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AN ORKNEY MAID

By AMELIA E. BARR

An Orkney Maid
Christine
Joan
Profit and Loss
Three Score and Ten
The Measure of a Man
The Winning of Lucia
Playing with Fire
All the Days of My Life

D. APPLETON & COMPANY
Publishers
New York



“Ian was utterly charmed with the picture she made---”
[PAGE 60]

AN ORKNEY MAID

BY

AMELIA E. BARR

AUTHOR OF "CHRISTINE," "JOAN," "PROFIT AND LOSS," ETC.

"The pleasant habit of existence, the sweet fable of life."

ILLUSTRATED

D. APPLETON AND COMPANY
NEW YORK
LONDON
1918

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TO
MY DEAR FRIEND
DR. MARTIN BARR
OF
ELWYNN, PENNSYLVANIA,
I INSCRIBE THIS BOOK.
AMELIA E. BARR.

*"Honor and truth formed your will,
Your heart, fidelity."*

MOTTO

*"You can glad your child, or grieve it,
You can help it, or deceive it,
When all is done,
Beneath God's sun,
You can only love, and leave it."*

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INTRODUCTION

YESTERDAY morning this thing happened to me: I was reading the *New York Times* and my eyes suddenly fell upon one word, and that word rang a little bell in my memory, "Kirkwall!"

The next moment I had closed my eyes in order to see backward more clearly, and slowly, but surely, the old, old town--standing boldly upon the very beach of the stormy North Sea--became clear in my mental vision. There was a whole fleet of fishing boats, and a few smart smuggling craft rocking gently in its wonderful harbour--a harbour so deep and safe, and so capacious that it appeared capable of sheltering the navies of the world.

I was then eighteen years old, I am now over eighty-six; and the straits of Time have widened and widened with every year, so that many things appear to have been carried away into forgetfulness by the stress and flow of full waters. But not so! They are only lying in out-of-the-way corners of consciousness, and can easily be recalled by some word that has the potency of a spell over them.

"Kirkwall!" I said softly, and then I began to read what the *Times* had to say about Kirkwall. The great point appeared to be that as a rendezvous for ships it had been placed fifty miles within the "made in Germany" danger zone, and was therefore useless to the British men-of-war. And I laughed inwardly a little, and began to consider if Kirkwall had ever been long outside of some danger zone or other.

All its myths and traditions are of the fighting Picts and Scots, and when history began to notice the existence of the Orkneys it was to chronicle the struggle between Harold, King of Norway, and his rebellious subjects who had fled to the Orkneys to escape his tyrannical control. And of the danger zones of every kind which followed--of storm and battle and bloody death--does not the Saga of Eglis give us a full account?

This fight for popular freedom was a failure. King Harold conquered his rebellious subjects, and incidentally took possession of the islands and the people who had sheltered them. Then their rulers became Norwegian jarls--or earls--and there is no question about the danger zones into which the Norwegian vikings carried the Orcadeans--quite in accord with their own desire and liking, no doubt. And the stirring story of these years--full of delightful dangers to the men who adventured them--may all be read today in the blood-stirring, blood-curdling Norwegian Sagas.

In the middle of the fifteenth century, James the Third, King of Scotland, married Margaret of Denmark, and the Orcades were given to Scotland as a security for her dowry. The dowry was never paid, and after a lapse of a century and a half Denmark resigned all her Orcadean rights to Scotland. The later union of England and Scotland finally settled their destiny.

But until the last century England cared very little about the Orcades. Indeed Colonel Balfour, writing of these islands in A. D. 1861, says: "Orkney is a part of a British County, but probably there is no part of Europe which so few Englishmen visit." Colonel Balfour, of Balfour and Trenabie, possessed a noble estate on the little isle of Shapinsay. He enthused the Orcadeans with the modern spirit of improvement and progress; he introduced a proper system of agriculture, built mills of all kinds, got laws passed for reclaiming waste lands, and was in every respect a wise, generous, faithful father of his country. To Americans Shapinsay has a peculiar interest. In a little cottage there, called *Quholme*, the father and mother of Washington Irving lived, and their son Washington was born on board an American ship on its passage from Kirkwall to New York.

However, it is only since A. D. 1830, one year before I was born, that the old Norse life has been changed in Orkney. Up to that date agriculture could hardly be said to exist. The sheep and cattle of all towns, or communities, grazed together; but this plan, though it saved the labour of herding, was at the cost of abandoning the lambs to the eagles who circled over the flocks and selected their victims at will. In the late autumn all stock was brought to the "infield," which was then crowded with horses, cattle and sheep. In A. D. 1830, the Norwegian system of weights was changed to the standard weights and measures, and money, instead of barter, began to be used generally.

Then a great Scotch emigration set in, and brought careful methods of farming with it; and the Orcadean could not but notice results. The Scotch trader came also, and the slipshod Norse way of barter and bargaining had no chance with the Scotch steady prices and ready money. But even through all these domestic and civic changes Orkney was constantly in zones of danger. In the first half of the nineteenth century England was at war with France and Spain and Russia, and the Orcadeans have a fine inherited taste for a sea fight. The Vikings did not rule them through centuries for nothing: the Orcadean and his brother, the Shetlander, salt the British Navy, and they rather enjoy danger zones.

A single generation, with the help of steam communications, changed Orkney entirely and in the course of the second generation the Orcadean became eager for improvements of all kinds, and ready to forward them generously with the careful hoardings of perhaps many generations. And as it is in this transient period of the last century that my hero and heroine lived, I have thought it well to say something of antecedents that Americans may well be excused for knowing nothing about. Also--

... the past will always win
A glory from its being far;
And orb into the perfect star,
We saw not, when we walked therein.

However, Orkney was far from being out of danger zones in the nineteenth century. In its first quarter French and Dutch privateers made frequent raids on the islands; and the second quarter gave her men their chance of danger in the Crimea. They were not strangers in the Russian Chersonesus; their fathers had been in southern seas centuries before them. During the last fifty years they have made danger zones of their own free will, quarreling with coast guards, tampering with smugglers, wandering off with would-be discoverers of the North Pole, or with any other doubtful and dangerous enterprise.

And these reflections made me quite comfortable about the "made-in-Germany" danger zone. I think the Orcadeans will rather enjoy it; and I am quite sure if any Germans take to trafficking, or buying or selling, in Kirkwall, they will get the worst of it. In this direction it is rather pleasant to remember that even Scotchmen, disputing about money, will find the Orcadeans "too far north for them."

CHAPTER I

THE HOUSE OF RAGNOR

Kind were the voices I used to hear
Round such a fireside,
Speaking the mother tongue old and dear;
Making the heart beat,
With endless tales of wonder and fear,
Or plaintive singing.

Great were the marvellous stories told
Of Ossian heroes,
Giants, and witches and young men bold
Seeking adventures,
Winning Kings' daughters, and guarded gold
Only with valor.

THE House of Ragnor was a large and very picturesque edifice. It was built of red and white sandstone which Time had covered with a heathery lichen, softening the whole into a shade of greenish grey. Many minds and many hands had fashioned it, for above its central door was the date, 1688, which would presuppose that it had been built from revenues coming as a reward for opposition to the Stuarts. It had been altered and enlarged by nearly every occupant, was many-roomed, and surrounded by a large garden, full of such small fruits as could ripen in the short summers, and of such flowers and shrubs as could live through the long winters. In sheltered situations, there were even hardy roses, and a royal plenty of England's spring flowers sweetened many months of the year. A homely garden, where berries and roses grew together and privet hedges sheltered peas and lettuce, and tulips and wall-flowers did not disdain the proximity of household vegetables.

Doubtless the Ragnors had been jarls in old Norwegian times, but in 1853 such memories had been forgotten, and Conall Ragnor was quite content with his reputation of being the largest trader in Orkney, and a very wealthy man. Physically he was of towering stature. His hair was light brown, and rather curly; his eyes large and bright blue, his face broad and rosy. He had great bodily and mental vigor, he was blunt in speech, careless about his dress, and simple in all his ways. His Protestantism was of the most decided character, but he was not a Presbyterian. Presbyterianism was a new thing on the face of the earth; he had been "authoritatively told, the Apostles were Episcopalians."

"My soul has received no orders to go to thy Presbyterian Church," he said to the young Calvinist minister who asked him to do so. "When the order comes, then that may happen which has never happened before."

Yet in spite of his pronounced nationality, and his Episcopal faith, he married Rahal Gordon from the braes of Moray; a Highland Scotch woman and a strict Calvinist. What compact had been made between them no one knew, but it had been sufficient to prevent all religious disputes during a period of twenty-six years. If Rahal Ragnor had any respectable excuse, she did not go to the ritual service in the Cathedral. If she had no such excuse, she went there with her husband and family. Then doubtless her prayer was the prayer of Naaman, that when "she bowed herself in the House of Rimmon, the Lord would pardon her for it."

No one could deny her beauty, though it was of the Highland Scotch type, and therefore a great

contrast to the Orcadean blonde. She was slender and dark, with plentiful, glossy, black hair, and soft brown eyes. Her face was oval and richly coloured. Her temperament was frank and domestic; yet she had a romantic side, and a full appreciation of what she called "a proper man."

They had had many children, but four were dead, and three daughters were married and living in Edinburgh and Lerwick, and two sons had emigrated to Canada; while the youngest of all, a boy of fifteen, was a midshipman on Her Majesty's man-of-war, *Vixen*, so that only one boy and one girl were with their parents. These were Boris, the eldest son, who was sailing his own ship on business ventures to French and Dutch ports, and Thora, the only unmarried daughter. And in 1853 these five persons lived happily enough together in the Ragnor House, Kirkwall.

One day in the spring of 1853 Conall Ragnor was at the rear door of his warehouse. The sea was lippering against its foundation, and he stood with his hand on his left hip, as with a raised head and keen eyes, he searched the far horizon.

In a few minutes he turned with a look of satisfaction. "Well and good!" he thought. "Now I will go home. I have the news I was watching for." Anon he looked at his watch and reflecting a moment assured himself that Boris and the *Sea Gull* would be safely at anchor by five o'clock.

So with an air of satisfaction he walked through the warehouse, looking critically at the men cleaning and packing feathers, or dried fish, or fresh eggs. There was no sign of slacking in this department, and he turned into the shop where men were weighing groceries and measuring cloth. All seemed well, and after a short delay in his own particular office he went comfortably home.

Meanwhile his daughter Thora was talking of him, and wondering what news he would bring them, and Mistress Ragnor, in a very smart cap and a gown of dark violet silk, was knitting by the large window in the living room--a very comfortable room carpeted with a good Kilmarnock "three-ply" and curtained with red moreen. There were a few sea pictures on the walls, and there was a good fire of drift-wood and peat upon the snow-white hearth.

Thora had just entered the room with a clean table-cloth in her hands. Her mother gave her a quick glance of admiration and then said:

"I thought thou wert looking for Boris home tonight."

"Well, then, Mother, that is so. He said we must give him a little dance tonight, and I have asked the girls he likes best to come here. I thought this was known to thee. To call my words back now, will give great disappointment."

"No need is there to call any word back. Because of thy dress I feared there had been some word of delay. If likelihood rule, Maren and Helga Torrie will wear the best they have."

"That is most certain, but I am not minded to outdress the Torrie girls. Very hard it is for them to get a pretty frock, and it will make them happy to see themselves smarter than Thora Ragnor."

"Thou should think of thyself."

"Well, I am generally uppermost in my own mind. Also, in Edinburgh I was told that the hostess must not outdress her guests."

"Edinburgh and Kirkwall are not in the same latitude. Keep mind of that. Step forward and let me look at thee."

So Thora stood up before her mother, and the light from the window fell all over her, and she was beautiful from head to feet. Tall and slender, with a great quantity of soft brown hair very loosely arranged on the crown of her head; a forehead broad and white; eyebrows, plentiful and well arched; starlike blue eyes, with a large, earnest gaze and an oval face tinted like a rose. Oh! why try to describe a girl so lovely? It is like pulling a rose to pieces. It is easier to say that she was fleshly perfect and that, being yet in her eighteenth year, she had all the bloom of opening flowers, and all their softness and sweetness.

Apparently she owed little to her dress, and yet it would have been difficult to choose anything more befitting her, for though it was only of wine-coloured cashmere, it was made with a plain picturesqueness that rendered it most effective. The short sleeves then worn gave to her white arms the dark background that made them a fascination; the high waist, cut open in front to a point, was filled in with white satin, over which it was laced together with a thin silk cord of the same colour as the dress. A small lace collar completed the toilet, and for the occasion, it was perfect; anything added to it would have made it imperfect.

This was the girl who, standing before her mother, asked for her approval. And Rahal Ragnor's eyes were filled with her beauty, and she could only say:

"Dear thing! There is no need to change! Just as thou art pleases me!"

Then with a face full of love Thora stooped and kissed her mother and anon began to set the table for the expected guests. With sandalled feet and smiling face, she walked about the room with the composure of a goddess. There was no hesitation concerning what she had to do; all had been arranged and settled in her mind previously, though now and then, the discussion of a point appeared to be pleasant and satisfying. Thus she thoughtfully said:

"Mother, there will be thyself and father and Boris, that is three, and Sunna Vedder, and Helga and Maren Torrie, that makes six, and Gath Peterson, and Wolf Baikie and his sisters Sheila and Maren make ten, and myself, eleven--that is all and it is enough."

"Why not make it twelve?"

"There is luck in odd numbers. I am the eleventh. I like it."

"Thou might have made it ten. There is one girl on thy list it would be better without."

"Art thou thinking of Sunna Vedder, Mother?"

"Yes, I am thinking of Sunna Vedder."

"Well and good. But if Sunna is not here, Boris would feel as if there was no one present. It is Sunna he wants to see. It is Sunna he wants to please. He says he is so sorry for her."

"Why?"

"Because she has to live with old Vedder who is nothing but a bookworm."

"Vedder is a very clever man. The Bishop was saying that."

"Yes, in a way he was saying it, but---"

"The Bishop was not liking the books he was studying. He said they did men and women no good. Thy father was telling me many things. Yes, so it is! The Vedders are counted queer--they are different from thee and me, and--the Bishop."

"And the Dominie?"

"That may well be. Thy father has a will for Boris to marry Andrina Thorkel."

"Boris will never marry Andrina. It would be great bad luck if he did. Many speak ill of her. She has a temper to please the devil. I was hearing she would marry Scot Keppoch. That would do; for then they would not spoil two houses."

"Tell thy father thy thought, and he will give thee thy answer;--but why talk of the Future and the Maybe? The Now is the hour of the wise, so I will go upstairs and lay out some proper clothing and do thou get thy father to dress himself, as Conall Ragnor ought to do."

"That may not be easy to manage."

"Few things are beyond thy say-so." Then she lifted her work-bag and left the room.

During this conversation Conall Ragnor had been slowly making his way home, after leaving his warehouse when the work of the day was done. Generally he liked his walk through the town to his homestead, which was just outside the town limits. It was often pleasant and flattering. The women came to their doors to watch him, or to speak to him, and their admiration and friendliness was welcome. For many years he had been used to it, but he had not in the least outgrown the thrill of satisfaction it gave him. And often he wondered if his wife noticed the good opinion that the ladies of Kirkwall had for her husband.

"Of course she does," he commented, "but a great wonder it would be if my Rahal should speak of it. In that hour she would be out of the commodity of pride, or she would have forgotten herself entirely."

This day he had received many good-natured greetings--Jenny Torrie had told him that the *Sea Gull* was just coming into harbour, and so heavy with cargo that the sea was worrying at her gunwale; then Mary Inkster--from the other side of the street--added, "Both hands--seen and unseen--are full, Captain, I'll warrant that!"

"Don't thee warrant beyond thy knowledge, Mary," answered Ragnor, with a laugh. "The *Sea Gull* may have hands; she has no tongue."

"All that touches the *Sea Gull* is a thing by itself," cried pretty Astar Graff, whose husband was one of the *Sea Gull's* crew.

"So, then, Astar, she takes her own at point and edge. That is her way, and her right," replied Ragnor.

Thus up the narrow street, from one side or the other, Conall Ragnor was greeted. Good wishes and good advice, with now and then a careful innuendo, were freely given and cheerfully taken; and certainly the recipient of so much friendly notice was well pleased with its freedom and good will. He came into his own house with the smiling amiability of a man who has had all the wrinkles of the day's business smoothed and soothed out of him.

Looking round the room, he was rather glad his wife was not there. She was generally cool about such attentions, and secretly offended by their familiarity. For she was not only a reader and a thinker, she was also a great observer, and she had seen and considered the slow but sure coming of that spirit of progress, which would break up their isolation and, with it, the social privileges of her class. However, she kept all her fears on this subject in her heart. Not even to Thora would she talk of them lest she might be an inciter of thoughts that would raise up a class who would degrade her own: "Few people can be trusted with a dangerous thought, and who can tell where spoken words go to." And this idea, she knit, or stitched, into every garment her fingers fashioned.

So, then, it was quite in keeping with her character to pass by Conall's little social enthusiasms with a chilling indifference, and if any wonder or complaint was made of this attitude, to reply:

"When men and women of thine own worth and station bow down to thee, Conall, then thou will find Rahal Ragnor among them; but I do not mingle my words with those of the men and women who sort goose feathers, and pack eggs and gut fish for the salting. Thy wife, Conall, looks up, and not down."

Well, then, as Rahal knew that the safe return of Boris with the *Sea Gull* would possibly be an occasion for these friendly familiarities, she wisely took herself out of the way of hearing anything about it. And it is a great achievement when we learn the limit of our power to please. Conall Ragnor had not quite mastered the lesson in twenty-six years. Very often, yet, he had a half-alive hope that these small triumphs of his daily life might at length awaken in his wife's breast a sympathetic pleasure. Today it was allied with the return of Boris and his ship, and he thought this event might atone for whatever was repugnant.

And yet, after all, when he saw no one but Thora present, he had a sense of relief. He told her all that had been said and done, and added such incidents of Boris and the ship as he thought would please her. She laughed and chatted with him, and listened with unabated pleasure to the very end, indeed, until he said: "Now, then, I must stop talking. I dare say there are many things to look after, for Boris told me he would be home for dinner at six o'clock. Till that hour I will take a little nap on the sofa."

"But first, my Father, thou wilt go and dress. Everything is ready for thee, and mother is dressed, and as for Thora, is she not pretty tonight?"

"Thou art the fairest of all women here, if I know anything about beauty. Wolf Baikie will be asking the first dance with thee."

"That dance is thine. Mother has given thee to me for that dance."

"To me? That is very agreeable. I am proud to be thy father."

"Then go and dress thyself. I am particular about my partners."

"Dress! What is wrong with my dress?"

"Everything! Not an article in it is worthy of thee and the occasion."

"I tell thee, all is as it should be. I am not minded to change it in any way."

"Yes; to please Thora, thou wilt make some changes. Do, my Father. I love thee so! I am so proud of thy figure, and thou can show even Wolf Baikie how he ought to dance."

"Well, then, just for thee--I will wash and put on fresh linen."

"And comb thy beautiful hair. If thou but wet it, then it curls so that any girl would envy thee. And all the women would say that it was from thee, Thora got her bright, brown, curly hair."

"To comb my hair? That is but a trifle. I will do it to please thee."

"And thou wilt wet it, to make it curl?"

"That I will do also--to please thee."

"Then, as we are to dance together, thou wilt put on thy fine white socks, and thy Spanish leather shoes--the pair that have the bright buckles on the instep. Yes, thou wilt do me that great favour."

"Thou art going too far; I will not do that."

"Not for thy daughter Thora?" and she laid her cheek against his cheek, and whispered with a kiss, "Yes, thou wilt wear the buckled shoes for Thora. They will look so pretty in the dance; and Wolf Baikie cannot toss his head at thy boots, as he did at Aunt Brodie's Christmas dinner."

"Did he do that thing?"

"I saw him, and I would not dance with him because of it."

"Thou did right. Thy Aunt Barbara--"

"Is my aunt, and thy eldest sister. All she does is square and upright; what she says, it were well for the rest of the town to take heed to. It would please Aunt if thou showed Wolf Baikie thou had dancing shoes and also knew right well how to step in them."

"Well, then, thou shalt have thy way. I will wash, I will comb my hair, I will put on clean linen and white socks and my buckled shoes. That is all I will do! I will not change my suit--no, I will not!"

"Father!"

"Well, then, what call for 'Father' now?"

"I want thee to wear thy kirk suit."

"I will not! No, I will not! The flannel suit is good enough for any man."

"Yes, if it were clean and sweet, and had no fish scales on it, and no fish smell in it. And even here--at the very end of the world--thy friend, the good Bishop, wears black broadcloth and all gentlemen copy him. If Thora was thy sweetheart, instead of thy own dear daughter, she would not dance with thee in anything but thy best suit."

"It seems to me, my own dear daughter, that very common people wear kirk toggery. When I go to the hotels in Edinburgh, or Aberdeen, or Inverness, I find all the men who wait on other men are in kirk clothes; and if I go to a theatre, the men who wait on the crowd there wear kirk clothes, and--"

"Thy Bishop also wears black broadcloth."

"That will be because of his piety and humility. I am not as pious and humble as I might be. No, indeed! Not in everything can I humour thee, and trouble myself; but this thing is what I will

do--I have a new suit of fine blue flannel; last night I brought it home. At McVittie's it was made, and well it fits me. For thy sake I will wear it. This is the end of our talk. No more will I do."

"Thou dear father! It is enough! With a thousand kisses I thank thee."

"Too many kisses! Too many kisses! Thou shalt give me five when we finish our dance; one for my curled hair, and one for my white, fresh linen, and one for my socks, and one for my buckled shoes, and the last for my new blue suit. And in that bargain thou wilt get the best of me, so one favour in return from thee I must have."

"Dear Father, thy will is my will. What is thy wish?"

"I want thy promise not to dance with Wolf Baikie. Because of his sneer I am coaxed to dress as I do not want to dress. Well, then, I will take his place with thee, and every dance he asks from thee is to be given to me."

Without a moment's hesitation Thora replied: "That agreement does not trouble me. It will be to my great satisfaction. So, then, thou art no nearer to getting the best of the bargain."

"Thou art a clever, handsome little baggage. But my promises I will keep, and it is well for me to be about them. Time flies talking to thee," and he looked at his watch and said, "It is now five minutes past five."

"Then thou must make some haste. Dinner is set for six o'clock."

"Dost thou think I will fiddle-faddle about myself like a woman?"

"But thou must wash---"

"In the North Sea I wash me every morning. Before thou hast opened thy eyes I have had my bath and my swim in the salt water."

"There is rain water in thy room; try it for a change." And he answered her with a roar of laughter far beyond Thora's power to imitate. But with it ringing in her heart and ears she saw him go to a spare room to keep his promises. Then she hastened to her mother.

"Whatever is the matter with thy father, Thora?"

"He has promised to wash and dress. I got all I asked for."

"Will he change his suit?"

"He has a fine new suit. It was hid away in Aunt's room."

"What made him do such a childish thing?"

"To please thee, it was done. It was to be a surprise, I think."

"I will go to him."

"No, no, Mother! Let father have the pleasure he planned. To thee he will come, as soon as he is dressed."

"Am I right? From top to toe?"

"From top to toe just as thou should be. The white roses in thy cap look lovely with the violet silk gown. Very pretty art thou, dear Mother."

"I can still wear roses, but they are white roses now. I used to wear pink, Thora."

"Pink and crimson and yellow roses thou may wear yet. Because white roses go best with violet I put that colour in thy cap for tonight. Think of what my aunt said when thou complained to her of growing old, 'Rahal, the mother of twelve sons and daughters is always young.' Now I will run away, for my father does everything quickly."

In about ten or fifteen minutes, Rahal Ragnor heard him coming. Then she stood up and watched the swift throwing open of the door, and the entrance of her husband. With a cry of pleasure she clapped her hands and said joyfully:

"Oh, Coll! Oh, my dear Coll!" and the next moment Coll kissed her.

"Thou hast made thyself so handsome--just to please me!"

"Yes, for thee! Who else is there? Do I please thee now?"

"Always thou pleases me! But tonight, I have fallen in love with thee over again!"

"And yet Thora wanted me to wear my kirk suit," and he walked to the glass and looked with great satisfaction at himself. "I think this suit is more becoming."

"My dear Coll, thou art right. A good blue flannel suit is a man's natural garment. To everyone, rich and poor, it is becoming. If thou always dressed as thou art now dressed, I should never have the heart or spirit to contradict thee. Thou could have thy own way, year in and year out."

"Is that the truth, my dear Rahal? Or is it a compliment?"

"It is the very truth, dear one!"

"From this hour, then, I will dress to thy wish and pleasure."

She stepped quickly to his side and whispered: "In that case, there will not be in all Scotland a more distinguished and proper man than Conall Ragnor!"

And in a large degree Conall Ragnor was worthy of all the fine things his wife said to him. The

new clothes fell gracefully over his grand figure; he stepped out freely in the light easy shoes he was wearing; there was not a single thing stiff or tight or uncomfortable about him. Even his shirt collar fell softly round his throat, and the bright crimson necktie passed under it was unrestrained by anything but a handsome pin, which left his throat bare and gave the scarf permission to hang as loosely as a sailor's.

At length Rahal said, "I see that Boris and the ship are safely home again."

"Ship and cargo safe in port, and every man on board well and hearty. On the stroke of six he will be here. He said so, and Boris keeps his word. I hear the sound of talking and laughing. Let us go to meet them."

They came in a merry company, Boris, with Sunna Vedder on his arm leading them. They came joyously; singing, laughing, chattering, making all the noise that youth seems to think is essential to pleasure. However, I shall not describe this evening. A dinner-dance is pretty much alike in all civilized and semi-civilized communities. It will really be more descriptive to indicate a few aspects in which this function of amusement differed from one of the same kind given last night in a fashionable home or hotel in New York.

First, the guests came all together from some agreed-upon rendezvous. They walked, for private carriages were very rare and there were none for hire. However, this walking party was generally a very pleasant introduction to a more pleasant and intimate evening. The women were wrapped up in their red or blue cloaks, and the men carried their dancing slippers, fans, bouquets, and other small necessities of the ballroom.

Second, the old and the young had an equal share in any entertainment, and if there was a difference, it was in favour of the old. On this very night Conall Ragnor danced in every figure called, except a saraband, which he said was too slow and formal to be worth calling a dance. Even old Adam Vedder who had come on his own invitation--but welcome all the same--went through the Orkney Quickstep with the two prettiest girls present, Thora Ragnor and Maren Torrie. For honourable age was much respected and every young person wished to share his happiness with it.

A very marked characteristic was the evident pleasure old and young had in the gratification of their sense of taste, in the purely animal pleasure of eating good things. No one had a bad appetite, and if anyone wished for more of a dish they liked, they asked for it. Indeed they had an easy consciousness of paying their hostess a compliment, and of giving themselves a little more pleasure.

Finally, they made the day, day; and the night, night. Such gatherings broke up about eleven o'clock; then the girls went home unwearied, to sleep, and morning found them rosy and happy, already wondering who would give them the next dance.

CHAPTER II

ADAM VEDDER'S TROUBLE

... they do not trust their tongues alone
But speak a language of their own;
Convey a libel in a frown,
And wink a reputation down;
Or by the tossing of a fan,
Describe the lady and the man.--SWIFT

It is good to be merry and wise,
It is good to be honest and true,
It is well to be off with the old love
Before you are on with the new.

BORIS did not remain long in the home port. It was drawing near to Lent, and this was a sacred term very highly regarded by the citizens of this ancient cathedral town. Of course in the Great Disruption the National Episcopal Church had suffered heavy loss, but Lent was a circumstance of the Soul, so near and dear to its memory, that even those disloyal to their Mother Church could not forget or ignore it. In some cases it was secretly more faithfully observed than ever before; then its penitential prayers became intensely pathetic in their loneliness. For these self-bereft souls could not help remembering the days when they went up with the multitude to keep the Holy Fast in the House of their God.

Rahal Ragnor had never kept it. It had been only a remnant of popery to her. Long before the Free Kirk had been born, she and all her family had been Dissenters of some kind or other. And yet her life and her home were affected by this Episcopal "In Memoriam" in a great number of small, dominating ways, so that in the course of years she had learned to respect a ceremonial that she did not endorse. For she knew that no one kept Lent with a truer heart than Conall

Ragnor, and that the Lenten services in the cathedral interfered with his business to an extent nothing purely temporal would have been permitted to do.

So, after the little dance given to Boris, there was a period of marked quietness in Kirkwall. It was as if some mighty Hand had been laid across the strings of Life and softened and subdued all their reverberations. There was no special human influence exerted for this purpose, yet no one could deny the presence of some unseen, unusual element.

"Every day seems like Sabbath Day," said Thora.

"It is Lent," answered Rahal.

"And after Lent comes Easter, dear Mother."

"That is the truth."

In the meantime Boris had gone to Edinburgh on the bark *Sea Gull* to complete his cargo of Scotch gingham and sewed muslins, native jewelry and table delicacies. Perhaps, indeed, the minimum notice accorded Lent in the metropolitan city had something to do with this journey, which was not a usual one; but after the departure of the *Sea Gull* the Ragnor household had settled down to a period of domestic quiet. The Master had to make up the hours spent in the cathedral by a longer stay in the store, and the women at this time generally avoided visiting; they felt--though they did not speak of it--the old prohibition of unkind speech, and the theological quarrel was yet so new and raw that to touch it was to provoke controversy, instead of conversation.

It was at such vacant times that old Adam Vedder's visits were doubly welcome. One day in mid-Lent he came to the Ragnor house, when it was raining with that steady deliberation that gives no hope of anything better. Throwing off his waterproof outer garments, he left them to drip dry in the kitchen. An old woman, watching him, observed:

"Thou art wetting the clean floor, Master Vedder," and he briskly answered: "That is thy business, Helga, not mine. Is thy mistress in the house?"

"Would she be out, if she had any good sense left?"

"How can a man tell what a woman will do? Where is thy mistress?" and he spoke in a tone so imperative, that she answered with shrinking humility:

"I ask thy favour. Mistress Ragnor is in the right-hand parlour. I will look after thy cloak."

"It will be well for thee to do that."

Then Adam went to the right-hand parlour and found Rahal sitting by the fire sewing.

"I am glad to see thee, Rahal," he said.

"I am glad to see thee always--more at this time than at any other."

"Well, that is good, but why at this time more than at any other?"

"The town is depressed; business goes on, but in a silent fashion. There is no social pleasure--surely the reason is known to thee!"

"So it is, and the reason is good. When people are confessing their sins, and asking pardon for the same, they cannot feel it to be a cheerful entertainment; and, as thou observed, it affects even their business, which I myself notice is done without the usual joking or quarrelling or drinking of good healths. Well, then, that also is right. Where is Thora?"

"She is going to a lecture this afternoon to be given by the Archdeacon Spens to the young girls, and she is preparing for it." And as these words were uttered, Thora entered the room. She was dressed for the storm outside, and wore the hood of her cloak drawn well over her hair; in her hands were a pair of her father's slippers.

"For thee I brought them," she said, as she held them out to Vedder. "I heard thy voice, and I was sure thy feet would be wet. See, then, I have brought thee my father's slippers. He would like thee to wear them--so would I."

"I will not wear them, Thora. I will not stand in any man's shoes but my own. It is an unchancy, unlucky thing to do. Thanks be to thee, but I will keep my own standing, wet or dry. Look to that rule for thyself, and remember what I say. Let me see if thou art well shod."

Thora laughed, stood straight up, and drew her dress taut, and put forward two small feet, trigly protected by high-laced boots. Then, looking at her mother, she asked: "Are the boots sufficient, or shall I wear over them my French clogs?"

Vedder answered her question. "The clogs are not necessary," he said. "The rain runs off as fast as it falls. Thy boots are all such trifling feet can carry. What can women do on this hard world-road with such impediments as French clogs over English boots?"

"Mr. Vedder, they will do whatever they want to do; and they will go wherever they want to go; and they will walk in their own shoes, and work in their own shoes, and be well satisfied with them."

"Thora, I am sorry I was born in the last century. If I had waited for about fifty years I would have been in proper time to marry thee."

"Perhaps."

"Yes; for I would not have let a woman so fair and good as thou art go out of my family. We

should have been man and wife. That would certainly have happened."

"If two had been willing, it might have been. Now our talk must end; the Archdeacon likes not a late comer;" and with this remark, and a beaming smile, she went away.

Then there was a silence, full of words longing to be spoken; but Rahal Ragnor was a prudent woman, and she sighed and sewed and left Vedder to open the conversation. He looked at her a little impatiently for a few moments, then he asked:

"To what port has thy son Boris sailed?"

"Boris intends to go to Leith, if wind and water let him do so."

"Boris is not asking wind and water about his affairs. There is a question I know not how to answer. I am wanting thy help."

"If that be so, speak thy mind to me."

"I want a few words of advice about a woman."

"Is that woman thy granddaughter, Sunna?"

"A right guess thou hast made."

"Then I would rather not speak of her."

"Thy reason? What is it?"

"She is too clever for a simple woman like me. I have not two faces. I cannot make the same words mean two distinct and separate things. Sunna has all thy self-wisdom, but she has not thy true heart and thy wise tongue."

"Listen to me! Things have come to this--Boris has made love to Sunna in the face of all Kirkwall. He has done this for more than a year. Then for two weeks before he left for Leith he came not near my house, and if he met Sunna in any friend's house he was no longer her lover. What is the meaning of this? My girl is unhappy and angry, and I myself am far from being satisfied; thou tell, what is wrong between them?"

"I would prefer neither to help nor hinder thee in this matter. There is a broad way between these two ways, that I am minded to take. It will be better for me to do so, and perhaps better for thee also."

"I thought I could count on thee for my friend. Bare is a man's back without friends behind it! In thee I trusted. While I feared and doubted, I thought, 'If worse comes I will go at once to Rahal Ragnor'--*Thou hast failed me.*"

"Say not that--my old, dear friend! It is beyond truth. What I know I told to my husband; and I asked him if it would be kind and well to tell thee, and he said to me: 'Be not a bearer of ill news to Vedder. Little can thou trust any evil report; few people are spoken of better than they deserve.' Then I gave counsel to myself, thus: Conall has four dear daughters, *he knows*. Conall loves his old friend Vedder; if he thought to interfere was right, he would advise Vedder to interfere or he would interfere for him, and my wish was to spare thee the sorrow that comes from women's tongues. I was also sure that if the news was true, it would find thee out--if not true, why should Rahal Ragnor sow seeds of suspicion and ill-will? Is Sunna disobedient to thee?"

"She is something worse--she deceives me. Her name is mixed up with some report--I know not what. No one loves me well enough to tell me what is wrong."

"Well, then, thou art more feared than loved. Few know thee well enough to risk thy anger and all know that Norsemen are bitter cruel to those who dare to say that one hair of their women is out of its place. Who, then, would dare to say this or that about thy granddaughter?"

"Rahal Ragnor could speak safely to me."

Then there was silence for a few moments and Rahal sat with her doubled-up left hand against her lips, gazing out of the window. Vedder did not disturb her. He waited patiently until she said:

"If I tell thee what was told me, wilt thou visit the story upon my husband, or myself, or any of my children?"

Vedder took a signet ring from his finger and kissed it. "Rahal," he said, "I have kissed this ring of my fathers to seal the promise I shall make thee. If thou wilt give me thy confidence in this matter of Sunna Vedder, it shall be for thy good, and for the good of thy husband, and for the good of all thy children, as far as Adam Vedder can make it so."

"I ask a special promise for my son Boris, for he is concerned in this matter."

"Boris can take good care of Boris: nevertheless, I promise thee that I will not say or look or do, with hands or tongue, anything that will injure, or even annoy, Boris Ragnor. Unto the end of my life, I promise this. What may come after, I know not. If there should be a wrong done, we will fight it out elsewhere."

"Thy words are sufficient. Listen, then! There is a family, in the newest and best part of the town, called McLeod. They are yet strange here. They are Highland Scotch. Many say they are Roman Catholics. They sing Jacobite songs, and they go not to any church. They have opened a great trading route; and they have brought many new customs and new ideas with them. A certain class of our people make much of them; others are barely civil to them; the best of our

citizens do not notice them at all. But they have plenty of money, and live extravagantly, and the garrison's officers are constantly seen there. Do you know them?"

"I have heard of them."

"McLeod has a large trading fleet, and he has interfered with the business of Boris in many ways."

"Hast thou ever seen him? Tell me what he is like."

"I have seen him many times. He is a complete Highlander; tall, broad-shouldered and apparently very strong, also very graceful. He has high cheekbones, and a red beard, but all talk about him, and many think him altogether handsome."

"And thou? What dost thou think?"

"When I saw him, he was in earnest discussion with one of his men, and he was not using English but sputtering a torrent of shrill Gaelic, shrugging his shoulders, throwing his arms about, thrilling with excitement--but for all that, he was the picture of a man that most women would find irresistible."

"I have heard that he wears the Highland dress."

"Not on the street. They have many entertainments; he may wear it in some of them; but I think he is too wise to wear it in public. The Norseman is much indebted to the Scot--but it would not do to flaunt the feathered cap and philabeg too much--on Kirkwall streets."

"You ought to know."

"Yes, I am Highland Scotch, thank God! I understand this man, though I have never spoken to him. I know little about the Lowland Scot. He is a different race, and is quite a different man. You would not like him, Adam."

"I know him. He is a fine fellow; quiet, cool-blooded, has little to say, and wastes no strength in emotion. There's wisdom for you--but go on with thy talk, woman; it hurts me, but I must hear it to the end."

"Well, then, Kenneth McLeod has the appearance of a gentleman, though he is only a trader."

"Say *smuggler*, Rahal, and you might call him by a truer name."

"Many whisper the same word. Of a smuggler, a large proportion of our people think no wrong. That you know. He is a kind of hero to some girls. Many grand parties these McLeods give--music and dancing, and eating and drinking, and the young officers of the garrison are there, as well as our own gay young men; and where these temptations are, young women are sure to go. His aunt is mistress of his house."

"Now, then, this thing happened when Boris was last here. One night he heard two men talking as they went down the street before him. The rain was pattering on the flagged walk and he did not well understand their conversation, but it was altogether of the McLeods and their entertainments. Suddenly he heard the name of Sunna Vedder. Thrice he heard it, and he followed the men to the public house, called for whiskey, sat down at a table near them and pretended to be writing. But he grew more and more angry as he heard the free and easy talk of the men; and when again they named Sunna, he put himself into their conversation and so learned they were going to McLeod's as soon as the hour was struck for the dance. Boris permitted them to go, laughing and boastful; an hour afterwards he followed."

"With whom did he go?"

"Alone he went. The dance was then in progress, and men and women were constantly going in and out. He followed a party of four, and went in with them. There was a crowd on the waxed floor. They were dancing a new measure called the polka; and conspicuous, both for her beauty and her dress, he saw Sunna among them. Her partner was Kenneth McLeod, and he was in full McLeod tartans. No doubt have I that Sunna and her handsome partner made a romantic and lovely picture."

"What must be the end of all this? What the devil am I to think?"

"Think no worse than needs be."

"What did Boris do--or say?"

"He walked rapidly to Sunna, and he said, 'Miss Vedder, thou art wanted at thy home--at once thou art wanted. Get thy cloak, and I will walk with thee.'"

"Then?"

"She was angry, and yet terrified; but she left the room. Boris feared she would try and escape him, so he went to the door to meet her. Judge for thyself what passed between them as Boris took her home. At first she was angry, afterwards, she cried and begged Boris not to tell thee. I am sure Boris was kind to her, though he told her frankly she was on a dangerous road. All this I had from Boris, and it is the truth; as for what reports have grown from it, I give them no heed. Sunna was deceitful and imprudent. I would not think worse of her than she deserves."

"Rahal, I am much thy debtor. This affair I will now take into my own hands. To thee, my promise stands good for all my life days--and thou may tell Boris, it may be worth his while to forgive Sunna. There is some fault with him also; he has made love to Sunna for a long time, but never yet has he said to me--'I wish to make Sunna my wife!' What is the reason of that?"

"Well, then, Adam, a young man wishes to make sure of himself. Boris is much from home---"

"There it is! For that very cause, he should have made a straight clear road between us. I do not excuse Sunna, but I say that wherever there is a cross purpose, there has likely never been a straight one. Thou hast treated me well, and I am thy debtor; but it shall be ill with all those who have led my child wrong--the more so, because the time chosen for their sinful deed makes it immeasurably more sinful."

"The time? What is thy meaning? The time was the usual hour of all entertainments. Even two hours after the midnight is quite respectable if all else is correct."

"Art thou so forgetful of the God-Man, who at this time carried the burden of all our sins?"

"Oh! You mean it is Lent, Adam?"

"Yes! It is Lent!"

"I was never taught to regard it."

"Yet none keep Lent more strictly than Conall Ragnor."

"A wife does not always adopt her husband's ideas. I had a father, Adam, uncles and cousins and friends. None of them kept Lent. Dost thou expect me to be wiser than all my kindred?"

"I do."

"Let us cease this talk. It will come to nothing."

"Then good-bye."

"Be not hard on Sunna. One side only, has been heard."

"As kindly as may be, I will do right."

Then Adam went away, but he left Rahal very unhappy. She had disobeyed her husband's advice and she could not help asking herself if she would have been as easily persuaded to tell a similar story about her own child. "Thora is a school girl yet," she thought, "but she is just entering the zone of temptation."

In the midst of this reflection Thora came into the room. Her mother looked into her lovely face with a swift pang of fear. It was radiant with a joy not of this world. A light from an interior source illumined it; a light that wreathed with smiles the pure, childlike lips. "Oh, if she could always remain so young, and so innocent! Oh, if she never had to learn the sorrowful lessons that love always teaches!"

Thus Rahal thought and wished. She forgot, as she did so, that women come into this world to learn the very lessons love teaches, and that unless these lessons are learned, the soul can make no progress, but must remain undeveloped and uninstructed, even until the very end of this session of its existence.

CHAPTER III

ARIES THE RAM

O Christ whose Cross began to bloom
With peaceful lilies long ago;
Each year above Thy empty tomb
More thick the Easter garlands grow.
O'er all the wounds of this sad strife
Bright wreathes the new immortal life.

Thus came the word: Proclaim the year of the Lord!
And so he sang in peace;
Under the yoke he sang, in the shadow of the sword,
Sang of glory and release.
The heart may sigh with pain for the people pressed and slain,
The soul may faint and fall:
The flesh may melt and die--but the Voice saith, Cry!
And the Voice is more than all.--CARL SPENCER.

IT was Saturday morning and the next day was Easter Sunday. The little town of Kirkwall was in a state of happy, busy excitement, for though the particular house cleaning of the great occasion was finished, every housewife was full laden with the heavy responsibility of feeding the guests sure to arrive for the Easter service. Even Rahal Ragnor had both hands full. She was expecting her sister-in-law, Madame Barbara Brodie by that day's boat, and nobody ever knew how many guests Aunt Barbara would bring with her. Then if her own home was not fully

prepared to afford them every comfort, she would be sure to leave them at the Ragnor house until all was in order. Certainly she had said in her last letter that she was not "going to be imposed upon, by anyone this spring"—and Thora reminded her mother of this fact.

"Dost thou indeed believe thy aunt's assurances?" asked Rahal. "Hast thou not seen her break them year after year? She will either ask some Edinburgh friend to come back to Kirkwall with her, or she will pick up someone on the way home. Is it not so?"

"Aunt generally leaves Edinburgh alone. It is the people she picks up on her way home that are so uncertain. Dear Mother, can I go now to the cathedral? The flowers are calling me."

"Are there many flowers this year?"

"More than we expected. The Balfour greenhouse has been stripped and they have such a lovely company of violets and primroses and white hyacinths with plenty of green moss and ivy. The Baikies have a hothouse and have such roses and plumes of curled parsley to put behind them, and lilies-of-the-valley; and I have robbed thy greenhouse, Mother, and taken all thy fairest auriculas and cyclamens."

"They are for God's altar. All I have is His. Take what vases thou wants, but Helga must carry them for thee."

"And, Mother, can I have the beautiful white Wedgewood basket for the altar? It looked so exquisite last Easter."

"It now belongs to the altar. I gave it freely last Easter. I promised then that it should never hold flowers again for any meaner festival. Take whatever thou wants for thy purpose, and delay me no longer. I have this day to put two days' work into one day." Then she lifted her eyes from the pastry she was making and looking at Thora, asked: "Art thou not too lightly clothed?"

"I have warm underclothing on. Thou would not like me to dress God's altar in anything but pure white linen? All that I wear has been made spotless for this day's work."

"That is right, but now thou must make some haste. There is no certainty about Aunt Barbie. She may be at her home this very minute."

"The boat is not due until ten o'clock."

"Not unless Barbara Brodie wanted to land at seven. Then, if she wished, winds and waves would have her here at seven. Her wishes follow her like a shadow. Go thy way now. Thou art troubling me. I believe I have put too much sugar in the custard."

"But that would be a thing incredible." Then Thora took a hasty kiss, and went her way. A large scarlet cloak covered her white linen dress, and its hood was drawn partially over her head. In her hands she carried the precious Wedgewood basket, and Helga and her daughter had charge of the flowers and of several glass vases for their reception. In an hour all Thora required had been brought safely to the vestry of Saint Magnus, and then she found herself quite alone in this grand, dim, silent House of God.

In the meantime Aunt Barbara Brodie had done exactly as Rahal Ragnor anticipated. The boat had made the journey in an abnormally short time. A full sea, and strong, favourable winds, had carried her through the stormiest Firth in Scotland, at a racer's speed; and she was at her dock, and had delivered all her passengers when Conall Ragnor arrived at his warehouse. Then he had sent word to Rahal, and consequently she ventured on the prediction that "Aunt Barbara might already be at her home."

However, it had not been told the Mistress of Ragnor, that her sister-in-law had actually "picked up someone on the way"; and that for this reason she had gone directly to her own residence. For on this occasion, her hospitality had been stimulated by a remarkably handsome young man, who had proved to be the son of Dr. John Macrae, a somewhat celebrated preacher of the most extreme Calvinist type. She heartily disapproved of the minister, but she instantly acknowledged the charm of his son; but without her brother's permission she thought it best not to hazard his influence over the inexperienced Thora.

"I am fifty-two years old," she thought, "and I know the measure of a man's deceitfulness, so I can take care of myself, but Thora is a childlike lassie. It would not be fair to put her in danger without word or warning. The lad has a wonderful winning way with women."

So she took her fascinating guest to her own residence, and when he had been refreshed by a good breakfast, he frankly said to her:

"I came here on special business. I have a large sum of money to deliver, and I think I will attend to that matter at once."

"I will not hinder thee," said Mrs. Brodie, "I'm no way troubled to take care of my own money, but it is just an aggravation to take care of other folks' siller. And who may thou be going to give a 'large sum of money' to, in Kirkwall town? I wouldn't wonder if the party isn't my own brother, Captain Conall Ragnor?"

"No, Mistress," the young man replied. "It belongs to a young gentleman called McLeod."

"Humph! A trading man is whiles very little of a gentleman. What do you think of McLeod?"

"I am the manager of his Edinburgh business, so I cannot discuss his personality."

"That's right, laddie! Folks seldom see any good thing in their employer; and it is quite fair for them to be just as blind to any bad thing in him—but I'll tell you frankly that your employer has

not a first rate reputation here."

"All right, Mistress Brodie! His reputation is not in my charge--only his money. I do not think the quality of his reputation can hurt mine."

"Your father's reputation will stand bail for yours. Well now, run away and get business off your mind, and be back here for one o'clock dinner. I will not wait a minute after the clock chaps one. This afternoon I am going to my brother's house, and I sent him a message which asks for permission to bring you with me."

"Thanks!" but he said the word in an unthankful tone, and then he looked into Mistress Brodie's face, and she laughed and imitated his expression, as she assured him "she had no girl with matrimonial intentions in view."

"You see, Mistress," he said, "I do not intend to remain longer than a week. Why should I run into danger? I am ready to take heartaches. Can you tell me how best to find McLeod's warehouse?"

"Speir at any man you meet, and any man will show you the place. I, myself, am not carin' to send folk an ill road."

So Ian Macrae went into the town and easily found his friend and employer. Then their business was easily settled and it appeared to be every way gratifying to both men.

"You have taken a business I hate off my hands, Ian," said McLeod, "and I am grateful to you. Where shall we go today? What would you like to do with yourself?"

"Why, Kenneth, I would like first of all to see the inside of your grand cathedral. I would say, it must be very ancient."

"Began in A. D., 1138. Is that old?"

"Seven hundred years! That will do for age. They were good builders then. I have a strange love for these old shrines where multitudes have prayed for centuries. They are full of *Presence* to me."

"*Presence*. What do you mean?"

"Souls."

"You are a creepy kind of mortal. I think, Ian, if you were not such a godless man, you might have been a saint."

Macrae drew his lips tight, and then said in detached words--"My father is--sure--I--was--born--at--the--other--end--of--the--measure."

Then they were in the interior of the cathedral. The light was dim, the silence intense, and both men were profoundly affected by influences unknown and unseen. As they moved slowly forward into the nave, the altar became visible, and in this sacred place of Communion Thora was moving slowly about, leaving beauty and sweetness wherever she lingered.

Her appearance gave both men a shock and both expressed it by a spasmodic breath. They spoke not; they watched her slim, white figure pass to-and-fro with soft and reverent steps, arranging violets and white hyacinths with green moss in the exquisite white Wedgewood. Then with a face full of innocent joy she placed it upon the altar, and for a few moments stood with clasped hands, looking at it.

As she did so, the organist began to practice his Easter music, and she turned her face towards the organ. Then they saw fully a beautiful, almost childlike face transfigured with celestial emotions.

"Let us get out of this," whispered McLeod. "What business have we here? It is a kind of sacrilege." And Ian bowed his head and followed him. But it was some minutes ere the everyday world became present to their senses. McLeod was the first to speak:--

"What an experience!" he sighed. "I should not dare to try it often. It would send me into a monastery."

"Are you a Roman Catholic?"

"What else would I be? When I was a lad, I used to dream of being a monk. It was power I wanted. I thought then, that priests had more power than any other men; as I grew older I found out that it was money that owned the earth."

"Not so!" said Ian sharply, "'the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.' I promised to be at Mistress Brodie's for dinner at one o'clock. What is the time?"

McLeod took out his watch:--"You have twenty minutes," he said. "I was just going to tell you that the girl we saw in the cathedral is her niece."

Ian had taken a step or two in the direction of the Brodie house, but he turned his head, and with a bright smile said, "Thank you, Ken!" and McLeod watched him a moment and then with a sigh softly ejaculated: "What a courteous chap he is--when he is in the mood to be courteous--and what a --- when he is not in the mood."

Ian was at the Brodie house five minutes before one, and he found Mistress Brodie waiting for him. "I am glad that you have kept your tryst," she said. "We will just have a modest bite now, and we can make up all that is wanting here, at my brother Coll's, a little later. I have a pleasant invite for yourself. My good sister-in-law has read some of your father's sermons in the Sunday

papers and magazines, and for their sake she will be glad to see you. I just promised for you."

"Thank you, I shall be glad to go with you," and it was difficult for him to disguise how more than glad he was to have this opportunity.

"So then, you will put on the best you have with you--the best is none too good to meet Thora in."

"Thora?"

"Thora Ragnor, my own niece. She is the bonniest and the best girl in Scotland, if you will take me as a judge of girls. 'Good beyond the lave of girls,' and so Bishop Hadley asked her special to dress the altar for Easter. He knew there would be no laughing and daffing about the work, if Thora Ragnor had the doing of it."

"Is there any reason to refrain from laughing and daffing while at that work?"

"At God's altar there should be nothing but prayer and praise. You know what girls talk and laugh about. If they have not some poor lad to bring to worship, or to scorn, they have no heart to help their hands; and the work is done silent and snappy. They are wishing they were at home, and could get their straight, yellow hair on to crimping pins, because Laurie or Johnny would be coming to see them, it being Saturday night."

"Then the Bishop thought your niece would be more reverent?"

"He knew she would. He knew also, that she would not be afraid to be in the cathedral by herself, she would do the work with her own hands, and that there would be no giggling and gossiping and no young lads needed to hold vases and scissors and little balls of twine."

Their "moderate bite" was a pleasant lingering one. They talked of people in Edinburgh with whom they had some kind of a mutual acquaintance, and Mistress Brodie did the most of the talking. She was a charming story-teller, and she knew all the good stories about the University and its great professors. This day she spent the time illustrating John Stuart Blackie taking his ease in a dressing gown and an old straw hat. She made you see the man, and Ian felt refreshed and cheered by the mental vision. As for Lord Roseberry, he really sat at their "modest bite" with them. "You know, laddie," she said, "Scotsmen take their politics as if they were the Highland fling; and Roseberry was Scotland's idol. He was an orator who carried every soul with him, whether they wanted to go or not; and I was told by J. M. Barrie, that once when he had fired an audience to the delirium point, an old man in the hall shouted out:--'I dinna hear a word; but it's grand; it's grand!'"

They barely touched on Scottish religion. Mistress Brodie easily saw it was a subject her guest did not wish to discuss, and she shut it off from conversation, with the finality of her remark that "some people never understood Scotch religion, except as outsiders misunderstood it. Well, Ian, I will be ready for our visit in about two hours; one hour to rest after eating and a whole hour to dress myself and lecture the lasses anent behaving themselves when they are left to their own idle wishes and wasteful work."

"Then in two hours I will be ready to accompany you; and in the meantime I will walk over the moor and smoke a cigar."

"No, no, better go down to the beach and watch the puffins flying over the sea, and the terns fishing about the low lying land. Or you might get a sight of an Arctic skua going north, or a black guillemot with a fish in its mouth flying fast to feed its young. The seaside is the place, laddie! There is something going on there constantly."

So Ian went to the seaside and found plenty of amusement there in watching a family quarrel among the eider ducks, who were feeding on the young mussels attached to the rocks which a low tide had uncovered.

It was a pleasant walk to the Ragnor home, and Rahal and Thora were expecting them. The sitting room was cheery with sunshine and fire glow, Rahal was in afternoon dress and Thora was sitting near the window spinning on the little wheel the marvellously fine threads of wool made from the dwarfish breed of Shetland sheep, and used generally for the knitting of those delicate shawls which rivalled the finest linen laces. On the entrance of her aunt and Ian Macrae she rose and stood by her wheel, until the effusive greetings of the two elder ladies were complete; and Ian was utterly charmed with the picture she made--it was completely different from anything he had ever seen or dreamed about.

The wheel was a pretty one, and was inlaid with some bright metal, and when Thora rose from her chair she was still holding a handful of fine snowy wool. Her blue-robed and blue-eyed loveliness appeared to fill the room as she stood erect and smiling, watching her mother and aunt. But when her aunt stepped forward to introduce Ian to her, she turned the full light of her lovely countenance upon him. Then both wondered where they had met before. Was it in dreams only?

Mother and aunt were soon deep in the fascinating gossip of an Edinburgh winter season, and Thora and Ian went into the greenhouse and the garden and found plenty to talk about until Conall Ragnor came home from business and supper was served. And the wonder was, that Conall bent to the young man's charm as readily as Thora had done. He was amazed at his shrewd knowledge of business methods and opportunities; and listened to him with grave attention, though laughing heartily at some of his plans and propositions.

"Mr. Macrae," he said, "thou art too far north for me. I do know a few Shetlanders that could

pare the skin off thy teeth, but we Orcadeans are simple honest folk that just live, and let live." At which remark Ian laughed, and reminded Conall Ragnor of certain transactions in railway stock which had nonplussed the Perth directors at the time. Then Ragnor asked how he happened to know what was generally considered "private information," and Ian answered, "Private information is the most valuable, sir. It is what I look for." Then Ragnor rose from the table and said, "Let us have a smoke and a little music."

"Take thy smoke, Coll," said Mrs. Ragnor, "and Mr. Macrae will give us the music. Barbara says he sings better than Harrison. Come, Mr. Macrae, we are waiting to hear thee."

Ian made no excuses. He sat down and sang with delightful charm and spirit "A Life on the Ocean Wave" and "The Bay of Biscay." Then these were followed by the fresh and then popular songs, "We May Be Happy Yet," "Then You'll Remember Me" and "The Land of Our Birth." No one spoke or interrupted him, even to praise; but he was well repaid by the look on every face and the kindness that flowed out to him. He could see it in the eyes, and hear it in the voices, and feel it in the manner of all present.

The silence was broken by the sound of quick, firm footsteps. Ragnor listened a moment and then went with alacrity to open the door. "I knew it was thee!" he cried. "O sir, I am glad to see thee! Come in, come in! None can be more welcome!" And it was good to hear the strong, sweet modulations of the voice that answered him.

"It is Bishop Hedley!" said Rahal.

"Then I am going," said Aunt Barbara.

"No, no, Aunt!" cried Thora, and the next moment she was at her aunt's side coaxing her to resume her chair. Then the Bishop and Ragnor entered the room, and the moment the Bishop's face shone upon them, all talk about leaving the room ceased. For Bishop Hedley carried his Great Commission in his face and his life was a living sermon. His soul loved all mankind; and he had with it an heroic mind and a strong-sinewed body, which refused to recognise the fact that it died daily. For the Bishop's business was with the souls of men, and he lived and moved and did his daily work in a spiritual and eternal element.

And if constant commerce with the physical world weakens and ages the man who lives and works in it, surely the life passed amid spiritual thoughts and desires is thereby fortified and strengthened to resist the cares and worries which fret the physical body to decay. Then vainly the flesh fades, the soul makes all things new. This is a great truth--"it is only by the supernatural we are strong."

The Bishop came in bringing with him, not only the moral tonic of his presence, but also the very breath of the sea; its refreshing "tang," and good salt flavour. His smile and blessing was a spiritual sunshine that warmed and cheered and brightened the room. He was affectionate to all, but to Mistress Brodie and Ian Macrae, he was even more kindly than to the Ragnors. They were not of his flock but he longed to take care of them.

"I heard singing as I came through the garden," he said, "and it was not your voice, Conall."

"It was Ian Macrae singing," Conall answered, "and he will gladly sing for thee, sir." This promise Macrae ratified at once, and that with such power and sweetness that every one was amazed and the Bishop requested him to sing, during the next day's service, a fine "Gloria" he had just given them in the cathedral choir. And Ian said he would see the organist, and if it could be done, he would be delighted to obey his request.

"See the organist!" exclaimed Mistress Brodie. "What are you talking about? The organist is Sandy Odd, the barber's son! How can the like of him hinder the Bishop's wish?" Then the Bishop wrote a few words in his pocket book, tore out the leaf, and gave it to Macrae, saying: "Mr. Odd will manage all I wish, no doubt. Now, sir, for my great pleasure, play us 'Home, Sweet Home.' I have not been here for four months, and it is good to be with friends again." And they all sang it together, and were perfectly at home with each other after it. So much so, that the Bishop asked Rahal to give him a cup of tea and a little bread; "I have come from Fair Island today," he said, "and have not eaten since noon."

Then all the women went out together to prepare and serve the requested meal, so that it came with wonderful swiftness, and beaming smiles, and charming words of laughing pleasure. And when he saw a little table drawn to the hearth for him and quickly spread with the food he needed and smelled the refreshing odour of the young Hyson, and heard the pleasant tinkle of china and glass and silver as Thora placed them before the large chair he was to occupy, he sat down happily to eat and drink, while Thora served him, and Conall smoked and watched them with a now-and-then smile or word or two, while Rahal and Barbara talked, and Ian played charmingly--with soft pedal down--quotations from Beethoven's "Pastoral Symphony" and "Hark, 'Tis the Linnet!" from the oratorio, "Joshua."

It was a delightful interlude in which every one was happy in their own way, and so healed by it of all the day's disappointments and weariness. But the wise never prolong such perfect moments. Even while yielding their first satisfactions, they permit them to depart. It is a great deal to *have been happy*. Every such memory sweetens after life.

The Bishop did not linger over his meal, and while servants were clearing away cups and plates, he said, "Come, all of you, outside, for a few minutes. Come and look at the Moon of Moons! The Easter Moon! She has begun to fill her horns; and she is throwing over the mystery and majesty of earth and sea a soft silvery veil as she watches for the dawn. The Easter dawn! that in a few hours will come streaming up, full of light and warmth for all."

But there was not much warmth in an Orcadean April evening and the party soon returned to the cheerful, comfortable hearth blaze. "It is not so beautiful as the moonlight," said Rahal, "but it is very good."

"True," said the Bishop, "and we must not belittle the good we have, because we look for something better. Let us be thankful for our feet, though they are not wings."

Then one of those sudden, inexplicable "arrests" which seem to seal up speech fell over every one, and for a minute or more no one could speak. Rahal broke the spell. "Some angel has passed through the room. Please God he left a blessing! Or perhaps the moonlight has thrown a spell over us. What were you thinking of, Bishop?"

"I will tell you. I was thinking of the first Good Friday in Old Jerusalem. I was thinking of the sun hiding his face at noonday. Thora, have you an almanac?"

Thora took one from a nail on which it was hanging and gave it to him.

"I was thinking that the sun, which hid his face at noonday, must at that time have been in Aries, the Ram. Find me the signs of the Zodiac." Thora did so. "Now look well at Aries the Ram. What month of our year is signed thus?"

"The month of March, sir."

"Why?"

"I do not know. Tell me, sir."

"I believe that in a long forgotten age, some priest or good man received a promise or prophecy revealing the Great Sacrifice that would be offered up for man's salvation once and for all time. And I think they knew that this plenary sacrament would occur in the vernal season, in the month of March, whose sign or symbol was Aries, the Ram."

"But why under that sign, sir?"

"The ram, to the ancient world, was the sacrificial animal. We have only to open our Bibles and be amazed at the prominence given to the ram and his congeners. From the time of Abraham until the time of Christ the ram is constantly present in sacrificial and religious ceremonies. Do you remember, Thora, any incident depending upon a ram?"

"When Isaac was to be sacrificed, a ram caught in a thicket was accepted by God in Isaac's place, as a burnt offering."

"More than once Abraham offered a ram in sacrifice. In Exodus, Chapter Twenty-ninth, special directions are given for the offering of a ram as a burnt offering to the Lord. In Leviticus, the Eighth Chapter, a bullock is sacrificed for a sin offering but a ram for a burnt offering. In Numbers we are told of *the ram of atonement* which a man is to offer, when he has done his neighbour an injury. In Ezra, the Tenth, the ram is offered for a trespass because of an unlawful marriage. On the accession of Solomon to the throne one thousand rams with bullocks and lambs were 'offered up with great gladness.' In the Old Testament there are few books in which the sacrificial ram is not mentioned. Even the horn of the ram was constantly in evidence, for it called together all religious and solemn services.

"A little circumstance," continued the Bishop, "that pleases me to remember occurred in Glasgow five weeks ago. I saw a crowd entering a large church, and I asked a workingman, who was eating his lunch outside the building, the name of the church; and he answered,--'It's just the auld Ram's Horn Kirk. They are putting a new minister in the pulpit today and they seem weel pleased wi' their choice.'

"Now I am going to leave this subject with you. I have only indicated it. Those who wish to do so, can finish the list, for the half has not been told, and indeed I have left the most significant ceremony until the last. It is that wonderful service in the Sixteenth Chapter of Leviticus, where the priest, after making a sin offering of young bullocks and a burnt offering of a ram, casts lots upon two goats for a sin offering, and the goat upon which the lot falls is 'presented alive before the Lord to make an atonement; and to let him go for a scapegoat into the wilderness.'"

Then he took from his pocket a little book and said, "Listen to the end of this service, 'And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the Children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away, by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness.

"And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited; and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.'

"My friends, this night let all read the Fifty-third of Isaiah, and they will understand how fitting it was that Christ should be 'offered up' in Aries the Ram, the sacrificial month representing the shadows and types of which He was the glorious arch-type."

Then there was silence, too deeply charged with feeling, for words. The Bishop himself felt that he could speak on no lesser subject, and his small audience were lost in wonder at the vast panorama of centuries, day by day, century after century, through all of which God had remembered that He had promised He would provide the Great and Final Sacrifice for mankind's justification. Then Aries the Ram would no longer be a promise. It would be a voucher forever that the Promise had been redeemed, and a memorial that His Truth and His mercy endureth forever!

At the door the Bishop said to Ragnor, "In a few hours, Friend Conall, it will be Easter Morning. Then we can tell each other '*Christ has risen!*'" And Conall's eyes were full of tears, he could not find his voice, he looked upward and bowed his head.

CHAPTER IV

SUNNA AND HER GRANDFATHER

Love is rich in his own right,
He is heir of all the spheres,
In his service day and night,
Swing the tides and roll the years.
What has he to ask of fate?
Crown him; glad or desolate.

Time puts out all other flames,
But the glory of his eyes;
His are all the sacred names,
His are all the mysteries.
Crown him! In his darkest day
He has Heaven to give away!
--CARL SPENCER.

Arms are fair,
When the intent for bearing them is just.

IN the meantime Sunna was spending the evening with her grandfather. The old gentleman was reading, but she did not ask him to read aloud, she knew by the look and size of the book that it would not be interesting; and she was well pleased when one of her maids desired to speak with her.

"Well then, Vera, what is thy wish?"

"My sister was here and she was bringing me some strange news. About Mistress Brodie she was talking."

"Yes, I heard she had come home. Did she bring Thora Ragnor a new Easter gown?"

"Of a gown I heard nothing. It was a young man she brought! O so beautiful is he! And like an angel he sings! The Bishop was very friendly with him, and the Ragnors, also; but they, indeed! they are friendly with all kinds of people."

"This beautiful young man, is he staying with the Ragnors?"

"With Mistress Brodie he is staying, and with her he went to dinner at the Ragnors'. And the Bishop was there and the young man was singing, and a great deal was made of his singing, also they were speaking of his father who is a famous preacher in some Edinburgh kirk, and---"

"These things may be so, but how came thy sister to know them?"

"This morning my sister took work with Mistress Ragnor and she was waiting on them as they eat; and in and out of the room until nine o'clock. Then, as she went to her own home, she called on me and we talked of the matter, and it seemed to my thought that more might come of it."

"Yes, no doubt. I shall see that more does come of it. I am well pleased with thee for telling me."

Then she went back to her grandfather and resumed her knitting. Anon, she began to sing. Her face was flushed and her nixie eyes were dancing to the mischief she contemplated. In a few minutes the old gentleman lifted his head, and looked at her. "Sunna," he said, "thy song and thy singing are charming, but they fit not the book I am reading."

"Then I will stop singing and thou must talk to me. There has come news, and I want thy opinion on it. The Ragnors had a dinner party today, and we were not asked."

"A great lie is that! Conall Ragnor would not give Queen Victoria a party in Lent. Who told thee such foolishness?"

Then Sunna retailed the information given her and asked, "What hast thou done to Conall Ragnor? Always before he bid thee to dinner when the Bishop was at his house? Or perhaps the offence is with Rahal Ragnor? Not long ago thou spent an afternoon with her and black and dangerous as a thunder storm thou came home."

"This day the dinner was an accidental gathering. Rahal knows well that I have no will to dine with Mistress Brodie. Dost thou want her here, as thy stepmother?"

"If Mistress Brodie is not tired of an easy life, she will turn her feet away from this house. If Sunna cannot please thee, thou art in danger of worse happening. Yes, many are guessing who

it is thou wilt marry.”

“And which way runs the guessing?”

“Not all one way. For thee, that is not a respectable thing. Thou should not be named with so many old women.”

“I am of thy opinion. An old woman is little to my mind. If I trust marriage again, I will choose a young girl for my wife--such an one as Treddie Fae, or Thora Ragnor.”

“Thora Ragnor! Dreaming thou art! I am sure Barbara Brodie has brought this young man here for Thora’s approval. Can thou stand against a young man?”

“Yes. Adam Vedder and fifty thousand pounds can hand any young man his hat and gloves. Thy father’s father is not for thee to make a jest about. So here our talk shall come to an end on this subject. Go to thy bed! Sleep, and the Good Being bless thee!”

Sunna was not yet inclined to sleep. She sat down before her mirror, uncoiled her plentiful hair, and carefully brushed and braided it for the night, as she considered the news that had come to her.

“This beautiful young man, this singing man, is one of Barbara Brodie’s ‘finds.’ Not much do I think of any of them! That handsome scholar she brought here turned out an unbearable encumbrance. I believe she paid him to go back to Edinburgh. That Aberdeen man, who wanted to invest money in Kirkwall had to borrow two pounds from grandfather to take him back to where he came from. That witty, good-looking Irishman left a big bill at the Castle Hotel for some one to pay; and the woman who wanted to begin a dressmaking business, on the good will of people like Barbara Brodie, knew nothing about dressmaking. This beautiful young man, I’ll warrant, is a fish out of the same net. As for the Bishop being taken with his beauty, that is nothing! The poorer a man is, the better Bishop Hedley will like him. So it goes! I wish I knew where Boris Ragnor is--I wish---

“Pshaw! I wonder what kind of a dress Mistress Barbara Brodie brought Thora. Not much taste in either men or clothes has she! Too large will the pattern be, or too strong the colours, and too heavy, or too light, will be the material. I know! And it will not fit her. Too big, or too little it is sure to be! With my own dress I am satisfied. And if grandfather asks no questions about it, I shall count it a lucky dress and save it till Boris comes home. I am going to forgive him when he comes home--perhaps---Now I will put the hopes and worries of this world under my pillow and be off to the Land of Dreams---Tomorrow is Sunday, Easter Sunday--I shall sing the solo in my new dress--that is good, I like a religious feeling in a new dress--I think I am rather a religious girl.”

Alas for the hopes of all who wanted to dress for Easter. It was an uncompromising, wet day. It was oil skin and rubber for the men; it was cloaks and pattens and umbrellas for the women. Yet, aside from the rain, it was a day full of good things. The cathedral was crowded, there was full cathedral service, and the Bishop preached a transfiguring sermon. The music was good, the home choir did well, and Sunna’s solo was effectively sung; but after she had heard Ian Macrae’s “Gloria,” she was sorry she had sung at all.

“Grandfather!” she commented, “No private person has a right to sing as that man sings! After him, non-professionals make a show of themselves.”

“Thou sang well--better than usual, I thought.”

“I was told he was such a handsome young man! And he has black hair and black eyes! Even his skin is dark. He looks like a Celt. I don’t like Celts. None of our people like them. When they come to the fishing they are not respected.”

“Thou art much mistaken. Our men like them.”

“Boris Ragnor says they are poor traders.”

“Well then, it is to fish they come.”

“What they come for is no care of mine. Boris is ten times more of a man than the best of them. No notice shall I take of this Celt.”

“Through thy scorn he may live, and even enjoy his life. The English officers do that.”

“This chicken is better than might be. Wilt thou have a little more of it?”

“Enough is plenty. I have had enough. At Conall Ragnor’s there is always good eating and I am going there for my supper. Wilt thou go with me? Then with Thora thou can talk. This beautiful young man is likely at Ragnor’s. It was too stormy for Mistress Brodie to go to her own house at the noonday. Dost thou see then, how it will be?”

“I will go with thee, I want to see Thora’s new dress. I need not notice the young man.”

“His name? Already I have forgotten it.”

“Odd was calling him ‘Macrae.’”

“Macrae! That is Highland Scotch. The Macraes are a good family. There is a famous minister in Edinburgh of that name. The Calvinists all swear by him.”

“This man sang in a full cathedral service. Dost thou believe a Calvinist would do that? He would be sure it was a disguised mass, and nothing better.”

Adam laughed as he said, “Well, then, go with me this night to Ragnor’s and between us we will

find something out. A mystery is not pleasant to thee."

"There is something wrong in a mystery, that is what I feel."

"Thou can ask Thora all about him."

"I shall not ask her. She will tell me."

Adam laughed again. "That is the best way," he said. "It was thy father's way. Well then, five minutes ago, the wind changed. By four o'clock it will be fair."

"Then I will be ready to go with thee. If I am left alone, I am sad; and that is not good for my health."

"But thou must behave well, even to the Celt."

"Unless it is worth my while, I do not quarrel with any one."

"Was it worth thy while to quarrel with Boris Ragnor?"

"Yes--or I had not quarrelled with him."

"Here comes the sunshine! Glean upon gloom! Cheery and good it is!"

"They say an Easter dress should be christened with a few drops of rain. That is not my opinion. I like the Easter sunshine on it. Now I shall leave thee and go and rest and dress myself. Very good is thy talk and thy company to me, but to thee, I am foolishness. As I shut the door, the big book thou art reading, thou wilt say to it: 'Now, friend of my soul, some sensible talk we will have together, for that foolish girl has gone to her foolishness at her looking glass.'"

"Run away! I am in a hurry for my big book."

Sunna shut the door with a kiss--and as she took the stairs with hurrying steps, the sunshine came dancing through the long window, and her feet trod on it and it fell all over her.

At four o'clock she was ready for her evening's inquest and she found her grandfather waiting for her. He had put on a light vest and a white tie, and he had that clean, healthy, good-tempered look that pleases all women. He smiled and bowed to Sunna and she deserved the compliment; for she was beautiful and had dressed her beauty most becomingly. Her gown was of Saxony cloth, the exact colour of her hair, with a collar, stomacher and high cuffs of pale green velvet. The collar was tied with cord and small tassels of gold braid; the stomacher laced with gold braid over small gilt buttons, and the high cuffs were trimmed to match. Very handsome gilt combs held up her rippled hair, and a large red-riding-hood cloak covered her from the crowning bow of her hair to the little French pattens that protected her black satin slippers. She expected to make a conquest, and her thoughts were usually the factors of success.

A little disappointment awaited her. She was usually shown into the right-hand parlour at once, and she relied on the bit of colour afforded by her scarlet cloak to give life to the modest shades of her spring colours of pale fawn and tender green. But servants were setting the dinner table in the right-hand parlour; and Conall and Rahal and Aunt Barbara had taken themselves to Conall's little business room where there was a bright fire burning. There, in his big chair, Conall was next door to sleeping; and Barbara and Rahal were talking in a sleepy, mysterious way about something that did not appear to interest them.

At the sound of Adam Vedder's voice, Conall became wide awake; and Barbara's face lighted up with a fresh interest. If there was nothing else, there was a chronic quarrel between them, which Barbara was ready to lift at a moment's notice. But Sunna was not dissatisfied. Conall's quick look of admiration, and Rahal's and Barbara's glances of surprise, were excellent in their way. She knew she had given them a subject of interest sufficient to make even the hour before dinner appear short.

"Where is Thora?" she asked, as she turned every way, apparently to look for Thora, but really to allow her admirers to convince themselves that her dress was trimmed as handsomely at the back as the front--that if the stomacher was perfect in front, the sash of green velvet at the back was quite as stylish and elaborate.

"Where *is* Thora?" she asked again.

"In the drawing room thou wilt find Thora with Ian Macrae," said Rahal. "Go to them. They will be glad of thy company."

"Doubtful is their gladness. Two are company, three are a crowd. Yet so it is! I must run into danger, like the rest of women."

"Is that thy Easter gown, Sunna?" asked Mistress Brodie.

"It is. Dost thou like it?"

"Who would not like it? The rumour goes abroad that thy grandfather sent to Inverness for it. Others say it came to thee from Edinburgh."

"Wrong are both stories. I am happy to say that Sunna Vedder gave herself a dress so pretty and so suitable."

With these smiling words she left the room and the elder women shrugged their shoulders and looked expressively at each other. "What can a sensible man like Boris Ragnor see in such a harum-scarum girl!" was Rahal Ragnor's question, and Barbara Brodie thought it was all Adam Vedder's fault. "He ought to have married some sensible woman who would have brought up the

girl as girls ought to be brought up," she answered; adding, "We may as well remember that the management of women, at any age, is a business clean beyond Adam Vedder's capabilities."

"Adam is a clever man, Barbie."

"Book clever! What is the use of book wisdom when you have a live girl, full of her own way, to deal with?"

"Conall chose the husbands for his daughters. They were quite suitable to the girls and they have been very happy with them."

"Thora will choose for herself."

"Perhaps, that may be so. Thora has been spoiled. Her marriage need not yet be thought of. In two or three years, we will consider it. The little one has not yet any dreams of that kind."

"Such dreams come in a moment--when you are not thinking of them."

In fact, at that very moment Thora was learning the mystery of "falling in love"; and there is hardly a more vital thing in life than this act. For it is something taking place in the subconscious self; it is a revolution, and a growth. It happened that after dinner, Conall wished to hear Ian sing again that loveliest of all metrical Collects, "Lord of All Power and Might," and Thora went with Ian to do her part as accompanist on the piano. As they sang Conall appeared to fall asleep, and no more music was asked for.

Then Ian lifted a book full of illustrations of the English lake district, and they sat down on the sofa to examine it. Ian had once been at Keswick and Ambleside, and he began to tell her about Lake Windemere and these lovely villages. He was holding Thora's hand and glancing constantly into her face, and before he recognised what he was saying, Ambleside and Windemere were quite forgotten, and he was telling Thora that he loved her with an everlasting love. He vowed that he had loved her in his past lives, and would love her, and only her, forever. And he looked so handsome and spoke in words of the sweetest tenderness, and indeed was amazed at his own passionate eloquence, but knew in his soul that every word he said was true.

And Thora, the innocent little one, was equally sure of his truth. She blushed and listened, while he drew her closer to his side calling her "his own, his very own!" and begging her to promise that she would "marry him, and no other man, in the whole earth."

And Thora promised him what he wished and for one-half hour they were in Paradise.

Now, how could this love affair have come to perfection so rapidly? Because it was the natural and the proper way. True love dates its birth from the first glance. It is the coming together of two souls, and in their first contact love flashes forth like flame. And then their influence over each other is like that gravitation which one star exerts over another star.

But much that passes for love is not love. It is only a prepossession, pleasant and profitable, promising many every-day advantages. True love is a deep and elemental thing, a secret incredible glory, in a way, it is even a spiritual triumph. And we should have another name for love like this. For it is the long, long love, that has followed us through ages, the healing love, the Comforter! In the soul of a young, innocent girl like Thora, it is a kind of piety, and ought to be taken with a wondering thankfulness.

An emotion so spiritual and profound was beyond Sunna's understanding. She divined that there had been some sort of love-making, but she was unfamiliar with its present indications. Her opinion, however, was that Ian had offered himself to Thora, and been rejected; in no other way could she account for the far-offness of both parties. Thora indeed was inexplicable. She not only refused to show Sunna her Easter dress, she would not enter into any description of it.

"That is a very remarkable thing," she said to her grandfather, as they walked home together. "I think the young man made love to Thora and even asked her to marry him, and Thora was frightened and said 'No!' and she is likely sorry now that she did not say 'Yes.'"

"To say 'No!' would not have frightened thee, I suppose?"

"That is one of the disagreeable things women have to get used to."

"How often must a woman say 'No!' in order to get used to it?"

"That depends on several small things; for instance I am very sympathetic. I have a tender heart! Yes, and so I suffer."

"I am glad to know of thy sympathy. If I asked thee to marry a young man whom I wished thee to marry, would thou do it--just to please me?"

"It would depend--on my mood that day."

"Say, it was thy sympathetic mood?"

"That would be unfavourable. Of the others I should think, and I should feel that I was cruel; if I took all hope from them."

"Thou wilt not be reasonable. I am not joking. Would thou marry Boris to please me?"

"Boris has offended me. He must come to me, and say, 'I am sorry.' He must take what punishment I choose for his rudeness to me. Then, I may forgive him."

"And marry him?"

"Only my angel knows, if it is so written. Men do not like to do as their women say they must do. Is there any man in the Orcades who dares to say 'No,' to his wife's 'Yes?'"

"What of Sandy Stark?"

"Sandy is a Scot! I do not use a Scotch measure for a Norseman. Thou art not a perfect Norseman, but yet, even in Edinburgh, there is no Scot that could be thy measure. I should have to say--'thou art five inches taller than the Scot at thy side, and forty pounds heavier, and nearly twice as strong.' That would not be correct to an ounce, but it is as near as it is possible to come between Norse and Scot."

"Thou art romancing!"

"As for the Norse women---"

"About Norse women there is no need for thee to teach thy grandfather. I know what Norse women are like. If I did not know, I should have married again."

"Well then, Barbara Brodie is a good specimen of a capable Norse woman and I have noticed one thing about them, that I feel ought to be better understood."

"Chut! What hast thou understood? Talk about it, and let thy wisdom be known."

"Well then, it is this thing--Norse women always outlive their husbands. Thou may count by tens and hundreds the widows in this town. The 'maidens of blushing fifteen' have no opportunities; the widow of fifty asks a young man into her beautiful home and makes him acquainted with the burden of her rents and dividends and her share in half a dozen trading boats, and he takes to the golden lure and marries himself like the rest of the world. Thou would have been re-married long ago but for my protection. I have had a very disagreeable day and---"

"Then go to thy bed and put an end to it."

"My new dress is crushed and some way or other I have got a spot on the front breadth. Is it that Darwin book thou art looking for?"

"Yes."

"Would thou like to read a chapter to me?"

"No, I would not."

"Grandfather, I can understand it. I like clever men. Can thou introduce me to him--to Darwin?"

"He would not care to see thee. Clever men do not want clever wives; so if thou art thinking of a clever husband keep thy 'blue stockings' well under thy petticoats."

"And grandfather, do thou keep out of the way of the widows of Orkney or thou wilt find thyself inside of a marriage ring."

"Not while thou remains unmarried. Few women would care to look after thy welfare. I am used to it, long before thou had been short-coated, I had to walk thee to sleep in my arms."

"Yes," laughed Sunna, "I remember that. I felt myself safest with thee."

"Thou remembers nothing of the kind. At six months old, thou could neither compare nor remember."

"But thou art mistaken. I was born with perfect senses. Ere I was twenty-four hours old, I had selected thee as the most suitable person to walk me to sleep. I think that was a proof of my perfect intelligence. One thing more, and then I will let thee read. I am going to marry Boris Ragnor, and then the widow Brodie would--take charge of thee." She shut the door to these words and Adam heard her laughing all the way to her own room. Then he rubbed his hand slowly over and over his mouth and said to himself--"She shall have her say-so; Boris is the only man on the Islands who can manage her."

After the departure of the Vedders, Rahal and her sister Brodie went upstairs, taking Thora with them. She went cheerfully though a little reluctantly. She liked to hear Ian talk. She had thought of asking him to sing; but she was satisfied with the one straight, long look which flashed between them, as Ian bid her "good night"; for--

He looked at her as a lover can;
She looked at him as one who awakes,
The past was a sleep and her life began.

Then she went to her room, and thought of Ian until she fell asleep and dreamed of him.

For nearly two hours Ian remained with Conall Ragnor. The Railway Mania was then at its height in England, and the older man was delighted with Ian's daring stories of its mad excitement. Ian had seen and talked with Hudson, the draper's clerk, who had just purchased a fine ducal residence and estate from the results of his reckless speculations. Ian knew all the Scotch lines, he had even full faith in the *Caledonian* when it was first proposed and could hardly win any attention. "Every one said a railway between England and Scotland would not pay, Mr. Ragnor," said Ian.

"I would have said very different," replied Conall. "It would be certain to pay. Why not?"

"Because there would be *no returns*," laughed Ian, and then Conall laughed also, and wished that Boris had been there to learn whatever Ian might teach him.

"Hast thou speculated in railway stock yet," he asked.

"No, sir. I have not had the money to do so."

"How would thou buy if thou had?"

"I would buy when no one else was buying, and when everyone else was buying, I would keep cool, and sell. A very old and clever speculator gave me that advice as a steady rule, saying it was 'his only guide.'"

This was the tenor of the men's conversation until near midnight, and then Ragnor went with Ian to the door of his room and bid him a frank and friendly good night. And as he stood a moment handfast with the youth, his conscience troubled him a little and he said: "Ian, Ian, thou art a wise lad about this world's business, but thou must not be forgetting that there is another world after this."

"I do not forget that, sir."

"Bishop Hedley is a greater and wiser man than all the railway nabobs thou hast spoken of."

"I think so, sir! I do indeed!" and the mutual smile and nod that followed required no further "good night."

It was a lovely, silent night. The very houses looked as if they were asleep; and there was not a sound either in the town on the brown pier or the moonlit sea. It was a night full of the tranquillity of God. Men and women looked into its peace, and carried its charm into their dreams. For most fine spirits that dwell by the sea have an elemental sympathy with strange oracles and dreams and old Night. In the morning, Conall Ragnor was the first to awaken. He went at once to fling open his window. Then he cried out in amazement and wonder, and awakened his wife:--

"Rahal! Rahal!" he shouted. "Come here! Come quick! Look at the town! It is hung with flags. The ships in the harbour--flying are their flags also! And there is a ship just entering the harbour and her colours are flying! And there are the guns! They are saluting her from the garrison! It must be a man-of-war! I wonder if the Queen is coming to see us at last! If thou art ready, call Thora and Barbara. Something is up! Thou may hear the town now, all tip-on-top with excitement!"

"Why did not thou call us sooner, Coll?"

"I slept late and long."

"But thou must have heard the town noises?"

"A confused noise passed through my ears, a noise full of hurry like a morning dream, that was all. Now, I am going for my swim and I will bring the news home with me."

But long before it was within expectation of Ragnor's return, the three women standing at the open door saw Ian coming rapidly to the house from the town. His walk was swift and full of excitement. His head was thrown upward, and he kept striking himself on the right side, just over the place where his ancestors had worn their dirks or broadswords. As soon as he saw the three women he flung his Glengarry skyward and shouted a ringing "Hurrah!"

As he approached them, all were struck with his remarkable beauty, his manly figure, his swift graceful movements and his handsome face suffused with the brightness of fiery youth. Through their long black lashes his eyes were shining and glowing and full of spirit, and indeed his whole personality was instinct with verve and fire. Anyone watching his approach would have said--"Here comes a youth made to lead a rattling charge of cavalry."

"Whatever is the matter with you, Ian?" cried Mistress Brodie. "You are surely gone daft."

"No indeed!" he answered. "I seem at this very hour to have just found myself and my senses."

"What is all the fuss about, Ian?" asked Rahal.

"England has gone to war at the long last with the cruel, crafty black Bear of the North."

"Well then, it is full time she did so, there are none will say different."

"And," continued Ian, "there is a ship now in harbour carrying enlisting officers--you may see her; she is to call at the Orkney and Shetland Islands for recruits for the navy, and Great Scot! she will get them! All she wants! She could take every man out of Kirkwall!"

"The Mayor and Captain Ragnor will not permit her to do so. She will have to leave men to manage the fishing," said Rahal.

"I thought the women could do that," said Ian.

"You do not know what you are talking about. It takes two or three men to lift a net full of fish out of the water, and they are about done up if they manage it. Come in and get your breakfast. If your news be true, there is no saying when Ragnor will get home. He will have some reasoning with his men to do, he cannot spare many of them."

"I have a good idea," said Mistress Brodie. "I will give a dance on Friday night for the enlisting officers, and we will invite all the presentable young men, and all the prettiest girls, to meet them."

"But you will be too late on Friday. The cutter and her crew will leave Thursday morning early," said Ian.

"Then say Wednesday night."

"That might do. I could tell the men freshly enlisted to wear a white ribbon in their coats---

"No, no, no!" cried Rahal. "What are you saying, Ian? A white favour is a Stuart favour. You would set the men fighting in the very dance room. There is no excuse in the Orkneys for a Stuart memory."

"I was not thinking of the Stuarts. Have they not done bothering yet?"

"In the Scotch heart the Stuart lives forever," said Rahal, with a sigh.

But the dance was decided on and some preparations made for it as soon as breakfast was over. Ian was enthusiastic on the matter and Thora caught his enthusiasm very readily, and before night, all Kirkwall was preparing to feast and rejoice because England was going to make the great Northern Bear--"the Bear that walks like a man"--stay in the North where he belonged.

CHAPTER V

SUNNA AND THORA

Love, the old, old troubler of the world.

Love has reasons, of which reason knows nothing.

Alas, how easily things go wrong!
A sigh too much, or a kiss too long,
And there follows a mist and a weeping rain
And life is never the same again.

NO sooner was Mrs. Brodie's intention known, than all her friends were eager to help her. There was truly but little time between Monday morning and Wednesday night; but many hands make light work, and old and young offered their services in arranging for what it pleased all to consider as a kind of national thanksgiving.

The unanimity of this kindness gave Rahal a slight attack of a certain form of jealousy, to which she had been subject for many years, and she asked her husband, as she had done often before, "Why is it, Coll, that every woman in the town is eager to help and encourage Barbara if she only speaks of having a dance or dinner; but if I, thy wife, am the giver of pleasure, I am left to do all without help or any show of interest. It troubles me, Coll."

And Coll answered as he always did answer--"It is thy superiority, Rahal. Is there any woman we know, who would presume to give thee advice or counsel? And it is well understood by all of them that thou cannot thole an obligation. Thou, and thy daughter, and thy servants are sufficient for all thy social plans; and why should thou be bothered with a lot of old and young women? Thy sister Brodie loves a crowd about her, and she says 'thank thee' to all and sundry, as easily as she takes a drink of water. It chokes thee to say 'thanks' to any one."

So Rahal was satisfied, and went with the rest to help Mistress Brodie prepare for her dance. There were women in the kitchen making pies and custards and jellies, and women in her parlours cleaning and decorating them, and women in the great hall taking up carpets because it was a favourite place for reels, and women washing China and trimming lamps. Thora was doing the shopping, Ian was carrying the invitations; and every one who had been favoured with one had not only said "Yes," but had also asked if there was anything they could loan, or do, to help the impromptu festival. Thus, Mrs. Harold Baikie sent her best service of China, and the Faes sent several extra large lamps, and the bride of Luke Serge loaned her whole supply of glassware, and Rahal took over her stock of table silver; and Mistress Brodie received every loan--useful or not--with the utmost delight and satisfaction.

On Wednesday afternoon, however, she was faced by a condition she did not know how to manage. Ian came to her in a hurry, saying, "My friend, McLeod, is longing for an invitation from you, and he has asked me to request one. Surely you will send him the favour! Yes, I know you will."

"You are knowing too much, Ian. What can I do? You know well, laddie, he is not popular with the best set here."

"I would not mind the 'best set' if I were you. What makes them 'the best'? Just their own opinion of themselves. McLeod is of gentle birth, he is handsome and good-hearted, you will like him as soon as you speak to him. There is another 'best set' beside the one Adam Vedder leads; I would like some one to take down that old man's conceit of himself--there is nothing wrong with McLeod! Yes, he is Highland Scotch---

"There! that is enough, Ian! Go your ways and bid the young man. Ask him in your own name."

"No, Mistress, I will not do that. The invitation carries neither honour nor good will without your name."

"Well then, my name be it. My name has been so much used lately, I think I will change it."

"Take my name then. I will be proud indeed if you will."

"You are aye daffing, Ian; I am o'er busy for nonsense the now. Give the Mac a hint that tartans are not necessary."

"But I cannot do that. I am going to wear the Macrae tartan."

"You can let that intent go by."

"No, I can not! A certain 'yes' may depend on my wearing the Macrae tartan."

"Well, checked cloth is bonnier than black broadcloth to some people. I don't think Thora Ragnor is among that silly crowd. There is not a more quarrelsome dress than a tartan kilt--and I'm thinking the Brodies were ill friends with the Macraes in the old days."

"The Brodies are not Highlanders."

"You are a shamefully ignorant man, Ian Macrae. The Brodies came from Moray, and are the only true lineal descendants of Malcolm Thane of Brodie in the reign of Alexander the Third, lawful King of Scotland. What do you think of the Brodies now?"

"The Macrae doffs his bonnet to them; but---"

"If you say another word, the McLeod will be out of it--sure and final."

So Ian laughingly left the room, and Mistress Brodie walked to the window and watched him speeding towards the town. "He is a wonderful lad!" she said to herself. "And I wish he was my lad! Oh why were all my bairns lasses? They just married common bodies and left me! Oh for a lad like Ian Macrae!" Then with a great sigh, she added: "It is all right. I would doubtless have spoiled and mismanaged him!"

It is not to be supposed that Sunna Vedder kept away from all this social stir and preparation. She was first and foremost in everything during Monday and Tuesday, but Wednesday she reserved herself altogether for the evening. No one saw her until the noon hour; then she came to the dinner table, for she had an entirely fresh request to make, one which she was sure would require all her personal influence to compass.

She prefaced it with the intelligence that Boris had arrived during the night, and that Elga had met him in the street--"looking more handsome than any man ought to look, except upon his wedding day."

"And on that day," said Adam, gloomily, "a man has generally good cause to look ugly."

"But if he was going to marry me, Grandfather, how then?"

"He would doubtless look handsome. Men usually do when they are on the road of destruction."

"Grandfather! I have made up my mind to marry Boris, and lead him the way I want him to go. That will always be the way thou chooseth."

"How comes that?"

"I loved thee first of all. I shall always love thee first. Boris played me false, I must pay him back. I must make him suffer. Those Ragnors--all of them--put on such airs! They make me sick."

"What art thou after? What favour art thou seeking?"

"Thou knows how the girls will try to outdress each other at this Brodie affair---"

"It is too late for a new dress--what is it thou wants now?"

"I want thee to go to the bank and get me my mother's necklace to wear just this one night."

"I will not. I gave thy dead mother a promise."

"Break it, for a few hours. My Easter dress is not a dancing dress. I have no dancing dress but the pretty white silk thou gave me last Christmas--and I have no ornaments at all--none whatever, fit to wear with it."

"There are always flowers---"

"Flowers! There is not a flower in Kirkwall. Easter and old Mistress Brodie have used up every daisy--besides, white silk ought to have jewels."

Adam shook his head positively.

"My mother wishes me to have what I want. Thou ought not to keep it from me."

"She told me to give thee her necklace on thy twenty-first birthday--not before."

"That is so silly! What better is my twenty-first birthday than any other day? Grandfather, I cannot love thee more, because my love for thee is already a perfect love; but I will be such a good girl if thou wilt give me what I want, O so much I want it! I will be so obedient! I will do everything thou desires! I will even marry Boris Ragnor." And this urgent request was punctuated with kisses and little fondling strokes of her hand, and Adam finally asked--

"How shall I answer thy mother when she accuses me of breaking my promise to her?"

"I will answer for thee. O dear! It is growing late! If thou dost not hurry, the bank will be closed, and then I shall be sick with disappointment, and it will be thy fault."

Then Adam rose and left the house and Sunna, having seen that he took the proper turn in the road, called for a cup of tea and having refreshed herself with it, went upstairs to lay out and prepare everything for her toilet. And as she went about this business she continually justified herself:--

"It is only natural I should have my necklace," she thought. "Norse women have always adored gold and silver and gems, and in the old days their husbands sailed long journeys and fought battles for what their women wanted. My great Aunt Christabelle often told me that many of the old Shetland and Orkney families had gold ornaments and uncut gems, hundreds of years old, hid away. I would not wonder if Grandfather has some! I dare say the bank's safe is full of them! I do not care for them but I do want my mother's wedding necklace--and I am going to have it. Right and proper it is, I should have it now. Mother would say so if she were here. Girls are women earlier than they were in her day. Twenty-one, indeed! I expect to be married long before I am twenty-one."

In less than an hour she began to watch the road for her grandfather's return. Very soon she saw him coming and he had a small parcel in his hand. Her heart gave a throb of satisfaction and she began to unplait her manifold small braids: "I shall not require to go to bed," she murmured. "Grandfather has my necklace. He will want to take it back to the bank tomorrow--I shall see about that--I promised--yes, I know! But there are ways--out of a promise."

She was, of course, delightfully grateful to receive the necklace, and Vedder could not help noticing how beautiful her loosened hair looked. Its length and thickness and waves of light colour gave to her stately, blonde beauty a magical grace, and Vedder was one of those men who admire the charms of his own family as something naturally greater than the same charms in any other family. "The Vedders carry their beauty with an air," he said, and he was right. The Vedders during the course of a few centuries of social prominence had acquired that air of superiority which impresses, and also frequently offends.

Certainly, Sunna Vedder in white silk and a handsome necklace of rubies and diamonds was an imposing picture; and Adam Vedder, in spite of his sixty-two years, was an imposing escort. It would be difficult to say why, for he was a small man in comparison with the towering Norsemen by whom he was surrounded. Yet he dominated and directed any company he chose to favour with his presence; and every man in Kirkwall either feared or honoured him. Sunna had much of his natural temperament, but she had not the driving power of his cultivated intellect. She relied on her personal beauty and the many natural arts with which Nature has made women a match for any antagonist. Had she not heard her grandfather frequently say "a beautiful woman is the best armed creature that God has made! She is as invincible as a rhinoceros!"

This night he had paid great attention to his own toilet. He was fashionably attired, neat as a new pin, and if not amiable, at least exceedingly polite. He had leaning on his arm what he considered the most beautiful creature in Scotland, and he assumed the manners of her guardian with punctilious courtesy.

There was a large company present when the Vedders reached Mrs. Brodie's--military men, a couple of naval officers, gentlemen of influence, and traders of wealth and enterprise; with a full complement of women "divinely tall and fair." Sunna made the sensation among them she expected to make. There was a sudden pause in conversation and every eye filled itself with her beauty. For just a moment, it seemed as if there was no other person present.

Then Mrs. Brodie and Colonel Belton came to meet them, and Sunna was left in the latter's charge. "Will you now dance, Miss Vedder?" he asked.

"Let us first walk about a little, Colonel. I want to find my friend, Thora Ragnor."

"I have long desired an introduction to Miss Ragnor. Is she not lovely?"

"Yes, but now only for one man. A stranger came here last week, and she was captured at once."

"How remarkable! I thought that kind of irresponsible love had gone quite out of favour and fashion."

"Not so! This youth came, saw, and conquered."

"Is it the youth I see with Ken McLeod?"

"The same. Look! There they are, together as usual."

"She is very sweet and attractive."

Sunna answered this remark by asking Thora to honour Colonel Belton with her company for a short time, saying: "In the interval I will take care of Ian Macrae." Then Thora stood up in her innocence and loveliness and she was like some creature of more ethereal nature than goes with flesh and blood. For the eye took her in as a whole, and at first noticed neither her face nor her dress in particular. Her dress was only of white tarlatan, a thin, gauze-like material long out of fashion. It is doubtful if any woman yet remembers its airy, fairy sway, and graceful folds. The filmy robe, however, was plentifully trimmed with white satin ribbon, and the waist was entirely of satin trimmed with tarlatan. The whole effect was girlish and simple, and Thora needed no other ornament but the pink and white daisies at her belt.

However, if Sunna expected Thora's manner and conversation to match the simplicity of her dress, she was disappointed. In Love's school women learn with marvellous rapidity, and Thora astonished her by falling readily into a conversation of the most up-to-date social character. She

had caught the trick from Ian, a little playful fencing round the most alluring of subjects, yet it brought out the simplicity of her character, while it also revealed its purity and intelligence.

Dancing had commenced when Mrs. Ragnor entered the room on the arm of her son Boris. Boris instantly looked around for Sunna and she was dancing with McLeod. All the evening afterwards Boris danced, but never once with Sunna, and Adam Vedder watched the young man with scorn. He was the most desirable party in the room for any girl and he quite neglected the handsome Sunna Vedder. That was not his only annoyance. McLeod was dancing far too often with Sunna, and even the beautiful youth Ian Macrae had only asked her hand once; and Adam was sure that Thora Ragnor had been the suggester of that act of politeness. Girls far inferior to Sunna in every respect had received more attention than his granddaughter. He was greatly offended, but he appeared to turn his back on the whole affair and to be entirely occupied in conversation with Conall Ragnor and Colonel Belton concerning the war with Russia.

Every way the evening was to Sunna a great disappointment, in many respects she felt it to be a great humiliation; and the latter feeling troubled her more for her grandfather than for herself. She knew he was mortified, for he did not speak to her as they walked through the chill, damp midnight to their home. Mrs. Brodie had urged Adam and Sunna to put the night past at her house, but Adam had been proof against all her suggestions, and even against his own desires. So he satisfied his temper by walking home and insisting on Sunna doing likewise.

It was a silent, unhappy walk. Adam said not a word to Sunna and she would not open the way for his anger to relieve itself. When they reached home they found a good fire in the room full of books which Adam called his own, and there they went. Then Sunna let her long dress fall down, and put out her sandalled feet to the warmth of the fire. Adam glanced into her face and saw that it was full of trouble.

"Go to thy bed, Sunna," he said. "Of this night thou must have had enough."

"I have had too much, by far. If only thou loved me!"

"Who else do I love? There is none but thee."

"Then with some one thou ought to be angry."

"Is it with Boris Ragnor I should be angry?"

"Yes! It is with Boris Ragnor. Not once did he ask me to dance. Watching him and me were all the girls. They saw how he slighted me, and made little nods and laughs about it."

"It was thy own fault. When Boris came into the room, he looked for thee. With McLeod thou wert dancing. With that Scot thou wert dancing! The black look on his face, I saw it, thou should have seen it and have given him a smile--Pshaw! Women know so much--and do so little. By storm thou ought to have taken the whole affair for thy own. I am disappointed in thee--yes, I am disappointed."

"Why, Grandfather?"

"An emergency thou had to face, and thou shirked it. When Boris entered the room, straight up to him thou should have gone; with an outstretched hand and a glad smile thou should have said: 'I am waiting for thee, Boris!' Then thou had put all straight that was crooked, and carried the evening in thy own hands."

"I will pay Boris for this insult. Yes, I will, and thou must help me."

"To quarrel with Boris? To injure him in any way? No! that I will not do. It would be to quarrel also with my old friend Conall. Not thee! Not man or woman living, could make me do that! Sit down and I will tell thee a better way."

"No, I will not sit down till thou say 'yes' to what I ask"; for some womanly instinct told her that while Adam was cowering over the hearth blaze and she stood in all her beauty and splendour above him, she controlled the situation. "Thou must help me!"

"To what or whom?"

"I want to marry Boris."

"Dost thou love him?"

"Better than might be. When mine he is all mine, then I will love him."

"That is little to trust to."

"Thou art wrong. It is of reasons one of the best and surest. Not three months ago, a little dog followed thee home, an ugly, half-starved little mongrel, not worth a shilling; but it was determined to have thee for its master, and thou called it thy dog, and now it is petted and pampered and lies at thy feet, and barks at every other dog, and thou says it is the best dog on the Island. It is the same way with husbands. Thou hast seen how Mary Minorie goes on about her bald, scrumpy husband; yet she burst out crying when he put the ring on her finger. Now she tells all the girls that marriage is 'Paradise Regained.' When Boris is my husband it will be well with me, and not bad for him. He will be mine, and we love what is our own."

"Why wilt thou marry any man? Thou wilt be rich."

"One must do as the rest of the world does--and the world has the fashion of marrying."

"Money rules love."

"No!"

"Yes! Bolon Flett had only scorn for his poor little wife until her uncle left her two thousand pounds. Since then, no word is long enough or good enough for her excellencies. Money opens the eyes as well as the heart. What then, if I make Boris rich?"

"Boris is too proud to take money from thee and I will not be sold to any man!"

"Wilt thou wait until my meaning is given thee--flying off in a temper like a foolish woman!"

"I am sorry--speak thy meaning."

"Sit down. Thou art not begging anything."

"Not from thee. I have thy love."

"And thine is mine. This is my plan. Above all things Boris loves a stirring, money-making business. I am going to ask him to take me as his partner. Tired am I of living on my past. How many boats has Boris?"

"Thou knowest he has but one, but she is large and swift, and does as much business as McLeod's three little sloops."

"Schooners."

"Schooners, then--little ones!"

"Well then, there is a new kind of boat which thou hast never seen. She is driven by steam, not wind, she goes swiftly, all winds are fair to her, and she cares little for storms."

"I saw a ship like that when I was in Edinburgh. She lay in Leith harbour, and the whole school went to Leith to see her come in."

"If Boris will be my partner, I will lay my luck to his, and I will buy a steam ship, a large coaster--dost thou see?"

Then with a laugh she cried: "I see, I see! Then thou can easily beat the sloops or schooners, that have nothing but sails. Good is that, very good!"

"Just so. We can make two trips for their one. No one can trade against us."

"McLeod may buy steam ships."

"I have learned all about him. His fortune is in real estate, mostly in Edinburgh. It takes a lifetime to sell property in Edinburgh. We shall have got all there is to get before McLeod could compete with Vedder and Ragnor."

"That scheme would please Boris, I know."

"A boat could be built on the Clyde in about four months, I think. Shall I speak to Boris?"

"Yes, Boris will not fly in the face of good fortune; but mind this--it is easier to begin that reel than it will be to end it. One thing I do not like--thou wert angry with Boris, now thou wilt take him for a partner."

"At any time I can put my anger under my purse--but my anger was mostly against thee. Now shall I do as I am minded?"

"That way is more likely than not! I think this affair will grow with thee--but thou may change thy mind--"

"I do not call my words back. Go now to thy bed and forget everything. This is the time when sleep will be better than either words or deeds. Of my intent speak to *no one*. In thy thoughts let it be still until its hour arrives."

"In the morning, very early, I am going to see Thora. When the enlisting ship sails northward, there will be a crowd to see her off. Boris and Thora and Macrae will be among it. I also intend to be there. Dost thou know at what hour she will leave?"

"At ten o'clock the tide is full."

"Then at ten, she will sail."

"Likely enough, is that. Our talk is now ended. Let it be, as if it had not been."

"I have forgotten it."

Vedder laughed, and added: "Go then to thy bed, I am tired."

"Not tired of Sunna?"

"Well then, yes, of thee I have had enough at present."

She went away as he spoke, and then he was worried. "Now I am unhappy!" he ejaculated. "What provokers to the wrong way are women! Her mother was like her--my beloved Adriana!" And his old eyes filled with sorrowful tears as he recalled the daughter he had lost in the first days of her motherhood. Very soon Sunna and Adriana became one and he was fast asleep in his chair.

In the morning Sunna kept her intention. She poured out her grandfather's coffee, and talked of everything but the thing in her heart and purpose. After breakfast she said: "I shall put the day past with Thora Ragnor. Thy dinner will be served for thee by Elga."

"Talking thou wilt be--"

"Of nothing that ought to be kept quiet. Do not come for me if I am late; I intend that Boris shall

bring me home."

Sunna dressed herself in a pretty lilac lawn frock, trimmed with the then new and fashionable Scotch open work, and fresh lilac ribbons. Her hair was arranged as Boris liked it best, and it was shielded by one of those fine, large Tuscan hats that have never, even yet, gone out of fashion.

"Why, Sunna!" cried Thora, as she hastened to meet her friend, "how glad am I to see thee!"

"Thou wert in my heart this morning, and I said to it 'Be content, in an hour I will take thee to thy desire.'" And they clasped hands, and walked thus into the house. "Art thou not tired after the dance?"

"No," replied Thora, "I was very happy. Do happy people get tired?"

"Yes--one can only bear so much happiness, then it is weariness--sometimes crossness. Too much of any good thing is a bad thing."

"How wise thou art, Sunna."

"I live with wisdom."

"With Adam Vedder?"

"Yes, and thou hast been living with Love, with Mr. Macrae. Very handsome and good-natured he is. I am sure that thou art in love with him! Is that not the case?"

"Very much in love with me he is, Sunna. It is a great happiness. I do not weary of it, no, indeed! To believe in love, to feel it all around you! It is wonderful! You know, Sunna--surely you know?"

"Yes, I, too, have been in love."

"With Boris--I know. And also Boris is in love with thee."

"That is wrong. No longer does Boris love me."

"But that is impossible. Love for one hour is love forever. He did love thee, then he could not forget. Never could he forget."

"He did not notice me last night. Thou must have seen?"

"I did not notice--but I heard some talk about it. The first time thou art alone with him, he will tell thee his trouble. It is only a little cloud--it will pass."

"I suppose the enlisting ship sails northaway first?"

"Yes, to Lerwick, though they may stop at Fair Island on the way. Boris says they could get many men there--and Boris knows."

"Art thou going to the pier to see them leave? I suppose every one goes. Shall we go together?"

"Why, Sunna! They left this morning about four o'clock. Father went down to the pier with Boris. Boris sailed with them."

"Thora! Thora! I thought Boris was to remain here until the naval party returned from Shetland?"

"The lieutenant in command thought Boris could help the enlisting, for in Lerwick Boris has many friends. Thou knows my sisters Anna and Nenie live in Lerwick. Boris was fain to go and see them."

"But they will return here when their business is finished in Lerwick?"

"They spoke of doing so, but mother is not believing they will return. They took with them all the men enlisted here and the men are wanted very much. Boris did not bid us a short 'good-bye.' Mother was crying, and when he kissed me his tears wet my cheeks."

Sunna did not answer. For a few minutes she felt as if her heart had suddenly died. At last she blundered out:

"I suppose the officer was afraid that--Boris might slip off while he was away."

"Well, then, thou supposes what is wrong. When a fight is the question, Boris needs no one either to watch him or to egg him on."

"Is that youngster, Macrae, going to join? Or has he already taken the Queen's shilling? I think I heard such a report."

"No one could have told that story. Macrae is bound by a contract to McLeod for this year and indeed, just yet, he does not wish to go."

"He does not wish to leave thee."

"That is not out of likelihood."

"Many are saying that England is in great stress, and my grandfather thinks that so she is."

"My father says 'not so.' If indeed it were so, my father would have gone with Boris. Mother is cross about it."

"About what then is she cross?" asked Sunna.

"People are saying that England is in stress. Mother says such words are nothing but men's 'fear talk.' England's sons are many, and if few they were, she has millions of daughters who

would gladly fight for her!" said Thora.

"Well, then, for heroics there is no present need! I surely thought Boris loved his business and would not leave his money-making."

"Could thou tell me what incalculable sum of money a man would take for his honour and patriotism?" asked Thora.

"What has honour to do with it?"

"Everything; a man without honour is not a man--he is just 'a body'; he has no soul. Robert Burns told Andrew Horner how such men were made!" replied Thora.

"How was that? Tell me! A Burns' anecdote will put grandfather in his finest temper, and I want him in that condition for I have a great favour to ask from him."

"The tale tells that when Burns was beginning to write, he had a rival in a man called Andrew Horner. One day they met at the same club dinner, and they were challenged to each write a verse within five minutes. The gentlemen guests took out their watches, the poets were furnished with pencils and paper. When time was up Andrew Horner had not written the first line but Burns handed to the chairman his verse complete."

"Tell me. If you know it, tell me, Thora!"

"Yes, I know it. If you hear it once you do not forget it."

"Well then?"

"It runs thus:

"Once on a time
The Deil gat stuff to mak' a swine
And put it in a corner;
But afterward he changed his plan
And made it summat like a man,
And ca'ed it Andrew Horner."

"That is good! It will delight grandfather."

"No doubt he already knows it."

"No, I should have heard it a thousand times, if he knew it."

"Well, then, I believe it has been suppressed. Many think it too ill-natured for Burns to have written; but my father says it has the true Burns ring and is Robert Burns' writing without doubt."

"It will give grandfather a nice long job of investigation. That is one of his favourite amusements, and all Sunna has to do is to be sure he is right and everybody else wrong. Now I will go home."

"Stay with me today."

"No. Macrae will be here soon."

"Uncertain is that."

"Every hair on thy head, Thora, every article of thy dress, from the lace at thy throat to the sandals on thy feet, say to me that this is a time when my absence will be better than my company."

"Well, then, do as thou art minded."

"It is best I do so. A happy morning to thee! What more is in my heart shall lie quiet at this time."

Sunna went away with the air of a happy, careless girl, but she said many angry words to herself as she hasted on the homeward road. "Most of the tales tell how women are made to suffer by the men they love--but no tale shall be made about Sunna Vedder! *No! No!* It is Boris Ragnor I shall turn into laughter--he has mocked my very heart--I will never forgive him--that is the foolish way all women take--all but Sunna Vedder--she will neither forgive nor forget--she will follow up this affair--yes!"

By such promises to herself she gradually regained her usual reasonable poise, and with a smiling face sought her grandfather. She found him in his own little room sitting at a table covered with papers. He looked up as she entered and, in spite of his intention, answered her smile and greeting with an equal plentitude of good will and good temper.

"But I thought then, that thou would stay with thy friend all day, and for that reason I took out work not to be chattered over."

"I will go away now. I came to thee because things have not gone as I wanted them. Thy counsel at such ill times is the best that can happen."

Then Vedder threw down his pencil and turned to her. "Who has given thee wrong or despite or put thee out of the way thou wanted to take?"

"It is Boris Ragnor. He has sailed north with the recruiting company--without a word to me he has gone. He has thrown my love back in my face. Should thy grandchild forgive him? I am both Vedder and Fae. How can I forgive?"

Vedder took out his watch and looked at the time. "We have an hour before dinner. Sit down and I will talk to thee. First thou shalt tell me the very truth anent thy quarrel with Boris. What did thou do, or say, that has so far grieved him? Now, then, all of it. Then I can judge if it be Boris or Sunna, that is wrong in this matter."

"Listen then. Boris heard some men talking about me--that made his temper rise--then he heard from these men that I was dancing at McLeod's and he went there to see, and as it happened I was dancing with McLeod when he entered the room, and he walked up to me in the dance and said thou wanted me, and he made me come home with him and scolded me all the time we were together. I asked him not to tell thee, and he promised he would not--if I went there no more. I have not danced with McLeod since, except at Mrs. Brodie's. Thou saw me then."

"Thou should not have entered McLeod's house--what excuse hast thou for that fault?"

"Many have talked of the fault, none but thou have asked me why or how it came that I was so foolish. I will tell thee the very truth. I went to spend the day with Nana Bork--with thy consent I went--and towards afternoon there came an invitation from McLeod to Nana to join an informal dance that night at eight o'clock. And Nana told me so many pleasant things about these little dances I could not resist her talk and I thought if I stayed with Nana all night thou would never know. I have heard that I stole away out of thy house to go to McLeod's. I did not! I went with Nana Bork whose guest I was."

"Why did thou not tell me this before?"

"I knew no one in Kirkwall would dare to say to thee this or that about thy grandchild, and I hoped thou would never know. I am sorry for my disobedience; it has always hurt me--if thou forgive it now, so much happier I will be."

Then Adam drew her to his side and kissed her, and words would have been of all things the most unnecessary. But he moved a chair close to him, and she sat down in it and laid her hand upon his knee and he clasped and covered it with his own.

"Very unkindly Boris has treated thee."

"He has mocked at my love before all Kirkwall. Well, then, it is Thora Ragnor's complacency that affronts me most. If she would put her boasting into words, I could answer her; but who can answer looks?"

"She is in the heaven of her first love. Thou should understand that condition."

"It is beyond my understanding; nor would I try to understand such a lover as Ian Macrae. I believe that he is a hypocrite--Thora is so easily deceived---

"And thou?"

"I am not deceived. I see Boris just as he is, rude and jealous and hateful, but I think him a far finer man than Ian Macrae ever has been, or ever will be."

"Yes! Thou art right. Now then, let this affair lie still in thy heart. I think that he will come to see thee when the boats return from Shetland--if not, then I shall have something to say in the matter. I shall want my dinner very soon, and some other thing we will talk about. Let it go until there is a word to say or a movement to make."

"I will be ready for thee at twelve o'clock." With a feeling of content in her heart, Sunna went away. Had she not the Burns story to tell? Yet she felt quite capable of restraining the incident until she got to a point where its relation would serve her purpose or her desire.

CHAPTER VI

THE OLD, OLD TROUBLE

From reef and rock and skerry, over headland, ness and roe,
The coastwise lights of England watch the ships of England go.

... a girl with sudden ebullitions,
Flashes of fun, and little bursts of song;
Petulant, pains, and fleeting pale contritions,
Mute little moods of misery and wrong.
Only a girl of Nature's rarest making,
Wistful and sweet--and with a heart for breaking.

THE following two weeks were a time of anxiety concerning Boris. The recruiting party with whom he had gone away had said positively they must return with whatever luck they had in two weeks; and this interval appeared to Sunna to be of interminable length. She spent a good deal of the time with Thora affecting to console her for the loss of Ian Macrae, who had

left Kirkwall for Edinburgh a few days after the departure of Boris.

"We are 'a couple of maidens all forlorn,'" she sang, and though Thora disclaimed the situation, she could not prevent her companion insisting on the fact.

Thora, however, did not feel that she had any reason for being forlorn. Ian's love for her had been confessed, not only to herself, but also to her father and mother, and the marriage agreed to with a few reservations, whose wisdom the lovers fully acknowledged. She was receiving the most ardent love letters by every mail and she had not one doubt of her lover in any respect. Indeed, her happiness so pervaded her whole person and conduct that Sunna felt it sometimes to be both depressing and irritating.

Thora, however, was the sister of Boris, she could not quarrel with her. She had great influence over Boris, and Sunna loved Boris--loved him in spite of her anger and of his neglect. Very slowly went the two weeks the enlisting ships had fixed as the length of their absence, but the news of their great success made their earlier return most likely, and after the tenth day every one was watching for them and planning a great patriotic reception.

Still the two weeks went slowly away and it was a full day past this fixed time, and the ships were not in port nor even in sight, nor had any late news come from them. In the one letter which Rahal had received from her son he said: "The enlistment has been very satisfactory; our return may be even a day earlier than we expected." So Sunna had begun to watch for the party three days before the set time, and when it was two days after it she was very unhappy.

"Why do they not come, Thora?" she asked in a voice trembling with fear. "Do you think they have been wrecked?"

"Oh, no! Nothing of the kind! They may have sailed westward to Harris. My father thinks so." But she appeared so little interested that Sunna turned to Mistress Ragnor and asked her opinion.

"Well, then," answered Rahal, "they *are* staying longer than was expected, but who can tell what men in a ship will do?"

"They will surely keep their word and promise."

"Perhaps--if it seem a good thing to them. Can thou not see? They are masters on board ship. Once out of Lerwick Bay, the whole world is before them. Know this, they might go East or West, and say to no man 'I ask thy leave.' As changeable as the sea is a sailor's promise."

"But Boris is thy son--he promised thee to be home in two weeks. Men do not break a promise made on their mother's lips. How soon dost thou expect him?"

"At the harbour mouth he might be, even this very minute. I want to see my boy. I love him. May the good God send those together who would fain be loved!"

"Boris is in command of his own ship. He was under no man's orders. He ought not to break his promise."

"With my will, he would never do that."

"Dost thou think he will go to the war with the other men?"

"That he might do. What woman is there who can read a man's heart?"

"His mother!"

"She might, a little way--no further--just as well 'no further.' Only God is wise enough, and patient enough, to read a human heart. This is a great mercy." And Rahal lifted her face from her sewing a moment and then dropped it again.

Almost in a whisper Sunna said "Good-bye!" and then went her way home. She walked rapidly; she was in a passion of grief and mortification, but she sang some lilting song along the highway. As soon, however, as she passed inside the Vedder garden gates, the singing was changed into a scornful, angry monologue:

"These Ragnor women! Oh, their intolerable good sense! So easy it is to talk sweetly and properly when you have no great trouble and all your little troubles are well arranged! Women cannot comfort women. No, they can not! They don't want to, if they could. Like women, I do not! Trust them, I do not! I wish that God had made me a man! I will go to my dear old grandad!--He will do something--so sorry I am that I let Thora see I loved her brother--when I go there again, I shall consider his name as the bringer-on of yawns and boredom!"

An angry woman carries her heart in her mouth; but Sunna had been trained by a wise old man, and no one knew better than Sunna Vedder did, when to speak and when to be silent. She went first to her room in order to repair those disturbances to her appearance which had been induced by her inward heat and by her hurried walk home so near the noontide; and half an hour later she came down to dinner fresh and cool as a rose washed in the dew of the morning. Her frock of muslin was white as snow, there was a bow of blue ribbon at her throat, her whole appearance was delightfully satisfying. She opened her grandfather's parlour and found him sitting at a table covered with papers and little piles of gold and silver coin.

"Suppose I was a thief, Grandfather?" she said.

"Well then, what would thou take first?"

"I would take a kiss!" and she laid her face against his face, and gave him one.

"Now, thou could take all there is. What dost thou want?"

"I want thee! Dinner is ready."

"I will come. In ten minutes, I will come---" and in less than ten minutes he was at the dinner table, and apparently a quite different man from the one Sunna had invited there. He had changed his coat, his face was happy and careless, and he had quite forgotten the papers and the little piles of silver and gold.

Sunna had said some things to Thora she was sorry for saying; she did not intend to repeat this fault with her grandfather. Even the subject of Boris could lie still until a convenient hour. She appeared, indeed, to have thrown off her anger and her disappointment with the unlucky clothing she had worn in her visit to Thora. She had even assured herself of this change, for when it fell to her feet she lifted it reluctantly between her finger and thumb and threw it aside, remarking as she did so, "I will have them all washed over again! Soda and soap may make them more agreeable and more fortunate."

And perhaps if we take the trouble to notice the fact, clothing does seem to have some sort of sympathy or antagonism with its wearers. Also, it appears to take on the mood or feeling predominant, looking at one time crisp and perfectly proper, at another time limp and careless, as if the wearer informed the garment or the garment explained the wearer. It is well known that "Fashions are the external expression of the mental states of a country, and that if its men and women degenerate in their character, their fashions become absurd." Surely then, a sympathy which can affect a nation has some influence upon the individual. Sunna had noticed even in her childhood that her dresses were lucky and unlucky, but the why or the wherefore of the circumstance had never troubled her. She had also noticed that her grandfather liked and disliked certain colours and modes, but she laid all their differences to difference in age.

This day, however, they were in perfect accord. He looked at her and nodded his head, and then smilingly asked: "How did thou find thy friend this morning?"

"So much in love that she had not one regret for Boris."

"Well, then, there is no reason for regret. Boris has taken the path of honour."

"That may be so, but for the time to come I shall put little trust in him. Going such a dubious way, he might well have stopped for a God Bless Thee!"

"Would thou have said that?"

"Why should we ask about things impossible? Dost thou know, Grandfather, at what time the recruiting party passed Kirkwall?"

"Nobody knows. I heard music out at sea three nights ago, just after midnight. There are no Shetland boats carrying music. It is more likely than not to have been the recruiting party saluting us with music as they went by."

"Yes! I think thou art right. Grandfather, I want thee to tell me what we are fighting about."

"Many times thou hast said 'it made no matter to thee.'"

"Now then, it is different. Since Boris and so many of our men went away, Mistress Ragnor and Thora talk of the war and of nothing but the war. They know all about it. They wanted to tell me all about it. I said thou had told me all that was proper for me to know, and now then, thou must make my words true. What is England quarrelling about? It seems to me, that somebody is always looking at her in a way she does not think respectful enough."

"This war is not England's fault. She has done all she could to avoid it. It is the Great Bear of Russia who wants Turkey put out of Europe."

"Well, then, I heard the Bishop say the Turks were a disgrace to Europe, and that the Book of Common Prayer had once contained a petition for delivery from the Devil, the Turks, and the comet, then flaming in the sky and believed to be threatening destruction to the earth."

"Listen, and I will tell thee the truth. The Greek population of Turkey, its Syrians and Armenians, are the oldest Christians in the world. They are also the most numerous and important class of the Sultan's subjects. Russia also has a large number of Russian Christians in Turkey over whom she wants a protectorate, but these two influences would be thorns in the side of Turkey. England has bought favour for the Christians she protects, by immense loans of money and other political advantages, but neither the Turk nor the English want Russia's power inside of Turkey."

"What for?"

"Turkey is in a bad way. A few weeks ago the Czar said to England, 'We have on our hands a sick man, a very sick man. I tell you frankly, it will be a great misfortune if one of these days he should slip away from us, especially if it were before all necessary arrangements were made. The Czar wants Turkey out of his way. He wants Constantinople for his own southern capital, he wants the Black Sea for a Russian lake, and the Danube for a Russian river. He wants many other unreasonable things, which England cannot listen to.'"

"Well then, I think the Russian would be better than the Turk in Europe."

"One thing is sure; in the hour that England joins Russia, Turkey will slay every Christian in her territories. Dost thou think England will inaugurate a huge massacre of Christians?"

"That is not thinkable. Is there nothing more?"

"Well then, there is India. The safety of our Indian Empire would be endangered over the whole line between East and West if Russia was in Constantinople. Turkey lies across Egypt, Syria, Asia Minor and Armenia, and above all at Constantinople and the Straits. Dost thou think England would ask Russia's permission every time she wished to go to India?"

"No indeed! That, itself, is a good reason for fighting."

"Yes, but the Englishman always wants a moral backbone for his quarrel."

"That is as it should be. The Armenian Christians supply that."

"But, Sunna, try and imagine to thyself a great military despotic Power seating itself at Constantinople, throwing its right hand over Asia Minor, Syria and Egypt; and its left holding in an iron grip the whole north of two continents; keeping the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus closed whenever it was pleased to do so, and building fleets in Egypt; and in Armenia, commanding the desirable road to India by the Euphrates."

"Oh, that could not be suffered! Impossible! All the women in Kirkwall would fight against such a condition."

"Well, so matters stand, and we had been at sword points a year ago but for Lord Aberdeen's cowardly, pernicious love of peace. But he is always whining about 'war destroying wealth and commerce'--as if wealth and commerce were of greater worth than national honour and justice and mercy."

"Yet, one thing is sure, Grandad; war is wasteful and destructive---"

"And one thing is truer still--it is this--*that national wealth is created by peace for the very purpose of defending the nation in war.* Bear this in mind. Now, it seems to me we have had enough of war. I see Elga coming with a dish of good Scotch collops, and I give thee my word that I will not spoil their savour by any unpleasant talk." Then he poured a little fine Glenlivet into a good deal of water and said: "Here's first to the glory of God! and then to the honour of England!" And Sunna touched his glass with her glass and the little ceremony put both in a very happy mood.

Then Sunna saw that the moment she had waited for had arrived and she said: "I will tell thee a good story of Robert Burns to flavour thy collops. Will that be to thy wish?"

"It is beyond my wish. Thou can not tell me one I do not know."

"I heard one today from Thora Ragnor that I never heard thee tell."

"Then it cannot be fit for thee and Thora Ragnor to repeat."

"Wilt thou hear it?"

"Is it about some girl he loved?"

"No, it is about a man he scorned. Thou must have heard of Andrew Horner?"

"Never heard the creature's name before."

"Then the story will be fresh to thee. Will thou hear it now?"

"As well now, as later." For Adam really had no expectation of hearing anything he had not already heard and judged; and he certainly expected nothing unusual from the proper and commonplace Thora Ragnor. But Sunna exerted all her facial skill and eloquence, and told the clever incident with wonderful spirit and delightful mimicry. Adam was enchanted; he threw down his knife and fork and made the room ring with laughter and triumph so genuine that Sunna--much against her will--was compelled to laugh with him. They heard the happy thunder in the kitchen, and wondered whatever was the matter with the Master.

"It is Robert Burns, his own self, and no other man. It is the best thing I have heard from 'the lad that was born in Kyle!'" Vedder cried. "Ill-natured! Not a bit of it! Just what the Horner man deserved!" Then he took some more collops and a fresh taste of Glenlivet, and anon broke into laughter again.

"Oh! but I wish I was in Edinburgh tonight! There's men there I would go to see and have my laugh out with them."

"Grandfather, why should we not go to Edinburgh next winter? You could board me with Mistress Brodie, and come every day to sort our quarrels and see that I was properly treated. Then you could have your crow over the ignoramuses who did not know such a patent Burns story; and I could take lessons in music and singing, and be learning something or seeing something, every hour of my life."

"And what about Boris?"

"The very name of Boris tires my tongue! I can do without Boris."

"Well, then, that is good! Thou art learning 'the grand habit of doing without.'"

"Wilt thou take me to Edinburgh? My mother would like thee to do that. I think I deserve it, Grandfather; yes, and so I ask thee."

"If I was going, I should have no mind to go without thee. One thing I wish to know--in what way hast thou deserved it?"

"I did not expect thee to ask me a question like that. Have I fretted and pined, and forgot to eat and sleep, and gone dowdy and slovenly, because my lover has been fool enough to desert me?"

Well, then, that is what any other girl would have done. But because I am of thy blood and stock, I take what comes to me as part of my day's work, and make no more grumble on the matter than one does about bad weather. Is that not the truth?"

"One thing is sure--thou art the finest all round girl in the Orcades."

"Then it seems to me thou should take me to Edinburgh. I want that something, that polish, only great cities can give me."

"Blessings on thee! All Edinburgh can give, thou shalt have! But it is my advice to thee to remain here until Mrs. Brodie goes back, then go thou with her."

"That will be what it should be. Mrs. Brodie, I feel, will be my stepmother; and---"

"She will never step past thee. Fear not!"

"Nor will any one--man or woman--step between thee and me! Doubt me not!"

"Well, then, have thy way. I give thee my word to take thee to Edinburgh in the autumn. Thou shalt either stay with Mrs. Brodie or at the Queen's Hotel on Prince's Street, with old Adam Vedder."

"Best of all is thy last offer. I will stay with thee. I am used to men's society. Women bore me."

"Women bore me also."

"Know this, there are three women who do not bore thee. Shall I speak their names?"

"I will not hinder thee."

"Sunna Vedder?"

"I love her. She cannot bore me."

"Rahal Ragnor?"

"I respect her. She does not bore me--often."

"Yes, that is so; it is but seldom thou sees her. Well, then, Barbara Brodie?"

"I once loved her. She can never be indifferent to me."

"Thou hast told me the truth and I will not follow up this catechism."

"For that favour, I am thy debtor. I might not always have been so truthful. Now, then, be honest with me. What wilt thou do all the summer, with no lover to wait on thy whims and fancies?"

"On thee I shall rely. Where thou goes, I will go, and if thou stay at home, with thee I will stay. Thou can read to me. I have never heard any of our great Sagas and that is a shame. I complain of that neglect in my education! I heard Maximus Grant recite from 'The Banded Men and Haakon the Good,' when I was in Edinburgh, and I said to myself, 'how much finer is this, than opera songs, sung with a Scotch burr, in the Italian; or than English songs, sung by Scotch people who pronounce English after the Scotch fashion!' Then I made up my mind that this coming winter I would let Edinburgh drawing-rooms hear the songs of Norse warriors; the songs in which the armour rattles and the swords shine!"

"That, indeed, will befit thee! Now, then, for the summer, keep thyself well in hand. Say nothing of thy plans, for if but once the wind catches them, they will soon be for every one to talk to death."

Adam was finishing his plate of rice pudding and cream when he gave this advice; and with it, he moved his chair from the table and said: "Come into the garden. I want to smoke. Thou knows a good dinner deserves a pipe, and a bad one demands it."

Then they went into the garden and talked of the flowers and the young vegetables, and said not a word of Edinburgh and the Sagas that the winds could catch and carry round to human folk for clash and gossip. And when the pipe was out, Adam said: "Now I am going into the town. That Burns story is on my lips, my teeth cannot keep my tongue behind them much longer."

"A good time will be thine. I wish that I could go with thee."

"What wilt thou do?"

"Braid my hair and dress myself. Then I shall take out thy Saga of 'The Banded Men' and study the men who were banded, and find them out, in all their clever ways. Then I can show them to others. If I get tired of them--and I do get tired of men very quickly--I will put on my bonnet and tippet, and go and carry Mrs. Brodie thy respectful---"

"Take care, Sunna!"

"Good wishes! I can surely go so far."

"Know this--every step on that road may lead to danger--and thou cannot turn back and tread them the other way. There now, be off! I will talk with thee no longer."

Sunna said something about Burns in reply, but Vedder heard her not. He was satisfying his vocal impatience by whistling softly and very musically "The Garb of Old Gaul," and Sunna watched and listened a moment, and then in something of a hurry went to her room. A new thought had come to her--one which pleased her very much; and she proceeded to dress herself accordingly.

"None too good is my Easter gown," she said pleasantly to herself; "and I can take Eric a basket

of the oranges grandfather brought home today. A treat to the dear little lad they will be. Before me is a long afternoon, and I shall find the proper moment to ask the advice of Maximus about "The Banded Men." So with inward smiles she dressed herself, and then took the highway in a direction not very often taken by her.

It led her to a handsome mansion overlooking the Venice of the Orcades, the village and the wonderful Bay of Kirkwall, into which

... by night and day,
The great sea water finds its way
Through long, long windings of the hills.

The house had a silent look, and its enclosure was strangely quiet, though kept in exquisite order and beauty. As she approached, a lady about fifty years old came to the top of the long, white steps to meet her, appearing to be greatly pleased with her visit.

"Only at dinner time Max was speaking of thee! And Eric said his sweetheart had forgotten him, and wondering we all were, what had kept thee so long away."

"Well, then, thou knowest about the war and the enlisting--everyone, in some way, has been touched by the changes made."

"True is that! Quickly thou must come in, for Eric has both second-sight and hearing, and no doubt he knows already that here thou art---" and talking thus as she went, Mrs. Beaton led the way up a wide, light stairway. Even as Mrs. Beaton was speaking a thin, eager voice called Sunna's name, a door flew open, and a man, beautiful as a dream-man, stood in the entrance to welcome them. And here the word "beautiful" need not to be erased; it was the very word that sprang naturally from the heart to the lips of every one when they met Maximus Grant. No Greek sculptor ever dreamed of a more perfect form and face; the latter illumined by noticeable grey eyes, contemplative and mystical, a face, thoughtful and winning, and constantly breaking into kind smiles.

He took Sunna's hand, and they went quickly forward to a boy of about eleven years old, whom Sunna kissed and petted. The little lad was in a passion of delight. He called her "his sweetheart! his wife! his Queen!" and made her take off her bonnet and cloak and sit down beside him. He was half lying in a softly cushioned chair; there was a large globe at his side, and an equally large atlas, with other books on a small table near by, and Max's chair was close to the whole arrangement. He was a fair, lovely boy, with the seraphic eyes that sufferers from spinal diseases so frequently possess--eyes with the look in them of a Conqueror of Pain. But also, on his young face there was the solemn Trophonean pallor which signs those who daily dare "to look at death in the cave."

"Max and I have been to the Greek islands," he said, "and Sunna, as soon as I am grown up, and am quite well, I shall ask thee to marry me, and then we will go to one of the loveliest of them and live there. Max thinks that would be just right."

"Thou little darling," answered Sunna, "when thou art a man, if thou ask me to marry thee, I shall say 'yes!'"

"Of course thou wilt. Sunna loves Eric?"

"I do, indeed, Eric! I think we should be very happy. We should never quarrel or be cross with each other."

"Oh! I would not like that! If we did not quarrel, there would be no making-up. I remember papa and mamma making-up their little tiffs, and they seemed to be very happy about it--and to love each other ever so much better for the tiff and the make-up. I think we must have little quarrels, Sunna; and then, long, long, happy makings-up."

"Very well, Eric; only, thou must make the quarrel. With thee I could not quarrel."

"I should begin it in this way: 'Sunna, I do not approve of thy dancing with--say--Ken McLeod.' Then thou wilt say: 'I shall dance with whom I like, Eric'; and I will reply: 'thou art my wife and I will not allow thee to dance with McLeod'; and then thou wilt be naughty and saucy and proud, and I shall have to be angry and masterful; and as thou art going out of the room in a terrible temper, I shall say, 'Sunna!' in a sweet voice, and look at thee, and thou wilt look at me, with those heavenly eyes, and then I shall open my arms and thou wilt fly to my embrace, and the making-up will begin."

"Well, then, that will be delightful, Eric, but thou must not accuse me of anything so bad as dancing with Mr. McLeod."

"Would that be bad to thee?"

"Very bad, indeed! I fear I would never try to have a 'make-up' with any one who thought I would dance with him."

"Dost thou dislike him?"

"That is neither here nor there. He is a Scot. I may marry like the rest of the world, but while my life days last, Sunna Vedder will not marry a Scot."

"Yes--but there was some talk that way. My aunt heard it. My aunt hears everything."

"I will tell thee, talk that way was all lies. No one will Sunna Vedder marry, that is not of her race." Then she put her arms round Eric, and kissed his wan face, calling him "her own little

Norseman!"

"Tell me, Sunna, what is happening in the town?" said he.

"Well, then, not much now. Men are talking of the war, and going to the war, and empty is the town. About the war, art thou sorry?"

"No, I am glad---

"How glorious the valiant, sword in hand,
In front of battle for their native land!"

And he raised his small, thin hands, and his face glowed, and he looked like a young St. Michael.

Then Max lifted the globe and books aside and put his chair close to his brother's. "Eric has the soul of a soldier," he said, "and the sound of drums and trumpets stirs him like the cry of fire."

"And so it happens, Mr. Grant, that we have much noise lately from the trumpets and the fife and drums."

"Yes, man is a military animal, he loves parade," answered Max.

"But in this war, there is much more than parade."

"You are right, Miss Vedder. It was prompted by that gigantic heart-throb with which, even across oceans, we feel each other's rights and wrongs. And in this way we learn best that we are men and brothers. Can a man do more for a wrong than give his life to right it?"

Then Eric cried out with hysterical passion: "I wish only that I might have my way with Aberdeen! Oh, the skulking cowards who follow him! Max! Max! If you would mount our father's big war horse and hold me in front of you and ride into the thick of the battle, and let me look on the cold light of the lifted swords! Oh, the shining swords! They shake! They cry out! The lives of men are in them! Max! Max! I want to die--on a--battlefield!"

And Max held the weeping boy in his arms, and bowed his head over him and whispered words too tender and sacred to be written down.

For a while Eric was exhausted; he lay still watching his brother and Sunna, and listening to their conversation. They were talking of the excitement in London, and of the pressure of the clergy putting down the reluctancies and falterings of the peace men.

"Have you heard, Miss Vedder," said Grant, "that one of the bishops decided England's call to war by a wonderful sermon in St. Paul's?"

"I am sorry to be ignorant. Tell me."

"He preached from Jeremiah, Fourth Chapter and Sixth Verse; and his closing cry was from Nahum, Second Chapter and First Verse, 'Set up the standard toward Zion. Stay not, for I will bring evil from the north and a great destruction,' and he closed with Nahum's advice, 'He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face, keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily.'"

"Well, then, how went the advice?"

"I know not exactly. It is hard to convince commerce and cowardice that at certain times war is the highest of all duties. Neither of them understand patriotism; and yet every trembling pacifist in time of war is a misfortune to his country."

"And the country will give them--what?" asked Sunna.

"The cold, dead damnation of a disgrace they will never outlive," answered Max.

There was a sharp cry from Eric at these words, and then a passionate childish exclamation--"Not bad enough! Not bad enough!" he screamed. "Oh, if I had a sword and a strong hand! I would cut them up in slices!" Then with an hysterical cry the boy fell backward.

In an instant Max had him in his arms and was whispering words of promise and consolation, and just then, fortunately, Mrs. Beaton entered with a servant who was carrying a service of tea and muffins. It was a welcome diversion and both Max and Sunna were glad of it. Max gently unloosed Eric's hand from Sunna's clasp and then they both looked at the child. He had fallen into a sleep of exhaustion and Max said, "It is well. When he is worn out with feeling, such sleeps alone save his life. I am weary, also. Let us have a cup of tea." So they sat down and talked of everything but the war--"He would hear us in his sleep," said Max, "and he has borne all he is able to bear today." Then Sunna said:

"Right glad am I to put a stop to such a trouble-raising subject. War is a thing by itself, and all that touches it makes people bereft of their senses or some other good thing. Here has come news of Thora Ragnor's hurried marriage, but no one knows or cares about the strange things happening at our doorstep. Such haste is not good I fear."

"Does Ragnor approve of it?" asked Mrs. Beaton.

"Thora's marriage is all right. They fell in love with each other the moment they met. No other marriage is possible for either. It is this, or none at all," answered Sunna.

"I heard the man was the son of a great Edinburgh preacher."

"Yes, the Rev. Dr. Macrae, of St. Mark's."

"That is what I heard. He is a good man, but a very hard one."

"If he is hard, he is not good."

"Thou must not say that, little Miss; it may be the Episcopalian belief, but we Calvinists have a stronger faith--a faith fit for men and soldiers of the Lord."

"There! Mrs. Beaton, you are naming soldiers. That is against our agreement to drop war talk. About Macrae I know nothing. He is not aware that anyone but Thora Ragnor lives; and I was not in the least attracted by him--his black hair and black eyes repelled me--I dislike such men."

"Will they live in Edinburgh?"

"I believe they will live in Kirkwall. Mrs. Ragnor owns a pretty house, which she will give them. She is going to put it in order and furnish it from the roof to the foundation. Thora is busy about her napery--the finest of Irish linen and damask. Now then, I must hurry home. My grandfather will be waiting his tea."

Max rose with her. He looked at his little brother and said: "Aunt, he will sleep now for a few hours, will you watch him till I return?"

"Will I not? You know he is as safe with me as yourself, Max."

So with an acknowledging smile of content, he took Sunna's hand and led her slowly down the stairway. There was a box running all across the sill of the long window, lighting the stairs, and it was full and running over with the delicious muck plant. Sunna laid her face upon its leaves for a moment, and the whole place was thrilled with its heavenly perfume. Then she smiled at Max and his heart trembled with joy; yet he said a little abruptly--"Let us make haste. The night grows cloudy."

Their way took them through the village, and Sunna knew that she would, in all likelihood, be the first woman ever seen in Maximus Grant's company. The circumstance was pleasant to her, and she carried herself with an air and manner that she readily caught and copied from him. She knew that there was a face at every window, but she did not turn her head one way or the other. Max was talking to her about the Sagas and she had a personal interest in the Sagas, and any ambition she had to be socially popular was as yet quite undeveloped.

At the point where the Vedder and Ragnor roads crossed each other, two men were standing, talking. They were Ragnor and Vedder, and Ragnor was at once aware of the identity of the couple approaching; but Vedder appeared so unaware, that Ragnor remarked: "I see Sunna, Vedder, coming up the road, and with her is Colonel Max Grant."

"But why 'Colonel,' Ragnor?"

"When General Grant died his son was a colonel in the Life Guards. He left the army to care for his brother. I heard that the Queen praised him for doing so."

Then the couple were so close, that it was impossible to affect ignorance of their presence any longer; and the old men turned and saluted the young couple. "I thank thee, Colonel," said Vedder, as he "changed hats" with the Colonel, "but now I can relieve thee of the charge thou hast taken. I am going home and Sunna will go with me; but if thou could call on an old man about some business, there is a matter I would like to arrange with thee."

"I could go home with you now, Vedder, if that would be suitable."

"Nay, it would be too much for me tonight. It is concerning that waste land on the Stromness road, near the little bridge. I would like to build a factory there."

"That would be to my pleasure and advantage. I will call on you and talk over the matter, at any time you desire."

"Well and good! Say tomorrow at two o'clock."

"Three o'clock would be better for me."

"So, let it be." Then he took Sunna's hand and she understood that her walk with Grant was over. She thanked Max for his courtesy, sent a message to Eric, and then said her good night with a look into his eyes which dived in his heart for hours afterwards. Some compliments passed between the men and then she found herself walking home with her grandfather.

"Thou ought not to have seen me, Grandfather," she said a little crossly, "I was having such a lovely walk."

"I did not want to see thee, and have I not arranged for thee something a great deal better on tomorrow's afternoon?"

"One never knows---"

"Listen; he is to come at three o'clock, it will be thy fault if he leaves at four. Thou can make tea for him--thou can walk in the greenhouse and the garden with him, thou can sing for him--no, let him sing for thee--thou can ask him to help thee with 'The Banded Men'--and if he goes away before eight o'clock I will say to thee--'take the first man that asks thee for thou hast no woman-witchery with which to pick and choose!' Grant is a fine man. If thou can win him, thou wins something worth while. He has always held himself apart. His father was much like him. All of them soldiers and proud as men are made, these confounded, democratic days."

"And what of Boris?" asked Sunna.

"May Boris rest wherever he is! Thou could not compare Boris with Maximus Grant."

"That is the truth. In many ways they are not comparable. Boris is a rough, passionate man. Grant is a gentleman. Always I thought there was something common in me; that must be the reason why I prefer Boris."

"To vex me, thou art saying such untruthful words. I know thy contradictions! Go now and inquire after my tea. I am in want of it."

During tea, nothing further was said of Maximus Grant; but Sunna was in a very merry mood, and Adam watched her, and listened to her in a philosophical way;--that is, he tried to make out amid all her persiflage and bantering talk what was her ruling motive and intent--a thing no one could have been sure of, unless they had heard her talking to herself--that mysterious confidence in which we all indulge, and in which we all tell ourselves the truth. Sunna was undressing her hair and folding away her clothing as she visited this confessional, but her revelations were certainly honest, even if fragmentary, and full of doubt and uncertainty.

"Grant, indeed!" she exclaimed, "I am not ready for Grant--I believe I am afraid of the man--he would make me over--make me like himself--in a month he would do it--I like Boris best! I should quarrel with Boris, of course, and we should say words neither polite nor kind to each other; but then Boris would do as that blessed child said, 'Look at me'; and I should look at him, and the making-up would begin. Heigh-ho! I wish it could begin tonight!" She was silent then for a few minutes, and in a sadder voice added--"with Max I should become an angel--and I should have a life without a ripple--I would hate it, just as I hate the sea when it lies like a mirror under the sunshine--then I always want to scream out for a great north wind and the sea in a passion, shattering everything in its way. If I got into that mood with Max, we should have a most unpleasant time---" and she laughed and tossed her pillows about, and then having found a comfortable niche in one of them, she tucked her handsome head into it and in a few moments the sleep of youth and perfect health lulled her into a secret garden in the Land of Dreams.

The next day Sunna appeared to be quite oblivious regarding Grant's visit and Vedder was too well acquainted with his granddaughter to speak of it. He only noticed that she was dressed with a peculiar simplicity and neatness. At three o'clock Grant was promptly at the Vedder House, and at half-past four the land in question had been visited and subsequently bought and sold. Then the cup of tea came in, and the walk in the garden followed, and at six there was an ample meal, and during the singing that followed it, Vedder fell fast asleep, as was his custom, and when he awoke Grant was just going and the clock was striking ten. Vedder looked at Sunna and there was no need for him to speak.

"It was 'The Banded Men,'" said Sunna with a straight look at her grandfather.

"Well, then, I know a woman who is a match for any number of 'banded men.'"

"And in all likelihood that woman will be a Vedder. Good night, Grandfather."

CHAPTER VII

THE CALL OF WAR

I came not to send peace but a sword.

--*Matt. x, 34.*

For when I note how noble Nature's form
Under the war's red pain, I deem it true
That He who made the earthquake and the storm,
Perchance made battles too.

THE summer passed rapidly away for it was full of new interests. Thora's wedding was to take place about Christmas or New Year, and there were no ready-made garments in those days; so all of her girl friends were eager to help her needle. Sunna spent half the day with her and all their small frets and jealousies were forgotten. Early in the morning the work was lifted, and all day long it went happily on, to their light-hearted hopes and dreams. Then in June and September Ian came to Kirkwall to settle his account with McLeod, and at the same time, he remained a week as the Ragnors' guest. There was also Sunna's intended visit to Edinburgh to talk about, and there was never a day in which the war and its preparations did not make itself prominent.

One of the pleasantest episodes of this period occurred early and related to Sunna. One morning she received a small box from London, and she was so amazed at the circumstance, that she kept examining the address and wondering "who could have sent it," instead of opening the box. However, when this necessity had been observed, it revealed to her a square leather case, almost like those used for jewelry, and her heart leaped high with expectation. It was something, however, that pleased her much more than jewelry; it was a likeness of Boris, a daguerreotype--the first that had ever reached Kirkwall. A narrow scrap of paper was within

the clasp, on which Boris had written, "I am all thine! Forget me not!"

Sunna usually made a pretense of despising anything sentimental but this example filled her heart with joy and satisfaction. And after it, she took far greater pleasure in all the circumstances relating to Thora's marriage; for she had gained a personal interest in them. Even the details of the ceremony were now discussed and arranged in accord with Sunna's taste and suggestions.

"The altar and nave must be decorated with flags and evergreens and all the late flowers we can secure," she said.

"There will not be many flowers, I fear," answered Mistress Ragnor.

"The Grants have a large greenhouse. I shall ask them to save all they possibly can. Maximus Grant delights in doing a kindness."

"Then thou must ask him, Sunna. He is thy friend--perhaps thy lover. So the talk goes."

"Let them talk! My lover is far away. God save him!"

"Where then?"

"Where all good and fit men are gone--to the trenches. For my lover is much of a man, strong and brave-hearted. He adores his country, his home, and his kindred. He counts honour far above money; and liberty, more than life. My lover will earn the right to marry the girl he loves, and become the father of free men and women!" And Rahal answered proudly and tenderly:

"Thou art surely meaning my son Boris."

"Indeed, thou art near to the truth."

Then Rahal put her arm round Sunna and kissed her. "Thou hast made me happy," she said, and Sunna made her still more happy, when she took out of the little bag fastened to her belt the daguerreotype and showed her the strong, handsome face of her soldier-sailor boy.

During all this summer Sunna was busy and regular. She was at the Ragnors' every day until the noon hour. Then she ate dinner with her grandfather, who was as eager to discuss the news and gossip Sunna had heard, as any old woman in Kirkwall. He said: "Pooh! Pooh!" and "Nonsense!" but he listened to it, and it often served his purpose better than words of weight and wisdom.

In the afternoons Mistress Brodie was to visit, and the winter in Edinburgh to talk over. Coming home in time to take tea with her grandfather, she devoted the first hour after the meal to practising her best songs, and these lulled the old man to a sleep which often lasted until "The Banded Men" were attended to. It might then be ten o'clock and she was ready to sleep.

All through these long summer days, Thora was the natural source of interest and the inciting element of all the work and chatter that turned the Ragnor house upside down and inside out; but Thora was naturally shy and quiet, and Sunna naturally expressive and presuming; and it was difficult for their companions to keep Thora and Sunna in their proper places. Every one found it difficult. Only when Ian was present, did Sunna take her proper secondary place and Ian, though the most faithful and attentive of lovers by mail, had only been able to pay Thora one personal visit. This visit had occurred at the end of June and he was expected again at the end of September. The year was now approaching that time and the Ragnor household was in a state of happy expectation.

It was an unusual condition and Sunna said irritably: "They go on about this stranger as if he were the son of Jupiter--and poor Boris! They never mention him, though there has been a big battle and Boris may have been in it. If Boris were killed, it is easy to see that this Ian Macrae would step into his place!"

"Nothing of that kind could happen! In thy own heart keep such foolish thoughts," replied Vedder.

So the last days of September were restless and not very happy, for there was a great storm prevailing, and the winds roared and the rain fell in torrents and the sea looked as if it had gone mad. Before the storm there was a report of a big battle, but no details of it had reached them. For the Pentland Firth had been in its worst equinoctial temper and the proviso added to all Orkney sailing notices, "weather permitting," had been in full force for nearly a week.

But at length the storm was over and everyone was on the lookout for the delayed shipping. Thora was pale with intense excitement but all things were in beautiful readiness for the expected guest. And Ian did not disappoint the happy hopes which called him. He was on the first ship that arrived and it was Conall Ragnor's hand he clasped as his feet touched the dry land.

Such a home-coming as awaited him--the cheerful room, the bountifully spread table, the warm welcome, the beauty and love, mingling with that sense of peace and rest and warm affection which completely satisfies the heart. Would such a blissful hour ever come again to him in this life?

His pockets were full of newspapers, and they were all shouting over the glorious opening of the war. The battle of Alma had been fought and won; and the troops were ready and waiting for Inkerman. England's usual calm placidity had vanished in exultant rejoicing. "An English gentleman told me," said Ian, "that you could not escape the chimes of joyful bells in any part of the ringing island."

Vedder had just entered the room and he stood still to listen to these words. Then he said: "Men differ. For the first victory let all the bells of England ring if they want to. We Norsemen like to keep our bell-ringing until the fight is over and they can chime *Peace*. And how do you suppose, Ian Macrae, that the English and French will like to fight together?"

"Well enough, sir, no doubt. Why not?"

"Of Waterloo I was thinking. Have the French forgotten it? Ian, it is the very first time in all the history we have, that Frenchmen ever fought with Englishmen in a common cause. Natural enemies they have been for centuries, fighting each other with a very good will whenever they got a chance. Have they suddenly become friends? Have they forgot Waterloo?" and he shook his wise old head doubtfully.

"Who can tell, sir, but when the English conquer any nation, they feel kindly to them and usually give them many favours?"

"Well, then, every one knows that the same is both her pleasure and her folly; and dearly she pays for it."

"Ian," said Mistress Ragnor, "are the English ships now in the Black Sea? And if so, do you think Boris is with them?"

"About Boris, I do not know. He told me he was carrying 'material of war.' The gentleman of whom I spoke went down to Spithead to see them off. Her Majesty, in the royal yacht, *Fairy*, suddenly appeared. Then the flagship hauled home every rope by the silent 'all-at-once' action of one hundred men. Immediately the rigging of the ships was black with sailors, but there was not a sound heard except an occasional command--sharp, short and imperative--or the shrill order of the boatswain's whistle. The next moment, the Queen's yacht shot past the fleet and literally led it out to sea. Near the Nab, the royal yacht hove to and the whole fleet sailed past her, carried swiftly out by a fine westerly breeze. Her Majesty waved her handkerchief as they passed and it is said she wept. If she had not wept she would have been less than a woman and a queen."

While Vedder and Ragnor were discussing this incident, and comparing it with Cleopatra at the head of her fleet and Boadicea at the head of her British army and Queen Elizabeth at Tewksbury reviewing her army, Mrs. Ragnor and Thora left the room. Ian quickly followed. There was a bright fire in the parlour, and the piano was open. Ian naturally drifted there and then Thora's voice was wanted in the song. When it was finished, Mrs. Ragnor had been called out and they were alone. And though Mrs. Ragnor came back at intervals, they were practically alone during the rest of the evening.

What do lovers talk about when they are alone? Ah! their conversation is not to be written down. How unwritable it is! How wise it is! How foolish when written down! How supremely satisfying to the lovers themselves! Surely it is only the "baby-talk" of the wisdom not yet comprehensible to human hearts! We often say of certain events; "I have no words to describe what I felt"--and who will find out or invent the heavenly syllables that can adequately describe the divine passion of two souls, that suddenly find their real mate--find the soul that halves their soul, created for them, created with them, often lost or missed through diverse reincarnations; but sooner or later found again and known as soon as found to both. No wooing is necessary in such a case--they meet, they look, they love, and naturally and immediately take up their old, but unforgotten love patois. They do not need to learn its sweet, broken syllables, its hand clasps and sighs, its glances and kisses; they are more natural to them than was the grammared language they learned through years of painful study.

Ian and Thora hardly knew how the week went. Every one respected their position and left them very much to their own inclinations. It led them to long, solitary walks, and to the little green skiff on the moonlit bay, and to short visits to Sunna, in order, mainly, that they might afterwards tell each other how far sweeter and happier they were alone.

They never tired of each other, and every day they recounted the number of days that had to pass ere Ian could call himself free from the McLeod contract. They were to marry immediately and Ian would go into Ragnor's business as bookkeeper. Their future home was growing more beautiful every day. It was going to be the prettiest little home on the island. There was a good garden attached to it and a small greenhouse to save the potted plants in the winter. Ragnor had ordered its furniture from a famous maker in Aberdeen, and Rahal was attending with love and skill to all those incidentals of modern housekeeping, usually included in such words as silver, china, napery, ornaments, and kitchen-utensils. They were much interested in it and went every fine day to observe its progress. Yet their interest in the house was far inferior to their interest in each other, and Sunna may well be excused for saying to her grandfather:

"They are the most conceited couple in the world! In fact, the world belongs to them and all the men and women in it--the sun and the moon are made new for them, and they have the only bit of wisdom going. I hope I may be able to say 'yes' to all they claim until Saturday comes."

"These are the ways of love, Sunna."

"Then I shall not walk in them."

"Thou wilt walk in the way appointed thee."

"Pure Calvinism is that, Grandfather."

"So be it. I am a Calvinist about birth, death and marriage. They are the events in life about which God interferes. His will and design is generally evident."

"And quite as evident, Grandfather, is the fact that a great many people interfere with His will and design."

"Yes, Sunna, because our will is free. Yet if our will crosses God's will, crucifixion of some kind is sure to follow."

"Well, then, today is Friday. The week has got itself over nearly; and tomorrow will be partly free, for Ian goes to Edinburgh at ten o'clock. Very proper is that! Such an admirable young man ought only to live in a capitol city."

"If these are thy opinions, keep them to thyself. Very popular is the young man."

"Grandfather, dost thou think that I am walking in ankle-tights yet? I can talk as the crowd talks, and I can talk to a sensible man like thee. Tomorrow brings release. I am glad, for Thora has forgotten me. I feel that very much."

"Thou art jealous."

Vedder's assertion was near the truth, for undeniably Ian and Thora had been careless of any one but themselves. Yet their love was so vital and primitive, so unaffected and sincere, that it touched the sympathies of all. In this cold, far-northern island, it had all the glow and warmth of some rose-crowned garden of a tropical paradise. But such special days are like days set apart; they do not fit into ordinary life and cannot be continued long under any circumstances. So the last day came and Thora said:

"Mother, dear, it is a day in a thousand for beauty, and we are going to get Aunt Brodie's carriage to ride over to Stromness and see the queer, old town, and the Stones of Stenness."

"Go not near them. If you go into the cathedral you go expecting some good to come to you; for angels may be resting in its holy aisles, ready and glad to bless you. What will you ask of the ghosts among the Stones of Stenness? Is there any favour you would take from the Baal and Moloch worshipped with fire and blood among them?"

"Why, Mother," said Thora, "I have known many girls who went with their lovers to Stenness purposely to join their hands through the hole in Woden's Stone and thus take oath to love each other forever."

"Thou and Ian will take that oath in the holy church of St. Magnus."

"That is what we wish, Mother," said Ian. "We wish nothing less than that."

"Well, then, go and see the queer, old, old town, and go to the Mason's Arms, and you will get there a good dinner. After it ride slowly back. Father will be home before six and must have his meal at once."

"That is the thing we shall do, Mother. Ian thought it would be so romantic to take a lunch with us and eat it among the Stones of Stenness. But the Mason's Arms will be better. The Masons are good men, Mother?"

"In all their generations, good men. Thy father is a Mason in high standing."

"Yes, that is so! Then the Mason's Arms may be lucky to us?"

"We make things lucky or unlucky by our willing and doing; but even so, it is not lucky to defy or deny what the dead have once held to be good or bad."

"Well, then, why, Mother?"

"Not now, will we talk of whys and wherefores. It is easier to believe than to think. Take, in this last day of Love's seven days, the full joy of your lives and ask not why of anyone."

So the lovers went off gaily to see the land-locked bay and the strange old town of Stromness; and the house was silent and lonely without them and Rahal wished that her husband would come home and talk with her, for her soul was under a cloud of presentiments and she said to herself after a morning of fretful, inefficient work: "Oh, how much easier it is to love God than it is to trust Him. Are not my dear ones in His care? Yet about them I am constantly worrying; though perfectly well I know that in any deluge that may come, God will find an ark for those who love and trust Him. Boris knows--Boris knows--I have told him."

About three o'clock she went to the window and looked towards the town. Much to her astonishment she saw her husband coming home at a speed far beyond his ordinary walk. He appeared also to be disturbed, even angry, and she watched him anxiously until he reached the house. Then she was at the open door and his face frightened her.

"Conall! My dear one! Art thou ill?" she asked.

"I am ill with anger and pity and shame!"

"What is thy meaning? Speak to me plainly."

"Oh, Rahal! the shame and the cruelty of it! I am beside myself!"

"Come to my room, then thou shalt tell thy sorrow and I will halve it with thee."

"No! I want to cry out! I want to shout the shameful wrong from the house-tops! Indeed, it is flying all over England and Scotland--over all the civilized world! And yet--my God! the guilty ones are still living!"

"Coll, my dear one, what is it thou most needs--cold water?"

"No! No! Get me a pot of hot tea. [*] My brain burns. My heart is like to break! Our poor brave

soldiers! They are dying of hunger and of every form of shameful neglect. The barest necessities of life are denied them."

[*] The Norsemen of Shetland and Orkney drank tea in every kind of need or crisis. No meal without it, no pleasure without it; and it was equally indispensable in every kind of trouble or fatigue.

"By whom? By whom, Coll?"

"Pacifists in power and office everywhere! Give me a drink! Give me a drink! I am ill--get me tea--and I will tell thee."

There was boiling water on the kitchen hob, and the tea was ready in five minutes. "Drink, dear Coll," said Rahal, "and then share thy trouble and anger with me. The mail packet brought the bad news, I suppose?"

"Yes, about an hour ago. The town is in a tumult. Men are cursing and women are doing nothing less. Some whose sons are at the front are in a distraction. If Aberdeen were within our reach we would give him five minutes to say his prayers and then send him to the judgment of God. Englishmen and Norsemen will not lie down and rot under Russian tyranny. To die fighting against it sends them joyfully to the battlefield! But oh, Rahal! to be left alone to die on the battlefield, without help, without care, without even a drink of cold water! It is damnable cruelty! What I say is this: let England stop her bell-ringing and shouts of victory until she has comforted and helped her wounded and dying soldiers!"

"And Aberdeen? He is a Scotch nobleman--the Scotch are not cowards--what has he done, Coll?"

"Because he hates fighting for our rights, he persuades all whom his power and patronage can reach to lie down or he says they will be knocked down. So it may be, but every man that has a particle of the Divine in him would rather be knocked down than lie down--if down it had to be--but there is no question of down in it! Aberdeen! He is 'England's worst enemy'--and he holds the power given him by England to rule and ruin England! I wish he would die and go to judgment this night! I do! I do! and my soul says to me, 'Thou art right.'"

"Coll, no man knoweth the will of the Almighty."

"Then they ought to! The question has now been up to England for a two-years' discussion, and they have only to open His Word and find it out"; then he straightened himself and in a mighty burst of joyful pride and enthusiasm cried out:

"Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight.

"My goodness, and my fortress, my high tower, and my deliverer, my shield, and He in whom I trust, who subdueth the people under me."

Anon he began to pace the floor as he continued: "'Rid us and deliver us, from the hands of strange children--whose mouth speaketh vanity, and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.' Rahal, could there be a better description of Russia--'her right hand of falsehood, her mouth speaking vanity?' David put the very words needed in our mouths when he taught us to say, 'rid us of such an enemy, and of all who strike hands with him!' Yes, rid us. We want to be rid of all such dead souls! Rid us."

Then Rahal reminded her husband that only recently his physician had warned him against all excitement, especially of anger, and so finally induced him to take a sedative and go to sleep. But sleep was far from her. She sat down in her own room and closed her eyes against all worldly sights and sounds. Her soul was trying to reach her son's soul and impress upon it her own trust in the love and mercy of the "God of battles." She had hoped that some word or thought of Boris would come back to her in such a personal manner that she would feel that he was thinking of her and of the many sweet spiritual confidences they had had together.

But nothing came, no sign, no word, no sudden, flashing memory of some special promise. All was void and still until she heard the voices of Thora and Ian. Then she went down to them and found that the evil news had met them on their way home. She asked Ian if he had any knowledge of the whereabouts of Boris. Ian thought he might be at sea, as his ship was at Spithead among the carrying ships of the navy. "If he had been in Alma's fight, you might have heard from him," he added. "It would be his first battle and he would want to write to you about it. That would be only natural."

"Well, then, I will look for good news. If bad news is coming, I will not pay it the compliment of going to meet it. Have you had a pleasant day? Where first did you go?"

"To the land-locked Bay of Stromness which was full of ships of all sizes, of schooners, and of little skiffs painted a light green colour like the pleasure skiffs of Kirkwall."

"And the town?"

"Was very busy while we were there. It has but one long street, with steep branches running directly up the big granite hill which shelters it from the Atlantic. What I noticed particularly was, that the houses on the main street all had their gables seaward; and are so built that the people can step from their doors into their boats. I liked that arrangement. Stromness is really an Orcadean Venice. The town is a queer old place, with a non-English and non-Scotch look. The houses have an old-world appearance and the names over the doorways carry you back to

Norseland. Only one street is flagged and little bays run up into the street through its whole length. But the place appeared to be very busy and happy. I noticed few Scotch there, the people seemed to be purely Norse. All were busy--men, women and children."

"It used to be the last port for the Hudson Bay Company," said Rahal, "and the big whaling fleets, and in days of war and convoys there were hundreds of big ships in its wonderful harbour. I suppose that you had no time to visit any of the ancient monuments there?" Rahal asked.

"No; Thora told me her grandmother Ragnor was buried in its cemetery and that her grave was near the church door and had a white pillar at the head of it. So we walked there."

"Well, then?"

"I cannot describe to you the savage, lonely grandeur of its situation. It frightened me."

"The men and women who chose it were not afraid of it."

"Thora says its memory frightened her for years."

"Thora was only eight years old when her father placed the pillar at the head of his mother's grave. It was then she saw it--but at eight years many people are often more sensitive than at eighty. Yes, indeed! They may see, then, what eyes dimmed by earthly vision cannot see, and feel what hearts hardened by earth's experiences cannot feel. Thora's spiritual sight was very keen in childhood and is not dimmed yet."

At these words Thora entered the room, wearing the little frock of white barége she had saved for this last day of Ian's visit. Her face had been bathed, her hair brushed and loosened but yet dressed with the easiest simplicity. She was in trouble but she knew when to speak of trouble, and when to be silent. Her mother was talking of Stromness; when her father came, he would know all, and say all. So she went softly about the room, putting on the dinner table those last final accessories that it was her duty to supply.

Yet the conversation was careless and indifferent. Rahal talked of Stromness but her heart was far away from Stromness, and Thora would have liked to tell her mother how beautifully their future home had been papered, and all three were eager to discuss the news that had come. But all knew well that it would be better not to open the discussion till Ragnor was present to inform and direct their ignorance of events.

On the stroke of six, Ragnor entered. He had slept and washed and was apparently calm, but in some way his face had altered, for his heart had mastered his brain and its usual expression of intellectual strength was exchanged for one of intense feeling. His eyes shone and he had the look of a man who had just come from the presence of God.

"We are waiting for you, dear Coll," said Rahal; and he answered softly: "Well, then, I am here." For a moment his eyes rested on the table which Rahal had set with extra care and with the delicacies Ian liked best. Was it not the last dinner he would eat with them for three months? She thought it only kind to give it a little distinction. But this elaboration of the usual home blessings did not produce the expected results. Every one was anxious, the atmosphere of the room was tense and was not relieved until Ragnor had said a grace full of meaning and had sat down and asked Ian if he "had heard the news brought by that day's packet?"

"Very brokenly, Father," was the answer. "Two men, whom we met on the Stromness road, told us that it was 'bad with the army,' but they were excited and in a great hurry and would not stand to answer our questions."

"No wonder! No wonder!"

"Whatever is the matter, Father?"

"I cannot tell you. The words stumble in my throat, and my heart burns and bleeds. Here is the *London Times*! Read aloud from it what William Howard Russell has witnessed--I cannot read the words--I would be using my own words--listen, Rahal! Listen, Thora! and oh, may God enter into judgment at once with the men responsible for the misery that Russell tells us of."

At this point, Adam Vedder entered the room. He was in a passion that was relieving itself by a torrent of low voiced curses--curses only just audible but intensely thrilling in their half-whispered tones of passion. In the hall he had taken off his hat but on entering the room he found it too warm for his top-coat, and he began to remove it, muttering to himself while so doing. There was an effort to hear what he was saying but very quickly Ragnor stopped the monologue by calling:

"Adam! Thee! Thou art the one wanted. Ian is just going to read what the *London Times* says of this dreadful mismanagement."

"'Mismanagement!' Is that what thou calls the crime? Go on, Ian! More light on this subject is wanted here."

So Ian stood up and read from the *Times'* correspondent's letter the following sentences:

"The skies are black as ink, the wind is howling over the staggering tents, the water is sometimes a foot deep, our men have neither warm nor waterproof clothing and we are twelve hours at a time in the trenches--and not a soul seems to care for their comfort or even their lives; the most wretched beggar who wanders about the streets of London in the rain leads the life of a prince compared with the British soldiers now fighting out here for their country.

... "The commonest accessories of a hospital are wanting; there is not the least attention paid to

decency or cleanliness, the stench is appalling, the fetid air can barely struggle out through chinks in the walls and roofs, and for all I can observe the men die without the least effort being made to save them. They lie just as they were let down on the ground by the poor fellows, their comrades, who brought them on their backs from the camp with the greatest tenderness but who are not allowed to remain with them. The sick appear to be tended by the sick, and the dying by the dying. There are no nurses--and men are literally dying hourly, because the medical staff of the British army has forgotten that old rags of linen are necessary for the dressing of wounds."

"My God!" cried Ian, as he let the paper fall from the hands he clasped passionately together, "My God! How can Thou permit this?"

"Well, then, young man," said Adam, "thou must remember that God permits what He does not will. And Conall," he continued, "millions have been voted and spent for war and hospital materials, where are the goods?"

"The captain of the packet told me no one could get their hands on them. Some are in the holds of vessels and other things so piled on the top of them that they cannot be got at till the hold is regularly emptied. Some are stored in warehouses which no one has authority to open--some are actually rotting on the open wharves, because the precise order to remove them to the hospital cannot be found. The surgeons have no bandages, the doctors no medicine, and as I said there are no nurses but a few rough military orderlies. The situation paralyses those who see it!"

"Paralyses! Pure nonsense!" cried Vedder, whose face was wet with passionate tears, though he did not know it. "Paralyses! No, no! It must make them work miracles. I am going to Edinburgh tomorrow. I am going to buy all the luxuries and medicines I can afford for the lads fighting and suffering. Sunna is going to spend a week in gathering old linen in Kirkwall and then Mistress Brodie and she will bring it with them. Rahal, Thora, you must do your best. And thou, Conall?"

"Adam, thou can open my purse and take all thou thinks is right. My Boris may be among those dear lads; his mother will have something to send him. Wilt thou see it is set on a fair way to reach his hand?"

"I will take it to him. If he be in London with his vessel, I will find him; if he be at the front, I will find him. If he be in Scutari hospital, I will find him!"

"Oh, Adam, Adam!" cried Rahal, "thou art the good man that God loves, the man after His own heart." Her face was set and stern and white as snow, and Thora's was a duplicate of it; but Ragnor, during his short interval of rest, had arrived at that height and depth of confidence in God's wisdom which made him sure that in the end the folly and wickedness of men would "praise Him"; so he was ready to help, and calm and strong in his sorrow.

At this point, Rahal rose and a servant came in and began to clear the table and carry away the remains of the meal. Then Rahal rose and took Thora's hand and Ian went with them to the parlour. She spoke kindly to Ian who at her first words burst into bitter weeping, into an almost womanly burst of uncontrollable distress. So she kissed and left him with the only woman who had the power to soothe, in any degree, the sense of utter helplessness which oppressed him.

"I want to go to the Crimea!" he said, "I would gladly go there. It would give me a chance to die happily. It would repay me for all my miserable life. I want to go, Thora. You want me to go, Thora! Yes, you do, dear one!"

"No, I do not want you to go. I want you here. Oh, what a selfish coward I am. Go, Ian, if you wish--if you feel it right to go, then go."

This subject was sufficient to induce a long and strange conversation during which Thora was led to understand that some great and cruel circumstances had ruined and in some measure yet controlled her lover's life. She was begging him to go and talk to her father and tell him all that troubled him so cruelly when Rahal entered the room again.

"Dear ones," she said, "the house is cold and the lamps nearly out. Say good night, now. Ian must be up early--and tomorrow we shall have a busy day collecting all the old linen we can." She was yet as white as the long dressing gown she wore but there was a smile on her face that made it lovely as she recited slowly:

"Watching, wondering, yearning, knowing
Whence the stream, and where 'tis going
Seems all mystery--by and by
He will speak, and tell us why."

And the simple words had a charm in them, and though they said "Good night," in a mist of tears, the sunshine of hope turned them into that wonderful bow which God 'bended with his hands' and placed in the heavens as a token of His covenant with man, that He would always remember man's weakness and give him help in time of trouble. Now let every good man and woman say "I'll warrant it! I never yet found a deluge of any kind but I found also that God had provided an ark for my refuge and my comfort."

CHAPTER VIII

THORA'S PROBLEM

There is a tear for all who die,
A mourner o'er the humblest grave;
But nations swell the funeral cry,
And triumph weeps above the brave.
For them is Sorrow's purest sigh,
O'er Ocean's heaving bosom sent
In vain their bones unburied lie,
All earth becomes their monument.

Born to the War of 1854 on October 21, 1854,
a Daughter, called Red Cross.

THE next night Vedder went away. His purposes were necessarily rather vague, but it was certain he would go to the front if he thought he could do any good there. He talked earnestly and long with Ragnor but when it came to parting, both men were strangely silent. They clasped hands and looked long and steadily into each other's eyes. No words could interpret that look. It was a conversation for eternity.

In the meantime, the whole town was eager to do something but what could they do that would give the immediate relief that was needed? There were no sewing machines then, women's fingers and needles could not cope with the difficulty, even regarding the Orkney men who were suffering. To gather from every one the very necessary old linen seemed to be the very extent of their usefulness.

In these first days of the trouble, Rahal and Thora were serious and quiet. A dull, inexplicable melancholy shrouded the girl like a garment. The pretty home preparing for Ian and herself lost its interest. She refused to look forward and lived only in the unhappy present. The few words Ian has said about some wrong or trouble in the past years of his life overshadowed her. She was naturally very prescient and her higher self dwelt much in

... that finer atmosphere,
Where footfalls of appointed things,
Reverberent of days to be,
Are heard in forecast echoings,
Like wave beats from a viewless sea.

However, if trouble lasts through the night, joy, or at least hope and expectation, comes in the morning; and certainly the first shock of grief settled down into patient hoping and waiting. Vedder and Ian were both good correspondents and the silence and loneliness were constantly broken by their interesting letters. And joyful or sorrowful, Time goes by.

Sunna wrote occasionally but she said she found Edinburgh dull, and that she would gladly return to Kirkwall if it was not for the Pentland Firth and its winter tempers and tantrums.

The war [she added] has stopped all balls and even house parties. There is no dancing and no sports of any kind, and I believe skating and golf have been forbidden. Love-making is the only recreation allowed and I am not tempted to sin in this direction. The churches are always open and their bells clatter all day long. I have no lovers. Every man will talk of the war, and then they get offended if you ask them why they are not gone. I have had the pleasure of saying a few painful truths to these feather-bed patriots, and they tell each other, no doubt, that I am impossible and impertinent. One of them said to me, myself: "Wait a wee, Miss Vedder, I wouldna wonder but some crippled war lad will fa' to your lot, when the pair fellows come marching home again." The Edinburgh men are just city flunkeys, they would do fine to wait on our Norse men. I would like well to see a little dandy advocate I know here, trotting after Boris.

So days came and went, and the passion of shame and sorrow died down and people did not talk of the war. But the doors of St. Magnus stood open all day long and there were always women praying there. They had begun to carry their anxieties and griefs to God; and that was well for God did not weary of their complaining. Women have the very heart of sympathy for a man's griefs. God is the only refuge for a sorrowful woman.

Steadily the preparations for Thora's marriage went on, but the spirit that animated their first beginnings had cooled down into that calm necessity, which always has to attend to all "finishings off." Early in December, Thora's future home was quite finished, and this last word expresses its beauty and completeness. Then Ragnor kissed his daughter, and put into her hand the key of the house and the deed of gift which made it her own forever. And in this same hour they decided that the first day of the New Year should be the wedding day; for Bishop Hedley would then be in Kirkwall and who else could marry the little Thora whom he had baptised and confirmed and welcomed into the fold of the church.

Nothing is more remarkable than the variety of moods in which women take the solemn

initiatory rite ushering them into their real life and their great and honourable duties. Thora was joyful as a bird in spring and never weary of examining the lovely home, the perfect wardrobe, and the great variety of beautiful presents that had been given her.

Very soon it was the twentieth of December, and Ian was expected on the twenty-third. Christmas preparations had now taken the place of marriage preparations for every item was ready for the latter event. There had been a little anxiety about the dress and veil, but they arrived on the morning of the twentieth and were beautiful and fitting in every respect. The dress was of the orthodox white satin and the veil fell from a wreath of orange flowers and myrtle leaves. And oh, how proud and happy Thora was in their possession. Several times that wonderful day she had run secretly to her room to examine and admire them.

On the morning of the twenty-first she reminded herself that in two days Ian would be with her and that in nine days she would be his wife. She was genuine and happy about the event. She made no pretences or reluctances. She loved Ian with all her heart, she was glad she was going to be always with him. Life would then be full and she would be the happiest woman in the world. She asked her father at the breakfast table to send her, at once, any letters that might come for her in his mail. "I am sure there will be one from Ian," she said, "and, dear Father, it hurts me to keep it waiting."

About ten o'clock, Mrs. Beaton called and brought Thora a very handsome ring from Maximus Grant and a bracelet from herself. She stayed to lunch with the Ragnors and after the meal was over, they went upstairs to look at the wedding dress. "I want to see it on you, Thora," said Mrs. Beaton, "I shall have a wedding dress to buy for my niece soon and I would like to know what kind of a fit Mrs. Scott achieves." So Thora put on the dress, and Mrs. Beaton admitted that it "fit like a glove" and that she should insist on her niece Helen going to Mrs. Scott.

With many scattering, delaying remarks and good wishes, the lady finally bid Thora good-bye and Mrs. Ragnor went downstairs with her. Then Thora eagerly lifted two letters that had come in her father's mail and been sent home to her. One was from Ian. "The last he will write to Thora Ragnor," she said with a smile. "I will put it with his first letter and keep them all my life long. So loving is he, so good, so handsome! There is no one like my Ian." Twice over she read his loving letter and then laid it down and lifted the one which had come with it.

"Jean Hay," she repeated, "who is Jean Hay?" Then she remembered the writer--an orphan girl living with a married brother who did not always treat her as kindly as he should have done. Hearing and believing this story, Rahal Ragnor hired the girl, taught her how to sew, how to mend and darn and in many ways use her needle. Then discovering that she had a genius for dressmaking, she placed her with a first-class modiste in Edinburgh to be properly instructed and liberally attended to all financial requisites; for Rahal Ragnor could not do anything unless it was wholly and perfectly done. Then Thora had dressed Jean from her own wardrobe and asked her father to send their protégée to Edinburgh on one of the vessels he controlled. And Jean had been heartily grateful, had done well, and risen to a place of trust in her employer's business; and a few times every year she wrote to Mrs. Ragnor or Thora. All these circumstances were remembered by Thora in a moment. "Jean Hay!" she exclaimed. "Well, Jean, you must wait a few minutes, until I have taken off my wedding dress. I am sorry I had to put it on--it was not very kind or thoughtful of Mrs. Beaton to ask me--I don't believe mother liked her doing so--mother has a superstition or fret about everything. Well, then, it is no way spoiled---" and she lifted it and the white silk petticoat belonging to the dress and carefully put them in the place Rahal had selected as the safest for their keeping. It was a large closet in the spare room and she went there with them. As she returned to her own room she heard her mother welcoming a favourite visitor and it pleased her. "Now I need not hurry," she thought. "Mistress Vorn will stay an hour at least, and I can take my own time."

"Taking her own time" evidently meant to Thora the reading of Ian's letter over again. And also a little musing on what Ian had said. There was, however, no hurry about Jean Hay's letter and it was so pleasant to drift among the happy thoughts that crowded into her consideration. So for half an hour Jean's letter lay at her side untouched--Jean was so far outside her dreams and hopes that afternoon--but at length she lifted it and these were the words she read:

DEAR MISS THORA:

I was hearing since last spring that thou wert going to be married on the son of the Rev. Dr. Macrae--on the young man called John Calvin Macrae. Very often I was hearing this, and always I was answering, "There will be no word of truth in that story. Miss Ragnor will not be noticing such a young man as that. No, indeed!"

Here Thora threw down the letter and sat looking at it upon the floor as if she would any moment tear it to pieces. But she did not, she finally lifted it and forced herself to continue reading:

I was hating to tell thee some things I knew, and I was often writing and then tearing up my letter, for it made me sick to be thy true friend in such a cruel way. But often I have heard the wise tell "when the knife is needed, the salve pot will be of no use." Now then, this day, I tell myself with a sad heart, "Jean, thou must take the knife. The full time has come."

"Why won't the woman tell what she has got to tell," said Thora in a voice of impatient anguish, and in a few minutes she whispered, "I am cold." Then she threw a knitted cape over her shoulders and lifted the letter again, oh, so reluctantly, and read:

The young man will have told your father, that he is McLeod's agent and a sort of steward of his large properties. This does not sound like anything wrong, but often I have been told different. Old

McLeod left to his son many houses. Three of them are not good houses, they are really fashionable gambling houses. Macrae has the management of them as well as of many others in various parts of the city. Of these others I have heard no wrong. I suppose they may be quite respectable.

This story has more to it. Whenever there is a great horse race there Macrae will be, and I saw myself in the daily newspapers that his name was among the winners on the horse Sergius. It was only a small sum he won, but sin is not counted in pounds and shillings. No, indeed! So there is no wonder his good father is feeling the shame of it.

Moreover, though he calls himself Ian, that is not his name. His name is John Calvin and his denial of his baptismal name, given to him at the Sabbath service, in the house of God, at the very altar of the same, is thought by some to be a denial of God's grace and mercy. And he has been reasoned with on this matter by the ruling elder in his father's kirk, but no reason would he listen to, and saying many things about Calvin I do not care to write.

Many stories go about young men and young women, and there is this and that said about Macrae. I have myself met him on Prince's Street in the afternoon very often, parading there with various gayly dressed women. I do not blame him much for that. The Edinburgh girls are very forward, not like the Norse girls, who are modest and retiring in their ways. I am forced to say that Macrae is a very gay young man, and of course you know all that means without more words about it. He dresses in the highest fashion, goes constantly to theatres with some lady or other, and I do not wonder that people ask, "Where does he get the money? Does he gamble for it?" For he does not go to any kirk on the Sabbath unless he is paid to go there and sing, which he does very well, people say. In his own rooms he is often heard playing the piano and singing music that is not sacred or fit for the holy day. And his father is the most religious man in Edinburgh. It is just awful! I fear you will never forgive me, Miss Thora, but I have still more and worse to tell you, because it is, as I may say, personally heard and not this or that body's clash-ma-claver. Nor did I seek the same, it came to me through my daily work and in a way special and unlooked-for, so that after hearing it, my conscience would no longer be satisfied and I was forced, as it were, to the writing of this letter to you.

I dare say Macrae may have spoken to you anent his friendship with Agnes and Willie Henderson, indeed Willie Henderson and John Macrae have been finger and thumb ever since they played together. Now Willie's father is an elder in Dr. Macrae's kirk and if all you hear anent him be true--which I cannot vouch for--he is a man well regarded both in kirk and market place--that is, he was so regarded until he married again about two years ago. For who, think you, should he marry but a proud upsetting Englishwoman, who was bound to be master and mistress both o'er the hale household?

Then Miss Henderson showed fight and her brother Willie stood by her. And Miss Henderson is a spunky girl and thought bonnie by some people, and has a tongue so well furnished with words to defend what she thinks her rights, that it leaves nobody uncertain as to what thae rights may be. Weel, there has been nothing but quarreling in the elder's house ever since the unlucky wedding; and in the first year of the trial Willie Henderson borrowed money--I suppose of John Macrae--and took himself off to America, and some said the elder was glad of it and others said he was sair down-hearted and disappointed.

After that, Miss Agnes was never friends with her stepmother. It seems the woman wanted her to marry a nephew of her ain kith and kin, and in this matter her father was of the same mind. The old man doubtless wanted a sough of peace in his own home. That was how things stood a couple of weeks syne, but yestreen I heard what may make the change wanted. This is how it happened.

Yesterday afternoon Mrs. Baird came to Madame David's to have a black velvet gown fitted. Madame called on Jean Hay to attend her in the fitting and to hang the long skirt properly--for it is a difficult job to hang a velvet skirt, and Jean Hay is thought to be very expert anent the set and swing of silk velvet, which has a certain contrariness of its own. Let that pass. I was kneeling on the floor, setting the train, when Mrs. Baird said: "I suppose you have heard, Madame, the last escapade of that wild son of the great Dr. Macrae?" Then I was all ears, the more so when I heard Madam say: "I heard a whisper of something, but I was not heeding it. Folks never seem to weary of finding fault with the handsome lad."

"Well, Madame," said Mrs. Baird, "I happen to know about this story. Seeing with your own eyes is believing, surely!"

"What did you see?" Madame asked.

"I saw enough to satisfy me. You know my house is opposite to the West End Hotel, and last Friday I saw Macrae go there and he was dressed up to the nines. He went in and I felt sure he had gone to call on some lady staying there. So I watched, and better watched, for he did not come out for two hours, and I concluded they had lunched together! For when Macrae came out of the hotel, he spoke to a cabman, and then waited until a young lady and her maid appeared. He put the young lady into the cab, had a few minutes' earnest conversation with her, then the maid joined her mistress and they two drove away."

"Well, now, Mrs. Baird," said Madame, "there was nothing in that but just a courteous luncheon together."

"Wait, Madame! I felt there was more, so I took a book and sat down by my window. And just on the edge of the dark I saw the two women return, and a little later a waiter put lights in an upper parlour and he spread a table for dinner there and Macrae and the young lady ate it together. Afterwards they went away in a cab together." Then Madame asked if the maid was with them, and Mrs. Baird said she thought she was but had not paid particular attention.

Madame said something to me about the length of the train and then Mrs. Baird seemed annoyed at her inattention, and she added: "Macrae was advertised to sing in the City Hall the next night at a mass meeting of citizens about abrogating slavery in the United States, and he was not there--broke his engagement! What do you think of that? The next night, Sabbath, he did the same to Dr. Fraser's kirk, where he had promised to sing a pro-Christmas canticle. And this morning I heard that he is going to the Orkneys to marry a rich and beautiful girl who lives there. Now what do you think of your handsome Macrae? I can tell you he is on every one's tongue." And Madame said, "I

have no doubt of it and I'll warrant nobody knows what they are talking about."

After this the fitting on was not pleasant and I finished my part of it as quickly as possible. Indeed, Miss Thora, I was miserable about you and so pressed in spirit to tell you these things that I could hardly finish my day's work. For my conscience kept urging me to do my duty to you, for it is many favours you have done me in the past. Kindly pardon me now, and believe me,

Your humble but sincere friend,
JEAN HAY.

This letter Thora read to the last word but she was nearly blind when she reached it. All her senses rang inward. "I am dying!" she thought, and she tried to reach the bed but only succeeded in stumbling against a small table full of books, knocking it down and falling with it.

Mistress Ragnor and her visitor heard the fall and they were suddenly silent. Immediately, however, they went to the foot of the stairway and called, "Thora." There was no answer, and the mother's heart sank like lead, as she hastened to her daughter's room and threw open the door. Then she saw her stricken child, lying as if dead upon the floor. Cries and calls and hurrying feet followed, and the unconscious girl was quickly freed from all physical restraints and laid at the open window. But all the ordinary household methods of restoring consciousness were tried without avail and the case began to assume a dangerous aspect.

At this moment Ragnor arrived. He knelt at his child's side and drew her closer and closer, whispering her name with the name of the Divine One; and surely it was in response to his heart-breaking entreaties the passing soul listened and returned. "Father," was the first whisper she uttered; and with a glowing, grateful heart, the father lifted her in his arms and laid her on her bed.

Then Rahal gave him the two letters and sent him away. Thora was still "far off," or she would have remembered her letters but it was near the noon of the next day when she asked her mother where they were.

"Thy father has them."

"I am sorry, so sorry!"

That was all she said but the subject appeared to distress her for she closed her eyes, and Rahal kissed away the tears that slowly found their way down the white, stricken face. However, from this hour she rallied and towards night fell into a deep sleep which lasted for fourteen hours; and it was during this anxious period of waiting that Ragnor talked to his wife about the letters which were, presumably, the cause of the trouble.

"Those letters I gave thee, Coll, did thou read both of them?"

"Both of them I read. Ian's was the happy letter of an expectant bridegroom. Only joy and hope was in it. It was the other one that was a death blow. Yes, indeed, it was a bad, cruel letter!"

"And the name? Who wrote it?"

"Jean Hay."

"Jean Hay! What could Jean have to do with Thora's affairs?"

"Well, then, her conscience made her interfere. She had heard some evil reports about Ian's life and she thought it her duty, after yours and Thora's kindness to her, to report these stories."

"A miserable return for our kindness! This is what I notice--when people want to say cruel things, they always blame their conscience or their duty for making them do it."

"Here is Jean's letter. Thou, thyself, must read it."

Rahal read it with constantly increasing anger and finally threw it on the table with passionate scorn. "Not one word of this stuff do I believe, Coll! Envy and jealousy sent that news, not gratitude and good will! No, indeed! But I will tell thee, Coll, one thing I have always found sure, it is this; that often, much evil comes to the good from taking people out of their poverty and misfortunes. They are paying a debt they owe from the past and if we assume that debt we have it to pay in some wise. That is the wisdom of the old, the wisdom learned by sad experience. I wish, then, that I had let the girl pay her own debt and carry her own burden. She is envious of Thora. Yet was Thora very good to her. Do I believe in her gratitude? Not I! Had she done this cruel thing out of a kind heart, she would have sent this letter to me and left the telling or the not telling to my love and best judgment. I will not believe anything against Ian Macrae! Nothing at all!"

"Much truth is in thy words, Rahal, and it is not on Jean Hay's letter I will do anything. I will take only Ian's 'yes,' or 'no' on any accusation."

"You may do that safely, Coll, I know it."

"And I will go back to Edinburgh with him and see his father. Perhaps we have all taken the youth too far on his handsome person and his sweet amiability."

"Thou wrote to his father when Thora was engaged to him, with thy permission."

"Well, then, I did."

"What said his father?"

"Too little! He was cursed short about all I named. I told him Thora was good and fair and well educated; and that she would have her full share in my estate. I told him all that I intended to do

for them about their home and the place which I intended for Ian in my business, and referred him to Bishop Hedley as to my religious, financial, social and domestic standing."

"Why did thou name Bishop Hedley to him? They are as far apart as Leviticus and St. John. And what did he say to thee in reply?"

"That my kindness was more than his son deserved, etc. In response to our invitation to be present at the marriage ceremony, he said it was quite impossible, the journey was too long and doubtful, especially in the winter; that he was subject to sea-sickness and did not like to leave his congregation over Sunday. Rahal, I felt the paper on which his letter was written crinkling and crackling in my hand, it was that stiff with ecclesiastic pomp and spiritual pride. I would not show thee the letter, I put it in the fire."

"Poor Ian! I think then, that he has had many things to suffer."

"Rahal, this is what I will do. I will meet the packet on Saturday and we will go first to my office and talk the Hay letter over together. If I bring Ian home with me, then something is possible, but if I come home alone, then Thora must understand that all is over--that the young man is not to be thought of."

"That would kill her."

"So it might be. But better is death than a living misery. If Ian is what Jean Hay says he is, could we think of our child living with him? Impossible! Rahal, dear wife, whatever can be done I will do, and that with wisdom and loving kindness. Thy part is harder, it must be with our dear Thora."

"That is so. And if there has to be parting, it will be almost impossible to spread the plaster as far as the sore."

"There is the Great Physician---"

"I know."

"Tell her what I have said."

"I will do that; but just yet, she is not minding much what any one says."

However, on Saturday afternoon Thora left her bed and dressed herself in the gown she had prepared for her bridegroom's arrival. The nervous shock had been severe and she looked woefully like, and yet unlike, herself. Her eyes were full of tears, she trembled, she could hardly support herself. If one should take a fresh green leaf and pass over it a hot iron, the change it made might represent the change in Thora. Jean Hay's letter had been the hot iron passed over her. She had been told of her father's decision, but she clung passionately to her faith in Ian and her claim on her father's love and mercy.

"Father will do right," she said, "and if he does, Ian will come home with him."

The position was a cruel one to Conall Ragnor and he went to meet the packet with a heavy heart. Then Ian's joyful face and his impatience to land made it more so, and Ragnor found it impossible to connect wrong-doing with the open, handsome countenance of the youth. On the contrary, he found himself without intention declaring:

"Well, then, I never found anything the least zig-zaggery about what he said or did. His words and ways were all straight. That is the truth."

Yet Ian's happy mood was instantly dashed by Ragnor's manner. He did not take his offered hand and he said in a formal tone: "Ian, we will go to my office before we go to the house. I must ask thee some questions."

"Very well, sir. Thora, I hope, is all right?"

"No. She has been very ill."

"Then let me go to her, sir, at once."

"Later, I will see about that."

"Later is too late, let us go at once. If Thora is sick---"

"Be patient. It is not well to talk of women on the street. No wise man, who loves his womenkin, does that."

Then Ian was silent; and the walk through the busy streets was like a walk in a bad dream. The place and circumstances felt unreal and he was conscious of the sure presence of a force closing about him, even to his finger tips. Vainly he tried to think. He felt the trouble coming nearer and nearer, but what was it? What had he done? What had he failed to do? What was he to be questioned about?

Young as he was his experiences had taught him to expect only injury and wrong. The Ragnor home and its love and truth had been the miracle that had for nine months turned his brackish water of life into wine. Was it going to fail him, as everything else had done? He laughed inwardly at the cruel thought and whispered to himself: "This, too, can be borne, but oh, Thora, Thora!" and the two words shattered his pride and made him ready to weep when he sat down in Ragnor's office and saw the kind, pitiful face of the elder man looking at him. It gave him the power he needed and he asked bluntly what questions he was required to answer.

Ragnor gave him the unhappy letter and he read it with a look of anger and astonishment. "Father," he said, "all this woman writes is true and not true; and of all accusations, these are

the worst to defend. I must go back to my very earliest remembrances in order to fairly state my case, and if you will permit me to do this, in the presence of your wife and Thora, I will then accept whatever decision you make."

For at least three minutes Ragnor made no answer. He sat with closed eyes and his face held in the clasp of his left hand. Ian was bending forward, eagerly watching him. There was not a movement, not a sound; it seemed as if both men hardly breathed. But when Ragnor moved, he stood up. "Let us be going," he said, "they are anxious. They are watching. You shall do as you say, Ian."

Rahal saw them first. Thora was lying back in her mother's chair with closed eyes. She could not bear to look into the empty road watching for one who might be gone forever. Then in a blessed moment, Rahal whispered, "They are coming!"

"Both? Both, Mother?"

"Both!"

"Thank God!" And she would have cried out her thanks and bathed them in joyful tears if she had been alone. But Ian must not see her weeping. Now, especially, he must be met with smiles. And then, when she felt herself in Ian's embrace, they were both weeping. But oh, how great, how blessed, how sacramental are those joys that we baptise with tears!

During the serving of dinner there was no conversation but such as referred to the war and other public events. Many great ones had transpired since they parted, and there was plenty to talk about: the battles of Balaklava and Inkerman had been fought; the never-to-be-forgotten splendour of Scarlett's Charge with the Heavy Brigade, and the still more tragically splendid one of the Light Brigade, had both passed into history.

More splendid and permanent than these had been the trumpet "call" of Russell in the *Times*, asking the women of England who among them were ready to go to Scutari Hospital and comfort and help the men dying for England? "Now," he cried,

"The Son of God goes forth to war!
Who follows in His train?"

Florence Nightingale and her band of trained nurses, mainly from the Roman Catholic Sisters of Mercy, and St. John's Protestant House, was the instant answer. In six days they were ready and without any flourish of trumpets, at the dark, quiet midnight, they left England for Scutari and in that hour the Red Cross Society was born.

"How long is it since they sailed?" asked Rahal.

"A month," answered Ian, "but the controversy about it is still raging in the English papers."

"What has anyone to say against it?" asked Rahal. "The need was desperate, the answer quick. What, then, do they say?"

"The prudery of the English middle class was shocked at the idea of young women nursing in military hospitals. They considered it 'highly improper.' Others were sure women would be more trouble than help. Many expect their health to fail, and think they will be sent back to English hospitals in a month."

"I thought," said Ragnor, "that the objections were chiefly religious."

"You are right," replied Ian. "The Calvinists are afraid Miss Nightingale's intention is to make the men Catholics in their dying hour. Others feel sure Miss Nightingale is an Universalist, or an Unitarian, or a Wesleyan Methodist. The fact is, Florence Nightingale is a devout Episcopalian."

A pleasant little smile parted Ragnor's lips, and he said with an Episcopalian suavity: "The Wesleyans and the Episcopalians, in doctrine, are much alike. We regard them as brethren;" and just while he spoke, Ragnor looked like some ecclesiastical prelate.

"There is little to wonder at in the churches disagreeing about Miss Nightingale," said Rahal, "it is not to be expected that they would believe in her, when they do not believe in each other." As she spoke she stepped to the fireside and touched the bell rope, and a servant entered and began to clear the table and put more wood on the fire, and to turn out one of the lamps at Rahal's order. Ragnor had gone out to have a quiet smoke in the fresh air while Rahal was sending off all the servants to a dance at the Fisherman's Hall. Ian and Thora were not interested in these things; they sat close together, talking softly of their own affairs.

Without special request, they drew closer to the hearth and to each other. Then Ragnor took out a letter and handed it to Ian. He was sitting at Thora's side and her hand was in his hand. He let it fall and took the letter offered him.

"I cannot explain this letter," he said, "unless I preface it with some facts regarding my unhappy childhood and youth. I am, as you know, the son of Dr. Macrae, but I have been a disinherited son ever since I can remember. I suppose that in my earliest years I was loved and kindly treated, but I have no remembrance of that time. I know only that before I was five years old, my father had accepted the solemn conviction that I was without election to God's grace. Personally I was a beautiful child, but I was received and considered, body and soul, as unredeemable. Father then regarded me as a Divine decree which it was his duty to receive with a pious acquiescence. My mother pitied and, in her way, loved me, and suffered much with me. I have a little sister also, who would like to love me, but there is in all her efforts just that touch of Phariseeism which destroys love."

"But, Ian, there must have been some reason for your father's remarkable conviction?"

"That is most likely. If so, he never explained the fact to me or even to my mother. She told me once that he did not suspect that I had missed God's election until I was between five and six years old. I suppose that about that age I began to strengthen his cruel fear by my antipathy to the kirk services and my real and unfortunate inability to learn the Shorter Catechism. This was a natural short-coming. I could neither spell or pronounce the words I was told to learn and to memorise them was an impossible thing."

"Could not your mother help you?"

"She tried. She wept over me as she tried, and I made an almost superhuman effort to comprehend and remember. I could not. I was flogged, I was denied food and even water. I was put in dark rooms. I was forbid all play and recreation. I went through this martyrdom year after year and I finally became stubborn and would try no longer. In the years that followed, until I was sixteen, my daily sufferings were great, but I remember them mainly for my mother's sake, who suffered with me in all I suffered. Nor am I without pity for my father. He honestly believed that in punishing me he was doing all he could to save me from everlasting punishment. Yes, sir! Do not shake your head! I have heard him praying, pleading with God, for some token of my election to His mercy. You see it was John Calvin."

"John Calvin!" ejaculated Ragnor, "how is that?"

"It was his awful tenets I had to learn; and when I was young I could not learn them, and when I grew older I would not learn them. My father had called me John Calvin and I detested the name. On my eighteenth birthday I asked him to have it changed. He was very angry at my request. I begged him passionately to do so. I said it ruined my life, that I could do nothing under that name. 'Give me your own name, Father,' I entreated, 'and I will try and be a good man!'

"He said something to me, I never knew exactly what, but the last word was more than I could bear and my reply was an oath. Then he lifted the whip at his side and struck me."

Rahal and Thora were sobbing. Ragnor looked in the youth's face with shining eyes and asked, almost in a whisper, "What did thou do?"

"I had been struck often enough before to have made me indifferent, but at this moment some new strength and feeling sprang up in my heart. I seized his arms and the whip fell to the floor. I lifted it and said, 'Sir, if you ever again use a whip in place of decent words to me, I will see you no more until we meet for the judgment of God. Then I will pity you for the life-long mistake you have made.' My father looked at me with eyes I shall never forget, no, not in all eternity! He burst into agonizing prayer and weeping and I went and told mother to go to him. I left the house there and then. I had not a halfpenny, and I was hungry and cold and sick with an intolerable sense of wrong."

"Father!" said Thora, in a voice broken with weeping. "Is not this enough?" And Ragnor leaned forward and took Thora's hand but he did not speak. Neither did he answer Rahal's look of entreaty. On the contrary he asked:

"Then, Ian? Then, what did thou do?"

"I felt so ill I went to see Dr. Finlay, our family physician. He knew the family trouble, because he had often attended mother when she was ill in consequence of it. I did not need to make a complaint. He saw my condition and took me to his wife and told her to feed and comfort me. I remained in her care four days, and then he offered to take me into his office and set me to reading medical text books, while I did the office work."

"What was this work?"

"I was taught how to prepare ordinary medicines, to see callers when the doctor was out, and make notes of, and on, their cases. I helped the doctor in operations, I took the prescriptions to patients and explained their use, etc. In three years I became very useful and helpful and I was quite happy. Then Dr. Finlay was appointed to some exceptionally fine post in India, private physician to some great Rajah, and the Finlay family hastily prepared for their journey to Delhi. I longed to go with them but I had not the money requisite. With Dr. Finlay I had had a home but only money enough to clothe me decently. I had not a pound left and mother could not help me, and Uncle Ian was in the Madeira Isles with his sick wife. So the Finlays went without me; and I can feel yet the sense of loneliness and poverty that assailed me, when I shut their door behind me and walked into the cold street and knew not what to do or where to go."

"How old were you then, Ian?" asked Ragnor.

"I was twenty years old within a few days, and I had one pound, sixteen shillings in my pocket. Five pounds from an Episcopal church would be due in two weeks for my solo and part singing in their services; but they were never very prompt in their payment and that was nothing to rely on in my present need. I took to answering advertisements, and did some of the weariest tramping looking for work that poor humanity can do. When I met Kenneth McLeod, I had broken my last shilling. I was like a hungry, lost child, and the thought of my mother came to me and I felt as if my heart would break.

"The next moment I saw Kenneth McLeod coming up Prince's Street. It was nearly four years since we had seen each other, but he knew me at once and called me in his old kind way. Then he looked keenly at me, and asked: 'What is the matter, Ian? The old trouble?'

"I was so heartless and hungry I could hardly keep back tears as I answered: 'It is that and everything else! Ken, help me, if you can.' 'Come with me!' he answered, and I went with him into the Queen's Hotel and he ordered dinner, and while we were eating I told him my situation. Then he said, 'I can help you, Ian, if you will help me. You know that all my happiness is on the sea and father kept me on one or another of his trading boats as much as possible from my boyhood, so that I am now a clever enough navigator. Two years ago my father died and I am in a lot of trouble about managing the property he left me. Now, if you will take the oversight of my Edinburgh property, I can take my favourite boat and look after the coast trade of the Northern Islands.'

"What could I say? I was dumb with surprise and gratitude. I never thought there was anything wrong in our contract. I believed the work had come in answer to my prayer for help and I thanked God and Kenneth McLeod for it."

Here Mrs. Ragnor rose, saying, "Coll, my dear one, Thora and I will now leave thee. I am sure Ian has done as well as he could do and we hope thou wilt judge him kindly." Then the women went upstairs and Ragnor remained silent until Ian said:

"I am very anxious, sir."

Then Ragnor stood up and slowly answered, "Ian, now is the time to take council of my pillow. What I have to say I will say later. This is not a thing to be settled by a yes or no. I must think over what thou hast told me. I must have some words with my wife and daughter. Sleep one night at least over thy trouble, there are many things to consider; especially this question of the young lady who is made the last count of Jean Hay's letter. What hast thou to say about her? She seems to have had some strong claim upon thy--shall we say friendship?"

"You might say much more than friendship, sir, and yet wrong neither man nor woman by it. Why, the young lady was Agnes Henderson, the sister of Willie Henderson, who is my soul's brother and my second self. Thora must have heard all about Agnes!"

"Is she Deacon Scot Henderson's daughter?"

"Of course she is! Who else would I have left two engagements to serve? But Agnes is dear to me, perhaps dearer than my own sister. Since she was nine years old, we have studied and played together. Willie and Agnes were the only loves and only friends of my desolate boyhood. You have doubtless heard how unhappy the deacon's second marriage has been. Both Willie and Agnes refused the stepmother he gave them, and last year Willie went to New York, where he is doing very well. But Agnes has been more and more wretched, and a recent proposal of marriage between herself and the stepmother's nephew has made her life intolerable. Two weeks ago I had a letter from Willie, telling me he had just written her, advising an immediate 'give-up' of the whole situation. He told her to take the first good steamer and come to him. He also urged her to send for me and take my help and advice about the voyage. Two weeks ago last Friday she did so and I went at once to the West End Hotel to see her. She had disguised herself so cleverly that it was difficult to recognise her. I went with her to her sitting room and there I found the woman who had waited on her all her life long. I knew her well for she had often scolded me for leading Agnes into danger.

"I ate lunch with Agnes and during it I told her to transfer all her money not required for travelling expenses to the Bank of New York; and I promised to go at once and secure a passage for herself and maid--for seeing that the *Atlantic* would leave her dock for New York about the noon hour of the next day, haste was necessary. I did not wish to go to Liverpool because of my two engagements, but Agnes was so insistent on my presence I could not refuse her. Well, perhaps I was wrong to yield to her entreaties."

"No, hardly," said Ragnor. "Going on board a big steamer at Liverpool must be a muddling business--not fit for two simple women like Agnes Henderson and her maid."

"I don't remember thinking of that but I could hear my friend Willie telling me, 'See her safe on board, Ian. Don't leave her till she is in the captain's care. Do this for me, Ian!' And I did it for both Agnes' and Willie's sake but mainly for Willie's, for I love him. He is my right-hand friend, always. Perhaps I did wrong."

"It is a pity there was any mystification about it. Was it necessary for Agnes Henderson to disguise herself?"

"Perhaps not, but it prevented trouble and disappointment. Her father supposed her to be at her uncle's home. On Saturday afternoon he went to see her and found she had not been there at all. He returned to Edinburgh and could get no trace of her, nor was she located until I returned and informed him that she was on the *Atlantic*."

There was a few moments of silence and then Ian said, "Have I done anything unpardonable? Surely you will not let that jealous, envious letter stand between Thora and myself?"

Then Ragnor answered, "Tonight I will say neither this nor that on the matter. I will sleep over the subject and take counsel of One wiser than myself. Thou had better do likewise. Many things are to consider."

And Ian went away without a word. There was anger in his heart, and as he sat gloomily in his dimly lit room and felt the damp chill of the midnight, he told himself that he had been hardly judged. "I have done nothing wrong," he whispered passionately. "Old McLeod collected his own rents and looked after his own property and no one thought he did wrong. He was an elder in one of the largest Edinburgh kirks and the favourite chairman in missionary meetings, but

because I did not go to kirk, what was business in him was sin in me.

“As to the gambling houses, I had nothing to do with them but to collect lawful money, due the McLeod estate; and as far as I can see, men who gamble for money are quite respectable if they get what they gamble for. There was that old reprobate Lord Sinclair. He redeemed the Sinclair estates by gambling and he married the beautiful daughter of the noble Seaforths. Nobody blamed him. Pshaw! It is all a matter of money--or it is my ill luck.” And to such irritating reflections he finally fell asleep.

CHAPTER IX

THE BREAD OF BITTERNESS

SORROW develops the mind. It seems as if a soul was given us to suffer with--

Dust to dust, but the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came
A portion of the Eternal which must glow
Through time and change unalterably the same.

Our endless need is met by God's endless help.

At her room door Thora bid her mother good night. Rahal desired to talk with her, but the girl shook her head and said wearily, “I want to think, Mother. I have no heart to speak yet.” And Rahal turned sadly away. She knew that hour, that her child had come to a door for which she had no key and she left her alone with the situation she had to face. Nor did Thora just then realize that within the past hour her girlhood had vanished, and that she had suddenly become a woman with a woman's fate upon her and a woman's heart-rending problem to solve.

How it came she did not enquire, yet she did recognise some change in herself. Hitherto, all her troubles had been borne by her father or mother. This trouble was her very own. No one could carry it for her but without any hesitation she accepted it. “I must find out the very root of this matter,” she said to herself, “and I will not go to bed until I do. Nor is it half-asleep I will be over the question. I will sit up and be wide awake.”

So she put more peat and coal on her fire and lit a fresh candle; removed her day clothing and wrapped herself in a large down cloak. And the night was not cold for there was a southerly wind, and the gulf stream embraces the Orkneys, giving them an abnormally warm climate for their far-north latitude. And she had a passing wonder at herself for these precautions. A year ago, a week ago, she would have thrown herself upon her bed in passionate weeping or clung to her mother and talked her sorrow away in her loving sympathy and advice.

But at this supreme hour of her life, she wanted to be alone. She did not wish to talk about Ian with any one. She was wide awake, quite sensible of the pain and grief at her heart, yet tearless and calm. Never before had she felt that dignity of soul, which looks straight into the face of its sorrow and feels itself equal to the bearing of it. She had as yet no idea that during that evening she had passed through that wonderful heart-experience, which suddenly ripens girlhood into womanhood. Indeed, they will be thoughtless girls--whatever their age--who can read this sentence and not pause and recall that marvellous transition in their own lives. To some it comes with a great joy, to others with a great sorrow but it is always a fateful event, and girls should be ready to meet and salute it.

As soon as Thora had made herself and her room comfortable, she sat down and closed her eyes. All her life she had noticed that her mother shut her eyes when she wanted to think. Now she did the same, and then softly called Ian Macrae to the judgment of her heart and her inner senses, but she did it as naturally as women equally ignorant have done it in all ages, taking or refusing their advice or verdict as directed by their dominant desire, or their reason or unreason.

With almost supernatural clearness she recalled his beautiful, yet troubled face, his hesitating manner, his restlessness in his chair, his nervous trifling with his watch chain or his finger ring. She recalled the fact that his voice had in it a strange tone and that his eyes reflected a soul fearful and angry. It was an unfamiliar Ian she called up, but oh! if it could ever become a familiar one.

The first subject that pressed her for consideration was the suspicion of gambling. Certainly Ian had promptly denied the charge. He had even said that he never was in the gambling parlours but once, when he went into them very early with the porter, to assure himself that some new carpets asked for were really wanted. “Then,” he added, “I found out that the demand was made by one of the club members, who had a friend who was a carpet manufacturer and expected to supply what was considered necessary.”

It must be recalled here that Norsemen, though sharp and keen in business matters, have no gambling fever in their blood. To get money and give nothing for it! That goes too far beyond their idea of fair business, and as for pleasure, they have never connected it with the paper kings and queens. They find in the sea and their ships, in adventure, in music and song, in dancing and story telling, all of pleasure they require. A common name for a pack of cards is "the devil's books," and in Orkney they have but few readers.

Thora had partially exonerated Ian from the charge of gambling when she remembered Jean Hay's assertion that "wherever horses were racing, there Ian was sure to be and that he had been named in the newspapers as a winner on the horse Sergius." Ian had passed by this circumstance, and her father had either intentionally or unintentionally done the same. Once she had heard Vedder say that "horse racing produced finer and faster horses"; and she remembered well, that her father asked in reply, "If it was well to produce finer and faster horses, at the cost of making horsier men?" And he had further said that he did not know of any uglier type of man than a "betting book in breeches." She thought a little on this subject and then decided Ian ought to be talked to about it.

Her lover's neglect of the Sabbath was the next question, for Thora was a true and loving daughter of the Church of England. Episcopacy was the kernel of her faith. She believed all bishops were just like Bishop Hedley and that the most perfect happiness was found in the Episcopal Communion. And she said positively to her heart--"It is through the church door we will reach the Home door, and I am sure Ian will go with me to keep the Sabbath in the cathedral. Every one goes to church in Kirkwall. He could not resist such a powerful public example, and then he would begin to like to go of his own inclination. I could trust him on this point, I feel sure."

When she took up the next doubt her brow clouded and a shadow of annoyance blended itself with her anxious, questioning expression. "His name!" she muttered. "His name! Why did he woo me under a false name? Mother says my marriage to him under the name of Ian Macrae would not be lawful. Of course he intended to marry me with his proper name. He would have been sure to tell us all before the marriage day--but I saw father was angry and troubled at the circumstance. He ought to have told us long ago. Why didn't he do so? I should have loved him under any name. I should have loved him better under John than Ian. John is a strong, straight name. Great and good men in all ages have made John honourable. It has no diminutive. It can't be made less than John. Englishmen and lowland Scotch all say the four sensible letters with a firm, strong voice; only the Celt turns John into Ian. I will not call him Ian again. Not once will I do it."

Then she covered her eyes with her hand and a sharp, chagrined catch of her breath broke the hush of the still room. And her voice, though little stronger than a whisper, was full of painful wonder. "What will people say? What shall we say? Oh, the shame! Oh, the mortification! Who will now live in my pretty home? Who will eat my wedding cake? What will become of my wedding dress? Oh, Thora! Thora! Love has led thee a shameful, cruel road! What wilt thou do? What can thou do?"

Then a singular thing happened. A powerful thought from some forgotten life came with irresistible strength into her mind, and though she did not speak the words suggested, she prayed them--if prayer be that hidden, never-dying imploration that goes with the soul from one incarnation to another--for the words that sprang to her memory must have been learned centuries before, "Oh, Mary! Mary! Mother of Jesus Christ! Thou that drank the cup of all a woman's griefs and wrongs, pray for me!"

And she was still and silent as the words passed through her consciousness. She thought every one of them, they seemed at the moment so real and satisfying. Then she began to wonder and ask herself, "Where did those words come from? When did I hear them? Where did I say them before? How do they come to be in my memory? From what strange depth of Life did they come? Did I ever have a Roman Catholic nurse? Did she whisper them to my soul, when I was sick and suffering? I must ask mother--oh, how tired and sleepy I feel--I will go to bed--I have done no good, come to no decision. I will sleep--I will tell mother in the morning--I wish I had let her stop with me--mother always knows--what is the best way---" And thus the heart-breaking session ended in that blessed hostel, The Inn of Dreamless Sleep.

There was, however, little sleep in the House of Ragnor that night, and very early in the morning Ragnor, fully dressed, spoke to his wife. "Art thou waking yet, Rahal?" he asked, and Rahal answered, "I have slept little. I have been long awake."

"Well then, what dost thou think now of Ian Macrae, so-called?"

"I think little amiss of him--some youthful follies--nothing to make a fuss about."

"Hast thou considered that the follies of youth may become the follies of manhood, and of age? What then?"

"We are not told to worry about what may be."

"Ian has evidently been living and spending with people far above his means and his class."

"The Lowland Scotch regard a minister as socially equal to any peer. Are not the servants of God equal, and more than equal, to the servants of the queen? No society is above either they or their children. That I have seen always. And young men of fine appearance and charming manners, like Ian, are welcome in every home, high or low. Yes, indeed!"

"Yet girls, as a rule, should not marry handsome men with charming manners, unless there is

something better behind to rely on."

"If thou had not been a handsome man with a charming manner, Rahal would not have married thee. What then?"

"I would have been a ruined man. I cared for nothing but thee."

"I believe that a girl of moral strength and good intelligence should be trusted with the choice of her destiny. It is not always that parents have a right to thrust a destiny they choose upon their daughter. If a man is not as good and as rich as they think she ought to marry they can point this out, and if they convince their child, very well; and if they do not convince her, also very well. Perhaps the girl's character requires just the treatment it will evolve from a life of struggle."

"Thou art talking nonsense, Rahal. Thy liking for the young man has got the better of thy good sense. I cannot trust thee in this matter."

"Well then, Coll, the road to better counsel than mine, is well known to thee."

"I think Bishop Hedley arrived about an hour ago. There were moving lights on the pier, and as soon as the morning breaks I am going to see him."

"Have thy own way. When a man's wife has not the wisdom wanted, it is well that he go to his Bishop, for Bishops are full of good counsel, even for the ruling of seven churches, so I have heard."

"It is not hearsay between thee and Bishop Hedley. Thou art well acquainted with him."

"Well then, in the end thou wilt take thy own way."

"Dost thou want me to say 'yes' today, and rue it tomorrow? I have no mind for any such foolishness."

"Coll, this is a time when deeds will be better than words."

"I see that. Well then, the day breaks, and I will go"--he lingered a minute or two fumbling about his knitted gloves but Rahal was dressing her hair and took no further notice. So he went away in an affected hurry and both dissatisfied and uncertain. "What a woman she is!" he sighed. "She has said only good words, but I feel as if I had broken every commandment at once."

He went away full of trouble and anxiety, and Rahal watched him down the garden path and along the first stretch of the road. She knew by his hurried steps and the nervous play of his walking stick that he was both angry and troubled and she was not very sorry.

"If it was his business standing and his good name, instead of Thora's happiness and good repute that was the question, oh, how careful and conciliatory he would be! How anxious to keep his affairs from public discussion! It would be anything rather than that! I have the same feeling about Thora's good name. The marriage ought to go on for Thora's sake. I do not want the women of Kirkwall wondering who was to blame. I do not want them coming to see me with solemn looks and tearful voices. I could not endure their pitying of 'poor Miss Thora!' They would not dare go to Coll with their sympathetic curiosity, but there are such women as Astar Gager, and Lala Snackoll, and Thyra Peterson, and Jorunna Flett. No one can keep them away from a house in trouble. Thora must marry. I see no endurable way to prevent it."

Then being dressed she went to Thora's room, and gently opened the door. Thora was standing at her mirror and she turned to her mother with a smiling face. Rahal was astonished and she said almost with a tone of disapproval, "I am glad to see thee able to smile. I expected to find thee weeping, and ill with weeping."

"For a long time, for many hours, I was broken-hearted but there came to me, Mother, a strange consolation." Then she told her mother about the prayer she heard her soul say for her. "Not one word did I speak, Mother. But someone prayed for me. I heard them. And I was made strong and satisfied, and fell into a sweet sleep, though I had yet not solved the problem I had proposed to solve before I slept."

"What was that problem?"

"First, whether I should marry John just as he was, and trust the consequences to my influence over him; or whether I should refuse him altogether and forever; or whether I should wait and see what he can do with my father and the good Bishop, to help and strengthen him." And as Thora talked, Rahal's face grew light and sweet as she listened, and she answered--"Yes, my dear one, that is the wonderful way! Some soul that loved thee long, long ago, knew that thou wert in great trouble. Some woman's soul, perhaps, that had lived and died for love. The kinship of our souls far exceeds that of our bodies, and their help is swift and sure. Be patient with Ian. That is what I say."

"But why that prayer? I never heard it before."

"How little thou knowest of what thou hast heard before! Two hundred years ago, all sorrowful, unhappy women went to Mary with their troubles."

"They should not have done so. They could have gone to Christ."

"They thought Mary had suffered just what they were suffering, and they thought that Christ had never known any of the griefs that break a woman's heart. Mary knew them, had felt them, had wept and prayed over them. When my little lad Eric died, I thought of Mary. My family have

only been one hundred years Protestants. All of them must have loved thee well enough to come and pray for thee. Thou had a great honour, as well as a great comfort."

"At any rate I did no wrong! I am glad, Mother."

"Wrong! Thou wilt see the Bishop today. Ask him. He will tell thee that the English Church and the English women gave up very reluctantly their homage to Mary. Are not their grand churches called after Peter and Paul and other male saints? Dost thou think that Christ loved Peter and Paul more than his mother? I know better. Please God thou wilt know better some day."

"Churches are often called after Mary, as well as the saints."

"Not in Scotland."

"There is one in Glasgow. Vedder told me he used to hear Bishop Hedley preach there."

"It is an Episcopal Church. Ask him about thy dream. No, I mean thy soul's experience."

"Thou said *dream*, Mother. It was not a dream. I saw no one. I only heard a voice. It is what we see in dreams that is important."

"Now wilt thou come to thy breakfast?"

"Is *he* downstairs yet?"

"I will go and call him."

Rahal, however, came to the table alone. She said, "Ian asked that he might lie still and sleep an hour or two. He has not slept all night long, I think," she added. "His voice sounded full of trouble."

So the two women ate their breakfast alone for Ragnor did not return in time to join them. And Rahal's hopefulness left her, and she was silent and her face had a grey, fearful expression that Thora could not help noticing. "You look ill, Mother!" she said, "and you were looking so well when we came downstairs. What is it?"

"I know not. I feel as if I was going into a black cloud. I wish that thy father would come home. He is in trouble. I wonder then what is the matter!"

In about an hour they saw Ragnor and the Bishop coming towards the house together.

"They are in trouble, Thora, both of them are in trouble."

"About Thora they need not to be in trouble. She will do what they advise her to do."

"It is not thee."

"What then?"

"I will not name my fear, lest I call it to me."

Then she rose and went to the door and Thora followed her, and by this time, Ragnor and the Bishop were at the garden gate. Very soon the Bishop was holding their hands, and Rahal found when he released her hand that he had left a letter in it. Yet for a moment she hardly noticed the fact, so shocked was she at the expression of her husband's face. He looked so much older, his eyes were two wells of sorrow, his distress had passed beyond words, and when she asked, "What is thy trouble, Coll?" he looked at her pitifully and pointed to the letter. Then she took Thora's hand and they went to her room together.

Sitting on the side of her bed, she broke the seal and looked at the superscription. "It is from Adam Vedder," she said, as she began to read it. No other word escaped her lips until she came to the end of the long epistle. Then she laid it down on the bed beside her and shivered out the words, "Boris is dying. Perhaps dead. Oh, Boris! My son Boris! Read for thyself."

So Thora read the letter. It contained a vivid description of the taking of a certain small battery, which was pouring death and destruction on the little British company, who had gone as a forlorn hope to silence its fire. They were picked volunteers and they were led by Boris Ragnor. He had made a breach in its defences and carried his men over the cannon to victory. At the last moment he was shot in the throat and received a deadly wound in the side, as he tore from the hands of the Ensign the flag of his regiment, wrote Vedder.

I saw the fight between the men. I was carrying water to the wounded on the hillside. I, and several others, rushed to the side of Boris. He held the flag so tightly that no hand could remove it, and we carried it with him to the hospital. For two days he remained there, then he was carefully removed to my house, not very far away, and now he has not only one of Miss Nightingale's nurses always with him but also myself. As for Sunna, she hardly ever leaves him. He talks constantly of thee and his father and sister. He sends all his undying love, and if indeed these wounds mean his death, he is dying gloriously and happily, trusting God implicitly, and loving even his enemies--a thing Adam Vedder cannot understand. He found out before he was twenty years old that loving his enemies was beyond his power and that nothing could make him forgive them. Our dear Boris! Oh, Rahal! Rahal! Poor stricken mother! God comfort thee, and tell thyself every minute "My boy has won a glorious death and he is going the way of all flesh, honoured and loved by all who ever knew him."

Thy true friend,
ADAM VEDDER.



He made a breach in its defences and carried his men over cannon to victory.

This letter upset all other considerations, and when Ian came downstairs at the dinner hour, he found no one interested enough in his case to take it up with the proper sense of its importance. Ragnor was steeped in silent grief. Rahal had shut up her sorrow behind dry eyes and a closed mouth. The Bishop had taken the seat next to Thora. He felt as if no one had missed or even thought of him. And such conversation as there was related entirely to the war. Thora smiled at him across the table, but he was not pleased at Thora being able to smile; and he only returned the courtesy with a doleful shake of the head.

After dinner Ian said something about going to see McLeod, and then the Bishop interfered--"No, Ian," he replied, "I want you to walk as far as the cathedral with me. Will you do that?"

"With pleasure, sir."

"Then let us be going, while there is yet a little sunshine."

The cathedral doors stood open, but there was no one present except a very old woman, who at their approach rose from her knees and painfully walked away. The Bishop altered his course, so as to greet her--"Good afternoon, Sister Odd! Art thou suffering yet?"

"Only the pain that comes with many years, sir. God makes it easy for me. Wilt thou bless me?"

"Thou hast God's blessing. Who can add to it? God be with thee to the very end!"

"Enough is that. Thy hand a moment, sir."

For a moment they, stood silently hand clasped, then parted, and the Bishop walked straight to the vestry and taking a key from his pocket, opened the door. There was a fire laid ready for the match and he stooped and lit it, and Ian placed his chair near by.

"That is good!" he said. "Bring your own chair near to me, Ian, I have something to say to you."

"I am glad of that, Bishop. No one seemed to care for my sorrow. I was made to feel this day the difference between a son and a son-in-law."

"There is a difference, a natural one, but you have been treated as a son always. Ragnor has told me all about those charges. You may speak freely to me. It is better that you should do so."

"I explained the charges to the whole family. Do they not believe me?"

"The explanation was only partial and one-sided. I think the charge of gambling may be put aside, with your promise to abstain from the appearance of evil for the future. I understand your position about the Sabbath. You should have gone on singing in some church. Supposing you got no spiritual help from it, you were at least lifting the souls of others on the wings of holy song, and you need not have mocked at the devout feelings of others by music unfit for the day."

"It was a bit of boyish folly."

"It was something far more than that. I had a letter from Jean Hay more than two months ago and I investigated every charge she made against you."

"Well, Bishop?"

"I find that, examined separately, they do not indicate any settled sinfulness; but taken together they indicate a variable temper, a perfectly untrained nature, and a weak, unresisting will. Now,

Ian, a weak, good man is a dangerous type of a bad man. They readily become the tools of wicked men of powerful intellect and determined character. I have met with many such cases. Your change of name---

"Oh, sir, I could not endure Calvin tacked on to me! If you knew what I have suffered!"

"I know it all. Why did you not tell the Ragnors on your first acquaintance with them?"

"Mrs. Ragnor liked Ian because it is the Highland form for John, and Thora loved the name and I did not like, while they knew so little of me, to tell them I had only assumed it. I watched for a good opportunity to speak concerning it and none came. Then I thought I would consult you at this time, before the wedding day."

"I could not have married you under the name of Ian. Discard it at once. Take it as a pet name between Thora and yourself, if you choose. No doubt you thought Ian was prettier and more romantic and suitable for your really handsome person."

"Oh, Bishop, do not humiliate me! I---

"I have no doubt I am correct. I have known young men wreck their lives for some equally foolish idea."

"I will cast it off today. I will tell Thora the truth tonight. Before we are married, I will advertise it in next week's *News*."

"Before you are married, I trust you will have made the name of John Macrae so famous that you will need no such advertising."

"What do you mean, Bishop?"

"I want you to go to the trenches at Redan or to fight your way into Sebastopol. You have been left too much to your own direction and your own way. Obedience is the first round of the ladder of Success. You must learn it. You can only be a subordinate till you manage this lesson. Your ideas of life are crude and provincial. You need to see men making their way upward, in some other places than in shops and offices. Above all, you must learn to conquer yourself and your indiscreet will. You are not a man, until you are master in your own house and fear no mutiny against your Will to act nobly. You have had no opportunities for such education. Now take one year to begin it."

"You mean that I must put off my marriage for a year."

"Exactly. Under present circumstances---

"Oh, sir, that is not thinkable! It would be too mortifying! I could not go back to Edinburgh. I could not put off my marriage!"

"You will be obliged to do so. Do you imagine the Ragnors will hold wedding festivities, while their eldest son is dying, or his broken body on its way home for burial?"

"I thought the ceremony would be entirely religious and the festivities could be abandoned."

"Is that what you wish?"

"Yes, Bishop."

"Then you will not get it. A year's strict mourning is due the dead, and the Ragnors will give every hour of it. Boris is their eldest son."

"They should remember also their living daughter Thora will suffer as well as myself."

"You are not putting yourself in a good light, John Macrae. Thora loves her brother with a great affection. Do you think she can comfort her grief for his loss, by giving you any loving honour that belongs to him? You do not know Thora Ragnor. She has her mother's just, strong character below all her gentle ways, and what her father and mother say she will endorse, without question or reluctance. Now I know that Ragnor had resolved on a year's separation and discipline, before he heard of his son's dangerous condition."

"Boris was not dead when that Vedder letter was written. He may not be dead now. He may not be going to die."

"It is only his wonderful physical strength that has kept him alive so long. Vedder said to me, they looked for his death at any hour. He cannot recover. His wound is a fatal one. It is beyond hope. Vedder wrote while he was yet alive, so that he might perhaps break the blow to his family."

"What then do you advise me to do?"

"Ragnor intends to go back with you and myself to Edinburgh. He will see your father and offer to buy you a commission as ensign in a good infantry regiment. We will ask your father if he will join in the plan."

"My father will not join in anything to help me. How much will an ensign's commission cost?"

"I think four or five hundred pounds. Ragnor would pay half, if your father would pay half."

Then Ian rose to his feet, and his eyes blazed with a fire no one had ever seen there before. "Bishop," he said, "I thank you for all you propose, but if I go to the trenches at Redan or the camp at Sebastopol, I will go on John Macrae's authority and personality. I have one hundred pounds, that is sufficient. I can learn all the great things you expect me to learn there better among the rankers than the officers. I have known the officers at Edinburgh Castle. They were

not fit candidates for a bishopric."

The good man looked sadly at the angry youth and answered, "Go and talk the matter over with Thora."

"I will. Surely she will be less cruel."

"What do you wish, considering present circumstances?"

"I want the marriage carried out, devoid of all but its religious ceremony. I want to spend one month in the home prepared for us, and then I will submit to the punishment and schooling proposed."

"No, you will not. Do not throw away this opportunity to retrieve your so far neglected, misguided life. There is a great man in you, if you will give him space and opportunity to develop, John. This is the wide open door of Opportunity; go through, and go up to where it will lead you. At any rate do whatever Thora advises. I can trust you as far as Thora can." Then he held out his hand, and Ian, too deeply moved to speak, took it and left the cathedral without a word.

He found Thora alone in the parlour. She had evidently been weeping but that fact did not much soothe his sense of wrong and injustice. He felt that he had been put aside in some measure. He was not sure that even now Thora had been weeping for his loss. He told himself, she was just as likely to have been mourning for Boris. He felt that he was unjustly angry but, oh, he was so hopeless! Every one was ready to give him advice, no one had said to him those little words of loving sympathy for which his heart was hungry. He had felt it to be his duty to try and console Thora, and Thora had wept in his arms and he had kissed her tears away. She was now weary with weeping and suffering with headache. She knew also that talking against any decision of her father's was useless. When he had said the word, the man or woman that could move him did not live. Acceptance of the will of others was a duty she had learned to observe all her life, it was just the duty that Ian had thought it right to resist. So amid all his love and disappointment, there was a cruel sense of being of secondary interest and importance, just at the very time he had expected to be first in everyone's love and consideration.

Finally he said, "Dear Thora, I can feel no longer. My heart has become hopeless. I suffer too much. I will go to my room and try and submit to this last cruel wrong."

Then Thora was offended. "There is no one to blame for this last cruel wrong but thyself," she answered. "The death of Boris was a nearer thing to my father and mother than my marriage. Thy marriage can take place at some other time, but for my dear brother there is no future in this life."

"Are you even sure of his death?"

"My mother has seen him."

"That is nonsense."

"To you, I dare say it is. Mother sees more than any one else can see. She has spiritual vision. We are not yet able for it, nor worthy of it."

"Then why did she not see our wedding catastrophe? She might have averted it by changing the date."

"Ask her;" and as Thora said these words and wearily closed her eyes, Rahal entered the room. She went straight to Ian, put her arms round him and kissed him tenderly. Then Ian could bear no more. He sobbed like a boy of seven years old and she wept with him.

"Thou poor unloved laddie!" she said. "If thou had gone wrong, it would have been little wonder and little blame to thyself. I think thou did all that could be done, with neither love nor wisdom to help thee. Rahal does not blame thee. Rahal pities and loves thee. Thou hast been cowed and frightened and punished for nothing, all the days of thy sad life. Poor lad! Poor, disappointed laddie! With all my heart and soul I pity thee!"

For a few moments there was not a word spoken and the sound of Ian's bitter weeping filled the room. Ian had been flogged many a time when but a youth, and had then disdained to utter a cry, but no child in its first great sorrow, ever wept so heart-brokenly as Ian now wept in Rahal's arms. And a man weeping is a fearsome, pitiful sound. It goes to a woman's heart like a sword, and Thora rose and went to her lover and drew him to the sofa and sat down at his side and, with promises wet with tears, tried to comfort him. A strange silence that the weeping did not disturb was in the house and room, and in the kitchen the servants paused in their work and looked at each other with faces full of pity.

"The Wise One has put trouble on their heads," said a woman who was dressing a goose to roast for dinner and her helper answered, "And there is no use striving against it. What must be, is sure to happen. That is Right."

"All that we have done, is no good. Fate rules in this thing. I see that."

"The trouble came on them unawares. And if Death is at the beginning, no course that can be taken is any good."

"What is the Master's will? For in the end, that will orders all things."

"The mistress said the marriage would be put off for a year. The young man goes to the war."

"No wonder then he cries out. It is surely a great disappointment."

"Tom Snackoll had the same ill luck. He made no crying about it. He hoisted sail at midnight and stole his wife Vestein out of her window, and when her father caught them, they were man and wife. And Snackoll went out to speak to his father-in-law and he said to him, 'My wife can not see thee today, for she is weary and I think it best for her to be still and quiet'; and home the father went and no good of his journey. Snackoll got praise for his daring."

"Well then," said a young man who had just entered, "it is well known that Vestein and her father and mother were all fully willing. The girl could as easily have gone out of the door as the window. Snackoll is a boaster. He is as great in his talk as a fox in his tail."

Thus the household of Ragnor talked in the kitchen, and in the parlour Rahal comforted the lovers, and cheered and encouraged Ian so greatly that she was finally able to say to them:

"The wedding day was not lucky. Let it pass. There is another, only a year away, that will bring lasting joy. Now we have wept over our mischance, we will bury it and look to the future. We will go and wash away sorrow and put on fresh clothes, and look forward to the far better marriage a year hence."

And her voice and manner were so persuasive, that they willingly obeyed her advice and, as they passed her, she kissed them both and told Ian to put his head in cold water and get rid of its aching fever, for she said, "The Bishop will want thee to sing some of thy Collects and Hymns and thou wilt like to please him. He is thy good friend."

"I do not think so."

"He is. Thou may take that, on my word."

The evening brought a braver spirit. They talked of Boris and of his open-hearted, open-air life, and the Bishop read aloud several letters from young men then at the front. They were full of enthusiasm. They might have been read to an accompaniment of fife and drums. Ian was visibly affected and made no further demur about joining them. One of them spoke of Boris "leading his volunteers up the hill like a lion"; and another letter described his tenderness to the wounded and convalescents, saying "he spent his money freely, to procure them little comforts they could not get for themselves."

They talked plainly and from their hearts, hesitating not to call his name, and so they brought comfort to their heavy sorrow. For it is a selfish thing to shut up a sorrow in the heart, far better to look at it full in the face, speak of it, discuss its why and wherefore and break up that false sanctity which is very often inspired by purely selfish sentiments. And when this point was reached, the Bishop took from his pocket a small copy of the Apocrypha and said, "Now I will tell you what the wisest of men said of such an early death as that of our dear Boris:

"He pleased God, and he was beloved of him, so that living among sinners, he was translated.

"Yea speedily was he taken away, lest that wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul.

"He, being made perfect in a short time, fulfilled a long time.

"For his soul pleased the Lord, therefore hastened he to take him away from among the wicked."

And these words fell like heavenly dew on every heart. There was no comfort and honour greater than this to offer even a mother's heart. A happy sigh greeted the blessed verses, and there was no occasion to speak. There was no word that could be added to it.

Then Ian had a happy thought for before a spell-breaking word could be said, he stepped softly to the piano and the next moment the room was ringing with some noble lines from the "Men of Harlech" set to notes equally stirring:

"Men of Harlech, young or hoary,
Would you win a name in story,
Strike for home, for life, for glory,
Freedom, God and Right!

"Onward! 'Tis our country needs us,
He is bravest, he who leads us,
Honour's self now proudly leads us,
Freedom! God and Right!
Loose the folds asunder!
Flag we conquer under!
Death is glory now."

The words were splendidly sung and the room was filled with patriotic fervour. Then the Bishop gave Ragnor and Thora a comforting look, as he asked, "Who wrote that song, Ian?"

"Ah, sir, it was never written! It sprang from the heart of some old Druid priest as he was urging on the Welsh to drive the Romans from their country. It is two verses from 'The Song of the Men of Harlech.'"

"In olden times, Ian, the bards went to the battlefield with the soldiers. We ought to send our singers to the trenches. Ian, go and sing to the men of England and of France 'The Song of the Men of Harlech.' Your song will be stronger than your sword."

"I will sing it to my sword, sir. It will make it sharper." Then Rahal said, "You are a brave boy, Ian," and Thora lifted her lovely face and kissed him.

Every heart was uplifted, and the atmosphere of the room was sensitive with that exalted feeling which finds no relief in speech. Humanity soon reacts against such tension. There was a slight movement, every one breathed heavily, like people awakening from sleep, and the Bishop said in a slow, soft voice:

"I was thinking of Boris. After all, the dear lad may return to us. Surgeons are very clever now, they can almost work miracles."

"Boris will not return," said Rahal.

"How can you know that, Rahal?"

"He told me so."

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"On the afternoon of the eleventh of this month."

"How?"

"Well, Bishop, I was making the cap I am wearing and I was selecting from some white roses on my lap the ones I thought best. Suddenly Boris stood at my side."

"You saw him?"

"Yes, Bishop. I saw him plainly, though I do not remember lifting my head."

"How did he look?"

"Like one who had just won a victory. He was much taller and grander in appearance. Oh, he looked like one who had realized God's promise that we should be satisfied. A kind of radiance was around him and the air of a conquering soldier. And he was my boy still! He called me 'Mother,' he sent such a wonderful message to his father." And at the last word, Ragnor uttered just such a sharp, short gasp as might have come from the rift of a broken heart.

"Did you ask him any question, Rahal?"

"I could not speak, but my soul longed to know what he was doing and the longing was immediately answered. 'I am doing the will of the Lord of Hosts,' he said. 'I was needed here.' Then I felt his kiss on my cheek, and I lifted my head and looked at the clock. It had struck three just as I was conscious of the presence of Boris. It was only two minutes past three, but I seemed to have lived hours in that two minutes."

"Do you think, Bishop, that God loves a soldier? He may employ them and yet not love them?"

Then the Bishop straightened himself and lifted his head, and his face glowed and his eyes shone as he answered, "I will give you one example, it could be multiplied indefinitely. Paul of Tarsus, a pale, beardless young man, dressed as a Roman soldier, is bringing prisoners to Damascus. Christ meets him on the road and Paul knows instantly that he has met the Captain of his soul. Hence forward, he is beloved and honoured and employed for Christ, and at the end of life he is joyful because he has fought a good fight and knows that his reward is waiting for him.

"God has given us the names of many soldiers beloved of Him--Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, etc. What care he took of them! What a friend in all extremities he was to them! All men who fight for their Faith, Home and Country, for Freedom, Justice and Liberty, are God's armed servants. They do His will on the battlefield, as priests do it at the altar. So then,

"In the world's broad field of battle,
In the bivouac of life,
Be not like dumb driven cattle,
Be a hero in the strife!"

"We were speaking of the bards going to the battlefield with the soldiers, and as I was quoting that verse of Longfellow's a few lines from the old bard we call Ossian came into my mind."

"Tell us, then," said Thora, "wilt thou not say the words to us, our dear Bishop?"

"I will do that gladly:

"Father of Heroes, high dweller of eddying winds,
Where the dark, red thunder marks the troubled cloud,
Open Thou thy stormy hall!
Let the bards of old be near.
Father of heroes! the people bend before thee.
Thou turnest the battle in the field of the brave,
Thy terrors pour the blasts of death,
Thy tempests are before thy face,
But thy dwelling is calm above the clouds,
The fields of thy rest are pleasant."

"When I was a young man," he continued, "I used to read Ossian a good deal. I liked its vast, shadowy images, its visionary incompleteness, just because we have not yet invented the precise words to describe the indescribable."

So they talked, until the frugal Orcadian supper of oatmeal and milk, and bread and cheese, appeared. Then the night closed and sealed what the day had done, and there was no more speculation about Ian's future. The idea of a military life as a school for the youth had sprung up strong and rapidly, and he was now waiting, almost impatiently, for it to be translated into action.

A few restful, pleasant days followed. Ragnor was preparing to leave his business for a week, the Bishop was settling some parish difficulties, and Ian and Thora were permitted to spend their time as they desired. They paid one farewell visit to their future home and found an old woman who had nursed Thora in charge of the place.

"Thou wilt find everything just so, when you two come home together, my baby," she said. "Not a pin will be out of its place, not a speck of dust on anything. Eva will always be ready, and please God you may call her far sooner than you think for."

The Sabbath, the last Sabbath of the old year, was to be their last day together, and the Bishop desired Ian to make it memorable with song. Ian was delighted to do so and together they chose for his two solos, "O for the Wings of a Dove," and the heavenly octaves of "He Hath Ascended Up on High and Led Captivity Captive." The old cathedral's great spaces were crowded, the Bishop was grandly in the spirit, and he easily led his people to that solemn line where life verges on death and death touches Immortality. It was Christ the beginning, and the end; Christ the victim on the cross, and Christ the God of the Ascension! And he sent every one home with the promise of Immortality in their souls and the light of it on their faces. His theme had touched largely on the Christ of the Resurrection, and the mystery and beauty of this Christ was made familiar to them in a way they had not before considered.

Ragnor was afraid it had perhaps been brought too close to their own conception of a soul, who was seen on earth after the death of the body. "You told the events of Christ's forty days on earth after His crucifixion so simply, Bishop," he said, "and yet with much of the air that our people tell a ghost story."

"Well then, dear Conall, I was telling them the most sacred ghost story of the world, and yet it is the most literal reality in history. If it were only a dream, it would be the most dynamic event in human destiny."

"You see, Bishop, there is so much in your way of preaching. It has that kind of good comradeship which I think was so remarkable in Christ. His style was not the ten commandments' style--thou shalt and thou shalt not--but that reasoning, brotherly way of 'What man is there among you that would not do the kind and right thing?' You used it this very morning when you cried out, 'If our dear England needed your help to save her Liberty and Life, what man is there among you that would not rise up like lions to save her?' And the men could hardly sit still. It was so real, so brotherly, so unlike preaching."

"Conall, nothing is so wonderful and beautiful in Christ's life as its almost incredible approachableness."

This sermon had been preached on the Sabbath morning and it spiritualized the whole day. Ian's singing also had proved a wonderful service, for when the young men of that day became old men, they could be heard leading their crews in the melodious, longing strains of 'O for the Wings of a Dove,' as they sat casting their lines into the restless water.

In the evening a cold, northwesterly wind sprang up and Thora and Ian retreated to the parlour, where a good fire had been built; but the Bishop and Ragnor and Rahal drew closer round the hearth in the living room and talked, and were silent, as their hearts moved them. Rahal had little to say. She was thinking of Ian and of the new life he was going to, and of the long, lonely days that might be the fate of Thora. "The woeful laddie!" she whispered, "he has had but small chances of any kind. What can a lad do for himself and no mother able to help him!"

The Bishop heard or divined her last words and he said, "Be content, Rahal. Not one, but many lives we hold, and our hail to every new work we begin is our farewell to the old work. Ian is going to give a Future to his Past."

"I fear, Bishop---

"Fear is from the earthward side, Rahal. Above the clouds of Fear, there is the certain knowledge of Heaven. Fear is nothing, Faith is everything!"

CHAPTER X

THE ONE REMAINS, THE MANY CHANGE AND PASS

You Scotsmen are a pertinacious brood;
Fitley you wear the thistle in your cap,
As in your grim theology.
O we're not all so fierce! God knows you'll find,

Well-combed and smooth-licked gentlemen enough,
Who will rejoice with you
To sneer at Calvin's close-wedged creed.

--BLACKIE.

Sow not in Sorrow,
Fling your seed abroad, and know
God sends tomorrow,
The rain to make it grow.

--BLACKIE.

THERE are epochs in every life that cut it sharply asunder, its continuity is broken and things can never be the same again. This was the dominant feeling that came to Thora Ragnor, as she sat with her mother one afternoon in early January. It was a day of Orkney's most uncomfortable and depressing kind, the whole island being swept by drifting clouds of vapour, which not only filled the atmosphere but also the houses, so that everything was to the touch damp and uncomfortable. Nothing could escape its miserable contact, even sitting on the hearthstone its power was felt; and until a good northwester came to dissipate the damp moisture, nobody expected much from any one's temper.

Thora was restless and unhappy. Her life appeared to have been suddenly deprived of all joy and sunshine. She felt as if everything was at an end, or might as well be, and her mother's placid, peaceful face irritated her. How could she sit knitting mufflers for the soldiers in the trenches, and not think of Boris and also of Ian, whom they had all conspired to send to the same danger and perhaps death? She could not understand her mother's serenity. It occurred to her this afternoon, that she might have run away with Ian to Shetland and there her sisters would have seen her married; and she did not do this, she obeyed her parents, and what did she get for it? Loneliness and misery and her lover sent far away from her. Oh, those moments when Virtue has failed to reward us and we regret having served her! To the young, they are sometimes very bitter.

And her mother's calmness! It not only astonished, it angered her. How could she sit still and not talk of Boris and Ian? It was a necessary relief to Thora, their names were at her lips all day long. But Thora had yet to learn that it is the middle-aged and the old who have the power of hoping through everything, because they have the knowledge that the soul survives all its adventures. This is the great inspiration, it is the good wine which God keeps to the last. The old, the way-worn, the faint and weary, they know this as the young can never know it.

However, we may say to bad weather, as to all other bad things, "this, too, will pass," and in a couple of days the sky was blue, the sun shining, and the atmosphere fresh and clear and full of life-giving energy. Ships of all kinds were hastening into the harbour and the mail boat, broad-bottomed and strongly built, was in sight. Then there was a little real anxiety. There was sure to be letters, what news would they bring? Some people say there is no romance in these days. Very far wrong are they. These sealed bits of white paper hold very often more wonderful romances than any in the Thousand Nights of story telling.

Rahal's and Thora's anxiety was soon relieved. A messenger from the warehouse came quickly to the house, with a letter from Ragnor to Rahal and a letter from Ian to Thora. Ragnor's letter said they had had a rough voyage southward, the storm being in their faces all the way to Leith. There they left the boat and took a train for London, from which place they went as quickly as possible to Spithead, fearing to miss the ship sailing for the Crimea on the eleventh. Ragnor said he had seen Ian safely away to Sebastopol and observed that he was remarkably cheerful and satisfied. He spoke then of his own delight with London and regretted that he had not made arrangements which would permit him to stay a week or two longer there.

Thora's letter was a genuine love letter, for Ian was deeply in love and everything he said was in the superlative mood. Lovers like such letters. They are to them the sacred writings. It did not seem ridiculous to Thora to be called "an angel of beauty and goodness, the rose of womanhood, the lily on his heart, his star of hope, the sunshine of his life," and many other extravagant impossibilities. She would have been disappointed if Ian had been more matter-of-fact and reasonable.

So there was now comparative happiness in the house of Ragnor, for though the master's letters were never much more than plain statements of doings or circumstances, they satisfied Rahal. It is not every man that knows how to write to a woman, even if he loves her; but women have a special divinity in reading love letters, and they know beyond all doubting the worth of words as affected by those who use them.

Ragnor gave himself a whole week in London and before leaving that city for Edinburgh he wrote a few lines home, saying he intended to stay in London over the following Sabbath and hear Canon Liddon preach. On Monday he would reach Edinburgh and on Tuesday have an interview with Dr. Macrae and then take the first boat for home. They could now wait easily, the silence had been broken, the weather was good, they had "The History of Penderennis" and "David Copperfield" to read, their little duties and little cares to attend to, and they were not at all unhappy.

At length, the master was to be home *that* day. If the wind was favourable, he might arrive about two o'clock, but Rahal thought the boat would hardly manage it before three with the wind in her teeth, or it might be nearer four. The house was all ready for him, spick and span

from roof to cellar and a dinner of the good things he particularly liked in careful preparation. And, after all, he came a little earlier than was expected.

"Dear Conall," said Rahal, "I have been watching for thee, but I thought it would be four o'clock, ere thou made Kirkwall."

"Not with Donald Farquar sailing the boat. The way he manages a boat is beyond reason."

"How is that?"

"He talks to her, as if she was human. He scolds and coaxes her and this morning he promised to paint and gild her figurehead, if she got into Kirkwall before three. Then every sailor on board helped her and the wind changed a point or two and that helped her, and now and then Farquar pushed her on, with a good or bad word, and she saved herself by just eleven minutes."

"And how well thou art looking! Never have I seen thee so handsome before, never! What hast thou been doing to Conall Ragnor?"

"I will tell thee. When I had bid Ian good-bye, I resolved to take a week's holiday in London and as I walked down the Strand, I noticed that every one looked at me, not unkindly but curiously, and when I looked at the men who looked at me, I saw we were different. I went into a barber's first, and had my hair cut like Londoners wear it, short and smart, and not thick and bushy, like mine was."

"Well then, thy hair was far too long but they have cut off all thy curls."

"I like the wanting of them. They looked very womanish. I'm a deal more purpose-like without them. Then I went to a first-class tailor-man and he fit me out with the suit I'm wearing. He said it was 'the correct thing for land or water.' What dost thou think of it?"

"Nothing could be more becoming to thee."

"Nay then, I got a Sabbath Day suit that shames this one. And I bought a church hat and a soft hat that beats all, and kid gloves, and a good walking stick with a fancy knob."

"Thou art not needing a walking stick for twenty years yet."

"Well then, the English gentlemen always carries a walking stick. I think they wouldn't know the way they were going without one. At last, I went to the shoemakers, and he made me take off my 'Wellingtons.' He said no one wore them now, and he shod me, as thou sees, very comfortably. I like the change."

Then they heard Thora calling them, and Ragnor taking Rahal's hand hastened to answer the call. She was standing at the foot of the stairway, and her father kissed her and as he did so whispered--"All is well, dear one. After dinner, I will tell thee." Then he took her hand, and the three in one went together to the round table, set so pleasantly near to the comfortable fireside. Standing there, hand-clasped, the master said those few words of adoration and gratitude that turned the white-spread board into a household altar. Dinner was on the table and its delicious odours filled the room and quickly set Ragnor talking.

"I will tell you now, what I saw in London," he said. "Ian is a story good enough to keep until after dinner. I saw him sail away from Spithead, and he went full of hope and pluck and sure of success. Then I took the first train back to London. I got lodgings in a nice little hotel in Norfolk Street, just off the Strand, and London was calling me all night long."

"Thou could not see much, Father, in one week," said Thora.

"I saw the Queen and the Houses of Parliament, and I saw the Tower of London and Westminster Abbey and the Crystal Palace. And I have heard an oratorio, with a chorus of five hundred voices and Sims Reeves as soloist. I have been to Drury Lane, and the Strand Theatres, to a big picture gallery, and a hippodrome. My dear ones, the end of one pleasure was just the beginning of another; in one week, I have lived fifty years."

Any one can understand how a new flavour was added to the food they were eating by such conversation. Not all the sauces in Christendom could have made it so piquant and appetizing. Ragnor carved and ate and talked, and Rahal and Thora listened and laughed and asked endless questions, and when the mind enters into a meal, it not only prolongs, it also sweetens and brightens it. I suppose there may be in every life two or three festivals, that stand out from all others--small, unlooked-for meetings, perhaps--where love, hope, wonder and happy looking-forward, made the food taste as if it had been cooked in Paradise. Where, at least for a few hours, a mortal might feel that man had been made only a little lower than the angels.

Now, if any of my readers have such a memory, let them close the book, shut their eyes and live it over again. It was probably a foretaste of a future existence, where we shall have faculties capable of fuller and higher pleasures; faculties that without doubt "will be satisfied." For in all hearts that have suffered, there must abide the conviction that the Future holds Compensation, not Punishment.

But without forecast or remembrance, the Ragnors that night enjoyed their highly mentalised meal, and after it was over and the table set backward, and the white hearth brushed free of ashes, they drew around the fire, and Ragnor laid down his pipe, and said:

"I left London last Monday, and I was in Edinburgh until Wednesday morning. On Tuesday I called on Dr. Macrae. I had a letter to give him from Ian."

"Why should Ian have written to him?" asked Rahal, in a tone of disapproval.

"Because Ian has a good heart, he wrote to his father. I read the letter. It was all right."

"What then did he say to him?"

"Well, Rahal, he told his father that he was leaving for the front, and he wished to leave with his forgiveness and blessing, if he would give it to him. He said that he was sure that in their life-long dispute he must often have been in the wrong, and he asked forgiveness for all such lapses of his duty. He told his father that he had a clear plan of success before him, but said that in all cases--fortunate or unfortunate--he would always remember the name he bore and do nothing to bring it shame or dishonour. A very good, brave letter, dear ones. I give Ian credit for it."

"Did thou advise him to write it?" asked Rahal.

"No, it sprang from his own heart."

"Thou should not have sanctioned it."

"Ian did right, Rahal. I did right to sanction it."

"Father, if Ian has a clear plan of success before him, what is it? He ought to have told us."

"He thought it out while we were at sea, he asked me to explain the matter to you. It is, indeed, a plan so simple and manifest, that I wonder we did not propose it at the very first. You must recollect that Ian was in the employ of Dr. Finlay of Edinburgh for three years and a half, and that during that period he acquired both a large amount of medical knowledge and also of medical experience. Now we all know that Ian has a special gift for this science, especially for its surgical side, and he is not going to the trenches or the cavalry, he is going to offer himself to the Surgical and Medical Corps. He will go to the battlefield, carry off the wounded, give them first help, or see them to the hospital. In this way he will be doing constant good to others and yet be forwarding the career which is to make his future happy and honourable."

"Then Ian has decided to be a surgeon, Father?"

"Yes, and I can tell thee, Thora, he has not set himself a task beyond his power. I think very highly of Ian, no one could help doing so; and see here, Thora! I have a letter in my pocket for thee! He gave it to me as I bid him good-bye at Spithead."

"I am so happy, Father! So happy!"

"Thou hast good reason to be happy. We shall all be proud of Ian in good time."

"Did thou give Ian's letter to his father's hands, or did thou mail it, Coll?"

"I gave it to him, personally."

"What was thy first impression of him?"

"He gave me first of all an ecclesiastical impression. I just naturally looked for a gown or surplice. He wanted something without one. He met me coldly but courteously, and taking Ian's letter from me, placed it deliberately upon a pile of letters lying on his desk. I said, 'It is from thy son, Doctor, perhaps thou had better read it at once. It is a good letter, sir, read it.'

"He bowed, and asked if Ian was with me. I said, 'No, sir, he is on his way to Scutari.' Then he was silent. After a few moments he asked me if I had been in Edinburgh during the past Sabbath. 'You should have been here,' he added, 'then you could have heard the great Dr. Chalmers preach.' I told him that I had spent that never-to-be-forgotten Sabbath under the blessed dome of St. Paul's in London. I said something about the transcending beauty of the wonderful music of the cathedral service, and spoke with delight of the majestic nave, filled with mediæval rush-bottomed chairs for the worshippers, and I told him how much more fitting they were in the House of God than pews." And Ragnor uttered the last word with a new-found emphasis. "He asked, quite scornfully, in what sense I found them more fitting, and I answered rather warmly--'Why, sir, sitting together in chairs, we felt so much more at home. We were like one great family in our Father's house.'"

"Are the chairs rented?" asked Rahal.

"Rented!" cried Ragnor scornfully. "No, indeed! There are no dear chairs and no cheap chairs, all are equal and all are free. I never felt so like worshipping in a church before. The religious spirit had free way in our midst."

"What did Macrae say?"

"He said, he supposed the rush chairs were an 'Armenian innovation'; and I answered, 'The pews, sir, they are the innovation.'"

"Did thou have any argument with him? I have often heard Ian say he plunged into religious argument with every one he met."

"Well, Rahal, I don't know how it happened, but I quickly found myself in a good atmosphere of contradictions. I do not remember either what I had been saying, but I heard him distinctly assert, that 'it was the Armenians who had described the Calvinists, and they had not wasted their opportunities.' Then I found myself telling him that Armenianism had ruled the religious world ever since the birth of Christianity; but that Calvinism was a thing of yesterday, a mere Geneva opinion. Rahal, the man has a dogma for a soul, and yet through this hard veil, I could see that he was full of a longing for love; but he has not found out the way to love, his heart is ice-bound. He made me say things I did not want to say, he stirred my soul round and round until it boiled over, and then the words would come. Really, Rahal, I did not know the words were in my mind, till his aggravating questions made me say them."

"What words? Art thou troubled about them?"

"A little. He was talking of faith and doubt, especially as it referred to the Bible, and I listened until I could bear it no longer. He was asking what proof there was for this, and that, and the other, and as I said, he got me stirred up beyond myself and I told him I cared nothing about proofs. I said proofs were for sceptics and not for good men who *knew* in whom they had believed."

"Well then, Coll, that was enough, was it not?"

"Not for Macrae. He said immediately, 'Suppose there was no divine authority for the scheme of morals and divinity laid down in this Book,' and he laid his hand reverently on the Bible, 'where should we be?' And I told him, we should be just where we were, because God's commands were written on every conscience and that these commands would stand firm even if creeds became dust, and Matthew, Mark, Luke, John and Paul, all failed and passed away. 'Power of God!' I cried, as I struck the table with my fist, 'it takes God's tireless, patient, eternal love to put up with puny men, always doubting Him. I believe in God the Father Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth!' I said, 'and I want no proofs about Him in whom I believe.' By this time, Rahal, he had me on fire. I was ready to deny anything he asserted, especially about hell, for thou knows, Rahal, that there are hells in this world and no worse needed. So when he asked if I believed in the Calvinistic idea of hell, I answered, 'I deny it! My soul denies it--utterly!' I reminded him that God spoke to Dives in hell and called him son and that Dives, even there, clung to the fatherhood of God. And I told him this world was a hell to those who deserved hell, and a place of much trial to most men and women, and I thought it was poor comfort to preach to such, that the next world was worse. There now! I have told you enough. He asked me to lunch with him, and I did; and I told him as we ate, what a fine fellow Ian was, and he listened and was silent."

"Then you saw Ian's mother and sister?" asked Thora.

"No, I did not. They had gone for the winter to the Bridge of Allan. Mrs. Macrae is sick, her husband seemed unhappy about her."

Rahal hoped now that her home would settle itself into its usual calm, methodical order. She strove to give to every hour its long accustomed duty, and to infuse an atmosphere of rest and of "use and wont" into every day's affairs. It was impossible. The master of the house had suffered a world change. He had tasted of strange pleasures and enthusiasms, and was secretly planning a life totally at variance with his long accustomed routine and responsibilities. He did not speak of the things in his heart but nevertheless they escaped him.

Very soon he began to have much more regular communication with his sons in Shetland, and finally he told Rahal that he intended taking his son Robert into partnership. Such changes grew slowly in Ragnor's mind, and much more slowly in practice, but Rahal knew that they were steadily working to some ultimate, and already definite and determined end in her husband's will.

The absent also exerted a far greater power upon the home than any one believed. Ian's letters came with persistent regularity, and the influence of one was hardly spent, when another arrived of quite a different character. Ian was rapidly realizing his hopes. He had been gladly taken into a surgical corps, under the charge of a Doctor Frazer, and his life was a continual drama of stirring events. Generally he wrote between actions, and then he described the gallant young men resting on the slopes of the beleaguered hill, with their weapons at their finger tips, but always cheerful. Sometimes he spoke of them under terrible fire in their life-or-death push forward, followed by the surgeons and stretcher-bearers. Sometimes, he had been to the trenches to dress a wound that would not stop bleeding, but always he wondered at seeing the resolute grit and calmness of these young men, who had been the dandies in London drawing-rooms a year ago and who were now smoking placidly in the trenches at Redan.

"What is it?" he asked an old surgeon, on whom he was waiting. "Is it recklessness?"

"No, sir!" was the answer. "It is straight courage. Courage in the blood. Courage nourished on their mother's milk. Courage educated into them at Eton or Rugby, in many a fight and scuffle. Courage that lived with them night and day at Oxford or Cambridge, and that made them choose danger and death rather than be known for one moment as a cad or a coward. It was dancing last year. It is fighting in a proper quarrel this year. Different duties, that is all."

Every now and then Sunna dropped them letters about which there was much pleasant speculating, for as the summer came forward, she began to accept the disappointments made by the death of Boris, and to consider what possibilities of life were still within her power. She said in May that "she was sick and weary of everything about Sebastopol, and that she wanted to go back to Scotland, far more frantically than she ever wanted to leave it." In June, she said, she had got her grandfather to listen to reason, but had been forced to cry for what she wanted, a humiliation beyond all apologies.

Her next letter was written in Edinburgh, where she declared she intended to stay for some time. Maximus Grant was in Edinburgh with his little brother, who was under the care and treatment of an eminent surgeon living there. "The poor little laddie is dying," she said, "but I am able to help him over many bad hours, and Max is not half-bad, that is, he might be worse if left to himself. Heigh-ho! What varieties of men, and varieties of their trials, poor women have to put up with!"

As the year advanced Sunna's letters grew bright and more and more like her, and she described with admirable imitative piquancy the literary atmosphere and conversation which is

Edinburgh's native air. In the month of November, little Eric went away suddenly, in a paroxysm of military enthusiasm, dying literally the death of a soldier "with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpets," in his soul's hearing.

"We adored him," wrote Sunna, in her most fervent religious mood, which was just as sincere as any other mood. "He was such a loving, clever little soul, and he lay so long within the hollow of Death's sickle. There he heard and saw wonderful things, that I would not dare to speak of. Max has wept very sincerely. It is my lot apparently, to administer drops of comfort to him. In this world, I find that women can neither hide nor run away from men and their troubles, the moment anything goes wrong with them, they fly to some woman and throw their calamity on her."

"It is easy to see which way Sunna is drifting," said Rahal, after this letter had been read. "She will marry Maximus Grant, of course."

"Mother, her grandfather wishes that marriage. It is very suitable. His silent, masterful way will cure Sunna's faults."

"It will do nothing of the kind. What the cradle rocks, the spade buries. If Sunna lives to be one hundred years old--a thing not unlikely--she will be Sunna. Just Sunna."

During all this summer, Ragnor was deeply engrossed in his business, and the Vedders remained in Edinburgh, as did also Mistress Brodie, though she had had all the best rooms in her Kirkwall house redecorated. "It is her hesitation about grandfather. She will, and she won't," wrote Sunna, "and she keeps grandfather hanging by a hair." Then she made a few scornful remarks about "the hesitating *liaisons* of old women" and concluded that it all depended upon the marriage ceremony.

Grandfather [she wrote] wants to sneak into some out of the way little church, and get the business over as quickly and quietly as possible; and Mistress Brodie has dreams of a peach-bloom satin gown, and a white lace bonnet. She thought "that was enough for a second affair"; and when I gently hoped that it was at least an affair of the heart, she said with a distinct snap, "Don't be impertinent, Miss!" However, all this is but the overture to the great matrimonial drama, and it is rather interesting.

I saw by a late London paper that Thora's lover has gone and got himself decorated, or crossed, for doing some dare-devil sort of thing about wounded men. I wonder how Thora will like to walk on Pall Mall with a man who wears a star or a medal on his breast. Such things make women feel small. For, of course, we could win stars and medals if we had the chance. Max considers Ian "highly praise-worthy." Max lately has a way of talking in two or three syllables. I am trying to remember where I left my last spelling book; I fear I shall have to get up my orthography.

The whole of this year A. D. 1855 was one of commonplaces stirred by tragic events. It is this conjunction that makes the most prosaic of lives always a story. It only taught Thora and Rahal to make the most of such pleasures as were within their reach. In the evening Ragnor was always ready to share what they had to offer, but in the daytime he was getting his business into such perfect condition that he could leave it safely in charge of his son Robert for a year, or more, if that was his wish.

On the second of March, the Czar Nicholas died, and there was good hope in that removal. In June, General Raglan died of cholera, and on the following fifth of September, the Russians, finding they could no longer defend Sebastopol, blew up its defences and also its two immense magazines of munitions. This explosion was terrific, the very earth appeared to reel. The town they deliberately set on fire. Then on Sunday morning, September the ninth, the English and French took possession of the great fortress, though it was not until the last day of February, A. D. 1856, that the treaty of peace was signed.

After the occupation of Sebastopol, however, there was a cessation of hostilities, and the hospitals rapidly began to empty and the physicians and surgeons to return home. Dr. Frazer remained at his post till near Christmas, and was then able to leave the few cases remaining in the charge of competent nurses. Ian remained at his side and they returned to England together. It was then within a few days of Christmas, and Ian hastened northward without delay.

There was no hesitating welcome for him now; he was met by the truest and warmest affection, he was cheerfully given the honour which he had faithfully won. And the wedding day was no longer delayed, it was joyfully hastened forward. Bishop Hedley, the Vedders and Maximus Grant had already arrived and the little town was all agog and eager for the delayed ceremony. Sunna had brought with her Thora's new wedding dress and the day had been finally set for the first of January.

"Thou will begin a fresh life with a fresh year," said Rahal to her daughter. "A year on which, as yet, no tears have fallen; and which has not known care or crossed purpose. On its first page thou will write thy marriage joy and thy new hopes, and the light of a perfect love will be over it."

In the meantime life was full of new delights to Thora. Wonderful things were happening to her every day. The wedding dress was here. Adam Vedder had brought her a pretty silver tea service, Aunt Barbie--now Madame Vedder--had remembered her in many of those womanwise ways, that delight the heart of youth. Even Dominie Macrae had sent her a gold watch, and the little sister-in-law had chosen for her gift some very pretty laces. Rich and poor alike brought her their good-will offerings, and many old Norse awmries were ransacked in the search for jewels or ornaments of the jade stone, which all held as "luck beyond breaking."

The present which pleased Thora most of all was a new wedding-dress, the gift of her mother.

The rich ivory satin was perfect and peerless in its exquisite fit and simplicity; jewels, nor yet lace, could have added nothing to it. Sunna had brought it with her own toilet. In fact, she was ready to make a special sensation with it on the first of January, for her wedding garment as Thora's bridesmaid was nothing less than a robe of gold and white shot silk, worn over a hoop. She had been wearing a hoop all winter in Edinburgh, but she was quite sure she would be the first "hooped lady" to appear in Kirkwall town. Thora might wear the bride veil, with its wreath of myrtle and rosemary, but she had a pleasant little laugh, as she mentally saw herself in the balloon of white and gold shot silk, walking majestically up the nave of St. Magnus. It was so long since hoops had been worn. None of the present generation of Kirkwall women could ever have seen a lady in a hoop, and behind the present generation there was no likelihood of any hooped ladies in Kirkwall.

Thora had no hoop. Her orders had been positively against it and unless Madame Vedder had slipped inside "the bell" she could not imagine any rival. As she made this reflection, she smiled, and then translated the smile into the thought, "If she has, she will look like a haystack."

Now Ian's military suit in his department had been of white duff or linen, plentifully adorned with gilt buttons and bands representing some distinctive service. It was the secret desire of Ian to wear this suit, and he rather felt that Thora or his mother-in-law should ask him to do so. For he knew that its whiteness and gilt, and tiny knots of ribbon, gave to the wearer that military air, which all men yearn a little after. He wished to wear it on his wedding day but Thora had not thought of it, neither had Sunna. However, on the 29th, Rahal, that kind, wise woman, asked him as a special favour, to wear his medical uniform. She said, "the townsfolk would be so disappointed with black broadcloth and a pearl-grey waistcoat. They longed to see him as he went onto the battlefield, to save or succour the wounded."

"But, Mother," he answered, "I went in the plainest linen suit to bring in the wounded and dying."

"I know, dear one, but they do not know, and it is not worth while destroying an innocent illusion, we have so few of them as we grow old."

"Very well, Mother, it shall be as you wish."

"Of course Ian wished to wear it," said Sunna.

"Oh, Sunna, you must not judge all men from Max."

"I am far from that folly. Your father has been watching the winds and the clouds all day. So have I. Conall Ragnor is always picturesque, even poetical. I feel safe if I follow him. He says it will be fine tomorrow. I hope so!"

This hope was more than justified. It was a day of sunshine and little wandering south winds, and the procession was a fact. Now Ragnor knew that this marriage procession, as a national custom, was passing away, but it had added its friendliness to his own and all his sons' and daughters' weddings and he wanted Thora's marriage ceremonial to include it. "When thou art an old woman, Thora," he said to her, "then thou wilt be glad to have remembered it."

At length the New Year dawned and the day arrived. All was ready for it. There was no hurry, no fret, no uncertainty. Thora rode to the cathedral in the Vedder's closed carriage with her father and mother. Ian was with Maximus and Sunna in the Galt landeau. Adam Vedder and his bride rode together in their open Victoria and all were ready as the clock struck ten. Then a little band of stringed instruments and young men took their place as leaders of the procession, and when they started joyfully "Room for the Bride!" the carriages took the places assigned them and about two hundred men and women, who had gathered at the Ragnor House, followed in procession, many joining in the singing.

The cathedral was crowded when they reached it, and Dr. Hedley in white robes came forward to meet the bride and, with smiles and loving good will, to unite her forever to the choice of her soul.

It was almost a musical marriage. Melody began and followed and closed the whole ceremonial. About twenty returned with the bridal party to the Ragnor House to eat the bridal dinner, but the general townsfolk were to have their feast and dance in the Town Hall about seven in the evening. The Bishop stayed only to bless the meal, for the boat was waiting that was to carry him to a Convocation of the Church then sitting in Edinburgh. But he wore his sprig of rosemary on his vest, and he stood at Ragnor's right hand and watched him mix the Bride Cup, watched him mingle in one large silver bowl of pre-Christian age the pale, delicious sherry and fine sugar and spices and stir the whole with a strip of rosemary. Then every guest stood up and was served with a cup, most of them having in their hand a strip of rosemary to stir it with. And after the Bishop had blessed the bride and blessed the bridegroom, he said, "I will quote for you a passage from an old sermon and after it, you will stir your cup again with rosemary and grow it still more plentifully in your gardens.

"The rosemary is for married men and man challengeth it, as belonging properly to himself. It helpeth the brain, strengtheneth the memory, and affects kindly the heart. Let this flower of man ensign your wisdom, love and loyalty, and carry it, not only in your hands, but in your heads and hearts." Then he lifted his glass and stirred the wine with his strip of rosemary, and as he did so all followed his example, while he repeated from an old romance the following lines:

... "Before we divide,
Let us dip our rosemaries
In one rich bowl of wine, to this brave girl

And to the gentleman.”

With these words he departed, and the utmost and happiest interchange of all kinds of good fellowship followed. Every man and woman was at perfect ease and ready to give of the best they had. Even Adam Vedder delighted all, and especially his happy-looking bride, by his clever condensation of Sunna's favourite story of "The Banded Men." No finished actor could have made it, in its own way, a finer model of dramatic narrative, especially in its quaint reversal of the parts usually played by father and son, into those of the prodigal father and the money-loving, prudent son. Then a little whisper went round the table and it sprang from Sunna, and people smiled and remembered that Adam had won his wife from three younger men than himself and, as if by a single, solid impulse, they stirred their wine cups once more and called for a cheer for the old bridegroom, who had been faithful for forty years to his first love and had then walked off with her, from Provost, Lawyer and Minister; all of them twenty years younger than himself.

Getting near to three o'clock, they began to sing and Rahal was pleased to hear that sound of peace, for several guests were just from the battlefield and quite as ready for a quarrel as a song. Also during the little confusion of removing fruit and cake and glasses, and the substitution of the cups and saucers and the strong, hot, sweet tea that every Norseman loves, Ian and Thora slipped away without notice. Max Grant's carriage put them in half-an-hour on the threshold of their own home. They crossed it hand and hand and Ian kissed the hand he held and Thora raised her face in answer; but words have not yet been invented that can speak for such perfect happiness.

Love is rich in his own right,
He is heir of all the spheres,
In his service day and night
Swing the tides and roll the years.
What has he to ask of fate?
Crown him, glad or desolate.

Time puts out all other flames
But the glory of his eyes;
His are all the sacred names,
His the solemn mysteries.
Crown him! In his darkest day
He has Heaven to give away!

Ian's business arrangements curtailed the length of any festivity in relation to the marriage. He had already signed an agreement with Dr. Frazer to return to him as soon as possible after the twelfth day and remain as his assistant until he was fully authenticated a surgeon by the proper schools. In the meantime he would enter the London School of Medicine and Surgery and give to Dr. Frazer all the time not demanded by its hours and exercises. For this attention Ian was to receive from Dr. Frazer one hundred pounds a year. Furthermore, when Ian had received the proper authority to call himself Dr. John Macrae, he was to have the offer of a partnership with Dr. Frazer, on what were considered very favourable terms.

So their little romance was at last happily over. Ian was an infinitely finer and nobler man. He had dwelt amid great acts and great suffering for a year and had not visited the House of Mourning in vain. All that was light and trifling had fallen away from him. He regarded his life and talents now as a great and solemn charge and was resolved to make them of use to his fellows. And Thora was lovelier than she had ever been. She had learned self-restraint and she had hoped through evil days, till good days came; so then, she knew how to look for good when all appeared wrong and by faith and will, bring good out of evil.

After Thora and her husband left for London a great change took place in the Ragnor home. Ragnor had been preparing for it ever since his visit to London and, within a month, Robert Ragnor and his wife and family came from Shetland and took possession. It gave Rahal a little pain to see any woman in her place but that was nothing, she was going to give her dear Coll the dream of his life. She was going to travel with him, and see all the civilized countries in the world! She was going to London first, and last, of all!

CHAPTER XI

SEQUENCES

NOT long ago I found in a list of Orkney and Shetland literature several volumes by a Conall Ragnor, two of them poetry. But that just tended to certify a suspicion. Sixty years ago I had heard him repeat some Gallic poems and had known instinctively, though only a girl of eighteen, that the man was a poet.

It roused in me a curiosity I felt it would be pleasant to gratify, and so a little while after I began this story, I wrote to a London newspaper man and asked him to send me some of his Orkney exchanges. I have a habit of trusting newspaper editors and I found this one as I expected, willing and obliging. He sent me two Orkney papers and the first thing I noticed was the prevalence of the old names. Among them I saw Mrs. Max Grant, and I thought I would write to her and take my chance of the lady turning out to be the old Sunna Vedder. It was quite a possibility, as we were apparently about the same age when I saw her. It was only for an hour or two in the evening we met, at the Ragnor house, but girls see a deal in an hour or two and if I remembered her, she had doubtless chronicled an opinion of me.

In about five weeks Mrs. Grant's letter in answer to mine arrived. She began it by saying she remembered me, because I wore a hat, a sailor's hat, and she said it was the first hat she ever saw on a woman's head. She said also, that I told her women were beginning to wear them for shopping and walking and driving, or out at sea, but never for church or visiting. All of which I doubtless said, for it was my first hat. And I do not remember women wearing hats at all until about this time.

I suppose [she continued] thou wants to know first of all about the Vedders. They were *the* people then, and they have not grown a bit smaller, nor do they think any less of themselves yet. My grandfather married again and was not sorry for it. I don't know whether his wife was sorry or not. I took Maximus Grant for a husband for, after Boris Ragnor died, I did not care who I took, provided he had plenty of good qualities and plenty of gold. We lived together thirty years very respectably. I took my way and I usually expected him to do the same. We had four sons, and they have nine sons among them, and all of the nine are now fighting the vipers they have been coddling for forty or fifty years. Some are in the regular army, some in the navy, and some in the plucky, fighting little navy, patrolling England and her brood of coastwise islands. They are a tough, rough, hard lot, but I love them all better than anything else in this world. There are a good many Vedder houses in Orkney, and they are all full of little squabbling, fighting, never clean, and never properly dressed little brats, from four to eleven years old. So I don't worry about there being Vedders enough to run things the way they want them run.

The Ragnors are here in plenty. All the men are at the war, all the women running fishing boats or keeping general shops, to which I like to see the Germans going. They are told what kind of people they are as they walk up to the shops; and they get what they want at an impoverishing price. Serve them right! Men, however, will pay any money for a thing they want.

There has not been such good times in Orkney since I was born, as there is now. We have an enemy to beat in trade and an enemy to beat in fight at our very doors, and our men are neither to hold nor to bind, they are that top-lofty. War is a man's native air. My sons and grandsons are all two inches taller than they were and they defy Nature to contradict them. I never attempt it. Well, then, they are proper men in all things, a little hard to deal with and masterful, but just as I wish them. My grandfather died fifty years ago, he might have lived longer if he had not married. His widow wept in the deepest black and people thought she was sorry.

The Ragnors are mostly here and in Shetland. Conall Ragnor never really settled down again. Rahal and he lived in Edinburgh or London, when not travelling. I heard that Conall wrote books and really got money for them. I cannot believe that. Rahal died first. Conall lived a month after her. They were laid in earth in Stromness Church-yard. My grandfather wanted to bring the body of Boris home and bury it in Stromness, and I would not let him. He is all mine where he sleeps in the Crimea. I don't want him among a congregation of his brothers and sisters and uncles and aunts.

I suppose thou must have heard of Thora's husband. He really did become famous, and I was told his father forgave him all his youthful follies. It was said Thora managed that in some clever way; but I'm sure I don't know what to say. Thora never seemed at all clever to me. She had many children, but she died long ago, though she did live long enough to see her husband knighted and her eldest boy marry the daughter of a lord. I have no doubt she was happy in her own way, only she never did dress herself as a person in the best society ought to have done. I once told her so. "Well, then," she said, "I dress to please my husband." Imagine such simplicity! As to myself I am getting near to ninety, but I live a good life and God helps me. I have kept my fine hair and complexion and I run around on my little errands quite comfortably. Indeed I am sunwise able for everything I want. I shall be glad to hear from thee again, and if thou wilt send me occasionally some of those delightful American papers, thou wilt make me much thy debtor. Also, I want thee to tell all the brave young Americans thou knows that if they would like a real life on the ocean wave, they ought to join our wonderful patrol round the English coast. They will learn more and see more and feel more in a month, in this little interfering navy, than they'd learn in a lifetime in a first-class man-of-war.

Write to me again and then we shall have tied our friendship with a three-fold letter. Thine, with all good will and wishes,

SUNNA VEDDER GRANT.

This is a woman's letter and it must have a postscript. It is only two lines of John Stuart Blackie's, and it should have been at the beginning, but it will touch your heart at the end as well as at the beginning.

"Oh, for a breath of the great North Sea,
Girdling the mountains!"

S. V. G.

Transcriber Notes

Fixed probable typos.

Hyphenation standardized.

Archaic and variable spelling is preserved.

Author's punctuation style is preserved, except quote marks, which have been standardized.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK AN ORKNEY MAID ***

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