tongues—perfectly conscious that he could become immortal whenever he pleased. Gracious Heaven, what a *will* the blind old man had, making time, infirmity, and sorrow his slaves! Other poets are summer yachts, moving hither and thither on the impulse of the vagrant wind; Milton is an ocean steamer, with steadfast-pointing needle, plenty of coal on board, and which, relying on internal resources, and careless alike of elemental aids or hindrances, bears straight on its determined way, deviating not a hair's-breadth, come hurricane, come calm. What power, what energy in everything he

does ! His lines are like the charging files of Cromwell's Ironsides. Compared with this man, what am I ? Clay in the hands of circumstance, to be made or marred—without force, resolution, will—a spineless caterpillar—a blown arrow of thistledown—a mere thing of shreds and patches; with no virtue in my goodness, no hardihood in my evil—a something marching shabbily from birth to death, a poltroon, a fool"—and here the young fellow, having worked himself into a rage, threw down the book impatiently, and going forward to the window stared out on the lemon-coloured sky which the black needles of the pine wood fretted.

He had not looked out long when the crunch of a footstep was heard on the gravel, and the shadow of a man shot past the corner of the house, speedily followed by the man himself—a middle-aged man, half shepherd, half keeper, with a gun across his shoulder and a terrier at his heel. Perhaps the master of Marsco was glad of this interruption to the current of thoughts which were by no means

agreeable. At all events he threw up the window and called out—

“Well, Rory, this is a beautiful evening. Were you coming to see me?”

“Yes, sir,” said Rory, touching his bonnet, while the terrier made a sudden rush into the shrubbery. “*Smoorach, Smoorach*, come here, you sinner! You were speaking about having a shot at a heron, and as this is a fine evening, I thought I would come up, whatever. *Gaghey, gaghey, Mahoö!*” cried Rory, as he stamped his foot on the gravel, and at the storm of gutturals, the terrier, which had returned from its raid, slunk away in the direction of the kitchen.

“But do you think we will get a heron to-night?” said Henry.

“Hoot, yes. They’ll be fishing on the low rocks at the early moon-rise, and the moon will be up in half-an-hour.”

“Well, then, I don’t care although I should try my luck. I have nothing better to do in any case. Wait there till I get my gun and shot-belt—or rather, go into the kitchen, and

have something from Jones. I'll be with you in ten minutes."

When Henry Willoughby got down to the gravel walk, Rory came out of the kitchen, drawing the back of his hand across his mouth as he did so. "This will be a fine night for the herons," he said; "they are fattest in the early winter moon-lights, but they are in good condition yet. Are you ready, sir? I've told Jones to take care of the terrier till I come back. He would make a noise and disturb the birds if he came with us."

The pair then passed out of the gate, and Rory led the way across undulating ground covered with natural birchwood, toward the low rocky shore. The early twilight was falling. The lemon-coloured light was still lingering around the splintered peaks that rose to the west of the great bay, wan lemon-coloured light that was dying momentarily: while above a dark round hill on the other side, a cone of tender radiance shot upward, the *avant-courier* of the moon. In a little while, above the dark hill peered the full-faced spring moon herself,

and the rocks, almost undistinguishable before, came out in a flicker of glister and gloom, and the making sea was traversed by a faint mesh of tremulous lustre. As the light increased, felt more than heard or seen was the stir of life along the shore, in the distance motion and the sound of wings, and the fine flute-like call and recall of birds. Paler grew the lemon light above the peaks, higher rode the moon, and broader and more vivid grew the net of trembling light, till at last all was silver and silence and the cold splendour of the making tide. The fallen sun had drawn his last skirt of sunset after him ; and the moon had no rival save the shadows which were afraid of her, and which hid themselves from her ray behind rocks and in hollow places.

For some little time Rory marched on in front, then he slackened his pace, and allowed Henry to walk alongside. "I was over at Uan-vohr yesterday, and saw Mr M'Quarrie," he said, suddenly. "I was bringing a stag-hound pup for Miss Oona — of a grand breed, sir. It's the only kind of dog Miss Oona cares for."

At the name, Willoughby's heart gave a great jump, and the blood so rushed to his face that he was glad only the moonlight beheld it. "I hope you found Mr M'Quarrie well," he said, after a pause.

"Quite well. He told me that Miss Oona and Miss Maggie were coming home by the first steamer."

"Coming home! What are they coming home for? I thought they were to remain in the south all spring and summer."

"I don't know, indeed; but he told me they were coming home. Ah, Mr Henry, perhaps you will make it up with Miss Oona when she comes. It's you that would be the handsome couple. I was just saying so to Mr M'Quarrie."

"What right had you, you rascal, to speak about Miss M'Quarrie and me," cried Henry, turning on his companion angrily.

"I was just saying"——

"You had no business to say a word, and to Mr M'Quarrie above all men. Your tongue will bring you into trouble."

Henry strode in advance for a few paces, but

his annoyance was short-lived; in a minute or so he asked, in an altered tone, "And what did Mr M'Quarrie say?"

"I'll tell you that," responded Rory, briskly, as he sidled up to his master. "He just put his hands in his pockets, and leaned his back against the dike, and laughed. 'It may come all right yet, Rory,' he says; 'and we may both dance at the wedding. Young ladies don't know their own minds sometimes, Rory,' he says, 'and say no when they mean yes.' He has seen big Duncan, sir."

"And who is big Duncan, pray?"

"Big Duncan! The man you knocked down in the booth at Narrowkyle. I'm told, sir, your arm was just like a flash of lightning, and Duncan fell all his length like a tree. He met with his match and more, sir, when he met with you."

"Humph! He saw big Duncan, you say?"

"Yes, and Duncan told him—Duncan's head's not right yet, sir—that he was sorry that he had insulted the gentleman, and that he had got nothing more than he deserved.

Duncan's a very decent man when he's sober."

"Did Duncan tell Mr M'Quarrie what was the cause of quarrel, and *why* I knocked him down?"

"I don't know, indeed. Mr M'Quarrie did not say. Duncan takes all the blame to himself, whatever. But, Mr Henry, the black rocks yonder, sticking like seals' heads out of the bed of moonlight, is a grand fishing-place for the herons. They come down with the tide on their way to roost. We must get down yonder."

Under Rory's guidance, Henry crept down over broken boulders to the shore, and the twain ensconced themselves under the shadow of a rock that stood up against the glittering sea. When they were fairly ambushed, Rory reconnoitred the shore and the low rocks, but there was no heron, only a disturbed cormorant scudding down the moonlight with outstretched neck, and a sound of flurried wings. If a shot was to be had that evening, there was nothing for it but to wait patiently. So they stood in

the rock shadows, seeing nothing but the broad wrinkled glitter of the moonlight, and the plash and gurgle of the making tide. Utter silence came back when the cormorant had gone.

As he stood there in the gloom of the rock, the expected heron was to Henry of but little account; the return of Miss M'Quarrie to Uan-vohr in such an unexpected manner dwelt in his mind, to the exclusion of everything else. It puzzled him. He could not make it out. It was evident that the return was intentional, and that something extraordinary had occurred. Finding no solution in his own thoughts, he turned to his guide.

"Did Mr M'Quarrie"-----

"Speak low, Mr Henry, speak low."

"Yes, yes. Did Mr M'Quarrie tell you why Miss Oona—the Misses M'Quarrie, I mean—were coming home so unexpectedly? Did he throw out no hint? Do you know, or can you guess, why they are coming home?"

"He only told me, Mr Henry, that they were coming home by the first steamer; and I told you because I thought you would like to hear."

"Did he know that you were coming across to Marsco this evening?"

"Of course he knew, because I told him I was coming."

"And do you think he told you that you might tell me?"

"Ah, Mr Henry, why should I know that? It's not for me to guess; you can guess better than I can."

"But, Rory"——

"Wheesh, wheesh, there's the heron."

And sure enough, skirting the shore, and coming with the tide, was the heron in its long slow lagging flight. It had been feeding higher up the coast, was on its way home to roost, but was not indisposed to secure yet another fish before retiring. As it passed, Henry could see its head turned in alert outlook, and the moon silvering its floating crest and beautifully curved wing tips. The gleaming tide had now almost submerged the low rocks, and over one of these, at about fifty yards' distance, the noble bird hung in doubtful poise for a moment, then it descended, and furling its mighty wings,

broke the cold dazzle of the sea almost as darkly as the rock on which it stood. All motion had ceased, and it seemed a bird carved in stone.

"Now, Mr Henry, now," whispered Rory.

Crack went the gun, and the stone was untenanted—but there was a silvery plash and tumult beyond it; and as the reverberation travelled along the glimmering coasts, it awoke the liquid pipings of innumerable sea-birds. Rory was on his feet in an instant, "You've shot him, Mr Henry, you've shot him! A splendid shot!" And he clambered over the rocks, and dashed into the water like a water-dog, whence in a few moments he emerged trailing the dead wet heron after him by the legs.

"Oh, Mr Henry, ye've made a pretty shot. I never saw a prettier! Ye've hit her just under the wing. It's you that has the steady hand and the quick eye," continued Rory, as he laid the dead bird down on the rock at the feet of his master. "I never saw a heron shot so prettily before, and I have seen many trying

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it. There's nobody could do it but yourself, Mr Henry—and by moonlight too !”

Henry looked at his prey for a few moments with a slight touch of compunction. “What call had I to do this ?” he thought to himself. “I have extinguished a life because time hung heavily on my hands—a life that, so far as I can see, was quite as useful as my own—and have broken the first sleep of a hundred sea-birds besides. I took the poor thing at a disadvantage too, while it was quietly looking after its supper. Well, well, I have saved a fish, perhaps, for the dinner of a cotter's children to-morrow. Death overtook it while meditating death ; and there is a sprat the more wagging his tail in the sea-silver, through my interposition. Take it up Rory, and let us go home,” said he aloud ; “the evening is getting cold, and you are wet to the waist.” And so saying, the young man shouldered his gun, and began to march homeward at a great pace.

Rory seized the bird and followed. When he came up, Henry said, “You must be very cold, I fear.”

"Hoots no, sir. I would wade far deeper any time of the night for you, Mr Henry."

"I am much obliged, I'm sure."

"Oh, Mr Henry, but you're a splendid shot," proceeded Rory in his most ingratiating tones as he came alongside, "you're the best I ever saw. When you lay your finger on the trigger it's death to beast and bird. Of all the gentlemen shooters I see coming about the country, you're by far the best. It was a grand shot yon"—

"Hold your tongue, you unconscionable liar and flatterer," cried Henry, half angry, half laughing. "You know as well as I that shooting a heron sitting quietly on a stone is no greater feat than shooting a squatting rabbit. Don't I know that if I were leaving the island to-morrow, you would flatter my successor, whoever he might be, just as you flatter me?"

At this unexpected rebuff, Rory was stricken dumb; and as they had now left the shore and were entering on the undulating ground covered with birchwood, there was no further opportunity for conversation, and so Rory, much to his

disrelish, was forced to keep his admiration of his master's prowess to himself and, to trudge silently at his master's heel.

When they reached the lighted porch at Marsco, Henry entered and threw down his gun, Rory remaining outside.

"Take the heron round to the kitchen, Rory."

"Yes, Mr Henry," said Rory, in a penitential tone.

"And, Rory," said Henry, as he disengaged himself from his shot-belt.

"Yes, sir," and Rory came back a pace.

"At what time, do you know, does the steamer from the south arrive—the steamer you spoke about?"

"Miss Oona should land at"—

"Who asked you about Miss M'Quarrie? How dare you mention her name? Don't do it again."

"Very well, Mr Henry," said Rory apologetically, and, beginning his retreat to the kitchen, much, marvelling at his master's crossness of temper.

But Henry stepped out into the moonlight.
“At what hour is she to arrive?”

“Miss Oona or the steamer, Mr Henry?”

“Oh, confound you, either, both—I suppose they will come together,” and Henry, despite his vexation, could not help laughing.

“At two o'clock to-morrow, sir, Mr M'Quarrie is to drive over in his dog-cart to meet them and to bring them home.”

“Oh, he is, is he?” said Henry, thoughtfully; “and, Rory”——

“Yes, Mr Henry.”

“Go to Jones, and tell him to give you something to warm you; I'm sure you must be very cold.”

“I'll do that, Mr Henry,” said Rory, briskly, while he ducked, took off his bonnet, and alertly disappeared.

When Henry Willoughby entered the library, in which a fire was burning, *Samson Agonistes* lay on the table where he had flung it impatiently a couple of hours before, but its perusal that night he did not resume. He threw himself into an easy chair, and sat there

silently—the firelight playing the while on his face and light curling locks—revolving Rory's unexpected communication. "These girls are not coming home for nothing," he thought to himself. "I wonder what can have happened. Can I have anything to do with their coming home? Who knows? If that fellow, Rory, were not such a thundering flatterer and liar, I should almost suppose that Mr M'Quarrie was not unwilling that I should know of the circumstance. What if I ride across to-morrow and see them land? What! I don't see why I shouldn't." Here Henry, flushing all over with the idea, got up and marched backwards and forwards through the fire-lighted apartment. "I'll do it," said the young man to himself resolutely, after a pause. "The apple will not fall unless the tree be shaken. A girl worth winning is worth running some risk for. I believe Oona loves me, for all that has come and gone; and the misunderstanding, if it did not involve consequences so serious, would be all too absurd." The pacing up and down was here continued silently for a little. "What an ass I was not

to have made a clean breast of it when at Uanvohr! It would have been the easiest thing to have explained that I did not go to Narrowkyle of my own accord, but only to look after that poor dear Merleton, and that I got into a squabble with those drover fellows on his account. Easy enough, but for my diabolical pride. Unjustly accused, as I conceived, I was idiot enough to stand on my dignity and to disdain explanation or defence. All that may be righted to-morrow." Another long pause, during which there was no cessation in the walking up and down. "How the darling looked that day in her father's room. How swift, imperious. All the affronted woman up in arms of sorrow and anger—proud as a wronged queen. But yet she might have trusted me more. Having secured her love, how could she fancy I was the base Judean to throw that pearl away! And yet I never loved and admired her half so much as then. In her presence no man could be guilty of a meanness, or do a cowardly act, or tell a lie. Merely to

look into her face is to add a cubit to the moral stature of a hind—then all poetry becomes possible, and heroism the most ordinary method of acting. To think of that high heart beating for me—of that proud neck bent in submission, those eyes filled with the dews of meek surrender!”

But why go on with a lover's extravagances? What a beautiful world lovers live in. The passion draws everything into its service, and enobles it, just as Maria Theresa knighted the entire Hungarian army that fought under her banner. Then is rascality eliminated from human nature, and all men are brave because they are capable of the divine madness; then are all women good and beautiful because they are the loved one's sisters. There is no such charitable personage as your lover—he clothes a whole out-at-elbows world in goodly qualities and noble vestures. I admire Miss Oona M'Quarrie myself, but Mr Henry Willoughby, at least as he walked up and down in his library on

that March evening, would very possibly have considered my admiration shamefully chilly and burdened with limitations.

When the young man had wearied himself with pacing up and down, and had come to an end of his rapturous ejaculations, he rang the bell. "James," he said, when the servant appeared, "I am going to ride to-morrow. I'll start by eleven o'clock. You will have my mare ready by that time—and, James, I wish my boat to be waiting for me at Ardoch Inn, a couple of miles this side of Uanvohr you know, to-morrow evening about five. I'll leave the mare at the inn, and one of the boys can go across for her on the following day." As he went up-stairs to bed, he said to himself, "I'll ride all the way with them if the coast is clear, and will surely have an opportunity of making up matters, or of putting matters in a proper train for making up."

Mr M'Quarrie had driven across from Uanvohr to the fishing village at which the steamer touched, he had taken the horse out

of the dog-cart and sent it round to the stable of the inn, he had transacted business in the merchant's shop, and he was now standing whip in hand watching a man in his shirt-sleeves posted on a little eminence, who was making desperate signals with his arms. All of a sudden the man came running down, and as he approached he called out, "The steamer is just gone into Eigg, Mr M'Quarrie, an' will be here in an hour. It's a beautiful day for Miss Oona and Miss Maggie, Mr M'Quarrie."

"Thank you, Donald," said the old gentleman.

At the sound of hoofs, Mr M'Quarrie turned round, and beheld Henry Willoughby pulling up in front of the merchant's shop. The rider dismounted hastily, threw the bridle to one of the bare-headed urchins standing at the door, and came forward.

"Bless me, Henry Willoughby, who should have expected to see you here! You are quite well, I hope?" said Hector, as he shook the young man's hand cordially.

"My fellow, Rory, told me that your daugh-

ters were to arrive to-day, and I thought I should ride across to see them."

"Yes!"

"I am anxious"—here the young fellow coloured slightly, and felt some difficulty in proceeding—"I wish very much to see Miss Oona again, Mr M'Quarrie. She has been away, and has had time to think over matters, and I am in hopes that she may be induced to reconsider her determination."

"Come this way, Henry," and the old gentleman slipped his arm into Henry's; "we are within earshot, and there have been too many tongues in the matter already. Well?" he continued in tone of interrogation, when they got a little bit away from the houses and the keen ears of the listening urchins.

Henry again stated the motive which had induced him to ride across that day.

"You have done quite right," said Hector; "and some fifty years ago I should have done the same, had I been circumstanced as you are. Now, Henry, let us perfectly understand one another. I had a good opinion of you be-

fore, and I have a good opinion of you still. I don't care, man, although you had been fighting at fifty fairs and had knocked down a hundred drovers; I should be the last man to throw a stone at you on that account. I mind at Falkirk once"—here the old gentleman began to chuckle over the reminiscence of his former prowess.

"But," said Henry, "I have never yet explained how I went to Narrowkyle, and how I became involved in the quarrel."

"Well, well, that's Oona's business. Explain it to her. She has got to marry you; I have not. It was at Falkirk, in the year 18—, a grand market that, and splendid prices for stirks, and at the end of the day a battle royal took place between the Highlanders and Lowlanders. Trotternish and I were standing looking on, when a wild creature from the Braes drew a knife and began flourishing it about. *That* of course couldn't be permitted, so we went in on the rascals with the butt-ends of our riding-whips. Talk of felling drovers! We soon put a stop to that quarrel,

A gentleman should never be ready with a blow, but he should always be able to give one at the proper time. Ay, it's an old story that Henry. The grass has been green over Trotternish's grave for twenty years now, and his head was as white as mine when they laid it in the coffin. But what was I speaking about when I began the story?"

"You were saying I should explain"——

"Ah yes, yes, I remember. The whole thing lies in a nutshell. It's rumoured in the country that you were slightly wild, reckless, unsettled, you know; and you were engaged to Oona on the condition of your good behaviour. Well, then, the next news that came was your appearance in the booth at Narrowkyle and your *mêlée* there. I don't think much of that:—you can't expect me to look on such matters with a young girl's eyes. But when the story came, Oona's pride was hurt; she conceived you regarded her affection as a thing of little moment, and so she would have died rather than have married you. And from her point of view the girl was perfectly right. I don't say it was *my*

point of view, but then I am not to marry you, as I said before. Girls are skittish creatures, Mr Henry. They are like wild colts on the hill-side—you come with fair words and a bag of oats, and are just about to slip the bridle over their necks, when they are off and whinnying at you from a mile's distance. I found out all that in my own love-making time—to which I can look back as to a wonderful summer I spent long ago."

"But the affair at Narrowkyle has been much exaggerated. I can explain the whole thing; and should have explained it at our last interview, but that I thought Miss Oona jumped too hurriedly to her conclusions, and some motive of foolish pride kept me silent."

"You were like two nuts in a fire at Hallowmass eve, burning away briskly for a while, till, puff!—you are off in different directions. You were a couple of fools—that is to say, you were both in love. But, Henry, you must deal with Oona, not with me. You must see Oona herself. I shall be very glad if the matter can be properly arranged, for I always liked you,

Henry, you know. But it is entirely Oona's business, and it is for her to decide."

"Do you think, Mr M'Quarrie, that time and consideration may have reduced Miss Oona's anger? I trust"—

"Fie, fie, Mr Henry. I am speaking to you as your friend, not as Oona's father. You would not have me tell tales out of school?"

"Oh, I beg your pardon! I didn't mean"—

"Don't blush, man. The foolishness of a speech may be excused to a lover. It's all right. I was only joking. How should I know? Oona has been living with a wonderful old sister of mine, down in Hawkhead, and *she* may have had some influence. Besides"—he was on the eve of mentioning that Miss Oona had been fighting for the good name of a certain Mr Henry Willoughby at Cuchullin Lodge, and had left the house in consequence of the aspersions thrown thereupon, but on second thoughts he resolved on keeping that interesting bit of information to himself.

As they walked backwards and forwards,

Hector asked after a little pause, "Do you go back straight to Marsco, Henry?"

"No. I have ordered my boat to wait me this evening at Ardoch Inn, and if you'll permit I'll ride as far as Uanvohr."

"All right. The girls will have some one to talk to on the way, and give them the news of the country. Nothing ever happens at Uanvohr, you know. But I had better get the horse put in, for the boat is going out yonder to meet the steamer."

Hector bustled about in the merchant's shop for a while, had certain parcels stowed away in the body of the vehicle, and got the horse harnessed. By that time the steamer had slid into the bay, and when the two had walked slowly down to the landing-place the steamer was gone, the boat approaching, and Henry with a heightened pulse descried two female figures seated in the stern.

The two gentlemen were standing on the rock as the boat came on. "Oh, Oona," whispered Maggie, all in a flutter, "there's papa and Mr Willoughby waiting for us."

What can have brought Mr Willoughby, Oona ? ”

Over Miss Oona's face a happy flush followed the words, as music follows a touched piano key. “Hush, Maggie ; how can I know ? ”—and the next moment the boat bumped on the rocks, which threw the girls into an opportune confusion, and gave Oona time to become mistress of herself.

Maggie stepped out first and kissed her father, and shook hands with his companion ; Oona followed, she touched her father's cheek with her lips and then turned with a frank word and smile to Henry.

“I heard only last night that you were coming home, and rode across to see you arrive.”

“It was very kind of you, Mr Willoughby. I am sure we are very much obliged.”

“Now then, dears,” cried the old gentleman ; “hurry, hurry. We have a long way to drive. Come along, come along. Mr Willoughby will look after your wraps and things.”

Henry jumped into the boat, and began to

collect shawls, bags, and miscellaneous items of feminine luggage. When he had completed his task Hector had reached the door of the merchant's shop, and was assisting his daughters into the back seat of the dog-cart. The young man came up in great bustle, and when he spread a shawl over the knees of the young ladies and tucked it carefully around their feet, he was rewarded by Miss Oona with the brightest of smiles and the most silvery words of thanks.

Mr M'Quarrie's boy had jumped up. "All right now?" asked the old gentleman, seizing the reins, and turning half round. "That'll do; *chir*, Maggie, *chir*!" and away in front of the inn went the dog-cart, and after it came Henry on his mare.

Henry had enjoyed many a pleasant ride, but never one so pleasant as on that afternoon. When they were half way across, the early spring sunset began to dress the road in rose, and to turn every pool into a sheet of gold leaf. The air had grown chill, too, and the girls had drawn a shawl over their hats, and out of that

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covering the rosy faces, with the rosy light on them, peeped on Henry as he rode behind—a pleasant sight to see. Nor was there lack of talk and merriment as they went. Maggie was the principal speaker, and Henry joked her about Hawkhead, her dancing parties, her conquests, and inquired specially about that remarkable cousin, Mr John Hagart, of whom he had occasionally heard; and at every sally and inquiry Maggie's laughter rang in the coloured air like a silver bell. Oona chatted frankly enough also; but when the party reached the head of the road, and began to descend the long glen which led to Uanvohr, and when the giant bulk of Marsco became visible, with its ravines and torrent lines, she became strangely silent, and over that silence Henry, as is the manner of foolish lovers, pondered, and drew sweet and bitter conclusions.

In a short time the dog-cart drew up at the point where the roads divided, the one leading to Uanvohr, the other to Ardoch Inn. Henry had taken off his hat to the ladies, and was

preparing to bid them adieu, when Oona suddenly exclaimed—

“Papa, had not Mr Willoughby better stay at Uanvohr to-night? It’s a long way to Marsco, and it will be dark before he can ride there.”

“But he is not going to ride to Marsco, my dear. His boat has been waiting him for an hour at Ardoch Inn down there.”

“But you will remain, Mr Willoughby, to-night? I have a great deal to say to you to-morrow, and it is better to have it said at once.”

“Certainly, if you wish it, Miss M’Quarrie.”

“Well, then, have you arranged?” cried the old gentleman. “Does Mr Willoughby stay at Uanvohr, or go on to Ardoch?”

“He stays at Uanvohr, papa.”

“Very well; go on, Maggie.”

And so Henry found himself that night a guest at Uanvohr.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN WHICH CERTAIN LOVE PASSAGES TAKE PLACE
IN THE RAIN.

DURING the night the weather changed. When the dwellers at Uanvohr met at the breakfast-table, a dim wall of mist obscured the line of splintered peaks on the opposite side of the bay; and between that wall of mist and the shore, immediately below the northern window, there rolled a dark-gray windy sea, flecked with patches of foam. The view from the westward-looking window of the same apartment was not a whit more inspiring. Great plashes of rain came against the panes at intervals, and as Henry looked out, while chipping his egg, thin veils of vapoury spume were drifting along the green hill-sides, the gaunt trees near the house were swaying to and fro, and in the direction of the barns a female domestic was seen scurry-

ing for a moment, with her gown drawn over her head. The atmosphere affected the spirits of our friends. Oona was singularly grave, silent, and preoccupied; Mr M'Quarrie drank an inordinate number of cups of tea, and grumbled at the weather all the while; and Henry and Maggie made a rather dismal attempt at conversation. After breakfast was over, the girls retired, Mr M'Quarrie lay down on the sofa, and while engaged in the perusal of a three-days-old newspaper, very sensibly fell asleep; and Henry went to the rain-blurred window, and looked out on the gray sea beruffed with foam, and the wall of mist beyond, and attempted to amuse himself watching the wheeling flight of the uncomfortable-looking sea-birds. But he could not be amused, he had nothing to do, nothing to read, no one to speak to. Then Mr M'Quarrie on the sofa, sinking into profounder slumber, began to snore audibly. The stertorous sound brought out in the keenest relief the dismalness of the day. Happily at this juncture Henry heard the notes of a piano, and going across the passage into the drawing-

room, he found Miss Maggie seated at the ancient and somewhat metallic-toned instrument; and so, in lack of more congenial occupation, he employed himself in turning over the music sheets for her.

He had not been so employed for long, when a step was heard in the passage, and then at the door of the room, which was standing ajar, Oona appeared in her walking dress, gloved and booted, wearing a long oil-skin cape, and a Glengarry bonnet, with a sprig of dried heather stuck in the silver badge at the side, and with an umbrella in her hand.

"Goodness gracious me!" cried Maggie, pausing in her task. "You surely don't mean to say that you are going out to walk, Oona? you are certain to be either washed away or blown away;" and out came the burst of sunny laughter, brightening the dim room almost, which John Hagart so much loved to hear.

"Just for a little bit, Maggie. And Mr Willoughby will be kind enough to accompany me, perhaps."

You may be sure that Mr Willoughby

procured his hat, and was at her side in a moment.

It certainly was not a day in which ordinarily-constituted young persons would have chosen to have gone abroad, but perhaps it had its advantages notwithstanding. If it rained it gave Henry the opportunity of sheltering Oona with the umbrella. The wind was strong, but it loosened a reckless ringlet or two from beneath the Glengarry bonnet, and when it blew so violently as almost to impede progress, it induced Oona to accept the aid of Henry's arm—all of which were pleasant things in their way.

"What a shocking day it is, to be sure," said Henry, as a gust came down on the pair nearly turning the umbrella inside out.

"Perhaps you would rather go in, Mr Willoughby? you are certain to get wet," said Oona, coming to a full stop.

"Go in! not a bit. I like wind and rain, I assure you. I think this is extremely pleasant," said the illogical and slightly incoherent young man. "Besides," he continued,

returning to comparative common sense, "when we get into the shelter of the rising grounds yonder, we shall be in a comparative lull."

So they walked on and reached the shelter of the rising grounds, where there *was* a comparative lull. All this while Oona had something very important to say, but could not bring herself to begin. At last, like a bather on a brink, who ends timidity and reluctance by taking a bold header, she plunged into *medias res* at once.

"Mr Willoughby, I have brought you here to ask your pardon very humbly."

"My pardon, Miss M'Quarrie?"

"Yes. I have been debating the matter in my own mind all the morning, and have resolved at last on taking this step. It had to be done, and I thought it best to have it done quickly. I have acted wrongly; and when one so acts it seems to me the best way always to make the wrong right in the frankest and directest way. I thought I was doing my duty when—when we parted at Uanvohr,

but I find now I was misled by the light of a false pride. I have schooled myself to make this confession, Mr Willoughby, and I have made it. Will you forgive me?"

Here Henry performed, in the circumstances, the somewhat difficult feat of holding the umbrella against the wind with his left hand, and of getting possession of the hand of Miss Oona with his right.

"I don't think I have anything to forgive, and if I had, forgiveness would have been yours all along. You know that, Oona. Let it all be forgotten, and let matters between you and me come back to their former position."

But Oona was resolved to sit down in sack-cloth and ashes before him. "I have acted hastily, wrongly, ungenerously, Henry. I thought only of myself. I believed my anger justice. I would run no risk, I would take everything and give nothing. You must feel that I have been selfish, and you must forgive me, Henry. I shall not be happy unless you do so."

The right hand held the umbrella now, and

the left was round the oilskin cape. "You have my forgiveness, then," said he, drawing her towards him, and looking down on her face with a fond smile. "My forgiveness, dearest, fully, unreservedly: my forgiveness for ever and ever. Don't speak about it any more. Are you happy now, Oona?"

"Oh, so happy, Henry, so happy."

Lovers should have a quarrel now and again for the mere pleasure of making it up. Our lovers were enjoying the full sweetness of a dissolved estrangement. Never in the world before did rain bespatter, or wind tash and dishevel, a happier pair than they did at that moment.

After they had gone on a little way, Henry said, "The time has now come when I must make a little explanation. If it had been made before it might have saved pain, and for the delay it is my turn to crave forgiveness, and forgiveness I need much more at your hands than ever you did at mine. You were hurt, Oona, that, in the view of my antecedents, and of the relationship in which I stood to

you, I should have been seen in the Narrowkyle booths at all, were you not?"

"There was the pang, Henry, there was the pang."

"But the pang has gone now, darling?"

"All gone;" and Oona smiled trustfully up at him; "the wound has healed and left not a scar."

"Then I did not go to Narrowkyle on my own account. An old university friend of mine, who has been sent down here out of the sight of his friends, was staying with me at the time. I had to keep a sharp eye and a tight hand on him. Somehow or another he had heard of the market and had gone across early in the morning. I knew what the consequences would be, and drove to Narrowkyle at once. When I got there I found poor Frank in a condition in which I trust he will never be seen by his mother or his sisters. It would break their hearts. He was surrounded by a lot of hulking fellows, who were making his humiliation a subject of brutal laughter, and it was to save him from

insult that the quarrel arose of which you have heard so much."

"Oh, Henry, why didn't you tell me this before?—it would have saved all."

"Because, darling, I thought you pulled me up too hard, that you did not sufficiently trust me, that you rushed too impetuously to an unfavourable conclusion."

"I knew it, I knew it. You felt all the while that I was wilful, hasty, selfish, ungenerous," cried Miss Oona, as she donned her robes of sackcloth and ashes once more. "You felt it although you would not say it, Henry, and yet you have borne with me all this time. Oh, Henry, you may forgive me, but I never shall be able to forgive myself."

"But you mustn't speak in that way," and the arm was again round the oilskin cape, and the wearer of the said cape was again drawn close. "I should have told you the whole affair frankly at the time. A foolish feeling of pride prevented me—no more noble motive, I fear. You have much more to forgive than I have, darling. Will you for-

give me?" And as he spoke he came to a full stop, and glanced down at the wind-blown locks and the Glengarry bonnet which were laid against his breast.

"Yes, Henry."

"And yourself—for I won't have a one-sided forgiveness."

"Ye—yes, Henry."

While the young people were thus running races and outstripping each other in generosity, and sweetly forgiving each other in the rain, Hector M'Quarrie awoke on the sofa. He got up and went to the window and saw the rocking trees, and the pale spume of rain drifting along the hill-sides. The day was quite as unpromising as when he fell asleep. He wondered what had become of his guest, and hearing the notes of Miss Maggie's piano, he went to the drawing-room to seek Henry. "What has become of Henry Willoughby?" he asked when he found his daughter alone.

"He has gone out with Oona, papa."

"Gone out with Oona! What are the two fools doing out on a day like this?"

"I don't know, papa. Oona said she was going out, and asked Henry to go with her."

"Humph!" said the old gentleman, as he turned on his heel, and went back to the dining-room.

When he got again into the light, a droll smile was playing on his weather-beaten visage. "Love keeps out the rain better than a waterproof," he muttered to himself. "I never yet heard of a lover catching cold. Love prevents any evil effect arising from damp feet—it's a capital thing in a climate like this. It's very cold," he continued, shivering internally; and then he went to a sideboard which stood in one corner of the room, took out a glass and a spirit-case in which herbs were swimming, filled the glass three-quarters full, quaffed it, put back the glass and the spirit-case again, went to the sofa, dallied with the three-days-old newspaper, and in ten minutes was as soundly asleep as he had been previously.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN WHICH CAPTAIN KATE FIGHTS HER LAST BATTLE—AND WINS.

ONE night in the bitter spring weather the curtains were drawn in Mortimer Street, and Miss Kate M'Quarrie, with a warm fleecy shawl wrapped around her shoulders, half sat, half reclined in an easy-chair before the fire. The truth was, the indomitable old lady, for the first time in her life almost, had become invalided. She had caught cold one Sunday on the way home from Church—indeed, the very storm which chilled Miss Kate was the one that, on its way northwards, enveloped our lovers at Uanvohr—and had been for a week or ten days, now, strangely out of sorts. Being unused to illness she did not take it well—she was hasty, querulous, and impatient. “Ugh, ugh,” she said as, recovering from a paroxysm

of coughing, she drew the fleecy shawl closer around her, "this can't last long. Asthma has got its finger and thumb on my windpipe at last. I am bankrupt in breath, and must live on a halfpennyworth a day. I suppose I mustn't grumble. If wanted elsewhere, I really wish another messenger than this wheezy one had been sent to lodge the citation. Ugh, ugh,—when on earth will that boy come home. Ever since Mr Crook became paralysed they are working him like a slave. I wish he would come home. I'm fairly blown, and I suppose I am near the end of my race. It's been a long and a weary one, but there's a long rest for all—a long rest." And here the old lady drew the shawl yet more closely around her shoulders, and stared intently into the fire.

In a few minutes Ann opened the door, with a letter, and Miss Kate, half turning round, stretched out her hand for it.

"It's for Mr John," said Ann, hesitating for a moment.

"Did I say it wasn't for Mr John?" cried

the old lady testily. "Do you think I am going to eat Mr John's letter? Give it to me here."

Ann delivered the letter and retired abruptly—in dread of a second volley.

Miss Kate turned again to the fire, and examining the epistle discovered thereupon the Hebridean post-mark. "What a correspondent that girl is, to be sure," she muttered, still playing with it; "she writes like a public office or a board of clerks. I wonder if her letters laugh. John and she are a pair of extremely loving cousins indeed. But I must keep it for the poor boy; it will be a lump of sugar in the tea-cup of his life." Here she got up and placed it carefully on the mantelpiece. "Ugh, ugh," she said, as she sat down, "that finger and thumb again!" She leaned back in the cushioned chair, still staring in the fire. "Uan-vohr! I wonder how brother Hector is holding out? We have not met for years and years, and I think I should like to see him once again. I wish that boy would come."

Miss Kate had not to wish long, for almost

as soon as she had given utterance to the words John Hagart entered the apartment.

"You are late, John."

"Yes. I had a lot of work at the office, and have only got through with it. I hope you feel better this evening, aunt."

"Not much. I am a beggar in breath; you can whistle away in an hour what would serve me for a week. But never mind me—there's a letter for you on the mantelpiece, John. I suppose you know from whom."

John did know, although he made no reply. In fact he knew the letter would be waiting him, and he struck work at the office half an hour earlier in consequence.

"May I read it, aunt?" he asked, as he lifted the letter from the mantelpiece and took his seat at the table beneath the light.

"Of course, read it, you foolish fellow; why hain your golden apples for me?"

The letter was from Miss Maggie, and John read it with eager eyes.

"UANVOHR, April 18—.

"MY DEAR JOHN,—I wish to-day I had a gold pen to write with, and perfumed ink to dip it in, and pink paper to write on, and white wax to close it with, and a seal with the motto, *Love conquers all things*, to seal it with! Do you know that Oona and Mr Willoughby have made it all up? Oona took the initiative, came forward frankly with an open hand, and confessed that in breaking the engagement a month or two ago she had acted wrongly and hastily. Wasn't it noble in her? I suspect that a conversation she had on the matter with dear auntie, and the fight at Cuchullin Lodge, helped much to bring it all about. The wedding is to take place in summer, and I am to be the chief bridesmaid. Oona is to wear a white *moire antique*, and I pink tarletan, with ruches and sprigs of heather. But I need not tell you about these things, as I suppose you are so frightfully ignorant that you don't know what a *moire antique* is, or what ruches are.

"Mr Willoughby has explained to Oona why

he went to Narrowkyle, and his explanation is perfectly satisfactory. He went to save a friend, and it was in defence of his friend that he became involved in the brawl. You see the evil idle tongues do. It was painful to Oona at the time, but *all's well that ends well*.

"And now you must excuse this hurried epistle. I am much engaged to-day. Papa won't be home till evening, and Oona and Mr Willoughby have gone to visit a waterfall, and, of course, all duties fall to me.

"Believe me ever,

"Your affectionate Cousin.

"*P.S.*—The wedding is to take place in summer, and you are to be here in summer—could not both those great events happen simultaneously? I should like it so much. Try."

"Here's such news, aunt," cried John, when he had finished his letter. "Oona and Mr Willoughby are friends again; the marriage is to go on after all, and Maggie is to be chief bridesmaid, she says."

“I am very glad to hear it, John; and how did the reconciliation come about?”

“It seems that Mr Willoughby is staying at Uanvohr, and while there Oona told him she had acted hastily in breaking off the engagement. And so it’s all right now. The wedding is to take place in summer, and Maggie wishes me to come up to Uanvohr then. What do you think? I have often wished to look up all my friends in the north.”

“And then we shall have another marriage, I suppose. When birds pair in spring-time the period of nest-building is not far off. You needn’t look so foolish, John. Don’t you think I have a pair of eyes in my head? Don’t you think I can notice what is going on under my nose?”

John, with a very red face, laughed uneasily. “Nonsense, aunt,” he said.

“And so the wedding is to take place in the summer!” the old lady went on, taking no notice of the young man’s exclamation. “There will be changes before then. I am very glad of it, however. I always liked Oona much

better than I liked Maggie, although, I dare say, you are of a different opinion." And here Miss Kate fell into a sort of muse, and again stared intently into the fire.

John Hagart was silent. He thought at the moment that silence was his best policy.

"John," Miss Kate said, after two or three minutes' pause, "I wish you would write Oona in my name, telling her how highly I approve of her conduct, and with how much sincerity I wish her every happiness. I would write to her myself to-night were I able. You'll do it for me. Just put my wishes in your own words. Will you, John?"

John said he would have very great pleasure, and he brought over his writing-desk from a side-table.

"And while you are writing, John, I think I shall have a little snooze. I feel very tired and weak to-night, and you will be as well pleased to be undisturbed. Just bring my footstool a little nearer. Thank you. Don't let me sleep too long. That'll do. The shawl



is very nice. Thank you again, John ; you are very good."

And so Miss Kate, with her shawl carefully wrapped round her shoulders, sank back into the warmth and softness of her easy-chair and closed her eyes. John watched her, and did not begin his letter till he knew she was asleep by the position of her hands and the sound of her breathing. He then wrote to Miss Oona as directed. The letter was not long, and was soon sealed and addressed. As it was too early to wake his aunt, who was sleeping comfortably, it struck him that he could not employ his half-hour better than by writting to Maggie. So he got hold of another sheet of paper, and while his pen was swiftly travelling down the second page, he heard his aunt suddenly call out, "Yes. Coming!"

John looked up on the instant, and there was Aunt Kate sitting bolt upright in her chair, and looking towards him, her shawl fallen off her shoulders, her hands trembling, and an alarmed look in her eyes.

"Who called my name, John? Was it you? Did you hear anything?"

"No one called you, aunt. I have not spoken since you went to sleep; no one has been here."

"But I heard my name distinctly. The sound is ringing in my ears yet," said Aunt Kate, slowly becoming mistress of her hands, and the light of alarm dying out of her eyes as she became conscious of surrounding objects. "I was called by name as if from a great distance, and the voice was a voice I know, or have known. What can it have been?"

"You have been dreaming, perhaps," said John, "and only fancied it."

Miss Kate had again lain back in the cushioned chair, and instead of the look of alarm which had been there a moment or two before, on her face was the strangest smile which John had ever seen. An inscrutable smile of infinite content which lay like a light; and in the light the plaits and creases of care, the lurking lines of worldly wisdom and shrewd

humour, the furrows of sorrow and the dried-up courses of ancient tears were smoothed out, and in their places had come an almost infantile repose, a wonderful youthfulness, which were beautiful to see, but which scared John by their irrelevancy and inappositeness. The eyes were closed, but on the face lay that gleam of alien beauty.

"I knew your voice, Richard, across the wastes of seventy years," she said to herself, yet distinct enough for John to catch. "Lonely have you been there; lonely have I been here. I am coming, Richard." And she passed her hands across her face, shutting out the strange expression, and then in a little while, John, who was looking on awe-stricken, saw the tears trickling down between the withered fingers.

But this emotion on the part of Aunt Kate was but of short duration, and when she removed her hands, but for a certain unusual tranquillity, her face had regained the ordinary look.

"Have you written the letter to Uanvohr?" she asked.

"Yes," said John.

"That's right. Be sure and post it to-morrow. I'll wear my grave-clothes, John, before Oona wears her wedding-dress."

"Don't say that, aunt," cried John, who came to her side. "Don't let a dream frighten you so. You are very nervous, and a good night's sleep will put you right."

"You don't know the finger and thumb I feel on my windpipe, John—and then I believe in dreams and omens. But there's no use in talking of these things at present. I have a great deal to do, and but little time to do it in. You can go to Uanvohr in summer if you like, John—it's perhaps the best thing you could do. And now, John, you will go to Dr Watkins to-morrow and tell him to come here. He can do nothing for me, but his presence will satisfy you and my other friends, and save all reproaches. You needn't go to-night, to-morrow morning will do quite well. And, John, I should like you to write to your mother at once, and tell her I wish her here. Write the letter, and make it as little alarming

as possible. Just say I am rather unwell, and that I wish to see her. Now I think that's all I have to say to-night. Ring the bell for Ann, and she will assist me to my room. You'll be sure and write to Greysley before you go to bed, and have it posted early. Good-night, John, good-night." And by the time that the old lady had played for a moment with John Hagart's brown hair and kissed him on the forehead, Ann was in the room.

John, when his aunt had gone, strove to make himself believe that the voice was merely a nervous delusion, and that when once the bitter spring winds were over, the invalid would be well again; but before he went to bed he wrote to his mother, summoning her to Miss Kate's bedside. Next morning, after hearing that his aunt had spent a rather restless night, he went to the office, calling on Dr Watkins and posting his letter on the way. The doctor was to go to Mortimer Street at once, and John was to call on his way home to hear his report.

John called on Dr Watkins in the after-

noon on his way home, and was shown into the library. The doctor came in almost instantly.

"How did you find my aunt?" John inquired anxiously.

"She is very weak," said the doctor; "very weak indeed."

"But is her illness dangerous?"

"Well, for a young and strong person it would not be dangerous. But, Mr Hagart, you must remember your aunt is very old, and that the rope is so frayed and worn that it cannot endure much strain now."

"Do you think she will die, doctor?" asked the young man with a sort of gulp.

"To tell you the truth," said the doctor, "I expect she will run down some morning like a watch—will stop from sheer exhaustion. But we will do everything we can for her, you may depend upon that. She has had a wonderful constitution, you know, and that may hold out for yet a little."

John did not ask any more questions; he was anxious to see how matters stood, and so

he went home carrying a heart with him which was heavy as lead.

When John came home Miss Kate had fallen asleep, Ann told him, and that during the day she had inquired several times if her sister had yet arrived, although each time she had remembered that Mrs Hagart, even if she had started on the receipt of the message, could not possibly be at Mortimer Street before the evening. She had been restless all the day, but she was now sleeping peacefully. And so the young man after dinner—he felt that day how dreary a thing it was to dine alone—sat down to finish his letter to Maggie, the conclusion of which contrasted strangely with the gaiety of the opening sentences.

While John was writing, his mother was driving rapidly in a hackney-coach from Greysley to Hawkhead. The good lady was in a state of sad perturbation. She knew perfectly well that Miss Kate would not send for her unless she was sore bested, and she was prepared to expect the worst on arrival. She loved her sister sincerely, and was grieved

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that illness had overtaken her; but with the natural sorrow there was mingled a certain feeling of bewilderment. She had known hardships and misfortune herself, she had wept over a dead face, sorrow and she had been year-long companions, and a personal catastrophe would have seemed the most ordinary thing in the world. But that anything should go wrong with Miss Kate, with whom she had associated every idea of stable prosperity, of invariable success, seemed to her wonderful, unaccountable; something like a suspension of the laws of nature, and the unhinging of all things.

Mrs Hagart lay back in the carriage, while the cold April moon shone out overhead, and the shadowy trees, like the dark plumes of funeral hearses, flitted rapidly past on either side of the road. Her mind went back to the old times; to her father's house; to her marriage and the estrangements consequent thereupon; to Miss Kate's kindness to her children; to the one that remained; to the far dearer one taken away, and dearer *because*

taken away; to the making up of the family breach;—and thinking of all this, and how the entire wrong thing had become right again, and of the duty on which she was at the time engaged, the poor lady threw herself back in a corner of the vehicle, and wept outright; and it was not till the cold stars, and the dark flitting ghosts of trees, and the silence of the country road, were exchanged for the far-radiating lines of lamps of Hawk-head, the blaze of shop windows, the continuous rattle of wheels, and the din and movements of intent crowds, that she regained comparative composure; and even then, glancing out of the window of the vehicle on the glare of light, and the bustle and pressure of passengers, she marvelled how many death-beds there were that night in the noisy, brilliant city, and how many of the dusky cases that hurried past for a moment in the shop lights bore hearts as sore as hers. “Hundreds on hundreds,” she said to herself; “hundreds on hundreds could take me by the hand to-night.”

Mrs Hagart had no sooner reached Mor-

timer Street than John was out on her in the lobby in a moment. He gave her what information he could concerning the condition of the invalid. He carried her into the room which had been prepared for her, and she had barely laid aside her bonnet and shawl when Ann appeared at the door.

"Please, ma'am," said Ann, "Miss M'Quarrie is awake now. She heard the door-bell, and is anxious to know if you have arrived. Will you come this way, ma'am?"

Mrs Hagart followed Ann at once, and when she entered the sick apartment, there was Miss Kate propped up in pillows in bed, looking gaunt and pale, her hands lying lax on the top of the bed-clothes. At the step she turned half round, and a look of pleasure visited the dim eyes. "I thought it was you, Margaret. It was very kind of you to come so soon. Place the candle on the table near my bedside, Ann, and then you can leave the room. You will be called if you are wanted."

Ann did as she was directed, and left the

room. "Kiss me, sister," said the old lady, when they were alone; "I am going on a long journey. You have been crying, Margaret," she continued, quickly, as she caught Mrs Hagart's face as she bent forward in the candle-light. "Is it worth crying for?"

"Don't speak in that way," said Mrs Hagart, as she placed her arms round Miss Kate, and kissed her. "Don't speak in that way; you will break my heart if you do. You must not speak of dying, Kate."

Miss Kate lay back on her pillow for a few moments. "Do you remember the day of Katy's funeral, Margaret?"

"Ah, yes."

"Do you remember my telling you of the man I loved, and still love?"

"Yes," said Mrs Hagart, in wonderment.

"*He* called me last night. I heard his voice calling my name as distinctly as I heard him long ago calling it from the red sunset cliffs behind the house, or from the boats in the bay, in the years when I was happy. And I knew his voice, and awoke, crying,

‘Yes, I am coming;’ and I’m going, Margaret; and it’s best. We have been separated for years and years; he on one rueful shore, I on another; and Death, the ferryman, is coming across to take me to him. We will understand each other now. If we have both sinned in pride, we have suffered, and God has accepted the expiation. Youth has been omitted in my life, and I am going back to it. That which was sown in corruption, shall rise in incorruption, and this mortal body shall put on immortality. Before a week is out, the coffin lid will press upon my face; but I shall feel younger then—far younger.”

To all this Mrs Hagart could only reply by caresses and tears; and after a little while Miss Kate went on.

“Don’t cry, Margaret; what’s the use? I have had ninety years of it, and I have no right to grumble, I am sure. Now, then, attend to me, for I have many things to say to you. I am going away, and I must set my house in order before I go. Are you paying attention, Margaret?”

“Yes, sister, yes.”

“Then in the lower drawer, yonder, you will find all the things I need, when it’s over. I made them years ago.”

“Oh, Kate, Kate, don’t speak in that way.”

“But I must, my dear. What do you think I brought you here for? I didn’t expect to give you pleasure, you know. You must listen to me, and you must remember what I tell you also.”

Here Mrs Hagart wiped eyes that were next moment wet again, and Miss Kate went on.

“I don’t wish many people to be here when they take me away. I wish my brother Hector, and my lawyer, Mr Hook—he’ll have something to do in any case when the company comes back; and John, of course, and Mr Stavert.”

Here the old lady lay still for a little while. “It’ll be a fine ploy this for Stavert,” she went on. “He was always a grand hand at a burial. He’s a liking for funeral cakes and wine. I should almost like to say good-bye to him, for all that has come and gone

between us ; and Hagart, yes, you must have Hagart. Alfred Hagart has been a prosperous man of late years."

"God has been very good to us ; Alfred has been very prosperous ever since he came to know you, Kate. It almost seems as if a special blessing had come with the reconciliation."

Here for a moment there was a flicker of a droll smile on Miss Kate's face. "Yes, indeed, Margaret, it almost seems so. Do you think the reconciliation had anything to do with it? But never mind that now. You can discuss the matter with Alfred when I am gone away out of earshot. Now, I have much to say to you yet. Where was I?—Oh, yes, you are to have our brother Hector, and Mr Hook, and John, and Stavert, and Hagart, at the funeral ; that will be enough, I think. I suppose you have heard from John that Oona's engagement had been broken off?"

Mrs Hagart said she had heard of the broken engagement.

“Then it’s made up again ; and be sure and tell Hector when you see him that it was one of my last wishes that this marriage should not be delayed. Why should they delay it ? Why should my grave lie in the way of a bride to church ? Don’t let my dying stop the wedding a single hour. At all events, tell Hector that I did not wish it to stop it. You will be sure and tell Hector that ?”

Mrs Hagart gave the required promise.

“And now, Margaret, John gets the house here and the furniture, and what little money I have left, barring a few legacies. He has been a great comfort through all the years he has stayed with me. And he will need it, too, for I rather think that, before long, he will be presenting you with a daughter-in-law ; that he will be taking a mate from the Uanvohr nest. He might do worse, Margaret. I leave you nothing, dear, save a few trinkets, which are sacred by the touching of dead fingers ; you will value them, I know. Had you needed money, I should have left you

some ; but you don't need it now. Well, I think that is all I have to say. If you think I have forgotten anything, Margaret, I hope you will mention it, for I am tired and sleepy, and my time for sleeping or waking is but short."

During all this talk there was sore distress at the good sister's heart as she half sat, half leaned on the bedside. One topic, all-important as it seemed to her at such a moment, had been entirely overlooked by Miss Kate, and she would have introduced it before had opportunity been granted her. The opportunity, she conceived, had now come.

"You have forgotten nothing, I think, in the way of temporal matters, and I shall fulfil every one of your wishes ; but, oh, sister, sister, if you are to leave us, would you not like to have a clergyman to pray with you?"

Miss Kate turned her eyes quickly round on the appealing face. "I thought, Margaret, you had known me better. For this hour I have waited more than fifty years, and

I was not a fool to put off preparations till it came upon me like an armed man. I have been lonely in my religion, as I have been lonely in my life. My temporal and eternal affairs I have transacted myself. Weak and frail, and scant of breath, I know that my Redeemer liveth. His right arm will sustain me and carry me. He walked along the road on which I am now entering, and took away its loneliness and terror. Not in my own merits I trust, but in His."

In a moment, Mrs Hagart's arms were around her sister, and the tears were falling thickly on her face.

"Now, don't cry, Margaret; I don't think this dying is worth the shedding of a tear. Now, you must go to bed. Ring the bell for Ann; she will watch with me to-night."

"You must allow me to sit up with you to-night," pled Mrs Hagart.

"You will do nothing of the kind. In a night or two you will have to wait, and so you had better take what rest you can just now. Ring the bell for Ann, dear: it's her

duty to wait on me, and she's paid for it; and then go and have some supper, and a little talk with John, and think as tenderly as you can, both of you, of the old dying woman here."

And so Mrs Hagart rang the bell; and when she went into the room where John was sitting, she threw herself down on the sofa, and broke into a great fit of weeping.

Mrs Hagart *had* to wait one night. Somewhat less than a week after, Ann, Alfred Hagart, who had come from Greysley, and John, were waiting in the sick-room. Dr Watkins had been at Mortimer Street several times during the day, and was just gone. Miss Kate was in a sleepy comatose condition. Ann had, in a whisper, expressed her opinion to Mrs Hagart that a change would come with the turn of the night. A little after midnight Miss Kate said, "Margaret!"

Mrs Hagart went and leant over her.

"I think I am getting into calm water now. Who's in the room with you?"

"Only Alfred and John."

"I should like to shake hands with them and say good-bye." And at the word Mrs Hagart motioned Alfred, who came forward to the bedside.

"Is that you, Alfred Hagart?" said Kate, when she felt his hand.

"It is me," said Alfred, huskily.

"I am glad you are here. I have been able to help you and yours, and it's a pleasant thought now. I'm going away; good-bye, good-bye. Think as kindly of me as you can when I am gone."

"John!"

"Yes, aunt."

"Our partnership is at an end now, John. Be a good man. Be a good man. You will know how precious goodness is when you come to lie on a bed like this. Is this your hand? God bless and keep you, John."

Miss Kate lay still for a little while, and then she called again, "Margaret!"

"I can't see you, Margaret. Surely the

candles are very dim. Have you any message for Katy? Kiss me yet again before I go. Oh, Margaret!"

And when on that spring morning sparrows began to chirp about the windows and to carry straw in their bills for nests beneath the slates and in the cosy corners of gargoyles and spouts; and the vegetable-carts to come rolling through the streets carrying with them the scent of primroses; and the coffee-shops to open for the benefit of the breakfastless artisan hurrying to work; and the night policemen to disappear from every beat—in the sunny light of that spring morning Captain Kate, still and white as a mound of snow, lay in a white bed in Mortimer Street, her warfare done, her long campaign closed. Let us draw down the blind and leave the room!

CHAPTER XV.

IN WHICH THERE IS A FUNERAL, THE READING OF
A WILL, AND THEREAFTER THE GENERAL SOUND
OF MARRIAGE-BELLS.

HECTOR M'QUARRIE arrived at Mortimer Street from Uanvohr the night before the funeral, and went into the silent room with Mrs Hagart—with whom he felt comparatively a stranger—to have a last look at the dead. What passed between them on that occasion it is not for me to say. They remained together a long time. Mrs Hagart related the circumstances of Miss Kate's death, as a matter of course, and delivered the message with which she was intrusted respecting Oona's marriage. When they came out Mrs Hagart's eyes were red; Hector was grave and silent, and in a short time went off to stay with his wife's poor relation, Mrs Wilson. Whatever Hec-

tor's thoughts might have been, he kept them strictly to himself.

Next day a hearse, dolorously plumed, with a string of mourning coaches behind it, paced slowly through Mortimer Street, drawing many a face to the window as it went. In about an hour the mourning coaches returned alone, and out of them stepped Alfred Hagart, John, Hector M'Quarrie, Mr Stavert, and Mr Hook. The gentlemen went into the dining-room, the blinds of which were drawn up for the first time for several days, and as they took their seats the Governor of Ceylon eyed them suspiciously from the wall. They had assembled to hear Miss Kate's will read, and to this professional duty Mr Hook solemnly addressed himself. First of all he placed a japanned box on the table, then he drew in his chair, then he opened the box ceremoniously: from the box he produced the document with its seals and signatures of witnesses, and the document he proceeded to read in a professional voice that to one or two of the auditors at least seemed harsh and grating. It is perfectly

needless to quote the will at length; and its provisions created little surprise. With the exception of certain legacies to servants, arrangements relative to the disposal of trinkets to this person and the other, John Hagart was made the inheritor of the entire property of the deceased, including the house in Mortimer Street, with the furniture and plate. Mr Hook finished reading at last, and then there was in the room a curious little sigh of relief, and Mr Stavert ventured to hazard a remark about the weather—which remark fell to the ground like a spent arrow.

Perhaps at that especial moment Mr Stavert felt more uncomfortable than he had ever done in his life before. He had known for long that not one penny of Miss Kate's money would he finger; but then he knew just as well that Alfred Hagart, and Mr Hook, and perhaps Hector M'Quarrie too, were aware that for long he had lived in the expectation of coming in for something handsome when the old lady died. He fancied that every one would think him disappointed. He was anxious not to look

disappointed, and so he made the irrelevant remark about the weather, of which no one was thinking at the time, and which came to such conspicuous grief. Mr Stavert had ridden in the same coach with the lawyer and found him reserved. He would have liked to have talked with Hector, whom he had never before seen, but then he remembered how his wife had treated Hector's daughters. He would have liked to have spoken to Alfred, but then it occurred to him that years ago he had had certain passages with Alfred on the subject of Miss Kate—passages, the remembrance of which might be disagreeable in the circumstances. So he remained silent, contemplating his hat which lay before him on his knee. Then he drew out his watch, and muttered something about an engagement. Then he got up, bowed to Mr Hook and Hector, shook hands with Alfred, and hoped Mrs Hagart was well, which of course drew an inquiry—probably as sincere as the other—as to the health of Mrs Stavert. John was standing near the door. “I have to congratulate you,” he said.

"And I wish from my heart," said John, colouring a little, "that I had no cause for congratulation."

"Old people must die, you know," returned the other, "and as they can't take their money with them, it is a pleasure to see it left in good and deserving hands; your good fortune has given me much pleasure, I am sure," said Mr Stavert, as he passed into the lobby.

After Mr Stavert's departure the party broke up. Mr Hook placed the will in the japanned box which he took with him. Hector was engaged to dine with Mrs Wilson, and in the evening Mr and Mrs Hagart returned to Greysley, leaving John in Mortimer Street alone. He wore his good fortune in its newest gloss that night, but he could not take pride in it. A bag of ducats is an admirable thing, but when the bag is brought you by the skeleton Death, the bony fingers strike a chill and the most fine gold is dim. But only for a little; the chill dies out and the gold pieces brighten.

Next day, while John Hagart was busy at the office, one of the clerks entered with the

request that he would speak with Mr Hook in his own room.

When John entered the bureau of his chief, a leather-covered office-chair was placed on either side of the fireplace, and between these chairs, and with his back to the fire, Mr Hook stood, perusing certain documents through his double eye-glass. Mr Hook's countenance was grave, professional, and John saw at a glance that important business was on hand.

"Ah," said Mr Hook, laying down the papers and letting the double eye-glass drop, "I wish to have a little conversation with you, Mr Hagart; but before I begin you will allow me to congratulate you on your good fortune, which I trust you will live long to enjoy. I must have the pleasure of shaking hands with you," and the professional look vanished for the moment from his face, and a cordial one took its place.

"I am very much obliged to you," said John, as they shook hands.

"Of course I was in the deceased Miss M'Quarrie's secrets all along, and had the

honour of her entire confidence; and her wishes as to the disposal of her property were as well known to me as they were to herself. And it is only to-day that I am in a position to speak to you as I am doing, and as I am about to do. I congratulate you most sincerely, Mr Hagart. Will you be seated?" and as Mr Hook dropped into one of the leather-covered chairs, and crossed one leg over the other, the professional look came back.

“The matter on which I am about to speak,” proceeded Mr Hook, with a trifle of hesitation in his voice, “happened several years ago. The seal of secrecy was placed upon me at the time, with regard to the transaction which I am about to make known, and that seal was not to be broken during the period of Miss M’Quarrie’s life. Whether it should be broken *now* has been to me the subject of anxious consideration. I have come to the conclusion that, having due regard to the memory of my deceased client, and to your interests as her heir and repre-

sentative, the seal should be broken. I think it due also to myself to say that I have taken counsel with Mr Crook—who, although unable to return to the professional career which he so long adorned, is one of the shrewdest advisers. I have taken counsel with Mr Crook, and he is decidedly of opinion, looking at the matter from every point of view, that the seal of secrecy is no longer binding, and this seal of secrecy I am about to break.”

Here Mr Hook adjusted the double eyeglass on his nose, and laid his hands on the papers before him.

“You will doubtless remember when your respected father—who was looking well yesterday, I was happy to see—became a partner in the firm of Wedderburn Brothers?”

John said he remembered the circumstance perfectly well.

“And have you any idea as to the motive which induced Wedderburn Brothers to offer Mr Hagart a partnership?”

“The motive of interest, of course. Wedderburn Brothers found my father's services

so valuable that they were anxious to secure them permanently. It was on that ground they proposed the partnership, and they could have no other reason for so acting."

Here a light smile played for a second on Mr Hook's lip. "It is quite natural that you should so think. I conducted the negotiations, and here is a copy of a letter which I addressed to Miss M'Quarrie, stating the terms on which Wedderburn Brothers were willing to admit your father as a partner of the firm. This letter," went on Mr Hook, as he handed it across, "states the sum to be paid, the conditions on which the partnership was to be offered, and here"—handing across another paper—"is Wedderburn Brothers' receipt in full. And now you have the secret history of the partnership."

"Then my aunt bought the partnership, and arranged that the partnership so purchased should be offered to my father on the ostensible ground of his valuable services?"

"Exactly," said Mr Hook. "You have hit the motives which actuated my client very

neatly. Your father at the period of this transaction contemplated emigration, and Miss M'Quarrie was anxious to keep him at home, and to make him contented at home. You will see at a glance that for the success of the plot it was necessary that your father should be kept in ignorance of Miss M'Quarrie's share in it. It is for you to decide whether he shouldn't be kept in ignorance still."

The reading of the papers and Mr Hook's talk sent John's mind away back to the old time, to his conversation with his father about Central America by the canal bank, to the letters which his aunt received from Greysley announcing the great fact of the partnership having been offered and accepted,—to his birthday dinner and Miss Kate's toast and his father's speech in reply,—and the blood rushed to his face when he thought how they had all been Miss Kate's puppets, and with what an amused gravity she must have pulled the strings and watched the family drama. "What a set of fools she must have thought us at times!" he said to himself.

"I fear that my communication has not given you entire pleasure," said Mr Hook, who through his double eye-glass had watched the blood rise in his young friend's face.

John laughed somewhat in awkward sort. "Well, perhaps not unmixed pleasure. We all thought that the partnership had been offered in the most perfect good faith, and strictly on the ground on which it was said to have been offered. We were all very proud of it, and at times I fear we wore very ridiculous airs in poor aunt's eyes. But she conferred on us all a great benefit, and she could not have conferred it in any other way."

"Yes, she flung a benefit in at your father's door, and then ran away in case she should be discovered."

"I am extremely indebted to you, Mr Hook, for all this information, but it seems to me that as the secret has been kept so long, and so successfully, it should be kept still longer. The communication you have made to me, if made to my father would pain him extremely.

The wisest plan is to let the matter remain as it is."

"Unquestionably, Mr Hagart. This little bit of secret history would not even have been made known to you but for the danger of your stumbling upon it, either when looking into your aunt's affairs, or going back upon the past business of this office. It would have startled you, and might have caused mischief. I quite agree with you that these papers after having seen the light this forenoon, should return again to their seclusion."

And so the papers, after having told their story, were folded up and put away, and Mr Alfred Hagart was allowed to dream his golden dream, undisturbed.

Miss Kate slept peacefully in the Hawkhead cemetery, with the Spring rain falling on her breast. And in due time the sky lifted itself above the city in an immeasurable arch of blue, and troops of white-winged clouds scudded across on the free wind. Then the gilded vanes of the city churches began to sparkle, and jaunty city clerks to come into their offices with jon-

quils stuck in their button-holes, and for entire hours during the day the lazy sunshine would sleep along one side of the principal thoroughfare. Then water-carts began to dispense their treasures in the dusty streets ; mercers and jewellers, mindful of the comfort of their customers, erected awnings over their hot shop-fronts ; and butchers and confectioners grew restive under the plague of flies. And Miss Oona M'Quarrie's marriage drawing near, John Hagart began to make preparations for his journey North.

I drove with that young fellow to the railway station, and could not help smiling at his boisterous mirth. "What a jolly thing it is to get out of harness !" he cried. "I shall now wash out all the inkstains from my soul."

"But I don't quite like to part with you," I said, after he procured his ticket and got his traps put to rights. "I have a presentiment that next time I see you, instead of John Hagart the bachelor I shall behold John Hagart the married man."

"Nonsense," said he, with a pleased colour

in his face and a merry ring in his laugh.
"You are a confirmed croaker, you know."

"We shall see, we shall see. You have my best wishes anyhow, whether married or single," said I, as the train moved off.

One evening, about a fortnight after, the following letter reached me :—

"UANVOHR,

"MY DEAR TOMPKINS,— You have been a very prophet. Miss Oona's marriage takes place in a couple of days, and Miss Maggie, who was to have been a bridesmaid, is now to have bridesmaids of her own. / In two days Miss Oona will become Mrs Henry Willoughby, and in two days, my Tompkins, Miss Maggie will become Mrs John Hagart. Father and mother arrived here yesternight, and everything is merrier than the merriest marriage-bell that ever rang.

"I cannot comprehend my happiness. I do not know the amount of it. It is a bag of old pieces which I have not counted. I will

not speak to you of my wife that is to be. You will see her soon. Only this will I say, that I have spoken to her of you, told her of all your good qualities, told her that you are my oldest friend and my dearest, and she has taken quite an affection for you. She knows that I am writing you, and desires me to send her love. Remember, my Tompkins, that this change in my life will make no difference in my feelings of regard to you. There will always be a knife and fork for you at Mortimer Street, and you must dine with us at least once a week.

“This is a grand place—green shores, great peaks with mists curling round them, a noble bay, the most splendid sunsets. To look on noble scenery is a great pleasure at all times, but how much is that pleasure enhanced when one is in love !

“Henry Willoughby is a fine fellow, and is the next happiest man in the world after myself—and after myself, in a couple of days, he will be blest with the most charming wife.

“ But I am called down to the boats. Adieu !
We shall send cards.

“ Yours, most sincerely,

“ JOHN HAGART.

“ Thomas Tompkins, Esq.”

This letter did not in the least surprise me, but it annoyed me slightly, nevertheless. When a boy gets a piece of nice plumcake to eat, and while eating it takes care to inform the world that it is so remarkably good, all the boys within ear-shot, and who have no plumcake, don't like it. I, however, comforted myself with the thought, that, if I had been in John Hagart's place, I would, in all probability have been as exuberant as he, and that if he had been circumstanced as I was, he would have felt even as I did. What a curious pleasure happy people take in thrusting their happiness in other people's faces. It is a pleasant thing for the rich man to make rattling cataracts of silver pieces in his breeches pocket, but it is not such a pleasant sound for a penniless man to hear. A hungry tramp never feels half so

hungry as when, nose flattened against the pane of a baker's shop, he beholds a batch of smoking loaves laid on the counter.

In due time the cards came, very pretty pieces of pasteboard indeed, adorned with silver cord. One of those interesting missives informed me that Mr and Mrs John Hagart would be at home on ——

With the cards came a note from Alfred Hagart himself:—

“UANVOHR.

“MY DEAR TOMPKINS,—The marriage is over, and the two happy couples have just driven off. What a curious blank came over the whole of us when the young people left! They are all to dine with me at Greysley on Monday fortnight. Come! We old fogies—I always think of you as an old fogie, and I know you will not be angry with me when I call you one—can have our own talk when they have gone. We can sit silently by the side of the fire and feel all the time that we are good companions. Wife sends love.—Yours ever,

“ALFRED HAGART.”

I liked the father's letter better than the son's. It was more in consonance with my mood of mind. I think that newly-married people are the most disgustingly selfish people in the world. They are happy, and they expect that every one else should do their wedding favours, and smile in answer to their smiles.

On the evening of the Monday fortnight I drove out to Greysley, and dined with Alfred Hagart and his guests. I saw the young people in the light of the honeymoon. Henry Willoughby was as handsome a fellow as you would see in a summer day's journey, and his wife was every whit his equal in the matter of good looks. John was delighted to see me; and Mrs John came up with a smile and a blush, put her little hand in mine, and hoped that as I was one of John's best and oldest friends, I should become one of her best—and in due time one of her oldest—friends, also. And of course I could only press the frank little hand in mine, and hope in return that I should.

The dinner was a pleasant one. Alfred was radiant, Mrs Alfred Hagart was very quiet—after all she is a woman more to my taste than either of her nieces—the past and the present being mingled in her thoughts, I daresay. We were all merry as befitted the occasion, and when the wine was placed on the table, Alfred Hagart made an appropriate speech, which caused the brides to sit with downcast eyes, the bridegrooms to thump the table with the handles of their dessert-knives, and Mrs Hagart—bless her! I could have placed my finger on the gay sentence that provoked the tears—to cry a little.

In due time the ladies retired, and John and Henry went up to the smoking-room in the tower, where Alfred and I promised to join them. When we were left alone we became silent.

“This has been a very pleasant evening,” said I, not knowing very well what to say, and yet anxious to say something. ♣

“It has, and it hasn’t. Do you know these young people make me feel very old? The

time was when I thought a man old at thirty. Now I strive to think that he isn't old at sixty. I have slid into the zone of gray hairs, and bald pates, and prosperous paunches, and strive to make myself as comfortable as I can. But it won't do. The afternoon may be pleasant enough, but it's nothing like morning. Then one knows that one has the whole day before one, and can waste an hour without any sense of impoverishment—just as if one were to spend one pound out of a thousand. A son's marriage is an event in life, and I think I have experienced all the events that are likely to fall to my share. There is nothing very strange or new before me now, till the crowning event of all—that makes an end of life altogether."

"If we hadn't to die, life would become a very humdrum affair on our hands. But why should we drift into this kind of talk at present?"

"I suppose because in life everything suggests its opposite. But you are quite right. Fill your glass, Tompkins. You have been the friend of my fireside and of my son's. You

know all that has come and gone with us, the good and the evil. I think my wife values your friendship more than the friendship of any other person living—she does so *now* at least. This is an auspicious occasion, Tompkins. When I look back upon my past, and see the fight I have waged, and how, without aid from any one, I have achieved independence—wealth, perhaps, some would call it—I consider I am not unreasonably proud of myself. My son has brought home his wife, and, I will say it, a prettier and a sweeter-natured no man was ever blest with. Her sister and her husband are here also. They are all under my roof to-night. Now then, before we go upstairs, I have a toast to propose—Alfred Hagart's Household."

"Alfred Hagart's Household," said I, and drained the glass; thereafter we went upstairs.

That dinner took place some years since. The knife and fork still wait me in Mortimer Street, but John Hagart and his wife are not my only friends there now. There is an Alfred

Hagart of another generation, and a little maid, Kate Hagart by name, who reminds me of a little Kate I knew long ago; and a Henry Willoughby Hagart who considers that I was created for the sole purpose of bringing him sweetmeats; and an Oona M'Quarrie Hagart, who has worn that name for six months only, who sucks her thumb industriously, who has not yet ceased to marvel with big round gray eyes at the strange world in which she finds herself, and who has the most wonderfully dimpled elbows and cheeks—a young lady of whom I am extravagantly fond, and who is called my little wife. So I am not without companionship. John Hagart and his wife are my dear friends; but their children are friends every whit as dear.

THE END.